Politics and History: The trajectories of revisionist challenges in Israel and the US

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1. Introduction

In 1998, Raymond Martin published his article, 'Progress in Historical Studies'. In this article Raymond Martin defended the value of historical scholarship against the attacks of those who say that the notion of progress is only in the eye of the beholder, and based on arbitrary criteria, and against postmodern skeptics, who hold that cannot know the past, hence cannot judge which interpretation is better and whether progress has been made[1]. Instead, Raymond Martin laid down a number of criteria which do signify progress in history. Raymond Martin claimed that historical interpretations can become more accurate, more comprehensive, better balanced and more justified[2]. Within interpretative polarities, there tends to be convergence towards consensus, but this cannot be achieved as long as there has not been interpretational divergence. New interpretations can thus lead to new insights and improvement of our overall understanding of the past[3]. Given this description of the conventional course of historiographical debates, we could ask ourselves whether this is usually the case.

In 1987 group of historians challenged the then prevalent ideas about Israeli history, especially about its war with the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab neighboring states. Although originally independent from one another, they quickly acquired the group name 'new historians'. According to this new group, the official Zionist history was characterized by a political bias towards Israeli policies; it served as a nationalist state building account, aimed at portraying Israel's founding generation as heroic defenders who succeeded against all odds. The new historians however challenged the old orthodox version of history as incorrect. They argued for another more critical approach which would, according to them, do justice to historical reality. Their challenge to history led to a heated exchange, both in the academia as the media, which continues, unresolved to this day.

This thesis will ask itself the question, what influence politics has on the course of historiographical debate. Because this question might somehow steer the scholars attention too much into proving that the reality of political influences do exist, the main

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[1] Raymond Martin, 'Progress in historical studies' in *History and Theory*, Vol 37 No 1 (1998), p.35
[2] Raymond Martin, 'Progress in historical studies', 28
[3] Ibid., 32

question of this thesis will be phrased like this: why did the debate on the new historians develop like it did. This thesis will consider as its main hypothesis the idea that societal circumstances influenced the trajectory of the historiographical debate in Israel. To prove that both the circumstances and the trajectory are exceptional, this thesis will compare the Israeli debate on 1948 with the debate of the Cold War revisionists, and look at the way the trajectory was influenced by political circumstances. In both cases, the event described takes place during the late 1940s, in both cases the event involved is about a major and powerful enemy (the 'Other') whose original intentions remain unclear during the debate by a lack of archival evidence, in both cases this enemy still exists, and in both cases the challenge comes from the Left aiming to undermine a patriotic mythical narrative. The thesis will proceed by explaining the societal circumstances both in Israel and the US, their respective trajectories, and will then go to explain whether these are different, and what accounts for this difference. Bt explaining what makes the trajectories in these two historiographical debates so different, we can come to the explanation on why the debate in Israel might not have followed the regular course of historiographical debates as described by Martin.

2. The Israeli debate on the New Historians

a. Historical background

  Zionism as an organized ideology and movement came into existence during the late 19th century. Ben Halpern characterizes the movement as nationalist, whose main objectives were the exclusive control over land, a renaissance of the Jewish Hebrew language and culture and national sovereignty of a Jewish state. The Zionist movement consisted of a number of branches, all connected in their focused on the founding of a Jewish homeland. Apart from a fringe group which had no preference, most Zionists wanted this home in the historical Jewish homeland, situated in Ottoman Palestine[4]. This nationalism was different from regular nationalist movements, as it was focused on migration to a land, where Jews formed a minority, instead of liberation from a foreign oppressor[5], and that it was seen as an answer to the 'Jewish problem'[6]. The Zionist movement was split in a number of factions, based on general ideology, and on the specific analysis and medicine of the Jewish problem.

  Zionism is in certain ways the outcome of frustrated expectations. The Jews of Europe had, until the late 18th century, been a repressed and sometimes persecuted minority, living separated from the rest of the otherwise Christian population. Although prayers were said in favor of the prospect of one day returning to Palestine –the land from which most Jews were expelled during the Roman Era-, most orthodox Jews were resigned to their faith of living in Diaspora in hostile societies until the day of the arrival of the Savior[7]. Only a few actually went to Palestine to end their days, providing a small but constant replenishment of the indigenous Jewish community.

  The 18th Century European Enlightenment however had a profound effect on Jewish life in Western Europe. The Enlightenment's new emphasis on rationality and universalism led states to introduce equality before the law for all religions[8]. In the following decades, Jews rapidly emancipated themselves, entering new professions, leaving the Ghetto, coming into increased contact with the non-Jewish neighbors and

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[4] Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (London 2003), 46
[5] Ben Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish State* (Cambridge Mass. 1961), 23
[6] Ibid., 21
[7] Ibid., 3
[8] Ibid., 10

eventually culturally assimilating into the wider society[9]. Some converted to Christianity, while others, like Moses Mendelssohn tried to renew Judaism by introducing new Enlightenment values in the Haskalah movement[10]. This led to opposition by traditionalist Jews, who saw little good coming from the adoption of new elements. This contrast between assimilationists and traditionalists was partly determined by the level of emancipation; high in Western Europe, low in Eastern Europe. Zionism, the ideology that stated that assimilation would not lead to total equality, and that only a Jewish state would bring full emancipation, would be particularly popular in those areas the least touched by emancipation and assimilation[11].

The popularity of the Zionist movement can partly be explained by the developments during the 19th century. The reaction to the Enlightenment, the Romantic movement, strove to place more emotional elements to the forefront, like national exclusivity and tradition. In many cases, this led to ethnic nationalism, which excluded Jews from the definition of the all important 'nation'. Religious anti-Semitism was gradually replaced by more racially oriented nationalism, from which there was no escape, whether by assimilation or even conversion[12]. Eastern Europe, especially the territories ruled by the Russian tsars, saw discrimination and increased levels of violence leading to the notorious pogroms. The Jewish population was pressured into leaving which it did in large numbers[13]. Many fled to the US (almost a million), but others sought refuge in Palestine, especially during and after the second Aliyah (1904-1914)[14]. Unsurprisingly, the Zionist movement would find fertile soil in Eastern Europe, while Western European Jews were more skeptical of the movement that seemed to provide anti-Semites with ammunition to declare Jews unwanted strangers[15].

It was a Western European incident, the Dreyfus affair (1896) in France, where a Jewish army officer was wrongly accused of espionage for Germany in a process marred by anti-Semitic overtones- that triggered the foundation of the movement. One of the journalists present who reported on the process was the assimilated Austro-Hungarian

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[9] Ben Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish State,* 9
[10] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism,* 17
[11] Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish State,* 13
[12] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism,* 20-21
[13] Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish State,* 11
[14] Colin Shindler, *A history of modern Israel* (Cambridge, 2008), 18
[15] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism,* 45

Jew Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) [16]. Shocked by the anti-Semitism of the trial, Herzl came to the conclusion that anti-Semitism remained a problem, emancipation of European Jews progressed too slowly and that a Jewish state was the only real solution to these problems[17]. The book where he expressed those ideas, *Der Judenstaat* (1896) became an influential bestseller. Herzl was not the only one with these ideas. One older contemporary, Leon Pinsker (1821-1891) had come to similar conclusions a little earlier. In his pamphlet *Auto-Emanzipation* (1882), Pinkser concluded that anti-Semitism had not diminished, despite the intellectual and economic progress of his age, and that Diaspora Jews would remain outsiders[18]. Pinsker therefore called upon Jews to lose their passivity, regain their self-respect and emigrate to a state of their own[19]. To this end he founded *Hovevei Zion*, a movement focused on building Jewish settlements and an infrastructure for a future Jewish state, and create a fait-accompli on the ground. The efforts of *Hovevei Zion* however, mostly stranded on financial and physical hardships[20]. Herzl's talent for organizing, his journalistic writing skills and his networking abilities however helped him to be more effective and catapult the Zionist movement into history.

In 1897 Herzl organized a Zionist Congress in Basel, whose delegates agreed to his idea of founding the *World Zionist Organization (WZO)* [21]. Its founding document, the Basel program, called for an internationally recognized Jewish homeland in Palestine, which would be furthered by immigration and settlement, Jewish national consciousness and the creation and union of Zionist organizations (including Hovevei Zion) [22]. The *WZO* would function as an umbrella for different factions within the Zionist movement. Herzl was less successful in implementing these ideas. His quest for international support and recognition was unsuccessful, despite his large network and charisma[23]. Moreover he failed in keeping his movement in the line and provoked unnecessary quarrels with his plan to agree to a temporary homeland for Jews in Uganda. When the exhausted Herzl

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[16] Ibid., 88
[17] Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (Berlin 1905), 46-53
[18] Leo Pinkser, *Auto-emancipatie. Oproep tot zijn stamgenoten door een Russische Jood.* (vert. Adolphine Vigeveno) (Amsterdam 1922), 7
[19] Ibid., 20
[20] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 80
[21] Ibid., 105
[22] Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish State*, 28
[23] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 97

died in 1904 his aim was for from reach, and his movement divided[24]. His successors were, until Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952) took the reigns in 1921, rather underwhelming[25].

Zionism included a broad spectrum of ideas. It included socialists elements (mainly dominant after the 1920s), liberal elements, right-wing *Revisionists* but also more religious right-wing elements, like the *Mizrachi*[26] and the ultra-right Messianic Zionists fringe elements[27], who (the latter) wanted to restore the territorial boundaries of the Jewish state of the first and second Temple[28]. A major issue of the early period of Zionism however was the split between cultural Zionists and more practical Political Zionists. The cultural Zionists saw, contrary to the Political Zionists, the idea of a Jewish state as inessential to the solution of the Jewish problem. Their analysis of the problem was cultural; Jews had become divided and estranged from their roots. A spiritual center, not necessarily a state, could unite and reinvigorate the Jewish community[29]. Ahad Ha'am (1856-1927), the most prominent of cultural Zionists, regarded a Jewish state as impractical[30], and many other cultural Zionists would plead for a bi-national state with the Arabs[31]. Although this idea failed to gain much traction among the wider Zionist movement, it is still brought up by some opponents of the current Israeli state, like New Historian Ilan Pappé. The cultural Zionist ideas however contributed to the revival of the Hebrew language and the flowering of Hebrew literature in the late 19th century[32]. The Political Zionism, itself split between those who emphasized to build the facts on the grounds first, and those who wanted more emphasis on international recognition first, remained dominant in the Zionist movement.

The core element of Zionism, immigration –described by the writer Zangwill as a 'people without a land' coming to a 'land without a people'-, begun in earnest during the First Aliyah (1882-1903). This Aliyah was relatively small scale (25.000 immigrants),

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[24] Martin Gilbert, *Israel. A history.*(London, 2008), 22
[25] Lacqueur, *A history of Zionism*, 149
[26] Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish State*, 17
[27] Yaacov Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement 1925-1948* (London, 1988), 131
[28] Ibid., 154
[29] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 49-50
[30] Ibid., 163
[31] Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish State*, 41
[32] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 16

ideological and in the end, less than impressive; three quarters of immigrants left Palestine after some time. The second Aliyah, now coupled to the (still limited) organizational and financial resources of the Zionist movement, accelerated immigration (40.000). This accomplishment was aided by anti-Semitic violence in Russia, such as the Kishinev-pogrom of 1903, which led to a flight to the US and other places, among them Palestine. This new group of arrivals, was also less ideological[33].

The period running up to the First World War saw new settlements, more land purchases, new Jewish cities like Tel Aviv, and new institutions like hospitals and a university[34]. It also saw increased tensions between the growing Jewish community and the local Arabs. For ideological reasons, Jewish agricultural settlements increasingly replaced Arab laborers by Jewish[35]. Agricultural collectives (kibbutzim) of Jewish laborers, based on socialist principles, were to provide a substitute to Arab labor[36]. Some socialists even hoped that this would provoke Arab class struggle, which would in turn create an alliance between Jewish and Arab workers[37]. In reality, this led to more communal segregation. Frustration among Muslim Arabs grew as well, as their previously privileged position came under threat.

Before Zionism arrived on scene and the Ottoman Empire began its 19th century reform movement in earnest, Palestine Jews had a subordinate societal and legal position, called dhimmitude[38]. Sometimes, religious anti-Semitism led to violence, as it did most famously during the 1840 Damascus blood libel case in Syria, of which Palestine was then a part. The 19th century however saw increased rights for religious minorities in the Ottoman empire, as part of a wider reform movement. In 1908 the liberal-Turkish nationalist Young Turks took power in Istanbul, leading to a counter-reaction in the form of growing Pan-Arab nationalism in the Arab parts of the empire, including Palestine. A potential Jewish state in Palestine, a religiously charged area anyway, was deemed to geographically split the Arab world. Fear of being displaced grew with accelerating Jewish immigration. Although Arabs profited from the economic windfall brought by the

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[33] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 18
[34] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 27-29
[35] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 27
[36] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 25-26
[37] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 27
[38] Ibid.,, 26

new economic activities of new Jewish arrivals, their position was at least ambiguous, and increasingly hostile[39]. Although some Zionists had characterized Palestine as a land without a people, fit for a people without a land, the relation between Jews and Arabs would dominate the 20th century. Early Zionists still harbored high hopes that increased prosperity would usher in a period of Jewish-Arab friendship. Even Herzl himself had envisioned Arab-Jewish brotherhood in his utopian novel *Altneuland* (1902). During the British Mandate however, it became clear that these hopes remained utopian[40].

2.   Mandate

In 1915, the Ottoman Empire went into the First World War on the side of the Central Powers. For Palestinian Jews -90.000 in 1914, among whom 75.000 immigrants-, this meant a deterioration of their situation. Turkish authorities doubted the loyalty of Jewish immigrants from Allied countries (like Russia), limiting Jewish immigration and expelling 18.000 Jews from Palestine[41]. Hardship and expulsions left only 56.000 of the 90.000 Jews in 1918[42]. The Zionist community itself was split on what position to take. Many Zionists resented the anti-Semitic tsarist regime in Russia, which fought on the side of the Allies and feared reprisals on the Jewish community in Palestine, if it decided to take sides against the Ottomans Empire[43]. Others, like Vladimir Jabotinksy (1880-1940), saw support for the allies as an opportunity to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. According to Jabotinsky, the Zionist movement could count on little support from Turkish reform movements like the Young Turks, as the latter was mostly focused on French-style centralization, instead of autonomy for minorities[44]. Instead the Jews would have to seek to benefit from a destruction of the Ottoman Empire[45]. In 1915, he called for Jews to join the Allied forces against Turkey. In March that year, the Palestine Refugee Commission called for the formation of a Jewish Legion. Later that year, the British allowed for the participation of a Zion Mule Corps, led by Joseph Trumpedor (1880-

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[39] Ibid.,, 28
[40] Ibid., 27
[41] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 30
[42] Ibid., 36
[43] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 341
[44] Vladimir Jabotinsky, *Turkey and the War* (London, UK., 1917), 87
[45] Vladimir Jabotinsky, *Die Jüdische Legion im Weltkrieg* (Berlin 1930), 5

1920), in Gallipoli[46]. In 1918, a Jewish Legion saw some action after it had been integrated into the British army, which, led by general Allenby, had already occupied Jerusalem in December 1917[47]. The bet on British support turned out to be fruitful, as the British we attributed Palestine as their zone of influence in the Sykes-Picot treaty (1916)[48].

More important than the military effort, were the negotiation efforts of Zionists, led by Aaron Aaronsohn (1876-1919) and the chemist Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952), to persuade British government to support the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. Driven by pragmatic motivations, such as the hope for Jewish financial support for the War effort, but also by more ideological motivations[49], the British government approved its Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930) to issue the (deliberately vague worded) *Balfour Declaration* (1917). This declaration stated that 'His Majesty's Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish People, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object'[50]. This was later reiterated by the Churchill White Paper (1922), which emphasized that the Jews were in Palestine as of right, but limited the number to the absorptive capacity of the economy. The Paris Peace Conference (1919) ratified the British occupation of Palestine, by granting the British a Mandate over Palestine, and accepting the Balfour Declaration[51]. Arab lobbying led to the exclusion of Transjordan from the Palestine Mandate Territory[52], a decision rejected by Jabotinsky's *Revisionist Zionists*, who saw the inclusion of Jordan to the Jewish State as one of their core objectives[53]. The Jewish National Home was however accepted by the League of Nations, as were the Palestinian representatives (later called Jewish Agency) of the Zionist Organization as an official agency[54]. Despite these promises, later British governments

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[46] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*,, 31
[47] Ibid., 36
[48] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism,* 190
[49] Ibid., 201
[50] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 34
[51] Ibid, 42
[52] Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish State*, 304
[53] Ibid., 297
[54] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 50

would be less pro-active in stimulating a Jewish National Home. Most of this was done by Jewish institutions[55].

Among the institutions set up were a Foundation Fund, set up for bringing in financial resources and a General Federation of Jewish Labour, the *Histradut*, which aimed to provide work, training and education. The *Histradut* aggravated tensions between Jews and Arabs by campaigning actively to remove Arab laborers from the Jewish economy, arguing that filling by Arab labor would give British authorities excuses to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine[56]. The Histradut's first secretary became David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), a pragmatic socialist, who would later dominate the Zionist movement and became prime-minister of the new state of Israel[57]. The British Mandate saw increased Jewish immigration (the Third Aliyah, 1919-1923, brought 40.000 mainly Eastern European Jews, the fourth, 1924-1928, 80.000, and the fifth, 1929-1939, 266.000, including many Germans), and accelerated building of settlements and land purchases. The creation of a Jewish majority would however encounter two obstacles; Arab immigration due to the economic growth in Palestine and increasing restrictions on Jewish immigration imposed by British authorities, as a response to Arab disturbances. Next to offering military protection, the Haganah incidentally eliminated threats to the Zionist endeavor. In 1924, the orthodox anti-Zionist leader, Jacob Israel de Haan (1881-1924) was killed on Haganah orders[58].

The British Mandate administration set up their own administration, but also a Jewish Commission as contact organ and administrator for Jewish affairs. The Arab leadership's stance was less than forthcoming. Arab-Jewish skirmishes erupted around settlements, in one of which (Tel Hai, March 1920), Trumpeldor was killed[59]. Later that year, it came to Arab riots in Jerusalem. In response to these riots the Histradut set up a special defense organization, the Haganah which would later form the basis of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF)[60]. In May 1921, it came to more serious rioting. In response the British High Commissioner, Herbert Samuel (1870-1963), temporarily suspended Jewish

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[55] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism,* 302
[56] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 31
[57] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 46
[58] Ibid.,, 53
[59] Ibid., 42-43
[60] Ibid.,, 47

immigration. This pattern would be repeated during the Mandate. The leader of the 1921 riots, Haj Amin al-Husseini (1895-1974), was appointed Grand Mufti later that year. He would use that position to undermine or even eliminate his Palestinian rivals (among them traditional elites like the Nashashibi and El Hadi families), and incite violence against the Jewish presence and British authorities[61]. The Zionists were divided on their response. Jabotinsky favored a hard-line approach. In his 1923 article, *The Iron Wall*, Jabotinsky argued that it would be naive to assume that Arabs would ever consent to the creation of a Jewish majority. He concluded that Jewish immigration should be protected by an Iron Wall, a defense force, which would protect the Jewish settlement, until the Arab population was resigned to the existence of a Jewish majority, and Arab leadership passed to moderate hands[62]. Others rejected these ideas as extreme. Disagreements between Jabotinsky, who had set up his own party, the Revisionist Movement, newspaper, and a militaristic youth organization (Betar) in 1925[63], and the mainstream of the Zionist movement, where Ben-Gurion became ever more important[64], let to the establishment of a separate Revisionist Movement in 1935, which included a separate security organization, the *Irgun*[65].

Violence returned in 1929 after the establishment of the worldwide Jewish Agency, an organization focused on migration to Palestine, culminating in an attack on Jews at the wailing Wall, and the slaughter of Jews by Arab mobs in Hebron and Safed; 133 Jews perished, while eighty-seven Arabs were killed by (mostly) British bullets[66]. Although the violence abated, rejectionist anti-Jewish propaganda did not[67]. An official British report on the violence concluded that 'Zionist claims and demands have been such as to arouse among Arabs the apprehension that they will in time be deprived of their livelihood and pass under the political domination of the Jews', and that 'immigration should be regulated by the economic capacity of Palestine to absorb new arrivals'[68]. The

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[61] Ibid.,, 48
[62] Jabotinsky, 'The Iron Wall, 4 November 1923', in Daniel Carpi *The Political and Social Philosophy of Ze'ev Jabotinsky*, 104;
[63] Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 353
[64] Ibid.,, 350
[65] Ibid.,, 367
[66] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 60
[67] Ibid., 61
[68] Ibid., 64

1930 White paper thus set out restrictions on immigration. Arabs persisted in their rejectionist stance, while Jewish arrivals came in greater numbers following Hitler's takeover of power in Germany. The Zionist leadership toyed with the idea of some kind of settlement, or even a federation with Jordan, but without tangible results, the idea of a peaceful Arab-Jewish society faded during the 1930s[69]. The Arab leadership itself called a national strike on 15 April 1936, and within 48 hours, tit-for-tat killings had spiraled out of control. While Arab leadership demanded the end to Jewish immigration, anti-Jewish, and anti-British violence and Haganah (which professed a policy of self restraint) and Irgun (which did not) counterattacks had spread over Palestine[70]. In 1937, the British responded by setting up a commission to investigate the cause of the violence. This Peel commission concluded that Jewish immigration had led to Arab fears of being overwhelmed, and should be limited to 12.000 for the next five years. It also concluded that Palestine should be partitioned between a Jewish and Arab state, with Jerusalem remaining under British control. The Zionists accepted the principle of partition, but rejected the size of their attributed territory as not viable, while the Arabs rejected partition altogether[71]. The plan collapsed, and Arab attacks on Jewish and British targets continued. The Arab uprising was finally quelled in March 1939. Its principal instigator, The Grand mufti, already in exile in Syria, fled to Nazi-Germany, where he enlisted into Hitler's service[72]. As a result of the violence, the British issued a new *White Paper* in 1939. This time, despite Nazi-persecution and immigration restrictions elsewhere, Jewish immigration was restricted to 75.000 in five year, after which majority rule (which would effectively hand the reigns of power to the Arabs) would be instituted[73].

The Zionist Movement itself rejected the plan as contrary to the British obligations under the Balfour program[74]. Haganah responded by organizing illegal immigration by sea, while stockpiling weapons to anticipate future unrest[75]. Despite objections raised by Churchill and despite growing awareness that the Germans were perpetrating mass killings, the restrictions on immigration were continued by the cabinet

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[69] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 33-34
[70] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 81;
[71] Ibid., 88
[72] Ibid.,, 117
[73] Ibid., 97
[74] Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish State*, 45
[75] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 104-105

throughout the much of the war[76]. Jewish forces such as the Haganah were however allowed to participate in the war effort. By and large, the Zionist movement came to the conclusion that they could no longer count on British support for their national home, Ben-Gurion therefore organized the *Biltmore Conference*, whose delegates (including Revisionists) came to the conclusion that a Jewish State should replace the British Mandate. One fringe rightwing group, the *Stern gang*, saw the British as its main enemy –hoping on a pact with Hitler-, and carried out terrorist attacks on British targets[77]. In January 1944, the Irgun –now led by Revisionist strongman Menachem Begin (1913-1992) called for an anti-British revolt as well[78].

After the War, the plight of Jewish refugees became even more pressing – illustrated by the Polish Kielce pogrom in 1946[79]-, but also enlisted more international support. Although Truman pressured the British to allow more refugees, the new Labor foreign secretary Ernest Bevin (1881-1951), continued immigration restrictions and actively prevented further immigration[80]. The Zionist response was illegal immigration, while the British stepped up arrests –most famously during Black Sabbath[81]- and deported intercepted refugees to Cyprus and further[82]. The interception of the Exodus however proved to be a British PR disaster[83]. Organizations like the Irgun responded by violence. On 22 July 1946, the Irgun blew up a wing of the King David Hotel, which housed British administrators, killing 91 people[84], and ended the fledgling cooperation between *Haganah*, *Irgun* and *Lehi*[85]. In December 1946, Zionist delegates gathered in Basle to decide how to proceed. This time, Weizmann's appeals for restraint and moderation were rejected. From now on, the Zionists took a tough stance, under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion[86].

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[76] Ibid., 108
[77] Ibid., 111-112
[78] Ibid., 117
[79] Ibid.,, 134
[80] Ibid., 123
[81] Morris, 1948, 35
[82] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*,, 134
[83] Ibid., 145
[84] Ibid., 134-135
[85] Shindler, *Israel, Likud and the Zionist Dream*, 35
[86] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 140

3.   _War_

On 15 February 1947, the British government announced it would hand over its mandate, without presenting any plans for the future[87]. Jewish terrorist activities continued, as (mainly) the Irgun carried out bombings on British targets[88]. The UN set up a Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). The Arabs boycotted its proceedings[89]. When the UNSCOP published its report in August 1947, in which it divided Palestine into a Jewish and Arab majority state and Jerusalem under international trusteeship, the Jewish Agency accepted the proposal, while the Arabs rejected it[90]. The UN General Assembly accepted the proposal with 33 votes (including the US and the Soviet-Union), with thirteen against (including all Arab states) on 29 November 1947. The resolution stated that power should be transferred no later than 1 August 1948[91].

The new was greeted by anti-Jewish riots across the Arab world, killing 130 Jews, while Arab-Jewish violence in Palestine spiraled into a violent struggle for control. Arab militias attacked Jewish settlements and the old City of Jerusalem (which were defended by the Haganah), while Irgun and Lehi stepped up their attacks on Arab and British targets. Already in January 1948, the death toll stood at almost 1100 Arab, 800 Jewish, and a 100 British casualties[92]. In the same month, the Haganah decided to engage in counterattacks, effectively turning the conflict into a war. Ben-Gurion instructed the Haganah to allow Jewish civilians to move into abandoned and occupied Arab city districts and villages. On 15 February 1948, the Haganah captured the village of Caesarea. It expelled those Arabs who had not already left[93]. While the British withdrew their positions, mutual atrocities intensified. On 15 April, while Jewish and Arab forces were locked in a battle over the road to Jerusalem, Irgun forces entered the city of Deir Yassin, killing 245 inhabitants[94]. It was followed by Arab counter killings, among them the attack on the Hadassah hospital convoy, which killed 77. After the Arab Liberation

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[87] Heller, *The Birth of Israel. 1945-1949. Ben-Gurion and His Critics* (Gainesville, 2000), 259
[88] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 142
[89] Ibid., 145
[90] Ibid.,, 149
[91] Ibid., 153
[92] Ibid.,, 155-159
[93] Ibid., 163
[94] Ibid., 166-169

Army attacked the Jewish quarter in Tiberias, the Haganah isolated the Arab quarter, after which the Arab population left[95]. After the British withdrawal from Haifa, the Jews won the struggle for control. Again the Arab residents left. According to Gilbert, the Haganah tried to persuade the Arab residents to stay, to no avail, only a few thousand remained. The Arab militias proved no match for Haganah forces, and the scene of Palestinians fleeing their village or town for battle was repeated throughout Palestine[96]. In the case of Safed, the Haganah 'helped' the population clear the area[97]. The Arab population of Jaffa left after the city's surrender (of 70.000, 3.000 remained). Arab forces in their turn, killed 157 Jews after capturing Kfar Etzion on May 14 1948[98]. In total, the period between April and June 1948, caused the flight of 200 to 300.000 Palestinian Arab[99]. The Israeli cabinet decided in June 1948, not to allow for the return of refugees, estimated by the Haganah to be around 391.000. The transfer of Arab refugees was not a theme in Zionist thought. Even Jabotinsky had opposed population transfer of Arabs from Israel[100]. In practice, this was what occurred.

On 14 May 1948, Israel declared independence. A few hours later, Arab forces from Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi-Arabia and Yemen invaded, as many had predicted. Their intentions seemed to bode ill, as one high official promised 'a momentous massacre'. Despite this invasion, the Israeli military stood its ground, even conquering areas not attributed to it by the UN. During this period of interstate war, another 300.000 Palestinians Arabs left[101]. Negotiations on refugees went nowhere. The Israeli's refused to take in all the refugees, while Israel's ultimate offer to take back a 100.000, was rejected by the Arab states[102]. Israel did however absorb about 500.000 Jewish refugees who were mostly forced out from Arab states.

The New Historians mostly criticized the official historiography on the period running up to, and during the Israeli War of Independence (or Nakba, according to

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[95] Ibid., 170-171
[96] Ibid.,, 173-174
[97] Ibid., 177
[98] Ibid., 183-185
[99] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 45
[100] Ibid., 58
[101] Ibid., 46-47
[102] Ibid.,, 52

Palestinian historiography). This thesis will go deeper into these periods when describing the New Historians.

4. Labor

As already indicated during the previous chapter, Israeli history has been dominated by a number of key themes: First was the nature of the society as an immigration society, trying to come up with a sense of shared identity, despite its people coming from different cultural backgrounds. Second was the debate on the nature of Zionism, especially between the socialist mainstream led by the Mapai party, and its first prime minister David Ben-Gurion, and the Zionist Revisionists, mostly members of the *Herut* party led by Menachem Begin. Third was the constant security threat posed by Arab states bent on the destruction of Israel and the attacks by Arab irregulars. The Israeli leaders of the Labor generation of 1948 were mostly eastern Europeans, who had arrived during the 1920s. According to Kimmerling, 'Together with their offspring and with a number of individuals who had been co-opted into the elite group, the leaders constituted an oligarchy, whose hegemony over Israeli society appeared indisputable and unassailable until the late 1970s'[103]. Ben-Gurion expanded the sway of the state, which was controlled by his Mapai party over much of the economy and over mechanisms of control over sociopolitical mobilization, while keeping the population dependent on the state at the same time; this control over the institutions prevented 'drastic change'[104].

After independence, Ben-Gurion turned immigration into a priority. The policy worked; within three years after independence Israel's population had doubled. The State of Israel went even as far as to buy immigrants from Eastern European communist states[105]. This was achieved despite financial –though American Jewry was forthcoming- and physical hardships, very often leaving immigrants stranded in tents[106]. Many of the New arrivals were Sephardim, who mostly came from Middle Eastern countries. Many of them had little affinity with secular Socialist ideas, and few possessed the qualifications and skills of Eastern European Jews, which was noted by Ben-Gurion. The result was a

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[103] Baruch Kimmerling, *The invention and decline of Israeliness. State, Society and the Military*, (Berkeley 2001), 69
[104] Kimmerling, *The invention and decline of Israeliness* , 70
[105] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 62
[106] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 261

frustrated underclass, which would later on support the anti-Labor opposition[107]. Who was eligible for citizenship was more controversial; the Law of Return, passed in July 1950 in the Knesset, allowed 'Jews' to return to Israel, raising the question who can be defined as a Jew. This led to a political and judicial battle between secularists and religious Jews who had different understandings[108].

The first elections brought a victory for the social democratic Mapai party and its leader; Ben-Gurion. Despite the initial backing of the Soviet-Union for the state of Israel, the new leadership was weary of any communist influence and the Israeli-Soviet relationship quickly turned sour[109]. Instead relation with the US would become more important, especially during and after the 1960s. Next to increasingly tense relations with the Mapam party (which also supported a bi-national state), Ben-Gurion had a troubled relationship with the Herut as well. In June 1948 Ben-Gurion almost provoked a civil war when ordered the sinking of a ship (the Altalena) carrying weapons to the Irgun[110]. The tense relation would continue; Begin took an uncompromising stance on a wide variety of issues, instigating violent protests against a reparations treaty with Germany (1952)[111]. Labor held power for almost three decades (1948-1977), seeing a succession of prime ministers (Ben-Gurion (1948-53, 55-63), Sharett (53-55), Eshkol (63-69), Meir (69-74), Rabin (74-77)). The Labor party however begun to suffer from splits and internal strife[112]. One important reason for this was internal disagreement on the future of the newly acquired territory after the 1967 war; some Labor leaders wanted to divide the new territories with Jordan (Allon), others wanted to trade the territories for peace, while others (Dayan) wanted to settle the new territories[113]. While the left became fragmented Begin's Herut profited, as it grew in strength and forged an alliance with the Liberals[114]. The developing new middle class however began to form a counterbalance. At the same time, many immigrants began to form groups along ethnic lines; the Northern African

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[107] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 95
[108] Ibid., 87
[109] Ibid., 67
[110] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 213
[111] Ibid., 282
[112] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 129
[113] Ibid., 138
[114] Ibid., 132

and Eastern European divide emerged[115]. In 1977, economic problems tipped the balance and brought Likud to power[116].

Although a cease-fire was in place, no peace treaty between Israel and its neighbors was signed. The threat of an Arab attack remained Infiltrators were at multiple occasions able to kill Israeli's, to which Israel responded with attacks on targets in Jordan and Egypt[117]. The Cold War and the hostility of Arab states –Palestine first approach meant that an international dimension was drawn in[118]. Mapai portrayed itself as the party of security, and Israel participated with the British and French forces in attacking Egypt during the Suez crisis of 1956[119]. In 1967, it came to renewed clashes on the Israeli-Syrian border[120]. The Pan-Arab nationalist president of Egypt, Gamal Nasser (1918-1970), stepped up his rhetoric, successfully demanded the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers in the Sinai and closed the Straits of Tiran[121]. Israel responded to the threat with a surprise assault on Egypt, Jordan and Syria, conquering the Sinai, Golan Heights and the Palestinian Arab territories (Gaza, West Bank), previously held by Egypt and Jordan[122]. The newly acquired territory would prove to be a mixed blessing, as nationalist and religious Zionists now argued for a Greater Israel[123]. Any hopes for future negotiations were dashed when the Arab League responded to Israeli proposals with the phrase; 'No peace, no negotiation, no recognition'[124]. Israel was left to occupy the territories. According to Kimmerling, the 1967 conquests 'opened pandora's box'. The 1967 conquests meant that Israel could maintain its settler identity[125]. The state's response was the de-factor annexation and the sponsoring of the building of settlements[126]. The 1967 conquest gave rise to more primordial elements in Israeli society; the religious elite gained a greater say now the biblical lands of Judea and Samaria were

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[115] Kimmerling, *The invention and decline of Israeliness,* 72
[116] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 146
[117] Ibid.,, 113
[118] Kimmerling, *The invention and decline of Israeliness* ,43
[119] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 119-121
[120] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 365
[121] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 123
[122] Ibid., 125
[123] Ibid., 125
[124] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 402
[125] Kimmerling *The invention and decline of Israeliness* ,47
[126] Ibid., 80

in Jewish hands[127]. This contributed to a challenge to the hitherto hegemonic Ashkenazi Labor elite by an alliance of secular nationalists (Likud) and religious conservatives who identified Israeli identity less civic Zionist and more Judaic[128]. Palestinian Arab terrorist organizations –most prominent of whom was the PLO, created by Yasser Arafat (1929-2004) in 1964[129]- continued their attacks, but included more spectacular international terrorist acts like hijackings and the Munich murders, in their modus operandi[130]. In 1973, Egypt and Syria started another war, catching Israel by surprise and were only defeated at the cost of a high human toll[131]. The war gave Egyptian president Anwar Sadat enough home credit to start negotiations with the new Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

5. Right

After coming to power in 1977, Begin had to deal with the restive Arab neighbors and Palestinian PLO terrorism, which became more lethal over the years[132]. Although his government was hard-line on security and the Arabs, his era saw not only a peace-agreement with Egypt, but also changes in how Israeli society perceived itself and its position in the conflict. In 1977, Sadat started peace talks. In a groundbreaking move, he visited Jerusalem in 1977, Begin responded by launching a plan for cultural autonomy for the Palestinians, but also permitted land purchases for settlements and leaving open the question of sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza[133]. In 1978 Carter joined Sadat in arguing that Palestinians had legitimate rights. While Begin and others on the right had regarded the Palestinian Arab question as a question of Pan-Arabism, international players now treated the Palestinian Arabs as a separate people[134]. With Camp David accords of 1978, Egypt agreed to Israel, while Israel handed back the Sinai peninsula, which would be demilitarized. The Palestinian question was left open[135]. Begins peace initiative narrowly won the support of his party, and his liberal economic policy lost him

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[127] Ibid., 82
[128] Ibid., 111
[129] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 352
[130] Ibid., 419
[131] Ibid., 459
[132] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 152
[133] Ibid., 158
[134] Ibid., 160.
[135] Ibid., 161

many supporters[136]. In 1983, he resigned, succeeded by Yitzhak Shamir (1915), whose finally lost elections to Labor's Yitzhak Rabin (1922-1995) in 1992[137].

Begin's minister of defense, Ariel Sharon pushed for and got an Israeli invasion into Lebanon, where the PLO was engaged in a civil war with Christian Lebanese factions and Syrians. It turned into a quagmire, from which Israel only extracted itself in 2000[138]. Sharon's policies already gained criticism from dissident officers for their perceived harshness in dealing with Palestinian Arabs and lack of direction. The events in Lebanon created the largest opposition movement, starting with officers, but turning into a mass movement against the War in Lebanon (Peace Now) and mass demonstrations of over a 100.000 people[139]. The September 1982 Shabra and Shatila massacre, conducted after the withdrawal of the PLO from Beirut by Phalangist militias in Palestinian refugee camps while nearby Israeli forces did nothing, led to an anti-government mass protest of over 400.000 people in Tel Aviv[140]. After a condemning report on the matter, Sharon resigned[141]. This meant the breakdown of consensus on Israeli policies. Critics of Israeli policies, whether from the left bi-nationalist side –like the Marxist Hashomer Hatzair and Mapam in the earlier days[142]- or those in favor of a two-state solution or ideologically nondescript Peace activists, now gained attention and societal impact[143]. Critics of this peace movement pointed to the fact that the PLO still rejected a two-state solution[144]. This realization later converted the New Historian, Benny Morris to more rightwing outlooks. The year 1982 also saw the opening of the Israeli State archives, which were eagerly used for new interpretations by a group called , the 'new historians'[145].

The 1980s and 1990s ascent of the 'new historians' coincided with the coming of age of a new post-Holocaust generation of Israeli citizens. Political activists such as Nachum Goldman criticized early politicians like David Ben-Gurion for selectively choosing from

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[136] Ibid., 166
[137] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 551
[138] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 173
[139] Ibid., 177
[140] Gilbert, *Israel. A history,* 509
[141] Ibid., 511
[142] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 182
[143] Ibid., 185
[144] Ibid., 186
[145] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 156

elements of Jewish and Zionist history to fit their political perspective[146].This criticism coincided with a wider trend in the Western society to be more skeptical about historical discourse. Influential critics of historical, like Foucault, argued that history was mainly used to legitimize political ideas[147]. Opposition among against the Lebanon War, the Israeli security policies in the West Bank and the settlements rose among the younger generation, and American Jews[148]. Europe, where the New Left gained positions of influence, became more critical. Support for a settlement with the PLO rose, as more people became convinced that Israel should talk to the PLO if the latter renounced violence, after which (1988) Arafat announced to renounce terrorism[149]. Opposition grew even stronger when riots broke out on 9 December 1987 in the West Bank and spiraled into an uprising against the Israeli presence on the West Bank[150]. As this uprising continued unabated for five years, the PLO, Hamas (a rejectionist Islamist group founded in 1988) and other organizations carried out violent attacks. International condemnation – especially under the influence of an Arab anti-Israel campaign- grew while military resources were brought under strain, many more began to ask whether continued occupation of the territories was tenable[151]. The Palestinian intifada, the Israeli inability to repress it (coupled with brutalities in the Arab areas, and attacks on Israeli civilians by Arabs), and the unfavorable coverage of "colonialist" repression, changed 'the cost benefit equation' of Greater Israel[152].

This was the climate in which the New Historians, but also the peace movement, and finally the efforts to come to an agreement with the Palestinian leadership rose. The success and eventual failure of the Peace Process would determine the New Historians Movement.

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[146] Ibid., 192

[147] H.J. Paul, *Masks of Meaning: Existentialist Humanism in Hayden White's Philosophy of History*, Groningen, 2006, 95

[148] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,* 194

[149] Ibid., 195

[150] Gilbert, *Israel. A history*, 525

[151] Ibid., 526

[152] Kimmerling *The invention and decline of Israeliness* ,49

b. Zionist historians and their challengers

Old Historiography

The New Historians self-described as a group of revisionist Israeli historians sought to debunk distortions of the 'Zionist narrative'[153], or a bit harsher as Simha Flapan expressed it 'to undermine the propaganda structures that have so long obstructed the growth of the peace forces in my country.[154]'. According to Benny Morris, 'Old Historians offered a simplistic and consciously pro-Israeli interpretation of the past', while the new historians use new material, had 'matured in a more open, doubting and self-critical environment' , and were thus able to be more impartial[155]. Some of these works- Morris admitted- were mainly polemical and failed to improve on existing research[156], but overall the New History 'seems to offer us a more balanced and more truthful view of the country's history than what has been offered hitherto. In Morris' view it may in some way serve the purposes of peace and reconciliation between the warring tribes of that land'[157]. Avi Shlaim as well (writing a little later), declared that the old historiography, 'propaganda of the victors', was deeply flawed and in need of revision based on newly available evidence through the opening of archives. Naturally, this would have implications for Israel's self-image[158].

The new historians described the (1980s) dominant Zionist narrative as flawed. According to Avi Shlaim, the narrative was one-sided and went roughly as follows: the 1948 War was a conflict which came to a head after the Jews accepted the UN partition plan and the Arabs rejected it, the British frustrated the establishment of a Jewish state and Arabs invaded the country after it proclaimed independence with the intention to destroy Israel. In the Jewish David – Arab Goliath struggle that followed, Israel fought heroically against overwhelming odds. At the same time, Arabs fled to neighboring states in response to their leaders orders, and despite Jewish pleas to stay. After the war, Arab intransigence made peace impossible. This narrative was, according to Shlaim, mostly

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[153] Efraim Karsh, 'Rewriting Israel's History', *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 2, June 1996, p.19-29;
[154] Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, (New York 1987), p. 10
[155] Benny Morris, 'The New Historiography', in Benny Morris (ed.), *Making Israel*, (Ann Arbor 2007), p, 14-15
[156] Morris, 'The New Historiography', 16
[157] Ibid., 27
[158] Avi Shlaim, 'The debate about 1948', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol 27 No 3, aug 1995, p. 287-304

written by participants or admirers, not actual historians, and is rather short on political analysis, but elaborative on Israeli moral military conduct during the War[159]. Morris as well described the old narrative in a similar fashion[160].

More orthodox scholars as well described the orthodox account as presenting an overly positive view on Israeli history, but were less damning on its consequences. Anita Shapira for instance links the old version of Israel as a defensive and morally upright Israel, which only opts for a military solution when there is no other way, with the mentality in its society. This mentality did not prevent the military from acting in accordance with the state interests. ' It also did not hinder brutal decisions. Yet it did also make it easier for the leaders to arrive at moderate decisions that were at odds with the wishes of the militants', as they profited from a population that 'continued to abhor the notion of being a nation of conquerors'. 'The defensive ethos undoubtedly remains a vital and resilient component on the road to peace'[161].

Old Historiography's context

Histories of Zionism, are almost as old as the movement itself, beginning with Nachum Sokolow's *History of Zionism, 1600-1918* (1919, with a preface by Lord Balfour), which was more a teleological pamphlet than historical work of scholarship, and Adolf Böhm's *Die zionistiche Bewegung* (1920-1935)[162]. Most of these early historians were Zionist activists themselves, and as Yoav Gelber characterized them, 'amateurs'[163]. According to Kimmerling, the hold of Labor on all facets of society until the 1970s, as well as the economic boom and the 'messianic mood' after the 1967 conquests, 'postponed any internal struggles'[164]. In other words; time was not on the side of a radical revision of Israeli self-perception. According to Shapira, the first generation of Israelis had 'burdened the complex Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine with all the

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[159] Avi Shlaim, 'The Debate about 1948', in Benny Morris (ed.) *Making Israel* (Ann Arbor, 2007), p. 125
[160] Benny Morris, *Righteous victims: A History of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York, 2001), preface, xvi
[161] Anita Shapira, *Land and power; the Zionist resort to force 1881-1948,* (Oxford, 1992), 370
[162] Derek Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography', in David N. Myers and David B. Ruderman, *The Jewish Past Revisited. Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1998, p. 105
[163] Yoav Gelber, 'The History of Zionist Historiography. From Apologetics to Denial', in Benny Morris (ed.), *Making Israel*, (Ann Arbor 2007), 47
[164] Kimmerling *The invention and decline of Israeliness* , 75

imported freight of the age old confrontation between Jews and gentiles'. They developed a self-image as victim and hero and saw 'Arab enmity towards Israel as another variation of anti-Semitic hatred'[165]. The coming of newer waves of immigrants led to a decline in 'native' Yishuv history and an endorsement of the more widely shared Jewish history of victimhood; the Holocaust, aided by the Eichmann trial of 1961 penetrated the national psyche and led to a growing fear for possible annihilation by aggressive Arabs. This self-perception was linked a defensive ethos, which perceived Israelis as only going into war if there was no other choice. Until 1982, the idea of no choice was advanced in all the wars Israel had to fight. The gap between 'the self-image of victim and the military ability' grew, but the 'erosion of old norms was extremely slow[166]. Sternhell too pointed at the development model created by Labor, which was so strong that 'even after its fall from power in 1977 no real changes occurred in the economic, cultural and social life of Israel. Israel's founders 'both formulated its ideology and put it into practice themselves. The theorists were also political leaders who controlled the political, social and economic institution they had set up. In the democratic world, this phenomenon was unprecedented both in its depth and in its continuity'. Israel knew the informality of immigration societies which lack the consciousness of a traditional elite, but its social policies lagged far behind other western nations[167].

The image of a heroic settler, pursuing defensive and justified goals, but ultimately faced with an intransigent and aggressive Arab leadership. This image was not limited to the Left, but also to some degree to the right; although Labor and the revisionists disagreed over the methods to be employed. The more realist perspective on the right however made them more open to the revisionist interpretations once these arrived in the 1980s[168]. After the creation of Israel, historical debate –Zionism now largely uncontroversial- focused more on the fathers of success; who drove the British out, who built the country and shaped the military[169]. Arthur Hertzberg's, *The Zionist Idea* (mostly a collection of texts from Zionist ideologues) and particularly Jewish Agency's publicist

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[165] Shapira, *Land and power*, 363
[166] Ibid., 369
[167] Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel. Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*. (Princeton 1999), 5
[168] Avi Shlaim, 'The War of the Israeli Historians', in *Annales* 59:1, 2004, p. 164
[169] Gelber, 'The History of Zionist Historiography. From Apologetics to Denial', 55

Ben Halpern, *The Idea of the Jewish State* (1961), a history of Zionism and the State of Israel, were widely acclaimed[170]. The 1960s and 70s saw the study of Zionist historiography coming of age, with journals such as *Tsiyonut* and *Cathedra* seeing the light. Universities, that had until then barred 'Zionist propaganda', allowed Zionist historical scholarship into their confines[171]. While mostly Anglo-Saxon historians wrote seminal overviews of Zionist and Israeli history, Israeli historians mostly focused on monographs on the Yishuv. Famous examples of the former are Walter Laqueur's *A History of Zionism* (1972) and Howard Sachar's *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (1976), and Noah Lucas who wrote *The Modern History of Israel* (1975)[172]. Lucas was critical of Israel's West Bank settlements policy, and is seen by some as a precursor to the New Historians[173]. An Israeli example of this type of broad scholarship was David Vital, who began his trilogy on Zionist history in the 1970s, with *The Origins of Zionism* (1975) with a new focus on the first Aliyah. Israeli scholarship thus far mostly concentrated on monographs concerning themes in Yishuv history. While minority Revisionist historians like Jabotinsky biographer Joseph Schechtman had their own ideological focus, most Israeli historians from the first generation focused on Labor Zionism, largely ignoring or dismissing topics outside this context, such as the First Aliyah or the pre-Zionist Yihuv[174]. The change of the political climate away from Labor Zionism (climaxing in Labors electoral defeat in 1977) was also reflected in historical scholarship, which broadened its scope. New forms of historical writing, such as biographies, came into being and more critical tones crept into the debate[175]. Some criticism during the 1970s was blatantly anti-Zionist. The Eichmann trial brought new attention to the Holocaust and the role of the Zionist movement during the War. Shabtai beit-Zvi used this attention to the Holocaust to accuse Zionists of obstructing rescue efforts of European Jews, because this would not advance the Zionist project[176]. The

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[170] Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography', 106
[171] Gelber, 'The History of Zionist Historiography. From Apologetics to Denial', 56
[172] Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography'108
[173] http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/mar/06/israel-noah-lucas-politics-history (last accessed 1 July 2012)
[174] Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography',106-109
[175] Ibid., 110
[176] Gelber, 'The History of Zionist Historiography. From Apologetics to Denial', 61

1970s saw new approaches to sociology as well[177]. Criticism on concepts like 'collective memory' reared its head as well, as scholars began to point out that these collective memories exclude minority groups[178]. New sociologists like Baruch Kimmerling and Gershon Shafir explained collectivist and militaristic aspects of Israeli society by referring to the Arab-Jewish relations and the Arab presence on land, Israelis wanted to settle. With this they brought renewed historiographic focus on Arab-Israeli relations[179].

The tone of the debate before the 1980s has been characterized as either pro-Israeli, portraying Israel as the victim of Arab aggression, or anti-Israeli (outside Israel), painting Israel as the aggressor. A change of tone in Israel in the 1980s was in the 1970s already predicted by historian Israel Kolatt, who forecasted the emergence of critical historiography, as Arab anti-Zionist propaganda already influenced the ideas of the European and American New Left and the New Left's critical attitude would undoubtedly reach Israeli shores[180]. Indeed, according to Yoav Gelber, the European post-colonial guilt complex, coupled with Arab petro-dollars, made Western academia much more receptive to pro-Palestinian slogans[181]. The opening of the Israeli state archives gave new (archival) ammunition to challengers as well as defenders of the orthodox account[182]. The third ingredient added in the mix that was brewing the new historiography, was the political course of 1980s Israel.

Baruch Kimmerling a described the late 1980s as a mix of several factors: 'The Palestinian uprising of 1987 and its spread into "Jewish territories" , the need to absorb some 800.000 new Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the economic and social hardships that threatened the delicate fabric of Jewish society, the changes in the world political system following the collapse of the Soviet superpower the results of the Gulf War, the American pressures to link aid (in the form of loan guarantees) to the "peace process"[183]. The rise of the religious right after the 1967 war and their challenge (especially by groups like Gush Eminim during the 1970s) of the hegemonic secular

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[177] Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography', 113
[178] Gelber, 'The History of Zionist Historiography. From Apologetics to Denial', 59
[179] Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography',113
[180] Gelber, 'The History of Zionist Historiography. From Apologetics to Denial', 57
[181] Ibid., 65
[182] Ibid, 58
[183] Kimmerling *The invention and decline of Israeliness* , 75

culture, contributed to the collapse of the latter and ultimately to more individualism[184].
Newcomers such as Russians (1980s, 1990s) and Ethiopians led to increased segregation
and splintering into subcultures, but also led to more space for Arab citizens[185]. Society
became more receptive for dissident voices.

Two events in the early 1980s in particular played at the hands of potentially more
revisionist scholars. One was the opening of British and Israeli state archives, which drew
scholars like Benny Morris –according to his own words- into researching and reviewing
the Israeli account on the Palestinian refugees of 1948[186]. The newly uncovered archival
material gave the New historians a chance to back their new interpretations up by 'new'
archival resources. The unavailability of Arab archival resources however left –according
to critics- a blind spot with regard to Arab intentions[187]. The second event was the
decision to invade Lebanon in 1982, and the justification given by prime minister
Begin[188]. Many historians mention this as pivotal in creating their new perception of
Israel's role in its neighborhood. Flapan referred to the 1982 Beirut War in the preface to
his *The Birth of Israel*, and especially to Begin's parallel of this war with Ben-Gurions
1948 policies of 'preventing a Palestinian state', 'destruction of Arab villages' and 'the
expulsion of their inhabitants', 'all in the interest of establishing a homogeneous Jewish
state'. Until then, the 1948 War had never been a subject of controversy, as it was
considered a War of self-defense. The remarks by Begin about the war in Lebanon being
a war for national self-interest instead of a war of defense, led to investigation, which led
Flapan to conclude that his remarks were, 'based on fact'[189]. The fact that Flapan was a
Marxist sympathizer of the Mapam party might have eased his conversion towards a
more critical stance in 1948[190]. Shlaim as well points at Begin's attitude towards the
Lebanon war as undermining the consensus of Israel's morally upright military standards;
'For many Israelis, especially liberal-minded ones, the Likud's ill-conceived and ill-fated
invasion of Lebanon in 1983 marked a watershed', especially with the admission of

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[184] Ibid, 232
[185] Kimmerling *The invention and decline of Israeliness* , 170
[186] Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Arab Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*. (Cambridge, 1987)
acknowledgements and introduction
[187] Shlaim, 'The War of the Israeli Historians', 127-128
[188] Avi Shlaim, 'The War of the Israeli Historians', in Annales 59:1, 2004, 161
[189] Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, (New York 1987), 5-6
[190] Shabtai Teveth, 'Charging Israel with Original Sin', in Commentary 88:3, 1989, 24

Begin that the 1982 Lebanon war was (as the Sinai war of 1956) 'a war of choice designed to achieve national objectives'. According to Shlaim, with this admission, 'national consensus around the notion of *ein breira* [there is no alternative, Hebrew] began to crumble, leaving space for a critical re-examination of the country's earlier history'[191]. Even scholars more critical towards the new historians were influenced by the Lebanon war. Anita Shapira attributed her more critical stance to Begin's speech, as this was the first time 'a leading public figure had openly advocated war. Previous Zionist and Israeli leaders were careful to avoid being viewed as trigger happy politicians'[192].

Then, there is the last contributing factor: the Palestinian issue. When the New historians started to publish their works, it coincided with the beginning of the Palestinian 'intifada', which made Israel's relation with its Arab inhabitants and Arab neighbors more of a pressing issue[193]. In fact, the intifada and peace process next few years would make the writings of the new historians, who explicitly proclaimed that their efforts might contribute to peace[194]. This connection to politics however also proved faithful to its development. Sternhell put it in 1999 like this: 'when the more complex aspects of the history of the twentieth century come up for discussion, the historiographical debate assumes a particularly intense tone. In Israel the reason is that this academic debate merges with the public debate on the future of Israeli society. Thus the Israeli intellectual establishment tends to blur the distinction between two totally different phenomena: the progress of scholarship and the emergence of what is called post-Zionist tendencies'[195]. The link between scholarship and politics would co-determine the course of the Israeli historiograhical debate.

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[191] Shlaim, 'The War of the Israeli Historians' 127-128
[192] Anita Shapira, *Land and Power. The Zionist Resor t to Force* 1881-1948 (Oxord, 1992)
[193] Gilbert, *Israel. A History*, 526
[194] Morris, 'The new historiography', in Making Israel, 27
[195] Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel. Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*. (Princeton 1999)

New Historiography

The years 1987 and 1988 introduced the works of a group of historians that came to be known as the 'new historians'. These historians set out to challenge long-held conceptions about the 1948 war[196]. In quick succession, three challenges to the Israeli historiographic status quo were launched. In 1987, Simha Flapan published his *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (1987), in which he set out to challenge a number of 'myths' on the events around the 1948 War of Independence, head-on. Benny Morris' *The Birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947-1949*, in which he claimed that Israel had been co-responsible for creating the Arab refugee problem, followed in the same year[197]. In his book, possibly the most debated of all the new historians' works, Morris detailed the expulsions of Palestinian Arabs from Israel and their prevention from returning thereafter[198]. In 1988, Avi Shlaim published his *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine*, which challenged the idea that the Arab world, that Israel faced in 1948, was monolithic. Instead Shlaim claimed that Israel colluded with Transjordan in allowing the latter to take over the West Bank to prevent a Palestinian state[199]. Ilan Pappé as well published his fist book, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1948-1951* in 1988, where he argued that Israeli and British interests coincided on Palestine, and that Britain allowed Israeli military expansion[200].

Before long, this group of publications was labeled 'the new scholarship'[201]. Benny Morris himself contributed to this idea by contrasting 'new historiography' with the 'old', in his influential article 'The New historiography. Israel confronts his past' (1988)[202]. The most prominent new historians of the next decades, Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim and Ilan Pappé, all received a major part of their education at British institutions at some point (Cambridge, the London School of Economics, Oxford), and all wrote English for

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[196] Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography' 111-112
[197] Anita Shapira, 'The Past is not a foreign country. The failure of Israel's new historians to explain war and peace', *in The New Republic*, 29 nov 1999,
[198] Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Arab Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge, 1987)
[199] Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, The Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine* (New York, 1988)
[200] Ilan Pappé, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1948-1951* (New York, 1988); *The making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (London, 1992)
[201] Richard Bernstein, 'Birth of the Land of Israel: A history revisited', *New York Times*, 28 July, 1988
[202] Benny Morris, 'The New historiography. Israel confronts his past'

mainly international audiences[203]. It is not unlikely that they had encountered the ideas espoused by the New Left, which was prominent in university campuses at the time. Some (like Pappé) read under prominent Arab and leftwing scholars like Albert Hourani, former representative of the Palestinian negotiators in 1946 and Roger Owen [204]. Although they disagreed on some issues, Morris, Shlaim and Pappé agreed in their view that Israel had more military power than assumed by 'official' Zionist scholarship, and that the Arab was not uniformly malevolent[205]. Although Morris, Shlaim and Pappé would become the most recognizable faces of the new group of New Historians (Flapan died in 1987), they would be joined by others as well, such as the American educated journalist Tom Segev, and Israeli scholars like Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, who were in their history of the Palestinian people in 1993[206] critical of both Israeli's as well as Palestinian leadership and its ineptitude due to factionalism[207]. The New Historians themselves did not eschew political statements about their ultimate aims. Several New Historians have unequivocal leftwing qualifications. Simha Flapan was an active member of the communist Meretz party, while Ilan Pappé, who ran for parliament on the communist Hadash list, would end up supporting boycotts of Israel in the 2000s[208]. Benny Morris self-described as leftwing (voting Labor or Meretz) as well , even being jailed in 1988 for refusing to serve in the West Bank[209]. Despite their political engagement, and explicit views on the peace process which would reach international newspapers during the 1990s and the 2000s, prominent historians like Morris emphasized their commitment to independent scholarship and archival research.

What the New Historians challenged most major preconceptions of the Zionist historiography. While the Zionists narrative, according to Shlaim, portrayed Britain as having the aim to prevent the new Jewish state, the revisionists (at least Pappé) contended that it was Britain's aim to prevent an Arab state. While the Zionist narrative presented

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[203] Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography' 114

[204] Ilan Pappé, 'Humanizing the Text: Israeli "new History" and the Trajectory of the 1948 Historiography' in *Radical Historical Review*, Issue 86, 2003, p. 104

[205] Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography'112

[206] Baruch Kimmerling and Joel MIgdal, *Palestinians. The making of a People*. (New York, 1993)

[207] Kimmerling and Migdal, *Palestinians,* 271

[208] http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2005/may/24/highereducation.internationaleducationnews (last accessed 1 July 2012)

[209] http://www.counterpunch.org/2004/01/16/an-interview-with-benny-morris (last accessed 1 July 2012)

the Jews as hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned, the revisionists put it that the Jews outnumbered Arab forces. While the Zionist narrative held that Arabs left on their own accord during the 1948 war, expecting a triumphant return, the revisionists held that Arabs did not choose to leave but were pushed out. While the Zionist narrative saw an Arab plan to destroy the Jewish state, the revisionists held that there was no single Arab war aim. While the Zionist narrative blamed Arab intransigence for the continuing elusive peace, the revisionists blamed Israeli intransigence, rather than Arab for the continuing absence of an accord[210]. Not surprisingly, the way one perceived the 1948 war, had consequences about how one would perceive the chances for a peace settlement during the 1990s. Roughly speaking: one side saw no chances for peace, as the Arabs were unwilling to engage in real negotiation and to recognize Israel. It also rejected the right of return for Arabs as they were the aggressors during the 1948 war and left at their own accord. The other side saw Arab willingness to negotiate, and blamed the lack of progress on inflexibility on the Israeli side. Part of this inflexibility was due to the lack of understanding of the legitimacy of Palestinian Arab claims on the return of refugees. Shlaim exalted the benefits of the revisionist history; it had spurred a quiet revolution in teaching in most Israeli schools, enabled ordinary members of the public to understand how Arabs perceive Israel and how they view the pas, and it presented to the Arabs an account of the conflict which they recognize as honest and genuine[211]. These claims might be considered to be debatable, especially by those who only see an inflexible unwillingness to recognize anything from the Israeli perspective or engage in real peace negotiations that would end in Israel's recognition by the Arabs. In that regard not only rightwing Israelis are skeptical on this issue, also Arab scholars like Fouad Ajami[212] regard overall Arab attitudes as unwilling to engage in real dialogue. The most radical new historian, Ilan Pappé has even been accused of doing the Palestinian cause a disservice by strengthening them in their one-sided propagandistic account of victimhood with his one-sided stories, Pappé helps to prevent the emergence of a more

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[210] Avi Shlaim, 'The war of the Israeli Historians', 2004, 162
[211] Ibid., 166
[212] Fouad Ajami, *The dream palace of the Arabs. A generations odyssey.* (New York 1998)

self-critical, intellectually stronger account that would increase Palestinian pragmatism which in the long run increases their chances of state hood[213].

During the 1990s, the new historians steadily rose to prominence. Although ignored and dismissed as fringe at first, the new historians began to rise to high positions at Israeli universities, while their views were widely disseminated in Israeli media. In 2000, the Barak government even reviewed its school textbooks to include more revisionist accounts on the war as well. Internationally, the new historians penetrated American media outlets as well[214]. Their rise went not without criticism and soon, historians from the orthodox account, such as Shabtai Teveth and Anita Shapira (but also writers such as Hillel Halkin and Aharon Meged) launched attacks on the revisionists on the grounds that the new historiography 'rests in part on defective evidence, and is characterized by serious professional flaws', and that it was politically motivated pro-Palestinian and aimed at delegitimizing Israel. Early critic Shabtai Teveth accused in his 1989 article 'Charging Israel with Original Sin', 'new historians' such as Morris of aiming to delegitimize Israel[215]. Shlaim in his turn accused Teveth –he names as member of the Mapai old guard- of being politically motivated, and unable to distinguish between history and propaganda, attacking any attempt to revise conventional wisdom as unpatriotic[216]. But the 1990s saw additional critics voicing the same message. Anita Shapira accused the movement of being 'surrounded by politics'[217]. According to Derek Penslar, New Historians deliberately created a politically motivated counter narrative, depicting the Yishuv as 'aggressive, expansionist and determined to foil the creation of a Palestinian state'. Flapans 1987 book, for instance was treated by critics like Teveth and Penslar more as a 'pamphlet' [218] or a 'polemical work written from a Marxist perspective'[219], than a serious work of scholarship Yoav Gelber as well was critical; the 'New Historians' main contribution to the Western debate was to 'deflect the focus from Israel's accomplishments to Palestinian ordeal'. Their pretense of objectivity in contrast

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[213] Mordechai Bar-On, 'Cleansing history of its content: Some critical comments on Ilan Pappé's The ethnic cleansing of Palestine', in *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 27 No. 2 2008, 274
[214] Daniel Posliar, 'Making History', in *Azure*, 2000 5760, 14-15
[215] Teveth, 24
[216] Shlaim, 130
[217] Anita Shapiro, 'The Past is not a foreign country', *in The New Republic*, 1999
[218] Penslar, 'Narratives of Nation Building. Major Themes in Zionist Historiography'114-115
[219] Shabtai Teveth, 'Charging Israel with Original Sin', in Commentary 88:3, 1989, 24

to supposedly partisan 'Old Historians' is, according to Gelber, 'particularly irritating', as 'their methodology is as open to criticism as that of their predecessors and their outlook can hardly be called unbiased'[220]. More rightwing scholars were less ferocious, as they treated Israel from a realpolitik perspective, rather than a moralistic vision[221]. The Likud government of Sharon (2001) was less welcoming. Sharon himself called for a reintroduction of teaching of Jewish-Zionist values, not of the new historians, while his education minister, Limor Livnat called for the return of the Iron Wall[222].

Not only the Israeli right or orthodox historians were critical of the new historians' endeavor. On the international stage their account was criticized as pro-Israel by the radical left and by Arab scholars, some of them tied to Edward Said. Said, an influential Palestinian Columbia University Professor of literature, and author of the book Orientalism, which claimed that western thinking of Arabs was inherently influenced by a colonialist cultural bias, used phases like imperialism, 'apartheid', settler colonialism' and 'racist indifference towards the Palestinians bound to subjugate the natives', when referring to Zionism[223]. Norman Finkelstein brought Morris to task for his interpretation of the evidence he presented himself. Siding with Edward Said, Finkelstein maintained that the evidence showed that 'a sequence of (planned) Zionist terror and Israeli expulsion.. was behind the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem', rather than Morris' own assertion that the problem was born in war, without a master plan[224]. Nur Masalha criticized Benny Morris for not concluding that the transfer idea was intrinsic in Zionist thought, something Masalha adhered to as a proponent of the through that the expulsion of Arabs was preplanned for decades as the Zionists wanted an exclusionist state[225]. In a later article, citing a range of radical leftwing scholars like Said, Fanon, Foucault and Gramsci as well as 'decolonizing methodologies', Masalha accused Morris work of following 'hegemonic discourses and Israel's politics of denial'[226], of 'crude racism',

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[220] Gelber, 'The History of Zionist Historiography. From Apologetics to Denial', 65
[221] Avi Shlaim, ' The War of the Israeli Historians', in Annales 59:1, 2004, 163
[222] Shlaim, 2004, 167
[223] Edward Said, 'Zionism from the standpoint of its victims', in Social Text 1 (1979), 30-33
[224] Norman Finkelstein, ' Myths, old and new', in Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol 21 No 1, 1991, 85
[225] Nur Masalha, 'A critique on Benny Morris' in *Journal of Palestine Studies* , 1991, 96
[226] Nur Masalha, 'New History, Post-Zionism and Neo-Colonialism: A Critique of the Israeli 'New Historians', in *Holy Land Studies*, 10.1, 2011, 23

which 'is deeply rooted in a supremacist settler society'[227]. Characterizing the new historians Masalha voiced his opposition to Israel's existence, as a colonial power by describing Morris as 'the rightwing racist colonizer', Shlaim as 'the liberal colonizer' and Pappé (the only to find mercy in his eyes) as the 'anti-Zionist decolonizer'[228]. Another Arab critic of Morris was Joseph Massad, who accused the West of not taking Arab scholarship serious, 'due to political biases in the West, as well as racial biases', and accused Zionism of being a colonizing movement and Israel of being a state 'committed to Jewish supremacy', 'like White South Africans before them' and rejected any of Morris' claims of objectivity or aims to promote mutual understanding[229]. These critiques were radical, but not uncommon; a narrative that Zionism was a form of Western imperialism, and that the Zionists had planned an 'ethnically pure' Jewish State by expelling Arabs was already part of the propaganda message of the Mufti and Nasser.[230] They would however influence the course of the debate, as they created a radical, and threatening (at least in the perception of many) anti-Zionist narrative, that ultimately questioned the legitimacy of Israel. This would ultimately taint the debate. Gelber and Karsh for instance put the new historians in the context of a debate in the West where next to the ' Old Historians', Palestinians 'scholars', whose books mainly consist of propaganda –full of factual errors- try to assign all the guild for the conflict to Israel[231], while left-wingers try to associate Zionism with 'Western imperialism', ignoring major differences between Zionism and Colonialism in the process[232]. The New historians themselves of course rejected the allegations. According to Shlaim, 'the debate about Israel's early history is a debate about history, not about contemporary politics'[233].

[227] Nur Masalha, 38
[228] Nur Masalha, 48
[229] Andrew Whitehead, Benny Morris and Joseph Massad, ' No common Ground': Joseph Massad and Benny Morris discuss the Middle East, in History Workshop Journal, No 53, 2003, 212-216
[230] Karsh, 2010, 3
[231] Gelber, 'The History of Zionist Historiography. From Apologetics to Denial', 67
[232] Ibid., 68
[233] Avi Shlaim, 'A totalitarian concept of history', *Middle East Quarterly*, Sep. 1996, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 52-55

The works that emerged in 1987-88 challenged major themes of Zionist historiography on the 1948 War. Benny Morris challenged the idea that responsibility for the flight of Palestinian Arab refugees lay solely with the Arab leadership. Avi Shlaim challenged the idea that the Israelis faced a monolithic Arab bloc, bent on its destruction, by describing how Israel made secret deals with Jordan to split Palestine[234]. Pappé challenged the idea that Israel only fought defensive wars. Instead he described Israeli actions in Arab territories as 'aggressiveness', while portraying the Palestinian people (not its leadership) as passive, blameless victims of foreign intrigue[235]. In later years Pappé would become more radical, asserting that the Israeli leadership effectively cleansed Palestine by forcefully expelling Arabs[236].

In general the new historians were scathing of the Old Zionist narrative. Flapan indicated seven 'myths' he set out to destroy in his narrative: that the Zionist acceptance of the 1947 UN Partition Resolution was a far-reaching compromise in which the idea of a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine was abandoned and the right of a Palestinian state was recognized (myth 1). This was rather ' a tactical move to destroy the Palestinian state in collusion with Jordan' . The second myth was that the Mufti totally rejected partition and that, responding to his call, the Arabs launched an all out war. According to Flapan, most Palestinians sough a modus vivendi; only Ben-Gurion's opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state drove Palestinians into arms. He also rejected the claim that the flight of Palestinians from the country came as a response to the call of the Arab leadership, despite attempts by the Jewish leadership to persuade them to stay (myth 3). Instead this was, Flapan, 'prompted by the Israeli political and military leaders, who believed that Zionist colonization and statehood necessitated the 'transfer' of Palestinian Arabs to Arab countries. He also rejected claims that Arab States invaded Israel aiming to destroy it (myth 4), that the Arab invasion made war inevitable (myth 5), that Israel was militarily inferior compared to overwhelming Arab military power (myth 6) and that

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[234] Avi Shlaim, Collusion across the Jordan.1988
[235] Ilan Pappé, Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1948-1951 (New York, 1988); The making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict (London, 1992)
[236] Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, (Oneworld Publications Ltd. Oxford, 2006

Israel had always extended its hand for peace, despite Arab rejectionist stances (myth 7, multiple Arab proposals were made, according to Flapan)[237].

The narrative of the refugee problem: Morris

To focus on one aspect in particular; the refugee problem, which is the basis of the claim for the right to return in the negotiations on the conflict, a red line for Israel, can learn us how the debate developed, and whether or not the claims of novelty by the new historians were actually true.

The Arab refugee problem saw two opposing sides: one was taken by mostly Arab scholars, like Walid Khalidi, who asserted that the Arabs were expelled by the Israeli's as part of the execution of a plan (Pan D) which was devised to expel Arabs using psychological warfare and actual expulsions[238]. The other by Israeli scholars and (mostly Jewish American) sympathizers, places (most of) the blame at the hands of the Arabs. The 'new historians' sought to create a more nuanced picture of the 1948 War.

Flapan, portrayed the old Zionist narrative as follows: '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 by the Jewish leadership to persuade them to stay'[239]. Flapan alleged this claim can be found in 'all official Zionist history and propaganda', with the most convincing and often mentioned evidence coming from Haifa, where the Arab population left, despite efforts to persuade them to stay by the Jewish mayor, Shabtai Levy and Israeli leadership. In reality, according to Flapan, 'the Haganah then succeeded in conquering Arab sections of the town, driving the inhabitants from their homes. The Haganah's conditions for truce were so humiliating that the Arab National Committee of Haifa could not accept them'[240]. Benny Morris identified two opposing camps in the debate; the Arabs claim that Jews expelled Arabs as a predetermined, preplanned operation, which underlines their portrayal of Israel as a vicious, immoral robber state. On the other hand, there is the Israeli account that

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[237] Flapan, *The Birth of Israel,* 8-10
[238] Khlaid Walidi, Waarom zijn de Palestijnen weggetrokken? Een onderzoek naar de Zionistische versie van de Exodus van 1948. Arab Information Centre, London, 1975, p.8
[239] Flapan, *The Birth of Israel,* 9
[240] Ibid., 84

Palestinians fled voluntarily, or were ordered to do so by their leaders, which leaves the Israeli self-image as morally upright state surrounded by semi-feudal dictatorial Arab states intact[241].

The early accounts of the Palestinian flight were however much more nuanced, than this portrayal of the old Zionist narrative. Even the Revisionist Zionist historian Joseph Schechtman, whose 1952 study was said to aim to 'sweep away some of the misconceptions, current in the Western world and to convince the West that resettlement is the only feasible solution'[242], mentioned panic as the main contributing factor to the Arab flight. Schechtman described Israeli leaders as 'determined to do all in their power to bring about harmonious cooperation between the two peoples', while mentioning only an Arab 'campaign of indiscriminate violence' in the run-up to Israeli statehood[243]. After wealthy Arabs left the country during the early phases of the conflict, anticipating quick Jewish defeat –not uncommon in the region, as 40.000 wealthy Arabs also left Palestine during the 1936-39 upheaval, panic took hold of the rest of the Arab population, whose warfare against the Jews 'had always been marked by indiscriminate killing, mutilating, raping, looting and pillaging' and anticipated ' nothing less than massacres in retaliation'[244]. According to Schechtman, the 'steady and relentless pressure exerted on the Arabs to leave the country by their leadership' , which was part of the strategy to create hatred for Jews, enmity towards Israel and general upheaval, and contributed to the flight[245]. To stimulate flight, the Arab leadership deliberately stoked fears by circulating stories about atrocities committed by Jews[246].

The late 1950s saw more elaborate accounts on the 1948 events. Don Peretz[247] presented an account on the 1948 events, which was roughly similar to that of Schechtman. Peretz mentioned both Israeli and Arab narratives. He presented the former as running like this: the 'Arabs were encouraged by their leaders to "clear the villages and the adjacent roads for the advance of the Arab armies ... to bring home to the Arab peoples of neighboring countries the reality of war in Palestine and to enlist heir support

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[241] Morris, 2004, 2
[242] Joseph Schechtman, The Arab Refugee Problem. (Philosophical Library, New York, 1952)
[243] Ibid., 1-3
[244] Ibid., 4-5
[245] Ibid., 8
[246] Ibid., 11
[247] Don Peretz. *Israel and the Palestine Arabs* (Washington, 1958)

in its prosecution ..., and to impress on the outside world the fact that no Arab was prepared to acquiesce in the establishment of Israel and live under its rule'. In contrast, the Arab account held that the refugees were driven from their homes. Peretz acknowledged that there were truths in both accounts, but ruled that there were deeper causes to be found in Arab society[248].

One was that the Arab society was dependent on a small elite of ruling families and on the British administration (in contrast to the Jews who had experience in administering their own affairs and democratic governance). When the elite left the country during the early phases of the conflict and the British began to depart, administration and morale collapsed, and the community became prey to rumor and exaggerated atrocity stories, which in turn led to a 'fear psychosis'[249].

Rony Gabbay[250] mentioned similar factors. According to him, the Arab exodus was a spontaneous reaction to the calamities of war. It was never planned, nor executed for its own sake by Jewish authorities, 'at least not during the early stages of the fight'[251]. When the Arab situation deteriorated in April and May 1948, chaos and disorder followed the exit of British forces and the exile of the upper classes. Gabbay gave additional psychological factors like Feudalist dependence on local notables, the 'Arab inclination to exaggerate events', the aggressive rhetoric by Arab leaders, like Azzam Pasha's; 'this will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacre and the crusades', which led to the expectation of a similar treatment by the Jews[252]. Differently from Schechtman, Gabbay did not follow the idea that Arab leaders deliberately provoked the flight with exaggerated propaganda on Jewish atrocities. He blamed this on the lack of Arab skill in the psychology of war. Although official Jewish policy was certainly not to drive the Arabs out, Jewish forces did expel Arab villagers to prevent strongholds[253]. After the truce, the Israeli leadership shifted its position; Arabs were no longer persuaded to stay, instead encouraging Arabs to leave,

[248] Peretz, *Israel and the Palestine Arabs* , 6
[249] Peretz, 7
[250] Rony Gabbay, *A political study on the Arab-Jewish conflict. The Arab refugee problem* (a case study) (Geneva, 1959).
[251] Ibid., 54
[252] Ibid., 85-88
[253] Ibid., 91-92

mostly through psychological tactics, but in a few instances forcing them to flee. For the Jewish leadership, the Arab exodus made things easier, as it removed the threat of a fifth column. In the words of Weizmann, it was a 'miraculous simplification of the task'[254]. Later works, like Dan Kurzman's *Genesis 1948*, mentioned the same factors (fear, rumors and actual atrocities) in their description of the conflict[255].

To this 1950s account of the refugee problem, the New Historians added surprisingly little. As those before him, Flapan saw the exodus of Palestinian Arabs was both forced and voluntary. According to him, archival evidence shows Israeli tactics to force Arabs out like, the denial of food, acts of terror and intimidation, creation of panic and forcible expulsion. Return of refugees was treated as 'infiltration'. Flapan called the 'myth' of a purely voluntary Palestinian exodus, the 'inevitable result of the denial of the Palestinians' right to national independence and statehood. A principle that guided Zionist policies from the very beginning'[256]. For him, the flight was helped by Jewish leaders. Jewish leaders feared the stability of the state as the Arab population rose with the conquest of territories originally designated for the future Arab state[257]. However this exodus, 'caused a disastrous complication and aggravation of the conflict', and the refugee problem it created 'remains an obstacle to peace'[258].

Benny Morris was much less vocal on the intended political implications of his work, aiming instead to 'describe the refugee problem'. His work, *The Birth of the Arab Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (1987), itself was more elaborate in terms of detail than that of any of his predecessors. The book was highly influential and much debated, but some of its findings had already been published in an article in 1986 in *Middle Eastern Studies*[259], called ' The Causes and Character of the Arab Exodus from Palestine: the Israel Defense Forces Intelligence Service Analysis of June 1948', which was largely based on a IDF document from June 1948[260]. Many of the findings of the 1987 book, the

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[254] Ibid., 110
[255] Dan Kurzman, *Genesis 1948. The First Arab-Israeli War* (Valentine, Mitchell, London, 1970), p. 149
[256] Flapan, *The Birth of Israel,* 117-118
[257] Ibid., 83
[258] Ibid. 117
[259] Benny Morris, *1948 and after. Israel and the Palestinians*. (Oxford, 1990), acknowledgements
[260] Benny Morris, 'The Causes and Character of the Arab Exodus from Palestine: the Israel Defense Forces Intelligence Service Analysis of June 1948', in Benny Morris, *1948 and After. Israel and the Palestinians* (Oxford, 1990), p. 70-71

multiple stages in the flight, the fact that Israel was not entirely innocent contributed to the flight with expulsions, were based on this document[261].

Morris rejected both the Israeli portrayal of events, that Arabs left voluntarily, and the Arab version, that the Jews expelled Arabs in a predesigned plan. Using recently (1980s) declassified British, US and Israeli state archives[262], but without Arab resources –which are not open to research- he came to the conclusion that 'the Palestinian refugee problem was born of War, not by design, Jewish or Arab. It was largely a by-product of Arab and Jewish fears and of the protracted, bitter fighting that characterized the first Israeli-Arab war; in smaller part, it was the deliberate creation of Jewish and military commanders and politicians'. 'The creation of the problem was almost inevitable, given the geographical intermixing of the Arab and Jewish populations, the history of Arab-Jewish hostility over 1917-47, the resistance on both sides to a bi-national state',[263]. One aspect of the book however drew the attention of both Arabs and rightwing Israeli's: Morris' discussion of the concept of transfer, which would entail removing Arab inhabitants from Jewish owned parts of Palestine. Arabs suspected the Jews of wanting to squeeze them out; the expectation by Arabs turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophesy, as they left before the Jewish forces could push them out. Morris claimed that 'these prognoses also had a basis in mainstream Jewish thinking, if not actual planning, from the late 1930s and 1940s. To back this claim up. Morris quoted Ben-Gurion, who portrayed in a meeting in 1938, the 'transfer of the Arabs out of the Jewish State to the Arab countries' as 'a starting point for a solution'. Ben-Gurion was willing to accept a small state 'on the basis of the assumption that after we will constitute a larger force following the establishment of the state – we will cancel the partition of the country and we will expand throughout the land of Israel'. The idea of transfer had been in the air since the 1930s, according tot Morris, after the Peel commission recommendation of 1937 came up with the idea of transfer for the sizable Arab minority in Jewish areas in Palestine. But although the idea of transfer 'fired the imagination of many Yishuv executives', it was ultimately rejected (in the form of a British Labor Party manifesto with the same content) by Ben-Gurion on the international stage. And although Ben-Gurion referred (during the 1947-48 War) to

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[261] Morris, 'The Causes and Character of the Arab Exodus from Palestine', p. 74
[262] Morris, *The Birth of the Arab Refugee Problem*, 1-2
[263] Ibid., 286

the Arab minority as a fifth column, he never explicitly mentioned the idea[264]. Morris thus rejected the idea that the flight was preplanned, or even intended by the Israelis, at least not at the start of the war. One factor was the collapse of Palestinian Arab society after the flight of the upper and middle classes; Their flight (December 1947 to March 1948) led to a deterioration in the situation of those left behind, which in its turn cracked Arab morale. Little inducement was necessary for many to flee, when the Haganah began its offensive in April and May 1948. Once the towns fell, villagers panicked and followed the city elites into exile. Jewish psychological warfare, designed to intimidate Palestinians into leaving, played its part as well. Arab fears amplified by massacres such as in Deir Yassin, but also the Arab media propaganda amplifying Jewish atrocities, led to panic. The Israeli military sometimes expelled the Arabs as well, but not systematically. Plan D, launched in March 1948 gave Haganah commanders the permission to clear vital areas and expel potentially hostile Arab villages, but commanders each interpreted this differently, leading to inconsistent results (differing from villages to village, with Christian villages more likely to stay than Muslim). Although there was no formal decision to expel Arabs, it was understood that the fewer remained, the better [265]. In June, 1948, the Israeli leadership decided that there would be no return during the war and that the matter would be considered after hostilities. Developments on the ground such as the destruction of Arab villages and establishment of Jewish settlements seem to preclude any future refugee return. Although there was no decision to expel, there was willingness. Ben-Gurion wanted as few Arabs as possible to stay, as he said in meetings in August but refrained issuing expulsion orders; ' he preferred that his generals " understand" what he wanted done' [266]. As the War progressed, Israeli forces became more willing to use force to expel Arab villagers. Thus, Israel bore co-responsibility for the Arab flight, which was not completely 'voluntary', but there was no plan before the war, although the transfer idea had readied the mindset.

In his later books on the subject, such as *Righteous Victims* (2001) and *1948* (2008), Morris reiterated this thesis, that neither Israel, nor the Arabs preplanned the exodus, but that a combination of factors –including expulsions by the Israeli army, but also the

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[264] Ibid., 23-28
[265] Ibid., 286-289
[266] Ibid., 291-293

makeup of Arab society- led to the Arab exodus. In 2004, Morris published his updated edition, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). In this version, using new archive material, as well as conducting interviews, Morris concluded that there were far more expulsions and atrocities by Israeli troops than tabulated in the first 1988 edition, while at the same time, there were also far more orders and advise to quit from Arab officials, than previously assumed. More importantly, Morris concluded that the concept of transfer was much more important than previously assumed[267]. He referred to Nur Masalha, who argued that idea of transfer lies at the very heart of mainstream Zionism, to this day' and that the notion of transfer was as old as Zionism itself, as the ultimate Zionist aim was 'a homogeneous Jewish state'[268]. Morris however concluded that 'although the Zionist support of Transfer is unambiguous, the connection between the concept and what happened in 1948 is more ambiguous than Arab propagandists argued'[269]. The near-consensus on transfer, was however not the same as preplanning, and the Jewish leadership did not enter the –Arab initiated- war with a plan of expulsion. But transfer was inevitably inbuilt into Zionism, as it sought t create a Jewish state, which meant displacing the majority Arab population. This, Arab rejectionist stances and the Arab initiated war, led to acceptance of the expulsion after 1948[270].

Morris' book was widely quoted, but also widely criticized. Arabs and the radical Left accused him of anti-Israeli bias, while more rightwing scholars such as Shabtai Teveth, Anita Shapira and Efraim Karsh accused him of an anti-Israeli political bias. The main criticism was aimed at Morris' scholarly credentials. Teveth[271], Derek Penslar[272] and others accused Morris of selectivity in his evidence and failing to contextualize, as well as a one-sided focus on Israeli deeds as as Morris' Arabic was not up to standard. Teveth also asserted that Morris' (and other new historians') claim of expressing 'new' ideas that were in reality nothing new, and 'uncovering' new facts that were already

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[267] Morris, 2004, 5;.
[268] Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" In Zionist Political Though, 1882-1948* (Washington, 1993), 209-210
[269] Morris, 2004, 6
[270] Ibid., 60
[271] Shabtai Teveth, 'Charging Israel with Original Sin' in *Commentary* 88-3 (1989), 24
[272] Penslar, 115

known[273]. Efraim Karsh, who spent the better part of the 1990s locked in a polemical (and sometimes amusing[274]) exchange with Benny Morris, accused Morris (and others) of systematically distorting archival evidence ignoring facts or archival resources (such as Arab primary resources) and twisting the meaning of texts of many archival resources, they had consulted[3]. Moreover, according to Karsh, neither the interpretations, nor the archival resources consulted were anything new[275].

Karsh rejected the new historians overall as unscientific; 'The "new historians" are neither new nor true historians but rather partisans seeking to give academic respectability to longstanding misconceptions and prejudice on the Arab-Israeli conflict'. Karsh also claimed that these historical distortions were deliberate, as the New Historians harbored a political agenda aimed at undermining Israel's legitimacy. According to him, they sought to propagate the view that Zionism was at best an aggressive national movement, or even an offshoot of European colonialism, responsible for the Palestinian tragedy and continuing Middle east violence[276]. The New Historians thus gave ammunition to the Palestinian narrative of victimhood, by suggesting the Zionists sought to create a Jewish majority in Israel by expelling Arabs[277]. In his 1997 book on the 'new historians' and later works he reiterated this claim: the new historians followed Edward Said, in being 'convinced that Israel were the bad guys', and using political methods like stigmatizing opponents as stained by serving the establishment and misusing historical evidence, sought archival evidence to back up their claim[278].In short, according to Karsh, Their message is a repeat of Arab and Soviet propaganda[279]. More specifically, Karsh rejected Morris' portrayal of Ben-Gurion on transfer, which he saw as an example of the failure to contextualize Ben-Gurion's words. Instead Ben-Gurion wished for peaceful coexistence, according to Karsh[280]. Morris replied by granting Karsh some points, but accused on his turn Karsh of focusing on minor points while ignoring the main pieces of

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[273] Teveth, 'Charging Israel with Original Sin' 25
[274] See for example; Efraim Karsh, 'The unbearable lightness of my critics' in *Middle East Quarterly*, 2002, 63-73
[275] Karsh, 34
[276] Efraim Karsh, 'Rewriting Israel's history', *Middle East Quarterly*, June 1996, Vol. 3, No. 2, p.19-29
[277] Efraim Karsh, Middle East Quarterly, June 1996, Vol. 3, No. 2, p.19-29;
[278] Efraim Karsh, *Fabrication Israeli history: The New Historians*, (London, 1997), p. 10-14
[279] Karsh, *Fabrication Israeli history* 16
[280] Ibid., 56

evidence; 'Karsh resembles nothing so much as those Holocaust-denying historians who ignore all evidence and common sense in order to press an ideological point[281]'. Shlaim was more careful in his rejection of Karsh, calling the accusations of twisting source materials 'a serious charge', but rejected them as source material can be 'read differently'[282]. In another reply Karsh lamented the 'politicized nature' of scholarship on the Middle East, complaining that the 'conventional view –absolving Middle Easterners and blaming the West- is academically unsound an morally reprehensible', as it repressed anything going against it. Morris was a part of this system of distortion, according to Karsh[283]. Later articles between Morris and Karsh were generally repeating the same arguments and produced more heat than light; in one, Karsh presented Morris' portrayal of transfer as 'a secret conspiracy to expel them [Palestinian Arabs] from the land', adding 'George Orwell could not have put it better'[284]. It shouldn't come as a surprise that some sympathizers called Karsh account as ineffectual and ruining his own case by trying too hard to vindicate Israeli leaders, while holding them (as do Israel's critics) to impossibly high moral standards[285].

The continuation of this polemic, more than 20 years after *the Birth* was published remains stunning to an outside observer. It bears testament to the emotionally charged nature of the subject (and possible personal friction of the historians involved). Morris himself noted he, by his choice of subject, devoted more time to atrocities by Jews on Palestinians than the other way around[286]. In his *1948* (2008), he set out to change that. Although maintaining a critical eye. He rejected the Israeli 'purity of arms' narrative, which portrayed Israel as defensive against mostly Arab brutalities; the IDF 'committed far more atrocities than the Arabs and killed far more civilians and POWs in deliberate acts of brutality in the course of 1948'. This was partly due to Israeli victories, as the Arabs had fewer opportunities to massacre[287]. On refugees as well he maintained his core

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[281] Morris,''Refabricating 1948'in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol 27 No 2, 1998 93
[282] Avi Shlaim, 'A totalitarian concept of history', *Middle East Quarterly*, Sep. 1996, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 52-55
[283] Efraim Karh, 'The unbearable lightness of my critics' in *Middle East Quarterly*, 2002, 63-73
[284] Efraim Karsh, 'Resurrecting the Myth: Benny Morris, the Zionist Movement, and the 'Transfer' Idea', in *Israeli Affairs*, Vol. 11. No 3, 2005, p.488
[285] Daniel Polisar, 'Making History, ', 19-20
[286] Morris, 'Politics by other means', 2004, 7
[287] Benny Morris, *1948. A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven, 2008), 405

thesis; Most refugees were not expelled, but fled. The decision by Israel not to allow refugees back, made the problem permanent[288]. There was however no plan; expulsionist ideology among Zionists was, contrary that of the Arabs, minor. Transfer was never adopted as an official policy. Arab elements remained in the country. On the Arab side, Morris saw mainly rejectionist intransigence; For the Arabs, it was a zero sum game, their aim was to destroy Israel[289]. Disunity, corruption and organizational incompetence and fatalism and the failure to prepare prevented them from achieving their maximal aims[290]. Morris bleaker assessment of the Arab's willingness to come to an agreement was influenced by the collapse of the 2000 peace accords, after which he became a vocal critic of the Palestinian side. It is puzzling that Karsh's most recent critique of the new historians and Morris completely ignores these developments. In his *Palestine Betrayed* (2010) Karsh again railed against the New Historians version of events, which he portrayed as a repeat of the anti-Israeli narrative, that asserted that Palestinians were displaced by Israeli design[291], and that politicized new historians had however helped to popularize this anti-Israeli narrative and 'have turned the saga of Israel's birth upside down, with the aggressors transformed into hapless victims and vice versa'[292]. Once again, Karsh concluded that Israel was committed to giving the Palestinian Arabs equal rights, while the Arab leadership was focused on destroying Israel[293]. As to the cause of the exodus, Karsh notes; 'The prevailing conviction among Palestinians was that they were the victims of their fellow Arabs rather than of Israeli aggression was grounded not only in experience but in the larger facts of inter-Arab politics'[294]. Expulsions only happened in battle, as they were dictated by military necessity. In cases like Haifa or Tiberias, the Arab community was forced out by their own leaders[295]. Arab leaders never envisaged the magnitude of the exodus and tried to contain it once it spiraled out of control. But their scaremongering about atrocities contributed to the flight[296].

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[288] Ibid. 411
[289] Ibid. 408
[290] Ibid., 399
[291] Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven) 2010, 3
[292] Ibid.,5
[293] Ibid.,235
[294] Ibid., 231-232
[295] Ibid. 235-238
[296] Ibid., 242

The Morris/Karsh polemic contains elements of a farce; nothing really changes despite the excitement. All arguments and examples are endlessly repeated, as if both historians remain locked in an inescapable loop. Both camps simplify the others' (orthodox or revisionist) account, and then seek to correct the black and white picture, they themselves construed. The vehemence of the attacks –Karsh portraying *all* new historians as to bend to destroy Israel's legitimacy, Morris replying with ad hominem attacks- could be due to the personalities of those involved, or the politically and emotionally charged nature of the matter involved.

The rest of the field.

The field of the new historians is wider. Some have refrained from stirring too much controversy. Kimmerling and Migdal remained brief on the War: the Palestinians started the fighting the Plan Dalet gave free reign to officers, although it did not directly call for eviction. Most Palestinians had fled before the fighting[297]. Hillel Cohen claimed in 2008 that 'the actions of the local leaders called into question the Zionist claim that the Palestinians had fought with all their might to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state', and that this claim had political rather than historiographic significance, since it served to justify Israel's refusal to allow Palestinian war refugees to return to their homes'. Cohen saw evidence that many local leaders cooperated with the Israeli forces in 1948; Arabs were not monolithic[298]. Both account did little to endanger Israel's legitimacy. Other accounts were more in line with Morris', especially on the War.

Even a major critic of the New Historians, Anita Shapira produced a work critical of the official account. She admitted that 600.00 Arabs had gone into exile 'some by choice, others by force', but held no illusions about the Arab intentions as well, stressing that the 'Arabs were uncompromising in their unwillingness to come to terms with the existence of a second national community in Palestine', and that the Arabs, outnumbering the Jews and offered with the assistance of the Arab states, 'had all the reason in the world to trust in their ability to decide on the issue by sheer force'[299]. On the other hand however, from the very inception of the Jewish colonization in Palestine, the course of

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[297] Kimmerling, Migdal, *The Palestinians*, 140- 150
[298] Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows. Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948*. (Berkeley 2008)
[299] Shapira, *Land and power*, 354

ultimate confrontation was inherent in the situation. Both sides held ultimately exclusive claims. Shapira was also critical of the official account of 'no choice', of defending a foothold. Although used to place the burden of guilt on the opposing side, the slogan was referred to in the military decision in a battle for ultimate sovereignty in Palestine: no longer steadfast resistance unto death but an offensive to be launched with the aim of attaining Jewish rule in Palestine'[300]. Shapira did however not go as far as challenging basic assumptions of the orthodox account. At the same time, she remained scathing of the New historians, even in 2008. Citing Ilan Pappé's support for a student who wrote on a massacre in Tantura in May 1948, allegedly perpetrated by Israelis[301] as an example – but then lumping Morris and the others together-, she criticized the new historians as bent on denying Israel's legitimacy, portraying Israel as conspirational, writing with a political agenda and selecting their sources and their terminology in the process, she came to similar conclusions about the New Historians as Karsh[302]

Avi Shlaim did. Already in his *Collusion Across the Jordan*[303], Shlaim challenged the idea of a monolithic and intransigent Arab leadership. In his *The Iron Wall* (2000), mostly written when the peace process had stalled during the Netanyahu era, he reiterated his assertion that Zionist leaders officially accepted the UN partition plan, but in secret sought an understanding with Jordan to abort a Palestinian state and accept peaceful coexistence[304]. This was not included in the official Zionist narrative, 'a prime example of the use of a nationalist version of history in the process of nation building', which is 'selective and subjective interpretation' of the facts[305]. Shlaim also concluded that by implementing Plan D (prepared for in March 1948), the Haganah 'directly and decisively contributed to the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem', 'there were many reasons for the Palestinian exodus, including the early exodus of the Palestinian leaders when the going was getting tough, but the most important reason was Jewish military pressure'; 'by ordering the capture of Arab cities and the destruction of villages, it both permitted

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[300] Ibid., 357-359

[301] See, Ilan Pappé, 'Historical Truth, modern historiography, and ethical obligations: the challenge of the Tantura case', in *Holy Land Studies*. 3.2. 2004, 171-194

[302] Anita Shapira, 'The strategies of Historical revisionism', in *Journal of Israeli History, Politics, Society and Culture,* 20:2, 2001, 62-76

[303] Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan*, 1988

[304] Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. (London 2000), 29

[305] Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* ,34-36

and justified the forcible expulsion of Arab civilians'[306]. In terms of strength, the number of IDF troops in May 1948, was 25.00, while the Arabs fielded 35.000 troops; Israeli troops outnumbered the Arabs, according to Shlaim. 'The final outcome of the war was therefore not a miracle but a reflection of the underlying Arab-Israeli military balance. Arab war aims (the older generations said they were aimed to destroy Israel), were different; Abdullah wanted a part of Palestine, other Arab leaders disagreed on their war aims. Israel used this disunity to its advantage[307]. According to Shlaim, the Jewish leadership rejected any compromise with the Palestinian Arabs[308]. While the official Zionist historiography blamed Arab intransigence for the failure of subsequent peace-talks, revisionists point at Israel's share of the responsibility, 'the real question facing Israel at that critical point in its history was not whether peace with its neighbors was possible but at what price': the Arabs demanded a return of the refugees, but were willing to talk. Israel, whose 'military power had expanded the margins for political choice' decided not to pay the price for formal peace agreement by allowing the return of a substantial number of Palestinian refugees or yielding territory to its neighbors. Thus an important factor in the failure to proceed from armistice agreements to contractual peace agreements was Ben-Gurion's inflexibility. And the major reason for this inflexibility was his belief that time was on Israel's side' [309]. Shlaims work had major implications for his view on the peace process. He viewed the Arabs as willing to accept Israel's existence and willing to negotiate. Fault for the lack of improvement lay with the Israelis.

The most extreme, politically speaking, of the New Historians was Ilan Pappé. Pappé interpreted in his book *the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006), but also in articles in the 1990s, and in his *A History of Modern Palestine* (2004)[310], Plan D as 'a plan for the for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine', where 'orders were dispatched for the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians from vast areas of the country'. 'The orders came with a detailed description of the methods to be employed to forcibly evict the people; large scale intimidation, laying siege to and bombarding villages' (etc.). 'Each unit was issued

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[306] Ibid., 31
[307] Ibid.34-36
[308] Ibid., 32
[309] Ibid., 49-51
[310] Ilan Pappé. *A history of Modern Palestine. One Land, two peoples*. (Cambridge, 2004), p. 129

with its own list of villages and neighborhoods as the targets of this master plan'[311]. He rejected Morris' account as biased to Israel. 'Had Morris and others used Arab sources or turned to oral history, they might have been able to get a better grasp of the systematic planning behind the expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948 and provide a more truthful description of the enormity of the crimes the Israeli soldiers committed'[312]. Pappé saw 'the plan' as the inevitable product of Zionist ideological impulse to have an exclusively Jewish presence in Palestine', 'The plan.. was a clear-cut case of an ethnic cleansing operation, regarded under international law today as a crime against humanity'[313]. As to the Arab armies, sent in 'to save Palestine', Pappé ruled that they were ill-prepared for battle and could only muster as many combatants as the Israeli's[314]. Pappé –who supports international boycotts against Israel- is extreme, and other new historians, most vocally Benny Morris, distanced themselves from him. Morris called him a 'retroactive poseur', who shifted into full-blown radicalism after getting a tenure, and offers virtually no evidence for his radical assertions[315]. In another article –in which he accused Pappé and Shlaim 'who shares his anti-Israeli outlook with European neo-fascists and Islamic jihadists' as being anti-Zionist- he criticized Pappé's historical narratives as ideologically driven and full of outright inventions and errors, lopsided and 'politics by other means'[316]. Pappé responded by accusing Morris of 'bigotry and narrow mindedness', and as a man 'who will feel unwelcome in such as society of equality of people and races'[317].

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[311] Ibid., xii
[312] Ibid. xv
[313] Ibid. xiii
[314] Ibid., 132
[315] Benny Morris, 'The liar as hero' in *The New Republic*, 2004
[316] Benny Morris, 'Politics by Other Means', in The New Republic, 2-004
[317] Ilan Pappé, 'Response to Benny Morris'"Politics by other means" in the New Republic', in *The Electronic Intifada*, 2004

c. The new historians and the peace process.

The New Historians were affected by the peace process and its ultimate failure. The 1990s witnessed the peace process with the Palestinians. After the election of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Labor in 1992, secret talks with PLO led to a breakthrough in Oslo. Arafat publically (at least for a Western audience) acknowledged the right for Israel to exist[318]. The Palestinians were to establish their state on the West bank, which was divided for the time being into areas of Palestinian, shared and Israeli control. The problem of settlers and refugees remained unresolved[319]. However the agreement gave ideological ammunition to PLO's (Fatah's) rivals in the Palestinian areas, most prominently the anti-Western Muslim Brotherhood offshoot Hamas[320]. A spate of suicide attacks by Hamas, between 1993 and 1996, left 300 Israelis dead, which was more than during the intifada[321]. Likud saw the rise of opponents of the Oslo accords in Benyamin Netanyahu (1949), who likened the accords to the 1938 Munich agreement[322]. Rabin was killed in 1995 by an opponent of the peace process[323]. A spike in the suicide bombings in 1996, caused his successor, Peres to lose the 1996 elections to Netanyahu's Likud. After his election, Netanyahu, in rivalry with Ariel Sharon, speeded up the building of settlements, and slowed down the peace process to a halt[324]. After the 1999 elections, his successor, Labor's Ehud Barak (1942), tried to revamp the peace process under American stewardship in Camp David[325]. Shindler blames the failure of the Camp David negotiations on the lack of preparedness of the Palestinians, mixed messages from Barak, a lack of chemistry and the perception that Arafat was unwilling as he made no counteroffers. Barak offered 90 percent of the West Bank, including a part of Jerusalem, and shared control over the Temple mount. The Palestinians rejected the agreement, mostly on the basis of 'the right to return', and the control of the old city. Soon after the breakdown of negotiations, now opposition (Likud) leader Sharon visited the Temple

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[318] Shindler, *A history of modern Israel,*, 235
[319] Ibid., 240
[320] Ibid., 244
[321] Ibid., 253
[322] Ibid. 259
[323] Ibid. 264
[324] Ibid., 269
[325] Ibid., 275

Mount, triggering disruptions, which coupled with rumors about massacres perpetrated by Israelis, led to full scale riots, groups like Hamas, but also Fatah returned to violence[326]. At last ditch negotiations in Taba (December 2000), Barak offered more than 90 percent of the West Bank and a land swap, as well as handing a 100 settlements over to Palestinian refugees. Arafat rejected the offer. A little later Ariel Sharon was elected prime minister[327].

The attitudes towards the peace process were reflected in the writings of the new historians. Ilan Pappé and Avi Shlaim stuck to their previous preconceptions.

Avi Shlaim vented his frustration at Likud's reluctance at peace negotiations in his book *The Iron Wall* (2000), where he alleged that the Israeli statehood project followed the logic of Jabotinsky's iron wall theory, which held that dialogue with the Arabs was, for the time being, pointless, as they would never give up their claims of the land. Israel should instead try to gain military superiority –he described as an *Iron Wall*, the Arabs could not break- to be able to negotiate from a position of strength. This strategy has been used successfully towards Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians. However, according to Shlaim, present Israeli leaders have become more intransient, even refusing to talk, when there is someone to talk to[328]. While –contrary to the official account- there has always been willingness to negotiate from the Arab side, Israeli leaders like Ben-Gurion and in his day, Netanyahu, rejected negotiations[329]. The election of Barak was to Shlaim, 'the sunrise after the three dark and terrible years during which Israel had been led by the unreconstructed proponents of the iron wall'[330]. While Benny Morris moved to the right, Avi Shlaim maintained his position. According to him writing in a Guardian article in 2004, the Palestinians are willing to make peace. 'The Palestinians are not a nation of fanatics wedded to violence but a normal people with a natural hankering for freedom and independence'. 'Having lost 78 per cent of mandatory Palestine in 1948, they gradually scaled down their aspirations to a state of their own over the remaining 22 per cent alongside Israel, not in place of Israel. By signing the Oslo Accords in 1993, the Palestinians opted for a historic compromise, for the peace of the brave. More than 10

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[326] Ibid., 279-283
[327] Ibid., 287-288
[328] Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 599
[329] Ibid., 605
[330] Ibid., 609

years on, they confront an Israeli leader who rejects the Oslo Accords and is determined to impose on them the peace of the bully. The conflict that is unfolding in the Holy Land today is a conflict of Biblical proportions - between a little Palestinian David and a massively armed, overbearing Israeli Goliath'.' The essence of Zionism is territorial expansion and its principal method is 'creating facts on the ground' by means of Jewish settlement on the land. Over the past 36 years, Israel has tried every conceivable method of ending the conflict with the Palestinians except the obvious one - ending the occupation. And as long as the occupation continues, there will be no peace and no stability in the Middle East[331].

While Avi Shlaim saw the main problem in 1967, Ilan Pappé rejected the legitimacy of Israel from 1948 onwards, based on the refugee crisis. For him, Israel's focus on 1967, is a ploy to reflect attention to the Nakba of 1948[332]. He accused the Israeli peace camp of ignoring the 1948 events, which led to the breakdown of negotiations. Siding with Arafat on the 2000 negotiations, he rejected the Israeli-American proposal as it 'excluded Jerusalem' and 'brought no solution to the refugees'[333].

Benny Morris came to different conclusions after the collapse of the 2000 talks. In an interview in 2004, Morris explained his change of heart: " 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 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 wanted it all. Lod and Acre and Jaffa" [334]. Already in his *Righteous Victims* (2001), Morris was scathing about the Palestinian rejection –without a counteroffer- of Israel's 'far reaching' offer to hand over 90 percent of the West Bank and handing the Temple mount to international control, and about the whipping up of the

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[331] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/jan/18/comment.theobserver (last accessed 1 July 2012)
[332] Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford, 2006), 239
[333] Ibid., 243
[334] http://www.counterpunch.org/2004/01/16/an-interview-with-benny-morris (last accessed 1 July 2012)

'Al-Aqsa intifada', by Palestinian leaders[335]. For Morris, these developments, and the paramount Islamic element in the protests, bode ill for future peace. 'If there is one thing the past teaches, it is this: That Palestinian violence has repeatedly helped trigger full scale Israeli-Arab wars'[336]. In 2002, his change of heart was thus, that Morris agreed to co-author an article with Ehud Barak blaming the collapse of negotiations on the Palestinian side. Here he characterized Arafat as 'untrustworthy': 'To Western audiences Arafat usually affirms his interest in peace or "the peace of the braves" (a Palestinian baseball team?), as he puts it. To Arab audiences, he speaks only of battle and planting the Palestinian flag on Jerusalem's walls (as Saladin planted his flag on Jerusalem's walls, after defeating the Crusaders, back in 1189) and of sacrificing "one million *shuhada* [martyrs, meaning suicide bombers]" in "redeeming Palestine."' 'It is time that the West's leaders, who initially dealt with Saddam and Milosevic as acceptable, responsible interlocutors, now treat Arafat and his ilk in the Palestinian camp as the vicious, untrustworthy, unacceptable reprobates and recidivists that they are'[337]. In *1948* (2008), Morris concluded that the Islamic nature of Arab society precluded any chance of future peace. In his conclusion, described by Avi Shlaim (in a otherwise praising review) as the 'only major departure from the evidence, and from common sense[338]', Morris characterized Arab thinking as inherently hostile and jihadi: 'Jews are the historic enemies of Muslims and carry the greatest hatred for the nation of Muhammed'. Jews were seen as 'unclean' and everyone dealing with Jews was seen as 'a sinner'[339]. The 'assault of 1947-48 was an expression of the Islamic Arabs' rejection of the West and its values as well as a reaction to what it saw as colonialist European encroachment against sacred Islamic soil. There was no understanding (or tolerance) of Zionism as a national liberation movement of another people'. The 1948 War, from the Arab perspective was a war of religion'. The territory was sacred: its violation by infidels was sufficient grounds for launching a holy war'[340]. The Arab loss in the 1948 war was mainly due to their lack

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[335] Morris, *Righteous victims* 2001, 660
[336] Ibid., 694
[337] http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2002/jun/27/camp-david-and-aftercontinued/?pagination=false (last accessed 1 July 2012)
[338] http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/may/31/history1 (last accessed 1 July 2012)
[339] Morris, *1948 and after*, 393-394
[340] Ibid., 394

of organization, incompetence and lack of motivation[341]. This perceived injustice –defeat at the hands of the Jews- remains unbearable to the Arab street, 'reared with tales of Islamic glory'[342]. Morris now also held more sympathy for standpoints taken by Karsh and others. Palestinians fought not as a people, but as towns and villages. 'What this says about the Palestinian Arabs at the time, as a people will also need to be confronted'[343]. In his *One State, Two States* (2009), a book described by one critics as 'a piece of crude Zionist propaganda with the usual anti-Arab racism'[344], Morris rejected the two-state solution as out of reach. Even a bi-national state wasn't viable, as Arabs would never accept the Jewish presence in the Middle East. The conflict was cultural, rather than political. As a solution, Morris offered the possibility of handing the West Bank back to Jordan, if Jordan were to contain the Palestinian Arabs[345]. In an interview, Morris even told an Israeli journalist that Ben-Gurion should have carried out a complete expulsion of Arabs, as he would have 'stabilized the state of Israel for generations'[346]. These ideas were not far from his main critic, Karsh, who claimed that Arab leaders had always opposed Israel's existence. Even the peace process with Egypt was never to reconcile it with the existence of Israel, as Mubarak strengthened the army and fostered a culture of anti-Semitism in Egypt[347]. Arafat as well, never accepted the idea of Jewish statehood, and saw the peace process as nothing more than a step in the phased strategy of destroying Israel, as he himself broadcasted in 1993 on Jordanian TV[348]. Karsh as well believed that no Palestinian state would be viable, as Arafat himself had admitted back in 1978 to Ceausescu, that the Palestinians 'lacked the unity, tradition or discipline to form a state'[349].

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[341] Ibid., 400-401
[342] Ibid. 412
[343] Ibid. 400-401
[344] Oren Ben-Dor, 'Benny Morris, Islamophobia and the case for the one-state solution', in *Holy Land Studies*, 9.2, 2010236
[345] Benny Morris, *One state, two states: Resolving the Israel/ Palestine Conflict* (New Haven 2009).
[346] http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/24/books/review/Goldberg-t.html?_r=1&ref=books (last accessed 1 July 2012)
[347] Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed*, 246
[348] Ibid., 249
[349] Ibid., 252

To make a preliminary conclusion, we could say that the New Historians, and their detractors have mainly followed the logic of their political convictions. Their outlook is partly based on their view of the Arabs, who are portrayed as fanatics unwilling to engage in real dialogue and still, after 60 years, bent on the destruction of Israel (by those who see no real chances for peace; the orthodox and Benny Morris), or as less monolithic and willing to negotiate (by those seeking negotiations; Shlaim and Cohen), or as blameless victims of Zionist ethnic racism (by those who seek to promote the return of the refugees and turn Israel into a bi-national state; Pappé and the Arab historians). The view on Israeli actions as well is influenced by the political outlook of today: to criticize Israeli expulsion policies in 1948, creates an argument for their return today. To portray the Arabs of 1948 as monolithic aggressors creates a moral justification for their expulsion. This has an influence on the course of the debate, which shall be explained in the next chapters by comparing it to the American revisionist debate.

3. The debate on the Cold War

We have seen the development of the Israeli New Historians' debate. To compare how political influence determines the course of a debate, we could look at an example where the 'orthodox' account of events was challenged, and where the 'revisionist' historians became highly influential, but also where the reaction to this challenge might be different from that in the Israeli debate. An example is the debate raging in the US in the 1960s about the Cold War. In general the way the debate evolved can be characterized like this; first the orthodox historians mention the totalitarian Soviet Union as starting the War, while the US defended the democratic world. During the 1960s and 70s, the revisionists portrayed an all-powerful US initiating the Cold War for ideological and economic reasons, while the SU was cautious, reactive and restrictive in security claims, rather than expansionist. The post revisionists during the 1970s and 1980s chose elements from both fields[350]. The challengers of the official perception of American moral policy, were not rejected outright, as happened in the case of many New Historians, but their ideas were used to create a new synthesis in Cold War historiography. In short, the course of the American debate was 'Hegelian'.

The debates in Israel and the US are comparable in a way, as they both feature challenges to an official account on the conduct of a war, that provided legitimacy to the main course of foreign policy –in the US, anti-Communism- to date. In both debates, the challengers profited from the availability of new material, although this material was more impressive (archival resources) in providing new insights in the Israeli case, while the American historians mostly had to deal with memoires to back up their new interpretations. On important aspects, the debates are very different. The American historical community is vast, and a wide array of campuses teach history from different perspectives. Plurality of visions has already been engrained in the American institutional academic makeup. It isn't surprising to find that some campuses, like the University of Wisconsin, have a background in teaching 'Progressive History', a more leftwing view on history stressing economic aspects as vital. Indeed it was at this University of

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[350] Anders Stephanson, 'The United States', in David Reynolds (ed.) *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, 27

Wisconsin, that a former student, and teacher, William Appleman Williams, and many of his teaching associates like Walter LaFeber, Thomas McCormick and Lloyd Gardner, began to publish critical re-appraisals of the basis of American foreign policy[351]. That their ideas became influential during the 1960s and 1970s has a lot to do with events outside the Academia.

a. Historical Overview
The issue at stake: the Cold War
1945-1947

Most of the publications of the revisionist historians deal with the period between 1941/1945 (when the US and the Soviet Union (SU) won the Second World War) and 1947 (when scholars agree the Cold War was under way). The later periods however merit our attention if we want to gain an understanding of the context in which the revisionists operated.

It needs no explanation that Europe, by 1945, had turned into a theater of War, after the Germans invaded Poland, Western Europe and in 1941, Soviet Russia. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Americans as well –until then sympathetic towards Britain and other democracies, but on the sidelines- entered the War. The tide of the War turned in 1943, and the issue of the future of postwar Europe, became more pressing. Thus, the Great powers (the US led by Franklin D Roosevelt (and after his death in April 1945, Harry S Truman), the Soviet Union led by Joseph Stalin, and Great Britain led by Winston Churchill) held a series of meetings, in 1943 in Tehran, in February 1945 in Yalta, and finally in July 1945 in Potsdam. In 1943 Roosevelt and Churchill met with Stalin in Tehran, where they agreed to divide Germany after the war[352]. During the Yalta conference, the military situation on the European front favored the Soviet Union, whose army had overrun most of Eastern Europe. The other allies had made little headway on the European continent. The American chiefs of staff sought Soviet help in the Pacific, and were prepared to make concessions. The Yalta agreements

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[351] Stephanson, ' The United States', 30
[352] Paul Boyer, (et al), *The Enduring Vision: A history of the American People. Fifth Edition*, (Boston, 2005) 550

mirrored these realities; Stalin agreed to declare war on Japan, some months after the German surrender, while the USA and UK reneged on their commitment to nationalist China, promised the Soviet Union concessions in Manchuria. The leaders also agreed to divide Germany, and establish an international organization for collective security. Stalin, had captured Warsaw in January, and repressed the non-communist majority. While Churchill and Roosevelt agreed to recognize the new Lublin regime, Stalin pledged to allow free elections and an inclusive government. By April 1945, the American and Russian armies met at the Elbe, Berlin was captured on 2 May, and the Germans surrendered on 8 May. Meanwhile, Roosevelt had died in April, and was succeeded as president by Harry S Truman.

Truman took a harder line, criticized the SU for backtracking on free elections in Poland, threatened to cut off land-lease aid if the SU did not cooperate, and reduced US assistance stalling on their request for a 1 billion reconstruction loan. Stalin as well broke Yalta promises by strengthening the hand in eastern Europe. When by June 1945, the UN was created, the international diplomatic field was already a battleground. From July to August, leaders met in Potsdam; mutual mistrust led to a postponement of agreements on the most divisive issues, such as the future of Germany. While in Potsdam, Truman warned Japan that he would use a nuclear bomb –which had been successfully tested earlier in July- if it did not surrender. On 6 August, after Japans rejection of this declaration, the Americans dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, altering the balance of power vis-à-vis the Russians. The bomb shortened the Pacific war, ending it, before the Russians could actively enter it. American policymakers hoped it would 'put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war', as secretary of state James Byrnes put it[353].

Although Russia had committed itself to democratic self-determination in Eastern European states, it became abundantly clear that the words this agreement would not be met by practice. On the other hand, the American atomic bomb (which had been build in secret) and its subsequent use in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, gave more concern in Soviet Russia. After the Potsdam conference, mutual hostility and rhetoric was stepped up. The prediction that the US would be somehow able to control Russian behavior proved to be

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[353] Boyer, *The Enduring Vision* 557-560

optimistic. By 1946, Western-Soviet relations were reaching a low. Stalin wanted a demilitarized Germany and a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and installed pro-Soviet communist regimes in most of Eastern Europe, suppressing any dissent in the process, ignoring the Yalta Declaration of Liberated Europe. Truman's inner circle thought that accepting this would lead to more expansion, and accepting Stalin's occupation of Eastern Europe would betray American war aims, betray the principle of self-determination and condemn Eastern European states to totalitarian tyranny. Domestic political considerations, Polish-American voters, and anti-communist sentiments, as well as the US's economic and military cloud contributed to Truman's diplomatic intransigence[354]. American assertiveness increased Soviet paranoia and Stalin began to close Eastern Europe to American influences, starting the so called 'Zhadnovchina' campaign against Western influences in Russia[355]. In February 1946, Stalin warned that there could be no lasting peace with capitalism. Two weeks later, George F Kennan, an American diplomat in Moscow, warned in a document that the only way to deal with the Soviet Union was 'containment of Russian expansive tendencies'. Truman accepted the idea of containment. In March 1946, Churchill, accompanied by Truman, held his 'iron curtain' speech, in which he called for an alliance of English-speaking peoples against the Soviet threat to democracy, and for a monopoly on atomic weapons. Not long afterwards, Truman threatened with intervention in Iran, unless the Soviet Union withdrew. In June he submitted to the UN a proposal on the issue of atomic energy, requiring the Soviet Union to submit to nuclear weapons control and inspection, before the US would destroy its own atomic arsenal. The Soviets rejected the proposal. Both countries went on to develop more sophisticated weapons. In early 1947, the US openly stated its commitment to combat Soviet power.

  After the British asked the Americans to take over the assistance to Greece and Turkey in supplying governments with weapons to fight communist guerilla's, and communist parties seemed to be on an electoral ascent, the Truman administration decided to take action to persuade Congress to release funding for more assistance to

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[354] Ibid., 567

[355] Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945*-1971 (New York, 1972), 32

Europe[356]. Speaking before Congress, Truman painted global politics as a stark confrontation between liberty and oppression and asked for more assistance for Turkey and Greece. The Truman doctrine, which he outlined, declared that the US should assist any free people resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures'. In June, the administration proposed massive assistance for European recovery, the Marshall plan, offering it to the SU and the European states as well, which was –predictably- refused. The new doctrine was made public in July 1947 by the X article, which had been written by George Kennan, who had –in February 1946- appealed for the containment policy[357].

The Cold War after 1947
1947-1959

As Communist coups swept Eastern Europe during the following months, the allies began to merge their zones in West Germany. In June 1948, Stalin responded by blocking all rail and road traffic to western Berlin, intending to force a decision on the future of Germany, by starving the city. Truman, in response, ordered a massive airlift, sending a fleet of B-29 planes (able to carry the nuclear bomb) to English bases. Close to war, the Soviets backed down, ending the blockade the same month as the Western nations formed military alliance, NATO, and the US stationed armed divisions in Europe, while arming their Western European allies . One of these allies would become the newly created West Germany, which was gradually armed. The Soviets formed their own military alliance, East German State, and exploding their own nuclear bomb in September 1949. In Asia, the US and SU partitioned Korea, while the SU created its own sphere of influence in Manchuria and the US occupied Japan. US support for the nationalists in China failed to prevent a communist takeover in 1949. In November 1952, the US exploded its first H-bomb, the SU followed nine months later. In 1950, a presidentially appointed commission on defensive policy presented the NSC-68 report, which emphasized the SU's aggressive intentions and military strength and called for a military buildup by the US. The Korea war of 1950-53 –in which the US intervened on the side of

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[356] Boyer, *The Enduring Vision,* 568
[357] LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945*-1971

the South Koreans, and the Chinese (aided by the Russians) on the side of the North Koreans- meant that Truman would follow their advise and triple the defense budget[358]. The Cold War had thus begun.

Domestic policy became increasingly anti-Communist, leading to an instance of paranoia, known as the 'Great Fear'. Investigations into anything related to communism destroyed the Left, purged officials and undermined labor militancy. In March 1947, Truman ordered all federal employees to undergo a loyalty check, as accusations began to spread, mere criticism of foreign policy would lead to accusations of disloyalty. Associations with the Left led to 300 people to lose their Jobs. In the same year, the House's Anti-American Activities Committee began its hearings, leading to a witch hunt on possible left-wingers. In 1951, the Supreme Court decided that Congress could curtail the freedom of speech if national security demanded restrictions. In 1951, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were arrested for communist espionage, leading to greater panic. Conservative republicans hurled accusations against the administrations; Republican senator McCarthy in particular was able to find a national forum by escalating accusations. In 1952, Dwight Eisenhower and vice presidential candidate Richard Nixon won the elections[359]. Domestically, Eisenhower followed an off-hands course. In 1954, Joseph McCarthy lost much of his power after accusing the army. Society however changed. The Supreme Court began to rule in favor of civil rights for blacks (Brown vs. Board of Education, 1954), Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 improved the voting rights of blacks[360], while a black civil rights movement began to take shape, the expanding economy created an affluent consumer society[361], TV's brought home culture and the baby boom children began to enter schools and universities[362].

1959-1974

During the late 1950s, the focus of the Cold War began to shift to the Third World, where the American CIA began to instigate coups (in 1953 in Iran, in 1954 in Guatemala), and began to train forces in non-communist South-Vietnam. In a setback,

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[358] Boyer, *The Enduring Vision,* 569-572
[359] Ibid., 580-581
[360] Ibid. 585-586
[361] Ibid. 590
[362] Ibid., 595

leftwing revolutionaries overthrew the pro-American government in Cuba in 1959. In 1960, the Soviets shot down a US spy plane[363]. Tensions spilled over during the Kennedy era (1961-1963). His attempt to overthrow Cuban communism by supporting an invasion into Cuba in April 1961 failed dismally. Khrushchev threatened war over Berlin during a July summit, finally constructing the Berlin Wall in August 1961. In October 1962, another major crisis escalated, when it appeared that Soviet missiles were stationed in Cuba. After the US imposed a blockade around Cuba and the threat of nuclear war seemed real, the SU backed down and removed the missiles[364].

After Kennedy's assassination in 1963, his successor Lyndon B Johnson was faced with the choice of removing American troops from Southern Vietnam, and allow a communist takeover, or increase the number of troops and escalate a war against communist guerilla's and communist North Vietnam. Fearing a domino effect of spreading communism, Johnson chose the latter. The high toll the war would take over the next decade, coupled with critical TV coverage of the war's brutalities meant eroding support for the war and increasing polarization over its continuation. A major communist offensive in early 1968 sunk Johnson's hopes for re-election. His conservative successor, Richard Nixon, unveiled in August 1969 his Nixon Doctrine, in which he redefined the role of the United States in the Third World into that of helpful partner (giving financial and moral support), but not as a military protector, replacing American troops with South Vietnamese. In January 1973, the US ended hostilities with Southern Vietnam. Disengagement from Vietnam helped establish relations with China, and a detente with the Soviet Union. The Soviets, professing since the 1960s the doctrine of peaceful coexistence, and the Americans signed accords to limit antiballistic weapons[365].

The 1960s saw a number of elements converge. The Cold War cooled; instead of confrontation, the two sides began to settle for 'peaceful coexistence'.

1974-1989

The 1980s saw president Reagan (1981-1989) step up anti-communist rhetoric, stepped up aid to anti-communist regimes and groups, swelled the military budget by

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[363] Ibid., 589-590
[364] Ibid., 608
[365] Ibid., 632-636

building up the American nuclear arsenal[366]. The Soviet Union, whose economy had stagnated, and whose military resources were drained by its intervention in Afghanistan and its subsequent against American-aided Islamist guerilla's, began to loose out to the United States. Internal events in the Soviet Union finally led to the end of the Cold War, with the collapse of the Soviet space in Eastern Europe[367].

Domestic events were influential as well. While the 1950s were conformist and highly anti-Communist, the relative relaxation of the Cold War during the 1960s led to a different appreciation of events. The Vietnam war gave more credence to voices critical of American policy, branded by communist Soviet propaganda as 'imperialism'. The 1960s saw a push for more left-wing 'liberal' policies and an expansion of the State responsibilities, an increasingly vocal struggle for civil rights by African-Americans, which was accompanied by marches, riots and murders of activists[368], the rise of more leftwing movements like feminism[369], and the rise of a youth movement in Universities, and the rise of a youth driven 'counterculture'. The New Left arose in universities, which strove to create a 'participatory democracy' and to end, what they perceived to be pervasive materialism, militarism and racism. Student protests against the Vietnam war and 'racism' quickly spread over campuses. After failing to bring about significant changes (and graduating), most new left students left the organized campaigning[370]. Other issues became more important (certainly after the Vietnam War had ended), such as economic troubles, crime, and trust in politics in general after the 1974 Watergate scandal that ended the Nixon presidency[371]. The baby boom generation turned towards materialism, while the Evangelical Christians organized a backlash against liberalism[372]. By the 1980s, the era of Leftwing radicalism had passed, although many former radicals held influential posts in Universities. The Cold War was over.

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[366] Ibid., 661-663
[367] Ibid., 671
[368] Ibid., 612-616
[369] Ibid., 618
[370] Ibid., 627-630
[371] Ibid., 643
[372] Ibid., 652

b. American Historiography and the revisionist challengers .

The orthodox account of the 1950s.

American historiography until the coming of the revisionists was relatively one-sided. The debate on the initiation of the Cold war, barely a decade earlier, had been dominated by scholars like George F. Kennan and Schlesinger. Their ideas were in line with the official Cold War portrayal of the Russians, whose imperialism should be contained. Most scholars during the early years agreed that the SU was exceptional and that cooperation with it was impossible. Blame lay with the unilateral moves of the Soviet Union, which imposed its rule on Eastern Europe before the Second World War had come to an end. Most orthodox scholars were backers of the liberal internationalist line that it was necessary to spread democracy and capitalism, and saw the retreat into isolationism after the First World War as a big mistake. The postwar 1945 period offered a second chance to complete America's historic mission[373]. US policy was thus 'the brave and essential response of free men to communist aggression'. Orthodox scholars may have disagreed on what influenced the Soviet behavior, such as the dynamics of the Soviet system, Russian foreign policy goals or Stalin's personality, all however agreed to attribute the causes to Soviet initiatives[374].

One of the official historians was Thomas Bailey, whose *America faces Russia* (1950) argued that Russia sought expansion. Bailey gave a number of reasons of why 'the Kremlin so rudely slap aside the proffered hand of co-operation and fellowship'. 'The Soviets had never allied themselves with the Western democracies in spirit', and ' when the fighting stopped there was a natural tendency for the Russian mind to return to –or remain in- the old grooves of anti-Western distrust'[375]. Communism, which openly proclaims warfare on Capitalism, could not trust the democratic world, and Moscow's policy was no doubt permeated by anti-capitalistic fears.

However, the American system bore in itself the roots of a challenge to this vision. Contrary to Israel, the country and its academic community are vast; historians have considerable social autonomy, and the period of 1943-50 has been the focus of a massive

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[373] John Lamberton Harper, *The Cold War*, (Oxford), 2011
[374] Robert James Maddox, *The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War* (Princeton, 1973), 3-5
[375] Thomas Bailey, *America faces Russia. Russian-American relations from Early Times to Our Day*, (Ithaca,1950), 323

outpouring of studies[376]. Most international relations history is done by American history scholars, which leads to an emphasis on the US. History writing on the cold war is politicized as it deals with one's position on American history; the experience of Vietnam is reflected in part in history writing on the Cold War.

The term 'Cold War' was popularized by an article by Walter Lippmann, who criticized George F. Kennan's *X-article*. In this article, Kennan assumed expansionism was inherent in the nature of the Soviet regime. Containment should do whatever was necessary to stop Soviet expansion. Since Russians were fanatical, they were impossible to talk with; doing whatever was necessary therefore meant that there would be no real diplomacy. Lippmann was critical of the Mr *X article*. In his *The Cold War*, Lipmann criticized the article for its disbelief in the possibility of a settlement. Lipmann agreed that 'we cannot enjoy intimacy with the Soviet regime', and that 'there can be no appeal to common purposes'. But history has been full of rival powers, and diplomacy deals with it by organizing a balance of powers, which deprives rivals a good prospect of successful aggression. A policy of settlement with Russia would aim to redress the balance of powers and could bring about the evacuation of Europe[377]. Lipmann agreed that Russia's aim was to expand into Eastern Europe, but that has been the aim of Russia all along. While the Russian army remains in Eastern Europe, threatening the West, America must hold its armies in the West, to hold the Russian machine in check[378]. In 1948, Kennan too began to argue for a negotiated exit[379]. Kennan, himself more a realist, became more critical of the ideological nature of American policy. Realists like Morgenthau as well criticized Truman for being too ideological in his Truman Doctrine, and many realists, including Hans Morgenthau and Louis Halle contended that Stalin pursued traditional Russian objectives, and not a communist world revolution[380]. Realists such as Kennan saw the Cold War as a tragic, but inevitable consequence[381]. Nor did the Realists question the idea that Soviet actions triggered the Cold War. The few writers who did argue that the US shared responsibility for the Cold War made little impression

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[376] Stephanson, ' The United States', 25
[377] Walter Lipmann, *The Cold War. A study of U.S. Foreign Policy.* (New York, 1947), p. 61
[378] Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War; a study of U.S. foreign policy,* 62
[379] Stephanson, ' The United States', 23
[380] Samuel Walker, *Historians and Cold War origins; the new consensus* in Haines, Gerald en Walker,Samuel (ed.) *American foreign relations; a historiographical overview* (Westport, 1981), 208
[381] George F Kennan, *realities of American foreign policy*, 1957, 69-76

on the prevailing consensus[382]. Elements from the official account were however already criticized during the late 1950s; scholars saw elements of self-interest and ambition, and deemed the depiction of the Soviet Union's behavior to be simplistic[383].

Although the ideological pro-American account did not survive the onslaught of revisionism, some of the realist accounts did survive to end up in post-revisionism. The American debate on the origins of the Cold War of the 1950s was already relatively diverse. Although there was agreement on the fact that most of the guilt lay with the Russians, there was disagreement on the factors that drove Russian politics and on the ideological nature of the American foreign policy towards Russia. Instead of painting a black and white picture of aggressively expansive Soviets and the US defending freedom from Soviet threat, the debate already knew shades of grey. Generally speaking, revisionists would reverse these ideas, by arguing that it was the US who was responsible for the Cold War, that the US was driven by economic interests and that the US behaved like an empire.

The revisionists

The 1950s saw little debate on Cold War foreign policy, although Kennan threw some stones in the pond with his plea for American-Russian disengagement from Europe and neutralization of Germany. During the 1960s and 1970s this stance was criticized as ideologically pro-American. According to Gardner, early American historiography of the 1950s could be characterized like this: 'The historian's facts and conclusions had already been chosen for him before he began'[384]. The attack of the American revisionists however led to a reversal of conventional cold war wisdom. Several factors, according to Stephanson, contributed to this attack. One was the rise of the 'new left', which was reinforced by the Vietnam war, antiwar movements and the civil rights struggle[385]. The attack by the New Left on traditional historical interpretations was wider than only foreign affairs. Many of the New Left's historians were also activists in civil rights and anti-war movements, and delivered their critique on the way American history was

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[382] Walker, *Historians and Cold War origins* , 209
[383] Harper, *The Cold War* , 84
[384] Lloyd C. Gardner, *Architects of an Illusion. Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy. 1941-1949*, (Chicago 1970), 301
[385] Stephanson, ' The United States', 30

constructed by providing alternative historical accounts focused on issues like exploitation, domination and oppression of minorities. Some followed a Marxist line, which linked those evils to the system of Capitalism, while others were less radical, but still sought to change society[386]. During the previous decade, the 1950s, many Leftwing scholars had abandoned their Marxist interpretations or even lost their jobs. The Progressive school, which sympathized with democratic and radical movements and paid attention to economic causes, endured the 1950s in some places, including the University of Wisconsin[387]. The resurrection of an alternative community of radical historians began to take shape in Wisconsin under professor William Appleman Williams.

Williams, a political activist and former graduate of the University of Wisconsin returned to teach there in 1957[388], and many of his Wisconsin teaching assistants, including Walter LaFeber, Thomas McCormick and Lloyd Gardner became prominent revisionists. Williams used the economic emphasis in Progressive history and coupled it to expansionism. Economic expansionist foreign policy he called the Open Door policy. When Williams wrote his essay *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* –the title referred to the divergence between the ideal and reality of American policy- (1959), it went largely ignored[389]. It would become the major theoretical tract of his day.

William Appleman Williams focused on the responsibility on the American side for the Cold War and came to the conclusion that the Cold War was largely to blame on American policies, albeit mostly unintended. Williams maintained that America was primarily focused on achieving a postwar settlement on its own terms, and rejected Soviet advances for a post war settlement. Contrary to what the orthodox scholars asserted, the Soviets were willing to get to an agreement and were relatively flexible in their position. Instead of aggressive anti-American expansionism, the Russians wanted to focus on internal rebuilding and development. The Americans however focused on maintaining their open door policy of continuing expansion and sought to force the relatively weak Russians to accept American dominance[390]. Instead of reacting to overtures, the

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[386] Jonathan Wiener, 'Radical Historians and the Crisis in American History, 1959-1980' in *Journal of American History*, Vol 76 No 2, 1989, p. 399
[387] Ibid., 402
[388] Ibid., p.407
[389] Stephanson, ' The United States', 30-31
[390] William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York, 1962), 223-225

Americans portrayed the Soviet Union (SU) as malign and expansionist[391]. According to Williams, American expansionism, not Russian, was to blame for the Cold War. The idea that the conflict was an absolute good versus an absolute evil should thus be rejected[392]. Williams linked American expansionism –but also the failed policy on Cuba- to the assumptions behind American foreign policy; it wants to be humanitarian, and stresses the right to self-determination, but thinks that people should really live their life as in America[393]. The contradictions between these policy initiatives lead to antagonism of other peoples[394]. The most important factor contributing to this (and here Williams Progressive education comes to mind) is America's economic expansionism. The US was ruled, according to Williams, by the idea that its freedom and prosperity depend on the continuing expansion of its economic and ideological system (Open Door imperialism). Williams called for this idea to be abandoned for cooperation. These faulty assumptions led to the escalation of the Cold War and could lead to a nuclear war in the future. Williams sought a reform of American policies based on different assumptions, and accepted the spheres of influence; The Russians have understood this, and developed the doctrine of coexistence; to indefinitely accept the current balance of powers[395].

Williams thesis was controversial. Critics pointed at the lack of distinction between system and ideology –as it remained unclear on whether America tended to expand or the system needed expansion to survive (a classical Marxist view on capitalism) or whether this expansion was ideological[396].

Williams thesis was quickly followed by others, critical of US policy during the Cold War. Some continued to analyze America's economic expansionism, others focused on other aspects as well, such as the impact of the nuclear bomb. During the 1960s, these critical studies achieved great impact. In 1965, Gar Alperovitz published his *Atomic Diplomacy*, in which –using mostly diaries as his sources- he argued that the US used the atomic bomb primarily as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the Russian[397]. While in

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[391] Ibid., 231
[392] Ibid., 298
[393] Ibid., 2-3
[394] Ibid., 10
[395] Ibid., 303-304
[396] Stephanson, 'The United States', 31
[397] Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy. The use of the atomic bomb & the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (Penguin, New York), 1965 (1985), 275

Yalta, the Soviets held bargaining power, the atomic bomb gave Americans a better negotiating position. 'by the middle of July leading American policy makers were convinced that the atomic bomb would permit the United States to take a firm stand in subsequent negotiations', to this purpose, the Americans stalled meetings until July[398]. The bomb altered American diplomatic-strategic thinking. With the weapon, the Americans no longer saw Germany as a potential threat, and were no longer required to deal with the Russians on the German issue. The bomb could, according to Alperovitz, now be used as a diplomatic tool vis-à-vis the Soviets. It gave American policymakers the confidence to try to undo the Yalta agreement to hand Eastern Europe to the Soviets, but eventually also unleashed an arms race[399]. To strengthen their position, the Americans deliberately ignored Japanese efforts to negotiate and bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs[400]. Alperovitz suggests that the bomb gave the Americans a dominant position in the postwar diplomatic game. This, coupled with more American assertiveness on Eastern Europe, makes the Americans bear more responsibility for the beginning of the Cold War. His suggestion on Japan also gives a more sinister spin on American intentions. This thesis was controversial in both camps. Kolko, who traced the roots for America's 'expansive' and 'imperialist' policies to its economic system, argued that tactical changes on the American side could not be tied directly to the bomb. Most others, according to Samuel Walker, argued that the bomb was used primarily for military reasons, secondary for diplomatic motives[401]. Other historians agreed with Alperovitz that 1945 meant a shift in American foreign policy, although they saw the shift more on the personal level. D.F Fleming in his *The Cold War and Its Origins* (1961) and David Horowitz in his *The Free World Colossus* (1965) argued that Truman reversed Roosevelt's more conciliatory policies and failed to recognize that Stalin's expansionist drive was an effort to secure Russia's borders[402]. This theme stuck. A later (post-revisionist) critic, Daniel Yergin, in his *Shattered Peace* (1977) as well delineated between Roosevelt's cooperative, and Truman's uncooperative stance. Yergin saw

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[398] Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy*, 277
[399] Ibid., 56-58
[400] Ibid., 290
[401] Stephanson, ' The United States', 35/ J Samuel Walker, ' The decision to use the bomb', *Diplomatic History* 14 (1990), p. 111
[402] Walker, *Historians and Cold War origins* , 209

missionary urges in American policy, not Russian, his book has however largely been considered to be post-revisionist[403]. The doctrine of national security, which argued that Russia posed an immediate threat, but in reality misinterpreted Russian policy, led to a redefinition of American policy in the world and interventionism, such as in Vietnam[404].

The War in Vietnam raised questions about the basics of America's interventionist Cold War policies and the theme of America as an economically driven imperialist power gained currency. Instead of actors, the (capitalist) system in which America operated became more important. In cue with their time, Revisionist critics of American foreign policy now saw a reform of policies or assumptions alone as insufficient. The whole American system was corrupt, and this had a global impact. Alperovitz and others were at the forefront of this newer interpretation. In 1970 Alperovitz published his *Cold War Essays* (1970). He characterized the United States as 'an anti-revolutionary nation', which represses movements that might become communist all over the world, something he considers a 'negative, destructive tendency'[405]. Alperovitz traced this tendency back to the American economic system, which requires an informal empire in the shape of an Open Door policy, a policy going back decades before the Cold War[406].

Gabriel Kolko published his radical critique of American foreign policy around the same time. Like Alperovitz, he saw a direct causal link between economic interests and American foreign policy, which was, according to Kolko, aimed at thwarting revolutionary movements and opening up new markets for America's expanding economy. More than those before him, Kolko emphasized the anti-revolutionary core in America's foreign policy (exemplified in his day by the war against communist guerilla's in Vietnam). According to Kolko in his *The Politics of War* (1968), American policy had to deal with 'the question of the Left, which is to say, the disintegration of the prewar social systems and the growth of revolutionary movements and potential upheaval everywhere in the world'. This emergence of the Left was a 'threat to securing American

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[403] Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace. The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State.* (Houghton Miffflin Co., Boston, 1977), 7-9
[404] Yergin, *Shattered Peace* ,13
[405] Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy* 75
[406] Ibid., 96

economic and political war aims'. The Americans linked this Leftist threat to Russia[407]. This was unfounded, revolutionary upheaval was in reality beyond Russia's control[408]: 'In Eastern Europe.. American leaders found evidence in what they interpreted to be the dangers of Soviet expansionism' however 'the war utterly and finally destroyed the traditional Eastern European political and economic structure and nothing the Russians might do could alter that fact'. In fact, the Russians followed a cautious line and were willing to co-operate with non-communists. The guilt for the Cold War thus lay completely with American 'imperialism': 'For the United States, Eastern Europe was a question of economic war aims to which political realities had also to conform to satisfy American aspirations', 'the United States considered all political and economic block or spheres of influence that it did not control as directly undermining it larger political and especially economic, objectives for an integrated world capitalism and a political structure which was the prerequisite to its goals'. To America it was a question of 'reintegrating the region into a traditional prewar European economy in a condition of semi colonialism'.' It was a failure of American policy for which Washington was ultimately to hold Russia responsible'[409]. The ultimate aim of the US was to prevent economic conditions from helping revolutionary movements. After the Second World War, the US was strong enough to impose its will on others, so that its trade would flow unhindered[410]. In *The Limits of Power* (1972) Joyce and Gabriel Kolko reiterated their thesis that 'American business could operate only in a world composed of politically reliable and stable capitalist nations, and with free access to essential raw materials. Such a universal order precluded the Left from power and necessitated conservative and ultimately subservient political control throughout the globe'[411]. This American imperial power was antidemocratic. 'In Germany, above all, the United States categorically vetoed the electoral path to socialism, and this in turn required partition'. 'In rejecting the desires of the German people themselves, the United States proved once again how utterly expedient it would be regarding self-determination when democracy opened the way to a

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[407] Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War. The world and United States Foreign Policy, 1943-1945*, (Randon House New York, 1968), 4-5

[408] Kolko, *The Politics of War* 6

[409] Ibid., 619-620

[410] Stephanson, ' The United States', 32

[411] Joyce Kolko and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United Sates Foreign Policy, 1945-1954* (New York, 1972), 2

conflict with capitalism'[412]. 'American strength was 'economic rather than ideological, for here the inspiration and initiative rest with national revolutionaries'[413].

Others were less ideologically driven than Kolko, although their conclusions were relatively similar. Lloyd Gardner argued in his *Architects of an Illusion* (1970) that America's disagreement with Russia, came from an Open Door inspired opposition to exclusive spheres on influence[414]. Because of this, America bore most of the guilt: 'Responsibility for the way in which the Cold War developed, at least, belongs more to the United States. At the end of the war it had much greater opportunity and far more options to influence the course of events than the Soviet Union'[415]. The way economic aid was handled, making it contingent on 'Russia's good behavior', the failure to offer the Soviets a guarantee of German disarmament, and the attempt to reach nuclear disarmament through the United Nations, instead of bilaterally, produced friction with Russia. The advantageous American position did not produce more flexibility. 'Economic opportunity in Eastern Europe was not essential to American capitalists, but an open world was –especially after twelve years of depression and war. The world could not be divided without being closed to someone'[416]. Gardner took a more radical stance in his *Imperial America* (1976), in which he argued that American Cold War rhetoric masked an imperial reality focused on expanding free market capitalism, in which Americans have participated for more than three hundred years[417]. Vietnam led to an exposure; the Americans were anti-colonialist in rhetoric, but a version of imperialism guided their foreign policy.

In 1972, Walter LaFeber published his *America, Russia and the Cold War 1945-1971*. Although less of a polemic than Kolko, LaFeber argued for economic determinism. LaFeber tried to show that the 'initial anti-Communist pronouncements unloosed on Americans through publicity surrounding the Truman doctrine and Marshall Plan, were chiefly desperate attempts to force a reluctant public to support foreign policies actually based on the economic requirements of the American political economy. These

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[412] Kolko and Kolko, *The Limits of Power* 713
[413] Ibid., 6
[414] Stephanison, ' The United States', 32
[415] Lloyd Gardner, *Architects of an illusion; men and ideas in American foreign policy 1941-*1949 (Chicago, 1970), 317
[416] Garner, *Architects of an illusion* , 319
[417] Lloyd Gardner, *Imperial America. American Foreign Policy since 1898* (New York, 1976), 2

requirements were pivotal assumptions of the Administration's Cold War Policies, but because the requirements were complex (...) the public heard primarily the negative anti-Communist rhetoric'. Americans thus supported policies, where they did not understand the reasons behind[418]. American foreign policy was determined by domestic economic factors[419]. America needed expansion into new open markets (Open Door policy), and used its economic aid to gain concessions and access to markets in allied states during the Second World War[420]. LaFeber implies that this opposition against a Russian sphere of influence is hypocritical. While the Americans set against spheres of influence in Europe –instead pushing for an economic open door policy-, it had its own sphere of influence in Latin America. Latin American economic needs were neglected, and non-American influences were kept away. Russian policy was influenced by economic concerns and security as well, which led Stalin to establish his sphere of influence in Eastern Europe 'with considerable more brutality'[421]. In LaFeber's viewed the Cold War eventually came down to two colliding interests driven by two colliding worldviews[422]. Although his book was well received, LaFeber's arguments were roughly similar to others; the US economy could only survive by means of an informal empire. The quest for this empire led to an aggressive and expansive American policy in postwar Europe, and this led to the Cold War with a reactive Soviet Union.

Although the revisionist historians differed on some points, they also resembled each other in others. The revisionists contended that the US, not Russia, was primarily (or, according to Kolko, solely) responsible for the Cold War. Its overwhelming power and effort to shape the postwar world led to friction[423]. The New Left revisionists also emphasized economic factors as the basis for American diplomacy, and rejected the moralist ideas of a benevolent America. Some, like Williams, argued that American leaders believed their idealistic announcements, while others rejected these pronouncements as unmeant. They saw Stalin as a cautious conservative, whose goals were limited to a security buffer, and a more accommodating policy by the US would

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[418] LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945*-1971, preface
[419] Ibid., 6
[420] Ibid., 9
[421] Ibid., 11-14
[422] Ibid., 16
[423] Walker, *Historians and Cold War origins* , 211

have avoided the Cold War[424]. Third, they saw the US as an empire, whose policies had an adverse effect on non-Americans. The revisionists proved their interpretations mostly by referring to statements and memoires of American leaders. As Russian archives were closed –one could argue if that mattered- the Russian side remained underdeveloped.

The revisionists were diverse in their interpretations. To take the most prominent proponents: Williams saw American policy as tragic; as the Americans professed to pursue economic well-being and self-determination for all, but acted mostly out of economic self-interest and an idea that was is good for America, is good for all. Alperovitz saw a more sinister American policy. Policymakers didn't hesitate to unnecessarily kill thousands in Hiroshima, in order to improve their negotiating positions vis-à-vis the Russians. Alperovitz and Kolko saw the driving force in America's foreign policy in its capitalist economy which needed constant expansion into a newly created informal empire (where American goods could flow freely via the Open Door policy). To maintain this informal empire, the Americans had to repress revolutionary movements – implicitly assumed, by Alperovitz and Kolko, to represent the majority of the local population in Europe. According to Kolko, this threat by revolutionary movements in Europe, provoked an American response which forced the reluctant Soviet Union into the Cold War. LaFeber and Garner as well assumed the interests of the economic system in the US to be the driving force for expansive American policies.

Many historical revisionists were politically engaged; all professed opposition to American interventions abroad, which they criticized in their works. Williams had been a political activist who explicitly said that in his essay –his book was more an essay than a historical monograph. Williams ended his conclusion by asking questions; 'isn't it time'.. 'to stop defining trade as the control of markets for our surplus products and control of raw materials for our factories', 'to stop depend on an informal empire', 'to stop defining trade as a weapon against other people', 'to halt and then cancel the arms race', 'to stop saying that all evil in the world resides in the Soviet Union and other communist countries' 'to admit that.. the Russians have been following a defensive policy in nuclear weapons', and 'that we can avoid living with communist countries only by embarking

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[424] Ibid., 212-213

upon a program that will kill millions of human beings'[425]. Williams expressed a domestic agenda as well; he wanted a radical non-communist reconstruction of society[426]. Kolko as well was an openly committed Left-winger[427]. All revisionist historians can be considered as critical of American interventionism and generally Left-wing.

Critics

Early responses already emerged, as the influential article by 'traditionalist historian' Arthur Schlesinger in 1967, and more critical accounts by Maddox and Tucker in 1971-72. Schlesinger saw revisionism as nothing new; it happened after every American war[428]. Although revisionism poses new questions, investigates new possibilities, and enriches insights, it usually does not stick. The revisionists rightly emphasized that American postwar policy assumed a threatening aspect to the Russians. The great omission of the revisionists lies in the fact that Russia was a totalitarian state with an all consuming ideology, for which the existence of a non-communist state was automatically considered a threat[429]. While the Americans believed that in the long run, a modus vivendi with Russia was possible, the Russians disagreed on that respect. The convictions of Russia of the infallibility of communist 'transformed an impasse between national states into a religious war'[430].

One critic of the new stream was Tucker. Tucker links the radical critique, to the decline of the cold war in the 1960s; with this decline, forces of change, which were long suppressed, could become manifest. With Vietnam, this new outlook increasingly gained followers. By revealing the imperial root of American policy, the war raised doubts about America's purpose[431]. According to him, revisionism paints American policy consistently in dark colors, thus in a way following a policy of American exceptionalism. Tucker saw the essence of the radical critique as stating that America is aggressive and imperialistic and that it is so out of an institutional necessity–the institutional structure of American capitalism. Although revisionists disagreed to what extent this creates

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[425] Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* 305-306
[426] Ibid., 208
[427] http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/left-turn-ahead/ (last accessed 1 July 2012)
[428] Arthur Schlesinger, 'Origins of the Cold War', in *Foreign Affairs* 46:22, 1967, p.22
[429] Ibid., 46-47
[430] Ibid., 52
[431] Tucker, 154

intentional policy. Kolko saw American foreign policy as responsible to the forces of American capitalism, and American imperialism as necessary for the continuation of the Capitalist system, and therefore wanted liberation of America through liberation of the Third World. Williams saw the American policy rooted in mistaken convictions, and the American empire as unnecessary[432]. There are, according to Tucker, some positive elements in the radical critique, as it showed that American foreign policy has been driven by self-interest, which makes the US similar to other great powers[433]. America has entertained a very expansive concept of security, and tried to stabilize the world into a pro-American equilibrium. In the end however, the benefits are less than the defects of revisionism. American policy for example might not be calculated, or attributed to the forces of its socio-economic structure, but is a natural trait of great states. To seek the sources in American institutions specifically ignores that fact. Revisionists haven't shown us, that with different institutions, a hostile world would have posed no threat to the US. For Tucker, American policy is realist, but masked by idealism. The standard of judging raised by radicals is in that sense American[434].

Maddox as well emphasized the political nature of the Revisionists; as all want their work to be used as a tool for change, some want radical altering of the American system. Their view of history is highly political, some arguing for the political use of history to help us achieve our ideological goals (like LeFebre), while others accused 'traditional' historians of being propagandistic. Maddox accused the revisionists of employing a double standard; Russia's actions are justified by referencing to national security. Western ideals are measured against some high ideal and found wanting. Western atrocities are met with outrage, Russian atrocities (like Katyn), with indifference[435]. Maddox –checking the revisionists' references- also accused the revisionists from twisting the evidence from archival resources; exaggerating evidence which supports their claims, while minimizing or ignoring material, which does not. Without exception, the revisionists misused source material. For example, they use the memoirs of Truman and Byrnes (published at the height of the Cold War, and thus using

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[432] Ibid., 10-14
[433] Ibid., 149
[434] Ibid., 151-153
[435] Maddox, *The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War,* 3-7

strong language) to show that the Americans were militant, while ignoring evidence discounting American aggressiveness. While having no access to the Russian side, the revisionists mostly construe Stalin's policies in the most favorable light[436]. According to Maddox, Williams' misuse of sources led to a pro-Soviet bias. Critics of Maddox have accused him of focusing too narrowly on Eastern Europe[437].

In a review of the most important works of his day, Alperovitz Atomic Diplomacy, *Kolko's The Politics of War*, and David Horowitz's *From Yalta to Vietnam*, J.L Richardson comes to criticize the revisionists one sided focus on American actions. Because –pointing mostly at Kolko- the revisionists lack a conception of international order, instead focusing on a system, and vilifying American policy, they neglect to reconstruct the perceptions of actors. Richardson accused them of violating Popper's falsification rule, as they do not test their own hypotheses properly, amassing favorable evidence instead. 'What we have, then, is not so much Cold War history as Cold War polemic. The narrowness of vision appears to stem from the values and assumptions of the writers. (…)What is overlooked is that scholarship is in itself a value, as well as a discipline, and that its demands represent the essential commitment of the scholar, which may conflict with his other social and political commitments. Revisionists are very conscious of this in commenting on views opposed to their own'. In their own work, their Left wing takes over and 'European actors disappear from view and a mythical Left has to be created to represent the forces in conflict with the counterrevolutionary United States'[438].

Other more modern reviewers are critical as well. The most radical account, by Kolko, bears the brunt of criticism. According to Stephanson, 'it is almost too easy to be critical of Kolko: the apocalyptic tone, the absolute certitude, the often crude determinism are immediately suspect, while the claims are often empirically questionable or one-sided'. American historiography seemed to focus only on the American side and American policy, largely ignoring other actors, accept for the Soviet Union[439].

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[436] Ibid., 10
[437] Bradford Perkins, ' the Tragedy of American Diplomacy': Twenty-Five Years After', in Lloyd Gardner (ed.) *Redefining the Past. Essays in Diplomatic History in Honor of William Appleman Williams,* Oregon State University Press, Corvallis (Or.), 1986, 33
[438] J.L Richardson, 'Cold-War Revisionism. A Critique', in *World Politics*, Vol 24 No 4 (1972), p.607-609
[439] Stephanson, ' The United States', 34

John Lewis Gaddis as well criticized the revisionists. According to him, Revisionists define internal constrains too narrowly, neglecting the domestic political system –the need for popular support-, while focusing on the economy[440]. Furthermore the revisionists are not consistent in their economic determinism. Instead of portraying the cold war as a conflict between two diametrically opposed ideologies, they assert that the US, because of its economic and military superiority could have accepted Moscow's postwar demands without endangering American security. Thus they hold the US responsible for the Cold war. Thus they place a single cause explanation for human behavior (economic interests), but criticize the subjects they deal with for not liberating themselves from the mechanistic framework the historians themselves have imposed. But even then, it was not only the conciliatory attitude of the US which was required, but also the receptive attitude on the part of Moscow. This did not exist. There was no single party responsible for the Cold War. But while the Americans had to put up with domestic political constrains, Stalin was immune to domestic political pressures (Congress), and was a master of communist doctrine; this gave him more leeway; he had thus more power to avoid a Cold War[441].

Criticism thus focused on the most radical ideas of the revisionists, which can be tied to the New Left. Critics found faults both on the methodological level, ignoring and misrepresenting of evidence, as well as on the level of interpretation[442]

Post-Revisionism

The polarization between revisionists and their detractors was influenced by the lack of archival resources; scholars had to interpret limited evidence, and were unable to refute each other's arguments convincingly. The opening of archives and the cooling of the political atmosphere opened the way for a new historiographic movement, which considered the Cold War, but without the political commitment of the revisionists[443]. The new historiography was more able to focus on empirical evidence, instead of political

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[440] Gaddis, John Lewis, 'The emerging post-revisionist synthesis on the origin of the Cold War' in *Diplomatic History* Vol. 7 Iss. 3 (1983)357
[441] John Lewis Gaddis, 'The emerging post-revisionist synthesis on the origins of the Cold War' in *Diplomatic History*, 7 (1983). 360
[442] Harper, *The Cold War* 85
[443] Gaddis, 'The emerging post-revisionist synthesis on the origins of the cold war'. 360

commitment. For these post-revisionists, American policy was not consistently anti-Soviet. Instead US policies were contradictory and an Open Door policy model is hard to draw. Instead of economic concerns, geopolitics and security were overall important[444].

In 1972, John Lewis Gaddis published his *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, in which he sought a new interpretation. According to Gaddis, domestic political concerns were highly important in dealing with the Soviet Union. The US did not pursue a Cold War policy. 'American leaders did not want a Cold War, but they wanted insecurity even less. By early 1946, President Truman and his advisors had reluctantly concluded that recent actions of the Soviet Union endangered the security of the United States'. This perception grew out of internal and external pressures. Gaddis rejected the idea that the Cold War was a continuation of American policy. World War II instead produced a revolution in American foreign policy, which was until then focused on minimizing political entanglements overseas. The war (and the attack on Pearl Harbor) convinced the Americans that relations between nations should be reformed and the US had the power to do that. Determined to avoid the mistakes which, in their view, had caused World War II, American planners sough to disarm defeated enemies, give peoples of the world the right to shape their own future, revive world trade, and replace the League of Nations with a new and more effective collective security organization. Russia rejected America's plans for collective security and reduction of tariffs. Russia's effort to turn Eastern Europe into a sphere of influence, 'despite the fact that its peoples were bitterly anti-Russian', was interpreted in the light of the fear of spreading communism. Domestically, administrators found it useful to exaggerate the Soviet threat to win support for programs of military and economic assistance in Europe. The US could have accepted the Soviet Sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, or eased Soviet mistrust by relinquishing its monopoly over the atomic bomb. But these were no viable alternatives at the time, and it is unjust to 'condemn officials for rejecting courses of action which, to them, seemed intolerable'. Domestic political concerns –not so much economic- put constraints on policymakers. Any policy would have to rely on a receptive attitude of Moscow, which did not exist. Distrust of foreigners and ideological differences would have militated against a relationship of mutual trust and Stalin's paranoia made it much

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[444] Stephanson, 'The United States', 37

worse. Once the complex interaction is take into account, it becomes clear, that neither side can bear sole responsibility for the onset of the Cold War'[445].

His later works were more neo-realist traditionalist. Gaddis began to argue that Stalin was never interested in basic co-operation with the West, at least not on grounds acceptable to any westerner. Attempts to get more cooperation had failed, because of Soviet Russia's imperviousness for external influences and distrust of foreigners and unilateralism. Russia's actions drained the goodwill amongst the allies[446]. Russian unilateralism had by 1947 created a credible source of danger, which was reflected in a clearer American policy. The logic of Soviet imperialism was not ideological, but imperial; its security needs were expansive and ill defined. If anything, containment had been rather late. The US wanted resurrection of Western European power, and Western Europeans themselves wanted to prevent the US from leaving. Although the means to achieve western aims were economic, their aims were geopolitical. Capitalism was secondary, strategy primary[447]. In 1982, Gaddis published his *Strategies of Containment*, in which he argued that containment had been the product, not of what the Russians had done, but of internal considerations, such as the economy. While Kennan saw a golden moment between naivety (1946) and anti-communist crusades (1948), when the world had turned Manichean, Gaddis saw the strategy of containment as successful, without a third force the system proved stable. This was more a long peace than a cold war. The lack of distinction between core and periphery led the US to interfere in Vietnam[448].

Gaddis was followed by other authors, beginning with George Herring (1973), who –despite incorporating some revisionists arguments- agreed that American actions would have done little to allay Stalin's fears, and that the Cold War was largely unavoidable, and Thomas Paterson, who deemed American policy to be expansionist, but saw other factors than pure economy. Other post-revisionists followed, pointing at different factors than the economy, some pointing at Stalin's policies and most of them regarding the outcome of the Cold War as unavoidable. Most agreed that the US lacked a

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[445] John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York 1972), 353-360
[446] John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace. Inquiries Into the History of the Cold War* (Oxford, 1987), 34-44
[447] Ibid., 44
[448] Gaddis 'the emergence of a post-revisionist synthesis', 180

coherent policy on Eastern Europe[449]. By the late 1970s a consensus began to emerge that attributed roughly equal blame for the Cold War to Russia and the United States, and that regarded the Cold War in a way inevitable. Many agreed that economic concerns were a part of the American considerations, and that public opinion and domestic pressures should be included into the picture[450].

In an overview of recent developments in American historiography in 1983, John Lewis Gaddis explained the differences between revisionist and post-revisionist Cold War history. The revisionists believed that American foreign policy 'approximated the classical Leninist model of imperialism –that is, an unwillingness or inability to redistribute wealth at home produced an aggressive search for markets and investment opportunities overseas'-, and that the US left little room for accommodating legitimate security interests of the Soviet Union, that the US imposed its empire on an unwilling world, and that this took place against the will of the American people. Against this – rather extreme- picture of the revisionists, he put the post-revisionists who emphasized national security more than economy, saw American policies as multilateral and aimed at preserving regional economic blocs; economic instruments were used to serve political ends rather than the other way around. According to one critic, Stalin was never determined to seek cooperation, but rather opted for unilateralism to establish a barrier of subservient states, and the West's failure lies more in its passivity, than in anything else. In Europe, America's influence was welcomed as a counterweight to the Russians; alignment with the US could not have happened without domestic support in Europe. The influences of domestic actors on foreign policy have not been dealt with by the revisionists either. Post revisionism –contrary to the orthodox account- pays account to the economic instruments used by the US to achieve its goals. Also it stresses the absence of any ideological blueprint in Stalin's mind, regarding him as an opportunist instead. Post-revisionism also confirms that the US government from time to time exaggerated dangers, for the purpose of achieving internal goals. Post-revisionists are also more likely to embrace the idea that there was an American empire, but that the Americans followed

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[449] Walker, *Historians and Cold War origins* , 216-218
[450] Ibid., 227-228

a model of defensive, rather than offensive expansion, and its policies were characterized by improvisation rather than careful planning[451].

The post-revisionists thus combined elements of the orthodox account and the newer revisionist account. Post-revisionists acknowledged that the US had created a sort of empire after 1945 and that the US used its economic weight abroad and manipulated domestic public opinion, to achieve its aims. This empire was however never driven by economic imperative, nor imposed on unwilling European states, as the revisionists assumed; it was rather an empire on invitation. Although Stalin had no master plan, he bore ultimate responsibility for the Cold War by his provocative behavior[452].

The post-revisionists were not universally welcomed as a consensus –although they gained much support, which incorporated revisionist insights into the orthodox account and added American archival evidence. Its ideas saw challenges from the Left and the right during the 198s. The 1980s saw a rightward shift in America. This led in some cases to an inversion of the revisionist stance. The scope of the finds of these newer historians was more determined by their target. Robert Pollard for example turned the economic argument of the revisionists around in his *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War* (1985). While accepting the Open Door argument, Pollard gives it a strategic twist. The US wanted to create an interdependent economic system. Moscow however refused to play along with multilateralist policies of the US, and with the crackdown in Poland opted for hardship[453]. 'The key element of U.S. foreign policy after World War II was economic security, the reliance upon economic power to achieve strategic aims'. Pollard challenged the revisionist account of Truman's foreign policy as coercive, haughty, expansionist and uncompromising. American policy was neither anti-Communism, nor based on a need to sustain world capitalism. Instead, American officials backed the Open Door policy, largely because they were determined to prevent a revival of the closed autarkic systems that had contributed to the world depression and split the world in competing blocs before the war'[454]. Other writers even began to abandon the idea that the Cold War context determined American policies such as the Marshall

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[451] John Lewis Gaddis, 'The Emerging Post-revisionist', 176-182
[452] Harper, *The Cold War,* 87
[453] Robert Pollard, *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York, 1985), 246-249
[454] Ibid., 244

Plan[455]. The end of the Cold War saw the opening of Eastern European archives and the inclusion of historians from former communist countries into the debate. According to new archival evidence, new light was shed on Stalin's contribution to the Cold War; although his aims were limited to Eastern Europe, his ideologically driven foreign policy led to miscalculations that contributed to the Cold War escalation. During the 1990s, much of the post-revisionist ideas had been vindicated. Gaddis' 1990s conclusion that the American empire was an empire by invitation, while the Soviet empire was an empire by imposition had been right, in the light of new evidence. More revisionist accounts such as that of Melvyn Leffler, who argued that hostile US policy was aimed at reviving capitalist economy in Europe, led to a defensive reaction in Moscow and to an escalation of the Cold War, appeared as well. However newly available archival evidence from European nations showed a more complex picture[456]. New archival evidence suggested both sides behaved in ways which would provoke alarm[457].

By the 1980s, the revisionists had lost much of their initial support, but elements of their writings were incorporated into the wider scholarly community, whether of more orthodox or more revisionist leaning. Many of their arguments were integrated into more nuanced accounts, or ignored. Some scholars, like Thomas McCormick still produced influential works, although he abandoned classical revisionism for a World Systems model, where the US is deemed to pursue an elite-interest driven policy of trying to integrate the periphery into an American led global market economy, and prevent another core from dominating Europe[458]. Post-Revisionist scholars however were much more influential. The relatively smooth integration of revisionism into the historical mainstream was different from the case of the New Historians in Israel.

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[455] Stephanson, ' The United States', 42
[456] Melvyn Leffler, 'The Cold War: What do we know now', in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, no. 2, 1999, 518-519
[457] Harper, 88-89
[458] Thomas McCormick, *America's half-century: The United States Foreign Policy during the Cold War* (Baltimore, 1989)

4.   The New Historians and the American revisionists: comparison and conclusion

Comparative history is said to have its merits. It could provide us with an explanatory framework. Similar outcomes might be the result of different patterns or how similar developments produced different outcomes[459]. This thesis compares the influence of politics on two political debates on foreign policy. A rough comparison learns us that these debates had some similar characteristics.

Timing

The Israeli New Historians and American Cold War Revisionists were both attempts to challenge preconceptions about the country's recent history and focused on a conflict containing major foreign and domestic policy issues. In both cases, the country's self-perception was tied to its recent history, although in the case of Israel, it was more fundamental to the country's identity and ultimately, its legitimacy. In both instances the core period on which the historiographic debate hinged was the late 1940s. In both instances, most of the official narrative was written shortly after the events happened. Although the revisionist challengers to the official historiography portray this official historiography to be monolithic and one-sided, the reality was in both instances more nuanced. The same rhetorical ploy of portraying a historiographical current as extreme, one-sided and largely monolithic, is used by opponents of revisionism as well. In both instances, the challenge to the official historiography led to a revision of national historiography and return to primary sources in the archives. Both differed on other aspects. For one was the difference in timing. The Cold War developed during the late 1940s, and was already questioned during the 1960s. Early criticisms, like Williams' (partly Cuba inspired) 1959 book were first widely ignored, but gained recognition with the change of the social-political context in the late 1960s. The 'orthodox' account on the Israeli-Arab war of 1948, the main (but certainly not the only) event on which the New

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[459] Peter Berger, 'Comparative History' in Peter Berger, Heiko Feldner and Kevin Passmore (ed.), *Writing History*, (London: Hodder Arnold, 2003), 165

Historians sought revision of the official account, was only challenged during the late 1980s, twenty years after the Cold war revisionists.

The reasons for the rise of historical revisionism could be many. Although the idea that history can progress has been criticized by relativists –who say the idea of progress is based on arbitrary criteria- and postmodern skeptics –who say that we cannot know the past, hence cannot judge which interpretation is better and whether progress has been made[460]-, many still strife for a better scholarly insight into novel events. Raymond Martin claimed that historical interpretations can become more accurate, more comprehensive, better balanced and more justified. Within interpretative polarities, there tends to be convergence towards consensus, but this cannot be achieved as long as there has not been interpretational divergence. New interpretations can thus lead to new insights and improvement of our overall understanding of the past[461]. This idea has been widely embraced by most –though not all- involved in the debates. In fact, in the case of the American Cold War revisionists the dissenting interpretations were welcomed by their most prominent detractors, such as Schlesinger[462], Tucker[463], or Gaddis[464], who incorporated the revisionist criticism in their more nuanced interpretations of American foreign policy history. In this American case, the revisionist interpretation, although backed by only scant archival evidence, was portrayed as an improvement on past history, despite the criticism that many revisionist authors –Kolko is frequently mentioned- overstated their case. Even critics who savaged the scholarly methods of the Cold War revisionists and portrayed the Cold War revisionists as trying to formulate the evidence in line with their ideological preconceptions, Maddox was one such critic, granted that historical revisionism could lead to an improved interpretation of the past. Traditional historians, such as Schlesinger, and post-revisionist historians such as Gaddis incorporated some of the more critical points on the American Cold War policy. Gaddis and others used and revised the arguments of the revisionists. New archival evidence supported the view that both the US and Soviet actions could be considered hostile during

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[460] Raymond Martin, ' Progress in historical studies' in *History and Theory*, Vol 37 No 1 (1998), 35
[461] Ibid., 28-32
[462] Schlesinger, 'The Origins of the Cold War' ,46-47
[463] Tucker, *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy* 149
[464] John Lewis Gaddis, 'The emerging post-revisionist synthesis on the origin of the cold war' in *Diplomatic History*, 7 (1983)

the early phases of the Cold War. Studies on Stalin's side of the Cold War suggested both that his aims were limited to Eastern Europe, as the revisionists had said, but also that his worldview was highly ideological and that this precluded any long-term cooperation with capitalists, as the orthodox account had assumed. The debate on the US Cold War policy, whether it was driven by economic interests and whether it was benign on Western European nations, is still raging, but various sides incorporate each others arguments and interpretations. To keep it short: The interpretations used in the Cold War debate are turning out to be more balanced and comprehensive, as they are backed by a larger amount of archival evidence and have to be explained in the light of more potential alternative interpretations to justify their validity. After the initial radical (orthodox and revisionist) positions had been stated, the newer explanations –starting in the 1970s- generally tended to converge to a position on the middle ground. Without any outside influence, we might assume that the course of a historical debate is largely determined by some natural order brought by more sophisticated insights, backed by a larger amount of evidence.

We can therefore question whether political -societal circumstances outside the academia influence the course of a historiographical debate. There is however the issue of timing. In the case of the American debate on the origins of the Cold War, it is very easy to chart how the debate developed along the lines of the developments in the real world. The 1950s were a time at the height of the Cold War and anti-Soviet hysteria –especially after the SU acquired the nuclear bomb-, economic growth in the US and totalitarian terror in the Soviet Union. These conditions were not conductive for a critical evaluation of American foreign policy, although this policy encountered critical changes like expansion into Europe, which entailed military and economic commitments and the intervention in Korea to name just a few. Critical accounts were unlikely to rise in this period of black-and-white thinking. During the 1960s the Cold War became more relaxed, especially after the Cuba crisis of 1962. Leaders of the US and the SU met on several occasions, and the danger of direct confrontation subsided and no immediate threats to the US and its position occurred or were perceived. The pressure for conformation thus subsided. Other societal developments made the ascent of a more critical generation of historians more likely as well. As the baby boom generation (born into conditions of

unprecedented wealth and freedom) began to fill the universities, and especially the liberal arts campuses, new visions on society were more likely to gain followers. Domestic politics made more critical history more likely as well. The anti-communist witch hunts led by McCarthy had made the anti-Communist atmosphere more suspect among younger generations. The struggle against discrimination against blacks reached fever pitch, and gained wide support among leftwing students. Most of all, the ultimately doomed intervention to stop communist guerrillas from taking over and in favor of an unpopular and corrupt government in Vietnam, accompanied by atrocities and increasing cynicism among troops, led to a complete review of the basics of American foreign policy among many. At the same time, European nations decolonized, while radical leftwing anti-colonialist and anti-western nationalists, such as Castro in Cuba, Nasser in Egypt and Nkrumah in Ghana won many admirers. The ideas among New Left scholars that the US was 'racist' and 'imperialist' reflected these critical currents on American power. The US was seen in a light of oppressive interventions against revolutionary forces, whether they were Cuban revolutionaries led by young and charismatic front men, like Castro, or Vietnamese guerilla's. The New Left embraced new takes on Marxist ideas. This happened in the US as well as in Europe, where in 1968 Parisian students rose up against the separation of sexes in dormitories and decided to rise against 'the system' as well[465]. During the 1960s and 1970s, 'critical' Marxist or just radical thinkers, such as Marcuse on society at large, but also Wallerstein on international economic relations, attracted many followers among students who had in most cases endured little economic misery themselves but were convinced that capitalism was malign and exploitative anyway, especially in the former non-western colonies. At the same time, the Soviet threat receded largely to the background, and, although the Soviets brutally suppressed uprisings in Berlin (1953), Budapest (1956) and Prague (1968, elsewhere such as in Poland in 1970, the local party chiefs did the butchering themselves), Soviet repression only featured vaguely in the public consciousness of the leftwing part of the student body. That history scholars from the Madison campus of the University of Wisconsin (and some sympathizers) were able to temporarily dominate the historiographic debate with their ideas that economy drove American policy and that this policy was in a sense

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[465] Tony Judt, *Na de Oorlog* (Amsterdam, 2005), 513

imperialist and against the interests and wishes of the European peoples, can only be seen in the context of the day. The pro-American account of the 1950s was bound to be revised, as Schlesinger remarked in his 1967 article, and the Progressive scholars from Wisconsin were able to profit from the window of opportunity the political wind among students provided. That more nuanced accounts swiftly gained currency after the end of the Vietnam war (and after the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan highlighted the Soviet imperialist practices and the economic crisis of the 1970s shifted attention to more mundane issues than a complete overhaul of society), should not be surprising either. The radical interpretations had lost their traction, and the opening of archives during the 1980s questioned the revisionist assumptions on the economic drivers of American policy.

In the case of Israel as well, critical scholars tried to improve on the then state of historical interpretation of the 1948 war. As in the case of the American scholars, the Israeli scholars portrayed the hitherto state of historical scholarship on the 1948 War as one sided and scholarly insufficient. Like the American scholars from the 1960s, the New Historians spoke about 'official' history, which only purported to follow the line of the Israeli leadership. The New historian Avi Shlaim portrayed the traditional Zionist narrative as follows: 'The traditional Zionist version maintains that Britain's aim in the twilight of its Mandate over Palestine was to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state; that the Jews were hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned; that the Palestinians left of their own accord and in the expectation of a triumphal return; that there was an all-Arab plan to destroy the infant Jewish state as soon as it came into the world; and that Arab intransigence was the sole cause of the political deadlock that followed the war'[466]. Shlaim's also described of the challenges made by the revisionists; 'The revisionist version maintains, in a nutshell, that Britain's aim was to prevent the establishment not of a Jewish state but of a Palestinian state; that the Jews outnumbered all the Arab forces, regular and irregular, operating in the Palestine theatre and, after the first truce, also outgunned them; that the Palestinians, for the most part, did not choose to leave but were pushed out; that there was no monolithic Arab war aim because the Arab rulers were deeply divided among themselves; and that the quest for a political settlement was frustrated more by Israeli than by Arab intransigence'. This portrayal of the traditional account was as exaggerated. More nuanced

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[466] Avi Shlaim, 'The War of the Israeli Historians', 161

accounts, which featured Israeli atrocities but assigned most of the guilt for the Palestinian refugee crisis to the Arab leadership, had appeared already during the 1950s. The New Historians profited from the opening of Israeli and British state archives, though Arab archives (portraying the viewpoint of the 'Other') remained closed. The New Historians sought to achieve a better balanced and less politicized historical account of the 1948 War. Historians like Morris and Shlaim pointed to archives and argued that their accounts gave a more nuanced picture in the light of the newly available archival evidence. A better understanding of the past was not the only reason for historical revisionism. As the American revisionists, the New Historians sought to achieve political aims as well. Their political aims however were more acute and pressing than those of the American revisionist. The American revisionists sought to achieve goals that mostly had to do with the impact the US had on other nations. The New Historians sought to change the self-perception of Israelis that lay at the heart of Israel's existence. Contrary to the American case, the Israeli debate is still highly polarized. Although some scholars have take over arguments by the opposing side (notably Morris), others have become more radicalized. Plus, until now, no new generation has been able to gain as much prestige as the 'first generation' participants in the debate. The difference in the course of the scholarly debate has much to do with the difference in political circumstances. The difference in timing could give us a clue in this respect.

The timing of the Israeli case is less familiar, but not less unconnected to political circumstances. Contrary to the American case, the challenge to the official account happened not before, but years after the opening of state archives in 1982, some thirty-four years after the actual events. Although the Cold War and the 1948 war happened roughly at the same time, their first major revisionist accounts were twenty years apart. As in the American case, the Israeli case needed a fading memory, and an event that put doubt on the core of the previous self-perception. The 1948 war was much more present in the minds and self-identity of Israeli's particularly those who had been through it, than the diplomatic games in a far continent the Americans faced. Although the panic on communism was real and widespread, it was mostly a media generated reality, instead of the reality on someone's doorstep. The threat of Arab invaders was a constant reality: infiltrators from neighboring countries perpetrated frequent attacks, Arab leaders like

Nasser (during the 1950s and 1960s) called for Israel's destruction, Arab armies amassed at the borders and either threatened Israel's existence (by closing the Tiran straits in 1967) or attacked Israel (in 1973). Internationally, Arab went on the offensive to delegitimize Israel, and sponsored or supported resolutions, such as GA resolution 3379 in 1975, which determined 'that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination'[467]. Zionism was equated with Portuguese colonialism (the Portuguese military rulers were engaged in battles against anti-colonial guerilla rebels) and South African racial Apartheid. Western New Left critics, attracted by Nasserist propaganda, portrayed Israel to be a product of Western imperialism and racism as well. Arab scholars like Mohammed Heykal or Abdul Wahhab Kayyali[468] linked the existence of Israel to the now delegitimized European imperialism, and called Israel a racist state, and Zionism a racist ideology. Other critics, who accepted Israel's right to exist, such as the influential Columbia University Professor Edward Said roughly used similar arguments in their critique of Israel –Said talked about imperialism, 'apartheid', settler colonialism and racist indifference towards the Palestinians bound to subjugate the natives, when referring to Zionism- during the 1970s through 1990s[469]. Leftwing intellectuals and Radical Left guerilla groups became steadily more convinced of anti-Zionists streams of thought especially after the 1967 War[470]. Since its existence, Israel engaged in several wars with its Arab neighbors, in 1956, 1967, 1973 and received numerous threats from Arab dictators who were currying favor with the Arab street, while Palestinian terrorist attacks targeted Israeli's across the globe. Although both the US and Israel were vilified and had to endure (and perpetrated themselves) violent episodes (although the element of choice was largely absent in many Israeli wars), the perceived threat to Israel was of a more existential nature. Especially the Wars of 1967 and 1973 were regarded as existential threats. These circumstances cannot be considered as conductive for open scholarly debate. Some opinion makers, such as Avraham Burg who in his *Defeating Hitler,* argued that Israel's function as a haven for the persecuted created a psychological mentality that

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[467] http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/761C1063530766A7052566A2005B74D1 see also http://www.thejc.com/news/on-day/40848/on-day-un-resolution-3379 (last accessed 1 July 2012)
[468] Abdul Wahhab Kayyali, 'Zionism and Imperialism: The historical origins' in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol 6 No 3, 1977
[469] Edward Said, 'Zionism from the standpoint of its victims', in *Social Text* 1 (1979), 30-33
[470] Robert Wistrich, 'The Jewish Question: Left-wing Anti-Zionism in Western Societies' in Michael Curtis (ed.)., Anti-Semitism in the Contemporary World, Westview Press, Bulder, 1986

resembled that of a beleaguered fort[471]. Although both the US and Israel have been immigrant nations, the experience of many Israeli immigrants is rather different from those in the US, as is their reason for migrating to Israel. The Israeli experience as a nation is also relatively brief: most of its institutions were built during the last decades, most of its citizens were first-generation immigrants (until the 1970s, a majority of the Israeli population was foreign born[472], this was less than ten percent in the US[473]). If we look for reasons why the American debate was relatively early (before the opening of archives, but after major figures involved had published their memoires) and coincided with the rise of the New Left, while the New Historians voiced their criticism only during the 1980s (about a decade after accounts hostile accounts from the Arab world had filtered through to New Left academia into Europe and the US), after the opening of archives, and after more critical sociology had gained traction. The historians from the New Left were mostly (except for Avi Shlaim, who emigrated from Baghdad to Israel when he was six) from the second generation, as they had been born in Israel. Their rise coincided –as did the American revisionists- with the coming of age of a newer generation, who entered universities without having direct memories of the 1948 events. What they did have however, was the experience of going through military service. As in the American case, it would be a war that would cast doubt on Israel's policy vis-à-vis the Arabs. In the American case, it was the Vietnam War, which sent the country into self-examination. In the case of Israel, it was the fateful invasion into Lebanon. The New historians and even less politicized historians mentioned the Lebanon war as a pivotal moment. Until then, Israel's wars were viewed as mostly defensive necessities. Menachem Begin statement that the basis of going into war as an act of national self-interest, is mentioned multiple times by those offering a new interpretation on Israel's existence. The conduct of the War itself was proved to be less than heartening as well; the Israeli military got stuck in the quack mire of Lebanese factional fighting, with its symbolic low in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. The direct effect was immediately visible, with the large anti-war demonstrations all across Israel. Although

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[471] http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/07/30/070730fa_fact_remnick?currentPage=4 (last accessed 1 July 2012)

[472] http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/demographics.html (last accessed 1 July 2012)

[473] http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab01.html (last accessed 1 July 2012)

this started the research project for some, we might not discount the riots and violent unrest in the Palestinian areas, as well as the abating of Palestinian PLO terror attacks (Hamas attacks went up), which created a different imagery of the Palestinian Arabs. The Israeli conquest in 1967 of the Arab inhabited territories in the West Bank had increased the number of Palestinian Arabs under the direct rule of Israel. The Intifada, brought to an international audience, made the issue of the relationship with Palestinians more urgent, while national politics itself had shifted from being Ashkenazi Labor dominated to the limbo of a more diverse spectrum alternating between Labor or Likud rule. The international factor should certainly not be excluded from the calculation, as the debate raging on Israeli policies and Israel's legitimacy as a state already reached a wide international audience and new publications in that area could generate a lot of attention internationally. The timing of the start of the debate was thus not without coincidence. It was linked to the changing self-perception of Israelis as a consequence of the 1982 war and troubles in the Palestinian areas, and to the change in the demography and experiences of the university population (more natively born, less with the experience of Israel's first existence and ensuing struggle to survive in economic, political and military terms), of the population of Israel at large (more Sephardim and people from areas previously closed to Israeli immigration) and of the political scene. The former Labor-led conformism, and pressure to align oneself with its organizations and ideas, proved to be less of an issue. The rightwing victory of Likud (1977) loosened up Israeli politics and gave more space to spread nonconformist ideas. The fact that most New Historians had teaching positions (and educational background) on foreign universities could have contributed to their insulation from Israeli domestic pressures. The great question why more critical accounts did not gain wide traction earlier can be tentatively answered by pointing at multiple factors. Israel had no history with, nor the institutional infrastructure for a great diversity of institutions; there were thus no potential sources available to feed an audience receptive for critical accounts. Israeli historiography was still in its infancy – it was even kept out of universities, for fear of its propagandistic nature- and did not have the range of interpretations as the American foreign policy historiography had. Accounts on the 1948 War had however already emerged during the 1950s. As was the case in America, the challengers of the official orthodoxy liked to exaggerate the one-sidedness

of the orthodox account, in order to make their own interpretation more pressing. In reality accounts on the 1948 War from the 1950s had already produced more balanced accounts; Israel had, according to these accounts, committed atrocities and the Palestinians had left due to panic and incidental expulsions, as well as due to the orders by their leaders. The opening of the archives, coupled with the changing mood in Israel made it more likely that critical accounts that did emerge during the 1980s, got more attention.

The course of the debate

As already discussed, the course of the debate in the US followed a course which was relatively traditional. The official accounts were challenged by a first generation of radical revisionists, after which the newer interpretations became more balanced, and more archival evidence was included, and the latest generation of scholars converged in their interpretations and their treatment of the evidence. The Israeli debate however shows few signs of following the same track, or at least not at the same pace. The Israeli New Historians emerged in a time when overt criticism of the official Israeli narrative was rare in the Israeli, but quite commonplace in the international context, especially in the Arab World and among circles of the New Left, where the connection between Zionism, imperialism, racism, premeditated plans to expel the Arab population and aggressiveness towards its Arab neighbors (in 1956 and 1967) [474] , was commonplace. The Israeli debate however did not follow the same course as the American. Even after almost a quarter of century, thing are still as politicized as they were during the early days. Instead of scholarly convergence on the basis of evidence, new interpretational insights and more balanced interpretations by the scholars, the interpretations mainly continue to reflect the political positions of those involved. This is partly because the first generation of revisionists –and their detractors- are still dominating the debate. Why this is the case has also partly to do with the charged nature of the events. For their detractors, the new historians function as a symbol as well as an opponent. Critics like Shapira and Karsh portray the new historians as opponents of Israel, who align themselves as fellow travelers with Israel's fiercest detractors; they do this by portraying the new historians as

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[474] See: Kayyali, 'Zionism and Imperialism: The historical origins', 111

collectively following the ideological and narrative outlook of their most extreme member, Ilan Pappé. Ironically, these detractors refer in their criticism to an image partly created by the New Left, which –as it did in the US- held Westerners to impossibly high moral standards, while ignoring the misdeeds or impact of others. The New Left's vision of westerners as 'racist' and 'imperialist', served as a mode to attack the official narrative orthodoxies, as in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, but left behind a vision of Leftwing historians as ideologically driven with an inherent anti-Western (thus irrational) bias. This image of the New Left historians was used, in the 1980s and 1990s to attack Leftwing challengers of the official accounts in Israel (and in the political discourse of present day Europe). Thus both the orthodox historians as well as their challengers accuse each other of being politically driven: the orthodox as part of the system which has political interest in upholding a certain narrative, the challengers as part of a destructive Marxist, anti-imperialist, anti-Western drive, which dominated thinking of Leftwing scholars during the 1970s. The debate however seems unable to progress from those views. The reason why Israel's debate departed from the conventional course of the historiographical debate as portrayed by Martin –which is largely followed in the US- can be found in politics. In the American case, the Cold War subsided during the late 1960s; the perception of an existential communist threat abated. This lessened the stakes of the debate. Although the challengers sought a complete overhaul of the system, beginning with an end to the 'imperialist' war in Vietnam, they never posed an existential threat to the American state's legitimacy. Although the detractors of the revisionists –such as Maddox- painted their ideas in the colors of their most extreme proponent (Kolko), this was not done as systematically as in Israel (moreover, many outside observers were aggrieved by the vicious nature of Maddox attack). American scholars themselves had experience with the phenomenon of 'revisionism', and –like Schlesinger- referred to their expectation of the natural course the debate would take. It is unsurprising that the 1970s saw new accounts that incorporated some of the criticism, while sticking to orthodox ideas, when these were not challenged. The American debate also had the advantage of the fact that their archives only opened *after* the attack of the revisionists, which gave archival ammunition to those who pursued a more nuanced, less politicized, version of the Cold War. In the Israeli case, the archives were first prominently used to back the

interpretations of the revisionists, which provided the challengers the initial upper hand. Also, the American case saw the opening of the archives of the 'other', mainly Eastern European states. In the case of the Israeli historians, these Arab archives remained closed. The Americans followed in some way dominant political currents of their day –patriotism during the affluent but conformist 1950s, Marxist inspired conspirational 'anti-imperialism' and an economic focus during the student revolt of the late 1960s, a more balanced account taking the main players and domestic political into account during the individualist right turn of the 1970s, and in some cases a more benign economic vision during the ideologically neoliberal turn of the 1980s. The Israelis reflected the course of the peace process, as their most influential books appeared during the times when the violence in the Palestinian areas raised questions and when peace process was at a low. The Israeli new historians also feature heavily in the international and domestic press to comment on the conflict, which is mainly fought with history as a weapon. Their ideas give credence to another side, and are influenced by events on the ground. Morris' idea that the Palestinian Arabs were pushed out, was used by Israel's Arab detractors to push for the right of return for refugees as well as to delegitimize Israel as a racist and colonialist settler state, bound to push out any element it deemed un-Jewish, while Morris' detractors used the same reasons to scathe his views. In the case of Ilan Pappé, it was used explicitly to push for the de-legitimization of Israel as a Jewish state –which was born in original sin- and push for the return of all refugees. Pappé's claim that the British helped Israel in its early days, instead of opposing it, gave credence to those who portrayed Israel as a product of –illegitimate- colonialism instead of a national liberation movement. Shlaim's challenge to the idea that the Arabs were monolithic and bound to the destruction of Israel, gives credence to the side who wants to negotiate with the Arabs.

The new historians were also influenced by events. During the 1990s, the new historians were still allies pursuing similar goals[475]. During the 1990s however, Pappé began to become more radical in his views, siding with anti-Zionist critics from Hadash, and with the Palestinian leadership on the refugee question. Shlaim as well became disillusioned with (in his perception) Netanyahu's lack of flexibility in the peace process, and wrote his book *The Iron Wall*, which put most of the blame on peace continuing

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[475] Benny Morris, 'Politics by other means'

illusiveness on the Israeli leadership. Morris however became disillusioned with the Arabs, and reinterpreted the 1948 war in the light of Arab unwillingness (he associated with a supremacist and fanatic Islamic culture), by claiming that all –including Jordan- were aiming to destroy Israel, and continue to do so today. Here we see the main reason for the lack of historiographical progress: the continuing presence of politics in the realm of history. The way history is interpreted has major historical implications in the Israeli case; it determines how we interpret Arab willingness to engage in dialogue, and the value of competing claims in the conflict. Interpretations themselves however are highly influenced by the way we perceive the current conflict; Shlaim's frustration with Israeli inflexibility in the late 1990s is translated into criticism of Israel's stance in the historic context. Morris' frustration with the Arab rejection of 'a far reaching offer' is translated into a narrative which portrays Arabs as intransigent fanatics, who are unwilling to compromise.

The difference between the different paths of historiographic debates can thus be explained by the politics of the present. In America, the Vietnam war ended, the Cold war became less hostile, and the country as a whole remained never experienced the feeling a a existential threat. The Israeli's –already burdened by the experience of the Holocaust and widespread persecution, and by the self-identity that resulted from that- have remained in a state of (at least perceived) existential threat. Its right to exist has been denied by its detractors, Arab or extreme left, who use history to prove their point that Israel is a major human rights violator, a racist colonizer and an ethnic cleanser. The boycott campaigns against Israel, the major repeated military attacks on Israel, and terrorism (although not unheard of in America, where it is less frequent) targeting Israel, as well as debates between ultra-orthodox and more liberal Jews on Israel's religious rights to exist, have created a country which is more on guard against threats to its legitimacy whose existential threat is unheard of in America, without which it would stand isolated. In this environment all historiographical positions have major implications on the political debate. Instead of historical convergence and balance, the politics of the day have taken over and determined the trajectory of 1948 historiography.

The question whether there has been progress is easier to answer. More archival resources have become available, and more interpretations are on offer to consider. Still,

the interpretations have remained politicized and instrumental. Without some kind of depolitization of the historiographical scholarship, the 1948 Israeli historiography will probably remain stuck in a polemic between traditionalists and challengers, without much of a convergence and progress.

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