PALESTINIAN LIVES MATTER: RACIALISING ISRAELI SETTLER–COLONIALISM

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ABSTRACT

Against the background of recent developments in Israel's racial rule over the Palestinians, the Black Lives Matter protests, and in view of Israel's declared intention to annex occupied Palestinian territories, this article theorises Israel's permanent war against the Palestinians as first, state of exception, second, racial state, and third, settler-colony. The paper critiques the focus on ethnicity as an analytical frame by Israeli scholars and posits race as a key concept in analising Zionist settler-colonialism. It proposes that rather than being a solution to European antisemitism, Zionism adopted discourses of race approximating those expressed by antisemitic regimes. As the Black Lives Matter movement proliferates, the article concludes by proposing that Palestine and the question of Palestine are becoming a truly global issue.

KEYWORDS: Race, Ethnicity, Settler-Colonialism, Antisemitism, Black Lives Matter, Palestine, Israel

Introduction

Racism in Israel, edited by Yehouda Shenhav and Yossi Yonah (2008) was the first edited collection dealing with racism in Israel by Israeli scholars in the Hebrew language (even though several other studies of race and racialization in Israel had been published in Hebrew before, e.g., Lavie 2001; Boyarin 2003; Yitzhaki 2003). The collection brought together

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empirical studies of racism, but contributors stopped short at theorising state racism, Israel as a racial settler–colonial state, and race rather than racism. Moreover, the editors actually wrote that their definition of racist 'regimes of justification' does not encompass Goldberg's (2002) conceptualisation of nation–states as racial states and my own insistence that Israel is a racial state (Shenhav and Yonah 2008: 43, fn 50).

Since the collection was published many things have happened that make it clear why race is central to understanding Israel's permanent war against the Palestinians. After Israel's genocidal assaults on the Gaza Strip in 2008, 2012 and 2014, there was the IDF's wanton shooting at unarmed protesters in the Gaza Great March of Return between March 2018 and March 2019, leading, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,[2] to the murder of 209 unarmed protesters (including 41 children) and the injuring of more than 22,500 (of whom over 5,500 with live ammunition). Other notable events were the ongoing threat to demolish the 'unrecognised' Bedouin village Khan al-Ahmar; the arrest and subsequent release of the Palestinian teenager Ahed Tamimi; the imprisonment and subsequent release of the Palestinian poet Dareen Tatour; and the lynching of three Palestinian citizens on a beach in Israel. All this apart from the ongoing raids of Palestinian homes and arrests of hundreds of Palestinians, including women and children by the occupation forces.

More recently, three further things stand out. In 2018 the Israeli Knesset enacted the Basic (constitutional) Nation State Law, which defines Israel as 'the nation-state of the Jewish people in which it realises its natural, cultural, religious and historical right to self–determination',[3] and which copper-fastens Jewish racial superiority and Israel's racial rule over the Palestinians. Two years previously, in 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)[4] – an intergovernmental organisation mandated to focus on Holocaust-related issues – in line with the weaponisation of antisemitism by Israel, published a new definition of antisemitism that includes, inter alia, 'accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations', and 'denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour' as antisemitic. The definition was adopted by many states and, while not legally binding, has been used to silence critics of Israel's policies. In May 2020, the murder of

2 www.ochaopt.org (accessed 1 July 2020).
3 https://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/BasicLawNationState.pdf (accessed 1 July 2020).
4 https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism (accessed 1 July 2020).

the unarmed African American man George Floyd by the Minneapolis police triggered widespread Black Lives Matter protests in the United States and elsewhere. This, and the murder, by Israel's Border Police, of the 32-year-old autistic Palestinian Eyad Al-Hallaq in occupied East Jerusalem, mobilised many Palestinians and their supporters to protest against Israeli racism. According to Aziza Nofal (2020), Palestinian activists have drawn an analogy between Floyd and Hallaq, and 'Palestinian activists presented the case of Hallaq as a clear example of the racist practices against them and the oppression they face only because they are Palestinians, comparing their situation to that of African Americans in the United States'.

In recent years, and not only because of the developments listed above, more Israelis are beginning to talk openly about Israeli racism, mostly on social media. However, many Israeli scholars and activists are lagging behind in theorising race, and some key Israeli theorists still prefer to use the concepts of ethnicity, ethnocracy, ethnic cleansing, and, racism instead of race to theorise Israel's permanent war against the Palestinians. This is astounding due to the fact that a significant number of Palestinian scholars — including Fayez Sayegh (1965), Edward Said (1980), Nadia Abu El Haj (2012), Elia Zureik (2016) and Joseph Massad (2003) — have been explicitly writing about the racial underpinnings of Zionism since the 1960s.

In this article, against the background of the developments listed above and in view of Israel's declared intention to annex the occupied Jordan Valley and large areas of the occupied West Bank, developing the argument made in my *Traces of Racial Exception: Racializing Israeli Settler Colonialism* (2018), I put race at the centre of my analysis. The paper outlines a three-pronged theorisation of Israel's rule over Palestine as first, state of exception, second, racial state, and third, settler-colony. The paper critiques the insistent focus on ethnicity as an analytical frame of reference by Israeli scholars such as Yiftachel (2006) and Pappe (2006), and argues that race, rather than ethnicity or racism, is key to understanding Zionist settler-colonialism. I propose that Zionist ideology has been constructing the Jewish people as a superior race from its inception to the present. Furthermore, I propose that rather than being a solution to the problem of European antisemitism, by declaring — as did the antisemites — that the Jews were not merely a nation with its own tradition and culture, but a biological racial entity, Zionism adopted discourses of race approximating those expressed by antisemitic regimes. In conclusion, I propose that as the Black Lives Matter movement proliferates, situating the liberation of racialised populations as its political objective, Palestine and the question of Palestine are becoming a truly global issue.

Before I begin, let me state that as a (Palestine-born) anti-Zionist Jewish Israeli scholar and activist who has devoted much of her life and academic

career to thinking and writing about the colonisation of Palestine and campaigning for Palestinian liberation, I refrain from representing and speaking for or on behalf of the Palestinian people. Instead, I focus on Israel and Zionist race-making, fully aware of my privileged membership of the perpetrator Zionist collectivity. Having spent many years attempting to understand the puzzle of Israel's permanent war against the Palestinians that persists unabated and uncensored by the so-called international community despite the growing global civil society solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinians for freedom and self-determination, I have come to the conclusion that using the lens of race critical theory is the only way of theorising Israel's permanent war against the Palestinians.

A further comment before I begin: I do not use the hackneyed terms 'Israel/Palestine' or 'Palestine/Israel' because such couplings mask unequal power. Nor do I call this war 'the Israeli-Palestinian conflict', as it is not a conflict but rather colonisation, and to analyse colonisation we need to use the lens of race, as argued by the late theorist of settler-colonialism Patrick Wolfe in his posthumous book *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race:* 'Race is colonialism speaking, in idioms whose diversity reflects the variety of unequal relationships into which Europeans have co-opted conquered populations' (Wolfe 2016: 5).

Is Israel a Racial State of Exception?

My previous work (Lentin 2008) focused on Israel as a classic case of what the Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben (2005) calls state of exception. Israel rules Palestine through practices of exception, permanent emergency (and a whole panoply of emergency legislation), necessity and security, and its self-styled exceptionalism positions it above and outside domestic and international law regarding Palestinian citizens, as well as occupied, besieged and refugee subjects. Following Agamben, I address Israeli governmental technologies that construct different racialised categories of Palestinians — Palestinian citizens of Israel and internal refugees ('1948 Palestinians'), occupied Palestinian subjects ('1967 Palestinians'), Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, and the Palestinian diaspora — through governmental technologies of segregation, exclusion and surveillance, employed from the 1948 'Plan D' for what Pappe (2006) terms 'the ethnic cleansing of Palestine' to the present. These technologies include the ongoing rule of the occupied Palestinian territory, the siege of the Gaza enclave, the prevention of the return of Palestinian refugees and the prevention of the return of internal refugees to their depopulated villages, as well as population management and surveillance technologies both in 1948 Palestine and in the occupied territory (for a detailed discussion of surveillance see Zureik 2016).

I proposed that the politics of exception aims to ensure that Israeli Jews, both Jewish Israeli citizens living within the state's 1949 Armistice 'green line' borders and Jewish settlers in the West Bank and the Golan Heights, live at the expense of the Palestinian other(s). At the same time the politics of exception discriminate against Palestinian citizens and occupied and besieged subjects, whose lives are regulated and controlled not only by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and the Shin Bet – the Israeli Security Agency, but also by the occupation's Civil Administration and other civil authorities. This is evident in the daily practices of exclusion and control employed by the Israeli occupation regime, including raids, arrests, checkpoints, curfews, house and village demolitions, administrative detention and the detention and torture of minors, population transfers and extra-judicial executions, all constituting an exceptional yet also routine settler-colonial racialised regime.

These settler-colonial conditions are not merely politics of life but also politics of death, that Ghanim (2008) documents as 'thanatopolitics' and Mbembe (2003) calls 'necropolitics'. And death, expulsion, and exclusion are Israel's ultimate way of overcoming the sense of self-perceived Israeli Jewish victimhood, that Svisrky (2012: 58) theorises as a settler-colonial immunitarian practice of segregation and political conservation of the paradoxical notion of 'Jewish democracy' against all possibilities of shared ways of life. At the same time practices of exception and emergency privilege discourses of security that Agamben (2005, 14) sees as 'the normal technique of government'. (2005: 14). Indeed, security, like discourses of existential threat and Jewish victimhood are central building blocks of Israel's control of the Palestinians. As Israel sees itself as a haven for the nebulous entity of the 'Jewish nation', it regards the control of 1948 Palestinians, 1967 Palestinians and diasporic Palestinians as an imperative born of necessity and emergency which, as Agamben argues, creates and guarantees the situation that the law needs for its validity.

However, Agamben's theorisation of exception and 'bare life' (Agamben 1995), a term referring to people who are outside the law and at the mercy of sovereign power that positions itself above the law, has been amply criticised. The first strand of criticism is that Palestinian subjects cannot be understood merely as 'bare life', because, as Walters (2008) argues, this casts them as victims and denudes them of any agency of active resistance. Nor can Palestinians under Israel's rule be understood as located in what Agamben calls 'zones of exception;' the Fanonian concept of 'zones of non-being' (Fanon 1967) is more apt here. The second strand of criticism, more pertinent to my focus in this article, is Agamben's Eurocentric tendency to occlude colonialism and anti-colonialism, but more importantly, to be utterly blind to the racial aspects of his theory, and to what race scholar Alexander Weheliye (2014)

calls 'racial assemblages'. Weheliye argues that Eurocentric theorisations of exception are universally transportable precisely because they don't speak from an explicitly racialised standpoint. Weheliye's work was crucial in leading me to positioning race front and centre in considerations of political violence as socio-political processes of differentiation and hierarchisation projected onto the biological human body. These processes are regularly and consciously employed by the State of Israel in racialising Palestinian citizens, occupied, besieged and refugee populations, as well as non-white, non-European Jewish citizens, and non-white, non-Jewish migrants. However, neither Israel nor many of its theorists articulate these processes as racial, but rather as a consequence of 'the conflict', 'the (1967) occupation', or of Israel's perceived victimhood and 'need to defend itself'.

One key reason to focus on race is countering the tendency by Israeli – but also many Palestinian and international — scholars to theorise Israel's rule over Palestine in terms of ethnicity rather than race. The central players here are the Israeli geographer Oren Yiftachel (2006) and the Israeli historian Ilan Pappe (2006), whose concepts of 'ethnocracy' and 'ethnic cleansing' have become common currency. Yiftachel (2006: 359) defines ethnocracy as 'a political regime that facilitates expansion and control by a dominant *ethnicity* in contested lands... with rights and capabilities depending primarily on ethnic origin and geographic location'. However, ethnocracy assumes that Israeli Jews — as well as Palestinian Arabs — are ethnically homogeneous despite their obvious ethnic heterogeneities. Ethnocracy is as problematic and theoretically inadequate as Yiftachel calling Palestine a 'contested land' rather than a racial settler-colony, which is the way I prefer to theorise it.

Pappe's conceptualisation of the Nakba as 'the ethnic cleansing of Palestine' is equally problematic. Based on the use of the term by the Bosnian Serb government to describe massacres and population transfers during the 1990s Bosnian war, Pappe (2006: 1) argues that ethnic cleansing is 'a well-defined policy of a particular group of persons to systematically eliminate another group from a given territory'. Yet he occludes the racial aspects of colonialism and settler-colonialism which, according to Wolfe (2016), describe more accurately the Zionist colonisation of Palestine.

Several scholars have critiqued Pappe's use of the term 'ethnic cleansing', which has nonetheless become popular despite, or perhaps because of, assuming Jewish ethnic homogeneity. Colonialism, Goldberg (2002, 31) reminds us, is about 'managing heterogeneity, dealing with difference through imposition and restriction, regulation and repression... Colonizing states... proceeded on an assumption of internalized population homogeneity;' hence the Zionist assumption of Jewish (and Palestinian) homogeneity is but a colonial strategy of control.

More generally, race scholar Alana Lentin (2004, 74–79) writes about the post–World War II UNESCO meeting of 'world panels of experts', and the resulting statements they issued in 1950 and in 1968 in which 'ethnicity' and 'culture' were posited as alternatives explanations of human difference previously covered by 'race', and in which 'cultural relativism' was offered as an alternative to 'racism'. Taking it further, race scholar Barnor Hesse (2004) critiques the very term 'racism' conceived without the implications of race as a Eurocentric ideology. Hesse (2010) asks how come that the racialised experiences and violations of the Jews in Europe, rather than those associated with US blacks or colonised 'non–whites' generally dominate and frame the twentieth century concept of racism in international relations, and calls for placing race at the heart of the analysis so that racism acquires a specific history. The occlusion of race, he argues, ignores 'how our conceptual inheritance of racism has historically foreclosed the questions of a silencing that has always been there'.

Therefore, rather than a state of exception (see Pappe, 2008, for proposing Israel as a *Mukhabarat* state rather than a state of exception), I analyse Israel as a racial state that excludes and includes in racial terms, and that, as Goldberg (2002) argues, constructs homogeneity through governmental technologies such as border controls, immigration policies, military and police forces, citizenship regimes, surveillance strategies and census categorisations, but also through invented histories and traditions that construct state narratives, state history and state memory — all applicable to Israel. I further theorise Israel as a racial settler-colony, to which I now turn.

Settler–colonialism, not a New Paradigm

Like other settler-colonies including the United States of America, Australia, and Canada, Israel follows the settler-colonial logic of elimination. As Wolfe (2016) argues, settler-colonialism destroys and replaces what it destroys, as evident in Zionist settler-colonial practices of replacing demolished and depopulated Palestinian villages and urban neighbourhoods with Jewish settlements, roads and national parks, substituting Palestinian Arab place names with Hebrew place names, replacing Palestinian orchards with imported European conifers ('making the desert bloom'), and the current practice of demolishing Bedouin villages deemed 'unrecognised' — that is not provided with water, electricity, roads, schools, refuse collection and other basic services, even though their inhabitants are Israeli citizens, and replacing them with Jewish settlements.

Though Pappe posits the theorisation of Israel as a settler-colonial regime as a 'new paradigm', and argues that Israel is 'the last remaining

active settler-colony' (Massey 2016), Zionist settler-colonialism had been theorised by many others including Palestinian scholars Constantine Zurayek (1965 [1948]), Fayez Sayegh (1965), Nahla Abdo (1995), and Elia Zureik (2016), Israeli scholars Gershon Shafir (1989) and Baruch Kimmerling (1983), the French historian Maxime Rodinson (1973), and by the Israeli-Palestinian socialist organisation Matzpen.

While colonialism focuses on exploiting resources and colonised populations, settler-colonials come to stay and consider the colonised territory — that they regard as various versions of *terra nullius* ('a land without people') — their own, as Israeli Jews do to this day. Wolfe understands settler-colonialism in terms of 'structured genocide', illustrating the concrete relations between spatial removal, mass killings and biocultural assimilation. The Zionist logic of elimination is evident in the expulsion of the Palestinians during and after the Nakba and the replacement of their villages and urban neighbourhoods by Jewish settlements; the 1948–1966 Military Government regime; the 1967 occupation of the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip; and the ongoing Israeli control of the Palestinian territory.

Like the omission of race analysis in theories of state of exception, until the publication of Wolfe's posthumous *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (2016), analyses of Israel as a settler-colony have also glossed over the race element. Wolfe outlines how regimes of race reflect and reproduce different forms of colonialism: 'Race is a trace of history: colonial populations continue to be racialized in specific ways that mark out and reproduce the unequal relationships into which Europeans have co-opted these populations' (Wolfe 2016: 2).

My analysis follows Goldberg's 'racial Palestinianization' (2008), as well as Wolfe's argument that in the annals of settler-colonialism Zionism is an unparalleled example of deliberate, explicit planning, making it particularly revealing for researching settler-colonialism, where the logic of elimination involves careful forethought though it does not depend on it. Palestinian entitlement, Wolfe insists, does not depend on whether it can be shown that, somewhere in Europe, Jewish theorists imagined expelling the Natives from the land of Zion. What matters is the outcome (Wolfe 2016: 203). As practiced by Europeans, Wolfe writes, settler-colonialism employs race and racial categorisations in its aim of eliminating the natives while gaining as much of their land as possible — as is the case in Israel — though it is not about the summary liquidation of Indigenous peoples, but rather about building a new colonial society that the settlers regard as their own. Elimination, crucially, is not a one-off occurrence but rather an ongoing organising principle — a 'structure, not an event', as Wolfe puts it.

Wolfe's book provides a historical analysis of the Zionist settler-colonisation of Palestine, focusing on first, how Zionism's diffuse Jewish metropolis financed Jewish land purchase in Palestine, and second, on the specific racial character of Zionist settler-colonialism. Zionism, he argues, is different to other settler-colonial regimes, the twin aims of which are first eliminating the Native territorially and then constructing a new society in its place. With Zionism, these twin aims were merged in the concept of return to the 'old new' homeland – 'Erez Israel' ('the land of Israel'), a term invented, as Sand (2014) argues, for the territorial space allegedly belonging to the 'Jewish people', another invented Zionist concept. The centrality of the concept of return to the supposed Jewish ancestral land reversed the usual colonial order of first expropriating the territory and then constructing a settler polity. With Zionism, the construction of the settler polity was a prerequisite to the physical expropriation of the territory. The name of the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea was translated from 'Palestine', used in Arabic and in European languages to 'the land of Israel' used in Hebrew. Racialising the analysis, Sand (2014: 21) argues that while most people know that 'the Jews' are not a 'pure race', too many adhere to the erroneous belief that 'most of the Jews belong to an old race-nation, an eternal 'ethnos', who had found a place among other nations and at a crucial stage, when these nations rejected it, began returning to its ancestral land'.

Interestingly, settler-colonialism is not universally accepted as a theoretical framework by several indigenous scholars who claim that settler-colonialism, rather than colonialism tout court, is a white discursive trope. According to Bhandar and Ziadah (2016), for instance, the settler-colonial framework often presents Israel as an exceptional and 'unfinished' settler colonial project, creates unnecessary binaries between colonialism and settler colonialism, and is incapable of encompassing class differences, racially inscribed dispossession and racial capitalism in the colonies:

> The terms 'postcolonial capitalism' and 'racial capitalism' both denote ways of understanding capitalist forms of dispossession that profit from, and reinforce class hierarchies, patriarchal formations, and racist ideologies lodged in colonial imaginaries that persist into the present. These terms do not neatly fit into a settler-colonial framework and yet are critical to understanding the political-economic, juridical and social complexities across various sites of inquiry. Forcing them into a single analytical category risks losing this richness and undermining forms of political solidarity across colonized spaces.

Some Palestinian scholars, on the other hand, adopt the settler-colonial framework more enthusiastically. Elia Zureik (2016: 3–5) sees settler-colonialism as 'the dispossession of Indigenous populations through

violence, repressive laws and practices and racialized forms of monitoring'. However, Israel, Zureik writes, has been misleadingly claiming that its intention was not to displace or dominate the Palestinian natives but rather to live side by side with them, claiming its Palestinian citizens enjoy a better standard of living than citizens of neighbouring Arab states in an attempt to justify the confiscation of Palestinian lands, the racialisation of the Native population, and the spatial segregation of coloniser and colonised. Raef Zreik (2016: 359) also argues that in its praxis and tools Zionism *is* settler-colonialism: 'its takeover of the land, its dream of the disappearance of the Native, the importance it allocates to the frontier, its expanding nature and the stories that it tells itself about the land as being *terra nullius* all match the settler-colonial paradigm'. Like Wolfe, Zreik argues that the political imagination of the Jewish settler project is different from other settler projects because of the Zionists' self-image of returning home to the ancient Promised Land, invented or otherwise.

Ironically, for a people whose history is replete with racial persecution, Zionist ideology itself articulates 'the Jewish race', constructing a homogeneous 'Jewish people', with Jewish self– and other racialisation an integral part of the Zionist ideology. Israeli geneticist Rafael Falk (2006) reads the history of Zionism as a eugenic race project, aiming to save the Jewish genetic pool from the degeneration of diaspora existence. According to Falk (2006, 18), Jewish people have always regarded themselves as a biological entity, linked by blood to the descendants of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and he proposes, using documentary evidence, that Zionism regarded Jews as a unique biological entity. While some European Jews struggled against the idea of Judaism as a race, many prominent Zionist founder-leaders and ideologues including Theodore Herzl, Max Nordau and Arthur Ruppin, not unlike the Nazis, constructed the Jews as a race. According to Wolfe (2016, 109), in excluding the most obvious criterion for Jewishness, religion, from the basis of the Zionist movement, its founder Theodore Herzl committed it to a concept of race that reflected *völkisch* colonial nationalism. Zionism, Wolfe adds (2016: 245), sought to be internal to Europe, a civilised nation-state thoroughly European in culture and allegiance, but by laying claim to Palestinian territory, Zionism placed itself outside Europe, 'an exteriority that found expression in the diasporan narrative of temple destruction and ensuing exile' at once European and Oriental in provenance.

What followed was the invention of the 'New Jew', a term coined by Max Nordau (1895) who also coined the phrase 'muscular Judaism' to denote the new Jews as masculine warriors, opposing not only the Palestinians but also their own despised degenerated diaspora past. Thus, just as antisemitism racialised Jews as a separate 'race' justifying their persecution by biological reasoning, Zionist ideologues adopted the

terminology of *volk* — a race-nation shaped by 'blood and soil', and were instrumental in producing a Zionist repertoire of racial categorisations and Jewish supremacy. Another early Zionist ideologue, Arthur Ruppin, contributed through his research of the 'original' groups of Jews who allegedly had direct biological connection with the ancient, racially pure Israelites (Bloom 2007), and inspired the Zionists' use of eugenics that, according to Hirsch (2009), had the dual purpose of using race as a unifying force in the service of Jewish nationalism, and of classifying Jews into distinct racial groups, and racially differentiating between Jews and Palestinians, and other non-white, non-European Jews (see e.g., Shochat 1998), as well as non-white, non-Jewish migrants and asylum seekers.

Falk, however, insists that research makes it impossible to prove Jewish racial uniqueness. He writes that although the Zionist discourse of the Jews' 'return to their ancestral homeland' did not invent the biology of the Jews, the questionable insistence on the 'Jewish race' was central to the Zionist movement. He argues that it was the close social and cultural relations between various Jewish communities rather than common genetic origins that sketched the Jewish genetic map; in other words, Falk concludes: 'there is no biology of the Jews' (Falk 2006: 230).

It is also worth noting that while Jewish people 'became white' in the United States (e.g., Brodkin 1998), and while whiteness must be understood as property, where racial identity and property are deeply interrelated (Harris 2006), Israeli Jewish people, and this includes non-white – Mizrahi and Ethiopian — Israeli Jews, are reaping the benefits of whiteness as property. As they access Palestinian lands, at first in the post-Nakba State of Israel through the 1950 Absentee Property Law whereby property belonging to (Palestinian) 'absentees', a term that defines persons who were expelled, fled, or who left the country after 29 November 1947, was placed under the control of the State of Israel with the Custodian for Absentees' Property,[5] and then by illegally settling on Palestinian lands after the 1967 occupation, they are arguably becoming white in their colonial old-new homeland, where what counts is Jewish racial superiority enabling them to rule the Palestinians.

Zionism and Antisemiism

The discussion of Jewishness as whiteness inevitably leads me to thinking about antisemitism and Zionism, an issue that continues to exercise both Zionist and anti-Zionist imaginations, as criticism of Israel leads to accusations of antisemitism, as we have seen in Britain where the legacy of the victimisation of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn continues with his

5 https://www.adalah.org/en/law/view/538 (accessed 4 July 2020).

successor deeming it necessary to sack party members critical of Israel whom he suspects of antisemitism.[6]

Unsurprisingly, however, the historical association between Zionism and antisemitism is nothing new and has colonial roots, as even before Zionism, Christian philosophers and statesmen debated what to do with the 'oriental' mass of Jewry in their midst, and proposed that one solution was to deport Jews to a colonial setting (Lentin 2018, 97). According to Massad (2012), Zionist leaders consciously recognised that state antisemitism was essential to their colonial project, and he reports Herzl as saying that all the governments of antisemitic countries would be interested in assisting the Zionists in achieving sovereignty and would contribute handsomely to getting rid of 'their' Jews.

There is plenty of evidence that, as Israel Shahak (1994) argues, Zionism was at once a response to antisemitism and its reactionary accomplice. Shahak lists various approaches made by Zionist leaders, including Theodore Herzl and Vladimir Jabotinsky, to known European antisemites whose support they attempted to enlist in progressing their plans to colonise Palestine. Zionism, Shahak writes, used the persecution of the Jews as a justification for the racialisation of the Palestinians, leading to the controversial alliance between Zionism, modern antisemitism, and even Nazism (see Segev 2000). And the controversial relationship between Zionism and antisemitism goes on. On the one hand, present day Israel is waging a bitter battle against its Jewish and non-Jewish critics and BDS supporters, explicitly equating anti-Zionism and antisemitism. On the other, the State of Israel aligns itself with known antisemites and with genocidal regimes that it supplies with arms and military training (see Halper 2015).

Beyond Israel weaponising antisemitism in order to silence its critics, is the observation by Alana Lentin (2020) that the political utility of antisemitism today is not to illuminate the operations of race, but rather to obscure them, particularly with regards to Islamophobia. Antisemitism today, Lentin (2020, 145) argues, the prevalence of which is beyond question, judging by the increase in violent antisemitic attacks against Jewish people, is not independently identifiable, but relies on an attendant Islamophobia and pro-Zionism that 'mysteriously slip out of view when it appears on the right and in pro-Israel circles'.

Crucially, she argues, antisemitism coheres with other forms of racism, particularly Islamophobia, as racists tend to contrast antisemitism as 'real racism', the worst kind of racism, an irrational prejudice that culminated in what they call the 'worst crime in human history' (ignoring centuries

6 https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/defamation-the-case-of-maxine-peake/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=new-article-from-jvl-newsletter-post-title_8 (accessed 5 July 2020).

of colonialism, slavery and apartheid), and Islamophobia, seen as a propaganda word invented by the Muslim Brotherhood, and therefore 'not racism'. This detachment of the definition of antisemitism from that of Islamophobia is bound up with our impoverished understanding of race (as biological or cultural rather than as a political structure invented to preserve white supremacy) and with the argument that, as Islam's adherents are multi-ethnic and multinational, Islam cannot be considered a race, leading to deligitimising the charge that Muslims face racism.

Jewish people, on the other hand, have been constructed by Zionist thinkers as racially supreme, and homogenised by theorists of ethnicity in the Israeli context as argued above. At the same time, anti-Zionist pro-Palestine activists often repeat antisemitic conspiracy theories, often concocted by the alt right, that cast Jewish people as wealthy and powerful manipulators of media and polities who fund and support Israel's ongoing colonisation of Palestine. As Alana Lentin (2020: 152–5) notes, the political rows over antisemitism in the British Labour Party and the claim that it was not about antisemitism but rather about criticism of Israel demonstrate the impossibility of treating antisemitism as separate from debates over Zionism. Although the majority of the world's Jews support the existence of the State of Israel, they do not all support its policies, and being racialised for being Jewish must be disentangled from some Jews' political beliefs. The fact remains that antisemitism persists despite the successful entry into whiteness of Euro-American Jewish people.

Gideon Levy (2020a) argues that Israel's propaganda war has silenced Europe and offers another take on the need to separate the discussion of antisemitism from criticism of Israel:

> Antisemitism must be fought, of course. It exists; it rears its head again and again; it stirs memories of the past. But one cannot conflate necessary and legitimate criticism of the Israeli occupation, or even of Zionism, with antisemitism. If Israel commits war crimes, they must be opposed and condemned. This is more than a right; it is an obligation. How in heaven's name is this about antisemitism? How has a struggle of conscience become something forbidden?

Lentin further argues that white supremacy and colonialism may be served by forms of antisemitism, while at the same time, denying and minimising antisemitism detract from the broad fight against racism. Put another way:

> The very fact that Islamophobia is so often mobilised in order to draw attention to antisemitism and to contend that Arabs and Muslims should bear the brunt of responsibility for antisemitism should alert us to the role played by racial rule in perpetuating both forms of racism... while some Jews... are complicit, and antisemitism certainly exists among Muslims, sometimes resulting in violence, neither Jews nor Muslims benefit from

the manipulation of antisemitism or the negation of Islamophobia. And antisemitism, while it has been used with great effect over centuries to incite hatred among poorer people in Europe and elsewhere, has always been an elite project, and so it remains. (Lentin 2020: 150)

Conclusion

Gideon Levy (2020b) quotes the inconsolable parents of the murdered Eyad al-Hallaq who look at the photographs of their son and of George Floyd and say: 'They killed George because he was black and Eyad because he is Palestinian... But look at the difference between the US and Israel. America was swept by rage and in Israel the usual apathy was accompanied by sadness because he was autistic'. Levy adds that in Israel there was neither rage nor an understanding that Eyad's killing was not a tragedy but rather the result of deliberate policy.

Indeed, as *The New York Times* suggests, the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, with about 15 to 26 million people in the United States demonstrating over the killing of George Floyd and others may be the largest movement in US history (Buchanan, Ouotrung and Patel 2020). In Israel, though connections between the two murders have been made, mostly, but not exclusively, by Palestinians, Israeli commentator Orly Noy (2020) called on Israelis protesting against the government's annexation plans to look at the face of Eyad al-Hallaq, because 'this is the face of annexation'. As millions of Americans were taking to the streets under the slogan 'Black Lives Matter', the murder of Eyad al-Hallaq and the proposed annexation plan must engender the slogan: 'Palestinian Lives Matter:'

I have no doubt that race caused the murder of George Floyd in a racial settler-colony where black and Indigenous lives are cheap, and that race caused the murder of Eyad al-Hallaq in a racial settler-colony where being Palestinian gives the ruling Israeli state forces permission to shoot defenceless, vulnerable people simply because they do not pass the bar of Jewish white supremacy. The coupling of the slogans 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Palestinian Lives Matter' makes it increasingly obvious, despite denials and despite the impunity enjoyed by the State of Israel, why race still matters, and why Palestine is becoming a global issue.

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