



המכון לאסטרטגיה ציונית
THE INSTITUTE FOR ZIONIST STRATEGIES

Teaching History in Israel and the World

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The views presented in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IZS.

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המכון לאסטרטגיה ציונית הוא גוף עצמאי הפועל למען שמירת צביונה היהודי והדמוקרטי של מדינת ישראל על פי עקרונות מגילת העצמאות.

המכון פועל לשמירת זכויות האדם במדינת ישראל ברוח עקרונות החירות, הצדק, היושר והשלום של מורשת ישראל.

המכון פועל למען הידוק הקשר בין יהודי התפוצות למדינת ישראל על פי ערכי הציוניות.

המכון עוסק בעריכת מחקרים, כתיבת תוכניות והגשתן, הדרכת מנהיגים צעירים, ייזום כינוסים, סמינרים, סיורים ופעילויות אחרות למען חיזוקה של מדינת ישראל כביתו הלאומי של העם היהודי.

The Changing Values of Israeli Society and Their Impact on Its Historiography

Until the Six Day War, the Zionist ethos was built upon collective experiences, primarily national survival and revival. Zionist ideals prioritized the enlistment of the individual in the service of the movement, the people, the society and the state; they valued allegiance to the collective and a sense of duty; self fulfillment meant "do what you believe in" (and not "advance yourself"). To a large extent, the consensus surrounding this demanding ethos stemmed from external pressure – the existential threat plaguing the Yishuv, and later Israeli society for a span of 30 years, beginning with the Arab riots of 1936 through the Second World War, the struggle against the British, the War of Independence and the years following it to the Six Day War in 1967. Regardless of its validity, the sense of the external threat was authentic. It weighed on everyone, and forced all members of the voluntary and heterogeneous immigrant society in the Land of Israel to adopt a basic level of ideological agreement regarding its goals and a procedural agreement on the rules of political behavior. Dissidents who deviated from this understanding or denied the legitimacy and authority of the institutions that embodied it were excluded from society (*Haredim*, communists or revisionists).

A few individuals and small groups disputed the declared objectives of the Zionist movement and opposed its policies. In the past twenty years these exceptions (*Brit Shalom*, *Ichud*, the Jewish communists, or individuals such as Yaakov de Haan or Haim Kalvarisky) have been described by post-Zionist historians, sociologists, political scientists, scholars of culture and geographers as an alternative to the line of the Zionist Movement and the Yishuv. However, they acted at the fringe of Yishuv society and their recent support is anachronistic at best.

Recent critics of history curriculum in Israel, (i.e. Eyal Naveh and Dan Bar-On) have relied on Martin Buber, Ernst Simon and other members of *Brit Shalom* and *Ichud*. These persons, despite their small numbers and marginal position in the public discourse of that period, have been an authority for post-Zionists' claims that the solidary society of the Yishuv

was no more than an illusion, and under the surface there were multiple voices that were repressed from the mainstream discourse.¹

The lessening perception of an existential threat following the Six Day War undermined the Israeli consensus. New flags were waved, old flags were folded, and in certain sectors of society the Zionist ethos withered. Traditional Zionist values and principles were abandoned one after another. A new ethos emerged, placing the individual – his self-accomplishment, rights, honor and life – in its center. These changes were apparent also in circles that had been identified in the past with the Labor Zionist Movement.

Before statehood and even in its early years, the left wing of the Zionist movement stood out as radical and activist, especially on issues of policy and settlement. First and foremost it was characterized by an ideology that integrated Zionism and socialism. This program cultivated values of equality, social justice and labor, and made them central to national and cultural revival. At the same time, it emphasized the avant-garde's role against that of the majority. Pioneering settlement was considered the essence of Zionism, both in terms of making the desert bloom and in terms of building a new and just society. Schools run by the Labor movement taught personal fulfillment in the fields of settlement and defense. This activism caused parts of the Zionist Left to oppose the partition and statehood out of concern that the establishment of a state would restrict settlement opportunities in the other parts of the land.

After the Six Day War, the differences between Zionist and non-Zionist Left were gradually blurred, and the pace of that change was accelerated after the political upheaval of 1977. In the Zionist, and new, non-Zionist Left that developed contemporaneously with the emergence of the New Left in the West following the student riots of 1968, the principal values of the Zionist-socialist ethos were replaced with materialistic competition. The collective effort to facilitate national revival was pushed aside by the individual's rights; equality and solidarity were replaced with fostering individualism; social justice withdrew in favor of material success; toil turned into entrepreneurship that employed foreign laborers; and the avant-garde's esprit de corps deteriorated to simple arrogance.²

For years, Israeli society has been twisting and turning. An ongoing internal battle over its identity, source of authority and ethos has been raging. It has been struggling with questions such as 'what is Israeli society?', 'who belongs to it?', 'what are its characteristics, values, core interests and symbols?' and 'which elite groups will guide it?'³ Divided on these issues by profound arguments, Israeli society has lost its balance between authority and responsibility, reward and punishment, rights and obligations, success and failure, the collective and the individual, service and parasitism, goals and results, wealth and poverty, work and capital, solidarity and competition, reality and fiction, words and deeds, truth and falsehood.

Under intensifying pressures by the political system as well as the forces of the market, the educational institutions – universities, colleges and schools – speculate about their national mission (and whether they even have one), over their social function and their academic and educational goals.

The public controversies over the teaching of history in universities and schools reflect the Zionist movement's loss of direction. Like society as a whole, Israeli historiography has also been in a state of bewilderment. It has lost its ability to distinguish between professionalism and charlatanism; schools of thought as well as different and contradictory historical traditions; integrity and opportunism; disparagement in the face of the social sciences and linguistic and critical literature theories vis-à-vis preservation of disciplinary uniqueness; discourse and reality; conformism to political correctness versus adherence to principles. Historians consider the contradictions between the extent and profundity of scientific work on the past and their desire to influence the present by means of participation in debates in the public sphere. Often the submission to the constraints of the media lowers the level of historical discussion and confines it to the framework, language, time and scope of television talk shows and newspaper opinion columns.

The Development of Teaching and Research on the History of Zionism and the Yishuv

A significant expansion of teaching and research both inside and outside of universities came hand-in-hand with the growing unrest among Israeli historians since the 1980s. In five years (1997-2001), Israeli universities offered over 300 undergraduate and graduate courses on different aspects of the history of Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel. Counting courses that were taught more than once, there were a total of 420 courses. These numbers relate to courses that were offered by historical and interdisciplinary departments only. If we add courses in political sciences, law faculties, and special programs, the figure grows even higher though I lack data on those departments. I also lack data on colleges that were opened in the 1990s and the 2000s.

In 1997, Israeli universities offered a total of 68 courses in these fields. In 1998, the number grew to ninety, dropped in 1999 to eighty, and in 2000 and 2001 it stabilized at 91 courses each year. The variety of subjects is impressive. A division of the courses by category (social, ideological, cultural, political, state, military, economic, settlement history, and combinations of them), or according to subjects, reveals that in the past five years the study of social history made up the largest category, with 71 courses, of which, at least according to their titles, seven were on "socio-cultural" history; one course was "socio-ideological"; three courses were "socio-military"; eight were "socio-political", two dealt with "socio-economic" history and two handled "socio-settlement" issues. The political history category included 54 courses, four of which were political-cultural, 16 were political-ideological, eight courses dealt with politics and society, and seven discussed politics and the military.

The category of Israeli and Zionist policy and diplomacy contained 57 courses. Twenty of them discussed military-political issues, particularly the struggle for statehood and the Arab-Jewish Conflict. The area of military history included 44 courses that focused on the history of the paramilitary organizations in the Yishuv, the IDF and Israel's wars with the Arabs.

Zionist ideology was taught in 44 courses: political aspects (10), cultural aspects (2), social aspects (1), and settlement aspects (1). This category also includes dozen of courses dealing with anti- or post-Zionism, such as Ron Zweig's MA seminar on "Zionism and its Objectors" that was given in Tel Aviv in 1997, or the seminar of Robert Wiestrich "Zionism and its Jewish Critics" that was taught in Jerusalem in 1998.

Alongside the growing interest in social history, interest in cultural history also appears to be on the rise. In the five years of this study, 42 courses were held on the subject of culture – from the issue of identity to representations of history in various areas: literature, films and folk music to historiography. The most neglected area has been the economic history of the Yishuv and of the State of Israel (only five courses on the subject). The number of introductory courses was also low (13), but in certain universities, introductory courses are part of a general survey of modern Jewish history. The settlement movements were the subject of 18 courses; the interest in this field appears to be declining, which can be seen particularly in the number of courses on the kibbutzim (only 3). Eleven courses discussed five Zionist Israeli leaders: Ben Gurion (6), Herzl (1), Weizmann (1), Jabotinsky (1) and Dayan (1).

The variety of topics is vast, and many courses can be attributed to more than one category. Without corresponding data from a comparable time period in the past, it is difficult to decisively point out any changes. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify topics whose popularity dwindled, while others that did not appear on the list in earlier years have become increasingly popular. A typical example of a subject that has lost its attraction is the relationship between Zionism and Britain (8 courses). By contrast, the unsolved problem of the Israeli identity or identities was the topic of 15 courses. Gender (6 courses), memory and commemoration, as well as Zionist versus anti-Zionist ideology and historiography (8 courses), have also become trendy subjects and hold a prominent place in course lists.

Social and cultural distress rooted in the mass immigration of the 1950s was the subject of thirteen courses – a phenomenon indicative of the perennial appeal of the ethnic composition of Israeli society. It is noteworthy that none of the lecturers teaching these subjects belonged to the

descendants of the mass *Aliyah* from Muslim countries at the beginning of the 1950s. Researchers from this background who specialized in Israeli society were more prominent in the social or political sciences, leaving historians to be predominantly WASPs (White, Ashkenazi, Sabra, Protectionists). The few exceptions to this rule, like David Ohana (excluding his recent book: *Not Canaanites, Not Crusaders: Origins of Israeli Mythology*), generally focused on historical issues that are not specifically connected to Zionism or to Israel.

Current tensions between the secular and religious sectors of Israeli society are probably the cause for the increasing number (20) of courses about the relationship between Zionism and the Jewish State on one hand, and the Jewish religion on the other hand. The selection includes courses on religion and nationalism, religion and the State, Religious Zionism, the *Haredi* opposition to Zionism and the communal life of *Haredim* during the time of the Yishuv and in the first years of the State.

The database analysis confirms previous impressions, and the findings are not specific to Israel. It reflects an increasing diversity of research and, consequently, of teaching in institutes of higher education. This diversification has been happening for years in American historiography and has recently spread to Britain as well.⁴ The process is to be praised, but there is a risk of losing the forest for the trees. It can be remedied by compensating for the growing eclecticism of elective courses with mandatory introductory courses and by instituting integrative final exams as a condition for graduation.

Dissertation Topics

The prosperity of the academic discipline of history in the field of Zionism and the Yishuv does not satisfy everyone. Prof. Shlomo Zand complains that the stagnation of the topics and paradigmatic approaches fails to express the changes that have occurred in Western historiography. He also laments the lack of Arab professors in the history departments of the universities and the absence of joint studies by Jewish and Arab colleagues. As usual with Zand, his assertion is imprecise. Arab and Druze faculty teach in history

departments of universities and colleges (Butrus Abu-Maneh, Kais Firro, Hassan Halayla and Mahmud Yazbek in Haifa, Mustafa Kabha and Adel Maneh at the Open University, and Mustafa Abassi in Safed College constitute a partial list only). The first two have instructed a number of Doctoral students – Arabs, Druze and Jews. Yazbek was recently elected Chairman of the Israeli Middle Eastern Studies Association.

The diversity of subjects is also manifested in PhD dissertations and MA theses. Zand claims that the areas of Jewish and Israeli history "have yet to show signs of serious change, and the character of the theses and dissertations has barely changed: they continue... to preserve the old conceptual paradigms and mechanisms". Like Zand's other contentions, this claim, too, has no factual basis.⁵ An analysis of MA theses and PhD dissertations written in recent years on the history of Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel reveals significant changes in the relative popularity of certain subjects and the methodological approaches used. Zand's pseudo-Marxist explanation that the lack of change can be attributed to the fact that academic funding continues to be generously routed to the Jewish history departments sounds ridiculous to anyone who is familiar with the chronic under-funding of these departments and the difficulty in fundraising for the humanities in general, and specifically for subjects perceived as ideological in nature (such as Zionist or Israeli history).

Israeli historiography follows in the footsteps of its elder Western sister, but lags behind it by two or three decades. By the end of the fifties, less than one fifth of history dissertations written in the United States discussed social, cultural or intellectual history. By the late seventies, forty percent of dissertations were written in these fields. During that time, the proportion of dissertations on political, diplomatic or constitutional history dropped from one half to one third.⁶

Between the years of 1997-2004, Israeli universities produced 110 dissertations on the history of the Yishuv, Zionism, the State of Israel and Israeli society. Four of them discussed the old and new Yishuv during the period of the Ottoman Empire. Forty-four discussed the British Mandate (18 of them continued into the early years of the State). Eighty dissertations

were on the history of the State of Israel, beginning with its establishment and discussing Israeli society and culture.

When divided into fields, the distribution in Israel is similar to that of the United States a generation ago. Nearly half of the dissertations (47%) were written in the field of social or cultural history and in adjacent fields such as gender, media and ethnography. Approximately 38% of them discussed political-military, political or ideological history. About seven percent of the dissertations dealt with historical geography and settlement issues. Seven dissertations (6%) were written on the Zionist movement in the Diaspora, and three dissertations (1.5%) were biographical.

The Status of History Studies

The remarkable scope of activity notwithstanding, Israeli and Zionist history studies as well as world history is experiencing a drastic drop-off in their perceived status as a part of the general decline in the position of the humanities in academia and in society. The study of history is falling apart on a global scale after peaking in the early seventies. Israel is no exception.

In the United States, the early seventies marked a rise in the number of undergraduates majoring in history, bringing the number to 44,000. However, in 15 years, by 1986, that number dropped to 16,000. It then rose slightly to 20,000 in the early nineties and then stabilized. At the same time, the number of PhD recipients in history from American universities dropped by more than half, to less than 600, after a high of over 1,200 per year in the early seventies. Class sizes shrank and the chances of the new PhDs to find university positions diminished accordingly. In 1970, 2,481 history PhDs competed for 188 positions in American universities. By the middle of that decade, the number of doctors of history receiving university positions hit all time low. This crisis was not unique to history, but affected most of the humanities.⁷

The drop in the number of students and professors can be partially attributed to the lower income of graduates of the humanities. An additional, equally important reason was the growing influence of postmodernism and radical relativism on the humanity departments in American academia during

the eighties and nineties. This influence, which entailed the revamping of many of the departments and focusing on micro-historical topics while losing track of the whole, deterred many potential students and indirectly reduced the number of instructors.

In Israel, the drop in the popularity of history (and the humanities in general) is both quantitative – reflected in the number of students – and qualitative. Most students register in the humanities departments not because of curiosity or interest, but because they admit almost everyone. In recent years, many history students have come from social backgrounds that were not part of the pre-statehood Zionist experience. In the universities in the periphery (those not in the central area of Israel) and in colleges, the number of non-Jewish students (Arabs, Druze, Bedouins) studying in history departments grew considerably. Some of them see the Zionist Enterprise as hostile, discriminatory or oppressive.

Of the students that take courses in Zionist and Israeli history, Jews and non-Jews alike are emotionally involved. At the same time, they lack basic knowledge. The combination of emotional involvement and ignorance creates a unique difficulty in classrooms. This predicament is accompanied by an additional quandary: the history of the Yishuv and the first years of statehood is the story of an ideological, dedicated and mobilized society. A majority of students today – and some of their younger instructors – are products of a competitive and individualistic society. Their ability to understand the past in its own terms is questionable, as is their ability to comprehend the zeitgeist of the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.

Serious students who choose to study history out of genuine interest and curiosity encounter postmodern, post-Zionist and relativist approaches from some of their professors, as in other humanities departments. Usually, these instructors do not tolerate views other than their own. The students quickly discover that the history they are being taught is a list of sins of the West and of Zionism and Israel; many of them lose their curiosity and desire to learn and transfer to other fields. Some of them conform to the new trends or adopt them. After twenty to thirty years, this process has shaped a generation of middle and high school history teachers: some of them were poorer students in university, some of them conformed to the new trends,

and some of them are a combination of both. Of course, there are also exceptions to this rule, especially among elder teachers, but their numbers are dwindling.

The Goals of Teaching History in Schools

The evolution of history studies in the universities has affected the practice in schools and the quality of the teachers. In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, teaching history in schools was a fundamental tool for shaping national identity and consciousness. However, the relativism and skepticism that characterized the history discipline in the second half of the 20th century created a dichotomy between academic historical research and study and the teaching of history in schools. While through the history taught in schools one generation imparts its image of the past – or "collective memory" – to the next, academic historical research examines critically the existing image of the past, and occasionally uproots it and builds another image in its place.

In an era of mandatory education, when history classes are obligatory for at least some years, the entire population is exposed to the curriculums, syllabuses, textbooks and teachers of history. Schools in general, and specifically history classes, are a key tool that instills the "collective memory" more than museums and monuments. They impart collective memory in various ways, beginning with classroom lessons (not only history classes, but also classes in literature, Bible, civics, art, etc.), through role-playing games, local history and family tree projects, public debates on historical issues, and ending with school spirit gained through field trips and ceremonies on memorial days and holidays. Naturally, public debates of history and "collective memory" also permeate the education system and its tools: curriculums and textbooks.⁸

Following the changes in the academic historical discipline, historians, pedagogues and teachers of history have been considering what the purpose of teaching history in schools is: is it imparting students with an understanding of the past as a "collective memory"? Or is it a fundamental stage in acquiring disciplinary skills for future studies and for thinking

critically about the past and its implications for the present? School curriculums include elements of both archetypes, and in the hands of different teachers they turn their focus in one or the other of these directions. According to the two emphases, the content and methodologies are also shaped in dissimilar ways.

Disagreements over History Education

Disagreement about the role of history in schools is not unique to Israel. In the early 1980s, French scholar Mark Ferro investigated the way in which history was taught and learned in various countries. He attempted to understand the means used by those countries for solving problems of self identity and their relationship with "others". Ferro's book incorporates chapters on the relationship between Arab and Muslim historiography and the exclusion of non-Muslim Arab kingdoms from the history of Islam, on the Persian and Turkish versions of Muslim history, on the "white" history of South Africa during the apartheid era and the teaching of history in black African nations following the decolonization, on the way Indian history curriculums coped with the question of identity following the country's independence, on Soviet historiography and the preservation of indigenous identity in Armenia, on the obliteration of the Aborigines from Australian history, and on European colonialism and the way in which it was taught in Algeria and in France.⁹

Following the political upheavals of the 1980s and 1990s, several countries reformed and transformed the state history curriculum; this was most noticeable in the former Soviet Union and in states recently liberated from communist rule. Similar problems arose in South Africa following the fall of apartheid. Public controversy on questions regarding history curriculums in schools also took place in Germany, Japan and Britain during Margaret Thatcher's leadership, when conservatives sought to institute a school curriculum that would teach an "authorized version" of the past. In Japan, where the government holds a monopoly on the publishing of textbooks, historians approached the courts in a plea to allow these books to

properly reflect the truth and not just cause people to feel at ease with their past.¹⁰

The United States also witnessed public struggles and disputes concerning the history curriculum in schools. One such dispute took place in Chicago at the conclusion of the First World War due to accusations by public figures that school textbooks were not patriotic enough.¹¹ The controversy intensified in the 1960s as a result of changes that occurred in American society. In one of the chapters of his book, Ferro discusses the calls to dismantle the white history of the United States and to put more emphasis on the history of women and minorities. Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob claimed that textbooks "celebrated the achievements, it was said, of dead white European males rather than showing the contributions of women, minorities, and the oppression of gays and other excluded groups". Radical professors on campuses, not necessarily historians, condemned the syllabuses of the history departments, alleging that they present a bourgeois ideology, and offered alternative syllabuses that emphasized the history of women, blacks, Native Americans and other minority groups.¹²

The Debate on the "New Standards" for History Education in the United States

In the 1980s and 1990s, the "history wars" occupied the American education system. Postmodernist professors of education with liberal-radical political tendencies rejected the principle that history studies in schools should be above conflicting ideologies. They argued that this approach was outdated and was a camouflage for the ideology of the political right. Radical historians maintained that the history textbooks were European-centered, racist, sexist, and homophobic. They encouraged sexist and racist stereotypes instead of helping children and adolescents to overcome them. As could have been expected, these assertions sparked opposition. One of the more prominent opponents of the postmodernist trend, historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., lamented that history had turned into a weapon and schools

into battlefields in an ideological and political attack on the identity of America.¹³

Trying to introduce into the school system new ideas that prospered in some academic departments of history, anthropology, culture studies, and blacks and women studies, several professors launched a campaign for the establishment of new national history standards. They recruited parents, history teachers, librarians, school principals, pedagogues and curriculum writers to support their cause. The suggested new curriculum shifted the emphasis from the War of Independence, the ratification of the constitution, the expansion westward and the Civil War to the oppression, discrimination and exploitation of women, blacks and other minorities, their affliction and how they overcame the hostility and fought to gain their rights.¹⁴

The main effort of the new standards' initiative focused on composing new textbooks that, in the opinion of the project's enthusiasts, were more compatible with the values of a heterogeneous society. These textbooks integrated the histories of women, African Americans, Latin Americans and foreign laborers into the traditional American history or stood in place of it. The books met strong opposition that criticized them as being no more than propaganda driven by political motives. From the opinion columns of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the controversy moved to Capitol Hill.¹⁵

Even before their official publication, the new standards instigated a great deal of media agitation. Supporters labeled the criticism as right-wing and conservative. Actually, it involved much broader circles that refused to allow the radicalism and postmodernism endorsed by the academe into schools. In January 1995 the US Senate voted in favor of a decision that condemned the "standards" and in effect signaled the end of the project. Nevertheless, the argument over history education continued notwithstanding the removal of the new standards from the political agenda. The public and media commotion surrounding them eventually marginalized history education in American schools in favor of the social sciences. In addition, the controversy pushed aside the debate on questions such as why should history be taught and what does it contribute to the growth and education of the student?¹⁶

Aside from textbooks, the "history wars" in schools concerned the subject matter of the curriculums. Following the failure of the new standards in the Senate, a few of its enthusiasts turned to a reexamination of the pedagogical principles that guided history education in schools. Instead of studying history as a method of transferring knowledge, they proposed seeing it as "a cultural act that instructs students about the nature of understanding and about their own role in making historical knowledge". The classroom, they believed, is an arena for gaining experience: the place where contending voices confront each other in the debate over what history means in a democracy.¹⁷

Facing the various clashing interpretations of the past, the team offered three possible approaches that represent different didactic and epistemological perspectives: The first seeks the "best story" and tells it "as it happened" to enhance the "collective memory". The second demonstrates two or more versions of a historical story and allows students to choose the one that seems best to them based on their analysis of primary and secondary sources as is customary in the discipline. The third, postmodern, approach, rather than directing the students to the best or most valid version, show the students what are the contemporary political uses for the various versions of the story of the past. According to this outlook, students should learn how different groups use rhetoric of the past to further their goals in the present.¹⁸

The Public Debate in Israel

The debates concerning history education in the United States served as a model for similar debates in Israel. The Shalem Center in Jerusalem took up some arguments of the new standards' opponents and used them in a campaign to disqualify certain post-Zionist ninth grade history textbooks. Conversely, Eyal Naveh, whose textbook on 20th century history was a prime target of that campaign, describes the debates in the U.S. in a one-sided and biased manner. He refers predominantly to the authors of the "standards" and presents the opposition as limited to a few extremist right-wing politicians.

Books and articles by historians who opposed the "standards" are carefully hidden in the footnotes, without being referenced. He presents the Senate resolution that condemned the standards in an overtly biased manner, and dubs a resolution that passed in an almost unprecedented 99 to one majority "political farce and ideological hysteria of a group of American conservatives with money and influence who tried, unsuccessfully, to change the multicultural agenda of their country." Without presenting any facts or evidence in support of his claim, he holds out that despite the resolution, the standards were adopted by schools and many teachers, and the reader has no other choice but to rely on his words – which in this case (as in many others) are far from convincing.¹⁹

The public debate on the way in which the history of the Yishuv and the State of Israel is taught in schools has recently been focusing primarily on new textbooks. Controversial textbooks, however, are only the tip of the iceberg: there are deeper issues emanating from demographic, social and political changes that are influencing culture as a whole.

Experiments in teaching history, primarily contemporary but also that of the period of the first and second commonwealth have been done in Israel, too. Zeev Tzahor claims that national history curriculums of the 1950s had a "recruiting role". In the era of political movement-run schools that preceded the institution of state education, each movement recruited its reserves in the schools and indoctrinated them. After the legislation of the State Education Law it was still customary to teach the central narrative in schools and to repress any opposing accounts.²⁰ Tzahor's claim requires an empirical examination that was not carried out. Besides, the narratives were diverse and each movement stressed different elements. Tzahor's assertion might be true of the kibbutz education to which he was exposed. However, not one of the seven elementary and high schools that I attended between 1949 and 1961 taught the history of the Yishuv or the State. The Jewish history curriculum at the Hebrew University (including the history of Zionism and the Yishuv), too, ended in 1948, at least until the late 1960s.

Core Curriculums for History and Its Critique

In the State of Israel, the Ministry of Education is responsible for shaping school curriculums as well as recommending and approving textbooks. In the past, the Ministry of Education worked independently of Israeli academia, which was barely involved in the areas under the jurisdiction of the Ministry. The connection between the education system and academia began to strengthen in the 1960s. In 1966, Education Minister Zalman Aran appointed a committee led by Prof. Joshua Prawer to explore the structure of Israel's state education. This committee recommended a structural reform that brought about the introduction of middle schools or junior high schools. Increasing numbers of teachers completed academic studies. Professors from the Hebrew University School of Education, and later from newer universities as well, lectured in teachers' supplementary programs organized by the Ministry. School curriculums and educational experiments relied increasingly on studies conducted in the universities' Schools of Education, and later also in their other disciplinary departments.

The State Education Law encouraged the preparation of a first comprehensive core curriculum for history studies that was intended for all public and religious-public school students. The curriculum of 1954 was intended to replace the curriculums of the various educational "trends" and the mandate government's curriculum for Arab schools into one program with eight objectives:

1. To bestow on the students the knowledge of the great past of the Jewish nation – its spiritual heritage, actions and vision – as well as knowledge of other nations that came in contact with the Jews and their mutual influences.
2. To make students aware that our People [...] preserved its religion, customs and ideas through two thousand years of exile, and did not idly assimilate in the face of large nations and their cultures and did not cease to exist as a unified nation throughout the Diaspora.
3. To inculcate in the hearts of students love of the exalted spiritual assets of our People and to encourage the desire to live by these standards, to

instill admiration of the Jewish sages, martyrs and heroes, and arouse the desire to learn from their virtues and good deeds.

4. To impart to the students understanding of the most important historical facts and the connections between them, comprehension of the spiritual and material forces that function in human society and general concepts of its evolution, and to devote special attention to the understanding of contemporary political, social and cultural world.
5. To cultivate an esteem for international partnership and recognition of the good and noble in the culture of every nation, to promote an attitude of tolerance toward other nations and to teach the importance of international organizations.
6. To imbue students with the awareness that our people developed dignified social ideals and served as a driving force in the moral advancement of the world.
7. To instill students with the consciousness of the principles of the Torah, the vision of the prophets on the End of Days, the Jews' devotion to the study of the Torah, their observance of the commandments, their deep-rooted belief in the Eternity of Israel, their uninterrupted affiliation to their homeland and their belief in redemption – all of which gave our people the strength to stand strong in the face of our oppressors and to maintain our autonomy from other nations, to return to our homeland, to ingather our exiles and reestablish statehood and sovereignty.
8. To imbue students with the understanding that the establishment of the State of Israel is the fruit of generations of yearning and devotion and the outcome of the efforts and accomplishments of the large pioneering movement that operated during the three generations of revival, and to instill them with love for the State of Israel and determination to act on its behalf.

The spirit of Ben-Zion Dinur – Minister of Education, professor at the Hebrew University, and Zionist historian – inspired the wording of these goals. It is enough to compare them with his programmatic article (written in conjunction with Prof. Itzhak Baer) in the first issue of the *Zion* journal in 1935. The core curriculum was compatible with the historiographic

approach of the time, the way history was taught in Europe and America, and the values of the first years of statehood.

Planning the curriculum preceded the legislation of the State Education Law and began during the War of Independence. A special committee was established for this purpose, chaired by Dr. Michael Hendel, one of the leading high school history teachers at the time. Disagreements that persist to our days characterized the committee's discussions: issues such as the proportion of world and Jewish history, the relationship between political, social and cultural history, the exclusion of history teaching from contemporary politics and how to reflect the needs of the present. The finalized curriculum granted slight preference to Jewish over world history. While world history was taught primarily as political history, Jewish history, especially of the Exile period, was mainly social and cultural. The curriculum ended at a safe enough distance from the present to keep it detached from current political issues.

During the past four decades, professors of education have strongly criticized the program. They opposed the preachy attitude of the State Education Law, attempting to define goals and lead education in certain directions. Professor Zvi Lamm of Jerusalem argued that a democratic regime is incapable of defining educational goals by legislation and teachers should be given a broad leeway to decide what and how to teach, based on their own worldviews. Former MK, author and educator Yizhar Smilansky also agreed with Lamm's opinion.²¹

Beyond the pretentious wording of the objectives (typical of its time), it is hard to find indoctrination in the first core curriculum. Furthermore, large gaps separated the curriculum, which was conceived in Jerusalem, from the field. Despite the avowed preference for Jewish history, the balance with world history was often equal, perhaps because the students, and even their teachers, preferred world history, especially when discussing the Middle Ages and the early modern period. In practice, the Jewish history taught in schools was not specifically Zionist. The textbooks and teachers, and occasionally the more curious students, drew primarily from the writings of Heinrich Graetz and Simon Dubnow – two historians who were not

Zionist despite their important role in the beginning stages of the growing Jewish national consciousness. In the 1950's the daily *Davar* published abridged editions of Dubnow and Graetz's books for use by senior elementary and high school students as basic reference books (in addition to the existing textbooks, which also relied on these historians).

In recent years, the original core curriculum has been censured by post-Zionist professors of education and historians. Generally, this retrospective condemnation casts values and concepts from the end of the twentieth century onto the 1950s curriculum and those who shaped it. Eyal Naveh disparages Dinur's Jewish-Israeli ethnocentrism, which had gained a normative status, by presenting it as a national liberation movement that had begun in the 19th century. He also argued against the emphasis that the core curriculum put on the negative aspects of Jewish life in the Diaspora, implying that Zionism was a historical must and the only solution for modern Jewish existence.²²

Naveh and his associates ignored the fact that most teachers of history (and other disciplines) in the 1950s, as well as those who shaped education policy and designed the curriculum, were "ethnocentric" Zionists. Naveh mentions two: Michael Hendel and Michael Ziv. I can add my four history teachers from high school (Avraham Margalio from *Ohel Shem* in Ramat Gan, Gabriel Knoller from the *Reali* in Haifa, Ben-Zvi and Yeager from the *Ironi A* in Tel Aviv), and many others whom I knew or heard about from friends that studied in their classes). "The recruiting ethnocentric approach" as Naveh dubs it, was not invented by Dinur but came from below and surfaced on its own.

Naveh and his followers' condemnation of the emphasis on Jewish history rather than world history is anachronistic. In the 1950s and sixties, all European and American countries taught their national histories, with world history serving as background only, and there was nothing special or unique in the Israeli history curriculum in this sense.

Following the disappearance of the non-Zionist alternatives in the Holocaust, and in view of the Zionist movement's success in achieving its goal (even if only partially) three years after the war ended, the Zionist

solution was axiomatically regarded as the only answer to the Jewish Question.

Not all the criticism of the core curriculum has been anachronistic. Already in that period it met criticism and even rebuttal. The opponents were a few professors of education and other academics. These individuals, such as professor of education Zvi Adar, argued that a national approach to history incites hatred between nations and even wars, falsifies the history of enemy nations (or in contemporary terminology: "others"), and distorts the past by means of mythologizing the important historical figures and worshipping them as heroes. Adar censured the history taught in Israeli high schools and argued that it should not be based on romanticism, but rather on critical thinking. Another staunch critic of State education's ideology and of the core curriculum was Zvi Lamm, who claimed that such a system was incapable of meeting the needs of a heterogeneous population like that of Israel.

In the mid-1960s, the influence of the academic world was already being felt in the Ministry of Education. Research at that time dealt primarily with issues of integration and gaps of achievements, and was based on American models and on concepts originating in American universities' schools of education. In the summer of 1966 the Ministry established a curriculum division that soon became an autonomous department. The curriculums developed by this department largely strived to raise student success rates, and the staff was less bothered by national tasks such as the melting pot policy or preparation for military service.

The changes in politics, society and education in the second half of the sixties and early seventies brought about the creation of a new core curriculum for history. The curriculum department made it public in 1975, following the shock of the Yom Kippur War to Israeli society. The blueprint was divided into three layers: In elementary school it focused on introducing core concepts; in middle school, history was taught in chronological order with a focus on Jewish history from the First Temple until the modern State. In high school (10th-12th grades) selected chapters of modern history were taught. The program emphasized issues that led to the establishment of the State. Three topics were mandatory: The Jewish National movement and

the Establishment of the State of Israel; main Jewish communities (including the Holocaust); and the Jewish-Arab conflict. The remaining topics were elective.

Critics of the original 1954 core curriculum praised its successor for encouraging the development of analytic and conceptual historical thought. They commended the effort to instill understanding and tolerance of traditions and ways of life of other nations simultaneously with fostering feelings of identification with the nation and State. The kudos welcomed the reduction of the "ethnocentric" sting of the curriculum. Other merits included the more central standing of the student in the educational process and the larger autonomy of the teacher in choosing topics and materials. Nevertheless, these changes did not please postmodernist critics nor satisfy their demands. Eyal Naveh maintains that the weakening of its pathos and ideology notwithstanding, "in terms of subject matter, the 1975 curriculum preserved the Zionist ethos of the new Israeli Jew, and despite its recognition of the power of pluralism, the difficulty in including 'others' in the hegemonic narrative remained intact."²³

Ruth Firer, who was a pioneer in researching Zionist textbooks, saw the years following the Six Day War as years of change. She indicated that the core curriculum and the textbooks that were subsequently written downplayed the glorification and mystification of Zionist history and ideology. However, she also agrees that the traditional structure of the idea of the return from exile to self-governance was preserved and it was still possible to identify a hidden orientation towards the consensual Zionist narrative.²⁴

The new core curriculum added three subjects to the realm of history teaching: The Jewish-Arab conflict, the Holocaust, and the heritage of Arabic Jewry. The growing self-confidence of Israeli society following the Six Day War made it possible to include the conflict in the program, and it even contained a bit of the Arab perspective. The Holocaust became a part of the curriculum in the late seventies. Its teaching focused primarily on the experiential-emotional aspect and only to a lesser degree on the historical. Ever since, there has been tension between teaching the Holocaust as a tragedy unique to the Jewish People, emphasizing the national lessons to be

learned from it, and stressing the rational and universal side of the lessons. This tension has entered the rivalry between the political right and left and the latter has linked it with Israel's attitude to the Palestinians.

Historical and Current Turmoil

Many years before the post-Zionist trend, Prof. Israel Kolatt, one of the pioneers of academic research of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv, foresaw the onslaught by revisionist professors on the research in and teaching of Zionist history. He linked their anticipated appearance to anti-Zionist Arab propaganda, and analyzed the linkage between future revisionist historians and the ideas of the "New Left" that spread in Europe and the US. Kolatt also identified a widening gap between the prevalent concepts in Western universities and the concepts that made up Israeli reality. Despite the Enlightenment, progress, and liberalism, he wrote, "The compound [in Judaism] of religion and nationalism, the affinity to the Land of Israel and the international nature of Jewish existence were, and continue to remain, a mystery exposed to libel."

Alongside the ideological clashes between Zionism and its opponents, Kolatt drew attention to the difficulty of finding a balance between the needs of Zionist historiography and the relativist approaches that have taken over Western historiography:

In terms of our attitude to facts, unbiased appraisal of truth, and rejection of the utilitarian myth – we are part of the Western world. However, in terms of the level of development of Yishuv history, and even in terms of its nature, it is difficult to adapt the new methods of Western scholarship to the topics of Yishuv and Zionist history. Western historiography prefers now the critical and epistemological over the constitutive role. The needs of Zionist historiography are different.²⁵

Kolatt made his comments in the wake of the 1960s controversy between British historians Edward Hallett Carr and Geoffrey Elton.

Since then, Western historiography has been absorbed in skepticism and self-criticism over the role played by historians during and between the World Wars, the decolonization and the disenchantment regarding the delusion of progress that guided historical research since the 19th century. Many American and Western European historians devoted themselves to debates over the value and purpose of history, its place in between the humanities and social sciences, the relationship between facts and interpretations, and the existence, or non-existence of an objective truth and the ways of approaching it or, alternately, declaring its absence and giving up the ambition to reach it.

Academic research of Zionist and Yishuv history was then just beginning and these subjects were not yet taught in schools as history. Initially, the researchers had to uncover the elements and details of the historical narrative and to reconstruct the basic infrastructure – to expose events, uncover trends and establish the connections between them – a task that is still far from completion in many areas. Only on the basis of such a foundation is it possible to argue seriously over different interpretations of the Great Story of Zionism.

Kolatt's article was written at the peak of Israeli social euphoria, between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War. In those years the first cracks in the cohesion of society appeared, though their significance was as yet unclear. In the 1980s, the advent of Western postmodernism and its Israeli off-shoots changed the framework of the debate on Zionist, Yishuv and State history. In the wake of their Western gurus, Israeli "postists" questioned the validity of historical research in general, and especially the "great story" of Zionism and its principal components. Placing the cart before the horse, they spread interpretations before the creation of a factual infrastructure. One generation later, Kolatt's vision and the accuracy of his predictions regarding the development of Israeli historiography under the influences of the social sciences, the media and postmodernism are overwhelming.

Changes in the History Curriculum in the Nineties

In the context of the many changes that Israeli society underwent in the period following the Yom Kippur War, the Israeli school system modified its image as well as its curriculums, and also updated the Zionist and Israeli history curriculum. These changes cannot be solely attributed to the increasing and unprecedented political interference of education ministers turned curriculum supervisors, beginning with Shulamit Aloni. Even before 1992, the Ministry – then led by Zevulun Hammer – appointed an advisory committee to make recommendations on teaching history. Prof. Moshe Zimmerman, chair of Hebrew University's history department, was nominated as chairman. This committee was responsible for devising an alternate middle school curriculum to replace the one that was based on the core curriculum of 1975.

Zimmerman was the first in a line of historians to be involved in history education policymaking for the Ministry of Education, whether as permanent advisors or as members of ad hoc committees appointed to deal with specific issues. As could be expected, following the debates on university campuses and in the media, post-Zionist historical revisionism began to penetrate into the school system where teachers and students were less equipped to deal with the phenomenon than university professors and students.

Post-Zionist academic scholars seeking to destroy the Israeli "collective memory" blamed the public school system for indoctrinating students. One such academic, Uri Davidson, at a conference of the Israel Sociological Society, censured the Zionist monopoly on education, the exclusivity of the Hebrew language and the stress on the pre-exilic period in textbooks. He claimed that this fixation was responsible for the stagnation of the education system and was leading it to a dead end. In his opinion, the education system was capable of imparting information but was unable to mold a personality that befits a postmodern global world.

During the years 1994-1996, the post-Zionist controversy reached a climax. The newspaper *Haaretz* spawned a public-media debate nourished by the widespread illusion of peace following the Oslo Accords. Following the increasingly postmodernist atmosphere on Western campuses and in intellectual circles, Israeli "postists" acted not only as if they had re-invented the past, but as if they could prophesize the future as well. In this vein, for example, they hastened to proclaim the dissolution of the unified Israeli society and the downfall of Israeli identity along with the Israeli collective memory and culture. Prof. Baruch Kimmerling, Jerusalem professor of sociology and a "prophet" of the demise of Israeli culture, identified seven cultures and anti-cultures, including that of Israeli Arabs, each internally divided, which dismantle Jewish nationalism and Israeli "collective memory" into opposing and mutually exclusive versions.²⁶

Zimmerman, another "prophet" of the same school of thought, promised that the next step would be a thorough examination of the word "assimilation", and that this scrutiny might turn Zionist historiography upside down. Zimmerman did not add any new information on assimilation, but he drew inspiration from "parallel debates on minorities, biases, racism, and cultural encounters passionately conducted by historians and political scientists in Europe and America."²⁷ Like his Tel Aviv colleague Shlomo Zand, Zimmerman also called for burying Jewish and Israeli history in world history, thereby blurring their unique character.

Zimmerman ascribed the changes in Israeli historiography to the transforming values of Israeli society and affirmed: "Naturally, when Zionism changed and Zionist society changed, so did the questions asked by historians and the answers expected by consumers."²⁸ He was certainly correct, except that the transformation affected all historians, and he chose to ignore the majority of them and to focus his attention on a radical group of post-Zionists and the ideological and cultural environment that supported them and followed their lead. The rest of his claims were a manifesto in support of assimilation. He

attempted to describe Zionism as a faltering movement that failed to achieve its aims and was taken over by evil ethnocentric and religious forces. These contentions may or may not be accurate, but they lack a basis in Zimmerman's or anyone else's historical research.

To paint his manifesto concerning the failure of Zionism in academic colors, Zimmerman reviewed the historians' (in his words, "The Guild") debates in Germany in the 1980s, comparing them with the development of Jewish and Israeli historiography. His analysis of the Germans was more solid, but the comparison between the German historians' conflicts over the Second World War and the post-Zionists' criticism of the historiography of the War of Independence was artificial and farfetched. Zimmerman went so far as to compare the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages and the German Reich in modern times to "small" and "large" Israel preceding and following 1967. This comparison also counted on a short-sighted and baseless interpretation of political developments in Israel between 1992 and 1996, an interpretation that demonstrates the great significance of historical perspective to historians and how limited and defective their contributions would be in its absence.²⁹

Following the criticism by Zimmerman, Zand and others, the Ministry of Education strove to blend Jewish and world history into one curriculum and unified textbooks. However, the necessity and added value of this merger have been questionable. Such a fusion is likely to be beneficial to the universities, whose purpose is to give students a disciplinary training in the fields they choose to study. Due to circumstances not relevant to this paper, it was impossible to merge the history departments in Israeli universities. Subsequently, historians suggested integrating them in schools. Unfortunately, they failed to take into consideration the primary difference between teaching history in school and in the academe. Eventually new research findings will find their way to textbooks, but only after many years of re-examination, consolidation and acceptance. Attempts to shortcut the process in the name of "pluralism" and to

introduce postmodern relativism and academia-style innovation-at-any-price to the school system lead to uncontrolled nihilism, not only in the subject of history.

Unlike universities, schools should educate their pupils, and disciplinary training is only part of their mission. The dubious contemporary Israeli practice – concealing national history by merging it with world history – reverses the proper order in which things should be done. All over the world, schools give extra weight to national histories. World history is taught only as essential background to American, British, French, Italian or Polish history. Even in the universities, the move from national history to the study of the history of other nations, continents and cultures is a relatively new phenomenon, characteristic of the last three decades and it still faces a great deal of opposition. This craze was more successful in the United States than in Britain and has yet to make an appearance in French and German universities. If this is the case in the universities, then all the more so in schools.³⁰

History or Its Representation?

The "democratization" of history, the expanding interest in individual and collective memories, and the empowerment of the media along with technological innovations in distributing information undermined the connection between the past and its representations. While history creates distance between the present and the past and attempts to illustrate the latter's complexity and intricacy, memory is built on representations that bridge the gap and bring the past closer to the present. It obliterates the distance between the two, creates an emotional affinity to the past and overlooks the hierarchy of time. Thus, for example, the French historian Henry Rousso went so far as to describe Claude Lantzman's film *Shoah* as "an outstanding film, completed in 1985, that is **just as special as the event it depicts** [my emphasis – Y.G.] and its influence will be long-lasting." With all due respect to Claude Lantzman, there is still, of course, an enormous

difference between a film, as good as it is, and the Holocaust. The "democratization" of history subverted the hierarchy between the various representations, until it completely disappeared. From the point of view of the general public, a feature film, a documentary program on television, an article in a newspaper supplement, a historical novel, a textbook and a research monograph all have equal educational value in relation to the past. The competition between these modes of representation is especially strong in contemporary history, and usually television and journalism win out.³¹

The lack of hierarchy in terms of sources and representations, the blurring of disciplinary boundaries, the affirmative action in favor of "others" and those who were excluded from established history, the mixing of memory (individual and collective) with history – have all confused teachers and their students alike, and have brought research and teaching to a level in which it is difficult to discern between history and folklore or film. This is true both in Israel and in the West. Thus, for example, an American researcher of school history curricula, Peter Seixas, based his conclusions on responses of students to the story of the American Frontier as represented by two films: *The Searchers* (a 1956 western) and *Dances with Wolves* (a 1990 western). Both films are fictional, of course, and do not accurately portray the Wild West of 1860, though they do present the difference between America of the 1950s and that of the 1980s (which is an interesting historical issue in itself, though unconnected to the story of the frontier).³²

Post-Zionism's Place in Israel

The post-Zionism that surfaced during the eighties and erupted toward the decade's end, intensified during the "new Middle East" period – the age of euphoria and delusion following the Oslo Accords. In those years, post-Zionists spoke of an identity crisis in Israeli society as it stood – so they thought – at the threshold of peace. They expected the security and survival issues that had stood

at the top of Israel's national agenda since its establishment to move aside to make room for social and cultural issues. Seeing themselves as battling over the boundaries and shaping the Israeli cultural arena, they undermined the exclusiveness of the "Zionist discourse" and struggled against Zionism's control of Israel's cultural life. Some post-Zionists followed in the footsteps of Western postmodernists and declared the end of Zionist hegemony and the beginning of a new, post-Zionist era. Others claimed the opposite and condemned their colleagues who either ignored or concealed the powerful impact of "Zionist discourse" on the structure and practices of Israeli society and culture. The assertion that the Zionist era had come to an end, they believed, was a fallacy that encouraged detachment from the urgent civic and political issues it had created.³³

Many post-Zionists assumed the assessment of Haifa sociologist Sami Samocha, who believed that the Jewish-Arab conflict was approaching its end after gradually fading for a period of twenty years. The conclusion of the conflict, Samocha maintained, was an irreversible process that progressed in stages, backed by international support and firmly anchored in both Israeli and Palestinian public opinion. He wrote this essay shortly before the outbreak of the terrorist war in 2000, proving thereby just how wrong predictions can be.³⁴³⁵

One realm in which post-Zionists were successful in undermining the Zionist discourse, and certainly its exclusivity, was in the Israeli school system. Successive education ministers from Meretz and "Peace Now" – Shlomit Aloni, Yossi Sarid and Yuli Tamir – directly or indirectly helped sneak post-Zionism into the education system, or, at least, did not prevent it. In some private schools, Zionist Israeli history is presented as the history of the injustice and misery caused by Zionism (as seen by Yossi Sarid's proposal to add the Kafr Qassim affair to the curriculum, and more recently by Yuli Tamir's idea to teach the *Nakba* in Jewish schools). Post-Zionists have invoked emotional descriptions of the suffering of Zionism's victims to encourage empathy toward the defeated and criticism

toward the victors. From their point of view, the very fact of the Zionist movement's success was enough to justify depicting it as immoral.

Post-Zionists ascribe the development of the Israeli collective memory to deliberate manipulations by the Zionist "establishment" or "elites", aimed at preserving their dominant position and ensuring its continuation. Their stereotyping of "Zionists" rests on a false image of a solidary and cohesive pre-statehood Yishuv – in contrast to the pluralistic and multicultural society in Israel at the end of the twentieth century. However, Yishuv society was heterogeneous, pluralistic and polarized. Struggles over narratives, identities and memories proved that no one perspective was seen as "hegemonic" in the eyes of its opponents.

This phenomenon can also be regarded in the context of privatization that is affecting many parts of Israeli society. The main goal of post-Zionists is to influence the memory and historical consciousness of society. By means of the education system and the media, post-Zionists attempt to privatize the Israeli "collective memory". Post-Zionist historiography is seldom based on research. Empirical scrutiny of documents is the last of their interests. They aspire to influence society. Hence, the debate is held primarily in the media. In this arena, the propaganda-fueled appearance of postmodernist historians conveying sharp and bold pre-prepared messages has an advantage over those who become cumbersome in their archival search for complex historical truths.

Many see the emergence of post-Zionism in the context of the process of westernization that Israeli society undergoes: the waning of the collective ethos, the downfall of ideology and increasing reservations about nationalism and a mobilized society in favor of a liberal and pluralistic, and one may add hedonist and decadent "civil society". The link between post-Zionism and pluralism, however, is loose and imagined. Post-Zionists neither offer an additional narrative to the existing variety nor demand in the name of liberal pluralism that it receive a legitimate status alongside its

predecessors. They attempt to refute the Zionist narrative, subvert its "hegemony" and replace it with a competing hegemonic narrative – their own one.

Although post-Zionists conceive of themselves as being of the intellectual elite, their common denominator is not intellectual, but ideological. What stands between Zionists and post-Zionists is not a historical debate over Israel's past or even over its interpretation, but an ideological-political debate over what the Israel of the 21st century should be. Like the postmodernists who transformed historical research into a crusade to reveal the past evils of the West in an attempt to upset the existing social and political order, post-Zionists transform the history of the Zionist enterprise into a list of sins, frauds and injustices, as part of their present-day ideological-political struggle against Israel. Usually, they refrain from matter-of-fact arguments with their critics and do not respond to criticisms. Instead, just like their postmodern comrades, they complain of persecutions and witch-hunts, dismiss the criticism as absurd, and launch *ad hominem* attacks on their rivals, smearing their personalities, motives and skills.³⁶

To contradict conventional Zionist history, post-Zionists have devised a "counter history" – an ancient polemic tactic that by means of a distorted presentation of its opponent's texts, attempts to warp its image, undermine its identity, and dismantle its collective memory. Pappé described the post-Zionist counter-history as a new heterodoxy that grew up in Israeli academia. In his view, the new heterodox historian is a counter historian who believes in breaking the agreed disciplinary rules: he admits his biases in approaching research topics, he makes assumptions and take positions in advance of the research; he passes moral judgment on the past and decides who is the scoundrel and who is responsible for this or that misdeed; he rejects the principle that history does not repeat itself and engages in comparative studies that pretend to determine the norm and the exceptions from it; out of disrespect to his study's subjects he replaces their terminology with of his own, apparently "neutral"

vocabulary.³⁷ Applying his new rules to the classroom and to his books, Pappé was a principle contributor to the destruction of Israeli historiography.

Despite some differences, post-Zionism was inspired by Foucault and the post-colonialist movement that emphasizes multiculturalism. According to the post-Zionists, questions of knowledge and power are the crux of the controversy. They maintain that Israelis turn a blind eye to the central role of power in shaping social and cultural systems, or at least downplay its importance and conceal the ways in which power is organized and exerted in Zionist practices. They object to the exclusion of Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews, Diaspora Jews, women and Haredim from the Israeli discourse – an odd complaint considering the scope of writing on all these groups since the 1980s, and the removal of other, no less important, issues from the agenda.

Their pretensions notwithstanding, the post-Zionists are far from shaping a new order. Eyal Naveh holds that post-Zionism developed beyond a new historiographic school or sociological paradigm that criticizes their predecessors. Yet he admits its failure to achieve political or social influence. Naveh regards post-Zionism as a new trend that is trying to reshape Israeli collective memory. This trend has been assisted by a variety of cultural agents and enjoys several mobilized forums from *Haaretz* daily and *Theory and Criticism*, through Israeli television to the Israeli film industry and theatres.

The post-Zionists have built a parallel model to the discrimination paradigm of radical and multicultural American historians and sociologists. Like their American colleagues they depict the suffering of individuals in the past as injustice and emphasize the duty to satisfy the desires of their descendents. The greater the victimization was in the past, the greater the entitlement to compensation in the present or future. Against the American hierarchy of immigrants, Afro-Americans, Native-Americans, women and then other minorities, post-Zionists put forward a hierarchy of

Holocaust survivors, Jews from Islamic countries and Palestinians. In the American prototype, the polarization between the veteran nucleus of Americans and the immigrants became a dichotomy between whites and Hispanics. In the Israeli imitation, the post-Zionists turned the natural tension between veterans and newcomers to Israeli society to a polarization between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews. Slavery, the scholar of American immigration Oscar Handlin reminds, had been an African phenomenon before it was introduced to the New World, and its characteristics were different depending on time and place. Similarly, the social and cultural gaps between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews or between Jews from eastern and western Europe were, at least in part, imported.

The counter-history of victimization and polarization aims to destroy Israeli identity. It does not offer any new or alternative historical explanation. Their original thinking and research harvest are poor. They do invest a great deal of effort in smashing the Israeli collective memory, yet they do not offer a replacement other than the adoption of foreign narratives, primarily Palestinian and feminist, and casting theories deriving from cultural studies and post-colonialist theories on the study of Jewish and Israeli society. The growing number of empirical historical works in those fields which stand as the focus of the polemics demonstrates the complexity of the issues as opposed to the simplistic arguments about complete exclusion of "others", or simply refutes them altogether. Because the primary purpose of post-Zionist writing is ideological and propagandist rather than scientific, they abstain from confronting new research findings and stick to their familiar catchphrases.

Outside Israel, post-Zionists succeeded in arousing enthusiasm among their Jewish and non-Jewish colleagues among the radical left in academia and the media. Their prominence in the media, in addition to their conformity to the prevalent trends in the West, has led many to falsely exaggerate their significance and believe that they represent a central socio-cultural phenomenon in Israel. The post-Zionists do not represent "generations that grew up after

statehood and the day-to-day reality demonstrated to them the weaknesses of Zionism" as described by one American Jewish partisan.³⁸ They are a marginal group in Israeli academia, film and media that make a lot of noise and cause damage abroad, but have very little influence in Israel if any.

A Few Suggestions

The influence of history teachers, curriculums, and textbooks on students' historical awareness is still in need of detailed empirical studies. Works like those of Ruth Firer and Avner Ben-Amos analyze curriculums and the contents of textbooks, but do not evaluate their impact on teachers and students. Hence, the field is open to claims and arguments over the goals of both subject-matter and teaching methods that rely on partial experiments or only on impressions.

Disputes over the past take place primarily within the public school system. They hardly affect schools in the religious public school system, and even less so independent religious schools – those of Shas and Agudat Yisrael. Even within the public education system, attempts to impose a binding agenda and guidelines for history education are met with only partial success. Much depends on school headmasters, and particularly on the history department heads. In middle schools, the freedom of action afforded principals, department heads and teachers is quite broad. In high schools, the contents are dictated by what is to appear on the matriculation exams, and thus they are centrally controlled by the Ministry of Education. However, the modes of teaching, the emphases and the textbooks are determined on a school-by-school level. In the event that a principal is not particularly interested in or familiar with history, the aforementioned tools are selected by the department head or even by the teachers.

Ignorance of the public may be the greatest asset of the post-Zionists. There is no need, reason or ability to return to the fifties in order to provide a Zionist education to school pupils. Schools

struggle to cope with the open world of today in many areas, and history is only one of them. At the same time, it is possible to make a few moves in the education system that may reduce the damage caused by the ignorance and short-sightedness.

The experience of recent years has demonstrated that professors of academia are not necessarily the answer to the troubles of the education system. Teaching problems in the academe differ from those of schools. A good university professor may not be a good high school teacher, and all the more so a good middle or elementary school teacher. In the university, classes are comprised of students who chose to attend, and are relatively free of administrative and disciplinary problems. Lessons last at least ninety minutes, during which the teacher can present a topic and moderate a discussion. School classes, by contrast, are mandatory. Each lesson lasts fifty minutes, half of which are dedicated to making order and solving administrative issues. The level of concentration is lower, and the understanding of the concept of time is different, or occasionally entirely absent. The heterogeneity of the pupils makes it even harder for the teachers.

Professors who chair committees and propose curriculums or courses of action are unfamiliar with the daily struggle of school teachers. The teams that the education ministers of recent decades appointed, from the Zimmerman Committee to the Bartal Committee, not only didn't solve any problem, they added new ones. According to teachers' testimonies, attempts to implement the recommendations caused confusion in classrooms among students as well as instructors. For these reasons, and also for the sake of strengthening the teachers' esprit de core and self esteem, it would be preferable to nominate to future committees senior and experienced teachers, known to be good in their profession, and to recruit them from a variety of schools serving different populations.

The task of planning a proper middle school curriculum does not require a world-renowned expert on German or film history, and not even an expert on folktales or on the relationship between

Eastern European Jews and their surroundings. Innovation is a virtue of the academe (though perhaps an exaggerated one in recent years). Schools should be based on stability, reliability and credibility; not every new research finding or new interpretation must make its way immediately into textbooks and classrooms. They need a period of maturation to prove their credibility, and only then may they be integrated into curriculums and textbooks. In principle, curriculums and textbooks should be based on what is agreed upon by historians rather than reflect their disputes.

A second change should be the re-separation of Jewish from world history in the curriculum. The emphasis should be placed on the former throughout each historical period, with world history studied as a background and context. This reorganization has ramifications also for the training of teachers. Few integrated Jewish history into their world history studies in university or vice versa. The teaching certification programs should include a broader supply of supplementary courses in Jewish history for graduates of world history and the other way around.

This reform must be accompanied by a revision of textbooks. It is impossible to include the 20th century narrative in its entirety in one book that contains both world and Jewish history in less than 200 pages, one quarter of them consisting of visual material to ease the difficulty arising from too much text. This Procrustean bed was one of the reasons for the sharp criticism of textbooks appearing in the late nineties. Even if they were written *bona fide*, it was impossible to include everything, and someone would complain that some subject or another was under-represented. When the book is written from the outset with post-Zionist leanings, as was true with several textbooks at that time, most national or Zionist motives were edited out with the excuse of the necessity of selection.

History, even when referred to as "collective memory", is a discipline of knowledge. In contrast to the social sciences, it cannot be based on experiences. The attempt to make the subject "interesting" and "relevant" by means of techniques borrowed from

the social sciences, such as role-playing games, psychodrama, public debates or trials and time travel, which are all quite tempting and attractive, does not add to historical knowledge or understanding. It is true that we live in an era of ever increasing information, which is accompanied by both relativism and subjectivism, but that does not mean that we must submit to this craze. Not all accumulated information, both historical and other, has equal value. A great deal of it has no value at all. It interests no one except for the creators of this knowledge and some of their colleagues who read their thoughts and comment on them. The venue for these discussions is in academia, not in schools. A curriculum must not only specify headlines, but also subject-matter. It must choose the most important and significant content and take responsibility for its choice without hiding behind slogans such as "narrative equality", presenting the "other", "there is no one truth", etc.

A curriculum must present the few basic concepts that a society wishes to instill in (or teach) its future generation, and not what students (or their parents) wish to acquire (or learn). There will always be discontented teachers, parents and students. Teachers will adapt the curriculum to their personal approach to teaching and to history, and to a certain extent this is legitimate. Certain teachers will always be critical of the curriculum and they have the means at their disposal by which they may and even should be able to partially influence it. Better students will not be satisfied with what their school has to offer and may be directed to additional sources of information beyond the textbook. Other students may have difficulty grasping the basic concepts presented in such a curriculum, but the large majority should fall between these two extremes and should be the target population the curriculum attempts to reach.

¹ Eyal Naveh and Esther Yogev, *Histories: Toward a Dialogue with Yesterday* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv 2002, pp. 47-49.

² For a detailed analysis of these transformation cf. Oz Almog, *Farewell to 'Srulik': a Change of Values in the Israeli Elite* (Hebrew), Haifa 2004.

³ For a discussion of these issues cf. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, 'The Struggle over the Symbols and Limits of Collective Identity in the Post-Revolutionary Israeli Society', in:

Pinchas Genosar and Avi Bareli (eds.), *Zionism: A Contemporary Polemics – Research and Ideological Approaches* (Hebrew), Sde Boker 1996, pp. 1-30.

⁴ Richard Evans, *In Defence of History*, New York 1999, pp. 172-176.

⁵ Shlomo Zand, 'The Post-Zionist as an unauthorized Memory Agent – on the Structures of Past's Production in Israel' (Hebrew), *Alpayim* (24) 2000 229.

⁶ Robert Darnton, 'Intellectual and Cultural History', in Michael Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1980, p. 353.

⁷ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream – The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession*, New York 1988, pp. 574-575; Keith Windschuttle, 'A Critique of the Post-Modern Turn in Western Historiography', in Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers (eds.), *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Rochester 2002, pp. 271-272.

⁸ Rafael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*:, Vol. I, *PaST AND PRESENT IN Contemporary Culture*, London 1994, pp. 12-13

⁹ Marc Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History, Or How the Past Is Taught*, London 1984.

¹⁰ Yosef, *Histories*, pp. 212-233

¹¹ Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History*, New York 1956, p. 4

¹² Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, New York and London 1995, pp. 5-6 and 272ff

¹³ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America*, New York 1992, pp. 45-99.

¹⁴ Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*, New York 1998.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 114-117.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Elizabeth Lasch-Squinn (eds.), *Reconstructing History – The Emergence of a New Historical Society*, New York 1999, pp. 242-252, and John P. Diggins, 'The National History Standards', *ibid*. pp. 253-275 ;Sean Wilentz, 'Battles over History in the Schools', *ibid*. pp. 276-281, and Walter A. McDougall, 'Whose History? Whose Standards?', *ibid*. pp. 282-298

¹⁷ Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg (eds.), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International perspectives*, New York University Press, New York 2000, pp. 2-6

¹⁸ *Ibid*. pp. 19-35, 71.

¹⁹ Naveh, *Histories*, pp. 199-211.

²⁰ Zeev Tzahor, 'History of Israel: Academy and Politics' in Tuvia Friling (ed.), *An Answer to a Post-Zionist Colleague* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv 2003, pp. 69-70.

²¹ Zvi Lamm, 'The Ideological Tensions in Israeli Education – Struggles over the goals of Education', in Chaim Ormian (ed.), *Education in Israel* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1973, p. 82.

²² Naveh, *Histories*, pp. 38-41

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 54-56.

²⁴ Ruth Firer, *Agents of Zionist Education*, Haifa 1985.

²⁵ Israel Kolat, 'On the Research and Researcher of the History of the Yishuv and the Zionist Movement' (Hebrew), *Cathedra*, 1 (1976), pp. 23-25.

²⁶ Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2001, pp. 1-2.

²⁷ Moshe Zimmerman, 'Historians' Controversies –The German and Israeli Experience', *Teoria U-Bikoret*, 8 (Summer 1996), pp. 92–93.

²⁸ *Ibid*. p. 91

²⁹ *Ibid*. pp. 95-100. For another attempt to juxtapose the historians' controversies in Germany and Israel cf. Daniel Levy, 'The Future of the Past: Historiographical Disputes and Competing Memories in Germany and in Israel', *History and Theory* 38 (1), February 1999, pp. 51-66.

³⁰ Evans, *In Defence of History*, pp. 178-181.

³¹ Henri Rousso, *The Haunting past: History, Memory and Justice in Contemporary France*, Philadelphia 2002, pp. 15-16, 29.

³² Peter Seixas, 'Schweigen! Die Kinder! Or, Does Postmodern History Have a Place in the Schools?', in Idem et alia (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History*, pp. 19-37 (esp. p. 31.)

³³ Laurence Silberstein, *The Postzionist Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture*, New York 1999, pp. 8-10.

³⁴ Sami Samocha, 'Transformations in Israeli Society: After Fifty Years (Hebrew)', *Alpayim* (1999), p. 249.

³⁶ Michael Shalev, 'Time for Theory' (Hebrew), *Teoria U-Bikoret* 8 (1996), pp. 225-237.

³⁷ Ilan Pappé, 'The New History of 1948' (Hebrew), *Teoria U-Bikoret* 3 (Winter 1993), pp. 101-102.

³⁸ Silberstein, *The Postzionist Debates*, p. 5.