[Israel: fascism or apartheid?](http://alternativenews.org/index.php/comment/165-israel-fascism-or-apartheid)

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Handwringing about Israel’s transformation into a fascist state problematically glosses over the fact that it has implemented apartheid since its inception.

In an online conversation concerning the regime in Israel, my friend wrote: “I find it difficult to determine what is worse from a moral perspective: a fascist regime or an apartheid regime?” To the best of my understanding, a fascist regime elevates one social group over all other groups. An apartheid regime, on the other hand, degrades the status of a social group. But, I don't know which is worse and I won’t compare between these two horrible phenomena for the sake of arriving at an abstract moral determination. Rather, I want to attempt to understand these social orders in order to struggle against them.

Embedded within my friend's question is an assumption that both phenomena already inform the characterization of the state of Israel. Indeed, both characterizations of Israel are constantly mentioned. But, I wish to cast doubt on their shared existence in Israel. So, which of them – apartheid or fascism – is absent?

*Apartheid*

One possible understanding of Israel as an apartheid state derives from the fact that the fundamental laws of the country distinguish between Jews and non-Jews, just as the basic laws of South Africa distinguished between whites and non-whites. In Israel, discriminatory legislation commenced immediately upon its acceptance to the United Nations and signing of ceasefire agreements with neighboring Arab countries: Absentee Property Law (1950); Law of Return (1950); Law for the Status of the World Zionist Organization/the Jewish Agency (1952); Law of the Jewish National Fund (1953); conventions between the government of Israel and the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency (1954); Basic Law for Israel Lands (1960); Law of Israel Lands Administration (1960); convention between the government of Israel and the Jewish National Fund (1961); Law of Agricultural Settlement (1967); and more. These laws create a clear distinction between Jews and non-Jews.

The cruel implications of apartheid legislation on the indigenous population were harsher in Israel in comparison to their parallels in South Africa. While in South Africa's apartheid, 87 percent of all land under state sovereignty was designated in accordance with the “whites only” law, in the state of Israel 93 percent of land within the borders of the 1949 armistice agreement ("the green line") is designated in accordance with the “Jews only” law. In this context, it must be noted that village communities established by the state of Israel throughout its almost seventy years of existence (kibbutzs, moshavs and community villages) set up “acceptance committees” to screen who could move into the village. This selection process is meant first and foremost to prevent Arab families from buying homes and lots in the communities.

The legislators of apartheid in South Africa did not make due with theft of land and natural resources from the indigenous population; they went even further, legislating racial separation laws, dubbed “petty apartheid:” separate toilets, separate lines and so on. Unlike their counterparts in South Africa, Israeli legislators make due with laws distinguishing between Jews and Arabs in areas that relate to the heart of Zionist settlement: citizenship, lands and water – all of these were reserved for Jews only. The avoidance of the Israeli legislator from implementing “petty apartheid” laws provided Israel with a significant advantage: since its establishment, Israel has succeeded in blurring its global branding as an apartheid state and marketing the great lie of the “only democracy in the Middle East.”

According to this analysis, the occupation of 1967 – i.e. Israel's taking over of the Golan Heights, West Bank and Gaza Strip – was not the beginning of new kind of apartheid in the occupied territories, but the cruel expansion of apartheid into these territories that was already alive and kicking elsewhere. Since the Palestinian society in the new territories did not break apart like the indigenous population in 1948 but commenced immediate resistance, the Israeli means of oppression became increasingly brutal. The establishment of two legal systems in the 1967 territories, one for Jews and the other for the indigenous population, was just another rung on the ladder of institutional apartheid in the state of the Jews, a process that began with its establishment.

*Fascism*

And what about fascism? Historical experience teaches that fascism is created when a capitalist-bourgeois regime cannot continue ruling via a democratic parliament due to a strengthening of the threatening power of the working class. In this situation, anti-democratic and anti-workers forces, which exist in every society, erupt into the political scene, attack the working class, erase its achievements, destroy its organizations, annul its parties, outlaw its leaders and occasionally even kill them. This takeover of the state apparatus permits the capitalist market to begin functioning again, and on the way the private property regime is strengthened and civil rights are replaced by loyalty to the homeland.

Robert Paxton, whose book *the Anatomy of Fascism* established him as the expert on fascism, objects to the aforementioned description of the character of fascism due to his hostility to class analysis. Yet, he admits that in all cases of fascist takeovers the murderous oppression of the working class repeats itself.

There is no need for a special effort to conclude that the Israeli working class does not threaten the piggish Israeli capitalist system: its organizations are weak, its achievements negligible and the vast majority are not organized and do not even manage to live in dignity from their work. While the working class is continuously defending itself from years of extortion and privatization, its institutions do not challenge the employers' regime or the government. The sole democratic trade union in Israel, Koach Laovdim (Power to the Workers), is too small to threaten the social order; and the replacement for the largest trade union in Israel, the Histradut, serves as one of the pillars of the Israeli regime and acts more like a corporation than a trade union. The Histradut is a full partner to privatization, division of the working class and creation of a reserve unit of industry, which pressures salaries downwards.

What brings, therefore, the Zionist left and its teachers, like Ze'ev Sternhall (see, for example, his article[the Birth of Fascism](http://hagada.org.il/2016/08/10/_____-_____-__-________/) in Haaretz) to determine that we are at the height of a fascist takeover of the “Jewish and democratic” state? What motivates them to assume that if we end the occupation, establish a Palestinian state, separate Palestinians lives’ from ours, and leave them to manage whatever is left of their lives in what will become an ad hoc Bantustan, then we Israelis can go back to living in a democratic state just like we allegedly did in the past? Only self-illusion, intellectual laziness and the fear of the privileged.

After all, if it’s under the wings of fascism that we stand, there is no need to deal with the oxymoron of “a Jewish and democratic state” or with its reality as an apartheid state. It is also possible to ignore the fact that in the 19 years of “small, good Israel” (i.e. from its establishment until 1967) it was an apartheid framework, the laws of which distinguished between Jews and non-Jews and took Arabs’ land for the good of another nation. It appears that an analysis of reality is not the foundation of political positions, but the opposite: political plans create a deformed explanation of the reality.

Professor Sternhall is the most prominent public figure amongst those who believe it is possible to halt the fascist takeover of Israel through dismantling the settlements and establishing a Palestinian state. So said the man who specialized in the research of fascism in an interview with journalist Gidi Weitz in August 2014: “[Israel] is today the last colonial state in the western world. How long will this go on? If it wasn't for memories of the Holocaust, the fear of the charge of anti-Semitism, Europe would have boycotted the settlements long ago.” Indeed, every word in this statement is true. So, why does Sternhall support the two-state idea? In his words:

To prevent there being here one state, because one state… will be an apartheid regime…. It will be an apartheid state in which we will control the Arabs without the this dimension of temporality which still exists concerning the territories, even though everyone I speak with and everyone who can see understands that the temporality disappeared long ago, and the situation in the West Bank is a situation of apartheid.

Sternhall is correct in his assertion that Israel is the last colonial state existing in the world due to the munificence of the West. He fears one state: a Jewish state that is an apartheid state. He determines that a situation of apartheid exists in the West Bank, but isn’t willing to accept that this situation is not limited to the West Bank. Apartheid exists in all of the present-day Israel. His support for the idea of “two states for two peoples” derives not only from his fears, but also due to his opposition as a Zionist to the idea of a secular, democratic state across all of the land, with full equality between Jews and Arabs, the return of refugees and truly equal citizenship.

Moreover, Sternhall refuses to understand that a majority of the anti-democratic laws promoted in recent years were intended to stabilize the relations of the apartheid state with its non-Jewish citizens (the reasons for this will be discussed in another article). Despite being one of the sole intellectuals fighting against what the state is doing to the indigenous people, his Zionist position limits his ability to understand that the Jewish state must be replaced. A Jewish state – like a Christian state in Europe’s past, or like every Muslim state – must divide its subjects into groups with privileges and others with fewer rights and even no rights. Only a secular democratic state that welcomes equally the entire population ruled over by Israel today as well as the refugees Israel created can answer the national question of the Jewish Israelis. Only a secular democratic state can untie the Gordian knot that binds Zionism and settlement “nationality” to the Jewish religion.

Read Michel Warschawski’s response to this article titled [Apartheid, Fascism – But Mostly Colonialism](http://www.alternativenews.org/index.php/comment/151-apartheid-fascism-but-mostly-colonialism).

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