

The Israeli Occupation and the Struggle for an Independent Palestine

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Abstract: This research explores the historical foundations and development of the Zionist movement, emphasizing the involvement of European colonial powers in advancing its goals and the subsequent emergence of Palestinian nationalism as a counterforce. Employing a qualitative methodology that includes historical analysis and a comprehensive literature review, the study investigates the repercussions of Zionism on Palestinian society, the national resistance against the Zionist settler-colonial initiative, and the dominant efforts to marginalize Palestinian historical narratives. The findings reveal that the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, facilitated by colonial support, served as a pivotal moment in the Zionist agenda. Strategic errors by Arab nations and Palestinian leadership contributed to a weakened campaign for Palestinian independence. Despite these challenges, Palestinians have demonstrated remarkable resilience in maintaining their identity and asserting their rights. The study concludes that achieving lasting peace necessitates confronting historical injustices, safeguarding human rights, and promoting equitable and honest dialogue between the parties involved. It underscores the imperative for international assistance in formulating a just and comprehensive resolution. Furthermore, the research highlights the significance of drawing lessons from historical complexities to foster a more equitable and peaceful future in Palestine.

Keywords: *Zionism; Theological Roots; Palestinian nationalism; colonialism; historical injustice*

INTRODUCTION

The Israel-Palestine conflict remains one of the most enduring and complex issues in modern international relations. Rooted in historical, religious, and political narratives, this multi-layered dispute continues to escalate with devastating consequences. As of 2024, the conflict has entered a new phase of intensified violence. Since October 2023, at least 41,391 Palestinians, mostly civilians, have lost their lives in the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, with an additional 95,760 individuals sustaining injuries (*Israeli attack on Gaza school sheltering displaced Palestinians kills 22*, 2024). This recent surge in violence, triggered by Hamas-led

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attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023, has reignited global attention on the longstanding dispute and its profound human cost.

The roots of this conflict can be traced back to the late 19th century with the emergence of the Zionist movement in Europe, a response to rising antisemitism and the desire to establish a Jewish homeland (Penslar, 2017). Although Palestine had been home to various ethnic and religious groups, including Arabs, Jews, and Christians, for centuries, the rise of Zionism, coupled with European colonial powers' support, sparked a conflict that continues to shape the region today (R. Khalidi, 2020).

To comprehend the complexity of this conflict, it is crucial to examine the historical roots of the Jewish people and their diaspora experience, as well as the long-standing presence and rights of the Palestinian people. The Jewish connection to the land, rooted in biblical narratives and religious traditions, has been a driving force behind Zionist claims. However, this narrative often overlooks the historical reality of Palestinian presence and their deep-rooted ties to the land (Masalha, 2012a).

Zionism, as a political movement, gained momentum in the late 19th century, driven by key figures such as Theodor Herzl, Leon Pinsker, and Moses Hess. The First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 marked a pivotal moment in the development of the movement, with Herzl outlining his vision for a Jewish state in his book *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) (Herzl, 1920). This vision, however, came at a great cost to the indigenous Palestinian population.

British support for Zionist aspirations, reflected in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, provided significant momentum for the movement. This declaration expressed Britain's support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine without regard for the rights and aspirations of the Arab population that had long inhabited the land (Schneer, 2011). The British Mandate period saw large waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine, often facilitated by European colonial powers who viewed Zionism as a tool for advancing their geopolitical interests in the region (Al-Kayyali, 1978).

The influx of Jewish immigrants and the land expropriation by the Zionist movement provoked resistance from the Palestinian population. Palestinian nationalist leaders sought to unite their people in defense of their rights and homeland (W. Khalidi, 2015; Shalash, 2021). However, the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent Nakba (catastrophe) led to the mass displacement of Palestinians, marking a significant turning point in the conflict (Pappé, 2006).

The impact of Zionism on Palestinian society has been profound and far-reaching. The displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, the destruction of villages, and the ongoing occupation have resulted in a fragmented Palestinian society struggling against systemic discrimination and human rights violations. Despite these challenges, Palestinians have shown remarkable resilience in preserving their identity and pursuing their rights (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007).

A critical aspect of this conflict is the contestation over historical narratives. Zionist narratives have often sought to erase or minimize Palestinian history and presence in the land, portraying Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land" (E. W. Said, 1992). This erasure of Palestinian history serves to legitimize Zionist claims and invalidate Palestinian rights. In response, Palestinians have worked tirelessly to preserve and assert their own historical and cultural narratives as a form of resistance and a means of maintaining their identity.

The role of media, particularly in the digital age, has become increasingly significant in shaping public perception of the conflict. Social media platforms and digital technologies have

provided new avenues for both disseminating information and mobilizing support, adding another layer of complexity to the conflict dynamics (Siapera & Veglis, 2012).

Numerous scholars have analyzed the history and impact of the Zionist movement on the Israel-Palestine conflict from various perspectives. Pappé (2006) has examined the historical roots of the conflict, particularly the events surrounding the establishment of Israel and the subsequent displacement of Palestinians. R. Khalidi(1997) has explored the development of Palestinian national identity in response to Zionism and colonial interventions. Masalha (2012a) has analyzed the concept of transfer and expulsion in Zionist thought and its impact on Palestinian displacement. Shlaim (2015) has provided critical insights into Israeli policies towards Palestinians and the dynamics of the peace process. Abunimah (2006) has challenged the two-state solution paradigm, proposing alternative conflict resolution frameworks. Thrall (2017) has examined the role of international actors and the limitations of conventional approaches to conflict resolution in the region.

Despite this rich body of research, there are limited studies that specifically address the intersection of religious narratives, historical memory, and contemporary political realities in shaping the ongoing conflict. While scholars like Jamal (2017) have touched upon the role of competing historical narratives, there remains a gap in understanding how these narratives are continually reshaped and deployed in the context of escalating violence and changing global dynamics.

Little attention has been paid to the potential role of interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding initiatives in addressing the root causes of the conflict. While scholars like Aasi et al (2009) have explored the potential of religious peacebuilding in other contexts, its application to the Israel-Palestine conflict remains understudied, particularly in light of recent escalations.

This research aims to bridge these gaps by examining the interplay between religious narratives, historical memory, and contemporary political realities in the Israel-Palestine conflict. It explores how these factors contribute to the perpetuation of the conflict and how they might be leveraged to foster dialogue and reconciliation.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the evolution of religious and historical narratives within both Israeli and Palestinian societies, with a particular focus on how these narratives have been shaped by and continue to influence the ongoing conflict. This analysis extends to the most recent developments, including the impact of the 2023 Gaza war on religious discourse and interfaith relations. The research also aims to identify potential avenues for interfaith dialogue and religious peacebuilding initiatives that could contribute to conflict resolution efforts.

This study offers a nuanced understanding of the role of religious narratives in shaping political realities, moving beyond simplistic characterizations of the conflict as purely religious or purely political. By examining the complex interplay between religious beliefs, historical memories, and contemporary political imperatives, provides a more holistic understanding of the conflict's dynamics.

The research provides insights into the potential of religious peacebuilding in one of the world's most intractable conflicts, offering a fresh perspective on conflict resolution strategies. Identifying and analyzing existing interfaith initiatives and their impacts, contributes to the development of more effective approaches to peacebuilding that take into account the religious dimensions of the conflict.

By situating the current escalation within a broader historical and religious context, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict's trajectory and potential

future developments. This analysis is particularly valuable considering the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape in the Middle East and the evolving nature of global interfaith relations.

This research fills a critical gap in the literature by offering a multidimensional analysis of the Israel-Palestine conflict that places religious narratives and interfaith dynamics at the center of inquiry. It contributes to academic discourse and practical efforts to foster dialogue, understanding, and, ultimately, a just and lasting peace in the region.

METHOD

This research employs a multifaceted qualitative approach to examine the complex historical, political, and social dimensions of the Israel-Palestine conflict, with a particular focus on the impact of Zionism on Palestinian society. The methodology combines historical analysis, critical discourse analysis, and comparative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conflict's origins, development, and contemporary manifestations.

Data collection involves a wide array of sources, including primary documents such as the Balfour Declaration, United Nations resolutions, and speeches by key figures, as well as historical records detailing demographic changes and land ownership patterns. These are complemented by testimonies and oral histories from both Palestinian refugees and Israeli settlers, offering personal perspectives on the conflict's human impact. Secondary sources, including scholarly literature by prominent historians like Ilan Pappé and Rashid Khalidi, media reports, and NGO documentation, provide additional context and analysis.

The research employs thematic analysis to identify key patterns related to Zionist narratives, Palestinian resistance, and the role of colonial powers. Critical discourse analysis examines the language used in official documents and media representations, while comparative analysis contrasts competing narratives and strategies. Historical process tracing maps the sequence of events leading to key turning points, and geopolitical analysis assesses the impact of international interventions. Ethical considerations are paramount, ensuring balanced representation, sensitivity to trauma, transparency about potential biases, and protection of participants' confidentiality.

The study acknowledges limitations such as restricted access to certain sources, potential biases in emotionally charged narratives, and the challenges of covering such a vast historical scope. Despite these constraints, this comprehensive methodological approach aims to provide a nuanced, well-substantiated analysis of the Israel-Palestine conflict, critically examining competing narratives, power dynamics, and the complex interplay of historical, religious, and political factors that continue to shape this enduring conflict.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Theological Roots and the Historical Basis of Zionist Claims to Palestine

The theological basis of Zionist claims to Palestine is rooted in the concept of the "Promised Land" in Jewish tradition. This narrative derives from biblical stories of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants, promising them the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance for the people of Israel (Quran 5:21). This promise was renewed through figures such as Isaac, Jacob and Moses and was closely tied to the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt and their journey to the Promised Land (Noble, 2005; Weinfeld, 1993).

In contrast, Islamic teachings also recognize the sacred connection between the land and the Abrahamic faiths. The Quran emphasizes the universality of God's message and the shared

heritage of humanity in sacred spaces, such as Jerusalem, which is revered in Islam as the location of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the site of the Prophet Muhammad's Isra' and Mi'raj (Quran 17:1). This recognition of Jerusalem as a holy city for multiple faiths underscores Islam's emphasis on justice and coexistence, rejecting exclusive claims over sacred spaces.

In Jewish tradition, the concept of the Promised Land holds profound theological significance. It is not merely a geographic area but symbolizes a divine covenant and the religious identity of the Jewish people. Ownership and sovereignty over this land are viewed as the fulfillment of God's promise and a testament to His faithfulness to His chosen people (Rowlandson & Salisbury, 1997). This narrative has resonated through Jewish liturgy, prayer, and longing during centuries of exile and diaspora.

Islamic principles, however, advocate for justice and equity in governance and land ownership. The Prophet Muhammad's Farewell Sermon emphasizes the sanctity of life, property, and mutual respect among communities, values that stand in stark contrast to the dispossession and displacement faced by Palestinians under Zionist policies. The Quran (2:177) calls for fairness and compassion in all dealings, highlighting the moral imperative to reject actions that perpetuate oppression or injustice.

The deep connection between Judaism and the land of Israel is reflected in Jewish laws and teachings. More than half of the 613 commandments in the Pentateuch (Torah) relate to the land of Israel and can only be fulfilled there. These commandments not only concern agriculture but also the social, legal, and religious life of the Israelites in the land, including topics such as the judicial system, Jewish kingship, laws of war, and the functioning of the Temple (Gordon, 2020). Similarly, over 70 percent of the Talmud deals with laws connected to the land of Israel (Lustick, 1988).

Judaism, as described in the Pentateuch and the Talmud, assumes Jewish self-determination, envisioning a Jewish nation-state complete with governance, military, legal systems, and welfare structures (Dalsheim, 2019). Zionism, therefore, is integral to Jewish identity, akin to observing the Jewish Sabbath or following kosher dietary laws (Topel, 2024). This illustrates how deeply intertwined the Jewish faith is with the land of Israel, shaping the Jewish worldview and aspirations.

However, the interpretation and application of the concept of the Promised Land underwent a significant shift with the rise of the Zionist movement in the late 19th century. Zionist thinkers such as Theodor Herzl and Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer reinterpreted this idea within the framework of modern nationalism, merging religious aspirations with political goals to establish a Jewish state in Palestine (Shimoni, 2018). They argued that the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael) was not merely a spiritual imperative but also a necessary solution to the issues of antisemitism and Jewish survival.

The transformation of the theological concept of the Promised Land into a political project of Zionism was supported by selective interpretations of sacred texts and Jewish tradition. As Eliach (2018) explains that although many commandments in the Torah and much of the Talmud pertain to the land of Israel, Zionism emphasized aspects that aligned with its nationalist agenda, often neglecting the broader spiritual and ethical dimensions of Judaism. This shift reflects a movement from Judaism as a religion centered on God and justice to Zionism as a political ideology focused on territory and statehood.

Zionist narratives also underscore the importance of Jerusalem and other Jewish holy sites in Palestine. Jerusalem, which served as the capital of the ancient kingdom of Israel and the location of the Temple Mount, holds a central place in Jewish religious consciousness and history. The city is seen as a spiritual center and a symbol of the yearning to return from exile

(Armstrong, 2011). Jewish prayers and rituals are oriented toward Jerusalem, and it has been a focal point of pilgrimage and eschatological hope.

For the Zionist movement, the claim to Jerusalem was not only a religious matter but also a political one. Control over the holy city was viewed as essential for restoring Jewish sovereignty and realizing the Zionist vision (Friedland & Hecht, 2000). This was evident in early 20th-century Zionist efforts to establish Jewish settlements in and around Jerusalem, as well as in the fierce battles during the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars to gain control of the city.

However, the exclusive Zionist claims to Jerusalem and other holy sites in Palestine overlook the religious and historical significance of these locations for non-Jewish communities, particularly Muslims and Christians. The Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, located within the Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary) complex, are the third holiest sites in Islam (I. G. Said et al., 2023). For Christians, Jerusalem holds deep spiritual meaning as the site of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (Stettler, 2023).

This disregard for the religious diversity and historical complexity of Palestine reflects the settler-colonial nature of Zionism. As historian Ilan Pappé (2006) notes, that Zionism sought to replace the indigenous Palestinian population with a new Jewish community, erasing traces of Palestinian presence through territorial conquest, population displacement, and cultural destruction. The Zionist claims to the "Promised Land," and Jerusalem thus served as theological justifications for this colonial project.

The close association between Judaism and Zionism, as highlighted by Eliach (2018), also raises ethical and human rights concerns. By conflating Jewish identity with support for the Israeli state and the Zionist project, this view overlooks the diversity of opinions within the Jewish community, silencing anti-Zionist or non-Zionist Jewish voices. It also blurs the distinction between Judaism as a religion and Zionism as a political movement, ignoring the possibility of being a devout Jew without endorsing settler-colonialism in Palestine.

The Zionist theological narrative also tends to ignore the complex historical realities of Palestine. For centuries, the region has been home to various ethnic and religious groups, including Muslims, Christians, Jews, Druze, and others, who have coexisted in a fluid relationship—sometimes harmonious, sometimes conflictual (Masalha, 2000). Exclusive claims to the land based on divine promises disregard the rights and historical presence of non-Jewish communities.

Furthermore, the Zionist narrative of "a land without a people for a people without a land" is factually inaccurate. By the late 19th century, when the waves of Zionist immigration began, Palestine was already home to a majority Arab population of around 500,000, including a long-established Jewish community (Al-Kayyali, 1978). The indigenous population had deep connections to the land and a distinct national identity rooted in their history, culture, and ancestral ties to Palestine.

Thus, while the theological claims of Zionism draw on a long and profound Jewish religious tradition, they have been reinterpreted and politicized to justify a settler-colonial project. The narrative of the "Promised Land" and the centrality of Jerusalem, when translated into modern nationalist agendas, overlook the historical complexities of Palestine and the rights of its indigenous non-Jewish inhabitants. It also fails to account for the region's demographic and religious diversity while silencing Jewish voices that oppose Zionism on the grounds of justice and human rights.

Although the religious significance of the land and holy sites for Jewish faith and identity cannot be denied, using this narrative to legitimize exclusive claims and the displacement of

populations raises serious questions about justice and legitimacy. A just and sustainable resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict requires recognition of the rights and aspirations of all communities inhabiting the land, as well as mutual compromise and accommodation that transcend exclusive claims based on theology or history. This also calls for a clear separation between religion and politics and respect for religious freedom and equal rights for all people, regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliations.

The Development of the Zionist Movement and International Support

Following Theodor Herzl's establishment of the ideological and organizational framework of modern Zionism—articulated in his book *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) and the convening of the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897—the movement actively sought international backing to realize its goal of creating a Jewish state in Palestine. Herzl diligently promoted his vision to influential European leaders, including German Emperor Wilhelm II and Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II (Cleveland & Bunton, 2019).

Zionism emerged as an expression of Jewish nationalism influenced by two primary factors. Firstly, it was rooted in the belief that Jews are a distinct nation with a unique covenant, as outlined in Jewish theology, which holds that Jews are God's chosen people with a special purpose (Kailany, 1993). This theological perspective fostered a sense of a divine mandate to return to their ancestral homeland of Palestine, which was perceived as unjustly occupied by others.

Secondly, the escalation of anti-Semitism in Europe increasingly marginalized Jewish communities, which were often viewed as separate from other ethnic groups (Romli et al., 2003). The rise of nationalism in 18th-century Europe, emphasizing the unification of ethnic groups into nation-states, influenced European politicians—particularly in Britain—to consider Jews as a nation without a homeland. The deep-seated Jewish longing for Jerusalem, nurtured over centuries through religious traditions, intertwined with this cultural and psychological milieu, contributing to the rise of Zionism as a movement advocating the Jewish return to Palestine and the establishment of a state with Jerusalem as its capital (Hasanoğlu, 2022).

In the broader geopolitical context, European leaders—especially in Britain—supported Zionism due to their strategic interests in the region. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 epitomized this support, with Britain officially endorsing the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine (Metzer, 1978). Chaim Weizmann, a prominent Zionist leader, persistently lobbied for British backing, rejecting alternative proposals such as the Uganda Scheme and emphasizing Palestine as the rightful Jewish homeland. Britain's imperial objectives in the Middle East and its appreciation for Weizmann's scientific contributions during World War I further solidified this alliance (Maulani, 2002).

Despite Herzl's foundational efforts, Zionist leaders faced challenges in garnering widespread support from the global Jewish population, particularly in Western Europe and the United States, where assimilation was prevalent. Movements such as Reform Judaism, which originated in Germany and spread to the United States, rejected the notion of Jewish nationhood, focusing instead on a religious identity separate from political aspirations for a Jewish state (Mosse, 2024). However, the atrocities of the Holocaust during World War II significantly altered perspectives, leading many Jews to view Zionism as essential for ensuring their survival (Urofsky, 2020).

After World War II, increasing international support for Zionism—especially from the United States—combined with escalating tensions between Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine, led to the termination of the British Mandate. In 1947, the United Nations approved a partition plan dividing Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states (Neyer, 2023). Although Arab nations rejected this proposal, Israel declared independence in 1948, and its subsequent victory in the Arab-Israeli War confirmed the establishment of the Jewish state.

For Palestinians, these events marked the beginning of the Nakba, or catastrophe, during which hundreds of thousands were displaced from their homes (Masalha, 2012b). The enduring impact of international support for Zionism is evident in the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories and the denial of their basic rights. While the United Nations once classified Zionism as a form of racism in Resolution 3379 (1975), this resolution was rescinded in 1991 under pressure from the United States, without addressing whether the elements considered racist had been mitigated (Dag Hammarskjöld Library, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

Impact of Zionism on Palestinian Society

The rise of the Zionist movement and the international support it received had profound and often tragic effects on Palestinian society. From its inception, the Zionist endeavor to establish a Jewish state in Palestine overlooked and dismissed the presence and rights of the indigenous Arab Palestinian population, who had resided on the land for centuries. Historian Walid Khalidi (2020) underscores that the Zionist slogan "a land without a people for a people without a land" was intentionally designed to deny Palestine's demographic reality and to legitimize the colonization of the territory.

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948, referred to by Palestinians as the Nakba (catastrophe), led to the mass expulsion and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their ancestral homes. Palestinian historian Nur Masalha (2012a) estimates that around 750,000 Palestinians became refugees during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, either forcibly removed by Zionist forces or compelled to flee due to violence and fear. Many sought refuge in neighboring Arab countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, while others became internally displaced within the newly established Israel.

This widespread displacement was not merely an unintended consequence of war but part of a deliberate Zionist strategy to secure a Jewish majority in the nascent State of Israel. Israeli historian Ilan Pappé (2006), in his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, argues that the expulsion of Palestinians was a systematically planned policy involving attacks on Arab villages, destruction of homes and property, and acts intended to force Palestinians to abandon their land.

The Nakba not only resulted in the loss of land and property but also disrupted the social, economic, and cultural fabric of Palestinian society. Numerous Palestinian cities and villages were destroyed or erased, replaced by Jewish settlements (W. Khalidi, 2015). Sacred Islamic and Christian sites, along with historical Palestinian landmarks, were often neglected or demolished. Dispossessed Palestinian refugees were compelled to rebuild their lives in overcrowded and impoverished refugee camps in neighboring countries or the West Bank and Gaza (Luz, 2023).

The hardships faced by the Palestinian people persisted after 1948, as Israel imposed a stringent military regime on the remaining Arab population within its borders. Palestinians experienced systemic discrimination in citizenship rights, land ownership, education, employment, and access to public services, along with severe restrictions on movement

(Nasser & Abu-Nimer, 2022). They were treated as second-class citizens in their homeland, which continued to be appropriated for Jewish settlements.

The situation deteriorated further after the Six-Day War in 1967 when Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Through this rapid military campaign, Israel took control of the remaining territories designated for an Arab Palestinian state under the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan. This ongoing occupation has led to additional land expropriations, the construction of illegal Jewish settlements, and the establishment of a system that discriminates against and oppresses Palestinians (Pollak, 2011).

Under Israeli occupation, Palestinians have endured continuous human rights violations, including movement restrictions, arbitrary detentions, torture, and violence perpetrated by Israeli security forces and settlers (*Israel/OPT*, 2023). Their access to essential resources like water and agricultural land is severely limited, and the Palestinian economy remains dependent on and constrained by Israel. Efforts by Palestinians to protest or resist the occupation are often met with military repression, including the use of lethal force against civilians.

The impact of Zionism is also evident in the territorial fragmentation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israeli policies involving the construction of separation barriers, checkpoints, settler-only roads, and military zones have divided Palestinian territories into isolated enclaves (Ayyash, 2024). This fragmentation has significantly hindered the movement of people and goods, stifled economic development, and eroded the social and familial structures of Palestinian communities.

Despite these challenges, the Palestinian people have demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination in their quest for rights and dignity. They have organized various forms of resistance, including peaceful protests, international solidarity movements, and armed uprisings. The First Intifada (1987–1993) and the Second Intifada (2000–2005) serve as prominent examples of mass mobilizations against Israeli occupation, combining nonviolent actions with more confrontational tactics (Somgynari, 2019).

In addition, Palestinians have worked to establish their own political institutions and civil society organizations, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA), to advocate for their rights and provide essential services. Although these entities have faced criticism and challenges—including allegations of corruption and complex relations with Israel—they remain crucial symbols of Palestinian aspirations for self-determination and statehood.

The enduring impact of Zionism on Palestinian society remains one of the most pressing issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Jewish theological concept of the "Promised Land" and exclusive claims to Palestine, when enacted through Zionist political policies, have resulted in significant suffering for the Palestinian people. Journalist Bradley Burston (2009) notes that the shared experiences of exile and displacement have profoundly shaped both Jewish and Palestinian identities. Mutual recognition of these historical narratives may be a vital step toward achieving a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Palestinian National Struggle in Response to Zionism

The rise of the Zionist movement and the establishment of Israel triggered the formation of a distinct Palestinian national identity, which developed in response to the challenges posed by Zionism. Although Palestinian Arab identity existed long before the emergence of Zionism, the conflict with the Zionist movement and the experience of losing their homeland

strengthened and consolidated Palestinian national consciousness (R. Khalidi, 1997). The Palestinian struggle for self-determination and the protection of their land and resources became central themes in the national narrative.

The creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 marked a significant turning point in the development of the Palestinian national movement. Initially led by Yasser Arafat, the PLO sought to unite various Palestinian factions and organize resistance against Israeli occupation (Sayigh, 2007). The PLO adopted a strategy combining armed struggle with diplomatic efforts to pressure Israel and the international community into recognizing Palestinian rights, including the right of return for refugees and the establishment of an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza.

However, the PLO's initial focus on armed struggle and total rejection of Israel gradually shifted towards accepting a two-state solution by the late 1980s. The 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence, which implicitly recognized Israel's right to exist, signaled an important change in the PLO's position (Tessler, 2009). This shift culminated in the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO in 1993, which led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) as an interim governing body in the West Bank and Gaza.

Although the Oslo Accords initially raised hopes for progress toward resolving the conflict, the failure to halt Israeli settlement expansion and improve the living conditions of Palestinians led to growing disillusionment with the peace process. Frustration and anger over political stagnation and continued occupation fueled the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, a mass uprising that combined nonviolent resistance with more militant tactics (Hammami & Tamari, 1997). Although Israel eventually suppressed the uprising, the Second Intifada highlighted the resilience and determination of the Palestinian people to confront the occupation.

Discontent with the PLO's leadership, perceived as overly accommodating towards Israel, contributed to the rise of Hamas, an Islamist resistance movement based in Gaza. Hamas, which won the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006, refused to recognize Israel and advocated armed struggle as the means to liberate Palestine (Hroub, 2006). The rivalry between Fatah, dominated by the PLO, and Hamas led to political fragmentation, with Fatah controlling the West Bank and Hamas governing Gaza, further complicating the Palestinian quest for unity and independence.

Despite internal divisions and the ongoing challenges posed by Israeli occupation, Palestinians continued to pursue their national aspirations. Diplomatic efforts to secure international recognition, such as applying for UN membership and acceding to various international treaties and organizations, reflected the Palestinian desire to assert their sovereignty and rights (Alayan & Riley, 2024). Civil society movements, such as the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, launched in 2005, sought to pressure Israel and garner international support for Palestinian rights through nonviolent means.

However, the Palestinian struggle is complicated by the stark imbalance of power between a sovereign Israel and the occupied Palestinian people. The ongoing expansion of Israeli settlements, crippling restrictions on movement, and territorial fragmentation of the West Bank and Gaza threaten the viability of a contiguous Palestinian state (Ural Federal University named after B.N. Yeltsin, Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation et al., 2022). U.S. military and diplomatic support, along with backing from other powerful nations, has further entrenched Israel's position and limited Palestinian bargaining power.

In response to these challenges, some Palestinian leaders and international supporters have called for a paradigm shift from a two-state solution to a struggle for equal rights for all

people living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea (Abunimah, 2006). They argue that the reality on the ground, with hundreds of thousands of Jewish settlers living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, has made a two-state solution unfeasible and that dismantling the structures of apartheid and discrimination against Palestinians is the only viable path forward.

Regardless of the specific form that the Palestinian struggle may take in the future, the aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination and justice cannot be ignored. Zionism's legacy as a settler-colonial movement continues to shape the realities of Palestinian life, and their resistance to colonization and oppression is a legitimate response to the historical injustices they have endured. However, as figures like Eliezer Schweid (1998) have noted, that the ancient Jewish connection to the land of Israel cannot be overlooked, making this conflict a tragic one in which two peoples with competing claims to the same land are trapped in a cycle of violence and hostility.

To break this cycle, both Palestinians and Israelis must engage in honest dialogue, recognize each other's narratives and aspirations, and work together towards a future that respects the human rights and dignity of all parties. This requires painful compromises and the rejection of exclusive or maximalist claims. Only by confronting past and present injustices and building a foundation for a just and equitable coexistence can the Palestinian struggle for independence be realized and lasting peace achieved in this conflict-ridden land.

Zionist Narratives and the Erasure of Palestinian History

A central issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the contest over historical narratives and the legitimacy of claims to Palestinian land. To justify the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, the Zionist movement has often attempted to deny or diminish the longstanding presence and history of the Palestinian people in the region. Zionist narratives frequently portray Palestine as "a land without a people" before Jewish immigration, overlooking the fact that Palestinians had inhabited the area for centuries (E. W. Said, 1992).

The Zionist assertion of rights to Palestinian land primarily rests on the belief that Jewish people possess exclusive historical and religious entitlements to the territory, drawing on biblical accounts of the "Promised Land" (Masalha, 2000). This perspective, however, neglects the existence and rights of Palestinians who had resided there for generations, as well as the historical reality of diverse ethnic and religious communities coexisting in Palestine over centuries. By minimizing Palestinian history, Zionist narratives aim to legitimize Israel's claims to the land and undermine the Palestinians' right to their homeland.

These efforts to diminish Palestinian presence are evident in Israeli policies and actions after 1948, including the demolition of numerous Palestinian villages, the renaming of locations from Arabic to Hebrew, and restrictions on Palestinian access to their lands, resources, and cultural sites (Pappé, 2006). The prevalent Israeli narrative of "making the desert bloom" seeks to erase Palestinian historical traces, framing the Zionist endeavor as one of rejuvenation and civilization rather than colonization and dispossession.

In response to these attempts at erasure, Palestinians have diligently worked to preserve and assert their historical and cultural narratives. Palestinian scholars, artists, and activists have recorded oral histories, mapped destroyed villages, and produced art that embodies Palestinian experiences and aspirations (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007). Initiatives such as the Nakba Project and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement aim to raise global

awareness of the historical injustices faced by Palestinians and call for accountability regarding ongoing human rights violations.

Affirming the Palestinian historical narrative is crucial for strengthening Palestinian national identity and legitimizing their pursuit of self-determination. By highlighting the historical foundations of Palestinian existence and their continuous resistance to colonialism, this narrative underpins the Palestinian claims to rights, including the right of return for refugees and the establishment of an independent state (R. Khalidi, 1997). Against the dominant Zionist narrative, bolstered by Israel's substantial political, economic, and military strength, preserving and promoting Palestinian perspectives becomes a vital form of resistance.

The international community holds significant responsibility in acknowledging and supporting Palestinian rights, such as the right of return and self-determination. United Nations bodies like the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have passed resolutions affirming Palestinian rights and condemning Israeli violations. However, these resolutions are frequently disregarded or vetoed by influential nations like the United States (W. Khalidi, 2020). Global solidarity movements, including the BDS campaign, have played a key role in exerting pressure on Israel and companies implicated in the occupation while fostering worldwide support for the Palestinian cause.

Despite these efforts, international backing for Palestinian rights remains weakened by the considerable power disparity in Israeli-Palestinian relations and the influence of pro-Israel lobbying groups in powerful countries like the United States. The lack of accountability for Israel regarding violations of international law and human rights has facilitated the ongoing occupation and the dispossession of Palestinian territories. Moreover, critiques of Israeli policies are often countered with accusations of antisemitism, which can suppress open and critical discourse about the conflict.

Nonetheless, an increasing number of voices within the international community—including civil society, academics, and political figures—are advocating for a more equitable and principled approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This approach involves recognizing the Palestinian historical narrative, endorsing solutions that uphold human rights and international law, and urging Israel to cease the occupation and discriminatory practices against Palestinians. Efforts such as the United Nations database of businesses operating in illegal Israeli settlements and the International Criminal Court's investigation into alleged war crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories indicate a growing movement toward accountability and justice.

Ultimately, addressing and overcoming the dominant Zionist narrative and the marginalization of Palestinian history is essential for achieving a just and enduring resolution to the conflict. This requires recognizing the historical injustices experienced by the Palestinian people, safeguarding their human rights and dignity, and dedicating efforts to build a future where both populations coexist in equality and mutual respect. By affirming their historical truths and asserting their rights, Palestinians continue to exhibit remarkable resilience despite formidable challenges. Supporting their struggle and striving for a peace founded on justice should be a priority for all committed to resolving this prolonged and tragic conflict.

CONCLUSION

The longstanding conflict between Israel and Palestine is a complex issue rooted in religious claims, national ambitions, and colonial interventions. The rise of Zionism as a

political movement in the late 19th century, supported by European colonial powers—particularly Britain—significantly transformed the demographic and political landscape of Palestine. The establishment of Israel in 1948 led to the widespread expulsion and displacement of Palestinians, marking the culmination of the Zionist settler-colonial initiative that continues to influence the region today.

The inability of Arab states and Palestinian leaders to effectively unite in defending Palestinian rights, along with strategic missteps, has contributed to repeated setbacks in their confrontations with Israel. Additionally, strong Western support for Israel has weakened the Palestinians' negotiating position in their quest for independence and sovereignty.

Despite these challenges, the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and identity has demonstrated remarkable resilience. In the face of efforts to erase their history and the dominance of Zionist narratives, preserving and affirming Palestinian history has become a vital form of resistance. Achieving lasting peace in this conflict-ridden region requires acknowledging historical injustices, protecting human rights, and committing to justice and equality.

The key lesson from the Israel-Palestine conflict is the importance of addressing the roots of injustice, respecting human rights, and fostering honest and courageous dialogue between the conflicting parties. The international community bears a moral responsibility to support a just and comprehensive solution that respects the rights and aspirations of both peoples. By understanding and acknowledging the complexities of history while working toward a more equitable and peaceful future, we can contribute to resolving this tragic conflict. Ultimately, the Palestinian struggle is a universal pursuit of human dignity and justice.

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