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# LEFT ANTI-ZIONISM<sup>1</sup>

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For Yale University

*Institution for Social and Policy Studies/Institute for the Study of  
Global Antisemitism and Policy- Seminar Series,  
Antisemitism in Comparative Perspective,  
November 10 2005*

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is very much a work-in-progress and not a finished piece of work. I would like to thank Robert Fine, Alexandra Simonon, Jane Ashworth and David M Seymour for endlessly discussing this topic with me. Also those who were present when I gave a version of this paper at the European Sociological Association Conference in Poland this year.

This paper looks at contemporary secular left anti-Zionism. It does not understand anti-Zionism solely as an intellectual or political critique of 'Zionism' but rather as a set of inter-linked social movements. The movement is a relationship between a set of shared conceptual meanings and understandings on the one hand, and the real-world political and social actualisation of those understandings and meanings, on the other. The anti-Zionist movement does not coalesce around criticism of Israeli policy or criticism of racist movements within Israel but rather around a common orientation to the existence of the state of Israel itself.

Since the idea of Zionism was raised in the second half of the 19th century, it has encountered political, philosophical and pragmatic opponents. The debate raged amongst Jews. Some argued that Jews should embrace a 'national liberation' strategy to respond to European antisemitism. Others argued that Jews should throw their weight behind liberal and socialist universalising movements in Europe and through them, fight for a society in which all people could live in peace and with mutual respect. But these pre-Second World War anti-Zionist movements are not the focus here. I am interested in the set of post war movements that understood themselves to follow in this tradition, but that lived in a radically changed world; a world in which the Holocaust had happened and a world in which Zionism had been transformed from a utopian idea into an existing state. It is largely the way contemporary anti-Zionism relates to this different world that defines it as a movement.<sup>2</sup> It understands

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<sup>2</sup> The anti-Stalinist left, particularly those sections that identified as Trotskyist, encountered huge difficulties in general, when faced with a post-war world in which Trotsky's revolutionary perspective had been entirely defeated. The 'degenerated workers state' neither collapsed, nor did the workers show any signs of making a 'political revolution' against the 'bureaucracy'. In fact, the 'degenerated workers state' came out of the war hugely strengthened and replicated itself across a significant section of the world. Capitalism showed itself, against all expectations, also to be hugely dynamic, and its 'death throes' seemed to go on for a very long time. The world seemed to find a third option that was neither socialism nor barbarism. Much of the anti-Stalinist left had great difficulty coming to terms with this new world, and much of it preferred to operate by denying that there was a new situation and a new stabilisation. So the anti-Zionist denial about how the world had changed was in fact part of a much wider failure to come to terms with a new situation.

its opposition to Israel's existence as a battle of ideas against an idea. Its first focus is always on 'Zionism' as an ideology; its relationship to real-world phenomena is conditioned by its explanatory emphasis on ideology.

### **The idea and its actualisation**

Israel, therefore, is not understood as a state by anti-Zionists, living in a world of states and Israelis are not thought of as a nation living in a world of nations. It is because the *idea* is thought to be illegitimate or racist that the state and the nation themselves can be thought of as such. Anti-Zionism relates to an existent social reality as though it were a bad idea. If only, it dreams, it was possible to go back to the pre-war debate and this time, to win it. Yet the decisive factor in the outcome of that pre-war debate was the Holocaust, not the rights and wrongs of the argument. It is the Holocaust that needs to be undone to prevent Israel coming into existence, but this is a fact that is not recognised by the anti-Zionist movement. The Holocaust is often discussed by anti-Zionists; it is understood as something that is used by the Zionists to justify their racist actions (Finkelstein 2003); it is understood as an event that, if not authored by the Zionists themselves, was aided by them (Allen 1987); the Holocaust is understood as a source of illegitimate power and moral authority that covers the crimes of Zionism; the Holocaust is understood as the trauma that psychoanalytically pathologises Israel (Rose 2005). But the Holocaust is never understood as the set of events that materially transformed the existence of European Jewry and thus created the conditions that made it possible for Jewish nationalists to transform Zionism from an idea into a state.

Post-1948 anti-Zionism is not a single movement but a collection of differing currents. There is a current of Middle Eastern anti-Zionism that has been hostile, first

to Jewish immigration into Palestine and then to the foundation and continued existence of Israel. In the Middle East there are both secular and Islamic anti-Zionist traditions. In the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc there was a tradition of Stalinist anti-Zionism. Right wing and neo-Nazi antisemitism is increasingly articulating its hostility to Jews in the form of anti-Zionist rhetoric (David Irving; David Duke). There is also a contemporary current of openly antisemitic anti-Zionism that is hard to place in terms of the left/right scale but has connections with both (Atzmon, Eisen, Shamir).

It is difficult to define which movements and which ideas belong 'authentically' to 'the left'. The difficulty of maintaining a focus on left anti-Zionism is compounded by the fact that much of the anti-Zionist rhetoric from 'the left' is now being adopted by movements clearly outside of 'the left'. Much of the left, after the Holocaust, supported the foundation of Israel, wanting to back the underdog against antisemitism and against British imperialism, but after 1967, and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, anti-Zionist discourses grew to become significant on the left.

In order to approach a clear analysis of this contemporary anti-Zionism, it is necessary to do more than look at the arguments and the narratives that anti-Zionist theorists produce. It is also necessary to look at how the *concepts* and the *actualities* of the social movement interact. In this arena particularly, ideas do not exist in isolation; they are part of a movement. And the anti-Zionist movement has extremely unclear, porous and shifting boundaries. The debate exists at the intersection of a number of different and mutually hostile terrains; the left discourses of 'anti-imperialism' and post-colonial theory; the totalitarian discourses inspired by Nazism, Jihadi-fundamentalism and Stalinist communism; the nationalist discourses of Arab

and Palestinian anti-colonialism; the religious discourses of antisemitism; Jewish communal minority anti-Zionist movements. Concepts and commonsense notions developed within one kind of discourse tend to slip and slide, and metamorphose, into those of the other terrains.

Some elements of the broad anti-Zionist movement are self-consciously antisemitic; racist against Jews. It is necessary to analyse the ways that the elements that think of themselves as anti-racist relate ideologically with these other traditions. Social movements aim to create new commonsense (hegemonic) notions, concepts and ways of thinking around which political alliances are formed. It is necessary to look at how concepts act on the social movements which take them up, and how they migrate and develop in the actuality of the movements. Also how that actuality relates back to the development of narrative and theory. I am not only interested in the truth or coherence of the ideas of anti-Zionism but also in the properties that emerge through their use and propagation.

### **Political Responsibility**

For example, one of the premises of the anti-Zionist movement is that Zionism is not a form of nationalism. Nationalism is usually understood to contain racist potentialities as well as elements that define a community of common responsibility. Rather, Zionism is defined as being essentially different from all other nationalisms – as nothing but a form of racism. It is necessary to investigate the empirical truth of this claim as well as the coherence of the argument. But this will only uncover half of the story. The other half is to be understood by looking at the ways that the Zionism=Racism claim is actualised in the movement and in the world beyond. How does the anti-Zionist movement actually relate to ‘Zionists’, who are defined as

racists? How does it license or encourage others to relate to 'Zionists'? How does it, in practice, define the group, 'Zionists', who are to be treated as racists and how do others define the term?

This is partly a question of how anti-Zionist theorists and activists understand their own political responsibilities. Micheal Neumann, a philosophy professor at Trent University in Canada was clear, in an email that he wrote to an antisemitic group (Jewish Tribal Review <http://www.jewishtribalreview.org>) about his notion of political responsibility. They ask him whether he thinks that their website is antisemitic. He replies

Um, yes, I do, but I don't get bent out of shape about it. I know you're site and it's brilliantly done. Maybe I should say that I'm not quite sure whether you guys are antisemitic in the 'bad' sense or not....

[I]n this world, your material, and to a lesser extent mine, is a gift to neo-Nazis and racists of all sorts. Unlike most people in my political niche, this doesn't alarm me: there are far more serious problems to worry about....

[O]f course you are not the least bit responsible for how others use your site. (<http://www.jewishtribalreview.org/neumann2.htm>)<sup>3</sup>

This discussion occurred five months after Neumann published a piece ('What is Anti-Semitism?' (*Counterpunch*, June 4 2002), in which he argued that antisemitism is trivial compared to other racisms and that it is entirely understandable that Israeli crimes result in a hatred of Jews in general.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This email exchange is published by 'Jewish Tribal Review' against the wishes of Michael Neumann. I asked Neumann whether this exchange was a forgery and he did not claim that it was, although he claimed that he could not remember if these were his exact words.

<sup>4</sup> Some quotes from Neumann's piece in *Counterpunch*:

Undoubtedly there is genuine antisemitism in the Arab world: the distribution of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the myths about stealing the blood of gentile babies. This is utterly inexcusable. So was your failure to answer Aunt Bee's last letter.

The progress of Arab antisemitism fits nicely with the progress of Jewish encroachment and Jewish atrocities. This is not to excuse genuine antisemitism; it is to trivialize it. If Arab anti-semitism persists after a peace agreement, we can all get together and cluck about it. But it still won't do Jews much actual harm.

Israel has committed war crimes. It has implicated Jews generally in these crimes, and Jews generally

The Socialist Workers Party in Britain gave a platform to the openly antisemitic saxophonist and Holocaust denier Gilad Atzmon to air his views.<sup>5</sup> Their defence of inviting him to speak at their event contained the following:

We think that some of the formulations on his website might encourage his readers to feel that he is blurring the distinction between anti-Semitism and anti Zionism. ('Gilad Atzmon at Marxism' June 21 2005, <http://www.swp.org.uk/gilad.php>)

This left anti-Zionist current is hostile to 'Zionists' but not to Jews that are anti-Zionist; or hostile to the Zionism but not to the Zionist. This is its general defence against charges of antisemitism. It takes little political responsibility for the possibility that its teachings and its actions might be understood as a license for antisemitic politics; it accepts little political responsibility for the possibility that it may act as midwife to openly antisemitic movements.

### **'Zionism' as monolith**

The anti-Zionist movement understands the distinction between state and civil society in Israel to be entirely absent. The anti-Zionists typically do not understand Israel as a state. They rely on a reading of civic nationalism that defines a state as a set of political institutions that have sovereignty within a territory and that endow people who live there with citizenship. Israel is not a state, then, but is more like an Arendtian totalitarian movement, its membership defined by blood, its boundaries open to unlimited expansion, its institutions the property of one pre-defined group. In this way, the 'normal' distinction between state and civil society is dissolved.

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have hastened to implicate themselves. This has provoked hatred against Jews. Why not? Some of this hatred is racist, some isn't, but who cares? Why should we pay any attention to this issue at all?

<sup>5</sup> Atzmon's website: <http://www.gilad.co.uk/>. For more on Atzmon's antisemitism, as well as links to other websites that make the case, see <http://liberoblog.com/2005/07/06/how-left-anti-zionism-lays-the-basis-for-open-antisemitism-david-hirsh/>. This piece also has more on the Neumann story referred to above.

The idea of a unity of ‘the people’ with ‘state’ sets up a frame for doing criticism that dissolves all politically relevant distinctions. Anti-Zionism fuses civil society and the state. It makes no distinction between the people in their plurality and state policy. It is often also tempted to dissolve the distinction between civilian and soldier.

‘Zionism’ is typically presented in anti-Zionist discourse as a one-dimensional unity. There is a rejection of a methodology that is interested in development over time or in understanding the phenomenon in context or of understanding the complex and contradictory dynamics that are usually thought to characterise the development of a movement or state.

Distinctions between left and right, bigots and anti-racists, one form or tradition of Zionism and another, settlers and non-settlers, occupied territories and Israel, Arab citizens and Arab non-citizens are all drowned out. The distinction that dominates is between Zionist and anti-Zionist; everything else is insignificant detail.

Typically, anti-Zionists will respond to this charge by saying that it is not the anti-Zionists that blur distinctions but the ‘Zionists’. It is Israel that has no separation between state and civil society; it is Israel that wants to annexe the West Bank; it is Israel that subordinates politics to the imperatives of ‘security’, it is Israel that singles itself out in the world.

This is an illustration of the way that anti-Zionism tends to replicate in its critique the errors and crimes of ‘Zionism’. ‘Zionism’ here is in inverted commas because it is not actual Zionism or the actual practices of Israel that the anti-Zionists replicate, but rather it is their own construction of ‘Zionism’, which bears little resemblance to the material reality of the state of Israel. Their ‘Zionism’ is a totalitarian movement that is equivalent to racism, Nazism, apartheid. Anti-Zionism

defines itself against a notion of 'Zionism' that is constructed by its own discourses and narratives.

### **Joseph Massad's Anti-Zionism – A Case Study**

Joseph Massad is a theorist whose work embodies all of the central features that I identify as being typical of the anti-Zionist movement. His paper, 'The Ends of Zionism: Racism and the Palestinian Struggle' is a summation of his argument for supporting 'the continuing resistance of Palestinians... to all the civil and military institutions that uphold Jewish supremacy' and campaigning for 'divestment from Israel, imposing an international economic blockade on the country, cultural and tourism boycotts, and instituting an international diplomatic isolation of the country' (Massad 2003:450).

He begins with the assertion that Zionism is a colonial movement that is 'constituted in ideology and practice by a religio-racial epistemology', adding that it is 'important also to analyze the racial dimension of Zionism in its current manifestation....' He understands Zionism to be defined by its commitment to 'building a demographically exclusive Jewish state', which he understands alongside the European colonial ideology of white supremacy over colonised people.

### **The Assumption of 'Zionist' Homogeneity**

Already we can see that Massad's notion of Zionism is essentially monolithic. It is one 'Jewish supremacist' movement, from the 1880s to the present day. There are no significant differences between Zionism in the 19th and in the 21st century; there are no significant differences between left and right Zionism, between religious and secular Zionism, between Labour Zionism and the Zionism of the fundamentalist

settlers. Massad writes as though the project to create a single Israeli culture with a single ideology, a single purpose, a homogenous body of Israeli Jews, has been successful. All differences are flattened out by the dominating principle of 'Jewish supremacism'.

This assumption of homogeneity underpins a methodology of taking incidents and quotations from particular people, places and times to stand for and to illustrate the true nature of all Zionists in all places and throughout history. For example, he tells that the leading Russian language daily in Israel published an article in January 2002 called 'How to force them to leave' suggesting that the Israeli government should use the threat of castration to encourage Arabs to leave the country (Relying on Galili 2002, which is a newspaper report translated into English from Hebrew of the original newspaper article in Russian). The assumption of Zionist unity means that one opinion piece in one newspaper can be understood to illustrate the nature of Zionism as a whole. The fact that the paper reportedly received no outraged feedback from its readership should not come as a surprise, Massad tells us, since the following month the Tourism Minister Benny Elon, proposed that the entire Arab population should be expelled from Israel. Elon, a representative of the fundamentalist religious settlers, according to the assumption of Zionist homogeneity, speaks for all 'Jewish supremacists', or Zionists. Shimon Peres, Ariel Sharon, Benny Elon, Theodor Herzl, Golda Meir, and the Meretz party are all used in this piece as examples of 'Jewish supremacism'. 'Israeli Jewish society in Israel, as well as the Israeli leadership, continues to uphold Jewish supremacy as sacrosanct and non-negotiable' (Massad 2003:445).

One piece in the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* entitled 'The Jews who run Clinton's cabinet' demonstrates the 'major ideological convergence between anti-

Semites and Jewish supremacists' (Massad 2003:446).<sup>6</sup> This piece is a manifestation of the Zionist project of 'turning the Jew into the anti-Semite' (Massad 2003:446), which was, Massad tells us, from the early days of the *Haskala* thinkers and Herzl himself, what Zionism aimed to do. An Israeli newspaper article, an assertion and a quote from Herzl's diary are employed to outline Zionist thinking on antisemitism. In a footnote, Massad directs us to another of his papers for his analysis of 'Zionism's complicity with anti-Semitism and its use of anti-Semites as a model'. He then adds an incident where an Israeli officer said that there was something to be learnt about military technique from the methods employed by the Nazis to clear the Warsaw ghetto, to an assertion that it is Israeli practice to write numbers on the arms thousands of Palestinians in detention camps, to reveal something more about the relationship between Zionism, antisemitism and Nazism.

### **'Zionism's' Place at the Vanguard of White Imperialism**

Massad's anti-Zionist methodology starts with 'Zionist' *ideology* and this task is much simplified by the assumption that in all its essentials, 'Zionist' ideology is one coherent body of thought. This assumption is justified by reference to two things in Massad's work. Firstly, Zionism is understood as part of the European colonial project. This expands the methodology of explanatory flattening globally and across five hundred years. The whole history of 'White' imperialism is understood as essentially one racist project. The Crusades, British rule in India, colonisation of Australia, New Zealand, the United States, South Africa, the British Mandate in

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<sup>6</sup> David Duke, a right wing open antisemite also uses the term 'Jewish Supremacism'. He uses the term to refer primarily to the World Jewish Conspiracy, although his rhetoric takes both anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist forms. Duke (2004), also makes much use of the Ma'ariv article in his piece 'Want to know the truth about Jewish Supremacism in their own words?' on his website.

Palestine, American policy during the Cold War in South and Central America and East Asia, the wars against the Saddam regime in Iraq, Belgian rule in Congo; all are essentially the same; all difference is insignificant next to the one explanatory element of European racist exploitation. And Israel is part of this wider project. Actual history, human agency and contingency constitute little but the way that the big project happens to have played itself out in different places and at different times. And the Jewish supremacist project is not a racist movement among Jews in Massad's understanding but rather it is presented as something global:

[T]he only way these arguments acquire any purchase is in the context of an international, read western, commitment to Jewish supremacy, wherein Jews are seen as white Europeans defending white European values and civilization against the primitive Arab hordes' (Massad 449).

Jews are not just Jews and Israel is not just a state. 'Zionists' and Israel constitute, for Massad, one central element of the larger western imperialist project. Some 19<sup>th</sup> Century 'socialists' constructed Jews as being a central element to the workings of international capitalism. Contemporary anti-Zionism understands the Jewish state to play a pivotal role in global imperialism.

### **Israel's Essence is Discovered Definitionally, not Empirically**

The second element that justifies the assumption of Zionist homogeneity is definitional. What various 'Zionists' have said and written is interpreted as coherent and unified agreement upon an essentially racist project. Zionism is defined by the Massad as 'Jewish supremacism'; it is related to racist movements, to Nazi movements, to colonialist projects and to Apartheid. The essential, necessary and unchangeable character of Israel is defined by etymology. Actuality is always found to be a manifestation of this definitional necessity. One key way of defining the difference between anti-Zionism in the sense that we are using it here and

straightforward criticism of Israeli policy is that anti-Zionism insists that Israel is not a state like other states and Israeli nationalism is not nationalism like other nationalism. 'Zionism' is Nazism but Israel is not like Germany. 'Zionism' carries out ethnic cleansing but Israel is not like Croatia or Serbia. 'Zionism' settles occupied land but Israel is not like China. 'Zionism' is a colonial settler project but Israel is not like Australia. For anti-Zionism Israel is the totalitarian movement, not a nation or a state. Its policy is always a manifestation of its inner essence, derived definitionally.

This framework gives huge explanatory importance to ideas and ideology. The racist idea is held to create and define the necessarily racist state. The story is often told by anti-Zionists. It begins with Hertzl and it picks out some racist quotes from his book; it moves on to Jabotinsky and to Ben Gurion, picking quotes and anecdotes, before it arrives in 1948 and the *Nakba*, as the actualisation of the racist idea in the world. It goes on to 1967 and shows how the inherently expansionist and colonial character of the 'Zionist idea' is manifested by the taking and settling of territory. The recent withdrawal of settlers from Gaza, first held by my anti-Zionists to be impossible, is now interpreted only as another manifestation of racist demographic necessity. The fault-line in Israeli politics, between the orange and the blue was understood only to be illusory; and anyway, an insignificant spat between Jewish supremacists over how best to further the cause of the racist movement.

### **Historical Materialism?**

There is an old joke from the 1920s: What is the definition of a Zionist? A Zionist is one Jew who gives money to a second Jew so that a third Jew can go to Palestine.

Contemporary anti-Zionism talks a lot about the narrative construction of the Holocaust but it doesn't talk much about the Holocaust itself. It understands itself to be in the tradition of pre-war opposition to the project of Zionism, but it misses what happened in between. What happened was that the perspectives of the European Jewish anti-Zionists were not only politically defeated by Nazism but most of the anti-Zionists were also killed by Nazis.<sup>7</sup> Jewish life and culture over large parts of Europe was removed. And it is not difficult to understand why amongst the remnants that remained, the attraction of Israel was strong. Israel was not imagined as a European colony. The idea that Jews in the refugee camps in Europe and in British Cyprus, recovering from starvation and from lives as non-humans, were thinking of themselves as standard bearers of the European idea, shows how far removed from reality is much anti-Zionist discourse.

It was not the ideas of Herzl and Jabotinsky that led to the war of 1948; it was the Holocaust. Jews did not go to Palestine to get rich on the back of the natives; they went there because Europe spat them out. Jews did not embody some idea of European whiteness, as the post-colonial theorist says, they embodied a European idea of rats and cockroaches that constituted an existential threat to Europe.

Massad mentions this but shows no sign of understanding its significance. He says that

Jewish anti-Zionists continued to oppose Zionism's Jewish supremacist plans until 1948 when most of the support they had received over the decades dwindled against the reality of the holocaust and the establishment of the Jewish supremacist state (Massad 2003:445).

Massad does not discuss what it was about the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel that changed the terms of the debate so

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<sup>7</sup> This fact, perhaps, sheds light on why many anti-Zionists go to such length to demonstrate the ideological unity of Nazism and Zionism. It is only in this way, that they can paint the Nazi defeat of pre-war anti-Zionism as a victory for 'The Zionists'.

completely. For him, the debate remains fundamentally the same in spite of the fact that the social reality of Europe and its relationship with Jews had changed. It is difficult to imagine how it could have changed more radically. He mentions another key point, but again fails to discuss its significance:

...[I]t is also important to remember that the majority of Jews who reside in Israel today, or at least who emigrated to Israel in the 1930s and '40s and '50s, did not come to Israel because of Zionist reasons. We have to remember that the larger segment of the Israeli Jewish population came to Israel as refugees after the war, and after 1948, from both Europe and the Arab countries, not because of the success of Zionism, but because they were refugees and had no other place to go (Whitehead 2002:213).

Jews, Massad, rightly points out, did not go to Israel because they were convinced Zionists in the sense of the pre Holocaust debates. They went to Israel because the world had changed, because they had nowhere else to go, because they were homeless and wanted to find a home. Also, as Massad says, Jews arrived in Israel because they were expelled from a number of countries in the Middle East. Massad is not explicit about how this huge influx of innocent refugee Jews was incorporated into the white Jewish supremacist colonialist project. But he believes that they were, quickly and completely:

The Jewish side, and by that I mean both Israeli Jewish society and the Israeli government, are still as Zionist as they have always been, and committed to Jewish supremacy. Jewish supremacy is the basis of the Israeli state. This is exactly the crux of the matter.” (Whitehead 2002:214)

### **Isaac Deutscher and Norman Finkelstein: Who Started It?**

Isaac Deutscher, someone who had lived his early political life in the Yiddish-speaking milieu of the Jewish left in Europe, before the Holocaust, wrote in 1954,

I have, of course, long since abandoned my anti-Zionism, which was based on a confidence in the European labour movement, or, more broadly, in European society and civilization, which that society and civilization have not justified... (Deutscher 1968:111-2, written 1954)

Deutscher dismisses anti-Zionism after the Holocaust as though it were simply ridiculous, yet he still does not identify as a Zionist. He was interested in coming to a non-nationalist, cosmopolitan analysis and politics. And in response to futile arguments over who started the conflict between Jews and Arabs, he tells the following story:

A man once jumped from the top floor of a burning house in which many members of his family had already perished. He managed to save his life; but as he was falling he hit a person standing down below and broke that person's legs and arms. ... If both behaved rationally, they would not become enemies. ... But look what happens when these people behave irrationally. The injured man blames the other for his misery and swears to make him pay for it. The other, afraid of the crippled man's revenge, insults him, kicks him, and beats him up whenever they meet. ... The bitter enmity, so fortuitous at first, hardens and comes to overshadow the whole existence of both men and to poison their minds. (Deutscher 1968:136-7, from an interview in *New Left Review*, 23 June, 1967)

If we understand the establishment of the state of Israel in the context of the huge events of the middle of the 20th Century and if we understand that it has material causes as well as ideational ones, then we can see that 'anti-Zionism' in 1929, for example, had an entirely different meaning and content to the one that it has today. In 1929 it was part of a genuine political dispute, primarily amongst Jews. In 2005 the debate is not the same debate. The debate now is about different issues. How can Israeli Jews and Palestinians forge a just peace? How can the racist currents within Israel and also within the Palestine be defeated politically? How can the tragic history that brought Jews and Palestinians into such a bloody conflict be transcended into the future? Anti-Zionism maintains that the terms of the debate and what is at stake in the debate have not changed since the 1920s.

Norman Finkelstein quotes this very passage from Deutscher and in his attempt to refute its relevance, he illustrates a number of defining features of left anti-Zionist discourse. He says that

The Zionist denial of Palestinians' rights, culminating in their expulsion, hardly sprang from an unavoidable accident.

It resulted from the systematic and conscientious implementation, over many decades... of a political ideology the goal of which was to create a demographically Jewish state in Palestine.

...To claim that Zionist leaders acted irrationally in refusing to "remove or assuage the grievance" of Palestinians, then, is effectively to say that Zionism is irrational: for, given that the Palestinians' chief grievance was the denial of their homeland, were Zionists to act "rationally" and remove it, the *raison d'être* of Zionism and its fundamental historic achievement in 1948 would have been nullified.

...To suggest that Zionists had no choice—or, as Deutscher puts it elsewhere, that the Jewish state was a "historic necessity"—is to deny the Zionist movement's massive and, in many respects, impressive exertion of will, and the moral responsibility attending the exertion of this will, in one rather than another direction. (Finkelstein 2005:11).

Finkelstein relies on the assumption of Zionist homogeneity. While anti-Zionism often insists on rhetorically splitting 'the Zionist leadership' from the Jews who were persuaded, cajoled, fooled and forced into following, it also insists on the homogeneity of Israelis and their total incorporation into the ideology of 'Jewish Supremacism'. Here Finkelstein bestows his enemy, now collapsed into the phrase 'the Zionist Movement', with a satanic greatness, capable of a 'massive... impressive exertion of will'. He cannot accept Deutscher's 'ex post facto' explanation of Zionism's transformation from a utopian movement into a state (what other sort of explanation is there?). It can only be explained by the super-human 'will' of Zionism since to accept that Israel's existence is somehow connected to the Holocaust would be to muddy the explanatory dualisms upon which anti-Zionism relies; white/non-white; oppressor/oppressed; good nationalism/bad nationalism; coloniser/colonised.

Deutscher says that if both Israelis and Palestinians had behaved rationally then they would have not become enemies. Finkelstein here falls back onto etymological rather than sociological explanation. He replies that the only way that Israel could have made peace with Palestine would have been to dissolve itself, since it was, *by definition*, incapable of living in peace. Deutscher was trying to find a

political orientation that could transcend both nationalisms. Finkelstein replies by saying that Israeli nationalism is definitionally racist and so instead of looking for a cosmopolitan politics, he finds no other option than choosing to support one nationalism against the other. The 'raison d'être' of Zionism would necessarily be removed, for Finkelstein, by a meaningful peace agreement. He goes on,

It's equally fatuous to assert that Palestinians act irrationally when they "blame" the Zionists "for their misery" and not accept that they were "the victim of circumstances over which neither of them had control." It's only irrational if Zionists bore no responsibility for what happened. (Finkelstein 2005:12)

Here he shifts the frame of the debate. Deutscher is arguing that the foundation of Israel can only be *understood* with reference to the events in Europe that preceded it. Finkelstein reads Deutscher as using 'the Holocaust' in order to *justify* the unjustifiable. And the only way Finkelstein can frame this claim is by totalising it. *Either* 'the Zionists' were responsible (hyper-agents with a super-human will) *or* they were innocent refugees (victims), in which case they would have behaved how innocent refugees 'ought' to behave. Finkelstein reads Deutscher as saying that 'Zionists' bore *no* responsibility for the hurt inflicted on Palestine. What Deutscher is actually saying is that it is understandable that Jewish refugees were taught to be frightened, angry and distrustful nationalists by their experience in Europe, but that still other outcomes were possible. Events were not determined by the etymological essence of 'Zionism' but rather by 20<sup>th</sup> century history and by political battles won and lost *amongst* Jews and *amongst* Palestinians.

### **The Assumption of Palestinian Homogeneity**

It is not only Israeli nationalist imaginings of homogeneity that are accepted by left anti-Zionism as a picture of reality, but also Palestinian ones. The Palestinian

population, Massad tells us, ‘understood Zionism for what it was and resisted it from its inception in the late nineteenth century’ (Massad 2003:444). This view of the world as being divided into monolithic peoples, with single purposes and understandings is typical of anti-Zionist writing. He repeats this claim in a debate with Benny Morris (Whitehead 2002:213): ‘From the Palestinian perspective, the nature of Zionism has always been clear.’ As though there was a single Palestinian perspective. But this perspective, it seems is not always the one of the Palestinian *leadership*, which, during the Oslo process, Massad tells us, accepted ‘in many ways, *the Zionist* version, both of Jewish and Palestinian histories, and succumbed to it.’ (Whitehead 2002:213). As though there was a single Zionist version of history. ‘The people’ have always understood everything clearly; the leadership was corrupted and bought off.

He also says that he is in favour of the ‘continuing resistance of Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories to all the civil and military institutions that uphold Jewish supremacy’ (Massad 2003:450). The apparently straightforward statement of solidarity also hides and glosses over the centrally important political distinctions in Palestine. Does Massad understand the suicide bombing of buses, restaurants and nightclubs to constitute resistance to institutions that uphold ‘Jewish supremacy’? Does he understand the openly antisemitic rhetoric and actions of Hamas to be a part of that ‘resistance’? Palestine is presented as a monolithic anti-colonialist nationalist struggle, although held back by corrupt leaders. It is presented as though there was no politics in Palestine, no differences of attitude to the presence of Jews and to the presence of Israel in the Middle East.

Massad says that if Jews were to give up their ‘Jewish supremacist’ ideology and allow Palestinians the ‘right of return’, then any threat to Jews would disappear

(Massad 2003:449). Terrorist threats to Jews, as well as antisemitism in the Middle East, is thought of by anti-Zionists as being nothing other than a (legitimate? understandable? predictable?) response to Zionism. Anti-Jewish racism is understood by anti-Zionists as being a profoundly different sort of racism to other racisms. Other racisms are not analysed by anti-racists in terms of what it is that the victims of those racisms are doing to make people hate them.

### **Conclusion**

Left anti-Zionism is often adopted by people that consider themselves to be Marxists and 'historical materialists'. Strange then, that it operates with a methodology that gives an overwhelming explanatory importance to *ideas*. This methodology is selective. What it leaves out is as important as what it includes. For example the Holocaust; for example the ethnic cleansing of Jews from the rest of the Middle East in the 50s and 60s; for example the existence of the anti-racist Israeli left and peace movement; for example Middle Eastern antisemitism.

Left anti-Zionism is often adopted by people that consider themselves to be anti-essentialist. Yet it operates with a methodology that understands events as little more than the manifestations of Israel's racist, colonialist and totalitarian essences. Had Sharon failed to make good on his promise to withdraw the settlers from Gaza, this would have been explained in terms of the Zionist necessity to occupy land. When in fact Sharon did withdraw the settlers, this was explained in terms of the racist logic of 'Zionist' demographics. Any event is understood as an epiphenomenon of the Zionist *essence*.

Left anti-Zionism is often adopted by people that consider themselves to be politically hyper-responsible. It operates in a world where virtually all antisemitism

clothes itself in the rhetoric of anti-Zionism. Yet it fails to see this context as significant and it refuses take reasonable care in its consciousness of the boundaries between the antisemitic demonization of Israel and the legitimate criticism of the policies of the Israeli state. It operates as though the only kind of anti-Zionism that is significant, is an anti-racist anti-Zionism.

Left anti-Zionism is often adopted by people who consider themselves to be hostile to nationalism but it fails to build a cosmopolitan politics that avoids replicating the phenomenon that it is fighting against. Anti-Zionism constructs a crude caricature of 'Zionism', which it treats as though it was the truth about all Jewish nationalism at all times. It defines its own world-view in opposition to this self-created monolith. Real Jews and real Palestinians are replaced in the left anti-Zionist imagination by symbolic Zionists and heroic victims. Left Anti-Zionism's critique of Israeli nationalism obliterates the actuality of politics within Israel and within Palestine. It presents a picture of reality that consists only of two opposing nationalisms between which one is forced to choose.

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