

# Separation, oppression for six long decades

**I**N A frank interview with the *Sunday Times* on June 15 1969, then Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir declared: "There is no such thing as a Palestinian people... It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn't exist." Sadly – but perhaps unsurprisingly – it seems that this warped view of Middle Eastern history is creeping into the Democratic campaign trail in the United States.

US presidential hopeful Barack Obama proclaimed at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's policy conference that Jerusalem is the undivided capital of Israel – a statement that might just turn out to be one of the crowning glories of Israel's 60th anniversary celebrations, particularly as the rest of the world continues to regard the annexation of Arab East Jerusalem as illegal.

Obama's populist speech at the beginning of June to one of Washington's most influential lobbying groups, where he pledged – if elected – to provide Israel with \$30 billion for its defence and gave an assurance that Israel would never be forced to the negotiating table after its attack on Syria, was obviously warmly received.

However, his ingratiating grandstanding is discredited both by fact and international law. When the US Senator for Illinois said: "In a state of constant insecurity, Israel has maintained a vibrant and open discourse and a resilient commitment to the rule of law", his views were laughably wide of the mark. Obama was obviously not referring to the 270 United Nations Security Council resolutions made against Israel since its birth, nor the other 631 UN General Assembly resolutions voted on regarding

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## Neil Hodge considers the dark side of Israel's 60th anniversary celebrations in 2008 with justice for the Palestinians still denied

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Israel, the majority of which have criticised and censured the country for its treatment of the Palestinians and for its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In fact, having been born in contempt of UN Security Council Resolution 46 that required Jews and Arabs to "refrain... from any political activity which prejudices the rights, claims or position of each community", Israel has flaunted UN resolutions going back 60 years. For example, it has consistently defied UN Resolution 194, which allows Palestinians the right to return to their homeland, even though the international community has reaffirmed it more than 150 times.

Notwithstanding peace talks in France this week, no other country has been more successful at defying the UN – even those deemed as "terror states" by the West. For example, there were just 17 UN resolutions made against Iraq prior to the illegal 2003 invasion. There are currently three against Iran and just two against North Korea. This number pales in comparison with those made against Israel.

Even the resolutions condemning Israel are not binding. This is because they were not made under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which sets out the UN Security Council's powers to take military and non-military action to "restore international peace and security" – cited as the basis for UN armed action in Korea in 1950 during

the Korean War and more recently for the use of coalition forces in Iraq and Kuwait in 1991.

Rather, these resolutions were made under Chapter VI, which relates to the "pacific settlement of disputes" between parties. Chapter VI says that the Security Council "may investigate any dispute or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute" and to "recommend appropriate procedures or methods of adjustment" if it determines that the situation might endanger international peace and security. However, these recommendations are not binding on UN members and as such have no enforcement mechanisms under international law. Consequently, Israel – with the blessing of the US – routinely ignores them.

With the seemingly unconditional backing of the world's most powerful country, coupled with the impotency of the international community's collective parish council, the United Nations, Israel is untouchable and above the law.

This can be seen in its demolition and settlement programmes. On June 3 this year, the UN reported that Palestinians living in Israeli-controlled Area C of the West Bank have given up on obtaining construction permits from the authorities and instead build without them, leaving 3,000 structures in the territory under



ISRAEL seems to be able to act with impunity in its continuing oppression of the Palestinian people

constant threat of demolition.

According to the Oslo Peace Accords signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation in the 1990s, the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory was divided into three categories. Area A was supposed to be under complete Palestinian control, Area B was split and Area C – comprising more than half of the West Bank and the area with the largest number of Israeli settlements – remained under Israeli control.

The UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs report entitled *Lack of Permit: Demolitions and Resultant Displacement in Area C* found that more than 94 per cent of Palestinian applications for building permits in Area C, submitted to the Israeli authorities by Palestinians between January 2000 and

## *Even the United Nations' resolutions that condemn Israel are not binding*

September 2007, were denied. In the first quarter of 2008, 124 Palestinian structures were destroyed by the Israeli authorities for not having a permit. In all of 2007, some 208 structures were demolished. Between 2000 and September 2007 about 1,600 structures were destroyed, the report stated.

Tellingly, the report also noted: "While Palestinian development in Area C has been impeded, the expansion and development of Israeli settlements and other Israeli infrastructure has flourished... despite these settlements' status as illegal under international humanitarian law." It added: "Palestinian residential areas already have a population density double to that in the Israeli settlements."

B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, says nearly 418,000 settlers now live on expropriated land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, despite assurances that the building of settlements there would be stopped. So far, only a handful of settlements have been removed, and with little consequence. The four West Bank settlements that were evacuated in August 2005 as part of the "disengagement plan" saw the settler population reduce by just 582.

Ironically, the day before the OCHA report was issued, the Israeli government announced plans to build nearly 900 new housing units in a part of East Jerusalem that is considered occupied territory. In total defiance of international law, the Israeli government also insists that any final peace deal will see these districts redrawn inside the Israeli border, thus encroaching even more into Palestinian territory.

No one should be surprised by this. Arab expulsion has always been central to the foundation of Israel. In a letter to his son dated 1937, David Ben-Gurion, who became Israel's first prime minister 11 years later, wrote: "I support compulsory transfer. I do not see in it anything immoral... The Arabs will have to go, but one needs an opportune moment for making it happen, such as a war." He soon got what he wished for.



## Out of Africa Bryan Rostron

# A circular journey that reveals ethnic absurdities

**S**OUTH Africa still boils with complex racial antagonisms. After the xenophobic explosions in many townships in May, comes the furious – and sometimes racist – response of several black professional bodies to a court ruling that South African Chinese should be considered "black" in terms of legally-defined "previously disadvantaged status".

Even 14 years after the fall of apartheid, we still have to fill in our racial category every time we complete an official form.

But the absurdity of such ethnic fixation was emphasised by DNA tests that my goddaughter, Vuyelwa Ngqase, and I had recently, as part of the Africa Genome Project. The aim is to create a genetic map of migration patterns of groups that have settled South Africa over thousands of years.

Vuyelwa is 18 and black while I am – well, check out the photo that accompanies this column. But there's a link between this unlungu (white person) and an isiXhosa-speaking teenager. Our DNA tests were from simple cheek swabs. They've produced amazing results.

Vuyelwa's lineage is associated with the "Out of Africa" move 60,000-80,000 years ago. Some branches left to populate the rest of the world, others dispersed through Africa. Vuyelwa's subgroup "possibly arose in Central Africa near Sudan around 35,000 years ago". So it's been one heck of a journey all the way to school in Cape Town today.

Women can only trace their female lineage, however, and need a male of their immediate family to trace paternal roots. Men (once again) have an unfair advantage: both sides of the family can be traced through that DNA sample.

My grandparents immigrated here at the turn of the 20th century: from Scotland, Lancashire and Ireland. These days they'd be known as "economic refugees", fleeing poverty and, fortunately for them, able to seek better prospects in the colonies.

Beyond that, the family tree faded out. Now I discover that, on my mother's side, the lineage arose about 30,000 years ago, mainly in north-west Europe, probably part of the population following the retreat of the ice sheets from Europe. The surprise was on my father's side: going back many thousands of years to south and central Asia, Iran and the Caucasus – and before that to the Roman people, who have their origins in India.

There was an even stranger result. It seems I've a distant connection to Angola. My paternal Y chromosome "haplotype" sequence, according to the

database for worldwide matches, showed only one single match on the global map: Cabinda, Angola. Heeran Makkan, chief medical scientist at the Johannesburg laboratory where testing was done, confirmed the result. "Given the history of the slave trade routes and the European settlements along the coasts of Africa in recent times", he said, "it is quite likely that while an individual identifies as a Cabinda individual, he may carry a Y chromosome that would have been passed down to him from a forefather in recent times that could have been European or Asian."

So what on earth does this signify in terms of my own link with Africa? The connection must go way back, possibly centuries.

The Cabinda enclave of Angola was one of the first points on the West African coast where Europeans began trading. Could it be that one of my ancestors – of whom we have no idea or record – was a sailor on a ship trading down that part of the coast in the 17th or 18th centuries; or, even, that I have an ancestor who was either a slave trader or took part in slaving expeditions? It's a sobering thought.

Nevertheless, the fact that the only match-up I have in the entire world is in Africa adds to the extraordinary complexity of our enduring obsession with skin colour and identity.

Nelson Mandela had his DNA tested as part of this project and the result showed that included in his ancestry were the San people, formerly known as Bushmen.

There have been similar results for white Afrikaners: many of whom have (hidden) black roots, too. The idea of racial purity is not just toxic; it's a myth, pure hogwash.

Yet, following the recent court ruling, our minister of labour made spiteful and racially-charged comments regarding Chinese people. We should all have a DNA test to demonstrate how utterly foolish are such exclusivist manias. After all, what should I say for "race" the next time I fill in a government form?

The fact is that, for both sides of my family, it had been a long trek out of Africa. And finally, many millennia later, it was also a long haul back. And that, I surmise, is where there's a link between Vuyelwa and myself.

Vuyelwa's group is linked to the "Out of Africa" migration, but her own ancestors stayed behind and eventually moved south. Mine left Africa, on foot, and had – like all whites in South Africa – to await the invention of technology (ships and guns) to return home.

Now it's up to all of us to work out what the hell we're actually doing here.