

Israel in the context of the “clash of civilizations”

By Michael Warschawski

The State of Israel is the product of a political movement, Zionism, aimed at providing a solution to “the Jewish question”, i.e. the rise of modern Anti-Semitism in Europe at the end of the 19th Century. “The Palestinian question” is the direct result of the unilateral drive to resolve the Jewish question by creating a Jewish State in Palestine, without taking into account the existence and the rights of the indigenous population.

A colonial movement for an Ethnic State

Zionism is an ideology and a political movement which is doubly the product of its time, the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century:

- on the level of its objective: an ethnic conception of political normality and the aspiration to create an ethnic state;
- on the level of the means to achieve this objective: colonization.

In that sense, it will be totally wrong to look at the roots of Zionism in the Jewish religion or in the Jewish experience: Zionism is rooted in the political history and philosophy of European modernism. Religion provided only some of the justifications and narratives to a modern nationalist ideology and a colonialist movement.

Like any other colonial movement, Zionism is in its very nature, unilateralist: the fate and the rights of the indigenes are of no relevance in the fulfillment of the colonial project. As a project aiming at creating a Jewish State – in the demographic sense of the concept, i.e. composed, as much as possible, of Jews only – Zionism combines ethnic-cleansing and apartheid features.

A marginal current

When Zionism emerged among the Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe, it was a marginal phenomenon and remained so until 1933. The great majority of European Jews were either religious or socialists. In both cases openly opposed to Zionism.

For the religious Jews, the idea to create a political movement to end Exile was a kind of blasphemy: God expelled us from our Land and sent us into Exile as a punishment for our bad behaviors, and only God will bring us back to the Holy Land. Moreover, as – basically – an anti-religious movement, Zionism was perceived by the Rabbis as

a potential threat to their hegemony, as all other modern movements, especially the socialist movements.

As for the various social movements at the turn of the century, they were (with the exception of the tiny Left Poalei Zion) opposed to Zionism considered either as a bourgeois trend or an “escapist ideology” and preaching that the solution to the Jewish question will be possible only through democratization, which will be the result of a successful socialist revolution. While for some the solution for the Jewish question will be their assimilation into the majority, for others, like the Bund, the solution will be national cultural autonomy.

In Palestine too, at the beginning of Zionist colonization, the Zionist pioneers were no more than a group of lunatic idealists, a small minority among the Jews of Palestine, who were, by large, opposed to these intruders whom they perceived as some kind of disturbing hippy communities, completely disconnected from reality.

Nazism contribution

The rise of Nazism in Germany, and Nazism mass terror later in the whole of Europe, provided the material ground for the transformation of Zionism into a reasonable, viable and realistic political option. This transformation occurred in two stages, first in the thirties, and then after the war.

Nazi anti-Jewish laws and practices in the thirties, brought about not only a mass Jewish immigration to Palestine, but an immigration with a high technological, scientific and intellectual level as well as with a relatively big amount of capital to be invested in the Jewish economy and society. Both quantitatively and qualitatively, the Jewish colony (Yishuv) was transformed from a utopian community to a modern social reality.

After the war, the mass of Jewish refugees, survivors of the Nazi genocide, provided not only a human reservoir for the coming Jewish State, but also a solid argument for the international community to support the Zionist project of a Jewish State, which will host the hundreds of thousands of survivors whom Europe was not interested to integrate.

The fate of the Arabs of Palestine and their legitimate rights were of little weight in the cynical calculations and the bad conscience of the international community, and they became the victims of the victims of European anti-Semitism, while having no part whatsoever in the genocide of European Jewry.

A wall of separation

Separation is at the heart of Zionist ideology. Like many nationalist philosophies at the end of the 19th Century, Zionism identifies normality with homogeneity. A

normal society is a society with few minorities as possible; a normal state is an ethnically homogenous state.

This is why, according to Zionism, Jews have to leave Europe and to establish a state of their own, demographically as Jewish as possible. This is why such a state – the State of Israel – could have been built only by a war of ethnic cleansing, expelling the great majority of the indigenous Arab population.

In that sense, even before the actual wall has been built, Israel surrounded itself by a wall of separation, and a series of laws, regulations and practices aimed to keep the Jewish nature of the state, and to make as difficult as possible any kind of integration with the surrounding environment. Ehud Barak's terribly racist definition – “we are a villa in the heart of the jungle” (sic) – summarizes this approach of Israel being an island of civilizations to be protected against the barbarian environment.

This perception integrates itself in a broader conception of the place of Israel in the world, and its function against those who are defined as barbarians.

A Wall against Barbarians

Since its inception, and in order to receive the necessary support from the major powers, Zionism was trying to sell to these major powers the benefit that a Jewish State could provide them. “A wall to protect (Christian) civilization against (Muslim/Arab) Barbarians” promised Theodore Herzl to European powers; a client to defend British interests against the Arabs... and the French, promised Haim Weizman to Lord Balfour; “an iron wall which the native population cannot brake through”, explained one of the main Zionist ideologists of the twenties, Zeev Jabotinsky, and the first editor of Haaretz daily, Gershom Shoken, readapted this wall-conception in the context of the cold war: Israel as a protection of the “free world” against communism.

In its own perception, the State of Israel is an extension of a civilizational-camp in a hostile environment. In most of its history, this “civilizational camp” was the “free world” led by the United States of America against the “communist camp” and, in a lesser extent, the “third world” and national liberation organizations throughout the world.

The neo-conservative strategy

In the mid eighties, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new global strategy was elaborated for the United States, as a unique super-power in the world. This strategy was looking for a new global enemy and identified this enemy as « international terrorism », soon to be synonymous to « Islamist terrorism ». The think tanks and research centers which were behind this new strategization – the neo-conservative trend – were composed of US right wing Republicans and Israeli Likud politicians and theoreticians. The influence of the Israeli partners was so big, that often their American counterparts were labeled as “The Likudniks of the Republican party”.

Among the neo-conservatives, a current developed the (very questionable) descriptive analysis of Huntington on “Clash of Civilization” into a strategy based on a non-ending crusade between Judeo-Christian civilizations against Islam. Gradually, the differences between the non-ending preventive war against global (Islamist) terrorism and the clash of civilization against Islam almost vanished.

Israeli neo-conservatives conquered political power six years before their US counterparts - with the assassination of Yitshak Rabin, which they largely provoked – and were able to test the neo-conservative policy and rhetoric before George W Bush’s political advisers. Palestinians (and Arabs in general) were replaced by “terror”, and the Israeli-Arab conflict was defined as a permanent preventive war against Islamist threat. Israel perceived itself, and tried to convince the world that it was the frontline of the defense of (Judeo-Christian) civilization against terrorism (Islam), and that its total war of destruction against the Palestinian people was a necessity for the safeguard of civilization.

The coming to power of the Bush Jr. Administration, in 2001, gave full legitimacy and support to this brutal and bloody strategy, especially after 9/11. Until this very day.

In that perspective, the same way that the destruction of Palestine is part of a global permanent and preventive war, the wall which is being built in the West Bank is not only a separation between Israelis and Palestinians, but a global wall between the “civilized world”, i.e. Israel, Europe, North America and, on the other side, the Barbarians – the Palestinians, the Arabs, the Muslims, and eventually the entire “third world” countries.

Neo-anti Semitism – manipulations and realities

At the beginning of this century, a huge media campaign was conducted in Europe around the purported rise of a mass “neo-antisemitism” all over Europe, and in France in particular by the right-wing pro-Israeli (minority) leaders of some European Jewish communities. The fact that all serious researches conducted by well known and respected institutions proved that the general trend was on the contrary, a retreat of Anti Semitism in Europe, and in fact a substantial decline of anti-Jewish sentiments and behaviors, did not stop the campaign which was not interested in fighting anti-Semitism, but to manipulate their campaign for three main objectives:

to shut the mouths of everyone daring to criticize the Israeli crimes being committed in the occupied territories by accusing every critic as anti-Semite;

to delegitimize any kind of Muslim or Arab activism as being anti-Semite (the use of neo anti-Semitism was aimed to claim that the new and real danger was not classical right wing anti-Semitism (which is currently existing) but new Muslim and leftist (hidden!!!) Judeo-phobia, disguised as anti-Zionism or even criticism of Israeli policies.)

To try to force the Jews to join their ‘tribe’, for, in the neo-conservative world perception, each one belongs to a tribe which should remain hermetic.

Moreover, throughout Europe, Jewish leaders connected to the Israeli right-wing, are ready to position themselves and the communities which they – falsely – claim to represent, at the for-front of the anti-Muslim crusade in their respective countries, using often anti-Semitism as a central weapon in such an attack (The ‘Tariq Ramadan affair’ in France, is a classical example). As a result, some Muslims – especially amongst the youth – start to perceive the Jews as their main enemies, and the ones who are responsible for their discrimination, exclusion, and the racism which they suffer from.

Is it an accident that most of the ideologist of the so call “Jewish-Christian civilization” who are pushing the Jews as a vanguard of their crusade are well-known anti-Semites, like, for example the US Protestant Fundamentalists of the Republican Party or some currents of the French Catholic far-right. By positioning the Jews at the front-line of their own crusade, they are cynically preparing the ground for a new wave of mass anti-Semitism, while hiding their own responsibility in the fate of the oppressed Muslim minorities in their countries. A very old story: Jewish leaders playing into the hands of their enemies and so preparing their own grave...

Ta’ayush

Against the “clash of civilizations” strategies aimed to re-colonize the world and established a globalized apartheid system, one must set as a top priority a counter-strategy of breaking the walls of apartheid, and building a trans-civilizational alliance. In Israel/Palestine we are doing it under the title of Ta’ayush – an Arabic word meaning “leaving-together” – a Jewish-Arab partnership aimed not at creating the illusion of peace and coexistence, but at creating a joint struggle to make it possible in the future.

Ta’ayush should be the banner of all women and men, throughout the world, who reject the globalized apartheid system, and aspire to struggle for a new global dividing line: not between races or religions, but between the neo-liberal crusaders and all the peoples of the world who, from Mumbai to Liverpool, from Porto Allegre to Seattle, Genova, Seoul and Jenin, are shouting, together, “another world is possible!”

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