

Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (London: Profile, 2020) £25.00

Rashid Khalidi's informed and passionate account of Jewish settlers' conquest of Palestine has broad appeal. While it does not present new arguments on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the book reads well and is filled with fascinating insights. It pulls no punches in its critique of Jewish-Israeli policies (with wholehearted US support after 1967), but it is a 'warts and all' book laying out Palestinian leadership failings. Khalidi participated in his history as an activist scion of a leading Palestinian family: in Beirut during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and with the Palestinian negotiating team prior to the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian peace accords. The text has a rich intimacy missing from dry academic books. Khalidi slams Israel but his is also an elegy for the Palestinians, for their dispossession, for their failure to resist conquest. It is a relentless story of Jewish-Israeli bad faith, alongside one of Palestinian corruption and political short-sightedness.

Khalidi sets out his stall early on: the Palestine-Israel war was never one between two national movements contesting equally over the same land but was always a 'settler colonial conquest' (the book's pointed subtitle) by European-based Zionists whose founding father, Theodor Herzl, laid bare the project to Khalidi's great-great-great uncle in 1899: Palestine's indigenous population did not matter and would anyway benefit from the modernising effects of Jewish 'pioneers,' like America with its westward Manifest Destiny. Khalidi vectors his argument that Jewish settlement of Palestine was, as with Ireland, Australia, Africa or America, an exercise in European colonialism, whose success would be determined by the resistance of local peoples. Jewish settlers, aided by Britain from 1917, and by the US later on, colonised Palestine, creating and securing Israel through six 'wars': the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the 1947 UN Partition Plan, the 1967 UN Security Council Resolution 242, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the 1993 Oslo Accords, and Israeli leader Ariel Sharon's Temple Mount visit in 2000. Palestinian leaders from elite notables in the 1930s to Yasser Arafat and PLO-Fatah in the 1960s to Hamas never channelled the people's passion to resist. This is not to 'blame the victim.' Khalidi points to the huge obstacles in the way: '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,' later supported by Washington. Protestant Christians bought into this 'colonial war' to 'civilise' the native population. There is a useful tension here between colonial superstructure and the patriarchal hierarchy and cronyism underpinning Palestinian elite leadership. Jewish-Israeli perfidy is central to Khalidi's study but bubbling up through the text are key moments of resistance that demanded the insurgent organisation and charisma of a Michael Collins, a Mahatma Gandhi, or a Ho Chi Minh. This never happened. Instead, the well-organised Zionist movement (and Israel) instinctively divided disunited opposition – *divide et impera*, as the Romans knew well.

While mainstream Zionism publicly proclaimed (or lied) that the two communities in Palestine could live harmoniously together, Jewish activists like Ze'ev Jabotinsky as early as 1923 presented the honest facts: all native populations will resist colonialists and

Palestinians were no different. The Jews needed an 'iron wall' of bayonets. British rule after the Great War supported settlement, until 1939 when on the eve of the Second World War London changed tack to garner wider Arab support. The British defeated a widespread revolt by Palestinians in 1936 in which their elites emblematically fought amongst themselves as they did against external enemies. There was no Irish-style *Dail Eireann*, no nascent branches of Government, and no centralised military forces to outwit the British. Britain crushed Palestinian resistance, doing the Jews' work for them. Remarkably, as Israel came into being in 1948, the Palestinian negotiator with the UN locked his own office door every evening as he had no secretary, although he did have someone to make him coffee. Many senior Israeli leaders came from America, knew the place, and spoke its language. In 1947, no senior Palestinian leader had lived in or visited the US.

Khalidi takes the reader through the long, hard years for the Palestinians after 1948 when Israel (and neighbouring Arab states) screwed down the Palestinians. The Six Day War during the Cold War, as America struggled in Vietnam, was a hinge event, turning the US to Israel as its prime ally against Soviet-backed Arab regimes. America is a sub theme here, and in baleful ways. While presidents such as Eisenhower and Kennedy were willing to stand up to Israel, after 1967 – excepting Bush Snr and Secretary of State James Baker – the rest fell into line. This was the tail wagging the dog. Khalidi lays out remarkable exchanges between US and Israeli officials (including a thrusting young Benjamin Netanyahu) in which the US rolled over. It is a strange tale, unless one buys into the argument of a powerful Israeli lobby guiding US policy.

Palestinian resistance endured, helped by the law of unintended consequences: Israel's crushing of Egypt in 1967 boosted the PLO, while the 1982 Lebanon invasion prompted the 1987 intifada. Israel unintentionally resurrected Palestinian resistance by its heavy handed actions. Arafat looms large in the book's final chapters, and not to his credit. He started as he meant to continue, by cheating in student elections as a young man in Cairo. The peace after 1993 brought Arafat into Israel, where it monitored and controlled him. Nothing changed. Fatah militants who had spent time in Israeli jails tortured Hamas detainees. The Greater Israel settlement project on the West Bank continued apace, Israel arguing that Palestinians neither wanted peace nor accepted Israel, a point Khalidi contests.

Khalidi's book proves the limits to military force and the power of political settlement. The Palestinians have belied David Ben Gurion's reputed comment that 'the old will die and the young will forget.' Short of another bout of ethnic cleansing, Israel is burdened with a resentful growing non-Jewish population. The solution is meaningful political dialogue, but this requires political will and this is a distant hope.