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MEMORIAL  
TRUST

Michael Davies 2015

**A project to improve the way the  
history of the Middle East is taught in  
British Schools**

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## **Brief Biography of the Author**

Michael Davies is a history teacher at Lancaster Royal Grammar School, a boys' state selective school in the North West of England. He is particularly interested in the way the teaching of history can play a role in either prolonging or resolving conflicts. He leads study visits to Ireland most years and two years ago took a school group to Israel and Palestine.

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## **Executive Summary**

As part of a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship I visited Israel, Palestine, also known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), and the West Bank and Jordan in July and August in order to research the following questions;

How is the history of the Middle East taught in their own schools?

What can we adopt for use in UK schools to improve the way we teach the history of the Middle East?

The major findings were that;

History is taught very differently in different types of schools (e.g. religious schools have a different approach from secular schools in Israel) and in the three different school systems governed by different educational ministries in Israel, the OPT and Jordan.

While there is little evidence of denigration of 'the other' in school textbooks, the different historical narratives presented ignore or downplay the history of the other side and emphasise those events which justify the political claims of their own side.

The teaching of history has been a hot topic over many years and there is plenty of academic research in the area. There is one book in particular called '*Side by Side*' which contains the two competing histories of the area from Palestinian and Israeli perspectives which has been impossible to use in schools in the area but could form the base of a new approach in the UK.

## **Introduction and Background to the project**

In the 15 years I have been teaching history in a northern state school I have been struck by two things. Students are always interested in the history of the countries in which Britain has a current involvement (e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq) and students are always intrigued by the way in which history is twisted or selected to justify a sectarian or nationalist position within disputes which are still alive. I first became aware of this when taking sixth form boys to Ireland on study trips. The Southern Ireland part of the visit would go like any other school history trip, but when we got to Belfast and talked to Orange Men, Sinn Fein, and ex IRA and UDA/UVF prisoners the students became much more interested. They were fascinated to hear competing histories being articulated with such passionate belief by opposing sides.

It was partly based on this realisation that students were ‘switched onto’ history through looking at history of real and recent conflicts that I decided to teach the history of the conflict in Israel and Palestine. It’s quite a difficult thing to do, because it’s such a politically sensitive subject. It arouses strong emotions among both Muslim and Jewish students and their parents, and as a result, teachers tend to shy away from it, for fear of being accused of coming down on one side or the other, or being caught in the firing line of conflicting claims and opinions. And yet it’s essential, I believe, that we do teach it, because if this present generation of students doesn’t grasp how the conflict came about and why it is so difficult to resolve – how can we in the West ever hope to play any role in bringing about a workable solution? The problem in teaching this is that the history of the conflict is so fiercely contested. Put simply, the Jewish people tell it one way and the Arab people tell it another. What’s happened in the UK is that history text books which do cover the conflict tend to take cover in the middle position between the two narrative extremes and have, therefore, produced a watered down account of the history, which neither does justice to the truth nor captures the fervour, rigidity and exclusivity of each side’s historical claims. So it was with this in mind I applied for the WCMT Fellowship this summer to visit Israel and Palestine on a Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship to talk to Jewish and Palestinian academics and teachers about how they teach their respective histories.

There was one other factor I considered. Currently Muslim students are under-represented in the cohort of A level students and I have a suspicion that part of the reason for that is because most schools don’t offer A level syllabuses which deal with historical areas of special interest to Muslims, e.g. Israel/Palestine. So if more schools offer this topic there will be more British Muslims engaging in debate and discussion about Britain’s colonial record in the Middle East and the more recent history of the conflict. This is a worthwhile end in itself.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Offices advises UK citizens not to travel to Gaza, and the WCMT endorse that advice, so I excluded it from my travel plans.

## **Objectives and purpose of the project**

- 1) To try and find a better way of teaching the conflict in the UK – to develop a curriculum which takes account of the two competing narratives and enables students to look beyond and behind the propaganda.
- 2) To find a way of publicising this initiative in the UK via a newspaper article in the Times Educational Supplement or the education pages of The Guardian.
- 3) To research how the book has been used in the colleges in the USA
- 4) To identify a body/organisation with access to or influence with the Department of Education which would take up my proposal.
- 5) To make some links with academics in Israel, Palestine and Jordan.

## **Research Methodology**

I realised that in order to fully understand the competing narratives I would need to talk to historians based in universities who could provide an academic overview, teachers in schools, and whenever possible ordinary citizens who had been through the educational system, or school students who were still inside it. I also realised that it would be impossible to make my research methodology ‘scientific’ as I didn't have the time and resources. However, the objective was not to write a report about history teaching in the Middle East, but rather to find out broadly what was taught, and then use that as stimulus material in UK schools.

There are at least four significant different school systems in Israel. Most Jewish Israelis are educated in Hebrew in the state sector, but religious students (Orthodox and Ultra Orthodox) have their own system and separate syllabus with a much stronger emphasis on the study of the Torah, and less emphasis on science. Arab Israelis are educated in the Arabic language, some in Arabic state schools and some in private, often Christian run, schools.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories there are two main school systems. About 60% of students attend schools run by the Palestinian Authority and 40% of students, mainly those from the refugee camps, attend schools run by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Administration).

In Jordan most education is provided through state schools but wealthier families often opt for private schools.

In all three systems there is a central control over the provision of school textbooks. In Israel it is normal for the head of the committee reviewing and approving books to be replaced when one government succeeds another. In the OPT one party (Fatah) monopolises political power so the education ministry toes the Fatah line

## **Report overview**

It will come as no surprise, but it needs to be stated and explained, that history is taught very differently in Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian schools. In fact it quickly became apparent to me that mastering the Palestinian and Israeli narratives was challenge enough for six weeks, and that adding in a third narrative from Jordan while very interesting (King Hussein's actions vis à vis the Israelis in the 1967 war are highly contested) would over-complicate the project and perhaps dilute the stark duality of the two main competing narratives.

So the report focuses on Israel and Palestine. The narratives of both, about the distant past, are not too dissimilar, but they diverge in the last century. For Dr Hillel Cohen of Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the crucial year when these two separate and conflicting narratives began was 1929; a dozen years after the Balfour Declaration promised the Jews that they would have a homeland in Palestine. Until 1929, the established majority Arab community and the growing Jewish minority had lived in relative harmony, but for reasons that are hotly contested, communal violence erupted in several cities and in the process of mutual blaming and recrimination, and each side began to develop its own separate history - two separate narratives which, argues Cohen, have moved further apart over time.

Thus, for example, the year 1948 was for the Jews a glorious year in which they fought a national war for independence. For the Arabs, on the other hand, 1948 was the year of the *Naqba* - Disaster - which led to the loss of their homes and lands.

1967, meanwhile, has gone down in history, for the Jews, as the year when they faced down the combined attacks of four Arab countries and liberated the rest of the 'Land of Israel'. For the Arabs, 1967 marks the beginning of a hostile military occupation which has lasted for nearly 50 years.

Fast forward to the mid 90s and the Oslo Accords. Modern Israeli history teaches that this led to the creation of an independent Palestinian government in the West Bank with full responsibility for health, education and policing the West Bank. The way the Arabs see it and teach it couldn't be

more different: they say that the same Accords have led to a form of apartheid akin to the system operated by the white settler governments in South Africa. They say that they have been left with only limited control within just 18% of the West Bank while there has been unlimited Jewish settlement in the other 82%.

And then, in another example, there's the wall. Arabs say that the wall built between the West Bank and Israel is a pretext for seizing more Palestinian land and strangling Palestinian economic life, whereas most Jews say it's an essential part of Israel's security, pointing to the cessation of suicide attacks since its erection.

Six weeks in, after hours of interviews and discussions, it was clear that I could pick any date, any event, any archaeological artefact, and it would produce a different story, a different interpretation, depending on who I was talking to.

## **Findings**

I have organised my findings into five themes: History experienced outside the classroom or university, History at university, History in schools, the PRIME initiative, and lastly, attitudes to Winston Churchill and Britain. I have split each theme into two sections, Israel and Palestine.

### **1. History experienced outside the classroom or university**

I have started with this theme because over the weeks of interviews I became aware that most ordinary people received most of their history outside formal education.

#### **Israel:**

It is very clear that the history of the Jewish people is an idea which is communicated in many different ways. It's certainly taught as much outside the classroom as it is inside. Many people I talked to in Israel said that they had learnt the history that they actually remembered from their family. The state also plays a role too. One example which illustrates this is state funded archaeology focused on uncovering evidence of Jewish presence, and in particular Jewish worship. Given the continuous occupation of the land for the last 10,000 years it impossible to dig without uncovering remnants of the past. You might find British Mandate (only 30 years but it produced many public buildings), the Ottomans (about 400 years), Mamluks (250 years), Crusaders (about 200 years), Arabs (500 years), Byzantine (300 years) Romans either directly or through proxies like Herod the Great (400 years), the Hasmonean dynasty (100 years), Seleucid Greeks (250 years), Persians (200 years), Babylonians (50 years), Assyrians (100 years), chaos between 930-

730 BCE and the Kingdom of David 1000-931 BCE. Across all these 30 centuries Judaism was probably the religion of the majority of the inhabitants for about 10 centuries but archaeologists admit that this is little more than a good guess. The archaeology which the state funds, critics argue is invariably directed towards establishing a case for a Jewish historical presence, which is then used to buttress arguments for ownership of the land. Critics say this is Judaicising history at the expense of other cultures in the past.

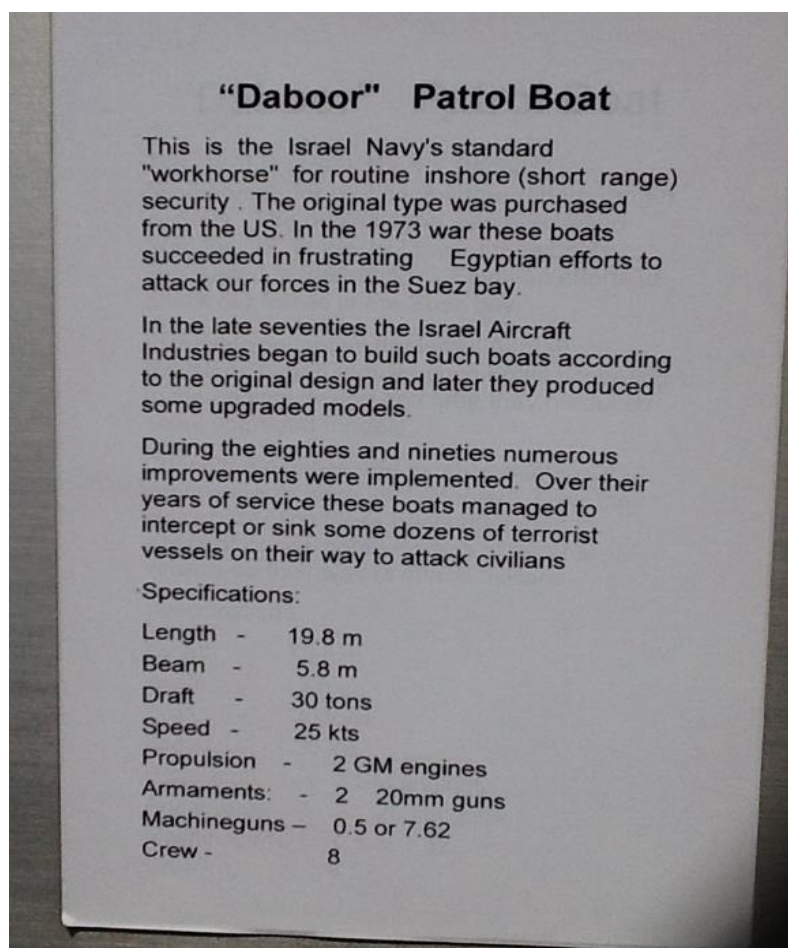
An example of this is the map produced by the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority on the back of their brochure about Herodium, the archaeological site of Herod the Great's burial, a few miles south of Bethlehem in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but in Zone C, which is fully controlled by Israel. Note first that there is no border shown between Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and second that of sixty-nine sites of interest listed which cover Jewish, Roman, and early Christian heritage, there is not a single Arab or Ottoman remain listed.



*The back of the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority brochure about Herodium, West Bank*



Successive Israeli governments, often funded by donations from Jewish benefactors in North America, have built many museums which tell the story of exile and return. The campus Museum in Tel Aviv University shows Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem documents the Holocaust and the flight of survivors to Eretz Israel, the Ministry of Defence Clandestine Immigration and Navy Museum in Haifa shows the struggle against British Mandate forces in order to smuggle immigrants into the country. The common theme is that Jewish people can expect no help from other countries and must look to themselves for their own salvation and security. I've included below a photograph of one of the exhibition signs in the Navy Museum in Haifa which illustrates the point that there is a subjectivity and sense of national pride in the historical approach taken which would be viewed as inappropriate in, say, the Imperial War Museum in London. But this approach may be changing. In conversation the Director of the Museum, Nir Maor, an ex-submariner rather than an academic, readily admitted that the signage needed updating and also translating into Arabic as well as English. He said 'that alone will cause a rethink about phrases like 'our forces'.



*An exhibition sign in the Navy Museum in Haifa Israel*

## **Palestine:**

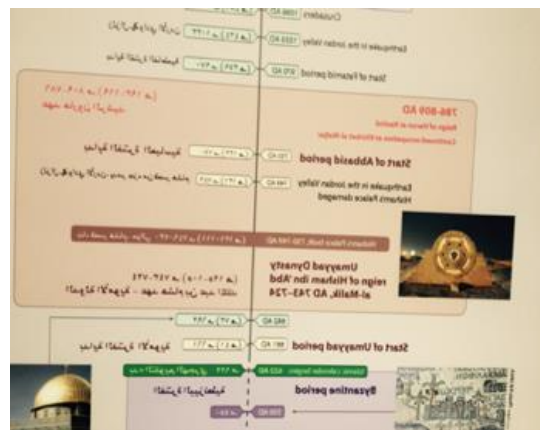
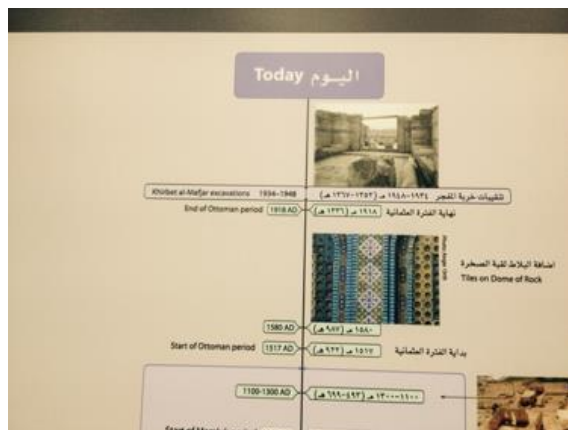
From talking to Palestinians in cafes, buses and hotels one is made quickly aware that, just as in Israel, history is too important to be left confined to the classroom, and there is a very strong oral tradition of folk history. Conversations can be divided into two types: ‘my family have lived here for umpteen generations’, or ‘my grandparents fled from Jaffa/Haifa in 1948 and my father has taken us back to see the house and the land that we lost’. The model of a key that some refugee camps have above their entrance symbolises this idea that the refugees are only temporarily displaced and are waiting to return. Their historical arguments are often more personal (‘we were forced to leave our house with nothing but what we could carry’) than the average Israeli who might see his/her own story within the broader sweep of world history in the middle decades of the C20th. The Palestinian attitude to history can best be explained by this piece of graffiti on the wall that bounds the back garden of the Greek Orthodox bishop in Nazareth. Here is a photograph of part of it.



*Part of an extended graffiti on a wall in Nazareth*

What is written is a small verse from the end of Tawfiq Zayyad's poem 'Niran Al'Majus', which translates as 'Fire of the Magus', i.e. Fire of the Fire Worshipers. His metaphor was, as I understand it, that the Palestinian revolution is not like a match that only burns once and turns into ashes. Rather, it keeps burning like the Fire of the Magus from birth to death, and it is passed on from ancestors to descendants. And then comes the verse which is the words pictured in the graffiti: "...we're not in a hurry, we have patience...because the function of history is to walk as we dictate", i.e. in accord with our steps. It's a poem which Palestinians agree is open to interpretation but I would take it to mean that the primary purpose of history is to remind the Palestinian people of their struggle.

In terms of archaeology the Palestinian Authority (PA) doesn't have the funds to match the Israelis, but this photograph taken of signage at Hisham's Palace (he was an Islamic ruler c.700 C.E. and this was his winter palace in Jericho) is the counterpoint to the Herodium leaflet shown above. This timeline from pre-history up to today shows every successive set of rulers, but the Hebrew kingdoms are nowhere to be found.



Signage from Hisham's Palace Jericho, West Bank showing a timeline from pre-history up to today with every successive set of rulers except the Hebrew kingdoms..

## 2. Academic History in universities

### **Israel:**

Revisionist historians (e.g. Shlomo Sands, Avi Shlaim, and Ilan Pappé) argue that the connection between the modern day Israelis and the Biblical Hebrew tribes is a relatively modern historical construction, and suggest that the idea of a mass exile in CE 140 is highly unlikely. They also question the centrality of Jerusalem to the Jewish people since, given the choice over the last millennia, Jews have usually opted to live elsewhere, as is still the case (a narrow majority of Jews live outside Israel). Among more mainstream historians (Benny Morris) there is now an acceptance that there was a Palestinian people, that during the war of 1948 this people was dispossessed, and that some massacres of Palestinian civilians took place. However, he argues, given the context in terms of the Holocaust and the acts of violence by Arabs on Jews, these acts were a regrettable necessity in order to assure the creation of a viable Israeli state. Norman Finklestein, a controversial USA historian and author of 'The Holocaust Industry', argues that the commemoration of this uniquely awful event is being over-used to shield the Israeli state from criticism for its oppression of Palestinians. Younger historians like Hillel Cohen takes the very radical view that the whole Israeli 'project' is based on an elaborate constructed history, and that Israeli and Palestinian narratives have been moving ever further apart since the riots of 1929. Cohen points out that in spite of an on-off peace process over the last decades there is in reality no overlap between the historical understanding of the most left wing dove-ish Israeli and the most pragmatic, conciliatory and dove-ish Palestinian. The Israeli would believe that the Jewish people do have a legitimate claim to at least part of Israel on moral and historical grounds, and the Palestinian would simply say that they did not, even if he or she were prepared to recognise Israel as a *fait accompli*. The fact that these critical and self-questioning views are to be heard at top Israeli universities is to the credit of the Israeli political system which protects academic freedom. However, two of the academics I interviewed said that the political climate was changing and it was becoming harder to be 'dissident'. Dr Cohen said that his lectures and seminars were routinely recorded by right wing students, and there was an Israeli online site modelled on the U.S. based Campus Watch which attacks academics who criticise Israel.

### **Palestine:**

In Palestine, by contrast, there is less academic freedom and academic tenure is less secure. Critics of the Fatah dominated Palestinian Authority like Professor Sattar

Kassem, recently retired from An-Najah University in Nablus has been imprisoned almost as much by the PA as he has by Israel for his criticism of what he sees as the corrupt, unrepresentative and collaborationist government in Ramallah. It is therefore harder to find academics willing to talk openly about the current situation unless they are in harmony with the Palestinian Authority's stated position. However, while Palestinian historians may disagree about the progress made since the Oslo Accords in the mid 1990s and the creation of the Palestinian Authority, there is a pretty much accepted narrative of the history of the area up to that point. In fact all students, whatever their degree choice, are required to take a course in Palestinian history which explains the pre-Islamic, Islamic and Crusader history, as well as the origins of the current conflict. Political Science is a much more popular course than History perhaps because it deals directly with the causes of the conflict and includes analysis of geopolitics and geography, as well as the ideological underpinnings of ideas like Zionism, Palestinian nationalism, or its rival Islamism. I met a number of ex-prisoners (that's not hard - about 40% of Palestinians living in the OPT have been in an Israeli prison) who had taken Political Science degrees upon their release. Overall the impression I received from talking to Palestinians studying or teaching in university was that while some students wanted to study History for its own sake, there were more who wanted to study the History of the Palestinians and their 'Cause' as part of a Political Science degree. They were more interested in getting degrees which would explain the past in terms of their current predicament and would lead to political solutions. This reminded me a little of my visits to Belfast to talk to ex-IRA prisoners who had used their university degree in politics or social sciences to move out of the armed struggle and into politics. One particular conversation I had with a senior Fatah man in Nablus who had spent 14 years in an Israeli gaol was revealing. Having heard that I was a history teacher he accosted me and asked, 'Is it really true that more than 5 million Jews died in the Holocaust?' To him that seemed impossible. How could the Germans have done it, and how could they have kept it secret till after the war? He seemed satisfied but a bit disappointed and certainly troubled when I replied that the number 5-6 million was proven and that the Germans had kept very good records. His discomfiture was precisely because he was being forced to accept a historical reality that conflicted with an ideological stance. As Edward Said, the Palestinian-Christian-Arab intellectual, said: 'Our problem is that we are victims of victims'.



### 3. History inside the classroom

#### **Israel:**

The fact that my Fellowship coincided with Israeli school holidays was always going to make it difficult to see teachers teaching in the classroom. But over six weeks I was able to make a lot of teacher contacts, although I only got to talk to a few, often where I had a prior personal connection. I would explain to what the project was, and then watch as their enthusiasm to put me in touch with a colleague or friend visibly waned. The idea that their history, and the Palestinians' history, might be held up side by side for scrutiny is uncomfortable, especially for the dominant narrative. The analogy would be to think how a climate change scientist might feel if it was suggested that his science should be put alongside the science of a climate change sceptic in a single book. There may be another factor in play here which is one of self-censorship. Unlike their outspoken colleagues in university, school teachers don't have any tenure. In 2014 an Israeli High School teacher Adam Verete was denounced by a student for having said that in his personal opinion 'the IDF was not the most moral army in the world'. The school board asked him to resign which he refused to do, but he was fired later that year as a part of budget cuts. He was also targeted with violent threats on social media and the Education Ministry's failure to defend him was commented on in the 'left of centre' Israeli press.

However I have been able to talk to lots of young people in casual conversations on buses or in cafes and when I ask them what they have studied about their own history they say Jewish history, the Nazis and the Holocaust, and the founding of Israel as a homeland for Jews from all over the world. I asked a young man I met wearing a Che Guevara T -shirt on the campus of Tel Aviv university, where he was doing a Masters in geophysics/climate science, if he felt his history teaching had been one-sided, and he replied, 'Well, after you've studied the Holocaust, it's difficult for there to be another side'. He also explained that he had really enjoyed his 3 years military service as he had been allocated to the Intelligence corps where he said 'I spent my days listening to Arabs chatter on the telephone.' He was typical of bright articulate students I met who one might call 'progressive' on all issues except national security.

#### **Palestine:**

I was able to talk both to a history teacher in an UNRWA refugee camp school as well as an UNRWA school inspector. The young teacher painted a picture of censorship in the

classroom when it came to any discussion of history and politics but said it was fine for him to go through the ‘older’ history. He claimed that, for example, it was not allowed to put up a Palestinian flag in the classroom. The school inspector with thirty-five years experience painted a different picture; he said it was perfectly allowable to put up a Palestinian flag in an UNRWA classroom if the UN flag was there too. He suggested that the young teacher might be paranoid because teaching jobs were scarce and the UN was cutting positions. Indeed in August UNRWA teachers had been told that schools would not be opening in September because there was no money. This may be a surprise to readers and is worth a quick explanation. The prima facie reason the budget has to be cut is because UNRWA has had additional expenses providing aid to refugees from the Syrian and Iraqi wars, but beyond that, many Arab countries who might be expected to contribute don’t, because they believe that propping up UNRWA in Palestine is actually only making the Occupation bearable and therefore prolonging it. In fact what happened was that right at the end of August, the Kuwaiti Government stepped in with an emergency pledge of \$15m to tide the schools over for the first few weeks of the school year.

Fortunately for my research there have been a number of academic studies published on the school text books used in Israeli and Palestinian schools, mainly done as a by-product of the peace process. The Israeli government has often accused the PA of allowing school textbooks which demonised Israel and taught children to hate Jews. They made the withdrawal of these books a precondition for future concessions on the Israeli side. The PA has always claimed that the Israeli accusation was not true, so the USA State Department has funded a number of very comprehensive studies of textbooks used in all sorts of different schools. The findings were that there was very little evidence of demonisation or name-calling of the other in either of the state school systems. What was more noticeable was that the other side was simply absent or ignored. Both sides were guilty of distorting history. Where there was in fact evidence of denigration based on racial stereotyping it was about Arabs and it was found occasionally in the textbooks used in Ultra Orthodox schools. The Israeli government rejected the report as flawed and biased.

#### **4. The PRIME initiative**

The discovery of this project and book was the single finding which has given me most confidence that I can turn this Fellowship from a set of recommendations into something real. In the early 2000s a group of Israeli and Palestinian academics and teachers set out, with a grant from the U.S. State department and under the auspices of PRIME (Peace

Research in the Middle East) to write a combined history of the Jewish and Arab peoples in the hope of once and for all reconciling these two competing stories. What happened to the book is as interesting and significant as the impulse behind it. To begin with, the authors soon realised it couldn't be done in the way that they'd hoped – not while the conflict remains unresolved. Or as Professor Eyal Naveh of Tel Aviv University and one of the Israeli project leaders, puts it: 'This might be possible in a post conflict situation, but it was not possible in an 'in conflict' situation.'

So the authors decided to try the next best thing: to at the least write their own separate narratives and then place them side by side, in Hebrew and in Arabic, on the opposite pages of a single book. It didn't work out. In Israel, says Professor Naveh, every book used in schools has to be passed by an Education Ministry committee and they knew that their book would stand no chance of approval. So they decided to discretely introduce the book in a couple of pilot schools through extracurricular programmes. Within three weeks parents had complained and the book was withdrawn. In Palestine, meanwhile, a thousand copies are still sitting in an apartment, deemed too inflammatory to distribute in any way. I have contacted the Palestinian co-author Professor Sami Adwan on numerous occasions asking for his comments but without success. It was strongly hinted to me on the Israeli side that while they had been criticised for their part in the project, the Palestinian contributors had been physically threatened.

It is, in so many ways, a depressing story, that such a brave collaborative project should come to nothing. But my hope is that some good can come of it by using the same side-by-side approach to develop a new curriculum in the UK for teaching this seemingly intractable conflict. By giving students extracts from the book in its English translation, supplemented by access to a wide range of documentary source evidence, either in English or translated from Arabic and Hebrew, we can challenge them to look behind the propaganda and work out what the most truthful narrative is. This is of course an almost impossible task but they will discover, crucially, that all history is politicised and all nations, especially young or aspirant nations, tell themselves a history which self-justifies. As Hebrew University's Dr Cohen says, 'There are really two kinds of people, those who understand that history is constructed, and those who don't.' It's an approach, furthermore, that offers Muslim students a sense that their voice is being listened to, that their stories are being heard and studied. It's an approach which, I hope, will mean that they will no longer be, as they are now, underrepresented in classes of secondary students who choose to study history at A level.



## 5. Attitudes to Winston Churchill and Britain

### Israel

The absolutely critical relationship for Israel and Israelis is with the USA, and it would be hard to overstate how this focus pushes the rest of the world into the margins in terms of Israelis' consciousness. There are of course historic references found in street names to famous Britons and many cities have a Balfour Street and an Allenby Street, as well as place name references to British Jewish philanthropists like Moses Montefiori and Lord Rothschild, but in the main the historical lesson being drawn is 'Jews have always had to find their own salvation. We cannot rely on anyone else'. The Holocaust Museum Yad Vashem is critical of the British and American failure to bomb the railway lines into Auschwitz in 1944 after evidence of the Final Solution had been presented to government officials in Washington. In Haifa the Museum of Clandestine Immigration criticises the British policy of intercepting 'illegals' and shipping refugees back to Cyprus. In terms of how Churchill is remembered there's very little. As the Iran nuclear deal debate rages, the Likud party has made a rather half-hearted attempt to invoke Munich in '38, with Prime Minister Netanyahu cast as Churchill, President Obama as Chamberlain, and the Iranians as the Nazis. And in 2012 a bust of Winston Churchill was unveiled in Jerusalem. There was good press coverage at the event (see the Telegraph below). However, the British Ambassador's comment at the time that Churchill was 'a forgotten friend' of Israel was rather prescient as his bust has been now tucked away in a dusty corner. It took me an hour to find him!



*Telegraph report of the unveiling in 2012*



*Photograph of the bust in August 2015*

## **Palestine**

Palestinian Arabs seem to be very good at distinguishing between governments and people and so while the British government is not held in high regard, this doesn't result in any anti-British animus. The Palestinians, with some justification, believe that they were betrayed by the British during the First World War. In 1915 at the instigation of Lawrence of Arabia, the British promised an Arab state in the Middle East as a reward for the Arabs starting a revolt against Germany's ally, the Ottoman Empire. Yet in 1917, Balfour issued his declaration that the same area would also provide a homeland for the Jews, and to add insult to injury, later the same year the Bolshevik revolutionaries published Tsarist diplomatic correspondence which exposed the Sykes/Picot plan. This was the plan hatched by the foreign ministers of Britain and France to simply divide the whole of the Middle East wrested from the Ottoman into two areas of imperial control. Certainly Palestinians understand their history in terms of western colonialism – once when a stall holder in the market in Nablus called out to me, 'Where you from?' and, tired of apologising for Balfour and Blair, I said 'Ireland', he replied, 'Ah...you had the same problem we have now'. But Palestinians also recognise that British power has long gone; as one man put it to me, 'You were the head of the snake once, but now it is the Americans'.

## **To what extent did you achieve your original aims and objectives?**

- 1) To try and find a better way of teaching the conflict in the UK – to develop a curriculum which takes account of the two competing narratives and enables students to look beyond and behind the propaganda.

*The most helpful conversations I had were with Professor Eyal Naveh in Tel Aviv about the book 'Side By Side' which does much of the academic legwork needed to create competing narratives, already translated to English. The book however does not include any source documents and I now need to find or develop a 'master list' of source documents to be used in conjunction with passages from the book.*

- 2) To find a way of publicising this initiative in the UK via a newspaper article in the Times Educational Supplement or the education pages of The Guardian.

*I pitched an article to Alice Whalley the editor of the Education pages at the Guardian and she has asked for 1000 words on the project, due for publication in September.*

- 3) To research how the book 'Side by Side' been used in the colleges in the USA.

*At my request New Press the publisher has written to the 21 schools and colleges in the USA who bought the book asking them to take part in my survey below.*

*1. Were your classes mixed: Jews, Muslims, Christians?*

*2. In terms of your students' learning, which of these statements would you agree with?*

*a) They came away with a better understanding of the history of Israel and Palestine*

*b) They understand that all history is constructed to serve a purpose*

*c) They were confused by the two accounts and would have preferred a single 'middle ground' approach*

*d) They started the course with a strong bias to one side or the other and by the end they had more of a balanced perspective?*

*(I offer these questions as stimulus, but if you would prefer to answer in your own words that's even better!)*

*3. In the original Hebrew/Arabic textbook the publishers left a blank space in the middle of each page for the students own account. Would you like to see that in the English edition, or is that expecting too much from students?*

*4. Did you expect students to use the book in conjunction with source documents, and if so what documents did you direct them to?*

*Seven so far have responded with some very interesting and encouraging comments. Not all the institutions had used the book in the same way (for some it was quite central and for others it was another book on a reading list) but they responded positively to the core the questions about what their students learnt.*

- 4) To identify a body/organisation with access to or influence with the Department of Education which would take up and support my proposal.

*I have been in contact with Mohammed Amin, a trustee of Curriculum for Cohesion to present my report and seek their support.*

- 5) To forge links with academics in Israel, Palestine and Jordan.

*I've done this successfully in Palestine and Israel (within mainstream education) and to a lesser extent in Jordan. The New Askar refugee camp is keen to start a lunchtime Skype club for students to practise their English and teach beginners Arabic.*

## **Recommendations/Next Steps**

In terms of the broad recommendations to other teachers in the UK which I could make now;

1. Don't be worried about tackling the Middle East because 'it's so complicated'. It's not complicated, it's just controversial, but because of that it's interesting and rewarding to teach.
2. Adopt a teaching strategy of using parallel and competing narratives and challenge the students to pick their way towards a better understanding of what happened. If you feel you could use '*Side by Side*' before it's been adapted for schools then it's available in the UK from New Press' UK distributor, Turnaround. I can also recommend '*Under the Lemon Tree*' by Sandy Tolan for use at Key Stage 4 and 5.

However, there's plenty more to be done make the Middle East easier to teach and more popular with students, and I plan to use the next year to continue working on this. The Fellowship has given me the confidence that my goal is both achievable and worthwhile.

Until my return to the UK I had envisioned that the 'end product' of the Fellowship would simply be a revised edition of the book '*Side by Side*' made suitable for use in British schools. However after several discussions with other teachers I realise that there is a bigger opportunity in repackaging and expanding on the material in the book, through developing an interactive website.

So my revised 'Next Steps' are;

1. Find an educational foundation willing to purchase the UK rights to adapt the material in '*Side by Side*' for use in British schools and fund website development.
2. Develop a master list of background documents and source evidence. Students would be expected to use these to test the validity of the competing narratives.

3. Build an immersive web-based experience which allows the student to explore the two competing narratives through as wide a range of media as I can put together. The extracts from the book would provide the 'spine', but the film clips, oral testimony, music, recipes etc. would put flesh on the bones and bring it all to life. I want to build in a control so that if for example you listen to an oral testimony from a Naqba refugee then the site won't let you continue until you've listened to an oral testimony from a Holocaust refugee.
  
4. Meet with exam boards to persuade them to endorse a new way of teaching the Middle East and recommend the website.

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And last but by no means least, the team at WCMT

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