

Opposition to Israeli occupation consistent with other human rights struggles

In my late teens, I was active in the movement opposing South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia, calling for boycotts and divestment of companies supporting the occupation and sanctions against the occupying power. I was involved in similar efforts during the 1990s against the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. These movements played a role in winning these countries their freedom. More recently, I have supported boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara.

Many of us who have been involved in such campaigns over the years including UC Santa Cruz Professor Emerita Angela Davis, the speaker at this year's Martin Luther King convocation, now support boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against the Israeli occupation. Like me and most people I know involved in the BDS movement, Davis does so as part of a longstanding commitment to human rights, justice, and international law.

It has been nearly 70 years since the founding of the United Nations and the codification of international legal standards regarding the inadmissibility of countries expanding their borders by military force. One would think, then, that opposing what the international community recognizes as a foreign belligerent occupation would not be particularly controversial. Unfortunately, as readers of the Santa Cruz Sentinel have witnessed in recent weeks, this is not the case.

Perhaps most upsetting about those who believe certain countries should be able to invade and occupy their neighbors is that, rather than simply acknowledging that they subscribe to a 19th century belief system that the right of conquest is more important than the right of self-determination, they instead attack the motivations of those who oppose such aggression.

In recent months, for example, I have been called an apologist for Western imperialism for my opposition to Russia's occupation of Crimea and an agent of Algeria for my opposition to Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara. I guess it is not surprising, then, that like-minded extremists would make similarly baseless accusations of anti-Semitism against people like me and Angela Davis for our opposition to Israel's occupation.

Within any movement for social justice, there are differences in opinion. (For example, unlike Davis, I do not support the academic boycott of Israel.) And there are undeniably some people in the BDS movement who do unfairly single out Israel, some of whom may indeed be motivated by anti-Semitism. Such anti-Semites, like all bigots, should be exposed and challenged. However, to make a blanket allegation that anyone who supports nonviolent campaigns against the policies of Israel's right-wing government as somehow being motivated by hatred or intolerance is utterly ludicrous.

This past Sunday, the Sentinel decided to publish a letter by the New York-based deputy director of the Anti-Defamation League attacking Davis for her opposition to the Israeli occupation and making a series of demonstrably false claims regarding the peace process, ignoring Palestinian peace overtures and Israeli refusal to withdraw from the occupied territories.

Just days earlier, the ADL sent out a press release praising King Abdullah, the late tyrannical ruler of Saudi Arabia, as a "wise and distinguished leader." By contrast, Davis has condemned that misogynist reactionary anti-Semitic regime, which — unlike the Palestine Authority, the PLO, or Fatah — refuses to even recognize Israel's right to exist.

Like me, the Resource Center for Nonviolence, and the late Santa Cruz Mayor Scott Kennedy, who have also spoken out against repression by both Israel and Arab regimes, Davis is being unfairly attacked on these pages as unfairly singling out Israel by those who defend both.

It is ironic that these white supporters of militarist governments which violate human rights paternalistically insist that UCSC should not allow a noted African-American anti-militarist human-rights advocate to speak at a convocation honoring Martin Luther King, who dedicated his life to opposing militarism and promoting human rights.

It is unfortunate the Sentinel still feels obliged to publish such ludicrous accusations.