

# Israel is an Apartheid State



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By Suraya Dadoo

**A**s we celebrate the legacy of those brave South African women who helped conquer Apartheid in South Africa, the struggle continues against Israeli Apartheid.

*"I am an Arab woman of colour and we come in all shades of anger. So let me just tell you this womb inside me will only bring you your next rebel She will have a rock in one hand and a Palestinian flag in the other I am an Arab woman of colour Beware! Beware my anger..."*  
*Palestinian poet, Rafeef Ziadah*

In August 1969, less than four months after the African National Congress Morogoro Conference presented and adopted the 'Strategy and Tactics' document that underlined the need for the armed struggle, Leila Khaled was part of an armed resistance team that captured TWA Flight 840 on its way from Rome to Athens, diverting the Boeing 707 to Damascus. She ordered the pilot to fly over Haifa, so that she could see her birthplace from which she and her family were forcibly removed and barred by the Israeli government. No-one was injured in the operation.

Like Winnie Mandela before her, Fadwa Barghouti is also campaigning globally for the release of her husband, Marwan, from prison. Marwan Barghouti, often referred to as the "Palestinian Mandela", is a unifying figure among Palestinians, even though he is a senior Fatah leader. In prisoner exchange talks with Israel, Hamas insisted on Barghouti's release.

The Israeli government regards Barghouti as a "terrorist", accusing him of directing numerous operations against civilian and military targets. He was arrested in 2002 in Ramallah, but was only tried and convicted two years later on charges of murder. Barghouti is currently serving five life sentences. The Israeli government has refused to release him.

Barghouti continues to mobilise Palestinian resistance and worldwide solidarity from within the confines of cell number 28 at the Hadarim Prison, mainly through Fadwa. In March 2013, Fadwa delivered a defiant message from her husband to Ronnie Kasrils and the rest of the Russell Tribunal on

Palestine jury in Brussels:

"...being in jail is one more testimony of the deprivation of our people's rights, notably freedom. ...Detention is an instrument of oppression and repression and submission...our struggle is the prolongation of the fights against discriminations in the US, of the Indian peaceful march for freedom, of the fights for independence of the '50s, '60s and '70s, and naturally of the heroic fight against [South African] Apartheid. Israel's actions towards Palestinians have combined occupation, discriminations and Apartheid. We are therefore asking the world to stand up for justice and not to render aid and assistance to

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these violations. We are asking the world to help us end this oppression and to preserve the values of freedom, equality and justice..."

Two years earlier, parliamentarian Haneen Zoabi risked treason charges and the withdrawal of her Israeli citizenship, to testify at the Cape Town session of the Russell Tribunal. Zoabi described how Palestinian parliamentarians within Israel were targeted, arrested, imprisoned, and had travel bans imposed on them. National political leaders and human rights defenders were detained, and related organisations shut down.

From former hunger-striking political prisoner Hana al-Shalabi to poet Rafeef Ziadah, Palestinian women are leading the charge against Israeli Apartheid.

**"This is not South Africa"**

Of course, the very mention of the term "Israeli Apartheid" infuriates apologists of the Israeli state. "There is no racial segregation. This is not South

Africa" is the hackneyed line you will hear from the Israel lobby.

Indeed, Israel is not South Africa. South Africa did not have an eight metre high, 360km long wall imprisoning its black population. While the Apartheid government practiced the abhorrent "pass system", it did not have 98 fixed checkpoints within its Bantustans, in addition to hundreds of surprise flying checkpoints. Hundreds of kilometres of roads and highways were never reserved exclusively for whites only.

While the 1913 Land Act restricted black ownership to 13% of the land, Palestinians inside Israel have access to less than 3% of the land. The Palestinian minority, which constitutes 20% of the population, has been prevented from establishing even one new town since the founding of the State of Israel. The almost 100 000 Palestinians who refused to leave their homes and remained within the borders of Israel after 1948 inhabit only 3% of the land, and are only allowed to build on 2%. Today, there are over a million Palestinians living on the same amount of land. The Bantustan of the West Bank has been carved up by hundreds of illegal settlements housing half a million settlers – sponsored entirely by the Israeli government. The Gaza Strip Bantustan is completely sealed off and under Israeli siege. The resulting humanitarian crisis remains hidden from the world's media, activists and NGOs.

The South African Apartheid state, in an attempt to create a pretence of equal treatment, threw money at its Bantustans and built inferior houses, schools, universities, businesses, and provided limited water to the black population. It provided very restricted material welfare to blacks while denying them political rights. Israel, on the other hand, denies political rights to Palestinians, and at the same time undermines their material welfare through the destruction of houses, agriculture and businesses, schools, universities, hospitals and clinics through repeated military attacks. Electricity plants are damaged, and water supplies and other amenities are constantly disrupted.

**"But the Arabs can vote!"**

"Israel is not an Apartheid state

because Arabs inside Israel can vote." Israel's propagandists have often countered allegations of Apartheid by pointing to the existence of the significant Palestinian population living within its borders who can vote and form political parties - unlike in Apartheid South Africa where the franchise was denied to blacks.

What Zionist lobbyists fail to mention in discussions on Apartheid is that it is not necessary to show that South Africa's version of Apartheid is being replicated elsewhere. The 1973 United Nations Apartheid Convention is a universal instrument, applicable to Apartheid systems anywhere in the world. According to the Convention, Apartheid was understood as "inhuman acts" that were practiced "for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them." The Convention offers examples of these acts, noting that they might be "similar" to acts in South Africa but not necessarily identical. If any state does similar things, for the same purpose, it is guilty of Apartheid.

The Apartheid Convention does not even include denial of the right to vote in the list of examples of Apartheid that are explicitly mentioned. Those who point to the Palestinian right to vote are ignoring Israel's discriminatory practices towards its Palestinian citizens in many other spheres of public life, such as restricting their access to residency rights; land ownership; urban planning; social services; and social, economic, and cultural rights. While Palestinians in Israel can vote and form political parties, their activities are constrained. If Palestinians challenge the declaration that Israel is a Jewish, democratic state, they are liable for prosecution.

#### Déjà vu

There are other areas where the Israeli government is also copying South Africa's version of Apartheid. Depo Provera was prescribed almost exclusively to black women in Apartheid South Africa to limit their fertility, and slow the growth of the black population. Fifty-seven per cent

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of those prescribed Depo Provera in Israel are Ethiopian women, despite the fact that they represent only two per cent of the entire Israeli population. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) believes that this is a deliberate policy to curb the birth-rate of Israel's black Jewish community.

In a spectacular sense of *déjà vu*, the Israeli government - like the Nationalist government - also uses natural beauty, a wealth of resources, and technological know-how to justify Apartheid laws. Just as the Apartheid government assured the world that blacks in South Africa allegedly enjoyed a higher standard of living than those living in other African countries, the Israeli government claims that Palestinians inside Israel supposedly enjoy a higher standard of living in the Israeli Apartheid state than their Arab counterparts in the Middle East. Israeli *hasbara* (propaganda) is a replication of South African Apartheid propaganda.

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**“In an attempt to deflect attention away from Israeli Apartheid, Israel's defenders use despotic Arab regimes to justify the existence of Israel's racist laws on land ownership and marriage.”**

to justify the existence of Israel's racist laws on land ownership and marriage. For Israel and many of its supporters, repression and other injustices in the Middle East is sufficient justification for Apartheid and ethnic cleansing. It is a means of steering attention away from Israel's behaviour. Until every other problem in the world is solved, Israel's defenders seem to be suggesting, no-one should criticise Israel.

#### **Apartheid: wrong for South Africans, wrong for Palestinians**

As South Africans, it is our duty to "Never Forget" our own Apartheid. As beneficiaries of a massive outpouring of global solidarity, it is also our duty to expose Israeli Apartheid and support the struggle against it. Several prominent South Africans have already done this.

During a visit to Jerusalem in 1989 when South Africa was still an Apartheid state, Archbishop Desmond Tutu equated Israel's treatment of Palestinians to the treatment of black South Africans in South Africa at the time. He said: "I am a black South African, and if I were to change the names, a description of what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank could describe events in South Africa."

In 2007, John Dugard, a South African law professor and then UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), issued a critical report on Israel's human rights record with regards to its treatment of Palestinians. "The international community, speaking through the United Nations, has identified three regimes as inimical to human rights - colonialism, Apartheid and foreign occupation. Numerous resolutions of the General Assembly of the UN testify to this. Israel's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem contains elements of all three of these regimes, which is what makes the OPT of special concern to the international community."

Justice Richard Goldstone, a Jewish South African judge, headed a UN Human Rights Council enquiry into war crimes by the Israeli government in the wake of Operation Cast Lead in 2009. The Goldstone



Report, as it came to be known, found that in seeking to “punish, humiliate and terrorise” the Gazan civilian population, Israel committed numerous violations of customary and conventional international law. It also listed a lengthy list of war crimes that Israel committed, including “wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment.”

The personal fallout for Goldstone was serious. He was ostracised and shunned by the local Jewish community. Goldstone’s family has borne the brunt of the condemnation and consequences of his co-operation with the UN Human Rights Council. In April 2010, the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) and other Jewish communal organisations threatened protest action at the *bar mitzvah* of Goldstone’s grandson if the judge attended. The threat caused outrage in the Jewish community, and amid much controversy, Goldstone eventually attended the *bar mitzvah* with a bodyguard. According to SAZF chairman Avrom Krengel, “it was the 72 hours of his [Goldstone’s] life he regrets the most,” referring to the weekend of the *bar mitzvah*.

The *bar mitzvah* saga was part of a sustained 18-month campaign of family and personal pressure and intimidation exerted by the South African Zionist lobby on the judge to reconsider the findings of the Goldstone Report. Asked if he would head the UN investigation again, Goldstone is reported to have said: “If I did not have a family.”

Not surprisingly, in April 2011, Goldstone expressed “misgivings” about a finding of the Goldstone Report that Israel’s indiscriminate attacks on civilians were intentional. The other members of Goldstone’s fact-finding team stand by the Report’s findings.

In November 2011, the Russell Tribunal on Palestine concluded, after listening to testimony from South African anti-Apartheid veterans and Palestinians at the District Six Museum, that Israel subjects the Palestinian people, whether they live in the OPT or within Israel, to an institutionalised regime of domination amounting to Apartheid as defined under international law.

In April 2013, after visiting the OPT and Israel, Ahmed Kathrada, a former

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Robben Island prisoner declared: “I have seen and heard enough to conclude that Apartheid has been reborn here. In its reborn form it is, however, worse than its predecessor.”

South Africans who have lived and fought Apartheid are unequivocal: Israel is an Apartheid state.

Despite this mountain of emphatic evidence, apologists for the Israeli state (both in South Africa and abroad) are outraged that the Israeli state is being compared to the regime of pre-1994 South Africa. Just as Apartheid South Africa faced an international backlash for its Apartheid policies and was internationally isolated, there are calls for similar measures to be employed against the Zionist state. In response, Israel’s propagandists ask “Why Israel?”

#### Why Israel?

Tired of Israeli propaganda and this rhetorical question, I embarked, together with my colleague Firoz Osman, on a literary project to answer this question. Our aim was to expose Israeli Apartheid to South Africans. To achieve this, we have made widely accessible the work and analyses of experts: academics who have analysed and dissected the issues, journalists and activists who have witnessed first-hand the brutality and effects of Israeli Apartheid, and Israeli and Palestinian NGO researchers and human rights advocates with

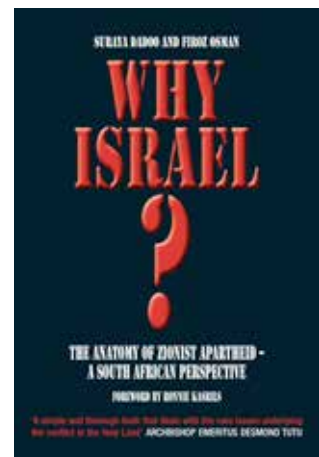
extensive, current, on-the-ground experience.

The result is a comprehensive, easy-to-understand investigation of Israel’s colonisation of Palestine, covering almost every facet of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the brutality of Israeli Apartheid, and various means of resistance. Fully-footnoted, with a full-colour photo essay, powerful quotes in side-bars, a detailed bibliography, index, and a list of useful websites and resources, we hope the book will be an indispensable guide for anyone wanting to fully understand the harsh contemporary realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel lobby groups around the world - including in South Africa - have ensured that a candid discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Israeli Apartheid is simply not possible. While Apartheid in South Africa was openly discussed around the world, Israel’s Apartheid practices are studiously avoided. Very few politicians or journalists dare to voice opposition against Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians for fear of being labelled anti-Semitic.

The main aim of the book is to stimulate discussion, debate, and understanding of Israeli Apartheid, and the multitude of issues associated with it. I hope that this book goes some way towards achieving this understanding.

The struggle against Apartheid continues.



*Why Israel? The Anatomy of Zionist Apartheid – A South African Perspective* (Porcupine Press, 2013) is available at all bookstores. Also available as an e-book and on Kindle. ■