

Anti-Zionism is Racism

by [Nikos Akritas](#) (December 2024)



Big Haifa Winter (Amos Garfunkel)

The idea that Zionism is racism rests on the belief it

discriminates against non-Jews, particularly Arabs who lived in what is now Israel prior to 1948. For Zionism's very *raison d'être* is the principle that those adhering to the Jewish faith have the right to settle in Israel, regardless of whether they have any recent ancestry linking them to it (i.e. non-Palestinian Jews). Arabs who had lived on the same land prior to 1948 and left as a result of the conflict do not have the right to return. This is a discrimination of sorts. But it is not Zionism. Zionism is based on the 'right of return,' not the right to exclude. The latter is not a tenet of Zionism but a desperate response to a desperate situation.

The decision not to allow Arabs to return was a political decision, not an ideological one. Israel, unlike the countries around it, has not been ethnically cleansed; its population is over 20% Arab. It does not subscribe to the belief in an Arab or Muslim-free territory between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. The same cannot be said of a reverse scenario. The denial of a territorial state for the Jewish people is the real racism at issue. For if other peoples are granted the right to self-determination, why not Jews?

The argument that Israel was created to the detriment of an indigenous community is not unique in the world but there were Palestinian Jews living in the area prior to the British Mandate. The promise of a state for each of the Arab and Jewish Palestinian communities was recognition of the right to self-determination and independence from the Ottoman Empire.

The division of the land into an Arab and a Jewish state is no more racist than was the partition of India and the population exchange between Greece and Turkey. All three of these areas had mixed populations of Muslims and non-Muslims. The recognition of the right to self-determination for Muslims resulted in what subsequently became East and West Pakistan. The desire to avoid further atrocities based on notions of ethnicity and religion resulted in the forced population exchange of Christians and Muslims between Greece and Turkey.

In each case, religious discrimination had contributed to significant violence and suffering. The very idea of self-determination attempted to tackle such issues. If, therefore, separate states were deemed necessary to protect rights for Muslims, Hindus, and Christians, why should Jewish Palestinians not also have their own state?

To force Palestinian Jews to live in a state dominated by Arab communities left them at the mercy of those communities. If Arabs had a right to independence why not Jews? The Jewish population of Palestine was small and the territory offered it by the 1937 Peel Commission was also small (a fraction of the present state of Israel). The Jews agreed to this tiny piece of land, accepting the rest of Palestine would consist of an Arab state. But their Arab neighbours begrudged them even this. Jews were not to be granted independence, only Arabs. The Peel Commission's recommendations came to nothing.

Those who deny Jews a state in this area of the world, deny the right to self-determination for Jews. Given the Jewish population of Palestine, how could the denial to self-determination only for this group be anything other than antisemitism? To argue the Jews of Israel prior to 1948 were Zionists who immigrated to the land is to overlook not only the presence of Palestinian Jews but Arab immigration to that land in the same period.

Palestinians in the early 20th century comprised both Arab and Jewish communities. The Jewish community was smaller and hence the Commission's recommendation of a much smaller territory. But once any territory becomes an independent state, it is that state's prerogative to decide on its immigration levels.

One cannot claim, as do many 'anti-Zionists', they are not against an Israeli state but Zionists who have immigrated into the country (basically all immigrants; half of whom were refugees fleeing Muslim countries and, of the rest, a large amount the horrors of Europe). It is not for outsiders to

decide an independent state's immigration policy. Israel, which would have been a country even smaller than it is now, has its present day borders as a result of continuous attempts to extinguish its existence – the denial of the right to self-determination through genocide.

Denying the right to self-determination purely for Jews is racism. If one concedes the right to self-determination, but then seeks to deny that country the right to let further Jews immigrate to it – effectively denying it the right to exercise sovereign control over its own affairs – on what grounds would that be? Denying a people's right to immigrate to an independent state that wants them is a right denied nowhere else. It is only Jews who are denied this right. It is discrimination against Jews. The express denial of such a right, known as anti-Zionism, is, then, racism.* Given racism towards Jews is antisemitism ... you complete the syllogism.

*I have of course ignored the antizionist assertions of those Ultra-Orthodox Jews, who oppose Zionism for religious reasons. When one bases arguments purely in terms of faith, there is no rational discussion to be had.

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