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Review Paper

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“*Israel’s Occupation*”

By Neve Gordon

University of California Press, October 2008

“*Changing Boundaries and Social Crisis: Israel and the 1967 War*”

By Joel Migdal

University of California Press, 2000

“*Beyond Compare*”

By Julie Peteet

Middle East Report, 2009

“*Creeping Apartheid in Israel Palestine*”

By Oren Yiftachel

Middle East Report, 2009

Israel and Palestine: Separation Tactics

 Since the Six-Day War in 1967, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has intensified because of measures taken to control the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. The purpose of this essay is to argue that separation is the central mechanism used by the Israeli government to colonize and control the occupied territories. The essay will discuss how and why the Israeli government instituted policies of control to divide the Palestinian population and separate them from their territory. Then it will reveal what resulted from this “separation” of the Palestinians. After explaining the separation tactics and their effects on the Palestinian population, the essay will examine how Israel continues to employ these methods today and how they eerily resemble Apartheid in South Africa.

The Israeli government established separating policies in the occupied territories (OT) to control the Palestinians via boundary changes, land seizures, restrictions on development, and fragmentation of society. These policies separated the Palestinians from not only the rights to their land, but also from the political and economic spheres in Israel. Migdal’s piece focuses on separation in the context of boundary changes and political and economic exclusion. Gordon’s book addresses separation in the form of fragmentation of society, land seizures, and separation principles. Lastly, Yiftachel and Peteet will discuss the comparison between the human rights violations in the OT to apartheid.

In his article, Joel Migdal discusses the physical boundaries of Israel and how their expansion excluded the Palestinians politically and economically in the occupied territories. He mentions how the original intention for the occupied territories was to return them “in exchange for peace and recognition”. However, the choice of what to do with the OT, gave Israeli officials the opportunity to expand their territory. The expansion of Israel’s territories would cause social crisis because it would call for a redefining of what society should be. According to Migdal, society became “ethnonational” for all Jews, meaning it was ethnic in nature and not civic. Thus the state and society excluded the many Palestinians living in the territories. They were denied citizenship and had no voice in society or politics. Economically, Israeli war policy led to a high number of low-wage Palestinian workers in the occupied territories. Migdal says that this unskilled mass of laborers was restricted in where they could work and economic mobility was difficult. This perpetuated the economic misfortunes of the Palestinians. Their exclusion from the skilled labor market signified a social gap that visibly separated them from the Israeli population.

Like Migdal, Neve Gordon talks about separation barriers and Israel’s plans to change boundaries. Unlike Migdal, Gordon believes that there was no original intention to return the OT. In his book, Gordon, an Israeli academic, argues that Israel’s policies before the second intifada gave the “statist illusion” of a temporary presence in the OT, but were speciously benevolent. For example, Israeli policies and agencies helped Palestinians build and run universities. However, the information going into and coming out of these universities was highly regulated. When Palestinians left the universities they could not actually use the knowledge they received. Furthermore, Gordon argues that the Israeli government was implementing policies that attempted to normalize and legitimize the occupation in order to push for a permanent presence in the occupied territories.

In the context of separation, Gordon stresses the contradictions that the Israelis created by instituting fragmentation policies. He begins with identifying how the occupation started as colonization and then, after the second intifada, the occupation shifted to adopt policies of separation. The distinction he makes between colonization principles and separation principles is based on how the Israeli government implemented their policies. The colonization principles, according to Gordon, are a means of extracting resources from an area while managing the population there. This implies the “statist illusion” of temporariness when the Israeli government gave the impression that they cared about the Palestinian population. On the other hand, the separation principles are a means of extracting resources from an area without regards to the present population. During this time, the Israeli government made it clear that they were interested in incorporating the OT into their recognized land. They became less covert with their tactics and cared less about Palestinian casualties.

Gordon misleadingly implies that colonization and separation are completely different movements in Israeli control. However, separation was probably a controlling apparatus used for the colonization rather than a completely different political maneuver. Still, Gordon’s book provides key evidence as to how the Israeli government used the victory in 1967 to covertly seize the OT from the Palestinian population. They did this by implementing policies aimed at fragmenting Palestinian society.

The Israeli government employed various methods of control to fragment Palestinian society. As mentioned previously, the Israeli government played a large role in the education systems in the OT. They regulated the textbooks, what was taught, and how it was taught. By doing this they attempted to disassociate the Palestinian population from their sense of heritage or shared history. Another example of fragmentation policy is the use of permits. During the “permit regime” Palestinians had to have and carry permits to work, reside, and publish in the OT. These permits allowed the General Security Services to closely monitor and keep track of Palestinians. Policies such as these were meant to separate and fragment the population itself. However, the Palestinian population gained solidarity through the shared experience of Israeli repression. For example, because they could not learn about their shared history in school, students made extra efforts to learn outside of school. Though these policies failed at fragmenting the population, they still succeeded in restricting movement and development.

Gordon says that when the Israeli government extended the regional and municipal boundaries of the West Bank they restricted and diminished Palestinian land. This brings us to land seizures and their effects on the Palestinians. Land seizures separate the Palestinians from their land, displacing or relocating them. The Israeli government would seize land in many ways such as “confiscating land for public needs” or “declaring land to be absentee property”. The Palestinians had less land to move throughout and less land to farm. This took a toll on their economic output. In addition, Palestinians needed special authorization to travel through closed areas in the settlements and within the boundaries. These policies, as Gordon and Migdal say, literally separated the Palestinian population from the Israeli population both physically and economically.

Separation principles spread the Israeli idea that there is an “us” and there is a “them”, perpetuating the conflict more. Gordon stressed that the separation principles were marked by attacks on Palestinian infrastructure, such as roads and schools. The Israeli government is trying to use the resources to which Palestinians have access. The Israeli military presence decreased not because of decrease in control, but rather a shift in the method of controlling. All this led to a further contraction of Palestinian space, largely due to the creation of the separation barrier. The separation barrier is outside the Green Line, the internationally recognized Israeli territory. This barrier is a physical fence that limits the movement of the Palestinians within their own land. The Israeli government uses the separation barrier to make claims to land and “separate” it from the Palestinian people.

Gordon believes the unjust separation of the Palestinian population is a violation of human rights and therefore supports the apartheid theory in Israel like Oren Yiftachel and Julie Peteet. Their articles both relate the treatment of the Palestinian people to apartheid in South Africa. Their theory of Israeli Apartheid serves as evidence of colonization. Apartheid is defined as a division of the population based on ethnic or racial characteristics that involves the creation of special reserves or the confiscation of land. Using the term Apartheid is controversial because, as Gordon points out, the separation of Israeli and Palestinian population is covert and not so blatant. In South Africa, separation was overtly state-sanctioned. Yiftachel supports the argument that methods of separation were used for colonization. He brings up the concept of “ethnocratic colonialism”. Petee stresses that Apartheid is a good comparison to separation in Israel, but that it is unique in its own way. She suggests giving it the name “hafrada” which is the Hebrew word for separation.

This evidence begs the question: why has Israel been able to get away with such a gross infraction of international law? Perhaps it is because the Jews have usually been on the receiving end of discrimination. Maybe, the western support of Israel is another factor. The United States did not support South Africa during Apartheid so how can they support Israel now. Arguments of apartheid also bring in the question of Palestinian identity. Apartheid implies racial discrimination, but do the Palestinians constitute a separate race? Palestinian identity and nationalism have undoubtedly been affected by the separation of the population. They share experiences and resentment towards the Israeli government but this obviously does not make them a different race. Gordon infers that Palestinian identity is convoluted because it is both fragmented and unified.

The Israeli government used separation as a mechanism to control the Palestinian population in the occupied territory. Essentially, the separation of the Palestinians from the political sphere, economic sphere, society and their land was employed to colonize the Palestinian land. Although the Palestinians are separated from basic rights, they are finding solidarity in shared experiences. There are very few plausible solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A two-state solution is incredibly improbable. However, Gordon and Yiftachel both suggest a one-state solution in which Palestinians and Israelis coexist with equality. Ironically, Israeli attempts to separate the Palestinian population will end up failing if a one-state system is adopted. Of course, this goal is very hard for Israeli’s to accept. On one hand, they cannot claim to be democratic and have two different governing systems for the two different populations. On the other hand, they do not want to lose the power and the pride they have in having a solely Jewish state.