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Political Zionism is based on the fallacy that there exists a single nation encompassing all the world's Jews. How can Zionism claim that Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, since the only attribute shared by all Jews is Judaism, a religion and not an attribute of nationhood in any modern sense of the word? Jews can belong to various nations—a Jew may be French, American, Indian, Argentinian, and so forth-but being Jewish excludes other religious affiliations. Thus, this essay argues, the Zionist claim that all the world's Jews constitute a single distinct national entity is an ideological myth, invented as a misconceived way of dealing with the persecution and discrimination suffered by European Jews, in particular. Indeed, from its earliest iterations and up to the present day, Zionism—a colonizing project—has been fueled by an inverted form of anti-Semitism: if, as it claims, Israel acts on behalf of all Jews everywhere, then all Jews must be collectively held responsible for the actions of that state—clearly an anti-Semitic position.

What Is Zionism?

ZIONISM—or to give it its full designation, political Zionism—is a movement that combines an ideology and a project. Like most political movements, it comprises a variety of currents and shades of opinion, which all share a common core.

The core of Zionist ideology is the belief that the Jews of all countries constitute a single national entity rather than a mere religious denomination; and that this national entity has a right to selfdetermination, which it is entitled to exercise by reclaiming its historical (or "God-given") homeland, Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel), which comprises—at a minimum—pre-1948 Palestine.

Let us see how Zionism is defined by its advocates. Here, for example, is an authoritative formulation: "Zionism is the national revival movement of the Jews. It holds that the Jews are a people and therefore have the right to self-determination in their own national home. It aims to secure and support a legally recognized national home for the Jews in their historical homeland, and to initiate and stimulate a revival of Jewish national life, culture and language."

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However, this partisan definition begs a couple of questions. First, does the totality of Jews constitute a nation in the modern secular sense, to which the right of national self-determination is applicable? This claim of nationhood is at best extremely questionable, and has in fact been denied by many Jews, who assert cogently that Jewish identity is not national but primarily a matter of religious affiliation or background.

Dangerous Doctrines

When Lucien Wolf, a distinguished journalist and leading member of the Conjoint Foreign Committee of British Jews, was confronted with Chaim Weizmann's effort to obtain what was to be known as the Balfour Declaration, he wrote a worried letter to James de Rothschild, dated 31 August 1916.

Dear Mr. James de Rothschild,

At the close of our conference with Dr. Weizmann on the 17th inst., you asked me to write you a letter defining my view. . . .

I have thought over very carefully the various statements made to me by Dr. Weizmann, and, with the best will in the world, I am afraid I must say that there are vital and irreconcilable differences of principles and method between us.

The question of principle is raised by Dr. Weizmann's assertion of a Jewish nationality. The assertion has to be read in the light of the authoritative essay on "Zionism and the Jewish Future" recently published by Mr. Sacher, more especially those written by Dr. Weizmann himself and by Dr. Gaster. I understand from these essays that the Zionists do not merely propose to form and establish a Jewish nationality in Palestine, but that they claim all the Jews as forming at the present moment a separate and dispossessed nationality, for which it is necessary to find an organic political centre, because they are and must always be aliens in the lands in which they now dwell (Weizmann p. 6), and, more especially, because it is "an absolute self delusion" to believe that any Jew can be at once "English by nationality and Jewish by faith" (Gaster pp. 92, 93). I have spent most of my life in combating these very doctrines, when presented to me in the form of anti-Semitism, and I can only regard them as the more dangerous when they come to me in the guise of Zionism. They constitute a capitulation to our enemies which has absolutely no justification in history, ethnology, or the facts of everyday life, and if they were admitted by the Jewish people as a whole, the result would only be that the terrible situation of our coreligionists in Russia and Romania would become the common lot of Jewry throughout the world.²

And on 24 May 1917, as negotiations that were to lead to the Balfour Declaration were at an advanced stage, Alexander and Claude Montefiore, presidents respectively of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and of the Anglo-Jewish Association, wrote a letter to The Times in the name of the Conjoint Committee of these two bodies, protesting against the fallacies and dangers of political Zionism. After declaring their adherence to Wolf's position, the writers go on to say that "Establishment of a Jewish nationality in Palestine, founded on the theory of Jewish homelessness,

must have the effect throughout the world of stamping the Jews as strangers in their native lands and of undermining their hard-won positions as citizens and nationals of those lands."

They point out that the theories of political Zionism undermined the religious basis of Jewry to which the only alternative would be "a secular Jewish nationality, recruited on some loose and obscure principle of race and of ethnographic peculiarity. But this would not be Jewish in any spiritual sense, and its establishment in Palestine would be a denial of all the ideals and hopes by which the survival of Jewish life in that country commends itself to the Jewish conscience and Jewish sympathy. On these grounds the Conjoint Committee of the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association deprecates earnestly the national proposals of the Zionists."

Similar views were held by prominent Jews in other Western European countries. Thus, for example, Alfred Naquet, polemicizing in 1903 against the Zionist Bernard Lazare, pointed out that the claim that Jews are a separate nation was not very different from the preaching of leading anti-Semites such as Édouard Drumont, the founder of the Anti-Semitic League of France.

If it pleased Bernard Lazare to consider himself a citizen of a separate nation, that is his affair; but I declare that, although I was born a Jew . . . I do not recognize Jewish nationality. . . . I belong to no other nation but the French. . . . Are the Jews a nation? Although they were one in the remote past, my reply is a categorical negative. The concept nation implies certain conditions that do not exist in this case. A nation must have a territory on which to develop, and, in our time at least, until a world confederation has extended this basis, a nation must have a common language. And the Jews no longer have either a territory or a common language. . . . Like myself, Bernard Lazare probably did not know a word of Hebrew, and would have found it no easy matter, if Zionism had achieved its purpose, to make himself understood to his counterparts [congénères] from other parts of the world. . . .

German and French Jews are quite unlike Polish and Russian Jews. The characteristic features of the Jews include nothing that bears the hallmark [empreinte] of nationality. If it were permissible to recognize the Jews as a nation, as Drumont does, it would be an artificial nation. The modern Jew is a product of the unnatural selection to which his forebears were subjected for nearly eighteen centuries.3

These views reflected the actual situation in Western Europe, where Jews enjoyed equal civil rights and shared the national language and secular culture of the majority. (Indeed, similar views are held today by many Jews in Western Europe and especially in the United States.)

In the Russian Empire and its periphery, the situation at the time was different. Jews did not enjoy equal rights, and most of them spoke their own language, Yiddish; and by the nineteenth century a vibrant secular Yiddish culture had developed. Moreover, much of the Jewish population was concentrated in certain areas, where they constituted a large proportion, in some cases a majority, of the population. Thus they had the main attributes of a nation.⁴ So the Jewish Bund, which was founded in the same year (1897) as the Zionist movement, and won far more support than the latter, had at that time reasonable grounds for asserting the existence of a Yiddish-speaking Jewish nation. While rejecting Zionism, the Bund demanded national-cultural autonomy for the Jews, to be exercised locally, where they actually lived. However, that Jewish

nation, as conceptualized by the Bund, did not encompass all Jews around the world, but only the Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern Europe.

In this connection let me mention that at present there also exists a "Jewish" nation, namely the Hebrew-speaking settler nation in Israel, widely referred to as "Israeli Jewish," but there is no single nation encompassing all the world's Jews.

Indeed, it was as true 120 years ago as it is now that the *only* attribute shared by all Jews is Judaism, practiced by them or by their recent forebears. They do not share *any* of the essentially secular attributes of a nation in the modern sense of the word.⁶

Moreover, a necessary and sufficient condition for a non-Jew to become Jewish is undergoing a religious conversion (*giyyur*). Jews can belong to various nations: a Jew may be French, American, Italian, Scottish, and so forth. But Jewishness excludes other religious affiliations: a Jew cannot be Muslim, Hindu, or Roman Catholic. Thus the Zionist claim that all the planet's Jews constitute a single distinct national entity rather than a religion-based community is an ideological myth, invented as a misconceived way of dealing with the discrimination and persecution of Jews.

This myth, as was pointed out by Jewish opponents of Zionism such as those I have quoted above, is shared by the most virulent anti-Semites, albeit with the evil intent of *justifying* the exclusion, persecution, and eventual elimination of Jews.⁷ An extreme illustration of this is the hypocritical statement by the arch-Nazi, SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, writing in the SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* (26 September 1935):

In the context of its *Weltanschauung*, National Socialism has no intention of attacking the Jewish people in any way. On the contrary, the recognition of Jewry as a racial community based on blood, and not as a religious one, leads the German government to guarantee the racial separateness of this community without any limitations. The government finds itself in complete agreement with the great spiritual movement within Jewry itself, the so-called Zionism, with its recognition of the solidarity of Jewry throughout the world and the rejection of all assimilationist ideas. On this basis, Germany undertakes measures that will surely play a significant role in the future in the handling of the Jewish problem around the world.⁸

A Colonizing Project

The second question begged by the propagandist definition of Zionism quoted above is the meaning of "self-determination." Whatever group of people the right of national self-determination may apply to, it does not entitle them to pick and choose at will the territory over which they may exercise that right. Claims that the group's alleged distant ancestors lived in the coveted territory many centuries ago, or that it was promised to them by a deity in whose existence many of them happen to believe, or that they have long wished to possess it, are simply not good enough. The right to self-determination certainly does not license any group to colonize a territory long inhabited by other people.

But the key fact about the Zionist project is precisely that it is a project of colonization of Palestine, an inhabited land; and it is precisely this essential fact that is conveniently omitted by the definition of Zionism offered by its present-day propagandists. They avoid the word "colonization" like the proverbial plague; it has become too compromising.

Earlier Zionist leaders and ideologues had no such qualms. Thus, for example, Vladimir Jabotinsky—the political and spiritual progenitor of five Israeli prime ministers, including Benjamin Netanyahu9—repeatedly and unselfconsciously used the term colonization in his seminal article "The Iron Wall" (1923) to describe the Zionist project:

Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonised. That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing, and what they will persist in doing as long as there remains a solitary spark of hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of "Palestine" into the "Land of Israel."...

Colonisation can have only one aim, and Palestine Arabs cannot accept this aim. It lies in the very nature of things, and in this particular regard nature cannot be changed. . . .

Zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population—behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.10

So, whether or not the totality of Jews may be regarded as a national entity to which the right of national self-determination is applicable, the Zionist project cannot possibly be regarded as an implementation of such a right. As the Zionist historian Yigal Elam had to admit: "Zionism couldn't appeal to the principle of self-determination and rely on it in Palestine. This principle worked clearly against it and in favour of the local Arab national movement. . . . From the viewpoint of national theory, Zionism needed a fiction that was incompatible with the accepted concepts of national theory. . . . [It] needed a much broader conception than the simplistic one. In this other conception . . . referendum of the world's Jews superseded referendum of the population of Palestine."11

The "Nation-State of the Jewish People" and the Hasbara Project

Israel—a product of the Zionist project of colonization, as well as an instrument for its continuation and extension—claims to be the "nation-state of the Jewish people" (briefly, "NSJP"). At the time of this writing, a Basic Law to this effect is in the process of being enacted by the Knesset, 12 but the claim itself is not new, and an insistent demand for its international acceptance has been made explicitly and officially on numerous public occasions.¹³ Note also that the NSJP claim is implied in the propagandist definition of Zionism I quoted at the beginning of this article; in fact, the claim and the definition are two parts of a single package.

In public political and journalistic discourse, the NSJP formulation is often misquoted in the abbreviated form, "Israel as a Jewish state"; and it is widely criticized as implying and sanctioning discrimination against Israel's non-Jewish—particularly Palestinian—citizens (also known as Palestinian citizens of Israel or PCI). This is certainly one of the intended effects of the NSJP law. Indeed, a major reason for the long gestation of this law has been disagreement among its proponents in the Israeli government regarding the extent to which the law should override the

alleged "democratic" character of the Israeli state and the individual civil and human rights of its non-Jewish citizens. But this actually *understates* the real intent of the law and the full implication of the NSJP formula. If nothing else, it renders the status of the PCI inferior not only to the status of their Jewish fellow citizens but also to that of Jewish people all round the world.

Here I would like to focus on the intended implication, and the actual use, of the NSJP formula to legitimize the colonizing Zionist regime and intimidate, persecute, and penalize robust criticism of the Israeli state and its actions. In recent years, the impulse to stage a worldwide campaign to this effect has been pressing itself on Israeli leaders in view of the growing critical trend in progressive public opinion around the world. This is reflected in the rapid growth of the global campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), aiming to apply economic and political pressure on Israel to end its violations of international law. Of particular worry to the Zionist leadership is the growing disaffection with Israel by Jews—especially the younger generation—in many countries, evidenced by their participation in the BDS movement.

Faced with this serious damage to its image, the Israeli government has taken steps to attack and discredit its critics by a variety of means, fair and (mostly) foul. This has required a major extension of Israel's *hasbara* (propaganda) machine abroad, providing it with teeth, and recruiting personnel from Israel's secret services. Worldwide operations are orchestrated by the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. Since 2015, this ministry is headed by cabinet member Gilad Erdan, who is also minister of internal security and information. Erdan himself is on record stating that his "achievements should be kept hush-hush." *The Guardian*, reporting on his secret meeting in London in September 2017 with disgraced Tory minister Priti Patel (following her return from a "holiday" in Israel), comments:

Erdan's ministry was asked in 2015 to "guide, coordinate and integrate the activities of all the ministers and the government and of civil entities in Israel and abroad on the subject of the struggle against attempts to delegitimise Israel and the boycott movement."

Most controversially, Erdan has been put in charge of large-scale efforts to target foreign individuals and organisations, reportedly including staff recruited from the Mossad foreign intelligence agency, the Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency, and the military intelligence directorate. ¹⁵

One of the main weapons in these "efforts to target foreign individuals and organisations" that criticize Israel, especially those that support BDS, is to accuse them of anti-Semitism. In this campaign, Erdan's operatives in foreign countries mobilize local pro-Israel lobbies. In a fascinating four-part television series on such activities in Britain, which aired in January 2017, Al Jazeera provided an exposé of undercover operative Shai Masot's attempts to meddle in the Labour Party. The series is available online, and I urge readers to view it for their entertainment and education.¹⁶

Since then, the campaign in Britain, directed against the left wing of the Labour Party and personally against its leader, Jeremy Corbyn—a long-time supporter of Palestinian rights—has escalated to become a veritable hysteria. It is spearheaded by the pro-Israel lobby and blatantly aided by Corbyn's right-wing and pro-Zionist enemies within the party, and by the media. A witch-hunt is being conducted against anti-Zionists and critics of Israel in the party, using accusations of anti-Semitism, the vast majority of which are simply false, conflating anti-Zionism

with anti-Semitism. In all high-profile cases in which insinuations of anti-Semitism have been made against Labour Party members, with the gleeful connivance of hostile media, no evidence of real anti-Semitism has so far been evinced. Some of the individuals concerned were eventually expelled on other, rather vague pretexts such as rudeness or "bringing the Party into disrepute." In other cases (including my own), which were met with a groundswell of solidarity and support within the party and beyond, no alternative pretext could be remotely justified and expulsions were rapidly rescinded.

The NSJP claim plays a central role in this campaign. Its clear and clearly intended implication is that Israel represents the totality of all Jews and acts on their behalf; hence any robust opposition to Israel is automatically anti-Semitic.

Tangle and Dilemma

An illustration of this paralogism is provided by the use made of the so-called "working definition of anti-Semitism" formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).¹⁸ This definition is often accompanied by eleven "Examples" of what may constitute anti-Semitism (although the IHRA itself has not formally adopted them). I will not discuss in detail this definition, which various public and private bodies everywhere have been pressured to adopt. I refer the reader to authoritative analyses of the definition, and especially the Examples, by two legal experts, Queen's Counsel Hugh Tomlinson¹⁹ and emeritus Court of Appeal judge Sir Stephen Sedley.²⁰ They are highly recommended reading. Suffice it to say that most of the so-called Examples are not concerned with anti-Semitism as normally understood (feelings, expressions, and practices hostile to Jews as such) but with opposition to the State of Israel.

For the purpose of the present article, the most telling are the following two of the Examples provided.21

The seventh one states: "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor."

The logic of this statement is quite bizarre. To begin with, how does the second clause relate to the first? Surely, it is logically consistent to affirm that there exists a Jewish people and that it has a right to self-determination, but that its alleged implementation in and by the State of Israel is racist. Looking at this statement as a whole, it would only make sense as an instance of anti-Semitism if you accept the propagandist definition of Zionism, behind which lurks the NSJP claim, implying that Israel represents all Jews everywhere.

The tenth of the Examples listed by the IHRA states: "Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."

Now, comparisons of this kind have in fact been made by Israeli scholars. As fairly recent examples, let me refer to two articles by Professor Daniel Blatman, a historian of holocaust and genocide at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,²² and to a report about a pronouncement by Professor Ofer Cassif, who teaches politics and government at the same university.²³

But look again at this Example. How is it supposed to be an instance of anti-Semitism? Let me concede for a moment that comparing contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis is an unjustified slur. But slur against what or whom? At worst, it could be a slur against a state, Israel; and as such it may well upset supporters of that state and those who still believe in it. But how can it possibly be a slur against the Jews, and hence anti-Semitic? Well, the only way in which it could bear such an interpretation is if we hold all Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel. Again, this presupposes that Israel acts on behalf of all Jews everywhere, which is the implicit message of the NSJP claim.

Curiously, the last example in the IHRA list states that the following position is anti-Semitic: "Holding all Jews as collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel."

This creates an interesting logical tangle.

You can only take Example 10 seriously as a genuine instance of anti-Semitism—rather than of outrage directed specifically at the Israeli state—if you hold all Jews collectively responsible for the actions of that state. But then you are guilty of anti-Semitism according to Example 11, which is undoubtedly an instance of real anti-Semitism. Thus the list of 11 Examples taken as a whole incriminates itself as . . . anti-Semitic!

The paralogism of the Examples is clearly unintentional. But what is certainly intentional is the false choice implied by the package consisting of the NSJP claim and the propagandist definition of Zionism. Indeed, this is its very purpose. If you accept this package, then you find yourself impaled on the horns of an immoral dilemma:

Either you blame "the Jews" for the injustices inflicted by the Zionist colonizing project on the dispossessed indigenous people of Palestine and for the atrocities against them committed by the Israeli settler state. This choice is the anti-Zionism of fools.

Or you keep quiet about these injustices and atrocities; in fact you avoid mention of Zionism in any derogatory sense. This choice is the decent one—if you accept the false package.

Conclusion: the package is a deliberately constructed antipersonnel device, designed to terrorize decent people into silence. The only way to make it harmless is to deconstruct it. So here is a moral health warning. If you wish to avoid the trap of an immoral dilemma:

- Reject the allegation that Jews outside Israel are aliens in their actual countries, but are members of a Jewish national entity whose homeland is elsewhere.
- Reject the self-serving justification of the Zionist colonization project and the Israeli settler state as implementing the self-determination of that alleged national entity.
- Reject the NSJP claim.

About the Author

Moshé Machover, born in Palestine in 1936, is an expatriate Israeli dissident and cofounder, in 1962, of the Socialist Organization in Israel, Matzpen.²⁴ He is a mathematician, professor emeritus at King's College London, and a socialist political activist.

ENDNOTES

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- See Moshé Machover, "Palestine and Hebrew Self-Determination," Weekly Worker, 12 January 2017, https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1137/palestine-and-hebrew-self-determination/.
- A related present-day phenomenon is the enthusiasm for Israel of some anti-Semites in Europe and the United States.
- Quoted by Francis R. Nicosia, The Third Reich and the Palestine Question (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985). The "measures" mentioned by Heydrich refer to the infamous Nuremberg Laws, promulgated a few days earlier.
- The others are Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Ariel Sharon (a late convert to the Jabotinskian wing of Zionism), and Ehud Olmert.
- 10 Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, "The Iron Wall" [O zheleznoi stene], published 4 November 1923 in the Russian-language journal Rassyyet [Dawn]; see https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-the-ironwall-quot for English translation.
- 11 Yigal Elam, "Hanahot hadashot leota tzionut" [New assumptions for the same Zionism], Ot, no. 2, Winter 1967; my translation (emphasis in original). Ot was an official theoretical journal of the Labor Alignment, which encompassed the then Labor Party.
- 12 Israel has no written constitution. Instead, it has Basic Laws, intended to be draft chapters of a constitution to be adopted sometime in the indefinite future.
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- 22 Daniel Blatman, "The Israeli Lawmaker Heralding Genocide against Palestinians," Haaretz, 23 May 2017, https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-the-israeli-mk-heralding-genocide-againstpalestinians-1.5475561; "Smotrich's Stage-by-Stage Plan" [in Hebrew], Haaretz, 10 June 2017, https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/.premium-1.4158915.
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