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Bringing apartheid through the back door

Conditions are ripe for the racial apartheid that Israel has been gradually imposing on the territories since 1967 to come out in the open – with a public primed to applaud and accept it.

By Na'aman Hirschfeld Nov. 23, 2014 | 2:18 AM | 6

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The separation barrier between Israel and the West Bank. Photo by Nir Kafri

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On November 5th 2014, Naftali Bennet published an opinion article titled “[For Israel, Two-State Is No Solution](#)” in the New York Times, asserting that “Israel cannot withdraw from more territory and cannot allow for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank.” Instead, Bennet proposes, Israel should control the entire West Bank, creating clusters of ‘upgraded’ Palestinian Autonomy that will be “short of a state,” not being allowed to “control its own borders and... to have a military.” Although within Israel this publication went relatively unnoticed, it was a momentous action, signaling the beginning of the public unmasking of the one-sided Israeli solution; making visible a system of apartheid that evolved over a long time, but did so in increments and in a way that allows those in power to deny its existence.

In South Africa apartheid was publicly visible from the onset, being the official state ideology, underlying its law, policy and actions. In Israel by contrast, apartheid was developed in a way that masks its nature, employing the imposition of martial law and military control on the Palestinian population, to create a geo-social and physical separation between Israelis and Palestinians, while simultaneously facilitating the seizure and

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settlement of Palestinian.

For most Israelis, as well as many international observers, this apartheid is invisible because the first and to a degree primary purpose of this system is the restriction of Palestinian presence within Israeli space – geographically, socially, judicially, economically and culturally. This effect is, by its nature, almost transparent within Israel itself: It occurs elsewhere – in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, areas into which most Israelis never venture and are in fact often not allowed to enter. The Israeli settlers who do live in those areas, be it because of their ideological commitment or because of governmental economic incentives, as well as the military forces, governmental personnel, non-profit organizations, and commercial concerns that operate there, are actively and aggressively imposing this apartheid as “facts on the ground.”

Indeed this is the special characteristic of this apartheid: rather than being the foundational Ideology of the state, it is an apparatus that is seemingly extrinsic to it – a de facto system of oppression and segregation that is wholly unspoken of in official rhetoric and almost all Israeli media. Although this apartheid was developed and shaped by the policies of almost all Israeli governments since 1967, it manifests primarily in praxis. This allows citizens and politicians alike to deny its existence (even to themselves.) After all, no Israeli government ever publicly discussed enacting “apartheid”, and the system that does exist is disjointed, composed of many different elements that act in unison but not through the aegis of any single official entity or government directive.

This is now changing. Two days after Bennet published his article, [the government approved a bill](#) that extends Israeli civil law into the settlements automatically (settlers are already subject to civil law) and thus officially extends the state’s civil jurisdiction into the west bank, which being an occupied territory, is currently governed through martial law. Alongside this territorializing action, which seeks to dissolve the distinction between the occupied and non-occupied, the democratic and secular basis of the state is under attack with the proposed “Jewish Nation-State Basic Law,” which Prime Minister Netanyahu [vowed to push through](#) as soon as possible.

The first clause of this law states: “a. The State of Israel is the national home of the Jewish people in which it realizes its aspiration for self-determination in accordance with its cultural and historic heritage; b. The right to realize the national self-definition in the State of Israel is exclusive to the Jewish people; c. The Land of Israel is the historic homeland of the Jewish people and the place of establishment of the State of Israel.” It further asserts the significance of “Jewish tradition as a source of inspiration” in legislation, demotes Arabic from being an official language into a secondary language, and sets the “basics of liberty, justice and peace envisioned by the prophets of Israel” as a defining characteristic of the state alongside democracy.

Erasing the Palestinians

If this bill becomes law, it would force the Supreme Court to give more weight in judicial decisions to the Jewish element than the democratic one in all instances in which there is a clash between the two, curtailing the judiciary and removing key checks and balances that have thus effectively prevented the enactment of a de jure apartheid through legislative and executive actions. It would also dramatically exacerbate the bias against Palestinians who are Israeli citizens (euphemistically referred to in Israel as “Israeli-Arabs,”) while introducing the denial of the Palestinians’ claim to a homeland and of their right to self-determination into the legal foundation of the State of Israel itself; making the erasure of Palestine and Palestinians into the law of the land while enabling the expansion of the



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state to include the entire territory of the Land of Israel / Palestine.

There is little hope for those who wish to stop this process. The political discourse in Israel is so powerfully controlled by the right, that this government – which is the most right-wing in Israeli history – is often criticized publicly for being ‘leftist.’ Even if the ruling coalition were to collapse, which appears to be a real possibility, the next government will be in all probability even more extremely right-wing, with the two real contenders for premiership being Netanyahu and Bennet.

Although the rise of the extreme-right in Israel has been in the making for many years, a development that notably accelerated since “Operation Cast Lead,” the past year saw a massive shift to the right in Israeli politics and society at large. This was not merely the result of events that occurred, or of conditions that ripened, but rather of intentional actions aimed at ushering this very reality.

While the Israeli move to cease the peace-talks this April was significant, this was mostly symbolic because these talks were a sham from the get go. The policy of settlement that was initiated by the first Netanyahu government (1996-’99) and continued ever since, made the two state solution a non-viable possibility: Even a cursory look at the [geographic distribution](#) of the settlements makes it abundantly clear that without the forced evacuation of a huge number of settlers from the West Bank the formation of an actual Palestinian state is impossible, and such an evacuation became an impossibility once Ariel Sharon ceased being premier (2006).

The facade of a “peace process” finally collapsed five months ago, when the kidnapping of three Israeli-Jewish teenagers was cynically used by the government to manufacture a war. Although the Israeli security services knew early on that the teenagers were dead, the government falsely claimed that the teenagers were alive. This was done in order to justify the transformation of the search into a large scale military operation against Hamas, initiating the spiral of escalations that eventually served as the official cause of war. It was also simultaneously used as an excuse to conduct a [veritable propaganda campaign](#) meant to shape the public’s opinion and collective experience by instilling a false sense of hope and solidarity with the families of the kidnapped – a campaign in which the established Israeli media was a willing participant. As expected, when the bodies were eventually found, this false hope shattered, transforming into collective grief and outrage, and giving rise to an unprecedented wave of racial hatred that swept Israel. The resulting burning of Mohammad Abu Khdeir and the ensuing large scale Palestinian demonstrations in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, against the background of escalation in the IDF’s bombardment of Gaza and Hamas’ launching of missiles, were used to galvanize the public, channeling the Israeli public’s wish for revenge into a justification for war.

Although the war ended in mid-august, by late September it became apparent that the Israeli government is trying to bring about a full scale intifada through aggressive steps in East Jerusalem, the Temple Mount and the West Bank. At the same time, a full-scale media war was initiated against the Palestinian Authority – [shifting the responsibility for the escalating violence](#) to Mahmud Abbas, while in fact agitating for more violence. This is an ‘end-game’ maneuver: The Israeli government closed the door on negotiations and has finally proved that it really is “no partner for peace,” forcing a situation in which there is no longer a solution, only a resolution.

A race has begun: As the Palestinian Authority attempts to achieve statehood, at least on paper, with a UN recognition of it’s being a state – an effort that already acquired substantial momentum, the Israeli government is maneuvering to create a reality that will empty these moves of all meaning, finally dissolving the last vestiges of the Oslo Accords by bringing the West Bank in its entirety back under Israeli control, consigning Palestinians to semi-autonomous territories that will resemble South-Africa’s “Bantustans” in all but name. Although there is a chance this maneuver will fail, there is also a good chance it will succeed. Since Israeli governments proved time and again that “facts on the ground” are very hard to change, and given the distinct possibility that the shifting balance of world-power will dramatically fortify Israel as an irreplaceable

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ally for the west, the successful enactment of apartheid will postpone indefinitely the creation of a Palestinian state and shift the site of conflict and oppression from the occupied territories to the very core of Israeli society. This is the end of Zionism, its final result – a Jewish state that embodies the rationale of anti-Semitism.


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