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The "New Historians" and the Establishment of Israel

Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987. xx + 380 pp.

Ian Pappé, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–1951*. London: Macmillan, 1988. xxi + 273 pp.

Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. x + 676 pp.

The trouble with revisionist historians is that only too often they attempt to read history backwards. Occasionally, as in the present instance, they seek to read the present into the past. They thus attribute present difficulties to the mistakes of an earlier day and assume that recognition of past error will summarily provide the key to solving current problems. Revisionism, however, can be wrong on two counts. For one thing, history evolves forwards not backwards, and putting the clock back does not alter the facts or necessarily furnish a solution. Events in the interim may make earlier errors, if such they were, completely irrelevant to resolving current difficulties. Furthermore, and this is crucial, the revisionist assessment of past mistakes may itself be flawed. Even in the light of newer and more complete documentation than was previously available, it may emerge that there is no basis for revising history, except in the minds of the revisionists themselves.

These thoughts are brought to mind by the three books reviewed here. At least two of them, the works of Shlaim and Morris, are outright revisionist. Shlaim candidly states that his is "a revisionist history which differs very sharply, and on many important points, from the pro-Zionist as well as the pro-Arab histories on this subject" (p. viii). Morris does not reveal his revisionist bent in as categorical a manner. However, in a series of articles that have followed the publication of his book, he has described his work as being one of the "new" histories that "significantly undermine, if not thoroughly demolish, a variety of assumptions that helped form the core of the old history" dealing with the Arab-Israeli dispute (*Tikkun*, November/December 1988, p. 21). Morris's polemical writings on the subject have provoked a vigorous reaction (led especially by Shabtai Tevet, biographer of Moshe Dayan and Ben-Gurion), and the result has been a vast new literature assessing Israel's role in the origins and durability of the Palestinian problem. To be more specific, the thrust of the revisionist thesis is that this problem—in all its current intensity and dimensions—is a product of deliberate and misguided Israeli

actions and that the sons of Israel today are suffering from the sins of their fathers at the time of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. In short, the Palestinian problem is peculiarly a consequence of Israeli commission or omission. Nothing else, it would appear, contributed to the tragedy of the Palestinians as much as Israeli malfeasance. Palestinian homelessness, Palestinian statelessness, the Palestinian refugee problem, and, implicitly, even Palestinian terror, including the *intifada*—all are to be laid at Israel's doorstep.

This is not a new thesis. It is, in fact, a thesis that has been propagated by the Palestinians and the Arab world ever since the Palestinian problem arose. What is new is that historians, ostensibly objective, interpret the facts on the basis of recently opened archival materials, and reach similar conclusions. The charges are serious and the analyses that lead to these charges warrant careful scrutiny to determine whether they are borne out by the written record or whether they are not merely a reflection of the writer's predilections. Is there more assertion than fact in the charges leveled against Israel?

Before proceeding to examine the case for the revisionist thesis and the strength of the evidence adduced, it is appropriate to comment on an underlying assumption of the thesis: that if the U.N. partition plan of 1947 had been implemented as originally envisioned, peace and tranquility would now reign in the Holy Land. This is a facile belief, itself dependent on a further crucial premise, that the Palestinian Arabs would have been content with a part of Palestine and would have foresworn hostility both to the Jewish state and an internationalized Jerusalem, as prescribed by the partition resolution. In the event, of course, neither the Palestinian Arabs nor the neighboring Arab states were ready to tolerate the emergence of either entity in 1948, and the hostility manifested then has not waned over the years. Indeed, it has only waxed stronger as revealed by the text of the so-called Palestinian Declaration of Independence announced in Algiers in November 1988, which is little less than a summons to arms against Israel. Regardless, then, of the strength of the evidence regarding Israeli complicity in the plight of the Palestinians, any assessment that assumes a rosy outcome in the absence of this alleged "complicity" seems quite misplaced or, at least, highly speculative.

Shlaim and Morris, respectively, deal with the central facets of the Palestinian problem—the failure of the Palestinians to attain statehood in 1948 and the creation of the refugee problem in the same year. Pappé, on the other hand, focuses on these two issues from the perspective of British policy in the period 1948–1951. All three authors draw heavily on original material in British, American and Israeli archives. (References to Arab sources are, of course, notably absent, and this, in itself, raises serious questions about their conclusions.) The factual material assembled in these three works handsomely enriches our knowledge of the factors that operated in the formative years of the Arab-Israeli dispute. The books are veritable treasure houses of information about the events that transpired and the personalities involved. Morris and Shlaim both write in a superb style and their accounts are fascinating, if disturbing. Moreover, the printed page in each case is a pleasure to peruse. Unfortunately, the Macmillan Press was not as kind to Pappé. Although his study also contains keen insights, it unfortunately suffers from a lack of careful editing. More editorial attention would have improved the work considerably. Further, the lack of

a running head for the Notes to identify the pages in the text to which they relate is most frustrating. Macmillan, with just a little more investment, could have produced a far more attractive volume.

Shlaim states his thesis on the very first page of his magnum opus. In 1947, "clandestine diplomacy" between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Zionist Yishuv produced "an explicit agreement" to divide Palestine between themselves and thus frustrate the emergence of an independent Arab state in Palestine. This "explicit agreement," which was ostensibly sealed at the secret meeting of November 1947 between King Abdullah and Golda Meir, "laid the foundation for mutual restraint during 1948" in the military sphere "and for continuing collaboration in the aftermath of the war." Thus, Palestine would be partitioned, but not as envisaged in the U.N. partition resolution. A Jewish state would emerge; and Transjordan would expand to include the area assigned for the creation of a local Arab state. This "unholy alliance" (p. 121) between Amman and Tel-Aviv represents the "collusion across the Jordan" in Shlaim's title.

A further "accomplice" to the "crime" was Great Britain, which encouraged Abdullah to enlarge his kingdom by gaining control of the West Bank and by ultimately annexing it to his territory. The alternative of an Arab state in part of Palestine headed by its archenemy, Haj Amin Al-Husayni, the former mufti of Jerusalem and collaborator with Nazi Germany, it was believed, would threaten all British interests in the Middle East. Such a state would forever remain unstable and would endanger Britain's most reliable ally in the region, Transjordan. Abdullah's annexation of the West Bank was, thus, a convenient way of strengthening Transjordan and forestalling the rise of a troublesome entity in the area.

But the key focus of Shlaim's charge is the imperialist nature of the two conspirators: King Abdullah and the Zionist movement. From the very beginning, each entertained expansionist designs. In 1897, when Herzl at Basel proclaimed the Zionist goal of a Jewish state, Palestine was inhabited by half a million Arabs and some 50,000 Jews. "But in keeping with the spirit of the age of European imperialism, the Jews did not allow these local realities to stand in the way of their own national aspirations" (p. 2). According to Shlaim, "[in a sense] violence was implicit in Zionism from the start" (p. 10). In this connection, he quotes the extremely anti-Zionist book by David Hirst according to which "in any true historical perspective the Zionists were the original aggressors in the Middle East, the real pioneers of violence, and the Arab violence, however cruel and fanatical it might eventually become, was an inevitable reaction to theirs." Thus, Zionism, from its very birth, was tainted by sin in Shlaim's opinion.

And Abdullah, although his birth was hardly a sinful event, was guilty of pursuing his own ambitious dream of reestablishing a Hashemite Empire in the Fertile Crescent. Mindful of the tragic loss that his father had endured in the Arabian Peninsula when he was defeated by Ibn Saud, Abdullah was intent on reviving the glory of the past by gaining control of the area of Syria, Transjordan and Palestine. This fantasy led him not only to conspire with the Jews, but to actually "weaken" the Arab front by restraining his forces in the confrontation with the Zionist enemy. According to Shlaim this "played a major part in the eventual loss of Palestine" (p. 2). Abdullah held clandestine meetings with Zionist leaders even before and during

the Second World War. He saw in them a vital force that could help him consolidate his kingdom throughout Greater Syria. His respect for Jewish enterprise, Jewish money and Jewish military prowess induced him to seek an accommodation with the Zionists and to enlist them as an ally in the pursuit of his ambitions. This was the basis of the conspiracy, of the collusion, that would allow each of the two parties to realize its own territorial goal at the expense of Palestinian statehood.

Several points need to be noted before analyzing the substance of the "conspiracy." Shlaim's account of the rise of Zionism reveals little or no appreciation of the key motive inspiring the Zionist enterprise—the desire to resolve the problem of Jewish homelessness, which had led to countless centuries of persecution and suffering at the hands of Christian and Moslem nations and had culminated in the horrors of the Holocaust. Even before that cataclysmic event, the international community of states, recognizing its own complicity in the age-old Jewish problem, had acknowledged the need for a political solution and had therefore confirmed the Balfour Declaration. The claim of the Jewish people to their ancestral home—which had largely lain waste for centuries—was thus given international sanction. The events of 1939–1945 added a note of urgency to the entire debate and spotlighted the magnitude of the crime committed against the Jewish people by Britain when, capitulating to Arab threats, it slammed shut the doors of Mandatory Palestine in the face of the Jewish masses fleeing Hitler's gas chambers. International endorsement of the Jewish claim to its ancestral home was now reconfirmed by the U.N. partition resolution. This critical background is sadly missing from the Shlaim account, which barely notes the Holocaust or its impact upon Jewish consciousness or upon the consciousness of the international community.

Another item that Shlaim (and Morris) blithely pass over is the enormous cost to the Yishuv of Israel's War of Independence. This first round of the Arab–Israeli dispute resulted in 6,000 deaths (not casualties, as Shlaim would have it). Which means that, on top of the frightful cost of the Holocaust, the Jewish people lost fully one percent of its 600,000 population in Mandatory Palestine. It is worth recalling that neither Britain nor the United States came close to losing that percentage of its population in the Second World War. Only Russian losses in that conflict stand comparison. The enormity of the cost to Israel is a factor to be taken into account with regard both to the savagery of the conflict and to Israel's determination to ensure for itself defensible borders that would make it less vulnerable to Arab aggression in the future.

In this connection, it should be noted that a considerable portion of the losses were sustained in clashes with the Transjordanian Arab Legion, in particular in the environs of Jerusalem. To this day, Jerusalemites relate accounts of the battles in which they participated while repelling the Legion's attacks on the city. It is well known that a Transjordanian tank attack was halted only at the very edge of the Israeli-held western sector of Jerusalem. Only the resolute defense of the city by the Israeli forces prevented its conquest by Abdullah's Legion. The Israeli-held half of Jerusalem was under siege from the Arab Legion for months. There were daily civilian casualties as a result of the bombardments and sniper fire that rained in indiscriminately from east Jerusalem. Food and water were strictly rationed because the Legion, supported by Palestinian irregulars, ambushed every convoy on its way

up to Jerusalem. Privation and suffering were the lot of fighters and civilians alike until a side road was laboriously constructed through the mountainous approaches to the city. Residents of Jerusalem will be astonished to learn that they had endured the torment of shellfire and severe scarcity during a period of phony war.

It is, thus, of little wonder that Yigael Yadin, chief of staff of the Israeli army, subsequently denied that Ben-Gurion's actions in the War of Independence had in any way been guided by a hidden agreement with Abdullah to exercise mutual restraint. Ben-Gurion's repeated attempts to dislodge the Arab Legion from Latrun confirm how remote any thought of such an "agreement" was from his mind. Likewise, his proposal to the cabinet in August–September 1948 to drive the legion back over the river Jordan and to occupy the entire West Bank, together with east Jerusalem, completely undermines the "conspiracy" thesis. (His proposal was rejected by the Israeli cabinet, to Ben-Gurion's dire regret.) The fact is that Abdullah and Golda Meir never did achieve an agreement, and Abdullah made it quite clear that the die was cast for war. Significantly enough, Shlaim omits the text of any Abdullah–Meir agreement from the collection of documents in the appendixes. There simply was none. These circumstances establish quite clearly that the collusion in the title is a misnomer.

But what is particularly surprising is that the author himself acknowledges as much. It is worth quoting Shlaim at length because, in this extract, he categorically rejects the allegation of "collusion" between Ben-Gurion and Abdullah:

There was no collusion between the socialist leader and the feudal warlord: the contact was severed in May and it was not renewed until four months later. Hence, the most that can be claimed is that during the latter part of this period there was a tacit understanding between the two rulers to avert a major collision between their armed forces. This tacit understanding was based on perceived interests that the two had in common and which neither shared with their Arab partners-opponents. And it was this perceived interdependence or overlap of interests that led each ruler independently to exercise a measure of self-restraint in relation to the other.

The distinction is not purely semantic. "Collusion" presupposes a direct and explicit agreement and it carries the connotation of a shabby and secret deal. "Tacit understanding," on the other hand, can issue from mutual mind reading, leading to awareness that cooperation between adversaries can work to their mutual advantage but without any direct contact or explicitly formulated plan of action. The difference between the two is small but significant. For if there had been collusion between the Zionist leader and the Hashemite monarch, how is one to account for the fierce fighting that took place between their respective armies in the central front? Surely the whole point about collusion is that it enables politicians to avert a head-on clash and limit the bloodshed. A tacit understanding, by contrast, is much more vulnerable to miscalculation by the policymakers and confusion on the part of their subordinates (p. 235).

On the same page, Shlaim also quotes, approvingly, Yigael Yadin's dismissal of collusion as a myth.

Given this frank acknowledgement that there was no collusion between Abdullah and the Zionists, how is one to explain the choice of title and the manner in which Shlaim presents his key thesis at the beginning of his book? It is difficult to understand what possible purpose all this can serve unless it is to tarnish Israel's

name by attributing the failure to establish a Palestinian state in 1948 to Jewish machinations interacting with the vile ambitions of a devious Arab monarch.

But the fact is that the Yishuv never conspired to deprive anyone of statehood. The Yishuv only conspired to establish a Jewish state in peace. It endeavored at all costs to avoid the horrors of war and had no desire to interfere in the fate of the Arab sector of Palestine or the proposed Arab state so long as those in charge were ready to tolerate the establishment of a Jewish state.

If the mufti had proclaimed that he had no claims on the area allotted the Jewish state, no doubt the Yishuv would have collaborated with him in a peaceful implementation of the partition plan. But on the morrow of the General Assembly vote of November 29, 1947, Arab bands began to prey on Jewish property, Jewish lives and Jewish interests. The mufti proclaimed a fight to the finish and not only mobilized his own Palestinian forces but summoned the neighboring Arab states to dispatch their armies into Palestine to destroy the nascent Jewish state. The mufti and his followers were not geared to establish an Arab state in all of Palestine, or even in part of it, and they were not prepared to countenance a Jewish state at all. Under such circumstances, how can it be said that it was the Yishuv that aborted the birth of an Arab state? The Palestinians themselves, in 1948, forestalled the birth of their own state, vacating the front to the neighboring Arab states, and, above all, to Transjordan. Their hostility to a Jewish state was so complete that they drowned their own national ambitions in the flood of aggression that they unleashed against the Jewish state. The Palestinian leaders thereby decreed the fate of the Arab sector, propelling it in a spirit of blind hatred into a war that would bring in its wake destruction, desolation and diaspora.

Recognition that war has consequences brings us to a consideration of Morris's book, which again seeks to pin the blame upon the Jews and upon Israel—this time for the tragedy of the Palestinian refugee problem. According to Morris, although there was no premeditated or systematic scheme to expel Arabs, Israeli army commanders, especially in the later stages of the war, took action that promoted a mass exodus of the Arabs from the areas in which they resided.

Before considering the strength of his evidence and whether Israel was indeed a primary factor in producing the flight of the Palestinians, it is again important to stress that in considering this problem it is impossible to overlook the responsibility of the Palestinian leadership for the outbreak of hostilities and for the consequences that flowed from it. War has consequences, and if the initiation of belligerence is a criminal act, as the Nuremberg trials confirmed, then that leadership stands convicted of causing its tragic outcome. Morris fails to take sufficient account of this basic fact in attributing the blame for the creation of the refugee problem.

But Morris himself is led to conclude that "the Palestinian refugee problem was born of war, not by design, Jewish or Arab" (p. 286). Israel, he agrees, did not initiate, plan or foment the flight of the Arabs. Numerous factors were at work, not least "the major structural weaknesses of Palestinian Arab society" (p. 286) and the Arab fear "that the Jews, if victorious, would do to them what, in the reverse circumstances, victorious Arab fighters would have done (and did occasionally, as in the Etzion bloc in May) to defeated Jews" (p. 288). These underlying conditions produced a "psychosis of flight" that led to a mass stampede.

Early Israeli reaction was to attempt to stem the flight. Only afterward, when the conflict expanded with the intervention of the Arab states, did security considerations sometimes lead to a change in Israeli tactics. As the front line between Jews and Arabs moved forward, steps were taken to ensure that the local populace not serve the enemy as an outpost of resistance behind the Israeli lines. "Cleansing the territory" became the only means of fighting a sustained war with five Arab armies. Thus, the very nature of the conflict brought in its wake a policy of banishment. The Arabs first fled spontaneously. Their flight was subsequently also prompted by the Israeli forces acting out of security considerations. As the conflict grew in viciousness and in expanse, nationalist motives also became a factor. If the Arabs were, indeed, the enemy in the full sense of the word, then there was no place for large numbers of them in the Jewish state. Their very aggression had produced a situation in which their ability to remain in a Jewish state as loyal citizens was no longer tenable. Morris fails to appreciate that the progressive stages of the Arab flight followed automatically from the nature of the war that the Palestinian leaders and the Arab states unleashed against the Jewish state. In this case, attribution of fault, like charity, begins at home.

Morris dismisses as a myth the popular claim that Palestinians were exhorted in radio broadcasts from the Arab Higher Committee (in Palestine) and the Arab states to evacuate their homes until the battle was over (pp. 129, 290, but cf. pp. 59, 66 and 84). He claims to have examined all the records of contemporary Arab broadcasts that were monitored and to have found no sign that the Palestinians were urged to flee (see especially his article in *Tikkun*, p. 99). And, very possibly, there is no such mention in the monitored broadcasts. However, the fact remains that the Arab refugees themselves *did believe* that they were advised to leave and *acted* upon that advice. This is made evident by contemporary reports from British diplomats who met with the refugees. Thus, a visit to Gaza by one such diplomat produced the following comment, "But while they express no bitterness against the Jews . . . they speak with the utmost bitterness of the Egyptians and other Arab states. 'We know who our enemies are,' they will say and they are referring to their Arab brothers who, they declare, persuaded them unnecessarily to leave their homes" (FO 371/75342/XC/A/4991).

Alongside the above quotation a Foreign Office official penned a query: "Did they?" This brief comment only highlights the fact that it is largely immaterial if the Arab states did or did not actually encourage evacuation. What is important is that the refugees acted in accordance with such a belief and subsequently felt extremely bitter for having acted on the basis of what they regarded as bad advice.

Morris's book, as the title denotes, focuses upon the *origins* of the Arab refugee problem. However, the political importance of that problem lies in the fact that, even today, more than forty years later, it has still not been resolved. The question arises: Were any opportunities missed in the first few years after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 of finding a solution to the refugee problem and of bringing about a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute? Each of the books under review addresses this problem. Once again, Israel finds itself placed in the dock, this time to be charged with sabotaging, or at least with willfully squandering, the opportunities to resolve the key issues in the dispute.

Thus Shlaim, in reviewing Israel's endeavors to reach an agreement with Egypt at Lausanne in 1949, is led to conclude that Israel was not flexible enough. The Egyptians were represented by Abdel Monem Mostafa; Israel was represented by Eliahu Sasson and Reuven Shiloah. Shlaim sums up the negotiations:

What Mostafa's lecture to Sasson and Shiloah showed, and in this respect there was no fundamental difference between Egypt and the other Arab states, was that in 1949 the Arabs did recognize Israel's right to exist, they were willing to meet face to face to negotiate peace, they had their conditions for making peace with Israel, and Israel rejected those conditions because they were incompatible not with her survival as an independent state but with her determination to keep all the territory she held and to resist the repatriation of the refugees (p. 488).

It is not difficult to refute this charge. Once again Shlaim himself, as with the charge of collusion, demonstrates that it is baseless. Just a few pages before the above quotation he notes that "the Israelis were outraged to discover the full extent of Egypt's territorial claims in Palestine, not least in view of the repeated public declarations that Egypt had no territorial ambitions of her own in Palestine and had only intervened to uphold the rights of the Palestinian Arabs" (p. 485). What were the Egyptians asking for? Merely "to hold on to the Gaza Strip, to extend the area of the strip in the south and in the north, to extend Egypt's border to the Dead Sea in a line that would include Majdal and Beersheba, and to attach to Egypt the southern Negev" (p. 486). The spirit underlying these demands was revealed by Mostafa in a talk with the Americans when he indicated that "in order to regain the confidence of the Arab world and bring lasting stability to the Middle East, America had to ensure that the state of Israel would not be large, nor powerful, nor overpopulated with Jews." Egypt, he explained "would not feel secure if on her border in the Negev there were to be three or four million Jews, all educated, all enterprising, all imbued with the spirit of self-sacrifice" (p. 487).

Thus Shlaim himself documents the fact that the Arab states were ready to recognize Israel only if it would consent to shrink to a minstate by awarding them territory in return for their belligerency in a land where they had no claims or title. Israel was asked to surrender the Negev, its access to the Gulf of Eilat, and its riparian rights on the Dead Sea in order to satisfy the avaricious appetite of its belligerent neighbors. The parable of the fox and the lamb comes readily to mind. The minstate that the Arabs sought for Israel would have been hopelessly vulnerable in later rounds of the protracted Arab-Israeli dispute. Arab demands for territory at the expense of the diminutive area awarded Israel under the partition plan and their obstinate insistence on the return of *all* the refugees reveal the full extent of Arab designs against Israel and their resolve to annihilate it at the first opportunity.

It is likewise baseless to charge Israel with responsibility for the failure of negotiations to conclude a Jordanian-Israeli nonaggression pact in 1950 or for the failure of a Palestinian state to emerge in the West Bank in 1949-1950. Shlaim himself shows that Israel went to extraordinary lengths to facilitate the conclusion of the nonaggression pact, but that its efforts were frustrated by internal opposition within the Hashemite state and by external opposition to Jordan's policies from the Arab states. King Abdullah was compelled to beat a retreat at the last moment (pp.

540–549). And the Palestinian option, as Shlaim himself makes clear, was a mirage from the start:

On their own, in the aftermath of the Palestine disaster, the Palestinians could not create a viable state, let alone an independent state. Only in cooperation with Israel and, in the final analysis, only if Israel were prepared to use her own army to expel the Arab Legion from the West Bank could such a state be formed, but then it could have been nothing more than a satellite. (p. 509)

As Pappé correctly points out:

It is noteworthy that no one talked about the Palestinian problem at that time (1948–51). There was a clear distinction between the question of Palestine's future, namely, the territorial problem as well as the question of sovereignty, and the question of the refugees' future, that is the humanitarian aspect of the problem. The main implication of such an approach was that the Palestinians were not regarded as a nation or as a people who could constitute a side in this dispute. The main reason for this approach was the attitude of the parties involved in the conflict towards the concept of an independent Palestinian state alongside a Jewish state. Such a state as offered by the UN resolution of November 1947 had been ruled out by all the parties prior to the war in Palestine. Most of the Arab states and the Arab Palestinians demanded a unitary state in Palestine, whereas Transjordan, with the consent of the British and the Jewish Agency, contemplated the annexation of the areas allotted to the Arab Palestinians in that resolution. During the bilateral and multilateral negotiations which followed the Palestine war, the Arab governments tended to accept the principle of partition without recognising the Jewish state. In fact, each Arab country suspected the other of conspiring to annex the territories allotted to the Palestinians (pp. 74–75).

And as for resolving the refugee problem, it is quite clear, as Morris amply demonstrates, that the Arab states were not intent on finding a solution to the problem. They preferred to preserve the issue intact—with all its poignancy, tragedy and festering animosity—as a potent weapon in their campaign to destroy Israel. Israel was in a catch-22 situation. It could not accept the refugees back en masse without destroying itself demographically as a Jewish state. And yet it could never prevail on the Arab states to adopt resettlement in Arab lands rather than repatriation to Israel as their basic guideline. Thus, Israel was simply not in a position to influence Arab policy. It could not accept the refugees nor could it cede territory without endangering itself.

Manifestly, the Arab refugee problem could only be resolved if it were treated as a case of population exchange. Such exchanges had taken place on numerous occasions in the aftermath of the First and Second World Wars. The Arab–Israeli conflict of 1948 was a subsequent outcome of those two conflicts and the population movements that followed the Palestine war could have been treated in accordance with accepted procedures. This, indeed, is how British diplomats in the Middle East viewed the development, as contemporary documents demonstrate. These diplomats, including the consul in Jerusalem, Sir Hugh Dow, the ambassador to Amman, Sir Alec Kirkbride, and the ambassador to Lebanon, Mr. Houghton-Boswell, referred to the Arab flight as the “silver lining” on the dark clouds of war. The demographic imbalance would willy-nilly be improved. (It is a pity that Morris does not quote them at length.)

But fecklessly, the British and American governments failed to press for a program of resettlement. As Pappé says, the problem was treated as one “which called for temporary relief rather than an overall solution” (p. 212). Failure to provide permanent homes and gainful employment fostered the growth of a ruthless terrorist movement. The refugee problem, as noted earlier, was a tragic consequence of Arab aggression. Israel could not be blamed for adhering to a policy on this question, as on the territorial question, which was designed to forestall future Arab attempts to eliminate the Jewish state.

It is self-evident, then, that Israel was not remiss in 1948 in pursuing policies, both externally and internally, that maximized its ability to survive as an independent sovereign Jewish state. It owes nobody an apology for surviving. It has a claim on the land as of right and not by sufferance. It would have been entitled to employ whatever tricks were at its disposal to defeat its enemies, who were sworn to destroy it. In fact, though, not tricks but hard-won battles, fought at enormous cost, enabled it to prevail and to preserve its Jewish identity. In the wake of the war and the undiminished Arab resolve to destroy the Jewish state, Israel was not only entitled, but compelled, to take steps that would deter future Arab aggression.

In light of the foregoing, one can only ask, in all fairness, what do the revisionist historians want? It has been amply demonstrated, as Shlaim himself says, that there was no collusion; as Morris acknowledges, there was no preconceived plan to expel Arabs; as Pappé agrees, there was no plan to forestall the emergence of a Palestinian state. If all this is true, then what is the aim of the “new historians”? What have they added to our knowledge? The answer, it appears, is that modern Israel, willy-nilly, was born in sin. The Christian notion of “original sin” is stamped on the state of Israel like the mark of Cain, never to be erased. But even if the charge were true, of what significance is all this? Surely many states, such as the United States itself, with its imperial policy of Manifest Destiny, were born in sin, yet this does not mark them for eternity. The answer is supplied by Morris when he questions Israel's claim to an “untarnished image” (p. 1). He elaborates on this point in his article in *Tikkun*:

If Israel, the haven of a much-persecuted people, was born pure and innocent, then it was worthy of the grace, material assistance, and political support showered upon it by the West over the past forty years—and worthy of more of the same in years to come. If, on the other hand, Israel was born tarnished, besmirched by original sin, then it was not more deserving of that grace and assistance than were its neighbors.

Here Morris reveals himself not as a historian but as a polemicist, as one who has an axe to grind. If he had contented himself with writing history by recounting the facts and analyzing them, his stand would have been dignified and his conclusions would command respect. But when a writer candidly reveals that the “original sin” that he and his colleagues have discovered is a reason to cut Israel down to size today, to cease treating it as something special, to reduce financial and political support for the country, then one sees a strange motive inspiring the writing of this “new history.” The aim, quite clearly, is to attribute blame for the plight of the Palestinians—their refugee status and their failure to attain statehood—to Israeli malfeasance in 1948, and to suggest that the wrongs of 1948 can be rectified in 1990

by restoring to the Palestinians today their robbed nationhood. This, supposedly, requires a more “even-handed” approach by the international community of states, and especially by the United States. This is the thrust of the approach of the “new historians.”

But if this policy goal is their proclaimed aim, then their historiography is, at best, suspect. There is a clear measure of a priori thinking in their research and writing. Finally, and more important, as they themselves demonstrate, the charges against Israel are quite unsupported by the evidence. This only leaves us with something of a mystery. Why do gifted historians engage in such a disjointed form of writing or, at the least, a disjointed manner of drawing conclusions?

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