



**Ben White, *Palestinians in Israel. Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy*, Pluto Press, London 2012, 128 pp., 13 Pounds.**

With the signing of the Oslo Accords that led to the outbreak of the so-called peace process between Israel and the occupied Palestinian people, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) abandoned its initial political goals (to realize the right of return of Palestinian refugees and to liberate Palestine from Zionist colonization) for some privileges and turned itself into an obedient servant of the colonizers. Whereas the PLO under the leadership of Yasser Arafat tried to get back some territory from Israel to establish a Palestinian state, Palestinians living in Israel proper, although suffering under discrimination as second-class citizens, demand Israel to become finally “a state for all its citizens” instead of staying a “Jewish State”. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the non-Jewish inhabitants have been subject to a second-class status in most walks of life.

Ben White is a freelance journalist and writer specializing in the subject of Palestine/Israel. In his previous book “Israeli Apartheid” he showed that Israel established its special kind of “Israeli apartheid” that differs in its sophistication from the petty apartheid in South Africa under the white racist regime. <http://between-the-lines-ludwig-watzal.blogspot.com/2010/11/ben-white-israeli-apartheid-beginners.html> His current book deals with the Palestinians living in Israel proper and their plight. It was overdue, that someone as competent as White would shed some light on Israel’s discriminatory treatment of some 20 per cent of its citizens. In comparison to their fellow countrymen in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), who live a life in extreme oppression; Israeli Palestinians might be designated as “Palestinians de luxe”.

The well-known Israeli Palestinian Knesset member Haneen Zoabi contributed a fine foreword in which she demanded full citizenship rights and added; “These taken for granted demands, for the indigenous people and for ‘full citizenship’, are suffice to undermine the moral and political legitimacy of the entire Zionist project, and to relegate it to the status of a racist, colonialist venture.” (sic) Israeli Palestinians demand from the State of Israel no less than to become the “state of all its citizens”. According to Zoabi, this demand “has forced the *Jewish state* to admit the primacy that it grants to Jewish-Zionist values over democratic values and to recognize the impossibility of coexistence between the two”. Currently, Israel is a democracy *sui generis*.

For making such demands, MK Zoabi and also the author came under attack by Zionist propagandists in Israel and Great Britain. Yaniv Halili wielded in “ynet” the worn Zionist “argument”, accusing both of “anti-Semitism”. Zionist defenders of Israeli war crimes, crimes against humanity, violations of human rights, contempt for international law and the United Nations, can only “justify” the morally bankrupt policies of the “only democracy in the Middle East” by slandering people who merely describe the horrible reality. The infamous Zionist lobby in Great Britain attacked the British branch of *amnesty international*, because it had dared present White’s book, and called for a “balanced” debate. The problem with Zionist slanderers is not their meanness - any rational person will immediately discount their arguments - the real problem lies with the non-Zionist citizens or politicians who are afraid of standing up to such intimidation, because they fear being accused of “anti-Semitism” or threatened in their career.

Ben White brings the discrimination of the forgotten minority of Israel's colonization project in Palestine, to light. The author pursues two aims: First, he wants to show how Israel relates to its Palestinian citizens, and second, he attempts to demonstrate that "denying democracy has been part of the Zionist colonization of Palestine from the very beginning". For White, Israel's definition as "Jewish and democratic" is the central contradiction and the heart of the conflict.

In seven chapters White describes the manifold discriminations against what some Israelis call "Israel's fifth column". To preserve their status of second-class citizens, Israel developed a sophisticated set of laws that apply to Jews only. This Palestinian minority is seen by Israel's power elite as a "demographic threat" to "Jewish majority rule". The author shows that the Israel's Declaration of Independence, which solemnly promises to "ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex" is not considered by the Israeli High Court as "constitutional law". White quotes Ari Shavit's article "Formative words" in the daily "Haaretz" saying: "The state it declared was not a state of all its citizens. It was not even a Jewish-democratic state, but a Jewish state, pure and simple." <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/formative-words-1.360697> In the last phrase of this sentence lies Israel's ongoing dilemma and its inherent contradictions. That is why many Israelis and Jews around the world call Israel an "ethnocracy" rather than a "democracy".

The rest of the book deals with the implementation of Israel's institutional discrimination. One of these discriminatory laws is the "Absentee Property Law" passed in 1950. This law regulates the exclusion of Palestinians from land acquisition and the "mechanism of expropriation" to realize the permanent alienation of (Palestinian absentees) land in favor of the Jewish state". (24) According to White, there are numerous other laws to be used to confiscate land, such as the "Emergency Land Requisition of 1949", or article 125 of the Emergency Regulations of 1948. This law enabled an area to be declared "closed" and then, using the "Land Acquisition" law of 1950 to designate the land as "uncultivated" and expropriate it for Jewish-only use, writes the author. It should come to no one's surprise that current Israeli President Shimon Peres called this judicial sophistry a means of "directly continu(ing) the struggle for Jewish settlement and Jewish immigration". (25) The Israeli land regime was finally completed in 1960, with the passing of Basic Law: Israel Lands 1960.

The campaign entitled "Judaising of the Galilee" overlaps and echoes and "judaisation" of occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. This strategy goes along with "day-to-day racism", a phenomenon widely cited by White. (54) Israeli newspapers periodically, including recently, report the most outrageous racist statements by rabbis, who do not mind to cite biblical texts in justification. It should be noted, that there has been no outcry by Zionist politicians against such overt racism. The author cites opinion polls showing "deep-seated levels of anti-Arab racism" in the population. (56) Such racism is reflected, among other things in the "judaisation program" against the Bedouins in the Naqab desert and the refusal to "recognize" certain Arab villages.

Systemic discrimination is described by White in areas such as education, budgetary allocations to Palestinian communities in the Galilee and petty discrimination at all levels of society. Just being an Arab disqualifies a person of serving in the Israeli military, except for members of the Druze minority. With these disqualifications goes the loss of privileges granted to Jewish soldiers and veterans.

Summing up his findings, the author tries to remain objective by writing that there might be some "logic" to the Israeli argument in "justifying" its racist policies towards the Palestinians in the OPT by pretending that the occupied territories might be "disputed" or that there might be "security concerns". The fallacy of

these arguments is revealed when it comes to the treatment of Palestinians in Israel proper. Israeli politicians and their friends in the U. S. and Western Europe often point out as evidence for Israeli democracy the presence of Israeli Arabs in the Knesset. However, they ignore the fact that these Arab MKs are subjected to regular slander and threats by their right-wing Jewish “colleagues” to have their parliamentary immunity lifted or their citizenship withdrawn. It is true that “Arabs and Jews” in Israel share the same beaches, work at the same hospitals, and may travel on the same buses. The relative absence of such petty racism hides, however, the more fundamental and pernicious discrimination against Palestinians enshrined in legislation and administrative practices.

White ends his book by quoting a revealing statement of Shmuel Dayan, General Moshe Dayan’s father, who admitted in 1950: “Maybe (not allowing the refugees back] is not right and not moral, but if we become just and moral, I do not know where we will end up.” The ongoing Zionist colonization dilemma could not be better phrased.

For democrats, who are interested in the reality and the functioning of the “Jewish and democratic” State, this book can be an eye-opener.

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First published: <http://mwcnews.net/focus/analysis/16684-ben-white.html>