

Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims (1979)

By Edward Said

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Zionism and the Attitudes of European Colonialism

...it is frequently argued that such an idea as Zionism, for all its political tribulations and the struggles on its behalf, is at bottom an unchanging idea that expresses the yearning for Jewish political and religious self-determination-for Jewish national selfhood-to be exercised on the promised land. Because Zionism seems to have culminated in the creation of the state of Israel, it is also argued that the historical realization of the idea confirms its unchanging essence and, no less important, the means used for its realization. Very little is said about what Zionism entailed for non-Jews who happened to have encountered it; for that matter, nothing is said about where (outside Jewish history) it took place, and from what in the historical context of nineteenth-century Europe Zionism drew its force. To the Palestinian, for whom Zionism was somebody else's idea imported into Palestine and for which in a very concrete way he or she was made to pay and suffer, these forgotten things about Zionism are the very things that are centrally important.

In short, 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 systems for accumulation (of power, land, ideological legitimacy) and displacement (of people, other ideas, prior legitimacy). Present political and cultural actualities make such an examination extraordinarily difficult, as much because Zionism in the postindustrial West has acquired for itself an almost unchallenged hegemony in liberal "establishment" discourse, as because in keeping with one of its central ideological characteristics, Zionism has hidden, or caused to disappear, the literal historical ground of its growth, its political cost to the native inhabitants of Palestine, and its militantly oppressive discriminations between Jews and non-Jews.

...The concealment by Zionism of its own history has by now therefore become institutionalized, and not only in Israel. To bring out its history as in a sense it was exacted from Palestine and the Palestinians, these victims on whose suppression Zionism and Israel have depended, is thus a specific intellectual/political task in the present context of discussion about "a comprehensive peace" in the Middle East.

The special, one might even call it the privileged, place in this discussion of the United States is impressive, for all sorts of reasons. In no other country, except Israel, is Zionism enshrined as an unquestioned good, and in no other country is there so strong a conjuncture of powerful institutions and interests-the press, the liberal intelligentsia, the military-industrial complex, the academic community, labor unions-for whom [...] uncritical support of Israel and Zionism enhances their domestic as well as international

standing. Although there has recently been some modulation in this remarkable consensus-due to the influence of Arab oil, the emergence of countervailing conservative states allied to the United States (Saudi Arabia, Egypt), the redoubtable political and military visibility of the Palestinian people and their representatives the PLO-the prevailing pro-Israeli bias persists. For not only does it have deep cultural roots in the West generally and the United States in particular, but its negative, interdictory character vis-a-vis the whole historical reality is systematic.

Yet there is no getting around the formidable historical reality that in trying to deal with what Zionism has suppressed about the Palestinian people, one also abuts the entire disastrous problem of anti-Semitism on the one hand, and on the other, the complex interrelationship between the Palestinians and the Arab states.

...To write critically about Zionism in Palestine has therefore never meant, and does not mean now, being anti-Semitic; conversely, the struggle for Palestinian rights and self-determination does not mean support for the Saudi royal family, nor for the antiquated and oppressive state structures of most of the Arab nations.

One must admit, however, that all liberals and even most "radicals" have been unable to overcome the Zionist habit of equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. Any well-meaning person can thus oppose South African or American racism and at the same time tacitly support Zionist racial discrimination against non-Jews in Palestine. The almost total absence of any handily available historical knowledge from non-Zionist sources, the dissemination by the media of malicious simplifications (e.g., Jews vs. Arabs), the cynical opportunism of various Zionist pressure groups, the tendency endemic to university intellectuals uncritically to repeat cant phrases and political clichés (this is the role Gramsci assigned to traditional intellectuals, that of being "experts in legitimation"), the fear of treading upon the highly sensitive terrain of what Jews did to their victims, in an age of genocidal extermination of Jews-all this contributes to the dulling, regulated enforcement of almost unanimous support for Israel.

...On the other hand, it would be totally unjust to neglect the power of Zionism as an idea for Jews, or to minimize the complex internal debates characterizing Zionism, its true meaning, its messianic destiny, etc. Even to speak about this subject, much less than attempting to "define" Zionism, is for an Arab quite a difficult matter, but it must honestly be looked at.

[Note from Facing the Nakba: Here, we have omitted Said's lengthy discussion of the place of Zionism in George Elliot's last novel, Daniel Deronda.]

The crucial thing about the way Zionism is presented in the novel is [that]... Eliot uses the plight of the Jews to make a universal statement about the nineteenth century's need for a home, given the spiritual and psychological rootlessness reflected in her characters' almost ontological physical restlessness.

...Despite the prevalence of anti-Semitism everywhere, the Jews are a reproach to the Gentiles who have long since forsaken the "observance" of any civilizing communal belief.

...The land itself is characterized in two separate ways. On the one hand, it is associated with debauched and paupered conquerors, an arena lent by the Turk to fighting beasts, a part of the despotic East; on the other, with "the brightness of Western freedom," with nations like England and America, with the idea of neutrality (Belgium). In short, with a degraded and unworthy East and a noble, enlightened West. The bridge between those warring representatives of East and West will be Zionism.

...Underlying all this, however, is the total absence of any thought about the actual inhabitants of the East, Palestine in particular. They are irrelevant both to the Zionists in Daniel Deronda and to the English characters. Brightness, freedom, and redemption--key matters for Eliot--are to be restricted to Europeans and the Jews, who are themselves European prototypes so far as colonizing the East is concerned. There is a remarkable failure when it comes to taking anything non-European into consideration although curiously all of Eliot's descriptions of Jews stress their exotic, "Eastern" aspects. Humanity and sympathy, it seems, are not endowments of anything but an Occidental mentality; to look for them in the despotic East, much less find them, is to waste one's time.

Two points need to be made immediately. One is that Eliot is no different from other European apostles of sympathy, humanity, and understanding for whom noble sentiments were either left behind in Europe, or made programmatically inapplicable outside Europe. There are the chastening examples of John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx (both of whom I have discussed in Orientalism), two thinkers known doctrinally to be opponents of injustice and oppression. Yet both of them seemed to have believed that such ideas as liberty, representative government, and individual happiness must not be applied in the Orient for reasons that today we would call racist. The fact is that nineteenth-century European culture was racist with a greater or lesser degree of virulence depending on the individual: The French writer Ernest Renan, for instance, was an outright anti-Semite; Eliot was indifferent to races who could not be assimilated to European ideas.

Here we come to the second point. Eliot's account of Zionism in Daniel Deronda was intended as a sort of assenting Gentile response to prevalent Jewish-Zionist currents; the novel therefore serves as an indication of how much in Zionism was legitimated and indeed valorized by Gentile European thought. On one important issue there was complete agreement between the Gentile and Jewish versions of Zionism: their view of the Holy Land as essentially empty of inhabitants, not because there were no inhabitants--there were, and they were frequently described in numerous travel accounts, in novels like Benjamin Disraeli's Tancred, even in the various nineteenth-century Baedekers--but because their status as sovereign and human inhabitants was systematically denied. While it may be possible to differentiate between Jewish and Gentile Zionists on this point (they ignored the Arab inhabitants for different reasons),

the Palestinian Arab was ignored nonetheless. That is what needs emphasis: the extent to which the roots of Jewish and Gentile Zionism are in the culture of high liberal-capitalism, and how the work of its vanguard liberals like George Eliot reinforced, perhaps also completed, that culture's less attractive tendencies.

None of what I have so far said applies adequately to what Zionism meant for Jews or what it represented as an advanced idea for enthusiastic non-Jews; it applies exclusively to those less fortunate beings who happened to be living on the land, people of whom no notice was taken. What has too long been forgotten is that while important European thinkers considered the desirable and later the probable fate of Palestine, the land was being tilled, villages and towns built and lived in by thousands of natives who believed that it was their homeland. In the meantime their actual physical being was ignored; later it became a troublesome detail.

Strikingly, therefore, Eliot sounds very much like Moses Hess, an early Zionist idealist who in his *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862) uses the same theoretical language to be given to Mordecai: [*Note from Facing the Nakba: Said here quotes from Hess and concludes*]...

Between them, Hess and Eliot concur that Zionism is to be carried out by the Jews with the assistance of major European powers; that Zionism will restore "a lost fatherland," and in so doing mediate between the various civilizations; that present-day Palestine was in need of cultivation, civilization, reconstitution; that Zionism would finally bring enlightenment and progress where at present there was neither. The three ideas that depended on one another in Hess and Eliot—and later in almost every Zionist thinker or ideologue—are (a) the nonexistent Arab inhabitants, (b) the complementary Western-Jewish attitude to an "empty" territory, and (c) the restorative Zionist project, which would repeat by rebuilding a vanished Jewish state and combine it with modern elements like disciplined, separate colonies, a special agency for land acquisition, etc. Of course, none of these ideas would have any force were it not for the additional fact of their being addressed to, shaped for, and out of an international (i.e., non-Oriental and hence European) context. This context was the reality, not only because of the ethnocentric rationale governing the whole project, but also because of the overwhelming facts of Diaspora realities and imperialist hegemony over the entire gamut of European culture. It needs to be remarked, however, that Zionism (like the view of America as an empty land held by Puritans) was a colonial vision unlike that of most other nineteenth-century European powers, for whom the natives of outlying territories were included in the redemptive mission civilisation.

From the earliest phases of its modern evolution until it culminated in the creation of Israel, Zionism appealed to a European audience for whom the classification of overseas territories and natives into various uneven classes was canonical and "natural." That is why, for example, every single state or movement in the formerly colonized territories of Africa and Asia today identifies with, fully supports, and understands the Palestinian struggle. In many instances—as I hope to show presently—there is an unmistakable coincidence between the experiences of Arab Palestinians at

the hands of Zionism and the experiences of those black, yellow, and brown people who were described as inferior and subhuman by nineteenth-century imperialists. For although it coincided with an era of the most virulent Western anti-Semitism, Zionism also coincided with the period of unparalleled European territorial acquisition in Africa and Asia, and it was as part of this general movement of acquisition and occupation that Zionism was launched initially by Theodor Herzl. During the latter part of the greatest period in European colonial expansion, Zionism also made its crucial first moves along the way to getting what has now become a sizeable Asiatic territory. And it is important to remember that in joining the general Western enthusiasm for overseas territorial acquisition, Zionism never spoke of itself unambiguously as a Jewish liberation movement, but rather as a Jewish movement for colonial settlement in the Orient. To those Palestinian victims that Zionism displaced, it cannot have meant anything by way of sufficient cause that Jews were victims of European anti-Semitism and, given Israel's continued oppression of Palestinians, few Palestinians are able to see beyond their reality, namely, that once victims themselves, Occidental Jews in Israel have become oppressors (of Palestinian Arabs and Oriental Jews).

These are not intended to be backward-looking historical observations, for in a very vital way they explain and even determine much of what now happens in the Middle East. The fact that no sizeable segment of the Israeli population has as yet been able to confront the terrible social and political injustice done the native Palestinians is an indication of how deeply ingrained are the (by now) anomalous imperialist perspectives basic to Zionism, its view of the world, its sense of an inferior native Other. The fact also that no Palestinian, regardless of his political stripe, has been able to reconcile himself to Zionism suggests the extent to which, for the Palestinian, Zionism has appeared to be an uncompromisingly exclusionary, discriminatory, colonialist praxis. So powerful, and so unhesitatingly followed, has been the radical Zionist distinction between privileged Jews in Palestine and unprivileged non-Jews there, that nothing else has emerged, no perception of suffering human existence has escaped from the two camps created thereby. As a result, it has been impossible for Jews to understand the human tragedy caused the Arab Palestinians by Zionism; and it has been impossible for Arab Palestinians to see in Zionism anything except an ideology and a practice keeping them, and Israeli Jews, imprisoned. But in order to break down the iron circle of inhumanity, we must see how it was forged, and there it is ideas and culture themselves that play the major role.

Consider Herzl. If it was the Dreyfus Affair that first brought him to Jewish consciousness, it was the idea of overseas colonial settlement for the Jews that came to him at roughly the same time as an antidote for anti-Semitism. The idea itself was current at the end of the nineteenth century, even as an idea for Jews. Herzl's first significant contact was Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a wealthy philanthropist who had for some time been behind the Jewish Colonization Association for helping Eastern Jews to emigrate to Argentina and Brazil. Later, Herzl thought generally about South America, then about Africa as places for establishing a Jewish colony. Both areas were widely acceptable as places for European colonialism, and that Herzl's mind followed along the orthodox imperialist track of his period is perhaps understandable. The impressive thing,

however, is the degree to which Herzl had absorbed and internalized the imperialist perspective on "natives" and their "territory."

There could have been no doubt whatever in Herzl's mind that Palestine in the late nineteenth century was peopled. True, it was under Ottoman administration (and therefore already a colony), but it had been the subject of numerous travel accounts, most of them famous, by Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Flaubert, and others. Yet even if he had not read these authors, Herzl as a journalist must surely have looked at a Baedeker to ascertain that Palestine was indeed inhabited by (in the 1880s) 650,000 mostly Arab people. This did not stop him from regarding their presence as manageable in ways that, in his diary, he spelled out with a rather chilling prescience for what later took place. The mass of poor natives were to be expropriated and, he added, "both the expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly." This was to be done by "spirit[ing] the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country." With uncannily accurate cynicism, Herzl predicted that the small class of large landowners could be "had for a price"-as indeed they were. The whole scheme for displacing the native population of Palestine far outstripped any of the then current plans for taking over vast reaches of Africa.

...This was not a prospect to charm a peon in Argentina or a fellah in Palestine. But Herzl did not intend his Diary for immediate publication.

One need not wholly accept the conspiratorial tone of these comments [...] to grant that world opinion has not been, until during the sixties and seventies when the Palestinians forced their presence on world politics, very much concerned with the expropriation of Palestine. I said earlier that in this regard 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. One needs to repeat that what in Zionism served the no doubt justified ends of Jewish tradition, saving the Jews as a people from homelessness and anti-Semitism and restoring them to nationhood, also collaborated with those aspects of the dominant Western culture (in which Zionism institutionally lived) making it possible for Europeans to view non-Europeans as inferior, marginal, and irrelevant. For the Palestinian Arab, therefore, it is the collaboration that has counted, not by any means the good done to Jews. The Arab has been on the receiving end not of benign Zionism-which has been restricted to Jews-but of an essentially discriminatory and powerful culture, of which, in Palestine, Zionism has been the agent.

Here I must digress to say that the great difficulty today of writing about what has happened to the Arab Palestinian as a result of Zionism, is that Zionism has had a large

number of successes. There is no doubt in my mind, for example, that most Jews do regard Zionism and Israel as urgently important facts for Jewish life, particularly because of what happened to the Jews in this century. Then too, Israel has some remarkable political and cultural achievements to its credit, quite apart from its spectacular military successes until recently. Most important, Israel is a subject about which, on the whole, one can feel positive with less reservations than the ones experienced in thinking about the Arabs, who are outlandish, strange, hostile Orientals after all; surely that is an obvious fact to anyone living in the West. Together these successes of Zionism have produced a prevailing view of the question of Palestine that almost totally favors the victor, and takes hardly any account of the victim.

Yet what did the victim feel as he watched the Zionists arriving in Palestine? What does he think as he watches Zionism described today? Where does he look in Zionism's history to locate its roots, and the origins of its practices toward him? These are the questions that are never asked-and they are precisely the ones that I am trying to raise, as well as answer, here in this examination of the links between Zionism and European imperialism. My interest is in trying to record the effects of Zionism on its victims, and these effects can only be studied genealogically in the framework provided by imperialism, even during the nineteenth century when Zionism was still an idea and not a state called Israel.

...[Note from *Facing the Nakba*: Said next discusses the emergence in the 19th century of the intellectual foundations of imperialism, including:

—A scientific attitude to the "inequalities" of race in which white races became scientifically different from reds, yellows, blacks, and browns, and, consequently, territories occupied by those races also newly became vacant, open to Western colonies, developments, plantations, and settlers.

—A linguistic taxonomy in which the Indo-Germanic (or Aryan) languages on the one hand differed from the Semitic-African languages. The former . . . were creative, regenerative, lively, and aesthetically pleasing; the latter were mechanical in their operations, unregenerate, passive. From this kind of distinction, Schlegel, and later Renan, went on to generalize about the great distance separating a superior Aryan and an inferior non-Aryan mind, culture, and society.

—The notion that some cultures were advanced and civilized, others backward and uncivilized; these ideas, plus the lasting social meaning imparted to the fact of color (and hence of race) by philosophers like John Locke and David Hume, made it axiomatic by the middle of the nineteenth century that Europeans always ought to rule non-Europeans.]

[Said continues] ...Among the supposed juridical distinctions between civilized and non-civilized peoples was an attitude toward land, almost a doxology about land, which non-civilized people supposedly lacked. A civilized man, it was believed, could cultivate the land because it meant something to him; on it, accordingly, he bred useful arts and crafts, he created, he accomplished, he built. For an uncivilized people, land was either farmed badly (i.e., inefficiently by Western standards) or it was left to rot. From this string of ideas, by which whole native societies who lived on American, African, and

Asian territories for centuries were suddenly denied their right to live on that land, came the great dispossessing movements of modern European colonialism, and with them all the schemes for redeeming the land, resettling the natives, civilizing them, taming their savage customs, turning them into useful beings under European rule. Land in Asia, Africa, and the Americas was there for European exploitation, because Europe understood the value of land in a way impossible for the natives.

I very greatly simplify the transformation in perspective by which millions of acres outside metropolitan Europe were thus declared empty, their people and societies decreed to be obstacles of progress and development, their space just as assertively declared open to European white settlers and their civilizing exploitation.

...Imperialism was the theory, colonialism the practice of changing the uselessly unoccupied territories of the world into useful new versions of the European metropolitan society. Everything in those territories that suggested waste, disorder, uncounted resources, was to be converted into productivity, order, taxable, potentially developed wealth. You get rid of most of the offending human and animal blight"-- whether because it simply sprawls untidily all over the place or because it roams around unproductively and uncounted--and you confine the rest to reservations, compounds, native homelands, where you can count, tax, use them profitably, and you build a new society on the vacated space. Thus was Europe reconstituted abroad, its "multiplication in space" successfully projected and managed. The result was a widely varied group of little Europes scattered throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas, each reflecting the circumstances, the specific instrumentalities of the parent culture, its pioneers, its vanguard settlers. All of them were similar in one other major respect--despite the differences, which were considerable-- and that was that their life was carried on with an air of normality. The most grotesque reproductions of Europe (South Africa, Rhodesia, etc.) were considered appropriate; the worst discrimination against and exclusions of the natives were thought to be normal because "scientifically" legitimate; the sheer contradiction of living a foreign life in an enclave many physical and cultural miles from Europe, in the midst of hostile and uncomprehending natives, gave rise to a sense of history, a stubborn kind of logic, a social and political state decreeing the present colonial venture as normal, justified, good.

With specific reference to Palestine, what were to become institutional Zionist attitudes to the Arab Palestinian natives and their supposed claims to a normal existence, were more than prepared for in the attitudes and the practices of British scholars, administrators, and experts who were officially involved in the exploitation and government of Palestine since the mid-nineteenth century.

Consider that in 1903 the Bishop of Salisbury told members of the Palestine Exploration Fund that

Nothing, I think, that has been discovered makes us feel any regret at the suppression of Canaanite civilisation [the euphemism for native Arab Palestinians] by Israelite civilization... [The excavations show how] the Bible has

not misrepresented at all the abomination of the Canaanite culture which was superseded by the Israelite culture.

Miriam Rosen, a young American scholar, has compiled a spine-tingling collection of typical British attitudes to the Palestinians, attitudes which in extraordinary ways prepare for the official Zionist view, from Weizmann to Begin, of the native Palestinian. Here are some citations from Ms. Rosen's important work:

Tyrwhitt Drake, who wrote in a survey of Western Palestine:

The fear of the fellahin that we have secret designs of re-conquering the country is a fruitful source of difficulty. This got over, remains the crass stupidity which cannot give a direct answer to a simple question, the exact object of which it does not understand; for why should a Frank wish to know the name of an insignificant wady or hill in their land?

The fellahin are all in the worst type of humanity that I have come across in the east. . . . The fellah is totally destitute of all moral sense. . . .

The Dean of Westminster, on the "obstacles" before the Palestine Exploration Fund Survey:

And these labours had to be carried out, not with the assistance of those on the spot, but in spite of the absurd obstacles thrown in the way of work by that singular union of craft, ignorance and stupidity, which can only be found in Orientals.

Lord Kitchener on the Survey of Galilee:

We hope to rescue from the hands of that ruthless destroyer, the uneducated Arab, one of the most interesting ruins in Palestine, hallowed by footprints of our Lord. I allude to the synagogue of Capernaum, which is rapidly disappearing owing to the stones being burnt for lime.

One C. R. Conder in his "Present Condition of Palestine":

The native peasantry are well worth a few words of description. They are brutally ignorant, fanatical, and above all, inveterate liars; yet they have qualities which would, if developed, render them a useful population. [He cites their cleverness, energy, and endurance for pain, heat, etc.]

Sir Flinders Petrie:

The Arab has a vast balance of romance put to his credit very needlessly. He is as disgustingly incapable as most other savages, and no more worth romancing

about than Red Indians or Maoris. I shall be glad to return to the comparatively shrewd and sensible Egyptians.

Charles Clermont-Ganneau's reflections on "The Arabs in Palestine":

Arab civilization is a mere deception--it no more exists than the horrors of Arab conquest. It is but the last gleam of Greek and Roman civilization gradually dying out in the powerless but respectful hands of Islam.

Or Stanley Cook's view of the country:

...rapid deterioration, which (it would seem) was only temporarily stopped by the energetic Crusaders. Modern travellers have often noticed the inherent weakness of the characters of the inhabitants and, like Robinson, have realized that, for the return of prosperity, "nothing is wanted but the hand of the man to till the ground."

Or, finally, R. A. S. Macalister:

It is no exaggeration to say that throughout these long centuries the native inhabitants of Palestine do not appear to have made a single contribution of any kind whatsoever to material civilization. It was perhaps the most unprogressive country on the face of the earth. Its entire culture was derivative. . .

These, then, are some of the main points that must be made about the background of Zionism in European imperialist or colonialist attitudes. For whatever it may have done for Jews, Zionism essentially saw Palestine as the European imperialist did, as an empty territory paradoxically "filled" with ignoble or perhaps even dispensable natives; it allied itself, as Chaim Weizmann quite clearly said after World War I, with the imperial powers in carrying out its plans for establishing anew Jewish state in Palestine, and it did not think except in negative terms of "the natives," who were passively supposed to accept the plans made for their land; as even Zionist historians like Yehoshua Porath and Neville Mandel have empirically shown, the ideas of Jewish colonizers in Palestine (well before World War I) always met with unmistakable native resistance, not because the natives thought that Jews were evil, but because most natives do not take kindly to having their territory settled by foreigners; moreover, in formulating the concept of a Jewish nation "reclaiming" its own territory, Zionism not only accepted the generic racial concepts of European culture, it also banked on the fact that Palestine was actually peopled not by an advanced but by a backward people, over which it ought to be dominant. Thus that implicit assumption of domination led specifically in the case of Zionism to the practice of ignoring the natives for the most part as not entitled to serious consideration. Zionism therefore developed with a unique consciousness of itself, but with little or nothing left over for the unfortunate natives. Maxime Rodinson is perfectly correct in saying that Zionist indifference to the Palestinian natives was an indifference linked to European supremacy, which benefited even Europe's proletarians and oppressed minorities. In fact, there can be no doubt that if the ancestral homeland had

been occupied by one of the well-established industrialized nations that ruled the world at the time, one that had thoroughly settled down in a territory it had infused with a powerful national consciousness, then the problem of displacing German, French, or English inhabitants and introducing a new, nationally coherent element into the middle of their homeland would have been in the forefront of the consciousness of even the most ignorant and destitute Zionists.

In short, all the constitutive energies of Zionism were premised on the excluded presence, that is, the functional absence of "native people" in Palestine; institutions were built deliberately shutting out the natives, laws were drafted when Israel came into being that made sure the natives would remain in their "nonplace," Jews in theirs, and so on. It is no wonder that today the one issue that electrifies Israel as a society is the problem of the Palestinians, whose negation is the most consistent thread running through Zionism. And it is this perhaps unfortunate aspect of Zionism that ties it ineluctably to imperialism—at least so far as the Palestinian is concerned. Rodinson again:

The element that made it possible to connect these aspirations of Jewish shopkeepers, peddlers, craftsmen, and intellectuals in Russia and elsewhere to the conceptual orbit of imperialism was one small detail that seemed to be of no importance: Palestine was inhabited by another people.