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## Israeli Apartheid

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They yelled: “Dirty Arab. You want a state? Is that what you want?” Then they began to beat up the Palestinian worker, who later told the press about how he was attacked by a group of around twenty young Jews while he was working in Tel Aviv. A few days later, another Palestinian was attacked by eight Jewish youths while going for a walk with his wife, and when police arrested four of the suspects they found that two of them had also participated in the first attack in Tel Aviv.

The Israeli press focused on these two stories not because they were isolated incidents, but because they came at a time of growing physical and verbal attacks on Palestinians—committed by groups of ultra-orthodox Jews, and increasing attempts to create a racial divide between the two peoples. These attempts include measures to prevent Palestinians from riding public buses on some routes, after Jewish settlers complained that their presence constituted a security risk. The Israeli authorities have complied with the desires of these settlers and last week began running buses especially for Palestinian workers traveling from the West Bank into Israel for work. This move was warmly welcomed by a number of residents of the Israeli settlements, but created widespread controversy and was criticized by a number of writers and commentators in the Israeli media, drawing comparisons with the practices of the white minority in the days of Apartheid rule in South Africa.

It is ridiculous that the Israeli ministry of transport claimed that allocating separate buses to the Palestinians was a move to improve their travel conditions, on the grounds that they are greatly inconvenienced when traveling on bus routes transporting Jews from the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and are forced to wait on the highway because they are forbidden from entering the settlements. This flagrant attempt to cover up for racism did not convince the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, which described the move as “a revolting plan”, noting that the Palestinian workers have security clearances entitling them to

work in Israel. According to a spokesperson from the organization, “This is simply racism. Such a plan cannot be justified with claims of security needs or overcrowding.”

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* also wrote an editorial refuting the Israeli transport ministry’s claims, and described the procedures as “another manifestation of a regime based on discrimination and segregation”. The newspaper went on to confirm that the allocation of special buses to transport Palestinian workers is “part of a more principled separation between the populations that is expressed in almost every area: In the allocation of areas for residential construction, in the different legal systems, in the unequitable distribution of resources and in discriminatory travel regulations.” The editorial concluded by calling on Netanyahu to immediately order a halt to this racist segregation.

These comments, which of course were attacked by Jewish extremists and labeled a campaign from the Israeli left, reflect the tense atmosphere that has resulted from the escalation of racist attacks against Palestinians, including the 1948 Arabs, or the Arab Israelis as they are called. The Palestinian and Israeli media, and sometimes Arab and international news outlets, have reported many stories about the targeting of Palestinians at a time when the Israeli extreme right is growing in stature, and the influence of settlers is expanding, having recently been described as the most powerful lobby group in Israel.

One particular story that was circulated a lot on the internet and in the media, with an accompanying set of pictures, was that of a young Palestinian woman in Jerusalem who was assaulted at the hands of a group of Jewish youths, who intended to beat her and remove her veil. When she tried to resist, one of them told her: “Never raise your hand to a Jew”, according to an eye witness account. Within a few days, the media had reported many similar stories about attacks on Palestinians, both men and women, who were either beaten, pelted with stones, spat at, or subjected to racist chants calling on them to leave. Pictures and video recordings were also posted documenting bus drivers refusing to admit Palestinians and demanding them to get off.

What is striking in the statements and comments of the Israeli police is the claim that these attacks were motivated by “nationalism”. This term has been used as an attempt to cover up the correct assessment of what happened, namely racist attacks that reflect growing feelings of hostility and the constant atmosphere of enmity. Although this is nothing new, the atmosphere is growing with the spread of the extreme right and the rising voice and influence of settlers and religious fanatics. However some try to blur the facts, it is hard to deny that Israel—with these practices—is seeking to building another buffer wall to divide itself from the Palestinians. Of course, this is in addition to the concrete wall that is already in place, which Israel spent millions on and proceeded to construct for years, still continuing to work on additional areas. This is all an attempt to deepen the physical and psychological division between them and the Palestinians, and this goes further even than the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

Amid such an atmosphere it is not surprising that talk is increasing about the possibility of an explosion of anger in the Palestinian territories and the outbreak of a third intifada. This may be the strongest and fiercest uprising yet in light of the current situation, the sense of frustration, and no view of peace on the horizon. The Palestinians may draw inspiration from the scenes of demonstrations and clashes that have dominated their television screens every day since the beginning of the Arab Spring. They may also find support from highly charged and frustrated youths of the Arab Spring states. The situation in the region at the moment is like quicksand, with the proliferation of arms in the hands of many groups, and the presence

of many parties that may see the ignition of a Palestinian uprising as a chance to escape from their internal crises.

Obama, coming to the region next week for talks in Israel and Ramallah, may not come to listen, as was the case with new US Secretary of State John Kerry, and he may not come with any new impetus to mobilize the stalled peace efforts. However, if he keeps his eyes open on the ground he will see the suffering of the Palestinians, and he cannot help but realize the military, political, and moral danger of ignoring this.

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