



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE
MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

For a Secular Democratic State

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This month marks the fortieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Four decades of control established and maintained by force of arms--in defiance of international law, countless UN Security Council resolutions and, most recently, the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice in The Hague--have enabled Israel to impose its will on the occupied territories and, in effect, to remake them in its own image.

The result is a continuous political space now encompassing all of historic Palestine, albeit a space as sharply divided as the colonial world ("a world cut in two") famously described by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Indeed, Fanon's 1961 classic still enables an analysis of Israel and the occupied territories as fresh, insightful and relevant in 2007 as the readings of Cape Town or Algiers that it made available when it was first published.

Israel maintains two separate road systems in the West Bank, for example: one for the territory's immigrant population of Jewish settlers, one for its indigenous non-Jewish (i.e., Palestinian) population.

The roads designated for the Jewish settlers are well maintained, well lit, continuous and uninterrupted; they tie the network of Jewish "neighborhoods" and "settlements"--all of them in reality colonies forbidden by international law--to each other and to Israel. The roads for the West Bank's native population, by contrast, are poorly maintained, when they are maintained at all (they often consist of little more than shepherds' trails); they are continuously blockaded and interrupted. A grid of checkpoints and roadblocks (546 at last count) strangles the circulation of the West Bank's indigenous population, but it is designed to facilitate the free movement of Jewish settlers--who are, moreover, allowed to drive their own cars on the roads set aside for them, whereas Palestinians are not allowed to drive their cars beyond their own towns and villages (the entrances to which are all blockaded by the Israeli army).

The wall that Israel has been constructing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 2002 makes visible in concrete and barbed wire the outlines of the discriminatory regime that structures and defines everyday life in the occupied territories, separating Palestinian farmers from crops, patients from hospitals, students and teachers from schools and, increasingly, even parents from children (it has, for example, separated one parent or another from spouses and children in 21 percent of Palestinian families living on either side of the wall near Jerusalem)--while at the same time enabling the seamless incorporation of the Judaized spaces of the occupied territories into Israel itself. And a regime of curfews and closures, enforced by the Israeli army, has smothered the Palestinian economy, though none of its provisions apply to Jewish settlers in the occupied territories.

There are, in short, two separate legal and administrative systems, maintained by the regular use of military force, for two populations--settlers and natives--unequally inhabiting the same piece of land:

exactly as was the case in the colonial countries described by Fanon, or in South Africa under apartheid.

All this has enabled Israel to transplant almost half a million of its own citizens into the occupied territories, at the expense of their Palestinian population, whose land is confiscated, whose homes are demolished, whose orchards and olive groves are razed or burned down, and whose social, economic, educational and family lives have been, in effect, all but suspended, precisely in order that their land may be made available for the use of another people.

The result has been catastrophic for the Palestinians, as a World Bank report published in May makes clear. While the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem enjoy growth rates exceeding those of Israel itself, Palestinian towns and villages are slowly being strangled. While Jewish settlers move with total freedom, the combination of physical obstacles and the bureaucratic pass system imposed by the Israeli army on the Palestinian population has not only permanently separated the Palestinians of the West Bank from those of Gaza, East Jerusalem and Israel (movement among which is forbidden for all but a tiny minority) but has also broken up the West Bank into three distinct sections and ten enclaves. Half of the West Bank is altogether off-limits to most Palestinians; to move from one part of the rest of the territory to another, Palestinians must apply for a permit from the Israelis. Frequent bans are imposed on movement into or out of particular enclaves (the city of Nablus, for example, has been under siege for five years), or on whole segments of the population (e.g., unmarried men under the age of 45). And all permits are summarily invalidated when Israel declares one of its "comprehensive closures" of the West Bank--there were seventy-eight such days in 2006--at which point the entire Palestinian population stays home.

The lucky few who are able to obtain passes from the Israelis are channeled from one section or enclave to another through a series of army checkpoints, where they may be searched, questioned, hassled, detained for hours or simply turned back. "The practical effect of this shattered economic space," the World Bank report points out, "is that

on any given day the ability to reach work, school, shopping, healthcare facilities and agricultural land is highly uncertain and subject to arbitrary restriction and delay." Given the circumstances, it is hardly any wonder that two-thirds of the Palestinian population has been reduced to absolute poverty (less than \$2 a day), and that hundreds of thousands are now dependent for day-to-day survival on food handouts provided by international relief organizations. Not only has the international community refused to intervene; it has actively participated in the repression, imposing--for the first time in history--sanctions on a people living under military occupation, while the occupying and colonizing power goes on violating the international community's own laws with total impunity.

To all of these charges, Israel and its supporters have but one response: "security." But as the World Bank report argues, it is "often difficult to reconcile the use of movement and access restrictions for security purposes from their use to expand and protect settlement activity." Moreover, the Bank notes, it seems obvious that Israeli security ought to be tied to Palestinian prosperity: By disrupting the Palestinian economy and immiserating an entire population--pushing almost 4 million people to the edge--the Israelis are hardly enhancing their own security.

Such arguments miss the point, however. No matter how fiercely it is contested inside Israel, there remains a very strong sense that the country is entitled to retain the land to which it has now stubbornly clung for four decades. Even while announcing his scheme to relinquish nominal control over a few bits and pieces of the West Bank with heavy concentrations of Palestinians, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert insisted on his country's inherent right to the territory, irrespective of the demands of international law, let alone the rights and claims of the Palestinians themselves. ("Every hill in Samaria and every valley in Judea is part of our historic homeland," he said last year, using Israel's official, biblical terminology for the West Bank.)

Although some people claim there are fundamental differences between the disposition of the territories Israel captured in 1967 and

the territories it captured during its creation in 1948--or even that there are important moral and political differences between Israel pre- and post-1967--such sentiments of entitlement, and the use of force that necessarily accompanies them, reveal the seamless continuity of the Zionist project in Palestine from 1948 to our own time. "There are circumstances in history that justify ethnic cleansing," argues Israeli historian Benny Morris, with reference to the creation of Israel. "A Jewish state would not have come into being without the uprooting of 700,000 Palestinians. Therefore it was necessary to uproot them. There was no choice but to expel that population. It was necessary to cleanse the hinterland and cleanse the border areas and cleanse the main roads. It was necessary to cleanse the villages from which our convoys and our settlements were fired on."

Israel's post-1967 occupation policies are demonstrably driven by the same dispossessive logic. If hundreds of thousands have not literally been forced into flight, their existence has been reduced to penury. Just as Israel could have come into being in 1948 only by sweeping aside hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, Israel's ongoing colonization of Palestinian territory--its imposition of itself and its desires on the land's indigenous population--requires, and will always require, the use of force and the continual brutalization of an entire people.

Indeed, the discriminatory practices in the occupied territories replicate, albeit in a harsher and more direct form, those inside Israel, where the remnant of the Palestinian population that was not driven into flight in 1948--today more than a million people--continues to endure the systematic inequalities built into the laws and institutions of a country that explicitly claims to be the state of the Jewish people rather than that of its own actual citizens, about a fifth of whom are not Jewish. Recognizing the contradiction inherent in such a formulation, various Israeli politicians, including Deputy Prime Minister Avigdor Lieberman, have explicitly called for the territorial transfer--if not the outright expulsion--of as much as possible of Israel's non-Jewish (that is, Palestinian) minority. Although it would be intended to mark the ultimate triumph of the dispossessing settler

over the dispossessed native (Lieberman is an immigrant from Moldova who enjoys rights denied to indigenous Palestinians simply because he happens to be Jewish), such a gesture would actually amount to a last-ditch measure, an attempt to forestall what has become the most likely conclusion to the conflict.

For, having unified all of what used to be Palestine (albeit into one profoundly divided space) without having overcome the Palestinian people's will to resist, Zionism has run its course. And in so doing, it has terminated any possibility of a two-state solution. There remains but one possibility for peace with justice: truth, reconciliation--and a single democratic and secular state, a state in which there will be no "natives" and "settlers" and all will be equal; a state for all its citizens irrespective of their religious affiliation. Such a state has always, by definition, been anathema for Zionism. But for the people of Israel and Palestine, it is the only way out.

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