

Understanding Zionism and the Liberation of Palestine

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It's been almost one hundred years since the [Balfour Declaration](#) and we are still trying to "understand" Zionism and Jewish supremacy in Palestine.

For a long time, what stood in the way of full understanding is the desire in Jewish intellectual circles on the left to fuse Zionism and Socialism in the belief that such a fusion would achieve so-called "Jewish national and social redemption" and at the same time be universally humanist toward Palestinian Arabs—in other words, the desire to view Zionism as "complicated" and give it validation through a critical perspective while at the same time insisting on its invaluable contribution to Jewish national development.

At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the Zionist delegation, "well versed in Western diplomacy and psychology", rested their claims over Palestine on the promise contained in the Balfour Declaration as well as on various religious, historic and humanitarian "rights". At the time, these Zionists, while careful to continue to use the term Jewish "national home" rather than Jewish state, contended that a Jewish Palestine with Jewish capital and know-how would be to the benefit of backward Arabs, 'long oppressed by the Turks.'

This Ashkenazi man's burden extended to indigenous Arab Jews as well, who at the time were a small minority in Palestine before their [forced emigration](#) to Israel in the 1950s from other Arab countries. Regardless of [deceptive](#) declarations around British aims in Palestine, Zionist goals were never "the free exercise of the initiative and choice of the indigenous population" that Great Britain supposedly espoused in a Nov 8, 1918 communiqué representing the British and French governments that was proclaimed throughout the Levant, including Palestine.

The majority of Jews in the world today are Ashkenazim, tracing their ancestry to Europe. In Israel, however, Sephardic Jews, who descend from Jews in Spain and North Africa, and Mizrahi Jews, who descend from Middle Eastern (i.e., [Arab](#)) Jews, [account](#) for "just over half (52%) of the Jewish population. There is also a small population (approximately 125,000) of Ethiopian Jews who account for 1% of the Israeli Jewish population."

Smadar Lavie, author of *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel*, writes about:

... the paradox that allows the majority of the world to ignore the Mizrahi problem in Israel. While 85% of world Jewry are Ashkenazim, they mainly reside in the diaspora. 15% of world Jewry are Mizrahim, and almost all of them reside in Israel. I discuss the implications of this paradox on the Israeli Ashkenazi Left's ability to hide its racism when this Left talk with pro-

Palestinian NGOs in the West and with the Palestinian national elite in the WB and Gaza... Nothing is going to move toward resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict without taking into account Israel's Mizrahi majority and their continual support of Israel's ultra-nationalist Right, stemming out of the racist history of Israel's Zionist Left.

The [Mizrahim](#) have a history of inequality in Israel, "based on the eugenics ideologies and practices of the Ashkenazi establishment", with the Israeli Labor Party openly referring to the 1990s Jewish emigration to Israel by Ashkenazim from the former Soviet Union as the "white 'aliya" meant to redeem the Jewish state from Mizrahization.

But again, we have a "complicated" [situation](#) here:

... The [third generation](#) of Mizrahim in Israel, those born in the 1970s whose parents and grandparents immigrated to Israel with the large wave of immigration in the 1950s, has mixed feelings toward its Mizrahi identity. For many, the lines between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim are blurring. Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, for the most part, study together, are enlisted together in the army, and often marry one another [On this last point, Lavie says, "All current demographers—some even of the Ashkenazi Zionist species—debunk "mixed marriages" between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim as a myth. Present rate of such marriages is 24-28%".]

The Jewish state is in the business of brainwashing its Jewish citizens of all backgrounds (as well as Jews worldwide, the vast majority of whom are Ashkenazim). Renee Leavy, manager of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) South Florida's social media campaign, writes:

Judaism teaches, that we should be willing to sacrifice our lives rather than commit murder, commit adultery or worship idols. [But] How many [Jewish] teenagers, especially those who grew up in the Israeli school system who have been brainwashed to believe that Arabs are subhuman are capable of thinking like that?

To help us understand the ins-and-outs of Zionism fully, the shameful realities of Israeli Jewish society, including Apartheid, had to be called out, one by one, dissected and analyzed, their "complications" often obscuring the heart of the matter—Palestinian suffering and dispossession—and putting the focus on Jewish identity politics.

Today in discourse about Palestine we have new "complications" having to do with internal differences among Israeli Jews and with the imperative of being consistent ethically and intellectually.

Ran Greenstein, author of *Zionism and its Discontents: A Century of Radical Dissent in Israel/Palestine*, expressed these new dynamics in a Facebook status as "Two self-defeating pseudo-radical strategies of 'call out' politics in Israel/Palestine":

(1) conflating Zionism with 'Zionists', thereby excluding those willing to act on the basis of opposition to current Israeli state practices (post-1967), because they do not share a critique of earlier historical practices. Result: elevating the radical leftist credentials of the caller out (call outer?), while diminishing the potential for a broader action-based front here and now. And

(2) refusing to protest current manifestations of racism and state oppression (towards Palestinians, African asylum seekers and others), together with 'white' leftists, because of the historical sins of the Zionist left against Mizrahim. Result: elevating the radical Mizrahi credentials of call-out activists, who end up serving as useful idiots for the Israeli state and its oppressive practices at present.

We have catchphrases in the above ("conflating Zionism with Zionists"? Really?) that may make us feel clever but that needlessly complicate, in my view, our understanding of Zionism and Zionists (past and present) and the strategies that ought to be open for all those struggling to achieve Palestine's liberation.

It is true that recognition of the brutalities of the ongoing Jewish-state-Nakba and explanations of its cause, which have been taking place among activists on social and alternative media for a long time now, have not translated into policies or concerns in the United States and the EU (let alone in Israel) for the well-being of Palestinian Arabs. Chances are good that joining a "broader action-based front", admirable and exhilarating as this movement is, will also fail to question the normative principles and narratives associated with Zionism—i.e. Jewish supremacy in Palestine.

This is because, beyond self-interest politics, I believe that at the heart of the resistance of Western countries to justice in Palestine is the underlying and pervasive concern for Ashkenazi Jews, stemming from the trauma of the holocaust.

This position is ingrained even as it flies in the face of the very international laws these Western countries have themselves [put in place](#).

The context of broader global social dynamics can work only if we address the particularity of the Jewish nationalist movement in Palestine—i.e., both its colonial and Jewish supremacist character—leading us to a position that embraces "the free exercise of the initiative and choice of the indigenous population" of Palestine.

It will not work if we begin making distinctions between Zionism and Zionists! Ran Greenstein writes,

"These people [liberal-left tendencies (Meretz in Israel, J Street in the USA, and many unaffiliated individuals and organizations)]define themselves as Zionist but deviate, to some extent at least, from some of the core policies pursued by mainstream Zionist movements and the State of Israel... There is no need for perfect agreement on all issues, tactical collaboration would serve us well."

The core policy in the liberation of Palestine is that of return, which means the end of the Jewish state. Any Zionist who espouses the Zionist core ideology that Palestine belongs to Jews worldwide and not to its indigenous inhabitants, regardless of religion or ethnicity, is a Zionist without a difference in my view. Tactical alliances with such Zionists are bound to lead to another decade or two of obfuscation regarding the "rights" of Ashkenazi Jews to Palestine.

Fighting to make Israel "Jewish and Democratic", rather than one truly democratic state for all, is a no starter for the liberation of Palestine. As Wayne Kraft, an American BDS activist, wrote on Facebook:

Those who believe that the occupation must be ended first to alleviate the most savage abuses must contend with the fact that the occupation has only been strengthened throughout all attempts to resolve and end it. That is, if the two-state solution is the only possible solution (interim or otherwise), well, it doesn't appear to be possible.

The end of Israel— i.e., the end of Jewish Supremacy in Palestine is not only the ultimate goal; it is the only goal that will bring justice and liberation to Palestine after all these decades.

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