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Weizman, E.; Englert, S.P.

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Brothers in Arms: liberal genocide and intra-settler conflict in Israel

ELIAN WEIZMAN and SAI ENGLERT 

Abstract: This article examines the ongoing genocide in Gaza as a culmination of long-standing Zionist settler-colonial practices, arguing that the apparent internal divisions within Israeli society obscure a deeper structural unity. It contends that these dynamics are better understood as generative tensions within a unified colonial project. Drawing on genocide studies, settler-colonial theory and political developments since October 2023, the article shows that liberal and illiberal Zionists have acted in concert to execute and justify mass violence against Palestinians. The liberal camp's discourse of 'permanent security', rooted in assumptions of Palestinian collective guilt, pre-emptive violence and existential paranoia, has played a crucial role in legitimising genocide both domestically and internationally. Far from opposing the genocide in Gaza, liberal Zionists have supported it and participated in its execution – both ideologically and practically, many taking an active role in its execution as reservists. This collaboration between the different wings of the Zionist movement is not new, and historically, liberal Zionists led campaigns of dispossession and mass killing, notably in 1948 and 1967. The article argues that the internal conflict within Israeli society is not over the ethics of domination, but over its methods and the need to legitimise it internationally. Accordingly, conflicts between liberal and illiberal Zionism are generative and act as a

Elian Weizman is a senior lecturer in international relations at London South Bank University.

Sai Englert is a lecturer at the Leiden Institute of Area Studies.

mechanism for settler-colonial endurance and expansion. By foregrounding the co-constitutive nature of liberal and illiberal genocidal practices, this piece offers a critical framework for understanding the present moment and the *longue durée* of Zionist violence.

Keywords: genocide, Israel, liberal Zionism, settler colonialism

Introduction

‘Israel must stay a democracy. . . if you want pilots to be able to fly and drop bombs and missiles into houses, knowing that they might kill children, they must have full trust in the people that are taking these decisions.’

*Shira Eting, former combat helicopter pilot, co-leader of Brothers in Arms, a reservist protest movement against Netanyahu's judicial overhaul, interview on CBS's 60 Minutes, July 2023.*¹

‘2023 protecting democracy, 2025 protecting the state. We salute the pilots!’

Brothers in Arms, billboard in Tel Aviv, June 2025.

At the time of writing, Israel's genocide in Gaza has entered its third year. The death toll in Gaza is almost certainly much higher than the official accounts.² Starvation, disease and the coming winter are all used as weapons of war.³ The annihilation of the population in Gaza, promised from the very first moments of the genocide, remain the guiding lines of Israeli policies. In the West Bank, state and settler violence continue to escalate, while settlements are expanded and refugee camps ethnically cleansed. Israel continues to occupy Lebanese and Syrian land, while militarily targeting numerous other states in the region. International recognition of the genocide *as a genocide* is now widespread, yet significant action in terms of cutting off economic, military, or diplomatic relations with Israel remains wanting.

Despite these overwhelming realities, which put the present moment very much in the same category as the Palestinian and regional defeats at the hands of Israel of 1948 and 1967, some have seen in the current situation signs of a more long-term crisis of Zionism and its state.⁴ Among the various indicators of Zionism's coming collapse – economic crisis, international isolation, military weakness, etc. – these analyses identify the fracturing of Israeli Jewish society as a process which started at different points in time but intensified since early 2023. This vision has been bolstered by the apparent intensification of the activities of an ‘anti-war camp’ in Israel⁵ and the calls by prominent Israeli policy-makers to end the onslaught on Gaza and recognise its ‘excesses’ – trying, in the process, to identify Netanyahu and his political allies as the sole culprits.⁶

This article takes a different approach, which foregrounds fundamental unity amongst different Israeli camps when it comes to domination over, and violence against, the Palestinian people. It presents an analysis that allows for a better reading of both the current moment, the society-wide genocidal drive, as well as the makeup of Zionism in the *longue durée*. Building on existing studies of settler colonialism and genocide, on the history of the Zionist movement, and on analyses of intra-Israeli political life over the course of the genocide, this paper will show that far from being unable to find common ground, Israeli society has responded overwhelmingly in a unified way. It is this unity, we argue, that has made the genocide in Gaza so complete and relentless. The whole gamut of Israeli society, very much including liberal Zionists,⁷ demanded bloodletting, conquest, and elimination in the Gaza Strip – as well as across the region. Political differences that peaked in the anti-government protests until October 2023 were put to the side; pilots and paratroopers, who had sworn to refuse to serve as long as the Netanyahu coalition remained in power, returned to their posts and political representatives of the liberal centre entered in a national unity government with the Israeli Right.

The argument being made here is that although the internal conflict over the control of the Israeli state that many identify is very real, this conflict should not be understood as waged between two antithetical and irreconcilable factions, but between two complementary wings of the Zionist movement: Two wings that have always co-existed (in different configurations and under different balances of forces) in the history of the Zionist project, and which both play crucial roles for its success. The conflict is not over the settler-colonial project itself, but rather on how to best organise it.⁸ Accordingly, we argue that the conflict is generative for the development of the Israeli state's colonial project and helps the settler colony develop its approach and policy towards the Indigenous population.

Building on these insights, and on genocide studies literature, we point to liberal Zionist discourse and practice on the genocide in Gaza, as complementary to its illiberal counterpart. Right-wing and liberal Zionism not only collaborate but build on one another. In addition, liberal Zionists play an important role in generating acceptability internationally, both during and in the aftermath of genocide, in projecting ideas of 'limits' and 'ethics' despite their participation in the crimes committed – both through ideological justification and practically, with many taking an active role in its execution as reservists, military strategists, and state officials.

We end with a reflection on the recent re-emergence of liberal Zionists, both in Israel and abroad, out of the killing frenzy, and their attempt at re-inserting Israel within the liberal western status quo. They have done so, however, without questioning the 'military gains' of the last twenty-one months. This, we argue, serves both as a way to attempt to improve their position in the internal balance of forces in Israel and re-stabilise the Zionist project internationally in the aftermath of genocide.

Settler colonialism, genocide and the Zionist project

Raphael Lemkin's work that coined the term genocide and worked to codify it in international law, analyses the history of genocides and argues that it is an intrinsically colonial phenomenon. Lemkin claimed that genocide consists of two phases, 'one, the destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group: the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonisation of the area by the oppressor's own nationals',⁹ with the aim of tipping the demographic balance in favour of the oppressor. In this way, colonial wars are total wars, and thus, genocidal, as they are waged against entire populations, particularly when local resistance triggers indiscriminate killing and the distinction between combatants and noncombatants becomes blurred. Such acts could be traced throughout human history and were particularly prominent in settler colonies that produced new, permanent societies on the back of the structural and continuous destruction of Indigenous societies.¹⁰

However, despite the colonial history of the practice of genocide, in its legal codification in the aftermath of the Second World War, its political meaning was abandoned in favour of a focus on its racial nature as the ultimate hate crime: the targeting of a group for who they are, rather than what they do. This idea is encapsulated in the phrase 'genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, **as such**', in the 1948 Genocide Convention.¹¹

In his critical work on genocide as a restrictive legal term, Dirk Moses claims that the legal codification of genocide as a hate crime (rather than a politically motivated one) was driven by the canonisation of the Holocaust as the archetype of genocide, that served powerwar powers' interests not to inhibit their ability to wage war and suppress dissent at home and in the colonies – actions that are driven, and justified, by the desire to achieve 'permanent security'.¹² Accordingly, genocide cannot occur in cases such as, for example, a suppression of insurgency because 'the political agency entailed by insurgent actions implies politics and even collective guilt'.¹³ By so doing, Moses continues, a clear distinction was made between the practices of illiberal regimes (embodied in the Nazi Holocaust) that meet the threshold of the genocide, and other practices, conducted by liberal regimes, such as the West's settler-colonial and imperial conquest of the world, past and present (including occupation, settlement, resource extraction, and destruction of Indigenous people in the name of 'security') as non-genocidal.

Moses' concept of 'permanent security', explained as the desire to achieve invulnerability, total defeat of a threat (or perceived threat), that could never again be waged, is meant to collapse this distinction. In his words, 'permanent security is the unobtainable goal of absolute safety that necessarily results in civilian casualties by its paranoid tendency to indiscriminate violence'.¹⁴ Permanent security re-politicises the practice of mass killing and destruction of civilian

groups, pursued in the name of security. Moses elucidates four elements of 'permanent security': firstly, the assumption of collective guilt on a whole group, which also includes noncombatants such as women, children or elderly for their potential to become combatants or supporting or shielding combatants. Secondly, the element of pre-emption of potential future attacks by members of the group. Third, paranoia, which leads to fantastical security imperatives and paranoid threat assessments. Such paranoia often originates from past traumas or loss, which is then utilised as a motivating force for revenge and redemption in the present. The past is thus never in the past, it can always repeat itself. Thus, mass violence against civilians is justified in the name of security (by frightened patriots indoctrinated in paranoia), rather than committed by evil men driven by racial hatred. Finally, the language of final solutions – the end of politics, 'the rupture of negotiation and compromise with different actors. Permanent security means total domination'.¹⁵

The connection between genocide and colonialism was then established from the outset in the work of Lemkin but reiterated by Moses and others. This article will return to the relevance of these contributions in the context of the contemporary genocide in Gaza. For now, it is useful to point out that while this approach helps us conceptualise the ideological and historical continuities between fascist and liberal genocides, as well as connect the settler-colonial world to the metropole, it also helps us shine a light on the nature of settler-colonial societies themselves, including their internal debates on their policy towards the Indigenous population, and within it, the method and pace of their eliminatory practices.¹⁶

The nature of settler colonies is the projection and maintaining of imperial power in conquered territories through the establishment in them of a permanent metropolitan population.¹⁷ This imposition generates specific social relations that define such regimes: settler populations are locked into a continuous conflict with Indigenous peoples over the control over land, resources, trade routes, labour, etc. The development of a settler colony is therefore underwritten by a process that defines and creates populations as either settler or Indigenous through the distribution and withholding of basic rights. As Brenna Bhandar and Robert Nichols have argued, to be a settler or Indigenous, in the eyes of the settler state, is to have the 'right' to dispossess or be dispossessed, to displace or be displaced, to kill or be killed – respectively.¹⁸ This classification is not static either. Jewish populations in Palestine or North Africa, for example, saw their legal status shift from one category to the other, as the settler project redefined their place in the racial order.¹⁹ The primacy of the colonial encounter, pitting the entirety of the settler population against the Indigenous population as a whole, emerges clearly here. Much like in the case of genocide discussed above, the ideological convictions of individual participants or the formal commitments of the institutions involved are subsumed under the material realities of the social conditions. This is not to deny the possibility of individual agency of the former, but to point to the overdetermining power of the latter.

Settler-colonial societies are often rocked by – at times extremely intense – internal conflict. This is both the case between settler populations and the metropole (a process that has tended to lead repeatedly to the independence of settler colonies) or between different classes of settlers. The extraordinary violence, in the early twentieth century, generated by the confrontations between white workers, on the one hand, and white bosses and the state on the other, over the place of Black workers in the South African context serves as an effective example.²⁰ Here confrontations between settler classes led to military repression and brought the settler colony to the edge of civil war. The conflict did not, at any point, raise questions about the settler state or the collective domination of whites over Blacks. It was fought strictly over the nature of that domination: should Black workers be excluded altogether or exploited as a cheap and hyper oppressed workforce? The settler state was understood by all parties as being key to the continued domination and dispossession of the Indigenous African population, and the redistribution of the colonial loot amongst white settlers. The issue was how that redistribution would take place and to whose advantage. It is out of the stalemate between the contending classes that the colour bar, and eventually the apartheid system, emerged as a compromise. Black workers were integrated in the labour force, but their integration was controlled and limited to the lower-skilled, dangerous, and poorly paid jobs.

These types of conflict are repeated across settler-colonial settings and play a key role – amongst other forms of conflict, most importantly that waged between settlers and Indigenous populations – in the emergence of the specific structures of settler domination, in different locales, at different moments in time.²¹ The same is true, as will be briefly discussed in the next section, in the case of Zionism in Palestine, or that of the struggle by the white Australian labour movement for a White Australia. In this sense, while internal conflicts and differences between settler factions are subsumed under the primary conflict between settler and Indigenous, they do play an important role in the development of every settler colony. Internal conflict is a crucial aspect in the development, adjustment and re-organisation of settler-colonial strategies of domination.

If these conflicts take place over the internal organisation of the settler colony, they also emerge over the crucial question of its expansion. The American war of independence, for example, can be understood more fruitfully as a struggle by settlers against the metropole. The former wanted to assert their right to maintain the institution of slavery on the one hand, and to more aggressively conquer land, dispossess Indigenous populations, and expand the settler colony in-land on the other.²² Similar conflicts emerged throughout settler-colonial locales. The declaration of independence of South Rhodesia or the failed coup by the Generals in Algeria are other such examples.²³ In the case of the North American settlers, independence led to rapid expansion of the colonial project, genocide on a continental scale, and the emergence and stabilisation of the modern United States. In the cases of Rhodesia and Algeria, successful and failed independence struggles

(respectively) were the precursor to the collapse of the settler colonies. What these examples point to, much like the example discussed above, is that within settler-colonial projects deep and often violent conflicts are fought between settlers, and between settlers and the metropole, over the nature of the settler-colonial project, its domination over Indigenous populations, and the speed of its expansion. Conflict is therefore not only structural, but creative – in the sense that it is necessary for the development of settler-colonial strategy and for shaping the nature of the settler-colonial state.

Conflict and cohesion in the history of Zionism

The tendencies described above are visible throughout the history of Zionism. Zionists have repeatedly clashed over the nature of their settler colony, the type of domination to impose on the Indigenous Palestinian population and the extent of their territorial claims. These conflicts, much like the examples discussed above, were overwhelmingly about scale, speed, and form – and not about the judiciousness of colonial domination itself. Two intertwined issues have taken centre stage in these conflicts, throughout the history of Zionism: what place, if any, should Palestinians occupy in the economy and how far should the (future) state extend its borders. An additional question, connected to the latter, is how quickly the border should be moved. While these issues are connected, they cannot be equated with one another. Importantly, the claim here is that to highlight these struggles is to identify, on the one hand, a simultaneous unity of purpose – settler-colonial domination – and disunity in strategy, as well as the importance of the conflict engendered in the development of colonial policy.

The first question that occupied the Zionist leadership, as it moved from theory to practical settlement in Palestine, was what to do with the Indigenous population in Palestine. Far from slogans about an empty land, the Zionists understood that the Palestinian population, which inhabited the lands that it hoped to settle needed to feature in their plans. The early conflict can be summarised as taking place between bourgeois and labour Zionists.²⁴ The former looked to places like Algeria and southern Africa. Theodore Herzl, for example, was a great admirer of Cecil Rhodes who he wrote to in order to request his support for 'something colonial' in 'Asia Minor'.²⁵ Their hope was to establish a minority of (European) Jewish landowners who would rule on a majority of Indigenous Palestinians and exploit their labour for the production of cheap goods and their export to European consumer markets.

Against this colonial model emerged the Labour Zionist movement. It rejected the aims of the General Zionists and argued for the creation of a Jewish workers' state. This would require mass migration – a key problem for the Zionist movement into the 1930s – and the creation of a Jewish majority. Jewish workers would therefore need to carry out the 'conquest of labour, land, and produce'²⁶ – which is to say the creation of a separate Jewish economy and the exclusion of Palestinians

from it. The Labour Zionists carried out this campaign for 'Hebrew Labour' against both Jewish bosses and landowners and against Palestinian workers.²⁷ They picketed Jewish-owned workplaces (primarily citrus groves) where Palestinians were employed, boycotted Jewish-owned businesses which sold goods made by Palestinian labour, and campaigned for the employment of Jewish workers in both Jewish and Mandate companies. These actions regularly turned violent and the key institutions of the Labour Zionist movement – the kibbutzim, the Histadrut, the Hagana²⁸ – were established to coordinate and support it.²⁹ The Labour Zionists, too, looked to other settler-colonial locales to argue their case. Haim Arlosorff, a key strategist of the movement, argued, for example, for the emulation of the struggle of white workers in South Africa and warned against the strategic consequences of building an economy on Indigenous labour. The latter would then, like in South Africa, be able to rebel and bring great economic pressure to bear on the settler economy.

By the very end of the 1920s, the leadership of the Labour Zionists over the Yishuv (Jewish settlement in Palestine before the formation of the Israeli state) was established and the Palestinian revolt of 1936–1939 reinforced its hegemony. It was the Labour Zionists' trade union federation, the Histadrut, that organised strike breakers, and its militia, the Hagana, that received training from the British to form the 'special night squads' who protected key British infrastructure against the Palestinian revolutionaries.³⁰ While the revolt was ultimately crushed by overwhelming British military power, it came to the brink of freeing Palestine from colonial domination.³¹ For the Zionists, the episode pointed to the validity of the Labour Zionist concerns about Palestinian revolt and the importance of their institutions in building an alternative.

This was also a period of acceleration of genocidal imaginaries in Zionist discourse, as Tamir Sorek has recently argued.³² Labour Zionists had started developing their ideas about 'transfer' – a euphemism for ethnic cleansing – throughout the 1920s.³³ However, in response to the Palestinian revolt, the Revisionist Zionists intensified their critique of the Labour Zionist leadership and demanded more aggressive – and often genocidal – action taken against Palestinians. Crucially, they demanded that the Zionist militias target civilians in exponential revenge attacks. The Revisionists were inspired by Mussolini's fascists and represented the most maximalist faction in the Zionist camp. It is out of the merger between the Revisionist and General Zionists that the modern-day Likud³⁴ emerged. The Revisionists demanded that the Zionist leadership work immediately for the expansion of the future state from the 'Nile to the Euphrates' and that Palestinians be dealt with as harshly as possible. Most famously, their leader Zeev Jabotinsky argued in his *Iron Wall*:

There can be no voluntary agreement between ourselves and the Palestine Arabs. Not now, nor in the prospective future. I say this with such conviction, not because I want to hurt the moderate Zionists. I do not believe that they will

be hurt. Except for those who were born blind, they realised long ago that it is utterly impossible to obtain the voluntary consent of the Palestine Arabs for converting 'Palestine' from an Arab country into a country with a Jewish majority. My readers have a general idea of the history of colonisation in other countries. I suggest that they consider all the precedents with which they are acquainted, and see whether there is one solitary instance of any colonisation being carried on with the consent of the native population. There is no such precedent. The native populations, civilised or uncivilised, have always stubbornly resisted the colonists, irrespective of whether they were civilised or savage . . . Zionist colonization must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population – behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.³⁵

The conflict between the Revisionists and Labour Zionists was therefore not about the place of the Palestinians in the future state, as it was between the Labour and General Zionists, but over the speed and intensity of their exclusion, and over the speed and extent of territorial conquest. This conflict, too, was often violent, sometimes deadly. Famously, Arlosoroff, mentioned above, was assassinated by Revisionist militia men for his participation in the negotiations between the Yishuv and the Nazi leadership. The Revisionists established their own militias, which would later turn against the British, also arguing that the turn to statehood was too slow.

Key conflicts that remain present within the Zionist movement and the Israeli state today – over the nature and form of colonial domination, not over its existence – emerged from the very early days of the Zionist movement and shaped its direction. While these conflicts were often violent and were fought over the leadership of the settler-colonial project and its tactics and strategy, when the time came to put the theory into practice, the Zionist movement unified in turning against the Palestinians. Nowhere was this more visible than during the Nakba. All Zionist factions participated in the campaign of ethnic cleansing through which between 700,000 and 800,000 Palestinians were expelled and around 500 villages and urban centres were destroyed. They were all integrated into the newly established Israel Defense Forces (IDF) after statehood and often carried out attacks together. As Walid Khalidi and Ilan Pappé have argued, for example, while much was made of the Revisionists' role in the massacre of Deir Yassin, which played a key role in terrifying Palestinians and accelerating their exile, historical evidence points to coordination with the Labour Zionist Hagana.³⁶ Similarly, while Revisionists cleansed Jaffa and destroyed much of the city, it was the Labour Zionists who carried out similar campaigns in other cities, such as Haifa. Indeed, the post-Nakba near-exclusive focus on the Revisionists' role in Deir Yassin helped mask the other massacres and the role of the Hagana in them, masking also the genocidal unity amongst the Zionist militias.

The singling out of the Revisionists, which took place largely after the bloodletting had ended, played primarily an ideological role. It served to depict the 'excesses' as committed by a fanatic fringe, while hiding the systematic nature of Zionist practices across historic Palestine. As Shira Robinson has argued, in the aftermath of the Nakba, the Labour Zionist leadership – which now ruled over the new state – was concerned with demonstrating its membership in the emerging liberal world order, while maintaining the gains of its colonial mass murder and expulsion campaign.³⁷ Its insistence on the equal citizenship of those Palestinians that remained inside the borders of the new state – despite their placement under military rule – and on the exceptional and fringe character of Revisionist violence played a key role in establishing its rightful place amongst the 'civilised' nations of the world.

A similar process can be observed later, too. In 1967, as Israel declared war on its neighbours, expelled around 300,000 Palestinians, and captured the whole of historic Palestine, as well as the Sinai desert and the Golan heights, it did so in a situation of perfect national unity – something that would remain true throughout its subsequent declarations of war against both Palestinians and neighbours. This unity continued in the aftermath of the war as all wings of the Zionist movement set off to make the occupation permanent. A certain division of labour appeared in this period, in which Labour Zionist state officials developed the structural plans and grabbed the land necessary to make settlement a possibility – most notably the Alon Plan, which divided the West Bank into Palestinian zones separated by Israeli settlement, that remains largely relevant today – while the religious Right, the new foot soldiers of the Revisionists, established and expanded the settlements.³⁸ The depiction by Labour Zionist leaders, like Yigal Allon, of the post-1967 settlers as the modern 'halutzim' (pioneers) captures this powerfully.³⁹

It is in the process of settlement that previous debates would re-emerge and take centre stage in Israeli politics. How quickly should the new occupied territories be settled? Should settlements be limited to strategic areas that would help the bantustanisation of Palestinian population centres,⁴⁰ or should settlements be built within these centres, in ideologically resonant areas like Hebron? How direct should the confrontation be with the newly conquered Palestinian populations? It is over these questions that the new battle lines were drawn in Israeli politics. Never over the validity of the occupation/colonisation itself, but over its organisation, its intensity, and the speed of its land grabs.

The same logic is visible in moments of Palestinian resistance. There were no doves or hawks when it came to crush the first or second Palestinian Intifada. Israelis unified around Yitzhak Rabin's 'Break-Their-Bones' policy in the former, and the idea that military force was necessary as there was 'no Palestinian partner for peace' in the latter.⁴¹ Divisions appeared in the aftermath of the successful repression over how to manage colonial domination most effectively. The Oslo Accords never offered Palestinians statehood, despite many claims to the

contrary. Settlement building accelerated in this period and no serious moves were made to grant Palestinians geographic, economic, or political independence. Instead, the accords were an attempt by Labour Zionists to re-organise the occupation, by outsourcing much of its day-to-day running to the Palestinian Authority, diminishing Israeli dependence on Palestinian labour, and increasing Israeli normalisation in the wider region.⁴² Ironically, one of the voices that captured most clearly the continued Israeli national unity around the continued domination over the whole of historic Palestine was Benjamin Netanyahu, who had staunchly opposed Oslo. In an interview in *Haaretz* in 1996, he explained:

When I ask people who supposedly support the establishment of [a Palestinian] state what they believe, they answer that they do support a Palestinian state, but on the condition that it does not have its own tanks, planes, or missiles. They support a Palestinian state, but on the condition that it does not control its own air space. They support a Palestinian state, but on the condition that it is not allowed to make military alliances with Iraq or Iran. They support a Palestinian state, but on the condition that it does not have the right to drill into the ground and tap our water. They support a Palestinian state, but on the condition that it is not allowed to bring two or three million refugees and settle them along the Wadi Ara, or close to the suburbs of Tel Aviv, or close to Jerusalem. These kinds of restrictions on sovereignty do not exist anywhere in the world. There is not a single state in the world that is completely demilitarised. Every state has the right to defend and arm itself, the right to control its borders and to make military alliances. Therefore when the vast majority of Israelis want to impose all these restrictions on the Palestinian Authority, they actually oppose the idea of Palestinian sovereignty.⁴³

This is not to say that there weren't real conflicts inside Israeli society. The re-organisation of the occupation and the rhetorical (but never more) support for Palestinian statehood were identified by the settler movement and the Israeli Right as an unacceptable retreat in the face of Palestinian resistance. Demonstrations and counter demonstrations, violent physical clashes between Israelis, clashes between the Israeli state and army and settler para-military organisations, and ultimately the assassination of the Israeli prime minister, were all very real signs of a violent rift dividing Israeli society over how the colonial project should be organised. Ariel Sharon's decision as Prime Minister in 2005 to implement the 'disengagement plan' – the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli military and civilian presence from the Gaza Strip – was another moment of intense friction, with severe physical clashes between settlers and the security forces, as well as an ideological clash between liberals (and their institutions, primarily the judicial system) and settlers. For many in the Israeli Right, this was also the moment that sowed the seeds of the recent conflict over the judicial changes introduced by the current Netanyahu government, that is seen by many as

‘payback’ for the rift created by the ‘expulsion’ of settlers from Gush Katif.⁴⁴ As the above quote captures, however, the issue was never one of abandoning the colonial project – in whole or even in part.

It is also worth pointing out that, here again, the issue of international legitimacy played an important role in the Labour Zionist strategy. For example, the Oslo process was responding, in no small part, to US pressure for greater regional integration and normalisation of its Israeli ally.⁴⁵ For example, Washington had refused a loan to Israel, arguing that the Shamir government would use it to expand settlements. The Rabin government, having given some rhetorical assurances, was granted the same loan two years later.⁴⁶ The real change of course, however, was not about settlements. Instead, it was Rabin’s willingness to enter ‘negotiations’ that would culminate in the Oslo Accords. The accords allowed Arab regimes to justify ending their boycott and/or non-recognition of Israel, given even the Palestinian leadership had. US-led summits throughout this period made Arab recognition of Israel a key precondition for economic agreements.

This, necessarily incomplete, overview should underscore the point made here. Real conflicts have existed between the different wings of the Zionist movement throughout its history. These conflicts have often been intense, sometimes deadly. They have, however, focused on the nature, the speed, and the organisation of Israeli colonial domination over the Palestinians. They have not questioned its need or acceptability. These conflicts are generative of Israeli policy making towards Palestinians (and at times each other) and continue into the present. They are, however, systematically put to the side when it comes to imposing Israeli colonial rule – whether in order to crush Palestinian and/or regional resistance, to expand Israel’s settler-colonial domination, or both. The same pendulum swing between intense internal conflict, national unity in the face of Palestinians, and back again has been on display in the last two years.

The contemporary pendulum

Since January 2023, mass protests were waged across Israel, triggered by the declaration of the government that month to initiate a comprehensive plan of legislation meant to weaken the judicial system, what came to be known as the ‘judicial overhaul’ or ‘regime coup’.⁴⁷ The protests reached their peak in summer 2023, with the passing in first reading of the reduction/limitation of the ‘Reasonableness Clause’, that allows the Supreme Court to exercise judicial review over government decisions. At that time, the actions of the protestors escalated, roadblocks intensified, and with them, the violence of the police that was meant to ‘restore order’. While anti-government protests are not uncommon in Israel, the protests of 2023 were exceptional in their scale, spread and durability: the police reported more than seven million protestors in over 1,816 protests across 200 different locations lasting for over eight months.⁴⁸ The Histadrut – Israel’s largest trade

union federation and a key institution of Labour Zionist historic power and state building – which is normally extremely resistant to taking political industrial action, participated in a national day of action alongside employers in key industries, especially high tech, transport and retail.⁴⁹ A mixture between a general strike and an employers' lockout, it shut down most of Israel's economy.

At the heart of the protests, in terms of representation and organisational networks, were those self-defining as liberals, mainly left- and centre-leaning. The protests saw strong representation from white-collar workers and professionals, the historical backbone of liberal Zionism (including from the high-tech industry, doctors, lawyers, former senior figures in the state security services and the military), that raged against Netanyahu and his government. They were all eager to save Israeli 'democracy' from what they perceived as steps meant to destroy its institutions and protections, and thus its internal strength and international legitimacy.⁵⁰ Thousands of Israelis marched at the heart of Tel Aviv, carrying flags, chanting 'democracy or rebellion'. It is interesting to note the militarised nature of the protests, both in terms of symbols, language and networks of organisation, but also for the fact that it included an important element of reservists' mobilisation – pilots and those from elite/special units – who signed letters declaring that they would refuse the call to serve because they refused to serve an authoritarian regime.⁵¹ Significantly, the protestors emphasised their loyalty to the state, to Zionist ideology, to the legacy of its founding fathers and ethos, apparent in the fact that Israel's Declaration of Independence became a symbol frequently used in the protests.⁵² Importantly, the bulk of the protestors remained silent on the question of the ongoing occupation and colonisation in the West Bank (not to mention, the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip), regarded as a divisive topic that should be left for later, aside from a small representation of the 'Anti-Occupation Bloc' that remained marginalised and frequently became a target of attacks both by the police and other protestors.⁵³

While the protests were seen by many as a moment of significant internal rift within Jewish Israeli society,⁵⁴ more critical observers identified the protests as 'an intra-Jewish struggle that accepts the premise of Jewish supremacy . . . Those 130,000 protesting in Tel Aviv, protest only about their space and their privileges'.⁵⁵ Sabbagh-Khoury argues that the protests were a reflection of a long-term process in which political power is gradually moving to the hands of right-wing settlers that explicitly express their territorial ambitions and their desire for supremacy. In this way, the protestors are 'mourning the loss of colonial democracy', one that can threaten the long-term political and economic privileges of the liberal Jewish-Israeli class. Indeed, according to her, only the threat to the state judicial system is perceived as a threat to democracy, rather than the continuous 'colonisation, occupation, siege, oppression, dispossession and horrendous daily violence' to which the protestors gave legitimacy and some also took active part in, during their military service, either as conscripts or reservists, as well as by providing ideological support and justification.⁵⁶ Indeed, as Berda claims, it is the

state's legal institutions that serve to continuously preserve the separation between 'democratic Israel' (within the Green Line) and 'colonial Israel' (in the occupied territories), and the decision to limit judicial power is viewed by Israeli liberals as a decision to collapse the separation between inside and outside, democracy and colonialism.⁵⁷ A clear expression of this position was voiced by Yuval Noah Harari, the world-famous Israeli public intellectual, who declared on stage during a protest in July 2023 that if the 'Regime Coup' will be completed, 'Israel will forever be a racist occupying state'.⁵⁸

Despite the many claims of refusal to serve under this government, and the irreparable breach it represented in Israeli national unity, the events of 7 October 2023 have put an immediate halt to all protest activity and served to unite Jewish Israeli society as a whole. As the deadly outcomes of the 7 October 2023 attack became clear, senior Israeli politicians and military generals, echoed on national TV, radio and over social media, made statements on the need, and even the right, of Israel to obliterate the whole of the Gaza Strip. Statements such as those made by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu comparing Gazans to 'Amalek', and the declaration by the Minister of Defence Yoav Galant on 9 October 2023 'I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed; we are fighting human animals', among so many others, serve now as the legal evidence to sustain the special claim of 'intent' which is the key component needed for the legal case of genocide (according to the 1948 Genocide Convention) which the South African government submitted to the International Court of Justice.

While it is commonplace to claim that the violent, dehumanising discourse exists among rightwing extremists (who are in government and leadership positions), it is our intention to look closely at the discourse and action of figures and representatives of the liberal camp in Israel who vocalised their support of the military onslaught on the Gaza Strip, and the spirit of revenge that engulfed the whole of Israeli society in the aftermath of 7 October. This demonstrates again the ways in which intense internal conflict over the nature of the colonial projects, disappears in the face of Palestinian resistance and/or colonial expansion. In what follows we provide some illustrative examples of this trend.

Sobering-up

Following the attack, one of the main groups behind the protests, 'Brothers in Arms', which represents the much-celebrated reservists, decided immediately to suspend all protest activity and go to 'protect the homeland'.⁵⁹ Indeed, the whole infrastructure of the protest was quickly diverted to 'provide support to the residents of the Gaza Envelope' area and 'to help the IDF win'.⁶⁰ As Raz and Bondy claim, the unquestioned mobilisation of the organisation and its members early on served to legitimise the government's policy of total destruction of the Gaza Strip, and facilitate the silencing of any critique of the government for many

months.⁶¹ Even in April 2025 when some reservists started publicly calling to stop the 'war',⁶² the organisation refrained from criticising its continuation. Any critique of the Israeli government that could raise the idea of refusing service quickly vanished the moment the 'existential threat' (Palestinian resistance) raised its head.

Parliamentary opposition parties representing the Left-Centre supported the government's conduct and policies towards the Gaza Strip from day one. Benny Gantz, the leader of the National Camp who participated in the protests and vocalised his opposition to the government before the attack, quickly joined the emergency government formed on 11 October 2023.⁶³ Yitzhak Herzog, the president of Israel and previously a member of the Labour party and the leader of the opposition, declared in a press conference that 'it is an entire nation out there that is responsible . . . It is not true this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved. It's absolutely not true'.⁶⁴ He even dedicated an artillery shell with his signature.⁶⁵ A similar 'gesture' was made by Arnon Bar-David, the General Secretary of the Histadrut, during a visit to the arms industries in late November 2023, when he signed a shell with 'greeting from the Histadrut and the workers in Israel'.⁶⁶

Israeli mainstream media (especially TV channels 11, 12 and 13), which is commonly targeted by the Right, was recruited unanimously to support the army, uncritically echoing the briefings of the military spokesperson,⁶⁷ mobilising daily the images and testimonies of 7 October in order to nurture support for the army and the necessity of unrestrained violence towards the whole of the Gazan population.⁶⁸ Additionally, all Israeli TV channels refrained completely from showing the scale of death and destruction in Gaza (apart from some distant sterile aerial photography), many months into the genocide.⁶⁹ Even the commonly recognised liberal (and critical) newspaper *Haaretz*, waited five months into the genocide before calling to 'stop the war' for the first time, on March 2024. Even then it did so in entirely self-referential (and racist) terms: 'A moment before Gaza becomes Somalia, it is essential to return the hostages, to enable the IDF to refresh itself and to start investigating the failure and returning the inhabitants of the north and the south (of Israel). It is time to stop'.⁷⁰ In April 2025, Raviv Druker, a senior analyst at *Haaretz*, after praising the role of the widespread 'ethos of the second Nakba' in softening Hamas' positions, wrote: 'even so, the continuation of military pressure and the stopping of humanitarian aid are on the brink of inhumane actions, and put us at risk for a long conflict with most of the international community, including indictments in The Hague'.⁷¹ Accordingly, it is not Israel's inhumane and genocidal actions in Gaza but the risk of international condemnation and isolation that is at stake which should guide the decision to stop.

It is interesting to note also wider trends among the camp that self-defines as 'left' or 'centre', as reflected in several opinion polls conducted since October 2023. The Israeli Democracy Institute (IDI) poll carried out in November 2023 reveals that 87 per cent of the Jewish-Israeli population think the 'war' should

continue following the ceasefire agreement (that took effect that month), across all political camps (74 per cent of those defining themselves as 'left'; 84 per cent 'centre' and 93 per cent 'right'). Only a small minority (7 per cent) of the Jewish-Israeli population supported 'a move to a different kind of warfare to minimise damage to Palestinian population in Gaza and manage better international pressure'.⁷² In February 2024, 68 per cent of the Jewish-Israeli public opposed the entry of humanitarian aid to Gaza, out of which 39 per cent defined themselves as 'left'.⁷³ A month later, another poll indicated that 74 per cent of the Jewish-Israeli public supported the widening of the military operations into Rafah, out of which 30 per cent were 'left' and 63 per cent 'centre'.⁷⁴

Almost a year into the genocide, in September 2024, an IDI poll shows that the Jewish-Israeli public is divided on the question of whether it is time to end the 'war' (43/45 per cent) but a further breakdown indicates that a vast majority (83 per cent) of the 'left' supports ending the 'war' and 63 per cent of the 'centre'. While this seemingly indicates a shift in positions, when looking further at the data, the poll asked respondents for their reasons for ending the war. Responses indicate that 53 per cent wish it to end because of the risk to the hostages, and the need to shift the focus of the army to the northern front. Only 3 per cent of Israeli-Jews said that it is for the 'high cost of human life and desire to live in peace, quiet and security'.⁷⁵ In another poll conducted by Penn State University in March 2025, 82 per cent of Israelis want to expel Gazans, among which, 70 per cent defined themselves as 'secular' (commonly a good indication of 'left'/liberal).⁷⁶

Not only such support but also a disregard for the continuous genocide is commonplace in the liberal camp. This is clearly reflected in the May 2025 'Popular Peace Convention' organised by *It's Time*, 'a coalition of over 60 peacebuilding and shared society organizations working together with determination and courage to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a political agreement that will ensure both people's right to self-determination and secure lives'.⁷⁷ Such a coalition includes most, if not all, liberal and 'left'-leaning civil organisations operating in Israel, many of which have been subjected to long-term delegitimisation and criminalisation campaigns by the Israeli Right in the past decade, and increasingly since October 2023.⁷⁸ Perhaps in an attempt to keep unity within the camp, the convention's programme focused on the need for renewed political solutions and imagination, leaving out any discussion about the genocide in Gaza. In the words of Orly Noy:

What good are dialogue workshops, discussions about the sanctity of Jerusalem, interfaith prayers, or panels on political solutions while a genocide rages? These are privileged distractions we can no longer afford. To transform reality, we must first stare directly at its horrors and name them without flinching. If this conference cannot even convene a single panel on Gaza's genocide, much less demand an end to complicity in it, how can it hope to drive the change it claims to pursue?⁷⁹

The decision to avoid voicing opposition to the genocide highlights the intra-Israeli nature of the discourse and is fuelled by the inability of even the liberal camp to see Gazans as human beings, deserving of life and in need of liberation.

Particularly relevant to mention is the phenomenon of the so-called 'sobering up' (*Mitpakhim*). *Mitpakhim* is a term used to describe those that 'woke up' from the liberal illusions or hope they previously held. It is a description of a phenomenon that involved centre- and left-leaning Jewish-Israelis as a reaction to the 7 October attack. According to Raz and Bondy, 'they understood that the hopes of peace they held were unrealistic, and that voting for parties that necessitate peace and living side by side with the Palestinians is no longer possible; they now shed away their leftist naivety'.⁸⁰ Among them, journalists, artists and other 'celebrities' publicly asserted that 'there are no uninvolved civilians in Gaza', and that the whole Strip should be flattened.⁸¹ By doing so, they ignore and deny the almost two decades of siege and many more decades of occupation endured by the inhabitants of Gaza, thus effectively erasing the context of the 7 October attack. It is worth noting that a similar phenomenon of 'awakening' was prevalent in the early 2000s with the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada, and the breakdown of the so-called Israeli peace camp, in the face of (armed) Palestinian resistance,⁸² which is telling about the blind spots of the liberal camp in Israel, and its boundaries of tolerance to Palestinian political action.

For example, Tzufit Grant, a journalist, TV host and actress, said that 'On 7 October, something was murdered inside me, they murdered the "humanitarian" part of my brain . . . that says that we are all humans. No, no! People are the product of their education. And if you are raised to be a vermin, this is what you become. A disgusting vermin.'⁸³ Another example is of Hanny Nahmias, an actress, singer and children's entertainer, who claimed that 7 October made her sober up, 'Until when will we continue to be enlightened and stupid?? . . . I was all for co-existence, I embraced this idea and even went to the shared Remembrance Day with the Palestinians . . . Today I believe that in the Middle East you must speak Arabic'.⁸⁴ A long segment on the i24 News TV channel in November 2024 was dedicated to the phenomenon, interviewing former political figures, artists, writers and inhabitants of the Gaza Envelope, all previously considering themselves part of the 'Left', admitting how their belief in peace was shattered, how they sobered up and understood reality for what it is.⁸⁵

Such a position was also expressed by Nir Meir, former General Secretary of the Kibbutzim Movement, who explained how in conversations with inhabitants of the Kibbutzim in the Gaza Envelope, 'in the first month after the massacre, the whitest peace doves told me that they will only go back if we will be able to see the sea from their house. Erase the whole of Gaza, we want to see the sea from Be'eri'. In the same segment, Oded Ben-Shemesh, a public law expert and a former assistant to Supreme Court judge Ahron Barak, claimed that 'I don't think I changed a lot. I was part of the liberal left-centre, and also today I am part of the liberal left-centre. But the meaning of liberal left-centre has changed, because

what we have seen on 7 October is a new reality'.⁸⁶ What is interesting here is not the so-called change in positions reflected in these statements, but the role these public (and other) figures play in denouncing the liberal-left positions, reasserting the belief that the only (viable) option is total war and elimination of the Palestinian population in Gaza.

Sobering up from sobering up

Since the collapse of the second ceasefire agreement in March 2025, the liberal camp in Israel is undergoing a gradual re-awakening. This has manifested itself more forcefully since the summer of 2025, with the spread of devastating images of starving people in Gaza across international media outlets, followed by overwhelming condemnation of Israel's conduct in Gaza, including by some of its closest allies.⁸⁷ Israeli public figures, journalists and intellectuals from the Centre/Left are gradually coming to the realisation that Israel has now 'gone too far', and that the 'war' must stop.

Such positions are apparent in articles published in Israeli (and international) media platforms, petitions and open letters signed by different groups. Calls from reservists are noteworthy, and include a letter signed by over a thousand air force pilots and combatant air crews officers in April 2025 calling for 'the return of the hostages without further delay, including for the price of ending the fighting'.⁸⁸ That same month, reservists from the cyber units published a similar letter,⁸⁹ and in August 2025, different groups of reservists addressed the Prime Minister with the demand to 'stop the war', since it 'endangers our soldiers without a cause, causing unnecessary harm to many innocent civilians, and deteriorating Israel's standing in the world to an unprecedented low'.⁹⁰ From academia, heads of five Israeli academic institutions wrote a public letter to Netanyahu to intervene to stop the famine in the Strip⁹¹ and a group of singers, actors and other personalities from the Israeli cultural scene published an open letter in early August, calling to stop the 'horrors' in Gaza, 'including the killing of children and innocent civilians, starvation, expulsion and senseless destruction of Gaza's cities'.⁹² It is interesting to note that several of these artists withdrew their signatures shortly afterwards because of the intense public reaction to this letter, and the cancellation of some of their scheduled performances. Opinion polls conducted by IDI in July 2025 show that the majority of the Jewish-Israeli public (62 per cent) thinks that Israel should accept a deal that will secure the release of all hostages, the end of the war and a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Here, the breakdown of the results by political camps show 92% support among those identifying as 'left' and 77% among those identifying as 'centre'.⁹³ Similar figures were presented in a poll by the popular Channel 12 news with 74% of the total public, out of which 89% are opposition voters.⁹⁴

In August 2025 protests against the government and in support of a comprehensive deal to lead to the release of the Israeli hostages intensified throughout Israel. This was triggered by the government's declaration of its intention to further 'expand and deepen the war' and 'occupy Gaza city', a decision seen by

many as posing a high risk (if not a death warrant) to the remaining living hostages.⁹⁵ Led by the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, the protests' first and foremost objective was to secure the release of the hostages held in Gaza as part of a comprehensive deal. Without centring such a call, it implied support for ending the 'war', as the only way to achieve a prisoner exchange deal.

A clear illustration of the reawakening of the liberal-Zionist camp is found in the words of Fania Oz-Salzberger, an Israeli historian and the daughter of the late Israeli author Amos Oz, writing in the *Financial Times* in August 2025. She calls on the liberals abroad to not equate 'Israel' with its government, but rather to consider its 'peace seeking' civil society, that is now 'waking up to the horrors inflicted on civilians caught between Israel and Hamas . . . we increasingly think of the ongoing war with sadness and shame'. She continues by calling to 'free the hostages, at the price of a ceasefire and retreat from Gaza'.⁹⁶

It is important to note that these examples reveal little concern for the fate of Gaza's population, and certainly do not question the army's conduct in Gaza since October 2023. As such, while there is some level of reckoning with the necessity to 'stop the war', the arguments brought forward are commonly self-referential: the need to save the Israeli hostages, the necessity to uphold moral standards, a particular responsibility on Jews as descendants of Holocaust survivors as well as, crucially, the need to address and counter Israel's deteriorating image internationally. Indicative of these positions is a study conducted in August 2025 by Reichman University on the positions of the Israeli public about the famine in the Gaza Strip. The results show that most of the Israeli public is sceptical about the claims of famine in Gaza and if such famine does exist, believe that Israel is not the one responsible for creating it. Specifically, 77 per cent of Jewish Israelis did not agree with the claim that 'there is vast scale famine in the Gaza Strip' (55 per cent of those voted for opposition parties); 80 per cent of Israelis disagreed with the claim that international media covers in a professional and balanced way the issue of famine and the entry of food into Gaza (79 per cent of voters of opposition parties); 87 per cent of Jewish Israelis put the main blame for the famine on Hamas and 78 per cent disagreed with the claim that Israel should do more to prevent mass famine in the Gaza Strip (out of them 53 per cent opposition voters). Finally, only 16 per cent of Jewish Israelis mention feeling sorry when they hear about the famine in Gaza.⁹⁷ As Ziv writes, while seven young refusniks are imprisoned (the highest number in recent years), and hundreds of reserve soldiers refuse to report for duty, these calls have not translated into a mass refusal movement, or even to a concrete discourse capable of threatening the government.⁹⁸

Conclusion

The re-emergence of liberal Zionists – both in Israel and abroad – following the killing frenzy, signals their attempt to re-insert Israel within the liberal western status quo, without however questioning the military conduct since October 2023. This, we argue, serves both as a way to attempt to improve their position in the internal balance of forces in Israel and to re-stabilise the Zionist project

internationally in the aftermath of genocide. Many in the liberal West are either looking for hope from within Israeli society or overestimate the differences between the liberal and the illiberal camps within Israeli society. However, we argue that very little hope can be found from within, and that the so-called disagreement between the two camps was never (and is never) centred on the treatment of Palestinians (and in this case, to destroy Gaza), but instead on the nature and extent of their domination, as well as the discourse that justifies it. While the genocide is commonly identified with the 'fanatic Right', the evidence shows the liberal Zionist support in the current genocide is well established – and is part of continuous left-Zionist conduct since 1948.

Our argument takes as its starting point what Moses conceptualised as the 'problems of genocide', i.e. a definition that excludes liberal mass killing in the name of security and focuses instead on illiberal mass killing in the name of racial hatred. The language of 'permanent security' is easily identified in the liberal discourse on genocide in Israel. Firstly, the assumption of collective guilt of a whole group, encapsulated in the claim that there are no 'uninvolved civilians' in Gaza. Secondly, the element of pre-emption of potential future attacks by members of the group as reflected in the call to target the whole of the Gazan population, including women and the elderly who support the combatants, and children who will grow up to become combatants. Third, the role of paranoia, one that leads to fantastical security imperatives and paranoid threat assessments. Here, we should consider the ways in which the 7 October attack is conceptualised as a second Holocaust, as an existential threat to the State of Israel. Moreover, by emphasising the proximity of the 7 October massacre to the Holocaust, the trauma of the Holocaust is activated in full force, and reactivated every day in the Israeli media and public discourse, and utilised to justify the need for absolute protection of the defenceless Jewish citizens of the state. Finally, the language of final solutions which signals the end of politics – no compromise or negotiation is captured in the catchphrase coined by Netanyahu, and endorsed by the majority of the Israeli public, of 'total victory'.

In the face of the perceived need to achieve and maintain 'permanent security' for the Jews of Israel, the total destruction of the Gaza Strip and the continuation of ethnic cleansing, military occupation and everyday violence in the West Bank are justified internally, and legitimised internationally. Accordingly, at the primary justification is the need for security, rather than territorial ambitions, vengeance, or a divine right of supremacy over the land. Genocide here is the regrettable, but inevitable, reaction to a threat that materialised so acutely in the 7 October attack. However, while justifications diverge, the unity of action is what matters: total destruction, death and annihilation of life, and the very possibility of life in Gaza that has been taking place ever since, which the two 'camps' in Israeli society have executed willingly and systematically. The case of Israel's conduct since 2023, but also consistently since 1948, reveals how these two 'arms'

of the movement are operating together and complementing each other. The conflict between them, rather than weakening the Israeli state, is generative, shaping the direction of the settler-colonial project. As we have shown in this piece, this is not unique to the Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine, but rather a constitutive element of settler societies historically.

As the article has shown, this process aligns with long-term tendencies. In the face of Palestine resistance and/or the ability to expand Israel's settler-colonial project, different Israeli factions speak with one voice and, crucially, act as one. It is therefore inaccurate, in the past or the present, to locate Israel's extreme violence against Palestinians as the actions of the Right. Furthermore, historically, it is the so-called Left that led the charge in previous rounds of Israeli campaigns of mass murder and dispossession – critically in both 1948 and 1967. Internal disagreements and conflict have focused – in the past as well as the present – on the intensity, speed and/or extent of the process. In addition, we have shown how Labour/liberal Zionists have repeatedly demonstrated a greater concern with international opinion and the need to legitimise their actions internationally. This goes a long way towards making sense of the current 'sobering up from sobering up' amongst that camp.

It follows from this analysis, that illiberal and liberal genocide need to be understood as co-constitutive of the Zionist project and its expansion, and that any analysis that foregrounds internal differentiation within the Zionist camp as a pathway to its end misses the mark. For Zionist settler colonialism and the horrors it continues to visit on Palestinians across the board to be defeated, one cannot hope for its internal contradictions to do the job. They have, for over a century, pushed it forward. Instead, and as with other settler-colonial projects before it, it will need to be defeated by Indigenous resistance, supported by regional liberation and international solidarity.

ORCID Id

Sai Englert  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8272-2538>

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