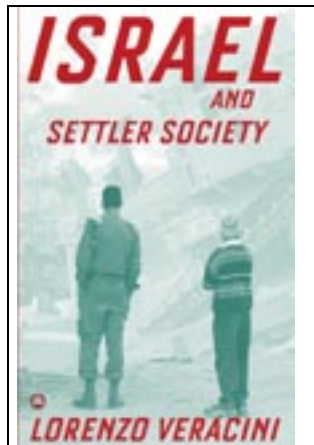


Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society*, Pluto, London-Ann Arber 2006, ISBN 0 7453 2500 9, 154 Seiten, € 22,50.



The struggle between Israel and the Palestinians is not unique. Lorenzo Veracini argues that the conflict is best understood in terms of colonialism. Like South Africa, the United States, Australia, Israel is also a settler society. The author who is a postdoctoral fellow at the Australian National University in Canberra, challenges two important myths: firstly, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict defies comparative approaches; and secondly that the struggle for liberation is mainly based in nationality and religion and therefore different to typical colonial conflicts. On the contrary, *Israel and Settler Society* approaches this conflict by utilizing a colonial framework of interpretation and a number of comprehensive test cases." The book documents and analyses the colonial endeavour of the Zionist enterprise which were already described in 1983 by Baruch Kimmerling in *Zionism and Territory* and by Gershon Shafir's *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, which regarded Zionism as a form of "European overseas expansion in a frontier region".

The author strongly emphasizes that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be seen in the light of Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon insists that the true enemy of the colonized is the European settler. Israel and Palestine in the years of the second Intifada resonates dangerously with this logic, writes Veracini. Fanon's capacity was "to encapsulate the intimate nature of the relationship between colonizer and colonized". The disappearance of a postcolonial horizon, despite the internationally sanctioned dealings of Madrid, Oslo, Wye River Plantation, and Camp David-II constituted a crucial turning-point. When the possibility of disengaging from Israel's colonial oppression became postponed into an indefinite future, a colonial phenomenology began increasingly to inform relationships, so the author.

Besides Introduction and Conclusion the book has three chapters: the Geography of Unilateral Separation; the Troubles of Decolonization, and Founding Violence and Settler Societies. Lorenzo Veracini compares former settler states like South Africa, Australia, and Algeria with the Zionist colonisation of Palestine. In chapter two he appraises increasing occurrence of references to apartheid in relation to Israel/Palestine and assesses a developing practice of exclusion through a comparison with South Africa's policies during the apartheid era. In chapter three he proposes a comparative analysis of two conflicts in which a settler project supported by a colonial power reluctant to relinquish control over an area deemed strategically and ideologically essential was and is opposed to a nationalist

movement struggling for independence. This chapter analyses Israeli responses to the Al-Aqsa-Intifada by comparing them with the repressive strategies developed by the Fourth French Republic to deal with the Algerian war of decolonization. In chapter four the author addresses the evolution of history writing and debates in two very different contexts: Israel and Australia. Two themes emerge as central: the final acknowledgement of the dispossession of the original inhabitants, and the defective legitimacy of the institutions of the state until a settlement with the occupied is reached.

1948 was a fateful year for the colonial histories of Israel/Palestine and South Africa. Both societies share a particular preoccupation about demography. As A. D. Smith has pointed out in his work *Chosen people: Sacred Sources of National Identity* that both Zionism and Afrikaner nationalism have insisted on indigenous absence, on a "land without a people", or the emptiness of the South African frontier, arguing that the indigenous people had entered the geographic space identified by the colonized project only at some late historical stage. The author mentions also the differences between South Africa and Israel/Palestine regarding the attitude and influence of the international community. "It was ultimately US policy that largely determined the timing and outcome of the conflict in South Africa, just as it was US power that shaped the Oslo process, and supervised its demise." Does Veracini really think that? Israel is not a banana republic. The influence between the US and Israel is *vica versa*.

The author is aware of the fact that a comparative approach should take the obvious differences between Algeria in the 1950s and the current situation in Israel/Palestine into account. In France in the 1950s there was a strong and organized opposition to colonialism, in contrast to the apathy that characterizes Israel's peace movement and the political Zionist left. Veracini hints to more similarities like the war of decolonization in Algeria and the Cold War on the one hand, and the second Intifada and the post-9/11 global "war on terror" on the other. Some historical analogies between the French and the Zionist colonial enterprise leads the reader astray. The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza-Strip cannot be compared. The first was a military disaster for France while the last one was decided unilaterally out of demographical considerations. Some other comparisons are also ahistoric and superficial.

Veracini argues that in Australia and Israel history and political perceptions are rewritten. Both governments are convinced that they are proposing "generous offers" to their Aboriginal and Palestinian counterparts. As a result, a resolution to the conflict tends to fade into an indefinite future. Until 1988 a systematic historiography on the origins of the State of Israel did not exist. Until 1977 the intellectual debate was hegemonized by the Mapai, the Zionist Social Democratic Party. The so-called New

Historians from the left-wing Zionist and non-Zionist parties presented dissenting interpretations of the dominant Zionist narrative. They challenged the "founding myths" which surrounded the establishment of the State of Israel. This debate is still going on in Israel and Australia what the Aborital are concerned. Both states have finally failed to become a state of all its citicens. They have remained in many ways the state of a colonial project, so the author.

Progress in Israel/Palestine can only come about through a shift in US sensitivities which brought change in French Algeria and apartheid South Africa., writes Veracini. The Middle East may wait for the end of the global "war on terror" to see some positive developments. "America's last taboo" (Edward Said L. W.), the unquestioning and automatic US support for Israeli actions in the Occupied Territories, could then be seen as an outcome of a settler consciousness appeased by "frontier" images of a poineering enterprise (as well as by the influence exercised by the Zionist lobby in Washington)." Despite the "tremendously influential factor" the "Israel lobby" (Mearsheimer/Walt) has, the author regards the "settler-determined constituency and the availibility of a settler world-view" more important that can help explain US support for the Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories. Neither the current "unilateral Bantustanization" nor "the stabilization of a number of Bantustans will not bring the confrontation to an end". Lorenzo Veracini opens a long forgotten persective to look at the longest regional conflict in International Relations. His view could help to understand the neocolonial dynamics in the Middle East and beyond. For the west a rather unconventional viewpoint.

Ludwig Watzal