

Three Books on Israel

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a review of

Israel's Global Role: Weapons for Repression. Israel Shakak. Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Inc., Belmont MA, 61 pp., 1982, \$2.95.

Our Roots Are Still Alive: The Story of the Palestinian People. Peoples Press Palestine Book Project, Institute for Independent Social Journalism, New York, 1981, 190 pp., \$5.45.

Zionism in the Age of the Dictators, Lenni Brenner. Lawrence Hill & Co., Westport, Conn., 1983, 277 pp., (price not marked; probably in the \$5.95–7.95 range).

If one still held out the hope that somewhere in either its history or in the contemporary Israeli political scene there existed some shred of redemption for the Zionist occupation of Palestine, these volumes should set that to rest.

This should not be taken to mean that there are not people and organizations in Israel which oppose the worst abuses of the state (witness the Peace Now movement), but precious few are willing to take as a starting point the recognition that as a white settler colonial movement, Zionism caused an indigenous people to be thrown from their historic homeland and supplanted them with a European culture and government tied solidly to Western imperial interests.

Israel Shakak, the author of *Israel's Global Role*, starts from such a premise and has had his attempts to inform the Israeli public met with the heavy hand of military censorship. Even though his work delineating Israel's role in supplying arms to repressive U.S. client regimes is taken primarily from the Hebrew press, the text of his book indicates the many deletions forced upon him.

Shakak describes Israel as a garrison state, a militarized society devoting its resources to arms production while surviving on the American dole with "a corresponding and quite predictable deterioration in its moral integrity," to quote Noam Chomsky's excellent introduction. This loss of integrity originates from the nature of the Zionist project itself—the need to lie continually about Palestine and its people who were forcefully displaced to make room for the refugees from anti-Semitism.

Golda Meier claimed the Palestinians did not exist; Begin, the ex-terrorist, stands reality on its head and claims his victims are all terrorists—an immense edifice of lies necessary to justify this theft of land just as in the Americas extermination and occupation is rationalized by describing the original inhabitants as savages.

As the lies become institutionalized almost anything becomes permissible. The Jews, once a peaceful and victimized people throughout their Diaspora, now return as weapon suppliers for the world's pariah nations—grotesque dictatorships which only the U.S. and Israel want to maintain. Israeli small arms, planes and armor have shown up in the arsenals of Mobutu in Zaire, Bokassa in the Central African Republic and even in Idi Amin's Uganda. None but a small minority in Israel protested that arms went to the tyrant Somoza in Nicaragua or the bloody Shah of Iran. Uzi machine guns go to Pinochet in Chile (maybe used to mow down Allende) and to the Argentine generals. The South African Prime Minister is welcomed in Tel Aviv for a Holocaust memorial even though he was jailed

as a Nazi sympathizer during the war (this should perhaps come as no surprise since Begin was chairman of the Israel-South Africa Friendship Association prior to his election).

The death squad regimes of El Salvador and Guatemala are that much more secure due to their Israeli weaponry, and as Labor Party representatives of the Tel Aviv government clinked glasses with generals from Argentina's anti-Semitic junta, Jacobo Timmerman, a jailed writer, was at that moment being tortured in a Buenos Aires jail and forced to kneel in front of a portrait of Adolf Hitler. And, it should be remembered, that from 1948 until 1977, it was the ostensibly socialist Israeli Labor Party which was in power (member in good standing of the Socialist International) and brokering arms to the world's most repressive right-wing regimes.

This is Israel as whore—doing the bidding of rich white men for pay; pay without which it could not exist. It is safe to say that without direct U.S. subsidy Israel would have collapsed financially at the outset. Capital transfers to Israel in the form of U.S. government loans, direct grants and private donations constitute virtually the whole of Israeli investment since the founding of the state. In return, Israel functions as Washington's guard dog against Arab radicalism in the Middle East and arms dealer to unsavory regimes supported by the U.S. The latter role also is a major prop of the Israeli economy and constitutes 40% of Israel's export revenue.

Our Roots Are Still Alive chronicles the establishment of the Zionist state in Palestine and effectively attacks many of the central myths erected in defense of the occupation. The Palestinians are shown to have had, contrary to Meier, a flourishing culture, and, in fact, one so solid that it took intense assault over several generations to finally and permanently dislodge the Arabic inhabitants. And, since their Diaspora, the Palestinians have maintained their strong resistance to Zionism and a cultural integrity which shows no sign of going away.

The book shows Zionism as a thoroughly racist doctrine whose adherents were never satisfied to live in peace with their neighbors who originally tolerated them. However, they then became suspicious of these Europeans who arrived with an ideology which declared the land to be an exclusive homeland for the Jews. The colonialists utilizing racial covenants on land, terror against Arab workers and products (or against Jewish owners who used either; most of which was mobilized by the "left-wing" labor movement), and cooperation with the British colonial forces, still only managed to bring a small portion of Palestine under Jewish control prior to World War II.

The desperation created by the Holocaust and the resultant swell of European Jewish refugees into Palestine set the final stage for the 1948 war—another myth where the supposedly beleaguered Zionists, gulled by the British and out-gunned by five Arab nations fought heroically to establish the Jewish state. *Our Roots...* makes clear that the war was planned by the Zionist leadership, was done purposely to circumvent the United Nations partition plan which would have left half the area in Arab hands, that the victory was a relatively easy one and was used primarily to chase out the remaining Palestinian residents.

The final myth is that of the Israeli economic miracle—"They made the desert bloom." Again, if anything made Israel bloom it was U.S. dollars, but even more importantly, the book demonstrates that the victorious settlers took over the preexisting Palestinian economy and began to operate it as their own. Palestine was not a desert; the Zionists took thousands of homes, factories and citrus groves and in the process eliminated almost 400 Palestinian cities and villages. The parallels to Nazi activity is too obvious to need exposition. It was that which created today's Israel.

The book's only flaw is its fawning before reactionary Arab nationalism and the PLO's statist intentions, but this is easily ignored in favor of its excellent history.

Lenni Brenner's book *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* exposes the shameful record historic Zionism had in its relationship with the totalitarian regimes which ruled Europe between the World Wars. Zionist leaders constantly sought the patronage and benevolence of avowed anti-Semitic governments even to the extent of making grand overtures to the Nazis.

Immediately following the Nazi assumption of power and the exclusion of Jews from Germany's economic life, the Zionists initiated a large "transfer" scheme for allowing German Jewish capital to be sent to Palestine for Nazi products in a period when "assimilationist" Jews had called for a world-wide boycott of Germany over its racist policies. The Zionist response to the latter was to do all in its power to stop the boycotts and protests against Jewish persecution holding out the hope that the Nazis would sponsor massive Jewish emigration. So intense was the collaboration that the ultimate persecutor of the Jews, Adolf Eichmann, was welcomed to Palestine in the late

1930s with the intent of winning favor among Nazis for Zionism. And, as a show of good faith, the Jewish Hagannah offered to spy for the Gestapo.

This seemingly peculiar relationship was born not only out of circumstance, but also by the marked similarities of the two nationalist ideologies. Zionist propaganda often differed little from that of their tormentors and repeated the anti-Semitic themes that Jews were different, that too many in a nation caused problems, that they had no real homeland and hence, were guilty of many of the problems ascribed to them by their accusers.

The small German Zionist movement, for instance, (the majority of Jews belonged to left-wing parties) paralleled the Nazi's anti-communism and echoed the rightist conception of pure race and nation. So favorably did the Nazis view Zionism during the 1930s that only the blue and white Zionist flag was permitted to be flown in Germany other than the swastika. Zionist organizations and their press continued to function and the Nazis even permitted the Zionist youth to wear their own uniforms. This was at a point when every union and opposition group in Germany had been crushed and their leadership sent to concentration camps or executed.

This venal collaboration was based on the Zionist concept that anti-semitism was inevitable and to struggle against it was futile, and saw only escape to Palestine for a select few as offering any hope for the Jews. Hence, their policy was that boycotts, sabotage or resistance of any sort would only further worsen their already precarious position.

Many Jews argue that in retrospect their arguments stand correct given the results of the Holocaust, but Zionist efforts to save European Jewry by negotiating with the Nazis, refusing all opposition to them, and stifling protest against their anti-Semitic policies was equally futile and certainly was self-fulfilling prophecy. Of course, no one could have foreseen to what lengths the Nazis were willing to go to settle the "Jewish Question," but collaboration with one's adversaries from a position of weakness, agreeing with his criticisms in advance, is at best naive. In the long run, Zionism can only be seen to have unwittingly aided a process already in the works.

But as mentioned above, Zionism's affinity to right-wing dictatorships should not be seen as just one of opportunism, for its political concepts were decidedly totalitarian in themselves. Basing itself mainly on the petty-bourgeoisie of Europe and seeking wealthy Jews as patrons, Zionism exhibited a hostility to all worker and internationalist movements, seeing them as "assimilationist." The Zionist press expressed an appreciation for Mussolini and fascism particularly since Il Duce was favorable toward a Jewish homeland in Palestine, The German Zionist movement, in its attempts of accommodation with the newly victorious Nazi Party, said repeatedly that it supported the Aryan concept of "race and nation" as one akin to the Zionist view.

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A distinct pattern begins to emerge from these three books: When Jews are the "rootless cosmopolitans" and "internationalists" that both anti-Semites and Zionists describe them as, they tend to display a hostility toward their "host" nation state. Hence, the presence of so many Jews in leftist and anarchist movements. They are often immune from the fervid nationalism that rulers use to chain people to the needs of "their" nation state if they are, from the outset, told they are not a part of it. Set in the era of intense resistance to capital and the state, Zionism, conceptually and often politically, instead lined up with reactionary nationalism of the epoch.

Israel today is quickly losing its image as a beleaguered "little" nation as it commits a genocidal war against Lebanon, lines up with the fascist forces of that country, and conspires to rob even more land from the remaining Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza. And, as the country catapults to the right, so its domestic and foreign apologists match the trajectory.

When Begin, a man with his origins in the overtly fascist wing of Zionism, with a personal history of terrorism against both Arabs and his Zionist opponents, is elected Prime Minister (an event which would be comparable to some one from the Minutemen gaining the U.S. presidency), he is hailed by the majority of American Jews. When massacres are carried out by right-wing militias, allied to and armed by Israel and permitted to carry out atrocious murders of defenseless refugees, Israel's supporters deny all blame, and when the stench gets so bad that a commission of inquiry says, yes, there was "indirect" blame, the head of Boston's B'nai Brith Anti-Defamation League says, see, this proves how democratic Israel is, even though not an official is given a punishment worth a mention.

In fact, so shameless are these defenders of Zion that when Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, architect of the massacres, recently came to the U.S. on a fundraising drive, rather than being shunned as a monster, he was

received with such overwhelming enthusiasm in the Jewish community that he was able to raise a record amount of money for Israel.

Within the U.S., Jews who were once part of the liberal and leftist trends in this country suddenly have become captive [sic] by Israel's rightist regime, echoing its lies uncritically and smiling at Reagan, who they see as Tel Aviv's ultimate protector. And, as letters of support appear in the daily papers rationalizing each new Israeli atrocity (thousands of Lebanese and Palestinians remain in Israeli concentration camps un-charged and living in horrid conditions) one winces at the upper-middle class and wealthy suburban addresses these Zionist apologists sign. Begin and Sharon have allowed them to shed the uncomfortable liberalism Jews have worn for so long and to take on a more suitable rightist stance that joins them with their wealthy and reactionary gentile neighbors. They support the right abroad and abandon liberalism at home.

Actually, in Israel the Zionist consensus is more fragile and has split along ethnic lines over the murderous war against Lebanon. On the eve of the mild reprimand to Sharon, for his role in "permitting" the Sabra and Shatilla massacres by the Israeli army's Phalangist stooges, Peace Now protesters took to the streets to demand that Sharon be dropped from the government.

When their demonstration reached Begin's office, mobs of government supporters, almost exclusively Sephardim, Jews from North Africa and Middle East countries, attacked, first with epithets, then with fists and finally a grenade killing one demonstrator and wounding several others.

Almost more telling of the division-wracked society were the insults hurled by the Begin supporters: "They shouldn't have rescued you from Hitler in 1945!," yelled one pro-government man.

"They're all Ashkenazim," (Jews of European extraction) shouted another, "That's why they're out there."

"Go back to your kibbutz; these do-gooders; they're educated," yelled one in contempt.

The Peace Now demonstrators were continually called "Arabs," apparently the vilest insult of all. An elderly man in a yarmulke shouted at a group of women demonstrators, "You are Arab women! You should have been at Sabra and Shatilla!"

So, this is what Israel has become—mobs chanting, "Begin is King!," a contempt for even the socialist trappings of the kibbutzim, and a racism consistent with that of other settler regimes such as South Africa, Israel's staunchest ally.

The final argument that Zionists will use is that Jews are safe nowhere in the world except in Israel. Quite the contrary is true, however. The Jews of Israel are in as precarious position as they were prior to the Holocaust, dependent upon the political winds of imperialism to keep the U.S. as its mentor and protector. A change in policy and Israel could be wiped away.

It's almost as if the rabbinical opposition to Zionism is becoming manifest—Israel as the false messiah to doom the Jews. A permanent garrison state, guard dog for a larger imperial power, mobs howling in the street; no thinking Jew or gentile can imagine this will last long.

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