

Zionist History and the Exclusion of Palestinians

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in Rhetoric Studies.

Whitman College  
2020

*Certificate of Approval*

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Mayrangel Cervantes-Juarez has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Rhetoric Studies.

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May 20, 2020

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the unwavering support of many people who have accompanied me in some capacity in my time here at Whitman. Without your support, this project wouldn't exist, and I wouldn't be where I am now. Firstly, a major shout out to the professors in the Rhetoric department who somehow always had answers to my endless questions and confusion. Matthew, Kaitlyn, Kalemba, and Lydia: thank you for your guidance and for teaching me to use my critical thinking skills. Especially in this time of uncertainty and anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic, your support was incredibly appreciated. Per liberal arts tradition, I also took courses in other disciplines such as History, Anthropology, Race and Ethnic Studies, Politics, and Spanish among others. I owe a big thanks to the professors in those departments who had a significant role in radicalizing me, from my first year and onward, as someone who had many ideas and opinions but no vocabulary to express myself with. Now I hella express myself, some may say even too much!

Another major shoutout to my parents and siblings. As a first generation/low income family, Whitman College was a first for us all and through trial and error and many tax forms that we still don't understand, my parents have their first college graduate. Gracias por su apoyo y amor eterno, por su ayuda y por sus rezos. ¡Si se pudo! I'd like to thank those who were there for me outside the classroom: my friends and community, and T. The former are my chosen family who held me up when the world was too big and too heavy. Through laughter and tears, my friends and I worked through being at an institution that wasn't created for us but that we were going to survive regardless. You all know who you are. T, as my rock, you held me steady and gave me

enough to look forward to in order to get through my (dynamic) last two years at Whitman, which I am incredibly grateful for. Thank you to the counseling center for being my place of refuge as I – oftentimes painfully – worked through my complexities as a human being on this planet today. To my Tia on campus, Jen Lopez who always looked out for me and gave me an ally on the inside: I told you I wasn't going to drop out! Thank you for your endless support. Thank you to everyone who I didn't list but that supported me in some capacity, I am eternally grateful. I carried you all with me throughout the last four years.

And lastly, I would like to acknowledge the land on which we reside, for it is stolen land, after all. Whitman College rests on the occupied homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, Nez Perce, Shoshone Bannock, and Burns Paiute who have stewarded this land for generations. This acknowledgement is about asking, “what is our responsibility living in a postcolonial world? What did it take for us to get here and how can we be accountable to our role in history?” (Settler) colonization is an ongoing process. Indigenous people are still here, and we are still occupying their lands. In acknowledging this, we must take a step toward reconciliation.

## **Abstract**

This project analyzes the way in which Zionist history is constructed for the use of the Zionist, settler colonial project that is the State of Israel. In this paper I argue that, in order to maintain the appearance of being a just and democratic state since its very inception, Zionist history must then erase Palestinians, the people who are indigenous to the land on which Israel was built. As Zionist historians worked to prove that the land of Palestine has belonged to the Jewish diaspora since before the arrival of the Zionist movement in the late 1800s, Palestinians find their historical existence shift. They went from either being nonexistent in the “Empty Land” narrative to being present upon the arrival of the Zionist movement but unable to revel in the modernity that Zionist colonialists brought to Palestine due to their inept leadership. The narratives that anchored Jewish folks to Palestine and relegated Palestinians to an irresolute existence, were created by Zionist historians that fused Zionist ideology with their professions as historians, thus allowing them to create a useable past for the Israeli government to then justify their actions in the present. An example of the Israeli government’s need to preserve their image as a historic just and democratic state is the manner in which the Nakba, commemorated as a day of mourning for Palestinians who’s families were forcibly removed from the land, is subject to attempts by the state to eliminate it from public memory.

*“In what world is there no argument when an entire people is told that it is juridically absent, even as armies are led against it, campaigns conducted against its name, history changed so as to ‘prove’ its nonexistence?”*

*-- Edward Said*

*The Question of Palestine (1992)*

## **Introduction**

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is an incredibly contentious topic throughout the globe. Nevertheless, in order to be seen as a just and democratic entity, as I will argue in this paper, the State of Israel depends on a useable Zionist history, to not only sustain this façade, but also to unify the Jewish diaspora. However, the Nakba, commemorated as a day of mourning for the expulsion of thousands of indigenous Palestinians from their homelands, endangers Israel’s perceived just and democratic appearance. The manner in which the Nakba is systemically erased from public memory, is symbolic of how Palestinians have been erased from Israel’s history throughout the duration of this conflict. To demonstrate this, in this paper I will I will utilize the rhetorical concept of history as a social construct, public/collective memory and constitutive rhetoric.

To preface, I will be referring largely to the work of Ilan Pappé, namely his works *The Idea of Israel* and *10 Myths about Israel*. I have chosen to utilize the former for a significant portion of the historical context present in this project because Israel, as an idea, lends itself nicely to rhetorical analysis.

There are three distinct sections within this paper. The first part is where I will establish that Israel is a settler colonial project, as defined by Pappé and others. But prior to this, I offer brief historical context about what led to the migration of Jewish folks

from Europe to Palestine. From his books *Ten Myths about Palestine*, Pappè offers three reasons as to why Israel is a settler colonial project: 1) settler colonies only initially relied on the empire for their survival and not for long, 2) settler colonialism inherently had a desire to take over land in a foreign space and 3) settler colonialists were refugees in a way, seeking “new homelands.”<sup>1</sup> I will also discuss the role of Britain and the US in the creation of the state of Israel, as that makes it a unique settler colonial project. Lastly, by expanding on the work of Wolfe, I will briefly discuss the inherent violence that comes from settler colonialism.

The second part of this project involves discussion about the manner in which Zionist historians created Israel’s history. Central to this section is the work of E. Culpepper Clark and Raymie E. McKerrow and the rhetorical construction of history. I also briefly utilize the work of Maurice Charland and Kenneth S. Zagacki and constitutive rhetoric. Overall, I initially expand on Pappè conceptualizing of Israel as an idea through a marketing/advertising perspective. The aim of this section is to demonstrate the way in which Israel’s history was made “useable” by historians and the Zionist movement overall so as to justify the existence of the state. By default, this also calls into questioning the role of historians, as they are the ones putting Israel’s history together.

The third and final section is about al Nakba, catastrophe or disaster in Arabic<sup>2</sup>, which has been subject to systemic attempts of erasure by the State of Israel. Criticism is not something that the State of Israel is necessarily open to, especially if it questions its

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<sup>1</sup> Ilan Pappè, *Ten Myths about Israel* (London ; New York: Verso, 2017), 42.

<sup>2</sup> Al Jazeera, “Al Nakba 4,” Palestine Remix Search, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/PalestineRemix/search.html?search=catastrophe#/20/755957>.

role as the only democracy in the Middle East,<sup>3</sup> and the mourning of the events that took place once Israel was established as a state in 1948 open it up to that. In this section, public/collective memory is central, as I will be describing the way in which attempts to prevent mourning al Nakba and even mention of it within school textbooks, are attempts to erase the violence experienced by Palestinians at the hands of the state of Israel, violence that continues until this very day. This erasure allows for Israel to maintain a *historical trajectory of democracy and justness*.

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<sup>3</sup> Alijla Abdalhadi Alijla, "Is Israel the Only Democracy in the Middle East?," Medium, April 25, 2019, <https://medium.com/@abid.ijla/is-israel-the-only-democracy-in-the-middle-east-ce8ec2840f13>.

*“Dispossession is both illegal and unsacred. There seems to be no law or sacred truth that can justify a human being’s right to dispossess other human beings of what they have”*

*-- Walter D. Mignolo*

*Decolonizing the Nation-State*

## **Israel as a Settler Colonial Project**

The State of Israel is a settler-colonial project. It is important to recognize this because it provides insight as to the mechanisms utilized by the state in order to achieve its goal of establishing a Jewish homeland. These mechanisms of settler colonialism, as will be discussed in this section, are not uncommon and have been seen throughout history be utilized by European countries. While Israel as a nation-state is not necessarily an “imperial power,” Mignolo argues that “imperial/colonial strategies and arguments have been at work there since 1967.”<sup>4</sup> His justification for using 1967 as a historical marker<sup>5</sup> comes from his belief that the results of the Six-Day War, gave Israel “the necessary confidence to consolidate its territorial and national project” in which it also “implemented the very colonial strategies that had been previously enacted by Western imperial powers.”<sup>6</sup> While I agree with the former statement, I’d argue that Israel had already *been* implementing the colonial strategies used by Western imperial powers by the time that the Six-Day War came about. It is those very colonial strategies that allowed

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<sup>4</sup> Gianni Vattimo, Michael Marder eds., *Deconstructing Zionism: A Critique of Political Metaphysics*, Political Theory and Contemporary Philosophy (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), chap. Decolonizing the Nation-State: Zionism in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity, 60.

<sup>5</sup> The significance of the year 1967 comes from the Six-Day war that took place in June of that year (Atlas and Mignolo).

<sup>6</sup> Vattimo, Marder, *Deconstructing Zionism*, 60.

Israel to establish a nation-state foundation capable of taking over such large amounts of land as results of war. In this section, I will be establishing all of this as groundwork for the rest of this paper. I will be demonstrating how Israel's behaviors are characteristics of settler colonialism and what the (violent) effects of these behaviors are on those indigenous to the land, that is, Palestinians.

Contrary to what some may think, the State of Israel was not a direct result of the Holocaust which took place during World War II. While "The Holocaust seems to vindicate the Zionist argument that Jews needed a state of their own to protect, rescue, and shelter them from their enemies,"<sup>7</sup> by the time that the Holocaust took place *and* Israel had declared statehood in 1948, Zionist Jews had already been steadily settling in Palestine for more than 60 years.

In 1882 the first *Aaliyah* or "wave of immigration"<sup>8</sup> saw Jewish settlers arriving in Palestine from Eastern Europe. These Zionist settlers bought land predominantly in the Jaffa region and Galilee as they fled the violent pogroms resulting from the assassination of Russian Tsar Alexander II. There was also immigration from Western and Central Europe as well. Overall, European Jews were facing the "Jewish Question" in different iterations with an overarching wariness on behalf of gentiles of whether Jews could be integrated into the state in which they found themselves at the time. For Jews in Eastern Europe, "the debate was not about citizenship, but rather about state centralization and integration of Jews and other minorities into state languages and state educational

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<sup>7</sup> Oxford Academic, "Was Israel Created Because of the Holocaust?" Medium, May 18, 2019, <https://medium.com/history-uncut/was-israel-created-because-holocaust-12f4f5ffc4b9>.

<sup>8</sup> Liora Halperin, "Origins and Evolution of Zionism - Foreign Policy Research Institute," <https://www.fpri.org/>, accessed April 13, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2015/01/origins-and-evolution-of-zionism/>.

institutions,”<sup>9</sup> whereas with Jews in Central and Western Europe, the Enlightenment brought forth a belief in individual rights and citizenship. The question of integration in the case of Jews in Western and Central Europe was then that “if such a unique and traditionally insular group could be integrated, the very principle of enlightenment would be supported,”<sup>10</sup> yet there were many who doubted the ability of Jews, regardless of their location, to integrate into the respective society.

A residual wariness still remained about Jews and their ability to integrate, even when it did occur, however it was about the effects of integrated Jews and the stability of the state. While some Jews in Central and Western Europe believed that integration was in fact possible and that it alone was the solution to increasing levels of anti-Semitism, for some secular Jews, they felt that “Jews could not be accepted as members of a host nation,”<sup>11</sup> and rather they should develop their own identity as a nation on their own.

Arriving and settling in Palestine was no easy feat, especially financially-speaking. In order to get Jewish folks from Europe to Palestine, wealthy benefactors took it upon themselves to fund the move made by European Jews to Palestine. One of the leading sponsors of the Jewish community was French aristocrat Baron Edmond de Balfour. He aided with the establishment of 30 Jewish settlements, spending over 14 million Francs to do so.<sup>12</sup> The importance of his financial backing to the State of Israel is exemplified by the fact that his remains currently lie in a mausoleum in northern Israel where Israeli schoolchildren visit to learn about “the wealthy patron who bankrolled

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<sup>9</sup> Halperin. “Origins and Evolution of Zionism ”.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Al Jazeera, “Al Nakba 1,” Palestine Remix Search, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/PalestineRemix/search.html?search=1799#/17/177272>.

Jewish-settlement building in Palestine over 100 years ago.”<sup>13</sup> As of 2018, there were 250 settlements in Israel, with the population of Israeli settlers being 611,000.<sup>14</sup>

The process that European Jews were partaking in is settler colonialism. And, as can be seen by the establishment of Jewish settlements that today make up the Israeli state, “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.”<sup>15</sup> The permanence of those Jewish settlements and the longevity of the State of Israel demonstrate that the colonization of Palestine by (Zionist) Jews was not an event with a beginning and an end. Rather, that initial invasion was merely the beginning of a larger, more complex project that culminated into what we now know as the State of Israel. Ilan Pappé defines settler colonialism, as opposed to “classical colonialism,”<sup>16</sup> in three ways. First, settler colonies relied on the empire only initially and for a short period of time. He makes the point that it was often the case that “the settlers do not belong to the same nation as the imperial power”<sup>17</sup> which initially supported them. This is because, as was most often the case, these colonies had ceded from the empire, and were striving to be a new nation redefined. Now with Israel prior to statehood, as I discussed earlier, immigrants were arriving in Palestine from multiple areas of Europe. While individual, wealthy European benefactors supported European Jewish folk in their relocation to Palestine, the British empire as a whole supported the Zionist movement way before Israel was to declare statehood in 1948.

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<sup>13</sup> Al Jazeera, “Al Nakba 1”.

<sup>14</sup> Zena Tahhan, “Israel’s Settlements: Over 50 Years of Land Theft Explained,” *Al Jazeera*, November 21, 2017, <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2017/50-years-illegal-settlements/index.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 388, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

<sup>16</sup> Pappé, *Ten Myths about Israel*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

Prior to the official declaration of Israel's statehood in 1948, Palestine was a British Mandate, beginning in 1917. Support for a Jewish state existed during this time and was exemplified by the Balfour Declaration. This document explicitly and officially demonstrated support for the Zionist movement from the British government via a 67-word letter between Lord Arthur James Balfour and Lord Rothschild.<sup>18</sup> In it, Balfour advocates on behalf of the Zionist movement: "declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet."<sup>19</sup> This statement of support is not just something that one or a few people support, but by citing the Cabinet as the source of approval, Balfour demonstrates institutional support for a Zionist government, but a Zionist state as well. In the second paragraph of the letter, Palestine is explicitly referred to as the "national home for the Jewish people," a goal that "His Majesty's Government" would do their best to help Zionists achieve.<sup>20</sup>

In the letter can also be found a brief mention of the native inhabitants of Palestine. Along with supporting the Zionist movement and their goals, Balfour adds "it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."<sup>21</sup> Contrary to how they were perceived and constructed by Zionists later on, this statement from an important British representative acknowledges the existence of native inhabitants of Palestine. This is a concept that doesn't coincide with some Zionist colonialists who later claimed that Palestine was an empty land. However, it is important to note that Palestinians weren't

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<sup>18</sup> Salman H. Abu-Sitta, *Atlas of Palestine, 1917-1966* (London: Palestine Land Society, 2010), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Balfour, "The Balfour Declaration," November 2, 1917.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Balfour, "The Balfour Declaration."

described as people, as neither the words “Palestinian” or “Arab” appears in the document.<sup>22</sup> This, however, is not new, as historically, projects of (settler) colonialism required that indigenous people be dehumanized to the point of becoming objects subjected to violence and death without moral indictment. Overall, this letter is an explicit example of the way in which Israel could count on the support of Britain in its colonization of Palestine which became crucial when surrounding Arab nations made attempts to intercede in the violent acts of the Zionist movement now recognized as ethnic cleansing.

Although the Balfour Declaration briefly mentioned those indigenous to the land Jewish colonialists were arriving to, there was no attempt made at communicating with those people about the effects of the Declaration’s open support for the establishment of “national home for the Jews.”<sup>23</sup> Balfour himself stated,

“we do not propose to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country... The four great powers are committed to Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder impact than the desires and prejudices [not the rights] of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit this ancient land.”<sup>24</sup>

However, just because Palestinians weren’t consulted about the Balfour Declaration and the plans for Palestine, didn’t mean that they weren’t aware of what was unfolding. In a speech given to the United Nations on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, Professor Rashid Khalidi of Columbia University described the Declaration’s effects on

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<sup>22</sup> Khalidi, “The Balfour Declaration from the Perspective of the Palestinian People.”

<sup>23</sup> Abu-Sitta, “Atlas of Palestine, 1917-1966,” 57.

<sup>24</sup> Abu-Sitta, 3.

Palestinians as “a gun pointed directly at their heads.”<sup>25</sup> The Declaration was described by Palestinian jurist Henry Cattan as “legally void, morally wicked and politically mischievous.”<sup>26</sup> Historian Avi Shlaim concurs, adding that “Britain had no moral or political or legal right to promise the land that belongs to Arabs to other people.”<sup>27</sup>

In this way, the State of Israel is unique. It is not an imperial state like England and the United States, nor is it a nation-state like India or Algeria.<sup>28</sup> That’s not to say that Israel didn’t replicate previous imperial discourses through the invocation of the bible, such as with the foundation of the U.S. and the colonization of South Africa by Europe.<sup>29</sup> And most importantly, what differentiates Israel from India and Algeria is the positionality of European powers. While the latter were founded against the wishes of the respective European powers, Israel relied heavily on the support of those same imperial powers. In fact, the Balfour Declaration serves as a synecdoche of the larger, more significant ways in which larger imperial powers helped make the State of Israel a reality. Khalidi points to this in his speech, claiming that the Zionist movement was able to secure “complete and exclusive control over the entirety of Palestine” as a result of two decades of “unstinting British support.”<sup>30</sup>

Another way in which settler colonialism differed from classical colonialism according to Pappe, is that the latter focused on the resources found on these foreign lands whereas the former not only intended to lay claim to the resources found on the

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<sup>25</sup> Khalidi, “The Balfour Declaration.”

<sup>26</sup> Abu-Sitta, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Al Jazeera, “Al Nakba 1”.

<https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/PalestineRemix/search.html?search=balfour#/17/876619>

<sup>28</sup> Vattimo, Marder, *Deconstructing Zionism*, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Khalidi, “The Balfour Declaration from the Perspective of the Palestinian People.”

land they colonized, but settler colonialists *also* had the intentions of taking over the land. The following, a line from the Israeli declaration of statehood, exemplifies this notion:

“Pioneers, ma'pilim [(Hebrew) - immigrants coming to Eretz-Israel in defiance of restrictive legislation] and defenders, they made deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language, built villages and towns, and created a thriving community controlling its own economy and culture, loving peace but knowing how to defend itself, bringing the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood.”<sup>31</sup>

While the declaration was written and ratified many years after the initial Aaliyah, it nevertheless demonstrates what it meant to establish a Jewish homeland. The implications of the images of deserts blooming and the creation of a thriving community is that the previous inhabitants of the land had maintained the land in such disarray that it created the conditions which incoming (settler) colonialists would need to fix.

The final way in which Pappé claims that settler colonialism was different than classical colonialism is found in the manner in which the colonists treated the new land they'd inhabit. For classical colonialism, all was done for the benefit of the empire, but in some cases, settler colonialists, like refugees, were seeking a new homeland.<sup>32</sup>

Attainment of that “new homeland” was complicated by the existence of indigenous peoples residing on that land. It wasn't as if Jewish settlers arrived at an empty land. In fact, when a colleague of Theodor Herzl, considered by many as the “founding father of

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<sup>31</sup> “The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel,” n.d., <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx>.

<sup>32</sup> Pappé, *Ten Myths about Israel*, 42.

Zionism”,<sup>33</sup> sent two rabbis to Palestine in order to inquire about a Jewish state being founded there, they reported back that “The bride is beautiful but she is married to another man.”<sup>34</sup> This can be interpreted to mean that “Palestine’s spouse was the Palestinian society rooted in its soil.”<sup>35</sup> There were already people with well-established livelihoods and a flourishing culture living in Palestine by the time the first settlers arrived.

During the Ottoman era, Palestine had begun exporting agricultural products to surrounding Arab countries and cities such as wheat, corn, and cotton among other things.<sup>36</sup> After 1865, citrus products were being exported, with oranges from Jaffa becoming popular with Berlin, and Paris, among other western cities.<sup>37</sup> During the British Mandate, Jaffa held its place as “Palestine’s commercial getaway”<sup>38</sup> due to its port’s serving agriculture and industry. As the “heart of Palestine,”<sup>39</sup> Jaffa held special social status with a capitalist infrastructure.<sup>40</sup> The city had electricity, railroads, and trade unions as well. The city also held that social status due to its cultural and social facets. Hundreds of weekly and daily newspapers were published during the Mandate, mainly in Jaffa but also Haifa. The theatres and cinemas in the latter showed Arab films and other cultural activities as well.

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<sup>33</sup> Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian journalist, wrote a book called “The Jewish State,” a very influential Zionist text. He also convened the first Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland to promote the idea of a Jewish state. This initial attempt at statehood failed, with the ruler of what was then the Ottoman Empire stating that, “Palestine is the patrimony of Muslims and I will not sell it for the gold of the whole world”(Atlas, 3).

<sup>34</sup> Al Jazeera, “Lost Cities of Palestine”.

<https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/PalestineRemix/search.html?search=culture#/10/1545159>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

As was explicitly mentioned in the Israeli declaration of statehood, in order to make deserts bloom, Jewish settlers would have to take what they believed were the necessary steps in order to make that happen. This meant that – with the belief that they had the “divine or moral right”<sup>41</sup> to the land – the Zionist movement would have to specifically overcome the human obstacles in the way of achieving their goal: a Jewish state. It is here that I would like to introduce the work of Patrick Wolfe, specifically their article “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native.” Pappé cites Wolfe’s work briefly when establishing the characteristics of Israel that make it a settler colonial project.

In the aforementioned article, Wolfe explores the relationship between settler colonialism and genocide, particularly a tendency that they term “the logic of elimination.”<sup>42</sup> He states that “settler colonialism is an inclusive, land-centered project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies.”<sup>43</sup> And while, “some Zionists unmistakably fantasize about *an Israel without Palestinians*, it is not Israel’s stated position to exterminate the Palestinians,”<sup>44</sup> elimination of the native did in fact take place. The reason for eliminating those who were already residing on the land being colonized was access to territory: “Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific irreducible element.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Pappé, *Ten Myths about Israel*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 387.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 393.

<sup>44</sup> Zahi Anbra Zalloua, *Continental Philosophy and the Palestinian Question: Beyond the Jew and the Greek*, Suspensions: Contemporary Middle Eastern and Islamic Thought (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 45.

<sup>45</sup> Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism”, 388.

Early on in the article, Wolfe states that “Settler colonialism destroys to replace.”<sup>46</sup> As discussed earlier, classic colonialism, focused on serving the empire, often exploited the land and its inhabitants, but what the Zionist movement did for the sake of a Jewish homeland, as described by Wakeem Wakeem, “was a more drastic form of colonialism than the average classical European colonialism, in the sense that the purpose was actually not only to exploit the locals, but to drive them out.”<sup>47</sup> This required settlers to develop the “necessary moral justifications and practical means to remove the natives.”<sup>48</sup> Historically, this has either manifested via genocide, ethnic cleansing or the denial of indigenous peoples’ basic human rights. Regardless of the violent actions they took, what was required in order to enact them in the first place is what Wolfe refers to as “the logic of dehumanization,” that is what was needed was “to dehumanize a whole native nation or society, before being willing to do the same, or worse, to fellow humans.”<sup>49</sup> This line of thinking and the violent actions it manifested in, resulted in the elimination of entire nations and civilizations throughout the world, particularly in North and South America.

To summarize, as I’ve illustrated here, the State of Israel is a settler colonial project. Jewish settler colonialists fled mounting anti-Semitic wariness, of which the violence of the Holocaust seemed to be a culmination of. Through Pappé’s definition of settler colonialism, I have demonstrated the ways in which Israel depended on imperial powers for support as early as Balfour himself sponsoring Jewish migration to Palestine. I

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<sup>46</sup> Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism”, 388.

<sup>47</sup> Jazeera, “Pa Al Jazeera, “Al Nakba 1”.

<https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/PalestineRemix/search.html?search=exploit+the+locals%2C+but+to+drive+them+out#/17/585933>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Pappé, *The Idea of Israel*, 42.

have also demonstrated how the importance of both land and resources also contribute to Israel's settler-colonialist nature. The depth and reach of Israel as it absorbed large swaths of land exemplify this. And thirdly, I have briefly discussed the manner in which Israel treated the new space Jewish colonialists came to inhabit. It is important to keep in mind the existence and success of Palestinian society which I briefly mentioned here, prior to and even during the British Mandate and onset of Zionism because of the manner in which Israel's history will be constructed.

*“Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past”*

*-- George Orwell*

*1984 (1949)*

## **Zionist Historians and the Construction of Israel’s History**

History is a social construction, and that is exemplified in the manner in which Zionists, for the purpose of establishing a Jewish state, erased Palestinians from existence so as to make their actions acceptable/palatable. With a clean history, Israel is then able to sell itself, as an idea, to the international community, who’s acceptance is vital to the state’s existence. It is then, when Palestinians have been erased from history and on the ground, that the present catches up to the past. If Zionist history says that the land which they lay claim to was empty, then so it would be.

For this section of my thesis, I will be analyzing how Zionist history was constructed and what that meant for indigenous Palestinians. This will serve as a foundation to help explain contemporary sentiments surrounding al Nakba, the focus of a later section. Through policies and subtle movements, memory of al Nakba and the way the Palestinian public holds it as a day of mourning are being repressed by the state of Israel for tainting its reputation as the “only democracy in the Middle East.”<sup>50</sup> In order to understand Israel’s motives for this, we have to understand how history is constructed overall. What we will see here is what Clark and McKerrow call the “Rhetorical Construction of History,” in which they define history as “argumentative discourse.”<sup>51</sup> What makes

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<sup>50</sup> Pappè, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> E. Culpepper Clark and Raymie E. McKerrow, “The Rhetorical Construction of History,” *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases* (1998): 34.

history an argument is the selective remembering that takes place which then validates later thought and action. But history is not only *what* is remembered, but also *how* it is remembered. The responsibility of the latter can be found with historians themselves.

When looking at the relationship between rhetoric and history, specifically the rhetoric *of* history, Clark and McKerrow present historians as “active performers”<sup>52</sup> who then utilize rhetorical devices to present their views. They also argue that history serves as the connection between past and present “for the purpose of evaluating existing conditions and charting courses.”<sup>53</sup> Because historians are susceptible to constructing a “useable past,”<sup>54</sup> history may then be parallel to present knowledge and assumptions. The argument that they then make through the way in which they construct history, or a historical event occurs through a process of selection. The result of this is that history’s purpose becomes to explain the present through a connection to the past. In the following section, I will be arguing that Zionist history was constructed as a “useable past” so as to justify the forced removal of Palestinians from their homelands. This argument, by default, then also implicates Zionist historians who were tasked with – and also believed in – constructing the history of the land on which the State of Israel would be founded.

In his book *The Idea of Israel*, Ilan Pappé makes the argument that

“Israel, or rather the idea of Israel, symbolizes for an ever growing number of people oppression, dispossession, colonization and ethnic cleansing, while, on the other hand, an ever-diminishing number of people string the same ideas and events into a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

story of redemption, heroism and historical justice. Along the continuum between these two extremes lie innumerable gradations of strongly held opinion.”<sup>55</sup>

This quote gets at a dichotomy that surrounds opinions of about Israel. The former refers to Palestinians, whose indigeneity ties them to the land, and places them at the receiving end of the oppression, dispossession, colonization and ethnic cleansing that Pappé refers to.<sup>56</sup> The latter refers to Zionist Jewish people who see the manner in which the state of Israel came to be as heroic and a restoration of historical justice for liberation.<sup>57</sup> And then there are those who do not fit into either of these two categories, with opinions and beliefs that fall somewhere along a spectrum between the Palestinian side and the Zionist Jewish side. As I will touch upon later on in this essay, there is a precarious space that Jewish folks hold when they do not subscribe to Zionist ideology. This is why I utilize the phrase “*Zionist Jewish people*” as opposed to simply “Jewish people” to avoid homogenizing the Jewish diaspora, especially because of the material repercussions anti-Zionist Jewish people face. The existence of multiple standpoints, including those that fall outside the Israel/Palestinian binary, elucidates the nuance and complexity to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

In the introduction to the book, Pappé claims that “Ideas can be marketed and commodified,”<sup>58</sup> with Israel (as an idea) serving as an example of this. As such, he delineates Israel’s marketing strategy as needing to be presented as a narrative with its

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<sup>55</sup> Pappé *The Idea of Israel*, 3

<sup>56</sup> Abu-Sitta, “Atlas of Palestine, 1917-1966,” 21- 59, “Palestine Remix,” *Lost Cities of Palestine*

<sup>57</sup> People’s Council (1948) “Declaration of Establishment of State of Israel.” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx>, retrieved 19/08/2014. *abbr.: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1948.*, Ian Black, “History Used and Abused in Israel | Ian Black,” *The Guardian*, July 23, 2009, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/jul/23/israel-palestine-history-nakba>.

<sup>58</sup> Pappé *The Idea of Israel*, 5.

beginning being the creation of the state. Through its description of Israel as a democratic and just state, the narrative utilized in the Israeli marketing strategy thus – keeping up with the marketing metaphor – creates Israel’s brand. But this narrative and thus Israel’s brand, isn’t simply constructed and then sent out into the world to fend for itself. Israel as an idea also demonstrates the manner in which this narrative must be protected and maintained, exemplified by the manner in which critiques about Israel are neither welcome nor accepted. While the state of Israel can utilize its military, economic, and political power, in order for its existence to be accepted as a just and right idea, it will still need authentication through “scholarly consolidation.”<sup>59</sup> More specifically, this validation through scholarly work is inherently Zionist, with anything outside of that school of thought being unwelcomed.<sup>60</sup>

The marketing metaphor that Pappé utilizes to talk about Israel as an idea which can also be tracked to the audience being marketed to. In this case, this would be the international community, or at least countries who could individually or together take action against Israel, by questioning its legitimacy and thus its existence. As such, in order to achieve acceptance, Israel needs to “sell the idea as both morally and logically valid,”<sup>61</sup> in order to prove its claim, as a unified nation state, that it is “the only democracy in the Middle East.”<sup>62</sup> This title refers to Israel being rated as “the most democratic (interpreted as free) country in the Middle East,”<sup>63</sup> based on a score given by the Freedom House Freedom index. Having an outside party making this claim, it is only

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<sup>59</sup> Abu-Sitta, “Atlas of Palestine, 5.

<sup>60</sup> Pappé, Shlaim “The War of the Israeli Historians,” accessed April 8, 2020, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ssfc0005/The%20War%20of%20the%20Israeli%20Historians.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Alijla, “Is Israel the Only Democracy in the Middle East?”

<sup>62</sup> Alijla, “Is Israel the Only Democracy in the Middle East?”

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

natural that Israel representatives would tout the moniker in their promotion of the state as well.

Yet, it would seem that Israel has been successful in marketing itself as just and right, at least in its present iteration. This is can be seen in the fact that Israel “possesses the second most technologized army in the world and enjoys a comfortable \$500 billion balance in foreign reserves.”<sup>64</sup> As such, it would seem that Israel and by default, the Zionist movement, has achieved “one of the most successful public relations exercises of the twentieth century.”<sup>65</sup> What makes this incredible, is the manner in which Israel’s history was constructed so as to create the conditions for it to be seemingly accepted by the international community, or at least so that it achieved statehood and the violence enacted on Palestinians was for the most part allowed to take place. As alluded to earlier, the education system is an area in which domestically speaking, the idea of Israel as morally just and right can be controlled for. In terms of the media and academia, theoretically academics and educators are “free agents” who shouldn’t be controlled in the same way as just mentioned. But, if they are to give in to the state’s narrative, Pappé argues, it will be “either out of true conviction or out of the false conviction that they have reached the same interpretation by the way of objective analysis.”<sup>66</sup> What Pappé is saying here is that if academics and educators *do* follow the state’s narratives, then it’s either because they genuinely believed it from the beginning *or* they genuinely believe that through scholarly objective work, they arrived at a logical conclusion that proves the state’s narrative is right.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Shlaim, 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Pappé *The Idea of Israel*, 6.

It is important to understand the significance of the state of Israel relying on academia and, specifically as we will see in the remainder of this section, history. Through the creation of a narrative, of a history, Zionists were able to justify not only their presence in Palestine, but by default, also the treatment of Palestinians that already resided there.

Clarke and McKerrow posit that historians play the crucial role of “active performers, employing rhetorical devices in the presentation of their views,”<sup>67</sup> which in the case of Israel, also means that they participate in the creation and affirmation of collective Jewish identity and the validity of Israel’s existence. Of importance to the creation of Zionist history, is Zionist historian Ben-Zion Dinur. Pappe opens the first chapter of his book, titled “The ‘Objective’ History of the Land and the People,” with Dinur who Pappe claims was asked by David-Ben Gurion – then leader of the Jewish community – if he could prove that Jewish people had occupied Palestine continuously from 70 CE to 1882, when the first Zionists arrived.<sup>68</sup> As you will see throughout this section, “establishing its history academically and publicly has always been essential to [Israel’s] survival.”<sup>69</sup>

What had spurred Ben Gurion’s request was the United Nations and the Peel Commission, tasked with finding a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Commission came after a series of uprisings, with its goal being to investigate the causes of Palestinian unrest and subsequent ways to subdue it.<sup>70</sup> And when Dinur told Ben-Gurion that the research he was being asked to perform would require extensive expertise and years to complete, Ben-Gurion replied with “The Peel Commission is arriving in two

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<sup>67</sup> Kathleen J. Turner, ed., *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, Studies in Rhetoric and Communication (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), chap. The Rhetorical Construction of History.

<sup>68</sup> Diner was the “doyen of early Zionist historiography in Palestine and one-time minister of education,” (Pappe, *The Idea of Israel* 17)

<sup>69</sup> Pappe, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Qumsiyeh, 64 “Balfour, Al-Buraq and the Zionist Build Up

weeks' time. Reach your conclusion by then, and then afterwards you can have a whole decade to prove it!"<sup>71</sup> What this tells us is that Ben-Gurion was preoccupied with "prov[ing] scientifically the Jewish claim to 'the Land of Israel'," which would require what is actually a rewriting of history, that is, a rewritten history that would erase Palestinians from the narrative.<sup>72</sup> Now, Pappé does imply that this anecdote may not be entirely true, yet it does bring forward a question of the relationship between Zionist ideology, history and those who are charged with writing that history.

## **The Role of Historians**

As I described in the introduction of this section, Clarke and McKerrow suggest that history is an argument, that is, "a selective remembering to validate thought and action."<sup>73</sup> This argument is made by historians who, given the positionality of history, are subject to creating a useable past. It is also important to acknowledge that history overall, is utilized as an affirmation of collective identity and self-worth. In the case of the history of Israel, it must be useable for the sake of validating Zionist claims to the land of Palestine. With that, the ideological and political project of Israel gains a sort of validation. As if to say that, because there are proven, Jewish roots in Palestine prior to the arrival of the Zionist movement, the fact that Palestine should become the national Jewish homeland is an indisputable fact. This resulted in some Zionist historians searching for the roots of Jewish nationalism, whether that meant searching in the 17<sup>th</sup> century or even biblical times. The work done by this system of academia, thus has been

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<sup>71</sup> Pappé *The Idea of Israel*, 17.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Turner, *Doing Rhetorical History*, 35.

to cultivate and preserve national collective memory, a topic that I will delve into further in the following section about al Nakba.

But what did it mean to be a Zionist historian? Per Dinur, “Zionist historians by definition, were researchers who fused scientific mastery of the material with a clear and correct understanding of Zionism.”<sup>74</sup> This understanding of Zionism and its relationship with history demonstrated a loyalty that implies that only Zionist historians could provide a quality history of Zionism. This stemmed from the belief that they themselves were taking part in the construction of the nation, which then necessitated continuity between ancient Israel and modern Zionism. Dinur himself exemplifies this, as he built a career on “the effort to reveal, through extensive source documentation, the continuous link between the people of Israel and its land.”<sup>75</sup> David Myers offers insight into Dinur’s methodology. Myers also explores Dinur’s upbringing prior to analyzing his historiographic methodology, allowing him to posit that Dinur’s “devotion to the Zionist cause can be traced to his formative environment,”<sup>76</sup> particularly the ideological transformations he experienced throughout his life. Overall, in his article “The Case of Ben Zion Dinur, Zionist Historian ‘Par Excellence,’” Myers describes the way in which Dinur seemed to have fused ideology and history together, with his preferred methodology being the anthologizing of primary sources.<sup>77</sup> Dinur not only believed that the historians job is to “fortify, or even reconstruct, the bridge between past and present,”<sup>78</sup> but he also acknowledged that historiography also functioned as the

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<sup>74</sup> Pappé *The Idea of Israel*, 20.

<sup>75</sup> David Myers, “History as Ideology: The Case of Ben Zion Dinur, Zionist Historian ‘Par Excellence,’” *Modern Judaism* 8, no. 2 (May 1988): 167.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>77</sup> Myers, ““History as Ideology: The Case of Ben Zion Dinur, Zionist Historian ‘Par Excellence,’” 169.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

“mouthpiece”<sup>79</sup> of Zionist ideology. While I will not delve into Dinur any deeper as that is not the focus of my paper, he does exemplify the manner in which Zionist ideology depended on history. Not only for the purpose of validating the colonization of Palestine but also, for the sake of guaranteeing a continuous connection to the land: “If we want to be the heirs of the people of Israel, then we must instill those 4000 years [of history] into the heart of every person.”<sup>80</sup>

In order to do their jobs, historians then had to embrace “the seemingly impossible combination of a positivist wish to reconstruct reality and an ideological commitment to prove the justness of their cause.”<sup>81</sup> This meant that, what Pappé referred to as “positivist” Zionist scholars focused on the elite, utilizing their biased version of events, which they portrayed as an “objective, accurate description of fact.”<sup>82</sup> Political archives and thus the activities of the elite are what constitute the facts studied by historians, placing them on a pedestal of Truth, a truth which must not only be protected but proven.<sup>83</sup>

The need to establish a link between ancient Israel and modern Judaism was central to the work of members of the Jerusalem School which was part of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, of which Dinur was a member. With the goal of centering the Land of Israel in their reconstructions of the history of the “People of Israel,”<sup>84</sup> Zionist historians sought and believed to have found scholarly proof which would allow the claim that the Land of Israel was central and focal to Judaism to be recognized on behalf of Jewish

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Pappé *The Idea of Israel*, 19

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>84</sup> Pappé *The Idea of Israel*, 22.

exiles. The evidence they believed to have found allows for a claim to be made which states that “Jews in pre-Zionist history possessed an unconscious desire, unknown to the Jews themselves at the time, to return to the land of Palestine.”<sup>85</sup> This claim demonstrates previous claims that I have mentioned about historic Jewish roots in Palestine, and in this case roots that preceded Zionism as a political ideology. By positing this desire to return to their homeland as unconscious, this statement also makes any refutation of a return to Palestine by Jewish folks complicated due to the fact that this unconscious desire removes agency and intentionality from the actions of those who do return to Palestine. Of course, there are ways to challenge that belief, in terms of asking about the ethics of “returning” to a land that already has people living there or whether a return necessitates settler colonial tendencies.

Throughout the first chapter, Pappe outlines the ways in which Palestinians and their presence on the land pre-Zionists is shifted to fit whatever narrative the Zionist state is trying to convey. According to him, pre-1882 Zionist narratives claimed that Palestine was empty, a homeland waiting “to be redeemed by exiled Jews.”<sup>86</sup> A common saying that exemplifies this notion is “A land without a people for a people without a land.”<sup>87</sup> For those living in Germany, Russia or Poland, this was where they would/could go when these countries became hostile. This narrative of the “The Empty Land” also reappeared in an encyclopedia about the history of Israel written by “the best scholars of the land”<sup>88</sup> in the 1970s. And while the Empty Land narrative was perpetuated by poetry and art, it

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>87</sup> Zalloua, *Continental Philosophy and the Palestinian Question*, 7, Vattimo, Marder, and Vattimo, *Deconstructing Zionism*, 17.

<sup>88</sup> Pappe *The Idea of Israel*, 18.

would take more than that for the land to be reclaimed/re-appropriated. As stated by Pappe, it would take “scholarly clout” for this to take place, and the responsibility to shape not only early but modern historiography fell on academia.

Later on in the chapter, Pappe also brings up the narrative that reconstructs Zionism as “a national movement that brought modernization and progress to a primitive Palestine.”<sup>89</sup> The notion of introducing modernization onto an already existing people implies that their way of life prior to the arrival of those who bring that modernization, is unable to care for the land in the way it needs. This rhetoric was utilized at least since the Balfour Declaration, with Balfour himself believing not only that

“Zionism was a sound colonial enterprise and that the Jews were its best managers but that the Arabs’ rights need not be taken into account because they were, ‘wholly barbarous, undeveloped and unorganized black tribes.’”<sup>90</sup>

This was exemplified by the Zionists’ task of rebuilding ruined cities, introducing modern agriculture and industry, which would not only benefit Jews, but Palestinians as well. The latter claim is also seen in Israel’s declaration of statehood, promising that the state of Israel “will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants.”<sup>91</sup>

In terms of what resistance to Zionism looked like and why it came to fruition, both of these were relegated to being byproducts of “Islamic fanaticism and pro-Arab British colonialism, along with traditions of political violence.”<sup>92</sup> This then left Zionism,

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>90</sup> Abu-Sitta, “Atlas of Palestine, 1917-1966,” 4.

<sup>91</sup> “Declaration of Establishment of State of Israel,” accessed February 4, 2020, <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx>.

<sup>92</sup> Pappe *The Idea of Israel*, 23.

unwaveringly “loyal to humanist precepts and unrelentingly stretched its hand to its Arab neighbors, who kept rejecting it.”<sup>93</sup> This quote from Pappè begins to show us how Zionists and Israel as a state are constructed/construct themselves within the historical narrative. The mere fact that Zionist Jews were able to establish this state is seen as miraculous “in the face of a hostile Arab world.”<sup>94</sup> There is a heroic tone to the manner in which this miracle is often talked about: “a state that, notwithstanding an objective shortage of space and means, absorbed a million Jews who had been expelled from the Arab world and offered them progress and integration into the only democracy in the Middle East.”<sup>95</sup> A description such as this one speaks to Zionist motifs of unity and the embracing of “a hundred diasporas,” making of them “a single new Jewish people.”<sup>96</sup> These heroic narratives also portray Palestinians as simply those who happened to live on the this Zionist homeland, and refused to join in on the Zionist offering of a better, modernized future.

This last point Pappè uses to signal to another version of the Zionist origins narrative that circulated for a time in which it claimed that the land was in fact empty, barren of any inhabitants. He credits this version to Joan Peters, a CBS documentary producer.<sup>97</sup> In it, Peters claimed that the “widely accepted narrative of displaced Palestinian refugees had been created to justify the destruction of Israel,”<sup>98</sup> because her research led her to the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Peters had been a member of Jimmy Carter’s team on the Middle East, but later joined a new conservative camp (Pappè, 23).

<sup>98</sup> Daniel E. Slotnik, “Joan Peters, Journalist Who Wrote on Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Dies at 78,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/13/world/middleeast/joan-peters-journalist-who-wrote-on-israeli-palestinian-conflict-dies-at-78.html>.

conclusion that “Arab settlers had flocked to Palestine beginning in the late 1800s, often drawn there by economic opportunities in areas that were being developed by Jewish settlers.”<sup>99</sup> Critiques of this theorizing are that it denies the existence of Palestinians prior to the 1800s, also making their expulsion easily resolved with neighboring Arab countries taking Palestinian refugees in. While the book Peters published where this version is found was a bestseller in the US and was actually promoted by the Israeli Embassy, professional historians in Israel later renounced the book, “demanding somewhat more sophistication in the construction of the Zionist claim that Palestine belongs to the Jewish people.”<sup>100</sup>

Another narrative that circulated, somewhat similar to Peters’ book, came from Efraim Karsh, who claimed that there were Palestinians living in Palestine, but it was their leadership that was to blame, for it was them who prevented Palestinians from taking advantage of the countless advantages that Zionism presented to them. Karsh also argues that it was Arab leadership that forced Palestinians to leave their homes:

“large numbers of them were driven from their homes by their own leaders and/or the ‘Arab Liberation Army’ that had entered Palestine prior to the end of the Mandate, whether out of military considerations or in order to prevent them from becoming citizens of the prospective Jewish state.”<sup>101</sup>

With Peters, Karsh and the “Empty Land” narrative, we see how the existence of Palestinians was constantly being negotiated.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Efraim Karsh, “Reclaiming a Historical Truth,” *Haaretz*, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5020993>.

In common with all these narratives, is that a Jewish homeland was indisputable and/or inevitable. The problem was trying to figure out where Palestinians fit in to all of this. This is especially present with the manner in which “Zionism needed history in order to prove to Jews wherever they were that they all constitute one entity and that there is historical continuity from Israel and Judea in ancient times until modern Judaism.”<sup>102</sup> What this quote is demonstrating is what Louis Althusser describes as interpellation.<sup>103</sup> He posits that

“ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’”<sup>104</sup>

Charland expands on this by arguing that when audiences are hailed, they are “calling a common, collective identity into existence.”<sup>105</sup> In this context, the Jewish diaspora is being recruited into Zionist ideology. However, the assumption made by Zionism hailing those that make up the Jewish diaspora is that there is a common a belief in Zionism, to the extent that they would support Israel in most, if not all its endeavors, is incorrect.

Zagacki, in his work on the constitutive paradoxes of G.W Bush’s Iraq war speeches,

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<sup>102</sup> Pappé *The Idea of Israel*, 23.

<sup>103</sup> Ott and Dickinson, *The Routledge Reader in Rhetorical Criticism*, chap. Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Québécois, 436.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Kenneth S. Zagacki, “Constitutive Rhetoric Reconsidered: Constitutive Paradoxes in G. W. Bush’s Iraq War Speeches,” *Western Journal of Communication* 71, no. 4 (November 22, 2007): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570310701653786>.

speaks on this similarly when describing the way in which Bush addressed the Iraqi audiences under the assumption that there was a universal desire for democracy.<sup>106</sup>

While I won't delve much further into this concept as it is not the focus of this paper, the notion of interpellating the Jewish diaspora, albeit under false assumptions, excludes Palestinians. If anything, it is as if Palestinians are being interpellated *over*. I noticed this in Charland's work as well, although in relation to the indigenous people that were colonized by the French ancestors of the Québécois. Where are those who were there before these new interpellated subjects? Are Palestinians thus left in limbo, recognizes only as objects but not as subjects?

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<sup>106</sup> Zagacki, "Constitutive Rhetoric Reconsidered", 274.

*“What Palestinians are really being commanded is not just forget their past, but instead to forget their future, too. That they will never do.”*

*George Bisharat for the San Francisco Chronicles (2007)*

## **Al Nakba**

In previous sections, I have laid out how the State of Israel is a settler colonial project, unique in the way it has seemingly always had the support of powerful empires such as Britain and the US. I have also demonstrated the manner in which the State of Israel has crafted a useable history in order to sell itself as an idea that is democratic and just. I have also shown you that the Zionist history constructed around Israel also functions to hail the Jewish diaspora, leaving Palestinians as objects being interpellated over, as if they weren't even there in the first place.

This final section is a culmination of sorts, as it is important to understand Israel within a settler colonial context and the importance of history to its existence as well. Up until now, I have shown you the way in which Zionist historians have worked to prove that there are Jewish roots in Palestine, with various narratives being constructed by different people. In this final section, I will demonstrate how the Israeli government handles narratives that endanger their claim as the only democracy in the Middle East, specifically through the systemic repression of al Nakba. In Arabic, al Nakba means “catastrophe”, and it refers to the mass expulsion experienced by Palestinians upon Israel's declaration of statehood in 1948.<sup>107</sup> For Israel and its constituents, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1948

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<sup>107</sup> Hussein Ibish, “A ‘Catastrophe’ That Defines Palestinian Identity,” The Atlantic, May 14, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/05/the-meaning-of-nakba-israel-palestine-1948->

symbolizes the culmination of the Zionist movement's work as it is the day Israel was declared a state. But for Palestinians, it symbolizes the continuation of Zionist violence, if not more so as thousands were forcibly removed from their homes. The way in which the Israeli government treats what Palestinians call "al nakba" exemplifies the manner in which it is attempting to cleanse Israel's past so as to keep it "useable".

Central to this section is an understanding of public and collective memory and the way they function rhetorically. While memory can exist on an individual level, it can also exist in a larger cultural level.<sup>108</sup> Public memory is thus "a particular type of collective memory that combines the memories of the dominant culture and fragments of marginalized groups' memories, and enables a public to make sense of the past, present, and future".<sup>109</sup> These two definitions are not entirely inclusive of oppositional memories, or memories that run against the dominant culture. Yael Zerubavel posits that "collective memory can and often does successfully suppress oppositional memory, but countermemory may also gain enough momentum to break out if its oppositional status and become official memory."<sup>110</sup> In tandem with the contents of this paragraph, I will also be referencing Rosa A. Eberly's article on the role of remembering and forgetting in relation to the University of Texas Tower Shootings, but more so the work of Charles E.

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*gaza/560294/*; Zack Beauchamp, "What Is the Nakba?," Vox, November 20, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/20/18080030/israel-palestine-nakba>.

<sup>108</sup> Cervantes, "Corridos and Their Dependence on Public Memory," (Essay, Whitman College, 2018.).

<sup>109</sup> Catherine Helen. Palczewski, Richard Ice, and John Fritch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life* (State College, PA: Strata Pub., 2016), 25 cited in Cervantes, "Corridos and Their Dependence on Public Memory"

<sup>110</sup> Zerubavel, Yael. 1995. *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. cited in: Whitlinger, Claire. "From Countermemory to Collective Memory: Acknowledging the "Mississippi Burning" Murders." *Sociological Forum* 30, no. S1 (2015): 648-70. Accessed May 12, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/43654411](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43654411).

Morris III, specifically his article “My Old Kentucky Homo: Lincoln and the Politics of Queer Public Memory.”

### **The “Nakba Law” and the systemic erasure of ‘the catastrophe’**

On May 15<sup>th</sup>, throughout the world, Palestinians commemorate the Nakba. This same date also symbolizes the establishment of Israel as a state, which for Palestinians resulted in the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homeland.<sup>111</sup>

Among the 1.7 million Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, commemoration of the Nakba usually manifests through protests, marches, lectures and “other events to mourn their ancestors' dispossession are held in Palestinian communities across Israel.”<sup>112</sup> But in 2011, the “Nakba Law”<sup>113</sup> was enacted by the Knesset.<sup>114</sup> Specifically, it is an amendment to the Budget Principles Law of 1985, and allows

“the Minister of Finance to fine public bodies that benefit from public funding (for example schools, universities, or local authorities) if they hold events that commemorate ‘Independence Day or the day of the establishment of the state as a day of mourning’. They could also be fined if they hold events that aim to revoke ‘the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.’”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Patrick Strickland, “Israel Continues to Criminalise Marking Nakba Day,” accessed May 11, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/israel-nakba-palestine-150514080431980.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Strickland, “Israel Continues to Criminalise Marking Nakba Day”; Jack Houry, “High Court Rejects Petition Against Israel’s Controversial ‘Nakba Law,’” *Haaretz*, January 5, 2012, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5159558>; “‘Nakba Law’ - Amendment No. 40 to the Budgets Foundations Law - Adalah,” accessed May 11, 2020, <https://www.adalah.org/en/law/view/496>.

<sup>114</sup> Per the Israeli Ministry of Foreign affairs website, the Knesset is “Israel’s unicameral parliament,” that is, its legislative body.

<sup>115</sup> “‘Nakba Law’ - Amendment No. 40 to the Budgets Foundations Law”

Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, raises the concern that the vague language of this amendment could lead to fines imposed for events that make any mention of the Nakba, even if the event is not taking place on Israel's Independence Day.

On May 11<sup>th</sup> of the same year, Adalah and “the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI); five parents of children who study at ‘Galil’, a joint Jewish-Arab bilingual school in the Misgav region of the Galilee,”<sup>116</sup> among others, filed a petition against the Nakba Law. The attorneys associated with the petition explained that

“the law is anti-democratic and severely and fundamentally injures the basic civil rights of Arab citizens in Israel, including freedom of expression, artistic and political freedom, the right to equality, the right to dignity, the right to education, and Academic freedom and freedom of occupation.”<sup>117</sup>

In January 2012, Israel's High Court rejected the petition, with Supreme Court President Dorit Beinisch stating that the petitions “was not yet ‘ripe,’”<sup>118</sup> and lacked the “concrete factual foundation” necessary to support the claims made in the petition. While the High Court did acknowledge that the “complex questions”<sup>119</sup> raised by the petition had “public significance,”<sup>120</sup> they could not make a judicial ruling over the matter.

Similarly, in October of 2011, Knesset Legal Advisor Eyal Yinon ruled that the Nakba Law was in fact constitutional. Per Yinon and his aides, the law itself does not prevent individual freedom of speech, nor is it forbidding individuals to commemorate the Nakba. Rather, they claim that “the purpose of the law is to ensure that the state does

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<sup>116</sup> “‘Nakba Law’ - Amendment No. 40 to the Budgets Foundations Law.”

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Khoury, “High Court Rejects Petition Against Israel's Controversial ‘Nakba Law.’”

<sup>119</sup> “‘Nakba Law’ - Amendment No. 40 to the Budgets Foundations Law.”

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

not fund organizations or actions that undermine its existence.”<sup>121</sup> Here, I would like to refer back to the first section of this essay, in which I discussed the way in which Israel as an idea, necessitates protection and scholarly validation. It would thus seem odd that, having at one point a \$500 billion balance in foreign aid, the state of Israel would still be troubled by any form of critique.

As of 2015, four years after its enactment, the Nakba law hadn't been implemented. Nevertheless, countless human rights groups and activists stated that “it has a dangerous deterrent effect and is meant to intimidate Palestinians and others who view Israel's establishment as a day of mourning for Palestinians.”<sup>122</sup> In 2014, students at Haifa University were unable to obtain a permit to hold a Nakba Day commemoration, still opting to stage a protest. As a result, some students were suspended for the remainder of the semester and Palestinian groups were even temporarily banned from holding events on campus.<sup>123</sup> And while this decision was later overturned by the Israel Supreme Court, this situation demonstrates the effects of the Nakba Law, regardless if that was its intentions or not, and regardless if it was being implemented or not. As Sawsan Zaher, a lawyer at Adalah states, the “deterrent impact”<sup>124</sup> of this law is still limiting the freedom of expression, making the statement to Palestinians in Israel “Don't mention the Nakba; you have no collective memory; this is not legal.”<sup>125</sup>

## **Censoring the Nakba within the education system**

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Strickland, “Israel Continues to Criminalise Marking Nakba Day.”

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

In the history section of this essay, I briefly mentioned that the education system is a variable that the State of Israel can control for domestically in terms of maintaining its reputation as morally just and right. Regardless if educators are able to act freely in terms of accepting the state's narratives, it can be difficult to demonstrate that in the classroom when the tools afforded push a particular narrative or erase the presence of a specific event. Specific to al Nakba, in 2009, Israel's education ministry banned the usage of the word "nakba" in the textbooks used by young Arab school children.<sup>126</sup> This comes just two years after the word and its meaning had been introduced in an Arabic-language textbook, a reflection of the experience of 5% of Israel's Arab population. Interestingly enough, Hebrew-language textbooks for Jewish children didn't utilize the word.

Under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Likud<sup>127</sup> deemed the word Nakba, as "tantamount to spreading propaganda against the Israel."<sup>128</sup> Per then Education Minister, Gideon Sarr, "There is no reason to present the creation of the Israeli state as a catastrophe in an official teaching programme,"<sup>129</sup> adding that "The objective of the education system is not to deny the legitimacy of our state, nor promote extremism among Arab-Israelis."<sup>130</sup>

Rosa A. Eberly posits that public spaces can function so as to store and invent memories.<sup>131</sup> By interfering with the ability for certain organizations and/or spaces to hold commemorative events for the Nakba, the state of Israel is preventing those public

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<sup>126</sup> Black, "History Used and Abused in Israel."

<sup>127</sup> The Jewish Virtual Library defines the Likud Party as "is a right wing political party in Israel founded by revolutionary leader Menachem Begin and was the first right-leaning party to lead the Israeli government. It is currently headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu."

<sup>128</sup> Black, "1948 No Catastrophe Says Israel, as Term Nakba Banned from Arab Children's Textbooks."

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Phillips, *Framing Public Memory*, chap. Everywhere You Go, It's There: Forgetting and Remembering the University of Texas Tower Shootings, 72.

events taking places in public spaces from storing and/or inventing memories of the Nakba. In terms of what it is that Palestinians are trying to do when commemorating the Nakba, Charles E. Morris III's work on Abraham Lincoln and the politics of queer public memory, provides insight into what Roger Simon calls "insurgent commemoration."<sup>132</sup> What this means is attempting to "construct and engage representations that rub taken-for-granted history against the grain so as to revitalize and rearticulate what one sees as desirable and necessary for an open, just and life-sustaining future."<sup>133</sup>

By continuing to commemorate the Nakba, Palestinians are attempting to maintain the memory of its historical significance. In this article, Morriss III discusses the ways in which Abraham Lincoln and his alleged homosexual relationship with Joshua Speed. He states that "Given the magnitude of Lincoln's memory in forging our collective, national identity, with obvious implications for individual identity, conviction of his homosexuality would necessarily implicate us all, by means of this inescapable heritage, as practitioners and progenitors of same-sex love."<sup>134</sup> To turn this towards the subject of this section of this essay, this begs the question of "Who and what is implicated if Israel was to acknowledge the devastation that May 15<sup>th</sup> represents for Palestinians?"

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<sup>132</sup> Phillips, chap. My Old Kentucky Homo: Lincoln and the Politics of Queer Public Memory, 98.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid 99.

## Conclusion

Palestine, it seems, was always destined to be subjected to colonialism under the pretense of establishing a Jewish State. In 1799, an army of Napoleon Bonaparte surrounded the city of Acre in Ottoman-controlled Palestine, in an effort to defeat the Ottomans and establish a French presence in the region.<sup>135</sup> In his search for allies, Napoleon issued a letter, where he offered Palestine as a homeland to Jewish folks. They would be under French protection if they chose to “rise up”<sup>136</sup> against what he called their oppressors. But, with his defeat also went his public support for a Jewish homeland. However, Napoleon’s idea persevered, and Palestine would find itself designated as the location of a national Jewish homeland, regardless, with the state of Israel being established less than 200 years later.

So as to be marked as a just and democratic entity, the state of Israel needed history to prove that it has always been just and democratic. Throughout this paper, I have demonstrated how Israel’s history would take on the Zionist ideology of its writers, who set out to prove that there were Jewish roots in Palestine prior to the arrival of the Zionist movement. A result of this, would be that the Jewish diaspora would be hailed into Zionist ideology and unified by the existence of a physical Jewish homeland. This hailing would occur *over* those who were already living on the land: Palestinians. As such, it is hard to maintain that Israel is a democratic and just entity when on the day which it celebrates its independence, indigenous Palestinians mourn the Nakba, or the

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<sup>135</sup> Al Jazeera, “Al Nakba 1”.  
<https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/PalestineRemix/search.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

catastrophe that befell them and their families upon the end of the British Mandate in 1917.

The Nakba saw thousands of Palestinians forcibly removed from their homes, many unable to return. Systemic attempts to obscure the Nakba and its effects, such as the Nakba Law, are symbolic of how Israel has attempted to erase the existence of Palestinians, whether that be by interpellating the Jewish diaspora over them, or adjusting historical narratives about their presence prior to the arrival of the Zionist movement to justify the violence enacted onto Palestinian bodies and the land.

At the foundation of this paper is the fact that the State of Israel is a settler colonial project. This is an important distinction that has to be made because the violence that Palestinians experienced at the hand of Israel is inherent to colonialism. Particularly the usage of biblical arguments to justify colonizing foreign land and peoples can be traced to the “Spanish conquest of America, in the foundation of the US nation-state, in the European colonization of South Africa”<sup>137</sup> and in this instance, the creation of the state of Israel. Israel’s foundation comes at an interesting time, historically speaking. Israel’s solidifying as a nation-state took place after the Republic of India was founded (1947), Egypt (1953), and Algeria (1962). However, as Mignolo points out, unlike Israel, these nation-states “were founded against the will of England and France.”<sup>138</sup> Israel, on the other hand, not only had the support of these two imperial powers, but also that of the

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<sup>137</sup> Gianni Vattimo, Michael Marder, and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Deconstructing Zionism: A Critique of Political Metaphysics*, Political Theory and Contemporary Philosophy (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), chap. Decolonizing the Nation-State, 58.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

United States, who recognized the “provisional Jewish government as *de facto* authority of it the Jewish state”<sup>139</sup> on the same date Israel declared statehood (May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1948).

The extent to which Israel had imperial support is an important distinction to be made, especially when the topic of “solving” the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is brought up. The fact that talks among Israel and the international community about finding a solution have remained at just that, goes to show how nuanced this conflict is overall and that an “easy” solution is not possible. As of today, there exists the “two state solution and the “one-state solution.” Edward Said was a proponent of the latter, stating that,

“It is my view that the peace process has in fact put off the real reconciliation that must occur if the hundred-year war between Zionism and the Palestinian people is to end. Oslo set the stage for separation, but real peace can come only with a binational Israeli-Palestinian state.”<sup>140</sup>

The one-state solution would join Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, thus creating one country.<sup>141</sup> This means coming to terms with the fact that both Israelis and Palestinians will remain in Palestine, shifting the conversation to be about citizenship, striving to ensure that an Israeli Jewish person, and a Palestinian Arab have the same resources and privileges. For Said, the fact of the matter is, that “in 1948 one people displaced another, thereby committing a grave injustice,”<sup>142</sup> with Palestinians bearing the brunt of the pain and loss, even if one invokes Jewish history alongside that of Palestinians. When the

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<sup>139</sup> “U.S. Recognition of the State of Israel,” National Archives, August 15, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/us-israel>.

<sup>140</sup> Edward Said, “The One-State Solution,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1999, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/10/magazine/the-one-state-solution.html>.

<sup>141</sup> Zack Beauchamp, “What Are the ‘Two-State Solution’ and the ‘One-State Solution’?,” Vox, November 20, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/20/18080094/what-are-the-two-state-solution-and-the-one-state-solution>.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

focus of finding a solution for the Palestinian-conflict becomes focused on peaceful coexistence and genuine reconciliation, only then, Said believed, can a conclusion be reached.

Proponents of a two-state solution advocate for the creation of an independent Palestine and an independent Israel. The line of thought here, is that “Because neither side can get what it wants in a joined state, the only possible solution that satisfies everyone involves separating Palestinians and Israelis.”<sup>143</sup> This would either result in the end of Israel as a Jewish state as Arab Muslims would outnumber Jewish Israelis, or the annexation of the West Bank and the subsequent forcing out of Palestinians and denying them the right to vote.<sup>144</sup> As such, finding a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not clear cut nor will its implementation be easy.

On the road to finding a solution, there is internal change that academia can make in the meantime. The field of rhetoric could gain perspective by situating their theories within (settler) colonialism. A critique I came away with from Charland is the manner in which his work on constitutive rhetoric completely ignored indigenous peoples in his analysis of the Quebecois. By doing this, he perpetuates the manner in which historically, indigenous people have been ignored and/or erased, particularly within academia. I think that as academics we should constantly be self-reflecting, asking ourselves, on whose backs are we theorizing? Are we as scholars contributing to larger systems of oppression with our work? Lastly, I think that we should be unabashedly critical of injustice, understanding that things are rarely simple. We can be critical of Zionism and the state of

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<sup>143</sup> Beauchamp, “What Are the ‘Two-State Solution’ and the ‘One-State Solution’?”

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

Israel while also holding and accepting that Jewish folks have faced oppression throughout history.

Especially now, in the current political atmosphere that we find ourselves in due to the COVID-19 pandemic when clinics attempting to deal with the virus are being destroyed and volunteers being arrested while trying to deliver supplies to communities in need.<sup>145</sup> While temporary solutions may be found in order to deal with this pandemic, we must also look to the past, in order to find the systemic roots of the injustices faced by Palestinians in Israel today, injustices that COVID-19 is only aggravating.

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<sup>145</sup> Yara Hawari, "In Palestine, COVID-19 Meets the Israeli Occupation," *Al-Shabaka* (blog), accessed May 13, 2020, <https://al-shabaka.org/memos/in-palestine-covid-19-meets-the-occupation/>.

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