

APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ISRAEL/PALESTINE: A CASE OF CONVERGENT EVOLUTION?

SAUL DUBOW

University of Cambridge

ABSTRACT: “Apartheid” is widely invoked to explain endemic conflict in Israel/Palestine. While oppression in South Africa and in Israel/Palestine bear striking familial resemblances, there are also fundamental differences. Analogy is not the same as rigorous comparison: It contributes little to the understanding of causality or process and may not be a sound guide for the development of political strategy. The two societies bear similarities with respect to their ethno-nationalist driving forces. Yet, whereas racial domination was a fundamental feature of apartheid racial capitalism, the displacement and expulsion of Palestinians has driven injustice in Israel/Palestine. Another key difference is that South Africa’s existence within its established borders was never seriously contested by the leading liberation movements, with the ANC holding firmly to the position that its struggle was to secure majority rule in a unitary nation-state with common citizenship. This presents a stark contrast to Israel, whose right to exist is frequently challenged. While Israel/Palestine and apartheid South Africa show more differences than similarities, this article concludes that they have been subject to convergent evolution, that is, the acquisition of similar characteristics, albeit from different starting points, and with subsequent divergence.



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Efforts to apply the idea of apartheid to the conflict in Israel/Palestine are now ubiquitous.¹ Evidently, the hope is that that the Israeli state will delegitimized by association with the iniquities of apartheid. Among the most important advocates of the analogy is the Boycott Disinvestment and Sanctions movement, reinforced by leading human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. This has been given backing by successive United Nations resolutions that, in defining apartheid as a crime against humanity or Zionism as a form of racism, offers a platform for conceiving of apartheid as a generic problem or part of a shared imaginary.²

The contention advanced here is that oppression in South Africa and Israel/Palestine reveal familial resemblances as well as fundamental differences. I argue that the apartheid analogy is not the same as rigorous comparison: It contributes little to the understanding of causality or process and, unless used mainly as a heuristic device for the purpose of analysis, may not be a sound guide for the development of political strategy. Moreover, as a historian of apartheid South Africa, I take the view that the distinctiveness of racial rule in that society should be retained.

Although the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 coincides with the landmark apartheid election of the same year, few if any identified these countries as having much in common as settler colonial states at the time. From the 1960s, parallels between these societies began to be drawn. And by the 1970s, the two countries began to establish strong security links. This contribution to a burgeoning comparative literature assesses the extent to which the two societies share common ontological foundations in settler colonialism, while reflecting on their underlying structural and historical commonalities. It concludes that Israel/Palestine and apartheid South Africa are not the same, while suggesting that they have undergone processes of *convergent evolution*, that is, the acquisition of similar characteristics from different starting points. This process has been followed by increasing divergence since 1994, the year of transition to majority rule in South Africa.³

Apartheid was a highly specific system of racial rule that built directly on nearly a century of experimentation in racial segregation.⁴ The word “apartheid” became official government policy in 1948. It was initially formulated by missionary theologians of the Dutch Reformed Church around a decade earlier as a means of preserving racial and cultural difference within a Christian framework. Apartheid thus supercharged previous racial policies and made South Africa a byword for white domination and supremacy in the postwar era. For good reasons, scholars routinely distinguish apartheid from its segregationist predecessor. This alone invites caution about generalizing apartheid to other contexts.

Most conspicuously, apartheid was practiced in a far more systematic fashion than racial segregation: Afrikaner ethno-nationalist ideological fervor powered a modernizing state served by a loyal bureaucracy that sought to use large-scale social engineering to solve the “native problem” definitively. Apartheid was not, however, solely about the treatment of “non-whites.” It was simultaneously a racial and ethnic national project designed to secure Afrikaner ascendancy over English-speaking South Africans. Anglophone South Africans were suspected by Afrikaner nationalists of exhibiting split loyalties to country and empire. English speakers were often mistrusted as dangerous liberals or dismissed as purveyors of a watered-down and dishonest segregationism. As an ethno-nationalist project, apartheid was thus watered by deep wells of anti-imperialism and republicanism. Apartheid was in this sense a national and social project designed to secure white, and specifically Afrikaner, ascendancy.

In its first decade, the meaning and future of apartheid remained uncertain. A key inflection moment was the 1960 Sharpeville massacre when 69 black civilians, residents of a township south of Johannesburg, were shot by police while protesting against the pass laws that relentlessly restricted Africans’ mobility and subjected them to routine humiliation. International condemnation of apartheid dramatically increased at this moment, led by the UN General Assembly and supported by the Commonwealth. In London, the fledgling British “boycott committee” transformed into the “anti-apartheid movement.” The

term stuck in part because apartheid was an exotic neologism suggesting the state of being apart and also because many of its supporters carried the whiff of national socialism. Conscious of the negative connotations of the one-word slogan or racial panacea that brought it to power in 1948, Prime Minister Verwoerd sought to rebrand apartheid as a form of “good neighborliness”—indeed as a local variant of decolonization.

FOUNDATIONS: 1948–1967

For all the parallels that seem so salient to many today, in 1948 few equated South African apartheid with the Zionist state of Israel. True, both societies saw themselves as bulwarks of European civilization and progress in regions of the world characterized by backwardness. Both, moreover, made reference to passages in the Old Testament, including the idea of the “Chosen People,” to legitimize their ethno-national ambitions. But comparability was not widely evident at the time. From an international perspective, the apartheid racial regime had worrying affinities with Nazism. Its reliance on statutory racism was manifestly opposed to the spirit and principles of the UN’s 1948 Declaration of Human Rights. In contrast, Israel’s existence as a Jewish national home attracted many sympathizers precisely because the new state was seen as a form of redress for the primary victims of the Nazi holocaust. Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, had much to say about capitalist imperialism and racism in South Africa, while viewing Israel as an example of national rights enhancing human rights.⁵ She did not equate them in any sense.

Herf describes the brief period of concord between the Soviet Union and the United States over the Zionist state’s creation as “Israel’s moment.”⁶ This was at just the same moment that South Africa began to attract international condemnation. Zionism could thus be regarded as a progressive movement by some of the same observers who dismissed Afrikaner nationalism as narrow-minded and retrograde. In its formative years, Zionism had strong affinities with Marxist as well as liberal nationalist thinking. Notably, there was a strong imprint of socialist ideology in the Israeli kibbutz and Histadrut labor movement before and after the establishment of the

state of Israel (which, it is important to note, did not preclude taking land by force).⁷ In contrast, apartheid's right-wing leaders saw liberalism as tainted and socialism as anathema. There was never any rural settler movement in South Africa inspired by socialist communal objectives.

Support for Zionism was not restricted to the West. Whereas the Soviet Union was an implacable foe of white minority rule, Moscow moved quickly to recognize the state of Israel in May 1948 (it reversed political support soon after, though not state recognition). Czechoslovakia provided Israel with crucial military help in 1948 in defiance of a United States-backed embargo. At the same time, Czechoslovakia was becoming a strong "fraternal friend" to the South African Communist Party and the ANC, hosting left-wing South African intellectuals and activists from the 1950s and supplying the liberation organization with weapons in 1963.⁸

Anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist thinking rooted in the communist left might have brought South Africa and Israel/Palestine into the same conceptual frame. But this did not occur until well into the postwar era and, in the case of the ANC, until the 1970s. The fact that the establishment of an Israeli state involved a struggle against British imperialism was looked upon sympathetically by internationally minded liberals and socialists in the West; there was support from the Eastern Bloc too.⁹ In South Africa, anti-imperialism was complicated by the fact that this political tradition, albeit strongly espoused by English-speaking laborites and socialists in the first decades of the twentieth century, was even more the preserve of Afrikaner nationalism. Progressives in South Africa were always a small minority who never acquired political power (though they maintained some influence within civic institutions). In Israel, politicians who thought of themselves as left social democrats attained high levels of office.

There appear to have been no substantial links between the Palestine and South African Communist Parties, both formed in the early 1920s, and both aligned to the Comintern. Connections shared by Jewish communists through the anti-Zionist Bund, labor Zionism, and the left-wing youth movement Hashomer Hatzair did not encourage mutual recognition—notwithstanding the two societies sharing

a common theoretical quandary, namely, how to reconcile the national question with broader class solidarity. In South Africa, the Comintern played a key role in the ideological rupture of the late 1920s, which involved transition from a revolutionary struggle premised on a white proletariat to one of a “native republic” led by African nationalists. The Israeli experience was rather different, in part for demographic reasons. The Palestine Communist Party proved unable to resolve the question of “Arabization” pressed by the Comintern in the late 1920s, and tensions came to a head during the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939.¹⁰

Despite compelling parallels to do with the “national question,” the respective literatures do not seem to mention each other.¹¹ Whereas pioneer South African communists such as Sidney Bunting and David Ivon Jones were disposed to see the configuration of race and class in South Africa as the colonial world in miniature, the situation in Israel/Palestine was treated by the Comintern as a specific case or outlier. As Greenstein explains, the South African and Palestinian communist parties existed in parallel, but not, it seems, in tandem. Palestinian communism emerged out of and in dialogue with Zionist colonial nationalism; until the watershed moment of 1928, South African communism was strongly associated with white workerism, but in its active opposition to colonialism and imperialism, South African communism was able to align itself with international socialism and, crucially, to embrace “non-racialism” as a core principle.¹²

If the discourse of the left did not encourage comparisons between South Africa and Israel/Palestine until the last quarter of the twentieth century, the fact that many of apartheid’s first generation of leaders displayed marked fascist inclinations in the 1930s and 1940s also did not suggest natural affinities with the state of Israel. In South Africa, the rise of the radical right occurred decades before its emergence in Israel. South Africa’s first apartheid prime minister was Daniel Malan, a pastor and newspaper editor whose followers were often derided as “Mala-Nazis” on account of their wartime pro-German sympathies. In contrast, international support for the state of Israel was deeply affected by the slaughter of European Jews by Nazism. In the 1930s and early 1940s, there was a virulently anti-Semitic component to Afrikaner nationalism. Although the “native problem”

underlay apartheid policies, anti-Jewish and anti-Indian populist rhetoric was arguably even more strident than anti-black ideology at this time (if only because the basic structuring mechanisms of white/black hierarchies were already substantially in place). Anti-immigration measures against “Aliens” (Jewish refugees from Europe) and attacks on Jewish capital featured prominently in Afrikaner nationalist rhetoric.¹³

In the postwar era, official anti-Semitism in South Africa went into abeyance as the new apartheid government focused on achieving overall white unity in domination. The creation of the state of Israel as a home for the Jews likely alleviated Afrikaner fears of further Jewish migration to South Africa. Jews in South Africa were permitted by the government to contribute financially to the Zionist cause. Strains of domestic anti-Semitism continued in South Africa, not least because many Jewish liberals and communists in South Africa were vocal and visible opponents of apartheid. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation (est. 1898) did everything possible to allay government fears of disloyalty. In 1953, South African prime minister Malan visited Israel, the first international head of state to do so. Ben-Gurion praised Malan for his “contribution to mutual understanding between the races”; for his part, Malan recommended Israelis’ attention to the soil as a “model” from which South Africans could learn.¹⁴ It was not forgotten, however, that Malan himself had been responsible for the anti-Jewish immigration Quota Act of 1930.¹⁵

Incongruously, the official Israeli program welcoming Malan to Israel—just five years into the apartheid era—included a performance of *Lost in the Stars*, a Hebrew language version of the Broadway stage adaptation of Alan Paton’s iconic anti-apartheid novel *Cry the Beloved Country*. A month later, ANC leaders Duma Nokwe and Walter Sisulu attended the very same production in Israel en route to China and the Soviet Union. Nitzan Tal and Louise Bethlehem show how the Israeli reception of *Lost in the Stars* raised difficult questions about the relationship between apartheid and Zionism. The Israeli commentator Azriel Carlebach remarked at the time that Israel might be recapitulating aspects of apartheid.¹⁶ But this was very much a niche view.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Israeli foreign policy sought to cultivate strong links with African countries. The state of Israel was at times willing to condemn apartheid at the United Nations, and in these early years, it was tacitly regarded within the United Nations as something of a moral arbiter.¹⁷ Israel positioned itself as anti-racist and anti-imperial. The country eagerly took on development projects in parts of Africa, born of a strategic desire to drive a wedge between black Africa and the Arab Middle East. In studying how to launch a guerrilla movement, Nelson Mandela learned from Israel's independence struggles as well as from liberation struggles in Algeria, Vietnam, and Cuba. Secular-minded left-wing activists and revolutionaries were disproportionately represented in the ANC's fighting arm, Umkhonto we Sizwe, and also in the South African Communist Party. Arthur Goldreich had direct experience of fighting with Palmah against the British in Palestine in 1948 before he returned to South Africa in 1954 and became an active member of the liberation movement. Mandela cites Goldreich in his autobiography as a valuable source on guerrilla warfare.¹⁸

Up until the 1967 War, Israeli–South African governmental relations were characterized by a degree of strategic ambiguity. In 1948, prime minister Jan Smuts (who enjoyed a close relationship both with the British political elite and with Chaim Weizmann) afforded Israel *de facto* recognition while at the same time keeping open the possibility of according similar recognition to a prospective “Arab State in Israel.” Pretoria's consulate in Egypt, with the support of the Afrikaans press, proposed recognition of the Arab League's provisional government for Palestine. The Egyptian government tried to enlist South African diplomatic help as an “African power” in reducing or ending the presence of British troops in the Suez Canal zone, noting that South Africa had itself fought against British imperialism. Good relations between apartheid South Africa and Egypt began to sour after Nasser's coup d'état in 1952. Israel tried to persuade South Africa to declare opposition to Egypt as tensions ramped up over Suez. But South Africa refused to side openly with Israel on account of the country's record of voting against South Africa at the United Nations. South African reliance on Egyptian

airspace for civilian flights to Europe was one of several factors that disposed it to adopt a cautious position on Israeli–Arab tensions.¹⁹

Having refused to condemn South Africa for the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, Israel now reversed its position. In November 1961, Israel voted in favor of UN sanctions against South Africa—to the express dismay of Prime Minister Verwoerd, who lashed out against an “utterly deplorable” action. Foreign Affairs Minister Eric Louw, a pernicious Jew-baiter, threatened sanctions by way of retaliation.²⁰ The vote was approved by a large majority in the Knesset the following year, with foreign minister Golda Meir stating that “it would have been contrary to Jewish morality for Israel to have failed to raise its voice against the ‘shameful iniquity’ of South Africa’s apartheid policy.” However, in the same debate, Meir pointedly supported the principle of “non-return” for Palestinian refugees.²¹

In this refusal, the underlying exclusivity coded into the socially progressive and idealistic Jewish labor Zionist movement is evident, as it is in Meir’s notorious 1969 statement in an interview with a British journalist: “There was no such thing as Palestinians.” Whether or not the conceptual dragnet of settler colonialism is the most apposite analytical framing device to understand this comment—and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury’s illuminating study of left-Zionism at the level of the kibbutz movement suggests that it may be—there remains merit in using Smootha’s idea of “ethnic democracy” to characterize the core Jewish Israeli state, noting too that since he devised this term, the character of this state has become notably less democratic and conspicuously more racialized.²² Apartheid, with its growing emphasis on ethnic consociationalism and rhetorical disavowal of “race,” traced a different path.

The 1967 War abruptly ended any pretensions Israel may have had to be pro-African. It also encouraged South Africa, assailed by the “Afro-Asian bloc” at the United Nations, to see Israel as a potential ally. The breach with Africa was confirmed by the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the 1976 Entebbe Raid in Kampala. In the early 1970s, South Africa first established and then upgraded its consular presence in Tel Aviv to an embassy. In 1976, the South African premier B. J. Vorster (who had interned during the Second World War as a Nazi sympathizer) traveled

to Israel to explore the possibility of arms deals and other forms of cooperation. As fellow pariah states, the Israeli and South African governments increasingly turned to mutual support, and it was during this era that transactional economic and military ties between the two countries gathered pace; by the end of the decade, there was substantial exchange in the development of nuclear weaponry and testing, as well as missile technology.²³

Analogies between Israeli and South Africa practices, while rare in the 1950s and 1960s, became more common by the mid-1970s. The 1975 UN resolution (3379) declaring Zionism to be “a form of racism” was a key moment in the identification of ethno-national exclusivism as a foundational principle in both countries. Here, the theoretical insights of the Syrian-born and Lebanese-educated intellectual Fayeze Sayegh, a UN special rapporteur and author of *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (1965), proved instructive.²⁴ Sayegh essayed the idea of settler colonialism in Israel–Palestine just as the French Marxist historian Maxime Rodinson began to develop the concept. So, too, did the Israeli Socialist Organization, Matzpen. There were clear echoes in such thinking of the South African Communist Party’s core thesis, “colonialism of a special type,” but the precise connections were not explored in detail.²⁵ Within the ANC’s London research department, tentative parallels began to be drawn in the mid-1970s between the two societies as versions of settler colonialism.

A HERRENVOLK DEMOCRACY?

One of Israel’s foremost appeals to international legitimacy was its professed commitment to democracy (at least within its internal pre-1967 borders). South Africa claimed to be an ally of the West and a committed enemy of communism, but it could never plausibly profess to be democratic. Not only was apartheid explicitly committed to the removal of black political rights and citizenship, it was also an increasingly authoritarian (though not a totalitarian) society that imprisoned whites as well as blacks deemed to be subversive. Measures enacted against communism, attacks on freedom of association and expression, and gerrymandering of the constitution, as well as constraints on the judiciary, were an affront to the very idea of liberal democracy.

Even so, a Westminster form of parliamentary government continued for whites until the constitutional reforms of the 1980s. This was sometimes characterized as a “Herrenvolk democracy” with a single government maintaining continuous power in South Africa from 1948 to 1994.

In contrast, Israel’s rumbustious political climate and proportional system of voting led to several changes in government or narrow coalitions. The Israeli 2018 Basic Law has strong echoes of apartheid-style ethno-nationalism and, indeed, may exceed it: Apartheid South Africa was a white state dominated by Afrikaners, but ethno-national dominance was never made *de jure* in the manner of Israel as a “Jewish” state. The distinction between civilian society in Israel “proper” and military rule in the occupied territories—frequently cited as evidence that Zionism is not inherently racist and that discrimination is merely temporary pending a resolution of the occupation—has been blurred over the past two decades. The effects of Israeli discrimination bear unevenly on Palestinian citizens of Israel (who carry blue identification documents), Palestinian Jerusalemites (blue IDs without citizenship), and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza (green IDs).²⁶ These fine-grained administrative distinctions are more than reminiscent of the apartheid “pass” system. Even so, it is well to remember that racial exclusivism and domination were legislatively baked into apartheid South Africa; in Israel, the discriminatory landscape was blurred by a quasi-constitution that did not distinguish formally between Jews and Arabs until 2018.

The notorious 1950 Population Registration Act in South Africa created multiple legal categories of South Africans at birth based on obsessive racial definitions that were reinforced by humiliating bureaucratic tests. In contrast, distinctions between Palestinian citizenship rights developed more slowly and in response to the exigencies of occupation and control. Apartheid concessions to urban African “insiders” with “Section 10 rights” was a response to a mixture of skilled labor shortage, political resistance, and the attempt to stabilize a permanent urban African populace without violating apartheid ideology; in the case of Israel, the tendency has been in the other direction, namely, incremental squeezing of Palestinian rights in an *ad hoc* and often disguised fashion. Thus, if Israeli society increasingly

resembles apartheid, it is important to recognize that this convergence has developed from very different starting points and assumptions.

Parallels might be drawn between the National Party in South Africa and right-wing parties and organizations (Irgun, Herut, Likud) with respect to their ultra-nationalism and hostility to British imperialism. Yet the National Party was firmly in power for the entire duration of apartheid, whereas Menachem Begin lost eight consecutive elections until he became prime minister in 1977.²⁷ Prompted by the crisis of the Soweto student uprising in 1976–1977, the South African state and its leading corporations sought to detoxify apartheid by introducing reforms geared to building alliances with sections of the black, coloured, and Indian communities. Israel has since moved ever further to the right on the back of military conquest. The superior rights of Jews over Palestinians (for example, with respect to property rights and “return”) was given effective force through the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the “racialization of security.”²⁸

Another point of difference lies in the intensity of ideologically framed racial restrictions in the two societies. Reformists in South Africa often drew a distinction between “petty” and “grand” apartheid (the former associated with measures such as separate amenities and access to public resources such as benches or beaches, the latter to core policies such as spatial separation and political rights) on the assumption that it was possible to relax certain racial restrictions without compromising apartheid as a system. Leaving aside the fact that “petty” apartheid resulted in daily humiliation and maltreatment of black South Africans, the distinction between “petty” and “grand” apartheid does not correlate with the situation in Israel proper or in the occupied territories. Here it seems to make more sense to think of a *discriminatory gradient*, with the most extreme forms of repression evident in the occupied territories. These are the consequence of day-to-day diktats enforced by military rule rather than the unfolding of a detailed apartheid logic.

LAND AND LABOR

Both in South Africa and in Palestine, the struggle over land has been central. Yet the dynamics and objectives are very different. The removal

of Khoe-San and then black Africans from their historic lands was a protracted process increasingly formalized through segregationist legislation. The 1913 Land Act expressed the newly constituted Union of South Africa's intention to maintain only a fraction of the country's rural areas for the exclusive use of Africans, with the promise of increasing the extent of "African reserves" in the future. The land reserved for African usage was never extensive enough to be self-sustaining; it was designed to house "reservoir" pools of labor that white commercial farmers and industrialists could access through the migrant labor system. Land segregation was thus not so much a means to dispense with black labor as a device to alter the balance of labor relations in the countryside. In the high-apartheid era of the 1960s and 1970s, the reserves were repurposed as ethnically defined Bantustans. These were charged with giving expression to putatively tribal black political ambitions while also facilitating policies of divide and rule.

In economic terms, blacks remained integral to the economy of white South Africa and so remained indispensable to white prosperity. White supremacy was thus a fundamental feature of South African racial capitalism, but also a tacit understanding of interdependence. In contrast, the displacement and expulsion of Palestinians—the land without its people—drove inequality in Israel/Palestine. This key point was highlighted by Fayeze Sayegh when he noted that European colonists in Africa generally

deemed the continued presence of the indigenous populations "useful" for the colonists themselves; and, as such, they have reserved for the "natives" all the menial functions and assigned to them inferior roles in the settler-dominated societies. Not so the Zionists! . . . They have expressed their fancied "supremacy" over the Arab "natives," first, by isolating themselves from the Arabs in Palestine and, later on, by evicting the Arabs from their homeland.²⁹

So important is this distinction to Sayegh that he immediately goes on to state, with bold emphasis, that not even in South Africa or Rhodesia have the "zeal for thorough-going racial exclusiveness" and the need for physical expulsion of indigenous populations been

so acute as under Zionism.³⁰ A quarter of a century later, Gershon Shafir's classic study of land acquisition and labor exploitation demonstrated how "pure settlement" in Israel–Palestine, especially on a collective basis, differed from settlement in colonies such as South Africa, where ownership of the land by whites seldom entailed whites working on the land.³¹

Forced removals of Arabs from the new state of Israel in 1948 were the result of concerted and opportunistic ethno-national erasure committed under the cover of war. The acts of violence and intimidation that took place during the Nakba are now widely seen as Israel's original sin.³² The notorious system of apartheid "influx control," in contrast, was geared more to the control of African labor mobility than to outright ethnic cleansing, though there were undoubtedly strong elements of the latter in the linked processes of population removals and Bantustan ethnic "consolidation."

Demographic manipulation and dispossession were evident in towns and cities such as Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem after 1948, but not in quite the premeditated state-sanctioned manner that the Group Areas Act (1950) required and enabled. The total removal of a black presence in "white" urban areas was achieved through remorseless, visible bureaucratic and ideological logic. Apartheid's planners reveled in these acts of social engineering and did little to hide their plans. The "de-Arabization" of West Jerusalem began even before 1948 as a result of Haganah provocation and ensued through war and conquest. The "unification" of Jerusalem in 1967 was also made possible by war.³³ Current plans to evict Palestinian refugees from Sheikh Jarrah in occupied East Jerusalem to make way for Jewish settlers suggests that Israel's original sin is being perpetuated rather than redressed or ameliorated. There was no comparable factor during the apartheid era.

In contrast to Israel, apartheid South Africa was thus not driven by the dynamics of expansionism; its aggression toward neighboring countries was more a matter of sealing borders against incursions from the exiled liberation movements—which is not to forget that cross-border raids and destabilization of neighboring states were a major feature of the late-apartheid militarized state in the 1980s, just as they were, say, in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Put another way, mass population removals and ethnic cleansing took place *within* the borders of the 1910 nation-state (and Namibia) and were overseen at every point by civil and administrative rather than by military authorities.

South Africa's sovereign existence within its established borders was not contested by the leading liberation movements. The ANC held firmly to the position that its aim was majority rule in a unitary nation-state. National liberation in South Africa thus entailed dismantling the gerrymandered apartheid Bantustans, a one-state solution in which common citizenship would be restored to all. This much was achieved in 1990–1994. In Israel/Palestine, however, the borders of the nation-state, constantly redefined through war and conquest, remain fundamentally at issue. And there is no prospect of agreement. It will be nearly impossible to roll boundaries back to the status quo ante of 1967, let alone 1948. An obsession with maps, “facts on the ground,” and demography in Israel/Palestine is indicative of the Israeli state's deliberate cartographic instability—though in fact Israel has been able to occupy historic Palestine more or less along the boundaries proclaimed during the Mandate period a century ago.³⁴

In South Africa's segregationist era, the politics of *differential* sovereignty meant that land was made over to Africans on a communal basis in exchange for tacit acceptance of loss of individual political rights; it was never the precondition for a political settlement as in Israel/Palestine: land for peace. In apartheid South Africa, the consolidation of homelands actually involved increasing the acreage available to blacks (through a mixture of compulsory purchases and disposal of government-owned land) to give the new Bantustans a semblance of self-sufficiency and territorial integrity. Thus, whereas in 1913 around 7% of the country's landmass was set aside for African use, by the end of apartheid the amount under African control had doubled to around 15%.

Precisely because the borders of South Africa were widely accepted and also because demographic pressure was much less acute in South Africa than in Israel/Palestine, historical or religious-based ontological reasoning (as in the sacralized ideas of “Eretz Israel” or “rights of return”) meant that land ownership was not a fundamental obstacle

to a political resolution in South Africa. Land redistribution is much more of an issue in post-apartheid South Africa and related to the failure to redistribute economic resources—a tacit recognition of the idea that apartheid dispossession was integrally linked to racial capitalism and exploitation.

Apartheid presumed the selective incorporation of blacks into a capitalist system subject to extreme disparities of power and rights; Israel/Palestine was characterized by systematic exclusion and shaped by contestation between two antagonistic nationalities over rights to the very same land and space.³⁵ These processes are ongoing. Thirty years after liberation, blacks in South Africa continue to serve the needs of whites. Over the same period in Israel, migrants from the global South have often been recruited to perform such functions. Under conditions of crisis, the Israeli state has had no compunction in shutting down flows of Palestinian labor.

Although Arab Israelis were not forbidden to own property (as blacks were in urban South Africa), they—and, even more, Palestinian refugees—continue to be deprived of their right to regain so-called “abandoned” property. Apartheid’s reliance on an urban African presence for economic reasons meant that the government was prepared to make pragmatic concessions by distinguishing between, say, those with qualified rights to reside in urban areas and “outsiders” lacking all rights. In the mid-1980s, the government began to sell leasehold properties to middle-class blacks in an effort to give them a stake in the social system. This policy change signaled a major modification of a key Verwoerdian precept, namely, that there should be no permanent black presence in “white” cities.

White South Africans moved into urban areas forcibly emptied of Africans, coloureds, and Indians under the terms of the Group Areas Act. Yet urban removals in South Africa had more to do with satisfying the rigid precepts of apartheid social engineering than with a need to secure space for whites—let alone immigrant settlers from abroad who claimed rights as Jews. The South African government razed the black freehold neighborhood of Sophiatown in 1950s Johannesburg, an iconic symbol of black cultural and political defiance, and built a white working class neighborhood on its ruins. In the case of Cape

Town's District Six, the government was largely unable to persuade private white businesses and property developers to take advantage of the salted earth in this historic area; District Six remains a visible apartheid wound nearly 50 years afterward. The spatial politics of exclusion in these two societies are comparable but are significantly different in purpose, intensity, and degree.

Typically, segregation in South African rural areas was maintained through the construction of out-of-town "locations" or "townships" for those people designated as "coloured" or "African." Roads and transport networks were configured to maintain separation and townships could be, and were, sealed off at times of political tension and turmoil. But there were no permanent military checkpoints in South Africa and no physical barriers like the vast concrete walls and barriers snaking through the occupied territories of Palestine.

SURVIVAL AND LEGITIMACY

While structural violence and repression were ubiquitous in apartheid South Africa—whether experienced by black South Africans on a daily and routine basis through the operation of pass laws or through forced removals in pursuit of the totalizing vision of Bantustan consolidation—such practices were enforced by the police and civic employees rather than by an occupying army. The presence of the military in South African townships to quell revolt in the 1980s marked a major escalation of repression; it also brought home to ordinary whites the brutal realities of apartheid injustice. This in turn sparked a limited but significant reaction in liberal-left circles and led to the emergence of civil disobedience activism, notably pursued by the End Conscription Campaign. The involvement of the South African army in Angola from 1975, initially denied by the state, was domestically unpopular: it served as a leading cause of the erosion of white political confidence in the apartheid securocratic state. The legitimization crisis increased further in the 1980s when white army troops were deployed *within* the country to police the black townships, visible proof that the presumed enemy was not communist infiltration but ordinary people doing ordinary jobs. In contrast, the Israeli

conscript army commands overwhelming political support among its populace (despite growing dissent as a result of the erosion of Israeli democracy), other than among those who refuse to serve on religious grounds.

Here lies an important difference. South Africa was not seriously threatened with liquidation or, in a phrase often applied to Israel but infrequently in apartheid South Africa, with settler occupiers being “thrown into the sea.” Only a small minority of blacks articulated the PAC/Poqo language of “one settler, one bullet” (a play on the broader liberation movement’s demand for “one man, one vote”). Slogans such as these were more a matter of rhetoric and political positioning than an article of political faith. The logic of elimination heard at both extremes in the Palestine/Israel context had little resonance in apartheid South Africa. Indeed, the Congress Alliance, of which the African National Congress was the leading element, proceeded from the cherished premise of the 1955 Freedom Charter that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.” The language of multi-racialism or non-racism was deeply woven into its assumptions and reaffirmed by the transition to democracy after 1990. Christianity has been as much a force for cross-racial unity as a source of division. In 1990, following lengthy debates about the morality of the “apartheid Bible,” the influential Dutch Reformed Church renounced apartheid as a sin. In contrast, appeals to the biblical justification of “Eretz Israel” have only become more insistent and the fundamentalist religious right or “Temple movement” ever more intransigent in contemporary Israel.

Afrikaner nationalists might have contended that theirs was an existential “struggle for survival,” but here they were referring to cultural and ethnic privilege rather than rights to live in the country of their birth. The situation is notably different in Israel, whose existence as a Zionist state has never been fully recognized by leading Palestinian bodies nor by any Islamist resistance organizations (the 1993 letter from Arafat to Rabin is perhaps the exception that proves the general rule). Continuous cycles of violence and war in Israel/Palestine make mutual recognition of common statehood—whether unitary or two-state—impracticable. The anti-apartheid movement, in contrast, sought to overthrow white supremacy and end minority rule, but it seldom if ever questioned the ontological basis of South Africa as a self-governing sovereign country.

This has an important bearing on the nature of anti-apartheid resistance.³⁶ The struggle against apartheid took many forms. It comprised internal as well as external forces. International sanctions and boycotts played their role. So did South Africa's ignominy and treatment as a pariah state. Yet, ultimately, it was domestic political dynamics and recognition of the reality of racial interdependence that proved decisive in preparing South Africa for political transition. Willingness to negotiate depended on mobilization within layered institutional and political ecosystems that included trade unions, civic organizations, and religious communities (churches, mosques, and synagogues), as well as drawing on long-established cultures of dissent (universities, media, law, and culture). For all its political divisions and the state of near civil war that raged in the 1980s and early 1990s—as the government stood by or encouraged murderous contestation between rival black political organizations—the aspiration to build non-racial democracy in a common society did not recede. Crystallized in the charismatic political persona of Mandela, demands for freedom coalesced into an effective movement that made political compromise and pragmatism a moral virtue and in turn ushered in the wholly unlikely “miracle” of the “New South Africa.”

For South Africa, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 proved critical: It removed the final justification of the apartheid regime as a guarantor of order against the forces of communism, while also giving an enormous boost to liberal internationalism and hopes for global human rights. In Israel, the end of the Soviet Union had little direct effect. To the extent that the end of the Cold War helped to kick-start negotiations leading to Oslo, this was in part the consequence of the PLO losing support from the Eastern Bloc. In South Africa, the ANC gained further legitimacy as the communist bogey evaporated, opening political space for the historic negotiations between the opposing parties. This required the removal of the intransigent South African president P.W. Botha. The grammar of Israeli politics parsed differently. Having survived the era of 1990s globalization, its leaders (Netanyahu especially) drew strength from identifying with strongman populist politics and divisions inflected by religion—fully in step and sometimes in alliance with Trump, Putin, and Erdogan.³⁷

The dual and complementary aspects of the struggle against South Africa—within and without—were a key aspect of anti-apartheid resistance. As yet, they have no direct comparison in Israel/Palestine, though there are signs that such a confluence is now developing as Israeli citizens protest against the country's rightward shift. In the last decade of apartheid rule, the internal and external opposition began to merge under the banner of the ANC. Yet the civic populism of the mass democratic movement within the country in the 1980s was markedly different from the ANC in exile, which was in turn divided between a political-diplomatic arm and a military wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, that mostly excelled in “armed propaganda.” Attacks on civilians were a rarity, and where they did occur, such actions proved controversial within the ANC and among its radical sympathizers.³⁸ To the last, there were those within the ANC who insisted that power could only be seized through “the barrel of a gun,” but these voices were minority ones, albeit symbolically powerful. Leadership also played a vital role. Mandela's political genius—and fortune—rested significantly on his decision to lead the armed struggle in 1960–1961 (when this had no real prospect of success) and then to opt for negotiations in the mid-1980s (when a political solution, even in the midst of urban insurrection, became a genuine possibility). There are parallels to be made with Arafat, but the PLO leader never attained the global moral authority that Mandela was able to achieve.

In exile in the 1960s and 1970s, the ANC was primarily concerned to maintain its presence and legitimacy as a potential government of the future. There are useful comparisons to be made between the ANC in exile (beset by internal rifts, facing mutinies in military camps in the 1980s, and with growing evidence of corruption and poor discipline) and the PLO under Arafat in Tunis after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. This was the moment when the PLO reiterated its claim to be “a liberation movement in the tradition of the FLN and ANC.”³⁹ How much this affection was reciprocated by the ANC, which always regarded its own struggle as *sui generis*, is difficult to assess.

In the Occupied Territories, the first and second Intifadas took the fight directly against Israel in a blaze of street-based violence and defiance. These events certainly invite comparison with the waves of

township-based protest in 1976–1977 and from 1984–1986 in South Africa. But whereas the ANC succeeded in building political support within broadly based civic networks such as the United Democratic Front or the Mass Democratic Movement, Fatah by and large did not. Palestinian “Tunisians” were much criticized for appropriating international development funds to fund lifestyles rich in conspicuous consumption when they returned to take over the new Palestinian Authority.⁴⁰ The return of ANC exiles in 1990 also prompted accusations that the new elites were after personal enrichment and less committed to principles of participatory democracy and non-racism than their comrades within the country. But evidence of this moral decline largely occurred *after* the transfer of power, and the ANC government was remarkably successful in absorbing all factions of the liberation movement into the Mandela government. It did not make the error of signing a humiliating compromise deal as the PLO had done in the Oslo Accords. Mandela wisely refused to renounce armed struggle even as he backed political negotiations.

The ANC was not vulnerable to politically purist rejectionism as was the PLO, which was confronted by Islamist rivals (such as Hamas) who repudiated the accommodationism of the Oslo accords of 1993 and 1995. With their collapse, the “peace process” became moribund. The 1993 “letters of mutual recognition” signed by the PLO and Israel were lampooned by leading Palestinian intellectuals and activists such as Edward Said, who famously called it a “Palestinian Versailles.”⁴¹ A decade later, Said pointedly contrasted the discipline and international-mindedness of the ANC leadership (which had been “strategically very firm and tactically flexible”) to the PLO: “exactly the opposite.”⁴²

THE APARTHEID METAPHOR

In the 1980s, an academic cottage industry debated the underlying structural similarities and possibilities of conflict resolution for democratic transition in three divided colonial settler societies: South Africa, Israel/Palestine, and Northern Ireland.⁴³ The opposing forces of African and Afrikaner nationalism, Zionism and Palestinian nationalism, or Unionism and Republicanism were not confused in these

analyses. Each was contextually specific: Rather than moral equivalence, the emphasis of inquiry was focused on structural comparisons.⁴⁴

Ever since the political transition in South Africa, “apartheid” has become a universal free-floating signifier, sustained in part by its presence in international law and conventions. In 1973, the United Nations General Assembly defined apartheid as a crime against humanity in virtue of the “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.” The resulting convention came into force three years later. In 1998, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (which came into force in 2002) followed up with a definition (Art. 7/8) of apartheid as a crime “committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.” However, the definition made no mention of South Africa. Thus far, no one and no state has been convicted under the statute, least of all in South Africa, which opted instead for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a cathartic, ecumenical means of binding the new nation together. Notably, as legal expert John Dugard points out, post-apartheid South Africa did not and has not become a party to the 1973 UN Apartheid Convention (though it is a signatory to the Rome Statute).⁴⁵ Apartheid, in international law, seems to be unmoored from South Africa itself.

Legal definitions of apartheid have only limited utility or purchase: they have political and moral leverage, but ought not be treated as immanent sociological or historical truths. Nor is there lawyerly agreement on the matter. In a widely cited 2020 report for the human rights organization Yesh Din, advocate Michael Sfard affirms that the crime of apartheid is practiced in the occupied West Bank. While originating in South Africa, apartheid is “now an independent legal concept with a life of its own, which can exist without being founded on racist ideology.” This expansive claim is qualified by the distinction Sfard draws between conditions in the occupied territories and those pertaining in East Jerusalem and towns and cities within the pre-1967 borders of Israel. The view on whether Israel is or might become an apartheid regime depends on such distinctions.⁴⁶

Conversely, the South African lawyer and international human rights prosecutor Richard Goldstone, who led a United Nations fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict of 2008–2009, was firmly of the opinion in 2011 that “In Israel, there is no apartheid. Nothing there comes close to the definition of apartheid under the 1998 Rome Statute.” (Rather a lot depends on the preposition “in” [Israel], because he concedes that “the West Bank is more complex.”)⁴⁷ These are legal opinions that are heavily influenced by the social and political views, as well as the personal experiences, of Sfard and Goldstone. As the legal anthropologist Richard Wilson observes, the use of history by lawyers does not necessarily promote deep historical understanding, for all the weight of judgments in courts such as Nuremberg or at the Hague.⁴⁸

The term “apartheid” continues to multiply and expand in its usage. It is now applied to the treatment of Uyghurs in China, to allegations of genocide perpetrated against Rohingyas in Myanmar, and increasingly to the Israeli government. The term has been retrofitted to the United States (which has its own expressive terminology) and applied as well to environmental politics and the distribution of Covid vaccines. Quite why “apartheid” has been used so indiscriminately deserves consideration. Very likely, the view that apartheid was overcome in South Africa with the notable assistance and intervention of the international community helps to explain its attractiveness as a model for international mobilization and action. Yet, with respect to Israel/Palestine, where the conflict appears intractable, the putative success of international sanctions against South Africa is often cited as a model for the BDS movement targeting Israel.⁴⁹

Boycotts and sanctions were only one aspect of the pressure placed on South African government: “a supplementary tool used by a powerful, strategically led and mass-mobilized liberation struggle.”⁵⁰ The steady delegitimation of apartheid in the minds of its own supporters was also important. It is not easy to replicate the apparent success of the anti-apartheid movement. Domino theories were wrong with respect to “communism” in the Cold War, and there are no good grounds to believe that domino moralism will work either. Hope that the baton of human rights might pass from the redeemed pariah state of South Africa to yet-to-be liberated Palestine may be misplaced.

Under the Mandela presidency, and for a while after, South Africa sought to maintain a judicious approach to the Middle East, which included striking diplomatic agreements and a cooperative accord in matters concerning trade, science, and culture, signed in 1995–1996. A decade later, the 2006 Lebanon War prompted intense criticisms of Israel within South Africa. President Mbeki welcomed PA leader Mahmoud Abbas to South Africa that year and lent his support to a two-state solution, while praising the peace-making efforts of Rabin and Arafat.⁵¹ This cautious approach, based on the idea that South Africa could facilitate peace in the Middle East by drawing on its own historical experience, did not survive long. Under the Zuma presidency, many senior ANC leaders likened Israeli treatment of Palestinians to life under apartheid, with Jewish-born ANC veteran Ronnie Kasrils supporting an academic boycott of Israeli universities because of “their complicity in the Israeli system of apartheid.”⁵² In 2018, South Africa recalled its ambassador to Israel indefinitely following clashes on the Gaza border.

Efforts to universalize the meaning of apartheid pre-date the end of that regime. In 1984, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida pronounced apartheid to be “Racism’s Last Word.” He meant by this that it was the “ultimate racism in the world” and the “last of many.” His claims were contested by the South African academics Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon, who argued that a blurring of differences and meanings had the effect of “conferring on the single term *apartheid* a spurious autonomy and agency.” Derrida shot back, turning their accusations that the generalization of “apartheid” was historically and politically inaccurate on their head: For Derrida, the abiding historical reality was that the essentials of apartheid remained in place and that the condemnatory value of this keyword in international discourse justified its continued usage. A comparison might be drawn here with Mahmood Mamdani’s definition of apartheid as “the generic form of the colonial state in Africa.”⁵³

The impulse to see apartheid as the archetype of systematic racial exploitation has obvious appeal for legal, political, and moral reasons. Bakan and Abu-Laban make a good case for comparability between Israel/Palestine and South Africa, while also noting that comparison should allow for difference. They conclude that the purpose of the

exercise is “not only grounded in sound comparative political science as a methodology, but also in the potential it offers for advancing a movement of global solidarity and inspiring a movement for equality, peace and justice in the Middle East.”⁵⁴ Anthropologist Julie Peete places Israel/Palestine and South Africa in the broad category of settler colonialism and is likewise concerned to highlight differences within family resemblances. She concludes that “the work of comparison” is mainly valuable by virtue of “the space it opens for new ways of conceptualizing and critiquing standard formulations of exception.”⁵⁵ Yet it is worth remembering the wry remark of Donald Akenson, who, in his comparison of settlers in Israel, South Africa, and Northern Ireland, points out that none of the groups in question welcome being compared to one another.⁵⁶ For liberation movements, solidarity is attractive—though not if this compromises the distinctiveness of one’s own struggle.

CONCLUSIONS

While there is no good reason to be proprietary about the term “apartheid,” political as well as conceptual problems arise when a term is appropriated for rhetorical or mobilizing effect. Relying overly on legal definitions risks trading historical understandings for technical, brokered consensus. Whether cut-and-paste attributions of “apartheid” help to understand fundamental societal conflict, let alone to develop strategies to overcome profound inequities, is doubtful. In South Africa, academic and political debates about the precise meaning of apartheid were a key part of the way in which campaigns to overcome it were devised and mobilized through the “politics of praxis.” This meant, as the ANC deputy minister of foreign affairs Aziz Pahad pointedly advised, that the “struggle must be against a system, and not against a people or a religion.”⁵⁷

Academics cannot hope to determine how words and phrases are deployed in political contexts. But they can propose useful qualifications, questions, and refinements. To invoke a different analogy, one might resist seeing “Nazism” as generally applicable, because it applies to a particular regime in a particular era, while being amenable to the use of the more flexible term “fascist” or “fascism,” which was adopted

variously in Europe and Latin America and refers as much to political style and affect as to particular statutes or practices. Thus, to use “apartheid” as an adjective or descriptor (as in “apartheid-like”) may make more sense than to use it as an abstract noun.

Apartheid may or may not have been the “ultimate racism” of the twentieth century, to cite Derrida again. Israel may in fact be exceeding late-apartheid-style oppression and discrimination, not least because of the extent to which it utilizes social and spatial engineering and integrated digital surveillance techniques that were not available to whites in South Africa. Levels of violence, revenge, and bloodletting in Israel/Palestine far exceed those in South Africa other, perhaps, than in the period 1984–1994. The role of the military in Israel/Palestine has been continuous since 1948; in South Africa, in contrast, the police remained preeminent through the 1960s and were only displaced, along with civilian government, by militarized securocrats in the 1980s.⁵⁸ It may also be worth pointing out that, whereas the South African economy went into a protracted decline from the mid-1970s, prompting opinion formers to think seriously about structural reforms, Israel’s economy became immeasurably stronger over the same period and its politics much more defiantly right wing and extremist. The influence of the “apartheid Bible” peaked in the 1960s, so that by the 1980s, leading theologians were as likely to criticize as to support apartheid. In contrast, in contemporary Israel, religious voices on the Jewish right are a palpable and growing factor in politics.

Apartheid-like discrimination in contemporary Israel–Palestine may, in certain respects, be even more potent than it was in South Africa, where the capacity of the white minority to dominate the black majority was never total. Viewed in time depth and at a distance, the two societies may be seen as mirror images of one another. Yet they did not have a great deal in common in 1948, when white ascendancy in South Africa was not genuinely threatened, while a new Zionist dominion fighting for its continued existence turned to ethnic cleansing. Apartheid reached its apogee around 1967 (Verwoerd was assassinated the year before), after which Israel was visibly much more powerful and also beginning to look more apartheid-like. Recent detailed reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights

Watch add heft to the idea of Israeli apartheid, not least by treating the Occupied Territories together with conditions in Israel proper—a move that makes growing sense as the evisceration of the “peace process” blurs the difference between temporary and permanent subordination.⁵⁹

Unyielding repression of Palestinians within and beyond Israel's borders makes the comparison with South Africa compelling, one striking example being the brutal response to mourners burying the murdered Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in 2022, an event that recalls the cycles of politicized violence—funeral—violence in 1980s South Africa. Increasing anti-democratic repression in the name of Zionism has persuaded the veteran South African and Israeli journalist Benjamin Pogrund to review his long-held insistence that Israel is not an apartheid state: “I am now witnessing the apartheid with which I grew up.”⁶⁰

Mass political violence was not, however, a feature of the early apartheid state, notwithstanding ubiquitous administrative and police repression. The decade and a half following the Soweto uprising was studded with violence, and these events became the catalyst for reforms designed to make South Africa more and more *apartheid-lite*. The trajectory in Israel–Palestine seems to be going in the opposite direction as powerful elements on either side talk of total victory and entertain fantasies of eliminating their adversaries. Israel/Palestine (or Israel–Palestine) and South Africa therefore suggest a striking case of convergent evolution, with 1967 featuring as a crossover point and the mid-1970s as a period ushering in mass resistance in both societies. However, this convergence has less to do with structural similarities than with external perceptions of gross injustice and systemic inequality. The 1970s were a defining period for Pretoria and Jerusalem in the court of international opinion, as global anti-colonialism and anti-racism worked to delegitimize South Africa and Israel and treat them increasingly as pariah states. Today's Israel/Palestine might thus be thought of as an instance of “neo-apartheid”: not the original phenomenon so much as an elaboration or familial version, with the important caveat that, in the words of Francesco Chiodelli, “If apartheid is everything, maybe it is nothing.”⁶¹

SAUL DUBOW is the Smuts Professor of History at the University of Cambridge. He has published widely on the history of South Africa, Commonwealth, and Empire.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Professor Amal Ghazal, whose invitation to a conference on “Settler Colonialism, Indigeneity and the Palestinian–Zionist Struggle” in Doha, 2022, challenged me to think seriously about the parallels between South Africa and Israel in a systematic way. I owe much to conversations with Paul Betts about comparative history. I wish to thank Andrew Arsan, Richard Drayton, Rebecca Hodes, Victor Kattan, Jeremy Krikler, Scott Malcomson, Miri Rubin, Hana Sleiman, Kim Wagner, and Tal Zalmanovich for valuable comments on successive drafts of this essay. Anonymous reviewers of this article saved me from errors and gave me much to think about. This article was conceived, written, and submitted prior to 7 October 2023.
2. For recent instructive examples drawn from a large literature see, e.g., A. Bishara, *Palestine: Matters of Truth and Justice* (London: Hurst, 2022), Chap. 8; R. Zreik and A. Dakwar, “What’s in the Apartheid Analogy? Palestine/Israel Refracted,” *Theory and Event* 23, 3 (2020), 664–705.
3. A. Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1995* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
4. For more details and discussion see S. Dubow, *Apartheid 1948–1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
5. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951).
6. P. J. Herf, *Israel’s Moment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 69.
7. On the limits of Zionist egalitarianism, see, e.g., Z. Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) and A. Sabbagh-Khoury, *Colonizing Palestine: The Zionist Left and the Making of the Palestinian Nakba* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023).
8. T. Lodge and M. Oralek, “Fraternal Friends: South African Communists and Czechoslovakia, 1945–89,” *Journal of African History* 61, no. 2 (2020), 226–29.
9. J. Krikler, “Moral–Historical Questions of the Anti–Israel Boycott,” *Boycotts Past and Present*, ed. D. Feldman (2018), 311–31; Herf, *Israel’s Moment*, 8.
10. Cf. M. Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919–1948: Arab and Jew in the Struggle for Internationalism* (London: Ithaca, 1979) and T. Lodge, *Red Road to Freedom. A History of the South Africa Communist Party 1921–2021* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana, 2021).
11. An exception is B. Neuberger, “Nationalisms Compared: ANC, IRA and PLO,” *The Elusive Search for Peace*, ed. H. Giliomee and J. Gagliano (Cape Town: Oxford/IDASA, 1990), 54–77, 67–70, who argues that communist influence in the ANC has been deeper than in the PLO, with the result that the ANC has been more inclined to talk about socioeconomic goals and to entertain multiracial cooperation rather than exclusive nationalism.

12. R. Greenstein, *Anti-colonial Resistance in South Africa and Israel/Palestine: Identity, Nationalism, and Race* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 20, 58–59. Matters were not made easier by the existence of rival Jewish communist groups.
13. M. Shain, *A Perfect Storm; Antisemitism in South Africa 1930–1948* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2015).
14. S. Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 51, fn. 139; D. Brown, *Against the World: A Study of White South African Attitudes* (London: Collins, 1966), 192.
15. M. Shain, "Paradoxical Ambiguity—D. F. Malan and the 'Jewish Question,'" *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa* 72, no. 1 (2017), 63–74.
16. N. Tal and L. Bethlehem, "South African Text, Zionist Palimpsest: Israeli Critics Read Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 19, no. 4 (2020), 450–471; Robinson, *Citizen Strangers*, 52–53.
17. I owe this point to Paul Betts.
18. Arrested in 1963, along with the ANC high command, Goldreich escaped from prison and fled to Israel. According to Chris McGreal, who interviewed Goldreich for *The Guardian*, "There was a time when he believed the young Jewish state might provide the example of a better way for the country of his birth. As it is, Goldreich [now] sees Israel as closer to the white regime he fought against and modern South Africa as providing the model. Israeli governments, he says, ultimately proved more interested in territory than peace, and along the way Zionism mutated." C. McGreal, "Worlds Apart," *The Guardian* (6 February 2006), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/06/southafrica.israel>.
19. F. J. Nöthling, "East of Suez, South of Agulhas," ed. T. Wheeler, *History of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs 1927–1993* (Johannesburg: SAIHA, 2005), 447–78.
20. "Premier Lashes Israel," *Rand Daily Mail* (23 November 1961).
21. "Golda Meir Defends Israel's Condemnation of South Africa at U.N.," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin* (15 November 1962), available at <https://www.jta.org/1962/11/15/archive/golda-meir-defends-israels-condemnation-of-south-africa-at-u-n>.
22. Meir interviewed by F. Giles, "Golda Meir: 'Who Can Blame Israel?'" *Sunday Times* (15 June 1969); Sabbagh-Khoury, *Colonizing Palestine*; S. Smooha, "Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype," *Israel Studies* 2, no. 2 (1997), 198–241.
23. S. Polakow-Suransky, *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Pantheon, 2011).
24. F. A. Sayegh, *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (Beirut: PLO, 1965); N. Fischer, "Palestinian Non-violent Resistance and the Apartheid Analogy," *Interventions* (2020), 6–9.
25. A. Sabbagh-Khoury, "Tracing Settler Colonialism: A Genealogy of a Paradigm in the Sociology of Knowledge Production in Israel," *Politics and Society* 50, no. 1 (2021), 44–83; Greenstein, *Anti-colonial Resistance*.
26. My thanks to Hana Sleiman for clarifying this point.
27. I am grateful to Victor Kattan for his suggestions here.
28. Robinson, *Citizen Strangers*, 8, 47.

29. Sayegh, *Zionist Colonialism*, 24.
30. Sayegh, *Zionist Colonialism*, 24.
31. G. Shafir, *Land, Labour and the Origins of the Israeli Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Chap. 7.
32. Benny Morris's pioneering work on the subject of the 1948 expulsions is now mired in controversy, partly because of his own shifting political position. For some of the most up-to-date thinking, see A. Confino, "The Nakba and the Zionist Dream of an Ethnonational State," *History Workshop Journal* 95 (2023), 131–53.
33. N. Krystall, "The De-Arabization of West Jerusalem 1947–50," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27 (1998), 5–22.
34. Again, thanks to Hana Sleiman for clarification.
35. R. Greenstein, *Genealogies of Conflict: Class, Identity and State in Palestine/Israel and South Africa* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), 263; cf. R. Greenstein, "Israel, Palestine, and Apartheid," *Insight Turkey* 22, no. 1 (2020), 73–92.
36. See M. Mamdani, "The South African Moment," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 45, no. 1 (2015), 63–68; Krikler, "Moral–Historical Questions."
37. G. Rachman, *The Age of the Strongman* (London: Bodley Head, 2022).
38. J. Cherry, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana, 2011), 54–57.
39. A. Shatz, "Palestinianism," *London Review of Books* 43, no. 9 (2021), available at www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n09/adam-shatz/palestinianism.
40. J. L. Gelvin, *The Israel–Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 242.
41. E. W. Said, "The Morning After," *London Review of Books* 15, no. 20 (1993), 3, available at <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v15/n20/edward-said/the-morning-after>.
42. E. W. Said and M. Rabbani, "Symbols versus Substance: A Year after the Declaration of Principles," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 2 (1995), 60–72, 71. On the fundamental imbalances baked into Oslo, see, e.g., R. Khalidi, "The United States and Palestine," *The Future of Palestine and Israel*, ed. A. Farouk-Alli (Midrand, South Africa: Institute for Global Dialogue, 2007), 272–98, 283–85.
43. S. Greenberg, *Race and State in Capitalist Development: South Africa in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980); D. H. Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); H. Giliomee and J. Gagiano (Eds.), *The Elusive Search for Peace* (Cape Town: Oxford/IDASA, 1990); A. Guelke, "The Political Impasse in South Africa and Northern Ireland," *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 2 (1991), 143–62; T. G. Mitchell, *Native vs. Settler: Ethnic Conflict in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland and South Africa* (Westport CT: Greenwood, 2000).
44. For a discussion of ethical and moral equivalences, also with a strong sense of structural comparisons, see D. Glaser, "Zionism and Apartheid: A Moral Comparison," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, no. 3 (2003), 331–51; P. Beinart, "A Jewish Case for Palestinian Refugee Return," *The Guardian* (18 May 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/may/18/a-jewish-case-for-palestinian-refugee-return>

45. J. Dugard, "Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid," United Nations (2008), <https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/cspca/cspca.html>. Israel did not sign the 1973 Apartheid Convention.
46. M. Sfar, "The Occupation of the West Bank and the Crime of Apartheid. Executive Summary," Yesh Din (2020), <https://www.yesh-din.org/en/the-occupation-of-the-west-bank-and-the-crime-of-apartheid-legal-opinion/>. In contrast, the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem argued in 2021 that "The Israeli regime enacts in all the territory it controls (Israeli sovereign territory, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip) an apartheid regime." B'Tselem, "A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This Is Apartheid" (12 January 2021), <https://www.btselem.org/apartheid>.
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56. Cited in Mitchell, *Native vs. Settler*, 4.
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