



Ben White, Israeli Apartheid. A Beginner's Guide. Foreword by John Dugard, Pluto Press, London-New York 2009, 172 p, L 8.50.

The current Israeli government supports actively a defamation campaign against the so-called delegitimizers of the State of Israel, namely those who criticize Israel's behavior as an occupying power and its constant violation of human rights and international law. The Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery named in his article "The Protocols of the Elders of Anti-Zion" the real "conspirators": Israel's minister

of foreign affairs, the minister of defense, and the minister for domestic affairs, all Israeli citizens. Through their political decisions they effectively "delegitimize" Israel's status in the international community.

At this point, the book "Israeli Apartheid" comes into play. Ben White, a British journalist and writer specializing in Palestine and Israel, sheds some more light on the alleged comparison between the South African Model of Apartheid with the State of Israel. This equation is the most fiercely resisted by the Israeli government. Israeli leaders consider such "delegitimizers" as irrelevant because they represent politicians of a society which have not only many political problems, but also psychological ones. Yet a society which is armed to the teeth with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and the best US made conventional weaponry (Israel), which sees itself as the "victim", has a real problem.

Ben White, and John Dugard in his foreword, emphasize that Israel is not South Africa. They acknowledge major differences as well as similarities. That is why White designates it "Israeli Apartheid", i. e. an Israeli sui generis "Apartheid", so to speak. In Israel there has never been the sort of petty Apartheid as was practiced in South Africa, where "blacks" could not sit on the same benches as "whites", or use the same toilets or buses. In Israel, Palestinians and Jews use the same buses, beaches, clinics, cafes, and soccer fields, and attend the same universities. The British journalist Jonathan Cook completely agrees with White, but adds one significant point overlooked by White: "In one instance ("Israeli Apartheid" L. W.) is explicit in this petty way — and this is when Jews and Palestinians enter and leave the country through the border crossings and through Ben Gurion international airport. Here the façade is removed and the different status of citizenship enjoyed by Jews and Palestinians is fully on show."

White mentions the very close and intense relationship between Israel and white racist South Africa. John Dugard, the UN Human Rights Rapporteur and South African professor and apartheid expert, said that "Israel's laws and practices in the OPT (Occupied Palestinian Territories L. W.) certainly resemble aspects of apartheid." Neither Dugard nor White equates Israel with South Africa. One major difference is the role of a white minority over a sizable black majority. He hints at another major difference: "While in apartheid South Africa, the settlers `exploited` the `labor power` of the dispossessed natives, in the case of Israel, the native population was to be eliminated; exterminated or expelled rather than exploited. It could be said that Zionism has been worse for the indigenous population than apartheid was in

South Africa – Israel needs the land, but without people.” The real aim of labor Zionism is that it aimed at “segregating” Jews from Arabs, and ultimately driving it away, but certainly not “exterminating” it.

The book is divided into three parts: the first one focuses on the state of Israel and the Palestinian catastrophe which is called “al-Nakbah”, the second one centers around “Israeli Apartheid”, and the third tends towards peace or opposition to “Israeli Apartheid”. The book closes with a very useful section containing frequently asked questions, a glossary, and an “Israeli Apartheid” Timeline.

We shall not focus on the first chapter because the history of the conflict is well known. The second chapter is more interesting because Israel regards and defines itself as a state of people the majority of which is not living within its borders. This chapter describes how “Israeli Apartheid” has been preserved for over 60 years in Israel proper and the OPT. According to White, Israel is not a state of all its citizens in sense Great Britain, France or the USA, but rather a state for “some” of its citizens. “Israel is in many respects admirably democratic”, yet there is a fundamental contradiction at its core. This contradiction between “Jewish and democratic” is revealed by the distinction made in Israeli law between *citizenship* and *nationality*. White writes that all Israeli citizens (Citizenship= “ezra`hut”) possess in theory equal rights. But only its Jewish citizens have rights as nationals (Nationality= “le`um”). “The whole purpose of political Zionism is a state of the Jewish nation”, writes White. And a court ruling in 1970 declared that there “is no Israeli nation that exists separately from a Jewish nation”, referring to world-wide Jewry. According to the author, a “Jewish democracy”, as Israel describes itself, is thus a contradiction in terms.

There are two major laws which define the boundaries of discrimination: the Absentee Property Law and the Law of Return. The latter is designated as Israel’s one of its Basic Laws. Basic Laws serve in Israel as a substitute for a constitution. The Law of Return declares the state as the “national home for all Jewish people the world over”. The implication of this law is that all Jews everywhere can become or are regarded as potential Israeli citizens by right. Almost as important is the Absentee Property Law of 1950 which declared land to be “abandoned” if its owners or tenants were absent in the period between November 29, 1947 and May 15, 1948, even for one day from areas under the control of Jewish armed forces. This affected all Palestinians who fled or were driven out by force by the Jewish militias or later by the Israeli army, including those who fled to areas that were later annexed to Israel. This latter group is designated in Israeli legal parlance as “Present Absentees”. In 1953, the Israeli parliament passed the Land Acquisition Law that confirmed the government’s title to the land classified as “absentee” land, writes White. To control the remaining Palestinians in Israel and provide justification for land confiscation, the Israeli government enacted “the Defense (Emergency) Regulations” law that imposed martial law until 1966 over 85 per cent of the Palestinians who remained under Israeli jurisdiction.

According to White, “The legal infrastructure of Israeli apartheid is more sophisticated and complicated than that of apartheid South Africa.” The author mentions the important role played by “National Institutions” in Israel and the key legal distinction between “Jews” and

“non-Jews” in Israel that “is rarely explicitly stated in the text of Knesset legislation”. Instead, a “two-tier structure” exists that “has preserved the veil of ambiguity over Israel apartheid legislation for over half a century”. *The first tier* is composed by Zionist institutions – the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and the Jewish Agency (JA) – which all exist for the explicit benefit of Jews. *The second tier* is the way in which these institutions are “incorporated into the body of the laws of the State of Israel, and in particular, the body of strategic legislation governing land tenure”. The author has demonstrated that these organizations have assigned responsibilities and authority normally reserved for the government.

The land ownership laws make life for the Palestinians in Israel proper very hard. They can't not only not by land but they also get hardly any building permits, which causes Palestinians to live in very crowded space which forces many to emigrate. As a case in point stands the town of Nazareth in the Galilee: In 1948, 15 000 people were living in the town, today the number rose to 60 000 within the city limits. On a hill overlooking Nazareth, the “sun town” Nazareth Illit was established for Israeli Jews. Not only do Israeli Palestinians live “as second-class citizens in terms of land ownership and development budgets” but they are also considered “to be a danger” to Israeli society. Palestinians are referred to as the “demographic threat”. White hints at another curiosity: there are even Israeli Palestinians living a “legal invisibility”: their dwellings are deemed “invisible”; these are unrecognized villages and “present absentees”. The author sums up his analyses with the following proposition: “The open racism faced by Palestinian citizens of Israel is simply a result of the central contradiction inherent in the idea of a `Jewish democratic` state.”

The occupation regime manifests itself through massive and enduring violations of human rights and international law. As for specifics, the author mentions the settlements, land theft, the “bypass roads” that may only be used by Israelis, the checkpoints that dot the entire OPT, general closures of the OPT from the outside world, the “Separation Wall” determined as illegal by the International Court of Justice, Israeli unilateral control of ground-water resources, administrative detention of thousands of Palestinians, systemic maltreatment and torture, a policy of house demolitions, the occupation of East Jerusalem, the extreme fragmentation of the OPT and general military brutality. The author regards all of these measures as “part of a systematic policy to consolidate and enforce Israeli apartheid in the territories”.

The last of White's book provides an overview of local and international forces that resist and oppose “Israeli Apartheid”. He cannot imagine a future based on injustice and domination and calls therefore for “dismantling Israeli apartheid and guaranteeing the collective and individual rights of all the peoples of Palestine/Israel”. For him, the biggest obstacle to a just peace is the “persisting Zionist mindset”. Even the most “liberal” Israeli politicians have, in his view, maintained and strengthened this oppressive system, “ensuring that the Palestinian people remain scattered, denationalized and dispossessed”.

Ben White is not as outspoken as Uri Davis who has written the book “Apartheid Israel” in which he challenged the Zionist ideology head-on. Nonetheless, White's book gives a thorough analysis of the discriminatory structure of Israel's political system, which is hardly

acknowledged in the West, or which Western political elites don't want to acknowledge, let alone talk about. The author highlights painful issues which must be addressed by Israeli society in order to lead the country into the future of a democratic state for all its inhabitants.

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