

From Left to Right: Israel's Repositioning in the World

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In its pioneer years, Israel was largely associated with leftist ideas of collective endeavour and socialist solidarity. Early Israeli elites often came from the kibbutz and were vocal in their allegiance to social justice and equality. This, in turn, brought them admiration and support from socialists around the world.

Few noticed that while praised by the left, Israeli society was steadily moving to the right. Nowadays Israel has earned admiration of the right and the extreme right in most Western countries.

This paper should explain this apparently puzzling transformation of the international position of this small country in Western Asia.

Zionism versus Socialism

The origins and legitimacy of Israel grounded in the Zionist ideology raise fundamental considerations of legal equality and political rationality. Its founding ideology—Zionism—embodies a complex relationship with the heritage of the Enlightenment as it affirms a particular ethnic identity and, at the same time, postulates the eternal nature of anti-Semitism. Zionism reflects Protestant millenarian evangelical beliefs that form the foundations of Christian Zionism, which antedates Jewish Zionism by nearly two centuries. Zionism is a variety of European nationalism, which absorbed moral and political values of the 19th century. The nationalism that gave birth to the state of Israel is European, conceived by Europeans to resolve the “Jewish question,” itself a European issue. Among the many tendencies within Zionism, the one that has triumphed set out to reach four principal objectives: 1) to transform the transnational religious identity of adepts of Judaism into a national identity, like ones then common in Europe; 2) to develop a new national language based on biblical and rabbinical Hebrew; 3) to transfer the Jews from their countries of origin to Palestine; and 4) to establish political and economic control over Palestine, if need be by force. While other nationalists needed only to wrest control of their countries from imperial powers to become “masters in their own houses,” Zionists faced a far greater challenge in trying to achieve their first three objectives simultaneously. The Zionists exerted great efforts in order to transfer, in the course of the 20th century, nearly one half of the world's Jews to Palestine.

From the outset, support for Zionism from the left did not come easily: world socialists not only had to ignore the resistance from the indigenous population of Palestine. They also had to recognize “the special character of Israeli socialism” and “the national reality of the Jewish people” (Zionist, 1). In other words, this support was predicated on conflating Jews

and Zionists. It followed that Zionists would be recognized as the vanguard of world Jewry even though the Zionist movement before World War II represented only a minority of European and American Jews and a miniscule part (0.38%) of Jews in Muslim countries.

Socialists constituted the backbone of the Zionist movement, which contained an entire gamut of political orientations. What united these disparate groups was the belief in “the historic right of the Jewish people to settle in Palestine” – the basic postulate of Zionism. Socialist Zionists declared themselves partners “in the social revolutionary movement, which seeks to end exploitation, national servitude, the rule of man over man, and people over people” (Zionist, 21). The left-wing support for Zionist settlement, rather than for Palestinian resistance to it, was due not only to the sympathy for Jewish victims of Nazism. According to the then chairman of the Socialist International, among the Arab masses there was “no post-imperial renaissance, no rebirth” (International, 5). In other terms, the European-dominated socialist movement saw Arabs as lacking in progressive ideas and therefore unworthy of the socialists’ support.

While Israel was developing nuclear weapons, the Council of the Socialist International insisted that Israel should be “provided with the necessary arms for self-defence...” while deploring “the work of former Nazi experts in Egypt on the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction” (International, 8, 14). The socialist organisation supported Israel’s attack on the neighbouring countries in June 1967 as a measure “defending its existence” (International, 20).

As a variety of European ethnic nationalism, Zionism can be expected to appeal to the political right. Indeed, as early as 1920, Chaim Weizmann, the future first president of the state of Israel, candidly argued that Britain should support Zionism because it distracts the politically active Jews from socialism. Winston Churchill was more than receptive to Weizmann’s argument:

the International Jews.... this world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality, has been steadily growing.... It becomes, therefore specially important to foster and develop any strongly-marked Jewish movement which leads directly away from these fatal associations. And it is here that Zionism has such a deep significance for the whole world at the present time...(Churchill)

This is why Zionism, instantly rejected by most religious Jews as contrary to the basic tenets of Judaism (Rabkin 2006), also encountered consistent ideological opposition from the Jewish left, which, just as Weizmann and Churchill, also saw Zionism as a distraction from class struggle.

Yet the early history of modern Israel appears to be closely related to the left. A number of progressive ideologies motivated pioneers of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. Most of them were “socialist nationalists”, the term coined by Zeev Sternhell, an eminent political scientist at Hebrew University, in contradistinction to the term “national socialists” associated almost exclusively with Hitler’s Germany. He further demonstrates how the Zionist labour movement made use of socialist forms of communal work and life for purposes of colonial settlement. Socialist forms of organization (such as collective settlements kibbutz and moshav) were indispensable tools in the Zionist colonization of

Palestine. Once Zionists occupied the lands, a separate economic infrastructure was in place, and – in 1948-49 – the unilateral declaration of independence of Israel became an internationally recognized fact, there began a gradual withering away of socialist rhetoric. The Zionist doctrine, based on principles of ethnic nationalism, provided a natural affinity to the right, while powerful factors, such as a permanent state of warfare and a firm positioning of Israel on the American side of the Cold War, pushed Israeli elites to the right of the political spectrum.

Ben-Gurion was well aware of the purely instrumental role allotted to socialist practices and rhetoric: “We are conquerors of the land facing a wall of iron, and we have to break through it” (Sternhell, 21). In the following year, 1923, his more overtly right-wing rival Vladimir Jabotinsky, borrowing Ben-Gurion’s expression, published an article in Russian, in which he affirmed that all Zionists understand that victory can be won only by force (Jabotinsky 1923). An admirer of Mussolini, who reciprocated his esteem (Kaplan, 154), Jabotinsky openly called on the Jews to prepare for war, revolt and sacrifice.

Socialist nationalists, along with other Zionists, feared for “the future of the Jewish people” in countries where Jews lived in peace and tranquillity (Zionist, 6). Just as other Zionists, they understood early on that without anti-Semitism there would be no Zionism. Happy people do not leave their country, and most Jews do not move to Israel unless they feel discriminated and persecuted. The founder of political Zionism Theodor Herzl wrote that the anti-Semites would be the Zionists’ “friends and allies” (Segev). Indeed, Lord Balfour, known as the sponsor of the idea of “a Jewish homeland in Palestine”, had earlier expressed traditional European anti-Jewish prejudice in restricting immigration of Jews to Britain. Today Christian Zionists constitute one of the pillars of American support for Israel while their outlook is predicated not only on the eventual conversion of Jews to Christianity, but also on their strong belief that “the Hebrews” belong to Palestine, rather than to the countries where they were born and bred. “Jews to Palestine” has been a familiar anti-Semitic slogan in many countries, including Nazi Germany. The British National Party, an offshoot of the National Front, goes further than any of the parties in its support of Israel. At the same time, Nick Griffin, one of its leaders, has a record of anti-Semitic vitriol and Holocaust denial (Klug).

In fact this affinity manifested itself when Zionist organizations in Germany welcomed the ascent of Hitler to power. This support was grounded in nationalist and racist concepts common to Zionist and Nazi ideologies, opening the door to cooperation with the new regime. In 1934 Rabbi Joachim Prinz (1902-1988), a prominent Zionist activist in Germany, extolled “the end of liberalism” in his book titled *Wir Juden* (We Jews) published in 1934 (Ross). SS officials were guests of the Zionist leadership in Palestine and returned to Germany with admiration, which they expressed in Nazi periodicals. A commemorative medal with the swastika on one side and the Zionist star of David on the other was minted in honour of that visit. This episode is now publicly known since a recent Israeli documentary, *The Flat*, recounted in great detail (Catsoulis). When Adolf Eichmann was kidnapped by Mossad agents in 1961 and brought to Israel to stand trial “for crimes against the Jewish people”, it was not his first visit to the country. He had landed there before to visit Palestine’s growing Zionist colonies, even though his visit was cut short by British authorities. Eichmann consequently facilitated Zionist activities in Germany, helping to establish training camps for the Zionist movement. In 1937, at about the time Rabbi Prinz settled in exile in the United States, he wrote that Germany’s Zionists were treated as “the

favoured children of the Nazi Government” (Prinz).

Rather than exceptional aberrations, such episodes appear rooted in the Zionist experience, replete with visions to regenerate “the Jewish race” deemed degenerate not only by Nazi ideologists but also by prominent Zionists (Falk). Social Darwinism, an important aspect of many right-wing ideologies, was part of the Zionist project from its inception. It would thus appear that the association of political Zionism with socialism could only be temporary, since both in terms of practices and ideology Zionism has an ideological predisposition to veer to the right.

Transformations in Israeli Society

By the late 20th century Israel’s industry and agriculture no longer had to rely on socialist principles. Socialist forms of land ownership and of enterprise management had fulfilled their purpose of settling and developing the country and could be discarded. The vestiges of the socialist infrastructure performed no longer any useful purpose and were cast aside: kibbutz land came to be used for shopping centres while the trade unions’ federation was divested of the factories and companies it used to own and manage. Israel’s economic policies took a sharp turn to the right under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu, first as finance minister, later as Prime Minister. Close to the neo-conservatives in the United States, he not only turned the Christian Zionists into a major force in support of Israel, but, at the same time, was converted to the neo-liberal economic beliefs. In an attempt to integrate Israel into Western capitalism, massive privatizations, monetization of social services and discontinuation of subsidies for staples transformed a hitherto rather egalitarian society into a sharply polarized one. While socialist Zionist movements withered within Israel, the poverty rate in Israel became the highest among the OECD nations (Efraim), and the country came share with the United States the record of socio-economic inequality (OECD). This has turned Israel into a poster boy for neo-liberal economic policies, an attractive country for direct foreign investment, firmly integrated into the globalized economy.

This rapid transformation and the attendant pauperization of large numbers of citizens have provoked relatively little social turmoil. The “tent protest” in the summer of 2012 was, perhaps, the most significant of all but it aimed at specific, rather than broad, socio-economic issues. This protest, just as many others throughout the history of Israel, was defused by means of raising tensions with the Palestinians. The allegations of the Iranian nuclear threat, mostly meant to distract world public opinion from the fate of the Palestinians (Rabkin 2009), also served an important internal purpose of social consolidation. Netanyahu has played up the Iran card quite successfully both for internal and external purposes. Just as expected by Weizmann and Churchill, nationalism once again distracted Israelis from struggle for social and economic justice.

Israeli society is fragmented along many a dividing line. For purposes of this analysis, we shall distinguish between Arab (or Palestinian) citizens of Israel and non-Arab citizens, i.e. a diverse group including Jews, Christians from Russia and other countries who immigrated as family members as well as other non-Arabs who chose, and were allowed, to join the Israeli mainstream (Lustick). The gap between Arab and non-Arab citizens of Israel is quite pronounced, with the income of the latter being three times higher than the former. Israel stands 22nd out of 177 on the UNDP Human Development Index, whereas that of its

Palestinian population if calculated separately would occupy the 66th place (Nahmias). Israeli Arabs, while constituting twenty percent of the population, own three percent of the land (MacIntyre). The gap between the two populations is perpetuated by a wide gap in educational expenditures: \$192 per Arab student against \$1100 per non-Arab. A similar gap can be observed in the health care system: infant mortality is twice as high among Arab children of less than twelve months, while tests for cervical cancer are conducted five times less frequently among Palestinian women than among non-Arab women (Schindler). The gap is much more profound between Israel and the territories under Israeli control since 1967: per-capita GNP of the Palestinians living there is fifteen times lower than that of Israelis (Kawach).

Socio-economic disparities, particularly when they overlap with systemic ethnic discrimination, tend to provoke violent reactions, which those who hold power define as terrorism, insurgency or disturbances. The Zionist state is often reproached for its colonial policies, intolerance and racism towards political dissenters, Arabs and refugees as well as some foreigners, particularly non-white ones. Israeli legislators openly call for erecting “a democratic and Zionist barrier against the use of human rights claims at the expense of Israeli patriotism.” They call the dissenters “traitors who are persecuting IDF soldiers and want to castrate our resilience.”(Sofer).

In this century, Israel’s turn to the right has been termed fascist. This was done not only by outspoken internal critics (Hass; Levy) but by mainstream academics, politicians and journalists. A committed Israeli Zionist wonders if his country is becoming fascist (Goldberg, M.). His fellow Zionist prominent in American media considers fascism “a strong word” all the while admitting that “this is not what should be happening in a country that calls itself a Jewish state” (Goldberg, J.) A well-known Israeli political scientist concluded that “Israel’s gravest danger today is the one it faces from within: fascism” (Gordon), while a member of the 2010 Netanyahu government (and a son of a former president of the country) also voiced concern that “fascism is touching the margins of our society” (MK Herzog). A year later, no longer in the government, he concluded that fascism was no longer a marginal phenomenon but had become rooted in Israeli society (MK Herzog) Similarly, a retired Israeli judge admitted “the emergence of apartheid and fascism” in his country (Oknon), while a veteran journalist wryly observed that in her country “‘fascist’ is not a rude word” (Hass). According to Sami Michael, prominent writer and president of ACRI, Association of Civil Rights in Israel, his country has become “the most racist state in the developed world” (Goldman).

In fact, accusations of fascism are not new, which suggests that this political tendency has been germane to Zionism for a long time. The German-born Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt, along with other Jewish intellectuals, denounced the future Israeli premier Menahem Begin as fascist a few months after the establishment of the state of Israel (Einstein). But fascist tendencies have become more visible at the turn of the 21st century.

Over one half of surveyed non-Arab Israelis does not want to live next to Arab citizens of the Zionist state. Mainstream Israeli media, for example, The Jerusalem Post, publish incendiary articles, such one by a son of the former Prime Minister Sharon, calling for flattening Gaza like Hiroshima (Sharon). Calls to expel all Palestinians from Israel and the territories it occupied in 1967 have become commonplace. Xenophobia has been particularly evident in Russian-language media in Israel, the new home to nearly a million former Soviet citizens, who mostly vote for right and extreme-right nationalist parties.

Youth is often receptive to extreme ideologies. Israeli teenagers are particularly vulnerable to fascist ideas due to their early socialization to violence towards Palestinians, beginning with compulsory army service at the age of 18 and, an even earlier experience of this kind for children of Zionist settlers in the conflict-ridden West Bank. Surveys show that 59 percent of Israeli teens aged 15 to 18 believe that Arabs should not have full equal rights, while 96 percent do not want Israel to be considered “a state of all its citizens”. Some 27 percent of teens questioned believe that anyone objecting to this definition of Israel as “Jewish and democratic” should be tried in court, while 41 percent wanted conscientious objectors stripped of their citizenship. When asked if they would be willing to learn in a classroom with Arab students, 50 percent of respondents said “no” (Kashti).

Anti-Arab attitudes are grounded in the portrayal of Palestinians in Israeli textbooks. Textbooks in such disciplines as history, geography and civics approved by the Ministry of Education are full of simplistic “good guys vs. bad guys” accounts. “With such distorted pictures and skewed maps firmly fixed in their minds, Israeli Jewish students are drafted into the army, to carry out Israeli policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians, whose life-world is unknown to them and whose very existence they have been taught to resent and fear”. (Peled-Elhanan 232)

Indeed, right-wing politicians have come to overtly intervene in the preparation of civics and history textbooks, attempting to strengthen nationalism and expunge “the universalist perspective” (Glick). This trend, including school-organized pilgrimages to sites in Hebron and elsewhere in the territories under Israel’s military control, has been denounced as fascist even in Israel’s mainstream media (Bar’el 2011), but has continued unabated. A booklet of 100 basic concepts prepared by the Ministry of Education in 2003 fails to mention Arabs and other non-Jews living in Israel. “None of them is worthy of mention, even in a derogatory way; the booklet simply erased Israel’s Arab citizens completely. Only in the context of the wars of Israel is the actual word “Arab” used. Thus every child will know that an Arab is not a partner, a citizen, or part of democratic society, but an enemy” (Tamir).

Vigilante terrorism has escalated from verbal to physical violence with little disturbance from Israel’s security apparatus. A recent variety, Tag mechir, or There is a Price, originated as a protest against uprooting a few unauthorized Zionist settlements (“hilltop posts”) in the West Bank. But most of the anger is directed at the Palestinians: desecrating mosques, vandalizing Palestinian-owned property, beating up random Palestinians and, finally, the burning a Palestinian teenager (Eisenbud). The Israeli judiciary and law enforcement agencies have been shown to be more lenient towards non-Arab citizens of the Zionist state (Smith).

In Israel, a few hundred official rabbis, most of them on the state payroll, made a public appeal to forbid selling and renting property to non-Jews (Levinson). They claimed that their ban is not only politically legitimate but also rooted in Judaism. None of them was reprimanded or lost his official position. Moreover, the Minister of Science and Technology awarded one of them a prize for “his actions, effort and devotion to the Jewish nature of the Land of Israel” (Ashkenazi). The few Israeli rabbis, almost exclusively non-Orthodox and foreign-born, who dare oppose the ban as well as the encroaching of Zionist settlements on Palestinian land, draw hostility and further marginalize themselves with respect to Israeli society (niqnaq).

Orthodox Jews used to overwhelmingly oppose Zionism (Rabkin 2006; True). In growing numbers, they have become – in practice, albeit not in theory – its most ardent adepts. The Haredi Jews hold the most extreme positions against the Palestinians, supporting apartheid-like measures in the case of official annexation of the territories to the state of Israel. An overwhelming majority (71 percent) are in favour of forcibly transferring Arabs out of Israel and the occupied territories (Stewart). A group of Orthodox rabbis published a book mandating the killing of enemy civilians, including children. While the state initially took action against them, it was later dropped, which led some Knesset members to call on the judicial authorities to apologize to the authors and their sponsors (Kahn). It has been reported that the suspects in the case of the Palestinian burned alive in July 2014 came from Haredi families (Mathis-Lilley).

Attacks by Zionist vigilantes on Palestinian civilians, initially in the West Bank and later in Israel proper, as well as on Muslim and Christian cemeteries, have gone largely unpunished (Gurvitz). When Israeli festivities are held to commemorate Jerusalem Day, tens of thousands of people, waving Israeli flags, descend on Palestinian parts of the city. The marchers chant slogans such as “butcher the Arabs”, “burn their villages”, and “death to the leftists”. Some surround a mosque, chanting “Muhammad is dead” and “They are only Arabs, they are only fleas” (Shuisha). This and a number of other episodes have led some Israeli observers to conclude that “the situation of Israeli Arabs is more like that of the Jews of Poland during the interwar period” (Avishai), others compare it with anti-Semitism in Germany (Weiss). Among those who express concern about the rise of racist discourse and fascist violence in Israel there are disproportionately many American Jews, mostly beholden to values of non-discrimination (Blau; Blumenthal). Official discrimination and violence as well as the rise of right-wing extremism among Jewish Israelis have, in turn, strengthened ethnic and religious identities among Arab citizens of Israel, who have grown more and more alienated from the Zionist state.

How serious is the Shift to the Right?

Israelis opposed to racism wonder if “Israeli racism [can] be eliminated through law, trial and punishment, or if it is already part of the Israeli identity” (Bar’el 2010). In view of the broad spectrum of people actively displaying racist attitudes, the burden on the law may be excessive: “Using legal means to stifle the trend would be tantamount to putting Israeli identity on trial.” This national identity is not enshrined in law but, rather, entrenched in the xenophobic fear and the belief that Israel must remain “Jewish”. Those who do not share these values, whether for religious reasons such as many groups of Haredim, or for political reasons, such as Palestinians or leftists, exclude themselves from this vibrant and growing community (Bar’el 2010).

Director of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University provided a most cogent depiction of this trend:

The wild propagandists of the right ... do not hesitate to use imagery and explanations taken from the anti-Semitic lexicon of Europe: Foreigners spread disease and take Jewish women; black refugees are violent criminals who endanger public safety. ... Israel today is becoming slowly and increasingly swept up in “redemptive xenophobia.” To an increasing number of Israelis, the Arab, the African refugee and people who are foreign in their religion, skin colour or nationality are considered the most serious problem society has to solve on the road to tranquillity (Blatman).

The commitment to maintain the non-Arab character of the state constitutes the common denominator of all Zionist parties in the Knesset. In January 2013, “the Israeli electorate has returned a parliament that is [90-10](#) in favour of [ethnocracy](#). ... Their vision of a Jewish state means no return for Palestinian refugees, inequality for Palestinians with citizenship, and annexation of key sections of the West Bank” (White). On the eve of that election, the prominent Israeli author Amos Oz, considered leftist in the West, played on the Jewish voters’ fear of equality with non-Jews.

Apparently, “the myth of progressive Zionism” is currently espoused only by a handful of Western liberals (Honig). Nowadays, the Zionist left appears as an oxymoron as practically all non-Arab parties in Israel oppose the prospect of an equal opportunity society, in which different religious and ethnic groups would coexist in the framework of a common state. They would not contemplate inviting Arab parties to form a ruling coalition. It is a matter of consensus in Israeli political life that the Arab parties are not eligible for participation in the government, thus effectively disenfranchising over 20% of the country’s citizens on the basis of their ethnicity, even though individual Arab citizens of Israel have been appointed to the Supreme Court as well as to the consular corps. This happens as government ministers from parties considered centrist in Israel threaten “a second Naqba”, i.e. a mass expulsion of Palestinians similar to the one operated by Zionist forces in 1947-49 (Avnery).

Israel’s Supreme Court has allowed discrimination by validating an Israeli law that forbids Palestinians in the occupied territories to move to Israel proper to join their spouses who are Israeli citizens (Sha’alan). However, if a Canadian or a Japanese decides to marry an Israeli citizen, he or she would be authorized to settle in Israel. This law clearly aims at reducing the number of Arabs in Israel. There is significant public pressure to eliminate Arabic as an official language of Israel and to legislate that the democratic character of the state should be subordinate to the requirement to maintain its “Jewish character”. In 2005, following the arrest of several high profile Arab politicians and lobbyists living in Israel, the Shin Bet security agency made a statement justifying their actions: “The security service will thwart the activity of any group or individual seeking to harm the Jewish and democratic character of the State of Israel, even if such activity is sanctioned by the law” (Monks). The Zionist imperative seems to take precedence over the law of the land for the country’s main state security agency.

Fragmented ideologically, religiously and ethnically, Israeli society is “a collective held together by a shared victimhood” (Shorten). This is empirically confirmed by a recent survey, which revealed a “total consensus among Israeli Jews – regardless of religious, ethnic or political differences – that the “guiding principle” for the country and for Judaism itself is “to remember the Holocaust.” Ninety-eight percent of the respondents consider it either fairly important or very important to remember the Holocaust, attributing to it even more weight than to living in Israel or observing such Judaic commandments as Sabbath and Passover. The Nazi genocide “has long been used to justify the existence and the necessity of the state, and has been mentioned in the same breath as proof that the state is under a never-ending existential threat” (Michaeli). Since historic victimhood has come to confer a privileged status, the state of Israel, since its establishment, has been able to evade substantive international sanctions for its treatment of Palestinians and of neighbouring countries.

Israel among Nations

The shift to the right earns Israel praise from right-wing adepts around the world, including activists of the Tea Party in the United States, xenophobic nationalists in Russia as well as leaders of the right from most European countries. They consider Israel a proud incarnation of their own principles, and regularly pay visit to the country. Anti-Arab and anti-Islam activists in Western countries look up to Israel for its harsh treatment of Palestinians and call on their governments to give up on multiculturalism and political correctness, emulate Israel and openly espouse exclusive nationalism. Among the visitors one finds “a Belgian politician known for his contacts with SS veterans, an Austrian with neo-Nazi ties, and a Swede whose political party has deep roots in Swedish fascism” (). On a trip to a West Bank Zionist settlement the Austrian donned an IDF combat jacket, while for a visit to Yad Vashem, Israel’s official Holocaust memorial, he chose to cover his head with “a red, blue, and black cap that identifies him as a lifelong member of Vandalia, a right-wing student fraternity associated with Pan-German nationalism and anti-Semitism” (ibid). The group was received at the Knesset and signed a Jerusalem Declaration, affirming that the signatories support Israel because they “stand at the vanguard in the fight for the Western, democratic community”. A delegation of a stridently right-nationalist movement from Russia, National Democratic Alliance, was also received at the Knesset (Широпаев), and the head of the delegation later wrote a poem glorifying the settler as “a free Israeli Cossack ... caressing the trigger” (Поселенец). Israeli rightists, in turn, express solidarity with their counterparts in Russia, including officers imprisoned for committing military crimes in Chechnya (Эскин).

As Islamophobia has largely replaced traditional anti-Semitism (Alibhai-Brown; Luban), Israel has come to be revered by Christian Zionists as the West’s advance defence outpost in the Muslim world and a frontline of European culture, assumed to be synonymous with Christian civilization, against the alleged onslaught of Islam. Expansion of Zionist settlements, which inevitably sharpens the conflict with the Palestinians, has earned Israel respect in right-wing circles of several western countries. Anders Behring Breivik, the Islamophobic murderer of dozens of fellow Norwegian Christians in 2011, was full of praise for the state of Israel, mentioning it 359 times in his memorandum (Hartman).

In Eastern Europe, where overt anti-Semitism used to be the hallmark of most right-wing nationalists, their ideological descendants can be found among the staunchest supporters of Israel. This dovetails with the logic of “the clash of civilizations”, promoted by right-wing activists (Steinback) most of whom feel obliged to tone down their hitherto habitual anti-Semitism. The very term “anti-Semitism” has been adjusted to mean negative attitudes to the state of Israel, the country routinely portrayed as a collective victim of anti-Semitism, rather than its logical beneficiary. Israeli observers note similarities between Israeli legislative measures and those adopted by fascist regimes in interwar Europe.

In the Manichean worldview reinforced in the wake of the attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001, Israel positioned itself in the camp of the good and came to be praised as a vanguard in the epochal struggle against the forces of evil, viz., Islamists (often conflated in the United States with Muslims, Arabs, and even Sikhs). Yet, unlike their political elites, citizens of major Western countries view the state of Israel as a danger to world peace and stability on a par with North Korea, and a greater danger than Iran (Poll). Western elites’ support for Israel suffers from a significant democratic deficit. Nevertheless, governments of countries in which a majority of citizens denounce Israel’s military actions against Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, actually contribute to Israel’s military power by purchasing Israeli arms labelled “battle-tested”, i.e. tested in actions against Palestinians. Such purchases are

essential to the Israeli security industry, the only industry of its type, which exports more than it sells within the country (Ilani).

Israel has faced Palestinian resistance for decades, and has dealt with it mostly by military and police actions. Its extensive military experience enabled it to become a major exporter of security equipment and anti-terrorism knowhow. Israel not only shows how the ruling elites can deal with mass protests by encouraging ethnic nationalism in order to defuse social unrest, but also provides material means to apply violence if distraction is not effective. The many decades of occupation have made Israel a world leader in counter-insurgency expertise. While armed conflict growingly becomes a conflict between states and motley insurgencies, Israel develops and exports arms designed to satisfy the new needs (Sadeh).

At the same time, doubts about, and criticism of Israel can be heard even in the United States, the country's main ally. According to a veteran American diplomat,

Thoughtful Israelis and Zionists of conscience in the United States are now justifiably concerned about declining empathy with Israel in the United States, including especially among American Jews. In most European countries, despite rising Islamophobia, sympathy for Israel has already fallen well below that for the Palestinians. Elsewhere outside North America, it has all but vanished. An international campaign of boycott, disinvestment, and sanctions along the lines of that mounted against apartheid South Africa is gathering force (Freeman 2013).

In fact, public opinion in the United States is quite polarized: a poll conducted in January 2013 showed that 75 percent of "conservative Republicans" support Israel while this proportion drops to 33 percent for "liberal Democrats" (Prager).

Right-wing authors, whether in Israel or elsewhere, usually do not accept the rationale that the widespread dislike of Israel is caused by that country's policies and practices. Some of them assert that the antagonism springs from, like anti-Semitism everywhere, envy of the Jews' allegedly superior accomplishments. Israel's rise as a world capitalist power, they argue, stems in part from the Jewish "culture of mind" and in part from Judaism itself, which "perhaps more than any other religion, favours capitalist activity and provides a rigorous moral framework for it" (Gilder).

Such essentialist explanations of socio-political phenomena are part and parcel of most right-wing ideologies. Critics of Israel are said to have failed the "Israel Test" because they are too inept to emulate Israel's successes. America's will to defend the Zionist enterprise in Palestine therefore defines its own survival as a nation: "If Israel is destroyed, capitalist Europe will likely die as well, and America, as the epitome of productive and creative capitalism spurred by Jews, will be in jeopardy." Thus the state of Israel is proclaimed not only as the vanguard of "the war on terror" and the bulwark of Western civilization but also as the world vanguard of the neo-liberal economic order.

The state of Israel is also revered by adepts of new religions, such as National Judaism (Jewish Zionists following Judaic practice) or the organization Christians United for Israel that claims to have over 50 million members in the United States alone, i.e. about four times the total number of Jews in the world. According to some English-speaking Protestant theologians, the ingathering of the Jews into the state of Israel is seen as a precondition of

the Second coming of Christ. While many Christian Zionists seek a final acceptance of Jesus as messiah by the Jews, which would mean their disappearance as Jews, adepts of National Judaism continue to court them receiving from them substantial financial and political support (Rabkin 2012). The Zionist commitment seems to bridge hitherto unbridgeable theological differences.

The committed Zionist Israel Charny, director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem, acknowledges that Zionists committed genocidal massacres and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians (Beckerman). The Zionist historian Benny Morris explains:

Zionist ideology and practice were necessarily and elementally expansionist. Realizing Zionism meant organizing and dispatching settlement groups to Palestine. As each settlement took root, it became acutely aware of its isolation and vulnerability, and quite naturally sought the establishment of new Jewish settlements around it. This would make the original settlement more “secure” — but the new settlements now became the “front line” and themselves needed “new” settlements to safeguard them (Morris, 676).

Insofar as the socialist nationalists strove to expand the project of separate development, their policies, as already mentioned, inexorably moved to the right, becoming indistinguishable from those advocated by their right-wing opponents. In fact, it was under the Labour government that the expansion of settlements on the West Bank began and gained significant momentum (Gorenberg).

Right-wing circles have long admired Israel’s resolve to disregard adverse world opinion and UN resolutions, mainly with respect to military activities and transfer of population onto occupied territories. Israelis have turned a blind eye to peace initiatives such as the one articulated by the Arab League in 2002 (Pedatzur). It offered Israel peace and diplomatic recognition in exchange for withdrawal from the lands taken by Israeli forces in June 1967. Israel has ignored scores of U.N resolutions, beginning with Resolution 194 adopted in December 1948 calling for the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. By its behaviour Israel has consistently undermined respect for public international law. This became more pronounced with the emergence in the late 1980s of the unipolar world under the hegemony of the United States. In the absence of a balance of power, which during the Cold War used to complicate, albeit not prevent, U.S. and Soviet interventions abroad, Israel’s habitual reliance on unilateral military action seems to have inspired the United States and its Western allies to attack Iraq, to engage in massive use of assassination by drones, and to otherwise act with impunity and in disregard of public international law.

The mainstream American reaction to the attacks of September 11, 2001 approximated the standard Israeli narrative. It was akin to the habitual refusal of Israelis to recognize the root causes of the hostility their country encounters among Palestinians and elsewhere in the world. Rather than acknowledging that discrimination, dispossession and deportation of Palestinians did, in fact, provoke hostility from the victims, Israel would rather invoke anti-Semitism and “Arab mentality”, which exculpates it from all responsibility for its actions. Similarly, after September 11 President Bush refused to recognize that his country’s policies with respect to Muslim countries might have angered inhabitants of those distant lands, leading a few of them to bring the violence they experience daily from the U.S. forces onto American territory. Rather, anti-Americanism and “hatred of our values” were invoked in

mainstream public opinion. Thus no rethinking of recent US foreign policy was undertaken, and a gradual “israelisation” of foreign policy took place, that is, a growing emphasis on military actions against those deemed “irrational fanatics”. This is how Washington embraced the seemingly endless “war on terror”, which became a dominant foreign policy priority (Jenkins). This policy is similar to Israel’s recurrent attempts to suppress Palestinian resistance by military means.

Israel also appears as a pioneer of using information as a tool of war. “Israel has led the way in understanding the importance of information warfare and developing new concepts of how to conduct it. Where Israel has led, others can be expected to follow” (Freeman 2012). Curiously, in the course of “the war on terror” one of the traditional American values, access to justice, which was embodied in the Nuremberg trials of Nazi

leaders, was set aside in favour of Israeli-style “targeted assassinations”, including that of Osama Bin-Laden. These extra-judicial assassinations have been approved by most Americans, including President Obama who used to teach law (Robertson).

Israel’s prominent supporters (among them William Kristol, Richard Perle, Daniel Pipes, Norman Podhoretz, Robert Kagan) inversed cause and effect in a letter to President Bush Jr.:

No one should doubt that the United States and Israel share a common enemy. We are both targets of what you have correctly called an “Axis of Evil.” Israel is targeted in part because it is our friend, and in part because it is an island of liberal, democratic principles — American principles — in a sea of tyranny, intolerance, and hatred (Letter).

According to this logic, Israel is hated because of its proximity to the United States, rather than that the image of the United States has been tarnished in most Muslim and Arab countries because of its support for Israel.

The beneficial effects of September 11 on American attitudes to Israel were promptly recognized by Benjamin Netanyahu, who initially qualified them as “very good”, but then promptly added, “Well, not very good, but it will generate immediate sympathy” and would “strengthen the bond between our two peoples, because we’ve experienced terror over so many decades, but the United States has now experienced it” (Bennet).

Zionism and Colonialism

For centuries, Europeans colonized countries and peoples they felt entitled to rule. They reaped immense economic and strategic advantages, often invoking a manifest destiny, a religious duty to settle “the promised land”, be it Tasmania, South Africa or Palestine. Later, by the end of the 19th century, physical anthropology came to justify colonial exploitation by means of hierarchies of races. Racial segregation is deeply ingrained in recent history of major Western powers.

In the 1920s the League of Nations rejected Japan’s proposal to condemn racial discrimination, a European norm, which, a few years later, acquired sinister proportions during the National Socialist regime in most of Europe. The U.S. troops that finally came to fight the Nazis in Europe in June 1944 were racially segregated, and it took over two

decades and strong-armed federal actions in the context of decolonization and the Cold War to abolish segregation in the United States. Moreover, when the U.S. military accepted De Gaulle's request to let French troops to be the first to march into Paris during liberation from Nazi occupation in 1944 the Americans did so on the condition that all the French soldiers would be white (Thomson).

Israel initially positioned itself as a champion of decolonization, presenting the Zionists' complex relationship with the British mandate authorities as part of the world struggle against colonialism. But soon thereafter Israel joined colonial powers Britain and France to attack Egypt in 1956, aided France in its war in Algeria, and later became an important source of support for apartheid South Africa. In its own right, Israel colonized territories occupied in 1967, largely argued in classical colonial terms of "the promised land".

The Zionist state's strategic and genetic links with the West account in large measure for the impunity it enjoys thanks to policies of the main colonial powers, and of the countries created by European colonialism such as the United States, Canada or Australia. Western governments uniformly condemn Israel's settlements as illegal but do little in practical terms to stop them.

One of the reasons seems to be the creeping rehabilitation of colonialism. The French president Nicolas Sarkozy praised certain benefits of colonization for the colonized countries, the German chancellor Angela Merkel said that multiculturalism was dead, and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed interest in research for "the gene of criminality". Essentialism and sanitized forms of racism are gradually replacing the belief in cultural diversity. Even though for much of the world "Israel today is the South Africa of yesteryear" (Pfeffer), the ruling elites, including those from some Arab countries, have come to warm up to Israel since the disappearance of the Soviet Union and its consistent anti-colonial policies.

The old motifs such as *la mission civilisatrice* or the White Man's Burden assumed different shapes ("clash of civilizations" or "spread of democracy") as re-colonization of the world began in earnest with the onset of the 21st century. In Israel one finds activists openly espousing white supremacist ideas to reinstall racial segregation in South Africa (Fogelman). As many Western societies came to experience Islamophobia, with Muslims routinely portrayed as alien to the allegedly immutable "Western values," Israeli settlement activities appeared more palatable in light of NATO attacks on several Muslim countries. Western forces provoked tenacious resistance, and Israel's vast experience in counterinsurgency, gained in a century of conflict with Arabs, was integrated, alongside Israeli equipment, into Western warfare in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Mali as well as in homeland security operations in several Western countries. Israel continues to play an active and multifaceted role in Western attempts to re-colonize the world.

Concluding Remarks

In the course of a few decades, the image of Israel has undergone a radical transformation. From one of an underdog, a successful socialist experiment and an incarnation of left-wing collectivist utopias it has turned into an assertive militarized state with an advanced economy open for foreign investment and a society deeply polarized between Arabs and non-Arabs, and between rich and poor. It is not surprising that the Zionist state of Israel appeals to rightists around the world.

Israel embodies not only a successful, albeit small-scale, attempt to re-colonize the world but also the belief that, as Margaret Thatcher used to say, “there is no alternative”. The campaign to discredit socialist alternatives, from the mildly social-democratic Sweden to the more regulated Soviet Union, makes good use of the little country in Western Asia. The state of Israel, in spite of its socialist origins, has come to symbolize the many features of globalized capitalism and of habitual reliance of force. While certainly not the most right-wing regime in existence, Israel has nonetheless become a beacon for right-wing movements around the world thanks to a gamut of ideological, political, economic and military values contained in political Zionism. This is why the right and the extreme right have come to constitute the backbone of Israel’s international support.

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