



Focus:
Palestine
a WCRC Handbook
part 2



Above: Rally for Gaza, Chicago, IL, May 2021. Photo: J. Bing

Cover photo: Jerusalem, just inside New Gate, the entrance to the Old City's Christian Quarter. Photo: Framke

This handbook was written in response to *Action 55* of the WCRC at the 2017 General Conference.

Focus: Palestine is created in 3 parts for ease of printing in smaller sections. It is designed for A4 paper but can also be printed on 8.5x11 paper when the “fit to scale” box is checked in the print window. Please print 2-sided copies and recycle your paper.

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Katherine Cunningham and Noushin Darya Framke

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World Communion
of Reformed Churches

Focus: Palestine

a WCRC Handbook

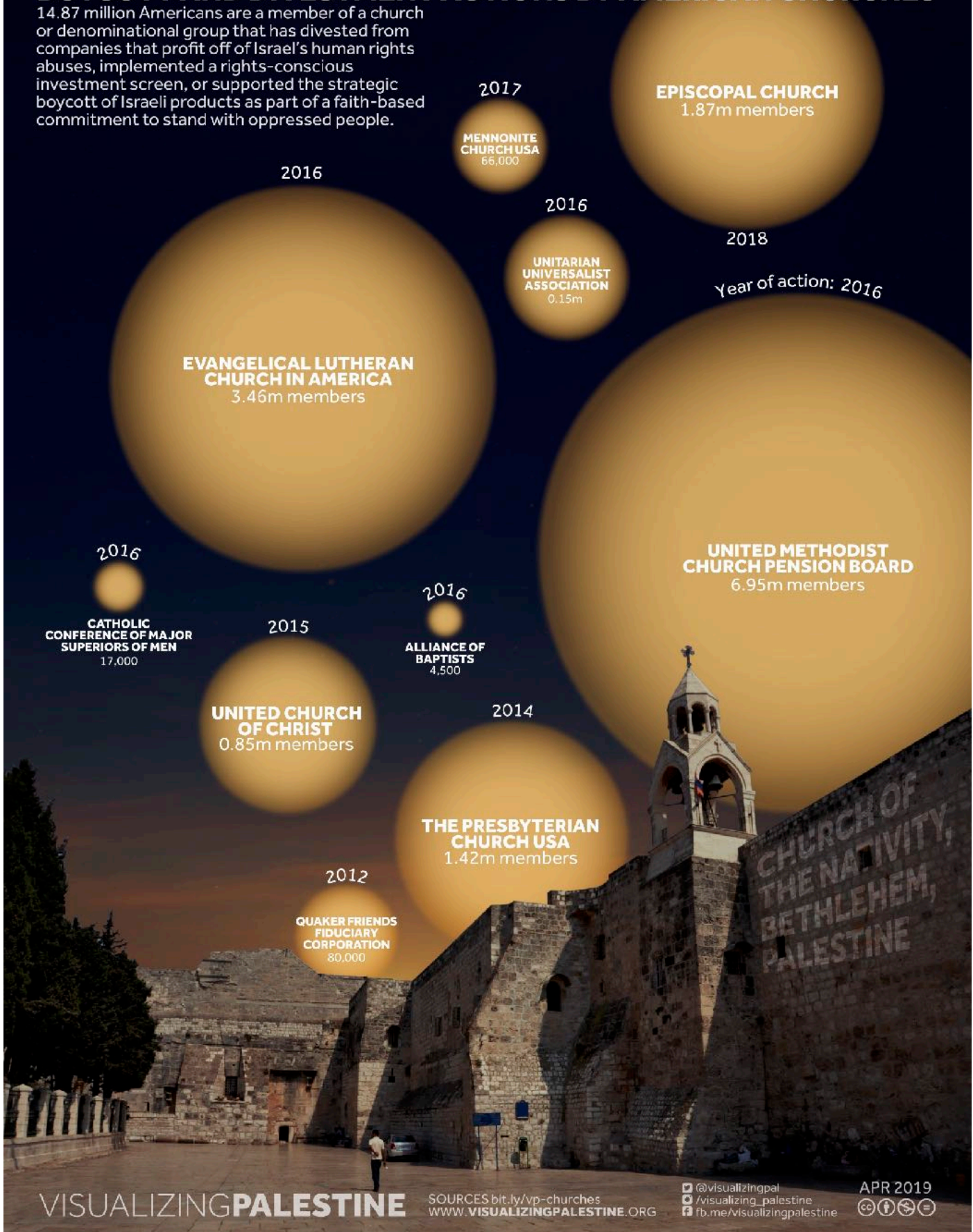
Part Two: Theologies, Ideologies, and Resistance

Written and Edited
by
Rev. Katherine Cunningham
Noushin Darya Framke

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

BOYCOTT AND DIVESTMENT ACTIONS BY AMERICAN CHURCHES

14.87 million Americans are a member of a church or denominational group that has divested from companies that profit off of Israel's human rights abuses, implemented a rights-conscious investment screen, or supported the strategic boycott of Israeli products as part of a faith-based commitment to stand with oppressed people.



VISUALIZING PALESTINE

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These videos are posted on the WCRC YouTube channel.

SETTLER COLONIALISM IS STILL A REALITY

Settler colonialism is a form of colonization where a settler society entirely or partially replaces an indigenous people on their land. This visual highlights some of the territories subject to significant settler colonial projects, past and present.



SETTLER COLONIAL TERRITORIES TODAY

- Dominated by settler population
- Decolonization / indigenization in progress

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THE ZIONIST COLONIZATION OF PALESTINE

- Zionist/Israeli locality
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Colonialism and the Endgame

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1. Overview

For many decades, Palestinian rights have been addressed under the paradigm of a military occupation since 1967. Palestinians and their supporters have been calling for an end to the occupation, and they have been using the terminology of “the Israel/Palestine conflict.” This has not been the case in academia for years, and the lexicon and model used in academia has, in the last decade, spilled over into the public sphere, first through students and activists, and eventually through global media and public opinion. The vocabulary of colonialism has permeated the conversations on Palestine.

As with the changes that brought about the end of apartheid in South Africa, government entities, politicians, and those who stand to lose power are the last to change their positions, and they only do so when public opinion has reached a tipping point. But there is no doubt that today, the Palestinians refer to their own struggle as one for human rights and civil rights, rather than a “conflict,” which implies there is a confrontation between two relatively equal powers.

Palestinians are now engaged in a liberation struggle, one against what many political scientists and historians have called an anachronistic colonial regime, implanted in southwest Asia (the “Middle East”) from Europe. Zionism, the ideology behind the modern state of Israel, is a political project that came out of needing a safe and secure home for the Jews of Europe, who were seen and treated as outsiders. European countries, later aided by the United States, helped create a “home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. Ironically, a safe haven was needed by the Jewish people because of centuries of antipathy and racism towards them by these same Western powers.

Historians have made the case that Israel is a nation founded and structured as a colonial state. The late Tony Judt of New York University, a British Jewish emigre, [argued in 2003](#) that Israel was a colonial project that came at the end of World War II when European colonization was being dismantled globally. As such, Israel was too late, he said, and called it an anachronism. Other historians have gone further and labeled Israel a settler colonial state a specific kind of colonial project that not only has designs on taking resources from another place and peoples, but intends to stay and replace the native peoples. Based on the work of Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe, whose [seminal work defined settler colonialism](#), Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has built an irrefutable case that [Israel is a settler colonial state](#).

2. Role of the Church

When it comes to colonialism and the church, Presbyterian minister, Rev. Kobi Little, speaks clearly and forcefully:

The church has not only been complicit with colonization, but the church has in error and in sin used the gospel to colonize and to disempower and to capture people; wherein Jesus proclaims the gospel is in fact to enlighten, to liberate and to advance. The only way the church can really repent of this great sin and this misuse of the Great Commission is to be forthright and make the commitment to consistently be anti-colonial, pro-liberation, pro-equality and pro-equity....

...One of the things we see when reading the Scriptures is that medicine begins through good thoughts and good words. Colonialism, hate, hegemony are diseases. These things we must cure, and we must first identify them in ourselves and cure them in ourselves.... We hear Jesus say, “Do you want to be made whole?” As we share the good medicine, we must see that it is a process of giving and receiving, but it’s also a question of do we want to be whole. The good medicine is there; the question is do we want to take it.¹



¹ “Decolonizing our politics, The good medicine is there, but do we want to take it?” quoting Rev. Kobi Little, President of the Baltimore, Maryland NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], Dean of Justice Chapel. Article by Pam Wineman, Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) April 19, 2021

The Doctrine of Discovery

The Church has a significant role in both colonialism around the world, and in settler colonialism, where people have settled and displaced, appropriated, and even erased native peoples and their cultures. Various edicts issued by popes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as papal bulls resulted in the “Doctrine of Discovery,” which declared that Christians had the right to dominate and exploit non-Christian lands in the so-called Age of Discovery.

Europeans positioned themselves as the standard against which all human civilization should be measured, with the Doctrine of Discovery providing the theological justification. Beginning with the Church, the doctrine eventually led to legal principles that colonizing powers used to enforce western theology and white supremacy. Through their theology, they justified violence, genocide, and slavery in the name of spreading Christianity.

In the book, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery*,² former Navajo pastor Mark Charles writes, “the assertion of European supremacy by these papal bulls had taken such a hold that anyone opposing this doctrine would be considered opposing the will of God.” As a Navajo Indian, Charles’ criticism of the Doctrine of Discovery and the sins of colonialism come from a personal place of loss and pain. Over the course of the book, Charles notes:

“You cannot discover lands already inhabited. That process is known as stealing, conquering, or colonizing.”

“There would be an unashamed elevation of the European rulers with a subsequent diminishing and demonizing of non-Europeans who would be rightly vanquished.”

“The slave trade would become the fulfillment and material expression of the dysfunctional theology offered by the church.”

“The spread of the European version of the Christian message would justify violence in all forms found in Western imperialism.”

“The doctrine created an insider perception for the European while generating an outsider, other identity for non-Europeans; it created an identity for African bodies as inferior and only worthy of subjugation....”

“What is generally referred to as the Doctrine of Discovery might be more accurately called the doctrine of Christian European arrival, or, better still, the doctrine of Christian European invasion.”

European imperial “greatness” arose from an ecclesial treatise rooted in a dysfunctional theology.

“The military and political doctrine that defined the parameters of European imperial greatness arose from an ecclesial treatise rooted in a dysfunctional theology.”

“The belief that the theological imagination allows the Christian to connect with the divine can lead the Christian to assume that they speak from a position of privilege, chosen and preferred by God, and that the Christian has the capacity to know what is best for the rest of the world.”

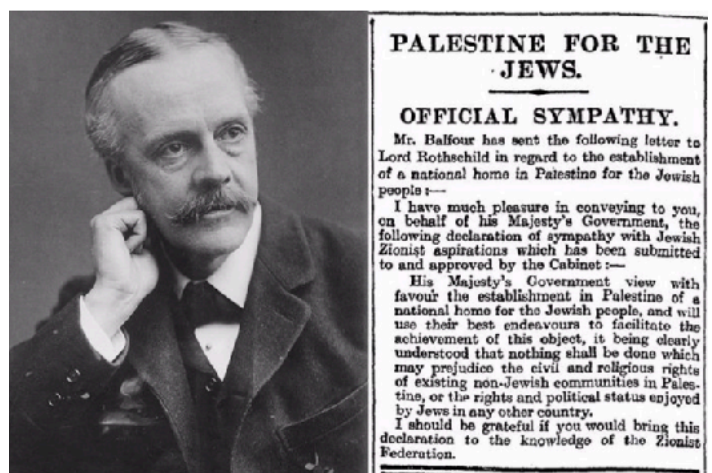
“This quest for dominance resulted in the enslavement of Africans and the genocide of Native Americans. In order to justify this unholy grab for land, wealth, and power, the so-called Christian nations of Europe needed a theological justification for their unjustifiable actions. Devastating outcomes emerged from these dysfunctional theological narratives.”

3. Results of the Doctrine of Discovery

A. Colonialism

As described above, colonialism is a system of domination and exploitation that came about with the full support of the Western church. It is imperial power that uses the name of God in vain and justifies its atrocities by claiming evangelism in the name of Jesus Christ. Colonialism degrades humanity and impairs the minds of the colonized by enforcing the false narrative that colonizers are superior humans. It demonizes indigenous and native ways of life, and appropriates and corrupts the culture and customs it encounters. And colonialism exploits resources and takes land, growing the power base of the colonial power.

The Balfour Declaration, made by Arthur Balfour in 1917 and a prominent legacy of British colonialism, promised a “homeland” for the “Jewish people,” who were less than ten percent of the population. The rest of the population were not even named, only appearing in the colonial document as “non-Jews.” At the time of the centenary of the Balfour Declaration in 2017, the [Church of Scotland declared](#) that it



² Mark Charles and Soon-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

“was issued during a period of great upheaval within the Middle East and at a time when international borders were being redrawn as colonial powers sought to shape and influence the region. This centenary raises specific questions for the Church of Scotland, given Lord Balfour’s membership of our denomination, the significance of Biblical Israel within Christianity, the ongoing Israeli Occupation and the Church of Scotland’s presence within the land.”

Being a worldwide practice, colonialism was experienced by many populations around the world. The Rev. Lloyd Nyarota of the Zimbabwe United Methodist Church explains the evils of colonialism through the African model. He describes how the process unfolds in phases:

1. **Label** the continent as belonging to the colonizer: Dutch, British, etc.
2. **Capture** humans for economic development: Slavery
3. **Exploit** the resource, minerals and animals for colonizers’ benefit
4. **Occupy** the land: Settlers arrive to stay and create new homeland
5. **Control**: Put in place a divide and control system of education
6. **Accumulate** deep and wide power over time
7. **Wield** the accumulated power over the native population

[CLICK TO WATCH VIDEO #4:](#)
[REV. NYAROTA EXPLAINS](#)
[7 PHASES OF COLONIALISM IN AFRICA](#)

Taiwan Example

Taiwan’s [ancient aboriginal population](#) who are not Chinese but Austronesian are predominantly Presbyterian or Catholic, depending on missionary influence. They are from 15 recognized tribes, and at half a million people, they are about two percent of the population of Taiwan. In December 1984, the Taiwan Aboriginal People’s Movement was launched when a group of aboriginal political activists, aided by the progressive Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT), established the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines to highlight the problems experienced by indigenous communities all over Taiwan, including: prostitution, economic disparity, land rights, and official discrimination in the form of naming rights. As part of their mission, the PCT engages in promotion of Tribal rights:



Promotion of indigenous culture: We will encourage presbyteries, tribes and districts to preserve their church and tribal documents, and encourage them to cherish each of their cultural uniqueness to share with other tribes.

Concerning indigenous rights and benefits: Whenever the rights and benefits of indigenous people are violated or in question, we try to provide necessary help in terms of personnel and resources.

Philippines Example



Christian groups join in the observance of the World Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine and Israel in Manila. Photo: Mark Saludes

[Philippine Christians Observe Israel-Palestine Peace Week](#)

Church Leader Says Filipinos Have a Moral Duty to Promote Peace in Places with So Much Violence

Christian churches in the Philippines joined the observance of the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel. The September 2018 event was highlighted by the celebration of the International Day of Peace, an initiative of the World Council of Churches. “Commitment to peace is an imperative of our faith and an obligation,” said Minnie Anne Calub, acting general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines.

[Indigenous Filipinos Protest Threats to Grab Lands](#)

Church Organizations Say Charter Changes Put Local Ethnic Groups under Greater Threat from Government Abuses

Chris Ablon, a pastor of the Philippine Independent Church who runs a program for tribal people, said the government and Duterte are “playing God” in hinterland communities. The pastor said the indigenous peoples are “the object of God’s love,” adding, that “a government that harms them is a government of the wicked.”

[Churches, Civil Groups Amplify Calls To Stop Human Rights Abuses In Philippines](#)

WCRC News, March 2021

“As a report on human rights abuses in the Philippines was delivered to the United Nations by the global group Investigate PH, churches and human rights groups reiterated their concerns over propagation of a culture that allows the abuse to happen....

“I think that we need to immediately go to some of the concrete recommendations of this dramatic situation, and one of them of course is to locate what we’re doing in terms of the world rising up,” said Chris Ferguson, general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. ‘We’re gathering energy to see people who are saying no to authoritarian governments and no to the erosion of mechanisms of international law.’”

B. Settler Colonialism

The work of Australian anthropologist and ethnographer Patrick Wolfe launched a major reconsideration of the role of settlement in colonization, looking at settler colonialism through the lens of the colonized. This type of colonialism is seen as a protracted “invasion” that obscures or erases indigenous presence on the land. Erasure is a major component of this kind of colonialism and settler cultures develop complex narratives to stamp out the humanity of indigenous people, making them easier to erase. The United States, Australia, and South Africa are all examples of settler colonial societies that have engaged in exploitation, erasure and genocide.

Zionism, as the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions has said, “[is a settler colonial project](#) whose aim was—and is—to Judaize Palestine, to transform an Arab country into a Jewish one. In the process, Zionism attempts to eliminate the indigenous Palestinians as a national and cultural presence; hence the demolition of Palestinian homes, among other ethnic cleansing operations.”

From transforming mosques into restaurants and bars, to renaming Palestinian streets, mountains, and landscapes, Israel has been erasing Palestinians since its creation in 1948. And today, erasure is happening daily as Israeli policies remove Palestinian narratives from media, maps, and education curricula. In a 2015 article in [Settler Colonial Studies](#), authors Rouhana and Khoury reference Israelis recasting themselves as rightful owners of the land and label Palestinians as “Arab refugees,” “foreigners,” and even “infiltrators” so as to remove any real ties with the land and erase them from the scene

[CLICK TO WATCH VIDEO #5:
WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
4 STORIES OF ERASURE](#)

[Philippines, Muscogee Native American Tribe,
Zimbabwe, and Palestine.](#)

In a Nutshell

“...**Settler colonialism** is a type of colonialism that functions through the replacement of an indigenous population with a settler society that, over time, develops a national identity and claims sovereignty over the colonised land. To achieve their goal of becoming fully sovereign over the land they colonised, settlers first expel or eliminate the majority of the Indigenous population. They then establish a system of segregation, or apartheid, to cement their supremacy over the Indigenous persons who have remained in the colonised territories. Such systems of segregation not only ensure that there is a legal and social hierarchy between the settlers and the indigenous peoples of the land, but also criminalise the practice, or even the mere mention, of indigenous sovereignty.”

~Mark Muhammad Ayyash, Associate Professor of Sociology, Mount Royal University, Calgary, Canada [“The path to peace in Israel-Palestine is through decolonisation”](#) Al-Jazeera, Feb. 2021

Official Language

“Arabic was an official language in Israel for 70 years, 2 months, and 5 days—until the 2018 Nation State Law: ‘Sometimes what a law says is more important than what it does. You can look at the Jewish Nation-State law from two perspectives. There is the message it was intended to send to Jews: a positive affirmation of Israel as the Jewish nation-state; as the Jewish homeland; as the state of the Jews; a reassuring and nationalist message that says ‘this country is yours and yours alone.’ The other message, the inverse, meant for Palestinians, is: this is not your land; this country does not belong to you, irrespective of whether you are an Israeli citizen living in the home of your great-grandparents or a refugee yearning to return to the land of your grandparents; your culture, language, and history are at best tolerated — this is not their home, this is not your homeland. ... The law, therefore, constitutionalizes a twisted and exclusionary social contract.”

~Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man, *972Mag* Editor in Chief, 2018

C. Israel/Palestine: A Settler Colonial State

“The expulsion of over half the Arab population of the country, first by Zionist militias and then by the Israeli army, completed the military and political triumph of Zionism. Such radical social engineering at the expense of the indigenous population is the way of all colonial settler movements. In Palestine, it was a necessary precondition for transforming most of an overwhelmingly Arab country into a predominantly Jewish state.... The modern history of Palestine can best be understood in these terms: as a colonial war waged against the indigenous population, by a variety of parties, to force them to relinquish their homeland to another people against their will.”

~Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 2020

Rashid Khalidi, historian of Modern Arab Studies at New York’s Columbia University, explains that “successful” settler colonial projects become nation states, as in the examples of the US and Australia, reminding us that being a nation-state does not preclude being a settler colonial one. Khalidi clarifies that Israel is a unique settler colonial state with differences from others before it, but nevertheless, according to Zionist descriptions, it has always intended to colonize the land and remove the people.

Ilan Pappé, Israeli historian and author of *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, points out that settler colonial projects are motivated by what Patrick Wolfe defined as “the logic of the elimination of the native.” These colonization projects are for creating a new homeland, which will inevitably put the settlers on a collision course with the local native population, which in some cases will lead to their elimination. Pappé writes, “Britain granted international legitimacy to Zionist colonisation, sowing the seeds for the future dispossession of Palestine’s native population.”³ He continues:

Zionism in Palestine is a settler-colonial project, and Israel remains to this day a settler-colonial state. This depiction is now widely accepted in the scholarly world, but rejected by mainstream Israeli scholars. On 2 November 1917, Arthur Balfour, then British foreign secretary, endorsed the idea of a “national home for the Jewish people” without “prejudice” against the “civil and religious rights” of the “non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” While this might imply that Jews were the native and majority population of Palestine, in reality, they comprised 10 percent of the population. This misrepresentation of the Palestinian reality in the Balfour Declaration shows how applicable the settler-colonial

³Ilan Pappé, “[From Balfour to the Nakba: The settler-colonial experience of Palestine](#)”, *Middle East Eye*, November 4, 2020.

paradigm is to the case of the Zionist movement in Palestine. The settler movement obtained the support of a colonial and imperial power, one that it would disown from 1942 onwards, and shared the perception of the local population as —at best— a tolerated minority, and at worst as usurpers. Britain granted international legitimacy to this act of colonisation, sowing the seeds for the future dispossession of the native population.

It cannot be denied today that the goal of the creation of Israel, a Zionist project as a home for the Jewish people, is to eliminate the native Palestinian population and to grow the Jewish numbers by means of immigration from around the world. Israel denies the “right of return” to Palestinian refugees and diaspora, which is a right enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights. At the same time, Israel gives automatic Israeli citizenship to any Jewish immigrant from any country in the world. This kind of discrimination is advanced further by the 2018 [Nation State Law](#), which codifies discrimination into their legal system, declaring Israel a “Jewish State” and claiming “the right of national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.” Fully twenty percent of Israel’s population is Palestinian and not Jewish, and if you consider all the people under the control of the Israeli government, that numbers rises to fifty percent. So after the 2018 Nation State Law, the pretense is gone and discrimination is in the law.

**[CLICK TO WATCH VIDEO #6:
IS ISRAEL A COLONIAL STATE?](#)**

Three scholars demonstrate how Israel is and always was a settler colonial state, with aspects unique and apart from other such states. (Professors Khalidi, Pappé, and Trachtenberg)

Israel displays many other characteristics of settler colonialism, as illustrated in Patrick Wolfe’s 2006 ["Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native."](#) For example, Wolfe cites:

- Despite Zionism's chronic addiction to territorial expansion, Israel's borders do not preclude the option of removal [of Palestinians].
- As the logic of elimination has taken on a variety of forms in other settler-colonial situations, so, in Israel, the continuing tendency to Palestinian expulsion has not been limited to the unelaborated exercise of force.... Israeli officials have only permitted family unions “in one direction—out of Israel.”
- ...As Palestinians become more and more dispensable, Gaza and the West Bank become less and less like Bantustans and more and more like reservations (or, for that matter, like the Warsaw Ghetto).

In the journal *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Nadim Rouhana argues [in his article](#), “Decolonization as reconciliation: rethinking the national conflict paradigm in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” that “the premise of national conflict is fundamentally flawed, and, therefore, reaching a settlement based on partition —let alone reconciliation— is becoming increasingly unlikely.” He posits that “a new paradigm is needed that applies a settler-colonial framework to the conflict.... Reconciliation in this conflict is conceived as decolonization within a transitional justice framework.” In other words, if it is colonization, then the way out is decolonization.

Appropriation

The cultural appropriation of books, music, art, cuisine and dress have been used by Zionists as a weapon against Palestinians.

~ Roger Sheety
Canadian writer

Cultural appropriation is familiar to most people when it comes to dominant American culture exploiting Native American rites, traditions, and icons. Using stereotypes, the worlds of fashion, sports, entertainment, and more have capitalized on Native American culture to the point of destroying the original meanings. In other words, the dominant culture has taken over the native identity, which, even if it is distorted, is yet a further continuation of colonization.

One distinct form of colonization is settler colonialism which aims to replace indigenous groups with a new society. Settler colonial countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were founded by settlers who came to stay and who persisted over decades and even centuries on eliminating local peoples and cultures. Frantz Fanon wrote that “...colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.”

Israel as a settler colonial nation intends to be the dominant culture over indigenous people it has colonized. Even as Zionists persisted with the propaganda that they had found “a land without a people for a people without

a land,” they appropriated the ancient local traditions, foods, embroidery art, and more. In the many appropriations of things Palestinian, Israel has become expert in what is known as “Columbusing,” which is what the Urban Dictionary defines as “the art of discovering something that is not new.” In this way, the appropriated items take on an Israeli veneer and are stolen out of their native identity. Familiar examples are Arab foods such as hummus and falafel, the Arabic dance, the Dabka, and most infuriatingly to the Palestinians, their cotton scarf originally used by farmers as protection from sun and dust, the Palestinian kufiya or keffiyeh.

Excerpted from Noushin Framke, "Branding a Nation," *Why Palestine Matters: The Struggle to End Colonialism* (Louisville, Kentucky: IPMN, The Israel Palestine Mission Network of the PCUSA, 2018)

Guide to Being a Palestinian

[Nathalie Handal](#)

...If you take your longing everywhere you go, keep the keys to your old house even if it's inhabited by others— it's a clue you should also keep everything else: the photos, the art, the folklore and even the stones. ...

If your ancestors gave you a map of your country but didn't give you one for dispossession, weave the distances with your history. ...

And if the day comes while far away you are asked, who gave you that name? remember what matters is that the land knows your face, your voice, the origin of your silence— and that, what's holy is alive in who you are, not in who you are told you should be.

[Read full poem](#)

'Israeli Hummus' Is Theft, Not Appropriation

Palestinian American Scholar of Indigenous Rights, Takes It a Step Further

...[T]he controversy about Israel's appropriation of Palestinian food —most infamously its claim to hummus, a lucrative product in Europe and North America— has nothing to do with Jews eating Arabic food. In fact, it has nothing to do with Jews at all. That ludicrous idea is possible only because Zionists aggressively conflate Jewishness with Israel.

Instead, it has everything to do with a deliberate, decades-old programme to disappear Palestinians. Referencing Arab defensiveness about traditional dishes without mentioning colonisation or ethnic cleansing is a whitewash....

When Zionists (or their oblivious collaborators) claim Arabic food as Israeli, it's not a paragon of intercultural harmony but the studious destruction of Palestinian culture. We can mitigate ambiguity by avoiding the word 'appropriation,' which doesn't adequately capture the dynamics of Israel's voracious appetite for anything that can be marked 'Indigenous,' which it needs to shore up an ever-tenuous sense of legitimacy.

'Theft' is more accurate. It is also rhetorically superior. Discourses of modernity exalt cultural interchange, but no good liberal supports piracy....

~Steven Salaita, "['Israeli hummus' is theft, not appropriation.](#)" *The New Arab*, September 4, 2017. Salaita is an American scholar, author, and speaker on indigenous rights; he is the author of *Uncivil Rites: Palestine and the Limits of Academic Freedom*. He successfully sued the University of Illinois over his firing for anti-Israeli tweets during the 2014 invasion of Gaza.



4. The Way Forward: Decolonization

Lament serves as a crucial expression of worship because it is truth telling before God.

~Mark Charles, Navajo Indian theologian⁴

In December 1960, The United Nations adopted the [Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples](#). Also known as the 1960 Declaration on Decolonization, it affirmed the right of all people to self-determination and proclaimed that colonialism should be brought to an end. Followed by [targeted decades of implementation](#), in 1988, the UN called for the Eradication of Colonialism.

A process of decolonization is needed. But what does it mean to decolonize a country and people who have been living under colonial rule for decades, even centuries? If it is about reclaiming what was taken, then there are concrete steps to take to honor what once was. But correcting the sins of the past normally begins with repentance, followed by lamentation. These are theological steps that are part of truth telling before God. When the colonizer takes ownership of the abuses inflicted on the colonized, a healing process can begin.

A model of partnership and cooperation is the beginning of a long road to dismantling oppressive structures that only favor the rich and the powerful, including the church. Jesus empowers the poor, the weak, and the oppressed, and moving to a model based on the authentic gospel of Christ will also move us to that which dismantles colonized places and spaces.

Although Palestine does not show up on UN maps of [non-self governing territories](#), it does not have self-determination. It is now argued that Israel/Palestine is not a "conflict" but a settler colonial project. Palestine is a place and people under the control of another country. Since Israel controls the borders, resources, economy, and movements of Palestinians, they do not have self-determination or sovereignty. Palestine fits the UN parameters and the need to "eradicate colonialism."

Saving Lifta

I very much live with my own ancestors' past in Poland and the shtetls they grew up in. I recognize Lifta as a Palestinian shtetl. Something in me said that just like I am involved in preserving the history of Jews in Poland, if we are asking people for respect and understanding for our own elders [in Poland], we have to show similar respect for

[Palestinians'] elders.

~Menachem Daum, Chair, Lifta Society, a coalition to save the de-populated Palestinian village of Lifta, seen at right



from the film [Walking the Tightrope - Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the 21st Century](#) by the United Reformed Church, UK



photos are screenshots

⁴ Mark Charles and Soon-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2019).

What is the Endgame?

We Christians have a faith mandate to untangle the knots and find a solution that honors the Palestinians' need for justice and peace and Israel's need for security and peace. God demands of us faithfulness in this work.

~ Naim Ateek, Palestinian Liberation Theologian⁵

The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.

~ Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Justice is the ever-present theme that runs through liberation theology, but especially Palestinian Liberation Theology. As with any other people living under years of occupation and colonization, Palestinians have turned from calling for an end to the occupation to calling for human rights for all people, Israeli or Palestinian, be they in the West Bank, Gaza, or within Israel's 1948 borders.

To demonstrate a framework with justice for all parties, two experts, one Palestinian, one Israeli, offer their endgame visions of decolonization in two video episodes:

Jonathan Kuttab, Palestinian Christian, co-founder of Jerusalem's [al-Haq Center for Human Rights](#), and expert on International Law, offers a compromise "endgame" in his proposal, [Beyond the Two-State solution](#). Kuttab explains, "Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism have been at loggerheads for over a century. Some thought the two-state solution would resolve the situation... [but] the two-state solution is no longer viable." He suggests that any solution should be predicated on the basic existential needs of both peoples and formulates a way forward for a one-state solution that challenges both Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism.

[CLICK TO WATCH VIDEO #7:
BEYOND THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION
JONATHAN KUTTAB, PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN
AND INTERNATIONAL LAW EXPERT](#)

Israeli anthropologist Jeff Halper, director of The [Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions](#), is part of a group working on one "endgame" dubbed the ODS: One Democratic State. He argues that the only way out of a colonial situation is decolonization: the dismantling of Zionist structures of domination and control, and their replacement by a single democratic state in which Palestinians and Israelis forge a new civil society and a shared political community. He explains how this scenario is a good model for decolonization, and what decolonization would look like in Israel/Palestine.

[CLICK TO WATCH VIDEO #8:
DECOLONIZATION IS THE ONLY WAY
OUT OF COLONIZATION
JEFF HALPER, ISRAELI ANTHROPOLOGIST](#)

India & Palestine

see article:

[Kashmir and Palestine: The Story of Two Occupations](#)

The growing pockets of solidarity expressed for Kashmiris are heartening, as is the solidarity for Palestinian struggle.

~Goldie Osuri

These excerpts are from Osuri:

...Since the 1990s, through a decade of armed struggle against the Indian state, state violence in Kashmir has taken its toll...

Torture, rape, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and extra-judicial killings are widespread. These human rights violations are intricately linked to the denial of political sovereignty for Kashmiris.

...We desperately need to reconsider our West versus non-West understanding of the geography of colonialisms. The years 1947 and 1948 mark the creation of the nation-states of India and Israel. These years scar Kashmiris and Palestinians. Palestinians have been dispossessed of territory and many forced into exile. Kashmir was handed over from an unpopular ruler without the legitimacy of popular vote to the Indian state on October 26, 1947. A condition of that accession is the United Nations resolution of 1948 for referendum or plebiscite, never facilitated by the Indian state. Israel and India thus inaugurate the colonial occupations of Palestine and Kashmir.

...And so transnational solidarity and activism are urgent when almost every nation-state seems rogue. The small but growing pockets of solidarity expressed for Kashmiris are heartening, as is the international solidarity for Palestinian struggle. Joining the dots between the occupations of Kashmir and Palestine shows the need for a greater solidarity between these two sovereignty struggles.

Goldie Osuri is associate professor of sociology at the University of Warwick, UK. She is the author of *Religious Freedom in India: Sovereignty and (Anti) Conversion*.

[India Solidarity Ecumenical Network-Kairos Palestine for the World Week of Peace in Palestine-Israel](#)

A five minute video created by the India Solidarity Ecumenical Network(ISEN) - Kairos Palestine and ISEN partners on the whole question of Peace in Palestine. Partners:

- Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI)
- National Council of Churches in India (NCCI)
- The National Council of YMCAs
- The YWCA of India

[Kashmiri and Palestinian activists stand against Indian envoy at Harvard](#)

Indian envoy Sandeep Chakravorty spoke at Harvard University conference after urging Hindus to create settlements on Muslim land in Kashmir. Protesters gathered at Harvard Square and set up banners reading "Stand With Kashmir" and "Settler-colonialism is barbarity." In unison, they chanted for freedom: *Hum kya chaatai? Azaadi! Hai haq humaara. Azaadi! Pyaari, pyaari Azaadi! Mehki, mehki Azaadi!* (What do we want? Freedom! It is our right. Freedom! Lovely, lovely freedom! Sweet, sweet, freedom.)

⁵ Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008).

A Helping Hand

2012 excerpt from **Frontline** "India's National Magazine"

[Christian organisations in India give a fillip \[boost\] to the Palestinian resistance by highlighting the harsh realities of Israeli occupation.](#)

...But many pilgrims from India are unaware of these facts, if not indifferent. They undertake the 5,000-km journey with a **flawed understanding of history provided by the Christian interpretation of the Bible. Some even equate metaphoric Israel with political Israel.**

...Recently, these groups got a boost from some Christian bodies in India when consultations that they held in Chennai and Delhi dealt with the question of Palestine. The Chennai consultation called on Christians to differentiate between biblical Palestine and the current socio-political realities of Palestine. It urged Churches to use alternative tourism partners in Palestine so as to facilitate visits to the Palestinian side of the country too.

The consultation was organised by the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College, West Bengal, and the Church of South India in coordination with the Indian Solidarity Ecumenical Network-Palestine (ISEN-P)

...The consultation drew attention to the Kairos document brought out by the Churches in Palestine in 2009, which called on the worldwide Church not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin of the occupation imposed on us. ...The World Council of Churches (WCC) also encourages member-churches to avoid investments or other economic links to illegal activities on occupied territory

and to boycott settlement products.

...The meetings in Chennai and Delhi also drew parallels to the Indian context and how religion was used to justify the politically exclusive claims of the Hindutva ideology. Hindutva and Zionism are two ideologies that are strikingly similar in content and orientation. Both are ideological constructs that prompt and promote division and suspicion of the other. They have grown into forms of nationalism that are intolerant of pluralism and seek exclusivist identities for their followers, said a statement released by the NCCI in connection with the Delhi consultation. The participants also found commonalities in the experiences of Palestinians and the oppression of and discrimination against Dalits in India, particularly Christian Dalits, both by the Church and by the state. One of the primary concerns raised was the constitutional guarantees available to Dalits in general and Dalit Christians in particular but not accessible to them.

...That has been denied to them. There is a lot of similarity between India and Palestine in how the land being taken away from [natives] is destroying the lives of people and their livelihood, says Aruna Gnanadason, who was executive director for planning and integration in the general secretariat of the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

But will all this remain an academic exercise? If this process encourages Christian groups to rethink the way in which they look at the Palestinian struggle, I think we have a success story. We just have to keep this discussion on in our churches and in the community, she says. I think change will come and public opinion will grow.

[emphasis ours]

Zionism, White Supremacy, and the Palestinian Revolution

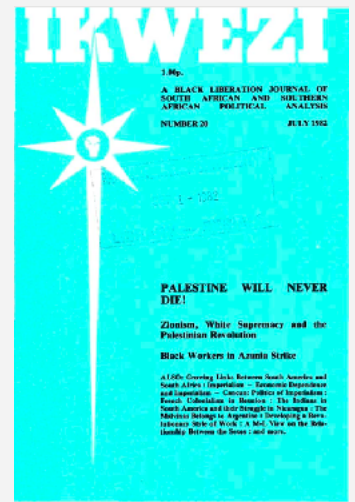
Excerpt from the archives of South African periodicals from the apartheid era. It is instructive to see the parallels with today's voices of Palestinians living under Israeli apartheid.

Israel is a Settler Colony:

Israel is no "special case." The Zionist state is an illegitimate settler colony occupying conquered Arab land, where Palestinians had lived and worked for thousands of years. From its inception, the Zionist movement put forward the Jewish settlement of Palestine as a vehicle for securing British colonial interests in the Middle East....

Zionism is White Supremacy:

Zionism is an integral part of white supremacist movement in the U.S. It is rooted in the defense of white privilege over colonized people. Zionists lay claim to Palestine based on the alleged Biblical right of Jews, the "chosen people" to return to the "promised land." This is markedly similar to the claim of racial and religious mission that Europeans have traditionally asserted to justify their violent conquest of Third World people. The U.S. version is "manifest destiny," the racist license to commit genocide against Native people occupy and conquer Northern Mexico, enslave and colonize Africans and then expand U.S. empire to Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines in 1898. Empire-building is always glorified by the conqueror. Romantic images of the American pioneer—good, fearless people who tamed the West—go hand in hand with the stereotypes of Native people, Mexicanos, and Blacks as primitive obstacles to



progress. Similarly Zionism projects Israeli pioneers as "agricultural geniuses who take arid land from lazy Arabs and make the desert bloom." For Zionism, the Palestinians simply do not exist as a nation. Israeli settlers assume the right to steal Palestinian land and water, to super exploit Palestinian labor, while all the time posing as the victims of Palestinian and Arab aggression.

Zionism is not National Liberation: It is in this light that we have to evaluate the trend among many progressive Jews towards acceptance of Zionism as a legitimate expression of Jewish identity. Zionism is not a national liberation movement! It has meant the plunder by Europeans of the land and resources of a Third World nation. It has meant the establishment of an outpost for Western imperialism in the Middle East. It means genocide and terror directed against the Palestinian people—the rightful owners of the land. This is why no national liberation movement in the world supports the Zionist state of Israel. This is why... Israel's closest allies are Western imperialist powers and their racist partners like South Africa....

Ikwezi: A Black Liberation Journal Of South African and African Political Analysis
July 1982
[Issue archived here](#)



South African Church Delegation Returns from Occupied Palestine

Kairos Southern Africa

Press Release from Jerusalem, December 2012

A group of twelve South African Christian leaders and members visited the occupied state of Palestine... We did not expect the extent to which Israel violates international laws to oppress the Palestinian people. Our exposure to East Jerusalem and the West Bank was overwhelming, one which traumatised us. However, even though we experienced that the Palestinians live in open-air prisons, they were still able to inspire us with their dignity and their commitment for a just peace based on human dignity for both themselves and the Israelis.

... We support the Palestinians' call for non-violent resistance. They ask for responsible tourism whereby pilgrims who visit Bethlehem and the Old City of Jerusalem also visit Palestinian Christians. They ask the world for economic, cultural and other forms of boycott, divestment and sanctions – a strategy that helped to end apartheid in South Africa.

Excerpted from [South African church delegation returns from occupied Palestine](#)

Being
South African,
it felt like
walking into
another apartheid
ambush.

Statement On Imminent Annexation Of Palestinian West Bank By Israel

Office of the South African Council of Churches

June 2020

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) is appalled at the latest developments in Israel, with the coalition government set to take decisive steps to kill off any prospect for a just peace with Palestine. While the nations of the world are self-absorbed, battling COVID19, the final chapter on the nightmare tale of Palestinian existence is being written in Israel with a new unity government with a not so new but bolder policy of the annexation of parts of the West Bank, already illegally occupied by Israel. This will make the already illegal Israeli settlements on the West Bank, to become "official" Israeli State territory. Such an annexation would unquestionably be in gross violation of international law.

This new reality facing the people of Palestine condemns to the scrap heap any prospect of a Palestinian State in the two-state solution under UN Resolutions, and all humanitarian protocols and humane considerations for justice and peace. In anticipation of this act of effectively abrogating of international law, the illegal Israeli settlers on the West Bank are already executing acts of violence against Palestinian citizens and destroying their olives and livestock. This goes against the best prophetic tradition and teachings of both Judaism and Christianity...

The annexation would leave the Palestinian people with even less rights than the disgraceful South African Bantustan – an unquestionable violation of international law and the premises of international humanitarian law. This cannot be countenanced in 2020, and it is morally reprehensible. The State of Israel should not be allowed to continue acting as an exception in terms of international law. The international community must be required to treat Israel like all other members of the international community and compel it to respect international law and the rights of all of humanity.

Excerpted from [Statement on Imminent Annexation of Palestinian West Bank by Israel](#)

Chapter Five

Resistance and Resilience: Palestinian Sumud

1. Political and Theological Resistance
 - Theological Foundations for BDS
 - BDS as Non-violent Resistance
 - Criticism of BDS as violent
 - Videos: Omar Barghouti on BDS
2. Invisible Resistance: Sumud
 - Daily Resistance - To Exist is to Resist
 - Examples of Sumud
 - The Arts and Literature, Food, Women's Role
 - Tent of Nation
 - Video: Culture is Sumud
 - Hope amidst Hopelessness

1. Political and Theological Resistance

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed.
~2 Corinthians 4

*If there is no struggle, there is no progress.... This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. **Power concedes nothing without a demand.** It never did and it never will....* The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.
~ Frederick Douglass, American abolitionist and former slave, 1857

Palestinians have been in a struggle for self-determination since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, first against the British Mandate, then against the state of Israel, created on their land, which was never “a land without a people, for a people without a land.” Even with the establishment of the United Nations after World War II, Palestinians have been in a struggle for their freedom and human rights.

Peace, Security and Justice are the foundations for human rights and the establishment of international law since the founding of the United Nations and the Declaration of Human Rights. International law reflects moral values and human rights, and the Palestinian right to resist occupation and erasure is enshrined in two documents: the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and the Fourth Geneva Convention and its subsequent protocols. It is enshrined in international law that “all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

Further, the United Nations declaration legitimized national liberation struggles, and the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom is no exception. The declaration states, “All armed action or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease in order to enable them to

exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete independence, and the integrity of their national territory shall be respected.

In 1982, during the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, the UN clarified and re-affirmed these rights and, in Resolution 37/43, “the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, national unity and liberation from colonial and foreign domination and foreign occupation by all available means, including armed struggle.” And in section 21, the resolution “strongly condemns the expansionist activities of Israel in the Middle East and the continual bombing of Palestinian civilians, which constitute a serious obstacle to the realization of the self-determination and independence of the Palestinian people.”



Palestinian Christians on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, walking the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, making their way to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Photo: Douglas Dicks

Theological Foundations for Economic Actions or BDS Boycotts, Divestment, Sanctions

More than anything, we in the churches need to stay on message that the BDS movement is a nonviolent moral movement to end longstanding suffering of the Palestinian people at the hands of a discriminatory system that continues daily to seize more and more land.... It's time for global churches to stop whitewashing racism by joining the BDS movement.... When we boycott injustice we express our love for Palestinian sisters and brothers, for Israelis, and for ourselves.

~David Wildman, Executive Secretary for Middle East, Human Rights & Racial Justice, Global Ministries United Methodist Church

In the [Global Kairos for Justice "BDS Toolkit,"](#) David Wildman of the United Methodist Church provides a thorough theological foundation for economic actions against injustice. Despite divisions and disagreements on BDS within communities of faith, it is hard to argue with the scriptures that Wildman lifts up as a means for understanding justice work and advocacy from one's Christian perspective.

If your brother or sister is being injured by what you consume, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you consume cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. ~Romans 14:15

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in work or speech, but in truth and action. ~John 3:17-18

But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. ~James 1:25

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. ~Romans 12:21

So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. ~Romans 14:16

Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, Oh House of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live! ~Ezekiel 18:31-32

Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great!... Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins." ~Revelation 18:2a, 4a

The Last Supper, by Sliman Mansour, showing Jesus and the disciples on the rooftop of a Palestinian home. Photo: Framke



BDS - Non-Violent Resistance

Besides the many ecclesiastical statements and confessions in support of non-violent resistance, there is also a broad-based secular movement in support of Palestinians rights. In 2005, Palestinian civil society called for upholding their rights to freedom, justice, and equality through non-violent economic actions: boycotts, divestment, and sanctions, which are the same actions that helped end apartheid in South Africa. [The BDS Movement](#) is a Palestinian-led movement which “upholds the simple principle that Palestinians are entitled to the same rights as the rest of humanity.” It is now a vibrant global movement made up of unions, academic associations, churches, and grassroots movements across the world. The BDS Movement urges nonviolent pressure on Israel until it complies with international law by meeting three demands:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality
3. Respecting, protecting, and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194

The BDS campaign notes “it is an inclusive, anti-racist human rights movement that is opposed on principle to all forms of discrimination, including anti-semitism and Islamophobia.”

Some have tried to equate the call for boycotts of Israel with the Nazi boycotts of Jewish businesses, saying that boycotts against Jews are in fact violent. This is a tactic to change the subject from Israeli human rights abuses. Not only are economic actions time-honored non-violent protest tools, but also, the movement is “anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and “is inclusive and [categorically opposes](#) as a matter of principle all forms of racism, including Islamophobia and antisemitism.”

Their [anti-racism guideline states](#):

[By] Adhering to the [UN definition of racial discrimination](#), the BDS movement does not tolerate any act or discourse which adopts or promotes, among others, anti-Black racism, anti-Arab racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, sexism, xenophobia, or homophobia.

The BDS campaign maintains that they target the Israeli state because of:

... [Israel's] responsibility for serious violations of international law, and the companies and institutions that participate in and are complicit in these Israeli violations. The BDS movement does not boycott or campaign against any individual or group simply because they are Israeli, let alone Jewish.... As the US organisation [Jewish Voice for Peace has explained](#), Israel claims to be acting in the name of all Jewish people but a rapidly increasing number of Jewish people of conscience feel compelled to make sure the world knows that many Jews are opposed to Israel's actions. Conflating opposition to apartheid Israel with anti-Jewish racism is both disingenuous, categorically false, and possibly antisemitic, as it deprives Jewish persons and communities of human diversity, reducing them to a monolith entirely represented by Israel. A call for boycotting Israeli or international corporations or institutions because of their complicity in grave human rights violations has nothing to do with any racist calls, historically or in the present, for boycotts targeting any community based on its ethnic, religious or other identity. It has everything to do with defending Palestinian rights under international law. Claiming otherwise amounts to intentional deception and/or anti-Palestinian racist propaganda that dismisses our right to engage in peaceful campaigns to achieve our inalienable rights under international law.

In 2016, the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) [issued a strong, clear statement](#) and approved support of the non-violent Palestinian struggle and recognized the danger of Christian Zionism. This was the first church in South Africa to commit to BDS, after which other South African churches followed.

For more details, see BDS Movement [homepage](#) and their [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page.

**CLICK BELOW TO WATCH VIDEOS BY
OMAR BARGHOUTI
CO-FOUNDER, BDS MOVEMENT:
[VIDEO #9: WHY BDS?](#)
[VIDEO #10: BDS IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT](#)**



Sumud:
Art as resistance
on the Separation Wall.
Photo: Usama Zoughbi

2. Invisible Resistance: Sumud

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?...For I am convinced that [nothing] in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God.

~ Romans 8: 35, 39 NRSV

Palestinian Christians take this affirmation of hope from Romans 8, trusting the presence of the Holy Spirit: From this vision derives the strength to be steadfast, remain firm and work to change the reality in which we find ourselves.

~ *Kairos Palestine*, section 3.2

The demand for the right of return for refugees and the right of Palestinians to resist their occupation and subjugation are enshrined in international law, a fact that is denied and violated by Israel and willfully overlooked by the rest of the world, but Palestinians continue to resist and struggle against Israeli apartheid and erasure. Besides political resistance, after decades of political struggle for these rights, there has always been another quintessentially Palestinian way to resist: *Sumud*.

Sumud is an Arabic word with many layers of meaning, particularly applicable to Palestinian life. It embodies the lived experience of being steadfast in the face of struggle and even hopelessness. It is a steadfast hope. *Sumud* is resilience, which moved into popular practice after the *Naksa*, the 1967 war, that led to the now on-going annexation and occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. *Sumud* is the living spirit of the Palestinians who refuse to yield their land, their culture, their stories and their history, even in the face of erasure and ethnic cleansing by the State of Israel. *Sumud* is refusing to yield to colonialism and its policies created to drive Palestinians out of their own land.

“Israelis Destroy, Palestinians Rebuild”

The Palestinian Bedouin village of Al-Araqib in the southern Naqab/Negev region has been demolished dozens of times by Israeli forces who say these villages “lack building permits” (which Israel refuses to grant). In 2019, after the 147th demolishing of the village, Palestinian journalist and analyst Yusef Alhelou wrote in *The New Arab*, “Israelis destroy and Palestinians rebuild. Palestinians have, sadly, become accustomed to endure such suffering. This defiance is an act of *Sumud* and a way of life.” This ongoing demolish/rebuild/demolish cycle is also prevalent in the West Bank across many other villages where it is common to be given 10 minutes to clear out a family’s possessions after a lifetime of living in a house that the Israeli forces have shown up to demolish with bulldozers. These demolitions are tactics designed to make life so unbearable that the Palestinians will give up and leave; they are a modern-day attempt at ethnic cleansing.

Read more about it in *The New Arab*:

[The living spirit of Sumud: Palestinians' form of resistance and steadfastness continues to grow stronger](#) Yusef Alhelou, 2019

Existence Is Resistance

Palestinians have learned through *sumud* —steadfastness— that existence is resistance. The decades-old military occupation, now complete with Kafka-esque checkpoints all over Palestine as portrayed in the Oscar-nominated 2021 short film, *The Present*, has taught Palestinians that enduring the abuses of the oppressor is a daily victory. Small daily victories add up to something big: remaining on the land and not being erased. Staying on the land and existing, keeps Palestinians and the struggle of memory alive.

Alain Epp Weaver of the Mennonite Central Committee, [illustrates the importance of memory](#), especially in Palestine where he worked for many years:

Milan Kundera, in his novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, writes that “the struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” In contexts where the victors seek to erase the textual and material traces of the vanquished and to obscure the bloody means by which victory was obtained, acts of memory can become political acts, disturbing and challenging dominant narratives. Thus, when Palestinians make pilgrimage to the ruins of their ancestral homes in places such as Bir’am, Mujaydil, and Suhmata, walking around the remaining stones and narrating the life of the village and its destruction by the Israeli military, they re-create landscapes from which Palestinian presence has been removed, and name as a *Nakba*, or catastrophe, what prevailing Israeli narratives call redemption.

In Palestine, it is not just historians whose job it is to fight against forgetting. Not only do Palestinians try to keep the memories of ethnically cleansed villages alive, as described by Weaver, but they are also engaged in keeping the present alive. By living their daily lives under an oppressive military occupation under apartheid conditions, they keep their culture from being erased, despite the efforts of the Israeli colonizers to appropriate everything, down to even their foods. For this reason, expressing themselves through food, art, dance, music, embroidery, and other culture, Palestinians have turned these everyday acts into political acts of resistance.

Kathleen Christison, a political analyst, speaks about Palestinian resistance:

Palestine remains, in its people and their memory and, most notably, in their resistance to erasure. Resistance is a critical act of hope, the essence of that struggle of memory against forgetting. Resistance is the very embodiment of the struggle of memory—memory of what was, of what might yet be—against the efforts of Power to erase and forget. Resistance fueled by memory and hope is in fact the Palestinians’ only weapon in the struggle.... The mere act of resistance, even in the absence of a clear reason for hope, nurtures and builds hope, for without resistance there is only surrender. Without memory, there is only surrender.⁶

⁶ [Why Palestine Matters: The Struggle to End Colonialism](#) (The Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2018)

But *sumud* is a difficult and uphill struggle. Jonathan Cook, British journalist living in the Galilee area of Israel reports about daily erasure, using a term very specific to Israeli erasure of the native story and culture. [He writes:](#)

The Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has coined the term ‘memoricide’ for Israel’s erasure of most traces of the Palestinians’ past after it dispossessed them of four-fifths of their homeland in 1948, what Palestinians term their Nakba, or Catastrophe. Israel did more than just raze 500 Palestinian towns and villages. In their place it planted new Jewish communities with Hebraicised names intended to usurp the former Arabic names. Saffuriya became Tzipori; Hittin was supplanted by Hittim; Muyjadil was transformed into Migdal.

And the Judaization and erasure continues in the West Bank and East Jerusalem at breakneck pace today.

Being an ancient community, Palestinians have a rich culture of art, music, dance, literature, film, and more, that has sustained them through decades of attempts of erasure. They have a hospitality-centered culture of welcoming visitors and will open their homes to share their meals, which are from one of the finest food traditions, as they have been in the crossroads of many empires who have left their mark. There is a vibrant tradition of “*tatreez*”, a specifically Palestinian cross-stitch embroidery, which is kept alive by women’s cooperatives and passed on from mother to daughter. Tatreez patterns signify a particular village, and women in each village strive to make a “*thobe*” in their village’s traditional pattern, to wear on their wedding and on special occasions.

Maintaining traditions such as *tatreez*, cooking their national dish, [Maqluba](#), for large gatherings, and [dancing the Dabka](#) at all family events are all examples of “invisible resistance.” Culture and art are the heart of Palestinian *sumud*, showing that indeed, “to exist is to resist.” Mirna Bamieh, an artist and cook who is fighting the appropriation and disappearance of Palestinian cuisine, displays *sumud* in reviving old food practices and forgotten dishes. (Seen in video on *sumud*.)

Tent of Nations An Example of Christian *Sumud*



Tent of Nations is an educational and environmental project in the form of a family farm, with a mission “to build bridges between people, and between people and the land,” this Palestinian Christian family brings different cultures together to develop understanding and promote respect for each other and the shared environment. They run educational projects at Daher’s Vineyard, their organic farm, located in the hills southwest of Bethlehem in Palestine. The farm is also a center where people from many different countries come together to learn, share, and build bridges.

Through their children’s summer camps, women’s empowerment project, and farm work camp, Tent of Nations (TON) is a welcoming place where they live by their motto, “We refuse to be enemies.” The work camps provide valuable support for the running of the farm. A key part of their work is to help individuals feel more connected to the land and the environment and to witness active and peaceful resistance on the ground, towards a greater understanding of the situation in Palestine. The Nassars, the family at TON, are a Christian family with historic connections to the land who are celebrating their 105th year in 2021. They are working towards becoming completely self-sustainable in regards to food, water, and electricity, with a vision to develop a vocational training and education center to provide a space for children and young people to learn about alternative energy, organic farming, and community building.

The farm is surrounded by Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank and is under constant attack and threat by the settlers around them. In what feels like an endless cycle of build and tear down, volunteers plant trees, settlers tear them out. But the Nassars “refuse to be enemies” with their neighbors and with the help of international volunteers who come to show solidarity, they continue to plant and harvest every year, with *sumud* and steadfast hope.



**Tatreez:
Palestinian
Embroidery**



Photos: instagram

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH VIDEO #11:
“HIDDEN” RESISTANCE:
SUMUD THROUGH CULTURE AND ART](#)

More On Palestinian Culture:
The Institute on Middle East Understanding (IMEU) on film, literature, art, music, cuisine, and sports see IMEU [culture page](#)

"How Girls Built a Library in the Gaza Strip" - A group of determined Palestinian girls are unlocking their future, one book at a time - UNICEF news, Mohammed Abu Sulaiman and Chris Niles, 18 December 2017.



Hope

amidst
Hopelessness



Above: graffiti on the Separation Wall in Bethlehem; below: Gaza artist Malak Mattar; right: family at Chicago rally for Gaza, May 2021. Photo: J. Bing





The Jezreel Valley, now the “bread basket” of Israel, is also known in Christian eschatology as the valley on which the Battle of Megiddo was fought and is the destined location of Armageddon. (Known in Hebrew as Yizre'el; יזרעאל; known in Arabic as Zir'ēn, زرعين) Photo: Framke

Kairos [South Africa] 30th Anniversary Statement: *Dangerous Memory and Hope for the Future*

Voices from the South, Karibu Foundation Newsletter, August 2015

The Karibu Foundation is an independent foundation that supports voices from the Global South that provide alternatives to the dominant paradigms of power, distribution, and development. This excerpt is from a special issue featuring the closing statement of the conference, in which the participants reflect on the dangerous memory of the South African Kairos. The statement challenges church and the global community on issues related to dignity and justice, and lifts up the struggles of Kairos movements that have grown in Central America, Europe, the U.S. Malawi, India, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Nigeria, and Palestine.

...In our time, we find that various sites of pain and struggle are joined in a Global Kairos, a shared quest for justice. In our discussions, we named our shared struggle against the scourge of this global empire of our times. Empire is an all-encompassing global reality seeking to consolidate all forms of power while exploiting both Creation and Humanity. The empire we face is not restricted by geography, tribe, language or economy. Empire is an ideology of domination and subjugation, fueled by violence, fed by fear and deception. It manifests itself especially in racial, economic, cultural, patriarchal, sexual, and ecological oppression. Empire deceptively informs dominant, white supremacist, capitalist paradigms controlling global systems and structures. Global empire is sustained by weapons and military bases (hardware)

along with ideologies and theologies (software)...

Since 1985, Kairos documents have expressed resistance to these and other realities in Central America, Europe, Malawi, India, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Palestine. In this conference, we were pleased to receive new Kairos documents from siblings in Swaziland, Nigeria, and the United States. The memory of unjust suffering in all contexts is dangerous to the purposes of empire.

In our listening to one another, we found that the context of suffering and pain created by Israel's oppression of Palestine contains all aspects of empire. Palestine is therefore a microcosm of global empire, a critical site of reflection that can bring experiences in other locales into sharper focus. Palestine does not eclipse other situations around the globe but instead intensifies the need for greater interconnection and mutual engagement.

All Kairos movements emerge from sites of grave injustice and deep pain. Every Kairos document is a cry to God and to the world. We confess, however, that we have served two masters and preached a gospel that requires nothing of the rich young ruler, even as we build empire on the widow's mite. We recognize that we and our church institutions have often closed our ears to our siblings' cries and drowned them out. In many cases, very little action has followed. The church has often been ambiguous and cautious in its response to human suffering. Sometimes, the church has engaged in active opposition to the liberating work of God present in communities of

resistance, increasing church complicity in structures of injustice. The church has often provided theologies of domination in the service of Empire. In our discussions, we found that the South African Kairos indictment of Church Theology is as relevant in our time as it was in 1985...

Imperial theology is at work in the continued oppression of Palestinians and the crisis now engulfing what is known as the Middle East. Analysis and rejection of the State Theology supporting Apartheid in South Africa was an essential element in exposing and resisting that sinful system. In its dominant forms, Zionism has been used to justify the dispossession, transfer, massacring, ghettoization and exploitation of the Palestinian people. Zionism has become an element within the dominant structures of empire. Politically, we call for an intensification of all economic and political pressures on the State of Israel, including the Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS). In our biblical interpretation, we strongly distinguish between biblical Israel and the modern State of Israel. Theologically, we declare to be heresy any Christian theologies that support the Zionism informing Israeli oppression...

All Kairos movements emerge from sites of grave injustice and deep pain. Every Kairos document is a cry to God and to the world.

[Read the full statement](#) at Karibu.no



Karibu Foundation
RESISTING AND REBUILDING

Chapter Six

Misleading Theologies and Ideologies

The Cross as God's Revolt against a Scandalous World

...We confess a cross that is a revolt against a scandalous world. In the cross we find the power of God who acts to annul the power of the forces of death; it is powerlessness confronting illegitimate power and emptying it.

~ Rev. Dr. Allan Boesak, working paper for the Confessing Circle, WCRC 03/2021 (see appendix C)

The Power to Resist and Courage to Hope

Caribbean WCRC Leaders Confront Empire

From the churches and leaders of Caribbean comes a call to eradicate theologies of domination and systems of violence.

The powerful combination of confrontation, solidarity, and hope arising from the network of WCRC churches of the Caribbean as they have encountered and resisted the power of Empire in theology and structural racism and exploitation speaks to the dynamics of Christian Zionism as experienced by Palestinians. Their handbook and study called the [Power to Resist and Courage to Hope: Caribbean Churches Living Out the Accra Confession](#), speaks directly to the issues of imperial theology and settler colonialism which also form the deep structure of Christian Zionism. Their work confronts the dynamics of Empire. This is the word brought from Caribbean preachers and leaders to the WCRC:

The Christian message or paradigm contravenes the way the Empire irradiates its purposes. This situation brings about difficulties because the Christian proposal does not follow either the same path or the logic of the Empire.

~Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega, "United in Search for a Fair Peace." p.75

When we note that throughout history imperialists have used violence to achieve their objectives of control over weaker peoples and nations, then it is rather contradictory for Christians to be on the side of imperialism. For Jesus made it quite incontrovertible that the kingdom he is commissioned to establish is not patterned after worldly styles of rule.

~Rev. Harold Sitahal "Where Empire Lies in My Experience" p. 66

We reject any claim of economic, political and military empire which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule.
~ The Accra Confession

The [Power to Resist and Courage to Hope](#) issues a call for a spirituality of resistance and transformation, which draws from the history of resistance of ancestral revolutionaries. It underlines the urgency for a vision that puts people at the centre, supports social well being, racial, ethnic and gender justice, exercise of freedom and cooperation among people, and honours creation.

"The Power to Resist" speaks to Action 55

Action 55 addresses negating theologies of empire in the context of Palestine. When the General Council sought to take action in response to the calls that Palestinian Christian organizations delivered to the global Christian community, the WCRC was directed to study "theology that has been employed to legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people, recognizing that such a study might result in the need for prophetic action...."

Christian Zionism originates in a similar EuroAmerican-centric theological movement as that identified by WCRC Caribbean churches, the one that came with white colonization and which, for both contexts, is used to justify geopolitical domination by mechanisms deemed scandalous by the Accra Confession. While all of Accra defines and condemns the suffering caused by the systemic sins of empire, two sections help focus the Accra Confession in the discussion of Christian Zionism:

- We recognize the enormity and complexity of the situation. We do not seek simple answers. As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire. In using the term "empire" we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.
~ [The Accra Confession, 11](#)
- We reject any claim of economic, political and military empire which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule.
~ [The Accra Confession, 19](#)



Pastor Mitri Raheb talks to children about Palm Sunday at Christmas Lutheran Church-Bethlehem. Photo: EAPPI/M. Whitton

“Christian Zionism” because the association of the theological ideology of Zionism with Christianity as a living faith tradition joins the Christian church to Zionist ideology. For these Christians, that connection is deeply problematic, personally in their faith and expressions of Christianity and because it seems to offer a legitimization of aligning Christian faith and practice with Zionism itself. Because the term exists in common global usage, for the purposes here, the term Christian Zionism will be used. But it is time to heed the resistance and its reasoning. Words matter!

We begin with listening to Palestinian Christians who have lived under the justifications and oppressions that are, in part, the result of Zionism’s continuing support of the occupation and pro-Israeli political policies. In an academic paper, a rising scholar and key leader from Kairos Palestine, Muna Nassar, identifies that a continuing challenge in most global discussion is permitting space for Palestinians to define themselves in their own contexts. This is a core Palestinian struggle to

exercise a legitimate right to their own self-determination and identity, “rather than a Eurocentric projection of the region and its people... Palestine has a long history of being colonized and imperialized.... Palestinians as a people have been witnessing life under occupation for almost all their lives under different empires and different regimes. However, all regimes have shared the same settler colonial mentality. It has been the battlefield for many superpowers.... Today the state of Israel belongs, represents and embodies the empire through its colonialist settler dominance of the other.”⁷

Palestinian theologians will be guiding the initial consideration of Christian Zionism in this handbook, drawing from several prominent voices from within that community whose teaching and writing arises within the ecumenical networks in which the WCRC participates. This section will draw heavily on the work of three prominent Palestinian theologians and pastors:

- The Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, an evangelical theologian, faculty member at [Bethlehem Bible College](#), and current senior pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Palestine. Dr. Isaac is the Founder of [Christ at the Checkpoint](#), a community of evangelical Christians who believe that following Jesus with integrity means that our lives are formed by our love for God, the teaching of the Bible, and a fearless life of discipleship in the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek is an Anglican priest, former Canon of St. George’s Cathedral, Jerusalem, and the Founder of [Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Center](#) in East Jerusalem. He has been called the “Desmond Tutu of Palestine.”
- The Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb is the Founder and President of [Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture in Bethlehem](#). Rev. Raheb served as the senior pastor of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and as the President of the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. He was elected in to the Palestinian National Council and to the Palestinian Central Council.

Dr. Ateek and Dr. Raheb are both authors of *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth*.

Christian Zionism

Let it be said plainly: Christian Zionism is imperial theology. Christian Zionism is a manifestation of Empire, a system of domination which oppresses Palestinians, led by powerful nations and supported by political interests fostered through a variety of pro-Israel and Zionist ideologies

Christian Zionism uses biblical interpretations and misleading theologies regarding the understandings of Land and Covenant and the promises to Abraham found in scripture. This use of the Bible is one dimension of what imperial theology looks like in the contexts of Palestine and is especially wounding to Palestinian Christians as members of the Body of Christ.

Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth directly confronts this misuse of scripture:

Therefore, we declare that any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, transform religion into human ideology and strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth. (*Kairos Palestine*, 2.4)

Centering Palestinian Voices about “Christian Zionism”

Kairos Palestine opens with a cry for hope that is grounded in prayer and reflection on scripture, and of deep faith in a God ever vigilant. Proclaiming God’s love for all, *Kairos Palestine* arises out of that Christian faith—and with deep conviction—“our sense of Palestinian belonging, bringing a word of faith, hope, and love.” *Kairos Palestine* speaks from the shared faith of Christians in the person and gospel of Jesus Christ, of a Creator God who embraces the world in an inclusive love and justice, of asserting the image of God exists in every person, and in affirming scripture as the Word of God to the universal church.

In some Christian Palestinian contexts, it should be noted here, there is a growing resistance to using the term

⁷ Muna Nassar, *The Othering of Christian Zionism*, unpublished manuscript in fulfillment of the M.Phil in the Department of Intercultural Theology and Inter-religious Studies, Trinity College, Dublin, Republic of Ireland (2021)



photo: Frankke

The “walled” city of Bethlehem

What Is Christian Zionism?

Over fifteen years ago, Dr. Naim Ateek described a Christian Zionist as “any Christian who, due to a particular understanding and interpretation of the Bible, supports the gathering of all Jews to Israel and their claim to the whole land of Palestine.”⁸ For Ateek, the alignment of Zionist ideology with misleading biblical interpretations is at the core of what creates what he calls “the humiliation and dispossession” of Palestinians at all levels of their existence.

In an essay written for *Zionism Unsettled*,⁹ Dr. Ateek declares, “Israel simply could not continue its mistreatment of the Palestinians without the support, encouragement, or silent acquiescence of the majority of Jewish Israelis and their Zionist supporters abroad.” Rev. Ateek then critiques two prominent forms of Zionism among Christians globally:

- In its fundamentalist Christian manifestation, Zionism functions to justify and support this ongoing humiliation and dispossession, not primarily for the sake of Jews, but for hastening the return of Christ and the apocalyptic “End Times” in which Jews will be given their last opportunity to convert to Christ and be saved, or be condemned to Hell.
- In its liberal Christian manifestations, Zionism serves as a “price-tag” theology providing Christians with a vehicle of repentance for the guilt accrued during centuries of European Christian anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust. It is the “price-tag” Christians need to pay.

The Palestinian Christians who authored the *Kairos Palestine* document go further in confronting these theological manifestations:

We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice. (*Kairos Palestine*, section 2.5)

Merging Political and Theological Beliefs

[Christian Zionism](#) merges theology and politics: “It teaches that the secular State of Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Christian Zionism believes that this fulfillment of Biblical prophecy began when European Jews started moving to Palestine in the 1800s, and continued as Israel became a nation in 1948. Christian Zionists believe that modern Israel is a continuation of Biblical Israel and therefore should enjoy special privileges. They declare that it is the responsibility of Christians to support the State of Israel and its policies.”

As a Palestinian theologian, Dr. Isaac points out that “...we need to look at this movement as more than simply a group of Christians with certain biblical and theological beliefs about Israel and Jews. It is a political movement—a movement that uses the Bible to justify and legitimate Israel’s position of power, and by association, their own power, at the expense of Palestinians.”¹⁰

Basic Assumptions of Christians and Israel

“When it comes to the church, in general, and how the Christians around the world look at the state of Israel today, these four principles summarise how many Christians, if not most Christians, understand the Bible in relation to the situation today. These are what I call the main assumptions of Christian Zionism. But please note that these assumptions are sometimes shared by many, your day-to-day Christians in the pews who might not even realise that this is part of that Christian Zionism agenda”. [Rev Dr Munther Isaac – Christian Zionism as Imperial Theology](#):

- The covenant of Abraham and the promises related to it continue with the Jewish people today and, by association, with the state of Israel.
- The creation of Israel in 1948 was a divine act, a fulfillment of prophecy, and/or a sign of God’s faithfulness to the Jewish people.
- If you bless Israel, God will bless you. If you stand against Israel, God will curse you (they base this on Gen. 12:1-3).
- The historical land of Palestine belongs to the Jewish people as an eternal possession. The Jewish people have a divine right to the Promised Land.¹¹

⁸ Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2020)

⁹ *Zionism Unsettled: A Congregational Study Guide* (Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church [USA], 2018), 56.

¹⁰ Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall*, 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

Dr. Isaac directly challenges these assumptions:

The idea that the creation of Israel is a sign to God's faithfulness is very common in Protestant churches, not necessarily just evangelical churches. And again, I must ask, what is this telling me as a Palestinian? Because if the creation of Israel is a sign of God's faithfulness to the Jewish people, it is a sign of God's what exactly to the Palestinians? Does that mean that God is against us? Is God judging us? That begs the question that many Palestinians ask. Where is the gospel, the good news of Christianity to the Palestinians if what happened to us in 1948 is simply a divine act.

...Another assumption is that, I'm sure you've heard it, and it's very common, for example, in North America, but I've seen that it's common, and I travel to speak on this topic, and always met people who believe this, whether



in East Asia or in Africa, or Latin America, the idea that if you bless Israel, God will bless you. But if you stand against Israel, God will curse you. Now they base this on Genesis 12: 3, where the address is actually about Abraham, it doesn't mention his descendants, and the Bible reads this as a sign of God's blessings to

the people through Christ.

One of the functions of imperial theology is erasure, that is the cancelling, removal, and denial of the realities of indigenous peoples and their culture, their identities, their sense of homeland. Dr. Isaac goes on to challenge this kind erasure in Christian Zionist theological assumptions:

But I don't want to go into the biblical text and analyse this assumption, but to simply ask, as a Palestinian again, and I continue to bring it back to the question of how does this come across to us as Palestinians, because now you're telling me that the land of my ancestors where I've been born, and my ancestors have been born, and we've been here for hundreds, if not thousands of years, somehow is not ours. And so we are taking someone else's land, and even worse, we're standing against God. The idea of a divine right, puts me in opposition to God.

And you see, if you ask many Christians around the world, do you believe God gave the land to the Jews? They say "yeah, definitely." And again, I ask, so what about us Palestinians? What's missing in all of this narrative is precisely the Palestinian element. We don't exist.

~Rev Dr Munther Isaac – [Christian Zionism as Imperial Theology](#)¹²

Engaging Romans 9-11 from a Palestinian Christian perspective

In a project for the WCRC, Palestinian theologian Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac states:

Whatever interpretation is made of the covenant theology found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, chapters 9-11, two things are clear. First the hope of redemption belongs to God's new era or time, not human time or vision. Equally clear, whatever interpretation may be given to Romans 11:26

About the saving of Israel, Dr. Isaac unequivocally states:

...Regardless of which interpretation one follows, there is one thing that cannot be disputed: *saved* in Paul's theology can only mean "coming to faith in Christ" and not a political restoration. It is about joining the church, not obtaining a state in the Middle East.*

There are churches in the wider communion of the WCRC that condemn a number of theological views found within global Christian Zionism movements in the churches as not only antisemitic, but as erroneous readings of scripture that defile Christ's gospel of love and justice. Christians are commanded to love all people as the neighbor, and this is particularly so for Jews as neighbors, fellow siblings in the family of Abraham. For some of those churches, these are viewed as a violation of adopted creeds, and in that sense a corruption of the standards of Reformed confessions and practice.

Rev. Dr. Mark Rich addresses both the territorial theology and the antisemitic strains of Christian Zionism's merging of biblical Israel and modern Israel in this way:

Modern Israel has been made in the image of all other nations of the earth, and some Israelis prove that by avidly oppressing their Palestinian cousins. But is that the will of God being done, or just the playing-out of the modern curse of Christian nationalism, with Christian Zionists providing the accompaniment? Is that what God has made humanity and Israel for? Is this really God at work? Jesus' gospel is the eschatological return to that formative unity and sharing of God's creation, abolishing death and the tools and systems of death.**

* Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall*, 123. Italics are authors'. For an extended discussion on the Romans passage, see Chapter 6: "My Jewish Neighbor."

** Mark Rich, "Describing Christian Zionism as Heresy," Cynthia Holder Rich, ed., *Christian Zionism in Africa* (Lanham, Maryland: Fortress Academic, 2021), 121.

A Political Movement with Political Goals

Christian Zionism has clear political goals that find expression in how Israel invests diplomatic and financial resources in persuading individual Christians, international Christian organizations and local charities, world ecumenical councils and denominations, as well as politicians in Africa, Latin America, the United States, and even such areas as Southeast Asia and Asian countries with minority Christian populations, to support the aims of the Israeli government. Dr. Isaac summarizes these goals, based on the work of Stephen Sizer. At the video linked below, please watch Dr. Isaac further outline these aims, which include:

- Support and defend the State of Israel
- Support and finance Jewish immigration to the land
- Support the settlements—politically and financially
- Oppose and lobby against the division of Jerusalem
- Some support the re-building of the temple
- Most oppose the peace process.

Dr. Isaac explains:

We are talking about billions of dollars coming from churches, not to support the cause of the gospel, Christian charities, peace initiatives, reconciliation efforts or even the mission of the church in the Holy Land. We are talking about billions of dollars given to the Israeli army and in support of illegal Israeli settlements, built on land confiscated by force from Palestinian families (including Palestinian Christian families). Those settlements are commonly viewed as one of the biggest obstacles to a peace resolution between Palestinians and Israelis.¹³

While Christian Zionism has become a global movement in churches, rooted in certain interpretations of scripture, covenant promises, and land, it is also a political movement supported financially and in international para-church organizations through funding that flows through the modern State of Israel. These funds are directed to encourage the prominence of Christian Zionism in churches and are also given to support evangelical Christians in national political office or running as candidates, to encourage them to align with the aims of the nation-state of Israel. One of the most powerful organizations of political allies who are part of the global campaigns to elicit approval of Israel's political and social aims in the Palestine Israel region is the [Israel Allies Caucus](#), a network of over 50 parliamentary caucuses globally. It uses what is called "[faith-based diplomacy](#)" to support the alignment with political—and notice theologically supported—justification of Israel in its international reach toward political support from Christians.

Dr. Naim Ateek told a conference of Canadian Friends of Sabeel that he considers Christian Zionism heresy. *The Anglican Journal* [reported](#)

Theologically, Ateek said he objects to Christian Zionism—which he labelled “a Christian heresy”—on several grounds. It violates Christ's message of love, justice and peace, he said. Its prophecy of the world ending in violence contradicts the view of a loving and merciful God. And it accepts, without question, a tribalism evident in some parts of the Old Testament that is based on racial exclusivity.

Christian territorial theology, too, is Christian imperial theology. As Dr. Allan Boesak writes, “We speak much against Empire.... We are powerful and are responsible for much exclusionary violence around the world.”¹⁴

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH VIDEO #3:
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL
REV. DR. MUNTHUR ISAAC](#)



Old City, Jerusalem. Photo: Framke

¹³Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall*, 5.

¹⁴Working paper for WCRC Confessing Circle, March 2021, see appendix C

Imperial Theology Found in Characteristics of Christian Zionism

The global churches of the WCRC should begin listening to those most affected by the beliefs and practices of Christian Zionism. The call of the Confession of Belhar means “that the church is called to stand where God stands: namely with the poor and oppressed, and against *any and all* forms of injustice.” We are, then, called to stand with Palestinians, particularly Palestinian Christians and hear their call for justice as our own, in our churches and in the WCRC.

In 2017, the World Communion of Reformed Churches invited Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb to teach and to provide the regional context of Palestine to the meeting of the General Council. The videos from his theological presentations reveal how imperial theology forms the core of Christian Zionism. In his paper, “[Palestinian Christian Reflections on Christian Zionism](#),”¹⁵ Rev. Raheb cites the following prominent characteristics of Christian Zionism in contemporary global Christianity and Israeli state politics:

- Historically speaking, Christian Zionism is part of European Colonial history and theology:

The seeds for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were sown over one hundred and fifty years ago in England. These seeds would not have borne fruit if they would have not fallen in that specific place (Great Britain) at that specific time (mid-nineteenth century). Great Britain was the colonial empire of its time and fifty years later it was the empire with a mandate over Palestine. And the mid-nineteenth century was the time because it was the era of a flourishing Christian Zionism and European Nationalism.

- Politically speaking, Christian Zionism [has much in common with the dominant Israeli political ideologies that developed after the 1967 war]:

...the native Palestinian populations were seen as the Canaanites whose land had to be occupied by Israel.... The 1967 victory had a huge impact on Christians worldwide. The David and Goliath myth was circulating among many Christian groups not only in the West.... The victory was seen by many as a divine intervention. The myth of Israel bringing the “desert to bloom” became widespread in church circles, and a vast number of Christians thought that they were seeing “divine history” unfold before their eyes.... They believe that all of historic Palestine has to be and remain as part of the State of Israel.

- Economically speaking, Christian Zionism is a booming business:

...a good chunk of Christian Zionist support to Israel goes into bringing Jews from Russia to Israel, or into supporting the building of settlements in the West Bank, or to buy more weapons so as to be ready for Armageddon.

- Christian Zionism is obsessed with a God who is revealed as victorious warrior in Armageddon:

They are interested in them only as part of their divine plan, an instrument in God's end time scenario. In that sense Christian Zionist ideology is not only islamophobic, but also anti-semitic. Christian Zionists are not interested

to relate to any group of people, or to listen to the suffering of others, but are only interested in seeing God's plan implemented at any cost.

- The Israelis push to use Christian Zionism to erase human rights violations and silence Palestinian Christian voices and then replace them with Christian Zionism globally:

The separation wall gave a face to the Israeli Occupation. The rapid expansion of settlement in the West Bank is turning even the closest allies of Israel against it.

According to International Law, International Court of Justice, The Geneva Convention, the Human Rights Charter what Israel does in the occupied territory is illegal and a violation of those laws and rights. Israel is becoming more and more isolated. Calls for BDS are increasing. It is becoming more and more difficult to defend the policies of Israel.

- In this context, Christian Zionism becomes very important. This movement doesn't care what the human rights charter is stating, because the divine rights supersede all other rights. International laws are not important because the divine laws are to be followed. In such a context, Christian Zionists might be the last allies that Israel has. They might be the only group outside the Israel-Right that not only defends the Israeli violations, but who can promote and support them. No wonder that the Netanyahu government is trying to promote the Christian Zionists allies to become the sole voice of Christianity abroad. Especially in the last two years, there is an attempt by the current Israeli government, to silence the voice of the native Palestinian Christian leaders, and to replace it with that of Christian Zionists.



Old City, Jerusalem. Photo: Framke

¹⁵Mitri Raheb, “[Palestinian Christian Reflections on Christian Zionism](#)” Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture, January 2014

Christian Territorial Theology Is Antisemitic

Rev. Dr. Gary Burge, a New Testament scholar in the Reformed tradition, in his landmark study of the New Testament understandings of land and covenant, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology*, calls the apocalyptic Christian Zionist theo-political dynamic "Christian territorial theology."

In the construction of this territorial perspective, Christian Zionism moves beyond the arenas of biblical interpretation and covenant to locating eschatological fulfillment of these understandings of biblical prophecy in the modern state of Israel, as the final stage of their unfolding. Burge writes:

It is a narrative that promotes a theological cycle centering on the land. And within this cycle there are three principal movements: land promise, land loss, and land recovery. And most importantly—and this is what makes Christian Zionism unique—they believe that this cycle has begun to operate again today.... Christian Zionists have attached to this territorial cycle an eschatology. This is the final cycle. And when it is complete, the end of history will come.¹⁶

A key piece of this theology is that the Jews of the world must be in Israel for the end-times to be initiated, at which point they will be confronted with the need to convert to Christianity or to perish eternally. In other words, this part of Christian Zionism—the return to Israel as Zion—regards Jews and Judaism in operational terms. Christian Zionism, while seeming to embrace Jews, financing and supporting Jewish

return to Israel, operates on a doctrine legitimizing the final destruction of the Jewish people. This is the great battle of Armageddon, and the Zionist Christians believe it is their responsibility to be catalysts to Jewish return to the land. This understanding by such Christians of biblical prophecy and sustained by huge donations enables Jews from many corners of the globe to "return to Israel," called by Jews "making *aliyah*." These contributions are justified by the kind of biblical interpretation that exploits Jews by believing that by paying for their resettlement in Israel, Christians are participating in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

For more info, see:

"[How Christian Evangelical Money and Biblical Prophecy Are Driving Immigration to Israel](#)," Judy Maltz and Allison Kaplan Sommer, *Ha'aretz*, March 8, 2021

Once the proud preserve of Jewish Diaspora organizations, *aliyah* funding is increasingly being 'outsourced' to deeply devout Christian groups with equally deep pockets and their own motives to encourage the ingathering of the exiles.

See also:

"[Why I am not a Christian Zionist](#)," by Gary M. Burge, who joined the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary in 2017 after teaching at Wheaton College for 25 years.

Old City, Jerusalem. Photo: Framke



¹⁶ Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology* (Ada, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 117.

Zionism

A Brief Overview of the History of the Political Ideology of Israel

Adapted and excerpted with permission from *Zionism Unsettled, A Congregational Study Guide*, chapters 1-3, by Rev. Dr. Walt Davis and Dr. Pauline Coffman
Published by The Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA), 2014

Our fundamental assumption is that no exceptionalist claims can be justified in our interconnected, pluralistic world.
~Zionism Unsettled, A Congregational Study Guide

The Zionist solution to the Jewish question has created a whole new set of problems, which it has so far proved incapable of solving.
~Adam Shatz¹⁷

All three Abrahamic religions claim to be exceptional in some ways. exceptionalism is the belief that “my people” are unusual, unique, or special. On the positive side, all three Abrahamic religions have a special calling to be a blessing for all the nations. Rabbinic Judaism coined the term *tikkun olam*, (repairing or healing the world) to express this call. On the negative side, exceptionalism exempts the chosen from the need to conform to normal rules, laws, or general principles that we use to hold other peoples accountable.

Exceptionalist beliefs have a sacred quality and lead to exceptionalist attitudes and actions involving double standards in behavior and often in law. When holding political

Political Zionism means different things to different people

- The nationalist movement to create in Palestine “a Jewish and democratic state”
- “The establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”
- “The first manifestation of the approach of our redemption.”
- “An ideology of Jewish nationalism. Referring primarily to the establishment and building up of a politically independent Jewish state in the historic land of Israel.”
- “The national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.
- “The preoccupation with Jewish vulnerability and suffering [i.e., ‘our eternal victimhood’], and the sense of entitlement to the land [of Israel].”
- Privilege allotted to one group and denied to other groups based on ethnicity and/or religion, i.e., state-sponsored ethnic discrimination and ethnic cleansing.

Each of these definitions has a different emphasis and implies a different historical and ideological understanding of Zionism.



Settlers have moved into this Palestinian home in Jerusalem Photo: Framke

power, each Abrahamic faith has been susceptible to the merger of theological and ethical exceptionalism that puts believer-insiders above the law they expect nonbeliever-outsiders to obey.

Christian exceptionalism has often taken the form of antisemitism, the theological support of slavery followed by Jim Crow segregation, as well as ethnic cleansing and genocide against American Indians.

Zionism is the political ideology of the modern state of Israel. The dark side of Zionist exceptionalism today is the ethnic cleansing and land confiscation of Palestinians, justified by an appeal to God’s will derived from biblical texts.

For Israel, the situation on the ground has trended inexorably toward territorial expansion and subjugation of the Palestinian people by military occupation. At the same time, from the Palestinian perspective, the trend has been growing dispossession and deprivation of basic human rights.

Alongside these negative developments, a positive trend is being seen: contemporary voices are breaking the taboos that have stigmatized and punished critical examination of Zionism and its consequences. Palestinians, who have as a people experienced Zionism as a *Nakba*, or “Catastrophe,” have struggled since 1948 to be recognized as victims of

¹⁷ Adam Shatz, ed., *Prophets Outcast: A Century of Dissident Jewish Writing About Zionism and Israel* (New York: Nation Books, 2004).

Zionism, the ideological movement established to remedy Jewish victimization.

Nur Masalha, a Palestinian historian (and Israeli citizen), echoes a widely felt Palestinian complaint about reflexive Western acceptance of the Zionist framework when he writes, “Upholding the Zionist narrative of denial is still seen in the West as neutral, while anything more critical is seen as biased.”

Masalha continues, “Zionism was (and remains) not just about the colonization of Palestinian land, but also about colonizing minds—Jewish, Arab, European, American.” Perhaps it is not surprising that Masalha, like many Palestinians, identifies Zionism as a root cause of the ongoing struggle for self-determination between Palestinians and Israelis.

What is unexpected is the number and diversity of Jews who have chosen to speak out about the consequences of Zionism—despite enormous communal pressure not to do so. It is a promising development that in our own time these diverse Jewish voices, with increasing confidence and assertiveness are re-examining the role of Zionism in shaping the history of the contested tract of land known by its inhabitants as both Palestine and Israel.

In a 2009 *Los Angeles Times* article, “Zionism is the Problem,” journalist Ben Ehrenreich echoed the opinion of his numerous Jewish and non-Jewish antecedents—but, importantly, in a major US daily newspaper. For several decades now, Ehrenreich wrote,

To question not just Israel’s actions, but the Zionist tenets on which the state is founded, has ...been regarded an almost unspeakable blasphemy. Yet it is no longer possible to believe with an honest conscience that the deplorable conditions in which Palestinians live and die in Gaza and the West Bank come as the result of specific policies, leaders or parties on either side of the impasse. The problem is fundamental: Founding a modern state on a single ethnic or religious identity in a territory that is ethnically and religiously diverse leads either to politics of exclusion... or to wholesale ethnic cleansing. Put simply, the problem is Zionism.¹⁸

Zionism is a colonizing
adventure, and
therefore it stands or falls
by the question of armed
force.

-Ze’ev Jabotinsky

Herzl and the Need for a Jewish State

On January 5, 1895, Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), a Viennese journalist, watched the show trial at L’École Militaire in Paris as Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew on the general staff of the French army who had been falsely accused of treason, was stripped of his military rank and banished to Devil’s Island as a mob cried “Death to the Jews.” Shocked to the core by the intractable antisemitism of Europe, Herzl set off on a personal quest that would lead to the creation of the state of Israel half a century later. In 1896 Herzl wrote *Der Judenstaat* [*The Jewish State*], calling for the creation of a national homeland for all Jews. The following year he convened the first international Zionist Congress, which began the implementation of this goal by establishing the World Zionist Organization. The central tenets of Herzl’s Zionism were:

- Antisemitism is a permanent, endemic, and ineradicable element of European cultures;
- Jewish life and culture in the *Galut* (exile) is distorted, producing passive, servile, and self-deprecating masses;
- Only a Jewish state can provide safety and wellbeing for Jews and reverse the negation of the *Galut* by creating a “New Jew”;
- Therefore, once a Jewish state is created, Jews should eventually immigrate to it, thus bringing an end to antisemitism.

From the earliest days of political Zionism prominent Jewish writers have opposed it. In his own day, Herzl’s greatest opponent, Ahad Ha’am (a cultural Zionist), predicted that the pursuit of an independent state would erode “the true spirit of Judaism” (the ethical teaching of the Hebrew prophets) and “beget in us a tendency to find the path of glory in the attainment of material power and political domination.” Later on, other cultural Zionists, including Rabbi Judah Magnes (one of the founders of Hebrew University in Jerusalem) and social philosopher Martin Buber, would join Ha’am in warning that moral degeneration might be the end result of Jewish nationalism and the desire to become “like all the nations.”

Political Zionism pulled off its first major diplomatic victory during World War I when, in 1917, Zionist leaders Chaim Weitzmann and Nahum Sokolow persuaded the British government to issue a declaration favoring “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” Britain’s motives were mixed. Both Prime Minister Lloyd George and Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, the declaration’s writer, had been influenced by Christian Zionism, which advocated the return of Jews to Palestine. At the same time, the emigration of Jews from Britain would please British antisemites who wished to be rid of what they called “the Jewish Problem.”

While Balfour’s letter to Lord Rothschild prescribed that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine,” it did not contain any pledge of political rights for either Jewish or non-Jewish communities. The Palestinian Arabs were not even mentioned by name and their leaders denounced the Balfour Declaration, stating “...we always sympathized profoundly with the persecuted Jews and their misfortunes in other countries..., but there is wide difference between such sympathy and the acceptance of such a nation... ruling over us and disposing of our affairs.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Ben Ehrenreich, “Zionism Is the Problem,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 2009.

¹⁹ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-1998* (New York City: Vintage, 2001), 76.

Jabotinsky and Military Force

Russian-born Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky (1880 - 1940) rejected the idealism of socialist Labor Zionism. In 1925 he founded an opposition party, the Revisionists, forerunner of today's Likud Party, which would eventually be elected to power in Israel in 1977 under the leadership of Menachem Begin. (The current Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, also belongs to the Likud Party and strongly identifies with the Revisionist tradition.) Jabotinsky's most influential essay, *The Iron Wall*, was written in 1923, long before the Nazi genocide would provide Zionists with the fundamental rationale for establishing a nation state in Palestine as a haven for the Jewish people with little regard for the impact on the existing Palestinian population and culture. No colonization can succeed by ignoring the "iron law" of armed force, Jabotinsky believed. "That is morality for you," he asserted. "Zionism is a colonizing adventure, and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force. It is important to build, it is important to speak Hebrew, but unfortunately, it is even more important to be able to shoot..."²⁰

Israeli scholar Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi summarizes Jabotinsky's position:

The Labor Zionist attitude towards the natives and their predicament was one of denial. The right-wing approach, developed by Jabotinsky, stated bluntly that the conflict was real, that dispossession was real and inevitable, but it was justified to fulfill Zionist plans.... [Its] attitude was one of defiance and confidence. The natives would have to accept their fate—namely an historical defeat. Right-wing Zionism has been quite open, even proud, about the colonialist role of Zionism and about its inherent violence vis-à-vis the natives of Palestine.... Jabotinsky... did not play games nor mince his words. He called a spade a spade and Zionism armed colonialism. Jabotinsky never denied the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians. On the contrary, he made it into one of the basic assumptions of his political program.²¹

Jabotinsky's fundamental doctrine of military force is firmly embedded today not only in the Israeli Defense Forces, the Likud Party, and other parties on the right, but also in other more centrist parties as well.

In November 1947 the United Nations adopted a plan to partition Palestine into areas designated for a Jewish state and an Arab state. Each state would consist of both Jewish and Arab citizens, but tragically no provision was made for an interim United Nations military force to protect the rights of the minorities during the transition. As expected, war broke out between Jewish and Arab forces when Israel declared independence in May 1948. Two months prior to independence, Ben-Gurion (considered a founding father in Israel) and his advisors had already adopted the Haganah's Plan Dalet, which called for the systematic and total expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland.

From December 1947 until the armistice between Israel and its Arab neighbors in 1949, this strategy of ethnic cleansing would force all the inhabitants from more than 500 Palestinian villages, totally and deliberately destroy the structures in 400 Palestinian villages, create 750,000 Palestinian refugees, kill

most who resisted the dispossession of lands and homes, and prevent the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes after the cessation of hostilities.

Ben-Gurion and the Bible

Although he was a thoroughgoing secularist, Israel's first prime minister, Ben-Gurion (born in Poland, David Grün, 1886-1973) also contributed to the sacred character of Israeli civil religion by interlacing nationalism with Biblical literalism. He "regarded the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine as a reflection of the biblical stories of exodus from exile in Egypt and the conquest of the land of Canaan.... '[The Bible is] the single most important book in my life,' he declared."²² From the early 1950s until his retirement from public life in 1963, he conducted Bible studies every two weeks in the Prime Minister's residence or his kibbutz in the Negev, lecturing to a wide range of political leaders and scholars. In his memoirs Ben-Gurion noted the role of religious motivation in the recruitment of Jewish immigrants to Israel:

Without a messianic, emotional, ideological impulse, without the vision of restoration and redemption, there is no earthly reason why even oppressed and underprivileged Jews... should wander off to Israel of all places.... The immigrants were seized with an immortal vision of redemption, which became the principal motivation of their lives.²³

Tellingly, Ben-Gurion's favorite book of the Bible was Joshua, which recounts the Israelite conquest of the land, the annihilation of the Canaanites, the settlement of the land by the twelve tribes of Israel, and a ceremony in which all the people promise to be faithful to their covenant with God. In this manner, the secular Ben-Gurion appropriated the biblical stories for a nationalistic civil religion that would later buttress the expansionism of both religious and secular settlers after the Six-Day War in June 1967.

Like Herzl before him, Ben Gurion was sensitive to world opinion and carefully avoided public statements about "the Arab problem," namely how a Jewish homeland would compromise the rights of native Palestinians. However, during the Arab Revolt of 1936-39, caused by Palestinian fears of dispossession and Jewish dominance, Ben Gurion asked Elimelech Avnir, the Haganah military commander in Tel Aviv, to draw up guidelines for the complete takeover of Palestine should the British relinquish their governing role. At a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive in June 1938, Ben Gurion declared, "I am for compulsory transfer; I do not see anything immoral in it."²⁴

The growing Nazi threat to European Jewry contributed to Ben-Gurion's willingness to sacrifice Arab rights in Palestine. A decade later, Ben-Gurion would adopt a draconian plan to rid the new state of as many Palestinians as possible.

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EPISODE FROM ZIONISM UNSETTLED:
HISTORICAL MYTHS, OBSTACLES TO PEACE
—A HISTORY TALK BY PROF. ILAN PAPPE—

²⁰ Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *Original Sins: Reflections on the History of Zionism and Israel* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Interlink Publishing Group, 1998), 103.

²¹ Ibid.

Paul Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 64.

²³ Ben-Gurion, Israel, 1971, Cited by Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 45.

²⁴ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2007), xi.

The Dream vs. The Reality

“If you will it, it is no dream,” Theodor Herzl, architect of modern Zionism, declared at the end of his 1902 novel, *Old-New Land*. But in 1896 when he first proposed a Jewish state, most people thought he was nothing more than a dreamer.

The Zionist movement that Herzl launched gained much of its support as a response to the history of humiliation and shame engendered by European persecution and Christian antisemitism and from the fear that no Jew anywhere would ever be secure without a Jewish state. The Holocaust/Shoah reinforced this fear, turning it into a central Zionist doctrine. The new state of Israel acted on this fear-based doctrine in 1950 by passing the Law of Return, granting the right of citizenship to any Jew who immigrates to Israel. Successive Israeli governments have manipulated this fear for political advantage both in domestic and foreign policy issues.

The Zionist movement, like other colonial movements, required collective denial of what was being done to Palestinians, a denial that may even be characterized as self-inflicted blindness. The major American Jewish organizations bear considerable responsibility for spreading this fear and blindness by their uncritical support for Israel over the years, especially since 1967. American journalist and Russian immigrant I.F. Stone wrote in 1975 about Zionism’s psychological act of denial seems to apply to these organizations as well:

Jewish life [in Palestine] went on as if the Arabs weren’t there. In a profound sense, the *yishuv*, the Jewish community, had to pretend that the Arabs weren’t there, or confront ethical problems too painful to be faced....²⁵

Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu chaired the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission that helped his nation begin a process of healing after half a century of brutal apartheid. He described this process of healing in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*. In Israel/Palestine, as a step that must be undertaken before forgiveness can begin: No Future Without Moral Truth. Speaking moral truth will require both courage and compassion. The time has come for us all to name the Christian theological and ethical failures that gave rise to Zionism, as well as the Jewish theological and ethical failures that Zionism has produced.

Civil Religion

In the Preface to the German edition of *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews, and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land*, the Jewish American psychologist Mark Braverman observes that the civil religions of Nazi Germany and Apartheid South Africa were both supported by state churches:

The civil religion of Zionism developed in the late 19th century, albeit non-theistic in origin, was ultimately embraced by the Orthodox Jewish establishment in Israel, and has now become a part of the religious identity and sensibility of Jews worldwide along a broad continuum of theology and practice, from progressive to conservative.



Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem. After several generations, the dwellings are no longer temporary tents. Photo: Framke

Reconciliation Process

In his groundbreaking work, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, Donald Shriver uses three case studies to illustrate four elements required to restore relationships between nations and other collectivities with a history of enmity. These are:

- Moral truth
- Forbearance
- Empathy
- A commitment to repair fractured human relationships.

“Forgiveness in a political context...calls for a collective turning from the past that neither ignores past evil nor excuses it, that neither overlooks justice nor reduces justice to revenge, that insists on the humanity of enemies even in their commission of dehumanizing deeds, and that values the justice that restores political community above the justice that destroys it...”

Donald W. Shriver, Jr., President Emeritus of Union Theological Seminary in New York is one of the few social ethicists who has examined the complex process of reconciliation between nations and groups within nations with a history of enmity.

Fouzi El-Asmar, *To Be an Arab in Israel* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1978), preface.

Cry, the Beloved Two-state Solution

“Just as the South African rulers understood, at a certain point, that there was no choice but to dismantle their regime, so the Israeli establishment has to understand that it is not capable of imposing its hegemonic conceptions on 3.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and 1.2 million Palestinians who are citizens of Israel.* What we have to do is try to reach a situation of personal and collective equality within the framework of one overall regime throughout the country.

“...So I think the time has come to declare that the Zionist revolution is over. Maybe it should even be done officially, along with setting a date for the repeal of the Law of Return. We should start to think

differently, talk differently. Not to seize on this ridiculous belief in a Palestinian state or in the fence. Because in the end we are going to be a Jewish minority here. And the problems that your children and my grandchildren are going to have to cope with are the same ones that de Klerk faced in South Africa. The paradigm, therefore, is the binational one. That's the direction. That's the conceptual universe we have to get used to.

“...In 1948, Zionism was truly victorious. It succeeded in consolidating itself in 78 percent of historic Palestine. But in 1967, Zionism won one victory too many, and in the 20 years that followed it sealed its fate by implementing the settlements project. Paradoxically, the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan only exacerbated the situation, because they determined the outer limit of the borders of western Palestine. They sealed us into the

binational reality of a territory that cannot be divided. The result is that now Zionism really can't realize its dream. It is the victim of its victories, the victim of a terrible history of missed opportunities.”

~Meron Benvenisti,
Israeli political scientist

“Cry, the Beloved Two-state Solution,” *Ha'aretz*, June 2003

** In 2021, these numbers have risen to approximately 2 million people in Gaza, 2 million Palestinians who are citizens of Israel, and almost 4 million*

Separation wall and guard tower as seen from Bethlehem home. Photo: Zoughbi

