

BRIDGE EVENT I

The Rise of Zionism:
Resistance and
Jewish-Palestinian
Allyship

JISOOR

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We look forward to seeing you at more of our events soon! Please join our mailing list to receive updates on upcoming events and organization updates!

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What is Zionism?

For the purpose of this work, we will investigate the creation of Zionism and the Zionist state as a colonialist white supremacist movement.

The Zionist movement began as a fringe political ideology, later transforming into a transnational project expanding Britain and the United States' imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa. The movement coat-tailed a shift in imperialism after WWII led by the US, which prioritized proxy wars, economic sanctions and influence over direct colonialism. The US and European powers used the creation of the Zionist state to colonize Palestine. These imperial powers propped up Israel, injecting a complacent and white-supremacist ally in the Middle East. Zionism, since its inception, prioritized the identity and experience of European Jews, attempting to forge a national identity from misplaced interpretations of Torah, and blatant anti-Semitic sentiments. ¹

The Rise of Zionism

Arthur Balfour, a Zionist, and member of British Parliament, endorsed the 1905 Aliens Act in the UK. The Aliens Act, similar to the US Immigration Act of 1924, heavily restricted Jewish immigration to the UK. Five years later, the Balfour declaration was announced, establishing a British backed Zionist state in Ottoman Palestine. Many Jewish members of British parliament opposed the announcement, including India Edwin Montagu, who publicly labeled the enforcers of the Balfour declaration anti-Semites. In his book *The Perils of Zionism* Claude Montefiore, Jewish scholar and historian writes:

“Those who have no love for Jews and those who are pronounced anti-Semites all seem to welcome the Zionist proposals and aspirations, Why should this be, unless Zionism fits with anti-Semitic presumptions and with anti-Semitic aims?”

After the US Immigration Act of 1924 was passed, severely restricting immigration into the US, several European countries followed suit, limiting immigration and asylum seekers from several countries. This legislation directly discriminated against Asian immigrants, but heavily restricted immigration access to several Jewish communities across Europe after WWI.⁵

Ultimately, Zionism began to garner more support, although remained a fringe movement in the Jewish community until the early 1930s. The Great Depression spurred anxiety in the Jewish community that a rise in

antisemitism was on the horizon due to a prospective influx of Jewish refugees due to WWII.⁵

There was widespread anxiety in the Jewish community that an influx of refugees and immigrants from Europe would instigate further economic decline. These rumors were bolstered by the Zionist movement as it aimed to siphon the refugee crisis in Europe into colonizing Palestine. Prior to the events of the Holocaust, only 3% of the 2 million Jews who fled religious persecution in Eastern Europe immigrated to Palestine. This goes to show how impactful the Zionist campaign was during WWII. 60 million German Jews alone immigrated to Palestine as a result of WWII (Havaara Agreements), in addition to several thousand more from Poland, France and Eastern Europe.

The Zionist movement acted quickly, rebranding the Zionist state as a re-homing for Jewish refugees in Europe. The association of the creation of Israel and the Jewish refugee crisis as necessary persists to this day and is a powerful tactic for Zionist propaganda.

Jewish Resistance

Zionism has found a fertile breeding ground in the United States, in the past three decades. The United States remains the largest ally and financial contributor to Israel. Zionism has become prolific to the point of becoming synonymous with Jewish Identity.

However, the American Jewish Community was not always hospitable toward Zionism. In fact, when Zionism first ran a ground in the late 1800s, and then again in the 1930s, Jewish immigrant communities actively organized against the ideology. Many Jewish immigrants came to the United States escaping oppressive systems which sought to erase them or assimilate them into a national identity. As such, many Jews saw the creation of a Jewish National identity as not only sacrilegious, but counter to everything they had fought to create and preserve in the United States.³

In 1885 reform Rabbi's inspired by the work of Rabbi Hirsh congregated in Pittsburgh for a conference. The resulting document was an eight point platform dispelling Zionism and calling for Jewish unity against the impending tyranny of Zionist ideology.^{4 5}

“We recognize in the era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching realization of Israel’s great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a

return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.”⁵

Subsequently, in 1897, the Central Conference of American rabbis wrote and adopted a resolution which condemned and delegitimize any attempt to establish a Jewish state. The resolution read thusly: *“Zion was a precious possession of the past...as such it is a holy memory, but it is not our hope of the future. America is our Zion.”*⁴ The Jewish reformation called for a universal prophetic Judaism, neutralizing a call for the return to Zion and aspirations of a Messiah from prayer books.

Jewish Labor Unions were some of the most fervent fighters against Zionism in the 1930s. The First Jewish reformation in the United States flourished under the US constitutional freedom of religion, and erased any literal interpretation of a return to Zion from prayer. They saw the creation of the Zionist state as a threat to the communities they built in the US and an extension of the colonialism and race politics they fled in Europe.³

Misplaced Victimization

The Jewish community was uniquely vulnerable to the lure of Zionism. The victimization of the community was something internally practiced and perpetuated. This victim mentality was traced back to the fleeing of the Egyptian Jews from Egypt and was framed as the first of many Jewish exoduses.³

The first Jewish reformation re-framed biblical text to understand these tragedies as historical events and a symbol for the Jewish people, but not an identity for our community.^{3 4} The first Jewish reformation took place in the US in the latter part of the 19th century and became codified in the 1897 Central Conference for American Rabbis.

The Zionist movement worked in opposition against this reframing narrative prioritizing literal interpretation and perpetuating a victimized mentality into our holidays and prayers. This was propped up by non-Jewish Zionists; Theodor Herzl, widely considered the father of Zionism, is quoted for stating

“Just think what the Jews have suffered over the past two thousand years for the sake of this fantasy of theirs.”⁴

Referring to the mentality of victimization perpetuated through generations. Herzl used this as a justification to call for the immigration of thousands of Jews from Europe and the colonization of Palestine. This not only highlights the blatant anti-Semitism that the Zionist movement was founded on, by non-Jewish white supremacists; but furthermore it provides commentary on how through the rise of Zionist Jews internalized the victimization of their past.⁴ This victimization then became an excuse to enact the same atrocities on Palestinians which had been enacted upon the Jews in WWII and before.

The Zionist State

As the attitude toward the Zionist state shifted in the US from deplorable to neutral and finally to a necessary of two evils. The imperialism project of the US and Britain in the Middle East worked quickly, securing the land and devoting it to the founding parties of Israel.⁵

The creation of the Zionist state would not have been possible without the support of the non-Jewish Zionist allies in the British parliament and US congress. The two governments deliberately tightened their immigration policy, making it harder for Jewish refugees to seek asylum, siphoning them into Palestine. Out of collective guilt and ignorance, Jewish American communities concentrated their altruism on founding the state of Israel in Palestine rather than fixing this immigration policy and bringing their families and communities abroad to the US.⁵

In 1948, these issues were codified in the Nakba. Palestinian resistance was reframed by the Zionist movement from “*a land without people*” to Palestinian hostility to Jewish Refugees. Meanwhile, Zionists lead a ruthless ethnic cleansing campaign in Palestine resulting in thousands dead on the Palestinian side and even more misplaced. The UN then solidified the Zionist state not as an asylum population but as an independent nation, legitimizing Zionism on the national stage and creating the state of Israel. This resulted in any opposition to the state of Israel seen as complacency to the creation of a second Jewish Refugee crisis.⁷

Nationalism and Identity Politics

The Second Jewish Reformation in the US brought about the integration of Zionist ideology into Jewish faith. It conflated nationalism and religion and reframed the annexation or colonization of Palestine as a religious issue and Jewish return after over 2000 years.

In the midst of the Cold War the USSR backed Arab world reframed the discussion around Israel for American Jews. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict became a proxy war in the US-USSR Cold War.⁵ This added another dimension to the forged nationalism of the Zionist movement. Jews who did not sympathize with Israel before or were indifferent to the issue had to pick a side. Between 1985 and 1991 Jews immigrated in mass from the Soviet Union to Israel. This new wave of nationalist adherence was exacerbated by the Red Scare. Jews who didn't support Israel were accused of supporting the USSR, and could be exiled from their communities and even lose their jobs. As a result of these converging brands of nationalism, American Jews begin to associate Israel with a Jewish homeland rather than territory set aside to solve the Jewish Refugee crisis.⁵

During this time marked the assimilation of Jews into whiteness, again conflating the Jewish religious identity with ethnic and nationalist identities. Furthermore, this cultural shift further erased the existence of Sephardic and all non-Ashkenazi Jews.⁸

After the Cold War, the creation of the privately owned US birthright trip was established in 1999 to incentivize American Jews to immigrate to Israel. The program sought to not only dedicate Palestine as the rightful Jewish homeland, but misappropriated the Jewish identity as a racial and ethnic identity, one which could be passed down through bloodlines and inherited for the sake of national identity. This definition of Jewish ethnicity was adopted from Nazism, which believed Jews as a distinct race separate from Europeans. The Zionist movement expanded this ideology, entrenching it into the identity of Jews around the world in a second reformation initiated by the Zionist political propaganda campaign.⁵

Zionism is Anti-Semitism

The earliest Zionist writers were not Jewish. Theodore Herzl, Aurthor Belfour, and Vladimir Jubutimsky were all non-Jews with blatantly anti-Semitic aspirations veiled in Zionism.

Theodor Herzl went was engaged by the mayor of Jaffa, in a letter entitled "Leave Palestine Alone." Herzl did not practice Judaism nor did he believe in God, and believed Palestine to be a 'land without people' or considered Palestinians to be people of no consequence.

Zionism was built off of removing the Jewish problem from Europe - as we can see in the actions of Arthur Balfour. Balfour was a powerful Zionist in the British senate; his namesake become later enshrined in the Balfour Declaration. Jubutimsky learned about Zionism in college, publicly stating, "*I am a Zionist because the Jewish people are a very nasty people.*" He adopted much of his ideology from Third Reich policy and perspective, and was active in an anti-Semitic terrorist cell called Ukrainian National Pettuira. Along with Abraham Stern, Yitzhak Shamir, Jubutimsky formed the Lehi Terrorist group.

Now, Zionism perpetuates anti-Semitism within the Jewish community. Because the second US Jewish reformation conflated Israeli nationalism and Jewish religious identity and community, internal dissent regarding the state of Israel by any Jew is immediately cast as anti-Semitism. Jews are targeted by their own communities, families as well as large scale Zionist organizations for publicly supporting Palestine. Zionism instigates anti-Semitism as it misrepresents the Jewish faith and associates the moral religion with the amoral apartheid state of Israel.

Solidarity

Despite internal pressure from the Jewish community and external influence from Israel and non-Jewish Zionists, there remains thousands of Jews which support Palestine, and the right of return. Organizations like Jewish Voices for Peace and the American Council for Judaism champion the internal struggle against Jewish instigated anti-Semitism.

The Jewish community has had a long history in solidarity struggles, which through the rise of Zionism were violently attacked. Jewish black and Puerto Rican solidarity seen as anti-semitic. From 1895-1963, the Jewish reform movement allied with organizers such as Booker T Washington to create desegregated schools in the American South.

Intersectional feminist movements of the 1960s-1980s aligned with anti-war movements to counter harmful nationalism. Some Jewish school teachers joined the movement to unite against Zionism as a toxic manifestation of American nationalism, and were quickly exiled by their Jewish Communities in New York.

Sources



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