



Racism and Violence: The Corollaries and Logical Implications of Political Zionism – by Dr. Sahar Huneidi

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Introduction

On 27 April 2021, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a groundbreaking report that provided evidence that the Israeli 'authorities have dispossessed, confined, forcibly separated, and subjugated Palestinians'. After thoroughly investigating Israel's laws, policies and practices, it accused Israel of apartheid and persecution, which are both crimes against humanity. In January of the same year B'tselem, a respected Israeli human rights organization, published a report that was entitled 'A Regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid'.¹

It is well-documented that Israel systematically discriminates against non-Jews, and Palestinians in particular. This, after all, is a country where the current prime minister openly boasted that 'Israel is not a state of all its citizens. According to the basic nationality law we passed, Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people – and only it'.

This raises the question of whether this racism is a recent phenomenon or if it was instead embedded in the original thinking of the founding Zionist leaders. This brief tries to answer this question by going back to the origins of the Zionist project and examining how it intersected with colonialism and race theories in the late 19th century. In asserting that Zionism is indeed inherently (both in theory and practice) racist, it draws attention to its clear desire to dispossess, dominate and persecute Palestine's indigenous population.

Was Zionism a Colonial Movement?

In a contemporary world where colonialism is, to varying degrees and extents, acknowledged as a historical crime, Zionism's colonial associations and connotations are something of an embarrassment for its supporters. Indeed, the Israeli historian Robert Wistrich was drawn to decry this 'accusation' as 'a modern version of the legend of original sin'.²

But Zionism's founding fathers had no qualms about casting Zionism as a form of settler colonialism, and they proudly inserted the word 'colonization' into the names of their new institutions, including the Jewish Colonization Association, the Society for the Colonisation of the Land of Israel, the Palestine Jewish Colonisation Association and the Jewish Colonial Trust, amongst many others.³ By way of further illustration, *Yishuv*, the name of Palestine's pre-

¹ B'tselem (2021) *A Regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid*. Jerusalem: B'tselem

² Robert Wistrich, *The Myth of Zionist Racism*, WUJS Publications, London, 1976, pp. 12,

³ *Remembering Michael Prior*, Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust, London, 2014 p. 137.

state Jewish community, translates to English as 'settlement', and the day-to-day language of Zionism was permeated with colonial terminologies.⁴

Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism who played a leading role in the development of the Zionist movement in the late 19th century and initial years of the 20th century, made it quite clear that he intended to implant an alien entity in Palestine. When he approached Europeans, he asked them to help Zionists achieve their colonising goals, and told them that a Jewish state *outside* Europe would not just resolve the Jewish problem *inside* Europe but would also function as a pan-European colony.

He also directly borrowed colonial rationales. In entertaining the prospect of taking Palestine from the Ottoman Sultan, he explained '[i]f His Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine, ... We should there form a part of a wall of defence for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism'.⁵ This rationale was, as Herzl was surely well aware, a key component of colonial discourse in the early 20th century.

Herzl's chosen instrument of Zionist colonisation was the chartered company, the institution of colonialism *par excellence*. The Dutch used it to establish their commercial empire, but it was the British who developed and used it for colonization and trade, and to establish settlements and colonies that could be exploited.⁶

In 1898, Herzl sought to create a Jewish chartered company that would operate under German protection. He told the German Kaiser that he wanted to create a company for Palestine that would be based on the British chartered company in South Africa. Cecil Rhodes, a seminal figure in British imperialism⁷, was one of Herzl's heroes and the founder of Zionism sought to arrange a meeting by dangling 'something colonial' in front of him, with the aim of gaining an endorsement that would impress Jewish businessmen and help his fundraising efforts.⁸

Herzl's template for obtaining a territory and then clearing it for settlement was clearly indebted to his hero. Just as Rhodes had been backed by financial wealth, in the form of Kimberly diamonds and Johannesburg gold, Herzl sought Jewish financial power and for this reason gravitated towards de Hirsch and the Rothschilds. And just as Rhodes had endeavoured to convince the British government that the new colony would be to their advantage, Herzl similarly went to great lengths to convince Britain that a Zionist state would bolster its interests.⁹

⁴ Faye A Sayegh, 'The "Non-colonial" Zionism of Mr. Aba Eban', reprinted from *Middle East Forum*, Vol. XLII 1966, distributed by the League of Arab States, Washington DC, p. 50.

⁵ Arthur Hertzberg. *The Zionist Idea. A Historical Analysis and Reader*. Connecticut, 1959 p. 222

⁶ Sayegh, op.cit., . P. 67

⁷ Cecil Rhodes (1853-1902) was born in Britain and travelled to South Africa, where he made a huge fortune in diamond mining. His 'achievements' were recognised by the British state when Rhodesia (contemporary Zimbabwe) was named after him.

⁸ Sayegh, op.cit pp. 55, 56, 62, quoting Herzl, *Diaries*, p. 1194.

⁹ Desmond Stewart. *Herzl*. London 1974. See pp. 187-191.

Zionism and racial ideologies of the time

Herzl had been a thoroughly assimilated Viennese Jew but was provoked to establish political Zionism by the rising tide of European racism against Jews and the associated belief that Europe had a 'Jewish problem'. The 1880s looked bleak for Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. The full civic emancipation they had won from the German Empire in 1871 was suddenly jeopardized by the rise of a new ideological political movement that called itself 'antisemitic', which denounced Jewish emancipation as a 'terrible mistake'. Wilhelm Marr, the 'father' of racial antisemitism, clearly sought to distinguish it from its religious predecessor, which had existed in Europe for centuries. In 1879 he created an 'Antisemitic League' and called for a 'war against the Jews' of Europe and the world.

The advance of imperialism and colonialism in the last decades of the 19th century established an alliance between racism and science that classified the people of the world into white and black and superior and inferior categories. The French aristocrat Comte Arthur de Gobineau developed a theory of the Aryan master race in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 1853-55.¹⁰ Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899) followed, and described history as a struggle for survival between the Germanic people and the Jews. Chamberlain and Gobineau had a profound and far-reaching influence on 19th century racial thought.¹¹

The 'racial' status of Jews that emerged in the late 19th century was an offshoot of what was then called 'racial science' and racial antisemitism. Although both viewed Jews as an inferior race, Zionist Jews also drew on the same theories and doctrines of race to 'prove' Jewish 'racial purity'.¹² This established the basis for a perverse dialogue between antisemites and Zionists who did not reject the assertion of Jewish racial essentialism. They actually accepted it, and even endeavored to establish it as an essential determinant and expression of Jewish self-respect. This exclusivism led them to disdain efforts to achieve equality within European societies and they asserted 'difference' as a better way of fighting antisemitism, rather than contest racist theories that were at the root of antisemitism.

German Jews made an essential and even defining contribution to the German intellectual world, and this explains how the 'racial purity' discourse so easily 'crossed over' from European 'race scientists' to their Jewish counterparts. Both drew from the same well, and asserted disturbingly similar arguments.¹³ Zionist racial scientists lamented the assumed demise of the Jewish people, and proposed that Zionism would awaken the Jewish masses from the effects of assimilation. They called for Jewish revival and rebirth, and for the racial purity of the 'chosen people' to be preserved.

¹⁰ Michael D Biddiss, *The Father of Racist Ideology. The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau*, London, 1970, pp. 7, 11. Gobineau was from a family that was committed to destroying the legacy of the French Revolution.

¹¹ A British-born writer who later became a German citizen. His work strongly influenced pan-German *völkisch* movements and Adolf Hitler considered him to be a mentor.

¹² Dafna Hirsch, 'Zionist Eugenics, Mixed Marriage, and the Creation of a "New Jewish Type"', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 15, No. 3. (September 2009), p. 598.

¹³ Anita Shapira, 'Antisemitism and Zionism', *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Oct 1995), pp. 215-232.

The early secular Zionists, in seeking to find a new identity, found no other way to express their uniqueness than to revert to the exclusivist racist rhetoric of the day. The answer to this 'challenge or problem of assimilation' was, as they saw it, the 're-isolation of Jews socially and culturally, in their own land ... or state.'¹⁴

The decline of political Liberalism after 1870 and the rise of 'scientific racism' and organized political antisemitism in Germany and Austria provoked a swift and vigorous response from Jewish scientists and medics, who were overrepresented in the country's scientific and medical establishments. Jewish anthropologists also tried to answer the thorniest anthropological questions of the time, including: 'What are the Jews?' Are they a race? If so, are they a single stable racial type or are they made up of many races? And this is how Jewish scientists such as Joseph Jacobs, Samuel Weissenberg, Elias Auerbach, Felix Theilhaber and Ignaz Zollschan became entrapped, like their European contemporaries, in the spider's web of pseudo-scientific race theory.

In 1886, Joseph Jacobs proposed that the Jews had remained racially pure since biblical times. The Austrian Ignaz Zollschan also suggested that the settlement of Palestine was the Jewish racial destiny.¹⁵ These seminal contributions to 19th century pseudo-science were later reproduced in the political discourse of Zionist leaders, in the guise of Jewish racial supremacy. For example, Ben Gurion claimed the Jewish people were an elite nation endowed with a 'superior moral will'. In one speech, he claimed:

'Not like all people - the people of Israel. Since we became a people we were different from all nations. We became the people of the book, the people of the prophets, the people of eternity, and a universal people'.¹⁶

The revisionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky was a political opponent of Ben Gurion. However, they both agreed that Jews are inherently superior. In 1936 he said: 'Superior is that race, who is solid, not subordinate.... We are an unbeatable race'. Jabotinsky's political thought combined an ascribed Jewish 'organic' superiority with a firm, inflexible and abiding commitment to the use of force. Jabotinsky emerged as the dominant ideological influence on Israel's Right-wing politics in the final decades of the 20th century.¹⁷

¹⁴ Mitchell B Hart (ed.), *Jews & Race, Writings On Identity & Difference, 1880-1940*, Brandeis University Press, Lebanon NH, 2011, p. 38.

¹⁵ John M Efron: *Defenders of the Race. Jewish Doctors & Race Science In Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994 pp. 157-163.

¹⁶ Quoted in Amal Jamal, 'Neo-Zionism and Palestine: The Unveiling of Settler-Colonialism Practices in Mainstream Zionism', *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 16.1 (2017), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh P. 58

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, quoting Hebrew source p. 58

Intent to persecute and dispossess Palestinians

In 1897, political Zionism was established and Israel Zangwill's notorious phrase (a 'land without people for a people without land') was recited and reproduced in due course. Zionists knew full well that this phrase was an outright lie and deception. They were completely aware that the land was inhabited and began, at an early stage, to consider measures that would uproot and dispossess the native population.

One year before the publication of *The Jewish State*, Herzl confided to his diary that he would like to 'spiri[t] away the penniless population'. In a further entry on 12 June 1895, he clarified this would entail '[...] expel[ling] the poor population across the border unnoticed, procuring employment for it in transit countries, but denying it any employment in our own country'.¹⁸

Jewish members of fact-finding missions in Palestine warned the First (1897) and Second (1898) Zionist Congresses that Palestine was already inhabited by 650,000 Arabs. The Zionist leadership pretended this inconvenient fact did not exist, as Israel Zangwill's motto 'a land without people for a people without a land' and the complete absence of the word 'Arab' from Herzl's *Jewish State* clearly attested. Afrikaaner nationalism was predicated on a similar wilful ignorance.¹⁹ From the outset, Afrikaners sought to confine native Africans to smaller enclaves, while Herzl favoured what would later become known as ethnic cleansing. In subsequent years, however, Israel largely 'reverted' to the Bantustan model in the occupied West Bank, while still applying 'cleansing' in particular instances.

Zionists also accepted that the use of force would be required to achieve their political goals. In 1904, the Zionist leader Menahem Ussishkin, who chaired the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in the 1920s, wrote:

Without ownership of the land, [Palestine] will never become Jewish ... but as the ways of the world go, how does one acquire landed property? By one of the following methods: by force- that is by robbing land of its owner; by forceful acquisition, that is by expropriation via governmental authority; and by purchase with the owner's consent.'²⁰

Zangwill made this even clearer in April 1905, when he wrote that Zionists 'must be prepared either to drive out by the sword the tribes in possession as our forefathers did or to grapple with the problem of a large alien population'.²¹ By implication, force was a *necessary precondition* for the colonisation of Palestine.

¹⁸ Quoted in Michael Prior, 'Violence and the Biblical Land Traditions', in *Challenging Christian Zionism. Theology, Politics and the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, (eds) Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, Maurine Tobin, Melisende, London, 2005, pp. 135-136. See also Peter Rodgers, *Herzl's Nightmare One Land, Two Peoples*. NY, 2005. pp. 6, 18.

¹⁹ Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society*, Pluto Press, London, 2006, chapter 'The Geography of Unilateral Separation: On Israeli Apartheids', p. 19. See also Anthony Smith's authoritative work, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.

²⁰ Quoted in Mahmoud Yazbak. *Templars as Proto-Zionists*, Journal of Palestine Studies . Vol 28. No. 4 Summer 1999. P. 50.

²¹ Ibid., p. 51

As Ussishkin anticipated, conquest and 'robbing land of its owner' would come later. At the turn of the century, the Jewish presence in Palestine was asserted by various Zionist Associations who purchased Palestinian land. In 1901, the Fifth Zionist Congress created the JNF, and in July 1920 the International Zionist Congress indicated the JNF would turn this land into 'the common property of the Jewish people'. In practice, this meant the land could only be leased on a hereditary basis, and therefore only to Jews, and this is why private land ownership is still rare in Israel.²²

It has to be said that these colonizing activities were not very successful – in 1948, the various land purchase companies only owned about 6 percent of the land.²³ And this is why Zionists pursued their political goals by driving Palestinians 'out by the sword', just as Zangwill had advocated more than 40 years earlier. Ilan Pappé observes:

Plan D was in essence a scheme for taking over by force the areas allocated by the United Nations to the Jewish State, as well as additional territories designated for the Arab State that were deemed vital to the survival of the Jewish community. The plan instructed Jewish forces to cleanse the Palestinian areas falling under their control. The Haganah had several brigades at its disposal, and each received a list of villages it had to occupy. Most of the villages were destined to be destroyed; only in exceptional cases were the troops ordered to leave them intact. ... By 15 May 1948, the day the Jewish State was declared, 58 villages in this area [the coastal plain] had already been erased from the earth.²⁴

In the 1948 war, Zionist militias and armed forces acquired 78 percent of the land of mandate Palestine, taking half of the territory that UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) Resolution 181 had proposed to give to the Palestinian state. Massacres and different forms of terrorism were used to drive Palestinians out of their towns and villages. By July 1949, 531 Palestinian villages had been destroyed and 805,000 Palestinians (close to 80 percent of Palestinians who lived in the area at the time) had been uprooted and driven out of their homes and off their lands.

Conclusion

The question of whether Zionism is a colonial enterprise should not even be asked, as it was originally endorsed and advanced as an explicitly colonial project. Zionism's exclusivism led it to ostensibly deny the very existence of the native inhabitants. On one level, this oversight certainly existed, as Zionist leaders viewed Palestinians as less than them and, by implication, undeserving of their attention and recognition. However, on a second level they were fully aware of the fact that this 'absence' could only be achieved through a sustained and comprehensive 'cleansing' of the territory. This 'cleansing' was not a contingent outgrowth or an expedient response to unexpected events, but was instead deliberately and intentionally applied, with a clear purpose in mind.

²² Victor Kattan. *From Coexistence to Conquest. International Law and the Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1891-1949*. London, NY, 2009. P. 36

²³ While there are no exact figures, estimates usually fall somewhere between 5-7 percent of the total land holdings in Historical Palestine. It has also been suggested that, after half-a-century of tireless endeavour by the JNF, its holdings were as low as 3.5 percent of this total. See Nur Masalha. *The Bible and Zionism. Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine*. Zed Books, London 2007. Pp. 50-52

²⁴ Ilan Pappé, *Out of the Frame: The Struggle for Academic Freedom in Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), pp. 202-203

In subsequent years, the Israeli state applied demographic engineering and ethnic discrimination to maintain Jewish dominance. The Nation State Law of 2018 was a further refinement of this discriminatory theme, which established that it is only the Jewish people who exercise national self-determination in Israel, and which enshrined Jewish settlement as a 'national value'. These are the components of a colonization that has, since 1880, relied on measures that include, but are not limited to, concentration, exclusion, exploitation, immobilization and population confinement.

The initial enquiry has therefore led us towards two pivotal questions. First, can Zionist exclusivist and supremacist ideology be reversed without decolonization and the dismantling of the Zionist movement's ideological tenets? Second, if this is not possible, then on what basis can we take a theory and practice that is saturated with racism and discrimination to be the foundation of a just and lasting peace?

This brief draws on research for the author's forthcoming book, which is entitled *The Ideological Creation of the New Jew. Max Nordau, Arthur Ruppin and Ephraim Lilien*. It will be published by Sussex Academic Press (publication date TBC).



Dr. Sahar Huneidi

Ph.D. in History, University of Manchester, UK

Sahar Huneidi has a BA in Political Science from the American University of Beirut, and a Ph.D. from the University of Manchester, where her thesis formed the basis of her subsequent published work on Herbert Samuel. She has contributed numerous articles to academic journals and has edited studies on Israel/Palestine. She has also received diploma certificates in art history from Christie's Education. She was the director of East & West Publishing from 2009 – 2020 and lives mainly in London.