

Institute for Palestine Studies
University of California Press

Rethinking the Palestine Question: The Apartheid Paradigm

Author(s): Mark Marshall

Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 15-22

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Institute for Palestine Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2538101>

Accessed: 30-10-2015 09:26 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Institute for Palestine Studies and University of California Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Palestine Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>



RETHINKING THE PALESTINE QUESTION: THE APARTHEID PARADIGM

MARK MARSHALL

The primary purpose of this essay is to argue for a shift from the “occupied territories” paradigm to an “apartheid” paradigm as a way for antiracist intellectuals, especially in the United States, to analyze the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine. Such a paradigm shift has the potential to help set in motion a process that could ultimately circumvent or dislodge the apparently “immovable object” of unconditional U.S. support for Israel spoken of by Helena Cobban.¹ The secondary purpose is to urge Arab Palestinian intellectuals to drop ethnically exclusive Arab Palestinian nationalism as the basis for the liberation struggle and replace it with a territorial Palestinian nationalism analogous to the nonethnic South African nationalism of the African National Congress during the struggle against apartheid.

Before proceeding further, a brief word should be said with regard to nomenclature. The word “Israel,” the generally accepted English translation of the Hebrew word *Yisra’el*,² has been linked to Judaism and Jewishness so inextricably and for so long that the proposition of “Israel” as a country inhabited by both Jews and non-Jews induces a state of cognitive dissonance. But what about the “Palestinians”? If the “Israelis” come from “Israel,” where do the “Palestinians” come from? We are left with the tacit assumption that, since the “Palestinians” are

Mark Marshall is a Ph.D. candidate in Middle East and Islamic studies at the University of Toronto.

Journal of Palestine Studies XXV, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), pp. 15-22.

not “Israelis,” they must come from some other country, yet “Palestine” does not appear on any map; many would say that they must come from the “occupied territories.” The point is that the vocabulary used to discuss the Palestinian problem in the English language makes a solution based on population exchange seem “natural” and makes it difficult for users of the language even to conceive of a nonracist solution to the problem.

Therefore the dominant usage must be rejected: The term “Palestine” will refer in this essay to the territorial entity generally referred to by the media as “Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.” In order to avoid confusion, I will retain the term “Israel” or “Palestine/Israel” when referring to the *state* that has sovereignty over the territorial entity of “Palestine.”

Resolution 242 and the “Occupied Territories” Trap

Palestine is perceived by the American elite as “Israel and the occupied territories.” This perception is passed on to the general population by academics and mainstream journalists and is reflected in the policies of the U.S. government. Accordingly, the dominant American perception is that the Jewish sector of the population (“Israel”) is a *territorial* extension of the industrialized West, or Europe. “Jewishness” is the form taken by Westernness or Europeanness in the Palestinian context, just as “Whiteness” was the form it took in the South African context under apartheid. In South Africa, however, the White population was never seen by the U.S. elite in territorial terms; South Africa was correctly seen as a unitary state where the White sector of the population enjoyed constitutional supremacy over the rest. With regard to Palestine, on the other hand, the U.S. elite does not see it as a country inhabited by Jews and Arabs; Jews are seen as “Israel,” a territorial entity, and Arabs are seen as a separate territorial entity or entities: either as neighboring states or “the occupied territories.”

Although Jews and Arabs are perceived in territorial terms, the territorial boundaries are left undefined in the collective mind of the U.S. elite. This is because “Israel” has not yet withdrawn from “the occupied territories,” and the consensus of the U.S. elite is that the precise boundaries of “the occupied territories” can only be defined retroactively, *after* the “occupation” has ended. Accordingly, the official U.S. interpretation of the “withdrawal clause” of Resolution 242 is that part, but not all, of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBG) should *probably* be considered occupied territory, but exactly what part that is can only be determined in negotiations.³ This means

Under the DOP the boundaries of “the occupied territories” can only be defined retroactively, *after* the “occupation” has ended.

that once Israel announces from what parts, if any, of WBG it is prepared to withdraw, those parts will retroactively be considered to have been occupied territory.⁴ This interpretation is enshrined in the Declaration of Principles of 13 September 1993 governing the negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).⁵

It is not clear why the U.S. elite adheres to this particular conception of “occupied territory” in the Palestinian context. Perhaps it has something to do with the importance of the frontier as a theme in American history: a contested zone between the advancing European colonial society and the retreating indigenous population. Along with the concept of the frontier went the assumption that European (or “White”) societies had the natural right to take what they wanted from the non-European societies with which they came into contact. Perhaps the psychological legacy of the frontier mentality informs the U.S. assumption that the precise extent of the occupied territories can be determined only after Israel has decided what part, if any, of WBG it does not want. It is possible that this basic American historical assumption about relations between Europeans and non-Europeans has been reinforced in the Palestinian context by the prominent roles played by Jews and Old Testament-oriented Protestants in American society.

“Jewishness,” then, is the criterion for Westernness in Palestine, and the Jewish population is seen in territorial terms as “Israel,” a Western country. As we have seen, articulate opinion in the United States defines “occupied territory” in Palestine as areas that the Israeli government does not want. It is assumed in the United States—no doubt correctly—that the Israeli government most definitely *does* want East Jerusalem. Hence the response of the U.S. elite to Arab challenges to the exclusively Jewish character of Jerusalem has always been to close ranks, in effect in defense of the territorial integrity of the West. From this perspective, it is easier to understand President Clinton’s statement that “I recognize Jerusalem as an undivided city, the eternal capital of Israel, and I believe in the principle of moving our embassy to Jerusalem.”⁶

As long as the United States continues to “reject the standard interpretation of the withdrawal clause of UN 242” (see note 3), it is worse than futile for the rest of the international community to make policy based on the assumption that Resolution 242 defines WBG as “occupied territory.” Such an assumption is a dangerous delusion and a trap, for two reasons: first, because it absolves the Israeli government of responsibility for the Arab population of those lands while doing nothing substantial to challenge its sovereignty over them; and second, the “withdrawal clause” of Resolution 242 is likely to be seized upon by Israel and the United States to provide a veneer of international legality to the unilateral creation of an Arab state that will exclude East Jerusalem and probably other parts of the West Bank as well. The PLO leader-

ship, dependent for its survival on continued cooperation with Israel, will have no choice but to go along with this scheme, no doubt with a fig-leaf clause postponing agreement on Jerusalem's "final status" to some permanently indeterminate future date. Such a state will not be considered a bantustan by the international community because Israel will be considered to have made a major concession by withdrawing from much—maybe even most—of WBG after decades of intransigence, and the Palestinians will finally have their state after many years of loudly demanding one. Moreover, Arab complaints about Jerusalem will be seen as a sign of bad faith, because the PLO, as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people," had knowingly and of its own free will entered into negotiations based on the American and Israeli interpretation of Resolution 242, according to which Israel is expected to withdraw only from those parts of WBG from which it wants to withdraw, and the PLO will not be able to convince anyone that it seriously believed at the outset that Israel would ever want to withdraw from East Jerusalem (see note 4). Unlike the bantustans created by South Africa during the apartheid era, this "Palestinian state" will likely receive widespread international recognition, which will have the effect of giving international legitimacy to the borders unilaterally redrawn by Israel.

Thus, it would be criminally naïve not to treat unqualified U.S. support for Israel as a given for the foreseeable future *as long as the conflict is seen as a territorial one between "Israel" and its Arab "neighbors."* However, one thing the United States cannot do—at least not in the long run—is extend unqualified support to a government that denies civil and political rights to a religious, ethnic, or racial group *that is part of its own population*: the civil-rights campaign in the U.S. south, the campaigns of solidarity with Jews in Czarist Russia and the Soviet Union, and the antiapartheid campaign prove this.

The Three Concentric Circles of Zionist Apartheid

The Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine, then, has been incorrectly portrayed as one characterized primarily by the occupation by a non-Arab country, Israel, of neighboring Arab lands, "the occupied territories." In reality, the conflict is an internal one within Palestine, which should be considered a unitary state with an ethnically divided population. The European colonial population of Palestine⁷ has rights, and the indigenous Arab population does not. The situation is analogous to the situation in South Africa before the abolition of apartheid. It is also worth noting that if the *entire* Arab population (i.e., not just those who have been allowed to remain within the country) is taken into account, Arabs are the majority of the population of Palestine. According to the *Palestine Statistical Abstract*, there were 4,880,518 Arab Palestinians in 1986; projected to 1995 the number would reach 6,692,153.⁸ If we accept the

high estimate of 4.5 million Jews in Palestine, we come up with a total population of 11,192,153, of whom 59.8 percent are Arabs.⁹

It is true that the Arab Palestinians have never been victims of what was called in the South African context “petty apartheid.” There never were any park benches, bus shelters, or public toilets labelled “Jews only.” However, the Arab Palestinians have been and remain to this day victims of what was called in South Africa “grand apartheid.” In South Africa grand apartheid took the form of a series of laws designed to ensure that the African and European populations were kept physically apart as much as possible and to ensure that the Africans had no power. In South Africa the main legal devices to achieve those ends were the Group Areas Act, which kept Africans out of European residential areas; the Separate Registration of Voters Act, which deprived non-Europeans of the right to vote; and the Bantu Homeland Citizenship Act, which was intended eventually to deprive all the Africans in the country of their South African citizenship.

Shifting to the Palestinian context, Zionism disenfranchises the indigenous population at three levels: banishment, “occupation,” and second-class citizenship. The Arab population can accordingly be conceptualized in terms of three concentric circles corresponding to the three levels of disenfranchisement. The outer circle represents the Arabs who have been expelled from the country. The Absentee Property Law, passed in 1950 to ensure that the Arab refugees of the 1947–49 war could never return, is the functional equivalent, for the Arabs in exile, of all three above-mentioned South African apartheid laws: By keeping them physically outside the country, it keeps them separated from the Jewish population, deprives them of the vote, and deprives them of citizenship.

The second concentric circle represents the Arab population of “the occupied territories.” By not extending citizenship to the Arab inhabitants of WBG after the 1967 war, the Zionist regime has accomplished the same thing vis-à-vis the Arabs as the apartheid regime accomplished vis-à-vis the African population of South Africa: The Arabs of WBG are forbidden to establish residence outside WBG and thus are kept physically apart from most of the Jewish population (the Group Areas Act); they are denied the right to vote (the Separate Registration of Voters Act); and—needless to say—they are deprived of citizenship (the Bantu Homeland Citizenship Act).

This brings us to the third and inner circle: Arabs who were allowed to stay within the areas controlled by the Israeli army after the 1947–49 war and are citizens of the State of Israel—sometimes referred to as “Israeli Arabs.” These people are the Palestinian equivalent of the “Section 10” Africans of South Africa: the privileged minority of Blacks who were allowed to live in White areas. True, Arab citizens of the State of Israel have the right to vote, something “Section 10” Africans never had

under apartheid, but they are a minority (about 12 percent) of the total Arab population of Palestine. They may also be compared to the mixed-race "Cape Coloreds" who had the vote in Cape Province in the early years of the Union of South Africa.

A Proposal for a Principled Course of Action

The most dangerous thing about the Oslo Accord is that, while it does nothing to alter the reality of Zionist apartheid, it is likely by virtue of the PLO's stamp of approval to legitimize it in the eyes even of Westerners who genuinely oppose racism. For many years the PLO has been demanding to be accepted by the United States and Israel as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Euphoria over the fact that it has finally secured this recognition is likely to distract many people of good will from the fact that the PLO has lost its representativeness and from the true nature of the regime being imposed on the Arab population of WBG.

Those of us in the West who support the cause of justice for the Arab Palestinians should focus our efforts on the democratization of Palestine by demanding the dismantling of Zionist apartheid. This is not necessarily to foreclose the possibility that a separate state for the Arab Palestinians might ultimately be the best solution; but as long as Palestine/Israel is a Jewish state, demands for Arab rights must be addressed to the Jewish government. A unilateral redrawing of the borders to create a fraudulent "Palestinian state" for the Arab population must be rejected by principled people of good will, just as similar schemes were rejected in the South African context. Those of us who are fortunate enough to have been in a position to learn the truth have a moral responsibility to expose the trap of the "occupied territories" paradigm.

The best hope for the Arab population in the post-PLO era is openly to recognize the borders,¹⁰ drop the "occupied territories" paradigm, and base their struggle on the demand for equality with the Jews. This would mean going back to the "secular democratic state" slogan, calling for a Palestine that will be nonethnic as well as secular: that is, a state that will define itself neither as a Jewish state nor

The best hope for the Arab population in the post-PLO era is to base their struggle on the demand for equality with the Jews.

as an Arab state. As long as articulate opinion within the Arab Palestinian population defines the Arab Palestinian struggle as the territorial struggle of the Arab population of an Arab land for liberation from foreigners, they will face the permanent obstacle of unconditional U.S. support for "Israel" as a Western country threatened with external aggression. Short of this, the best the Arabs can hope for is an empty shell of a symbolic "Palestinian" (i.e., Arab) state: an Arab bantustan under a

regime that will necessarily be an oppressive dictatorship because it will have forfeited all legitimacy by acceding to permanent and exclusive Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem, which is one of the three holiest places in Islam as well as the historical capital of Palestine. Needless to say, such an outcome would be a cruel mockery of the aspirations of a people that has suffered more than enough.

Thus the Arab population is faced with a choice between two models of liberation: a model according to which WBG is seen as an Arab country, "Palestine," occupied by a hostile, non-Arab neighboring country, "Israel"; and a model that would reflect the reality of Palestine/Israel as a unitary state where Jews enjoy full civil and political rights and Arabs do not. The first model is doomed to failure because it ignores the fact that Palestine/Israel is a Jewish state; the second model has a chance of success because it has the potential to lead to the transformation of Palestine/Israel from a Jewish state to a nonethnic Palestinian state. This transformation will become possible when the Arabs start to resist the Jewish state in the same way that the Blacks went about resisting the White state in apartheid South Africa: at its roots and from within, by demanding to be included in the state as full citizens. For reasons outlined above, Israel will not be able to count on the permanent assistance of the United States in repulsing such an attack on the exclusively Jewish character of the state.

If the Arab population is to base its struggle on the demand for a nonethnic Palestinian state, it will have to free itself from Arab nationalism. The desire of the Arab bourgeoisie to be a national ruling class in a purely Arab state (where they would be protected from competition from, and probable subordination to, the Jewish bourgeoisie) prevents this, however. The combined Israeli-U.S. effort to help the PLO impose the "Palestinian Authority" on the Arab population of WBG thus constitutes outside intervention in an intra-Arab class struggle.

The immediate choice facing progressive Arabs is clear: overcome the obstacle of the Arab bourgeoisie and its self-serving ideology of Arab nationalism, or accept the permanence of the "immovable object" of unconditional U.S. support for the Jewish state. Westerners who oppose racism can help them by exposing the trap of the "occupied territories" paradigm, by refusing to take the bantustan leadership of the PLO seriously, by calling on our governments to break diplomatic relations with and impose economic sanctions on Israel until it grants equal rights to its Arab population, and by calling on the private sector to divest from Israel until it abolishes Zionist apartheid.

NOTES

1. Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p. 259.

2. As a religious term, *Yisra'el* means "the Jews." It is also popularly used as an abbreviation of *Eretz Yisra'el*, or "the land of the Jews."

3. On 18 March 1994, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Madeline Albright stated that "We simply do not support the description of the territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 war as occupied Palestinian territory." She also stated that "while my government reaffirms our view that the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 12 August 1949, applies to territories* occupied by Israel since 1967, we oppose the specific reference to Jerusalem in this resolution and will continue to oppose its insertion in future resolutions." Albright quoted President Clinton to the effect that Jerusalem "is a matter for the parties to decide, and in accord with the declaration, it is something to be ultimately decided at a later point." In other words, Israel will withdraw from East Jerusalem only if it wants to. Quoted in *JPS* 23, no. 4 (Summer 1994), pp. 151-52.

In 1972, the Israeli-Jewish anti-Zionist activist Uri Davis wrote, "How could we be so ridiculously naive? How evident it is in retrospect . . . that ever since the annexation of East Jerusalem with the tacit consent of all major powers (coupled, of course, with loud indignant condemnation), the post-1967 Israeli occupation is there to stay." Uri Davis, "Journey Out of Zionism," *JPS* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1972), p. 68.

[* Note the absence of the definite article: This leaves open the possibility that the Fourth Geneva Convention could be determined retroactively to have applied only to the Golan Heights, which, along with WBG, have been occupied since 1967.]

4. Noam Chomsky writes that the United States adopted this interpretation of Resolution 242 in 1971, when Israel rejected UN mediator Gunnar Jarring's proposal for peace between Israel and Egypt based on Israel's full withdrawal to the pre-1967 border. The United States endorsed Israel's rejection of the Jarring plan after Egypt had accepted it. Quoting Haim Bar-Lev, Chomsky states that "Since 1971, the U.S. and Israel have been virtually alone in rejecting the standard interpretation of the withdrawal clause of UN 242. The basic cause for the misery and suffering that followed is their conviction, which has proven to be true, that 'if we continue to hold out, we will obtain more.'"

Noam Chomsky, "The Israel-Arafat Agreement," *Z Magazine*, October 1993, p. 20.

5. Article 14 of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) states that "Jurisdiction of the Council will cover West Bank and Gaza Strip* territory The two sides view the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as a single territorial unit, whose integrity will be preserved during the interim period." Article V.3 dealing with negotiations over the permanent status of WBG says that Jerusalem and "borders" are among the things to be discussed. In other words, East Jerusalem will be considered part of the West Bank if Israel agrees. Apart from Jerusalem, WBG as referred to in the Declaration will include those lands in their entirety as they were when Israel seized them in 1967—if Israel agrees to that in the discussions on "borders." For the text of the DOP, see *JPS* 23, no. 1 (Autumn 1993), pp. 115-21.

[* Note again the absence of the definite article.]

6. Donald Neff, "Clinton places US policy at Israel's bidding," *Middle East International*, 31 March 1995, pp. 15-16.

7. It is true that the majority of Israeli Jews are of non-European origin, but even Jews from such lands as Yemen and Ethiopia, when they immigrate to Palestine/Israel, assimilate into Israeli-Jewish society, which is essentially a European industrial society. (This is not to deny the alienation Jewish immigrants from non-European countries have experienced and the color discrimination which undeniably takes place within the Jewish community.)

8. Population estimates and projections are in *Facts and Figures About the Palestinians* (Washington: Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, 1993), p. 4.

9. Incidentally, if we accept the 1986 estimate of a total Arab Palestinian population of 4,880,518 and assume that that population has remained completely stable since then, and if we accept the estimate of 4.5 million for the present Jewish population, we come up with a total population of 9,380,518, of whom 52 percent are Arabs.

10. In fact, by unconditionally recognizing the State of Israel and by failing to define the borders of the Arab state it aspires to establish, the PLO has legally recognized the post-1967 borders as the borders of the State of Israel. However, it feels obliged to make an outward show of adhering to the "occupied territories" paradigm in case Israel decides to accord the "Palestinian Authority" diplomatic recognition as a "sovereign state."