

Benny Morris tells his readers in the *New Republic* that he and I walked a stretch of road together as ‘revisionist historians’. This is how his article begins with a factual mistake; an article which is meant to show that my work is a fabrication. This is a falsification of history as I could not be a partner to a person who had already in 1988 held views I found unacceptable morally. I was privy to the views, he only aired later on, already in our first meeting back in the late 1980s. I was fully aware – as he seemed to trust me – of his abominable racist views about the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular. Unlike others, I did not feel that his good qualities as a chronologist which came out in his most famous book, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Cambridge 1987) – he was never a proper historian – and especially his invaluable contribution in aggregating data for us on the 1948 ethnic cleansing – made up for his bigotry and narrow-mindedness. In fact, there was, and still is a direct line between the kind of chronology he provided in the 1980s – which had very little analysis and therefore hid well his justification for ethnic cleansing – and his recent over confidence that he can provide such analyses in his latest works instead of his conventional collection of facts. Such an attempt was made in his *Righteous Victims* which came out in 1999: a book in which analysis was replaced by his right wing ideologies. It was much easier to accept him as a data collector – without much ideology – than his new presumptuous posture of a historian who shares with us his views. Now that we know all we want to know, and much more I suspect, about his views, we can only long for the old Morris.

The debate between us is on one level between historians who believe they are purely objective reconstructers of the past, like Morris, and those like me, who claim that they are subjective human beings striving to tell their own version of the past, like myself. When we write histories, we built arches over a long period of time and we construct out of the material in front of us a narrative. We believe and hope that this narrative is a loyal reconstruction of what happened – although as was discovered by historiographers Morris had never bothered to read - we can not ride a train back in time to check it. Narratives of this kind, when written by historians involved deeply in the subject matter they write about – such as in the case of Israeli historians who write about the Palestine conflict – is motivated also – and this is not a fault but a blessing – by a deep involvement and a wish to make a point. This point is called ideology or politics. Zionist historians wanted to prove that Zionism was valid, moral and right and Palestinian historians wished to show that they were victimized and wronged. Morris wanted also to make a point recently – that ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by Jews was justified in the past and would be acceptable in the future. Lately he shared with us some other views that explain his listing of he calls the ‘factual’ mistakes in my book – that of viewing all the Arabs and all the Muslims as barbarians and primitive people. This also apply to their documents, sources and histories. Anyone who argues with him about these ideas is ‘factually’ wrong.

I had a different point to make: I condemned the uprooting of the Palestinians and the violence inflicted on them, as well as the de-Arabization of Jews who came from Arab countries to Israel, the imposition of military rule on Palestinians in Israel before 1967

and the de-facto Apartheid policies put in place after 1967. I also cry out against the callous Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. I do it not only as human being, but also as Jew, who feels appalled that such crimes can be committed by Jews after the holocaust. I studied history to find out why it happened and gave answers through analyzing Zionist ideology, the historical colonialist context in which Zionism emerged and so on.

When something is burning in your bones you might mistake names and dates as did Morris in his review in the New Republic when he smeared my friend Avi Shalim who fell from grace in Morris' eyes because of his Zionism. Morris accuses Shalim for identifying with a British diplomat of the 1940s he calls James Troutbeck and which he sees as anti-Semitic. There was never such a person. Morris means probably John Troutbeck who was not an anti-Semite as Morris writes, quite on the contrary. Does this misspelling of the name, or that almost all the Arab and Palestinian names he mentions in his first book, disable us from understanding the points he makes or miss the zeal with which he drives them home? Or does his manipulation of the Ben-Gurion diary's text, as has been exposed unfortunately by a rival of both of us, Ephraim Karsh (who rejects the 'new history' but none the less exposed a serious gap between Morris' text and the original diary of Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel) of all people, undermine our respect for his work? Not in my books at least. I am worried about moral issues not the natural human follies of professional historians.

But Morris wants to persuade us that this is not the nature of the historiographical debate. His view as stated in the New Republic article is: 'that while historians, as citizens, had political views and aims, their scholarly task was to arrive at the truth about the historical event or process, to illuminate the past as objectively and accurately'. The noble dream called it American historian already in the beginning of the century. But this in Morris' case is not a noble dream – as he is not a dreamer like myself – this is pure cynicism. An Israeli historian who justifies ethnic cleansing, writes about it in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (and even recently republished an updated version of this book) can not claim to be a 'neutral' historian. Why did he twice write the book on that episode in history? Just by sheer accident?. Morris tells us in the preface to the updated book on the 1948 war that new material prompted him to revise the book. But in fact this is not what distinguishes his two books. The first was written at a time when it was *bon ton* to be a 'peacenik' and his version of history was that the ethnic cleansing in Palestine (the massive expulsion of about 750,000 Palestinians in 1948) was not the result of a master plan. It happened through a war and therefore there was no Israeli accountability or direct responsibility – a narrative that fitted the peace camp at the time. But with such views after Netanyahu's victory in the 1996 elections it was difficult to get professorship in an Israeli university. This is when the shift began. And it was even easier to get tenure and professorship he gladly found out if he would air the set of views, he believed in any way. So when the second Intifada broke out, our charlatan finds out that the *bon ton* in Israel has shifted to the right. In his new book the ethnic cleansing becomes a master plan that is criticized by Morris for not being efficient enough as too many Palestinians were left in their houses (almost 10 percent of those living within the Jewish State).– None the less, the ethnic cleansing is now represented as a wise

foresight of the Israeli leadership at time that should be repeated once more. This is not based on new evidence, but on an ideological twist.

Thus the strong conviction Morris expresses in the following way that ‘my own view is that the historian must base his work on the primary sources, that is, on contemporaneous documents’ is not the basis for his historical conviction. His primary sources are almost exclusively coming from the IDF archives. With the help of these documents he reconstructs 1948 (he used some English sources in a lame and insignificant biography he wrote on Glubb, I believe, but this is an exception not the rule). Israeli officers lied in the past and lie in the present –but they are the basis for the true history for Morris. In fact, when his ideology changed he guessed they told only part of the truth about the ethnic cleansing and therefore he was willing to be a post-modernist and read into, and outside, the texts. But his picture of the 1948 war will never be complete. There are plenty of Arab and Palestinian documents, Morris who can not read Arabic, will not be able to use them.

Morris feels that his strongest card against me is my ‘sloppiness’ which is structural and therefore he lists an endless number of mistakes. He finds them all in my recent book, *A History of Modern Palestine; one land, two peoples* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). This book tells the history of Palestine from the point of view of its workers, peasants, children, women and all the subaltern groups that make the society and not its political elite. It is also a book that wishes to see Jews and Palestinians living one day in one state.

There are, according to Morris, to begin with: the grand mistakes. Here they are. The first that the Palestinians were the main victims of the conflict (in the last two hundred years). I think even the majority of the readers of the ‘new republic’ are familiar with the fact. But for someone who regards the Arabs as barbarians and almost semi human it is clear that their suffering is not equal to that of the civilized Zionists.

Secondly, there was no Palestinian feminism or women’s participation in the national struggle; nor were they organized. Morris does not only lack Arabic, he does not as a rule read or quote any work of Palestinian women - or for that matter other women’s work or Palestinian male historians. ‘There are no good Palestinian historians’ he told a crowded hall sitting next to me and Edward Said in 1998. My knowledge and reading, and indeed working with feminist historians, is a ‘factual’ mistake. Take the question of women casualties – he uses only Israeli sources to show that he is right and I am wrong. Yes, I use Palestinian sources for the Intifada: they seem to me to be more reliable, I admit. In his ignorance, and as he has not been in the occupied territories for years, which I visit regularly, he claims that Islamic fundamentalism ever since 1988, restricted women’s participation in the confrontation with the occupying forces. Ten minutes from where he lives he could had witnessed the first demonstration of the present intifada – only women – many of them veiled - participated in it (in the unfulfilled hope that the Israeli army would not shoot them).

But even East Jerusalem, its history and yes even its documents are not ‘legitimate’ bricks in the house of history he builds.

Thirdly, he claims I invent a history of children; presumably they are not a subject matter in his reading as they do not appear in the political archives. Do the readers of this journal really need reminding of the great works done on children’s history here, in Europe and the Middle East? But, Morris never read one work on Ottoman history therefore he claims no one can write the history of children in Palestine. The IDF archives, his shrine of truth, indeed has not written about them, unless they were victims of massacres..

His forth point is that I have not mentioned Bar-Kochva – a Jewish hero who fought against the Romans, or the bible.. This allegation comes from someone who says in the beginning of this article that he is on the left. Yes we know that in the name of Bar-Kochva and other Jews who had roamed Palestine two thousands years ago, Palestinians were expelled from their homes. But I thought, as Morris says in the beginning of the article, he came to deconstruct Zionist historiography not to propagate it.

Then there are the smaller mistakes. In some cases he just openly lies. For instance I write in the book in page 108: ‘The Palmach, the Stern Group and Menachem Begin’s Irgun would emerge at the end of the mandate’. Morris writes in order to inflate the list of ‘fabrications’: ‘according to Pappé, the Stern Gang and the Palmach existed before the Revolt’ (without giving a page number of course). Why does he lie openly? I hope this is out of commitment to his new cause and not malice. In page 293 I write that Ben Gurion became the chairman of the Jewish Agency in 1935. Morris writes: ‘according to Pappé, Ben-Gurion in 1929 was the chairmen of the Jewish Agency’. And so on and so forth, every fact, apart from two or three, is being brought before the readers as a sheer lie. But of course he needs this list so as to show that in what counts – minute details – there is no end to my mistakes. Well, it seems to recap on E. H. Carr’s dictum that to praise the historian for his facts, is like praising the architect for the timber of the wood. Morris’ timber is not of best quality, and his architecture is monstrous.

Morris attributes my mistakes for being almost a Palestinian. The moment you are a Palestinian you can only be a bad historian. He detests, as he admits, my siding with the Palestinian narrative of disputed events. Such as the debate over the question of who provoked the 1920 and the 1929 riots. Morris relies on the British reports when they endorsed the Zionist claims and disregards the British reports when they endorse the Palestinian claims. I probably do the opposite in many cases, I admit, he does not. He is an ‘objective’ historian.

Similarly amazing is the way Morris treats things he does not know. Take for example the following sentence: ‘Brazen inaccuracy similarly marks Pappé’s treatment of the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939. Pappé writes that the Arab Higher Committee had tried to ‘negotiate a principled settlement with the Jewish Agency (it did not)’. Why did it not

– Morris says so. Well the historian Yizhar Herzog mined the beloved archives of Morris - the Zionist Archives – and has given us a detailed picture of these negotiations.^a In his haste Morris even contradicts himself when he disagrees the figure I gave for the number of refugees living outside Palestine in the end of the 1948 war, which is based, among other things on his own work. In other cases, he echoes Israeli propaganda when he claims no damage was inflicted on Lebanon in the 1982 war.

My books has in it mistakes of the dates, names and numbers as does his books. We should all try and minimize them to note, I agree. Very few of us succeed and one can only hope to become perfect in the next work – which has not as yet been written (the Well Kept Secret among historians who served as readers for other historians). They should not however be pointed out as part of an ideology or a basis for ad homonym attack. Worse, a reviewer is not allowed to lie openly about them as Morris does.

Finally, Morris decided to involve my two boys, whom he knows well, in his narrative. They, he explains to the readers, would be the first ones to leave Palestine or to be killed there, if my political vision would become a reality. My boys know Morris: they have met him. They also have met all my Palestinian friends. I leave to the readers to decide with whom among my visitors and friends they would wish to share the land of Palestine. They have several advantages: they are learning Arabic, they do not distinguish between my friends according to nationality or religion and I hope they will never grow to be mature supporters of massacres, ethnic cleansing and bloodshed. Unlike Morris, they do not tell my Palestinian students that if there were to be many of them – as a result of the right of return or birth – it is the end of civilization (as the Nazis had told the Jews). They are lucky to be growing up in an atmosphere where maybe they got Adolph Hitler's date birth wrong by a year, but they will do all they can, to prevent the Nazi venom from sipping through the veins of its own and ultimate victims who came and colonized Palestine, uprooted its population and occupied and brutalized many of them. Morris will probably feel unwelcome in such a society of equality between people and races and yet would write its history and claim to be 'objective' about it all.

^a See his article 'Negotiations between the Jewish Agency and the Palestinians' in Ilan Pappé (ed.), *Jewish-Arab Relationship in Mandatory Palestine; A New Approach to the Historical Research*, Givat Haviva 1992, pp. 11-42.