

Well-Known BBC Presenter Hints Israel May Be Underdog

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Evan Davis, seen here visiting a British weapons firm, shirks his responsibility to ask tough questions of Israeli war criminals. (DHL/[Flickr](#))

Israel is a state established by the violent theft of land from a native population. The theft is continuing with the building of new towns — the settlements — on occupied Palestinian land.

At the same time, Israel exploits the resources it has stolen from the native population — whether these are minerals from the Dead Sea or lush agricultural land — for its own profit, while warehousing the indigenous people into what are essentially reservations, behind a giant wall in the occupied West Bank and behind a blockade in Gaza.

Israel's expansionist aims and its actions in pursuit of these aims are the very definition of colonialism. Israel is a colonial force, with the complete imbalance in power between the colonizer and the colonized which that entails.

So, in the 21st century — these supposedly modern, anti-racist times — how does Israel get away with the chauvinistic behavior of 19th century European settler states without arousing the fury of the masses?

The answer lies in the fact that the masses — accessing their news from the mainstream media — simply don't know what's going on.

Mainstream news sources shield Israel from the wrath of millions who, if they were aware of the facts, might be lobbying for change.

The variety of ways in which this cover-up takes place was starkly illustrated in recent weeks by the BBC's [Newsnight](#) program, broadcast every weekday evening and billing itself as providing "analysis and observation of the news agenda."

In the space of just four weeks, *Newsnight* presenter, Evan Davis, conducted two lengthy one-on-one interviews with prominent Israelis — Shimon Peres, a former president and prime minister, on 18 May, and Tzipi Livni of the Zionist Union Party on 16 June.

Both interviews provided a masterclass in how Israeli colonialism is supported by acquiescent journalism, demonstrating ever so lucidly how the right questioning can give Israel's occupation and ongoing land theft the space it needs to survive and even thrive. In the weeks which separated the two Israeli interviews, no Palestinians were afforded any airtime on *Newsnight*.

[Davis' opener with Peres](#), a man who led a state which violates international law in numerous ways every single day, was to ask whether "Israel has made any mistakes."

And so the interview began, based on the premise constructed by the BBC that Israel is essentially a law-abiding nation which, now and again, as it goes about its legitimate business, may make "mistakes."

When an interview has been framed in this way, there is no need to ask tough questions (these are reserved for the Palestinians, the colonized people, on the few occasions they appear on the BBC).

Astonishing

Instead, Peres could be treated like an elder statesman, being invited onto *Newsnight* simply because, as Davis explained, "it so happens he's in London at the moment."

And so Peres was set up as the font of gentle wisdom and knowledge, being thrown soft questions by Davis, no mention of Israel's brutal, never-ending occupation, or Peres' part, while in power, in enforcing it.

Given all the time he needed to speak slowly and thoughtfully, Peres was allowed by the BBC to present himself and Israel as peace-loving and moderate, desperately facing down Palestinian terror. "Actually, we wanted to have peace in the 67 years," he told Davis. "We tried with the Palestinians, but the Palestinians were never a people before...They didn't have the experience and I think many people around us and inside us didn't dream that terror would become a major player in the situation."

He was allowed, basically, to act as a mask for Israel. The horrors that go on behind the mask were not touched upon in this eight minute interview.

And, because they were hidden, not just during this interview, but in BBC coverage in general, Davis felt able to end his chat with Peres with this quite astonishing question:

"Who do you think is the underdog? Do you think Israel is the underdog now, or do you think the Palestinians are the underdog? Who is the underdog in that region?"

It was beyond satire, but Davis knew he could get away with the question because the BBC, over the decades, has kept its audience so ill-informed about the occupation and the dispossession of the Palestinian people, that *Newsnight* viewers would see this as a legitimate line of inquiry.

This was why he was able to pose the question with no trace of embarrassment, with no anxiety about his journalistic credibility when he asked the former leader of an occupying power, armed to the teeth, in possession of nuclear weapons, colonizing the land of an indigenous people who resist, in Gaza, with home-made explosives and, in the West Bank, with their bodies — marching every week in their villages to protest the theft of their land, to be shot at and tear-gassed again and again — who is the underdog.

This is how Israel's outdated colonialism survives — with the help of outdated journalism. A journalism which accepts and treats the colonizer as "one of us" and presents the colonized as "the other", much as colonial-era journalism did in its time.

Ignoring the occupation

Four weeks after this debacle with Peres, [Davis sat opposite Livni](#) — in London on diplomatic immunity to protect her from arrest for war crimes — and sought to question her about the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.

Again, the interview did not frame Israel as a military occupier whose occupation is illegal under international law. In fact, as in the interview with Peres, Davis did not mention the occupation at all.

With Davis assiduously ignoring the existence of the occupation, Livni did not have to deal with facts.

She was able to insert, on more than one occasion, Israel's propaganda line about "our need for security" in the face of threats from Palestinian "terror" because at no point during the interview was she forced to confront Israel's position as a military occupier.

Had she been challenged, even once, on Israel's near 50-year occupation, its brutality and its illegality, she would have found it harder to sound credible in her pleas for security against the native people whose land Israel is stealing and occupying to this day.

But Davis clearly did not see any journalistic obligation to mention the occupation — the elephant in the interview room which, if brought up, might have completely reframed Israel as an aggressor rather than the passive victim of terror.

And this must be why the BBC refuses, time and again, to bring up the occupation — the essential part of Israel — in its reporting and its interviews with that country's spokespeople. To constantly bring up the occupation would not give Israel's colonialism space to breathe.

Davis, of course, is not alone in the way he obfuscates Israel's actions. He is part of the BBC machine, a machine which is expertly geared to hiding the truth of the occupation from the public, allowing Israel's racist, old-fashioned colonization of another people's land to continue into the 21st century.

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