

THE EXODUS OF JEWS FROM ARAB AND MUSLIM COUNTRIES OFTEN COMPARED TO THE NAKBA AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF ARAB PALESTINIANS. WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR THIS COMPARISON? IS IT VALID?

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Abstract

The establishment of state of Israel by the Western powers created a permanent rivalry between the Muslims of the Arab world and Israel. The seeds of genesis of Israel's bright were sown in the Balfour Declaration in 1917. A movement particularly Middle East has been started by the Zion's of the West. Since then, Zionist are advocating a symmetry between the two in order to absolve Zionism from the Nakba and deny the Palestinian refugees' right to return; Arab scholars tend to interpret the departure of Jews as a consequence of Zionism alone and downplay the role of Arab governments in the departure of Arab Jews from their countries. It is not realistic to equate sufferings of Palestinians with those of Jews from Muslim lands. Palestinians are most egregiously wronged by Zionism and we cannot think to compare the long lists of crimes against both. Till now both Palestinians and Arab Jews have been the objects and not the subjects of Zionist ideology and policies.

Keywords: Exodus, Jews, Arab, Muslim, Country.

Introduction

Zionism¹ was originally a European movement – appealing principally to the persecuted Jews of Russia and East Europe; Oriental Jews were certainly not an integral part of the intellectual struggles and national aspirations of European Jews. Until concrete economic and demographic needs emerged, Oriental Jews were not part of the Zionist plan.

There is no doubt that discrimination with the Muslims in Israel was and is aboveboard. This apartheid and discrimination has been accepted by the international community at all platforms including United Nations. The discrimination within Israel with its own community (Jews) because of migrations of Jews having different cultural backgrounds is natural and is lower in its content and magnitude as compared to the Muslims.

Oriental Jews were about to assume an even more vital role in Zionist enterprise. By the early 1940s, Zionist leaders were grasping the scale of the Holocaust

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as Nazi horrors were unfolding in Europe. Without Oriental Jews, David Ben-Gurion argued, there wouldn't be enough Jews in Palestine, and Zionism would collapse. Ben-Gurion made it clear that when Herzl wrote of the 'Jewish People' he had meant 'the Jewish People in Europe ... the people that bore the Zionist movement on its shoulders'. After the Holocaust, Ben-Gurion lamented: 'The State was formed, but could not find people who had expected it.'²

At the time of the establishment of Israel, the population was not so large to run the state securely. For this purpose, a well thought plan was formulated so that the Arab Jews may be migrated into Israel. In next fifteen years, a large number, of not only Arab Jews but also Jew from different parts of the world migrated to Israel because of different reasons and incentives. Till 1965, a sufficient population based to run its security coupled with state apparatus matters.

Among Muslim countries Iraq was where the Jewish community prospered most. It traces its history back to 597 BC, when around forty thousand Jews were exiled to Babylon, which has since been Judaism's global centre and has been a Jewish address for over two millennia – the longest record of Jewish residence, anywhere. (Shabi:2009) Babylon, later came to be known as Iraq, witnessed the rise and fall of countless empires, but a Jewish community stayed put throughout. The centre of Jewish faith shifted in thirteenth century to a Sephardic base in Spain and then to an Ashkenazi base further east in Europe. But Iraq's Jews continued to thrive. In the early 1950s, the majority of the Jewish population of Iraq, which was least likely to uproot and go, left at once for Israel --- as part of the necessity to 'liquidate the (Jewish) exile' as a prerequisite for materializing Zionism.³

Under Muslim rule the legal status of Jews became dhimmi, 'protected'. Some scholars highlight all the degradations inherent in this second class, non-egalitarian status of dhimmi. Others point out it's changing nature according to which ruler was enforcing it and apart from some exceptions such as Yemen, dhimmi did mean protected, a liberal measure and quite explicable by the sociological and historical conditions of the time, and not the product of a pathological European-style anti-Semitism.

Since long those Jews which were inhabited in Middle East were well organized and were retaining their identity through cultural variation and different religious practices. The legal status of Jews changed from being dhimmi to millet as a result of modernization initiated by Ottoman rulers. Equal rights and parliamentary representation was granted to all minorities along with religious and educational autonomy.⁴

To attract migration of Jews in state of Israel and to influence the Western capitals in their favours Zionist propaganda that Jews are mistreated and are marginalized by the Muslim rulers created a soft corner for the Israeli government in the Western capitals. This well received propaganda precipitated in the form of unconditional support to Israel. In this context, generous economic aid and arms were given to Israel.

Advent of Zionism in Muslim Lands

The emergence of Zionism in the Muslim world posed serious problems for Arabs as well as for Jews living among them. Zionism's claim to be a liberation movement for all Jews and Zionist ideologists' attempt to make the two terms 'Jewish' and 'Zionist' virtually synonymous (Shohat:1988,p1) further sealed the fate of Jews living in Muslim lands. For the Jews of North Africa, 'word of the Zionist movement's birth in Europe fuelled the cherished hopes for national redemption that were an integral part of their religious conviction.'⁵

In 1898, a Zionist association was established in the Egyptian city of Alexandria and by 1904, Zionist organisations mushroomed across the country. Several hundred Jews throughout Egypt paid their shekel for membership in the World Zionist Organisation. Zionist associations proliferated in towns across Morocco. (Abitbol:1981) By 1911, Zionism had gained foothold in North Africa. Zionism was gradually spreading among Jewish communities in the Arab World. A Jewish literary society, formed in 1920, aroused significant misgivings and tensions in Iraq. Manahem Saleh Daniel, a Senator in the Iraqi Parliament, warned the Zionist Organization in London of the dangers of a Zionist policy. 'You are doubtless aware,' he wrote, 'that, in all Arab countries, the Zionist movement is regarded as a serious threat to Arab national life... in the mind of the Arab,' sympathy with the Zionist movement 'is nothing short of a betrayal of the Arab cause'.⁶

Regionalisation of Palestine Question

The period of 1936–39, which witnessed the first comprehensive Palestinian anti-colonial revolt and the first proposal to partition Palestine, is most important for understanding the regional dimensions and trajectories of Arab Jews before and after 1948. 'In this sense, 1936–39 seems more of a terminus a quo in terms of its explanatory power of the emerging interdependencies between the Arab Jews, Euro-Zionism, Arab nationalism, and the conflict'.⁷

Peer partition plan of 1937 resulted in Arab Muslims discontent against the policies of West as these were apartheid in its nature and content. However, the British who were the colonial master of that time were in favour of creation of state of Israel on Palestinian land. In 1937, Egypt British ambassador was of the view that Palestinian question is a domestic political issue particularly in Egypt.⁸

The Muslim Arab intellectuals and policymakers were of the view that creation of state of Israel on the land of Arabs was a unjust decision of the West and it is colonial master approach. The regionalization of the Palestine issue was materialized upon the migration of the Palestine question to neighbouring Arab states and its fusion with Arab national politics.⁹

Egypt's religious scholars met in 1938, to discuss the 'Palestine Question'. Al-Azhar rector Sheikh al-Maraghi delivered its decisions to the British emphasizing: 'the propaganda of creation of state of Israel on Palestinian land was well received Jews who were living in the Middle East since centuries. They realized that creation of state of

Israel may put them in clash with the Arabs because Muslims view the idea and moment of creation of Israel will result in capture and possession of Muslim lands of Middle East in general and Palestine in particular. It was quite possible ... that the Jews in Iraq and Egypt ... might shortly find themselves involved in the general anti-Jewish hostility of the Moslem world.'¹⁰

A week earlier Iraqi Minister of Interior predicted: 'Before long, a demand might arise for the expulsion of all the Jews in Iraq ... It was not entirely fantastic to visualize the 90,000 Jews of Iraq being escorted across the Euphrates ... to this Palestine of theirs ... sooner or later it was bound to happen...'¹¹

Middle Eastern Jews did not end up in Israel just because of the deliberate Zionist policy and unscrupulous activities of its Ashkenazi emissaries throughout the region; they received equally deliberate 'assistance' from such regimes as those of Nuri al-Said and Zaydi Imam Ahmed and the accidental help from the Arab xenophobic groups.

Colonialist Stratagem

When British conquered Iraq in 1917, Iraqi Jews, numbered around 87,500, perfectly fitted the requirement of a British colonial power, reliant on support from a favoured minority community. Highly educated, business minded, the Jewish population featured disproportionately in private business - oil, banking, railroads, postal services, the customs office etc. Salman Shina, a newspaper editor said: 'Commerce blossomed and flourished, the Jews made fortunes, and gold descended upon them like rain on grass'.¹²

The discussion about the Zionist's claim to have saved Mizrahi Jews from the harsh rule of their Arab captors (Shohat: 1988) and the claim that Jews from Arab lands were unnecessarily uprooted by the forces of Zionism, is irrelevant, given that by the late nineteenth century the Arab countries in question were under colonial rule. Colonising forces in each country promoted Jewish communities over their compatriots, thereby causing inter-communal hostilities as nationalist independence movements developed.

Zionism and Its Backlash

Between 1917 and 1948, a large number of Jews migrated to Palestine. During this period a total 420,000 Jews, from all corners of the world including Middle East settled in Palestine. Out of 420,000 migrates, 385,066 came from Western Europe including American continent and remaining 44,809 came from the Middle East. The Middle Eastern Jews did not face systematic anti-Semitism, or pogroms; in the Middle East, a 'Jewish question' did not exist so the Middle Eastern Jews did not develop Jewish national consciousness.

The leadership of Zionist regime was well aware that the escalating conflict in Palestine would imperil Jews in the Middle East. 'The very same day that brings redemption and salvation to European Jewry will be the most dangerous day of all for

the exiles in Arab lands.' said Eliyahu Dobkin, head of the Jewish Agency for Immigration, in July 1943.¹³

The head of Egyptian delegation, Muhammad Hussain Heykal Pasha, warned the UN General Assembly during the debate on partition of Palestine on 24 November 1947, that 'the lives of one million Jews in Moslem countries would be jeopardised by partition.' He further warned that 'If a Jewish State were established... Riots would break out in Palestine, would spread through all the Arab States, and might lead to a war between two races.'¹⁴

On 22 January 1948 the President of the Federation of Jewish Societies of Algeria, Elie Gozlan, wrote, 'The Muslims do not hesitate to accuse North African Jewry of sending money, arms, and men to the Zionists.' He then added: 'What prudence the Jews must show in dealing with the Palestinian affairs!' (Stillman:1991,p510) The Jewish community was damned either way: those who opposed Zionism weren't believed by their co-nationalists; those who did not oppose it were considered traitors. Those who kept in touch with relatives who had already migrated to Palestine were accused of having contact with the enemy.

After secret negotiations in Baghdad with the Iraqi Prime Minister Tawfic al-Suwaidi [Zionist emissaries Shlomo] Hillel and [Mordechai] Ben-Port succeeded, on the basis of a substantial cash payment, in securing a law allowing Iraqi Jews to immigrate to Israel. The Bill to this effect was introduced to the Iraqi parliament on 5 June 1950.¹⁵

In December 1951, three Jews were found guilty of planting series of bombs in Baghdad with the express intention of terrorising the Jewish community and precipitating its exodus. Though some Israeli historians do not consider these bombings the work of Zionists but neither British nor American reports from the period think the Iraqi trial of the alleged bombers a sham. Wilbur Grane Eveland, a former CIA adviser, in Baghdad at the time, wrote: 'In an attempt to ... terrorize the Jews, the Zionists planted the bombs ..., and soon leaflets began to appear urging Jews to flee to Israel'. In 1954, when the Israeli government was reeling from the Laevon affair, an IDF minister said: 'This method of operation was not invented for Egypt. It was first tried in Iraq.'¹⁶

The prominent Iraqi Jewish poet Me'ir Basri stated: 'If Israel had not been established, nothing would have happened to the Iraqi Jews...' The existence of Israel was a powerful incentive for Jews to leave Muslim lands. 'Without internal impediment or harassment, 25,000 Iranian Jews immigrated to Israel in 1950 and 1951. Many of these immigrants were members of Zionist youth movements and wanted the opportunities to use their youth and energy to build up the Jewish State.'¹⁷

The establishment of the State of Israel aroused messianic enthusiasm among the Jewish population of Morocco. From May 1948 to 1956, more than 90,000 Moroccan Jews left for Israel. One of the first actions of the new Moroccan government, after gaining independence in 1956, was to order the Jewish Agency to close down the emigration camp. On 25 November 1961, a secret agreement, to pay the Moroccan

authorities \$ 100 for each emigrant, was signed between the Israeli government and King Hassan II. Operation 'Yakhin' brought 100,000 Moroccan Jews to Israel between 1962 and 1964 at a cost of \$ 10 million paid to the Moroccan authorities.¹⁸

The birth of the State of Israel, the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, the military defeats of 1948, 1956 and 1967 and the loss of Jerusalem --- all combined to embitter Arab attitudes toward Jews in general. The new bitterness was an important factor in the mass exodus of the Jewish population from most Arab countries. The Zionist menace became a reality in the eyes of the majority of Arabs, and the term 'Zionist' took its place alongside 'imperialist', and 'colonialist' in the Arabic lexicon of epithets - perhaps the most sinister of them all.

The Zionist activities and the emergence of State of Israel resulted in irrevocably identifying Jews with Zionism. Zionism by turning into a global Jewish nationalism posed a serious threat to the survival of local Jewish communities living in Arab lands. The creation of Israel resulted in non-acceptance of the principle of self-determination aspirations of the Arabs. So violation of this principle resulted in continued persistent conflict between Jews and Arabs. Further, installation Jewish state in the heart of Arab world was viewed by all Muslim world and illegal act.

Suddenly, robust Judeo-Arabic tradition, once an integral part of the region, came to an abrupt end. Multiple narratives describing the diverse facets of Jewish life steeped in the Muslim lands trickled through the cross cultural checkpoints operating in Israel into the experience of animosity in the Muslim lands, magnified into central significance.

The mass migration of the Middle Eastern Jews to the new Jewish state was dictated by history, not part of the original plan. Zionism was born as a reaction and a solution to the rampant anti-Semitism in Europe. There are no Oriental Jewish names on a list of key Zionist thinkers precisely because there was at that time no Jewish nationalism in the Middle East.

Oriental Jews posed a real dilemma for Zionism by resembling and behaving like the 'uncivilised' enemy. A real fear was that the high influx of immigrants from the Middle East might actually impede the project of building a Jewish homeland. Jews from the Arab countries were emblematic of many of Israel's fears about the region that it was part of but wanted no part of it. Fearing an encroachment of the contaminative Eastern forces upon the West, the establishment repressed the Arabness of Oriental Jews. Ben-Gurion voiced these fears: 'We do not want Israelis to become Arabs.' (Smoocha:1978,p88) The Oriental Jews were urged to see Judaism and Zionism as synonyms and Jewishness and Arabness as antonyms, when in fact they were both Arab and Jewish.

The process to develop Israel as a viable state resulted in dispossession of Palestinian Muslims of their lands. The migration of Jews from the West and Middle East was programmed and resulted less damage to their properties as state of Israel was their dreamland. Now they were in Jewish culture. Due to class distinction, the

Oriental Jews who migrated were called 'human dust,' and crowded into transient camps, hastily constructed out of corrugated tin. The Israeli media refers to these slums of the Mizrahi population as 'the second Israel': low status, low income, underachieving. Many were stripped of their 'unpronounceable' Middle Eastern names at arrival and were given new names by whimsical Israeli bureaucrats.¹⁹

Conclusion

Nakba is catastrophe of a magnitude in which Arab Muslims lost their property and rule and were converted into subjects at their own land. The Arab Jews who migrated to state of Israel were less in loss as compared to the Muslims. Zionism is sole responsible for the Nakba against the Muslims. In Nakba, Palestinian people are worst loser. However, within a state of Israel Oriental Jews have certain problems. The peace in Middle East not possible without recognizing couple with granting the rights of land to the people of Palestine.

NOTES

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- ¹ Zionism is the movement of the Jewish people who supported the re-establishment of a Jewish state in the territory on Arabs land. Modern Zionism emerged in the late 19th century in Central and Eastern Europe as a national revival movement, both in reaction to newer waves of antisemitism and as an imitative response to other nationalist movements. Soon after this, most leaders of the movement associated the main goal with creating the desired state in Palestine, then an area controlled by the Ottoman Empire. Until 1948, the primary goals of Zionism were the re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty in the Muslim Palestinian land, ingathering of the exiles, and liberation of Jews from the antisemitic discrimination and persecution that they experienced during their diaspora. Since then Zionists have expansionist design and are still grabbing Arabs land. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zionism>
- ² Meir-Glitzenstein:2004,p53
- ³ Behar:2012
- ⁴ Gilbert:2010,p127
- ⁵ Stillman:1991,p72
- ⁶ Stillman:1991,p331-3
- ⁷ Behar:2008
- ⁸ FO407/222, Lampson (Cairo) to Halifax, 24 May 1938.
- ⁹ Behar:2007
- ¹⁰ Behar:2007
- ¹¹ FO406/76, Houstoun-Boswall (Baghdad) to Halifax, 29 August 1938
- ¹² Meir-Glitzenstein:2004
- ¹³ Shabi:2009,p88
- ¹⁴ Gilbert:2010,p208
- ¹⁵ Gilbert:1998,p167
- ¹⁶ Woolfson:1980,p199
- ¹⁷ Gilbert:2010,p268
- ¹⁸ Gilbert:2010,p279
- ¹⁹ Shohat:1988