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Page

10

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# Racism: do the duck test

*All criticism of Israel does not equate to anti-Semitism*

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IT IS obvious why racism remains such a hot topic in this country. We acknowledge it still exists and needs to be dealt with urgently.

The nuance comes in with the definitions around racism. Things such as context, intent and tone need to be considered when declaring comments or incident as racist, and who defines the concept.

Yet, at some point, it becomes obvious. It's called the "duck test". If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck.

If Zane Dangor is to be believed ("Anti-Semites under the bed", April 14), Jewish advocates for Israel are deceitfully "crying anti-Semitism" to suppress legitimate criticism of Israel.

This he terms "a well-honed tool to silence criticism of Israel's human rights abuses against Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories".

He makes these claims in relation to the downgrade of the SA Embassy in Tel Aviv.

Actually, Dangor's sneering intimidation that the Jewish establishment knowingly makes false claims of anti-Semitism to shut down debate on Israel is itself a form of anti-Jewish bigotry.

David Hirsh, a UK sociologist and anti-racism activist who has written extensively on this phenomenon,

observes that in terms of this, those who raise the issue of anti-Semitism are held not merely to be wrong, but of being "wrong on purpose; of crying wolf, of playing the anti-Semitism card", to "mobilise Jewish victim-power for illegitimate purposes".

It is also, of course, an effective way of smearing and discrediting Jews who defend Israel, and provides a convenient excuse for not engaging with what they might have to say on the topic, whether on Israel itself or where anti-Israel sentiment does cross over into racist attacks against Jews in general.

To strengthen his argument that "Jewish leadership" is stifling debate, he says the "Jewish Voice for Peace" supports the downgrade.

This is disingenuous. He endorses the Jewish Voice for Peace, a fringe group, discarding the vast majority of Jewish South Africans in this country.

While the SA Jewish Board of Deputies might not speak on behalf of every Jew in the country, it has been the democratically elected representative body of SA Jewry for 117 years and represents the overwhelming majority of the community.

Dangor contends that the Jewish community claim that any criticism

## TheQuick

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of Israel is anti-Semitic. We don't.

In reality, no serious advocate of Jewish rights equates all criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Indeed, it is all but unanimously accepted that "criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic".

Rather, the question unavoidably arises when such "criticism" is decidedly not similar to that levelled against other countries, but instead takes the form, in Natan Sharansky's well-known 3D formulation, of "demonisation, delegitimation and double standards".

And if the world's sole Jewish majority state, which most Jews everywhere support and identify with to some degree, is subjected to unjust and discriminatory treatment, then how can that not be a form of anti-Semitism, in practice if not

necessarily in intent?

What the Jewish community wants from our government is not, as Dangor alleges, to stifle debate, but to ask that it treats the Jewish state as it would any other it deals with. To treat it differently from all others and then claim that it is only upholding its own moral standards is both hypocritical and unjust.

It is immoral to subject Israel alone to punitive sanctions whereas no similar measures are contemplated against known abusers of human rights South Africa has relations with, among them China, Myanmar, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Iran.

It is likewise dishonest to hold Israel to be entirely guilty of the failure to create an independent Palestinian state, as if the record of rejectionism, incitement to violence and hatred, corruption and repression of the Palestinian population on the part of its leaders counts for nothing.

Most reasonable people in the world support the Palestinians' right to have a secure state. It is something the board fervently believes in. I certainly consider myself Pro-Palestinian.

However, being Pro-Palestinian does not require one to be anti-Israel. That is, unless, you think that Israel

should not exist. Despite the calls by the anti-Israel groups including BDS, to eradicate Israel, as in their slogan "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" the reality is that Israel has a right to exist.

Jewish South Africans should be allowed to argue against the embassy downgrade without being insultingly accused of crying anti-Semitism.

After all, South African citizens stand to benefit from a full relationship with Israel.

Our Department of International Relations doesn't have to kowtow to an organisation like BDS, which has a long track record of inciting racist hatred against South African Jewry.

And our Minister shouldn't have to apologise (as she did) to those same narrow-interest parties for not having downgraded our embassy sooner.

Zane Dangor seeks to preach to the Jewish community as to what anti-Semitism is. I wonder if he would also lecture our black community on what racism is, and women what sexism is?

Surely it is up to minorities themselves to decide what constitutes racism against them? Is that a quack I hear in the distance?

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