

**Book review: *Seeking Mandela: Peacemaking between Israelis and Palestinians***  
By Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, Wits University Press, 2005.

**Introduction:**

The book, *Seeking Mandela: Peacemaking between Israelis and Palestinians*, is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in the Middle East. It contributes greatly to an understanding of what Israelis and Palestinians can learn from the South African experience of the transition from apartheid to democracy.

The political landscape has changed dramatically since the book was written because of the election of Hamas to govern the Palestinian territories and the victory of the newly formed Kadima in the March 2006 Israeli election. Keeping that in mind, President Thabo Mbeki was correct in his decision to invite the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas on an official visit to South Africa. Mbeki understands that isolating the democratically elected Hamas government is not the way to contribute to peace in the Middle East. Hopefully, President Mbeki will teach the Palestinian government the importance of both *justice of warfare* and *justice in warfare*. Even more importantly, Israel needs to learn this lesson.

**Moral literacy:**

In general, Adam and Moodley give a balanced, two-sided account of the controversial conflict. The book starts off by calling for *moral literacy*, the ability to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate behavior. This sets the tone of the book. Throughout the book the authors themselves show an admirable level of moral literacy. They avoid the populist slogans utilized by both of the parties. They speak out against the killing of innocent civilians by Palestinian suicide bombers and also condemn the Israelis excesses and human rights violations against Palestinians.

**An Israeli and Palestinian Truth Commission?**

A truth and reconciliation commission, similar to that of South Africa, is necessary after a negotiated settlement, and is preferably part of that settlement. Adam and Moodley argue that an Israeli and Palestinian truth commission would be useful in redefining the collective memory of the two peoples. Such a commission could provide a shared narrative and thereby undermine the sectarian stronghold on history. The Israelis would agree upon their view of history and the Palestinians on theirs before the two commissions fuse to agree upon a common narrative. This exercise could possibly facilitate a negotiated settlement of the conflict, by changing the view of the “other”, according to Adam and Moodley. I, however, have my doubts about an Israeli and Palestinian truth commission because of the asymmetry of power between the two. To have Palestinian and Israelis agreeing on a common view upon history is too idealistic, as long as one is under occupation by the other.

**6 issues for comparison:**

Adam and Moodley focus their comparison between South Africa and Israel – Palestine around six main issues; economic interdependence, religion, third-party intervention, leadership, political culture and violence.

While South Africa was characterized by high economic interdependence, the Israeli and Palestinian economy is much more separated. Since the first Intifada, Israel has freed itself from dependence on the Palestinian economy and labor, while the Palestinian economy is still largely dependant on Israel. Religion, on the other hand, played the role of moral unifier in South Africa, which differs from the use of religion as a divisive force for competing claims in the Middle East. Third-party intervention had the consequence of moral isolation and erosion of South Africa, in contrast to the international support received by the Israelis.

A leadership that managed to maintain its credibility with their constituencies was the blessing of South Africa. The Israeli and Palestinian leadership, on the other hand, is largely fragmented. A credible and cohesive leadership is crucial to selling a controversial compromise. When it comes to political culture, South Africa had a lot more social interaction between black and white people than is the case for Israelis and Palestinians. As far as violence is concerned, the extensive use of collective punishment by Israel never occurred in South Africa, and South Africa never experienced suicide bombers. On the contrary, the African National Congress (ANC) had a clear policy of not hurting civilians.

Adam and Moodley find that the differences outweigh the similarities in their comparative study between South Africa and Israel-Palestine. The comparative analysis constitutes the basis for the lessons from South Africa's peacemaking process.

The book concludes with 10 concrete lessons for peacemaking based on the South African experience. In addition to a truth commission, Adam and Moodley recommend that the negotiators be freely chosen by each side and not dictated by the one party. They also argue that ending violence as a precondition for negotiation gives veto power to any individuals with a gun. Negotiation does not depend on a ceasefire, but should be unconditional and open-ended. I could not agree more. Adam and Moodley also call for leaders on both sides to educate their constituencies in political literacy in order to prepare them for controversial compromises.

### **One versus two states?**

The main difference between South Africa and the Israeli-Palestine conflict is that they are aiming for two separate states. The debate between the one-state solution in Israel and Palestine and the two-state solution has diminished during the last couple of years mainly due to the Road Map, endorsed by the Quartet (The UN, the US, Russia and the EU). Everyone seems to agree that the only way forward is two separate states.

I agree with the authors that the days of a two-state solution might soon be over because of the expansion of settlements and by-pass roads inside the West Bank. Creating a viable Palestinian state is therefore becoming more and more difficult. The Palestinians might therefore turn to a one person – one vote strategy. Such a strategy would be the hope of many Palestinians, as it would make it easier for them to garner international support for their cause.

Israel has acknowledged the urgency of a two-state solution. In a report in August 2002, Israel's National Security Council stated that Israel must decide its final borders within the next few years. The Council warned that, "the alternative was for Israel to retain control over an ever-growing number of Palestinians with no political rights, thereby endangering the state's Jewish and democratic characters alike."<sup>1</sup> The Unilateral Disengagement Plan must be understood within this framework. In the absence of a "partner for peace" Israel believes, the alternative to disengagement would in a few years time, be an apartheid state where a minority will be controlling a majority of the population between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

### **Critique:**

My main critique of the book is that it seems to take the perspective that the Israel-Palestine conflict is an ethnic one and thereby offers the solution of what I would call the people to people approach. People to people programmes are built on the assumption that if the

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<sup>1</sup> Haaretz, 23 August 2002 as cited in Wasserstein, Bernhard, *Israel and Palestine: Why They Fight and Can They Stop?*, Profile Books Ltd., London, 2003, p. 139.

conflicting people spend time together and get to know each other, the conflict between them will diminish. Such programmes are working well in ethnic symmetrical conflicts. In asymmetric conflicts where the one party clearly has the power, such programmes will perpetuate the unbalanced power relationship. Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories has to be a precondition for people to people programmes. At this stage, they will serve to consolidate the present occupation. The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is a conflict over land, not an ethnic conflict. The contentious issues are borders, settlement, refugees and Jerusalem. Thus a politically negotiated settlement is the only way forward.

### **The Apartheid analogy – Is Israel an apartheid state?**

Armed conflicts are also a battle between competing narratives. Words and analogies play an important role in this battle. Is a suicide bomber a terrorist, a martyr, or a freedom fighter? As part of the battle over narratives, Israel tries to promote itself as the ultimate victim by playing on European guilt for the Holocaust. The victim role is a strong one. Besides, it enables Israel to attack any critics for being anti-Semitic. This distorts the open debate about Israeli policy against the Palestinians. People who critique Israel's breaches of international law and violation of the human rights of the Palestinian population in the West Bank are in my view not anti-Semitic, but rather pro-international law and human rights.

The Apartheid analogy must be understood as part of the battle of narratives and words, and I believe it is a justifiable analogy. This does not mean that there are no differences between what happened in South Africa during Apartheid and what is happening in Israel-Palestine at the moment. According to Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Israel's human right abuses and breaches of international law are worse than what happened in South Africa during Apartheid.

### **Boycotts, Sanctions, Divestment:**

Adam and Moodley support boycott of goods made in the settlement, but argue that Archbishop Tutu uncritically emulates strategies by simplistic comparisons when he calls for a similar divestment movement of the 1980s against apartheid. I cannot disagree more. It is true that the end of apartheid did not result only from international pressure, but I will argue that the economic factors of boycotts, sanctions and divestment played a large role to end the regime. Besides isolating South Africa, they also morally de-legitimized the South African government, both internationally and nationally.

I am aware of the fact that boycotts, sanctions and divestment can harden the Israeli view and in the short term, even push voters to the right of the political landscape. That has always been the unintended consequence of sanctions.

When it comes to economic measures, it is crucial to have a mandate from the ones it will hit hardest. During the Apartheid struggle, Archbishop Tutu called for boycotts on behalf of black South Africans. In Palestine, more than 170 Palestinian civil society organizations signed the "Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel" on the first anniversary of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ ruled that the Israeli Wall built on occupied Palestinian territory is illegal according to international law (Hague Regulations and the Fourth Geneva Convention). The ICJ issued a similar advisory opinion in 1971, which denounced South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia and triggered the anti-apartheid sanctions.

The Call from Palestinian Organizations reads:

“We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era. We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this Call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.”

It is also important to note that these sanctions only shall be carried out until Israel complies with international law and universal principles of human rights. In February 2005, the World Council of Churches also decided to “give serious consideration to economic measures” against Israel to bring an end to its occupation of Palestinian territories.<sup>2</sup> A worldwide sanction movement against Israel is not only possible, but also about to become a reality.

### **Conclusion:**

By unilateral decisions Israel dictates peace on its terms. The international community should not recognize this. It might be possible to impose separation, but never possible to impose peace. Israel is trying to create peace through security instead of security through peace. In my view, an imposed peace through security is not sustainable. The parties have to go back to the negotiation table and reach a political settlement.

Whether Marwan Barghouti will become the Palestinian Mandela as the book suggests that he might remains to be seen. Let us hope so for the sake of both Israelis and Palestinians. Unfortunately, I doubt Israel will allow him to do so, which is a pity for both parties.

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### Quotes:

“Adam and Moodley argue that an Israeli and Palestinian truth commission would be useful in redefining the collective memory of the two peoples.”

“Negotiation does not depend on a ceasefire, but should be unconditional and open-ended.”

“In the absence of a “partner for peace” Israel believes, the alternative to disengagement would in a few years time, be an apartheid state where a minority will be controlling a majority of the population between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.”

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<sup>2</sup> The Press Statement from the World Council of Churches reads (February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005):

“The WCC governing body encouraged the Council’s member churches “to give serious consideration to economic measures that are equitable, transparent and non-violent” as a new way to work for peace, by looking at ways to not participate economically in illegal activities related to the Israeli occupation. In a sense, the committee affirmed “economic pressure, appropriately and openly applied” as a “means of action”.”

“Israel is trying to create peace through security instead of security through peace. In my view, an imposed peace through security is not sustainable”