

Apartheid Israel And The Political Zionist Claim For National Self-Determination

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I have spent a good proportion of my life in an academic framework and we gather here in the hospices of London University and SOAS, also we are not a massive audience. So with your permission I hope I will make a fairly rigorous presentation and ask you to walk with me at least some way. I hope that the consequence of the conceptual journey will bring useful products.

So let me begin with one or two conceptual or definitional comments. First, perhaps with reference to the introductory comments by the sponsors and Professor Rabkin. I don't describe myself as a Palestinian Jew, I actually happen to be a Palestinian Jew, I was born in Jerusalem in 1943 in a country called Palestine and the title of my birth certificate is 'Government of Palestine'. That is neither here nor there because it is significant only in a political context and the political context that is relevant to my work, my advocacy is critique of Zionism. I'm an anti-Zionist Jew. But in what sense do I justify the projection of my identity or stranding my identity as being Jewish, I do not subscribe to any or most of the 613 commandments or prescriptions which define Jewish lifestyle and an observant obedient Jew. So in this respect if I am a Jew, I am very much a sinning Jew. I am non believer, at least a non believer in the deity as described in scriptures that are alleged to be the word of God, the holy scriptures, so in what sense can I justify the projection of my presence here as a Jew?

I have an answer for me that is satisfactory and I invite you to challenge my answer. I am a member of one of the many Jewish tribes. There is a rainbow of Jewish tribes, there is a rainbow of European Jewish tribes, Arab Jewish tribes, African Jewish tribes, Indian Jewish tribes and I happen to be a member of these tribes, the Ashkenazi' Jewish tribe. I am regarded by mainstream political philosophy in Israel, mainstream political Zionism as being, to an extent radical and again I wish to dissent at least to a degree because at least philosophically and in terms of philosophy and political science theory I am in no way radical. I am a disciple of the values of the French and American, American and French Revolutions of the principle

of separation of religion from the state and I take that principle on one or two steps further and I advocate, I subscribe to the derivative principle of separation of nationalism from the state and tribalism from the state. So I have no problem with my tribal identity, I pick and choose some of the cultural baggage that I inherited being born into this particular concept, celebrate the parts that are consistent with the values of the universal declaration of human rights (and mind you there aren't too many) and reject and deny the sections of my cultural baggage, cultural heritage that are not consistent with the values of the universal declaration of human rights. So it is in this capacity that I address you and we have agreed among us that we would devote one hour to presentation and the latter hour to discussion and I would welcome challenge or support for the position that I represent.

I did suggest or did ask for your permission to walk with me somewhat, it could be a controversial narrative and it might rub some of you up the wrong way but give me the credit of a guest and a speaker and perhaps my previous record and allow me go that way. I suggest that we go at least to an extent with the political Zionist narrative and see where it takes us. A mainstream argument of the political Zionist advocacy in defence of the right of the state of Israel to exist as a Jewish State is that the Jewish people, the Jewish community worldwide, represent a Jewish people and I am old enough to remember vicious and ferocious discussions within and outside the ranks of Palestine solidarity (about whether) Jewish communities worldwide are a people or a religion. A person whom I regard as a teacher and who I very much admire, Rabbi Elmer Berger, he is now deceased, spent much of his massive intellectual and other resources in defending the position that Judaism is only a religion and projecting Jewish communities worldwide as a Jewish people is wholly unfounded and wrong logically, politically, morally and in every regard.

And as much as I admire Elmer Berger, I want to suggest that we suspend this debate and that we go along with the mainstream political Zionist advocates and say, 'ok, lets accept that there is a Jewish People', and the next step is, well there is, and you accept there is a Jewish People, then like all other people, they have the right to self determination. And again the debate has raged for many decades whether the Jews have the right to national self-determination, and I again suggest that we suspend the debate and work along with the argument and say, 'ok, the Jewish People have the right to national self-determination'. So if they have the right to national self-determination they have a state of their own, a Jewish state, now if anyone of you could care to do their homework and research properly they would come across articles and debates in which I have been an active participant and a vocal opponent to the idea of a Jewish

state arguing that a Jewish state is by definition an apartheid state. You can't have a Jewish state that is not an apartheid state. And again I suggest that at least for the purpose of this conference, this discussion, we bracket the question and say, 'ok, if there is a Jewish people, they have the right to national self-determination; there is a right for a Jewish State'. I also belong to the camp that for many decades has argued that the entire gamut of UN resolutions relevant to the question of Palestine represent an important defence of Palestinian rights, all UN resolutions, and not those that I like or dislike, or those that the opposite party likes or dislikes, all UN resolutions taken together, bundled together, represent a good defence of Palestinian rights. That includes not only resolution 194, underpinning the rights of 1948 Palestine refugees to return to their titles, their properties inside Israel. It also includes resolution 181, recommending the Partition of a country called Palestine into three components, not just two components; a Jewish State, an Arab State, and the city of Jerusalem under an international regime administered by the UN. So all UN resolutions, and of course at least until the past fifteen or twenty years mainstream Zionist advocates anchored their arguments on the legitimacy of the Jewish State in those resolutions. So if I accept all UN resolutions I really shouldn't pin my primary quarrel on the term 'the Jewish State', it entered through the resolutions into international legal narrative. So there we go, there is a Jewish People, they have the right to self-determination, and a state of their own, within the context of all UN resolutions.

Now the interesting question, at least provisionally, let us grant the opposite party this argument, there remains a critical question; what do you claim you have the right to do in the name of the Jewish people, in the name of the right of national self-determination, in the name of the Jewish State? If you claim that the fact there is a Jewish people, and the people have the right for national self-determination and to a State, it entitles the leadership and the army of that people to perpetrate crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, destroy and raze to the ground hundreds of indigenous localities, rural and urban, if that is your claim, then it's just not on. The only response to such a claim is resistance. If on the other hand you would claim that the Jewish people and the right to national self-determination and the entitlement to a Jewish State should be implemented in conformity to all UN resolutions and values the thirty articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, then there is something to talk about. For instance, implement, not just recognise, implement the right of all 1948 Palestine refugees to freedom of choice of return and definitely the titles to their property. Implement all UN resolutions including resolutions on Jerusalem, and that means that Jerusalem is not the eternal capital of the state of Israel but an

international city. Implement UN resolution 181 including its constitutional sections and citizenship and its constitutional sections, outline for the Jewish State and Arab State a liberal democratic constitution very much akin to the constitution of South Africa, the new South Africa, or the Constitution of the United States. Not the practice of the United States, the Constitution of the United States. Implement the stipulations of citizenship, where they say, in Resolution 181, that any person ordinarily resident in the territory allocated for the Jewish State has the right to Jewish State citizenship, and any person ordinarily resident in the territory allocated by the UN for the Arab State has the right to Arab State Citizenship.

What do you get if you implement all UN Resolutions in this framework? You get a, basically a federal arrangement consisting of three components; Jewish State, Arab State, and international city of Jerusalem, bound together by an economic union, and we know what an economic union can do, we have it unfolding in the European Union today. And you have a democratic constitution, you have freedom of residence, freedom of choice of location of neighbour, and access to housing. There is what emerges, at least to my mind, a fairly decent environment to raise a family, there is only one thing missing in this environment; there is no demographic majority of ethnic Jews, there is no demographic majority of Jewish tribes in this arrangement. And the crux of our argument against political Zionism, is not about a conceptual argument of whether or not Jews constitute a people or otherwise, whether the Jewish people have a right to national self-determination or otherwise, whether the idea of a Jewish State is an idea which stinks or otherwise. It is whether it is justified to attempt to establish in a country called Palestine, a sovereign entity called a Jewish State or the State of Israel, that attempts to guarantee in law and in practice a demographic majority of the Jewish tribes. The party that says that it is justified, it is necessary, it is inevitable, it is progressive or it is enlightening, or whatever, belongs to the political Zionism camp, and make no mistake, argues for apartheid. Implementation in law and in practice, not just in practice but in law, to guarantee a demographic majority of any constituency is apartheid, Apartheid uses the legal instruments available to the state in order to guarantee discrimination and implement discrimination. And reference was made to a work that I had published by Zed Books, two or three years back, 'Apartheid Israel', that (shows this) is exactly the case. Immediately after the first decade after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the strategic piece of legislation was put in place in order to secure that in the area that is at the core of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, question of control of land and sub-soil, land tenure in Israel, access to land and housing, access to water is

controlled and legislated on an apartheid basis, implemented through the legal system, the law enforcement instruments of the State and the practical result of that is the ethnic cleansing of the country of Palestine in the wake of the 1948-1949 war.

So the lines are clearly divided and the core arguments are; Are you for or are you against, can you justify or can you not justify, do you support or do you resist a settler-colonial project that attempts to consolidate in law and in practice an apartheid system in the country of Palestine?

The pro-Zionist or pro-Israel lobby has lost much of its ground in the arena of moral or principled discussion. They are in a defensive position in universities or in any other environment that regards as relevant normative and ethical references and references to a sense of fairness or decency. The retreat of the Zionist lobby from the university campuses represents an achievement of which we can be very proud, it's an important beginning. The achievement was gained through decades of Palestine solidarity work at many levels, both inside and outside Palestine, both at trade union levels, at student levels. It had not been able to get to this stage without the consistent and heroic resistance of the Palestinian people themselves represented by the PLO, and the achievement of the PLO in gaining UN recognition as the representative of the Palestinian people. As all of us are aware the PLO has had a period of an achievement of progress and success and as well as achievement of decline, notably since the strategically horrendous mistake of engaging in the Oslo peace negotiations, alleged peace negotiations peace process. We are facing today a circumstance that is perhaps more difficult to negotiate than immediately in the wake of the 1967 war. In the context of this difficulty I want to point out the indications of resurgence on a very sound and strategically promising basis; the campaign for divestment, boycott and sanctions against the State of Israel. I would like to add my voice to all fora, academic, trade union and other, working towards the development of divestment, of boycott, of sanctions against the apartheid government of the State of Israel, the government of the State of Israel that stands in violation of most UN General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions. To do so on an apartheid basis is productive. We, to the extent that I am allowed to say we, we lost one massive achievement of the Palestinian resistance in the passage of the UN of the resolution identifying Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination. That resolution has been struck off the book of resolutions of the UN. The opposite party worked very hard to get it struck off, they knew the significance of that resolution, they were aware that this resolution represented the international legal basis for sanctions against Israel, it's a setback, it's a massive setback. But we don't have to concern ourselves

with that setback, we can bring the import of what we want to bring into the international arena on a better basis, a basis that is supported by the achievement of our brothers and sisters in Southern Africa, on an anti-apartheid basis. And if I have (a) hope that I can share with you, (it is) that within the next decade or fifteen years in the UN, through the UN a covenant (will emerge) for the suppression of political Zionism as a crime against humanity.