

Racism and Segregation in Israel: Under Israeli Apartheid, Palestinians Cannot Ride Israeli Buses

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Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon has officially banned Palestinians from traveling on Israeli-run public transportation in the West Bank, according to [a new report by Haaretz](#), Israel's most prominent newspaper.

The new apartheid law dictates that Palestinians cannot take buses that go from central Israel to the West Bank. They must go out of their way, to the Eyal Crossing, near the city Qalqilyah, "far from populated settler areas."

It is already difficult for Palestinians to enter Israel. Palestinian workers traveling into central Israel for their jobs have to go through high-security, militarized check points. Those who are allowed to cross are not allowed to sleep in Israel. Unemployment and poverty are high in the West Bank because of the [47-year Israeli military occupation](#). Palestinians seek employment opportunities in Israel, often in low-paid, dangerous work such as construction. Because of the checkpoints and Israeli militarized security apparatus, it takes Palestinians a long time to travel into Israel (if they are even able to do so at all). This new decision will increase their already inordinately large commute times even more.

A security official involved told *Haaretz* that "no Palestinian will be prevented from reaching his destination"; this may be true, but the question is how much longer will it take that Palestinian to travel between work and home?

Haaretz notes that the decision to segregate buses did not come out of the blue; Ya'alon decided on it after facing "intense pressure from settlers." The paper explains the Samaria Settlers' Committee and local Jewish authorities "conducted an aggressive campaign" to ban Palestinians. It adds that "settlers have tried on multiple occasions to prevent the Palestinians from commuting on those buses, and have released a video calling for them to be banned." Ya'alon "met with settler leaders" and assured them he would implement the apartheid, Jewish-only policies they desired.

It is clear that this decision is explicitly motivated out of a racism, not out of "security" concerns. *Haaretz* indicates that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has officially stated it "does not view the presence of Palestinians on West Bank buses as a security threat." The paper interviewed IDF GOC Central Command Major General Nitzan Alon, who insisted that West Bank Palestinians do not pose a "security threat," as they already "must obtain pre-approval from the Shin Bet security service and Israel Police in order to receive permits. They then undergo body checks at the border crossings."

Member of Knesset Moti Yogev, of the far-right, religious, pro-settler Habayit Hayehudi

party, explained his reasoning: “Riding these buses is unreasonable. They are full of Arabs.”

This call for bus segregation is not new. AFP [reports](#) that “Israeli settlers in the West Bank have called for years for Palestinians to be banned from public transport.” In many ways, Israeli buses have been moving toward segregation for some time. In March 2013, Israel [created](#) Palestinian-only buses. Although not technically mandatory, racist Israeli settlers used the existence of these buses to pressure Palestinians into *de facto* segregation.

A variety of human and civil rights organizations publicly criticized this *de facto* racism. Among these was Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem. In the wake of this most recent decision, the Israeli government officially implementing *de jure* segregation, AFP interviewed B’Tselem, which insisted: “It is time to stop hiding behind technical arrangements... and admit this military procedure is thinly veiled pandering to the demand for racial segregation on buses.”

Motivated by a Racist Society

It is most telling that this decision was pressured from below, not imposed from top-down. Racism in Israeli society is not just systemic; most Israelis themselves are obscenely racist toward indigenous Palestinians and African refugees.

In Israel, it is not uncommon for fascist mobs to roam the streets [“Death to Arabs!”](#) and “Gas the Arabs!” (as well as [“Death to leftists!”](#) and “Gas the leftists!”).

The vast majority of Israelis support their [ethnocracy](#)’s ethno-religious supremacist policies. [95% of Israelis](#) supported their country’s most recent military attack on Gaza, “Operation Protective Edge”—a 50-day assault that killed close to 2,200 people—including roughly 1600 civilians, 500 of whom were children—wounded over 11,000, and made over 100,000 homeless.

As I have [noted in a previous article](#), in 2012, also in *Haaretz*, renowned journalist Gideon Levy published the results of a poll that found [“Most Israeli Jews Would Support Apartheid Regime in Israel.”](#) This study, “expos[ing] anti-Arab, ultra-nationalist views espoused by a majority of Israeli Jews,” was not based on an internet survey. It was conducted by Dialog and directed by professor Camil Fuchs, *Haaretz*’s polling expert and head of the Department of Statistics at Tel Aviv University’s School of Mathematical Science, and commissioned by the Yisraela Goldblum Fund.

The study revealed the following unsavory facts about Israeli society:

- 59% want preference for Jews over Arabs in admission to jobs in government ministries.
- 49% want the state to treat Jewish citizens better than Arab ones.
- 42% don’t want to live in the same building with Arabs.
- 42% don’t want their children in the same class with Arab children.
- c. 33% want a law barring Israeli Arabs from voting for the Knesset.

- 69% object to giving 2.5 million Palestinians the right to vote if Israel annexes the West Bank.
- 74% majority are in favor of separate roads for Israelis and Palestinians.
- 24% believe separate roads are “a good situation.”
- 50% believe separate roads are “a necessary situation.”
- 47% want part of Israel’s Arab population to be transferred to the Palestinian Authority.
- 36% support transferring some of the Arab towns from Israel to the PA, in exchange for keeping some of the West Bank settlements.
- 38% want Israel to annex the territories with settlements on them.
- 31% don’t admit that Israel practices apartheid against Arabs.
- 58% do admit that Israel practices apartheid against Arabs.

In August 2014, *Haaretz* released a report titled “[Israeli teenagers: Racist and proud of it](#),” revealing that “Ethnic hatred has become a basic element in the everyday life of Israeli youth.” The piece opens with a quote from a 10th-grade Israeli girl from a high school in the central part of the country.

For me, personally, Arabs are something I can’t look at and can’t stand. I am tremendously racist. I come from a racist home. If I get the chance in the army to shoot one of them, I won’t think twice. I’m ready to kill someone with my hands, and it’s an Arab. In my education I learned that ... their education is to be terrorists, and there is no belief in them. I live in an area of Arabs, and every day I see these Ishmaelites, who pass by the [bus] station and whistle. I wish them death.

The article is a review of an upcoming book from which this interview is excerpted. *Scenes from School Life* is based on three years of field work by Israeli sociologist Idan Yaron at a six-year, secular Israeli high school. The school was “the most average school we could find,” says professor of education Yoram Harpaz, who wrote the book with Yaron. The quote above was taken from a student at this “most average school.” Yaron’s book is filled with myriad instances of Israelis calling for the murder, and even genocidal extermination, of Palestinians. Yet Israeli racism is not just directed at indigenous Palestinians. Journalists Max Blumenthal and David Sheen released a brief documentary titled “[Israel’s New Racism: The Persecution of African Migrants in the Holy Land](#),” detailing the horrific extent to which anti-black racism pervades Israeli civil and political society. In it, they show video footage:

- of prominent politicians, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Member of Knesset Michael Ben-Ari, among others, calling African refugees “infiltrators” and/or “cancer,” and even openly using the n-word;
- of Israeli citizens harassing fellow Israelis for engaging in interracial relationships; and
- of some politicians even going so far as to propose the creation of concentration camps in which to hold African refugees.

De jure bus segregation such as this reminds us that Israel is simply an apartheid state; there is no candy-coating this fact. In 2007, David A. Kirshbaum, of the Israel Law Resource Center, published a piece titled "[Israeli Apartheid — A Basic Legal Perspective](#)," meticulously detailing the many ways in which Israel is an apartheid state, under its very own laws.

Once again, Israel's most-read newspaper has published pieces confirming this fact, admitting that "[Israeli Arabs have never been equal before the law](#)."

Ben Norton is an activist, artist, and freelance writer. He can be found on Twitter at @HeartsMindsEars. [Visit Ben's website](#).

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