

Reflections on The Pale of Settlement and the Pale—estine

I choose as the starting point for these reflections a recent article by Khaled Amayreh published in the Al-Ahram Weekly and entitled “Much like Auschwitz”, [<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/print/2007/868/re61.htm>]. In the article he recounts a recent attack by “crack Israeli soldiers” on the 1,200 Palestinian detainees at the “notorious Kitziot Prison” on the 22 October, 2007. He writes of the Israeli soldiers “ganging up on helpless and fettered Palestinian prisoners, shooting, beating and humiliating them under largely concocted pretexts.”

In describing this particular attack in which hundreds were seriously wounded, nine severely, and with one death, he uses the expression “a pogrom-like attack”. Personally I find the parallel with the pogroms rather more apt than the comparisons with Nazi concentration camps, although both may be seen as appropriate in different ways. But at least the use of the word ‘pogrom’ has telling echoes of the attacks on Jewish persons in the Russian Empire of the Tsars.

The Pale of Settlement

The victims of those pogroms—defined as “the organized massacre of a particular ethnic group, in particular that of Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe”—were the Jews in a part of the Russian Empire known as The Pale of Settlement. The Pale of Settlement was a western border region of Imperial Russia, instituted first by Catherine the Great in 1791, and ending with the revolution in 1917. Briefly put, Catherine inherited the large Jewish population of Eastern Europe in the Peace Treaty signed with Austria and Prussia in 1791. After the partition of Poland (1791 +), several hundred thousand Jews became incorporated into the Russian Empire. This the Empire defined as “the Jewish Problem,” to be solved either by enforced assimilation or by expulsion. Though comprising only 20% of the territory of European Russia, the Pale included most of present-day Lithuania, Belarus, eastern Poland, Moldova and the Ukraine.

Within this Pale, Catherine, and the subsequent Tsars, instituted a series of laws whose aim was to confine, control and restrict the movement, activities, professions, educational opportunities, legal status, and enforce conscription for long periods of military service, of the Jewish persons living in those territories. The purpose of these acts of confinement was to ensure that the Jews would not ‘infect’ the rest of the population. At its heyday, the Pale had a Jewish population of over 5 million, which represented the largest concentration of world Jewry at that time.

The reasons for its creation were primarily nationalist and economic. So the first ‘problem’ the Jews posed was to the nationalist or panslavic conception of the Russian Empire. Thus the Jews did not fit into the aim to form “of all nationalities a single people” based on a “common language, common religion and the Slavic Mir.” In a somewhat similar way, the Jews were later to present the same ‘problem’ within the Nazi nationalist ideology of nationalism and racial ‘purity’.

The second issue was economic: the majority of Jews lived in villages and fulfilled a vital role in the village economy. However, the emergence of a middle class in the course of the nineteenth century was rapidly being filled by Jews. By limiting the Jews’ area of residence, the imperial powers were ensuring the growth of a non-Jewish middle class. The Polish nobility, having lost its feudal rights after the partition, wanted

to regain the economic functions they had once delegated to the Jews—a political demand that Russian governments were eager to accommodate. Both the nationalist and economic issues were addressed time and again by imperial decrees and counter-decrees. However, both ‘problems’ remained largely unresolved throughout the nineteenth century.

Restrictions and persecutions

Between 1791 and 1917, when the Pale officially ceased to exist, there were various reconfigurations of its boundaries, so that certain areas were open or shut to Jewish settlement. In some periods, special dispensations were given for Jews to live in the major imperial cities, but these were tenuous.

In his “Statute Concerning the Organization of the Jews” from 1804, Alexander I was the first to formulate the dual policy of forced assimilation and expulsion from the villages. In order to undermine the Jewish village economy, Jewish residence in the villages was prohibited, and expulsions began soon afterward. Jews were barred from owning land. A strict quota was established to keep the number of Jews in higher education and professions artificially low. Jews resisted assimilation into a society that would only accept them if they renounced Judaism, and preferred their traditional village existence above forced residence in overcrowded cities.

From time to time throughout the nineteenth century, Jews were summarily transferred; in 1843, the Jews were expelled from Kiev where they had lived for centuries; as late as 1891, 20,000 Jews from Moscow, where they had been settled since 1865, were forced to give up their homes and livelihood and were deported, many in chains, to the already overcrowded Pale. More particularly after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, a wave of pogroms spread throughout the southwestern regions. The authorities condoned them through their inaction and indifference, sometimes even showing sympathy for the pogromists. With the so-called "Temporary Laws" of May 1882 a new period of anti-Jewish discrimination and severe persecution began. Jews were once more prohibited from living in villages, from buying or renting property outside their prescribed residences, denied jobs in the civil service and forbidden to trade on Sundays and Christian holidays. All hopes the Jews might have had for further improvement of their situation were dashed.

A taste of what a ‘pogrom’ entailed may be gleaned from this partial description of one of the more brutal of them. The “Kishinev pogrom was an anti-Jewish riot that took place in Kishinev, then the capital of the Bessarabian province of the Russian Empire [now Moldova] on April 6-8, 1903. The Kishinev pogrom spanned three days of rioting against the Jews. Forty-seven Jews were killed, 92 severely wounded, 500 slightly wounded and over 700 houses looted and destroyed. No attempt was made by the police or military to intervene to stop the riots until the third day. This non-intervention is an argument in support of the opinion that the pogrom was sponsored or, at least, tolerated by the state.” [Wikipedia]

In the Pale of Settlement, Jews formed approximately one-ninth of the population. As their number increased due to the high birth rate, the confinement to the Pale caused growing poverty. Massive expulsions from the villages and the restrictions on professions and trade increased competition among a growing number of people. At the end of the nineteenth century the Jewish population had become so impoverished that

approximately one-third depended to some degree on Jewish welfare organizations. It is not surprising then that a feeling of despair spread among the Jewish communities.

During the Second World War, the whole area of the former Pale found itself within the furthest extent of Nazi German control on the Eastern front, resulting in many mass killing sites by the so-called Einsatzgruppen in one of the Nazis' largest planned systematic operations of Jewish extermination as part of the "Holocaust". This led to the virtual disappearance of Jewish life in the area of its once greatest concentration. The persecution of Jews within the Pale towards the end of the Second World War can be seen, not as something strange and unique, but as the final exaggerated stages of a process begun well before Hitler even entered onto the stage of history.

Zionism and the 1948 Declaration

Recall then that it is amongst these Jews in particular that Zionist ideology, including the desire to create a political 'homeland' where they would be free of all forms of victimisation, took strongest root; these were Jews who acutely felt they did not 'belong'. It was from here that emigration of Jews began in the 1880s. The sense of longing for something other than their present situation became more strongly felt after the expression of the Zionist ideal by Herzl with the publication of his book, *Der Judenstaat*, in 1896, and the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897. If we look at the emigration of Jews from the Pale from 1880 until 1928 (the first four aliyot), we have some 70,000 to Canada, close to 2,000,000 to the USA, well over 100,000 to parts of South America, 45,000 to South Africa, some 5,000 to Australia, 240,000 to countries in Western Europe, and approx. 45,000 to Palestine. Emigration from the former Pale continued in the 1930s, and after the Second World War.

A further impetus to the whole Zionist programme was provided by sympathetic Christian and Christian Zionist ears in Britain. One such was Arthur Balfour, who fell into line with Jewish Zionist thinking, and openly supported the idea of a Palestinian homeland (or secretly a State) for the Jews; hence the (in)famous Balfour Declaration of 1917. It was these British sympathisers who were mandated control of Palestine after the First World War and until 1948. Major emigration to Palestine and elsewhere had proceeded apace through the 1920s and the 1930s, and again after the War.

And so to the May 1948 unilateral Declaration of the State of Israel, within minutes of the official cessation of the British Mandate, and the planned dispossession of the native Palestinian population. We may remember that in 1947 and the years immediately following, Ben Gurion and the Consultancy "prepared plans for the ethnic cleansing [of Palestinians from their ancestral homeland] and supervised its execution until the job of uprooting half of Palestine's native population had been completed." [I. Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, p. 5]

Eastern European Jewish rule in Israel/Palestine

Now what is the point of all this material so far presented in understanding the situation in what is now called Israel and the illegally Occupied Territories of Palestine known as the West Bank and Gaza? It is simply this: that the Ashkenazi Eastern European Jews, and their descendants, migrants from the Pale, have created a new Pale, an old Pale writ large, but with a change of roles and a change of location. I call the new Pale the Palestine. The new persecutors, the Zionists from the old Pale, are the former victims, and

the new victims are the indigenous people of that part of the former province of the Ottoman Empire mandated to the British after the First World War.

The magnitude of East European immigrant control and influence in Palestine is dramatically illustrated by the fact that every Prime Minister of Israel since the first, David Ben Gurion, is either born in the original territory of the Pale of Settlement, or whose parents, or in one or two cases, earlier relatives, were born in the Pale.

Here is a brief summary of the origin of the PMs of Israel:

David Ben Gurion PM 1948-53; 1955-63. Born in Plonsk, Poland, in 1886, then part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Moshe Sharrett PM 1953-55. Born in Kherson, Ukraine, 1894, then part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Levi Eshkol PM 1963-69. Born near Kiev, Ukraine, in 1895, then part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Golda Meir PM 1969-74. Born in Kiev, Ukraine, in the late nineteenth century, then part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Yitzhak Rabin PM 1974-77; 1992-95. Born in Jerusalem in 1922. His father, born in 1886, was from a small Ukrainian town, then part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement. His mother was born in Mohilev in 1890, in Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Menachem Begin PM 1977-83. Born in 1913 in Brest-Litovsk (now Brest) in Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Yitzhak Shamir PM 1983-84; 1986-92. Born in 1915 in Eastern Poland, presumably in part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Shimon Peres PM 1984-86; 1995-96. Born in 1923 in what is now Vishnevo in Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Benjamin Netanyahu PM 1996-99. Born in Tel Aviv in 1949. Netanyahu's relatives were Jews from Lithuania, which until 1917 was part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Ehud Barak PM 1999-2001. Born in the kibbutz Mishmar Hasharon in 1942. His father was from Lithuania, his mother from Poland.

Ariel Sharon PM 2001-2006. Born in 1928 in Palestine. His father was from Brest-Litovsk (now Brest), his mother from Mohilev, both towns in Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire and within the Pale of Settlement.

Ehud Olmert PM 2006- Born in 1945 in British Mandated Palestine. His parents were from the Ukraine and came to Palestine by way of Harbin, China.

Add to this that of the nine Presidents of Israel, only two do not have either their own or their parental origins from the Pale. The two exceptions are President Yitzhak Navon (1978-83) a Sephardic Jew, born in Jerusalem, whose family had lived in Palestine from the seventeenth century, and Moshe Katsav (2000-07), a Jew of Iranian origin.

Chaim Weizmann Pres. 1949-1952, born in Motol, Belarus, 1874.

Yitzhak Ben-Zvi Pres. 1952-63, born in Poltava, Ukraine in 1884.

Zalman Shazar Pres. 1963-73, born in Mir, Belarus, 1889.

Ephraim Katzur Pres. 1973-78, born in Kiev, Ukraine, 1916.

Chaim Herzog Pres. 1983-93, born in Ireland in 1918. His father, born in 1889, was from Lomza, Poland, just North-East of Warsaw, and within the Pale of Settlement.

Ezer Weizman Pres. 1993-2000, nephew of Chaim Weizmann.

Current President: Shimon Peres.

To these top figures could be added many other influential political and military figures from the time of General Moshe Dayan, whose father came from the Ukraine, to the current Foreign Affairs Minister, the hawkish Tzipi Livni, daughter of Eitan Livni, a Polish-born former Irgun operator, classified by the British as a terrorist for his part in the King David Hotel attack in 1946.

Parallel policies

When one considers in general terms the kind of impositions employed by the Russian authorities, as outlined briefly above, one must be struck by the parallels with the rules, laws and regulations that the Israeli/Zionist government has imposed, through sheer strength of force, upon the Palestinians within the area they currently declare as Israel, and the illegally Occupied Territories.

It is not my purpose here to enter into the details of the forced deportations, the occasional massacres, and all the legal, political and physical barriers imposed on the Palestinians by the Israeli authorities from 1948 onwards. The following selective list is intended to suggest that the policies and practices adopted by the Israelis are Tsarist-type policies writ very large: checkpoints, barrier wall, bypass roads, restrictions on movement, arrests and deportations, targeted assassinations of leaders, house demolitions, land appropriation, economic and diplomatic blockades, aerial bombardments, restriction on water and electricity supplies.

Victim > persecutor

It is very difficult for many of us to grasp how persons and families who have suffered so much in Europe at the hand of various persecutors can themselves turn into persecutors. However, the mental framework of these politicians and policy-makers may be explained as that of an originally persecuted minority who, when in a position of power, replicate in their policies and actions the policies and actions which were imposed upon them (or their forebears) by their original persecutors. It is a classic case, well known in psychology, of the victim become persecutor. There are grounds for considering such mentalities or behaviour patterns as not only learned, but inherited genetically—a kind of cellular ancestral pattern of thought and behaviour. In recognising this Eastern European Zionist control in Israel and the Territories, and the support given them by Zionist Jews with a similar background in other countries, we need to reflect on the psychological phenomenon of “victim become perpetrator”. Such reflection will help us to begin to understand the incomprehensible, the inhuman and the inhumane treatment of the Palestinians. The ‘other’ (the Palestinian) constantly appears to threaten the Zionist sense of security. In fact, in such cases, it is the Zionists’ own inherited Insecurity which is the root cause of their policies. If they were to yield an inch to those whom they see as such a ‘threat’, although they are in fact persecuting the ‘other’ through their own fear, then the very foundation of their existence would appear to be crumbling under them. In all this, there is a peculiar deep down recognition of the fact that the only way to maintain their indefensible position of power is to continue to strafe, bomb, and demolish, in a desperate attempt to legitimate the land they have usurped and plundered, and to eliminate its people by continually persecuting and victimising them by every means conceivable.

In a sense the Zionists in control of the territory they have unilaterally declared as theirs are to be pitied; they are now the victims of a massive ideological lie, which, deep down, they know to be a lie. Hence the repetitive campaign on the dubious theme of ‘recognition’ (whatever that might mean), even to the point now where Israeli foreign Minister Livni is adding the right to declare whatever regions Israel chooses as an “exclusively Jewish State”, thus finally laying the groundwork for a programme of forced transfer of the million or so Arab Christians and Muslims living within Israel.

Moreover, the migrants (and their descendants) of Jews from the Pale to the West were (and still are) often strong Zionists, and are, by and large, strongly supportive of their former countrymen in Israel and their policies. They provide the backbone, or the core, of what is called in each of those countries, the powerful Jewish lobby, incredibly influential groups in the West, especially in the USA where they effectively control Congressional policy on the Middle East. Often they were (and are) at odds with the already Jewish inhabitants of those countries. That, however, is another story.

Interpretations

In the way that the issues pertaining to the Israeli/Palestinian situation have been represented by the Western media, and in many schoolbooks in Israel and the US, and no doubt elsewhere, we are constantly given the false impression that the Jewish people now resident in Israel have been there for eons, as of right, and that it is the Palestinian people, Arab, many of whom are of the Islamic faith, who are the disruptive, dissident and ungrateful intruders, descending to inhuman and inhumane behaviour such as throwing rocks at Israeli tanks and soldiers, launching minor rocket attacks into lands occupied and claimed by Israelis as Israel proper. Some even descend to the tactics of suicide bombing in order to inflict damage on Israeli persons, structures and institutions as a way of vehemently stating their opposition to the Israeli presence in territories that were theirs, and territories that had been theirs for well over a thousand years.

Alternatively, many of the Israelis claiming Jewish heritage are seen initially as the survivors, or descendants of survivors of the “Holocaust”. However, the migration of East European Jews to Palestine, still part of the Ottoman empire, began in the 1880s. We need to be reminded that in 1882, even after the first wave of immigration from the Pale, only 5% of the population of Palestine were professing as Jewish in allegiance.

Nor do the forces leading to the Zionist ideal of a Jewish State in Palestine have anything at all to do with the “Holocaust”. Yet endless tear-jerking novels, documentaries and Hollywood movies have assisted in further constructing and embellishing the “Holocaust” legend and agenda. Put simply, the idea is that the largely Christian West has treated the Jews so badly over the centuries with the “Holocaust” as just the most recent exemplum of that treatment, that the West owes it to them and to their descendants, in perpetuity, as a form of expunging collective guilt, to do everything in its power to assert and support Zionist claims to own, live in and control, in their own right, a land which they claim as theirs because of a 3000 year old myth that is supposed to connect them directly to a Middle Eastern tribe which formed a kingdom there, very briefly, some 3000 years ago. And before that, somehow, to an early tribal god of those people who had that land promised to them and to their descendants in perpetuity. Any hereditary links of the Ashkenazi Jews of the Pale with any mythic, or even real, “Kingdom of Israel” can quite reasonably be said to be nil. How effectively have the

Zionists, from the beginning, used some of the basic myths of Judaism to their own political ends—a perversion ultimately of the religious tradition they hide behind.

The current situation. What way for a just society?

Unfortunately, by every present indication, the policy of removal and ‘cleansing’, initially introduced in the 1920s, and then with quite systematic and unabated ruthlessness since the unilateral declaration of a Jewish State of Israel in 1948, is to be continued until the original and legitimate inhabitants are simply eliminated. Such is the visible “final solution” silently proposed for the Palestinian ‘problem’. And all this continues in defiance of numerous UN resolutions condemning the actions associated with that policy. Just one example of the continuation of that policy is the recent declaration of Gaza as ‘enemy territory’, presumably laying the grounds for a ‘legal’ invasion and take-over.

In view of the history since 1967 at least, the various ‘peace’ plans and road-maps prove to have been nothing more than a series of delaying tactics, smoke-screens, planned quite deliberately to convince the international community and a mostly gullible Western media of the “good intentions” of both Israel and the US. In fact, we may trace the subterfuge, lies, deceit, cover-ups, delays and lip-service from the Zionists and their Western promoters and supporters (including currently Australia—to our shame) as far back as the infamous Balfour Declaration of 1917. Eighty shameful years from Balfour until the sham of Annapolis. And the pretence that the USA or Britain, largely responsible in their own ways for the mess that is Palestine/Israel over the last 100 years, can act as any kind of go-between must be regarded on face value as derisible

The whole idea of a Zionist/Jewish State was a predictable (and predicted) absurdity, a disaster in motion, from the very beginning. The twentieth-century East European invasion of Palestine represents an extremely ugly form of post-colonial colonialism. Until Israel as a Jewish State as such, and under Ashkenazi Zionist control, is dismantled, there is no possibility of an even remotely just society being formed in Palestine.

Now is the time to recognise and proclaim once again the disaster that Eretz Israel always would be — and now is the time for every patient step to be taken to dismantle that State, as it is now constituted, and the ideology behind it, step by careful step, with every ounce of energy at the disposal of people of good will, and with every practical effort to be made to that end by the international community.

Major sources:

Wikipedia.

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January, 2008.