

The Limits of Reconciliation
Rihani's View of State-Zionism
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It may have taken prophetic inspiration to write in 1921, as Rihani did in *The Descent of Bolshevism*, that the Bolshevik revolution was an instance of egalitarian criminal conspiracies like the Assassins. It did not require prophecy to write in the 1930's that State-Zionism would result in unending and increasingly violent conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine [*Fate*, p.26]. I use the term 'State-Zionism' instead of 'political Zionism' to refer to those who believe that Jews must have their own state if they are to be Jews at all. Cultural or religious Zionists may or may not be State-Zionists, just as State-Zionists may or may not be religious or follow any particular Jewish practice. Reading the Balfour Declaration in the context of State-Zionist claims would have sufficed:

His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

Rihani commented that: 'The British Government has either to perform a miracle or let one of its clients go to the devil' [*Fate*, p.39]. Rihani knew who would make the journey to hell, as millions of Palestinian refugees can attest. For State-Zionism, from its

inception, would make every effort to resolve the contradictory objectives of the Balfour Declaration in favor of a Jewish state. When in 1948 the West recognized the Israel, it in effect placed a period after the word ‘object’ in the Balfour Declaration. Seldom has a punctuation mark resulted in so much bloodshed and misery.

In contrast to this straightforward reading, consider the interpretation of a leading American apologist for State-Zionism: ‘The Jewish people, like other historic nationalities, have a right to self-determination. The Jews, having been exiled from their ancestral homeland, cannot effectively exercise their right to self-determination until restored to sovereign possession of their country. *Ergo*, the Jews are entitled to sovereign possession of Palestine. The subordinate clauses that were appended to the Balfour Declaration had the following significance, in terms of this scheme: Other legitimate rights existed which might conceivably be affected by restoring Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. The restoration should be so conducted that these would not in fact be adversely affected. This was entirely possible, moreover, since the rights in question, by definition, were not incompatible with Jewish sovereignty in Palestine’ [Halpern, p.299]. Leaving aside highly problematic historical premises, e.g., the forced exile of all Jews from Palestine without any possibility of return until sovereignty be achieved, note the question begging assumption that Jewish sovereignty in Palestine is to occur first, before other rights have to be considered. The plain reading of the English states that a Jewish Homeland in Palestine--note “sovereignty” is not used—*is conditional* upon the upholding of other rights of non-Jews already living in Palestine. Before a homeland can be pursued on the ground an agreement must be reached with the indigenous population regarding their rights. Note also, the Declaration refers to a homeland *in* Palestine, not a

homeland *of* Palestine. Note also the enormous omission that the Palestinians, certainly a historic nationality, might have a right to self-determination. At the very least they have been an identifiable people living in the region for two thousand years since the Jews left, and several millennia before that. The Balfour Declaration did not mention sovereignty at all. If Halpern wishes to introduce the term in his eccentric reading of the document, then he must allow the concept to be used by the Palestinians, the principal non-Jewish community in Palestine. That he does not do so demonstrates that his avowed attempt to give an impartial “Wilsonian” assessment of the idea of the Jewish state is either a failure or a fraud. It is much more successful as a moderate State-Zionist piece of propaganda, which is precisely how an honest scholar would have presented it. Over fifty years later the violence and the suffering continue. State-Zionism, as predicted, has been a ‘menace...to peace in the Near East’ [*Fate*, p.37].

This picture of unending ethnic violence, to say nothing of dishonest scholarship, may seem an eccentric way to begin a paper on reconciliation. Yet reality must be confronted, if reconciliation is to be more than a pious hope. The reality of State-Zionist Israel has been disastrous for Palestine, but not because of Jews or Judaism. Like many moderate advocates of the Arab position, Rihani drew a sharp distinction between Jews and the proponents of State-Zionism. This distinction has been the crux of the Jewish problem. It was brought into high relief with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and the consequent rise of the Nation-State.

The position of the nation-state has never been framed better than by Clermont-Tonnerre in his famous address to the French National Assembly in 1789: ‘As a nation the Jews must be denied everything, as individuals they must be granted everything; their

judges can no longer be recognized; their recourse must be to our own exclusively; legal protection for the doubtful laws by which Jewish corporate existence is maintained must and; they cannot be allowed to create a political body or a separate order within the state; it is necessary that they become citizens individually' [Vital, *A People Apart*, p.44]. Of course this declaration of exclusive sovereignty did not apply only to Jews but to all groups with political aspirations independent of the Nation-State.

All nations are to some extent created. Any group, however constituted, which qualifies its affiliation to the state cannot be tolerated. Citizenship must exhaust political claims and citizenship resides in individuals. Repeatedly, Rihani celebrated the revival of the Hebrew culture and the cultural achievements of the Jews. He praised 'the intellectual Jews [who] everywhere are in the vanguard of the internationalism that is the harbinger of universal peace' [*Fate*, p.33]. State-Zionism was another matter: 'In a nutshell, it is an effort to create with foreign money and foreign force a national home for one race in a country which is, and which has been for more than thirteen hundred years, the national home of another. No, a national home for the Jews in Palestine cannot be accomplished without putting the Arabs out of their own homes' [*Fate*, p.68]. Rihani was not alone in this assessment. 'In New York in 1918, David Ben Gurion and Yitzak Ben-Zvi...stated that the country had more than a million natives, but those did not feel at home and showed no signs of attachment. Therefore...Palestine was a land without a people...' [Beit-Hallahmi, p. 75]. Pushing this logic to its absurdity soon followed: 'at some point the natives [became]... invaders and aggressors.... Arabs were compared to eastern European gentiles, engaging in pogroms against peaceful Jews' [Beit-Hallahmi, p.77].

Here it may be useful to indicate the propositions my paper assumes, but does not defend. For reasons of brevity: *first, all absolutist ideas are inimical to reason and tend to find the material world problematic if not depraved; second, all racial nationalisms, like State-Zionism and Nazism, are totalitarian in nature, however circumscribed their practice is by reality.* Linking Nazism and State-Zionism often seems extreme to Americans. Not to honest Israelis. According to Teddy Preuss, Israeli extremists, either State-Zionist or Fundamentalist or in some combination, like the National Religious

Party, ‘see the Arabs as nothing more than disease-spreading rats, lice or other loathsome creatures; this is exactly how the Nazis believed that the Aryan race alone had laudable qualities that were inheritable but that could become polluted by sheer contact with dirty and morbid Jews. Kahane, who learned nothing from the Nuremberg Laws, had exactly the same notions about the Arabs’ [Shahak and Mezvinsky, p. 106]. *Third, all sectarian dogmatic monotheisms tend towards theocracies; the more literal and fundamental the theology, the greater the tendency towards tyranny in the name of God; fourth, when racial nationalism and fundamentalist theology combine, the rush to totalitarianism becomes all but irresistible.* The political becomes subordinate to ‘God’s will’, which speaks to the communicant or the priest in eschatological terms. The end justifies the means because only the end counts.

By political I mean the ancient Greek idea that all public matters are at the disposal of the citizenry. Of course, they may have religious views, that is, beliefs which transcend the material world, but these, however much they inform their citizenship, have no place in the public debate. Transcendental views count privately but not publicly. Above all these transcendental ideas are not the province of priests or rabbis or any other

special interpreters of the divine. In other words, transcendent ideals have to become politicized, that is, brought within the body politic to be debated and criticized like any other idea. They possess no special status.

Although not in so many words, no political theorist, Rihani largely subscribed to these propositions and to this conception of the political. Many illustrations could be drawn from his prose and especially his poetry. Given his views of State-Zionism and assuming the truth of my propositions, the question becomes, Can Rihani's passionate belief in reconciliation be squared with his analysis of the conflict of Arabs and Jews in Palestine?

Here again, let us define terms. Although not often emphasized, tolerance has the negative connotation of indifference (or, as Rihani expressed it, 'apathy'). One does not mind an obnoxious person or trait so long as that person or trait can be avoided. So understood tolerance is a long way from reconciliation and may be closer to irreconcilable differences than to accommodation. Reconciliation implies acceptance of the 'other' *in the presence of the other*. Ideally, and there is evidence that Rihani pursued this ideal, reconciliation suggests the absorption of the other *without diminishing the other's otherness*. Reconciliation thus becomes a synthesis where neither of the initial terms loses its distinctiveness, yet manage *because of their differences* to form an enhanced third term. Consider an ideally consummated sexual union, whereby the bodies of the lovers mirror their souls and their souls their bodies. In its most spiritual formulation, the two become one, without ceasing to be two, an exalted third term, the *Thou* and the *Me*, which allows each to thrive.

Yea, Man is as near the Beloved
As far from the world he may be;

He is full of the beauty of Allah
As he's void of the *Thou* and the *Me*.
Life and the world we abandon
That the life of the world we may see.
O, come to the assembly of Lovers
In the shade of the Tuba tree.
O, come to the Banquet of Union
And taste of the ecstasy. *Chant of Mystics*, p.104

If, for Rihani, reconciliation implied transcendental spiritual powers, what made State-Zionism resistant to reconciliation? Why did he believe that State-Zionism was an impregnable barrier to peace among Arabs and Jews in Palestine? Before I discuss these still explosive questions, let me say what Rihani did not do. He did not make an anti-Semitic argument. He did not follow the dominant European idea that the Jews, both as historical actors and as symbols, were the cause of the world's ills. He did not write, as T.S. Eliot did, 'The rats are underneath the piles, / the Jew is underneath the lot'. Most apposite for this paper, he did not define the Jews, as Hitler and other anti-Semites did, as fundamentally anti-spiritual, as irremediably materialistic. In other words, Rihani believed that Jews were reconcilable in the fullest senses of his use of the term. 'The Native Jews are our Brothers. But the Jews who come from Central and Eastern Europe are the vanguards of a dream of conquest, a dream which is being supported with American money and English bayonets' [*Fate*, p.25]. Rihani did not condemn the Jews of Europe out of hand: 'It is in their power to help in promoting the highest ideal of mankind, which is much higher than the ideal of Zion' [*Fate*, p.33]. All State-Zionists, however, disagree with Rihani's distinction between Zion and the highest ideals of mankind.

In a book which analyzes many of the chief exponents of State-Zionism, Avineri's *The Making of Modern Zionism*, it is clear that State-Zionism assumes that the

Jewish People in their own state are necessary to the accomplishment of their missions, secular and sacred, to the rest of humanity. It is clear that Rihani radically distinguished Jews from the advocates of State-Zionism, which he saw as ‘the only barrier between the Arabs and the Jews. Remove that barrier, and the Palestinian problem could be solved without prejudicing the rights of any individual or the legitimate claims of the Palestinian people. (For a sensitive and moving portrayal of the plight of the Palestinians, see Hanan Ashrawi’s, *This Side of Peace*.) Remove that barrier and the doors of Arabia will be open to the Jews who are fleeing the Kultur Lords of Europe’ [*Fate*, p. 122-3]. If the Jews were as spiritually open to reconciliation as any other people, then there must be something in State-Zionism which makes them closed to it. Shahak and Mezvinsky (p.132) echo Rihani’s point: ‘An intellectual compromise with Jewish orthodoxy is no more possible than with any other totalitarian system.’ The authors are not referring to what is in America a ritually precise form of Judaism, but to Jewish Fundamentalism, especially as it has found political expression in extreme State-Zionist policies, most particularly the settlements of the *Gush Emunim*, the assassin Baruch Goldstein, and the various rabbis who believe, among other things, that the Jews are the only truly human species, born to rule all others. What is this element which makes reconciliation impossible in principle and not merely a practical obstacle to the reconciliation of Arabs and Jews? A short primer on State-Zionism is here necessary.

In many respects State-Zionism was merely another 19th century nationalist movement. Indeed the success of European nationalism necessitated Jewish nationalism for those Jews who believed the Jews were a nation, not merely a group of citizens, who might or might not practice Judaism. There was more to State-Zionism than the political

aspirations of yet another ethnic or racial group in Europe. There was more to State-Zionism than an effort to retain cultural identity.

The first premise of State-Zionism, and this is what makes it unique among European nationalisms, is the concept of *Absolute Anti-Semitism*. This axiom states that every nation has been and must be anti-Semitic. No matter what rights might be proffered the Jews under this or that universal creed, no matter how these rights were to be guaranteed, sooner or later, anti-Semitism would reveal itself. With the Enlightenment West European countries eliminated the political disabilities of Jews. Citizenship and with it allegiance to the nation-state became more important than religion, ethnicity or any other claim to nationhood independent of citizenship. Many religious Jews properly feared that political equality would lead to assimilation, the loss of Jewishness. With the rise of State-Zionism another reason for fearing the Western democracies arose. These countries, particularly the U.S. would attract Jews who were still persecuted, mostly from Eastern Europe, thereby making it more difficult to populate Palestine. For these reasons, one doctrinal, one practical, the axiom of Absolute Anti-Semitism has support of both atheists and Fundamentalist Jews. Moreover, the nation-states of the Enlightenment were considered more insidiously dangerous to Jewry than the nation-states of reaction. For concepts of natural rights would seduce Jews into becoming non-Jews far more effectively and permanently than the tortures of the Inquisition.

Among the many misconception about the history of the various inquisitions is that it targeted Jews. No inquisition had jurisdiction over Jews. The mandate of all inquisitions was to root out heresy among the baptized. As a practical matter the inquisitors tended to pay scant attention to the sincerity of Christian beliefs among the

poor, focusing their attention upon the more affluent, who could and did often buy their tormentors off. The inquisitions did pay a great deal of attention to baptized Jews for two good reasons: their sincerity was often properly suspect and only affluent Jews had incentives to convert.

Naturally, not all the advocates of State-Zionism have believed in all its tenets, or in any of its tenets to the same degree or in the same way. Nevertheless, Absolute Anti-Semitism lies at the heart of its doctrine. What matters to this paper is not its truth of the State-Zionists' position, but its *absolutism*. State-Zionism is an ideology based on an absolute conviction, one impervious to history and experience, to emendation and to compromise. *State-Zionism is a secular faith, more akin to Nazism than its proponents grant.*

As this paper suggests State-Zionism and Nazism have many elective affinities: Both are racist, asserting the biological inferiority of human groups. Both assert the right of the dominant group to rule absolutely all others in the interest of the Chosen group. Both assert the right of conquest. Both deny individual civil and political rights to any but the chosen few. More positively, both Nazism and Statist-Zionism are idealistic movements. Their strength and energy come from the belief in their sacred mission to cure the world of its ills, to make it more spiritual, to make it conform to a transcendent divine plan which only its leaders know.

State-Zionism's founders were for the most part enthusiastic atheists. Not only were they antithetical to religious ideas, they particularly despised the Judaism and the Jewish way of life of the Diaspora. 'According to Zionism, the effects of Diaspora-living on the Jewish people have been thorough and devastating. The abnormal state of the

Diaspora has created physical, years of death in life created a sick human group, profoundly perverted and parasitic' [Beit-Hallahmi, p.49]. Not incidentally, the Nazis shared this assessment of Diaspora Jewry. If the Jews were to assert their destiny as a people, medieval Judaism had to go and with it all the practices of the Diaspora that had enabled Jews to survive in a generally hostile Christendom. The ideological aim of the founders of State-Zionism was to eliminate Diaspora Jewry without having the Jews become Germans or Poles who practiced Judaism or who had ancestors who did so. The State-Zionists quite properly understood this would be impossible without a homeland, not conceived merely as a place where Jews could live as Jewish citizens or this or that state, but as a place where Jews would rule. The second cardinal principle of State-Zionism: *If the Jews were to survive they needed their own state.*

The least likely support for this idea was among the most religiously fundamental sects of Judaism, which tend to be anti-political. Yet this is the source of much of the contemporary energy of State-Zionism. This is not as paradoxical as it may seem. For absolutists tend to share the same cast of mind. Because the propensity to believe absolute ideas is more important than the content of those ideas, it has proved a short mental step from State-Zionism to Fundamentalist Judaism. Fundamentalist Judaism believes in the absolute, divinely ordained superiority of the Jewish people. It is a nice question whether the Jews became superior because God chose them or whether God chose them because they were superior. It is beyond question that this superiority is God's will and that it should be expressed by control of the land of Israel. The racist implications of this doctrine are also beyond dispute. The most obvious, but not the only, expression of this union of State-Zionism and Fundamentalist Judaism can be seen in the

alliance of the New Religious Party (NRP) and the *Gush Emunim*, the settlers of the Arab territories taken in 1967. ‘During the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, for example, the military rabbinate in Israel...exhorted all Israeli soldiers to follow in the footsteps of Joshua and to re-establish his divinely ordained conquest of the land of Israel. This exhortation of conquest included extermination of non-Jewish inhabitants’ [Shahak and Mezvinsky, p.64]. Ideologically, this policy of extermination is justified by the dogma that Jews are of God and non-Jews are not. In the words of Rabbi Ginsberg, ‘If every simple cell of a Jewish body entails divinity, is part of God, then every strand of DNA is part of God. Therefore there is something special about Jewish DNA...’ As Shahak and Mezvinsky assert: ‘Changing the words “Jewish” to “German” or “Aryan” and “non-Jewish” to “Jewish” turns the Ginsberg position into the doctrine that made Auschwitz possible in the past’ [Shahak and Mezvinsky, p. 62, both quotations].

Rihani did not analyze State-Zionism in this manner anymore than he parsed Bolshevism in 1921. He seems to have not understood State-Zionism’s secular atheistic origins. But he deeply appreciated its absolutist nature. He knew that absolute creeds, whatever their ideal, cannot be reconciled with differing outlooks. Moreover, as he said, ‘One holy howl has provoked in Palestine another’ [*Fate*, p.80]. Absolutes create absolutes. And conflicting absolutes lead to genocide. All of Rihani’s thought rebels against ideological and dogmatic absolutes.

Nor Crescent Nor Cross we adore;
Nor Buddha nor Christ we implore;
Nor Muslim nor Jew we abhor:
We are free.
We are not of the East or the West;
No boundaries exist in our breast:
We are free.

Chant of Mystics, p.106

While this antipathy to dogmatic rigidity can be most profoundly appreciated in his Sufism, it was reflected in his entire experience, which can be reduced to two Spinozist propositions. First, the universe is God's creation; and second, man could be reconciled to God because he was of God, quite literally God's creature. Only man's fears, his weaknesses, his cowardice, his pettiness, especially as these grounded his ideologies, alienated man from Creation. Note: it is man who alienates himself from God.

State-Zionism, like Bolshevism and Nazism, is an ideology that places its advocates outside the realm of reconciliation. President Bush in his speech on terrorism, September 20, 2001, cited 'Nazism, fascism and other totalitarian movements as the enemies of civilization', omitting Bolshevism or Stalinism, to say nothing of State-Zionism. He also condemned the takeover of states by Islamic fanatics. Similarly, liberal politicians and journalists routinely condemn fundamentalism, Christian and Islamic. Fundamentalist Judaism is seldom acknowledged, ostensibly in an effort to avoid intensifying anti-Semitism. (Anti-Semites, in their rush to condemn everything Jewish, do not bother with such distinctions.) State-Zionism, like Fundamentalist Judaism, removes non-Jews from the created universe. It is secular without being prudential or mindful of existential limits and religious without being mindful of the participation of all creation in the Creator. State-Zionism is a monstrous projection of man's alienation from himself and his brother creatures and from his profound alienation from God. Alienation particularly afflicts Jewish intellectuals: 'The Jewish intellectual shares first in the garden-variety disaffection of the normal person in the modern world. The he or she suffers from the normal estrangement which is the lot of Jews among non-

Jews. And then he or she experiences an alienation from Jewish culture and tradition...'[Beit-Hallahmi, p.29].

Rihani's concept of reconciliation implies two conditions: First, man must approach his brothers as well as all other living things as created beings partaking of the divine. The corollary of this principle is that all men are spiritually equal and spiritually free. Second, any political doctrine which denies this principle and its corollary, as State-Zionism does, is a tyranny which tends to genocide. By denying the spiritual equality of all beings and by denying freedom to all men, all such tyrannies detach themselves from creation. In this sense State-Zionism is anti-spiritual.

With the demise of Nazism and Bolshevism, State-Zionism remains the most powerful tyranny in the Western world. It is likely to remain so, as long as it has the tacit moral and very tangible financial support of the so-called enlightened nation-states of Europe and North America. Although Rihani knew that a Zionist state would depend on Britain and the United States for its survival, even he would be astonished how much support State-Zionism would continue to receive, after its policies have been in force for over fifty years. When Rihani wrote, State-Zionism was merely a pernicious doctrine in search of an application. Its absolutist, racist, and tyrannical concepts were twisted and perverted ideals which in the face of the Nazi threat would necessarily seem small and unimportant to all but those directly in its path. But now, when State-Zionism is in power (armed with nuclear weapons) and Nazism is but a perverted doctrine with a cult following, when State-Zionism has placed two million Palestinians in camps, and kept them there for a generation in appalling conditions, where is the outrage in the West? Now, when it is clear that State-Zionism is the most powerful and thorough antagonist to

the values of the Western democracies, in practice as well as ideology, where is the outrage of the West? Forget outrage; where in the governments of the West can one find a frank discussion of State-Zionist atrocities?

Consider the torrent of discussion regarding terrorism. There is not the slightest suggestion that activities of resistance, many of which were made famous against the Nazi occupation and appropriately extolled, can be conceived as anything but terrorist acts when undertaken by Palestinians or Arabs. Nor is there the suggestion that terrorist activities, even when properly so-called, are desperate last resorts, attempts of the weak to compel the attention of the strong. Instead it is asserted, seldom argued in the wake of the attacks of September 11th, that Fundamentalist Islam is the principal antagonist to the values of the West and that State Zionism reflects enlightenment values. There can be no question that Fundamentalist Islam is a profound enemy of America and its values and so are Fundamentalist Judaism and State-Zionism. There is a profound difference, however, between terrorists like Bin Laden and McVeigh and the power of Israel. In terms of power Bin Laden is much closer to Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, than to Prime Minister Sharon. And finally, if terrorism, however understood, is to be condemned, where is the recognition of Israeli State-sponsored terrorism?

Let us consider another instance of double standards. Consider the drumbeat of recent Israeli and American propaganda against Iraq. 'Weapons of mass destruction cannot be tolerated in the Middle East,' etc. Has any American or Israeli official of newspaper mentioned Israeli nuclear weapons, the only weapons of mass destruction which exist as established facts? Why is there no proposal to cleanse the entire region of all such weapons? Answer: Israel would object. Why is there no discussion of

measuring four billions in annual aid dollars to Israel against their treatment of the Palestinians? Answer Israel would object. Why then would there be no American leverage to overcome these objections? Answer: The Jewish lobby would object.

The only conclusion one can draw from these questions and answers is that the American government, not the American people, believe it is in its interest to placate five million Israelis and their American Jewish allies, even if it violates the strategic interests of the U.S. and antagonizes 1.3 billion Muslims, to say nothing of millions of others who are appalled at the atrocities committed daily by the Israelis with the support of the U.S. Rihani was both a prophet and a realist, but even he would never have believed his America would ignore the rights and aspirations of a courageous people seeking its independence in favor of a racist criminal tyranny.

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