

## **Palestine...It Is Something Colonial**

*Hatem Bazian*

*The Hague: Amrit Publishers, 2016. 327 pages.*

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not existed since the beginning of time. Hatem Bazian explores the roots of the conflict, locating the Zionist movement as a settler colonial project under the tutelage of British colonial efforts. Bazian's text is a look at and beyond first-hand accounts, an investigation of and critical analysis of settler practice in relation to similar

texts such as Sari Nusseibeh's *Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life*, Alan Dowty's *Israel/Palestine*, and Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land*.

Hatem Bazian's *Palestine...it is something colonial* is not an introduction to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Readers should possess a basic understanding of the conflict and history of the region over the last century. Nor does this text provide the reader with an unbiased look at the timeline of events since the inception of the Zionist movement. *Palestine...it is something colonial* instead is a rich critique of the Zionist movement and British colonialism. It investigates the way British colonialism influenced Zionism and how Zionism adopted colonial ideas and practices. Bazian locates Zionism as a settler colonialist movement still at work today, which historically planned and systematically executed the removal of Palestinians from their land, with the aid of the United Kingdom and (later) the United States. Bazian examines Ottoman collapse, the colonization of Palestine by the British, Israel's biblical theology of dispossession, as well as British colonial incubation of Zionism, Zionism as a Eurocentric episteme, the building of Israel through ethnic cleansing, and the Nakba, all of these culminating in legalized dispossession. Throughout the text, Bazian is able to tie each chapter to the present state of affairs and remind the audience of the trauma of a people forcibly removed.

Bazian opens with the straightforward assertion that "Palestine is the last settler-colonial project to be commissioned in the late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and still unfolding in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with no end in sight" (17). In chapter one, "Dissecting the Ottomans and Colonizing Palestine," Bazian navigates the biased historiography of the fall of the Ottoman empire, linking the collapse of the empire to the colonizing forces of Europe which sought to ensure access to the newly discovered oil in the region as well as to Asia and Africa. Bazian masterfully steers the reader through the history of European intervention, and in particular on behalf of Christians as ethnic minorities in the Middle East.

Europe is historically anti-Jewish; at the turn of the century, Zionism was determined to solve Europe's "Jewish Problem" and maintain a stronghold in the Middle East, he writes. In chapter two, "Israel's Biblical Theology of Dispossession," Bazian explores the biblical roots of Zionist ideology. The chapter opens with a discussion of a contemporary Bedouin tribe being expelled in the Negev. Bazian writes that "the biblical text gets transformed into policy by the Zionist state, by which it then normalizes or makes legal the wholesale theft of Palestinian lands and expulsion of the population"

(57) using legal documents such as the Levy Report. These policies create “facts on the ground” which lead to “legalized expulsions.”

The Bible was central to the historical development of the European Christian supremacist idea of the Holy Land. The loss of the territory conquered during the Crusades ruptured this notion, a break “fixed” through Zionism. In chapter three, “British Colonialism and Incubation of Zionism,” Bazian begins to address British colonialism and Zionism as complementary. Bazian uses primary texts from British political actors of the time, such as Lord Robert Cecil and Lord Balfour, to establish the anti-Semitic inspiration for British actions of the time. Bazian also successfully uses the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence and the Sykes-Picot agreement to establish the double dealings of the British in the Middle East in the early twentieth century. Bazian uses many primary texts in this chapter effectively, though their organization could leave readers confused.

Chapter four, “Zionism: Eurocentric Colonial Epistemic,” continues the themes of the prior chapter as the colonial influence is cemented. In this chapter, Bazian explores the subterfuge and the genius propaganda selling Palestine as “a land without a people for a people without a land” along with “making the desert bloom”—as if the indigenous Arab people were not there. Bazian frames this chapter within the Zionist ideology of the peoples living in the land being only a barrier to a Jewish state in Palestine. Bazian uses primary sources (e.g., Herzl) to defend the assertion that the removal of the Palestinian people was always a piece of the Zionist plan. Bazian also includes Jewish critical voices (e.g., excerpts from the reporter Ella Shohat) to establish the European Jewish bias against the indigenous Arab peoples, including Sephardic Jews.

Bazian that these biases and the effort to remove Palestinians from their land defined the early Zionist movement and the creation of the state of Israel in chapter five, “Building a State and Ethnic Cleansing.” This chapter draws extensively on primary sources: correspondence, reports, declarations, agreements, commissions, and maps. Bazian struggles to organize these rich resources in a clear fashion; however, his analysis matches the richness of the sources. These sources establish the “legalized” systematic removal of the Palestinians from the land by the Israelis in 1948.

In chapter six, “The Nakba,” Bazian uses further legal documents and first-hand accounts to trace the forced removal of Palestinians. He pays homage to the trauma while critically dissecting the process of legalizing ethnic cleansing and peddling the innocence of the Israelis to the rest of the world. Bazian profoundly concludes his chapter with the story of a Pal-

estinian boy who witnessed the mass executions of men and women of his village and marched away from his home. The boy, now a man, closed his story with poignant words that capture the horror of the Nakba: “The road to Ramallah had become an open cemetery” (241).

After the land was emptied the new state of Israel needed to legally take possession of the Palestinian-owned property. Chapter seven, “Colonial Machination,” elaborates this process: “the State of Israel is structured to give maximum attention to fulfillment of the settler-colonial project and the state apparatus is directed toward achieving this criminal enterprise” (243). The name “Palestine” is erased as a name for the land and the peoples; former colonial and Ottoman laws were twisted to support a systematic theft of the land.

Bazian concludes his book with a look to the future: “What is the way forward and Palestine’s de-colonial horizon?” (276). He lays out the options available for true and lasting peace, discounting out of hand the two-state solution as impossible due to the extent of the settlements in the West Bank. He also dismisses both the options of the removal of Palestinians and the removal of the Jewish people. He instead posits a way forward through a one-state solution, leaving how this is to be done to the reader and the people of Israel/Palestine to determine.

Bazian has contributed a full-bodied analysis of primary sources to defend his assertion that Zionism has always been a settler colonial movement with its goal being a land devoid of the indigenous people. The organization of the text, the lack of sectioning in the chapters, and the technical insertion and citation of primary sources could be improved for clearer reading. Bazian thoroughly defends his thesis with tangible evidence that Zionism is something colonial, and has been something colonial from the start. This is a text that complicates the narrative of what colonialism is, what the State of Israel is, and who and what Palestine is, together establishing the book as required reading for understanding nuances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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