Jewish Settlement in the Land of Israel/Palestine

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Introduction

The Land of Israel/Palestine again became an actor in world affairs and a focus of wide interest with Zionism's successful effort to ensure for Jews a place among the nations of the world with a Jewish state. Ottoman Palestine was a woefully underdeveloped country with but 250,000 inhabitants in 1800 and only 500,000 in 1900. By 2000, that same land from Lebanon to the Sinai and from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean, accommodated a population that had grown 20-fold to nearly 10,000,000 people. The engine for this remarkable transformation has been the injection of the skills, initiative and capital largely provided by the Zionist movement and the State of Israel. The history of Jewish settlement of this largely undeveloped territory is a major topic in the history of this region.

The expansion of European trade and tourism made the Holy Land an increasingly popular venue and contributed to the growth of cities particularly on the coast, such as historic Jaffa, the subsequent establishment of its dynamic suburb Tel-Aviv, as well as Haifa across the bay from historic but dormant Acre. The population of Jerusalem, too, grew from a mere 15,000 in 1840 and 50,000 in 1900 to around 700,000 a century later. According to the country's Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS), in 2010, there were 14 cities in Israel with more than 100,000 residents. Of these, six -- Jerusalem, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Haifa, Rishon Letzion, Ashdod, and Petah Tikvah -- have more than 200,000 residents. Sixty-three years earlier, at Israel's founding in 1948, Tel Aviv alone had more than 100,000 residents. Clearly, the removal of the country from Ottoman rule and the control of the British (1918-1948) and the establishment of Israel released unprecedented energies and opportunities.

The countryside was transformed as well, beginning slowly at the end of the Ottoman period with small communities of Jewish farmers settling in the Galilee, along the coast on the Sharon plain and in the Valley of Jezreel. The process of change is well documented in travelers' accounts, official documents, and reports of explorers. It is also evident in the work of photographers who recorded the country while providing souvenirs for the growing tourist market. Consider, for example, the two photos of Jerusalem and Haifa by Felix Bonfils, a Beirut based photographer who catered to this trade.

Jerusalem in the 1870s from Mount Scopus in the east. The "Old City" at that time was encompassed in its historic walls with minimal population beyond.

A Druze on donkey on site where the modern Haifa is now situated with the Carmel mountain in the background.

In both cases they record a largely empty landscape that is now filled with vigorous and productive cities generating income for the support of large, new populations.

The same barrenness characterized the countryside. Large areas were uncultivated. In yet others, as in the Upper Galilee and near Hadera on the coast, there were marshy areas that produced more malaria than crops. Indeed, as B.Z. Kedar's brilliantly illustrated volume of World War I aerial photographs demonstrates, vast areas of the country were desolate or sparsely inhabited, a situation that contrasts dramatically with the present. Walid Khalidi, a Palestinian historian much concerned with the loss of Arab lands and the flight and expulsion of the Arab population, records the Palestinian countryside prior to the 1948 War through photographs that show largely a society of scattered, small or modest-sized villages and their replacement by Jewish villages, towns and cities. Whether one celebrates or laments the transformation of Palestine in the course of the 20th century, it is obvious that a dramatic and radical change has taken place.

This essay will begin by examining change in the countryside and will go on to detail the urban revolution that transformed a traditional, rural society into a modern one with an advanced economy. This historical background and an analysis of the reasons for change will make it possible to explore two crucial questions: 1. What has been the impact of the Arab/Israel conflict on Jewish settlement? 2. Is the Jewish settlement of Palestine/Land of Israel but another example of European colonialism, as critics of the Zionist enterprise argue, or does it fit in a different category altogether? I will

argue that the latter is the case. The question is essential for it bears on the character and even legitimacy of the Zionist experience.

Rural Pioneering

Zionist agriculture was dominated by two models – the moshav and the kibbutz. In the *moshav* or cooperative agricultural community, members worked individual farms of generally equal size and sometimes pooled labor as well as machinery and marketing; in the *kibbutz* or *kvutza,* a collective community, land and even tools and clothing were owned jointly and all decisions were made by the community. What these forms have in common is that they were settled by *groups* of pioneers who explicitly organized *villages*and not by individuals creating individual, detached homesteads or ranches. Unlike the individualist pattern that characterized frontier settlement in the United States, Argentina orAustralia, the Zionist frontier was settled by communities. This distinction is crucial and can best be understood by exploring the comparison.

In both the American and Zionist frontier experience, ex-Europeans intended to create societies designed to serve primarily the interests and needs of settler populations. In America, the pioneer was typically an individual seeking personal gain, usually moving westward on his own initiative and with his own resources. But unlike the American experience, Zionist colonization was a highly centralized and directed experience that often supported socialist and communist forms of settlement. Zionist ideology encouraged individual and collective self-sacrifice for the nation in contradistinction to the private "pursuit of happiness," articulated in the Declaration of Independence, that was the guiding ethos and purpose of the American pattern. The United States, in the course of several centuries, became a continental nation committed to individualism and to the furtherance and protection of personal rights in a new land that had been foreign to the settlers. The Zionist experience was different. Zionist society was viewed as a realization of the goals and needs of a historic people with deep roots in the land.

Thus, during the twentieth century, about seven hundred urban and rural communities were established by groups of Zionists to serve the interests of the Jewish people.   From the inauguration of Zionist colonization in the 1880s through the present, there has been almost no homesteading, or the establishment of farms by private individuals. Israel has virtually no examples of "the little house on the prairie." Nor have towns or cities been organized and developed by boosters, that is, individual entrepreneurs seeking profit in large-scale suburban and industrial developments. Instead, there are various forms of village settlement—of which the moshav and the kibbutz are the best known.

The American and Zionist frontier experience can also be compared by observing how pioneering in each has been idealized and stereotyped. In America, pioneering is highly associated with individualism, but not in the Israeli case. The equivalent of "pioneer" in Hebrew is derived from the biblical *halutz,* one who went before the people and was in their service. It derives from biblical passages describing how the Israelites overcame Jericho upon entry into the Promised Land:

And he [Joshua] said unto the people: "Pass on, and encircle the city, and let the *halutz* pass on before the ark of the Lord." And it was so, that when Joshua had spoken unto the people, the seven priests bearing the seven rams' horns before the Lord passed on, and blew the horns; and the ark of the covenant and the Lord followed them. And the **halutz** went before the priests that blew the horns. (Joshua 6:7-9)

While the root of the word *halutz* contains the meaning of "armed soldier," it more popularly came to mean one who goes before the people. The *halutz* is part of the avant-garde. While the word virtually disappeared from use in Hebrew during the Middle Ages, Zionist writers at the beginning of the twentieth century rediscovered the term and employed it extensively to describe pioneers (*halutzim*) and pioneering (*halutziut*). Although in the pre-Zionist context it referred to fulfilling a divine mission, secular Zionists readily appropriated the term and the concept to refer to those taking the lead on behalf of a national, secular movement.

Another significant difference between the American and Zionist frontier experience is the way land was viewed. In America land is protected as private property or the possession of individuals. In Zionist thought and praxis, land is a resource for the benefit of the people as a whole. In the American experience, this is found only with respect to assigning "reservations" for Native Americans. There were also practical issues and the historical context that shaped the Zionist attitude toward land. Whether under the Ottomans or the British Mandate, Jews in Palestine were limited in where they might purchase land and were often denied this elementary right because of their identity as Jews. Moreover, the process of acquiring land was cumbersome and few individual pioneers had the ability and means to negotiate the difficulties or possessed the legal expertise and the connections to overcome obstacles. Territory, once acquired, was held in reserve for the national movement in the name of the Jewish people rather than for individuals. Even today, Israelis typically "own" their property through long-term and renewable leases from the Israel Lands Authority or the Jewish National Fund. Hence, land is referred to as "Jewish" or "Arab" throughout historic Palestine.
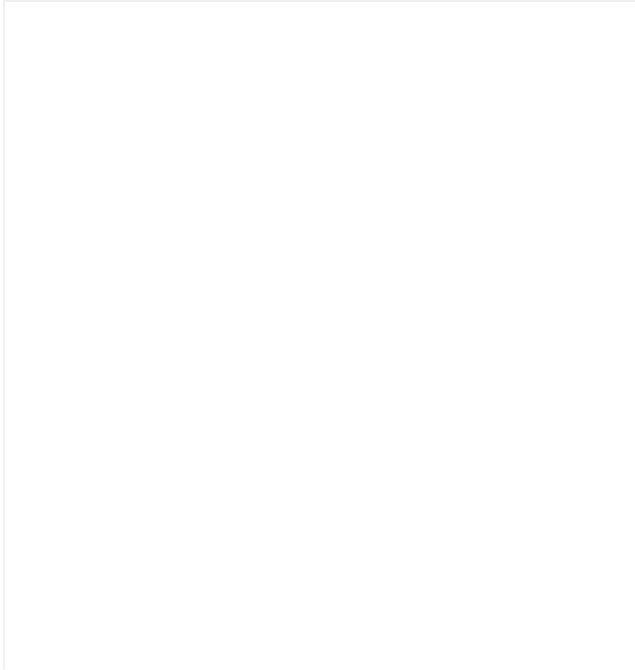
Changing Preferences in Rural Settlement

The earliest Zionist villages, or moshavoth, from the 1880s to World War I, proved economically unsustainable. Only external subsides, primarily from France's Baron Rothschild, enabled them to be maintained. A consequence of financial dependence was that they could not expand fast enough to absorb the pioneers who wanted or needed to immigrate. By 1910, members of the Second Aliyah (1904-14) were imagining alternative forms of colonization that with a collective, communal approach might manage to be self-sustaining. The result was the moshav that blended private ownership with cooperation and was therefore much preferred by the bourgeois leadership of the World Zionist Organization (WZO).
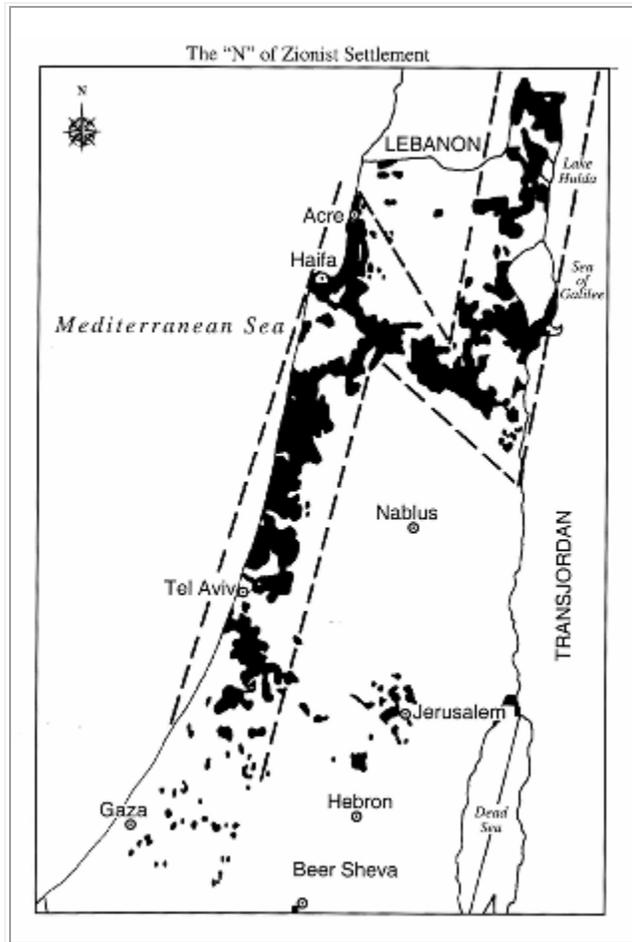
During World War I, Palestine became a battlefield where the Ottomans with their German allies fought the British, so it was not until 1921 that Nahalal, the prototype moshav, was established at the eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel. By the mid-1930s, despite its earlier preference for the moshav, the same bourgeois leadership of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) made the communistic kibbutz the prime instrument of settlement despite ideological preferences and economic difficulties. From the 1930s, security needs took precedence over economic considerations. That is, once the Zionist settlement program became seriously obstructed by the Arabs of Palestine and beyond, it was the growing national struggle with Arabs that dictated both the form of settlements and their locations.

Jewish self-defense developed in response to growing hostility. The loose organization of "watchmen" (HaShomer) before World War I became increasingly organized and was subsumed by more sophisticated organizations that, in turn, became precursors to the Israeli army established at Independence. Initially, the "watchmen" guarded settlers against the scattered depredations of Bedouin marauders intent on theft. Later, a Muslim urban elite organized attacks. The watershed occurred in 1929 when anti-Jewish riots that began in Jerusalem over the rights of Jews to the Western or Wailing Wall spread to other cities and the countryside. Finally, the extended Arab uprising from 1936-1939 against Jewish settlements, as well as the British, caused a radical transformation in the ways in which Jews organized settlement. These threats resulted in a coordinated policy of settlement designed to protect the Zionist enterprise as a whole, as well as individual communities.

The Zionist response to the 1929 attacks was to develop the concept of the "N" of Jewish settlement as illustrated in the map. The clustering of settlements into a discernible N-shaped pattern had characterized Zionist settlement since the 1880s. Since the First Aliyah pioneers had settled on the plains of Eretz Israel: the Sharon or coastal plain, the Jezreel Valley, the Beit She'an Valley below the Sea of Galilee, and up into the finger of the Upper Galilee. This was the base for what would become the "N" of settlement. With the Arab population located largely in the hills

and the mountains of Palestine, land could be purchased and settled more readily in the valleys where absentee landlords were willing to sell to Jews. What is significant is that even though some Palestinian Arabs initiated violence against Jews, others, members of leading families including that of the Mufti, sold land for Zionist settlement. It is important to note that all the lands on which Zionists established settlements were purchased from Arabs, and not taken by conquest or international treaty.

The "N" of Zionist Settlement

N

LEBANON

Lake Hulda

Acre

Haifa

Sea of Galilee

Mediterranean Sea

Nablus

Tel Aviv

TRANSJORDAN

Jerusalem

Gaza

Hebron

Dead Sea

Beer Sheva

The shaded areas within the "N" of settlement represent land purchased or settled by Jews prior to Independence in 1948. The map also indicates selected purchases and settlements outside this region: near Jerusalem, the northern Negev and the Western Galilee near the Lebanese border. Zionist planners also consciously invested their resources outside the Arab-populated West Bank until independence. This policy effectively established which areas would become part of the Jewish state after Independence.

Not only the location but the form of village settlements within these areas changed. It is worth pointing out that the earliest settlements through World War I were built without regard to defense. For example, there were no walls around the moshavoth. In 1921, the buildings in Nahalal were placed in an inner circle with paths leading to the outlying fields like spokes in a wheel, a design meant to increase security, but there was still no wall. However, after the first Arab attacks of 1936-39, the new kibbutzim, particularly those built in vulnerable areas, took the form of a stockade with an observation tower (*homa u'migdal*). Usually prefabricated, they were erected literally overnight to establish "facts" in a hostile landscape, as in this illustration of Kibbutz Tel Amal erected in the Beit She'an Valley below the Sea of Galilee in December 1936. It was the first of 57 such settlements founded during this three-year period.

The same concern for security informed settlement after Israel was established in 1948. Israelis accepted at face value declarations from the Arab world that it would not accept the presence of an independent Jewish state in their midst and that it was preparing for a much publicized "second round" to destroy Israel. As a consequence, the logic of the "N" of settlement continued to shape the defense of the state's borders. This can readily be illustrated with reference to the placement of new development towns and of the rural settlements.

The United Nations partition plan for Palestine of November 1947 established a Jewish and an Arab Palestinian state and designated a significant area around Jerusalem and leading toward the sea as an international zone. As the conflict developed both the Arabs and Jews established lines that ignored the creation of an international zone and the final battle lines defined the borders between Israel and Jordan. Similarly, the termination of the conflict brought additional areas of the Galilee as well as the Negev into the new state. Since the war ended with armistice lines rather than peace treaties, that is, with a suspension of active hostilities rather than agreed international borders, it was essential to defend those armistice lines. As occurred earlier, Zionist settlement was based on the idea that people living in communities would establish and defend the borders of the state. This logic determined how and where Israel absorbed a large body of immigrants and how it dispersed them into new communities.

New villages, whether moshav or kibbutz, were established all along the borders and in strategic areas that were largely devoid of Jewish population within the country, notably in the Lachish region between the center of the country and the northern Negev near where were the city of Kiryat Gat was later established. In effect, these rural and urban settlements secured Israel's border with Jordan and the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip. In the absence of such settlements, movement between Jordan and the Gaza Strip would have been unimpeded and the Negev could have been readily cut off from the main body of Israel.

It is important to note that at this point the balance in popularity between moshav and kibbutz changed. As one can readily see in the table below, the kibbutz became the prime instrument of rural settlement in the decade before the creation of the state and still had a measure of popularity in the few years after Independence. After 1953,

however, few kibbutzim are established and the overwhelming choice was again the moshav, the form of settlement that blended private property with cooperative features.

Establish Settlements 1943-1967*
(by 5 year periods)

Period	Kibbutz	Moshav	Total
1943-47	56	24	80
1948-53	79	213	292
1953-57	15	66	81
1958-62	3	17	20
1963-67	2	8	10
Total	155	328	483

* Calculations derive from Alex Bein, Immigration and Settlement in the State of Israel (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv, 1982), 260-298.
1967 includes only until June when the war broke out.

The kibbutz, based on the ideological commitments of highly motivated and often still single youth, was essential for defensive purposes in a period when there was no state army to define and defend future borders. This form of village proved less popular among family-oriented immigrants from cultures that were not imbued with collectivist and radical ideologies. Whatever form it took, new settlements continued to be planned as villages, whether moshav or kibbutz, and meant to serve national purposes.

Urban Settlements

Another significant development one can see in the table above is a decline in the number of new agricultural settlements. Few are established after the first decade of Israeli independence. There are many reasons for this. The first may be the unanticipated fact that despite Zionist ideology, most Jewish immigrants to Palestine intended to live in cities. Indeed, there was never more than 20% of the population

engaged in agriculture. It is clear that without the commitment of halutzim who built the settlements of the countryside the state could not have been established; however, it is also true that many of Zion's immigrant pioneers who had been tradesman, artisans or professionals in their home countries expected to do much the same in their new land.

Herzl's utopian novel, *Altneuland* (1902), focuses on middle-class immigrants transplanted from a European city to a new city in Palestine with comparable commerce, industry and arts, including an opera house. In fact, many immigrants were bourgeois or expectant bourgeois intent on attaining a satisfactory European standard of living in their new country. Thus, although Zionist ideology was committed to working the soil and making the desert bloom, and the early history of the state is typically remembered in agrarian terms, Israel's exceptionally successful advanced modern economy should not come as a surprise. It developed in tandem with innovations in agriculture and was itself crucial to the success of the Zionist project.

The foundation for urban Israel was laid already in the pre-state period with Tel-Aviv and Haifa. Built on the sands just north of Jaffa, Tel-Aviv, the first new Jewish city in nearly 2,000 years, was home to about one-third of the population of the Yishuv by the 1930s. Rapidly expanding Haifa was a substantial second. In contrast, in 1947, no more than 7 percent of the population had ever lived on a kibbutz. It probably could not have been different given a semi-arid zone where much of the soil had been degraded over centuries of abuse and was unsuitable to productive and profitable agriculture. The wonder is how successful Israel became in developing not only citrus but a whole range of flowers, vegetables and fruits that it exports to the rich European market, and a strong dairy and meat industry for domestic consumption. However, as with most successful economies such as the United States, Germany and Japan, fewer than 5% of the population are engaged in agriculture. The leading modern states are based on advanced urban-industrial economies rather than a society of peasants tilling the soil. For all the celebration of the *halutz* as farmer in Zionist ideology and iconography, Zionist settlement depended on a successful urban component.

In fact, the prominence of contemporary Israel's economy based in hi-tech, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and other sophisticated products is rooted in the beginning of the settlement program that included a commitment to education and the application of scientific knowledge to solving human problems. Well before the creation of the state, the WZO supported the establishment of research-oriented universities such as Haifa's Technion (1924), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1925), and the Weizman Institute for Science(1934). In keeping with this

tradition, [Ben-Gurion University](#) of the Negev was founded in 1969 in the Negev frontier to develop the region and anchor the growth of Beer-Sheva, which would become its major city. The development of the country by an educated population was envisioned and intended by [Herzl](#) who portrays the hero of *Altneuland* as a well-educated chemical engineer.

A negative outcome of the transformation of Palestine into a modern state with a successful economy is that this exacerbated relations with the country's Arabs. In addition to the competing religious and national differences between Jews and Arabs, scholars are able to identify a "dual" economy in which, as early as the 1930s, the Jewish sector is far advanced in economic achievements, literacy and education levels, and civic and economic institutions. This gap still exists despite the substantial changes in educational and economic achievement of many Arabs, primarily those who have integrated into Israel's economy.

Post 1967 Settlements

Between the [War of Independence](#) and the [1967 June War](#), settlements continued to be planned along the lines established earlier. A policy shift to investing in urban development after 1950 is notable and expressed in the building of "development towns" that were established particularly in frontier zones from Kiryat Shmona on the Lebanese border in the far north to towns like Dimona and Yerucham in the Negev. This was confirmation that the agricultural potential of the country had been realized and that Israel's future development required cities whose location would typically be governed by strategic concerns. Within this context, Israeli planners conceived of "rurban" settlements. That is, they were urban-type communities in a rural setting. Initially planted on the hilltops of the Galilee in the 1960s to maintain control over areas where Arabs were or were likely to be a majority, these were essentially white-collar rather than farming communities and inhabited by residents who usually commuted to industrial zones in the area or to nearby cities like Haifa. Aptly termed "*mitzpim,*" these "look-out" communities also served as observation posts on the elevated parts of the region. It turned out, unexpectedly, that they provided the model for the settlement of the West Bank. Similar urban settlements are now scattered across the hilltops of much of the West Bank.

The growth of the [West Bank](#) settlements was initially very slow. The first sanctioned settlement was in the Etzion Block (Gush Etzion) south of Jerusalem and near Bethlehem. The move to this area re-established a community that had been settled well before Independence and was destroyed just prior to the [1948](#) war by Arab forces that killed or took captive those inhabitants who did not manage to escape. The resettlement of Gush Etzion in the aftermath of the 1967 war thus met with

widespread approval, but additional settlements encountered opposition.

The arguments for and against contemporary settlements are now largely focused on the West Bank, including Jerusalem. The few settlements established in the Sinai after 1967 were removed as part of the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, and settlers were removed from Gaza through a policy of unilateral withdrawal carried out by the government of Ariel Sharon in 2007. Settlements on the Golan Heights are rarely subject to public condemnation because there is widespread consensus that the area is vital for security and because the prospect for a peace agreement with Syria appears remote. The major issue of contention is the settlements on the West Bank, from the 1948-67 borders or Green Line to the Jordan River. It was in this area that development became intense and extensive after 1977 and the installation of a Likud government under Menachem Begin. Until then, settlements grew slowly, with some 15,000 settlers in the West Bank in the first decade after the 1967 war. Under Begin, plans were drawn up to settle as many as a million Jews in this area. That number has not been reached, but, by 2010, there were about 300,000 in the West Bank as well as 200,000 in East Jerusalem. This Jewish population growth was achieved unevenly but steadily under both Likud and Labor governments.

The arguments in support of settling the West Bank were secular as well as religious. Many secular Zionists viewed Jerusalem and the West Bank as the historic patrimony of the Jewish people and control of this region as a matter of momentous historic importance. Other secular Zionists were convinced that the territories must not be surrendered due to their strategic value. Even the moderate and influential Yigal Allon, a war hero from 1948 and key Labor leader, argued in a well-publicized plan that bears his name, that military bases were necessary in the West Bank hill country and along the Jordan River for purposes of defense.

Religious Zionists were affected by the messianic hopes released by the spectacular victory of the IDF when, in six days, it routed the attacking armies of Syria, Jordan and Egypt in1967. With their arguments based in theology, particularly under the banner of Gush Emunim [*Block of the Faithful*, a faction of the National Religious Party], they were successful in challenging the government prior to 1977 and established illegal outposts that later gained recognition as settlements. In the subsequent expansion of their settlements they consciously sought out locations identified with the Bible and situated in a pattern that would make creation of an Arab state difficult. Throughout this process, they claimed they were the successors to the romance and virtue of Zionism's earlier secular pioneers.

The arguments over settlements grew more complicated following the outbreak of the first Intifada (Palestinian uprising) in 1987. It demonstrated that the Arab population

in the occupied territories did not view Jewish control as benign but as a terrible yoke they were determined to throw off. At the same time, Jewish critics in Israel voiced opposition to settlements across the 1967 lines particularly in the West Bank and Gaza. Their criticism was based in a belief that the large and rapidly growing Arab population in these areas would obviate the possibility of a Jewish state that is also democratic since on a one-man-one-vote basis a Jewish majority would become precarious and unable to carry out an agenda that reflected Jewish interests.

Critics expected the long-term growth to dominance of the Jewish population in historic Palestine would come to an end and would probably be reversed. That is, while in 1900, one in ten of Palestine's population was Jewish, in 1947, one in three was Jewish and that toward the end of 20th century there was a clear Jewish majority, due in significant measure to the immigration of a million Jews from the former Soviet Union. The concern grew that Arabs in Palestine might become the majority by 2050, if not before, should the borders of Israel encompass all of the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. To forestall this possibility, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided in 2005 to withdraw unilaterally the scattered Jewish settlements in the overwhelmingly Arab-populated Gaza Strip. With this in mind, pragmatists have joined with those calling for withdrawal to borders where Jews are a majority as a guarantee that Israel maintain its identity as both Jewish and democratic.

It is these religious, strategic, secular, historic and pragmatic arguments that contend so vociferously and passionately today, while world opinion, including that of many of Israel's supporters in the U.S., urges Israel to withdraw from all or most of the West Bank so a Palestinian state can be established. In this way, more than 60 years after the UN vote on partition, the land of Palestine would finally be shared, divided into a Jewish and an Arab state.

The Legitimacy of Zionist Settlement in International Discourse

World opinion concerning Jewish settlement has undergone a significant shift. From the first part of the twentieth century through independence, international commissions and an interested public expected research from a wide variety of disciplines, including biblical scholarship, archaeology, theology, history and social sciences, to adjudicate competing Jewish and Arab claims to Palestine. Based on this work, the international community affirmed, through the Mandate, the legal and moral right of the Jews to "*re-constitute*" themselves as a modern people in Palestine, and to "*re*-turn" and "*re*-claim" the land. The "*re*" suggests, of course, "again," and the language used is evidence of widespread acknowledgement of the Jewish past and its enduring significance through the continuity of the Jewish people. This assumption that Jews have a deep and vital historical connection to the land was inherent in the

literature of the social sciences and humanities and essential to legitimating the right of Jews to reconstitute themselves as a people and to resettle in Palestine.

"*Reconstitute*" had a clear and dramatic meaning in the first part of the twentieth century. It signaled support for the re-emergence of Jews as actors in history. It signified recognition that the Jews were a nation like other nations when the nation-state had become the privileged and valued actor in international affairs. Woodrow Wilson's 14 points, for example, declared the rights of nations to self-determination and to states. The nineteenth century European and twentieth century non-European worlds are replete with movements for "national" liberation. The nation-state, since at least the time of the French revolution, was understood as the instrument for advancing personal freedoms and rights. Such freedoms could not be achieved and protected in a vacuum. They could not just happen. They had to be implemented by political communities organized around distinct peoples. For these reasons nationalism was considered a progressive ideal that would enhance the dissemination of the Enlightenment's highest political values. With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the League of Nations therefore invented the mandate system to nurture national development in large areas of the now defunct Ottoman polity that had ruled this large region for about 500 years. Mandates were intended to nurture the formation of new states until independence and this instrument was to be applied to Jews and to the Arab peoples of Syria and Iraq. In this view, Jews were a people and, as such, entitled to a state in the part of the world where they had originated and had continued to reside. They were seen as belonging, not as aliens, in the region including Palestine, where they still constituted a vital presence. Thus defining Jews as a modern people had clear and manifest political consequences, even as denying Jewish peoplehood was an attack on the legitimacy of the Jewish state.

Formal recognition by international bodies as the League of Nations or the United Nations was not enough. Evidence of reconstitution was required to substantiate the argument for legitimacy. It was thus the thriving agricultural and urban settlements that had been built and populated over such a relatively short period, no less than the prevailing consensus, which made possible recognition of Israel in November 1947 by the United Nations. But perhaps the most manifest evidence was the revival of Hebrew. Preserved in texts and prayer over two millennia, Hebrew returned to being a living language, reasserting the landscape's Jewish identity and enabling the creation of an indigenous culture with literal roots in the ancient past.

Reconstitution of the National Language

The society re-created by [Zionism](#) was unlike other European "imagined communities." Zionists explicitly distanced themselves in crucial ways from the European exile they left behind. They never imagined their polity tied to a European state nor did they simply transplant European culture. Rather, they consciously and overtly rejected much in their European past. A prime example is the singular success of restoring Hebrew into a living language with a vibrant popular literature, modern media, scientific scholarship, commerce and politics. No other ancient language, even if maintained in the recitation of liturgy or in the study of sacred texts, has been so revived in the modern world. Taking into account the Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel, Palestinians on the West Bank and neighboring states, and Jews in the [Diaspora](#), more than 8 million people are now conversant with Hebrew as a living modern language. This is a number of speakers even greater than those who speak many contemporary European languages. Moreover, the decision to reconstitute Hebrew had opponents who insisted that European languages be maintained. Indeed, even Herzl expected that German would be the language of the Jewish state but a vigorous *kulturkampf* decisively defeated that possibility before [World War I](#).

Reclaiming the Name

As they "re-imagined" and "re-constituted" the country's landscape, [Zionists](#) continued a process begun by Christian explorers, archaeologists and bible scholars from Europe and the United States who visited Ottoman Palestine in the mid-nineteenth century. These experts began the process of recovering ancient designations found in sacred texts or other historical sources from contemporary Arab adaptations or corruptions of the original. For the Zionist settlers this was not merely an effort to recapture the Holy Land of Scriptures. Rather it was a deeply personal attempt to re-imagine themselves in the land of their ancestors. As a consequence, they consciously ignored or set aside many of the physical, social and cultural markers of both Europe and Arab neighbors. In Israel there is no New Vilna, New Bialystock, New Warsaw, New England, New York, or Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, Berlin and so on. Instead, Zionists celebrated the return to history of Biblical Rehovoth, Beer Sheva and Ashkelon. Jerusalem, of course, did not require a new name. In addition, thousands of streets, public squares and places were named for Jewish historical figures, with signs in Hebrew everywhere. This nomenclature announced that the settlements were the concrete manifestation of national revival by a people who viewed themselves as natives rather than foreigners engaged in conquering other lands. They had been strangers in the Diaspora for centuries. In Eretz Israel, Jews expended enormous creative energy to feel and be at home. So it was this rejuvenation, including in language, which convinced a majority of the world community that Jews were entitled to independence within that portion of the land they had so distinctively settled and marked.

Counter-Proofs/Counter-Theses

The validity and significance of "reconstitution" was denied by Zionism's opponents. George Antonius, a leading Lebanese/Palestinian Christian intellectual, scholar and public servant who served under the British in Palestine and spent much time in London, systematically set forth his views in the period's most influential pro-Arab volume, *The Arab Awakening* (1938). His ideas remain as part of a discourse prevalent in the Arab world. From the 1970s, there has been a growing movement to repudiate Zionism, reiterating Antonius that it is but another form of European colonialism. This analysis assumes an identity between Zionist settlement and the injustices of a "settler society." Thus, while Jewish settlement of Palestine was supported, even celebrated, by an earlier generation of social scientists, it is now publically challenged as a negative and destructive phenomenon whose consequences require correction. Current campaigns to delegitimize the Zionist enterprise are based in large measure on a radically different historical paradigm that now permeates public discourse.

The best-known such analysis is found in Gershon Shafir's *Land, labor, and the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 1882-1914*. Shafir begins his comparative analysis by identifying multiple types of settler societies in the 400 years of colonialism that began with Columbus and ended with Zionism. Relying on the insights of historians of western imperialism, he and his colleagues review Jewish settlement to determine which of the various colonial models fits Zionism best. Because his comparative framework takes European colonialism as the sole explanatory instrument for Jewish settlement, the analysis faults Zionism by definition. To use a phrase: one cannot be a little pregnant. Either one is, or is not. Comparing Jews to the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, and the English is to view them exclusively in the European historical framework. Zionist settlement may be more or less benign, but the starting point of the analysis, like its conclusion, is that it remains colonialist. Shafir examines no additional or alternative model to take account of significant anomalies of the Zionist case.

Comparison is, of course, a basic tool and obligation of serious scholarly research. The universal reference point for all such critical or revisionist scholarship is *The colonial empires: a comparative survey from the eighteenth century*, the seminal work of D. K. Fieldhouse, a British scholar, written during heyday of de-colonization, with which he identifies, and on the eve of one of the great flash-points of the Arab/Israeli conflict, the 1967 Six-Day War. Yet it is puzzling that Fieldhouse's magisterial and comprehensive 1966 publication, which continues to influence generations of researchers, omits any analysis of Zionism.

Why did Fieldhouse not apply "settler society" or colonialism to Jewish settlement that had already been in progress for more than 80 years when he published his interpretation? A likely explanation is that the Zionist project does not fit the rubric he established for the Dutch, British, French, Spaniards, Portuguese, Germans, and Italians. For one thing, Jewish colonization during its first forty years took place in the Ottoman Empire. It was not part of the process of imperial expansion in search for power and markets. Moreover, it did not come about as a consequence of industrialization and financial interests. Indeed, as numerous scholars have noted, Jewish settlement was so unprofitable that it was judged then, and at times still is, to be economically irrational. The scathing critique of Zionism then, is not a direct outgrowth of Fieldhouse's analysis of colonialism but rather an analysis of revisionist scholars who have wrenched a concept out of context in keeping with their own ideological agenda.

As explained above, Zionism did not establish plantations or other large units of capitalistic agriculture. Instead, groups with small truck farms or modest-sized collective colonies settled the land. These forms of settlement were suited to homogeneous communities and were distinctly unlike the large plantations managed by European settlers and operated by exploiting native labor. Ideologically and practically, Jews worked the land themselves.

Ironically, even this self-reliance and the determination of the *halutzim* to undertake themselves the manual labor entailed in both building and agricultural work, has given rise to charges against the Zionist enterprise in its entirety. Critics interpret the economic and cultural separation between Jews and Arabs as the sole responsibility of Zionist ideology and praxis. The contemporary indictment of Israel as an "apartheid state" follows from this charge. An examination of the historic context makes a very different case. In Arab lands, Muslims for centuries separated themselves from Jews by defining them as *dhimmis*, or tolerated but second-class members of the community. This normative separation between Jews and Muslims throughout the Arab Muslim world was imposed by the Muslim Turks and their predecessors after the rise of Islam in the seventh century and has continued through the present. It is absurd to expect a handful of Jews living in remote agricultural colonies under Turkish rule to rebel against such deeply engrained and accepted practices. To delegitimize their efforts as failures because they did not create an egalitarian and integrated civil society that had yet to be actualized even in the United States is a malevolent fantasy, but one recognizable as this generation's operative paradigm.

The suggestion that Israel is a "settler society" is a distortion. "Settler societies" were intended "replicas" of the home society and "true reproductions of European society." In the case of Algeria, the French even tried to incorporate the colony into

the home country. In sharp contrast, Zionist settlements were at once distinct from Europe and different from Arab society. While European and American technology, political ideas and other aspects of modern culture were transferred to Palestine, Zionist society consciously recast and transformed them in a unique mold dedicated to creating the "new Jew." This was, as we have seen, at the core of the idea of "reconstitution."

By defining Zionists as colonizers, revisionist scholars make an implicit claim that Jews occupy a land in which, by this same definition, they do not belong. Palestine in this argument is the home to only one indigenous or native people, the Palestinians. In what must be an extreme anomaly in the history of colonialism, this new scholarship constructs Palestine as having been occupied by two imperial powers – the British and the Jews. If we consider the multitudes of refugees from the Holocaust and from Arab lands who desperately and often unsuccessfully sought entry into Palestine prior to independence, this characterization of Jewish power appears as a cruel joke.

In like manner, revisionist scholarship bolsters its claims with reference to other ideologically driven disciplines to negate the very substantial accomplishments of the Zionist movement. It fuses the insights of post-colonial studies with "liberation theology" that declares Palestinians are a historic people descended from the inhabitants of what was once Palestine two millennia ago and denies the continuity of Jewish peoplehood. It relies on minimalist biblical scholarship that denies the validity of much of the historical narrative of the Old Testament. And it cites the findings – or absence of findings– of revisionist archaeology as evidence that the Bible has no value as a source of historic truth. In other words, the underlying assumption of these critics is that Jews are not a historic people and contemporary Jews can have no legitimate claim to the land. This constitutes an *a priori* rejection of the entire Zionist enterprise.

In basing itself on such claims, the revisionist literature on Zionist settlement has been central to challenging the legitimacy of Jewish presence in the land and denying the right of Jews to the "Jewish state" they established in it. For this reason, the topic of Zionist settlement is likely to remain a vital area of research and public discussion both for those intrigued to understand how contemporary Jews reconstituted themselves as a people, reclaimed their ancient homeland and transformed Israel into an economically, culturally and technologically developed democratic state, and by those who continue to oppose the emergence and right of the Jewish state to exist.

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