

The Battle for Justice in Palestine

Review of Ali Abunimah's book

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Obama's plan: *Let Netanyahu and Abbas "stew in their juices", [Senior White House official tells Haaretz](#) U.S. president hopes that after a few months with no negotiations and less U.S. involvement, both sides will understand it is in their interest to renew talks.*

With the peace talks being dead, what happens in Israel/Palestine? Settlements will continue to be built, dispossession will continue against Palestinians, slowly the "apartheid" context of Israel will become more and more obvious.

While the peace talks were in process, *The Battle for Justice* by Ali Abunimah was published and pre-emptively indicated that the peace process is/was essentially over and done with regardless of ongoing talks. The main context of the book is of the elements of apartheid and the associated boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement (BDS) that is sending disconcerting messages to all the pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian two staters. Not that a two state solution has not been possible in the past, but that it is beyond being a possibility now, leaving essentially two solutions, a single apartheid state (the considered de facto state as it is now) that is proclaimed to be Jewish, or a state with democracy inclusive of equal rights for all its citizens.

In the preface, Abunimah indicates that the Palestinians are winning - not necessarily on the ground where settlements, annexation, blockades, and military rule remains - but winning in the general knowledge of the world from the impact of the BDS movement. The real indicator to this are the many methods and great amount of money and time that is being used to discredit the BDS movement in particular within the U.S.

Comparison

As the U.S. is Israel's largest benefactor, the work starts with a comparison of Israel and the U.S., not the usual demographic statistics (although those are interesting as well), but a comparison based on racial considerations. Racial profiling, discriminatory laws and courts, and the disproportionate prison populations that result, the huge industry of security and surveillance, and the training of security forces (for "interoperability") all play into the comparison.

The underlying basis for it is the colonial-settler mindset: in the U.S. it is African-american/first nations subject to discrimination; in Israel it is Arabs/Palestinians facing discrimination. A populist fear factor from this racial bias (crime, drugs, terror, religion) assists with the cowering and manipulation of the colonial-settler population.

Demographics and apartheid

Demographics is the main concern of Israel. It is the real threat to a “Jewish and democratic state”. Israel does not want two states as that removes part of Eretz Israel from its domain. At the same time, a one state solution being Jewish and democratic is not possible with a resident population of Palestinians that is overtaking the Israeli population. As argued by Abunimah, “The already present reality is a de facto binational state, albeit with apartheid conditions, throughout historic Palestine.”

Two other apartheid states are used as a comparison for Abunimah’s arguments for a one state solution that overcomes apartheid. South Africa and Northern Ireland provide his case, the former an obvious racial apartheid state, the latter a perhaps not so obvious religious apartheid state. The main commonalities to sustain the apartheid status are the creation of the ‘other’ as a mortal threat against a superior society, a demographic threat (obvious in South Africa with its much larger black population), and the creation of a sense of victimhood, that the ‘other’ is the cause of the problems.

The section ends with a return to a comparison within the U.S. of economic apartheid, an awareness of the economic “Jim Crow” that exists in the U.S. and a recognition that South African apartheid was rescinded based on the accession to the Washington consensus economic agenda of neo-liberalism – in other words, the economic status quo of white control would not be interfered with.

Neoliberal Palestine

One of the more interesting parts of the discussion is that of the neoliberal economic patterns that have been imposed on Palestine, especially in the West Bank, although Gaza’s status as a large concentration camp hanging in isolation could be a forewarning of what might come to the U.S. homeland concept of neoliberalism. Regardless of that speculation on my part, Abunimah examines what he calls Fayyad-ism. Salam Fayyad has in the meantime resigned as Prime Minister, a position that he was not elected for (as no member of the current Palestinian governance has been elected).

As a digression from reviewing to commentary, [the New York Times described Fayyad in very positive terms.](#)

Mr. Fayyad, an American-educated economist, had gained the confidence of the West and of many Israelis, building up the credibility of the Palestinian Authority by introducing transparency, accountability and stability. Since being appointed to the premiership in 2007, he has championed law and order in the West Bank after years of chaos and focused on building the institutions of a future state.

The New York Times comment is typical neoliberal hogwash, extolling the virtues of “transparency, accountability and stability” without any sign of any of them. And while he has “has championed law and order in the West Bank” it has been for his Israeli masters at the expense of the Palestinians people, other than the select few PA associates who manage the money.

[The Guardian provided a bit of a rejoinder to that rhetoric.](#)

A former World Bank economist, Fayyad was appointed by a presidential

executive order in 2007 following the collapse of the Palestinian national unity government and Hamas taking control of the Gaza Strip. While he was one of the few senior politicians to frequently visit marginalised communities and ask after their concerns, tax and commodity price hikes repeatedly stoked angry street protests against him.

Palestinian unemployment has risen to almost 25% and real GDP growth is set to fall from an average of 11% in 2010-11 to just 5% in 2013, according to the World Bank.

Apart from the statistics, which coming from the World Bank are presumably rigged as most western economic statistics are rigged, Fayyad was obviously not as popular at home as he was within Israeli circles and international economic circles.

Abunimah provides a clear deconstruction of the economic miracle that was supposedly created in the West Bank. He describes Fayyadism as “glittering illusions” from a “credit fuelled consumptive binge” that depended on foreign aid and credit plus a repressive police state apparatus...to suppress and disarm any resistance to Israeli occupation and to crush internal Palestinian dissent and criticism with increasing ferocity.

Should these policies continue, Palestinians “can only look forward to new, more insidious forms of economic and political bondage.”

The poverty, debt, and dependence created by the neoliberal policies is discussed, highlighting the lack of employment, no real development (i.e. of a manufacturing/industrial/agricultural sense), no direct investment, easy credit creating more debt than income, a high level of inequality, all based on a “construction and consumption binge fueled by easy credit and foreign aid [Qatar and U.S.]”

A new Palestinian settlement of Rawabi highlights the effort to “mask and normalize the worst abuses of occupation.” Fittingly, U.S. style mortgages are considered a “soft power tool” for “explicitly political goals” that “advances U.S. foreign policy.” The economic plans demonstrate a “close integration between the aid and NGO industries...and the advance of neoliberal economics and U.S. hegemony” using policies formulated with the PA elites “behind closed doors with no transparency or democratic process.”

Normal Neoliberalism?

Another aspect of economic normalization (recall that “normalization” was a major part of the reason for the first Intifada) in its current status is allowing Israeli companies to operate in the West Bank, “almost all of which are complicit in Israel’s occupation, apartheid, and denial of fundamental human rights.”

It is a form of Shock Doctrine as described by Naomi Klein, wherein a powerful ruling alliance between a few large corporations and a class of wealthy politicians..facilitated by brutal force, a usurpation of democratic rules and torture...a silent partner in the global free market crusades.”

Two final constructs of neoliberalism are presented. First is the destruction of the economic infrastructure (among other structures) of Gaza, forcing it into a literal underground economy now highly constricted by the new neoliberal order within the Egyptian junta. Secondly, the creation of industrial zones and free market zones serves as a means of controlling and then annexing more and more Palestinian territory.

All this is done for the benefit of large corporations (beyond the obvious benefits to Israel). These zones create areas where Israel and corporations “operate in exploitive ways forbidden in their home territories.” It is time, argues Abunimah, to

abandon the illusion that the formal recognition of a Bantustan-like Palestinian state alongside Israel would do anything to free Palestinians from an exploitative economic system that is already deeply entrenched.

As a final note on the never say die neoliberal order, the U.S. has plans to continue with their neoliberal shock doctrine if the two sides start negotiations anew,

In addition, the [White House is pleased both with the plan drawn up by General John Allen](#), which proposes security arrangements for a two-state reality, and with the plan to restore and upgrade the Palestinian economy - devised by the U.S. administration, the quartet envoy Tony Blair and private sector representatives. These two plans “can be put back in the mix if the parties are willing to come back to the table seriously,” the official said.

I defer to the reader’s intelligence and the above comments when considering that perspective.

BDS

It was the South African BDS movement that finally caused the country to make a volte face and get rid of its political apartheid structures, unfortunately replacing them with economic apartheid. Israel is facing a burgeoning movement that borrows heavily from that success, adapting it as necessary for the slightly different situations.

This is where Abunimah sees the win, the growing awareness of Israeli actions brought about by the BDS movement, and ironically, Israel’s attempts to discredit it. Israel realized early that it could not argue “the facts” against the BDS as it was the very facts on the ground that provided the support for the campaign. They have also realized that trying to argue the victim role has had little effect again in consideration of these very facts. Instead Israel has changed to ideological arguments that attempt to deny the validity of the people supporting BDS and to hasbara, a public relations efforts to disseminate abroad positive information.

Israel sees the BDS movement as “deligitimization”, another “existential threat” that is coalescing with the one state solution by “undermining moral legitimacy...constraining military activities, destroying Israel’s image.” To counter this they have used a variety of tactics in various situations.

Much of it has to do with rebranding. This includes ‘pinkwashing’ attempting to present Israel as a liberal haven for the LGBT community. It also includes ‘greenwashing’, a “propaganda campaign of smoke and mirrors to conceal some of Israel’s most troubling, environmentally destructive and criminal activities, many directly linked to military occupation and colonization.”

One of the largest areas of countering BDS is within the universities of the U.S., the “David Project”. This program targets teachers and students, it attempts to intimidate institutions, misuses civil rights laws, and attempts to criminalize campus behaviours. A relatively long comparison is made between these actions and the U.S./Arizona actions with Hispanics, including walls along the Mexican border and the ‘other’ described as ‘terrorists’.

Success?

As per Israeli sources, the negative view of Israel is increasing, in a “finding that indicates that public opinion is sharply out of step with official government policy.” No surprise there. Netanyahu has indicated the “its not about the facts, its about the defamation of Israel,” that it is an “image problem.” Again very similar to U.S foreign policy.

The Reut Institute, “a nonpartisan and nonprofit policy think tank in Tel Aviv designed to provide real-time, long-term strategic decision-support to Israel,” “tacitly conceded that resistance to Israel is based on genuine and justifiable grievances and the denial of Palestinian rights.”

In essence, BDS has shifted the focus of debate from that of Israeli victimhood and the virtues of neoliberal democracy to that of the voice of the Palestinian people.

The end of the two state solution’s endless negotiations and the increasing awareness created by the BDS movement highlight problems brought about by Israel onto itself.

The Battle for Justice in Palestine is a well referenced, well written, and well argued presentation on the current state of affairs in Palestine. It is a strong update to events within that particular sector of global ideological manipulations.

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