

INTRODUCTION TO ILAN PAPPÉ



In Gaza now, it's worse than ethnic cleansing | Centre Stage

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I think it's worse than ethnic cleansing this is ethnic cleansing which have has turned into genocide so from my perspective what's happening now in Gaza is far worse than what happened in 1948.

Taking Center Stage Ilan Pappé, he's an Israeli historian and professor at the University of Exeter.

Pappé is known for his outspoken views on the Israeli Palestinian question drawing both praise and criticism he's the author of several books including the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in which he challenges the traditional Israeli narrative over the establishment of Israel in the dangers of the Zionist ideology and its impact on Israel and Palestine the historical context of October the 7th and his vision for a one-state solution.

Professor Ilan Pappé. Thank you so much for speaking to Center Stage.

It's a pleasure to be on the program thank you for having me before you left Israel to the UK in 2006 you were condemned in the kneset you were targeted you were boycotted at the University that you worked at I understand you also received death threats as a result of you speaking out in

support of Palestinians but as an Israeli Jew who lived in Israel whose parents immigrated from Europe to Israel where does this conviction to speak out come from it's uh actually a journey it doesn't happen in one day you don't have a moment of epiphany so to speak that suddenly you are willing to actually risk your association with your own Society in many ways you have to deprogram yourself from an indoctrination that you were exposed to from very early age. In my case I think what really helped was first of all the fact that I love history uh and I knew always from a very early age that I would like to be an historian and I was also very interested in the history of the place in which I was born Hifa and because I was looking at the modern history of Hifa and then of Palestine I was exposed to let's say historical facts that challenged the indoctrination that I was exposed to but I think what really helped was the fact that I it was just a coincidence that I decided to continue my studies outside of Israel in Britain in the University of Oxford and also by chance I had an Arab supervisor the late and great Albert Hurani and uh and through him I met Palestinians on a different footing that I would have met them in Israel so this intimacy with Palestinian colleagues and Friends being outside of the country working on the most important year in the history of modern Palestine my mind about who I am the story and so on and slowly I began to uh take myself if you want out of the Zionist tribe and um became quite a critical voice against it right but so I mean The 1973 War many people would be interested to know that in fact you served in the Israeli military in the 1973 War so there wasn't a turning point an incident which shaped your narrative today.

I should say I had a very conventional Israeli upbringing uh we which included going to the Army because you have to serve in the Army and uh I was in the 1973 War I was on the Golan Heights uh in the war between Syria and Israel. I saw things there that I think later also helped to shape my ideas but I think it was I was too young and too immersed in the Israeli mindset to be affected by the war itself. I think it came a bit later it came a bit later and when I should also say I mean I became a mature scholar through a very important dramatic time the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 which was clearly to me at least not a war of choice but an invasion the first intifada when you had the First Palestinian Uprising seeing Palestinians fighting for freedom and Independence it also influences you there's a moment you get up and you say you are at peace with yourself you are okay with what you think you're willing to pay the price uh you're not looking back because you know too much and from then on you become committed to the cause to continue what you believe in is that hard to do Keeping your moral compass these days I mean how do you keep your moral compass uh how do you hold

on to such views when the Israeli Society itself is a Zionist society as described by yourself and by many and also the successive Israeli governments that come into power are extremely right and they're pretty much Zionist governments particularly after the events of October the 7th how do you keep that moral compass well I think what helps me that I already understood that this is going to happen uh when I wrote in the mid the Oslo Accord I was writing very pessimistic articles everybody was writing hopeful articles that Oslo will bring peace between Israel and the Palestinians and I was writing something very differently. I said you don't understand the Israeli Society you don't understand the Israeli educational system. I could see what kind of young Israelis are being uh educated I could envisage how Israel would look 10 15 years or 20 years where we are now onwards because. I understood that a new generation of Israelis far more right-wing far more extreme far more Zionists far more racist uh being educated in the school system uh so I was ready unfortunately for the event so I it didn't they didn't shake me but The most important historical context let me ask you this I mean you you're a historian as a historian what would you say is the most important historical context that people need to know today uh when it comes to Israel and Palestine as the Gaza War continues yeah I think there's more than one historical context the first and most important one is probably uh the events of 1948 you cannot understand uh what happened on the 7th of October if you don't go back to the Gaza Strip was created because most people don't know that before 1948 there wasn't such an entity called the Gaza Strip the Gaza Strip is an Israeli invention in 1948 until 1948. Gaza was a small town very cosmopolitical because it was on the Viam Maris between Alexandria and Alexandretta in Turkey. Many people passed through it had Jewish Christian and Muslim communities living there in coexistence and peace and then came the **Nakba** the catastrophe Israeli, what I called in my book the ethnic cleansing and what happened was that Israel was able when it committed the ethnic cleansing to expel Palestinians to Lebanon to Syria to Jordan but Egypt did not allow Israel to expel Palestinians to Egypt so Israel had the in the South so they said okay we'll give up they decided not to occupy Gaza they decided to create this rectangle as a huge refugee camp so that they can push the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from the Central and South of Palestine that Egypt did not want to receive and to push it to 2% of historical Palestine and close it as a border and let the Egyptian take the military rule over that area so from the very first moment in 1948 the strip was a huge refugee camp under pressure and un bearable conditions already in 48 of course things became even worse after Israel occupied it in Siege on Gaza began and then the 17 years of siege that

included four bombardments of Gaza, which is probably what most young people in Gaza know since many of them are in the early 20s the only reality they know is the reality of Siege and four bombardments from the air the land and the Seige from 2007 until today in the this whole reaction both to The Siege but also to the fact that so many of the people in Gaza were refugees who were pushed into this strip from 1948 and were under military occupation Is history repeating itself you've written that book the ethnic cleansing GF Palestine uh about what happened in 1948 and you said that it was noted by the world at the time but not condemned is history repeating itself now when it comes to not only what we're seeing happen is it ethnic cleansing taking place in Gaza right now in your opinion and are some World governments complicit in what's happening first of all I think it's worth an ethnic cleansing I think what we see in Gaza now is genocide and I don't think that what happened in 48 was genocide ethnic cleansing is bad enough I mean don't misunderstand me and ethnic cleansing is an operation that is usually accompanied by massacres but uh this is not ethnic this is ethnic cleansing which have has turned into genocide so from my perspective what's happening now in Gaza is far worse than what happened in 1948 that's the first point. Secondly I think you're right I think the same International indifference uh that allowed the Israelis to complete the ethnic cleansing in 1948 is work is also activated uh today and today it's even less forgivable than it was in 48 because 48 there was no television there was no internet unlike today where the genocide is taking place in front of our eyes we know we know every day what's going what's going on and the governments of the west of the Global nors as fully aware what goes on and they refuse to uh Force Israel uh to accept the ceasefire this is incredible that uh the United States Administration uh willingly and knowingly gives Israel a card blanch to uh continue the genocide now for more than 3 months what settler colonialism we see now is contextualizing and historicizing what's going on also triggers accusations of anti-Semitism to what extent do you think that this is part of the settler Colonial nature of Zionism sett colonialism is a phenomenon of Europeans who became actually in many cases refugees in Europe or outcasts because they were not welcomed by Europe for religious reasons economic reasons cultural reasons and they felt that Europe was unsafe or Europe didn't want them so they were looking for a new Europe outside of Europe and very often they chose places where other people already lived and uh and what happened when they understood that there is an indigenous native population in the new places they uh were uh willing to try and remove that population either by genocide or by ethnic cleansing so we usually say that they're acted according to a logic of the elimination of

the Native and Zionism is not a different case Europeans felt unwelcome in Europe but they still wanted to create a Europe they chose Palestine because of the religious connection between Judaism uh Through the Bible to the land of Palestine uh with the help of like all SLE Colonial movements they got a help from an Empire Britain but they were always working on this logic that I mentioned the logic of the elimination of the Native but you know not complete the elimination they expelled half of Palestine's population and half of Palestine population remained in historical Palestine they also did not take into account that those who were expelled would continue and create a Liberation movement and would not give up their right of return and so on so I think what we have here in very simple terms it's a project of having as much of the land with as few indigenous native people of it as possible Right Gaza is a problem Gaza was always a problem for Israel the West Bank was Judaized was colonized uh and there is now more than 700,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank so Israel feels that even if there is a Palestinian problem in the West Bank because you have such a huge Jewish presence they have it under control Gaza they never succeeded in persuading enough Jewish settlers to go into only let's take them out they are more trouble than helping us and decided to create this huge prison and um Gaza still became a problem I mean after they created the big prison in 2007 the Hamas continued its resistance so it didn't solve the problem as far as they were concerned One State solution you're an advocate for the one state Solution that's right tell us how this would work in your mind yeah I mean based on what you're saying and these decisions that are taken by the Israeli governments it's uh it seems to be very challenging absolutely what it really means is that you cannot have a one-state solution as long as Zionism is the most important the hegemonic ideology in Palestine there's no chance for a one-state solution there's no chance for any solution also the two-state solution is not a solution as long as Israel is a Zion state so obviously when we talk about a one state as a vision for the future we understand that it has to go through the De-Zionization of Israel or the decolonization if you want of historical Palestine that disintegration happening yeah but what we can see very clearly is processes by which this project is not working not just because of the Palestinian resistance but because it has other uh organic problems for instance this whole idea of creating a state on the basis of religion never worked in any country in the world the idea that you can create a state of Jews just because they all believe in the same religion is not a basis for nationalism and we can see now the struggle inside the Jewish Society between two camps the secular Jews and the religious Jews and they find it very difficult to find anything in common so first of all I think this is

disintegrating from within I think there is an implosion of the society from within secondly the state relies so much on the United States that the moment that there is a scenario by which America for whatever reasons not necessarily prop Palestinian reasons is unable or unwilling to provide the financial and military aid to Israel it has less capacity to keep its economy or its military uh capacity so I think I'm much more clear about the disintegration of the Zionist project I really think we are beginning to see the end of this look let me ask you this right of Palestinians to return though would it be anti-semitic then to advocate for the right of pal Palestinians to return but not for Jews no it will not be anti-semitic I think there's a, I'll explain I think the right of the Palestinians to return to their Homeland because they were expelled is uh very much grounded in international law there is a clear United Nation resolution 194 from the Palestinians to return is sacred and internationally legal so I think that's a right that cannot be denied this is not a political issue this is an the an individual right of a refugee to go back home the immigration of Jews to Israel is not a regular immigration law of a state articulates an unreasonable idea that any Jewish baby born anywhere in the world is automatically and potentially an Israeli citizen you cannot turn every Jew in the world into a potential uh citizen of the future uh one state no the one state would have to distinguish between the right of the refugees to return and agree upon all the people who live there on its immigration uh policy so I would totally separate the right of the Palestinian refugees to return which is correcting an historical Injustice then the future of people who would like to if at all would like to come to what hopefully would become a democratic State uh all over Palestine if they want to go there as Jews as Christians and so on but what will it take Professor for uh this idea of Zionism to disintegrate in Israel for people for the Zionists in Israel to start unlearning it because you speak of Jews who are outside of the United States out of Israel forgive me or people outside of Israel who are now unlearning Zionism but the real problem is in Israel itself absolutely if Israel seizes to exist as a Zionist State and is replaced by a democratic State I predict that a lot of Jews especially with European background with European passports with options of living outside would leave that happened to the white community in South Africa I hope that will not but I think some of them would leave there's no doubt the fact that this is a possible scenario is not a good enough reason to stop uh the Injustice in Palestine so I think we have to be honest with people you know you cannot describe a Rosy decolonization you know saying to people oh don't worry you just get up tomorrow morning and the Palestinians suddenly would be equal citizens the refugees are coming back and you don't you don't won't even feel it your

life will continue as it is no it won't because you have many unjust privileges which you're going to lose you're going to feel quite unsafe at the beginning because someone else is now taking control but this is unavoidable and necessary it also means that we should not expect a change from within Israel as a precondition for the liberation of Palestine this will happen despite the fact that most Israeli Jews would be the one state solution against it speaking of acceptance I mean when we talk about this one state solution so far it's confined if I can say so and correct me if I'm wrong here to sort of intellectual circles to um historians like yourself I mean one of the recent polls that I was uh reading suggests that in 2023 support for the one state solution stands at about 23% among Palestinians and 20% among is really Jews and also you have governments who are now trying to re-energize reinvigorate this idea of a two-state solution so how can this idea for a one-state solution gain momentum do you think it's going to gain momentum going forward first of all yes so I think uh this is changing rapidly uh what is important is the change in the position of Palestinians in the West Bank or under the Palestinian Authority who are officially under a leadership that talks only about the two-state solution the number of people who are for the one state solution is growing exponentially every day every day I know it because I'm a member of a movement which is called the one Democratic State campaign uh and we are working in the West Bank as well as in Gaza and inside Israel and the numbers are all the time growing especially among the younger generation and we have to remember the Palestinian Society is one of the youngest in the world 50% of the Palestinians wherever they are under Palestinian iions I guess I don't know I don't have the numbers but I guess an overwhelming majority would be for a one- state solution and you can see it because the young people use the internet more than the older generation and they are less factional factionalized uh so I think that there definitely we are going I'm totally sure about it I don't know exactly when but in the medium-term uh future I think that the Palestinian declared Vision even institutionalized vision would move to a one state solution what about acceptance amongst Israeli Jews they don't accept the two-state solution and they don't expect the one state solution I really think that their position is not relevant that much because as long as most of the Israeli Jews are Zionists and most of them are Zionists they don't believe in any solution that could begin to uh address the injustices that Zionism inflicted on the Palestinians this is why I think the most important strategy the Palestinians have adopted in recent years is the BDS movement the boycott divestment and sanction the logic of the BDS which was copied from South Africa the logic of the BDS is that you don't think that the Society of the occupier is going to change from

within so you believe that boycott divestment and sanction would force it to change so I think what matters is do we have effective tools to force the Israelis to effective tools change are there effective tools then to force change amongst the uh the sort of political structures on both sides as well as governments around the world we have to believe that there is otherwise we have no hope for the future if we if we don't believe that we have a chance of influencing the people who make policy in any country then there's very little Hope For Humanity I think young people around the world believe that they have the chance to change e ecological policies uh young African-Americans believe uh that they have a chance of making the American society more egalitarian and young Palestinians believe that they have the power to liberate Palestine so I think yes we have a chance we have the tools if we haven't done it yet it means that we are either using the wrong tools or we are not using the tools correctly but I think if this energy that Young Generation of Palestinians have would be translated into organization namely we need to see the a new PLO the new PLO has to include Hamas and the Jihad in other factions you cannot have four five Palestinian National Liberation movements they will never succeed if they continue like this they need one organization as they used to have a democratic one an authentic one that represents all the Diversified positions of Palestinians and agreeing on what they can agree this can change policies of Palestinian leadership of Arab leadership uh and world leadership yes I do think that uh there is a way of doing it but there are certain conditions that have to be fulfilled so that these processes uh are becoming positive because the destruction I think of Israel from within will happen anyway the problem is if there's no Palestinian a proper Palestinian organization to take over what you create what you get instead of it is chaos right and Chaos can continue for 20 30 years so transitions have to be quick long transition periods usually destroy the achievements of Liberation and decolonization we've seen it in many African countries for instance so we hope that Palestine would go in a different pass in the future Professor Elam Pappé. real pleasure speaking to you thank you so much thank you very much thank you

