

The Palestine Laboratory – Book Launch

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I acknowledge the sovereign owners of land we are gathered on, the Gadigal People and pay my respects to their elders past and present. No matter where we are in this country, we are on stolen land. Sovereignty was never ceded. This always was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

I recognise the parallels between the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and the Palestinian people are considerable. Both are targets of settler colonialism and both continue to resist and demand their rights.

I express my deep solidarity with them and my commitment to do all I can to support their struggle for justice, on their terms, not ours.

It is lovely to be here with you all tonight.

Last time I was here with Antony, it was to launch his book “Pills, Powder and smoke – inside the bloody war on drugs ‘ in August 2019.

It was an honour to launch that superb piece of work. I had the pleasure of being the Greens Drugs and Harm Minimisation Spokesperson for five years when I was in the NSW Parliament. One of the things I am proud of is moving the Greens NSW policy towards the legalisation of adult use of cannabis, in line with the experiences in the US. In the years since the public debate on this issue has also shifted in that direction.

Today, it is again such a privilege to launch another masterpiece by Antony Lowenstein ‘The Palestine Laboratory – How Israel exports the technology of occupation around the world”.

Even just reading out the title sends shivers down my spine. To think that Palestinians are being used as test subjects, as effectively guinea pigs for Israel’s military weaponry and technology of surveillance, espionage, cyber warfare, phone-hacking, and house demolition gives you a window

into the toxic ideology that drives settler-colonisation, oppression, violence and apartheid.

Just last month marked the 75th anniversary of Al Nakba, the catastrophe that saw the violent expulsion of approximately three quarters of all Palestinians from their homes and homeland.

As Antony's book shows, the Nakba is not just about that day, it is about the continued dispossession of the Palestinians, the denial of their human rights and their ongoing targeting by Israel.

The Nakba is alive every day for the more than 7 million refugees, both displaced during Israel's creation and their descendants still awaiting justice.

The Nakba is not a history lesson, it is a lived past and present for the Palestinian people.

It is lived every day that they are denied the right of entry to their land.

It is lived every day by the people in the Gaza strip who are kept in an open air prison camp because Israel and Egypt refuse to open the borders.

It is lived every day in the West Bank as Israel settlements expand and settlers are allowed to behave with impunity.

Antony's brilliant and forensic investigative skills, research and forthright writing tells us though that in those decades of occupation, the state of Israel has been developing the tools and technologies to not only oppress Palestinians but it's been exporting these to well over 100 countries. Nations that are democracies and those that are dictatorships.

The book lays out the scale, breadth and depth of how ubiquitous across the globe these tools of surveillance, espionage and death have become, and how their software and hardware fuel brutal conflict and oppression around the world.

For example, the use of drones to monitor refugees by the European Union and how Greece does the European Union's bidding to monitor, punish, isolate and violently repress refugees, stopping most of them from entering the continent.

Or the case from the part of the world I grew up – the subcontinent and Kashmir. Where under PM Modi and the BJP government in India the occupation and oppression of Kashmiris is the worst its been.

The parallels drawn between the situation in Palestine and Kashmir are not uncommon, but what is much less known is the strengthening relationship between India and Israel and the mutual ideology of embracing ethnonationalism fed by an anti-islamist propaganda which suits the agenda of both states.

The last example I'll give from the book is of the US-Mexico border – a major site of Israeli security and surveillance companies with their technology a vital element in its militarization. One line that Antony quotes about the border in Arizona from the Tucson Mayor who left office in 2019 is etched in my brain:

“If you go to Israel and you come to Southern Arizona and close your eyes and spin yourself a few times, you might not be able to tell the difference.”

Colonialism and its cheerleaders have a lot to answer for.

As I read through example after example of the commercialisation of Israel's military industrial complex, past and present, I got to the point where my head couldn't move past one question

Why? Why? Why?

And as terrifying as the answer to that question is, Antony does not mince words when answering it:

“Palestine is Israel's workshop, where an occupied nation on its doorstep provides million of subjugated people as a laboratory for the most precise and successful methods of domination.”

And this:

“Israel’s mission from the beginning was to be a beacon in a century that suffered catastrophically from the perils of ethnonationalism. Today, Israel provides inspiration, ideologically and with military and intelligence equipment, to further its missionary zeal and find like-minded countries.

Sadly and shockingly, it seems there is no dearth of like-minded ethno-nationalist states that want to replicate the ultimate model Israel has built.

These states will not hesitate to use the weapons, the drones, the spy technology, the cyber hacking etc and Israel it seems is a willing and active dealer.

Reading Antony’s exposition of these defence deals and how far and wide the tentacles spread is frightening, so I was looking at an anti-dote, some hope and a way forward by the time I reached the conclusion.

And while Antony talks about a turning tide by way of institutional investors starting to divest from Israeli companies because of unlawful settlements and human rights abuses and the changing public opinion about the state of Israel, it is the book itself that makes a massive contribution in turning that tide by shining a floodlight on the secret ways the suffering of Palestinians is sold to the world.

I hope Australian politicians, decision-makers, media and the public read this with open eyes, listen to this with open ears and absorb it with open minds and hearts.

I hope the work that Antony has put into this global investigation and what it reveals will break the taboo on speaking out about the human rights of Palestinians and more importantly taking action for change.

Because I can tell that you in my workplace – the parliament of Australia - there is a bipartisan commitment by the old parties to the denial of Palestinian rights, the minimisation of the crimes of the Israeli state, and a condemnation of those who dare speak up.

Unfortunately, even the Labor government cannot bring itself to acknowledge even the existence of the Nakba. They voted against officially commemorating it at the UN general Assembly this year.

Australia continues to vote against justice and continues its traditional role as the USA's lackey running interference to support Israel no matter what crimes it commits, yet insists that Australia seeks a peaceful resolution but there is no doubt we are part of the problem.

The 'lesser known side' of the occupation that Antony courageously reveals in 'The Palestine Laboratory' is a must read for everyone who cares about justice and peace.

I don't use the word courageous, lightly or flippantly. I use the word for Antony with the deepest respect and some understanding of the vicious commentary being critical of Israel earns you – as Antony told the Sydney Morning Herald - Terror supporter, anti-semite, arab lover, propagandist and more.

I am acutely and personally familiar with this type of backlash piled on you for criticising Israel.

For Antony, being a Jew earns him the extra labels of a Nazi collaborator, Traitor, self-hating Jew

For me, being a Muslim the extras come as – Muslim scum, unadulterated racist, Islamic terrorist....

This vile hate is meant to silence you, these vicious labels are designed to shut you up, to stop you from speaking out, to make you an outcast.

To keep highlighting the oppression, persecution and dispossession the Palestinian people can often be a pretty lonely fight.

To praise the Greens for their new policy on Israel and Palestine which recognises Israel as practising the crime of apartheid and opposes the IHRA definition of anti-semitism because it conflates the criticism of the state of Israel with anti-semitism probably isn't going to win Antony any new friends.

Yet he has the courage to do that.

Even the quotes that Antony has selected to start each chapter reflect his 'telling it like it is' style.

It does take everything you've got to keep telling the truth, to keep digging up truth, and to keep fighting for justice.

It does have an impact on you and your loved ones. It does take its toll.

So Antony, thank you for being loud and proud and upholding justice and truth telling.

We all owe you a deep gratitude of thanks.

One way of showing your support and thanks for the bold and excellent work Antony does is to buy 'The Palestine Laboratory' for yourself, for friends and family, to immerse yourself in it, to question what might have been unquestionable and then to hold our own government to account in their complicity towards one of the great injustices of our time.