

## The mood among the historians

The first history books about the State of Israel were written by veterans of the Haganah (the pre-independence army of Palestine's Jews) and leaders of the Labor movement, including David Ben-Gurion. The first prime minister did not settle for making history; he also wrote a long, fairly tiresome series of history books on the Zionist truth. This was not historiography, but rather national mythology. In the 1950s, however, books of this sort were considered the only truth that Israelis needed and were allowed to know. This attitude was part of the "Jerusalem school" of historiography.

In 1978, Yaakov Sharett published the sensational diaries of his father, Moshe Sharett, Israel's first foreign minister and second prime minister. Thus was born Israel's "new history." The eight volumes of the diary, published by Sifriat Maariv, convey to this day something daring and subversive; there is a generation of Israelis whose political worldview is anchored in that diary. It revealed to them for the first time that Zionist history and the story of the State of Israel were not exclusively wonderful and heroic, as they had been told in school.

Shortly thereafter, the government and party archives began opening up, and a new generation of "new historians" began to learn the true story and to publish it in books, a few of which aroused stormy arguments and generated national soul-searching. Thus arose the renewed debate on Zionism and "post-Zionism."

A quarter-century later, the new historians have become elderly professors. Israel Studies, a journal put out in the United States by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, recently contended that a new wave is washing over Israeli historiography. A long article by Assaf Likhovski, a law professor at Tel Aviv University, essentially pronounces the death of "post-Zionism" in Israeli historiography and crowns its heir: "post-post-Zionism." Several other scholars in America also have identified such a trend in Israeli historiography. The impression is that the new Israeli mood has seeped into academic discourse: Like most Israelis, the post-post-Zionist historians are fed up with politics.

They distance themselves as much as possible from the conflict over the Land of Israel, from Israelis' identity issues, and from battles over the fundamental values of Israel. Instead they focus on the mentality of Israelis, on feelings, rituals, beliefs and lifestyles. It is not systems of power and control that preoccupy them, not Israel as a collective, but primarily Israelis' daily life. The "post-posters" focus on culture, welfare, medicine and consumerism. A few of them are interested in

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Israelis' attitudes toward the body, food and trash. Dr. Dafna Hirsch of the Open University researched the history of hummus in Israeli society, and Oz Almog of the University of Haifa studied the history of the Israeli haircut. Here, ostensibly, is a new trend, which might be termed the "Tel Aviv school."

There is a point to analyzing research trends, but the tendency to sort them into catalogs of "paradigms," as they like to say in academia, creates an optical illusion. Most of the historical studies that come out of Israeli universities still reflect conservative Zionism and post-Zionism. Most are written in a tediously heavy manner.

Here and there are young people who are dealing with topics that were never researched until now; they may indeed be fed up with the political discourse of their predecessors. In all likelihood, their tendency to stay away from the basic questions of Zionist history stems at least in part from the financial effort that Jewish organizations in America are making to "rescue" Zionism from the "post-Zionist" historians, and to fund supposedly "neutral" research.

What Nadav Davidovich and Shifra Shvarts, both of Ben-Gurion University, and Dafna Hirsch wrote about the medical treatment that was given to new immigrants from Arab countries in the 1950s might look like a chapter in the state's medical history, but it reflects above all the tendency of the Ashkenazi establishment to create an Israeli "melting pot." Orit Rozin of Tel Aviv University, in her book "Duty and Love: Individualism and Collectivism in 1950s Israel" (Am Oved Publishers), focuses on Israeli housewives during the *tzena* (austerity) period, but depicts the failure of Israeli officialdom, as does the book by Tammy Razi of Sapir College, "Forsaken Children: The Backyard of Mandate Tel Aviv" (Am Oved).

The writing style of these scholars tends, fortunately, to differ from that of the preceding generation, although like them, they follow the fads popular at American universities. But at this stage they still look like second-generation "post-Zionists," not the harbingers of a new school.