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Zionist Settler-Colonialist Identity

From Ethnic Cleansing to Genocide

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Abstract

This essay addresses a poignantly critical question: how did Israel enter into such an unsustainable, illegal, immoral and rather impractical position in the span of a few months following the bloody slaughter of 7 October 2023? It explains the problem triggering the move towards genocide, the fact that ethnic cleansing of Palestinians had run its course, and not enough Palestinians have departed Palestine since 1967 despite terrifying war crimes against them. The essay advances that the step-change from the decades of ‘good-old ethnic cleansing’ to a new level of criminality and depravity—genocide—was not a simple issue of turning up the volume; it required a mindset which sees genocide not only as an ‘option’, but one perceiving it as the only option. This was made possible after 7 October 2023.

Keywords

ethnic cleansing – genocide – Israel – mass psychosis – Palestine – settler colonialism – Zionism

1 Introduction: The Systemic Shock

There is little doubt that the Hamas and Islamic Jihad offensive on 7 October 2023 delivered a body-blow to Israeli settler-colonial society, of a kind never

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before experienced. In a society predicated and modelled on the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), where every Jewish man and most women serve well into middle age, such a jolt is understandable. Since 1948, Israelis have been habituated to treating the military as the main organizing principle of their perceived needs (see Bresheeth-Žabner 2020). This is untypical of small states—it is a *modus operandi* normally afforded by leading political powers, and even they occasionally face limitations. Israel's case is unique—it prefers and is accustomed to using mainly and frequently only military means to resolve, in essence, political issues.

Hence, a military debacle, certainly one as severe as Israel suffered on 7 October, is as bad as it gets. Not only were all frontline positions around the Gaza Strip taken with little or no resistance, despite the futuristic and costly systems employed, but so were all civilian settlements along the electronic border fence. The IDF had never before suffered such a defeat and heavy losses in a single day. The fact that many of the Israeli soldiers and civilians killed were victims of the IDF's total breakdown (Sanders 2004)—shot during the panic which engulfed Southern Israel—is evidence of the depth of the disaster. Advanced technologies, including remote-controlled drones, helicopter gunships, guided missiles, long-range artillery and fighter jets, are prone to identification errors. Add to this the IDF practice of employing strategies such as the Dahiya Doctrine and Hannibal Directive, dictating huge firepower where Israeli hostages are taken, killing both friend and foe alike, and you have the potential for total mayhem. So, not only was the IDF caught totally unprepared, but they were defeated by a smaller, poorer and weaker opponent without modern armament equal to the IDF. That this resistance movement managed to kill more than a thousand Israelis, mostly civilians, in a meticulously-planned operation is even more humiliating. Following the events of 7 October, Israelis live in constant danger despite the huge investment in military, financial and human outlay terms. From a place where Jews were ruling the region, Israel proved to be the most unsafe location for them.

This raises deep doubts about the claimed successes of the settler-colonial project in Palestine. On the face of it, Israel has never been stronger. The aid of various types from the United States has never been more substantial, and the political and diplomatic support from the Western Bloc is also at a historical high. Many Western states have used the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) Definition of antisemitism, passing legislation to silence and criminalize any criticism of Israel. The BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) campaign has not yet affected Israel much.

Despite all this, Israel has never been weaker. It is a deeply divided society—the first nine months of 2023 saw substantial anti-government demonstrations,

blocked roads and sit-ins outside the Knesset, the Premier's office and his various abodes. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu can be labeled the most despised Israeli leader of all time, and not just in Israel. His government is a terrifying circus act of fascist and neo-Nazi parties from the extreme-right, set on transforming Israel's political and juridical systems to suit their authoritarian and racist plans for assuming control over the whole of historic Palestine, oppressing Palestinians under their authority and denying them any rights.¹ While the animosity towards Palestinians is shared across all Jewish political parties, the 'left' and center are struggling against Netanyahu because they view, quite correctly, his legislative revolution as an anti-democratic coup against them.

Interestingly, in a new set of polls published recently, this cleavage between the Israeli political camps has not disappeared or declined since 7 October. Despite most Israeli Jews supporting the Gaza genocide—though they would fight to the death to avoid calling it that—they are not more supportive of Netanyahu and his government, but less so! 'The October 7 massacre and the war [*sic*] in Gaza did not remove the division and hostility from the Israeli society, as arises from an analysis of the data of the Israeli Democracy Institute of the public positioning before and after the start of the war. "Together we shall win" is a strong and optimistic slogan, but its hold on reality seems minimal' (Klingweill 2024). Nevertheless, Netanyahu is already at the end of his long career, unlikely to stay in power much longer, and is not the worst feature of the Israeli crisis. The real difficulty is that 7 October and the genocide which followed have changed Israel beyond belief, and walking backwards to the *status quo ante* is out of the question. If Israel is united in anything, it is the genocidal campaign against Palestine, with Gaza at the core.

How did Israel trip into such an unsustainable, illegal, immoral and rather impractical position over seven months of bloody slaughter? Much will be written in the future about this apparent switch of policy and attitude, for sure. On closer examination, this is not a sharp switch in policy but rather an inevitable result of the Zionist project. The objective of Zionism was and remains the exclusive control of historic Palestine through incremental removal of the Palestinians, replacing them with Jewish settlements. This was the rationale of the 1948 Nakba with its 800,000 ethnically-cleansed refugees and the 1967 war with a further 250,000. Ethnic cleansing is a violent method of removing indigenous populations, and it worked on these occasions. This problem trig-

1 For a preview of their plan for the future, please consult a now-famous article by Bezael Smotrich (2017), the author (when he was hardly known) of a seminal document published in Hebrew preparing the genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

gered the move towards genocide because ethnic cleansing had run its course. Moreover, not enough Palestinians have left Palestine since 1967, despite terrifying war crimes against them: the rampant Apartheid, daily denial of rights, continuous land theft, house demolitions, illegal detention without trial of thousands and frequent and violent pogroms against West Bank Palestinians. The knowledge that after leaving, they will never be allowed to return has meant that Palestinians have chosen *Zumud*, or resistance, through attachment to the land. This delayed the Israeli colonization of the West Bank and stopped Gaza Strip colonization altogether in 2005 when all Gaza settlements were vacated, as the IDF could not protect them.

This hampered advance of the settlements, and the new government of 2023 changed the rules—in came the fascist fringe of Israel's right, promising to remove the bottleneck and settle everywhere. This could not be done just by decree or legislation—Palestinian resistance has intensified and spread despite the collaborationist and servile PA (Palestinian Authority) regime. The fragility of the status quo was apparent, and with time running out, Israel decided that more brutality was needed, leading to a move from ethnic cleansing to genocide. The ratcheting up of attacks was a normative tool of the IDF—constantly upping brutality levels, increasing violence and finding new means to make life impossible for Palestinians—even after 75 years of making it impossible. The Israeli toolkit is predicated on superficial assumptions. If a new measure fails to force Palestinians off their land, more force is needed! Israel calls itself a 'Jewish State', and in that precise sense, there is nothing Jewish about racism, apartheid, land theft, settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing or genocide. In actuality, the opposite is true. Every crime committed by Israel violates millennia of Jewish religion, culture, tradition and history. Israel's Jews have left this tradition, departing from historical Judaism.

This enabled the step-change from the decades of 'good-old ethnic cleansing' to a new level of criminality and depravity—genocide! It was not a simple issue of turning up the volume; it required a mindset which views genocide not only as an 'option', but one perceiving it as the only option. This was made possible after 7 October 2023. Individual and societal perceptions of the events in and around Gaza have undergone a violent transformation: 'many times during this genocide, I heard and read people saying they are feeling like they're going crazy' (Mizrahi 2024). Rogel Alpher, a leading columnist in Haaretz, also uses psychological terminology to describe the change: 'as a derivative of the Versailles syndrome, Israeli society now wants to increase the defence budget and the army, arm itself to the teeth and turn into a military monster. Establishment of a Palestinian state is liable to radicalize Israel into the realms of madness' (Alpher 2024). As if Israel was not already armed to the teeth.

The term madness recurs in many columns on the Gaza genocide, not just in the text but also in the very titles (Michael 2024), even before 7 October. More accurately, some used the term 'mass psychosis': 'what was so screwed-up in our psyche that we couldn't bring ourselves to just get up and leave this place? You must see this as some kind of mass psychosis, as an act of madness', I said. 'I'm terrified by it, and I admire your courage', she replied, 'but if not for your own sake, then do it for your children's sake' (Elliott Hofmann 2023). Such examples abound, yet so does the mass psychosis. One is reminded of the United States post 9/11 when nothing was harsh enough for the punishment its administration was meting out to Iraq—a country which had nothing to do with the atrocity in New York City. Nevertheless, someone had to be punished for the grand infraction committed, and civilians became fair game in the mass psychosis because civilians were the victims in New York.

A mass psychosis requires initiation and steering from some quarters, and Mizrahi identifies the machinery of instilling the madness: 'a well-planned, well-executed, and heavily budgeted campaign by [the] US and Israeli organs of government responsible entirely for fooling great numbers of people into believing all kinds of nonsense (and not believing the simple truth) (Mizrahi 2024)'. The campaign of lies by Israeli Hasbara clearly led Western leaders to their facile and false speeches decrying the horrors on 7 October, especially ones which never took place, such as Biden's claims that he saw images of beheaded babies (Al-Jazeera Team 2023), or the mass rapes described by Israel, which were proven to be false (Sanders 2024).

Following the November 2022 election, which resulted in elevating Israel's most extreme administration to power, the die has been cast. That the objectives of this government were the completion of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, including such mechanisms as genocide, is evident from the Smotrich article referred to above. Through a long series of wars, mostly IDF-initiated, with smaller military campaigns in between, Israelis adopted an identity determined by the IDF (Bresheeth 2023: 435; also see Bresheeth-Žabner 2020). All conflicts were to be resolved by force alone, and force was on the side of Israel, not just the IDF, but the whole Western Bloc standing ready to intervene on its behalf, which it had done since 7 October.

The same government so vociferously opposed by most Israelis during the first nine months of 2023—blamed for its illegitimate and undemocratic changes to the 'constitutional laws' of Israel and its frenetic race to remove legal protection from its opponents, not to mention the Palestinian citizens of Israel—has managed to create a mass psychosis by using Holocaust memes (Sboros 2023), and drive its citizenry, as well as the politicians in the West, into a cycle of vengeance and hatred, demanding terrifying revenge at any cost.

2 Conclusion: Zionism Can No Longer Be Supported

In the maelstrom of pain, hatred, humiliation and snubbed hubris, Israel has crossed the invisible line between 'normative' and repetitive war crimes, such as ethnic cleansing, towards the 'crime of crimes', genocide. As proven historically, once that line is crossed, there is no way back, and a society thus marked becomes a permanent pariah, though the most robust regimes on earth may support it. What underwrites that result is the staunch support of the genocide by the Israeli Jewish population, time and again (Gordon 2023). It is clear, much like so many times before, that Israelis see themselves as the victims in this genocidal war, which did not start on October 2023, in 1967, or even in 1948. This is a colonial war against the indigenous people of Palestine by a political minion of the West for more than a century. If this destructive and unequal atrocity proved anything, it is the unsustainability of Zionist settler colonialism, a movement in terminal moral and political decline supported by the similarly declining Western powers. Israeli society's predilection, the ability to describe themselves as the most potent military force in the Middle East while also perceiving Israel as a victim of the Palestinians, is the clearest sign of the mass psychosis referred to above and its incurable nature.

The 'UnJewish State' has started its spiralling degeneration, which could only lead to dissolution, though on the way, it may yet ignite the whole Middle East. Israel has chosen the *Samson option*, and for a state with hundreds of nuclear devices, such choice is a terrifying threat to world order. We must stop it before it is too late.

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