

**Luboš Studený**

**Monopol na pravdu. Revize pohledu na poválečnou  
minulost v Česku a v Izraeli (bakalářská práce, FF UK 2015)**

Oponentský posudek  
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Lubos Studeny's bachelor work Monopol na pravdu. Revize pohledu na poválečnou minulost v Česku a v Izraeli is concentrating on a very interesting theme, one that definitely deserves further scrutiny. The author makes a valuable attempt at analyzing the existing literature on the topic in the Israeli case in a critical way, with some measure of success. His deconstruction of the ideologization and politicization of the debate in Israel are particularly convincing, and his criticism of the "new historiography", particularly of Benny Morris', belongs to the best part of the work.

However, the work is also fraught with a number of shortcomings.

First of all, the thesis presented on page 7 is self-fulfilling and seems to be lacking in relevance: the pointed out relationship between political hegemony and alternative discourse as described here serves as a weak working hypothesis. If an alternative narrative is formulated, then by definition the political hegemony is disrupted. The point is thus rather meek. It is a pity because the author's further analysis about how the Israeli new historiography tried to delegitimize zionism because it was born as a "sin" would have been a very interesting point to compare with the Czech dissidents claim that the Czech communist regime was the price to pay for another "original sin", the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans.

Secondly, the work fails to deliver on what is promised in the title, i.e. a comparison between the historiographical treatment of the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia and the expulsion of the Palestinians from Israel. The comparison itself amounts to a few general paragraphs and general statements on page 47 ("V obou případech je debata především bipolární a jde především o posouzení viny či nevinny") or there were "personal attacks" thrown at leaders in both countries. This is neither new nor very useful and mainly there is no analysis of the said comparison.

It is all the less convincing that the author's own outcome is far from being conclusive: "Oddělit odbornou debatu od moralizující však u tématu s tak vysokým aktualizačním

potenciálem zkrátka nejde a snažit se o to, je v současné situaci marné.” Yet the point of a historical analysis should precisely have been to separate and analyze what is “moralizující” and what is, or should have been, a “odborná debata.” The author himself points to very interesting elements, such as the use of the “threat”, of “guilt” or of “historical selectiveness” in both cases, as well as the radicalization of both the debate and its participants (“Zásadním problémem diskuse je to, že vstup do arény, kde se spor odehrává, nutně řadí např. historika na nějakou „stranu“ a přispívá tak spíš k radikalizaci. Místo hledání middle ground toto vede k polarizaci nových účastníků diskuse a škodí vědeckému výzkumu, neboť je to spor především politický a identitární. Práce tak nejsou hodnoceny podle toho, jak jsou kvalitní, ale podle toho, k jaké straně autor patří”, p. 40 - an excellent point that would justify a whole comparison by itself.)

Then, a number of remarks might be raised as concerns the bibliography and sources:

- as ambitious and right as it might be, such a work can hardly reach a sufficient level if the author does not speak the language of the country he is studying. We don't know how much is missing here. Of course the author warns about this himself, the question is rather for the future.

- where it was a good idea (although one that was not pursued very actively) to introduce literature as a source of historical reflexion, why doesn't the author use history school books (and army education) as a source? One can hardly find a media that is more relevant in constructing “collective memory.” The range of existing literature in English would greatly widen. He would find a much inspiration for instance the book by Nurit Peled-Elhanan, *Palestine in Israeli School Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education*.

- historical accounts or novels that are not literally works of historians but that sparked heated debate within Israeli society in the past years could and should also be used. *My Promised Land* by Ari Shavit especially comes to mind.

- similarly, why doesn't the author take into account the numerous civic projects that exist and that explicitly aim at comparing the Israeli and the Palestinian narratives on history? To give but one example, Jaffa Tours, led by Arab Israeli activist Sami Abu Shchade, organizes “mixed” walking tours of Jaffa where, on a number of landmarks, both the Israeli and the Palestinian narratives about a particular event relating to Jaffa's history, and notably the departure of its Arab population in 1948, are given.

- even more strikingly, why does the author not include the numerous and excellent Israeli documentary films (again, often made in tandem between an Israeli and a Palestinian) on Israeli/Palestinian history and namely on the expulsion and/or cohabitation of Israelis and Arab Israelis before, during, and after 1948? The film *Jaffa: The Orange's Clockwork* by Eyal Sivan would be a particularly pregnant example, analyzing the iconography of the Promised Land and the way Palestinians have

“disappeared” from it. But many other films explore the use and abuse of history in Israel, or simply help contextualizing the Israeli approach to history and/or to the Palestinian question and how it is informed by the Holocaust. See for instance *The Defamation* by Yoav Shamir, *The Flat* by Arnon Goldfinger (that would enlighten the author about the process of silence that characterizes the “second generation”), and many more.

- on the Czech issue, why does not the author not mention the work of the Czech-German and Czech-Austrian historical commissions, particularly the crucial numbering of the dead that redefined the terms of the debate in the 1990s?

Had the author explored these avenues and others, he would doubtlessly find that his claim about an alleged “lack of bibliography”, even in English, is not substantiated.

Another problematic aspect of the work is the author's lack of historical contextualization, not only within Israel (very little or nothing is mentioned first of all about the nakba itself, but also about the situation before and after in terms of Jewish-Palestinian relations, and crucially about the wave of terror attacks in the 2000s without which the Jewish narrative cannot be understood) but also in the world. There was a general renewal, or revision, of the historiography of the Second World War and its aftermath in the whole of the Western world in the 1960s-1970s and many of the author's interrogations about the specificity of the Israeli case would be greatly relativized.

Other remarks:

- a reflexion/definition of nation/territory is entirely missing.
- I am uneasy with the author's apparent endorsing of the disqualification of “new historians” on an ethno-nationalist basis as being “not really Israeli” (p. 29.).
- the discussion on whether or not history can be written in a non-ideological way (p. 38) seems rather pointless. At the latest since Marc Bloch (1943), we know that the historian can never be “objective” in the sense that he cannot be separated from the context in which he writes. History is in this sense always political/ideological; what is relevant, as the author notes it himself, is that the historian should employ a clearly defined methodology. As a side remark, the author would be well inspired to revisit Maurice Halbwachs as well, which would enlighten him on many of this interrogations on the concept of collective memory.
- the debate about the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans was stopped not by the communist regime but by the 1945-48 “democracy”.
- p. 44: what is a “dominantni pamet” supposed to be and since when does it “self-realizes”? If the Israeli example can be useful, it is to show that democracy and

freedom of speech do not necessarily prevent the ideologization of history.

- p. 46: The claim that the Czechs would have experienced a genuine debate on the expulsion if 1968 had succeeded is pure speculation.

- p. 48: the author's claim that the relations between the Czech Republic and Germany have quieted the debate is really off the mark. The diplomatic relations might have been good, but what about the noisy efforts of the Sudeten German organizations to delegitimize the Czech Republic and prevent it from entering the EU? And how about the way the tensions these attempts created within and outside of the Czech Republic have influenced Czech politics? It should be reminded here how Jan Sokol was discredited as a candidate to the presidency when it was rumored he was in favor of abrogating the Benes Decrees (the said Benes Decrees are, by the way, also missing in this work.)

- p. 50: The author claims that he addressed historical myths in Israel, and also in the Czech Republic: "jde například o mýtus oběti, jehož protireakce je vidět na diskusi o koncentračních táborech v Letech a Hodonínu u Kunštátu." Unless I am seriously mistaken, I did not see a word about this theme in the work itself.

For all these shortcomings but while taking into account the originality and difficulty of the topic, I propose the grade 3, or 2 if the author makes a particularly convincing oral defense of his work.

Muriel Blaive, PhD, 2 September 2015