

The New Apartheids: Colonialism Revisited in the 21st Century

Last month, the State of Israel while celebrating the 73rd anniversary of its establishment, the Palestinian lands on which it was founded drew once again pain, blood and tears deep into it – and unfortunately, not the last. Undoubtedly, there were very important developments during the thirty-year period of British colonial rule in Palestine, from ‘the promise of one nation’s territory (Palestinians)’ by another nation (the British) to a third nation (the Jewish nation)’ with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, to the establishment of Israel in May 1948[1]. However, successive declarations of war at short intervals after ‘48 brought the problem in the region to the top of the international agenda. In the meantime, it was quite remarkable that the naming of the issue had changed and transformed over the years in a way that pointed to the history and handling of the issue, and many other things too: the Arab-Israeli wars, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and in the last fifteen years, the Gaza tragedy, the ‘Gaza Wars’ or the Hamas-Israel conflict, as if it was intended to be portrayed as a separate issue from the whole Palestinian cause. In fact, every naming necessarily involves some attempt to define and specify, to include or exclude, and finally to dominate.

The Palestinian people have been exposed to the most brutal facets of colonialism in the past hundred years from the usurpation of their homes and lands to the burning down of olive trees, to the fact that millions of Palestinians were forced to live in very harsh conditions for years as refugees, to the treatment as ‘second’ or even ‘third’ class citizens in their own homeland. Palestine has turned into a gigantic colonial-space where individual, social, and political suffering is constantly displayed before the eyes of humanity in an almost theatrical-tragic way. Towards the end of the last century, in one part of the world – South Africa –, the *Apartheid* regime, one of the most vicious racist-colonial regimes of modern times, was overthrown at the end of a long struggle; while in another region, on Palestine, the Israeli *Apartheid* was carrying out an ethnic cleansing quietly but decisively on the colonial-space it had created over the years with an unprecedented international support and camouflage. ‘Peace and security’ discourse is tediously repeated in neo-colonial rhetoric and politics, together with the claims of bringing democracy, freedom and human rights overseas. Israeli apartheid regime has always tried to hide itself behind these discourses. However, there are now ‘new’ actors, different voices, and asymmetrical groups, all claiming aloud their own rights and representation, and whose effects are not as easily predictable as before. It has also led to the emergence of very different spheres of struggle and resistance in the 21st century. Today, as we approach the first quarter of the 21st century, the forms of colonialism, or in other words, the policies of any ‘Empire’ attempting a kind of global dominance – although ‘Empire’ mostly refers to the USA today, I shall use the term in a more broader sense, including, for example, China in terms of the strategy it pursues and the language it uses; and even to some extent France, Germany, or Russia –, and the configuration of opposition to those imperial policies have both been quite differentiated and diversified compared to the last century.

The change of conditions and the use of new tools and technologies have *refined* the imperial ambitions and neo-colonial methods and policies, if not invisible. Although it is impossible not to discern Israel’s apartheid policies if your eyes and ears are not closed to the truth, a much more complex and *refined* picture emerges when one considers especially greater Western metropolises. It would be relatively easy to follow and predict the hard power use such as the declaration of wars, military interventions and occupations, or soft power elements as to the establishment of influence through trade, investments, debts and grants, by which the great powers, especially the US, attempt to dominate overseas and protect their interests in distant regions. On the other hand, the ‘Empire’ is most *truly* felt inside today. The ‘uncanny’ individuals and communities at the great metropolises – which no longer just form their slums, but often ‘disrupt’ the usual flow of urban life by highly irregular and unpredictable behavioral patterns – have changed everything in a way that now terrifies the *native* inhabitants. The rules and the order of the ‘Site’ have not only been shaken, but these foreigners (or *barbarians*) who have appeared suddenly also want to have a say in determining the new rules. The usual response to these ‘insolent and arrogant’ strangers has been social exclusion and rejection *par excellence*. It should be stressed that the rejection attitude here is not only an ordinary and simple one, it has also formed the basis of increasingly xenophobic, and at the same time, systematic administrative policies. That is exactly one of the main thoughts of this article: in the year 2021, the new forms of colonialism and imperial policies are ‘socio-political apartheids’ operating against ‘others’ at home; i.e. in imperial capitals and at other major centres throughout the mainland of the ‘Empire’. These are definitely ‘new-ghetto’ formations of the world we live in today; they are not easily noticed at first due to their *non-spatiality* (i.e. *spacelessness*). Yet the new apartheid belongs to this metropolitan city and is shaped by the conditions that determine the socio-political structure of the metropolis.

The (Western) metropolis of the 21st century has been conditioned by certain dynamics that have shaped

the post-Cold War era. Foremost among these are the radical withdrawal of publicity[2] and a blind 'market society individualism' – devoid of any sense of personality and any ethical and aesthetic concerns. These conditions, which completely destroy the social fabric of urban life, have isolated people more and more, and created a terrible inequality. As to the metropolitan apartheid – deprived of even the intra-ghetto solidarity networks that a physical ghetto could provide – the same conditions have made the already critical position of those marginalised groups several times more difficult. The immigrants, refugees, foreigners, different minority groups, and all the 'others' who have been decisively pushed out of the 'real life' by the owners of the metropolitan space face strongly the feeling of 'being alone and helpless', which, in turn, aims at breaking any possibility of a resistance by these communities. Thus, the spaceless nature of the new apartheid at the metropolis hinders any search or pressure for solidarity. While the primary aim of classical colonial and imperial domination was the control and transfer of physical and visible resources of the overseas to the mainland; as a result of a series of global processes, the colonised of the past is now demanding the right to have a say on the 'Empire'. The relationship between the old coloniser and the colonised has now become much more complex. So the 'Empire' has today had to re-direct its imperial ambitions in this new context. Emerging at the metropolises of the West and heavily felt in nearly every aspect of the urban life, this new and spaceless colonial-racial form – which I conceptualise it here as the 'metropolis apartheid' – is the internalisation of 'Empire'; and both as a systematic policy-making style and as an administrative model reveals its new orientation towards the former colonial 'object', which now demands the right to coexist with its old coloniser on an equal status at the imperial spaces.

Yet it will be incomplete if we end the story here. Perhaps the most obvious truth that the long history of colonialism has taught is: there are two sides around the table; the two sides work 'together' on the painting canvas: 'Empire' and the Resistance. The resulting picture has been shaped by the strokes of these two throughout the history. It will certainly continue to be so in the future.

Note: I would like to commemorate here the late Edward W Said, the author of many important works, including the masterpieces *Orientalism* (1978), and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), who inspired me to think about many things I discuss in this essay, and who was a valuable teacher and also a tireless activist during all his lifetime.

[1] For this period and beyond, see Professor Rashid Khalidi's recently published, excellent work that is truly a masterpiece: *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020).

[2] See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).
