

Israelophobia and the Apartheid Criminalization of the Jewish State

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ABSTRACT

Zionism is a liberation movement like others across the African continent, South America, and Southeast Asia. The history of the indigenous people in all these continents mirrors that of the Jews concerning their quest for Israel, in that they were all brutally conquered by militarily superior foreign empires, which forced them to surrender control of their homelands and destiny. The notable difference is that the Jewish people were not just conquered, but the bulk of the population was expelled from ancient Israel. Yet the Jews' connection to their homeland and longing for restoration was never severed by displacement.

The depiction of Jews as colonizers occupying Arab ancestral land is bankrupt of all truth. It is a brazen lie that is as audacious as it is devoid of historical accuracy. It stands to reason that people cannot colonize or occupy their own land, and yet, only the Jewish people are forced to endure this unjust characterization.

Therefore, labelling Israel as an apartheid state can only be described as a new virulent form of anti-Semitism masquerading as legitimate political criticism.

The State of Israel has, against all odds, managed to thrive in a very difficult geopolitical neighbourhood. As with any other country, it faces regional and domestic challenges, be they economic, security, illegal immigrants, or racial tensions. To be fair, you can visit most of Europe, the United States, or even my home in South Africa, and you will find that despite the advent of our much heralded democracy, racial tensions continue to be an ugly blight that punctuates our national discourse, as no country on earth is immune to these challenges.

It is only logical that we judge Israel on the same basis as any other country, but, inexplicably most of us choose not to do so. We compound matters even more, choosing to impute certain socio-political policies upon both the State of Israel and Jewish people interchangeably, with full knowledge that they are blatant lies. One such lie is that Israel is an apartheid state. If you truly understand what apartheid is, you can appreciate that this libel is so far reaching and broad that it attacks the very foundational ethos of the State of Israel.

Apartheid was and remains one of the greatest crimes against humanity. It was a system that was not only evil by design but it was matched by its ruthless policies and pathologically brutal enforcement. Apartheid policies discriminated against, regulated, and oppressed every conceivable aspect of our black human existence. To understand apartheid you need to appreciate the historical sequence of events that paved its foundation as it did not mysteriously appear in a vacuum in 1948, but was the pinnacle of a centuries-old colonial project.

In his book *A History of South Africa*, Leonard Thompson, a respected historian, prolific author, scholar and the Charles J. Stillé Professor of History Emeritus at Yale University, writes in a chapter entitled “The Conquest Completed”:

“Although they differed in many other respects, white farmers and businesspeople, traders and missionaries, and government officials had a common interest in subjugating the Africans, appropriating their land, harnessing their labour, dominating their markets and winning their hearts and minds. By the end of the century (19th), they had completed the process of conquest that had begun in the time of van Riebeeck (1652). All the indigenous people of Southern Africa were incorporated in states under white domination.”

DOES THIS IN ANY WAY SOUND LIKE ISRAEL?

The period from 1910 to 1948 saw a steady increase of laws enforcing racial segregation and the disenfranchisement of Africans and this gave rise to the liberation struggle. Zionism was one of the driving forces behind the rebirth of the State of Israel and the proper definition of Zionism is that it is a national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.

Similarly, over the past century we have seen a proliferation of liberation movements emerge across the entire African continent, South America and South East Asia. The history of the indigenous people in all these continents mirrors that of the Jews concerning their quest for Israel in that they were all brutally conquered by a militarily superior foreign empire, such as Britain, Spain, France, Portugal or Rome, which forced them to surrender control of their homelands and destiny. With the passage of time the conquered people have risen up in their quest for self-determination. The only notable difference with Israel is that the Jewish people were not just conquered but the bulk of the population was

expelled from their homeland. However, as with any conquered people, their connection to their homeland and longing for restoration was never severed by displacement.

It therefore follows that if it is just and desirable for indigenous people to be restored to their ancestral homelands and have the fundamental right to self-determination then such goal and rights must be equally afforded to the Jewish people concerning their homeland of Israel, otherwise, even we black South Africans should be denied that basic right if the world is consistent in its denial of Jewish restoration in Israel.

The “Israel is an apartheid state” libel is often used by those who know very little of apartheid or merely find it a convenient accusation because, bizarrely, it is accepted without the requisite burden of proof. Concerning apartheid, I talk from experience not gained from the safe comfort of reading about it in history books or of observing it whilst living a cushioned life a continent’s distance away.

I was born in an apartheid homeland because the Natives Land Act of 1913 ensured that as black people we owned only a measly 7 percent of our ancestral homeland and this ensured that we lived only within demarcated and economically unviable reservations.

Apartheid further decreed that a black child was intellectually inferior and should thus not be exposed to subjects like mathematics and science as the government deemed that we would have no use for them in adult life. It ensured that schools were segregated, the syllabus was inferior and resource allocation a paltry minimal. It was precisely in defiance of these racial limitations that my father challenged this education system and prevailed by enrolling my brother and me in a previously all-white private boarding school in the 1980s. This brought me face to face with apartheid as

I witnessed the contrast between how the white community lived, their wealth, their homes, and the privations of black existence. I was not allowed to watch movies with my white fellow students, visit the same beaches, use the same restrooms, travel on the same train carriages, and additionally, was subjected to unrelenting racial harassment for no other reason than the simple fact that I was black.

I have visited Israel more than any other country in the world and have been privileged to visit other countries including Brazil, Canada, France, Denmark, Italy, Malaysia, the United States, Singapore, Spain, Sweden and Thailand. My daughter has, by choice, spent two stints volunteering and working in Israel. As a Black South African I have felt more at ease in Israel than in any one of these other countries as in Israel my race has never determined how anybody interacts with me. More importantly, in terms of the racial segregation associated with apartheid, there are no separate public facilities for Jews that discriminate against Arabs, no separate universities or hospitals, no racial laws regulating who you can fall in love with or marry, and most importantly, the Arab population is afforded a full franchise including Arab politicians elected into the Knesset. This could not be any further removed from the apartheid that we knew and experienced.

The scenario of Jews being colonizers and occupying Arab ancestral land is bankrupt of all truth. It is a brazen lie that is as audacious as it is devoid of historical accuracy. It stands to reason that people cannot colonize or be deemed an occupiers of their homeland and yet for some inexplicable reason only the Jewish people amongst all other peoples are forced to endure this unjust stigmatic characterization. Therefore, labelling Israel as an “apartheid state” can only be described as a new virulent form of anti-Semitism masquerading as legitimate political criticism.

Holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the State of Israel is wrong. Jews are not a homogenous entity. Some support Israel whilst others do not. Further, others are religiously observant and others are not. Yet, as I write this article, Israeli Apartheid Week is taking place at a few South African universities and in support of this, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) will be picketing outside the offices of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies in Cape Town. When COSATU was asked why they were demonstrating outside the offices of a South African Jewish communal organisation rather than an Israeli one, COSATU's deputy international secretary, Zanele Mathebula, responded by stating that, "They have everything to do with Israel... they are the closest thing to Israel in Cape Town."

Similarly, in August 2014, the then Western Cape COSATU leader Tony Ehrenreich posted the following on his Facebook page: "The time has come to say very clearly that if a woman or child is killed in Gaza (during Operation Protective Edge), then the Jewish board of deputies, who are complicit, will feel the wrath of the people of SA with the age-old biblical teaching of an eye for an eye...the time has come for the conflict to be waged everywhere the Zionist supporters fund and condone the war killing machine of Israel."

It is immoral to apply double standards by requiring of Israel behaviour that is not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation. There is absolutely nothing wrong with legitimate criticism of the policies of the State of Israel but those should be directed at state actions and never at world Jewry in general, based simply on their ethnicity. Yet again, in South Africa, we have seen surrogate organisations of the Palestinian cause such as BDS organising demonstrations outside South African retail outlets such as Woolworths, Wellness Warehouse and Reggies, on the premise



A pro-Israel rally in South Africa.

Photo: South African Friends of Israel

that they stock one or two items, cosmetic products from either the Dead Sea, or pretzels from Israel on their shelves – heaven forbid!

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) defines antisemitism as “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

It is fair to conclude that certain agencies within the United Nations, along with certain countries, political parties, civic organisations and individuals have long ceased to make a clear distinction between genuine criticism of the policies of the State

of Israel and anti-Semitism in general. Israel has become fair game for the most pernicious lies and continues to be held to impossibly exacting moral standards whilst certain countries are allowed to behave in a rogue manner.

It is a sad commentary and an indictment on the world that one has to pen such an article as this in defence of the rights of Jews to be treated as all other peoples and for Israel to exist as the nation-state of the Jewish People.