

Canada and Israel - Partners in Racial and Humanitarian Crimes

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Global Research, October 12, 2014

[Foreign Policy Journal](#) 9 October 2014

Region: [Canada, Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [History](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

As most of the world has duly noted, Canada under the neo-Conservative Harper regime has been a front-runner in supporting Israel in its racial apartheid policies in Israel. Also recently a discussion comparing South Africa's apartheid system with that of Israel has occurred with South African testimony indicating that while they are not the same, they are very similar, and in some circumstances, Israel's apartheid is worse. What is not seen is Canada's role in modeling apartheid for South Africa under the Afrikaner-dominated National Party. Canada's role in developing these systems of apartheid has been seldom noted academically, and is given very little attention either domestically or internationally.

It is generally recognized that North America was a series of colonies from Great Britain, France, Spain, and Russia with a few Dutch thrown into the mix. The first 'discoverers' of America, the Norse Vikings, died out through their lack of ability to adapt to the climatic changes that overtook them. The later colonial settlers survived in part because they did accept the graciousness of the indigenous peoples in assisting them, from which Canada and the U.S. derive their respective national holiday, Thanksgiving.

However, right from the start, these colonial-settler immigrants created myths that allowed them to overrun the native populations without too many qualms about the abuses they perpetrated. Religion, race, and government policies all had a great deal to do with this. The two main myths directed at the Indians of North America can be located elsewhere in the world where colonial-settler populations have invaded. The first myth is that North America was a vast empty land filled with riches to be exploited by the newcomers. Somewhat in contradiction to that is the myth that the Indians were primitives, needing to be civilized, a notion that included religion, land ownership, and the rule of white man's law.

The reality of history is much more disconcerting for those concerned about human rights and the nature of our societies, as they were, and as they exist today. I will not deal with the history of the natives population in the U.S., although it is interrelated with that of Canada. It is generally recognized that after the era of glorious movie westerns celebrating the settlement of the empty plains and mountains, the reality is that of a steady policy of genocide, racism, and warfare against the native people while capitalist ownership of land subjugated the landscape.

Canada's native history

Canada's story is a bit different, especially as perceived in comparison to that of the U.S. It is true we do not have the same degree of violent history over the native population, but it is a history that nonetheless is still violent, genocidal, and racist. Current events reflect that

it is still violent, if of a different form, and still very much racist, although covered over with all sorts of ignorant platitudes. Unfortunately as well, the vestiges of apartheid still hang on within Canadian governance, never described as such, with the blame for its human rights abuses being blamed mainly on the recipients of that abuse – racism at its most civilized.

These thoughts all coalesced this summer while I was travelling across Canada. Somewhere along the line (literally – I went by train) I bought a powerful, damning critique of Canadian government policy during the era of Canada’s colonial settlement years across Canada’s vast resource rich prairie region. *Clearing the Plains – Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*, (University of Regina Press, 2013), written by James Daschuk, is a study of the Canadian settlement in relation to the early fur trade up to the time when the railroads opened up the plains for the large settler populations from Europe, most from eastern Europe. The title is very indicative of the content, and as I read it I was also reminded of Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs, and Steel – The Fates of Human Societies* (Norton & Company, 1999).

It is Diamond’s middle term, germs, that plays a significant role in Canada’s history, although guns and steel had their fair share, and all were tied into political policies of the day.

By the time the fur traders arrived in the Prairie region of Canada, epidemics of European origin had already swept through many of the tribes, decimating a population that had not previously been exposed to them. While this is an attribute of all peoples not previously exposed to particular microbes, the problem in Canada was significantly increased by both a lack of interest in native health – other than for labour for harvesting the beaver pelts – and later a government official policy of ‘near starvation.’

Without their historical access to food as the buffalo herds were decimated as a foodstock for the early traders and settlers, and without reliable water resources as the beaver population was decimated for the leisure class in Europe, the natives were highly susceptible to foreign microbes as malnutrition compromised their immune systems. As the fur trade progressed in its many facets, then died out to be replaced by the railroads and settlements, the vectors for transmission of disease increased. As the vectors increased, so did the government policies of starvation and apartheid.

Our current neo-Conservative government loves to promote the achievements of Sir John A. Macdonald, considered the ‘father of confederation.’ It is perhaps not surprising then that their current attitudes towards the native population are reminiscent of their political heritage. It was Sir John A. MacDonald who said, “We cannot allow them to die for want of food....[We] are doing all we can, by refusing food until the Indians are on the verge of starvation, to reduce the expense.”

The Liberals were not significantly different as opposition to the government. They were

“an important factor in constraining the government expenditures on the Indian population....the prime minister pre-empted criticism by promising to keep the hungry from dying, but assuring the House that his government would be “rigid, even stingy” in the distribution of food.”

This pretence of financial responsibility was of course part and parcel of the countries policy of settlement of the prairies. Along with this simple policy of starvation were several other

factors (such as the lack of immunities mentioned above) that were part of Canada's racial apartheid policy.

Reservations

Today, much of Canada has no recognizable Indian territories other than the small parcels of land allocated to the various remaining band populations under the Indian Act (1876). This Act purportedly provided the Queen's protection for the natives including the enforcement of the various treaties that ceded huge swaths of territory to the Canadian government. These reservations have a history of being revoked, resettled, cut-off, redrawn, leaving mostly small remnants of generally poorer geographical areas for native use.

The treaties themselves were and are generally treated as inconveniences for the government and were not much more than lip service for their underlying articles for rights and assistance. The Indian Act placed the native population under the care of the 'crown', the government, and has been used as a device to control and limit native power rather than to uphold treaty obligations: "To Canadian officials, the widespread occupation of reserves had another benefit: it greatly facilitated their control of the population." This was managed in several ways along with the official policy of starvation.

Agricultural practices were one factor. Although encouraged to settle and take up farming, the government controlled agricultural practices,

An order in council was passed to forbid the inhabitants of reserves from "selling, bartering, exchanging or giving any person or persons whatsoever, any grain, or root crops, or any other produce grown on any Indian Reserve in the Northwest territories [as the prairie regions was then called]." The move was intended to preserve locally grown food for the communities that produced it, but it also had the effect of barring reserve farmers from participating in the commercial economy of the northwest.

As usual the excuse for the action and the intended effect are contradictory. The ultimate idea "was not that the Indian should become self-supporting. He was only to be kept quiet till the country filled up when his ill will could be ignored."

Settlements

With the arrival of the railways, sections of land were given to immigrants in order to establish an agricultural economy. This was done through providing the railways themselves with enormous tracts of land, and relocating the natives.

The most significant relocation was the forced removal of communities from their chosen reserves in the Cypress Hills after the decision to build the Canadian Pacific Railway along the southern prairies....In doing so, the Canadian government accomplished the ethnic cleansing of southwestern Saskatchewan of its indigenous population.

Starvation was a tool within this policy as "Rations were deliberately withheld until the chief capitulated."

Another factor of control was the institution of a pass system. With a pass, the natives were given certain rights subject to the Indian Act and ultimate control by the government. It was "perhaps the most onerous regulation placed on the Indians after the

rebellion,"...implemented to limit the mobility of treaty Indians, keeping them on their reserves and away from European communities."

Culture

Once the land was removed – and the land is essential to any indigenous people's culture – the cultural attributes of the indigenous people were attacked. Foremost among these efforts were the Residential schools controlled mainly by the Catholic and Anglican religions (paid for by the government) that followed the white man into the prairies. Native languages and religious rituals were forbidden, visitations were limited, the program of minimal nourishment and lack of health care continued, the latter contributing to many unrecorded deaths among the native children. Along with these limitations and prohibitions, the religious orders created a situation ripe for sexual abuse and assault. These institutions existed until as late as 1996 when the last one was closed down.

Beyond the residential schools, band based religious practices were forbidden. Indigenous rights to access courts were forbidden. The right to vote did not arrive fully until 1960; before then if a native were to vote, their treaty rights – such as they were – were revoked, another means to control the reserve populations.

Disease continues

Racism was easily inculcated into the settlers across the prairies as by the time they arrived in the late Nineteenth Century, they were witness to the nadir of native health and culture. What they saw was a population decimated by disease, incapable of supporting themselves, unkempt and "uncivilized". They did not know or care to know the conditions that had reduced the once self-sufficient and culturally whole tribes to a state of haggard dependency on an uncaring government.

The Indian Act still controls the reserve system and is still used and abused by the government to control the native population. While outright starvation is not a serious problem, modern diseases – AIDS, diabetes, alcoholism, suicide – are significantly higher in native populations than in the rest of Canada.

Education is still used as a tool to manipulate both the native people and the opinions of the non-native population. The latter is managed by the latent racism that is not far below the surface of many Canadians of all political stripes, very clearly seen in response to protests or demonstrations, especially with the "Silent no more" actions.

Economic activity is another tool used to manipulate the current native populations. Individual economic agreements with bands are attempts to both divide the populations in the bands as well as get around Treaty requirements and other Federal or Provincial regulations in many aspects of the economy from agriculture to mining and forestry. Money is still used as a manipulator, with promises and conditions being put forward that overall are attempts by the government to destroy the resurgence in native culture, to destroy its ability to use constitutional law against the government.

The Canadian apartheid system is still alive. It is not as demonstrative or obvious as that of Israel or formerly of South Africa, but it still exists as a construct within Canadian governance. As concluded by Daschuk,

While Canadians see themselves as world leaders in social welfare, health care, and

economic development, most reserves in Canada are economic backwaters with little prospect of material advancement and more in common with the third world than the rest of Canada.

Apartheid in South Africa

As I indicated above, I will not discuss the relationships, differences, and commonalities between South Africa and Canada and Israel. There are two recent works that discuss Israeli apartheid in comparison to South African apartheid that I have read: *Battle for Justice in Palestine* (Haymarket Press, 2014) and *The Anatomy of Zionist Apartheid* (Porcupine Press, SA, 2013). Both provide the obvious evidence for the state of apartheid in Israel, with valid comparisons to South Africa.

There is however a Canadian link. Officially Canada opposed South Africa's apartheid system, but underneath trade and economic business carried on as usual. Canada only went against it when popular opinion became too strong to resist as a political platform. The real tie to South African apartheid is not at this level, but comes from South Africa modelling the Canadian reserve system and its instruments in order to implement apartheid in South Africa.

Notwithstanding this self-congratulatory revisionism, Canada mostly supported apartheid in South Africa. First, by providing it with a model. South Africa patterned its policy towards Blacks after Canadian policy towards First Nations. *Ambiguous Champion* [University of Toronto Press, 1997] explains, "South African officials regularly came to Canada to examine reserves set aside for First Nations, following colleagues who had studied residential schools in earlier parts of the century."
<http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/12/10/canadas-role-in-the-apartheid-struggle/>

More recently Thomas Mulcair, as opposition leader to the current neo-Cons, commenting after the passing of Nelson Mandela,

makes a fairly direct comparison between South Africa's apartheid regime and Canada's treatment of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. He's not wrong, either — in fact, the apartheid system was based on Canada's Indian Act. Our residential schools, Indian Reserve and many other deeply racist systems inspired South Africa's oppressive regime. I'm glad that at least one of our federal leaders has (somewhat) acknowledged this in their remarks on Mandela's death.
http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/anne-theriault-/canadas-apartheid_b_4468449.html

Thus for all of Canada's rhetoric about apartheid in South Africa and its rhetoric in support of Israeli and therefore its apartheid, there is a strong linkage demonstrating the positive role Canada has had in creating and maintaining the apartheid systems.

Israel's apartheid

Apartheid in Israel is obvious to anyone reading about how the overall cultural-geopolitical landscape is managed. Accompanying apartheid, ethnic cleansing has also occurred, on a scale probably larger and more violent than occurred in Canada; genocide has not been a significant factor in Israel yet (other than used as an ongoing excuse for being the global victim of ethnic hatred), but was a considerable factor in Canada.

Certainly there are similarities and differences. Israel, like Canada, is a colonial-settler

country, with the original Zionist philosophers clearly recognizing the problem of an already existing population in Palestine. Theodore Herzl recognized it clearly, advocating the ethnic cleansing of the region,

“Spirit the penniless population across the frontier by denying it employment... Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.” Theodore Herzl, founder of the World Zionist Organization, speaking of the Arabs of Palestine, Complete Diaries, June 12, 1895 entry.

Ben Gurion also warned in 1948 after the independence war and the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their villages and towns, “We must do everything to insure they (the Palestinians) never do return.” Assuring his fellow Zionists that Palestinians will never come back to their homes, “The old will die and the young will forget.”

The lie of denial of an existing population, reminiscent of North America’s ‘unoccupied’ lands is frequently quoted from Golda Meier: “How can we return the occupied territories? There is nobody to return them to.” Golda Maier, March 8, 1969; “There was no such thing as Palestinians, they never existed.” Golda Maier, Israeli Prime Minister, June 15, 1969.

Cultural apartheid

Apartheid is a construct that includes both cultural and geographical elements. The idea of ethnic cleansing and the denial of existence as above is one such factor. There are many others.

Strangely enough, the idea of starvation as a manipulator of populations has been one of the more recent manifestations of Israeli policy, most particularly as directed against Gaza. Dov Weisglass, advisor to Ehud Olmert stated, “The idea,” he said, “is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger.” Sounds strangely familiar to Canada’s policy of the Nineteenth century.

Canada somehow calculated what it thought were minimal survival rations for its indigenous populations, and it appears that Israel carried that forward with even more mathematical precision,

While the health ministry determined that Gazans needed a daily average of 2,279 calories each to avoid malnutrition – requiring 170 lorries a day – military officials then found a host of pretexts to whittle the number down to a fraction of the original figure.

The reality was that, in this period, an average of only 67 lorries – much less than half of the minimum requirement – entered Gaza daily. This compared to more than 400 lorries before the blockade began.

<http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/the-starvation-diet-for-gaza-shows-the-blockade-will-fall#full>

Other cultural factors

Racism, ethnic cleansing, starvation are manifestations of cultural policies that support apartheid and its purposes. The purpose in Israel, unlike Canada, is the great demographic fear of the burgeoning Arab population within Israel and cantonized Palestine.

There are many other cultural factors that come into play, similar in several respects to

Canada's apartheid system.

Education is controlled centrally, and the knowledge base allowed for Palestinian education ignores completely the 'nakba' and its ethnic cleansing and instances of mass murder. Islam is obviously an ongoing religious base for the Palestinians, but it is increasingly demonized as an ideology of evil, resulting in the ever present rhetoric of an existential threat. Many laws are discriminatory, with rulings on land ownership, residency, marriage, mobility, and other facets of civilian life being restricted by Israeli courts.

Most Palestinians live under military rule where civilian law simply does not exist. Movement of any kind, and daily life can all be controlled at the whim of regional military personnel and/or Shin Bet.

Geographical apartheid

The reality of apartheid however is the physical setting. Racism and ethnic hatred can spread throughout cultural systems and can support apartheid, but they are not apartheid itself. Israel is clearly an apartheid state from its actions on the ground. These have been well explained in many, many books and articles over the past several decades.

The physical landscape of apartheid is clearly visible in Israel. The euphemistic 'wall' is one of the larger barriers, supposedly to keep out 'terrorists' but in reality enclosing prime settlements, agricultural lands, and water sources. The settlements are designed to capture and hold prime landscapes for demographic control as well as resource control, physically grabbing land and effectively denying the validity of a two state solution with a contiguous Palestinian state. Roads are built that bypass Palestinian settlements, providing both a barrier to Palestinian movement and a continuous web of encroachment and encirclement of Palestinian villages and farmlands. The indiscriminate destruction of Palestinian housing on various trumped up civilian rules and on military authorizations to evict resistance fighters slowly clears land to be later incorporated into Israeli settlements using various laws concerning land usage and residency.

Gaza

Looking at a map of areas 'controlled' by Palestine reveals a largely diminished and fragmented series of bantustan style areas remaining. The West Bank is ostensibly under the rule of Abbas, but its apartheid nature is still clear from the descriptions given above. Gaza is the largest indicator of Israeli apartheid, and an indicator of the viciousness of Israeli apartheid.

Starvation as a policy is directly applied – and acknowledged – as a control mechanism for Gaza. Gaza is technically not occupied but all of its land, sea, and air space is controlled by Israeli military force. It is in essence a large concentration camp, completely controlled in all its physical aspects by Israel.

The ultimate purpose of Israeli apartheid is similar to that of Canada, the Palestinians are "to be kept quiet till the country filled up when his ill will could be ignored." That purpose cannot be realized without much violence: Canada's indigenous population is very small in comparison the overall population; Gaza in particular and the Palestinians in general are about on par with the Israeli population, but with a higher birth rate that, as always, gives the big demographic threat to the idea of a unitary theological state called Israel.

Partners in apartheid

Apartheid in Israel is a process used to try and eliminate as many Palestinians through emigration as possible, and perhaps the same conditions as in Canada: starvation leading to malnutrition, compromised immune systems, especially among the young, and an eventual and inevitable outbreak of some epidemic.

Fortunately for the Palestinians, the world is watching. Drastic actions, including the past three invasions of Gaza by Israel, are openly observed by the world. The result of all these actions has been an increase in support for Palestinians and a much more critical view of Israel and its national intentions. The boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement have strengthened and Israel is increasingly recognized globally as a threat to Middle East peace.

Canada remains in the forefront of countries supporting Israel. This devolves from Canada's history of Christian Zionism, its support of Britain's colonial systems, and its current neo-Conservative government with its fundamentalist evangelical mythology. On the surface the Harper neo-Conservatives argue in terms of human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and the evil of terror perpetrated by "Islamicism" (Harper's coined term to try and create a pejorative view of Islam). Underneath lies the religious fundamentalism combined with strong support for non-democratic corporate control of governance. Canada has distinct problems with human rights, the ongoing problems with the Indian communities and reserves being the largest, its ongoing support of Israel and its apartheid policies being another.

Final word to Canada's indigenous population

Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, attending the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), an historic two-day meeting, that began on Sept. 22 at the UN General Assembly in New York, summarized Canada's position,

For years, the Harper government has refused to consult indigenous rights-holders on crucial issues, especially when it involves international forums. This repeated failure to consult violates Canada's duty under Canadian constitutional and international law.

In his opening remarks, Ban declared to indigenous peoples from all regions of the world, "You will always have a home at the United Nations." Yet in our own home in Canada, the federal government refuses to respect democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/canada-sets-lowest-standard-at-world-conference-on-indigenous-peoples-1.2779590>

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