



Ilan Pappé, *Out of the Frame. The Struggle for Academic Freedom in Israel*, Pluto Press, London-New York 2010, 246 pp, L 13.

In this intellectual autobiography, Ilan Pappé, Professor in the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, tells his story of conversion from an Israeli Zionist to an anti-Zionist. For him, it was an act of liberation or even a kind of revelation which religious people sometimes experience. The author does not recall the precise moment of his awakening, but there was a moment when the un-Jewishness and immorality of the Zionist project became clear to him. He still does equate Jewishness and morality, not as superior to any other position, but rather as a comfortable heritage to which he belongs and on which he can rely on when making moral judgments. In his own words: “(F)rom this perspective, the Zionist project abused this kind of Judaism and this kind of morality. Worst of all was the Zionist and later Israeli abuse of the Holocaust memory to justify the dispossession of Palestine that disconcerted and outraged me. The abuse is obvious and yet so many today can still not see it. It was this departure point human and Jewish that recently led so many Jews to oppose crimes and policies done in the name of the state.”

In this book, Pappé tries to decipher the riddle of Zionist ideology that was once seen by him as the “ultimate expression of pristine humanity, but when abandoned, as a racist and quite evil philosophy of morality and life”. The author grew up in a typical Zionist-controlled environment until he left in 1981 for the United Kingdom to start his doctoral studies at Oxford University. At that time, he associated with a left-wing Zionist party. Two events caused the first fissures in Pappé’s Zionist-edifice: the Israeli invasion in Lebanon in 1981, and an invitation he received from the Israeli Embassy to deliver a speech at a pro-Israeli rally in the north of Britain. Pappé was picked by the embassy because they feared it was too dangerous to send an official representative after the assassination attempt on Ambassador Shlomo Argon. This explanation struck Pappé because it was not only the willingness to sacrifice him, should there be another terrorist attack, but also the presumption that he had no reservations about the attack on Lebanon. From here, he embarked on a journey with no return. This “divorce” did not mean that the author severs all ties with his country or his many friends in Israel. But to preserve a positive side of Jewish life in Israel, according to him, not only Palestinians would be better off with a “non-Zionist regime”, but so would most of the Israelis.

For an Israeli, to end by viewing Zionism as a colonial movement and not as a kind of liberation movement for the Jewish people, as Zionists claim, that person has to liberate himself from Zionism as an ideology. To equate Zionism, a late form of Jewish nationalism, with colonialism is a view not allowed in Israeli academic discourse; it is branded a gross ideological distortion of the so-called historical truth, writes Pappé. But the Zionist actually described their enterprise in colonialist terminology, and they were proud of it. They thus set up “the Jewish Colonization Association”, “the Society for the Colonization of the Land of Israel”, “the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association”, and “the Jewish Colonial Trust”. The Twelfth Zionist Congress set up a “Colonization Department”. Chaim Weizman compared the Zionist movement with the French colonization of Tunisia. Beyond that, they deployed the full battery of colonialist racist attitudes (a bulwark against Asia, and an advance post of civilization against barbarism, as Herzl sold its project to the Western imperialist powers), professing an overt disdain for the indigenous Arab population. All these early clichés are still rampant in Israeli society (Ehud Barak:

Israel, as a “villa in the jungle”). In his diary, the “father of Zionism”, Theodor Herzl, wrote that the indigenous inhabitants of the land should be “discreetly and circumspectly” expelled. In public, however, he declared the wish to advance the interests of the “native population”. Pappé mentions Herzl’s invention of the Zionist discourse, and that “one of his more important legacies was double-talk”. There has been essentially no change in Zionist colonial intentions, as the quotation of Israel Galili in Haaretz, April 18, 1972, illustrates: “Our right in Gaza is exactly like our right in Tel Aviv. We are colonizing Gaza exactly in the same manner in which we colonized Yafa. Those who doubt our right in Gaza should doubt our right in Tel Aviv as well.”

Pappé’s autobiography is closely linked to the history of his country and colonized Palestine. To view Zionism as a colonial movement cause him deep trouble. Unlike his colleague Benny Morris, who made a U-turn after the so-called peace talks at Camp David failed and joined the Zionist consensus again. Pappé stuck to his scholarly principles. The author mentions a meeting between Israeli and Palestinians historians in Paris in which they clashed about issues such the equation between Zionism and colonialism and the designation of the Naqba as an “ethnic cleansing” operation. At the forefront of this clash were Benny Morris and Itamar Rabinovitch. These Israeli historians, according to Pappé, doubted the ability of the Palestinians to possess the expertise or historical documents necessary for writing their own history. This would mean that, at least in that case, only the colonizer has the ability to write the history of the colonized.

In the chapter entitled “Arming of the Zionist Mind”, the author describes the role of the media in the militarization of Israeli society. With the exceptions of a few journalists, the whole media conglomerate is described as a willing mouthpiece of the army, security establishment, and for Zionist ideology. “The media could serve as the IDF’s (Israeli Defense Forces) spokesman, but not as its watchdog; very rarely was the army’s immunity from outside supervision questioned or challenged.” The military way of thinking infiltrates peu à peu all walks of Israeli society. The close relationship between the army and the academic elite corrupted traditional university ethos and strengthened the army’s ideological grip over academic freedom, so Pappé. The closed mind of many media people was also seen in the academia. The poster child of this was Benny Morris when he, as a “new historian” subscribed in 2004 to the view “that the expulsion was inevitable and should have been more comprehensive, it helped to legitimize any Israeli plans for further ethnic cleansing”.

What the author writes about the mobbing and the denunciation he was subjected to by his former colleagues at Haifa University, in the wake of the so-called Katz affair, can only be described as shameful. In his thesis, Katz documented the Tantura massacre alleged committed by an Israeli elite unit at Tantura in 1948. Although Katz did not write his thesis under Pappé’s supervision, Pappé defended him. As a result, a gauntlet started at the university. Social and academic contacts were cut off. The “system” isolated Pappé totally. An “intellectual and historiographical dialogue with my own society became impossible”. Emotional compensation for this personal vilification received the author from the Palestinian community in Israel. He even moved from Haifa to Kiryat Tivon where he established a sort of “home university” where he taught his fellow countryman about the Nakba and the crimes committed in the course of the establishment of the State of Israel on the indigenous population.

When he was publically accused by a TV-moderator as a “traitor”, and an ex-minister of justice called him “an agent of Hezbollah” (sic!), it was time for Pappé to look for a safe haven. The author mentions the crimes against the Palestinian and the Lebanese people which were committed between from 2000

until 2006, reaching its climax with the massacre on the civilian population of Gaza in 2008/09 shortly before the turn of the US-Presidency from George W. Bush to Barack H. Obama. In this massacre 1 400 people were killed, most of them civilians. The Western political elite called this massacre legitimate self-defense.

In the epilogue "Disarm Israel" Pappé shows how insane Israeli society has become. "It seems that people like me represent the new anti-Semitism, which had, like the old one, a strong self-hating component in it." For this distorted attitude, the author found a very appropriate explanation: "It was my Jewish origins that did not allow me to tolerate anymore the lie and pushed me to take an active part in unmasking it." For Pappé Zionism began as a "noble response" to an "acute real problem of Jewish existence in Europe". But this noble impulse was gone the moment Palestine was chosen for the Zionist enterprise. "It was not about rescuing people anymore, it was focused on colonization and dispossession." According to the author, Israel became an army with a state. The "disarmament" of this modern Sparta has to start with its ideological disarmament. This ideological disarmament should avoid unnecessary demonization, and has to distinguish between the state and the people. The tough dialogue must be initiated with the representatives of the state and a society that wish to be part of the "civilized" world, "while remaining racist and supremacist". Can there be a "dialogue" between oppressors and oppressed? If one is an optimist like Ilan Pappé, this aim could be achieved via the non-violent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign that are currently being pursued world-wide by civilian society.

In sum: An intellectual and political sophisticated autobiography.

Ludwig Watzal

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