

Zionism:
"Ask Big Questions"
Discussion Guide

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to facilitate an "Ask Big Questions" style group discussion on campus as part of the AUJS National "Reclaim the "Z" Word campaign.

Contained in this guide are **five modules** on different topics relating to Zionism. Each module contains source material. **You are welcome to discuss, as a group, as many or as few modules and/or sources as you please.**

There are questions at the end of each module to prompt discussion. However, please feel free to go beyond the material.

At the end of this session, there will be an opportunity to ask and discuss other questions about Zionism.

CONTENTS

MODULE ONE - Why do Jews need a Nation-State?

MODULE TWO - Why the Land of Israel?

MODULE THREE - Why is Judaism a Nation?

MODULE FOUR - Is Zionism Racism?

MODULE FIVE - Is Zionism Colonialism?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

MODULE 1: WHY DO JEWS NEED A NATION-STATE?

Source 1.1

Theodore Hertzl

Extract from: *The Jewish State (Der Judenstaat 1896)*

No one can deny the gravity of the situation of the Jews. Wherever they live in perceptible numbers, they are more or less persecuted. Their equality before the law, granted by statute, has become practically a dead letter. They are debarred from filling even moderately high positions, either in the army, or in any public or private capacity. And attempts are made to thrust them out of business also: "Don't buy from Jews!"

Attacks in Parliaments, in assemblies, in the press, in the pulpit, in the street, on journeys--for example, their exclusion from certain hotels--even in places of recreation, become daily more numerous. The forms of persecution varying according to the countries and social circles in which they occur. In Russia, imposts are levied on Jewish villages; in Rumania, a few persons are put to death; in Germany, they get a good beating occasionally; in Austria, Anti-Semites exercise terrorism over all public life; in Algeria, there are traveling agitators; in Paris, the Jews are shut out of the so-called best social circles and excluded from clubs. Shades of anti-Jewish feeling are innumerable [...] I think that this external pressure makes itself felt everywhere. In our economically upper classes it causes discomfort, in our middle classes continual and grave anxieties, in our lower classes absolute despair.

[...] Everything tends, in fact, to one and the same conclusion, which is clearly enunciated in that classic Berlin phrase: "Judens Raus" (Out with the Jews !) I shall now put the Question in the briefest possible form: **Are we to "get out" now and where to?**

Question for discussion: *if you were a European Jew in the end of the 19th century, where are you most likely to have gone and why?*

NOTES

- Popular Jewish emigration destinations inside Europe (for Jews from Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, etc.): France, United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium
- Popular Jewish emigration destinations outside Europe: USA, South America (Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico), Canada, South Africa, Australia
- The Hebrew Yishuv in Ottoman\British Palestine was a rather small and 'experimental' project that was not very popular among the Jewish people in Europe.
- The main groups of Olim circa World War 1 (about 20 years after 'The Jewish State' was published) were young and enthusiastic Russian Jews who made Aliyah to fulfill their Socialist-Zionist dreams.

Source 1.2

Prof. Raul Hilberg

Extract from: *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1985)

The destruction of the European Jews between 1933 and 1945 appears to us now as an unprecedented event in history. Indeed, in its dimensions and total configuration, nothing like it had ever happened before. As a result of an organized undertaking, five million people were killed in the short space of a few years. The operation was over before anyone could grasp its enormity, let alone its implications for the future.

Yet, if we analyze this singularly massive upheaval, we discover that most of what happened in those twelve years (1933-1945) had already happened before. The Nazi destruction process did not come out of a void; it was the culmination of a cyclical trend. **We have observed the trend in the three successive goals of anti-Jewish administrators**

- the missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: **You have no right to live among us as Jews.**
- the secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: **You have no right to live among us.**
- the German Nazis at last decreed: **You have no right to live.**

Consider: *How can the existence of a Jewish state impacts this 'cyclical trend'?*

Source 1.3

Extract from: *The Passover Haggadah*

"The Egyptians treated us badly and they made us suffer, and they put hard work upon us."

"The Egyptians treated us badly," as it is said: Come, let us act cunningly with [the people] lest they multiply and, if there should be a war against us, they will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the land."

"And they made us suffer," as it is said: "They set taskmasters over [the people of Israel] to make them suffer with their burdens, and they built storage cities for Pharaoh, Pitom and Ramses."

"And they put hard work upon us," as it is said: "The Egyptians made the children of Israel work with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard work, with mortar and with bricks and all manner of service in the field, all their work which they made them work with rigor."

Due to Zionism, and the existence of a Jewish state, for the first time in history, there can no longer be a "Jewish refugee".

MODULE 2: WHY THE LAND OF ISRAEL?

Source 2.1

On the Way to Jerusalem (Beautiful of Elevation)

Rabbi Jehuda Halevi

c. 1075 – 1141

Judah Halevi's poems, secular and religious, are recognized as belonging to the foremost examples of Hebrew poetry. His Songs of Zion, giving expression to the poets yearning for Jerusalem, are still used in synagogues during the Ninth of Av service to introduce a note of consolation after the recital of the dirges on this day of mourning for the destruction of the Temple and for other calamities of the Jewish past. Obedient to the call of the Holy Land, Halevi, at the age of 60, resolved to leave Spain in order to settle in the country of his dreams. Legend has it that he did arrive in the Holy Land only to be murdered there, but recent research has established that, in fact, on his way he stayed in Egypt, where he died.

Beautiful heights! The whole world's gladness!
O great King's city, mountain blest!
My soul is yearning unto thee
From the limits of the west.

The torrents heave from the deep within,
At memory of thine olden state,
The glory of thee borne away to exile,
Thy dwelling desolate.

And who shall grant me, on the wings of eagles,
To rise and seek thee through the years,
Until I mingle with thy dust beloved,
The waters of my tears?

I have sought thee and though thy King
be not in thee, and if so -
thy Gilead's balm is now of fiery
Serpents and scorpions.

Shall I not to thy very stones be tender?
Shall I not kiss them verily?
Shall not thine earth upon my lips taste sweeter
Than money unto me?

Source 2.2

Psalm 137 (Parts said at most Jewish weddings)

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept,
as we thought of Zion.

There on the poplars
we hung up our lyres,
for our captors asked us there for songs,
our tormentors, for amusement, "Sing us one of the
songs of Zion."

How can we sing a song of the LORD
on alien soil?

**If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither;
let my tongue stick to my palate
if I cease to think of you,
if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at
my happiest hour.**

Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall;
how they cried, "Strip her, strip her to her very
foundations!"

Fair Babylon, you predator,
a blessing on him who repays you in kind what you
have inflicted on us;
a blessing on him who seizes your babies
and dashes them against the rocks

עַל נְהָרוֹת | בְּבַל שָׁם יֹשְׁבֵינוּ גַם־בְּכִינוּ בְּזָכְרֵנוּ
אֶת־צִיּוֹן: עַל־עַרְבִים בְּתוֹכָהּ תִּלְיֵנוּ כְּנִרְוֹתֵינוּ: כִּי
שָׁם שָׂאֵלֵנוּ שׁוֹבֵי־נוֹ דְּבַר־שִׁיר וְתוֹלְלֵינוּ שְׁמִחָה
שִׁירָה לָנוּ מִשִּׁיר צִיּוֹן: אִינְךָ נְשִׁיר אֶת־שִׁיר־יְהוָה עַל
אֲדָמַת גֹּבֶר: אִם־אֶשְׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי:
תִּדְבַק־לְשׁוֹנִי | לְחִכִּי אִם־לֹא אֶזְכְּרֶכִי אִם־לֹא אֶעֱלֶה
אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל רֹאשׁ שְׁמִחָתִי: זָכַר יְהוָה | לְבִנְיָ
אֲדוֹם אֶת־יְוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם הָאֲמָרִים עָרוּ | עָרוּ עַד
הִסּוֹד בָּהּ: בְּתִבְבֵּל הַשְּׂדוּדָה אֲשֶׁר־י שִׁישְׁלֵם־לָךְ
אֶת־גְּמוּלָךְ שְׁגַמְלֵת לָנוּ: אֲשֶׁר־י | נְשִׂיאֵי הָאֵז וְנִפְצָ
אֶת־עַלְלֵיךְ אֶל־הַסֵּלַע:

Source 2.3

Shmuel Yosef Agnon

Speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1966

It is said in the Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 23a): "In Jerusalem, the men of discrimination did not sit down to dine in company until they knew who their companions were to be"; so I will now tell you who am I, whom you have agreed to have at your table.

As a result of the historic catastrophe in which Titus of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and Israel was exiled from its land, I was born in one of the cities of the Exile. But always I regarded myself as one who was born in Jerusalem. In a dream, in a vision of the night, I saw myself standing with my brother-Levites in the Holy Temple, singing with them the songs of David, King of Israel, melodies such as no ear has heard since the day our city was destroyed and its people went into exile. I suspect that the angels in charge of the Shrine of Music, fearful lest I sing in wakefulness what I had sung in dream, made me forget by day what I had sung at night; for if my brethren, the sons of my people, were to hear, they would be unable to bear their grief over the happiness they have lost. To console me for having prevented me from singing with my mouth, they enable me to compose songs in writing.

Source 2.3

Leah Goldberg
Pine (1955)

Here I will not hear the voice of the cuckoo.
Here the tree will not wear a cape of snow.
But it is here in the shade of these pines
my whole childhood reawakens.

The chime of the needles: Once upon a time –
I called the snow-space homeland,
and the green ice at the river's edge -
was the poem's grammar in a foreign place.

Perhaps only migrating birds know -
suspended between earth and sky -
the heartache of two homelands.

With you I was transplanted twice,
with you, pine trees, I grew -
with my roots in two disparate landscapes.

Consider: *How does Goldberg view the new Jewish identity of hers? Does she neglect the past and only accept the new? How does Jewish identity coincides with the old national\cultural identity?*

(Keypoints: Hybrid identity, constant longing for the European past while acknowledging and appreciating the present, "like a bird suspended between earth and sky").

Question for discussion: *What kind of connection did the Jews have with the Land of Israel?*

NOTES religious, almost mystical form of 'remembrance'. At a time of the 'First Globalization' of 1870-1914, and in the spirit of European emancipation and the Spring of Nations, inspired Zionists built on these religious sentiments and made the claim for a national emancipation of the Jewish people in their historic homeland.

MODULE 3:

WHY IS JUDAISM A NATION?

Source 3.1

Nation (n.) - *A large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular state or territory.*
(Oxford dictionary)

Do the Jewish people have a common descent?

Common descent: Israel is perhaps one of the most racially diverse countries in the world, however as Judaism is hereditary, non-missionary and often subject to hate, there's basis for the unprovable assumption that most Jews are in fact of common descent.

Do the Jewish people have common history?

Common history: Common Jewish history is united not only by the preservation of Jewish Bible and other religious texts, but also through an ongoing development of Jewish thought in the diaspora, which often became known even in the most remote Jewish communities. Jewish history of persecution and fleeing also brought about the scattering of Jewish communities who had a common history that was told for generations. In most recent history, the Holocaust has directly impacted the 9 million people large European Jewry (more than 60% of the Jewish population worldwide).

Do the Jewish people have common culture?

Common culture: However diverse, the Jewish people maintain a common culture and folklore that has often been adapted amongst different communities. Therefore, Jewish holidays and Shabbat may be kept differently amongst Jews of different origin, and yet the core practices show astonishing resemblance. Other Jewish customs like circumcision, Bar/Bat-Mitzvah, Marriage, Burial, as well as a common languages (Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, etc.), make a significant cultural tie amongst the Jewish people.

Do the Jewish people have a common language?

Common language: For years, Hebrew was used only as a language of prayer that was taught through generations for religious purposes only. The establishment of a Jewish national home involved the reclamation and the rapid development of the old Hebrew language, that would serve as a common spoken language for the Jewish people (It shall be noted the the State of Israel also recognises Arabic as an official language).

Source 3.2

Extract from: Amos Oz

A Look at... Israel turning 50 (The Washington Post, 1998)

In an old dialogue between an Israeli and a visitor, the visitor asks: Why did you Jews come to Palestine? The Israeli answers: We came here to forget. To forget what, the visitor asks. I forgot, says the Israeli.

Zionism was an uneasy coalition of diverse dreams, and by definition it would have been impossible for all those dreams to have been fulfilled. Some are partially fulfilled, some forgotten and some are turned into nightmares.

Israel is not a people, not a state, not a society, but a collection of arguments. There are nearly six million citizens here (1998), if not six million prophets and messiahs and savior, each with a personal formula for salvation in three moves.

It is a fiery collection of arguments, and I like it this way, although it is no garden of roses. A whole nation has been immersed for the past 30 years in a debate that is superficially political or military but that is essentially ethical, historical, even theological about the kind of identity its people want.

Outsiders say, "Can't you Israelis lower your voices a little when you disagree with each other? You are embarrassing us in front of our non-Jewish neighbors."

No way, no deal.

[...]

We don't actually have a debate about "Who is a Jew." It's really just over "Who is a rabbi." To me, the answer is very simple: Everyone is a rabbi. This is a nation of 5.9 million rabbis, teachers, prophets, prime ministers and messiahs. Everyone talks and no one listens (I listen sometimes, that is how I make a living). Who is a Jew? Everyone who is mad enough to call himself or herself a Jew. It's not for nothing that we never had a pope. Anyone who calls herself or himself the Pope of the Jews, everybody would slap this Jewish pope on the back, saying "Hi, Pope, we don't know each other, but your uncle or my grandfather used to do business together in Minsk or Casablanca, so let me tell you once and for all what God really wants from us." Judaism is a game of interpretations and interpretations of interpretations. Each time the Jews live in submission, obedience, in blind religious discipline, rather than in open interpretation, there are bad times for Jews. Some impatient outsiders ask: "When are you going to give us a juicy little Jewish civil war?" They want the settlers shooting at the peaceniks, the Ashkenazi at the Sephardi, the religious at the secular. I tell those people, "the Israeli civil war has been going on for 70 years, but it is mostly a verbal civil war. We fight by calling each other terrible names, thus inflicting cancer and heart attacks on each other."

Questions to consider:

How does Oz interpret Jewish national identity?

How does Oz' interpretation affect Jews outside of Israel?

Important: Jews are A PEOPLE, hence Jewish peoplehood has religious, cultural and national elements, each reflected in the other. Zionism exercised the national tendencies inherent in Jewish religious tradition (From the Haggadah: "In each and every generation, a person is obligated to regard himself as though he actually left Egypt"); and, in the spirit of the 19th century Spring of Nations, sought to realise Jewish nationhood in the form of a Jewish nation state.

MODULE 4: IS ZIONISM RACISM?

Source 4.1

Resolution 3379 (XXX): Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination The UN General Assembly

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 1904 (XVIII) of 20 November 1963, proclaiming the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and in particular its affirmation that "any doctrine of racial differentiation or superiority is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous" and its expression of alarm at "the manifestations of racial discrimination still in evidence in some areas in the world, some of which are imposed by certain Governments by means of legislative, administrative or other measures",

Recalling also that, in its resolution 3151 G (XXVIII) of 14 December 1973, the General Assembly condemned, inter alia, the unholy alliance between South African racism and zionism,

Taking note of the Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and Their Contribution to Development and Peace 1975, proclaimed by the World Conference of the International Women's Year, held at Mexico City from 19 June to 2 July 1975, which promulgated the principle that "international cooperation and peace require the achievement of national liberation and independence, the elimination of colonialism and neocolonialism, foreign occupation, zionism, apartheid and racial discrimination in all its forms, as well as the recognition of the dignity of peoples and their right to self-determination",

Taking note also of resolution 77 (XII) adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity at its twelfth ordinary session, held at Kampala from 28 July to 1 August 1975, which considered **"that the racist regime in occupied Palestine and the racist regime in Zimbabwe and South Africa have a common imperialist origin, forming a whole and having the same racist structure and being organically linked in their policy aimed at repression of the dignity and integrity of the human being"**,

Taking note also of the Political Declaration and Strategy to Strengthen International Peace and Security and to Intensify Solidarity and Mutual Assistance among Non-Aligned Countries, adopted at the Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Non-Aligned Countries held at Lima from 25 to 30 August 1975, which most severely condemned zionism as a threat to world peace and security and called upon all countries to oppose this racist and imperialist ideology,

Determines that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.

Source 4.2

Ambassador Chaim Herzog's response to Resolution 3379 (1975)

I can point with pride to the Arab ministers who have served in my government; to the Arab deputy speaker of my Parliament; to Arab officers and men serving of their own volition in our border and police defense forces, frequently commanding Jewish troops; to the hundreds of thousands of Arabs from all over the Middle East crowding the cities of Israel every year; to the thousands of Arabs from all over the Middle East coming for medical treatment to Israel; to the peaceful coexistence which has developed; to the fact that Arabic is an official language in Israel on a par with Hebrew; to the fact that it is as natural for an Arab to serve in public office in Israel as it is incongruous to think of a Jew serving in any public office in an Arab country, indeed being admitted to many of them. Is that racism? It is not! That ... is Zionism.

(This resolution is) another manifestation of the bitter anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish hatred which animates Arab society. Who would have believed that in this year, 1975, the malicious falsehoods of the 'Elders of Zion' would be distributed officially by Arab governments? Who would have believed that we would today contemplate an Arab society which teaches the vilest anti-Jewish hate in the kindergartens? ... We are being attacked by a society which is motivated by the most extreme form of racism known in the world today.

For us, the Jewish people, this resolution based on hatred, falsehood and arrogance, is devoid of any moral or legal value. For us, the Jewish people, this is no more than a piece of paper and we shall treat it as such.

Source 4.3

Extract from: Israel's Declaration of Independence (1948)

The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Source 4.4

Article 4.4

Extract from: Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty (1992)

1. The purpose of this Basic Law is to protect human dignity and liberty, in order to establish in a Basic Law the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Fundamental human rights in Israel are founded upon recognition of the value of the human being, the sanctity of human life, and the principle that all persons are free; these rights shall be upheld in the spirit of the principles set forth in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel.
2. There shall be no violation of the life, body or dignity of any person as such.
3. There shall be no violation of the property of a person.
4. All persons are entitled to protection of their life, body and dignity.
5. There shall be no deprivation or restriction of the liberty of a person by imprisonment, arrest, extradition or otherwise.

Things to consider.....

- Zionism seeks to establish a JEWISH STATE for the Jewish people. However, it does NOT imply that the Israeli-Arab minority of citizens in this Jewish State should enjoy a less favourable status than the Jewish population. Israel's founding text, the Declaration of Independence, states equality before the law as one of the conditions for Israeli democracy.
- Arabic is an official language in Israel, thus allowing publications and education in the language of the minority.
- Ethnic and cultural minorities exist in other countries as well, some even claim independence or some form of autonomy. The Israeli democracy allows Israel Arabs equal rights and full citizenship.
- Some may argue that the definition of Zionism as the national liberation movement for the Jewish people, and the definition of Israel as a Jewish state, is racist on the basis that it "discriminates" against the Israeli-Arab community, who cannot affiliate with Israel's national identity. These subjective feeling of exclusion raised by some Israeli-Arabs are indisputable, but the legal framework under which Muslims and Christian Arabs live in Israel is no different than any other national minority and in fact no different than any Jewish minority existing in Christian and/or Muslim states (the latter are mostly non-democratic). Israeli law recognises Israeli-Arabs as equal citizens and protects their civil liberties; Arabic is considered an official language by the state of Israel (for education, official correspondences, media broadcasting, etc.) and the third largest party in the Israeli Parliament is 'The Joint Arab List'.
Examples of other minorities: Irish Catholic in Northern Ireland; Basques in Spain, Japanese in Brazil, Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro.

MODULE 5: IS ZIONISM COLONIALISM?

Source 5.1

Colonialism (n.) *The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.*

(Oxford Dictionary)

KEY POINTS

- For most of its history, Zionism was disputed with colonial powers who took over Palestine (Ottoman, British). Jewish resistance groups (Nili, Etzel, Hagannah, Lehi, etc.) most often worked AGAINST the colonial powers in order to 'liberate' Palestine.
- Menachem Begin, former Israeli Prime Minister (1977-1983), was considered to be a role model of anti-British resistance - often jailed by British authorities, he was an inspiration for anti-colonial movements like the IRA (Irish Republican Army)
- Palestine was never an independent state and the term 'Palestinian people' is relatively new. However, there's no denial that the Palestinians, as a collective, are entitled for self national determination.
- About 900,000 non-Jews lived in Israel prior to 1948. The Hebrew Yishuv (Jewish community in Ottoman and British Palestine) had begun its development with the full legal acquisition of land from their previous Arab owners. In fact, in the early days of Zionism, Jewish investors often employed the local Arab population as there was no Jewish workforce. This economic boost attracted migration from neighbouring countries, in addition to the Jewish Aliya (when colonial powers allowed).
- The Hebrew Yishuv suffered deadly terrorist attacks (dating back to the beginning of the 20th century) that caused confidence between Jews and Arabs to waver. These attacks increased exponentially until 1948, and the Arab population refused any proposals suggested by the British and/or the UN to partition British Palestine. They were later defeated in the War of Independence.
- In the midst of the War, many Arabs felt insecure and sought to flee the country; others were expelled for security concerns. However, in the 1949 Ceasefire agreements, Israel's new borders were recognised, leaving an Arab minority within Israel and numerous refugees who sought to return. Four generations on, the Palestinians are the only people in the world to still be recognised as refugees 70 years later (including children and grandchildren).

Source 5.2

Extract from:

Amos Oz

Open Seminar (2015)

I think that many western people tend to treat every international conflict as a Hollywood movie with good guys and bad guys. And they often have the urge, not always but often, they have the urge to sign a petition in favor of the good guys, launch a demonstration against the bad guys, and go to sleep feeling good about themselves. **Now the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the entire Middle Eastern issue is not a Hollywood movie.** It's not a western movie; it's not black and white. As I said many times in the past, Israel and Palestine is a clash between right and right. Recently it's a clash between wrong and wrong, but it's still not black and white. And I'm amazed that people who claimed often that they despise Hollywood, and despise western movies, when it comes to Israelis and Palestinians it is black and white. [...]

To some extent I can tell you this happens because, morally, the 20th century was fairly easy. Fascism and anti-fascism was black and white. Colonialism and decolonialism was black and white. Vietnam was black and white. South Africa was black and white. **Israel and Palestine is not. Many people tend to think that because in the past, in the major events, you could easily take sides with the good guys, the same relates to Israelis and Palestinians. I'm sorry; it's not that simple. It's not that simple.** I don't expect anyone in this world to support the policies of Netanyahu's government. They are disastrous policies, I think its an anti-peace policy, I think it's a negative policy. At the same time, I think it would be a great mistake to embrace and hug Islamic fanatics and Islamic aggressors; and Hamas aggressors, and ISIS aggressors, just because Israel is wrongly building settlements in the West Bank.

Source 5.3

Extract from: Amos Oz
Speech at the 16th Premi Internacional Catalunya
Barcelona, September 8, 2004

Ladies and gentlemen, the clash between Jews and Arabs, between Israelis and Palestinians, is a tragedy, a clash between right and right. (Although recently I sometimes can't help seeing it as a clash between wrong and wrong). It is not a Wild West movie with good guys and bad guys. [...] I find it rather amazing that Europeans, who often criticize others for lack of subtlety, for painting the world black and white, are doing precisely that as they relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. **The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is emphatically not a story about colonialism and decolonization. Nor is it the Vietnam War riding again, or another version of South African apartheid.** Two nations claim one very small country, the size of Sicily or Denmark, as their one and only homeland in the world. And they are both right. Neither Israeli Jews, nor Palestinian Arabs, can find a national homeland anywhere else. The Palestinians are in Palestine for the same reason for which the Dutch are in the Netherlands or the Greeks in Greece. **The Israeli Jews are in Israel because most of them were virtually kicked out of Europe and of the Arabic Islamic countries. And because Israel is the only country in their very long history where the Jews, as a nation, have been entirely at home.**

[...]

When my parents were young, many walls in Europe carried the hateful graffiti, 'Jews go back to Palestine'. Just as today the same walls bear the hateful graffiti, 'Jews out of Palestine'. During the 1920s and 30s, my parents and grandparents, sensing the growth of east European anti-Semitism and the imminent ethnic cleansing openly threatened by Nazism, appealed for six or eight different citizenships, in Europe and elsewhere. No one took them in. Canada claimed that 'none is too many'. New Zealand used a more original argument: we don't have a problem of anti-Semitism and we do not want the problem to arise.

Zionism, for my family, was not a matter of making a choice at a travel agency. Not a matter of ideology or greedy colonialism. Not a matter of Eurocentric imperialism. It was their only life choice. It offered the only place they could go.

Question to consider: Why do people regard Zionism as a colonial project?

KEY POINTS

- Wrongly framing of Jews as European - Jews came from all lands, east and west, in all colours, often seeking refuge.
- Wrongly perceiving the Palestinians to be a native, pre-existing and politically organized entity.
- Disrespecting Jewish claims and historic evidence that show Israel as being a Jewish homeland.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Extract from: Amos Oz

A Look at... Israel turning 50 (The Washington Post, 1998)

I love Israel even at times when I don't like it, even when I can't stand it. I love it because I feel somewhat at home in Israel, even though it is a flawed home. It is necessary to do some mending. At times it is disappointing, but this is the nature of dreams -- to be somewhat disappointing once they are fulfilled. Israel is a dream come true. The only way to keep a dream rosy and intact is to never live it out. This is true of planting a garden, raising a family, living out a sexual fantasy or building a nation.

[...]

The real Israel is not one dream come true, but a conglomeration of dreams, fantasies, blueprints and master plans. There were people who came here to humbly wait for the Messiah. There were others, more ambitious, who intended to make the Messiah come immediately. Others wanted to be the Messiah, or to reconstruct the ancient kingdoms of David and Solomon with all their glory, or to build a Marxist paradise (so one day Stalin could visit and get the grand tour of a kibbutz, and then the kibbutzniks could have a lengthy discussion with him and teach him once and for all what Marxism/Leninism is all about, and then, they fantasized, he would rise to his feet and say "you Jews did socialism better here than we did in Russia" and then die of happiness). There were Europeans who hoped to rebuild Vienna or Prague in the heart of the Middle East, with tea and European decorum, music, and peace and quiet between 2 and 4 in the afternoon.

There were people who wanted this place to become a 51st state of the United States or a Scandinavian social democracy. The founders of my own kibbutz, Hulda, semi-religious social anarchists, maintained that it was time for the Jewish people to come back to Israel to create a loose federation of rural communities where the Jews would undergo a deep religious renewal -- not in synagogue, but through constant touch with the elements of nature, through hard physical work and sharing everything with each other. There was, in short, a rainbow of fantasies.

Questions to Consider:

What is your dream for Israel?

Has this dream been fulfilled? If not, what needs to happen to actualise the dream?

What does Zionism mean to you?