Ilan Pappe on Zionism as Colonialism and Israel's Current Threat to Regional Stability

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> Historian Ilan Pappe argues that Zionism is a colonial project rooted in European colonialism, characterizes contemporary Israel as an apartheid state threatening regional stability, and contends that Palestinians have consistently demanded democratic self-determination—principles systematically denied through ethnic cleansing and coercive control.

SAŽETAK

In this address, Ilan Pappe presents a historical and political analysis of Zionism and the Israeli state, framing Zionism as an inherently colonial enterprise—citing early Zionist leaders' explicit self-identification as colonialists and their reliance on British imperial power to establish a Jewish state in Palestine against Palestinian majority opposition. He argues that Israel's founding required ethnic cleansing in 1948 to resolve the contradiction between claims of democracy and the demographic reality of a non-Jewish majority population. Pappe documents that Palestinians have consistently advocated for democratic principles and self-determination—rights promised by Britain and France but systematically suppressed. He characterizes the current Israeli state as an apartheid regime comparable to apartheid South Africa, noting designations by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and B'Tselem. He contends that Israel poses threats beyond Palestinian territories, endangering regional stability across Lebanon, Iraq, and the broader Middle East, and undermining international systems of justice. He frames Palestinian resistance as an anti-colonial response to initial colonization, situating the cycle of violence within that context. Throughout, he appeals to moral accountability and calls on audiences to recognize and oppose what he describes as ongoing ethnic cleansing, dispossession, and apartheid.

KLJUČNE PORUKE

- Zionism originated as an explicitly colonial project, with early Zionist leaders such as Theodor Herzl framing it to colonialists like Cecil Rhodes as a European colonization venture in Palestine.

> Israel's founding in 1948 required ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian majority population to resolve the contradiction between claims of democracy and non-Jewish demographic dominance.

> Palestinians have consistently demanded democratic principles and self-determination—rights that Britain and France promised in 1918 but which the Zionist project systematically destroyed.

> Contemporary Israel functions as an apartheid state according to assessments by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem.

> Israel poses threats to regional stability across Lebanon, Iraq, and the broader Middle East, endangering international systems of justice and order beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

> Palestinian anti-colonial resistance is a response to the initial colonial project, not the origin of the cycle of violence.

> Large civil society mobilizations, including Jewish participants, have opposed Israeli government policies as unjust, as evidenced by million-person demonstrations in Rome and London.

ČLANAK

Opening Remarks and Historical Context

I am glad to see that the Israelis haven't taken all the water, as they do in the West Bank. I also want to congratulate the Union for creating the climatic conditions we have in Palestine, which makes it easier to be in touch with reality.

Let me start by proposing an idea for peace. I am sure that the Iraqi government, in fact it has already made such a statement, would welcome you and your family back to Iraq and let Radha and Arwa and her family go back to Palestine. Here is an idea for peace now.

The Historical Position of Jews in the Arab World

Jews in the Arab world never thought that in any difficult moment in their history—before the arrival of Zionism—that any solution for a difficult time they might have had was the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine at the expense of the Palestinians. When Zionism arrived, the relationship between Jews and the Muslim and Christian communities in the Arab world deteriorated. Zionism was not only a disaster for the

Palestinians; it was a disaster for the Arab world, and it was a disaster for the Arab Jews who lived there.

The Current State of Israel and Its Regional Impact

The notion we have today goes beyond the question of whether Israel wants peace or does not want peace. The question is far more important: what does Israel want, and what do we do knowing what Israel wants—not in 1980, not in 1990, but today? Today there are six million refugees because of Israel and the current government of Israel. Two million are in Gaza and the West Bank, one million in Lebanon, and three million in the Greater Tehran area. Is this the kind of state we have to discuss, questioning whether it wants peace? Or is this a state that wants to destroy, to occupy, to dispossess?

Isn't this a state that endangers not only the life of Palestinians and Lebanese in the South? It endangers the stability of the Middle East and further afield. It is now a state that endangers the whole international system of justice and order. When you vote today, you are not voting only on the question of whether Israel wants peace or not. You are voting on what we do with such an aggressive, dangerous political regime that every day is responsible for the killing of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in the West Bank, in South Lebanon, and threatens the stability and peace of people all over the region.

Israel as an Apartheid State

You are also voting for something else. You are voting on the motion that is hidden within this idea: that Israel is an apartheid state, very much as claimed by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem. Can you imagine a debate in the Oxford Union at the heyday of apartheid South Africa, with a cheering group supporting apartheid and voting for apartheid? Surely you have enough modicum of decency in you to vote against the current Israel. Don't think only about the past. The current Israel is an apartheid state that is now threatening a whole region.

Already, civil societies around the world, including a large number of Jews, find their government's indifference and in some cases complicity with this state unacceptable. This is what took one million young Italians to the streets in Rome. This is why we had a one million demonstration in London. These are not anti-Semitic people—some of them are also Jews. They are not self-hating Jews. These are people who understand what injustice means, and they are fighting with all they can against this injustice.

Zionism as a Colonial Project

The fact that Zionism started as a colonialist project is the crux of the matter. When Theodor Herzl was going around the world trying to recruit support for the Zionist

project, he wrote to Cecil Rhodes, one of the biggest British colonialists who created Rhodesia: "I want to interest you in another colonialist project, namely the colonization of Palestine." When, in 1900, the Zionist Congress convened in London, they proudly displayed products from what they called the Zionist colonies in Palestine. Colonialism was not a dirty word at that time, and therefore Zionists used it without any problem.

When colonialism became a problem from a public relations perspective, the whole narrative of Israel changed. Suddenly, the story was that we were not colonialists; we were a liberation movement. We fought against the British. We were returning to our homeland. But the early Zionists understood that only with violence and coercion could they plant at the heart of the Arab world a European Jewish state. And if you want to maintain it, you have to use more coercion, more violence.

Colonialism, Resistance, and the Cycle of Violence

Of course, there is resistance from the indigenous population. Of course, there is an anti-colonialist struggle. Anti-colonialist struggles in history are not a walk in the park. Yes, they can be violent themselves, but this is a cycle of violence that begins with the colonization, not with the anti-colonialist reaction.

When you are voting today, think about this whole tragic idea. Indeed, Jews were persecuted. Jews were suffering from genocide in Europe. They were suffering from antisemitism. But was the solution to plant at the heart of the Arab world, at the heart of the Muslim world, a European Jewish state on the bayonets of the British Empire? This is a project that had to be maintained by force, and you needed the British bayonets, the British power, to establish it.

The Suppression of Palestinian Democratic Rights

The currency was Jewish. The posters were Jewish. Of course they were, because Britain was behind it, not because the majority of the people were Palestinians who objected to the idea of a Jewish state. From the very beginning of the Zionist project, Palestinians insisted on two principles that appear consistently in all their motions submitted to the various enquiry commissions that came one after another. These two principles were democracy and self-determination—the very values that the West claimed it exported to the Middle East to show that after 400 years of Ottoman rule, the region could move toward a more enlightened, progressive, and Westernized future.

Palestinian Commitment to Democratic Principles

The Palestinians said they welcomed these principles. They proposed that there should be a vote on what Palestine should be when Palestinians constituted 90 percent of the population. They asked to exercise the right to self-determination, as both Britain and France had promised. In November 1918, Britain and France made a commitment to

five peoples in the Arab world, including Palestinians, that they would respect the right of self-determination on the ground itself. Yet Britain allowed the Zionist project to completely destroy Palestinian aspirations for both democracy and self-determination.

The Demographic Contradiction and Ethnic Cleansing

This outcome makes sense when examined logically. If you build a state in 1948 and want it to be both Jewish and democratic, but the majority of the people are not Jewish, what do you do? You downsize the electorate by ethnically cleansing them in 1948. By the time the first election arrived in 1949, the state could proceed without fearing the contradiction between the claim of democracy and the reality of demography. This represents the core nature of what is called liberal Zionism—the notion that one can somehow reconcile having an ethnic racist state while remaining loyal to universal values such as democracy, socialism, or liberalism.

A Call for Moral Action and Accountability

The speaker urged the audience not only to vote in favor of the motion, but to think seriously with their representatives in Parliament and government about what it means that Israel is an apartheid state, and what the British government should do to prevent further ethnic cleansing, genocide, and dispossession of Palestinians rather than mediating between Jews and Arabs. He concluded by saying that those who vote for the motion will be on the right side of history, and they will be able to tell the next generation that they were in Oxford, demonstrated their moral constitution and moral courage, and were not afraid of intimidation and provocation by those defending an apartheid state.

#Zionism and colonialism in Palestine #Israel and apartheid #Palestinian self-determination and democracy #Ethnic cleansing and displacement #Israeli-Palestinian conflict #Regional stability and Middle Eastern security #International law and human rights

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