

The last of the Semites:

It is Israel's claims that it represents and speaks for all Jews that are the most anti-Semitic claims of all.

Al Jazeera English, 14 May 2013

Joseph Massad,

**Associate Professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History at
Columbia University.**

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/05/201351275829430527.html>

Jewish opponents of Zionism understood the movement since its early age as one that shared the precepts of anti-Semitism in its diagnosis of what gentile Europeans called the "Jewish Question". What galled anti-Zionist Jews the most, however, was that Zionism also shared the "solution" to the Jewish Question that anti-Semites had always advocated, namely the expulsion of Jews from Europe.

It was the Protestant Reformation with its revival of the Hebrew Bible that would link the modern Jews of Europe to the ancient Hebrews of Palestine, a link that the philologists of the 18th century would solidify through their discovery of the family of "Semitic" languages, including Hebrew and Arabic. Whereas Millenarian Protestants insisted that contemporary Jews, as descendants of the ancient Hebrews, must leave Europe to Palestine to expedite the second coming of Christ, philological discoveries led to the labelling of contemporary Jews as "Semites". The leap that the biological sciences of race and heredity would make in the 19th century of considering contemporary European Jews racial descendants of the ancient Hebrews would, as a result, not be a giant one.

Basing themselves on the connections made by anti-Jewish Protestant Millenarians, secular European figures saw the political potential of "restoring" Jews to Palestine abounded in the 19th century. Less interested in expediting the second coming of Christ as were the Millenarians, these secular politicians, from Napoleon Bonaparte to British foreign secretary Lord Palmerston (1785-1865) to Ernest Laharanne, the private secretary of Napoleon III in the 1860s, sought to expel the Jews of Europe to Palestine in order to set them up as agents of European imperialism in Asia. Their

call would be espoused by many "anti-Semites", a new label chosen by European anti-Jewish racists after its invention in 1879 by a minor Viennese journalist by the name of Wilhelm Marr, who issued a political programme titled *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*. Marr was careful to decouple anti-Semitism from the history of Christian hatred of Jews on the basis of religion, emphasising, in line with Semitic philology and racial theories of the 19th century, that the distinction to be made between Jews and Aryans was strictly racial.

Assimilating Jews into European culture

Scientific anti-Semitism insisted that the Jews were different from Christian Europeans. Indeed that the Jews were not European at all and that their very presence in Europe is what causes anti-Semitism. The reason why Jews caused so many problems for European Christians had to do with their alleged rootlessness, that they lacked a country, and hence country-based loyalty. In the Romantic age of European nationalisms, anti-Semites argued that Jews did not fit in the new national configurations, and disrupted national and racial purity essential to most European nationalisms. This is why if the Jews remained in Europe, the anti-Semites argued, they could only cause hostility among Christian Europeans. The only solution was for the Jews to exit from Europe and have their own country. Needless to say, religious and secular Jews opposed this horrific anti-Semitic line of thinking. Orthodox and Reform Jews, Socialist and Communist Jews, cosmopolitan and Yiddishkeit cultural Jews, all agreed that this was a dangerous ideology of hostility that sought the expulsion of Jews from their European homelands.

The Jewish *Haskalah*, or Enlightenment, which emerged also in the 19th century, sought to assimilate Jews into European secular gentile culture and have them shed their Jewish culture. It was the Haskalah that sought to break the hegemony of Orthodox Jewish rabbis on the "Ostjuden" of the East European shtetl and to shed what it perceived as a "medieval" Jewish culture in favour of the modern secular culture of European Christians. Reform Judaism, as a Christian- and Protestant-like variant of Judaism, would emerge from the bosom of the Haskalah. This assimilationist programme, however, sought to integrate Jews in European modernity, not to expel them outside Europe's geography.

When Zionism started a decade and a half after Marr's anti-Semitic programme was published, it would espouse all these anti-Jewish ideas, including scientific anti-Semitism as valid. For Zionism, Jews were "Semites", who were descendants of the ancient Hebrews. In his foundational pamphlet *Der Judenstaat*, Herzl explained that it was Jews, not their Christian enemies, who "cause" anti-Semitism and that "where it does not exist, [anti-Semitism] is carried by Jews in the course of their migrations", indeed that "the unfortunate Jews are now carrying the seeds of anti-Semitism into England; they have already introduced it into America"; that Jews were a "nation" that should leave Europe to restore their "nationhood" in Palestine or Argentina; that Jews must emulate European Christians culturally and abandon their living languages and traditions in favour of modern European languages or a restored ancient national language. Herzl preferred that all Jews adopt German, while the East European Zionists wanted Hebrew. Zionists after Herzl even agreed and affirmed that Jews were separate racially from Aryans. As for **Yiddish**, the living language of most European Jews, all Zionists agreed that it should be abandoned.

The majority of Jews continued to resist Zionism and understood its precepts as those of anti-Semitism and as a continuation of the Haskalah quest to shed Jewish culture and assimilate Jews into European secular gentile culture, except that Zionism sought the latter not inside Europe but at a geographical remove following the expulsion of Jews from Europe. The **Bund**, or the General Jewish Labor Union in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, which was founded in Vilna in early October 1897, a few weeks after the convening of the **first Zionist Congress in Basel** in late August 1897, would become Zionism's fiercest enemy. The Bund joined the existing anti-Zionist Jewish coalition of Orthodox and Reform rabbis who had combined forces a few months earlier to prevent Herzl from convening the first Zionist Congress in Munich, which forced him to move it to Basel. Jewish anti-Zionism across Europe and in the United States had the support of the majority of Jews who continued to view Zionism as an anti-Jewish movement well into the 1940s.

Anti-Semitic chain of pro-Zionist enthusiasts

Realising that its plan for the future of European Jews was in line with those of anti-Semites, Herzl strategised early on an alliance with the latter. He declared in *Der Judenstaat* **that**:

"The Governments of all countries scourged by anti-Semitism will be keenly interested in assisting us to obtain [the] sovereignty we want."

He added that "not only poor Jews" would contribute to an immigration fund for European Jews, "but also Christians who wanted to get rid of them". Herzl unapologetically confided in his *Diaries* [that](#):

"The anti-Semites will become our most dependable friends, the anti-Semitic countries our allies."

Thus when Herzl began to meet in 1903 with infamous anti-Semites like the Russian minister of the interior [Vyacheslav von Plehve](#), who oversaw anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia, it was an alliance that he sought by design. That it would be the anti-Semitic Lord Balfour, who as Prime Minister of Britain in 1905 oversaw his government's Aliens Act, which prevented East European Jews fleeing Russian pogroms from entering Britain in order, as he put it, to save the country from the "undoubted evils" of "an immigration which was largely Jewish", was hardly coincidental. [Balfour's infamous Declaration of 1917](#) to create in Palestine a "national home" for the "Jewish people", was designed, among other things, to curb Jewish support for the Russian Revolution and to stem the tide of further unwanted Jewish immigrants into Britain.

The Nazis would not be an exception in this anti-Semitic chain of pro-Zionist enthusiasts. Indeed, the Zionists would strike a deal with the Nazis very early in their history. It was in 1933 that the infamous Transfer ([Ha'avara](#)) Agreement was signed between the Zionists and the Nazi government to facilitate the transfer of German Jews and their property to Palestine and which broke the international Jewish [boycott](#) of Nazi Germany started by American Jews. It was in this spirit that Zionist envoys were dispatched to Palestine to report on the successes of Jewish colonization of the country. Adolf Eichmann returned from his 1937 trip to Palestine full of fantastic stories about the achievements of the racially-separatist Ashkenazi Kibbutz, one of which he visited on Mount Carmel as a guest of the Zionists.

Despite the overwhelming opposition of most German Jews, it was the Zionist Federation of Germany that was the only Jewish group that supported the [Nuremberg Laws of 1935](#), as they agreed with the Nazis that Jews and Aryans were separate and separable races. This was not a tactical support but one based on

ideological similitude. The Nazis' Final Solution initially meant the expulsion of Germany's Jews to Madagascar. It is this shared goal of expelling Jews from Europe as a separate unassimilable race that created the affinity between Nazis and Zionists all along.

While the majority of Jews continued to resist the anti-Semitic basis of Zionism and its alliances with anti-Semites, the Nazi genocide not only killed 90 percent of European Jews, but in the process also killed the majority of Jewish enemies of Zionism who died precisely because they refused to heed the Zionist call of abandoning their countries and homes.

*The anti-Semites will become
our most dependable friends,
the anti-Semitic countries
our allies.*

Theodor Herzl , Diaries

After the War, the horror at the Jewish holocaust did not stop European countries from supporting the anti-Semitic programme of Zionism. On the contrary, these countries shared with the Nazis a predilection for Zionism. They only opposed Nazism's genocidal programme. European countries, along with the United States, refused to take in hundreds of thousands of Jewish survivors of the holocaust. In fact, these countries voted against a UN resolution introduced by the Arab states in 1947 calling on them to take in the Jewish survivors, yet these same countries would be the ones who would support the United Nations [Partition Plan of November 1947](#) to create a Jewish State in Palestine to which these unwanted Jewish refugees could be expelled.

The pro-Zionist policies of the Nazis

The United States and European countries, including Germany, would continue the pro-Zionist policies of the Nazis. Post-War West German governments that presented themselves as opening a new page in their relationship with Jews in reality did no such thing. Since the establishment of the country after WWII, every West German government (and every German government since unification in 1990) has continued the pro-Zionist Nazi policies unabated. There was never a break with Nazi pro-

Zionism. The only break was with the genocidal and racial hatred of Jews that Nazism consecrated, but not with the desire to see Jews set up in a country in Asia, away from Europe. Indeed, the Germans would explain that much of the money they were sending to Israel was to help offset the costs of resettling European Jewish refugees in the country.

After World War II, a new consensus emerged in the United States and Europe that Jews had to be integrated posthumously into white Europeanness, and that the horror of the Jewish holocaust was essentially a horror at the murder of white Europeans. Since the 1960s, Hollywood films about the holocaust began to depict Jewish victims of Nazism as white Christian-looking, middle class, educated and talented people not unlike contemporary European and American Christians who should and would identify with them. Presumably if the films were to depict the poor religious Jews of Eastern Europe (and most East European Jews who were killed by the Nazis were poor and many were religious), contemporary white Christians would not find commonality with them. Hence, the post-holocaust European Christian horror at the genocide of European Jews was not based on the horror of slaughtering people in the millions who were *different from European Christians*, but rather a horror at the murder of millions of people who were the *same as European Christians*. This explains why in a country like the United States, which had nothing to do with the slaughter of European Jews, there exists upwards of 40 holocaust memorials and a major museum for the murdered Jews of Europe, but not one for the holocaust of Native Americans or African Americans for which the US is responsible.

Aimé Césaire understood this process very well. In his famous speech on colonialism, he **affirmed** that the retrospective view of European Christians about Nazism is that

it is barbarism, but the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before [Europeans] were its victims, they were its accomplices; and they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimised it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole of Western, Christian civilisation in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack.

That for Césaire the Nazi wars and holocaust were European colonialism turned inwards is true enough. But since the rehabilitation of Nazism's victims as white people, Europe and its American accomplice would continue their Nazi policy of visiting horrors on non-white people around the world, on Korea, on Vietnam and Indochina, on Algeria, on Indonesia, on Central and South America, on Central and Southern Africa, on Palestine, on Iran, and on Iraq and Afghanistan.

The rehabilitation of European Jews after WWII was a crucial part of US Cold War propaganda. As American social scientists and ideologues developed the theory of "totalitarianism", which posited Soviet Communism and Nazism as essentially the same type of regime, European Jews, as victims of one totalitarian regime, became part of the atrocity exhibition that American and West European propaganda claimed was like the atrocities that the Soviet regime was allegedly committing in the pre- and post-War periods. That Israel would jump on the bandwagon by accusing the Soviets of anti-Semitism for their refusal to allow Soviet Jewish citizens to self-expel and leave to Israel was part of the propaganda.

Commitment to white supremacy

It was thus that the European and US commitment to white supremacy was preserved, except that it now included Jews as part of "white" people, and what came to be called "Judeo-Christian" civilisation. European and American policies after World War II, which continued to be inspired and dictated by racism against Native Americans, Africans, Asians, Arabs and Muslims, and continued to support Zionism's anti-Semitic programme of assimilating Jews into whiteness in a colonial settler state away from Europe, were a direct continuation of anti-Semitic policies prevalent before the War. It was just that much of the anti-Semitic racist venom would now be directed at Arabs and Muslims (both, those who are immigrants and citizens in Europe and the United States and those who live in Asia and Africa) while the erstwhile anti-Semitic support for Zionism would continue unhindered.

West Germany's alliance with Zionism and Israel after WWII, of supplying Israel with huge economic aid in the 1950s and of economic and military aid since the early 1960s, including tanks, which it used to kill Palestinians and other Arabs, is a continuation of the alliance that the Nazi government concluded with the Zionists in the 1930s. In the 1960s, West Germany even **provided** military training to Israeli

soldiers and since the 1970s has provided Israel with nuclear-ready German-made submarines with which Israel hopes to kill more Arabs and Muslims. Israel has in recent years armed the most recent [German-supplied submarines](#) with nuclear tipped cruise missiles, a fact that is well known to the current German government. Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak told *Der SPIEGEL* in 2012 that Germans should be "proud" that they have secured the existence of the state of Israel "for many years". Berlin financed one-third of the cost of the submarines, around 135 million euros (\$168 million) per submarine, and has allowed Israel to defer its payment until 2015. That this makes Germany an accomplice in the dispossession of the Palestinians is of no more concern to current German governments than it was in the 1960s to West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer who affirmed that "the Federal Republic has neither the right nor the responsibility to take a position on the Palestinian refugees".

This is to be added to the massive billions that Germany has paid to the Israeli government as compensation for the holocaust, as if Israel and Zionism were the victims of Nazism, when in reality it was anti-Zionist Jews who were killed by the Nazis. The current German government does not care about the fact that even those German Jews who fled the Nazis and ended up in Palestine hated Zionism and its project and were hated in turn by Zionist colonists in Palestine. As German refugees in 1930s and 1940s Palestine refused to learn Hebrew and published half a dozen German newspapers in the country, they were attacked by the Hebrew press, including by *Haartez*, which called for the closure of their newspapers in 1939 and again in 1941. Zionist colonists attacked a German-owned café in Tel Aviv because its Jewish owners refused to speak Hebrew, and the Tel Aviv municipality threatened in June 1944 some of its German Jewish residents for holding in their home on 21 Allenby street "parties and balls entirely in the German language, including programmes that are foreign to the spirit of our city" and that this would "not be tolerated in Tel Aviv". German Jews, or Yekkes as they were known in the Yishuv, would even organise a celebration of the Kaiser's birthday in 1941 (for these and more details about German Jewish refugees in Palestine, read Tom Segev's book *The Seventh Million*).

Add to that Germany's support for Israeli policies against Palestinians at the United Nations, and the picture becomes complete. Even the new holocaust memorial built in Berlin that opened in 2005 maintains Nazi racial apartheid, as this "Memorial to the

Murdered Jews of Europe" is only for Jewish victims of the Nazis who must still today be set apart, as Hitler mandated, from the other millions of non-Jews who also fell victim to Nazism. That a subsidiary of the German company Degussa, which collaborated with the Nazis and which produced the **Zyklon B gas** that was used to kill people in the gas chambers, was contracted to build the memorial was anything but surprising, as it simply confirms that those who killed Jews in Germany in the late 1930s and in the 1940s now regret what they had done because they now understand Jews to be white Europeans who must be commemorated and who should not have been killed in the first place on account of their whiteness. The German policy of abetting the killing of Arabs by Israel, however, is hardly unrelated to this commitment to anti-Semitism, which continues through the predominant contemporary anti-Muslim German racism that targets Muslim immigrants.

Euro-American anti-Jewish tradition

The **Jewish holocaust killed off** the majority of Jews who fought and struggled against European anti-Semitism, including Zionism. With their death, the only remaining "Semites" who are fighting against Zionism and its anti-Semitism today are the Palestinian people. Whereas Israel insists that European Jews do not belong in Europe and must come to Palestine, the Palestinians have always insisted that the homelands of European Jews were their European countries and not Palestine, and that Zionist colonialism springs from its very anti-Semitism. Whereas Zionism insists that Jews are a race separate from European Christians, the Palestinians insist that European Jews are nothing if not European and have nothing to do with Palestine, its people, or its culture. What Israel and its American and European allies have sought to do in the last six and a half decades is to convince Palestinians that they too must become anti-Semites and believe as the Nazis, Israel, and its Western anti-Semitic allies do, that Jews are a race that is different from European races, that Palestine is their country, and that Israel speaks for all Jews. That the two largest American pro-Israel voting blocks today are Millenarian Protestants and secular imperialists continues the very same Euro-American anti-Jewish tradition that extends back to the Protestant Reformation and 19th century imperialism. But the Palestinians have remained unconvinced and steadfast in their resistance to anti-Semitism.

European Jews were transformed into the instruments of aggression; they became the elements of settler colonialism intimately allied to racial discrimination...

Yasser Arafat, 1974 UN speech

Israel and its anti-Semitic allies affirm that Israel is "the Jewish people", that its policies are "Jewish" policies, that its achievements are "Jewish" achievements, that its crimes are "Jewish" crimes, and that therefore anyone who dares to criticise Israel is criticising Jews and must be an anti-Semite. The Palestinian people have mounted a major struggle against this anti-Semitic incitement. They continue to affirm instead that the Israeli government does not speak for all Jews, that it does not represent all Jews, and that its colonial crimes against the Palestinian people are its own crimes and not the crimes of "the Jewish people", and that therefore it must be criticised, condemned and prosecuted for its ongoing war crimes against the Palestinian people. This is not a new Palestinian position, but one that was adopted since the turn of the 20th century and continued throughout the pre-WWII Palestinian struggle against Zionism. Yasser Arafat's [speech](#) at the United Nations in 1974 stressed all these points vehemently:

Just as colonialism heedlessly used the wretched, the poor, the exploited as mere inert matter with which to build and to carry out settler colonialism, so too were destitute, oppressed European Jews employed on behalf of world imperialism and of the Zionist leadership. European Jews were transformed into the instruments of aggression; they became the elements of settler colonialism intimately allied to racial discrimination...Zionist theology was utilised against our Palestinian people: the purpose was not only the establishment of Western-style settler colonialism but also the severing of Jews from their various homelands and subsequently their estrangement from their nations. Zionism... is united with anti-Semitism in its retrograde tenets and is, when all is said and done, another side of the same base coin. For when what is proposed is that adherents of the Jewish faith, regardless of their national residence, should neither owe allegiance to their national residence nor live on equal footing with its other, non-Jewish citizens -when that is proposed we

hear anti-Semitism being proposed. When it is proposed that the only solution for the Jewish problem is that Jews must alienate themselves from communities or nations of which they have been a historical part, when it is proposed that Jews solve the Jewish problem by immigrating to and forcibly settling the land of another people - when this occurs, exactly the same position is being advocated as the one urged by anti-Semites against Jews.

Israel's claim that its critics must be anti-Semites presupposes that its critics believe its claims that it represents "the Jewish people". *But it is Israel's claims that it represents and speaks for all Jews that are the most anti-Semitic claims of all.*

Today, Israel and the Western powers want to elevate anti-Semitism to an international principle around which they seek to establish full consensus. They insist that for there to be peace in the Middle East, Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims must become, like the West, anti-Semites by espousing Zionism and recognising Israel's anti-Semitic claims. Except for dictatorial Arab regimes and the Palestinian Authority and its cronies, on this 65th anniversary of the anti-Semitic conquest of Palestine by the Zionists, known to Palestinians as the **Nakba**, the Palestinian people and the few surviving anti-Zionist Jews continue to refuse to heed this international call and incitement to anti-Semitism. They affirm that they are, as *the last of the Semites*, the heirs of the pre-WWII Jewish and Palestinian struggles against anti-Semitism and its Zionist colonial manifestation. It is their resistance that stands in the way of a complete victory for European anti-Semitism in the Middle East and the world at large.

Joseph Massad teaches Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History at Columbia University in New York. He is the author of The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians.

You can follow the editor on Twitter: [@nyktweets](https://twitter.com/nyktweets)

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy.