

Memories, Myths and Misconceptions: An Analysis of Dominant
Zionist Narratives Formalized in the Israeli *Declaration of Independence*

by

Tara Douglas
BA, University of Victoria, 2005

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Abstract

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This thesis contends that from the inception of Zionist ideology until the formation of Israel, the Zionist leadership, through the skillful use of narratives and the process of articulating a specific position and constraining opposing narratives, has been highly effective in creating and molding the historic perspectives and collective memories which have shaped, and continue to shape, Jewish identity and experience in Palestine. This study argues that the Israeli *Declaration of Independence* of May 1948 formalized core Zionist narratives and national myths within Israeli national self-identity, while simultaneously promoting their acceptance among world Jewry and the international community. This paper also maintains that these key narratives were used to legitimize the attitudes and actions of the early Zionists, and later Israelis, towards the indigenous (and surrounding) Arab populations. The impact of these narratives and national myths on the Palestinian Arabs, the effects of which continue to reverberate, is particularly addressed.

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Israel's Declaration of Independence

Issued at Tel Aviv on 14 May 1948¹

Eretz-Israel [the Land of Israel or Palestine] was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world.

Exiled from the Land of Israel, the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all the countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return to it and the restoration of their national freedom.

Impelled by this historic association, Jews strove throughout the centuries to go back to the land of their fathers and regain their statehood. In recent decades they returned in masses. They reclaimed the wilderness, made deserts bloom, revived their language, built cities and villages and established a vigorous and ever-growing community with its own economic and cultural life. They sought peace yet were ever prepared to defend themselves. They brought the blessings of progress to all inhabitants of the country.

In the year 1897 the First Zionist Congress, inspired by Theodor Herzl's vision of the Jewish State, proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national revival in their own country.

This right was acknowledged by the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, and reaffirmed by the Mandate of the League of Nations, which gave explicit international recognition to the historic connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and their right to reconstitute their National Home.

The recent Holocaust, which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the need to solve the problem of the homelessness and lack of independence of the Jewish people by means of the re-establishment of the Jewish State, which would open the gates to all Jews and endow the Jewish people with equality of status among the family of nations.

The survivors of the disastrous slaughter in Europe, and also Jews from other lands, have not desisted from their efforts to reach Eretz-Yisrael, in face of difficulties, obstacles, and perils; and have not ceased to urge their right to a life of dignity, freedom and honest toil in their ancestral land.

¹“State of Israel: Proclamation of Independence” in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, ed., *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001) p. 81-83.

In the Second World War the Jewish people in Palestine made their full contribution to the struggle of the freedom-loving nations against the Nazi evil. The sacrifices of their soldiers and their war effort gained them the right to rank with the nations who founded the United Nations.

On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a Resolution requiring the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, and called upon the inhabitants of the country to take all the necessary steps on their part to put the plan into effect. This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their independent State is unassailable.

It is the natural right of the Jewish people to lead, as do all other nations, an independent existence in its sovereign State.

ACCORDINGLY, WE, the members of the National Council, representing the Jewish people in Palestine and the World Zionist movement, met together in solemn assembly today, the day of the termination of the British Mandate for Palestine; and by virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish people and of the Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

WE HEREBY PROCLAIM the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called the State of Israel [Medinath Yisrael].

WE HEREBY DECLARE that as from the termination of the Mandate at midnight, the 14th-15th May, 1948, and pending the setting up of the duly elected bodies of the State in accordance with a Constitution, to be drawn up by a Constituent Assembly not later than the first day of 1st October, 1948, the National Council shall act as the Provisional State Council, and that the National Administration shall constitute the Provisional Government of the Jewish State, which shall be known as Israel.

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open to the immigration of Jews from all countries of their dispersion; will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on the principles of liberty, justice and peace conceived by the Prophets of Israel; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race, or sex; will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and will loyally uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter.

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be ready to cooperate with the organs and representatives of the United Nations in the implementation of the Resolution of the Assembly of November 29, 1947, and will take steps to bring about the Economic Union over the whole of Palestine.

We appeal to the United Nations to assist the Jewish people in the building of its State and to admit Israel into the family of nations.

In the midst of wanton aggression, we yet call upon the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve the ways of peace and play their part in the development of the State, on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its bodies and institutions – provisional and permanent.

We extend our hand in peace and neighbourliness to all the neighbouring states and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all. The State of Israel is prepared to make its contribution to the progress of the Middle East as a whole.

Our call goes out to the Jewish people all over the world to rally to our side in the task of immigration and development, and to stand by us in the great struggle for the fulfillment of the dream of generations for the redemption of Israel.

With trust in the Rock of Israel, we set our hand to this Declaration, at this Session of the Provisional State Council, on the soil of the homeland, in the city of Tel Aviv [on this Sabbath eve, the fifth of Iyar, 5708 (14 May 1948)].

[David Ben-Gurion]

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father,
whose devotion to Zionism stimulated this research
and
to Oliver Schmidtke, whose long-term guidance
and support have been very much appreciated

Introduction:

“Modernity and the nation-state in themselves are constituted on grand mythological narratives.”
– Michael Feige¹

In Hayden White’s view of the relationship between history and narrative, “narrativity...is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality.”² To White, therefore, a narrative provides meaning and “points to a moral, or endows events, whether real or imaginary, with a significance that they do not possess as a mere sequence.”³ Indeed, at any given time, our perceptions of the past are framed and conditioned by the dominant, constructed narratives which are accepted as historical truths until challenged by competing perspectives. Similarly, as Michael Feige observes, nation-states themselves are constructed on grand narratives which provide meaning, define national identity and shape the collective memory of the past. The state of Israel is a case in point.

This thesis contends that from the inception of Zionism as an ideology (with its particular doctrines and system of beliefs) until the formation of Israel, the Zionist leadership, through the skillful use of narratives and the process of both articulating a specific position and constraining opposing narratives, has been highly effective in creating and molding the historic perspectives and collective memories which have shaped Jewish identity and experience in Palestine. As Yael Zerubaval states: “the power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance.”⁴ Indeed, the supremacy of the official Zionist position has been such that, according to Myron J. Aronoff, it established the “root cultural paradigm of Israeli political culture” and “the parameters of permissible discourse.”⁵

Only recently have the historical narratives created and perpetuated by authoritative Zionist ideology begun to be challenged. As Israeli sociologist Uri Ram observes:

In the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century Zionism was busy inventing for itself a tradition and composing for itself a historical narrative, so today in the postnationalist era, a variety of groups in Israel are busy deconstructing that particular version of history and constructing their own histories.⁶

Currently competing versions of history and collective memory have led Israeli scholar Yosefa Loshitzky to call Israel “a society marked by fragmentation and polarization,”⁷ while also asserting that “in an immigrant society aspiring to be a Jewish state rather than a state of its citizens, the issue of collective identity becomes all the more important for its members.”⁸ One can argue, however, that present polarizations and identity fragmentations in Israel are but expressions of historical continuity writ large, the current acknowledgment of prior issues and conflicts which have been contained and subsumed by the previously uncontested Zionist ideology – with its particular vision and version of collective identity and historic memory – and that these contesting voices have been forced into public focus by recent blows to the hegemony of the Zionist narratives.

This paper maintains that the state of Israel was established on the basis of Zionist ideology and dominant Zionist narratives and myths (using “myth” in the sense of a constructed narrative or traditional story which is accepted as history, provides meaning, and serves to explain the worldview of a people), and that these foundational Zionist narratives originated decades prior to Israel’s formation. The narratives that the early Zionists created to justify the establishment of a Jewish “national” identity and an eventual state included assertions that for two centuries Jews as a whole longed to

return to Palestine; that the ancient kingdoms of “Greater Israel” provided historical justification for the re-establishment of a nation-state in Palestine; that the Jewish connection to Palestine was supported by the biblical pledge of the Promised Land to the Israelites; and that Palestine was a barren wasteland before the Jews began to settle there – a “land without people for a people without land.” As Ram observes: “The social and political project of Jewish immigration to Palestine, the settlement and colonization of the land, and the construction of a Jewish community and state there, all against Arab opposition and hostility, were rendered culturally in terms of national ‘revival,’ territorial ‘repatriation,’ and historical ‘redemption.’”⁹ These, and a number of other key Zionist narratives, formed the core around which pre-state and later Israeli collective identity and historic memory coalesced.

This study also argues that the Israeli Declaration of Independence, formulated and read aloud in Tel Aviv on 14 May 1948 by David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister, articulated the Zionist version of historical memories and national myths and helped to formalize and enshrine core Zionist narratives within Israeli national self-identity, while simultaneously promoting their acceptance among world Jewry and the international community. In analyzing some of the key narratives framed by the Declaration of Independence, this paper also argues that these national narratives and “myths of origin” profoundly influenced the relationship of the early Zionists, and later the Israelis, with the indigenous (and surrounding) Arab populations.

To support these arguments, this paper draws on research presented by a range of scholars, including those who have been referred to as the Israeli “new historians” due to their recent challenges to the official Zionist narratives. This group, which

includes among others Simha Flapan, Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé, Benny Morris, Tom Segev and Zeev Sternhell, is credited with helping to “precipitate a rethinking of basic issues”¹⁰ in Israel. For example, a number of these historians argue that foundational narratives relating to the founding of Israel and the 1948 war were not only unsubstantiated by archival documents released in the 1980s but were openly contradicted. Similarly, they contest the traditional Zionist narrative which blames the creation of the Arab refugee crisis directly on the Arabs themselves.¹¹ As well, they challenge ideas sanctioned by Israeli historiography and social science regarding the nature of Jewish nationalism, Zionist socialism and Israeli society, ideas which are “still very much part of the Weltanschauung of the Israeli elite.”¹²

In regard to the relationship between Zionists and the Arabs, Avi Shlaim, whose early work, *Collusion Across the Jordan*, focused on the collaborative relationship between Jordan and Israel in the 1940s, asserts that Israel has been “considerably more successful than its Arab opponents in putting across its rendition of events.”¹³ While recognizing that, like any nationalist history, Israel’s version has been one-sided and self-serving and, as in every country, there is a gap between rhetoric and practice, Shlaim’s research has prompted him to claim: “I don’t know of any country where the gap is as great as in Israel.”¹⁴ Thus, by questioning the traditionally-constructed historical and social narratives, these scholars have presented research and ideas which, Ilan Pappé observes, “are strongly at odds with the Jewish public’s self-image and collective memory.”¹⁵

The emergence of the “new historiography” occurred as a result of two events. The first was that under Israel’s Archive Law, which prohibits public access for thirty

years, hundreds of thousands of state documents dating from the late 1940s became available to researchers in the early 1980s. These government, military and civilian documents provided new insights into the state of Israel's formative period and the nation's early years.¹⁶ The second critical factor was the emergence of a new generation of Israeli historians who, influenced by the uncertainties produced by Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza following the 1967 War, the upsets of the 1973 War, and the 1982 Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanon, brought a more questioning attitude to the dominant myths of Israeli culture.¹⁷ As Israeli historian Ronald Zweig states: "New historiography is fuelled as often by the shifting perspectives of succeeding generations of historians looking at old issues with new insights as it is driven by the sudden availability of new archival material."¹⁸

This new historiography has been vehemently opposed by more conventional Israeli historians, including Shabtai Teveth, who in a series of articles published in 1989 critiqued Morris and Shlaim, accusing them, among other things, of politicizing historical study and being sympathetic to the Palestinians.¹⁹ According to Israeli commentator Joé Brunner, the current public debate in Israel over these issues began in June 1994 with an aggressive article written by historian Aharon Megged in the *Ha'aretz* daily newspaper, in which Megged railed against what he called "a suicidal impulse" that infused recent Israeli historiography and which, by creating self-doubt in the hearts of the Israeli population concerning the legitimacy of the Zionist project, could endanger the very existence of the Jewish State.²⁰

Both sides of this debate tend to agree that the distinction between the "old" conventional and the "new" historians refers primarily to "the role of historians in the

shaping of Israel's collective memory"²¹ and whether the work of a historian can be said to contribute to the affirmation or to the critique of the Zionist foundational narratives of the Jewish State.²² The traditional historians have tended to present the foundation of Israel in terms of a "heroic" discourse similar to that used by the political elite of the Zionist movement to mobilize legitimacy and support. Even though the narratives of the traditional historians may also contain critical elements and use previously unknown information and new documents, they tend to extend or defensively amend the myths that have become part of the conventional Jewish-Israeli collective consciousness. In describing this traditional, mythic historiography Brunner states:

Explicitly or implicitly, the Zionist project and its realization in the foundation of the Jewish State are depicted as an ingathering of exiles, the return of the dispersed Jewish collective to its historical homeland, where it has managed to rebuild itself from the abyss of complete destruction in the Holocaust into a self-determining collective subject of modern statehood. Its achievements are portrayed as the result of efforts of moral self-sacrificing pioneers, achieved in the face of Arab intransigence by the few who fought against the many, a small nation which sought peace against overwhelming and hostile Arab others who sought its destruction.²³

American Palestinian Rashid Khalidi is in agreement with Brunner. Using the term "revisionist history" in a broad and non-derogatory manner, in contrast to the traditional Israeli historians who denigrate the new historians as "revisionists," Khalidi argues that revisionist history "requires as a foil an established, authoritative master narrative that is fundamentally flawed in some way."²⁴ He maintains that the works of the new historians are fully within this tradition, for what they are arguing against is the nationalist mythology that has formed and shaped the account of the history of the state of Israel. This mythology, according to Khalidi, has also conditioned opinions of

the Arab-Israeli conflict, since it has formed “the backbone of the received version of the history of the conflict as it is perceived in the West.”²⁵

Since the key Zionist narratives concerning self-identity, collective history, and the Zionists’ relationship with the Arabs are complex and span a large block of time, this thesis is organized in a generally chronological format, beginning with the ideological premises of Zionism and the founding of the World Zionist Organization in 1897 and concluding with the period following the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, by which time these narratives were already well-entrenched and had been formalized by the Declaration of Independence. Chapter One analyzes the historical formation of Zionism itself, as well as the foundational narratives concerning the ancient emotional, religious and historical connection of Diaspora Jews with the land of Palestine, which Zionists cited to provide moral and historical legitimacy to the Jewish right to return and establish a state there. Chapter Two focuses on the formative historical demographic and socialist narratives associated with pre-state settlement, while Chapter Three addresses the main narratives associated with the Balfour Declaration. Chapter Four explores the conventional Zionist efforts to create a causal and legitimizing connection between the Holocaust and the formation of the state of Israel. This chapter also analyses the Holocaust narratives used by Israel following the establishment of the state. Chapter Five examines the narratives regarding the United Nation’s Partition Resolution of 1947; Chapter Six examines foundational narratives associated with the formation of the state of Israel, and the creation and treatment of Arab refugees. The conclusion not only provides a synthesizing overview but includes examples of how the official Zionist narratives, national myths and created historical

memories, as articulated in the Declaration of Independence, have continued to influence Israel and the Israeli-Arab relationship until the present.

Notes:

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- ¹ Michael Feige, "Rescuing the Person from the Symbol: *"Peace Now"* and the Ironies of Modern Myth" in *History and Memory*, Vol. 11, No.1, 1999, p. 142.
 - ² Hayden White, "On the Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" in Mitchell, W.J.T., ed. *On Narrative*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) p. 300.
 - ³ White, "On the Value" p. 300.
 - ⁴ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 8.
 - ⁵ Myron J. Aronoff, "Myths, Symbols and Rituals of the Emerging State" in Laurence J. Silberstein, *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991) p. 177.
 - ⁶ Uri Ram, "Postnationalist Pasts: The Case of Israel" in Jeffery K. Olick, ed., *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts and Transformations in National Retrospection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003) p. 241-242.
 - ⁷ Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) p.xiii
 - ⁸ Loshitzky, *Identity Politics* p. xi.
 - ⁹ Ram, "Postnationalist Pasts" p. 228.
 - ¹⁰ Laurence Silberstein, *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991) p. 3.
 - ¹¹ Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
 - ¹² Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*. David Maisel, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) p. 334-335.
 - ¹³ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 2001) p. xiii.
 - ¹⁴ Avi Shlaim, quoted in Meron Rapoport interview, "*No Peaceful Solution*" in *Ha'aretz*, 13 August 2005
 - ¹⁵ Pappé, "Post-Zionist Scholarship in Israel" in Joel Beinin and Rebecca L. Stein, ed., *Struggle for Sovereignty: Israel and Palestine, 1993-2005* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) p. 151.
 - ¹⁶ Silberstein, *New Perspectives*, p. 3.
 - ¹⁷ Silberstein, *New Perspectives*, p. 4.
 - ¹⁸ Ronald W. Zweig. "Israel-Diaspora Relations in the Early Years of the State" in Laurence Silberstein, *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991) p. 258.
 - ¹⁹ Shabtai Teveth, "Charging Israel with Original Sin" in *Commentary*, September 1989, p. 24-25
 - ²⁰ Joé Brunner, "Pride and Memory" in *History and Memory*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, Spring/Summer 1997, p.256.
 - ²¹ Brunner, "Pride and Memory" p. 257.
 - ²² Brunner, "Pride and Memory" p. 258.
 - ²³ Brunner, "Pride and Memory" p. 260.

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- ²⁴ Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006) p. xxxii.
- ²⁵ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. xxxii.

Chapter One: The Zionist Narratives of the Historic Association of Jews with Palestine and their Longing to Return

“Eretz-Israel [the Land of Israel or Palestine] was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world.

“Exiled from the Land of Israel, the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all the countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return to it and the restoration of their national freedom. Impelled by this historic association, Jews strove throughout the centuries to go back to the land of their fathers and regain their statehood.” The Israeli Declaration of Independence, 1948

The opening paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence, read out in the great hall of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art on 14 May 1948 by David Ben-Gurion to inaugurate the State of Israel, encapsulate an aspect of official Zionist ideology which is now commonplace. These paragraphs justified the founding of a “Jewish” state by tying the “national” identity and political sovereignty of the Jews in ancient Palestine to modern Jews, through both an historical connection with the territory and the professed millennial prayers and strivings of world Jewry to return to their ancient “homeland.” As Yael Zerubavel maintains, the establishment of master narratives such as those articulated in the Declaration of Independence are important mechanisms by which a nation constructs a collective identity.¹ And, as well as shaping internal identity, these narratives have also comprised vital propaganda discourse as an important means of presenting the newly created state’s *raison d’être* and national identity to the world. In examining the origins of Zionism, this chapter will address these narratives, articulated in the Declaration of Independence, which have formed a basis of Zionist ideology and which have served to validate the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

The particularly Zionist reading of Jewish history and the construction of the Zionist movement's own memory of the past have been important facets of the Zionist doctrine and political agenda. A key element of this agenda has been to promote the ethnic connection between nineteenth-century European Jewry and the ancient Hebrews, and Jewish identity as a "nation" through the revival of Jewish national life as it was deemed to have been experienced in ancient Israel. This connection between past and present was articulated in the Declaration in the created memory, stated as fact, that: "Jews strove throughout the centuries to go back to the land of their fathers and regain their statehood." That this narrative, expressed in 1948, of a constant collective striving to return to former "statehood," has become a pervasive part of current Israeli self-identity is illustrated by the almost verbatim claim made by Israeli scholar, Israel Harrel, in 2005:

The land of Israel, within its historical borders, is the only legitimate territorial basis for the realization of the Jewish people's political sovereignty. It belongs to the Jewish people by virtue of the political sovereignty that existed in it for hundreds of years and by virtue of 2,000 years of the Jewish people's continuous and uninterrupted longing for it.²

Although the Zionist claim to Palestine as the Jewish homeland is based on an ancient inhabitation by Hebrews of the territory, Hebrew sovereignty in the area was not that long-lasting and was exercised by kingdoms, not a nation-state in the modern sense of the term. According to biblical text, which the Zionists have drawn heavily upon, the Israelites of the Old Testament invaded the area of Canaan (later Palestine) in approximately 1,200 BCE and by 1000 BCE had established a kingdom in Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel or "Greater Israel") first under Saul, then David and his son Solomon. In approximately 960 BCE Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem.

After Solomon's death, the ten northern tribes centered in Samaria revolted, and in approximately 930 BCE the kingdom was divided into two: Judea, in the south and Israel, in the north.³

The departure of Jews from the region, known as the *Diaspora*, or dispersion, occurred in stages. The twelve tribes of Israel – the descendents of Abraham's son Isaac – continued to inhabit the land of Canaan until the ten tribes in Samaria (renamed Israel) were conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BCE and taken as slaves to Mesopotamia (now Iraq). The two remaining Hebrew tribes stayed near Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judea and were later taken captive in 586 BCE by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who captured Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple of Solomon, and effaced Jewish sovereignty. Thus began the dispersion of Hebrews throughout Babylon, the Middle East and beyond. This process of exile was completed when the remaining Hebrews in Judea, who had lived under a succession of foreign rulers, revolted against the Romans in 70 CE and were defeated. This revolt resulted in the destruction of the second, rebuilt Temple and the scattering of the majority of the remaining Jews throughout the Roman Empire, Eastern Europe, and eventually the world.⁴

While Jews continued to live in Palestine and the Middle East after the Diaspora of 70 CE, they remained a small minority. Thus, prior to the late nineteenth-century, the great majority of claimed modern descendents of the ancient Hebrews had had no collective or "national" presence in Palestine for approximately two thousand years. As a result of this absence, there was a need to establish a historical Jewish connection to the region of Palestine that spanned the intervening millennia, and to

invent a narrative tradition that established Zionist legitimacy to the land and created a viable claim to continuity with the distant past. About this narrative Zerubavel states, “The predominantly secular Zionist movement turned away from traditional Jewish memory in order to construct its own counter-memory of the Jewish past,”⁵ as an effective way to revitalize national culture, to legitimize Zionist political aspirations for the future, and to place nationhood above any other criteria for classifying Jewish history. Similarly, anthropologist and political scientist Myron Aronoff says of this new construct: “Perhaps the primary goal of Israeli political culture has been to make the continuity of the ancient past with the contemporary context a taken-for-granted reality.”⁶ Zionists – whose collective memory divides Jewish history into two main periods: “antiquity” and “exile,” with the former positively portrayed and the latter constructed as a long, dark period characterized by suffering and persecution – have been highly successful in their aim to integrate their vision of antiquity with modern “national redemption.”⁷ This success is illustrated by an almost universal acceptance of the narrative of historic continuity and legitimacy so well articulated by Ben-Gurion in the Declaration: “Exiled from the Land of Israel, the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all the countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return to it and the restoration of their national freedom.” This belief in a universal Jewish identification with Palestine, and a unified longing among the masses of Jews over the centuries to return and establish a nation there, has become so engrained that it has now assumed the status of collective memory among the majority of Israelis and the general population of world Jewry.

However, despite presenting the Diaspora Jews as a united body, with all members Zionist at heart and longing to return to nationhood in Palestine, this historical depiction, like that of the Declaration, appears to be simplistic and inaccurate. Neither prior to nor since the Diaspora were Jews a monolithic, unified group with uniform aspirations. From ancient times to the modern era, diversity, pluralism, and a vast range of experience have characterized Jewish life, which has been comprised of a number of sects, denominations and ethnicities. This diversity has included, among other groupings: Karaites, Rabbanites, Maimonideans and anti-Maimonideans, Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Crypto-Jews, as well as the more modern Conservative, Orthodox, Liberal, Reconstructionist, Humanist, and Reform denominations.⁸ Nor did Jewish communities and individuals exist in a vacuum; they influenced and were influenced by their various religious, social, cultural, political, and national environments. Although it can be argued that Jewish religious traditions shared a common recognition of sacred texts which contained prayers and messianic ideals concerning the land of Israel, as in any organized religion these texts were neither approached nor interpreted uniformly; nor was there more consensus among rabbis than there has been among leaders of any religious affiliation.

Nonetheless, and despite their efforts to negate the life in “exile” that had been created by traditional, religious Jews, Zionists frequently invoked religious ritual and biblical passages to support their claim of Jewish association with the land of Palestine. They cited, for example, Genesis 17:8 which states: “And I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession;” or the so-called rallying cry “next year in

Jerusalem,” which many Jews argue was a prayer intended to be interpreted figuratively, not literally, since traditional Judaism also considered Zion a metaphysical homeland that the Jews carried within them as part of their spiritual mission in the world.⁹ Yet, notwithstanding the Zionist narrative in the Declaration that Jews were “never ceasing to pray and hope for their return” to the land of ancient Israel, there is strong evidence that such writings and prayers were never enough to incite Diaspora Jews to demonstrate the uniform longings and desires the Zionists claimed they possessed.

This evidence accords with the view of American scholar Edwin Black, who, when referring to the early decades following the inception of organized Zionism in 1897, states: “At the time Zionism was but a flicker in the imagination of a few determined Jews. It outraged the bulk of world Jews.”¹⁰ During this period the majority of Jews, both secular and religious, rejected the Zionist vision of a return to Palestine. This rejection was intense among Orthodox Jews who strenuously objected to Zionist ideology on the grounds that it negated true messianic redemption.¹¹ Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth-century the friction between Zionists and traditionalist Jews was strong not just in Palestine but among Jews worldwide. Joseph Baer Soloveichik, Europe’s most esteemed traditionalist rabbi called the Zionists: “a new sect like that of the seventeenth-century false messiah Shabbetai Zevi,” while Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Schneerson, stated: “In order to implement their idea, the Zionists must distort the essence of Jewishness in order to get the Jews to assume a new identity.”¹² Similarly, Noah Efron asserts: “In a world where Jews did not lack for enemies, their worst adversaries were the Zionist heretics.”¹³ Furthermore,

in spite of expressions of anti-Semitism in Western Europe, the majority of Jews there did not support Zionist nationalist ideals and continued to favour assimilation.¹⁴ The bulk of Western European Jews ascribed to the view that “the definition of Jews as a nation was contrary to the liberal...outlook rooted in the rationalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century,”¹⁵ and regarded assimilation in the country of origin as the true end of emancipation.

Jewish immigration patterns, recent and historic, also counteract the narrative of a uniform Jewish longing for inhabiting the land of ancient Israel. The vast majority of Jews in both Western and Eastern Europe who did want to emigrate much preferred to move to America. Between 1900 and 1914, of the 1.5 million Jews who emigrated as a result of Russian and Polish pogroms (massacres), most went to the United States.¹⁶ Between 1920 and 1932, less than one percent of world Jewry voluntarily returned to their ancient “home.”¹⁷ Even among the small minority of Jews who supported the creation of a national “homeland” or state, only a small number sought haven in Palestine.¹⁸ And a great many others felt that it was the destiny of the Jewish people to be dispersed throughout the world, as part of *tikkun olam* or a Jewish responsibility to “repair the world” and help promote the ennoblement of all humanity.¹⁹ Thus, in spite of the Declaration’s assertion regarding Palestine that “the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all the countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return to it and the restoration of their national freedom,” and despite the Zionist narrative declaring Palestine the site of Jewish nationalism, salvation, and redemption, until the mid-twentieth century and the

establishment of the state of Israel, the majority of Jews do not appear to have been interested in returning to Eretz-Israel.

Yet, if ancient historic association and mass longing were not responsible for the creation of Zionism and ultimately of Israel, what was? A majority of historians concur that Zionism emerged as a modern political movement within the specific circumstances of late nineteenth-century Europe and in the mold of the type of nationalism that predominated there.²⁰ During the previous century nationalism had developed along distinct trajectories in Eastern and Western Europe as a result of differing social and political conditions.²¹ East of the Rhine River, in Central and Eastern Europe, national allegiance was based on culture, religion, language and ethnicity, all of which were regarded as reflecting racial or biological differences. Therefore, the idea of the nation, which claimed the primary allegiance of the individual, preceded that of the state.²²

The influence of this ethnic nationalism was evident in the writing of Leo Pinsker, a Jewish doctor in Czarist Russia who in 1881 published a book titled *Autoemancipation*, affirming the need for Jews to emancipate themselves rather than rely on others to do that for them. Although Pinsker believed that Jews needed to acquire territory somewhere, claiming that if Jews lacked territory, they lacked substance, he was not originally committed to Palestine, but preferred land somewhere in North America.²³ Pinsker's choice of destination changed only in 1884 when he agreed to become president of the Lovers of Zion organization, which had been started by religious Jews intent on aiding Jewish immigration from the Russian Empire to

Palestine in response to a series of pogroms following the assassination of Czar Alexander II, for which Jews were held responsible.²⁴

Western Europe, on the other hand, had been conditioned by liberal nationalism, which was based on the principles and democratic values of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and on the development of nation-states “through a long process of the unification of populations, which were very different in their ethnic origins, cultural identities, languages and religions.”²⁵ However, as Norman Finkelstein states, in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, the principles of tribal or ethnic “blood and soil” nationalism, which maintained that “profound bonds both ‘naturally’ united certain individuals and ‘naturally’ excluded others” and that organic communities or peoples of common descent should possess their own state, began to impact Western Europe, especially Germany but also France.²⁶

It was in France that Zionism as an organized political movement came into being through the efforts of Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jew and journalist living in Paris and covering the Dreyfus trial. In 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, an army officer and an Alsatian, German-speaking Jew, was accused by the French government of passing military secrets to the Germans. The ensuing debate over Dreyfus’ guilt or innocence, fanned by both the political right and by supporters of Jews on the left, brought much French anti-Semitism to the fore and convinced Herzl that there was no safety for Jews even in emancipation and assimilation.²⁷ Herzl believed that the only way to solve what he considered to be a political problem was by political means and political leadership. Greatly influenced by the prevalent German ideologies of romantic, tribal nationalism (the same “blood and soil” nationalism which was to later inform Nazism),

Herzl believed that to accomplish this political resolution, Jews needed a national identity based on a national homeland.²⁸ According to Shlaim, “It followed rationally from these premises that the only solution was for the Jews to leave the diaspora and acquire a territory over which they would exercise sovereignty and establish a state of their own.”²⁹ Thus motivated, Herzl became the outspoken champion of Zionism as a political movement. In his 1896 booklet, “The Jewish State” (*Der Juden staat*), Herzl wrote: “Let the sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves.”³⁰ It is important to note, however, that Herzl put forth Palestine as but one possibility, and he did so for pragmatic and not ideological reasons, as illustrated by his statement: “Here two territories come under consideration, Palestine and Argentine...[since] in both countries important experiments in colonization have been made.”³¹ In fact, Herzl felt that Argentina had the advantage, with its mild climate, vast fertile territory, and sparse population.³² A year after publishing his booklet, Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress in Basil, Switzerland and then worked to establish the World Zionist Organization (WZO).³³

At Herzl’s Zionist Congress in 1897, the Russian chapter of Pinsker’s Lovers of Zion, who were suspicious of Herzl’s indifference to Hebrew and to Palestine, as well as of his political rather than religious and cultural orientation,³⁴ were absorbed into the World Zionist Organization. When the Zionists debated the various options for the site of a national Jewish homeland, the East Europeans, who had already created some communities in Palestine without the goal of establishing a state there, and who also believed that Palestine had the power to stir the Jewish masses, insisted that

Palestine was the only option that they would consider.³⁵ Herzl, however, was not completely committed to Palestine until he decided to side with the Russians the year prior to his death. This action and Herzl's death in 1904 resulted in an exodus of many moderate or "cultural" Zionists out of the organization and the takeover of the WZO by the more extreme Russian Jews. Palestine then became the official, and uncontested, Zionist destination of choice.³⁶

And thus, within the context of romantic, ethnic nationalism, modern Zionist nationalism came into being, both as a result of emulation by a Western European (Herzl) and as a response by Eastern European Jews to anti-Semitism. Since "the conceptual framework in which they [Zionists] operated was molded by historical, cultural and romantic nationalism,"³⁷ Zionist ideology developed the classic features and language of this type of "blood and soil" nationalism: an organic connection with the soil, the desire for roots, tribal association, and the need to establish and legitimize a "home" or state of their own. One can make a strong argument, therefore, that the Zionist narratives of historic and emotional connection to place – clearly articulated in the Declaration of Independence – emerged not from historic association and uniform longing but from a powerfully prevailing European nationalist ideology. These created myths and memories, developed by early Zionists to add moral legitimacy to the Zionist political movement and its intent to establish a Jewish state, became formalized by the Declaration into master narratives which were invoked to shape Israeli identity, both at home and abroad.

Notes:

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- ¹ Yael Zuberval, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 14, 214.
- ² Israel Harrel, "Preserve the Land" in Mark A. Heller and Rosemary Hollis, ed. *Israel and the Palestinians: Israeli Policy Options* (London: Chatham House, 2005) p. 37.
- ³ David Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, Nechemia Meyers and Uzy Nystar, trans. (Tel Aviv: Sabra Books, 1972) p. xi; Alan Segal, "The Jewish Religion" in Willard G. Oxtoby and Alan Segal, ed., *A Concise Introduction to World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 70-71.
- ⁴ Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001) p. 7; Segal, "The Jewish Religion" p. 70-71.
- ⁵ Zuberval, *Recovered Roots*, p.14 and 17; Zuberval also states: "Even when the Zionist counter-memory began to enjoy hegemony among the Jews of Palestine, thus transforming into collective memory, it continued to maintain an oppositionist pose to the larger and more established society in exile, in order to highlight the new Hebrew society's distinct identity." Zuberval, p. 15.
- ⁶ Myron Aronoff, "Myths, Symbols and Rituals of the Emerging State" in Laurence J. Silberstein, *New Perspectives in Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991) p. 175.
- ⁷ Zuberval, *Recovered Roots*, p.18.
- ⁸ Alan Segal, "The Jewish Religion" p. 95, 100, 111-114; Paul Szarmach, ed., *Aspects of Jewish Culture in the Middle Ages* (Albany: State University of New York, 1972) p. 12; Howard Adelman, "Jewish Culture in Medieval Christian Europe" Jewish University in Cyberspace. http://www.hebroots.org/hebrootsarchive/9806/980610_h.html
- ⁹ Alfred M. Lilienthal, *What Price Israel?* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953) p. 2; Zuberval, *Recovered Roots*, p. 16.
- ¹⁰ Edwin Black, *The Transfer Agreement: The Untold Story of the Secret Pact between the Third Reich and Jewish Palestine* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1984) p. 40.
- ¹¹ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History" in *Representations*, Vol. 86, 1989, p. 8.
- ¹² Noah Efron, *Real Jews: Secular versus Ultra-Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 2003) p. 28-29.
- ¹³ Efron, *Real Jews*, p. 29.
- ¹⁴ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 33.
- ¹⁵ Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, David Maisel, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) p. 17.
- ¹⁶ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 35.
- ¹⁷ Lilienthal, *What Price Israel?* p. 19.
- ¹⁸ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) p. 33.
- ¹⁹ Ethel and Frank Cohen, ed. *Palestine: A Study of Jewish, Arab and British Policies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947) p. 36.
- ²⁰ Zuberval, *Recovered Roots*, p. 14.
- ²¹ Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*, p. 11.
- ²² Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*, p. 11.
- ²³ Cohen, ed. *Palestine: A Study of Jewish*, p. 15.
- ²⁴ Cohen, ed. *Palestine: A Study of Jewish*, p. 17.
- ²⁵ Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*, p. 10.
- ²⁶ Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London and New York: Verso, 1995) p. 8.
- ²⁷ Paula Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979) p. 10-14. In 1894 Alfred Dreyfus was arrested, convicted of treason, and sentenced to life imprisonment, despite obvious doubts about his guilt. The resolution of what became known as the Dreyfus Affair in 1906, when Dreyfus was pardoned by the High Court of Public Appeal, reinstated in the army, and awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor, seemed to purge the general French public of much of its interest in anti-Jewish sentiments.

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- ²⁸ Finkelstein, *Image and Reality*, p. 8.
- ²⁹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 2.
- ³⁰ Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, ed., *Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001) p. 7.
- ³¹ Laqueur and Barry Rubin, ed., *Israel-Arab Reader*, p. 19.
- ³² Cohen, ed. *Palestine: A Study of Jewish*, p. 34.
- ³³ Cohen, ed. *Palestine: A Study of Jewish*, p. 41.
- ³⁴ Cohen, ed. *Palestine: A Study of Jewish*, p. 36.
- ³⁵ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 40.
- ³⁶ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p. 23.
- ³⁷ Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*, p. 15.

Chapter Two: The Zionist Narratives of Settlement and Socialism in Palestine

“They reclaimed the wilderness, made deserts bloom, revived their language, built cities and villages and established a vigorous and ever-growing community with its own economic and cultural life. They sought peace yet were ever prepared to defend themselves. They brought the blessings of progress to all inhabitants of the country.” The Israeli Declaration of Independence, 1948

Historians generally hold that Zionist settlement in Palestine during the late nineteenth-century and the early decades of the twentieth-century was essentially a European imperialist, colonialist project of conquest. The dominant Zionist narrative, on the other hand, depicts Jewish settlement in the region as a civilizing mission whereby a sparsely populated, barren desert was turned into a fruitful oasis through the efforts of hardworking Jewish socialist labourers, a project which resulted in the simultaneous renewal of both the land and the people. This chapter will analyze the impact on the Jewish-Arab relationship of the aforementioned Zionist settlement narratives, formalized in the Declaration of Independence by the words: “They reclaimed the wilderness and made the deserts bloom...” “They sought peace...” and “They brought the blessings of progress to all inhabitants of the country.”

The assertion that Palestine was effectively an empty land awaiting economic and social development gained international credence through the effective use of a slogan created by European Zionists: “A land without people, for a people without land.”¹ It became common among early Zionists thereafter to deny the existence of an Arab population in Palestine, despite the fact that Herzl and the majority of Zionists were well aware of the slogan’s inaccuracy.² Nonetheless, the slogan’s claim has been reinforced by Zionist historians such as Arnold Blumberg, whose book *Zion before Zionism* states: “Essentially...between 1838 and 1880 Palestine had remained an

empty land...”³ Yet by 1881, or just prior to the first wave of East European Jewish immigrants, there were already 457,000 people inhabiting the region of Palestine – 400,000 Muslim Arabs, 42,000 Christian Arabs and 15,000 Jews.⁴

The assertion that Palestine was unpopulated allowed the early Zionists to accomplish two goals simultaneously: the elimination of concern for an indigenous population and justification for the appropriation of territory. While the slogan’s inaccuracy diminished its viability and usefulness over time, these two goals were achieved and the image of an “empty” desert was gradually amended into one of a sparsely populated, barren wilderness whose inhabitants immeasurably benefited from the peaceful, civilizing, socialist presence of the Jews. This transformation from a literal to a figurative gloss on the Zionist efforts to deny the Palestinian existence is well illustrated by the comment made by Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in 1969, in which she essentially dismissed the indigenous Palestinian population because they were not “a people” in the European nationalist sense of the term. Concerning the Palestinian Arabs she stated: “It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.”⁵

When the indigenous Arab population was acknowledged by the Zionists, their significance was generally minimized since, according to European imperialist standards, the indigenous Arabs were assumed to be socially and culturally uncouth, undeveloped and backward. Regarding the importance of these attitudes to the Zionist-Arab relationship, Israeli sociologist and anthropologist Gershon Shafir argues: “At the outset, Zionism was a variety of East European nationalism, that is, an ethnic

movement in search of a state. But...it may be seen more fruitfully as a late instance of European overseas expansion,”⁶ – or as imperial colonialism. French Middle Eastern scholar Maxime Rodinson also maintains that the Zionist tendency to downgrade the Arab presence in Palestine and to hold a “dehumanized image” of the Palestinian people was a result of the prevalent European nationalist and imperialist ideologies which held that “every territory situated outside that world was considered empty – not of inhabitants of course, but constituting a kind of cultural vacuum, and therefore suitable for colonization.”⁷ More pointedly, Zeev Sternhell contends that the Zionists ignored or downplayed the dilemma of the Arab existence “chiefly because they knew that this problem had no solution within the Zionist way of thinking”⁸ and because in general both sides knew “that the implementation of Zionism could only be at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs.”⁹ Concerning the latter, British historian David Hirst argues, “violence, then, was implicit in Zionism from the outset.”¹⁰

The sense of superiority inherent in European imperialism prompted Zionist Asher Ginsberg (aka Ahad Ha’am), a well-known East European writer (and later a major influence on the revival of the Hebrew language),¹¹ to write of his Jewish compatriots in Palestine in 1891: “[They] treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, deprive them of their rights, offend them without cause and even boast of these deeds; and nobody among us opposes this despicable inclination.”¹² And while Herzl claimed publicly that “indigenous Arabs would become equal citizens in the Jewish Commonwealth,”¹³ in private he asserted that the Arabs would have to be displaced and transferred elsewhere. In his diary Herzl wrote that Jews would “try to spirit the

penniless population across the border by procuring employment for *it* in the transit countries, while denying *it* any employment in our country.”¹⁴ (Italics added)

Regarding the attitude of Herzl and other Zionist leaders towards the Arabs, Avi Shlaim states: “The unstated assumption of Herzl and his successors was that the Zionist movement would achieve its goal not through an understanding with the local Palestinians but through an alliance with the dominant great power of the day.”¹⁵ In his efforts to gain the support of a great power such as Germany for the Zionist cause, Herzl asserted that the Jews in Palestine would constitute “an outpost of civilization against barbarism.”¹⁶ After failing to win the support of both Turkey and Germany, Herzl turned his focus on Britain. Understanding Great Britain’s imperial interests, Herzl wrote:

England with her possessions in Asia should be most interested in Zionism, for the shortest route to India is by way of Palestine. England's great politicians were the first to recognize the need for colonial expansion... And so I must believe that here in England the idea of Zionism, which is a colonial idea, should be easily and quickly understood in its true and most modern form.¹⁷

This sense of superiority towards the Arabs was blatant in the second wave or *aliya* (literally, ascending) of Zionist settlers to Palestine (1905-1914), many of whom fled the Russian Empire following the collapse of the Revolution of 1905.¹⁸ Although this group was dominated by ideological socialists, first and foremost these Jews were Zionists, determined to achieve their goals within a separate Jewish environment, not within a larger socialist context. These Zionists also looked down on both the indigenous and the older generation of Jewish immigrants who had been willing to work with the Arabs, and who even partook of Middle Eastern culture and dress.¹⁹ Nationalistic Zionists represented the new, imperialist, European-focused generation.

Despite the narrative later formalized in the Declaration of Independence which claimed that Zionists “brought the blessings of progress to all inhabitants of the country,” for these Zionists the Arabs were to be economically and socially excluded from the Jewish state-building enterprise, as well as from their own land.²⁰

What Israeli historian Anita Shapira calls the Zionists’ “great socialist mission...the challenge of advancing the lot of the Arab worker,”²¹ American political scientist Norman Finkelstein terms a “racist” “*mission civilisatrice*’ in socialist guise.”²² For Finkelstein the Zionist narratives of socialism and progress cloak the inequitable social and economic realities of the early Zionist-Arab relationship, as well as those of the Palestinian Arabs who later found themselves living in a “Jewish” state.²³ The latter was the case because the predominately East European leaders of Labor Zionism in the *Yishuv* (the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine), the strongest supporters of economic and social separation between the Arabs and the Jews, were also to form the core political power-elite of Israel until the late 1970s.²⁴

With the founding in 1920 of the *Histadrut*, or the General Federation of Labor, the *Yishuv*’s exclusively Jewish association of labor and trade union organizations became the spearhead of economic and political development.²⁵

Describing the powerful nature of the *Histadrut*, Israeli scholar Yoav Peled states:

Aside from being an umbrella labor organization, the *Histadrut*, a pillar of pre-statehood Zionist colonization, possessed an economic empire encompassing, at its height, agricultural, manufacturing, construction, marketing, transportation and financial concerns, as well as a whole network of social service organizations... As long as the Labor Party was in power (1933-1977), this political-economic structure played a crucial role in maintaining the political and cultural hegemony of the Labor Zionist movement, thus ensuring the privileged position of a large segment of the veteran Ashkenazi community.²⁶

Furthermore, Israeli sociologist Gershon Shafir argues: “The particular shape given to the exclusivist aim of an all-Jewish labor force by the predominance of the labor movement’s strategy of economic bifurcation encouraged *separatism* as the predominant form of nationalism.”²⁷

Regarding the Arab labor force, the Histadrut’s founders made it very clear that “national interests” took priority over all else, and the Histadrut became more focused on expanding the Jewish community’s political power and borders than on the rights of workers.²⁸ Proclaiming that the Jewish state had to be built by the toil of Jewish workers, the Histadrut mollified dissenters by insisting that Jews should not “exploit” native Palestinians by hiring them to work in fields or factories.²⁹ Histadrut leaders then coined two slogans to guide the Yishuv throughout the 1920s and 1930s: “the Conquest of Work” and “the Conquest of the Land.”³⁰ In accordance with these slogans, Zionists pursued a policy of leasing and reselling land only to Jews; Jewish agricultural settlements and industries only hired Jews; Jews boycotted Arab workers and the produce from Arab farms. Strong-arm techniques were often used to ensure these aims, with violent struggles ensuing between Jews who employed Arab workers and the more nationalistic Zionists, as well as between Jews and Arabs.³¹ The actions of organized labour prompted Ari Brober to argue:

the Zionists, with their access to foreign capital and a ‘Jewish labor only’ policy, successfully blocked the development of a Palestinian capitalism that might have offered some employment to the expropriated Palestinian peasants. The result was the development of a practically hermetically sealed Jewish society in the middle of a disintegrating Palestinian society.³²

Similarly, Israeli historian and journalist Amos Elon maintains that it is a deep and tragic irony that Zionist Labor, advocated as a means of dispelling conflict, began a

process of economic, political, social and psychological self-segregation which led to a total cleavage between these two peoples, fomenting an Arab response to this segregation that made violence inevitable.³³

The lack of social and economic equality existed not only between Jews and Arabs in Palestine but also between the Askenazim, or Jews of European origin, and the Mizrahim, or Middle Eastern Jews. In regard to this relationship Pappé argues: “It should not be forgotten that the Zionist leaders and ideologues wished to reform the veteran Jews as much as they desired to reinvent the new Jew of Europe on Palestine’s soil.”³⁴ Although both groups of Jews were included in the Zionist socialist narrative, there was much economic disparity and conflict between them, again belying the Zionist mythological narrative, expressed in the Declaration, of “progress for all inhabitants.”

This social inequality is further illustrated by the attitude of the European Jews to Arab or Mizrahi Jews outside of Palestine. In order to get around the ban on employing Palestinian Arabs, many Zionist business and land owners employed Arab Jews instead, the first of whom they brought in from Yemen.³⁵ This was a clever, albeit racist solution; the workers were Jews, but they were also Arabs who could be hired cheaply.³⁶ These workers were employed for a short time in various settlements, and then eventually placed in slum areas near the newly developing Jewish towns.³⁷ The secondary status granted Yemenite Jews, both in the labor market and in the denial of their access to land, helped to define the separate identity of these Arab Jews within the emerging Israeli society.³⁸ Further, this type of social and economic discrimination on the part of European Jews was also evident in their treatment of the

Mizrahi Jews who immigrated to Israel from other Arab countries after the creation of the state in 1948.³⁹

David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), the eventual leader of the new state of Israel, was the Yishuv's dominant political authority for over two decades. Ben-Gurion first wrested power by serving as the secretary-general of the Histadrut from 1921 until 1935,⁴⁰ and then by heading Mapai, the Zionist Labor Party, which by 1930 had absorbed other, earlier socialist groups and was in control of the Histadrut.⁴¹ Ben-Gurion and the Labor Zionist leaders are often described by historians in benign, moderate and accommodating terms. For example, historians Ian Bickerton and Carla Klausner state: "The majority of the Labor Zionists who controlled the Jewish Agency were socialists who ardently desired good relations with the Arabs and myopically believed that Zionism was good for the Arabs as well as the Jews."⁴² The Labor Zionists are also generally and favourably contrasted with Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky and the opposition Revisionist Zionist party, which Jabotinsky founded in 1925.

Jabotinsky, who strongly believed in the cultural superiority of the West, to which he felt the Jews socially and spiritually belonged, clearly stated that Zionism was not a return of the Jews to their "spiritual homeland" but simply an offshoot of European colonialism and a "civilizing mission" in the East.⁴³ As well, Jabotinsky was the first Zionist leader to acknowledge that the Palestinians were a nation and that they could not be expected to voluntarily relinquish their right to national self-determination.⁴⁴ In 1923 Jabotinsky publicly and presciently wrote:

Every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement. This is how the Arabs will behave and go on behaving so long as they possess a gleam of hope that they can prevent 'Palestine' from becoming the land of Israel.⁴⁵

Thus, for Jabotinsky, the only way the Arabs would accept the reality of the Zionist project was through the unilateral establishment of a Jewish state through military force – what Jabotinsky termed an “iron wall.” The Revisionist Zionists are described by Bickerton and Klausner as “a minority representing particularly urban, nonsocialist, property-owning Jews” and who were, nevertheless, a “vocal and ideologically consistent group throughout the mandate period.”⁴⁶ Indeed, Jabotinsky remained true to his conviction that Jewish military power was the key factor in the formation of a Jewish state.

The differences between Labor Zionists and Revisionist Zionists, however, were not as great as is usually portrayed. Labor increasingly relied upon the strategies propounded by Jabotinsky, as Ben-Gurion continually moved away from his initial plan to diffuse Arab opposition through the power of Jewish economics, and turned to other, more aggressive options instead (which will be addressed in later chapters).⁴⁷ Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s Ben-Gurion publicly conformed to the official position of the Zionist Labor movement, which held that the Arabs of Palestine did not constitute a separate national entity but were part of a larger Arab nation and that there was no inherent conflict between the interests of the Arabs of Palestine and the interests of the Zionists.⁴⁸ This position also claimed that Zionism’s only conflict was with the land-owning Arab elite, a discord which “would be resolved when the Arab peasants realized that their true interests coincided with those of the Jewish working class.”⁴⁹ However, although Ben-Gurion did not publicly use the terminology of the iron wall, his conclusions were virtually identical to those of Jabotinsky; like Weizmann and Herzl before them, both Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky considered British

support indispensable to the establishment of a Jewish state and Arab cooperation of far lesser importance.⁵⁰

Thus, like Jabotinsky, Ben-Gurion and other labour leaders believed that diplomacy would not solve the problems of the Jewish-Arab relationship, and that not socialism and improved conditions for Arab workers but only great-power support, large-scale Jewish immigration, and “insuperable Jewish military strength would eventually make the Arabs despair of the struggle”⁵¹ and accept a Jewish state in Palestine. The very existence of Palestinian Arabs and the response of the pre-state Zionist colonialists to this indigenous population, first by attempting to deny or minimize their existence, then by assuming an attitude of superiority and segregation, came to define both Yishuv and post-1948 Israeli society in a manner much different than if Palestine had truly been an empty land. It can, therefore, indeed be argued that violence was inherent in Zionism from its inception, since the Zionists were intent on taking over an already inhabited territory, using whatever means were necessary. Nevertheless, the official Zionist narratives articulated in the Declaration that early Jewish settlers peacefully sought to make barren deserts bloom and that the state was founded by socialist laborers dedicated to “bringing progress to all” are foundational national myths that continue to permeate Israeli self-identity and collective memory.

Notes:

¹ Israel Zangwill, “The Return to Palestine” in *New Liberal Review*, Vol. 2 December 1901, p. 627.

² David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East* (London:

- Faber and Faber, 1983) p. 19. In 1901, when Max Nordau, one of Herzl's earliest followers, found out that Palestine was indeed inhabited by Arabs, he exclaimed to Herzl: "I didn't know that – but then we are committing an injustice." Not concerned with this injustice for long, Nordau, an eminent Zionist leader until his death in 1923, publicly sought to reassure Palestinians that the Zionists had no intention of establishing a Jewish state there, while privately he claimed credit for the systematic duplicity that this assertion entailed. He also claimed credit for the Zionists' continual use of the word 'homeland' rather than the provocative word "state." Hirst, *The Gun*, p. 19.
- ³ Arnold Blumberg, *Zion before Zionism, 1838-1880* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985) p. 158.
- ⁴ Ian Bickerton and Carla Klausner, *Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Upper Saddle River, N.J. Prentice Hall, 2005) p. 20.
- ⁵ Golda Meir, *The Sunday Times* (London) June 15, 1969.
- ⁶ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 8.
- ⁷ Maxime Rodinson, *Israel and the Arabs* (New York: Random House, 1968) p. 14.
- ⁸ Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*. David Maisel, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) p. 43.
- ⁹ Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*, p. 43-44.
- ¹⁰ Hirst. *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, p. 18.
- ¹¹ David Novak, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 256.
- ¹² Ahad Ha'am, "The Truth from the Land of Israel," quoted in Alan R. Taylor. *The Zionist Mind* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1974) p. 103.
- ¹³ Quoted in Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) p.22.
- ¹⁴ Theodor Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, Harry Zohn, trans. (New York: Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960) p. 98.
- ¹⁵ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 2001) p. 5.
- ¹⁶ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p. 23.
- ¹⁷ *The Diaries of Theodore Herzl*, cited in Eli Lobel, "Palestine and the Jews," in *The Arab World and Israel* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970) p. 115.
- ¹⁸ The Jewish settlement waves or *aliyas* are generally considered as follows: First: 1882-1902; Second: 1905-1914; Third: 1919-1923; Fourth: 1924-1928; Fifth: 1933-1939.
- ¹⁹ Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*. (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001) p. 40.
- ²⁰ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 41 In order to accomplish these aims and to support the purchase of land from the Arabs, the WZO Congress of 1899 set up the Jewish Colonial Trust, the first Zionist bank, and in 1902 it also established a subsidiary, the Anglo-Palestinian Bank. In 1901, the Zionist Congress created the Jewish National Fund, to raise funds from Jews around the world in order to purchase land which, once bought, could be resold or rented only to Jews. By 1914 there were 85,000 Jews in Palestine and Jews owned over 100,000 acres of land. Smith, p. 43.
- ²¹ Anita Shapira, *Going toward the Horizon* Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1989, p. 75, 372 cited in Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel* p.18.
- ²² Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London and New York: Verso, 1995) p. 111.
- ²³ Finkelstein, *Image and Reality*, p. 111.
- ²⁴ Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 88.
- ²⁵ Bickerton and Klausner, *A Concise History*, p. 46.
- ²⁶ Yoav Peled, "Civil Society in Israel" in *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* Vol. 12, No. 1, 2005, p. 16.
- ²⁷ Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins*, p. 21.
- ²⁸ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 95.

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- ²⁹ Haim Hanegbi, “The Histadrut: Union and Boss” in Arie Bober, ed., *The Other Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1972) p. 123.
- ³⁰ Hanegbi, “The Histadrut: Union and Boss” p. 124.
- ³¹ Arie Bober, ed., *The Other Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1972) p. 12.
- ³² Bober, ed., *The Other Israel*, p, 10-11.
- ³³ Quoted in Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, p. 26.
- ³⁴ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 53.
- ³⁵ Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins*, p. 91, 120.
- ³⁶ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 55.
- ³⁷ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 55.
- ³⁸ Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins*, p. 117.
- ³⁹ Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins*, p. 195.
- ⁴⁰ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, p. 16-17.
- ⁴¹ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 95; Hanegbi, “The Histadrut: Union and Boss” p. 124.
- ⁴² Bickerton and Klausner, *A Concise History*, p. 46.
- ⁴³ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 12.
- ⁴⁴ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 598.
- ⁴⁵ Quoted in Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 13; About the Arabs and the Jews, Jabotinsky also stated: “the tragedy lies in the fact the there is a collision here between two truths but our justice is greater. The Arab is culturally backward, but his instinctive patriotism is just as pure and noble as our own; it cannot be bought, it can only be curbed [by a] *force majeure*.” Quoted in Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p.108.
- ⁴⁶ Bickerton and Klausner, *A Concise History*, p. 47.
- ⁴⁷ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 16.
- ⁴⁸ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 17.
- ⁴⁹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 17.
- ⁵⁰ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 18-19.
- ⁵¹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 19.

Chapter Three: The Narrative of the Balfour Declaration and International Support for a Jewish State

“In the year 1897 the First Zionist Congress, inspired by Theodor Herzl’s vision of a Jewish State, proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national revival in their own country.

“This right was acknowledged by the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, and re-affirmed by the Mandate of the League of Nations, which gave explicit international recognition to the historic connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and their right to reconstitute their National Home.”
Israeli Declaration of Independence, 1948

The Balfour Declaration, referred to in the above excerpt of the Declaration of Independence, was used by the Zionists to form the initial basis of the Zionist narrative of international legal recognition of their right to a state in Palestine. This was done first by publicly transforming a British policy letter into the “Balfour Declaration” and then by claiming the Declaration to be a binding statement of British support for the Zionist objective of creating a Jewish “home” in Palestine. Under the leadership of Chaim Weizmann, the Zionists also successfully lobbied to have the Balfour Declaration inserted into the British Mandate of the League of Nations following World War I, thereby elevating it to relevance in international law. However, despite the claim in the Declaration of Independence that this inclusion gave explicit international recognition to “their right to reconstitute their National Home” in Palestine, the right to a Jewish “state” in the region was never explicitly stated in Balfour’s undertaking. Nonetheless, the Zionists were able to leverage the controversial Balfour Declaration into a narrative of legitimacy and legality that produced dramatic consequences for Britain, the Zionists and the entire Middle East.

Issued on 2 November 1917 in the form of a letter from Arthur J. Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, to Lord Rothschild, the head of the British Zionist Organization, what was to become known as the Balfour Declaration stated:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.¹

This ambiguous statement of British policy in support of a "national home" was interpreted and then transformed by the Zionists into a statement of promise of British support for a Jewish "state" in Palestine, despite the fact that Britain had no legal authority to make such a promise. As Arthur Koestler notes, here was one nation, Britain, promising another nation, the Jews, the land of a third nation, the Palestinian Arabs, which was, at the time, under the dominion of a fourth nation, the Ottoman Empire.²

The Balfour Declaration came into being as a result of the efforts of Chaim Weizmann, a Belorussian Zionist who became a chemist at the University of Manchester, and in 1920 the president of the World Zionist Organization headquartered in London.³ Weizmann, who had made an important contribution to the British war effort, took advantage of his influential position to contact a number of British political leaders to gain their support for the Zionist cause.⁴ In his autobiography Weizmann states that the "time had come... to take action, to press for a declaration of policy in regard to Palestine on the part of the British Government. Toward the end of January 1917, I submitted to Sir Mark Sykes the memorandum prepared by our committee, and had several preliminary conferences with him."⁵

In July 1917 Weizmann submitted to the British government a formula for a proposed declaration, which was called "The Outline of a Programme for the Jewish Resettlement of Palestine in accordance with the Aspirations of the Zionist

movement.”⁶ This formula called for Palestine to be recognized as *the* national home of the Jewish people and provided for the establishment of a Jewish National Colonising Corporation for the resettlement and economic development of the country.⁷ The British were not prepared to accept the wording of the formula, which essentially asserted that all of Palestine belonged to the Jews, nor were they prepared to use the word “state.” A total of six drafts were painstakingly analyzed before Lord Balfour issued the final, ambiguously-worded statement in November 1917.⁸ Regarding the importance of Weizmann to the outcome of these discussions, Weizmann’s associate Harry Sacher states: “I can say with absolute certainty, that without Dr. Weizmann, we would have received neither a declaration, nor a mandate, nor international recognition in a Jewish national home in Palestine.”⁹

However, despite the Zionist claim in the Declaration of Independence that the Balfour statement amounted to an acknowledgement of “the right of the Jewish people to national revival in their own country,” historians such as M.E. Yapp maintain that the Balfour Declaration’s promise of “a national home” was virtually meaningless; it committed Britain to nothing definite, since the deliberately vague wording could be interpreted as British support for nothing more than a cultural center.¹⁰ Further, as High Commissioner Sir John R. Chancellor acknowledged in 1930:

The most significant and incontrovertible fact is, however, that by itself the Declaration was legally impotent. For Great Britain had no sovereign rights over Palestine, it had no proprietary interest, it had no authority to dispose of the land. The Declaration was merely a statement of British intentions and no more.¹¹

Nonetheless, British historian David Hirst argues: “It is difficult to recall a document which has so arbitrarily changed the course of history as this one.”¹²

The deliberately vague and ambiguous document served the purposes of the Zionists, who claimed success in finally winning great power support for a Jewish “homeland,” by which they meant “state,” in Palestine. Although Hirst claims that the Balfour Declaration “must be reckoned the finest flower of Zionist diplomacy at its most sophisticatedly ambivalent,”¹³ Zionist Max Nordau, who professed to have originated the synonym “homeland” to avoid provoking opposition, stated in 1923: “It was equivocal but we all understood what it meant...to us it signified ‘Judenstaat’ and it signifies the same now.”¹⁴

From its inception the Balfour Declaration was a contentious policy document which did not receive unanimous support among members of the British government. A number of members were concerned about the rights of the indigenous Arab population in Palestine, including Lord Curzon, who wrote in a 1917 Cabinet paper:

What is to become of the people of the country? [The Arabs] and their forefathers have occupied the country for the best part of 1,500 years. They own the soil...They profess the Mohammedan faith. They will not be content either to be expropriated for Jewish immigrants or to act merely as hewers of wood and drawers of water for the latter.¹⁵

To address these British concerns about the Arabs, Lord Balfour inserted into the Balfour Declaration the demand that nothing should be done that might clash with the “civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities” in Palestine.¹⁶

Although this statement was also included to quell Arab objections to the Balfour Declaration, that objective was not to be met in practice. Indeed, the Balfour Declaration served to diminish the significance of the Palestinian Arabs, since referring to the Palestinian people as “the non-Jewish communities,” even though they

constituted 91 percent of the population of approximately 670,000, contributed to denying Arabs their rights and relegated them to a peripheral status in Palestine.¹⁷

As well as minimizing the existence and rights of the Palestinian Arabs, the Balfour Declaration inherently contradicted earlier British promises to the Arabs to support their national aspirations, promises made in letters between Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt and Sharif Husayn (also Hussein), the *amir* of Mecca who ruled the Hejaz (now northwest Saudi Arabia). From July 1915 until March 1916, a time when the British were very concerned about the outcome of World War I, these two men were in correspondence as the British attempted to convince the Arab leader to command an Arab rebellion against the Turks. In exchange for this rebellion, the British promised Husayn, and his sons Faysal and Abdullah, support for an independent Arab state at the end of the war, to be assisted and advised by the British.¹⁸ In a letter dated October 1915, and in response to Husayn's request for a specific commitment regarding boundaries, McMahon stated: "Great Britain is prepared to recognize and uphold the independence of the Arabs in all the regions lying within the limits demanded by the Sharif of Mecca."¹⁹

Whether or not the proposed Arab territory was to include Palestine has been the subject of much subsequent debate among all parties concerned. However, according to Yapp, the officials in Cairo who were masterminding the British-Arab alliance, including Gilbert Clayton, head of Military Intelligence in Egypt, founder of the Arab Bureau, and British policy advisor on Palestine,²⁰ "considered the inclusion of Palestine to be consistent with their notion that a loose Arab confederation under British control offered the best means of securing British interests in the Near East."²¹

Husayn kept his side of the bargain and initiated the Arab Revolt on 5 June 1916.²²

Yet, as a demonstration of the lack of cohesion between London and Cairo, as well as the lack of clear, well-planned policy objectives in London, less than two years after promising the Arabs support for their own national independence, the British stated their support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. In addition, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, made between Britain and France in May 1916, further demonstrates British policy incongruence and contradictory promises. This agreement provided for the post-war division of the Ottoman Empire into French and British spheres of influence, whereby France would control what is now Syria and Lebanon, Britain what is now Iraq, and the majority of Palestine would fall under a shared, international administration.²³

If Britain's contradictory promises to the Arabs and French were based on wartime contingencies and momentary need, so too was British support for the Zionist program primarily the result of self-serving political motivations. By late 1916 the British had changed their minds about sharing Palestine with France following the war. Implementation of a Jewish homeland would provide justification for maintaining a British occupation of Palestine, which was deemed necessary in order to keep France and Russia from Egypt and the Suez Canal.²⁴ At the same time, Britain wanted to win the support of American Jews for the war effort, since wealthy pro-German Jews had helped to finance President Wilson's election and were putting pressure on him to keep the Americans out of the war.²⁵ Concerning the latter, Malcolm Thomson, the official biographer of British Prime Minister Lloyd George, states that Mark Sykes, then Under-Secretary to the War Cabinet and the instigator of negotiations with Weizmann,

supported the idea that “an allied offer to restore Palestine to the Jews would swing over from the German to the allied side the very powerful influence of American Jews, including Judge Brandeis, the friend and adviser of President Woodrow Wilson.”²⁶

Furthermore, after the Americans entered the war in April 1917, the expectations for political restructuring following the war were altered. The British anticipated that the previous pattern of great powers arranging territories without concern for the desires of the indigenous population was likely to be replaced with concepts of self-determination as championed by American President Wilson.²⁷ Thus the British believed that support for Zionism and a “solid body of Jewish and Arab opinion in favour of independence”²⁸ from Turkey would provide Britain with a strong hand at the anticipated war-end peace conference.²⁹ Yet, while the British were attempting to manipulate international relations with the Balfour Declaration, the Zionists were being equally skillful in manipulating the British, prompting Gilbert Clayton to write in December 1917 that he was anxious “about the effect of the tremendous propaganda which is to be carried out in connection with the Zionist movement on Arab opinion here.”³⁰ Clayton believed that the world trend “would not permit a government to exclude any one community from the rights and privileges granted to others.”³¹ Concerning Britain and the Arabs, Clayton was proven wrong. Clayton was also replaced in July 1919 by Richard Meinertzhagen, a committed Zionist.³²

While Arab influence was diminishing, despite British assurances to Husayn of continued support for Arab national independence, the superior attitude of the Zionists towards the Arabs remained unchanged, even though cloaked behind claims of

peaceful intentions.³³ Chaim Weizmann, as head of the newly created Zionist Commission, was sent from London to Palestine in 1918. To help quell Arab fears over Zionist immigration, Weizmann met with Husayn's son, Faysal, who had led the Arab Revolt and who had also established a government in Damascus.³⁴ Weizmann told Faysal that the Zionists did not intend to create a Jewish government and that Jews were only asking to settle in the Arab territory in order to enjoy full civil rights, insisting that a Jewish government would be "fatal to his plans" of providing a "home in the Holy Land."³⁵ However, in a letter to his wife Weizmann stated, "The Jewish population in Palestine cannot be classed on the same level as the Arabs... We should be treated as the founders of the Jewish National Home and the future masters of Palestine."³⁶ While admitting that the Balfour Declaration was merely a framework which would mean "exactly what we would make it mean – neither more nor less," Weizmann publicly stated in London in 1919 that "Palestine shall be as Jewish as England is English."³⁷

At the 1919 Peace Conference, Weizmann attended as the international Zionist representative. Despite the fact that Jews represented less than ten percent of Palestine's population and the Zionist movement did not reflect mainstream Jewish opinion, the British made clear their preference for Zionist proposals over the Arabs' demands for the right to self-determination.³⁸ The British perspective, as well as their generally dismissive attitude toward the Arabs, is illustrated by a confidential government memo written by Balfour in 1919:

Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far greater import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit the ancient land.³⁹

Rashid Khalidi asserts that “In view of these revealing words, one can easily identify the source of the discriminatory language of the famous declaration which bears Balfour’s name and of the Mandate document that he helped to negotiate.”⁴⁰ Yet even prior to its ratification by the League of Nations, the Palestinian Arabs refused to recognize the Balfour Declaration, and violent protests erupted in Palestine against what the Arabs presciently perceived to be a British-Zionist strategy to take over their country.⁴¹ Furthermore, the Palin Commission, appointed to investigate the Nebi Musa riots of April 1920 which were the first expression of mass violence between Arabs and Jews, traced the origins of the trouble directly to the Balfour Declaration and to the general sentiments held by the Arabs that Palestine was indeed part of the territory which the British had promised would form an Arab nation.⁴²

In 1922 the League of Nations ratified the mandate system, the method of taking over Ottoman territories with the ostensible purpose of facilitating eventual self-government, in contradistinction to overt and conventional colonialism. Weizmann, who succeeded in recruiting Balfour to lead an Anglo-Zionist lobby to convince the Americans not to oppose the Zionists, was also successful in having the Balfour Declaration included in the preamble to the British Palestinian Mandate. This inclusion, according to Zionist narrative, thereby elevated the Balfour Declaration to the status of international law, a claim of legality which was unprecedented and is still contested, but which resulted, nevertheless, in international recognition of Zionist aims.⁴³

Thus were the Zionists able to transform the status of the Balfour Declaration from a deliberately vague policy statement into the narrative of international

acceptance of the Jewish right, as articulated in the Declaration of Independence: “to national revival in their own country.” Despite the lack of precedent in international law, this right was claimed by the Declaration to be “re-affirmed by the Mandate of the League of Nations, which gave explicit international recognition to the historic connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and their right to reconstitute their National Home.” And with these assertions the Declaration of Independence formalized the Zionists’ right to create a Jewish state in Palestine, even though the word “state” was never mentioned in either the Balfour Declaration or in the League of Nations’ Mandate.

The successful leveraging of the Zionist narrative of the Balfour Declaration into the Mandate preamble, and ultimately into the claim of a legal basis for the state of Israel, adds credence to the assertion of Edward Said that:

The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations *are* themselves narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.⁴⁴

Based on political manoeuvrings and the strength of the Zionist narrative, the Palestinian Arabs, for so long part of the Ottoman Empire and dominated by the Turks, were to be henceforth controlled by the British, and were forced to contend with the now internationally recognized aspirations of the Zionists to their territory in Palestine, thereby setting events in motion which continue to resonate until the present.

Notes:

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- ¹ Cited in Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005) p. 71.
- ² Arthur Koestler quoted in Avi Shlaim "The Balfour Declaration" in William. Roger Louis, ed., *Yet More Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005) p. 253.
- ³ Jon Kimche, *Palestine or Israel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973) p. 107.
- ⁴ Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001) p. 71.
- ⁵ Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (New York: Harper, 1949) p. 186.
- ⁶ Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, p. 186.
- ⁷ Leonard Stein, *Zionism* (London: Ernest Benn, 1925) p. 113-115.
- ⁸ J. M. N. Jeffries, *Palestine: The Reality* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969) p. 165.
- ⁹ Harry Sacher, *Ha'aretz* 2 November 1927 quoted in Jehudia Reinhartz, "The Balfour Declaration and its Maker: A Reassessment" in *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 64, No. 3 September 1992, p. 455.
- ¹⁰ M. E. Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War* (New York: Longman Inc., 1991) p. 290.
- ¹¹ Sir John R. Chancellor to Lord Stamfordham, May 27, 1930, Middle East Archive, St. Antony's College, Oxford in Sol M Linowitz, "The Legal Basis for the State of Israel" in *American Bar Association Journal*, Vol. 43, 1957, p. 522. See also Henry Cattan, *Palestine and International Law* London: Longman Press, 1973.
- ¹² David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1983) p. 37-38.
- ¹³ Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, p. 39.
- ¹⁴ Quoted in Christopher Sykes, *Two Studies in Virtue* (London: Collins Publishers, 1953) p. 72.
- ¹⁵ Quoted in David Gilmour, "The Unregarded Prophet: Lord Curzon and the Palestine Question" in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring 1996), p. 64; Sir Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India and the only Jewish member of the British Cabinet, disagreed with the political nature of Zionist aims and questioned the credentials of the Zionist Organization to speak for all Jews, claiming "Zionism has always seemed to me to be a mischievous political creed." British Government, British Public Record Office, Cabinet No. 24/24 (August 1917).
- ¹⁶ Cited in Ian Bickerton and Carla Klausner. *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Upper Saddle River, N.J. Prentice Hall, 2005) p. 41.
- ¹⁷ Muhammad Hallaj "Palestine: The Suppression of an Idea" *The Link* - Volume 15, Issue 1 January - March 1982 p. 2 cited in Americans for Middle East Understanding <http://www.ameu.org>
- ¹⁸ Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War*, p. 280-283.
- ¹⁹ *The McMahon Letter (October 24, 1915)* in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, ed., *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001) p. 11.
- ²⁰ Kimche, *Palestine or Israel*, p. 30.
- ²¹ Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War*, p. 284.
- ²² Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War*, p. 286.
- ²³ *The Sykes-Picot Agreement (May 15-16, 1916)* in *The Israel-Arab Reader*, p. 13-16.
- ²⁴ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*. (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1994) p. 163.
- ²⁵ Kimche, *Palestine or Israel*, p. 23.
- ²⁶ After studying the original documents relating to the Balfour Declaration, Thomson stated in *The Times* (London) on 2 November 1949: "From these it was clear that although certain members of the Cabinets of 1916 and 1917 sympathized with Zionist aspirations, the efforts of Zionist leaders to win any promise of support from the British Government had proved quite ineffectual, and the secret Sykes-Picot agreement with the French for partition of spheres of interest in the Middle East seemed to doom Zionist aims. A change of attitude was, however, brought about through the initiative of Mr. James A. Malcolm, who pressed on Sir Mark Sykes, then Under-Secretary to the War Cabinet, the thesis that an allied offer to restore Palestine to the Jews would swing over from

the German to the allied side the very powerful influence of American Jews, including Judge Brandeis, the friend and adviser of President Wilson. Sykes was interested, and at his request Malcolm introduced him to Dr. Weizmann and the other Zionist leaders, and negotiations were opened which culminated in the Balfour Declaration.”

²⁷ Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War*, p. 287.

²⁸ Kimche, *Palestine or Israel*, p. 56.

²⁹ Kimche, *Palestine or Israel*, p. 56-57.

³⁰ Clayton letter to Arnold Wilson, quoted in Kimche, *Palestine or Israel*, p. 33

³¹ Quoted in Kimche, *Palestine or Israel*, p. 33.

³² Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War*, p. 329.

³³ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 77.

³⁴ Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War*, p. 324-325.

³⁵ Kimche, *Palestine or Israel*, p. 41, 47.

³⁶ Quoted in Kimche, *Palestine or Israel*, p. 155.

³⁷ *Chaim Weizmann: Excerpts from his Historic Statements, Writings and Addresses* (New York: The Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1952) p. 48 and 302 cited in Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, p. 40.

³⁸ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 83.

³⁹ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 86; Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006) p. 36.

⁴⁰ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 37.

⁴¹ Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate*, Haim Watzman, trans. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000) p. 141.

⁴² Fritz Liebreich, *Britain's Naval and Political Reaction to the Illegal Immigration of Jews to Palestine-1945-1948* (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2005) p. 33.

⁴³ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 36-37.

⁴⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993) p. xiii.

Chapter Four: The Holocaust Narratives, Prior to and Following the Creation of the State

“The recent Holocaust, which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the need to solve the problem of the homelessness and lack of independence of the Jewish people by means of the re-establishment of the Jewish state, which would open the gates to all Jews and endow the Jewish people with equality of status among the family of nations.

“The survivors of the disastrous slaughter in Europe, and also Jews from other lands, have not desisted from their efforts to reach Eretz-Yisrael, in face of difficulties, obstacles, and perils; and have not ceased to urge their right to a life of dignity, freedom and honest toil in their ancestral land.” The Israeli Declaration of Independence, 1948

The story that Israel was created as a direct and natural outcome of the Holocaust is an almost universally accepted narrative and one generally treated by academics as an acknowledged and uncontested historical “fact.” As Laurence Silberstein states, “In spite of the classical Zionist view that the movement entailed a revolt against Diaspora Jewish history and culture, the State of Israel, from the outset, declared a clear, almost causal link between the Holocaust and the establishment of the state.”¹ This link, as articulated in the first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence cited above, together with a Western assumption of homogeneity among Jews – which equated European Jews with the Jews in Palestine – resulted in a general international perception of an inevitable connection between the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. In examining the dominant Zionist Holocaust narratives, this chapter argues that not only was the Holocaust appropriated to justify Israel’s creation, but that it has been strategically used to shape Israeli self-identity and collective memory, to frame social and political debates within Israel regarding Israeli-Arab relations, and to silence criticisms of Israeli government policy. This analysis is framed in two parts: the first section of the chapter focuses on the period prior to,

during and following the Holocaust, until 1948; the second addresses the Zionist narratives formulated after the creation of the state.

Aside from the collective guilt over the Holocaust and sympathy for Jewish survivors among many Western nations, the logical and moral connection between the Holocaust and the state of Israel is based on pervasive, Zionist-generated assumptions: that there were no other alternatives for the surviving Jews; that the Jewish survivors all needed and wanted a state of their own; that Palestine, as their sole “home,” was the destination of choice for the majority of survivors; and that the Yishuv wanted these European Jews to come to Palestine out of compassion and natural affinity. Despite the aforementioned assumptions and the Zionist narrative articulated in the Declaration that “The recent Holocaust ...proved anew the need to solve the problem of homelessness...of the Jewish people by means of the re-establishment of the Jewish State,” there was no inevitable causative connection between the Holocaust and the formation of Israel except the one formulated by the Zionists and facilitated by the Americans under President Harry Truman. Nonetheless, the Zionist leadership under Ben-Gurion was successful in creating a narrative in which, according to Israeli Amos Elon, “The genocide of the Jews by Hitler has been turned into a legitimizing myth for the existence of the state of Israel.”²

To more fully understand the Zionist narratives related to the Holocaust, it will be helpful to examine events in Palestine during the 1930s, including Jewish immigration to the region and the Yishuv leadership’s attitudes towards European Jews prior to the outbreak of the war. Concerning the former, here again most academic history texts imply a natural, almost inevitable causal relationship between

Hitler's rise to power and the large emigration of German Jews to Palestine between 1933 and 1939, referred to in the traditional Zionist narrative as the fifth *aliyah* or wave. Indeed, between 1933 and 1936 these immigrants doubled the Jewish population in Palestine, a fact which had a major impact on the Palestinian Arabs and was one of the prime factors in precipitating the Arab Revolt of 1936-39.³ However, scholars such as Avraham Barkai, Edwin Black and others argue that this immigration was not inevitable but was the direct result of a political and economic alliance between the Nazi party and key Yishuv and German Zionist leaders, an alliance which began in 1933 and lasted until the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴ Known as the *Haavara* or Transfer Agreement, this now well-documented but still controversial agreement enabled German Jews to leave Germany with a portion of their capital for Palestine alone, in exchange for the Jewish Agency's efforts to aid and stabilize German economic development, import German manufactured goods into the Middle East, and help block plans for the international trade boycott of Germany that was being spearheaded by American Jews.⁵

In spite of the increasing numbers of Jews in Palestine throughout the 1930s, by the end of the decade Jews still comprised less than one third of the total population. In 1939 Germany tightened its restrictions on Jewish émigrés and the British began curtailing Jewish immigration to Palestine. As a result of the Arab Rebellion of 1936-39, and in order to prevent further unrest and to gain Arab support for the war effort, as well as to safeguard their Middle Eastern interests, British officials published a White Paper which recommended the creation of a Palestinian state after a ten-year period. The White Paper also restricted Jewish immigration to a

total of 75,000 over the coming five-year period. Pursuing this policy, Britain began to block Jewish refugees from entering Palestine and to divert them to other locations.⁶

Because the British and the Jews shared a common enemy during World War II, the Yishuv officially backed the British against Germany, all the while stealing weapons and munitions from them in preparation for an armed conflict with Britain once the war ended.⁷ The Zionists also recognized that if the British immigration policy went uncontested and if Jews in other countries were successful in pressuring their governments to admit European Jewish refugees, the Zionist project in Palestine would be in grave danger. Notwithstanding his assertion in the Declaration of Independence concerning Jewish immigrants that “in recent decades they returned in masses,” immigration was a problem that the Zionist leaders had been concerned about throughout the 1920s and 1930s. This is illustrated by Ben-Gurion’s statement in his memoirs: “I saw immigration as the central issue facing Zionism.”⁸ In describing how the pre-occupation of Jews in other countries with rescuing European Jews in the late 1930s might hurt the work of creating a Jewish state in Palestine, Ben-Gurion stated in a letter to the Zionist executive on 17 December 1938:

Britain is trying to separate the issues of the refugees from that of Palestine. It is assisted by anti-Zionist Jews...if Palestine will not absorb them another territory will. Zionism is endangered...If Jews will have to choose between the refugees, saving Jews from concentration camps, and assisting a national museum in Palestine, mercy will have the upper hand and the whole energy of the people will be channelled into saving Jews from various countries. Zionism will be struck off the agenda...If we allow a separation between the refugee problem and the Palestine problem, we are risking the existence of Zionism.⁹

In his determination to establish a state, Ben-Gurion regarded the efforts of other countries and organizations to absorb German Jews into their territories as a threat to the Zionist cause.¹⁰ As a consequence, and as a result of the *Haavara*

Agreement, the initiative in the struggle against Nazism during the 1930s generally originated from non-Zionist Jews and their organizations.¹¹ Nor was Ben-Gurion the only Yishuv Zionist leader more interested in the fate of Palestine than that of the Jews outside the Zionist context.¹² On 11 September 1939, when Hitler was invading Poland, the Histadrut Executive Committee debated the role that Jews were to play in the war. Some, like Eliyahu Golomb, leader of the Yishuv's paramilitary defence force, the Haganah, wanted a general conscription of all Jews in whichever country they resided. The majority disagreed, and sided with Ben-Gurion, who responded:

For me, Zionist considerations take precedence over Jewish sentiments, and I only heed Zionist considerations in this matter – that is, what is required for Eretz Israel. Zionism is the most profound thing in Judaism, and I think we should act according to Zionist considerations and not merely Jewish considerations, for a Jew is not automatically a Zionist.¹³

Thus, despite the narrative enshrined in the Declaration of Independence that the re-establishment of the Jewish state “would open the gates to all Jews” and despite an expressed awareness of the difficulties faced by the Polish Jews, the key Yishuv political and labour leaders were interested in a specifically Zionist solution – a state in Palestine – for *Zionist* Jewish people.

A similar attitude towards European Jews apparently persisted during and following the war. According to Uri Avnery, an Israeli journalist and former politician who was once a member of the Irgun, an anti-British terrorist organization:

Throughout the war, nothing much was done by the Zionist leadership to help the Jews in conquered Europe about to be massacred... Many people think that things should and could have been done: hundreds of Haganah and Irgun fighters could have been parachuted into Europe; the British and American governments could have been pressured into bombing the railways leading to the death camps...¹⁴

Similarly, in 1943, the year of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, Jewish Agency Chairman Yitzhak Greenbaum declared: “If I am asked could you give from UJA [United Jewish Appeal] money to rescue Jews? I say, ‘No, and again no.’ In my opinion, we have to resist that wave which puts Zionist activities in the second line.”¹⁵ In October 1946, Rabbi Hillel Silver, then head of the Zionist Organization of America, stated in a speech to the organization membership, “are we again, in moments of desperation, going to confuse Zionism with refugeeism, which is likely to defeat Zionism? Zionism is not a refugee movement.”¹⁶

Israeli historian Dina Porat, who also challenges conventional assumptions regarding Zionist actions and attitudes towards the Holocaust and its victims, states that the Yishuv’s Zionist leadership was ambivalent about the behaviour and moral character of the survivors, in addition to their importance to the state. In the early 1940s, Ben-Gurion had anticipated that there would be millions of surviving European Jews who would immigrate to Palestine to fulfill the demographic requirements of the anticipated state.¹⁷ Porat’s research demonstrates that at the conclusion of the war, Mapai members debated the refugee question concerning the role of survivors in the Zionist project, asking: “Those Jews [that survived], are they a hindrance, an obstacle to Zionism, or a benefit?”¹⁸ According to Porat, during his visits to the Holocaust survivors in the Displaced Persons (D.P.) camps in 1945, Ben-Gurion “realized the possible convergence of their needs with the needs of Zionism.”¹⁹ Once the decision was made that the survivors would be a benefit to the Yishuv in terms of demographics and public relations and were, therefore, still useful to achieving the goal of a Jewish state, the Yishuv leaders became determined to get the European refugees to Palestine

and to Palestine alone.²⁰ The Jewish victims of the Nazis thus became the Zionists' means of mobilizing international sympathy and opinion in favour of the creation of a Jewish state while they also became an effective political weapon in the Zionist struggle both to gain American support and to oppose the British in Palestine.

Following the war, there were between seven to nine million displaced persons, of whom one to two million did not want to return to their countries of origin, resulting in the emigration of over one million refugees to 113 countries over a period of five years.²¹ Of these million plus refugees, approximately 250,000 were Jewish war refugees in Displaced Persons camps.²² Yet contrary to the Declaration's narrative that "the survivors of the disastrous slaughter in Europe...have not desisted in their efforts to reach Eretz-Yisrael, in face of difficulties, obstacles, and perils," most of the original 250,000 displaced Jews either wanted to go to the United States or to stay in Europe, even in the face of the intimidation tactics used by Zionist envoys to induce survivors to immigrate to Palestine.²³ The resistance of the majority to go to Palestine was answered with intense propaganda work by the Jewish Agency, whose tactics included confiscation of food rations, dismissal from work, removal of legal protection and visa rights, and expulsions from camps.²⁴

In his report on survivors to the American Jewish Congress in 1948, American Rabbi Klausner expressed his view on how to deal with these resistant refugees, stating: "I am convinced that the people must be forced to go to Palestine...The first step in such a program is the adoption of the principle that it is the conviction of the world Jewish community that these people must go to Palestine."²⁵ That this

perspective was not universally held by American Jews is illustrated, however, by the 1946 statement of *New York Times* publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger:

Admitting that the Jews of Europe have suffered beyond expression, why in God's name should the fate of all these unhappy people be subordinate to the single cry of Statehood? I cannot rid myself of the feeling that the unfortunate Jews of Europe's D.P. camps are helpless hostages for whom statehood has been made the only ransom.²⁶

Ultimately, however, the Zionists succeeded in their efforts since the lobbying on the part of the Jewish Agency was able to convince a majority of the refugees to claim that they wanted to go to Palestine, even if they wrote down other countries as well.²⁷

Although many of these refugees had previously hoped to go to the United States, it was, as Smith states, a “forlorn hope” since the Americans did not immediately change their restrictive immigration laws, in place since the 1920s.²⁸ These were also laws that the American Zionists did not want changed. Indeed, David Hirst argues: “no one did more to encourage the American denial than the Zionists themselves.”²⁹ Morris Ernst, a Jewish lawyer, co-founder of the American Civil Liberties Union, and an associate of American President Franklin Roosevelt, maintains that the Zionist pressure was tremendous. Ernst, sent by Roosevelt to explore the possibilities of an international refugee and immigration effort, states that he was treated like a traitor and was openly accused by Zionist leaders of undermining Zionism with the plan for freer immigration.³⁰ Furthermore, Roosevelt told Ernst: “The Zionist movement knows that...they can raise vast sums for Palestine by saying to donors, ‘There is no other place this poor Jew can go.’ But if there is a world political asylum for all people irrespective of race, creed or color, they cannot raise

their money.”³¹ And American money and American support for a Jewish state was, from the Zionist perspective, now crucial.

As Ben-Gurion states in his memoirs, “America’s entrance into the war left no room for doubt that after the war the United States rather than England would call the tune.”³² Therefore, Ben-Gurion travelled to the United States in 1940 and 1942 “to enlist the support of American Jewry in the struggle to cancel out the White Paper and establish a Jewish State after the war.”³³ However, the Zionists were unable to enlist Roosevelt’s support for a Jewish state in Palestine. When Franklin Roosevelt died in April 1945, Harry Truman assumed the American presidency and their task then proved immeasurably simpler.³⁴ Truman, who was very concerned about garnering the American Jewish vote, told American ambassadors to Arab countries that he was sorry, but “I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.”³⁵ Over the following months Truman, influenced by his Zionist advisors in the White House, David Niles and Max Lowenthal, who convinced him that to offer US immigration to Jewish refugees would dilute the argument that a Jewish state was needed to absorb them, ignored State Department immigration legislation proposals, publicly asserted that Palestine was the Jewish refugees’ “only hope of survival” and was persuaded to intervene on the Zionists’ behalf with the British by requesting that Britain issue 100,000 refugee permits for Jews to enter Palestine.³⁶

In the meantime, the Yishuv, which had organized an underground railroad, was illegally shipping displaced camp survivors and other Jewish refugees to Palestine, while concurrently engaging in an intense campaign of terrorism against the

British.³⁷ Struggling to resolve the situation in Palestine, and, it has been argued, with the expectation not of giving up the Mandate but of having it amended in the form of a trusteeship under UN auspices, the British handed over the fate of the region to the United Nations in February 1947.³⁸ Circumstances, however, did not unfold the way the British had envisioned, and, following the UN General Assembly Partition Resolution in November 1947 (which came into being as a direct result of American support and which is addressed in the following chapter), the state of Israel was established in May 1948.

Although the Zionists had been successful with their international propaganda discourse that portrayed a Jewish state in Palestine as the sole hope of the European Jewish Holocaust survivors, the establishment of the state now required the Zionist leaders to create a national narrative that integrated the Holocaust and the refugees with the Yishuv in the “new” Jewish entity, Israel. According to Ronald Zweig, the term *shilat hagola* “the negation of exile” embodied the core Zionist ideology of “the negative or pessimistic view of Jewish life outside of Eretz Israel.” This ideology considered the Holocaust to be the logical, if extreme, outcome of life in the Diaspora.³⁹ In creating a new national mythology, the Zionists had to reconcile their perception of the weak, victimized Diaspora Jewish Holocaust survivors with their own image of the strong, militant, victorious, but still European-looking “new” Jews of the Yishuv.

Ben-Gurion’s attitude toward and subsequent use of the Holocaust in the national narrative as formalized in the Declaration of Independence has been characterized by Shlomo Ben-Ami, an Israeli historian, former minister in the

government of Ehud Barak and a leading participant in the Camp David Summit of 2000, as follows:

He had only one central issue in his mind – the creation of a state of Israel. The Holocaust didn't interest him very much in the beginning, but he discovered that he couldn't build a cohesive nation through the ethos of the new Israel, the Sabra, because people were coming from all over the world. So he needed to resort to Jewish memories, to Jewish values, to *Jewish catastrophe*, as a way to unite the newborn nation.⁴⁰

Similarly, Porat claims that Ben-Gurion's references to the Holocaust in the Declaration of Independence functioned to historically legitimate the new state and that subsequently a whole complex of myths, symbols and rituals in Israeli society have been associated with the Holocaust.⁴¹ In this regard Porat argues:

Insofar as the Holocaust was now seen as providing a fundamental legitimation for the Jewish state, there was a basic bond between the fate of Diaspora Jewry and the new state. Therefore, the Jews of Europe could not be ignored or disparaged... The phrase "forced to slaughter" in the Declaration of Independence appears to resolve this contradiction. "Forced" means that they fought and resisted mighty powers, so it was not their fault they were eventually led to slaughter.⁴²

Furthermore, Porat asserts that the Zionists addressed the inconsistencies between Zionist rhetoric and the realities of the Holocaust by creating official state commemorations and the Martyrdom and Heroism Remembrance Authority, thus "elevating the valor of the Jews in Europe to a position equal to their suffering"⁴³ and thereby resolving the problem of the Zionists' relationship with these "other" Jews. The idea of catastrophe as formulated and utilized by Ben-Gurion is, according to Israeli scholar Yosefa Loshitzky, a formative narrative and ideological core of modern Israeli identity, one which suggests "a mythic link between the destruction of European Jews and the birth of Israel – i.e. catastrophe and redemption."⁴⁴ To Loshitzky, the Holocaust has become subsumed in and submitted to the official Zionist

perspective “which is predicated on the perception of the State of Israel as the most suitable monument to the memory of European Jewry, the secular redemption.”⁴⁵

However, notwithstanding the Holocaust’s sympathetic and mythic value, because Ben-Gurion’s national, statist ideology regarded the Holocaust as the logical culmination of Jewish life in exile,⁴⁶ the Zionists’ negative perception of the Holocaust survivors also persisted as an integral part of Israeli identity. Porat notes that in a closed Mapai meeting in 1949, Ben-Gurion expressed sentiments to which Zionist leaders would not publicly admit: “Among the survivors of the German camps were people who would not have been alive were they not what they were – hard, mean, and selfish – and what they have been through erased every remaining good quality from them.”⁴⁷ Comparisons were then drawn between the Yishuv Zionist’s mythic self-image of the “productive person, imbued with universalistic humanist values, who worked for the common good”⁴⁸ and the survivors who were apparently the opposite. Ben-Gurion concluded that these “remnants” thus continued to pose an obstacle to Zionism and to themselves.⁴⁹ This perception reinforced the necessity of emphasizing the process of Jewish redemption which culminated in a new Israeli identity free of the burden of the Diaspora. Yet, despite the effort to create a collective, hegemonic identity through integrative narrative and memorials, the dominant Yishuv attitude towards the survivors often remained one of superiority and contempt. This attitude is recalled in an opinion piece in Israel’s *Ha’aretz* newspaper, written in 1996 by the daughter of Polish Holocaust survivors, who states: “My parents symbolized the Diaspora, they were despised. ‘You went like lambs to the slaughter, you did not fight or resist’ was the dominant attitude toward the Holocaust survivors until the 1980s.”⁵⁰

Loshitzky maintains that “in the Zionist narrative, the illegal immigration of European Jewish survivors and refugees to Palestine during the British mandate is described as if it were an inseparable part of the Holocaust.”⁵¹ In this narrative the events surrounding the ship *Exodus*, which was turned into a public relations vehicle by the Zionists, played a crucial role in the birth of the state. Israeli historian and journalist Tom Segev, author of one of the most critical attacks on Ben-Gurion’s behaviour during the Holocaust (*The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*) provides the following account of events: in July 1947 the *Exodus*, after leaving France with 4,500 displaced persons from German camps, was attacked by the British near Haifa, killing three and injuring dozens of passengers. The British then sent the ship back to France where the passengers refused to disembark and where they remained for three weeks, generating extensive media coverage and public sympathy. This sympathy was only intensified when the British returned the ship and its passengers to their point of origin in Germany.⁵²

That the anticipated arrival of the *Exodus* coincided with the hanging of two British sergeants by Irgun terrorists in Jerusalem particularly angered Ben-Gurion, who feared that the hanging would divert attention from the propaganda value of what he called “one of the greatest displays of the Jewish struggle, of Jewish pride, and of the connection with the Land of Israel.”⁵³ But from the Zionist perspective the *Exodus* saga served its purpose, having “helped persuade the world that the Jewish people needed their own state.”⁵⁴ Similarly, the movie *Exodus*, which Loshitzky calls “Hollywood’s ultimate Zionist epic”⁵⁵ is a paradigm for the traditional liberalizing, redemptive version of Zionism which suppresses the narrative of conquest,

colonization and domination of the “other,” whether that “other” is the Holocaust survivor, the Sephardi or Mizrahi Jew, or the Palestinian Arab.

The repercussions of the Zionist narratives of the Holocaust continue to reverberate widely, pervasively shaping both Israeli self-identity and Western perceptions, as exemplified by Avi Shlaim’s stated belief that: “The moral case for a home for the Jewish people in Palestine was widely accepted from the beginning; after the Holocaust it became unassailable.”⁵⁶ That Western perception of the direct relationship between the Holocaust and Israel continues unabated is illustrated by a 2001 review of Ilan Pappé’s book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* in the *Guardian Weekly*. Pappé argues in this book that Ben-Gurion’s rhetoric during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war about the dangers of annihilation or of a second Holocaust was public propaganda, since privately Ben-Gurion was confident of a Jewish victory. In response to this argument, reviewer Ian Black asserts that Pappé is here “ignoring the motives of the Jews” since, following the Holocaust, “the Jews were fighting, as they saw it, for survival. To ignore that perception – a huge factor in western sympathy for Israel in 1948 and for so long afterwards – is to misrepresent reality.”⁵⁷

However, in the three decades prior to the Holocaust, the Yishuv had already established the political, social, economic and military structures necessary for a Jewish state, while simultaneously defying the British White Paper through terrorism and illegal immigration. That a Jewish state would be established was not in doubt for the Zionists; it was only a matter of time and the attainment of new great-power support. Consequently, as Segev argues: “There is therefore no basis for the frequent assertion that the state was established as a result of the Holocaust.”⁵⁸ Yet, because of

the Zionists' successful appropriation of the European Holocaust for their own nationalist aims and narrative purposes, and through their success in keeping the *shoah* alive through national myths, commemorations and the frequent invocation of a possible repetition, to either inspire public fear or legitimize a host of Israeli actions, the Holocaust has assumed a central place in Israeli society, determining both Israeli attitudes and policy. The Holocaust has also been repeatedly invoked, along with charges of anti-Semitism, to silence any external, foreign critiques of Israeli government policies or actions. The Holocaust narratives have, therefore, monopolized the structure of permissible debate both within Israel and internationally, and have created a legitimating discourse that has become largely immune to rational and empirical challenges of any sort.

In addition, the Zionist Holocaust narratives continue to powerfully and negatively impact Israel's relationship with its neighbours and with Palestinian Arabs, both Israeli and in the Occupied Territories. In this regard Myron Aronoff states: "the changing symbolic salience and meanings of ...the Holocaust...for Israeli political culture reflect not only the general theme of the few against the many but a growing emphasis on the notion of "them against us."⁵⁹ Flapan argues that "Israel's myths are located at the core of the nation's self-perception. Even though Israel has the most sophisticated army in the region and possesses an advanced atomic capability, it continues to regard itself in terms of the Holocaust, as the victim of an unconquerable, bloodthirsty enemy,"⁶⁰ a perspective which leads Israel to justify all of its actions in terms of self-defence. Furthermore, Loshitzky argues: "It is the fate of the Palestinians...that the Holocaust occupies such a significant role in their collective

consciousness. And that is so because the memory of the Holocaust is “forced” upon them not only to justify Jewish settlement in Palestine, but to explain the expulsion of the Palestinians and the negation of their right to freedom and self-determination.”⁶¹

Thus do the grand narratives of the Holocaust, which were constructed and formalized in the Declaration of Independence to justify the state’s existence, continue to define Israeli national identity, shape the collective memory of the past, and powerfully impact the present.

Notes:

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- ¹ Laurence J. Silberstein, *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991) p. 10.
 - ² Quoted in Ian Bickerton, and Carla Klausner (*A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Upper Saddle River, N.J. Prentice Hall, 2005) p. 71.
 - ³ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1994) p. 255; Donald Neff, *Warriors for Jerusalem: The Six Days That Changed the Middle East* (New York: Lunden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1984) p. 22; In 1932, Jewish immigration to Palestine was only 9,553. In 1933 the number was 30,327. This doubled in 1935 to 61,854.
 - ⁴ For further research on the contentious collaboration between the Nazis and the Zionists, see the following: Eliahu Ben-Elissar, *La Diplomatie du III Reich et Les Juifs, 1933-1939*; Daniel Frenkel *On the Abyss: Zionist Policy and the Question of the German Jews, 1933-1938* Klaus Polkehn, “The Secret Contacts: Zionism and Nazi Germany, 1933-1941”; Edwin Black *The Transfer Agreement: The Untold Story of the Secret Agreement between the Third Reich and Jewish Palestine*; and Avraham Barkai, *From Boycott to Annihilation*.
 - ⁵ Klaus Polkehn, “The Secret Contacts: Zionism and Nazi Germany, 1933-1941” in *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 5, No. 3/4, Spring-Summer 1976, p. 54-55.
 - ⁶ Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001) p. 148-149.
 - ⁷ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 149.
 - ⁸ David Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, Nechemia Meyers and Uzy Nystar, trans. (Tel Aviv: Sabra Books, 1972) p. 45.
 - ⁹ Letter to the Zionist Executive, 17 December 1938, cited in Bober, ed., *The Other Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1972) p. 171; Jews were specifically targeted for German concentration camps after November 1938; earlier camps had been established to hold dissidents and political prisoners.
 - ¹⁰ Edwin Black, *The Transfer Agreement: The Untold Story of the Secret Pact between the Third Reich & Jewish Palestine* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984) p. 258-259.
 - ¹¹ Nathan Israeli, “Zionism and Anti-Semitism” in Arie Bober ed., *The Other Israel*, New York: Doubleday, 1972 p.171.

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- ¹² Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, David Maisel, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) p. 31.
- ¹³ Labor Movement Archives, Section 4, Dossier 29: Statements by Ben-Gurion, Minutes of the Histadrut Executive Committee, 11 September 1939 p. 3, cited in Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*, p. 31.
- ¹⁴ Uri Avnery, *Israel Without Zionism: A Plan for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Collier Books, 1971) p. 141.
- ¹⁵ Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* (New York: Julian Messner, 1961) p. 50.
- ¹⁶ Rabbi Hillel Silver, *New York Times*, October 27, 1946.
- ¹⁷ Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians* (London: Croom Helm, 1979) p. 287.
- ¹⁸ Mapai Central Committee, 22 November 1945 LPA, 23/45, cited in Dina Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State of Israel toward the Holocaust and Its Survivors: A Debate over Identity and Values" in Laurence J. Silberstein *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1991, p. 163.
- ¹⁹ Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State of Israel, p. 164.
- ²⁰ Alfred M. Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II: What Price Peace?* (New Brunswick, NJ: North American Publishers, 1982) p. 52.
- ²¹ Mark Wyman *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, 1989) Preface.
- ²² Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, *Report to the U.S. Government and His Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom* Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1946; Michael J. Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p. 109.
- ²³ Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 119.
- ²⁴ Alfred M. Lilienthal, *What Price Israel?* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953) p. 194.
- ²⁵ Quoted in Lilienthal, *What Price Israel?* p. 194.
- ²⁶ Arthur Hays Sulzberger, *New York Times*, Oct 27 1946; Indeed, Michael Cohen asserts that the American Jewish community was split between Zionists and those who favoured more Jewish immigration to the United States. Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 113.
- ²⁷ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 105; Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate*. Haim Watzman, trans. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000) p. 491.
- ²⁸ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 185.
- ²⁹ David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1983) p. 114; Michael Cohen states: "By way of a counterbalance to the Zionist lobby the American Council for Judaism (ACJ) sought to reduce the number of potential Jewish immigrants to Palestine by improving their living conditions in Europe and by securing the swift passage of an international bill of human rights, still pending at the UN. The ACJ organized its own lobby to secure the lifting of American immigration restrictions...which would thereby debilitate the Zionist case." Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 109.
- ³⁰ Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, p. 115.
- ³¹ Morris L. Ernst, *So Far So Good* (New York: Harper, 1948) p. 170-177 cited in Lilienthal, *What Price Israel?* p. 33.
- ³² David Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, Nechemia Meyers and Uzy Nystar, trans., (Tel Aviv: Sabra Books, 1972) p. 54.
- ³³ Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, p. 54.
- ³⁴ Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II*, p. 45.
- ³⁵ Quoted in Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, p. 114.
- ³⁶ Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, p. 115; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 113-114. Wanting to appease the Americans, the British suggested a joint Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on European refugees to look into settling the refugees elsewhere than Palestine. The Committee, formed on 10 December 1945, did recommend the immediate issuance of entrance certificates to 100,000 Jewish survivors, but on the condition that Palestine should neither become "an Arab state, in which the Arab majority would control the destiny of a Jewish minority or a Jewish state in which a Jewish majority would control that of an Arab minority." The Jewish Agency rejected the report. The joint Morrison-Grady Plan of July 1946, which recommended a

- unified, bi-national federal state, was first supported by Truman but, since it was also rejected by the Zionists, this support was short lived. Flapan, *Zionism*, p. 289-290; Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* p. 184, 187.
- ³⁷ Thurston Clarke, *By Blood and Fire: The Attack on the King David Hotel* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981) p.133.
- ³⁸ UN Special Committee on Palestine Summary Report, 31 August 1947, in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, ed. *The Israel-Arab Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 1969, 2001) p. 65; Britain's purpose in handing over Palestine to the UN was described by the Colonial Secretary, Arthur Creech-Jones, in the House of Commons as follows: "We are not going to the UN to surrender the Mandate. We are going to the UN setting out the problems and asking for their advice as to how the Mandate can be administered. If the Mandate cannot be administered in its present form, we are asking how it can be amended." Minutes of the House of Commons, 25 February 1947; See also Amitzur Ilan "'Withdrawal Without Recommendations' Britain's Decision to Relinquish the Palestine Mandate" in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia Haim, ed. *Zionism and Arabism in Palestine and Israel* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1982) p. 187-188.
- ³⁹ Ronald W. Zweig, "Israel-Diaspora Relations in the Early Years of the State" in Laurence J. Silberstein, *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991) p. 258.
- ⁴⁰ Amy Goodwin, *Democracy Now!* "Transcribed Debate between Ben-Ami and Finkelstein on Israel and the Palestinians" PBS Radio 14 February 2006, p. 1
<http://www.democracynow.org/shows/2006/02/14>
- ⁴¹ Silberstein, *New Perspectives on Israeli History*, p. 15.
- ⁴² Dina Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State of Israel Toward the Holocaust and its Survivors: A Debate over Identity and Values" in Silberstein, *New Perspectives on Israeli History*, p. 168-169.
- ⁴³ Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State" p. 169.
- ⁴⁴ Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) p. 14.
- ⁴⁵ Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*, p. 16.
- ⁴⁶ Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*, p. 16.
- ⁴⁷ The Mapai Center, 22-23 July 1949, LPA, section 2 11/2/1 cited in Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State" p. 162.
- ⁴⁸ Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State" p. 162.
- ⁴⁹ Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State" p. 163.
- ⁵⁰ Tzipi Reibenbach, "HaHorim Sheli" (My Parents) in *Ha'aretz*, October 25, 1996 p. 26 cited in Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*, p. 49.
- ⁵¹ Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*, p. 10.
- ⁵² Tom Segev. *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, Haim Watzman, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993) p. 129-132.
- ⁵³ David Ben-Gurion, *Chimes of Independence*, p. 317 cited in Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate*. Haim Watzman, trans. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000) p. 479.
- ⁵⁴ Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*, p. 4.
- ⁵⁵ Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*, p. 2.
- ⁵⁶ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 2001) p. 23.
- ⁵⁷ Ian Black, "Divided Loyalties" in *Guardian Weekly* London, 19 March 2007.
- ⁵⁸ Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 491.
- ⁵⁹ Myron J. Aronoff, "Myths, Symbols, and Rituals of the Emerging State" in Laurence J. Silberstein, *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991) p. 185.
- ⁶⁰ Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987) p. 8
- ⁶¹ Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*, p. 43.

Chapter Five: The Narrative of the 1947 UN Partition Resolution

“On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a Resolution requiring the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, and called upon the inhabitants of the country to take all the necessary steps on their part to put the plan into effect. This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their independent State is unassailable.” The Israeli Declaration of Independence, 1948

The Declaration of Independence cites the United Nation’s Partition Resolution of 1947 as a means of conferring international legal status and authority to the creation of the state of Israel. This authority is reinforced by the language used: the UN Resolution, and therefore the international legal body itself, is “*requiring* the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine.” However, the statement of fact concerning the adoption of the UN Resolution gives no indication of the amount of effort and influence that the Zionists exerted in order to have this resolution drafted and then passed. As well, the conventional Zionist narrative of the Yishuv’s “acceptance” and the Arab “rejection” of the Partition Resolution has further enhanced the perception of the Zionists’ role as one of compromise and acquiescence rather than agency. This chapter examines challenges to this narrative and analyzes the role that Zionists played both in thwarting the Arabs and in garnering American support for the partitioning of Palestine, support which resulted in the international endorsement of a Jewish state by the UN. Furthermore, despite utilizing the UN Resolution 181 to their advantage, the point that the Zionists never considered themselves legally bound to the terms of the resolution will also be addressed.

It can be argued that one of the most pervasive Israeli national myths concerns the relationship between the Zionists and the United Nations Partition Resolution of 29 November 1947. This Resolution called for the termination of the Mandate and the

separation of Palestine into two independent states, one Arab, one Jewish, as well as a “Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem.”¹ Flapan describes the conventional and almost universally accepted Zionist narrative in this manner:

Zionist acceptance of the United Nations Partition Resolution of November 29, 1947, was a far-reaching compromise by which the Jewish community abandoned the concept of a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine and recognized the right of the Palestinians to their own state. Israel accepted this sacrifice because it anticipated the implementation of the resolution in peace and cooperation with the Palestinians.²

This narrative of Zionist acceptance of the partitioning of Palestine and of the right of the Palestinians to their own state ignores the intense efforts put forth by the Zionists to have the region partitioned, since partition was perceived as a necessary tactical component of an overall Zionist strategy. The claims of compromises and sacrifices correspond to the Zionists being awarded and accepting less territory than they originally demanded, yet Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders never intended to be constrained by the allotted borders. Instead, as this chapter will demonstrate, the Zionists’ two-part strategy was to lobby for partition and then to increase the territory granted to Israel by the UN, through military means if necessary, while also thwarting the creation of a Palestinian state through a secret agreement with King Abdullah of Transjordan.³

Although historians have generally equated Ben-Gurion’s acceptance of a Jewish state in half of Palestine with acceptance of the entire UN Resolution, Ben-Gurion had long viewed partition as the first step toward a Jewish state in the whole of the territory. In response to the two-state partition recommendation of the Peel Commission, which had been set up to address the conflicts and issues raised by the

Arab Revolt, Ben-Gurion stated in a letter to his son on 5 October 1937: “I am certain we will be able to settle in all the other parts of the country, whether through agreement and mutual understanding with our Arab neighbours or in another way.”⁴ Ben-Gurion supported this partition plan at the Twentieth Zionist Congress, stating to detractors who wanted nothing less than the whole of Palestine: “I see in the realization of this plan practically the decisive stage in the beginning of full redemption and the most powerful lever for the gradual conquest of all of Palestine.”⁵ Ben-Gurion made a similar speech to the Histadrut on 3 December 1947, in which he stated: “Erect a Jewish State at once, even if it’s not in the whole land. The rest will come in the course of time. It must come.”⁶ Thus, although it allotted the Zionists only part of the region, the Jewish Agency leaders considered the UN Partition Resolution a victory. As articulated in the Declaration of Independence, the Resolution represented official international support and legal justification for a Jewish state, one whose boundaries could, and later would, be extended.⁷

It is important to review the events that led up to the Partition Resolution in order to understand the amount of manoeuvring and leveraging carried out by the Zionists to achieve their partition aims, as well as the impact of American President Harry Truman’s secured support on the fate of both the Zionists and the Arabs. Indeed, this shift in great-power allegiance from Britain to Truman was an essential element in the Zionist partition strategy since, as previously acknowledged, by the end of World War II international circumstances were dramatically altered and the United States was seen emerging as the new world power. That America was also concerned with

expanding its interests in the Middle East only stimulated the Zionists to redirect their efforts away from Britain and towards the new power broker.⁸

At the 1942 WZO Congress in New York City the Zionists had passed the Biltmore Program, which demanded the immediate establishment of a Jewish state in the whole of Mandate Palestine.⁹ Three years later the Zionists abandoned this program. Instead, the 1945 Zionist Conference decided on a policy of active opposition to British rule, and by 1946 Ben-Gurion had taken the World Zionist leadership away from the more diplomatically-inclined and pro-British Weizmann.¹⁰

About this transition of power Ben-Gurion simply states:

Differences of opinion developed between the president of the Zionist Organization, Dr. Weizmann, and myself as chairman of the Zionist Executive in regard to relations with the British. I believed that Zionist diplomatic efforts must now be centered on the United States rather than on England. Dr. Weizmann was not reelected to the Presidency.¹¹

Under Ben-Gurion's direction the Zionist leadership agreed to promote partition, considering it not as a concession to the Arabs but as a means of gaining American support for the idea of a Jewish state.¹² This promotion effort began in earnest once the British handed Palestine over to the United Nations on 14 February 1947, and a UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), comprised of eleven ostensibly neutral nations, was set up to investigate and propose a solution to the Palestinian debacle.¹³ Unfortunately for the indigenous Arab population, these officials had neither experience in the Middle East nor any knowledge of the Palestinian situation.¹⁴

During the UNSCOP tour of the region – which lasted five weeks and which coincided with the British blockade and forced return of the *Exodus*¹⁵ – what Pappé

refers to as the “able and well-prepared Zionist representatives,”¹⁶ headed by Weizmann, presented the committee members with a comprehensive partition plan. Although Bickerton and Klausner state that the Jewish Agency “accepted partition...on more or less the principles set out in the Peel Commission Report,”¹⁷ the Peel Commission’s partition proposal had allotted the Zionists 20 percent of the land.¹⁸ Weizmann’s proposal essentially limited the Arab state to the territory of the West Bank; the Jewish state was to occupy the rest of Palestine.¹⁹

Further, although the Zionists publicly declared support for a Palestinian state, in practice their strategy was to thwart its formation. To accomplish this aim, Zionist leaders sought a covert alliance with King Abdullah of Transjordan, the son of Sharif Husayn, who had been placed on the throne by the British.²⁰ This alliance was based on Abdullah’s regional ambitions and his belief that the Zionists represented a potential source of support for realizing his own dream of Greater Syria. Both sides wanted to see the absorption of the Palestinian Arabs into Transjordan.²¹ This idea had been previously incorporated into the 1937 recommendations of the Peel Commission, which, as well as advocating the partition of Palestine into two states, had also recommended the unification of the Arab state with Transjordan, to which the Arabs from the plains in the Jewish state would be transferred, either by agreement or by a compulsory exchange of populations.²²

Avi Shlaim, whose research has focused on the hidden agreements between the Zionists and the Arab leader over the latter’s proposed (and later realized) annexation of Palestinian territory, argues that Abdullah and the Zionists spoke the same language of “realism”: both shared a common protector in Britain, both desired to repress

Palestinian nationalism, and both shared a common enemy in the mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini.²³ Al-Husseini had assumed a leadership role in Arab Palestine in 1922 when Herbert Samuel, then British High Commissioner in Palestine and a Zionist, established the post of the Grand Mufti and installed the (at the time) pliant al-Husseini. This was done despite the fact that the rival Nashashibi candidate had won the elections among Muslim religious leaders and that al-Husseini had come fourth.²⁴

Samuel had thus placed al-Husseini at the center of Palestinian Arab religious and political life, and allowed him leadership of the national groups that developed in response to Zionism. Over time, however, the mufti became increasingly extreme in his support of an independent Arab Palestine. Sent into exile by the British following the Arab Revolts of 1936-39, where he developed an anti-British alliance with Hitler, the mufti returned to Cairo after the war, re-established himself as head of the Arab Higher Committee, and sought to obstruct the ambitions of both Abdullah and the Zionists.²⁵ The Palestinian leadership, led by al-Husseini, wanted a Palestine-wide unitary state with an Arab majority, a right which they believed was self-evident.²⁶ Fearing that the UNSCOP committee was biased in favour of the Zionists, the Palestinian leaders boycotted the committee. This defiant attitude led to what Harold Beely of the British Foreign Office called “exceedingly inept diplomacy”²⁷ which only aided the Zionists, who were, in the words of American Consul-General Robert Macattee, “ready to fete Committee members individually and collectively *ad nauseam*.”²⁸ The Arab case was instead presented to UNSCOP in Lebanon by delegates of the Arab League, the multi-national Arab organization which had been established in Cairo in 1945.²⁹ Pappé says of the Palestinian position that: “The

Palestinian nationalist notables...were helpless, even when the will to act was there. Once they surrendered diplomacy to the Arab League, the diplomatic battle was no longer in their hands.”³⁰ Rashid Khalidi, on the other hand, concludes that the Palestinians at this stage were already considered a negligible factor by the major international nations involved.³¹

In addition, the Israeli narratives that Palestinian Arab leaders were uniformly uncompromising and extremist, and that the masses of Palestinians were eager for war³² have not held up to scrutiny. For one thing, there was sizable Arab opposition to the mufti. Voicing public support for partition was generally considered treasonous, but a number of prominent and moderate Palestinians of diverse political affiliations made covert contacts and attempted to negotiate with Zionist leaders.³³ For another, in spite of the substantial number of Palestinians who were opposed to partition, the Zionists were well aware that, as reported by the Yishuv’s Arab affairs expert Ezra Danin, “the majority of the Palestinian masses accept the partition as a *fait accompli* and do not believe it is possible to overcome or reject it.”³⁴ Regarding the Palestinian people, Ben-Gurion conceded that “the decisive majority of them do not want to fight us and all of them together are unable to stand up to us.”³⁵ The Zionists, therefore, were not unduly perturbed by al-Husseini’s leadership. Instead, Ben-Gurion used the fact of the mufti’s wartime connection to Hitler and his current leadership of the Arab Higher Committee as an excuse to end official Zionist efforts to negotiate with the Arabs (Abdullah excepted).³⁶

Within nine months the UNSCOP committee presented two solutions to the UN General Assembly. The minority plan, favoured by India, Iran and Yugoslavia,

each with a large Muslim population, proposed an independent unitary federal state. The majority plan, favoured by eight nations including Canada, followed the Zionist lead and recommended the partition of Palestine into two states, with international status for Jerusalem.³⁷ Although the Zionists were not granted all the territory they had put forth in their proposal, the UNSCOP partition plan did grant 56 percent of Palestine to the Jews, who comprised 33 percent of the total population, owned 20 percent of the cultivable land and only six percent of the total territory.³⁸ The proposed Jewish state was also to include most of the fertile coastal area, western Galilee and the Negev, and would contain over 400,000 Arabs, a number almost equivalent to the Jewish population of approximately 500,000. The international conclave of Jerusalem would contain approximately 100,000 Jews and 105,000 non-Jews.³⁹ The Arab state, in the remaining less fertile 43 percent of Palestine, was to include ten thousand Jews along with 725,000 Arabs.⁴⁰ UNSCOP also recommended an economic union between the two states and a two-year transitional period.⁴¹ To appease the Arabs, the UNSCOP Plan contained the following, somewhat ironic, article:

It is recognized that partition has been strongly opposed by Arabs, but it is felt that opposition would be lessened by a solution which definitively fixes the extent of territory to be allotted to the Jews with its implicit limitations on immigration. The fact that the solution carries the sanction of the United Nations involves a finality which should allay Arab fears of further expansion of the Jewish State.⁴²

On 29 November 1947, UN Resolution 181 approved the partition of Palestine along the lines of the majority plan.⁴³ The resolution was passed in the General Assembly by a vote of 33 to 13. Britain and nine other countries abstained. The Soviet Union, anxious for a weakened Britain and its own foothold in the Middle East, also pushed hard for partition, placing the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. in temporary accord.⁴⁴ The

Soviet Union was also motivated by its own alignment with the Zionists. Recent documents from Russian archives demonstrate that Zionist leaders first made contact with the Soviet government in 1939, after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the annexation of part of Poland and the Baltic states to the Soviet Union, which increased the Soviet Jewish population by 1.8 million. In 1941 Weizmann met with Moscow's ambassador to London, Ivan Maisky, to discuss an exchange of populations, suggesting that half a million Arabs could be transferred to the Soviet Union in exchange for two million Jews under Soviet rule. Apparently Maisky was not shocked by this idea. Five months later, after the German invasion of Russia, the Zionists forcefully pursued two major goals: one, to reach an agreement that would allow Polish Jews to emigrate to Palestine and two, to convince the anti-Zionist Bolshevik leaders that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine would be in line with their own interests. The Zionists were obviously successful with their latter aim.⁴⁵ After the UN resolution was passed, the Arab delegation walked out and a week later the Arab League declared the partitioning of Palestine illegal.⁴⁶

How the needed majority votes were obtained at the UN is still a contentious issue. The commonplace position, described by Bickerton and Klausner, is that the partition plan was considered to be an American proposal, and since most of the UN member nations at that time were Western, these states identified more strongly with the Western, European Jews than with the Eastern "Oriental" Arabs. The Holocaust is also often cited as a decisive factor, since it is commonly believed that Western nations, deemed to share a collective guilt over the Holocaust, sought to assuage their guilt by partitioning Palestine for the Jews. As well, the conventional narrative posits

that Catholic nations in Latin America and Europe were happy with the international status to be granted Jerusalem.⁴⁷ However, the extent of the pressure that the American Zionists and the Jewish Agency exerted on the American government prior to the vote, and the pressure exerted by Truman and the Americans on undecided national delegates in order to procure UN votes, are subjects rarely extensively addressed.

In contrast to the commonplace position, a number of historians, including American Michael Cohen in his book *Truman and Israel*, attribute the success of the partition plan precisely to extreme Zionist and American pressure, and credit Truman with a decisive role in the birth of the new Jewish state. Pappé also acknowledges: “It took considerable American Jewish lobbying and American diplomatic pressure, as well as a powerful speech by the Russian ambassador to the UN, to gain the necessary two-thirds majority in the Assembly for partition.”⁴⁸ Truman’s *Memoirs* and Margaret Truman’s biography of her father are very clear and unambiguous in detailing the pressures that forced the United States to compel other UN members to assure the passage of the partition resolution.⁴⁹

Throughout this entire period Moïse Shertok (later Sharett), the Yishuv’s second-in-command and later Israel’s first foreign minister and second prime minister, was in New York, acting at the behest of Ben-Gurion and on behalf of the Yishuv to recruit support for the partition plan and to block any other proposals.⁵⁰ As early as 1940 Shertok claimed that American Jewry could profoundly influence public opinion if they could direct their strength at the right target, stating: “Only if such an active Jewish body is created, which...directs its efforts toward Palestine – only then will we be able to test whether the American Government can be induced to support us.”⁵¹ The

resultant Zionist lobby was remarkably effective, and President Truman was induced to support partition in spite of opposition from within his own government, including three of his secretaries of state and his secretary of defence.⁵² To illustrate the extent of the influence of Zionist leaders on Truman, despite his public assertions to the contrary, following a private meeting with Weizmann, Truman called the American UN delegation as they were in the midst of critical UN negotiations. Truman then told the delegates to reverse the American position, which supported the Arab claim to the Negev, and instead to support inclusion of that area in the Jewish state.⁵³

Regarding the coercion of other UN delegates by Zionists, Bickerton and Klausner state, “The pressure that was exerted on delegates who appeared hesitant...was primarily exerted by Jewish Agency representatives.”⁵⁴ However, others disagree with this assessment, asserting that pressure was applied by a strategic alliance of international influences, spearheaded by three American Zionists: New York Judge Joseph Proskauer, Washington economist Robert Nathan and most importantly, David Niles, a White House assistant, political consultant and close friend of Truman’s.⁵⁵ These three, other American Zionists, and a number of official and unofficial U.S. governmental representatives exerted pressure through threats as well as bribes, influencing nations as diverse as Liberia, which was threatened with an economic boycott by Harvey Firestone of Firestone rubber and tire products,⁵⁶ and South and Central American states, which were offered economic and infrastructure advantages, as well as outright cash.⁵⁷ In addition, Bernard Baruch was prevailed upon to speak to the French, who could ill afford to lose Marshall Plan aid. Former Ambassador William Bullitt similarly met with the Chinese ambassador in

Washington, and Truman advisor Clark Clifford met with the Philippine ambassador, while other influential Americans contacted other nations also dependent upon American aid.⁵⁸

Smith states that to increase the pressure, “congressmen and senators along with Supreme Court Justices were drafted to send telegrams to heads of states and their representatives either cajoling them or in some cases threatening suspension of American aid.”⁵⁹ A joint telegram from twenty-six pro-Zionist American senators was sent to the president of the Philippines, as well as to twelve other resistant UN delegations who had declared their intention to oppose partition. Believing that it would be foolish to antagonize these powerful, determined Americans, the representatives changed their votes to either support partition or to abstain from voting. The sole exception was Greece, which despite pressures from prominent Greek-American business leaders, risked antagonizing the American Senate largely because of the country’s traditional association with Egypt.⁶⁰

However, on 27 November, the day the vote was originally scheduled, the needed two-thirds majority still did not appear to be forthcoming. Consequently a filibuster was instituted during which time Truman approved further pressuring of delegates. Truman later told his former (and now Zionist) business partner, Eddie Jacobson, that he, and he alone, had been responsible for swinging the votes of several delegates.⁶¹ That Truman exerted unprecedented pressure is confirmed by Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, who later wrote, “By direct order of the White House every form of pressure, direct and indirect, was brought to bear by American officials ... to make sure that the necessary majority would be at length secured.”⁶²

James Forrestal, Secretary of Defence at the time, states in his memoirs: “The methods that had been used ... to bring coercion and duress on other nations in the General Assembly bordered closely on to scandal.”⁶³ Similarly, Dean Rusk, then Director of the State Department’s Office of United Nations Affairs, admitted a few months following the partition vote that “certain unauthorized officials and private persons violated propriety and went beyond the law,”⁶⁴ thereby robbing the partition decision of whatever moral force it might otherwise have had. In regard to moral force, it can be argued that the partition plan itself, which allotted more than half of Palestine to 33 percent of a population owning less than six percent of the land illustrates, in Lilienthal’s words, “the devastating abnegation of the Western professed ideal of self-determination.”⁶⁵

To further complicate matters, even though the UN Partition Resolution was passed, the Americans could not get the UN General Assembly to agree upon an implementation of the partition plan, particularly because Requests (b), (c) and (d) of the Resolution called for the establishment of a trusteeship under the auspices of the UN should partition constitute a threat to the peace of the region,⁶⁶ which it undoubtedly did. As a result, Truman agreed to compromise by approving a temporary UN trusteeship, stating that “If the U.N. agrees to trusteeship, peaceful settlement is yet possible; without it, open warfare is just beyond the horizon.”⁶⁷ To dissuade the Americans from following such a trusteeship plan, however, the Zionists decided to accelerate the achievement of statehood, and to push a military offensive in Palestine in combination with an intense political offensive in the United States. Ben-Gurion issued a press release on 20 March which stated:

The Jewish state is not subject to the United Nations resolution of November 29...but on our ability here in this country to achieve a decision by force. By means of our own strength the state shall arise even now...We will not consent to any trusteeship, either provisional or permanent, not even for the briefest period.⁶⁸

These objections were made even stronger when a substitute resolution was put before the General Assembly in mid April calling for a three-month truce, a delay in Israeli statehood, and the appointment of a UN Commission for Palestine to mediate between the Zionists and the Arabs.⁶⁹ Fearing that a truce agreement would prevent the establishment of a Jewish state and anticipating a military victory for Israel, Ben-Gurion was extremely opposed to a truce of any sort. Despite a meeting in Damascus on 11 May, in which all Arab foreign ministers supported a truce (with the exception of Transjordan, acting under Abdullah's directive, since the king planned to annex Arab Palestine in the event of a pan-Arab/Israeli war),⁷⁰ Ben-Gurion, preferring to retain his secret arrangements with Abdullah, refused to defer statehood or to participate in any truce negotiations, even though he was well aware that proclaiming a state and reading the Declaration of Independence would lead to war.⁷¹ Ben-Gurion's attitude prompted U.S. Middle Eastern diplomat Robert McClintock to presciently state:

The Jewish Agency refusal exposes its aim to set up its separate state by force of arms – the military action after May 15 will be conducted by the Haganah with the help of the terrorist organizations, the Irgun and LEHI, [and] the UN will face a distorted situation. The Jews will be the real aggressors against the Arabs, but they will claim that they are only defending the borders of the state, decided upon, in principle, by two-thirds of the General Assembly.⁷²

Indeed, the Zionists were determined to anticipate both the truce and the recommended transitional period by declaring Israel's existence as soon as the British withdrew from Palestine on 14 May. On 13 May, the day before the UN accepted an

American proposal to appoint a mediator in place of the UN Palestine Commission effective midnight 14 May, Truman received immense pressure from Jewish groups and Zionist leaders, including a letter from Weizmann, requesting that he immediately recognize the new state.⁷³ Clark Clifford independently commissioned a formal request for American recognition from the Jewish Agency and then, under the influence of Niles and Eddie Jacobson, as well as under pressure from Weizmann, Truman made the unilateral decision to recognize Israel in order to procure Jewish financial aid and votes, and to recoup political losses for the Democratic Party.⁷⁴ He kept his intentions from the State Department and UN Ambassador Austin, as well as from the other UN delegates.

Thus, even while the UN General Assembly was in process of debating the internationalization of Jerusalem and the implementation of a truce was gaining majority support, Truman accorded de facto recognition to Israel at 6:00 PM 14 May, shortly after Ben-Gurion read the Declaration of Independence to the Provisional State Council in Tel Aviv.⁷⁵ Although this was a triumph for the Zionists, many UN delegates felt double-crossed by the Americans, since Truman's unilateral and immediate recognition of the new state was considered to be a statement of American support for Israel's sabotage of the truce efforts and a violation of the terms of the Security Council truce resolution.⁷⁶

As Smith states, "Whatever the nature of the Zionist accomplishment in Palestine, the victory at the United Nations was essentially won in the United States."⁷⁷ However, the Zionist victory, first in winning American support for the UN Partition Resolution and getting it passed, and then in successfully gaining Truman's

support for the new state of Israel, was a victory for the Yishuv and the Zionist movement as a whole, as cited and formalized in the Declaration of Independence. Circumstances had indeed unfolded in accordance with Ben-Gurion's and the Yishuv leaders' strategy, which included securing the support of the new great power, the United States, as well as gaining international recognition for the Jewish state, through whatever means were necessary. The success of Ben-Gurion's and the Zionists' strategic efforts also simultaneously laid the foundation for future American-Israeli relations while reinforcing the "advantage of direct action over diplomacy"⁷⁸ in the Zionists' dealings with the Arabs.

Furthermore, that the state of Israel came into existence as a direct result of American efforts created a general Arab perception, reinforced by subsequent events, of American bias in favour of Israel. This perceived and actual partiality negatively impacted American efforts to act as a "neutral" peace broker over the following decades. On the international front, the Zionist narrative of "acceptance" of partition, and therefore also of an Arab state, successfully reinforced the created image of the Zionists as flexibly willing to compromise for peace and to work within international law, in contrast to the lawless and intransigent Arabs. Nonetheless, for the dominant Zionist leadership, partition itself was always a temporary solution with impermanent, expandable boundaries. For this reason the boundaries of the new state were never articulated in the Declaration of Independence, and subsequent actions have demonstrated that the Zionists themselves rejected both the letter and the spirit of the UN Partition Resolution, which called for the establishment of two states.

Notes:

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- ¹ “UN Partition Resolution, 29 Nov 1947” in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, ed., *Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001) p. 71.
- ² Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987) p. 8.
- ³ Sasson to Sharett, March 22, 1948, Central Zionist Archive S 25/3960 cited in Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 39.
- ⁴ David Ben-Gurion, *Letters to Paula*, Aubrey Hodes, trans. (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1971) p. 153-157.
- ⁵ David Ben-Gurion, *Memoirs*, 1974, Vol. 4 p 278 cited in Tom Segev, *One Palestine Complete, Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000) p. 403.
- ⁶ Michael Ben-Zohar. *Ben-Gurion: A Biography* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978) p. 641.
- ⁷ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York and London, WW Norton and Company, 2001) p. 25.
- ⁸ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 25.
- ⁹ “The Biltmore Program, Towards a Jewish State” in Laqueur, *Israel-Arab Reader* p. 55.
- ¹⁰ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 24.
- ¹¹ David Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, Nechemia Meyers and Uzy Nystar, trans. (Tel Aviv: Sabra Books, 1972) p. 57.
- ¹² Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 25.
- ¹³ Jan Bickerton and Carla Klausner, *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2005) p. 85.
- ¹⁴ Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 123.
- ¹⁵ Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001) p. 191.
- ¹⁶ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 124.
- ¹⁷ Bickerton *A Concise History*, p. 84.
- ¹⁸ Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 31.
- ¹⁹ Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, Partition Map 4, p. 28.
- ²⁰ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 29.
- When Palestine became a British Mandate, in an attempt to reconcile with Husayn and the Arab nationalists, especially after the French ousted Faysal from Syria, the British organized the area of Palestine east of the Jordan River into a semi-autonomous emirate called Transjordan and installed Faysal’s brother Abdullah as ruler. Faysal was given the throne in Iraq. Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005) p. 72.
- ²¹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 29.
- ²² Peel Commission Report, CMD 5479, 1937 p. 376 and Report of the Royal Commission Command Paper 5479, p. 391 cited in Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians* (London: Croom Helm, 1979) p. 255.
- ²³ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 30.
- ²⁴ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 85.
- ²⁵ Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006) p. 127.
- ²⁶ Bickerton, *A Concise History*, p. 84.
- ²⁷ Quoted in Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 191.
- ²⁸ Macattee to Merriam, 501 BB Palestine/7-2147,USNA cited in Amitzer Ilan, “Withdrawl without Recommendations: Britain’s Decision to Relinquish the Palestine Mandate, 1947” in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia Haim, ed. *Zionism and Arabism in Palestine and Israel* (London: Frank Cass, 1982) p. 198
- ²⁹ Bickerton, *A Concise History*, p. 84.
- ³⁰ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 125.
- ³¹ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 126.

- 32 Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 72.
- 33 Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 68 These contacts ranged from the Nashashibis elite, who were in contact with Abdullah, to progressive moderates like Umar Sidqi Dajani, and trade union leaders.
- 34 Political and Diplomatic Documents of CZA and ISA, Dec. 1947-May 1948, doc. 90, p. 128 cited in Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians*, p. 246.
- 35 Documents on Foreign Policy in Israel, ISA Vol. 1, Doc 1, Jerusalem 1981 p. 3.
- 36 Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 67.
- 37 Bickerton, *A Concise History*, p. 89, 90.
- 38 Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 191.
- 39 Bickerton, *A Concise History*, p. 85.
- 40 Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 25.
- 41 Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 30.
- 42 UNSCOP Partition Plan, Article 9, in Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 213.
- 43 UN Partition Resolution 181 in Laqueur, *Israel-Arab Reader* p. 69-77.
- 44 Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 126.
- 45 Sovetsko-Izrail'ski otnoshenia. Sbornik Dokumentov 1941-1953 (SIO) (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenia, 2000) Vol. 1, p 15-17 cited in Laurent Rucker, "Moscow's Surprise: The Soviet-Israeli Alliance of 1947-1949" in *Cold War International History Project*, Bulletin 46, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- 46 Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II*, p. 97.
- 47 Bickerton, *A Concise History*, p. 87.
- 48 Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 126.
- 49 Alfred M. Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II: What Price Peace?* (New Brunswick, NJ: North American Publishers, 1978, 1982) p. 62.
- 50 Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies: Israel and Transjordan in the War of 1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1987) p. 30.
- 51 Quoted in Dan Tschirgi, *The Politics of Indecision: Origins and Implications of American Involvement with the Palestinian Problem* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983) p. 40.
- 52 Michael Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p. 168; Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II*, p. 100.
- 53 Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 194; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 224.
- 54 Bickerton, *A Concise History*, p. 87.
- 55 Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II*, p. 65.
- 56 Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 194.
- 57 Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) p. 184; Robert Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977) p. 331.
- 58 Robert Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis*, p. 330; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 169-170.
- 59 Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 194.
- 60 Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II*, p. 66-67.
- 61 Robert John and Sami Hadawi, *The Palestine Diary, Volume 2, 1945-1948*, (New York, 1971) p. 260-64 cited in Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 194; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 170.
- 62 Sumner Welles, *We Need Not Fail* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948) p. 63.
- 63 James Forrestal, *Forrestal's Memoirs* (New York: Viking, 1951) p. 363.
- 64 Quoted in Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II*, p.67.
- 65 Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II*, p.97.
- 66 UN General Assembly Partition Resolution in Laqueur, *The Israel-Arab Reader* p. 70.
- 67 FR 1948 Vol. V Part 2 p. 759-60 in Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection II*, p. 79.
- 68 Michael Ben-Zohar *Ben-Gurion, A Biography* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978) p.151.
- 69 Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 165.
- 70 Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 181; Khalidi p. 129.
- 71 Political and Diplomatic Documents of Israel State Archives, Document 496, p. 780-781, cited in Flapan, *The Birth of Israel* p. 182-3.
- 72 Foreign Relations of the US, State Department Washington, DC 4 May 1948 p. 894-95 cited in

Flapan, *The Birth of Israel* p. 174.

⁷³ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 215-216.

⁷⁴ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 220-221, 225.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 200-201; De facto recognition did not involve the acceptance of any definite borders, unlike full de jure recognition. Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 227.

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 220-221.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 195.

⁷⁸ Nahum Goldmann *The Autobiography of Nahum Goldmann: Sixty Years of Jewish Life*, Helen Sebba, trans. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969) p. 288-90.

Chapter Six: Zionist Narratives Concerning the 1948 War and the Arab Refugees

“In the midst of wanton aggression, we yet call upon the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve the ways of peace and play their part in the development of the State, on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its bodies and institutions – provisional and permanent.

“We extend our hand in peace and neighbourliness to all the neighbouring states and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all.” The Israeli Declaration of Independence, 1948

In the months prior to and following the proclamation of the state of Israel through the Declaration of Independence on 14 May 1948, two dominant narratives emerged as national myths which have been instrumental in shaping Israeli self-identity. One, the myth of David and Goliath, was appropriated by the Israelis to describe the founding of the state through what, conjuring up the American Founding Fathers, Israelis call their “War of Independence.” This narrative holds that a small, vulnerable, newly-formed Israel was forced to defend itself against a mighty, united mass of aggressive Arab armies, yet Israel miraculously emerged victorious. As described in the Declaration, this Arab “wanton aggression” occurred despite the offer of Israel’s hand in “peace and neighbourliness.” The other seminal Zionist narrative maintains that the Arabs were responsible for the creation of the Palestinian refugees, who either left Palestine of their own accord or were ordered to leave by their own Arab leaders, notwithstanding the Zionist promises of equality, full citizenship and the common good of all, as stated in the Declaration. Both these narratives place the blame for the Israeli-Arab conflict and for the refugee crisis squarely on the Arabs. This chapter analyzes the impact of both these Israeli national myths, beginning with the refugee narrative and following with that of David and Goliath.

By the time of the official outbreak of the 1948 War in mid-May of that year, and even before the Declaration of Independence was written, approximately 350,000 Arabs had already fled Palestine.¹ Why these Palestinians left their homes is still the subject of much controversy. This flight occurred during the first phase of conflict, that is, during the “unofficial war” which began a few weeks after the UN Partition Resolution was passed in late November 1947. Although this “unofficial war” is generally referred to as the “civil war,” to some historians, including Tom Segev, it is more accurately considered “a war between two distinct peoples.”² The “official” 1948 War, called the War of Independence by the Israelis, involved the regular armies of neighbouring Arab states; it lasted from 15 May 1948 until the end of hostilities on 7 January 1949.³

What this paper will refer to as the late 1947-early 1948 “civil war” took place between the Haganah (the Yishuv’s official military arm, which later became the Israeli Defence Force or IDF) in combination with the Irgun and Lehi, two Zionist “terrorist groups,” on the one side and the irregular Palestinian forces on the other. The first phase of this war was limited to intermittent attacks by Palestinian Arabs on Jewish settlements, with Zionist reprisals. Even at this stage the Zionists were superior to the Palestinians in terms of numbers, weapons, organization and, most importantly, unity of command,⁴ since the Palestinians still had not recovered militarily from their defeat following the Arab Rebellion: their leadership was exiled or disorganized, their fighters were fewer and their weapons inadequate.⁵ The Zionist strategy during this conflict was shaped at meetings held on 1 and 2 January 1948 between Ben-Gurion and his civilian and military advisors.⁶ Ben-Gurion, who consistently sought to

consolidate his power, assumed personal responsibility for directing the military struggle, having taken over the defence portfolio of the Jewish Agency in 1946.⁷

While Jewish Agency civilians and Arab experts alike called for political flexibility, the Haganah commanders wanted hard-hitting military reprisals against any Arab guerrilla attacks. Ben-Gurion agreed with the Haganah, arguing that the best strategy was to escalate the military conflict and then adopt a policy of “aggressive defense.”⁸ Recognizing that land could be conquered and retained, and that demographics could be changed under the cover of war, Ben-Gurion stated to the Mapai Council on 7 February that Western Jerusalem’s Arab districts had been evacuated and that a similar, permanent demographic change could be expected in much of Palestine as war continued.⁹ Nonetheless, for the first few months the Palestinians appeared to be holding their own, despite their lack of arms and expertise.¹⁰ This situation changed in early April when the Zionists instigated a Palestine-wide offensive policy under Plan Dalet (Plan D) which, as an extension of the Joint Command’s previous activities, was a military blueprint that was to profoundly impact the Palestinian population.¹¹

The massive exodus of Palestinians during both phases of the war is a subject which, according to Uri Ram, Israeli academic historians have studiously avoided and school texts have tended to refer to as an Arab “mass escape.”¹² The Zionist narrative that this exodus was voluntary or occurred at the behest of Arab leaders is strongly contradicted by the existence of Plan Dalet, which ordered the capture and destruction of Arab villages and thereby both promoted and justified the expulsion of Arab civilians from their homes.¹³ Benny Morris, who in the 1980s initiated groundbreaking

research on the subject of refugees and the 1948 War, contradicts the Zionist narrative of voluntary mass flight, maintaining that there is no evidence of a call by the Arab leadership for Palestinians to leave their homes and that over half the refugees were forcefully expelled.¹⁴ Even Bickerton and Klausner state that Plan Dalet was a plan to undermine Palestinian Arab morale through the use of terror and to “cleanse” the territory wanted by the Jews.¹⁵

In his definitive work of the same title, Andrew Bell-Fialkoff defines “ethnic cleansing” as follows:

Population cleansing is a planned, deliberate removal from a certain territory of an undesirable population distinguished by one or more characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, race, class, or sexual preference. These characteristics must serve as the basis for removal to qualify as cleansing... Cleansing so defined is a part of a wider continuum of population removal ranging from genocide...to voluntary emigration under pressure.”¹⁶

It was important to the Zionist leadership to clear the territory of Palestinian Arabs for two main reasons: tactical, in the face of the anticipated pan-Arab war;¹⁷ and demographic, since otherwise the new “Jewish” state would have almost as many Arabs as Jews.¹⁸ As well, as Shlaim argues, Plan Dalet was an offensive strategy to “secure all areas allocated to the Jewish state under the UN partition resolution as well as Jewish settlements outside these areas and corridors leading to them, so as to provide a solid and continuous basis for Jewish sovereignty.”¹⁹ With its implementation in April and May, Plan Dalet and the terrorism that followed in its wake directly and decisively impacted the exodus of Palestinian refugees.

Although in his earlier writing Morris claimed that the “ethnic cleansing” of 1948 was an accident of war, in a 2002 *Guardian* article Morris restates his research conclusion, admitting that transfer was imprinted on Zionism from its inception and

that the fathers of Zionism had believed that the Zionist project's success would displace the Arabs from Israel.²⁰ In a *Ha'aretz* interview in 2004 Morris added that "Ben-Gurion was a transferist who erred in not having ordered a large expulsion that would have cleansed the whole country – the whole Land of Israel, as far as the Jordan River."²¹

Segev also argues that the idea of transfer was inherent in Zionism from its inception, beginning with Herzl's idea of "trying to spirit the penniless population across the borders" and resurfacing in the 1920s with the Zionist argument that the Arabs had the whole Arab world to go to, while the Jews had only Palestine.²² Historians such as Smith, Ben-Ami, Pappé and others concur, arguing that this cleansing action was deliberate and that the Zionists had been considering the idea and methods of evicting the Arabs from their land at least as early as the 1930s.²³ For example, the recommendation for population transfer in the Peel Commission's Partition Plan had been at the urging of Weizmann, who told Colonial Secretary William Ormsby-Gore that "the transfer could only be carried out by the British government and not the Jews."²⁴ Similarly, Ben-Gurion had enthusiastically responded to the Peel Commission's recommendation, writing in his diary that "forced transfer" outweighed all the drawbacks of partition.²⁵

That the Zionists were considering methods of evicting the Arabs during the 1948 War is reinforced by Ben-Gurion's statement to the General Staff in May: "We must use terror, assassination, intimidation, land confiscation, and the cutting of all social services to rid the Galilee of its Arab population."²⁶ To help accomplish these aims, the Zionist leaders created a register and began to assess the Arab villages within

the allotted Jewish territory, compiling information on strategic location, wealth, population, production, and relationship history to the Zionist movement.²⁷

Information from this register was provided to Zionist commanders during the civil war and the later official war, with strategic location being the determining factor in an Arab village's fate.²⁸

The strategic location of the Arab village of Dayr Yassin, situated as it was near Jerusalem, determined the fate of its Palestinian inhabitants. This village was the site of a now well-documented massacre on 9 April 1948 which terrorized the Arab Palestinian community.²⁹ While the Haganah later tried to minimize their involvement, the destruction of Dayr Yassin was carried out as part of the Plan Dalet, despite the village's record of relatively good relationships with nearby Jewish neighbourhoods and a nonaggression pact with the Haganah.³⁰ The main attack on Dayr Yassin was undertaken, with the support of Haganah artillery, by 132 Irgun and Lehi forces, who viciously tortured and murdered two thirds (current estimates vary from 120-250 people) of the village's unarmed men, women and children, as well as raping women and mutilating dead bodies.³¹ This massacre occurred on the day after the shooting death of Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini, the mufti's nephew and his representative in Palestine, and the most prominent military commander of the Palestinian militias in the Jerusalem/Judea Hills area during the civil war.³² Although the younger Husseini's death itself had a debilitating effect on the Palestinians, the quickly-publicized massacre that occurred the following day was a decisive factor in the mass Arab exodus over the following weeks and months.³³

Nur-eldeen Masalha, a Palestinian political scientist and researcher from Galilee, argues that “most recent Israeli writers have no difficulty in acknowledging the Dayr Yassin massacre and its effect, if not intention, of precipitating the exodus.”³⁴ However, he asserts that this was only one of many such atrocities that drove the Palestinians from their land. While claiming that recently released Israeli archival sources, diaries and notebooks provide a much clearer picture of Ben-Gurion’s expulsion policy than the traditional Zionist version of events, Masalha also maintains that many important files in the Israeli State Archives still remain closed and that a number of massacres and expulsions committed from June 1948 onward, and which lie at the base of competing Palestinian narratives, have yet to be researched.³⁵

Perhaps the most striking result of the recent research that has been undertaken, according to Masalha, has been the shift in discourse away from the known terrorism of the Irgun and Lehi and towards the conduct of the Haganah and IDF, with the involvement of mainstream Labor Zionists such as Ben-Gurion, Yigal Allon, Moshe Sharett, Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin and others, who used the 1948 War to create an Arab-free state.³⁶ For instance, Allon, portrayed in official Haganah history as the best commander of 1948, readily admitted that his “brilliant psychological warfare, whispering campaigns and harassment...brought about panic-stricken evacuation of tens of thousands of Arab villagers” from the area of eastern Galilee.³⁷ Similarly, according to a former director of the Israeli army archives, “in almost every Arab village occupied by us during the War of Independence, acts were committed which are defined as murders, massacres, and rapes.”³⁸ The number of large-scale massacres (defined as acts involving more than 50 murders) is put by the army archivist at a

minimum of twenty with small-scale massacres at approximately one hundred. Uri Milstein, an Israeli military historian of the 1948 War, goes one step further and maintains that “every skirmish ended in a massacre of Arabs.”³⁹

Although many Israelis have since argued that the use of terror against civilians was the only way that they could win the civil war and the War of Independence that followed, Ben-Ami concedes:

The reality on the ground was that of an Arab community in a state of terror facing a ruthless Israeli army whose path to victory was paved not only by its exploits against the regular Arab armies, but also by the intimidation and at times atrocities and massacres it perpetuated against the civilian Arab community. A panic-stricken Arab community was uprooted under the impact of massacres that would be carved into the Arab’s monument of grief and hatred.⁴⁰

The bulk of the over 300,000 Palestinians who left prior to the official outbreak of war on 15 May and a further 450,000 who left during the official war, ended up in the West Bank, Gaza, and in the neighbouring Arab countries of Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon.⁴¹ Although, according to Tom Segev’s research, these people generally fled from their homes with very little, once the 1948 War began the majority of the refugees anticipated an Arab victory and believed that they would be able to return home quite quickly.⁴²

The second foundational Israeli narrative, of the “wanton aggression” of a mighty, united Arab foe arrayed against a small, vulnerable and peace-loving Israel, relates particularly to the second, official phase of the conflict. According to Israeli scholar Nurith Gertz, the myth of David and Goliath has provided a structure of meaning in Israel which has linked the past, present and future from the years of early settlement until the present.⁴³ The Zionists found this myth especially useful in

describing their battle with the Arab nations during the 1948 War and as a foundational nationalist narrative for the new state. Israel's military situation, and ultimate victory, during this period has been persistently portrayed by the Zionists as the struggle of the Israeli few against the Arab hosts who were "united in their determination to destroy the newborn Jewish state and cast the Jews into the sea."⁴⁴

Although the theme of victory in the face of insurmountable odds has been fostered in Israel and abroad over the years, as this and the previous chapter have demonstrated, the Zionists deliberately sought to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and to expand through military force the territory allotted them by the UN Partition Resolution.

Furthermore, despite the Zionist portrayal of the Arabs as a united force, recent research demonstrates that the Arab political rhetoric about "saving" Palestine was not an accurate expression of either intent or ability, as the Arab states were neither united in their national interests and aims nor well prepared to go to war with the new state of Israel. Only in April 1948 did the Arab leaders prepare a plan for Palestine, which even then was hampered by internal Arab divisions.⁴⁵ A major division existed between the mufti al-Husseini, who was situated in Egypt, and who wanted to control the Palestinian resistance and create a Palestinian government in exile, and the various members of the Arab League, who also wanted to assert control.⁴⁶ The Arab League itself, which had come into existence in March 1945, was consumed by rivalries between Hashemite-ruled Iraq and Transjordan, the Saudi dynasty, and Egypt, all of whom vied for positions of influence over the other Arab nations.⁴⁷

King Abdullah, who was supported by the Nashashibi faction in Palestine and whose objective was to make himself master of the Arab part of Palestine with the aid of Israel, did not want a Palestinian state ruled by either the mufti or Syria and deliberately sabotaged the Arab League's plans.⁴⁸ As Ben-Gurion wrote in a letter to Shertok (who changed his name to Sharett in May 1948) dated 14 December 1947: "The king is still maintaining his rebellion – he is not offering a hand either to the Mufti or the League; whether he will hold out in the end is not clear to me, but there is a chance."⁴⁹ Concerning the overt rhetoric of animosity and war which masked the secret relationship between the Yishuv and King Abdullah, Israeli political scientist Uri Bar-Joseph states: "There have been only few cases [in international struggles] where an ostensibly extremely polarized conflict has stood in such sharp contrast to a very different relationship beneath the surface."⁵⁰ In addition, like Transjordan, Syria also wanted the Arab areas of Palestine, and like Egypt, did not want Abdullah to take control.⁵¹ Egypt, headed by King Farouk, supported the mufti's leadership in Palestine as a way of containing Abdullah.⁵² Indeed, that Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon did invade Palestine is now deemed in large part to have been based on their desire to block Abdullah's territorial and political ambitions.⁵³

The divisive self-interest of the pan-Arab leaders was paralleled by disunity among the Palestinian national leadership. Khalidi argues that the crushing of the Palestinian leadership by the British as a result of the Arab Revolt of 1936-39:

largely determined the outcome of the 1948 war for the Palestinians; and [that] the failures of their leadership, and the absence of structures of state contributed to their political and military defeat...and precluded a unified effort to resist the takeover of large parts of Palestine by Zionist forces in the first few months of 1948.⁵⁴

Thus internal and external rivalries prevented any coordinated Arab assaults and united objectives and, when combined with a lack of military preparation and training, greatly limited the scope of Arab tactics, military ability, and threat.⁵⁵ In fact, Stanton Griffis, the American ambassador in Cairo, reported on 13 May 1948: “Informed circles [are] inclined to agree that Arabs would now welcome almost any facing saving device if it would prevent open war. [It is] also feared that Arab armies will probably be soundly defeated by [the] Jews.”⁵⁶

The huge discrepancy between the Arabs’ rhetoric and their actual military preparation on the ground was not mirrored on the Yishuv’s side, which was characterized by an intense military build-up and a greater certainty of military dominance.⁵⁷ This was definitely to be the case by June 1948, with the arrival of massive stores of modern weapons from Czechoslovakia, including tanks, aircraft and artillery that had been previously purchased but whose receipt was delayed by the Yishuv until the final British withdrawal from Palestine in mid May.⁵⁸ As well, in addition to effectively setting up a state infrastructure during the Mandate, the Zionists had also gained military experience while fighting the British following the war, including experience in using the terrorist tactics which they later employed in their conflict with the Arabs.⁵⁹

By the outbreak of the war on 15 May, not only had a large percentage of the Palestinian population already been evacuated but the massive quantity of arms that had been purchased by the Zionists was now waiting to be transferred to Palestine. Flapan maintains that the fact that these arms did not arrive until a week to ten days after the Arab hostilities began created the only real period of stress and doubt

concerning the war's outcome for the Zionists.⁶⁰ Although the Arab nations had a large civilian population, the difference in numbers between the Arab armies and those of Israel was relatively small. Ben-Gurion claimed that the Arab forces totalled 153,405 men.⁶¹ In contrast, Bickerton and Klausner claim an estimated 40,000 for the Arabs and 30,000 for the Israelis,⁶² while other historians, including Morris, Flapan, Shlaim, Khalidi, and Pappé state that the Israeli forces outnumbered the Arab forces.⁶³ According to Flapan's research, at the start of the war the total number of Arab troops, both regular and irregular, operating in the Palestine theatre was under 25,000, while the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) fielded over 35,000 troops.⁶⁴ Regarding the "massive" united Arab army and Israel's victory against this Goliath, Shlaim states:

By mid-July the IDF mobilized 65,000 men under arms, and by December its numbers had reached a peak of 96, 441. The Arab states also reinforced their armies, but they could not match this rate of increase. Thus, at each stage of the war, the IDF significantly outnumbered all the Arab forces arrayed against it, and by the final stage of the war its superiority ratio was nearly two to one. The final outcome of the war therefore was not a miracle but a reflection of the underlying Arab-Israeli military balance. In this war, as in most wars, the stronger side ultimately prevailed.⁶⁵

Shlaim also asserts: "In the case of Ben-Gurion it is essential to understand his political objectives because these were usually at variance with his declared objectives,"⁶⁶ and as minister of defence, it was Ben-Gurion who set the political objectives which largely determined Israel's military conduct and the borders which were established during and following the war. Ben-Gurion's main priorities were Jerusalem, the Galilee and the Negev; his strategy was to pick off the Arab states one front at a time.⁶⁷ In addition, although Abdullah's Arab Legion was technically at war, it merely defended its positions; it pursued limited objectives and did not attempt to

take any territory assigned to Israel, as the previous agreements between the Zionists, Abdullah and the British had stipulated. Thus, while other Arab armies lost the war and territory, Transjordan and Israel remained, in Uri Bar Joseph's words, the "best of enemies."

Israel's stronger military power dictated the armistice agreement with Abdullah, which represented a major victory for what Shlaim calls Israeli "coercive diplomacy," or negotiations accompanied by threats and the use of military force.⁶⁸ By signing the armistice with Abdullah in 1949, which both sides viewed as the preliminary to a peace accord, Israel acknowledged the king's rule over much of the territory that the UN had designated for a Palestinian state. With Abdullah's annexation of the West Bank, what had been the Mandates of Palestine and Transjordan became the states of Israel and Jordan. The partition of Palestine at the expense of the Palestinians thereby effectively eliminated Arab Palestine.⁶⁹

By the end of 1948 and as a result of the 1949 armistice agreements with the Arab states, Israel had expanded its territory from 56 percent to almost 80 percent of Mandate Palestine and had expelled all the Arab states' forces from the territory with the exception of the Arab Legion, which stayed in control of the West Bank.⁷⁰

Although the armistice agreements that ended the war were not peace treaties and were not meant to indicate permanent boundaries, these frontiers remained stable until the Six Day War of 1967.⁷¹

For the Arabs, defeat in the war of 1948 was extremely humiliating. Called *al-nakba*, or the catastrophe, the year 1948 proved to be a turning point for the old Arab regimes, as a series of coups and revolutions altered the Arab political landscape

shortly thereafter. Blamed by many Palestinians for their plight and for the partitioning of Palestine, King Abdullah was assassinated in 1951 by a Palestinian nationalist in Jerusalem; a year later Gamal Nasser overthrew the Egyptian king.⁷² Most pointedly, the United Nations estimated that there were now 726,000 homeless Arabs, over half of the population of Palestinian Arabs.⁷³

By 1950 there were also over 150,000 Palestinian Arabs still in Israel.⁷⁴ In spite of the Zionist narrative, articulated in the Declaration, that Israel wanted the Palestinians to “play their part in the development of the state, on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation...” most of the Israeli Palestinians lived in military zones and were subject to military edicts, without being granted any civil liberties.⁷⁵ In practice this generally meant forcible removal of Arabs, so that new Israeli immigrants could occupy Arab housing or construct new villages where previous Arab villages had stood.⁷⁶ As well, during the early 1950s, the Israeli government took possession of 92 percent of the land of Israel and put this “state land” under the administration of the Jewish National Fund; Israel then passed citizenship laws which prohibited Palestinians from buying any state property.⁷⁷ As a consequence, with 370 Palestinian villages destroyed during the war and an additional 40 villages depopulated between 1949 and 1952, these internal refugees eventually became the most politicized of Israeli Palestinians.⁷⁸

In 1949, Syria had offered to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion to discuss arrangements for the settling of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Syria but Ben-Gurion refused the offer.⁷⁹ One year later, the Israelis insisted that the exiled Palestinians be re-settled in Arab lands, in exchange for Arab Jews being allowed into

Israel. However, the majority of Palestinian refugees, who remained in camps under the auspices of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), rejected resettlement offers. They wanted to return to Palestine.⁸⁰ For the Palestinians, the trauma of exile and the subsequent Arab defeat became an indelible part of their collective memory, as was the resolve to return and reclaim their homeland, although their “right of return” has been continually denied by Israel. The official Israeli narrative, which has denied any responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem, has also been used to justify Israeli refusal of the Palestinian right of return.

The effect of victory on the Israelis was equally dramatic. Their win reinforced the Zionist conviction that force, not negotiation, was Israel’s greatest weapon. As Nahum Goldmann argues, the 1948 military victory had a profound psychological effect, whereby “to brook nothing, tolerate no attack...and shape history by creating facts seemed so simple, so compelling, so satisfying that it became Israel’s policy in its conflict with the Arab world.”⁸¹ Ben-Gurion formalized a number of these “created facts” in the Declaration of Independence, thereby helping to turn predominant Zionist narratives into national myths. In the period between 1948 and 1952 these national myths gained authority, despite archival evidence that openly contradicts the conventional Zionist accounts. One of the most entrenched myths, and the one almost inevitably invoked to explain Israeli actions, is that of being the “victim” who continually has to defend itself against aggressive “others.” As Simha Flapan maintains:

The myths of Israel forged during the formation of the state have hardened into [an] impenetrable, and dangerous, ideological shield...Whatever Israelis do, whatever means we employ to guard our gains or to increase them, we justify as last-ditch self-defense. We can, therefore, do no wrong.”⁸²

Thus do these Zionist narratives, so brilliantly articulated and formalized in the Declaration of Independence and so powerfully productive of Israeli identity, collective memory and Arab policy over the past half-century, continue to dominate until the present day.

Notes:

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- ¹ Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006) p. 131.
 - ² Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate*. Haim Watzman, trans. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000) p. 501.
 - ³ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 2001) p. 28.
 - ⁴ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 132.
 - ⁵ Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 509.
 - ⁶ Ben-Gurion War Diary: The War of Independence, 1948-1949, Gershon Rivlin and Elhanan Orren ed., Tel Aviv 1982, cited in Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* p. 32.
 - ⁷ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* p. 28.
 - ⁸ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* p. 31.
 - ⁹ Benny Morris, *1948 and After* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) p. 40.
 - ¹⁰ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 132.
 - ¹¹ Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 129; This “Joint Command ” was comprised of the Haganah, Lehi (or the Stern Gang, headed by future Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Shamir), and the Irgun (commanded by future Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin) Thurston Clarke, *By Blood and Fire: The Attack on the King David Hotel* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1981) p. 20.
 - ¹² Uri Ram, “Postnationalist Pasts: The Case of Israel” in Jeffery K. Olick, ed., *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003) p. 229.
 - ¹³ Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987) p. 62-63.
 - ¹⁴ Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, p. 62-63.
 - ¹⁵ Bickerton, Ian and Carla Klausner. *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Upper Saddle River, N.J. Prentice Hall, 2005) p. 104.
 - ¹⁶ Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, *Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1996, 1999) p. 3.
 - ¹⁷ On 13 May a Lehi spokesperson stated: “A strong attack on the centres of the Arab population will intensify the movement of Arab refugees and all the roads in the direction of Transjordan and the neighbouring countries will be filled with panic-stricken masses and [this] will hamper the [enemy’s] military movement...A great opportunity has been given us...The whole of this land will be ours.” Jabotinsky Institute, Lehi Papers, kaf 5/5/2 in Benny Morris, *1948 and After* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) p. 37.
 - ¹⁸ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 126.

- ¹⁹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* p. 31.
- ²⁰ Morris “A New Exodus for the Middle East?” *Guardian*, 3 October 2002.
- ²¹ *Ha’aretz Friday Magazine*, 9 January 2004, quoted in Yoram Meital, *Peace in Tatters: Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East*. (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006) p. 125
Morris, who has become increasingly radical in his anti-Palestinian views, also added: “The great American democracy could not have been created without the annihilation of the Indians” and “Something like a cage has to be built for them [the Palestinians]. I know that sounds terrible...But there is no choice. There is a wild animal there that has to be locked up one way or another.”
- ²² Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 404.
- ²³ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 124; Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*. (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001) p. 199; Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005) p. 256.
- ²⁴ *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 August 1937 cited in David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983) p. 130.
- ²⁵ Ben-Gurion Memoirs, Vol. 4, p. 367 cited in Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 403.
- ²⁶ David Ben-Gurion, May 1948, to the General Staff cited in Michael Ben-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion, A Biography* (Delacorte: New York 1978) p. 178.
- ²⁷ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 125.
- ²⁸ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 125.
- ²⁹ Bickerton and Klausner. *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 103.
- ³⁰ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 130.
- ³¹ Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 207-209; Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 133.
- ³² Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, p. 206.
- ³³ Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, p. 209.
- ³⁴ Nur-eldeen Masalha, “On Recent Hebrew and Israeli Sources for the Palestinian Exodus, 1947-49” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 18. No. 1, Autumn 1988, p. 122.
- ³⁵ Masalha, “On Recent Hebrew and Israeli Sources...” p. 128-129.
- ³⁶ Masalha, “On Recent Hebrew and Israeli Sources...” p. 130.
- ³⁷ Quoted in Masalha, “On Recent Hebrew and Israeli Sources...” p. 131.
- ³⁸ Quoted in Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London and New York: Verso, 1995) p. 110.
- ³⁹ Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality*, p. 110; During the month-long UN truce initiated in June 1948, the UN-appointed mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden presented proposals for a settlement. In his first report, Count Bernadotte wrote about the Arab exodus: “It would offend basic principles to prevent these innocent victims of the conflict from returning to their homes, while Jewish immigrants flood into Palestine and, furthermore, threaten, in a permanent way, to take the place of the Arab refugees who have been rooted in this land for centuries.” He also described Zionist pillaging on a grand scale and the destruction of villages without apparent military necessity. His first settlement proposal was rejected by both sides. Bernadotte submitted a second report to the UN (UN Document A, 648, p. 14) on 16 September. On 17 September Count Bernadotte and his French assistant, Colonel Serot, were assassinated in Jerusalem by the Stern Gang (Lehi) through an order given by future Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. The assassination forced the Israeli government to merge the Irgun and Lehi with the Israeli Defense Force or IDF. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 37.
- ⁴⁰ Ben-Ami, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace*, p. 230.
- ⁴¹ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 31; Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 199.
- ⁴² Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, p. 508.
- ⁴³ Nurith Gertz, “The Few against the Many” in *The Jerusalem Quarterly* Vol. 30 Winter 1984, p. 94-104
- ⁴⁴ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 35.
- ⁴⁵ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 132.
- ⁴⁶ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 196.

- ⁴⁷ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 180.
- ⁴⁸ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* p. 35-36.
- ⁴⁹ Political and Diplomatic Documents, State of Israel Archives, World Zionist Organization, Jerusalem 1979 p. 60, cited in Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies: Israel and Transjordan in the War of 1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1987) p. 29.
- ⁵⁰ Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 2.
- ⁵¹ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 126.
- ⁵² Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 3.
- ⁵³ Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 26.
- ⁵⁴ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 105-106.
- ⁵⁵ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 196.
- ⁵⁶ U.S. National Archives 867N 01/5-1379, cable 513 from Cairo 13 May 1948 cited in Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987) p. 192.
- ⁵⁷ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 126.
- ⁵⁸ Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 193.
- ⁵⁹ Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 193; Mainstream Zionist historian Anita Shapira acknowledges that during the Arab Revolt of 1936-39 the Irgun engaged in “uninhibited use of terror and mass indiscriminate killings of the aged, women and children.” Anita Shapira *Going toward the Horizon* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1989) 47-49; The Irgun increased its terrorist activities in 1939, after the British instituted the White Paper. The Stern Gang (Lehi) was so hostile to the British that it considered seeking an alliance with the Axis powers in order to drive the British out of Palestine. Both groups engaged in political assassinations. Lord Moyne, the British secretary of state in Cairo, declared in the House of Lords on 9 June 1942 that the Jews were not the descendants of the ancient Hebrews and that they had no “legitimate claim” on the Holy Land. A proponent of curtailing immigration into Palestine, he was accused of being “an implacable enemy of Hebrew independence.” On 6 November 1944, Lord Moyne was assassinated in Cairo by two members of the Stern Gang. Isaac Zaar, *Rescue and Liberation: America's Part in the Birth of Israel* (New York: Bloch, 1954) p. 115; From November 45-July 1946, all three groups joined together in the “Hebrew revolt.” In July the Irgun, with the consent of the Jewish Agency, placed a high-powered bomb in the British government wing of the King David Hotel. Eighty people – Arabs, Jews and British – died. The armed clashes between the British and Zionist forces then increased, moving Palestine towards war, and were instrumental in Britain’s decision to hand Palestine over to the UN. Thurston Clarke, *By Blood and Fire: The Attack on the King David Hotel* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1981) p. 78.
- ⁶⁰ Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 196.
- ⁶¹ David Ben-Gurion, *Israel: A Personal History*, Nechemia Meyers and Uzy Nystar, trans. (Tel Aviv: Sabra Books, 1972) p. 61.
- ⁶² Bickerton and Klausner, *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 102.
- ⁶³ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p. 217, 241; Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p.196; Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 35; Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 131; Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 132.
- ⁶⁴ Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p.196.
- ⁶⁵ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 35.
- ⁶⁶ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 36.
- ⁶⁷ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 36.
- ⁶⁸ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 44.
- ⁶⁹ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 136.
- ⁷⁰ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 136.
- ⁷¹ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 201.
- ⁷² Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 24-25.
- ⁷³ Bickerton and Klausner. *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 104.
- ⁷⁴ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 136.
- ⁷⁵ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 136.
- ⁷⁶ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 147.
- ⁷⁷ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 160.

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- ⁷⁸ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, p. 147.
- ⁷⁹ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 227.
- ⁸⁰ Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 228.
- ⁸¹ Nahum Goldmann, *The Autobiography of Nahum Goldmann: Sixty Years of Jewish Life* (New York, 1969) p. 289-290.
- ⁸² Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, p. 8.

Conclusion:

“The process of constructing myth out of historical evidence always entails selective remembering and forgetting, accentuating favorable parts of the narrative and, in general, bringing the disorganized and self-contradictory historical facts to fit the simplistic narrative structure of political myth. Some pasts, however, are more problematic than others.” – Michael Feige¹

This thesis has examined some of the core Zionist narratives which formed the foundational impetus for the emergence of the state of Israel and which, it has been argued, are expressed and formalized in the Israeli Declaration of Independence. In a manner emulating the American Declaration of Independence, the clear articulation of these narratives in the Israeli Declaration helped to define the historic legitimacy for, and the guiding principles of, the new state, both for internal consumption and as a vehicle of international public relations or external propaganda. This study maintains that these created narratives and national myths shaped the dominant Yishuv identity, collective memory and attitudes towards the Arab “other,” and that these narratives, already crystallized by the time of the establishment of the state, have continued to define and limit Israeli self-identity, political and social discourse, and attitudes and actions until the present day.

As addressed in the first chapter, the Zionist movement was originally a predominantly secular, political program motivated by ethnic nationalist concerns. The master narratives which connected the Jewish collectivity to Palestine and justified the creation first of a national “homeland” and then a “Jewish” state were impelled by the conditioning nineteenth-century European concepts of romantic, ethnic nationalism and the nation-state. Thus, narratives of the direct line of descent from the ancient Hebrews to the modern European Jews were combined with claims of a right to

reconstruct what had previously existed as an ancient Hebrew “nation” in Palestine. Although neither Pinsker nor Herzl, the founders of political Zionism, was attached to Palestine as the site of the proposed state, early Russian Zionists determined that the land of ancient Israel would provide a stronger rallying point for the masses of Jews than any other possible location. As a result, the justification for territorial acquisition became framed in terms of a collective Jewish longing for the land of Palestine. The argument for this longing was deemed to be demonstrated by Jewish religious prayers and rituals, and was justified by the authority of sacred texts as well as by rights of ancient occupation, eventually becoming formalized as the “right of return.”

These narratives have now been widely accepted by world Jewry, despite the fact that Zionist ideology originally generated much opposition from the majority of Jewish groups and religious traditions, since Zionism was perceived as both a threat to emancipatory gains and assimilation rights, and a counter to traditional convictions regarding the messianic return to Israel. These assertions also gained credence notwithstanding the fact that historically the majority of Diaspora Jews had demonstrated no interest in settling in Palestine. Nevertheless, the convergence of secular and religious narratives regarding the “right of return” gradually resulted in a general Zionist (and eventually a widespread Jewish) sense of entitlement to the modern territory of Palestine.

Although formed as a secular political movement which attempted to move away from old religious traditions, Zionist narratives also included biblical and religious justifications as part of their propaganda discourse, both to rally Jewish response and to motivate non-Jewish support. Thus, while originally hidden under the

veer of secularism, Jewish religious identity has always been an influencing factor in both Zionist ideological discourse and the realities on the ground. This intermingling of national and religious identity is expressed in the Declaration of Independence by the words: “Impelled by this historic association, Jews strove throughout the centuries to go back to the land of the fathers and regain their statehood [in] Eretz-Israel...the birthplace of the Jewish people [where] their spiritual, religious and national identity was formed.”

The impact of the former has been particularly evident in Israel since 1977. Although earlier efforts to procure all of Palestine were shielded behind the Labor Zionist narrative of “bringing progress to all,” following the rise to power of the right-wing Likud Party, with its roots in Jabotinsky’s Revisionist Party and the Irgun, the power of the religious right has continually grown, and with it the overt demand for Jewish ownership of all of Palestine and the refusal to compromise or to give up any of the territory acquired (illegally, according to the UN²) through war. In addition to opposing the creation of a Palestinian state in these Occupied Territories, acquired in the 1967 War, a large percentage of the political leadership and the Israeli population have so strongly identified with the Zionist narrative of religious and historical sovereignty over ancient Judea and Jerusalem that it is now considered a sacrilege to give these territories up.³

Similarly, as addressed in Chapter Two, the Zionist narrative of settlement in Palestine was framed in terms of a redemptive mission of repatriating a people in exile. For the indigenous population this project was viewed as little more than an expression of Western imperialism and colonialism. In fact, even Herzl termed his mission a

colonial project. But the early Zionist mission, which was encapsulated in the slogan “a land without people for a people without land,” was highly problematic. As two rabbis who were sent to Palestine on a Zionist reconnaissance mission in 1897 duly noted, the bride was beautiful but she was already married:⁴ at that time Palestine was already occupied by close to 500,000 Arabs. Undeterred, the Zionists knowingly and determinedly set about to settle in Palestine, subsequently changing the “empty land” slogan into a narrative whereby Zionist settlement was a “civilizing” socialist enterprise, designed to bring “progress” to the backward Arab inhabitants of Palestine, a narrative which was contradicted by the efforts of the dominant Zionist leadership to maintain economic and social separation between the two peoples. Despite some compromising and conciliatory efforts on both sides, it soon became clear that there could be no solution to the “Arab problem” within a Zionist ideology that was determined to create a “Jewish” state on occupied Arab land, other than by control through force of arms or by the removal or “cleansing” of the Arab population. Both of these, as it turned out, were to occur. As it has been argued, violence between Zionists and Palestinians was inevitable: it was inherent in the Zionist ambitions to repossess a land, dispossess a people. Nonetheless, the narrative that the state was founded by peaceful socialist laborers intent on bringing “progress to all” remains ingrained in Israeli historical memory.

While the Palestinian Arabs were hampered by a range of factors that included leadership divisions and the lack of external support, the Zionist leaders were united in their goal to pointedly seek and acquire great power support and international recognition for their cause. As Chapter Three examines, this support was first

generated by attaining the backing of the British, in large part through the Zionist narrative that successfully transformed a single letter into the “Balfour Declaration.” This was then deemed to bind the British to the Zionist project of establishing a national “home,” interpreted by the Zionists, if not immediately vocalized to the world, as support for an eventual Jewish “state” in Palestine. This initial great power support was then parlayed, predominately through the negotiating efforts and skills of Chaim Weizmann, into the claim of international legal recognition of Zionist rights to Palestine through the Balfour Declaration’s insertion into the League of Nations Mandate, an act which, according to the Declaration of Independence “gave explicit international recognition to the historic connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and their right to reconstitute their National Home.”

Despite the fact that the Balfour Declaration contradicted previous British promises to the Arabs, the Declaration and the Zionist narratives associated with it had far-reaching consequences for the Middle East. Under the auspices of the British throughout the Mandate period, the Zionists were able to successfully set up the structures of a state. Despite the Mandate’s stated neutrality, the latter was accomplished in no small measure through the pro-Zionist backing of the British, who for their own political and strategic reasons consistently privileged the interests of the Zionists over those of the indigenous Arabs. As Khalidi notes, facing both the British and the Zionists:

was a weak and ineffective Palestinian leadership that seemed to grasp only dimly, if at all, the strategic challenge facing their people, the actual balance of forces in the field, the exact nature of the relationship between the great power of the day and its local Zionist allies, the way politics functioned in London...and how to use the meagre resources at their disposal to overcome these long odds.⁵

When the British were no longer willing to back the Zionists following the prolonged Arab Rebellion of 1936-39, the Yishuv leadership turned its attention to the upcoming great power: the United States. As Chapter Four demonstrates, in this shift, which coincided with World War II, the Zionists were able not only to generate American support for their cause but international public sympathy as well, by creating a narrative which connected the horrors experienced by the European Jews during the Holocaust with the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, despite a Zionist ideology which devalued non-Zionist Diaspora Jews.

Concerning the Holocaust it is sadly ironic that Zionist nationalism, centered in the ethical reference point of Jewish ethnic unity, emerged from the same nineteenth-century “blood and soil” nationalism, or idea of a *volkisch* state for a singular kind of people, that informed Nazism. Although citing similarities between these two ideologies is considered highly contentious and the vast differences in terms of magnitude, actions and intent are obvious, the irony of shared ideological roots bears noting. Like Zionism, Nazi ideology was a product of created monolithic, exclusionist histories that fostered a narrow ethnocentric self-identity in which there was no space for “others,” and where superiority and objectification led to the de-valuing and dehumanization of the “other.” Also like Nazism, Zionism embraced factors associated with ethnic cleansing: entitlement, exclusion, intolerance of difference, and military culture. Yet, as Norman Finkelstein argues, in following the logic of romantic nationalism:

the claim of Jewish ‘homelessness’ is founded on a cluster of assumptions that both negates the liberal idea of citizenship and duplicates the anti-Semitic one that a state belongs to the majority ethnic nation. In a word, the Zionist case for a Jewish state is as valid or as invalid as the

anti-Semitic case for an ethnic state that marginalizes Jews.⁶

That European Jews were victims of Nazi genocide on a horrendous and massive scale is unquestioned, but that the Yishuv leaders were skillful in using this victimization to generate international sympathy and to successfully create a propaganda discourse which linked the needs, and claimed desires, of the war refugees with the necessity of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine is also true. This Zionist Holocaust narrative is still commonplace today, and, with its accompanying emphasis on the “uniqueness” of the Jewish experience, on Jewish “victimization” and anti-Semitism, it has been repeatedly invoked to limit discourse, justify Israeli policy and actions, and silence critics, both within and outside the state.

Despite the general assumption that Israel came into being as a result of the Holocaust, as Chapter Five demonstrates, Zionist quasi-state structures were already established in Palestine and were awaiting the right circumstances and the support of a great power to coalesce into an independent sovereign entity. These circumstances came in the form of American political support for the partition of Palestine, generated predominately through the influence of President Truman, whose decision to back a Zionist state was, this study argues, much more influenced by domestic political considerations and Zionist pressure than by his public assertions of humanitarian concerns. With the narrative of Israeli “acceptance” and Palestinian “rejection” of the UN Partition Resolution, the Zionists were also successful in establishing an international image of the Israelis as peaceful and compromising, in contradistinction to the apparently lawless Palestinians. (Also ironically, the Zionists used the UN Partition Resolution to legitimate the legality of the state of Israel, while subsequently

blocking, denying, or defying the legality of later UN resolutions regarding the return of Israeli territory acquired through war, the return of refugees, Jerusalem, and the establishment of a Palestinian state.)⁷

The Zionists' foundational narratives of the 1948 War and the creation of the state of Israel continued to forge a national identity based on peaceful, defensive action. Indeed, the myth of David and Goliath – of massive, united Arab aggression against tiny, vulnerable and victimized Israel – still resonates in the present, as Israel persists in shielding acts of aggression behind a constant claim of self-defence, despite being the strongest military presence in the Middle East and the only country to retain nuclear weapons.⁸ However, as examined in Chapter Six, while the narrative that the Arabs were united and determined to “drive the Jews into the sea” still conditions Israeli collective memory and identity, the Zionists went to war against the divided and unprepared Arabs with the deliberate intention to appropriate land, determined not to be limited to the boundaries allotted by the Partition Resolution, and with no intention of being bound by the international law that the Zionists themselves had fought so hard to attain.

Yet the ethos of victimization has become part of an ongoing “defensive” strategy, a master narrative used by the Zionist leadership to justify Israeli actions towards the Arabs in general and the Palestinian “other” in particular. Regarding the latter, the so-called “enemy” of the Israelis, American philosopher Sam Keen states in his book *Faces of the Enemy*: “In the image of the enemy, we will find the mirror in which may see our own face most clearly.”⁹ Yosepha Loshitzky expresses a very similar idea when she asserts: “To look at oneself in the mirror is also to look at the

other.”¹⁰ That it may be helpful for Israel to look in the mirror is symbolized by the Israeli response to the attempted appropriation by the Palestinians of the *Exodus* narrative. A few months prior to the start of the 1987 *intifada*, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), hoping to draw international attention to the plight of the Palestinian refugees and to Israel’s refusal to allow them the “right of return” to Palestine, as well as in order to draw parallels between the Arab situation and that of the Jewish Holocaust survivors – both victims of ethnic cleansing seeking to return home – arranged to send a ship named *Safinat al-Awda* (Boat of Return) from Cyprus to Israel. The boat was to be filled with Palestinian refugees, and Israeli and European peace activists. The Zionists, however, were fearful of a similarly successful public relations strategy. On 15 February 1987, just days before setting off, the Israeli secret service, the Mossad, which had previously been in charge of illegally transporting Jewish survivors to Palestine, blew up the ship.¹¹ Thus the narrative of the “right of return,” which was used to such advantage by the Zionists to settle Jews in Palestine, and to justify keeping and settling the Occupied Territories that comprise what was “Greater Israel,” is deemed applicable only to Jews. The narrative that the Palestinians refugees left of their own accord before and after 1948 has been used to absolve Israel of all responsibility concerning this issue and to justify the Israeli refusal to allow a “right of return” to the Palestinians. It is therefore ironic, but also tragic, that despite the Zionist narrative of the Jews as eternal victims constantly forced to defend themselves, the victimization of the Palestinians by the Jews has created another *diaspora* of homeless refugees.

It is also unfortunate that in spite of the Zionists' redemptive vision of the *aliya* and of a state which would "open the gates to all Jews," a great number of Jewish immigrants, particularly those not of European descent (Holocaust survivors excepted), were displaced from their countries of origin only to experience alienation and discrimination in what was supposed to be their place of refuge. Another sad result has been that the majority of "returning Jews" have also had to deal with the realities of dispossessing the "other," with the resultant conflict and the guilt, whether consciously acknowledged or not, that is continually being reflected back to them by the Palestinian mirror.

As Israeli historian and politician Shlomo Ben-Ami states:

Israel, as a society, suppressed the memory of the war against the local Palestinians, because it couldn't really come to terms with the fact that it expelled Arabs, committed atrocities against them, dispossessed them. This was like admitting that the noble Jewish dream of statehood was stained forever by a major injustice committed against the Palestinians and that the Jewish state was born in sin.¹²

Although in Ben-Ami's view the moral perspective does not undermine the creation of the Jewish state, "however tough the conditions and however immoral the consequences for the Palestinians,"¹³ he does concede that the current generation of Israelis must end the injustice and address the harm that has been done to the Palestinian nation. Similarly, Avi Shlaim argues:

...there is no denying that the establishment of the State of Israel involved a massive injustice to the Palestinians. Half a century on, Israel still has to arrive at the reckoning of its own sins against the Palestinians, a recognition that it owes the Palestinians a debt that must at some point be paid.¹⁴

That point of recognition has yet to arrive. Despite the claims articulated in the Declaration of Independence that Israel would be "based on the principles of liberty,

justice, and peace...;” despite promises to “uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race, or sex;” ...and to “loyally uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter [of Human Rights]” this narrative of justice and social equality has never been actualized. Notwithstanding its lofty rhetoric, the Declaration has had no legal standing and has never served as a point of reference with regard to equality before the law: these promises were never put into effect for the Israeli Arabs. Instead, the Palestinians were placed under a military regime that lasted almost 20 years; they endured forced evacuations, the destruction of their villages and the expropriation of Arab-owned land through the Absentee Property Law and the Office of the Custodian of Absentee Property.¹⁵ According to Israel Shahak, Chairman of the Israeli League for Human and Civil Rights, the Arabs “have been expelled, put in prison, limited in their movements... and have suffered many other forms of oppression, without the fact even being noted except in the case of the most flagrant crimes.”¹⁶ As a result of the gaping discrepancy between the hard-line, security-oriented approach used on the Arab minority in Israel and the democratic processes enjoyed by Jews, no constitution has ever been created in Israel. A constitution would legally enshrine equality of rights to all Israeli citizens and could perhaps lead to a bi-national rather than a “Jewish” state.

This blatant discrepancy between narrative and reality has led human rights scholar Brian Orend to assert:

It is ironic that Israel came into being in 1948, the same year the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created and ratified by the UN. The declaration extensively covers first generation civil, political and legal rights, including the right to a nationality, the “right to take part in government,” movement rights, and a variety of legal rights to ensure equality before the law, the prevention of arbitrarily being detained, the right to a trial. These

are all rights that the UN subsequently sanctioned Israel against, for denying to the Palestinian Arabs, within and outside state borders.¹⁷

Similarly, a recent report from *B'Tselem*, the Israeli Information Center for Human

Rights in the Occupied Territories, acknowledges that:

Israel has established in the Occupied Territories a separation cum discrimination regime, in which it maintains two systems of laws, and a person's rights are based on his or her national origin. This regime is the only one of its kind in the world, and brings to mind dark regimes of the past, such as the Apartheid regime in South Africa.¹⁸

The foundational Zionist narratives, which have all played crucial roles in the historic relationship between the Zionists and the Palestinian Arabs, have also impacted the peace process that extended from the Oslo Accords in 1993 to the Camp David Summit/Taba Talks of 2000-2001, and were used to define and defend this process's collapse.¹⁹ That Yasser Arafat and the Palestinians were given all the blame for the breakdown of the process by the Israelis and the Americans, as well as for the terror of the *intifada* which followed, is indicative of the current strength of the traditional Zionist narratives within Israeli culture. The narrative that Israel has constantly had its hand out in peace, but that there has been "no one to talk to on the other side" is readily accepted: it dominates Israeli perceptions across the religious and political spectrum. The created myths and memories concerning the Jews' historic right to all of Palestine and to Jerusalem, the valiant efforts of a defenceless state against a mighty Arab foe determined to "drive the Jews into the sea" in 1948 and beyond, the Palestinian refugees who fled of their own volition, and the narrative that Israel's military actions are always defensive, forced upon them by the anti-Semitic and aggressive Palestinians who never were a people and who rightly belong to a pan-Arab nation – and who comprise the terrorist Arab "other" – have all served to thwart

Israel from moving beyond a fortress, “iron wall” mentality. The ready and constant apportioning of blame to the Palestinians has prevented Israelis from perceiving the historical complexities of their inter-relationship with the Arabs and accepting their own responsibility in creating the unhappy situation of occupation and exile under which the majority of Palestinians still suffer.

This widespread lack of understanding of the plight and motivations of the Palestinian “other” and the Israeli focus on the narratives of security and defence against the aggressive, “terrorist” enemy all contributed to the election in 2001 of a right-wing military leader, Ariel Sharon, as prime minister. Sharon’s unilateral measures, including the building of a separation wall or “defence fence” and the disengagement from Gaza in order to focus on the more historically relevant West Bank, also serve to illustrate the continuing influence of the narratives which place sole responsibility for the existing circumstances on the other side.

The situation of constant conflict and turmoil in Israel and the Occupied Territories begs the question: Was the belief in the redemption of Jews and the elimination of anti-Semitism through the act of “return” to Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state ill-founded? Or was the restoration of ethnic nationalism in the guise of a modern, highly militarized and aggressive state justified? Undoubtedly, the majority of Israelis would answer the latter question in the affirmative. From another perspective, one can argue that the creation of Israel is akin to the re-institution of a large-scale ghetto, a variation of the originally self-imposed segregation of Diaspora Jews in order to protect the integrity of Jewish religious and social communities, which was turned against them by the dominant national powers into an imposed

segregation through the construction of figurative and literal walls. As well as being a tangible expression of the need of romantic nationalism to procure “soil” for the existent “blood ties,” and of a desire to be rid of the oppressive “other,” the creation of Israel as a nation-state can be viewed as an extension of the logic of Jewish exceptionalism and particularity, an expression of the historic exclusivity of the “chosen people” and of the “promised land” ideology.

Ironically, the attempt to move backward in time, to re-create the ancient past in the present, now counters the current postmodern thrust towards transnationalism, globalization, multiculturalism, and diversity. The contemporary globalizing tendencies which emphasize cultural pluralism and minority rights are generally regarded as hostile to the Zionist concept of Israel as the state of the “Jewish” people. However, throughout the planet the homogenizing effects of globalization are impacting on cultural distinctiveness in general, further corroding the legitimacy of a state based solely on purity of ethnicity and religion. As Michael Smith argues, with the erosion of the capacity of the nation-state to maintain boundaries, “the distinctions between inside and outside, citizen and alien, self and other”²⁰ are becoming increasingly problematic

The dominant legitimizing Zionist narratives continue to define and limit Israeli identity and, therefore, the scope of options available to the political leadership. Yet the world’s current globalizing forces, the untenable Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the challenges levelled against Israel’s traditional historical representations, collective memories and national myths by the “new historians” and others are all beginning to erode the credibility and the unquestioned reproduction of these

narratives. These challenges are also impacting the intense internal debate over Israel's future, as well as its past. Concerning the former, as the viability of a two-state solution appears to be rapidly disappearing, Israel may be left with only two options: either expand occupation and complete the process of ethnic cleansing which it began in 1947-48, or create a single, unitary state. Although the latter option is at present unthinkable to the majority of Israelis, it may, over time, become inevitable.

Notes:

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- ¹ Michael Feige, "Rescuing the Person from the Symbol: *Peace Now*" and the Ironies of Modern Myth" in *History & Memory*, Vol.11, No.1, 1999, p. 143.
 - ² Following the 1967 War, UN Security Council Resolution 242 stressed the "inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war" and called for Israel to "withdraw from territories occupied in the recent conflict" [West Bank, Golan Heights and Gaza] and to achieve a "just settlement of the refugee problem." UN Resolution 242 cited in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, ed., *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001) p. 116.
 - ³ In 1982 then Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir publicly stated: "Israel has made it clear that it has a claim to sovereignty over Judea, Samaria, and Gaza... Israel will not be party to a design that would deny Jews residence in those areas... No less important, the Israeli presence in those areas... is vital to Israel's defense." Quoted in Laqueur and Rubin, ed., *The Israel-Arab Reader*, p. 245.
 - ⁴ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 2001) p. 3.
 - ⁵ Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006) p. xix.
 - ⁶ Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London and New York: Verso, 1995) p. 101.
 - ⁷ Finkelstein, *Image and Reality*, p. xv-xvi ; For example, the 1968 UN Security Council Resolution 252 "considers that all...actions taken by Israel... which tend to change the legal status of Jerusalem are invalid and cannot change that status." The 1980 UN Security Council Resolution 476 "reconfirms that all actions taken by Israel, the occupying power, which purport to alter the character and status of Jerusalem have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention." In response, the Knesset passed legislation proclaiming all Jerusalem to be Israeli. Since the 1970s when the PLO endorsed a two-state solution, the international community, with the exception of Israel and the US, backed the creation of a Palestinian state. The US consistently cast lone Security Council vetoes and blocked UN General Assembly resolutions, with the result that Israel has enjoyed virtual immunity from enforcement measures for numerous violations of international law.

- ⁸ Concerning the Israeli narrative which paints the Palestinians as predominately dangerous terrorists, casualty statistics reveal the Israelis to be at least six times more effective in killing “the enemy.” As of November 2003, Palestinian civilian deaths due to direct military action and indirect consequences of Israeli policies stood at just over 2700 people. Palestinian civilian injuries due to Israeli action stood at over 47,000. The casualty count as of 2007, released by *B’Tselem*, reports that Israeli forces have killed 4,396 Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories while 705 Israelis have been killed by Palestinians. *B’Tselem*, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories <http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics>.
- ⁹ Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination and the Psychology of Enmity* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986) p. 11.
- ¹⁰ Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) p. 4.
- ¹¹ Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*, p. 14.
- ¹² Amy Goodwin, *Democracy Now!* “Transcribed Debate between Shlomo Ben-Ami and Norman Finkelstein on Israel and the Palestinians” PBS Radio 14 February 2006, p. 2. <http://www.democracynow.org/shows/2006/02/14>
- ¹³ Goodwin, *Democracy Now!* p. 2.
- ¹⁴ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 598.
- ¹⁵ Laurence J. Silberstein, *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991) p. 7.
- ¹⁶ Israel Shahak, in Felicia Langer, *With My Own Eyes: Israel and the Occupied Territories 1967-1973* (London: Ithaca Press, 1975) Foreward.
- ¹⁷ Orend, Brian. *Human Rights: Concept and Context*. Toronto: Broadview Press, 2002 p. 245.
- ¹⁸ “Land Expropriation and Settlements” *B’Tselem*, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 2007 p.1 <http://www.btselem.org/English/Settlements>.
- ¹⁹ According to US President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Barak offered the Palestinians a most generous offer which Yasser Arafat refused, thus collapsing the peace process. Yet as Robert Malley, President Clinton’s special assistant for Arab-Israeli affairs has argued, there never was a formal Israeli offer at Camp David II, since nothing was written down, at Barak’s insistence, nor was Israeli’s final position clear. Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, “Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors” in *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 48, No. 13, August 2001 p. 11. Similarly, the signing of the Declaration of Principles with the PLO in September 1993 seemed to indicate that the Israeli government intended to alter its settlement policy. Yet contrary to Palestinian expectations on signing the Oslo Agreements, between 1993 and the outbreak of the *al-Aqsa intifada* in 2001, the number of housing units in West Bank and Gaza settlements increased 54 percent, from 20,400 to 31, 400. The sharpest increase during this period was in 2000, under the government headed by Ehud Barak. “Land Grab: Israel’s Settlement Policy in the West Bank” report from *B’Tselem*: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in Occupied Territories (excerpt May 2002) in Joel Beinin and Rebecca L. Stein, ed. *The Struggle for Sovereignty: Israel and Palestine, 1993-2005* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) p. 187-188.
- ²⁰ Michael Peter Smith, “Transnational Migration and the Globalization of Grassroots Politics” in *SocialText*, Vol. 39, 1994, p. 23.

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