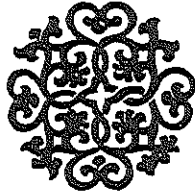


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### Review Essay

#### Re-Imagining Nationalism: New Studies in Arab, Turkish, and Israeli Historiography

*Afshin Marashi*

James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni eds., *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). xxvi + 287 pages. Notes to p. 336. Glossary to p. 340. Bibliography to p. 354. Index to p. 372. Paperback \$19.50.

Sibel Bozdogan and Resat Kasaba eds., *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997). xi + 260 pages. Index to p. 270. Paperback \$22.50.

Laurence J. Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture*, (London: Routledge Press, 1999). x + 209 pages. Notes to p. 239. Bibliography to p. 261. Index to p. 275. Paperback \$19.99.

Nine years after the appearance of Benedict Anderson's revised edition of *Imagined Communities*<sup>1</sup> and seventeen years after the book's original publication, the volume of books and articles that continue to take as their point of departure Anderson's now famous dictum that the nation is "an imagined political community" still shows no signs of decreasing. Anderson's study is one of those rare books—like Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, and from an earlier

1. 2d ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

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time Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*—which, elegantly conceived yet audacious in scope, manages to challenge disciplinary boundaries and conceptual habits while in the process shedding new light on some of the perennial questions of the social sciences: How have groups organized themselves as communities; when did such communities emerge historically; and what are the structures that constitute this form of consciousness? The three books under consideration here are important new works that reflect some of the disciplinary and conceptual shifts that have taken place in the study of nationalism during the past two decades. At least as importantly, these works also illustrate the changes taking place in the historiography of the modern Middle East, as the insularities of the area studies model gives way to a self-conscious engagement with the broader global and comparative questions of historical studies and the social sciences.

As such the three books have much in common, being characterized by a critical spirit that begins by questioning the received wisdom of their respective historiographic traditions. Israel Gershoni's lead article in *Rethinking Arab Nationalism* can be read as the singular introduction to all three volumes under consideration. He contends that the first task in rethinking the history of nationalism in the region is to decode the assumptions that underlie, what he calls, "the old narrative."<sup>2</sup> Each of the three books define their old narratives differently depending on the specificities of Arab, Turkish, and Israeli historiography. In the context of Arab historiography, according to Gershoni, "[t]he general paradigm that guided its [the old narrative] approach to the study of nationalism was that of the 'history of ideas.'"<sup>3</sup> For Turkish historiography, as editors Sibel Bozdoğan and Resat Kasaba describe in the introduction to their volume, the guiding framework that guided the development of modern Turkish historiography was "the Enlightenment project of Modernity."<sup>4</sup> In Israeli historiography, as Laurence Silberstein describes, the dominant narrative of Zionism constructed a discourse of Israeli identity that worked to "impose unity in place of multiplicity, consensus in place of conflict, and

2. Israel Gershoni, "Rethinking the Formation of Arab Nationalism in the Middle East, 1920-1945: Old and New Narratives," in *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. 5.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4. *Rethinking Modernity*, p. 3.

homogeneity in place of heterogeneity."<sup>5</sup> Although joined in a common project of questioning these conventional narratives, each book draws from a different set of analytical tools to reconceptualize the history of nationalism in the region.

### The Social Origins of Arab Nationalism

In questioning traditional narratives of Arab nationalism, and beginning the work of reconstructing a new narrative, *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* seems to make the sharpest break with the past. Gershoni, for example, asserts that the old narrative of Arab nationalism—a narrative he describes as being formulated by (among others) Elie Kedourie, Albert Hourani, Sylvia Haim, Majid Khadduri, Hans Tütsch, Leonard Binder, Hazem Nuseibeh, Fayez Sayegh, Anwar Chejne, Bernard Lewis, W.C. Smith, Patrick Seale, Nissim Rejwan, Hisham Sherabi, and Eliezar Be'eri—as emerging in the 1950s and 1960s during the heyday of the "history of ideas" approach to history made popular by Arthur Lovejoy. According to Lovejoy, Gershoni tells us, ideas represent "the spirit of an age" and are "the expression of whole cultures and societies."<sup>6</sup> This fundamental methodological assumption underlying the old narrative of Arab nationalism—which he also describes as being part of the "Orientalist, textual-philological tradition"—invariably has led to an ahistoric and oversimplified reading of Arab nationalism. Relying exclusively on the ideological texts of Arab nationalists, the generation of Kedourie et al. thus took for granted the centrality of language, culture, and history as constituent elements of Arab identity.

Once these pre-existing elements were "tapped" by vanguard intellectuals, the old narrative suggests, the repressed Arab national culture came rushing to the fore. Ironically, the old narrative of Arab nationalism, according to Gershoni, thus reproduced the logic of its own object of knowledge. Further, as a political form, the traditional historiography of Arab nationalism followed a "diffusionist model" of transmission from European philosophical sources to Arab nationalist texts. For example, Kedourie, in his characteristically blunt style as a post-colonial Edmund Burke, wrote in the famous opening sentence of his 1960 work that "nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the

5. *Postzionism Debates*, p. 18.

6. Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. 6.

nineteenth century.”<sup>7</sup> Following Kedourie, the political manifestation of Arab nationalism was conceived as entirely derivative of the pan-ist, integralist, and irredentist nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe. The old narrative of Arab nationalism also took little notice of the internally varied, fluid, and contested nature of Arab nationalism, relying instead on what Gershoni describes as an “all-Arab angle” that elides alternative forms of identity and social organization.

All the contributors to the volume seem to agree that the much neglected historical complexity of Arab nationalism can be retrieved best by shifting the focus of the historiography away from Arab nationalism as an ideological system and toward a new found concern for the political, economic, and social context in which Arab nationalism crystallized. If there is a budding “new narrative” of Arab nationalism in the offing, as the editors to the volume suggest, then it is being constructed with this new set of historiographic and methodological assumptions. The articles by Fred Halliday, Rashid Khalidi, James Gelvin, Zachary Lockman, and Phillip Khoury give some indication of what this new narrative might look like. Halliday and Khalidi, for example, suggest an alternative history of nationalism that emphasizes the instrumentalist-political nature of its development. Taking cases from Yemen and Palestine respectively they argue that the dynamics of political contestation were the main determinants shaping the nature, scope, and style of nationalism in each case. In the case of Yemen, Halliday observes, “[w]e see in Yemeni nationalism the combination of elements found in other Middle Eastern nationalisms—pre-Islamic, Islamic, Arab, third worldist, local, in this case Yemeni: far from these being set by history, or necessarily contradictory, they are combined in a mutually supportive, and changing, manner.”<sup>8</sup> The changing nature of Yemeni nationalism, Halliday continues, “reflects the shifts in the political situation within the country.”<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, in tracing the origins of Palestinian nationalism, Khalidi places central importance on the political context of what he calls “the critical years” of 1917-23. Khalidi suggests that Palestinian nationalism experienced its formative moment during this time, out of the political

7. Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960), p. 9.

8. Fred Halliday, “The Formation of Yemeni Nationalism: Initial Reflections,” in *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. 37.

9. Ibid.

crucible of the Great War, Ottoman dismemberment, and the competing territorial claims of Arabism, Syrianism, and Palestinian identity. Also central to the equation was the territorial challenge of the Zionist movement. As Khalidi argues, “Palestinian identity crystallized much more rapidly than it might otherwise have done due to the urgency of the threat that the Zionist movement posed.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than history, culture, and ideology, Halliday and Khalidi both emphasize the political dynamics of nationalist movements. In this sense both seem to be following the work of John Breuilly whose *Nationalism and the State*<sup>11</sup> poses a broadly comparative framework that likewise traces the development of nationalism to the political contestation for state power.

The articles by Gershoni, Gelvin, and Lockman go yet further in de-emphasizing the ideological factor in the formation of Arab nationalism. Whereas, all the contributors to the volume seem to argue that the focus on ideology by definition has tended to emphasize the role of elites in Arab society, the emerging new narrative of Arab nationalism is shifting the focus to the “historically marginal” strata of society: workers, peasants, minorities, tribes, and women.<sup>12</sup> The shift to the social origins of Arab nationalism—what Lockman calls the “view from below”<sup>13</sup>—represents a Copernican change in the historiography of Arab nationalism. From this perspective nationalism is located at the intersection of distinct social forces. As Gershoni, Gelvin, and Lockman emphasize, the longer-term economic transformations in the region produced as a result of integration into the world-system and the resulting social re-alignments, were foremost in producing the social and epistemic structures that made imagining the nation possible. Gelvin includes among these new structures and re-alignments: increased urbanization, the changing role of the state sector and the resulting growth to the “middle strata,” the consolidation of new migratory circuits linking the countryside and new sub-regional metropolises, the weakening of traditional vertical bonds of loyalty, and the

10. Rashid Khalidi, “The Formation of Palestinian Identity: The Critical Years, 1917-1923,” in *ibid.*, p. 188.

11. 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

12. Phillip Khoury, “The Paradoxical in Arab Nationalism: Interwar Syria Revisited,” in *Rethinking Nationalism*, p. 274.

13. Zachary Lockman, “Arab Workers and Arab Nationalism in Palestine: A View from Below,” in *ibid.*, p. 249.

consequent growth of new horizontal forms of association. He goes on to argue that the origin of “popular nationalism” in Syria was linked most directly to these social processes.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the old narrative of Arab nationalism which concentrated on the ideological development of elites, the shift to the social origins of Arab nationalism therefore gives agency to the newly discovered nationalist subaltern. It was as a result of these longer term social and economic re-alignments, Gelvin argues, that the popular classes of Syria “reconceptualized their community and undertook its reconstitution.”<sup>15</sup>

The changes in the historiography of Arab nationalism are significant, but pose a number of questions. While the critique of the old narrative’s exclusive consideration of cultural and intellectual history is a pointed and necessary criticism to a conventional historiography that reduced complex social, political, and cultural processes to the interests and ideas of elites, the new narrative’s compensation for this traditional historiographic shortcoming poses the problem of leading to a new found neglect of all things “cultural.” The conceptual weight of the new narrative seems to assign to “culture” the status of a residual effect of broader macro-processes. As a result, the important contributions to the volume by Beth Baron, Reeve Simon, Gabriel Piterberg, and Donald Reid—each of whom takes a decidedly “cultural turn” in their considerations of Arab nationalism—fit awkwardly in the context of the self-professed new narrative that emphasizes the more narrowly conceived social and economic origins of Arab nationalism. Resolving this tension and thinking creatively about the intersection of social processes and cultural forms ought to be central to the agenda of further research.

#### Turkish Modernity and Its Discontents

*Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* is similar to *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* in terms of its critical spirit vis-à-vis its historiographic tradition. Like the collected essays in the latter, the volume about Turkey also engages the broader conceptual and comparative questions in the study of nationalism. The focus of the Bozdogan and Kasaba book, however, emphasizes the cultural history of

14. James Gelvin, “The Other Arab Nationalism: Syrian/Arab Populism in its Historical and International Contexts,” in *ibid.*, p. 238.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

nationalism in Turkey, looking critically at the state-led modernization project and its construction of modern Turkish national identity. Here the powerful legacy of Kemalism looms large, and contributors to the volume each work to decode the cultural implications of this legacy. In the process the volume uncovers the compromises and contradictions within Kemalism and begins the work of challenging the triumphalist narratives of modernization and nationalism that have been central to Turkish historiography. Kasaba begins by posing a sober reassessment of Kemalism’s understanding of modernity:

Mustafa Kemal had envisioned for Turkey an organized, well-articulated linear process of modernization through which the whole nation was going to move simultaneously and with uniform experience. At the end of this process, there would emerge a militantly secular, ethnically homogenous republic well on its way to catching up with the civilized nations of the west.<sup>16</sup>

This strict, stubborn, and single-minded positivism today is being called into question. Kasaba, Çağlar Keyder, and Serif Mardin—and the other contributors to the volume—question the simplicity of this understanding of modernity. They also question whether Kemalism’s understanding of modernity represents a universal and liberating process, or conversely, a state-imposed alien cultural form that has proven repressive, undemocratic, and has led to the cultural malaise of Turkey’s military-bureaucratic society. None of the contributors pose any simple answers to these questions. In this sense too the volume is different than the volume on Arab nationalism. While the contributors to the latter pose a radical break between the old and the new narratives, the tone of the Turkish volume suggests a group of *engagé* scholars who, while critical, still operate within the terms of the traditional Turkish historiography. As Kasaba writes—following Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob’s considerations of modernity more broadly—the agenda in rethinking Turkish nationalism and modernity is “to undertake a rigorous critique of the Enlightenment Project of modernity without surrendering its liberating and humanist premises.”<sup>17</sup>

16. Resat Kasaba, “Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities,” in *Rethinking Modernity*, pp. 16-17

17. *Ibid.*, p.3.

Mardin, for example, seems to offer a Habermasian solution to the impasse of Turkey's unfinished project of modernity. Kemalism, he suggests, followed the statist assumptions of seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century European social thought, from Schlözer, Qusnay, and Seckendorf to Rousseau and the Jacobins. The state, as both the Kemalists and their reforming Ottoman precursors believed, was the main agent of change in society, able to carry out what Mardin calls, "the Jacobin principle" of promoting "science" and opposing "reaction."<sup>18</sup> He argues that the result of this "reductionist dialectic" has been a conceptual blind-spot in Turkish social science that emphasizes civilizational macro-structures at the expense of recognizing the social importance of "existential questions." The Kemalist project "considered these issues to be 'metaphysical' and a residue of scholasticism."<sup>19</sup> The consequence of this conceptual blind-spot can lead either to the existential malaise of contemporary Turkish culture or, as in Iran's experience with modernity, the challenge of Islamism as a rival universality. To forestall this impasse Mardin poses, following de Certeau and Habermas, the category of the "life-world" as a new framework for Turkish social science and historiography. The "life-world" seems to suggest a new cultural history of "the self," a new analytic that takes seriously the social function of subjectivity, what Mardin calls "the many-layered texture of social forces."<sup>20</sup> Challenging Turkish historiography, Mardin writes:

Today, for studies of Turkey, Mikhail Bakhtin seems more appropriate than Durkheim and Marx in his descriptions of the components of diologics or in his view of ritual inversions of hierarchy—but it will take some time before the level of Bakhtin's cultural history is tapped by Turkish researchers.<sup>21</sup>

Judging from the other contributions to the volume, the two areas of Turkish historiography that have made the most progress toward Mardin's ideal are gender studies and urban studies. Yesim Arat and Deniz Kandiyoti's articles are significant in considering the Turkish state's

18. Serif Mardin, "Projects as Methodology: Some Thoughts on Modern Turkish Social Science," in *ibid.*, p. 71.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

construction of the "Kemalist woman." Arat includes in her discussion the important distinction between the role of women in the public versus the private domains. In the public domain, Arat argues, Kemalism projected a rhetoric of equality that worked in practice to subsume the position of women to the demands of the nation. As she writes, "the Kemalist project of modernity legitimized male-female equality as it denied male-female difference."<sup>22</sup> Thus, women aviators and urban professionals were important symbols of Kemalist "progress," but their entry into the public domain also brought with it the rejection of their gendered identities. Conversely, in the private domain even the pretense of equality did not exist. Here women's roles did not remain stagnant but were re-ordered within a new system of patriarchy. Taylorism and the "science of housework" produced new ideals of discipline and rationality for the private domain. Inevitably the business of producing these scientific changes became designated as women's work. As Arat writes, "to the extent that difference was acknowledged in the private realm, it precipitated hierarchy."<sup>23</sup>

Deniz Kandiyoti's contribution to the volume also looks at the Kemalist project through the intersection of the nation, modernity, and gender. She begins by considering Kemalism's construction of a new type of domesticity, observing that at the turn of the century the growing proliferation of print-media such as newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and books worked to disseminate a new standard of the modern "companionate, child-centered conjugal family."<sup>24</sup> Kandiyoti argues that the quasi-scientific tone of this new discourse and Kemalism's later appropriation of it as official state policy gave the new conception of the family the cultural cache of "progress." As a result, new attitudes about the proper age of marriage, social prohibitions against arranged marriage and polygyny, and new notions of "appropriate reproductive heterosexuality"<sup>25</sup> became juxtaposed against Islamic and rural practices that became the

22. Yesim Arat, "The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey," in *ibid.*, p. 102.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

24. Deniz Kandiyoti, "Gendering the Modern: On Missing Dimensions in the Study of Turkish Modernity," in *ibid.*, p. 115.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

“civilizational ‘others’”<sup>26</sup> against which Kemalist modernity increasingly defined itself. These conceptions of old and new had a powerful effect on gendered identities within the family. Kandiyoti elegantly describes how habits, fashions, and style transformed society: New forms of mixed-sex communal family entertainment proliferated and house interiors were decorated in a new Westernized style. The changing spatial arrangements within the home and new patterns of music and food consumption were also markers of cultural change that followed the same logic. A new conception of masculinity emerged, as the remote old “ottoman patriarch”<sup>27</sup> gave way to a new ideal of Turkish manhood that included “intimacy and paternal involvement.”<sup>28</sup> In considering Kemalism’s construction of gender and the family Arat and Kandiyoti both argue—as per the tone of the volume—that these new constructions had potentially liberating possibilities but ultimately became subsumed to the ideological precepts of the Kemalist state.

Sibel Bozdogan makes a broadly similar argument in considering the role of architecture and urban design in the formation of modern Turkey. The consideration of architecture and urban planning as elements of cultural history is itself a major breakthrough for studying the modern history of the region. Bozdogan reminds us that architecture and the city are not autonomous fields of analysis but rather are central elements in the construction of the nation. In drawing this connection, Bozdogan describes Turkish architecture’s failure to harness the creative possibilities of modernity and its ultimate corporatization within the Kemalist project:

[I]n Turkey, the truly critical and creative potential of modern architecture was compromised from the beginning because it was introduced to the country from above (and from without) as one aspect of the official program of modernization and was inscribed within the cultural politics of the nation-state.<sup>29</sup>

This Faustian bargain of Turkish architecture began in the 1930s with Kemalism’s new-found obsession with transforming the physical

26. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

29. Sibel Bozdogan, “The Predicament of Modernism in Turkish Architectural Culture: An Overview,” in *ibid.*, p. 135.

appearance of the nation. Bozdogan suggests that Kemalism’s understanding of modernity and nationalism made architecture part of the visible politics of the nation, assigning to it the task of giving Turkey the outward physical markers of progress. As a result, a generation of Turkish architects began the work of importing European architectural forms: from the modernist, and sometimes fascist, avant-garde of Le Corbusier, to the American inspired prairie homes of Frank Lloyd Wright, and to the subsequent sterile high-modernism of the international style. The result was invasive large-scale construction projects that broke with the Islamic cosmology of traditional architectural aesthetics and instead emphasized new structures suitable for national education such as the peoples’ houses (*halkevi*), exhibition halls, and monuments. Like the Kemalist construction of women, Bozdogan argues that the architectural profession found a new status in Kemalist Turkey as agents of change performing a civilizational mission, but this status came at the cost of creativity and independence. Bozdogan concludes her article by echoing an argument found throughout the volume: the liberating possibilities of modernity were compromised by its coupling with the repressive structures of the nation-state; in order for the liberating potential of modernity to be re-harnessed it must be de-linked from the state and associated with a new conception of community.

### Israeli Historiography: The Margins of Zionism

Of the three books under consideration Laurence Silberstein’s *The Postzionism Debates* is the only monograph. It shares with the other two, however, the goal of (re)thinking critically about the formation of national identities in the Middle East, in this case Zionism’s construction of Israeli nationhood. It also shares with the other two the attempt to draw from the broader comparative and theoretical work focusing on the nation in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. In Silberstein’s case the emphasis is most noticeably on categories drawn from literary theory and discourse analysis. The book introduces readers of English to contemporary debates concerning the parameters of Israeli identity by critics operating within the parameters of Zionist discourse, as well as those operating beyond those parameters, or as Silberstein explains “critics from within” and “critics from without.” In the process Silberstein’s work recovers the lost history of contestation within Zionism and re-articulates the varied political-cultural alternatives that were (and are) available to Israeli society.

Rather than follow the conventional view of Zionism as the expression

of the basic unchanging characteristics and continuous historical existence of "the Jewish nation,"<sup>30</sup> Silberstein's point of departure is his consideration of Zionism as a discursive formation complete with all of its myriad power relations. He writes:

Conventional studies of Zionism, particularly those written by Israelis, tend to neglect or minimize power relations. Focusing on individual motives and actions, these studies tend to obscure the multiple ways in which power is imbricated in and actualized through Zionist practice. A clear indication of the limitations of this approach is its neglect or minimizing of the disempowering effects of Zionism on groups such as Palestinians, diaspora Jews, Jews of Middle Eastern origin, women, and nonzionist Jewish religious groups.<sup>31</sup>

Silberstein maintains that while the official history of Israel—what he calls, following Foucault, its "regime of truth"<sup>32</sup>—has denied these power effects, nevertheless there also has existed a submerged history of dissent within Zionism that has worked to resist these power relations and promote a more inclusive and egalitarian version of Zionism. As Silberstein explains, this debate goes back to the early history of the Zionist movement. While most narratives of Zionism point to Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* (1896) as the foundational text of the Zionist movement, Silberstein recovers the work of Ahad Ham (1856-1927), Micah Yosef Berdyczewski, and Yosef Haim Brenner, each of whom posed an alternative conception of Jewish identity and political aspiration. This early generation of critics was followed by the generation of Mordecai Bar On (b. 1928), Martin Buber (1878-1965), Meron Benvenisti (b. 1935), and Amos Oz (b. 1939). Coming of age after the establishment of Israel, this generation operated within the parameters of Zionism while at the same time challenging the narrowly conceived construction of Israeli identity. Among this group—whom Silberstein calls the "liberal Zionist" critics<sup>33</sup>—were Buber whose call for "a state for two nations"<sup>34</sup> challenged Israelis to conceive of a binational civic community; Amos Oz in his fiction and nonfiction writings also

30. *Postzionism Debates*, p. 4.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

challenges the narrow, religious, and expansionist model of Zionism in favor of one that is secular, civic, and liberal; there is also Benvenisti, the important critic to emerge from labor Zionism, and who challenged the national ceremonies, rituals, and other practices that, he has argued, produced a "cult of the homeland."<sup>35</sup>

From these earlier critics Silberstein then moves to the generation of scholars and critics who came of age in the 1980s. This group consists of (among others) the critical historians Benny Morris and Ilan Pappé, the sociologists Uri Ram and Baruch Kimmerling, the Palestinian-Israeli writers Anton Shammas and Emile Habiby, and the poststructuralist and feminist critics associated with the important Hebrew journal *Teoria Uvikoret* [Theory and criticism]. As Silberstein explains, this generation of critics—many of whom are still active participants in the debates surrounding Israeli culture and politics—has been influenced most directly by the disciplinary and conceptual shifts in the study of nationalism. While emphasizing what they have in common, Silberstein also points out the important differences in their analyses of Israeli discourse. The work of Morris and Pappé is grounded in traditional historiographic methods but nevertheless has managed to produce a radically revisionist historiography. Morris's *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem: 1947-1951* (1987) and Pappé's *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: 1947-1951* (1992) made use of previously closed Israeli archival materials to argue—contra the conventional narratives that made mass Arab flight in 1948 the result of encouragement from Arab leaders—that Israeli political and military leaders played a central role in precipitating the flight. This thesis marked a radical challenge to one of the central foundational myths of Israel. As Silberstein argues, by the late 1980s, the 1967, 1973, and 1982 wars and the post-1987 intifada had

produced in the younger generation [of Israelis] a skeptical attitude towards the truths produced and disseminated by official Israeli discourse. Increasingly, the younger generation found that Zionist discourse, addressing a very different set of circumstances, could not provide persuasive explanations of the changing realities.<sup>36</sup>

35. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

The result of this disillusionment with the official truth was a turn to new methods and categories of analysis. Importantly, the disenchantment of this generation of Israelis coincided with the emergence of poststructuralism and critical studies.

The work of the Hebrew journal *Teoria Uvikoret*, published since 1991, is the most important example of a new critical scholarship focusing on Israeli nationhood. The group of scholars and critics associated with this journal—Ariela Azoulay, Sara Chinski, Gil Eyal, Hanan Hever, Adi Ophir, Gabi Piterberg, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, and Dani Rabinowitz (among others)—has made self-conscious attempts to draw from the work of cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and feminist criticism. As Silberstein argues, the result has been a dynamic new scholarship that has worked to uncover the exclusionary practices and “cultural fault lines” of Israeli society. Raz-Krakotzkin and Piterberg, for example, draw from the work of Edward Said, Hayden White, and Walter Benjamin to engage Israeli historiographic discourse critically. Narratives of Israeli history and representations of “the land,” Raz-Krakotzkin argues, have been premised on the central trope of “negation of the diaspora” (*shelilat hagalut*). The effect of this narrative practice has been to privilege the Ashkenazi experience of “return” at the expense of Mizrahi Jews and Palestinian Arabs. The privileging of European Jews within Israeli discourse also takes on Orientalist forms, as Piterberg has shown. Dominant Israeli representations of Mizrahi Jews, Piterberg argues, are put in terms of primitiveness, backwardness, and inferiority. Practices of representation also are analyzed by Azoulay and Chinski. Azoulay’s consideration of Israeli museums—such as the Bezalel Institute in Jerusalem and the Museum of the Diaspora—are analyzed as attempts to control and standardize collective memory in ways that reflect and sustain dominant power relations. Chinski’s analysis of representations of “the land” in Israeli art illustrates, as Silberstein writes, the “struggle ... oppression, and violent conquest of space.”<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusion

The three books under review here clearly do not exhaust the scope and extent of work being done in the study of Middle Eastern nationalisms. The rejection of ideological narratives in favor of a new social and

economic history of Arab nationalism, the search for a post-Kemalist project of neo-modernity in Turkish studies, and the deconstructionist impulse within Israeli cultural studies and historiography suggest only some of the strategies thus far employed by scholars and critics working to reconceptualize the history of nationalism in the region. Despite their methodological differences, what the volumes clearly have in common is that each gives some sense of the growing convergence between “nationalism studies” and modern Middle Eastern historiography. The absence of a volume on Iranian modernity and nationalism should be noted here. The same process of rethinking Iranian history in light of the conceptual and disciplinary shifts discussed above is also underway among critics and scholars of Iranian history, but important exceptions aside Iranian historiography to date has been sluggish in moving forward. On the whole, the volumes considered here suggest that the much-discussed insularities of area studies are giving way noticeably to new comparative and conceptual approaches to the history of nationalism in the region. These disciplinary shifts are already leading to the exploration of new domains of scholarship, the asking of new questions about the history of the region, and the formation of new knowledge.

37. Ibid., p. 190.