

Response to McGill Daily on Zionism

By: Michael Aarenau and Josh Shapiro

In their September 3rd issue, the McGill Daily published a glossary in an attempt to better educate students on various complex socio-political terms. How pitiful then, that in their attempt to define "Zionism," they misled the entire McGill community with a definition that is not only factually inaccurate, but malicious as well.

In their so-called definition, the Daily equates Zionism with colonialism, violence and racism. This erroneous definition of Zionism is both misleading and irresponsible.

So let's take it from the top. Zionism is the national movement of the Jewish people to express their right to self-determination. Nothing more, nothing less.

The Jewish people have faced millennia of oppression and discrimination from virtually every corner of the globe, from expulsions to pogroms, and from forced conversions to genocide. Indeed, among the most recent and horrific attempts of our total destruction was the Holocaust, which took place less than 75 years ago.

Realizing that the world has continuously ignored the spilling of Jewish blood, many put forward the idea that the best way to ensure Jewish survival was to put our destiny into our own hands. And just like that, the Zionist dream was born. Had there been a State of Israel in the 1930s, who is to say just how many lives would have been saved from the gas chambers.

But let's move on.

The idea that a Jewish national presence in the Levant is akin to colonialism has no basis in history. The Jewish people originated from the Middle East. The Western Wall in Jerusalem is the last remnant of the ancient Jewish Temple and there are countless other landmarks and artifacts that link our connection to this land as well.

Colonialism is predicated on settlers, with no connection to a territory, moving into it and exploiting its resources on behalf of another country. We have already established that Jews have a legitimate connection to the land of Israel, but furthermore, when waves of Jews began moving to Palestine starting in the 1880s, on which country's behalf were they doing this?

With regards to racism and violence, Zionism as an ideology has always been rooted in peaceful cohabitation and equality. In Israel's own declaration of independence, it states quite clearly that Israel will guarantee the "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations."

While we can poke holes in how the practice has differed from the theory, the point is that the Zionist project, at its core, intends to safeguard the rights of the Jewish people as well as promote equality for all - including the non-Jewish minority that resides there.

Yes, Zionism does prioritize the safety and security of the Jewish people above all others, but this is no different than other progressive movements that seek to advance the success of oppressed peoples. That's why time and again our courts have ruled that affirmative action programs cannot be characterized as racist. This distinction is crucial.

Finally, in what can only be described as a ludicrous attempt at irony, the Daily invites their readers to learn more about Zionism by visiting the website of the BDS Movement. This is akin to defining religion and inviting readers to learn more about it by visiting Richard Dawkins' website!

The BDS Movement is an anti-Zionist movement founded by Palestinian academic, Omar Barghouti. We need not get into the specifics of the BDS Movement (and their rejection of the Two State Solution) in order to point out that they are not an authority on Jewish self-determination. If readers wish to learn more about Zionism, they are invited to do so by reading *Der Judenstaat*, a book outlining the Zionist dream by the man who largely envisioned it in the first place: Theodor Herzl.

We can't imagine the Daily ever allowing a mens' rights organization define feminism, so we can't help but ask why they believe that those who are inherently opposed to Jewish self-determination get to define it.

There's a reason why the vast majority of Jews around the world (especially those at McGill) identify as Zionist, and it's not because they're violent, racist, colonialists; it's because they actually understand what Zionism is and through their lived experiences, understand why it's necessary.

Ultimately, there's plenty of room to critique the State of Israel and even Zionism itself, but in order to have a real conversation, you have to understand what it is you're talking about.

