



Rashid Khalidi.- *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020), 336 p.

In his riveting and original book, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*, Rashid Khalidi, the Edward Said professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University and the author of *Brokers of Deceit*, delineates the development and expansion of Israel since the 1917 Balfour Declaration. The Zionist vision gained momentum thanks to “international and imperial forces” such as the Balfour Declaration of Nov. 2, 1917, which was issued by a British cabinet and committing Britain to the creation of a national Jewish homeland, and which, Khalidi notes, was “a declaration of war by the British Empire on the indigenous population.” The author also examines the declaration of the state of Israel in 1947; the Six-Day War of 1967; the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, directed at neutralizing the Palestinian Liberation Organization; the first Palestinian uprising, or Intifada, which began in 1987 and shifted the locus of disaffection from outside to inside the country; and the enormous Palestinian demonstrations that have taken place in Israel as Hamas and the Palestinian Liberal Organization (PLO) played out their power struggle. Khalidi is clear about the “ideologically bankrupt political movements” that have made up Palestinian leadership, and he recognizes the need for a better understanding of how to positively affect public opinion in the U.S. Yet he also presses for significant work inside Israel, namely “convincing Israelis that there is an alternative to the ongoing oppression of the Palestinians.”

Khalidi shows how Israel used U.S. endorsement to reinforce its military might, and exerted diplomacy to maintain U.S. backing. He sympathetically imparts the desires of the Palestinian people for self-determination and equal rights, and is remorseful of the ineptness and short-sightedness of their leadership. He skilfully balances his professional analysis of historical and diplomatic documents with insights of his own and his relatives who had leadership roles throughout the XXth century.

Khalidi accentuates six turning points in the struggle over Palestine. These six events, or what he prefers to dub Declarations of War, from the 1917 issuance of the Balfour Declaration, which decided the fate of Palestine, to Israel's siege of the Gaza Strip and its intermittent wars on Gaza's population in the early 2000s, highlight the colonial nature of the hundred years' war on Palestine, and also the indispensable role of external powers in waging it. His book collates partly from the experiences of Palestinians who lived through the war, many of them members of his family who were present at some of the episodes described. Rashid Khalidi has included his own recollections of events as a witness, as well as materials belonging to his own and other families, and a variety of first-person narratives. His purpose throughout has been to show that this conflict must be seen quite differently from most of the prevailing views of it.

The author begins the stubbornly determined chronicle of Palestinian injustices by culling from a wealth of untapped archive, "worm-eaten books," documents, and letters belonging to generations of Khalidis – mayors, judges, scholars, diplomats, and journalists; he discovered a moving letter which he unearthed in a Jerusalem library, written in 1899 by his great-great-great uncle, the mayor of Jerusalem, Yusuf Diya al-Din Pasha al-Khalidi, an erudite intellectual, to the "father of Zionism," Theodor Herzl. Pasha al-Khalidi had witnessed the friction with the local population prompted by the first years of proto-Zionist activity, starting with the arrival of the earliest European Jewish settlers in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The mayor reminded Herzl respectfully of the folly of embarking on a Jewish nation within an already inhabited land and urging him "in the name of God, let Palestine be left alone." Thus Rashid Khalidi, al-Khalidi's great-great-nephew, begins this timely, cogent and sweeping history, the first general account of the conflict told from an explicitly Palestinian perspective.

Yusuf Diya's letter and Herzl's response to it are well known to historians of the period, but most of them do not seem to have reflected carefully on what was perhaps the first meaningful exchange between a leading Palestinian figure and a founder of the Zionist movement. They have not reckoned fully with Herzl's rationalizations, which laid out, quite plainly, the essentially colonial nature of the century-long conflict in Palestine. Nor have they acknowledged al-Khalidi's arguments, which have been borne out in full since 1899.

The author asserts that European colonizers seeking to supplant or dominate indigenous peoples, whether in the Americas, Africa, Asia, or Australasia (or in Ireland), have always described them in pejorative terms.

These imperial powers deploy a constellation of stereotypical and orientalist images and vignettes, the purpose of which is to build a colonial discourse that is imbued with certain discursive strategies. This is what the author does here in this book; he demystifies the main representational strategies deployed by the colonizers. The condescending rhetoric of Theodor Herzl and other Zionist leaders was no different from that of their European peers. The Jewish state, Herzl wrote, would “form a part of a wall of defense for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism.”

In line with this colonial rationale, there is a vast body of literature dedicated to proving that before the advent of European Zionist colonization, Palestine was *terra nullius* to those who came to settle it, with those living there nameless and nebulous. Historical Palestine has been the subject of innumerable disparaging tropes in Western popular culture, as well as academically worthless writing that purports to be scientific and scholarly, but that is fraught with historical errors, misrepresentations, and sometimes outright bigotry. At most, this literature asserts, the country was inhabited by a small population of rootless and nomadic Bedouin who had no fixed identity and no attachment to the land they were passing through, essentially as transients.

Khalidi avers that just like Zionism, Palestinian and other Arab national identities were modern and contingent, a product of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century circumstances, not eternal and immutable. The denial of an authentic, independent Palestinian identity is of a piece with Herzl’s colonialist views on the alleged benefits of Zionism to the indigenous population, and constitutes a crucial element in the erasure of their national rights and peoplehood by the Balfour Declaration and its sequels.

Unlike most other peoples who fell under colonial rule, Palestinians not only had to contend with the colonial power in the metropole, in this case London, but also with a singular colonial-settler movement that, while beholden to Britain, was independent of it, had its own national mission, a seductive biblical justification, and an established international base and financing. According to the British official responsible for “Migration and Statistics,” the British government was not “the colonizing power here; the Jewish people are the colonizing power.”

By managing to impose themselves on the map of the Middle East in spite of the best efforts of Israel, the United States, and many Arab governments, literary figures whose ideas and images played a major role in the revival of Palestinian identity succeeded in reacquiring something long denied to

them, what Edward Said called the “permission to narrate.” This meant the right to tell their story themselves, taking back control of it not only from Israel’s omnipresent narrative in the West, in which the Palestinians scarcely figured except as villains (as in *Exodus*, for example), but also from the Arab governments.

Depicting so vividly the dilemmas faced by Palestinians: the travails of exile and the pain of life in post-1967 Palestine, now entirely under Israeli control, writers and poets both throughout the Palestinian diaspora and living inside Palestine – Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Emile Habibi, Fadwa Touqan, and Tawfiq Zayyad, together with other gifted and engaged artists and intellectuals – played a vital role in this vein, culturally and politically. Their work helped to reshape a sense of Palestinian identity and purpose that had been tested by the Nakba – or the Catastrophe, as Palestinians call it, grounded in the defeat of the Great Revolt in 1939 and willed by the Zionist state-in-waiting – and the barren years that followed. In novels, short stories, plays, and poetry, they gave voice to a shared national experience of loss, exile, alienation. At the same time, they evinced a stubborn insistence on the continuity of Palestinian identity and resoluteness in the face of daunting odds.

As a spontaneous, bottom-up campaign of resistance, born of an accumulation of frustration and initially with no connection to the formal political Palestinian leadership, the inception of the First Intifada in 1987 was an stupendous instance of popular resistance against oppression and can be considered as being the first unmitigated victory for the Palestinians in the long colonial war that began in 1917. Unlike the 1936-1939 revolt, the intifada was driven by a broad strategic vision and a unified leadership, and it did not exacerbate internal Palestinian divisions. Its unifying effect and largely successful avoidance of firearms and explosives – in contrast to the Palestinian resistance movement of the 1960s and 1970s – helped to make its appeal widely heard internationally, leading to a profound and lasting positive impact on both Israeli and world public opinion.

Rashid Khalidi comes to a firm idea that with his election, Donald Trump began pursuit of what he called “the deal of the century,” purportedly aimed at a conclusive resolution of the conflict. He confirms that one key change that is needed involves acknowledging that the diplomatic strategy adopted by the PLO since the 1980s was fatally flawed: the United States is not and cannot be a mediator, a broker, or a neutral party. It has long opposed Palestinian national aspirations and has formally committed itself to endorse the Israeli

government's positions on Palestine. The Palestinian national movement must recognize the true nature of the American stance and undertake dedicated grassroots political and informational work to make its case inside the United States, as the Zionist movement has done for over a century.

According to Khalidi, Israel's regional hegemony depends in very large measure on the maintenance in power of undemocratic Arab regimes that will suppress such sentiment. However distant it may seem today, real democracy in the Arab world would be a grave threat to Israel's regional dominance and freedom of action. Moving through these critical moments, Khalidi interweaves the voices of journalists, poets and resistance leaders with his own accounts as a child of a UN official and a resident of Beirut during the 1982 siege. The result is a profoundly moving account of a hundred-year-long war of occupation, dispossession and colonization. Khalidi cogently wishes that his book *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* will reflect Palestinians' resilience and help recover some of what has thus far been airbrushed out of the history by those who control all of historic Palestine and the narrative surrounding it.

Lahoucine Aammari

University of Sultan Moulay Slimane,
Beni-Mellal, Morocco