

## **RELIGIOUS SIONISM & THE ISRAELI COLONIAL PROJECT**

Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio Vilariño

### **The creation of Israel: a colonial project**

From its inception at the end of the 19th century, the main claim of Zionism was the colonisation of Palestine. In his 1896 book *The Jewish State*, Theodor Herzl states: "I consider the Jewish question to be neither a social nor a religious question, although it shows these and other facets. It is a national question and, to solve it, we must make it a problem of international politics". From then on, Zionist leaders strove to enlist the support of the major Western powers for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, with the idea that it would become a bastion of Europe in the heart of the Arab world. Herzl, who was an ardent admirer of European colonialism and corresponded with the British tycoon Cecil-Rhodes, creator of the British South Africa Company, vehemently asserted: 'For Europe we would represent a bastion against Asia: we would be an outpost of civilisation against barbarism'.

Zionism, therefore, has many parallels with the European colonisation project and the need to maintain control of the land and appropriate the resources of the colonised peoples, and to displace and replace the indigenous people through settler colonialism. As the Catalan historian Joan Culla points out, 'If we consider colonialism as a socio-cultural superiority complex, a condescending, paternalistic or contemptuous attitude towards non-Europeans and their collective identities and aspirations, it is clear that Zionists participate in such traits and insert themselves, consciously or not, in the background wave of the great imperialist expansion of the Old World' (2005: 59). This superiority complex was not only limited to the Arab population, but also extended to the Jewish population from Arab countries: the Sephardim and Mizrahi who were considered second-class citizens and inferior to the Ashkenazi, the European Jewish promoters of Zionism.

In the view of Palestinian journalist Amjad Iraqi of the Arab Minority Rights Law Center in Israel-Adalah: 'As a nationalist-colonialist project of European origin, Zionism was essentially conceived as an engine for Jews to replicate the path of Western nations in the 19th and early 20th century. At this point, statehood was not simply about embodying self-determination: it implied the right to dispossess other peoples of their lands, deprive 'inferior' subjects of civil liberties, and inflict monstrous violence aimed at erasing the unwanted society and its culture' (2024). This project demanded the invisibilisation of the indigenous population through foundational myths such as 'a land without a people for a people without a land': 'In the case of Zionism, its discourse was structured around the redemption of European Jews and the denial of the existence of the indigenous people inhabiting the territory under its colonisation' (Abu-Tarbush and Barreñada, 2023: 87). The Zionist project would gain full British backing through the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised the conversion of Palestine into 'the national home for the Jewish people'.

Zionism's advocacy of colonisation is still relevant today. The Smotrich Plan, promoted in 2017 by the current finance minister, considers that Israel should pursue its *fait accompli* policy by building new settlements to make the emergence of a Palestinian state entirely unfeasible. Under the heading "victory through colonisation" it is made clear that "we are here to stay":

"Our national ambition of a Jewish state from the river to the sea is a *fait accompli*, a fact that brooks no discussion or negotiation. This stage will be realised through a political-legal act of imposing sovereignty over the whole of Judea and Samaria and through recurring acts of settlement: the establishment of towns and villages, the building of infrastructure as is customary in 'little' Israel and the encouragement of tens and hundreds of thousands of residents to come and live in Judea and Samaria. In this way, we can create a clear and irreversible reality on the ground. Nothing would have a greater and more profound effect on the consciousness of the Arabs of Judea and Samaria, undermining their illusions of a Palestinian state and demonstrating the impossibility of establishing another Arab state west of the Jordan. The facts on the ground weaken aspirations and defeat ambitions. The settlement blocs bear witness to this.

The settlement colonialism so common in the 19th century was born when a group of European immigrants claimed a territory already inhabited by another people, requiring, on the one hand, the appropriation of the land and its resources and, on the other hand, the dispossession and displacement of the native population

which, in turn, was replaced by outsiders. Zionism is a product of its time, as it was born in Central Europe in the last decades of the 19th century when the European colonialist project reached its peak with the Congress of Berlin in which the major European powers divided up the African continent. As Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, points out in an article published in the Middle East Report and Information Project: "Settlers reconstruct the social order of the colony by introducing new hierarchies and institutions through raiding, appropriation, redistribution, exploitation, extermination, erasure and/or violence. They transform land and society while rejecting indigenous claims to territory and sovereignty. These changes have various consequences for the native population, including dispossession, displacement, forced labour, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The control of land demanded by Zionism requires the dispossession and expulsion of the indigenous population, which can only be achieved through violence. As the Jewish revisionist thinker Vladimir Jabotinsky pointed out in his famous article "The Iron Wall. We and the Arabs" published on 4 November 1923 in the Russian newspaper Razsviet:

"There can be no voluntary agreement between us and the Palestinian Arabs. Neither now, nor in the future. I say this with such conviction, not because I want to hurt moderate Zionists. Except for those who were born blind, the rest realised long ago that it is utterly impossible to obtain the voluntary consent of the Arabs to convert Palestine from an Arab country into a country with a Jewish majority. My readers have a general idea of the history of colonisation in other countries. I suggest that they consider all the precedents they know of and check whether there is a single case of colonisation that has been carried out with the consent of the native population. There is no such precedent. The native populations, civilised or uncivilised, have always stubbornly resisted the colonists, whether they were civilised or savages".

Realising that the Palestinian population would oppose the Zionist project with all its might, Jabotinsky proposed creating a military organisation powerful enough to dissuade them from rebelling. Indeed, he went so far as to point out: 'Zionism is a colonising venture and therefore it stands or falls by its military strength'. Consistent with this idea, the Russian-born Jewish thinker advocated the construction of 'an iron wall that the Palestinians cannot break through' and established the paramilitary organisation Betar, inspired by the Black Shirts that Benito Mussolini mobilised for the March on Rome in October 1922. On numerous occasions Jabotinsky displayed his contempt for the Arab population: 'We Jews, thank God, have nothing to do with the East' (Jabotinsky, 1922, p. 1). The Islamic soul must be swept out of Eretz Israel', pointing, on another occasion, to the Palestinians as 'a vociferous and noisy mob covered in rabidly gaudy rags'.

The Betar's main slogans were "with fire and blood Judea will be reborn" and "there is no law or justice or God in heaven. Only one law decides and surpasses them all: the Jewish occupation of the land". Betar was instrumental in the establishment of the terrorist groups Irgun and Lehi, commanded by Menahem Begin and Isaac Shamir respectively, who would eventually become prime ministers of Israel. These groups were responsible for the notorious Deir Yasin massacre on 9 April 1948 in which 250 civilians were murdered in cold blood. Such practices of psychological terrorism terrorised the local population and accelerated the flight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes before the proclamation of the State of Israel on 14 May of the same year.

Jabotinsky's Revisionist Party, later to become the Herut, the predecessor of Likud, advocated the establishment of a Jewish state encompassing not only British Mandate Palestine but also Transjordan under the control of the Hashemite dynasty. As Palestinian historian Nur Masalha (2000: 75) notes, 'in contrast to the pragmatic and gradual expansionism of Labour Zionism, with its perception of political reality and what was possible under local, regional and international conditions, Revisionist Zionism has always been known for its maximalist political goals, which during the Mandate included the establishment of a Jewish state on both banks of the Jordan'.

David Ben Gurion would eventually assimilate Jabotinsky's thesis, believing that the Palestinians would never willingly accept being dispossessed of their land, and acknowledged: "If I were an Arab leader, I would never sign an agreement with Israel. It is normal; we have taken their country. It is true that God promised it to us, but why should they care. Our God is not their God. There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was it their fault? They only see one thing: we have come and stolen their country. Why should they accept that? The Israeli leader also noted in 1938: "Let us not ignore the truth: politically we are the

aggressors and they defend themselves [...]. The country is theirs, because they inhabit it, while we want to come here and settle, and in their opinion we want to take their country from them [...]. Behind [the Arabs'] terrorism is a movement which, although primitive, is not without idealism and sacrifice'.

It is well known that the Israeli Labour leadership accepted the 1947 UN Participation Plan and that the Palestinian nationalist movement rejected a project that confined them to 45 per cent of their territory despite the fact that they represent two-thirds of the population. Not to mention that the indigenous people of Palestine were not consulted, contrary to the UN Charter itself, and that the Palestinian national movement had been dismantled by Britain after the anti-colonial rebellion of 1936-1939. However, it is often not emphasised enough that Ben Gurion considered, as Masalha points out, that these borders were merely circumstantial. As a good 'practical expansionist', the Labour leader believed that 'the borders of the Jewish state should be flexible, never fixed in a definitive way, but would depend on the nature and needs of the historical moment and on regional and international conditions' (2000: 17). As Ben Gurion himself would acknowledge, such acceptance of the Partition Plan represented only an intermediate stage until "we create a powerful army immediately after the proclamation of the State, abolish the division of the country and spread over the entire Land of Israel".

Numerous historians have weighed in on the debate over the ethnic cleansing of 1948, which resulted in the expulsion of at least 750,000 Palestinians from their homes in the course of the Nakba. Israeli academic Benny Morris is one of them. In an interview published in the daily Haaretz on 9 January 2004, Morris responded: 'If Ben Gurion had carried out a comprehensive expulsion and cleansed the whole country, the whole Land of Israel, all the way to the Jordan River, this may have been his fatal mistake. If he had carried out a complete expulsion, instead of a partial one, he would have stabilised Israel for generations. Morris went even further, suggesting that the expulsion of the Palestinian population fell short: "If history ends badly for the Jews, it will be because Ben Gurion did not complete the population transfer in 1948. Because he left a large and volatile demographic pool in the West Bank and Gaza and within Israel itself [...]. Israeli Arabs are a ticking time bomb. Their slide towards complete Palestinianisation has made them an emissary of the enemy in our midst. They are a potential fifth column. Both in the demographic and security sense they have a tendency to undermine the state. Thus, if Israel finds itself once again in a situation of existential threat, as in 1948, it may be forced to act as it did then".

### **The intensification of colonisation after 1967**

After the Six Day War in 1967, the colonisation effort also extended to the Palestinian territories of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as to the Egyptian Sinai and the Syrian Golan, all of which were occupied by the Israeli army between 5 and 10 June. As Nur Masalha (2000: 28) points out, "the expansionist instincts of Greater Israel" were intensified as a result of "the claim to 'historic Jewish rights in the Land of Israel' which had a solid basis in the secular mainstream of Labour Zionism", but also because the military victory signalled "the triumph of Zionism and the creation of a confident, dynamic and half-militarised settler society", as well as by "the extraordinarily effective mobilisation in Israel of neo-Zionists, Jewish political fundamentalists and other social forces".

Colonisation began immediately after the occupation of the territories in order to make the return to the pre-war situation irreversible. Yigal Allon, Labour's deputy prime minister and head of the immigration portfolio, told a government meeting on 16 June 1967: 'There is no need to return a single inch of the West Bank to any foreign government. It is within this framework that a solution must be sought. Our control over the Jordan Valley is a necessity that we cannot relinquish'. A few weeks later, the Labour leader released the Allon Plan, in which he called for the absorption of as much land as possible with as few inhabitants as possible. This plan twisted the security argument to argue that Israel should retain control of the Sinai, Golan and Jordan Valley and reject the return to the 5 June 1967 borders called for by the resolutions 242 of the Security Council. The most relevant aspect of this proposal was the separation it established between the land and the population, a true cornerstone of subsequent Labour initiatives in the decades that followed; it sought to dissociate the domination of the land and the administration of affairs related to its Palestinian population, a principle that was taken up by the Oslo Agreements.

The Likud's electoral triumph in 1977 led to the rise to power of Menahem Begin, Ariel Sharon and Isaac Shamir, all disciples of Jabotinsky and advocates of extending Jewish sovereignty to the whole of Eretz Israel.

Thereafter, the occupied territories were renamed 'liberated territories' and the biblical names Judea and Samaria were adopted to refer to the West Bank, while its population became known as 'the Arabs of the Land of Israel'. To implement his plans, Begin forged a close alliance with the settlers and, in particular, with their most extremist wing, the Gush Emunim movement, which saw colonisation as an essential condition for hastening the redemption of the people of Israel and bringing about the coming of the messiah (Sprinzak, 1991: 88).

As settler movement leader Daniella Weiss emphasises in a recent interview published by The New Yorker on 11 November 2023: 'The Six Day War was a miracle and it awakened very deep feelings towards the birthplace of our nation: Hebron, Shiloh, Jericho and Nablus. And, because of the miracle of the war, we had a spiritual feeling that something of biblical dimensions was happening. I felt that I wanted to actively participate in this miraculous event and I was part of the settler movement Gush Emunim, which established communities in Judea and Samaria'. For her, Palestinians "must accept the fact that there is only one sovereign in the Land of Israel. This is the point. We, the Jews, are the sovereigns in the State of Israel and in the Land of Israel. They have to accept that."

The Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful) movement was established in 1974 in the settlement of Gush Etzion and was closely linked to the Merkaz Ha-Rav yeshiva of the Ashkenazi grand rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and his son Zvi Yehuda Kook, who saw the territorial conquests of 1948 and 1967 as signs of the entry into an era that would lead to the coming of the messiah. According to this approach, colonisation was an essential condition for hastening the redemption of the Jewish people. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook provided 'a coherent religious-national Zionist philosophy and thus attempted to bridge the gap between religious Judaism and modern Jewish nationalism' (Avineri, 1983: 216-219) and exerted an undeniable influence on future generations and, like his son, brought Zionist nationalism closer to Jewish religious orthodoxy' (ibid.).

The settlers of Gush Emunim interpreted the Land of Israel as sacred because God had promised it to Abraham 4,000 years ago. As Israeli historian Ehud Sprinzak aptly warns, 'when their ideologues speak of the Land of Israel they think not only of the post-1967 territory, but also of the land promised in the Covenant (Genesis 15: 18) which includes the occupied territories, especially Judea and Samaria, the central core of the historic Israeli nation and vast areas now belonging to Jordan, Syria and Iraq' (1991: 113). This is a sentiment shared by many Israeli settlers, such as the aforementioned Weiss, who interprets that "the borders of the Jewish homeland are the Euphrates to the east and the Nile to the southwest" and that the Jewish people have priority over the land of Palestine because they were "the first nation to receive the word of God, the promise of God, the first nation that has the right to it".

Gush Emunim was given the green light by Begin's government to colonise the West Bank by establishing dozens of settlements. His demands were taken up by the Plan for the Development of the Settlement of Judea and Samaria (1979-1983) drawn up by Mattityahu Drobles, director of the Settlement Department of the World Zionist Organisation, and presented by Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon in October 1978. The purpose of the plan was to multiply the creation of settlements with the intention of besieging Arab populations. One of the paragraphs of the Drobles Plan reads: "State lands and uncultivated lands must be requisitioned immediately in order to colonise the areas between and around the [Palestinian] minority concentrations, in order to minimise the possibility of the development of another Arab state in the region. It will be difficult for the minority population to form territorial continuity and political unity when it is fragmented by Jewish settlements".

Begin's radical government viewed the Jewish colonies as 'confrontational settlements' and granted the settlers full military powers. A UN committee charged with investigating the human rights situation in the occupied territories issued a devastating report in 1985 that noted:

"The extent and strength of the activities of these settlers vis-à-vis the Palestinians in the occupied territories indicate that it is in fact the settlers who constitute the real authority [...], the civilian population remains without any protection. This attitude is corroborated by the leniency with which the Israeli authorities treat members of Jewish underground groups found guilty of murder and physical abuse of the civilian population [...]. There can be no doubt that the real political force in the occupied territories, which determines the fate of the civilian population, is made up of the settlers illegally settled in those territories" (UN, 1990: 255).

The Oslo Agreements signed in 1993 did not allow for the creation of a Palestinian state on the territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 war, but divided their territory into three areas: A, B and C.. The Palestinian Authority only had direct control over Area A and indirect control over Area B, while Area C, which represented two-thirds of the West Bank, remained in the hands of the occupying troops. Although it also stipulated that the parties would not develop measures to alter the situation on the ground, in practice Israel continued to build settlements and move its population into occupied territory in a blatant violation of international law that prevented the occupying power from moving its population into areas under its occupation. Between 1990 and 1995 the number of settlers in the West Bank and Gaza almost doubled from 76,000 to 145,000.

Although the Oslo Agreements warned that the parties should refrain from changing the status of the occupied territories, Israel took advantage of the constructive ambiguity to multiply its settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Thirty years after the Oslo Agreements, the situation could not be more dramatic. According to Human Rights Watch, "while Palestinians have a limited degree of self-rule in some parts of the occupied territories, Israel retains primary control over borders, airspace, movement of people and goods, security and registration of the entire population, which in turn dictates issues such as legal status and the ability to issue identity documents".

According to the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem, "Israel practices a policy of 'Judaisation' based on the maxim that land is a resource meant almost exclusively for the Jewish people. Land is used to develop and expand existing Jewish communities and build new ones, while Palestinians are dispossessed and confined to small, overcrowded enclaves."

Today, 800,000 settlers reside in the occupied territories, which means that colonisation has not only not stopped, but has grown at a faster pace since the signing of the Oslo Agreements. There is no doubt that one of the main supporters of the Netanyahu government is precisely the settler movement, which sees it as the only way to avoid the two-state solution. In fact, the government programme of 28 December 2022 stated that "the Jewish people have an exclusive and unquestionable right to all areas of the Land of Israel. The government will promote and develop settlements in all parts of the Land of Israel: in the Galilee, the Negev, the Golan, Judea and Samaria".

In their report *Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: A cruel system of domination and crime against humanity* in 2022, Amnesty International concluded that there is "an institutionalised and systematic discrimination by Israel against Palestinians under the international law definition of *apartheid*" with "Israel's intention to oppress and dominate all Palestinians by establishing its hegemony over the whole of Israel and the occupied territories, including by demographic means, and maximising resources for the benefit of its Jewish population at the expense of the Palestinians", which represents "a violation of international law, a gross violation of human rights and a crime against humanity" as set out in the Apartheid Convention and the Statute of Rome.

According to the report, "this segregation is carried out in a systematic and highly institutionalised manner through laws, policies and practices, all aimed at preventing Palestinians from claiming and enjoying the same rights as Jewish Israelis within Israel and the occupied territories, and thus aimed at oppressing and dominating the Palestinian people".

In recent decades, supremacist and messianic groups have been able to impose their agenda on Israeli society as a whole and place their supporters in prominent positions in the administration, military and politics. According to a 2016 Pew Research Center poll, 65 per cent of settlers who considered themselves orthodox supported the expulsion of the Palestinian population from Israel. A November 2023 The Peace Index survey, following the 7 October 2023 attacks, conducted by Tel Aviv University, showed a clear reversal of support for the two-state solution, with only 14.6 per cent of the Jewish population supporting it, while 43.7 per cent favoured maintaining the current status quo indefinitely.

It should not be overlooked that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made the defence of Eretz Israel, the Greater Israel that stretches from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, his top priority. The complete defeat of the Palestinian nationalist movement, which aspires to erect a sovereign and independent state on the territories occupied by Israel since 1967: East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, is a *sine qua non*

for achieving this goal. As Israeli journalist Aluf Benn (2024) notes, "Netanyahu has devoted his term as prime minister, the longest in Israel's history, to undermining and marginalising the Palestinian national movement. He has promised his people that they can prosper without peace. He has sold the country on the idea that it can continue to occupy Palestinian land indefinitely with little internal or international cost".

The decisions taken by the Netanyahu government, born in December 2022, have been decisive in explaining the escalation of violence in recent years. This government, considered the most radical in Israel's history, consists of a heterogeneous amalgam of forces. On the one hand, Likud, an ultra-nationalist party staunchly in favour of Eretz Israel and therefore opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state, defeated the Labour Party for the first time in the 1977 elections. The second component is Religious Zionism, made up of various Jewish supremacist formations, which advocates the unilateral annexation of the West Bank and the colonisation of Gaza. The third link is the Sephardic-Mizrahi religious parties Shas and Ashkenazi United Torah Judaism, with a purely ultra-Orthodox agenda based on defending their privileges: funding for yeshivas or religious schools and exemption from military service, among others.

In total, this coalition accounts for 64 of the 120 seats in the Knesset. The glue that binds together such different political formations and sensibilities is the attempt to impose Jewish sovereignty over the whole of Eretz Israel to the detriment of Palestinian national aspirations. The means to do so is the expansion of settlement to the whole of the West Bank in order to make the two-state solution unworkable. Indeed, the government's programme states flatly that 'the Jewish people have the exclusive and undisputed right to all parts of the Land of Israel', which includes the territories occupied by Palestinians since the 1967 war. The Netanyahu government has pledged to extend Israeli sovereignty to the West Bank (referred to by its biblical name: Judea and Samaria) in this legislature, in line with traditional Zionist plans to make Palestine a state for the Jewish people.

Netanyahu's two main government allies are Bezalel Smotrich, head of the Religious Zionist Party and head of the Finance Ministry, and Itamar Ben Gvir, leader of Jewish Power and Minister of Internal Security.

The Religious Zionism party to which they both belong has 14 seats in the 120-seat Knesset and is the third largest political force in Israel with more than 10 per cent of the votes cast in the 2022 legislative elections. Its importance lies not only in the broad support it enjoys in society, but also in its ability to condition governance, as its support is indispensable to keep the current coalition government in power and to safeguard Netanyahu from the judicial investigations that have him in their grip.

Religious Zionism is a supremacist, messianic organisation that believes that the whole of the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people by divine will. In reality, Religious Zionism is not an entirely new movement, but is the heir to a series of parties that existed in the 1980s and 1990s, including Moledet, Tzomet and the National Religious Party. They all agreed on a maximalist programme that Palestinian historian Nur Masalha summarises in five points: "(1) maximum territorial expansionism; (2) complete and immediate annexation of the territories occupied in 1967; (3) repression of the Intifada and any form of Palestinian resistance by all means and forces necessary; (4) establishment of massive Jewish settlements; and (5) expulsion of the Palestinians" (2000: 38). Its most ultramontane sectors, as Prime Minister Netanyahu now does, demanded "the total annihilation of the modern Amalek", referring to the native Palestinian population.

Itamar Ben Gvir, the internal security minister, comes from the radical Kach party, which until recently was on the US list of terrorist organisations and advocated the expulsion of the Palestinian population on the grounds that the Israeli people had an exclusive right to the Land of Israel by divine will. Meir Kahane, the Kach's top leader, used to repeat at his rallies: 'The Arabs are a cancer [...]. I tell you what every one of you feels in your heart of hearts: there is only one solution and no other, no partial solution: Arabs out, out.... Do not ask me how.... Let me be your defence minister for two months and you will not see a single cockroach around you! I promise to cleanse the Land of Israel! Ben Gvir, who resides in the Kiryat Arba settlement in the heart of the Palestinian town of Hebron, is also a known admirer of Baruch Goldstein, a militant settler from Kach who perpetrated the 1994 Abraham Mosque massacre in the course of which 29 Palestinians were killed and 120 others wounded.

The Internal Security Minister is also notorious for leading extremist settler incursions into the Esplanade of the Mosques that houses Jerusalem's Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site for Muslims after Mecca and Medina,

to demand the Judaisation of the mosque. Between January and October 2023 alone, more than 50,000 radical Jews visited the Muslim shrine in a provocation unprecedented in recent history and in a clear attempt to change the status quo of the shrine that prevents non-Muslims from holding religious ceremonies in its spaces. It should be recalled that messianic sectors advocate the construction of a third temple once the Aqsa Mosque is destroyed, believing that this would hasten the arrival of the messiah. These actions are anything but innocent, as it was Ariel Sharon's entry into the Esplanade of the Mosques that triggered the Aqsa Intifada in 2000.

Bezalel Smotrich, for his part, is one of the most influential ministers in the Israeli cabinet after taking over the finance portfolio, whose powers go far beyond what might be imagined. In fact, the ministry exercises absolute control over almost two-thirds of the West Bank, the so-called Area C of the Oslo Agreements where more than 400,000 Israeli settlers live and where Smotrich wields absolute powers. Two years ago, the Israeli politician was involved in a bitter dispute with an Arab member of the Knesset to whom he said: "You are here because of a mistake, it is a mistake that Ben Gurion did not finish the job and did not expel you in 1948".

Both Ben Gvir and Smotrich have actively lobbied for the 28 December 2022 Israeli government programme to recognise that "the Jewish people have an exclusive and inalienable right to all parts of the Land of Israel. The government will promote and develop settlements in all parts of the Land of Israel: the Galilee, the Negev, the Golan, Judea and Samaria". The programme also stated: "The government will preserve the Jewish character of the state and the heritage of Israel, as well as respect the religions and traditions of the adherents of the country's religions, in accordance with the values of the Declaration of Independence".

Both leaders espouse a messianic ideology and believe that the Land of Israel belongs exclusively to the Jews. In fact, they reside in settlement colonies that are illegal according to international conventions, although they consider settlement as a religious duty to redeem the occupied land. Smotrich became notorious in 2017 for a pamphlet entitled Israel's Decisive Plan in which he advocated the expulsion of the Palestinian population that did not recognise Jewish supremacy over Judea and Samaria, as they call the West Bank. The plan stated: "Those who choose not to renounce their national ambitions will be assisted to emigrate to one of the many countries where Arabs realise their national ambitions or to any other destination in the world".

In reality, the Smotrich Doctrine is not new, but rather draws on a line of thought that is widespread among the supremacist and messianic sectors of Zionism. The main novelty is that this doctrine, once a minority, has gained significant support within Israeli society to the point that its main proponents enjoy enormous weight in the political arena and have the power to impose it as a programme of government. As Israeli activist Orly Noy points out, "an examination of Israeli media and political discourse shows that, when it comes to the army's assault on Gaza, much of public opinion has fully internalised the logic of Smotrich's plan. Indeed, Israeli public opinion on Gaza, where Smotrich's vision is being implemented with a ruthlessness that even he could not have foreseen, is now even more extreme than the text of the plan itself. That is because, in practice, Israel is removing from the agenda the first possibility offered to it - that of an inferior, de-Palestinised existence - which until 7-O was the option chosen by the majority of Israelis" (2023).

The Smotrich Plan interprets 'ending the conflict means creating and consolidating the idea that there is room for only one expression of national self-determination west of the Jordan River: that of the Jewish nation. Consequently, no Arab state can emerge on the same territory to realise Arab national aspirations. Victory means putting an end to this dream. And as the motivation for its realisation diminishes, so will the campaign of terror against Israel'. All this "requires the application of full Israeli sovereignty to the central regions of Judea and Samaria and the end of the conflict by colonisation through the establishment of new towns and settlements inside the territory and the arrival of hundreds of thousands more settlers to live in them. This process will make it clear to all that the reality in Judea and Samaria is irreversible, that the State of Israel is here to stay and that the Arab dream of a state in Judea and Samaria is no longer viable. Victory through colonisation will impress on the conscience of the Arabs and the world that an Arab state will never emerge on this land.

The alternatives for the Palestinian population of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem would, according to the plan, be reduced to three: "(1) Those who wish to give up their national aspirations can stay here and live as individuals in the Jewish state; they will, of course, enjoy all the benefits that the Jewish state has brought and brings to the Land of Israel; (2) those who choose not to give up their national ambitions will be assisted

to emigrate to one of the many countries where Arabs realise their national ambitions, or to any other destination in the world; (3) presumably not everyone will adopt one of these two options. There will be those who continue to choose the other 'option': to continue fighting the IDF, the State of Israel and the Jewish population: these terrorists will be met by the security forces with an iron fist.

The plan considers that for Palestinians who chose the first option and decided to accept Jewish sovereignty over their territories, the Israeli state should "define a residency model that includes autonomous self-governance, including municipal administrations, along with individual rights and obligations. The Arabs of Judea and Samaria will conduct their daily lives on their own terms through regional municipal administrations devoid of national characteristics. Like other local authorities, they will hold their own elections and maintain regular economic and municipal relations with the authorities of the State of Israel. In time, and depending on loyalty to the state and its institutions, and military or national service, models of residency and even citizenship will be offered'. On the other hand, it states that "the Arabs of Judea and Samaria will be able to conduct their daily lives in freedom and peace, but not to vote in the Israeli Knesset. This will preserve the Jewish majority in decision-making in the State of Israel".

The 7-O massacre has meant that these previously minority theses have found growing support in Israeli society. As Israeli activist Orli Noy (2023) points out, 'the terrifying *smotrichisation* of Israeli public opinion is embodied in the total willingness to sacrifice the lives of every last Palestinian in Gaza for the final victory that the far-right minister promised in his plan [...]. In the opinion of most Israeli Jews, the more than two million Palestinians in Gaza should have shut their mouths and accepted their starvation. But today, even this option is no longer satisfactory, leaving the Israelis to unite behind a new ultimatum for Gaza: emigration or annihilation."

## Bibliography

- ABU-TARBUSH, J. y BARREÑADA, I. (2023): *Palestina: de los Acuerdos de Oslo al apartheid*, Madrid: Catarata.
- AVINERI, S. (1983): *La idea sionista. Notas sobre el pensamiento nacional judío*, Jerusalén: La Semana Publicaciones Ltda.
- BENN, A. (2024): "Israel's Self-Destruction. Netanyahu, the Palestinians, and the Price of Neglect", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April.
- CULLÁ, J. (2015): *La tierra más disputada. El sionismo, Israel y el conflicto de Palestina*, Barcelona: Alianza Editorial.
- HERZL, T. (1896): *The Jewish State*, New York: American Zionist Emergency Council.
- IRAQI, A. (2024): "Israel's right to tyranny", *+972 Magazine*, 17 de enero.
- MASALHA, N. (2000): *Israel: teorías de la expansión colonial*, Barcelona: Bellaterra.
- NOY, O. (2023): "The Israeli public has embraced the Smotrich doctrine", *+972 Magazine*, 10 de noviembre.
- OLMERT, E. (2020): "Israel is becoming a fascist country", *The Jerusalem Post*, 2 de julio.
- SABBAGH-KHOURY, A. (2022), "But if I don't steal it, someone else is gonna steal it" – Israeli Settler-Colonial Accumulation by Dispossession", *Middle East Report and Information Project*, n. 302, Spring.
- SPRINZAK, E. (1991): *The Ascendancy of Israel's Radical Right*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- REPORTS
- AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (2022): *Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity*, MDE 15/5141/2022, 1 de febrero.
- B'TSELEM (2021): *A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid*.
- HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (2021): *A Threshold Crossed. Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, 27 de abril.
- NACIONES UNIDAS (1990): *Orígenes y evolución del problema palestino (1917-1988)*, Nueva York: Naciones Unidas.
- PEW RESEARCH CENTER (2016), *Israel's Religiously Divided Society*, 8 de marzo.

Translated with DeepL.com (free version)