

May 6, 110 Thursday 1 Sivan 3870 8:20 IST  Print

# THE JERUSALEM POST

JPOST.com  
Israel's best-selling English daily and most-read English website

## Terra Incognita: Israel's democracy wars

By SETH J. FRANTZMAN  
04/05/2010

Why is it assumed that the doyens of Israeli academia are necessarily democratic and good judges of the country's democratic character?

The most common nervous reaction among a certain segment of Israel's left is the refrain that Israel is always threatened by undemocratic forces from within. The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University recently released a poll showing that the average adult Jewish Israeli believes "there is too much freedom of expression" and that many respondents "favor punishing Israeli citizens who support sanctioning or boycotting the country."

Haaretz's headline screamed "Israel's Jews back gag on rights groups."

The reaction was fast and furious from the academic establishment, which had commissioned the study. Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal of TAU claimed "Israelis have a distorted perception of democracy – most people are almost anti-democratic."

David Newman of Ben-Gurion University and fellow Jerusalem Post columnist claimed the results were "very worrying."

THE SURVEY was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Large segments of Israeli academia and various organizations like the Israeli Democracy Institute believe the public is anti-democratic and they craft surveys to tell them exactly that. The fact that the survey measured only Jewish members of society should have been a red herring.

It is no different from a survey by Ma'agar Mochrot in March that surveyed Arabs and Jews on "democracy" but primarily wanted to examine young people's attitudes on the state's Arab citizens. What about what the Arabs had to say about the Jews and the state?

Why is it assumed that the doyens of Israeli academia are necessarily democratic and good judges of the country's democratic character? Bar-Tal, for instance, is on the editorial board of the Palestine-Israel Journal whose logo is a Palestinian flag and an Israeli flag without the Star of David and which routinely refers to Palestinian terrorism as "resistance." When they "understand" Palestinian terrorism, support boycotts of Israel, the "one-state solution" or encourage soldiers not go to the army, are these "democratic" choices?

Is support for "Voices from Gaza" (a TAU conference), part of supporting democracy by bringing the Islamist voice of Hamas to its student body?

Maybe the public doesn't understand why year after year their tax dollars go to universities where their sons and daughters are called "Nazis" and they are said to be practicing "apartheid" and where the Jewish people's existence is denied and the Palestinians are called "indigenous" and where the details of the Holocaust are called "unimportant."

The public doesn't understand why "democracy" only means hatred of the State of Israel and see no benefit from this form of "democracy," We don't understand why those who call Israel undemocratic, like writer

Gideon Levy, are the same ones who embrace Palestinian nationalism and envied the late king (say it again, king) of Jordan.

Maybe the public doesn't understand why "human rights" groups never care about their rights, such as those of Ethiopian Jews who wonder why the Israeli left was marching against Sabra and Shatilla in the 1980s but could care less as ten thousand of them died in the deserts of Sudan.

YEAR AFTER year Israelis go to army and leave it with little prospects for economic success. But they soldier on, paying their taxes, waiting in lines and scraping by. They work 12-hour shifts and live crammed into tenements on the Coastal Plain or exposed to Kassams in Sderot.

All the while they are demonized with contempt by those at the higher levels of society, the "free thinkers" and "critics" who call them brutish antidemocratic forces.

Consider just some of what the public has witnessed in recent years: The late Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz of Hebrew University claimed Israel was a "Judeo-Nazi" state. Yitzhak Laor wrote the play Ephraim Returns to the Army which drew "comparisons between Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Nazi rule in occupied Europe." Moshe Zimmerman, director of the Minerva Center for German History at the Hebrew University, claims "there is an entire sector in the Jewish public which I unhesitatingly define as a copy of the German Nazis." The same Zimmerman wrote that Hitler didn't intend to kill the Jews; "Hitler improvised and raised the question of the Jews."

Hanna Yablonka of BGU called the "details" of the Holocaust unimportant. Adi Ophir at TAU opened "Israel Apartheid Week" in London at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Udi Aloni, whose work has been shown at the Museum of Israeli Art in Ramat Gan and who has presented at the Van Leer Institute, wrote in March that the "occupation and the apartheid regime is hovering over the State of Israel."

Prof. Shlomo Sand of TAU, author of *The Invention of the Jewish People*, claims "intellectuals of Jewish origin in Germany, influenced by the folk character of German nationalism, took upon themselves the task of inventing a [Jewish] people." Oren Yiftachel of BGU claims the Beduin are indigenous to Israel and writes on *Beduin-Arabs and the Israeli Settler State: Land Policies and Indigenous Resistance*. Prof. Ze'ev Sternhell, Israeli Prize winner, advised the Palestinians in an op-ed in May 2001 on their best terrorism strategy: "Palestinians would be wise to concentrate their struggle against the settlements."

Ariel Toaff of Bar-Ilan University argued in his book *Passovers of Blood* that Ashkenazim may have indeed used the blood of Christian children in rituals. Numerous Israeli academics, from Neve Gordon (BGU) to Anat Matar (TAU) and Ilan Pappé (formerly University of Haifa), have all joined calls to boycott their own universities or Israel entirely. Some academics enthusiastically applaud the Palestinian nationalist cause, call for understanding Hamas and teach classes that force students to volunteer for anti-Israel "peace" organizations.

AND AFTER all this there are expressions of surprise that the vast majority of Israelis tire of those whose salaries they pay and who wrap themselves in the Palestinian nationalist flag but abhor the flag with the Star of David on it. Ironically it is the public who are called "undemocratic" when the real haters of democracy are the well heeled who argue that their extremist hatred of Israel is an essential part of democracy. A survey of academics would show that a significant minority, if not a majority, hold to principles that are not mainstream democratic ones, such as supporting chauvinist nationalist Palestinian groups and excusing terrorism as "resistance."

In the dustup over Im Tirzu's advertisements condemning Naomi Chazan of the New Israel Fund, Prof. Avner De Shalit, dean of social sciences and Max Kampelman Professor of Democracy and Human Rights at Hebrew University, urged in an e-mail "I wonder if Im Tirzu shouldn't be sued."

That's very democratic: If you don't like someone giving their opinion, sue to gag them.

Abe Lincoln said, "A nation divided against itself cannot stand," and Samuel Adams elaborated, "A general dissolution of principles and manners will more surely overthrow the liberties of [democracy] than the whole force of the common enemy."

Some of the country's best educated and brightest thinkers have few principles or manners and they have a deep-seated hatred of the State of Israel. Their constant refrain is that it is the people who have lost faith in democracy. If they have, it is only because they have learned from their cultured peers.

*The writer is a fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Market Studies.*



Print

---

[About Us](#) | [Advertise with Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [RSS](#)

All rights reserved © 1995 - 2009 The Jerusalem Post.

כל הזכויות שמורות © 2009- נט אפיקי תקשורת אינטר מדיה בע"מ