

**ISRAEL^{AND}
SOUTH
AFRICA**

**THE PROGRESSION
OF A RELATIONSHIP**

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OF A RELATIONSHIP

RICHARD P. STEVENS
and
ABDELWAHAB M. ELMESSIRI

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with Foreword by John Henrik Clarke

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1

CULTURAL ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL PARALLELS

A. Zionist Apologetics and the White Man's Burden

ABDELWAHAB M. ELMESSIRI

European settler colonialism was predicated on certain racist assumptions concerning the genetic and cultural superiority of western civilization and the white man. It was these assumptions, in turn, which bestowed legitimacy in the eyes of the colonists on the introduction of an alien western demographic element on the continents of Africa and Asia. In other words, assumption of superiority went hand in hand with colonialism and formed a more or less organic part of it. Lord Balfour, an actor in the South African as well as the Palestinian context, described the process of settler colonialism as being an expression of the "great rights and privileges" of the races of Europe, and he considered the inequality of the races "to be the plain historic truth of the situation."¹

European settler colonialism, according to Crossman, was launched in terms of the white man's right to bring civilization to the "less civilized 'natives'" of Asia and Africa by physically occupying the two continents even at the cost of "wiping out the aboriginal population," a curious way of civilizing a people by exterminating them.² Even before his espousal of Zionism, in keeping with his racist colonialist outlook, Max Nordau suggested the settlement of unemployed European workers, with the European emigrants taking "the place of the 'lower races' who were not surviving in the struggle of evolution."³

The Nazi theoretician Rosenberg, to prove his innocence or at least normality during his trial at Nuremberg, advanced a similar argument, underscoring for his judges the organic relationship between racism and colonialism. He pointed out that he had tumbled on the terms "superman" and "super race" in a book on the life of Lord Kitchener, a man who "had conquered the world." He also claimed that he had come across these lines in the writings of the American ethnologist Madison Grant,

*From the author's forthcoming book, *The Land of Promise: A Critique of Political Zionism*.

and those of the French ethnologist Lapouge. He underlined his remark by asserting that this kind of western ethnology was but a "biological discovery which was the conclusion of 400 years of European research."⁴

It seems that with the growing need for markets and territories, and the intensification of Europe's economic and demographic crises, racist theories gained in depth and intensity. The writer of the entry "Race Relations" in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* indicates that "the era of race relations can be said to have begun with the overseas expansion of the major European powers from the fifteenth century onward."⁵ Gentile Zionism and Christian restorationist views began to flourish at that time. It is no coincidence either that the modern pseudo-messianic movements in Judaism also became more frequent from that time on. The most dangerous of all the false messiahs, Shabettai Zvi, came from a mercantile background and his father worked for a British overseas trading company.

But all of these myths and ideologies were mere adumbrations for the fullfledged global imperialism and racism of the late nineteenth century. The author of the entry on "Race" in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* finds it "no accident that racism flourished at the second great wave of European colonial expansion and the scramble for Africa." He then adds that the ideology of colonialism and the white man's burden was "often expressed in racist terms."⁶

The fraudulent messiah of the age of imperialism and scramble for Africa was Zionism, and it was in the late nineteenth century imperialist-racist frame of reference that the Zionist theoreticians conceived of their project and implemented it. In order to take advantage of the colonialist formula and to share the privilege and right of shouldering that most onerous burden of civilizing the non-white races and of engaging in the noble *mission civilisatrice* of Europe, one had to be a white man. There was indeed no alternative for the Zionists, they simply had to think in these terms, for they were, after all, the product of their historical background, and one does not expect them to be either angels transcending common historical failures or devils sinking far below them.

In his study *The Jews Today*, Arthur Ruppin sides with a certain von Luschau, one of the many Zionist theoreticians of the "Jewish race," whom he credits with the discovery of the physical resemblance between the Jews and the races of Asia Minor, especially the Armenian. Ruppin prefers to see the Jews as members of "the white race,"⁷ and lauds such theoretical efforts that strike a "blow at the Semitic theory." The racial difference between Jews and *Europeans*, according to him, is "not great enough to warrant an unfavorable prognostic as to the fruits of a mixed marriage."⁸

There is a whole strain in Zionist thought which confines the term "Jew" to European Jews, the Ashkenazim. Ruppin talks of how "the Zionist movement has already stirred the Jewish consciousness of many a Western Jew,"⁹ with the obvious omission of Sephardic (Oriental) Jews. Accordingly, Zionist settlement efforts aimed till 1948 at recruiting European Jews only, and rarely tried to recruit Oriental Jews, despite the fact that it would have been "a far easier task to settle Oriental Jews (Jews

from Yemen, Morocco, Aleppo and the Caucasus) in agricultural colonies." Ruppin even saw them as "already drifting toward Palestine" presumably without conscious Zionist efforts. This Oriental drift did not please him, however, because "the spiritual and intellectual status of these Jews is so low that an immigration *en masse* would lower the general cultural standard of the [Ashkenazi] Jews in Palestine and would be bad from several points of view"¹⁰—words which Abba Eban echoed half a century later in his *Voice of Israel*.

Only pragmatic considerations, however, made a dent in the Zionist white supremacist outlook. Oriental Jews, provided they come "in small numbers, might be extremely useful by virtue of their knowledge of Oriental conditions, their small needs,"¹¹ but above all their capacity for "competing in wages with the Arab agricultural laborer." The problem with the [white] east European Jew is that he "cannot possibly live on such [low] wages" as those given to Arabs. Moreover, the European Jew, given the fact that he lives "in Palestine only by work which makes demands on his intelligence and reliability," employs Arabs "for purely manual labor."¹² This would have been an acceptable arrangement had it not been imperative from the Zionist standpoint to segregate the "Jewish economic system in order to achieve 'separate development' through the pure Hebrew labor of the Zionist settlers." The hiring of an Arab would represent a "breach" of the Zionist closed system and therefore it had to be "bridged by the Oriental Jew who can do the rough work at the same price as the Arab."¹³

In other words, the Zionist myth of rights, according to Ruppin's view, applies only to the Ashkenazi; as for the Sephardim, they were to be admitted into the enclave out of dire economic necessity and pragmatic consideration.

The language of Ruppin's analysis might sound terribly immoral and racist, and excessively utilitarian, for he speaks of the Sephardic Jews as very useful creatures with very small needs, an *instrumentum vocale*, but such was the language common to Europe at the time. To the extent that Zionism functioned within that framework the universal ethical values of Judaism could not inhibit the accomplishment of its goal.

In point of fact, and in fairness to Ruppin, it should be indicated that he proved far more generous, far more sensitive and concrete, than his abstract theories. When he went to Palestine to supervise Zionist colonial activities there, he developed an awareness of the specificity of the situation far more complex and tragic than his questionable theory of the white Jew's burden.

Theodor Herzl was also part of that colonial culture and he fully realized that his Zionist efforts had to be coordinated with similar projects so that different "white" rights would not come into conflict with each other. Before meeting "Joe" Chamberlain, as Herzl affectionately called the British colonialist, he wrote in his diary that he had to show the Colonial Secretary "a spot in the English possessions where there were no white people as yet" before they "could talk about that"¹⁴ Zionist project for settlement.

Throughout all of the discussions involving the Zionist proposals for

white penetration into Africa and Asia, it was assumed that the white people of the Occident have these rights and privileges because of their high level of civilization. Herzl, in the manner of nineteenth century imperialist thinkers, spoke of imperialism as a noble activity destined to bring civilization to the benighted members of the other "races."¹⁵ Viewing the Jewish state with these occidental white binoculars, he wrote in 1896 a letter to the Grand Duke of Baden assuring him that when the Jews return to their "historic fatherland," they will do so as "representatives of Western civilization" who will bring "cleanliness, order and the well-established customs of the Occident to this plague-ridden, blighted corner of the Orient."¹⁶ The Zionists, as fervent advocates of European progress, will "build railroads into Asia—the highway of the civilized peoples."¹⁷ Herzl, operating within the myth of the white Jew, asserts that the Jewish state was designed to "form a part of a wall of defense for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism."¹⁸

The defense of the Jews as a white, occidental race sounds somewhat ironic, especially after the holocaust, but it was quite natural to the age and almost universal among the Zionists. In a language clearly smacking of the colonial racism of Europe, Jabotinsky, no "great admirer of Oriental culture," described the "Jews as Europeans" who have nothing in common with the Orient where "everything" as he claimed, was "doomed."¹⁹

The perception of the Jews not merely as a separate racial entity, but as members of the white race and western civilization, underlies many of the statements of the Zionists and their image of themselves.

In *Rebirth and Destiny*, Ben Gurion draws a number of analogies between the Zionists and other colonists which reveal his strong white orientation. In 1917, in an essay entitled "Judea and Galilee," he saw the Zionist settlers in the Land of Israel "as not just working" but rather as "conquering, conquering a land. We were a company of conquistadores." Even though the analogy with a white settler colonialist enterprise is clear, the conquest in this essay is narrowed down to the land, not people.²⁰

In another piece entitled "Earning a Homeland," Ben Gurion, extending the conquest to include the people as well, compares the Zionist settlement to the American settlement in the New World, conjuring up the image of the "fierce fights" the American colonists fought against "wild nature and wilder redskins."²¹ It is significant, from the standpoint of the present argument, how the Zionist leader identifies the natives of America by color; but more significant was his reduction of the Indians to the level of nature, even lower than it, for they are "wilder." This process of abstracting man, reducing him to mere natural cycles, which is an extension of the Darwinian ethics and outlook, renders extermination quite a palatable act and depopulation of an area an act of survival. The Nazis later on made full use of that logic on a more massive and more systematic and "scientific" scale. They declared it their duty "to depopulate," as part of their mission of preserving the German population. "If nature is cruel, . . . we too must be cruel."²²

Although frequently at odds with Ben Gurion on tactics, Weizmann in *Trial and Error* preferred to use the image of the French *colons* in Tunisia²³

and British settlers in Canada and Australia as models, while demonstrating marked sympathy for the settlers in South Africa.²⁴

In a note sent by him to President Truman, on November 27, 1947, we note the colonial tendency to draw a sharp line of demarcation between a technologically advanced "European" community and backward natives. Describing the Zionist community in Palestine, Weizmann said that it consisted mainly of "an educated peasantry and a skilled industrial class living on high standards." To this bright image he contrasted the bleak one of "illiterate and impoverished communities bearing no resemblance to the Zionist community."²⁵ Weizmann of course did not bother to explain to the American president the reason for this state of affairs, and why, after fifty years of British and Zionist colonialism and enlightenment, the light of civilization had not yet dawned.

Given the white racist colonial myth of rights, the Balfour Declaration did not hesitate to refer to the Arab Moslems and Christians of Palestine, who made up over 90 percent of the population, as the "non-Jewish communities." In other words, the indigenous majority was already being ruthlessly relegated to the status of a minority in the name of the superior rights of Europe's forthcoming surplus. Balfour himself once wrote, "in Palestine we do not propose ever to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country, though the American [King-Crane] Commission has been going through the form of asking what they are."²⁶ As for those public proclamations and liberal safeguard clauses, they were to be dumped: "The Powers have made no declaration of policy which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate."²⁷ The dominant colonial powers took the decision, and the Zionist settler colonialists took full advantage of the international power structure.

The "civilizing mission enjoyed by Gentiles can [from that point on] be emulated by Jews,"²⁸ as indicated by an Israeli writer or, to put it more simply, the white Jews should have the rights and privileges of other white settlers in Africa and Asia.

After the establishment of Israel, the same white orientation of the state persisted with the attendant tension between an Ashkenazi myth of rights pitted against the exigencies of multi-racial Jewish immigration and Middle East geo-politics. The tension is quite manifest in Ben Gurion's claim that Israel is only geographically in the Middle East but not of it,²⁹ and in his declaration that he would like to see more Western Jews settling in the Zionist state to stop Israel from becoming a Levantine state.³⁰

Moshe Dayan, Israel's national military hero, chose South Africa to explore his own fears of Oriental Jews. In 1974, at the annual conference of the South African Zionist Federation, he described the fact that "Oriental Jewish immigrants outnumbered immigrants of European origin" as "Israel's biggest problem." He appealed to his audience to help solve Israel's demographic problem by immigrating there.³¹

The classical Israeli expression of this tension is in Abba Eban's *Voice*

of Israel, where the author, with his customary eloquence, defined his concept of the ideal relationship that should exist between Israel and her neighbors. "The idea should not be one of integration. Quite the contrary: integration is rather something to be avoided." Turning to the subject of the Oriental Jews, Eban, a South African Ashkenazi Jew himself, speaks of "the great apprehensions which afflict" the Western-born Israelis, stemming from their feeling of "the danger lest the predominance of immigrants of Oriental origin force Israel to equalize its cultural level with that of the neighboring world,"³² i.e. Asia and Africa. He then goes on to say that "far from regarding our immigrants from oriental countries as a bridge toward our integration with the Arabic-speaking world, our objective should be to infuse them with Occidental spirit, rather than to allow them to draw us into an *unnatural orientalism*."³³

If Ben Gurion evoked the image of the *conquistadores* and Weizmann that of the *colons*, Eban evokes that of the Yankee in Latin America; Israel, he said, should work toward establishing a relationship akin to that which obtains between the United States and the Latin American continent.³⁴

The South African settlers saw themselves in more or less the same terms as members of a superior white civilization, cast themselves in the same missionary role as carriers of that civilization, and, in the name of that cultural and racial superiority, tried to depopulate their promised land from the aborigine to carve out another Western democracy in the middle of the jungle. The white supremacist logic used by some Zionist theoreticians, is central to the apologetics of *apartheid*, for both ideologies grew within the same cultural ambience and drew from the same sources and myths. Probably a detailed exploration of the apologetics of *apartheid* might be unnecessary since most people are familiar with the logic of the South African segregationists who, unlike the Zionists, never tried to conceal their logic of conquest and its underlying outlook. What might be of some interest in the present context is the fact that the South African apologists included "the Jews" in the category of a white people. On November 3, 1919, at a reception held in Johannesburg under the auspices of the South African Zionist Federation and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Smuts spoke of the Jews as a "little people" having "a civilizing mission" in the world. He cited the language of the Old Testament as the basis of "our white culture" and "your Jewish culture."³⁵ When Smuts drew the analogy, it was probably greeted with approval, but with the growing isolation of the white minority in South Africa, Zionism thought it fit to minimize the importance of the common cultural, historical origins it shares with *apartheid*. Prime Minister Vorster, however, brushed the whole thing aside, decrying those embarrassed Zionists who want to set up a distinction between Israel's "policy of separate development" on the basis of religion and South Africa's comparable policies on a racial basis.³⁶

This viewing of the Jew as a white man is quite manifest in various South African government acts and regulations. When a literacy test to read and write "in the characters of a European language" (designed to exclude Asiatics) was adopted, Yiddish, a language written in (Asiatic) Hebrew characters, was nevertheless accorded official recognition as an acceptable language in the Cape immigration law of 1906 as well as in the basic Immigration Act of 1913.³⁷

This labeling of the Jew as "white" accounts for the fact that South African Jewry views itself as an "integral part of the white population," feels that its destiny is "bound up with the rest of the white community,"³⁸ and "leans as heavily as the rest on the Government which can and is providing order and security."³⁹

The idea of the white man's burden, be he a gentile or a Jew, is a theme that both Zionism and the philosophy of *apartheid* have in common. As much as mankind is rigidly divided along racial lines, separate economic development and segregated political structures become only logical and even desirable. It was in the name of this racial separateness, and superiority, that waves of European immigrants, Europe's demographic surplus, flooded South Africa and Palestine, expropriating the natives, then expelling them. In view of these common cultural and historical roots, it is quite natural that the two states, in the face of mounting historical pressures, close their ranks and solidify their relationships.

¹ Richard Stevens, "Settler States and Western Response: Israel and South Africa," Abdeen Jabbara and Janice Terry, eds., *The Arab World: From Nationalism to Revolution* (Wilmette, Illinois: The Medina University Press, 1971), pp. 167-168.

² Richard Crossman, *A Nation Reborn: The Israel of Weizmann, Bevin and Ben Gurion* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1960), p. 58.

³ Desmond Stewart, *Theodor Herzl* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1974), p. 192.

⁴ *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal: Nuremberg, 14 November 1945—1 October 1946* (Nuremberg, Germany, 1947), XI, 450.

⁵ Edited by David Sills (New York: The Macmillan Company of the Free Press, 1968), XIII.

⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*. (Chicago: William Benton, 1973), XV.

⁷ Ruppin, *The Jews Today*, trans. Margery Bentwitch (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913), p. 213.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 293-294.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, ed. Raphael Patai, trans. Harry Zohn, 5 volumes (New York: Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), IV, 1361.

¹⁵ "Race," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, XII.

¹⁶ *Diaries*, I, 343.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 338.

¹⁸ Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1959), p. 222.

¹⁹ Joseph B. Schechtman, *Fighter and Prophet: The Vladimir Jabotinsky Story, The Last Years* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), p. 324.

Settler Colonialism and *Herrenvolk* Democracy

SAMIH FARSOUNT

[The text printed below is an abridged part of a paper titled "South Africa and Israel: A Special Relationship" submitted to the Conference on Socio-Economic Trends and Policies in Southern Africa, which, under the aegis of the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, Dakar, took place in Dar-es-Salaam between November 29 and December 12, 1975. Some of the details and illustrations, contained in the original, had to be left out.]

The nature of South African settler colonialism historically and contemporaneously has been amply studied from varied perspectives. Less so Rhodesia. And, perhaps because of traditional Western bias, Israel even less. But, since June, 1967, and the emergence of the 'new left' internationally, Israel has been analyzed directly in those terms.¹

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²⁰ David Ben Gurion, *Rebirth and Destiny*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), p. 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²² Jacob Bernard Agus, *The Meaning of Jewish History*, 2 volumes (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1963), II, 386.

²³ Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (New York: Harper and Row, 1949), p. 191.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

²⁵ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955), II, 159.

²⁶ Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration*, (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1961), p. 649.

²⁷ *Ibid.*
²⁸ N.A. Rose, *The Gentile Zionists, A Study in Anglo-Zionist Diplomacy 1929-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1973), p. 75.

²⁹ Ben Gurion, *Rebirth and Destiny of Israel*, p. 489.

³⁰ Philip Sigal, "Reflections on Jewish Nationalism," *Issues*, Fall 1961, p. 21.

³¹ *Third World Reports*, Vol. 5, No. 7, September 1974.

³² Abba Eban, *Voice of Israel* (New York: Horizon Press, 1957), p. 76.

³³ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ "Smuts' Vision for Zion and World Jewry," *Jewish Affairs*, August 1970.

³⁶ *Contemporary Links Between South Africa and Israel* (Madison Committee on Southern Africa), cited in *127 Questions and Answers on the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Beirut; Palestine Research Center, 1973), p. 136.

³⁷ "South Africa," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: The Macmillan Company, 1972), XV.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Neville Rubin, "The Impact of Zionism and Israel on the Political Orientation of South African Jews," in *Settler Regimes in Africa and the Arab World: The Illusion of Endurance* (Wilmette, Illinois: Medina University Press, 1974), p. 171.