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A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples By llan Pappe (Cambridge University Press, 333 pp., \$22) Click here to purchase the book.

lan Pappe and I walked a stretch together in uneasy companionship, but we have now parted ways. In the late 1980s and early 1990s we belonged to a group dubbed the "New Historians" of Israel, which also included Avi Shlaim and Tom Segev. This group, contrary to the conspiratorial image projected by our critics, was never a close-knit or monolithic school of intellectuals who plotted together around the table at Friday-night meals. Some of us barely knew one another. Each, in different institutions and different cities and different countries (indeed, only Pappe was on the faculty of an Israeli university), had plied his craft alone and reached his conclusions on his own. But we had all written histories focusing on Israel and Palestine in the 1940s, and they had all appeared, mostly in English, in the late 1980s, and taken together they had shaken the Zionist historiographic establishment and permanently undermined the traditional Zionist narrative of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

In some measure, our histories also undermined the traditional Arab narratives of the conflict (as in my book *The* Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949, which argued that there had been no Zionist master plan of expulsion and that no systematic policy of expulsion was implemented in 1948). But the thrust of the "New Historiography" was that the century-old conflict was not a straightforward clash between good and evil, that it could not be properly understood in black-and-white terms. Both sides, it was implied if not argued explicitly, had strong claims, and both sides had just grievances. The documentation released in American, British, U.N., and (principally) Israeli archives in the 1980s showed that the Zionist side was not blameless in the conflict, and had sometimes made wrong decisions and indulged in policies and practices that were morally dubious if not downright unethical.

But that was the limit of our consensus. Propagandistic or official historians usually sound the same happy note, and for



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the same reasons; but dissenting historians usually are polyphonic, and the relationships among them are often troubled, if not flatly unhappy. In the case of Pappe and myself, there was always methodological discord. We both knew that official Zionist historiography was deeply flawed and needed to be reassessed and rewritten on the basis of the evidence that had become available; but we approached history, and the writing of history, from antithetical standpoints. Pappe regarded history through the prism of contemporary politics and consciously wrote history with an eye to serving political ends. My own view was that while historians, as citizens, had political views and aims, their scholarly task was to try to arrive at the truth about a historical event or process, to illuminate the past as objectively and accurately as possible. I believed, and still believe, that there is such a thing as historical truth; that it exists independently of, and can be detached from, the subjectivities of scholars; that it is the historian's duty to try to reach it by using as many and as varied sources as he can. When writing history, the historian should ignore contemporary politics and struggle against his political inclinations as he tries to penetrate the murk of the past. Pappe--and, implicitly, my Zionist critics such as Anita Shapira and Shabtai Teveth--have argued that no one is capable of abandoning his educational, ideological, and political baggage, and that I, too, have been motivated, consciously or subconsciously, by my politics and have reflected (according to Pappe) my solid Zionist convictions or (according to the establishment Zionists) my solid anti-Zionist convictions.

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rom the first Pappe allowed his politics to hold sway over his history. Initially he was rather restrained. His first book, Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-51, published in 1988, was bland and flat in tone. Perhaps this was due to its origins as a doctoral dissertation; perhaps there were other reasons. In any event, the book avoided blunt iconoclasm, and its innovations are extremely hesitant (unlike Avi Shlaim in his Collusion Across the Jordan, published the same year, where it was trenchantly argued that the Yishuv--the Jewish community in Palestine--and the Hashemite rulers of Jordan had colluded to limit their war in 1948 and to nip in the bud the emergence of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, as endorsed by the U.N. partition resolution of November 1947). In his second book, The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951, which appeared in 1992, Pappe allowed his politics more leeway, and they are apparent in his descriptions and in his interpretations; but here, too, there is an effort toward objectivity and accuracy.

In both books Pappe in effect tells his readers: "This is what happened." This is strange, because it directly conflicts with a second major element in his historiographical outlook. Pappe is a proud postmodernist. He believes that there is no such thing as historical truth, only a collection of narratives as numerous as the participants in any given event or

process; and each narrative, each perspective, is as valid and legitimate, as true, as the next. Moreover, every narrative is inherently political and, consciously or not, serves political ends. Each historian is justified in shaping his narrative to promote particular political purposes. Shlomo Aronson, an Israeli political scientist, years ago confronted Pappe with the ultimate problem regarding historical relativism: if all narratives are equally legitimate and there is no historical truth, then the narrative of Holocaust deniers is as valid as that of Holocaust affirmers. Pappe did not offer a persuasive answer, beyond asserting lamely that there exists a large body of indisputable oral testimony affirming that the Holocaust took place.

This broaches the third element in Pappe's historiographical approach: his faith that oral testimony is valuable and valid, and that historians should base their narratives also on the testimony and the memory of witnesses, even decades after the event. But in his new book, as in his previous books, Pappe makes no use at all--or almost no use--of oral testimony, basing his work on primary and secondary written sources. Perhaps he does not really believe in the value of oral history; or perhaps he found the work involved too stressful and time-consuming. In any event, *A History of Modern Palestine* makes no use of oral sources.

My own view is that the historian must base his work on primary written sources, that is, on contemporaneous documents, and must be exceedingly wary of oral history, especially when the events that are being remembered are morally sensitive and politically charged, and occurred many years ago. In the absence of contemporary documents, the historian may occasionally draw upon oral testimony for "color" or a sense of atmosphere, but never to reconstruct what actually happened.

Since so much of the debate about the New Historians is political, I should add that Pappe and I differ not only in our methods but also in our politics. We are both men of the left; but whereas since the late 1960s I have consistently voted Labor or Meretz (a Zionist party to the left of Labor), Pappe, so far as I know, has always voted the Israel Communist Party ticket (under its different names) and has figured repeatedly in the party's list of Knesset candidates. During the past few years Pappe has veered even further leftward. Although his party still advocates a two-state solution, Pappe, like his mentor Edward Said, believes that the only solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is a single bi-national state in all of Palestine. (I shall return to this theme.)

So, as I say, Pappe and I always were uncomfortable companions in our historical travels. The outbreak, at the end of September 2000, of the current intifada, which I regard as a Palestinian rebellion against the occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip *and* as a political-terroristic assault on Israel's existence (and also as an offshoot of

fundamentalist Islam's ongoing assault on the West, in which Israel, unfortunately, figures as a front-line outpost), has, like a giant centrifuge, sent the New Historians spinning toward opposite corners of the political universe. It has separated the anti-Zionist goats from the Zionist sheep, and has accentuated their goatish and sheepish natures. By now it would not be incorrect to call Pappe, as well as Shlaim, an anti-Zionist.

Shlaim's The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World, which was published five years ago, is highly critical of the Zionist movement and Israel. Since the start of the current intifada, he has moved steadily to the left--or is it, really, to the right? After all, he shares his anti-Israeli analysis with European neo-fascists and the Islamic jihadists, who openly advocate Israel's destruction in the name of medieval religious values. In an op-ed in the International Herald Tribune, Shlaim recently identified with the anti-Semitic British official James Troutbeck, who in June, 1948 described the emergent state of Israel--the one that had just been assaulted by a bevy of Arab states, in defiance of the United Nations Partition Resolution of November, 1947--as a gangster state headed by "an utterly unscrupulous set of leaders." "Today," Shlaim continued, "a similar sense of moral outrage is felt toward the rightist government of Ariel Sharon by people throughout the world."

As for Pappe, the outbreak of the Palestinian revolt has thrust him into academic and political prominence as one of the most outspoken Israeli advocates of a Western boycott of Israel's universities. During the past three years, many pro-Palestinian academics in the West have campaigned (not very successfully) to persuade their universities to cut off contact with their Israeli counterparts and to block research and investment funds from reaching Israel's universities; academic journals have refused to consider or to publish papers by Israelis; a handful of academics have refused to supervise Israeli postgraduate students; and scholars, such as Eugene Rogan, head of the Middle East Centre at Oxford's St. Antony's College, have refused to give lectures in a country governed by Ariel Sharon (presumably they would give lectures in countries run by the likes of Bashar al-Assad and the Ayatollah Khamenei). Pappe has been at the forefront of this effort. It is worth noting that he has not declined to receive wages from a university subsidized by the government whose policies he finds so repulsive. It is also worth noting--here Pappe's logic becomes as flawed as his ethics--that Israel's academic community, the one that has been boycotted by "progressives" in the West, has been in the vanguard of the struggle within Israel to recognize the Palestinians and to reach a political compromise. Israel's universities, as Prime Minister Sharon and Education Minister Limor Livnat regularly recognize, are a mainstay of the Israeli left--and none more so than Haifa University, Pappe's own institution, which has the highest proportion of Arab staff and students (the latter about 20 percent) in Israel.

Next: A History of Modern Palestine is a milestone in his evolution as an historian.

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