Haim Yacobi, *Israel and Africa: A Genealogy of Moral Geography*, Routledge, 2016, x + 146 pp., $145.00 US (hbk), ISBN 9781138902374.

Haim Yacobi's *Israel and Africa* is a very important contribution to a short list of monographs that treat Israel's encounter with Africa. The title's conjunction—"*and*"—gesticulates by itself to the plus value of this book. That is, the book is not only about Israel's diplomatic, commercial, or political involvement *in* Africa, nor is it simply about the reverse, Africa *in* Israel. The *in* conjunction would presuppose two entirely distinct entities (Israel and Africa) existing independently and meeting at some point in their history. In fact, Africa—as a trope, a metaphor, a geographical and moral space, as a present absence—has always been a key ingredient of what makes contemporary Israel. While Africa certainly did exist prior to Israel's presence on the geopolitical cartography, or prior to the birth of the Zionist movement for that matter, it is also impossible to disentangle from contemporary Africa the ideas, institutions, and forms of knowledge that shaped at once Africa's and Israel's (post)colonial legacies and their modes of being in the world from the advent of modernity to this very day.

Indeed, long before Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, Africa was at the very heart of Zionism in the form of a colonial discourse that steered a debate threatening to tear the movement apart from the inside. In 1903, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, in what came to be know as the "Uganda Proposal," made an offer to the head of the World Zionist Organization, Theodor Herzl, that he could not turn down: the promise of the establishment of a Jewish colony in the East Africa Protectorate. Herzl presented the Uganda Proposal to the 6th World Zionist Congress, which was turned down for various reasons. Among the major objections were the holiness of the land of Palestine and the already considerable effort the first *Yishuv* put into settling British Mandate Palestine.[1]

At a minimum, the Uganda Proposal came in handy for both men. Herzl, for his part, had failed to secure El-Arish to establish a Jewish settlement in the Levant and thus needed

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[1] Consequently, the Uganda Proposal became an issue of great concern for early Zionist thinkers and activists and spread discord (and even conflict) within the Zionist movement. Congress participants from Eastern Europe (mainly Russia) felt betrayed and some even accused Herzl of treason. Eventually, the World Zionist Congress's Vice-President, Max Nordau, wrote a letter in the German daily *Die Welt* responding to the East European critiques. Following the publication of this letter, the fight took an orientalist turn—supporters of Herzl accused Russian Jews of being uneducated Easterners lacking the intellectual faculties to understand the Zionist leadership's plan and presented themselves as the Jewish representatives of a civilized West.

to present something concrete and tangible to the upcoming 6th World Zionist Congress. Moreover, humanitarian concerns for East European Jews facing anti-Semitic violence, especially in Russia (the Kishinev pogrom happened that year) also motivated Herzl's decision. For Chamberlain, who's administration was facing increased pressure from Britons resistant to the nearly 300,000 East European Jews fleeing violence and relocating in large numbers in London's East End, the Uganda Proposal would be an effective strategy to relocate the Jewish migrants and divert future flows elsewhere.[2] Yet, beyond this alliance for practical purposes between, let us say it, a form of anti-Semitism and the Zionist project, one can identify a common settler colonial ideological ground; both shared, if not identical, at least similar phantasms of sovereignty or self-mastery.[3]

Herzl's phantasms had been exposed to the larger public the year before the Uganda Proposal, in 1902, with the publication of his novel *Old New Land* (*Altneuland*). Like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, published in its stand alone novelistic format the same year and inspired by two centuries of popular novels adopting the imperial *échappatoire* narrative model—from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* to H. M. Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* and *In Darkest Africa*—*Altneuland* shared the same "boyhood ideals,"[4] desires, and anxieties. In this narrative model, a young white man who never grew up from his "boyhood noblesse" ends up alone in the middle of a never-trodden jungle or a desert island and, while "growing up" and becoming native, brings civilization and enlightenment into an exotic world that was, until his arrival, filled with monsters, horror, death, and madness—a world of darkness. These narratives of colonial expeditions fascinated Theodor Herzl himself. Herzl even mentioned the Exodus as an early version of "the present-day scientific exploration of the Witwatersrand gold fields."[5]

Herzl's novel narrates two visits that two friends—Kingscourt and Loewenberg—make to Palestine (the first in 1902 and the second in 1923). The years in-between are spent on a desert island in the South Seas. Kingscourt is introduced as a tall and muscular German,

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[2] In a speech delivered in 1904, Chamberlain explained that "the best solution of this question was to find some country in this vast world of ours where these poor exiles can dwell in safety without interfering with the subsistence of others" (as quoted in Eitan Bar-Yosef, "A Villa in the Jungle: Herzl, Zionist Culture, and the Great African Adventure," in *Theodor Herzl: From Europe to Zion*, eds., Mark H. Gelber and Vivian Liska [Tubingen: Max Niemeyer, 2007], 13-14). As Kathy Ferguson notes, heeding Jonathan Boyarin's work, "the creation of the state of Israel was a convenient solution to Europe's 'Jewish Problem'; it got rid of the Jews without having to examine the state policies in Europe and North America that helped create the crises of Jewry" ("From a Kibbutz Journal: Reflections on Gender, Race, and Militarism in Israel," in *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities*, eds., Michael Shapiro and Hayward Alker [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996], 451). See also: Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 121.

[3] The view Chamberlain expresses here was hardly new. In fact, one of the proponents of the Jewish "emancipation," Johann David Michaelis—a contemporary of Wilhelm Dohm—had proposed a long time before Chamberlain that Prussian Jews be deported to a "sugar Island" in the Caribbean where they could settle a new colony and thus expand the Prussian King's kingdom overseas. Strangely, like Wilhelm Dohm, he thought that Jews were degenerates who could reform, but unlike Dohm, he believed that in order for them to do so they had to move somewhere south where the climate was in tune with their "Semitic" origins. On this particular topic, see Jonathan M. Hess, "Johann David Michaelis and the Colonial Imaginary: Orientalism and the Emergence of Racial Antisemitism in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, and Society Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, and Society* 6, no. 2 (2000): 56-101 and Jonathan M. Hess, "Sugar Island Jews? Jewish Colonialism and the Rhetoric of 'Civic Improvement' in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 1 (1998): 92-100.

[4] The expression is Arendt's. On boyhood ideals, imperialism, and Zionism, see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001), 210-11.

[5] Bar-Yosef, "A Villa in the Jungle," 5.

while Loewenberg a young, frail, and effeminate Jewish boy. If the two manage to survive all these years far from modernity, it is because of Kingscourt (his manly character and physical attributes) and his "books, apparatus for physics, and weapons"[6]—in sum, civilization. Yet, when they leave the island, Loewenberg, "the green hollow-chested Jewboy" has become "like an Oak" Kingscourt admits.[7] In short, Herzl's *Altneuland* is about a young Jew being the Friday of a German Crusoe, and his becoming—through *Bildung* (the process of self-cultivation and reformation through education and maturation)—Crusoe himself. Rightly so then, Haim Yacobi's *Israel and Africa* argues that colonialism and colonial spaces such as Africa are still "used as an instrument in the constant re-shaping of Zionism, which defines itself as a de-colonized Western territorial project" (ix).

The Uganda Proposal's settler-colonial enterprise was presented as a stepping-stone to an establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Barely a year had passed since the publication of *Altneuland*, and with Chamberlain's proposal Herzl was being offered the "island in the South Seas where one is really alone,"[8] an imperial expedition for European Jews and the Dr. Friedrich Loewenbergs of Europe, who like Herzl, had internalized the European anti-Semitic stigma of the Jew as an effeminate, physically inferior, sexually deviant, sick, irrational, if not literally "black"[9] man. In any case, by bringing civilization and enlightenment into the heart of darkness, Jews, Herzl hoped, would reform their bodies and character and enter the circle of humanity and, thus, legitimately claim Palestine as their right. In sum, long before the Holocaust, European Zionists were mobilizing the colonial "moral geography" (2-3, 25), Yacobi argues, that the Europeans would later rely upon to legitimize worse atrocities from the colonial spaces to the heart of Europe (Holocaust).

If we fast-forward to the present, the European colonial "images of Africa are still central to Zionism's self-fashioning."[10] This is something that the book under review here highlights quite well. Indeed, the common and still widely spread narrative explains Israel's spatial and ethno genesis as a natural outgrowth of a civilized West in the geographic "East."[11] In other words, this narrative depicts Israel as a nation-state finding itself constantly in an *exceptional* situation, a "state under siege," "entangled in a conflict of unparalleled dimensions" creating a situation of "exceptional vulnerability" that only can be answered by exceptional security needs, a "state of exception."[12]

In contemporary Israel truncated versions of this narrative are commonplace; for instances, Israel's former Defense Minister Ehud Barak's assertion that "Israelis still live in a

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[6] Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland*, trans. D.S. Blondheim, Jewish Virtual Library, Book IV, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/altneulandtoc.html>, (accessed September 18, 2015).

[7] Herzl in *Altneuland*, note 26 as quoted in Bar-Yosef, "A Villa in the Jungle," 7.

[8] Op. cit., Herzl.

[9] On the Jew as a "black" see Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 171-200 and Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 6-12. On the "black" Jew and the process of "whitening" in Israel see Eitan Bar-Yosef, "Zionism, Apartheid, Blackface: Cry the Beloved Country on the Israeli Stage," *Representations* 123, no. 1 (2013): 117-53. On the "black" Jew and the process of whitening in the U.S., see Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[10] Bar-Yosef, "A Villa in the Jungle," 2.

[11] Aziza Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel," *American Sociological Review* 68, no. 4 (August 2003), 481. See also: Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010) and Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (October 1, 1988): 1-35.

[12] Jonathan B. Isacoff, "Writing the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Historical Bias and the Use of History in Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 1 (2005), 74-76.

villa in the middle of the jungle" or the expression describing Israel's surroundings as a "Middle Eastern muck" (*habotz haMizra-Tichoni*).[13] The oft-cited phrase outside of the state of Israel that "Israel is the sole democracy in the Middle East" likewise encapsulates the sentiment effectively. The embedded premise within these short phrases is the colonial definition of the Middle East and its indigenous population—especially the Muslim and Arab populations—as a reservoir of irrational, sick, unreasonable, unredeemable (sub)humans, who pose a constant threat to "civilization." In this set of hidden assumptions, upon which the Zionist narrative is built upon, one can see the shadow of Africa and its present absence in Israel.

The reason why I have turned to this series of events from 1902 and 1903 is that they instantiate the intersectionality of modernity and coloniality that defines Israel's relationship with Africa. In other words, it demonstrates how the formation of the European Jewish subject came to be simultaneously colonized—carrying with him/her the stigma of the Enlightenment's anti-Semitism—and colonizer—a becoming "white." Herzl's (and Zionism's) African fantasy aptly highlights, as Eitan Bar-Yosef writes, the affinity and conviviality "between the colonial desire and the post-colonial guilt."[14] At this intersection, orientalist tropes, phantasms, and ultimately mimicry play an important role and were/are shared by Israelis and Africans alike (although with considerable variation due to varying loci). Consequently, the shared colonial legacies of Africa and Israel laid the ground for similar pathways to decolonization, emancipation, and redemption through nationalist, Marxist/socialist, and nativist discourses—discourses that constituted an instinctive reaction or answer to Jewish and black experiences of submission, captivity, and bondage.

Haim Yacobi's monograph picks up from this shared modern experience to explore the reality of contemporary Israel (post-independence) in Chapter 1. The most significant development in this regard was "Africa's Decade" (1956-1966), a critical development in Israel's foreign and aid policies which break the country's isolation from the so-called Third World and during which it initiated vast diplomatic efforts to build political and commercial bridges with at least 16 African governments. Although much has been said about the commercial implications (especially in terms of military, arms, and logistical equipment trade) of this critical moment, very little had been said before this book about how Israel was actually exporting a comprehensive settlement and colonization model adapted for the "colonial spatial practices of population control and space shaping" (5). In other words, there was a central socio-political aspect to Israel's foreign aid and commercial activities in Africa that needed to be addressed. Yacobi's important contribution here is to show that arms, weapons, equipment, and other material goods subjected to international trade never travel by themselves. They also travel with military doctrines, "moral geographies," and modes of being in the world.

What the book does remarkably well is to highlight how African Jews (especially from North Africa) had brought with them Africa *in* Israel (these *Mizrahim* or Oriental Jews were often labeled *schartz khayes* or "black animals" by the Ashkenazim elite of the previous *Yishuv*) and had prepared the ground, so to speak, for Israel's Ashkenazim political elite's encounters with Africa. In other words, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of *Mizrahim* in Israel resulted in Israel's Ashkenazim political elite making concerted efforts (with the political, social, economic and spatial variables this involves) to manage—i.e., "whiten"—the

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[13] Ian S. Lustick, "Abandoning the Iron Wall: Israel and 'The Middle Eastern Muck,'" *Middle East Policy* 15, no. 3 (2008), 34.
[14] Bar-Yosef, "A Villa in the Jungle," 2.

population. Relatedly, Israel's presence in various African countries amounted to a translation of the *kibbutz* (communal settlements) and *Nahal* (semi-agricultural settlements) to the reality of various African nations. Just as the establishment of Israel came along with the reformation of European Jewish identity (*Hashkala,* Reform Judaism, Zionism) and a new Jewish Israeli born subject—the pioneering *new Jew (halutz)* or *Sabra*—these newly exported institutions and discourses demanded that African subjects also "reform" themselves and adopt a similar kind of "pioneering" ethos (32-35).

In Chapter 2, Yacobi expands his analysis to the export of Israeli architects' expertise in designing spaces and buildings that were supposed to be a key element to African emancipatory and nation-building projects. Far from being apolitical "developmental" or simply commercial partnerships, the Israeli architects' involvement in Africa during the 1960s and 1970s, Yacobi argues, served to reify an imagined cartography of Africa that in turn served to generate further moral justification for foreign spatial interventions (37). In turn, this reification of Africa as a spatial entity needing foreign intervention served to reinforce Israel's Western self-image and the Zionist narrative. Another important contribution one can take from this second chapter is also how Israel's architectural venture in Africa in the the 1960s and 1970s served as a laboratory for the planning, designing and construction of Israel's settlements in the West Bank, such as Ma'ale Adumim for instance (54). This second chapter is particularly well documented and researched. It is one of the highlights of this book.

The third chapter moves to the case of "Africa in Israel" by critically examining how Africa was read, imagined, represented, and consumed in Israel. It does so by analyzing school textbooks, theatrical plays, novels, expositions, and other cultural artifacts. What stands out of this chapter is the extent to which Israelis—despite their relatively recent and very violent colonial experience with Europe—reproduced the Orientalist tropes Europeans deployed against colonized nations and peoples (including European Jews). Africa, as part of the geographical "East" is represented as simultaneously exotic and thus desirable, yet dangerous and threatening. As such, it lays the ground for understanding today's fear of African migrants (mostly Sudanese and Eritreans) in Israel. In other words, the Israeli production of Africa *in* Israel was central to its Western identity project. With this identitarian lens in mind, one can understand Israel's aid to Africa as the performance of its self-conceived Western identity.

In Chapter 4, Yacobi looks for cultural signs (artifacts) of the presence of North African Jews (particularly from Morocco) in Israel despite Israel's hegemonic "de-Arabizing" past. He argues that one can find these signs in the towns and cities that evolved from the "development towns" North African Jews were sent to upon their arrival in Israel during the 1950s. One of these sites is the town of Netivot and, in particular, its Yeshiva (religious school). The latter, built following the North African Jewish standards, acts as an "architectural disruption" of Israel's Westernization narrative. It also is a place where *Mizrahi* tradition is revived and lived daily through *hillulah* (commemoration events for *Tzadikim*, or North African Jewish spiritual and "righteous" masters) for instance (12, 86).

Chapter 5 discusses "Africa in Israel" from the prism of African asylum seekers who seek to find shelter in Israel. Here Yacobi shows how racialization (and racism) operates in Israel today in order to protect its "demographic balance" and the extent to which Palestinian and migrant "demographic threats" act as a source of biopolitical anxiety. In other words, drawing upon the previous chapters that map how Africa is represented and imagined only to be rejected, this chapter shows empirically how this rejection or absent presence takes concrete form through the body of the African asylum seeker in

contemporary Israel. What this chapter does particularly well is to establish important parallels between Palestinians' and African asylum seekers' plights. It indeed shows that Palestinian's are not alone in their plight and that eugenic and ethnonational anxieties also extend to other groups, including migrants, Bedouins, and foreign workers from Asia.[15] ,In other words, although one population is indigenous and the other is constituted of migrants, the treatment of these "dangerous" populations threatening the biopolitically and racially defined Israeli national project is similar (though not identical) and that tactics and strategies to control, police, and pacify these populations overlap. When one keeps in mind the current refugee crisis in Europe this chapter takes on even greater importance. The only shortcoming of this chapter is that it does not discuss the politics of Palestinian citizens of Israel or their encounters with these African asylum seekers. Are there any solidarities developed between these groups (as in the case of the U.S. based Black Lives Matter movement[16]) or do these two groups find themselves pitted against one another (in a "divide and conquer" manner)?

In the last chapter (6) of the book, the author comes full circle to Israel's "Africa Decade," but this time in the twenty-first century. Drawing on the work of scholars who have worked on Israel's economy of violence (Neve Gordon amongst others), Yacobi argues that Israel's military experience and arms industry—along with the agricultural sector—is one of the most important defining features of the country's economy and of its exports around the globe, including Africa.[17] Israel has thus become, through almost five decades of occupation of Palestine, an expert country in "corn fields and battlefields" (119-122).

This is a wonderful book, but it nevertheless has a few shortcomings. For instance, theoretically speaking *Africa and Israel* is very rich, but what is lacking is a more robust account of the author's own philosophical conclusions drawn from his empirical and genealogical findings. Nevertheless, considering its short length, the book asks and answers many new and extremely important questions, making it essential reading for anyone interested in postcolonial studies, African studies, Middle Eastern and Israeli studies, the study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as cultural studies more broadly speaking. It is one of the few books that critically assess the full measure of the entanglement of colonialism, racism, and postcolonial realities in Israel, as well as the impact of Israel's Eurocentrism in Africa and Palestine.

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[15] See for instance the case of Chinese migrant workers who were forced so sign a "no-sex contract" as a condition to get a job in Israel in 2003. Conal Urquhart, "Chinese workers in Israel sign no-sex contract," *The Guardian*, December 23, 2003, [online] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/dec/24/israel1>, (accessed June 30, 2016).

[16] On the latter, see: Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundation of a Movement* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

[17] On this topic, see Jeff Halper, *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), reviewed by Richard Falk in *SCTIW Review*, March 31, 2016, <http://sctiw.org/sctiwreviewarchives/archives/1058>.