

Israeli Exceptionalism

The Destabilizing Logic of Zionism

M. Shahid Alam



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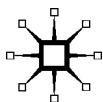
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You have the light, but you have no humanity. Seek humanity, for that is the goal.

—Rumi

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PREFACE

Why is an economist writing a book on the geopolitics of Zionism? This is easily explained. I could have written a book about the economics of Zionism, the Israeli economy, or the economy of the West Bank and Gaza, but how would any of that have helped me to understand the cold logic and the deep passions that have driven Zionism?

Zionism is a historic movement that emerges from the guts of Europe's turbulent history. It is propelled by the dialectical interactions between two intertwined streams of Western civilization, the Jewish and Christian. And, as it has unfolded, Zionism has brought both these Western streams into a dangerous collision with the Islamicate. It would not be easy squeezing this tragic history into an economic model or a set of econometric estimations.

In my capacity as an “economist” too, Zionism, at its core—as an exclusionary settler colonialism—was scarcely a strange beast. I began grappling with colonialism as a graduate student. In one of the three essays that I wrote for my PhD dissertation, I used the tools of economics to explain why the free trade that the British imposed on India in the nineteenth century had led to its pauperization. A decade later, after I had secured “citizenship” in the department of economics at Northeastern University, I returned to this subject again. In several articles, leading to a book, *Poverty from the Wealth of Nations*, I examined the theory, history, and evidence on the connections between colonialism and backwardness in the global economy that emerged during the nineteenth century.

Zionism has always piqued my interest because of the cleverness that it brought to the defense of its aims. I had my first encounter with a Zionist in 1974 when I was a student at the University of Indiana at Bloomington. When my interlocutor discovered my opposition to Zionism, the conversation quickly took an eerie turn. In anger, assuming that I was an Arab, he placed the blame for the Holocaust on the Arabs. If the Arabs had not resisted the entry of Jews into Palestine, there would have been no Jews in