

FROM VICTIMS TO COLONIZERS

A Comparative Study of 'Repatriated Indigenous Communities' in Israel and Liberia

David M. Spence
Near & Middle East Studies
MA student

ABSTRACT

Popular discourses have painted Israelis and Liberians as two peoples who fled persecution to return to their ancestral homelands. The oppression of blacks in America and Jews in Europe is without question. However, historical analysis indicates that the migration of Americo-Liberians to West Africa and European Jews to Palestine are unique examples of settler colonialism. Previous comparative work on Israel and Liberia is almost non-existent. Therefore, my writing attempts to fill the gap in academic literature. Throughout this article, I answer the question: "How and why did these two persecuted peoples perpetuate Western colonialism?" through the lens of comparative analysis and post-colonial theory. I hope that this work will open the door for a future comparative study of Israel and Liberia, black settler colonialism, and repatriated indigenous communities. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that, although they fled America and Europe for wholly legitimate reasons, Americo-Liberians and Israelis simultaneously adopted the role of colonial aggressors in West Africa and Palestine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David M. Spence is an MA graduate in Near & Middle East Studies at the School of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics at SOAS. He completed his BA in Religious Studies and Political Science at Mount Allison University in Canada and currently works for the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) in Vienna, Austria. His interests include conflict resolution, indigenous rights, religious reconciliation, and refugee/humanitarian aid.

KEYWORDS:

Israel, Palestine, Liberia, indigenous, repatriation, colonialism

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Jews in Europe and blacks in America have been persecuted by a white, Christian majority. One potential solution to this oppression was the establishment of a ‘homeland’ for these communities, based on the cultural or racial attributes that led to exclusion in their countries of origin.²⁶⁸ In both cases, this process was framed in public discourse as the repatriation of an indigenous community to its former ancestral homeland and resulted in the colonization of Palestine and West Africa. Eventually, this colonization led to the establishment of the nation-states of Israel and Liberia. While very little comparative scholarship currently exists on these two cases, I believe that the idea of repatriated indigenous communities merits consideration due to the longstanding conflicts they have generated. In this paper, I will compare the evolution of these two states, beginning with Israel as the paradigmatic case, and comparing Liberia to it. I will argue three main points: 1) The creation of Israel and Liberia was a direct response to the problems of exclusion and persecution faced by blacks and Jews in the countries from which they emigrated. 2) The immigrating populations faced substantial challenges transitioning to their new environments and required significant support from external actors to remain viable. 3) Geographic territory and religious ideals played significant roles in both cases and served as powerful incentives for colonization. Finally, I will demonstrate that the colonial projects of Israel and Liberia were harmful, illegitimate, and have resulted in generations of conflict and trauma.

THE CASE OF ISRAEL

The Jewish people are acutely aware of the many hardships they have suffered, from slavery in ancient Egypt to genocide in Hitler’s Europe, and this painful history plays a defining role in Jewish identity. Over time, the communal identity shared by European Jews evolved from being religious in nature (Judaism) to secular (Jewishness). In the latter part of the 19th century, the new Jewish secular society in Eastern Europe began to feel that social exclusion and violent persecution could be solved through political articulation and

²⁶⁸ Mark Krain, “A Comparative Study of Transplantations of Nationalism: The Cases of Israel, Liberia, and Sierra Leone,” *International Review of Modern Sociology* Vol. 2, No. 2 (September, 1972): 168.

organization. However, this changed with legal restrictions and periodic pogroms, which, combined with the lengthy Dreyfus Affair, turned public opinion in Europe even further against Jews, despite the soldier's eventual exoneration.²⁶⁹

By the 1880s, ongoing Jewish suffering and the desire for a political solution led to the rise of Zionism and foundation of the Zionist World Organization (ZWO) by Europe's Jewish elite. In 1898, the First Zionist Congress was convened in Basel, Switzerland with the belief that European Jews were facing an urgent crisis. The Zionist leadership, including Congress Chair Theodor Herzl, ultimately agreed that Jews would not enjoy equality and safety anywhere in the world unless they possessed a homeland of their own.²⁷⁰ However, the notion of just what constituted a homeland and how it would be established was unclear and the subject of intense debate. The Zionists had been considering South American options at the time, including Leon Pinsker's 1882 proposal of Argentina.²⁷¹ However, by the conclusion of the Congress, the ZWO had produced their manifesto, known as the Basel Program, which pledged to work for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.²⁷²

Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire, became increasingly important to Jews in the 19th century. Uri Abulof explains the belief of religious Zionists that "Eretz Israel" (The Land of Israel) was promised to the ancient Israelites when they entered into a covenant with God.²⁷³ As part of fulfilling this covenant, modern Jews are obligated to occupy and defend the land in a way that embodies the ideals of the Torah. Additionally, the city of Jerusalem has served as a symbol of the Holy Land for generations of diaspora Jews, helping to maintain their connection to Palestine.²⁷⁴ What the religion of Judaism held for centuries as a central tenet of the faith, secular Jewishness declared as a political goal: Return to the Holy Land.²⁷⁵

²⁶⁹ Nancy Fitch, "Mass Culture, Mass Parliamentary Politics, and Modern Anti-Semitism: The Dreyfus Affair in Rural France," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 1 (1992): 55.

²⁷⁰ Salo W. Baron, *Great ages and ideas of the Jewish people*, L. W. Schwarz (Ed.) (New York: Random House, 1956), 435.

²⁷¹ See: Leon Pinsker, *Auto-emancipation* (Maccabaeon, 1906).

²⁷² Zionist World Organization, 1897.

²⁷³ Uriel Abulof, "The Roles of Religion in National Legitimation: Judaism and Zionism's Elusive Quest for Legitimacy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol. 53, No. 3 (2014): 525.

²⁷⁴ Nissan Mindel, "The Three Daily Prayers," *Chabad.org*.

²⁷⁵ Abulof, "The Roles of Religion in National Legitimation" (2014): 525.

Despite this, many Jews were slow to embrace Zionism due to religious uncertainties, believing that re-establishing a Jewish national home in the Biblical land of Israel by human agency, rather than Divine intervention, was blasphemous. Religious Jews initially viewed Zionism as a form of rebellion against God, as the movement sought to expedite Salvation and the arrival of the Messiah, which was expressly forbidden.²⁷⁶ Samson and Fishman have examined the religious legitimation of Zionism by the late Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. As a right-wing religious ideologue, Kook responded to criticisms of the Zionist project by asserting that, “Zionism was not merely a political movement by secular Jews. It was actually a tool of God to promote His divine scheme, and to initiate the return of the Jews to their homeland.”²⁷⁷ This belief eventually came to be tolerated, if not embraced, by the majority of religious Jews, save for extreme left-wing Haredi groups like the Neturei Karta, who reject the Israeli state and advocate for Palestinian rights.²⁷⁸

In 1917, the political support the Zionists sought to facilitate the return of the Jews to Eretz Israel was delivered in the form of the Balfour Declaration. This announcement saw the British government pledge assistance for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine.²⁷⁹ The publication of the Balfour Declaration was tantamount to an official recognition that European Jews were in crisis, and relocation to Palestine was the solution to their problems. Still, questions always surrounded the legitimacy and legality of the British promise to facilitate the settlement of Jews in Palestine. Not the least of these issues was that at the time the Balfour Declaration was published, the region was still under Ottoman control.

Yet, as persecution of European Jews continued, the constant danger motivated their accelerated emigration from Central and Eastern Europe. In this context, the Zionist elite was able to influence the British government’s issuance of the 1922 White Paper, which saw the Empire reaffirm its support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.²⁸⁰ However, despite having little authority to make promises of this nature to the Zionists or

²⁷⁶ Babylonian Talmud *Ketubah* 11A.

²⁷⁷ David Samson and Tzvi Fishman, *Torat Eretz Yisrael*, (Jerusalem: Torat Eretz Yisrael Publications 1991), 12.

²⁷⁸ Neturei Karta, “About Us,” <https://www.nkusa.org>.

²⁷⁹ Arthur James Balfour, “The Balfour Declaration” (London: British Foreign Office, 1917).

²⁸⁰ Winston S. Churchill, “British White Paper, 1922” [Cmd. 1700] Correspondence with the Palestine Arab Delegation and the Zionist Organization.

anyone else, the British had already made conflicting commitments to the Arabs. In 1917, British diplomat Sir Henry McMahon had pledged his support for Sherif Hussein of Mecca to establish a Hashemite kingdom (including Palestine) in the Arabian Peninsula in exchange for his participation in a revolt against the Ottomans.²⁸¹ These incompatible promises by the British would directly contribute to violent conflict in the Middle East for generations to come.

British support notwithstanding, the Zionists fully expected that the indigenous Arab population would challenge the immigration of a large number of European Jews to Palestine, an area the Arabs long considered a homeland of their own. In a 1915 address to a Jewish audience in New York City, David Ben-Gurion articulated this impending conflict in Zionist terms. Ben-Gurion, who would go on to become the first Prime Minister of Israel, stated that, like American pioneers, the Zionists would fight “wild nature and wilder redskins” in Palestine.²⁸² While clashes between Arabs and Jews in post-WWI British Mandate Palestine took a different form than the violence the Jews experienced in Eastern and Central Europe, they were similarly acrimonious. The infamous intercommunal riots of 1920, 1921, 1929, and 1933 led to the bloodshed of both Arabs and Jews across the region.²⁸³

Indeed, Palestinian Arabs reacted strongly to the mass immigration and land acquisition practices of the incoming European Jews (Ashkenazi), which were necessary precursors for achieving the Zionist goal of re-establishing the Jews in Eretz Israel. When European Jewish settlers began arriving in significant numbers to Palestine in the late 19th century, their approach towards the native population was emblematic of traditional colonial attitudes towards “savage” and “uncivilized” peoples.²⁸⁴ By lifting the region’s indigenous Jews out of their “primitive” conditions of “poverty and superstition,” the settlers saw themselves as benevolent modernizers, bringing a western society to the Middle East that would be characterized by democracy, tolerance, and human rights.²⁸⁵ To this end, Zionist

²⁸¹ Ali Ibrahim Al-Bashayreh, “The British policy and its impact in the implementation of the Balfour Declaration,” *Asian Social Science* Vol. 8, No. 7 (2012): 229.

²⁸² David Ben-Gurion, “Earning a Homeland,” *Rebirth and Destiny of Israel*, trans. M. Nurock (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 3.

²⁸³ W.F. Abboushi, “The Road to Rebellion Arab Palestine in the 1930s,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1977): 42.

²⁸⁴ Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism* (New York: Verso, 2008), 62–73.

²⁸⁵ Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel,” *Social Text* (Autumn, 1988): 3.

discourse painted the colonization of Palestine as a means of “saving” Middle Eastern Jews from their Arab “captors.”²⁸⁶

The original Zionist settlers were largely comprised of a first-world elite who spoke European languages, were predominantly secular, and segregated themselves from Palestine’s Arab population, both Jewish and Muslim.²⁸⁷ Zionist leaders actively discouraged Jewish settlers from learning Arabic and turned Arabic-speaking, Middle Eastern Jews away from their Christian and Muslim neighbours, drawing a clear social distinction between Jewish and “non-Jewish” communities.²⁸⁸ Charles D. Smith highlights how, from the beginning, Zionist settlers never intended to integrate themselves into Arab society. Instead, they sought to create a “new” Jewish society in Palestine (the Yishuv) that would be culturally, politically, and socially distinct from its surroundings, despite the enormous challenges involved.²⁸⁹ Moreover, like other settler-colonial movements, the Zionist project also aimed to establish an autarkic economy, independent and superior to its indigenous Arab counterpart.

By 1922, the Yishuv was already accomplishing this goal, by running its own schools and implementing its own welfare system under the Histadrut, the labour federation organized and later headed by Ben-Gurion, all under the legal protection of the British Mandate.²⁹⁰ Simah Flapan argues that the Zionist’s push for “100 per cent Jewish labour” in the settler economy was the most significant factor in ensuring economic, social, and territorial separation between Palestine’s indigenous population and the Yishuv.²⁹¹ With foreign capital flowing in from American and European benefactors and the Jewish boycott of Arab labour, the Yishuv industrialized and expanded its market at a rate that considerably surpassed the indigenous economy.²⁹²

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text* Vol. 19, No. 20 (Autumn, 1988): 2.

²⁸⁸ Thompson, “Moving Zionism to Asia,” *Colonialism and the Jews* (2017): 320.

²⁸⁹ Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict* (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004), 122.

²⁹⁰ Elizabeth F. Thompson, “Moving Zionism to Asia: Texts and tactics of Colonial Settlement, 1917–1921,” *Colonialism and the Jews* (2017): 320.

²⁹¹ Simah Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians*, 199.

²⁹² Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism*, 62–73.

The British could have acted at any time to restrict Jewish immigration and control the acquisition of land.²⁹³ Their failure to do so, combined with the increasing economic marginalization of Palestinian Arabs, largely prompted the 1936 Arab general strike. This preceded the three years known as the ‘Arab Revolt’ against increasing Jewish immigration and British rule in Palestine.²⁹⁴ By 1937, the British felt their hand had been forced and established the Peel Commission to uncover the causes of unrest in Palestine. In the aftermath, the British withdrew critical elements of support for the Zionist project, placing severe restrictions on Jewish immigration and land acquisition.²⁹⁵ These back-and-forth issues became a zero-sum game: any concession to the Arabs was a loss for the Jews and vice versa.²⁹⁶

The restrictions implemented by the Peel Commission, combined with the proposed characteristics of the Jewish state, represented a significant threat to the Zionist project as well as Jews currently living in Palestine. More specifically, both the curbs on immigration and restrictions on land acquisition threatened the population growth and economic viability of the burgeoning Jewish community. More pressingly, at this very time, the necessity for Jewish emigration from Europe was most desperate. The gathering momentum of the Holocaust saw the most severe pressure yet for immigration to Palestine.

However, despite the significance of curtailing Jewish immigration at a vital juncture, Salo Baron rightly argues that the Peel Commission’s defining act was the recommendation to partition the Mandate into separate Arab and Jewish states.²⁹⁷ While the Zionists accepted this plan in principle, a combination of factors, including the backpedaling of British support and staunch Arab resistance to the partition proposal, convinced them that they could rely only on their own resources to achieve statehood. To this end, throughout the 1940s, Jewish paramilitary organizations such as the Irgun and Stern Gang carried out terror attacks against Arab and British targets across Palestine. These acts, combined with

²⁹³ George E. Kirk, *A Short History of the Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1959), 187–189.

²⁹⁴ Kirk, *History of the Middle East*, 187–189.

²⁹⁵ Baron, *Ideas of the Jewish people*, 446–447.

²⁹⁶ Kirk, *History of the Middle East*, 153–159.

²⁹⁷ Baron, *Ideas of the Jewish people*, 446–447.

increased illegal immigration by European Jews, served to put enormous pressure on the British to free themselves of the burden Mandate Palestine had become.²⁹⁸ Finally, the conclusion of the Second World War and the British decision to relinquish the fate of Palestine to the United Nations resulted in a Jewish victory, and the Israeli Declaration of Independence on May 14th, 1948.

THE CASE OF LIBERIA

Like the Jews who had experienced generations of persecution in Europe and elsewhere, black slaves were keenly aware of their own suffering at the hands of the slave trade. In the late 18th and early 19th century, the abolition movement was well underway in pre-Civil War America. At the time, slavery was the primary concern of American society, especially in the middle and southern Atlantic states where many plantations were located. The status of ‘freedmen’ (former slaves who had been emancipated) was seen as a pressing issue, as the black population had doubled between 1789 and 1819.²⁹⁹ Within white American society, the freedmen were seen as a potentially agitating and rebellious demographic. This was due to the general feeling that freedmen should not aspire to legal equality with whites. Any notion of equality threatened the doctrine of racial superiority that was inherent to the institution of slavery.³⁰⁰ Emblematic of the failure to fully emancipate black slaves, the legal restrictions levied upon them became more arduous throughout the 1820s. Indeed, all states implemented legislative restrictions on the economic, political, and social activity of freedmen, a move that coincided with the dramatic increase in their numbers.³⁰¹

The constant danger of kidnapping or malicious use of the legal system (i.e. the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850) to snare freedmen back into slavery was perhaps comparable to the violent pogroms experienced by Jews in Europe. But, while the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe were left to fend for themselves by the Christian majority, and thus comprised the vast majority of those who recognized and reacted to their problem, those who responded to the plight of the black freedmen were predominantly white. Indeed, two

²⁹⁸ Y.S. Brenner, “The ‘Stern Gang’ 1940–48,” *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1965): 5.

²⁹⁹ Robert E. Anderson, *Liberia: America’s American Friend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), Ch. 5.

³⁰⁰ Krain, “Transplantations of Nationalism,” 175.

³⁰¹ John H. Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 213–219.

groups of American elites felt compelled to address the situation. The first were altruistic and sympathetic abolitionists, mainly businessmen, clergy, and politicians. They were less likely to view the freedmen as a threat and sympathized with their situation. The second group were slaveholders whose primary motivation was the fear that freedmen would incite a slave rebellion against plantation owners and aid those who remained enslaved to escape.³⁰² From an early stage, both groups agreed that the remedy for the problem of the freedmen was their removal from the American body politic.

In this context, the American Colonization Society (ACS), was founded in 1816 by Robert Finley, a Presbyterian minister, along with some of America's most prominent national leaders. Among them were slave-owning American presidents Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe and prominent businessmen such as Henry Clay, John Randolph, and Bushrod Washington.³⁰³ The organization's stated mission was to "encourage and support the voluntary migration of free African Americans to the continent of Africa."³⁰⁴ The ACS' membership was also thoroughly populated with evangelical zealots seeking to fulfil a 'civilizing mission' by converting the 'dark continent' to Christianity.³⁰⁵ The group organized quickly and, owing to its wealthy founders, was well-financed. They sought to implement their plan for an African colony of freedmen as soon as possible.

While the organization professed that any emigration from the United States was voluntary, many blacks were pressured to do so. In some cases, slaves were manumitted on the condition that they join the ACS' venture immediately.³⁰⁶ The primary obstacle to the ACS' goal, however, was that the vast majority of the African American community was strongly opposed to the project and colonialism in general.³⁰⁷ In many cases, freedmen could trace their family histories in the United States back for generations. They argued

³⁰² Anderson, *Liberia*, Ch. 5.

³⁰³ Krain, "Transplantations of Nationalism," 175.

³⁰⁴ American Colonization Society, Library of Congress, (Washington D.C. 4 September, 1895), <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam002.html>.

³⁰⁵ Franklin, *Slavery to Freedom*, 235–238.

³⁰⁶ Francis Scott Key, "Mr. Key on the Colonization Society," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* Vol. 12, No. 11 (November, 1836): 346–351.

³⁰⁷ Brandon Mills, "The United States of Africa: Liberian Independence and the Contested Meaning of a Black Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring 2014): 98.

vehemently that they were “no more African than the Americans were British.”³⁰⁸ Almost exclusively, the freedmen spoke English, wore Western clothing, and practised Christianity. On this basis and others, even as early as the 1820s, many blacks were advocating for equality and inclusion in American society rather than segregation or emigration.³⁰⁹ At the same time, however, the freedmen’s disillusionment about their prospects for emancipation in the United States was growing, and they dreamed of greater political freedom in Liberia. This persuaded some members of the black community to reconsider the project they had decisively opposed from the beginning.³¹⁰ However, if there was to be a future repatriation to Africa, the freedmen wanted to make the decision themselves.

Because of the role of the Holy Land in Judaism, European Jews had prayed for God to “return (the Jewish people) in mercy to thy Jerusalem” on a daily basis for centuries.³¹¹ As a result, they fundamentally understood which ‘homeland’ they would be ‘returning’ to before there was even a pressing need to do so. Conversely, Mark Krain highlights that, for the freedmen, the concept of establishing an African ‘homeland’ was considered a purely practical matter. It was an open secret that white men had inhumanely removed the blacks from Africa, and abolitionists felt that they bore the responsibility of returning them. Yet, there was much uncertainty as to where. Over generations of slavery, the freedmen had lost their former tribal identities and places of origin.³¹²

This issue was resolved on an entirely practical basis. When faced with the same question a generation earlier, the British elected to establish their colony of black freedmen (Sierra Leone) in a lightly-populated and underdeveloped area of the West African coast.³¹³ These elements were vital, as building a colony at many locations along the west or southwest coast would have exposed the settlers to the dangers of the still-flourishing slave trade and the local tribal regimes who supported it. It was only to this extent (protection, viability)

³⁰⁸ Key, “Colonization Society,” 346.

³⁰⁹ Key, “Colonization Society,” 346.

³¹⁰ Mills, “The United States of Africa,” 84.

³¹¹ Mindel, “The Three Daily Prayers,” *Chabad.org*.

³¹² Krain, “Transplantations of Nationalism,” 176.

³¹³ Donald L. Wiedner, *A History of Africa* (New York: Random House, 1962), 74–75.

that the specific territory was important, as opposed to simply “somewhere in Africa.”³¹⁴ With these necessities in mind, the ACS, whose members were very influential in American industry and politics, successfully lobbied Congress for the necessary legislation to begin transferring freedmen to Africa. With the assistance of President Monroe, the ACS established the first African-American settlement on the quiet and somewhat inhospitable headland of Cape Mesurado in 1820.³¹⁵

Because the initial freedmen communities were heavily reliant on external support, assistance from the ACS was critical to their survival. The organization was not only required to purchase the land upon which the freedmen’s settlements were built, but it also provided the tools the settlers used to construct buildings and work the land. Without this external support, the early settlers could barely defend themselves against external threats and mobilize resources for physical sustenance.³¹⁶ While the ACS went to great lengths to aid the emigrating freedmen in addressing the practical problems of survival in an inhospitable land, the organization’s high-ranking elite were careful to make it appear as though the U.S. government had no official concern with the colonization project. The intensity of the slavery debate in American politics and the Federal government’s policy of not engaging in colonialism prohibited an official declaration of support for these settlements.³¹⁷ Despite this, throughout the 1820s, the U.S. Navy consistently intervened on behalf of the settlers. The Navy regularly stepped in to defend Americo-Liberians against incursions from neighbouring French Guinea and Sierra Leone, and from local tribes like the Golahs and Condos,³¹⁸ who were waging war against colonial aggression while simultaneously aiding and abetting the region’s still-thriving slave trade.³¹⁹

The settlers from whom the Liberian nation evolved were far more American than African in their worldview and orientation, maintaining a strong sentimental attachment to the

³¹⁴ Wiedner, *A History of Africa*, 74–75.

³¹⁵ Wiedner, *A History of Africa*, 74–75.

³¹⁶ Magdalene S. David, “The love of liberty brought us here (an analysis of the development of the settler state in 19th century Liberia),” *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 11, No. 31 (1984): 61–62.

³¹⁷ Wiedner, *A History of Africa*, 74–75.

³¹⁸ Monday B. Akpan, “Black Imperialism: Americo-Liberian rule over the African peoples of Liberia, 1841–1964,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol. 7, No. 2 (1973): 221.

³¹⁹ Svend E. Holsoe, “A Study of Relations between Settlers and Indigenous Peoples in Western Liberia, 1821–1847” *African Historical Studies* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1971): 343–346, Krain, “Transplantations of Nationalism,” 172.

United States, which they saw as their “native land.”³²⁰ The colonists preferred American foodstuffs such as bacon, butter, corn-meal, flour, lard, and pickled beef, in comparison to African food like cassava, palm oil, plantains, sweet potatoes, yams, and locally-grown “country rice,” instead opting to import large quantities of American-grown varieties.³²¹ They dressed in the Victorian, Western styles with which they were familiar,³²² and openly denounced the scantily-clad Africans, whom they viewed as semi-nude, “untutored savages.”³²³ The settlers also abhorred traditional African religions such as heathenism, idolatry, and paganism. H.A. Jones highlights how many of the colony’s ACS backers and leading settlers aimed, through territorial expansion, to create a great, “civilized” Christian nation on the West Coast of Africa that would overcome the “barbarism and paganism” of the local inhabitants by spreading “light and knowledge.”³²⁴

Thus, in spite of the colour of their skin, the Americo-Liberians were foreign, and, similarly to British, French, and Portuguese colonists elsewhere throughout the continent, lacked emotional attachment to the West African region in which they settled.³²⁵ Like the European settlers in newly-established colonies from Algeria to Zimbabwe, the Americo-Liberians had been raised in Western culture and were imbued with the accompanying epistemologies of modern science, technology, and political organization. In contrast to the communal land ownership practices of the local African population, the colonists held land individually, and their political institutions were based on the American model, with an elected president, House of Representatives, and Senate.³²⁶ As such, the settlers regarded their own culture as superior to that of the indigenous African population. Moreover, by as late as the 1830s, at least one Liberian colonist held that, due to their “heathen” and “uncivilized” nature, “Africans ought to be slaves.”³²⁷

³²⁰ *The African Repository* LII, January 1876, 16.

³²¹ *The African Repository* IV, March 1828, 16.

³²² Sir Harry Johnston, *Liberia* Vol. 1, (Hutchinson, London, 1961), 354–355.

³²³ *The African Repository* XXVII, April 1851.

³²⁴ H.A. Jones, “The Struggle for Political and Cultural Unification in Liberia 1847–1930,” Doctoral Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1962, 151, A.C.S., *Tenth Annual Report*, January 1827, 42–43.

³²⁵ Akpan, “Black Imperialism,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1973): 219.

³²⁶ Monday B. Akpan, “The African Policy of the Liberian Settlers 1841–1932: A Study of the Native Policy of a Non-Colonial Power in Africa,” Doctoral Dissertation, Ibadan University, 1968, Ibadan, Nigeria, 11–14.

³²⁷ *The African Repository* X, December 1834, 316–318.

After 1834, ACS support for the settlers weakened for several reasons. Abolitionists, at the behest of the freedmen, became opposed to the idea of colonization over integration into American society. In the same vein, it had become clear that the majority of black freedmen were not interested in emigrating to a West African outpost. Even if there had been substantial black support for emigration to Liberia, the ACS, despite its well-heeled founders, could not have financed it. The cost of assisting the first several thousand settlers alone was prohibitive, and many had died due to tropical diseases and conflict with the native inhabitants.³²⁸ In addition, land acquisition posed another significant issue. The original territory had been purchased from local ruler Zolu Duma (King Peter) under accusations of duress, and the chief later denied that he had sought to relinquish it permanently. Even so, it is debatable whether local chiefs had the power under the tribal structure to sell off land, even if they wished to do so.³²⁹

Generally speaking, aside from the establishment of several small communities such as Buchanan, Greenville, and Monrovia, none of the goals of the ACS' founders were being achieved. Free blacks were strongly opposed to mass emigration, widespread Christianization of Africa was appearing unlikely, and a major colonial expansion did not appear to be on the horizon. With the failure to achieve significant progress, the heterogenic nature of ACS' leadership devolved into much internal disagreement regarding how best to proceed. In 1834, experiencing a shortage of funding, the ACS became insolvent. When the last ACS-appointed white governor of Liberia died in September 1841, he was succeeded by Joseph J. Roberts, a freedman.³³⁰ In the years following, the settler's ambiguous relationship with the American government as neither a colony nor a protectorate factored strongly in the July 26, 1847 decision to terminate their official ties to the ACS and declare independence.³³¹ This assertion of sovereignty by which the Republic of Liberia was founded was legalistically unique: a solely private enterprise of citizens in one country (America) had evolved directly into a sovereign nation-state.³³²

³²⁸ Tom W. Shick, "A quantitative analysis of Liberian colonization from 1820 to 1843 with special reference to mortality," *The Journal of African History* Vol. 12, No.1 (1971): 50.

³²⁹ Wiedner, *A History of Africa*, 76.

³³⁰ Akpan, "Black Imperialism," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1973): 218.

³³¹ Mills, "The United States of Africa," 89.

³³² Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 245.

ANALYSIS

The challenges faced by African Americans and European Jews differed in nature. In Europe, Jews were struggling against centuries of discrimination and segregation. In America, the institution of slavery was premised on a fundamentally de-humanizing understanding of blacks that failed to end when they achieved freedom from slavery. In each instance, the need to alleviate these hardships compelled influential groups to action. While in the case of the freedmen, their cause was championed primarily by white American elites, in the case of the Jews, it was said demographic that responded to its own crises. Although European Jews faced great persecution, when compared to emancipated slaves, the Jews possessed a degree of social and economic capital that blacks in America never did. Furthermore, it is obvious that the emigration of blacks from America and Jews from Europe was viewed favourably, if not actively encouraged, by the majority white population.

Both the ZWO and ACS were able to mobilize influential backers and financial support from those who were moved by the enormity of their respective plights. In the case of the ZWO, the movement was able to achieve its goals of establishing a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine and providing a safe haven from European persecution. Conversely, while the ACS was successful in establishing a West African colony that evolved into modern-day Liberia, it largely failed in its quest to encourage the mass emigration of black freedmen and its dream of using the colony as an outpost to spread Christianity throughout the continent. Nevertheless, the support of both organizations was vital for the establishment and sustainability of settler colonies of both African American and Jewish communities.

The role of the specific geographic territory was critically important for Israel, due to the central role played by the land of Eretz Israel in the Jewish faith. Indeed, Judaism's religious ideal of a return to the Holy Land was essential to the Zionist project and merged with the growing secular awareness of European Jews. This marriage of two powerful forces resulted in a nationalist fervour that served as the overwhelming impetus the ZWO required to carry out its project of colonization. Additionally, Israel had both push and pull factors working in its favour. The Jews 'pushed' out of Europe but were also 'pulled' back

to their homeland. Conversely, black freedmen ‘pushed’ out of the US but were not ‘pulled’ by a strong religious ideology or historical claim to a specific geographical territory.

Indeed, in the case of Liberia, the freedmen’s loss of their tribal identities meant that the importance of a specific territory for settlement was based on practical, rather than ideological, considerations. Throughout the abolition process in America, there were many proposals for granting freedmen land on the Western frontier. Yet, the inherent racial element of the freedmen’s exclusion from society may have been due to the belief in the minds of white Americans that blacks “came from Africa” and their return to “somewhere in Africa” was somehow just.³³³ Regardless, practicality was the determining factor in deciding where in Africa the emigrating freedmen would be situated. Because of the known hostility of the West African tribes and their cooperation with slave raiders on the coast, the ACS’ choice of territory was entirely logical, due to its relative safety.

The Jews immigrating to Palestine were aided both by the policies of the British Mandate and the worldwide network of financial support from the ZWO. In the case of Jewish settlers in Palestine, external (British) assistance was most vital in terms of political support. The policies of the British Mandate gave immigrating Jews the opportunity to increase their population and take ownership of economic assets (i.e. land and resources) that facilitated their dominance of Palestine.

In West Africa, the vulnerability of the African Americans lay in their ability to survive the swampy, disease-ridden climate and defend themselves from attacks by inland tribal communities. While the Liberian colonists did not enjoy nearly the same financial backing as their Zionist contemporaries, they still benefited enormously from ACS support. West African settlers were provided with training and tools that were highly beneficial for establishing their settlements and moving towards a declaration of sovereignty. In both cases, the initial support from external actors allowed the colonists to develop the capacity to sustain themselves and eventually assert their sovereign independence.

³³³ Krain, “Transplantations of Nationalism,” 184.

CONCLUSION

Israel and Liberia are unique examples of settler colonialism. In the case of Israel, European Jews did not immigrate to Palestine from a single metropole, a common characteristic of this type of colonialism. Additionally, the case of Liberia is perhaps the only known example of black settler colonialism. In both instances, the hostility and resistance towards the colonists from the local population have been the defining characteristic of these colonial projects. In each instance, the native inhabitants considered these attitudes legitimate on the grounds that the immigrants had no right to the land they were occupying. Indeed, neither the ACS nor the ZWO had the right to establish colonies in either of the regions in question. While, in many cases, the colonists purchased the land they settled on, both the fairness of the transactional terms and the right to sell the land in the first place were disputed and led to enormous problems.

In the case of Israel, the conflict between Zionism and emerging Arab nationalism resulted in a series of wars and intergenerational trauma that endures to this day. In the case of Liberia, the country continues to be plagued by a despotic ruling elite, multiple civil wars, and general poverty and destitution. The establishment of Israel and Liberia as sovereign nation-states was framed as the result of successful repatriation of an indigenous community to their former ancestral homeland, and this provided ideological legitimacy in the eyes of both backers and colonists alike. Yet, generations of war and conflict in both states lead to the conclusion that European Jews and black freedmen were as indigenous to the lands they colonized as the Americans were British.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

A.C.S. *Tenth Annual Report*. January, 1827.

Act of February 12, 1793. 1 Stat. 302. (1793).

Act of September 18, 1850. 9 Stat. 462. (1850).

American Colonization Society. Library of Congress. Washington D.C. 4 September, 1895. Accessed 18 April, 2020. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam002.html>.

Babylonian Talmud Ketubah IIIA.

Balfour, Arthur James. "The Balfour Declaration." London: British Foreign Office. 1917. Accessed 18 April, 2020.

Churchill, Winston S. "British White Paper, 1922." [Cmd. 1700]. Correspondence with the Palestine Arab Delegation and the Zionist Organization.

Neturei Karta. "About Us." <https://www.nkusa.org>. Accessed 7 September, 2020.

The African Repository IV. March, 1828.

The African Repository X. December, 1834.

The African Repository LII. January, 1876.

Zionist World Congress. "Zionist Congress: First Zionist Congress & Basel Program (August 1897)." *Jewish Virtual Library*. Accessed 12 April, 2020.

Secondary Sources

Abboushi, W.F. "The Road to Rebellion Arab Palestine in the 1930s." *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1977): 23–46.

Abulof, Uriel. "The Roles of Religion in National Legitimation: Judaism and Zionism's Elusive Quest for Legitimacy." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol. 53, No. 3 (2014): 515–533.

Akpan, Monday B. "The African Policy of the Liberian Settlers 1841–1932: A Study of the Native Policy of a Non-Colonial Power in Africa." Doctoral Dissertation, Ibadan University, 1968.

Akpan, Monday B. "Black imperialism: Americo-Liberian rule over the African peoples of Liberia, 1841–1964." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol. 7, No. 2 (1973): 217–236.

Al-Bashayreh, Ali Ibrahim. "The British policy and its impact in the implementation of the Balfour Declaration." *Asian Social Science* Vol. 8, No. 7 (2012): 228–239.

Anderson, Robert E. *Liberia, America's American Friend*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952.

Baron, Salo W. *Great ages and ideas of the Jewish people*. L. W. Schwarz (Ed.). New York: Random House, 1956.

Ben-Gurion, David. "Earning a Homeland." *Rebirth and Destiny of Israel*. trans. M. Nurock. New York: Philosophical Library, 1954.

Brenner, Y.S. "The 'Stern Gang' 1940–48." *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1965): 2–30. DOI: 10.1080/00263206508700030.

David, Magdalene S. "The love of liberty brought us here (an analysis of the development of the settler state in 19th century Liberia)." *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 11, No. 31 (1984): 57–70. DOI: 10.1080/03056248408703600.

Fitch, Nancy. "Mass Culture, Mass Parliamentary Politics, and Modern Anti-Semitism: The Dreyfus Affair in Rural France." *The American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 1 (1992): 55–95.

Simah, Flapanf. *Zionism and the Palestinians*. London: Croom Helm, 1979.

Franklin, John H. *From Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947.

Fyfe, Christopher. *A History of Sierra Leone*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Holsoe, Svend E. "A Study of Relations between Settlers and Indigenous Peoples in Western Liberia, 1821–1847." *African Historical Studies* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1971): 331–362.

Johnston, Sir Harry. *Liberia* Vol. 1. London: Hutchinson, 1961.

Jones, H.A. "The Struggle for Political and Cultural Unification in Liberia 1847–1930." Doctoral Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1962.

Key, Francis Scott. "Mr. Key on the Colonization Society." *African Repository and Colonial Journal* Vol. 12, No. 11 (November, 1836): 339–351.

Kirk, George E. *A Short history of the Middle East*. New York: Praeger, 1959.

Krain, Mark. "A Comparative Study of Transplantations of Nationalism: The Cases of Israel, Liberia, and Sierra Leone." *International Review of Modern Sociology* Vol. 2, No. 2 (September, 1972): 168–189.

Mindel, Nissan. "The Three Daily Prayers." *Chabad.org*. Accessed 12 April, 2020. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/682091/jewish/The-Three-Daily-Prayers.htm.

Mills, Brandon. "The United States of Africa: Liberian Independence and the Contested Meaning of a Black Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring 2014): 79–107.

Piterberg, Gabriel. *The Returns of Zionism*. New York: Verso, 2008.

Pinsker, Leon. *Auto-emancipation*. Maccabaeon, 1906.

Samson, David, and Tzvi Fishman. *Torat Eretz Yisrael*. Jerusalem: Torat Eretz Yisrael Publications, 1991.

Sherman, C. (ed.). *Changing Liberia, A Challenge to the Christian*. Monrovia: Young Men's Christian Association, 1959.

Shick, Tom W. "A quantitative analysis of Liberian colonization from 1820 to 1843 with special reference to mortality." *The Journal of African History* Vol. 12, No. 1 (1971): 45–59.

Shohat, Ella. "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims." *Social Text* Vol. 19, No. 20 (Autumn, 1988): 1–35.

Smith, Charles D. *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

Thompson, Elizabeth F. "Moving Zionism to Asia: Texts and tactics of Colonial Settlement, 1917–1921." *Colonialism and the Jews* (2017): 317–326.

Wiedner, Donald L. *A History of Africa*. New York: Random House, 1962.