

**The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to
Israeli Fundamentalist Politics**

Ephraim Nimni

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In uttering “Everywhere I wander is Jerusalem,” the late nineteenth-century Hasidic revolutionary, Nahman of Bratzlav, was the first post-Zionist. The thought-provoking essays in this anthology, especially the conclusion, address the shifting signification of post-Zionism from (1) a methodology in the Israeli social sciences, (2) to the political trends within contemporary

Israeli society, and (3) to a particular period/project of the Israeli polity/society (p. 183).

Rounding out the volume are the 1998 reflections of renowned Palestinian thinker, Edward Said, "New History, Old Ideas" (pp. 199-202). This is his critique of a Palestinian-Israeli conference featuring "new" Israeli historians and their Palestinian counterparts, which included Elie Sambar, Nur Masalha, and himself, as well as Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Itamar Rabinowitch, and Zeev Sternhell.

The present anthology is born from Said's critique of those who concluded that it was morally wrong but necessary to expel the Palestinians in tandem with Zionist efforts to reestablish the Jewish state. Of this group, only Pappé resists the profound contradiction, bordering on schizophrenia (p. 200), that informs all other research of these "new" historians. Calling for Palestinian and Arab intellectuals to engage Israeli academic and intellectual audiences by lecturing in Israeli centers openly, while admitting that the years of boycotting have achieved little (p. 202), Said calls for a new politics free of racial prejudices and ostrich-like attitudes. These seminal reflections are misplaced as an appendix, rather than as a forward. Following Hanna Herzog's call for a post-Zionist discourse more informed by the clarity of feminism, it is a loss that the voice of Said's daughter, Najla, is absent. Her significant involvement with the non-violent, democratic party, the Palestinian National Initiative, would have been another welcome voice in this discourse.

Uri Ram's "From Nation-State to Nation-State: Nation, History, and Identity Struggles in Jewish History" (pp. 20-41) provides a nuanced introduction to the issues surrounding the historiographical text and the historical context of Zionism. "Pure identity" and "objective memory" no longer obtain; rather, the crisis in historicist national narratives opens critical, complementary, or alternative narratives. These narratives, exemplified by the shift from historicism to post-historicism, and from Zionism to post-Zionism, allude to the alterity of self-identity as well as the fragmentation of the nation (p. 35). By contextualizing the identity crisis in Israel against the background of local social change and global political and cultural transformations, Ram offers paths for new thinking.

Ilan Pappé's "The Square Circle: The Struggle for Survival of Traditional Zionism" (pp. 42-62), presents the issues that challenge Zionism succinctly from the perspective of the political scientist. His contextualization of contemporary political realities, along with some nuance, are invaluable to the general reader and specialist alike. Avishai Ehrlich's "Zionism, Post-Zionism,

and Anti-Zionism in Israel: Jews and Arabs in the Conflict over the Nature of the State” (pp. 98-116), philosophically challenges any current attempt at defining post-Zionism except *ex post-facto* (p. 65). Since Zionism is undergoing a transformation, it cannot be held to a rigid definition. This contingency allows him to take note of how post-Zionism may be a local version of ideological globalization (p. 92), rather than the end of an ideology.

As’ad Ghanem’s “Zionism, Post-Zionism, and Anti-Zionism in Israel: Jews and Arabs in the Conflict over the Nature of the State” (pp. 98-116) reflects the Palestinian perspective on the significance of post-Zionism in Israel. This is crucial for a balanced anthology. Ghanem’s datum portray an uncompromising ethnocentric Zionism held by the majority of Jews vis-à-vis the state, while the Palestinian minority maintains anti-Zionist positions that reject the nature and objectives of Israel despite their acceptance of Israeli citizenship (p. 114). Ghanem foresees violence as a way of combating the Jewish-Zionist character of a state founded upon discrimination (p. 115). Although the violent tone of his conclusion will disturb many readers, such a tone is welcome if it signifies a shift away from bombs to books. He might benefit, however, from Said’s critique that racial prejudices and ostrich-like attitudes must be eradicated if there are to be continued interactions with the new Israeli historians.

Ephraim Nimni’s “Introduction” (pp. 1-19) and his essay “From *Galut* to *T’futsoth*: Post-Zionism and the Dislocation of Jewish Diasporas” (pp. 117-52) outlines the challenges of post-Zionism from the perspective of a social historian concerned with the limits of history and historiography. His contextualization of exile and diaspora suggest ways of reimagining the correlation between Israel and its diaspora communities.

Hanna Herzog’s “Post-Zionist Discourse in Alternative Voices: A Feminist Perspective” (pp. 153-67) explores how deconstructing gendered ethno-national structures would allow Israeli society to be transformed from one that thinks in militaristic terms to one that thinks in civil terms (p. 164). The feminist perspectives for a civil agenda in Israel are multi-vocal and not limited to the corridor politics of the Knesset; in fact, they extend to the political elements of the quotidian and thereby broaden the definition of politics (pp. 164-65).

Henriette Dahan-Kalev’s “You’re So Pretty – You Don’t Look Moroccan” (pp. 168-81) is her translated anecdotal account of growing up hearing this phrase from the time her parents brought her from Morocco to Israel in 1949. Reflecting upon life in an immigrant camp and then a transit camp (p. 168), her story exemplifies an entire generation of North African Jews whose

identity underwent Ashkenazification (p. 178), being steamrolled by a distorting Ashkenazi, Zionist, Israeli, and European hegemony (p. 179).

Nira Yural Davis' "Conclusion" (pp. 182-96) of June 2002 updates this anthology with the realities threatening the perpetuation of any post-Zionist dialogue in the academy and society through a Gramscian lens of "optimism of the will" alongside her "extreme pessimism of the intellect." When analyzing Israel as a post-Zionist, liberal, multiculturalist society, and/or even as an ethnic democracy, she warns how the normative construction of ethnic domination of the Jewish collectivity in the Israeli state is much of what blinds most Israelis, even Nimni, from realizing a democratic resolution to the conflict (p. 193). The only way to establish a political and moral clarity is by revisioning the conflict as being one between an ethno-settler project and a resisting indigenous population. Such is her stepping stone toward any process of reconciliation that would involve a measure of dignity and justice (p. 194). As a critical reflection, her conclusion bears witness to the possibility of a continued thinking and dialogue that might begin the process of redemptive transformation.

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