



Forever ours
The modification means that the Israeli State would act to preserve Jewish culture and legacy among the so-called diaspora
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STATES OF MATTER

Undeclared apartheid

A recent amendment in Israel's basic law gives closure to the Zionist project of conquest and dispossession



SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

Anxieties about identity and citizenship, once banished, are emerging afresh in a most unwelcome form. France's victory in football's greatest championship was followed by moments of self-examination, when questions of national identity came up for a brief public airing, before all sides settled in to an accustomed comfort zone. In India, a new citizenship law applied to the complexity of Assam has created a crisis threatening to plunge four million into the limbo of a stateless existence.

In more optimistic times, the argument between ethnic privilege and democratic ethics was settled decisively in favour of the latter. That choice can no longer be taken for granted. It is a time when Israel appears on the global stage as the ideological paradigm other nations could aspire to; when its Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, emerges as prophet of the passage to primitivism, grandmaster of extreme nationalism.

On July 18, the Knesset enacted an amendment to the country's basic law, declaring Israel the "Nation State of the Jewish people". Self-determination as a right within the State would be "unique to the Jewish people". The Israeli State would act to preserve Jewish culture and legacy among the so-called diaspora, and encourage Jewish settlement as a "national value".

The territorial scope of these assertions remains undefined. An explicit affirmation of extra-territoriality follows: That the Israeli State would "ensure the safety of sons (sic) of the Jewish people and its citizens who are in trouble and captivity due to their Jewishness or their citizenship".

In an unintended irony, just days after this ringing declaration that Israel would be the adversary of anti-Semitism everywhere, Netanyahu played the host to a close ally, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. The far-right Orban's populist rhetoric and bitter campaign against the Jewish-American investor George Soros has carried clear over-

tones of anti-Semitism. Yet, Netanyahu has seemed not to mind.

Netanyahu has often referred to US President Donald Trump as a great friend of Israel, despite the deep seams of anti-Semitism the latter has tapped in his cultivation of a white nationalist electoral base. The cynicism runs deep, sufficient to provoke *The Economist*, no radical voice or champion of Palestinian rights, to observe a year back, that Netanyahu's use of the anti-Semitic accusation is a matter of convenience and calculation.

Some of this is apparent in the manner campaign groups in the UK have mobilised to smear Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the opposition Labour Party. Corbyn's traditionally strong support for the Palestinian cause is portrayed in Israel's rhetoric as a reprise of the world's most ancient hatreds. It was an absurd accusation, yet sufficiently discomfiting for Corbyn to revamp his party's internal rules.

Netanyahu's politics has a tendency to segue into the kind of far-right populism that incubates anti-Semitism. There should be little surprise there, since Zionism was nurtured in the milieu of "blood and soil" nationalism that caused two brutal wars on the European mainland through the 20th century.

The Israeli leader's current stratagems were foretold in a 1993 book titled *A Durable Peace*, written when he was a pushy young politician bidding for a role in the right-wing Likud coalition. The book is a hatchet job on history, arguing that Palestine is the eternal patrimony of the Jewish people, illegitimately snatched away by Arab conquests in the ancient past.

In more recent times, Netanyahu has been credited with public utterances that Nazi Germany never intended anything more malignant than the expulsion of the Jewish people from territories under its control. The exter-

mination option, he has said, was authored by the Palestinian leader Hajj Amin al-Husseini, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem at the time, who feared that expulsion from Europe would hasten the Jewish colonisation of his land.

Questionable history aside, Netanyahu was prescient about the possibility of a new nationalist paranoia sweeping the world, creating the potential for a reconciliation with Zionism. The "Palestinian principle" is how he labels the demand that people living under Israeli military occupation should be free to constitute themselves into a State. If applied across the world, he warns, the principle would unleash chaos: Potentially triggering for instance, a demand for Hispanic self-determination within the US.

Fearmongering always had its audience, but even with its unconditional backing of Israel, the US was unprepared to endorse the audacity of the Jewish Nation-State law until Trump's crude racism gained ascendancy. This absolute convergence of values between Israel and its main patron prepares the ground for a final closure: For making official the conquest and dispossession written into the Zionist agenda at its origins.

Netanyahu had put forward the strategy with great clarity in an address to a Knesset committee in 2015. Since the entire land was Jewish patrimony, all local movements had to be alien. This made Jewish control over "all the territory" an imperative for the "foreseeable future".

An undeclared state of apartheid has now become official, with the majority living between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan, deprived of basic civil rights, liable like the people of Gaza to be killed at any time.

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