



Do you agree with Richard Anderson Falk that Israel is a “colonialist solution to a European problem?”

Yes, I agree with him, and that’s ironic that until the 1960s or so, the Zionists agreed with him as well. Again, when you look at the early Zionists, they are dreamily transparent and clear about it. They say there is anti-Semitism in Europe, as the nation states are formed throughout the 19th century, and Jewish populations in Europe are increasingly targeted by a new form of anti-Semitism that considers them to be sort of fundamentally foreign to the nation states within which they find themselves. And the Zionist movement emerges as a particular response to that by saying European anti-Semitism will never disappear, and the only way for us to solve it is to also develop a nation state, and we will develop that nation states in the colonial world. They’re very transparent about this. Of course, they are European bourgeois thinkers from the late 19th century, and like all European bourgeois who lived in the late 19th and early 20th century, they see no problem with colonialism. They’re in favor of it. They think that’s an OK way to resolve internal problems in Europe through conquering, occupying, and subjugating the peoples of the world.

So, in that sense, I kind of doubly agree with the quote, since on the one hand, it’s a colonial solution to a European problem because it’s about European control in the Middle East, and it’s a colonial solution to European problem because it’s an attempt by the Zionists to resolve the kind of the contradictory position they find themselves in in Europe, as both they are very much part of Europe – they’re Europe-

an, of course – and victims of European racism. And in fact, that’s also how the Zionists are going to convince the great powers to support Zionism.

So, if I can sort of sum it up in a way the arguments for the European powers is to say, you want control over Palestine and you don’t want the Jews in Europe, we have a solution to both of those problems. Although at some point, they talk about Argentina, at some point, they talk about Uganda, but they mainly talk about Palestine. And so one of the things that becomes striking is that many of the colonial policymakers or officials who supported Zionism were rabid anti-Semites. The Balfour Declaration, when the British Empire signs away Palestine to the Zionist movement, carries the name of a British politician called Lord Balfour, a famous anti-Semite. He passed legislation in 1905, the Aliens Act, that attempted to limit Jewish migration into Britain. There are many examples like that. And in fact, we still see them today, when we see the Israeli government cozying up to anti-Semitic governments in Hungary or in Poland.

You know, there’s a logic here that continues, which is to say that the goal of the Zionists was not to challenge anti-Semitism in Europe, but to say, “It’s simply a fact, there is nothing we can do about it, and so we will solve it by becoming a European state in the Middle East.” And Herzl who founded the Zionist organization and writes ‘The Jewish State’, which is really kind of the founding document of the Zionist movement, writes that the Jewish state will be a rampart of European civilization against Asian barbarism. And so there’s already this kind of idea of that by leaving Europe, they will be-

come Europeans – if that makes sense.

Interesting. A few months ago, at the beginning of the recent war, there was a debate around banning the word “decolonization” on Twitter, now known as X. Why is Israel so afraid of this word?

First of all, I should say that I’m not on social media and don’t actually know the particular thing you’re referring to. But I think it’s part of a broader tendency, certainly in the context of Zionism and of the Israeli state, to limit the possibility and ability of the International Solidarity Movement to express itself. And I think we see that in lots of different ways. There are attempts at criminalizing the BDS Movement (the boycott, divestment, and sanction movements), attempts to make it illegal in lots of different places, both in Europe and in North America, there are attempts to make it into law that anti-Zionism is equated with anti-Semitism. And so that it can no longer be about solidarity with the Palestinians, but it can be criminalized as hatred towards Jews.

And, you know, of course the idea of decolonization is not one that is comfortable for people that are committed to a colonial project. I would say, however, and this might seem a little bit contradictory, but it seems to me that all these different repressive tactics are signs of weakness. And I think, in general, this is true. When political movements or regimes have to rely more and more on repression, I think it tells us something about the fact that they find themselves threatened, isolated, etc. I think two or three decades ago, what the Zionists would have said, in Europe, or in North America was “We are the only democracy in the Mid-

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Nur Masalha traces the uses and theories of “transfer” amongst the early Zionists, and shows that the Nakba, the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians out of Palestine at the moment of the creation of the Israeli state, doesn’t come from nowhere.



dle East, we are bringing progress and advancement, and that’s why you should support us.”

In many ways, that’s still part of the narrative, but I think, fundamentally they know that they’ve lost the battle for hearts and minds in the majority of the populations of the world. And so instead of trying to wage an effective argument to convince, they are waging a campaign to repress. And that campaign can be very violent, people can lose their jobs, be slandered, attacked, etc. But fundamentally, I think it points to a weakness on their side, which is they feel that the popular sentiment has shifted away from them, and so they have to police people’s languages, political expression, etc., in these kinds of hyper repressive ways.

Israel tried and keeps trying to fabricate history in a way to legitimize their claim on the Palestinian land. How can we show the world that the land belongs to the indigenous people living on it regardless of their faith or race, and debunk the myth that the Palestinian land belongs to the Jews?

I think what’s interesting about that is, again, it’s striking when you look at, read, and engage with early Zionists and Israeli policymakers. They always had this double language. On the one hand, they would say Palestine is empty, so the early Zionists would say that Zionism was a movement for “people without a land in a land without a people,” and so the idea was that there was nobody in Palestine and so it was a perfect place to settle. And at the same time, they were hyper conscious of the fact that there was a population there, and that they were going to have to find a solution to it. And so

the early debates amongst the Zionists are really about what to do with the Palestinians. And so for people who claim that there were no Palestinians, it’s funny how much they spoke about them and debated what to do with them.

And you have two schools of thought here, which, by the way, also drives this point home of colonization and how aware they were that they were colonizers. You have one school of thought that is going to say we should do in Palestine what the French did in North Africa. So, we should colonize in the same way as the French were colonizing in Algeria at the time. And so we should have a minority of landowners who exploit the majority of indigenous workers, i.e. Palestinians, in order to pay them very little and work them very hard so that we can export cheap goods towards Europe.

And against that, another camp would say no, what we have to do is to build an economy that is not dependent on the indigenous population. And they will point, for example, to South Africa, and they will say the problem is that if you build an economy that’s dependent on indigenous labor, that indigenous labor will rebel, fight back, and refuse to submit.

Again, I think in the kind of Zionist sources, whether it’s [David] Ben-Gurion, whether it’s [Haim] Arlosoroff, who was one of the key theoreticians of early Zionism, whether it’s people like [Ze’ev] Jabotinsky, who wrote a famous article called “The Iron Wall”, where he talks about the fact that the only way that the indigenous people will be defeated is if they are militarily defeated and separated through an iron wall from the future state, it’s very interesting that