



Drowning in a sea of resentment and hate, it's far from clear that Israel can make it back to shore.

Purim is almost here, but it feels more like the hours before the Ninth of Av; joy barely registers, while dread looms everywhere; the roots of the crisis are as old as Hatikvah

March 6 Daniel Gordis



"When I'm 18, will there still be elections?" Sign at Jerusalem protest two weeks ago. Photo: Daniel Gordis.

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Last week’s “pogrom” (not my word; it’s the term used by [IDF Maj. Gen. Yehuda Fuchs](#), who oversees the West Bank / Judea and Samaria) was unbearably horrific, shameful and a desecration of everything that Judaism ought to stand for.

Full stop. Nothing can mitigate that.

Still, here’s what one needs to understand:

You may or may not be opposed to the settlement project; you may or may not love or even like the religious worldview or politics of many of the people who live there. But to understand Israel today, one needs to understand how deeply betrayed the settlers of Har Bracha and other similar settlements feel. They live where they live with the approval of the Israeli government. Not just right wing governments, but governments of the left as well. They are Israelis, living where the state has told them that they may legally live, and—they feel—they are virtually abandoned—left entirely unprotected by the army. Two brothers getting shot at point blank range and dying is as much a result of Israeli policy, they will tell you, as it is Palestinian hatred and venom.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, the rabbi of Har Bracha, one of the leading halakhic authorities of modern Israel, [delivered a eulogy](#) for those two brothers—Hallel Yaniv and Yagel Yaniv—which we quote here in part (we’ll send out a translation of a more complete version in the days to come). [Even if you don’t understand the Hebrew, I urge you to listen to a bit of the brief eulogy, from 2:00-3:00 in the video, for example, just to get a sense of the heartbreak he felt as he spoke.]:



We did not return to this land to dispossess Arabs from their ancestral lands, but rather, to bring goodness and blessing to the world. The Arabs, too, could have benefitted from that. But now that they have decided to rise up against us, we will wage war against them and emerge victorious, [the war conducted] entirely within the rule of law, by the army and police.

Beloved settlers, who will tell you how wondrous are even your smallest acts, how great is your courage, as even when you are afraid you continue to travel, by day and by night, to work and to study, to celebrations and to funerals, and you continue to settle this sacred land and to defend with your very bodies this land and its people.
...

In the Diaspora, we were not able to bury our dead with honor. A large funeral was liable to spark a pogrom. Jews buried their dead quietly, and in secret they wept over their dead; with tremendous suffering they watched over the embers that they not be extinguished. Today, we are privileged to bury our holy dead in an official ceremony on Mount Herzl.

How blessed are we that we have a state and an army, and with God's help and with the steadfastness and courage of our commanders and soldiers, we are able to

stand up against our enemies, as we continue to build this land and to cause its desolateness to blossom.

But that army, he did not need to point out, does not keep them safe.

The settlers are brokenhearted, and in ways we often don't appreciate, they feel deeply betrayed by Israel.

So, too, does the secular left. Why are they are protesting by the tens of thousands, blocking highways, [reservists threatening](#) not to show up for military service, pilots saying they [won't join training exercises](#), the rescuers from Entebbe in 1976 [accusing](#) Netanyahu of endangering the state for his own personal good, people taking their money out of the country and encouraging others to do so? Because to them, the sort of illiberal democracy (they believe) Yariv Levin and Simcha Rothman are trying to create in Israel is a betrayal of the very democratic foundation of the Jewish state.

Why, ask these reserve pilots, would they possibly risk their lives and risk turning their children into orphans for a country in which their right to vote is not guaranteed, in which protections that the courts afford to minorities have been whisked away?

It's still too early to know how this is going to play out (I remain cautiously optimistic that a compromise under which Israel will remain democratic will still emerge), but in many ways, it no longer matters. The fact that we could get this close to an illiberal democracy has showed the secular center-left that Israel is not what they thought it was. Even if compromise is reached, the secular left now knows that large swathes of the country cannot abide them, that a substantial portion of the country does not care if Israel is not a first world country. And they know that even if the judicial revolutionaries don't win this time, those whom the secular left consider to be "the forces of darkness" will just keep trying again and again.

The center-left feels betrayed by the country their grandparents created.

The ultra-Orthodox feel betrayed by the country. Many of us (myself included) have every right to feel that it's absurd that our coalition system of government allows their

electoral block to squeeze millions out of governments left and right, fund schools that do not prepare their children for (our vision of) the 21st century. But they see things differently. Why does everyone hate us so much, they want to know? Why the tax on soda, which was obviously meant to target the Haredi community? [They consume much more than their share of sugary, unhealthy drinks; the new government has already repealed the tax.] Why force secular education on us if we don't want it? Why is using *our* electoral power to get funding for our schools any less legitimate than settlers getting government funding for settlements, secular Jews getting funding for universities and cultural institutions in which we have no interest? Why is the "game" legitimate for everyone, except when we play it?

The Haredim feel betrayed by a country that has never wanted them.

The Ethiopians? It's getting better, but there have been so many cringe-worthy moments that most of us have lost sight of them. More on that for another time.

The Ethiopians have long felt betrayed by a country that boasted about saving them, but at the same time, mistreated them horribly.

How about Israeli Arabs? We often forget this critical fact: the War of Independence in November 1947 began not as a war against outside countries, but as a civil war between the country's Jews and Arabs. Those who are today Israeli Arabs (some prefer to be called Palestinian Israelis) come from families that were in the lifetimes of many still at war with this country and the Jews who live in it. The war is over and relations have gotten a bit better, but the dark cloud of that history hovers over everything here. Compare the infrastructure in Arab towns and their schools to that of Jewish towns and Jewish villages, and we know why the resentment persists, why the yawning chasm still exists.

(Oh, and the Druze hate the Palestinians, but [that's another story.](#))

The Arabs feel betrayed by this country. To put matters very mildly.

And the Mizrahim, those Jews from Muslim lands, *who are now a majority of the Jews in the State of Israel?* It's gotten better, but the worldview of Ben-Gurion and his compadres still stings. Ben-Gurion had no shame about saying, quite publicly:

The dispersions that are being terminated [that is, entire communities, such as the Bulgarian and Iraqi Jews, that were liquidated through immigration to Israel] and which are gathering in Israel still do not constitute a people, but a motley crowd, human dust lacking language, education, roots, tradition or national dreams. . . . Turning this human dust into a civilized, independent nation with a vision . . . is no easy task...

Determined to make the state as culturally advanced as it could possibly be, Ben-Gurion went so far as to suggest segregating schools and educating Mizrahi and Ashkenazi children separately, worrying that Israel would become "Levantine" and "descend" to be "like the Arabs."

To say that the Mizrahim feel betrayed by this country would be an absurd understatement. They feel rage. They hate the elites.

That is in large measure what is playing out here. The parties fueling the Judicial Reform (or the Judicial Revolution, depending on who you ask) are seeking to wrest power away from the (largely Ashkenazi, certainly elite-in-image) Supreme Court.

And those parties would not be in power without the Mizrahim. Bibi's Likud (which isn't so much Bibi's any longer, as he's lost his grip on just about everything in this country rapidly spinning out of control), Smotrich's "Religious Zionist" Party, Ben-Gvir's "Jewish Power" Party and Aryeh Deri's "Shas" Party all have significant Mizrahi voting blocs. This is not *only* about Mizrahi rage, but it's largely about Mizrahi rage. And approve of the proposed legislation or not, one cannot understand this country without internalizing how deep and (often) how justified that rage is.

It's not only the Mizrahim, of course. We are where we are, to no small extent, due to (entirely legitimate) rage many groups feel towards the founding elites of this country. Those elites are less and less numerous (some say they are about 8% of the country) and less and less popular (Ben-Gurion's party got 46 seats in 1949, but only 4 in this past election), but they still have an enormous amount of control. True, there are many Ashkenazim pushing for Judicial Reform, but the idea is particularly popular not among the elites, but among the less "privileged" population in Israel. They may not know the details of the proposed legislation (those opposing it don't, either, of course), but they support it because their parties support it and because they know it is about "sticking it to the elites."

Israel is a country drowning in a sea of sensed betrayal. It is a country drowning in a sea of resentment. It is a country drowning in a sea of mutual hatred.

It is a country that may not make it back to shore.