

A Zionist Protest Forgetting Their Palestinian Neighbors



Anti-far-right government protesters wave Israeli flags at the Horev center in Haifa on Saturday. Credit: Rami Shlush

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Once again I did not go to Habima Square, or to Kaplan Street, to join the demonstrations. My legs did not carry me there and my heart kept me from taking part in a protest that is largely justified, but which is not my protest.

A demonstration covered in a sea of blue-and-white flags, as if to prove itself and to protect its participants, while the flags of the other people that live in this land are prohibited or gathered into a narrow ghetto on a mound of dirt at the edge of the square, as in the previous demonstration, cannot be my demonstration. An all-Jewish, one-nation demonstration in a clearly binational state cannot be a demonstration for anyone who seeks equality or justice, which are among the key words of this protest but remain hollow within it.

Hollow is the talk of “freedom, equality and quality government” by the organizers of one demonstration in Tel Aviv; no less hollow is the talk of “fighting for democracy” by those of the other. There is not and will never be “freedom, equality and quality government” in an apartheid state, nor is there “fighting for democracy” when a blind eye is turned to apartheid.

Some of the Jews of this country are now [outraged in the face of a concrete threat to their rights and liberty](#). It is good that they have been shaken into civil action, but their rights and liberty, even after they are curtailed, will remain those of the privileged, of the inherent Jewish supremacy. Those who assent to it, in speech or in silence, take the name of democracy in vain. Silence about it is silence about apartheid. Participation in these demonstrations of hypocrisy and double standards is unacceptable.

The sea of Israeli flags at these demonstrations is meant as apology in the face of the right's questioning of the camp's loyalty and patriotism. We are Zionists, therefore we are loyal, the demonstrators say. The Palestinians and the Israeli Arabs can wait until we finish things among us. It's forbidden to mix issues, as if it were possible not to mix them. Once again, the center and the left fall dead before the accusations of the right, mumbling and apologizing; the purity of the flag tarnished them far more than the accusations did.

Once again, [this camp is shown to exclude Palestinians and their flag no less than the right does](#). How can one participate in such a demonstration? There is not and cannot be a demonstration on democracy and equality, on freedom and even on quality government, in an apartheid format in an apartheid state, while ignoring apartheid's existence.

The flag was chosen as a symbol because it is a Zionist protest, but it cannot be a Zionist demonstration for democracy and also a just demonstration. An ideology that engraves on its flag the supremacy of one people over another cannot preach justice before it changes the basis of its ideology. The Star of David is sinking, as the cover illustration of Friday's Hebrew Haaretz Magazine demonstrated so wrenchingly, but its sinking is inevitable as long as Israel's flag is the flag of one of the two nations with a claim to it.

[Palestinian blood has been spilled like water in recent days](#). Not a day goes by without innocents being killed: a gym teacher who tried to save an injured person in his yard; two fathers, in two different places, who tried to protect their sons, and a 14-year-old son of refugees – all in one week. How can a protest ignore this, as if it weren't happening, as if the blood were water and the water were blessed rain, as if it has nothing to do with the face of the regime?

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Can you imagine if Jews were attacked every day or two? Would the protest have ignored them? The occupation is farther than ever from ending; it has become an annoying fly that needs to be silenced. Anyone who mentions it is a troublemaker who must be kept away; even the left doesn't want to hear about it anymore.

“Stop the coup d’etat,” call the announcements, with pathos that seems to have been taken from the French Revolution. But there is no revolution in an apartheid state, if it continues to be an apartheid state. Even if all the demands of the protesters are realized, the Supreme Court carried aloft, the attorney general exalted and the executive branch returned to its rightful stature, Israel will remain an apartheid state. So what is the point of this protest? To enable us to revel once more in being “the only democracy in the Middle East.”