

## **NEO-ZIONISM AND PALESTINE: THE UNVEILING OF SETTLER-COLONIAL PRACTICES IN MAINSTREAM ZIONISM**

**Professor Amal Jamal**

Department of Political Science  
Tel Aviv University  
P.O.B. 39040  
Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv, 69978 Israel  
and General Director, I'lam Center, Nazareth  
ajamal1962@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the rise and key characteristics of Neo-Zionist political thought in Israel and its relationship with mainstream Zionist thought. It argues that despite the radical and repulsive discourses of Neo-Zionism and the critique expressed by liberal Zionists towards it, the former has always been embodied in classical Zionism. The justifications provided by Neo-Zionists are based on principles propagated by central leaders of mainstream Zionism. Utilising new perspectives in Settler-Colonial Studies, the article demonstrates how both strands encapsulate the Zionist continuum and continuous expansionist drive for new settlements in Palestine based on 'Biblical right' of Jews over the land of Palestine. Both advocate supremacist, exclusivist, and *volkish* rights for Jews with disastrous consequences for the indigenous people of Palestine. The convictions and practices of the Neo-Zionists in the post 1967 period help unveil the camouflaged motivations, justifications and practices of mainstream expansionist Zionism.

**KEYWORDS:** Mainstream Zionism, Neo-Zionism, new Settler-Colonial Studies, political messianism, territorial expansionism, supremacism, majoritarian despotism, Edward Said, Palestine

Zionism has never been a consensual idea. Internal debate and external critique have always been two of the major characteristics that accompanied Zionist thought (Peterberg 2008; Hertzberg 1959; Avineri 1981). As in the past, the current literature on Zionism reflects deep rifts

not only between pro- and anti-Zionists, but also intense debate between various trends within the Zionist movement (Biling and Lebel 2015; Friling 2003; Ram 1999). The increasing critiques from post-Zionists or other Zionist streams of thought have led to realignment between several nationalist Zionist camps. Many Zionist intellectuals have invested much effort in delegitimising critical post-Zionist voices, especially those post-Zionists who questioned the morality of the movement and shed light on its wrongdoings vis-à-vis Palestinians and non-Western Jews (Friling 2003; Gelber 2008; Gans 2008). New historians, critical sociologists and philosophers who questioned the dominant Zionist narrative and the morality of central Zionist leaders and movements were also attacked by Zionist thinkers (Ginossar and Bareli 1996; Jakobson and Rubenstein 2009; Gans 2008; Gelber 2008). These individuals were accused of being secular, liberal intellectuals who are inconsiderate of the historical and political circumstances of Jews in Europe, of the efforts made by Zionist leaders to avoid clashes with the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, and dismissive of their efforts to reconcile Jewish aspirations for statehood with the basic rights of Palestinians (Friling 2003). This intellectual 'war' has filled hundreds of pages of books, journals and newspapers.

Another important debate within Zionism is that between mainstream Zionist thought, which seeks to reconcile Zionism with democratic and liberal values, and conservative nationalist Zionism, which prioritises national values and beliefs over democratic and liberal principles for either messianic or security reasons (Hazony 2000).<sup>1</sup> The latter are Neo-Zionists, for they seek to redefine the justifications of Zionism, the identity of the Jewish state, the meaning of Jewish sovereignty and the relationship between the Jewish people and the 'land of Israel'. This disagreement between mainstream Zionists and Neo-Zionists, which is conceived 'as a quarrel within the family', has not occupied intellectual spaces as has the former, despite the fact that the rise of Neo-Zionism has had much greater implications for Israeli reality and its relationship with its immediate regional and remote global environments (Illouz 2014). Therefore, this article engages with this debate, seeking to explore its underpinnings, authenticity and implications as they pertain to each camp's common features and principles. Focusing on these areas of overlap enables us to follow these debates' trends and their evolution in the available space, but also allows room to study and draw upon more original and secondary sources to illustrate these trends.

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that we mainly refer to the underpinning ideological and political commitments of people within this camp. This means that intellectuals, academics and leading political thinkers in political parties are brought together in one camp. The logic behind such a treatment is that all of them contribute to the establishment of the dominant national, historical and sociological narrative in Israeli Jewish society.

For the purpose of this analysis, mainstream Zionism is considered an intellectual, ideological and practical political stream. Despite its internal variance, it is a given here that it takes for granted its own morality, especially the right of Jews over their homeland and their right to defend their sovereignty by all means possible. It is also taken as a given that it praises the achievements of the state of Israel in the social, economic and technological fields and believes in the potential to reconcile the Jewishness of the state with its democratic regime and liberal values. Mainstream Zionists take the state of Israel within the 1948 borders (the Green Line) as its own right, and view Israel's control of the Palestinian areas occupied by its army in June 1967 (Occupied Territories) and the domination of millions of Palestinians as a temporary deviation that should and can be fixed, if only Palestinians would make a good faith effort to reach a historical compromise over the land. This stream of thought portrays an ambivalent stance towards Palestinian national rights, for it on the one hand accepts the political formula that Palestinian national aspirations for sovereignty should and can be resolved in the Occupied Territories, but either ignores or belittles the fact that the Palestinian people includes the refugees and Palestinians living inside Israel and that any solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must take that into consideration.

Mainstream Zionists criticise Neo-Zionists for various reasons. They highlight the way the latter conceive of the sources of legitimacy for Jewish sovereignty and statehood, their messianic possessive perception of the spatial and territorial dimension of the Jewish state, their views of the identity and culture of Jewish society in Israel and the rising militaristic nature of the Israeli regime. Mainstream thinkers accuse Neo-Zionists of radicalising Zionist thought and practice, something they feel has led to a reality that endangers the entire Zionist project (Shavit 2014; Pedahzur and Peliger 2009; Feige 2009; Taub 2010; Sternhel 1998; Sprinzak 1991).

Mainstream Zionists separate their ideology from Neo-Zionists, whom they consider to be radical nationalists, depicting the current as a deviation and an interruption from the mainstream. This reading is based on the assumption that mainstream Zionism is moderate, pragmatic and mainly humanistic. Mainstream Zionist thinkers have portrayed Zionism as a humanistic liberal ideology that seeks to guarantee security for the Jewish people in its historical homeland, within the 1949 borders of the State of Israel. For example, Taub (2010), representing mainstream Zionist thought, contrasts radical Zionism with Zionist sovereignty, which he defines as secular, pragmatic and constitutional, as compared to the settlers' perspective, which he identifies with religiosity, messianism and salvationism. Such a treatment legitimises the former by delegitimising the latter. Neo-Zionists on their part question such civic and secular principles

of legitimacy and claim that Zionism is legitimate only when it admits its religious and ethnic foundational principles; therefore it has the full right to settle in the areas occupied in 1967 in the same way it settled areas on which the Israeli state was first established in 1948 (Segal 2013).

It is true that the Neo-Zionist movement is blunt and radical. It is nationalistic, messianic, racist and confrontational (Zevloff 2016). Neo-Zionists assert that the Jewish tradition and its values do not necessarily contradict the humanistic tradition, but actually form one of its central sources. Loyalty to the Jewishness of the people and 'land of Israel' is considered a legitimate value, as manifested in one of the central principles of the humanistic tradition; namely self-determination.

Notwithstanding these characteristics, this article argues that Neo-Zionism has always been a romanticist trend embedded in classical mainstream Zionism.<sup>2</sup> This embeddedness has been manifested in mainstream Zionist discourse, as one can see in the writings of David Ben-Gurion, Berl Katznelson, Yitzhak Tabenkin, Arthur Ruppin, Ben-Zion Dinur, and many other Zionist thinkers (Ram 2006; Bloom 2008; Shapira 1985; Segev 2000; Sternhel 1998; Bar On 1999; Tzur 2015). Therefore, the article argues that Neo-Zionism emerged ideologically from within mainstream Zionism and forms not only its continuation, but an externalisation of its native principles, ideas and aspirations. The article argues that such principles and ideas were either not realised because of the movement's initial circumstantial limitations but later emerged as a result of internal changes in Israeli society and external changes in the balance of power on the regional and global levels; or were pursued and practiced from the inception of the movement, but under a thick ideological and judicial veil and therefore were not admitted until recently.

Through the analytical differentiation between manifestations of policies on the one hand and their justifications on the other, it is possible to demonstrate that the categorical distinction between mainstream Zionism and Neo-Zionism is misplaced and that the variance between them is not substantial but is rather a matter of presentation. It is true that manifestations of Neo-Zionist policies and the way they are justified and propagated are radical and repulsive, especially in the age of new media, where the whole world may witness their most perverse manifestations. Nonetheless, the justifications provided by Neo-Zionists are based on principles propagated by central leaders of classical mainstream Zionism. The continuous expansionist drive for new settlements in Palestine based

<sup>2</sup> There is enough evidence about the romantic nature of Zionism in the thought and activities of the Hakibbutz Hameuhad movement, which was the backbone of the labor movement from the 1920s until recently. The Hakibbutz Hameuhad movement was the first to push for settling the areas occupied in 1967 and initiated most of the settlements in the West Bank, in Sinai, and on the Golan Heights (see for example: Tzur 2015).

on the Biblical right of Jews over the land, the unconditional, sole right of Jews to immigrate to their exclusive 'homeland', and their need to secure their rights form the major components of the strategy utilised to normalise Israeli-Jewish hegemony in the largest space of historical Palestine, including areas occupied since 1967.

Based on this assertion, the article also argues that the convictions and conduct of Neo-Zionists, which unveil the hidden motivations, justifications and practices of classical mainstream Zionism, lead to the latter's harsh critique. The justifications provided by Neo-Zionists for their practices, especially concerning territorial expansion and settlement raise many questions about what was done by the Zionist movement and the state of Israel before and since 1967. It is argued that the more radical, racist and aggressive practices of Neo-Zionism are rooted in three main factors enabled by mainstream Zionism. The first is that the Neo-Zionist movement has the entire apparatus of the Israeli state behind it, something that was missing before 1948. The second is the fact that mainstream Zionism managed to set forth a sophisticated ideological apparatus, veiling its practices behind a liberal, enlightened façade. This veiling activity has been promoted by the liberal academic and judicial elites that successfully constructed a valuation affinity between the justifications and aspirations of Zionism and liberal European nationalism. The veiling mechanisms have been facing difficulties as a result of technological globalisation, which enables the following of every movement made by the Israeli army and the settlers in the Palestinian areas occupied in 1967 and the broadcasting of these movements almost live to the entire world.

To support the main arguments presented above the article focuses on the four central, shared pillars of Zionist and Neo-Zionist thought. It is argued that by examining, first, the sources of legitimacy of the state of Israel; second, the territorial borders of the Jewish state; third, the characteristics of the identity of Jewish society in Israel; and finally, the nature of the Israeli regime—the two camps become difficult to differentiate, despite the variances in the language used to justify their policies in these four areas.

The following analysis is based on the reading of a wide spectrum of sources that cannot all be cited in this context. Only a selected number of original relevant sources from Neo-Zionist leaders were cited in order to advance the main arguments of the article and keep it within the limited space available. These selected are very representative sources, chosen in order to demonstrate the alignment between secular and religious discourses in Neo-Zionist thought, such that between Uri Elizur on the one hand and Ronen Shual on the other. The same citation policy was followed when it came to illustrating the similarity between mainstream Zionist and Neo-Zionist discourses.

This analysis follows Edward Said's methodology when he argues that 'effective political ideas like Zionism need to be examined historically in two ways: (1) *genealogically* in order that their provenance, their kinship and descent, their affiliation both with other ideas and with political institutions may be demonstrated; (2) as practical system of accumulation (of power, land, ideological legitimacy) (Said 1992: 125). Notwithstanding Said's recommendation, the following analysis' epistemological position is not that of the victim of Zionism. Addressing the affinity between mainstream Zionism and Neo-Zionism this analysis seeks to demonstrate the continuity within Zionism from the standpoint of its supporters, something that enables us to demonstrate that continuity rather than rupture is what characterises Zionist policies.

Before proceeding it is important to clarify that it is not argued that Neo-Zionist thought is a monolithic ideology or a stable political category. It is an ideology and political trend that provides a blend of religious-messianic ideas and practical-strategic calculations to justify its claims. This renders it a hybrid political stream that extends from people such as Uri Ariel on the messianic side to people such as Benjamin Netanyahu on the strategic side. This spectrum of ideas is not dichotomous but rather dialectical and continuous. Messianic ideas justify security measures and the latter support the realisation of the former.

### **The Epistemology of Settler-Colonialism and the Zionist/Neo-Zionist Debate**

When discussing the similarities and differences between mainstream Zionism and Neo-Zionism, the current theoretical discussion taking place in the literature regarding colonialism and settler-colonialism comes to mind. A growing number of scholars insist that there is a need to differentiate between the two phenomena, not only since they reflect two different occurrences, but also because it enables us better to understand the sophistication of settler-colonialism (Veracini 2011). This discussion compares and contrasts the two phenomena, arguing that there are common features, but there are also differences that can help in better understanding the complexity of settler-colonialism.

On the theoretical and methodological levels Lorenzo Veracini — a leading theorist in new Settler-Colonial Studies and the author of *Israel and Settler Society* (2006) and *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (2010) — argues that 'utilizing the same language to describe something that wants itself ongoing and something that wants itself terminated is bound to result in some theoretical ambiguity' (2011: 4). In his view, 'whereas colonialism *reinforces* the distinction between colony and metropole, settler-colonialism *erases* it' (Veracini 2011: 3).

Settler-colonialism ‘covers its tracks and operates towards its self-supersession’ (Veracini 2011: 3). It seeks to extinguish itself and become indigenous, thereby replacing the natives of the land. In other words, one of the main aspirations of settler-colonisers is to become indigenous, and for that purpose they must invent an imagined past to justify what they seek to do and find a way to deal with the original natives of the land. Settler-colonisers seek to cover their tracks, seeking to ‘supersede the conditions of their operation’ (Veracini 2011: 3). As Wolf (2006) states, settler-colonialism ‘strives for the dissolution of native societies’ (2006: 388). At the same time, settler-colonialism ‘erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base’ (2006: 388). That is why Wolf views settler-colonialism as structure rather than an event. According to him, ‘territoriality is settler-colonialism’s specific, irreducible element’ (2006: 388).

In other words, settler-colonialism is based on the continuous negation between the settler and the native, seeking the removal of the latter. It is a movement towards the disintegration and decomposition of the negative ‘other’. Settler-colonialism is a collective effort to capture the place of the native, not only in the physical sense. It is about deleting the ‘tracks’ of the indigenous that may form evidence to its historical affiliation with the place. Therefore, settler-colonialism is about the politics of physical and symbolic/cultural elimination through encirclement, ghettoisation, attrition, suffocation, dependency, identity deformation, and disciplining through sanctions. The settler-coloniser leaves no place to return to, since the settled land becomes the only place of habitation. This absence of choice is a strategy embedded in the settler-colonial phenomenon.

We must note that between the model of a colonial state becoming its own postcolonial successor, such as in Australia, the United States of America, Canada and New Zealand, and the colonial state withdrawing to the metropole and disappearing, such as France in Algeria and the United Kingdom in India, there is a third model that renders the settler-colonial state possible. This is a complex model, echoed in Said’s analysis of Zionism, which in his view is based on the physical and cultural disintegration and fragmentation of the indigenous population. In his seminal book *The Question of Palestine* Said argued that:

the major Zionist achievement was getting international legitimization for its own accomplishments, thereby making the Palestinian cost of these accomplishments seem to be irrelevant. But it is clear from Herzl’s thinking that that could not have been done unless there was a prior European inclination to view the natives as irrelevant to *begin with*. That is, those natives already fit a more or less acceptable classificatory grid, which made them *sui generis* inferior to Western or white men — and it is this grid that Zionists

like Herzl appropriated, domesticating it from the general culture of their time to the unique needs of a developing Jewish nationalism. (Said 1992)

Said's argument feeds into the current operational meaning of settler-colonialism, rendering the latter an adequate framework of analysis to demonstrate the affinity between Zionism and Neo-Zionism. The justifications provided by both streams in order to establish themselves in the place of indigenous Palestinians and the practical mechanisms utilised to erase the evidence of their settlements, superseding the conditions of their operation, are sufficient indicators to demonstrate the affinity between these two movements and their match with the main characteristic of settler colonialism. It is the radicalisation of Zionism through Neo-Zionism that reveals many of the characteristics that the former veiled until now, using its ideological identification with liberal thought and its promotion via mainstream academic and judicial systems.

The establishment of settler-colonialism as an analytical tool facilitates our discussion of Zionism and Neo-Zionism as a continuous rather than a distinctive phenomenon. It helps in understanding the affinity between the two, thereby deconstructing three very important fallacious assumptions propagated by most scholars of Zionism, including several of its critics. The first is the distinction between Israel and the occupation, as if the partition of Palestine necessitates a differentiation between the sphere of normality (Israel within the Green Line) and the sphere of abnormality (the Occupied Territories). The fact that the occupation has been in place since 1967 and seems to have become part and parcel of Israel renders the above differentiation a mere ideological veil. The second assumption is that the occupation of the 1967 Palestinian areas has been a surprising and unintended action that resulted from an unintended act of self-defense. This assumption is not accurate and entails the presumption that the settler movement has forced the state of Israel to expand into the areas occupied in 1967 (Mendelsohn 2016; 2014; Haklai 2007). It also means that expansion into the West Bank and Gaza is not a natural part of the self-realisation of Zionism. This perception contradicts not only the basic discourse of Neo-Zionism, but also the beliefs of central trends within mainstream Zionism (Tzur 2016; Gordon 2008; Pedatzur 1996). The third assumption is that the Israeli presence in the Palestinian areas occupied in 1967 is temporary. This assumption is central in mainstream Zionism discourse, despite the fact that it has been argued for almost fifty years, as if Israel may decide to withdraw or not from these areas the moment peace with Palestinians is reached.

As we shall demonstrate, classical mainstream Zionism was sophisticated enough to avoid being conceived as racist, framed displacement in modernist terms and utilised 'democratic' mechanisms, such as majority



rule, in order to promote the dissolution and segregation of the indigenous population, while maintaining a 'democratic' façade that enabled it to win the support of many well-established democracies. It is through objection to classical Zionism that Neo-Zionism reveals the main features of the former and enables us to see how the internal dialectics of these tensions expose the continuity between these two schools of thought. It is the settler-colonial nature of Zionism and Neo-Zionism that render their differences a matter of presentation rather than substance. As we shall demonstrate, settler-colonial discourse dominates both perspectives, despite the fact that organisations and leaders speaking in the name of mainstream Zionism try very much to dissociate themselves from Neo-Zionism (Rubenstein 1997; Gavison 2002; Avineri 1981, 2013; Taub 2010; Shavit 2014).

### **Theological Superiority and Divine Mandate to Colonise**

Neo-Zionist thought is not a coherent set of ideas. Nonetheless, it shares perceptual foundations that bring together secular and religious followers. By examining its political theology—the set of ideas that stand behind, define and justify the authority of the people and the state—one can expose a central set of principles. In doing so we notice that the writings and speeches of central leaders of this ideological trend, directly or indirectly, conceive of the divine promise as a foundational principle. This principle ties together the people of Israel and the land of Israel through a metaphysical power that cannot be untied by human force. The divine promise stands at the heart of all Neo-Zionist thinkers even in secular currents of Neo-Zionist thought, such as in the writings and speeches of Benjamin Netanyahu, Yariv Levin, Moshe Arens, Yoaz Hendel and others. In this regard there is hardly a difference between these leaders and religious thinkers, such as Israel Harel, Haggai Segal, Naftali Benet and many others. The theological superiority of the historical bond between the Jewish people and the land of Israel is deeply related to the messianic role of the people of Israel in the universal salvation of humanity (Shwartz 2012, Ahitov 2013). This idea has become very central in various types of literature in Israel in recent years and is embedded in many novels, such as *Mlachim III (Kings III)* (2008), *Seven Mothers* (2010) of Yochi Brandis and *From the Bible with Love* of Ram Oren, which have become best sellers and well-supported throughout mainstream Jewish-Israeli society.

The idea of theological superiority is not new and has been historically embedded throughout classical Zionist thought (Gavison 2002; Shapira 1997). Since its inception, in the writings of Heinrich Gertz, Moshe Hess, Leon Pinsker, Theodor Herzl, Israel Zangwill, Aaron David Gordon, and Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky, one notices an effort to provide an authentic

Jewish answer to the challenges Jews faced in the era of emancipation and nationalism in Europe by emphasising a 'secular' interpretation of the religious perception of the historical and cultural bond between the Jewish people and their homeland (Masalha 2013; Evron 1995). Early Zionist thinkers, even those with secular education, have fully relied on religious beliefs to justify the Zionist vision of the eternal bond between the Jewish people and its promised land. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin claims that 'the national-historical consciousness, identified as secular, is an interpretation of the theological Judeo-Christian myth. It is based on viewing the Zionist settlement and sovereignty over the land as the return of Jews to their homeland; as complementary to Jewish history and realisation of Jewish prayers for salvation. The national consciousness was not based on a break away from the theological perception, but on viewing nationalism as exclusive interpretation of this mythos, as revelation that illustrate its real content' (Raz-Krakotzkin 2009).

Many Zionist thinkers were and still are secular. Nevertheless, their justifications of the right of Jews to the 'land of Israel' relies on the biblical narrative (Schweid 2012). It is the eternal 'divine promise' and its influence over various Jewish communities in Europe that brings Herzl, a secular Jew, and most of his followers to refocus the dream of a Jewish state on what they consider as the 'historical' homeland (Dieckhoff 2003; Avineri 1981). The spiritual and religious sentiments of Jews towards Palestine become a major factor in the strategic planning and consolidation of Zionist settler-colonialism in Palestine.

These ties with religious thought were guaranteed through religious thinkers, who were fond of the Jewish awakening and saw it as a sign of redemption. Rabbi Samuel Mohilever, one of the founders of the Mizrahi movement, wrote at the time of the first Zionist Congress in 1897:

It is essential that the Congress unite all 'Sons of Zion' who are true to our cause to work in complete harmony and fraternity, even if there be among them differences of opinion regarding religion . . . The Torah, which is the source of our life, must be the foundation of our regeneration in the land of our fathers. (Hertzberg 1959: 402–403)

This pattern of thinking which views the Bible as the source of Jewish life, albeit selectively, was embedded in the political thinking and practical policies of David Ben-Gurion, the most dominant leader of Zionism in the period between the 1920s and 1960s, (Shapira 1997a; Avineri 1981). Ben-Gurion was a man of the Bible, whose heroes and depictions of the national landscape are deeply related to the biblical narrative (Shapira 1997). Anita Shapira, one of the key intellectuals of Labour Zionism, argues:

in the life of the *second aliyah* there has been a special place for the Bible. Almost in every room of each worker there has been a book; the Bible contained the memory of Eretz Israel as homeland. It granted a realistic meaning to the bond between the people and land. It formed a guide for geography, for plants and animals of Eretz Israel. People of the *second aliyah* used to walk in the land and identify its oldness through the Bible. (Shapira 1997: 219)

Shapira cites Yitzhak Tabenkin, one of the central leaders of 'secular' socialist Zionist thought, arguing, 'The Bible formed birth certificate for the immigrant, helped to break the distance between the person and the land and nourished 'a sense of homeland' (Shapira 1997: 262). Such a connection to the Bible and its narration of the divine bond between the Jewish people and its promised land went through various interpretations that enabled the labor movement, led by Ben-Gurion, to establish deep relations with the descendants of the Mizrahi movement, the National Religious Party, until 1977.<sup>3</sup>

This 'divine' claim has become very central to Neo-Zionist thought over the last four decades. Neo-Zionist discourse utilised mainstream Zionist thought in order to assert the lack of difference between the lands 'liberated' and settled in 1948 and lands 'liberated' in 1967 and settled since then. Secular Neo-Zionists, such as the '*Im Tirtzu*' movement emphasise the divine dimension of the relationship between people and land. One of the founders of this movement, Ronen Shuval claims in this context:

Between the Land of Israel and the culture of Israel there is a relationship of redemption. The responsibility of the people is to materialize and achieve this relationship. Culture grants the people, who lives in its homeland, the role and aspiration, whereas the land grants the people the space where redemption takes place. (Shuval 2010: 114)

Despite the fact that *Im Tirtzu* is an Israeli secular Zionist movement, its discourse nevertheless relies on a given, divine bond between the people of Israel and the land of Israel. This bond does not differ from what we find in the discourse of nationalist religious leaders of the same Neo-Zionist camp. As matter of fact this discourse echoes Ben-Gurion's supremacist rhetoric. Ben-Gurion attributes 'supernatural abilities' to the

<sup>3</sup> The secularised version of the divine worldview, as superior and more just than any daily and immediate use of the land has been institutionalised in state policies, mostly manifested in the educational system and in history books (Hazoney 2000). It is also present in the planning and housing ministries, which promoted the establishment of new towns and other types of settlements based on Jewish maps and in the archeological policies promoted by state funds which focused on the revealing of Jewish history and presence in Palestine thousands of years ago (Finkelstein and Silberman 2006; Benvenisti 2000; Abu El-Haj 2012).

Jewish people. Ben-Gurion also claimed that the Jewish people is an elite nation which is endowed with ‘a [superior] moral will and carries a historical vision since it appeared on the historical stage’ (Shapira 1997: 228). In one of his elitist speeches Ben-Gurion claimed: ‘Not like all people — the people of Israel. Since we became a people we were different from all nations. We became the people of the book, the people of the prophets, the people of eternity, and a universal people’ (Shapira 1997: 230–231). This nationalist supremacist perception of the people of Israel is rooted in the Bible, an indisputably religious text.

Despite his differences with Ben-Gurion, Zeev Jabotinsky reiterates the same supremacist claims. He emphasised Jewish ‘racial’ supremacy. He had this to say in 1936:

superior is that race, who is solid, not subordinate, that race who you can annihilate but cannot change his consciousness by force; that race who in time of pressure does not give up his internal freedom. Since our beginning of time we are stubborn people, and even not after many generations we are still fighting, we still resist and did not give in. We are an unbeatable race. (Jabotinsky 1936: 130)

Jabotinsky’s thought, which became the dominant ideology in Israel over the last few decades, emphasises the combination of ‘organic’ superiority and force as central components of Jewish survival (Avineri 1981: 207). Greater Israel and Jabotinsky’s territorial maximalism was aimed at creating the ‘third state’ (and ‘Third Temple’) and he stated clearly that the:

... final and real goal of Zionism will not appear but in the third state ... the formation of national culture, which will lend from its superiority to the entire universe, as written ‘from Zion shall the Torah come out. (Bilski Ben-Hur 1988)

Jabotinsky’s territorial expansionism and the usage he makes of the concept of the ‘third state’ (and ‘Third Temple’) from the Old Testament demonstrates clearly the theological foundations of his political worldview. This same language used by a secular Zionist is reiterated by a close devotee of Jabotinsky, namely Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In his Bar Ilan speech on 14 June 2009, when he came closest to admit the need for a territorial compromise with the Palestinians Netanyahu said:

But let me first say that the connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel has lasted for more than 3500 years. Judea and Samaria, the places where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, David and Solomon, and Isaiah and Jeremiah lived, are not alien to us. This is the land of our forefathers.

The right of the Jewish people to a state in the land of Israel does not derive from the catastrophes that have plagued our people. True, for 2000 years the Jewish people suffered expulsions, pogroms, blood libels, and massacres which culminated in a Holocaust — a suffering which has no parallel in

human history. There are those who say that if the Holocaust had not occurred, the state of Israel would never have been established. But I say that if the state of Israel would have been established earlier, the Holocaust would not have occurred.

This tragic history of powerlessness explains why the Jewish people need a sovereign power of self-defense. But our right to build our sovereign state here, in the land of Israel, arises from one simple fact: this is the homeland of the Jewish people, this is where our identity was forged.

As Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion proclaimed in Israel's Declaration of Independence: 'The Jewish people arose in the land of Israel and it was here that its spiritual, religious and political character was shaped. Here they attained their sovereignty, and here they bequeathed to the world their national and cultural treasures, and the most eternal of books.

Neo-Zionist thought views itself as a superior culture, which represents itself as not only technologically more advanced, but also theologically more moral. As Shuval makes clear:

... the Neo-Zionist ideology views the return of Jews to Zion as a central component of *Tikkun Olam* [Fixing the World] by the Israeli nation ... since the national existence of the people of Israel in the land of Israel is a precondition and an indispensable stipulation of the continuation of the action of the people of Israel in fixing the entire humanity. (Shuval 2010: 119)

The myth of 'exile and return' and the doctrine of 'Jewish supremacy' are constantly reiterated by Israeli-Zionist spokespersons. This supremacist ideology, which is repeatedly reproduced in the secular as well as religious manifestations of Zionism, finds echoes in the imagination and discourse of Neo-Zionism. A more apparent example of such thought is expressed by Uri Elitzur, one of the most outspoken representatives of Neo-Zionist thought. In one of his articles Elitzur reminds readers that the 1948 Israeli Declaration of Independence opened with the clear statement, 'The land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people'. Elitzur then goes on to say:

that is how the Israeli state was born, that is how its creators have explained the reasoning behind its establishment: the land of Israel and the people of Israel. From now on, the declaration of independence continues to detail and in length the story of these two, the Jewish people and the land of Israel and the marvelous bond between them. . . the founders of the state say that the Jewish people and the land of Israel are the groom and the bride, for whom we gathered here and the state of Israel is their wedding. . . It is sometimes necessary to gently remind our precious state that in spite of all our love to her, it is not the vision, but only the instrument for its materialization. And with all due respect for the invested scenery and décor,

without the groom and the bride there is no wedding. . . There are many nation states in the world, but not any that is complex and complicated like ours. The Jewish people and the land of Israel are a prophetic story. Where there is a people that went for exile and returned after 1900 years? . . . We did not establish the state in order to be normal. We did in order to return the people of Israel to the land of Israel. Without the story from the Bible we are a colonial European settlement in the Middle East. (Elizur 2013)

This discourse of the theological superiority of the divine, historical bond between the Jewish people and the land of Israel leaves no doubt not only that classical Zionists and Neo-Zionists share the same sources of legitimacy for the practical reality they seek to establish, but also leave no place for any legitimate national Palestinian presence. The discourse of theological superiority mirrors the erasing of any tracks of its act of colonial settlement, conceiving of its acts as a return to the homeland, manifested in the concept of '*hityashvut*' [settlement] that has positive connotations rather than '*hitnahlut*' [settlement] which practically means the same thing, but entails negative connotations that Neo-Zionists seek to avoid.

### **Territorial Expansionism**

It is widely accepted among scholars of Israeli politics that pioneering in settlement and territorial expansion are fundamental characteristics of Zionist ideology and practice (Azoulay and Ophir 2012; Masalha 2000; Shafir and Peled 2002; Zertal and Eldar 2004). It is also well established in the literature that the methods of settlement and territorial expansion are developed in accordance with political and militaristic circumstances, which are geared to enable as much territorial control as possible (Tzfadia 2008; Oren 2003). In contrast to the mistaken impression made by groups of radical settlers, who choose to settle in remote and isolated areas, most settlements are promoted by official agencies of the state, pioneered by the Israeli military (Kimmerling 1983; Shafir and Peled 2002; Tzur 2008). It is the combination of theological ideas, such as *Geulat Ha-Karka'a* (redemption of land), nationalist thought, such as the idea of *Lebensraum*, and militaristic thought, expressed through the idea of 'defensible borders' that stand behind the expansionist character of Zionist and Neo-Zionist thought and practice (Kemp 2004; Ben Eliezer 1998; Cohen 1993). That is why settlers and settlements have become centrally valued, elevated into the level of a virtue in classical mainstream Zionism as well as in Neo-Zionist thought (Shafir and Peled 2002).

The ideology of *Geulat Ha-Karka'a* became a central motivating force in all streams of Zionist politics (Friedman 1992; Kretzmer 2002). The concept of *Geula* is a religious concept meaning saving or liberating

something—usually the soul or the land from foreign occupation and exploitation. In Zionist terms the conquest of most of Palestine and expulsion of most of its inhabitants in the areas that were controlled by the Israeli army during the 1948–1949 war—the Palestine Nakba—has been and still is viewed as liberating it from its inhabitants and returning it to its original owners (Pappe 2006; Masalha 2007; Aronoff 1991; Zerubavel 1995; Morris 2001). That is why the 1948 war is called the war of liberation in the Israeli official and public discourses. The secularisation of the religious concept of '*geula*' by Zionist leaders and the development of a modern ethnicised 'civic religion' did not manage to wash away the messianic transcendental dimensions of the type of relationship, which has been constructed (Liebman and Don Yehiya 1983). The leaders of *Geula*—the Zionist pioneers—became heroes that were celebrated as models of national commitment and heroism (Neuman 2009; Gorny 1985). The religious connotations of *Geula* remain a subtext in the settler-colonisation processes (Masalha 2007).

The other side of *Geula* is the delegitimation of the Palestinian indigenous presence, the dissolution of their presence and the erasure of their tracks, all are activities carried out systematically by state agencies and civil organisations, delegated with authorities that resemble those of the state, beginning with the Jewish Agency and ending with radical organisations, such as *Ateret Cohanim.*, an Israeli Jewish settler organisation with a yeshiva located in the Muslim Quarter of the occupied Old City of Jerusalem.

Settling and building the land is conceived as a central component of national Jewish identity, situated within biblical theology and history, and utilising modern economic and technological tools to promote their practical materialisation (Chowers 2012). Settlements have returned to their ideological roots, as depicted by the liberal economic philosophy of Jabotinsky, and gained a clear neo-liberal character. The need for housing has been fully utilised by state institutions to promote territorial expansion on various areas of the country, especially areas populated by Arabs, such as in the Galilee, the triangle, the Negev and in the West Bank. This process has been intentionally de-politicised, based on the basic human need for housing, but simultaneously merging security and ideological motivations (Kadman 2008).

Settlement and military strategy have been always intertwined, since the time of the colonisation before 1948 (Tzfadia 2008). This relationship has led to the symbiosis of military settlement, in which Jewish settlements are conceived as part and parcel of the Jewish military strategy. Despite disputes between Zionist leaders and organisations regarding the placement of settlements, the settling of the land was promoted by the military organs of the Zionist movement, from *Hashomer* (the

military organisation established to protect the Jewish settlements in late Ottoman Palestine) to *Ha-Palmach* (a strike force of the *Haganah* during the Mandatory period) until this very day (Pa'il 1995). Settlers in the frontier were viewed as combatants in the name of the nation. They were trained by military organisations, so they did not only to protect and work the land, but also fought against indigenous resistance to their expansion (see for example, *Nahal*, the 'Pioneering Combatant Youth' unit of the army) (Shiran 1998).

One must address in this particular context the fact that the official and practiced meaning of security in Zionist ideology is not limited to the protection of the territory of the Jewish state and its population. It is based mainly on the promotion and protection of the ethno-national project of nation building in which the capturing, controlling and settling of territory play a central role. It is a security concept that is based on the protection of the *Lebensraum* of the nation, securing its territory and creating reserves for future generations. Since most areas of Palestine before 1948 and most areas of the West Bank were populated or privately owned, the Israeli army, through the organs developed by the Military government, utilised various 'legal', 'judicial' and military technologies in order to promote an ethno-national conception of security and control (Tzur 2008; Lebel 2015). The settling of Jews in the midst of areas populated by Palestinians became part and parcel of the dominant conception of security, demonstrated by the settlement policies promoted in the West Bank or those promoted in the Galilee and the Negev, even today (Lebel 2015).

Settlers are deeply rooted in Zionist and Neo-Zionist thought as 'citizens-pioneers-soldiers' that lead the whole camp in a mission that is conceived as existential (Neuman 2009). In this sense current settlers view themselves as not much different from the pioneers that led the camp decades ago, before the establishment of the state (Lustick 2015; Zertal and Eldar 2007).

The aphorism made by Ben-Gurion that settlement makes security and security makes settlement is reflected in his speech from 1948:

State security will not be based on the military defensive forces only. Our ways of settlement will determine state security not less than the methods of military formation. (Ben-Gurion 1971)

This same perception has been repeated by his student and political ally, Shimon Peres, concerning settling the Occupied Territories. Peres states in his book *Tomorrow is Now* (1978):

[We need] to create a continuous stretch of new settlements; to bolster Jerusalem and the surrounding hills, from the north, from the east, and from



the south and from the west, by means of the establishment of townships, suburbs and villages—Ma'alei Edumim, Ofra, Gilo, Beit-El, Givon, and IDF [Israeli army] camps and [military] Nahal outposts—to ensure that the capital and its flanks are secured, and underpinned by urban and rural settlements. These settlements will be connected to the coastal plain and Jordan Valley by new lateral axis roads; the settlements along the Jordan River are intended to establish the Jordan River as [Israel's] de facto security border; however it is the settlements on the western slopes of the hills of Samaria and Judea which will deliver us from the curse of Israel's 'narrow waist'; the purpose of the settlements in the Golan is to ensure that this territorial platform will no longer constitute a danger, but a barrier against a surprise attack. . . (48)

This coupling of settlement and security strategies resulted not only in the establishment of hundreds of new Jewish settlements across the state of Israel, but also established an inherent relationship between the safety of the state of Israel and the expansion of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories since 1967 (Pedatzur 1996). The role of the army in this process was more than crucial. The army determined the areas appropriate for settlement, their placement, their physical structure, and their social composition (Oren 2003). The army appointed a high ranking officer, responsible for settlement affairs, who was at one time in charge of organising the settlement, as a military post in case of war. Each settlement included inhabitants that were charged with security affairs, who were trained by the army and were under the command of the army in their area (Shiran 1998). For the purpose of establishing 'occupying settlements', which led to the establishment of hundreds of new settlements all over the country, the *Palmach* was a pioneering force not only in the battlefield, but also in expanding the demographic control of the Jewish settlement in Palestine (Pa'il 1995). *Palmach* units established at least 36 of the well-known Kibbutzim and agricultural settlements in strategic posts before 1948. The same policy of military involvement in settlement policies was followed by the army unit, the *Nahal*, whose main task was to establish new military posts that were later civilianised by absorbing new Jewish immigrants (Shiran 1998; Oren 2003; Yiftachel and Meir 1998; Solomonica 1989).

The army has been very active since 1967 in establishing 'military posts' which were later civilianized, and determined the placement and the pace of settlement (Pedatzur 1996). As Peres' words cited above demonstrate, this process was justified and promoted by the government. Although Peres' book *Tomorrow is Now* was published in 1978, its content must have been written when Peres was Defense Minister in 1974–1977. It is clear that Peres' explanations closely resemble the discourse of the

Neo-Zionist leaders, a discourse utilised to justify the settler-colonisation processes of today. During Peres' period as Defence Minister the Israeli army was encouraged to establish new settlements in the West Bank, as part of the policy which was aimed at tightening the grip of the Israeli state on Palestinian territories. After the 1977 elections the Likud party, led by Menachem Begin, won and formed the government, the messianic settlers of *Gush Emunim* joined the military ideologues in an intensive process of settlement that established Jewish settlements in every position possible (Shvout 2002). All relevant government ministries encouraged and supported the settlement process. Ariel Sharon, who was appointed as Agriculture Minister, utilised the 'Unit for Settlement' in his ministry to transfer monies to the settlement process in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Eldar and Zartal 2004). In his autobiography Sharon admits that he managed to establish sixty-four settlements within a short period of time (Sharon 1989; Kimmerling 2003). Eldar and Zartal claim that 'the settlers viewed the Occupied Territories as their property and themselves as its masters' (2004: 387). The Alon Moreh affair not only demonstrates this view, but also mirrors the Neo-Zionist nature of the Likud party, which embraced the settlers and deepened the relationship between the Jewish historical right over the land of Israel, the security of the state of Israel and the centrality of the pioneering role of the settlers, as genuine virtues of Zionism (Biling and Lebel 2015). The worldview of Jabotinsky (1936), as manifested in his text 'The Iron Wall', which entailed an arrogant militaristic superiority and very chauvinistic nationalist self-perception, was implemented by Ben-Gurion, and was later declared by the Likud dominated government to be the main doctrine of the Israeli security forces (Ben Yisrael 2013). This means that the perceptions and assumptions underlying the Iron Wall doctrine were openly the law of the land since 1977, when the Likud party came to power (Biling 2015; Lustick 1996). This doctrine entails the blurring of the 'Green Line', at least in regard to the possessive nature of the relationship between the Jewish people and the land of Israel, which according to the logic of the doctrine includes the West Bank, especially the holy places in Hebron, Bethlehem, Nablus, Bet El, Gush Etzion and Jericho (Biling and Lebel 2015; Shenhav 2010; Gans 2008).

The blurring of the differences between territories inside the Green Line and areas beyond it is exactly the reason why Neo-Zionists—not only settlers living on the West Bank—raise questions regarding the differences between the legitimacy of settling either area (Meisels 2015). Settlers claim that if Jews had the historical right to settle in historical Palestine based on the belief that it is the historical homeland, as the Zionist movement did before the establishment of the state of Israel, then

this same logic is valid in the West Bank, which is the heart of the Land of Israel. If settling in the West Bank is illegitimate, then the whole Zionist project is immoral and a colonial project, thus demonstrating the deep ties between Zionist and Neo-Zionist thought and practice (Eldad 2007).

### **Ethnic Exclusivity**

Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi has made the claim that ‘the Zionist plan of action starts with two basic assumptions: the continuity of the Jewish people in time — the historical continuity between ancient and modern Jews, and the continuity of the Jewish people in space — and the unity of Jews all over the world’ (Beit-Hallahmi 1993: 60).

These two assumptions are manifested in Zionist as well as Neo-Zionist discourse. If one is able to speak of any difference between the two discourses, it is a matter of nuance rather than major substantial disparity. When it comes to the meaning of time as historical consciousness and as existential awareness, this disparity is really minor. This is also true when it comes to the basic perception of space, not only as a territory, but also as a locus of identity, culture and national aspirations. These perceptions make the affinity between time and space deeply related to an exclusive and closed ethno-national identity that contrasts with those of non-Jews inhabiting the same land.

Since the beginning of Jewish immigration to Palestine, the segregation between Jews and Palestinians has been effected by delineating time by means of physical and cultural barriers. These barriers augmented the flow of Israeli time while diminishing the flow of Palestinian time. Efforts at Jewish normalisation are thus translated into temporal distinctions ensuring fast Jewish time and slow Palestinian time. This process required initial geographic segregation between Jews and Arabs so as to preserve the Judaisation of the land. The engine of Israeli planning has, accordingly, replanted national physical space from the Arab–Palestinian onto the Jewish time frame and thus produced a physical and temporal hierarchy to separate the two peoples (Benvenisti 2000; Gorny 1985).

The first expression of these practices was the occupation of space by a clear settlement policy, which aimed at locating Jewish immigrants in separate residential areas. The 283 Jewish cities and agricultural towns that were established before 1948 were located near Arab cities and towns on lands that were acquired by the Jewish national institutions before 1948. After 1948 an intensive process of settlement was fostered, based on historical and strategic grounds and this led to the establishment of over 800 settlement posts of various forms; i.e., kibbutzim, moshavim, communal settlements, towns and cities (Tsfadia 2008).

A sophisticated planning and construction policy ensured a Jewish spatial hegemony in tandem with continuous living spaces, dotted minimally with Arab enclaves that Jews could skirt (Yiftachel 1992; Rabinowitz 1997). Separate Arab and Jewish planning jurisdictions and subsequent highway construction guaranteed Jewish territorial continuity and flowing time order, and solidified the fragmentation and therefore the freezing of Arab regions (Weizman 2007). Highways, built mainly on Arab open spaces, served to connect Jewish metropolitan areas with outlying Jewish towns. It cannot be ignored that Arab Palestinian citizens in Israel benefit from the road infrastructure as a facilitator of time flow, but neither can one ignore the fact that Arabs win time in exchange for space, since most of these roads are built either on Arab confiscated lands or on the outskirts of Arab villages, limiting their future development, as routes 6, 70, 60, 65, 443, 75 and many others demonstrate (Rabinowitz and Vardi 2010). The bypass road policy, adopted most fully in the West Bank, is a tremendous illustration of the complex relationship between space and time flow (Kotef 2015; Weizman 2007).

Time and temporality have been also central dimensions in Zionist thought. Neo-Zionist thought and practice emphasise the centrality of the collective Jewish efforts and national myths to 'return to history' and establish new temporal standards applicable to Jewish existence, which has major implications not only on Jewish life, but on the entire surrounding Arab region, especially the Palestinians. Secular Zionism was established based on an explicit link between national awareness and existence in historical time, seeking to overcome the absence of the people from its land (Eisenstadt and Lissak 1999; Chowers 1998).

Zionist theorists attempted to institute a temporal revolution contrary to Ultra-Orthodox theological determinism. Zionist time, constructed by secular Zionists, such as Ben-Gurion and accepted by Zionist religious, such as Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, was reconstructed by religious Zionists as open time immune to change by a sacred entity intent on redeeming the 'land of Israel'. The national Zionist narrative therefore dealt with the neutralisation of history, its release from celestial forces and deterministic finiteness. Time was to be returned to the Jewish people, who had lost it in response to historical events beyond their control. The 'return to history' was to become a core myth in Zionist political thought, rooted in epistemological distinctions and practices (Schweid 1979).

Neo-Zionists reiterate the Zionist view conceiving Jewish nationalism as a reawakening within the framework of modern, progressive time, deeply connected to profound Jewish aspirations to return 'home' (Ram 2006). Neo-Zionist thinkers, such as Ronen Shual, Dmitry Radyshvsky, Yoram Hazoni, Uri Elizur, Eliezer Schweid and others follow Zvi (Heinrich) Graetz, Shimon Dubnov, Ben-Zion Dinur, Raphael Mahler,

Julian Morgenstern and others who spoke in this context of messianic motivations that were influenced by the conception of time apparent in tradition, linking divine creation and the history of the universe (Oren, Hazoni and Hazoni 2006; Shuval 2010). When speaking of Neo-Zionist time Shuval claims:

[The] Neo-Zionist historiosophy conceives history as moving on a spiral line, a kind of screw that progresses in circulation. The spiral movement of time combines the circular direction of nature with the linear direction of history. That is how Jewish consciousness breaks the repetitious circulation of nature and infuses into it value, meaning, direction and purpose. That is how humans free themselves from being a banal part of nature and carry a meaning. The Neo-Zionist human being has the capability to promote the spiral line to a better future. (Shuval 2010: 118)

Accordingly, the promise of God is to be realised, the exile ended, and the Jewish people returned home. This understanding of time gives coherence and reason to Jewish history and bridges almost 2000 years of Jewish absence from the 'homeland'. It is behind the 'messianic activism' traceable to Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, which links the Jewish people and the 'Land of Israel' with a trans-historical temporal framework (Raz-Karkotzkin 1993). This understanding implies that Jewish biblical history is the only valid time frame of the 'Land of Israel' (Gorny 2001). Ben-Gurion states that '[t]he realisation of Zionism is now on the agenda. . . History does not wait. Non-Jewish Palestine waited 1800 years without Jews . . . During the next 20 years we have to create a Jewish majority in the Land of Israel. This is the essence of the new historical situation' (Ben-Gurion 1971: 98). The implication of such an understanding is reflected in the following citation of Eliezer Schweid:

in the Land of Israel no alternative national entity that relies on this land was established. The foreign occupation [by Arabs] was not turned into a national settlement'. (Schweid 1973: 210)

Schweid adds that 'no national settlement, on the economic, social or cultural-spiritual level was established. On the contrary, the Land of Israel was turned into desert and. . . destroyed. . .' (Schweid 1973: 211). Based on such an understanding, the rights of Palestinians to their homeland are annulled when confronted by Jewish trans-historical time, determined not by physical presence, but rather established via divine promise and collective theological yearning. The immediate implication of this understanding is the suspension or emptying of Palestinian time. Accordingly, Palestinians' physical presence is either temporary protectors of the land or as stumbling blocks to the realisation of the Jewish 'return to history', and the indigenous Palestinians' removal from the history of

the 'Land of Israel', is rationalised as Ilan Pappé has demonstrated in his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006).

### **Ethno-Majoritarian Despotism**

Current Neo-Zionist trends in Israel do not differ from mainstream Zionism in utilising ethno-majoritarianism as a despotic 'democratic' mechanism in order to promote their worldviews and turn them into practical policies. The demographic weight of the Jewish majority has been exploited in order to establish the institutional and material privileges of Jewish citizens through democratic means. This policy is reaching new peaks in the Neo-Zionist age, as more than 40 bills and several laws enacted by the Knesset in the last decade demonstrate (Jamal 2016).

In this regard it is hard to dispute Anthony Smith's claim that every 'nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms' (Smith 1991). Nonetheless, it is hard to escape the deeply exclusive and hegemonic ethnic dimension of Jewish nationalism, as manifested since Israel's independence, making it almost impossible to speak of a common and shared civic public good in Israel. Recent ideological trends have demonstrated that the 'general well-being' and 'public interest' in Israel are exclusively determined and should be maintained in the hands of the Jewish majority. It is, therefore difficult to speak about 'civic religion' or 'constitutional patriotism' of a minimal character common to all Israeli citizens (Habermas 1998).

Smootha has defined the Israeli regime by saying that

[d]riven by ethnic nationalism, the state is identified with a core ethnic nation, not with its citizens. The state practices a policy of creating a homogenous nation-state, a state of and for a particular ethnic nation, and acts to promote the language, culture, numerical majority, economic well-being, and political interests of this group. (Smootha 1989: 199–200)

When the most recent Basic Laws were enacted in the early 1990s the immediate impression was that they symbolised a liberalisation process that was difficult to stop.<sup>4</sup> Several Israeli political and legal scholars spoke of the liberalisation of Israeli constitutional law (Rubinstein 2010; Peled 2008). This argument was supported by the discourse of constitutional revolution, enhanced by, at the time, the president of the High Court, Aharon Barak (Barak 2006; Neuer 1998). However, the link between protection of individual rights and the values of the state of Israel 'as

4 There are 11 basic laws in Israel which are considered to have constitutional status. All of them emphasize the substantial Jewish character of the state of Israel or come to protect the interests and institutions of the Jewish people. On Israeli constitutional developments, see (Lerner (2011).

a Jewish and Democratic State' engraved in the two basic laws of 1992 'has overshadowed the language and practice of rights that the basic laws legislation of 1992 sought to further' (Avnon 1998). The propagation of the two liberal basic laws as mirroring Israeli political culture and the role played by the High Court of Justice (HCJ) in monitoring executive decisions became rather a symbolic mask, veiling aggressive neoliberal economic policy, narrowing the welfare services provided by the state and veiling the spatial expansionism of the settlements in the name of the human rights of the settlers, especially their rights for security, normalisation and natural growth.

In the Neo-Zionist era one can clearly speak of what Rogers Brubaker has coined as the 'nationalising state', which 'is the tendency to see the state as an unrealised' nation-state, a state destined to be a 'nation-state', the state of and for a particular nation. The concomitant disposition to remedy this perceived defect, to make the state which it is properly and legitimately destined to be, by promoting the language, culture, demographic domination, economic flourishing, and political hegemony of the nominally 'state-bearing nation' (Brubaker 1996: 63).

A clear manifestation of majoritarianism as a tool of particularistic political well-being are the blunt claims made by one of the most influential civic organisations identified with the Neo-Zionist trend; namely the Institute for Zionist Strategies, an Israeli policy and research think-tank established in 2005 in Jerusalem. The Institute has commissioned a team of mainstream experts headed by Professor Abraham Diskin—formerly Chair of the Political Science Department of the Hebrew University and the Chair of the Israel Political Science Association and currently Professor at the Interdisciplinary Centre in Herzliya—to draft 'A Constitution for the State of Israel'. Diskin has served since the 1990s as the statistician of the Central Committee of Elections in Israel. In one of the Institute's 2009 publications, Dubi Helman and Adi Arbel best expressed the principle of exclusivity as a legitimate characteristic of the state and asserted the exclusive relationship between the Jewishness of the state of Israel and the principle of equality. They claimed:

In the past, the State's status as National Home for the Jewish People was never questioned: it was obvious to the public and to the authorities, including the Judiciary. Practical manifestation of the Jewish status of the state can be seen in the very name of the State and from a multitude of laws such as the Flag, Symbol and Anthem Law 5709–1949; the Independence Law 5709–1949; the Law of Return 5710–1950 (which grants each Jew with the right to immigrate to Israel); the Work and Rest Hours Law 5711–1951 (which adopts the Sabbath and Jewish Holidays as days of rest); laws that institutionalise the cooperation between the State of Israel and the

National Institutions of the Jewish People, and many more. Additionally, the State of Israel initiated programs and invested resources for the welfare of the Jewish people in the Diaspora, including: the promoting of *aliya* to the Land of Israel, programmes to bring Jews to the Galilee, assisting in the *aliya* of Ethiopian Jewry, supporting Jewish Zionist education, memorialising the Holocaust, and other things.

Helman and Arbel complain that the principle of equality has become central in the Israeli judicial discourse and has been posed as a legitimate demand by non-Jewish citizens of the state of Israel. They demonstrate that the principle of equality has become an internal danger which must be cured by legislation. In their view, equality contradicts the fundamental right of the Jewish people to have exclusive privileges in its own state, despite the fact that 20% of the population is not Jewish:

In recent years, a back-peddling trend has developed, which weakens the position of the State of Israel as the National Home of the Jewish People. The State of Israel, which was established as a Jewish State with a democratic form of government, would be turned into a liberal-democratic country with Jewish characteristics only to the extent that these characteristics do not contradict the principle of absolute equality among all groups. This radical liberal approach regards strict and absolute adherence to rigid and ubiquitous equality as the exclusive supreme value in a democratic society.

According to Helman and Arbel, adopting the principle of equality as a supreme value in Israel would deny the Jewish people its right to self-determination, seriously distort democratic principles, violates the intention of the founding fathers, and thwarts legitimate majority rule’.

Based on this ‘internal demographic threat’ posed by the Palestinian citizens of Israel and in order to face it, Helman and Arbel, make clear that:

... it is imperative that Israel enact a Basic Law setting forth clearly that Israel is a Jewish state and the ‘National Homeland of the Jewish people’, and defining explicitly its Jewish character and mission.

Such blunt statements would not be of practical value and importance if not for the fact that a Basic Law proposal, similar to the one proposed by Helman and Arbel, was introduced to the Knesset by an MK, Avi Dichter, who was a key minister in the Israeli government and led the Israeli internal intelligence service (Shabak) a few years ago. Furthermore, the position of Helman and Arbel would have remained private if not for the clear process taking place in Israel in the last decade, when new laws were promoted which aimed to anchor Jewish hegemony and its privileges in the constitutional structure and culture. One of the best examples of this trend is the 2003 ‘amendment’ of the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, which made it almost impossible for Palestinian



citizens of Israel to obtain permits for their Palestinian spouses and children from the Occupied Territories to enter and reside in Israel for purposes of family unification (Adalah 2012). In 2007, the law was amended again to prohibit spouses from ‘enemy states’—Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Iraq—to enter Israel as part of family unification, in order to avoid charges that the law was racist since it was directed solely and specifically against Palestinians (Adalah 2012). These racist amendments, which were declared by the Israeli High Court as constitutional, complement the Israeli Law of Return of the early 1950s—which was viewed by Ben-Gurion as a foundational law of Israel—which provided for any person of Jewish descent to obtain automatic and rapid citizenship of Israel.

The despotic nature of the hegemonic majoritarian principle, utilised in the early years of the Israeli state, became a powerful tool of policies towards the Palestinian citizens of Israel. The best example to illustrate this point is the recent ‘Nakba law’, which allows the Finance Minister to withhold funds from official organisations which decide to commemorate the Palestinian Nakba of 1948 (ACRI 2011). This law is a part and parcel of the grand policy of ‘epistemic violence’ against Palestinian history, memory, and consciousness, as manifested in formal school books, literary and art policies, and even gastronomy (Bar Tal and Teichman 2013).

The immediate meaning of the conservative legislation promoted by the Neo-Zionist camp is that it enjoys a convenient automatic majority to support its views, especially when these are combined with the protection of the rights of the entire Jewish people and the reiteration of its right for a sovereign state in its contested historical land. The bond between the state of Israel and the entire Jewish people is elevated into the major principle of Neo-Zionist ideology, redefining the territory of the nation and membership in it. Neo-Zionists omit the difference between Israel and the West Bank and view them as one entity, emphasising the right of the Jewish people over its entire homeland. When speaking about the state they make clear that the sovereign agent to determine the future of the state is not the citizens of the state, but rather the entire Jewish people. Accordingly, the state of Israel expresses the aspirations of all Jews, including those living in the US, Canada, Australia, Russia, the UK, etc., emptying civic sovereignty from any meaning and replacing it with ethno-nationalistic sovereignty that goes beyond the state. This trans-ethnic sovereignty renders the meaning of citizenship empty and replaces it with kinship as the main logic of sovereign power.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

The previous discussion has shown that the arguments made by mainstream Zionist critics of Neo-Zionists are closely related to their

efforts to maintain the camouflaging of (colonialist) Zionism in liberal garb. However there is a deeper ideological affinity between the two streams, more than the one portrayed by mainstream Zionists. This affinity centres on the central values of Israeli settler-colonial society and the core ideas of mainstream Zionism which dominated Israeli politics for decades. There is, in other words, clear and direct ideological affinity between what David Ben-Gurion, Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky, Rabbi Avraham Hacoen Kook said and did and what Benjamin Netanyahu, Avigdor Liberman, Naftali Benet, Zeev Elkin and Yariv Liven say and do, despite the different timing, location and bluntness. The discourse of superiority, expansionism, exclusiveness and majoritarian despotism is almost the same, despite the difference in the way they veil it. Mainstream Zionism paved the road for the rise of Neo-Zionism, which utilise the same ideas, justifications and practices in order to promote its radical worldview. Neo-Zionists place mainstream Zionists between impossible alternatives; either accept the legitimacy of their policies or look untrustworthy, hypocritical or even as if betraying beliefs they or their ideological fathers propagated in the past.

The previous discussion demonstrates that hidden or understated features of Zionism have been made apparent with the rise of Neo-Zionist trends, leading mainstream Zionist thinkers to become aggravated, since Neo-Zionist thought has put them on the spot. Neo-Zionist thought has managed to pose itself as a direct continuation of classical Zionist thought and where this argument was criticised by liberal Zionists, Neo-Zionists thinkers and practitioners brought evidence that question the entire Zionist project. In other words, Neo-Zionist thinkers embarrass mainstream intellectuals and leaders who seek to depict the former as a deviation rather than a continuation of mainstream Zionism. The unveiling of Zionist thought and practices and the construction of Neo-Zionist thought as their natural heir, given the circumstances, demonstrate that the study of current political trends in Israel today cannot be based on the theory of breaking away from mainstream Zionism. It is true that current interpretations of the four points of Neo-Zionist thought examined earlier, which as demonstrated above are not homogenous, are more blunt and extreme compared with the more pragmatic and moderate discourse of mainstream Zionist thought and practice. Nonetheless, the difference seems to be in the way these ideas and practices are presented and propagated, rather than a difference in their main characteristics and materialisation. This conclusion uncovers mainstream Zionist thought and practices, demonstrating the efforts made by supporters of this stream within Zionism to differentiate it from what is argued by Neo-Zionist to be the former's core ideas. The examination of Neo-Zionist thoughts and practices and their affinity with mainstream Zionism does not mean

to reveal the former in more pragmatic or rational language. What comes out of this analysis is that mainstream Zionism paved the way for Neo-Zionism to emerge; the latter was embedded in mainstream ideas and practices towards the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. The ability of mainstream Zionism to differentiate itself from the ideas and practices of Neo-Zionism is not defensible. Both streams entail settler-colonial characteristics based on exclusivist ethnic religious beliefs that cannot be abolished without delegitimising their own presence on the one hand and cannot be settled with the presence of people that pay a heavy human price for both mainstream Zionist and Neo-Zionist ideas to be realised, on the other. This labyrinth brings up the need for decolonising the colonial logic behind the Zionist-Jewish hegemony in Palestine-Israel as the sole avenue of salvation in the disputed holy land.

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