

A Short History of the Colonization of Palestine

Myth: “‘Israel’ was a land without a people for a people without a land.”

History: Arab people have lived in Palestine for thousands of years. Who are the indigenous people of Palestine? All of them speak Arabic. They are mainly Sunni Muslim. There are a minority of Christians, Shiite Muslims, Jews, and Druze. European Jewish settlers began to steadily arrive in 1882 but there was never anything other than an overwhelming Arab majority until a few weeks before the “Nakba” (Arabic word for catastrophe) otherwise known as the establishment of the state of “Israel” in the spring of 1948.

Myth: The state of Israel had to be created as a response to the Holocaust.

History: Zionism is a kind of European colonialism that began in the late 1800’s long before the Holocaust in Europe. Zionism’s goal is and has always been to establish a Jewish state on land already inhabited by an indigenous Palestinian people. Zionism as a colonial project was explained by Vladimir Ze’ev Jabotinsky, one of its chief architects, in 1923: “We can talk as much as we want about our good intentions but they understand as well as we what is not good for them. They look upon Palestine with the same instinctive love and true fervor that any Aztec looked upon his Mexico or any Sioux looked upon his prairie... Thus we conclude that we cannot promise anything to the Arabs of the land of Israel or the Arab countries. Their voluntary agreement is out of the question. Zionist colonization even the most restricted, must either be terminated or carried out in defiance of the will of the native population. Thus colonization, can therefore continue and develop only under the protection of a force independent of the local population-an iron wall which the native population cannot break through. This is in toto our policy towards the Arabs. To formulate it any other way would only be hypocrisy.”

Nothing in Zionist policy toward Arabs has changed, but the language that is used to talk about these policies has.

Myth: Israelis just want to live in security and peace with their Arab neighbors.

History: In 1923, it was possible to talk openly about getting rid of the native population. Today the code words of “peace” and “security” are really a call for the end of Palestinian resistance to Zionist colonialism and genocide. Jabotinsky’s “Iron Wall” has become a real Wall in Palestine which has the purpose of stealing more land from Palestinian people and destroying potential resistance to settlement by socially controlling Palestinian people. How did this happen?

In 1917, in the Balfour Declaration, the British government promised to support the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine when there were already Palestinian people living on this land. Between 1919 and 1936, the ruling British supported taking the land of tens of thousands of “fellahin” (Palestinian villagers) and giving it to European Zionist settlers. In response to the unfair transfer of Palestinian land to settlers, Palestinians resisted and called for a general strike from 1936 to 1939 accompanied by boycotts of all British and Zionist institutions. The strike was met with extreme physical force and resulted in a popular uprising. The uprising was eventually crushed, and the British imprisoned 5,000 Palestinians, executed 148 people and demolished 5,000 homes.

At the end of 1947, Zionists had acquired only 6.59% of the total land mass of Palestine. That year, the UN, which had an interest in cultivating Western European settlement in Palestine, voted to partition Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state. Palestinians and Arab states rejected this (at this time Jewish people would gain over 54% of the land by UN partition). In 1948, Joseph Weitz, director of the Jewish National Land Fund and head of the 3rd “Transfer Committee” stated “ [we] must direct our war towards the removal of as many Arabs as possible from boundaries of our state.”

Between 1947 and 1949, there were 45 reported massacres including the Yehida Massacre, Al-Sheikh Massacre, Beit Daras Massacre, Dahmesh Massacre, and the better known Deir Yassin Massacre in which more than 250 people were murdered (25 pregnant women were bayoneted in the abdomen and 52 children were beheaded) as well as the Dawayma Massacre in which 100 people were killed, including children who were murdered by fracturing their heads with sticks.

In 1948, 935,000 Palestinians (85% of the indigenous population of Palestine at that time) were forced off their land, in some cases at gunpoint, in other cases through massacres or threats of massacres like the massacre at Deir Yassin. As a result, 530 of an estimated 550 total villages were completely destroyed or depopulated. Over 78% of Palestinian land was confiscated for the establishment of a state for Jewish people. The “state of Israel” was established in May, 1948 and the colonial system put in place by the British was transferred to the new Zionist settler state.



Myth: “Israel” is a democracy.

History: A variety of racist laws were passed soon after the “state of Israel” was established. The Law of Return in 1950 grants the right of immigration to Jews born anywhere in the world. Non-Jewish native born Palestinians who fled the massacres in 1947 and 1948 are in most cases prevented from returning. The Absentee Property Law of the same year designated the personal property of Palestinians who fled during the terror campaign of 1948 as “absentee property” and this property was placed within the power of the Custodian of Absentee Property who would distribute this land to Jewish settlers. Palestinians’ capacity to have any personal property or wages was abolished during the first decade of this “democracy.”

Since the 1950’s, nationality and identity laws have defined a “Jewish nationality” with special privileges above the “Arab nationality” who is subject to a special regime of “security.” The Transfer of Property Law of 1950 and the Land Acquisition Act of 1953 accomplished the transfer of confiscated Palestinian villages and private property to the Development Authority for Jewish settlement. These Israeli laws of the 1950’s resemble Apartheid South Africa’s Natives Land Act of 1913 and the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923.

In 1967, the remainder of Palestine was invaded and occupied by the Zionists and another 350, 000 Palestinians fled or were expelled. In the 1970’s, the “Judaization of the Galilee” (the term Zionists use to describe the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from this area for exclusively Jewish settlement) followed the same pattern of settlement familiar throughout historic Palestine:

- the confiscation of agricultural and grazing land in the areas surrounding Palestinian population centers;
- the freezing of growth in Palestinian villages by denying building and planning rights;
- the systematic demolition of Palestinian homes and businesses
- planned Jewish settlement aimed at breaking up the territorial continuity of Palestinian areas;
- the denial of access to basic services such as water (and the theft of that water); and
- policies aimed at preventing Palestinian economic subsistence and forcing dependence on settlers.

Through the “peace negotiations” of Oslo, the Geneva Accords, and the Road Map, Zionists have pursued a policy of stealing more land and striking genuine resistance to colonial settlement with crushing force.

Myth: The problem is an age old conflict between religious groups.

History: It is a conflict between the indigenous Palestinian people and the Europeans who came with guns to steal their land and resources. Zionism is a racist ideology with the aim of ethnically cleansing Palestine of its native population through systematic methods. The Palestinian people themselves are of multiple religions—all have suffered from Zionist racism and brutality.

The myth of “religious conflict” is central in propagating the notion that “dialogue” between “Israelis” and Palestinians can resolve “the conflict” and that people need to develop “an understanding” of one another. It is meant to undercut any discussion about the reality—a racist regime that continues to colonize indigenous land. This myth asks Palestinians to “put the past behind them” and build “a shared future” with the people who continue to murder their families, steal their land and destroy their homes. It implies that Palestinians should concede their basic rights, dignity and homeland.

Myth: Palestinian resistance fighters are extremist, anti-Semitic, and do not want to live in peace.

History: Palestinian people are fighting for their survival as a people against racism and genocide. Just as a New African should not be expected to make peace with a white racist, it is absurd to think that Palestinians should be motivated to make peace with their oppressors while Zionist colonizers still occupy Palestinian land. Palestinians have been legitimately resisting racism, colonization, and genocide since the 1920’s to the present day by any means necessary: general strikes, demonstrations, periods of non-cooperation, boycotts of Israeli products and services, refusal to obey military orders, refusal to vacate land confiscated for settlers, tax revolt, armed struggle, and martyrdom operations (called “suicide bombing” by Zionists).

Any form of resistance to the settlement program has been consistently met with severe and brutal repression: aerial bombardment, military checkpoints, the “Iron Fist” policy of crushing the bones of Palestinian children’s hands, collective punishment, torture and mass detention (over 600, 000 Palestinians have been detained since 1967). Zionist propaganda blames resistance fighters for increased repression against the Palestinian people. In reality, Palestinian resistance is the only barrier stopping the Zionists from completely fulfilling their mission to annihilate the Palestinian people as a whole.

