What Is Left of the Israeli Left? (1948–2015)

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The division between the Left and Right in Israeli politics is quite unique in world politics. Whereas the term *left* often indicates a socialist worldview of society across the overwhelming majority of the world, the Left, or Zionist Left, has a rather different connotation in Israel. The identification of a person or a group as leftist in Israel depends on their position vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict, particularly with regard to the question of Palestine. The essence of this leftist position is a willingness to territorially compromise with the Arab world over the Israeli territories occupied during the June 1967 war, and it is quite often accompanied by a greater loyalty to secular values (which most Israelis see as equivalent to democratic values).[1] Since Left does not represent a complete social or economic perspective, people and factions can be grouped together as leftists even if they do not share a socialist point of view or an identity with any of the disadvantaged groups in Israeli society. Moreover, since the leftist identity is centered on two narrow themes—a concrete position vis-à-vis the occupied territories and a greater belief in secularism—the Israeli Left does not actively support groups such as the ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, who are among the poorest in the state.

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By supporting, I specifically mean tolerating their way of life and moral positions. On the contrary, being a leftist in Israel means opposing the ultra-Orthodox Jewish way of life, almost as though it were an existential threat. It is this clash of ideas that highlights the difference between Left as it is understood in the world and Left as it is defined in Israel. The clash between Left and Right in Israel is not about socioeconomic issues such as government spending, social welfare, or minority rights. It is rather a clash between a secular way of life and a more traditional and religious way of life. This is important to understand because after the 1967 war, the division between the Zionist Left and Right revolved around the question of whether or not Israel should withdraw from the territories it occupied in the June 1967 War. Quite a few of the ultra-Orthodox Jews supported withdrawal, as did the Zionist Left. However, this was not enough to form an alliance, as secularism was just as important to the Zionist Left as the idea of withdrawing from the 1967 occupied territories.

This essay is not a sociological analysis of what the Israeli Left is or should be. It accepts the popular reference in Israel to the Zionist Left as a group of people who support a territorial compromise with the Palestinians over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip through a two-state solution and as a political view that favors secular aspects of the Jewish state. In this essay, I will shed light on the existence of an alternative Left, an anti-Zionist one in essence, whose future impact depends largely on the fortunes of its bigger and more mainstream rival group. The anti-Zionist Left has a clear view of the past and a vision for the future. It views Zionism as a settler-colonial movement, which has wronged Palestinians, and believes in the decolonization of the whole space of Israel and the occupied territories. They support the idea of one democratic state encompassing all of historical Palestine and accept the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

The mainstream Zionist Left in Israel is indeed a very atypical case study of leftist parties. Its agenda in all the years of the state's existence did not include any support for a social democratic regime, which in the case of Israel would include catering to and subsidizing the three disadvantaged groups in Israeli society: the Mizrahim Jews, the Palestinians, and the ultra-Orthodox Jews. This Left is also not particularly feminist or environmentalist in its worldview, as most of the leftist groups around the world tend to be. Alas, we still have no analysis for this prioritization—namely the total nonalignment with the universal leftist agenda and its replacement with an idiosyncratic ideology focused on secularism and the willingness to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967. The wish to be secular is closely associated with the wish to be part of Western civilization to which both the Mizrahi Jews and the Ultra-Orthodox allegedly do not subscribe.

The Mizrahi Jews are seen as still too strongly connected to Arab culture, and the ultra-Orthodox Jews to pre-modern Europe.

On the margins of Israeli politics, there was another kind of Left. From the early days of statehood, this Left consisted of people with a far more universal point of view, which may explain the relative marginality and insignificance of this alternative ideology. In those days, this philosophy revolved around the Israeli Communist Party and some smaller offshoots that ceded from the party—groups that were more Trotskyite in their worldview or that chastised the communist party for its alleged soft critique of Zionism and its allegiance to the Soviet Union. For these groups, the struggle for social and economic justice was closely connected with the opposition to Zionism as a colonialist ideology. In the 1950s, Palestinian thinkers and ideologues formed a clear analysis of Zionism as colonialism, a point of view shared by many other liberation movements and by their Western supporters at the time. These ideas found their way into the platform of the Israeli anti-Zionist Left. Unsurprisingly, quite a few Palestinian citizens in the new Jewish state were able to easily identify with such a worldview, even if they did not subscribe to Marxism or communism with enthusiasm. Some groups like Matzpen (compass in Hebrew) comprised of a relatively large number of Jewish members from all walks of life, while others such as Abna al-Balad (Sons of the Land in Arabic) had a very small Jewish presence. In any case, we should remember we are talking about a very small group.[2]

The mainstream Left in pre-1967 Israel was centered around the Labor Party, with all of its various splinter groups and sister parties. It was recognized as a social democratic party in Europe, even though the welfare system it created only privileged the state's Jewish citizens. Far worse than that, the state imposed military rule on the Palestinian minority in Israel until 1966, which has since been replaced, both legally and practically, by a regime of institutional discrimination.

On 5 June 1967, the Israeli Air Force bombarded the airbases of its neighboring Arab countries (and even further afield in Iraq). The Israeli historiography depicts this action as a preemptive strike against a planned Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian war of annihilation against the Jewish State. The war effort was led by the Egyptian leader Jamal Abdul Nasser, who had already sent his troops into the Sinai peninsula in May and closed the maritime routes to Israel's southern port of Eilat. Although recent scholarship casts doubt about this framing, the Zionist Left in Israel largely accepts the depiction of the 1967 War as a defensive war.[3] What the Zionist Left challenged is the need to keep the territories Israeli occupied as a result of the war. The war lasted only six days and during

it, Israel occupied the Sinai peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights.

After the June 1967 war, the Zionist Left was associated almost exclusively with issues of defense and peace. The Israeli public was divided into "redeemers" and "custodians." The redeemers regarded the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as the heart of the ancient Jewish homeland and hence viewed their occupation as an act of redemption. The custodians, on the other hand, saw the occupied areas as a bargaining chip for future peace negotiations with the Arab world. The distinction between the two philosophical positions was made clear during the public discussion about the future of the areas occupied in Egypt and Syria but less so when it came to the future of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. As Jewish colonization of those areas intensified, an objective of the Zionist Left became the search for a way to retain strategic control over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without directly ruling them, so that the state could maintain its Jewish electoral majority. The group that wanted to annex these territories—regardless of the possible change in the demographic balance of power between Palestinians and Jews in the greater state of Israel—formed the Zionist Right.

The mainstream Left has two shades or ideological components. I will use the color red, which is identified worldwide with the Left, to demonstrate the different shades of the local Left: the redder a party, the closer it is to universal definitions of Left. The lighter red dons the Zionist Labor movement and party; the darker one belongs to the political forces in Israel that are to the left of Labor. (As mentioned before, since the definition of the Israeli Left is unique, there is even more to be explained.) I choose to call these groups the Liberal Left, as they are more vociferous on issues of civil rights than is Labor, and are more committed to a full withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. These groups also supported the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai for peace with Egypt, as did the Labor party. However, of late they have been regarding the Golan Heights as an occupied Syrian territory.

The main Zionist Left group is the Zionist Labor movement. Its main political party, the Labor Party, dominated Israeli politics until 1977. After it was defeated in the 1977 national elections by the right wing Likud Party (consolidation in Hebrew) headed by Menachem Begin, the Labor Party has functioned as the major opposition to Likud. However, more than once, it was willing to join the Likud in government as part of what is called in Israel "the unity governments." The Labor Party joined forces with Likud in 1984 for the first time. At first, this was done out of electoral necessity: both parties lacked the necessary majority to rule. However, as the occupation of the West Bank

became one of incremental annexation, and the Labor Party began to endorse neoliberal economic policies, no ideological reason remained not to cooperate. The difference between the two parties was not in their vision of the future—which comprised a partly Jewish and partly Palestinian West Bank—but more about how to get there and the discourse employed to describe this strategy. In order to understand why Labor, as a leftist group, did not oppose the incremental annexation of the West Bank, one has to go back to 1967. During the first year after the 1967 occupation, Labor and the right-wing parties were together in a unity government. This government agreed on the need to colonize small parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Both political sides did not object to this idea; they differed on questions of the scope of the colonization and the issue of publicity. The right wing wanted to settle Jews everywhere while Labor wanted to confine settlement to areas not densely populated by Palestinians. The left-wing Labor party saw no reason to announce the plans, especially in order to avoid irritating the United States, while the right wing wanted the world to know and behold their plans. The right wing operated a messianic ex-parliamentary group, Gush Emunim (the bloc of the loyalists in Hebrew), to settle outside the government settlement plans. Labor, in retrospect, accepted these new settlements as established and irreversible facts.[4]

Yet, the impulse to rule alone remained, and for Israel's allies in the West, the Labor Party always seemed to be more pragmatic and amiable, not because of its positions, but due to its style and discourse. While both parties enacted the same policy on the ground, the Labor Party tried to conceal it and gave verbal support to the peace process, even as it did not actively seek reconciliation with the Palestinians.

The darker red, as mentioned above, belonged to smaller parties and groups to the Left of Labor. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to the mainstream left Zionist camp as the Labor Party and to the groups to its left as the Liberal Zionist camp. There is a third group, which I will refer to as the alternative Left. We thus have three reifications of Left in Israel: the Labor Left, the Zionist Left, and the Alternative Left. These groups at times united into a joint front and at other times split according to personal whims and ambitions. They shared a stronger commitment to a full withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. At first they wished to return the territories to Jordan, and as of the late 1980s, they supported the creation of an independent Palestinian state in those territories.

Israeli politics was dramatically affected by the June 1967 war. Over the course of six days in June, Israel occupied vast areas of Egypt, Syria, and most

importantly, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Liberal Left emerged immediately at the end of the June War as an activist group, lobbying for the withdrawal from occupied territories in return for peace with the Arab world through a series of petitions, letters to editors, and pressure on political parties. Its members believed the Labor party could deliver peace with the Arab world but that it needed lobbying and pressure to remain loyal to its ideology.

As mentioned previously, the Labor Party dominated Israeli politics until 1977. The party was willing to negotiate bilateral agreements with both Egypt and Syria in return for the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights, respectively, but was unwilling to negotiate with the Palestinians over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Both "shades" of the Labor Left and the Zionist Left were unwilling to include the fate of the 1948 refugee problem, the nature of the Jewish state, or the future of Jerusalem in the negotiations.[5]

The UN conservatively estimates that there are about five million Palestinian refugees. The Palestinian national movement demands the right to return to Palestine on the basis of a UN General Assembly resolution, Resolution 194, which was adopted on 11 December 1948.[6] The Zionist parties see such a repatriation as the end of the Jewish State, claiming that return of Palestinians would shift the demographic balance against the Jewish majority. They also insinuate that repatriated Palestinians will be disloyal citizens of the state. The Palestinian position is that without such a return, or at least a recognition of the right of those who wish to return to do so, there will never be an end to the conflict.[7] The Palestinian movement was born in the 1948 refugees' camps and strove to return the expelled population back to its homeland. The Israeli refusal to even negotiate on this does not enable a discussion of how practical such a return might be or to estimate the number of refugees who would choose to return. It is clear that Israel violates international law by not allowing refugees to return. Even pragmatic Palestinian leaders, who wish to bury the demand for sake of progress on other issues, find it very difficult to do so because this is such a sacred position to the Palestinian movement.

The demand for maintaining Israel as a Jewish nation-state is at the heart of the Zionist consensus. The Palestinian position during the "peace negotiations" was to neither challenge nor publicly accept this. The wider Palestinian position is that as long as Israel remains a Jewish State, even within a two-state solution, Israel will never be a democracy. Palestinian NGOs inside Israel articulated this position well in a series of policy papers they produced, known as the "Vision Document": the two-state solution would be a secular democratic state for all its citizens in Israel next to a Palestinian state.[8]

In a similar way, the unification of Jerusalem and its inclusion within Israel in any given scenario is all but a consensus in Israel accepted by the various shades of the Zionist Left. The eastern parts of the city were officially annexed to Israel in 1967 from Jordanian control—an annexation condemned and rejected by the international community. The Palestinian position is very clear on this issue: East Jerusalem must be the capital of the future Palestinian state.

The Labor government authorized the colonization of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in areas that were not densely populated by Palestinians and legalized further colonization within dense Palestinian communities. By 1977, when the Labor Party lost the elections to Likud, vast areas were already colonized and annexed de facto to the Jewish state.[9] This was the moment when the liberal Zionist camp, the groups to the left of the Labor Party, could have provided a clearer alternative of their own but failed to do so. Their overall Zionist perspective prevented them from genuinely respecting the Palestinians' rights to Palestine in general, and to the entire West Bank in particular.

There is a common misunderstanding in the way mainstream Zionism regarded the 1967 war. The leaders of Zionism aimed from the very beginning to have as much of Palestine as possible with as few Palestinians as possible in it. The ethnic cleansing of 1948, which lasted from February until the end of the year, left them with a small Palestinian minority within almost 80 percent of Palestine.[10] The circumstances of the 1967 crisis and war landed them with the whole of Palestine, but also with a huge number of Palestinians. The unity government of 1967, which included Herut (later the Likud Party) and Mapai (later the Labor Party), regarded the West Bank as the ancient heart of the land of Israel and as a strategic buffer zone against a potential eastern front, with the River Jordan as a natural border of the new Israel. What the unity government did not want was to include the Palestinians from the occupied territories in the demographic balance of the Jewish state. Consequently, Palestinians have remained noncitizens with various degrees of municipal autonomy since then.

Liberal Zionists did not fully subscribe to this view, but they also did not find the courage to resist the oppressive policies of the occupation when they were presented as defensive, temporary, and in the national interest. Furthermore, its members found it difficult to pressure the Israeli government that was committed to peace negotiations on paper but that unilaterally undermined their chances in practice. Consequently, the liberal Zionist camp opposed colonization only in parts of the West Bank. To most of its members, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was a terrorist organization determined to destroy the state of Israel, and its preferred partner for peace was the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The ascendance of Likud, the main right-wing party led by Menachem Begin, to power in 1977 changed the political scene once again. Begin had led the main right-wing militia, the Irgun (the national military organization), during the British Mandate period (1918–1948). He founded a political party, Herut (freedom in Hebrew), in 1948 and soon joined forces with the centrist Free Liberal Party, creating a block called Gahahl (acronym for the liberal-Herut Bloc). In the wake of the 1973 war with Egypt and Syria, with the help of the widely admired war hero Ariel Sharon, he created Likud, catering mainly to Mizrahi Jews who felt marginalized by the Labor establishment. The shock from the 1973 military fiasco combined with the social unrest among the Mizrahi Jews brought Menachem Begin to power.

This new reality enabled the Zionist Left to act more freely, since they now had an unapologetic right-wing "redeemer" party in power to oppose. However, this was not an easy task. When it came to bilateral agreements with the Arab world, Likud was far more forthcoming than the Labor Party: it was Menachem Begin who concluded a peace treaty with Egypt. Likud merely continued the same policies as the Labor Party regarding the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Although its ideals had support from members of the Knesset, the Zionist Left decided to act independently through Peace Now, a movement that lobbied for an agreement—initially with the Jordanians and then with the Palestinians—over the occupied territories. Peace Now's parliamentary counterpart, represented in small parties, pushed for more civil rights for all but without questioning the Jewish supremacy mindset endemic to the state.

On the eve of Likud's rise to power, the Labor party was advocating for the "Jordanian option," which would find a way to divide the rule of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with Jordan, both geographically and functionally.[11] The Liberal Zionist movement wanted Labor to consider local Palestinian leadership as possible partners for a similar arrangement, while Likud was still openly advocating the need to officially annex the occupied territories to Israel. Over time, they all came to agree that peace was not in the cards, and therefore a long-term rule over most of these territories was the only way forward.

Thus, in the late 1970s, Labor's political hegemony came to an end. The ruling party was now Likud, and as a result of the peace treaty signed in 1979, new right-wing parties emerged to object to the peace with Egypt (as it required a total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Sinai peninsula with the Jewish settlements built there after 1967) and to any further negotiations over the future of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—which these groups deemed a sacred part of the homeland. The settler movement, Gush Emunim, represented this point

of view outside the Knesset.

The Israeli Left became even more unusual after 1977. Its agenda was shaped purely according to U.S. policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—this is true in the cases of both the Labor Party and the Liberal Zionist Left. Until the late 1980s, American diplomacy toward the conflict was based on the Jordanian option, namely a search for an Israeli-Jordanian understanding over the fate of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip areas. As long as this was the U.S. position, the Peace Now camp followed suit. At the same time, the anti-Zionist Left began developing a different agenda based on secret negotiation with the PLO, which was outlawed in Israel until the early 1990s.

In 1988, U.S. policy shifted, and the George H. W. Bush administration opened negotiations with the PLO. As a result, the Peace Now movement openly endorsed "the Palestinian Option," otherwise known as the two-state solution.[12] With the backing of the U.S. administration, the Zionist Liberal Left reached its most powerful position in Israeli politics, which lasted for a few years (1988–1995). The first Palestinian uprising in 1987 brought the occupation to the attention of local Israeli media, and the Zionist Liberal Left developed more intimate relationships with the Palestinian political elite, setting the groundwork for the PLO Peace Accord of September 1993. The Liberal Zionists brought the Labor Party into this historical juncture with them, raising hopes for peace and reconciliation across the Middle East. At that point, the anti-Zionist Left was likely willing to give the move a chance since it was fully supported by the PLO. However, these small groups of activists echoed Edward Said's apprehensions about the peace deal, which led them to reject it.[13]

The Oslo Accords became possible because the liberal Zionists and prominent leaders of the Labor Party shared the same point of view for the first time since the occupation and colonization of Palestine began; both ideological wings of the Zionist Left regarded the reality they built in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as an irreversible one. Their view was informed by the expansion of Jewish settlements in both areas and the transformation of the colonies into proper urban sprawls in many places. They also assumed that a huge eviction of Jewish settlers in the West Bank would be impossible since it could lead to a civil war.

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The question, then, was how to convince the Palestinians and the world to accept this as part of a final settlement. The newly united Zionist Left devised a plan that the PLO first accepted and then rejected. Israel would tolerate two small Palestinian protectorates run by allies of the regime in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip similar to the Bantustans of Apartheid-era South Africa, while maintaining Jewish settlement blocs within these territories, which would eventually be annexed to Israel. Furthermore, this vision included a Jewish capital in greater Jerusalem (with a possible Palestinian one in Abu Dis, a village on the eastern side of the city) and the abolition of Palestinian refugees' right to return. The new united Zionist Left expected the Palestinians to cease making any future demands from Israel once the settlement was agreed upon. At this time, the anti-Zionist Left was vehemently opposed to the Oslo process as a whole and was more openly in favor of a one-state solution: a democratic Jewish state all over historical Palestine. Their views were more visible outside Israel, where quite prominent Palestinian writers and activists began to explore this option more seriously.[14]

We will never know for sure whether this Israeli decree to the Palestinians, authorized by the U.S. administration, could have become a reality had it not been for the assassination of its greatest supporter, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in 1995. In any case, the political will in Israel to further negotiate the Oslo Accords slowly abated through the last decade of the twentieth century. A very harsh and violent Palestinian reaction to the continued occupation (leading to the Second Intifada in 2000), in the form of suicide bombings within Israel and led by both secular factions of the PLO and powerful new political Islamic groups, contributed to the fading public support for the leftist agenda.

Both Bill Clinton's and George W. Bush's administrations invested some effort in keeping the vision for a two-state solution alive. Being on the Israeli Zionist Left meant supporting these U.S. initiatives, which usually came under the umbrella term of a "new roadmap" for the Middle East. Therefore, the past distinction between the liberal Zionist Left (e.g. Peace Now) and the Labor Party was once again blurred. The United States had the full support of the European Union, Russia, the UN, and later the Arab League. However, Israeli politics moved away from this "roadmap" and charted a very different path into the future: while the Zionist Left served as a lobby for U.S. peace initiatives, AIPAC, the most prominent pro-Israeli lobby in the United States, served as the Israeli bulwark against them.

During this particular period, a third variant of the Israeli left, the anti-Zionist camp, reemerged. It resurfaced as an intellectual movement at first but

soon spilled over to the media, educational system, and other areas of cultural production.[15] Generally speaking, this trend, referred to in professional literature as "post-Zionism," labeled pre-state Zionism as colonialist; viewed the 1948 war as ethnic cleansing; and heavily criticized the state's treatment of the Mizrahi Jews, women, and the large Palestinian minority in Israel. The United States played a role here as well: it was the U.S. multicultural politics of identity that inspired, among other factors, this new soul searching in Israel.

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, the contours of the Israeli Left were once again redrawn. In high politics, the Labor Party disappeared as a significant voice, being replaced by a centrist party, Kadima, created and led by Ariel Sharon. It was officially committed to continuing negotiations with the Palestinians but in practice advocated unilateralism. This meant that Israel would take actions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without consulting the Palestinians as long as there was no result for the peace process. These actions included building a wall that separated the West Bank from Israel, Jerusalem from the West Bank, and areas in the West Bank from each other. It also meant considering a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip (which eventually took place in 2005).[16]

While Sharon was active in government, he kept Likud out of power. Once he fell seriously ill, however, Likud took over, and the new central party nearly disintegrated. The Labor Party attempted to return to the political scene as a major opposition party—it still tries to do so today—to no avail. Presently, Likud dominates politics from above in Israel with little significant opposition, presenting a nationalistic agenda that offers no compromise with the Palestinians, adopts an intransigent policy towards the Arab world, and increases discrimination against Palestinians within Israel. Economically, Likud promotes an extreme version of neoliberalism that caused large sections of the Israeli society to protest in massive numbers in the summer of 2011. Two attacks on Gaza, in 2012 and 2014, and two new parties promising to represent the protesters killed, institutionalized this revolutionary impulse before it could become a significant force in Israel's history.

The facts on the ground in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are such that all of those who once believed in the two-state solution as the only way forward now find it difficult to convince others that the solution is still viable. These facts are clearly irreversible. Israeli colonies have turned into urban sprawls, and the autonomous Palestinian enclaves have shrunk into inviable and unsustainable municipalities. Half of the West Bank is nearly annexed to Israel.[17] In 2015, politicians in Israel lost faith in the two-state solution, and

they remain convinced that unilateral Israeli policies that will consolidate Israeli control over the West Bank, allow economic autonomy to the Palestinians under such control, and encourage a tight siege on the Gaza Strip are much better options.[18] Any Palestinian resistance is met with harsh and brutal force that has cost, thus far, thousands of Palestinian lives, the demolition of tens of thousands of homes, the imprisonment of thousands of people, and the desolation of the life and infrastructure of the society as a whole.[19]

Although Israeli policy has been widely condemned by global civil society, so far this has not undermined Israel's international immunity in the eyes of Western political elites. However, as I have shown elsewhere, this immunity has slowly eroded.[20] The outrage from below found a channel in the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions campaign (BDS), which has gathered momentum in U.S. academia, particularly in the last few years. The BDS campaign is based on a request from academic institutes and society worldwide to cease any official institutional connection with Israeli universities and cultural bodies as long as Israel continues to violate three basic rights of Palestinians: the right of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to be liberated from military occupation and siege; the right of Palestinians inside Israel to live as equal citizens; and the right of Palestinian refugees to return.

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In 2015, the Israeli government identified the BDS campaign as an existential danger against which it has been struggling, unsuccessfully, with all its diplomatic and financial might.[21] Israel's overall international image is still protected mainly due to the dramatic and quite horrific developments in Syria and Iraq that have dwarfed, in the eyes of some sections of the public opinion, the brutal actions of Israel. More importantly, the need to find a solution for the crisis in Syria, with its immigration impact on Europe, has distracted attention from the Palestine question. However, with a nuclear agreement between the West and Iran, the possibility of this outrage moving from civil society into the class of political elites is as real as it has ever been before.

With this background in mind, what is the Israeli Left in the twenty-first century? In this century, it is still quite a challenge to explain what the Left in Israel is. Today, the Left is an incoherent ideological formulation, at times articulated through political actions, but quite often expressed through cultural media. The Zionist Left is represented through a new attempt to regroup the old

Labor Party into a new outfit, which was named "the Zionist Camp" in the last national elections (2015). As these elections proved, the Israeli electorate regarded "the Zionist Camp" as a softer and less-welcomed version of Likud, instead of a party with a traditional Israeli leftist agenda. Specifically, they have not offered an alternative strategy vis-à-vis the Palestine issue. Their leaders support the brutal means the government employs against any Palestinian opposition and resistance. To the left of the Labor Party is the liberal Zionist camp, represented in the Knesset by Meretz, the last proper liberal Zionist party, which almost vanished in the last elections (although it appeals to bodies such as J-Street in the United States because of its more direct support for the two-state solution). Just as Peace Now once was, it is guided by U.S. ideas of how to move forward. As President Obama runs out of ideas, so do they.

However, a new Left is emerging that more realistically digests these local and regional developments. Intellectually, it continues the critical work done by the post-Zionists in the 1990s. The critical instinct that characterized the work of many Israeli academics in the 1990s has subsided, and it has been replaced by a far more obedient academic trend—or maybe one that represents more faithfully the Zionist narrative in its professional work. This critical instinct moved into civil society. It is within civil society that activists provide a political agenda based on the analysis of Zionism as a settler-colonial ideology and of Israel as an apartheid state, and where new—and some old—ideas of how to solve the conflict through a democratic one-state solution (based on the post-Apartheid South African model of one man, one vote democracy) are seriously discussed.[22] These agendas include the work of NGOs such as Zochrot, which supports the right of return of Palestinian refugees within this vision of one democratic state in historical Palestine. This agenda holds wide support among Palestinian citizens in Israel and a small group of very committed young Jews who joined forces with veterans of the anti-Zionist fringe of the 1960s.

The emergence of a united parliamentary list that represents the Palestinian minority in Israel, after years of factionalism and internal dissent, probably provides the best these activists can hope for in terms of representation in the Knesset. More importantly, these activists, who have mobilized in several small NGOs, are the only ones who present an alternative not only to the right-wing politics of Israel, but also to the dead idea of the Oslo process and the two-state solution.

Not surprisingly, these activists regard the BDS movement as the best tactic for changing the reality on the ground, but like everyone else, they depend on the ability of the Palestinian national movement to present a strong, unified

front—an unlikely scenario in the near future. The Palestinian political body has been fragmented as a result of the 1948 catastrophe, and it has consequently always been difficult to present a singular, shared vision through a national movement—even though the PLO under Yasser Arafat was recognized as the sole, legitimate leadership until the Oslo process. After Oslo, political Islamic groups such as Hamas and Islamic jihad questioned that legitimacy—in particular after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, viewed by many Palestinians as collaborating with the Israeli occupation. Hamas and Fatah, the two main parties still in existence with representation in the occupied territories, refugee camps, and diaspora communities, have attempted with various degrees of success to form a unified front. A positive development in this direction was the ability of the various political parties inside the Palestinian community in Israel to form a joint parliamentary list in the last Israeli national elections. Even so, how the Palestinian community inside Israel relates to overall Palestinian representation remains an unresolved issue. At this point, the inability of the Palestinian national movement to show unity of purpose and to clearly define its liberation project—due to lack of authentic representation and fragmentation—is one of the main reasons for the lack of progress in the more progressive and leftist strategy.

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With time, Israeli Jews will have to face the power of religion in their own society's politics and that of the Palestinians if they wish to have broader public appeal. This confrontation would require a clear forum and rules of dialogue. In the case of Jewish society, this new Left finds it difficult to connect with the Mizrahi Jews, whose respect for tradition is often accompanied by racist attitudes toward Palestinians.

The formidable issues that still need to be tackled and the anti-Zionist Left's small numbers are balanced by their impact on the discourse outside of Israel. The chances for this new leftist agenda in Israel, which is fundamentally based on human and civil rights, to succeed in its belief in the need to have a democratic state all over historical Palestine depend, in particular, on Palestinian and international support. Will the Palestinian liberation movement be able to state clearly, as it has not done until today, how it views the future of the Jewish settler society in a possible end of the conflict scenario? Will it be able to clarify the assumed role of the progressive Jews in Israel in this liberation project? Time will tell whether these Leftist agendas are historical anecdotes or the precursors of a popular movement, as illustrated by the name of the One Democratic State

NGO, which aspires to change Israel from within.

Traces of the more traditional agenda of socialist and communist movements can also be found in these groups' platforms. The neoliberal nature of international aid to the Palestinian authority; the brutal privatization of the Israeli economy; the subcontracting of employment to noncontracted works with no rights; and the policy toward Ethiopians or refugees from Africa have all caught their attention. However, they feel that only the "de-Zionization" of Israel, namely giving up the Jewish supremacy enshrined in law and in the identity of the state, can open the way for the implementation of a more caring and just social welfare system.

Many Palestinian citizens of Israel and a smaller number of Jewish citizens make up the present nucleus of what can be called the Left in Israel. It is difficult to know their numbers, as some of these groups are ad hoc NGOs, and it is hard to distinguish between a member and a supporter. We do know that the Palestinian minority in Israel makes up around 20 percent of the population. Without the support of this community, or if its numbers diminish, Israel will become a theocracy of zealots that can only be defeated by force, vengeance, and retribution.[23] Conscientious Israelis are the remaning hope for a proper reconciliation and restitution once the human rights of all who live in Israel and Palestine—or who were expelled from those territories—are respected within a new state system between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean.

Ultimately, it is impossible to reconcile a Zionist perspective with universal values associated with the Left. The history of the Zionist Left reveals genuine attempts to reconcile Zionism with universalism, but all these attempts have failed dismally. Yet, an alternative approach was always there, waiting for its historical opportunity to come forward as a universal agenda of peace and reconciliation for the sake of Israelis and Palestinians alike. Were such an agenda to be integrated into the Palestinian liberation project, it would become possible for the international community to rally around it. This can only happen when the two-state solution, which accepts and reinforces that there is conflict between two national movements that divide the land, is declared dead and gone. This has already been defeated as a possible solution, but a strong international coalition still supports it, and it will be a long process to undo this. It can only be replaced by a framework that recognizes that the conflict is between a settler-colonial movement, Zionism, a settler state of Israel,

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and the native population. Such a solution means, in essence, a decolonization of the whole of Palestine, which means reframing the relationship between the Jewish settler community (by which I mean the Israeli Jewish society as a whole), now in its third generation, and the native population. Such decolonization occurred in South Africa when progressive whites joined the African National Congress (ANC), rather than creating their own peace movement such that the Left became part of the ANC and the liberation movement. It is time to think in such terms about the future in Israel and Palestine.

Notes

1. For an example, see: "The Platform of the Party," Meretz.

2. For a history and more detailed analysis of these groups, see: Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel: History of Power and Knowledge* (New York: Verso Books, 2010), 69–105.

3. See: Ilan Pappé, "Revisiting 1967: The False Paradigm of Peace, Partition and Parity," *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3-04 (2013): 341–51.

4. Akiva Eldar and Idith Zertal, *Lords of the Land: The War over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007* (New York: Nations Books, 2007).

5. For a good discussion of this, see: Khalil Nakhleh, "Israel's 'Zionist Left' and the 'Day of the Land,'" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, no. 2 (1978): 88–100.

6. UN General Assembly, Resolution 194, "Palestine—Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator," December 11, 1948.

7. Michael Dumper, *The Future of Palestinian Refugees; Towards Equity and Peace* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Ryder, 2007).

8. Ghaida Rinawie-Zoabi, ed., *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel* (Nazareth: The National Committee for the Heads of Local Arab Authorities in Israel, 2006).

9. Eldar and Zertal, *Lords of the Land.*

10. Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (New York: One World Publications, 2007); See the history of that minority in: Ilan Pappe, *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinian Minority in Israel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

11. Robert S. Satloff, *Troubles on the East Bank* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

12. Michelle Gawerec, *Prefiguring Peace: Israel-Palestinian Peacebuilding Partnerships* (New York: Lexington Books, 2012), 41–42.

13. Edward Said, "The Morning After," *London Review of Books* 15, no. 20 (1993): 20–21.

14. Cherine Hussein, *The Re-emergence of the Single State Solution in Palestine/Israel: Countering an Illusion* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

15. For a detailed discussion, see: Pappé, *The Idea of Israel.*

16. Ilan Pappé, "Ingathering: The Israeli election and the 'demographic problem," *London Review of Books* 28, no. 8 (April 20, 2006).

17. "Bennet: Israel Should annex 60 percent of the West Bank," *Ynetnews,* April 27, 2014, http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4513888,00.html.

18. Evelyn Gordon, "It is Time to Revive Netayahu's Economic Peace," *Jerusalem Post*, September 29, 2014, http://www.jpost.com/Experts/Its-time-to-revive-Netanyahus-economic-peace-376588.

19. "Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories," Amnesty International.

20. Pappé, *The Idea of Israel*, 295–313.

21. Peter Baumont, "Israel brands Palestinian led Boycott movement a strategic threat," *Guardian*, June 3, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/03/israel-brands-palestinian-boycott-strategic-threat-netanyahu.

22. For my discussion with Noam Chomsky, see: Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé, *On Palestine* (Chi-

cago: Haymarket, 2015).

23. Ilan Pappé, "Israel at Crossroad between Civic Democracy and Jewish Zealotocracy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 33–44.