ETHNICITY, MILITARISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS: ISRAEL AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Given the subject matter, it is necessary to state at the outset that I speak as a Jew, and as a supporter of the state of Israel's right to exist [1]. For the past year I have been working with a group called the Committee of Concerned Canadian Jews, working to oppose Israel's invasion of Lebanon and to fight Israeli imperialism. In addition I have been working with TCLSAC, the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of South Africa, since 1975. Both these groups have as their focus the question of human rights and their violation in the world today.

In comparing Israel and South Africa there are two distinct approaches. The first is to document the actual links between Israel and South Africa — diplomatic, military, and economic. The second is to compare the social and economic structures of the two societies, the ideologies of their dominant groups, the political character of their state, and the direction in which they are moving.

The latter approach is the one I propose to take here. My purpose is comparative sociology and not the tracing out of the considerable links that exist between the two, although obviously that is of considerable importance [2]. Any exercise in comparative sociology has to have a purpose behind it. We may well ask what purpose is being served by this comparison. Many sympathizers of the state of Israel, for example, would argue that such a comparison

would be odious, only serving the purpose of delegitimizing Israel. What I hope to show is quite the contrary: namely, by exploring the dynamic of development of two settler states and how they develop in parallel reactionary directions, and by situating this in the context of the larger imperialist system, I hope to alert people of good will to the dangers of this direction. Ultimately I cherish the hope that it may be possible to change the direction of Israeli society, and avert the disaster that is looming for Israelis, for Jews everywhere, and for the world.

I will argue that many extraordinary parallels and convergences exist between South African and Israeli politics, sociology, and military policies, and that this is particularly true when we look at the policies of the two states towards the people of different ethnic origin under their rule. Pulling these parallels out will help us understand both Israeli society and South African society [3].

I will also argue that there are important differences between the two social formations: in the history of the dominant groups and in the alliance of class and ethnic forces within each society. Therefore it would be an error to extend the parallels too far. So let us approach this exercise with an open mind.

Comparison and Contrast

Both South Africa and Israel are colonial settler states. In one the dominant ethnic group is a white minority of Afrikaner and English stock, in the other, a Jewish major-

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ity. South Africa was settled in the 1600s and became an independent country in 1910; Israel was *re*settled by Jews from the early 1900s on and became independent in 1948. (But, of course, a handful of orthodox Jews had lived in the holy land for centuries.)

Both countries share certain historical experiences. Each fought wars of independence from Britain. The Boer War of 1899—1902 was lost by the Boers, and won by the British. In the case of Israel, the Israelis won independence from Britain, although their major struggle was not with the British power per se but with the five Arab nations that invaded them after independence was declared.

Both countries, furthermore, represent outposts of the Western Alliance, of the North Atlantic powers, in strategic parts of the world, one controlling the Cape Sea route and the mineral wealth of southern Africa, and the other in the Suez Canal area, key to Middle East oil.

Each polity rules over large numbers of ethnically differentiated subjects. Both have, as a ruling ideology, an ideology of ethnic or racial superiority, which sets apart the ruling group from the surrounding population. In both countries the ethnic rulers (in South Africa, the Boers) are also the most reactionary segment of the population. But one must note the irony of Israeli society: the Sephardim, the so-called Oriental Jews, hold, on the whole, lower class positions and occupations, yet provide the popular base for Begin's proto-fascist regime.

Both of them have very strongly entrenched discriminatory legislation, which creates classes of citizenship. In South Africa for many years only the 4,000,000 whites had the vote while all other races were excluded. Now a process of reenfranchisement of 3,000,000 Coloured and Asians is underway, but the 20,000,000 Blacks continue to have no vote inside South Africa. In Israel, it's not so much a question of voting rights. 3,000,000 Jews share the right to vote with a half million Israeli Arabs. But people of Jewish ancestry anywhere in the world have the right to Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return. The same right is not extended to Moslems or Christians who may want to immigrate to Israel. On the question of trade unions, black workers are still strictly excluded from the South African white unions. In Israel, by contrast, some Arab workers joined the Histadrut, the strong trade union alliance that backs the Israeli Labor party.

One clear difference that emerges at the outset in the overall political character of the two states is that in Israel there is a large active peace movement that can bring 400,000 people out on the streets in an antiwar demonstration. No similar bloc seems to exist inside the white population of South Africa. They may be there, but they are unorganized and fragmented: to get 4,000 white South Africans out on the street would be a major achievement.

Land, Labor and Military Policies

Land, labor and military policies constitute the core of the human rights question. Consider South Africa first.

The British and Boer colonists conquered and absorbed millions of native people into the South African state at the end of the nineteenth century, and later extended their rule to Namibia, which they virtually annexed after 1950. Since then, South Africa has made no further territorial conquests — perhaps it's not for lack of trying — and in fact there is some evidence of territorial devolution in South Africa. We are familiar with the hiving off of the Bantustans, and more specifically a recent proposal to give Swaziland a chunk of South Africa and an outlet to the sea.

Israel, by contrast, is expanding its territory by leaps and bounds. This constitutes a major

difference, and this is probably one —though not the only -- reason why Israel is in the public eye more than South Africa. Israel began expanding in 1948–49, when it increased its area during the war of independence. The actual state of Israel at its founding contained an area 30% larger than the UN partition plan had allotted to it. Next, in 1967 Israel took the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and the Sinai peninsula. Then, in 1982, it occupied a large chunk of Lebanon.

No matter what they may say, the Israelis look like they are going to be in Lebanon for a long time, at least several years. One should note also that Israel did relinquish the Sinai in the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, but by the same token, they have actually annexed Syrian and Jordanian territory: the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem; and Israeli policy seems to be bent on annexing the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: all behavior of the present government points in that direction [4]. And it may be that the new West Bank is going to be Lebanon. I will return to that point in a moment.

Israel is expanding, South Africa gives the appearance of devolving; but the similarities in their land policies far outweigh the differences. Both administer very large pieces of real estate, with populations who, in the main, function as sources of cheap labor for the South African and the Israeli economies respectively.

The South African Group Areas Act of the 1960s resulted in the massive removals of Black populations to the "Bantu homelands"; the plight of these millions of displaced peoples is well known. But lesser known, perhaps, is that the same sort of process is going on in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and inside Israel itself. There are well documented cases of forced evictions and land expropriation inside Israel and the same is going on in the West Bank [5].

In the West Bank it has been estimated that over 20,000 Palestinians have been forcibly removed from their land by the Israeli occupation, and a similar number of Israelis have been settled in the West Bank in over one hundred different settlements. New settlements are being set up every month. Independent authorities estimate that over half of all the usable land in the West Bank is now in Israeli hands.

One interesting question is how the Israeli government does this on land covered by the Geneva Convention of 1949 pertaining to Occupied Territories [6]. First, they use an obscure Defence Emergency Regulation dating from 1945 during the British Mandate, and still in force in Israel in the 1970s and 1980s, under which the Mandate power or, in this case, the Israeli occupying power, may expropriate any land for reasons of security.

Second, they invoke an Order in Council concerning abandoned property. During the 1967 war, tens of thousands of Palestinians fled to the East Bank, and when the cease fire was declared, Israel would not let them come back into the West Bank. After three years had passed, their land was confiscated, on the grounds that it had been abandoned!

Outright purchase is another method used. The Jewish National Fund, during the Palestine Mandate, would purchase land from Arabs and settle Jewish settlers on it, and this is still being done in the West Bank in the 1980s. It should be noted that the same three methods were widely used to appropriate thousands of hectares of Arab land inside Israel after 1948.

The purchase and expropriation of land in the West Bank is very much linked to policies of settlement. Israel has opened Jewish settlements in the West Bank in the face of opposition from almost everybody: local Palestinian inhabitants, members of the Knesset, the UN, and world opinion. Presidents Reagan, Carter and Ford have all opposed this settlement policy. And even a resolution of the World

Zionist Congress in December 1982 condemned the Israeli government's policy of starting new settlements on occupied Arab lands [7]. (The resolution was immediately declared invalid by the chair.) Nevertheless, the process of settlement has continued and has accelerated steeply in the last year [8]. Israel is building highrise and townhouse units by the thousand in the West Bank for Jewish occupants, and in effect is mortgaging the aspirations of a whole generation of young married Israelis to their policies. One has to wait for up to ten years to be able to get a house in Israel, but if you're willing to live in the West Bank you can get your house or condo within two years [9]. Planners now speak of a "critical mass" of 100,000 settlers, which they hope to reach by 1985, the point at which it would be politically impossible for Israel to relinquish the West Bank in a peaceful settlement.

This process I find quite interesting: it is a classic scenario of settler colonialism. It reminds one of Southern Rhodesia or Namibia; or, if we want to go a little further afield, of Algeria, or Ulster. You move in settlers who are ideologically correct; they entrench themselves; then, when it comes time for the local people to have their independence, the settlers can say, "Well, what about us? Don't we have any rights?" It worked in the 1890s and 1930s; the question is whether Israel can pull it off in the 1980s.

Let's go on to the question of labor. One of the most dramatic developments since 1967 is the rapid increase in Palestinian labor inside Israel. Every day some 60–100,000 workers cross the Green Line from the West Bank and Gaza into Israel, and return home at the end of the day. This is very similar to the South African picture: black workers by the thousands living in Kwazulu enclaves and working in Durban, or similar enclaves outside the suburbs of Port Elizabeth and East London.

Of the 70,000 West Bank Israeli workers in 1978, 45,000 were legal, documented workers, and 25,000 were illegal. There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these statuses. The work is organized through a labor bureau, men line up and are picked up for a day's or a week's or a month's work, just as in South Africa. The workers from the West Bank are not allowed to join Israeli labor unions. The ILO reported in 1978 that Palestinian workers from the West Bank received only 40% of the average Israeli wage. Further, if you are a documented West Bank worker in Israel, 30–40% of your already low wages are deducted to pay the labor contractor, your social security, your pension plan and so on, even though West Bank workers are not eligible for benefits [10]. Workers *inside* the West Bank and Gaza receive only 25–35% of the Israeli wage. Quite clearly, a pattern of exploitation that is familiar to us from South Africa is being reproduced here. One of the most telling facts concerns the Israeli kibbutzim, the utopian socialist communities founded on the principle that everybody should share the work and benefits collectively, and that no outside labor would be hired. These same kibbutzim have now become successful business enterprises. They still share the benefits but much of the actual work is done by hired Arab laborers [11]. I find that a pivotal point: to see how the iron laws of the capital–labor nexus are at work in these little socialist enclaves in Israel.

Repression and Militarism

Both South Africa and Israel have built up formidable military forces, including nuclear capability. Both act, to a greater or lesser extent, as the gendarmes of their regions, attempting to manipulate governments on their borders, either with the carrot or the stick — mostly with the stick.

Both of the powers are attempting to regionalize the conflicts within their societies,

South Africa by attacking, and supporting counter-revolutionary terrorists, in Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe — and Israel by attacking Lebanon, and in its moves towards annexation in the West Bank.

Both have taken it upon themselves to administer large subject populations and both face growing liberation movements. The result has been an increasing militarization of South African and Israeli societies, leading to the erosion of the civilized values and behaviors that the dominant groups claim to be fighting to uphold. This is something I want to go into in some detail, because it is the heart of the matter.

In South Africa, as we know, there has been an increasing right-wing trend, an increasing "laager" or siege mentality on the part of the whites. Every household has a handgun, they take shooting lessons and so on. To a certain extent the same process is going on in Israel. The right-wing trend resulted in the 1948 coming to power of the National Party in South Africa; the corresponding development in Israel is the coming to power of the Likud bloc under the leadership of Menachem Begin in 1977. We are familiar with the extremely reactionary and militaristic direction of South African society, starting from an already conservative fundamentalist base [12]. But sympathetic observers may not be prepared for Israel's recent sharp swing to the right. Many people, myself included, have long regarded Israel as a humane society, a society based on the rule of law with a respect for individual rights. At one time there was a good case to be made that such a massive denial of human rights simply couldn't happen in Israel.

I don't think it holds any longer [13], but let us look at what this case consists of. First of all, even strong supporters of the PLO agree that despite its faults Israel is the only democracy in the region. Second, it is legitimate to argue that Israel is an embattled state fighting to survive in a hostile environment. It is certainly true that more than once they have been attacked by their neighbors, and have fought their neighbors off. A third aspect of Israeli society is that it has a very strong labor movement, much stronger than that in South Africa, and it had a Labour government in power for the first 30 years of its existence. Furthermore, as I noted, Israel had and has a strong left wing which acts as the conscience of Israel. But above all, if we were to look to Israeli society for inspiration or encouragement, one could reasonably argue that if *any state* would be respectful of human rights, it would be the Israeli state, given the history of the Jewish people — centuries of persecution and the horrible experience of the Holocaust. This powerful argument has done much to dampen criticism of Israel.

Yet, in spite of all of this, there is increasing evidence that Israeli rule is resorting to all the dirty tricks that regimes in countries like Argentina, the Philippines, South Korea, Zaire, South Africa and other U.S. client states use to maintain subject populations; and furthermore, Israel seems to be displaying an external aggression that is even in excess of South Africa's. The revelations of the Judicial Inquiry into the Sabra—Shatila massacres show the extent of Israeli complicity in this tragedy [14].

When we look at the earlier evidence for repression in Israel and in their occupied territories, our sources are Amnesty International annual reports, and the National Lawyers' Guild. Also, in 1977 the London *Sunday Times* did a very detailed investigation of torture in Israel: some of their evidence was corroborated by the International Committee of the Red Cross. They reported use of electric shocks, beatings, sleep deprivation and mutilation of the genitals of men and women prisoners. Additionally, there is evidence of collective punishments; if members of a village in the West Bank demonstrate against the Israeli occupation, the whole village may be roused in the middle of the night and all the men of the village made to stand at attention in the town square until dawn. A frequent tactic of

reprisal is to destroy homes and businesses. The Israeli authorities admit that 1,200 buildings have been destroyed by them as punishment for individual offenses against the occupation; other sources claim it's more like 10,000 buildings. There has been a lively discussion inside Israel on this. The occupying authorities have argued that it's really more humane to blow up a person's home with dynamite than it is to detain them or to execute them. But the fact is, as the National Lawyers' Guild points out (see note 5, pp. 61–82), they are *both* flattening the buildings *and* detaining people, so it's not really an alternative.

Israel and South Africa: If the Shoe Fits

With all this going on in Israel, I think we have to ask ourselves why, until the recent invasion of Lebanon, hasn't there been more outcry here about it? I think the reasons for this are very complex. It has to do with progressive and liberal people's fear of being labelled anti-Semitic. All of us are very ready to condemn South Africa, and rightly so. But there is growing evidence that Israel's policies are pretty much the same; why don't we speak out more forcibly than we do? I think that the whole issue of anti-Semitism — which is undeniably a real problem in society — is used by the apologists for Israel to smear anybody who criticizes Israel, whether they are Jews or non-Jews.

Despite the name-calling it is an issue that we have to face squarely, and not allow ourselves to be browbeaten. If people of good will won't speak out, then who will? The Committee of Concerned Canadian Jews and many parallel groups in the U.S. and elsewhere were formed to show that a force exists within the Jewish community that is willing to face facts. Surely it is possible to be anti-Begin without being labelled anti-Semitic. It is the faulty and demagogic logic that equates the two that we must break through [15].

Now to summarize. How can we account for the causes of these developments and the parallel process in the two states? I think several points can be brought out. First, both South Africa and Israel seem to be evolving along the lines predicted by Marx in *Capital* concerning the nature of the capital—labor relation, and specifically in forcing down wages and the creation by capital of a reserve army of labor. This nexus has been amply demonstrated for South Africa by Wolpe, Legassick, Magubane, Saul and others. In Israel, the West Bank and Gaza serve the same labor reserve functions as do the Bantustans. There is a conjuncture between the forced removal of Palestinians from the land and the needs of the Israeli labor market. When peasants can no longer till the soil, they have to enter the labor market and sell their labor across the Green Line to the Israeli economy. Then Israel has the added advantage of putting middle-class housing up on the expropriated land. So land, labor supply, and elite housing all work together in this case.

Second, both Israel and South Africa are clients of U.S. imperialism and ultimately serve U.S. interests in their regions. It should be added that Israel has a much more powerful lobby in Washington than South Africa does. It must be remembered that Israel is the world's number one recipient of U.S. military aid and in its own right is the world's seventh largest arms supplier. For decades Israeli officers have gone through the same training programs and indoctrination courses that other U.S. client militaries undergo. Increasingly, the U.S. subcontracts military aid and training to the Israelis. Israel's current list of clients include the extremely repressive regimes in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Thailand and Zaïre, as well as South Africa [16].

A third point concerns the crucial question of the ideological transformations that the dominating groups go through as a result of their self-assumed task of repression. Looking

into the past of the Boers and the Jews, both have a strong ideology of persecution, of being the victims of powerful outside enemies. The tragic history of European Jewry is universally acknowledged, but we shouldn't forget a crucial point — the Afrikaners too had their holocaust: thousands of Afrikaners died in overcrowded British concentration camps during the Boer War; the feeling of persecution is a large element in Afrikaner literature and national world-view. The same feeling of persecution is a dominant element in the voluminous literature of Zionism after the Second World War. Their historical experiences thus gave both peoples a burning desire in the first instance to survive, and in the longer run to become politically and militarily strong so that no one could do "that" to them again.

But once in power a crucial transformation takes place, where that persecution is transformed into persecution of others; the victim is transformed into the persecutor and the prisoner into the prison warden. In trying to find an explanation for this transformation I started reading up on the history and theories of fascism, of the Italian, Japanese, German, and Spanish varieties. One of the elements common to fascist doctrines is a powerful feeling of persecution: Italy has been degraded but now it's going to be great again; Germany has been vanquished but now it's going to rise to its true greatness. But more compelling than these historical analogies are the very acts of domination now practised by the South African and Israeli militaries. The very use of terror and force conditions the user to further uses. Terror is a spiral that leads to greater and greater uses of terror, a psychological numbing and hardening of the soul; the result is a psychological addiction to terror. As Jacob Timerman says in *The Longest War*: "I have discovered in Jews a capacity for cruelty that I never believed possible."

That path to State Terror, it seems to me, cannot be avoided in the Israeli case, as long as their policies force them to administer a

million and a half Palestinians and other Arabs in the West Bank, Gaza, and now in Lebanon. If Israel is to avoid becoming more like South Africa, the only solution seems to be for Israel to divest itself of those territories. This is the position taken by the Peace Now movement inside Israel. "Yes," they argue, "it would be physically possible for the Israeli state to annex all these territories and to administer these subject populations. But what would it do to the character of the Israeli state and people?" The Israeli Peace movement sees quite clearly the choices before it. Now it is only necessary to convince the North American Jewish community, the American government, and the Israeli government of the wisdom of this course of action. But we seem to be faced with an irreconcilable clash of values, the destructive implications of which put us all in jeopardy.

NOTES

1. This paper was originally presented at the Symposium "Anthropology and Human Rights in the 1980s," organized by Frances Rothstein. American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., Dec. 6, 1982.
2. These links include extensive trade, the diamond industry, nuclear and other military collaboration and scientific and diplomatic cooperation. Each considers the other along with the U.S. its closest ally.
3. Similar exercises have been undertaken on a number of occasions before: at least ten books have been written comparing Israel and South Africa.
4. It should be added that the Labour government policy was heading in that direction anyway, before 1977.
5. The best single source on these questions is the National Lawyers' Guild 1977 Middle East Delegation Report entitled "Treatment of Palestinians in Israeli-Occupied West Bank and Gaza."
6. See J. Abu-Lughod, "Israeli Settlements in Occupied Arab Land: Conquest to Colony", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 16–54.
7. *The Toronto Star*, Dec. 15, 1982.
8. See "The Suburbanization of the West Bank," *Toronto Star*, Nov. 15, 1982.
9. I happen to know something about this because my nephew is on the waiting list for a house in the West Bank.
10. Budeiry, M.K. "Changes in the Economic Structure of the West Bank and Gaza Under the Israeli Occupation", in *Labour, Capital and Society*, Vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 46–63.

11 See Pollis, Elfi,"Divisions in the Kibbutz", *Merip Reports,* (May, 1983) pp. 23–24.

12 Cf. Moodie, T.D. *The Rise of Afrikanerdom* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1975). Moodie delineates the ideological structures of Afrikaner domination.

13 In fact a powerful point can be made that Begin's aggressive militarism is a logical extension of, and *not* a deviation from, the politics of previous labour governments. See Rokach, Livia *Israel's Sacred Terrorism: The Secret Diaries of Moshe Sharett* and "Zionism Good and Bad: Jacobo Timerman and the Lebanon War", *Merip Reports,* (May, 1983) pp. 28–36.

14 It is not generally known that the saturation bombings of Beirut in August 1982 actually killed more civilians than were killed by the perpetrators of the Sabra/Shatila massacres, see also E. Shorris, *Jews Without Mercy: A Lament* (New York: Anchor, 1982).

15 Similarly it should be possible to be critical of Zionism in its current expansionist form without being labelled anti-Semitic.

16 Cf. I. Shahak, *Israel's Global Role: Weapons for Repression* (Belmont, Mass.: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1982).