Shtetl Colonialism: First and Last Impressions of Indigeneity by Colonised Colonisers

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> *We passed by an old barefoot Arab, leading a loaded camel. His ancestors for ages must have driven loaded camels and shepherded sheep, erected tents and at nights ignited fire baked pitta bred and set around the fire, smoking and telling fables into the quiet night. And I – I just arrived, hardly slept one night in Eretz Israel, hardly drank a glass of water, hardly walked a mile, and yet I saw this Arab as an alien. I was the inhabitant and he was the nomad. My sense of integrity and justice felt shame, my blood cried: this is my homeland (second Aliya poet Shlomo Blumegarten, 1915)*

This article argues that although the paradigms of settler colonialism and apartheid are adequate analytical tools for understanding Israel and Zionism in the past and in the present, they leave few of the phenomena in that part of the world unexplained and in need of further elaboration. Through an examination of the steadfastness of the racist perception of what is 'Arab' in Jewish Palestine and Israel since the late 19th century and until today, this article wants to attract attention to two such phenomena. The first is the rapid transformation of the Jews of Europe from the ultimate victims of that continent and that civilisation to the chief victimisers in Palestine. Secondly, this article draws attention to the total immunity the Zionist movement and, later, the Jewish state received as a result of this transformation.

In recent years two progressive paradigms emerged in the scholarly/activist attempt to depict the phenomena of Zionism and Israel as accurately and as ethically as possible. They are the colonialist and the apartheid paradigms. Both prisms challenge effectively the official and mainstream scholarly Israeli paradigm, which insists on seeing Zionism exclusively as a national liberation movement and Israel as a liberal democracy.

And yet despite their usefulness, both paradigms are unsatisfactory. They apply historical case studies with a known closure to an ongoing reality. In the conventional study of colonialism, settler colonialist states are states whose colonialist history is behind them. This article is written within this relatively new paradigm, of which this journal is one of its leading representatives. The comparative settler colonialist framework applies to the contemporary as well as the past structures of settler colonialism, and thus, for instance, I argue that the Australian and North American societies still face issues today that result from their settler colonialist existence. I will argue here that the continuity of colonialist patterns in Israel is far more unique in its intensity and presence. Likewise, although Apartheid is not a framework distinct from settler colonialism, in recent years it has been used as a generic independent paradigm.[1] But generic Apartheid has two historical examples which are over and which can be appreciated because they were toppled and have come to an end. Despite the relevance of both paradigms to Zionism and Israel, the ideological movement and the state it created are a current affair for which one cannot have a full historical perspective.

This article is thus inspired by both paradigms, but wishes to add to them. It recognises their valuable contribution for comprehending the early Zionist history as a colonialist project and for evaluating the present legal and political reality in some parts of Israel and the Occupied Territories as apartheid. However, several chapters in the history of the state are not easily explained from within the colonialist, or settler colonialist, paradigm, nor does this paradigm offer any particular wisdom about complex realities such as the one prevailing at the moment in the Gaza Strip. Similarly, the apartheid model misses some crucial aspects of being a Palestinian citizen in Israel. In short, these challenging paradigms, as well as the Zionist one, insisting on a national perspective, apply well only to a certain period or a certain aspect of the phenomenon in question.

I will give one example here that will explain the missing dimension: the steadfastness of ethnic 'purity' ideas as a cornerstone of Zionist policy from the day of its inception has turned the means, the ethnic cleansing, into an ideology and a vision. Unlike the contemporary cases of Australia and North America, the present

settler colonialist reality in Israel does not represent an adaptation of the paradigm to the new reality (there are no longer explicitly racist laws, segregation or genocidal practices). In Israel, these means have not been transformed, or adapted, to the present time; They are there, bare and exposed for everyone to see. Importantly, in Israel the reaction to this explicit continuation of settler colonialist practices enjoys a global immunity.

As I can not offer at this point, nor I think can anyone else, a better paradigmatic perspective than the one offered by comparative settler colonialist studies, I feel it is prudent and right to begin the fine-tuning of it by focusing on the ethical and moral aspects of what I defined above as bare realities and global immunity. The whole debate on the issue in any case cannot be presented as purely theoretical or methodological. Its very existence stems from competing ethical perspectives as much as it does from conflicting theoretical or methodological questions. For that reason this article focuses on the one feature of the Zionist project that did not change since the first settlers arrived in Palestine one hundred and fifty years ago. I argue here that a recognition of the crucial and constant role this feature plays can explain the uniqueness of our case study within the history of both settler colonialism and apartheid. Rather than deduce from the theoretical framework or compare the case study to others, I would like to examine historically and ethically the evolution of Zionist and Israeli Jewish engagement with the question of indigeneity in Palestine. This engagement, unlike the political structures, economic realities, balances of power and many other dynamic factors that kept changing, remains steadfast and dominant at every given historical and current moment since the early 20th century. It was born in a certain historical reality and is still unchanged in a very different one more than a century later.

This particular engagement or attitude can be summed up as exclusionary and racist. Its basic assumption is that the native population is comprised of aliens who usurped a home country and, as long as they are there, they are inevitably involved in an attempt to prevent a Jewish presence in Palestine. This perception led to the 1948 ethnic cleansing operation and the imposition of military rule on the remaining Palestinians, who were regarded as a 'fifth column' within the state between 1948 and 1967. The incorporation of a

large Palestinian population in the state after 1967 strengthened this attitude and led to an oppressive occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and to discriminatory policies towards the Palestinian citizens in Israel. It is an approach that has the potential of turning Israel into a pariah state, even if it has not so far prevented the Jewish State from remaining part of 'the civilised and developed' world.

Its basic features, as noted, are well within the settler colonialist paradigm: its attitudes in the past towards the native population, its territorial expansionism, its establishment of an ethnocratic regime.[2] Gabriel Piterberg has shown that it also fits well when its hegemonic narrative is analysed as a typical settler colonialist one, which has three main factors: an emphasis on the exceptionality of each settler nation, the exclusiveness of the settlers' subjectivity, and the refusal to recognise the presence of colonised people. Methodologically, his work opened the way for concretising these general themes by identifying their unique manifestations in the case of Zionism: the alleged uniqueness of the Jewish nation in its relentless search for sovereignty in the biblically endowed homeland, and the privileging of the consciousness of Zionist settlers at the expense of the colonised, together with a focus on settler intentions rather than on the outcome of their actions. Piterberg sees the Zionist denial of the presence of the Palestinian Arabs on the land destined for colonisation as the single most significant factor in determining the shape taken by the settlers' nation.

This article offers a diachronic rather than theoretical or deconstructive view on the development of this Zionist formula, as it was formed in the early twentieth century and as it appears today.[3] It treats this engagement as the principal signifier of the state and a constant variable in the history of Zionism. The permanency of this attitude, despite the dramatic change in the world and in the region (including the transition from colonialism to postcolonialism), may help explain why Israel is depicted both as a colonial and as a postcolonial phenomenon. The inclusion of Israel within a certain postcolonial framework is therefore essential to my mind. I am aware of convincing critiques of Israel's purported postcoloniality, in particular that proposed by Ellah Shohat, but I offer here a

connection to a less well known and in my eyes more relevant genre: postcolonial Jewish studies.[4]

Shohat's main critique is directed against what she terms as the ahistorical and universalising nature of the term, which lead to it de-politicisation. She claims that, first of all, there was no linguistic necessity for its usage – neo-colonialism was good enough in many cases to describe the phenomena coming under the description of the 'postcolonial'. She also criticises the implication inherent in the term that colonialism is over, and the lumping together of too many distinct and diverse phenomena, which leaves one with a strong sense of ambiguity. More importantly, it does not leave one with political agency (as does postmodernism in the eyes of many of its critics). I fully accept this critical approach. I will, however, strive to show that in the case of the transformation of the Jews from victims to victimisers, the analysis of the processes that took place in Palestine can benefit from the perspective of 'postcolonial Jewish studies'. Bearing in mind this criticism, I think that postcolonial Jewish studies can offer a better historical perspective on the dilemma of where to locate Israel today and, more importantly, explain why Israel is immune from any depiction as a settler colonialist or Apartheid state in the Western mainstream media and academia.

This Zionist and Israeli engagement with indigeneity gels in that humble and impoverished Jewish existence in Eastern Europe and on the shores of Palestine. They are conveyed to us from the past through the first impressions of the people who constituted the core group from which sprang the past Zionist and present Israeli Jewish leadership. These were the people of the Second *Aliya*, and their impressions stayed on and led to the construction of the Zionist presence in Palestine as a gated and self-excluded community trying to fend off the strangeness of the country and its people. They came from secluded townships in Eastern Europe, the *Shtetl*, and created a new kind of seclusion in Palestine. The *Shtetls*, small towns in Yiddish, were inhabited mostly by Jews and formed the nucleus for the Pale, the restricted area in which Jews were allowed to live within Tsarist Russia between 1791 to 1914 (much of it was previously within the territory of historical Poland). With the wave of pogroms and harassment, quite a few of them were deserted for the sake of

urban life, immigration to the new world and Zionism. They symbolised rich Jewish life in poor socio-economic conditions and in an excluded and secluded existence; popularised as heaven upon earth in *Fiddler on the Roof* and gone forever with the Holocaust.

The *Shtetl* was traded by the settlers for a new kind of exclusion: the Zionist colonies in the midst of an indigenous people that was regarded as stranger to Jewish life, as the gentiles of Europe, but, unlike the 'Goyim', blamed for being foreign to the land. I do not intend here to enter the debate about the origins and the nature of Jewish exclusivity. I think it suffices to go back to Israel Shahak's notion that Zionism extracted and magnified the existing historical and theological drive towards separation in Judaism. What is important for our case here is that Zionism claimed to free the Jews from that drive and existence, but actually drove back into separateness willingly and knowingly.[5]

Even worse, indigenous peoples were understood as the principal obstacle for the final liberation from the exilic existence symbolised by the *Shtetl*. Hence their removal by every possible means was contemplated early on as the best solution for the problem.[6] These early and diffuse ideas became a strategy in the 1930s and an ethnic cleansing policy was eventually executed in 1948. The incomplete ethnic cleansing operations and the continued presence of Palestinians in Israel and in post-Mandatory Palestine transformed the ethnic cleansing into a vision and an ideological infrastructure for the newly founded state.[7]

This trajectory is more than anything else a metamorphosis of the exilic oppressed Jews into colonialist victimisers within a very short period of time. I suggest analyzing this transformation and evaluating it ethically within the postcolonial Jewish studies framework. Within this genre, the Jews of Eastern Europe are understood as victims of internal colonialism, and by accepting this notion I offer to follow their subsequent and rapid transformation into colonialist victimisers in the second part of this article. To stress the point: it is not the transformation itself, this happened to the Puritans and Huguenots in north America as well, but it is the historical period in which it happened, and the change of pace, in particular after the Holocaust, which is accepted as a *sui generis*

historical event. Namely, you are the victims of the worst modern atrocity and you are becoming in no time a victimiser.

The view of the early and most recent Zionist and Israelis, that Palestinians are an obstacle for the success and survival of the Zionist project, has not undermined Israel's global standing. I suggest that a focus on the transition can explain better the reasons for this international blindness and immunity. In 2012 the Western mainstream media and academia treats Israel as a unique case and this claim for uniqueness is supported academically by Zionist and pro-Zionist scholarship. The Holocaust memory and its manipulation play a crucial role in this ongoing Israeli impunity, but Zionism was globally legitimised long before the terrible events in Europe occurred. The oblivious denial of the transformation of victims into victimisers is a very crucial part in Israel's success in remaining part of the 'civilised world'. It provides the state immunity for Apartheid and colonialist practices. This shield cannot be explained by sheer power of lobbies, strategy, and cynical economic considerations alone. Dwelling on the ethical dimension of Zionism as a settler colonial movement in a postcolonial world may prove to be a crucial aspect in the search for peace and reconciliation in the land.

THE LASTING POWER OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Psychologists, in particular those interested in personality studies, were intrigued from early on by the question of first impression. Their inquiry included the investigation of the stability of first impressions and what affects them. Ethnic labelling, for example, produced perceptions and images that did not change easily with time.[8] Psychological research seems to agree that first impressions of events influence how we interpret later impressions and fresh information. As for the question of what can transform first impressions, the main hypothesis seems still to be the one evolving around accountability. Sometimes the need to justify one's action transforms first impressions, but quite often even that impulse does not easily erode them. Even when a person is exposed to fresh information and effective self and external criticism, it seems that when first impressions pertain to questions of 'ethnicity' or 'race', they remain steadfast.[9] When this is accompanied by a harsh conflict

and violent reality, of course, the chances of re-evaluating first impressions are even slimmer.

Settler colonialist societies which got rid of the indigenous population – in the Americas and in the Pacific – have retained their basic impressions of the natives, although by engineering and coaching from above, many of these perceptions have been delegitimised, sometimes by laws, and at least an appearance of a reformed image has been conveyed domestically and for international consumption. In the very few cases where the indigenous population was neither exterminated nor the colonisers driven out, there is a strong sense that defeating first impressions was part of the process of reconciliation, whether by force in the case Zimbabwe, or through reconciliation and struggle in the case of South Africa. Israel in this respect constitutes now the unique example of a settler colonialist project that has the indigenous population as integral part of the state it created, which leads to all those intriguing questions of paradigmatic applicability discussed in the opening paragraph of this article.

In both the psychology of personality and the history of settler colonialism one can see room for change even in the most steadfast of cases. And yet, despite the dramatic life and politics of Israel and Palestine, Jewish first impressions moved very little, if at all. The first impressions of the core group of the Zionist project are there, dominating present day Israeli discourse about the very same native population they have encountered for the first time at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Official Israel, as well as large segments of society, holds on to these first impressions. Official and public statements have not as yet appeared in the scholarly literature, but it is obvious that the 2011 Zionist consensus is to maintain a state with a stable Jewish majority within an allegedly democratic state. The scientific advisor to the Israeli Ministry of immigration is a known researcher of the Russian Jewish community. As an official academic par excellence, Zeev Hanin published comprehensive research that could be summarised in the following way: the vast majority of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union subscribe to the dominant view among Jews in Israel about the need to exclude the Palestinian citizens of Israel from the common public good.[10] The connecting

thread between the first and last settlers (both coming from the same part of the world) is indeed the wish to establish an exclusive Jewish state over much of Palestine. What is Jewish, what is Palestine and what are the best means to achieve this vision are concepts and issues which changed with time, but not the impulse for exclusivity. Almost from the very start, exclusivity meant demographic 'purity' at best and demographic majority at worst. Extreme means were sought by messianic Zionists to achieve the first option; more pragmatic ones were employed by the dominant labour movement for attaining the second one.

The leading and most active members of the early colonisation project came from gated Jewish communities, mostly living in townships, the *Shtetl* (which were enforced, and sometime self imposed, Jewish exclusive enclaves). Absurdly, as so many good critical studies have shown, this pre-Zionist existence was detested by the Zionist movement wishing to create a new Jew as an antithesis to what they called the exilic condition.[11] And yet, when arriving in Palestine, they built once more gated communities, introduced the foreign idea of fenced human settlement to a rural area that never had them before, and tried to create an exclusive Jewish presence in the urban space, first by dominating the labour market, then by building separate neighbourhoods and towns, and finally by urbicide in 1948 (which was not just about expulsions or the destruction of buildings, but also about annihilating the political, social, cultural and economic centres of the indigenous society).[12]

The formidable and fierce *shtetl* state in the making was the historical answer to the weak and poor *shtetl* of Eastern Europe. The cognitive atmosphere that accompanied the building of the gated community and existence – some of it very impressive socialist and even communist communities – explain the uniqueness of the settler strategy against the old Jewish colonies so ably described by Gershon Shafir.[13] These early settlers were described by the Second *Aliya* as 'colonists'; an important development by itself as the self depiction of Zionism as colonialism ended after the second *Aliya* (anyone who preferred 'Arab' workers was a despicable colonist wrote one of them; so indeed they were something different).[14]

This core group numbered between 20,000 and 40,000 people and came mainly from Russia (constituting only 4% of those who left

Russia at the time). It was not at the time a success story, as the vast majority of them (90%) left mainly to the US. So this core group was only a few thousand strong. They were nonetheless great achievers: expelling the Palestinian workforce from the old Jewish colonies – *Kibbush Ha-Avoda* (Conquest of the Labour Market), they called it – as well as laying the foundations for the future state.

They more or less went through similar trajectories that brought them into contact with Palestinians. It began on the Jaffa shore, then labouring alongside Palestinians in the more veteran Zionist colonies, or meeting them as neighbours in the towns. Self-exclusion produced the first pure settlements; finally, paramilitary forces began to guard the enclaves. Congregating in exclusive enclaves was both a response to the impulse of exclusivity and to the material necessity of 'conquering' the labour market in order to secure jobs and immigration. The British Mandatory authorities, recognised this separateness early on and legalised it.[15]

These settlers were compulsory diarists and letter writers – they did not miss one mosquito bite and in a truly *Shtetl* style did not stop complaining. The first anti-Arab entries were written when they were still hosted by the Palestinians on the way to the old colonies, or in the towns of Palestine. Complaints stemmed from the formative experiences of these settlers, which was the search for labour and subsistence. This predicament seemed to affect universally all of them: whether they went to the old colonies or whether they tried their luck in the towns. Wherever they were, in order to survive they needed to work shoulder to shoulder with Palestinian farmers or workers. By such intimate contact even the most ignorant and defiant settlers realised that Palestine was totally an Arab county in its human landscape. This first impression constitutes therefore a process of recognition of an 'unpleasant reality' intertwined with early thought of how to change it.

When David Ben-Gurion, then one of the leading activists of the Second *Aliya*, described Palestinian workers and farmers as *Beit Mihush* ('an infested hotbed of pain') he would also immediately, by resorting to medical metaphors, conjure up exclusive Jewish labour as a panacea. In his and other settlers' letters, Hebrew workers appear as the healthy blood that would immunise the nation from rottenness and death. He added that employing 'Arabs' reminded

him of the old Jewish story of a stupid man who resuscitated a dead lion that devoured him.[16] The problem was the very presence of the Palestinians: distancing them, or distancing yourself from them, was always a solution that could be very brutal in the first instance and alluringly peaceful in the second.

Some of the recollections I have read were written in the early 1940s and were already driven by a wish to justify the racist attitudes towards the native population. For many among the settlers, socialism was still a meaningful dogma, and exclusion somehow did not fit easily with it. In fact many of them were socialists and at times even communists before coming to Palestine. Socialism was deeply rooted in the cognition of settlers and their leaders and thus a certain righteousness was employed to justify the ethnic purity paradigm by bizarre argumentation. Employing Arabs was 'exploitation' – hence they should not be employed and not be part of the Jewish state. As Zeev Sternhall has shown, once Zionism territorialised Palestine as the coveted land of social freedom and equality socialism became secondary to the national project.[17]

Turning socialism into national socialism was explained as the fault of the Palestinians themselves. Neta Harpaz, a leading member of *Hapoel Hazair* (the main outfit of the socialist Zionist movement in the second Aliya), who was born in a part of the Russian Empire that today is in Poland and came to Palestine in 1909, learned Arabic, a move that always appears as a unique gesture towards the locals and not as a necessity. He did it in order to organise a joint industrial action, but the Palestinians were 'traitors' who in the last moment told the Jewish farmer of the intention to strike and asked for a raise. As he wondered if this one case indicated a more serious problem for the chance of socialism in Palestine he consulted one of the leaders of the movement, Yizhak Ben Zvi (later, the second president of Israel), who explained to him that international revolution meant in Palestine Jewish and Western revolution alone.[18] As Zachary Lockman has shown, these manipulations became more sophisticated beginning from the late 1920s; but first impressions depicted the locals as 'shifty' characters, as an obstacle not just to Zionism but to socialism as well.[19]

Showing solidarity with Palestinian workers through their exclusion was only one of the paradoxes produced by a desire for

demographic purity. The most enduring paradox was that of the 'alienated' homeland. It became a strange place wherever 'Arabs' were. Nature seemed weird and unfriendly, but much worse was the alien human landscape. Zionists were confident they could master the land; they were less confident of what to do with the humans in it (a very intriguing new research on eco-feminism traces this drive also to the misogynist and chauvinist perception of the land as a woman to be conquered).[20] So it was simultaneously 'home' and a foreign land. This is not unique – settlers in other settler colonialist locales faced similar ambiguities – it is, however, unique as a persistent feeling and emotion in our times.

The settlers talked about Palestine as *Nechar*, a foreign land, or even worse as *Yam Nechar*, a sea of foreignness and alienation. And this was always described in the diaries or letters in an angry complaining tone as this 'sea' covered the coveted homeland.[21] A synonym for 'alien' was wilderness, *Shemama*. Wherever there were Palestinians, there was a sense of bareness that caused some settlers to rethink the whole venture and contemplating a return from, as one of them put it, a 'land of nothingness'. The empty land was full of strangers; '[p]eople who were more strange to us than the Russian or Polish peasant'. He wrote in 1929: 'We have nothing in common with the majority of the people living here'.[22]

Realistically, it was foreign if you came from Europe, but ideologically it looked foreign because the foreigners were living in it and gave the place its alien character. They were not just 'aliens', they were aggressive aliens. The aggression was meted at the Jews, according to this narrative, from the first encounter. Like all foreigners, the Jewish settlers sailed first to Alexandria, took a ferry to Jaffa and there they were taken by small boats ashore. This disembarkment appears in the settler view as aggressive and alien treatment. '*Aravim Hetikifu Ottanu*' – 'the Arabs assaulted us' is the phrase used to describe Palestinian boys helping settlers to small boats on the way to Jaffa.[23] They shouted because the waves were high and they asked for *Baksheesh* (tipping) because this was their way of living. But in the settlers' narrative they were assaulters. Noise, which must have been a normal feature of life in the *Shtetl*, becomes menacing when it is made by women on the shore wailing the traditional welcome salute for the returning fishermen or sailors.

They did it 'with the fiery eyes and a strange garrotted language'.[24] Whether it is their language, their dress, or their camels they were all reported back to Europe as unpleasant realities.

Alienation and unpleasantness arising from the presence of 'Arabs' in Palestine was accompanied by surprise in particular at the way the old colonies of the First *Aliya* were structured. Yona Hurewitz was disgusted to find out that in Hadera part of the houses was occupied by 'Arabs'.[25] In the jewel of the Zionist crown, Rishon Lezion, Natan Hofshi (whose family name was re-invented on arrival and meant 'a liberated person') reported back home to Poland how disgusted he was to see many 'Arab' men, women and children crossing through Rishon Lezion. '*Nehradeti*' ('I was flabbergasted'), he noted, and asked: 'maybe it was a terrible mistake to come here and maybe this was a foreign country?' Writing later, he noted that once 'the Arabs were not allowed to pass [through] it became home'.[26]

The presence of Palestinians in Jewish colonies or near them is referred to often as *Kalon* (Shame), which is accentuated by the *La'ag* (contempt) and *Buz* (scorn) shown by the 'Arabs', who for some reason, according to this depiction, understood how pathetic the situation was. '*Masakin*' (the pathetic poor ones), 'they called us', recalled the settlers. That Palestinians were allowed to guard the property of the early settlers was seen as most eminently absurd.[27]

The solution for *Kalon* was *Kavod* (honour), and this at a time when the early Zionist Orientalists explained how to manipulate the centrality of honour in 'Arab culture' for the success of the Zionist project. Zionist settlers acted again and again as people who were insulted. They sometime objectively were, when they were physically attacked, but more often than not it was due to the very presence of Palestinians in Palestine. One interesting aspect of this search for honour was the constant reported competition with Palestinian workers on production, and especially brutal retaliation for what the Zionist settlers deemed as theft of their newly acquired land. What they referred to was an old rural habit of cultivating part of the public, or even private land that was sanctioned by the Ottoman Empire as legal and accepted; for instance picking fruits from orchards on the sideways. All this, including common use of water wells, became an act of robbery only once Zionism purchased the

land. Robber, *Shoded*, and Assassin, *Rozeach*, were alternated with ease when these acts were described.[28]

But even the most violent encounter with, and even more violent discourse about, the locals could not be easily reconciled with the need to learn how to shepherd and cultivate; how to dress and survive. Very soon the 'Arab way of cultivating and dressing and behaving' was depicted as a necessary initial evil that had to be abandoned as soon as possible. This became one of the principal declared missions of the second *Aliya* (together with the need to create a 'pure' Jewish defence force).[29]

Appropriating local habits in order to get rid of locals was regarded as a necessary and temporary evil. Sometimes that evil was prolonged to help the Zionist project. Such was the idea conceived by Arthur Rupin to build a *Madafa*, the traditional guest tent, hall or room, for settling with local notables the final transition of land from absentee landlords to Zionist hands (the notables represented the tenants of the land, together with the landlord's agent, and had to be convinced to expel the tenants so as to allow the actual Zionist settlement of the land purchased).[30] Cleansing the farmers and tenants was done at first through meeting in the Zionist *Madafa*, then by force of eviction in Mandatory times. The good Palestinians were those who came to the *Madafa* and evicted peasants; those who refused were robbers and murderers. Even those with whom settlers shared the ownership of horses, or long hours guarding property, were transformed into villains once they refused to evict.[31]

Urban Palestine triggered another kind of impression. Towns had a large number of Christians, reported Ben-Gurion. His colleague Nathan Shifris lamented that they were educated, nationalists and more or less grasped what Zionism was all about. They were 'impertinent and too assertive'.[32] Israel Kadishman believed that 'our wits' and not only power will be needed to combat these 'Arabs'.[33] Jaffa in particular symbolised everything the Second *Aliya* dreaded and detested. In 2012 the town of Nazareth occupies in the Zionist imagination a similar image of a hub of self assertive national Palestinian sentiment and activity.

The urban and the rural Palestinians disappointed twice. First of all by being there, and secondly by been ungrateful. In a bizarre way, there was very little the Second *Aliya* did for the Palestinians

(whereas at least one could say the first wave of immigrants offered employment, be it in an exploitative terms), and yet the sense was that the Palestinians were ungrateful to the blessings bestowed upon them by the Zionist movement, a point made today by Israeli historian Ephraim Karsh in *Palestine Betrayed*.[34]

Betrayal and disappointment were interwoven, since the 'good Arabs', exemplified by Rashid Bey in Theodore Herzl's *Altneuland*, who was beyond himself with joy when Zionism arrived, were not to be found. Mishmash between what is an Oriental, an Arab, and a Muslim, and a gentile frequently appears in Second *Aliya* recollections. In 1945, the ideologue of this group, Berl Katznelson, reported that despite his benign proclivities, as he reported them, 'I was more extreme than Brit Shalom and a philosemite and my longing for the *Yishmaelite* were immense'. He already knew, however, that this was hopeless when he met for the first time 'unfriendly' Turks back home in Russia.[35]

Faint hearted humanist views were not allowed. When one leading activist, Yosef Rabinowitch, allowed himself such an indulgence in what he called 'a moment of weakness', and was charmed momentarily by the beauty of an Arab village and the sound of the shepherd's flute, he had to remind himself that 'these were foreigners on the homeland'.[36] To sum up: the need to exclude the Palestinians in order to turn Palestine into a safe haven for Jews is the strongest and most common message coming from the second *Aliya* voices. Yosef Rabinowtich was one of the most zealot fighters against the employment of Palestinians, which he defined 'the evil' (*Hara' Hazeh*). 'We are only few and if they upraise against us this is our end', he noted. Even when he says here and there 'I met a decent farmer' he then notes that they were potentially '*Raa Hola*' (a 'malignant evil').[37]

'*Raa Hola*' was used as a phrase often in official discussions to describe the Palestinian minority in Israel during the years of the Military Rule [1948-1966]. The panacea for this was the same as before, looking for ways of getting rid of them. Expelling that minority was seriously discussed as an alternative to the regime imposed on them in accordance with the British Mandatory emergency regulations that robbed them of most of the basic human and civil rights up to 1967.[38] These same characterisations appeared in

official discourse once more in 1976, when the infamous Koenig Report delineated what senior officials thought of Palestinians in the Jewish state. 'Cancer in the heart of the nation' was a phrase related to the author of an official report that recommended severe measures against the Palestinians in order to Judaise the areas where they were still present. Although he was not the one who said it, his report nonetheless represented Palestinians as a virus threatening to kill a healthy body.[39]

Alienation became more institutionalised after 1967 through discriminatory legislation, governmental policies and official conduct. The literature on this is overwhelming and there is no need to refer to it here; I have followed this particular development myself in a recent book.[40] The most updated indexes of racism and discrimination, those provided annually by Palestinian NGOs in Israel (*Musawwa* and *Adalah*, for example), and the more conservative census carried out by university research institutes drive home forcefully the message that for most Jews in Israel, and according to the present legislative efforts, policies and strategies, Palestinians in Israel are deemed as immigrants, aliens and hostile.[41]

These were indeed powerful first impressions. They have not changed. One could argue that these first impressions were reinforced, or made necessary, by the actual material experience of the settlers in the second *Aliya*: they needed to exclude themselves in order to survive and secure further immigration (interestingly, this point is made both by Zionist and by anti-Zionist historians). But this is a distorted picture of the reality in Palestine. There was no need to be exclusive in order to survive, or even to secure immigration. There was a need to secure exclusiveness only if one wanted to get rid of the local population. This is similar to the debate about the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. Some Zionist and anti-Zionist historians assumed that the war of 1948 caused the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. On the contrary, as I have argued in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, the war was the means, not the cause, for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Change is connected to a different moral evaluation of the Zionist project in general. As Nira Yuval-Davis has commented:

> Ignoring or marginalizing the construction of Israel as a settler society, with its own specific characteristics, prevents most Israelis, both emotionally and analytically, from understanding some epistemological and ontological aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. [...] Such an understanding is vital for any possible transversal dialogue between the conflicting sides that goes beyond the manipulative simulation games of conflict resolution models that have occupied such a central place in the Oslo negotiations in a most 'post-modernist' manner.[42]

More specifically, what has to be understood from within and without is the transition of the East European Jews from victims to victimisers, and the recurrence of this transition at any given moment whenever new settlers arrive from imagined or really oppressed communities. Today, most of the Israeli Jews are not victims of any oppression, and yet the self-perception of victimhood is dominant in society. But the early group that initially moulded that self-image was originally victimised, and its transformation laid the basis for perceptions and attitudes that are still with us today.

These impressions were those of victims, and their transformation into victimisers occurred when they were still poor (hence postcolonialism is the best prism through which one can understand how subaltern oppressed groups become so quickly and absolutely oppressive). It is their genuine victimhood that protects their ideological and biological descendents today. And yet its victimhood was not unique and its transformation was also quite common. Perhaps this too should be part of the required change suggested by Yuval Davis.

CONCLUSIONS

I have tried to show that the early perception of the native as an 'alien' in the 'homeland', an alien that had to 'spirited away' (in Herzl's suggestion), in any possible way has remained the dominant perception in Israel today. Yet it has not undermined the legitimacy

of the state nor its place in the 'civilised world'. Israel's immunity stems from its success in negating any description of Zionism and Israel as a settler colonial project and an Apartheid state.

The focus on the formative moment, the moment when a particular perception of indigeneity was born, and the analysis of first impressions as part of the transformation of victims of colonialism and oppression into oppressive colonisers may help question this immunity. Disproving Western and Israeli claims regarding Israel's *sui generis* status, and critical research on Zionism that ignores the origins of the settlers – not in the sense of who they are, but in the timeless sense of who they themselves and their supporters perceived them to be – may also help exposing Zionism for what it was and is.

At the end of the day, the lack of moral and ethical discussion of Zionism is the result of either an oiled public relations machine that does not include it in colonialism or apartheid studies, or the result of genuine apprehension or submission to fear in the case of Europeans who have not yet had closure on the Holocaust.

The unambiguous way Zionist settlers then, and Israeli Jews today, refer to the native as an 'alien' is the constant feature of past attitudes, present polices and probable future vision. Academically and politically, one would have to be able to explain the ideological centrality of this immoral assumption from the beginning of the movement until today. This is why ethnic cleansing began as an idea, turned into a strategy, was executed as policy, and remains a vision for the future. Perhaps not challenging the victimhood of Jews who came to Palestine but the morality of what they have done will help defining the nature of the project they have created and they sustain today – the uncompleted project of Judaising whatever is deemed geopolitically as Israel.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Professor Ilan Pappe is the Director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies and a Fellow of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter. His latest works include The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine *(Oneworld 2007),* The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel *(Yale University Press, 2011),* The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty: The Husaynis 1700-1948 *(University of California Press, 2011) and* Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians *(with Noam Chomsky, Penguin, 2010).*

NOTES

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[22] Moshe Bellinson, 'Rebelling Against Reality', *The Book of the Second Aliya*, p. 48.
[23] Mendel Zinger, 'From Barodi (a Shtetl in the Ukraine) to Erez Israel', *The Book of the Second Aliya*, p. 128.
[24] Natan Hofshi, 'The Pioneers of Zion', *The Book of the Second Aliya*, p. 139.
[25] Yona Hurewitz, 'From Kibush Ha-Avoda to Settlement', *The Book of the Second Aliya*, p. 210.
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[28] Alexander Zaid, 'The Gensis', *The Book of the Second Aliya*, p. 169.
[29] Michal Sadan, 'The Hebrew Shepard', PhD Thesis, Tel-Aviv University, 2006.
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[31] Zaid, 'The Genesis'.
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[37] Rabinowitch, 'Entries from the Rehovot Diary', p. 235.
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