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Eliau Weizman

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# The anticolonial settler: reflections on citizenship, violence and decolonisation

Elian Weizman

School of Law and Social Sciences, London South Bank University, London, UK

## ABSTRACT

Focusing on Israel/Palestine, this article explores the role of anticolonial settler-citizens, discussing how they may advance or impede struggles to dismantle the settler state. It shows how in settler states citizenship is founded on, and functions through, violence. It then analyses how the settler colonial condition imposes a set of paradoxes on those settler-citizens who wish to resist the colonial condition, thus limiting possibilities for settler solidarity and co-resistance. Overall, the article presents a critique of the role of citizenship in decolonisation struggles, including through the framework of ‘acts of citizenship’. It shows that the role of violence and non-violence in the (anti)colonial project is key to unravelling the impossibility of bridging the inherent fault line of being anticolonial while remaining settlers. Lessons from other past and present decolonisation struggles teach us that settler solidarity and co-resistance must centre indigenous struggles and take leadership from them, in ways accepting the uncertainty of the settlers’ future after decolonisation. Only such recognition can allow genuine allyship and solidarity and with it hope for such a future.

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No matter how liberated you are, if you are still occupying Indigenous lands you are still a colonizer. [...]

The work of an accomplice in anti-colonial struggle is to attack colonial structures & ideas.

(Indigenous Action 2014)

In Israel, Zionist ideology, discourse and practice hold a hegemonic commonsensical position. Only a tiny minority of Israeli Jews, numbering in the hundreds at most, consider themselves part of an anti-colonial struggle – one led by Palestinians whose continued existence on their own land is at stake. These Israeli Jews contribute their voices, bodies, skills and knowledge to the struggle against the Israeli state’s ideology, practices and policies. They regularly travel to the occupied West Bank or approach the fence encircling the Gaza Strip, using their bodies to confront armed soldiers or violent settlers. They chain themselves to trees at risk of being uprooted and houses facing demolition, remove road blocks, sleep in situ, escort Palestinian children to schools or farmers to their fields to protect them from settler violence, join marches, document, advise, rebuild demolished homes, guide tours, console, encourage, disseminate

**CONTACT** Elian Weizman  [weizmane@lsbu.ac.uk](mailto:weizmane@lsbu.ac.uk)

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information and contribute in other innovative ways, including artistic production. Most of them enter 'forbidden' places,<sup>1</sup> take part in civil disobedience, sharing their contempt of the Israeli state and its legal symbols. Many support and actively promote the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions<sup>2</sup> against the State of Israel. Their actions and demonstrations also take place on the Israeli side of the Green Line – the demarcation boundary of Israel prior to the 1967 war. They seek to disrupt the normality of Israeli life, raise awareness or use their bodies to oppose actions by agents of the state.

Disobeying orders and laws, many have been arrested, detained, injured, harassed and denounced by their own families, community and society at large. Still, they continue to struggle. It is their activism, their constant, uncompromising and uncomfortable acts of resistance,<sup>3</sup> that make them anti-colonial, Jewish Israeli citizens who reject being complicit in the Zionist colonial project that purports to act in their names.

This small group of Jewish-Israeli anticolonial (or anti-Zionist) activists is not unified for there are divisions and disagreement over strategies, priorities and activities. What unites them is what is pertinent for the discussion here. While being a part of the privileged group of settler-citizens they actively reject and fight to dismantle Zionist ideology and practice, recognising its structural racialised hierarchies of privilege. My focus on the small group of self-defining anti-Zionists is grounded in the understanding that 'to bring about a radical change in (the) present structure . . . depends upon how clearly those people advocating change want a change and understand the system they are facing' (Deloria [1970] 2007, 67). I exclude many other activists whose critique is limited to the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for they accept the existence of Israel as a 'Jewish and democratic' state, albeit a deeply flawed one. I thus focus on committed 'anticolonial settler-activists'. I explore the paradoxes of their position, how can one 'refuse an ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationship'? (Memmi [1957] 2003, 64). I intend to explore the possibilities and conditions under which settler citizens can resist the structures that give them privileges and become allies in anticolonial struggle.

This article offers a conceptual reflection on the role and positionality of the anticolonial settler-citizen, with a focus on Israel/Palestine. These reflections are based on existing empirical research previously conducted by myself and others,<sup>4</sup> as well as my own experience and questions I have asked myself as a settler scholar, anti-Zionist Jewish Israeli, who thinks and writes about the Zionist settler colonial project in Palestine from afar. The article investigates how activists take up the role of the 'anti-colonial settler' and attempts to understand the possibilities and limits to resisting their structural positions as settlers.

I put forward three interrelated arguments. First, that in settler states, citizenship, as a legal institution and structure of privileges, is founded on and functions through violence. I trace the evolution of citizenship law at the birth of the Israeli state, thus exposing the links between settler colonialism, violence, law and the institution of citizenship. Second, building on the writing of Albert Memmi and Franz Fanon, I argue that the settler colonial condition – enshrined in the duties and norms of 'settler citizenship' – imposes a set of paradoxes on those settler-citizens who wish to resist the colonial condition and struggle against it, thus limiting the possibilities for settler solidarity and co-resistance. Thirdly, I trace the role of violence and nonviolence in the (anti)colonial project, as key to unravelling the impossibility of overcoming the inherent

fault line of being anticolonial while remaining colonisers/settlers. I conclude with concrete lessons from historical and contemporary decolonisation struggles that teach us that settler solidarity and co-resistance must centre indigenous struggles and take leadership from them, in a way that accepts the uncertainty of the (settlers') future after decolonisation. At the same time, this mode of practice may also contain within it the possibility that through the construction of allyship and solidarity such a future might exist.

### Beginnings: settler colonialism and the violence of settler citizenship

In the aftermath of the 1948 war in British Mandatory Palestine between the Zionist Jewish community and the Palestinians, the Zionists gained the upper hand. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was a culmination, albeit not the end, of the colonial project pursued by the Zionist movement since the late 1800s with a view to settling the 'biblical land of Israel' with Jews (Erekat, 2019, 54). Rather than being a miraculous achievement, the Zionist victory in 1948 was the outcome of years of political and military preparation by the Zionist movement in Palestine and globally that facilitated a situation in which a minority population managed to prevail, and to become the majority in the newly established polity – the State of Israel (Robinson 2013). In the words of Erekat:

What began as British Prerogative (establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine) and was later enshrined into international law and policy (in the Mandate for Palestine) now became embodied in the legitimacy and legal standing of the Israeli state. (2019, 54).

The violence of the 1948 war was immense. Around 1% of the Jewish population died. Yet their vulnerability pales into insignificance when compared with the catastrophe that befell the Palestinians. Jewish-Zionist forces conquered nearly 78% of Mandatory Palestine and expelled some 750,000 Palestinians from the boundaries of the newly established state. Palestine 'had been wiped off the map, and the designated Arab state [in the partition plan] fell into virtual oblivion' (Robinson 2013, 27). The war was a turning point for the Zionist movement. The Jewish community reversed the minority status of Palestine's Jews, a demographic reality that had concerned Zionist leaders for decades, by forging an understanding that removal of the existing Palestinian population would be essential for the establishment of the envisioned 'Jewish state' (*ibid.*, 11).

The Zionist project that sought to revolutionise Jewish life and to create a new Jew and a new Jewish nation in its 'ancestral land' now formalised itself into a state, a system that needed the legitimating guise of the rule of law, and within it, the regularisation of the relationship between the new state and the individual via the institution of citizenship (Masri 2017a).

As a settler colonial project, the practices of the Zionist movement are not unique. The physical elimination of indigenous presence and culture has been an integral part of the constitution of settler societies in different continents around the globe alongside establishment of new polities and articulations of the 'rule of law' (see Erekat 2019; Simpson 2014; Wolfe 1999, 2006, *inter alia*). Once established as a state, law plays an integral part

in sustaining the violent logic of any settler colonial project, and with it the privileges of the settler community. What was achieved thus far by brute force alone is now regulated into the settler state's legal infrastructure. In the words of Kauanui and Wolfe (2012, 241):

... once the Natives have been violently suppressed [...], the colonizers have to establish a colonial society in their place, on their land. To do that, you have to have a system of laws and regulations – the playing field has got to look level. [...] A rule of law has to be applied and applied consistently; otherwise the incoming settler society would get out of order.

Analysis of the Zionist colonial project in Palestine requires seeing the 1948 war as a moment of 'law-making violence' (Benjamin 2009). Territorial conquest forged new demographic realities, enabling the establishment of the new polity and the laying of its legal foundations. Establishment of the state retroactively legitimated Israel's founding violence since it embodies a claim of new lawmaking authority' and also because it was 'used in the service of a public interest defined by the nascent settler sovereign' (Erekat 2019, 54). But violence does not merely lay the foundation for a new legal system and citizenship in the new polity, nor does it cease to exist thereafter. Indeed, the legal system is one of the most powerful institutions at the hands of the state to construct its legitimacy, internal coherence and, most importantly, to build capacity for sustaining its power structures.

After its constitution, state law distinguishes between legally permissible and impermissible violence. The legally prescribed violence is occasionally mobilised against impermissible forms of resistance/violence that seek to fundamentally challenge state law. Permissible violence receives immediate justification, as the law declares the obligation to respect it and gives authority to the regime to enforce it, also by force (Derrida 1990). Thus, violence is the other side of law, according to the instructions and limitations determined in law and by law (Benton 2009).

While this is true for any state or regime, it is particularly valuable to think about the link between law and violence in the context of settler colonial states, and in particular Israel. Mazen Masri's *The Dynamics of Exclusionary Constitutionalism* (Masri 2017a) highlights the role of law, and the state's judicial system more broadly, as an integral part of maintaining hierarchical settler colonial social relations and the violent logic of the settler colonial project. This is important since 'the constitutional order [...] controls the creation, transformation and exercise of political power' (p. 193) while also regulating and normalising state violence and shielding it with legitimacy. These processes of 'legalisation' and application of the 'rule of law' do not change the logic of the settler colonial project, but rather:

[T]he way in which remaining Natives are eliminated shifts – it becomes more legal and more genteel. It looks better. [...] The rhetoric shifts radically, but the outcome remains consistent with elimination (Wolfe in Kauanui and Wolfe 2012, 241).

Establishing the rule of law in a given territory is an all-encompassing project grounded in the definition of 'the people'. Those who belong to 'the people' are now given formal membership in the state and accorded social privileges that also regulate their status within the polity. Citizenship, according to Isin and Turner (2007, 14) is 'both a legal status that confers an identity on persons and a social status that determines how economic and cultural capital are *redistributed* and *recognised* within society'.

Following this definition, citizenship has to do with the rights and duties of citizens in any particular context. In its formal legal sense, citizenship thus has a central place, not only defining and regulating the relationship between the individual and the state but also the means by which formal membership in a political community is defined and becomes a condition for full and meaningful participation in the polity. Control over the composition of the citizenry is one of the most effective ways of controlling the identity of the sovereign, while maintaining the formal roles of the democratic process (Masri 2017a).

Pursuing this argument, I contend that the study of ‘citizenship’ in settler states must not begin at the moment of its formal formation and institutionalisation. Rather, it is an ongoing process built upon two opposing elements: the ‘negative’ – the violent elimination and practices of dispossession of native populations on the one hand, and the ‘positive’ – the formation of a new settler society in its place (Wolfe 2006). The one is dependent on the other, and cannot exist without it. This process begins before the establishment of the ‘polity’ – the settler state – and continues well beyond it. Indeed, violence is an integral part of ‘settler citizenship’ for without it would not come into existence, and with it, the goals of the settler state would remain unfulfilled.

The role of violence in producing citizenship in settler states is commonly overlooked in citizenship studies scholarship. Such oversight can be found in the contribution by Isin and Turner (2007) to the tenth anniversary issue of the discipline’s flagship journal, *Citizenship Studies*. While reflecting on the development of citizenship throughout history, and particularly as an aspect of modern politics, Isin and Turner mention the American war of independence as one of the three revolutionary events that produced a particular formation of the notion of citizenship in the US. They overlook the fact that American independence from the British Crown was established via elimination of the native populations of ‘America’. They thus help reify the American myth that citizenship in the US is bound up with revolutionary idealism, rather than genocide and ethnic cleansing. Without the elimination of the native populations such revolutionary moments would not have been possible. It was these realities that gave way to the construction of a new settler society and finally to its independence. The drafting of the US constitution allowed extension of citizenship to new immigrants but not to indigenous populations. The role of violence in shaping this citizenship is left uninterrogated.

Tatour’s (2019) work addresses this gap, asserting the centrality of colonial conquest in the production of citizenship in settler colonial contexts. Citizenship accordingly cannot be divorced from the violent processes of colonisation that preceded its foundation:

[Citizenship] is doing what it was created to do: normalize domination, naturalize settler sovereignty, classify populations, produce difference, and exclude, racialize, and eliminate indigenous peoples (*ibid.*, 11).

Violence is constitutive of settler colonial citizenship, part and parcel of its foundation, and also an integral part of its function as a technology of the settler state. Since citizenship plays into the dual nature of the settler colonial project – the ‘negative’ and the ‘positive’ –

citizenship in settler colonial states works to include those immigrants (settlers) who arrive in the new territory, and exclude, negate, marginalise and eliminate those who were there before, even if they might be granted formal status as citizens in that state.

Such was the case in the formation of citizenship laws in Israel. As Masri argues, 'citizenship and the immigration regime is probably one of the areas where settler-colonialism's imprint on the Israeli constitutional order is most palpable' (2017, 77). To that end, *The Law of Return 1950* and the *Citizenship Law 1952*, serve to regulate access to citizenship for Jewish immigrants and their families – the backbone of the Zionist colonial project in Palestine.<sup>5</sup> By so doing, they ground a racial distinction between Jews and Palestinians, while fostering indigenisation of Jewish settlers and de-indigenisation of Palestinian natives. In this respect citizenship is a site of subjectivation through which both settlers and natives are produced (Tatour 2019, 10).<sup>6</sup> Considering the foundational violence that led to the establishment of the state of Israel, settler citizenship is thus intrinsically bound to violence, the imprints of past violence and mechanisms of present violence sustained by the presence of the settlers as hostile occupiers of the land of others. In the words of Kotef (2020a, 14), 'There is not an "I", in the case of the settler, without dispossession, if not elimination, of natives, and so the effort to stabilize identity [...] is inextricable from this violence'.

It is interesting to pause and reflect about the meaning of 'political identity' and its ties to the concept of 'citizenship'. Thinking about political identity in the Israeli context inevitably entails discussion of nation and nationality. The State of Israel is a 'nation state' in which the nation is defined in racial terms (Jewish), and the right to self-determination of the Jews is perceived as axiomatic (Azoulay and Ophir 2012; Ram 2011).<sup>7</sup> National identity and collective memory are structured and rooted in the ideological, bureaucratic and military spheres, in schools and households, in the work place and in the army, thus becoming firmly established in the subjectivity of the people. Accordingly, the commitment of the citizens to the state means commitment to the existence of the Jewish state (Azoulay and Ophir 2012; cf. Bishara 1996). In 2018, this idea was specifically enshrined in law by the *Basic Law: Israel – The Nation State of the Jewish People* which declares that Jews are the only people who have the right to self-determination in the State of Israel.

Considering this, we can assert that the political identity of Jewish-Israeli citizens is racial-national, one that equates the nation to the state, the cultural to the political. Where does it leave citizenship? As Bishara explained in his illuminating discussion on nation and nationality, 'when the nation is theoretically identified with nationality, there is no space left for civil society [...]. Nationality is [thus] the only recognised community' (Bishara 2006, 346).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, for Jewish-Israelis, nationality, or national belonging, acts as both an identity and a legal category that provides the full range of privileges and rights, including access to land, political and economic rights and of course, right to self-determination. Citizenship is accordingly a taken-for-granted secondary identity with only limited legal significance, since its rights and privileges are racially allocated.

Following from that, we can determine that the binary of the settler colonial condition creates also a binary of citizenship in the settler state, between what Rouhana Nadim and Sabbagh-Khoury (2015) termed 'settler colonial citizenship' – which is imposed on the



Palestinians citizens and which serves as a tool of domination (Tatour 2019) – and ‘settler citizenship’ which is bestowed on Jewish Israelis, that is, the privileged status that entails belonging both to the ‘nation’ and the ‘state’.<sup>9</sup>

Citizenship in the settler state is thus both the outcome and the bearer of the violence of the settler state. In this context, it is now possible to go back to activists-settlers-citizens. Are they, through acts of resistance, able to move away from this violence? Can they be something other than settler-citizens? In this line of analysis, citizenship emerges as a structure of opportunity for action that might push for change, but also persists as an inevitable limitation – when juxtaposed with the reality of struggles against the settler-colonial state. The next section elaborates this point.

### The settler colonial condition and the limits of (acts of) citizenship in the settler state

Settler colonialism is built upon a set of relations based on a binary between the settler and the native (the coloniser/colonised) (Coulthard 2014; Fanon 2001 [1961]; Mamdani 1998). We also need to account for the incorporation of the ‘arrivant’ (Byrd 2011) – the racialised non-natives coerced – to various degrees – into the settler colonial project. This triad (settler, native, arrivant) is the basis of other distinctions that aim to normalise the presence of the settlers and isolate the natives physically and politically. It is manifested in state policies, political institutions, legal and social structures and forms of knowledge. What is important to understand is that:

settler colonialism does not work at the individual level [...], for it is a way of governing through naturalized nation-states that erases Indigenous people and implicates us [settlers] all, however well-intentioned we are ... (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel 2014, 7).

The privileged position of the settlers/colonisers thus does not depend on the individual’s good will or actions. They exist before the settler’s arrival (or birth) and ‘whether he accepts or rejects them matters little’ (Memmi [1957] 2003, 82). Indeed, the settlers’ privileges are structural. They are the unearned and unequal benefits of living as a settler-turned-citizen on indigenous land. ‘Racialised privilege’ is a core feature of the (settler) colonial relationship, given to one group (even if uneven and stratified amongst itself), and denied from the other. It is, then, the binary that determines the position of each one of the members in this unequal relationship: the settler is part of the oppressing group, and shares a collective responsibility by the fact of her/his membership of this group, either willingly or by default. The native is oppressed, dispossessed, marginalised and subject to extreme forms of violence. Their mere existence is perceived as an existential threat to the stability and continuity of the settler’s society and polity. Thus, the anticolonial settler-citizen is never separate from these structural lines. As Kauanui and Wolfe (2012, 237) explains:

... in a structural sense, in terms of the history that has put me where I am and Indigenous people where they are, my individual consciousness, my personal attitude has got nothing to do with this. I am beneficiary and a legatee of the dispossession and the continuing elimination of Aboriginal people in Australia. As such [...] I am a settler.



Analysing the ‘colonial psyche’ in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* Memmi offers an intimate account of the entangled psychology of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Memmi’s analysis of the structural condition of the ‘coloniser who refuses’ is pertinent to reflections on the positionality of the Jewish-Israeli activists. Memmi explains that to refuse means ‘either withdrawing physically from those conditions or remaining to fight and change them’ (Memmi [1957] 2003, 63). The two ‘options’ of refusal are therefore either to leave the settler colony or to stay and actively engage in resistance against the colonial situation. Neither option is problem free, for leaving the colony does not necessarily cancel colonial privileges and the relatively privileged position in which the immigrant settlers might find themselves in.<sup>10</sup> Yet the choice of ‘refusal’ from within entails an inevitable paradox – rejecting an ideology while still living with and benefitting from it. Indeed, the ‘colonisers who refuse’ live their lives ‘under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquillity’ (*ibid.*). This paradoxical position of the colonisers who try to reject the privileges that constitute them and that they benefit from is, for Memmi, a dead-end, as everything confirms their ‘solitude, bewilderment and ineffectiveness’ (*ibid.*). The question then arises: can anticolonial settler-citizens genuinely be committed to, and take part in, an anticolonial struggle that is premised on the end of their privileges?

Critical Citizenship Studies scholars offer a possible solution to Memmi’s paradox with the innovative framework of ‘acts of citizenship’ and ‘activist citizens’. Thinking about citizens who struggle to transform the system that governs them and others, Isin (2009) suggests important tools of analysis to expand the boundaries of citizenship, its meaning, and who it embraces. He asserts that:

citizenship is ‘a dynamic (political, social and cultural but perhaps also sexual, aesthetic and ethical) institution of domination *and* empowerment that governs *who* citizens (insiders), subjects (strangers, outsiders) and abjects (aliens) are and *how* these actors are to govern themselves and each other in a given body politic’ (Isin 2009, 371).

The activist citizen, accordingly, is the citizen who performs:

acts that transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (that is, claimants of rights) through creating or transforming sites and stretching scales (*ibid.*, 383).

Isin and Nielsen (2008) argue that citizens are not necessarily those who are regulated by the state, but also those who strive to be included, in various ways, and with demands that might entail a transformation of the system itself. Accordingly, ‘thinking about citizenship through acts means to implicitly accept that to be a citizen is to make claims to justice: to break habitus and act in a way that disrupts already defined orders, practices and statuses’ (Isin 2009, 382).

‘Acts of Citizenship’ is a compelling framework, one that expands the concept of ‘citizenship’ beyond the state and which conceptualises empowerment of citizens and ‘aspiring’ citizens, taking into account a variety of struggles taking place around the world where migrants, ‘aliens’, asylum seekers and others struggle to be recognised and included in the states where they reside. However, it is clear is that even here, ‘citizenship’ is still often about incorporation/inclusion in an existing (even if in a reformed) polity. It

is exactly this approach that indigenous scholars (in Canada, Palestine, Hawaii and elsewhere) have been consistently arguing against. The call for the politics of rejection and refusal of mechanisms of incorporation, inclusion and recognition of the settler state, with citizenship standing as perhaps the most effective method of the state, is a consistent feature of such literature (Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2014). Accordingly, even radical moves ‘within’ citizenship or ‘on’ citizenship are thus incompatible as a framework for anticolonial struggle against the settler state. It thus can be determined that ‘acts of citizenship’ cannot be reconciled with the inherent violence of settler citizenship, and the settler state itself, and with the reality of the anticolonial struggle. How, then, can we think about resistance practices of the anticolonial settler-citizen and their capacity to contribute to a radical transformation of the settler state?

### The anti-zionist settler-citizen

The practices of resistance exercised by anti-Zionist Jewish Israelis have been extensively chronicled.<sup>11</sup> They include a variety of ‘acts’: direct actions; demonstrations; consciousness-raising activities; dissemination of reports; publications in local media; support and encouragement of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israeli institutions; and many others. These are primarily designed to show solidarity with existing Palestinian struggles, to answer a call to participate and protect Palestinians who suffer from continuous threats by West Bank settler communities or harassment by the state’s security apparatuses. They strive to expose the violence that is integral to Israel’s colonisation and exercise of brute force towards Palestinians and to undermine the broad acceptance of state violence among Israelis.

Yet, while struggling for the same cause alongside and in support of the Palestinians – that of dismantling the settler state – the colonial lines of difference are ever present. As Jewish citizens of the Israeli state, they occupy a position of power, ‘both legally enshrined and socially embedded, relative to Palestinians and other non-Jews in Israel/Palestine [...] and have historically been, and continue to be, privileged by the Israeli settler-colonial project’. (Wright 2018, 5). The paradox of ‘refusal’ (in Memmi’s sense)<sup>12</sup> from within surfaces. For these anticolonial Jewish Israelis resistance is a means to cope with an unresolvable and inherent crisis of existence, wherein members of the settler society who want to refuse the privileges that define them, in fact have no structural way of doing so. Even if they leave the colony as Memmi’s solution to Algeria’s French settlers suggests (not a realistic option as most Israeli-Jews born in Israel have nowhere else to go), it will not resolve the problem or empty Palestine of settlers, nor is it what Palestinians necessarily have asked them to do.

These anti-colonial settlers try to live the present through attempts at manifesting their desire for a common future with the Palestinians – as a consciousness, practice of friendship and solidarity and political act. Amongst anti-Zionist Jewish Israelis this has manifested in a range of political platforms – the most radical of which currently on the ‘table’ is the ‘one state solution’ to the conflict. These proposals are often presented as an alternative to the problematic and failed ‘two states for two peoples’ logic that frames the mainstream discourse on Israel/Palestine. The ‘one state’ solution has spawned separate discussions and formulations by groups of Palestinians and Israelis that have steadily gained ground in political discourse in the past decade (Bashir and Busbridge 2019; Hussein 2015; Todorova

2015). While offering different formulations of the future state between bi-nationalism (one state that respects the existence of two national groups), confederation or single democratic state options, such plans include calls for ‘co-existence in full equality’, based on ‘recognition’ and ‘accountability and responsibility’ for the injustice suffered by the Palestinians.<sup>13</sup> However, while most articulate fundamental ideological or symbolic changes to the colonial state, the majority still do not explicitly engage with the *material* aspects of ‘decolonisation’. For example, there is no discussion of the issue of restitution of land and resources from which Palestinians were dispossessed, nor do we find a logic of redistributory economic justice.<sup>14</sup> And without material change, decolonisation remains just a metaphor.

I do not intend to critique these plans for they may offer the only way forward if they garner necessary majority support from Palestinians, residing within and outside Palestine, and could then be subsequently extended to the settlers. While promoting a vision for a transformed future, these proposals are also a call for the maintenance of the material status quo in which the structures that shape Jewish citizenship/privilege remain largely unchanged. I argue that for Jewish-Israeli activists resistance is paradoxically as much about preservation as it might be about change – and at the same time it also serves as a tool to solve their own crisis of legitimacy. Based on these documents, and previous conversations with activists, it seems that when Jewish-Israeli activists dream of a future, it is one in which their lives remain fundamentally unaltered. They wish to remain on the land, keep their possessions (or part of them), fantasising a harmony between remaining as they are, and not-colonising. It is a manifestation of the desire to address the inevitability of being settlers from birth, and to self-situate oneself on the anticolonial side of history.

However, as Kauanui and Wolfe reminds us (2012), despite clear efforts at erasing lines of difference, at joining protest activities, at calling for social and political change, the material structures remain. Settler-activists remain citizens of the settler society, one constituted in violence and with starkly stratified privileges. It is the colonial structure, with its discourse, practices and laws that classifies them. Some activists hope, aspire or expect to be welcomed by the Palestinians as partners. They might come for a few hours or days to join the colonised, in acts of celebration or mourning, organising activities, getting injured or arrested together, loving, donating, volunteering or advocating.

They may try to overcome the coerced identity gaps which are momentarily suspended or forgotten but nevertheless stubbornly present themselves. Yet, because material change never seems to be on the table there is always a kind of (white/settler) fragility in the room (Parasram 2019), as most activists continue to refuse and/or avoid genuinely reckoning with the meaning of their position as ‘settlers’, with the structures that maintain this binary, and with the fact that their struggle is a choice. For they do not change the actual definitions and realities of settler citizenship, thus allowing them to live with the paradox. It allows them to choose to be anti-colonial, but also allows them the possibility to always return home to the protections constituted in the Israeli citizenship they hold.<sup>15</sup> And so, meaningful partnership on these terms remains irreconcilable.

I would like to further interrogate this point by tracing the divergent approaches to the use of violence as a strategy of struggle across these two ‘anticolonial communities’. I believe this discussion is vital in light of the prominence of violence in the settler colonial project, in settler citizenship and identity. Violence, and the discourse around it, stands out as a watershed.

## Anticolonial struggle, decolonisation and the paradox of (non)violence

Decolonisation, as a material process, must be tied to the nature of the colonial order itself. In settler colonial states decolonisation is a particularly troubled/troubling process because empire, settlement, and internal colonialism have no spatial separation. As Tuck and Yang insist, any treatment of decolonisation that does not consider the repatriation of and/or reparation for the loss of indigenous land and sovereignty is an evasion that ‘kills the very possibility of decolonization; it centers whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future’ (Tuck and Yung 2012, 3). Palestinian literature about decolonisation and futurity, centres discussions and practices that rather than finding ‘solutions’ (one/two states) centres modes of existence, imagining and return with a focus on liberation – both material and epistemological (for such notions, imaginations, and thoughts, see Abu Sitta 2016 and the Palestine Land Society; Azeb 2017, 2021; Hawari 2020). In such thinking, and among these practices, discussion of settlers’ future is side-lined or is non-existent and the centre stage is dedicated to indigenous sovereignty and futurity.

It is worth pausing to think about the notion of ‘settler futurity’ referred to above, a future in which the settler not only has a place, but defines her/his place amidst/among indigenous futures (as opposed to indigenous people defining these futures). Tuck and Yang (2012) challenge this point precisely: in decolonisation, the settlers’ future does not exist (as a demand). Any notion of a future for the settler society obscures the complete and full meaning of decolonisation as the restitution of land and sovereignty. When ‘settler futurity’ is constituted on the stage of decolonisation, at least as a part, if not equal, desire of the process (as some sort of ‘reconciliation’ or ‘shared vision for the future’), these strategies ‘only serve the settler, and thus are incompatible with decolonisation’ (*ibid.*, 10).<sup>16</sup> Rejecting such claims to a future, Tuck and Yang instead call for an ‘ethic of incommensurability’ accompanied by acknowledgement that the future need not be foreseen in order for decolonisation to exist as a framework for its actuality will be determined by and through resistance, and first and foremost by indigenous people

Violence is integral to shaping settler-native/indigenous relations, and is translated into the legal infrastructure of the state and its key structural apparatuses (including citizenship). The settler state’s violence – whether barriers, curfews, settlements, checkpoints, arrests, demolitions, dispossessions, denial of essential services, assaults and killings – are ever so common. They are so deemed ‘necessary’ that they disappear and are overlooked (by the settler state and its allies). Violence is part of the very identity of the settler and structures of the self (Kotef 2020a, 2020). It seems almost inevitable that violence also accompanies decolonisation.

Fanon’s discussion of violence offers a crude and realistic depiction of decolonisation as a process that sets out to change the order of the world, epitomised in ‘the last shall be first’ and a programme of ‘complete disorder’ (Fanon 2001 [1961] 2004, 2), that cannot come as a result of a ‘magical process . . . nor of a friendly understanding’. Fanon insists that ‘decolonisation never goes unnoticed’ (*ibid.*), since it is designed to fundamentally alter the foundations of the colonial world and inverse its relations. With this in mind Fanon understands that:

this determination to have the last move up to the front [...] can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence. [...] The colonized who have made up their mind to make such an agenda into a driving force, have been prepared for violence from time immortal (*ibid.*, 3).

Fanon thus considers violence as integral to the anticolonial struggle, to the material alteration of the colonial structure and to the creation of new, liberated people. Fanon is precise about the dangers posed by the exercise of violence as an end in itself – and emphasises the importance of a clear political strategy to accompany it.

Therefore, despite the fact that decolonisation can take different forms, historical experience shows one must accept violence might be part of such processes. As we have seen the privileges of the settler-citizen are constituted by the violence of the settler colonial project, violence that is formalised in and by the law, and in the institution of citizenship in the state. And yet, among anti-colonial settler activists there is a consistent refrain in which violence is deemed beyond the pale of legitimate struggle. It is important to interrogate and problematise this issue, as I see it as part of my unravelling of the paradoxes (and inherent limitations) of settler citizen activists.

Indeed, we can easily distinguish between Jewish-Israeli anticolonial activists and Palestinians based on their use/approach to violence. Palestinians, both historically and contemporarily, have used armed resistance in their struggle. By contrast, (nearly<sup>17</sup>) all anticolonial colonisers adhere to ‘nonviolence’, avoiding actions that might support Palestinian armed resistance, such as trading and concealing arms, or ‘spying’.<sup>18</sup> Nonviolent action seems to be a guiding principle among numerous pro-Palestinian organisations and individuals and is considered the sole and most effective strategy of struggle.<sup>19</sup> This is an important observation worthy of consideration.

In the extensive literature addressing ‘nonviolence’ in resistance a distinction is commonly made between ‘principled nonviolence’ (Gandhi) and ‘strategic nonviolence’ (Sharp 1973). While the former is motivated by the need to win people’s hearts and belief that the opponent cannot respond with violence to nonviolence for long, the latter considers nonviolence as the most effective way to exert political and social power over more powerful opponents, expose the asymmetric nature of the conflict and topple the opponent’s internal and external support (Scruggs 2011, 72–73). As with violence, nonviolence can take different forms, such as civil disobedience, boycotts and demonstrations.

I argue that in the case of the anticolonial settler nonviolence is more than a tactic or a moral choice. Resort to and support for nonviolent resistance strategies and practices helps solve the anticolonial settlers’ dilemma, torn as they are between their wish to be part of the resistance to injustice and their own privileges and the safety of their loved ones, themselves and their homes. This is not a dilemma facing Palestinians.

Adherence to ‘nonviolence’ should be understood as a strategy that seeks to overcome the paradoxical position of being anticolonial while remaining settlers and maintaining the material status quo. They cannot struggle without nonviolence, and they cannot be (anticolonial) without struggling. Put differently, ‘nonviolence’ here serves more than the struggle itself, but the anticolonial coloniser self. It is, as Owen suggests, an ‘aspect of self-preservation, the unwillingness to accept Fanon’s prediction in that [...] the idea of

support towards a Palestinian violent struggle, can be viewed as the embracing of self-annihilation' (2018, 65). By so doing, they inadvertently weaken the legitimacy of anticolonial violence.

Nonviolence erodes the legitimacy of violence by helping camouflage colonial violence and evading the potential necessity of violence against the settler state. Alsaafin (2012) argues that the argument for nonviolent resistance:

falls into the trap of western- (read, colonizer) dictated methods of acceptable means to resist. Oppressed people do not and should not have to explain their oppression to their oppressor, nor tailor their resistance to the comfort of the oppressors and their supporters.

While contributing to the struggle in one way, anticolonial Jewish Israelis effectively, but unintentionally, weaken the right for violent resistance by clinging to nonviolence. The mere categorisation 'violent/nonviolent' is a colonial construction, in the sense that these are categories decided and imposed by the settlers, which primarily serve to preserve settlers' interests, privileges and structures (together with those of the complicit colonised elite).<sup>20</sup> Again, the paradox resurfaces: (non)violence both categorises the anticolonial settlers, and allows them to momentarily overcome the categorisation. Moreover, the structures of violence remain intact: the violence of the settler state, and within it, settler citizenship is still ever present, and ever prominent.

### Co-resistance across the settler-indigenous divide

Fiona Wright highlights how many from the Israeli radical left regard their activism within the frame of 'acts of citizenship'. Wright shows that for them citizenship means empowerment to strive to change the ways in which those living within the polity of the Israeli state are governed, acting out of a sense of civic responsibility. She argues:

Both the physical movements of the activists and the ways in which they drew on culturally resonant symbolic tropes in their verbal interactions can be read here as an intimate form of communication with those deemed to be 'like us' by the activists — other Jewish Israeli citizens. This emphasis on common Israeli citizenship, and highlighting of the ways in which it privileges Jewish subjects specifically, is what was enacted by activists' approach to the soldiers blocking the entrance to the settlement: unlike Palestinians, who would be much more likely to be shot were they to approach the soldiers in this manner, the physical approach of a Jewish Israeli body towards the state apparatus is an invitation for that body to be restrained and disciplined, but with the knowledge that it will be unlikely to suffer the kind of grievous physical harm faced by other kinds of subjects (Wright 2018, 34)

Such 'acts of citizenship', together with the discursive and tangible adherence to nonviolence seem to do little to materially reckon with the violence of settler citizenship, and thus do not chime with the key vision of anticolonial struggle – the end of the settler state. Acts of citizenship serve to stretch and expand (even as they work to reform and transform) structures of citizenship, while decolonisation and the disorder that it entails, poses an absolute limit to what such acts can do. Anticolonial struggle demands a rejection and refusal of the settler state and its structures, and might also entail resorting to violence. Accordingly, meaningful co-resistance must go beyond citizenship, as a structure (and limitation) of action, an identity and a legal framework. The only role citizenship might fulfil is through its weaponisation. 'The destruction of colonialism requires behavior that



would be considered criminal for many allies: Redistributing resources, betraying institutions, weaponizing one's privilege and access . . . ' (Grundy, Jiang, and Niiya 2019). Indeed, it is suggested, terms such as 'solidarity' or 'allyship' should be replaced by 'accomplice' (Indigenous Action 2014).

Fanon insisted that 'Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content' (Fanon 2001 [1961], 36). Evans (1997) oral history project, documenting French resistance to the Algerian war traces the motivations and inspiration of those French citizens, living in France who joined in solidarity with the Algerian struggle against the French army. Taking advantage of being white French they provided 'safe houses, passing FLN members across frontiers, printing the FLN press, the transporting of arms and explosives' (Evans 1997, 176). He describes how they struggled between national and ideological identities. The tacit understanding by FLN members of the lines of difference is indicated in the insistence of Rabah Bouaziz, when interviewed by Evans, that 'the FLN never asked French people to participate in armed attacks. [. . .] the FLN was on the front line, whilst the role of the French underground was to provide infrastructures of support' (*ibid.*, 177).

We can, following Gordimer's critique of Memmi in the introduction to his book, look at the South African anti-Apartheid struggle, where there were a minority of colonisers who understood that 'colonialism had misshapen them, too; its privileges were distortions, and the loss of these in post-colonial society would be and is normalcy they had never had a chance to experience'. (Gordimer 2003, 39). However, despite staying a minority:

to suggest that the coloniser's rebellion could serve no purpose in liberation of the colonized is to deny the possibility [. . .] of a range of actions taken by rebels among them: from Steward Gore-Brown accompanying UNIP's Kenneth Kaunda to negotiate return of a territory, named for the arch-imperialist Rhodes, back from the British for rebirth as Zambia, to Ronnie Kasrils becoming Head of Military Intelligence and Joe Slovo the chief strategist in South Africa's liberation army, Umkhonto we Sizwe during the guerrilla war against Apartheid. Men and women Leftist colonizers in South Africa were imprisoned, as Nelson Mandela and thousands of his fellow black South Africans were, or tortured, as Steve Biko was, for activities with the liberation movements [. . .] (*ibid.*, 37)

Both examples highlight settlers/colonisers' support for armed forms of resistance, whether through actual participation or by providing enabling infrastructure. While highlighting colonisers' participation in anticolonial struggle, both these cases underline the prime role of the colonised as agents of change and transformation, while carving space for the inclusion of members of the colonising societies, in the struggle for liberation, equality and justice.

The lesson I draw from comparative struggles, is that the lines of difference must always be openly acknowledged in any attempt to address the question of resistance from within, its contribution to the larger struggle and potential to contribute to genuine indigenous-led decolonisation. The important distinction between leaders and allies-supporters has also guided indigenous-led struggles in North America. The activist and scholar Shiri Pasternak, who self identifies as a 'twice settler' (her mother from Israel, herself Canadian born), describes a decolonial approach to participating in indigenous self-determination struggles. This requires:



acting only with a clear mandate from the community; acting from a place of political responsibility, not out of guilt or charity; educating yourself and not relying on the community to educate you; seeking never to speak on behalf of the community unless explicitly asked; limiting political influence on a community's decisions or decision-making process; being prepared to do any kind of work requested, including staying in the background and raising funds; making a long-term commitment; and having a sense of humour and some patience. [...] Mainly, a clear and undisputed line of guidance and source of agreement coming from Indigenous peoples themselves. [...] Ultimately, an ally has to measure the principle of solidarity against the principle of non-interference (Pasternak 2013, 139-140).

This type of 'taking leadership' entails accepting that the struggle may lead towards an uncertain future, one that will not be determined by settlers, or necessarily suit their needs or desires. But, as Bouteldja (2016) reminds us, it also contains the possibility that indigenous leaders might offer the settler some place in it. This is a crucial difference – one that departs from a demand for an inclusive future after decolonisation. Indeed, some activists in Palestine already do adhere to the same principles that Pasternak describes (Turner 2015; Weizman 2016a; Wright 2018). It is crucial to remember and recognise, however, that the possibility of co-resistance does not solve the structural paradox: There is no easy or comfortable way to reconcile between being a settler and an anticolonial ally. The politics of resistance across the settler/native divide lines is troubled for it involves a firm reckoning with the positionality and subjectivity of being settlers, and with the disorder that is part of the anticolonial struggle and decolonisation. It must also include a relinquishing of claims for settler futurity. In this sense, it is a multidimensional struggle towards an uncertain future.

A clear illustration of this direction is apparent in the case of Jonathan Pollak, an anticolonial Jewish Israeli activist arrested by the Israeli police for consistent refusal to appear in court to answer criminal charges of assaulting soldiers during demonstrations in the West Bank. Shortly after his arrest, he published a piece in *Haaretz* (2020). He ended with this exhortation – the last sentence of which was subsequently taken off-line<sup>21</sup>

In order to genuinely join the struggle to bring down Israeli Apartheid, the minority of those Israeli citizens that want it will have to acknowledge their privileges and be ready to pay the price that comes with giving them up. The Palestinian resistance is leading a rebellion against the regime for years, and the price its members are paying is huge. In order to contribute to a change, Jews must willingly give up the desire to lead the struggle, and instead support the Palestinian one, not just in their hearts, but also in deeds. Yes, we must cross the lines and break the law; despite the price, we must join the children throwing stones and molotov cocktails, we must march in their footsteps.

## Notes

1. These include both the areas defined by the Oslo Agreements as 'A' (under full administrative and security control of the Palestinian Authority) and areas under full or partial Israeli control which are often declared by the occupation authorities as 'closed military zones.'
2. See <http://boycottisrael.info>. Currently, about a 1,000 Israeli citizens (both Jews and Palestinians) have signed this call.
3. The theoretical and empirical literature around 'resistance' is vast and wide. There seems to be an agreement among scholars that resistance entails both action (verbal, cognitive or physical) and opposition as core constitutive elements (Hollander and Einwohner 2004).

4. (Todorova 2021; Turner 2015); Weizman 2016 and (Wright 2018).
5. This process continues to take up new forms, for example through the ‘temporary order’ of the *Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law* – extended on a yearly basis since its emergence in 2003 – which bars Palestinians from the occupied territories married to (Palestinian) citizens from receiving permits to live in Israel, in addition to preventing their access to naturalisation processes on the basis of racial identity.
6. On the nature of citizenship granted to some Palestinians after the establishment of the State of Israel, see, *inter alia*, (Molavi 2013; Robinson 2013; Rouhana Nadim and Sabbagh-Khoury 2015; Sultany 2003).
7. For discussions on the nation state as a racial state, see Goldberg 2002 and (for particular focus on Israel) Lentin 2018.
8. Bishara explicitly refers here to ‘civil society’ and not to ‘citizenship’. But his rich scholarship indicates that the two are interlinked.
9. For discussions on citizenship in other settler colonial contexts, see, for example, (Ahluwalia 2001; Nijhawan, Winland and Wustenberg 2018; Rifkin 2014; Simpson 2014).
10. This might be due to financial means, having a passport that facilitates mobility more easily or benefits from the existence of family members with means or property who stay behind, together with the ability to visit and even return to the settler state.
11. (Todorova 2021; Turner 2015; Weizman 2016a; Wright 2018).
12. I refer here specifically to Memmi’s treatment of ‘refusal’ – that of refusing the colonial condition by either leaving or resisting – and not the vast literature on indigenous refusal.
13. See: (one state campaign), <https://onestatecampaign.org/all/en-manifesto/>; One State Foundation, <https://onestatefoundation.org/what/>; (The One State Declaration 2007), <https://electronicintifada.net/content/one-state-declaration/793>.
14. This is partly because several of these ‘calls’ are akin to a declaration of intent rather than a detailed plan of action. An exception is the ‘One Democratic State’ campaign that specifically refers to the idea that ‘The State will do everything in its power to restore to the refugees their private and communal property and/or compensate them.’ <https://onestatecampaign.org/all/en-manifesto/>.
15. Todorova (2019) addresses this issue, arguing that the politics of vulnerability is a form of decolonial solidarity between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. I argue however, that while this is true, as long as vulnerability is a choice, as in the case of the Jewish Israelis – it actually further highlights, and actually sustains, the colonial lines of difference.
16. I would suggest thinking about the involvement of Jewish Israelis in ‘one state’ projects in this light.
17. Ehud Adiv, who joined the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) in the 1970s is perhaps an exception that proves the rule. However, in his support of global proletariat struggle he did not get to aim weapons at other Israelis.
18. There are a few exceptions to the rule, the best known of whom is Mordechai Vanunu, a nuclear technician who in 1985 revealed Israel’s nuclear programme. Abducted and arrested, he was imprisoned for 18 years and subsequently denied permission to leave Israel.
19. The principle of ‘nonviolence’ is clearly indicated on websites and social media profiles of organisations and individual activists. For examples see: <https://boycottisrael.info/content/points-unity>; [https://taayush.org/?page\\_id=61](https://taayush.org/?page_id=61). See also (Owen 2020).
20. See Fanon on the colonial bourgeois (Fanon 2001 [1961], 23).
21. Shortly after publication Pollak was interrogated by the Israeli police for ‘inciting violence’.

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