# The Sad State of Israeli Radicalism

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"The notion that a radical is one who hates his country is naïve and usually idiotic," H.L. Mencken once noted. "He is, more likely, one who likes his country more than the rest of us, and is thus more disturbed than the rest of us when he sees it debauched. He is not a bad citizen turning to crime; he is a good citizen driven to despair."[1] Many Israelis would take issue with this assertion. From their standpoint, the defining characteristic of Israel's radical left is its deep revulsion toward the Jewish state and everything it represents. And most of the Israeli public, it seems, repays the radical left in kind.

Indeed, there is no end to the charges hurled at them. It is accused of harboring pathological self-hatred, bordering on antisemitism; of cooperating, deliberately or not, with the Jewish people's worst enemies; of receiving financial support from foreign organizations hostile to Israel's interests; of shamelessly accepting funds from the very public that detests its ideology and objectives; of consisting mainly of solipsistic academics and bohemians

who are completely out of touch with reality; of having little to no influence beyond the walls of the ivory tower; and of various other vices, the truth of which need not concern us here.[2]

Despite the extensive, if largely unfavorable, media coverage of its activities, however, Israel's radical left does not receive the considered critique it deserves. This is regrettable, for its arguments are not simply a hash of falsehoods and follies. On the contrary, they contain nuggets of truth and profound insights that merit careful attention. Public debate will gain nothing by ignoring the voices from its margins—voices, it might be added, which belong to some of the most prominent intellectuals in Israel today. The ideological and moral challenge these intellectuals pose to the Jewish state cannot be rejected as a mere nuisance. Anyone seeking to broaden the horizons of Zionism—or, at the very least, to free it from the ideological paralysis in which it has been trapped for quite some time now—must heed the words of its harshest critics and confront them with honesty and courage.

This essay presents just such an attempt. Though it is written as a critique, it avoids the usual quarrels over historical narratives or moral justifications. Rather, it seeks to uncover the internal logic of anti-Zionist thought and point to its theoretical implications and practical conclusions.[3] The issues on which we shall focus—the radical left's positions vis-à-vis the 1967 "occupation" and the 1948 *Nakba* (catastrophe), its critique of the Jewish state's oppressive nature, and the strategies of resistance it advocates—reveal a fascinating yet frightening *weltanschauung* that cultivates pessimism instead of hope, and alienation instead of involvement. Despite its grimness, this worldview appeals to many educated, guilt-ridden Israelis, who see in it an irresistible combination of moral purism and intellectual rigor. It also explains why these Israelis—most of whom are indeed "good citizens"—are driven to such deep despair, and why they cannot find even a trace of hope in what they conceive as a terrifying, debilitating reality.

Acommon mistake places Israel's radical left on the same political continuum as the Zionist left, as if the difference between the two lay merely in the *intensity* of their support for a particular ideology. In truth, however, these two camps—if they may be so called—are separated by a vast ideological chasm, and the occasional altercations between them are sometimes more passionate and acrimonious than the longstanding political debate between the Israeli left and right.[4]

Judging by electoral representation, there is, of course, no comparison. The radical left, particularly among Israeli Jews, is an extreme minority; its considerable influence in academic and cultural circles does not translate into any sizable political power, and its spokesmen and activists usually relegate themselves to parties representing the Arab vote. Yet in recent years, the Zionist left's numbers have also dwindled, rendering it a mere shadow of its former self. Indeed, in the February 2009 elections for the eighteenth Knesset, it was almost wiped off the political map. The Labor Party, which enjoyed unchallenged political hegemony in the state's early decades, gained only thirteen seats, relegating it to the embarrassing position of fourth-largest party in parliament. Meretz, meanwhile, a coalition of urban liberals and kibbutznik social democrats, could no longer pretend to be the Great White Hope of Israeli politics, its support base having granted it a meager three mandates. The Zionist left's resounding collapse could be heard as far away as Europe: In a recent interview on France Inter radio, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner bemoaned its demise, complaining that "What really hurts me, and this shocks us, is that before there used to be a great peace movement in Israel. There was a left that made itself heard and a real desire for peace. It seems to me, and I hope that I am completely wrong, that this desire has completely vanished, as though people no longer believe in it."[5]

In Israel, at least, no one is shocked that so many political doves have flown the coop. The hopes placed in the Oslo peace process—expectations that bordered on the messianic—suffered blow after devastating

blow. The suicide bombings in Israeli cities, the "Al-Aksa Intifada," the Hamas takeover in Gaza, the barrage of rocket attacks on the country's southern towns, and the stubborn refusal of the Palestinians (even the moderates among them) to recognize the legitimacy of the Jewish state or renounce the "right of return"—all these have convinced even the most optimistic of Israeli statesmen that there is no real partner in the opposite camp. Ehud Barak, for example, who during his term as prime minister demonstrated a willingness to meet the Palestinians more than halfway, was answered with an upsurge of violence. In a 2008 interview with reporter Ari Shavit, Barak explained, "I went to [Palestinian leader Yasser] Arafat and found that he did not want to solve the problem of 1967, but [rather that] of 1947. Arafat is dead, but people are still angry at me. They do not forgive me for exposing a truth that toppled the secular 'religion' of the deep left."[6]

The secular "religion" of the Zionist left, as Barak called it, may indeed have crumbled under the weight of Palestinian violence, but the core beliefs of the radical left have only been strengthened by these developments. In his preface to *Real Time*, a compilation of essays that appeared shortly after the outbreak of the Second Intifada, philosopher Adi Ophir sought to enlighten his readers as to the true source of the bloodshed:

> By now, it is clear that ending the occupation is a necessary condition for the reconciliation of the two nations, yet it is not sufficient; the conflict between Jews and Palestinians did not begin with the occupation of 1967 and will not end when that occupation is abolished. Reconciliation will be achieved only when a compromise is reached that incorporates the refugees of 1948. The hope of a reconciliation with Israel's Palestinian citizens and of settling their status as equal citizens who are part of a recognized national minority also depends on this issue.[7]

What Barak, and a large part of Israeli society, understood only after the collapse of the July 2000 Camp David peace summit had been clear to the radical left—and, ironically, to the right as well—for years.[8] Both camps understood that the roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lay not in the

Israeli occupation of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza following the 1967 war, but in the struggle waged between Arabs and Jews *before* the establishment of the Jewish state—a struggle that culminated in the War of Independence (or the Palestinian Nakba) of 1948. The conflict, consequently, cannot be resolved through a territorial compromise over the 1967 borders, or some such similar settlement. The Palestinians' campaign against the occupation is, in truth, only part of their all-out war against the "Zionist entity"—the despised state that was born in sin and established on stolen land, that drove out and dispossessed their families, that repressed their national aspirations and subjected their people to discrimination and persecution. The radical left, which adopts the Palestinian narrative without reservation, thus believes that if Israelis are truly interested in peace, they must stop deluding themselves that the problem can be solved by simply handing over their backyard to their neighbors. They must realize that the very foundations of their house are rotten, and have been so from the start.

This position is forcefully articulated in sociologist Yehouda Shenhav's new book *The Time of the Green Line*. Here Shenhav, until recently an editor of the prestigious Israeli journal *Theory and Criticism*, mounts an attack on the "1967 paradigm," which he considers "the primary mental block currently preventing Israelis from confronting the conflict and its historical roots."[9] In his own words:

> Today, the division between "right," "left," and "center" is superficially determined, and political alignments are ascertained almost exclusively by one's attitude toward the territories conquered by Israel in 1967: Those who hold that these territories (or part of them) ought to be returned and serve as a basis for a Palestinian state alongside Israel are considered to be politically "left," and vice versa…. The fact that the Green Line has been practically and conceptually eliminated plays no part in the left's political thought and its solutions for ending the conflict. Though over forty years have elapsed since that war, the liberal left still views the borders of June 4, 1967 as the imaginary boundaries of Israel. The post-1967 conquests and West Bank settlements are seen as a temporary situation, an accident in

Israel's political history. The 1967 war created an agenda for the old Zionist left, allowed it to relegate the (im)moral space to the other side of the Green Line, thereby solidifying the situation created by the injustices of 1948 and rendering it irreversible. The fact that Israel engaged in colonial practices well before 1967 (such as the martial law it enforced on its Arab citizens) is thus denied, as is the fact that we are already living in a binational society whose governing principle is based on apartheid policy.[10]

Shenhav directs his argument at the Achilles' heel of the Zionist left: the Green Line, which serves to distinguish "legitimate" Israel from the quagmire of the Palestinian territories. The Oslo accords, much like the unilateral disengagement plan conceived after their colossal failure, were based on the same erroneous concept of geographic separation between the "pure" land, or the paradise lost of pre-1967 Israel, and the noxious occupied territories, overrun by extremism, terror, and lawlessness. In reality, Shenhav argues, *this boundary does not exist*, since the Zionist state oppresses, disinherits, and exploits on both sides of the Green Line.

To Shenhav, the persistence of the 1967 paradigm is not the result of a mere misreading of the map. Rather, the political fantasy on which it rests endures precisely because it benefits a particular sector, one that enjoys (or used to enjoy, until the very recent past) a hegemonic position in Israeli society. This sector, according to Shenhav, is composed of "the liberal middle class and a silent majority of professionals: technocrats, civil servants, state attorney's office employees, academics in the social sciences and humanities, foreign ministry officials, retired army generals, and journalists—the majority of Kadima, Labor, and Meretz voters."[11] Israel's bourgeois hegemony seeks to preserve the "Jewish colonial control between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River" at any cost, perpetuating the socioeconomic, national, and gender-based gaps on which its power rests.[12] Hence, this elite's demand to dismantle Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria is nothing but a detestable attempt to clear its conscience through collective exorcism, projecting the sins of the occupation onto the "evil" settlers. "Liberal thought

based on the Green Line premise," Shenhav claims, "has sanctioned and legitimized the racist reality of the so-called Jewish-democratic state model; it has denied the role of the secular state and liberal elites in the obscene project of cleansing the land; and it has marked the settlers as the scapegoat through which the elites can regain their moral stature."[13]

Suspicion of any attempt to assign political or moral validity to the Green Line has become deeply rooted in radical discourse. Indeed, when two of its most prominent theorists—Ariella Azoulay and the abovementioned Ophir—dared to propose an analysis distinguishing the occupation of the Palestinian territories from the (for them, severely flawed) democratic order that exists within Israel's borders, they were met with a decidedly chilly response from some of their colleagues.[14] Their comprehensive work, *This Regime Which Is Not One: Occupation and Democracy Between the Sea and the River*, published in 2008, was the target of an acrimonious review in the radical Israeli journal *Mita'am*. Geographer Oren Yiftachel accused Azoulay and Ophir of joining the "circles of academic and public apologetics for Israel's existing regime."[15] The very description of the system of government within the Green Line as a "democracy," he maintained, proves that they, too, have been deceived by the Zionist establishment's "logic of separation." In contrast to the dual paradigm posited by Azoulay and Ophir, Yiftachel argued that "Zionism, at different historical stages and, consequently, in somewhat different ways, has subjected the entire Palestinian/Israeli realm to the control of a *single* regime, whose guiding principle was the Judaization of this space…. Anyone unable to conceive of this unity, to internalize this unity, cannot deal with the success of the occupation, with its perpetuation, within a governing system that produces subjects of a regime which is one but pretends to be two."[16]

Although Yiftachel employs the term "occupation," he clarifies that one cannot properly understand its full meaning—or fight against the injustices it denotes—without acknowledging that it represents a mere tip of the iceberg, beneath which lurks a far more pernicious evil: a Jewish apartheid regime masquerading as the only democracy in the Middle East. While the

Zionist left is prepared not only to defend this system, but also to preserve it through various separationist solutions (such as territorial concessions or unilateral disengagement), the radical left views it as an irredeemable disgrace.

Yiftachel's criticism of the "logic of separation" is certainly cogent, as is the analysis suggested by Shenhav. Indeed, an increasing number of Israelis are coming to understand that the conflict with Palestinian national aspirations did not begin in 1967, and will not be resolved by simply withdrawing to the state's borders before that fateful year. So, too, the Zionist left's attitude toward the settlers, its eagerness to place all responsibility for Israel's corruption on their narrow shoulders, calls for political—and psychological—criticism.[17] But replacing the "logic of separation" with the "logic of equation" creates its own problems, some of which far outweigh any faults we might find with the 1967 paradigm.

One such problem lies in the marking of 1948 as the turning point in Jewish-Palestinian relations. This would appear to be the natural choice, since it was in this year that the foundations of a Zionist state were laid on the ruins of the local Arab communities. Nonetheless, such a choice follows a regressive logic, the likes of which cannot be found even within the Zionist left's demands for withdrawal. It stems, in large part, from a desire to turn back the hand of time and "heal" the original trauma. At the same time, however, it precludes any possibility of ever reaching a feasible agreement with the Palestinians. After all, a return to 1948 as a way of making amends, if only in part, for the injustices of the Nakba would also imply an acceptance in some form of the Palestinian "right of return."[18] Needless to say, this proposal is met with fierce opposition from the vast majority of Israel's Jewish citizens, who perceive it, not unreasonably, as a recipe for national suicide. Given the present reality, the radical left's position is more intent on reopening old wounds than it is on achieving a real breakthrough toward reconciliation.

Yet the main problem with the "logic of equation" championed by Shenhav, Yiftachel, and others (as opposed to Azoulay and Ophir) is that

it blurs the substantial distinctions between two very different systems of government. For these distinctions *are* morally significant, and the decision to ignore them, or to present them as irrelevant, leads down a slippery slope. Placing Israel's democracy, for all of its shortcomings, in the same category as the military rule in the territories diminishes the importance of basic political and legal principles such as civic participation and human rights. The status of Israeli Arabs, discriminated against as they may be, is in no way similar to that of the Palestinians living across the Green Line. Attempts to describe both groups as subjects of a single, oppressive regime encompassing the entire region from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River devalue the fundamental liberties ultimately enjoyed by *all* Israeli citizens, just as they detract from the very real suffering of those living in the occupied territories.

The "logic of equation" is compelling because it is purist, and dangerous because it is simplistic. The tendency to lump together tyrannies and democracies, open and closed societies, ruthless persecution and relatively minor discrimination is one of the most fatal flaws of radical discourse, both in Israel and worldwide. Proponents of this discourse can easily distinguish "black" from "white," but are quite blind to the many shades of gray in between. It is no wonder they feel as if they were trapped in perpetual darkness.

The Israeli radical left is often branded "post-Zionist." This once-fashionable term has become a hackneyed epithet, one that is frequently misused. Some radicals have openly repudiated it, and for good reason.[19] Their position is not post-Zionist, whatever that may mean, but unabashedly *anti*-Zionist. Their rejection of the Jewish state is unequivocal and absolute, their rhetoric vehement and angry.[20] They denounce Israel because they hold it to be a colonial nation-state that oppresses, in one way or another, the vast majority of its subjects. Their criticism of Israel amounts to an overwhelming negation, one that leaves the Zionist project not a trace of legitimacy—or a shred of hope.

Unlike the Zionist left, for which Israeli history is the story of a fall from grace, the radical left believes the whole business was corrupt from the outset. It portrays Zionism as a colonial entity founded on the dispossession of Palestine's indigenous Arab population. Although similar accusations were leveled at the *Yishuv* already in the 1920s (usually by communist activists[21]), their successful assimilation into contemporary academic discourse may be attributed to "critical sociologists" such as Baruch Kimmerling and Gershon Shafir.[22] The late Kimmerling skillfully connected disparate dots when he described the modern-day return to Zion, with all its unique attributes, as part of a much wider, inherently reprehensible phenomenon:

> The Israeli state is the last remnant of a European political and economic culture that can no longer be found in its original form. This culture defended the right (and perhaps even the obligation) of populations from the Old Continent to immigrate from the densely populated Europe to faraway destinations, with or without the assistance of their home countries. These immigrant groups established societies and even founded countries at the expense of indigenous populations, often in their stead. This is how the United States, Canada, all of South and Central America, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, white South Africa, and French Algeria were created. This was the *zeitgeist* in which Zionism was born.[23]

According to Kimmerling, Shafir, and others, Zionism is tainted with the stain of original sin, from which it can never be absolved. In their view, the colonization of Palestine, in which European settlers seized native Arabs' land and drove them from the local workforce, lends the Jewish presence in the region a patently immoral character. An abusive colonial mentality is imprinted in the very foundations of the State of Israel, they insist, and permeates the state's policies and actions to this day. Historian Gadi Algazi, for instance, lambastes the hegemony of "colonial capitalism," which is responsible, he believes, for the construction of the security fence and its neighboring Jewish settlements. Against those who oppose the "occupation," he claims, stands "a powerful alliance of state, political, and

capitalist interests, well-off home-buyers, and those suffering real hardship: large families looking for cheap housing or new immigrants dependent on government subsidies and seeking social acceptance."[24]

Of course, there are many liberal democracies—countries, that is, that grant equal rights to all citizens within their borders, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, or gender—whose roots lie in European colonialism; the United States is one prominent example. Israel, however, is an entirely different story. Instead of adopting a universal and inclusive model of citizenship, it defines itself as the state of the Jewish people. Israel's politics of identity are thus particular and exclusive—and have remained so despite the growing liberalization of its culture since the 1970s. For the radical left, this self-definition alone is enough to consign the Jewish state to the dark, chauvinist, racist side of humanity. Historian Shlomo Sand, known for his controversial book *The Invention of the Jewish People*,[25] outlines Israel's genealogy of evil in a 2004 work:

> This national identity, which the Zionist movement had already begun to formulate at the end of the nineteenth century, was based on an ethno-religious or ethno-biological principle and was in many respects similar to the German "volk" nationalism which served as its model. The process of Zionist settlement in Mandatory Palestine conserved the ethnic-exclusive defining parameters of the collective identity, parameters which were strengthened by Hitler and his murderous project, and, ultimately, formed the basis for the national definition of the State of Israel. Although the Palestinians who remained within Israel's borders after 1948 were granted citizenship, the state, by the spirit of its laws, is not an open, inclusive national "republic," and certainly does not belong to all of its Israeli citizens.[26]

The description of Israel as a "volk" state modeled after (and clearly inspired by) German nationalism is a view largely accepted by both radical-left circles and the Arab parties with which they are aligned. In their view, Israel's self-identification as a Jewish state—reflected both in symbols such

as the flag and the national anthem, and in legislation such as the Law of Return (granting automatic citizenship to Jews and their descendants)—relegates the country's Arabs to the status of second-class citizens. Since military rule over the Arab sector was abolished in 1966, Israeli Arabs—or "Palestinian citizens," as they are known in radical discourse—ostensibly enjoy liberal political rights. However, to quote scholars Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir, they are actually "excluded from full citizenship in its republican sense, i.e., from participating in the definition of the common social good."[27] Full citizenship, not just formally but also essentially, is a privilege reserved for Jews. Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line are the "other" whom the Zionist project will never be able to contain; their lot in the Jewish state can only be one of continuous humiliation. Sociologist Lev Grinberg, who accused Israel of "symbolic genocide" of the Palestinian nation,[28] draws on this analysis to claim that the regime operating within the boundaries of the Green Line is no more than an "imagined democracy."[29] His colleague Yiftachel prefers the term "ethnocracy."[30]

The Palestinians, according to the radical left, may be the primary victims of the Jewish state, but they are hardly alone in their misfortune. They have the dubious honor of heading a long list of groups and sectors similarly crushed under the heel of the Zionist establishment. The *Mizrahim* (Sephardi Jews) who arrived in Israel in the 1950s, for example, are undoubtedly justified in protesting the degrading treatment they received at the hands of the state. Yet for radical intellectuals and activists who identify themselves as "New Mizrahim" or "Arab Jews," this historical score is an inexhaustible source of grievances against the "Ashkenazi hegemony," and reinforces their profound sense of solidarity with their Palestinian brethren.[31] In the words of poet and educator Sami Shalom Chetrit,

> The radical novelty in the New Mizrahim's critique is in viewing Mizrahim… as the Jewish victims of the Ashkenazi Zionist revolution, after its primary victims, the Palestinians, perceived by Zionism as its enemy. Mizrahim, according to this critique, were brought into the Zionist revolution in circumstances over which they had no influence whatsoever, as masses

for Zionism's demographic-territorial struggle against the Palestinians, and in order to form, despite themselves, the proletariat on which the modern Israeli economy was built, the fruits of which they do not enjoy.[32]

The complaints of discrimination against Sephardi Jews are hardly new, and are certainly not without merit (at least with regard to the first three decades of the state). The radical Mizrahi agenda, however, does not end with the demand for political, social, or economic equality. It aims, in the words of anthropologist Yossi Los, "to redefine Jewish nationalism—*this time as part of the Arab sphere in which we exist* and not as an extension of neocolonial, conceited Europe, or as yet another chapter in a tale of endless persecution."[33]

Of course, no list of the victims of Zionism would be complete without mention of the female sex. Although women have always been active in the Jewish national movements, achieving positions of power and influence (one of them, it will be remembered, even became prime minister), radical feminist critique portrays modern Zionism and the state it created as mechanisms of patriarchal oppression. How this oppression plays out in practice is eloquently explained by legal theorist Orit Kamir:

> "Women's equality" in Zionism and in Israel means, first and foremost, "recognizing the right of the Jewish woman to participate in the Zionist project in keeping with her place and her role in the Zionist political worldview…." Accordingly, the Jewish man is destined to redeem the desecrated homeland like a son returning to his mother; his mission is to free the land from foreign occupiers, cultivate it, and restore it to its days of yore. In addition to redeeming the motherland, these exploits are meant to express, establish, and publicly proclaim the renewed Jewish manhood. Concomitantly, the Jewish woman is expected to serve as the man's help-mate in this task: to assist him in conquering, building, and tending the land, to help establish the renewed Jewish manhood, and to produce new generations of Jewish males and raise them as such.[34]

From the standpoint of radical feminism, the Zionist movement is thus guilty of turning the woman into a protomasculine figure, a passive

birthing machine, and, above all, a junior partner in the aggressive campaign to "redeem the homeland." And, although Israeli women have undeniably come a long way since those early days, they still live in a society defined by oppressive masculine norms. The discrimination they suffer, both overt and covert, pervades every area of life, from working conditions to the language of preschool textbooks. And while the struggle to break free of the chains binding female identity no doubt requires vast mental resources, this does not prevent radical feminists from empathizing with other victims of Zionism. Mizrahi feminists, for example, claim to be doubly discriminated against, as do Palestinian and lesbian feminists.[35] Hannah Safran, a leading activist in the "Coalition of Women for a Just Peace" and "Women in Black," proclaims that "our feminism is associated with the radical left because of our struggle against oppression. We know full well that one cannot fight against one form of oppression while participating in another. We do not see why we shouldn't be able to fight more than one form of oppression at the same time."[36]

Safran is right, of course. If we would for a moment adopt the radical point of view, we would have to concede that the Jewish state *is* providing the opponents of oppression with an awful lot against which to protest. After all, it has, at one time or another, trampled underfoot the ultra-Orthodox, the working classes, the Jews of the diaspora, the homosexuals, the disabled, the elderly, the foreign workers, the Holocaust survivors, the former Soviet Union immigrants—and the list goes on, growing longer each year. Considering these copious injustices, one can understand why some of the more conscientious Israelis would find Zionist leftism, with all its misgivings and uncertainties, deficient. The radical option, free of all doubts and equivocations, seems a much more appealing choice.

Such an alternative also coincides with the prevailing moral climate of Israel in particular and the West in general. Art critic Robert Hughes dubbed this climate a "culture of complaint," implying that the veneration of victimhood has become something of an obsession in contemporary public life.[37] Perhaps the most pronounced expression of this phenomenon

is radical identity politics, which seeks to give a voice to the oppressed, but in truth amount to little more than a cacophony of grievances. Instead of encouraging activism inspired by genuine confidence and pride in one's identity, it nurses feelings of entitlement and frustration. Sadly, the cult of the victim may be more than a passing trend. It may portend a much deeper cultural shift, one that replaces the enlightened modern subject, who celebrated man's ability to govern the world through his reason and his will, with the helpless, fragmented postmodern subject, who perceives himself as a passive and insignificant pawn in the brutal game of vastly superior forces.

Either way, political obsession with victimhood is greatly enfeebling. Because the would-be victim is so steeped in self-pity and resentment toward authority, he would not know what to do with political power even if he were to obtain it. His natural place is on the sidelines, and there he desires to remain, deriving his legitimacy from his sense of unjust marginalization. American poet Maya Angelou warned of this debilitating state when she wrote about "the holiness of always being the injured party." "When access to a better life has been denied often enough, and successfully enough," she said, "one can use the rejection as an excuse to cease all efforts."[38]

As we have seen, the radical left entertains a host of complaints against the particularistic character of the State of Israel. And yet its criticism is grounded in a fundamentally universal sentiment: a profound suspicion of the modern state as such. There is nothing new about such a sentiment; political radicalism, especially in its anarchist fringes, has espoused it for years. However, we must recall that until recently a great number of radicals invested extravagant hopes in the ability of the state—the Socialist state, of course—to cure all mankind's ills. The awakening from the utopian dream of a communist "paradise" following the collapse of the Soviet Union swung the pendulum sharply in the other direction. As opposed to the social-democratic left, which clings to its belief in public welfare systems, the

majority of today's radicals—including those of the Marxist variety—are extremely distrustful of the state and its institutions.

In this respect, radicals give voice to claims that are, ironically, remarkably similar to those expressed by classical liberals (on the surface, at least). A telling example is provided by Azoulay. In an essay in which she professes her urge to run over the Israeli flag with her car on Independence Day, Azoulay writes: "I remember the day I noticed the violence manifest in the ubiquitous flags. That was the day I understood what I had already known, that the event even I referred to as 'Independence Day' marked, in fact, a day of calamity for others (in Hebrew, the term Nakba was not yet in use). The public, flagrant display of the flag, ignoring the gaze of those others, seemed to me a show of intolerable conceit."[39] Azoulay opposes the very notion of "identifying the interests of a separatist collective that seized political control—the Jewish collective—with the state."[40] For her, the Zionist regime adds insult to injury when it attempts to persuade its citizens to view it as their representative, to feel themselves part of it, to regard it as an object of desire rather than a mere political instrument. In so doing, the state crosses a dangerous line:

> Modern citizenship, that which can still be salvaged from the permanent harm inflicted by the nation-state and whose ideal contours can be reconstructed, was born precisely of the need to protect the subject from the government and limit the latter's power, to separate the two by a distance which the governing power must not cross. Even though it is difficult to define a standard, fixed measure for this distance, it needs to be defined in principle. This principle is the uniformity of the distance between ruler and ruled, so that it is no greater nor lesser than the distance maintained between the ruler and all its subjects.[41]

John Locke and John Stuart Mill would no doubt have concurred with this observation. But where liberal theory expresses a healthy concern over state coercion, the radical left exhibits outright panic. Its conception of the state and its power leaves little room for hope that its subjects will indeed

be able to preserve some distance from the clutches of authority. Adi Ophir, who together with Azoulay has published some of the most important treatises on anti-Zionism, paints a particularly disturbing picture:

> The modern state is a totalizing structure: It demands the right to absolute supervision of a territory, a population, and anything that takes place on that territory and within that population. The state constantly perfects the mechanisms that allow for such supervision. Its ability to collect, sort, and process detailed information about subjects and people—about each and every individual and entire populaces—is continuously growing, invading more and more areas of life, bypassing legal barriers on the one hand and legalizing new aspects of reality on the other. The state's ability to intervene through law, police, and regulatory systems in all that takes place within its boundaries is almost without limits, other than those it places on itself.[42]

Ophir here follows in the footsteps of modern critical theorists such as Max Weber, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault, who described, each in his own way, the various strategies by which the modern state imposes its authority not only over its citizens' bodies, but also their minds. Of course, contemporary scholarship no longer views the state as a monolithic system or pyramid-like hierarchical structure, from the top of which a single sovereign commands all. Instead, it is seen as a complex network of power centers that act in conjunction with, independently of, or even in conflict with one another. And yet, in the final analysis, the control exercised by the system of government as a whole—usually at the expense of its subjects' autonomy—grows dramatically with time. Nowhere is this more evident than in the "imperialism of law":[43] In an essay attacking the judicial activism of the Israeli Supreme Court, legal theorist Ronen Shamir explains, "Not only does the law cover more and more spheres of social activity, but its language is also changing so as to allow judges to act as a 'council of sages'—those who, in the name of their wisdom, appropriate the authority to determine what is normal, proper, ideal, or accepted."[44]

The encroaching colonization of life by the law presents more than a few causes for concern, and not only among those affiliated with the radical left. Inclusive and overreaching as it may be, however, the law cannot constrain the power of the modern state—specifically, its power to harm. Over the past few years, radical theorists have shown great interest in the notion of the "state of emergency," particularly in light of the new situation that arose in the West following 9/11. In this context, radical thinkers frequently quote German jurist Carl Schmitt, who, ironically, was a member of the Nazi Party and a reactionary Catholic. In his seminal 1922 work *Political Theology*, Schmitt asserts that the true test of sovereignty is not the enforcement of a constitutional order during times of peace, but rather the state of emergency, when "the state suspends the law in the exception on the basis of its right of self-preservation."[45] When such a situation is declared by the sovereign in the face of an either external or internal threat, the state may employ special means to protect its security—even to the point of severely infringing upon formal principles of justice or basic civil liberties. Put simply, if the state is to survive, it has no choice. Legal norms, however, are expected to be reinstated once the threat subsides. Yet according to radical theorists such as Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, the global war on terror has provided Western countries, most notably the United States under the Bush Administration, with a pretext for turning this "exception" into the rule. Thus a new, oppressive world order has been created, enabling governments to monitor their populations, spy on those suspected of "hostile activity," arrest and incarcerate them without benefit of trial, and sometimes even make them "disappear."[46] Yehouda Shenhav's apocalyptic warning expresses these concerns explicitly:

> The state of emergency that is currently in place in Western democracies has become a permanent working paradigm…. This paradigm's takeover is a recipe for the collapse of these societies as democracies, and for the continued deterioration of the rule of law into a frightening darkness. These countries will become breeding grounds for terrorism and will

themselves become terrorist entities…. The state of emergency will not stop with the "enemy," but will permeate society at every level and in every institution, making it patently undemocratic.[47]

Shenhav claims that the heated debate over the state of emergency has caused "a fascinating shift in the epistemological foundation of critical theory…. Instead of focusing on liberation from control, it has turned its attention to what is perceived as the diametric opposite of control: abandonment."[48] In their discussion of this issue, radical academics often refer to the work of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, whose celebrated book *Homo Sacer* posits that we live in an age in which the "camp"—the death camp, the concentration camp, the refugee camp, even the airport terminal where asylum-seeking foreigners congregate—has become the hidden matrix of modern politics. The inhabitants of these camps lead "bare" lives: Deprived of any rights and legal protections, and exposed to the arbitrary violence of the sovereign, they are left with nothing but their naked biological existence. According to Agamben, this is the fate awaiting us all under the new, global state of emergency, in which there is no significant difference between regimes that appear to respect civil liberties and those that outrightly violate them: "Only within a biopolitical horizon will it be possible to decide whether the categories whose opposition founded modern politics (right/left, private/public, absolutism/democracy, etc.)—and which have been steadily dissolving, to the point of entering today into a real zone of indistinction—will have to be abandoned or will, instead, eventually regain the meaning they lost in that very horizon."[49]

Claiming that liberal democracies are essentially "indistinct" from totalitarian dictatorships is a provocative theoretical move that more cautious intellectuals, such as Shenhav and Ophir, are careful to qualify. Still, they agree that the "providential state," in the familiar legal-bureaucratic-democratic sense, and the "abandoning state" (or, as Ophir calls it, the "catastrophic state") to which Agamben refers are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. Ophir writes,

In the twentieth century, these two state models have become indistinguishable from one another. The term that perhaps best connects these two models and demonstrates how closely they are associated is "security." For all or part of the citizen body, security is a form of supervision. The state does everything to prevent threats to its security, thereby spreading extremely tight networks of supervision. These networks are a catastrophe for some citizens, or for a large group of non-citizens who are within the state's range of control or harm. These are not citizens of other countries, but individuals who have no other effective citizenship, their status as non-citizens defining their relation to the state, as well as the state's relation to them. The lives of non-citizens can be abandoned; their lives are exposed. "Our" security is "their" calamity.[50]

Ophir's point is clear: A state that "does everything to prevent threats to its security" becomes, almost inevitably, a monstrous power. On the one hand, it spreads "extremely tight networks of supervision" that subject its citizens to various mechanisms of surveillance and control whose purpose is "the disciplines of the body and the regulation of population," in the words of Michel Foucault.[51] On the other hand, it forsakes the lives of non-citizens within its area of influence—terrorizing them without legal restrictions, depriving them of its protection, abandoning them to natural disasters and man-made catastrophes.[52] According to the radical critique, these are the two options that define the modern state's range of action, and though all people would certainly prefer life under the watchful eye of the bureaucrat to life under the guard tower spotlight, this is a choice not between good and evil, but between different degrees of oppression.

In view of the menacing omnipresence of the state, radical thought seeks to create a realm of political activity that is free from the hold of the governing powers. This activity is always a form of "resistance," of curbing state intervention or exposing the evils it tries to conceal. In contrast to liberal politics, which aims to check state authority from within the governmental system itself, radicals, who place no faith in the establishment, seek to challenge this system from the outside, to create a "political" sphere

that is not subject to—and actively works to undermine—"politics" in its institutional sense.[53] Such logic precludes any attempt to participate in the public process that shapes the state's political and legal agendas. The radical approach is not interested in either creating a new order or rectifying the old one; its sole concern is the deconstruction and subversion of the status quo. Foucault, for example, asserted that the political was born out of "resistance to governmentality, the first uprising, the first wrestling."[54] Similarly, Jacques Rancière, one of the most quoted philosophers in this context, defined politics as a "disruption" of the police order.[55] And, in the same anti-statist vein, Agamben says that "The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity)."[56]

The fact that the state is not the only actor in the political arena, that it shares its power with other local and international entities (corporations, NGOs, international institutions, and, unfortunately, guerilla armies and terrorist organizations), does indeed allow for non-state and even anti-state political action. Nevertheless, the state is still the main authority in modern public life and, to a growing extent, in the private sphere as well. Moreover, its dominance is showing no signs of decline. There is therefore something almost pathetic about the politics of "resistance" advocated by the radicals: Despite its grandiose aspirations, its scope of activity is limited to the increasingly narrow spaces in which the state has either no interest or no ability to exercise power. In most cases, radicals cannot but negotiate with the state, or at least benefit from the freedom accorded to them by the authorities' policy of non-intervention.[57] Given these conditions, radical discourse may pride itself on its revolutionary fervor, but as long as it does not cross the line into actual violence, it is, as far as the hegemonic order is concerned, little more than a nuisance, a mosquito bite on the back of the Leviathan.

The extreme frustration of the Israeli radical left is thus understandable, as is the direction in which it is headed. To be sure, its activists are not idle: They stand side by side with Palestinians at demonstrations, scuffle with IDF soldiers at checkpoints and with border police by the security fence, organize "alternative" events in protest of national holidays, and mount "political art" exhibits. The anti-Zionist intelligentsia, limited in size yet vocal and determined, publishes numerous books and essays, documenting obsessively what it considers to be the crimes of the Zionist establishment and occupation forces. There is, however, something misleading about this flurry of activity. Though it creates an impression of deep involvement in the local public sphere, its underlying motivation actually serves to distance it from that sphere. The vanguard of radical resistance to the Jewish state is not interested in taking part in the Israeli milieu, even as an opposition. It has given up on it, and *is looking for a way out.*

This attitude translates into various forms of detachment, conscientious objection being one of the most obvious. Although many objectors and their supporters insist that they are loyal, committed citizens who are opposed only to military service in the "occupied territories," the phenomenon, as described by some of its prominent representatives, betrays a sense of defiance against Israeli society at large. Haggai Matar, a radical activist sentenced in 2004 to a year in prison for refusing to serve in the IDF, is convinced that the utter depravity of that society had left him no choice:

> I can wholeheartedly declare that Israel has reached an unprecedented moral low. This extreme deterioration began with "Barak's generous offers," which were but another attempt at forcing a unilateral agreement upon the Palestinian people. Today, militarization and racism among the Jewish population has reached a fascist level. The repression of critical thinking, the total acceptance of the occupation's crimes, the idolization of the army and the gradual acceptance of the principle of "ethnic cleansing"—all these constitute only part of our society's collapse. To this list one should add the systematic mistreatment of the Palestinian citizens

of Israel, the hateful violence addressed at peace demonstrators, and the heartless attitude towards the abnormal and the weak. *With all these, I refuse to cooperate…* At home I learnt of oppression and justice. At the face of such evil as one may find here and now, there is no other way.[58]

Matar's impassioned revulsion does not end with his refusal to enlist in the "occupying army." He is appalled by the "evil" that has spread into every corner of Israeli society and is determined to extricate himself from this corrupt system entirely, opposing it from the outside. A similar tone pervades the diatribe of the poet and publicist Yitzhak Laor against military service:

> The time has come to address the misdeeds taking place here, those committed by the state and its army against those it rules, including soldiers infected with a vicious virus, all with the approval of a collective unmatched in the democratic world. All the atrocities committed by the IDF always take place under the purview of "the compulsory conscription law," which is not only a law in the sense of income tax or driving on the right side of the road, but is a sanctified commandment. Only "crazies" do not go to the army, do not dip their hands into the ceremonial blood. This is the supreme, traditional norm of Israeli society, and it covers up everything, both in denial and in acceptance of one's punishment.
>
> Not only does the entire system—education, the army, the Shin Bet and, of course, the media and literature—rule out any talk of struggle or of being sane and not belonging, it even rejects the possibility that something within it is fundamentally immoral.[59]

If Israel is in truth a "collective unmatched in the democratic world," a ruthless society that subjects its youth to a bloody rite of passage, then "not belonging" becomes the only rational and moral alternative. The logic of conscientious objection, according to both Laor and Matar, stems less from a desire to protest and more from a decision to exclude oneself altogether. And since military service is still largely regarded as the essence of "Israeliness," the supreme civic norm of Israeli society, refusing to take part in it

is perhaps the most blatant act of voluntarily exclusion, of angrily turning one's back on one's state.

The same motivation stands behind Israeli anti-Zionists' endorsements of international attempts to boycott their country. Such support, which has enraged many an Israeli, attests to the utter aversion these radicals feel toward the Jewish state, believing it to be beyond the point of self-correction. Ilan Pappé, a controversial "new historian," explained in a 2005 interview in *Haaretz* why he is in favor of blacklisting local academia:

> The Zionist left is not my milieu. My milieu is the Palestinian milieu. My milieu is the progressive and leftist international milieu. I've reached the conclusion, though I could be wrong, that there is no chance that a significant movement that would end the occupation will arise from within the State of Israel. There isn't, and it doesn't matter how many good people there are in Israel. If we wait for an effective movement to end the occupation, what will happen in the end is the total destruction of the Palestinian people…. It may be that my way has no chance either. It may be that the Palestinians are doomed to extinction, but I don't want to live as someone who didn't do all he could to stop this. And the only thing that can stop Israel is outside pressure.[60]

The yearning for foreign intervention, for a sort of *deus ex machina* that will put an end to their country's criminal conduct, plays an increasingly important role in the dreams of Israeli radicals. Most international initiatives, however, do not come close to meeting their expectations; some have even been criticized as providing indirect assistance to the Israeli occupier. In his 2007 book, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, architect Eyal Weizman complains that the United States and Europe, in agreeing to allocate vast funds for the rehabilitation of the Palestinian Authority, have "effectively released Israel from its responsibilities according to international law."[61] In the same spirit, he remarks that the efforts of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) to renovate Palestinian refugee camps and build permanent housing, roads,

and sewage infrastructures inadvertently played into the hands of the Israeli armed forces. "By taking responsibility for the well-being and maintenance of architecture in a situation of ongoing conflict, UNRWA's planning program was exposed to one of the more obvious cases of the 'humanitarian paradox'—namely, that humanitarian help may end up serving the oppressing power," he writes.[62]

If fantasies of severing the Gordian knot of the occupation (and then, ideally, bringing down the apartheid Zionist state) by means of external pressure acquire at times an apocalyptic character; if that longed-for scenario involves the crushing defeat of the IDF by armed international forces—as was the case with the Serbian militias or Saddam Hussein's Baathist thugs—Israeli radicals generally refrain from voicing such aspirations publicly. As a rule, open support for a violent struggle against the Jewish state is a red line that even the most extreme of anti-Zionists are careful not to cross.[63] They deride the accusations of treason often hurled at them, even as they find new and creative means of pushing the envelope. For example, shortly after the outbreak of the Second Intifada, which claimed the lives of over a thousand Israeli citizens and many more Palestinians, literary critic Hannan Hever stated the following in an essay published in the *Real Time* anthology:

> It is precisely in order to serve his people… that the Israeli-Jewish intellectual is required to forsake his place among them. To do so, he is pushed into a corner that the right wing has already defined as treason. What critical position, then, can the intellectual adopt in the present situation of the Second Intifada? As Jean-Paul Sartre stated, the intellectual's critical position is the place where his particular and universal positions stand in stark contradiction to one another—the contradiction between the particularity of being a part of the Jewish-Israeli people and the universalist stance that recognizes the justice of the Palestinians' claim and sympathizes with their feelings and expectations. From this emerges the conflict between he who continues to obey the particularist commandment to identify with one's own people who are at war with the Palestinians, and

he who supports the Palestinians' position and is prepared to justify their turn to violence.[64]

Hever solves the conflict between a particularist allegiance to one's people and a universalist commitment to justice by claiming that the "Israeli-Jewish intellectual," in turning his back on his country, actually *serves* the interests of his people—although they, in their shortsightedness, label him a traitor. For the radical intellectual, the decision to adopt a universalist point of view means justifying Palestinian violence as "the final step toward liberation from Israeli occupation."[65] Journalist Gideon Levy is even more pronounced in his support for the Palestinian struggle. "Israelis," he declares in an essay published in the same anthology, "understand only force. They change their positions only under pressure, preferably violent and bloody, and they have never conceded, nor altered a position, half a position, a quarter of a position, without being subjected to force…. Since the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and until the Christmas of 2000, not only did violence, ultimately, pay off for the Arabs, but Israelis have proven to them that it is the only recourse available to them if they desire freedom, independence, liberty, or the repossession of the territories taken from them—by force, of course."[66]

Anyone searching the Israeli radicals' positions for a systematic ideological agenda (beyond that of merely delegitimizing Zionism) is likely to be puzzled by the intensity of their solidarity with the Palestinians. After all, leading the Palestinian struggle against Israel are either the corrupt Fatah nationalists or the Hamas religious fundamentalists—not exactly the stuff of which an enlightened and progressive community is made. Yet in the case of Israel, as in that of the West in general, the radicals' readiness to sanction the acts of tyrants and terrorists stems not from any real solidarity with the enemy, but rather from their overwhelming aversion to the society in which they live—an aversion that often results in outright support for terrorist violence. French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, whom Hever quotes, applauded the Third World "freedom fighters" responsible for the

massacre of European settlers. In his preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Sartre spewed invective at his French brethren and the Western world at large: "Today, the native populations reveal their true nature, and at the same time our exclusive 'club' reveals its weakness—that it's neither more nor less than a minority. Worse than that: Since the others become men in name against us, it seems that we are the enemies of mankind; the élite shows itself in its true colors—it is nothing more than a gang. Our precious sets of values begin to molt; on closer scrutiny you won't see one that isn't stained with blood."[67] Is there any radical leftist in Israel who would not wholeheartedly endorse these words?

Considering their relatively small numbers, Israeli anti-Zionists do an impressive job of rocking the boat. Yet their opposition to military service, their support for international boycotts, and their willingness to defend the violent actions of their country's worst enemies prove that the banner of "resistance" raised by these radicals effectively positions them *outside* Israeli society. Many have chosen this position out of a genuine sense of moral revulsion, while others believe it to be the only plausible course of action. Either way, the end result is the same: The radical left has given up on the possibility of effecting change from within. In light of the direction in which it is currently heading, it is not at all implausible that in the future it will give up on the possibility of change altogether.


It is not easy to be a radical in Israel. Such an individual probably feels as though he lives in the heart of darkness, a citizen of a country conceived in sin whose history is but a narrative of heinous crimes and injustices, and whose very existence is an insult to morality. For the radical, Israel is not only a corrupt society. It is a blot on the world map. No law, no careful, incremental process of political reform from within can solve the problem that is the Jewish state. To deal with such extreme evil, extreme measures must be taken. "The lie masking the occupation," write Azoulay

and Ophir, "is interwoven into the very fabric of cultural and social life. It relies on a twisted perception of reality, a perversion that is constantly growing, an inherent blindness that continues from generation to generation. Today's lie is the plow that prepares the ground for tomorrow's new atrocities." Their conclusion is unequivocal: "In order to stop the lie, the occupation regime must be uprooted. In order to uproot the occupation regime, the Israeli regime must be changed."[68] The occupation, the Zionist government, Israeli society—all are bound up in a stinking mass that must be wiped off the face of the earth, one way or another.

Israeli anti-Zionists have differing ideas about the kind of society they would like to replace the current Jewish ethnocracy. Some of them support the model of a "state of all its citizens," while others call for a "binational state" or a kind of multicultural democracy.[69] Everyone, however, is keenly aware that the road leading to that destination is long—so long, in fact, that it seems downright impossible. Azoulay and Ophir confess that the change for which they call is "utopian of the sort that Marx criticized: It does not include a sufficiently detailed account of the historical process that might lead to it, and it is not based on an identification of the forces and interests that will set such a process in motion."[70] Shenhav, in the same spirit, writes: "The political process of turning back the clock to 1948 is necessary if only for the purpose of containing the Palestinian trauma of 1948, which never healed and continues to demand a price." But, in the same breath, Shenhav notes that his proposal is a "utopia whose chances of being realized are slim."[71]

Critics of Israeli radicals usually dismiss their arguments as the pathological ravings of self-hating Jews. The opinions of Shenhav, Ophir, Hever, Levy, and their associates, however, are born not out of disgust, but despair. The indignation to which they give voice—and which raises the ire of their fellow citizens—reveals, when all is said and done, their sheer helplessness in the face of what they perceive to be an evil closing in on them from all sides. Azoulay candidly confesses the sense of futility she felt after delivering a speech at an event marking "Nakba Day" in Tel Aviv:

The hall was filled with participants, the discussion after the talk was stimulating, and yet I left feeling distressed. This was not an unfamiliar feeling to me. I have felt it before, at home and outdoors. I am not entirely certain how to interpret it, but it seems to me it was connected to the insignificance of the things I had said, an insignificance that inevitably marked them as a mere provocation. Though they were delivered in a sympathetic "echo chamber" of people gathered on Israel's Independence Day to mark the Nakba, I felt like someone who had once again taken on the somewhat ludicrous role of the provocateur. All I wanted to do was jump over the security gates, burrow into my office, and close the shades.[72]

Azoulay's impulse to steal away into the safety of a familiar workplace—or an "echo chamber" filled with other like-minded people—is not unique to her political circle. It has come increasingly to characterize the state of Western radicalism at the dawn of the twenty-first century. If the revolutionary movements of the not-so-distant past were characterized by a political messianism that promised to establish an egalitarian Eden on earth, their contemporary counterparts subsist more on self-righteous rage than on any real hope. Secular religion, which set its sights on a better future, has been replaced by a Gnostic metaphysics that views the entire world—especially those societies governed by global capitalism—as one big prison. Like the Gnostic believers of early centuries who viewed themselves as *Kosmou apallotriousthai* (strangers to the cosmos), turning their backs on the world because they believed it to be the wicked product of a malevolent deity, so have many radicals today succumbed to the charms of detachment.[73] The Slovenian intellectual, cultural critic, and anti-establishmentarian provocateur Slavoj Žižek, for example, holds that *any* form of public involvement constitutes collaboration with the detested status quo:

The threat today is not passivity, but pseudo-activity, the urge to 'be active,' to 'participate,' to mask the nothingness of what goes on. People intervene all the time to 'do something'; academics participate in meaningless debates and so on. The truly difficult thing is to step back, to withdraw.

Those in power often prefer even a 'critical' participation, a dialogue, to silence—just to engage us in 'dialogue,' to make sure our ominous passivity is broken. The voters' abstention is thus a true political act: It forcefully confronts us with the vacuity of today's democracies. If one means by violence a radical upheaval of the basic social relation then, crazy and tasteless as it may sound, the problem with historical monsters who slaughtered millions was that they were not violent enough. Sometimes doing nothing is the most violent thing to do.[74]

The problem with the type of non-involvement Žižek advocates is that it is simply not an option for any man of conscience. The radical left prides itself on its purism, on its unwillingness to compromise its principles. By drifting to the outskirts of the society whose corruption it derides, however, it renders itself morally irrelevant. After all, if the "occupation" really does commit atrocities—and even outspoken right wingers would concede that the military rule over the Palestinians inflicts undue suffering on innocent civilians—then surely this entails an obligation to take action. A soldier positioned at a military checkpoint who does his best to spare the passing populace whatever aggravation and humiliation he can contributes far more to the preservation of basic humanity than any conscientious objector. Likewise, a prominent scholar who uses his standing to foster, rather then sever, ties between his country and the global intellectual community will only help expand the political and moral horizons of the local academic elite.

If something is rotten in the State of Israel, then it must be dealt with—an endeavor that requires involvement, perseverance, and patience, and sometimes also the willingness to bend and compromise. The work can be tedious, draining, and unrewarding—but it is vital. Unfortunately, radicals are all too reluctant to get down in the trenches. They would rather criticize from the safety of their perch above.

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## Notes

1. H.L. Mencken wrote these words to author Upton Sinclair on October 14, 1917. Quoted in Marion Elizabeth Rodgers, ed., *The Impossible H.L. Mencken: A Selection of His Best Newspaper Stories* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 411-412.

2. For a particularly vehement attack on the Israeli radical left, see Elhanan Yakira, *Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust: Three Essays on Denial, Forgetting, and the Delegitimation of Israel*, trans. Michael Swirsky (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2010).

3. Obviously, one cannot treat the Israeli radical left as a single, homogeneous entity. It comprises diverse factions and organizations that are divided by differences of opinion and at times even profound disagreement. This paper nevertheless posits that it is possible to point to an underlying worldview shared by the various groups, allowing us to discuss the common logic or ideology of the radical left without too broad a generalization.

4. For this reason, I have chosen to avoid the labels "extreme" and "moderate" left, which imply some degree of contiguity between liberal, social-democratic Zionism and radical anti-Zionism.

5. "France Fears Israel Does Not Want Peace Deal," Reuters, November 11, 2009, http://in.reuters.com/article/worldnews/idinindia-43838320091110.

6. Ari Shavit, "Rumors of My Demise Were Premature," December 19, 2008, Haaretz.com.

7. Adi Ophir, "Real Time," in Adi Ophir, ed., *Real Time: Al-Aqsa Intifada and the Israeli Left* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2001), p. 9 [Hebrew].

8. In the opening editorial of a special issue of the journal *Theory and Criticism* marking 40 years since the 1967 "occupation," Yehouda Shenhav attacks the Zionist left's poor conception of reality, noting that he is "aware that these ideas may be identical to those of the radical right. Indeed, I believe there is a certain similarity in the diagnosis, but that does not necessarily invalidate it nor make it wrong. The difference is not in the diagnosis, but rather in the political horizon that it dictates." Yehouda Shenhav, "Why Not 'The Occupation,'" *Theory and Criticism* 31 (Winter 2007), p. 8 [Hebrew].

9. Yehouda Shenhav, *The Time of the Green Line: A Jewish Political Essay* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2010), p. 19 [Hebrew].

10. Shenhav, *Time of the Green Line*, pp. 20-21.

11. Shenhav, *Time of the Green Line*, p. 29.

12. Shenhav, *Time of the Green Line*, p. 32.

13. Shenhav, *Time of the Green Line*, p. 111.

14. Azoulay and Ophir stress that the Israeli regime is not a liberal democracy in the usual sense of the term, but an ethnic democracy that shuts Palestinian citizens (Israeli Arabs) out of any participation in the government. At the same time, these citizens, in contrast to their Palestinian brethren who live under the occupation regime, enjoy certain protections and rights and are not entirely vulnerable to sovereign oppressive power. "The Palestinian citizens may be neglected (by longstanding budgetary and administrative discrimination) but they cannot be abandoned…. One cannot claim, as Yiftachel does, that the democratic characteristics of the Israeli regime are merely external and non-essential. These distinctions are fundamental, and the differentiations they create cut across every dimension of the regime and its governing system and penetrate every realm of the life of its subjects." Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, *This Regime Which is Not One: Occupation and Democracy Between the Sea and the River (1967- )* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2008), p. 383 [Hebrew].

15. Oren Yiftachel, "One Book, One Regime: Reflections on Azoulay and Ophir," *Mita'am* 17 (March 2009), p. 67 [Hebrew].

16. Oren Yiftachel, "One Book, One Regime," pp. 67-68.

17. Gadi Taub's 2006 book, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism*, which is just such a critique, was met with vehement attacks from both the right and the left. See Gadi Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2006) [Hebrew]. For an example of some of the charges hurled at Taub by the radical left, see Yitzhak Laor, "The Voice of My Beloved! Behold, He Cometh," *Haaretz*, January 12, 2007 [Hebrew].

18. For different, largely unrealistic suggestions for returning the refugees to Israel or compensating them for the wrongs committed against them, see Yoni Eshpar, "The Return of Palestinian Refugees in Politics: An Obstacle for One Settlement, The Basis for a Different Compromise," *Sedek* 4 (July 2009), pp. 91-103 [Hebrew]; Norma Musih and Eitan Bronstein, "Thinking Practically About the Return of the Palestinian Refugees," *Sedek* 3 (July 2008) [Hebrew], www.zochrot.org/images/majdal/practical%20thoughts%20on%20return%20in%20english%20final.pdf.

19. Historian Amnon Raz-Karkotchkin, for instance, claims that "the concept of 'post-Zionism' has acquired several interrelated meanings in Israeli discourse—and, in every case, instead of contributing to the discussion, it seems only to mislead and distort." According to Raz-Karkotchkin, "The concept of 'post-Zionism' does not include Arabs, but refers explicitly to Israeli Jews. Arabs cannot be post-Zionist, just as they cannot be Zionist. Theoretically, they can be included in the definition of 'post-Zionism,' as long as they forgo their national Arab identity and take up an identity that defines itself as 'civil.'" Therefore, "this is not a 'civil' identity as it proclaims itself to be, but a national identity that defines itself as 'post-national,'

a Jewish identity that defines itself as non-Jewish." Amnon Raz-Karkotchkin, "Post-Zionism and the Bi-National Challenge," *Ofakim* 24 (August 2005) [Hebrew], http://ofakim.org.il/zope/home/he/1124479600/1124626659.

20. See, for example, the oft-quoted essay by Adi Ophir and Ariella Azoulay, "Remnants of Europe," in which the authors, in the name of the Israeli collective, write:

> We are the damned remnants of Europe…. We are the last frontier of the military colonialism that Europe abandoned in shame decades ago. We are a thorn Europe has left in the Orient—now converted into the litmus test Arab countries must take before entering into the New World Order…. We are a site of experiments for testing the universalizability of evil—the principle of universalizability being a European legacy and the practices for the production of evil imported from a Europe which no longer exists. The hypothesis to be corroborated (one that has not yet been refuted) is: "it can happen to everyone"; the victims of yesterday may always become today's victimizers. Every person can find herself participating in the hatred, humiliation, and oppression of the "Other," in racial discrimination, in ethnic cleansing of neighborhoods and cities; everyone may end up cooperating with a regime that produces and distributes evil systematically.

Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, "Remnants of Europe," *Tikkun* 13:2 (Spring 1998), p. 68.

21. See, in this context, Yehouda Shenhav and Hannan Hever, "The Postcolonial Gaze," *Theory and Criticism* 20 (Spring 2002), p. 14 [Hebrew].

22. See, for example, Baruch Kimmerling, *Immigrants, Settlers, and Natives: Israel Between Plurality of Cultures and Cultural Wars* (Tel Aviv: Alma and Am Oved, 2004) [Hebrew]; Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1989).

23. Kimmerling, *Immigrants, Settlers, and Natives*, p. 18.

24. Gadi Algazi, "Offshore Zionism," *New Left Review* 40 (August 2006), p. 31.

25. Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People,* trans. Yael Lotan (London & New York: Verso, 2009).

26. Shlomo Sand, *Historians, Time and Imagination, From the "Annales" School to the Postzionist Assassin* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), p. 116 [Hebrew].

27. Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir, "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Civil Society in Israel," in Yoav Peled and Adi Ophir, eds., *Israel: From Mobilized to Civil Society?* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Van Leer and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001), p. 194 [Hebrew].

28.  The term "symbolic genocide" originally appeared in an article published by Lev Grinberg in the Belgian paper *La Libre Belgique* in March 2004, and created a stir in Israel. On the same issue, see also Aviv Lavie, "The Article That Stabbed a Nation in the Back," *Haaretz*, May 5, 2004 [Hebrew].

29.  Lev Luis Grinberg, "Imagined Democracy in Israel: Theoretical Background and Historical Perspective," *Israeli Sociology* 2:1 (1999/2000), pp. 209-240 [Hebrew].

30.  Oren Yiftachel, "Ethnocracy, Democracy, and Geography: Notes on the Judaization of the Land," *Alpayim* 19 (2000), pp. 78-105 [Hebrew].

31.  See, for example, Ella Shohat, *The Sephardi Revolution: Three Essays on Zionism and Sephardi Jews* (Jerusalem: The Alternative Information Center, 1999) [Hebrew]; Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford, 2006).

32.  Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 203.

33.  Yossi Los, "'But I Thought You Were Ashkenazi': Sephardi Identity as a Radical and Democratic Identity in Israeli Society," in Yossi Yona, Yonit Naaman, and David Machlev, eds., *A Rainbow of Opinions: A Sephardi Agenda for Israeli Society* (Jerusalem: Sifrei November, 2007), p. 59 [Hebrew].

34.  Orit Kamir, *Human Dignity Feminism in Israel: A Socio-Legal Analysis* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2007), pp. 15-16 [Hebrew].

35.  On Sephardi feminism see, for example, Shlomit Lir, ed., *To My Sister: Mizrahi Feminist Politics* (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2007) [Hebrew]; Henriette Dahan-Kalev, "Feminism: The Sephardi Ashkenazi Divide," in Daphna Izraeli et al., eds., *Sex, Gender, Politics* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999), pp. 217-266 [Hebrew].

36.  Hannah Safran, *Don't Wanna Be Nice Girls: The Struggle for Suffrage and the New Feminism in Israel* (Haifa: Pardes, 2006), p. 165 [Hebrew].

37.  Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford, 1993).

38.  Maya Angelou, *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 85.

39.  Ariella Azoulay, "Independence: The Regime Is Always Foreign," *Sedek* 1 (May 2007), p. 82 [Hebrew].

40.  Azoulay, "Independence," p. 83.

41.  Azoulay, "Independence," p. 84.

42. Adi Ophir, "On Time and Space in the State of Emergency," in Yehouda Shenhav, Christoph Schmidt, and Shimshon Zelniker, eds., *The Politics of Exception and State of Emergency* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Van Leer and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2009), p. 65 [Hebrew].

43. For a discussion of the "colonization" of life by the law, see Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1987).

44. Ronen Shamir, "The Politics of Reasonableness," *Theory and Criticism* 5 (Fall 1994), p. 12 [Hebrew].

45. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George D. Schwab (Cambridge: MIT, 1986), p. 12.

46. In this context, see Assaf Sagiv, "The State of Freedom and the State of Emergency," Azure 28 (Spring 2007), pp. 31-74.

47. Yehouda Shenhav, "The Imperial History of the 'State of Exception,'" *Theory and Criticism* 29 (Fall 2006), p. 217 [Hebrew]. The "Israeli experience" to which Shenhav refers is the fact that the Jewish state has been in a state of emergency since its inception. The Law and Administration Ordinance (*Pekudat Sidrei Hashilton Vehamishpat*), enacted immediately after Israel's Declaration of Independence, authorized the Provisional Council to declare a state of emergency and establish emergency regulations with the power to "alter any law, suspend its validity or modify its conditions, and impose or increase taxes or other obligatory payments." And indeed, four days after the enactment of this ordinance a state of emergency was declared, and the Knesset has extended it every few months ever since. In addition, Israel's administrative orders grant the government extensive emergency powers, some of which are derived from the British Mandate and others that are the result of new legislation. The Israeli government is authorized, for example, to introduce emergency regulations without the approval of the Knesset and even if they contravene the latter's legislation. Yet, despite this state of affairs, which places tremendous power in the hands of the executive branch, Israel successfully upholds the basic rules of democracy. In the words of jurist Ruth Gavison: "It must be acknowledged that Israel today exhibits no outstanding exceptions to, or unusual violations of, human rights, *made possible because Israel has been in a continuous state of emergency since its inception.*" See Ruth Gavison, "Constitutionalizing the State of Emergency," in *Politics of Exception*, p. 50 [Hebrew] (emphasis in the original). The radical left is naturally unimpressed by this accomplishment; to its mind, the real outrage is in the brutal state of emergency imposed by the Israel on the "occupied territories." Adi Ophir claims that the distinction between the area under the jurisdiction of Israeli law and the area in which the IDF is free to operate under the auspices of emergency regulations turns the lives of Palestinian non-citizens into a "living hell" and the territories seized in 1967 into a "disaster zone." See Ophir, "On Time and Space," p. 59.

48. Yehouda Shenhav, "Preface," *Theory and Criticism* 30 (Summer 2007), p. 5 [Hebrew].

49. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford, 1998), p. 10.

50. Ophir, "On Time and Space in the State of Emergency," p. 66.

51. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 139.

52. Ophir actually expresses the hope that the "seemingly Gordian knot between supervision and abandonment" may be undone, although he admits that "these distinctions are becoming increasingly blurred over the course of modern history." He refuses to forsake the consequent moral call for the establishment of a providential state that will not act at the same time as a catastrophic state, although his analysis implies that this possibility is highly impracticable, if only because the modern state cannot renounce its intense engagement with security threats both at home and abroad. See Ophir, "On Time and Space in the State of Emergency," pp. 67-68.

53. See, for example, Yehouda Shenhav, "On the Auto-nomos of the Political," *Theory and Criticism* 34 (Spring 2009), pp. 181-190 [Hebrew]; Michal Givoni, "Not to Be Governed Thusly: Non-Governmental Politics," *Theory and Criticism* 34 (Spring 2009), pp. 191-198 [Hebrew].

54. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 390.

55. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999).

56. Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota, 2000), p. 87.

57. The Israeli radical left, for example, has entrenched itself within the local ivory tower, primarily in the humanities and social sciences. The political freedom it enjoys in these circles can be at times intoxicating, creating the illusion that the university campus is its exclusive playground. Last year, for example, a group of Tel Aviv University professors came out against the faculty of law's intention to invite Colonel Pnina Sharvit-Baruch, head of the IDF's international law department, to teach its students. The professors, some of whom are known for unabashedly turning their classrooms into political soapboxes, argued that a university should not host an officer who had justified the IDF's "war crimes" against the civilian population of Gaza. The fact that the bulk of the university's budget is funded by the State of Israel and Zionist donors did not strike them as relevant. See Dina Kraft,

"Israeli Army Lawyer Who Sanctioned Bombings Under Attack over University Post," *Daily Telegraph*, February 1, 2009, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/4413747/Israeli-army-lawyer-who-sanctioned-bombings-under-attack-over-university-post.html.

58.   Haggai Matar, "Militarism and Racism Have Reached a Fascist Level," in Peretz Kidron, ed., *Refusenik!: Israel's Soldiers of Conscience* (London: Zed, 2004), pp. 76-77 [emphasis in the original].

59.   Yitzhak Laor, "The Most Moral Army in the World. Fact," Haaretz.com, April 14, 2009, www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1078410.html.

60.   Meron Rapoport, "Alone on the Barricades," *Haaretz*, May 6, 2005.

61.   Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 157.

62.   Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 205. Global humanitarianism has come under fire from a host of radical critics who accuse it of cooperating, directly or indirectly, with the very regimes whose wrongdoings it purports to amend. See, for example, Mark Duffield, "Governing the Borderland: Decoding the Power of Aid," *Disasters* 25:4 (2001), pp. 308-320. The article is also available online at www.odi.org.uk/hpg/confpapers/Duffield.pdf. Adi Ophir and Michal Givoni adopt a more favorable—though not uncritical—position toward humanitarian action. See Adi Ophir, "Moral Technologies: The Administration of Disaster and the Forsaking of Lives," *Theory and Criticism* 22 (Spring 2003), pp. 67-103 [Hebrew]; Michal Givoni, "Who Cares [What's to Be Done]? Israel Responds to Biafra," *Theory and Criticism* 23 (Fall 2003), pp. 57-81 [Hebrew].

63.   This is obviously true only with respect to the *Jewish* radical left in Israel. Israel's radical Arab activists suffer no such misgivings. In this context see Dan Schueftan, "Voice of Palestine: The New Ideology of Israeli Arabs," Azure 14 (Winter 2003), pp. 73-106.

64.   Hannan Hever, "Notes on the Position of the Israeli Intellectual," in Ophir, *Real Time*, p. 195 [Hebrew].

65.   Hever, "Notes," p. 195.

66.   Gideon Levy, "Only by Force," in Ophir, *Real Time*, p. 91.

67.   Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface to the 1961 Edition," in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1965), p. 22.

68.   Azoulay and Ophir, *This Regime Which is Not One*, p. 443.

69.   Radical intellectuals disagree strongly on this matter. Only a minority desires the establishment of a "state of all its citizens" (a term coined by former MK

Azmi Bishara, a Christian-Arab intellectual who was extremely popular among Jewish radical circles until it was revealed that he was aiding Hezbollah during the 2006 Lebanon War). Generally speaking, a "state of all its citizens" is a post-national community that grants full and equal rights to all citizens living within its borders, without assigning any constitutional or political significance to their ethnic, religious, or cultural identity. This ideal is in keeping with central liberal approaches, a fact that may explain not only the criticisms raised against it in many radical circles—which claim that it does not assign sufficient importance to collective identities—but also its appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court. The proponents of the binational alternative, on the other hand, call for a regime of shared sovereignty that fully recognizes the religious and national rights of the two nations living in its territory. Finally, those who support the more complicated multicultural model envision a society of diverse communities, boasting distinct cultural identities, which nonetheless exist side by side—communities that willingly abandon any aspirations of hegemony in the public sphere in exchange for the freedom to cultivate their heritage and unique national-cultural traits in their own, autonomous sphere. For arguments in favor of the creation of a "state of all its citizens" see Azmi Bishara, "On the Question of the Palestinian Minority in Israel," *Theory and Criticism* 3 (Winter 1993), pp. 7-21 [Hebrew]; for a binational position, see Raz-Karkotchkin, "Post-Zionism and the Bi-National Challenge"; for the multicultural model, see Yossi Yonah, *In Virtue of Difference: The Multicultural Project in Israel* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Van Leer and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2005) [Hebrew].

70. Azoulay and Ophir, *This Regime Which is Not One*, p. 459.

71. Shenhav, *Time of the Green Line*, p. 168.

72. Azoulay, "Independence," p. 84.

73. For a discussion of Gnostic ethics, see Jean-Pierre Mahé, "Gnostic and Hermetic Ethics," in Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, eds., *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998), pp. 21-36.

74. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), p. 217.