

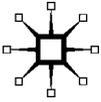
ISRAELI EXCEPTIONALISM

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THE DESTABILIZING LOGIC OF ZIONISM

M. Shahid Alam

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ISRAELI EXCEPTIONALISM

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You have the light, but you have no humanity. Seek humanity, for that is the goal.

—Rumi

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PREFACE

Why is an economist writing a book on the geopolitics of Zionism? This is easily explained. I could have written a book about the economics of Zionism, the Israeli economy, or the economy of the West Bank and Gaza, but how would any of that have helped me to understand the cold logic and the deep passions that have driven Zionism?

Zionism is a historic movement that emerges from the guts of Europe's turbulent history. It is propelled by the dialectical interactions between two intertwined streams of Western civilization, the Jewish and Christian. And, as it has unfolded, Zionism has brought both these Western streams into a dangerous collision with the Islamicate. It would not be easy squeezing this tragic history into an economic model or a set of econometric estimations.

In my capacity as an “economist” too, Zionism, at its core—as an exclusionary settler colonialism—was scarcely a strange beast. I began grappling with colonialism as a graduate student. In one of the three essays that I wrote for my PhD dissertation, I used the tools of economics to explain why the free trade that the British imposed on India in the nineteenth century had led to its pauperization. A decade later, after I had secured “citizenship” in the department of economics at Northeastern University, I returned to this subject again. In several articles, leading to a book, *Poverty from the Wealth of Nations*, I examined the theory, history, and evidence on the connections between colonialism and backwardness in the global economy that emerged during the nineteenth century.

Zionism has always piqued my interest because of the cleverness that it brought to the defense of its aims. I had my first encounter with a Zionist in 1974 when I was a student at the University of Indiana at Bloomington. When my interlocutor discovered my opposition to Zionism, the conversation quickly took an eerie turn. In anger, assuming that I was an Arab, he placed the blame for the Holocaust on the Arabs. If the Arabs had not resisted the entry of Jews into Palestine, there would have been no Jews in

Europe for the Nazis to exterminate; they would all be in Palestine. This was my first taste of the self-righteous rhetoric of Zionism.

I first began writing about Zionism when I was persuaded by the attacks of 9/11 to enter into the public discourse on the “clash of civilizations,” a brilliantly executed ideologization of the Zionist onslaught against the Arabs. At this time, I first began asking myself, why had Zionism achieved such dramatic success during a phase of global capitalism when all overt imperialist intrusions into the periphery were being rolled back and terminated? My early jabs at this question produced a few essays that became part of my previous book, *Challenging the New Orientalism*. I will let the reader decide if the book in hand, the result of three years’ labor, has produced a more definitive explanation.

Writing about Zionism has not been easy. The history of Zionism is history gone wrong, and not only for the Palestinians. The tragedy for the Palestinians is obvious, although blinded by racism and the Zionist bias of their media, Westerners only recently have begun to see this tragedy for what it is. It has been a tragedy for the Jewish people too, who were co-opted by the Zionists to place their energy, their talent, and their hopes on a project they should never have undertaken, and whose only chance of success lay in obliterating the hopes of another people. The more trapped this project becomes in its own logic, the greater the destruction it becomes willing to wreak. It chooses destruction in order to delay coming to terms with, and making amends for, the tragedy it has spawned.

Thankfully, during my encounters with Zionism, I have received warm support from a few good friends. They stood by me when my writings provoked the ire of Zionists and some of their overzealous acolytes. Critics of Zionism have never been safe from reprisals in the United States; after 9/11, their position became more precarious. Alone, I could not have faced the special attention I was receiving from this band of zealots. For their warm support, friendship, and counsel in these difficult times, I am grateful to Elaine Hagopian, Syed Shakeel, Ken Barney, Paul de Rooij, Lawrence Davidson, Frank Naarendorp, Kamal Ahmed, Susan Barney, Nazim Ali, Agha Sayeed, Teepu Siddique, Amr Fahmi, and Muhammad Idrees Ahmad. Although few, their warmth more than compensated for their fewness.

Two of my friends deserve my special thanks. Very generously, Elaine and Ken provided extensive comments on an earlier draft of this book, which proved very helpful in revisions of the manuscript. I hasten to add that these friends do not agree with all the particulars of the case that I

present in this book. Indeed, my differences with Ken produced at least one very lively exchange of opposing viewpoints.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge a more personal debt to Farzana, Junaid, and Noor—my wife and sons—for putting up, during the past three years, with the more than usual dose of my dour prose about all that is wrong with the world. Now that this book is behind us, I promise there will be more sweetness and light, more Rumi and Ghalib, more Iqbal and Faiz.

I will close with words borrowed from al-Beruni's *Kitāb al-Hind*: "We ask God to pardon us for every statement of ours which is not true. We ask Him to help us that we may adhere to that which yields Him satisfaction. We ask Him to lead us to a proper insight into the nature of that which is false and idle, that we may sift it so as to distinguish the chaff from the wheat. All good comes from Him, and it is He who is clement towards His slaves. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds, and His blessings be upon the prophet Muhammad and his whole family!"