



DOES ISRAEL DISCRIMINATE AGAINST ARABS?

OLGA MESHOE

Maybe you've heard someone say that Israel is an apartheid state. That Israel has a policy of segregating and oppressing the minority population within its borders – like South Africa once did.

Maybe you've been so outraged by this information that you have considered joining the BDS movement – the effort to boycott, divest and sanction Israel until it ends its alleged “racist” policies.

I don't blame you. Apartheid is a great evil and deserves to be fought wherever we find it. But here's the thing: You won't find apartheid in the State of Israel. So, I'll put it bluntly: The BDS movement is a slick propaganda effort built on lies.

I think I have the credibility to make this claim.

Having grown up in South Africa, and having spent a fair amount of time in Israel, I know what apartheid is and what it is not. My parents were raised under real apartheid where blacks were, by law, separated from whites at every level, from education to drinking fountains.

Blacks couldn't vote, couldn't own land, couldn't live next to, or use the same transportation system as whites. I remember my father telling me about how my grandfather was kicked and humiliated in public by a young white boy. All he was permitted to say was, “Please stop, little boss.” That was the world my family lived in.

That was the world of apartheid South Africa.

But in Israel, the law is color-blind. Israeli Arabs have the same rights as Israeli Jews. They ride the same buses, study in the same schools, and are treated in the same hospitals. Arabs are elected to Israel's parliament, serve as judges, and fight in the Israeli military.

On my first trip to Israel, the group I was with had a Jewish tour guide and an Arab bus driver. Imagine our surprise, having heard that Israel is an apartheid state. This would have been inconceivable in apartheid South Africa. All these things would be self-evident to anyone who did any kind of actual research, or, even better, visited Israel – something I encourage everyone to do.

BDS doesn't want you to do research or visit Israel. It depends on the ignorance of its audience. Sadly, on American college campuses, BDS has a significant presence. It succeeds by playing on the good intentions of good people through deliberate deception.

In short, they lie.

And lies really make me angry because lies empower evil.

Lies about blacks empowered apartheid in South Africa.

Lies about Jews made the Holocaust possible.

And lies about Israel are misleading a lot of good-hearted young people into opposing the only country in the entire Middle East that doesn't segregate and oppress its minority population. Just ask the next Egyptian Copt or Iraqi Christian you meet on campus.

So, the question people should really be asking is: What does the BDS movement want? The answer is simple. They want to destroy Israel. They can't do it militarily, so they try to do it through lies.

They say that Jews have no historic claim to Israel. Lie.

They say that Israel treats its Arabs as second-class citizens. Lie.

They say that Israel doesn't want peace with its Arab neighbors. Lie.

If you tell lies, and you tell them often enough, people who don't know the truth start to believe them.

The BDS movement's leaders barely try to hide this charade. They will lie and say that they only want a Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel, and then they say this: "We oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine....Ending the occupation doesn't mean anything if it doesn't mean upending the Jewish state itself." That's from Omar Barghouti, a founder of BDS.

Barghouti lives in Israel, so you might expect that he said this from inside an Israeli prison, like Nelson Mandela during South African apartheid. You would be wrong. Barghouti is a PhD student at Israel's Tel Aviv University, where he enjoys the same rights as every Israeli.

My parents could only dream of that kind of freedom.

Is Israel a perfect country? No. There are as many perfect countries as there are perfect people. But to call it an apartheid state is not only an insult to the only democracy in the Middle East and the only country with equal rights for all its minorities, it's also an insult to the actual victims of apartheid--like my parents and all those who suffered under it.

I'm Olga Meshoe for Prager University.