

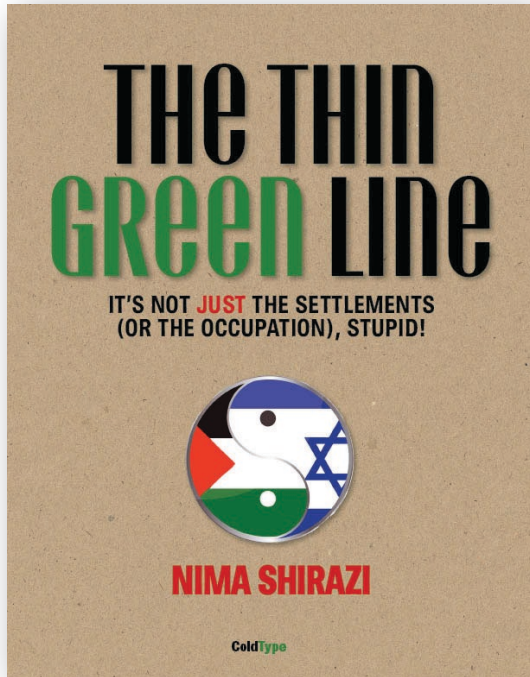
THE THIN GREEN LINE

IT'S NOT **JUST** THE SETTLEMENTS
(OR THE OCCUPATION), STUPID!



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THE THIN GREEN LINE

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“Before their eyes we turn into our homestead the land and villages in which they and their forefathers have lived... We are a generation of settlers, and without the steel helmet and gun barrel, we shall not be able to plant a tree or build a house.” - Moshe Dayan, Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff, speaking at the funeral of an Israeli farmer killed by a Palestinian in April 1956

The public debate over the Israeli Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign was reignited recently with the news that the illegal West Bank colony of Ariel would soon be opening its newly-constructed, multi-million dollar cultural center and would host performances by several of Israel’s leading theater companies in its auditorium, built - tragically - by the very Palestinian construction workers that Israel has occupied and dispossessed. The an-



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nouncement marked the first time these notable Israeli drama groups would be performing outside of the 1949 Armistice Line in Israeli-occupied Palestine.

Within days of the report, over 50 Israeli actors, directors, playwrights, and producers had signed onto a letter addressed to the boards of Israel’s repertory theaters declaring their refusal to perform in Ariel, which is the fourth largest settlement in the West Bank. The letter stated:

“We wish to express our disgust with the theater’s board’s plans to perform in the new auditorium in Ariel. The actors among us hereby declare that we will refuse to perform in Ariel, as well as in any other settlement. We urge the boards to hold their activity within the sovereign borders of the State of Israel within the Green Line.”

Condemnation and outrage were quick to come from the Israeli government, with Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu criticizing what he called the “international delegitimization assault” on Israel through academic, cultural, and economic boycotts and stating, “The last thing we need now is an attempt of boycotts from within.” Other ministers chimed in with their own, often fascist, statements, all implicitly (some explicitly) treating the militarized and messianic Jewish communities in the Palestinian West Bank as part of Israel, which they are not. (Though, this should hardly be surprising considering that Netanyahu himself referred - with a straight face and utter contempt for international law - to Ariel as the “capital of Samaria” and an “indisputable” part of Israel during a visit to the colony early this year. Additionally, Israel’s racist, child-beating Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who openly calls for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, lives in the illegal West Bank settlement of Nokdim.)

Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz called the boycott letter “unthinkable” and “a case of unfounded hatred,” before suggesting that the government withdraw funding from theater companies which refuse to perform in Ariel. He also expressed his desire for the dissenting performers to be fired. “I hope that those who fail to fulfill their contracts will be removed from the theater,” he said, continuing, “There’s a limit to everything.” *Everything*, that is, according to Steinitz, except decades upon decades of land theft and apartheid.

Science and Technology Minister Daniel Hershkowitz, regretful of “the fact that people mix culture with politics,” called the boycott “inappropriate” and scolded one of the signatories for not serving in the Israeli military. It can be assumed that Hershkowitz doesn’t find it *inappropriate* for Israel to use its science and tech-



One wonders if Huldai extends this responsibility to Nazi soldiers and concentration camp guards who were “just following orders”

nology to harvest and traffic human organs and spy on the telephone calls and emails of “governments, international organizations, foreign companies, political groups and individuals” in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Europe.

Echoing Hershkowitz, the mayor of Ariel, Ron Nachman claimed, “Culture has nothing to do with politics. If the actors and artists want to deal with politics, let them go to the Knesset. The vileness, baseness and hypocrisy of those who work in culture and call on a boycott of us, is intolerable,” while Naftali Bennett, the Director-General of the Yesha Council which speaks collectively for the municipal organizations of illegal West Bank settlements (which is *all* of them), blamed the motion on the “unfounded hatred and factionalism” that have historically affected the Jewish people. A counter-campaign by a group called Our Land of Israel declared that the “liberals and enlightened” are “always on the Arabs’ side,” called the letter’s signers “traitors,” and suggested these enemies of Israel should perform in Gaza.

In one of the more ironic condemnations, Tel Aviv mayor Ron Huldai opined, “Those who work in a theater financed with public funds cannot refuse to perform in places decided by the theater’s management,” and expanded on his broader belief that, “A person who is part of the public system and works must respect the management’s decisions.” One wonders if Huldai extends this responsibility to Nazi soldiers and concentration camp guards who were “just following orders.” Perhaps he should bone up on his knowledge of the Nuremburg Principles, the fourth of which affirms,

“The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his Government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsi-

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bility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him.”

The Israeli signatories of the boycott letter are clearly better versed in international law than the mayor of Tel Aviv. Citing both Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (“The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”) and the very first Nuremberg Principal (“Any person who commits an act which constitutes a crime under international law is responsible therefore and liable to punishment.”), Israeli dramaturgist Vardit Shalfi, one of the letter’s initiators, clearly explained,

“Ariel is not a legitimate community, and as such, is against international law and international treaties that the State of Israel has signed. This means anyone performing there would be considered a criminal according to international law. The theater’s boards should inform their actors that there are apartheid roads for Jews only that lead into the settlement of Ariel. The moment we perform there, we are giving legitimization to this settlement’s existence.”

Despite the aggressive condemnation (including the heckling of two actors who signed the letter by an Israeli parliamentarian and his aide during the performance of a play in Tel Aviv), the boycott quickly received support from influential sectors of Israeli society, as well as internationally. By the following week, over 150 Israeli academics, including professors Zeev Sternhell, Shlomo Sand, and Neve Gordon, signed a letter in solidarity with the Ariel boycott which states, “We will not take part in any kind of cultural activity beyond the Green Line, take part in discussions and seminars, or lecture in any kind of academic setting in these settlements.” In another



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supportive statement signed by several dozen noted Israeli authors David Grossman, A.B. Yehoshua, and Amos Oz, the signatories warn that “legitimization and acceptance of the settler enterprise cause critical damage to Israel’s chances of achieving a peace accord with its Palestinian neighbors.”

Additionally, about 300 people gathered outside the Habimah Theater in Tel Aviv to protest its decision to perform in Ariel. Protest participants included current and former Knesset ministers, actors, playwrights, veteran peace activists, and the former editor-in-chief of the Israeli daily newspaper *Maariv*. “Where there is occupation, there is no culture,” read some rally banners.

Perhaps even more impressive, and certainly surprising, is the support for the Ariel boycott coming from over 150 stage and screen actors, directors, writers, producers, and composers in the United States. Organized by Jewish Voice for Peace, a “national membership organization dedicated to a just peace in Israel/Palestine based on equality and international law,” a statement has been released, calling the Ariel boycott “brave” and “courageous” and correctly noting the clear illegality of the West Bank colonies “by all standards of international law.” The statement continues,

“Most of us are involved in daily compromises with wrongful acts. When a group of people suddenly have the clarity of mind to see that the next compromise looming up before them is an unbearable one -- and when they somehow find the strength to refuse to cross that line -- we can’t help but be overjoyed and inspired and grateful.

It’s thrilling to think that these Israeli theatre artists have refused to allow their work to be used to normalize

a cruel occupation which they know to be wrong, which violates international law and which is impeding the hope for a just and lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians alike. They've made a wonderful decision, and they deserve the respect of people everywhere who dream of justice. We stand with them.

The signatories, among them “four Pulitzer Prize winners, several recipients of Guggenheim Fellowships, a MacArthur Fellowship, a National Medal of Honor, and scores of recipients of the highest U.S. acting honors, including Tony Awards, Emmy Awards, Grammy Awards, Obie Awards, Drama Desk Awards,” include Tony Kushner, Vanessa Redgrave, Stephen Sondheim, Roseanne Barr, Julianne Moore, Ed Asner, Cynthia Nixon, Mary Rodgers, Jennifer Tilly, Mandy Patinkin, Wallace Shawn, Theodore Bikel, Stephen Webber, Mira Nair, Hal Prince, Bill Irwin, James Schamus, Eve Ensler, and Sheldon Harnick.

A story in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, Israel's leading daily newspaper, reported that, once news of the Jewish Voice for Peace letter surfaced, several noted Hollywood actors asked the Israel consul general in Los Angeles whether or not they should sign the statement. They were told, “Instead of getting involved in such matters it would be more helpful to support Israeli culture which needs such help. They shouldn't involve themselves in domestic Israeli politics. What's more, Ariel is within the Israeli consensus.” The consulate then turned to “key members of the Hollywood entertainment industry asking them to persuade others not to sign.”

Beyond the sheer creepiness of these American actors taking their marching orders from the Israeli consulate (not to mention the willingness of the consul-



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ate to give those orders), the hypocrisy of the consul general is staggering. For instance, when actor Jon Voight, who is a fervent Zionist, declared his support of Jewish colonization of Palestine and opposition to Palestinian self-determination by stating, “God gave this land to the Jewish people,” later accusing President Barack Obama of lying “to the Jewish people” and promoting anti-Semitism by pursuing policies that, in his mind, are “putting Israel in harm's way,” the Israeli consul general was silent. Clearly, Voight's opinions are in line with official Israeli policy and didn't constitute unnecessary interference in Israeli affairs. F

urthermore, the consul's statement that “Ariel is within the Israeli consensus” is a lie. It's not. It's illegal under international law and is, at present, undoubtedly not a part of Israel proper, regardless of what any future bogus “peace” agreement may determine.

Actor Wallace Shawn, a Jewish Voice for Peace statement signatory and one of the letter's drafters, explained his view on the ongoing efforts to legitimize West Bank settlements, saying, “Most of us, including actors, just want to lead a quiet life. And most of us go through our entire lives without doing anything really courageous, without risking anything important to us. But when asked to perform in an illegal settlement for an all-Jewish audience, as if this were one more ordinary theater, they had the guts to say no.” He continued, “To do a play in that new theater helps to make the settlement seem like a permanent part of the landscape, but the settlements are obstacles to peace and morally unjustifiable on top of that,” adding, “Theater is the art of truth, and the Israeli artists are following their own truth.”

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Boy Oh Boycott!

While the frustrated reactions of those who encourage garrison-colonialism and support in Jewish exceptionalism and supremacy over the inalienable human rights, sovereignty, and self-determination of Palestine's indigenous population is both predictable and easily dismissed, the debate now raging within so-called progressive circles, among the alleged advocates of "peace and justice," is far more important.

While the Israeli artist boycott of Ariel (and its supporters worldwide) has been widely praised as an unprecedented act of courage and conscience, the morality and effectiveness of a broader international campaign is still a hotly-contested subject. Essentially, regardless of the absurd attacks one might receive from the *Eretz Yisrael* crowd, the condemnation and even symbolic boycott of West Bank settlements like Ariel, is relatively easy.

After all, funding for such illegal projects comes, in part, from Christian Zionists like pastor John Hagee, who has donated at least \$500,000 to the Ariel colony. In return for his financial (and ideological) support, "a special dedication ceremony was held naming the main building of the [Ariel settlement's] Lowell Milken Family Sports & Recreation Complex in honor of John Hagee Ministries" prior to Ariel's "Night To Honor Those Who Honor Israel" celebration in April 2008. The settlement's own website states that "those in attendance gave resounding applause as Mayor Ron Nachman and Pastor John Hagee uncovered the sign naming the almost completed building" and quotes Nachman as telling those gathered, "Here in the hills of Samaria, in the heart of Biblical Israel, you are now well-rooted in the



It's probably safe to say that the Israeli consulate general hasn't told Hagee and his flock to mind their own business

Land. Not just by talking but by doing, you have made this possible." One can be sure that the subsequent ovation for Hagee, who has said that "turning part or all of Jerusalem over to the Palestinians would be tantamount to turning it over to the Taliban," was, well, *rapturous*.

The settlement's website lays the *hasbara* on thick when describing its vital support from organizations like Hagee's *Christians United for Israel*:

"Ariel has been so very fortunate in developing strong relationships with Christian Zionist communities around the world whose deep and abiding love for Israel and the Jewish people is completely unconditional. These dear friends visit us frequently, (despite the fact that we live in a tough neighborhood), are often the first to call when times are particularly difficult, express interest in the needs of the residents of Ariel, respect our choice to live in an area of Israel that is sometimes disputed and fund projects that truly make a difference in our city and in our everyday lives. In short, they are true friends of Israel and Ariel."

It's probably safe to say that the Israeli consulate general hasn't told Hagee and his flock to mind their own business and refrain from involving themselves in "domestic Israeli politics."

If the militant, messianic, and wholly illegal aspects of West Bank settlements aren't enough to demand a boycott, basic morality might do the trick. Beyond stealing Palestinian land for colonization, settlers also steal natural resources, such as water, which is also a gross violation of Israel's obligations as an occupying power. So offensive are these settlements and so racist their residents, that, not only do they and the occupying infrastructure upon which

they rely obviously discriminate against the native Palestinian population from whom they steal via an apartheid highway system, checkpoints, road blocks, and curfews, they also discriminate against each other. For instance, the Israeli Education Ministry has recently upheld a request by a religious school in the illegal Israeli settlement of Immanuel to segregate white Jewish students from non-white Jewish students in classrooms. As such, “74 white girls who have been studying in a building next to the school will now be allowed to study in whites-only classrooms that are privately funded, as their parents claim they do not want their girls to study in racially-mixed classrooms.”

To oppose and rightly boycott exclusive and stockaded Jewish settlements on Palestinian land is, to be quite frank, unimpressive. The clear illegality of the colonies makes any argument to the contrary irrelevant, not to mention wholly immoral, regardless of whatever arcane religious land deed one happens to personally believe in. After all, despite its ongoing actions of encouraging and facilitating, the Israeli government itself recognized this unequivocal contravention of international law back in 1967, a mere three months after aggressively (not defensively) conquering and occupying East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

However, campaigns to boycott Israel itself - whether economically, militarily, diplomatically, culturally - are a different story. The Jewish community worldwide, for example, has long had mixed reactions to calls for both international and domestic boycott.

In early 1933, less than two months after the Reichstag Fire, but more than half a decade before the German an-



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nexation of Austria and the Sudetenland, the terror of *Kristallnacht*, the invasion, occupation, and ghettoization of Poland and the extermination camps, and almost nine years before the Final Solution, American Jews were already mobilizing against racist Nazi programs. In response to the then-rising threat of anti-Semitism and the horror of discriminatory policies within Germany, New York City’s Jewish War Veterans, after considering the consequences for the persecuted German Jewry, became the first American organization to announce a trade boycott of the Third Reich and organize a massive protest parade, in which over 4,000 veterans marched on City Hall and were welcomed by Mayor John P. O’Brien.

Soon thereafter, a coalition of the American Jewish Congress, the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, and the Jewish Labor Committee sponsored simultaneous protest rallies in New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Cleveland and numerous other locations, encouraging the boycott of German goods. The New York rally, held at Madison Square Garden, was broadcast worldwide and featured speeches delivered by American Jewish, Christian, and labor leaders, along with Senator Robert F. Wagner and former New York governor Al Smith, calling “for an immediate cessation of the brutal treatment being inflicted on German Jewry.” Four years later, another rally sponsored by the AJC and the Jewish Labor Committee was held at Madison Square Garden, at which union leader John L. Lewis, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, and Rabbi Stephen Wise all spoke in support of boycott.

Nevertheless, the boycott movement - both in the US and worldwide - was

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largely unsuccessful, in part due to governments' unwillingness to cut economic ties with the heavily industrialized Germany, but also because the Jewish community itself was divided on the issue. Historian Lenni Brenner writes that "there were those in the Jewish community in America and Britain who specifically opposed the very notion of a boycott.

The American Jewish Committee, the B'nai B'rith (Sons of the Covenant) fraternal order and the Board of Deputies of British Jews refused to back the boycott. However, of all of the active Jewish opponents of the boycott idea, the most important was the World Zionist Organisation (WZO). It not only bought German wares; it sold them, and even sought out new customers for Hitler and his industrialist backers."

The WZO, intent on pursuing policies which would promote the establishment of a Zionist state in what was then Mandatory Palestine, "saw Hitler's victory in much the same way as its German affiliate, the ZVfD [*Zionistische Vereinigung fuer Deutschland*, or the Zionist Federation of Germany]: not primarily as a defeat for all Jewry, but as positive proof of the bankruptcy of assimilationism and liberalism," Brenner tells us. These sentiments were expressed with staggering enthusiasm by the renowned German biographer Emil Ludwig during a visit to the United States. "Hitler will be forgotten in a few years, but he will have a beautiful monument in Palestine," he said. "Thousands who seemed to be completely lost to Judaism were brought back to the fold by Hitler, and for that I am personally very grateful to him." (Meyer Steinglass, "Emil Ludwig before the Judge," *American Jewish Times*, April 1936)



The settlements are not the root of the current Israeli dilemma, often cast by Israeli intellectuals as a supposedly stark choice "between two terrible options: Jewish-dominated apartheid or non-Jewish democracy"

Israel's "Right to Exist"...But As What?

Recent evidence that the international BDS campaign is gaining traction includes the Olympia Food Co-op, TIAA-CREF meetings, and the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) in which over 175 Irish creative and performing artists have pledged not to accept invitations to perform in Israel. The boycott in Chile, divestment in Norway, and the recent cutting off of diplomatic relations by Mauritania, Qatar, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Bolivia are all proof that the movement is having an effect. Still, the boycott divide has resurfaced in the Jewish academic community, though the arguments employed are strikingly similar to those considered over 70 years ago.

In condemning the academic boycott of West Bank settlements by Israeli scholars, authors, and lecturers, Professor Yossi Ben Artzi, Haifa University's outgoing rector and one of the founding members of the Israeli anti-occupation advocacy group Peace Now, stated his belief that "academics should not use an academic boycott as a tool to further ideological or political agendas," the Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* reported.

"I too believe that settlements are the source of all evil in Israel," he stated, continuing, "Nevertheless, the use of a boycott is not only ineffective but bolsters the target of the boycott." Ben Artzi also accused the Israeli academics of "throwing stones and shattering the basis for their existence."

Ben Artzi is wrong. The settlements are *not* the root of the current Israeli dilemma, often cast by Israeli intellectuals as a supposedly stark choice "between two terrible options: Jewish-dominated apartheid or non-Jewish democracy."

These scholars, exemplified recently by Gadi Taub, an assistant professor of

communications and public policy at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and author of “The Settlers,” argue that “the status quo cannot last” and that the settlements are not merely “obstacles to a final peace accord, which is how settlement critics have often framed the issue,” but, rather, that they are a “danger [that] will doom Zionism itself.”

In his August 29 OpEd in *The New York Times*, Taub argues that “the settlement problem should be at the top of everyone’s agenda, beginning with Israel’s. The religious settlement movement is not just secular Zionism’s ideological adversary, it is a danger to its very existence,” claiming that “the secular Zionist dream was fundamentally democratic.” Well, democratic for Jews, at least. Taub explains, “Its proponents, from Theodor Herzl to David Ben-Gurion, sought to apply the universal right of self-determination to the Jews, to set them free individually and collectively as a nation within a democratic state.”

Taub’s conceptions of both “freedom” and “democracy” here are seriously flawed. As Joseph Agassi, professor of Philosophy at Tel Aviv University, notes, “[The Zionist] ideology deems anti-Semitism unavoidable and Israel the only place where a Jew can be safe. This view is essentially undemocratic: it denies *a priori* any value of the emancipation of Jews in the modern world...As an Israeli patriot and a philosopher, I find it imperative to make Judaic anti-Zionism a part of the badly needed debate about Israel’s past, present and future.” The idea that the Jewish communities of the world could only achieve their right to self-determination, freedom, and political representation under the banner of fierce nationalism based on ethnicity and consolidated by the so-called



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“Arab threat,” is inherently paranoid, jingoistic, racist, xenophobic, and, ultimately, ethnocentric and supremacist in its inception. Secular Zionism, as described by Taub, therefore confirms the prescient late 19th century warning of Moritz Gudemann, chief rabbi of Vienna, who predicted that “the Zionists would ultimately create a Judaism of cannons and bayonets that would invert the roles of David and Goliath and would end in a perversion of Judaism, which never glorified war and never idolized warriors,” and who, quoting from an Austrian poet, concluded that the Zionist leadership was following a path that leads “from humanity through nationality to bestiality.”

Additionally, Taub deliberately omits that the Zionist goal of a “Jewish state” relied heavily - some may argue, primarily - on denying the indigenous population of Palestine the very “universal right of self-determination” that these European immigrants were claiming for themselves. Nevertheless, Taub later claims, “In Israel proper, the Arab minority represents about a fifth of its 7.2 million citizens, and they have full legal equality.”

To call this last statement disingenuous would be an insult to that word’s actual definition. The claim is an outright lie.

For starters, whereas the Israeli Proclamation of Independence (unilaterally declared on May 14, 1948, in defiance of the international community and the “universal right” of Palestinian self-determination) declared that the new state would “ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex” and “guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education

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and culture,” the Israeli Supreme Court has repeatedly stated, in a series of decisions, that “the proclamation does not have constitutional validity, and that it is not a supreme law which may be used to invalidate laws and regulations that contradict it.” Furthermore, the Israeli “Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty,” enacted in 1992 and which carries with it the ostensible force of a bill of rights (as Israel has no Constitution), tellingly makes absolutely no mention of “equality,” and affirms “State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state,” a concept which explicitly grants legal and collective superiority upon Jewish nationals to the implicit detriment of other Israeli citizens.

In its concluding observations on Israel’s compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, published on July 29, 2010, the UN Human Rights Committee noted with concern that Israel’s Basic Law “does not contain a general provision for equality and non-discrimination.”

The US State Department’s 2009 Human Rights Report on Israel and the Occupied Territories, released in March, states that: “Institutional, legal, and societal discrimination against Arab citizens, Palestinian Arabs, non-Orthodox Jews, and other religious groups continued, as did societal discrimination against persons with disabilities. Women suffered societal discrimination and domestic violence. The government maintained unequal educational systems for Arab and Jewish students.”

The 2003 “Official Summation of the Or Commission Report,” an Israeli government-sponsored investigative finding, even categorized the government’s treatment of its Palestinian citizens “primarily neglectful and discriminatory.”



Israeli Professor Uzi Ornan, writing in *Ha’aretz* almost twenty years ago, explained that the “blatant discrimination against non-Jews” is evidence that “Apartheid is so powerful a mindset in this society, that its existence and preservation is championed by all the members of the ‘Zionist parties,’ including those who believe themselves to be in the vanguard of the struggle for socialism, peace and equal rights”

Back in 1998, the United Nations Human Rights Committee observed that, in Israel, there exist “deeply imbedded discriminatory social attitudes, practices and laws against Arab Israelis that have resulted in a lower standard of living compared with Jewish Israelis, as is evident in their significantly lower levels of education, access to health care, access to housing, land and employment.” Continuing, the Committee noted “with concern that most Arab Israelis, because they do not join the army, do not enjoy the financial benefits available to Israelis who have served in the army, including scholarships and housing loans. The Committee also expresses concern that the Arab language, though official, has not been accorded equal status in practice, and that discrimination against members of the Arab minority appears to be extensive in the private sector.”

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Not only have conditions in Israel not improved in the past two decades, they have actually worsened. Three months ago, Avishay Braverman, Minister of Minority Affairs, described Israel as “the most unequal society amongst western nations.” In March, a report by two prominent Israeli civil rights groups found that, in the last few years, “the Israeli government passed at least

21 bills aimed at discriminating against the country's Arab citizens making the current Knesset...the most racist Israeli parliament since the country's founding." In the first three months of 2010, an additional 21 racist laws had already been proposed. The report's authors Lizi Sagi and Nidal Othman said, "There has never been a Knesset as active in proposing discriminating and racist legislation against the country's Arab citizens."

Recently, Professor Mordechai Kremnitzer, vice-president of the Israel Democracy Institute, stated that the "ugly trend" of discrimination and delegitimization of Israel's Palestinian citizens is comparable to "a McCarthyite campaign against civil society," while Ilan Saban, a law professor at Haifa University, said that, "Unlike most - if not all - other democracies, Israel lacks a political culture that respects limits on the power of the majority."

As such, in Israel today, "only Jews enjoy full rights," observes George Bisharat, professor at Hastings College of the Law, explaining that "Palestinian citizens of Israel endure more than 35 laws that explicitly privilege Jews as well as policies that deliberately marginalize them." This is not an exaggeration and may, in fact, be a gross understatement, considering Israel's two-tiered legal system.

The Israeli Knesset has proposed loyalty oaths meant to affirm Jewish superiority. There is separate citizenship status for Jewish and non-Jewish Israelis. There is discrimination in real estate laws (especially the fact that about 93% of pre-1967 Israel is deemed the "inalienable property of the Jewish people" and the rights of residency, business ownership, and often even employment is explicitly denied to all



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non-Jews solely because they are not Jewish). Interfaith marriage is prohibited. The legacy of military control looms over the Palestinian Arab community's public education system, in which there is overt apartheid and funding inequity. Israeli police officers and soldiers kill Palestinians with impunity and Palestinian men are convicted of rape for "claiming to be Jewish" and having sex with Jewish women. The erasure of Palestinian history, culture, and identity is both profound and deliberate. Palestinian cemeteries are desecrated. The Shin Bet security service is authorized to "thwart the activity of any group or individual seeking to harm the Jewish and democratic character of the State of Israel, even if such activity is sanctioned by the law." Racism is systematic and institutionalized. These are the policies and realities of life within the Green Line and all are evidence of the "fundamental" injustice in Israeli society.

B.D.yeS?

Mitchell Plitnick, a former editor of the online information service Jewish Peace News and former co-director of Jewish Voice for Peace, who has worked for the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, recently applauded Norway's divestment from an Israeli company involved in "building settlements in the West Bank and working on construction of the Separation Barrier." Nevertheless, he made clear that his support for BDS stops abruptly at the Green Line, because, in his opinion, "the movement as a whole has become associated with one-state ideologies and support for the Palestinian Right of Return, two points that fall well outside the international diplomatic consensus and are non-starters for most of Europe's elites."

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Arguing, essentially, that a “Jewish Israel” should not be affected in any way by some future, hypothetical peace agreement, Plitnick claims that “the problem is the settlements” and that the way to “address the historic, and massive, injustice done to the Palestinians” is not “by promoting a single state where Jews lose their political self-determination and quickly become a minority in the area in question.”

Another Jewish Peace News editor, Lincoln Z. Shlensky, agrees. He writes that, to be effective and compelling, a clear distinction “between the settlements and Israel proper” must be made by the BDS movement, which he claims “implicitly anticipates the end of Israel as a predominantly Jewish, democratic state and therefore serves to radicalize Jewish Israelis against it and to make its aims unacceptable to almost all Western governments.” That way, he suggests, “such a strategy can succeed if the occupation, and not the existence of Israel itself, is the clear target.”

In his new article, “The New Zionist Imperative Is to Tell Israel the Truth,” published in Rabbi Michael Lerner’s *Tikkun Magazine*, J Street head Jeremy Ben-Ami refers to the BDS campaign as an approach “that rel[ies] on anger” and one that will not encourage the “very difficult and painful compromise that is necessary to achieve peace.” Are we to infer that the hard choice Ben-Ami, who mentions his commitment to a “Jewish, and democratic” Israel four times in his short piece, believes that Israel - its government and public - must make is to actually respect international law and human rights? To most reasonable observers, this might seem to be a “compromise” that Israel shouldn’t have the choice *not* to make.



During deliberations among American Jewish leaders in 1933 as to whether or not to support a boycott of Nazi Germany, Joseph Proskauer and Judge Irving Lehman of the American Jewish Committee publicly opposed the move. Lehman pleaded, “I implore you in the name of humanity, don’t let anger pass a resolution which will kill Jews in Germany”

Incidentally, Rela Mazali, another editor of Jewish Peace News, is quick to point out that “there isn’t and never has been “a Jewish Israel.” What there is, what I live in, is a Jewish-controlled Israel. Which is not a democracy.”

Ben-Ami’s claim that the BDS movement is born of anger has historic parallels. During deliberations among American Jewish leaders in 1933 as to whether or not to support a boycott of Nazi Germany, Joseph Proskauer and Judge Irving Lehman of the American Jewish Committee publicly opposed the move. Lehman pleaded, “I implore you in the name of humanity, don’t let anger pass a resolution which will kill Jews in Germany.” Sound familiar?

Also, it should be noted that, if a century of colonialism, over six decades of ethnic cleansing, 43 years of occupation, and systemic discrimination, intolerance, and racism aren’t enough to elicit “anger,” either one has no morality to speak of, or the word itself has lost all its meaning. It is not the “anger” that is the problem, here, it’s the historic - and unabated - injustice.

Huffington Post blogger M.J. Rosenberg does “not support boycotting the State of Israel,” because he believes it would hurt “those brave Israelis (B’tselem, Peace Now, Rabbis for Human Rights, Gush Shalom, Machsom Watch, Gisha, Israelis Against Home Demolitions, etc.) who fight the occupation with everything they have.”

“These Israelis (I particularly think of Rabbi Arik Ascherman of Rabbis For Human Rights) actually put their bodies on the line to fight settlers and soldiers when the need arises. I think of Uri Avnery, the old Haganah fighter, who has struggled against the occupation from the beginning.”

Apparently, Rosenberg considers supporting Israelis who “fight” and “put their bodies on the line,” more important than respecting the non-violent tactics of the actual Palestinians who have lost their homeland to a militarized, colonizing enterprise, who fight oppression, dehumanization, and degradation on a daily basis, and whose bodies are actually in the line of fire from Apache helicopters, F-16 jets, Predator drones, white phosphorous and tank shells.

Similarly, Israeli historian and writer Bernard Avishai, a longtime critic of Zionism and its effects, also opposes a substantial boycott campaign directed at Israel. In his June 2010 article in *The Nation*, entitled “Against Boycott and Divestment,” Avishai argues that academic and economic boycotts and international divestment are “seriously counterproductive...Because those actions generally undermined the very people who advanced cosmopolitan values in the country. To get social change, you need social champions, in management as in universities.”

“Even under apartheid,” Avishai writes, “you had enlightened people who needed the world’s backing, and B[oycott] and D[ivestment] cut the ground out from under them.”

For some reason, Avishai’s concept of life inside the Green Line runs parallel to Taub’s when he states that “despite institutionalized discrimination and the disquieting excesses of its security apparatus - the Israeli state still accords its citizens, including about 1.5 million Arabs, a functioning democracy, the right to vote, a free press and an independent judiciary.”

“Democratic Israel is under threat from growing numbers of rightists for whom settling “Eretz Yisrael” is of a piece with



Avishai omits that Israel’s democracy functions only by disempowering its minority citizenry, as already discussed, and that great pains are taken to punish internal dissent and stifle media coverage of its illegal and inexcusable behavior

containing, if not disenfranchising, Israeli Arabs and Jewish dissenters skeptical of their version of the Jewish state. But, then, how to strengthen dissent? By isolating dissenters?”

Avishai omits that Israel’s democracy functions only by disempowering its minority citizenry, as already discussed, and that great pains are taken to punish internal dissent and stifle media coverage of its illegal and inexcusable behavior.

Echoing Defense Minister Ehud Barak’s concern regarding a potential Israeli brain-drain, Avishai writes, “Polls show that about 40 percent of Israeli Jews have abidingly secular and globalist (if not liberal) attitudes. Who gains from economic decline and the inevitable consequence of most educated Israelis fleeing to, well, the Bay Area?”

Interestingly, Avishai does allow that, “Targeted sanctions against the occupation are another matter, however. Foreign governments might well ban consumer products like fruit, flowers and Dead Sea mineral creams and shampoos produced by Israelis in occupied territory, much as Palestinian retail stores do.”

A ‘Jewish State’ of Mind

So, when allegedly progressive commentators write “Yes to Israel. No to settlements,” and favor the boycott of West Bank colonies, but oppose the same campaign when its targets fall inside Israel’s borders (which aren’t even internationally recognized), what do they see as the ideological difference between the two, and where is the evidence that there really is one? What kind of state do these commentators actually wish to preserve and protect: one that privileges one demographic group over another or one that represents all its citizens equally?

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For instance, in a recent *Ha'aretz* article, Yossi Beilin, a former leader of the ultra-dovish Meretz party and an architect of Oslo, spoke for the Zionist left in Israel, calling a one-state solution “nonsense,” adding, “I’m not interested in living in a state that isn’t Jewish.” Similarly, in the very same issue, Hanan Porat, one of the iconic founders of the ultra right-wing, messianic settler movement Gush Emunim, dismissed the idea of a single, democratic state. “There is no point in threatening us with the idea of a state of all its citizens,” he scoffed.

Neither governmental policies of discrimination and racism nor the declarations of left or right-leaning activists need speak for the Israeli public. Yet numerous opinion polls from the past few years give the distinct impression that the majority of Israelis have questionable attitudes towards concepts like equality and democracy.

In March 2010, a poll conducted by the Maagar Mochot research institute revealed that while 80% of Israeli high school students prefer a democratic form of government (while 16% actually desire a dictatorship), over 49% do not support equal rights being granted to both Jewish and Arab citizens of the State of Israel. 56% of the high school students polled believed Arabs should not be allowed to vote, while 32% said they would not even want to have an Arab friend. One out of every six students would not want to study in the same class with an Ethiopian or an immigrant from the former Soviet Union, and 21% of them think that “Death to Arabs” is a legitimate expression. Additionally, 48% insisted they would refuse official orders to evacuate illegal West Bank settlements if they were serving in the Israeli military (for which 91% of re-



One out of every six students would not want to study in the same class with an Ethiopian or an immigrant from the former Soviet Union

spondents were eager to enlist).

Perhaps these results should not be surprising, considering that a 2008 poll cited by *Yediot Ahronot* discovered that “40 percent of Jewish Israelis did not believe that Arab Israelis should be allowed to vote.”

In late April 2010, a survey commissioned by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University found that over 57% of the respondents agreed that human rights organizations that expose immoral conduct by Israel should not be allowed to operate freely, the majority felt that “there is too much freedom of expression” in Israel, 43% said “the media should not report information confirmed by Palestinian sources that could reflect poorly on the Israeli army,” 58% opposed “harsh criticism of the country,” 65% thought “the Israeli media should be barred from publishing news that defense officials think could endanger state security, even if the news was reported abroad,” and 82% said they “back stiff penalties for people who leak illegally obtained information exposing immoral conduct by the defense establishment.”

The poll also found that “most of the respondents favor punishing Israeli citizens who support sanctioning or boycotting the country, and support punishing journalists who report news that reflects badly on the actions of the defense establishment.” Additionally, of those polled who described themselves as right-wing, 76% said “human rights groups should not have the right to freely publicize immoral conduct on Israel’s part.”

“Israelis have a distorted perception of democracy,” said pollster Daniel Bartal, a professor at the Tel Aviv University’s School of Education, as he analyzed the survey’s findings. “The public recog-

nizes the importance of democratic values, but when they need to be applied, it turns out most people are almost anti-democratic.”

In 2006, according to the Israel Democracy Institute, 79% of Israelis trust the IDF more than any other institution. This poll came shortly after the Israeli devastation of Lebanon, in which the IDF killed over 1,180 people (about a third of whom were children), wounded over 4,050, and displaced about 970,000 others as direct result of the more than 7,000 air attacks by the Israeli Air Force and an additional 2,500 bombardments by the Israeli Navy in the short span of a month. The assault, with its utter contempt for international humanitarian law and willful commission of war crimes, also deliberately targeted the civilian infrastructure of Lebanon, destroying or severely damaging airports, seaports, water and sewage treatment plants, electrical facilities, power plants, fuel depots, over 200,000 meters of road, 120 bridges, 900 commercial enterprises and factories, and over 30,000 residential properties, offices and shops (including 15,000 civilian homes, houses, and apartments). Israel bombed a milk farm and grain silos. Two government hospitals were completely destroyed, while three others were severely damaged.

Another 2006 poll found that 68% of Israeli Jews fear that Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel would “initiate an intifada” and 64 % believe that “Arabs endanger the security of the state because of their high birth rates.” Other polls from 2006 and 2007 revealed that 50% of Israeli Jews support the “transfer” of Arabs out of the country, 42% desire the “nullifying Arab Israeli citizens’ right to vote,” and 55% supported the “notion that the government should encourage Arab em-



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igration.” The Israel Democracy Institute’s June 2007 report found that 55% of Israeli Jews surveyed support the idea that the government should encourage Arab emigration and 78% are opposed to Arab political parties (including Arab ministers) joining the government.

Additionally, surveys found that 75% of Israeli Jews “oppose living in the same apartment buildings as Arabs,” 55% believe that “Arabs do not have the ability to reach the same level of cultural development as the Jews,” 61.4% were unwilling to have Arab friends visit their homes, 55% supported segregated recreational facilities for Jews and Arabs, while 37% of them “view Arab culture as inferior.”

A few years ago, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel reported that 49.9% of the Jewish population feels fear when hearing Arabic spoken in the street, 31.3% feels revulsion, 43.6% senses discomfort and 30.7% feels hatred.

A different poll, conducted by KEEVOON Research and Strategy company, showed overwhelming support in the Hebrew-speaking Jewish population of Israel for the Jewish National Fund’s policy of selling land to Jews only. 81% of respondents favored the 100-year old policy, with only 10% opposed.

Is it any wonder, then, that the 2007 Israel Democracy Index Survey, conducted by the Israeli Institute for Democracy, revealed that 54% of the Arab Israelis polled felt that it was “impossible to trust the Jewish majority,” while 51% believed that Jews were racist?

That year, *Ha’aretz* journalist Bradley Burston wrote of the Jewish inclination to demonize Palestinian citizens of the Israel:

“Too many of us want our Arabs to be traitors. Too many of us see Israeli Ar-

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abs, as a group, as hypocrites, parasites, their dual-loyalty a thin disguise for support of terror in the service of Palestine.

“There is a quiet sense among many of us, that Israeli Arabs are fleecing the state, even as they grouse about inequality and nurse plans to de-Judaize the national home of the Jewish People.

“It is, in many ways, a form of classical anti-Semitism in which the Semites in question happen to be Israeli Arabs.

“We complain that they live off the rest of us, that they flaunt our zoning laws and evade the taxes we pay, that they are happy to take our welfare while spurning the notion of defending the country.

“It makes us feel somehow more secure in our own identity as Jews in a Jewish state. It makes our dislike of them, our educational, economic, and social discrimination against them, seem more of a reasoned response than what it actually is, which is institutional racism.”

These sentiments echo those of the distinguished South African sociologist Stanley Cohen, who was the Director of the Institute of Criminology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the 1980's. In 2001, *The Guardian* quoted Professor Cohen as stating, “Denial of the injustices and injuries inflicted upon the Palestinians is built into the social fabric... There are, of course, good historical reasons why Israeli Jews should have a defensive self-image and a character armour of insecurity and permanent victimhood. The result is a xenophobia that would be called ‘racism’ anywhere else, an exclusion of Palestinians from a shared moral universe and an obsessional self-absorption: what we do to them is less important than what this does to us.”

Aharon Barak, Israeli Supreme Court President from 1995 to 2006, summed



Does anyone actually know the meaning of the term “Jewish state” that we bandy about so much? Does it mean a state for Jews only? Is it not a new kind of “racial purity”?

up the conundrum thusly: “We have still not worked out properly the interrelationship between the Jewishness of the state and the fact that it is a state of all its citizens.”

Sadly, many years later, these findings and observations hadn't changed much.

Just last month, Gideon Levy, the brilliant, truth-telling *Ha'aretz* commentator, wrote, “Defining Israel as a Jewish state condemns us to living in a racist state.” He continued,

“Does anyone actually know the meaning of the term “Jewish state” that we bandy about so much? Does it mean a state for Jews only? Is it not a new kind of “racial purity”? Is the “demographic threat” greater than the danger of the state's becoming a religious ethnocracy or an apartheid state? Wouldn't it be better to live in a just democracy? And how is it even possible to speak about a state being both Jewish and democratic?”

How, indeed? These are questions J Street's Ben-Ami and Hebrew University's Taub should answer. Instead, as we have seen, they -as representatives of the so-called “left” - suggest *compromise*. Does the Jewish Israeli population polled above really seem like the compromising type? How exactly should Palestinians be expected to compromise when, at best, they are being told to accept the “generous offer” of 42% of the 80% of the 22% of 100% of their original homeland? Should those demanding justice and equality really just sit back and wait for their oppressors and occupiers to suddenly change their minds, especially when 77% of Israeli Jews even oppose the artist boycott of settlements?

Just like Ben-Ami, Taub, Avishai, Plitnick, Shlensky, and others, a new *Ha'aretz* editorial laments that

there is a growing international movement that “no longer distinguishes between the settlements and the Green Line, between the “occupation” and Israel’s very right to exist.”

This statement once again blames Israel’s current crisis of conscience on the consequences of the Six Day War. But the 42-year occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights accounts for almost 70% of Israel’s entire existence. It is not a simple anomaly, a misstep off the path of righteousness. The occupation, land theft, colonization, displacement, dispossession, and disenfranchisement of and violence against Palestinians is not anathema to Zionism, it is Zionism.

Levy is essentially emulating the honesty of his journalistic predecessor Yeshayahu Bar Porath who, in 1972, wrote, “It is the duty of Israeli leaders to explain to public opinion, clearly and courageously, a certain number of facts that are forgotten with time. The first of these is that there is no Zionism, colonialization or Jewish State without the eviction of the Arabs and the expropriation of their lands.”

Zionist leaders from Herzl to Ben-Gurion, have all understood and acknowledged this.

In 1898, Theodor Herzl recognized that, in order to establish a “Jewish state” in Palestine, the inconvenient indigenous population would have to be removed. “We shall try to spirit the penniless population (i.e. Arab) across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country,” he suggested.

Vladimir Jabotinsky, in his 1923 Zionist manifesto, *The Iron Wall*, wrote, “Zionism is a colonization adventure



David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s beloved first Prime Minister, said, “Let us not ignore the truth among ourselves. Politically we are the aggressors and they defend themselves. The country is (the Palestinian’s), because they inhabit it, whereas we want to come here and settle down, and in their view we want to take away from them their country”

and therefore it stands or it falls by the question of armed force. It is important to speak Hebrew but, unfortunately, it is even more important to be able to shoot – or else I am through with playing at colonization,” adding, “Zionist colonization, even the most restricted, must either be terminated or carried out in defiance of the will of the native population.”

In 1938, years before Jewish terrorist organizations and Zionist militias rampaged through Palestine, blowing up hotels, massacring Palestinians and destroying entire villages, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s beloved first Prime Minister, said, “Let us not ignore the truth among ourselves. Politically we are the aggressors and they defend themselves. The country is (the Palestinian’s), because they inhabit it, whereas we want to come here and settle down, and in their view we want to take away from them their country.”

Nevertheless, many in the Israeli left (and their counterparts here in the US) still insist on differentiating between the nobility and righteousness of “Herzl’s Zionist vision” and the frustrating, “unhelpful” post-1967 occupation.

Levy, as usual, is able to tell it like it is. Earlier this year, he explained that the problem is “rooted in the left’s impossible adherence to Zionism in its historical sense. In precisely the way there cannot be a democratic and Jewish state in one breath, one has to first define what comes before what - there cannot be a left wing committed to the old-fashioned Zionism that built the state but has run its course. This illusory left wing never managed to ultimately understand the Palestinian problem - which was created in 1948, not 1967 - never understanding that it can’t be solved while ignoring the injustice caused from the beginning. A

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left wing unwilling to dare to deal with 1948 is not a genuine left wing.”

In a just-published interview, Levy elaborates: “I think there could be a solution, but it requires Israel to have good will – which it doesn’t have. It would involve, first of all, Israel recognising its moral responsibility. That’s the first condition. It’s about time for Israel to take accountability for what happened in ’48 and realise and recognise that there was a kind of ethnic cleansing...”

The Nakba and Beyond

“It’s not a matter of maintaining the statu quo. We have to create a dynamic state, oriented towards expansion.” -David Ben-Gurion

That the creation of Israel and the guarantee of establishing complete hegemony of a Jewish minority in 1948 required the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from most of their homeland is neither a secret nor a matter of debate. It is a known fact.

The forcible removal of the indigenous Palestinian population by Zionist violence and intimidation was not an unhappy accident of history, nor was it an unforeseen consequence of the Zionist dream; it was integral to Zionism’s success and a well-planned, non-negotiable aspect of its implementation. As scholar Norman Finkelstein wrote in *Image and Reality of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, “One can imagine an argument for the right of a persecuted minority to find refuge in another country able to accommodate it; one is hard-pressed, however, to imagine an argument for the right of a persecuted minority to politically and perhaps physically displace the indigenous population of another country. Yet...the latter was the actual intention of the Zionist movement.”



Moshe Sharett, Israel’s second prime minister, said, “We have forgotten that we have not come to an empty land to inherit it, but we have come to conquer a country from people inhabiting it”

The United States-sponsored King-Crane Commission in 1919 concluded that the Zionist project demanded and anticipated “a practically complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants to Palestine.”

In 1937, Ben-Gurion declared that “In many parts of the country new Jewish settlement will not be possible unless there is a transfer of the Arab peasantry...The transfer of the population is what makes possible a comprehensive [Jewish] settlement plan.” He is also credited with saying, “Land with Arabs on it and land without Arabs on it are two very different types of land.”

Moshe Sharett, Israel’s second prime minister, said, “We have forgotten that we have not come to an empty land to inherit it, but we have come to conquer a country from people inhabiting it...if we cease to look upon our land, the Land of Israel, as ours alone and we allow a partner into our estate - all content and meaning will be lost to our enterprise.”

After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire following World War I, and the expiration of the British Mandate, the Palestinian people have, for over 63 years, been denied self-determination and sovereignty in their own land. In 1947, the United Nations recommended that the indigenous majority (then consisting of about 70% of the population in historic Palestine) establish a state of their own on 44% of its homeland, while the 30% minority (consisting mostly of recent Jewish immigrants from Europe) would get 56% of Palestine, despite the fact that the minority owned less than 8% of the land at the time. When that suggestion was unsurprisingly rejected by Palestinian representatives, a unilateral declaration established a Jewish State of Israel in Palestine and, in the

ensuing war, Israel grabbed an extra 22% of Palestine as its own.

During what Israelis proudly refer to as their “War of Independence,” over 450 Palestinian towns were destroyed, including villages that had signed non-aggression pacts with their Jewish neighbors, and over 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their own homes. The terror campaign of Plan Dalet, put into effect in early 1948, consisted of “large-scale intimidation; laying siege to and bombarding population centres; setting fires to homes, properties, and goods; expulsion; demolition; and finally, planting mines among the rubble to prevent any of the expelled inhabitants from returning.”

Denying refugees their legal right to return to their homes after the war’s end was necessary for Israel to steal Palestine away from its inhabitants. As Ben-Gurion said, “We must do everything to ensure they [the Palestinians] never do return... The old will die and the young will forget.” Unfortunately for him and his Zionist followers ever since, they did not forget.

Following the massacre of Deir Yassin in April 1948 during which over 100 unarmed villagers were murdered by commandos of the Zionist terror groups Irgun and Lehi (The Stern Gang), journalist and author Jonathan Cook tells us that Ben-Gurion trained his sights on the Galilee, “where some 100,000 Palestinians, as well as tens of thousands of refugees from the fighting, were living on land that had been assigned to the Palestinian state under the Partition Plan. ‘Then we will be able to cleanse the entire area of Central Galilee, including all its refugees, in one stroke,’ he announced.”

In mid-July 1948, over 60,000 Pal-



As Ben-Gurion said, “We must do everything to ensure they [the Palestinians] never do return... The old will die and the young will forget”

estinians were expelled from the twin towns of Lydda and Ramle at gun point and tank muzzle, upon the orders of future Israeli Prime Ministers Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Rabin and under the direction of future IDF generals and Israeli politicians Yigal Allon (commander of the Palmach militia) and Moshe Dayan (commander of the 89th Armoured Battalion).

A few months later, the large village of al-Dawayma of about 3,500 residents, located northwest of Hebron, was invaded and captured by Israeli forces. The villagers were unarmed. Palestinian scholar Nur Masalha has revealed that the massacre of at least 80 Palestinians was carried out, “not in the heat of the battle but after the Israeli army had clearly emerged victorious in the war. Various evidence indicates that the atrocities were committed in and around the village, including at the mosque and in the cave nearby, that houses with old people locked inside were blown up, and that there were several cases of the shooting and raping of women.”

Despite the mythology perpetuated about Israel’s miraculous birth, Zionist fighters were not struggling against devastating odds for the survival of their nascent state. Not only had the Palestinian fighting forces been “decimated by the British in the 1936-1939 revolt,” during which over 10% of the Palestinian population had been killed, wounded, imprisoned or exiled, but the violent British repression also affected the Palestinians’ ability to resist further assaults in the future as Rashid Khalidi explains, a “high proportion of the Arab casualties include the most experienced military cadres and enterprising fighters.”

Scholars John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt have also pointed out that,

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“Israel is often portrayed as weak and besieged, a Jewish David surrounded by a hostile Arab Goliath. This image has been carefully nurtured by Israeli leaders and sympathetic writers, but the opposite image is closer to the truth. Contrary to popular belief, the Zionists had larger, better-equipped, and better-led forces” than their Arab opponents. In fact, “the Zionist/Israeli fighting forces outnumbered the Palestinians between December 1947 and May 1948, and they outnumbered the Arab armies from May 1948 to January 1949, when the fighting stopped.” As Israeli historian Benny Morris put it, “it was superior Jewish firepower, manpower, organization, and command and control that determined the outcome of battle.”

For the next 17 years, Palestinians in Israel lived under martial law.

Nur Masalha has found evidence of further Palestinian expulsion from Israeli-controlled territory for years following the creation of Israel. For example, 2,000 inhabitants of Beersheva were expelled to the West Bank in late 1949, while 2,700 inhabitants of al-Majdal (now Ashkelon) were driven into Gaza a year later; as many as 17,000 Bedouins were forced out of the Negev between 1949 and 1953; several thousand inhabitants of the Triangle were expelled between 1949 and 1951; and more than 2,000 residents of two northern villages were driven into Syria as late as 1956.

In the early 1950's, Ben-Gurion stated, in two separate state documents, his belief that that Israel was created “in a part of our small country” and “in only a portion of the Land of Israel,” later noting that “the creation of the new State by no means derogates from the scope of historic Eretz Israel.” These statements harken back to his 1937 declaration that



Dan Rabinowitz wrote, “What happened to the Palestinians in 1948 is Israel’s original sin... Between the 1950s and 1976, the state systematically confiscated most of the land of its remaining Palestinian citizens”

“the boundaries of Zionist aspirations are the concern of the Jewish people and no external factor will be able to limit them,” as well as his 1948 proclamation that “We are not obligated to state the limits of our State,” thereby affirming the tenet of territorial expansion and compulsive land theft in Zionist doctrine and practice.

That the State of Israel exists almost exclusively on stolen Palestinian land is indisputable. In an article in *Ha’aretz*, Israeli scholar Dan Rabinowitz wrote, “What happened to the Palestinians in 1948 is Israel’s original sin... Between the 1950s and 1976, the state systematically confiscated most of the land of its remaining Palestinian citizens.” In 1969, Moshe Dayan was quoted in *Ha’aretz*:

“Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you because geography books no longer exist. Not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either. Nahlal arose in the place of Mahlul; Kibbutz Gvat in the place of Jibta; Kibbutz Sarid in the place of Huneifis; and Kefar Yehushua in the place of Tal al-Shuman. There is not a single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population.” (Edward Said, ‘Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims,’ *Social Text*, Volume 1, 1979)

According to the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property, by exploiting the authority of the Absentee Property Law of 1950, the Jewish National Fund Law, through the establishment of the Development Agency and Israel Lands Authority, almost 70% of the territory of pre-1967 Israel consists of lands classified as ‘absentee property’ which had been confiscated from its Palestinian owners and residents. The Jewish Na-

tional Fund, perhaps in an effort to brag, estimates as much as 88% was taken from Arab landowners.

The 22% of Palestine that remained was conquered in 1967 and remains occupied territory under international law. Following the Six Day War, several Israeli leaders refused to turn the armistice lines into permanent borders. Prime Minister Golda Meir said the pre-1967 borders were so dangerous that it “would be treasonable” for an Israeli leader to accept them. Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban said the pre-1967 borders have “a memory of Auschwitz.” Prime Minister Menachem Begin later described a proposal for a retreat to the pre-1967 borders as “national suicide for Israel.”

So, is the founding Zionist ideology, which the anti-BDS progressive left pines for and fears the demise of, really a legitimate form of self-determination and a functioning democracy to be maintained and treasured? Perhaps the “Yes to Israel” crowd, which so abhors the occupation and the settlements, would respond as Golda Meir did in 1971: “This country exists as the fulfillment of a promise made by God Himself. It would be ridiculous to ask it to account for its legitimacy.”

The Invisible and Voiceless Victims

“It’s not just about occupation; it’s also about the system of apartheid within Israel and the most important form of injustice, the denial of Palestinian refugees their UN-sanctioned rights to return.” - Omar Barghouti

Through reading the articles and arguments of the progressive community against BDS, one thing becomes quite clear. The commentators feel like their grand design for a perfect Zionist future



As Gideon Levy wrote a decade ago, “For most Israelis, the Palestinians are almost non-existent. They’re like thin air...”

has been hijacked and sullied by the settler movement and its government (and foreign) backers. These forward-thinking humanitarians believe themselves to be the victims of a right-wing conspiracy to dash the hopes of any peace agreement. This is absurd. These Israelis and Americans suffered no actual injustice. Nothing has, in fact, been taken away from them, save perhaps their own integrity. They have been oppressed by no one. Unlike the Palestinians.

And yet, the progressive discourse consistently omits Palestinian perspectives in their appraisal of the current situation. What do *they* want? Almost nowhere does the “Zionist left” of J Street and *Huffington Post* discuss what the actual victims of past and ongoing Zionist atrocities, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing want, or what tactic they believe would be the most effective to reach an acceptable, democratic, just, and peaceful solution in which all parties would be afforded equal civil and human rights, the same economic opportunities, and full political representation, as determined by international law. Apparently, these viewpoints - the voices of the victims and their descendants - are unimportant in the intellectual sphere of *Ha’aretz* and *New York Times* opinion. As Gideon Levy wrote a decade ago, “For most Israelis, the Palestinians are almost non-existent. They’re like thin air...” (‘An existential exercise,’ *Ha’aretz*, 16 October 2000)

In supporting the Ariel settlement boycott, the “Yes to Israel, No to settlements” crowd proves how easy it must be to praise the noble perpetrators and their subsequent beneficiaries, yet somehow not even give a moment’s thought to supporting the demands of the actual victims. To advocate for a

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“Jewish and democratic” state, created through colonization and ethnic cleansing, is to explicitly encourage the victims of such atrocities to voluntarily relinquish their rights, forget their history, and accept second-class citizenry in their homeland out of deference to the sensibilities and sensitivities of their colonizers and cleansers. Does this seem like a reasonable request?

It is precisely here that a closer look at the BDS movement is necessary.

As described in a recent statement by leaders of the campaign itself:

“The BDS movement derives its principles from both the demands of the Palestinian BDS Call, signed by over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations in July 2005, and, in the academic and cultural fields, from the Palestinian Call for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, issued a year earlier in July 2004. Together, the BDS and PACBI Calls represent the most authoritative and widely-supported strategic statements to have emerged from Palestine in decades; all political factions, labor, student and women’s organizations, and refugee groups across the Arab world have supported and endorsed these calls. Both calls underline the prevailing Palestinian belief that the most effective form of international solidarity with the Palestinian people is direct action and persistent pressure aimed at bringing an end to Israel’s colonial and apartheid regime, just as the apartheid regime in South Africa was abolished, by isolating Israel internationally through boycotts and sanctions, forcing it to comply with international law and respect Palestinian rights.”

As a result, the campaign urges “the morally consistent rationale and principles of the Palestinian boycott campaign



Both calls underline the prevailing Palestinian belief that the most effective form of international solidarity with the Palestinian people is direct action and persistent pressure aimed at bringing an end to Israel’s colonial and apartheid regime, just as the apartheid regime in South Africa was abolished

against Israel,” when addressing the question of boycotting institutions inside the Green Line that support the systematic discrimination within Israel and the continued colonization of the occupied territories. The call for BDS, according to PACBI founding member Omar Barghouti, “has as close to a consensus as you can get, and it’s not just among Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, Gaza, including East Jerusalem, but also Palestinians inside Israel, and the largest component of the Palestinian people, those in exile in the Diaspora.” The campaign focuses on affirming three basic rights of the Palestinian people, as already demanded by international law. These rights are: (1) Ending the 43 year old Israeli occupation and colonization of all Arab lands conquered in 1967 and dismantling the Apartheid Wall that illegally annexes large portions of the West Bank to Israel; (2) Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality, thereby ending the system of racial discrimination within Israel proper; and (3) Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in United Nations Resolution 194.

The refusal of advocates of Liberal Zionism, those alleged progressives who profess to want change yet ignore or re-imagine Israel’s true history, to recognize the incompatibility of both a “Jewish” and “democratic” state or embrace the demands of the wronged party (Palestinians, *not* Israelis) in this conflict makes their arguments sound like little more than cowardly equivocation. They represent a sort of solipsistic intellectual narcissism, tranquilized by the “drug of gradualism,” and talking into an echo chamber of *pragmatism* and *com-*

promise.

“The academic community in Israel,” Omar Barghouti recently explained, is “very Israel-centric. I mean, the world revolves around them.” The BDS campaign, he said, is “about Palestinian rights and Israeli oppression and injustice and the role of the Israeli academy as a partner in the system of oppression. In fact, no Israeli university has ever come out against the occupation, ever.”

In Gideon Levy’s estimation, “they lack courage, some of them,” despite having good intentions. He elaborated, during a recent interview with Jamie Stern-Weiner of the New Left Project:

“I think that Oz and Yehoshua and Grossman, who I know very well personally, mean well. But in many ways they are still chained in the Zionist ideology. They haven’t released themselves from the old Zionist ideology, which basically hasn’t changed since ’48 – namely, that the Jews have the right to this land, almost the exclusive right. They are trying to find their way to be Zionist, *and* to be for peace, *and* to be for justice. The problem is that Zionism in its present meaning, in its common meaning, is *contradictory* to human rights, to equality, to democracy, and they don’t recognise it. It’s too hard for them to recognise it, to realise it. And therefore their position is an impossible position, because they want *everything*: they want Zionism, they want democracy, they want a Jewish state, but they want also rights for the Palestinians... it’s very nice to want everything, but you have to make your choice and they are not courageous enough to make the choice.”

Levy, in contrast to commentators like Avishai, Taub, Rosenberg, and Ben-Ami, has the conviction to envision Israel as



A growing number of Israeli intellectuals, scholars, and activists don’t feel beholden to the 19th century colonial, exclusivist, and racist ideology of Zionism

“a state for Jews that will be a just state, a democratic state, and if there will be a Palestinian majority, there will be a Palestinian majority. The idea is that Jews have to have their place, but it can’t be exclusively theirs, because this land is not exclusively theirs.”

Courage, Truth, and Justice

There is hope. A growing number of Israeli intellectuals, scholars, and activists don’t feel beholden to the 19th century colonial, exclusivist, and racist ideology of Zionism and stand with the Palestinian demand for BDS as a non-violent strategy to achieve justice.

Jeff Halper of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions explains that “the purpose of this effort is to deny Israel the ability to brand itself as a normal nation while flouting the law and suppressing an occupied people. Brand Israel is their strategy; ours is to insist on no business as usual with the regime, as was done successfully in the struggle against apartheid South Africa.”

Professor Neve Gordon, who teaches politics at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba, understands that it is not simple for an “Israeli citizen to call on foreign governments, regional authorities, international social movements, faith-based organizations, unions and citizens to suspend cooperation with Israel. But today, as I watch my two boys playing in the yard, I am convinced that it is the only way that Israel can be saved from itself.”

Prime Minister Netanyahu’s own nephew, Jonathan Ben Artzi, currently a PhD student at Brown University, recognizes that Israel “must give equal rights to all. Regardless of what the final resolution will be – the so-called “one state solution,” the “two state solu-

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tion,” or any other form of governance.” He suggests that the only way to encourage - no, *force* - Israel to comply with international law is for the United States to withdraw military funding, corporate investments, and diplomatic support.

Michel Warschawski, veteran Israeli activist, journalist, and co-founder of the Alternative Information Center in Israel, has recently written, in solidarity with the BDS movement, that “our goal is the fulfillment of certain values like: basic individual and collective rights, end of domination and oppression, decolonization, equality, and as-much-justice-as-possible.” He continues:

“For us, Zionism is not a national liberation movement but a colonial movement, and the State of Israel is and has always been a settlers’ colonial state. Peace, or, better, justice, cannot be achieved without a total decolonization (one can say de-Zionisation) of the Israeli State; it is a precondition for the fulfillment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians – whether refugees, living under military occupation or second-class citizens of Israel. Whether the final result of that de-colonization will be a “one-state” solution, two democratic states (i.e. not a “Jewish State”), a federation or any other institutional structure is secondary, and will ultimately be decided by the struggle itself and the level of participation of Israelis, if at all.

“This is where the BDS campaign is so relevant: it offers an international framework to act in order to help the Palestinian people achieving its legitimate rights, both on the institutional level (states and international institutions) and the civil society’s one. On the one hand it is addressed to the international community, asking it to sanction a State that is systematically violating international law,



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UN resolutions, the Geneva Conventions and signed agreements; on the other hand, it is addressed to the international civil society to act, as individuals as well as social movements (trade-unions, parties, local councils, popular associations etc) to boycott goods, official representatives, institutions etc. that represent the colonial State of Israel.

“Both tasks (boycott and sanctions) will eventually be a pressure of the Israeli people, pushing it to understand that occupation and colonization have a price, that violating the international rules may, sooner or later, made the State of Israel a paria-country, not welcomed in the civilized community of nations.

“The BDS campaign was initiated by a broad coalition of Palestinian political and social movements. No Israeli who claims to support the national rights of the Palestinian people can, decently, turns it back to that campaign: after having claimed for years that “armed struggle is not the way”, it will be outrageous that this strategy too will be disqualified by those Israeli activists. On the contrary, we have all together to join ‘Boycott from within’ in order to provide an Israeli backup to that Palestinian initiative. It is the minimum we can do, it is the minimum we should do.”

Ofer Neiman, contributing editor of *Occupation Magazine* and The Only Democracy? website, believes that a boycott that targets only settlers, and not Israeli society as whole, is not only myopic, but would be ineffective since, including those colonizing East Jerusalem, the settlers “make up only 7% of Israel’s citizens. Most of the settlements are small communities, and many of their inhabitants make their living either through work in Israel (west of the green line) or as state employees in their communities.”

As a result, he explains his support for the “morally justified” BDS campaign this way: “The Palestinian BDS call is first and foremost a call for the promotion of universal principles of human rights. From this universal perspective, it should not be difficult to see that there is something inherently flawed about Israel’s entire constitutional fabric when it comes to the treatment of its Palestinian citizens, not to mention the specific policies pursued by successive Israeli governments on this issue.”

Heeding Wise Words

The sole reason there exists an ongoing, bloody Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the ideology of Zionism. It is irrelevant to try and figure out what came first, the rejection of indigenous self-determination or resistance against ethnocentric, settler-colonialism, as they both follow the concept of Zionism. In order to truly seek peace with justice, the real root of the problem must be honestly identified as the Zionist ideology itself, and not, as Yossi Ben Artzi suggests, the settlement enterprise after 1967. Ironically, Zionism, though originally conceived to protect a persecuted minority against rampant persecution, inherently embodies the very worst aspects of human nature: ethnic superiority, racism, exclusivity, intolerance, xenophobia, jingoism, entitlement, and arrogance, to name just a few.

The ugly militarism, fierce nationalism, and fascist ideals required to achieve Zionist goals in Palestine have long been acknowledged by many Jewish intellectuals and humanists like Martin Buber and Hannah Arendt. Albert Einstein, for instance, denounced the Irgun-aligned Betar youth movement in 1935, describing it as being “as much a

danger to our youth as Hitlerism is to German youth” and believed that “the essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish state with borders, an army, and a measure of temporal power....I am afraid of the inner damage Judaism will sustain – especially from the development of a narrow nationalism within our own ranks.”

Judah Magnes called the Zionist collective in pre-1948 Palestine an “artificial community” and he predicted that sanctions imposed by the United States would halt “the Jewish war machine.”

Rabbi Stephen Wise, arguing that “the whole tradition of the Jewish people is against militarism,” expressed disgust at what he saw as a slogan to fit the 1930s: “Germany for Hitler, Italy for Mussolini, Palestine for Jabotinsky.”

In 1963, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of the “fierce urgency of now” in demanding that all people benefit from “the riches of freedom and the security of justice.” He declared: “Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God’s children.”

Three decades earlier, in a meeting to discuss holding a anti-Nazi boycott rally in Madison Square Garden in New York City, Rabbi Stephen Wise said much the same thing:

“The time for prudence and caution is past. We must speak up like men. How can we ask our Christian friends to lift their voices in protest against the wrongs suffered by Jews if we keep si-

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lent?...What is happening in Germany today may happen tomorrow in any other land on earth unless it is challenged and rebuked. It is not the German Jews who are being attacked. It is the Jews.”

And now, decades upon decades later, both King’s and Wise’s sentiments are still relevant. The promises of democracy still must be realized, racial justice must still replace segregation, equal rights for

all must still be demanded, and freedom must ring from every mountainside and through every wadi.

What’s happening in Israel and Palestine today may happen tomorrow in any other land on earth unless it is challenged and rebuked. It is not the Palestinians who are being attacked. It is our collective humanity.

It is time to speak up.

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