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SETTLER COLONIAL HUMANITARIANISM

A Genealogy of the Settler Subject in Palestine/Israel

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Abstract

This thesis reorients settler colonial studies towards an understanding of humanitarianism's role in the constitution of the settler subject. Grounded in the case of Palestine/Israel, the settler colonial modality of humanitarianism that I illustrate is two-fold: enabling the continuous establishment of the settler society; and providing a tool for the dispossession of Palestinians. To substantiate these central claims, I draw from a genealogical methodology that reconstructs the changing patterns and spaces in which humanitarianism came to shape the settler subject, tracing its appearance and evolution to present day. To trace this genealogy linking different historical moments to the present, I relied on research in multiple archives and over 60 interviews conducted primarily during fieldwork in Palestine/Israel.

The global history of humanitarianism in colonial and settler colonial contexts tells us a story in which it is usually the native subject the recipient of humanitarian aid and sentiment. But archival research on the relief work of the Zionist Commission (1918-1921), which targeted settlers in need of aid to rebuild damaged colonies, reveals a distinct form of settler colonial humanitarianism which breaks from that historical pattern. After the First World War, humanitarian relief transformed into an instrument of settler sovereignty formation within the bounds of British imperial rule. Meanwhile, in revisiting the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe), I argue that the 1923 precedent on Greek-Turkish 'population exchanges' influenced how the expulsion of Palestinians

was framed as a 'humanitarian' population transfer. This moment opens an avenue for understanding humanitarianism's function in the dispossession of Palestinians. Yet, at this historical juncture, for the Israeli statehood project to succeed the mass depopulation of Palestinians that took place in 1948 had to be coupled with populating the conquered land with settlers. Here I argue that the 'humanitarianisation' of the Jewish immigration process facilitated the creation of the Israeli settler state.

Drawing from an ethnographic approach and interviews with Israeli settlers, Israeli military officials, and staff of international humanitarian organisations, I explore the contemporary manifestations of the settler subject through two different processes. First, I examine a recent form of humanitarian governance adopted by the Israeli military which serves to buttress the control, counterinsurgency strategies, and ultimately dispossession of Palestinians. Second, a close appraisal of Israeli settlers evacuated from Gaza in 2005 reveals the multiple ways in which a settler colonial form of humanitarianism emerged. Israeli settlers began mobilising the figure of the refugee and the mental health discourse of trauma to disavow the process of de-settlement from Palestinian land. Through a reconstruction of the historical and contemporary contours of Israeli settler colonialism, this genealogical investigation thus shows how humanitarianism generates an eliminationist settler subjectivity that heralds the removal and replacement of Palestinians.

Lay Summary

Humanitarianism is often thought of as an uncontroversial and moral practice in the service of disenfranchised and suffering others, usually of a different nationality. But can it be mobilised to advance an unjust political project of displacement, dispossession and elimination? This thesis foregrounds the history of humanitarianism in the making of the Israeli state; a state founded on the mass expulsion and violent domination of the Palestinian people. Grounded in the case of Palestine/Israel, I bridge critical humanitarian studies and the field on comparative settler colonialism, which are often treated in separation. The thesis combines archival with ethnographic methods to study the emergence of different settler subjects, from the period of British rule (1917-1948) to contemporary times, in their practices of achieving control of the land and subjugating Palestinians. I then analyse the findings through a genealogical methodology, which identifies a present that seems unproblematic and seeks to trace the history of how that present came to be.

The global history of humanitarianism tells us a story in which it is usually the colonised native subject the recipient of humanitarian assistance. But my archival research on the relief work of the British-mandated Zionist Commission (1918-1921), reveals a distinct form of humanitarianism which breaks from that historical pattern. In Mandatory Palestine, humanitarian relief directed at the suffering Jewish population transformed into an instrument of political sovereignty formation within the bounds of British imperial rule. Rather than saving 'distant strangers', humanitarian relief was targeted to communities claimed as one's own. In another crucial historical juncture

for the Israeli statehood project, the mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948 was coupled with populating the newly available territory with Jewish immigrants. On the one hand, the seemingly distant 1923 international legal precedent on Greek-Turkish 'population exchanges'—which sanctioned population transfer and the resettlement of minorities—had in fact come to inspire the Zionist movement to frame the expulsion of Palestinians as a 'humanitarian' practice, because ostensibly resettling in neighbouring countries would benefit them and avoid future conflict. On the other hand, the thesis examines how the humanitarianism emanating from international institutions such as the International Refugee Organisation, as well as the post-war human rights regime, enabled Jewish immigration and the creation of Israeli statehood on dispossessed Palestinian land.

I then combine archival research with an ethnography conducted during five months of fieldwork in 2022 in Palestine/Israel. The ethnography was primarily based on over 60 interviews with former Israeli military officials, Israeli settlers, and staff of humanitarian and development NGOs. One case study deals with Israel's military-civilian administration in the 1967 occupied territories wielding governmental power over Palestinians through projects of humanitarian aid, while the other case examines how the evacuation of 8,000 Israeli settlers from Gaza in 2005 was experienced as a traumatic event that demands humanitarian concern and a disavowal of withdrawing from Palestinian territory. This genealogical study therefore demonstrates how the long history of humanitarianism can come to shape Israeli settler subjectivities in strategies to remove the Palestinian people and replace them as the rightful owners of the land.

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Introduction

Research questions

It is difficult to write about Palestine and Israel in 2024 without starting the horrors that have unfolded in Gaza. The Hamas-led attack launched on October 7, 2023, that resulted in the killing of approximately 1,200 people inside Israel, and captured over 240 hostages, has brought about an Israeli genocidal war on Palestinians in Gaza of unprecedented proportions. The scope, scale and speed of Israel's bombing campaign was unseen since the Second World War.¹ In less than a month Israel dropped more than 25,000 tons of explosives on the Gaza Strip, equivalent to two nuclear bombs.² And by January 2024, Israel's aerial attacks had damaged or destroyed at least half of Gaza's buildings.³ More than a year into Israel's military campaign, the Palestinian death toll has surpassed 43,000, another 10,000 people are presumed dead under the rubble, over two thirds of Gaza's 2.3 million population is displaced, and Palestinians are facing one of the most intense starvation crises in recent history.⁴ Against this backdrop of death, starvation and displacement in the ruins of Gaza, the charge that what Israel has committed amounts to genocide is becoming globally recognised.

¹ Lisa Hajjar, 'Gaza Is a Crime Scene', *Middle East Report* 309 (Winter 2023).

² Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 'Israel hits Gaza Strip with the equivalent of two nuclear bombs' (2023) available at <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5908/Israel-hits-Gaza-Strip-with-the-equivalent-of-two-nuclear-bombs#:~:text=Geneva%20%2D%20Israel%20has%20dropped%20more,a%20press%20release%20issued%20today> (accessed 29 Nov. 2023).

³ 'At least half of Gaza's buildings damaged or destroyed, new analysis shows', *BBC* (30 January 2024) Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68006607> (accessed 17 April 2024).

⁴ Alex de Waal, 'We are about to witness in Gaza the most intense famine since the second world war', *The Guardian* (21 Mar 2024) available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/21/we-are-about-to-witness-the-most-intense-famine-since-world-war-ii-in-gaza> (accessed 17 April 2024).

As the different stages of Israel's genocidal military campaign against Palestinians advanced, it became increasingly clear that Israel was mobilising a particularly unusual form of humanitarianism. 'Humanitarian zones', 'humanitarian corridors', and 'humanitarian solution' are all framings that have come directly from the Israeli government and military not to primarily ensure the protection of civilians but, arguably, to justify and enable forms of genocidal violence. The Israeli military has declared 'humanitarian zones' multiple areas in the south of Gaza—e.g. al-Mawasi, Rafah and Khan Younis—where Palestinians from the north should evacuate to avoid being targeted by Israel's bombing campaigns. Under the framework of international humanitarian law (IHL), 'safe zones' are considered areas where civilians can escape from the fighting and should find adequate living conditions.⁵ But Palestinians evacuated to these areas have found uninhabitable conditions, lacking adequate access to food, water, electricity, shelter and healthcare. Israel has also repeatedly conducted aerial attacks and killed Palestinians in these 'safe zones'. Rather than a preventative measure to safeguard civilian lives during warfare, the Israeli-designated 'humanitarian zones' have served to constitute genocidal violence and the expulsion of Palestinians from the north to the south of Gaza.⁶ The UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese, used the notion of 'humanitarian camouflage' to denote Israel's deliberate distortion of IHL protective measures to conceal genocidal intent.⁷

⁵ Emanuela-Chiara Gillard '“Safe areas”: The international legal framework', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 99 (3) (2017), 1075–1101.

⁶ Forensic Architecture, 'Humanitarian Violence: Israel's Abuse of Preventative Measures in its 2023-2024 Genocidal Military Campaign in the Occupied Gaza Strip', (2024).

⁷ Francesca Albanese, 'Anatomy of a Genocide: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967,' 25 March 2024, 20.

In the concluding chapter I will return to unpack and discuss more in depth the framings that Israel has called ‘humanitarian initiatives’ to defend itself against the charge of the crime of genocide brought forward by South Africa in December 2023 at the International Court of Justice.⁸ But for now, it is important consider the ease with which these framings are used. What explains this propensity to use humanitarian language? And why is humanitarianism so easily amenable to a genocidal agenda? It is common for the armies of liberal states to frame the conduct of their military campaigns as abiding to IHL. Yet, it seems evident that the Israeli military’s interpretation of the humanitarian norms of the laws of war does not closely correspond to some of its established understandings. While the scale of the violence Israel meted out to Palestinians in 2023/24 may be unprecedented, this interpretation of humanitarianism, by using its language and strategies, is not entirely unparalleled. This study will deal with some of the historical roots that can explain how the Israeli military and government have come to justify and enact techniques of population concentration and expulsion within the political paradigm of humanitarianism.

The recent intensified resurgence of humanitarian discourse to seemingly structure the conduct of Israel’s genocide in Gaza brings to the fore the central concern of this thesis: an examination of the historical and contemporary relationship between humanitarianism and settler colonialism through the case of Palestine/Israel. The concept of settler colonialism has been applied to a vast array of cases of European conquest in Africa, Asia, North America, and Oceania (e.g. South Africa, Algeria, Libya, Hawai’i, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). Palestinian scholars have specifically sought to define Zionism—an ideology and political movement that

⁸ ‘Observations of the State of Israel on South Africa’s Request for the indication of provisional measures and modification of the Court’s prior provisional measures decisions’ (15 March 2024).

emerged to find a solution to the history of antisemitism experienced by Jews through the creation of a new Jewish state—as a European settler colonial project which, in their words, ‘subjects Palestine and Palestinians to structural and violent forms of dispossession, land appropriation, and erasure in the pursuit of a new Jewish state and society.’⁹ This definition emphasises two core features undergirding settler colonisation: a dialectic between dispossessing natives and the building of a sovereign settler state.

Mainstream understandings of humanitarianism would seem to fit uneasily within such a definition. Humanitarianism in its broader sense is a set of principles and procedures concerned with the life, welfare, and the prosperity of individuals.¹⁰ At first glance, it appears to be diametrically opposed to the violence and subjugation informing settler colonialism. Humanitarian ethics of intervention establish it as a just and moral response to care for distant others in the name of humanity.¹¹ But is humanitarianism oppositional to the settler colonial logic of native elimination? More precisely, my work engages with a key theoretical and political conundrum: how has humanitarianism come to enable a settler colonial enterprise in Palestine/Israel?

The thesis will demonstrate that there is a long history of humanitarianism within the Zionist project that demands interrogation as a process inherent to the century-long settler colonial dispossession of Palestine. Humanitarian discourses and practices can become entangled in the twofold process of dispossessing natives and building a sovereign settler state. This thesis explores some of the critical historical

⁹ Omar Jabary Salamanca et al, ‘Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine’, *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2(11) (2012), 1.

¹⁰ Didier Fassin, [Rachel Gomme translation] *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2012).

¹¹ See, for example, Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

junctions that illustrate how humanitarianism has come to constitute two key dimensions at the heart of settler colonialism. This introductory chapter proceeds as follows. First it puts into dialogue academic literatures on settler colonial and critical humanitarian studies, which are often treated as separate fields of inquiry, and outlines the contributions of each empirical chapter. After the literature review, which is composed of three sections, I illustrate the main concepts that structure the thesis' theoretical frame. The subsequent section discusses the genealogical methodology and the multiple methods adopted, which include archival research and fieldwork interviews.

An alternative history of humanitarianism

This study contributes to academic literatures on humanitarianism and the comparative field of settler colonial studies. As both the fields of humanitarianism and comparative settler colonialism do not neatly fit within one disciplinary boundary, this investigation required an interdisciplinary approach, broadly drawing from global history, international relations and anthropology. Since the end of the Cold War era in the 1990s there has been a resurgence of interest in humanitarianism in international politics,¹² with scholars shedding light on a specific form of humanitarian governmentality.¹³ In recent years, there has also been significant attention devoted

¹² See, for example, Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds), *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (London: Cornell University Press, 2008); Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*. (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

¹³ Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*; Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin (eds), *In the Name of Humanity, The Government of Threat and Care*, (Durham: Duke University Press 2010).

to the turn to history in the study of humanitarianism.¹⁴ There is a tendency in the literature to trace the origins of contemporary Western humanitarianism starting from the eighteenth and nineteenth century to the anti-slavery abolitionist movements and to the emergence of the laws of war regulating the conduct of militaries on the European battlefield.¹⁵ Histories of humanitarianism, and debates in the fields of international relations and anthropology, often follow these trajectories of a 'conventional narrative' assigned to the contemporary humanitarian movement.¹⁶ This narrative poses that the imperative of current organisations working, for instance, to eradicate poverty in faraway places is traceable to the humanitarian campaigns in the metropole to ameliorate the worst excesses of European colonial expansion. Meanwhile, the current humanitarian ethos to restrain warfare across the globe is rooted in the story of the Swiss businessman Henri Dunant and his inspiring the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the emergence of international law.

But there is another approach, which pays closer attention to humanitarians' role in advancing imperialism, colonialism, and warfare. After all, it is often forgotten that Dunant was himself a coloniser.¹⁷ In fact, he was travelling through the warzone of Solferino while on a business trip to solicit Napoleon III's support for his investments in the French colonisation of Algeria.¹⁸ Little known is that Dunant also supported the

¹⁴ For an overview see, Matthew Hilton, et al, 'History and Humanitarianism: A Conversation', *Past & Present*, Volume 241, Issue 1, (2018), e1–e38.

¹⁵ Michael Barnett *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Iain Wilkinson, 'The problem of understanding modern humanitarianism and its sociological value.' *International Social Science Journal*, 65: 215-216 (2014), 65–78.

¹⁷ Frederic Mégret, 'From "savages" to "unlawful combatants": A postcolonial look at international humanitarian law's "other,"' in Anne Orford ed, *International Law and its Others* (265-317), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 273.

¹⁸ Vasuki Nesiah 'Human Shields/Human Crosshairs: Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Wars', *AJIL Unbound*, 110 (2016), 324.

creation of a settler colony in Ottoman Palestine. In a short biography of Dunant published in 1974 in the *International Review of the Red Cross*, Pierre Boissier, an ICRC official and historian, praises Dunant's 'prophetic intelligence' for suggesting 'the re-settlement of Palestine by the Jewish people,' decades before the first Zionist colonies were established in 1882.¹⁹ Boissier was referring to what Dunant wrote in a pamphlet published in 1866, titled *Universal International Society for the Renovation of the Orient*, where he advocated for the creation in Ottoman Palestine of a 'neutral' colony populated by European Jewish settlers.²⁰ Dunant's plans gained little traction at the time and failed to materialise; however, it was appreciated by the founders of political Zionism, who recognised his 'pioneering' efforts as a 'Christian Zionist.'²¹

In locating the historical development of the concept of humanity as a collective subject, Talal Asad persuasively argued that it 'was born and nurtured in the crucible of early modern conquest and settler colonialism.'²² What Asad points to, among other things, is that the political genealogy of humanitarianism and that of settler colonialism are profoundly intertwined. This is central for Asad because 'it is in the name of humanity that the modern project of humanitarianism intervenes in the lives of other beings to protect, help, or improve them.'²³ Moreover, Alan Lester and Fae Dussart have reasoned that we must reconsider understandings of the development of humanitarianism as originating from an 'anti-slavery mother' and 'European battlefield father,' especially in 'light of trans-imperial governmental experiments in violently

¹⁹ Pierre Boissier, 'Henry Dunant,' *International Review of the Red Cross*, 161 (1974), 416.

²⁰ Ellen Hart, *Man born to live: life and work of Henry Dunant founder of the Red Cross* (London: Gollancz, 1953).

²¹ Philip Earl Steele, 'Henry Dunant: Christian Activist, Humanitarian Visionary, and Zionist,' *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 12:1 (2018), 81–96.

²² Talal Asad, 'Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism,' *Critical Inquiry*, 41:2, (2015), 398.

²³ *Ibid.*

colonised settler colonial spaces.²⁴ In this regard, there is a growing scholarship at the intersection of nineteenth-century imperialism and the history of humanitarianism.²⁵

Despite this growing literature, even within the more critical approaches the case of Palestine in general, and the relief work of the Zionist Commission (1918-1921) in particular, remain overlooked. Some major historical studies on humanitarianism during the Great War have paid no attention to Palestine.²⁶ Meanwhile, historian Davide Rodogno focuses on the case British-ruled Palestine, but has not dealt in depth with the relief work of the Zionist Commission, which became the first settler governmental body under British military occupation (Chapter 1).²⁷ Not only has the history of humanitarianism in Palestine received relatively little attention, but it presents a crucial case for better appreciating a less observed aspect of settler colonialism. The early period of British rule in Palestine reveals some unexplored understandings of the relationship between humanitarianism and settler colonialism: that humanitarian aid helped constitute settler structures of government.

Some histories of humanitarianism have focused on the American humanitarian efforts to support Jewish colonists during the First World War.²⁸ Though, these works

²⁴ Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

²⁵ Penelope Edmonds and Anna Johnston, 'Empire, Humanitarianism and Violence in the Colonies', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 17:1 (2016); Amalia Ribi Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880-1940*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Michelle Tusan, *Smyrna's Ashes: Humanitarianism, Genocide, and the Birth of the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

²⁶ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014); Elisabeth Piller and Neville Wylie (eds) *Humanitarianism and the Greater War, 1914-24*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2023).

²⁷ Davide Rodogno, *Night on Earth A History of International Humanitarianism in the Near East, 1918–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021).

²⁸ Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Jaclyn Granick, *International*

do not engage with the settler colonial frame of analysis. Besides, in the literature on colonial humanitarianism, it was imperial administrations who often voiced the duty to ‘protect’ native populations until they could be ushered to acquire their own national sovereignties.²⁹ And in studies that attend to the function of humanitarianism in settler colonies, above all it is the native—not the settler—the recipient of humanitarian aid and sentiment.³⁰ What distinguishes the settler humanitarianism examined in Chapter 1 from other kinds of colonial humanitarianism is that the relief work of the Zionist Commission was primarily targeted at the settler population, or at those local Jewish communities already inhabiting Ottoman Palestine that the Commission wished to absorb into the settler constituency. This framing of humanitarian relief to the settler subject—examined also in relation to Jewish immigration (Chapter 3) and settler evacuations from Gaza in 2005 (Chapter 5)—contrasts with much of the history of colonial humanitarianism and its focus on intervening to aid the native population. In those chapters, a key settler colonial modality of humanitarianism is that it enables establishing the settler society.

Settler colonial humanitarianism: displacement and replacement

While there have been ways in which humanitarianism was deployed in the service of anti-colonial struggle, liberation and revolution, this thesis specifically focuses on its

Jewish humanitarianism in the age of the Great War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

²⁹ On colonial humanitarianism see for example, Silvia Salvatici, *A History of Humanitarianism, 1755-1989: In the Name of Others*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), Chapter 2.

³⁰ Lester and Dussart, *Colonization*; Krista Maxwell, ‘Settler-Humanitarianism: Healing the Indigenous Child-Victim,’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 59:04 (2017), 974–1007; Rebecca Swartz, *Education and empire: Children, race and humanitarianism in the British settler colonies, 1833–1880* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

entanglement with the conduct of settler colonialist practices.³¹ In the Palestine context, studies adopting a settler colonial lens first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s.³² This theoretical lens then re-emerged most prominently at the turn of the millennium.³³ I suggest that there is a distinct 'settler colonial humanitarianism' within the Zionist movement, and later the Israeli state, that has not been yet fully explored in the literature on settler colonialism. Among the first strand of settler colonial studies, the works of Fayez Sayegh, Edward Said, and Maxime Rodinson offer some openings to appraise how the Zionist movement operated through humanitarian frames. Throughout the *Question of Palestine*, Said reiterates the central problematic in the composition of Zionist ideology. Said described this problematic as 'the extraordinary unevenness in Zionism between care for the Jews and an almost total disregard for the non-Jews or native Arab population in conceptual terms.'³⁴ He rephrased this point as the basic dichotomy in Zionism which produces 'benevolence towards Jews and an essential but paternalistic hostility towards Arabs.'³⁵ Said's theoretical

³¹ Ilana Feldman, 'Humanitarianism and Revolution: Samed, the Palestine Red Crescent Society and the Work of Liberation', in *Humanitarianism and Media 1900 to the Present*, Johannes Paulmann (ed), (New York: Berghahn Books 2018); Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2016).

³² See, for instance, Fayez Sayegh, 'Zionist Colonialism in Palestine (1965)', *Settler Colonial Studies*, (2012) 2:1, 206–225; George Jabbour *Settler Colonialism in Southern Africa and the Middle East*, (Beirut: Palestine Liberation Organization Research Center 1970); Jamil Hilal, 'Imperialism and Settler Colonialism in West Asia: Israel and the Arab Palestinian Struggle,' *Utafiti: Journal of Arts & Social Studies & Social Sciences*, 1, no. 1 (1976), 51–69.

³³ Omar Jabary Salamanca et al, 'Past is Present'; Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, (London: Verso 2016); Tariq Dana and Ali Jarbawi 'A Century of Settler Colonialism in Palestine: Zionism's Entangled Project', *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 24: 1 (2017), 197–220; Yara Hawari, Sharri Plonski, and Eilan Weizman, 'Seeing Israel through Palestine: knowledge production as anti-colonial praxis' *Settler Colonial Studies*, 9 (1) (2018), 155–75; Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, 'Tracing Settler Colonialism: A Genealogy of a Paradigm in the Sociology of Knowledge Production in Israel,' *Politics & Society*, 50(1), (2022), 44–83.

³⁴ Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, (New York: Vintage Books 1979), 83.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 110.

conceptualisations are helpful to situate the relationship between Zionism and the politics of settler care.

While discussing the first wave of settlers arriving after 1882 in Ottoman Palestine, Fayeze Sayegh noted that 'Zionists were coming in relatively small numbers and emphasising the religious or humanitarian motives of their enterprise, while concealing the political, ideological, and colonial-racist character of their movement.'³⁶ Sayegh was suggesting that already at the end of the nineteenth century, settler colonisation was constituted through a humanitarianism which concealed its colonial-racist character. In his *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*, Rodinson pointed out that in the 1930s members of Labor Zionism were claiming to advance a socialist project and appealed directly to humanitarian sensibilities to defend their political movement. For Rodinson, the proponents of this Jewish nationalist 'socialism' thought that a 'renewal' of the Jewish community in Palestine would be beneficial for the indigenous residents.³⁷ This rhetoric fitted a general assumption of the time where colonialism was perceived as humanitarian in that it would 'improve' the conditions of indigenous subjects.³⁸ While Sayegh recognised that Zionists thought about their colonial project as humanitarian for settlers, Rodinson identified that it could be conceived as humanitarian for natives.

It might seem counterintuitive to claim that humanitarianism—generally understood as the alleviating of suffering and improving the human welfare of others—could be settler colonial, which often entails mass dispossession of land and the elimination of colonised peoples. But this is precisely how Zionist settlers thought

³⁶ Fayeze Sayegh, 'Zionist Colonialism in Palestine (1965)', *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2:1 (2012), 221.

³⁷ Maxime Rodinson *Israel: A Colonial -Settler State?* (Monad Press, 1973).

³⁸ Craig Calhoun 'The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order' in Didier Fassin, and Mariella Pandolfi, (eds) *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, (Brooklyn NY: Zed Books 2010), 37.

about an array of practices, and Chapter 2 focuses on a practice that was the most consequential in the modern history of Palestine: the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948, what is known in Arabic as the Nakba (catastrophe). Chapter 2 will show that the influences of the global order on strategies of Palestinian dispossession have remained largely unacknowledged in the historiography on the 1948 Palestine War. It was the international relations practice of ‘population exchanges’ that afforded a humanitarian operational logic to structure the mass expulsion of Palestinians in the name of creating a racially homogenous nation-state. The 1923 ‘population exchange’ between Greece and Turkey—the forced expulsions of around 1.5 million people, Orthodox Christians Turkey from and Muslims from Greece—became an international legal precedent used to justify the forcible transfer of unwanted minorities. Historian Rashid Khalidi has briefly acknowledged that the concept of ‘transfer’ used by the Zionist movement to plan for the expulsion of Palestinians was rooted in the Greek-Turkish precedent. As he states, ‘the concept derived in part from the transfers of Greeks to Greece and Turks to Turkey in the wake of the Turkish-Greek war that followed World War I’.³⁹

Yet, to understand how this came to be, we need to look closer at the new international context in Europe and the new urgencies of nation-state formation. By the interwar period, ‘population exchanges’ had become an established practice of international relations that moved away from the principle of protecting minorities on the land where they resided. For one historian, ‘a new practice was introduced into European diplomacy and population politics: a population exchange as agreed between erstwhile combatants with the aim of creating ethnically homogeneous

³⁹ Rashid Khalidi, *Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 259.

territory.⁴⁰ This new population politics did not, however, remain in the confines of Europe. Along with overseeing minority protection in Europe's nation-states, the League of Nations, which had sanctioned the Greek-Turkish exchange, began administering the international structure of the mandate system in the Middle East. Historian Laura Robson has examined how the League and the British and French mandate governments proposed a 'number of schemes for ethnically based population exchange and transfer in the interwar Middle East,' which by the 1930s had become 'a space for a massive experiment in demographic engineering'.⁴¹

In the imperial context of Mandatory Palestine, the 1937 inquiry commission headed by Lord William Peel drew on the Greek-Turkish population exchange precedent to recommend partition and the transfer of Palestinians. The Peel Commission regarded transferring Palestinians, and creating a Jewish majority state, a viable solution to a conflict it viewed primarily through the prism of two competing nationalisms and two populations, Arabs and Jews, racially construed as irreconcilable. Chapter 2 illustrates how Zionist leaders drew from Peel's suggestion and began proposing what were in fact plans for indigenous dispossession but under a humanitarian agenda of resettlement. This enabled conceiving of ethnic cleansing not merely in terms of necessity, to create a state, but also in humanitarian terms because ostensibly resettlement in neighbouring Arab lands would benefit Palestinians.⁴²

⁴⁰ Donald Bloxham, 'The Great Unweaving: The Removal of Peoples in Europe, 1875-1949' in Richard Bessel and Claudia B. Haake (eds) *Removing Peoples. Forced Removal in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 181.

⁴¹ Laura Robson, *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press 2017) 4 and 6.

⁴² Catriona Drew, 'Remembering 1948: Who's Afraid of International Law in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?' In: Gaita, Raimond and Simpson, Gerry, (eds.), *Who's Afraid of International Law?* (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2017) 103–134.

For the Israeli statehood project to succeed, however, the mass depopulation of indigenous Palestinians that took place in 1947-1949 had to be coupled with populating the land with Jewish settlers. Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine was a principal means through which advance the settler colonisation process. In the 1920s, the question of Jewish immigration to Palestine rapidly turned into a site of conflict and contestation between Zionists and Palestinians, culminating in the 1936 Great Revolt. The Zionist movement could benefit from the British Mandate's regulations—specifically Article 6—to claim that Jewish immigration was a legitimate and legal right to fulfil their national aspirations.⁴³ Yet, the international context in Europe, with the rise of antisemitism and the Nazi genocidal plan to exterminate Jews, introduced another form of justification for immigration based on humanitarian sympathy.

Chapter 3 sketches some of the contributions made by international humanitarianism during the interwar and post-war era to the establishment of a Jewish majority settler state. The function of humanitarianism in facilitating settlers to populate Palestine has received limited attention in the literature. The Second World War has been appraised as a key moment in the development of international humanitarianism.⁴⁴ Most distinctive about this moment is a new form of humanitarianism that comes into the frame.⁴⁵ Specifically Jewish suffering became the central concern of an emergent post-war humanitarianism. But the effect of this humanitarianism on the process of Zionist settlement has not been extensively examined. International institutions, such as League of Nations' Permanent Mandates

⁴³ Natasha Wheatley, 'Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations', *Past & Present*, 227 (1), (2015), 205–248.

⁴⁴ Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*.

⁴⁵ Lori Allen, *A History of False Hope*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2020), 103.

Commission, were sites in which sympathy for a suffering subject characteristic of twentieth century humanitarianism aided the Jewish immigration effort to Palestine. This was possible because of the conflation of settler immigration as merely a form of seeking refuge, which humanitarianism compounded. This chapter critiques the approaches of historians of the International Refugee Organisation, which facilitated the immigration of Jewish refugees, who downplay the role of settler colonialism in the creation of Israeli statehood and hold on to a redeemable 'rescue phase' of Zionism.⁴⁶

At this historical juncture, it is also productive to observe the interaction of humanitarianism with a cognate concept, human rights. Humanitarianism and human rights are commonly described as arising together in the late eighteenth century and equally rooted in the category of 'humanity'.⁴⁷ They are respectively expressions of different meanings of humanity, which can at times overlap. There is a debate in the literature, however, on when and how the two cross paths. On one hand Michael Barnett suggests that it is only after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s that humanitarianism and human rights end their parallel trajectories and begin attending to some of the same causes and suffering populations.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Samuel Moyn argues that it is on the heels of decolonisation struggles in the 1970s that humanitarianism and human rights became 'fused enterprises, with the former incorporating the latter and the latter justified in terms of the former'.⁴⁹ I join Moyn in examining how human rights were justified in the name of humanitarianism, yet build on scholars who have pointed to this process already taking place in the 1940s.

⁴⁶ Gerard D. Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

⁴⁷ Michael Barnett, 'Human rights, humanitarianism, and the practices of humanity' *International Theory* 10:3 (2018), 314–349.

⁴⁸ Barnett, 'Human rights', 327

⁴⁹ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia. Human Rights in History*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2010), 221.

Specifically after the Holocaust, the West viewed the creation of Israeli statehood as a ‘humanitarian reparation’ for the human rights violations perpetrated against European Jewry by the genocidal project of Nazi Germany.⁵⁰

At the same time, as Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin explain, the domain of human rights and humanitarianism is ‘marked by an internal tension between rights and needs, between legal forms and ethical practices’.⁵¹ Chapter 3 also briefly explores how the tension between humanitarianism and human rights materialised in the intellectual thought of jurist René Cassin, a key drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), who applied unevenly the two formations. The chapter critiques the way Cassin mobilised the new post-Second World War human rights regime to advocate for Jewish settlement in Palestine, and only afforded Palestinian refugees displaced during the Nakba humanitarian concern and rights grounded in the laws of war.⁵²

The 1967 moment

The 1967 Israeli invasion and occupation of the remaining parts of historical Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank) had brought back the problem of an unwanted native population that could threaten the settler colonial project—predicated on a Jewish majority nation-state. When the Six-Day War came to an end, the Israeli government installed army general and former chief of military intelligence Shlomo Gazit as chair of the Committee for Coordination of Activities in the Occupied Territories—which was

⁵⁰ Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon, *The Human Right to Dominate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 30–31.

⁵¹ Feldman and Ticktin, *In the Name of Humanity*, 3.

⁵² Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *René Cassin and Human Rights From the Great War to the Universal Declaration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013).

later renamed Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT). This new military branch of government was created to manage the mass Palestinian population residing in the territories just conquered. Illustrating a particular mindset of Israeli rule, general Gazit would write in his memoir that after the military occupation, 'Israel recognized the humanitarian aspect of the Palestinian problem: it assumed rule over a large Arab population and sought to treat them in the most benevolent way possible.'⁵³

The emergence of a hybrid military-civilian branch called COGAT has since 1967 acted as the colonial government of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Chapter 4 focuses on the multiple ways in which COGAT instrumentalised humanitarianism to advance settler colonial policies vis-à-vis Palestinians. While tracing the three key historical phases in the evolution of COGAT (1967–1981, 1981–1993, 1993–present), the chapter focuses on the post-Oslo Accords era. Recent studies on the Israeli military have investigated the legitimating role of international law and of war lawyers, as well as the function of ethics as a productive force enabling militarism.⁵⁴ Focusing on the post-Oslo period, several scholars have sought to shed light on how humanitarianism can become a tool in the hands of the Israeli occupation. Some of their main arguments include: that transforming the political situation into a 'humanitarian problem' can frustrate and obfuscate Palestinian aspirations;⁵⁵ humanitarianism provides Israel a 'surface' to enact its violent regimes of

⁵³ Shlomo Gazit, *Trapped Fools: Thirty Years of Israeli Policy in the Territories*, (Taylor & Francis 2003).

⁵⁴ Craig Jones, *The War Lawyers: The United States, Israel, and Juridical Warfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020); James Eastwood, *Ethics as a Weapon of War: Militarism and Morality in Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017).

⁵⁵ Ilana Feldman, 'Gaza's Humanitarianism Problem', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2009), 22–37.

securitisation;⁵⁶ Israel's counterinsurgency tactics entail the humanitarian management of the Palestinian body;⁵⁷ international aid is not a direct challenge to Gaza's siege but part of its functioning mechanism;⁵⁸ Israel's approach in Gaza is to produce a 'suspended catastrophe' where aid keeps the population away from total collapse but always on the brink of a looming disaster;⁵⁹ and that facilitating international food aid is part of the plan to isolate a surplus Gazan population largely unwanted in the Israeli labour market.⁶⁰

Relatedly, a study on West Bank checkpoints showed that Israeli authorities used the creation of a 'humanitarian lane' specifically for women and children to suggest that the checkpoint system had become more humane.⁶¹ Furthermore, Israeli military officials responsible for building the separation wall in 2002 have argued that because the total number of checkpoints was reduced, in their words, this 'goes to demonstrate Israel's improved humanitarian attitude toward Palestinians.'⁶² The shift to automation in the checkpoint system and relying heavily on digital technology has also been described as part of Israel's tactic to humanise and 'civilianise' its treatment

⁵⁶ Hagar Kotef, 'Objects of Security: Gendered Violence and Securitized Humanitarianism in Occupied Gaza', *Comparative Studies of South Asia Africa and the Middle East*, (30) 2 (2010), 179–191.

⁵⁷ Lisa Bhungalia, 'A liminal territory: Gaza, executive discretion, and sanctions turned humanitarian', *GeoJournal*, 75(2010), 347–357; Lisa Bhungalia, *Elastic Empire Refashioning War through Aid in Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2023).

⁵⁸ Yives Winter, 'The Siege of Gaza: Spatial Violence, Humanitarian Strategies, and the Biopolitics of Punishment', *Constellations*, 23(2) (2015), 308–319.

⁵⁹ Adi Ophir, 'The Politics of Catastrophization: Emergency and Exception,' in Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (eds) (2010), *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, (New York: Zone Books).

⁶⁰ Ron Smith, 'Isolation Through Humanitarianism: Subaltern Geopolitics of the Siege on Gaza' *Antipode*, 48(3) (2016), 750–769.

⁶¹ Hagar Kotef and Merav Amir, '(En)Gendering Checkpoints: Checkpoint Watch and the Repercussions of Intervention', *Signs*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2007), 973–996.

⁶² Irus Braverman, 'Checkpoint Watch: Bureaucracy and Resistance at the Israeli/ Palestinian Border,' *Social & Legal Studies* 21(3) (2012), 303.

of Palestinians.⁶³ Most prominently among this literature, in what Eyal Weizman called the ‘humanitarian present,’ he theorised how humanitarian practices and the deployment of international law in Israel’s wars and occupation of Palestine have become a way to moderate and calibrate an economy of violence.⁶⁴

While these works are attentive to the way humanitarianism can advance military occupation, warfare and counterinsurgency, implications from a settler colonial perspective are rarely drawn out. Commenting on Weizman’s ‘humanitarian present,’ Derek Gregory briefly responded that this is also, as he writes, ‘a *colonial* present, not surprisingly: “humanitarianism” was often the velvet glove wrapped around the iron fist of colonialism.’⁶⁵ In fact, the literature reviewed above has not extensively dealt with the settler colonial past and present of humanitarianism. The case discussed in Chapter 4—a colonising army bureaucracy that adopts humanitarian measures towards its native subjects—is comparable to examples of nineteenth century and early twentieth century settler colonial projects. Academic studies attending to the historical origins of humanitarian governance have pointed out its role in furthering British imperial expansion in the settler colonies. In the nineteenth century settler colonisation of Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa and North America, colonisers dispossessed indigenous people and maintained at the same time to be enacting humanitarian governance in their interests. A register of humanitarian thought and

⁶³ Sophia Goodfriend, ‘Algorithmic State Violence: Automated Surveillance and Palestinian Dispossession in Hebron’s Old City’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 55 (3) (2023), 461–478.

⁶⁴ Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza*, (London: Verso 2012).

⁶⁵ Derek Gregory (2012) ‘Counterinsurgency and the humanitarian present’, available at <https://geographicalimagination.com/2012/07/30/counterinsurgency-and-the-humanitarian-present/> (accessed 2 Oct. 23).

action constituted the governance of settler colonial spaces, which rendered settler invasion compatible with the 'protection' of indigenous people.⁶⁶

Among the second and contemporary strand of settler colonial studies, scholars have explored how humanitarian projects ostensibly to assist Palestinians have benefited Israeli strategies of segregation and state violence. By looking at the failure of international food aid to address the root causes of Israeli state domination, Linda Tabar argued that 'humanitarianism can extend the logics of settler colonialism'.⁶⁷ Another similarly framed article showed that since the building of new settler infrastructure in the occupied West Bank, Israel intentionally mobilised humanitarian measures to constrain the impact of this infrastructure on Palestinians.⁶⁸ While building on these critical contributions, this thesis aims to expand knowledge on the settler-humanitarian relationship by combining an historical reconstruction with interviews that help to better explain the emergence and implementation of these practices.

Humanitarianism, trauma, and settler evacuations

A different kind of process was mediated through the humanitarian register when Israel evacuated all its over 8,000 settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005. Here the Israeli state constructed their transfer from one colonised territory to another as a humanitarian crisis in need of redress and a huge concession for peace with Palestinians. But territorial withdrawal did not mean an end to Israeli domination over Gaza, which was reorganised around a tight siege and an increase in aerial attacks. In fact,

⁶⁶ Lester and Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance*, 2-4.

⁶⁷ Linda Tabar 'Disrupting Development, Reclaiming Solidarity: The Anti-Politics of Humanitarianism,' *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 45, no. 4 (2016), 16–31.

⁶⁸ Omar Jabary Salamanca, 'Assembling the Fabric of Life: When Settler Colonialism Becomes Development', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 45 (4) (2016), 64–80.

disengagement from Gaza became an opportunity for Israel to continue and expand settlements in the occupied West Bank. Disengagement was not a territorial withdrawal that marked the end of settler colonial domination and the return of settlers to the metropole, as it was prominently the case in Algeria where over one million French settlers repatriated to mainland France after decolonisation in 1962. And yet, a close ethnographic examination of Israeli settlers displaced from Gaza reveals the multiple ways in which they constructed humanitarian narratives of trauma *as if* they had decolonised. Israeli settlers began mobilising the figure of the refugee and the mental health discourse of trauma to refuse and delegitimise the process of de-settlement that the government had imposed on them.

Chapter 5 seeks to explore the mobilisation of humanitarianism among Israeli settlers evacuated from Gaza in 2005 and how they came to identify as refugees. Long before 2005, the mass displacement of populations after the Second World War had brought about the intersection between refugees, trauma and humanitarianism. In this period, humanitarian psychiatry emerged as an important field for finding solutions to the European refugee crisis. Humanitarian psychiatrists were applying medical and psychological frameworks to the problem of forced displacement, increasingly labelled in terms of refugee trauma. One post-war approach favoured by the Allied powers sought to cure the trauma of Displaced Persons inside camps, while on the other hand, for the International Refugee Organisation the best cure would be finding permanent homes for the uprooted.⁶⁹ Yet, it was only after the Vietnam War (1955-1975) and the emergence of a 'combat trauma' phenomenon among US soldiers, that Post

⁶⁹ Bahar Ibrahim, 'Uprooting, Trauma, and Confinement: The Entangled Roots of Military and Refugee Mental Health' in Margot Tudor and Brian Drohan (eds) *Military Humanitarianism: Reimagining the Nexus Between Aid Operations and Armed Forces* (forthcoming Cornell University Press).

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) became a formal diagnosis.⁷⁰ By the 1980s, the concept of 'trauma' had become central to studies and interventions that attended to the mental health of refugees, both in western countries and in conflict zones.⁷¹

Didier Fassin and Richard Rechman have analysed the historical construction and political uses of trauma, noting that before the 1980s trauma was rarely discussed beyond the medical fields of psychiatry and psychology.⁷² Contemporary society now naturally assumes that it is rational for psychologists and psychiatrists to intervene in contexts of war and disaster, as well as in response to exceptional or everyday forms of violence. Fassin has further argued that in the 1990s a new moral economy, based on what he calls 'humanitarian reason', structured the biopolitical government of suffering populations, and one key way this is implemented is by sending psychologists to warzones.⁷³ Humanitarian psychologists crucially redefined the violent wounds of suffering populations through the language of trauma and mental health.

As the 1967 Israeli occupation entered the consciousness of international human rights and humanitarian organisations, psychologists increasingly showed humanitarian concern by exposing the violence Palestinians suffered at the hands of Israeli soldiers through the language of trauma and a practice of testimony.⁷⁴ On the other hand, Nadia Abu El-Haj has illustrated how the rise of humanitarian psychology and the construction of the traumatised soldier in the American imagination of imperial wars has transformed the perpetrator of war crimes abroad to a suffering victim at

⁷⁰ Allan Horwitz, *PTSD: A short history*. (Johns Hopkins University Press 2018).

⁷¹ David Ingleby, 'Editor's Introduction', in David Ingleby (ed.), *Forced Migration and Mental Health: Rethinking the Care of Refugees and Displaced Persons* (Springer: 2005), 6-7.

⁷² Didier Fassin and Richard Rechman, [Rachel Gomme translation] *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2009)

⁷³ Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*, 7.

⁷⁴ Didier Fassin, 'The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict,' *Cultural Anthropology*, 23 (3) (2008), 531– 558.

home.⁷⁵ In Israel, a culture that came to be labelled 'shooting and crying', represented in books and films, denoted the moral dilemmas of soldiers expressing sadness and discomfort for the violence perpetrated against Palestinians—though, Gil Hochberg points out that in recent years this has been replaced with 'shooting and singing'; a less denialist and more overt, unapologetic rightfulness for the myriad forms of oppression inflicted on Palestinians.⁷⁶

The case of Israeli settler evacuations from Gaza presents some key specificities within the history of trauma, humanitarian psychology and displacement. A crucial context is that of settler colonialism. In this regard, the chapter situates the production of traumatised settlers in a moment of de-settlement from colonised territory. The 2005 Gaza disengagement was not the first time Israel withdrew from occupied territory or evacuated its settlers from conquered land. Israel occupied southern Lebanon for fifteen years between 1985 and 2000, though it did not implement there a colonial settlement project.⁷⁷ The closest comparison is to when Israel evacuated 18 settlements comprising around 3,000 settlers from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. One peculiarity of the Gaza evacuation is that despite the disengagement not marking the end of the settler colonial enterprise, Israeli settlers experienced the displacement as a form decolonisation. In this respect, the story of Gaza settlers has several striking similarities with the experience of colonial returnees migrating to postcolonial societies. Previous studies have analysed decolonisation as a traumatic

⁷⁵ Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Combat Trauma: Imaginaries of War and Citizenship in post-9/11 America*, (London: Verso 2022).

⁷⁶ Ursula Lindsey 'Shooting Film and Crying,' *Middle East Report Online*, (March 15, 2009); Gil Hochberg, 'From "Shooting and Crying" to "Shooting and Singing": Notes on the 2019 Eurovision in Israel', *Contending Modernities* (2019), available at <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/global-currents/shooting-and-singing/> (accessed on 23 April 2024).

⁷⁷ Since October 7, 2023, a small Israeli settler movement has emerged advocating for the establishment settlements in Lebanon.

process, although focus is usually on the natives' trauma and not that of the coloniser. Anticolonial intellectual Frantz Fanon offered a vision of the colonial situation by depicting it as inherently pathological and necessarily involving a traumatic experience.⁷⁸ Ron Eyerman and Giovanni Sciortino have sought to shed light on the traumas of colonial returnees after decolonisation, and examined how 'traumatic experiences were narrated, ignored, debated, and contested in the former colonial metropolises.'⁷⁹

The uprooting of Israeli settlers from Gaza bears some salient similarities to what took place in other European settler colonies that were ultimately dismantled.⁸⁰ For instance, after the decolonisation of Algeria, around one million settlers (known as *pieds-noirs*) returned to France, the imperial metropole. Fiona Barclay has examined how the *pieds-noirs* experienced their displacement as a traumatic process that turned them into refugees. Upon arrival in mainland France, however, these settlers were in possession of legal rights which distinguished them from stateless refugees. In fact, to integrate the *pieds-noirs*, the French government passed legislation to provide benefits and housing to repatriates. Barclay explains the ways in which French settlers constructed 'a narrative of victimhood which portrayed them as the victims of decolonisation, and colonial Algeria as a lost paradise.'⁸¹ Although settlers vastly benefited from the colonisation of Algeria, she adds, their sudden departure from the

⁷⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press 1963).

⁷⁹ Ron Eyerman and Giovanni Sciortino (ed) *The Cultural Trauma of Decolonisation: Colonial Returnees in the National Imagination* (eBook) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) 5. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27025-4>

⁸⁰ Pamela Ballinger, 'Colonial Twilight: Italian Settlers and the Long Decolonization of Libya' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51(4) (2016), 813–838.

⁸¹ Fiona Barclay, 'Victims of decolonisation? The French settlers of Algeria', *Refugee History*, available at <https://refugeehistory.org/blog/2019/9/17/victims-of-decolonisation-the-french-settlers-of-algeria> (accessed on 23 April 2024); see also Jean-Jacques Jordi, 'The Creation of the *pieds-noirs*: Arrival and Settlement in Marseille, 1962', in *Europe's Invisible Migrants*, ed. Andrea L. Smith (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 61–74.

colony 'enabled them to challenge the view that they were the perpetrators of colonisation, replacing it with a narrative which positioned them as the victims of history.'⁸² Ultimately, the *pieds-noirs* were able to mobilise French political opinion through emphasising their displacement and their experiences as assumed refugees. What clearly distinguishes the case of Israeli settlers is that rather than returning to a post-colonial metropole, they remained active agents of settler colonialism.

Hitherto literature has analysed different political, sociological, and legal aspects of the Gaza evacuation, such as the anti-disengagement protests, the settlers' struggle for monetary compensation and the imprisonment of settler children.⁸³ Literature grounded in settler colonial studies have analysed other features of the evacuation, including the memorialisation of trauma, the intra-settler antagonisms between the secular and religious Zionist camps, and have drawn comparisons with French Algeria.⁸⁴ This chapter adds to the existing literature on Gaza and the evacuation trauma by focusing in particular on the function of humanitarianism, the mobilisation of the refugee figure, and the role of psychologists, which are themes that remain often side-lined. Appreciating that humanitarianism is mobilised precisely when settlers face the prospect of decolonisation, can help us better grasp with how the settler project is sustained and reproduced, even in moments of evacuation from the colony.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Eran Shor, 'Utilizing Rights and Wrongs: Right-Wing, The "Right" Language and Human Rights in the Gaza Disengagement', *Sociological Perspectives* 51(4) (2008), 803–826; Hedi Viterbo, *Problematizing Law, Rights and Childhood in Israel/Palestine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

⁸⁴ Nicola Perugini, 'The Moral Economy of Settler Colonialism. Israel and the "Evacuation Trauma"', *History of the Present*, Vol 4, n. 1 (2014), 49–74; Nicola Perugini, 'Settler Colonial Inversions: Israel's 'Disengagement' and the Gush Katif 'Museum of Expulsion' in Jerusalem,' *Settler Colonial Studies*, Volume 9 (2019), 41-58; Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society* (London: Pluto Press 2006); Joyce Dalsheim, *Unsettling Gaza: Secular Liberalism, Radical Religion, and the Israeli Settlement Project*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

In sum, I envisage two main audiences for this study: scholars of humanitarianism who may be interested in a critical alternative history; and those interested in settler colonial studies on the case of Palestine/Israel. For while the relationship between humanitarianism and settler colonialism has been previously examined through primarily a focus on the native subject, an examination that includes the settler side has not yet been conducted. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to reorient settler colonial studies towards an understanding of humanitarianism's function in the constitution of the settler subject.

Theoretical framework and key concepts

One of the central tenets of liberal humanitarianism is its presentation as an impartial and neutral project in the service of a universally conceived humanity. What it means to be humanitarian, however, is not a fixed and apolitical category. While it has generally come to mean benevolence towards the suffering of a usually distant other, scholars have emphasised that humanitarianism does not necessarily connote an ontological reality and should be seen as an ideology that can take various forms and meanings depending on the agent.⁸⁵ This flexibility, and indeterminacy, calls for an approach that understands it as a social construct with meanings historically situated and varied. Because who is the 'humanity' of humanitarianism, or who is the 'human' of human rights, is not solely a biological category but a political one, its meanings and scope keep varying depending on political and ideological priorities.⁸⁶ Humanitarianism's malleability can lend itself for different uses, and as this thesis

⁸⁵ Jenny Edkins, 'Humanitarianism, humanity, human', *Journal of Human Rights*, 2:2 (2003), 253–258.

⁸⁶ Costas Douzinas, 'The many faces of humanitarianism', *Parrhesia* 2, (2007), 1–28.

illustrates it can become a particularly salient ideological mechanism for settlers to deploy.

In a seminal contribution for the development of settler colonial studies, Patrick Wolfe theorised that the 'logic of elimination' is a characteristic feature of settler colonial formations. To define this logic of indigenous elimination, Wolfe draws on the way in which Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin developed the concept of genocide. In his influential 1944 work *Axis Rule of Occupied Europe*, Lemkin writes that 'Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor.'⁸⁷ Building on Lemkin's concept of genocide, Wolfe suggests that settler colonialism has both negative and positive phases. The negative phase includes the eradication of indigenous society, while the positive phase entails the establishing of a new settler society. Humanitarianism's malleability, this thesis argues, can enable both strategies of settler colonialism. Negatively, when humanitarianism is directed at Palestinians, it becomes complementary to the ethnic cleansings carried out in 1948 and to the forms of dispossession Palestinians face while under the 1967 military occupation. Positively, humanitarianism permits establishing the new settler colonial society on expropriated Palestinian land. It does so when relief work is used to aid and reconstruct colonies in aftermath of wars, when Jewish immigration is presented as a form of humanitarian refuge, and when humanitarian concern for evacuated settlers is mobilised to further avow the expansion of settlements in the West Bank.

A foundational element of settler colonial theory is the critical distinction between 'migrant' and 'settler'. Scholars have theorised how the former joins

⁸⁷ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79.

established political polities while the latter seeks to create a new dominant structure that excludes and subjugates the indigenous residents already residing on the land.⁸⁸ In other words, settlers seek to carry sovereignty on their backs when they enter native spaces. Taking a comparative lens, the global history of settler colonialism shows that conquest often leads to the creation of a sovereign and liberal nation-state. This has been the trajectory of various cases of settler conquest, such as in the US, Canada and Australia. As Shira Robinson argues in relation to the Israeli case, 1948 marks the moment in which Israel was created as a 'liberal settler state.'⁸⁹ Extending citizenship to the Palestinians who were not expelled was a necessary compromise to receive the liberal international recognition for Israel's new settler state sovereignty.

While the theory on sovereignty often centres on the way the state is constituted and maintained, Chapter 1 examines methods of sovereign formation that precede the state. It builds on scholarship that suggests sovereignty's most important context is empire rather than statehood.⁹⁰ Historian Lauren Benton argues that in the long span between the fifteenth and nineteenth century, European empires created legal geographies of power, what she calls 'enclaves' and 'corridors', that produced a limited form of sovereignty.⁹¹ In this vein, scholar of settler colonial studies Lorenzo Veracini suggests that 'a settler sovereignty should be understood in pluralistic terms—a concept contiguous with self-government and suzerainty—and not as primarily

⁸⁸ See for instance, James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

⁸⁹ Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2013).

⁹⁰ For some key works on empire and sovereignty see Anthony Angie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁹¹ Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, Chapter 6: 279–299.

concerned with establishing state institutions.⁹² This understanding emphasises a focus on political power, which ‘enables an exploration of settler colonialism’s self-constituting capacity.’⁹³ It thus permits appraising settler notions of a localised sovereignty that can coexist with other colonial, imperial and national sovereignties.

It is within this layered form of sovereign formation that the philosopher Michel Foucault’s conceptualisation of biopolitical power captures how humanitarian relief can constitute the building of sovereignty. The rise of biopolitical sovereignty is distinguished by a primary concern for the welfare of the population as a whole and the improvement of its condition. At its core, what Foucault called ‘biopower’ is ‘bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them.’⁹⁴ In this way, the capability of an agent to sustain lives and govern populations through humanitarian relief can broaden our understanding of settler sovereignty within the bounds of imperial rule and before the advent of statehood.

While the contributions of Foucauldian scholarship to the understanding of modern humanitarianism have been acknowledged,⁹⁵ Foucault’s work needs to be resituated within a frame of settler colonialism, given that his theorisations of power relations were not explicitly in a colonial context.⁹⁶ This thesis follows Elia Zureik and other scholars in reevaluating and stretching Foucault’s conception of power by

⁹² Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler colonialism: a theoretical overview*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), 53.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction. Vol. 1* (New York: Pantheon Books 1978), 138.

⁹⁵ See for example, Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield (eds) *Forces of Compassion Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics*, (School for Advanced Research Press 2011); Ilan Kapoor *Celebrity Humanitarianism. The Ideology of Global Charity*, (New York: Routledge 2013); William Walters, ‘Foucault and Frontiers: Notes on the Birth of the Humanitarian Border’ in Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (eds) *Governmentality. Current Issues and Future Challenges* (New York: Routledge 2011).

⁹⁶ Scott Lauria Morgensen ‘The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now’, *Settler Colonial Studies*, 1:1 (2011), 52–76.

centering settler colonialism in the analysis.⁹⁷ The concept of 'humanitarian governance' (or 'humanitarian government') is often grounded in a Foucauldian framework of biopolitical care for the population. Academic literature on humanitarian governance in the fields of international relations and anthropology tend to deploy this concept to study different practices ranging from, for instance, emergency relief, development and security.⁹⁸ For humanitarianism scholar Michael Barnett, despite acting in the name of the victims of the world, humanitarian governance is ultimately about power. It is where an ethics of care meets the will to control.⁹⁹ What remains under-theorised in Barnett's contemporary understanding of humanitarian governance, however, is how it can serve the interests and strategies of settler colonialism.

Humanitarian governance in the Israeli settler colonial context has many faces.¹⁰⁰ Because humanitarian governance denotes a particular form of 'legitimate domination' it permits 'social agents [to] base their claim to authority over others on the benevolence of their actions to the governed'.¹⁰¹ I use the concept to explain a range of actions that the COGAT colonial government takes on. These actions include regulating the movement of Palestinians inside occupied territory; making interventions to ameliorate the conditions of those dispossessed and enclaved by

⁹⁷ Elia Zureik *Israel's Colonial Project in Palestine: Brutal Pursuit*, (London: Routledge 2015); Ronit Lentin *Traces of Racial Exception: Racializing Israeli Settler Colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

⁹⁸ Didier Fassin 'Humanitarianism: a nongovernmental government' In *Non-governmental Politics*, ed Michel Feher, (New York: Zone Books 2007), 149–60; Mark Duffield. *Development, Security, and Unending War*. (Boston: Polity 2007); Mark Duffield *Global Governance and the New Wars*. (London: Zed Books 2001).

⁹⁹ Michael Barnett, 'Humanitarian Governance', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16, (2013), 379–98.

¹⁰⁰ Douzinas, 'The many faces of humanitarianism'.

¹⁰¹ Laurence McFalls, 'Benevolent Dictatorship: The Formal Logic of Humanitarian Government' in Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, *Contemporary States of Emergency*, (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

settler expansion; counterinsurgency methods that focus on controlling the civilian population; and the system of military-humanitarian coordination between COGAT and international organisations. Ultimately, these many faces of humanitarian governance have an important constitutive role in the making of settler subjectivities and Palestinian dispossession.

Subjectivity is a notion that threads through the entire study. With the notion of subjectivity, I mean the ways in which power produces subjects, and how individual identity is the product of power.¹⁰² Prominently, Fanon emphasised the importance of attending to the question of subjectivity when writing that ‘the problem of colonization, therefore, comprises not only the intersection of historical and objective conditions but also man’s attitude toward these conditions’.¹⁰³ The central feature of the settler colonial humanitarianism examined in this thesis is a dual subjectivity: one the one hand is the humanitarian settler that is benevolent towards the native, and on the other hand is a ‘humanitarianised’ settler in need of assistance and care. Examining the production of these subjectivities is helpful to analyse how humanitarianism can establish settler subjects in their practices of dispossession. Studying this production of settler subjectivity can help us further understand the endurance of settler colonial power, because it is the mechanisms that structure settlers as such subjects which positions them to engage in acts of dispossession.¹⁰⁴

The thesis will demonstrate the emergence of a typology of settler subjects formed within a structure of humanitarianism. The ‘humanitarianised’ settler is evident in the Jewish colonists appealing for relief work from the Zionist Commission after the

¹⁰² Dianna Taylor (eds) *Michel Foucault. Key Concepts*, (New York: Routledge 2011).

¹⁰³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press 1952), 65.

¹⁰⁴ Marcelo Svirsky ‘The Israeli elephant in the settler-colonial room’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 26(4) (2022), 508–524.

First World War. It is also apparent in the process of Jewish immigration facilitated by international humanitarian organisations. I then analyse the reappearance of a settler subject in need of humanitarian care after the 2005 Gaza evacuations. However, this is a historical and political context significantly different to that of Mandatory Palestine and the early years of Israeli statehood. For instance, at the juncture of the Second World War the identification with refugeehood and displacement arises from surviving and escaping the Nazi genocide in Europe. Instead, the Gaza settlers' claim to refugeehood is contingent to a moment of unsettling from colonised land. Keeping in mind the shared features yet also the key differences is crucial to appreciate the multiple functions of humanitarianised settler subjectivities across time.

Despite differences, the reason why there is a continuity in settler subject formations is not reducible to how individuals identify—whether in need of aid or benevolent towards others—but it has to do with what is the effect of their actions on Palestinians. This also requires attending to what settlers do as fundamental to their subjectivity. In conjunction with the humanitarianised settler, I throw into sharp focus the humanitarian settler subject that is ostensibly benevolent towards the native. The 1948 Nakba is a key moment for this development. Conceiving the systematic displacement of the majority Palestinian population as a 'humanitarian' population transfer, was a principal way in which settlers retained a humanitarian ethos while dispossessing the native. The subsequent 1967 colonial occupation of Palestine continued this humanitarian settler subject position vis-à-vis Palestinians. While the strategies of the post-Oslo era have veered more towards concentration in enclaves rather than expulsion to neighbouring countries, a form of humanitarian governance served the purpose of advancing settler colonial dispossession. And amid the ongoing genocide in Gaza, a humanitarian settler is seemingly observable in the stated conduct

of the Israeli military to ‘evacuate’, that is forcibly displace, Palestinians into ‘safe zones’, and in the calls from Israeli politicians to ‘encourage’ refugee immigration outside of Gaza. Put briefly, this genealogical investigation illustrates how humanitarianism generates an eliminationist settler subjectivity that heralds the displacement and replacement of Palestinians.

Methodology, methods, and scope of analysis

The overarching approach of this study is genealogical. I sought to build an historical genealogy of settler colonial humanitarianism that reconstructs the changing patterns and spaces in which it operates, starting at the turn of the twentieth century, tracing its appearance and evolution to present day. Foucault has prominently drawn on a genealogical methodology for studying the creation of the modern state and the modern subject.¹⁰⁵ In this approach I also build on Said’s invitation to examine effective political ideas like Zionism, ‘*genealogically*, so that their provenance, their kinship and descent, their affiliation both with other ideas and political institutions may be demonstrated’ (emphasis in original).¹⁰⁶ A genealogical methodology has as its aim an analysis (or history) of the present.¹⁰⁷ It identifies a present that seems unproblematic and seeks to trace the history of how that present came to be. Some of the normative power and appeal of humanitarianism—the ‘doing good’ for others—is that at first sight it appears uncontroversial and a universal norm. But as I began

¹⁰⁵ Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2013); Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,’ trans. by D. F. Bouchard and S. Simon, in D. F. Bouchard (ed) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

¹⁰⁶ Said, *Question of Palestine*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Mark Bevir, ‘What is Genealogy?’, *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, (2008), 263.

discussing at the start of this introductory chapter, there is a particular interpretation of humanitarianism currently put forward by the Israeli state in Gaza, and more generally throughout the 1967 occupied territories, that demands problematising and historicising. Rather than an exhaustive history of over a century of settler colonisation in Palestine, this thesis' genealogy approaches some critical junctures, episodes and examples that can illustrate and better explain a problematic form of humanitarianism manifesting in the present. Each chapter contributes something new to the understanding of that moment, though, they also inform the subsequent chapters and the contemporary conjuncture.

While covering a time span that exceeds a century makes it difficult to produce a historical reconstruction that does not leave some gaps in time, this genealogy tackles some key junctures for the constitution of settler colonial humanitarianism in Palestine/Israel. In regard to the figure of the settler constructed as in need of humanitarian care and assistance, I centred crucial moments following the two World Wars. If the First World War directly precipitated a humanitarian emergency on the territory that would become Mandatory Palestine, the Second World War proved no less consequential for the humanitarianisation of the Jewish settler subject. At the tail end of the Great War, September 1917 marked the beginning of the British military occupation and a new colonial order in Palestine. The British-mandated Zionist Commission intervening at this juncture sought to build power through a campaign of relief work for the Jewish population. Meanwhile, in the interwar years and in the aftermath of the Second World War, focus is then set on the specific humanitarianisation of the settler immigrant subject and the project of demographic replacement. This form of humanitarian sympathy for Jewish suffering is also briefly examined into the postwar war era and into the 1970s. Here, humanitarian sympathy

for Jewish suffering would become embedded in the intellectual thought of renown liberals such as Cassin and transform in a human right to migrate (or 'return') to the settler colony.

Although this settler colonial mode of humanitarianism is examined in-depth in the foundational moments of instituting the British occupation and Israeli statehood (1917 and 1948), there is less focus on the decades leading up to and immediately after the 1967 War. This has the effect of leaving certain groups with diminished attention. Firstly, contrary to the immigration of Holocaust survivors and displaced persons from Europe, the thesis has not contented with an equally significant mass movement of Arab-Jews (*Mizrahim*) residing in Arab and Muslim countries that were conscripted in the early years of Israeli statehood to take part in the settler colonial plan of demographically replacing Palestinians expelled in the Nakba. Furthermore, in the 1980s the immigration waves from Ethiopia could have granted an added layer of analysis. In both cases of non-Ashkenazi Jewish groups, there is evidence of the Israeli state constructing the mass immigration in terms of 'saving', 'protecting', and 'rescuing' those populations, which bear similarity to the process discussed in relation to the postwar immigration of European Jews.¹⁰⁸

Secondly, the examination of humanitarian care for settler suffering and victimhood shifts from the phenomenon of immigration that reached some its highest peaks between 1948 and 1951, to the phenomenon of evacuation from colonies. In shifting to the case of evacuation from colonies, the thesis does not throw light on the 1982 removal of Israeli settlers from the Sinai after the peace agreement with Egypt.

¹⁰⁸ Roberta Hershenson, 'Telling the Story of Ethiopian Jews', *New York Times*, (7 July 1991) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/07/07/nyregion/telling-the-story-of-ethiopian-jews.html>; Esther Meier-Glitzstein. 'Operation Magic Carpet: Constructing the Myth of the Magical Immigration of Yemenite Jews to Israel' *Israel Studies* 16 (3) (2011), 149–173; JDC Jerusalem Office, Aden Subcollection available at <https://archives.jdc.org/our-collections/finding-aids/jerusalem/1944-1952/aden/> (accessed on 23 April 2024).

At the same time, foregrounding the 2005 transfer of Israeli settlers from Gaza narrows the scope of analysis of subject formation to a small, albeit influential, segment of the settler society. Nonetheless, in seeking to capture the significance of humanitarianism in the process of evacuation from colonised territory, the 2005 disengagement marks a critical moment that would come to shape the contemporary era. Indeed, post-disengagement humanitarian concern for traumatised settlers would come to influence several colonial practices, from settler retaliatory 'price tag' violence against Palestinians to renewed expansion of colonies in the West Bank to forming a moral and argumentative shield against the idea of future evacuations from Palestinian land (see Chapter 5).

With regards to the analysis of the settler humanitarian gaze for Palestinians that comes to enable modes of expulsion, dispossession and elimination, the genealogical reconstruction illustrates that it is neither 1967 nor 1948 the seminal moment. Prior to the Nakba, I emphasise the 1920s and 1930s as highly significant periods for this development. Hence, considerable focus is given to the effects of the 1923 population exchange agreement and the 1937 Peel Commission on the Zionist construction of Palestinian dispossession as a humanitarian population transfer. In studying the production of a settler humanitarian subjectivity, I have found less material, whether from the interviews, archives or in secondary literature, that could permit me to shed further light on the period from the 1948 Nakba to the 1967 Naksa (setback) and the Palestinian minority that was granted citizenship from Israel. That said, in Chapter 2 a key part of the argument put forward is that the frame of humanitarianism helped a Zionist civil-military contingent to concentrate Palestinians in an enclave within the city of Haifa. This case of internal 'humanitarian transfer' was an early manifestation of policies of population concentration and 'ghettoisation' that

would recur in subsequent decades within the Green Line before 1967 and across historical Palestine thereafter.

Because the Palestinian minority within Israel mostly hold citizenship could be a determining factor in a seemingly less overt humanitarian discourse cast on them by Israeli state institutions. Part of the function of humanitarianism in the Israeli military is the othering of colonised Palestinians as foreign non-citizens in need of benevolent care. This follows the general trajectory of humanitarianism as a mode of relations with suffering others usually of a different nationality, whereas for citizens of a state a discourse of welfare provision and state benefits tends to be more prevalent. Besides, a primary reason why the Palestinian minority receives less investigation is that Chapter 4 focuses on a branch of the Israeli military that explicitly governs solely non-citizen Palestinians inside the 1967 occupied territories. Furthermore, the bulk of international humanitarian organisations tend to work with Palestinians under the 1967 occupation and not with those who hold Israeli citizenship. In sum, these methodological choices have left certain historical eras and groups out of the scope of analysis—yet they ought to not be completely excluded when considering how settler colonial humanitarianism operates.

The research design combined reading of materials in multiple archives with interviews conducted during fieldwork in Palestine/Israel. Multiple methods were a productive endeavour given the different layers and historical scales that the research covers. The archival research draws from Ann Laura Stoler's approach of reading 'along the archival grain' in the analysis of historical evidence.¹⁰⁹ Stoler's approach aims to examine the epistemologies of colonisers and seeks to identify an archival

¹⁰⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2008).

'colonial common sense'.¹¹⁰ While it is important to not overlook indigenous voices in settler colonial studies, it remains nonetheless significant to examine what settlers do and how they think about what they do.¹¹¹ Eliding this standpoint runs the risk of reproducing monolithic and undefined understandings of settlers, and ultimately could undercut a fuller and more complex picture of the colonial situation.

The aim of the archival research was to discern a Zionist colonial common sense on questions of humanitarianism, and critique it by drawing from the insights of settler colonial theory. The first three chapters relied on primary sources from the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem; the Israel State Archives, Jerusalem; the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem; the Weizmann Archives, Rehovot. For Chapter 1 reports, letters and documents, were revealing of the function of relief work and the importance it played in on the minds of the Zionist Commission's members. Chapter 2 builds on some key archival materials that detail Zionist thinkers making analogies with the Greek-Turkish population exchange. It also draws significantly from Hebrew-language archival sources that have been translated to English and reproduced in a rich body of secondary literature.¹¹² One approach from global intellectual history that calls for attending to the movement of concepts across time and space offered generative possibilities for examining the influence of population exchange precedents on the architects of the 1948 Nakba.¹¹³ Meanwhile, Chapter 3 draws in part from the digital newspaper collection in the National Library of Israel to substantiate a growing debate

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

¹¹¹ Rana Barakat, 'Writing/righting Palestine studies: settler colonialism, indigenous sovereignty and resisting the ghost(s) of history', *Settler Colonial Studies*, 8(3) (2017), 349–363.

¹¹² Another researcher's ability to read primary sources in Hebrew, as well as Arabic, would have certainly enriched this study, although there is an extensive amount of English-language material that permit constructing an informed argument about the themes discussed.

¹¹³ Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (eds) *Global Intellectual History*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 16.

emerging between Zionists and Palestinians, as well as their respective international supporters, on whether Jewish immigration to Palestine could be deemed a 'humanitarian' act.

Chapters 4 and 5 are based primarily on different methods. They draw from over 60 in-depth interviews with Israeli settlers, military veterans, former COGAT members, government advisers and humanitarian workers. Interviews were conducted mainly during five months of fieldwork in 2022 while residing in occupied Al-Quds/Jerusalem. A small number of interviews were conducted remotely online at the request of interviewees. Almost all agreed for the interviews to be voice recorded and for their full names to be used. In conducting the interviews, I drew from an interpretative constructionist frame that emphasises the need to understand the lenses through which people interpret events and locates language as a key aspect of social action.¹¹⁴ This was useful to analyse what specific meanings humanitarianism takes as it materialises in the Israeli settler discourse. I adopted a semi-structured interview method, which provided a fitting instrument for understanding the subjectivities of interviewees. The overarching goal was to find ways to represent the world that captures the understandings, feelings, and choices of participants.¹¹⁵

Apart from the interviews with humanitarian NGO workers, the bulk of the interviews was with subjects that could be defined as perpetrators of political violence. This fieldwork that focused on Israelis implicated in the settler colonisation of Palestine contrasts with the common solidarity assumptions of ethnographic methods.¹¹⁶ Rather than the traditional anthropological expectation of 'empathetic rapport' and building

¹¹⁴ Herbert Rubin. And Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing (2nd ed.): The Art of Hearing Data*, (London: Sage Publications 2005).

¹¹⁵ Geert Clifford, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. (New York: Basic Books 1973).

¹¹⁶ See Rhoda Ann Kananeh, *Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2008).

relationships with research participants, discomfort and maintaining distance characterised much of the interactions with people who I assumed had held active roles in an oppressive colonial system.¹¹⁷ Yet, closely appraising the at times uncomfortable content of Israeli narratives can become fertile methods to deconstruct the operation of settler colonialism. Conducting over 60 interviews in about five months entailed a highly demanding and sustained engagement with the subjects and society studied. It required a commitment to often conduct multiple interviews per day in different homes, places of work and public spaces as well as frequent travel from where I was based to the Tel Aviv area, the south of Israel near the Gaza Strip, and inside settlements in the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli military is not particularly known for being open to critical researchers, and my request to interview a serving COGAT official went back and forth through their bureaucracy for over six months until it was finally rejected without explanation. Yet, perhaps because of them having exited the unit, I have obtained rare access to several high-ranking former COGAT generals and officials. Positionality affected the type of study that was written, and mine is that of an 'outsider' to the Palestinian-Israeli context. 'Appearing international' facilitated approaching and extended encounters with Israeli military veterans and settlers, as well visits to settlements in occupied territory, something which for many Palestinians would be a security concern or outlawed in the case of entering settlements (only Palestinians with work-permits can enter). It may have also enabled more candid conversations.

Chapter 4 relies on 17 interviews with former members of COGAT who held a range of positions, including: two Major Generals that served as heads of the branch

¹¹⁷ See also Akanksha Mehta, *Right-wing sisterhood: everyday politics of Hindu nationalist women in India and Zionist settler women in Israel-Palestine*. (PhD thesis. SOAS University of London 2017).

(subordinate only to the Minister of Defense and the IDF Chief of Staff); four Brigadier Generals (two headed the Civil Administration); two Colonels; two Lieutenant Colonels; an economic officer; a health coordinator; and two low-ranking soldiers. These actors had crucial first-hand experience of how the army constructs its population control and the conduct of military operations. I then found productive conducting 7 interviews with key informants within the Israeli military and government and with West Bank settler leaders. These included a former Major General of the IDF's Central Command and a former adviser to multiple Israeli Prime Ministers, who collaborated with COGAT on what they deemed humanitarian policies to Palestinians. Among West Bank settler leaders, I was able to access individuals who worked with COGAT officials on several issues varying from the construction of the separation wall in 2004 to the running of Israeli businesses in the occupied territory. At the same time, 16 interviews were held with staff of UN agencies, as well as international and national organisations to gain a better understanding of the nature of military-humanitarian coordination.

To bring into sharper focus Israeli narratives on the 2005 Gaza disengagement, Chapter 5 relies on 22 interviews, of whom 17 were with Israeli settlers evacuated from Gazan settlements. The other 5 interviews were with West Bank settlers who in their capacity as psychologists and social workers intervened to aid the evacuees. These interviews were conducted in the Israeli settlements of Karnei Shomron and Ma'ale Adumim inside occupied Palestinian territory. Most of the interviews with former Gaza settlers took place in Nitzan Bet, a small Israeli settlement located in between the southern cities of Ashkelon and Ashdod, which is less than a 30-minute drive from Gaza. This is where the Israeli government constructed a *caravilla* camp of

prefabricated homes to temporarily house the settlers after the disengagement.¹¹⁸ This chapter benefited from ethnographic observations at the Gush Katif museum in Jerusalem and extended visits at the Gush Katif Heritage Centre, located inside the camp in Nitzan. It also drew from material found in the settlers' archive at the Centre, which included a newspaper collection, NGO reports, pamphlets, academic literature and novels.

Before exploring what interviews can tell us about the contemporary contours of settler colonial humanitarianism, this history begins with an archival excavation of the members of the Zionist Commission engaged in a campaign of relief work. We start the story here not because it is an origin point for a linear and progressive evolution—genealogies emphasise the importance of historical contingency, whereby discourse and practices are constantly made and remade in each moment. But because it is a particularly revealing moment to explore a different function of humanitarianism than the one that we have come to commonly accept. The mobilisation of relief work to aid the formation of settler colonies destabilises the dominant contemporary assumption of humanitarianism as a means through which provide support to Palestinians, and more broadly native or formerly colonised populations.

¹¹⁸ A portmanteau in Hebrew of the words caravan and villa.

Chapter 1 Humanitarian relief as settler sovereignty in British-ruled Palestine

Introduction

On February 18, 1918, in an oral answer to questions in the House of Commons, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour announced that,

His Majesty's Government have acceded to the request of the London Zionist Central Organisation to permit a Zionist Commission to proceed to Palestine at an early date. The functions of the Commission are to investigate the present condition of Jewish colonies in Palestine, to organise relief work, and supervise reparation of damage done to Zionist colonies during the War in as far as circumstances will permit.¹¹⁹

Less than a month later, on March 11, 1918, the first meeting of the Zionist Commission (ZC) was held at the Excelsior Hotel in Rome, Italy.¹²⁰ Although the ZC initially included some international representatives from the Allied Powers, it essentially became the main structure of self-government under British rule.¹²¹ While during the previous Ottoman period there was no officially recognised Zionist administration, when the British Empire took control of Palestine the Commission

¹¹⁹ *Hansard*, HC Debate Volume 103, Column 473, 18 Feb. 1918.

¹²⁰ Copies from the Weizmann Archives of the minutes of the Zionist Commission, 1918, A324\3\1t, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, (hereafter cited as CZA).

¹²¹ These included Comandante Angelo Levi Bianchini from Italy, Professor Sylvian Levy from France, and William Ormsby-Gore MP as British political liaison to the commission.

gained key governmental powers. Headed by Chaim Weizmann, the Russian-born leader of British Zionists, archival records show London's Foreign Office giving the Commission permission to 'carry out, subject to General Allenby's authority, any steps required to give effect to the Government's declaration in favour of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.'¹²² On the heels of a moment of rupture in Palestine after British General Allenby conquered Jerusalem, until then under Ottoman authority, constituting a self-governing body was the first practical step taken to begin implementing the 1917 Balfour Declaration. Much scholarly focus has gone into the making and significance of the Declaration, with less attention devoted to how the Zionist Commission began to operationalise that British statement of intent as a tool of governance.¹²³

After close coordination between Balfour and Weizmann,¹²⁴ the Foreign Office mandated the Zionist Commission a number of tasks: to represent the Jewish population with the British military administration in Palestine; to coordinate relief work and repatriate those evacuated to neighbouring countries during the war; to survey the damage done to colonies; to develop communal institutions; to expand Jewish colonies; to explore the possibility of establishing a university; and to establish necessary political connections with Arabs.¹²⁵ The Zionist Commission also sought to accelerate the pace of settler colonisation by forming ministries for settlement and

¹²² Foreign Office to Sir Reginald Wingate, 13 Feb. 1918, Foreign Office 371/3392/419, The National Archives, London.

¹²³ For some recent examples see, Susan Pedersen, 'Writing the Balfour Declaration into the Mandate for Palestine', *The International History Review*, (2022) 45(2), 279–291. Karin Loevy, 'The Balfour Declaration's Territorial Landscape: Between Protection and Self-Determination,' *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, Volume 12, Number 2, (2021), 138–158.

¹²⁴ Weizmann to Sykes, 16 Jan. 1918 (CZA A324/112).

¹²⁵ Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and the Arab-Jewish Conflict 1917-1929*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 25; *Zionist commission in Palestine: Aims and objectives explained*. (London: World Zionist Organisation, 1918), 4–8.

farming, as well as training an armed force.¹²⁶ In the same period in which the Zionist Commission operated (1918-1921), the British and American governments sent in total three investigative commissions to Palestine.¹²⁷ But the ZC differed from those Anglo-American commissions that ostensibly aimed to determine the causes of violent conflicts and how to resolve them.¹²⁸ Rather than investigating the potential for conflict resolution, it was mandated to form a governmental structure, in the first instance with the authority to organise humanitarian relief.

When in September 1917 British colonial forces entered Palestine, the ongoing First World War (1914-1918) had precipitated a humanitarian crisis in the region. The crisis was a result of, among other factors, the 1915 locust plague and the wartime naval blockade imposed by the Allied Powers Britain and France, which prevented the import of food products by sea. By the end of the war, Palestine was largely a disaster zone. Estimates suggest the entire population, primarily composed of Palestinian Arabs, had depleted by a quarter.¹²⁹ The main preoccupation of the Zionist Commission arriving in 1918 was to solely assist the Jewish population living in cities and in the settler colonies that began to develop in 1882. The Jerusalem Jewish community (thus excluding other towns and colonies) reduced from 60,000 before the war to about 27,000.¹³⁰ One of their main source of income, the *Chaluka* charity funds coming from Europe, had been suspended during the war, and as a ZC report stated, ‘epidemics of typhus and meningitis had claimed many breadwinner, the percentage

¹²⁶ David Cronin, *Balfour's Shadow: A Century of British Support for Zionism and Israel*, (London: Pluto Press 2017) 15.

¹²⁷ The US sent the King-Crane Commission in 1919, while Britain mandated the Palin Commission in 1920 and the Haycraft Commission in 1921.

¹²⁸ For an analysis of investigative commissions to Palestine see Allen, *A History of False Hope*.

¹²⁹ Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine*, 2.

¹³⁰ Reports regarding the activities of the Palestine Zionist Commission, including minutes of meetings 1918 (CZA Z4\40452).

of orphans and widows among the total population was appalling and starvation in the most literal sense of the word was rampant when the British entered.¹³¹

The Commission's core activity came to be relief work, which involved assisting the Jewish population to recover from the hardships of war, disease and famine. Of those 27,000 Jews remaining in Jerusalem, the commissioners estimated that 23,000 depended on 'direct or indirect relief.'¹³² The two largest relief actions constituted distributing food and attending to orphans. Another core function of relief work, however, was to develop institutions of self-government, primarily healthcare and educational structures. The Commission built hospitals and developed the healthcare system, symbolically laid the foundation stone of what would become the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, established primary and secondary schools, and promoted Hebrew as an official language.

This chapter argues that the Zionist Commission carried out a campaign of humanitarian relief which transformed into an instrument of settler colonial sovereignty. Sovereignty is a contested political concept, with some theorists defining it as the 'state of exception', the right to decide when laws are suspended and when they are not,¹³³ while for others the sovereign is who holds a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence.¹³⁴ These conceptions of sovereignty are often inextricably linked to state control. While the theory on sovereignty centres on the way the state is constituted and maintained, this chapter examines methods of sovereign formation

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² March 1918 The work of the Zionist Commission, 3-401, Weizmann Archives, Jerusalem, (hereinafter WA).

¹³³ See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); and Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹³⁴ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 54.

that precede the state.¹³⁵ The British Empire's occupation of post-war Palestine was a context in which sovereignty and authority were in flux. Sovereign actors seek to take charge of international relations and require international recognition. From an internal point of view, sovereigns need to control the population within a given territory. The people also must recognise the sovereign's authority, and, in return, they commonly demand the sovereign to provide for their security. From an external point of view, the Zionist movement gained international legitimacy from the British Empire in 1917, which would later enshrine the Balfour Declaration's text as policy in the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine. The task at hand for the Commission arriving in Palestine in 1918 was to develop a settler sovereignty on the ground in the newly occupied British territory.

At inception, a shared characteristic of settler sovereignty is the institution of self-government and its coexistence with other imperial and national sovereignties.¹³⁶ This understanding emphasises a focus on political power, which permits an examination of settler colonialism self-constituting capacity.¹³⁷ Areej Sabbagh-Khoury has argued that prior to the founding of Israeli statehood in 1948, a 'settler colonial semi-sovereignty was nested within British imperial rule'.¹³⁸ Drawing from Ann Laura Stoler's insight on what she calls imperial formations enabling 'gradated variations and degrees of sovereignty', Sabbagh-Khoury shows that in the Palestine Mandate era 'pockets of Zionist presence gradually coalesced into a contiguous sovereignty.'¹³⁹ It

¹³⁵ On empire and sovereignty see Anghie, *Imperialism*; Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*; Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788-1836* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2011).

¹³⁶ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 53.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, *Colonizing Palestine: The Zionist Left and the Making of the Palestinian Nakba*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2023), 15.

¹³⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, 'On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty', *Public Culture*, 18:1 (2006), 139; Sabbagh-Khoury, *Colonizing Palestine*, 7.

is in this layered form of sovereignty where different agents control different aspects of life that humanitarian relief may hold—as Foucault conceptualised the formation of biopolitical sovereignty—the ‘power to foster life or disallow it’ over recipients of aid.¹⁴⁰ Rather than the classical understanding of state sovereignty as the provision of security and protection from external threats, Foucault suggested sovereign power was becoming conditional to the promotion of welfare and protection against dangers inherent to social and political life.¹⁴¹ The capability of an agent to sustain lives and govern populations through humanitarian relief can broaden our understanding of settler sovereignty within the bounds of imperial rule and before the advent of statehood.

To flesh out this argument of humanitarian relief as settler sovereignty, I trace a shift from emergency relief to what Weizmann and other commissioners termed constructive relief—which became more commonly associated with a discourse of reconstruction emerging globally after the First World War. The emergency relief operations of the Commission resembled that of other actors intervening in the Levant at the time—the famine plaguing the region had become one aspect of the wider collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In a different context, Simon Jackson shows that ‘emergency humanitarian food relief efforts fitted into the gradual establishment of French imperial occupation in Syria-Lebanon between 1915 and 1925.’¹⁴² The Commission initially carried out emergency relief to create the necessary conditions for the Jewish population to recover from the post-war crisis. But it also looked to expand relief work into the ‘constructive’ variant that Weizmann and other members

¹⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction. Vol. 1* (New York: Pantheon Books 1978), 138.

¹⁴¹ Nicholas Guilhot, ‘The Anthropologist as Witness: Humanitarianism Between Ethnography and Critique’, *Humanity*, 3: 1, (2012), 81–101.

¹⁴² Simon Jackson, ‘Transformative relief: imperial humanitarianism and mandatory development in Syria-Lebanon, 1915-1925,’ *Humanity*, 8:2 (2017), 248.

of the ZC constantly referred to. In practice constructive relief meant intervening in the fields of education and health with the aim of planting the seeds for developing a sovereign nation-state. The two forms relief work, with the former being a necessary precondition for the latter, helped transform humanitarian aid into a mode of settler colonial governance while still under British military occupation. While humanitarian relief was a venue for producing settler sovereignty, these relief schemes articulated social and political barriers between Jews and Palestinians and contributed to segregation along racial lines.

To excavate the story of the Zionist Commission, I relied on primary sources available from the Central Zionist Archives, the Weizmann Archives, and the Israel State Archives. Reports, letters and documents—in particular the minutes taken of meetings—reveal that the Zionist Commission’s main concern was carrying out relief work and provide a detailed lens into how the commissioners thought about what they did. Along with secondary literature, other relevant material was found in the British National Archives, the digital newspaper collection of the National Library of Israel, the British parliamentary debates, and finally in speeches and memoirs. The central argument – that humanitarian relief transformed into settler colonial sovereignty – is carried forward in five sections. The first section reviews the existing historiography, showing that the case of the Zionist Commission’s relief work offers a path to appraise the roots of settler sovereignty formation. The second section traces the rise of humanitarian relief during the Ottoman era and before the work of the Commission took hold. The third section explores the debates and processes within the ZC to deliver emergency relief to the Jewish population in the cities and colonies under British occupation. The following section illustrates the shift from relief to reconstruction in the commissioners’ interventions in the fields of education and

healthcare. The last section examines the constitution of an exclusive settler sovereignty negotiated with the British military, which was formed in opposition to Palestinians and other international relief efforts.

Humanitarian relief and settler sovereignty formation

We can see how from the early beginning, Zionist leaders were framing the plan for a new state in Ottoman Palestine through the paradigm of humanitarianism. Theodor Herzl, the founding father of political Zionism, wrote at the end of the nineteenth century in his *The Jewish State* that resolving the 'Jewish question' in Europe through the creation of a state in Palestine would contribute to humanity's progress.¹⁴³ The following year, in 1897, at the First Zionist congress held in Basel, Herzl further articulated that the new political project he had envisioned was a 'moral, lawful, humanitarian movement, directed toward the long-yearned for goal of our people.'¹⁴⁴ While settler colonisation in Ottoman Palestine had been ongoing at least since the early 1880s, when Chaim Weizmann, Herzl's successor as leader of the Zionist movement, arrived in Jerusalem in early 1918 with the British-mandated Zionist Commission, relief work became a principal concern of governance. Conceptualisations of Zionist relief work as 'constructive' featured also in wartime and post-war East-Central Europe. 'Constructive' relief work provided a space of political activism for the Zionist movement in Europe.¹⁴⁵ Yet, the role of the Commission's relief

¹⁴³ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*: with 2014 Foreword by Jerold S. Auerbach, (New Orleans: Quid Pro Books, 2014), x.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ See, Jan Rybak, *Everyday Zionism in East-Central Europe: Nation-Building in War and Revolution, 1914-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2021), 63.

work in expanding settler colonial power and sovereignty in British-ruled Palestine has received little attention in the academic literature.

Histories of the Zionist movement's activities in early twentieth century Palestine have emphasised the 'technocratic' dimension of settlement, significantly downplaying its settler colonial character.¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Ronen Shamir has argued that Zionism was open to 'Western-colonialist' conceptions of law and state, and that throughout the British Mandate 'the fundamental Zionist experience was of sharing in the colonial rule over Palestine'.¹⁴⁷ Liora Halperin has explored the relationship between language and nationalism to argue that the Zionist movement was committed to establishing Hebrew as an hegemonic language.¹⁴⁸ For Halperin, 'The overall impression of the Jewish community, in both British and Jewish sources, is of a group bent on achieving ethnic autonomy and eventually sovereignty', although her analysis is not concerned with the issue of post-war humanitarian relief work.¹⁴⁹

The historiography on humanitarianism within the Zionist movement is rich on American influences during the Great War, but the process of relief work remains under-studied during the period of British rule.¹⁵⁰ Historians have focused on the Zionist Commission's orphan relief activities, largely omitting its work in food aid,

¹⁴⁶ Derek J. Penslar, *Zionism and technocracy: the engineering of the Jewish settlement in Palestine, 1870–1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Derek J. Penslar, 'Zionism, colonialism and Postcolonialism', *Journal of Israeli History*, 20: 2-3 (2001), 84–98.

¹⁴⁷ Ronen Shamir, *The Colonies of Law: Colonialism, Zionism and Law in Early Mandate Palestine* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2000), 171.

¹⁴⁸ Liora Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine 1920–1948*, (London: Yale University Press), 16.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 139.

¹⁵⁰ Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*; Granick, *International Jewish humanitarianism*; Roberto Mazza, 'An Honest Broker? The American Consul in Jerusalem, Otis A. Glazebrook (1914–20)', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 84 (2020), 105–121; Abigail Jacobson, 'American "Welfare Politics": American Involvement in Jerusalem During World War I,' *Israel Studies*, 18(1) (2013), 56–76.

education and health.¹⁵¹ Other historical works have treated its relief operations only tangentially.¹⁵² An article solely focusing on the Commission deals primarily with its attempts to win the support of Jewish communities residing in Ottoman Syria, with the hope of favourably influencing the 1919 King-Crane Commission.¹⁵³ Another paper discusses the initial tensions that existed between the Zionist Commission and the British military administration in Palestine, due to the latter's insistence on international law stipulating that the occupied territory's status quo should be preserved.¹⁵⁴ My exploration, instead, starts by foregrounding how humanitarian relief can enable a settler colonial movement to establish its sovereignty.

Examining this case is important because it embodies a unique moment in the global history of Zionist state-building. The Commission was the first form of self-government under a new British military occupation in Palestine. It thus offers a fertile ground to better understand the roots of sovereignty formation in a settler colonial context, and the role humanitarian relief played in its constitution. A key marker of settler colonialism is that upon arrival, settlers impose new social, economic, and political structures with the intent of replacing the indigenous population as the sovereigns of the land.¹⁵⁵ To impose these new sovereign structures, humanitarian donations from a global constituency of supporters helped fund relief work, first in the form of food aid, and then as modes of intervention in the educational and healthcare

¹⁵¹ Granick, *International Jewish humanitarianism*; Ella Ayalon 'Orphan Relief in the Jewish Community in Jerusalem during and in the Aftermath of the First World War', *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* Volume 3, Number 1, (2016), 115–137.

¹⁵² Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine*; Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (London: Abacus 2000); Sahar Huneidi, *A Broken Trust: Herbert Samuel, Zionism and the Palestinians* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).

¹⁵³ Andrew Patrick, 'The Zionist Commission and the Jewish Communities of Greater Syria in 1919', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 56 & 57 (2013), 107–117.

¹⁵⁴ John J. McTague, 'The British Military Administration in Palestine, 1917-1920', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 7:3 (1978), 55–76.

¹⁵⁵ Veracini, *Settler colonialism*, 53–74.

systems. As with all settler colonial projects, the Zionist Commission needed the protection of an imperial power. But unlike other British settler colonial formations, it was not exclusively an extension of a single imperial metropole. Rather than having a single imperial metropole as a sponsor the Zionist movement in Palestine was supported through a transnational network that Maxime Rodinson termed the 'collective mother country.'¹⁵⁶

State of relief work before the Zionist Commission

Without contextualising the rise of humanitarian assistance to Zionist colonists that took place in the late Ottoman period, it would be difficult to fully understand how the Commission was able to initiate its relief work. A key cog in the transnational mechanism of support for Zionism was the American assistance provided to colonists already residing in Ottoman Palestine. Until 1914 American Jews were able to send individual donations to their co-religionists in Europe and Palestine.¹⁵⁷ When the First World War began, support from individuals was largely cut off due to the halting of postal services and bank transfers. After the war intensified, Jews in Ottoman Palestine started increasingly to appeal to America for emergency relief. This led in 1914 to the formation of more organised forms of assistance such as the creation of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The United States government's sympathy for Jewish presence in Palestine, and because it remained neutral during the war, facilitated relief operations in territories still under Ottoman

¹⁵⁶ Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial -Settler State?*, 76.

¹⁵⁷ Granick, *International Jewish humanitarianism*, 55.

rule.¹⁵⁸ Dr Otis Glazebrook, the US consul in Jerusalem, was instrumental in facilitating the transfer of resources to Palestine until the US entered the war in April 1917.¹⁵⁹

The liberal rabbi Stephen Wise, through the American Provisional Committee for Zionist Affairs (APCZA), became another key figure in the wartime humanitarian assistance movement. In his memoir, Wise writes that, 'The first task of our committee was to save as much as possible of what had been planted in the twenty or more colonies in Palestine, the work of the *chalutzim* – the pioneers.'¹⁶⁰ Wise credits the US Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels for facilitating the transfer of resources to Palestine, as he stated, 'This precedent later resulted in other humanitarian activities by our country.'¹⁶¹ In 1915 it was Secretary Daniels that facilitated the Navy's cooperation and through the USS *Vulcan* ship carried 900 tons of food and medicine to Palestine.¹⁶² Historian Keith Watenpaugh argues that this process of relief was legitimated through constructing the wartime suffering of Jewish colonists as a humanitarian emergency.¹⁶³ Framing the crisis as a humanitarian emergency also helped to unite Zionists and non-Zionists in America towards supporting Palestine's colonies.¹⁶⁴ The humanitarianisation of settler colonialism had the powerful effect of drawing support even from purported anti-Zionists.

Before the Commission arrived in Palestine, Siegfried Hoofien was a key settler leader organising the distribution of internationally funded humanitarian relief. Born in

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 51.

¹⁵⁹ Roberto Mazza, 'An Honest Broker? The American Consul in Jerusalem, Otis A. Glazebrook (1914–20)', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 84 (2020), 105-121.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Wise, *Challenging Years: The Autobiography of Stephen Wise*, (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons 1949), 112.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Granick, *International Jewish humanitarianism*, 52.

¹⁶³ Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 41.

¹⁶⁴ Michael R. Cohen, "'A Scientific Humanitarian and a Humanitarian Scientist" Lee Kaufer Frankel and American Jewish Philanthropy, 1899-1931', *American Jewish History*, 97:3, (2013), 207–233.

Holland, his first job as part of the Zionist movement was working for the Anglo-Palestine Bank in 1912 and later became its General Manager. The bank was the main financial institution funding Zionist colonisation and was shut down by Ottoman authorities during the Great War.¹⁶⁵ The bank eventually was able mediate all money transfers coming from abroad to the Commission. As the president of the Palestine Relief Committee, Hoofien ran the operations of what was the main relief agency at the time until the ZC took over its activities in June 1918.¹⁶⁶ In the summer of 1917, a few months before the British military occupation of Palestine, Hoofien also became Distributing Agent of the Joint Distribution Committee and continued in that post until May 1918. The ZC would later receive significant funding from the American JDC to initiate its relief work. As the commissioners were about to arrive in Palestine, Hoofien penned a report on the humanitarian situation of Jewish people on the ground. The study titled *Report of Mr. S. Hoofien to the Joint Distribution Committee of the American Funds for Jewish War Sufferers* covers the August 1917 to May 1918 period and provides a detailed lens into the state of relief work at the time.¹⁶⁷ Showing American donors the necessary funds needed for the Zionist Commission to start operating was a key purpose of the study.

In the report, Hoofien outlined the main activities he conducted for the JDC in collaboration with the Palestine Office of the World Zionist Organisation and the Special Committee for the Relief of Jews in Palestine. The Special Committee was based in Cairo, at the time under British occupation, and was run by Jack Mosseri, an Egyptian (Sephardic) Jew, who acted as the main agent for relief until operations were

¹⁶⁵ Ayalon, *Orphan Relief*, 123–126.

¹⁶⁶ Summary of report of Zionist Commission to Palestine, 1919 (CZA A264\6).

¹⁶⁷ Siegfried Hoofien, *Report of Mr. S. Hoofien to the Joint Distribution Committee of the American Funds for Jewish War Sufferers* (New York: Schoen printing Co, 1918).

centralised in the Commission's Relief Department. This department would absorb and become an umbrella structure for the numerous existing committees that previously oversaw the distribution of aid. For instance, the main centres of population such as Jerusalem, Jaffa, Hebron, Haifa, Tiberias and Safed had their own committee, as did the more recently established 'Judean,' 'Galilean,' and 'Samaritan' colonies. Hoofien's main task had been distributing resources received from abroad to the local committees.

The ways in which Hoofien divided his work into two related types can tell us a lot about the evolution from emergency relief to the constructive variant. At first the prerogative was 'to get the Jewish population through the crisis in some way or other.'¹⁶⁸ In a second instance, Hoofien described having to 'lay the foundation of a new relief work on broad and modern lines.'¹⁶⁹ This latter job was to be taken over by the ZC. What is at stake here is a shift in conceptualising the operation of relief work. If emergency relief is more in the business of saving lives, the new relief is a modern practice meant achieve more than just merely rescuing lives.

In Jerusalem, particularly during the last half of 1917, along with the spike in orphans the most urgent emergency relief work was providing food. The inability of most food shipments to reach Palestine during the war meant that simply donating money was ineffective in times of crisis – 'we wanted food and not banknotes,' Hoofien wrote.¹⁷⁰ And food-rations to the sick was the principal source of medical aid, as he stated, 'The main cause of illness was starvation and the most important medicine was

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 24.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 16.

food.¹⁷¹ Bread distribution became the central relief activity during the war, which led Hoofien to estimate that it has saved thousands of children's lives.

On the method of food distribution Hoofien criticised the system overseen by the US consul Glazebrook. The consul's system had divided the Jewish population into three categories: 'the utterly destitute, those whose income was insufficient to defray the minimum cost of living, and those who suffered temporarily from war conditions.' A fixed amount was assigned to each category. Hoofien found this organisation too 'simple' and 'rough' and to a certain extent inhumane. The more humane way was having a distribution system that did not 'pauperise the whole population,' as it was unnecessary to assign aid to everyone regardless of need.¹⁷² Hoofien asserted the need to modernise these relief practices and stated that, 'If modern institutions continue to work on the old lines of general distribution they strengthen these ideas which they are called to combat.'¹⁷³ Hoofien's critique that the previous method, although well-intentioned, may risk causing unnecessary harm is reminiscent of what scholars and practitioners have come to consider in contemporary times as the 'humanitarian paradox.'¹⁷⁴

For Hoofien it was paramount that a modernising form of relief work should take hold and lead to self-sufficiency. He briefly identified the creation of women's workshops and medical organisations as activities of the kind that will be taken up by the Commission's Relief Department.¹⁷⁵ In concluding the report, although he stated that relief will have to be continued, Hoofien emphasised the great progress achieved: 'Children, swollen from starvation, are now no longer to be found, no orphans are

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 42.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 30.

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁵ Hoofien, *Report*, 20.

begging in the streets, work is provided for many hundreds of women, the organization of relief work is steadily further progressing.¹⁷⁶ Eventually, a significant source of funding came from the JDC, which chose the Commission to oversee the relief work it had initiated during the war. Relief funds were donated from 1919 until cooperation ended in June 1920. As a precursor to the Zionist Commission, Hoofien's report painted a detailed picture of how humanitarian intervention can help carve a space to govern populations. It points to some early forms of self-government that served to build a settler sovereignty. Hoofien also identified the need for shifting to modern relief, which was a key idea driving Weizmann's plans for the Commission.

Emergency relief work

The Zionist Commission operated in a transitional period of military occupation after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and before the League of Nations Mandate of Palestine legally came into effect under international law. In this context, self-government struck a balance between the wishes of the commissioners and that of the British military administration. In early 1918, Weizmann would state that there was no interest in Arab governance—without ruling out that it may still be on the cards in the future.¹⁷⁷ Weizmann recognised early on that because international law—the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907—stipulated that a military occupation should maintain the enemy occupied territories' status quo, little conventional forms of settler colonisation that involved large-scale appropriation of land, and native dispossession, was on the horizon.¹⁷⁸ The guidelines of military occupation drawn up at the Hague

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 49.

¹⁷⁷ The Zionist Commission at Work, (WA 4-458A).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

conferences clashed with Zionist ambitions that belonged to an earlier age of imperial annexation of foreign territory and settler colonialism.¹⁷⁹ Despite the Balfour Declaration's broader scope, with its promise of a 'national home,' relief work was the main activity that the British military occupation was willing to initially concede. This humanitarian relief, however, was not devoid of politics; it performed important governing and colonising work. The Zionist Commission's emergency relief was beginning to constitute a biopolitical sovereignty concerned with attending to the post-war needs of the Jewish population.

In December 1917 the British army occupied Jerusalem and the southern part of Palestine until the northern part was ceded by the Ottomans in September 1918. The Zionist Commission formed in March 1918 and was supposed to be a kind of embassy, but it became essentially the main structure of self-government under British rule. In particular, relief work quickly developed into the most prominent form of self-governance. For Weizmann, 'the problem of relief to the Jews in Palestine was very important,' since the 'outbreak of the war had found the worker almost reduced to starvation, and their number had reduced by diseases.'¹⁸⁰ As stated also in a World Zionist Organization report, 'The main practical task of the Commission was the organisation and administration of relief work for the Jews of the occupied territory.'¹⁸¹

In April 1918, while *en route* on the ship SS Canberra from Italy to Palestine, commissioners stopped in British-occupied Egypt to meet, among others, with General Allenby and Jack Mosseri, the representative of the Cairo Special Relief Committee. Weizmann mandated Mosseri to 'purchase relief goods at the request of the

¹⁷⁹ Martin Bunton, 'Government Land Policies in Occupied Enemy Territory: The Case of British Rule in Ottoman Palestine 1917-1920', *Historyka Studia Metodologiczne*, T. 52, (2022), 227–246.

¹⁸⁰ Copies from the Weizmann Archives of the minutes of the Zionist Commission, 1918 (CZA A3243\1t).

¹⁸¹ *Zionist commission in Palestine*, 16.

Commission and to take the necessary steps for their export to Palestine.¹⁸² In cooperation with the British army, Mosseri served the crucial role of overseeing the transfer of goods from Egypt to Palestine for the implementation of the Commission's relief measures.¹⁸³ Egypt became a vital passageway for both the transit of parcels to Palestine and for the transfer of money to the ZC, which were held by the Anglo-Palestine bank.

Before the British occupation of Jerusalem, funds had to be sent in gold, and relief was limited to only assisting Jewish people evacuated from Jaffa. When the Commission began attending to other areas in the south of Palestine, it started shipping food stuffs and medicines. As the ZC set up a Relief Department, it was decided that a fixed amount of money was to be disbursed to the three main districts of Jewish inhabitants: Jerusalem, Jaffa, and the colonies. The colonies had set up their own relief committees with the approval of British military authorities, to then distribute the resources received from the ZC. The initial relief work included distributing 'bread to school children, orphans and inmates of institutions.'¹⁸⁴

Commissioners thought of relief work as a potentially transformative practice towards two different strata of populations—and the territories they inhabited. Aid was directed to the local Jewish community and the more recent immigrant-settlers; the former tended to reside in cities while the latter in colonies. In preparing for relief work in the colonial settlements, the Commission observed that settlers 'had undergone severe economic trial during the years of their enforced isolation from Europe and the world market.'¹⁸⁵ During the Great War, the imposed blockade had prevented settlers

¹⁸² Summary of report of Zionist Commission to Palestine, 1919 (CZA A264\6).

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Copies from the Weizmann Archives of the minutes of the Zionist Commission, 1918 (CZA A324\3\1t).

to export the colonies' produce (i.e. wine, oranges, almonds), while at the same time rendering impossible the import of essential agricultural implements. The ZC decided that for the colonies it was necessary that a particular form of relief 'ought to take the form of loans, as the heads of the colonies were more financial than material.'¹⁸⁶ Due to the considerable damage to the colonists' plantations, the commissioners believed that 'what was needed by them was money to improve the credit.'¹⁸⁷

Special attention was paid to Petah Tikvah, one of the first colonies founded in the 1880s, which was the largest settler colony at the time, representing more than a third of the Yishuv and was the worst affected from the war. At a May 1918 meeting of the ZC it was reported that the Petah Tikvah settlers had suffered greatly from the war and were 'living constantly under the menace of evacuation.'¹⁸⁸ A central problem the Commission sought to tackle in colonies was what they referred as the 'Yemenite question.' The first non-European Jews recruited to Palestine to join the Zionist colonial project were two thousand Yemeni Jews between 1910 and 1914.¹⁸⁹ According to a report prepared by Leon Simon, an English civil servant and the first head of the commission's Relief Department, 300 Yemenite families lived in the colonies.¹⁹⁰ In terms of relief, the Yemenites lamented that the colonies committees made no proper provision for their needs, that they were underfed and large numbers of them died of starvation and disease. Yemenite settler workers also complained that the other colonists were treating them as Arabs rather than Jews and paying them only half of what other Jewish workmen received. There is evidence here of a

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Joseph Massad, 'Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 25:4 (1996), 54.

¹⁹⁰ Transcription of the achievements of the Zionist Commission from 1917-1918 (CZA 324\69).

racialised class hierarchy emerging, whereby Ashkenazi (of European descent) 'pioneers' were deemed superior to Sephardi immigrants that comprised the labour force.¹⁹¹ Simon reported that the arrival of the Commission had inspired hope in the Yemenites that more consideration will be paid to their plight. To prevent Yemenite settlers from abandoning the colonies, the ZC started distributing grants to meet their demands.

In Jerusalem and other cities as soon as the Commission started operating it was inundated with letters and petitions from the Jewish community asking for 'money to buy bread, medicine, and clothes for the winter, to pay rent and finance lessons for their children.'¹⁹² Particularly in Jerusalem a significant amount of the population was on the verge of starvation. Most of Jerusalem's Jewish population (23,000 out of a total of 27,000) depended on either 'direct' or 'indirect relief.' The Commission decided to differentiate between two kinds of groups in need of assistance: the ones with 'no means whatsoever,' and those 'who had some form but who had to pay inflated prices for the materials they required.'¹⁹³ For Jerusalem, the ZC reviewed the previous relief work done by Hoofien, who had been spending £5,000 per month. Instead, they expected not only to increase the rationing of bread to orphans and the elderly, but to double expenditures to £10,000 per month to organise the 'new constructive relief work.'¹⁹⁴ This type of relief work, such as the extension of ateliers and workshops, was deemed 'constructive' because it would not create dependency.

¹⁹¹ For an analysis of the Yemenite workers in the colonies see Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁹² Segev, *One Palestine Complete*, 68.

¹⁹³ 6th Meeting of the Zionist Commission, 1918 (CZA A324\3\1t).

¹⁹⁴ 14th Meeting of the Zionist Commission, 1918 (CZA A324\3\1t).

The European settlers of the Zionist Commission expected that frictions may emerge with the local Jewish community, particularly the Orthodox Jews.¹⁹⁵ As reported in the minutes of a ZC meeting, 'For the city communities, it is anticipated that there would be difficulties in cooperating and the most serious problems would be the *Chaluka* and religious questions.'¹⁹⁶ Upon his return to London in 1918, Weizmann articulated how overcoming the *Chaluka* constituted a shift from unproductive charity to reconstruction. He criticised distributing funds through this old charity method that was reinstated after the war, stating that 'until this mandate is given to us we have no other choice but to continue the system which we condemn.'¹⁹⁷ Weizmann viewed the *Chaluka* as 'simple, unorganized, unproductive charity.'¹⁹⁸ While Weizmann preferred that funds were spent on constructive relief work, he came to recognise that this was difficult to implement while pressing issues were still widespread. As he stated, 'Starvation was rampant in Jerusalem. Orphans had to be fed and had to be housed, and until you could organise in a more rational form one had to continue the old system.'¹⁹⁹ While the ZC was wary of creating dependency and hoped that 'foreign support would help the indigent help themselves,' Weizmann also viewed relief as a form of transformative power in that accepting resources meant they were recognising his authority.²⁰⁰ As for the 'Yemenite question' in the colonies, humanitarian relief also became a way for the Commission to impose its rule, govern the social relations of the

¹⁹⁵ Copies from the Weizmann Archives of the minutes of the Zionist Commission, 1918 (CZA A324\3\1t).

¹⁹⁶ 6th Meeting of the Zionist Commission, 1918 (CZA A324\3\1t).

¹⁹⁷ 'Jewish Palestine in the Making,' *The Sentinel*, 27 December 1918, p. 11, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/?a=is&oid=cgs19181227-01&type=staticpdf&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-The+Sentinel%2c+27+December+1918-----1>.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Segev, *One Palestine Complete*, 69.

settler society and develop a sovereign biopower that centred on fostering the welfare of the population while inside the British occupied territory.

Despite Weizmann and the Zionist Commission at large preferring to focus on reconstructive relief in the form educational and healthcare development, emergency relief was needed for the population to recover from the war. They constantly wrestled between the two types of relief but what emerged clearly from the archival sources was that even 'unproductive' relief came to be seen as a form of colonisation. Without that mode of relief work, it would not have been possible to carry out the more constructive forms. As stated in a revealing passage:

Coming now to those questions with which the Commission would have to deal, the most important was that of relief. The general opinion was that relief work was engaging all our forces uselessly, especially as it was not constructive Zionist work in the true sense of the word, such as Colonisation, Education, etc. If Zionist work meant reorganization of Palestinian institution, then even relief work was Zionist.²⁰¹

That even relief work was also 'Zionistic' captures the importance it played on the minds of the commissioners, who had in a short time come to govern a new population on the ground, and with an eye to the British imperial patron, they had to prove their state-building capabilities. This emergency relief work was also enabling performances of sovereignty.

²⁰¹ Copies from the Weizmann Archives of the minutes of the Zionist Commission (CZA A324\73-1t).

Health and educational reconstruction

Comprehensive plans for the restoration of Jewish Palestine are now under way at the headquarters of the Zionist Commission in Jaffa. With the machinery of relief organized, the commission is entering upon the second stage of its work — reconstruction.²⁰²

Education and healthcare played a key role in the process of constituting the Zionist self-government and a settler sovereignty. This section explores the roots of the health and educational system that the Commission worked on, illustrating the way in which humanitarian interventions were directed at governing and developing a population that will make up the future state. To explain the type of work that constructive relief entailed, Weizmann wrote that it exceeds what at the time in England would fall under the Board of Guardians (an ad hoc authority that provided relief to the poor).²⁰³ Instead, the constructive relief that the Commission advanced was usually under the remit of educational authorities, county councils and the central government.²⁰⁴ This was part of the effort, in Weizmann's words, 'to bring back the life of the Colonies to the pre-war conditions by necessary aid to the educational, health and communal institutions and by aiding repatriation.'²⁰⁵ It was driven by a concern to manage the life of a settler population at the collective level.²⁰⁶

²⁰² 'Palestine Entering on Reconstruction Era', *The Hebrew Standard*, 11 April 1919, p. 11. <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/hebstd/1919/04/11/01/article/45/?srpos=3&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-Zionist+Commission+relief+work-----1>.

²⁰³ March 1918 The work of the Zionist Commission, (WA 3-401).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ The personnel of the Zionist Commission: Budget program (WA 4-400).

²⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, '17 March 1976' in his *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana eds, (New York: Picador. 2003 [1976]), 239–64.

In April 1918, during a conference in Jerusalem, representatives of Jewish communities in Palestine expressed hope for the newly arrived Zionist Commission.²⁰⁷ While addressing Jerusalem's Jewish Orthodox community, Weizmann promised that he would do the utmost to relieve their economic needs. At the same time, he expected that the indifference which the Orthodox Jewish community had displayed towards Zionism would cease. One of his core demands was the revival of Hebrew, deemed 'necessary as it was the pivot upon which the new modern Jewish life would turn.'²⁰⁸ The revival of the Hebrew language was a key pedagogical aim that would help create a new settler national identity, binding together existing communities with the new settler population. The Commission pressured the British military administration to make Hebrew an official language in Palestine, even though Jews constituted only a small minority. British colonial officials eventually agreed to assign the Hebrew language a status equal to that of Arabic and to employ Jews in government staff positions.²⁰⁹ According to a ZC report this demand was more than a 'mere caprice'; instead 'Hebrew had become the language of the new Jewish settlement, of the schools, of the whole younger generation. It was one of the most vital questions of their existence in the country.'²¹⁰

For the Zionist Commission, teaching Hebrew constituted a method of constructive relief work that crucially served to foster a new national sentiment necessary to advance the colonial state-building project.²¹¹ A problem that the Commission attempted to tackle was the lack of remaining Hebrew teachers after the

²⁰⁷ Copies from the Weizmann Archives of the minutes of the Zionist Commission, 1918 (CZA A324\90-1t).

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ March 1918 The work of the Zionist Commission (Weizmann Archive 4-401).

²¹¹ Timothy Mitchell has also adopted a Foucauldian view of schooling as a disciplining measure to consolidate social order and collective obedience. *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 9.

war. Leon Simon asserted during a meeting of the ZC that Hebrew teachers were only receiving a 'starvation wage' and instructed for their salaries to be doubled.²¹² Reported in the American press, Weizmann devoted particular attention towards using relief work for developing the educational structures. As he stated,

One of the important items of relief in Jerusalem was the question of education. If you will look at our budget you will find we spent most on education. We had to double the salaries of the teachers—it was essential—we had to support the schools, to provide books, to set up a printing press.²¹³

For the new teachers that should carry on the educational work, Weizmann tied the pedagogical with the settler colonial values of 'pioneers,' as he penned in a letter to American Zionist leader, and Justice at the US Supreme Court, Louis Brandeis: 'it was soon felt that novel conditions required new types of teachers, young men of high moral standard, imbibed with the best elements of Anglo-American life, possessing a good Hebrew education and filled with the idealist spirit of pioneers.'²¹⁴ And teaching Hebrew would help with the important task of absorbing a new class of settlers arriving in the colonies. Hebrew education became a strategy of settler indigenisation—meaning the transformation of immigrant-settlers into a cohesive collectivity who believed to rightfully belong to the land.²¹⁵

²¹² Minutes of the Zionist Commission Meetings 1918, Edwin Samuel Private Collections, 656/1, Israel State Archives, Jerusalem, (hereafter cited as ISA).

²¹³ *The Sentinel*, 11.

²¹⁴ Copies from the Weizmann Archives of correspondence between Louis Brandeis, Aaron Aaronsohn, and Chaim Weizmann, 1918 (CZA3 24\107).

²¹⁵ Yoni Furas, *Educating Palestine: Teaching and Learning History under the Mandate*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020), 5, 8–9.

Above all, the Zionist movement recognised the importance of producing a form of knowledge capable of unifying disparate people within an imagined settler nationalism. Furthermore, Weizmann had also reached a private agreement with Balfour—who was at the time also the Chancellor at the University of Edinburgh—to establish a university in Jerusalem, and in July 1918, in a symbolic ceremony on Mount Scopus he laid the foundation stone of what would become the Hebrew University. Weizmann regarded establishing the Hebrew University as a major political victory that, in his words, ‘would clearly symbolise before the eyes of the world our relation to our country and also the spirit in which we desire to enter Palestine.’²¹⁶

Beyond symbolic performances, education was a manifestation of national sovereignty that also instigated Arab-Jewish segregation. From 1920, when the British set up a civilian administration in Palestine to replace the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA), until the 1933 Education Ordinance, the Zionist Commission and the political structures that succeeded it were allowed by the British to develop the educational system. Regarding education, the British retained ultimate sovereignty in principle, while allowing Zionist self-rule in practice. Article 15 of the Palestine Mandate conformed to this arrangement and recognised, ‘The right of each community to maintain its own schools for the education of its own members in its own language’.²¹⁷ In 1933, the Education Ordinance officially subordinated the Jewish education system to the British administration, while maintaining a bifurcation of public schools with Arab and Jewish systems retaining their own language of instruction.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann November 1917 – October 1918, Volume VIII, Series A, available at <https://israeled.org/volume-viii-series-a-november-1917-october-1918/>.

²¹⁷ ‘The Palestine Mandate’, *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School*, available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp.

²¹⁸ Government of Palestine, Education Ordinance, No. 1 of 1933.

Taking up the role of head of the Zionist Commission's Relief Department from Simon was the British physician and psychoanalyst Dr David Montague Eder, who had specific expertise in medicine, education and social work. Described by his cousin, the better-known Israel Zangwill, as being as much an imperialist as he was a Zionist, Eder was no marginal figure, at times also acting as Weizmann's deputy and shared his vision of creating a Jewish majority state in Palestine.²¹⁹ At the first meeting in which Eder was head of the Relief Department, he reported on Jerusalem Jewish community's conditions and 'the methods undertaken to attempt to mitigate and ameliorate the appallingly wretched conditions there existing.'²²⁰ Eder addressed the recurrent complaints among the Zionist movement that too much money was spent on relief work in Jerusalem. He rebutted the suggestions that all funds were devoted to unproductive charity. Instead, he emphasised that money was going to key institutions such as hospitals, asylums, orphanages, schools, industrial workshops, which, according to him, 'partook of the nature of Reconstruction rather than relief.'²²¹

Under the heading 'Health Reconstruction,' the minutes of a ZC meeting detailed one of Eder's report on the healthcare system.²²² Eder found an enormous spread in malaria and estimated that it affected 60 percent of Jerusalem's Jewish population. Specifically, the unhealthy water and drainage system contributed to the spread of the malaria mosquito. To improve sanitary conditions, Eder decided to set up public health offices and hospitals in Jerusalem, Jaffa and other localities to support the existing medical aid societies. According to the ZC, one of the most notable service

²¹⁹ Mathew Thomsom, "The Solution to his Own Enigma": Connecting the Life of Montague David Eder (1865–1936), Socialist, Psychoanalyst, Zionist and Modern Saint', *Medical History*, 55 (2011), 61–84.

²²⁰ Summary of report of Zionist Commission to Palestine, 1919 (CZA A264\6).

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Copies from the Weizmann Archives of the minutes of the Zionist Commission (CZA A324\73-1t).

of the British military authorities was rendering the Jerusalem community with provision of a fresh water supply to help dealing with the spread of diseases.²²³

One year into the Commission and Eder further discussed his reconstruction work in the fields of health and education. He outlined how new schools opened for about 8,500 children, using Hebrew as the language of instruction.²²⁴ For Eder the question of hygiene remained of great importance because of the highly weakened population suffering after the war. This was aggravated by the epidemic of influenza, emerging globally at the time, and an outbreak of cholera in the northern town of Tiberias.²²⁵ The focus on health was importantly related to creating favourable conditions for immigrant-settlers. It was American organisations such as Hadassah and figures like Henrietta Szold, who served in the political body succeeding the Commission (the Palestine Zionist Executive), that would in later years play a major role in developing the health system.²²⁶ In this early stage of the Zionist project, supporting the health system through relief work was part of a wider push to improve the conditions of those who would come to populate the future state.

An exclusive settler sovereignty

The relief work of the Zionist Commission emerged at a time when other international relief operations took place, yet with differing political objectives and intended

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Erica B. Simmons, *Hadassah and the Zionist Project*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2005).

recipients.²²⁷ The ZC was not the sole actor articulating the shift from relief to reconstruction. The JDC and the American Red Cross (ARC) conceptualised this shift in similar terms. They hoped that reconstruction would lead to self-sustaining Jewish communities. The JDC funded and came to collaborate with the ZC but only in a limited scope. It did not entirely share the goal of Zionist state-building and aimed for a short-lived humanitarian intervention.²²⁸ Where the two came to cooperate was in solving the orphan crisis. This made room for pragmatic cooperation under the Palestine Orphan Committee, a combined ZC and JDC structure co-directed by Zionist social worker Alice Seligsberg and British Colonel Norman Bentwich, where also Dr Eder worked in for a limited period.²²⁹

Meanwhile, cooperation between the ZC and other international relief operations was highly contentious. A key difference in the ARC approach lied in the organisation not totally embracing Zionism and its exclusionary political project. For instance, Dr John Finley, Commissioner of Education of the State of New York and a member of the ARC Palestine commission, raised concerns about the purpose of Zionist reconstruction work.²³⁰ His main reservation was that in working solely with Jews the Zionist Commission was operating on sectarian lines, while the ARC had employed 37,000 people, mainly Muslims.²³¹ In Finley's mind, 'to draw the line again between Jews, Christians and Moslems in relief work and reconstruction' meant 'acknowledging again those barriers which have been responsible for much of the

²²⁷ Davide Rodogno 'International Relief Operations in Palestine in the Aftermath of the First World War: the Discrepancy between International Humanitarian Organisations' Visions, Ambitions, and Actions', *Journal of Migration History*, 6 (2020), 18.

²²⁸ As argued by Granick, between the two organisations 'There were few entrenched local interests'. *International Jewish humanitarianism*, 168.

²²⁹ See Ayalon, *Orphan Relief*, 128.

²³⁰ Rodogno, 'International Relief Operations in Palestine', 29.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 35.

discord in the Near East'.²³² For their part, Zionists also refused to cooperate with the ARC under a joint program. The ARC Palestine commission ended in July 1919, and the role of international humanitarian organisations diminished after 1921, giving Zionist organisations greater freedom to operate.

What distinguished the Zionist Commission from those initiatives was that its humanitarian relief was enabling the incremental development of an exclusive settler sovereignty. The Zionist Commission arrived in Palestine vested with authority from the imperial metropole, though that did not automatically translate in support from the OETA.²³³ This sovereignty would be negotiated with and constrained by the imperial power. To establish its authority the commissioners repeatedly presented themselves to the British administration as specifically European settlers. In the minutes of a May 1918 meeting the ZC noted that, 'It seemed necessary to point out to the Authorities that the colonies consisted of a European community, and not of Palestinian natives'.²³⁴ In this vein, Weizmann lamented that the perpetuation of the status quo was damaging the interests of the Jewish population, and that 'that British administrative officials regarded the whole of the population of Palestine, Jews included, as "natives."'²³⁵ These protests illustrate the Zionist Commission's desire that the British administration recognise their differing settler status and authority, which contrasted with the native Palestinians whose political rights had not been affirmed in the 1917 Balfour Declaration.

Despite the British military administration's posing some resistance to the Zionist Commission's activities, humanitarian relief work benefited from the new

²³² Quoted in Rodogno, 'International Relief Operations in Palestine', 29

²³³ Sahar Huneidi, 'Was Balfour Policy Reversible? The Colonial Office and Palestine, 1921-23', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 27:2 (1998), 25.

²³⁴ Minutes of the Zionist Commission Meetings 1918, Edwin Samuel Private Collections, (ISA 656/1).

²³⁵ Ibid.

transformative occupation. If the relationship was fraught at first, as time went on it increasingly became a site that enabled sovereignty formation. The British occupation facilitated the movement of resources to aid the rebuilding of colonies. It removed many of the obstacles preventing food aid and funding from being safely distributed during the Ottoman era. Maritime transport was resumed, and the Anglo-Palestine bank facilitated fund transfers from abroad. The military oversaw all logistics related to the relief of the civilian population, which initially consisted primarily of food coming from Egypt and medical aid. It also re-established the railway route between Jaffa and Jerusalem.²³⁶ The ZC and British authorities closely collaborated on all matters of relief. For instance, on one occasion Leon Simon discussed coordinating with British Captain Waley the distribution of relief goods in Jaffa, while they also studied together the approaches needed for providing relief in cities and colonies.²³⁷ The *Zionist Commission Daily Bulletin* is replete with brief reports of collaboration with the British military, such as Brigadier-General Gilbert Clayton visiting Jewish schools in Tel Aviv, and Captain Waley regularly travelling to Egypt to meet Mosseri to discuss the import to Palestine of relief goods.²³⁸

The Zionist Commission's institution of a settler sovereignty was also formed in opposition to Palestinians. The last of the ZC's functions was to establish 'friendly relations' with Arabs. This function was in line with the second part of the Balfour Declaration which called for respecting the civil and religious rights of 'non-Jewish communities'. Members of the Commission were certainly aware that they were considered a threat. As stated by Weizmann in a speech in London, 'We were spoken

²³⁶ Rodogno, 'International Relief', 22.

²³⁷ Minutes of the Zionist Commission Meetings 1918, Edwin Samuel Private Collections, (ISA 656/1).

²³⁸ Zionist Commission Daily Bulletin, Number 39 (ISA 656/1).

of as the Jews who came to Palestine to oust the poor Arab fellaheen from their land, to lay our hands on everything which was in Palestine, and to establish at once a Jewish Government which would probably try to suppress everything that was not Jewish'.²³⁹ In private, Weizmann acknowledged that 'it had fallen to the commission to take up the task of winning over the Arabs, but it was hardly the suitable body to carry on this work'.²⁴⁰ Instead, Weizmann wanted the British to deal with Palestinians and believed that 'if the Authorities would adopt a firm attitude towards the Arabs, it could work its will against them'.²⁴¹ He thought that if the British adopted a strong position, the Arabs would submit. At the same time, Weizmann tried to appease Arab leaders and, for instance, at a reception hosted by the British military administration in Jaffa, he spoke as president of the Zionist Commission 'to allay any fears which existed in the minds of the non-Jewish population.'²⁴²

In this vein, Weizmann also relayed to the ZC a discussion he had with the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini: 'The Mufti had said that of course the educated people understood the Jewish problem, but that if the people saw a blue and white ribbon, they knew what it meant. And to them it was a form of irritation.'²⁴³ The key problem for the Zionist Commission was that it could try to win over some Arab leaders but not the wider masses. The new power relations imposed in a territory inhabited by a vast majority of Palestinian Arabs with their own national aspirations, constituting over ninety percent of the total population under British occupation, were met with outbreaks of violence. As a response to British rule facilitating the work of the

²³⁹ Dr. Weizmann's report on the Zionist Commission, at the English Zionist Federation (WA 4-458A).

²⁴⁰ Minutes of the Zionist Commission Meetings 1918, Edwin Samuel Private Collections, (ISA 656/1).

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Zionist Commission Daily Bulletin, Number 21 (ISA 656/1).

²⁴³ Minutes of the Zionist Commission Meetings 1918, Edwin Samuel Private Collections, (ISA 656/1).

Commission came in a short period of time two Palestinian revolts, first in Nabi Musa (1920) and then in Jaffa (1921). To be sure, relief work was not the sole reason for these outbreaks of violence, with Arab resentment towards the Balfour Declaration and immigration certainly featuring a prominent role. Yet the ZC, including its relief work, was part of the structure starting to alter the political landscape of Palestine.

The Palin Commission established to investigate the causes of the Nabi Musa riots noted that the ZC had become the 'chief' source of conflict and that Palestinians complained of British bias in favour of Jews. Its report stated that Palestinians see 'the Zionist Commission intermeddling in every department of Government, in Justice, Public Health, Legislation, Public Works' and that 'they have seen the introduction of the Hebrew language on an equality with Arabic and English: they have seen considerable immigration not effectively controlled.'²⁴⁴ In a similar fashion, the Haycraft Commission mandated in response to the Jaffa riots, found that the ZC had caused 'profound distrust' in Palestinians and effectively contributed to the eruption of violence.²⁴⁵ The distrust was due to the Zionist Commission receiving preferential treatment from British authorities, including 'in the matter of obtaining permits to travel on and to import merchandise by military railways' for its relief work.²⁴⁶

Ultimately, in 1920 Weizmann seemed confident that the work of the Zionist Commission proved to the British administration that they had the ability to take the job forward: 'I am satisfied that the British Administration, even the present military administration, is willing to give us the possibility to begin work of reconstruction.'²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ See para 29 of the report available at https://content.ecf.org.il/files/M00936_PalinReport1920English.pdf.

²⁴⁵ See p. 54 of the report <https://balfourproject.org/bp/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Haycraft-Commission-report-1.pdf>.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 55.

²⁴⁷ The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann, October 1918 – July 1920 Volume IX, Series A <https://israeled.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Weizmann-vol-9.pdf>.

The following year, Weizmann praised the Commission's work while comparing Zionism to other settler colonial projects, by stating that similarly to the history of 'British dominions,' it was making impressive achievements in Palestine, especially considering 'the inevitable percentage of failures which occurs in all colonising work.'²⁴⁸ When the British military occupation formally ended, the Zionist Commission gained governing authority from the League of Nations Mandate under its new title of Palestine Zionist Executive.

Conclusion

The global history of humanitarianism in colonial and settler colonial contexts tells us that it is usually the native subject the recipient of humanitarian aid and sentiment. This chapter has examined the emergence of a distinct settler colonial humanitarianism in British-ruled Palestine which breaks from that tradition. The central feature of this settler humanitarianism was that it principally targeted settler colonisers in need of aid to rebuild their colonies, or those local Jewish communities that the ZC sought absorb in the settler constituency. In this way, it served to constitute the new settler society. The main argument suggested that humanitarian relief transformed into an instrument of settler colonial sovereignty. Though the story of sovereignty is most often told as a history of statehood, this chapter shows that empire remains a crucial context for sovereign formation. Despite the commissioners' initial wariness of emergency humanitarian relief, they understood that without that form of aid it would have not been possible to begin the more modern variant of reconstruction, and ultimately lay the groundwork for state-building.

²⁴⁸ Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 277.

The Zionist Commission's humanitarian relief made visible the biopolitical nature of sovereignty. Emergency relief enabled the ZC to aid and govern the settler society. Health and education were additional spheres where the ZC established structures of self-governance that would then transfer into the fabric of a proto-state during the British Mandate. Examining how the commissioners thought of humanitarian relief also illustrates the ways in which it contributed to the segregation of communities. The relief work that went into establishing a Hebrew education system contributed to the emergence of Arab-Jewish segregation, and represented a manifestation of settler national sovereignty that the British would come to promote. This added to the gradual development of an exclusive sovereignty that the Commission sought to institute, which contrasted with other international relief actors who diverged from the goal of Zionist-state building and were working on non-sectarian lines. To establish segregation, the ZC conceived of the exclusions they were enacting and presented them to the British military administration along the settler/native dyad. For their part, the British military administration created the conditions for the expansion of segregated forms of Zionist self-government, while retaining ultimate sovereignty. In subsequent decades, Britain saw in Zionist and international humanitarian activities also a way to relieve the colonial administration from the burdens of governing as an occupying power.²⁴⁹ For the British, humanitarianism was a form of subcontracting colonial administration while simultaneously constituting settler sovereignty.

The substantive case of the Zionist Commission also expands on key concepts in the literature on humanitarianism. First, it upends the standard assumption of aid to

²⁴⁹ Jacob Norris, *Land of progress. Palestine in the age of colonial development, 1905–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013) 21.

'distant strangers.' Much scholarly, and public, discussion about humanitarian action proceeds from a position that this is aid to other people, raising questions about the politics of intervention across these divides, whether North-South or South-South. But humanitarian histories, and even aspects of present humanitarian work, show that humanitarianism has also been provided to people and communities that are claimed as one's own. The story of the Zionist Commission is an important example of this. The ZC provided humanitarian relief work to settlers and other Jewish communities on the ground that it sought to bind together in a common settler national movement. At the same time, it received donations for this relief work from a global constituency of supporters, which were Zionist or were Jewish organisations drawn to support the Commission because of an attachment to what was framed as a humanitarian emergency in post-war Palestine.

Second, and related to the question of aid to one's own community, this chapter showed how aid can transform not only recipients but also donors. Like some, but not all, self-directed humanitarian activities, this work is pursued with an eye not only to helping, but also to transform the recipients. In this way, humanitarian work was part of the project of shaping Zionist settler subjectivity. Aid to recipients was meant to foster a new subject that identified with the settler national movement in Palestine. And the transformation was not unidirectional. Aid transformed donors in that non-Zionist organisations came to fund relief work because of an attachment to settler colonialism created through humanitarian narratives. Third, the Zionist Commission strived to create self-governing systems of relief work while under the authority of the British military administration, showing the broader ways in which humanitarianism can come to govern populations and territories. After the First World War, humanitarian relief was one way in which the Zionist Commission could develop a

settler sovereignty while still confined within the bounds of British imperial rule, and before other opportunities for colonisation—land appropriation and Palestinian dispossession—would come in later years to dominate the state-building agenda.

Chapter 2 Dispossession, ‘humanitarian transfer’, and the 1948

Nakba

Introduction

In the 1930s, the settler colonial project emerging in Mandatory Palestine increasingly favoured a ‘transfer’ solution to establish a nation-state.²⁵⁰ This conception of transfer derived from the 1923 ‘population exchanges’ between Greece and Turkey, which led to the expulsion of around 1.5 million people across both countries.²⁵¹ The significance of the Greek-Turkish agreement was that it became the first internationally sanctioned compulsory displacement of populations in the name of the ‘greater good’, whereby displacing minorities—Orthodox Christians from Turkey and Muslims from Greece—was presented under a humanitarian agenda of resettlement.²⁵² Yet, hitherto literature has not explored in depth how population exchange precedents have come to bear on settler colonial strategies of dispossession.

In the interwar period, population exchanges had become an established practice of international relations that could create racially homogeneous nation-states by removing unwanted minorities.²⁵³ Population exchange precedents, I argue, permitted envisioning the expulsion of Palestinians as a ‘humanitarian’ population transfer. Appeals to discourses of population exchange—at times called ‘unmixing of races’—were used to advocate that transfers were a humanitarian endeavour that could

²⁵⁰ Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: the concept of "transfer" in Zionist political thought, 1882-1948*, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

²⁵¹ Khalidi, *Iron Cage*, 259.

²⁵² Asli Igsiz, *Humanism in Ruins: Entangled Legacies of the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2018), 4.

²⁵³ Bloxham, ‘The Great Unweaving’; Robson, *States of Separation*.

provide a solution to an assumed racial conflict. Through the notion of a 'humanitarian transfer' is in part how settlers constituted the ethnic cleansing of over 750,000 Palestinians in 1948—what is known in Arabic as the Nakba (catastrophe).²⁵⁴ This chapter thus opens an avenue for understanding how the politics of humanitarianism can come to structure the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians.

Critical studies on humanitarianism have long problematised its function as an instrument of power. Simon Reid-Henry has proposed that humanitarianism works as a 'liberal diagnostic' that helps identifying and characterising some interventions desirable while precluding others, ultimately constituting a liberal politics that is projected onto other peoples.²⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Polly Pallister-Wilkins has argued that humanitarianism can act as a liberal mechanism that veils racial hierarchies and upholds white supremacy.²⁵⁶ Laleh Khalili has attended to the ways in which humanitarianism can shore up racial capitalism.²⁵⁷ Fleshing out these critical notions of humanitarianism is necessary to better comprehend the concept of 'humanitarian transfer' that the chapter examines. They are helpful to appraise humanitarianism's configuring role in the settler colonial expulsion of Palestinians during the Nakba.

Scholars have previously explored the manifestation of humanitarianism in settler colonies.²⁵⁸ Krista Maxwell argues that liberal interventions of care and protection intended to ameliorate indigenous suffering can align with the enduring goal

²⁵⁴ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

²⁵⁵ Simon Reid-Henry, 'Humanitarianism as Liberal Diagnostic: the geography of humanitarian reason and the political rationalities of the liberal will-to-care', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (2013), Vol 39 (3), 418–431.

²⁵⁶ Polly Pallister-Wilkins, *Humanitarian Borders. Unequal Mobility and Saving Lives*, (London: Verso 2022), 19–52.

²⁵⁷ Laleh Khalili, 'Humanitarianism and racial capitalism in the age of global shipping', *European Journal of International Relations*, 29(2) (2023), 374-397.

²⁵⁸ Lester and Dussart, *Colonization*; Edmonds and Johnston, *Empire, Humanitarianism and Violence*. Swartz, *Education and empire*.

of indigenous elimination.²⁵⁹ US settlers, for instance, justified the removal of indigenous Cherokees on humanitarian grounds.²⁶⁰ Prominently, US President Andrew Jackson would come to justify the Indian Removal Act of 1830 as an ostensibly humanitarian measure. ‘Removal was in fact an alternative to extinction’, stated Jackson, and ‘the only means we have in preserving them as nations, and of protecting them.’²⁶¹ Jackson’s idea, writes his biographer, was that removal ‘was an exchange of land based on the premise that the two races could not live together.’²⁶² The notion of inextricable racial conflict between settlers and natives was enmeshed with ethical rationalisations for native removal. In the history of European imperial expansion there is indeed a long genealogy in which the idea of treating colonised peoples humanely did not necessarily mean refraining from settler colonial violence. For Talal Asad this process entailed a ‘humanitarianism that uses violence to subdue violence.’²⁶³

Studies on Israel’s colonial occupation of Palestine have analysed the emergence of humanitarianism as a tool of domination.²⁶⁴ Jasbir K. Puar has argued that Israel’s ‘purportedly humanitarian practice of sparing death by shooting to maim has its biopolitical stakes not through the right to life, or even letting live, but rather through the logic of “will not let die.”’²⁶⁵ Eyal Weizman used the notion of ‘humanitarian violence’ to denote how an economy of the ‘lesser evil’ has come to calibrate and

²⁵⁹ Maxwell, ‘Settler-Humanitarianism’.

²⁶⁰ Elspeth Martini, ‘Dangerous Proximities: Anglo-American Humanitarian Paternalists in the Era of Indigenous Removal’, *Western Historical Quarterly*, Volume 53, Issue 4, (2022), 379–404.

²⁶¹ Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Empire, 1767–1821, vol. 1* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1977), 336.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ Asad, ‘Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism’.

²⁶⁴ See e.g. Feldman, ‘Gaza’s Humanitarianism Problem’; Kotef, ‘Objects of Security; Winter ‘The Siege of Gaza; Kathryn Medien, ‘Israeli settler colonialism, “humanitarian warfare,” and sexual violence in Palestine’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 23(5) (2021) 698–719.

²⁶⁵ Jasbir K Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2017), X.

moderate the implementation of state violence.²⁶⁶ While I build on that critical scholarship, these scholars' attention remains focused on the 1967 colonial occupation of Palestine and the contemporary conjuncture, leaving the history of humanitarianism in the foundational violence of 1948 largely unexplored. This chapter shifts our gaze to the making of the Nakba and expands on the function of humanitarianism in shaping conquest and dispossession under settler colonialism.

One approach to global intellectual history, which invites attending to the 'mobility of concepts' across regions of the world, provided a useful point of departure for thinking about the influence of population exchange precedents in the decades prior to and during the 1948 Palestine War.²⁶⁷ To follow the movement of concepts across time and space, I focused primarily on the thought of colonisers, and to a lesser extent imperial administrators and intellectuals. Evidence of their thinking was found in speeches and writings on population transfer and exchanges, predominantly in key documents from the Central Zionist Archives (CZA) and in a rich body of secondary literature. The political thought of Zionist thinkers, politicians and settlers was revealing of how they were influenced by novel practices of international relations and, at the same time, became the architects of a new order.

The chapter proceeds in six sections. First, I discuss how the concept of humanitarian transfer derived from population exchanges is situated within the context of international relations. Second, the chapter revisits the debate on the causes and consequences of the 1948 Nakba and suggests that hitherto literature has not explored in depth the role of the global order. The following two sections trace the debates on population exchange and humanitarian transfer in Mandatory Palestine. I

²⁶⁶ Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils*.

²⁶⁷ Moyn and Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*.

then reconstruct two different cases during the 1948 War where a form of humanitarianism served to buttress the displacement of Palestinians. First, in 1948 a Zionist civil-military contingent presented as an ostensibly humanitarian measure concentrating in an enclave the remaining Palestinians in the city of Haifa. Second, after the expulsion of Palestinians organising the provision of humanitarian aid and resettlement became part of the rationale to deny refugee returns.

Population exchange in international relations

That the Zionist movement explicitly drew upon the international legal precedent on population exchanges requires looking closer at how it is situated within the history of international relations. This helps better appreciating the significance of the international relations context in influencing the strategies of dispossession that were operationalised through humanitarianism. Out of the ashes of the First World War, US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points promised the constitution of a new world order, one governed by the guiding principle of national self-determination. Wilson's postwar vision of a liberal internationalism was also fundamental to the establishment of the League of Nations. This new institution had initially come to be associated with protecting minorities *in situ* and offering them rights enshrined in international law.²⁶⁸ Yet, by the time of the 1923 agreement, the legal status of population transfer (and exchanges) was anything but settled.²⁶⁹ In the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 there is no explicit mention of forcible transfer. Only the earlier 1863 Lieber Code has

²⁶⁸ Mark Mazower, 'Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe', *Daedalus*, Vol. 126, No. 2, (1997), 49.

²⁶⁹ Umut Özsü, *Formalizing Displacement: International Law and Population Transfers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), 11.

some ambiguous prohibition in Article 23 on the 'carr[ying] off to distant parts' of '[p]rivate citizens'.²⁷⁰ It is following the Second World War that the newly established Genocide Convention and the Fourth Geneva Convention would provide international legal instruments for the prohibition of population transfer.

Rather than rooted in the discourse of self-determination or the League's protections afforded to minorities, the legal formalisation of the Greek-Turkish population exchange was framed as a commitment to find *ad hoc* solutions to war and conflict.²⁷¹ The 1919–22 Greco–Turkish War, which began with Greek ambitions to revive a Hellenic empire on Ottoman territories, was a bloody conflict that would ultimately lead to the dissolution of the Ottoman empire.²⁷² In 1922, Turkish forces entered Izmir on the west coast of Anatolia, causing the forcible displacement of hundreds of thousands of Greeks. The 1923 population exchange agreement was primarily a response to this crisis. The forced transfer of Muslims from Macedonia, western Thrace, and other regions in Greece would permit the resettlement of Greeks who had been removed by Turkey. Correspondingly, expelling Greeks from Asia Minor and eastern Thrace would allow for a new and ethnically homogenous Turkish nation-state. Leading up to the agreement and in the following years, approximately 350,000 Muslims were forcibly displaced from Greece and over 1 million Greeks were expelled from Turkey.²⁷³

When in the interwar period European states started viewing minorities as one of the root causes of instability, they increasingly turned to ideas of population 'transfer' and 'exchange' as a political solution. But undergirding seemingly benign terms such

²⁷⁰ Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field (Lieber Code). 24 April 1863.

²⁷¹ Özsu, *Formalizing Displacement*, 17.

²⁷² Iğsız, *Humanism in Ruins*, 4.

²⁷³ Özsu, *Formalizing Displacement*, 7.

as 'transfer' and 'exchange', were often violent practices of population removals and mass deportations. The 1923 agreement between Greece and Turkey provided one innovative solution to minority problems.²⁷⁴ Since the agreement was adopted, it became an oft-cited precedent for ethnic cleansings throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.²⁷⁵ By the interwar period, population exchanges had become a novel international relations practice that not only could permanently eliminate minority problems, but it was also functional to the demographic engineering of the international system's basic unit: a racially homogeneous nation-state.

Crucially, the logic underpinning population exchanges partially rested on the racial imaginary that structured the global order of the time. Although in the 1923 agreement populations were defined by religion, Fridtjof Nansen—the League of Nations' first High Commissioner for Refugees and the key figure behind the agreement—had come to describe it as 'an emigration of the racial minorities in Turkey and Greece'.²⁷⁶ In this way, 'exchanges' or 'unmixing races' denoted that racial segregation would be a 'humanitarian' solution for establishing nation-states. A lesser evil that would avoid future greater conflict. As scholars have demonstrated, this type of racist thinking was intrinsic to the International Relations (IR) discipline's founding in the early twentieth century, which became increasingly concerned with the question of potential 'race wars' and was thought of more accurately as 'interracial relations'.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ A. Dirk Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021), 337.

²⁷⁵ Jennifer Jackson Preece, 'Ethnic Cleansing as an Instrument of Nation-State Creation: Changing State Practices and Evolving Legal Norms', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1998), 817–842.

²⁷⁶ League of Nations Council, *The Question of Exchange of Populations between Turkey and Greece* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1922), 6.

²⁷⁷ Alexander E. Davis, Vineet Thakur and Peter Vale, *The Imperial Discipline: Race and the Founding of International Relations*, (London: Pluto Press, 2020); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015); Errol A. Henderson 'Hidden in plain sight: racism in international relations theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1 (2013), 71–92.

Accordingly, attending to how racism is entangled with humanitarian thought and practice is to further a tradition of IR scholarship that has exposed the racist foundations at the heart of the field's core tenets.²⁷⁸ The multiple ways in which racist discourses were readily conjoined with notions of a humanitarian population transfer calls attention to the function of race in structuring humanitarianism.

In recent years there has been a growing interrogation of race and racism in international relations.²⁷⁹ Despite this burgeoning attention to race, the discipline of IR is yet to fully foreground questions of settler colonialism.²⁸⁰ Eliding settler colonialism's role often leads to theories that take for granted an ahistorical and state-centric conception of international order. Rather than focusing solely on the story of the Westphalian modern state system, the history of settler colonialism reveals a significant, though not the sole, mode of nation-state formation, which in turn informs what we have come to recognise as global order.²⁸¹ Relatedly, a postcolonial critique of IR poses that scholars misdescribe the origins and character of the international order by omitting the centrality of empire and colonialism.²⁸² While racist assumptions about 'exchanging' minorities through humanitarian population transfers coalesced in the light of the international context in Europe, these ideas were embedded in a racialised liberal world order emerging in part out of the global experience of settler colonialism. By the nineteenth century, ideas about irredeemable racial relations were

²⁷⁸ Polly Pallister-Wilkins, 'Saving the souls of white folk: Humanitarianism as white supremacy', *Security Dialogue*, (2021), Vol. 52(S), 99.

²⁷⁹ Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam (eds). *Race and Racism in International Relations*, (London and New York: Routledge 2014).

²⁸⁰ David Roediger, 'What would it mean to transform international relations?' in Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam (eds). *Race and Racism in International Relations*, (London and New York: Routledge 2014), 199.

²⁸¹ Alexander D. Barder, *Global Race War: International Politics and Racial Hierarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2021), 76.

²⁸² Sanjay Seth, 'Postcolonial Theory and the Critique of International Relations' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 40(1) (2011), 167–183; see also Brawnen Gruffydd Jones (ed) *Decolonizing International Relations* (Rowman & Littlefield 2006).

the norm in the settler colonies. This was because settler colonial formations hinged upon the constitution of racially exclusive settler societies.²⁸³

Mahmoud Mamdani offered a framework for understanding settler colonialism as one primary model for the making of nation-states and minorities.²⁸⁴ As he states, 'in the colonies, the permanent majority-minority distinction became the division between the nation and the uncivilised, referred to as the native.'²⁸⁵ In this framework, ethnic cleansing is the principal instrument for the nation-state to create an exclusive racial homogeneity in its territory and remove the minority from it as much as possible.²⁸⁶ When the British Empire took control of Mandatory Palestine, the minority settler movement did not control yet a state and it faced an indigenous Palestinian majority. It was the Greek-Turkish precedent which provided the 1937 British Royal (Peel) Commission of Inquiry to Palestine a reasoning to recommend for the first time not only partition into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, but also endorse population exchange and transfer as a method of resolving what was framed in terms of a conflict between two competing nationalisms and two populations racially construed as irreconcilable. Eventually, rather than an organised post-war agreement to exchange populations, what happened in 1948 was a unilateral ethnic cleansing of Palestinians amid settler colonial warfare. But the idea of humanitarian transfer derived from population exchanges remained a settler colonial tool mobilised to implement the dispossession of Palestine. The international relations practice of population exchanges therefore afforded a humanitarian operational logic to structure

²⁸³ Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 39.

²⁸⁴ Mahmoud Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2020), 18.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 7.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

the mass expulsion of Palestinians in the name of creating a racially homogenous nation-state.

Population exchange in the historiography of the Palestinian Nakba

In the late 1980s, the Israeli state's partial declassification of documents from its archives on the 1948 War spurred a new historiography to emerge on the subject. The newly available archival material permitted the production of revisionist histories, authored by so-called Israeli 'New Historians', who began to chip away at the official narratives (both of Israel and the Arab regimes that fought in the war) and debunk some of the core myths absolving Israel of culpability for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem.²⁸⁷ Chief among the official Israeli myths were that Palestinians had not been forcibly expelled but had left voluntarily after the Arab leadership's directives. To be sure, what emerged from the archives was not entirely novel or unknown as Palestinian writers and historians had already accounted, some using oral history methodologies with survivors, for part of the wartime violence and atrocities perpetrated by Zionist militias.²⁸⁸

In 1987, Israeli historian Benny Morris published archival evidence corroborating the essence of what Palestinians had been saying all along: that contrary to the official position of the Israeli government, Palestinians had not left

²⁸⁷ For an exploration of the myths and debates see, Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (eds) *The War for Palestine Rewriting the History of 1948*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012).

²⁸⁸ For studies that pre-date some of the arguments of the New Historians, see Nafez Nazzari, *The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee 1948*, (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies 1978); Elias Shoufani, 'The Fall of a Village,' *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 1, no. 4 (1972) 108–21; Reja'e Busaileh, 'The Fall of Lydda, 1948,' *Arab Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1981): 123-51; and Fouzi El-Asmar, *To Be an Arab in Israel*, (London: Frances Pinter 1975); Rosemary Sayigh *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (New York: Zed Books, 1979).

voluntarily, or merely followed the instructions of the Arab leadership, but escaped because of the Zionist forces' orders to demolish and depopulate villages.²⁸⁹ Most controversial among the New Historians became Morris' conclusion, which was interpreted as morally exculpating the Israeli government of intentional wrongdoing, that, in his words, 'the Palestinian refugee problem was born of war, not by design.'²⁹⁰ This conclusion stood in stark contrast with the arguments proposed by Palestinian scholar Nur Masalha.²⁹¹ Masalha suggested the expulsion of Palestinians was no war-time contingency but was rather a premeditated policy evidenced in prior decades of Zionist thinking and planning on how to resolve what was called the 'Arab problem.' He argues that the idea of population transfer was so ingrained in the Zionist leadership's ideology to prove that Palestinian expulsion in 1948 was the intentional culmination of plans years in the making.

Despite later conceding that the population transfer thinking consolidated long before the war in Palestine broke out, Morris still maintained that no coordinated or master plan existed to expel Palestinians, and further, that Palestinians shared responsibility with the Zionist leadership for the exodus of refugees.²⁹² In a 2004 interview with *Haaretz*, Morris strikingly stated 'there are circumstances in history that justify ethnic cleansing'.²⁹³ When questioned about the morality of his suggestion, he replied, 'Even the great American democracy could not have been created without the annihilation of the Indians. There are cases in which the overall, final good justifies

²⁸⁹ Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

²⁹⁰ Morris, *Birth*, 286.

²⁹¹ Masalha, *Expulsion*.

²⁹² Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 44.

²⁹³ Ari Shavit, 'Survival of the Fittest Cont.', *Ha'aretz* (January 8, 2004) available at <https://www.haaretz.com/2004-01-08/ty-article/survival-of-the-fittest-cont/0000017f-e86d-da9b-a1ff-ec6fb5000000>, (accessed 16 October 2024).

harsh and cruel acts that are committed in the course of history.²⁹⁴ What is more, in a subsequent interview with the *Los Angeles Times* Morris himself would come to use the Greek-Turkish precedent to justify the expulsion of Palestinians. As he states, 'Israel's decision was not unprecedented, nor was it necessarily immoral... While the "population exchange" was no doubt traumatic, in the long run both peoples have vastly benefited.'²⁹⁵

Also contrasting the arguments posed by Morris was the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, who when explaining what happened in 1948 introduced a new paradigm which gained prominence in the 1990s after the ethnic cleansings in the former Yugoslavia. Contrary to Morris' conclusion that the displacement of Palestinians was a by-product of the war, Pappé argued that warfare was in fact the means through which a policy of ethnic cleansing could be implemented.²⁹⁶ Pappé introduced the ethnic cleansing paradigm to the study of the 1948 Palestine War and modelled the paradigm in comparison to the former Yugoslavia. Yet he has not considered the historical precedent of the Greek-Turkish population exchange agreement, and the influence it had on the ethnic cleansings that took place in 1948. Literature adopting the settler colonial lens tends to incorporate Pappé's ethnic cleansing paradigm to explain what Wolfe theorised as the logic of indigenous elimination.²⁹⁷ What remains less known is the broader political and international context in which transfer crystallised as a specifically humanitarian idea, how it shaped the 1930s population transfer debates and the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948. This demands taking

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Benny Morris, 'In '48, Israel Did What It Had to Do', *Los Angeles Times*, (26 January 2004) available at <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-jan-26-oe-morris26-story.html>, (accessed 16 October 2024).

²⁹⁶ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing*.

²⁹⁷ Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism'.

seriously the global context in which population exchange agreements transformed ethnic cleansing into a form of humanitarian population transfer.

Extant scholarship has discussed the Israeli state using the population exchange precedent to rationalise the massive influx of Jews from Arab countries into Israel, but focused primarily on the 1950s and 1960s period.²⁹⁸ Another article focuses primarily on the thought of Revisionist Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky and his adoption of the population exchange precedent to justify the expulsion of Palestinians.²⁹⁹ Historian Dirk Moses and legal scholar Catriona Drew have traced the influence of the Greek-Turkish agreement on the population transfer debates occurring in Europe and their ramification in Palestine. Moses explains that the Greek-Turkish precedent was seen internationally as ‘ultimately a “humane” policy because future genocidal warfare had effectively been abolished.’³⁰⁰ Meanwhile, Drew explores the international legal history of population transfer and argues that ‘it was the principle of humanity that tipped the balance in favour of the Zionist “near-consensus” on transferring the Arabs of Palestine.’³⁰¹

This chapter departs from previous studies by examining how humanitarianism came to structure the displacement of Palestinians during the 1948 Palestine War. Both Moses and Drew focus primarily on the morality of transfer debates but do not draw out the implications for what happened in 1948. Moses writes that he is more interested in the justifications than he is in on the events themselves.³⁰² Yet, as this

²⁹⁸ Itamar Mann, ‘Disentangling Displacements: Historical Justice for Mizrahim and Palestinians in Israel’, *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 21(2) (2020), 427–458.

²⁹⁹ Rubin Gil ‘Vladimir Jabotinsky and Population Transfers between Eastern Europe and Palestine’, *The Historical Journal*, 62(2) (2019), 495–517.

³⁰⁰ Moses, *The Problems*, 342.

³⁰¹ Catriona Drew ‘Remembering 1948: Who’s Afraid of International Law in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?’ In: Gaita, Raimond and Simpson, Gerry, (eds.), *Who’s Afraid of International Law?* (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2017), 123–124.

³⁰² Moses, *The Problems*, 333.

chapter will show, the notion of humanitarian transfer was mobilised at key moments during the military operations to expel Palestinians and prevent their return. To overlook the history of the 1948 Nakba is to miss a significant part of the story.

The roots of the debate on humanitarian transfer

While it was the 1930s when the apex of the debate on the morality of transfer occurred, the British writer Israel Zangwill was one of the early Zionist thinkers to claim that settler colonial dispossession could be humanitarian. In December 1915, Zangwill gave a lecture to the Fabian Society in London where he proposed that ‘the Arabs would trek into Arabia, or could be peacefully expropriated.’³⁰³ His speech echoed Theodor Herzl writing in 1895 in his diary that ‘we must expropriate gently’ and ‘try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries.’³⁰⁴ In various publications Zangwill frequently used the word ‘trek’ to describe the transfer of Palestinians.³⁰⁵ The usage of the word originates from the Boer settlers of South Africa, who in 1836 began a mass migration from Cape Colony to Transvaal in order to avoid British interference and extend the colonial domination of their subjects.³⁰⁶ This migration became known as the ‘Great Trek.’ With this comparison between the movement of settlers in South Africa to that of indigenous people in Palestine, Zangwill wanted to emphasise the morality of transfer. As he asserted, ‘migration is a fortunate experience. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred

³⁰³ Israel Zangwill, *The War for the World*, (New York: Macmillan 1916), 342.

³⁰⁴ Quoted in Morris, *Birth Revisited*, 41.

³⁰⁵ Chaim Simons, *A Historical Survey of Proposals to Transfer Arabs from Palestine 1895 - 1947*, (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, Inc. 1998), 56.

³⁰⁶ Joseph Schechla, ‘Ideological roots of population transfer’, *Third World Quarterly*, 14:2 (1993), 253.

the transferees have found their new territories to be better, more spacious and healthier.’³⁰⁷

While this may appear an odd analogy, it was contingent to a growing imperialist discourse emerging at the time where refugees were being reimagined as colonists. For instance, transforming refugees into settlers offered British imperial administrators organised strategies for solving the ‘refugee problem.’³⁰⁸ Ultimately, Zangwill’s vision of a ‘peaceful expropriation’ rested on the idea that Palestinians, as other indigenous peoples, were an inferior race with no legitimate claim to own the land they inhabited. In addressing criticism against the morality of his transferist suggestions, he compared the colonial project in Palestine to other cases of settler colonialism and responded, ‘[w]here and on what status, pray, are the original inhabitants of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, even of Wilson’s own America?’ and added that history had ‘never recognised the rights of races to monopolise territories they could not develop. If, as you say, the Arabs have been in Palestine 2000 years, then it is high time they trekked, like the Boers from Cape Colony.’³⁰⁹ In 1917, during a conversation with Jabotinsky, Zangwill even predicted the Greek-Turkish population exchange that would take place six years later, although he had framed the transfers as voluntary. To justify his position on the transfer of Palestinians, Zangwill looked at developments occurring in Europe and the Near East, arguing that it would occur as part of a general remaking of the world, the ‘unmixing of races.’³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Vladimir Jabotinsky, ‘A Conversation with Zangwill’, *Der Moment*, (Warsaw), no.152, 21 July 1939, (news-clipping in Jabotinsky Archives 1939/18 tav no.17) cited in Simons, *A Historical Survey*, 56.

³⁰⁸ For more on the transformation of refugees into settlers and John Hope Simons’ role, see Anne Schult ‘Interwar statistics, colonial demography, and the making of the twentieth-century refugee’, *Journal of Global History*, 18(1) (2023), 131–151.

³⁰⁹ Quoted in Simons, *A Historical Survey*, 60.

³¹⁰ Gil, ‘Vladimir Jabotinsky’, 502.

Imperial ways of thinking and analogy-making constituted the bedrock of the British administration attempts to resolve the Palestine situation. To investigate the violent unrest of 1929 the British established a commission of inquiry on questions of immigration, land settlement, and development. Heading this commission was John Hope-Simpson, who could bring a range of imperial and international experiences to the case of Palestine. In 1927, Hope-Simpson oversaw the Greek-Turkish forced population exchanges in his appointment to the League of Nations' Refugee Settlement Commission. The Hope-Simpson final report recommended restricting immigration, expanding areas of settlement and agricultural development. Drawing on his experience in the Greco-Turkish agreement and foreshadowing the population transfer recommendation of the Peel Commission, Hope-Simpson wrote that development would require relocating Arab cultivators so as to increase the size of their landholdings.³¹¹

It was in 1930 that for the first time the British government received a secret proposal for transferring Palestinians.³¹² The instability caused by increasing Jewish settlement and the ensuing outbreak of violence in 1929 had led Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann to consider the 'possibility of removing the Arabs of Palestine to the "practically empty" country of Transjordan or to Iraq.'³¹³ In a private meeting with the British parliamentary undersecretary for the colonies, Dr Drummond Shiels, Weizmann recounts stating that if the state project in Palestine was permitted, 'the Arabs would certainly not suffer.' Weizmann suggested that the removal of Palestinians to neighbouring countries was not unprecedented and 'this quasi

³¹¹ Penny Sinanoglu, *Partitioning Palestine: British Policymaking at the End of Empire*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2020), 29.

³¹² Masalha, *Expulsion*, 36.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

exchange of population could be fostered and encouraged.... It had been done with signal success under the aegis of the League of Nations in the case of the Greeks and Turks.³¹⁴ Weizmann was clearly referring to the new established practice consolidating in Europe after the 1923 population exchange agreement.

Post-Peel commission consensus

Liberal tools of imperial governance such as the British commissions of inquiry came to significantly influence idea of humanitarian population transfer in Mandatory Palestine.³¹⁵ After the 1937 Peel Commission proposed a population exchange as one of its recommendations, the Zionist movement began advocating for it in a more pronounced way. The British had mandated a commission of inquiry after conflict between natives and settlers had reached its climax with the major Palestinian revolt of 1936-39. Following an unprecedented Palestinian general strike that lasted six months the British appointed the Peel Commission to investigate the causes of conflict and propose a viable solution in a written report. The novelty of the Peel Commission report was the introduction of partition between two sovereign states—what remains known today as the ‘two-state solution.’ The Commission’s report essentially viewed the question of Palestine through the prism of the ‘Minority Problem’, which in its words, ‘has become only too familiar in recent years, whether in Europe or in Asia. It is one of the most troublesome and intractable products of post-war nationalism.’³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Allen, *A History of False Hope*.

³¹⁶ Palestine Royal Commission Report (1937), 390. Available at <https://fada.birzeit.edu/bitstream/20.500.11889/3901/1/palestine%20royal%20commission.pdf> (accessed on 24 Jan. 23).

But because of the vast disparity in the demography of the two populations, a large Arab majority versus a Jewish minority, cutting up Mandate Palestine into two territories and redrawing borders was not sufficient. Hence, the Commission recommended an unequal population exchange in which 250,000 Arabs would be removed from the Jewish state, and 1,250 Jews from the Arab state. The Commission's report had explicitly relied on the international precedent of the Greek-Turkish population exchange to justify its proposal. As the Peel report states in the following quote, population transfer provided a model for resolving irredeemable racial conflict.

In view of the present antagonism between the races and of the manifest advantage to both of them of reducing the opportunities of future friction to the utmost, it is to be hoped that the Arab and the Jewish leaders might show the same high statesmanship as that of the Turks and the Greeks and make the same bold decision for the sake of peace.³¹⁷

Drawing on this precedent, the Peel Commission wrote of population transfer as an 'instructive' model, whereby the 'ulcer' of nationalism had been 'clean cut' and Greek-Turkish relations are 'friendlier than even before'.³¹⁸ Moreover, in framing the Palestine situation as analogous to post-war Europe, the report elided the historical and political context of empire and settler colonialism. Peel's 'minority problem' was rather an 'indigenous problem' and conflict emerging between Arabs and Jews was not reducible to two competing nationalisms and two populations racially construed as

³¹⁷ Ibid, 391.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

irreconcilable; the settler minority, abetted by an imperial power, was attempting to dispossess the indigenous majority.

The rise of population exchanges as an established practice of international relations cited in the Peel Commission's report became especially appealing to settler aspirations of creating a new state in a territory already inhabited by a vast majority of Palestinians. The Peel Commission's recommendation influenced the Zionist leadership to embrace more decisively the notion of humanitarian transfer. David Ben Gurion, the main architect of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine,³¹⁹ readily took on board the recommendation on population exchange. After 1937, Ben Gurion commented in his diary that they 'must grab hold of this conclusion as we grabbed hold of the Balfour Declaration' and that it is 'more important than all our demands for additional land.'³²⁰ Ben Gurion further confided in his diary:

It is important that this plan comes from the Commission and not from us
Transfer is what will make possible a comprehensive settlement programme.
Thankfully, the Arab people have vast empty areas. . . . You must remember, that this system embodies an important *humane and Zionist idea*, to transfer parts of a people [i.e., Palestine's Arabs] to their country [i.e., Transjordan and Iraq] and to settle empty lands³²¹ (emphasis added)

The Peel Commission recommendation changed the terms of the debate on transfer and infused it with the liberal concept of humanity. It permitted conceiving of

³¹⁹ Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing*, 23.

³²⁰ Translated and reproduced in Morris 2001, 41.

³²¹ Translated and reproduced in Morris, *Birth Revisited*, 48.

indigenous expulsions as not merely necessary but also humanitarian because resettlement in other Arab lands would benefit Palestinians.

Ben Gurion was far from being the sole exponent of this concept of transfer that would have beneficial consequences. In fact, both the left and right wings of the entire Zionist movement came to support the basic elements of this kind of transfer proposal. In 1937, Moshe Shertok (later Sharret), who from 1933 was the director of the Jewish Agency's Political Department and in 1948 became Israel's first foreign minister, told at a meeting of the Mapai party in Tel Aviv that according to the Commission there was nothing wrong in removing people who inhabited the land for many generations. As he stated, 'It [the Commission] points out that after the population transfer between Greece and Turkey, good relations once again prevailed between the two countries.'³²² Also in 1937, this time at the debates of the Poale Zion, Eliahu Lulu, argued that transfer is 'a just, logical, moral, and humane programme in all senses.'³²³

If until the 1930s the settler movement was wary of openly discussing the expulsion of Palestinians, the Peel Commission provided added legitimacy to the notion of transfer based on an international precedent. An internal memorandum of the Jewish Agency outlines this new-found rationale: 'The fact that the Commissioners themselves have considered a compulsory exchange of population, entitled the Jewish Agency to examine such a possibility without the fear of being charged with the reproach to have taken the initiative for the transfer of Arabs.'³²⁴ In a memorandum addressed to the Twentieth Zionist Congress convened in Zurich, Switzerland in 1937, Dr Selig Soskin, director of the Land Settlement Department of the Jewish National

³²² Sharett, *Yoman Medini*, Vol. 2, 5 July 1937, cited in Masalha, *Expulsion*, 239.

³²³ Quoted in Nur Masalha, *The Politics of Denial. Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, (London: Pluto, 2003), 57.

³²⁴ Dr A. Bonné, 1937. Outline for an enquiry into the problems of exchange of land and population. CZA, S90/581.

Fund and a supporter of the right-wing Revisionist movement, added his voice to the chorus on humanitarian transfer, stating, 'The settling of the Arab rural population must be presented as a great humanity work.'³²⁵ Resettlement, he argued in an Orientalist tone, would bring the indigenous better liberties compared to the old 'musha' customary system of land tenure predominant in the previous Ottoman period. It would also promise, as he stated, '[w]ell laid out villages with neat houses, a main road, water supply ... which will be more hygienic and nicer in appearance than the present villages, very often surrounded by or even standing on, heaps of manure.'³²⁶ Arguments like Soskin's, couched in the racist rationale of 'improvement', were constructing the expulsion of Palestinians in the more easily acceptable terms of doing 'humanity work'. Brenna Bhandar has examined how in the early twentieth century the ideology of improvement was used to cast Palestinian modes of cultivation and land tenure as irrational and economically unproductive, thus undeserving of land ownership rights and rightfully appropriable.³²⁷ The proposed methods of humanitarian transfer were linked to what Bhandar terms 'racial regimes of ownership' to denote a discourse of superiority undergirding the cultivation methods of European settler colonial projects.

The growing notion of humanitarian transfer was not exclusive to internal speeches and debates but became the subject of comparative studies carried out to forward a theory of population exchanges with normative implications for the Palestine situation. Dr Jacob Thon and Dr Kurt Mendelsohn—two central figures of the Jewish Agency's Committee for Population Transfer created in the wake of the Peel

³²⁵ To the Members of the Political Commission of the XXth Zionist Congress, S25/247, CZA.

³²⁶ Soskin, Selig E. 1937. Memorandum: To the Members of the Political Commission of the XXth Zionist Congress. CZA S25/247. Cited in Drew, *Remembering 1948*, 119.

³²⁷ Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership*, (Durham: Duke University Press 2018), 8.

Commission—set off to conduct a comparative study to assess the possibilities of applying the Greek-Turkish model to Mandatory Palestine. In late 1937, Thon and Mendelsohn travelled to Greece to investigate the experience of population transfer that took place in 1923. In 1938, Mendelsohn published a pamphlet based on his and Thon's survey of the Greek-Turkish population transfers. In this publication, he reasons on the economic development benefits resulting from compulsory transfer:

Not until the unmixing of population and the creation of homogeneous States and territories, was the way cleared for the economic development of these countries... Only with the exchange of population, and under the pressure of the exigencies of resettlement was this incubus of the past washed away.³²⁸

Dr. A. J. Ettinger, an agronomist and director of the Colonization Department of the Jewish Agency, was also spurred by the Peel Commission to write about the humanitarian merits of a population exchange in Mandatory Palestine. He argued that, 'Such a solution is not only in accordance with principles of justice and humanity but also in keeping with the best interest of the Middle East people as well as of the Democratic Nations.'³²⁹ Dr. Ettinger further articulated that at the beginning of the Second World War the method of population exchange was no more a controversial solution but was 'accepted as one of the recognised forms of international settlement.'³³⁰ He began proposing the postcolonial state of Iraq as a possible site of Arab resettlement, because it supposedly faced a shortage of population. This would

³²⁸ Kurt Mendelsohn, *The Balance of Resettlements: A Precedent for Palestine* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff's Uitgeversmaatschappij, N. V., 1939).

³²⁹ Dr. A. J. Ettinger, Exchange of population and land in application to the Middle East. (CZA A111/6-21t.)

³³⁰ Ibid.

lead to him to argue that it was 'clearly indefensible, from the humanitarian point of view, for the Arab people to occupy territories so vast that they lack working hands to cultivate and develop them.'³³¹

In the 1940s the interwar debate on the morality of transfer, propelled by the Peel Commission, had started to travel to the higher echelons of American politics. US president Herbert Hoover notably wrote of Palestinian transfer as a viable plan to make way for Jewish immigrants. In a 1945 statement appearing in the *New York World-Telegram*, Hoover suggested that 'there is a possible plan of settling the Palestine question and providing ample Jewish refuge' and that his sentiment was worth considering because it offered a 'constructive humanitarian solution.'³³² Hoover's plan was significant because it marked the first time that a US politician of his stature urged a solution to the Palestine question based on a 'humanitarian' resettlement of Palestinians to another Arab country.³³³ According to the plan, Palestinians would resettle and develop lands inside Iraq.

Despite British policy stepping back from the partition and transfer recommendations, population exchanges occurring in Europe remained instructive models for dealing with an unwanted indigenous population.³³⁴ By the Second World War a near consensus was emerging among the Zionist movement that the Palestinian majority must be transferred away from Palestine, including through an expulsion framed as humanitarian. Exemplary of this mindset was Ben Gurion, who in 1944 would state: 'Regarding the transfer of the Arabs this is much easier than any other transfer. There are Arab states in the vicinity...and it is clear that if the Arabs are

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Cited in Simons, *A Historical Survey*, 155.

³³³ Rafael Medoff, 'Herbert Hoover's Plan for Palestine: A Forgotten Episode in American Middle East Diplomacy', *American Jewish History*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (Summer 1990), 449–476.

³³⁴ Sinanoglu, *Partitioning Palestine*, 131.

removed this will improve their condition and not the contrary.'³³⁵ Indigenous dispossession now held a positive connotation of 'improvement,' showing how racist assumptions could come to inform the humanitarian thought of settlers who were intent on displacing and replacing Palestinians. While this section showed how proponents of transfer embedded their plan for creating a majority nation-state within a form of settler-humanitarianism, the next section begins illustrating the ways in which these framings were invoked during the 1948 War.

Internal humanitarian transfer

At the Potsdam Conference in 1945—organised by the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States to consider how to administer a post-Nazi Germany peace—the Allies delved into the issue of population transfer. Article 13 of the Potsdam Agreement recognised that 'any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner.'³³⁶ The Allies knew as they called for orderly humane and transfers that the expulsions which were just then occurring in Europe were anything but humane. The Allies oversaw the largest forced population transfer in modern European history: at least 12 million German-speaking civilians living in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland were forced to leave their homes and made to resettle in defeated Germany.³³⁷

It is at this juncture of forced population transfers in global politics that in early 1947, Britain announced that it was going to quit the League of Nations Mandate

³³⁵ Quoted in Masalha, *Expulsion*, 159.

³³⁶ Berlin Postdam Conference (1945) Available at <https://mronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/m-ust000003-1224.pdf> (Accessed 5 April 2023).

³³⁷ Raymond M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (London: Yale University Press 2012), 1.

for Palestine. On 15 May 1947, the General Assembly established the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), to investigate the problem of Palestine and make once again recommendations for a solution. Some Zionist organisations were still pushing the population exchange formula in their submissions to UNSCOP. In its memorandum to the UN committee, Lehi—the paramilitary group also known as Stern Gang—called for the compulsory evacuation of the entire Arab population of Palestine, preferably to Iraq, and declared ‘it considers an exchange of the Arab population and the Jews of Arab countries as the best solution for the troubled relationship between the Jewish people and the Arabs.’³³⁸ At the UNSCOP deliberations taking place at the General Assembly Ben Gurion brought back the Greek-Turkish precedent to make his case for transfer, as he stated: ‘There was perpetual war between Turkey and Greece. Once a decision was made, and Turks were transferred to Greece, back and forth, [...] they became the best of friends.’³³⁹ Eventually UNSCOP did not suggest population transfers but made a partition proposal and on 29 November 1947 the General Assembly adopted Resolution 181, stipulating the creation of two states. According to Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi, by sanctioning the creation of a Jewish state the UN gave settlers an ‘umbrella of legalism’ to take matters into their own hands.³⁴⁰

The ensuing 1948 Palestine War was anything but an ‘orderly and humane’ affair. Historians have documented the use of psychological warfare, sexual violence, killings, and massacres as key techniques enabling Zionist militias to systematically

³³⁸ Quoted in Yaacov Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement 1925–1948* (Routledge 1988) 267.

³³⁹ Report to the general assembly, volume III, Annex A: Oral evidence presented at public meeting, (1947), 64. Available at <https://www.un.org/unispal/document-source/united-nations-special-committee-on-palestine-unscoop/> (Accessed April 5 2023).

³⁴⁰ Walid Khalidi, ‘Revisiting the UNGA Partition Resolution’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 105, (1997), 15.

depopulate hundreds of Palestinian villages as well as other localities of its indigenous inhabitants.³⁴¹ Above all, the implementation of Plan Dalet provides the most damning evidence of a systematic strategy agreed by the Zionist leadership to conquer, demolish, and depopulate Palestinian villages and localities.³⁴² Finalised in early 1948 and initiated on the 5th of April with the launch of Operation Nachshon, Plan Dalet set the framework for a series of operations carried out by military forces. The plan *inter alia* explicitly mandates depopulation: 'In the event of resistance, the armed force must be wiped out and the population must be expelled outside the borders of the state.'³⁴³

Against this backdrop, within the Zionist militias' operations against the Palestinian city of Haifa, there emerges a case of population expulsion enacted within the prism of humanitarian transfer. In less than a week since an operation was launched against the coastal city, 50,000 Palestinians had been forcibly expelled (earlier around 15,000 of the Palestinian elite had already escaped).³⁴⁴ The mass exodus of Haifa's Arab population was 'the spontaneous reaction to the ruthless combination of terror and psychological warfare tactics adopted by the Haganah during the attack.'³⁴⁵ By mid-May, Haifa effectively became a city mainly populated by Jewish settlers. Yet, some 4,000 Palestinians had stayed put and became the last targets of expulsion.

The remaining Palestinians of Haifa, most of them Christians, were forcibly removed to one sole neighbourhood, the quarter of Wadi Nisnas. In July, the exit from Haifa of the last remaining British troops prompted, in the words of Morris, a

³⁴¹ Sayigh, *The Palestinians*; Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing*; Nazzari, *The Palestinian Exodus*.

³⁴² Walid Khalidi 'Plan Dalet Revisited', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18:1, (1988) 3.

³⁴³ Walid Khalidi, 'Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Volume 18, issue 1, (1988), 29.

³⁴⁴ Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing*, 207–208.

³⁴⁵ Walid Khalidi, 'The Fall of Haifa Revisited', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 37:3 (2008), 30.

'concentration operation.'³⁴⁶ According to Northern Front General Moshe Carmel, who gave out the order to the military, the concentration of Palestinians in Wadi Nisnas was prefigured in Plan Dalet.³⁴⁷ This further dislocation of Palestinians from one area to another of the city had two military motives. First, for 'security' reasons as the war was still ongoing Arabs were seen as a fifth column and potential spies. Second, to accommodate the absorption of Jewish immigrants there was a growing housing need. The concentration of the last Palestinians in Haifa became a dual military and civilian operation, led by Major General Rehavam Amir, a commander of the Haganah, and Avraham Ye'eli from the Haifa Arab Affairs Committee, which was composed of leading Jewish figures.

After Major Amir communicated the order to the committee to concentrate all remaining Palestinians in one sole area, Wadi Nisnas, Ye'eli was initially surprised at the fact that, in his words, 'we were not consulted at all', but still he thought that it was 'justified to concentrate the Arabs in one place both from the point of view of the military good and for their own welfare.'³⁴⁸ Another member of the committee, Yosef Vashitz, a high-ranking member of Mapam party, was concerned that given the short time frame of five days for implementing the order there was 'no possibility of its being carried out in a humane manner,' and that it would be better to 'make them [all] prisoners of war.'³⁴⁹ Following a joint discussion, writes Morris, the 'Arab Affairs Committee reluctantly agree[d] to assist the army in the transfer operation in order to make it as clean and as humane as possible.'³⁵⁰ To be sure, what is presented as 'humane' was rather a forced displacement of the population.

³⁴⁶ Benny Morris, 'Haifa's Arabs: Displacement and Concentration, July 1948', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 2, (Spring 2008), 244.

³⁴⁷ Morris, *Birth Revisited*, 210.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 243.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 245.

The order entailed removing Palestinians from the Carmel ridge–Stella Maris, Wadi Jamal, Abbas Street and the German Colony—to abandoned houses in Wadi Nisnas, previously inhabited by other Palestinians. The commander Amir along with the Arab Affairs Committee held a meeting with Palestinian representatives, most of whom were members of the Communist Party, to make the announcement and ask them for help communicating the order to the community. According to minutes of the meeting, Ye'eli mobilised a humanitarian reasoning to structure plans for the displacement:

Later they [Palestinians] will come to appreciate it, and realize that the fact that their being concentrated in one area is a blessing. When the schools are opened and life returns to normal, they'll discover it was all for their benefit. Now it looks like a sudden blow. When they are concentrated they will also be protected from thefts and so on.³⁵¹

In response, the Palestinian trade unionist Bulus Farah protested, 'It's described as a military action, but in fact it's a political one. It's racism. We can hardly see it as an improvement if we have to move into a ghetto.'³⁵² The commander Amir replied, 'I did all I could in these warlike circumstances to improve the conditions of life.... [But] this is war [and] ... I must carry out orders!' He then rejected the 'ghetto' charge while accepting that the operation was a concentration effort: 'People will continue their normal lives, but they will be concentrated in one place'.³⁵³ Thirty-five years later, the

³⁵¹ Tom Segev, *The First Israelis* (Jerusalem: Domino Press, 1984), 55.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 54.

Haganah commander further recalled the operation, stating that he was 'still proud that the order was carried out in a humane way'.³⁵⁴

These techniques of population concentration and expulsion were enacted within the frame of humanitarianism. My claim in this section is that humanitarianism became part of the operational logic to implement a form of internal displacement during the 1948 War. This story of forced relocation to a nearby area within Haifa is atypical compared to most Palestinian refugees who were forced to flee beyond the borders of the UN-mandated Jewish state. Their story, however, is instructive of how the new military occupation drew upon a settler colonial modality of humanitarianism to concentrate Palestinians inside enclaves.

Retroactive humanitarian transfer

Ethnic cleansing constitutes not only the systematic displacement of a population from a given territory but also manifests in preventing the return of expellees to their original homes and lands. Zionist leaders responsible for the policy against refugee returns defined it as 'retroactive transfer.' Yosef Weitz, the head of the Jewish National Fund Lands Division, played a major role in the 1948 War as executive and adviser for the expulsion of Palestinians, in the takeover of land and villages and in establishing a position against the return of refugees.³⁵⁵ Crucially, to prevent the return of refugees he mobilised ideas of humanitarian aid and resettlement in other Arab countries. This section further illustrates the function of humanitarianism in entrenching Palestinian displacement amid and after settler colonial warfare.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 56.

³⁵⁵ Benny Morris, 'Yosef Weitz and the transfer committees, 1948–49', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 22 (4), (2006), 522–561.

During March and April of 1948, Weitz accelerated the push for implementing the expulsions. In May, he then sought the now prime minister Ben Gurion and foreign minister Sharrett's backing for the creation of a 'Transfer Committee'—of the kind that was created in the previous decade but this time also to ensure that there would be no Palestinian returns. The population exchange framework was still part of the plans of those engaged in displacing Palestinians during the war. According to an archival source, Sharret headed his notes from the May meeting: 'after the fact of evacuation/eviction, exchange of population, appointment of a committee.'³⁵⁶ Weitz found willing supporters for this move given that when the first UN mandated truce to the war had come into effect in June 1948, the Israeli leadership was wary of the Arab leaders' calls for the return to Palestine of the approximately 300,000 refugees displaced by that point. Weitz's two initial collaborators in the committee were Eliahu Sasson, who headed the Arab Affairs Department at the Jewish Agency, and Ezra Danin, representing the Israel War Cabinet. In June, Weitz presented a memorandum to Ben Gurion entitled 'Retroactive Transfer, A Scheme for the Solution of the Arab Question in the State of Israel.'³⁵⁷ The memorandum refrained from acknowledging responsibility for the Palestinian exodus, though it now advised that Zionist forces should throw all their weight behind preventing refugee returns. As Weitz stated, 'The uprooting of the Arabs should be seen as a solution to the Arab question...and, in line with this, it must from now on be directed according to a calculated plan geared toward the goal of "retroactive transfer."³⁵⁸ In August 1948 the Transfer Committee was

³⁵⁶ Cited in *Ibid*, 530.

³⁵⁷ Morris, *Birth Revisited*, 2004, 313.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

formally established with the goal of amplifying and consolidating the demographic transformation of Palestine.³⁵⁹

Weitz recorded in his diary that the 'retroactive transfer' policy they formulated had envisioned two main strategies: 'Preventing the Arabs from returning to their places'; and '[Extending] help to the Arabs to be absorbed in other places.'³⁶⁰ Regarding the first guideline, the committee suggested five policies, including the destruction of villages, creating colonial settlements to fill the emptied Palestinian localities, and making 'propaganda aimed at non-return.'³⁶¹ It is within the last policy of 'non-return' that the work of the previous years to develop the idea of a humanitarian transfer in the image of past international precedents became a useful tool to deny refugee returns. Danin specifically defined the committee's mission (as Mendelsohn did in the previous section) as collecting information about past cases of population transfers, by making comparison with the Greek-Turkish precedent. On the second guideline, Weitz was fundamentally proposing that humanitarianism should accompany the expulsion of Palestinians to impede their return. Danin further suggested considering that 'Christian organizations could be found, acting under the rubric of helping the refugees, which would assist in their resettlement in the Arab countries.'³⁶² In other words, humanitarian assistance to refugees elsewhere other than Palestine would help keep the indigenous population out of the new settler colonial state. When humanitarian aid in exile is prioritised over the indigenous population's demand for return to the homeland, it can come to further the project of settler colonial dispossession.

³⁵⁹ Nur Masalha, 'From Propaganda to Scholarship: Dr Joseph Schechtman and the Origins of Israeli Polemics on the Palestinian', *Holy Land Studies*, Volume 2 Issue 2, (2004), 188–197.

³⁶⁰ Morris, *Birth Revisited*, 2004, 313.

³⁶¹ Morris, 'Yosef Weitz', 532.

³⁶² Morris, *Birth Revisited*, 312.

While in July 1948 the Israeli Cabinet met to discuss the question of Palestinian return Ben Gurion set out his views, which were to serve as the basis of the consensus that emerged thereafter. He reverted once again to the Greek-Turkish population transfers to justify his position against refugee repatriations:

They were enemies for more than four hundred years – and after the last war in which the Turks won and expelled the Greeks from Anatolia – they became friends and signed a treaty of peace, and it is also possible between us and the Arabs.³⁶³

In that summer of 1948, a key struggle on the question of refugees took place between the Israeli government and United Nations Mediator in Palestine Count Folke Bernadotte, a Swedish diplomat who helped bring about a truce to the war and was shortly after assassinated by the Lehi paramilitary group. With battle on pause, the UN mediator was pushing for Israel to accept the return of Palestinian refugees. In a meeting with Sharrett, Count Bernadotte spoke of ‘300,000–350,000 refugees, living in poverty and deprivation,’ and that humanitarian assistance had to be organised, but he suggested ‘the most effective assistance would be their return ... to their places.’³⁶⁴ For Count Bernadotte the refugees’ return to their original lands would be the most effective humanitarian assistance. Sharret rebutted that the question of refugee returns should not be determined exclusively on a humanitarian basis but ‘it is a matter for political and military calculation.’³⁶⁵ He added that repatriation constituted a ‘warlike measure’ against Israel, ‘the introduction of a Fifth Column ... and of an explosive to

³⁶³ Morris, *Birth Revisited*, 318.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 323.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

blow us up from within.’³⁶⁶ According to Sharret the most appropriate solution that considered long-term humanitarian considerations would be the resettlement of Palestinians in Arab countries, similarly to the Greek-Turkish population transfers he had already discussed a decade earlier after the Peel Commission.³⁶⁷ The humanitarianism that Sharret was willing to accept is one that only preserves expulsion and is disassociated from return.

In late 1948, the demographer Joseph Schechtman visited Weitz and the other members of the Transfer Committee, who had appointed him to conduct research and make recommendations on the question of the Palestinian refugees’ resettlement in Arab states. Schechtman was a vocal supporter of Jabotinsky, who authored two major studies on forced population transfers in Europe (1946) and in Asia (1949), in which he implied that expelling minorities would bring stability.³⁶⁸ Mark Mazower writes that the lesson people like Schechman took from the post-war order was that ‘eliminating minorities was simply a necessary part of modern nationalism and modern internationalism alike.’³⁶⁹ In December 1948, the Transfer Committee eventually recommended resettling ethnically cleansed Palestinian refugees in ‘thinly-populated’ Iraq, Syria, and Transjordan.³⁷⁰ The following year Schechtman’s *Population Transfer in Asia* was published, where he wrote of ‘The Case for Arab-Jewish Exchange of Population’.³⁷¹ ‘Palestine’, he reasoned, ‘seems a classic case for quick, decisive transfer action as the only constructive method of solving the basic problem and

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Joseph Schechtman, *European Population Transfers 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946); *Population Transfer in Asia* (New York: Hallsby Press, 1949).

³⁶⁹ Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2009), 107.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, 138.

³⁷¹ Schechtman, *Population Transfer*, 85.

preventing extremely dangerous developments.³⁷² Similarly, in 1949 Norman Bentwich—who became the first Attorney-General of Mandatory Palestine, and later held the Chair of International Relations at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem—compared the condition of Palestinian refugees to that of the Greeks expelled from Turkey, and wrote that ‘Some large transfer of population was inevitable; and it offered the most humane as well as the most realistic solution’.³⁷³ The displacement of Palestinians was not only presented as humanitarian but also ostensibly a way of ensuring security in the region.

Appealing to population exchange precedents did significant political work in constructing the expulsion of Palestinians as portending security and avoiding an assumed greater future conflict. Yet it was also the form of humanitarianism analysed in this section, distinguished by its capacity to structure plans for entrenching the dispossession of Palestinians, that began the process of framing the question of Palestinian refugees in a way that bypassed the political issue of return. After the Nakba, the newly established United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) reduced Palestinians to a predominantly refugee problem manageable through regimes of humanitarian aid, rather than an indigenous struggle for return and for the liberation of dispossessed land.³⁷⁴ Ultimately, the idea of retroactive humanitarian transfer articulated by some of the key architects of the new order in Palestine became a powerful way in which the indigenous population, now turned refugees, were denied the possibility to return to their homes and lands.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Norman Bentwich, ‘The Arab Refugees’, *Contemporary Review*, no. 176 (1949), 82.

³⁷⁴ Shaira Vadasaria, ‘1948 to 1951: The racial politics of humanitarianism and return in Palestine’, *Oñati Socio-Legal Series*, 10(6) (2018), 1242–1269.

Conclusion

Exploring the 1923 international legal precedent on Greek-Turkish population exchanges enables attending to how the mass expulsion of Palestinians was framed as a humanitarian population transfer before, during and after the foundational violence of 1948. This chapter has shown the ways in which a settler colonial project can dispossess indigenous people yet retain that it has been a humanitarian endeavour. The concept of humanitarian transfer thus opens an avenue for understanding humanitarianism's role in the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians. If in the 1950s population exchange was a popular justification within Israeli diplomatic circles, in present times the discourse has largely fell out of favour in the international order.³⁷⁵ A century since the Greek-Turkish agreement, the type of forced population displacements that was legalised in 1923 would be considered illegal under present international law.

But in the international context of the 1948 Palestine War, drawing on population exchange precedents permitted cloaking the elimination of the native with the mantle of humanitarianism. The ways in which racist discourses were readily conjoined with notions of a humanitarian population transfer also help substantiate the broader scholarly contention that race is central to humanitarianism's rationalities.³⁷⁶ It points to the different ways in which humanitarianism can articulate racial difference and inequity.³⁷⁷ While the chapter built on existing contributions on the ethnic

³⁷⁵ See Ella Shohat, 'Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims', *Social Text*, No. 19/20 (1988), 12.

³⁷⁶ Katharyne Mitchell, 'Education, race and empire: a genealogy of humanitarian governance in the United States,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 42 (3) (2017), 349–362.

³⁷⁷ See, Polly Pallister-Wilkins, 'HuManitarianism: Race and the overrepresentation of "Man"', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 47 (3), (2022), 695–708; Lewis Turner,

cleansing of Palestine, revisiting this history in a new light offers a framework to widen the path for studying the Nakba; a path that is attentive to the effects of a racialised liberal world order.

While this chapter focused on the specific timeframe between the 1920s and 1950s, we can begin reading these historical events in the context of the *longue durée*. The mobilisation of humanitarianism to erase the settler colonial causes of Palestinian dispossession discussed in relation to the 1948 War, help inform and explain an enduring contemporary approach within the Israeli military. It constitutes the necessary history to understand the making of settler humanitarian subjectivities of benevolence towards the native. At the same time, the case of internal transfer justified under humanitarian concern was an early manifestation of policies of population concentration and ‘ghettoisation’ that would recur in subsequent decades.³⁷⁸ The Zionist civil-military contingent concentrating natives inside enclaves as a form of humanitarian transfer epitomises an important feature of the ‘humanitarian governance’ of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip—which will be further examined in Chapter 4 when discussing branch of COGAT.

In past decades there has notably been a marked resurgence of the transfer debate inside Israel. In 2017, the current Israeli government minister Bezalel Smotrich, himself a settler from the occupied West Bank, mobilised the population exchange discourse to advocate for the forced expulsion of Palestinians. He had written that, ‘Zionism was built based on population exchange e.g. the mass Aliyah of Jews from Arab countries and Europe to the Land of Israel, willingly or not, and the exit of masses

‘#Refugees can be entrepreneurs too!’ Humanitarianism, race, and the marketing of Syrian refugees,’ *Review of International Studies*, 46(1) (2020), 137–155.

³⁷⁸ See for example, Alina Korn, ‘The Ghettoization of the Palestinians’ in Ronit Lentin (ed) *Thinking Palestine* (London: Zed Books 2013), 116–130.

of Arabs who lived here, willingly or not, to the surrounding Arab areas. This historic pattern seems to require culmination, ensuring a future of peace above all else.³⁷⁹ Most recently, the transfer debate has prominently re-emerged during Israel's 2023/24 genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Since then, multiple Israeli politicians have been calling for a 'humanitarian solution', by which they mean the expulsion of Palestinians outside of Gaza, into neighbouring Egypt for example.³⁸⁰ The concluding chapter will further illustrate how the demands for expelling Palestinians were presented as an encouragement of refugee immigration and resettlement and rationalised as a humanitarian transfer in the very same terms invoked during the Nakba.

³⁷⁹ Bezalel Smotrich, 'Israel's Decisive Plan', Available at <https://hashiloach.org.il/israels-decisive-plan/?s=09>, (accessed on April 16, 2023).

³⁸⁰ See for example, Gila Gamiel, 'Victory is an opportunity for Israel in the midst of crisis – opinion', *Jerusalem Post* (2023) available at <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-773713> (accessed on 13 Dec. 23).

Chapter 3 The humanitarianisation of the settler immigrant

Introduction

[Palestinians] have had the extraordinarily bad luck to have a good case in resisting colonial invasion of their homeland combined with, in terms of the international and moral scene, the most morally complex of all opponents, Jews, with a long history of victimization and terror behind them. The absolute wrong of settler colonialism is very much diluted and perhaps even dissipated when it is a fervently believed-in Jewish survival that uses settler colonialism to straighten out its own destiny.

Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*³⁸¹

What Edward Said articulates in the epigraph neatly captures how the international order of the interwar and Second World War periods came to rally around the idea of Israel as a nation-state. To escape persecution and statelessness in Europe, the principal solution of the Zionist project was for Jews to become migrants, but of a specific kind: colonial *settlers*. Along with the use of sheer violence against the native, settler colonialism relies on powerful epistemic forces to institute itself, as was also the case in the creation of modern states. The power of these epistemic forces—forms of knowledge that can, for instance, be constituted by discourse and narrative—is that they render invisible what should be evident by removing the historical and political

³⁸¹ Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, (New York: Vintage Books), 108.

context of settler colonialism. One epistemic force typical of settler colonial formations is the discursive conflation of settlers and immigrants.³⁸² The distinction is crucial because immigrants join existing societies and polities, whereas settlers seek to establish new ones. The sympathy for a suffering subject characteristic of twentieth century humanitarianism can aid the conflation between settler and immigrant. The humanitarian paradigm can help erase the fact that settlers are occupying a native territory and frame them instead, for instance, as solely refugees seeking a safe heaven. Humanitarianism has the power of making a range of political projects difficult to resist, including a demographic program of settler colonial replacement.

The myth of a 'nation of immigrants' is a recurrent feature among settler societies, such as those established in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.³⁸³ It is a resilient discourse that has helped normalise the settler invasion of indigenous territories. Once Israel achieved statehood in 1948, the mass immigration of Jews was often presented as a natural movement of populations, an 'Ingathering of Exiles'. But on the contrary, Jewish migration to Palestine was part of a carefully coordinated political project. In addition, for scholars of settler colonial studies, there is a fundamental difference between migrants and settlers, which is their differing sovereign prerogatives.³⁸⁴ Migrants enter someone else's society while settlers create new ones in their own image.³⁸⁵ Meanwhile for Veracini, settler discourses tend to portray settlers as migrants, which enables settler colonialism to disappear behind victimisation. A prior dispossession comes to legitimate ongoing domination, as the

³⁸² Mahmoud Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 21.

³⁸³ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Not "A Nation of Immigrants" Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and a History of Erasure and Exclusion* (Boston: Beacon Press 2022).

³⁸⁴ Lorenzo Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), 33.

³⁸⁵ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

settler arguments would go, 'they had to leave' and 'had no other choice'.³⁸⁶ In this regard, the influential nineteenth century liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill reasoned that emigration in the settler colonies was the 'only feasible mode of removing the immediate pressure of pauperism' and that they were spaces in which 'the existing civilizational potential [of settlers] could be realized'.³⁸⁷

The Israeli case is an important example of the constitution of the settler subject as a victimised migrant. Political Zionism's genealogy is partly rooted in a history of Jewish persecution in Europe. While the Zionist ambition to create a nation-state preceded the Holocaust, the Nazi genocide of European Jews is a unique feature of the settler colonial project in Palestine. No other settler society was subjected to a genocide.³⁸⁸ At the same time, from a global and comparative perspective Israel was the last European settler colony established in a decolonising world.³⁸⁹ It achieved statehood at a time when several formerly colonised countries were gaining formal independence from imperial subjugation. To say it with Pakistani intellectual Eqbal Ahmad, 'At the dawn of decolonization, Palestine was colonized'.³⁹⁰ This anomaly in the global context furthered Israel's image as exclusively a nationalist movement seeking an end to Jewish victimisation in Europe.³⁹¹ But as Patrick Wolfe notes, Zionism has two poles. On the one hand, it is a response to the persecution of Jews, with the Holocaust being the ultimate extreme representation. While the other face is

³⁸⁶ Ibid 35.

³⁸⁷ Bell *Reordering the World*, 216 and 225.

³⁸⁸ Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, 'Tracing Settler Colonialism: A Genealogy of a Paradigm in the Sociology of Knowledge Production in Israel,' (2022), *Politics & Society*, 50(1), pp. 44–83.

³⁸⁹ 'Settler Colonialism Then and Now. A Conversation between J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Patrick Wolfe' *Política e Societa* (2012), 253.

³⁹⁰ Eqbal Ahmad, *The Selected Writing of Eqbal Ahmad*, ed. Carollee Bengelsdorf, Margaret Cerullo, and Yogesh Chandrani (New York: Colombia University Press, 2006), 378.

³⁹¹ Ahmad H. Sa'di and Nur Masalha (eds) *Decolonizing the Study of Palestine: Indigenous Perspectives and Settler Colonialism after Elia Zureik* (London: I.B. Tauris 2023), 1.

the settler colonial movement, which responded to persecution by expelling Palestinians and appropriating their lands.³⁹²

Referring to the Zionist project Wolfe concludes that, 'There could hardly be a clearer example of settler colonialism's replacement of Natives by immigrants.'³⁹³ However, the function of humanitarianism in facilitating settlers to populate Palestine has not received sufficient attention in the literature. Rashid Khalidi briefly noted how during the Ottoman era what was at stake in discussions of Jewish settlement in Palestine was its humanitarian nature. Khalidi details a debate emerging in the Arab press already in the 1910s, where Palestinian journalist Najib Nassar responded to supporters of the Zionist movement who had claimed that 'Zionism meant no harm to the people of Palestine, and was only a humanitarian movement to relieve the suffering of oppressed Jews'.³⁹⁴ Nassar's firm response was that 'a true humanitarian movement would not cause hardship to the people of the country so as to relieve the oppression of others.'³⁹⁵ This brief interaction foreshadowed a similar debate that would come to fruition in the interwar period.

Chapter 1 detailed how the rise of humanitarian relief after the First World War became a means for the settler consolidation of power on the ground in British-ruled Palestine. Here the focus shifts to the period leading up the Nakba and in the immediate years after establishment of Israeli statehood. The wider context of the Second World War that ushered in the state of Israel has been appraised as a key

³⁹² 'Settler Colonialism Then and Now. A Conversation between J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Patrick Wolfe' *Politica e Societa* (2012), 254.

³⁹³ *Ibid* 198.

³⁹⁴ Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, (New York: Columbia University Press. 1997), 138.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

moment in the development of international humanitarianism.³⁹⁶ Most distinctive about this moment, argues Lori Allen, is a new form of humanitarianism that comes into the frame.³⁹⁷ Specifically Jewish suffering became the central concern of an emergent post-war humanitarianism. Yet the effect of this humanitarianism on the process of Zionist settlement has not been extensively examined. In this chapter, I sketch some of the contributions made by international humanitarianism to the creation of the Israeli settler state.

The chapter first situates a growing debate coalescing in the press between Zionists and Arabs on whether Jewish immigration constituted a humanitarian practice. Searching the Historical Jewish Press digital collection from the National Library of Israel one finds an abundance of articles that framed immigration to Palestine using a humanitarian register. On the other hand, the Arab critiques of those appeals are an important site where to understand the conflation of humanitarian immigration with settler domination. I trace this Zionist-Palestinian debate first in the 1930s, and later after the Second World War when the debate re-emerged during the deliberations of the 1946 Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry to Palestine. Then, the chapter examines two other sites in which international humanitarianism helped to constitute the process of settler colonisation. First, the work of International Refugee Organisation (IRO) was a prime example of this. Yet, existing historical literature on the IRO, while acknowledging that international humanitarianism for Jewish refugees was fundamental for the creation of Israel, fails to recognise that this process was part and parcel of the workings of settler colonialism.

³⁹⁶ See, Johannes Paulmann, 'Conjunctures in the History of International Humanitarian Aid during the Twentieth Century', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 4, no. 2 (2013), 215–38.

³⁹⁷ Allen, *A History of False Hope*, 103.

Second, not only has humanitarianism furthered the creation of Israel, but human rights too were instrumental in its formation as a settler colonial state. Like humanitarianism, human rights are part of a universally conceived notion of humanity, which rather than furthering emancipation, can become an instrument of dispossession. Here it is shown that the creation of Israel was framed as a humanitarian reparation for human rights violations committed by Nazi Germany. This humanitarianisation of human rights reparations effectively endorsed the settler colonial expulsion of Palestinians in 1948. Relatedly, in the last section I explore the intellectual thought of one of the key drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the renowned jurist René Cassin. It is argued that Cassin's uneven application of human rights to advocate for Jewish immigration and solely humanitarianism to displaced Palestinians living in exile reflected a racial hierarchy underpinning his political commitments.

Internationalising humanitarian sympathy for settler immigration

In less than two decades since the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine was officially installed with Britain as the colonial power, the Jewish population increased from 80,000 (around 10 percent of the total population) in 1922 to some 450,000 (approximately one-third) in 1939.³⁹⁸ Before the British occupation in 1917, Ottoman Palestine was the home of a local Jewish population, as it was the case in many other Arab countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq and Yemen. However, unlike other areas where Jews resided, Palestine was also undergoing a process of Zionist

³⁹⁸ Susan Pedersen 'Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations' in Susan Pedersen and Caroline Elkins (eds) *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century, Projects, Practices, Legacies* (New York: Routledge 2005), 125.

settlement. In the 1930s a contentious debate sparked on whether European Jews should join the Zionist project and immigrate to Mandatory Palestine. Before the 1930s, most Zionist settlers were not considered 'refugees', a term that only subsequently began acquiring legal significance and connotations related to not only displacement but denationalisation.³⁹⁹ Jewish immigration and settlement in colonies increasingly became a key source of conflict, which eventually led to the Palestinian Great Revolt of 1936-39.⁴⁰⁰ Historian Susan Pedersen has shown that at the League of Nations, particularly in the 1930s, the Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC) harnessed the growing antisemitism occurring in Europe to support Jewish immigration to Palestine on humanitarian grounds.⁴⁰¹ This section adds to Pedersen's account by examining an emerging international debate coalescing in the press between Zionists and Palestinians, as well as their respective supporters, on whether Jewish immigration constituted a humanitarian practice.

On one side of the debate were Zionist settlers and their supporters in the League of Nations, particularly in the PMC, which was responsible for overseeing the newly established mandatory system.⁴⁰² The PMC was created by the victors of the First World War to oversee the former colonial possessions of the Ottoman Empire and German Empire. Although most of its members came from imperial establishments, it did act independently of states to ostensibly constrain the behaviour of colonial powers. If for its own imperial reasons Britain attempted to limit commitments to Zionism—by restricting Jewish immigration after Palestinian rebellions

³⁹⁹ See Alon Confino, 'The Nakba and the Zionist Dream of an Ethnonational State', *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 95, (2023), 131–153.

⁴⁰⁰ Ghassan Kanafani, *The 1936-39 Revolt in Palestine* (New York: Committee for a Democratic Palestine, 1972).

⁴⁰¹ Susan Pedersen 'Settler Colonialism at the Bar'.

⁴⁰² Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015).

in 1929 and 1936—the League of Nations’ PMC remained the Zionist movement’s most consistent advocate, especially at a time when the appeal for settler conquest was globally in demise. Departing from the heights of European colonial invasions in the nineteenth century, the British settler project in South Africa and that of Germany in Southwest Africa (Namibia) were falling out of favour within the PMC.⁴⁰³ This was partly because the self-stated mission of the League was to follow the spirit of Wilsonian self-determination for colonised peoples. Imperial annexation and settler colonial expansion were challenging that ostensibly progressive new international norm. Zionist state-building was, however, the only case in which settler colonialism was officially recognised in the mandate system.⁴⁰⁴

The League of Nations and the PMC held no coercive powers; they were institutions that tried to subject imperial rule to legitimate international control. As Pedersen notes, they were in the business of ‘rehabilitating the imperial order’.⁴⁰⁵ What the PMC provided was legitimation for Zionist settlement, including through a humanitarian register. This register was effective because of the growing antisemitism that inspired sympathy for the Zionist movement casting itself as the solution to the ‘Jewish question’ in Europe. Nazi Germany’s anti-Jewish policies in the 1930s caused a spike in Jewish migration to Palestine and provided a reason for the PMC to loudly back Zionism, both as a humanitarian response to persecuted Jews and as another stick with which to beat their own adversary in the Nazi regime.⁴⁰⁶

The support emanating from the PMC was not unrepresentative of the views of settlers on the ground in Mandatory Palestine, whose claims were based on

⁴⁰³ Pedersen, *Settler Colonialism at the Bar*, 114.

⁴⁰⁴ Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2015), 5.

⁴⁰⁵ Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 111.

⁴⁰⁶ Pedersen ‘Settler Colonialism at the Bar’, 128 (Nazis favoured the expulsion of Jews but categorically rejected the creation of a Jewish state).

humanitarian sentiments. For instance, in 1938 the Zionist newspaper *Palestine Post* (the precursor to today's *Jerusalem Post*) published an article by a German Jewish refugee who appealed to the 'humanitarian feeling' of the League of Nations when calling for increased immigration.⁴⁰⁷ In the same year, Elihau Dobkin, the head of the Jewish Agency immigration department, would write that 'The Zionist cause had every right to be proud of its humanitarian, constructive and practical success in the Youth Immigration movement.'⁴⁰⁸

This type of humanitarianism supporting Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine was also characteristic of a rising global Zionist constituency. In a campaign by American Zionist organisations, 64,000 telegrams were sent to the White House to urge the US government to pressure Britain to not restrict Jewish immigration. In this regard, the *Palestine Post* relayed the following statement from the campaign, 'World opinion is disturbed at the reported intentions of Great Britain to repudiate the Palestine Mandate. Britain is bound by humanitarian reasons and the specific terms of the Balfour Declaration to establish and maintain a Jewish National Home.'⁴⁰⁹ The demand for settler national self-determination was tied to the humanitarian need for Jewish protection. In addition, these demands were often put directly to the British government as emerges from a resolution passed by the Austrian Settlers Association

⁴⁰⁷ 'How Long? 'By an immigrant from Germany', *Palestine Post*, 25 March 1938, 8. available at <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/pls/1938/03/25/01/?a=d&d=pls19380325-01&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-----1>

⁴⁰⁸ 'Clamouring at the Gates of Palestine. Distress of Refugees Described by Jewish Agency Spokesman', *Palestine Post*, 21 December 1938, 2 available at <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/pls/1938/12/21/01/article/16/?srpos=221&e=-----193-en-20-pls-221--img-txIN%7ctxTI-humanitarian-----1>

⁴⁰⁹ '64,000 Telegrams Urge "Open Door"', *Palestine Post*, 18 October 1938, 1, available at <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/pls/1938/10/18/01/article/9/?srpos=227&e=-----193-en-20-pls-221--img-txIN%7ctxTI-humanitarian-----1>

in Tel Aviv where members called for ‘the British Government on humanitarian grounds to extend the facilities for immigration to Palestine for Austrian Jews’.⁴¹⁰

On the other side of the debate were Palestinians and a section of the wider Arab world. This statement from Dr. Izzat Tannous, who since 1936 had been elected as executive member of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) is emblematic of the way Palestinians recognised and opposed the humanitarian turn in justifications for settler colonisation. In a memorandum submitted to British Minister MacDonald (who later oversaw and introduced the 1939 White Paper), Dr. Tannous wrote in late 1938,

We are aware that the Jews are trying to increase their numbers in the country by appealing to humanitarian principles and that their associates in Parliament support this viewpoint. I consequently regret to state that any increase of Jewish immigration into Palestine, no matter for what reason, will arouse Arab resentment and indignation.⁴¹¹

Shortly after, when in 1938 attention briefly shifted to the French city of Evian hosting a US-sponsored conference on the Jewish refugee crisis—called in the wake of the Nuremberg Laws stripping German Jews of citizenship and to assess the immigration policies of participating nations⁴¹²—the Palestinian newspaper *Filastin* provided an

⁴¹⁰ ‘American Subject’s Illegal Stay’, *Palestine Post*, 17 July 1938, 2, available at <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/pls/1938/07/17/01/article/75/?srpos=42&e=-----193-en-20-pls-41--img-txIN%7ctxTI-humanitarian-----1>

⁴¹¹ Osama Tannous, ‘Arabs Six Point Basis To London Conference Uncompromising Stand on Child Immigrants’, *Palestine Post*, 18 December 1938, 2, available at <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/pls/1938/12/18/01/article/16/?srpos=169&e=-----193-en-20-pls-161--img-txIN%7ctxTI-humanitarian-----1>

⁴¹² Paul Bartrop, *The Evian Conference of 1938 and the Jewish Refugee Crisis* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018).

incisive critique of the humanitarianism of Western governments. The *Filastin* article stated,

The Arabs are ready to take part in this humanitarian work and suggest that Arab kingdoms should take part in the conference. But the condition must be that each country participating should undertake to accept a certain number of Jewish refugees in proportion to their population. If the Democratic countries do this, they will demonstrate their real sympathy; but if they decide to place all immigrants in Palestine or another country by force of arms, then they will show they are not sincere.⁴¹³

The article's point was that if those countries attending the conference are approaching the Jewish refugee problem from a humanitarian viewpoint, each of them should consider their own territories as possible centres of refuge—something which they were reluctant to do. At this juncture American policy severely limited the quota for Jewish refugees. *Filastin's* comment did not dismiss the genuine crisis faced by Jewish refugees and did not reject immigration *a priori* but suggested that assistance should be done proportionally and in a manner that would not harm Palestinian national aspirations.

Joining in this public debate on whether Jewish refugees should find humanitarian refuge in Palestine were other Arab nations rising in solidarity against what they saw as foreign and imperialist interventions in the region. If the League of

⁴¹³ 'Charity Begins at Home. Falastin's Comment on Evian' *Palestine Post*, 3 July 1938, 2, available at <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/pls/1938/07/03/01/?&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-----1>; On the history of Falastin see Fred H. Lawson, 'Falastin: An Experiment in Promoting Palestinian Nationalism through the English-language Press' in Anthony Gorman and Didier Monciaud (eds) *The Press in the Middle East and North Africa, 1850–1950*, (Edinburgh University Press 2017).

Nations had helped internationalising support for Zionist settler colonialism, the 1936-39 anti-colonial uprisings were internationalising the question of Palestine in the Arab world. In 1938, shortly after the Evian conference, the recently established Palestine Defence Committee in Iraq (a similar group to the Palestine Defence Committee in Syria which both formed during the Great Revolt) sent a letter of protest to US president Franklin Roosevelt.⁴¹⁴ The letter read,

The endeavours of Zionists to secure intervention on their behalf in Palestine are much resented by the Arabs and Moslems, who, have always regarded the United States as a fair, just, and democratic country. The removal of Arabs and their replacement by foreigners is not a humanitarian act and causes international friction.⁴¹⁵

Even if the Iraqi Palestine solidarity committee did not use these terms, it critiqued the ‘settler colonial humanitarianism’ being proposed, specifically what they understood as a process of removal and replacement could not be deemed a humanitarian act. In the interwar era, while the League of Nations was inclined towards a pro-Zionist position, Palestinians and their supporters stood their ground and tried to tease out the project of settler domination evident in the humanitarian discourse. Palestinian resistance did cause the British White Paper of 1939, which put a significant limit to Jewish immigration, although it did not completely halt it. However, the internationalisation of support for Zionism within the League’s PMC, which included a

⁴¹⁴ Philip S. Khoury, ‘Divided Loyalties? Syria and the Question of Palestine, 1919-39’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1985), 324–348.

⁴¹⁵ ‘Baghdad Press on Palestine’, *Palestine Post*, 3 July 1938, 3, available at <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/pls/1938/10/25/01/article/33/?srpos=126&e=-----193-en-20-pls-121--img-txIN%7ctxTI-humanitarian-----1>

humanitarian sympathy for Jewish immigration, was crucial in delaying that policy reversal of 1939 to much later than the British had originally intended.⁴¹⁶

The 1946 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry to Palestine

For has not Palestine had its share of relieving the sins of Europe?

Nassib Bulos, letter to the *Palestine Post* (1946).⁴¹⁷

In 1946, a diverse contingent of British and US diplomats, politicians and scholars were appointed as commissioners to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. They were mandated to: 'examine political, economic and social conditions in Palestine as they bear upon the problem of Jewish immigration and settlement'; and 'examine the position of the Jews in those countries in Europe where they have been the victims of Nazi and Fascist persecution, and ... to make estimates of those who wish or will be impelled by their conditions to migrate to Palestine or other countries outside Europe.'⁴¹⁸ With the end of the Second World War and Europe grappling with further refugee crises, of which a significant part were Jewish Holocaust survivors, the impetus for opening the gates of Mandatory Palestine received once again momentum. Jewish suffering became the central concern of an emergent post-war humanitarianism undergirding both this specific Anglo-American Committee and liberalism at large.⁴¹⁹ Because of the new dominant liberal norm of humanitarian

⁴¹⁶ Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 390.

⁴¹⁷ 'Reader's Letters', *Palestine Post*, 2 March 1946, 4, available at <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/pls/1946/03/02/01/article/68/?srpos=12&e=-----194-en-20-pls-1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-humanitarian-----1>

⁴¹⁸ 1946 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/angtoc.asp

⁴¹⁹ Allen, *A History of False Hope*, 103.

sympathy for Jews, Palestinians and their supporters entered an uneven playing field where the suffering of their opponents mattered more than theirs. The Anglo-American Committee's mandate prioritised resolving the plight of displaced Jews above all else, and thus set the terms of discussion around that goal as the principal humanitarian concern in need of resolve.

The commissioners convened first in Washington, then travelled to Europe to investigate the conditions of Jewish displaced persons (DPs), and then to Mandatory Palestine and other Arab capitals to collect witness submissions from Zionists, Palestinians, and Arab leaders. In its final report, the Committee summarises what it calls the 'Jewish Attitude' as a straightforward policy based around three main points. Firstly, the British Mandate should hand complete control of immigration to the Jewish Agency. Secondly, there should be an end to restrictions on land sales to Jewish settlers in Palestine. And lastly, it was demanded as the main recommendation that once a Jewish demographic majority has been achieved, a Jewish state should be established.⁴²⁰

From the other side, Palestinian leaders protested that the League of Nations was violating their right to self-determination and pointed out that neighbouring Arab nations, which were all formerly mandates, have all been granted formal independence. When it came to the question of Jewish refugees the main Palestinian and Arab approach in their testimonies was to show that they were not antisemitic—after all, Jews had found refuge and amicable relations among Arab communities for centuries—and Arabs hold great sympathy for the persecution of Jews. But they were

⁴²⁰ 1946 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/angtoc.asp

not the persecutors and should not be forced to pay compensation for a crime committed by Europeans.⁴²¹

Along with hearing from Jewish and Arab sides, a key part of the Committee's work was visiting Jewish DPs across Europe and in under three months the commissioners made several trips, including to American, British, and French occupied zones in Germany and Austria. The final report that followed the fieldtrips notes how organisations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee provided health and welfare aid to the DPs by supplying food, clothes and educational material. The Jewish Agency was providing a different kind of care, one centered around rehabilitation and resettlement, particularly the projected emigration of Jews to Mandatory Palestine. Notably, the Committee's report discusses finding a section of Jewish DPs as 'unwilling to engage in any activity which is not designed to fit them for a new life in Palestine'.⁴²² The Committee lay the ground work for elevating these sentiments on a global scale and established that redress was an international responsibility. As it stated: 'We consider that these men, women and children have a moral claim on the civilized world. Their pitiable condition has evoked a world-wide sympathy, but sympathy has so far taken the form only of providing them with the bare essentials of food, clothing and shelter.'⁴²³ Sympathy for providing care and support to Jewish DPs in Europe was not enough; a particular humanitarian sympathy had to be shown which entailed offering them the possibility of emigrating to Palestine.

One of the first testimonies the Committee heard after its establishment in January 1946 was that of Earl G. Harrison, a lawyer and American representative to the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees—the body formed at the Evian

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid.

conference in 1938 that would be succeeded in 1946 by the International Refugee Organisation. Of relevance to the Committee's proceedings was what came to be known as the Harrison Report. This was a document the American lawyer produced the year prior in 1945 after visiting Europe's DP camps at the request of US President Harry Truman. For some historians the Harrison Report swayed Truman's sympathy for the Jews' plight, and, according to the *New York Times*, it was the first officially sanctioned proposal to settle 100,000 European Jews in Palestine.⁴²⁴ Yet, the original source of that demand was the Jewish Agency, which in June 1945, a month after the German surrender, sent a memorandum to the British Palestine administration requesting the immediate admission of 100,000 Jewish immigrants. The request, however, was not taken on board as Britain was holding on to its revised policy on immigration laid out in the 1939 White Paper. Nevertheless, President Truman's sympathy for Jewish suffering boded well for the upcoming US elections and winning over the so-called 'Jewish vote'. While gaining US support at a time when British appeal was dwindling was important, just as significantly the Harrison Report was beginning to nationalise European Jews as part of another nation. This idea built on the already ongoing transformation of 'Jewish' into an ethno-national category, rather than solely a religious one.

In describing the reasons why Jews wanted to leave Germany and Austria, the sites Harrison had investigated, his report states, 'They want to be evacuated to Palestine now, just as other national groups are being repatriated to their homes'.⁴²⁵ Nationalising Europe's Jewish DPs crucially meant that they were not belonging

⁴²⁴ See, David Nasaw *Last Million, The: Europe's Displaced Persons from World War to Cold War* (Penguin Press 2020).

⁴²⁵ Report of Earl G. Harrison (1945), 3.
<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/research/online-documents/holocaust/report-harrison.pdf>

anymore to their country of original residence but belonged to the settler nationalism unfolding in Palestine. In his report, Harrison concluded that ‘for some of the European Jews’ Palestine is the sole solution to their ills—only ‘some’ and not all because the report acknowledges that others did not wish to emigrate and wanted to return to their country of nationality. And finally, the justification he mobilises is representative of the ever-present tendency to displace the political from humanitarian claims, as its stated: ‘this is said on a purely humanitarian basis with no reference to ideological or political consideration so far as Palestine is concerned’.⁴²⁶ For what is characteristic to the power of humanitarianism is its capacity to construct a diverse set of political endeavours as non-political and thus more easily palatable, while in fact advancing, as in Harrison’s case, the settler immigration to Palestine of Europe’s Jewish refugees. Armed with his report, Harrison campaigned before the Anglo-American commissioners to include his findings, and as we will see below the Committee’s final recommendations were not far off.

A challenge to the Committee’s framing and attempt to conjoin Europe’s Jewish refugee crisis with the Palestine situation came from the famed historian Albert Hourani. Born in Manchester, England to Lebanese parents, before embarking on an academic career at Oxford he represented the Arab side before the Committee. In his oral testimony to the commissioners Hourani was at pains to convey that ‘the Arabs do not understand by what right Great Britain and the United States demand of them that they should bear the main burden of solving the problem of refugees.’⁴²⁷ He pointed out that as the US wished to take the moral high ground its doors were kept shut to Jewish refugees, and along with Great Britain, was trying to coerce Palestinian

⁴²⁶ Ibid, 5.

⁴²⁷ ‘The case against a Jewish State in Palestine: Albert Hourani’s Statement to the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry of 1946,’ *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 35(1) (2005), 84.

to accept foreign immigrants without prior consent, an imposition which for Hourani will inevitably lead to the 'injustice of turning a majority into a minority in its own country.'⁴²⁸

Hourani also criticised the Zionist position expressed to the Committee that prioritised the creation of a state even at the expense of refugees, by stating 'I make reference to Mr. Ben-Gurion's answer when he was asked whether he would save the lives of 100,000 German Jews at the cost of giving up his ideal of a Jewish State, and he said no.'⁴²⁹ As the terms of discussion were set on immigration as a humanitarian necessity, Hourani attempted to critique the Zionist maximalist demand, which push comes to shove, will in the end favour the political goal of a settler colonial state over an interest in solving the refugee crisis.

Then again, it is impossible—it is unhappily impossible—to consider the question of immigration simply on humanitarian grounds or any other grounds. The question of immigration into Palestine must be seen in its general political framework. It must always be remembered that what the Zionists are aiming at is not to solve the refugee problem for its own sake, but to secure political domination in Palestine, and that their demand for immigration is only a step towards dominating Palestine.

With this unbending position on what he saw as a real danger to the fate of Palestine, some may say prescient given the events that would shortly follow in the 1948 War, Hourani and the many others making similar points could not win the argument in a

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 82.

highly unfavourable playing field. For the deadlock lay in Zionist supporters seeking to internationalise the responsibility for Jewish victims solely through immigration to Palestine, whereas the Arab side attempted to internationalise the Jewish refugee crisis as a shared responsibility of all nations.⁴³⁰ Despite Palestinians' repeated acknowledgement of the Jewish refugee crisis and willingness to contribute to its resolution but in a manner that would not jeopardise their nation's prospects, this intransigence was very much at odds with Western eyes that viewed support for Jewish settlement in Palestine as the ultimate expression of post-war humanitarianism.

In the end, to give the appearance of balance the final report included elements 'in favour of the Arabs' too, such as refraining from calling for the establishment of a Jewish state and stating that in any political resolution Arabs should not be subordinate to Jews, and vice versa. What remains particularly significant, however, was that the Anglo-American Committee recommended for the immigration of 100,000 European Jews, now seen as a separate national group, and that humanitarian sympathy for Jewish refugees effectively translated into support for populating Mandatory Palestine with settlers. Even though the British Palestine administration did not expand its immigration quota at the time, the recommendation came to influence the approach of the International Refugee Organisation, which after 1948 was pivotal in facilitating the transfer of Jewish refugees to what had become by May of that year, on around 78 percent of Mandatory Palestine, the sovereign state of Israel.

The International Refugee Organisation

⁴³⁰ Allen, *A History of False Hope*, 118.

The internationalisation of humanitarian sympathy for Jewish suffering, coupled with relieving that suffering through nationalisation and emigration to the Israeli settler colonial state in Palestine materialised starkly in the work of the International Refugee Organisation. The IRO assumed many of the functions of UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration created in 1943, and run operations from 1946 to 1952.⁴³¹ The IRO emerged at a moment in which the Second World War had reshaped the international order anew. The United Nations replaced the League of Nations, intergovernmental organisations were scrambling to aid an estimated sixty million European displaced persons, and states were signing up to a novel international human rights regime. If the post 1945 category of the 'national refugee' was a result of the new state formation process of the interwar period and remained an unwanted figure threatening the stability of ethnically homogenous nations, the reverse relationship was also taking place.⁴³² In Israel, Jewish refugees and migrants were helping to constitute a new nation-state.

While here my analysis builds on historian Gerard Daniel Cohen's study of the IRO and his argument that 'refugee humanitarianism enabled the advent of Jewish statehood,' to talk solely of 'Jewish statehood', as he does, neglects a central part of the story in which statehood was constituted.⁴³³ Israeli statehood was built primarily on the over half century of settler conquest that culminated in the 1948 Nakba. Hannah Arendt, for example, was much more unambiguous on the colonial founding of the

⁴³¹ UNRRA was initially supposed to give those who refused to return home to Communist countries the option of resettlement in the West. See Ruth Balint, *Destination Elsewhere Displaced Persons and Their Quest to Leave Postwar Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2021), 4.

⁴³² Lauren Banko, Katarzyna Nowak and Peter Gatrell, 'What is refugee history, now?' *Journal of Global History*, 17 (1) (2021), 13.

⁴³³ Cohen, *In War's Wake*, 126; see also Gerard D. Cohen, 'Between Relief and Politics: Refugee Humanitarianism in Occupied Germany 1945-1946' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2008), 437-449.

state when writing that the 'Jewish question' was solved 'by means of a colonized and then conquered territory'.⁴³⁴ That Jewish nationalism and statehood was primarily born in Europe, as Cohen suggests, is only true if the material repercussions of that nation-state, i.e., the violence meted out to Palestinians, is absent from our thinking.⁴³⁵

Jewish nationalism took the very specific trajectory of a settler colonial project, without which it would have been impossible to develop and create a state. As scholar Muhannad Ayyash argues, nationalism is 'an element within, not alongside, settler colonialism.'⁴³⁶ The stated intentions of Zionism to rescue, save, and provide security to Jewish people cannot be separated from the fact that the effects of this process produced the mass expulsion of Palestinians. Cohen is right to point to the 'international arena, as much as the inner world of Jewish life' as spurring what he calls 'the Jewish emergence from powerlessness'.⁴³⁷ However, his claim that this should quell 'the numerous voices eager to delegitimize the whole Zionist enterprise (including its early rescue phase), who conveniently forget the legitimising role played [...] by western humanitarian politics' is arguably misplaced. For the international humanitarianism of the IRO funded and facilitated Jewish immigrants to replace Palestinians expelled during the 1948 War. An analysis unwilling to recognise the centrality of settler colonialism, and willing to defend parts of the Zionist enterprise, remains rooted in a colonial lens that fails to fully account for the ways in which Palestinians were displaced and dispossessed. Appraising this history of international humanitarianism while acknowledging its dovetailing with settler colonialism, I argue can offer a more comprehensive approach.

⁴³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism [1951]*, (London: Penguin 2017), 290.

⁴³⁵ Gerard D. Cohen 'The Politics of Recognition: Jewish Refugees in Relief Policies and Human Rights Debates, 1945–1950', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 24:2 (2006), 134.

⁴³⁶ Muhannad Ayyash, 'Zionism, Settler Colonialism, and Nationalism: On Motivations and Violence', *Middle East Critique*, (2024), 1.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid*, 140.

The IRO framing of Jewish Holocaust survivors as national refugees begins in the text of its constitution, adopted by the UN General Assembly in Lake Success, New York in 1946. '[T]he term "refugee" also applies to persons who, having resided in Germany or Austria, and being of Jewish origin or foreigners or stateless persons, were victims of Nazi persecution', the IRO constitution's text states.⁴³⁸ By applying the category of refugees to Jewish German and Austrian nationals, this IRO provision was essentially transforming them into extraterritorial refugees in their own country.⁴³⁹ The United Kingdom, by then far from the main Zionist supporter, sounded the alarm: 'the new provision might well involve the new International Refugee Organization in schemes for Jewish immigration into Palestine.'⁴⁴⁰ The disaggregation of Jewish Holocaust survivors as a separate group of refugees provided a shift from the earlier practice of UNRRA and the Allied armies, which throughout and after the war were reluctant to make that distinction. While the Allies preferred grouping displaced people according to their nationality, after the Harrison Report's recommendations to US President Truman, including that Jews be granted their own separate camps, there was a symbolic acknowledgment that 'they were a separate nation.'⁴⁴¹

In a memorandum submitted in 1947 to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), Zionist organisations (primarily those operating in the US and Mandate Palestine) were precisely calling for entangling Jewish refugees with Jewish nationhood.⁴⁴² For their part, Arab states supporting the Palestinian cause continued the line of argumentation outlined during the Anglo-American Committee of

⁴³⁸ 'Constitution of the International Refugee Organization.' (15 December 1946) available at https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1948/08/19480820%2007-01%20AM/Ch_V_1p.pdf

⁴³⁹ Cohen, *In War's Wake*, 142.

⁴⁴⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ Balint *Destination Elsewhere*, 4; and the latter Cited in Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2010), 75.

⁴⁴² Cohen, *In War's Wake*, 133.

Inquiry. In a session of UNSCOP held in Lebanon to collect testimonies from Arab representatives, the Iraqi delegate in no uncertain terms stated,

The question of displaced persons is a humanitarian matter which the Zionists try to exploit for their own political ends... To assist Zionist political domination in Palestine with the pretext of DPs [sic] to create trouble in the Arab world. This is an anti-humanitarian act. One should not attempt to remove an injustice by committing a greater injustice.⁴⁴³

As Hourani and others did before him, the Iraqi delegate critiqued decoupling the humanitarian matter of displaced Jews from the Zionist project of political domination.

Regarding the question of Jewish immigration, Edward Atiyah, a Lebanese author and Secretary of the Arab League, similarly argued that ‘the Zionists should not be allowed to exploit the plight of the displaced persons and the humanitarian feelings which this tragedy has naturally and properly aroused in the civilised world, to further their political ambitions in Palestine.... Jewish immigration into Palestine involves acute political issues and cannot be regarded in a purely humanitarian light.’⁴⁴⁴ For Atiyah it was clear that Palestine is an Arab country, therefore Jews have no sovereign claim to that land and, in addition, ‘foreign immigrants who have a political design on the country is an act of aggression, and does not cease to be so merely because the immigrants may be in another sense refugees.’⁴⁴⁵ While the problem of Jewish refugees should be solved on an international basis, he reasoned, and United Nations

⁴⁴³ ‘Testimony from representatives of the Arab States (cont.) – UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) 39th Meeting – Verbatim Record’, (23 July 1947) available at <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-211193/>

⁴⁴⁴ Edward Atiyah, ‘Palestine,’ *Contemporary Review*, no. 174 (1948), 7–8.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid* 8.

member states should open their doors in proportion to their absorptive capacity, this did not give them the 'right to enter any country against the wishes of the majority of its inhabitants.'⁴⁴⁶ These powerful Arab critiques bring to the fore how humanitarianism can make an injustice (settler colonialism) seem like justice.

Nevertheless, shortly after the UN Partition Plan of November 1947, the IRO officially mandated the Jewish Agency for Palestine to carry out refugee resettlement plans to the state of Israel. Though, from when the IRO began operating in 1947 to May 1948 it only facilitated the legal immigration of 6,000 Jews to Mandate Palestine.⁴⁴⁷ Immigration was still taking place illegally through an underground movement spearheaded by organisations such as the *Brichah* and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.⁴⁴⁸ The bulk of the IRO's work had to wait until early 1949 because the Director General, US Quaker and businessman William H. Tuck, issued instructions for funds 'not to be used to assist the immigration of any refugees to any of the belligerent countries in the Middle East, including Palestine'.⁴⁴⁹ Within the IRO Executive, however, views were split on whether to facilitate immigration as the 1948 Palestine war was unfolding. The American delegate argued that Jewish immigration was in line with the UN Partition Plan, and relieved American taxpayers from the economic burden of sustaining Jewish refugees in Germany.⁴⁵⁰ On the other hand, the British delegate questioned the supposed neutrality of legitimating resettlement on technical grounds, stating that immigration was a 'key Zionist strategy' and asserted frankly the impact it would have on Palestinians: 'Who could say that none of those actual persons helped in that way could not occupy a refugee's house

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Louise Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: a specialized agency of the United Nations: its history and work, 1946-1952*, (London: Oxford University Press 1956).

⁴⁴⁸ Idith Zertal, *From catastrophe to power* (Oakland: University of California Press 1998).

⁴⁴⁹ Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization*, 415.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

or land or join a strategic colony?'⁴⁵¹ This question gets to main issue at stake in the humanitarianism of the IRO. Jewish DPs in Palestine would become settlers occupying the homes and lands of Palestinian refugees expelled during the 1948 War.

The compromise reached out of the impasse between the American and British positions was first for the IRO to pay retroactively for the immigration that took place after May 1948 and second that following January 1949 the IRO will consult with the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP)—which had been mandated by UN Resolution 194 to find a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem.⁴⁵² In January 1949, then, the IRO funded retroactively for the emigration of 50,000 Jewish DPs, transported by the Jewish Agency in collaboration with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.⁴⁵³ Despite the public statements from William H. Tuck proclaiming the organisation's willingness to remain neutral in the war, funding covered for the immigration of Jewish refugees which were now beginning to settle in the homes and localities previously inhabited by Palestinians, whom had only just been forcibly removed at gun point. After the Zionist leadership's decision to prevent the return of Palestinian refugees, Jewish immigrants provided a very specific wartime measure to secure the settler colonial plunder. The systematic occupation of ethnically cleansed Arab towns was possible after May 1948 also because a newly available settler-immigrant population coming from Europe was ready to fill the void left by Palestinians.

In April 1949, a month after the war in Palestine came to an end, the IRO disbursed five million US dollars for facilitating the immigration of 120,000 IRO-registered Jewish displaced persons, and then a further 10 million to the Jewish

⁴⁵¹ Cohen, *In War's Wake*.

⁴⁵² Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization*, 415.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*, 416.

Agency to finalise the operation. This latest escalated push came as a response to the recognition of Israeli sovereignty in immigration matters by the UN Conciliation Commission.⁴⁵⁴ 'By supporting a policy of clearing out a whole area thereby creating displaced persons in order to settle other persons there', the Lebanese representative Karim Azkul stated at the UN General Assembly in May 1949, 'the IRO was partly responsible for the fate of the Arab refugees from Palestine.'⁴⁵⁵ Still the IRO maintained, at least in words, a position of neutrality as Tuck's successor, General Donald Kingsley, stated in July 1949 that the IRO 'did not wish to become a contributor to the intensification of the Arab refugee problem'.⁴⁵⁶ Yet, this intergovernmental humanitarian organisation had effectively facilitated the large-scale immigration of settlers to replace the expelled Palestinians now confined to exile. In doing so, while settling Jewish refugees it contributed to settler colonial dispossession and erasure.

Human rights, humanitarianism and racial hierarchies of humanity

While for the most part of their historical trajectories humanitarianism and human rights have been distant cousins, there is agreement among scholars that it is in the twentieth century when they began to converge more pronouncedly.⁴⁵⁷ The post-Second World War moment is one conjuncture in which the two started to interact. It is important to note that the convergence also took place at the beginning of the decades of

⁴⁵⁴ Cohen, *In War's Wake*, 145.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Gerard Daniel Cohen, 'The Politics of Recognition: Jewish Refugees in Relief Policies and Human Rights Debates, 1945–1950'. *Immigrants & Minorities*, 24(2) (2006), 125–143.

⁴⁵⁷ Michael Barnett ed, *Humanitarianism and Human Rights, A World of Difference?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020); see also Michael Geyer, 'Humanitarianism and Human Rights: a Troubled Rapport' in Fabian Klose, ed. *The Emergence of Humanitarian Intervention. Ideas and Practice from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 31–55.

decolonisation. These decades were a turning point for both the emerging international humanitarian system, and a new international human rights regime.⁴⁵⁸ After 1945, the crumbling end of empire was replaced by an international relations formed of humanitarian action and human rights activism that exercised a new power in a global context through the workings of many, governmental and non, international organisations. But a principal way in which it is productive to dwell on this interaction is by observing how humanitarianism came to influence the new human rights regime. In this vein, Samuel Moyn argues that the relationship between the two paradigms is characterised primarily by the ‘humanitarianisation’ of human rights.⁴⁵⁹ Although Moyn doesn’t see this turn take place until the 1970s and 1980s, already in the late 1940s when the Allies were reshaping the international order, and the state of Israel was established, there is the appearance of the mobilisation of human rights justified in the name of humanitarianism.

As we have seen in previous sections, the Holocaust was foundational to the joint effort of humanitarianising and nationalising Jewish refugees, so important to justify their becoming settlers outside of Europe. Yet it was also foundational to the development of a new understanding of human rights. Emerging out of the human catastrophe of the Second World War, the idea of human rights was supposed to prevent such extreme and genocidal violence from ever happening again. When the victorious Allies set out to hold the Nazi regime accountable for the horrific crimes

⁴⁵⁸ Andrew S. Thompson, ‘Unravelling the Relationships between Humanitarianism, Human Rights, and Decolonization: Time for a Radical Rethink?’ in Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thomson (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017), 456.

⁴⁵⁹ Samuel Moyn, ‘Human Rights and Humanitarianization’, in Michael Barnett (eds) *Humanitarianism and Human Rights, A World of Difference?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020) 33–48.

committed during the war, they introduced a novel post-war international norm grounded in prosecutions for human rights violations.

The problem with prosecutions, and with what Mamdani calls the ‘criminal model of human rights’, is that it provided an ahistorical and apolitical paradigm for coming to terms with mass violence.⁴⁶⁰ By focusing solely on perpetrators as criminals, human rights can render political violence individualised and depoliticised. Within a human rights framework that only seeks to find the perpetrator and put it on trial, the political question of why the crime had happened and what is the history of the crime are excluded. The Third Reich wanted an ethnically homogenous Germany in which Jews and other ethnicities had no place. This is why the Nazi genocidal project was at roots a means to a nation-state project. And the criminal process at the Nuremberg tribunals ignored that the mass murder of Jews had historical roots in past cases of genocide, specifically European settler colonialism in the Americas and in Africa. Several influential thinkers—from Raphael Lemkin, the Polish lawyer that first coined the term ‘genocide’, to Aimé Césaire, the Martinican anticolonial intellectual—have all drawn a connection between the extreme violence meted out in the colonies and the Nazi extermination of Jews.⁴⁶¹ This misdiagnosing of the problem thus led to a form of reparations for the victims of the Holocaust which ignored the massive harm it would cause to Palestinians. Reparations entailed the creation of a new settler colonial nation-state in Palestine which, crucially, was framed as a humanitarian solution for the human rights violations perpetrated against Jews in Europe.⁴⁶² That is how the

⁴⁶⁰ Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native*, 21.

⁴⁶¹ John Docker, ‘Are settler colonies inherently genocidal? Re-reading Lemkin’ in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (New York: Berghahn, 2008); Aimé Césaire Translated by Joan Pinkham *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press 2000), 36.

⁴⁶² Perugini and Gordon, *The Human Right to Dominate*, 30–31.

criminal model of human rights was humanitarianised, and the way in which it helped usher in the state of Israel.

At the same time, incorporating an analysis of human rights alongside humanitarianism is productive because it helpfully illustrates that at this post-war juncture the two frameworks were applied unevenly to Palestinians and Jews. The intellectual thought of René Cassin, one of the key drafters of the UDHR, is exemplary of the racial hierarchies that would produce an uneven application of human rights for some and humanitarianism for others. In their book on the rise of human rights and liberal internationalism in the interwar period, historians Jay Winter and Antoine Prost have insightfully uncovered how Cassin unequally applied a human rights framework for Jews but only viewed Palestinians as deserving of humanitarian rights.⁴⁶³ This led Cassin to advocate for the human right of Jews to emigrate to Israel, as a 'right of return', but only afforded Palestinians expelled in 1948 humanitarian care as refugees in exile. Yet it is surprising to see Winter and Prost reserve laudatory praise as they state, 'It would be absurd to fault Cassin for failing to respond to the unfolding human rights tragedy in Palestine and Israel [...] few have done better than he did in trying to keep sight of simple standards of decency and respect for the law.'⁴⁶⁴ They add that 'Why he never came to see that they [Palestinians] had human rights too, and not merely humanitarian rights is difficult to say.'⁴⁶⁵ There is a racial hierarchy underpinning Cassin's humanitarianism that Winter and Prost elide. In this regard, scholar Jessica Whyte less laudatorily noted, Cassin's 'universalism coexisted with a

⁴⁶³ Winter and Antoine Prost, *René Cassin and Human Rights From the Great War to the Universal Declaration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013).

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 338.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 358.

deep belief in the civilising role of colonial rule, and the legitimacy of violence in sustaining it.⁴⁶⁶

Severely wounded as a soldier during the First World War, Cassin then spent fourteen years as a French delegate to the League of Nations. After tragically losing 26 family members in the Holocaust, he emerged in the 1940s as a leading international figure in the class of liberal humanitarians that saw the creation of Israel as a great achievement of the West. In this period, the new state of Israel rarely showed aversion to the emergent human rights norms.⁴⁶⁷ Human rights norms reproduced some of same the hierarchies of international law that divided the world between civilised Europe and uncivilised non-European cultures.⁴⁶⁸ After all, when the UDHR was drafted most of the world's population was still under colonial subjugation and thus excluded from the drafting process. While in his role in the drafting committee, Cassin argued that 'the right to rebel did not extend to Algerians. France's actions in the colonies were aimed at spreading respect for rights'.⁴⁶⁹ As historian Emma Stone Mackinnon notes, for UDHR drafters such as Cassin, 'Anticolonial violence was evidence of a lack of respect for rights, and therefore proof of the lack of a legitimate claim to self-determination.'⁴⁷⁰

Within this global order structured on racial hierarchies, when Cassin looked at the cause of Jewish settlement in Palestine, he identified with the Zionist project as a matter of human rights. It was on the question of Jewish immigration to Palestine that

⁴⁶⁶ Jessica Whyte. *Morals of the Market. Human Rights and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (London: Verso 2019), 138.

⁴⁶⁷ Ihab Shalbak, 'Human rights in Palestine: from self-determination to governance', *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 29:3 (2023), 492–510.

⁴⁶⁸ Antony Anghie, 'The Evolution of International Law: Colonial and Postcolonial Realities' (2006) 27(5), *Third World Quarterly*, 742.

⁴⁶⁹ Emma Stone Mackinnon, 'Declaration as Disavowal: The Politics of Race and Empire in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights', *Political Theory*, Vol. 47(1), (2019), 73.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid* 72.

Cassin most clearly mobilised the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In June 1947, as the president of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* (AIU) he wrote to the UN Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, a memorandum in support of partition, Israeli statehood and expanding Jewish immigration to Palestine. Jewish immigration was justified as ‘the first duty of the international community’ to the Holocaust survivors, and as Cassin wrote, ‘this is a right humanity cannot refuse them.’⁴⁷¹

After the 1967 War, Cassin continued to support the Israeli cause. He readily agreed giving his name to an Israeli school build on stolen land in occupied East Jerusalem. In 1972, Cassin was a leading figure behind the drafting of the Uppsala Declaration on the Right to Leave and the Right to Return. While at the conference in Uppsala, Sweden he was vocal about, in his words,

the sad and persistent problem of Soviet Jewry, a problem which merited the sympathetic attention of the Soviet government, in light of its power and the prestige of this great country . . . The only solution consistent with the restoration of the indestructible core of human rights, is freedom of choice, which in this case means the freedom to stay or to leave.⁴⁷²

The following year, Cassin wrote about the Uppsala Declaration in the *New York Times* and drew attention to ‘the persistent and painful problem of Soviet Jewry’.⁴⁷³ This was a politically significant step because it became a message that fuelled the

⁴⁷¹ Cited in Winter and Prost, *René Cassin*, 341, AIU, AM Présidence 030, René Cassin, ‘Memorandum de l’AIU sur le problème palestinien,’ June 9, 1947.

⁴⁷² Karel Vasak and Sidney Liskofsky, eds., *The Right to Leave and to Return: Papers and Recommendations of the International Colloquium Held in Uppsala, Sweden, 19–20 June 1972* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1976), xi. 20 Ibid., xxi–xxii.

⁴⁷³ René Cassin, ‘For a Right to Leave and a Right to Return’, *New York Times*, (23 March 1973) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/03/23/archives/for-a-right-to-leave-and-a-right-to-return.html>

growing movement calling on the Soviet Union to allow its citizens to emigrate to Israel.⁴⁷⁴

Yet, regarding Palestinian refugees Cassin does not explicitly connect their plight to human rights and the right to return. Instead, he only writes that 'The scholars who participated at Uppsala recognized as well the important problem of the Arab refugees and the need for a humane solution.'⁴⁷⁵ Relatedly, Cassin accepted the insidious myth that Palestinians had not been forcibly expelled during the 1948 War but were the unfortunate victims of their own Arab leaders' misguided instructions to abandon their homes. To him the Palestinian refugees were 'pitiable instruments of those who ordered them in 1948 to flee from Palestine'.⁴⁷⁶ In Cassin's mind Palestinians were only victims of war and their right to humanitarianism was grounded in the protections afforded by the laws of war.⁴⁷⁷

The unequal treatment of the two groups reflected a racial hierarchy in Cassin's thought that elevated Europeans above colonised peoples. This was evident in his political positions regarding both Palestinians and the Algerians under the boot of French colonisation—as he notably failed to condemn the systematic use of torture against Algerians in internment camps.⁴⁷⁸ His racist and Orientalist thinking led him to support the Israeli state as a humanitarian haven for Europe's Jewish refugees and as bringing human rights to a Middle East where Arabs, or what he called 'thieving and bloody indigenous masters', were the oppressors of Jewish minorities.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁴ Bernard Sabella, 'Russian Jewish Immigration and the Future of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,' *Middle East Report* 182 (May/June 1993).

⁴⁷⁵ Cassin, 'For a Right to Leave'.

⁴⁷⁶ Rene Cassin, 'Pour éviter un nouveau Munich', *Ici Paris Hebdo*, 6–12 June 1967, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁷ Winter and Prost, *René Cassin*.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid* 274.

⁴⁷⁹ Moses, *The Problems of Genocide*, 169.

What is more, Cassin acknowledged that there must be a political solution to the Palestinian refugee problem but only advocated for a resolution under the 'population exchange' formula. In 1974, on behalf of the AUI Cassin wrote to Alain Poher, the President of the French Senate, calling for the equal recognition of status between the Mizrahim, the Arab-Jews that immigrated to Israel, and the Palestinian refugees living in exile. Writing about this case, Winter and Prost recognise that it was not an equivalent comparison because it 'would leave Palestinians with unfulfilled national aspirations'.⁴⁸⁰ Yet they fail to identify the historical roots of the population exchange discourse, which was grounded in the earlier plans for expelling Palestinians in 1948 and denial of the Nakba. It is crucial to point out here the longer genealogy of this discourse—as I have tried to show in the previous chapter—because it helps us understand that Cassin's intellectual thought and political positions were also the product of past humanitarianisations of settler colonialism.

Conclusion

Israeli society has been artificially assembled and forcibly installed in Palestine, as a replacement of the indigenous Palestinian society and at its expense, Israel *is*, because Palestine *is not*; and Palestine *is not*, only because Israel *is*. The *being* of Israel is therefore an act of elimination: it is the *nonbeing* of Palestine.

Fayez Sayegh, *A Palestinian View*⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ Winter and Prost, *René Cassin*, 335.

⁴⁸¹ Fayez Sayegh, *A Palestinian View*, General Union of Palestinian Students, 2nd World Conference on Palestine (1970).

Settler colonialism has been defined as ‘the practice of conquering land and then populating it with the victorious people, the settlers’.⁴⁸² A distinctive feature of settler societies is thus to not integrate as guests within the social and political framework of the local population but to create a dominant framework through which permanently implant a settler population on indigenous lands. Remarkably, over thirty-five years before Wolfe first theorised about the logic of elimination, Fayez Sayegh was already illuminating that the demographic program of establishing an Israeli society in Palestine is an act of Palestinian elimination.

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the humanitarianisation of the settler immigrant subject was a constituent part of Israel’s eliminationist system of territorial dispossession. Emigration had always been a modality through which the Zionist movement could engineer a majority on a piece of land where they constituted only a small minority. But it was the international turn to humanitarianism in support of Jewish migration to Mandatory Palestine, beginning with the League of Nations in the 1920s that helped achieve that objective. Because the question of Jewish immigration as a humanitarian measure became a site of international contention and contestation, Palestinians and their supporters began voicing their opposition also within that compassionate register. They repeatedly recognised Jewish suffering but tried to tease out, albeit with little success, that immigration portended settler colonialism: the removal and replacement of Palestinians.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the 1946 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry began the process of subjectifying Jewish displaced persons as national

⁴⁸² David Lloyd and Laura Pulido, ‘In the Long Shadow of the Settler: On Israeli and U.S. Colonialisms’, *American Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (2010), 796.

refugees belonging not in Europe but to the settler nationalism unfolding in Palestine. Humanitarian sympathy for suffering Jews required not only aid and assistance *in situ* but their relocation and resettlement elsewhere. This sympathy also shaped the formation of a humanitarianised settler subjectivity in need of care and assistance through resettlement in Palestine. The United Nations' International Refugee Organisation accepted a similar framing to that of the Anglo-American Committee while also implementing its recommendation for 100,000 immigrants to settle in Palestine. The IRO retroactively funded for Jewish immigrants to travel to Palestine and settle in the homes of Palestinians expelled in 1948. Once the war came to end and Israeli sovereignty was recognised in immigration matters, this humanitarian intergovernmental organisation facilitated the mass influx of settlers to populate the Israeli state.

While the Jewish refugees that survived the Holocaust were subjected to new humanitarian regimes, they were also central to the configuration of the post-war human rights system. If humanitarianism facilitated the conflation of immigrants and settlers, in a similar way it helped to conflate human rights reparations for Nazi crimes with support for a settler colonial state. The creation of Israel as a humanitarian reparation was seen as a just solution for Europe's horrific crimes, yet it rewarded the settler colonial warfare that caused the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland. The influential figure of René Cassin built on this post-war human rights tradition by mobilising the UDHR in support of Jewish immigration. Mired in a racial hierarchy buttressing his thinking, Cassin embraced the human right of Jews to migrate to the Israeli state but unequally afforded Palestinians a humanitarianism to ameliorate their displacement and statelessness.

The previous chapter examined the construction of Palestinian expulsion as a form of humanitarian transfer. This was deemed humanitarian because the interwar international precedent on population exchanges paved the way for an ostensibly humane and orderly way out of future mass violence and racial conflict. This chapter focused on the other element in the population exchange analogy: the mass transfer of Jewish settlers to populate Palestine. It showed that international sympathy for Jewish suffering helped forge the settler immigration to Palestine as a humanitarian practice. Its main contribution illustrated how international support for Zionist settlement in Palestine became a paramount expression of humanitarianism.

Chapter 4 Israel's COGAT as the humanitarian face of settler colonialism

Introduction

Much of the scholarship on humanitarianism starts from the position of foreign or international intervention into a crisis in the name of saving 'distant strangers'.⁴⁸³ This form of humanitarian assistance is usually understood as a response to the violence emanating from war, conflict and natural disasters. In this regard, a recurrent debate in the academic literature is whether international humanitarian interventions help or harm the intended recipients. A key driver of this debate has been the 1990s resurgence of interest in military humanitarian interventions—which have a longer history dating back to at least the nineteenth century.⁴⁸⁴ Attention has also been paid to the global history of imperial humanitarianism.⁴⁸⁵ While helpful, these approaches stop short of fully capturing what is at stake when Israeli military officials deploy humanitarian discourses and practices while ruling over the Palestinian population. The Israeli military control of Palestinians is not so much a temporary intervention towards 'distant strangers' but has rather been a permanent colonial government for over seven decades on the same piece of land. It is not the case of a sovereign state intervening in the affairs of another sovereign state in the name of humanity, as the story of humanitarian intervention is often told. And it is not the case of humanitarian sentiments stemming from the imperial metropole to ameliorate the conditions of

⁴⁸³ See, for example, Wheeler, *Saving Strangers*; Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*.

⁴⁸⁴ Mark Swatek-Evenstein, *A History of Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008) 2.

⁴⁸⁵ See for example, Edmonds and Johnston, 'Empire, Humanitarianism and Violence'.

natives in overseas and faraway colonies. We are rather presented with the military arm of Israeli settler colonialism that holds a humanitarian ethos while conquering land and dispossessing the Palestinian population.

This settler colonial form of humanitarianism is explored through the case of Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT). Known in Arabic as *Almunasseq* and in Hebrew as *Matpash*, this is a hybrid military-civilian administration that rules over both Palestinians throughout the 1967 occupied territories and Israeli settlers residing in Area C of the West Bank. What this administration has presented as humanitarian policies in recent years include, granting permits to Palestinians to enter Israel for work, medical care or travel abroad; controlling the import and export of goods, including food; planning and building civilian infrastructure; and coordinating international aid to Palestinians. At the same time, COGAT enables the development of Israeli colonies by appropriating Palestinian land and natural resources, demolishing homes, schools, and other infrastructure, preventing the free movement of Palestinians across the territory, and supporting the day-to-day activities of Israeli settlers. COGAT is therefore a crucial node in Israel's contemporary settler colonial strategy, which involves concentrating the Palestinian population in the enclaves of Gaza, and in Area A and B of the West Bank, while expanding the colonisation of Area C.⁴⁸⁶

This specific type of rule over fragmented Palestinian territory has been heavily influenced by the Oslo Accords (1993–2001). In 1993, under the sponsorship of the United States, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) signed a peace agreement whereby the latter recognised the former's sovereignty and renounced

⁴⁸⁶ Ghazi-Walid Falah, 'The geopolitics of "Enclavisation" and the demise of a two-state Solution to the Israeli – Palestinian conflict', *Third World Quarterly*, 26:8 (2005), 1341–1372.

armed struggle, in exchange for merely autonomy and ‘self-rule’ over some non-contiguous parts of the occupied territories. Amongst the many trappings of the Oslo process, there was no agreement that Palestinians would achieve national self-determination or the condition of post-colonial state sovereignty. In the words of Edward Said, the accords signed on the heels of the 1987 Intifada were ‘an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles.’⁴⁸⁷ Part of the reorganisation of Israeli domination through this peace process importantly included the mushrooming of a nongovernmental sector and a massive influx of international donor aid.⁴⁸⁸ The predicament now facing Palestinians was the acceleration of economic dependency on international humanitarian assistance, resulting from the new control mechanisms that the Oslo Accords brought about. In particular, a process of land dispossession, denial of the means to maintain a self-sustaining economy and what Sara Roy would call ‘de-development’, led to increasing levels of Palestinian dependency on international humanitarian assistance.⁴⁸⁹ It is in this context that COGAT would come to mobilise a form of humanitarianism contingent to Israeli settler colonial imperatives of land possession and containment of Palestinians in ever-shrinking enclaves.

This chapter builds on the work of scholars that have begun to focus more closely on the relationship between Israeli settler colonial expansion and the international humanitarian interventions deployed to ameliorate the dispossession of land.⁴⁹⁰ Yet my contribution departs from those works by zooming in on the case of

⁴⁸⁷ Edward Said, ‘The Morning After’, Vol. 15 No. 20, 21 October 1993, *London Review of Books*, available at <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v15/n20/edward-said/the-morning-after> (Accessed on 19 November 2024).

⁴⁸⁸ Bhungalia, *Elastic Empire*, 18.

⁴⁸⁹ Sara Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development*, (Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies 1995).

⁴⁹⁰ Tabar, ‘Disrupting Development’; Jabary Salamanca, ‘Assembling the Fabric of Life’.

COGAT, which tends to be given less attention in the literature.⁴⁹¹ Hitherto academic studies on this branch has primarily relied on public documents and statements made by Israeli officials in the media. Instead, I adopt ethnographic methods, primarily in-depth interviews conducted during five months of fieldwork in Palestine/Israel, that permit to analyse the social reality from the subjective point of view of those who live within it.⁴⁹² I use this method because it provides a deeper lens not only into the discourse of Israeli military officials beyond what is available in the public domain, but it is also a lens into how they think about what they do. It thus offers a generative ground to investigate the production of settler colonial subjectivity.⁴⁹³ A cynical view may pose that Israeli military officials claiming to act in a humanitarian way towards Palestinians is solely a form of propaganda. Although performing the role of an ethical occupier, especially to international audience, is an important aspect, interviews help to illustrate that humanitarian thought serves a specific function within the Israeli military and the broader settler colonial milieu: to structure a range of practices to control Palestinians inside enclaves while simultaneously appropriating land for the benefit of settlers.

This chapter's analysis relies on rare access to interviews with 17 former members of COGAT who held a range of positions. From the military side, interviews included Major Generals that served as heads of the branch, Brigadier Generals that headed the Civil Administration, as well as mid and lower ranked officers. From the civilian side, I spoke with economic officers and health coordinators. Other 7 interviews

⁴⁹¹ For exceptions that have provided ground-breaking work on COGAT see, Neve Gordon *Israel's Occupation*, (Berkeley: University of California Press 2008); Yael Berda *Living Emergency: Israel's Permit Regime in the Occupied West Bank*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2017).

⁴⁹² Geert Clifford, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. (New York: Basic Books 1973), 3–32.

⁴⁹³ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1997), 2.

were conducted with individuals from the Israeli government, military and West Bank settler movement who regularly collaborated with COGAT.⁴⁹⁴ At the same time, 16 interviews were held with staff of UN agencies, and international and national organisations to gain a better understanding on the nature of humanitarian coordination. The interviews are complemented with other primary material found in published literature, NGO reports, and Israeli Supreme Court judgments. As the laws of war are crucial to an analysis of settler colonisation, I also examined COGAT's mobilisation of the humanitarian visions of the law to guide its conduct in the 1967 occupied territories.⁴⁹⁵ The general aim is not to provide an exhaustive account of COGAT over the years, but rather to examine a sample of key organisational practices framed as 'humanitarian' that focus on the post-Oslo Accords era, which can be seen as indicative of a wider contemporary pattern.

The analysis builds on the concept of 'humanitarian governance' because it closely captures the ways COGAT officials seek to wield power over Palestinian lives. The concept denotes that humanitarian principles are intrinsic to the work of government.⁴⁹⁶ The literature on contemporary forms of humanitarian governance, however, tends to omit how it can come to mediate settler colonial relations.⁴⁹⁷ Past manifestations of humanitarianism in colonial contexts provide more fitting comparative examples that have explanatory potential for the case of COGAT. Crucially, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonialism wore an

⁴⁹⁴ Among West Bank settler leaders, I was able to access individuals who worked with COGAT officials on several issues varying from the construction of the Separation Wall in 2004 to the operation of Israeli businesses in the occupied territory.

⁴⁹⁵ Helen Kinsella, 'Settler Empire and the United States: Francis Lieber on the Laws of War.' *American Political Science Review*. 117(2) (2023), 629–642; see also Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁴⁹⁶ Carmela Murdocca, "'Let's help our own' Humanitarian compassion as racial governance in settler colonialism', *Oñati Socio-Legal Series*, 10(6) (2020), 1272.

⁴⁹⁷ Barnett, 'Humanitarian Governance'.

'aggressive humanitarian face'.⁴⁹⁸ This was a 'benevolent' colonialism, 'the white man's burden' of European empires in Africa, where power was still exercised through terror and destruction but it was also complemented with what Foucault called 'disciplinary' power, which elicited compliance and acquiescence in the natives. At the same time, theorisations of settler colonial relations have demonstrated that care for the welfare of natives does not preclude the transferist impulse of removal or to keep them away from land marked for settlement.⁴⁹⁹

These contributions help to frame my notion of humanitarian governance within the broader paradigm of settler colonial humanitarianism. This notion is more rooted in the settler colonial past of the Zionist project that this thesis has sought to reconstruct. Chapter 2 showed how during the 1948 War, the population concentration and expulsion of Palestinians inside segregated enclaves in the city of Haifa were enacted within the frame of humanitarianism. It also demonstrated that once Palestinians were expelled during the war, the calls for humanitarian assistance and resettlement served to entrench the refugees' exile from Palestine. Thus, my main argument in this chapter is that humanitarian governance of the indigenous population coincides with and serves to *normalise* settler colonial expansion and consolidation over Palestinian territory. This argument is carried forward in five sections. First, it begins with situating COGAT's humanitarian policies in historical context. The second section explores the travel permit system that regulates the movement of Palestinians to show that COGAT married the humanitarian governance of Palestinians in segregated enclaves with colonial expansion for Israeli settlers. The following section examines the Israeli humanitarian interventions to constrain the impact of the

⁴⁹⁸ Neta Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), 201–202.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

separation wall on the Palestinian population, and specifically the enclavisation of the city of Qalqilya. The fourth section explores Israel's program of humanitarian counterinsurgency to pacify dispossessed Palestinians inside the Gaza Strip. The last section illustrates that Israeli military coordination with international and local actors has enabled a method of indirect rule, whereby COGAT outsources the humanitarian governance of Palestinians to international actors ostensibly external to its system.

COGAT and the 'benevolent occupation'

Shortly before the 1967 War, Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan had notoriously stated that in case of conquest, Palestinians would become subjects of a so-called 'Enlightened Occupation.'⁵⁰⁰ Two days after the war began, Dayan told commanders of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza, 'We have to treat the Arabs as our equals from the civil and humane point of view.'⁵⁰¹ This meant respect for places of worship, for local, family and tribal structures, and avoidance of unnecessary contact between soldiers and civilians. Israel should, he continued, 'minimally intervene in their affairs and not treat them as enemies, unless they act against us.'⁵⁰² Once the military occupation over the West Bank and Gaza came into effect, one of Dayan's first decisions was mandating COGAT to implement an 'open bridges policy'—referring to the bridges over the Jordan River but also as a metaphor for the desired relations. This policy allowed Palestinians freedom of movement to and from Jordan, and

⁵⁰⁰ Gideon Levy, 'The Dayan Dynasty: Israel's Story', (2014) *Haaretz*, available at <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2014-05-04/ty-article/.premium/the-dayan-dynasty-israels-story/0000017f-e9c9-df2c-a1ff-ffd90b1e0000> (accessed 2 Oct. 23).

⁵⁰¹ Eitan Shamir, 'From Retaliation to Open Bridges: Moshe Dayan's Evolving Approach toward the Population in Counter Insurgency', *Civil Wars*, 14:1 (2012), 73.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

permitted the development of trade between the East and West banks. In 1969, while touring the Jordan Valley on an official visit to the occupied territories Dayan told journalists that his new policy was serving the population well and that if the bridges were closed, Palestinians would suffer.⁵⁰³

Dayan's initiative was justified as humanitarian for Palestinians, though it was explicitly contingent to their acceptance of Israeli military prerogatives.⁵⁰⁴ For the head of COGAT at the time, Major General Gazit, this was part of a 'carrot and stick' policy.⁵⁰⁵ The opening of bridges and the benefits they entailed were conditional on the behaviour of Palestinians. The reasoning behind this kind of strategy posited that colonial rule would improve Palestinian living conditions and help them prosper so as to minimise the utilisation of coercive forms of domination.⁵⁰⁶ For Gazit, Dayan's experience as a journalist during the Vietnam War (1955-75) significantly influenced his attitude to the governance of Palestinians. It was the failure of the US to pacify the Vietnamese civilians—so central to the success of the Vietcong's guerrilla warfare tactics—that prompted Dayan to develop an approach which included exacting harsh and punitive measures against any potential insurgency, but also promise 'a fair and humane treatment of the population.'⁵⁰⁷ As another military report from 1970 noted, '[T]he only way to avoid a potential outburst of social forces is to strive continuously

⁵⁰³ 'Dayan Says 'open Bridges' Policy is Serving West Bank Arab Population Well', *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, (August 21, 1969) available at <https://www.jta.org/archive/dayan-says-open-bridges-policy-is-serving-west-bank-arab-population-well> (accessed on 2 Oct. 23).

⁵⁰⁴ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, (London: Verso 2007), 142.

⁵⁰⁵ Gazit, *Trapped Fools*.

⁵⁰⁶ Gordon, *Israel's Occupation*, 48–93.

⁵⁰⁷ Shamir, *From Retaliation to Open Bridges*, 74.

for the improvement of the standard of living and the services of this underprivileged society.⁵⁰⁸

In addition to preventing the insurgence of Palestinians and minimising the use of coercive forms of rule, humanitarian governance could serve other Israeli political and settler colonial aims. According to an unpublished military document from 1971 titled 'Gaza Plan,' Israel's attempt to resettle Palestinians out of refugee camps and settle them into urban spaces was promoted as an opportunity 'to improve considerably the living conditions of refugee camp residents and to develop social and community services for them.'⁵⁰⁹ For Sara Roy, Israeli authorities have 'always claimed that the resettlement program is humanitarian and aims to provide more and better housing, thereby improving local living standards.'⁵¹⁰ But to qualify for the financial incentives to resettle, Palestinians had to denounce in writing their refugee status and demolish their camp shelters. Through a humanitarian gesture, Israel hoped to eliminate the camps from the landscape and the refugees' political demands for return. Yet the fast population growth of Palestinians, along with only 20 percent of refugees accepting the resettlement scheme, eventually led to the demise of this kind of policy.

Nonetheless, the humanitarian justifications for governing Palestinian lives continued, often resembling an Israeli version of the colonial 'white man's burden' and the imperative to 'improve' the livelihoods of native populations.⁵¹¹ Part of the reason why in the late 1970s Palestinians launched a human rights movement was that in the early years of its military occupation Israel successfully managed to cultivate the image

⁵⁰⁸ Quoted in Nur Arafah, 'Why Israel's goal of pacifying the Palestinians is failing', *+972 Magazine*, (2023) available at <https://www.972mag.com/pacification-palestinians-counterinsurgency/> (accessed on 2 Oct. 23).

⁵⁰⁹ Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development*, 184.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ Hagar Kotef, *The Colonizing Self*, (Durham: Duke University Press 2020), 240.

of, in the words of Palestinian writer Raja Shehade, a 'benevolent occupation.'⁵¹² While facing growing protests, and against the backdrop of the Camp David agreements between Israel and Egypt, in 1981 COGAT rebranded the military government it imposed over the territories as the 'Civil Administration.' The military order that instituted the Civil Administration retained a humanitarian reasoning, as it calls 'to preserve orderly administration and the public order, and in order to ensure the well-being and the good of the population and to supply and implement public services.'⁵¹³ The nominal change from military to civil administration was an effort to conceal what was becoming permanent Israeli control in the West Bank and Gaza. The legitimacy of presenting it as a civilian government was assumed necessary given that according to international legal norms military occupations should remain temporary.

In the early years of the occupation, it was the incorporation of Palestinians into the Israeli labour force that provided the greatest uplifting in living standards. In approximately twenty years between the beginning of the occupation and the First Intifada (1987), the Palestinian workforce and the number of workers employed in Israel increased exponentially.⁵¹⁴ The Civil Administration initially recruited Palestinian workers, which could travel without many obstacles into Israel, but after the First Intifada it began applying a work-permit regime. In the 1970s Israel's 'general exit permit,' which had allowed relatively free movement for Palestinians between Israel and the occupied territory, represented a tendency to integrate, albeit partially, the

⁵¹² Raja Shehadeh, *Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 135; see also Lori Allen, (2018) 'What's in a Link?: Transnational Solidarities across Palestine and their Intersectional Possibilities', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 117 (1), 111–133.

⁵¹³ 'Israel Military Order No. 947 Concerning the Establishment of a Civilian Administration' available at <http://www.geocities.ws/savepalestinenow/israelmilitaryorders/fulltext/mo0947.htm> (accessed on 2 Oct. 23).

⁵¹⁴ Gordon, *Israel's Occupation*, 81.

native population with the wider settler society across the Green Line. Yet, in 1991–amid the First Intifada–Israel cancelled the ‘general exit permit’ and began requiring individual permits for travel by applying to the Civil Administration. By the start of the Second Intifada, in September 2000, the number of Palestinian workers inside Israel or settlements drastically decreased, from 146,000 to 43,000.⁵¹⁵ This significant reduction in Palestinian freedom of movement, and the ability to work in Israel, marked a shift towards a policy of incremental separation between settlers and natives.⁵¹⁶

Months before the First Intifada erupted, the Civil Administration produced a booklet covering twenty years of Israeli rule between 1967 and 1987.⁵¹⁷ The booklet used pictures, diagrams, and graphs to boast about how Israeli rule was improving Palestinian lives. Dayan’s promise of an Enlightened Occupation that was to pacify the population had seemingly held on for twenty years. But waves of Palestinian uprisings in the 1980s and 1990s began to challenge the idea that the humanitarian governance implemented until then was a viable alternative to coercive forms of control. The ensuing series of agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation that came to be known as the Oslo Accords, precipitated a major transformation in the forms of Israeli rule in the occupied territories. One of the Oslo agreement’s institutional changes was that Palestinians would be governed jointly by Israel and the newly created Palestinian Authority—a non-sovereign entity with some power of self-governance.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁵ ‘Al-Haq Intervention to Diplomatic Representatives Regarding the COGAT Briefing’, *Al-Haq*, (2010), available at <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/7320.html> (accessed on 2 Oct. 23).

⁵¹⁶ Neve Gordon, ‘From Colonization to Separation: exploring the structure of Israel’s occupation’, *Third World Quarterly*, 29:1 (2008), 25–44.

⁵¹⁷ Yitzak Zaccai, Office of the Co-ordinator of Government Operations in Judea, Samaria and Gaza District, *Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District 1967-1987, Twenty Years of Civil Administration*, (Jerusalem: Carta 1987).

⁵¹⁸ Berda, *Living Emergency*, 25.

This partial transfer of power changed COGAT from a state institution directly governing the lives of Palestinians to a 'coordinating' institution that was to oversee and direct the Palestinian Authority. The Civil Administration still retained all powers in Area C. While in Areas A and B, Israel transferred some responsibilities for the everyday life of Palestinians to the PA, transforming it into a chain of indirect rule. This fundamental change reoriented the implementation of humanitarian governance from solely a direct measure to an indirect form of rule, that included international humanitarian organisations. In this way, Israel was able to outsource to external actors the burdens of governing a large native population unwanted as citizens while retaining direct rule over a large swath of land in Area C that soon experienced rapid growth as Israeli settlers moved in.

COGAT's purpose, in fact, was never solely concerned with administering the affairs of the colonised. By the 1990s, it became a key institution without which settler colonial expansion in the occupied territories could not be achieved. Although the Knesset and the IDF have gradually applied Israeli law to settlers in the West Bank and Gaza, since the territory itself is under military control, the Civil Administration was responsible for many administrative issues affecting the settlers. Importantly, it could determine the fate of resources under its control, of which the most sought after is the land. The planning system that the Civil Administration implements is one of the most effective tools of land theft.⁵¹⁹ Its declaration and registration of Palestinian land as 'state land' has enabled land expropriation on a mass scale. By 1992, Israel almost tripled control of the land defined as 'state land' from some 530,000 dunums (53,000

⁵¹⁹ B'Tselem, 'Land Grab: Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank', (2002) available at https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/sites/default/files2/publication/200205_land_grab_eng.pdf (accessed on 9 Oct. 23).

hectares) in 1967 to more than 1.4 million dunums (140,000 hectares), which amounts to approximately 25 percent of the total land area of the West Bank.⁵²⁰

It is worth contextualising here the changing Israeli strategies of population and territorial control with reference to other cases of settler colonialism. The comparison of the Israeli occupation to Apartheid South Africa started to become widespread in the early 2000s, but a closer look points to the period between 1967 to 1987 as the time in which the Palestinian territories most resembled Bantustans. South African Bantustans segregated the black population in separate territories from whites but the regime vastly relied on and exploited their cheap labour. Gaza most seemed like a Bantustan when Gazan labour daily crossed into Israel in the pre-Oslo period.⁵²¹ But the other major transformation of the Oslo agreements, the institutionalised fragmentation of the Palestinian territory into enclaves had a different underlying logic. The post-Oslo enclaves were geared much more to separate, control and create uninhabitable conditions that would foster voluntary migration.⁵²² Vastly reducing reliance on Palestinian labour and separation from the wider settler society is comparable to the Native American reservations.⁵²³ These secluded spaces were a consequence of ethnic cleansing and dispossession of land, and exercised a limited form of sovereignty within a larger state. In addition, European settlers sought to appropriate more Native American lands and resources rather than exploit their labour.

⁵²⁰ Norwegian Refugee Council, 'A Guide to Housing, Land and Property Law in Area C of the West Bank', (2012) 42. Available at <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/a-guide-to-housing-land-and-property-law-in-area-c-of-the-west-bank.pdf>

⁵²¹ Darryl Li, 'Disengagement and the Frontiers of Zionism', *Middle East Report*, (16 February 2008), available at www.merip.org/mero/mero021608.html (accessed on 2 Oct. 23).

⁵²² Julie Peteet, 'Camps and Enclaves: Palestine in the Time of Closure', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 29, Issue 2 (2016), 218.

⁵²³ Gary Fields, *Enclosure: Palestinian Landscapes in a Historical Mirror* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 19–20.

Along with this shifting configuration of population and territorial control, during the Second Intifada (2000-5), Israel escalated its use of counterinsurgency methods to repress the uprising. Contrary to the First Intifada, Palestinian resistance factions such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad increasingly adopted armed struggle that included rocket attacks and suicide bombings. In retaliation, Israel carried out counterinsurgency operations that included almost daily lethal military raids inside the occupied territories, aerial bombardment, and the use of 'targeted killings'.⁵²⁴ In addition to these operations, Israeli forces placed a significant emphasis on population control measures. These methods involved concentrating civilians in enclosed spaces through permanent and temporary obstacles such as walls, fences, checkpoints and roads.⁵²⁵ For Adam Hanieh, in 2002 and 2003 it implemented 'the most restrictive series of internal closures of the West Bank in the history of the Israeli occupation,' which helped the military control of the movement of Palestinians, incarcerate civilians on a mass scale, and the expropriation of land.⁵²⁶ Enclaves, which have a long history in the colonial era and in asymmetric warfare or counterinsurgency, became a primary Israeli method of population concentration and management. Notably, Israeli authorities continued to mobilise a humanitarian effort for Palestinian civilians such as relief, reconstruction and development to complement its military aims and counterinsurgency operations.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁴ Paul Gaston Aaron, 'The Idolatry of Force: How Israel Embraced Targeted Killing', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 46 (4) (2017), 75–99.

⁵²⁵ Laleh Khalili 'The Location of Palestine in Global Counterinsurgencies', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 42(3) (2010), 425–426.

⁵²⁶ Adam Hanieh, 'The Politics of Curfew in the Occupied Territories,' in *The Struggle for Sovereignty: Palestine and Israel, 1993–2005*, ed. Joel Beinin and Rebecca L. Stein (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press 2006), 329.

⁵²⁷ Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2013) 4.

In this period, the Israeli government and IDF firmly adopted a discourse of humanitarian intent to describe its military operations and institutionalised its ties with humanitarian organisations.⁵²⁸ Exemplifying this trend, in 2003 COGAT started the programme 'Another Life,' which explicitly aimed to 'minimize the damage to Palestinian life fabric (*mirkam haim*) in order to avoid a humanitarian crisis that would necessitate the IDF to provide food and services to the Palestinian population.'⁵²⁹ In sum, the Second intifada and the rise of Israel's perpetual counterinsurgency in the West Bank and Gaza, which characterises the contemporary moment, did not mean an end to humanitarian governance. The marked increase in the coercive forms rule to control the Palestinian population was complemented with a widespread mobilisation of humanitarian discourses and practices.

The permit system

The beginning of my fieldwork in 2022 coincided with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. This period has increasingly become a moment of heightened repression and revolt in Palestine. The previous year led to Israel bombarding Gaza for 11 days after worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque were repeatedly attacked by Israeli police. The repression sparked a wider uprising dubbed by Palestinians the Unity Intifada. I was initially excited to return to Al-Quds/Jerusalem where I had lived for around three years as a teenager between 2008 and 2010. But excitement soon subsumed in the

⁵²⁸ Eyal Ben Ari, 'Human Security, the Military and the (Israeli) State: "In-Between Organisations" at Checkpoints' in Monica den Boer and Jaap de Wilde (eds) *The Viability of Human Security*, (Amsterdam University Press 2008), 127; Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir *The One-State Condition: Occupation and Democracy in Israel/Palestine*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 23.

⁵²⁹ Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 290.

ebbs and flows of a highly militarised, racist and violent settler colony. On April 7, 2022, while I was visiting a Palestinian friend in Jaffa, we heard the news that a Palestinian attack in the centre of nearby Tel Aviv had killed an Israeli. We cancelled plans to go out that evening and remained at home until the IDF manhunt ended the following morning with the killing of the attacker. The subsequent weekend, the Israeli police once again stormed the Al-Aqsa compound leading to confrontations with worshippers. As a result, around 400 Palestinians were arrested in a single day.

Against this background of domination and resistance, I began conducting interviews with former members of COGAT, Israeli military veterans, West Bank settlers and staff of humanitarian organisations. I met with Brigadier General (Res.) Dov Sedaka in Ramat Gan, a city in the eastern Tel Aviv district, in one of the office buildings known as the Twin Towers where he now works as a Senior Adviser for the Economic Cooperation Foundation—a prominent Israeli think-tank credited with initiating the secret negotiations that led to the Oslo Accords. This is quite fitting and unsurprising given how COGAT's form of rule very much embodies the new arrangements of the Oslo era. When asked to explain his role heading the Civil Administration, first in the Gaza Strip (1995-1998) and then in the West Bank (1998-2003), Sedaka responded,

I never worked with the Palestinians because as a combat soldier you have a war to do. Then they asked me to do the Civil Administration because I speak Arabic. They asked me to replace the commander in Gaza; a shock to me. It was something different from a combat officer to deal with things I never thought I would deal with: agriculture, education, water, electricity, sewage, build a port in Gaza, speak with Palestinians as equals, not with any kind of ideas that they

are the enemy. For me it was a great change but a positive one, not a negative one. Because I was the head of the Civil Administration [...] I have a daily meeting with the other side talking about workers, talking about how we can facilitate the life of the people to enter Israel.⁵³⁰

You can almost hear the Oslo accords speaking out in this normalised vision of peaceful relations between the coloniser and the colonised. The governance of Palestinians inside the enclaves of the occupied territories was a main responsibility of Sedaka, which he described as a positive change from the combat roles previously held. Before becoming the head of the Civil Administration, Sedaka had served as a combat officer in *Sayeret Matkal*, an elite special forces unit famed for hailing numerous army generals and future prime ministers. The Israeli liberal newspaper *Haaretz* once praised him as a dovish figure because during his time in the Civil Administration, particularly during the Second Intifada, he was more critical than other military generals of the methods used to crush the Palestinian uprisings.⁵³¹ This dovish caricature of Sedaka is representative of a wider perception of COGAT within the Israeli military and security establishment. Sedaka himself partook in the portrayal of a dovish caricature when discussing his role of colonial governor in the occupied territories. He deemed the many years of rule in the Civil Administration a positive form of humanitarian governance, a better alternative than fighting on the battlefield.

Sedaka then described the contradictions and difficulties of the role, where he had to balance between representing the security interests of the Israeli army but also,

⁵³⁰ Interview 2022.

⁵³¹ Amira Hass, 'Dovish Ex-general Appointed to Liaise With Bedouin in West Bank', (2015) available at <https://www.haaretz.com/2015-03-06/ty-article/.premium/dovish-ex-officer-appointed-to-liaise-with-bedouin/0000017f-ed8c-d639-af7f-eddf165e0000> (accessed on 3 Oct. 23).

he stated, ‘you have to deal with Palestinians, you have to take care of their daily life, to make their life as easy as you can.’⁵³² He found most troubling the worst excesses of the travel permit regulations, which he surprisingly likened to a system akin to slavery, not so much for the ownership of a person and their labour but because of the level of control the Israeli ‘master’ holds over Palestinian lives. The permit system shows the repressive and controlling facets of rule, as he said, ‘The permit is in the hand of the Civil administration. You are the good man, you bring the food, you bring the water, on the other hand you are the face of the occupation because you give them the permit.’⁵³³ He was particularly critical of offering permits, and the benefits they entail, to recruit Palestinians into becoming collaborators and informants for the Israeli army. This makes the Israeli side lose its heart, soul and humanity—he stated. Yet Sedaka did not reject the justness and legitimacy of the permit system: ‘There is a good idea behind the permit [...] We want to control’—meaning that it is normal for a state to police and regulate its borders. But the Israeli checkpoints where Palestinians must present valid permits to cross are not positioned on international borders. They are scattered across the frontiers that separate settlers from natives. In Sedaka’s recollections, it is thus only the assumed security overreach of recruiting informants that is deemed problematic.

Currently, hundreds of Israeli soldiers and civilians work in COGAT, primarily in the Civil Administration and include 24 professional units.⁵³⁴ The Civil Administration has eight District and Coordination Liaisons (DCL) throughout the West Bank, which along with the administration for Gaza, are tasked with issuing travel permits to

⁵³² Interview 2022.

⁵³³ Interview 2022.

⁵³⁴ Yesh Din, ‘Through the Lens of Israel’s Interests, The Civil Administration in the West Bank (Position Paper),’ (2013) 6, available at <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Minhal+Ezrahi/YeshDin+-+Haminhal+-+English.pdf> (accessed on 3 Oct. 23).

Palestinians. While the Shin Bet, Israel's security agency, has ultimate authority, the Civil Administration is where Palestinians must apply for permits to travel within the occupied territories, to Israel or abroad. Israeli authorities justify the permit system as a legitimate security measure because, as one of COGAT's latest regulations state, in essence 'terror organisations exploit the movement of people.'⁵³⁵ Israel has long been at the forefront globally in deploying the 'terrorist' category to criminalise Palestinian political mobilisation as inherently illegitimate and therefore deserving repression.⁵³⁶ In racialising Palestinians as 'terrorists', it operationalises a bifurcated distinction that enhances a conception of the native as always either a security concern or in need of humanitarian care.

Israeli authorities have claimed that the permit system gives Palestinians a sense of 'normalcy.'⁵³⁷ When discussing COGAT's role in the permit regime, the view from lower ranked soldiers fitted the one portrayed above, whereby governance is beneficial to Palestinians. In this vein, a young former soldier that worked in one of the Civil Administration's DCLs told me during an interview that, 'We're basically like customer service for Palestinians who rely on Israeli permits to go about their daily lives.'⁵³⁸ In the most extreme case, that of the Gazan enclave (before October 2023), the vast majority of over two million Palestinians cannot even apply for an exit permit because they do not fall under any of COGAT's designated categories for travel.⁵³⁹ In regulating this permit system, COGAT strikingly uses the term 'humanitarian' as a

⁵³⁵ 'Status of Authorizations for entry of Palestinians into Israel; for their passage from Judea and Samaria into the Gaza Strip; and for their departure abroad Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories Operations Department Updated to 08 February 2022', 3.

⁵³⁶ Nahla Abdo, *Captive Revolution: Palestinian Women's Anti-Colonial Struggle within the Israeli Prison System*, (London: Pluto Press 2014), 4.

⁵³⁷ Breaking the Silence, *Military Rule*, 20.

⁵³⁸ Anonymous Interview 2022.

⁵³⁹ Berda, *Living Emergency* 2017. According to Berda, Israel's development of a permit system to regulate Palestinian mobility vastly exceeds its stated security rationale.

justificatory category for what it allows. For example, under what it calls 'exceptional humanitarian circumstances,' COGAT allows residents to apply for travel outside Gaza to visit first-degree relatives, but only if they are dying, have died, or are getting married.⁵⁴⁰ In other circumstances the Civil Administration approves permits to Palestinians as 'benefits' or 'gestures', such as allowing West Bank Palestinians to travel to Jerusalem to pray at the Al Aqsa Mosque on Muslim holy days.⁵⁴¹

Moreover, inside the Israeli army benevolent gestures are understood through gendered forms of militarism, in which being humanitarian to Palestinians is associated with femininity. Israeli soldiers that work in the Civil Administration are often mocked as 'welfare NCO for the Palestinians'—a welfare NCO (non-commissioned officer) is almost always a female IDF soldier responsible for the general welfare of soldiers within a given unit. Israeli soldiers, including those serving within the Civil Administration, have come to believe that it "helps" Palestinians because of Israel's generosity or goodwill.⁵⁴² In an interview with Israeli NGO Breaking the Silence, a Lieutenant from the Civil Administration stated that, 'Back then, I don't think I had any doubts. I was convinced I was on the humane side. I was happy that I, as a good soldier who wanted to help people, got to be in the place that gives the permits.'⁵⁴³ However, the Lieutenant later recognised that, 'it's not the Palestinians' Welfare NCO, it's the settlers' Welfare NCO.'⁵⁴⁴ In other words, COGAT seems to foster a culture where control of Palestinian lives is thought of as humanitarian but in reality the system is ultimately in place to serve Israeli settlers.

⁵⁴⁰ Gisha, 'The Permit Regime: Testimonies', (2020) available at <https://gisha.org/en/the-permit-regime-testimonies/> (accessed on 3 Oct. 23).

⁵⁴¹ Yesh Din, 'Through the Lens of Israel's Interests', 20.

⁵⁴² Breaking the Silence, 'Military rule' (2022), 35, available at https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/inside/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Military_rule_testimony_booklet.pdf (accessed 2 Oct. 23).

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

Although at times tensions emerge between COGAT and the West Bank settler population, after decades of administrative growth they have developed a symbiotic relationship. Settlers often protest that COGAT is violating their rights and is too protective of Palestinian interests because it does not advance colonial settlements at the scale and speed they wish. Despite Israeli laws applying to settlers while residing in the West Bank, they view the very existence of COGAT and military control as something stigmatising that renders them second class citizens compared to those residing inside the Green Line, which fall under the jurisdiction of the Israeli civilian government. Nonetheless, COGAT is very much central to Israeli state practices of settler colonial expansion and appropriation of land in the occupied West Bank. For instance, following a freedom of information request, it emerged that over 99 percent of the land permit requests approved by the Civil Administration were assigned to help Israeli colonies develop.⁵⁴⁵ Moreover, between 1998 and 2020, Israeli authorities have issued almost 20,000 demolitions orders to Palestinian structures in the West Bank.⁵⁴⁶ With the natural growth of Palestinian villages over the years and given the near impossibility of obtaining a land or construction permit, Palestinians resort to building structures without the Civil Administration's approval and then become the target of demolition orders.

Since the 1990s positions within the Civil Administration were increasingly filled by post-1967 settlers. Activists from the West Bank settler movement entered COGAT, and the IDF, including in leading capacities such as high-level COGAT staff and local

⁵⁴⁵ Isabel Kershner, 'In West Bank, 99.7% of Public Land Grants goes to Settlers,' *New York Times* (2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/17/world/middleeast/west-bank-public-land-israel-palestinians.html> (accessed on 3 Oct. 23).

⁵⁴⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Demolition Orders against Palestinian Structures in Area C – Israeli Civil Administration data', available at <https://www.ochaopt.org/page/demolition-orders-against-palestinian-structures-area-c-israeli-civil-administration-data> (accessed on 3 Oct. 23).

IDF commanders.⁵⁴⁷ In 2023 the Israeli finance minister Bezalel Smotrich, a settler leader from the West Bank, pressured the government to assign him key civilian powers in the running of COGAT and the Civil Administration. West Bank settlers therefore have direct access to top-ranking officials within the Civil Administration, with whom they hold regularly scheduled meetings to ‘coordinate expectations’ and create a ‘shared dialogue.’⁵⁴⁸ For example, in an interview I conducted with a West Bank settler, he discussed ‘knowing the corridors’ of the Civil Administration and working with all its officers. The main cooperation related to ensuring the smooth running of his solar panels business built on the *moshav* (agricultural settlement) of Netiv HaGdud in the Jordan Valley inside the occupied West Bank.

At first glance there is a tension between COGAT framing Palestinian movement through humanitarian rhetoric and its role in the expansion of West Bank settlements. The humanitarian discourses from the interviews purport to institute positive governance and concern for the welfare of Palestinians. But juxtaposing this discourse with what Israeli officials do in regulating the permit system shows that they enact a settler subjectivity. What is presented as humanitarian for Palestinians is rather a measure that ultimately benefits settlers. COGAT’s control of Palestinian movement is highly functional to the establishment of segregated Israeli settlements in the West Bank, where Palestinians are barred from entering except as labourers on time-limited permits. To put it briefly, by restricting Palestinian movement, demolishing homes, appropriating land and exploiting its natural resources, COGAT married the humanitarian governance of Palestinians in segregated enclaves with colonial expansion for Israeli settlers.

⁵⁴⁷ Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler and Cas Mudde, *The Israeli Settler Movement: Assessing and Explaining Social Movement Success* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020), 167.

⁵⁴⁸ Yesh Din, *Through the Lens of Israel’s Interests*, 17.

Walled Qalqilya

In the 2005 *Ma'arabe* petition, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the government's construction of the separation wall respected the humanitarian norms of international law.⁵⁴⁹ This ruling contrasted with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which found the construction of the wall illegal under international law. COGAT's humanitarian work features a prominent role in the arguments presented by the Israeli government to defend its position. When reviewing what matters the IDF military commander—what is called the 'long arm of the state'—must weigh in determining the route of the wall, the Supreme Court suggested that international law stipulates two considerations: security and humanitarian.⁵⁵⁰ Supreme Court President Aharon Barak, who delivered the judgement, had written on these two considerations that, 'The Hague Regulations revolve around two main axes: one – ensuring the legitimate security interests of the occupier in territory held under belligerent occupation; the other – ensuring the needs of the civilian population in the territory held under belligerent occupation.'⁵⁵¹ However, Barak adds, these security-humanitarian considerations are often in tension with each other. To resolve this tension the military commander 'must create a balance between the conflicting considerations.'⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁹ For more on the wall as forging a settler national enclosure see Rachel Busbridge 'Performing colonial sovereignty and the Israeli 'separation' wall', *Social Identities*, 19:5 (2013), 653–669.

⁵⁵⁰ HCJ 7957/04, *Ma'arabe v. Prime Minister of Israel* (decision delivered 15 September 2005).

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid*, 21.

⁵⁵² *Ibid*.

First, to establish that it was driven by a security concern, the Israeli government argued that the construction of the wall is part of its combat operations. In applying the law of belligerent occupation to make its judgment the Supreme Court accepted this security rationale. Then, to balance security considerations with humanitarian ones, Barak writes that the Israeli government ‘discussed a list of infrastructure and logistic improvements intended to relieve the situation of the residents of the villages to the extent possible.’⁵⁵³ Among the eight humanitarian considerations provided, one improvement was the creation of a crossing near the eastern entrance to the city of Qalqilya that is always open, and where a representative of COGAT is onsite to resolve problems that may arise. This Palestinian city in the West Bank, bordering Israel and the Green Line, became one of the localities worse affected by the building of the wall, which surrounded all but one side of it on the east side.

Another humanitarian measure put forward was for COGAT, in coordination with the international NGO Anera, to commence a project to connect the villages of Ras a-Tira and Hirbet a-Daba to the water system. Those Palestinian villages are on the Israeli (west) side of the wall in the same enclave created to annex the colony of Alfei Menashe to the south of Qalqilya. To further rationalise the Israeli state’s position, it is acknowledged that because of the security considerations Palestinian residents are harmed by the ‘seizure of lands, harm to agriculture, restrictions of movement, and impediment of daily life.’⁵⁵⁴ These ostensible security considerations, then, were balanced with a humanitarian measure, which was an effort to protect ‘the residents’ fabric of life after its [the wall] construction.’⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ Ibid, 52.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, 53.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

As legal scholar Nimer Sultany demonstrates, the Supreme Court has repeatedly harnessed international law to remove political and historical context from practices of settler colonisation by rendering the situation either a security concern or a humanitarian issue.⁵⁵⁶ What is depoliticised by omission in the ruling on the *Ma'arabe* petition is that the wall facilitated continued settlement expansion by incorporating West Bank colonies into Israel. And where benefits to Israeli settlers are recognised, these are justified as a security concern. Israeli authorities argue that the route of the wall does not follow the Green Line because it would pose a disadvantage in combat. According to Colonel (Res.) Danny Tirza, who oversaw the IDF's planning of the route of wall (and was previously involved in outlining the boundaries of Oslo's areas), from a security perspective 'mountains dominate valleys,' thus the wall had to be built on the high grounds. After the Supreme Court's recommendation to balance security with humanitarian considerations, in an article he admitted quite starkly that 'we cannot take all the land that we want for the sake of security.'⁵⁵⁷ To establish a balance that attends to the concerns of Palestinians, Tirza explained that the planning of the wall incorporated Palestinian needs by providing services for those residing east of the wall. These humanitarian services included building new roads and constructing new clinics so Palestinians will not need to travel elsewhere.⁵⁵⁸ In this plan for settler colonisation, humanitarian interventions towards Palestinians accompany the dispossession of land to ameliorate the conditions of those suddenly enclosed by settler infrastructure. Israel's highest judicial body has worked in tandem with the

⁵⁵⁶ Nimer Sultany, 'Activism and Legitimation in Israel's Jurisprudence of Occupation' *Social & Legal Studies*, Vol. 23(3) (2014), 315–339.

⁵⁵⁷ Dany Tirza (2006), 'The Strategic Logic of Israel's Security Barrier, *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, available at <https://jcpa.org/article/the-strategic-logic-of-israels-security-barrier/> (accessed on 3 Oct. 23).

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

military arm of the settler colonial state in resorting to international law's security-humanitarian considerations to facilitate the expansion of Israeli settlements.

Further zooming in on the case of Qalqilya offers an illustrative example of COGAT implementing humanitarian measures to respond to the harms created by Israel's own settler colonisation methods.⁵⁵⁹ The towns and villages closer to the Green Line used to fare relatively well economically compared other West Bank localities, due to access to jobs in Israel and the large number of predominantly Palestinian citizens of Israel purchasing goods. The Oslo agreements' banning of Israeli citizens from entering Area A, along with the separation wall, effectively cut off Qalqilya's residents from the Israeli labour and consumer markets. Once known as Palestine's 'fruit basket' where olives, seasonal fruits and vegetables were sold all over the occupied territories, Qalqilya quickly turned into a ghost town.⁵⁶⁰ For scholar Sari Hanafi this process can be understood through the concept of 'spatio-cide', meaning that the Israeli regime targets Palestinian land for the purpose of transforming it into an uninhabitable space which will induce a 'voluntary' transfer of the native population.⁵⁶¹

A retired Lieutenant Colonel and commander in the West Bank Civil Administration explained to me during an interview closely monitoring the situation created in Qalqilya during his service in 2003 at the height of the Second Intifada. He

⁵⁵⁹ For more on the carceral geography of Qalqilya see Ron Smith, 'Graduated incarceration: The Israeli occupation in subaltern geopolitical perspective', *Geoforum*, Volume 42, Issue 3, (2011), 316–328; Hillan Dayan 'Regimes of separation: Israel/Palestine and the shadow of apartheid' In: Ophir A, Givoni M, Hanafi S (eds) *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*. (New York: Zone Books 2009), 281–322.

⁵⁶⁰ 'Israel's Apartheid Wall: we are here and they are there', (2002) *LAW-The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment*, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/israel/israels-apartheid-wall-we-are-here-and-they-are-there> (accessed on 3 Oct. 23).

⁵⁶¹ Sari Hanafi 'Explaining spatio-cide in the Palestinian territory: Colonization, separation, and state of exception', *Current Sociology*, 61(2) (2013), 190-205.

identified the reduced freedom of movement as the central issue affecting Palestinian residents. The wall had surrounded all but one side of Qalqilya, with Palestinian residents allowed only one passageway through a military checkpoint on the east side. This meant that what was once a five-minute drive from Qalqilya to the Israeli town of Kfar Saba became an over an hour journey. The city was also disconnected from its surrounding villages, such as Hable, which used to be a 3-minute drive and then became a 45-minute journey due to the restrictions. The village of Hable was once in the Qalqilya governorate but after the Oslo agreement, almost a quarter of the village's land was classified as Area B, and the remaining part as Area C.⁵⁶² Tellingly, in the lead up to the construction of the wall, Israeli government minister Haim Ramon had stated that 'it would be a mistake to have territorial contiguity between Qalqilya and Habla.'⁵⁶³ Although Israeli authorities always justified the wall as a security measure, disrupting the territorial contiguity between Qalqilya and Habla allowed for the incorporation of the West Bank colony of Alfe Menashe into Israel.

The retired Lieutenant Colonel stated that he 'noticed the distress created due to the preservation of the difficult security interest that prevailed at that time' and worked in collaboration with the COGAT general, the head of the Civil Administration and the IDF military commander 'to change the difficult and complex reality that harms the movements of the residents and disrupts their way of life and causes great suffering and intensifies hatred.'⁵⁶⁴ The COGAT official suggested taking down the east side fence and the military checkpoint, as well as creating alternative routes for

⁵⁶² 'Habla Town Profile', *The Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem*, (2013) available at http://vprofile.arij.org/qalqilya/pdfs/vprofile/habla_vp_en.pdf (accessed on 3 Oct. 23).

⁵⁶³ Meron Rappaport and Yedioth Ahronoth 'On Israel's separation fence (part 2)', *Electronic Intifada*, (2003) available at <https://electronicintifada.net/content/israels-separation-fence-part-2/4605> (accessed on 3 Oct. 23).

⁵⁶⁴ Interview 2022.

Palestinians to travel, including a tunnel connecting Qalqilya to Hable. In his words the key to this plan consisted in,

preservation of civil movements and relationships, relief for the population, encouragement of the economy and trade [...] Ensuring the existence of civil life and normal and common civil activity in the territories is an Israeli and Palestinian interest.

The portraying of the intervention as ‘relief for the population’ helps COGAT to constitute it as humanitarian governance beneficial to Palestinians. Concurrently, it omits the vast advantages brought to the settler communities, who had campaigned for the route of the wall to segregate Qalqilya so that the West Bank colony of Alfe Menashe could be annexed into Israel. And the measures established for Palestinians did not bring about a real improvement in living conditions. Connecting Qalqilya and Habla through a road dug underneath the street built for settlers to access Alfe Menashe, became an obsolete necessity because the impact of the wall voids the social and economic basis of travel between the two localities.⁵⁶⁵ Furthermore, the strangulation of economic opportunities often has the effect of displacing the population of smaller villages who tend to escape to larger urban enclosures. According to the retired Lieutenant Colonel, the program eventually was approved and became ‘a model of civil activity’ in the Seam Area—the enclaves between the Green Line and the wall. This land in the Seam Area that the separation wall de facto annexed to Israel proper is of strategic importance given that 85 percent of the total West Bank

⁵⁶⁵ Peter Lagerquist, ‘Fencing the last sky: Excavating Palestine after Israel’s “separation wall”’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 33:2 (2004), 5–35.

settler population resides there.⁵⁶⁶ As examined in this section, COGAT seeks to operate within a liberal mechanism of humanitarianism to organise the displacement of Palestinians from land sought by Israeli settlers. In this way, Israeli settler colonial practices of Palestinian dispossession are implemented in accordance—not in contrast to—the techniques of government afforded by the humanitarian imaginary.

Humanitarian aid as counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency techniques are often divided between ‘enemy-centric’ and ‘population centric’ strategies. Enemy-centric counterinsurgency predominantly relies on ‘kinetic’ force (lethal power) to defeat insurgents, as well as to deter the civilian population from taking up arms or supporting the insurgency. Meanwhile, the population-centric approach places greater emphasis on non-kinetic measures that aim to influence behaviours and establish relationships with the population in the territory to be secured.⁵⁶⁷ The counterinsurgent’s targeting of civilian populations also comes from the realisation that their active participation in people’s war and revolutionary warfare has been fundamental to the success of anti-colonial liberation movements.⁵⁶⁸ Israel’s counterinsurgency features a form of power that appeals to

⁵⁶⁶ OCHA (2022) ‘The humanitarian impact of 20 years of the Barrier - December 2022’, available at <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-impact-20-years-barrier-december-2022> (accessed on 10 Oct. 23).

⁵⁶⁷ Joseph MacKay, *The Counterinsurgent Imagination: A New Intellectual History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2023); Lisa Bhungalia, ‘Managing violence: aid, counterinsurgency, and the humanitarian present in Palestine’, *Environment and Planning A*, volume 47, (2015), 2308–2323.

⁵⁶⁸ Eqbal Ahmad, ‘Revolutionary War and Counter-Insurgency’, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1971), 1–47; Amanda Alexander, ‘Revolutionary War and the Development of International Humanitarian Law’ in Victor Kattan and Brian Cuddy (eds) *Making Endless War: The Vietnam and Arab-Israeli Conflicts in the History of International Law* (University of Michigan Press, 2023); Nicola Perugini, ‘Decolonising the Civilian in Third World National Liberation Wars’ *Millennium*, 0(0) (2024) <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298231214163>.

liberal principles, is distinguished by a discourse of humanitarian intent, and is settler colonial in its imperative to confine in enclaves the Palestinian population.⁵⁶⁹ Israeli counterinsurgency operations adopt both enemy-centric and population-centric methods. Both methods of counterinsurgency are part and parcel of Israel's settler colonialism. Lethal power and more subtle methods of population control serve to foster compliance to the process of Israeli settler colonisation.⁵⁷⁰

The humanitarian mode of managing civilians figures centrally in the population-centric counterinsurgency approach. As the 2009 US Government Counterinsurgency Guide posits, '[t]he capabilities required for COIN may be very similar to those required for peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, stabilization operations, and development assistance missions.'⁵⁷¹ Renown counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen rearticulated this form of counterinsurgency as 'armed social work'.⁵⁷² In an interview with the International Committee of the Red Cross, he argued that the concept of counterinsurgency does not closely align to what is actually happening on the ground. Instead, the idea of 'complex humanitarian emergencies' and creating an 'environment where existing conflicts can be dealt with in a non-violent way' is much closer to the way the population-centric operations are conducted.⁵⁷³ Before the Hamas-led attack of October 7, 2023, and Israel's genocidal military campaign against the Palestinian people in Gaza, the phrase 'Mowing the

⁵⁶⁹ Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, 4.

⁵⁷⁰ Mandy Turner, 'Peacebuilding as counterinsurgency in the occupied Palestinian territory', *Review of International Studies*, 41(1) (2015), 97.

⁵⁷¹ 'US Government Counterinsurgency Guide' (2009) available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf> (accessed 5 Oct. 23).

⁵⁷² David Kilcullen (2006) 'Twenty-Eight Articles Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency', *Small Wars Journal*, available at <https://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/28articles.pdf> (accessed 5 Oct. 23).

⁵⁷³ Vincent Bernard and Michael Siegrist, 'Interview with David Kilcullen', *International Review of the Red Cross*, Volume 93 Number 883 (2011), 589.

Grass' had come to denote one of Israel's primary counterinsurgency strategies.⁵⁷⁴ This doctrine holds that by launching pre-emptive or retaliatory attacks with disproportionate force, and by targeting civilian populations deemed supportive of the resistance, the enemy can be forced into submission, its armed capabilities crippled and temporary deterrence achieved.

This section focuses on a less visible form of Israeli population-centric counterinsurgency against Palestinians that is operationalised through strategies of humanitarian governance. It shows that as a non-combat branch that remains active in times of war, COGAT has become a crucial player in the implementation of humanitarian counterinsurgency operations to Palestinians subjugated inside settler colonial enclaves. Firstly, economic incentives packaged in the name of humanitarianism are put forward to alleviate the suffering of Israel's own blockade of Gaza. Secondly, food aid served to forestall the possibility of a 'collapse' or 'humanitarian crisis' in Gaza. Ultimately, the control mechanism of the Gaza blockade does not merely separate Palestinians from Israelis, it also enables Israel's control from a distance, rather than with boots on the ground, over the Gaza Strip and maintains an unwanted surplus Palestinian refugee population contained in exile and unable to return to their lands.

I interviewed retired Major General of the IDF's Central Command, Gadi Shamni, to gain a better understanding on COGAT's function as a humanitarian government under settler colonialism from the perspective of other military organisations that had worked closely with it. Shamni spent 36 years in the IDF and

⁵⁷⁴ Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir, 'Israel's Counterinsurgency Experience' in Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir (eds). *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016), 168–190; Efraim Inbar, and Eitan Shamir. "'Mowing the Grass": Israel's Strategy for Protracted Intractable Conflict', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014): 65–90.

some of his most senior roles included commander general of the Gaza division (2003) and head of the operations division in IDF headquarters (2004). In 2005, he was promoted to the rank of Major General and became the Military Secretary to at the time Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. During the interview Shamni discussed the importance of COGAT to the army's decision-making process and explained that it is one of the four main players in the conduct of military operations—the other three being the military commander, the police, and the IDF headquarters. COGAT, he stated, is 'a key player in this room because he is the one that can bring the authentic thoughts, feelings, things that are being done among the Palestinians [...] he actually represents the Palestinian audience who are not in the room.'⁵⁷⁵ To illustrate this point Shamni said,

Whenever I commanded the area, when I was brigade commander, when I was the head of the operations division of the whole IDF [...] sometimes the commander under me, would like to put curfews because [...] he looks at the pure military angle. [But] he cannot ignore many things that the COGAT representative will bring to the table, we have to make sure that medical supplies, food and water will be provided, and no reason to stop people from going to school. Without COGAT in the room, the Palestinians will always miss something, will suffer more, their voice will not be heard.

What Shamni's comments interestingly illustrate is that COGAT emerges as the counterinsurgent's humanitarian arm that will promote Palestinian needs and ensure that medical supplies, food, water and so on will be provided. Seen in this light, it is

⁵⁷⁵ Interview 2022.

the branch that will ostensibly make Palestinians suffer less. Besides, the reliance of Druze recruits and their rise to high-ranking positions—as is the current COGAT Major General Ghassan Alian—because of their bilingual skills (Hebrew and Arabic) serves to enable a closer understanding of the population under control. From the Israeli colonial gaze, the Druze are deemed to have a closer affinity to Arabs and thus are better capable to represent Palestinians' concerns.⁵⁷⁶

The mobilisation of humanitarian aid as part of population-centric counterinsurgency doctrine was best exemplified in Israel's 2007 siege of Gaza. After the 2005 'disengagement' in which the IDF permanently relocated over 8,000 Israeli settlers from Gaza, and the 2006 election of Hamas to the Palestinian legislative council, Israel decreed Gaza a 'hostile entity' and imposed a land, sea and air blockade, from which humanitarian aid was supposedly exempt. From an Israeli military perspective, the heightened control over Gaza was justified as a security measure against the Hamas enemy. The implementation of a blockade—harsh restrictions on the movement of people and goods—is then depicted as a humanitarian form of warfare—as opposed to, for instance, aerial bombardment—through which the civilian population is meant to abandon support for the ruling authority. International lawyers repeatedly labelled the Israeli blockade a war crime because it constitutes collective punishment of civilians.⁵⁷⁷ In this regard, the impact of the siege has had devastating consequences for Palestinians. UN agencies reported at the beginning of 2023—that is, before the October 7—that 58 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza (1.3 million people) required some form of humanitarian assistance. The unemployment rate had

⁵⁷⁶ On the Druze in the Israeli military see, Lisa Hajjar, 'Speaking the conflict, or how the Druze became bilingual: a study of Druze translators in the Israeli military courts in the West Bank and Gaza', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23:2 (2000), 299–328.

⁵⁷⁷ OHCHR 'Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians illegal and an affront to justice: UN expert' available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/07/israels-collective-punishment-palestinians-illegal-and-affront-justice-un> (accessed on 23 Oct. 2023)

reached 44 percent, which was the main factor requiring the need for international aid, and over 80 per cent of the population lived under the poverty line.⁵⁷⁸

There is a further military logic at work here, too: the poorer the population, and the more they rely on external aid, the more dependent they become, and therefore the easier they are to control. According to a low-ranking soldier from COGAT that spent part of his service on the Gaza front during 2018-2020, COGAT offers economic incentives to encourage acquiescence in the Gazan population but those incentives can be removed if the security assessment demands the resuming of forms of coercion and control. For the soldier interviewed, 'the idea being you improve the humanitarian situation, that's the carrot, and then if they turned to violence, they shoot rockets, if they tried to invade, [...] then you have the ability to take those things back, which is the stick.'⁵⁷⁹ It is striking how this former soldier used the same 'carrot and stick' metaphor to describe counterinsurgency policy as COGAT's first head general Gazit did to label Dayan's 'open bridges' regulation soon after the 1967 occupation. Humanitarian actions, including economic initiatives, therefore become an instrument for controlling the population's behaviour. The soldier added that COGAT does what it 'can to ameliorate civilian humanitarian suffering, for you know, for humanitarian reasons, but also to weaken the position of the of the terrorist organisations in the Strip.'⁵⁸⁰ An example that came up in our discussion on the economic incentives to improve the humanitarian situation was the recent news that COGAT would increase the number of work permits for Gazans to 20,000; a significant rise compared to the

⁵⁷⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Humanitarian Needs Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territory, January 2023, 23.

⁵⁷⁹ Interview 2022.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

7,000 allowed in the previous year and the highest number since the blockade began back in 2007.⁵⁸¹

Brigadier General (Res.) Baruch Spiegel was a very influential figure involved in developing COGAT's policies. He previously worked in the Ministry of Defense as IDF director of civilian and humanitarian issues, was a deputy head of COGAT, and served as special advisor for regional affairs for President Shimon Peres. He also had some recent experience when recalled as a COGAT reservist during the 2021 Israeli military offensive in Gaza. For Spiegel, the current Israeli policy in Gaza revolves around a seemingly simple assessment: 'when you push operationally too much, you don't know exactly when the collapse can happen.'⁵⁸² He explained in dehumanising language that Gaza was a 'monster to control' and Israel feared a collapse scenario where the crossings that regulate the entry of goods are completely closed. And if the international delivery of food, water, and medical aid ends, Palestinians will depend 100 percent on Israel. To avoid the collapse, Spiegel discussed the calculations COGAT makes to decide how much Palestinians in Gaza are allowed to import for their needs. He stated, 'Basic humanitarian is a must. Then you have to identify what is basic humanitarian. Keep the head above the water. What does it mean, toy for children? This is a debate. What is a humanitarian crisis?'⁵⁸³

Similarly to how international humanitarian organisations calibrate the caloric intake of recipients as best practice in the planning of food aid, COGAT calculated what would constitute a 'humanitarian minimum' in Gaza under which the civilian population will not be able to survive. In 2012 it emerged that following the blockade

⁵⁸¹ Adam Sella, 'How Israel's Work Permit Policy for Palestinians Helps Maintain the Occupation' *Ha'aretz*, (2023) available at <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-05-26/ty-article-magazine/.premium/how-israels-work-permit-policy-for-palestinians-helps-maintain-the-occupation/00000188-53ae-df79-a19d-f3be86530000> (accessed on 5 Oct. 23).

⁵⁸² Interview 2022.

⁵⁸³ Interview 2022.

COGAT produced a document titled 'Food Consumption in the Gaza Strip – Red Lines' to calculate the minimum level of calories, based on an assessment by the Ministry of Health, needed to prevent malnutrition. Spiegel further explained that deciding what goods should be allowed to enter Gaza was always a dilemma and asked if there are any statistics or measurements to decide what kind of food should be deemed humanitarian. He used the example of COGAT banning the entry of pasta at one point. This made international news in 2009 after US Senator John Kerry visited Gaza and discovered that Israel had banned pasta because it was considered a 'luxury' good rather than a 'humanitarian' food item (rice was being allowed in).⁵⁸⁴ This debate inside COGAT regarding what constituted a humanitarian crisis is emblematic of the calculations and designs used to implement an ostensibly humanitarian counterinsurgency. Rather than a traditional policy of winning over 'hearts and minds', Israeli counterinsurgency is calibrated to maintain a 'humanitarian minimum' for the population to survive and to comply with a carceral enclave regime.

Recent Israeli policies in Gaza are not exceptional but epitomise the history of settler colonialism in Palestine. Since the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians in 1948, Israel has always viewed the return of refugees has a 'demographic threat' to its Jewish majority settler state.⁵⁸⁵ Gaza's separation from the rest of Palestine constitutes the endpoint of Israel's appropriation of Palestinian land. The endpoint entails the enclavisation of Palestinian population centres and territories surrounded by Israel or Israeli settlements.⁵⁸⁶ In this vein, COGAT's humanitarian aid as counterinsurgency had become part of a strategy that not only fosters control but also

⁵⁸⁴ Trude Strand, 'Tightening the Noose', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 43(2) (2014), 6–23.

⁵⁸⁵ Elia Zureik 'Demography and transfer: Israel's road to nowhere', *Third World Quarterly*, 24:4 (2003), 619–630.

⁵⁸⁶ Tareq Baconi, 'Gaza and the One-State Reality', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 50:1 (2021), 77–90.

seeks to entrench the dispossession of unwanted Palestinians. Israel's settler colonial siege instituted a logic whereby Palestinian refugees in Gaza, constituting the vast majority of the total population, were to be kept under humanitarian care and unable to return to the lands from which they were displaced in 1948.

Military-humanitarian coordination

A retired Colonel who served in the Civil Administration and a former World Bank staffer emphasised to me during separate interviews that despite Palestinians not having full sovereignty, their quality of life is quite high compared to other regions of the world affected by war and conflict. The former claimed that the standard of life in the West Bank is better than in 80 percent of the world—that is why sometimes, particularly in reference to the city of Ramallah where the Palestinian elite reside, it is nicknamed a 'five-star occupation'. The latter pointed out that based on the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI), the 'State of Palestine' receives scores which are around the same level of neighbouring Arab countries such as Jordan, Lebanon or Egypt and are much higher than most states in sub-Saharan Africa that have full sovereignty.⁵⁸⁷ There was a striking convergence in their approaches and in the examples drawn to show me that humanitarian assistance was having some sort of positive impact on Palestinians.

COGAT explicitly publicises that one of its main roles is to liaise directly with the 'international community on issues relating to humanitarian aid and the promotion

⁵⁸⁷ Summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living.

of various initiatives in Judea and Samaria' (the West Bank).⁵⁸⁸ It currently has an International Relations unit which works entirely on coordination with NGOs. Since the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, the provision of humanitarian assistance in the occupied territories is also coordinated with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and a collection of international governments, donors, UN agencies, and international and national organisations. The major actors—which have been called an 'aid politburo'— are the US, the EU, the UN and the World Bank.⁵⁸⁹ In recent years the government of Qatar has become an increasingly important donor of humanitarian aid, particularly to Gaza.⁵⁹⁰ The planning and distribution of this humanitarian aid from Qatar has been coordinated primarily with COGAT.⁵⁹¹

This section shows that Israeli military coordination with international and local actors has enabled a form of indirect rule, whereby COGAT outsources the humanitarian governance of Palestinians to players external to its system. Until the 1990s, COGAT had been a primary source of humanitarian governance to Palestinians, though not the sole.⁵⁹² With the Oslo agreements and the massive influx of international aid to Palestinian institutions under the guise of state-building, Israel was able to relieve itself from some of the burdens, both financial and operational, of governing the native population. Under the logic of indirect rule, Israel had set up a

⁵⁸⁸ 'Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories', available at <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/coordination-of-government-activities-in-the-territories/govil-landing-page> (accessed on 5 Oct. 23).

⁵⁸⁹ Anne Le More, *International Assistance to Palestinians After Oslo*, (New York: Routledge 2008), 34.

⁵⁹⁰ Elia Zureik, 'Qatar's humanitarian aid to Palestine', *Third World Quarterly*, 39(4) (2018), 786–798.

⁵⁹¹ Jacob Magid, 'Documents show Israel sought, valued Qatari aid for Gaza in years leading to Oct. 7', 22 March 2024 *Times of Israel*, (accessed 8 Apr. 24) <https://www.timesofisrael.com/documents-show-israel-sought-valued-qatari-aid-for-gaza-in-years-leading-to-oct-7/>

⁵⁹² UNRWA since the 1950s has been an agency where international government funded aid to Palestinian refugees, who themselves constituted the majority of the employed staff.

system of 'security coordination', in which essentially Palestinians would police themselves, ultimately serving the purpose not of preserving their own security but that of the colonial power instead.⁵⁹³ The primary of function of security coordination was to protect Israeli security by outsourcing to the PA repression of Palestinian political mobilisation and armed resistance.⁵⁹⁴ The system of humanitarian coordination has followed a similar rationale in that COGAT managed to absorb humanitarian actors as practitioners for its own interest of governance and control of the Palestinian population. COGAT's increasing reliance on international organisations and foreign aid coincided with a deepening embrace of humanitarian roles within Western militaries during the 1990s.⁵⁹⁵ In the 2000s, the IDF also deepened humanitarian-style roles during combat and institutionalised ties with humanitarian actors.

Israeli counterinsurgency operations were an important moment for building relationships with humanitarians. In May 2004, following a Palestinian attack on Israeli armoured vehicles in Gaza city and Rafah that killed 12 soldiers, the Israeli military retaliated with an offensive dubbed 'Operation Rainbow'. The Israeli offensive entailed an invasion and siege of Rafah lasting from 12 to 14 May that killed 59 Palestinians and caused the destruction of around 300 homes to expand a pre-existing buffer zone on the Gaza-Egypt border.⁵⁹⁶ In a petition submitted to the Supreme Court by Israeli NGO Physicians for Human Rights, the Israeli army described three humanitarian

⁵⁹³ Jamil Hilal, 'Rethinking Palestine', *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2015), 351–362.

⁵⁹⁴ Alaa Tartir (Ed.) *Outsourcing Repression: Israeli-: Palestinian Security Coordination*, (Afro-Middle East Centre 2019).

⁵⁹⁵ Killian McCormack and Emily Gilbert, 'The geopolitics of militarism and humanitarianism', *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 46(1) (2022), 179–197.

⁵⁹⁶ 'IDF Operations in Rafah May 2004', *Human Rights Watch*, available at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/rafah1004/11.htm> (accessed on 5 Oct. 23).

steps it had taken to coordinate with external actors.⁵⁹⁷ First, it set up a 'humanitarian centre' to deal with parties outside of the battlefield, such as human rights and humanitarian organisations, to mitigate problems that may arise from the fighting. Second, a District Coordination Office (DCO) was established inside the COGAT branch. The DCO was responsible for communicating on humanitarian matters that result from the operation with the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the Palestinian Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Third, every Israeli military battalion had a DCO humanitarian officer, whose job was to deal with the evacuation of Palestinian dead and wounded.⁵⁹⁸ In reviewing the army's conduct in the Rafah offensive, the Supreme Court suggested that the execution of these three measures 'have greatly facilitated the implementation of humanitarian principles' and in addition recommended that institutional arrangements should be created to allow for the future adoption of those measures.⁵⁹⁹ While the IDF established three new organisational structures to facilitate humanitarian operations, their purpose was not necessarily humanitarian in nature but had a legal motive: adopting these measures would provide some degree of legal protection for IDF operations.

This experience was a formative one for military-humanitarian relations during large-scale operations, such as the subsequent 2008/2009 Israeli war on Gaza that the IDF called 'Operation Cast Lead'.⁶⁰⁰ Ten days into the three-week assault that killed over 1,300 Palestinians, Baruch Spiegel led the opening of the Joint Humanitarian Coordination Center (JHCC). This was a COGAT initiative to coordinate with the major international humanitarian organisations the response to the damage

⁵⁹⁷ HCJ 4764/04 Physicians for Human Rights v. IDF Commander

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid 224.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid 234.

⁶⁰⁰ Amnesty International, 'Gaza: Operation "Cast Lead"' (2017), available at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/gaza-operation-cast-lead> (accessed on 5 Oct. 23).

caused by Israel's attacks. In Spiegel's words, the purpose was to 'not let a humanitarian crisis happen in Gaza,' even if the very Israeli attacks were causing just that.⁶⁰¹ In essence the creation of the JHCC permitted COGAT to outsource the burden of humanitarian aid to international organisations during sustained combat operations.

Operation Cast Lead also resulted in the creation of 'humanitarian officers,' whose purpose was to enhance the political legitimacy of Israeli counterinsurgency operations. Humanitarian officers were first tested at checkpoints to reduce the frictions that arise at the often busy and jammed crossing points. These positions were later created to support the combat battalions.⁶⁰² On the selection of personnel to serve as humanitarian officers, one former COGAT School instructor noted that 'dignity' was a trait that officers should have. But they should also be able to 'influence' the civilian population, as he suggested that the humanitarian element in combat operations can help normalise IDF relations with Palestinian civilians. As the official stated, 'if I didn't deal with supplying food and electricity and the civil problem, I don't gain any legitimacy.'⁶⁰³

Yet the use of humanitarian officers to enhance Israeli legitimacy among Palestinian populations often suffered from a lack of resources. While COGAT was able to handle day-to-day coordination, it did not have the capacity to manage military-humanitarian coordination during large-scale military operations.⁶⁰⁴ As suggested by

⁶⁰¹ Interview 2022.

⁶⁰² Ashnel Pfeffer, 'IDF Leaders Learn to Be "Humanitarian Officers" in Battle', *Haaretz*, (2011) available at <https://www.haaretz.com/2011-04-18/ty-article/idf-leaders-learn-to-be-humanitarian-officers-in-battle/0000017f-f738-d318-aff-f77b8e0f0000> (accessed on 5 Oct. 23).

⁶⁰³ Interview 2022.

⁶⁰⁴ Ruben Stewart and Ana Zaidenweg, 'Humanitarian civil-military coordination in the occupied Palestinian territory', (2013) available at <https://odihpn.org/publication/humanitarian-civil%20military-coordination-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory/> (accessed on 5 Oct. 23).

two international staff members working in the UN Office of the Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator, the decision to open the coordination centre was partly a response to pressure from the humanitarian community, but also the result of the IDF's realisation that battalions without humanitarian officers would delay international organisations from carrying out their missions and slow down the army's overall progress.

Since the creation of the JHCC, the UN has participated in training conducted at the COGAT School and delivers presentations on the roles and functions of UN and other agencies as well as principles underpinning humanitarian action. The two UN humanitarian workers mentioned above welcomed the constructive relationship built with the Israeli army and indicated that the involvement in COGAT training is the cornerstone of their unit's strategy. At the same time, this collaboration was made possible because of the IDF's increased attention to the humanitarian sphere during combat. These aid workers believe that their involvement in COGAT training 'is a positive example of a military that has recognised the need to deploy extra capacities beyond standard civil-military coordination staff and mechanisms to engage with humanitarian operations.'⁶⁰⁵

This level of public commendation for IDF coordination with the humanitarian sector is not the norm, however. From my fieldwork, I found that international humanitarians—let alone Palestinian aid workers—are generally more critical of Israeli authorities, who often constrain their work and are particularly averse to reports from international organisations that cast the IDF in a negative light. Moreover, many international aid workers report that Israeli authorities regularly hinder the delivery of aid, and at times even destroy humanitarian assistance provided for Palestinians by

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

the international community. As one senior humanitarian worker noted in 2022, COGAT's willingness to coordinate humanitarian assistance to Palestinians is usually conditional to them not residing on lands marked for Israeli settlers in Area C of the West Bank.⁶⁰⁶

The approach to humanitarian action, and relations with the Israeli military, of the two UN staff discussed above differs from the one of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). MSF's more attentive approach to the negative consequences of humanitarian action is rooted in a strand of humanitarianism that emerged in 1970s.⁶⁰⁷ MSF pioneered a form of humanitarian action based on speaking out and bearing witness to the suffering of victims.⁶⁰⁸ This was a significant departure from the tradition of the ICRC. Specifically, it contested the principle of neutrality as an almost sacred pillar of humanitarianism. Beginning operations in occupied Palestine in 1988 during the First Intifada, over the years MSF has been more vocal than others about the dilemmas of intervention. Caroline Abu-Sada, coordinator of the Research Unit of the Swiss section of MSF, reviewed the organisation's operations in the occupied Palestinian territories between 2007 and 2010. She reported that a COGAT official willingly allowed MSF into Gaza during Operation Cast Lead because it provided medical assistance, but to avoid criticism of the IDF's conduct COGAT refused to let in other NGOs who solely wanted to observe and report on the conflict.⁶⁰⁹ This led Abu-Sada to raise the following critical question: 'In such conditions, is it possible for medical aid organisations such as MSF to avoid becoming the healthcare assistants of the

⁶⁰⁶ Interview 2022.

⁶⁰⁷ Didier Fassin, 'Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life', *Public Culture*, 19(3) (2007), 499–520.

⁶⁰⁸ Eleanor Davey, *Idealism beyond Borders: The French Revolutionary Left and the Rise of Humanitarianism, 1954–1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015).

⁶⁰⁹ Caroline Abu-Sada, 'Gaza Strip: A Perilous Transition' in Claire Magone, Michael Neuman, Fabrice Weissman (eds) *Humanitarian Negotiations Revealed: The MSF Experience* (London: Hurst 2011), 103.

occupying power?’⁶¹⁰ She further recalled a warning on the issue of NGOs collaborating with the Israeli military from the MSF president in 2002: ‘Until now, international humanitarian aid has only played a peripheral role in this conflict, but there is a danger of it being expected to assume that of assistant prison guard at the centre of a pitiless system of domination and segregation.’⁶¹¹ Essentially, MSF was sensitive to Palestinian concerns that the provision of humanitarian aid might serve as a form of collusion with the Israeli occupation. Rather than bearing witness to suffering, MSF had to be careful not to become auxiliaries of occupation.

MSF reflected once again on the possible perils of humanitarian intervention during Cast Lead as well as during Israel’s 2014 attacks on Gaza, which caused more than 2,000 Palestinian deaths (including more than 500 children) and more than 10,000 people injured.⁶¹² A few days into the 2014 war on Gaza, Johnathan Whittall, Director of the Analysis Department at MSF, provocatively asked:

At what point does MSF’s repeated medical action in an unacceptable situation become complicity to aggression and oppression? Would MSF accept to work in a prison where the guards had thrown away the key and threw explosive devices over the wall into the overcrowded den of human suffering? Should MSF stay and deliver care, while bearing witness - or walk away in outrage, refusing to be complicit?⁶¹³

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, 104.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² *Amnesty International UK* ‘Gaza: Operation Protective Edge’, available at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/gaza-operation-protective-edge> (accessed on 5 Oct. 23).

⁶¹³ Johnathan Whittall and Michael Neuman, ‘Debate : The limits of humanitarianism in Gaza (2014) available at <https://msf-crash.org/en/blog/war-and-humanitarianism/debate-limits-humanitarianism-gaza> (accessed on 5 Oct. 23).

Whithall concludes his opinion piece stating that ‘While the blockade on Gaza remains firmly in place, MSF is continuing to work in an open-air prison to patch up prisoners in between their torture sessions.’⁶¹⁴ With that analogy he was referring to a case occurred to MSF in Libya, where the organisation suspended its medical aid in Misrata’s detention centre because it did not want to be complicit in the authorities’ use of torture. Whithall raises some important questions while framing the dilemma of humanitarian intervention between providing care and testimony on the one hand and refusing complicity on the other.

That said, providing humanitarian care and witnessing to the suffering of Palestinians is not the only way of acting in solidarity with victims of oppression. There is a longstanding Palestinian criticism of international humanitarian aid, which Abu Sada noted, as an ineffective way to challenge Israeli settler colonialism because by relieving it of responsibilities to provide for the welfare of Palestinians can contribute to making it more sustainable. Scholar Lena Meari has also argued that humanitarian solidarity produces the condition of Palestinian victimhood and stunts more emancipatory forms of anticolonial agency.⁶¹⁵ It is notable that the contemporary humanitarian approach towards those at the receiving end of war and colonialism has changed significantly since the modes of anticolonial solidarity of the 1960s. If in the past international volunteers joined as fighters in the armed struggles of colonised peoples in the name of revolution and against imperialist domination, today humanitarian workers take care of the victims of conflict and speak of bearing witness to their suffering.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Lena Meari, ‘Colonial dispossession, developmental discourses, and humanitarian solidarity in “Area C”: the case of the Palestinian Yanun Village’, *Community Development Journal*, 52(3) (2017), 506–523.

⁶¹⁶ Didier Fassin, ‘The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict,’ *Cultural Anthropology*, 23 (2008), 532.

Along with displacing other emancipatory forms of solidarity, humanitarian discourses and practices are strategies that can closely align with the imperatives of militaries and colonial powers – and have done so in Palestine/Israel. The limits of speaking out through humanitarian advocacy while continuing operations remain, particularly when hearing Israeli officials admitting to the benefits of international aid. Dov Sedaka, the former head of the Civil Administration, bluntly described how the international community's humanitarian efforts have affected the occupation:

The involvement of the international community and Palestinians are making the occupation very easy for Israel, it's a very easy occupation. We have nothing to pay. Ok workers come in Israel, the international community will pave the road, assistance for medical treatment...So Israelis are releasing themselves from this obligation. I think the international community are making the occupation more calm, more easy.⁶¹⁷

Another ex-COGAT official, who now teaches humanitarian studies at an Israeli university, agreed with Sedaka that international assistance to Palestinians is making the occupation more 'comfortable' and 'bearable' for the IDF to carry on.⁶¹⁸ International humanitarians' work has proven useful to COGAT's rule by relieving Israel, as the ultimate sovereign power, of its responsibility to provide services to Palestinians as stipulated in the regulations of international law for occupying powers. A key implication is that humanitarian actors who are external to the bureaucratic system of government in the occupied territories, and who might support Palestinians,

⁶¹⁷ Interview 2022.

⁶¹⁸ Interview 2022.

can become agents or practitioners of a humanitarianism that enables the settler colonial power.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the many faces of humanitarian governance in a settler colonial context. It has shown that humanitarianism as a technique of government has become central to the workings of COGAT, whose *raison d'être* is the control and dispossession of Palestinians. COGAT's humanitarian governance has come to constitute dispossession when Israeli officials consider regulating the permit system as a positive form of rule that facilitates the daily life of Palestinians. It constitutes dispossession when colonial infrastructures such as the separation wall are accompanied by deliberate humanitarian interventions to mitigate the impact of land theft. It entrenches Palestinian confinement and exile in Gaza when Israeli counterinsurgency demands keeping the colonised under humanitarian care but without being able to sufficiently access it. Even the interventions of international humanitarian actors can become beneficial to COGAT's form of settler colonial rule. Through coordination with humanitarian actors COGAT is the epicentre of a bureaucracy that works through and with international and local players ostensibly external to the system.

The practices examined in this chapter constitute part of an eliminationist system of dispossession which have broader significance for the strategies of Israel's settler colonial project. In recent years the Israeli settler-philosopher Micah Goodman had popularised a discourse of 'shrinking the conflict' to resolve the longstanding internal debate among the Zionist left and right over what to do about the 1967

occupied territories. Goodman's best-selling book *Catch 67* argues that the left and right can agree only on one thing: solving the 'Israeli-Palestinian conflict' is now beyond reach.⁶¹⁹ His main proposition is that the centre ground where both sides can 'shrink the conflict' is through improving Palestinian living conditions as much as possible, but without giving up Israeli settler sovereignty. This centre ground is very much one based on the settler colonial humanitarianism that COGAT has been implementing over the years. The practical steps Goodman suggests includes improving freedom of movement within the occupied territories, expanding Palestinian autonomous zones and more employment opportunities in Israel, all while the military retains full security control over borders and no evacuation of West Bank settlements. This new mantra had reached the higher echelons of Israeli politics with former prime minister Naftali Bennet fully endorsing it.⁶²⁰ In a different context, decolonial scholars have theorised 'settler moves to innocence' to denote tactics that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of responsibility without giving up land or power.⁶²¹ In the Israeli case, the interviews discussed in this chapter have sought to buttress empirically the claim that humanitarianism has woven into a settler subjectivity of benevolence towards the native, while simultaneously furthering colonial expansion.

The 2023/24 Israeli genocide in Gaza has in certain aspects marked a momentary pause in the type of rule that was discussed in this chapter's section on aid as counterinsurgency, where a 'humanitarian minimum' is calibrated to enact the siege and to foster acquiescence in the civilian population. In particular, the genocidal

⁶¹⁹ Micah Goodman, *Catch-67 The Left, the Right, and the Legacy of the Six-Day War*, Translated by Eylon Levy, (Yale: Yale University Press 2019).

⁶²⁰ Patrick Kinsley, 'Shrinking the Conflict': What Does Israel's New Mantra Really Mean? (2021), (accessed 14 September 2022) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/30/world/middleeast/israel-bennett-palestinians-shrinking.html>

⁶²¹ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a metaphor,' *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* Vol. 1, No. 1, (2012), 10.

campaign of mass killings, expulsions and a complete siege are qualitatively different from the blockade that Israel had imposed since 2007. After the Hamas attack, for a brief period COGAT abandoned any public pretence to humanitarian concern, showing in full force its racist and dehumanising settler colonial character when general of the branch Ghassan Alian stated, 'Human animals must be treated as such. There will be no electricity and no water [in Gaza], there will only be destruction. You wanted hell, you will get hell.'⁶²² Yet, appraising the depths to which COGAT officials went to calibrate the caloric intake of Palestinians in the planning of food aid can help explain how starvation became a weapon of war in the current genocide. After October 7, 2023, the 'humanitarian minimum' implemented until then was brought down to a catastrophic level, leading to one of the most severe starvation crises in recent decades.⁶²³ While there is not sufficient space to expand here, the final chapter will examine some of the ways in which Israel's settler colonial strategies of humanitarian governance have resurfaced after October 7.

⁶²² Gianluca Pacchiani, 'COGAT chief addresses Gazans: 'You wanted hell, you will get hell' (10 October 2023) *Times of Israel*, available at https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/cogat-chief-addresses-gazans-you-wanted-hell-you-will-get-hell/

⁶²³ Alex de Waal, 'We are about to witness in Gaza the most intense famine since the second world war', *The Guardian*, (21 March 2024) available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/21/we-are-about-to-witness-the-most-intense-famine-since-world-war-ii-in-gaza>

Chapter 5 Humanitarianism and the Gaza settlers evacuation

trauma

Introduction

In late March 2022, I began making trips to conduct interviews in Nitzan Bet, a small Israeli settlement located between the southern cities of Ashkelon and Ashdod, which is less than a 30-minute drive from the Gaza Strip. Unaware of travel disruption announcements, the West Jerusalem station where I took the train to begin the first trip to Nitzan Bet was bursting with ultra-Orthodox Jews seeking to attend the funeral of one of the most influential rabbis in the country. I managed to squeeze in a train, where I was evidently the sole foreigner and the only person not dressed in the traditional black suit and hat worn by ultra-Orthodox Jews. The following train I took was packed with young Israeli soldiers, seemingly on their way to serve in military bases across the country. By this point of the trip, I already had a very visual snapshot of the multiple layers that make up Israeli society. Though, I was travelling to the settlement of Nitzan Bet to meet with another small strand of Israeli society whom in the past few decades had become increasingly marginalised: the Gaza settlers.

The just over 8,000 Israeli settlers who inhabited Gaza until 2005 once held massive political weight despite their relatively small numbers. Gush Katif, the main bloc of settlements in the Gaza Strip where most of the settlers lived, enclosed more than a million Palestinians living in crowded conditions in villages, cities, and refugee camps. But on August 15, 2005, Israel initiated a unilateral 'disengagement' and in just over a month it permanently evacuated all twenty-one settlements in the Gaza Strip,

as well as four others in the West Bank. The disengagement was a controversial event in Israeli politics, pitting the religious Zionist right that has come to dominate the settlement project in the 1967 occupied territories against the secular and liberal left, which ostensibly supported a two-state solution. One of the most significant developments to emerge during the disengagement was a concerted effort to frame the evacuation of settlers as an exceptionally traumatic and painful event—to send a message internationally that Israel was paying a high price for its decision. The Israeli government, media and the settler themselves all partook in discourses that constituted the evacuations from Gaza as the ‘trauma of disengagement’. Undergirding this discourse was the idea that settlers were the victims of the Israeli government’s generous concession – ‘land for peace’ – to the Palestinians.⁶²⁴ The media coverage and images broadcast on TV showed distraught settlers being forcibly evicted from their homes by tearful IDF soldiers. A critical element in the traumatised victim narrative was that these Israeli settlers had become ‘refugees’. This refugee identification was widespread, particularly among those who were not able to immediately resettle elsewhere in the West Bank or inside Israel but were relocated to temporary camps while awaiting permanent housing.

Interventions to relieve the suffering and trauma of victimised groups has long been characteristic to the imaginary of humanitarianism. Historian Thomas Laqueur has noted the way ‘the suffering bodies of others engender compassion and how that compassion comes to be understood as a moral imperative to undertake ameliorative action.’⁶²⁵ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was in medical reports, as well

⁶²⁴ Sara Roy, ‘Praying with Their Eyes Closed: Reflections on the Disengagement from Gaza’ *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2005), 64–74.

⁶²⁵ Thomas Laqueur ‘Seven Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative’ in Lynn Hunt (ed) *The New Cultural History* (Oakland: University of California Press 1989), 176.

as novels, where the reader was solicited to sympathise with the suffering body of the patient or protagonist.⁶²⁶ For Laqueur these mediums were constitutive of 'humanitarian narratives', which framed bodily suffering as a reason for intervening in the lives of others. Underpinning the humanitarian narratives of the different strands of Israel's settler society was above all the suffering settler subject. Yet, in the absence of physical wounds, this suffering was construed through the mental health language of trauma and loss. Notably, many West Bank settlers began providing aid to the Gazan settler community, primarily in the form of psychological interventions and therapy.

Beyond narratives, an examination of the central animating role of humanitarianism in the disengagement process helps illustrating how it can come to extend the eliminatory agenda of settler colonialism. It can further the 'positive' dimensions of a settler colonial logic that strives for a continuous reproduction of the settler society. Humanitarianism became an easily amenable mechanism for the Gaza settlers because it is a form of politics that structures action, making some interventions necessary and desirable, and foreclosing others, while suggesting specific actions that should be undertaken.⁶²⁷ As Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin remind us, claims 'to speak on behalf of humanity stakes out a powerful position,' which permit implementing certain desired practices while resisting aversion to them.⁶²⁸ Humanitarianism after disengagement became a way to resist evacuations and build the moral arguments for renewed settler colonisation.

While there has been a similar evacuation of 18 Israeli settlements from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982 after the peace agreement with Egypt, which held not more

⁶²⁶ Ibid, 183.

⁶²⁷ Reid-Henry, 'Humanitarianism as Liberal Diagnostic'.

⁶²⁸ Feldman and Ticktin, *In the Name of Humanity*, 9.

than 3,000 settlers, the Gaza disengagement marked the most significant permanent evacuation of settlers from Palestinian territory. Although the Gaza Strip remained part of the colonial order—modes of domination persisted through economic de-development, aerial domination, border control, and complete regulation of the population's registry and civil record—disengagement was a moment of de-settlement. This abrupt end to Gaza's settlements led to Israeli settlers claiming to experience a traumatic event, constructing it as *if* they had decolonised. Humanitarian reasoning, this chapter argues, emerges precisely when settlers face the prospect of an end to the settlement project and a potential decolonisation. To contest the prospect of a potential decolonisation, aided by the interventions of psychologists, the settlers narrate the different forms of trauma they suffered, and mobilise their condition of refugeehood to delegitimise unsettling from Palestinian land.

Fieldwork and interviews were necessary to learn more about the complex self-understandings of Gaza settlers. Eighteen interviews were conducted with former members of Gazan settlements, while four other were with psychologists and social workers that worked before and after the disengagement with the evacuees. My intention was not to assess whether settlers had suffered trauma while evacuating from Gaza. It was neither to evaluate the efficacy of the mental health practitioners' interventions. It was rather to understand what kind of political work is done by construing the unsettling and withdrawal from Palestinian territory as painful and traumatic. This process brings into sharp focus a moment in which humanitarianism's function was to support the Gaza evacuees in defying removal from the colony. The humanitarian rationale for challenging evacuations can subsequently serve the continuation of a settler subjectivity intent on advancing colonisation and the dispossession of land.

This study also benefited from observations and visits at the Gush Katif and Northern Samaria Commemoration Centre in Nitzan Bet. In 2008 the Knesset passed a law to establish this centre as a national memorial project, which was built inside a caravan (*caravilla*) camp for settler evacuees.⁶²⁹ It is essentially a museum that strives to preserve the memory of the Gaza settlements and educate Israelis and an international audience about their story. Most of the interviews I conducted were in the Nitzan Bet area and included the centre's employees and settlers who were able to permanently resettle nearby after residing in the caravan camp. Interviews with settler psychologists and social workers were conducted during visits to the settlements of Ma'ale Adumim and Karnei Shomron in the occupied West Bank. Interviewees comprised mostly settler women. During my visits to the Gush Katif centre, I was invited to access their archive, which is part of the Israeli State Archives, and an archivist introduced me to several sources, including newspapers, NGO reports, pamphlets, academic literature, films and novels.

The chapter proceeds in four sections. The first section reviews the existing literature and shows that the main contribution calls for greater attention to the way humanitarianism, through its rationalities and practices, is mobilised when settlers incur the risk of evacuation from Palestinian land. The second section examines the emergence and significance of the refugee figure among the Gaza evacuees. The third section shows the different ways in which settlers portrayed their suffering through the mental health language of trauma and invited humanitarian concern for their displacement. Lastly, the chapter explores the role of humanitarian psychologists

⁶²⁹ Gush Katif Heritage Centre, available at <https://mkatif.org/the-law/?lang=en> (accessed on 31 May 2024).

in establishing the existence of trauma, rendering it legible to wider audiences, and in reshaping settler subjectivities through therapy.

Humanitarianism after disengagement

The colonial settlement of the Gaza Strip had begun under the supervision of the Labor government a decade after Israel captured it from Egypt in the 1967 War. In the mind of Israeli colonial planners, the civilian settlements' housing infrastructure and attendant road networks built in the densely populated territory of Gaza would provide safe havens and efficient travel for the military.⁶³⁰ Colonising Gaza had also an ideological element, and most of the settlers in the 1970s were from the right-wing religious Zionism camp. In the 1980s, so-called 'quality of life' settlers—who justified moving to colonies not for ideological reasons but for socioeconomic uplifting—increasingly joined in the spoils of settler colonial dispossession. By the late 1980s, the unequal distribution of land between Israeli settlers and Palestinians was a glaring representation of segregation and domination. Palestinians who made up 99.5 percent of the population, inhabited only two thirds of the land, and the settlers, who were a fraction of the total population, had a third.⁶³¹

The Labor party's colonial planners placed Gaza's Palestinians in a five-fingered grasp of settlements surrounded by security fences and constantly guarded by a high military presence. Yet, the Second Intifada of the early 2000s vastly disrupted the viability of the Israeli settlement project in the Gaza Strip. Because of the high

⁶³⁰ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land* (London: Verso 2007) 69.

⁶³¹ Thomas Friedman, 'Gush Katif Journal; Sun and Fun in Gaza: See the "Friendly Bedouin"' (Nov. 27 1987) *New York Times* available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/27/world/gush-katif-journal-sun-and-fun-in-gaza-see-the-friendly-bedouin.html>

costs of protecting settlers, the Palestinian national liberation movement's uprising was in part the reasons that forced the Israeli government to announce the pull-out from the area. Other key reasons for withdrawing from Gaza were reducing contact between Palestinian and Israeli populations and minimising the number of Palestinian civilians under direct or indirect Israeli responsibility.⁶³² For historian Nur Masalha, it was the failure to expel the Gaza refugees to northern Sinai in the late 1960s and 1970s that formed part of the historical background to the 2005 decision. With the evacuation Israel removed the possibility that almost two million Palestinians could threaten the Jewish majority character of the state without losing much territory.⁶³³

The 2005 Gaza disengagement was not the first time Israel withdrew from occupied territory or evacuated its settlers from conquered land. Israel occupied southern Lebanon for fifteen years between 1985 and 2000, though it did not implement there a colonial settlement project. The closest comparison is to when Israel evacuated settlements from the Sinai Peninsula after the peace agreement with Egypt in 1982. Maha Mansour's comparative study defined the Sinai and Gaza evacuations 'colonial contractions'.⁶³⁴ For Mansour the withdrawals signalled that Israeli colonisation is contingent on maximising control, rather than necessarily ideological commitments to holding territory. In this vein, argues Mansour, the evacuation from Gaza was 'a ground contraction process, which restructured colonial control over this area.'⁶³⁵ Indeed, after 2005, instead of an end to military occupation Israel imposed a brutal siege on Gaza, dubbed by scholars 'settler colonialism without

⁶³² Israel Government Secretary. 2004. Government Decision no. 1996. Jerusalem: Government Secretary.

⁶³³ Nur Masalha, 'The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Thinking and Practice: Historical Roots and Contemporary Challenges', *Institute for Palestine Studies*, Issue 007 (24 Nov. 2023).

⁶³⁴ Maha Samman Mansour 'Israeli Colonial Contraction: The Cases of the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip' (February 1, 2011). *Birzeit University Working Paper* No. 2011/15

⁶³⁵ *Ibid*, 21.

settlers' to denote a continuum in domination over the area.⁶³⁶ At the same time, Mansour's critical study suggests that 'decolonization of the land in the Gaza Strip illustrates what can happen when colonial control of a territory becomes such a burden that it is more convenient to end this form of territorial control rather than face the downfall of the whole colonial project on that territory.'⁶³⁷ The Gaza evacuation unsettled not only settlers who were physically displaced but also the idea that settlements are a *fait accompli* and a permanent reality that cannot be dismantled.

Recent scholarship on the 2005 disengagement has downplayed the role of Palestinian agency and resistance in causing the Israeli evacuation, and instead sought to frame it as the settler movement's ultimate 'failure'.⁶³⁸ This argument suggests the settler movement failed to convince and stop the Israeli government from a unilateral pull-out, while overlooking that it was the government's failure to maintain the settlers' security which forced it to abandon the territory. Another major recent work has analysed this case as an instance of Israeli territorial withdrawal, but largely elided the inextricably linked issue of settler colonialism.⁶³⁹ This scholar's reductive and sole focus on 'military occupation' avoids dealing with the colonial question undergirding Israeli territorial withdrawals.

More critical literature on the Gaza pull-out has focused on the law and politics surrounding the brief imprisonment of evacuated settler children.⁶⁴⁰ Veracini has examined the disengagement in the context of comparing Israel and French Algeria as settler colonial situations.⁶⁴¹ Based on an ethnography with Gush Katif settlers prior

⁶³⁶ Michelle Pace and Haim Yacobi 'Settler Colonialism (Without Settlers) and Slow Violence in the Gaza Strip', *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2021), 1222–1237.

⁶³⁷ Mansour, 'Israeli Colonial Contraction', 18.

⁶³⁸ Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde, *The Israeli Settler Movement*, 194.

⁶³⁹ Rob Geist Pinfeld, *Understanding Territorial Withdrawal: Israeli Occupations and Exits*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2023).

⁶⁴⁰ Viterbo, *Problematizing Law, Rights and Childhood*.

⁶⁴¹ Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society*.

to 2005, Joyce Dalsheim sheds light on the apparent antagonism between the right-wing religious Zionist settlers residing in the occupied territories and the left-wing liberal and secular Israelis living within Green Line that marked the pre-1967 armistice line.⁶⁴² For Dalsheim differences conceal more than they reveal about the depth of commonalities between the two camps. She argues that ‘these groups in conflict are better understood as part of the same settler hegemony and that the conflict between these two groups has also enabled settler-colonial practices.’⁶⁴³ A further ethnographic study has explored the evacuation of the small secular settlement of Dugit and its previous fractured relationship with Palestinian workers in Gaza.⁶⁴⁴

For Sara Roy, the considerable attention devoted to the suffering of Jewish settlers has served to ‘humanise the often violent and zealous settler population, and in so doing, to illustrate and amplify the sacrifices Israel is making for peace’.⁶⁴⁵ Ron Dudai has argued that an enduring effect of the Israeli anti-disengagement protest movements was the mobilisation of right-wing advocacy couched in a discourse of human rights, which enabled a form of ‘victimhood work’.⁶⁴⁶ Another scholar argues that discourses of disengagement trauma enabled settlers to resist the end of the colony and legitimise further settler colonisation as a form of healing.⁶⁴⁷ A related study focuses on the memorialisation of the Gaza evacuation in a Jerusalem museum, and its reproduction of settler colonial inversions: the settler mimicry of indigenous

⁶⁴² Dalsheim, *Unsettling Gaza*.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid*, 22.

⁶⁴⁴ Emily Lewsen ‘Reeled in: the settlement project and the evacuation of an Israeli fishing village from Gaza’, *Settler Colonial Studies*, 5:1 (2015), 66–83.

⁶⁴⁵ Sara Roy, ‘Unsettling Gaza: Secular Liberalism, Radical Religion, and the Israeli Settlement Project by Joyce Dalsheim’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (2013), 844–846.

⁶⁴⁶ Ron Dudai ‘Entryism, mimicry and victimhood work: the adoption of human rights discourse by right-wing groups in Israel’, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21:7 (2017), 866–888.

⁶⁴⁷ Perugini, ‘The Moral Economy of Settler Colonialism’.

Palestinian narratives of human rights violations and the return to dispossessed land, which ultimately serve to produce knowledge that forecloses the possibility of future decolonisation.⁶⁴⁸ Yet, a scholarly engagement on this case that foregrounds the relationship between humanitarianism and settler colonialism has not received sufficient attention.

Tracing the long genealogy of humanitarianised subjectivities shows that they can become intricately tied to settler colonial ambitions, even in moments of de-settlement from Palestinian territory. A similar process of humanitarianisation was discussed in chapters 1 and 3. The figure of the refugee that the former Gaza settlers drew upon to mobilise political opinion is not unprecedented in the settler colonial history of Palestine/Israel. Sociologist Gershon Shafir referred to as ‘refugee-colonists’ the immigrants from eastern Europe who relied on Jewish philanthropists to establish colonies in Ottoman Palestine.⁶⁴⁹ And throughout the 1930s and 1940s there were growing appeals to international humanitarian sensibilities to facilitate the mass immigration of Europe’s Jewish refugees. Yet, the Israeli subject that came to identify as a refugee in the aftermath of the Gaza disengagement is qualitatively different than that of the previous historical eras. The specific context of evacuating colonies entails a settler subject that, contrary to for instance the Jewish refugees of the 1940s, was already an active perpetrator of Palestinian dispossession. What they have in common, and this is a key continuity, is that a humanitarianisation of the subject became a tool to advance the demographic program of populating Palestinian land with settlers.

⁶⁴⁸ Perugini, ‘Settler Colonial Inversions’.

⁶⁴⁹ Gershon Shafir, ‘Settler Citizenship in the Jewish Colonisation in Palestine’, in *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practises, Legacies*, Caroline Elkins and Susan Pederson (ed.) (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 41.

Mobilising the figure of the refugee

On the fourth day of Sukkot, we ride in Abba's pick-up truck to Nitzan. Finally, we got our keys to what the government has dubbed 'caravillas'. I see these square, mustard-colored pre-fab housing units from the main highway. They remind me of the plastic homes of the Monopoly board game. The familiar terra cotta roof tiles don't make the caravillas feel any more like 'villas'. Abba rarely uses profanity, but he doesn't hesitate to call the caravillas by a different nickname: 'charavillas', meaning 'shit houses'. Imma calls Nitzan a 'ma'abarah', referring to the tent cities where her Iraqi grandparents were herded in the 1950s. Shua calls Nitzan a 'trailer park'. Carmit calls Nitzan a 'luxury ghetto'.

The Settler, Orit Orfa⁶⁵⁰

This passage from a novel I found in the Gush Katif centre's archive is only a background to the plot's main story, which narrates the struggles of a religious settler girl displaced from Gaza's settlements and her transformation into a 'nightlife queen' in liberal Tel Aviv. The referencing of 'ma'abarah' in the novel situates the caravan camp for Gaza evacuees in a longer history of settler camps. The 'ma'abarot' (plural) were the camps that the newly created Israeli state set up between 1948 and 1951 to absorb a huge influx of around 250,000 Arab-Jewish immigrants predominantly from the Middle East and North Africa. At different historical junctures, the Zionist colonial project has mobilised settler camps as a fast and versatile architecture of power.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁵⁰ Orit Orfa, *The Settler: A novel of modern Israel*, (Route 60 Press, 2015), 72.

⁶⁵¹ Irit Katz, *The Common Camp: Architecture of Power and Resistance in Israel-Palestine*, Minneapolis, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022).

Prominently, contemporary Israeli settlers intent on creating new ‘outpost’ colonies inside the West Bank often use portable abodes to quickly establish a presence on stolen Palestinian land. But rather than rapid territorial expansion, the construction of caravan camps became a humanitarian space where to care for displaced settlers and an instrument of state power during a moment of unsettling from Gaza.

Humanitarian camps for forcibly displaced populations are the archetypal setting when thinking of refugees. Accordingly, the refugee category became a key form of identification after the evacuations. Exemplifying this identification, an Israeli settler woman remarked to the *BBC*: ‘I live in a refugee camp for the people who were expelled from Gush Katif in Gaza one year ago. My husband and I live in a “caravilla”.’⁶⁵² For a former spokesperson of the Gush Katif community that I interviewed, the Israeli government transforming them into refugees aggravated the pain because, in his words ‘when you are expelled by your own people the feeling is harder.’⁶⁵³ Israeli state institutions also repeatedly promoted the idea that the Gaza settlers had become refugees. A primary example was the state commission of inquiry’s report into the evacuation process. It stated that Israel’s responsibility to the settlers ‘is rooted in the basic social contract that ensures the human rights of every citizen of the state; all the more so when it involves citizens which the state itself has turned into refugees in their own homeland.’⁶⁵⁴ The report makes clear that the social contract with Jewish citizens is a settler colonial contract based on settling the land and unsettling amounts to human right violations and the creation of refugees—they

⁶⁵² BBC News, Rachel Saperstein 29 August 2006
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/5262830.stm 2006

⁶⁵³ Interview 2022

⁶⁵⁴ PM Netanyahu Receives Final Report of the State Commission of Inquiry into the Handling of the Evacuees from Gush Katif and Northern Samaria (15 June 2010) available at <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/spokegush150610>

are considered refugees even if settler evacuees have not crossed an international border but remained under the state's jurisdiction.

For a significant portion of the settler population resettlement was protracted and saw them residing for years in caravan camps. Life in these impoverished and marginalised camps were a stark contrast to the bygone 'Sun and Fun in Gaza'—the title of a *New York Times* column from Thomas Friedman where he depicts the settlers 'as ideologically attached to every grain of sand in Gaza as the West Bank settlers are to their land'.⁶⁵⁵ In the settler imagination, and in Friedman's Orientalist propaganda, expropriating Gaza's coastline territory was akin to making the desert bloom. Initially, most of the settlers that came to inhabit these colonies were often people from traditional religious backgrounds and for whom living in the occupied territories provided an opportunity to fulfil Zionist ideological visions of pioneering the land. In subsequent decades, secular settlers started to join the religious ones, as they found in the occupied territories cheap housing and rural lifestyles within commuting distance of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.⁶⁵⁶ Despite different reasons for settling Gaza, settler colonisation brought great advantages and privileges to all. 'Quality of life' settlers were incentivised by highly subsidised mortgages for single-family homes. Meanwhile, more ideological farmers in agricultural settlements were often able to build large homes on land priced lower compared to areas inside the Green Line. Agricultural settlements significantly profited from the exploitation of underpaid Palestinian labour, which allowed them to develop successful export industries.

Once the privileges gained from the spoils of settler colonial dispossession and capitalist exploitation were taken away, new discourses of suffering and trauma

⁶⁵⁵ Friedman, 'Gush Katif Journal'.

⁶⁵⁶ Shai M. Dromi, 'Uneasy Settlements: Reparation Politics and the Meanings of Money in the Israeli Withdrawal from Gaza.' *Sociological Inquiry* 84 (2) (2014), 294–315.

emerged. Throughout my interviews, Israeli settlers generally depicted in a highly romanticised fashion the attachments previously held in the colony. In contrast to the romanticised past socio-economic lifestyle, the dominant narrative of unsettling was predominantly a tragic story of irredeemable loss.⁶⁵⁷ It is true that at first the disengagement was detrimental to the livelihood of settlers. The Israeli settlement project in Gaza ended with the destruction of most houses, public institutions, and with the abandonment of agricultural fields and greenhouses. Nevertheless, the Israeli government provided significant financial compensation packages, ranging from about \$100,000 to \$500,000 per family, and totalling about \$2 billion.⁶⁵⁸ A substantial number of the evacuees resettled in existing colonies inside the occupied West Bank and Syrian Golan Heights. Notably, religious Zionist settlers from Gaza were intentionally sent to the city-colony of Ariel in the West Bank to bolster the religious community there.⁶⁵⁹ New small settlements were purposefully formed, on both sides of the Green Line, with names that memorialised the location of their evacuated settlements (e.g. Bnei Dekalim and Bnei Netzarim). Though, most of the evacuees remained in southern Israel, with Nitzan hosting the higher concentration of settlers in caravan camps.

Interestingly, several interviewees pointed out that the same hotels they were housed in after the disengagement have recently become host to Ukrainian refugees after Russia's invasion in 2022.⁶⁶⁰ Since then, Israel has invited Jewish Ukrainian refugees to obtain citizenship and become settlers on West Bank lands taken from Palestinians. Despite the opposite positions—Ukraine is under foreign occupation,

⁶⁵⁷ Eyerman and Sciortino, *The Cultural Trauma of Decolonisation*, 18.

⁶⁵⁸ John Ward Anderson, 'In Gaza, it's settler against settler', *NBC News*, (2004) available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna6296112>.

⁶⁵⁹ 'Analysis: Evacuated from Gaza in 2005 but still "homeless"', (2011), *The New Humanitarian*, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/analysis-evacuated-gaza-2005-still-homeless> (accessed 16 April 2024).

⁶⁶⁰ Peggy Cidor, 'Lev Echad: Israelis stand up for Ukrainians' *Jerusalem Post* (May 14, 2022) available at <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-706541>

while Israel is the occupying power—Gaza settlers identified with Ukrainian refugees and sympathised with the predicament of having to live temporarily in hotels, something many had actively opposed. While the Israeli government provided compensation to evacuated families and offered new homes, a protracted struggle emerged on where each community was to relocate.⁶⁶¹ A common view among the settlers was that the government did not understand the importance of maintaining the fabric of the community that existed in the Gaza Strip. Due to the refusal of various settler communities to relocate individually in hotels across the country, the Israeli government resorted to establishing temporary accommodations such as the caravan camps.

In one extreme case of disagreement with the Israeli government, the settlers from Elei Sinai (named after the evacuated settlements from Egypt in 1982) decided to live in tents for months until their entire community could resettle as a bloc. I interviewed one settler that used to live in Elei Sinai, who was at pains to explain how the disengagement had turned them into refugees and the failure to resettle had initiated 'another crisis'.⁶⁶² This idea of displaced settlers facing a humanitarian crisis resonated internationally among supporters of Israel. To take one example, the Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOI), a relatively small US-based charity, strikingly describes in a fundraising pamphlet that its work had 'benefited 50,000 people from Judea and Samaria and the refugees of Gush Katif'.⁶⁶³ As with other Christian Zionist groups in the US that provide vast political, financial and practical support to Israeli settler colonialism, this charity ran fundraising campaigns for people

⁶⁶¹ Nir Hasson, 'The Day After Housing - First Families Move to Nitzan Homes; Others Opt for Tents', *Haaretz* (August 1, 2005) available at <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4926839>

⁶⁶² Interview 2022.

⁶⁶³ Human Rights Watch, 'Separate and Unequal, Israel's Discriminatory Treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories' (2010) available at <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4d1049e12.pdf>

it identified as Gush Katif refugees. CFOI has also provided financial aid to the colony of Maskiot, which became notorious for being the first new settlement constructed in the Jordan Valley for a decade in 2009 and which hosted Gush Katif evacuees. Similarly to the history of humanitarianising settlers recounted in previous chapters, donations from a global constituency of Zionist supporters were possible because of an attachment to what was framed as a humanitarian emergency, but in this case to help Gaza settlers renew the dispossession of Palestinian land in the West Bank.

For an early settler who joined a Gaza Strip colony in 1977, the refugee identification is not necessarily in conflict but rather coexists with an embracement of settlerhood. Rivka explains that after the evacuation she identified as ‘a refugee in my own country’.⁶⁶⁴ Where conflict emerged was with the liberal Israeli camp, mostly residing within the Green Line, who have come to elide their settlerhood. Instead, Rivka explicitly held on to her settler identity during our conversation, as she stated: ‘For the rest of my life I’ll be a settler. You know, also the population in Tel Aviv, they don’t know but they’re also settlers. But they’ve been treated differently. Like as if to say they are legal and we are illegal, which is not true.’⁶⁶⁵ Almost all settlements in the Gaza Strip and West Bank have been legalised in the Israeli legal system yet remain controversial because they are considered illegal under international law. Dalsheim has illustrated in detail the superficial appearance of profound difference between Israelis residing on either side of the Green Line.⁶⁶⁶ Left-wing Israelis often depict right-wing settlers as extremists who endanger their own lives, and that of their children, by living in the occupied territories and put at risk the viability and international legitimacy of the Israeli state. Yet, they ignore that the settlers living on the frontier in recently

⁶⁶⁴ Interview 2022.

⁶⁶⁵ Interview 2022.

⁶⁶⁶ Dalsheim, *Unsettling Gaza*, 22.

colonised land share the same pioneering ethos of the early left-wing Zionist settlers during the British mandate era. It is also the case that successive Israeli Labor governments have consistently supported the colonisation of 1967 Palestinian territories, they initiated the construction of settlements in Gaza, and were the dominant leadership when the Haganah and other militias carried out the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948.

These intra-settler antagonisms evoke Tunisian writer Albert Memmi's differentiation between two types of colonisers. Rivka's admonishing of Tel Aviv dwellers who don't acknowledge their settlerhood is reminiscent of Memmi critiquing the left-wing coloniser 'who refuses' to acknowledge an active role in the colonial project. Instead, Rivka is very much the 'coloniser who accepts', as Memmi writes: 'a colonialist is, after all, only a colonizer who agrees to be a colonizer. By making his position explicit, he seeks to legitimize colonization. This is a more logical attitude than the tormented dance of the colonizer who refuses and continues to live in a colony'.⁶⁶⁷ Read in this context, the refugee identification after forced evacuation is in line with the coloniser who accepts the legitimacy of living in the colony. And this refugee identification adds to the reproduction of settler subjectivities. If after unsettling the settler becomes a refugee wronged by political conflict, this avows the legitimacy of settler colonisation, and renders decolonisation an unethical process that should be prevented and rectified.⁶⁶⁸

Despite the claim that Gaza settlers had become refugees, they were able to relocate in new settlements, and like the *pieds-noirs* settlers that returned to France from Algeria after decolonisation in 1962, were in possession of legal rights and state-

⁶⁶⁷ Albert Memmi, *The Coloniser and the Colonised* (Souvenir Press, 1967), 45.

⁶⁶⁸ See also Perugini, 'Settler Colonial Inversions'.

sanctioned benefits which differentiated them from stateless refugees. Similarly to the *pieds-noirs*, the Gaza settlers sought to draw on their refugee experience in mobilising political opinion. This mobilisation of the refugee figure can serve as a tool to reframe the perpetrator of colonialism into a traumatised victim. But rather than repatriating to a postcolonial society in the metropole, Israeli settlers remain deeply implicated in the consolidation of the settler colonial enterprise by drawing from a humanitarianism that reproduces subjectivities of rightfully belonging on dispossessed Palestinian land.

Shades of trauma

In the immediate years after the disengagement, Israeli academics were conducting studies and publishing research that not only defined the ultimate experience of displaced settlers as one of trauma, but also characterised the psychologists that provided medical interventions and the IDF soldiers that carried out the evacuations to likewise have suffered traumatic disorders.⁶⁶⁹ In this vein, the Israeli government and media recurrently projected the disengagement in the broader conception of a 'national trauma', with commemoration enshrined in Knesset legislation.⁶⁷⁰ The disengagement came as a shock because the right-wing Likud Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that set in motion the Gaza withdrawal was widely known as the 'father' of the

⁶⁶⁹ See for example Julia Elad-Strenger, 'Risk-resilience dynamics of ideological factors in distress after the evacuation from Gush Katif' *International Journal of Stress Management*, 20 (1) (2013), 57–75; Rachel Dekel 'Mental Health Practitioners' Experiences During the Shared Trauma of the Forced Relocation from Gush Katif. *Clin Soc Work J* 38, (2010) 388–396; Zehavit Gross, 'Relocation in Rural and Urban Settings: A Case Study of Uprooted Schools From the Gaza Strip,' *Education and Urban Society*, 40(2) (2008), 269–295; Miriam Billig et al 'Anticipatory stress in the population facing forced removal from the Gaza Strip' *J Nerv Ment Dis.* 194(3) (2006): 195–200.

⁶⁷⁰ Elhanan Miller, 'A decade after Gaza disengagement, schools mark 'expulsion' (2015), *The Times of Israel* available at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/a-decade-after-gaza-disengagement-schools-mark-expulsion/>

settlements. Throughout Sharon's political career, he rarely shied away from expressing support for the settlers. In 1998, then foreign minister, he incited settlers 'to move, run and grab as many hilltops as they can to enlarge the settlements because everything we take now will stay ours. Everything we don't grab will go to them.'⁶⁷¹ It is also significant that Sharon made this statement at the high point of the Oslo 'peace process', which illustrates an active and expansionist settler project even when it misleadingly appeared that things may change through the negotiation of a peace agreement. Nonetheless, shortly after announcing the Gaza disengagement plan in early 2004, many began comparing him to the French general Charles de Gaulle. It was de Gaulle who put an end to 130 years of French colonisation in Algeria, resulting in the displacement of more than a million settlers.⁶⁷² Sharon's decision to evacuate Gaza therefore deeply shocked the entire settler movement in the 1967 occupied territories, although it became clear he was not going to, like de Gaulle, dismantle the entire settlement project.

An interview with an employee at the Gush Katif centre in Nitzan Bet encapsulates the feeling of the evacuated settlers from Gaza. For Laurence, 'it [the disengagement] was a shock. When we heard it, we felt betrayed'.⁶⁷³ The prevalent belief among the settlers was that the state they hold to be sacred had abandoned them.⁶⁷⁴ It was not just the religious and highly ideological settlers that were left stunned by the decision, but also the secular settlers who display a devoted

⁶⁷¹ BBC News, 'In quotes: Ariel Sharon' 11 January 2014 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11576714>

⁶⁷² Shlomo Avineri, 'Ariel Sharon: The Leader Who Was Almost De Gaulle', *Ha'aretz*, (January 11, 2014) available at <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2014-01-11/ty-article/.premium/sharon-the-leader-who-was-almost-de-gaulle/0000017f-e49f-d804-ad7f-f5ff05950000>

⁶⁷³ Interview 2022.

⁶⁷⁴ Eran Shor, 'Utilizing Rights and Wrongs: Right-Wing, The "Right" Language and Human Rights in the Gaza Disengagement', *Sociological Perspectives* 51(4) (2008), 803–826.

nationalism could not come to terms with this drastic decision.⁶⁷⁵ That settlers understood the disengagement primarily in terms of a unilateral Israeli government decision, provided an added layer to the trauma. A popular slogan that emerged during the anti-disengagement protests which erupted in 2005 across Israel was 'Jews don't expel Jews', denoting a certain fracture in the relations that tie together the settler nationalism's imagined community.⁶⁷⁶ It is characteristic of colonial returnees after decolonisation claiming recognition for their trauma to accuse the colonial state of disregarding their suffering, if not outright betrayal.⁶⁷⁷ This claim then becomes a central component of the settler narrative of victimhood and is embedded in the prevalent experience of structural tension between the settler movement and the colonial state. While the disengagement was far from a decolonisation process that ended Israeli settler colonialism, Gaza settlers seemingly experienced evacuation as if they were returnees. What distinguishes their case, however, is summoning this victimhood to support the continued displacement, dispossession and domination of Palestinians.

As I sit down to interview Lior in the front garden of her house in Nitzan Bet, she jokes that I'm not her psychologist and we're not about to begin a therapy session. Lior was also keen to tell me that they are not fanatical and violent people, in contrast to the common media representation of settlers. Indeed, this study's focus on the process of unsettling complicates mainstream understandings of overtly and physically violent settlers attacking Palestinians. To be sure, there are good reasons for the mainstream representation of Israeli settlers as zealous and violent. However,

⁶⁷⁵ Dromi, 'Uneasy Settlements', 300.

⁶⁷⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso 2006).

⁶⁷⁷ Eyerman and Sciortino, *The Cultural Trauma of Decolonisation*, 7.

focusing on unsettling and the trauma of evacuation opens a view into different ways in which settlers partake in a structurally violent system of settler colonialism. After the evacuations, Lior recalls receiving psychological help from volunteer art therapy professionals who sympathised with their cause. But almost twenty years after the evacuation, the trauma has not fully ended and is still affecting her present life. For instance, she forces her son, who is an interrogator for the Israeli police, not to come home in his uniform because it triggers unwanted traumatic feelings. This loss of confidence in state institutions was common among the evacuated settlers interviewed.

When I asked Lior to describe the 'evacuation process' she interjected: 'We called it expulsion'.⁶⁷⁸ Expulsion is key to the way settlers embodied their trauma and victimhood, albeit one produced by their own Israeli government and soldiers. Expulsion also evokes the historical trauma of Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust. In that regard, on the eve of the disengagement, Gush Katif settlers initiated a campaign of protest by pinning Stars of David on their clothing, which mimicked the antisemitic practice of Nazi Germany.⁶⁷⁹ The campaign was short-lived, and the organisers apologised after growing accusations of Holocaust denial from other Israelis. Though, some settlers still described the days of the evacuation as reminiscent of the Nazi genocide, with a particular trauma felt from Israeli soldiers forcibly evicting them, as one interview reported in the media stated: 'listen, it really was like the Nazi army was coming in.'⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸ Interview 2022.

⁶⁷⁹ Nir Hasson, 'Gaza Settlers to End Orange Star of David Protest Against Pullout', *Ha'aretz* December 23, 2004 <https://www.haaretz.com/2004-12-23/ty-article/gaza-settlers-to-end-orange-star-of-david-protest-against-pullout/0000017f-e231-d7b2-a77f-e337e2760000>

⁶⁸⁰ Eyal Ben, 'Evacuee: I should have blown myself up in Gush Katif' (17 August 2006) available at <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3292340,00.html>

A significant source of trauma came from a rupture in the settlers' self-identification as the vanguard of Israeli society fulfilling the Zionist vision of securing the frontier. In this regard, agriculture was a key component in the settlement process of the Gaza Strip. It not only provided work to sustain communities but created a sense of belonging through attachment to the land. Laurence, who settled in the *moshav* (agricultural settlement) of Gadid in 1984, stated during an interview: 'My husband was very close to the land and wanted to do something special, pioneering, to build something new that is based on agriculture, secure the borders, build security.'⁶⁸¹ The Gush Katif settlers had transformed the attachment to settlements into their self-identification as the messianic vanguard of Israeli society. Thus, the withdrawal from Palestinian territory upended their collective identities at a fundamental level and caused a significant loss of belonging to the Israeli nation. According to one report, over 40 percent of evacuated settlers visited a mental health professional in the period after the relocation.⁶⁸²

For another settler woman interviewed, Celia, the evacuation trauma caused widespread and severe illnesses. Celia is originally from London and had moved with her husband from Banffshire in Scotland to Gush Katif where they worked as a nurse and doctor respectively.⁶⁸³ After spending months in a hotel post-evacuation and several years residing in the Nizan Bet caravan camp, she now has a permanent home. Celia recalled the disengagement period as the most emotionally challenging time of her family's lives and that humanitarian assistance was urgent in the early stages. She required psychological help and described suffering from 'blackouts' of

⁶⁸¹ Interview 2022.

⁶⁸² Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde, *The Israeli Settler Movement*, 210.

⁶⁸³ Conal Urquhart and Inigo Gilmore, 'After all the threats, it's a muted goodbye to Gaza', *The Guardian*, August 14 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/aug/14/israel1>

memory for which therapy was needed. Celia claimed that the evacuation trauma was the cause of settlers disproportionately suffering from several health conditions, including diabetes, cancer and an increased breakdown of familial relationships.

What is more, cementing in Celia's mind that nothing good can come from evacuations and territorial withdrawal was that since relocating to areas near the Gaza Strip they have remained under constant threat of Palestinian attacks. As she states, 'the proof is it didn't work. We left and there still isn't peace and the rockets come over. And we're in a very dangerous place here because the rockets go right over us.'⁶⁸⁴ War and Palestinian attacks highlighted their victimisation. Facing rocket attacks were also a stark reminder that withdrawing from Gaza did not enhance Israel's security. In this vein, Israeli right-wing politicians have recurrently mobilised the Gaza disengagement trauma to argue against considering the possibility of evacuating West Bank settlements, pointing to the increased launching of rockets that follow territorial withdrawal.⁶⁸⁵ This humanitarian concern for the displacement trauma which precedes the actual event of evacuations can then be used as a shield to protect settlers from potential evacuations.

Humanitarian psychologists

On a hot summer day, I travelled to an Israeli settlement deep into the occupied West Bank. There I was to interview a psychologist, Miriam. She had spent considerable time providing aid to the Gush Katif evacuees, so I thought it would help me better

⁶⁸⁴ Interview 2022.

⁶⁸⁵ See for instance Naftali Bennet, 'For Israel, Two-State Is No Solution', *New York Times* (Nov. 5, 2014), accessed on 30 May 2024, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/06/opinion/naftali-bennett-for-israel-two-state-is-no-solution.html>

understand the role of psychologists during the disengagement. The journey on the green settler busses to Karnei Shomron, around 85 km from Jerusalem, entailed passing through several military checkpoints and encountering heavily armed settlers along the way. The Karnei Shomron settlement sits on a hilltop surrounded by rocky slopes. It comprises mainly affluent houses and villas with a view. A stark contrast to the impoverished and neglected neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem where I spent most of my time while not conducting interviews. The psychologist took me on a brief tour of the settlement and we stopped near a cliff overlooking a Palestinian shepherd herding cattle. She then pointed to a house built on the highest point of the hilltop and told me it was constructed purposely during the Second Intifada as retaliation for a Palestinian killing a family member of Karnei Shomron's mayor. Nearby I noticed some abandoned portable abodes that reminded me of the kind used to set up the caravan camp in Nitzan Bet. The psychologist briefly explained that that is where she and others resided when the settler movement first arrived in the area and awaited formal recognition from the state.

Since the 1990s, psychologists increasingly joined humanitarian missions and helped to rearticulate the plight of victimised and disenfranchised populations in the language of trauma—and its clinical qualification as posttraumatic stress disorder.⁶⁸⁶ Yet what ends up happening when humanitarian psychologists intervene is not that a political conflict or social justice question is solely transformed into a medical issue, although this has the powerful effect of obscuring the political stakes. The importance of psychological interventions is that they 'discover and testify to a hitherto neglected reality—that of the suffering of victims of violence.'⁶⁸⁷ It is the expertise of mental health

⁶⁸⁶ Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*, 15.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 201–202.

professionals who diagnose patients and then testify of their suffering that renders traumatic experiences legible to a wider audience.

The intervention of psychologists to aid the Gaza evacuation was crucial to construe the existence of trauma and was necessary for establishing humanitarian concern for the evacuees. This became evident during an interview with Aviva, a West Bank settler and lecturer in social work at Ariel university. We initially spoke about her report 'The Psychological Damage Suffered by the Evacuees from the Gaza District and Northern Samaria', which I had found in the archive of the Gush Katif Heritage Centre. At the time of the Gaza disengagement, Aviva volunteered as a social worker because she identified politically and religiously with the people of Gush Katif. She discovered that the damage was not financial because they had government compensation, but it was rooted in the evacuation turning families into refugees which 'creates problems of identity' and 'trust in the world'.⁶⁸⁸ Aviva also stated that along with her colleagues they began experiencing secondary trauma because of their work. It was striking to hear that Aviva's work began much earlier than when the evacuations took place. For the ten months before the evacuation, along with other volunteers, she made weekly visits to the families in Gush Katif to prepare them for the day after the event. It is significant to note that humanitarian concern preceded any medical diagnosis. Volunteer social workers were providing psychological aid to settlers before any diagnosis of trauma.

For the highly ideologically driven settlers of Gush Katif, losing the vanguard social status of Zionist pioneers and the transformation into pariahs, albeit briefly, was the main traumatic experience. Since most of Gaza's evacuees were not able to relocate to other post-1967 settlements inside the West Bank or Syrian Golan heights,

⁶⁸⁸ Interview 2022.

the psychologists' primary concern became attending to those facing an identity crisis. Miriam, the psychologist in Karnei Shomron mentioned above, described identifying as a Zionist pioneer who settled in the West Bank in the 1980s. She recalled hearing from evacuee patients about the joys of pioneering in Gaza. For these settlers who held such a 'high level of ideology, it's not only the trauma of loss, it's also the trauma of losing identity,' she remarked.⁶⁸⁹ According to Miriam, the settlers' 'most painful acknowledgment' was realising that the people of Israel, inside the Green Line, do not sympathise with their suffering. In this regard, the Gush Katif settlers' experience closely corresponds to the fate of colonial returnees in the postcolonial nation-state. For those colonial returnees the trauma of decolonisation is usually presented in a dual process, as Eyerman and Sciortino explain: 'colonists have been victimized by the loss of the colonies and by the humiliation and lack of sympathy experienced upon their arrival in the "homeland."' ⁶⁹⁰ For the former Gaza settlers, the lack of symbolic recognition and emotional support for the loss of the colony is deemed much more important than the substantial financial compensation received after the withdrawal. A study that examined the Gush Katif settlers' interactions with the governmental committee tasked with determining financial compensation argues that settlers mobilised an 'array of cultural logics' to demonstrate that no amount of money would be enough to compensate their trauma.⁶⁹¹ These cultural logics included making moral critiques of the Israeli government and wider society by speaking of a broken pact with settlers.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁹ Interview 2022.

⁶⁹⁰ Eyerman and Sciortino, *The Cultural Trauma of Decolonisation*, 20.

⁶⁹¹ Dromi, 'Uneasy Settlements', 295 and 305.

⁶⁹² *Ibid*, 296.

In a previous study that interviewed her, Miriam had expressed humanitarian concern for the Gaza settlers prior to the disengagement and warned about potential traumatisation if the general public will ‘not receive them with love, with recognition (in the simplest sense of acknowledging the suffering that they experienced, and in acknowledging that they have been through this suffering for the good of the whole society, and not for themselves)’.⁶⁹³ In this way, humanitarian psychologists, rather than providing solely a medical treatment, can become legitimate testifiers and narrators of the settlers’ trauma. In our interview, Miriam described the process of walking through patients in the making of a ‘new narrative, which is told again and again.’⁶⁹⁴ This new narrative was based on the idea that the people of Gush Katif, rather than colonising the frontier (post-1967 territories) as pioneers, would be able to ‘get a home in the heart of other people in Israel’.⁶⁹⁵ It is in the moment of intervention that humanitarian psychologists not only unveil the hidden violent experience of settlers and requalify it as trauma but make possible the modification and production of a new form of settler subjectivity.⁶⁹⁶ My claim here is that psychological therapy to heal the evacuees’ disengagement trauma enables reshaping settler subjectivities. Psychologists establish the existence of trauma and provide a reason for intervening in the lives of others by rendering suffering understandable to the wider society through humanitarian concern. They also help evacuees dealing with the loss of a vanguard status of colonising the frontier. Rather than abandoning the settler colonial project, psychologists reorient the humanitarianised settler self towards a new identification with the Israeli nation. While the former Gaza settlers may not highly

⁶⁹³ Ibid, 308.

⁶⁹⁴ Interview 2022.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ See Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*, 112.

regard settling within the Green Line in same way that they would inside the West Bank, residing within Israel proper, what Palestinians call '48 Palestine', still constitutes a settler colonial act that contributes to the dispossession of land.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored what is the function of humanitarianism when settlers face the possibility of territorial withdrawal and terminating life in the colony. It was shown that a key mode to sustain settler colonisation by humanitarianising settlers was through the invocation of the refugee figure, which became an important instrument to reframe the perpetrator of dispossession into a traumatised victim. The chapter then illustrated the different ways in which settlers portrayed their trauma and how this trauma can be directed to politically mobilise against future evacuations. Lastly, it was discussed how settler psychologists played a crucial role in establishing the existence of trauma. They narrate and testify to the settlers' trauma, while also modifying means of identifying with a Zionist nationalism. In these ways, the construction of humanitarianised settler subjectivities feed into logics that disavow unsettling as a danger to life and avow settlement expansion as portending safety.

Examining humanitarianism's role in the settler evacuations from Gaza remains a case study with significant political implications for the contemporary moment. Disengagement from Gaza did not signal an end to settler colonial expansion across historical Palestine. It rather became an opportunity to annex Palestinian land, particularly in the West Bank.⁶⁹⁷ The perceived trauma of disengagement also became an instrument to legitimise modes of settler violence. For example, after 2005 settler

⁶⁹⁷ Roy, 'Praying with Their Eyes Closed'.

organisations insisted that Palestinians should pay a price every time the Israeli government tried to limit settlement activity.⁶⁹⁸ What became known as ‘price tag’ attacks on Palestinians were rooted in the trauma experienced by the settler movement in 2005. Furthermore, the ongoing suffering of displaced settlers became a justification to sanction the creation of new settlements. In 2017, the Israeli state asked the High Court of Justice to reject legal challenges to a law that would allow for the retroactive expropriation of land owned by Palestinians in West Bank settlements. It had called the law ‘a humane, proportional and reasonable response to the genuine distress of Israeli residents’.⁶⁹⁹ This language emerged after the experience of the Gaza pull-out, and produced a rationality whereby dispossessing Palestinians is considered a ‘humane response’ to ameliorating settler ‘distress’.⁷⁰⁰

Despite the fate of the Gaza settlers becoming a marginal issue given that the majority successfully resettled inside Israel and in settlements elsewhere in the occupied West Bank, Israeli media continued to spotlight the story of those still living in temporary accommodation over a decade since 2005. For one settler the inability to resettle further exacerbated the disengagement trauma.⁷⁰¹ In a recent article, the trauma was said to be still haunting the settlers interviewed, who stated that it remains a ‘lingering wound’ and that there is hope for one day to return to Gush Katif.⁷⁰² This prospect seemed incredibly far-fetched until the events of October 7, 2023. Israel’s genocidal onslaught in Gaza has revived the possibility of recolonisation. By

⁶⁹⁸ Andy Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1994*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2017).

⁶⁹⁹ Kareem Rabie, *Palestine Is Throwing a Party and the Whole World Is Invited: Capital and State Building in the West Bank*, (Durham: Duke University Press 2021) 177.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁰¹ Melanie Lidman, ‘Ten years of limbo: Gush Katif evacuees still in trailers’, *Times of Israel* <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ten-years-of-limbo-gush-katif-evacuees-still-in-trailers/>

⁷⁰² *Ynet News* ‘17 years on: Trauma of Gaza disengagement haunts Israelis who left’ (16 September 2022) available at <https://www.ynetnews.com/magazine/article/ryh928gbi>

December 2023 the widespread destruction of infrastructure in northern Gaza, with almost the entire Palestinian population ethnically cleansed to the south, saw both Israeli politicians and a settler movement emerging with calls to resettle as a dual ideological and security imperative. In late January 2024, a conference was held in Jerusalem, attended by prominent Israeli cabinet ministers, with the stated intent to plan for the construction of settlements in Gaza.⁷⁰³ Pictures from the conference showed many participants wearing orange shirts, the colour that came to be identified with the anti-disengagement movement in support of Gush Katif. While it remains to be seen whether Israel will carry on with the recolonisation of Gaza, examining this story of disengagement trauma may help inform our understanding of the ways humanitarianism can come to govern settler populations in times of evacuation from indigenous territory.

⁷⁰³ *Al Jazeera English* 'Israeli ministers join gathering calling for resettlement of Gaza' (29 January 2024) available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/29/israeli-ministers-join-gathering-calling-for-rebuilding-settlements-in-gaza>

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the historical and contemporary relationship between humanitarianism and settler colonialism. It has sought to address the question of how a settler colonial project can dispossess indigenous people yet retain that it has been a humanitarian endeavour. The five chapters traced different historical junctures, episodes, and cases that demonstrate the emergence of a specific settler colonial form of humanitarianism. In what follows, I further articulate the analysis of the constitutive elements that inform this genealogical study. Combining archival research with ethnographic interviews has permitted tracing a genealogy of the settler subject in Palestine/Israel. This methodological approach opens a view into the notion of settler colonial humanitarianism and the constitution of settler subjectivity. What is characteristic to the settler colonial humanitarianism examined in this thesis is a two-fold subjectivity: on the one hand is the humanitarian settler that is ostensibly benevolent towards the native, and on the other hand is a settler in need of humanitarian assistance and care. This conclusion first summarises the key findings of each chapter and draws out the contributions to the academic literature. Secondly, it discusses some limitations encountered and directions for further research. The chapter ends by drawing on the findings from earlier chapters to expand on what this alternative history of humanitarianism can tell us about the present genocide in Gaza.

Tracing the genealogy from the archive

I began this history by exploring the British-mandated Zionist Commission (1918-1921) and its humanitarian efforts in post-First World War Palestine. My primary argument was that this humanitarian enterprise transformed into settler colonial sovereignty. Using primary sources from multiple archives, I traced this transformation of humanitarian relief from its early manifestation during the Ottoman period and illustrated the evolution from 'emergency relief' (food aid) into 'constructive relief' (education and healthcare) while under British military occupation. The chapter provided an account of the early years of Zionist activities in British-ruled Palestine, which often remain overshadowed by the prominent historical narrative of the 1917 Balfour Declaration—and its promise of a 'Jewish national home.' The Zionist Commission was unlike previous Anglo-American commissions to the region, which sought to investigate conflict and propose solutions, in that it was the first practical effort to initiate a new settler governmental structure under British protection. The chapter also tackled the way humanitarianism enabled the Zionist Commission to interact with a global constituency of supporters, primarily in Britain and America, to obtain crucial funding for its relief work. In sum, by throwing light on the case of the Zionist Commission in Palestine, Chapter 1 calls for greater attention to the history of humanitarianism in the making of settler colonial structures of government and ultimately sovereignty.

The global history of humanitarianism in colonial and settler colonial contexts shows that it is usually the native subject the recipient of humanitarian aid and sentiment. Chapter 1 illustrated that the case of the Zionist Commission went against the grain of this historical pattern. While the Zionist project shares several defining characteristics with other settler colonial formations, in the process of establishing of a new settler society it presents some unique features. One widely acknowledged

unique feature is that the settler population who came to inhabit Palestine did not originate from a single imperial metropole, as was the case in French Algeria or in other British settler colonies. But in the early years of British rule in Palestine, another distinguishing characteristic of the Zionist Commission was that humanitarian relief came to aid the settler colonies to recover in the aftermath of war, while also targeting the existing Jewish population that the ZC wished to absorb into the settler constituency. Rather than targeting the native population, humanitarian relief thus enabled the formation of a new settler society while under British military occupation.

This case also contributed in conceptual ways to the literature on humanitarianism. It breaks from a tradition of humanitarian studies that investigate how aid is directed at 'distant strangers.' During the age of 'high imperialism' in the nineteenth century, colonial administrations typically showed humanitarian concern for native populations in overseas and faraway territories. Along the same trajectory, after the successful struggles for decolonisation that reached their peak in the 1960s, the bulk of international humanitarianism continued the previous pattern but from the position of former imperial powers aiding populations in the newly established post-colonial states.⁷⁰⁴ The case of the Zionist Commission illustrated that relief work was a powerful means to support communities claimed as one's own.⁷⁰⁵ This self-directed humanitarian activity rendered possible helping those in need but also transforming them, for instance through Hebrew education, into subjects that identified with the settler national project. It also transformed some non-Zionist donors, such as the Joint Distribution Committee, who came to fund relief work because of the depoliticisation of settler colonialism through humanitarian narratives. Humanitarian relief also

⁷⁰⁴ Thompson, 'Unravelling the Relationships'.

⁷⁰⁵ Ilana Feldman, 'What UNRWA Teaches Us about Humanitarian Histories', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, issue 94, (2023), 65–69.

articulated racial difference, hierarchy, and inequity from different directions, and served simultaneously to promote forms of Palestinian dispossession.

Chapter 2 began exploring more in-depth how humanitarianism served to structure settler colonial strategies of violent dispossession. It revisited the historiography on the 1948 Palestinian Nakba and suggested that hitherto literature has not extensively explored the effects of the global order. The chapter examined the ways in which Zionist settlers deemed the expulsion of Palestinians as humanitarian partly because of the 1923 international legal precedent on Greek-Turkish population exchanges. Moving away from the principle of minority protection, after the First World War population exchanges had become a new established practice of international relations in which ethnic cleansing could create racially homogeneous nation-states. Discourses of population exchanges permitted Zionist settlers to conceive of Palestinian removal as a 'humanitarian transfer' that would resolve irreconcilable racial conflict in the colony. The chapter demonstrated how the idea of humanitarian population transfers was first debated in the 1930s—particularly after the proposals of the 1937 British Peel Commission—and later an eliminationist form of humanitarianism was mobilised amid warfare in 1948, first to concentrate Palestinians internally inside enclaves, and then to entrench the expulsion of refugees.

The foundational violence required to establish the Israeli settler state was met for a very long time with a systematic pattern of historical denialism. The Israeli government put forward many pernicious myths to absolve itself from culpability for the expulsion of Palestinians. Chief among them was the myth of Palestinians escaping to neighbouring countries at the orders of the Arab armies' leadership. Based on newly declassified evidence from Zionist archives, the so-called New Historians had debunked this myth and demonstrated that it was a propaganda line conceived

by the Israeli government's Transfer Committee in late 1948.⁷⁰⁶ At the same time, Israel repeatedly argued that the Palestinian refugee exodus was a legitimate 'population exchange' with the large masses of Jews who immigrated from the Arab world in the 1950s. Chapter 2 traced the intellectual roots of the 'population exchange' line to the transfer debates of the 1930s and 1940s, but also fleshed out how it enabled cloaking the elimination of the native with the mantle of humanitarianism during the 1948 Palestine War. It was, for example, in the Transfer Committee where key figures like Joseph Weitz and Ezra Danin designed propaganda schemes aimed at implementing the expulsion of Palestinians in the terms of humanitarian resettlement. In this way, humanitarianism can add to the politics of Nakba denial and more broadly become part of the forces of settler colonial erasure.

This chapter proposed the concept of 'humanitarian transfer' to further examine the expulsion of the Palestinian population in 1948. Zionist settlers drew on the racist underpinnings of population exchanges, which ostensibly permitted the 'unmixing of races'. This racialisation of minorities undergirding the logic of population exchanges was mobilised to advocate that transfer could be a humanitarian endeavour with beneficial consequences for Palestinians. The chapter situated population transfer within legal and humanitarian discourses and took seriously the significance of the international relations context. Appealing to the international legal precedent on population exchanges became important means to erase the settler colonial causes of dispossession, namely forced displacement amid warfare. The events described in this chapter provide a crucial moment for appraising the settler's humanitarian subjectivity of benevolence for the colonised. What appraising this subjectivity shows

⁷⁰⁶ Nur Masalha, *The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, (London: Pluto Press 2003).

is that the Zionist civil-military contingent justifying the enclavisation of Palestinians in Haifa on humanitarian grounds was an early manifestation of the sort of 'humanitarian governance' that COGAT would come to institute after 1967, and in contemporary times, throughout the occupied territories.

The thesis subsequently dealt with the other element in the population exchange analogy: the mass transfer of Jewish settlers to populate Palestine (Chapter 3). This chapter showed that international sympathy for Jewish suffering helped forge the settler immigration effort as a humanitarian practice. The international turn to humanitarianism in support of Jewish migration to Palestine, beginning in the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine in the 1920s helped achieve the ambition of a Jewish majority nation-state. In the British mandate era, the question of Jewish immigration as a humanitarian measure became a site of international dispute whereby Palestinians and their supporters began voicing opposition also within that compassionate register. They were at pains to recognise Jewish suffering and repeatedly proposed accepting refugees on a proportional basis but, at the same time, tried to tease out, albeit with little success, that unlimited humanitarian immigration portended settler colonialism: the removal and replacement of Palestinians.

After the horrors of the Holocaust in Europe, the 1946 Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry initiated transforming Jewish displaced persons as national refugees that belonged not in the European countries where they had resided until then, but in the settler nationalism of the Zionist movement in Palestine. Humanitarian sympathy for suffering Jews required not only aid and assistance *in situ* but their relocation and resettlement elsewhere. Building on this framing, the International Refugee Organisation retroactively funded for Jewish immigrants who had travelled to Palestine and settled in the homes of Palestinians expelled in 1948. Once the war in

Palestine came to end and Israeli sovereignty was recognised in immigration matters, this humanitarian intergovernmental organisation enabled over 120,000 immigrants to populate the Israeli settler state. This chapters' contribution illustrated how international support for settler colonialism in Palestine became the paramount expression of humanitarianism. It also adds to our understanding of settler colonialism by reconstructing how the humanitarianisation of the immigrant subject consolidated the creation of a new sovereign settler society. If after the First World War, humanitarian relief transformed into a settler sovereignty that precedes the state and was cultivated within British imperial rule, the humanitarianism in Jewish immigration matters emanating from international institutions continued that project, coalescing in the formation of a globally recognised and sovereign Israeli statehood. At this key historical juncture, the dual humanitarian and humanitarianised settler subjectivities powerfully coexisted and operated on the same playing field, enabling the creation of a settler colonial state founded on the destruction of Palestine's indigenous Arab society.

[Tracing the genealogy from the interviews](#)

While the first three chapters excavated materials from archives and historical literature, the following two chapters were based on interviews that focus on more contemporary phases. Chapter 4 initially provided an historical background that charted some of the ways in which since the time of its creation in 1967, COGAT began implementing policies billed as humanitarian for Palestinians that resided on the land it coveted for settler colonial expansion. Examining in-depth the narrative of COGAT officials during interviews, and the humanitarian workers that collaborated

with them, reveals how multiple projects of humanitarian aid can be designed to normalise the dispossession of land and the interrelated forms of population control. To take the example of the travel permit system, COGAT regulations and Israeli officials allow Palestinian movement in terms of facilitating their daily lives. But beneath this benevolent discourse lies a system that segregates Palestinians in enclaves and promotes settler expansion. Considering the process of enclavisation in the city of Qalqilya after the construction of the separation wall in 2002 showed that COGAT implemented humanitarian measures—i.e. creating alternative travel routes for Palestinians—to mitigate the harms created by the drive to establish West Bank settlements and annex them to Israeli territory within the Green Line.

This chapter, then, demonstrated that as a non-combat branch that remains active in times of war, COGAT has become a crucial player in the implementation of counterinsurgency operations to Palestinians subjugated inside enclaves. It focused on the siege of Gaza, before the events that followed Hamas' October 7 attacks, which was already the most intensified and brutal form of enclavisation across historical Palestine. COGAT had put forward economic incentives contingent to the non-resistance of the colonised to ameliorate the oppression of Israel's own blockade in Gaza, and to maintain a 'humanitarian minimum' level that would prevent the complete implosion of the society. Lastly, it was examined how the increased collaboration between the Israeli military and humanitarian actors facilitated bringing into the fold the international aid sector to subsidise the management of the Palestinian population. Since the Oslo Accords, COGAT was able to partially outsource its responsibility to the colonised population as the sovereign power—relieving Israel of significant operational and financial burdens. When taking these different formations as a whole—travel permits, managing enclaves, counterinsurgency, and military-humanitarian

coordination—the type of humanitarian governance that COGAT advances should be understood as constitutive of settler colonial dispossession, which entails the deprivation of Palestinian land and means of independent subsistence to assist the development of Israeli settlements and settler society at large.

There are some important continuities to draw out with what was analysed in relation to the Nakba. Studying the historical formation of subjectivities that came to guide the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 offered insights on their subsequent reproduction and reconstitution in later historical periods. This can be observed in Chapter 4, where the Israeli military control of Palestinians continued to approach the colonised through a humanitarian lens and reflected the settler state's territorial strategy to concentrate natives inside fragmented enclaves. That in 1948 Zionist settlers considered humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees as conducive to undermining their quest for return provides the basis for better grasping a pattern that would recur in COGAT's mobilisation of humanitarian aid to enable the siege of Gaza—where a large, displaced refugee population continued to live in exile and was dependent on international aid. It shows a deeply embedded disposition to structure settler domination as a humanitarian endeavour.

Meanwhile, COGAT's collaboration with humanitarian actors builds on an analogous history of military-humanitarian relationships in Mandatory Palestine. Chapter 1 examined the important role that the British military played in facilitating the Zionist Commission to carry out a campaign of relief work. In subsequent decades, the British Empire saw in Zionist and international humanitarian activities also a way to relieve the colonial administration from the burdens of governing as an occupying power. As the urgencies of British imperialism rather favoured devoting energies and resources to capitalist development, humanitarianism became a way to subcontract

the expansion of the settler project.⁷⁰⁷ The 1967 Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip inherited this duality of governance – at once a provider for the needs of the native population and later outsourcing features of the occupation to humanitarian actors. Besides, COGAT's contemporary coordination with international humanitarian actors shows the continuing significance of reframing settler colonialism through humanitarian discourses. As discussed in Chapter 1, to operate within a humanitarian playing field helped the Zionist Commission to collaborate and obtain support from organisations which were ostensibly non-Zionist. COGAT presenting the subjugation of Palestinians in terms of a humanitarian problem thus allows it to repurpose the conduct of settler colonial practices into projects of military-humanitarian coordination with international organisations. In an ostensibly post-colonial international order in which Israel tends to avoid the overt use of colonialist terms, humanitarian discourse can act as a lingua franca to normalise relations.

The de-settlement and evacuation from Gaza in 2005, is a process that bears similarity what was discussed in chapters 1 and 3 but which unfolded in a very different moment and context. Chapter 5 argued that humanitarianism emerged to mediate the settlers' perceived trauma of disengagement. The power of strategies grounded in humanitarian sympathy is that they render bodily suffering legible to wider audiences and provide reasons for intervening in the life of others. In this vein, the chapter examined how the protracted struggle over resettlement compelled the Israeli government's construction of temporary camps where a significant number of displaced settlers lived for many years. Similarly to the history of colonial returnees after decolonisation, the Gush Katif settlers' claim to refugeehood served to mobilise political opinion in their favour and transform the perpetrator of colonialism into a

⁷⁰⁷ Norris, *Land of progress*, 21.

traumatised victim. But rather than repatriating to a postcolonial society in the metropole, Israeli settlers remained deeply implicated in the consolidation of settler colonialism within the Green Line, and its expansion in the occupied West Bank. Underpinning the continued necessity to settle is the production of humanitarian narratives of trauma and of becoming refugees which orient Israeli settlers to disavow the process of de-settling from Palestinian lands. Chapters 1 and 3 had examined the settler subject emerging as in need of humanitarian care and assistance not only to save lives and reduce suffering. But in crucial moments for the development of an exclusive settler sovereignty formed first in opposition to Palestinians during the Mandate, and then through the intensification of Jewish immigration to replace Palestinians who had been forcibly expelled in the Nakba.

While the 2005 Gaza evacuation is a markedly different case to those explored in relation to the junctures of 1917 and 1948, it is striking that in moments of heightened crisis framing the situation in terms of humanitarian emergency can serve a host of political and settler colonial ends. The sudden termination of Gaza's settlements led to Israeli settlers claiming to experience a traumatic event, constructing it *as if* they had decolonised. At this moment, the production of humanitarian narratives based on refugeehood and victimhood came to constitute a new subjectivity in need of redress. Reconstructing the multiple ways in which Israeli settlers narrated their experience of trauma is helpful to understand the subsequent political uses of trauma. The evacuation trauma can be invoked to justify settler colonial expansion in the West Bank, by using the painful memory of the Gaza disengagement to prevent the future dismantlement of settlements. Thus, to resist the prospect of a potential decolonisation, aided by the interventions of psychologists, humanitarianism enabled settlers to constitute the different forms of trauma they

suffered, and can mobilise their claim to refugeehood to delegitimise unsettling from Palestinian land.

Directions for further research and limitations

Inevitably, covering different episodes from the First World War up to the contemporary moment meant certain periods and processes were given more attention than others. Studying in detail the relief work of the Zionist Commission between 1918 and 1921, entailed focusing on a particular moment after the 1917 Balfour Declaration and the very early stages of British military occupation. Further research could examine the evolution of 'constructive' relief work in the Palestine Zionist Executive, which in 1921 succeeded the Zionist Commission, and began operating in a context where the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine was officially recognised. The different context is significant because it was noted in Chapter 1 how the British military initially sought to constrain the Zionist Commission in certain aspects due to international law stipulating that the occupation should retain neutrality. While historian Davide Rodogno suggests that after the Zionist Commission the discourse changed, and Zionists spoke less of humanitarian relief work and more explicitly of state-building, it could prove productive investigating the evolution of 'constructive' relief work during the Mandatory era.⁷⁰⁸ As I examined in Chapter 3, the humanitarian discourse did not entirely disappear, and was prevalent in the interwar years to legitimise and facilitate Jewish immigration to Palestine.

To add to Chapter 3, other key immigration flows beyond that of Europe's Jewish refugees may present attempts to justify and operationalise them through the

⁷⁰⁸ Rodogno, *Night on Earth*, 168.

humanitarian paradigm. Between 1948 and 1951 the Israeli state was able to absorb a huge influx of Jewish immigrants from Arab and Muslim countries (Mizrahim) primarily through what came to be known as immigrant and transit camps (*ma'abarot*). These were the camps that the novel discussed in Chapter 5 drew a connection to describe the *caravilla* camp established for the Gush Katif settlers after evacuating from Gaza. Notably framed as a 'rescue mission', the transfer of Yemenis in the early 1950s was negotiated by Israel, the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and the governments of Aden and Yemen.⁷⁰⁹ In fact, the JDC 'planned, coordinated, implemented, and financed' what came to be known as Operation Magic Carpet, which transferred around 50,000 Jews from Yemen, Aden, Djibouti, and Asmara, Eritrea to Israel in the early years of statehood.⁷¹⁰ The 'rescue mission' eventually led to hundreds of Yemeni deaths as well as state abductions of Yemeni babies who were removed from transit camps and reallocated to Ashkenazi couples.⁷¹¹ Decades later, in three covert military operations between 1984 and 1991, over 20,000 Ethiopian Jews facing hardship in their home county were evacuated and airlifted to Israel to bolster the settler state's demographic needs.⁷¹²

One potential limitation that I thought of at the start of the research project was that not having the ability to read Hebrew would preclude having access to necessary

⁷⁰⁹ Esther Meier-Glitzstein. 'Operation Magic Carpet: Constructing the Myth of the Magical Immigration of Yemenite Jews to Israel' *Israel Studies* 16 (3) (2011), 149–173.

⁷¹⁰ JDC Jerusalem Office, Aden Subcollection available at <https://archives.idc.org/our-collections/finding-aids/jerusalem/1944-1952/aden/> (accessed on 23 April 2024).

⁷¹¹ Ofer Aderet, 'Hundreds of Yemenite Children were Abducted in State's Early Years, Says Israeli Cabinet Minister' *Haaretz* (July 31, 2016) available at <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2016-07-31/ty-article/hundreds-of-yemenite-kids-were-abducted/0000017f-f067-dc28-a17f-fc773c230000>.

⁷¹² Roberta Hershenson, 'Telling the Story of Ethiopian Jews', *New York Times*, (7 July 1991) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/07/07/nyregion/telling-the-story-of-ethiopian-jews.html> Esther Meier-Glitzstein. 'Operation Magic Carpet: Constructing the Myth of the Magical Immigration of Yemenite Jews to Israel' *Israel Studies* 16 (3) (2011), 149–173.

sources. While this certainly remains a limitation in certain respects, the thesis drew from a significant amount of English-language archival sources that permit forming an informed argument about the themes discussed. That the English-language documentation is rich on this subject also reflects the important global element of a settler colonial humanitarianism that was enabled, supported and interacted with the British and US empires. Regarding the Zionist Commission, that they produced a large number of documents and took notes of meetings in English is also not entirely surprising given that it was after all a British-mandated commission, many of its members did not speak Hebrew and were organising relief work in collaboration with the British military. Chapter 2 also relies on some key documents in English found in the Central Zionist Archive, but, in addition, I was able to draw extensively from Hebrew archival sources that have been translated and reproduced in the historiography on the 1948 Palestine War. Meanwhile, for the interviews with Israeli subjects, I did not encounter significant difficulties conducting them in English. That said, mindful of potentially important information held in Hebrew sources, I hired a Hebrew translator and visited the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) archive inside an army base in Tel Aviv and learned that it holds vast amounts of historical documents on COGAT, primarily from the 1970s to the 1990s. Lack of resources, and time, to continue archival research with the help of a translator steered me away from continuing the investigation there, but future research may further draw from the material in the IDF archive.

Meanwhile, an issue that could have been further discussed is the paradoxical position of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) in its relations with Israel. In the early years of its existence, Palestinians viewed UNRWA in a very negative and suspicious light, intent on implementing 'resettlement', rather than allowing them to

return to Palestine. As the Palestinian poet Muin Bseiso poignantly put it in his *Gaza Diaries*, published in 1971, 'The program of annihilating the Palestinian Red Indians in the new concentration camps in the Gaza Strip supervised by UNRWA didn't follow the old traditional methods of genocide'.⁷¹³ Writing critically of the new international humanitarian regime, Bseiso points to a continuation of the violence that took place during the Nakba in the new camps set up for the dispossessed. Furthermore, since 1967 UNRWA has had to collaborate with the Israeli military occupation, the entity directly responsible for the refugees' displacement and dispossession, to implement its mandate in the West Bank and Gaza, which was limited to humanitarian and economic assistance. At times, Israeli officials have even voiced support for the UN agency because it provides stability in the occupied territories and relieves the occupying power from the responsibility to guarantee the welfare of Palestinians. UNRWA therefore has thread a fine line between collaboration with the coloniser and supporting the interests of the colonised.⁷¹⁴

The relationship built in over seven decades between UNRWA and Palestinians has often been fraught, with a long history of the latter organising through strikes and activism to challenge policies viewed as detrimental to the national liberation movement.⁷¹⁵ Yet, over the years UNRWA has come to be seen as a preserver of the Palestinian right of return, which is affirmed, even if symbolically, in the United Nations institutional recognition of Palestinians specifically as *refugees*, a classification that Israel highly contests. Staffed mostly by Palestinians, though few are in the managerial

⁷¹³ Quoted in Esmat Elhaby, 'Our Siege is Long', (27 October 2023) *Public Books*, available at <https://www.publicbooks.org/our-siege-is-long/>

⁷¹⁴ Benjamin N. Schiff, 'Between Occupier and Occupied: UNRWA in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1989), 60–75; Riccardo Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Volume 28, Issue 2-3, (2009), 229–252.

⁷¹⁵ Jalal Al Hussein, 'UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010), 6–26.

positions, the organisation continues to provide vital services—emergency assistance, health, and education—to Palestinian refugees under Israeli occupation and in neighbouring Arab countries. This vital support for Palestinian welfare and de facto institutional recognition of the refugees’ right of return explain the attempts to dismantle UNRWA by defunding it, first in 2018 during the Trump US presidency, and most recently by major western donors at the request of Israel and amid a genocide in Gaza. Further research may explore how UNRWA—the largest and most long-standing provider of humanitarian assistance to Palestinians—paradoxically embodies both an anti-colonial dimension, that of the Palestinian refugee right of return, and a settler colonial one that has enabled Israel to outsource governance and maintain Palestinians exiled from their lands and living in camps.

The genocidal present of settler colonial humanitarianism

The genocide of indigenous peoples is a persistent feature in the history of settler societies, though only until recently has the concept of genocide been widely adopted to describe Israel’s extreme violence against Palestinians.⁷¹⁶ Israel’s response to the Hamas-led attack of October 2023 has been compared to the reprisal of Germany against the Herero and Nama peoples in South West Africa.⁷¹⁷ In 1905, the German Schutztruppe (the colonial defense force) punished the indigenous peoples of today’s Namibia with a war of annihilation for revolting against German rule and for killing 133

⁷¹⁶ Mohamed Adhikari (ed) *Civilian-Driven Violence and the Genocide of Indigenous Peoples in Settler Societies*, (London: Routledge 2019); for a recent work that engages with the concept of genocide in Gaza before October 2023, see Mohammed Nijim, ‘Genocide in Palestine: Gaza as a case study.’ *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 27(1) (2022), 165–200.

⁷¹⁷ Didier Fassin, ‘The Rhetoric of Denial: Contribution to an Archive of the Debate about Mass Violence in Gaza’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, (2024), 1–7.

settlers.⁷¹⁸ In Germany's first genocide of the twentieth century more than 100,000 people were exterminated, combatants and civilians alike. It is indeed after moments of indigenous resistance that genocide can become an appealing strategy of elimination. As one historian of genocides notes, 'Resistance leads to reprisals and counterinsurgency that can be genocidal when they are designed to ensure that never again would such resistance occur.'⁷¹⁹ Israel's genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza, ongoing for the past ten months, represents the destructive peak of a settler colonial and eliminationist project. Within this context of Israeli genocide after the latest Palestinian revolt, the remaining of the chapter briefly examines the multiples ways in which humanitarianism became intertwined in the attempts to perpetrate and justify genocidal violence.

The creation of what the Israeli military called 'humanitarian zones' epitomise how humanitarianism can come to be appropriated by a settler colonial power to advance an eliminationist agenda. The first time the IDF mentioned of specific areas where Palestinians should relocate was on October 18, 2023. It ordered Gaza residents 'to move to the humanitarian zone in the area of al-Mawasi, to which international humanitarian aid will be directed if necessary.'⁷²⁰ The IDF explicitly gave the impression that this area would be safe from attacks and Palestinians would find the necessary international aid to meet the needs of a displaced population. Only a few days later, on the social media platform X, the IDF reiterated the message along with a not so veiled threat, 'If your life and the lives of those you love are important to

⁷¹⁸ Kris Manjapra, *Colonialism in Global Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020), 137–138.

⁷¹⁹ A. Dirk Moses, 'Empire, Colony, Genocide: Keywords and the Philosophy of History', in A. Dirk Moses (ed) *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, (New York: Berghahn Books 2008), 29.

⁷²⁰ Emanuel Fabian, 'IDF announces humanitarian zone in southwest Gaza' https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/idf-announces-humanitarian-zone-in-southwest-gaza/ (accessed 29 Nov. 2023).

you, head south of Wadi Gaza. We advise you to arrive at the humanitarian area in Mawasi according to our instructions'.⁷²¹ In other words, remain put and Palestinians would endanger their lives and that of their families. Under international humanitarian law (IHL), those administering 'safe zones'—in Gaza the Israeli military—should ensure the secure livelihood of the population and enable the exercise of rights, including access to medical care, housing, education, and employment.⁷²² But it rapidly became evident that in the zones that the Israeli military designated as 'safe' and 'humanitarian'—which along with al-Mawasi included Rafah, Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis—Palestinians would not find habitable or safe living conditions.

Testimonies from displaced Palestinians and staff of international humanitarian organisations attested to the extremely dismal living conditions found in the 'safe zones'. Consisting mostly of farmland and sand dunes the al-Mawasi area, to take one example, is largely barren and lacks basic utilities and infrastructure, including roads, water and sewage systems, and health facilities.⁷²³ An emotive testimony from Save the Children's Country Director for the occupied Palestinian territories describes the precarious situation in al-Mawasi: 'Israel is squeezing Palestinian children and families into "death zones" dubbed as "safe zones." I've seen children and families roaming the streets of what hasn't been flattened in Gaza, with no food, nowhere to go, and

⁷²¹ Merlyn Thomas and Ethar Shalaby 'Al-Mawasi: Gaza humanitarian zone not humane, evacuees say', (8 Dec 2023) BBC, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67646964> (accessed 23 Apr. 2024).

⁷²² Harriet Macey, "'Safe zones": A protective alternative to flight or a tool of refugee containment? Clarifying the international legal framework governing access to refugee protection against the backdrop of "safe zones" in conflict affected contexts', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 104 (919) (2022), 1455–1475.

⁷²³ Mohamed Soulimane, 'Inside Gaza's supposed 'safe zone', where displaced Palestinians struggle for survival' *The New Humanitarian* (11 Jan 2024) available at <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/01/11/inside-gaza-supposed-safe-zone-displaced-palestinians-struggle-al-mawasi> (accessed 23 Apr. 2024).

nothing to survive on.’⁷²⁴ Not only were the ‘safe zones’ failing to meet the general requirements stipulated under international law, but the Israeli military has intentionally turned them into battlegrounds and repeatedly carried out airstrikes in all the designated safe areas, with a large number of civilians, including children, killed and injured.⁷²⁵ Israeli aerial attacks in these ostensibly ‘humanitarian areas’ were not isolated or sporadic incidents. In fact, by November 20, 34 percent of all Palestinians killed in Gaza were in the Israeli-designated ‘safe areas’ in the south.⁷²⁶ For the UN Special Rapporteur on the oPt, Francesca Albanese, a clear pattern was identifiable, as her report *Anatomy of a Genocide* states: ‘[s]imply put, “safe areas” were deliberately turned into areas of mass killing.’⁷²⁷ Crucially, the creation of these areas is a constituent part of Israel’s techniques of ‘humanitarian camouflage’: the deliberate distortion of IHL protective measures to conceal genocidal intent, and therefore legitimise the genocide.⁷²⁸

South Africa’s application to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to institute proceedings against the state of Israel for the crime of genocide in Gaza was a momentous turning point in the global perception of the war in Gaza. Until then Israel’s

⁷²⁴ Save the Children, ‘Deaths by starvation and disease may top deaths by bombs as families squeezed into deadly “safe zones”, two months into Gaza crisis’ (9 Dec. 2023) available at <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/deaths-starvation-and-disease-may-top-deaths-bombs-families-squeezed-deadly-safe-zones-two#:~:text=Thousands%20of%20people%20are%20in,than%20from%20bombings%20in%20Gaza> (accessed 23 Apr. 2024).

⁷²⁵ Jason Burke, Aseel Mousa and Malak A Tantesh, ‘Al-Mawasi: Palestinians fleeing to ‘humanitarian zone’ find little hope’ (26 Mar. 2024) *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/26/gaza-al-mawasi-palestinians-fleeing-to-humanitarian-zone-find-little-hope> (accessed 23 Apr. 2024).

⁷²⁶ OCHA ‘Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel - reported impact | Day 45’ (20 Nov. 2023) available at <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-45> (accessed 23 Apr. 2024).

⁷²⁷ Francesca Albanese, ‘Anatomy of a Genocide: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967,’ 25 March 2024, 20.

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

narrative of a war of 'self-defence' held much political capital in the Western world. But since South Africa's intervention it has become much harder to deny that what Israel is committing amounts to genocide. It has also brought to the fore a wider debate on genocidal intent. Article II of the Genocide Convention defines the crime of genocide according to two main elements: first, a 'mental element', that is the 'intent to destroy, in whole or in part', a national group; second, a 'physical element', which comprises five acts of aggression, that include 'killing members' and 'causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group'.⁷²⁹ Israel's army, including COGAT, and the ostensible 'humanitarian efforts' have played a prominent role in the concealment of genocidal intent throughout the war on Gaza. Israel has intentionally recommended Palestinians to seek shelter in the 'humanitarian areas' as a haven for fleeing the war. Col Elad Goren, the head of the Civil Administration in COGAT, confirmed to the international press this was the army's supposed motive, stating 'we want to encourage the population to go to this humanitarian zone where assistance will be delivered.'⁷³⁰ A Palestinian interviewed by the *BBC* testified that he indeed came to al-Mawasi because 'the Israeli army has been directing people here' but charged that the area was 'neither humane nor safe'.⁷³¹ In January 2024, one of many deadly Israeli airstrikes that specifically targeted the 'humanitarian zone' of al-Mawasi killed 14 people, the majority of them young children.⁷³²

⁷²⁹ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

⁷³⁰ Julian Borger and Ruth Michaelson, 'IDF instructions on Gaza refuge zones cruel "mirage", say aid agencies', (7 Dec 2023) *The Guardian*, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/07/idf-israel-gaza-refuge-zones-cruel-mirage-say-aid-agencies> (accessed 23 Apr. 2024).

⁷³¹ Thomas and Shalaby, 'Al-Mawasi'.

⁷³² *Save the Children*, 'No Safe Place in Gaza' (4 January 2024) available at <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/fourteen-killed-near-humanitarian-zone-in-gaza>

It is instructive to briefly consider the recent history of al-Mawasi under Israeli military occupation. Prior to the 2005 disengagement, al-Mawasi was a Palestinian Bedouin town on the southern coast of the Gaza Strip that became an enclave surrounded by Israeli settlements on the east side. It is a small piece of land, one kilometre wide and fourteen kilometres long, bordering Rafah to the south and Deir al-Balah to the north. Since the founding of Gush Katif settlements in Gaza, the movement of al-Mawasi's residents had been severely restricted, and during the Second Intifada it reached points where freedom of movement was entirely denied.⁷³³ It essentially foreshadowed the carceral enclave system that Israel would institute in 2007. After 18 years in which al-Mawasi was part of the fabric of the Gaza Strip, albeit under siege, in the gaze of Israeli military planners it has returned to the status of enclave, but now as a tool to implement genocidal violence. According to international aid agencies, by March 2024 around 380,000 Palestinians have been displaced solely in the small strip land comprising the al-Mawasi 'humanitarian zone'.⁷³⁴ Thus the creation of 'humanitarian zones', rather than providing protective measures have become a key mechanism to implement the mass expulsion of Palestinians from the north to the south of Gaza. While the killing and displacement of Palestinians in the 'humanitarian zones' represents the genocidal peak of this form of enclavisation, Israel framing the expulsion and enclavisation of Palestinians through humanitarian rhetoric is not entirely new. This thesis has dealt, primarily in chapters 2 and 4, with the historical and more contemporary roots that can help us better make sense of how the Israeli military and government have come to justify and enact techniques of population concentration and expulsion within the frame of humanitarianism.

⁷³³ Shlomi Swisa, 'Al-Mawasi, Gaza Strip. Intolerable life in an Isolated Enclave', *B'Tselem* 2003.

⁷³⁴ Burke, Mousa and Tantesh, 'Al-Mawasi'.

Military-humanitarian coordination and counterinsurgency

In addition to the techniques described above, Israel has sought to use similar humanitarian framings in related aspects of its genocidal military campaign. For example, on November 9, 2023, a four-hour 'humanitarian pause' was announced to evacuate Palestinians out of northern Gaza to areas south of Wadi Gaza, with 'humanitarian corridors' used by the Israeli military to describe the routes that should ostensibly be safe for civilians to travel. In this case too, Israel's use of these humanitarian practices did not entirely conform to what is permitted under international law. But the mobilisation of these humanitarian visions of international law were nonetheless instrumental to advance the genocidal military campaign. A coalition of international humanitarian organisations protested that the way the Israeli army has been using 'humanitarian pauses' and 'humanitarian corridors' does not correspond to the established practices outlined by the ICRC and international law in times of war.⁷³⁵ For the UN Special Rapporteur on the oPt, Israel has in fact militarised 'humanitarian corridors' by systematically attacking Palestinians evacuating through these routes, and effectively turned them in 'death corridors'. The IDF has bombed, shelled, and used snipers to target Palestinians escaping along the designated 'humanitarian corridors'.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁵ 'Pauses, Corridors, and Safe Zones in Gaza: Rhetoric vs. Reality', <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/pauses-corridors-and-safe-zones-gaza-rhetoric-vs-reality#:~:text=On%209%20November%202023%2C%20it,telling%20civilians%20to%20move%20south> (accessed 29 Nov. 2023).

⁷³⁶ Albanese, 'Anatomy of a Genocide', 20–21.

What is more, in March 2024, Israel responded to South Africa's request for additional provisional measures to the International Court of Justice, rejecting all accusations of genocidal intent by pointing to its 'humanitarian efforts'. It rhetorically asked the court,

which State that is engaged in genocide, or is indifferent to the commission of acts within the scope of Article II of the Convention, works to coordinate humanitarian convoys and airdrops, or facilitates constantly the provision of medical supplies to hospitals, the establishment of field hospitals, and the repair of critical infrastructure damaged in the course of hostilities?⁷³⁷

Rather than these measures providing evidence that disprove genocidal intent, it is possible to see them as attempts to erase and cover over the ongoing forms of genocidal violence. Take for example the spectacle of military humanitarianism evinced in international governments airdropping food into Gaza at the behest of Israel. Following what came to be referred as the 'flour massacre'—whereby Israeli soldiers indiscriminately shot on crowds of Palestinians desperately gathered to collect flour in the south-west of Gaza City on 29 February 2024—killing at least 112 people and injuring some 760, the US army began air dropping food in pallets over Gaza to ostensibly avoid repeating such incidents.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁷ 'Observations of the State of Israel on South Africa's Request for the indication of provisional measures and modification of the Court's prior provisional measures decisions' (15 March 2024), 3.

⁷³⁸ UN Special Procedures, 'UN experts condemn 'flour massacre', urge Israel to end campaign of starvation in Gaza' (5 Mar 2024) available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-experts-condemn-flour-massacre-urge-israel-end-campaign-starvation-gaza> (accessed 23 April 2024).

The ‘flour massacre’ came at a time of catastrophic levels of starvation because shortly after October 7, Israel had imposed a near-total siege on the enclave, cutting off electricity and water, and blocking the entry of food, medicine, and other essential supplies. At least 31 people are reported to have starved to death in Gaza – a number that is likely a low estimate. This was the result of a calculated policy. On October 9, Israel’s defence minister Yoav Gallant had stated ‘I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly.’⁷³⁹ Gallant’s words strongly evoke Aimé Césaire’s famous text on colonial discourse, where he writes that the coloniser ‘gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*’ (emphasis in original).⁷⁴⁰ The dehumanisation and racialisation of indigenous people has been a common precondition for what came to be known as ‘savage warfare’: the asymmetrical conflicts of imperial powers against what they deemed ‘uncivilised’ indigenous populations. A racialised rule of colonial difference thus justified methods of warfare and violence not usually permitted against ‘civilised’ nations.⁷⁴¹ Gallant’s words are also clear evidence of intent to use starvation as a weapon of war by blocking all access to food and other means of subsistence which, as some have argued, should be considered a genocidal technique.⁷⁴²

Nonetheless, to reject the charge of genocidal intent Israel provided multiple cases to the ICJ of humanitarian coordination with governments and international

⁷³⁹ Emanuel Fabian, ‘Defense minister announces ‘complete siege’ of Gaza: No power, food or fuel’, *Times of Israel* (9 October 2023) available at https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/defense-minister-announces-complete-siege-of-gaza-no-power-food-or-fuel/ (accessed 23 April 2024).

⁷⁴⁰ Aimé Césaire [Translated by Joan Pinkham] *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press 2000), 41.

⁷⁴¹ Kim A. Wagner, ‘Savage Warfare: Violence and the Rule of Colonial Difference in Early British Counterinsurgency’, *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 85, (2018), 217–237.

⁷⁴² See for instance, Jessica Whyte, ‘A “Tragic Humanitarian Crisis”: Israel’s Weaponization of Starvation and the Question of Intent’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, (2024), 1–15.

organisations. It stated, for instance, that between 26 February and 9 March 2024, the IDF facilitated the airdrop into Gaza of approximately 1,138 aid packages.⁷⁴³ Encapsulating the ineffective spectacle of such measures, a pallet of food airdropped from a US military plane killed 5 Palestinians and injured 10 after parachutes attached to the aid failed to open properly. Remarkably, the US, along with other governments, was dropping food aid from the sky but simultaneously supplied weapons to the Israeli army perpetrating a genocide, shielded it from accountability in international fora, while most other international humanitarian organisations were blocked from operating in the area. Ultimately, the US and other countries airdropping food while allowing Israel to continue implementing the siege and its military campaign, provided little mitigation for the widespread starvation crisis.

But notably, Israel presents coordination with international governments and humanitarian organisations to deny genocidal intent and adherence to international law, which obligates belligerent parties to not obstruct or prevent the delivery of humanitarian assistance during conflict. Along with airdrops, the creation of a maritime corridor was used to show Israeli humanitarian concern for civilian suffering. In partnership with the governments of Cyprus and the United Arab Emirates, Israel has established a maritime corridor for the delivery of food aid into Gaza. Israel also wrote to the ICJ that in collaboration with the US, the IDF is coordinating the construction of a floating pier— known as ‘Joint Logistics Over-the Shore’—on the coast of Gaza for the delivery of aid by sea.⁷⁴⁴ On June 8, 2023, the US was accused of allowing Israeli special forces to use the pier to conduct a military operation to retrieve Israeli hostages, in which over 200 Palestinians were killed as a result—an accusation the US

⁷⁴³ Observations of the State of Israel, 7

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

denies. At the same time, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) said that Israeli forces hid in humanitarian aid trucks masking as civilians to enter the Nuseirat refugee camp in Gaza to carry out the deadly operation to retrieve hostages.⁷⁴⁵ Beyond this particularly extreme and insidious case of soldiers hiding inside humanitarian vehicles to carry out an armed attack, even the forms humanitarian assistance that are designed to reach Palestinians in dire need remain part of a highly problematic tactic to conceal genocidal intent and carry on with implementing the genocide.

As examined in Chapter 4 through the case of COGAT, Israel recurrently outsources humanitarian assistance to international actors and mobilises humanitarian aid as counterinsurgency to pacify the Palestinian population besieged in Gaza. Strikingly, Israeli officials announced in late February 2024 the planning of what they explicitly called ‘humanitarian pockets’ for the delivery of aid in a post-war scenario. According to cabinet minister Benny Ganz this is a ‘pilot plan’ that envisions recruiting Palestinians not affiliated with Hamas as collaborators in the management of humanitarian assistance.⁷⁴⁶ Israel had already attempted to implement a similar scheme in the 1980s, called the Village Leagues, through fostering an alternative Palestinian leadership that would undermine the influence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Led by Menahem Milson, head of the Civil Administration in the West Bank, the plan entailed offering development aid only to Palestinians in the Israeli-backed Village Leagues, and not to the elected Palestinian officials from the

⁷⁴⁵ ‘Aid trucks used to enter Gaza’s Nuseirat — Red Crescent on Israeli deceit’, *TRTWorld*, (11 June 2024), available at <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/aid-trucks-used-to-enter-gazas-nuseirat-red-crescent-on-israeli-deceit-18171877>

⁷⁴⁶ Reuters and Times of Israel, ‘Israeli official confirms plan for locals to run ‘humanitarian pockets’ in Gaza’ (22 Feb 2024) available at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-official-confirms-plan-for-locals-to-run-humanitarian-pockets-in-gaza/>

PLO. The plan eventually faded out due to Palestinian resistance and non-compliance.⁷⁴⁷

The use of humanitarian aid as counterinsurgency during the Israeli genocidal campaign in Gaza is further evident in the statements of COGAT officials. Writing on X in March 2024, Lt Col Peter Lerner, a former humanitarian officer in COGAT that re-enlisted as a reservist in October 2023, stated: 'The humanitarian effort is one that works in conjunction with the operational effort to rid us once and for all from #Hammas.'⁷⁴⁸ Here the purpose of humanitarian assistance is not solely to alleviate civilian suffering but is contingent to a counterinsurgency strategy aimed at regime change and defeating Hamas. The COGAT official's social media post continued by describing the efforts of the Israeli government to coordinate access into Gaza for an international aid agency. But since the assault on Gaza began, Israel has developed a parallel system of aid delivery and obstructed the work of major UN and international humanitarian organisations. In January 2024, an Israeli-led campaign to dismantle UNRWA saw major donors withdrawing funding from the agency which has the largest capacity to provide humanitarian assistance to the population in Gaza.⁷⁴⁹ Israel has also imposed blanket bans and carried out multiple attacks on aid convoys, and as of April 2024, it has killed 254 humanitarian workers.⁷⁵⁰ The Israeli plan to establish a

⁷⁴⁷ Hazem Jamjoum, *The Village Leagues: Israel's native authority and the 1981-1982 Intifada*, (PhD Thesis American University of Beirut, 2012).

⁷⁴⁸ <https://twitter.com/LTCPeterLerner/status/1768704630924464489>

⁷⁴⁹ Riley Sparks et al, 'In-depth: Israeli attempt to circumvent UN contributes to Gaza aid chaos' (1 April 2024) available at <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/04/01/Israel-circumvent-UN-aid-Gaza>

⁷⁵⁰ *Refugees International*, 'Siege and Starvation: How Israel Obstructs Aid to Gaza,' (March 7, 2024) available at <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/-briefs/siege-and-starvation-how-israel-obstructs-aid-to-gaza/>; Human Rights Watch 'Gaza: Israelis Attacking Known Aid Worker Locations,' (May 14, 2024) available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/14/gaza-israelis-attacking-known-aid-worker-locations#:~:text=As%20of%20April%2030%2C%20the,injuring%20at%20least%20one%20more.>

parallel aid system, implemented for instance through airdrops and maritime corridors, serve to undercut the land crossings, which are the most effective and rapid routes for delivering aid to Palestinians in Gaza. Above all, this is to take the reins over a less visible form of counterinsurgency enacted through the management of aid flows, that serves to complement Israel's genocide of the Palestinian people.

Ongoing Nakba: 'humanitarian' displacement and replacement

A critical way in which humanitarianism became deeply entangled in the attempts to operationalise genocidal violence is discernible in the Israeli politicians' repeated calls to expel Palestinians outside of Gaza. Less than a week since October 7 and mass population transfer was at the forefront of the Israeli state's plans to complete what was started in the 1948 Nakba. On October 13, 2023, in a position paper the Israeli Intelligence Ministry proposed the 'transfer' of Gaza's 2.3 million population to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.⁷⁵¹ The authors of the position paper list three potential options 'to effect a significant change in the [demography and] civilian reality in the Gaza Strip'.⁷⁵² The most desirable for Israel's security is the 'transfer alternative', which includes deporting Gaza's population to tent cities in the northern Sinai, then building permanent cities and a 'humanitarian corridor' to assist civilians.⁷⁵³ The following month Danny Danon from the right-wing Likud and Ram Ben-Barak from the liberal Yesh Atid wrote that, 'The international community has a moral imperative—and an

⁷⁵¹ Amy Teibel 'An Israeli ministry, in a "concept paper," proposes transferring Gaza civilians to Egypt's Sinai' *AP News*, available at <https://apnews.com/article/israel-gaza-population-transfer-hamas-egypt-palestinians-refugees-5f99378c0af6aca183a90c631fa4da5a> (accessed on 13 Dec. 23).

⁷⁵² Nur Masalha, 'The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Thinking and Practice: Historical Roots and Contemporary Challenges', *Institute for Palestine Studies*, Issue 007 (24 Nov. 2023).

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*

opportunity—to demonstrate compassion’ by accepting displaced Palestinian families from Gaza.⁷⁵⁴ Israel’s intelligence minister Gila Gamliel similarly advocated for ‘the voluntary resettlement of Palestinians in Gaza, for humanitarian reasons, outside of the Strip.’⁷⁵⁵ This idea was repeated by finance minister Smotrich, who stated that ‘the voluntary migration of the Palestinians of Gaza to other countries of the world is the right humanitarian solution.’⁷⁵⁶ The idea of ‘humanitarian transfer’ that was examined in Chapter 2 has forcefully re-emerged a century since the 1923 Greek-Turkish ‘population exchange’.

Former Mossad deputy chief Ram Ben-Barak expanded on this idea on Channel 12 News, Israel’s most watched news program,

If all of Gaza is refugees, let’s scatter them around the world. There are 2.5 million people there. Every country could take in 20,000 people – 100 countries. It’s humane, it’s logical, they are refugees anyway. Better to be a refugee in Canada than a refugee in Gaza. If the world really wants to solve this problem, it can.⁷⁵⁷

On the same line of argumentation, the chairman of the libertarian caucus in the Likud party, Amir Weitmann, wrote a position paper for the Misgav Institute, estimating that

⁷⁵⁴ Danny Danon and Ram Ben-Barak ‘The West Should Welcome Gaza Refugees’, *Wall Street Journal* (13 Nov. 2023) available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-west-should-welcome-gaza-refugees-asylum-seekers-hamas-terrorism-displacement-5d2b5890>.

⁷⁵⁵ Gila Gamliel, ‘Victory is an opportunity for Israel in the midst of crisis – opinion’, *Jerusalem Post* (2023) available at <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-773713> (accessed on 13 Dec. 23).

⁷⁵⁶ *Al Jazeera English* ‘Israeli minister supports “voluntary migration” of Palestinians in Gaza’ (14 Nov. 2023) available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/14/israeli-minister-supports-voluntary-migration-of-palestinians-in-gaza> (accessed on 13 Dec. 23).

⁷⁵⁷ Nettanel Slyomovics ‘Israeli Rightists Are Trying to Reframe a Gaza Population Transfer as a “Moral Act” (17 November 2023) available at <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-11-17/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/israeli-rightists-are-trying-to-reframe-a-gaza-population-transfer-as-a-moral-act/0000018b-d914-d423-aff-fbb7ddd30000>

it would cost \$7 billion for ‘an immediate plan, realistic and sustainable, for the resettlement and humanitarian rehabilitation of the entire Arab population of the Gaza Strip.’⁷⁵⁸ The right-wing Zionist camp that has been more vocal, though not the sole, in framing mass expulsion in humanitarian terms by suggesting Palestinians would have a better life elsewhere, are also the ones openly advocating for settler colonial replacement and the re-colonisation of Gaza. Itamar Ben-Gvir is one far-right Israeli cabinet minister who attended a conference in Jerusalem in 2024 in support of the resettlement of Gaza and for the ‘voluntary migration’ of Palestinians, which is for Ben-Gvir ‘a correct, just, moral and humane solution’.⁷⁵⁹ It would be far easier to dismiss these propositions as fantasies if the systematic displacement of Palestinians in 1948 had not been structured in the very same arguments used in 2023/24.

Meanwhile, writing in the Israeli journal *HaShiloach*, its editor Yoav Sorek argued that ‘Transferring the noncombatant population to continue their life in a different place, by encouraging emigration and inhibiting a return to Gaza, is a moral deed.’⁷⁶⁰ Sorek frames his call for population transfer as the lesser evil and most ‘humane’ solution that would avoid the ‘calls for revenge’ and the killing of civilians. He adds, ‘Transferring a population or [implementing] a population exchange are pervasive practices in settling conflicts and are completely unrelated to the crime known as “ethnic cleansing”’.⁷⁶¹ But contrary to Sorek’s rhetoric, this sort of appeal to population exchange precedents is indeed an avowal of ethnic cleansing. As the global

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Mick Crever et al, ‘Israel’s far-right wants to move Palestinians out of Gaza. Its ideas are gaining attention’ *CNN*, (17 January 2024) <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/17/middleeast/israel-far-right-gaza-settler-movement-cmd-intl/index.html>

⁷⁶⁰ Nettanel Slyomovics ‘Israeli Rightists Are Trying to Reframe a Gaza Population Transfer as a “Moral Act” (17 November 2023) available at <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-11-17/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/israeli-rightists-are-trying-to-reframe-a-gaza-population-transfer-as-a-moral-act/0000018b-d914-d423-affb-fbb7ddd30000>

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

history of settler colonialism shows, called on to justify violence, settlers often rely on analogies.⁷⁶² The contemporary articulations of an ostensibly humanitarian transfer show that the concept may prove useful in other historical contexts and demonstrate humanitarianism's continued relevance for those committed to the violent expulsion of Palestinians.

It is thus difficult to fully comprehend how the current genocide came to be without taking stock of the cumulative history of humanitarianism within the Zionist project, which demands interrogation as a process inherent to the century-long settler colonial dispossession of land and of people in Palestine. While the current moment in Gaza evinces a more pronounced settler subjectivity of benevolence towards the native, which concurs with extreme forms of violence, this thesis has redirected attention to the interconnected process of displacement and replacement in which the humanitarianisation of the settler was also fundamental. I have shown some of the historical and contemporary junctures where this humanitarianisation took place. In more recent times, the figure of a Jewish refugee that becomes a settler on appropriated Palestinian territory reappeared following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Ukrainian Jewish refugees were conscripted by the Israeli state to join in the settler colonial plunder of Palestinian land by immigrating and settling inside the occupied West Bank—while more than five million Palestinian refugees continue to be denied a right to return to their homeland.⁷⁶³ Humanitarianism re-emerged to orient a settler subject position and to operationalise territorial dispossession.

And because of Israel's genocidal war against Gaza in the south and its conflict with the Lebanese Hezbollah in the north, by November 2023 a staggering number of

⁷⁶² Lauren Benton, *They Called It Peace. Worlds of Imperial Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2024), 94.

⁷⁶³ Cidor, 'Lev Echad'.

around 253,000 Israelis had been evacuated from their homes.⁷⁶⁴ It was the largest evacuation of civilians in Israel's history, albeit without a permanent territorial withdrawal. Although it is too early to assess whether these evacuations will be temporary or a significant part permanent, there are some indications that certain elements analysed during the 2005 Gaza evacuation will return to play a role. Namely, that the claim to refugeehood of those evacuated, along with their displacement-induced trauma, should be rectified by resisting a permanent territorial withdrawal or should lead to establishing new settlements on Lebanese soil. In that regard, it is unsurprising that former Gush Katif settlers who share an analogous experience of evacuation have joined the current campaign and movement to establish settler colonies inside Lebanon.⁷⁶⁵ The transformation of settler communities who actively partake in the expropriation of Palestinian land as solely displaced refugees and victims of war may point to the importance of continuing to take seriously what is at stake with the humanitarianisation of the settler subject. This subjectivity can come to reproduce the demand for settler colonialism as a solution when faced with the prospect of evacuating from indigenous territory.

As examined through the long history of settler colonialism in Palestine and Israel, this genealogical study showed how humanitarianism generates an eliminationist settler subjectivity that heralds the removal and replacement of Palestinians. The two sides of the same genealogical coin that I sought to illuminate are: the continuous (re)establishment of the settler society; and providing a tool for the

⁷⁶⁴ Ariel Heimann and Alon Berkman, 'The Evacuation of Israeli Communities During the Swords of Iron War: Plans, Execution, and Reassessing the Criteria for Evacuation', *Institute for National Security Studies*, (21 March 2024) available at <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/evacuation/>

⁷⁶⁵ Linda Dayan, "'It Is Part of Eretz Israel': Meet the (Very Few) Israelis With Dreams of Settling Southern Lebanon' (11 April 2024) Available at <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-04-11/ty-article-magazine/.premium/part-of-eretz-israel-meet-the-very-few-israelis-dreaming-of-settling-south-lebanon/0000018e-cdbf-d5ed-adcf-ffbf750000>

dispossession of Palestinians. If knowledge of how settler colonisation takes place is fundamental to decolonisation, the hope is that this thesis will help to make a modest contribution towards that now difficult to imagine, but vital, project.

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