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**The Other Shift:**  
**Settler Colonial Studies and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

Lorenzo Veracini

Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Melbourne

Menachem Klein's *The Shift: Israel-Palestine from Border Struggle to Ethnic Conflict* recently proposed a reinterpretation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict centred on the transformations that followed the Israeli victory in the war of 1967.<sup>1</sup> Since then, an Israeli-determined 'control system' instituted no less than 5 different Palestinian constituencies defined by their subjection to different administrative regimes: the citizens of Israel, the residents of East Jerusalem, those who live in Gaza, those who live in the West Bank – west of the recently erected separation wall, and those who live in the West Bank – east of it. The progressive emergence of this 'pattern of control', Klein argues, but one could refer to a growing number of contributions proposing similar interpretative shifts, transformed a border dispute into an ethnic confrontation.<sup>2</sup> If approaching a border conflict necessarily involves a search for a territorial resolution, an ethnic confrontation, by definition, rules this possibility out. As well as a shift from a border to an ethnic conflict, however, this article suggests that 'the shift' is also and especially from a system of relationships that could be understood as settler colonial to one crucially characterised by colonial forms.

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<sup>1</sup> Menachem Klein, *The Shift: Israel-Palestine from Border Struggle to Ethnic Conflict*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> On Palestinian 'fragmentation', see also Meron Benvenisti 'United we stand: Do Israelis and Palestinians belong to one divided society, or to two separate societies in a situation of forced proximity as a result of a temporary occupation?', *Haaretz*, 28/01/10, Oren Yiftachel, "'Creeping Apatheid" in Israel-Palestine', *Middle East Report*, 253, 2009, pp. 7-15, 37. It is significant in the context of this article that Benvenisti refers to settler colonialism as a suitable concept for the interpretation of current circumstances in Israel/Palestine.

Based on the insights of a growing comparative literature, this article is based on distinguishing between colonial and settler colonial formations, between attempts to permanently dominate an external constituency while ruling it from a metropolitan centre, as it happened, for example, in India and Nigeria, and efforts to erase it for the purpose of replacing it with another sociopolitical body, as it happened, for example, in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>3</sup> If the latter required the primary extermination or expulsion of the indigenous populations, followed by their subsequent demographic ‘swamping’, the former primarily needed to focus on controlling the ‘natives’. Klein does compare the various regimes Israel established with a number of colonial settings but his overall conclusion is that colonialism is not the issue. By contrast, this article argues that the conflict should be understood as crucially informed by a variety of colonial forms. This theoretical contribution, of course, should be read *in conjunction* with the growing literature dedicated to a detailed analysis of the reality of the Israeli occupation regime; it relies on a growing mass of empirical data deriving from concrete examples, occurrences the readers of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* will be familiar with, and it is by no means meant to stand on its own.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On settler colonial forms as distinct from colonial ones, see, for example, Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983, Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis (eds), *Unsettling Settler Societies*, London, Sage Publications, 1995, Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, London, Cassell, 1999, David Pearson, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Settler Societies: States of Unease*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, Lynette Russell (ed.), *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous-European Encounters in Settler Societies*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001, Caroline Elkins, Susan Pedersen (eds), *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies*, London, Routledge, 2005, Alyosha Goldstein, Alex Lubin (eds), *Settler Colonialism*, special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107, 4, 2008, James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, Tracey Banivanua-Mar, Penelope Edmonds (eds), *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan 2010, Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788-1836*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2010, Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Pacific Rim Cities*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2010, Fiona Bateman, Lionel Pilkington (eds), *Studies in Settler Colonialism: Politics, Identity and Culture*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. See also my works cited below and settler colonial studies, a new scholarly journal dedicated to the comparative study of this specific colonial formation.

<sup>4</sup> For exemplary analyses of the occupation and its operation, but this is a rapidly growing scholarly field, see Neve Gordon, *Israel's Occupation*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2008, Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2008.

However, this theoretical approach, emphasising the relevance of colonial and settler colonial studies to the understanding of the conflict in Israel-Palestine, remains important. The prospect of the ‘two-state’ solution, for example, whether achieved through negotiations and then international recognition of independent ‘Palestine’, or vice versa, as discussed in September 2011 and possibly again in November 2012, when the leadership of the Palestinian Authority formally applied for UN membership and to upgrade its status, is premised on an interpretation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that adopts a colonial subjection to decolonisation paradigm. According to this format, a formerly nonsovereign entity that is subjected to external control becomes emancipated in the context of an international system of relationships. This approach neglects settler colonialism as a social formation that is distinct, indeed largely antithetical, from colonialism, fails to understand Zionism as a settler colonial movement, and cannot address the position of the Palestinians who were ‘transferred’ in 1948 – the Palestinians of the Diaspora – and those who were not ‘transferred’ in 1948 – the ‘Israeli Arabs’. Thus, the colonial subjection to decolonisation paradigm is premised on a partial understanding of Zionist history and practice and only aims to address the circumstances of one Palestinian constituency among many. That is why analysing the conflict within a settler colonial studies framework may be crucial: reflecting on the available options should not be about facing the purportedly exclusive alternative between the ‘one-state’ and the ‘two-state’ solutions.<sup>5</sup> Approaching the conflict would probably require *a suite* of solutions.

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, as Moshe Behar has recently noted, the ‘1S2S’ debate should take account of what happens outside of the conceptual and geographical boundaries set by its parameters. After all, supporters of what he defines as the ‘one-ethnically-cleansed-state solution’ have never been so powerful, and regional developments could present the opportunity for enacting a further ‘transfer’ of substantial segments of the Palestinian population. He concludes: ‘If my delineations thus far are even partially correct, then one conclusion emerges: as critical, engaging and stimulating as the 1S2S exchange is – in practical terms it remains utterly esoteric once juxtaposed with ongoing material politics free from doses of wishful thinking’. Moshe Behar, ‘Unparallel Universes: Iran and Israel’s One-state Solution’, *Global Society*, 25, 3, 2011, pp. 353-376. Quotation at p. 360.

### *A failed settler colonialism*

Emphasising that settler colonial objectives informed pre-1948, post independence, and post-1967 Zionist actions is important.<sup>6</sup> As settler colonial phenomena are essentially defined by processes where an exogenous collective replaces an indigenous one, there is an underlying and uninterrupted continuity of intent that recurring and sustained Zionist attempts to distinguish between pre- and post-1967 Israeli circumstances cannot disguise. But there is a crucial difference between pre- and post-1967 Israeli settler colonial practice: the Israeli capacity of reproducing a successful settler colonial project has substantially declined. Israeli/Zionist settler colonialism was remarkably successful before 1967 and was largely unsuccessful after, and if settler colonialism is about establishing *legitimate* claims to specific locations, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank has ultimately very little to show for over 40 years of unrestrained rule. Normally, debates regarding the Israeli settlements in the West Bank focus on the question of their morality and legality. While not discounting the importance of retaining a moral compass, the fact that post-1967 attempts to turn the Occupied Palestinian Territories into an extension of an otherwise largely successful settler society have failed should be also emphasised.

A brief outline of the differences between colonialism and settler colonialism as distinct formations, as supported by specific reflection on the comparative analysis of different colonial systems, is warranted. In theoretical terms, the settler colonial 'situation' is

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<sup>6</sup> For interventions interpreting Zionism as primarily a settler colonial movement, see, for example, Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*, New York, Monad Press, 1973, Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics*, Berkeley, CA, Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1983, Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society*, London, Pluto, 2006, Steven Salaita, *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan*, Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 2006, Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel*, London, Verso, 2008. See also Omar Jabary, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie, Sobhi Samour (eds), Past is present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine, special issue of *settler colonial studies*, 2, 1, 2012, forthcoming.

quite different from the colonial one (I should point out here that while I am arguing for their theoretical distinction, I have no particular preference for one form over the other: they are both inherently unequal and unjust systems of relationships characterised by exogenous dominance and indigenous subjection).<sup>7</sup> One crucial distinction between them is that the first aims to supersede itself while the latter aims to reproduce itself.<sup>8</sup> This is absolutely critical: while a colonial society is successful only if the principle separating coloniser and colonised is retained, a settler project is only ultimately successful when it *extinguishes* itself, when the settler ceases to be defined as such, becomes a ‘native’, and his/her position is normalised. A successful settler project has emancipated itself from external supervision and control, has established local sovereign political and cultural forms, has terminated substantive indigenous autonomies, and has tamed a landscape that was once perceived as intractably alien. In other words, a settler colonial project that has successfully run its course is no longer settler colonial. They are all inherently dynamic processes characterising the relationships a settler project establishes with its alterities (i.e., the external and internal ‘Others’, the land), and all envisage an end point when a relationship of alterity is finally resolved and no longer detectable. This is why, paradoxically, settler colonialism is usually associated with locations where it ultimately failed (i.e., Rhodesia, Algeria) and not with locales where it finally succeeded (i.e., the Canary Islands, New England – the list could go on, however, settler colonialism is indeed a global phenomenon). It is easier to detect the “Islands of White” than the continents of white.<sup>9</sup> Like the Marxist notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat that would supposedly result in the extinction of the state, settler colonialism can be

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<sup>7</sup> This definition does not specify that the colonists must come from the same location and is flexible enough to allow for the appraisal of colonising endeavours emanating from a diaspora. Incidentally, it should be noted most settler societies resulted from colonisation processes where colonists actually came from a multiplicity of locations. In different ways, they all construct their new communities’ identities via a denial of diasporic origins.

<sup>8</sup> For more sustained discussions of this distinction, see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, Lorenzo Veracini, ‘Introducing *settler colonial studies*’, *settler colonial studies*, 1, 1, 2011, pp. 1-12.

<sup>9</sup> Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1987.

conceptualised as the temporary ‘dictatorship of the settlers’, a form of exclusive but inherently temporary rule that is exercised against indigenous and exogenous alterities until a settler society is extinguished via its normalisation. Except that in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, unlike what eventually happened in Israel proper and indeed in other settler societies, it did not and it cannot happen. The occupation of the Palestinian Territories remains a powerful manufacturer of illegitimacy, not its opposite.

In turn, the theoretical separation between colonial and settler colonial forms sustains another crucial distinction: the project of settler colonising the West Bank and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank should not be seen as the same thing. The Occupation was meant to be a means to an end; it was supposed to enable and facilitate settlement. But then we face a paradox: while the Occupation is the absolute precondition for the settlements’ ongoing existence, since it is designed to *reproduce* itself and become permanent, and since it is ostensibly very successful at what it does, it also inevitably produces a subjected and external Palestinian collective, not the ‘domestic dependent nation’ that would mark a settler colonial project’s triumph. This is also a vital consideration: while under colonial conditions citizenship rights for the colonised are denied or indefinitely postponed in order to disallow native sovereign capacities, under settler colonial conditions elements of a settler citizenship are selectively imposed as means to terminate indigenous sovereign autonomy. The prospect of integration/assimilation, and the rhetorical claim that indigenous individuals *could* participate in the political life of the settler polity are indeed one of the most powerful weapons available to of consolidating settler colonial projects. Settler colonialism is at its strongest when it speaks in universalising terms, when it claims to be ‘closing the gaps’, not when it emphasises or reinforces them. In the context of the settler colonial situation,

indigenous subjectivities are physically and/or discursively transferred away, not permanently subjected.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, as colonial studies as a field of scholarly inquiry has emphasised practically since its inception, colonialism is fundamentally characterised by reciprocal co-constitution in the context of a dialectical process (this field of studies, however, has remained characteristically underdeveloped in Israel).<sup>11</sup> The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the building of infrastructure, the establishment of settlements, and the appropriation of Palestinian land, cannot transform an inherently relational rapport. Indeed, as colonial relationships immobilise colonised subjectivities, the reverse happens, and the more infrastructure and settlements one establishes, the more land one forcibly appropriates, the more the co-constitution of coloniser and colonised progresses.<sup>12</sup> A widespread interpretative paradigm may turn out to be somewhat misleading: the ‘irreversible’ occupation of Gaza and the West Bank does not make the two-state solution ‘impossible’. As it perpetuates the permanent distinction between an indigenous subordinate collective and an exogenous dominant one, the Occupation and its permanent infrastructure may contribute to making the two-state solution ultimate inevitable. And yet one witnesses a strange interpretative convergence. Supporters of the Occupation *wish* that if only it could be made even more oppressive, brutal and forceful, the settler colonial project could succeed. Opponents of the Occupation *fear* that if it is allowed to become even more intrusive, the settler colonial domination of the Occupied Palestinian Territories would become irreversible. These

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<sup>10</sup> On settler colonialism as transfer, and for a taxonomy of different settler colonial transfers, see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, especially pp. 33-52. See also n. 10 below.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, London, Earthscan, 2003, Jean Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, London, Routledge, 2001. Introducing the Hebrew translation of Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* in 2006, Ella Shohat significantly remarks on an academic and public sphere ‘where the “colonial” itself had hardly been thought through in any depth’ (by the time of postcolonial studies’ emergence in the early 1990s). This gap, she notes, has not been closed. See Ella Shohat, ‘Black, Jew, Arab: Postscript to “The Wretched of the Earth”’, *Arena Journal*, 33/34, 2009, pp. 32-60. Quotation at p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> For a Memmian analysis of the colonial dimensions of Zionist/Israeli control of Palestinian life, see David Lloyd ‘Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel’, *settler colonial studies*, 2, 1, 2012 (forthcoming).



approaches are based on knowing everything about the Occupation except what it probably means.

In the end, if the Occupation could be seen in some ways as in the process of extinguishing itself before the onset of the first Intifada, that is, if the Green Line was then being erased as a meaningful border for *all* those who lived in the geographical area under Israeli control, a comprehensive segregationist regime was gradually imposed afterwards; that is, the Green Line acquired a renewed meaning for *some* of those living in the geographical area under Israeli control. Crucially, however, in a settler colonial context, indigenous segregation in one set of locales (i.e., a number of indigenous reserves) must correspond to the possibility of (unequal, of course) indigenous integration in all others, where indigenous peoples and constituencies are then targeted for variously defined assimilatory processes. Enforcing segregation *everywhere* in the West Bank, conversely, ended up constituting a colonised subjectivity that mirrors the institution of colonial, not settler colonial forms. This is why merely calling settlements ‘neighbourhoods’ or ‘communities’, and simply ensuring that settlements *look like* neighbourhoods can never be enough. The necessary normalisation can only proceed once these ‘neighbourhoods’ become fully integrated in their surrounds, and when a relationship of opposition between settler and indigenous collectives is eventually erased or superseded.

Conversely, it is the settlements’ very existence that, in the context of a segregating practice that is deemed as absolutely necessary, institutes the permanent opposition between coloniser and colonised. As mentioned above, and as confirmed by a comparative analysis of locales where the settler collectives were able to effectively manage the local population economy, settler colonial practices can only be effective in contexts where indigenous integration (also variously referred to as ‘absorption’ or ‘assimilation’) is at least theoretically available to the settler colonised. In the absence of this possibility, attempts to enforce the

distanciation of coloniser and colonised cannot establish a settler colonial system of relationships: as the transition from colonial to neo-colonial forms of exploitation has demonstrated, propinquity is a consequence of a colonial system of relationships, not the thing itself. Likewise, controlling a specific constituency while refraining from depending on, or from exploiting, its labour is also an effort to supersede an (admittedly crucial) aspect of a colonial system of relationships that is bound to fail.<sup>13</sup> Ceasing the direct exploitation of a colonised collective cannot turn colonialism into settler colonialism (indeed there are examples of non-exploitive colonialisms).<sup>14</sup>

### *Settler colonialism to colonialism*

A focus on Israeli-Palestinian antagonism can be misleading in a context in which the main opposition may be that between a settler colonial occupation that wins by erasing itself and a colonial occupation that wins by reproducing itself. On the one hand, the Occupation is essential and dismantling it would jeopardise the settlements' viability; on the other, the Occupation *erases the very conditions of possibility* for reproducing an effective settler colonial project. It is a double bind from which, from the Zionist settler colonial project's point of view, there is no way out. Israeli planners thought they could achieve a settler colonial aim via essentially colonial means but did not consider how inherently different the

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<sup>13</sup> See Shir Hever, *The Political Economy of Israel's Occupation: Repression Beyond Exploitation*, London, Pluto Press, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> In a context that could not be different from that of the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the early 2010s, Robert Paine coined in the late 1970s the notion of 'welfare colonialism' to describe the system of colonial relationships then prevalent in the Canadian North. Inherently contradictory, 'solicitous rather than exploitive, and liberal rather than repressive', welfare colonialism is a circumstance in which colonisers still take all decisions and still control the future of the colonised. See Robert Paine, 'The Path of Welfare Colonialism', in Robert Paine (ed.), *The White Arctic: Anthropological Essays on Tutelage and Ethnicity*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1977, pp. 7-28 (quotation at p. 3). Similarly solicitous rather than exploitative, and yet repressive and more repressive, the colonial regime instituted in the Occupied Palestinian Territories could be defined as 'harmfare colonialism'.

two circumstances are. They thought they could pay lip service to the ‘two-state’ solution (especially in the presence of international audiences) while operating decisively to erase its very possibility. It is not unusual for people in charge of political processes to do things that are different from what they say they would do. And yet, in this case, they did what they at times said they would do while thinking they were doing its opposite. They were resolved and prepared, they could clearly master the technology and resources, but they did not realise that the systematic ‘matrix of control’ and the consequent separation they were enforcing would inevitably constitute a colonised Palestinian subjectivity that marks the strategic failure of a settler colonial project.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the relationship between Occupation and settlement seems now to be irreversibly compromised. The Occupation was progressively established as a means to enable permanent settlements, now it is the settlements that perpetuate the need for permanent occupation.<sup>16</sup> As a result, failed settler colonialism reverts to colonialism. It is an impasse that even a fully articulated transferist imagination cannot elude.<sup>17</sup> The Palestinians living under the Occupation, now legally defined as ‘infiltrators’, are subjected to a punishing regime that should promote their departure and/or create conditions appropriate for their expulsion, turn them into ‘present absentees’, and in the meantime ensure their invisibility. But different and simultaneous approaches to transfer can offset each other. Please note: I am not denying that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been administratively or otherwise transferred after 1967, or suggesting that the Occupation should harmonise its

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<sup>15</sup> For an entry point to the ‘matrix of control’, see Jeff Halper, ‘The Key to Peace: Dismantling the Matrix of Control’, ICAHD. Available at: <http://www.icahd.org/eng/articles>. Accessed: 02/12/12.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation*, London, Verso, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> A determination to ‘transfer’ in various ways the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories may be explicitly articulated, but, contrary to what routinely happens in other settler colonial settings, Israeli approaches systematically reject, or are unable to recognise the very admissibility of transfers that target the indigenous sector of the population economy by envisaging the transformation of indigenous individuals or constituencies in variously assimilated or integrated contributors to the settler polity. In the long term, these are the most viable types of transfer – not because they positively provide for the inclusion of assimilated indigeneity (that’s almost never the point), but because they create the conditions for the extinguishment of indigenous *qua* indigenous claims.

transferist agendas – on the contrary, I am arguing that it can't. On the other hand, if the 'silent transfer' of Palestinians, a desire to leave resulting from being squeezed and being subjected to enforced immobility, and Palestinians are subjected to a regime that is obsessively interested in controlling their mobility, one encounters another double bind, as relaxing constraints on Palestinian mobility, a move that would supposedly enable the expression of this putative yearning, would also undermine the desire itself.<sup>18</sup> Likewise for visibility: in theory, the Occupation should operate smoothly and render the Palestinian population largely invisible. On the other hand, the Occupation is premised on acquiring an enhanced, truly panoptical capacity to *see* all facets of Palestinian life, demands that the daily humiliation of Palestinian people be especially visible, and requires that responses to possible challenges to its operation be predictable, disproportionate and, most importantly, highly visible (this posture may secure 'deterrence', but certainly defeats the purpose). In these circumstances – homeopathically promoting concealment through visibility and mobility via constraint, and yet very unhomeopathically delivering ever-increasing doses – it is exactly because the Occupation is efficient that it is not effective. Why would the prospect of a 'Nakbaic conjuncture' be even necessary, and there is substantial evidence of these imaginings in current Israeli public discourse, if the current regime was deemed to be operating satisfactorily in the first place?<sup>19</sup> The settler colonial project is obsessed with demographic concerns. But is a settler colonial project that must think about catastrophic events (visited on others) to imagine its success doing that well?

It is not that counterintuitive: since a desire to leave cannot be detached from the possibility of exercising a right to return, the most efficient way of turning the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories into a people of migrants would probably be to give them passports

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<sup>18</sup> Chaim Levinson 'Israel has 101 different types of permits governing Palestinian movement', *Haaretz*, 23/12/11.

<sup>19</sup> Moshe Behar, 'Unparallel Universes: Iran and Israel's One-state Solution', *Global Society*, 25, 3, 2011, especially pp. 364-367.

(and passports and the sovereignty that underpins them are exactly about the capacity to actualise this right). The most efficient way to make their lives invisible would be to discontinue their direct oppression. Given this impasse, the best the Occupation can do is to maintain rather than supersede itself. Of course, at this point the Occupation is not likely to be dismantled through a series of deliberate acts mirroring and reversing its systematic establishment (especially after 1992).

But if the occupation is irreversible and if there is no way back – and there is no way back – the exit may be forward. The Palestinian Authority, or a government led by Hamas in Gaza could inherit the Occupation's structures and reconstitute themselves into a postcolonial successor polity – they both, after all, together with a plethora of western NGOs, can be considered an inherent part of the Occupation in its current configuration. It will not be the first time that a colonial power succeeds by effectively establishing the institutions of the colonial state that, in turn, enable the possibility of decolonisation (it should be noted, however, that often colonial powers deliberately established inherently defective postcolonial successors with the purpose of ultimately demonstrating their own indispensability). It won't be, after all, a major departure. As historian of postcolonial Africa Mahmood Mamdani has repeatedly noted, the decolonised polity and the neo-colonial relations it entertains with former colonising cores should be understood as the colonial state (and the colonial relations it entertained with the imperial centre) direct successors.<sup>20</sup> Thus, as the scholarship on decolonisation processes has extensively emphasised, continuity and discontinuity need to be appraised together.

This, in turn, requires a further interpretative shift: the inevitability of the establishment of a successor Palestinian polity should be seen as a function of Israeli strength, not weakness (besides, once this postcolony is established, we may even witness

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<sup>20</sup> See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Oxford, James Currey, 1996, Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2002.

generosity, as the successor state's stability will become an Israeli security asset). Likewise, internationally sanctioned Palestinian independence (and associated forms of neocolonial dependency) in the West Bank and Gaza should be seen as the colonial occupation's logical outcome, not its demise. The point is that if you colonise, you'll end negotiating sovereign capacities *between* (unequal) polities, whereas if you settler colonise, you'll negotiate *within* the polity. Thus, colonialism is followed by decolonisation; only settler colonialism remains 'impervious to regime change'.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, there is no intermediate solution and deciding not to decide has also proved elusive. *There is no regime that is formidable enough to extinguish and reinforce itself at the same time.* Colonial and settler colonial forms routinely mix and interpenetrate, and yet, as they remain antithetical, one necessarily prevails over the other. And in the West Bank and Gaza it is the colonial form that has now prevailed.

It is ironic, really. For much of its history as a settler colonial project Zionism achieved remarkable results in comparatively difficult circumstances; then, after 1967 and in later decades, having finally established unchallenged regional supremacy and in the presence of unwavering US support, which is no little asset, could no longer perform. Let's say it: the Zionist settlers of old were much more effective settler colonisers than today's colonial settlers (they also had a fully developed comparative understanding of their project).<sup>22</sup> We need to account for this change, and pointing to a comprehensive failure to understand the distinction between colonialism and settler colonialism as distinct formations may contribute to explaining this paradox. But this is not all. That colonial forms are creeping into a settler colonial scenario, and that this shift involves Israel proper as well – where the relative

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<sup>21</sup> Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8, 4, 2006, p. 402.

<sup>22</sup> For evidence of the intensity of this comparative awareness, see, for example, Zachary Lockman, 'Land, Labor and the Logic of Zionism: A Critical Engagement with Gershon Shafir', *settler colonial studies*, 2, 1, 2012, forthcoming, Shalom Reichman, Shlomo Hasson, 'A Cross-cultural Diffusion of Colonization: From Posen to Palestine', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 74, 1, 1984, pp. 57-70.

integration of the 'Israeli Arabs' is being progressively reversed and where even the very autonomy of a settler colonial project is also being eroded – should be emphasised as well.

### *Settler colonialism to recolonisation*

The Zionist settlers of old were ultimately and jealously independent of both the imperial agencies they were collaborating with, or contesting, and the organisations of the Jewish Diaspora. If they needed support, they understood this reliance as temporary. Whereas settler colonial forms are inherently premised on settler autonomy and on the establishment of a substantive localised sovereign capacity that can use metropolitan (or, in the case of Zionism, Diasporic, and/or imperial) support but can also dispose of it when it is necessary, Israel may in recent decades have undergone what could be defined as a recolonisation process ('recolonisation' is a concept that New Zealand historian James Belich sees as informing the development of many settler colonial contexts – while his analysis focuses on the economic dimensions of recolonisation, this notion could be extended to its political manifestations).<sup>23</sup>

The need to mobilise the Diaspora (and other supporters – the US Christian Zionists, for example) in order to colonise the West Bank has produced a situation in which the whole settler colonial project depends (again) on external support. There is a crucial difference between taking advantage of external support and having to rely on it. Dependency on external support is entirely natural for a colonial project – colonial dependencies are by definition political entities ruled from elsewhere. It is never good news, however, for a settler colonial one. Settler colonists who permanently rely on variously negotiated accommodations with indigenous sovereigns operate outside the boundaries of a settler colonial system of

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<sup>23</sup> See James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, especially pp. 435-547.

relationships, but settler colonists who permanently rely on exogenous support also operate outside these boundaries.

A focus on the recolonisation of a settler colonial project, not as a *fait accompli* but as a process, can indeed be useful to the interpretation of current Israeli circumstances. Zionism by definition was about establishing a country of *some* Jewish people (i.e., those who would move there). The recurring prospect of making Israel the country of *all* Jews (however this category may be defined) produces an inevitable recolonisation effect that subjects Jewish Israelis to the political determination of others. As mentioned above, this is not unprecedented, and in the context of the relationships a settler collective entertains with external agencies, contestations surrounding the ‘state of the Jewish people’ formula can be seen as structurally replicating debates surrounding the position of the 13 colonies during the revolutionary war in North America. Royalists and Loyalists claimed that the colonies were the indivisible property of the whole British nation (as represented by the king in parliament). The settlers of the colonies begged to differ, had a tea party dressed up as Indians and established the most successful settler polity of all (both contenders were denying the ultimate validity of indigenous claims, albeit in substantially different ways). Needless to say, the North American settler patriots did not fight for the rights of all as freeborn Englishmen, or for the rights of all freeborn Englishmen. They fought for *their* specific rights as freeborn Englishmen and nobody else’s (even though, as Aziz Rana has recently outlined in a convincing book, immigrating co-ethnics were necessary and welcome and were for a long time seamlessly incorporated on arrival as settlers through alien voting legislation and access to land).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Aziz Rana’s *The Two Faces of American Freedom*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2010.



This is also crucial: settler colonial formations are inherently premised on elective (and/or selective) forms of belonging.<sup>25</sup> Thomas Jefferson, for example, who understood the serial establishment of settler republics as his personal duty, knew that belonging to the US, unlike belonging to other national entities, was ‘a matter of individual conscience and choice’.<sup>26</sup> Volitional belonging, as epitomised for him by the very act of having voluntarily moved to America, and to the West, was and is structurally different from ascriptive types of belonging (the accident of birth, for example). That recolonisation and the forms of dependency that it institutes are also and indeed especially an endogenous Israeli trend – that they have the ostensible support of the majority of the Israeli public – does not make them structurally different from other recolonisation processes and does not change their inherently anti-settler colonial character. A successful settler project can only be the project of its settlers – no one else’s. Recolonisation compromises settler colonialism. As it erases the necessary distinction between settler insiders and exogenous outsiders, recolonisation prevents effective settler indigenisation, which is a crucial element of the settler colonial ‘situation’, a point that many in the Zionist movement understood quite clearly (even if proposals regarding *how* to approach indigenisation varied dramatically).<sup>27</sup> Indigenisation is essential to the establishment of a legitimate settler claim. Thus, settlers aim to own the land, but also to own it *as indigenous peoples would*, which is ultimately the only way of claiming a radical and original title (that is, of not owning it as a result of fraudulent transactions or forcible dispossession – yet again, the two most frequently overlap). Failure to fully

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<sup>25</sup> On ‘elective’ forms of belonging see Mike Savage, ‘The Politics of Elective Belonging’, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 27, 2, 2010, pp. 115-135.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Peter S. Onuf, Leonard J. Sadosky, *Jeffersonian America*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> On Zionist attempts to collectively ‘indigenise’, see Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism*, London, Verso, 2008, pp. 107-109 (on the Canaanites), and Chapter 7, entitled “The Bible of an Autochthonous Settler: Ben-Gurion reads the Book of Joshua”, pp. 244-282. On ‘indigenisation’ as a fundamental trait of settler colonial discursive orders, see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, especially pp. 17-32.

indigenise vis-à-vis those who have not yet moved to the settler locale is also rarely good news for a settler colonial project.

While the reverse is also true – failure to indigenise creates the conditions of possibility for recolonisation to become operative – in the end, recolonisation processes constitute a ‘new old land’, not the ‘old new land’ of settler colonial/Zionist imaginings. It is significant that, according to settler colonial traditions, it is always settlement that makes a nation, not vice versa. (Indeed, these renditions of colonising processes routinely refer to the inevitable differentiation of national types that the very experience of settlement and life on the land produces, a differentiation that is then used to sustain claims to political autonomy.) Thus, supporting external constituencies may not ultimately have Israel’s *settler* colonial project at heart. They seem more interested in their capacity to shape Israeli actions, in sustaining Israel’s control over all Palestinians, and in their ability to use Israeli circumstances as a reference point capable of galvanising their political rhetoric (and one certainly needs reference points when is running out of ideas). Thus, they can be quite dismissive of what could be construed as attempts to renegotiate the Israeli system of control over Palestinian life (and, implicitly, of the settler sovereign capacity that enacting this renegotiation would constitute and demonstrate). Unlike the majority of the Israeli public, the American based Zionist organisations were, for example, strongly opposed to the Israeli government’s decision to exchange in October 2011 100% of the Israeli captives in Palestinian hands for less than 20% of Palestinians held in Israeli captivity.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Bradley Burston, ‘The new U.S. Zionist: Israel-bashing, made kosher’, *Haaretz*, 23/10/11. Then again, despite ostensible disagreement there is a substantial convergence in Israeli public debate: while some considered with pride what Alon Idan has called ‘Israel’s racist price index’, whereby one Israeli was deemed to be worth 1027 Palestinians, others have looked at the exchange rate and its implications with dismay. ‘The Shalit deal is, in fact, a public display of Israel’s racist price index’, Idan commented. ‘The ceremony occurs every few years and the index is designed to update the market values of the region’s various races’, he continued: ‘As of October 2011, in the Israeli market, the price of one Jew equals 1,027 Arabs. And the price increases every day’. In this context, the very fact that the deal confirmed that Palestinian captives are proportionally worth five times their Israeli counterparts remains overlooked. Alon Idan, ‘Shalit deal reveals Israel’s superiority complex’, *Haaretz*, 28/10/11.

External supporters also resent typically settler colonial attempts to promote immigration to the settler periphery, as if a successful settler colonial project should need to actively promote the immigration of potential settlers beyond the ostensible possibility of a ‘regenerated’ lifestyle. Swift and overwhelming reaction to an advertising campaign promoted by the Israeli Absorption Ministry in late November 2011, ‘insensitively’ promoting the re-emigration to Israel of Israelis living in the US by questioning the Jewishness of Jewish life in the Diaspora, immediately prompted the Israeli government to backtrack.<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that these ads were not trying to convince American Jews of the desirability of migrating to the settler colonial locale; they were targeting a constituency that had, for an extraordinary diversity of reasons, voted with its feet *out* of the settler project. Moreover, this campaign was not positively prospecting the opportunity to embrace a regenerating lifestyle but, on the contrary, emphasised the possibility of retaining a specific definitory character – as defensive a proposition as it can be. Similarly, the Jewish Agency has recently shifted its focus from supporting migrants to promoting the links between Israel and the Diaspora via the sponsorship of temporary visits.<sup>30</sup> This is not how a healthily indigenising settler colonial collective positions itself. The agents of the different settler colonies that were dispatched to the European metropolises and, later, their successors from the British Dominions, even those from colonies or dominions that were finding it difficult to promote the migration of a sufficient number of settlers, or those who had serious doubts about the quality of incoming settlers, while always careful to play down the cultural

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<sup>29</sup> Barak Ravid, ‘Netanyahu cancels controversial ad campaign to bring back Israeli expats from the U.S.’, *Haaretz*, 02/12/11. This refrain is not unprecedented in settler discourse. White Rhodesians, for example, also promoted immigration by highlighting how only in Rhodesia it was possible to embrace a lifestyle premised on old fashioned and traditional notions of Britishness that had been discontinued in the motherland.

<sup>30</sup> See a recent exchange published in *Haaretz* on the subject, where in response to criticism regarding the Jewish Agency’s plan to discontinue its funding for the higher education of new (Jewish) immigrants to Israel and focus on ‘Jewish-identity building’ instead, director-general of the Jewish Agency for Israel Alan Hoffmann reiterates the Agency’s “new mission: bringing ever-larger circles of young Jews to visit and experience Israel”. Daniel Tauber, ‘Keep aliyah on the agenda’, *Haaretz*, 13/01/12, Alan Hoffmann, ‘A better approach to aliyah’, *Haaretz*, 20/01/12.

differences between metropole and colony, never endeavoured to organise those who had failed to settle after a stay in the colonies.

These episodes are indicative of a recolonising trend – they are about the difficulties a settler colonial project is facing in its assertion of an ultimate sovereign capacity vis-à-vis its indigenous and exogenous alterities. The Zionist settlers of old were able to allow for the subordinate integration of Palestinians within the structures of their settler project – they may have done so only because circumstances forced them to compromise but it worked in their favour. In the end, incapable of renegotiating its relationship with indigenous constituencies, or of selectively integrating indigenous people on the one hand, and unable to autonomously control the separation between settler colonial collective and exogenous alterities on the other, the settler colonial project loses ultimate control over its population economy while recolonisation can proceed. Recent attempts to interpret automatic US support for Israeli actions with reference to the extraordinary capacity of an organised, well funded, and strategically located pro-Israel lobby are misleading.<sup>31</sup> The lobby is there, of course, and it is well funded and strategically located, even if largely redundant – you cannot improve on automatic, unquestioning and unqualified support – but its activities should be framed in the context of the recolonisation of Israeli circumstances, not in the context of an Israeli ‘colonisation’ of US policy (even if the two processes can look alike, they proceed from different directions).

Besides, when it comes to recolonisation processes it seems wise to look both ways. In a recent article entitled “The Republican Nightmare”, David Bromwich highlighted the crucial distinction between appealing to Jewish voters and appealing to Jewish donors, and, noting the almost unanimous opposition the Israeli intelligence establishment has expressed against the prospect of military adventurism against Iran, concluded:

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<sup>31</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

So we are at a strange crossroads. The right-wing coalition government of Israel is trying to secure support, with the help of an American party in an election year, for an act of war that it could not hope to accomplish unassisted; while an American opposition party complies with the demand of support by a foreign power, in an election year, to gain financial backing and popular leverage that it could not acquire unassisted.<sup>32</sup>

Strange indeed, but it would all make more sense if one added an appraisal of a recolonisation dynamic to the equation; after all, all recolonisation processes rely necessarily both on a recolonisation party located in the settler periphery and on a recolonisation lobby firmly established in the metropolitan core (and their entanglements). One can be the colony of a diaspora as well as a colony of a particular lobby or a corporate body and its local allies.<sup>33</sup> The history of the British Empire, the history I am most acquainted with, is replete with instances of this kind.

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<sup>32</sup> David Bromwich, 'The Republican Nightmare', *The New York Review of Books*, 09/02/12. Available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/feb/09/republican-nightmare/> Accessed: 31/01/12. On the other side of the Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea, but on the same subject, Chemi Shalev recently noted in *Haaretz* that 'Israel has never been so prominent in any presidential race. It never served as such a "wedge issue". And it never received such sweeping and unequivocal support – especially for its right flank. The statement made by the current front-runner, Newt Gingrich, about the Palestinians being "an invented nation" is only the most recent in a string of policy statements that, in Israeli terms, would position the Republican candidates – with the exception of Ron Paul – somewhere in the Knesset's radical right, between the Likud's Danny Danon and National Union's Aryeh Eldad. Michele Bachmann says Israel shouldn't give back one more inch of territory; Rick Perry says Israel can build settlements to its heart's content; Rick Santorum has already annexed the West Bank to Israel proper; Jon Huntsman claims that Israel is the only American interest in the Middle East; and Mitt Romney thinks the United States should keep its mouth shut on the peace process and surrender the floor to his good friend "Bibi" Netanyahu. Oh, and they all promise to move the American Embassy to Jerusalem, at once'. And yet, I suspect that this support would become somewhat confused if it needed to decide between an occupation that reinforces itself and an occupation that supersede itself. This support is not unqualified: it only exists because Israel can be represented as needing support, and because it can be represented as a heterotopian locale, as a really existing place of alternative ordering. In the end, these supporters are probably more interested in supporting their support for Israel than in supporting Israel. See Chemi Shalev, 'The Republican's unconditional support for Israel is undoubtedly gratifying for many Jewish voters, but in the long run, it could do more harm than good', *Haaretz*, 15/12/11.

<sup>33</sup> Advocating a 'break away from the Jewish lobby' and its capacity to shape Israeli policy – that is, calling for what amounts to a declaration of settler independence, and noting Prime Minister Netanyahu's primary reliance on foreign funding, Oudeh Basharat recently noted that 'there are some [i.e., those who rely on the lobby] who

In any case, making options that could not otherwise be considered is an informal yet incredibly powerful way to shape decision making. Paradoxically, by making a colonial occupation possible, and therefore tempting, and therefore actual, it is this external support that ultimately makes the prospect of successful settler colonisation (yet alone ‘democratic’ life) impossible.<sup>34</sup> After all, from a Zionist point of view and for the reasons outlined above, the problem may not be that the Occupation is not allowed to do what it is meant to do, but that it quite efficiently does what it is not meant to.

## *Conclusion*

*The Shift* argues that since 1967 the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation has progressively reverted into what it was before 1948: an ethnic conflict. On the contrary, in these preliminary notes I have suggested that it is since the policy of closure that was instituted in the early 1990s that Israel-Palestine has turned into what it was before 1948: a locale again primarily informed by the presence and operation of a variety of specifically colonial forms.<sup>35</sup> Of course, the shift Klein identifies *has* produced a set of circumstances where the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation can now be read as an ethnic conflict, and a territorial solution *has*

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see America as the place where they will live after retiring from their years of service in the Middle East’. This intuition is significant and convincing: the distinction between an intention to stay and an aspiration to eventually leave is, after all, as good a definition as any of what separates a ‘colonist’ from a ‘settler’. Oudeh Basharat, ‘For Mideast peace, Israel must cut off U.S. Jewish lobby’, *Haaretz*, 05/02/12.

<sup>34</sup> In *The Anatomy of Israel’s Survival* (New York, Public Affairs, 2011) Hirsh Goodman expands on his concern with what the settlers do to Israel’s ultimate security because of what they do to its legitimacy. While Israel’s survival is not at stake, its survival as a settler society is. On the other hand, as it differently affects Zionist constituencies located in two separate locales, the ‘crisis of Zionism’ could indeed be seen as a colonial crisis. See Peter Beinart, *The crisis of Zionism*, New York, Times Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Colonialism and settler colonial forms are always mixed in reality, and this is not to say that colonial forms did not inform Israeli-Palestinian relations in the period between the establishment of the Israeli state and the formal disbandment of the military government in 1966 (and indeed later – most of its regulations remained in place). The crucial difference is, however, in the ways in which a particular regime is imagined either as permanent or in the process of extinguishing itself. In other words, if the military government and the policies that followed its disbandment were manufacturing ‘Israeli Arabs’, the post 1967 Occupation, and especially its post-1992 closures-filled version, has been a tremendously powerful manufacturer of ‘Palestinians’. It is no small difference.

become impracticable. But this article seeks to *integrate* this approach, not to dismiss it. And in a sense, the conflict has remained a border conflict: the border separating a colonial from a settler colonial system of domination.

If the conflict has shifted, we should shift established approaches to the interpretation of the conflict as well. When we think about settler colonialism in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we need to redirect our gaze from the West Bank, where it failed, to other areas in Israel, where it succeeded. What happens in the West Bank may be a consequence of the institution of an ‘accidental empire’ (it really depends on one’s definition of ‘accidental’), but while there are settlers, and while it is an empire, it is not a settler colonial empire.<sup>36</sup> This is the other shift – an interpretative one. As the ‘one-state’ solution turns out to be the settler colonial solution, the Occupation and its perpetuation should be seen as the colonial solution, a regime that will likely lead to the establishment of two (unequal) polities in the Erez Israel/Greater Palestine area. That the colonial settlers of the West Bank are failing as settler colonisers, that they and their supporters are damaging the ‘achievements’ of a settler colonial project, and the recolonisation of Israeli life should be emphasised. The post-1967 divergence suggests that we are facing *one* Zionist settler colonial project and *two* outcomes: one largely successful, the other largely unsuccessful. The simultaneous coexistence of successful and failed settler colonialisms – that is, of a largely successful settler colonial and a largely successful colonial formation – explains why, the decolonisation paradigm remains available for the West Bank and Gaza while other frameworks must be available for the Palestinians who were trapped *within*, and those who were trapped *without* the area controlled by Israel in 1949 (and their descendants).

These considerations may be important for people who have an interest in Zionist efforts, but are also vital for debates that should take place within the Palestinian national

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<sup>36</sup> See Gershom Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of Settlements, 1967-1977*, New York, Times Books, 2006.

movement. The options available to this movement are informed by this divergence. We must consider the implications of the Palestinian Authority leadership's pursuit of a 'two-state' solution for the Palestinians who were subjected to a successful settler colonial project. For all these reasons, the Palestinian constituencies that remain neglected in the context of the 'two-state' solution framework must be allowed to talk about settler colonialism and the way it works (and sometime doesn't).