

***Undermining National Narratives with Family Stories:
An oral history project in a Palestinian-Jewish school*¹**
Bob Mark

Introduction

In addressing the challenges of teaching history in Israel, some of the literature points to differences between countries in post-conflict situations as opposed to countries in active conflict.² This distinction came to mind as I heard the presentations of researchers from Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, Korea and Cameroon who came together in Luzern to produce this comparative study. In post-conflict situations where the State has an interest in healing and moving on, we may hope to find government support for a process of airing the truth about contested pasts, producing knowledge, acknowledging injustice and taking responsibility. These are the conditions necessary for the work of truth and reconciliation commissions such as we saw in Canada regarding treatment of its indigenous peoples³ and for work conducted in a similar spirit by the Lumumba Commission in Belgium.⁴ In countries in active conflict — Israel and Cameroon in this project — confronting contested pasts may come with a price. In a case like Israel, acknowledging historical injustice may undermine future negotiating positions and interfere with plans for further abuse of power. Naturally the government's concerns and agenda are reflected in the Ministry of Education's history program. Without legitimacy at the Israeli state level for a comprehensive look at the country's past, critical history teachers in Israel must consider not only their moral responsibilities as teachers, they must also consider the strategies available and the risks involved in making their voices heard.

A number of creative initiatives have been taken to challenge Israel's master narrative through public education work outside of the classroom. This kind of work, providing a platform for silenced voices, is generally conducted through non-government organizations.⁵ Attempting work of this nature within the Israeli school classroom is much more complicated. The difficulties of teaching history critically in Israel are generally addressed by discussing educational policy, one-sided history textbooks and militarism in education about which much has been written.⁶ However, a far more pervasive challenge may come from school

¹ This text was later published as: Bob Mark (2020). *Undermining National Narratives with Family Stories: An oral history project in a Palestinian-Jewish School*. In N. Fink, M. Furrer and P. Gautschi (Eds.), *Teaching the History of One's Own Country: International experiences in a comparative perspective* (271 – 289). Frankfurt / M, Germany: Wochenschau Verlag

² Sami Adwan and Dan Bar-On, "Shared History Project: A PRIME Example of Peace-Building Under Fire." In: *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Spring 2004, 513-521
Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism: Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017

³ <http://www.trc.ca/reconciliation.html> (accessed May 29, 2019)

⁴ Annelies Verdoolaege & Paul Kerstens, "The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Belgian Lumumba Commission: A Comparison." In: *Africa Today*, vol. 50 no. 3, 2004, pp. 75-91

⁵ Gutman, *Memory Activism*

⁶ See for example: Nurit Peled-Elhanan, *Palestine in Israeli School Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education*.

communities that police mainstream narratives well before the teacher is called to order by State educational inspectors.

I am interested in how criticism of Israel's master narrative and of the Zionist ideology on which it is based might at least be engaged in the classroom. In this chapter I will discuss some of the challenges involved and then revisit an oral history project that I conducted several years ago with the sixth-grade class of an integrated Palestinian-Jewish bilingual primary school in Israel. Here I will examine how material gathered in this manner offered opportunities to approach issues that will not be addressed in the near future by approved history textbooks and programs in Israeli schools.

Background

The political struggle over Israel / Palestine is reflected in the manner in which we present the events leading up to and surrounding the 1948 War. Known in Hebrew as the War of Independence, it marks the Zionist movement's achievement of its goal to create an independent Jewish State in the biblical land of Israel. In Arabic, the 1948 War is known as the Nakba, or Catastrophe. It was a war that resulted in the expulsion and flight of an estimated 750,000 Palestinians⁷ from their homes, representing over 80% of those Palestinians who lived in the territory that was to become Israel. It marked the creation of a Palestinian Diaspora and a devastating blow to their hopes of achieving any kind of independence. Those Palestinians who succeeded to remain within Israel's borders became second-class citizens of the state. Palestinians today constitute approximately twenty percent of Israel's citizens.⁸

Arguments continue today regarding whether there was a systematic policy to empty the land of Palestinians or whether the expulsions were a result of local strategic military decisions made by Israeli commanders in the field.⁹ This is no mere academic argument over a nuanced detail of the past. It is an issue raised in contemporary political and educational discourse. It speaks to questions of rights to the land, responsibility for the conflict and to the nature of the Zionist project as a whole. It plays a part in the image that each group portrays of itself and of the other. An undeniable result of the expulsion is that once the Palestinians left their homes, they were not allowed to return to them, and Israel benefited from the expropriation of a

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; Hagit Gur (ed.) *The Militarization of Education*, Tel-Aviv: Bavel 2005 (in Hebrew); and Majid Al-Haj, "National Ethos, Multicultural Education, and the New History Textbooks in Israel," *Curriculum Inquiry* Vol 35, No. 1, Spring 2005, 47-71

⁷ Adel Manna, *Nakba and Survival: The Story of the Palestinians Who Remained in Haifa and the Galilee, 1948-1956*, Tel-Aviv: Van Leer Institute Press, 2017 (in Hebrew)

⁸ Ilan Pappé, *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel*, Cornwall: Yale University Press 2011

⁹ For a brief discussion in English on this debate see Dalia Karpel's interview with Adel Manaa in Haaretz: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-palestinians-who-didn-t-flee-during-the-nakba-1.5452202> (accessed May 29th 2019)

considerable amount of Palestinian land and other property. In seeing to it that a return would be out of the question, the State then did what it could to erase the memory of Palestinian life and culture that preceded it. This erasure was done not only physically with destruction of the abandoned villages,¹⁰ but it continues to be done through education in general and history teaching in particular. That is to say that history in Israel - whether it is in classroom teaching, archeology¹¹ or tour guiding - is an arena of the conflict. In this environment, the simple act of marking the site of a destroyed Palestinian village can be understood as an act of resistance, regarded by Gutman as “memory activism.”¹²

The Master Narrative

Israel’s master narrative is based on a Zionist historiography that makes the gathering of Jews from around the world and the creation of what Smootha¹³ refers to as a Jewish ethnic democracy appear self-evident and unproblematic. Classroom history teaching is only one of the ways in which this is achieved. Zerubavel¹⁴ discusses the way in which history is enacted through Israel’s “commemorative narrative.” The concept of a commemorative narrative captures the manner in which days of commemoration — the annual cycle of holidays and memorial days — inculcate in children a Zionist understanding of Jewish history long before they open a history textbook. It is a narrative that infuses religious holidays with secular nationalist aspirations that are ultimately realized by the establishment of the state of Israel. Here the Bible plays a unique role. In traditional Judaism the Talmud, or Oral Law, takes precedence over the Bible. However, Zionism — originally a secular nationalist movement — placed the Bible front and center as part of a political program. Shapira wrote that the Bible provided Zionism with “a mythological-historical foundation to consolidate its distinctiveness around its ancestral land serving as evidence of the ‘naturalness’ of the Zionist solution to the Jewish problem.”¹⁵

In order to make the Zionist solution appear natural, the master narrative must not only downplay the Palestinians’ history in and competing claims to the same land. The narrative

¹⁰ A detailed map of the hundreds of destroyed villages with a few words about each one can be found at: <https://www.zochrot.org/en/site/nakbaMap> (accessed Sept. 2, 2019).

¹¹ Israeli Archaeologists protesting the abuse of archaeology for nationalist aims founded the Emek Shaveh NGO. Criticism of particular archaeological practices in Israel can be found anywhere on their website <https://alt-arch.org/en/> (accessed Sept. 2, 2019).

¹² Gutman, *Memory Activism*

¹³ Sammy Smootha, “The model of ethnic democracy: Israel as a Jewish and democratic state,” in: *Nations and Nationalism* vol. 8, no. 4, 2002, 475-503.

¹⁴ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995

¹⁵ Anita Shapira, “The Bible and Israeli Identity,” in: *AJS Review* Vol. 28, No. 1, Apr., 2004, p. 13. For a detailed presentation of the use of the Bible in Zionist historiography see also: Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, London: Verso, 2010

also negates alternative Jewish life in the Diaspora¹⁶ and it negates work toward building a society based on shared life and civic equality with Palestinians.¹⁷ In recent years an extreme expression of this negation has been the equation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, implying that Zionist and Jewish are one and the same.¹⁸ To appreciate the work involved in making this equation, it is worth noting the degree to which there have always been sources of Jewish opposition to Zionism.

Jewish criticism of Zionism

At the time of the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, the proposal to create a Jewish State in Palestine was among the more far-fetched solutions that were put forth to meet the challenges of anti-Semitism in Europe and the idea was highly contested in the Jewish world. Jewish opposition to Zionism was based not only on how impractical the idea of a state sounded, it was based on principle. The Zionist premise that the Jewish people as a whole constituted a single nation and that Jews cannot be at home among other nations of the world was seen as reinforcing the very same claims that fueled anti-Semitism. These were the claims against which the Western Jewish establishment fought while trying to demonstrate that the Jews were every bit as French, German, British or American as their fellow citizens.¹⁹ In the Austrian Empire, Zionism faced competing forms of Jewish national organization based on the culture and Yiddish language of Jews in that particular region. Here, Jewish nationalism was aimed not at separation from the surrounding population, but at integrating into the social and political life of the empire by gaining recognition as an autonomous national minority group.²⁰ In the Russian Empire the Jewish Labor Bund also organized on the basis of a Jewish national group as a means of joining a broader alliance — in this case a socialist alliance aimed at advancing revolution. The Bund rejected Zionism's dependence on imperialist power and colonialist practice in Palestine. They also did not see the point in trading their struggle with anti-Semites in Europe for the struggle that Zionist aims would awaken with Arabs in the Middle East.²¹ In Palestine itself, the political aims and practices of Zionism were met with opposition by leaders of the native Sephardic Jewish community who sought liberation through Ottoman reform in

¹⁶ Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*

¹⁷ Marcelo Svirskey and Ronnen Ben-Arie, *From Shared Life to Co-Resistance in Historic Palestine*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018

¹⁸ For one of many examples see: Yakov Rabkin, "Conflating Zionism and Judaism leaves Jewish students exposed," at: <https://972mag.com/conflating-zionism-and-judaism-leaves-jewish-students-exposed/131244/> (accessed on May 29th, 2019)

¹⁹ Robert Wistrich, "Zionism and Its Jewish 'Assimilationist' Critics (1897-1948)," in: *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1998, 59-111

²⁰ Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014

²¹ Abraham Brumberg, "Anniversaries in Conflict: On the Centenary of the Jewish Socialist Labor Bund," in: *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 5, No. 3, Spring - Summer, 1999, pp. 196- 217

alliance with their Arab countrymen. They spoke out against practices and attitudes of European Zionists that sabotaged that alliance.²²

British conquest of Palestine during the First World War led to the Zionist movement's success in gaining the imperial support that it sought for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The diminishing options for emigration from Europe (notably the immigration quotas of 1924 that put an end to the mass Jewish immigration to the USA), the rise of Nazi Germany, and finally the Holocaust led many non-Zionist and formerly anti-Zionist Jews to accept immigration to Palestine as a pragmatic solution for refuge. The experience of Nazi occupation and Holocaust also strengthened the ideological case for Zionism. However, here too it is worth remembering that even within the Zionist movement there were advocates of binationalism who opposed the concept of a Jewish state on the grounds that it contradicted principles of social justice and equality.²³

While the Jews' need for refuge was very real, the Zionist solution remains, at the very least, problematic. As Wistrich writes, "The fact that the Zionists won the struggle against their anti-Zionist opponents within Jewry does not necessarily prove that they were right or that they always had the best arguments. Although the classical Jewish anti-Zionist ideology has indeed faded, many of its residues can still be heard in contemporary Israel-Diaspora tensions and in the post-Zionist critiques that have emerged from within Israeli society in recent years."²⁴

Challenges of critical education

It might be expected that the diverse sources of historical and contemporary Jewish criticism toward Zionism would open the door to serious discussion in Israeli classrooms of the internal contradiction of an ethnic democracy — more specifically of Israel's definition as Jewish and democratic. The criticism, after all, comes from sources whose concern for the well-being of the Jewish people is beyond doubt. Unfortunately, the legislation that recent Israeli governments have introduced to defend themselves from this criticism — notably the Nakba Law and the Nation-State Law — only serve to illustrate that contradiction. The Nakba Law, introduced in 2011, "authorizes the Finance Minister to reduce state funding or support to an institution if it holds an activity that rejects the existence of Israel as a 'Jewish and democratic state' or commemorates Israel's Independence Day or the day on which the state was established as a day of mourning."²⁵

²² Svirsky and Ben-Arie, *From Shared Life to Co-Resistance*

²³ Hashomer Hatzair's program called for the creation of a binational socialist society. See: David Zayit, *Tsiyonut Bedarkei Shalom*, Bnei Brak: Sifriat Poalim, 1985 (in Hebrew). See also Zohar Maor, "Moderation from Right to Left: The Hidden Roots of Brit Shalom" in: *Jewish Social Studies* Vol. 19, No. 2, Winter 2013, pp. 79-108

²⁴ Robert Wistrich, "Zionism and Its Jewish 'Assimilationist' Critics," p. 62

²⁵ <https://www.adalah.org/en/law/view/496> (accessed May 29th, 2019)

More recently, the introduction of the Nation-State Law eliminated the ambivalence of the concept of a Jewish state, giving legal sanction to discriminatory practice that could have previously been challenged in court.²⁶ Under these conditions, introducing critical discussion in public school education becomes both more urgent and more difficult.

Two projects may be mentioned here to illustrate some of the difficulties of introducing a critical reading of history into Israeli classrooms. One of the more ambitious projects is the series of Dual-Narrative History books produced by the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME).²⁷ Jewish history teachers from Israel worked with Palestinian history teachers from the Palestinian Authority²⁸ to produce books showing, side by side, the manner in which milestones in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are portrayed and explained in each group's narrative. The organizers stressed that they had no expectation to create a joint narrative that bridges the differences between them. The aim of the project was to create material that could lead Palestinian and Jewish students "to acknowledge and live with the fact that there are at least two competing narratives to account for their past, present, and future."²⁹ Despite what may appear to be a modest aim, the organizers had a sense that it was important to keep a low profile and produce their books beneath the radar of the Education Ministry. Indeed, in 2004, after a newspaper article on the project was published, the Israeli Ministry of Education announced that educators were forbidden to introduce these books into Israeli schools.³⁰

In light of the difficulties involved in introducing alternative textbooks, another project worth noting is the creation of an unofficial teachers' guide presenting ways to teach critical reading of the State-approved high school program on the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict.³¹ The guide directs attention to information that the existing program carefully omits in order to portray a picture of us and them as good against evil; it helps teachers work with their students to analyze the terminology that the books employ; and it helps examine the double standards that are used when describing the actions and motives of each side in the conflict. At one point the author of the book — a high school history teacher — was recorded by one of her students putting the principles of her guide into practice. The recording was publicized and the uproar

²⁶ <http://time.com/5345963/israel-nation-state-law-democracy/> (accessed May 29th, 2019)

²⁷ Texts of the Dual Narrative books can be found in English at: <http://www.vispo.com/PRIME/narrative.pdf> (accessed May 29, 2019).

²⁸ The Palestinian National Authority was established in 1994 as an interim self-governing body in parts of the territory that has been occupied by Israel since the 1967 War. Palestinians from the Palestinian Authority, referred to in the PRIME project, are *not* citizens of Israel as opposed to the Palestinians discussed in the rest of this chapter.

²⁹ Adwan and Bar-On, "Shared History Project," p. 514

³⁰ Shoshana Steinberg and Dan Bar-On, "The Other Side of the Story: Israeli and Palestinian Teachers Write a History Textbook Together," In: *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 79, No. 1, Spring, 2009. 104-112

³¹ Adva Zeltzer, *Shuruch – Cracks in Israeli Historiography: Complementary Information for 11th-Graders Studying the History Curriculum*, Tel-Aviv: Zochrot, 2016 (in Hebrew). An English presentation of the guide can be found at <https://www.zochrot.org/en/educationUnit2/all> (accessed Sept. 2, 2019)

over her teaching actually reached the press. In this case the school principal stood by the teacher in the face of the Ministry of Education's demand to take action against her.³²

Naturally there are history teachers who succeed to do some degree of critical work in their classrooms without reaching the press, but they must navigate the same socio-political climate described above. It is against this background that any attempt to challenge the mainstream narrative within the Israeli classroom should be appreciated.

The most politically radical educational settings imaginable in the Israeli school system may be those of the integrated Palestinian-Jewish bilingual schools. As such, these schools provide particularly interesting opportunities to see how difficult it is to approach national identities critically and to work toward a common understanding of the country's past. Below is a description of an attempt to take on that challenge within one of these schools.

Palestinian-Jewish bilingual schools

Schools in Israel are divided into different streams such that Palestinian and Jewish citizens of the state for the most part go to separate schools. In 1984 the Palestinian-Jewish village of Wahat al-Salam / Neve Shalom (WAS/NS) created the first integrated bilingual primary school in Israel serving both Palestinian and Jewish children. The school inspired further initiatives and today there are eight such schools in the country, most of them supported by the Hand in Hand Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel. The day-to-day interaction and cooperation of Jewish and Palestinian children, teachers and parents in these school communities are unique, and the work that they do in confronting conflicting historical narratives is, in Israeli reality, remarkable.³³

I taught history and English in the WAS/NS Primary School for 23 years and I conducted research on the school for over ten years. Here it is important to add that I am Jewish and an immigrant to Israel, each of these points having something to do with my perspectives and the questions that I bring. Without detracting from the accomplishments of the Palestinian-Jewish schools, what interests me here is the critique that targets the identity politics lying at the foundation of their educational work.³⁴ The approach of these schools is based on the

³² Rogel Alpher, "There won't be any more school principals like Zeev Dagani. After him comes fascism" *Haaretz* Aug 8, 2018 (in Hebrew) <https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/television/tv-review/premium-1.6431131> (accessed Sept. 2, 2019)

³³ A considerable amount of research has been conducted on these schools. For an overview of the model see: Assaf Meshulam, "Palestinian-Jewish schools in Israel: Unravelling the educational model," *International Journal of Educational Development*, 70, 2019, 102092 www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedudev (accessed Sept. 2, 2019). For more comprehensive work see for example: Grace Feuerverger, *Oasis of Dreams*, New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001 and Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

³⁴ See: Zvi Bekerman, "Identity versus Peace: Identity Wins: *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 79, no. 1, 2009, 74-83 and Marcello Svirsky and Aura Mor-Sommerfeld, "Interculturalism and the Pendulum of Identity," *Intercultural Education*, vol. 23, no. 6, 2012, 513-525

conviction that the children's separate Palestinian or Jewish national identities should be sharpened in order to help them know themselves and the other. The criticism is that this approach reifies national identities as content that should be taught, rather than exploring these identities as constructs shaped in time and place, and rather than taking advantage of the experience, knowledge and insight gained from the encounter in order to imagine other options of social identity that may lead to the construction of a pluralistic democratic society. Even in these schools, teachers inclined to challenge hegemonic representations of national identity will have to contend with pressure from colleagues and from the school community to conform to familiar norms.³⁵ The difficulty of crossing boundaries of national identity and creating something radically different is most tangibly displayed during ceremonies for the Israeli Memorial Day and the Palestinian Nakba Day that are conducted separately and often simultaneously. Here Jewish teachers and children appear in white shirts to commemorate those who fell in the struggle to achieve and maintain an independent Jewish state while the Palestinian teachers and children come in black shirts to conduct a parallel ceremony commemorating their loss of Palestine and marking their continued struggle for independence.³⁶

In the WAS/NS School, in the days leading up to Memorial Day ceremonies, the teachers and children conduct discussions and activities on the aspiration for independence, the different ways in which Jews and Palestinians experience the conflict and the consequences of the 1948 War for each group. The condensed and often emotionally-charged work involved in preparing these ceremonies does not leave much time to look at the historical context of the events that are singled out for commemoration and there are few other opportunities in the school year when this context can be addressed. In sixth grade, when the children begin to study history, they learn about ancient Greece and Rome. They have a couple of years ahead of them before they begin to study nationalism, colonialism, world wars and genocide.

In an attempt to create a suitable and more relaxed framework in which the children could look into the ways that recent history brought them together, positioned them and made them have to confront issues of national identity and conflict, a Palestinian colleague and I received an hour a week to embark on an oral history project with the sixth-grade children (eleven and twelve years old). I also added some time from my English lessons, working with them to produce the translated stories presented below.

³⁵ Maureen Rajuan and Zvi Bekerman, "Inside and outside the integrated bilingual Palestinian-Jewish schools in Israel: Teachers' perceptions of personal, professional and political positioning," *Teaching and Teacher Education* vol. 27, no. 2, 2010, 395-405

³⁶ Robert Mark, *The Construction of Culture in Multicultural Education: Classroom participation and teacher-student interaction in a Jewish-Arab School*, (2013) Ph.D. Dissertation at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

A Palestinian-Jewish family history project

The aim of the family history project was to take advantage of the mosaic of stories that Jewish and Palestinian children can bring to the classroom from their families and to explore history through questions that arise from the patterns that they find in this mosaic. The children were asked to find any story that they could from a few generations back in their family past. Any story with a beginning, middle and end would suffice. It could be as mundane as an account of what their great grandparents prepared for breakfast before they had a refrigerator. They were to open with a couple of sentences about the background of the story, including at the very least when and where it took place. If the story took place somewhere other than where the children were brought up, they were asked to close the story with a sentence or two about why the family moved. The opening and closing sentences enabled us to map the collection of family histories while the stories awakened questions and connected the children more personally to the events of the past. The following is a selection of six accounts presented more or less in chronological order. They were chosen here because they were presented clearly and represent patterns found in most of the Jewish and Palestinian stories. The Jewish stories in general reached a few years further back into the past. Presenting these stories in chronological order means beginning with three stories that the Jewish children brought.³⁷

Ayelet

Grandma Molly's Uncle Joseph

World War One was fought from 1914 to 1918. Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Turkish Empire fought against Britain, France, Italy, Romania, Russia and the USA.

In Romania during World War One, Joseph was supposed to join the army and fight in the war. Joseph did not want to go so he acted like he was deaf. Many people tried to pull that trick. They put all of the "deaf" people in a room and after a while someone told them that they can leave. Many just got up and started to go and then the army people knew that they can hear and fight in the war. Joseph was smart and he waited for someone to tell him in sign language that he can go.

Joseph's sister Clara went to the USA, and in Chicago she married Harry. Their daughter Molly married Junie in Holyoke. Molly and Junie moved to Israel with their two daughters. Their daughter Daniella — my mom — met and married Yitzhak — my dad — in Tel-Aviv and that's where I was born.

³⁷ Pseudonyms are used for the children and their parents and family names are intentionally omitted.

Hadar

The Story of Alberto

In 1939 my grandfather, Alberto, was in France. When World War Two started, the Germans (Nazis) took his father from his family to a concentration camp with all the other Jews. His mother stayed alone with their five children. Alberto's mother put all of them in a monastery in order to save them. The priest hid each one of her children with a different family and Alberto was without his own family for four years. Meanwhile the Nazis murdered Alberto's father and they took his mother to a concentration camp. His mother escaped and joined the Partisans in the woods.

After the war, one soldier met Alberto in the village where he lived. Alberto told him his story and the soldier volunteered to help him find all his brothers and sisters. The soldier put them in an orphan house. Later, Alberto's mother found her five children. The reunited family moved to Argentina and started a new life. Years later, Alberto married Marta and they had three children: Naomi, Danny and Claudia. They were all educated in Zionist schools, and when Naomi grew up, she immigrated to Israel. That was in 1984. Naomi met my father, Udi, in Israel. I was born one year after they got married.

Noga

Grandma Eva

Background: Algeria had a lot of conquerors. The Romans, the Arabs and then the Turks conquered Algeria. The French controlled Algeria for 131 years, from 1831 to 1962. My grandmother Eva was born in Algeria in 1935 and this story is about the mid 1940's.

Noga: Tell me about your childhood. What did you play or do in your free time?

Eva: There was no radio and there was no television. We walked to school at 8:00 and came back home at 12:00 to eat lunch. We went back to school at 1:15 and walked home at 4:00. We came back late. My sisters, my friends and I played hopscotch and jump rope. Many times I hid behind the door on our roof and I read books when no one knew. It was the only way I could find privacy. My mother washed our clothes and cleaned our house. She worked hard. My father was a shoemaker and then he made mattresses and blankets.

Noga: Algeria is an Arab country but you don't know any Arabic. Why?

Eva: Most of the people in Algeria spoke French. It was the official language. My parents spoke with me in French and the Arabs spoke with me in French. In their homes and in the markets the Arabs spoke to each other in Arabic. As a little girl I wasn't exposed to the language.

Noga: Tell me about coming to Israel.

Eva: The year was 1949. My big brother was a Zionist and he had immigrated to the country to help fight in the War of Independence in 1948. When the war was over and the State of Israel

was established, my father wanted to join my brother. My father was religious. He wanted to go to Israel for religious reasons and he wanted to be with his oldest son. In Algeria we lived in the city of Constantine. Most of the Jews there did not go to Israel. We were exceptions. We went to a camp in France organized by the Jewish Agency and we had to wait for four months before we were finally sent to Israel. There were many Jews from Morocco and other places in the camp, but there were very few Algerian Jews. Most Algerian Jews moved to France after Algeria became independent in 1962.

Eva became a high school literature teacher and she continues to teach today.

Samira

The Story of Ghabsia during the 1948 War.

My grandfather, Said, was born in 1940. He lived in Ghabsia in Palestine. He was eight years old in the war of 1948. My great grandfather, Mustafa, was a merchant. He bought and sold cows. Sometimes he bought cows from Lebanon. In his time it was easy to move from Palestine to Lebanon.

The War:

When the war started, my grandfather and his small family were afraid and they were forced to escape to Lebanon. They stayed there until the war was over. From time to time Mustafa went to Ghabsia in order to check on his house. Sometimes he even took his oldest son Hassan. It was dangerous to check his house because sometimes they were bombed. Once Hassan was knocked down from an explosion and they thought that he died.

While my grandfather's family was staying in Lebanon the residents of Ghabsia said that they give up and agree to let the Israeli soldiers take over. A man named Daoud Ez-Zina climbed on the mosque holding the white flag as a sign of surrender, but the soldiers shot him and he died. When that happened all the people were terrified and they started yelling and rushing from one side of the village to the other. The soldiers shot all over and it was a mess. The families gathered themselves in big groups under the trees.

My grandmother, also from Ghabsia, was a small girl of eight years old by that time. The older people made one big circle around the children in order to defend and hide them from the shooting. This way the soldiers could not see the small children. I asked my grandmother if she could see a soldier. She said, "yes we were hiding in the grass when they passed. They were wearing gray uniforms and holding black guns."

By the end of the war, my grandfather, his sister and mother came back home from Lebanon. His brother Hassan came back only three months later because they would have sent him to jail if he returned earlier. Mustafa, the father of my grandfather, was in jail for some time and then he was released.

Linda

Spiro

In 1948 my grandfather Spiro (1927-1999) worked in the Palestinian resistance that defended the city of Lod against the Jewish forces. But the Palestinians lost the war and the city was taken over by the Jews. The Jewish forces then threw the Palestinians out of the city. 40,000 people were thrown out but some families were able to hide and they stayed. My grandfather was one of them and continued to live under Jewish occupation all his life.

Spiro wrote a book about the modern history of Lod. He wrote the book in Arabic. He decided to write the book and tell the story of the events of 1948, how the city was occupied, and life under occupation for the few families that remained. He also described life before 1948 in a city that was a commercial center and an important city in Palestine.

Adham

My Grandfather

In the 1950's my grandfather lived with his family in the Negev desert. He had sheep, but he did not always have work. In the winter, during the rainy season, they lived in the mountains so their tent would not get wet. The water flowed down the mountains into the valleys. In the spring they moved to the fields to live. They planted wheat for the summer while the sheep ate in the pasture. In the summer they cut the crop and made flour. The sheep ate what was left in the fields after the harvest.

When he went to Lod he left the sheep because he did not have a way to raise them.

Upon further investigation ...

It took the children several weeks to prepare their stories and present them to each other. As brief as these accounts are, they provided a wealth of material for class discussion and exploration. The stories captured their imaginations and engaged them personally in the lives of each other's families. Warfare was not addressed by heroics on the battlefield, but by the image of Alberto's mother delivering him to a monastery in the hope that he could be saved and by the image of Samira's grandmother as a little girl surrounded by protective grown-ups while soldiers invaded her village. The children were no less engaged by Adham and Noga's accounts of daily routines that were still part of their families' memories. The stories raised questions that often sent the story-tellers back to the source for more information, only a small part of which was used to refine their written presentations.

The outstanding characteristics that made these stories Jewish or Palestinian were not so much about culture, but about political circumstance and choice. Each of the Jewish family stories takes place in a different location outside of Israel or Palestine. There is restlessness in the Jewish family histories. Two of the three accounts span three continents over three generations. They each direct our attention to decisions that the families made in going one place and not another, though the options that were open to them and the choices that they made are not necessarily explained. While many Jews who reached Israel came in immigration waves, often driven by persecution in their countries of origin, that is not the case with any of the Jewish families represented here. Their decisions to move to Israel appear ideological in nature. In Hadar's story we are told that his mother received a Zionist education in Argentina. In Ayelet's story the move to Israel does not receive an explanation and no one in the class asked for one. We know that not many Jews from North America made the decision to move to Israel in the years that she discusses. As neither persecution nor material incentive generally drove North American Jews to Israel, we tend to assume the motive was ideological. In Noga's story we hear that it was an unusual choice for an Algerian family to immigrate to Israel as they had the option of taking advantage of their French citizenship to go to France when they felt they needed to emigrate. In their case we hear of the grandparents wanting to join their son who had gone ahead of them to fight for Israel and we hear of the grandfather's religious motivation.

The choices that the Palestinian families faced are those of an indigenous group trying to hold on to their homes or at least remain in the country. This struggle ties together stories that come from three very diverse sectors of Palestinian society: A family from Ghabsia, a Muslim agricultural village in the north; a Bedouin family from the southern desert regions; and, finally, the story of Spiro, an urban Christian. Linda writes that Spiro grew up in what was an important Palestinian town before 1948. Spiro was among the few Palestinians who escaped the mass expulsion from his town and his story is the only one here of someone who managed to stay in his house. Remaining in the same location, he soon found himself living as a minority in an Arab neighborhood of a mixed Jewish-Arab town. Spiro published his story. This is no small

matter. Guttman's³⁸ discussion of memory activism, mentioned above, describes the challenges of trying to document Palestinian life both before the 1948 War and in its aftermath. One of these challenges is the reticence of Palestinian citizens of Israel from the 1948 generation to share their experience either on account of fear, a survival instinct, shame or all of the above. The first generation of Palestinians brought up in Israel lived under a military administration until 1966. Intense scrutiny by Israel's internal security services instilled fear of the consequences of speaking out. A legacy of silence left its imprint on the next generation of Palestinian citizens, who often report on their frustration with not having been told by their parents about what happened to their families in 1948.³⁹ This challenge can be detected in each of the Palestinian stories told here. The uniqueness and courage in Spiro's act of writing and in speaking out at the time that he did is expressed in the repetitive wording of Linda's account: "Spiro wrote a book about the modern history of Lod. He wrote the book in Arabic. He decided to write the book and tell the story of the events of 1948...." Linda's mother — Spiro's daughter — added stories of harassment that the family experienced from Israel's internal security service on account of his writing at the time that he did. He eventually published his book outside of Israel, in Beirut.

Publishing material such as Spiro's is not much of an issue today. However, bringing Palestinian stories such as these into an Israeli school still feels like subversive educational work. In a single paragraph Adham presented the logic of semi-nomadic Bedouin life, changing sites according to seasons. Adham's family at first seemed to protect their son from making too much trouble and having him report to the class why it is that they left their land. They readily elaborated on this when they felt comfortable that it would not present a problem. What Adham was describing was a regular annual route that Bedouin tribes took on their respective land. They did not arbitrarily wander from one place to the next, as is often assumed. The tribes recognized each other's land ownership as did the Turkish and later British authorities until 1948. Adham's story led to discussion of the customs and culture that developed in order to sustain their community in desert conditions. We also learn that Adham's final sentence, "When he went to Lod he left the sheep..." somewhat passively describes Israel's expropriation of vast tracts of Bedouin land and resettlement of much of the Bedouin population. This has led to extreme social challenges that are far from resolved in the Bedouin communities. Bedouin society in Israel is characterized by a particularly low socio-economic status and by academic underachievement. The Bedouins are stigmatized by other Arab groups. While socio-economic status, academic achievement and stigmas were not part of the discussion in this class, the Arab children were certainly aware of the poor reputations of the Bedouin neighborhoods of Lod. Coming from one of these neighborhoods, this was a valuable

³⁸ Gutman, *Memory Activism*

³⁹ This silence is a common theme, not only appearing in Gutman's book but in Palestinian literature and in my own interviews with Palestinian teachers in the WAS/NS school. See for example Bisharat's brief article in Haaretz: Odeh Bisharat, "November 8, 1966: Military Rule on Israeli Arabs Lifted" June 16, 2013 in <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/1.5280516> (Accessed May 29th, 2019)

opportunity for Adham to present to his Arab peers what brought his family to the town. Adham's description of Bedouin life was as new to the other Arabs in the class as it was to the Jews.

Continuing to look into Samira's story, we learn that the Israeli army destroyed the village of Ghabsia and that Samira's grandparents raised their family in a Palestinian village adjacent to where their village once was. Her father grew up with the experience of being an "internal refugee," referring to those Palestinians who, like Adham's family, lost their homes and land but managed to remain in the country. Long after the school year was over Samira's father told me that he and his siblings had never heard their mother bring up the traumatic childhood memories that she related here until Samira, her granddaughter, turned to her for a story for this project.

The Jewish children's stories are told against the background of a more familiar context supported in the public sphere by the state's education system, the "Zionist commemorative narrative"⁴⁰ and the media. They do not need to elaborate on the Holocaust or explain the Zionist education that brought their families to Israel. Noga, however, brought discussion to less familiar territory. Her question about her grandmother Eva's French mother language in Algeria provided a wonderful opportunity to look at European colonialism and at the principle of divide and rule that facilitated it. We later learned that Eva's parents spoke to each other in Arabic and that Eva actually represented the first generation in her family that did not speak it. Under French rule, Jews and Christians in Algeria were granted automatic French citizenship while the Muslims had to apply for it. In two or three generations, the French had succeeded to erase the Arabic language of the land for the Jewish population of Algeria and to replace it with French. No longer sharing a common mother language, Eva experienced the Muslims in the market as the Arab "other" who spoke to her in French. It then sounded natural when she said that most of the Algerian Jews went to France when Algeria gained its independence. They had become French and had left Algeria in order to remain in France. Eva's story was useful not only for discussion of colonialism, but for discussions of how national and other social identities can be made available and be chosen.

Discussion

Each of the Palestinian children in the class — not only those represented here — presented stories about upheaval in their families' lives as they lost their land and began to contend with a new reality of becoming part of a discriminated minority group. The Jews played a central role in the Palestinians' stories. The Palestinians, on the other hand, did not make an appearance in any of the stories that the Jewish children in the class brought from home. Discussion of upheaval that drove the Jews' family history in one direction or another was generally about

⁴⁰ Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*

events that preceded the family's immigration to Israel. There was mention of Eva's brother going to Israel in order to fight in the War of Independence, but other than that it came much more naturally to the Jewish families to tell their stories without needing to mention the Palestinians. This asymmetry connects to an array of issues beyond the scope of this chapter regarding the ways in which Jews and Palestinians, as majority and minority groups in Israel, are positioned. The Palestinians in Israel contend with life on the majority group's terms. It is generally assumed that they speak Hebrew well. Their familiarity with Jewish society is incomparably better than the Jews' familiarity with Palestinian Arab society.⁴¹ Regarding the study of history, this positioning connects to the capacity of the Zionist master narrative to weave a story that, at best, ignores the Palestinians' experience.

In an education system hostile to alternative texts, conducting work in the classroom that begins with family stories from different parts of the spectrum enabled us to produce material relevant to the children and beyond the reach of the gatekeepers of Israeli history teaching. The stories served as snapshots from the family past, raising questions, as obscure family photos often do: "What issues were these people dealing with, what options did the families face, what choices did they make and what are the consequences of these choices?" This was not a meeting of conflicting historical narratives. The stories were more like pieces of an incomplete puzzle that we worked on together to see how they fit, what's missing, how they position us and how they lead us to the same classroom. The work then invited discussion of the kind of society we might want to build in light of the picture that we receive.

While a project like this is not likely to replace conventional history study in school, it can certainly contribute to preparing the students with a critical perspective when, in the following years, they confront the official textbooks. What is less obvious is that this direction of work also challenged the position of the Palestinian-Jewish school in which it took place. The discussion in the project was not about strengthening each group's national identity as the school regularly advocates, but about examining what leads us to identify ourselves as we do in a given time and place. The project resonated with Bekerman's criticism of the integrated schools' identity politics and with his call to direct educational work towards an understanding of identities as "fluid, changing, negotiated definitions that recognize individuals as co-participants in complex socio-historical-political contexts."⁴² Responding to Bekerman's call is easier said than done. Educational practice with this aim in mind has to be adapted to possibilities and constraints of very different classroom contexts. In most contexts in Israel, teachers who attempt to tackle this task may risk losing their jobs. Educational work that examines identities as fluid and negotiated, and that targets the creation of a socially just

⁴¹ It is unusual to find Israeli-born Jews who can conduct discussion in Arabic. There were periods at which Arabic language study would most likely have disappeared altogether from the curriculum of Israel's Jewish schools had it not been for the intervention of Israel's security branches interested in preparing youth for service in the intelligence. For more on the motivation and orientation of Arabic instruction for Jewish citizens see: Yonatan Mendel, *The Creation of Israeli Arabic*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014

⁴² Bekerman, *Identity versus Peace: Identity Wins*. p. 80

society, will strike at the foundation of a national ideology that espouses preferential rights for one group of citizens over another.