

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### TALKING ZIONISM, DOING ZIONISM, STUDYING ZIONISM\*

*Zionism and the creation of a new society.* By Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. 293. ISBN 0-19-509209-0.

*Land and power: the Zionist resort to force, 1881–1948.* By Anita Shapira. Translated by William Templer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. Reissued Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. Pp. x + 446. ISBN 0-8047-3776-2.

*The founding myths of Israel: nationalism, socialism, and the making of the Jewish state.* By Zeev Sternhell. Translated by David Maisel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Pp. xv + 419. ISBN 0-691-00967-8.

‘Zionism’ is defined by the recently published *Political encyclopedia of the Middle East* as ‘[t]he movement for the national renaissance and political independence of the Jewish People in Eretz Yisrael (Palestine), which emerged toward the end of the nineteenth century. The word is derived from one of the biblical names of Jerusalem – Zion.’<sup>1</sup> Zionism is also a multi-faceted ideology that evolved into the modern State of Israel and has also produced a voluminous historiography. The recent centennial of the first Zionist Congress (held at Basle in 1897) gave rise to numerous academic conferences and publications reflecting on one hundred years of Zionist history and historiography. Among the latter is an important Hebrew anthology entitled *From vision to revision*, whose title refers to the latest wave of revisionist history that has become a popular subject in its own right.<sup>2</sup>

Things seemed much simpler when, as a graduate student at the London School of Economics and Political Science, I first turned my attention in the late 1960s and early 1970s to Zionism, Israel, and the Arab–Israel conflict. Even then a novice was quickly overwhelmed by vast quantities of information to absorb, beginning with the social and intellectual origins of the movement and of its rival, the Arab nationalist movement of the mid- and late nineteenth century. Like others new to the field, I had to master its particular, at times esoteric, vocabulary, and the basic time-line of important events and dates – from the first Zionist Congress to the Balfour Declaration (1917), the Peel (Royal) Commission Report of 1937, the United Nations Partition vote of 1947, and the ‘Six-Day’ War of June 1967. There were also dozens of unusual-sounding names of thinkers and politicians and a dizzying number of competing ideologies, movements, organizations, political parties, and factions.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the publication of a number of still classic works

\* I am grateful to Saul Panofsky, Usher Caplan, and Bernard Wasserstein for their helpful comments on various drafts of this review.

<sup>1</sup> Avraham Sela, ed., *Political encyclopedia of the Middle East* (New York, 1999), pp. 811–15.

<sup>2</sup> Yechiam Weitz, ed., *From vision to revision: a hundred years of Zionist historiography* (Jerusalem, 1997 – Heb.).

that provided students with a wealth of background information, and stimulated many like myself to venture into new areas and sub-topics of further reading and research. From the excellent works of the late Ben Halpern and Arthur Hertzberg we learned about the main Zionist thinkers and the sources and development of their ideas, while Walter Laqueur provided a seminal historical survey of the political dynamics of the evolving Zionist movement.<sup>3</sup> All of this was rendered even more vivid by the available diaries, biographies, and autobiographies of the leading figures of the movement.<sup>4</sup> The struggles of ordinary Zionists – most of whom were recent immigrants who purchased and settled the land, built a new Jewish society (the *yishuv*, or Jewish community in pre-state Palestine or *Eretz-Israel*, ‘the land of Israel’), and created its underground army (the *Hagana*) – were treated in standard works by Alex Bein, S. N. Eisenstadt, the Esco Foundation, and others.<sup>5</sup>

One of the joys of graduate research in history and the social sciences is working with primary sources. To prepare for the ‘raw’ materials in the archives, one began by consulting materials available in previously published collections of letters or documents.<sup>6</sup> Two official British publications – the Peel (Royal) Commission Report

<sup>3</sup> Ben Halpern, *The idea of the Jewish state* (2nd edn, Cambridge, MA, 1969); Arthur Hertzberg, ed. and introd., *The Zionist idea: a historical analysis and reader* (Garden City, NJ, 1959; reprinted New York, 1981); Walter Z. Laqueur, *A history of Zionism* (London, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Hayim Arlosoroff, *Jerusalem diary* (2nd edn, Tel Aviv, 1949 – Heb.); Menachem Begin, *The revolt: story of the Irgun*, trans. Samuel Katz (New York, 1951, and Los Angeles, 1972); Alex Bein, *Theodore Herzl: a biography*, trans. Maurice Samuel (Philadelphia, 1940); David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Pearlman, *Ben-Gurion looks back in talks with Moshe Pearlman* (New York, 1965); David Ben-Gurion, *Letters to Paula and the children* (Tel Aviv, 1968 – Heb.), translated as *Letters to Paula* by Aubrey Hodes (London, 1971); Ben-Gurion, *Israel: a personal history*, trans. Nechemia Meyers and Uzy Nystar (New York, 1971); Ben-Gurion, *Memoirs* (5 vols. [to 1938], Tel Aviv, 1971–82); Ben-Gurion, *My talks with Arab leaders* (Jerusalem, 1972); Eliahu Elath, *Zionism and the Arabs* (Tel Aviv, 1974 – Heb.); *Theodor Herzl: complete diaries*, ed., Raphael Patai, trans. Harry Zohn (5 vols, New York, 1960); Enzo Sereni and R. E. Ashery, eds., *Jews and Arabs in Palestine: studies in a national and colonial problem* (New York, 1936); Frederick H. Kisch, *Palestine diary* (London, 1938); Moshe Medzini, *Ten years of Palestine politics* (Tel Aviv, 1928 – Heb.); Arthur Ruppin, *Chapters of my life* (3 vols., Tel Aviv, 1968 – Heb.), abridged English translation published as *Memoirs, diaries, letters*, ed. A. Bein, trans. K. Gershon (London and Jerusalem, 1970); Herbert L. Samuel, *Memoirs* (London, 1945); Joseph B. Schechtman, *The Vladimir Jabotinsky story* (2 vols., I: *Rebel and statesman: the early years*, II: *Fighter and prophet: the last years*) (New York, 1956–61); Moshe [Shertok] Sharett, *Political diary* (1936–42), ed. A. Malkin, A. Sela, and E. Shaltiel (5 vols., Tel Aviv, 1968–79 – Heb.); Sharett, *At the gate of the nations, 1946–1949* (Tel Aviv, 1958 – Heb.); Marie Syrkin, *Golda Meir: woman with a cause* (London, 1964); Shabtai Teveth, *Moshe Dayan: the soldier, the man, the legend*, trans. Leah and David Zinder (Boston, MA, 1973); Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and error* (London, 1949).

<sup>5</sup> Yigal Allon, *Shield of David: the story of Israel's armed forces* (London, 1970); Alex Bein, *The return to the soil* (Jerusalem, 1952); Shlomo Bardin, *Pioneer youth* (New York, 1932); Moshé Burstein, *Self-government of the Jews in Palestine since 1900* (Tel Aviv, 1934); S. N. Eisenstadt, *Israeli society* (London, 1967); Esco Foundation for Palestine, Inc., *Palestine: a study of Jewish, Arab, and British policies* (2 vols., New Haven, 1947); Benzion Dinur, Yehuda Slutsky et al., eds., *History of the Hagana* (3 vols., Tel Aviv, 1964–72 – Heb.); Hanna Trager, *Pioneers in Palestine* (London, 1923).

<sup>6</sup> Walter Laqueur, ed., *The Arab-Israeli reader: a documentary history of the Middle East conflict* (rev. edn, London, 1970; since revised and reissued, ed. Laqueur and Barry Rubin, 5th revised and updated edn, New York and Harmondsworth, 1995); Moshe Attias, ed., *Documents of the Vaad Leumi* (2nd enlarged edn, Jerusalem, 1963 – Heb.); Meyer W. Weisgal and Barnet Litvinoff, gen. eds., *The letters and papers of Chaim Weizmann*, Series A: Letters (23 vols., New Brunswick, NJ, 1968–80).

(1937) and *A Survey of Palestine* (1946–7)<sup>7</sup> – were invaluable sources of rare data about the growing *yishuv* and its socio-economic structure. One of the early books that sought to integrate history and sociology was V. D. Segre's *Israel: a society in transition*, which showed how Zionism had tried to 'solve the Jewish problem by applying eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideological and technological tools, borrowed from Europe, to the twentieth-century colonial agrarian situation in Palestine'.<sup>8</sup>

On the early development of the Arab–Israeli conflict, most students in the UK at the time read the classic treatments by J. C. Hurewitz, John Marlowe, and Christopher Sykes.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the most interesting new research of that period – making use of previously unavailable or neglected memoirs and archival sources – addressed itself to the origins of the conflict. This body of work focused on the uneasy early relations between Zionist settlers and the Arab residents of the Ottoman provinces that were shortly to become the hotly contested land of Palestine/Israel, and extended also to the continuing struggle in the early days of the British mandatory regime following the Balfour Declaration.<sup>10</sup>

Such was the state of studies in Zionism that one encountered three decades ago. As all students of history soon discover, there is no such thing as a neutral fact, and in the case of Zionism there were (and still are) frequently conflicting normative interpretations, which add an intellectually stimulating edge to the field. One of the hotly debated issues of the period was the relation between Zionism and colonialism. What were the real objectives of Zionism and the Jewish state? Was Zionism a 'colonialist' and/or 'racist' phenomenon? Was the state of Israel the product of an illegitimate movement, as the French critic Maxime Rodinson and others, echoing basic Arab grievances, alleged? Or was Zionism to be viewed as the 'national liberation movement' of the Jews (and, as such, worthy of the support of progressive people everywhere),

<sup>7</sup> Palestine Royal Commission, *Report*, Cmd 5479 (London, July 1937); *A Survey of Palestine*, prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry (2 vols., Jerusalem, 1946), and *Supplement to Survey of Palestine*, notes compiled for the information of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (Jerusalem, June 1947 – 3 vols. reprinted by the Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> V. D. Segre, *Israel: a society in transition* (London and New York, 1971), p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> J. C. Hurewitz, *The struggle for Palestine* (New York, 1950; reprinted New York, 1968); John Marlowe, *The seat of Pilate: an account of the Palestine mandate* (London, 1959); Christopher Sykes, *Crossroads to Israel, 1917–1948* (Cleveland, 1965; reprinted Bloomington and London, 1973).

<sup>10</sup> An unacknowledged pioneer in this field was P. A. Alsberg, whose archives-based article 'The Arab question in the policy of the Zionist executive before the First World War' appeared in *Shivat Zion*, 4 (1956–7), pp. 161–209 (Heb.). Other early works on this topic were: two Hebrew volumes by Michael Assaf, *The Arab awakening in Palestine* and *Arab–Jewish relations in Palestine, 1860–1948* (Tel Aviv, 1967 and 1970); Yehuda Bauer, *From diplomacy to resistance: a history of Jewish Palestine, 1939–1945* (Merhavia, 1966 – Heb.; trans. into English by Alton M. Winters, Philadelphia, 1970); Aharon Cohen, *Israel and the Arab world* (Merhavia, 1964 – Heb.; published in English, New York, 1970); Susan Lee Hattis, *The bi-national idea in Palestine during mandatory times* (Haifa, 1970); Elie Kedourie, 'Sir Herbert Samuel and the government of Palestine', in idem, ed., *The Chatham House version and other Middle-Eastern studies* (London, 1970), pp. 52–81; Neville J. Mandel, 'Attempts at an Arab-Zionist entente, 1913–1914', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1 (1964–65), pp. 238–67; Mandel, 'Turks, Arabs and Jewish Immigration into Palestine, 1882–1914', in Albert Houran, ed., *St. Anthony's papers 17* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 77–108; Yehoshua Porath, *The emergency of the Palestinian-Arab national movement, 1918–1929* (Jerusalem, 1971 – Heb.; English trans. published London, 1974); Yaacov Ro'i, 'The Zionist attitude to the Arabs, 1908–1914', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 4 (1968), pp. 198–242. Mandel's original PhD thesis and research papers of the 1960s were reworked into a highly accessible book, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (Berkeley, 1976).

which unfortunately emerged in the declining years of the imperialist era, rather than in the heyday of more respectable third-world national movements.<sup>11</sup>

In the heyday of campus radicalism and the rise of the New Left, many students of those days felt called upon to take a stand on the post-1967 Israel–Arab and Israeli–Palestinian conflicts. Examination of the origins of this complex dispute led many researchers to conclusions as to the rights and wrongs involved, and what shape a ‘just and lasting peace’ ought to take. Among the works which raised such issues was an international best-seller by the Israeli journalist Amos Elon, who, while presenting the origins and evolution of Zionism sympathetically, dared to suggest that Israel’s founding fathers were prevented by their own preoccupations from foreseeing and avoiding a fateful clash with the Arabs.<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, Ehud Ben Ezer published *Unease in Zion*, a collection of reflective and self-critical essays by, and interviews with, Israeli intellectuals.<sup>13</sup>

Even more original and provocative questions were raised in the mid-1960s by the French sociologist Georges Friedman in *The end of the Jewish People*?<sup>14</sup> Friedmann, a self-defined ‘marginal’ Jew who had visited Israel for the first time in 1963 and 1964, was troubled by the ‘non-Jewish’ characteristics he saw in the ‘new’ Jews whose values had been shaped by an independent Israel and its pre-state institutions. Stressing his findings about the distinctiveness of contemporary Hebrew-speaking native-born Israeli *sabras* (who were for the most part non-observant religiously), Friedmann appeared to be arguing that Zionism had run its course and had already fulfilled – or perhaps subverted – its mission, solving ‘the Jewish question’ by creating a new (‘non-Jewish’) Middle-Eastern state and society.

The years between this writer’s initiation to the study of Zionism and the appearance of the three volumes under review have seen a plethora of new publications, many of which merely rehashed existing knowledge or old truths and presented them, as new, in

<sup>11</sup> Maxime Rodinson, *Israel and the Arabs*, trans. Michael Perl (Harmondsworth, 1968); Rodinson, ‘Israël, fait colonial?’ *Les temps modernes*, 22 (1967) 253bis, pp. 17–88, later translated as *Israel: a colonial settler-state?*, intro. Peter Buch, trans. David Thorstad (New York, 1973); Nathan Weinstock, *Le sionisme contre Israël* (Paris, 1969); Walid Khalidi, ed. and introd., *From haven to conquest: readings in Zionism and the Palestine problem until 1948* (Beirut, 1971; 2nd printing, Washington, 1987); Noam Chomsky, *Peace in the Middle East? Reflections on justice and nationhood* (New York, 1974). Other critiques coming from two very different Jewish perspectives, included Aharon Cohen, *Israel and the Arab world* (Tel Aviv, 1964 – Heb.; English version published New York, 1970), and Michael Selzer, ed. and introd., *Zionism reconsidered: the rejection of Jewish normalcy* (London and New York, 1970). For a liberal defence of Zionism and Israel against their various critics of those days, see: Michael Curtis, ed., *People and politics in the Middle East* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1971); Irving Howe and Carl Gershman, eds., *Israel, the Arabs and the Middle East* (New York, 1972); Jacob Tsur, *L’Épopée du sionisme* (Paris, 1976) trans. as *Zionism: the saga of a national liberation movement* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Amos Elon, *The Israelis: founders and sons* (New York, 1971), esp. ch. 8, ‘An open wound’. For contradictory interpretations, showing that the early settlers were well aware of the contradictions between their aims and the interests of the indigenous population, see: Laqueur, *History of Zionism*, pp. 211–34; Neil Caplan, *Palestine Jewry and the Arab question, 1917–1925* (London, 1978), pp. 2–7, 185–203; Shmuel Almog, ed., *Zionism and the Arabs: essays* (Jerusalem, 1983); and Gershon Shafir, *Land, labor and the origins of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, 1882–1914* (updated edn, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996), pp. 202–11.

<sup>13</sup> Ehud Ben Ezer, ed., fwd Robert Alter, *Unease in Zion* (New York, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Georges Friedmann, *Fin du peuple juif?* (Paris, 1965), trans by Eric Mosbacher as *The end of the Jewish people?* (London, 1967).

the latest politically correct fashion. A few studies have unearthed new information about personalities, movements, or fateful decisions, while others have offered new critical perspectives for rethinking aspects of the origins and development of Zionism and Israel. Proper consideration of the vast output of material on Zionism in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s lies beyond the scope of this review, but brief mention will be made of some of the works that have left their mark.

Two high-profile Israeli intellectuals, Shlomo Avineri and Amnon Rubinstein, produced original and highly readable contributions: the former did a study of Zionist leadership, and the latter examined the impact of Zionist thinking on the political, psychological, and literary development of Israel.<sup>15</sup> Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak co-authored an important historical-sociological analysis of the growth of the *yishuv* as a political community, integrating ideological and quantitative elements in their study of that society's transition to statehood in 1948.<sup>16</sup> New perspectives on the study of Zionism and the creation of modern Israel were explored by scholars working with methods and concepts derived from archaeology, anthropology, and even psycho-history.<sup>17</sup> At least one traditionally trained historian, David Vital of Tel Aviv University, dared to reconsider some of the sacred premises of Zionist thinking in the light of four decades of Israeli statehood and changes among diaspora Jewry. In his 1990 essay *The future of the Jews*, Vital raised the near-heretical idea that Georges Friedmann may have been right – even if for the wrong reasons – in suggesting the imminent ‘end of the Jewish people’.<sup>18</sup>

New autobiographies and biographies afforded further insight into the lives and times of Theodor Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett, Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan, Abba Eban, and other leading personalities.<sup>19</sup> In the early 1980s, the

<sup>15</sup> Shlomo Avineri, *The making of modern Zionism: intellectual origins of the Jewish state* (New York, 1981); Amnon Rubinstein, *From Herzl to Gush Emunim and back* (Jerusalem, 1980 – Heb.), trans. as *The Zionist dream revisited: from Herzl to Gush Emunim and back* (New York, 1984). Recently Rubinstein published a new interpretative history, *From Herzl to Rabin: the changing image of Zionism* (New York, 2000), with a forward by former Prime Minister Ehud Barak and a preface by Arthur Hertzberg. An appropriate partner for the three works under review here, it appeared too late for proper treatment in this review essay. Another, more abstract and scholarly, addition to the field of intellectual history is Yosef Gorny's *The state of Israel in Jewish public thought: the quest for collective identity*, fwd Michael A. Meyer (New York, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *From yishuv to state* (Tel Aviv, 1977 – Heb.), trans. by Charles Hoffman as *The origins of the Israeli polity: Palestine under the mandate* (Chicago, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> Elon, *The Israelis*, pp. 279–89; Jay Y. Gonen, *A psychohistory of Zionism* (New York, 1975); David Jacobson, ‘Mythmaking and commemoration in Israeli culture’, in Laura Zittrain Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, eds., *Review essays in Israel studies: books on Israel, volume V* (Albany, 2000), pp. 99–117; Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered roots: collective memory and the making of Israeli national tradition* (Chicago and London, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> David Vital, *The future of the Jews* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion: a biography*, trans. Peretz Kidron (New York and London, 1978); Ronald W. Zweig, ed., *David Ben-Gurion: politics and leadership in Israel* (London and Jerusalem, 1991); Yemima Rosenthal and Eli Shaltiel, eds., *David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister: selected documents (1947–1963)* (Jerusalem, 1996 – Heb.); David Ben-Gurion, *War diary: the war of independence, 1947–1949*, ed. Gershon Rivlin and Elhanan Orren (3 vols., Tel Aviv, 1982 – Heb.); Moshe Dayan, *Story of my life* (London, 1976), and the quite different Hebrew version, *Milestones: an autobiography* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1976); Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai campaign* (New York, 1966); Abba Eban, *An autobiography* (New York, 1977); Eban, *Personal witness: Israel through my eyes* (New York, 1992); Eliahu Elath, *Zionism at the U.N.: a diary of the first days*, fwd by Howard M. Sachar (Philadelphia, 1976); Elath, *The struggle for statehood: Washington, 1945–1948* (3 vols.,

Israel State Archives began publication of its definitive collection of official documents on Israel's foreign policy, an excellently edited and annotated series, with extremely useful English companion volumes.<sup>20</sup> Similar to the *Foreign relations of the United States* series published in Washington DC, the Israel State Archives' *Documents on the foreign policy of Israel* opened the gates to archival work by scholars interested in exploiting these hitherto unavailable primary sources.

In the late 1970s, a new generation of mostly British-trained scholars produced archive-based studies of the Mandate period, which revised some of the existing interpretations of the *yishuv's* development.<sup>21</sup> In the 1980s, a flurry of Israeli (and expatriate-Israeli) self-criticism focused on Zionism's handling of the 'Arab question' – publications by Simha Flapan, Baruch Kimmerling, Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Uri Ram, Tom Segev, Avi Shlaim, and Gershon Shafir.<sup>22</sup> Over the past ten

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Tel Aviv, 1982 – Heb.); Amos Elon, *Herzl* (New York, 1975); Theodor Herzl, *Old new land (Altneuland)*, trans. Lotta Levinson with a new introduction by Jacques Kornberg (New York, 1987); Golda Meir, *My life: the autobiography of Golda Meir* (London, 1976); Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin memoirs*, trans. Dov Goldstein (Boston and Toronto, 1979; expanded edn, with afterword by Yoram Peri, Berkeley, 1996); Gideon Rafael, *Destination peace: three decades of Israeli foreign policy: a personal memoir* (New York, 1981); Jehuda Reinharz, *Chaim Weizmann: the making of a statesman* (New York, 1993); Norman Rose, *Chaim Weizmann: a biography* (London, 1986); Moshe Sharett, *Personal diary, 1953–1957*, ed. Yaacov Sharett (8 vols., Tel Aviv, 1978 – Heb.); Ariel Sharon, with David Chanoff, *Warrior: the autobiography of Ariel Sharon* (New York, 1989); Gabriel Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett: biography of a political moderate* (Oxford, 1996); Shabtai Tevet, *Ben-Gurion: the burning ground, 1886–1948* (Boston, 1987); Tevet, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: from peace to war* (New York, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> The series, *Documents on the foreign policy of Israel*, has been under the skilful general editorship of Dr Yehoshua Freundlich, with individual volumes edited by Freundlich, Yemima Rosenthal, and Baruch Gilead. Since 1981, volumes I–VIII, covering the years 1948 through 1953, and volume XIV dealing with 1960, have appeared. The series was preceded by an equally important volume published jointly by the Israel State Archives and Central Zionist Archives, *Political and diplomatic documents, December 1947–May 1948*, ed. Gedalia Yogev et al. (Jerusalem, 1979). Regrettably, the publication schedule of this important material has in recent years been interrupted owing to budgetary and administrative complications. See also: Barnett Litvinoff, ed., *The letters and papers of Chaim Weizmann*, series B: Papers (2 vols., New Brunswick, NJ, 1983). An excellent sourcebook of selected primary documents is: Joseph Heller, ed. and introd., *The struggle for statehood: Zionist policy, 1936–1948* (Jerusalem, 1984 – Heb.).

<sup>21</sup> Caplan, *Palestine Jewry and the Arab question*; Ann M. Lesch, *Arab politics in Palestine, 1917–1939: the frustration of a nationalist movement* (Ithaca and London, 1979); Moshe Mossek, *Palestine immigration policy under Sir Herbert Samuel: British, Zionist and Arab attitudes* (London, 1978); Kenneth W. Stein, *The land question in mandatory Palestine, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984); Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: the mandatory government and the Arab–Jewish conflict, 1917–1929* (London, 1978).

<sup>22</sup> Simha Flapan, *The birth of Israel: myths and realities* (New York, 1987). Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and territory: the socio-territorial dimensions of Zionist politics* (Berkeley, 1983); Benny Morris, *1948 and after: Israel and the Palestinians* (Oxford, 1990); Morris, *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge and New York, 1987); Morris, *Israel's border wars, 1949–1956: Arab infiltration, Israeli retaliation, and the countdown to the Suez War* (Oxford, 1993); Ilan Pappé, *Britain and the Arab–Israeli conflict, 1948–1951* (London, 1988); idem, *The making of the Arab–Israeli conflict, 1947–1951* (London and New York, 1992); Uri Ram, *The changing agenda of Israeli sociology: theory, ideology and identity* (Albany, 1995); Tom Segev, *1949: The first Israelis* (New York and London, 1986); Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist movement, and the partition of Palestine* (Oxford, 1988); Shafir, *Land, labor and the origins*. Cf. Itamar Rabinovich, *The road not taken: early Arab–Israeli negotiations* (New York and Oxford, 1991).

years, there has been a lively debate sparked by these ‘new historians’ and ‘critical sociologists’, who insist on discussing Zionism and Israel, warts and all.<sup>23</sup>

The critical scholarship produced by these writers seeks to discredit and replace a self-serving nationalist narrative, in which Zionism and Israel are idealistically portrayed as heroically engaged in an epic struggle for survival and supremacy against implacable, antisemitic and murderous enemies. This new approach was counterbalanced by other writers who – even while consulting the latest scholarship – continued to present Zionism in the more familiar terms of siege and saga.<sup>24</sup> More discerning, and somewhat above the fray between ‘old’ and ‘new’ historians, Mark Tessler crafted an outstanding review of the historical, social, and psychological dimensions of the clash between Zionism and Palestinian Arab nationalism.<sup>25</sup>

The three works under review here provide a useful opportunity to reflect on half a century of writing and research on Zionism. The three new books range from a conventional approach (Halpern and Reinhartz), to a ground-breaking treatment by an ‘establishment’ historian (Shapira), to a radical critique (Sternhell) associated with the new academic trends referred to above. Given the abundance of existing work on nearly every aspect of Zionist history, and given the ingrown Israeli cynicism which has bestowed upon the term ‘Zionism’ the popular connotation of ‘hot air’ or ‘idle chatter’, each new publication in the field must necessarily face a sceptical reception: ‘Why *another* volume? What does *this* study add to our existing understanding of this perhaps over-studied subject?’

*Zionism and the creation of a new society* may be seen as Jehuda Reinhartz’s tribute to his late mentor Ben Halpern and a complement to the latter’s seminal work, *The idea of the Jewish state*. It sets out to fill a gap in the literature by placing the evolution of Zionism in a comparative socio-historical perspective, and seeks to explore the ways in which Israel has been similar to, or different from, other new states whose political institutions derived from the national movements that brought them to independence. But despite its title and opening pages which lead readers to expect a novel approach, most of the book takes the well-travelled path of intellectual history rather than exploring the relatively undeveloped terrain of social history.

Indeed, it is difficult to find much in this volume that is new or different from the available literature of three decades ago. The best parts are in the later chapters covering the British period (1917–48) that deal with what Jews were *doing* in creating facts on the ground in Palestine/*Eretz-Israel*, rather than what ideologues were *saying* about Zionism in all its theoretical complexity. It is here that the authors provide some of the texture of the new society created by Zionism through descriptions of its welfare agencies, educational institutions, forms of collective and individual landholding, labour-unionism, medical services, and financial institutions.

<sup>23</sup> One of the best single volumes on this subject is a special issue of the journal *History and Memory: Studies in Representation of the Past*, 7 (1995), Gulie Ne’eman Arad, ed., *Israeli historiography revisited* (essays by Anita Shapira, Baruch Kimmerling, Ilan Pappé, Uri Ram, Derek Jonathan Penslar, and Dan Diner). See also: N. Caplan, ‘Israeli historiography: beyond the “new historians”’ [review essay], *Israel Affairs*, 2 (1995), pp. 156–72 and sources cited there; Avi Shlaim, ‘The debate about 1948’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27 (1995), pp. 287–304, reproduced as chapter 8 of Ilan Pappé, ed., *The Israel/Palestine question* (London and New York, 1999). For a lively but sometimes vicious critique, see Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli history: the ‘new historians’* (London, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Notably, Connor Cruise O’Brien, *The siege: the saga of Israel and Zionism* (New York, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> Mark Tessler, *A history of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994).

The book's title and introduction lead the reader to expect some thoughtful comparisons between the Zionist society that became Israel and other developing, post-colonial societies that evolved into sovereign states. Yet such comparisons are raised only superficially and tentatively at the outset, and again in a ten-page concluding chapter,<sup>26</sup> rather than figuring as an organizational framework that might have done something to unite the authors' extensive narrative descriptions. Missing is any attempt to apply some general theory to the case of Zionist settlement and state-building – for example, Louis Hartz's thesis of the unrepresentative splintering-off that takes place in the founding of new societies, or Elie Kedourie's idea of the inappropriateness and artificiality of transplanting European nationalist ideas wholesale into the late-colonial and post-colonial worlds of Asia and Africa.<sup>27</sup>

The authors do not – most unfortunately for a study which seeks to place its subject in a comparative perspective – manage to extend their gaze much beyond the confines of Jewry, Zionism, and Israel, preferring to describe intellectual currents and social forces that are already well known in the literature. Readers with little background may soon find themselves lost in a maze of countless names of luminaries, scribblers, and party organizers, factions and groupings, parties and movements, associations and organizations – and all without benefit of a glossary. Halpern and Reinharz revisit the well-known divisions of Zionist history into 'spiritual' versus 'cultural,' practical versus political, Jews of Eastern Europe versus those of Western Europe, labour-Zionism versus bourgeois capitalist Zionism, etc.<sup>28</sup>

The Zionist movement is often presumed both by its patriotic and uncritical adherents, as well as its Arab nationalist opponents, to have been a great success – demonstrating (for the latter, nefarious) 'Jewish power,' vision, determination, and unity. In this respect, novices reading the Halpern and Reinharz volume should come away with a more realistic view of Zionism as a movement that always struggled to harmonize divergent tendencies, a movement that experienced its full share of setbacks, failures, and squabbles. This point, brought out by other authors as well,<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> A much better-developed presentation on this theme was published earlier by none other than Jehuda Reinharz, 'The transition from yishuv to state: social and ideological changes', in Laurence J. Silberstein, ed., *New perspectives on Israeli history: the early years of the state* (New York and London, 1991), pp. 27–41.

<sup>27</sup> Louis Hartz (with contributions by Kenneth D. McRae et al.), *The founding of new societies: studies in the history of the United States, Latin America, Canada and Australia* (New York 1964); Elie Kedourie, 'Introduction', E. Kedourie, ed., *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (London, 1970), pp. 1–152.

<sup>28</sup> The authors add another level of complication to an already complicated story by affixing additional labels to many factions or ideological stances, often combining two or more of the following (listed in alphabetical order): activist, agrarian, autonomist, centralist, collectivist (and 'ideological collectivism' – presumably to distinguish it from its 'non-ideological' variant), communist, constructivist, egalitarian, fanatical, gradualist, idealist, liberal, Marxist, nationalist, obscurantist, organicist, orthodox, populist, progressive, proletarian, radical, revolutionary, sectarian, separatist, socialist, traditionalist, and *ultratraditionalist*. I am not sure what new understanding or insight is gained from sentences like: 'Underlying Ahad Haam's call for self-dedication to the national revival were general assumptions drawn from the vitalistic, organicist sociological theorists of his time' (p. 148).

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., David Vital, *Zionism: the crucial phase* (Oxford, 1987); Caplan, *Palestine Jewry*, passim. For a perceptive critical retrospective, see Bernard Wasserstein, 'Zionism at one hundred', in William Frankel, ed., *Survey of Jewish Affairs, 1982* (Cranbury, NJ, 1984), pp. 163–72.



is a valuable insight for any student seeking a more sophisticated understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Zionism and Israel.

Another feature of the Zionist experience that is reflected in *Zionism and the creation of a new society* is the unbelievable wordiness – writing and speechmaking – that went into endless hairsplitting, verbal gymnastics, and ‘Talmudic’ analysis on the big question: which among the several competing ideologies would lead Zionists to resolve the ‘Jewish problem’? Halpern and Reinharz provide ample evidence of this omnipresent ‘talking Zionism’ without acknowledging that there may be something unusual or abnormal in such heavy-duty intellectualizing.<sup>30</sup>

In their almost exclusive focus on the speeches and writings of Zionist leaders, Halpern and Reinharz scarcely allude to the *impact* Zionism had on the Muslims and Christians of Palestine/Israel, as though Jewish intentions and preoccupations were all that needed to be examined. Thus, the ‘mass flight and some expulsions of Arabs out of the area of Israel’ get brief mention – but strangely only in terms of the inconvenience this unexpected exodus caused the new Israeli agricultural sector and would-be peace-seekers. ‘In the earlier period’, the authors write (in what is surely the most unconvincing sentence of the book), ‘the fact that Jews and Arabs would some day have to reach a modus vivendi was brought home to Zionists in every field of their daily activity.’ After independence, however, ‘the need for an understanding with Arabs became remote and was relegated mainly to the field of external politics, in which the Israeli individual-on-the-street was personally involved only when mobilized for military service’ (p. 270–1).

The failure to address itself to the distinction between the ‘talking’ and the ‘doing’ of Zionism is perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the Halpern and Reinharz volume. But this nexus is developed in much more stimulating and rewarding ways by the two remaining works under review. Anita Shapira’s *Land and Power: the Zionist resort to force, 1881–1948* (in Hebrew: *herev ha-yona: ha-tsiyonut ve-ha-koah*, literally translated as: The sword of the dove: Zionism and power) offers far more than the narrow military-political perspective suggested in the book’s English or Hebrew titles. Shapira, the *doyenne* of Israel’s historians of Zionism, has fashioned a subtly textured and sophisticated appreciation of the evolving world-view and mentality of Zionist settlers, workers, and youth. This study, a logical extension of her work on the Zionist labour movement during pre-state period, recreates the intricate web of Zionist attitudes to the Arabs. Like Amos Elon in *The Israelis: founders and sons* (but without deigning to refer to this popular work), Shapira uses generational differences to explain much of the evolution of Zionist–Israeli political psychology which, in due course, came to be recognized as the native-born *sabra* traits of emotionless, macho toughness, including the sense of isolation and desperation captured by the phrase *ein breira* – there is ‘no choice’ but to fight the Arabs for control of the country.

Shapira attributes to the socialist humanism and universalism of the early Zionist fathers a certain ‘restraining influence’ upon the development of aggressive and chauvinistic attitudes towards the Arabs. At the same time, she reveals the contradictions and inconsistencies that inevitably developed between these nobler intentions and the harsh requirements of the national struggle to create a Jewish state in Palestine – a territory populated by a clear majority of Arabs until mid-1948. Tracing the full sweep of Zionist activity in Palestine, Shapira monitors the growth of the *yishuv*

<sup>30</sup> For a classic satirical attack on this phenomenon, see Haim Hazaz’s diatribe ‘The sermon’, in Joel Blocker, ed., *Israel Stories* (New York, 1962).

from its 1881–2 origins (several tens of thousands) to 650,000 in 1948. Along with this demographic and economic growth came important changes in Jewish self-perception, which was radically transformed from that of a weak, defenceless, and easily victimized people (facing ‘pogroms’, or ‘living on the edge of a volcano’) to that of a determined and self-confident community able and willing to defend itself. Shapira’s analysis also takes into account the impact on the ‘other side,’ recognizing, for example, that this ‘growing confidence’ and ‘new self-assurance’ were viewed by the Arabs ‘as a form of insolence’ (p. 107) and that increasing Jewish immigration and land-purchases demonstrated that the Zionists ‘naturally harbored an element of aggressiveness’ (p. 139).

Shapira quotes liberally from archival records of internal Israel Labour Party (MAPAI) debates and the political press, as well as diaries, letters, poetry, fiction, and popular songs. Her deft use of these varied sources creates a vivid and vital context, against which backdrop she distinguishes between hollow rhetorical excesses (usually, but not exclusively, from the pens and mouths of militant right-wing ideologues), and emotional flourishes that reflected genuine currents of popular opinion within the *yishuv*. Without being associated with the latest wave of scholars who focus on the power of myth in the creation of national identity,<sup>31</sup> Shapira has anticipated their approach. Her work is full of examples illustrating the view that, ‘[i]n the life of a national movement, the import of symbols and symbolic acts often exceeds the value of facts’ (p. 90).

One of the formative legends analysed by Shapira is the battle of Tel Hai in early 1920, where Joseph Trumpeldor died and was immortalized after having supposedly uttered the phrase ‘It is good to die for our country’ – the Hebrew equivalent of ‘dulce et decorum est pro patria mori’. In this case, as in others,<sup>32</sup> Shapira critically examines the spread of such legends and their influence on actual behaviour. She assesses their contribution to the creation of a national-communal ‘ethos’ with clear implications for Jewish–Arab relations. Citing the work of Y. H. Brenner and other writers, Shapira provides detailed examples of ‘the tension that existed between the rhetoric of bravery and the disappointments of reality’ (p. 364).

Shapira announces, in her opening sentences, that she was led to undertake this study in the wake of debates over Israel’s 1982 invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon. Like many Israelis, she disagreed with Prime Minister Menachem Begin’s outspoken advocacy of this ‘war of choice’ – Israel’s first war not based on an ‘ein breira’ justification. Her historical presentation is discriminating and hard-nosed, shunning oversimplification and recognizing, as other studies have done before, the existence of internal divisions as well as common unspoken understandings among the various elements of the *yishuv* regarding relations with its Arab neighbours. Some of her insights into youth culture and psychology are particularly valuable to our appreciation of the evolution of *yishuv* thinking (e.g., p. 272). Shapira succeeds, where Reinhartz and

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada myth: collective memory and mythmaking in Israel* (Madison, 1995); Nurith Gertz, *Captives of a dream: national myths in Israeli culture* (Tel Aviv, 1995 – Heb.); Robert Wistrich and David Ohana, eds., *The shaping of Israeli identity: myth, memory and trauma* (London, 1995); Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered roots: collective memory and the making of Israeli national tradition* (Chicago, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> For example, the heroic tales circulated around the creation of the northern border settlement of Hanita in the late 1930s; the revival of the myths surrounding the suicidal last-stand by zealots at Massada fighting the Romans; tales of heroism and honourable death in the spring 1943 Warsaw ghetto revolt.

Halpern and Yosef Gorny have failed,<sup>33</sup> in presenting more than a one-dimensional intellectual history of the Zionist movement. What she reveals is that, beneath the often bitter debates, most Jews in Palestine quietly recognized that there existed a gap between what they, as Zionists, were committed to making out of Palestine and what the Arabs seemed determined should *not* happen to what they considered *their* country.

The inevitability of a fundamental clash – and the resulting ‘Zionist resort to force’ (the book’s subtitle) – were not, of course, always apparent to everyone. There were times when the possibility seemed remote, or was superseded by more urgent priorities on the *yishuv*’s political agenda. There were also times when it loomed large, but open debate was avoided by a self-imposed communal consensus as a tactical imperative, for purposes of morale or public relations. Reinforcing (although not fully utilizing) earlier research on the subject, Shapira’s study demonstrates how all Zionists – some sooner, others later – came to realize that the historic necessity of building their national home was going to lead to an unfortunate, but unavoidable, clash with the Arabs.

This, Shapira shows, was true even while most public discussion inside the Jewish community focused on what was seen as the artificiality or insincerity of Palestinian–Arab nationalism, or on the anti-Zionist scheming of the British mandatory authorities. Sometimes leaders spoke ‘in two voices’ – discussing one ‘truth’ amongst themselves, and another with their followers (p. 357). Led by its majority labour leadership which was regularly challenged by a more militant minority Revisionist Party opposition, Palestinian Jewry grappled with the reality of mounting Arab opposition and formulated its own responses and policies – such as the ‘iron wall’ philosophy (or, ‘the Theory of Frontal Confrontation’, pp. 154–63) espoused by Vladimir Zeev Jabotinsky or the bi-national solution advocated by *Brit Shalom* (Covenant of Peace) and *Ihud* (Unity), tiny intellectual peace advocacy groups.

Sidestepping the polemics of those who excoriate Zionism as an aggressive, colonialist phenomenon, *Land and power* reflects the view that ‘Zionist psychology was molded by the conflicting parameters of a national liberation movement and a movement of European colonization in a Middle Eastern country’ (p. 355). Shapira is also careful to avoid assigning blame for the historical cycle of violence, in which it is almost impossible to determine who is the original ‘aggressor’ and who is the innocent victim. In the case of the Jews, the distinction she prefers is between a ‘defensive’ and an ‘offensive’ ethos, and she describes the evolution of Zionist thinking, at first inspired by the former (1881–1936) but later influenced by the latter (1936–48). This development reflects the movement’s changing fortunes in the real world of international politics and in the regional arena of Arab and Palestinian affairs.

The ‘defensive ethos’ was built on ‘evolutionary’ assumptions regarding the ability of Zionism to flourish under protection of the Turkish and British regimes. Ultimately, it was believed, the Jews would become the majority and peacefully take over the country through the power of their numbers (immigration), their economic infrastructure, and their hold on newly purchased land and the creation of colonies and collective settlements. These optimistic assumptions began to unravel in the late 1920s. By the mid-1930s, the author believes, the ‘defensive ethos’ was ‘functioning as an incubator of enmity and alienation’ at a ‘certain psychological level’ (p. 215). Gradually, *yishuv* political culture became more influenced by its ‘nationalist

<sup>33</sup> Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs, 1882–1948: a study in ideology* (Oxford, 1987), reviewed in Neil Caplan, ‘From powerlessness to power: Zionism in theory and practice, 1882–1950’, *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990), pp. 182–5.

component', which expanded 'at the expense of the socialist component' among the youth (p. 275). The imagery of the stalwart pioneer, worker, and watchman that had been at the core of the mythology and mystique of the earlier 'defensive' ethos was supplanted in the later period of the 'offensive' ethos by that of the intrepid underground fighter or warrior – 'the new image of the Jew, proud and courageous, ready to fight back' (p. 186). 'The symbiosis between historical myth and the concrete landscape resulted in a unique emotional bond between youth and the land' (p. 319). Young Jews came to believe that '[t]he land was theirs, theirs alone. This feeling was accompanied by a fierce sense of possessiveness, of joyous anticipation of the fight for it' (p. 275).

The change to a 'revolutionary' or activist approach was also based on the pessimistic assumption that time was running out for the Zionist project, an awareness of the rising national consciousness of the Arabs in Palestine and the neighbouring countries, and growing evidence of the British self-interest in retreating from the pro-Zionist commitments enshrined in the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine. All these factors combined to force the *yishuv* 'to confront the terrifying prospect of a war without any end in sight'. One result was 'a slow shift in the meaning of the concept of *power* from the sense of a "critical mass" to physical-military power' (pp. 221–2). In the internal struggle between left- and right-wing approaches, labour-Zionism's support for a policy of *havlaga* (self-restraint) was pitted against the appeal of the Irgun Zvai Leumi's '[u]nbridled nationalist ideology joined with the sanctification of violence as the exclusive political method' (p. 248). While the ethos of the earlier generation of 'fathers' was complicated by diaspora notions of the Jew as the perennial 'victim' of unchanging anti-Semitism, the activism on the *sabra* 'sons' – the 'new Jews' with a Palestine-centred world-view – was based more squarely on a matter-of-fact recognition of the British and the Arabs as concrete enemies in the struggle for a sovereign state to be populated and run by a majority of Jews. 'Awareness of the existence of an irreconcilable Jewish–Arab conflict contained a subliminal assumption that this was a Gordian knot and could only be cut by the sword' (p. 283).

Although readers may not accept all of Shapira's definitions of what constitutes a characteristically 'diaspora,' 'Jewish' or 'Biblical' value or attribute (e.g., pp. 226, 235–7, 258–9, 352), her presentation of diaspora contributions to Israeli political culture is often helpful in furthering our understanding of contemporary concerns and attitudes. 'The first seventy years of the new Jewish colonization in Palestine', she writes, 'took place in the shadow of an ongoing conflict between a "Diaspora" mentality ... and the evolving Palestinian realities.' To deal with this tension, psychological defences were erected 'by means of ideology, an entire system of credos and norms, indoctrination, and a blocking from consciousness of the portions of reality that were incompatible with their beliefs' (pp. 366–7). Despite the tendency of many of the *sabra* generation to see themselves as being rid of the psychological complexes of their diaspora parents, the self-image of the Jew as victim and underdog was nurtured during the 1930s by the link between Jewish fate in Europe and in Palestine. Phrases like 'The entire world is my gallows', by the Hebrew poet H. N. Bialik, were invoked, for example, in writings about the 1936 Arab revolt (p. 225).

In later generations the Holocaust had something of a delayed reaction impact on Israelis in ways that have effectively reintroduced some of the psychological complexes from which the heroic generation that fought in the 1948 war might have felt itself liberated. The 'fear of destruction became a central factor in bolstering the self-image

of the Israelis as weak – victimized but righteous’, a feeling that might not always accord with the reality of Israeli military superiority over its Arab foes (p. 369). Shapira’s presentation helps readers better understand the origins of Israelis’ ‘suspicion of Gentile plots and designs and the belief – at times hidden, at times overt – that “the whole world is against us”’ as well as the ‘strange admixture of a sense of power accompanied by a willingness to defy the entire world with the sense of helplessness and profound apprehension’ (p. 370). These paradoxical conclusions echo (although Shapira does not refer to them) the insights of David Biale’s *Power and powerlessness in Jewish history*.<sup>34</sup>

Displaying her skills as a serious historian and a fine writer, Shapira offers a nuanced and even-handed examination of a variety of elements within the Jewish community, based on a rich selection of original sources. Despite the complexity of its subject, the book reads better than most works of history and political science – a tribute to both the author and her translator. The author’s coverage of secondary materials is, however, selective and not as comprehensive as one would have expected.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the book’s usefulness to the English-speaking reader is enhanced by an excellent glossary, but compromised by an absence of consistent references to available English editions of works cited in the endnotes and bibliography.<sup>36</sup>

Most studies of the ideological development of Zionism have commented on the uneasy blend of nationalist and socialist influences on the labour-Zionist movement. Zeev Sternhell is neither novel nor unique in criticizing the triumph of nationalist values over pioneering and socialist idealism. His *Founding myths of Israel* offers a searing indictment of the ‘bourgeois-nationalist’ or ‘nationalist-socialist’<sup>37</sup> ideology which was

<sup>34</sup> David Biale, *Power and powerlessness in Jewish history* (New York, 1986).

<sup>35</sup> In addition to works by Amos Elon and David Biale mentioned above, one might have expected Shapira to have utilized or noted important relevant publications such as: Sereni and Ashery, eds., *Jews and Arabs in Palestine*; Begin, *The revolt*; Bauer, *From diplomacy to resistance*; Hattis, *The bi-national idea in Palestine*; Elyakim Rubinstein, ‘The 1928 questionnaire on the Arab question’, in Y. Bauer et al., eds., *Essays in the history of Zionism* (Jerusalem, 1976 – Heb.), pp. 31–47; J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion: Irgun Zvai Leumi, LEHI, and the Palestine underground, 1929–1949* (New York, 1977); Arthur A. Goren, ed. and introd., *Dissenter in Zion: from the writings of Judah L. Magnes* (Harvard, 1982); Yehoyada Haim, *Abandonment of illusions: Zionist political attitudes toward Palestinian Arab nationalism* (Boulder 1983).

<sup>36</sup> E.g., the English text on Ben-Gurion’s 1929 constitutional proposals (in Shapira, *Land and power*, pp. 189–91) is available in CZA S25/6297 (also discussed in N. Caplan, ‘Zionist visions in the early 1930s’, in Jonathan Frankel, ed., *Studies in contemporary Jewry: an annual* (Oxford, 1988, pp. 251–3); Arlosorof’s 1932 letter to Chaim Weizmann (in Shapira, *Land and power*, pp. 207–9), English original, is in the Weizmann Archive (discussed in Caplan, ‘Zionist visions’, pp. 256–9), extracts of Moshe Beilinson’s analysis of the significance of the 1929 riots (Shapira, *Land and power*, pp. 175–9, 184) are translated as ‘Problems of a Jewish–Arab rapprochement’, in Sereni and Ashery, eds., *Jews and Arabs in Palestine*, pp. 155–94; Gershom Scholem’s interview with Ehud Ben Ezer (‘Zionism – dialectic of continuity and rebellion’) in *Unease in Zion*, pp. 263–96. Other works which Shapira cites in Hebrew and are readily available in English (original or translation) include: Joseph B. Schechtman, *Rebel and statesman: the Vladimir Jabotinsky story: the early years* (New York, 1961), and *Fighter and prophet: ... the last years, 1923–1940* (New York, 1961); David Ben-Gurion, *My talks with Arab leaders* (Jerusalem, 1972); and Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion: the burning ground, 1886–1948* (Boston, 1987).

<sup>37</sup> In his lengthy introduction, entitled ‘Nationalism, socialism, and nationalist socialism,’ Sternhell attempts to create a hair-splitting distinction between the labour-Zionist movement’s fusion of nationalism and socialism, on the one hand, and the better-known brand of European fascist national-socialism, on the other.

instrumental to the creation of Israel and in shaping its first three decades of statehood. By now part of the revised mainstream of Zionist historiography, this book may be situated as an almost 'post-Zionist' critique from within the fold, rather than as an anti-Zionist attack by a maverick outsider. Sternhell criticizes the labour movement under the leadership of its founders and immediate successors for its 'inability ... to curb aspirations for territorial expansion, as well as its failure to build a more egalitarian society'. In contrast to Shapira, who gives credit to the socialist idealism of Israel's founders for softening the harsher nationalistic impulses in their struggle with the Arabs for control over Palestine, Sternhell insists on viewing the history of Zionism as an unhappy one determined by wrong-headed 'conscious ideological choices' made by the labour-Zionist elites – and decidedly not 'due to any objective conditions' or to circumstances beyond the movement's control (p. 6).

By page 6 the reader has learned much about the author, his approach, and the direction the remaining 340 pages of text will be taking. Within the community of scholars who legitimately disagree on the extent to which ideology shapes human action, Sternhell situates himself at one extreme with his twin presumptions that ideology plays a determining role in history and that it is imposed upon the duped masses by their manipulative elites. Sternhell has also disclosed two facts about himself. The first is that he comes to the subject as a novice, having heretofore specialized in European history. His second confession is that he is a liberal, a humanist, and a universalist who deplores the fact that Zionism's and Israel's entanglement with religion has produced a society with a poor record of living up to the ideals of the early socialist-Zionists.

For a novice, it must be said, Sternhell has done an impressive amount of research, and as a newcomer to the field of Zionist history he has been able to bring some refreshing comparative perspectives to his subject. He makes his case with great flair and passion, intensity, and conviction. But, judging *The founding myths* as a work of scholarship rather than as a polemic, one can quickly spot a number of problematic tendencies on the author's part. Sternhell's penchant for overstatement and sweeping generalizations about complex historical phenomena is matched by his resort to oversimplification and to analysing human behaviour according to rigid definitions of some very complicated notions (e.g., 'justice') and ideological labels (e.g., 'socialist'). He also indulges in inappropriate comparisons, simplistic 'either/or' dichotomies, and the use of popular buzz-words ('nationalist', or 'bourgeois-capitalist') as value-laden denigrations rather than as neutral descriptive labels.<sup>38</sup>

As a critique of Zionist thinking, *The founding myths of Israel* offers an iconoclastic look (chs. 1–3) at the ideological contributions of A. D. Gordon, Nachman Syrkin, David Ben-Gurion, and Berl Katznelson (whose definitive biography was penned by Anita

<sup>38</sup> For example: 'In the democratic world', the forty years of labour-Zionism's hegemony was a phenomenon 'unprecedented both in its depth and its continuity' (p. 5); 'Until the revolt of the Black Panthers in the early 1970s, Israel did not have *any* social policies *at all*' (p. 5); by the late 1970s labour-Zionism was 'a movement that claimed to be socialist' but 'had not created a society that was special *in any way*' (p. 5); Israel's 'social policies lagged far behind *those in France or Britain*' (p. 5); 'Israel is undoubtedly the Western democracy with the weakest means of control in parliament and the strongest executive branch' (p. 320–1); '*No* social consideration was allowed to stand in the way of national interests' (p. 6). My emphases added. In fairness to the author, such strident passages are more characteristic of his introduction and epilogue than of the main body of the study, where Sternhell does sometimes use a more sober tone in presenting labour-Zionism in a comparative socio-historical perspective.

Shapira) and highlights the supremacy of nationalist (read: 'evil') components in their analyses. Another chapter focuses on the General Federation of Jewish Workers, the all-powerful Histadrut, pointing to the organizational decisions that contributed to the consolidation of the growing Palestinian Jewish community at the expense of workers' interests or socialist priorities. 'The Histadrut', Sternhell writes, 'was never intended to be an instrument of change; its very comprehensiveness rendered it important in the social sphere ... [I]ts economic strength was never used to promote equality' (p. 181). Sternhell also criticizes the organization's hegemonic and demagogic tendencies as a power broker in the *yishuv's* political economy, constantly striving for 'a concentration of power by controlling the lives of Histadrut and [Labour, MAPAI] party members' while maintaining 'the illusion ... that the Histadrut was a voluntary organization' (p. 195). Far from encouraging creative, grass-roots experimentation, the organization fostered a 'cult of discipline and authority' (pp. 198–216) among its vast membership. In the end, it was bound to cause disillusion and bitterness among its members because it was, Sternhell reminds us, 'neither an economic organization nor a trade union: it was the state in preparation' (pp. 316–17).

In discussing evolving labour-Zionist dialectics in the late 1920s and early 1930s and the struggle over workers' education, Sternhell finds further reason to lament the stifling of individualism and innovation and the accompanying 'triumph of nationalist socialism' (ch. 5). From the debates and writings of the late 1930s, he assembles incriminating evidence of the 'hegemony of the [party] apparatus', the 'poverty of intellectual life', 'oligarchy', 'conformism', and policy decisions that did nothing to foster true egalitarianism (ch. 6). 'To this day', Sternhell concludes, 'Israeli democracy has serious deficiencies, and its weaknesses, for the most part, are those of the prestate Yishuv, where political and cultural life was dominated by the Histadrut' (p. 319).

There are many Israelis, expatriates, and diaspora Jews who have, over the years, become disillusioned with what the Zionism of their dreams has produced. Sternhell's revisionist history of labour-Zionist ideology and leadership reflects these disappointments. The author's academic credentials and hard-hitting historical analysis, even though built with ideologically selected evidence, make this volume more than a passing *cri de coeur*.<sup>39</sup> The open advocacy of *The Founding myths of Israel* sets it apart from the more scholarly detachment evidenced in both *Land and power* and *Zionism and the creation of a new society*, and makes it a more engaging, if problematic, book. Read by itself, it may perplex or anger. Read critically against a background of traditional Zionist historiography, it can provide a useful corrective to some of the more self-serving narratives of earlier generations. Ending on the poignant note of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in late 1995, the book continues to resonate among intellectuals who are dedicated to transforming Israel into a more democratic, egalitarian, humane, and tolerant society, living in peace alongside its Palestinian and Arab neighbours.

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<sup>39</sup> Although often labelled a 'post-Zionist', Sternhell is definitely accepted as an insider when compared to disaffected leftists like Maxim Ghilan, the Paris-born journalist who lived in Palestine and Israel between 1944 and 1969 and published his personal lament under the title: *How Israel lost its soul* (London, 1974).