

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

PATRICK BOND

14.05.2025

BRICS Nations and Israel: Hype, Hope and Helplessness



Photograph Source: Bb3015 – [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Patrick Bond sat down with the Media Review Network (Pretoria) to offer insights into the reality behind the rhetoric on Israel. He explains the deep-seated links between the SA elite ruling class and corporate business and how this impacts on SA's moral stance on Palestine. Prof. Bond also talks about the ecological links in the social justice movement and illuminates why we can no longer separate issues of economic inequality and ecological exploitation.

Mariam Jooma Çarikci: Welcome to the inaugural episode of Critical Currents, the official podcast of the Media Review Network, where analysis meets activism and narratives from the Global South rise to the forefront. I'm your host, Mariam Jooma Çarikci, and in this space we cut through propaganda, challenge dominant discourses, and spotlight stories too often sidelined by mainstream media. In each episode, we'll be joined by thought leaders, activists, scholars, and journalists who bring clarity to the chaos and help us to connect the dots between geopolitics, media framing, and the lived

lives of oppressed communities – from the war zone of Gaza to the boardrooms of BRICS, from Sudan’s shifting sands to South Africa’s policy contradictions. We unpack it all, critically and unapologetically. This is not just commentary; this is resistance through reason. Welcome to Critical Currents.

And today, our first guest – our inaugural guest for our podcast – is Professor Patrick Bond. Professor Bond is a distinguished political economist, public intellectual, and author, and is currently professor at the University of Johannesburg, Department of Sociology. Professor Bond has written extensively on global justice, financialization, climate debt, BRICS, and, of course, subimperialism – which is a topic we are quite interested in today. His seminal works include Elite Transition, Politics of Climate Justice, and BRICS: An Anti-capitalist Critique. He was also a former adviser to former President Mandela’s Reconstruction and Development Program. Professor Bond is known for his sharp critique of neoliberalism and elite state capture, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa. Welcome, Professor Bond. We’re honored to have you on the show.

Patrick Bond: Oh Mariam, thank you. Salam alaikum, and what a great honor. I mean, Media Review Network doing the podcast is a wonderful expansion. I always relied on the analysis, the articles, the letters to the editor – hey, you’ve spent decades keeping us informed. So thanks to the network.

Miriam: Thank you so much indeed. It’s been a long journey – it’s 30 years of the MRN – but we’ve been invigorated by intellectuals like yourself. So today, we’re digging into South Africa’s relations with Israel, the BRICS contradictions, and the role of elites in shaping foreign policy – and, more critically, the climate crisis. Let’s start with the subimperialism and Israel trade question. So, you’ve argued that BRICS states have often reinforced the global capitalist structure rather than resisting them. How do you see South Africa’s – what some would argue – rhetorical solidarity with Palestine squaring with its continued trade with Israel, and looking at the coal issue in particular?

Patrick: Well, thanks. Lots there. I mean, the general ideological problem is one we face all the time: it’s called ‘talk left, walk right.’ That is to say, it’s easy to have a rhetorical anti-Zionism and anti-genocide position, but then, when key people are profiting from it, you kind of wonder – well, how deep is this? Once you scratch the surface. Because the BRICS – all of them – will have some statement about a two-state solution, the need to have a ceasefire. They’ll certainly have rhetoric. And South Africa, to its credit, has gone in two directions: the

International Court of Justice, with the International Criminal Court arrest warrant; but also that ICJ determination that there's a genocide underway. And backing the ICC, is the 'Hague Group.'

Secondly, that is not just to rely upon judges – at least one of whom, from Uganda, the deputy chair of the ICJ – is very pro-Zionist, so we're not sure what will happen. And even if it does lead to a good ruling, we know that in Tel Aviv there are two words that they use to describe what happens, and those are: 'Hague Shmague.' In other words, they don't care. So, the other process – the Hague Group – is to say, governments can come together against the United States' prosecution and persecution of International Criminal Court, with its sanctions and the attempt to delegitimize the ICC, when it has an arrest warrant against Netanyahu and others.

Now, that becomes another point of hypocrisy, because it would be wonderful if that was the, let's say, template for standing up to Trump. That is, you put a collective together, you have the moral high ground, you stand up for international values – especially against genocide. And then, in that Hague Group declaration, January 31 this year, you say: 'We will not provide military fuel, and we will not facilitate military fuel.' That would be wonderful. And if we could expand that spirit, now that the tariffs, now that the climate crisis, the public health, the humanitarian food aid – all of that – is now something I think the G20 here in Johannesburg in November will have to figure out: do we even want the United States in the G20?

But unfortunately, that strength is balanced by a weakness. And the weakness is profiteers. And there are profiteers across the BRICS. And South Africa's profiteers include an arms merchant who's a bastion of the Zionist establishment – Ivor Ichikowitz – and he's had deals with Elbit, deals that supply fascistic governments in Latin America – Ecuador's army – with not only military vehicles, but Elbit souping them up for communications. And that continues. He's also – Ichikowitz – supplying the Israeli, well, the Jewish people's spiritual support, which is tefillin, which is a leather strip that you bind around with a verse from the Torah in a small box on your head. That – that's what this guy Ivor Ichikowitz, who is an arms merchant and an ANC member, and, as recently as mid-2023, the number one donor to the ANC, as the public records at least have shown. And that means, when the genocide began in October 2023, Ichikowitz was schizophrenic and split. And instead of still supporting the ANC, he has come out very strongly – especially in articles in 2024 and statements the whole time – against South Africa's support for Palestine.

Now, that's just one angle – the arms dealing. And then we have Rheinmetall, which is the German company that owns big chunks of Denel, South Africa's state-owned arms company. Are weapons being made in South Africa – in Somerset West or in Centurion – are they going up to not only to Rheinmetall in Germany, but onward, including to Israel? It's an open question. We're not sure. We have a very ineffectual National Conventional Arms Control Committee meant to look this over – and they're not doing well. There are a few other arms dealers that we're curious about – the extent to which, certainly historically, Armscor and Israel, and indeed going back to the 1970s nuclear collaboration.

The other big problem, though, is coal – which is very open. Because we can track the coal-bearing ships that go from Richards Bay all the way up to Hadera port, and to some extent Ashdod. At Hadera, there is the Orot Rabin power station. At Ashdod, it's the Rutenberg station. And those are supplying Israel with about 20% of its grid-based energy. And that's a very important part of the supply that the Israel Defense Forces would use to prosecute that genocide or to maintain apartheid. And it would therefore be against the International Court of Justice ruling in July – that was actually codified by the United Nations General Assembly in September – that says: don't do electricity supply or any other goods crucial for the apartheid, the land grabbing of the West Bank too, not just the genocide of Gaza.

So we've got a couple of, let's say, screaming contradictions. And it's even more embarrassing, I think, for South Africa, because President Ramaphosa used to be the main partner of the main company that sells coal to Israel – both from South Africa, but also from Colombia. And they've continued that, even into this year, in spite of the Colombian president telling them not to.

And that company – Glencore – is notorious for bribing African governments. They were not prosecuted for the activities in South Africa, but across the rest of Africa, the prosecutions, including in the US and Britain, have shown that this is a very corrupt company. And they have chosen – particularly because their predecessor, Xstrata, was doing deals with the African Rainbow Minerals chief executive, Patrice Motsepe, who happens to be President Ramaphosa's brother-in-law.

Now we have found – and a protest in early April confirmed this – 23% of Glencore's ownership is of the mines in question in Mpumalanga that get the coal out and get them coal over to Israel. That would be profits to Patrice Motsepe, we estimate, out of about a \$5 million profit – that is the net income after the costs – for each of the 177,000 tons of coal that are put on the ship and shipped out to Israel, Patrice Motsepe makes about a million dollars. So these are the sorts of, let's say, contradictions that just scream out, and that we

hope more pressure will allow us to resolve – resolve in favor of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions of Israel.

Mariam: Wow. That's – you know, that's a lot to process. And it definitely raises the question about civil society. So what kind of leverage do we have? Is this about complete elite state capture, where we've now become almost enslaved to the political system without any avenue for protest that's meaningful? Because protests have been going on. But, you know, what is the stumbling block?

Patrick: Yes, I mean, I think we are now looking at – if you're a genuine anti-imperialist from civil and uncivil society – and you're interested in Palestinian survival and solidarity, and you're also interested in the climate catastrophe and interested in future generations' welfare, which is something that I think obviously go together. We see activists in South Africa embody those in coming to protests against coal with both hats. That is, they don't want to see coal as it's combusted – a ton will create more than two tons of CO₂. And when that happens, the crisis, for example, in Palestine is not just the occupation, the genocide, the apartheid, but it's also going to be a climate catastrophe.

In coming years and decades, we're going to see much higher temperatures – to the point where it's impossible to go outside. Also, more extreme weather events and the drying of soils, which I think the Israelis are now encountering, where they planted inappropriate pine trees instead of the local indigenous cedar. And that meant when fires have raged through parts of what had been Palestine – after the Nakba, 1948 – the Israelis planted pine trees, and now those are burning. That's also because of a climate effect, we can safely say.

I mean, the scientific studies aren't in yet. And I think if we can understand this Middle East site being, you know, where there's so much oil and gas – gas offshore Gaza that the Israelis are already trying to figure out how to steal – and the CO₂, but also the methane that comes when you burn not just coal, but now you're burning gas. And methane is 85 times more potent a greenhouse gas. That means that – what I can again safely predict is – we're going to see countries like, not just Israel (which had been nearly entirely reliant on coal), shifting to gas because they have their own gas fields.

Likewise, South Africa seems to have gas fields. And the president's spokesperson, speaking to The New York Times in February, offered those up to U.S. oil companies as a sort of peace deal with Donald Trump, because of the ideological hammering South Africa was getting from this neofascistic Trump regime. It's very shocking to see The New York Times have this offering when we've had more than 100 protests on the beaches – the Indian Ocean

and especially the Atlantic Ocean coastline – against offshore oil and gas drilling. And the courts are actually favorable to the activists, saying that companies like Shell, Total – you can't go ahead. And I just fear that this is one of the issue areas that – if we are not linking Palestine and climate – we're losing an enormous opportunity.

And one of the opportunities is to talk to others in civil society who are implicated. Let's be frank. The main coal mining unions – there are three of them – are not yet on board. They will have good rhetoric against the genocide and against Zionism. But when you look at the National Union of Mineworkers, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the latter, NUMSA, the biggest union, historically the most militant socialist union in solidarity with peoples under fire all over the world. But their own mineworkers, working for Glencore, have not stood up yet and said, 'We're going to leave that coal in the hole.' And if it means our jobs are lost, then we also have another route, which is to go to the Just Energy Transition Partnership – which is over 150 billion rands, sitting in the presidency in Pretoria – precisely to help decarbonize. That is, to leave the coal in the hole.

Even South Africa's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) – the offering that South Africa makes to the United Nations for climate control – even that document says we need to have non-fossil fuel development in Mpumalanga. The money is there. The political will isn't – even in our own ranks – where this inability to link Palestine solidarity with being concerned about climate isn't quite there yet.

Mariam: So Professor, you've definitely raised, you know, numerous issues that allow us to look at our democracy from a different perspective. Because to what extent have we – not just as you say with the rhetoric on Palestine, but also with our substantive concept of democracy – have we just allowed, you know, paper and legalese to define democracy? So I know you've written a lot about subimperialism, and particularly you're critically – critical or post – about it in South Africa. If we could maybe just divert a bit and look at the idea of democracy: how would you characterize South Africa's current position, and where do you think we need to be?

Patrick: Well, the phrase used by people like Barry Gills and Joel Rocamora and Walden Bello is 'low-intensity democracy.' But that's not to say that in 1994, the victory of one person, one vote, in a unitary state – something that many Palestinians look to as a way to get around the apartheid character of Gaza and the West Bank's geographical Bantustanization by Israel – and to have a unified project now, is for Palestinians to make that choice about a one-state solution. But certainly, we achieved that one person, one vote, when many thought

it was impossible, given the adverse balance of forces. Imperialism loved the apartheid regime – until it was too late. And the apartheid collapsed partly due to internal, obviously political resistance – but also economic contradictions.

And I think if I see, then, the economic way out that the likes of Anglo American Corporation would choose – it was to go up to Zambia, to a game lodge, invited by the Zambian president at the time, Kenneth Kaunda. And this is in 1985. Here in Johannesburg, in August, P.W. Botha had created such incredible friction and volatility and crisis in the financial markets that the international banks pulled out. It was because P.W. Botha gave a speech – the Rubicon Speech. And you know, when I've been in Gaza and Ramallah giving talks about this, about the history of BDS – Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions – and showed a little film made by Connie Field about this: standing ovation. Not because of me, but because of this example. And the beauty of saying, through a nonviolent economic strategy that should complement all of our politics and cultural and all the other work we do – yes – that you can find things like the energy Achilles heel of Israel and begin to affect that.

We did that here, but in a way that the big business went to Zambia, met the African National Congress in exile, and began to do a deal that, as you say, left the political economic underpinning of apartheid – like migrant labor and extraction of minerals – kept that intact. The only thing that really has changed – but not to our benefit – is that there's been some deracialization at the very top. You could think of an Irish coffee – well, maybe you don't think of it, but you can – it's a metaphor people have used to say: well, at the bottom of that cup is dark black coffee, and then there's a layer of white cream, and then you sprinkle on some cinnamon or some chocolate. And that, in a way, is the metaphor as well of Zwelinzima Vavi of the South African Federation of Trade Unions. He puts it: that Irish coffee society is what we've been left with.

So that means that, digging deep into the soil, are exploited mineworkers. Marikana was a site where we understood very clearly that the co-owner of the mine, Cyril Ramaphosa, wasn't the same Cyril who had organized the same mineworkers to fight for justice in the late '80s. And indeed, that change – the Black Diamonds emerging to take over coal. And it's not just Ramaphosa with Shanduka Coal, allied with Glencore, Optimum Mine especially, or Patrice Motsepe, the brother-in-law of Ramaphosa and his African Rainbow Minerals, co-owner of the mines that send the coal to Israel. It's also a few others that have, in a way, made our discussions about climate so difficult. Because their interests are to continue to dig out the coal and burn it.

The interests of your children, my children, and future generations would be: leave that coal in the hole. And let the next generations decide if they want it – not to burn, that would be crazy, because it creates CO₂ and climate catastrophes – but instead to use for plastics and synthetic materials, or pharmaceutical products, or lubricants, or tarmac, or all sorts of things that we use in daily life that depend on hydrocarbons. But right now, our generation is just burning them.

And I think it's that inability of our new elite – they have tapped into an imperialist politics that's both climate denialist (in the case of Donald Trump and the big project of Big Oil and, you know, Big Coal around the world) to avoid making the cuts in emissions. But secondly, it's with the mainstream of the West – imperialist project of turning the climate catastrophe into a marketing opportunity. To privatize the air through carbon markets and emissions trading. And to deny that there's any 'polluter pays.' That is what we would normally say. If I dump toxic waste on a neighbor, the neighbor says, 'Well, you're going to owe me a lot for that.' And you would pay for, you know, ecological reparations.

But our government – and the West – have in common, and the BRICS do as well, the failure to, let's say, acknowledge climate debt. To even admit that there was, not just from the U.S. – the main historic polluter – but from the main emitters now, which are, number two, China historically, and Russia, and India, and Brazil and South Africa, a little bit lower on the list. But to actually acknowledge. And I think that's why the subimperial politics have come out – because there are so many self-interested factors.

A neoliberal financial elite. We have Standard Bank that funds projects all over Africa that promote, for example, in northern Mozambique, TotalEnergies' extraction of gas against the wishes of local Islamic community – who've had an insurgency. And then we've seen them in Uganda and Tanzania with the East African Crude Oil Pipeline. And we've seen them here funding coal. So Standard is one target of combined forces of activists saying: we don't want you to be promoting Glencore – as they have in the past – for its coal in South Africa. Nor do we want any coal or fossil fuels to be funded.

Those, to me, are the politics that get you around that problem: talk left, walk right. Where the government has a strong nationalist prestige of winning democracy, but then being co-opted by fossil capital, mining capital – which, frankly, loots the country. If you do a measure of the extraction of the minerals – which I do regularly and contest this with professionals and other scholars – you find that there's more that's taken out, for example, under this city, Johannesburg – half the world's historic gold taken out – and then the reinvestment of the

proceeds is inadequate to compensate for that loss of wealth. That is, there's a net loss of our natural capital. Even when you add the produced capital – machinery, or the built environment – and our educational capital, our human capital, and our financial capital.

You put it all together and it's less than what we've taken out. And that's the case for all these minerals, including coal. And I hope that we can do those kinds of calculations and ask the likes of Patrice Motsepe and Glencore – this very, very corrupt company, whose number two listing is the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, number one is in London – and to ask them: 'If you're looting us, don't we have a polluter pays responsibility to get reparations?' I think the reparations we should be demanding from Glencore, Patrice Motsepe, and others who've profited from coal to Israel should somehow fund good work for Palestine, first and foremost. So I hope that's one of the areas where we can say: reparations for the profits you've made. And we can count the profits because we know – we can track the ships that are taking them.

Mariam: Yes, certainly. So, of course, this extends to areas like the Congo, and then we talk about Mali. And we've seen interesting movements in West Africa with regard to Guinea, Mali, and Niger. But let's go back to what you were saying now about offering, you know, the prestigious position of being a champion of the oppressed, but at the same time profiting from that. Let's look at BRICS. So what does it say about BRICS? I mean, we've looked to BRICS – when I say 'we,' I mean the Global South – as somehow seeing BRICS as an alternative. In your view, where do they stand?

Patrick: Yeah, having studied this very closely – lots of books and articles, dozens and dozens – I certainly would say that the hype about BRICS, and hope for BRICS, leading to ultimately helplessness: from hype to hope to hopelessness, is fairly common once you realize what they're doing. And it's so tragic, because there has been hype about de-dollarization, about the abuse of the imperialist financial institutions – the IMF, the World Bank – imperialist trade, the World Trade Organization. And then, when you actually look at the way that the BRICS tap in.

Now, I could start obviously with Israel. Because Russia – as Vladimir Putin estimated – has 2 million Russian citizens that he's responsible for who live in Israel. They're some of the most right-wing, pro-genocidal, and IDF-active citizens of Israel. I think there are about 7.2 million Jewish Israelis, and of those, 2 million according to Putin – 1.3 million according to other sources – but you'd regularly find them, you know, as hostages, you find them in the IDF, you find them in the right-wing parties. And then you've got Russian coal going there.

Then we could go from Russia to Brazil. Brazil has Petrobras in league with Total to send oil to Israel – and they're about 9% of the supplies from Brazil. And Brazil has also had a long-standing military relationship with Elbit Systems.

Then we could go to China, which is the biggest – and it's so tragic that Yahya Sinwar of Hamas is known in his last minutes, his last seconds, because of a drone. And these drones, by and large, are coming from the consumer markets from state-owned companies in China that have been able to flood the world with drones. And Israel is one of the big buyers. And they worry that, okay, maybe there's some software or there's some problems. So, they deconstruct the drones, put them back together, and they send these drones in – for surveillance but also for actual attacks. Then you have about \$20 billion a year of trade between China and Israel at peak. And the privatization of the Haifa Port and the Ashdod Port – privatization that's both from the Chinese – a Shanghai state-owned company doing the Bayport, which is a major port for Haifa – and then an Indian company, Adani, which has got the other part of the Haifa Port. And the Indians are supplying lots of military, you know, supplies as well – and workers that have replaced Palestinians.

So then, I think those are the main five BRICS. And we look at ourselves in South Africa as the main supplier of coal – but also of raw diamonds. They come back sometimes processed. And grapes.

So these are the sorts of relationships that mean when you hear 'two-state solution' and you hear the calls for ceasefire – well, what pressure is being put on? Like Turkey – when the leader Erdoğan has said, 'We're not going to have trade' – well, it turns out there are a lot of ways that the profiteers in Turkey can go ahead and get their activities continuing into Israel. And I fear that's what the likes of Ivor Ichikowitz, with his – you admitted – tefillin supplies to the IDF, or deals with Elbit, or this coal supply, or the diamond dealers or the grape dealers... they're all able to do without a second thought because we haven't yet got the BDS movement to the point where we've embarrassed this government to stop it.

It would be easy to stop. The, you know, the Trade and Industry Minister, Parks Tau, said, 'We can't stop the coal trade because of the World Trade Organization non-discrimination clauses.' But when you see what Donald Trump's doing with trade, you can just say: forget it. The WTO doesn't even really have an adjudication panel anymore, because the US sabotaged it. So I don't think there's any basis for South Africa – which has the ability to regulate dangerous exports – and the danger of coal going to Israel to fuel a genocide is so obvious. Parks Tau looks like one of those in this government who's ready to bend over backwards to Donald Trump and do deals with Israel. And it's, I think in his case, an

ideological problem. He's – you know, he's drunk the Kool-Aid, as they say. They've taken over.

I think those other new BRICS – like, with the exception of Iran – all the others, even Indonesia, the newest one, which has the largest Muslim population – even they have deals. And their new leader had done some time in Jordan and had done some Israeli military deals. But particularly the UAE and Egypt are very, very close allies. Also Ethiopia. And Ethiopia supplies soldiers into the IDF. And Egypt, of course, subject of a recent protest here at the Pretoria Embassy, because of their failure to open the Rafah border. But also, they generally support Israel when it comes to the big geopolitical arrangements. For example, when Israel and Iran were trading missiles – relatively non-fatal, but a show of force by both sides in 2024 – it was the UAE and Egypt, from the BRICS (Jordan as well), that helped Israel and the US to keep that Iron Dome going.

And so, when you look at all of this – and you look at some of the new BRICS coming in as well – I would say there's, like, Nigeria. It's also a partner in the BRICS. But it will also be subject to concern by environmentalists and by pro-Palestine activists in Nigeria – that this is also a major problem. Nigeria is one of the three major African oil suppliers to Israel.

And I hope that's the basis for us continuing to network critics of the BRICS. Because I do think, by and large, when you look not just at Israel but the multilateral institutions – the World Bank, IMF, WTO – certainly the IMF: when they recapitalize, they need more money, they turn first to the BRICS. The BRICS get more shares in the IMF. By doing so, they push down other countries. Venezuela lost 41%. Even South Africa and Nigeria lost shares – when China, Brazil, India, and Russia – four of the five BRICS – got much greater shares of the IMF in 2015.

And the IMF hasn't changed. I mean, we are subject to IMF austerity as we speak. Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana is repeatedly being told – like 100 times in three documents – to impose 'fiscal consolidation.' So when USAID pulls out its AIDS medicine support – PEPFAR more or less closes – that's around 8.5 billion rand. And you know, Godongwana looks the other way, because he's so tied up with Western financial markets.

Speaking of which – I mean, the BRICS Bank as well. It's the New Development Bank, where here in Sandton we have a branch. But when Russia invaded Ukraine illegally and was subject to financial sanctions, the BRICS bank actually sanctioned its 20% member, Moscow, because the credit rating agencies in New York – Standard & Poor's, Moody's – and Janet Yellen, the US finance minister, told the BRICS Bank: you better join us in the sanctions against your own member. Which is quite extraordinary.

And the whole sense that maybe we could get de-dollarization – we could get the financial markets here in Johannesburg, or in São Paulo, or Mumbai, or Shanghai – to stand up and get some alternative to SWIFT, the interbank system. Unfortunately, that was part of the hype and the hope – and ultimately, the helplessness. Even Ebrahim Rasool, when he gave his infamous seminar presentation to MISTRA, the Mapungubwe Institute, basically said: ‘Don’t even talk about it. It will get us punished. Don’t even mention de-dollarization.’

And I must confess, even with Brazil hosting the BRICS, with a progressive leader – Lula – they are frightened. And they’re unwilling to challenge anything, even that probably the worst president for the Third World, Donald Trump, has given, which is dropping out of climate, dropping out of the World Health Organisation, cutting all this medicine and medical support, cutting food to places like Sudan where it’s desperately needed, and wrecking world trade and world finance.

There, to me, is an argument that the BRICS could be anti-imperialists. And South Africa could say to Donald Trump, ‘You obviously have no interest in multilateralism. Why are you in the G20?’ We could make it the G19. Everybody – with maybe two exceptions, Argentina and Italy – everybody else would say, ‘We vote Donald Trump off the G20 island.’ And the G19 in 2026 won’t be held in the U.S., hosted by Trump – maybe in Mexico, hosted by Claudia Sheinbaum. So I would hope that’s the sort of spirit that comes through. But the fact that I’m having to suggest it – and there are very few others in the country who are – shows you that we’re a long way away.

Mariam: Well, certainly. That’s definitely what I wanted to ask you, Doc, in that about the G20 as a missed opportunity. But before we get there, let’s look a little bit to the question of Zionism as racism. Should South Africa push for this revival of the UN 1975 resolution? Because I think the challenge was to accommodate the Oslo Accords, and in order for the Israelis to come on board, that’s how it had to be rescinded. Do you think there’s now a case for it to be put forward again in order to give Israel, you know, a much firmer push in the right direction – against the genocide?

Patrick: Oh yes. I agree with Edward Said’s critique of Oslo, because that was already clear – unfortunately – Yasser Arafat bought into a bad deal. And it was already, with the breaking up of Palestine and the acknowledgment of those borders, a travesty. But then, when you think that ‘Zionism is racism’ – that very clear message that was coming from the majority of UN members – had to be reversed. And now, if you’re anti-Zionist, you can also be accused, in many jurisdictions, officially in the courts, of being anti-Semitic. Which is outrageous. For Palestinians, who are Semitic people, this is an extraordinary abuse of phraseology.

And as someone whose own great-uncle served in the Rote Kapelle in Germany fighting the Nazis, and was caught and executed – he was the leader of that group, Harro Schulze-Boysen – and Jewish members of my academic family had to go to the United States during that period. So these are extraordinary distortions of a reality, when we could have absolute solidarity with Jews who are being oppressed on the one hand, and a critique of Israel coming up in Palestine in the way that it did – and then through theft and dislocation and massive destruction and death.

And there is a group – South African Jews for Palestine – and their allies all over, who are saying that very clearly. It's outrageous to say that if you're against the Zionist project of settler colonialism in Palestine, then that makes you anti-Semitic. And I think it's terribly important to keep contesting that. And certainly, I would welcome a move to say, yeah, 'Zionism is racism.'

Mariam: Right. And now, talking about the role of social movements, Prof, you've now emphasized this power of grassroots mobilization. What role should movements like BDS – which you are very involved in – how should they engage with government in terms of policy? What has been your experience? How have you been received by government?

Patrick: Well, because we have an extremely progressive group in DIRCO – the Department of International Relations and Cooperation – I think there's no question that the message is getting through. The question is: have we got enough pressure outside to overcome that huge contradiction, where there are people at the very top of our government – the President and his brother-in-law – who've had deals with Glencore, the main profiteer from selling fossil fuels to Israel over all these years. How do we do a combination – let's call it – of the tree-shakers outside and the jam-makers inside? To quote Jesse Jackson, the great U.S. civil rights leader – sort of looking for that division of labor in which the right pressure points are applied.

And there is a tendency – because we have a great tradition in the African National Congress, of winning democracy, and because the former Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor had such courage, with the then Justice Minister, her replacement Ronald Lamola – to go to the International Court of Justice in late 2023. A lot of respect, a lot of prestige, goes with the South African government – and thus, let's call it, a reticence to be openly critical. But I think being, let's say, too tolerant – too gentle – with that contradiction, and not bringing it forward means, I think, there's only been one time, for example, in Parliament, where Al Jama-ah

asked the question: why are we still selling coal to Israel? That's the only time, I think, that on at least this BDS question, we've seen a challenge in Parliament.

It just means that the streets have to get hotter. Street heat is desperately needed. And we've seen it against Glencore in August 2024, and against Patrice Motsepe's African Rainbow Minerals – Glencore's ally – in April 2025. So we need to see much more of it. And the U.S. Consulate is very close to African Rainbow Minerals – literally across the street. Ivor Ichikowitz's office is right down the road. As we're speaking now, we have an opportunity because the great Palestinian liberation leader, Leila Khaled, is in a coma – after a life-threatening stroke. And I think, before she passes us, winning the renaming of Sandton Drive – on the one part, Ichikowitz; on the other part, the U.S. Johannesburg Consulate – would be the right sort of tribute. And I think we just need to be up in that space quite a bit more.

Mariam: Prof, finally – are there any books or publications that we should look out for from yourself, or anything that you think our readers and our listeners should delve into?

Patrick: Yes. I think this is a great moment for us to be aware of ideology – soft power. Sometimes, people like myself – trained in Marxist theory – are focusing on what we've talked about a lot: material interests, flows of capital, flows of commodities. But actually, there's a period now of fluidity in ideology.

And the neo-fascist movement – the Zionist movement – has its own new ideology. It's not new, but it's a very fresh way of saying: 'We can work with nationalism.' The working-class interests of white men in the U.S. or Britain, who support – they call it, by the way, paleo-conservatism or right-wing populist nationalism. And we have to be aware that this is a disease of, let's say, false consciousness – by workers – that they would support someone like Donald Trump. Or, as has happened now in Britain, the Reform Party.

This is a very, very dangerous problem. We've seen it in lots of parts of the Third World – like Brazil, with Bolsonaro; the Philippines with Duterte and now Marcos. And we've seen, in a sense, a right-wing Christian evangelism that's fed into that. And I think, ideologically, we have to be careful. There is a strain of it in South Africa. We see it in the cabinet with Gayton McKenzie. We see it in white business and, you know, BizNews, and especially Rob Hersov. And we see it with xenophobic tendencies in Operation Dudula. So we'd sort of say, well, there's some xenophobia and isolationism and protectionism that doesn't speak to this vital spirit of solidarity.

Likewise, the other ruling class ideologies – neoliberalism and neoconservatism – are under threat. They're changing. They're becoming less diverse, less tolerant. They're used to being

neoliberal capture of ‘diversity, equity, inclusion’ – so you would find black neoliberals, women neoliberals, gay – you’d find a whole set of, let’s say, neoliberal assimilation. And that is a little bit harder because of the threat from this very fascistic right-wing – the paleocons.

And then, on our left, we have people who would say the BRICS still represent an anti-imperialism. I disagree with them profoundly, but it’s great to have these debates. They’re all good comrades – plenty of them in this country, in major groups like the ANC, the Communist Party, the Economic Freedom Fighters, MK Party, NUMSA, COSATU. You know – major, major leadership of our own political terrain would say the BRICS are an ally; that Russia’s anti-imperialist; China’s socialist – things I completely disagree with.

And then you’ve got Keynesians – those are people who would see global reform and would be hosting some of those in the G20 debates from the left. They don’t have much chance to succeed, but it’s terribly important.

And I think of those, the most important is what we’re doing in Palestine solidarity, climate solidarity, Black Lives Matter solidarity, feminist solidarity, economic justice and debt cancellation. And we could go on and on. All of these grassroots and progressive movements that include some intellectuals – like myself – who can have a little bit of free space to contemplate these links. And we would call that the Global Justice Movement. It’s got, I think, a spirit still that began in the mid-1990s, in a place in Mexico called Chiapas, with the Zapatistas. It peaked in a place called Seattle, when the World Trade Organization was shut down. And we could say, well, the greatest success was getting anti-retroviral medicines, for – we have about 7.8 million South Africans who are living with HIV. And they can get their medicines because we defeated the World Trade Organization in the early 2000s, to get those off of intellectual property – made generically, given out free by the South African government.

That would be the sort of spirit I would look to – to continually inspire us: to decommodify and to deglobalize capital through international solidarity. And I think the social movements of the world, and the labor movements, and the feminist movements, and the Palestine support movements especially – have been exemplary. And I’m hoping the climate movement catches up, because in a way, that’s the greatest threat of all. And in a place where South Africa has so much coal – and that coal is going to Israel to fuel a genocide – it’s an absolute imperative that we all get involved, and bring that to a halt.

Mariam: And I think exactly as you’ve said – the environment is almost the core issue that all the other issues almost rotate around. So if we’re able to then focus on the

environment and how it impacts every aspect – economically, politically, socially – then we’d be able to create perhaps a more cohesive global justice network. Because as you’ve said, there are so many different movements, and perhaps finding a common theme around the environment would give it a greater cohesiveness.

Patrick: Yes – so long as it’s not merely an environmental and conservationist movement. It has justice. Because where we’re speaking from – Johannesburg – the most unequal city in the world, based on having been utterly looted, now falling apart in many crucial respects, in the country that’s the most unequal, and the third most contributing to the climate crisis, that is, by emissions per person, per unit of output in the economy. It’s a great place to do this work. And we’re very blessed by all of the different activists – from economic justice, climate justice, and especially justice for Palestinians – that can come together.

Mariam: Thank you so much, Professor Bond. It was such a pleasure to have you, and we hope to host you again – and indeed, to engage on more Critical Currents coming up. We hope to have one every week. And if you’d like to follow us, please do so on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Our website is mediareviewnetwork.com. Thank you so much.

MAY 13, 2025

Patrick Bond is professor of sociology at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. He can be reached at: pbond@mail.ngo.za