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# *The Settler Colonial Paradigm and the Israeli Official Narrative: an Example of Elimination of the Natives*

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## **Abstract**

This article is an attempt to apply the Settler Colonial paradigm to the analysis of the Israeli official-Zionist historiography. This approach leads to identify the Zionist ideology as a settler colonial one and the Zionist historiography as the academic support to the Zionist project.

The aim of this research is to demonstrate how the settler colonial concept of the transfer of the native population, immanent in Zionist thought, has been translated into narrative and underpinned by historiography. Moreover, I will investigate on how the official historiography has succeeded in remaining predominant over the time since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, influencing the political and social perception of the Palestinian issue all over the Western world<sup>1</sup>.

**Keywords:** Settler Colonialism; official historiography; transfer; natives; New Historians.

## *Introduction*

This article is part of my PhD research, but the question that leads me to investigate on Israeli historiography stems from my previous work and experience in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and other Arab countries. I think some premises are needed, before going on. Let's start with the fact that Palestinian refugee camps were born immediately afterwards the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and that the same state,

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<sup>1</sup> "That history has shaped the way Israelis and Diaspora Jews-or at least Diaspora Zionists-have seen, and in large measure still see, Israel's past; and it has also held sway over the way gentile Europeans and Americans (and their governments) see that past. This understanding of the past, in turn, has significantly influenced the attitude of Diaspora Jews, as well as European and American non-Jews, toward present-day Israel which effects government policies concerning the Israeli-Arab conflict", (Morris, 1988).

without hesitation, took legal measures to prevent the return of the Palestinians to Palestine/Israel.

Palestinians accuse Israel for having intentionally created the unsolved problem of the refugees by expelling them from their land; on the other hand, Israel rejected all the accusations and blamed some Arab leaders who gave order to the Palestinian population to flee. Consequently, Israel does not want to assume any responsibilities and any commitments for the resolution of this problem.

Generally speaking, in Western countries the most accepted and divulgated version of the historical facts is the Israeli one. First of all, because of a general European colonialist attitude which tended to see native populations as inferior and with no historical past; furthermore, in this particular case, the event of the Holocaust played a very important role in shaping the Israeli version as the dominant one<sup>2</sup>.

The supremacy of the Israeli official narrative does not mean that Palestinians have not produced any historical works about the 1948 and the Nakba. It is worth to mention here 'Ā. al-'Ārif's book *Al-Nakba 1947-1949* (1952) or C. Zurayq, *Ma'na al-Nakba* (1948), among the first Palestinian books on the issue.

Sure, at the beginning, Palestinian (as well as Zionist<sup>3</sup>) historical works were somehow "antiquarian", as T. Khalidi (1981) defined them, that is to say that "they have no other ostensible purpose than to unearth or record various aspects of Palestinian and Arab history and culture" (p. 64).

No doubts that the Palestinian historiography has been influenced from the political and social context of the moment, in particular from the danger represented by the "Mandate and its clients, the Zionists" (Khalidi, p. 60). As the author noticed, "as one Arab country after another began to negotiate its independence, the volume of Palestinian rhetoric and polemic seemed to increase" and continued: "Palestinian historiography constituted, of course, a special segment of Arab cultural life in the

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the impossibility to develop this argument here, I recommend I. Zertal's works: *From Catastrophe to Power: The Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (1998) and *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (2005) or N. Finkelstein *The Holocaust Industry. Reflections on the Exploitations of Jewish Suffering* (2000).

<sup>3</sup> Y. Gelber (2007, p. 47) affirmed: "Early historians of Zionism were, on the whole, amateurs – Zionist activists who under certain circumstances became historians".

Mandate period. But the political pressures to which the Palestinians were subjected were undoubtedly more fearsome than those in any other Arab country of that era" (p. 61). For this reason, nationhood and self-determination were predominant themes in Palestinian historiography.

At the same time, the question of the nationhood was fundamental also in defining Zionist<sup>4</sup> historical and cultural production at the time. Indeed, it has to be considered that the different Jewish communities in Europe felt themselves as a unique people<sup>5</sup>. Following some episodes of intolerance and antisemitism<sup>6</sup>, some of the most influential Jewish intellectuals started to associate the existence of a Jewish people to the need of a nation for its persecuted members. Although different places were taken into account to establish the Jewish nation, Palestine seemed to be the most suitable one, in order to create a real sense of nation among the Jewish communities in Europe. The "Promised Land", or *Eretz Israel*, was the biblical land of the ancestors, from which Jews were expelled and to which they were promised to return by God. This divine promise became the main unifying element of the variegated diasporic Jewish community.

To demonstrate the strength and the continuity of this official narrative I have taken as an example some different official Israeli historians: Netanel Lorch, one of the main historian of the Israeli Army. He wrote the famous book *The Edge of the Sword* (1961) that is a very detailed story of what the

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth to mention here that the birth of the Zionist ideology was preceded by a cultural period called *Haskalah*, developed in central Europe among European Jews. The debate around the *Haskalah* was mainly about the possibility for the Jews to assimilate into the social context of the country in which they lived. The evolution of the European political events brought some of the intellectuals to the abandonment of this tendency and to embrace the Zionist nationalist ideology. I recommend to read Y. Gorny (2003).

<sup>5</sup> S. Dubnow (1903, p. 10) referred to the Jewish people as the most historical one, as if he wanted to stress that the Jews have always been a unique people, despite their diaspora: "A definition of the Jewish people must needs correspond to the aggregate of the concepts expressed by the three group-names, most ancient, ancient, and modern. The only description applicable to it is "the historical nation of all times," a description bringing into relief the contrast between it and all other nations of modern and ancient times, whose historical existence either came to an end in days long past or began at a date comparatively recent. And granted that there are "historical" and "unhistorical" peoples, then it is beyond dispute that the Jewish people deserves to be called "the most historical" (historicissimus)".

<sup>6</sup> One of the most symbolic episode was the well-known Dreyfus Affair.

Israelis call *War of Independence*<sup>7</sup>, since its very beginning till the creation of the State of Israel in 1948; S. Ettinger and A. Malamat, historians at the Hebrew University; E. Karsh, Professor and Head of the Middle East and Mediterranean Studies Programme at King's College in London, and A. Shapira, both of them contemporary historians.

Another important pamphlet I have analysed is *Auto-emancipation* (1935), published for the first time in 1882 by Leon Pinsker, one of the pioneers of Zionism. Although he was not a historian and his work is not a historical one, the pamphlet gives an important proof of the early Zionist mind and it is a very interesting analysis of the perception of anti-Semitism among European Jewish communities at the time.

Following the paradigm used nowadays by the Settler Colonial Studies, I will focus on how the official Israeli historiography has served the colonial tendency of the Zionist movement by creating a structured complex of myths and knowledge which tend to hide, negate and deny the Palestinian presence in Palestine.

In settler colonial terms this is called logic of elimination of the natives (Wolfe, 2006), that is to recognize that an attempt to erase and expel the indigenous population, both physically and culturally, had taken place in order to substitute the native population with the settlers' community.

It is this logic that allows scholars, such as Wolfe, to speak about Settler Colonialism as a structure, not only an event. The structure is understood as a complex and enduring system of relations between all the elements of the colonial system, with a particular reference to the relation between settlers and natives. Indeed, the attempt to eliminate the natives persists over the time and takes different forms, as for example in the case of a

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<sup>7</sup> With this expression, Israeli historians indicate the events of the 1948 and the war against the Palestinians and the Arabs for the establishment of the Jewish state. Shapira (2012) wrote: "The closest phrase in English is 'the War of Independence', which expresses the most important change that resulted from it—the achievement of Jewish sovereignty. The fighters of the Palmach— the precursor and spearhead of the new Israeli army—called it 'the War of Liberation'. as if it were another anti-colonial war leading to liberation from the yoke of a foreign ruler, in this case the British. However, the war was not waged against the British, but against the Arabs. It was not a war of liberation, but a war between two peoples striving for control over the same piece of land. For their part the Arabs referred to the war with the neutral phrase '1948 war', implying that it was just one in a series that had been and would be waged", (p.156).

process of assimilation or selective integration<sup>8</sup>, under a strict settlers' control. At the same time, it collides with the resistance of the native population that simply face the settler logic of elimination by trying to exist and not to be erased. For this reason, Settler Colonialism is also perceived as a zero-sum game (Kimmerling, 1995; Wolfe, 1999).

The temporal dimension in this structure is very important, opposite to the limited dimension of the "event", as a completed situation of the past. The innovation of Wolfe's study is thus all in the sentence "Settler Colonialism is a structure, not an event; invasion is a structure, not an event" (1999, p. 2).

In order to historically and morally accept the removal of the native population, the land to be settled has to be imagined as empty. The symbolic removal prepared for the physical removal. In other words, the Zionist narrative served to empty the land from the Palestinian natives at a discursive level, before expelling them physically.

### *1. Israeli Official (or "Old") Narrative*

Talking about 1948 and the birth of the State of Israel from a historiographical perspective, it could be useful to individuate at least two main moments: the first (from 1948 to 1980s) dominated by what it is known as Old Historiography and the second one (from the second half of the '80s) characterised by the appearance of the so called New Israeli Historiography<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Veracini (2010, p. 37) individuates in the process of assimilation another way to transfer the native population. With the assimilation process, indigenous are literally "uplifted out of existence". By assimilating part of the native population, the settler entity succeeds in eliminating the indigenous authenticity or in controlling it.

<sup>9</sup> Since in this article I am going to focus on the Old Historiography, I will explain briefly the main characteristics of the New historiographical tendency. The so called Israeli New Historiography appeared in the '80s with the main aim of challenging the traditional vision of Israeli historiography. New Historians tried in particular to shed a light on the Palestinian exodus of the 1948 rethinking the role of Israeli army, thanks to the analysis of some declassified documents found in the Israeli Archives. The strength of the New Historians became, in this way, the professional methodology based on the study of the documents. Benny Morris and Ilan Pappé are among the most famous and well-known exponents of this tendency but it is not possible to consider it as a historiographical school, because of the diversity of positions and ideas that can be found among its members. In the last section of this article I will quickly mention the debate around the New Historians.

It could also be said that the first one has been defined in opposition to the other, although the distinction between them is relatively recent<sup>10</sup>.

In a sense, all the Israeli historians in the 1950s, '60s and '70s who were linked to the establishment, to the army and to the Zionist Movement could be classified as "Old". These historians have conveyed the official version of the events of the 1948, without taking into account (or trying to soften) what Palestinians named the Nakba (catastrophe), that is the expulsion of the Palestinian people from Palestine<sup>11</sup>. The Old Historians actively participated in the construction (or the rebuild) of the Jewish State and the Jewish society; for this reason, they could not be considered impartial.

Benny Morris (1988, p. 20) wrote:

The Old Historians offered a simplistic and consciously pro-Israeli interpretation of the past and they deliberately avoid mentioning anything that would reflect badly on Israel. People argued that, since the conflict with the Arabs was still raging, and since it was a political as well as a military struggle, it necessarily involved propaganda. (...) In short, *raison d'état* often took precedence over telling the truth.

Considering that the majority of the official historians came from political or military environment<sup>12</sup> (Gutwein, 2003), Morris' words cannot be considered odd. The Old History, as Morris (1988) affirmed, was mainly based on interviews and memoirs because the majority of the documents

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<sup>10</sup> The first time the distinction appeared was in an article of the Israeli New Historian Benny Morris, published in the *Tikkun* magazine at the end of 1988. The New Historians "some of them living abroad, have looked and are looking afresh at the Israeli historical experience, and their conclusions, by and large, are at odds with those of the Old Historians". In Morris' opinion two factors contributed to the emergence of this new trend: one related to the possibility to access Israeli archive and declassified documents; the second one is directly related to the historians: "most of them matured in a more open, doubting and self-critical Israel than the pre-Lebanon War Israel, in which the Old Historians grew up". (Morris, 1988, pp. 20-21).

<sup>11</sup> The Nakba (an Arab term that means catastrophe) indicates the expulsion of the Palestinian people from Palestine, due to the creation of the Jewish State in 1948. Official Israeli historiography wants Palestinians have fled spontaneously or because they were encouraged by the Arab leaders; on the contrary, Palestinian historiography affirms that they were violently expelled by Jewish forces (*Haganah* and later the Israeli Army) in the framework of what it is best known as the Plan D, a military strategic plan which involved the destruction and the expulsion of the Palestinian society.

<sup>12</sup> Such as the Army History Department, for example.



were still censored and it is true that the founding historians of the State of Israel were deeply involved in their mission to rebuild a new state that they were not able to recognize and separate profession from ideology.

The ideology, of course, was Zionism. Born at the end of the XVIII century<sup>13</sup> in Europe among the Jewish communities, the Zionist movement, through an old-fashioned interpretation of the Bible<sup>14</sup>, aimed to give a “national home”<sup>15</sup> to the Jews all over the world. Zionism and its nationalist aspirations born also as a reaction to the waves of anti-Semitic feelings and *pogrom* which spread in particular in East Europe during that period.

As we can read in Leon Pinsker (1935, p. 5):

The essence of the problem, as we see it, lies in the fact that in the midst of the nations among whom the Jews reside, they form a distinctive element which cannot be assimilated, which cannot be readily digested by any nations.

Since the “amalgamation of the Jews with the original inhabitants of a land is absolutely impossible” (Pinsker, 1935), the only solution to the “Jewish question”<sup>16</sup> was a national one:

The proper, the only remedy, would be the creation of a Jewish nationality, of a people living upon its own soil; the auto- emancipation of the Jews; their emancipation as a nation among the nations by the acquisition of a home of their own. (Pinsker, 1935, p. 32).

As stated by the Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling (1995), who has been often associated to the New Historians, “Political Zionism crystallized and emerged on the eve of the European colonial period, which perceived

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<sup>13</sup> Primly, the Zionist Movement was established during the First Zionist Congress held in 1897 in Basel.

<sup>14</sup> I’m referring here to the myth of the Jewish people as the chosen one by God.

<sup>15</sup> “National home” is an expression used for the first time in the text of the Balfour Declaration, a letter through which Lord Balfour, on behalf of the British Government, secured his support to the Zionist movement for the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine.

<sup>16</sup> The so-called “Jewish question” has been deeply explained by Pinsker in “Auto-emancipation” which, in some ways, anticipated what Theodore Herzl (the founding father of the Zionist Movement) wrote in his famous work “Der Judenstaat” in 1896.

as self-evident the right of Europeans to settle any available non-European land", (p. 41).

However, contrary to other European colonial enterprises, Zionism did not choose Palestine (or *Zion*, or *Eretz Israel*<sup>17</sup>) because its abundance of natural resources or its wealth; the link between Zionism and Palestine was exclusively bound to the land religious and symbolic value: "it was the only land that could awaken the sentiments needed among world Jewry in order to develop a movement devoted to immigration and the building of a new society", (Kimmerling, 1995, p. 41).

It was clear, since the beginning of the Zionist enterprise, that one of the necessary requirements for the creation of a new Jewish nation was an empty land or, at least, the transfer of the native inhabitants. As very well demonstrated by the Palestinian historian Nur Masalha in his work about the concept of transfer in Zionist thought (Masalha, 1992), the idea of transfer is something immanent in Zionist mind since the beginning and it could be considered the logical consequence of its colonial aspect. However, until 1937<sup>18</sup> it is difficult to find the concept of transfer explicitly cited or explained in Zionist historiography and in official documents.

It could be read in Herzl's diaries (Patai, 1960, p. 88):

We must expropriate gently the private property on the estates assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country.

The transfer idea of the native Palestinian population represented thus the logical outcome of a colonial movement which needed an exclusive land and which did not recognize any property right on the land to non-European populations.

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<sup>17</sup> The expression *Eretz Israel* in Hebrew literally means "Land of Israel"; while the term *Zion* was first used to indicate the holy city of Jerusalem and then its meaning has been extended to indicate all Israel.

<sup>18</sup> In 1937 the report of the Peel Commission was published. It was a commission appointed by the British Mandatory Government in order to investigate the causes and to find a solution for the growing tensions between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. The report suggested the partition of Palestine between a Jewish state and an Arab state and the consequent transfer of the Arab population.

2. *What kind of role have historians played during this period?*

As Kimmerling (1995) noted, in particular before the creation of the State of Israel “historiography was an integral part of the process of nation and collective identity building”, (p. 41).

Indeed, the past had been seen as the only way to legitimate Zionist claims over the Palestinian land, in opposition to that of the Arab population.

In fact, the role of the past in a settler colonial context in general, and in the case of Zionism in particular, is fundamental in order to validate the new enterprise “externally” (in front of the international community and the public opinion), as well as “internally” (to mitigate any possible attempt to diverge). As we have seen before, Zionism was born among the different Jewish communities in Europe, which were eventually far from each other, not only physically but also “culturally”. In fact, Zionism was all but a homogeneous movement<sup>19</sup> and in order to reach its aims, the leadership must have been able to create a solid social basis through the use of a common past. The only thing that could unite the European Jewish groups in that particular moment was a “selected arsenal of primordial symbols and myths taken from Jewish religion partially secularized and nationalized to suit Zionist purposes” (Kimmerling, 1995, p. 42).

After the creation of the state, Israeli historiography has tried to achieve a “professional” status, that means it sought to be academic with the use of a scientific methodology; but at the same time historians have continued to be devoted to Zionism, as their immediate ancestors. “However”, affirmed Kimmerling, “when ideological commitments collide with standards of objectivity and impartiality, usually the Zionist orientations receive primacy” (p. 47).

Official historians have tried to find the right balance between “the seemingly impossible combination of a positivist wish to reconstruct reality and an ideological commitment to prove the justness of their cause” (Pappé, 2014, p. 25). But it was this commitment to the cause which has been perceived by the Old Zionist historians as necessary for a complete

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<sup>19</sup> For the history of Zionism and its numerous internal trends I recommend Gorny, (1998); Gorny, (2003).

and trusty reconstruction of Zionism and the State. In other words, this Israeli generation of historians worked to confirm the early Zionist version, so that the scientific proof became the repetition.

These features are not, of course, peculiar to the Zionist-Israel official historiography, however it could be questioned the way in which the official version served the colonial Zionist aims and how it has influenced the global perception of the entire Palestinian-Israeli question until now.

### 3. *The Settler Colonial paradigm*

What makes Settler Colonialism different from other forms of colonialism and why its paradigm can be useful to understand the role of historiography in supporting the Zionist thought?

Undoubtedly, Settler Colonialism is not something new<sup>20</sup>, neither unique<sup>21</sup> and it has some general features in common with other forms of colonialism but, at the same time, it adds some innovations.

The first element to point out is the relation between the settler colonial entity and the land. The settler colonial entity is usually represented by a group of European settlers, searching for an “available” and “empty” land, in which a new society and a new state could be constructed. This new state looks for independence and legitimacy and for this reason does not want to depend on a foreign and far mother country.

At the same time, settlers want to cut any kind of relation with the native population. They do not want to exploit or to dominate it; they simply want it to disappear, in order to replace it with the new

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<sup>20</sup> Among the first to analyse this phenomenon we remember Maxime Rodinson’s work *Israel a Colonial Settler State* (1973), first published in French at the end of 1967 war.

<sup>21</sup> The Settler Colonial paradigm is often used to refer to the cases of Australia, United States, South Africa and Algeria, even if scholars are still debating about defining Algeria as a settler colonial case, in particular because of the country success in reaching its independence and expel the settlers. The end of the colonial oppression has been seen as the opposite of a settler colonial context, usually understood as a structure, that is to say a system that is going to last.

community of settlers. Indeed, one of the main attitude of the settler community is the attempt to “indigenize” itself, in order to overcome the colonial status and become a recognized and legitimized nation.

What is relevant for the purpose of this article is the orientation of the settler entity towards the native population. As I told before, settlers do not perceive it as necessary and simply try to eliminate it. In settler colonial terms this is called the “logic of elimination of the natives”.

As Patrick Wolfe well explained in his work: “The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler colonialism. Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus, contests for land can be—indeed, often are—contests for life” (2006, p. 387). That is not to say that every settler colonial movement requires genocide or, on the contrary, that genocide cannot happen outside a settler colonial context. However, the relation between genocide and settler colonialism is very tight<sup>22</sup> and this relation is summarized in the logic of elimination of the natives.

The elimination of the natives can be justified in different ways: using the spectre of racism, or xenophobia, or ethnicity and so on; but the only important reason of the elimination is the “access to the territory”, (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388).

In this sense, Settler Colonialism is something revolutionary: it “destroys to replace”, affirmed Wolfe (2006), and through the elimination of the native population it constructs a new society.

In the process of eliminating and replace the native population, settler violence is a fundamental element, since the native population starts to resist to the uprooting process. Settler Colonial Studies define this violence as “foundational”, because it is necessary to the creation of the new state; it means, it is functional to the last purpose of the settler colonialism that is to supersede itself.

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<sup>22</sup> “Settler Colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal”, (Wolfe, 2006, p. 387).

For this reason, the main characteristic of this violence is to be denied, by presenting it as a defensive violence: “settler colonialism needs to disavow any foundational violence” (Veracini, 2010, p. 75), because, as every violent act, it could never be considered moral. In fact, “when settler colonial narratives celebrate anti-indigenous violence, they do so by representing a defensive battle ensuring the continued survival of the settler community and never as founding violence per se” (Veracini, 2010, p. 78). Disavowing the foundational violence thus becomes a defensive mechanism and, at the same time, a way to negate the presence of the native population, (Veracini, 2010).

Indeed, the natives are usually perceived as shadows (Said, 1978) or inconsistent presences, that is tantamount to affirm the emptiness of the land.

#### *4. Narrative Transfer*

Given the above mentioned characteristic of the settler colonialism and the necessities of the Zionist movement, it is clear how the two things can be linked together. The question remains how the logic of the elimination of the natives has been translated into narrative and historiography?

As I said before, Israeli official historiography is mainly based on the Bible and some myths<sup>23</sup> have been used by the Zionist leadership, over the time, in order to underpin its projects.

It is now possible to understand how official historiography has adapted some of these myths through the use of what Veracini (2010) has called the narrative transfer, a mean to carry out the aforementioned logic of elimination of the natives. Settlers need to find a moral defence and explanation for their acts of elimination

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<sup>23</sup> The term “myth” is here understood as an element, a belief or an event taken from a legendary or a real past and readjust to fit the present. As Kimmerling stated, myths are necessary to build and preserve the collective identity, (Kimmerling, 2001, p. 56).

and, in doing this, they literally transfer the indigenous population away from the official narrative.

Veracini (2010) individuates four different ways in which natives could be “denied” or “ignored”. First of all, indigenous people are represented backward or as primitives and undeveloped “a form of humanity inhabiting pockets of past surrounded by contemporaneity”, (p. 41). As Veracini observed, these pockets of past are the equivalent of indigenous territorial reserves and aim to create a situation in which indigenous are transferred “elsewhen” (in the past).

Zionist historiography has always affirmed that Palestine was inhabited by underdeveloped and uncivilized people:

For centuries Palestine had been inhabited predominantly, though sparsely, by Arabs. Through faulty cultivation or careless administration, large parts of the country had become barren, erosion had carried off soil from once fertile mountainsides, swamps had formed in plains and valleys. (Lorch, 1961, p. 32)

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Palestine was a remote, backward province of the Ottoman Empire, which itself was in decline. Internecine wars and clashes between Bedouins and fellahin occurred every day, and the roads, controlled by robbers and bandits, were dangerous. The country was almost empty, with some 250,000 inhabitants, including about 6,500 Jews concentrated in the four holy cities: Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, and Hebron. (Shapira, 2012, p.27).

Secondly, narrative tries to create a sort of discontinuity in indigenous life between past and present. This discontinuity “between an indigenous past and a post colonial present” (Veracini, 2010, p. 41) makes any indigenous protests or insurgencies unworthy, they no longer subsist. It could be seen an example of this type of narrative the way in which Israeli official scholars refer to Palestinians in Israel as “Israeli Arabs” or, with Karsh’s words (2010), “Arab citizen of the Jewish State”.

Breaking the continuity with the past makes every indigenous claim or protest meaningless. Karsh (2010) pointed out that the new Arab inhabitants of the Jewish State would be equal citizens and would have equal rights, a principle that was also stated in Israel’s Declaration of Independence. In particular:

Arab citizens were urged to take part in the building of the state on the basis of full and equal citizenship and on the basis of appropriate representation in all its institutions, provisional and permanent. (p. 236).

Calling for this kind of political assimilation could be view as a mean to weaken and absorb the natives' political demands.

Anita Shapira (2012), on the contrary, seemed to be more realistic and describes the situation of the Arab minority<sup>24</sup> in Israel as follow:

Israel seized abandoned Arab property and expropriated Arab land for Jewish settlement. According to some estimates, between 40 and 60 percent of the Arab-owned land in Israeli areas in 1948 was now transferred to Jewish settlement. In the Declaration of Independence Israel assured its Arab inhabitants of equal rights, but in the wake of the war Ben-Gurion was persuaded that the Arabs could not be trusted and military government should be imposed on them for security reasons—meaning that they were excluded from the right to defend themselves in the Israeli judicial system. Ironically this military government was based on the British Mandate Defence (Emergency) Laws that had been used against the Jewish Yishuv. Military government restricted the Arab inhabitants' freedom of movement. They needed permits to leave their towns and villages, a situation that prevented them from obtaining employment in the center of the country or higher education. The military administration was entitled to demolish buildings and confiscate land if it thought they had been used to perpetrate hostile actions. Employment in education or the municipalities was conditional upon the administration's consent. (pp. 196, 197).

Shapira added:

The Arab population of Israel underwent a shift in identity and a psychological change as a result of its encounter with the Arabs of the occupied territories. At first the Israeli Arabs boasted of their economic achievements compared with those of their brethren from the West Bank. But as time went by, their identification with the Palestinian people became stronger, while their sense of identity as Israeli citizens weakened. (p. 349).

As Veracini (2010) notes, in this way the “Indigenous survival is thus transferred away, foreclosed” (p. 42).

The third type of narrative transfer recognized by Veracini is, in a sense, the reverse of the previous one and it is the attempt to emphasize the “discontinuity within the settler body politic, claiming its post colonial status”, (p. 42). As we said before, settler colonialism tries to supersede

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<sup>24</sup> See also: Kimmerling & Migdal (2003).



itself and to abandon its colonial status to reaffirm the “indigeneity” of the settlers. Lorch (1961) wrote:

The association of the Jewish People with the Holy Land dates back to the second millennium B.C. The movement for the return of the Children of Israel to their ancient home began in the early centuries of the Christian Era immediately after the Roman destruction of the Judean State. The return is a recurring note of Jewish Religious ritual. (p. 23).

Abraham Malamat (1976) wrote:

For when Assyria and Babylonia eventually deprived them (the Israelites, n.d.r.) of national independence, the leading citizenry of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah established there a large centre of exile, from which a revitalized nation later emerged, (p. 3).

Shapira (2012) added something more to this claim for a post-colonial Israel: “Of all the states created after 1945, Israel is one of the few that has maintained a democratic regime”, (p. 179). Democracy is thus used as a guarantee to deny the entire settler colonial system.

The last example of narrative transfer, well linked with the one before, exists when claims such as “settlers are also indigenous people are made”, (Veracini, 2010, p. 42) The meaning of this attitude is to focus on the settler continuity over that particular land to demonstrate that the settler community originated in that land. This kind of claim goes along together with the statement “indigenous people are also settlers”, (p. 43).

Netanel Lorch (1961) affirmed:

The Arabs came into possession of Palestine in the seventh century A.D after their conversion to Islam. Thereafter they ruled the country for four centuries. Gradually they replaced or assimilated the original inhabitants and become the dominant element in the population. (p. 23).

At the time of the Muslim occupation of Palestine in the seventh century, the country’s Jewish population ranged in the hundreds of thousands at the very least (...). This forced marginalization notwithstanding, not only was there always a Jewish presence in Palestine, but the Jews’ longing for their ancestral homeland, or Zion, occupied a focal place in their collective memory. (Karsh, 2010, p. 8).

This last attitude in particular can explain the importance of the concept of “Return to a Promised Land” for Jews; they are returning to the Land

they lost, to a kind of Golden Age of prosperity and *grandeur*. The idea of return is intrinsic to the Zionist ideology.

Karsh (2010) explained:

The roots of this conflict date back to the Roman destruction of Jewish statehood, which had existed intermittently for over a millennium in the country that had subsequently be known as Palestine. Since then, exile and dispersion had become the hallmark of the Jewish people. (p. 9).

“Settlers come to stay”, affirmed Veracini (2010, p. 97). In fact, Veracini founded that Settler Colonial narratives has a linear structure: settlers do not discover a new land, they want to settle down in a land that connect their present with their past, a land that they inherited; and, in so doing, they bring with them their sovereignty, their lifestyle and culture. As said before, all the connections with the mother country are cut because they are returning back to the lost and promised land.

Malamat (1976) again:

The bond between the people and their spiritual mission, as well as their affinity to the Holy Land, became sanctified in the people’s consciousness as a supreme religious idea. It shaped the entire corpus of their national and religious values, set the Israelites apart from other nations and served as their expression of selfhood. Thus, emerged the national synthesis to which they aspired and which, even after its disintegration, continued to be cherished in the heart of the nation as a source of inspiration and vitality throughout the long and wearisome years of exile, a strength stemming largely from the notion of their being a Chosen People belonging to a Promised Land (...)

The relationship between Israel and the Holy Land was determined by the Lord’s command to Abraham. (p. 3).

His obedience to this command “transformed the land of Canaan into the Land of Israel, engendering that complex relationship between Israel and the indigenous peoples of Canaan” (pp. 3, 4).

### *Conclusion*

All these narrative ploys explain how the official Israeli historiography has succeeded in hiding and transferring the indigenous Palestinian

presence in a very remote past of backwardness and to strengthen the link between settlers' history and land, in order to substitute the native population even in a discursively dimension, coherently with the essence of the Settler Colonial paradigm.

The extraordinary success of the spread of the official version and its long-lasting persistence contribute to cover the natives' historiography, because native Palestinians are usually perceived as a backward people without a history. Morris (2004) complained about the fact that Palestinians, and Arabs in general, were not able to keep and preserve historical documents and that Arab archives are usually impossible to access. Testimonies, interviews and oral proofs are not, in Morris' opinion, reliable sources.

The fact that the Palestinian version of the 1948 events has been left almost silent until the appearance of the so-called Israeli New Historiography is an example of how little Palestinian narrative has been taken into account, at least to counterbalance the Israeli official one. It appeared only during the '80s, supported by some of the works of the New Historians, it means thanks to a breakage inside the Israeli academic system.

The New Historiography, as a matter of fact, provoked a heated debate not only, as it is obvious, between old and new historians<sup>25</sup>, but also among Palestinian historians, who viewed the New Historiography as another product of the settler colonial system<sup>26</sup>, something that could be created thanks to the status of its founders. In fact, despite new historians' researches proved in many cases that Israel and its new-born army played an important role in the creation of the problem of Palestinian refugees, the majority of them (as Benny Morriswell demonstrated<sup>27</sup>) remain faithful to the Zionist ideology.

The persistence of the Zionist historiography has obscured the Palestinian version of the 1948 events, not only in Israel but also in the Western academia and the erasure of the Palestinian history has meant the elimination of the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine and of the refugee

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<sup>25</sup> For what concerns the debate between official historians and the New ones I suggest to read S. Teveth (1989); E. Karsh (1997).

<sup>26</sup> See for example: E. Said "New History, old ideas" (1998) and N. Masalha "New History, post-Zionism and neo-colonialism: a critique of the Israeli 'New Historians'" (2011).

<sup>27</sup> Read Morris' interview to *Haaretz*, by A. Shavit (2004).

problem from the “peace process” and from all the international community discussions about the Palestine question.

To prove the duration and the persistence of this vision it could be sufficient to report that a book about the history of the Palestinian people has been released in 2017 by the Israeli author Assaf AVoll. The book titled *A History of the Palestinian People – From Ancient Times to Modern Era* (Voll, 2017) is totally empty<sup>28</sup>, nothing has been written inside. As reported by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* (June 2017) the author affirmed during an interview: “The Palestinian people believe they are a people, and someone needs to tell them the truth even if it hurts. Look what happens when they were given the feeling that they are a real people”.

To conclude, the negation of the Palestinian native people stemmed directly from the European ideological imperialist context, in which usually native populations were seen as inferior, violent and uncivilized.

The narrative transfer is the direct consequence of what Edward Said (1979) identified as the orientalist attitude of the Europeans towards the Arab and Muslim populations. Furthermore, the narrative transfer, which underpins the settler colonial logic of elimination of the natives, has been used to support discursively the physical transfer and expulsion of the Palestinian Arab population, whose refugees in Diaspora today number almost 6 million (United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA], 2016) and, at the same time, to make the original settler colonialist Zionist enterprise a moral and fair one.

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<sup>28</sup> It is possible to download the “Hebrew” version of the book to the link <http://www.jewishpress.com/blogs/muqata/a-history-of-the-palestinian-people-from-ancient-times-to-the-modern-era/2017/06/18> (last visited 23/06/2017), while at the moment it is impossible to find it on Amazon.

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