

Spring 2011

# South African Jews and How the History of the Apartheid Has Effected the Community's Relationship to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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## Recommended Citation

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SOUTH AFRICAN JEWS AND HOW THE HISTORY OF THE APARTHEID HAS  
EFFECTED THE COMMUNITY'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE ISRAELI-  
PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for South Africa: Multiculturalism  
and Human Rights

School for International Training

Cape Town

Spring 2011

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## Acknowledgements

The writing of this ISP was a very personal and at times emotionally difficult experience for me. I would like to thank my advisor Shifra Jacobson for helping me through not only the intellectual and logistical side of this project, but the emotional side as well. I would like to thank all of my participants who shared with me their personal stories and, at times, difficulties dealing with their communities. I would like to thank all of my home stay families in Langa, Tshabo, Stellenbosch, and Bo-Kaap. I would like to thank my peers for helping me to get through this trip with the most amazing experiences. I would also like to thank the SIT staff for giving us such a broad and in-depth view of South Africa.

## Abstract

This research paper is centered on the question “how does the history of the Apartheid effect South African Jews relationship to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?” Four South African Jews from different parts of the Jewish community were interviewed. Blogs and newspaper articles were also analyzed. The participants were asked about their personal stories. They were asked about their relationship to Israel and Palestine, their visits there, whether or not they see a comparison between the Apartheid regime and the Israeli government. Participants were also asked to comment on the current climate of the South African Jewish community and the issues that the community faces. In all cases, even in the cases of the declared Zionist Jews, the participants felt silenced. There was a clear sense of fear to speak against Israel in the South African community, as it is an extremely Zionist one. Two of the participants see a strong comparison between the racism and human rights violations caused by the Apartheid towards blacks as being caused by the Israeli government towards Palestinians. While some of the participants were made uncomfortable by this comparison to Israel as a state, the West Bank and Gaza were compared to having a system of a “creeping apartheid.”

## Terminology

**Apartheid**-inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group...over another racial group...and systematically oppressing them (Dugard, 2009).

**Zionism**-A policy for establishing and developing a national homeland for Jews in Palestine (Miller, 2011).

**Reform Judaism**-The modernized sect of Judaism, which maintains that Jewish traditions should be compatible with surrounding culture and that the religion should be a set of guidelines rather than a list of restrictions (Reform, 2011).

**Ashkenazi**-a member of one of the two great divisions of Jews comprising the eastern European Yiddish-speak Jews (Ashkenazi, 2011).

**Revisionist Zionism**-An outgrowth of Zionism in which revision and reexamination of the principles of Political Zionism is advocated. The goals of Revisionist ideology include relentless pressure for a Jewish majority in Palestine; a reestablishment of the Jewish regiments; and military training for the youth (Revisionist, 2011).

**Settlements**-Israeli civilian communities in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory. They currently exist in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Approximately 300,000 Israelis live in these Israeli-recognized settlements in Palestinian land (Settlement, 2009).

## Background

### South Africa

The early inhabitants of Southern Africa were Stone-Age hunter-gatherers. They were ancestors of the Khoikhoi and the San people, collectively known as Khoisan. Bantu-speaking farmers also began arriving in southern Africa, bringing a new culture and domesticated crops. Chiefdoms arose based on control of cattle, these developed into hierarchies of authority within communities. These cultures were in Southern Africa several centuries before the Europeans arrived (*About South Africa*, 2010).

In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Portuguese seamen, who established the sea route to India established a in the Western Cape of South Africa. In 1652, the Dutch East India Company set up by the Dutch as a station in Cape Town to provision passing ships. Trade with the Khoikhoi quickly descended into warfare (*About South Africa*, 2010). The Khoisan population also suffered, as the Europeans introduced diseases such as smallpox. The European colonists had supremacy over these other cultures. Slave population increased as more labor was needed on the ports. Most slaves were from different parts of Asia, and most brought Islam with them(*About South Africa*, 2010).

In the 1700, the Khoisan began to resist the increasing colonizer population and warfare continued for a century. The colonists gained the upper hand over both the Khoisan and the Xhosa chiefdoms of the Eastern Cape (*About South Africa*, 2010). The Xhosa, however, seemed to be immune to European diseases, and for this reason began to gain the population majority over the whites and other cultural groups in South Africa.

British settlers came by the thousands at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the Napoleonic wars were sweeping Europe. The Cape became a British colony. Clashes among the different cultural groups inhabiting the area continued. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, vast deposits of diamonds and gold were discovered in what is now Kimberley and Johannesburg (*About South Africa*, 2010). This discovery eventually led to the Anglo-Boer War between the Dutch and the British. The blacks were segregated from almost everything besides manual labor. They were separated from parliament and measures were taken to continue white power in the area. ANC was formed to unite blacks against this growing white power.

As the Afrikaners opposed South Africa's participation in WWII, had the strongest determination to maintain white domination, and among other things worked to abolish the remaining imperial ties. The party gained favor among the population, and the Nationalist Party rose to power with its apartheid ideology (*About South Africa*, 2010). Afrikaners saw a great improvement with this switch in power, as the state became focused on

brining the Afrikaners up out of their poverty an into jobs. South Africa became a republic shortly after the Afrikaners were put into office.

With the new government. Many new changes were put into place. One of these changes was new concern for racial purity. Laws were made prohibiting interracial sex. Coloured voters were removed from the roll of common votes. Racial segregation was enforced, and those who lived in the 'wrong' area were removed. These forced removals into "group areas" continued throughout the apartheid regime (*About South Africa*, 2010). These areas were areas with the worst locations, and worst quality of land, they were huge rural slums. Overpopulation and social erosion became an increasing problem. 3.5 million people lost their homes to this forceful removal from these "white areas" (*About South Africa*, 2010).

As the blacks were continually oppressed by the apartheid regime, the ANC gained power among the black majority. The ANC developed a program of complete rejection of white domination and called for protests, strikes, and demonstrations. The Defiance campaign was the beginning of the end for the Apartheid regime. It was a non-violent campaign, primarily put into effect through resistance of the pass laws. The Pan-Africanist Congress was also formed on the platforms of "Africanism" and "anti-communism" (*About South Africa*, 2010). As the opposition gained power, the government became more violent. At the Sharpeville Township in 1960, 69 anti-pass demonstrators were killed when police fired at the center of the demonstration. A state of emergency was imposed by the government and the black political

organization were banned and the leaders went to jail or into exile (*About South Africa*, 2010). The ANC and PAC both turned to armed struggle and formed the military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe. The 1970s also saw the beginning of the Black Consciousness movement, led by Steve Biko. This movement helped to ignite a sense of pride and solidarity amongst the black people of South Africa (*About South Africa*, 2010). The Defiance Campaign continued, and eventually international support for the anti-apartheid caused helped pressure the Apartheid Regime into pulling back. Prisoners were released from jail, Nelson Mandela among them, who helped to negotiate a peaceful transition into the end of the apartheid.

#### Palestine/Israel

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this disputed land of Israel/Palestine was inhabited by a multicultural population comprising of 86% Muslims, 10% Christians, and 4% Jews (Ami, 2009). In 1906 The Zionist Congress decided on this land for the Jewish homeland. Many Jews from Europe relocated in Palestine, establishing small farm communities all over the land. By 1914, the Jewish population was at 100,000 and the Arab population was about 615,000 (Ami, 2009).

During WWI, many Jews were deported from Russia, as the Turkish military ordered the internment and deportation of all foreign nationals. This caused another wave of Jewish migration to Palestine. Slowly, more and more Zionists immigrated to Palestine, and the indigenous population became

more and more alarmed. Riots broke out among the two populations, and in response the British, who was the colonizer of the land, began limiting immigration in the 1939 White Paper-which decreed that 15,000 Jews would be allowed to enter Palestine each for five years (Ami, 2009).

WWII saw the systematic extermination of the Jews of Europe. The threat of extermination caused even greater pressure on Jews to immigrate to Palestine. At this point, the idea of Palestine as the homeland for the Jewish had a lot of international support. Britain was in strong favor of Zionism (partially as a way to get the Jews out of the British economic system), Nazis were in favor of deporting the Jews, and the US had an initiative to save European Jews. Tens of thousands of Jews were saved by this immigration. In 1947, the UN decided to divide up the land themselves as the sudden influx of Jews was causing issues in this very small region. Under pressure from the Zionist community, the UN Partition Plan recommended that Palestine be divided into an Arab state and a Jewish state (Ami, 2009). At the time, slightly less than half the land in Palestine was owned by Arabs, slightly less than half belonged to the state, and about 8% was owned by the Jews. The Arabs rejected this partition plan, but the Jews accepted it (Ami, 2009).

As there had been rising tension between these two groups, the partition only added to Arab animosity toward this large new population that had taken a large portion of their land. The Arab league declared a war to rid Palestine of the Jews. This began the 1948 War of Independence.. The Jews

proclaimed the independent state of Israel in 1948 and the British withdrew from Palestine. In the following days, the Arab nation invaded Palestine and Israel. During a cease-fire, the Israeli Defense Force was able to bring in large shiploads of artillery and to train a real fighting force of 60,000 troops-giving them a real advantage (Ami, 2009). This led the Jews to a decisive victory. When the fighting ended in 1949, Israel had a total of 78% of the area (Ami, 2009).

The UN called for the allowance of Palestinian refugees to return and the hostilities between the two groups to end. Palestine continued to refuse to recognize Israel, and the refugee problem continued as Israel refused to admit more than a very small number of refugees. Yasser Arafat, an Egyptian Palestinian who grew up in the Gaza strip founded the General Union of Palestinian Students in 1955 (Ami, 2009). He then went on to form Fatah, the Palestinian Liberation Movement with a group of other Palestinians.

Tension was rising again between Israel and the Arab nation. Israel was pumping water from the Sea of Galilee into central Israel. It became known that Israel had created a secret water carrier plan which would, effectively, transport most fresh water from neighboring Arab areas into Israel. Fatah named Israel an "imperialist state" and called for a revolution and a war to eliminate Israel. Nasser, the Egyptian-Palestinian president at the time, founded the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the "tamer" alternative to Fatah. In 1967, the PLO declared war on Israel (Ami, 2009). Though Israel had inferior arms and numbers compared to the entire Arab

nation that was ready to fight against them, they struck Egypt first, and destroyed over 400 enemy aircrafts. The war lasted 6-days, with Israel continually conquering Arab forces. Because more land was conquered for Israel in this war, a million Palestinian Arabs fell under Israeli rule. Arafat became the new leader of the PLO, and the organization was recognized by the UN as the representative of the Palestinian people, though all of Palestine at this point was under Israeli control. On most maps, the region was now called Israel, some included the West Bank and Gaza under "Palestinian Territories," but the country of Palestine was literally wiped off the map.

The PLO never gained enough power to fight back and regain the territories lost during the war. Palestinians in the occupied territories fought back themselves, in the first intifada in 1987. Local residents initiated this revolt and fought the Israeli soldiers by with rocks. The first Intifada showed the world the state of desperation that Palestine was in, but Israel was seen as the only democracy in the Middle East, and therefore continued to have much more international support. The international community responded with the Oslo Accords in 1993 (Ami, 2009). These provided for mutual recognition between the PLO and the state of Israel. It limited Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza. Acts of violence continued, and a video of an Israeli soldier killing a 12 year old Palestinian in one of these violent outbreaks was broadcast around the world.

After September 11, violence escalated as Israel created its own "war on terrorism." In response to Israeli violence, Palestinian militants launched a

new wave of suicide bombings, which caused many deaths on both sides. In 2004, Israeli forces began the building of a security fence, along its pre-1967 borders, but with some parts of the wall branching out into Palestinian areas. Settlements are increasing as more and more Jews migrate to Israel.

Israel still has a military occupation in Palestine. Privately owned land in the West Bank is being confiscated. There was a second intifada in September of 2000, but the situation in Gaza remains the same. It is completely controlled by Israel, as the goods, services, and people that are allowed in and out of the area are all regulated by the Israeli Defense Force. Often, food and medicine are blocked from entering Gaza, contributing to the escalating humanitarian crisis.

## Introduction

I grew up in a reform Jewish family. Neither of my parents was very religious, but we celebrated all the major holidays and identified ourselves as Jewish. My parents never stressed the religious aspect of Judaism in their parenting. I remember asking to go to temple a few Fridays in a row before they begrudgingly agreed. There was something about the idea of organized religion and worship that made both of my parents uncomfortable. They stressed things like literature, music, movies, and psychology in their

parenting of my brother and I. They wanted us to question the idea of “the meaning of life” but not get a set answer from one religion.

I appreciate this now, but at the time I didn't feel part of mainstream Jewish community. I did feel, however, shaped by my Jewishness. My high school had only 5 Jews, and I was close friends with four of them. They were all much more religious than I was, but I felt more comfortable with them than other students in my high school.

Going into college, I identified myself as Jewish, but felt like a bit of a fake around Jews that actually knew what they were talking about when it came to the religion, beyond just cultural aspects like food and ritual.

Earlham College, where I attend school, is 30% Jewish. It is also 25% International students. Of the International Students at Earlham, the most dominant religion is Islam, and the country with the most students represented is Palestine. My orientation into Earlham was very unique because I was one of about 15 other Americans who chose to participate in the International Student Orientation, about a week and a half before all of the other American students got to campus. This week and a half was when my perspective on things, most things, began to change. I met people from all over the world. It was the first time I experienced being the only American in the room, and the first time I experienced being the only white person in the room. I loved it, I loved meeting everyone from everywhere and I loved the feeling of being surrounded by people who had totally different experiences and things to offer than I had ever encountered before.

The group of Palestinians weren't quite as interested in meeting me. There were some, of course, that were open to meeting an American Jew, because they separated that from being an Israeli. Most though, didn't really want to get to know the Jews on campus and stuck to themselves. I decided I needed to learn about this issue as it was clearly one that effected me if it was having an impact on my interactions with people at my 1,200 student school. I became close with a Jewish boy, David Gabriel, from Newton who was extremely interested in Palestine/Israel and he encouraged me to join Students for Peace and Justice in Palestine on campus. At the time, it was the largest organization on campus, with over 50 active members and 250 non-active members. At a school of our size, this was a very big deal. I was welcomed into the group with some hesitation, but the convenor, Nidal, was extremely excited to have two freshman Jews join their group- as most were too intimidated to even interact with the Palestinians on campus who ere a part of this group. He made a big impact on me, he was patient with my lack of knowledge and talked me through a lot of the conflict. I think David and my presence at SPJP helped open it up to other students who just wanted to learn about what's happening in the region. Before it was a group of 90% Arabs.

Through the group, I made a lot of my closest friends. As I became closer with the group of Palestinians and Lebanese on campus (they stuck together more than the other Arabs on campus) I also began dating another freshman Palestinian from Jerusalem, David Ismail. This was about halfway

through my first semester in college. I learned from him the more personal, individual side of the occupation. He told me about how his cousin from Ramallah was sick and needed to get to their house in Jerusalem, but couldn't because he didn't have the right pass. It took him a week to get to Jerusalem, thankfully he is fine now, but David told me many times this inability to get through checkpoints results in situations much worse than David's cousin. There were many stories like this I learned through people at Earlham. Another friend told me how in the West bank, the only thing that is available to buy is Israeli goods, so even when she just wants to buy a bag of chips or go to the movies, she has to think through that choice because her money would be feeding the occupation. Another friend from Ramallah confided in me about her experience being sexually harassed and embarrassed by an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint.

I learned about this all so quickly, I heard these kinds of stories that I had never encountered before. I had had no idea what was going on in Palestine and I became extremely invested and emotional about the fact that most people I knew from home didn't know these things. During this first semester, I didn't really have to address my Judaism in the context of all this, I was just another person learning. I would get teased by my new Arab friends a lot about being Jewish, but I would just smile and laugh along, because I didn't really have any positive or negative feelings about my religion either way.

Things changed drastically second semester. The first thing that happened was the siege on Gaza. David Ismail and most of my other Palestinian friends went home to Palestine during the Christmas break. One day I saw that Israel had bombed Gaza. I frantically started thinking of every friend I had in the area and whether or not they were in Gaza. I realized that none of my friends who lived in Gaza were able to go home because Israel wouldn't allow them to go back to the United States had they entered Gaza, so they were still in the US. While I didn't know anyone who was physically injured by the siege, a few of my Palestinian friends had relatives or friends who were killed or injured in the siege on Gaza.

While this was happening, I was going through a lot of issues with my family and friends at home. I went to a rally for Gaza in Boston- the closest city to me. I had a lot of difficulty there-seeing the signs that people were holding-signs that had a swastika instead of a Jewish star on the Israeli flag. I felt wrong for some reason, to be in a rally with people holding signs like that, but I didn't know what else to do to support the Palestinian people from my home. I tried to talk to my friends at home about this issue, but they immediately started arguing with me over the fact that there was even an occupation at all. I didn't know how to even begin to argue that there was- I had come from a world where that was just taken as solid fact. I became very emotional with my friends and started arguing back, trying to pull from stories from my friends or just facts I had learned through SPJP. It became

awkward and my friends could not understand why I was getting so emotional. I just decided I needed to get back to campus.

When we got back to campus, everything was different. I didn't know how exactly to handle the situation, or how to talk to my friends from Palestine. David Ismail wouldn't talk to me, or to anyone really, he was so upset and frustrated. SPJP meetings were incredibly emotional, and angry. People were less PC and started saying things like "fuck the Jews, they did this." I shifted uncomfortably in my seat during moments like this, but didn't say anything. There was a lot that I blocked out as well, because I didn't want to hear my close friends saying these things.

Slowly things started getting back to normal, but the mood at SPJP had shifted. Things were more desperate and seemed more hopeless than before. I slowly started seeing David Ismail again, but he was dealing with his emotions about home through drinking and emotional outbursts, and really wasn't in the best place to be in a relationship.

At that time I felt very lost, I couldn't understand what was happening with my Palestinian friends because there is no way I could understand what it feels like to not have a country-to be constantly in fear of another siege or other act of violence. I also no longer connected to my Jewish friends at home because I couldn't get past the fact that they thought what Israel was doing was all right and would bring that up in conversation because they couldn't get past the fact that I thought it wasn't. I always wanted to defend my Judaism to my Palestinian friends and others who would say anti-Semitic

things, but I felt I didn't have a strong enough tie to this part of my identity to do so. I began to push away my Judaism, and went through a brief period where I didn't consider myself Jewish at all. I am still battling with my relationship to my religion. I want to learn more about the amazing parts of being Jewish, as for the past three years I have mostly been around people who see it as a negative.

During my time with SPJP, I have been slowly reading and learning everything I can about the Occupation. In my research I came across a beautiful letter written by Farid Esack, a South African Muslim scholar. He visited the Occupied Territories and felt an overwhelming similarity to Apartheid South Africa. This letter got me interested in comparing the two conflicts, and was the main reason why I ended up in Cape Town on SIT's program Multi-Culturalism and Human Rights. I have been struck here, by how active Jews and passionate some Jews are in the Palestinian solidarity movement. I imagine they also went through a struggle with their identity in the context of their history as South Africans.

This is the personal background for which I began my research of South African Jews and their opinions of Israel/Palestine. Jews that have problems with Zionism are silenced in almost every space, words like "self-hating Jew" and "anti-semitic" are thrown around to refer to these Jews. Each of my participants, though they come from different places in the South African Jewish community, have experienced some kind of silencing. I am interested in giving these Jews a voice. South Africa is traditionally an

extremely Zionist community. This divide in the South African community combined with the history of the Apartheid, put Jews in a very unique place when it comes to their relationship to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. There is much debate over the comparison between the Israeli Occupation and the Apartheid Regime. In my literature review, I plan to flesh out this comparison. I then plan to highlight South African Jews who have, at times publically, experienced silencing from the Jewish community about their criticisms of Israel. Lastly, I plan to look at specific events or issues facing the current South African Jewish community. The objective of this paper will be threefold: to present the South African Jewish opinion that has been silenced, what issues these Jews face from mainstream society, and uncover how the Jewish voice in South Africa is unique because of the recent history of the Apartheid.

## Limitations

This research and writing of this paper was conducted over a one-month period. I did not find this time period sufficient enough to give this project the attention it deserved, but I am proud of the work I have produced in this short amount of time. Because the participants of this paper had to be members of the South African Jewish community, the timing of the research portion was very difficult to work around. Passover and a few other holidays made it almost impossible for people to schedule time with me during the middle two weeks of the project, when I was planning to do most of my interviews. This was an error on my part, to not take those holidays into account. Also, because this is a sensitive issue, and speaking negatively about the South African Jewish community has resulted in different forms of harassment for some, not everyone was willing to participate.

I also wish I had been able to get in contact with more members of the mainstream, Zionist South African Jewish community. Those I contacted though, were unavailable to be interviewed for the time I was conducting interviews. I was able to find one member of the mainstream Zionist community to interview, though he lived in Johannesburg, where the Jewish

community is much more conservative. I still found that I covered a broad range of the South African Jewish community, I just needed to supplement my information with more interviews from the Zionist community.

I also had limitations when it came to my research. Because we are not members of any of the Public Libraries, and it is difficult to travel after dark, it was hard to look into the books I found that would have been helpful had I been able to take them home to do my research. I also had issue because, as an English major, I have never done a research project of this type before. I had to research how to present field research in a comprehensive way and am still learning to do this as I write up my project.

Perhaps the main issue I had though, was my own personal bias. I chose this project primarily because of the issues I have faced at home being a non-Zionist Jew. I am very emotional about this issue, and had difficulty separating these emotions when it came to my research and interviews. I have not remained completely unbiased. My analysis of the material is done through my specific lens. I see the Israeli government as an apartheid government. I see this as a truth, but many people (including some of my participants) do not agree with this claim, and therefore will find my analysis of the data I collected to be false in some way.

This is an issue with all qualitative research; anyone's identity would have framed his or her research. It is just important for me to acknowledge mine was done through the lens of a white Jewish American college student who is active in the pro-Palestinian movement on her liberal arts campus.

I went into my interview with clear expectations. I expected David, Ruth, and Arielle to all declare themselves non-Zionists, and for the most part support the comparison of Israel as an apartheid state. David and Arielle have both been involved in Open Shuhadah Street, and Ruth is a former Palestinian rights activist. I expected Nathan, a political advisor of the South African Union of Jewish Students to be very rejecting of the comparison between the Israeli state and the Apartheid regime. Instead, I found David claiming the Zionist identity while still being critical of Israel, and Nathan discussing Silencing, the comparison to Apartheid, and the deep issues with the Israeli government. Doing this research revealed to me my deeply rooted own personal biases.

## Methodology

To gather my data, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with four members of the South African Jewish community. My data is qualitative, as opposed to Quantitative. Quantitative data involves drawing conclusions from numerical data using statistics. Because I was working with qualitative data I was more concerned with the question “why?” and instead of looking at numerical data, I was looking for patterns and behaviors.

Shifra Jacobson, my advisor put me in contact with three of my participants. In my research I came across a debate on the blog Chutzpah. Chutzpah is the blog for the Zionist organization, the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS). On the blog, one of the senior advisors was causing controversy because of his criticisms of Israel. I found this to be a very important place where silencing is occurring, that I had not yet explored. I was able to contact him for an interview.

One of the first things I found out about the South African Jewish community and their relationship to Israel/Palestine was that not many South African Jews were willing to talk about this issue. Over the course of the first two weeks in April, I sent out over 20-emails to Zionist Jewish Organizations, Jews I found were part of pro-Palestinian organizations, Rabbis, and members of SAUJS. By the third week, I had only received four confirmations and had done four interviews. This issue is clearly one that is surrounded in controversy, and is one that not many Jews feel comfortable speaking about.

I interviewed two men, Nathan Goldman who is an administrator in the SAUJS, and David Roth who is a student at UCT and member of Open Shuhadah Street, a human rights organization concerned with raising awareness to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. I also interviewed two women, Ruth Crane in her 50s and Arielle Heard in her 40s. Each of the people I interviewed described the South African Jewish community as deeply, deeply Zionist. Nathan Goldman described the South African Jewish community as “right wing in its nature, in fact it is the largest representative of the revisionist outside of Israel.” Arielle described the community as “Fractured. It’s a much more divided community.”

To do my semi-structured interviews I used public transportation, primarily minibuses. I used my own handheld recorder to record three of the interviews. One of my participants was in Johannesburg, so I typed up notes during my phone interview with him.

## Literature review

There was a clear difference in my participants responses based on their generation. Those that were part of the older generation Arielle, and Ruth were much more emotional about discussing their history and had more difficulties in their personal communities. The younger generation, David and Nathan, were very passionate, but were not as emotionally worn by the years of dealing with this issue. This of course, could have been coincidental and pertained only to these individuals. There was a clear distinction between the two different generations as both members of the older generations teared-up during the interview, while the two members of the younger generation were both very matter-of-fact in their speech.

*Israel as an apartheid State*

The comparison between the Israeli government and the Apartheid government is a highly controversial one. To compare the Israeli government to the Apartheid regime would be to, in one statement, condemn Israel for human rights violations and racial discrimination. To condemn Israel in any way is often called "anti-Semitism." Even so, respected activists and leaders who fought against the Apartheid have spoken up and supported Palestinians in their struggle.

Nelson Mandela wrote a memo to a declared Zionist New York Times columnist, Thomas Friedman. In his memo he states: "Palestinians are not struggling for a 'state' but for freedom, liberation and equality, just like we were struggling for freedom in South Africa," (Mandela, 2001). South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu has also made statements on a world stage comparing the conflict to the Apartheid: "If you change the names, the description of what is happening in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would be a description of what is happening in South Africa" (*Carter, Mandela, and Tutu on Palestine*, n.d.).

The organizations "Is It Apartheid" outlines this comparison Mandela and Tutu touch on. This territory in the West Bank makes up 12 percent of the original Palestinian territory and is divided into 70 isolated cantons with no physical movement without Israeli permission. "There are over 500 military check points where Palestinians often wait hours, and must have ID cards and passes just to travel short distances. Israeli settlers can travel easily on Israeli-only roads," (*Israeli Apartheid in the Occupied Territories*, n.d.) In

South Africa, the blacks had to carry passes, which detailed where they were going and why, to be allowed to be on the streets of South Africa. The blacks were separated in Bantustans by the Apartheid government, these Bantustans made up only 13% of the land (*Israeli Apartheid in the Occupied Territories*, n.d.).

There are two systems in Palestine/Israel, they are separate and they are unequal. The list of these differences between the life of an Israeli and the life of a Palestinian is a long one. "Palestinians are under Military Law and face the constant threat of arrest and detention without charge and can be held indefinitely. They have no right to representation or trial. Israelis living in illegal settlements on Palestinian land have all the privileges of Israeli Civil Law. As citizens of Israel, they can vote, seek redress in court, and have freedom of speech and assembly," (*Israeli Apartheid in the Occupied Territories*, n.d.). The article continues to outline the prevalence of house demolitions, curfews, military raids, and random acts of violence and harassment.

So far, over 170,000 Palestinian houses have been demolished, creating hundreds of thousands of homeless Palestinians. Over a million Palestinian olive and fruit trees have been uprooted. Palestinian land ownership is subject to military and economic confiscation. Palestinians are prohibited from using the extensive network of settler only highways that connect the settlements to Israel. Also similar to South Africa, Palestinian workers only receive a small minimum wage while the Israeli worker receive all the rights

and benefits of Israeli employment law including a much larger minimum wage. "The Israeli military authority controls virtually all the water in the West Bank. 73% of the West Bank water is piped back to Israel. Illegal Jewish settlers use 10% of West Bank water. Palestinian have access to only 17% of their own water and must buy it from Israel at 4 times the price Israelis pay" (*Israeli Apartheid in the Occupied Territories*, n.d.).

Then, there is the wall, something which blacks in South Africa never had to experience: " the wall fragments Palestinian communities; it separates families from their land, their livelihood, health care and schools. The wall also divides communities and families from each other. The wall does not fragment Israeli settlements; it is built in such a way as to annex them to Israel proper" (*Israeli Apartheid in the Occupied Territories*, n.d.).

The "Jordanian Campaign to End Israeli Apartheid" outlines a long list of "Apartheid Laws." Just as in South Africa, these laws extend to identity and citizenship, land, political participation, and judicial practices. The first law is the 1950's Right of Return, this is the right of immigration to Israel to Jews born anywhere in the world. In 1970 it was amended to include "a child and a grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew" (Ciea, 2010). In this law, "Jew" is defined as "a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism." In most cases, "non-Jewish native-born Palestinians- most importantly those who fled during the massacres in 1947 and 1948- are in most cases prevented from returning" (Ciea, 2010)

The Land Acquisition Law of 1953, “Confiscates the land of more than 400 Palestinian villages; “validates” their use for military purposes and for Jewish settlements (Ciea, 2010). The Law of Political Parties of 1992, “bars the registrar of Political Parties from registering a political party if it denies “the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state” (Ciea, 2010)

These laws are listed under the title “Apartheid Laws” because of the many similarities to the laws during the Apartheid. In 1950, the Population Registration Act required that all South Africans become racially classified as either white, black, or coloured. The coloured category included Indian and Asians (*About South Africa*, 2010). In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act established a series of “homelands,” or ethnic reserves which were meant to be independent states to which each African would be assigned by the government. Every political right was restricted to the homeland each African was a part of (*About South Africa*, 2010). They were citizens of this homeland instead of citizens of South Africa.

The 1953 Public Safety Act and Criminal Law Amendment Act empowered the government to declare a state of emergency and increase any penalty for protesting, the fines included fines, imprisonment and whippings (*About South Africa*, 2010). This was the law that was used after the Sharpeville massacre to declare the state of emergency. 69 people were left dead and 187 wounded (*About South Africa*, 2010).

The United Nations has taken stands against this human rights offenses

committed by Israel. The General Assembly passed Resolution 3379 in 1975. The resolution “determined that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination” (*United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379* , n.d.). It recalls that “any doctrine of racial differentiation or superiority is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous” (*United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379* , n.d.). There was much controversy over this resolution and in 1991 it became the only resolution to be revoked. The reason for this was Israeli’s claim that the resolution was “another manifestation of the bitter anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish hatred which animates Arab society” (*Israeli Ambassador Herzog’s Response to Zionism is Racism Resolution*, 2011).

#### *Palestinian Solidarity in the South African Jewish Community*

Even with these clear violations of human rights by Israel, and UN resolutions, it is still extremely taboo to criticize Israel. South Africa is in a unique place as one of the only countries outside of the Arab world with leaders who have done so. In 2010, a group of over 100 South African academics from more than 12 South African universities created a petition that called for the University of Johannesburg to terminate its relationship with the Israeli Institution Ben Gurion. Amongst others, the petition was supported by Neville Alexander, Desmond Tutu, and Breyten Breytenbach.

The petition states: “As members of the academic community of South Africa, a country with a history of brute racism on the one hand and both

academic acquiescence and resistance to it on the other, we write to you with deep concern regarding the relationship between the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU)...The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories has had disastrous effects on access to education for Palestinians. While Palestinians are not able to access universities and schools, Israeli universities produce the research, technology, arguments and leaders for maintaining the occupation" (*Petition to sever links with Ben Gurion University, 2010*).

The petition gained over 300 more signatories and the University of Johannesburg officially and publically severed ties with BGU on March 16, 2011 (Rawoot, 2011). UJ is the first institution to officially sever relations with an Israeli university - a landmark moment in the growing boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign (Rawoot, 2011). "The committee said the decision, coming from a South African institution, was of particular significance as it could start "a domino boycott effect" (Rawoot, 2011).

There have been many other instances of strong Palestinian support coming from the South African community. In 2003, the Palestinian Solidarity Committee put on the concert Amandla Intifada to raise awareness in South Africa about the Palestinian cause. In the Mail & Guardian's article covering the concert; the international community is described as "afraid to voice their views on the Israeli occupation because they don't want to offend Jews or Muslims" (Rawoot, 2009). The PSC is attempting to end that ignorance South Africans experience and this Amandla Intifada concert was

one way to do that. The concert featured Deep Fried Man, a young Jewish South African known offstage as Daniel Friedman. Friedman's hope is that his presence in the concert will help "negate the perception that if you're Jewish, you're a Zionist" (Rawoot, 2009). According to Friedman, more young people in the Jewish community are moving away from the idea that Judaism and Zionism have to be synonymous. "It's happening more than you think, but it's a very gated community with a conservative older guard who ensures that there is no space to express ideas," (Rawoot, 2009). Jewish South African, Allan Kolski Horwtiz also preformed at the concert. He changed his stance as a Zionist after his time as a tank driver in the Israeli Defense Force in the mid 1970s. "The experience of dealing with the Palestinian population was an eye-opener about the occupation...The notion that Israel has put out about a velvet occupation is nonsense. But people buy into the idea that criticizing Israel is buying into anti-Semitism," (Rawoot, 2009).

While much of the older Jewish generation is more conservative than the younger generation, as Friedman points out, in South Africa there are Jews of an older generation who fought against the Apartheid regime and are now fighting against Zionism. Ronald Kasrils is one of the most active Jewish former Apartheid activists who is now working in solidarity with Palestine. Kasrils was a member of the National Executive Committee of the ANC from 1987-2007, he was a member of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party from 1986-2007, and he was the Minister for Intelligence from 2004-2008.

*Current Events shaping the SA Jewish community's relationship to Israel/Palestine*

In 2007 Kasrils gave a lecture at Birzeit University in Palestine entitled: "Why I am not a Zionist?" In his lecture, he shed light on Israel's policy of racial segregation and suppressive measures against Palestinians. Kasrils stated that his main reason behind being anti-Zionist is that he sees Zionist ideology as being against human Ideology. In his talk, Kasrils clarified the differences and similarities between experiences of Ireland, South Africa and Palestine. He "focused on Apartheid-Bantustan Policy, he compared the South African concentration of the African populations into impoverished zones to Israel's transfer policy. He also contrasted South Africa's exploitation of the black workforce to Israel's replacement of Palestinian workers with foreign workers," (*Why Am I Not a Zionist?*, 2007). Kasril highlighted the strong Palestinian-South African relationship, stating: "Since the 1960s, we have established strong relations with the Palestinians, sympathizing the Palestinian cause for freedom and independence is achieved," (*Why Am I Not a Zionist?*, 2007).

After visiting Birzeit and other places in Palestine, Kasrils stated "Travelling into Palestine's West Bank and Gaza Strip is like a surreal trip back into an apartheid state of emergency. It is chilling to pass through the myriad checkpoints---more than 500 in the West Bank. They are controlled by heavily armed soldiers, youthful by grim, tensely watching every movement,

fingers on the trigger...the West Bank is effectively a hermetically sealed prison. It is shocking to discover that certain roads are barred to Palestinians and reserved for Jewish settlers. I try in vain to recall anything quite as obscene in Apartheid South Africa (Kasrils, 2007).

After his visit, Kasrils helped to unite the non-Zionist Jewish community of South Africa by co-authoring the "Declaration of conscience on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by South Africans of Jewish Descent." The declaration outlines the injustices of the Israeli government and urges these criticisms do not equal anti-Semitism. The declaration states: "our history compels us to speak out...All Jews live in the shadow of the Holocaust. We believe that Jewish survival and the fulfillment of Palestinian national aspiration are not mutually exclusive goals," (Kasrils, Ozinsky, 2009). The Declaration also voices the signatories as South Africans, not only as Jews: "It becomes difficult, particularly from a South African perspective, not to draw parallels with the oppression experienced by Palestinians under the hand of Israel and the oppression experienced in South Africa under Apartheid rule." The declaration also touches on an extremely important aspect of this conflict and all conflicts in general: the psychology of oppressor/oppressed: "We are committed to justice and freedom for pragmatic as well as ethical reasons. Oppression almost always gives rise to rebellion and thereby threatens the security of the oppressors. Repression and reprisals in response to rebellion provide no relief," (Kasrils, Ozinsky, 2009).

The creation of this declaration caused a great debate among Jewish

South Africans. It became known as “The Karsils Affair” and a book by the same name was written in analysis of the debate. Kasrils’ declaration caused an international stir as well. It was the first time in history “that a prominent Jewish public official outside Israel had attacked the Israeli government and its policies so vehemently—and had done so, publicly and self-consciously, as a Jew (Pollack, 2009). This action by Kasrils caused him to be ostracized from the Jewish community, many Jews have claimed he isn’t Jewish at all.

This event was one example of the great divide in the South African Jewish community between the majority Zionists and minority non-Zionists. Pollock discusses the Zionist Jewish reaction in South Africa to Kasrils’ declaration: “Part of the reason lay in the strong feelings of solidarity among South African Jews towards Israel, and the community’s deep historical attachment to Zionism- broadly defined as the belief that Jews have the right to self determination in their religious and cultural homeland in the Middle East,” (Pollack, 2009). So, Kasrils’ challenging of both Israeli policies, Zionism itself, and its prominence in the intellectual, political, and cultural life of South African Jews upset a large portion of the South African Jewish community because those are the ideas their identity is based on.

Another controversial event in the modern South African Jewish community was the South African Zionist Federation’s (SAZF) invitation to Alan Dershowitz as their opening speaker for the annual SAZF March Conference. One of the reasons why this invitation was so controversial in the Jewish community was because Dershowitz was part of the campaign to have

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu removed as patron of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre. A number of Jewish human rights judges, academics and activists took issue with this invitation to Dershowitz.

In the New York press, Dershowitz wrote that Tutu's "ever present grin...masks a long history of ugly hatred toward the Jewish people, the Jewish religion and the Jewish State....the only word to describes Tutu's motives is anti-Semitism," (Dana, 2011.) Dershowitz claims that Tutu's support for a cultural boycott of Israel "finds its roots in the Nazi 'Kauft Nicht beim Juden' campaign of the 1930s" (Dana, 2011). The signatories of the declaration against Dershowitz, on the other hand, state of Tutu that: "All we have known is his bravery, integrity and sense of fairness. One among the many examples of this is his consistent call that Israel ends its military occupation, that both sides cease to attack civilians, and that a Palestinian state should exist alongside Israel in peace," (Dana, 2011).

Dershowitz was also an issue for the signatories of this declaration because of his stance on Israel/Palestine. Dershowitz has voiced support of home demolitions and the destruction of entire Palestinian villages. He has publically chastised Jews and Israelis that are critical of the Israeli policy ect... This event, UJ's splitting of ties with BGU and the Kasrils' affair, are recent events that are shaping the current South African Jewish community. These events show the split and conflict that the community is experiencing internally.

## Findings

### *Israel as a home away from home*

Today, a Jew's relationship to Israel has become a way to understand one's religion. If you have been to Israel, you are seen as almost a "better" or

“more religious” Jew than someone who has not made that journey. Each of my participants were able to visit Israel at least once. Each of the participants used the word “home” to describe their experience in the “holy land.” Nathan, a political advisor for the South African Union of Jewish Students said he “was deeply moved by the state of Israel. I am very proud of it. It is a place I cherish and value.” This sense of pride Nathan describes comes from the beauty, wealth, and democracy, haven that is created in Israel solely by our people.

Ruth, a former Palestinian rights activist, described her year in Israel for the first time as “the most amazing year, I had never left South Africa, and it was the first time I ran into the red sea and let my hair go curly...I developed an incredible love for the terrain and for the country and its people, all its different people, so it was a marvelous year.” This land for the Jews is a place of liberation for the Diaspora. Even though Ruth grew up in a place with a strong sense of Jewish community, there was something about Israel that leads her to a kind of liberation of her identity as a Jew. The fact that so many Jews experience this kind of freedom and release shows that, outside of Israel, there is still a problem. Still anti-Semitism. Still something unacceptable about completely embracing and declaring oneself to be Jewish.

David describes this deep emotion towards Israel from South African Jews: “Israel is held up as the thing that gives people strength, with any kind of fear about South Africa, Israel keeps us safe and also as an option to flee.” Not only have these participants experienced a sense of liberation in Israel as

Jews, but Israel also represented a freedom from the world of the Apartheid. While each of the participants is white, and therefore a member of the privilege identity in South Africa, each felt fear and entrapment as South Africans. Farid Esack states: "The humanity of the oppressor is reclaimed through liberation and Israel is no exception in this regard" (Esack, 2009). As Esack states, there is an oppression of ones humanity when living in an apartheid society as the oppressor as well as oppressed. As South African Jews (predominately Ashkenazi) these participants navigated both spaces with that privileged identity, and therefore occupy a very unique space in regards to their relationship to Israel.

### *Propoganda*

In 1983, when she was 14, Arielle, a Palestinian human rights activist, participated in a program called Tachnechakiva where she spent three months in Israel. She describes the propoganda she experienced: "there was this whole program in Jerusalem where we were shown film clips of Arafat and the PLO and then show these bombed out buses in the Kiriach in the North. And then like dead children, like Israeli children. And then cut to Arafat, giving kind of like a fiery polemic in Arabic. You know, who knows how it was translated." This was easy for Arielle to identify with because she had been through something similar in the primary schools of South Africa during the liberation movements. "We were told about terrorists and shown clips about terrorists. When I was ten I thought Nelson Mandela was going to

eat me in my bed. He was like this monster, bogeyman that ate white kids. And the jump to that kind of repression through fear and control through fear was like a very short distance. It wasn't a jump, it was like a shuffle." Arielle has been able to see the falsities in the propaganda she was given about Arafat, terrorists, and Arabs, partly because of her realization of the large amount of propaganda fed to her by the Apartheid regime.

Palestinians were completely and purposefully separated from Arielle's first trips to the region. "We were always told that those color number plates are Arab and those number plates are Jewish. You knew one was safe and one wasn't. There was always this kind of menace. It was associated unconsciously and then inculcated unconsciously around anything associated with Arab. And at the same time we were told, like in our Hebrew classes at the Kibbutz, that there is no such thing as Palestine. Palestinians do not exist. The Arabs didn't want Jews to be there and so they manufactured this national identity that didn't exist before the state of Israel existed. And we were given, I mean so much of it was like anchored in text you know." This idea of "who was first" exists in both Israel and South Africa. In South Africa, the Dutch claim that they were first to the land in Southern Africa just as we see here, the Israelis claiming that the land, the country, of Palestine never existed before the Jews came to the land.

Jews learn a very specific truth when they go to Israel. Arielle and others like her are unique in that they have questioned and come to certain realizations about the falseness of some of the information she is given about

Israel. She is able to go back now, and analyze that information: "I suppose in the unconsciously Islamophobic position, because ultimately that's what it is, its a combination of anti-Arab, anti-Islam position. I never knew that there were Christian Arabs. I never knew that. It never crossed my mind. Never knew that there were Communists." To help instill this fear in those of privileged identity, one must create a unified "other" to define oneself against. Also, because Islamophobia was gaining more and more power, to look at all Palestinians as Muslims was a more effective way to separate them from the westernized Israeli Jews. Christianity is seen as a civilized and western religion, so to acknowledge those Christian Arabs would not be in the benefit of this created fear of the uncivilized, terrorist, Arab.

Nathan also experienced this kind of propaganda because he attended Jewish day schools as a youth in South Africa: "In Jewish day schools we were taught a very firm, Zionist historical narrative. Jews are all good, Palestinians are all bad." Zionism is taught in Jewish day schools alongside Torah scriptures, Hebrew, and other aspects that have been part of the religion since before Israel was created. It has now become one of the fundamental aspects of Judaism, from orthodox to reform Jews.

Ruth is also extremely frustrated with the Zionist propaganda and Zionist pressures the Jewish community experiences. She states: "the Jewish media is brainwash. And if everybody that, you know, is supposedly anti-Israeli policies is self hating Jews, well then why would you listen to those people? Why would you even have the articles in your newspapers? So no,

there's no voice. I mean Open Shuhadah Street and there's Palestine solidarity, but there's not much happening, no."

*Starting to see another apartheid*

Ruth began to realize this "othering" and discrimination on her second trip to Israel. She began to meet Israelis of color, and that's what began the realization for her, the realization of something outside of this glamorously holy land of Israel: "When people from Yemen, Syria Lebanon, were brought over to Israel for work, they were housed in the projects, whereas Ashkenazi Jews have many more rights...and then I started to see the many more layers of discrimination. And I started to see an apartheid, not only based on religion, but here based on color. That the white you were...it seemed to me that it was based on white supremacy. If you were from Russia, Germany...if you were Ashkenazi, you had privilege. The more you were Jewish Arab, the worse you were. And the hierarchy just got worse. They were all doing domestic work in Ashkenazi peoples homes." While there may have been a strong sense of home in Israel, as the Defiance campaign gained power in South Africa, Ruth moved back to South Africa.

David also mentioned his first trip to Israel/Palestine as the moment when everything changed, and he began seriously questioning what he had been taught: "I had read, I had a certain kind of perspective, but until walking down the roads, that's when the message and the things I had been taught in school came crashing down. The more Jews have that experience, this

process will be eroded to a kind of reframing.”

When asked about whether he sees the Israeli government as an apartheid regime, Nathan disagrees with the analogy himself, but is sensitive to the similarities. He sees a definite “creepy apartheid mentality in certain institutions, there are some laws that I find quite repulsive and I personally am very uncomfortable with some of the laws.” While Nathan sees that there are needs for laws which protect the security of families in the settlements, he also sees that now, “the settlements are misused to take more and more land, thus destroying, undermining the possibilities of a two-state solution in the foreseeable future.” He speaks of South African Jews in general when he says that “for most South Africans, they won’t like that comparison- to even being to think there are partial comparison between the conflict and South Africa...you would think they would be more sensitive to human rights violations, but they are not for the most part.”

Nathan, like the other three participants of this study, also felt a kind of restructuring of his beliefs when he visited Palestine: “I went to Ramallah, Jenin, Jericho, Bethlehem, and those were eye-openers for me, and it gave me the concentration to the Palestinian narrative. Before then, I had very similar views to the mainstream, more extreme views coming from religious nationalist camp. It was a life changing experience, just to meet Palestinian nationals and seeing how diverse it is, they aren’t all extremist religious fundamentalists, I really sympathized and felt for them greatly in terms of their plight...not to say I think they shouldn’t be blamed for a lot of what

happened.” Because Nathan is a part of the more mainstream Zionist Jewish community, as a leading member of the South African Union of Jewish students, it is much more difficult for him to have any kind of criticism of Israel. Here, he clearly does see that the Palestinians are suffering greatly at the hands of the Israeli government, something that not many Zionist Jews would acknowledge, but he must follow this acknowledgement with the idea that they should still be blamed for a lot of what happened. This moment makes it seem impossible to simply criticize Israel, or to simply empathize with the Palestinians without it being some great attack on the state of Israel and Jews themselves.

Nathan does something similar when describing his trip to Hebron, “I was in Hebron, I saw the stream of settler movements, the dirty water and the growing of old vegetables. I was the checkpoints and the humiliation that they suffer there. Not that I am opposed to Israel having security, that is not something to be played down.” Here, any acknowledgement of this humiliation felt by Palestinians in the checkpoints has to be countered with a statement on the necessity of these checkpoints. It is as if a certain aligning of beliefs must be made. To be part of the mainstream Zionist community and to recognize that the Palestinians suffer do not go hand and hand. Nathan, though, bravely and publically acknowledges this suffering in that uniform space of the mainstream South African Zionist community.

## *Zionist Backlash*

As Nathan is very liberal in the mainstream South African Zionist community, his articles on Chutzpah, the blog for SAUJS, have been met with controversy. Nathan had personally organized slkfjslkdf to come to South Africa and speak to SAUJS. Many members of SAUJS were unhappy with this choice. In defense, Nathan wrote: What both participants agreed on was that the growth illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories were destroying efforts to establish a viable independent Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel. They also agreed that America was not doing enough to bring a peace settlement and that it was important for both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government, to take bold and courageous steps to bring about a just and equitable solution!" (Goldman, 2011). 25 comments of back and forth between Nathan and SAUJS members were made on his post, most of which were removed by SAUJS. On the day of the removal of the majority of the posts, SAUJS commented: "Just to point out that Nathan speaks on this blog in his personal capacity. A number of things which he claims are SUJS policy are only that in his opinion and no one else"(SAUJS, 2011). This post clearly alienates Nathan from the rest of SAUJS leadership, it clearly states that no one else agrees with him and has a sense of disapproval of his opinions on the matter. Even amongst Zionists, any one who voices criticism of Israel is silenced.

The kinds of comments that were allowed on Nathan's post were extremely critical of his view of Palestine Israel. One poster wrote: "What do

you mean by 'Occupation of Palestine?' What geographic area do you have in mind when you use the term 'Palestine'? In what sense are you suggesting that settlement activity is 'illegal'?" (SAUJS member, 2011). All of these quotes suggest the falseness the commenter finds in the occupation and Palestine itself, and these were the only kinds of posts that were spared from removal.

Besides Nathan's post, many of the posts on Chutzpah by SAUJS members are anti Palestine. Last Tuesday one member wrote: "Given the opportunity, Hamas and other terrorist groups would happily commit a Holocaust and the rest of the Palestinian population wouldn't so much as lift a finger to stop them. So as you can see within the Palestinian population, we have a potential Holocaust, and for me that is enough to say the 'Never again' has failed in reference to Jewish lives as well" (SAUJS member, 2011). Here, the threat and the reminder of the holocaust brings "legitimacy" to these racist claims towards the Palestinian population by using the fear of terrorism and the Arab other.

David addresses this problem and heated debate in the Jewish community between right wing Zionists and critics of the Israeli government's policies: "The problem is people's inability to see what is actually going on, even when presented with the facts. Their cognitive dissonance is so strong people can't break through it. And they are afraid of what it means if they do." Part of this is created by the propaganda I touched on in the previous section and part of it is the need to define one's self in

terms of the other, and the Palestine is that identified other in this situation.

Nathan describes the South African Jewish community as having the majority be loyal supports of Israel, “unquestioning support.” The Non-Zionist framework, however, is “almost non-existent. They are ostracized, but that has been the nature of the community since it’s beginning. The first institution in the Jewish community was a Zionist Federation. Zionism remains an essentially de facto belief in mainstream Jewish community.

For those who speak out, says Nathan: “it depends how objectors voice their opinions, these people can be attacked and harassed and called all kinds of names out of a last resort.” If someone has been labeled a non-Zionist, they are totally ostracized, not only from the discussion on Israel/Palestine, but in regards to the community as a whole. Nathan gives the example of those who have declared themselves to be non-Zionist, “not given platforms to speak to other issues if their platform of non-Zionism is known, they aren’t really allowed to talk on any other issues.”

While non-Zionists are bad in Zionist opinion, non-Zionist Jews are the most problematic, and that is where the most hate and violence is directed. David who is a member of Open Shuhahdah street comments on the reaction to the organization: “Open Shuhadah Street gets under people’s skin because it has a number of Jews involved, and the Jewish community wants to keep out all the [critical] discussion about Israel that has Jews in it, and any time you step out of that, that’s when the anger comes in.”

### *Internal Conflict*

While the Zionist backlash experienced in the community is of course extremely difficult to deal with, that experienced by the participant's own family and friend's is the most difficult. Arielle was the one participant who opened up about issues she has faced in her own personal life: "My father said to me about two months ago, he said, 'Arielle, we're not proud of you.' That's really hard, I find, even though I'm over 40, for my father to say...there's like a part of me wanting to be the good girl always. I want my parents to be proud. I want them to have, like Nachas." How does one stand up to her own family with such resolve? Arielle address this was well: "Yeah, there are these moments. I think, oh my god, like jeez that's a hectic thing to carry. And then the other ones, I think, you know what, what Israel is doing cannot be justified. There's no way around it. There's no way around justifying you can do that to other human beings. I mean that's, bloody hell, that's preemptive genocide." When one is so sure, as Arielle is, that she is standing up for what is right, it gives her the strength to stand up to her community, her friends, and her family.

Throughout all this it becomes difficult to stay in touch with one's Judaism. That is the biggest issue I am facing personally. All of my participants have come to a positive relationship with their religion and with their beliefs and critiques regarding Israel.: "I don't even want to make like an issue about Jews against Jews or Jews against me. I really want to zone out of that, because I feel so Jewish. I don't know what that is. I just feel it. I

feel it less than I used to. I think it used to be like a shell that I hid under....it was the only way I felt legitimate in articulating a political position of social justice or struggle for social justice in the world. And I shifted that. Now its like, no, it's the only identity that I have to hold onto is the notion of being a creature of this world."

Ruth became very emotional when discussing her relationship to Israel, alongside her realizations of the great violations of human rights caused by the country's government. "I have a deep, deep love and passion for that country. I could cry, you know? Its so sad...Id be living there I think." An even more difficult layer is that, that love for the country that she feels so deeply, is attempted to be negated in some way by other members of her community who feel that she cannot possibly be truly jewfish or truly love Israel if she is it as an occupying state. This makes the interaction, or the creation for a broader Jewish community outside of Zionism extremely difficult. "This is who I am and this is what I believe and what happened to me. And that was an experience that nobody can deny. I saw it with my own eyes, you know? And that's want I want to tell the Jewish mainstream community. I want to tell that story. I want to say this is what I saw and this is how it made me feel." It is clear though, from my research, that this story is an extremely difficult one to tell, and to be made public. There is such a strong force, and strong community against the revealing of stories like these, than these people get silenced.

## Conclusion

This project has contributed to my ongoing grappling with my own religion. I am searching to find my own understanding of Judaism, and my pride in that in the midst of everything else. I need to look outside of Israel to find these things, but for the past few years my identity as a Jew has been deeply rooted to Israel/Palestine, which has greatly complicated this quest for me. My own relationship to Judaism colors this project, my analysis, my

conclusions, and my interviews.

What does it mean to be a Jew? Is it a religion, a culture, a race? Unlike Christianity, Judaism has never had a strong missionary movement so the vast majority of Jews were born Jewish. Being Jewish is more about family traditions and less about a set of beliefs. But this is dangerous ground because thinking of Judaism as a race seems to echo back to Hitler, pogroms, and the expulsion of Jews from Spain, and being blame for the killing of Christ- just to cite a few examples.

In a famous essay called *Anti Semite and Jew*, French existential philosopher Jean Paul Sartre argued that the Jew and the Anti Semite define each other. We are Jews and feel connected to other Jews in part because we are all victims of anti-Semitism (Sartre, 1995). Non-religious Jews were killed in the holocaust as were religious Jews. Belief made no difference. A very negative view of Judaism in some ways, but there is truth in it.

To the Zionists of S. Africa and elsewhere, being Jewish means being a Zionist. This wasn't what Judaism meant for me going into my college experience because I wasn't raised in a religious home so I didn't have to grapple with the same experience of propaganda as the participants having not gone to a Jewish school or having not attended temple consistently. A Zionist, on the other hand, would have a completely different view of my identity. He or she would say I am a self-hating Jew, which would suggest a totally different psychology. In the former case and in the way I see myself, I

am able to see beyond my own self-interest and the interest of my people. In the latter case, I am somehow damaged, turning against my people and my identity. Those two opposite views show the problems with the polarizing politics on the Middle East. I shouldn't see a Zionist in black and white terms, just as he or she shouldn't see me in black and white terms as a self-hating Jew.

My participants for this project helped me to see that. I haven't had much experience with non-Zionist Jews, and I learned a lot from their stories and how they navigate their own Jewish community. The non-Zionists see the parallels with Apartheid when they empathize with the Palestinians, but they don't turn against the Israelis as much as they seem to recognize the Palestinians plight and see in it a parallel to Apartheid. Two of my participants also declared themselves to be Zionist. Hearing their opinion, and their pride in that identity, while still criticizing the governments actions, helped me to begin to see someone who identifies as a Zionist as a whole person. It helped me start to let go of the prejudices I have within me towards these people.

The Jews feel connected to Israeli because they see it as a safe place, a last resort if they have to flee their home country, and the holocaust serves as justification. The whole notion of the self-hating Jew also gained tremendous strength during the holocaust as some Jews cooperated with the Nazis. Out of this came the psychological notion of identifying with your aggressor: hostages held for long periods begin to feel connected even loyal to their

captors.

The holocaust has created a great fear in the world. A fear of being racist, a fear of marginalizing Jews in any way. The Holocaust drastically shifted the history of mankind. Never before had the world seen such calculated murder on such a broad scale, although the scale of the Rwandan and Armenian genocides was equally horrendous. How does history continue on after an event like the holocaust? How do Jews as a people create a space to mourn and to rebuild? Israel was given to the Jews as a safe homeland after the holocaust, and so with this history, the history of Israel/Palestine, the holocaust colors everything. There were people living in that land already, the Palestinians, but that seemed incredibly insignificant in light of what kind of destruction the Jewish community had just faced.

Israel has become a representation of all things Jewish, of the Jewish community itself. Israel has taken the Star of David, the symbol of the religion, and put it on their flag so that the star is now also associated with Israel. Any criticism of Israel has become anti-Semitism. Things like anti-Semitism and the fear of the holocaust have been used by some Jews as tools to use against anyone finding fault with Israel.

9/11 is the other major event in history that is shaping the current political climate in Israel/Palestine. It was the first time since Pearl Harbor in which the United States has experienced an act of terrorism, and murder of American citizens on a broad scale. The orchestrators of this act of terror were Muslim extremists. While not all Arabs are Muslim, and not all Muslims

are Arab, there needed to be someone to blame for this act of terror on American soil. The people to blame were the Arabs. The words terrorism and Arab became linked.

Suddenly, instead of communist Russia being the setting for American action films, it became the Middle East. The Arabs (equated with the Muslims) were the new "bad guys." They became the tangible enemy to the intangible "War on Terror." The United States, as the world power, sets the stage for the power of other regions and countries, and anti-Arab sentiment spread.

These two fears, the fear of being called a Nazi, and the fear of Muslims and Arabs, became worldwide. They set the stage for Israel's identity as the shining beacon of light, westernization, democracy, in the land of unruly, uncivilized Muslims. It is a similar story to the Westernized, civilized Dutch bringing hope to the region of the primal, native Bushmen. It is the same story everywhere. The Western world, the white world, is the world of domination and the world of civilization. The black, brown, Arab, Muslim, eastern, other is unknown and uncivilized. These people benefit from the development brought to them by the majority. This is the story that has repeated itself in many parts of the world, and it is the story that has happened in both South Africa and Israel/Palestine. Of course there are other things in play, money, oil, power, allies, enemies. There are so many things in play, but difference in race and in Israel/Palestine's case, religion, is at the root of both conflicts.

We cannot find the Palestinian narrative in the media. I found it through the people I met in college. The participants of this study found it in Palestine itself. That is the only way that things will change, if the rest of the world hears the story of Palestinians. That is how minds were changed in regards to South Africa; the truth began to come out. Arielle describes her emotional realization during the Truth and Reconciliation trials, where everything that she was told, all of the propaganda that she was presented as a white South African, was revealed as a lie.

In both my interview and my research, it became apparent that the members of the Jewish community I was working with felt it was a personal responsibility to be involved with raising awareness about Palestine. Some felt it was their responsibility as South Africans because of the history of Apartheid, some felt it was their responsibility as Jews, and some felt it was their responsibility simply as humans. It is the fact that this is a responsibility, not an interest or a passion, that gives these people strength in light of the silencing, propaganda, and hatred from the majority of the mainstream Zionist Jewish community in South Africa.

### Recommendations for Further Studies

One thing I ran into while doing my interviews was that most whites have not dealt with the history of the Apartheid. One of my participants stated that one reason that Zionist South Africans remain Zionist is because they won't face either set of human rights violations: the Apartheid's or the Israeli government's. Most Zionist South Africans haven't come to terms with what Israel is doing as Jews, and haven't come to terms with what the Apartheid did as white people. Clearly, more work needs to be done on white South Africans and how they view their own history. More research needs to be done within the more global Jewish community as well. There is a split occurring in the Jewish community as the religion becomes more and more centered on Israel. Some Jews are rejecting this "necessary relationship," but those Jews are ostracized, and at times harassed by other Jews. This is a global problem that needs further study, research, and time than I did in my project. The Israeli Occupation needs more world exposure in general, whether that be through further research projects, news articles, literature, music, ect...Anything that tells the story of the Palestinians to the world,

because that story is not heard and it is one that needs to be.

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