

# Reviews

## How settler colonialism ends

Hagar Kotef, *The Colonizing Self: Or, Home and Homelessness in Israel/Palestine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020). 300pp., \$28.95 pb., 978 1 47801 133 0

Adam Shatz, *The Rebel's Clinic: The Revolutionary Lives of Frantz Fanon* (London: Head of Zeus, 2024). 451pp., £22.50 hb., 978 1 03590 004 6

Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press, 2020). 401pp., £24.95 hb., 978 0 67498 732 6

Jonny Steinberg, *Winnie & Nelson: Portrait of a Marriage* (London: William Collins, 2023). 550pp., £12.99 pb., 978 0 00835 381 0

In her book *The Colonizing Self*, Israeli political theorist Hagar Kotef recalls overhearing a conversation at a café in a bourgeois left-leaning neighbourhood of northern Tel Aviv in 2012. The Israeli army had been engaged in a war on Gaza at the time that killed over 150 Palestinians and displaced hundreds of families. She describes two people sitting at separate tables who end up sharing a newspaper and a conversation. At some point they conclude, in her paraphrase, that ‘if the world blames us for committing crimes against humanity in Gaza we might as well commit genocide and get it all over with’ (182). Kotef notes that they did not seem to know one another until their chance encounter in the café, as if to underscore the banality of Israeli genocidal intent vis-à-vis Palestinians such that it could furnish the shared ground for imagined community between strangers.

The anecdote is almost emblematic of a book that is devoted to demonstrating how the settler-colonising self, and specifically the Israeli self, is forged through an attachment to violence and structures of injury. Kotef distances herself from theoretical approaches that seek to account for mass violence in the reproduction of political community through recourse to notions of coercion, cruelty and disassociation. Instead she places her bets on desire, arguing that the settler is attached to violence in the way that Lauren Berlant accounts for attachment to ‘bad objects’: ‘as part of an almost tragic effort to stabilize identity – the meaning of who we are’ (48). Much of the book is devoted to substantiating this argument with reference to the quest for home and homeland, and practices of homemaking, on two registers. Within liberal

political theory, Kotef demonstrates how the household constitutes the basic analytical unit of Lockean possessive individualism, functioning as the tip of the spear in the ideological justification of settler colonial expansion. And in the context of Israel/Palestine, she illuminates how both liberal and rightwing Israelis make themselves at home in landscapes of ruination, and specifically in the ruins of Palestinian homes, demonstrating how homes become tools of destruction and expulsion.

This is a book about how settler colonialism is sustained rather than how it ends. Yet I want to take the scattered remarks that Kotef makes on this latter subject as the point of departure for this review of recent works that address settler colonialism across different geographies and genres. About halfway through her book, Kotef startles the reader with a parenthetical caveat: ‘I do not call here for killing all settlers or so many others whose social positions, security, and prosperity generate a world of insecurity for others’, she says (131). The comment seems to speak to the café conversation in some way, even if only to pre-empt its obvious antithesis. If the settler wants to eliminate the native, as Patrick Wolfe tells us, it seems logical and even defensible for the native to want to eliminate the settler for reasons of sheer self-preservation. Yet Kotef does not want us to go there, or at least cautions against interpreting elimination in its most corporeal sense. In doing so, she enters into conversation with a number of texts including Lorraine Hansberry’s celebrated play *Les Blancs* and the field of settler colonial studies more generally.

Set amidst the throes of decolonisation in an un-

named African settler colony, Hansberry's *Les Blancs* is a masterful study of the complexity but also the illusion of moral, political and psychic choice available to settlers and natives. The play generated extreme and racially polarised responses when it was first performed on Broadway in 1970, with *Playboy* arguing that it 'advocated genocide of non-blacks as a solution to the race problem.' Yet a more careful reading suggests that it is a text preoccupied with shades of grey in both settler and native society and with the impossibility of perceiving these shades under the shadow of settler colonial rule. The natives' choices are represented by the contrasting paths taken by three brothers: Eric, who is most firmly committed to violent insurgency against the settlers; Abioseh, who in becoming a priest chooses the path of assimilation; and Tshembe Matoseh, a figure of quintessential postcolonial hybridity. Educated at the Christian medical Mission that is the site on which most of the play's action unfolds, Tshembe travels extensively, spending time in Europe where he marries a white woman and fathers a child. On his return to his native country he rises to a position of influence in the political leadership of the independence movement, but is torn between his loyalties to his family in Britain and his people in Africa, and between the violent and nonviolent strands of the movement. Interestingly Palestinian writer Tareq Baconi begins his book *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance* with a brief meditation on the profound influence that *Les Blancs* had on him. For Baconi, it is Tshembe's dilemmas – the strain under which his dedication to non-violence is placed by the apparent futility of peaceful protest – as well as the play's illumination of the fratricidal nature of liberation struggles that supplies a point of entry into his own subject matter.

Kotef is more interested in the settlers in the play. They occupy a range of ethical and political positions even as the play relentlessly interrogates whether their professed scruples amount to very much at all under conditions of settler colonialism, conjuring up but also questioning putative distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' settlers. For Kotef, it is Major Rice – who exhibits the typically heavy handed and racially supremacist attitudes of a colonial military man and repeatedly asserts that the colony is his home – who best exemplifies the forging of the settler self and home through an attachment to viol-

ence and a recognisably Lockean justification for it: 'Men like myself had the ambition, the energy and the ability to come here and make this country into something... They had it for centuries and did nothing with it. It isn't a question of empire, you see. It is our home' (Hansberry, 81). We learn about life in the Mission through the eyes of Charlie Morris, an American journalist who visits to write a story about its good works, but who gradually becomes jaded with the entire enterprise. However, it is in two other settler figures that the unforgiving limits of ethical action under settler colonialism are most acutely represented. One of these is Dr. DeKoven, who confesses to Morris that although he came to the Mission to help alleviate suffering, he has participated in the very institutions that help sustain it. Arguing that colonial subjects die mainly from 'a way of life' that his work as a medical doctor has reinforced, he concludes with a stunning self-indictment: 'I have helped provide the rationale for genocide.' Towards the end of the play, DeKoven has a premonition of how things will end, seeing a future in which the settlers will be murdered and the world press will condemn this as 'bestial absurdity'. Importantly, he does not see things in this way, arguing that

The sun really *is* starting to rise in the world, so we might just as well stop pretending it is the middle of the night. They are quite prepared to die to be allowed to bring it to Africa. It is *we* who are not prepared. To allow it *or* to die (Hansberry, 197).

Kotef reads this as framing the ethico-political choice for the settler as one of leaving or dying; or more pressingly as being prepared 'both to allow decolonization to take place *and* to die, to allow it *by* dying' (134). The notion of the settler 'allowing' decolonisation to take place can seem oxymoronic, even offensive, in its possible insinuation that decolonisation takes place because the settler colonist has allowed it rather than because the native has fought for it. Yet this framing of choices is not an account of how decolonisation happens so much as one about what it would mean to act ethically as a settler in a settler colonial context. In this argument, the only good settler is the settler who ceases to be one by leaving or dying. The choice is similarly framed by Madame Neilsen, wife of the Mission's founder, who is alone among the settlers in having established a relationship with the natives that approaches something resembling friendship. She teaches but also learns from them, becoming profi-

cient in their language, foraging techniques and ways of life. When Tshembe asks her whether she intends to stay on in the Mission as the insurgency threatens to engulf it, she replies, 'At my age, one goes home only to die. I am already home' (Hansberry, 208). Yet despite feeling at home in the colony, she does not speak of it in the proprietary terms that the other settlers do. Like Tshembe, with whom she has the closest relationship, she is caught between places, feeling at home in a country that she knows she does not own. Most importantly, she is unambiguous in her support for the resistance. Sensing Tshembe's ambivalence, she stiffens his resolve: 'Our country needs *warriors*, Tshembe Matoseh. Africa needs warriors' (Hansberry, 211). Because Madame Neilsen will not leave, as a good settler she must die, which she does – not heroically but caught in the crossfire, a casualty of the impossibility of the subject position of good settlerhood.

In the immediate aftermath of the Hamas-led attack of 7 October 2023, which killed nearly 1200 Israelis in an unprecedented incursion across the Gaza border, many news reports underscored the irony of its targeting of the kibbutzim which are regarded as some of the most left-leaning communities in Israel. There is something morally incoherent about this critique. If the prohibition on killing civilians is absolute as these reports implied, then the political views of those civilians must be irrelevant. Yet there is another aspect of this discourse that is curious, one at which the Tunisian Jewish writer Albert Memmi might have looked askance. In his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized* – which anticipates many of the themes of postcolonial and settler colonial studies – Memmi describes the figure of the 'left-wing colonizer' as an impossibility. Estranged from their fellow colonisers on account of their sympathies with struggles for national liberation, left-wing colonisers are also potentially ideologically alienated from those very struggles on account of their use of terror and religious zeal. Structurally they are part of the oppressing group whether they accept this or not, sharing in its bounty and collective responsibility. Moreover, there is something delusional about their positionality in the way they dream of an end to the colonial situation without appreciating that this would entail their own overthrow. Under these circumstances, Memmi argues, the only real options for the left-wing coloniser are silence or departure. He might have been

writing about himself. As a Tunisian Jew, Memmi had always found himself in a liminal position – a 'native' of the French settler colony but part of a community that was marginally more privileged than the Arab Muslim majority and that sought assimilation within dominant French culture. He would take his own advice, supporting the liberation of Tunisia from French rule but emigrating to France soon after this was accomplished.

In the shortest but most arresting section of her book entitled 'A Brief Reflection on Death and Decolonization', Kotef unpacks the (im)possibilities for ethical action on the part of the settler offered by these texts and is troubled by all of them in the context of Israel/Palestine. She expresses her opposition to 'individual, collective, or political suicide' (Memmi's silence) as well as to the killing of settlers. She does not consider 'leaving' a valid solution. Here she ignores a small but significant Israeli literature on emigration from Israel as a form of resistance to Zionism, exemplified by Hila Amit's *A Queer Way Out: The Politics of Queer Emigration from Israel*. Kotef notes, not unreasonably, that leaving is the privilege of those with 'economic and ethnic advantages' (134) but in doing so neglects the potentials of elite protest. Instead she yearns for the possibility of alliances, shared futures and horizons, affiliating her hopes with Edward Said's vision of peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians, and gesturing at a future in which the settler remains – not as a settler, but transformed in some substantial way so as to enjoy no more or less of a claim on the state than its native inhabitants.

Lorenzo Veracini has offered a useful aphorism for this transformation, arguing that decolonisation in settler colonial contexts would require one to 'Kill the Settler in Him and Save the Man'. The aphorism inverts the more well-known 'Kill the Indian, save the man', which described the vision of forced assimilation of Native Americans popularised by the nineteenth century US military officer Richard Henry Pratt who founded the infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the flagship Indian boarding school in the United States. Veracini proposes turning the settler colonial logic of elimination of the native (in part through assimilation) against the settler. The call to 'kill the settler, save the man' invites us to think about what it would take for the settler to be able to remain on indigenous lands yet no longer as a settler. Veracini is clear that this would have to be an

indigenous-led process if it is not to reiterate the historic injustice of settlers unilaterally setting the terms of relation. But there are other challenges. Kotef is sympathetic to the justice of the demand but sceptical of its feasibility: 'To kill the settler in the man is to kill so much of the man himself that the distinction becomes questionable' (132). Here she is with Memmi, who laments that 'it is too much to ask one's imagination to visualise one's own end, even if it be in order to be reborn another' (Memmi, 84). Yet unlike Memmi who embraces the radical implications of his argument, Kotef shies away from doing so. Having portrayed with considerable acuity the settler colonising self's attachment to violence and particularly to homemaking in spaces of violence, Kotef then problematises all possible avenues for dismantling settler colonialism, illuminating an impasse from which there is apparently so little possibility of escape that her own argument frustratingly and irresponsibly tails off: 'Here I stop writing. I do not know how one writes dead ends or how one writes themselves out of history' (134). While leftwing settlers agonise over their responsibility, the Israeli state certainly knows how to write others out of history. In July 2024, Rasha Khatib, Martin McKee and Salim Yusuf wrote in *The Lancet* that on a conservative estimate, the death toll from Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza since October 2023 may amount to 186,000 people or 8% of the population, once indirect killing through the decimation of the territory's healthcare, food systems, water supplies and housing is also taken into account.

## I

In the months since the Hamas-led attack of 7 October 2023, many have turned to Frantz Fanon to evaluate the legitimacy of violent resistance to settler colonial occupation. In an essay published in the *London Review of Books* a month after the attack, Adam Shatz sought to reclaim Fanon from what he described as the 'ethno tribalist fantasies' of those parts of the decolonial left that celebrated the action. Homing in on the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, the text in which Fanon makes a case for anticolonial violence, Shatz argued that Fanon's description of violence as having a 'cleansing' force had been mistranslated from the original French, in which he speaks instead of its 'disintoxicating' effect. There is of course a great deal else in the chapter that is

more difficult to explain away or water down: Fanon's insistence on the necessity of violence against colonialism, which is 'not a thinking machine ... [but] will only yield when confronted with greater violence', its positive role in mobilising and bringing the nation into being, and its emancipatory effects in freeing the native 'from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction' (Fanon, 61, 94). Instead Shatz places more emphasis on Fanon's preoccupation with the corrosive effects of violence, evident in the case notes that he maintained as a psychiatrist treating both French soldiers and rebels from the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in the hospital in which he worked at Blida-Joinville in colonial Algeria. Shatz's Fanon counsels against resentment and revenge and is linked, somewhat inexplicably, to the spirituality of Martin Luther King. Moreover the title of Shatz's *LRB* essay – 'vengeful pathologies' – evinces a disinclination to unpack the military, political and diplomatic logics of the October 7 attacks. In a powerful critique, Abdaljawad Omar rightly notes that Shatz purports to decode Palestinian violence by beginning to explore its contexts but consistently 'circles back to the instinctual desire for vengeance'. When settlers are actually killed, no explanations are possible or permitted beyond the requisite ritualised condemnations.

Reading Shatz's recent biography of Fanon makes clearer how this skewed portrait of the twentieth century's arch theorist of anticolonial violence becomes possible. Early in the book, Shatz acknowledges that much of the power of Fanon's writing 'resides in the tension, which he never quite resolved, between his work as a doctor and his obligations as a militant, between his commitment to healing and his belief in violence' (9). Shatz tells us a great deal about both dimensions of Fanon, locating him as a political thinker in relation to the leading lights of Négritude, existentialism and psychoanalysis, and tracing his development and practice as a psychiatrist through his work in France, Algeria and Tunisia. His book also does much to illuminate Fanon's position in the Algerian liberation struggle as a representative of and ambassador for the FLN, but one who always fit more comfortably within its increasingly marginalised secular Marxist wing.

There is something troubling about Shatz's framing of Fanon as a figure split between a militant 'belief in violence' and a medical 'commitment to healing'. Re-

sponding to Hannah Arendt's infamous critique of Fanon as glorifying 'violence for its own sake', David Macey argues in his biography of Fanon that it is almost absurd to criticise Fanon for his advocacy of violence. He did not need to advocate it given its sheer omnipresence and its stranglehold on the unconscious in colonial Algeria. Macey depicts Fanon less as a figure who developed a normative position on violence than as one who theorised its pervasiveness and inescapability in the settler colony. In contrast, beginning with the more conventional view of Fanon as someone who 'believed' in violence, Shatz contorts himself into a number of peculiar positions in an attempt to resolve an ambivalence that he believes he has discovered in his subject.

Sometimes this takes the form of his elevation of one Fanon above another, evident in a series of normatively charged dichotomies that are littered through the text. Shatz contrasts the 'starry-eyed agrarian radicalism' (277) of the political Fanon with the 'mature thought' (381) of the psychiatric Fanon in the clinic. He believes that 'psychiatry enabled Fanon to step away from his grandstanding polemical positions and write with sensitivity and grace about the "mental disorders" produced by the war' (265). And when he notes Fanon's partiality to the 'angry didacticism' in the early fiction of Richard Wright over the 'inquisitive and probing literary journalism that questioned many orthodoxies, including those of the anti-colonial left' later in Wright's oeuvre, this sounds like a reverse projection of Shatz's own preferences (261).

These preferences are less than persuasive when they are grounded in potential misreadings of Fanon. For example, in an attempt to resolve the tension between Fanon's views on violence in the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* and his account of its dehumanising effects in its last substantive chapter, Shatz seems to suggest that Fanon envisaged a temporal sequence in which an inevitably violent opening phase of the struggle for decolonisation characterised by the 'primitive Manichaeism' of settler colonialism would have to be tempered by the revolutionary leadership, on the understanding that 'not all the settlers are their enemies, and not all the natives are their allies' (322). It is true that in the crucial third chapter of the text, entitled 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness', Fanon presciently warned about the limits of a form of political independence in

which the nationalist bourgeoisie took over the reins of government from departing white colonists and serviced the neocolonial arrangements that resulted from such transfers of power. To obviate this, he argues powerfully for a transformation of national consciousness into a universalist socioeconomic consciousness that is directed at the depredations of a transnational class constituted by the shared interests of native and colonial elites. Yet far from entailing a reduction in violence, this calls for its redirection against a different set of targets. As Fanon clearly explains,

violence used in specific ways at the moment of the struggle for freedom does not magically disappear after the ceremony of trooping the national colours. It has all the less reason for disappearing since the reconstruction of the nation continues within the framework of cut-throat competition between capitalism and socialism (Fanon, 75).

At other times rather than attempting to resolve the tension between Fanon the militant and the doctor, Shatz appears to use the latter to undermine the former. Thus he finds Fanon's faith in the redemptive effects of violence unpersuasive, suggesting that this contradicted much of what he had learned in his study and practice of psychiatry. Shatz even argues that the final chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* on 'Colonial Warfare and Mental Disorders' implicitly rebuts the opening chapter of the text, which underscores the necessity for violence against the settler (328–329). In fact, Fanon is as categorical about the need for violence at the end of the book as he is at the start, noting that 'armed conflict alone can really drive out these falsehoods created in man which force into inferiority the most lively minds among us and which, literally, mutilate us' (Fanon, 294).

Through all this, Shatz does not consider what it might mean to read Fanon as clinging tenaciously and with equal intensity to both a belief in the inescapability of violence under settler colonialism and an awareness of its destructive effects on those swept up by its all-consuming force. Among the many patients whom Fanon describes in his case notes is an Algerian militant who reports a range of distressing symptoms on the anniversary of his planting of a bomb that killed ten people. It is difficult to miss the note of admiration in Fanon's account of the patient, who he says 'never for a single moment thought of repudiating his past action, realiz[ing]

very clearly the manner in which he himself had to pay the price of national independence' (Fanon, 253). Edward Said – himself caught in a double bind between a recognition of the necessity for Palestinian nationalism as a vehicle for the liberation of a colonised people and of its invariably authoritarian and coercive logics – described such conundrums as inhabiting the genre of tragedy. What if, rather than setting the first and last chapters of Fanon's pre-eminent text against one another, we were to read the last chapter as bolstering the authority of the first. After all, someone who so unflinchingly chronicled the traumas of impotence, homicidal impulses, anxiety psychosis, depression, stupor, suicidal ideation and other psychic illnesses of the patients from both sides of the settler colonial divide who visited his clinic, could hardly be accused of demonstrating the irresponsibility of a keyboard warrior or tankie when he – in the same breath – called for violent resistance against the settler colonial machine.

If there is ever a moment of resolution of the tension between Fanon the doctor and the militant – albeit one that was forced on him by circumstances – it is in his 1956 letter of resignation from his post at the hospital in Blida-Joinville. Thwarted in his psychiatric practice by the oppressive political context in which he and his staff were forced to work, Fanon the doctor lays down arms, so to speak: 'if psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization ... The social structure existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged.' Even though Fanon continued to practice in Tunisia, as Nigel C. Gibson and Roberto Beneduce note in *Frantz Fanon, Psychiatry and Politics*, from this point onwards psychiatry ceased to be his primary occupation or preoccupation. If resignation offers a resolution of sorts to the tensions between his political and psychiatric praxis, sometimes Fanon can barely restrain himself from suggesting that it might have helped his patients as well. Commenting on the case of a police inspector who understood that his mental disorders were the direct result of his work as an interrogator, Fanon remarks with some incredulity: 'As he could not see his way to stopping torturing people (that made nonsense to him for in that case he would

have to resign) he asked me without beating about the bush to help him to go on torturing Algerian patriots without any prickings of conscience, without any behavior problems, and with complete equanimity' (Fanon, 269–270). Perhaps the obverse of Memmi's impossible left-wing coloniser is Fanon's equanimous torturer.

Shatz's book concludes with a magisterial epilogue mapping Fanon's influence over space, time and disciplinary fields in the decades since his death. When laid out in this fashion, the scope of his impact is stunning to behold. Yet one is left with the suspicion that many of Fanon's most hard-nosed followers in this impressive roster – in the Palestinian Liberation Organisation or the Black Panthers, for example – were influenced precisely by the dimensions of Fanon that Shatz disparages as didactic and grandstanding.

## II

In contrast to the Manichaeism of a worldview in which natives confront settlers, in *Neither Settler Nor Native* Mahmood Mamdani looks forward to a future in which both settler and native identities will cease to have political relevance in decolonised states. This ambitious book locates settler colonialism within a larger genealogy of political modernity in which colonial governmentalities birth nation-states marked by the politicisation of racial and ethnic identities whereby majorities invariably oppress minorities. Central to Mamdani's concerns is the question of how permanent minorities – fashioned on the basis of identity – might be undone by shifting interest-based configurations emerging out of the give-and-take of democratic politics.

Sprawling in geographical scope with its case studies straddling four continents, this is nonetheless not a work in the classic comparativist mould of side-by-side juxtaposition but one that offers a more connective history. Mamdani's story begins in the United States, which in his view pioneers the technologies of settler colonialism as a response to the settler state's problem of what to do with surviving natives. In studying the US management of the 'Indian Question', we are introduced to the entire panoply of weapons that stock the settler colonial arsenal: internal colonies euphemised as reservations that are accorded the dubious prerogatives of tribal sovereignty and second-class citizenship; dual-

istic legal systems that misrecognise indigenous relationships with the land as a prelude to appropriating it; and a range of methods – from genocide to cultural assimilation – by which the native presence is sought to be eliminated. These techniques would inform and inspire other projects of mass atrocity including Nazism, apartheid and Zionism, each of which are dealt with in separate chapters.

Not all of the case studies in the book are straightforwardly settler colonial. Thus Mamdani makes clear in a chapter on Sudan that distinctions of settler and native

there were inventions and impositions by British colonial authorities, mapped respectively onto ‘Arabs’ in the North and ‘Africans’ in the South, with the latter being further subdivided into ‘tribes’ through the mechanism of indirect chiefly rule. While serving the colonial purpose of divide and rule – or what Mamdani memorably calls ‘define and rule’ (13) – these governmentalities leave deep and lasting legacies, evident in the conflict that has wracked Sudan, the secession of what is now South Sudan and the internecine warfare that has marked the latter’s short history.



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The chapter on Israel/Palestine – the longest in the book – also complicates the settler colonial paradigm, distinguishing native Jews who had always lived in historic Palestine from those who came as immigrants prepared to live under Ottoman rule in the first wave of Aliyah, and those who arrived as settlers determined to impose an exclusivist Jewish state that was premised on the expulsion of Arab Palestinians. Here we might note parenthetically how a number of scholars have further complicated the conceptualisation of Israel/Palestine as

a case of settler colonialism. Yuval Evri and Kotef argue in their article ‘When does a native become a settler?’ that natives can become settlers without moving, through an account of how Arabic-speaking native Jews of Palestine were conscripted into early waves of the Zionist project as useful intermediaries in land purchases. In a related piece entitled ‘When does a Settler Become a Native?’, to which Evri and Kotef refer, Raef Zreik notes the dual character of Zionism as a settler colonial and national project. The duality does not make Zionism less violent,

in his view, but more sophisticated in allowing Zionists to feel victimised even as they dispossess Palestinians. Zreik insists that Zionism is settler colonialism in its techniques even if not in its self-imagination, something that is all too evident in its conquest of a land that is constructed as empty, its unrelenting expansion of frontiers, and its dream of the disappearance of the native. In their introduction to a landmark collection of essays seeking to place Israel/Palestine more squarely within the field of settler colonial studies, Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie and Sobhi Samour go further in insisting that while Israel's tactics have often been described as settler colonial, they are underpinned by a settler colonial structure that must be centred in any analysis.

While Mamdani spends considerable time describing the making of settler colonial polities, he is equally invested in the question of how they might be unmade. Central to his account of how states and societies cope with mass atrocity is a distinction between conceptualisations of violence as criminal and as political, reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's distinction between law-preserving and law-making violence. The criminal approach to violence regards it as an aberration and responds to it by seeking to identify and punish individual perpetrators. The political approach to violence regards it as a diagnostic of grievance around questions of belonging and focuses more on the underlying issues that drive it. Recognising that political violence relies not only on perpetrators but also supporters and that the latter tend to be mobilised around issues rather than (or perhaps as much as) personalities, its remedial measures are addressed to this wider constituency. While the criminal approach can come across as more severe and as having greater deterrent effect than the political approach, Mamdani effectively suggests that the latter is more ambitious in casting a wider net and seeking a wholesale reconfiguration of dichotomous political identities such as majority/minority, perpetrator/victim, settler/native into the singular category of what he calls 'survivors'. The suggestion is evocative of the scene described by Fanon in which two of his patients from either side of the colonial divide – torturer and tortured – encounter one another by chance on the grounds of the hospital at which he worked. Fanon reminds us of how traumatic the encounter was for both: while the former has an anxiety crisis, the latter attempts

suicide in a toilet.

For Mamdani, the Nuremberg trials following the Second World War offer the paradigmatic example of the criminal approach to mass violence and of everything that is wrong with it. Nazism was reduced to an accumulation of individual crimes rather than a political project. Denazification correspondingly became a punitive effort to identify and root out individual perpetrators rather than a transformative political process. Even this criminal approach turned out to be half-hearted and abbreviated as geopolitical considerations, such as the need for German economic recovery in the face of the looming Soviet threat, trumped imperatives of justice. In this context, zealous West German support for the new state of Israel – powerfully on display these days as support for Israel is endlessly declared to be a unified Germany's *Staatsräson* – became an alibi for incomplete denazification, with devastating consequences for Palestinians. Meanwhile nationalism and racial supremacism were never on trial at Nuremberg. They could hardly be, given that – as Aimé Césaire famously reminds us – Hitler's crime had been to apply in Europe 'colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa' (Césaire, 14). The hegemony of these political ideologies and procedures would only be reinforced by the creation of Israel as a state for the Jews supported and bankrolled by Western imperialism.

In contrast, South Africa's transition out of apartheid supplies Mamdani with the paradigmatic example of a political approach to the aftermath of mass atrocity. The transition admittedly contained elements of the criminalising approach in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Despite its granting of amnesty rather than punishment to truth-tellers, Mamdani argues that its focus on individual perpetrators, its neglect of a wider constituency of beneficiaries of apartheid and its narrow understanding of suffering partially reinscribed the logic of Nuremberg in the South African transition. Nonetheless, in his reading of this process the TRC's importance was vastly outweighed by that of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), which dismantled juridical apartheid and enabled the introduction of majority rule electoral politics. Crucial here is his attention to the social forces that laid the groundwork for a reconfiguration of political identities in ways that



broke from the racial categories defined by apartheid: the Black Consciousness movement's reimagining of an expansive political Blackness, as well as solidaristic organising by radical white students and migrant and township labour activists. As he explains, in 'redefining the enemy as not settlers but the settler state, not whites but white power ... South Africa's liberation movements eased whites into the idea of a nonracial democracy' (176). Yet this easing came at a substantial cost – the reform and retention of the apartheid state, amnesty for perpetrators, protection of private property and the consequent entrenchment of white economic privilege, and guarantees of native 'tribal' and white political representation through consociational arrangements at local government levels. Given the place that South Africa occupies in Mamdani's argument as the most successful example of the renegotiation of settler and native identities, it is imperative to examine the price of the political alchemy that he describes.

At times Mamdani appears to present the South African compromise as *inevitable* – the best that could have been expected in a situation of stalemate between the white National Party and the African National Congress (ANC). As he puts it, 'the anti-apartheid movement had fostered a crisis, not a victory' (174) necessitating compromise in which the warring parties agreed to view one another as political adversaries rather than enemies. At other junctures, he presents the South African transition out of settler colonialism as *preferable* to any other imaginable alternative on account of its avoidance of mass bloodshed. This is evident particularly in his separation and sequencing of political and social reform, a move that is elevated almost to an article of faith. At the very outset of the book he proclaims that the political precedes the social, arguing that 'the first question at independence is not "how do we distribute wealth?" but "who belongs?"' (34). Yet he does not take seriously enough the prospect that the price of negotiating universal belonging might be an agreement *never* to redistribute wealth. It is not as if Mamdani is unaware of the critiques, although it is striking – given his evident admiration of apartheid-era student movements – that he does not see fit to mention student movements in South Africa today. Since 2015, movements such as Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall calling for the decolonisation of the university, the reduction of fees and the reversal of privat-

isation have been among the fiercest critics of what they see as the post-apartheid ANC government's betrayal of many of its promises of liberation especially vis-à-vis poor black South Africans. Rather, his argument is held up by the forlorn hope that political reform has given South Africans the tools with which to solve problems of social justice.

This sequencing of political reform as a necessary if insufficient prerequisite for social justice results in his oft-reiterated call for a 'decolonization of the political', a process that he argues would entail upsetting the permanent majority and minority identities that characterise the nation-state (or the settler and native identities that structure the settler-colonial relationship) by transmuting both into a common category of citizenship. The focus on citizenship seems symptomatic of a divide, even impasse, between settler colonial and indigenous studies as cognate but distinct fields. Even as indigenous scholars redirect our attention to questions of land ownership and use, settler colonial studies more typically fetishises citizenship as the transformative mechanism through which settler colonialism might be dismantled. Mamdani's 'decolonization of the political' reprises the old liberal ruse that purports to manage inequality by demarcating the political from the social, positing equality in the former while bracketing and deferring questions of hierarchy and difference within the latter. This is the kind of narrative that seems to regard the transformation of the settler colony into a polity that suffers the 'ordinary' problems of liberal democracy as a kind of progress. Envisaged as the first step in a dynamic process, it nonetheless threatens to deliver the truncated decolonisation that Fanon famously associated with the native bourgeoisie.

### III

If there was ever a time in which we risked idealising the South African transition out of settler colonialism, it is now. The country's ANC government has justifiably won global admiration on account of its leadership of the Palestine solidarity movement in intergovernmental structures, particularly the International Court of Justice where South Africa has spoken for the global majority in charging Israel with genocide in Gaza. Impossible to fathom as the future of Palestine may be, South Africa

glimmers on the horizon as a possible model because Israel enacts a form of apartheid in Palestine today and because the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel is inspired by and seeks to emulate the historic anti-apartheid movement. More than ever, it seems imperative to better understand the process of South Africa's transition out of apartheid and the extent to which it has been able to dismantle the legacies of white minority rule. Jonny Steinberg's *Winnie & Nelson* helps us to do some of the former through an intertwined biography of the anti-apartheid movement's two largest protagonists. Biography necessarily offers a highly individualised and stylised entry point into large scale social, political and historical processes. Yet Steinberg – like Shatz – is adept at situating his narrative amidst the turbulence of its setting, so that his story is not only one about two individuals but also about contrasting modes of fighting apartheid.

Nelson Mandela's life – or at least a sanctified version of it – is certainly the better known, not least through his own autobiography. Steinberg takes us quickly through the early political milestones – the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the writing of the Freedom Charter in 1955 committing the anti-apartheid movement to a multiracial vision of South Africa, the Treason Trial of 1956 and the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 which precipitated the movement's turn to violence through the creation of uMkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation; hereafter MK), which would wage a campaign of sabotage of government installations. Shortly after the onset of the campaign (coincidentally, days after Fanon's death in 1961), Nelson would travel abroad to mobilise weapons, materiel and training for the military campaign. Steinberg suggests that he took away from his meetings with FLN officials in Rabat a more sobering assessment of guerrilla warfare as being useful only insofar as it pressured the enemy to negotiate, and of political mobilisation at home and abroad as more consequential for the struggle.

It was in the wake of Nelson's incarceration, first in 1962 and then under a life sentence following the Rivonia trial, that Winnie Mandela emerged as a public figure and indeed as the face of the ANC. A magnetic personality and powerful speaker, she plunged headlong into the struggle, building a singular relationship with the black masses of South Africa especially in urban townships and nowhere more so than in Soweto. Her tempestuous personal life,

marked by a succession of unstable love triangles, and the aura of glamour and sex appeal that she radiated, kept her permanently in the news. Subject on multiple occasions to banning orders, arrest, incarceration and torture, she seemed to embody the suffering of ordinary black South Africans and won their unqualified adulation as mother of the nation. Yet her vision of how apartheid would end was distinct from that of her husband, hewing more closely to that of a faction of the ANC that envisaged a Cuban-style guerrilla campaign as bringing about the end of white minority rule. She gave effect to this vision through initiatives that were as brazen as they were militarily amateurish, recruiting the youth of Soweto into what she hoped might become a trained corps of saboteurs who would engage in spectacular acts of violence, and finding routes into exile for others to join the ranks of MK.

Even as the jailed Nelson's star rose – the imperative of his release being taken up by a galaxy of prominent political and cultural figures at the UN, through global musical extravaganzas and birthday celebrations and even in the UK Labour Party – Winnie became ever more deeply mired in the trenches of South Africa's increasingly violent struggle against apartheid. Steinberg usefully reminds us that nearly 20,000 people were killed in the violence that engulfed South Africa in the last decade of apartheid. Much of this violence was a legacy of the structures of indirect rule that Mamdani illuminates. The insurrections of the mid-1980s were protests against hikes in rent and service charges imposed by black local government authorities that the apartheid government of P. W. Botha had installed. They were also a response to the attempted incorporation of black residential areas of Natal into the KwaZulu Bantustan, a decision that triggered ethnic separatist violence between Zulus and non-Zulus which also mapped uneasily onto tensions between the Zulu Inkatha party and the ANC. It seemed as if what had begun as a revolt against apartheid was morphing into an internecine war among black people. Winnie's own role at the time was centred around the infamous Mandela United Football Club, which she established ostensibly to take young people off the streets of Soweto and channel them into revolutionary activities while also giving herself a modicum of protection. In short order, club members went on to perpetrate terrifying acts of vigilante justice against those perceived

to be sellouts, informers and spies, with Winnie personally overseeing and participating in some of these acts of violence. Her actions polarised the internal resistance movement, some feeling repelled and wanting to distance themselves from her and others alleging conspiratorially that the club had been infiltrated and directed by the apartheid state to sow disunity and to discredit the Mandelas. A 1991 conviction for kidnapping and assault proved to be the final straw, prompting her resignation from all political positions in the ANC and her eventual divorce from Nelson.



Among Steinberg's many achievements in this book, two stand out. First, his success in illuminating a political partnership and a marriage whose protagonists barely cohabited and who communicated largely through heavily censored letters and supervised visits (to make matters more complicated, much of Winnie's side of the correspondence has yet to be made publicly available). Second, his ability to make intelligible, without ever endorsing, the violence of Winnie and her milieu. Unlike Shatz, Steinberg is less interested in passing judgment on his subjects. Perhaps he feels no need to, given that an entire nation has imagined itself through the process of

continuously doing so. Instead he helps readers to view the world through their eyes, partly with reference to their words and those of their closest interlocutors, but also through an acute reading of political and psychic formation under apartheid. In a 1984 interview with documentary filmmaker Peter Davis, Winnie confesses to having been made through her experience of torture, which taught her the hatred that white South Africans – embodied in the figure of her torturer – felt for the black people of the country, a hatred that she internalised and turned back on him (322). Speaking later in life about her role in the struggle as an uncompromising enforcer of social and political norms in the resistance, she explained that black South Africans who had become accustomed to life under apartheid had to be made more frightened of her than of the apartheid regime if they were to rise up against it (351). And in an afterword to her prison diary written shortly before Nelson's death, reflecting on what she knew to be the world's divergent verdicts on the two Mandelas, she writes:

They wonder why I am like I am ... [T]hey have a nerve to say, 'Oh, Madiba is such a peaceful person, you know. We wonder how he had a wife who is so violent?' The leadership on Robben Island was never touched; the leadership on Robben Island had no idea what it was like to engage the enemy physically. The leadership was removed and cushioned behind prison walls... They did not know what we were talking about and when we were reported to be so violent, engaged in the physical struggle, fighting the Boers underground, they did not understand that because none of them had ever been subjected to that, not even Madiba himself. They never touched him, they would not have dared (464).

Steinberg's gloss on this is instructive: Winnie does not say it in so many words but her implication is that 'what her husband was locked away from all those years was the experience of being black; so thoroughly and, indeed, for so long that it had become puzzling to him' (464).

Nelson and Winnie may have divorced, but their legacies are harder to disentangle. It would be too pat to suggest that either ever had such a dialectic in mind, but as things turned out, Winnie's politics helped to create the crisis of ungovernability to which the apartheid government regarded Nelson's release as the only solution. Yet in bringing this about, she came to personify the underbelly of the struggle, distilling in herself the excesses

of every revolution that devours its own children. In this reading, Winnie is a kind of scapegoat, allowing Nelson's ascension to sainthood in the eyes of a global and especially a white public, free of the taint of murderous retribution that is associated with his wife. Yet posterity is a fickle judge. Even before Nelson died in 2013, the rumbles of discontent with his legacy were audible. The avowedly Marxist Economic Freedom Fighters broke away from the ANC that year, alleging its betrayal of the anti-apartheid struggle's more radical promises. Two years later, South Africa's first 'born free' generations rose up in revolt in student movements such as Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall, their antipathy directed not only at the persistence of the legacies of apartheid in the academy but also at the failure of their elders to dismantle those legacies – a failure for which Nelson's politics of compromise and reconciliation bore significant responsibility. Conversely, Winnie has become a talisman for the frustrations and hopes of radical young black South Africans, her politics presaging the more redistributive futures for which they yearn. Post-apartheid South Africa remains the country of Nelson and Winnie Mandela, a reminder – if one were needed – of the troubling inseparability of violence and non-violence in every story of how settler colonialism ends.

If it is difficult to think of any historical examples in which settler colonialism ends non-violently, then liberal condemnations of the violence of the colonised express a kind of fantasy that demands analysis. Moreover, the ideological imperative to join this chorus of condemnation enjoins universal participation in this fantasy. In their determination to read the relationship between violence and non-violence as contrast rather than dialectic, liberal critics fantasise about forms of political action that are both effective and morally pure. In this, they are fellow travellers of Memmi's left-wing coloniser, desirous of a place on the right side of history but with no sacrifice or disruption of their way of life. So it is salutary to recall Memmi's critique of this fantasy: shut up or get out.

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