HORIT HERMAN PELED & YOAV PELED

POST–POST–ZIONISM?

Confronting the Death of the Two-State Solution

THE SOCIAL SECTOR once famously described as Israel's 'enlightened public' has undergone a profound moral and intellectual crisis over the past ten years.[1] Comprised largely of secular, educated and well-to-do Ashkenazim, historically affiliated with the Labour Zionist movement, this layer had been shaped by opposition to Israel's occupation of the territories captured in 1967 and stood for a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The demise of the Oslo peace process at Camp David in July 2000, the Second Intifada that followed it—marked not least by the Palestinians' resort to suicide bombings—and the election of Ariel Sharon as Israel's Prime Minister in 2001 threw this perspective into question. Most members of the 'enlightened public' reacted by moving to the right and adopting the prevailing state discourse which portrayed the Palestinians as responsible for the failure of the peace efforts; the historian Benny Morris was a celebrated example of this shift.

Among those who continued to be critical, to one degree or another, of Israel's policy towards the Palestinians, a number of prominent intellectuals have recently reassessed their positions. In this essay we interrogate three works by authors belonging to this category; each adopts a different approach in dealing with the new political reality.[2] In *This Regime Which is Not One*, Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir seek to uncover the structure of Israeli rule over the occupied territories, and its relation to the democratic order within Israel's pre-1967 borders, through a thick description of the occupation regime, divorced from the history of Zionism. Boaz Neumann's *Land and Desire* is an ecstatic depiction of the early Zionist pioneers' love for the land, devoid of historical or any

other context. In *The Time of the Green Line*, Yehouda Shenhav celebrates the end of the pre-1967 border and constructs another dividing line, between the Ashkenazi liberal elite and its victims: not just Palestinians but Mizrahim and all religious Jews as well.

All three, we argue, end up by affirming, directly or indirectly, the basic tenets of Zionism and, indeed, Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories captured in 1967. This may seem a surprising statement, since the authors in question are considered to be among the most radical and outspoken critics of the occupation and of Israeli society in general. But, as we show in the remainder of this essay, a close reading of their texts reveals an underlying commitment to Zionism and to maintaining Israel's character as a Jewish state, as well as a reluctance to offer any sensible alternative to the defunct two-state solution.

I. HISTORY WITHOUT AGENTS

The most ambitious project is that of Azoulay and Ophir. Over 500 pages, *This Regime Which is Not One* aims to decipher the structure of Israel's dominion over the occupied territories and their non-citizen Palestinian residents. The authors term this a 'control system' because, as they correctly argue, the term 'occupation' implies a temporary state of affairs—as envisaged in the legal status of 'belligerent occupation' in international law—whereas Israel's control of the occupied territories is anything but temporary. The evolution of this control system, they claim, has gone through three stages: first, a 'project' that ran from 1967 to the beginning of massive Jewish settlement in the West Bank in 1981; second, a 'regime' which obtained from 1981 to 2000, during which time it remained separate from the regime prevailing inside Israel's 1967 borders; finally, since 2000 the two regimes have fused, to form a dual structure that is still 'not one'.

---

[1] The epithet was coined by Israel's former Chief Justice, Aharon Barak.
[2] Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, *This Regime Which is Not One: Occupation and Democracy Between the Sea and the River (1967–)*, Tel Aviv 2008 (henceforth TRNO); Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, Tel Aviv 2009 (henceforth LD); Yehouda Shenhav, *The Time of the Green Line: A Jewish Political Essay*, Tel Aviv 2010 (henceforth TGL); all in Hebrew, though an English translation of Neumann's book is due in early 2011.

Azoulay and Ophir describe this dual structure as made up of an 'occupation regime in the territories and a democratic-ethnic regime in Israel itself'. The use of the term 'occupation' here and throughout the book is puzzling, in view of the authors' emphatic statement that their opposition to the occupation includes a critique of the term itself, which is discursively part of the occupation.[3] This semantic inconsistency, or duality, is not as trivial as it may seem. It is symptomatic of the authors' indecision as to their unit of analysis: is it a unitary 'control system' in Baruch Kimmerling's sense, encompassing both pre-1967 Israel *and* the occupied territories, or is it a system comprised of two clearly defined bodies, an occupying power and its colony?[4] Each of these options has profound political implications, and the authors' reluctance to commit themselves to either one, we will argue, reflects their inability, or refusal, to commit themselves to any particular course of political action.

The concept Azoulay and Ophir use to convey the two-in-one nature of the Israeli regime is 'inclusive exclusion': the exclusion of the occupied territories from the State of Israel—as portrayed by the state itself and imagined by many of its Jewish citizens—is, they argue, what enables Israel to include them in its actual system of control.[5] This is a valuable insight inasmuch as it points to the manipulation of political consciousness in order to mask a reality that is inconsistent with a society's professed system of values:

> The [occupied] territories are what is constantly parenthesized, forgotten, denied. Perhaps in order not to lose our minds from the enormity of the madness, from the magnitude of the evil, from the blame and responsibility for deeds we didn't do, for deeds we loudly object to but that are still being done in our name, with our money, by our children.[6]

---

[3] TRNO, pp. 383, 10.

[4] Baruch Kimmerling, 'Boundaries and Frontiers of the Israeli Control System: Analytical Conclusions', in Kimmerling, ed., *The Israeli State and Society*, Albany 1989, pp. 265–84. For Azoulay's and Ophir's indecision see, for example, such sentences as: 'at issue is a difference between two regimes: an occupation regime in the territories and an ethno-democratic regime in Israel itself' (TRNO, p. 383), and 'the occupation is a regime in itself and that regime is part of the Israeli regime' (TRNO, p. 442).

[5] See also 'Introduction', in Adi Ophir et al., *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, New York 2009.

[6] TRNO, p. 27. The idea of inclusive exclusion has given rise to a strategy of trying to inform the Israeli public of the horrors of the occupation through films, photographic exhibits, media reports, scholarly studies, etc.; a strategy that has proven utterly futile.

This analysis, however, suffers from two weaknesses. First, the 'we' referred to here consists only of the 'enlightened public' which, as noted above, has been decimated by the derailment of the Oslo process and the Second Intifada, and no longer constitutes a meaningful political force. On the other hand, the people most interested in incorporating the occupied territories into the State of Israel—the Jewish settlers in the West Bank and their numerous supporters—do not share the moral compunctions described in this passage; nor do they need to resort to the tactic of 'inclusive exclusion' in order to be able to live with the occupation. Their customary slogan is 'YESHA is here!'—YESHA being the Hebrew acronym for Judea, Samaria and Gaza, and 'here' meaning inside Israel. Secondly, as Oren Yiftachel has pointed out, Azoulay and Ophir do not argue that a false consciousness of exclusion is covering up the reality of inclusion; rather, they are practising 'inclusive exclusion' in their own analysis by depicting the Israeli system as a 'dual regime' that includes and does not include the occupied territories at the same time.[7]

In order to do this, the authors forgo the conventional method of analysis, which would seek first to understand Israeli society prior to 1967 and then, on the basis of that understanding, try to explain the occupation. They work in the opposite direction, beginning with an analysis of the occupation and, from that, tracing the characteristics of the Israeli regime within its pre-1967 borders. Instead of asking, 'What is it in the structure of the Israeli regime that enables it to maintain the occupation?', Azoulay and Ophir ask: 'Given the character of the occupation, what must the structure of the Israeli regime look like?' The advantage of this inverted methodology is that it relieves them of the need to consider the occupation as a chapter in the history of Zionism or to assign agency in this historical process to any identifiable subject. Analysing the occupation historically would have required them to read it 'as yet another manifestation of a preconceived principle—such as ethnocracy, apartheid or colonization'. They, however,

> do not conceive of the control system as resulting from planning by any identifiable subject(s) . . . or as a product of interaction between conflicting forces possessing definite and known aspirations . . . We [thus] relieve ourselves of the need to decide between competing stories that locate the control of the territories in a national or global story . . . We think of the

[7] Oren Yiftachel, 'This Book Which is Not One', *Mita'am*, 17, 2009, pp. 54–71 (Hebrew).

occupation regime as a system of relations and a state of things whose 'grammar' can be analysed and understood relatively independently of the genealogy of the factors that produced them in the past and that maintain them in the present.

Moreover, scholars who would include the occupation in their analysis of the Israeli regime are guilty of 'a wrong conceptualization of the control over the territories':

> They see in it a continuation of the Zionist project and a distinctive phase in its history, possessing its own characteristics. For them, control over these territories is made up of a series of political decisions, colonial practices, legislation and procedures designed for a clear purpose—Judaization of the space or colonization of the frontier. They do not take into account that what had begun as a project, and actually as a series of projects, has been empowered with the passage of time and crystallized into a solid, sustainable structure, which reproduces itself and constrains all the activities, plans and political, military and settlement initiatives that take place within its sphere.[8]

If the latter part of this passage means anything at all, it means that, like the Golem of Prague, the occupation has assumed a life of its own and can no longer be controlled by its originator, the democratic State of Israel. How this amounts to a critique of those who see the occupation as a distinct phase of Zionist history, resulting from a series of deliberate political and military decisions, is not clear at all. What is clear, however, is that Azoulay and Ophir will go to almost any lengths to insulate Zionism itself from the occupation and to avoid thinking of it as a colonial project.

Colonial parallels

The authors ground their analysis theoretically in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, who, they say, ask 'not what it means but how it works'.[9] Marcelo Svirsky, who has written a generally favourable review of the book from a Deleuzian perspective, criticized Azoulay and Ophir for using this approach in order to justify their divorce of the occupation from the history of Zionism as a colonial movement:

> The dynamic of uprooting (or transfer) and replacement that is involved in the desire for '*terra nullius*' appears in Azoulay's and Ophir's text in the

---

[8] TRNO, pp. 26, 22, 384.   [9] TRNO, p. 23.

context of the occupation regime (settlements, military structures, transfor-
mation of the civil space), but [this dynamic] cannot be understood outside
the context of the colonial development of Zionism. What began as defen-
sive practices in the labour market [of pre-statehood Palestine] and turned
into exclusionary practices in all spheres of life, crystallized in time into a
spring that ignites to this day the dominant desires of Jewish Israeli society.[10]

Svirsky is right in arguing that the dynamic of the occupation cannot
be understood outside the historical context of the Zionist colonization
of Palestine. But he misses a more important point: by insulating the
occupation from the history of Zionism, Azoulay and Ophir in effect
exonerate Zionism itself of the charge of colonialism. Serious consid-
eration of Zionism as a colonial movement by Israeli sociologists such
as Baruch Kimmerling and Gershon Shafir was prompted by the claim
of Jewish settlers in the occupied territories that their activities were
no different from those of the Zionist 'pioneers' in the pre-statehood
era. This claim was dismissed as preposterous by liberal Zionists, who
rejected the idea that the heroic settlement efforts of the pre-1948
period had anything to do with the admittedly colonialist drive post-
1967. Critical scholars, however, began to compare the two periods
more systematically and concluded that they were indeed two phases of
the same colonial project. By cutting the knot that ties the two phases
together, Azoulay and Ophir revive the old liberal Zionist position. They
do this explicitly:

> If colonialism is a family name, then the Zionist case is a distinctive type
> within it, lacking some of the common characteristics of the genre: until
> 1948 one cannot talk about a motherland, only about a patron state, which
> the Zionist project leaned on but did not stem from; since 1948 there is no
> geographical distance between two separate political units that would make
> it possible to talk about a motherland and a colony in the accepted sense;
> since the early 1990s even the minimal responsibility of the colonial state
> for the welfare of the native population in the colony has been gradually
> removed as well.[11]

This pot-pourri of arguments, for which no evidence is provided, is
typical of liberal defences of Zionism against the colonialist allegation.
Moreover, just like the prominent Zionist historian, Anita Shapira,
Azoulay and Ophir also concede that, clearly,

---

[10] Marcelo Svirsky, 'This Regime Which is Not One: A Deleuzian View', *The Public
Sphere*, 3, 2009, p. 116 (Hebrew); mixed metaphor in the original.
[11] TRNO, p. 445.

the colonial perspective is vital for understanding the historical processes and forces that shaped the Israeli regime, but that perspective is not exhaustive and it cannot explain the unique structure of this dual regime. The fact that the Jewish settlers in Palestine established a democratic society was not necessitated by their being a colonial settler society; the structural imperative that the settlers set up had its own rationale, which was not derived from the colonial processes and is not explained by them.[12]

As Gabriel Piterberg has shown, the assertion of historical uniqueness is characteristic of settler-colonial projects, and the fact that each project takes its own historically specific form does not detract from its settler-colonial nature. Gershon Shafir, meanwhile, has demonstrated that the character of the institutions the Zionist settlers set up in Palestine, including their democratic elements, derived precisely from the 'structural imperatives' of colonization in the context of Palestine and of the Zionist movement itself. More generally, in Piterberg's words, there cannot by definition be 'a history of the institutions and ideologies of the settler societies that is not simultaneously a history of the settler–native relations'.[13] Reason enough to avoid the study of history.

Separations

So how does the occupation 'work', in Azoulay's and Ophir's view? Half their book is devoted to a detailed description of the mechanisms of control, coercive and otherwise, that Israel has employed in the occupied territories. This is a useful summary of information that has been scattered over many primary and secondary sources, but it does not add much that is new. Their contribution lies, rather, in their conceptualization of the system of control, characterized as two sets of separations: a spatial separation, between the territory of the sovereign State of Israel and the occupied territories; and a civic separation between citizens (i.e. Jewish settlers) and non-citizens (i.e. Palestinians) living in the latter space.[14] A third—the ethno-national separation between Jews and Palestinians—appears only when the authors turn to the Israeli regime itself.

This—arguably more significant—ethno-national separation obviously cuts across both the spatial and the civic separations, a reality that has

---

[12] TRNO, p. 445; cf. Anita Shapira, *New Jews Old Jews*, Tel Aviv 1997, p. 40 (Hebrew).
[13] Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel*, London 2008, p. 57; Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labour and the Origins of the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, Cambridge 1989.
[14] TRNO, p. 187.

led Yiftachel and others to conclude that the entire territory under effec-
tive Israeli rule should be viewed as one 'ethnocratic' regime; that is, a
regime characterized by the rule of one ethnic group. Azoulay and Ophir
argue, however, that ethno-national separation has different implications
for the two territories on either side of the spatial separation. To this
end they introduce a further distinction, between the sphere of (partic-
ipating in) ruling and the sphere of being ruled—an obvious echo of
Aristotle's definition of a citizen as one who rules and is being ruled in
turn. This completes the matrix established by the other three distinc-
tions: only Jewish citizens participate in ruling, while all citizens are (at
least formally) being ruled democratically, and non-citizen Palestinians
are being ruled arbitrarily through military force.[15] This matrix could be
described as a cohesive polity whose population is stratified along both
an ethno-national and a civic axis.[16] Azoulay and Ophir, however, see it
as establishing 'two different regimes: an occupation regime in the ter-
ritories and a democratic-ethnic one in Israel itself':

> In both regimes the decisive principle is the national principle and in both
> of them the government is invested in a national project for which the
> entire society is mobilized. But both the principle and the project have dif-
> ferent meanings in each regime, because the two regimes are differentiated
> by the civil principle, between citizens and non-citizens, and the national
> difference [sic] distinguishes between two kinds of citizens on one side of
> the Green Line and between citizens and non-citizens on the other side.
> The civil distinction cuts across the regime's structure in all of its dimen-
> sions, differentially shapes the form of relations within it, distinguishes
> between two separate colonial projects.[17]

In other words, what distinguishes the two regimes, or perhaps the
two colonial projects within the same regime, is the formal criterion of
citizenship. Both Jews and Palestinians in pre-1967 Israel are citizens,
while in the occupied territories only the Jewish settlers are citizens and
the Palestinian residents are not. Coming after 380 pages of analysis in

---

[15] TRNO, pp. 379–80. There is actually a third category as well, the 250,000
Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, who are permanent residents but not citi-
zens of Israel.
[16] See Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple
Citizenship*, Cambridge 2002; and Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity
Politics in Israel/Palestine*, Philadelphia 2006.
[17] TRNO, pp. 383–4. If both the State of Israel and the settlements in the occupied
territories are colonial projects, then Zionism itself is a colonial movement, contra-
dicting what Azoulay and Ophir argued earlier in the book.

accordance with a 'new paradigm' this is a disappointing conclusion, since it is hardly different from the formal 'inclusive exclusion' proffered by the state.

As Yehouda Shenhav, who considers Azoulay's and Ophir's work 'an important book', has noted, the paradigm 'assumes the Green Line as a constitutive element', enabling them to assign overwhelming significance to the formal citizenship enjoyed by Palestinians on the 'right' side of the Green Line and to describe 'Israel itself' as an ethnic democracy.[18] How can 'Israel itself' be a democracy, of any kind, when only Jewish citizens participate in ruling it? Because 'the removal of the Palestinian citizens from the government is not written into the law, is not formally derived from Israel's definition as a Jewish state, and is not necessitated by the principle of self-determination that justifies in the eyes of many the demand for Israel's existence as a Jewish state'.[19] In other words: there is nothing in Israel's being a Jewish state that is inherently discriminatory towards non-Jewish citizens.

Given the contradictory and confused character of their analysis, it is not surprising that Azoulay and Ophir devote only five of the book's 450 pages of text to their 'utopia'—the proposed solution to what is, in their view, a morally untenable situation. Since 'the occupation is a separate regime that is part of the Israeli regime', ending it will require a transformation of the Israeli regime as well. What kind of ending and what kind of transformation? Azoulay and Ophir do not commit themselves to any specific measures, but insist that whatever the solution adopted, 'ending the occupation without a violent revolution would necessitate the inclusion of the Arabs [i.e. Israel's Palestinian citizens] in the government'—'a coalition of Zionist political parties will agree to accept Arab parties as legitimate partners and share all positions of power with them in accordance with their relative [electoral] power'; that is, a proportion of 9:1. This will not necessarily entail the end of Zionism, because:

> the Jews will not have to give up the state instruments that protect the Jewish collective, assist Jews in the Diaspora, stand ready to save persecuted

---

[18] TGL, pp. 57–9, 194 n. 59. For the concept of 'ethnic democracy' see Sammy Smooha, 'Minority Status in an Ethnic Democracy: The Status of the Arab Minority in Israel', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1990, pp. 389–413.
[19] TRNO, pp. 380–1.

Jews and promote Jewish cultures, including the national culture. They only have to grant the same instruments to the Palestinian collectivity that would remain part of the new Israeli regime.[20]

This formulation, which concludes the programmatic chapter of the book, is curiously vague. Would the 'state instruments' retained by the Jews include the Law of Return, enabling any Jew to immigrate to Israel and become a citizen upon arrival? In that case, would the same instrument be granted to the Palestinians 'who would remain part of the new Israeli regime', in the form of the right of return of the 1948 Palestinian refugees?

2. THE NEW PIONEER

Boaz Neumann is best known as a historian of Weimar and Nazi Germany and as a novelist; he was also a left-wing activist and critic of Zionism: 'In elections I voted Communist and I demonstrated in front of the Ministry of Defence. One time my friends and I shouted: "Defence Minister, how many children have you murdered today?"'.[21] Neumann's first foray into Israeli history, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism,* signals a return to the fold and has been ecstatically received. The book opens with a personal account of his reaction to the bloodshed of the Second Intifada: 'F-16 jet planes bombing heavily populated civilian areas, buses being blown up on busy streets. All distinctions between the victims had been totally blurred: men, women, young and old, and children. Terror from here and there. Bereavement and failure.'[22] These traumatic events, Neumann explains, inspired him to seek a path out of the futile and stifling conventions that governed existing analyses—historical, sociological, psychological, ideological or religious—of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. He was looking for 'something' that would open a new terrain beyond this intellectual and emotional impasse. He found it in the desire of second and third *aliyot* (settlement wave) 'pioneers' for *Eretz Israel*, which he claims had been neglected by historians:

> As a result of my research I concluded that it would be a mistake to impose on that love, that desire as I called it, concepts that are foreign to

---

[20] TRNO, pp. 455–6, 457.
[21] Boaz Neumann, 'Why I returned to Zionism', *Eretz Acheret*, February–March 2010, p. 15.
[22] LD, p. 11, (Hebrew).

it. For example, to read into it romantic-Orientalist, colonialist or proto-fascist meanings. Such a reading would sin against the 'Nietzschean spirit' of Zionist pioneering.[23]

The 'pioneers', a group of about 9,500 who arrived in Palestine from Eastern Europe between 1904 and 1922, comprised around 16 per cent of the immigrant-settlers during that period. (In 1908 the entire Jewish population of Palestine stood at 80,000.) Small as it was, the group laid the institutional and cultural foundations for Israeli society and state. Aside from communal agricultural settlements, producers' and consumers' cooperatives, labour unions, political parties and a rudimentary military establishment, the 'pioneers' also produced an impressive body of letters, diaries, narratives and poetry, mostly reflecting their exuberance at the land of *Eretz Israel*.[24]

Like Azoulay and Ophir, Neumann also derives his theoretical framework from Deleuze and Guattari, analysing the pioneers' literary output in terms of the desiring machine, the body without organs and de- and/or re-territorialization. The story he extracts from these writings, and retells in Deleuzian language, has three main characters: the Jews, the Land of Israel and the Hebrew tongue—body, space and language. In exile, the de-territorialized Jews had been 'bodies without organs', not only in the sense of being unable to fulfil their potential as a people, but also in being deformed, impotent, parasitic individuals, especially the men. Thus the pioneers' hero Joseph Trumpeldor, who had lost an arm in the Russo-Japanese war and was killed by Syrian rebels against the French occupation at Tel Hai in 1920, described the Jewish body as 'counterfeit, miserable and disgusting, stamped with degradation, stupidity and ugliness'.[25]

Palestine was also a 'body without organs'—naked, barren, old, decayed. When the 'pioneers' re-territorialized themselves in the Land of Israel, penetrated her with their hoes and impregnated her with their liquids—water, sweat and blood—both were resurrected. For Neumann, as for the 'pioneers', resurrection means being repossessed by Jews: 'The pioneer wets the land with his sweat and thus transforms

---

[23] Neumann, 'Why I returned to Zionism', p. 15.
[24] LD, pp. 19, 65. In Hebrew, 'land', 'earth' and 'soil' are all conveyed by the same word, *adama*, a feminine derivative of the masculine term for 'human being', *adam*.
[25] Quoted in LD, p. 147; see also pp. 146–57.

it from [mere] soil to land, from no-man's land to Jewish land, marking the border between Jewish land and Arab soil'. What distinguished the two was that, in the eyes of the pioneers, the Palestinians did not possess any desire for their land. This is why they 'never cleared their fields of stones and never improved them, they never ploughed with heavy, expensive European ploughs'—the Palestinian peasant 'does not really plough, he just scratches or slightly bruises the surface of his land with his shovel'. Just like Diaspora Jews, the Palestinians were also weak and impotent, 'bodies without organs', incapable of really penetrating their land as 'a virgin, a bride, a mother'. The Zionist settlers, said David Ben-Gurion, will therefore not only redeem the Jews and the land, they will also rescue the Arab, 'save him from his economic poverty, raise him from his social humiliation, redeem him from his physical and moral degeneracy'.[26]

Finally, by writing in Hebrew, the 'pioneers' resurrected a language that had been dead for two thousand years. Neumann considers this to be integral to the practice of 'pioneering': if desire for the land marked the 'pioneers' off from the Palestinians, writing in Hebrew differentiated them from the Jewish immigrant-settlers who arrived in Palestine from Yemen at the same time. Contemporary Mizrahi scholars claim that the Mizrahim, and certainly the Yemenites who settled in Palestine around the turn of the 20th century, were no less pioneering than the Ashkenazi immigrant-settlers, but were not recognized as such by the dominant Labour Zionist historiography. Neumann's answer is not only that history is written by the victors, but that the very writing of history is what makes the victors into victors. The Yemenites may have toiled on the land and suffered the same hardships as the 'pioneers', but since they did not write about it, at least not in a language that the dominant historiography could read, they could not qualify as genuine pioneers.[27]

In the Valley

That Zionism's 'negation of the Diaspora' involved the adoption of anti-Semitic stereotypes is well known, and Neumann's barrage of citations adds nothing new. That the Zionists sought to redeem or 'conquer' both the land and the people and that, like colonialists everywhere, they

---

[26] LD, pp. 94, 104, 106.   [27] LD, pp. 212–4.

viewed Palestine as a desert and their mission there as a civilizing one, are also worn-out clichés. So what was the object of Neumann's vast archaeological dig into the literary legacy of the 'pioneers'? The purpose, of course, was not antiquarian but very contemporary: to re-legitimize Zionism in the wake of the post-Zionist critique.

Post-Zionism, or the 'new history', may be seen as one of the cultural side-effects of the economic liberalization that Israeli society underwent at the end of the 20th century. Post-Zionist scholars focused on the colonial character of the settlement and the uprooting of the Palestinians in 1948.[28] In the process, the mythical status of the 'pioneers' was also eroded, in a wave of criticism aimed at the republican, anti-individualist culture that sustained the settlement project.[29] Trained in the post-Zionist discourse, Neumann aims to transcend it by portraying the 'pioneers' as rugged individualists motivated by an almost primal desire for the land, innocent of all ideology or colonialist design. He tries to achieve this through a patchwork of concealment and disclosure, which could serve as a Borgesian map covering the real landscape and history of the Land of Israel in the modern era.

The book's cover announces Neumann's strategy. It reproduces an image of an artwork by Gal Weinstein which consists of a patchwork in shades of green and brown. Titled *Jezreel Valley*, this seemingly abstract work is tied by its title to a specific place—the mythological cradle of the Zionist pioneering ethos, also underlaid with Biblical myths (Armageddon, for example, is located there). Considered the most fertile region of Palestine, the valley was purchased by Zionist settlement organizations from its landlords, the Sursuk family of Beirut, over the first three decades of the 20th century. This resulted in the dispossession of about 8,000 Palestinian peasants, some of whom had to be evicted by force. The artwork portrays the valley after it had been taken over by the settlers, tamed and subjected to a rational system of cultivation by modern, mechanized methods, the pioneers' 'expensive, European ploughs'.

---

[28] See for example Shafir, *Origins*; Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, Cambridge 2004; and Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oxford 2006.

[29] A cottage industry of books, films and art exhibitions portraying the horrors of growing up on kibbutzim developed in Israel in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The—continuing—Palestinian presence in the Jezreel Valley and in the country as a whole is not the only thing Neumann conceals. He also obscures the vast institutional infrastructure which recruited settlers from Europe, shipped them to Palestine, raised funds to purchase land and had it reclassified legally as Jewish, as well as evicting the Palestinian peasants and settling the 'pioneers' in their place. In other words, what enabled the 'pioneers' to fulfil their desire for the land was a whole army of diplomats, fundraisers, bureaucrats, lawyers, accountants, agricultural experts and so on, together with the power of the British Empire, as of 1917. The ecstatic relations of the 'pioneers' to the land were only the tip of a vast colonial iceberg that facilitated their activities and used them for its purposes. All of this is omitted from Neumann's account.

Where does Neumann himself stand in relation to the pioneers' desire? His posture is that of a purely descriptive historian, who wants 'to let the pioneers' desire speak for itself'. Thus, while the 'pioneers' denied that the Palestinians had any desire for the land, Neumann himself avers at the outset that the story of the Jewish–Palestinian conflict is a story of two conflicting desires for the same place, but that he cannot relate the Palestinian desire, because he is not a Palestinian. Still, the spirit of the book is unmistakably one of total identification with the desire of the 'pioneers'. Moreover, Neumann declares explicitly that:

> When we, the Jews/Israelis, gaze at *Eretz Israel*, it is mainly through the eyes of the pioneers that we see it. When we feel [the land] in our bodies and in our spirit, we feel it largely through their feelings. We are connected to the land, and find it difficult to part with it, because of their connection to the land. The *Eretz Israel* time that we are living now is, to a large extent, the mythical time scripted and imprinted in their deeds. When we speak Hebrew we speak their language. When we love *Eretz Israel* we love it, to a great extent, through their love, and when we are willing to throw down our lives for her we die, to a large extent, the 'beautiful/aesthetic' death they died, or were at least willing to die for her. The pioneers' desire for *Eretz Israel* is the 'archaeological' layer of our desire for her.[30]

In Israeli political discourse, the term *Eretz Israel* refers to the entire geographical unit of Mandatory Palestine, not to the sovereign territory of the State of Israel. The 'pioneers'' desire for the land was certainly not limited by Israel's future 1967 borders. It is shared by today's Jewish settlers in the West Bank, who see themselves as continuing the pioneering

---

[30] LD, pp. 83, 12–3, 19.

project. While Neumann does not absolve Zionism and Israel of the injustices they committed against the Palestinians, the political message conveyed by his book, regarding the entire territory under Israel's effective rule, is: 'between justice and my mother, I choose to defend my mother'.[31] Contrary to appearances, he implies, Israelis have not been softened by liberalism and affluence: we still possess the original pioneering desire to hold on to the land, and to die for it if necessary.

3. COALITION OF THE DISAFFECTED

Yehouda Shenhav's short book—it runs to 160 pages—is not an academic study but, as its subtitle indicates, 'a Jewish political essay'. *The Time of the Green Line* attributes the failure of the Oslo peace process, correctly in our view, to the different 'languages' spoken by the Jews and the Palestinians involved in that process: the Jews spoke the language of 1967, while the Palestinians spoke the language of 1948. This was clearest with regard to the fate of the Palestinian refugees from 1948 and the civic status of Israel's Palestinian citizens, two issues studiously avoided in the peace talks.[32] Shenhav further argues that the language of 1967, or the 'Green Line paradigm', is a 'cultural myth harnessed to the economic-political interests of a broad liberal stratum in Israel', conventionally referred to as the Israeli 'left'. The Israeli 'right', on the other hand—first and foremost the Jewish settlers in the occupied territories—also speak the language of 1948. It would therefore be necessary, when rethinking the solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, to 'redraw the political map in Israel—to reshape the conventional distinction between "left" and "right"—in a new design that may give rise to surprising coalitions'.[33]

The contours of these 'surprising coalitions' begin to emerge with Shenhav's identification of the 'economic-political' interests of the social stratum we have called Israel's 'enlightened public'. Their greatest fear, he argues, is to be inundated by the Oriental majority in whose midst they live, made up of both Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews. They are also repulsed by the messianic, politicized religiosity adopted by religious Zionists since 1967, which shapes the ideological worldview of many of

---

[31] Neumann, 'Why I returned to Zionism', p. 16.

[32] TGL, pp. 9, 20, 73–5, 90–7.   [33] TGL, p. 10.

the Jewish settlers in the occupied territories. Through the 'language of the Green Line', liberal Ashkenazi Zionists

> describe Israel as a Western liberal democracy, whereas the Arabs (and with them the Mizrahim and the religious [Jews]) are described as inferior and insufficiently democratic. This is the language of those who came to the Middle East for a short time, not in order to integrate into it, but to exist there as guests. This position is not only immoral with respect to the Palestinians, it is disastrous for the Jews themselves. It imposes on them life inside a ghetto with a conception of democracy based on race laws and a permanent state of emergency.[34]

Shenhav reserves particular ire for Amos Oz, Israel's best-known novelist and the quintessential figurehead of the 'enlightened public':

> Oz scorns the supporters of Greater Israel . . . Jews and Jewish theology . . . and the 'mob', be it right-wing Mizrahim or just non-whites and non-liberals . . . The racist apparatus employed by Oz is in the sociological literature called 'racism without race'. This is a pattern of racism that was born in Europe after 1945 and replaced the traditional biological markers (skin colour, phrenology, hair, smell) with sociological markers, among other reasons because of the trauma of the Nazi racialized state. But in spite of the blurring, the correspondence between the two fields of signification is almost perfect.[35]

In these two quotations, Shenhav collapses three distinct phenomena which should be treated separately. It is certainly true that fear of the 'demographic problem' has been the overriding concern of liberal Zionists in pursuing the two-state solution. The unofficial motto of the Oslo process, based on the principle of separation between Jews and Palestinians, was 'we are here and they are there'. The plight of Mizrahi Jewish immigrant-settlers in Israel, both before and after 1948, has been amply demonstrated and discussed. Because of this plight Mizrahim have by and large been among the staunchest opponents of peace with the Palestinians, as demonstrated by the positions taken by Shas, the first successful Mizrahi political party, established in 1984. The ideological divide between religious and liberal Zionists is real enough, although Shenhav grossly exaggerates its magnitude. Politically, the problem has been precisely the opposite: until Likud came to power in 1977, the settlers owed their success to the understanding attitude displayed by liberals from the Labour Zionist tradition. Shenhav is aware of this affinity between the settlers and important segments of Labour Zionism, but

---

[34] TGL, pp. 52–3. [35] TGL, p. 49.

he juxtaposes it with the liberal Zionist position, instead of seeing both as components of the same enterprise.[36]

While lumping together liberal Ashkenazi attitudes towards Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews and religious Jews, Shenhav is very discriminating in his analysis of different shades of opinion among right-wing Israelis, especially among the West Bank settlers. He identifies three distinct tendencies among the latter: 'pragmatic', 'messianic' and 'democratic'. The pragmatists, like the liberal left, adhere to the idea of separation between Jews and Palestinians, i.e. they speak the language of the Green Line. 'Messianic' settlers support the establishment of a racialized Jewish state in the entire territory of Mandatory Palestine. The democrats are willing 'to open the space and establish in it, in varying degrees of equality or justice, a bi-national society—sometimes on the basis of inter-religious agreements'.[37]

This latter position is the basis of Shenhav's own proposal for resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the key to the aforementioned 'surprising coalition', which he terms the 'Third Israel': 'I envision a productive coalition that will place left-wingers, Palestinians and democratic settlers in a united front whose aim will be to find a more just solution [than partitioning the country] that is not based on the arbitrariness and violence of the Green Line'. One manifestation of 'the arbitrariness and violence of the Green Line' is the demand to dismantle the Jewish settlements in the West Bank: 'liberal thought never paid attention to the moral implications of removing the settlements. I hold that under the conditions of opening the space and establishing political justice between Jews and Palestinians the settlements should remain in place'.[38]

A consociational regime

What would be the concrete political programme of the 'Third Israel'? In spite of his commitment to 'opening the space', Shenhav's basic premise is that 'the demand for an exclusive space with a Jewish character is legitimate', as is the demand 'to recognize the fact of the Jews' existence as a national collectivity, including their achievements since

---

[36] TGL, p. 109.   [37] TGL, pp. 103–4.   [38] TGL, pp. 113, 111–2.

1948'.[39] So replacing the 'language of 1967' with 'the language of 1948' does not mean necessarily rectifying the injustices perpetrated against the Palestinians since that time. While devoting a great deal of space to describing these injustices, primarily the Nakba and the treatment of Israel's Palestinian citizens since 1948, Shenhav refuses to go into specifics as to what he believes should be done to remedy them. On the right of return of the Palestinian refugees, he accepts, with certain qualifications, its definition as the right of each refugee and their descendants to choose between actual return to Israel and other, alternative solutions. But he never sets out these qualifications, except to say that he opposes 'collective return to a specific place from where Palestinians had been expelled if it is populated by Jews, because you cannot correct one historical injustice by inflicting another'.[40] This seems reasonable, but it does not tell us very much: not even the most uncompromising advocates of the right of return among the Palestinians demand such ethnic cleansing in reverse.

As to Israel's Palestinian citizens, if the solution to the Jewish–Palestinian conflict is to be found in an open space between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, then that solution should do away with their second-class citizenship as well. But Shenhav refuses to commit himself to any specific solution to the overall conflict.[41] In the Epilogue, aptly titled 'Return to the Rights of the Jews', he considers three possible solutions that (presumably) meet his requirements of an open space and political justice. The first solution he would like to take off the table is that of a single secular, democratic state: 'There is something utopian in the idea of a just, equal, multi-national, democratic, multi-coloured, liberal and universal society. [But] there isn't and there never was a real political framework of this kind'. Moreover, 'this model is problematic . . . because it assumes a homogeneous public with interests that are mostly individualistic'. This is not the case in Israel–Palestine, since 'most of the public in that space is national-religious and there is tremendous variance among both Jews and Palestinians'.[42] The second model is the two-state solution ('a model of equal division of sovereignties'), which Shenhav had already dismissed at the outset. So the only model that is actually offered for consideration is the third one—consociational democracy.

---

[39] TGL, pp. 150–1.   [40] TGL, p. 144.   [41] TGL, p. 228 n. 14.
[42] TGL, pp. 154–5; no evidence is provided to substantiate these claims.

For Shenhav, the advantage of consociational democracy is that 'such a regime could, by definition, do away with demographic politics in Israel, and demography would become a product of the model, rather than its fundamental principle'. For this sentence to make any sense at all, 'demography' will have to be replaced with 'ethnicity'. But ethnicity is precisely the foundational principle of consociational democracy, as well as its product, because the famous 'pillars' that make up the society, according to the consociational model, are ethnic; the model freezes them over by making ethnicity a constitutional principle of the state. Since in our particular case, as Shenhav has informed us, 'most of the public . . . is national-religious', the consociating elements would be ethno-religious, and therefore, 'theology has a central role to play' in his preferred solution.[43]

Another difficulty with Shenhav's favourite model is that consociation, as is well known, is an arrangement between the elites of the different ethnic groups, intended to safeguard their interests, to the detriment of those outside the elite. Writing about the South African transition, Courtney Jung and Ian Shapiro have noted that the assumption behind consociational democracy is that:

> ethnic divisions so completely overdetermine other conflicts, and . . . are so intense and enduring (if not primordial), that the only viable institutional recipe is one that is designed to minimize political competition and keep the different groups from getting at one another's throats . . . [Thus] consociational systems are not designed to foster alternation of major parties in power. Instead, they permit the same combinations of elites to entrench themselves at the peaks of spoils and patronage more or less continuously . . . Those who are not in government are removed from politics altogether, making it more likely that they will turn to extra-institutional politics if they can.[44]

It is curious that Shenhav, whose starting point was that the most significant line of demarcation was *not* the one between Jews and Palestinians, and who argued that the liberal Ashkenazi elite scorned Mizrahi Jews, Palestinians and settlers alike, would recommend an arrangement based on the ethno-religious divide between Jews and Palestinians, which would entrench the Jewish and Palestinian elites in positions of

---

[43] TGL, p. 158.
[44] Courtney Jung and Ian Shapiro, 'South Africa's Negotiated Transition', *Politics and Society*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1995, pp. 273–4.

power and privilege. By the same token, why would the 'Third Israel', a coalition of the disaffected—Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews and settlers (whom Shenhav also counts among the disaffected)—struggle to institute such an arrangement?

The real reasons for Shenhav's preference for the consociational model, as well as the real rationale for writing his book, become apparent towards the very end. One way or another, he rightly notes, Jews are bound to become a minority in the area of Mandatory Palestine, where they already constitute no more than 50 per cent of the population. Their ability to maintain their rights and privileges through 'violent military means' cannot be guaranteed forever, so 'Israel's strategic goal should be to formulate the Jews' rights under any conceivable regime'.[45] What concerns Shenhav, then, is not the oppression of the Mizrahim, the Palestinians and the settlers under the yoke of the liberal Ashkenazi elite, but rather the safeguarding of the rights of Jews as an ethno-religious group that is bound to become a minority. This is a legitimate concern, but it is unfortunate that Shenhav does not lay it out openly at the outset instead of reaching it in such a roundabout way.

4. THE ALTERNATIVE

The authors of all three volumes take as their basic assumption the inseparability of Israel within its 1967 borders from the occupied territories. We believe this assumption is correct; the collapse of the diplomatic charade played out between the US, Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the closing months of 2010 offers yet more proof, if any were needed, that any 'two-state solution' is now dead in the water. This has serious implications for Israel's continued ability to define itself as both Jewish and democratic, and raises two fundamental questions. Firstly, since the project of settling the occupied territories was always viewed by the 'enlightened public' as a colonial one, does the new reality reflect on the nature of pre-1967 Zionist settlement as well? Second, what kind of political arrangement should be instituted for the polity that encompasses both Israel and the occupied territories?

The works discussed in this essay all seek to insulate pre-1967 Zionism from the accusation of colonialism. As a result, none of them is able to

---

[45] TGL, p. 159.

offer a reasonable political programme for alleviating the oppression of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Azoulay and Ophir present the occupation regime as being simultaneously inside and outside the democratic State of Israel, and their political proposal amounts to no more than having a citizen-Palestinian political party join the government coalition. Neumann abstracts early Zionist settlement entirely from its social-historical context and presents the 'pioneers'' primal desire for Palestine—'for them, to be in *Eretz Israel* meant to be'—as innocent of any broader political purpose or ideology. Although he does not address the question of the occupied territories directly, it is clear that he includes them in the 'mother' in whose defence he is willing to die against the Palestinians' claim for justice. Shenhav seeks to diffuse the colonial reality by replacing the demarcation line between colonizers and colonized with one between the 'enlightened public' and all other social sectors in Israel–Palestine. But his political proposal—consociational democracy—does not follow in any way from his analysis.

We believe that the colonial nature of the Zionist enterprise has been persuasively demonstrated in the scholarly literature and needs to be faced without subterfuge. Such recognition would provide a coherent conceptual framework in which to comprehend the State of Israel and the occupied territories as one political entity. At present, 40 per cent of the residents of this political entity are denied all citizenship rights; this is the most pressing problem that needs to be faced by people who are still committed to the universal values of the Enlightenment. This definition of the problem already presents us with the solution: one secular, non-ethnic, democratic state with equal citizenship rights for all in the entire area between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. The great advantage of a political programme designed to bring about this solution would be that it would shift the grounds of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, from an ethno-national confrontation to one over civil rights and equal citizenship. Conceivably, this could change the nature of the conflict from a zero-sum to a positive-sum game.

The stability of the future secular, democratic Israeli–Palestinian state would depend not only on it being truly democratic, but also on the strictest constitutional separation between state and religion. This should not mean forced secularization or placing restrictions on the free exercise of religion, but it does mean that the state would neither sanction nor subsidize religious activities and institutions. Given the

present state of affairs this idea sounds utterly utopian, not only because both Israeli and Palestinian societies are becoming ever more religious, but also because Israel's economic, political and military standing has never been better, so that most Israeli Jews do not feel there is a problem that requires a solution. Shenhav is correct, however, in predicting that Jews will eventually become a demographic minority in the area of Mandatory Palestine, so their own self-interest should lead them to try to find appropriate arrangements for their long-term relations with the Palestinians. But his proposal—to fossilize ethno-religious divisions—is the wrong solution. What the self-interest of the Jews dictates, rather, is an arrangement that would de-ethnicize relations, in the form of a single secular, democratic state.