

UNPACKED FOR
EDUCATORS

 **THE JEWISH**
EDUCATION PROJECT

Unpacking Israel's big questions: Apartheid, Occupation, and Settler Colonialism

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UNPACKED



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IS AN ACT OF DECOLONIZATION

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Who is Omer Fedi?

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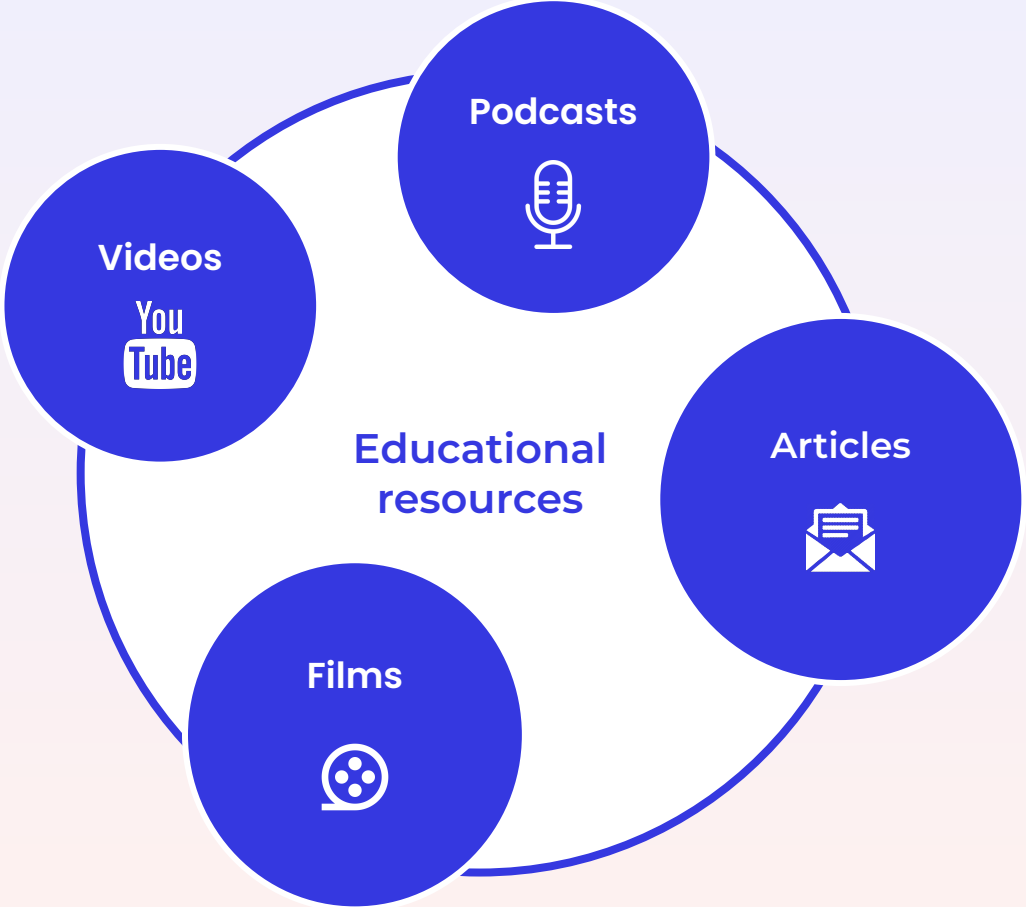
THE POWER of

TEN STORIES / ONE ISRAEL HOMELAND

Judaism Updated Weekly

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Today's plan

1

Outlining the challenge

2

4 approaches for addressing the
“big questions”

3

Takeaways and reflection

Outlining the challenge

MENTIMETER QUESTIONS

How important is it to address these questions with our students?





Israel advocacy

Train young people to
defend Israel

**Young adults
and older**

Israel studies

Dispassionately develop
knowledge about Israeli
society, history and politics

Adults

Israel education

Cultivate connection to
contemporary Israel as part
of one's Jewish identity

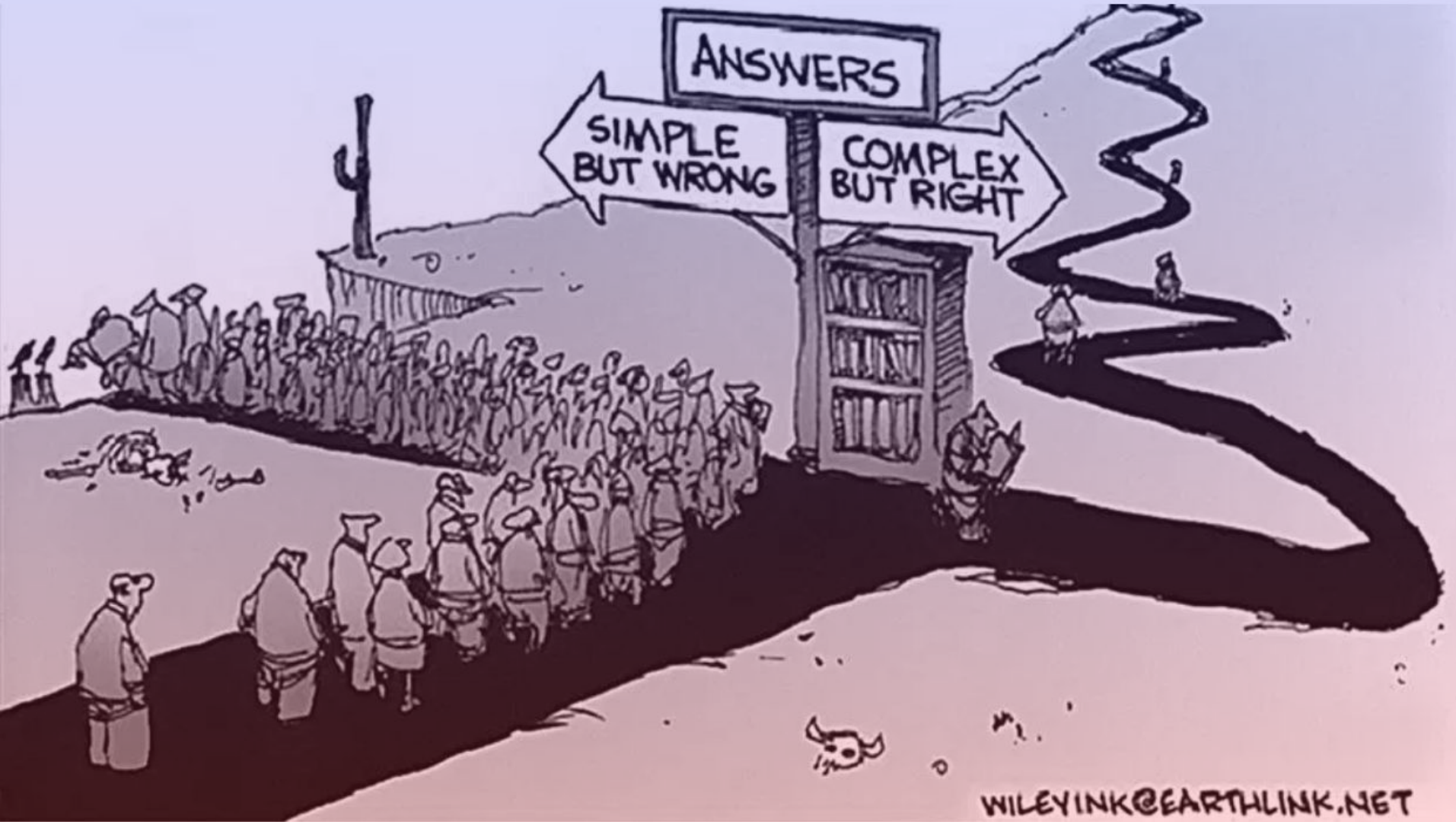
From 5-120

Big picture

“When we think about the desired outcomes of Israel education, then, we ought to focus, among other things, on overcoming Israel-immaturity or Israel-sentimentality and on achieving mature love of Israel.”

Prof. Jon Levisohn from “Mature Love, Nuanced Loyalty, And Redemptive Vision” in Israel Education: The Next Edge ed. Jonny Ariel (2020)





4 approaches for addressing the “big questions”

Addressing big questions

1

Language matters

2

Moving from straw man to
steel man arguments

3

Adding historical context

4

The dangers of inflammatory
statements

Approach #1

Language matters

Defining occupation

MILITARY OCCUPATION

(definition)

The control and possession of hostile territory that enables an invading nation to establish military government against an enemy or martial law against rebels or insurrectionists in its own territory.

Miriam-Webster Dictionary

A young man with short dark hair and a slight smile is looking towards the camera. He is wearing a dark-colored zip-up hoodie. The word "UNPACKED" is printed in white, bold, capital letters on the lower right side of the hoodie. In the background, there is a bookshelf filled with books and a window with light-colored curtains.

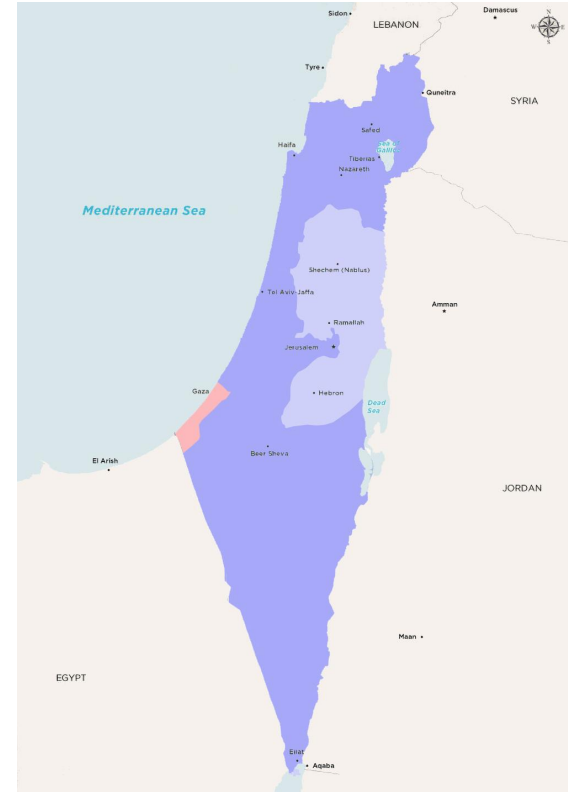
**WHEN SOMEONE
MENTIONS THE**

UNPACKED

Palestinian perspective(s)

The West Bank is occupied Palestinian land and should serve as the basis for a future Palestinian state (1967)

All of Israel is an occupation from the river to the sea (1948)





Approach #2

Moving from straw man to steel man arguments

“The question is not ‘why are they wrong,’ but rather ‘why do they think they’re right?’”

*Dr. Micah Goodman from
Mifleget HaMachshavot Podcast*



Addressing “big questions”

1

The quick
response

2

Adding
complexity

3

Historical
context

A scarecrow in a cornfield, wearing a straw hat and a light-colored shirt, standing in a field of tall corn stalks. The image is overlaid with a blue and red gradient.

Unpacking Israel's big questions

Is Israel an apartheid state?

**The quick
responses**



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**ISRAEL AN
APARTHEID
STATE?**



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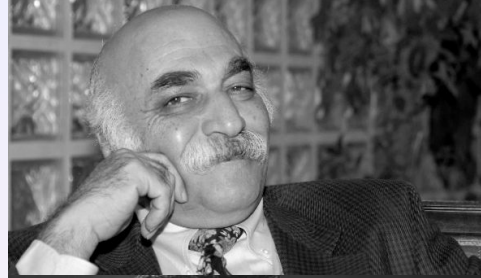
ISRAEL AN
APARTHEID
STATE?

**Jewish
Israelis are
not one
racial group**



20% of the Israeli population are **Arab-Israelis** who have **full rights as citizens.**

Some are justices of the Supreme Court and members of Knesset (Israeli Parliament).



**Adding
complexity**

A knight in full plate armor stands in the center of a ruined castle. The scene is overlaid with a red-to-white gradient. The knight is holding a sword and a shield. The background shows stone arches and towers of a destroyed fortress.

**Why do people *still think*
Israel is an apartheid state?**

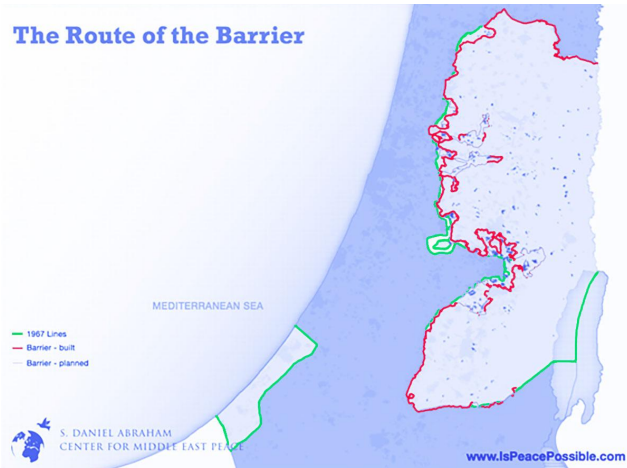
“Judea and Samaria are under **Israeli military rule**, but the Palestinian inhabitants there are **not Israeli citizens**. This fact casts serious doubt on the democratic character of the State of Israel.”

Micah Goodman, Catch 67



What's the **best argument** about why
Israel might be an apartheid state?

**Palestinians in the West Bank
and East Jerusalem are *not*
Israeli citizens and are subject
to different laws than Israelis**



- Palestinians in the West Bank/East Jerusalem **hold different passports than Israelis**
- **Restrictions on movement:** different passports, checkpoints, roads, the separation barrier.
- Descendants of refugees are **not allowed** to return
- The Nation State Law (2018) emphasizes that Israel is primarily a **Jewish state**, and not a state of all its citizens

How might we move our students beyond the easy answers to grappling with the complex problems that Israel faces?

Can we help students differentiate between two separate conversations:

1. Is Israel an apartheid state?

2. What inequalities exist in Israeli society?

- How did this situation come to be?
- What are the different opinions in Israel about how to navigate these challenges?



Death to settler

SETTLER COLONIALISM

(definition)

the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

Oxford Languages

**Is Zionism “settler
colonialism?”**

**The quick
responses**



**Continual Jewish
presence in the Land
of Israel**

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black top and a necklace with a star pendant, is speaking. Her hands are positioned near her chest. The video has a dark, semi-transparent border on the left and right sides. The text 'IS AN ACT OF DECOLONIZATION' is overlaid on the bottom center of the frame.

IS AN ACT OF
DECOLONIZATION

**Jews are not colonizers
since there has been a
continual Jewish presence
in the Land of Israel**



Colonialism and economic exploitation

Is Zionism colonialism?

האם הציונות היא קולוניאליזם?

هل الصهيونية استعمار؟



A key feature of colonialism is economic exploitation in service of a foreign homeland. Zionists were not serving a foreign power and therefore cannot be defined as colonizers.

Student prompts

How might you summarize these responses to the argument that Jews are settler colonialists?

What about these arguments do you find compelling? Where might you push back?

**Adding
complexity**

Why do people *still* think Zionism is colonialism?

A The percentage of Jewish inhabitants grew in the early 1900's, while the Muslim percentage decreased

B Early Zionist leaders used the term colonialism when describing the goals of Zionism

Figure 2

Population of Palestine



1919

Arab 90%
Jewish 10%



1929

Arab 83%
Jewish 17%



1939

Arab 70%
Jewish 30%



"Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonized... That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing."

Ze'ev Jabotinsky, "The Iron Wall", 1923



"The main reason for the immigration of Jews to Palestine is the consolidation and colonization of the land."

Menachem Ussishkin, Zionist leader and head of the JNF, 1923

Adding complexity

**Why the “settler
colonialism” *still* falls
short**

**Why do people
still think
Zionism is
colonialism?**

A

It conflates *colonising* with
colonialism

B

It ignores the Jewish refugee
experience



From the *Wondering Jives Podcast*
of *Disputed Podcasts*



**WITH NO MOTHER
COUNTRY?**

WITH

FILED

Student prompts/ Essential questions

Is there a difference between
“colonising” and “colonialism”?

What factors determine whether a
people are indigenous to a land?

Under what circumstances can
people immigrate to another
land?

Can refugees be colonialists?

“In case of Americans, often they'll see race as if Israeli Jews are white people and Palestinian Muslims are black people...

There are Americans who really believe that a country thousands of miles away which has a completely different history, completely unrelated to race in America, somehow maps onto America's racial preoccupations... because that's the skeleton in their closet...

There's a history of projecting whatever ills you see in the world onto Jewish people and then condemning them as the avatars of the ills that you see.”

Matti Friedman, Israeli journalist and author

Addressing “big questions”

1

The quick
response

2

Adding
complexity

3

Historical
context

Reflection

What resonates with you about this approach?

What is challenging about this approach?



Approach #3

Provide historical context

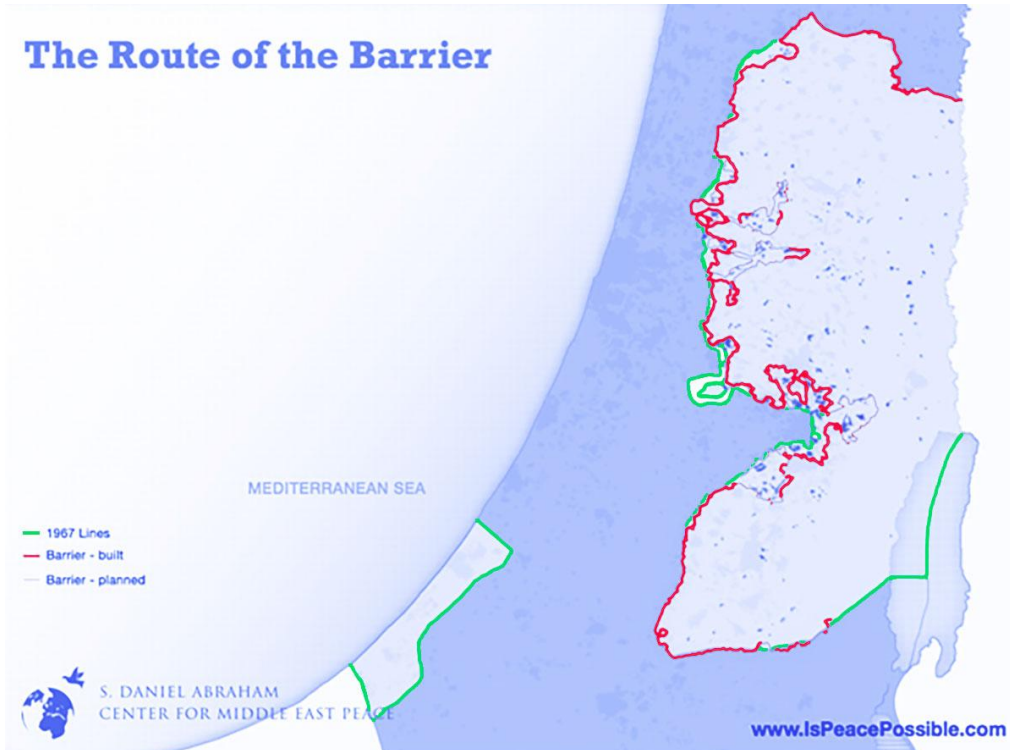
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Why does Israel maintain military control of the West Bank?

A photograph of a multi-lane highway in the West Bank, viewed from an elevated perspective. The road curves through a hilly, arid landscape. A tall, multi-layered security fence runs parallel to the highway, separating it from the surrounding terrain. Several cars are visible on the road. The image has a semi-transparent blue and red overlay. Centered over the image is a text block.

**Israel maintains military control over
Palestinians in the West Bank to
ensure the **security** of its citizens.**

The Route of the Barrier



A photograph of a person climbing a concrete wall topped with barbed wire. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a headscarf, and is holding a flag with red, white, and green horizontal stripes. The scene is set outdoors with a clear sky.

**APARTHEID
WALL OR
SECURITY
BARRIER?**

A photograph of a person climbing a concrete wall topped with barbed wire. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a headscarf, and is holding a flag with red, white, and green horizontal stripes. The scene is set against a clear sky. The text 'APARTHEID WALL OR SECURITY BARRIER?' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**APARTHEID
WALL OR
SECURITY
BARRIER?**

Student prompts

Should Israel prioritize the security of Israeli civilians or the freedom of movement of Palestinians living in the West Bank?

Is it possible to do both?



Approach #4

The dangers of inflammatory statements

Why the apartheid accusation is distracting

A Hardens as
opposed to opens

B There are
legitimate
criticisms of Israel

RECAP
**Addressing the
“big questions”**

1

Language matters

2

Moving from straw man to steel man arguments

3

Adding historical context

4

The dangers of inflammatory statements

Reflection

What resonated with you
from this presentation?

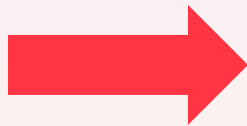
What are you still
wondering?

CONCLUSION

Let's separate conversations



**WHAT STORY
IS EACH
WOMAN
TELLING
ABOUT
ISRAEL?**



The “End the Occupation” woman focuses on long lines outside military checkpoints, soldiers arresting Palestinians in the middle of the night, and the large cement wall cutting Palestinians off from their land.

To her, what is happening beyond the Green Line is military occupation of the Palestinian people.

The “homeland” woman is telling the story of biblical connection between Jews and Judea, where Abraham and Isaac and Rachel and Leah and Rebecca once walked... **For her, there is an inherent right for Jews to return to their (theological and historical) homes.**

Lauren Cohen Fischer



These two women are clearly in disagreement — but they're having two separate conversations... **If we can separate the conversation into the status of the land and the experience of those who live in it**, then we can bring the two women from Prima Kings into conversation with each other: **we can discuss Jewish legacy without refuting Palestinian reality.**

Lauren Cohen Fischer





VIDEO

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

From the River to the Sea Explained



VIDEO

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Does Israel Commit War Crimes?



VIDEO

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Does Israel Act as an Apartheid State?



VIDEO

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Is Israel an Occupying Power?



VIDEO

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Did Israel Expel Palestinian Arabs?



VIDEO

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Was Zionism a Form of Colonialism?

Q&A


Q&A

Thank you!

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