ISRAEL-PALESTINE: GLOBALISATION AND MICRO-NATIONALISMS

Introduction

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Palestine: Mondialisation et micro-nationalismes (Palestine: Globalisation and Micro-Nationalisms) was published in 1998 (Éditions Acratie).

It is largely the result of the experience I gained during seven years as a presenter on Radio Libertaire's programme "Les Chroniques du nouvel ordre mondial" (Chronicles of the New World Order) from 1990 to 1997.

However, this book would not have been possible without the friendship of Moïse Saltiel, our long conversations, the documents he provided me with and his thesis, which he shared with me: *Sur la Palestine, terre nourricière, Israël, base militaire* (Paris, May 1988).

This book also owes a great deal to Arna Meir-Khamis, whom I interviewed on Radio Libertaire in 1991 during the Gulf War.

I would also like to add that the friendship of Wallid Attallah and Issa Wachil, two Palestinian friends, was invaluable to me in writing my book, not to mention Raouf Raïssi, Tunisian publisher and humanist.

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Fifty years ago, before the eyes of the world, a state was formed: the State of Israel. This may seem trivial, but it is not. Anarchists should have been interested in observing this phenomenon; yet few understood that something important was happening, namely the opportunity to test the validity of their theories against reality[1]. Of course, this was not the only reason to be interested in the phenomenon, but it was one among many.

It could be argued that many states were formed during the period of decolonisation, but this is a different issue. The states that emerged from decolonisation were formed on the basis of structures put in place by and for the former coloniser, who withdrew, or in imitation of the coloniser's state structures. In many respects, the embryonic Palestinian state currently being formed is of this type.

The State of Israel corresponds more or less to the model of the state that has gradually been established in the West. This was the intention of its promoters. It is therefore a relevant example from which to analyse the process of state formation. The anarchist activist Emma Goldman defined Zionism as 'the dream of the Jewish capitalists of the world for a Jewish state with all its attributes, such as government, laws, police, militarism and the rest. In other words, a Jewish state machine to protect the privileges of a few against the many'[2].

Emma Goldman was careful to point out that Zionists were not the only supporters of Jewish emigration to Palestine, and that Jewish masses from all countries, particularly the United States of America, donated large sums of money to support this cause, motivated by "the hope that Palestine might be a refuge for their brothers cruelly persecuted in almost every European country."

Here, very briefly, are the main lines of the anarchist theory of the constitution of states:

1. For Bakunin, the original act of forming any state is violence, robbery and the forced subjugation of populations.

The first historical states were formed by the conquest of agricultural populations by nomadic populations: "Conquerors have always been the founders of states, and also the founders of churches'[3]. The state is "the temporary legal organisation of all the facts and social relations that naturally arise from this primitive and unjust fact, conquest," which has always had "as its main goal the organised exploitation of the collective labour of the enslaved masses for the benefit of

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1   British libertarians, for obvious reasons, since Great Britain was the mandatory power in Palestine, took a keen interest in the question: see *British Imperialism & The Palestine Crisis, selections from the Anarchist Journal Freedom, 1938-1948,* Freedom Press, 1989. 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

2   *British Imperialism & The Palestine Crisis*, selections from the Anarchist Journal Freedom, 1938-1948, op. cit., p. 25.

3   Bakunin, *Works,* Champ libre, vol. II, p. 83.

the conquering minorities"[4]. Violence is therefore the constitutive act of class domination, exploitation its motive[5]. While Marx arrives at the state through the emergence of social classes and the development of their antagonism, for Bakunin classes can only be constituted *at the outset* by an act of violence or conquest that coincides with the formation of the state. Bakunin suggests that the state is the result of the appropriation of power by an *already* constituted and organised group. This is because power is the *condition* for the existence of an exploitative society: "classes are only possible in the state"[6]. "Thus are formed the *state classes*, from which the state emerges fully formed".

2. The power of the state and the ruling classes is not based on a higher law, but on an indisputably more powerful 'organised force', on 'mechanical, bureaucratic, military and police organisation'. This 'mechanical organisation' cannot suffice on its own; it needs to be cloaked in legitimacy. A dominant group can only maintain its domination by being convinced of its right to do so. Force alone is not enough to perpetuate the state; it needs <u>moral,</u> <u>legal</u> and <u>religious</u> sanction. This sanction is not only intended for the dominated populations, but also to legitimise the right of the dominant group in its own eyes. 'One religion or another will then explain, that is, deify, the act of violence and in this way lay the foundation of *so-called state law*[7].' If, in the case of Israel, religion serves as a *prior* legitimisation for the foundation of the state, we can see the close interdependence, constantly emphasised by Bakunin, between religion and the state.

3. The third part of Bakunin's theory is particularly interesting, as it describes the process of the *dissolution* of power.

First, the "state classes" consolidate, and over time "the majority of these exploiters, either by birth or by the position they have inherited in society, will begin to believe seriously in *historical right and birthright*." This tendency gradually changes under the influence of several factors. In the early stages of a ruling class's life, class selfishness is hidden by "the heroism of those who sacrifice themselves not for the good of the people, but for the benefit and glory of the class which, in their eyes, constitutes the whole people." But this period gives way to times of pleasure, enjoyment and cowardice: "Little by little, class energy decays and degenerates into debauchery and impotence." At this stage, a minority of less corrupt men emerge, active, intelligent and generous men who "put the truth before their own interests and think of the rights of the people reduced to nothing by class privileges".

There is a tipping point between the gradual collapse of the ruling class's sense of legitimacy and the rise of the dominated class's sense of entitlement. In its slow awakening to its rights, the people rely on two "bedside books': their material condition, the experience of oppression; and "tradition, living, oral, passed down from generation to generation and becoming each time more complete, more meaningful and more extensive". When the people become aware of their oppression and manage to formulate the causes of their ills, the representations they have transmitted provide the source of their right, the agent of which is "organised force", for "without organisation, spontaneous force is not a real force"[8].

The present work is not intended to be a defence and illustration of the anarchist theory of the state through the example of Israel, and we will not devote ourselves to the task of showing, point by point, the adequacy of the theory to the facts. Bakunin's theory is one interpretation among others, such as those of Marx or Max Weber, which are equally relevant and, moreover, not contradictory.

However, we thought it would be interesting, as a preamble, to outline the main features of the anarchist theory of the state:

– precisely because there are many parallels with the process of the formation of the Israeli state;

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4   Bakunin, *Works,* Champ libre, vol. II, p. 84.
5   "The state, completely in its genesis, essentially and almost completely during the first stages of its existence, is a social institution imposed by a victorious group of men upon a defeated group, with the sole aim of ensuring the domination of the victorious group over the defeated and of protecting itself against revolt from within and attacks from without. Teleologically, this domination had no other purpose than the economic exploitation of the defeated by the victors." This quote is not from Bakunin but from Franz Oppenheimer, a German sociologist (1864-1943). F. Oppenheimer, *The State* (1914), Black Rose Books, Montreal, republished in 1975.
6   Bakunin, *Works,* Champ libre, volume II, p. 146.
7   Bakunin, "Science and the Vital Question of Revolution" *Works,* Volume VI, p. 274. See also Machiavelli: "It is true that there has never been, among any people, an extraordinary legislator who did not appeal to God, for otherwise his laws would not have been accepted." (*Discourse on Titus Livius,* I, p. 11.)
8   Bakunin, *Works,* Champ libre, volume VI, p. 285.

– and also because the reasons why libertarians might be interested in the phenomenon are obvious.

It is clear, however, that the issue is not limited to an academic debate, and that in the conflict that developed with the settlement of Jews in Palestine, and then with the creation of a state that claimed to be the state of all Jews, it is men and women who are confronting each other and fighting for their existence, and it is also two conceptions of law and justice. We cannot therefore remain indifferent.

It is difficult to deny that the creation of the State of Israel was achieved through violence. It is interesting to note how relevant Bakunin's analysis is with regard to "moral sanction'. The expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their land would have been impossible without a solid ideological apparatus to justify it, which for a long time made it possible to believe that this violence *had never taken place,* and also made it possible to deny the very existence of a Palestinian people.

The argument of *historical right* raised by Bakunin is particularly important in the genesis of the Israeli state. We can also see the evolution from a heroic and ascendant period, which then gives way to a period where energies decline and sink into "decay": the kibbutz movement is particularly revealing in this regard. Made up of pioneers imbued with communal and egalitarian ideals – which greatly appealed to many libertarians – it sank into individualism and financial and real estate speculation.

Also consistent with Bakunin's analysis is the phenomenon of the decline – albeit a relative decline, far from being a "collapse" – of the sense of entitlement and the emergence of awareness of the rights of others. Israeli society has produced many men and women capable of putting "the truth before their own interests".

The prevailing tendency is to consider the State of Israel as a special case, different from others, and that the criteria for analysing it are different from those applied to other states. This attitude is contested in Israel itself by intellectuals such as Baruch Kimmerling and Gerchom Sapir.

Refusing to allow Israel to be judged by the usual criteria makes it possible to frame the problem not in critical, political, economic or sociological terms, but essentially a moral one. The support that all Western states have long given to the policy of the State of Israel, and that which the United States continues to give unconditionally, is, in a way, expiation – at the expense of the Palestinians, who are in no way responsible for the Holocaust – for our collective faults. According to this thesis, the Holocaust legitimises the State of Israel. However, here again, it is Israel itself that is challenging this attitude, notably through the work of Tom Segev, which shows that Holocaust survivors were initially very poorly received in Israel: it was only later that this appalling tragedy was exploited for the purposes of statecraft.

One of the arguments used to legitimise the State of Israel is that of *historical right*. Can a people legitimately claim a 2,000-year-old right to a land that it has not occupied for all that time, and on which an indigenous population lived? After 2,000 years, is there not a "statute of limitations"? For the Arabs who occupied what became the State of Israel were a population no different from those who occupied Palestine before the Exodus. They were the same people, who remained in place and were, in the course of history, successively Christianised and then Islamised.

If we accept the argument of historical right, regardless of how much time has passed, when applied to Israel, we must also accept its validity in all other cases. A right, even a "historical" one, can only be considered as such if it has universal value; otherwise, it is not a right but a privilege. Recognising this right for Jews alone would lend credence to the idea that Jews are different, that they can legitimately enjoy privileges that are not recognised for others, which would be contrary to all the traditions of our culture and greatly detrimental to Jews themselves. Jewish fundamentalists, such as Gush Emunim, play the religious legitimacy card to the hilt, denouncing aspirations to "normality" as an "illusion of secular Zionists": Jews cannot be "normal" because the "eternal uniqueness" of the Jews comes from their covenant with God on Mount Sinai, which leads Rabbi Shlomo Aviner to say that "God may require other nations to submit to abstract codes of 'justice and righteousness', but these codes do not apply to Jews".

What would the generalisation of "historical right" mean? First of all, it could apply to the detriment of the State of Israel itself: indeed, a reading of the Bible clearly shows that the Hebrews are themselves the occupiers of a territory previously occupied by a people they had dominated, the Canaanites. Consequently, if there were a population today that could claim descent from the Canaanites, it could legitimately claim the territory of Israel[9]. Indeed, the logic of "historical right' is that the older it is, the more valid it is. To this, one might respond that it was God who gave

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9   To tell the truth, the Jews of Israel could perhaps come to an arrangement with the possible descendants of the Canaanites, for they would be related to them by marriage: the Bible says that 'the sons of God' (i.e., symbolically, the Hebrews) married the 'daughters of men' (i.e., the Canaanites)...

Israel to the Hebrews, an argument still used today by Jewish fundamentalists who accuse secular Israelis of being "Judeo-Canaanites". A Jewish proverb says that some Jews do not believe in God, but they believe that He gave them the land of Israel.

The logic of "historical right" is absurd, and anarchists cannot subscribe to it under any circumstances. And especially if this "historical right" claims to be based on the word of a character who does not exist...

What Bakunin said about the principle of nationality could perfectly apply to Zionism in its present form: nothing is more harmful, said Bakunin, than making the "pseudo-principle of nationality the ideal of all popular aspirations". Nationality is a historical fact, limited to a region, which certainly has an undeniable right to exist, "like everything that is real and harmless." The essence of nationality is the product of a historical era and conditions of existence; it is formed by the character of each nation, its way of life, of thinking, of feeling. Every people, like every individual, has the right to be itself: "In this lies the whole of so-called national right." But it does not follow that a people, an individual, has the right or interest in making its nationality, its individuality, a matter of principle and that they must "drag this ball and chain all their lives"[10]: "On the contrary, the less they think of themselves, the more they become imbued with the substance common to all humanity, the more the nationality of one and the individuality of the other take on relief and meaning[11].'

It is on the basis of these considerations that we must approach the question of the existence of the State of Israel:

1.– Since anarchism does not consist in denying facts, we cannot but recognise the State of Israel, in the sense of "acknowledging its existence".

2.– But there is another problem: that of recognition in the sense of "attributing legitimacy" to the State of Israel. We have no more reason to justify the existence of the State of Israel than we have to justify the existence of any other state. Every state is an instrument of oppression, exploitation and manipulation of the masses; we can only acknowledge its existence. Our non-recognition of the State of Israel, in the sense of legitimising it, is therefore not motivated by the fact that it was Jews who created this state, but because it is a state, and there is no reason why we should have any complacency towards Israel, or even towards a possible future Palestinian state, a complacency that we do not have for other states.

3. – But in reality, the real problem is not there, it is not the problem of recognising the legitimacy – legal or moral – of the State of Israel, it is the problem of recognising the legitimacy of the Israeli people. The question of the legitimacy of the State of Israel is in reality of no importance to us; on the other hand, we believe it is more important to ask whether the Israeli people can, today, legitimately claim this land from which they drove out the Palestinians.

Since the creation of the State of Israel is a historical phenomenon that must be addressed as such, we cannot ignore any considerations regarding long-term historical perspectives. There are countless examples of populations settling on the territory of other populations and remaining there: America North and South, Australia, New Zealand. These are tragic *faits accomplis* that punctuate the history of humanity. There are also examples where a strongly rooted settler population had to leave: this is the case of the French in Algeria.

The question is therefore: is it conceivable, fifty years later, to demand the expulsion of the inhabitants of Israel? Of course not. Only a small minority of Palestinian extremists still hold this view. It is no more realistic to demand the expulsion of the inhabitants of Israel than it is to demand the expulsion of Europeans from America, Australia or New Zealand. But it should be noted that these are countries where the settlement of Europeans was accompanied by the virtual extermination of the indigenous populations, which is not the case in Palestine.

While the Zionist project obviously did not call for the extermination of the Palestinians, it did envisage their mass expulsion, referred to as "transfer" for the occasion. Michel Warschawski, for his part, does not hesitate to speak of "ethnic cleansing"[12]. The first form of resistance by the Palestinians was therefore to cling resolutely to their land whenever they could.

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10 Bakunin's reflections anticipate in many ways those of the Austrian Marxists who were confronted with the problem of nationalities thirty years later. Otto Bauer wrote in a letter to Pannekoek: "The enemy that must be fought at the present time is not the abusive negation but the abusive affirmation of the national fact..." (Bauer, letter of 26 April 1912, Pannekoek archives, map 5/14, am.IIHS.)

11 Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy,* Champ libre editions, Vol. IV, p. 238.

12 Michel Warschawski, "State, Nation and Nationalism: The Relevance of Zionism," *L'Homme et la Société,* no. 114, 1994, p. 28.

The expulsion of the "pieds-noirs" (French settlers) from Algeria is partly the consequence of the policy they adopted. To a large extent, Israel's long-term survival depends on the attitude of the Israeli population and its state. The question of Israel's survival is, in our opinion, linked to its ability to integrate into the region and see itself as a country of the Middle East. Unable to resolve the issue by expelling the Palestinians *en masse* from the territories they covet, the Israelis have no choice but to find a way to integrate into the region; the problem is that both the ruling classes and a significant part of the population reject this possibility:

a) They categorically refuse to accept the idea that they live in the Middle East.
b) They refuse to consider any form of relationship with their neighbours other than economic and political domination.

Second- and third-generation Israelis cannot be held responsible for a situation they found ready-made. That is why we can only recognise the right of Israelis to live on this land – generally speaking, we affirm the right of *everyone* to live where they want – but it is a right that their fathers won through violence. This is why this recognition implies that Israelis in turn recognise the violence that has been done to Palestinians, instead of hiding behind a fallacious historical right, and recognise the Palestinians' right to exist.

To those who refute the argument that Jews have a thousand-year-old right to live in Palestine, anarchist Emma Goldman replies that the argument that Arabs have lived there for generations is no more valid, "unless we admit the monopoly of land and the right of governments of each country to exclude newcomers". The fact that Arab feudal lords sold their land to Jews without the population's knowledge "is nothing new": "The capitalist class everywhere owns, controls, and disposes of its property as it pleases. The masses, whether Arab, English or otherwise, have no say in the matter"[13].

The existence of the State of Israel is not a moral imperative, it is a historical fact like any other, whose future is largely in its own hands. We do not know whether it will still exist in fifty years' time. History shows us many states that were formed through conquest and disappeared after a few generations, starting with the Christian kingdoms of Palestine at the time of the Crusades. When the strategic issues that justify the support of the major powers for Israel have disappeared or changed, the very foundations of this state are likely to dissolve.

However, it seems that the main danger for Israel lies within Israel itself. Internal forces within Israeli society are contributing to its demise, largely fuelled by the policies of its governments.

What this book is, and what it is not. This book claims to be neither a history of Israel nor a history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The information contained in this work is accessible to all and is drawn from the press, but also from personal contacts with Palestinians, Israelis and Arabs of various nationalities. It is not the work of an "expert" on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but that of a libertarian activist interested in international issues, whose chance encounters – in particular with Arna Mer-Khamis during the Gulf War – led him to take an interest in this particular issue.

But why take an interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Because it seems to us that this conflict between two 'micro-nationalities' of a few million people would hardly be mentioned by the media if it were not the centre of gravity of international antagonisms that go far beyond its direct protagonists.

Because this conflict is a perfect illustration, even a caricature, of the type of relationship established between industrialised metropolises and dominated countries.

Because it highlights the scandalously discriminatory way in which issues of justice are dealt with by the powers that dominate the planet: double standards.

Because it is exemplary of how a just struggle, that of the oppressed Palestinian people, has been exploited for the benefit of caste interests.

Because it shows how the gains of an entire population's struggle over several years – the Intifada – have been destroyed by the Palestinian leadership's frenzy of concessions without demanding anything in return.

We fully share the opinion of Christiane Passevant and Larry Portis:

> "Palestine is closer to Europe than we imagine. Despite various government propaganda campaigns relayed by submissive and unprofessional media, Palestine no longer seems so distant. In terms of historical relations, social and demographic interactions, or simple distance, Palestine and the countries of the Middle East are

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13   British Imperialism... *op. cit.* p. 25.

more closely linked to Europe than are the countries of the American continent or the former Soviet Union"[14].

While this book does not claim to replace the work of specialists on the subject, it does assert that one does not need to be a specialist to try to understand. It is nothing more than a reflection on a conflict, the application of a method of approach – in this case, the libertarian approach – to a complex conflict, and this is perhaps the only "speciality" we claim to have.

> "While we sympathise with the Palestinian people and activists from the outset, sympathy is not an analysis, let alone a political position. It is a matter of understanding the struggle of this oppressed people, their cultural identity, their desire for national and ethnic identification. The same applies to their aspirations for statehood, represented by the Palestine Liberation Organisation. What position can libertarians adopt with regard to their rejection of state structures[15]?"

One may be surprised at the paucity of information published in the French media on the Israeli-Palestinian question. Yet there is no shortage of information, starting with that published in the Israeli press itself. Those who do not read Hebrew do not even have this excuse, since Israel Shahak, to name but one, has for years been reporting on the Israeli press, including numerous quotations[16].

Our ambition has been to attempt a synthesis of the issues raised by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, categorically rejecting any argument of religious legitimacy and affirming the need to apply a strictly materialist approach to the problem. We refuse to apply any criteria to the analysis of the nature of the State of Israel other than those applied to any other state – after all, the initial Zionist project was to create a state for Jews "like any other state"...

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14 *La main de fer en Palestine,* Histoire et actualité de la lutte dans les teritoires occupés, Christiane Passevant and Larry Portis, anarchist pamphlet.
15 Passevant/Portis, *op. cit.*
16 Monthly translations of the Israeli press can be obtained from: Middle East Data Centre; P.O. Box 337, Woodbridge, VA 22194-0227, USA. The 'Shahak Reports' were published on the Internet Activists Mailing List <ACTIV-L@MIZZOU1.BITNET>.