



Credit: Avi Ohayon

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On the American Jewish Left

By Paul Scham

Below is an article I recently published in *Ha'aretz*, which now, for better and worse, serves partly a house organ for the Israeli left. Very few articles written in English are translated and published in Hebrew so, ironically, the people who don't see this and other articles originating in English are Israelis themselves, even though it's an Israeli newspaper.

I wanted to republish it here in *Israel Horizons* because it brings up several issues that those who identify with what I call the "moderate American Jewish left" need to ponder. Of course any distinction between the "far" and moderate" wings is fairly arbitrary; by making the distinction I don't mean to erect a wall between "us" and "them" or to imply they're beyond some sort of pale. However, with the growth of a larger and more energetic pro-BDS and non- (or even anti-) Zionist minority faction in the Democratic party, and the continued practice of the Jewish right wing in conflating us with them, we must make clear where we stand on various issues.

One of the most important of these issues is our work with mainstream parties (especially Meretz, of course) and those NGOs which are

Contents

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

- 1 On the American Jewish Left

INSIGHTS

- 3 I'm on the American Jewish Left—and I Haven't Abandoned Israel
By Paul Scham
- 5 Is the Biden Administration Inching Toward a Rights-Based Discourse on Israel and Palestine?
By Ron Skolnik
- 8 Standing Up for Progressive Values in the American Zionist Movement

KOLOT

- 9 Mahapach-Taghir: Creating Change through Solidarity
By Adi Dagan

SYMPOSIUM

- 13 A Virtual Invocation
By Ben Sharif
- 14 Introducing the Israel-Palestine Symposium 2021

WOMEN'S INITIATIVE

- 16 The Tinderbox
By Marcia G. Yerman

BOOK REVIEW

- 18 The Self as the Soul of the Nation
By Julie Arden Ficks

President's Message

heavily invested in moving Israel in a more progressive direction. This is where Partners' unique position stands out. We are a peace and anti-occupation organization, but by no means only that. We actively support the work of innumerable Israeli NGO's and, through our Kolot: Voices of Hope program, we introduce them to the American public. Thus, as our name itself makes clear, we partner with Israeli organizations and serve as a bridge to Americans—particularly, but not only Jews—who believe in a progressive Israel.

It is not that we refuse to pressure Israel. The issue of "conditioning" or "restricting" aid will be argued over in the coming year. We oppose BDS—but also oppose penalizing people or organizations who choose not to do business with Israel, which is a violation of their right to free speech. While recognizing the danger of growing anti-semitism, we strongly oppose automatically equating anti-Zionism with it. We support Israel as a Jewish state and the two-state solution to strengthen it, but many of us in recent years have come to support confederation as the fairest and most feasible means of achieving a workable 2SS. We strongly oppose any annexation schemes, whether of parts of the West Bank, or in miniature, such as by evicting longtime Arab residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem through use of unjust and discriminatory laws.

I welcome your thought on this agenda, whether positive, negative or mixed. Below each *Israel Horizons* [article](#) is a comment section, which we hope will become a lively forum for active discussion of the issues we raise.

Sincerely,



Paul Scham
President, Partners for Progressive Israel



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I'm on the American Jewish Left— And I Haven't Abandoned Israel

INSIGHTS

By Paul Scham



Partners for Progressive Israel in Haaretz! This important and timely op-ed piece, written by Partners President, Paul Scham, was [published](#) on June 20th.

As the AIPAC consensus—the norm for American Jewish political life for decades—recedes, the “American Jewish Left” is becoming increasingly visible and heterodox opinions on the left are proliferating.

However, with that profusion comes the need for distinction and nuance about the spectrum and character of that new left, not least in terms of how its constituent camps relate to Israel’s statehood and the Israeli occupation.

Etan Nechin’s recent piece ([The American Jewish Left’s Untimely Abandonment of Israel’s Leftists](#)), with which I largely agree, lacks that nuance. He critiques the “American Jewish Left” without defining what he means.

By the end of the article, two things become apparent: Nechin is talking solely about the part of the (far) left which opposes Israel as Jewish state, i.e., the anti-

Zionist left, and he ignores even the existence, let alone the activities, of what is sometimes called the pro-peace, pro-Israel left, the “Zionist left,” or even “liberal Zionists,” a term that is seemingly falling out of favor all around the political spectrum.

My point is not primarily about definitions. Increasingly, the arguments over Israel in the U.S. are being simplistically described as “pro” and “anti,” which both distort reality and imply there is no middle ground. In fact, the vast majority of American Jewish opinion is in that middle ground, which largely coincides with sentiment supporting (in principle if not necessarily in immediate practice) the venerable two-state solution. It is only the anti-two state extremes, on both left and right, that attempt to maintain their purist “with us or against us” mentality.

Of course Nechin does nothing wrong by focusing on what I call the far, i.e., anti-Zionist left. But he owes it

to his readers to make clear that there is a much larger group, also on the left and strenuously opposed to the occupation and related policies, that has long been doing exactly what he advocates, i.e., working closely and coordinating with the existing and active Israeli left, both in the electoral and NGO arenas. As a more than 30 year veteran of this part of the American Jewish political spectrum, I know whereof I speak.

J Street is, of course, the best-known and most high profile of this group of organizations, and it likes to declare there was no home for pro-peace, pro-Israel Americans, especially Jews, before it was founded in 2007. However, as its president, Jeremy Ben-Ami, well knows, there were a number of organizations that advocated those views well before J-Street.

For example, in early 1989, I set up the first Washington office of [Americans for Peace Now](#)—building on sentiment that had existed since the first Lebanon War. The [New Israel Fund](#), whose explicit mission is to support progressive Israeli NGOs, was established back in 1979. Other organizations followed, though it is unquestionable that J Street finally achieved the national impact all of us had long been seeking.

J Street works closely with Israeli left-wing parties Labor and Meretz, and various other parties over the years—and coordinates strategy, while maintaining itself as an American (primarily Jewish) organization. Anyone who has attended a J-Street conference (the “Woodstock of the American Jewish Left”) can’t help but bump into many of the leaders of the Israeli Left.

And there’s more, outside of J Street. My own organization, [Partners for Progressive Israel](#), is affiliated with Meretz. There’s growing support for the Israeli NGO [Eretz l’Kulam](#), which advocates a two-state confederation, reflecting newer trends in thinking about possible political configurations. Most of these moderate left organizations have affiliated with the new [Progressive Israel Network](#), a consortium of (currently 11) American Jewish organizations that maintain their separate identities but coordinate their statements, some activities, and support for the organizations of the Israeli left.

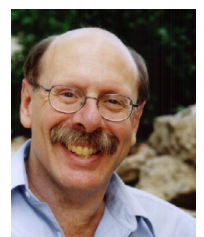
In fact, what defines the primary difference between us and the individuals and organizations Nechin critiques is precisely that they reject working within the Israeli political consensus. Some, like Peter Beinart, are fully knowledgeable about it, and have deliberately moved out of that consensus, for reasons he’s written about at length. Others identify exclusively with the Palestinians because of their status as an oppressed people.

Sometimes we in the “moderate” left and they on the “far” left support the same organizations, such as B’tselem and Combatants for Peace. Perhaps the most visible red line between us is their support for, and our opposition to, the supremely ineffectual [Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions](#) (BDS) movement.

I absolutely agree with Nechin’s call for the (far) left to “set aside their ideological purity obsessions and work with Israel’s center left, who sit in the new government too.” But their refusal to do so is what defines them. As they well know, there is already an energetic moderate left, closely tied to the realistic, on the ground Israeli political and NGO ecosphere. That is what they reject.

The moderate American Jewish left will necessarily have to work harder in the coming period to define itself vis-a-vis the rise of the farther left, as it has traditionally done with regard to the center and the right. But what Nechin wants to see already exists. Those who reject it have consciously made their own choice. ■

Paul Scham is President of Partners for Progressive Israel and the Director of the Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland.



Is the Biden Administration Inching Toward a Rights-Based Discourse on Israel and Palestine?

INSIGHTS

By Ron Skolnik



“Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken... emphasized the Administration’s belief that Israelis and Palestinians should enjoy equal measures of freedom, security, prosperity, and democracy.”

This past April 2, U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken delivered a subversive take on the Israel-Palestine conflict. In a readout of his conversation with then-Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, Blinken omitted any mention of a permanent-status solution for Israel and Palestine, and instead focused his summary on a principle much more fundamental—equality. “The Secretary emphasized the Administration’s belief,” the [readout](#) stated, “that Israelis and Palestinians should enjoy equal measures of freedom, security, prosperity, and democracy.”

Coming ten days after Israel’s fourth election, most eyes at the time were trained on the country’s high-stakes coalition wrangling, and the remarks were little noticed. But they were no inadvertent “slip of the pen.” Some six weeks later, on May 11, as the latest Israel-Gaza war was beginning to escalate, White House Press Secretary, Jen Psaki, delivered an official

[statement](#), which, while this time referencing support for a two-state solution, again underscored the new administration’s position that “Palestinians and Israelis deserve equal measures of freedom, security, dignity, and prosperity.” Blinken again repeated this “equal measures” language on [May 25](#).

The Biden administration has shown no signs, of course, of radically revamping its approach to the overall endgame for Israel-Palestine. In a May 23 [interview](#) with George Stephanopoulos on ABC’s “This Week,” Blinken said that “President Biden has been very clear that he remains committed to a two-state solution.” But, though this “song” was the same, Stephanopoulos, a former White House Communications Director, was picking up on a new “arrangement”: “You stress that word ‘equal’ right there,” he observed to Blinken. “That seems to be a new emphasis for this administration. We haven’t heard that a lot in the past, equal rights for

Palestinians and Israelis. ... [I]s this new emphasis ... really the start of a longer-term shift?" Stephanopoulos might have been on to something.



When it comes to Israel and Palestine, American administrations have tended to be results-oriented, not values-oriented. George W. Bush's vision, to take one example, wasn't a set of human aspirations, but a geopolitical endpoint: "[two states](#), living side by side in peace and security." To get there, Bush embraced a "performance-based and goal-driven [roadmap](#)," that was as spiritually uplifting as an efficiency expert's report, with its "clear phases, timelines, target dates, and benchmarks," and which eschewed any mention of "dignity," "freedom," or "equality."

While U.S. administrations frequently invoke "democracy" and "equal rights" in their effort to seize the moral high ground on the international stage, they have tended (with occasional exceptions, of course) to avoid this language when it comes to Israel-Palestine—possibly because of the uncomfortable dissonance created when juxtaposing those noble values with Israel's undemocratic and unequal decades-long military occupation. The Biden administration's new language, therefore, might, just might, represent a first whiff of possible change in the air.

A similar metamorphosis seemed to be in evidence recently in a Partners for Progressive Israel [webinar](#) with Knesset Member Mossi Raz of Meretz. Raz, a longtime anti-occupation activist and former director of Israel's Peace Now movement, was asked whether

there is still hope for the two-state solution. His reply refocused the issue, placing values at the center of the discussion, rather than this or that political structure:

One state or two states are not part of my ideology. My ideology is freedom... My ideology is securing human rights. And if we have to do that in one state, two states, or seven states, it's not that important. One state or two states is [also] not part of my Zionism. My Zionism [is] the right of the Jewish people to implement [our] national rights, and that might be in one state, in two states, in a binational state.

Raz went on to argue that the two-state model is still, notwithstanding the bumps and bruises it has endured, the more realistic and feasible approach for two peoples who have divergent narratives, competing national interests, a history of violence and hatred, and a residue of fear and ill will. Blinken, similarly, believes that a partition into two states continues to be the best path towards bringing "equal measures" into practice.



Two states, then, ultimately remains the paradigm for Blinken and Raz (and most everyone else). But the framing of two states as an instrument for achieving more essential aims, rather than an ideal to be sanctified, is a significant development that needs to be embraced more widely—because the placement of higher principles at the forefront of our discourse is key to preventing "two states" from becoming a vehicle for continued oppression.

For those who have repressed their memories of 2020, we saw just such an exploitation of two-states language only last year, in the Orwellian-named "Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the



Palestinian and Israeli People”—aka the “[Trump Plan](#).” With significant input from ardent supporters of Israel’s settler right, such as then-U.S. Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, the plan coopted and corrupted phrases such as “Palestinian state” in order to present a “two-state solution” in name only. The so-called “deal of the century” would have left the Palestinians scattered in a series of disjointed West Bank cantons, surrounded and dominated by Israel, and enjoying nothing close to an “equal measure” of prosperity, let alone freedom or dignity.

Blinken’s new language, therefore, is a sort of “diplomatic subtweet”—a crystal-clear, albeit indirect and implicit, rejection of the machinations of Donald Trump, Jared Kushner, and Mr. Friedman. Similarly, it also represents a sharp rebuke of the quarter-century-long effort by Netanyahu (still prime minister when Blinken

issued his formulation) and others on the Israeli right to water down the meaning of Palestinian sovereignty to such an extent that it became, in their schemes, little more than a disempowered, disenfranchised local autonomy. (Perversely, even the Israeli far far-right has coopted the term “two-state solution” in support of the [claim](#) that Israel should unilaterally annex all the land between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River, since “Jordan is Palestine.”)

Whatever modus vivendi Israelis and Palestinians eventually agree upon, be that two states, one state, confederation, or something else entirely—and, in the meantime, the two-state option is still regarded by both peoples ([here](#) and [here](#)) as the least objectionable of all—to make it work stably over the long term, the arrangement will have to deliver benefit to both sides in “equal measure” in terms of the basic human right to freedom, security, dignity, prosperity, and more.

While some might look cynically at Blinken’s new language and regard it as lip service, we mustn’t rule out the optimistic possibility that, nearly three decades after Rabin and Arafat first shook hands on the White House Lawn, we are actually seeing the start of a significant perceptual shift. Rather than dismiss Blinken’s new terms of reference *in limine*, progressives instead should applaud, repeat, and help mainstream and ingrain them—and loudly hold the Biden administration to them on every occasion that it fails to adhere to its own lofty rhetoric. ■

Ron Skolnik is an American-Israeli political columnist and public speaker, whose articles have appeared in a variety of publications, including *Haaretz*, *Al-Monitor*, *Tikkun*, the *Forward*, *Jewish Currents*, & the *Palestine-Israel Journal*.





June 25, 2021

We are writing to be sure you are aware of some very recent and welcome changes in the leadership of the American Zionist Movement (AZM) and to update and clarify some points in Arno Rosenfeld's otherwise comprehensive article, [Is J Street Unwelcome in the American Zionist Movement](#), published in the *Forward* last week. The article outlines many of the obstacles that progressive Zionist groups faced during the recent protracted and needlessly complicated campaign for the admission of the J Street Education Fund (JSEF) as an Associate Member of the AZM.

After that article was published, on June 22 the American Zionist Movement (AZM) elected a new slate of officers, one that better reflects the American Zionist community in this country, spanning the religious and political spectrum. We are hopeful that this new leadership can heal some of the rifts that have been unnecessarily created over the last few years. In light of these changes, we'd like to emphasize some further elements of the backstory leading to this point.

For almost a year, Ameinu and Partners for Progressive Israel, leaders in the Hatikvah Slate during last year's World Zionist Congress elections that concluded in March 2020, worked closely with Mercaz and ARZA (affiliated with the Conservative and Reform movements, respectively), as well with several other organizations within the AZM, in building support for JSEF's candidacy. Despite the JSEF application's approval by the AZM's Leadership Cabinet, elements within the AZM dragged out the process with procedural maneuvers until it was certain that it had a majority of the votes to defeat JSEF's candidacy. Clearly seeing the writing on the wall, J Street withdrew its application before it could be voted down.

And as documented in the *Forward* article, Mort Klein and the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) continue to spew hatred for progressive Zionist organizations—against established members of the AZM—while blocking newer Zionist organizations like the JSEF from joining. At the AZM Biennial held on Tuesday, the ZOA and its allies ran candidates against two of the more liberal candidates on the Nominating Committee's diverse, consensus slate of officers in a failed attempt to tilt the leadership to the extreme right.

At a time when the Zionist movement should be expanding its efforts to engage with younger, progressive Jews, elements within the AZM, including the ZOA, have worked in the opposite direction. We in Ameinu and Partners for Progressive Israel are multi-generation Zionists who have worked for decades to create a stronger, more socially just and democratic Israel. We pledge to work with the incoming AZM administration to develop strategies to broaden Zionism's message to better reach critical new audiences.

Thank you for your support. ■

Ken Bob
President, Ameinu

Paul Scham
President, PPI

Mahapach-Taghir: Creating Change through Solidarity Between Marginalized Jewish and Arab Communities

By Adi Dagan



This essay is the latest in our series of “Kolot: Voices of Hope” profiles of Israelis and Palestinians furthering peace and equality. Find all of the profiles in the series [here](#).

Mahapach Taghir (“change” in, respectively, Hebrew and Arabic) is a grassroots Jewish-Arab organization for social change, founded in 1998. Our overall goal is to promote a shared society in Israel with equal opportunities for all, by:

- Building leadership in Arab and Jewish communities in the periphery—the areas outside Israel’s more urbanized central region—through empowerment and formal and informal education;
- Promoting solidarity and equality between social groups; and
- Facilitating participatory democracy, civil leadership, and more effective local governance.

The marginalized communities where we work face some of the greatest barriers to quality education and jobs due to discriminatory policies. They are also systematically excluded from decision-making

processes at the community, municipal, and national levels. Our organization has been working with Arab and Jewish communities for over 20 years. In that time, we have gained extensive experience—becoming part of the local communities, listening to their needs, and building leadership and Arab-Jewish partnership based on political values of democracy, equality, and human rights.

The “Learning Communities”

At the heart of Mahapach-Taghir’s work are the Learning Communities. The Learning Community is a holistic, inclusive, and intergenerational empowerment and educational model. It strives to provide equal educational opportunities to children and youth in disempowered marginalized neighborhoods, while encouraging the civic participation of local residents, parents, and college students. The Learning Communities facilitate the active engagement of

residents in marginalized communities, particularly women, and encourage them to organize themselves and generate solutions to common problems. In parallel, university students provide children and youth with pedagogical and social tutoring. Our informal education model fosters a strong democratic civil society through dialogue and solidarity among marginalized groups.

Since 1998, we have engaged some 3,000 college student volunteers, 500 women, and 6,000 children. We currently work in eight Arab and Jewish Learning Communities throughout Israel, located in: Yad Eliyahu (Tel Aviv), Acre, Maghar, Yafia, Nof Hagalil, Tamra, Talpiot (Jerusalem), and Baqa al-Gharbiyye.



National Women's Council

Our National Women's Council brings together Arab and Jewish women from disadvantaged communities in the social and geographic periphery of Israel to promote a vision of shared society and gender equality. Launched in 2019, the Council includes 22 representatives from seven disadvantaged communities in which Mahapach-Taghir (MT) works. The communities share common challenges and the Council members work together on solutions and actions against racism and discrimination. In addition, the Council serves as a platform for leadership development for Arab and Jewish local women leaders.

What Three National Women's Council Members Have to Say:

"It is important for me to be part of a joint group of Arab and Jewish women who are active together in a struggle to promote our rights."

"For many years I have been looking for a group to be active in and to meet Jewish and Arab women."

"My life is not easy and the Council is empowering and supportive."

"Second Opportunity"—Higher Education for Disadvantaged Women

This innovative model makes higher education accessible to women of disadvantaged communities, the goal being to facilitate their social and vocational mobility, as well as their ability to become leaders in their communities. Participants are women over the age of 35 who were unable to attend institutes of higher learning due to social, economic, and/or gender-related barriers. The first cohort of the program featured 30 Jewish women in Jerusalem in partnership with David Yellin College and the Yuvalim community center; 29 of the 30 were able to successfully graduate with a B.Ed. The second cohort is operating in Tamra, a predominantly Arab city, in partnership with the municipality and the Open University, with 22 women studying for their B.A. A group of 26 women from Baqa al-Gharbiyye has finished the first year of their B.A. and a new cohort of 29 women in Yafia has recently begun their studies. In 2018, Mahapach-Taghir was awarded the prestigious Genesis Prize for this program, which is supported by the Yad Hanadiv Foundation and Schusterman Family Foundation.

What "Second Opportunity" Participants Have to Say:

"First of all. I will be an example to my children, that at this late age I went back to study, to get an academic degree. It gives them an understanding of how important studies are, how without studies we will not have the standard of living that we want. My daughter is starting university next year because I helped her to go for it."

“I started the program when my children were very young, one was 2.5 years old and one was one year old. I gave birth to a third child while studying. It was very difficult. Unfortunately, my husband does nothing in the home; I have to do everything... He told me that it’s ok that I study, as long as it does not affect my housework. I clean and cook, I work in my business and I have high grades. When he realized that I am successful he said—‘well done, I am very proud of you’ and even defended me when my father-in-law said: ‘What do you need the degree for? You will go back to the kitchen anyhow.’”

Mahapach-Taghir and the Pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis has had a profound impact on our organization, on our member communities, and on the many projects we run and programs we offer. The main challenges we have faced during the global pandemic have been the neglect of Israel’s social and geographical periphery. This neglect has existed for years, but has been made only worse during the public health crisis, with increased gaps between the periphery and main cities in terms of education, infrastructure, public services, and more. Gender inequality has also risen—most prominently, an increase of incidents of violence against women, particularly in the Arab community.

Throughout the pandemic, MT has shifted into emergency and support mode, mediating between municipalities and residents; helping our members access deserved benefits during the economic fallout from the crisis; mobilizing our communities to address unmet needs; and even delivering basic goods whenever possible—services that were especially crucial for disadvantaged communities during this time. The year 2020 was a period in which the strength of our organization grew. The emergency situation allowed us to understand the meaningful impact of our activities in the different communities, which led us to expand those activities. The crisis brought to light the tremendous needs of vulnerable populations—economic, gender-based, educational—as well as MT’s ability to provide effective solutions, tailored to each community and also at the national level.

Mahapach-Taghir is run by two co-directors, one Jewish and one Arab. Lital Ayalon comes from the fields of social and non-formal education, dialogue group facilitation, and team training while leading processes for social change. She managed Jewish-Palestinian “face-to-face” programs at Givat Haviva, a nonprofit that promotes Jewish-Arab shared society. Lital holds an MA in Dispute Resolution.

Prior to becoming our co-director, Muna Arok was MT’s community coordinator in Yaft El-Nasrah and the co-coordinator of the National Women’s Council. She is currently studying human resource management. Muna was acknowledged at the Knesset as a “world-changing woman” and has represented MT in tours and conferences abroad.



The many successes of Mahapach-Taghir are also reflected in the personal growth stories of our participants. Here are two such stories:

Liron Azulay is the CEO of “The Women’s Courtyard,” an organization that protects and empowers at-risk girls and young women and gives them an opportunity for positive change. Liron was exposed to social action at an early age, starting with activism in an environmental organization and deepening when she volunteered as a student tutor for Mahapach-Taghir. That mentoring experience shaped much of who she is today. Beyond the special connection she formed with her two mentees, she realized the importance that social organizations have and the never-ending nature of their work. After volunteering, she transitioned into

community-building positions and a few years later returned to MT as co-CEO. Today, she is busy helping populations in need, addressing the many problems that have intensified due to the health crisis, specifically problems that affect women and girls.

Najach Iyad lives in a disadvantaged neighborhood in Yafia. Her daughters were participants in MT's Learning Center and, through the girls, Najach was persuaded to join the women's group. Thanks to the support and encouragement she received there, she completed her matriculation exams and graduated with honors. She started volunteering at the Learning Center with the children and in 2019 received a scholarship to serve as MT's day coordinator, a position she continues to hold, assisting our community coordinator in managing the Learning Center. Even her husband, who was not supportive at first, is now proud of her accomplishments. Her children have become outstanding students and she decided they would not degenerate into a life of poverty and drugs. She joined our "Second Opportunity" program and now participates in a group facilitation course in the village of Manda. She is a very active participant in the Feminist Council and the Alumni program and never stops telling course participants about her experience and about how MT changed her life.

Mahapach-Taghir During the Recent War

Mahapach-Taghir's communities found themselves in the midst of the political conflicts and violence that took place in May. MT staff, board members, and community members participated in demonstrations calling to end the war and for a shared and equal society.

Our various Learning Communities, in Acre, Talpiot (Jerusalem), Yafia, Maghar, and Nof Hagalil, continued to function—in person, or via Zoom when the situation felt too dangerous. Our coordinators stayed in touch with the children and their families; tutoring activities continued; and discussions were held in order to process fears and emphasize the need to maintain Arab-Jewish partnership and combat lies and incitement. Our coordinators also worked on the

broader community level to promote dialogue and help defuse local tensions.

Our National Women's Council members maintained their strong bonds by meeting on Zoom and holding a discussion in their WhatsApp group. They talked about the absence of women's voices in the public discourse during the war and how they wish to continue working together as a joint Arab-Jewish group in these challenging times.

While the recent events were distressing, the long-term conditions that contributed to them—including the Israeli occupation of Palestinians, the discrimination and racism against Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel, the presence of extreme rightwing activists in mixed cities such as Jaffa, Acre and Lod, the shortage in affordable housing and employment for Arabs in the mixed cities—came as no surprise. We will continue to engage with Jewish and Arab communities to strengthen them and bring them together to create a strong civil society working towards equality and peace. ■



To learn more about Mahapach-Taghir and their work, please visit their [website](#), follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#), or contact them at info@mahapach-taghir.org.

Adi Dagan is the Resource Development Coordinator for Mahapach-Taghir.



By Ben Sharif



As a young American Jew concerned with the ongoing crisis in Israel/Palestine, I've often wondered what the role of the Jewish diaspora should be in this struggle. I had been exposed as a teenager to the horrors of the Israeli occupation; the dehumanizing barbed wire-lined fences and screeching barred turnstiles of Qalandia checkpoint are etched in my memory. Ten plus years removed from that experience, the situation had only seemed to worsen after multiple futile Israeli elections and the Trump administration further enabling sinister policies of annexation and devastation. Partners for Progressive Israel's 2020 virtual symposium seemed to offer a unique and affordable opportunity to listen to, engage with, and learn from a diverse range of Israelis and Palestinians to better determine how hopeless the situation really was.

Gazans educated us about their economic, infrastructure and employment limitations, as well as their rising suicide rate. Palestinian citizens of Israel and Ethiopian Jews expressed the marginalization they face on a daily basis, reinforced by the notorious 'Nation State Law.' I'll never forget Issa Amro from Hebron explaining the difference between the dehumanizing military law he was subject to and the more lenient civil law governing Israeli settlers, all while experiencing recurring electricity outages during our Zoom session. And yet, in a session with Knesset members from

various parties, Uzi Dayan of Likud told us "You worry too much about the Palestinians."

The situation is clearly dire, and I'm grateful to have been exposed to realities not offered by most American media outlets. Progressive activists representing organizations doing essential work on the ground such as Breaking the Silence, Givat Haviva, and Gisha relayed the urgent need for foreign pressure to hold the Israeli government accountable. Our mission, representing the American Jewish diaspora, became abundantly clear: we must thoughtfully question many of the narratives we've taken for granted about the historical and seemingly cyclical tension between these two peoples, as well as our role as bystanders in the perpetuation of injustice. We must activate our communities by sharing what we have learned. Americans in particular must vehemently urge our legislators to prioritize policies furthering Palestinian civil rights and genuine sovereignty. It seems inherently un-Jewish not to. ■

Ben Sharif is a Brooklyn-based documentary filmmaker. An alum of the Film & Television Production program at NYU Tisch School of the Arts, he specializes in video editing.

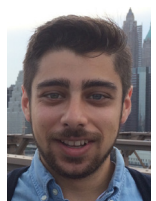




Photo Credit: Gili Getz



Meet young Israeli & Palestinian activists.

Dialogue with Knesset members.

Visit Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem & a Bedouin Camp.

Discover NGOs working for social justice, equality & peace.

Enjoy artists who are creative agents of peace.

Explore how Israelis & Palestinians envision the future.

We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must - at that moment - become the center of the universe.

— Elie Wiesel



The time is now.

In recent weeks, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has escalated devastatingly and ended in another ceasefire. Many of us are left with the same question: what can we do individually and collectively— Jews, Arabs, Israelis, Palestinians—now? How can we be supportive and empower collective justice?

What does the future look like in this land that both peoples—Israeli and Palestinian—call home?

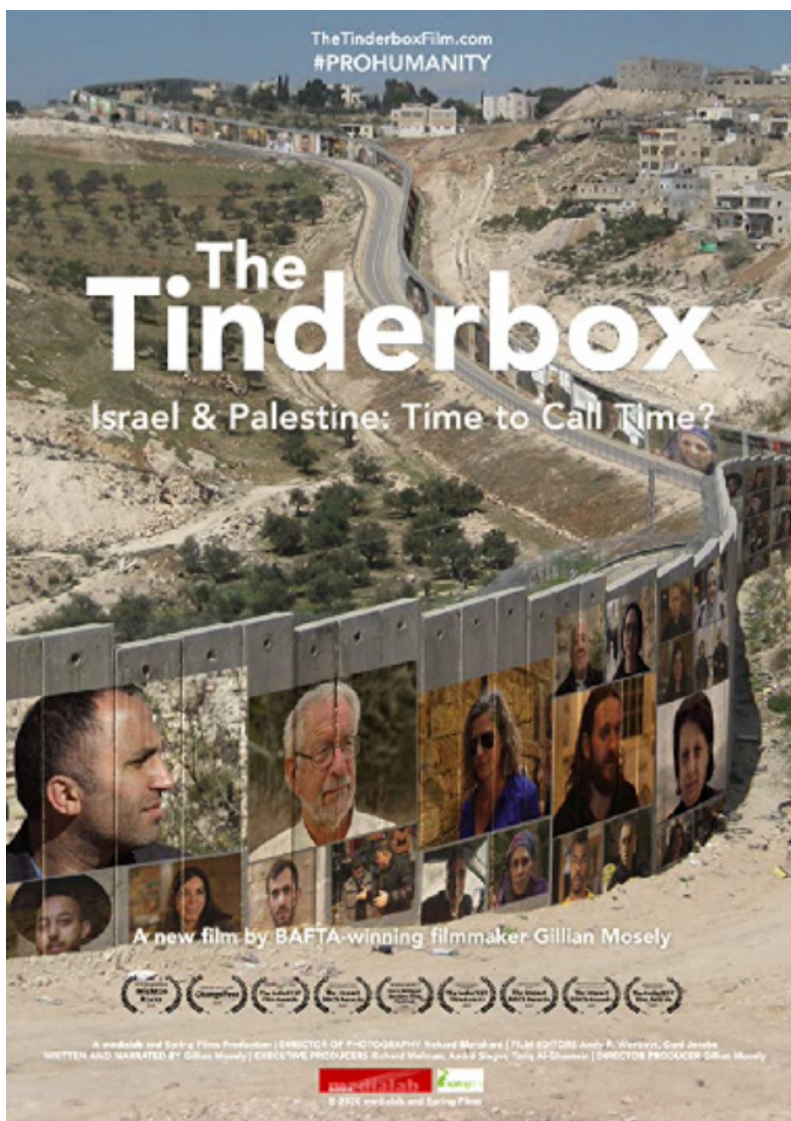
The time is now to learn, to ask questions, to challenge, to speak up, to heal. **The time is now to listen; to hear the story of the Other.**



Boy with Pail in Palestinian Village Susya, Credit: Gili Getz

[Click here to register & for more info!](#)

By Marcia G. Yerman



At stake is the idealistic version of the founding of the state of Israel.

Raised in a Zionist home, Mosley has famous rabbis and cantors throughout her family tree. Her ancestors were Sephardic Jews from Spain and Italy. Her Ashkenazi German antecedents arrived in England in the early 1800s, where they changed their name from Moses to Mosley. While in production, Mosley discovered that she had British relatives who played a role in the 20th century history of Israel/Palestine, including [Sir Herbert Samuel](#), the first British High Commissioner of Palestine.

After two years making the film, Mosley portrays it as teasing out facts from emotion. She quickly discovered that she is deep into “very murky territory.” As Mosley explains, the one true constant throughout her physical and emotional voyage is that everyone she interviews “believes they are right.”

Mosley’s exchanges include in-depth dialogues with Arab and Christian Palestinians, a settler, a progressive Israeli musician, and the widow of a Hamas member. There are also short “[on-the-street](#)” style conversations that reveal attitudes from various stakeholders, often ideologically opposed.

Early in her filming, Mosley realizes that she will encounter uncomfortable realities but doesn’t shy away from what unfolds. As she encounters painful situations that make her uneasy, she shares her distress with the audience. At one point, she states, “I want to believe Jews are better than this.”

The viewer follows Mosley through her evolving concerns. She steps back from her original premise of delving into “Who does the land belong to?” when she decides to reexamine the

With a shift in American and Israeli leadership, the armed hostilities between the Israeli government and Hamas in May, and street riots within mixed Israeli cities, Diaspora Jews are beginning to question the traditionally accepted narratives.

Into the fray the fray has stepped Gillian Mosley, a British-American and Jewish film director. Her documentary, “[The Tinderbox](#),” follows her journey of exploration and self-discovery as she digs into the historical antecedents of the Israel-Palestine conundrum—while interviewing those living through the on-the-ground daily reality.

premise with, “Is that the right question to ask?”

Using archival footage, Mosley underscores the role of the post-World War I colonial powers, specifically the impact of Britain’s actions. While anticipating carving up the lands of the Ottoman Empire, Germany’s ally in the war, Britain was promising Arabs their independence while simultaneously cultivating Jewish financiers. There was much dissension within the British ranks—specifically [Lord Curzon](#)’s opposition to the Balfour Declaration. Yet Britain’s self-motivated global interests in Palestine superseded all the mitigating factors. The result was a legacy of competing claims of sovereignty.

Two decades earlier, Theodore Herzl had recognized an opportunity to formulate his conception of a homeland for the Jews as the only viable option and response to centuries of European anti-Semitism. Ironically, as Mosley points out, many European countries saw “Zionism as a way to get rid of their Jews.”

Numerous historical figures appear in the storyline—some better known than others. [Khalil al-Sakakini](#), the Christian Palestinian who in 1917 called for the independence of his people, is introduced. The [British Palestine Mandate](#) was legally constituted 1922.

Of course, Jewish actors also play major roles. [Ze’ev Jabotinsky](#) calls for “sweeping out all traces of the Oriental soul.” Yet dating back to 1891, [Ahad Ha’am](#), a Jew from Kyiv in Ukraine originally named Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg, observed while in Palestine that the Jewish behavior toward the land inhabitants was “hostile.” He wrote that the Jewish settlers treated the Arabs with a “repressive tyranny.”

When listening to people referencing promises outlined in the Old Testament as if it were a “land deed,” Mosley asks rhetorically, “How can you use the Bible as a document of proof?” One American Orthodox woman asserts that her realizations come from the Torah and that it is “the will of God for Jews to live in the land of Israel.” For Yisrael Medad, originally from New York, his deeply held belief is an existential one—that “without the land of Israel, we are nothing.”

Mosley reflects, “Do we want peace enough to stop the

blame game? Is it possible to listen to the Other? Is there the will for all parties to take collective responsibility?”



There is anger and calls for reconciliation. A Christian Palestinian (a group now reduced to only two percent of the present-day Palestinian population), Muna Tannous, reminds us that, “Christians have been here for over 2,000 years.” She adds, “It’s land they’re after, not peace.” Her weariness is evident in her simple declaration, “I just want to live.”

[Kobi Farhi](#), a Jewish musician from Tel Aviv/Jaffa and founder of the well-known Israeli band Orphaned Land, reflects soberly, “What’s so holy if blood is spilled all over the place?”

[Issa Amro](#), a prominent Palestinian human rights activist based in Hebron, struggles to effect change through non-violence. He is the founder of Youth Against Settlements and was [found guilty](#) by an Israeli

military court for an assortment of charges earlier this year. Like many Palestinians, he articulates a palpable feeling of “no future” and a lack of hope.

Mosley includes an unvarnished look at the 1948 Nakba, the moves toward population transfer, ‘right of return’ questions, and the dismal living conditions for Palestinians in Gaza. She and her camera bear witness to the demeaning checkpoint culture and the colossal separation wall erected to keep people separate.

While she was recently in the United States, Mosley met with me for an interview.

“I’m speaking to the center ground,” she emphasized. “I made the film for millions of people who don’t understand. To understand is to increase the number of voices in the conversation. People will have to look again.”

Acknowledging that the response from some Jews was not positive, she told me, “I was screamed at for undermining the Jewish myth and told, ‘You’re not helping the cause.’” Some Palestinians said it was the film “they had been waiting for.” Others believed that their community wouldn’t watch it.

Mosley’s purpose is not to present a solution. Her mission is to show what has happened and continues happening in the land of Israel/Palestine. The Tinderbox website offers a robust set of verticals which presents [resources](#), [historical references](#), and tools for how to “[Achieve a Just and Lasting Peace in Israel/Palestine](#).” ■

The Partners for Progressive Israel-Palestine [Symposium 2021](#) will feature “The Tinderbox” as a pre-Symposium feature. All attendees who register prior to July 5 will receive a link to watch the film which will be available from Monday, July 5 to Saturday, July 10. There will be an interview/Q&A with the director, Gillian Mosley, on Thursday, July 8, at 12:30pm ET.

Marcia G. Yerman is a writer, artist, and activist based in New York City.



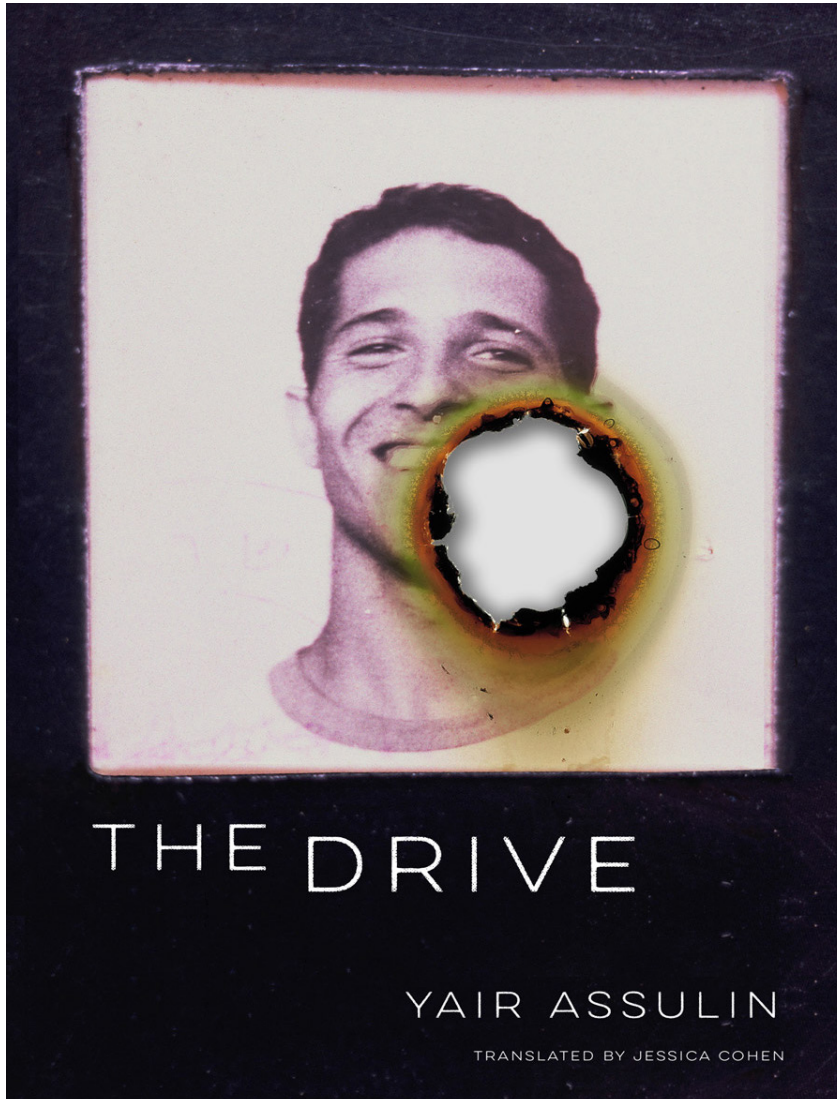
Click below to watch the trailer!



The Self as the Soul of the Nation: A Review of Yair Assulin's *The Drive*

BOOK REVIEW

By Julie Arden Ficks



Note: This article and novel include discussions of mental health issues including depression and suicide that may be upsetting for certain individuals.

Yair Assulin opens his evocative 2020 novel, *The Drive*, with two quotes: “In the army, they don’t teach you how to kill; they teach you how to get killed,” by Israeli filmmaker Yehuda Judd Ne’eman; and “It is my political right to be a subject which I must protect,” by French philosopher Roland

Barthes. Already infused into its pages is the dichotomy between the larger, societal mechanism (the army), and the individual (the subject). In *The Drive*, Assulin explores the relationship between the army and the subject, or the self, in a way that has rarely been seen before in Israeli literature.

“‘To be a subject.’ [Barthes]. This is in, a lot of ways, the deep essence of my novel,” Assulin stated at an interview organized by his American publisher, New Vessel Press, in 2020. First published in Hebrew in 2011, the novel tells the story of a young man who struggles immensely to fulfill his Israeli army service. It is written in first-person and consists of short, story-like chapters. It is set inside of a car, as the narrator’s father drives him to the Mental Health Officer (MHO) at Tel Hashomer Hospital. During the car ride, the narrator describes how he ends up pursuing a mental health exemption from army service—one of the most shameful paths one can go down in Israeli society.

He describes his experience in the army as being “suffocated,” and that when he began his service, he realized that he was committed to “three years of slow death” (Assulin 20). Whenever he expresses his difficulty being in the army to his family, friends and fellow soldiers, not one person is able to console him. This is because the army is a fact of life; so deeply ingrained in the fabric of Israeli society, it is something everyone either must go through, or has already gone through. If everyone goes through it and manages, how bad can it really be?

The narrator becomes depressed and frequently contemplates suicide. At one

point, he begs one of his friends to slam his hand in a car door in order to get longer time off.

This is not a novel of complex politics. It is an affective account of how being in the Israeli army impacts mental health. Some readers may be disappointed by the lack of detail and repetitive nature of the book, which are valid criticisms. However, the omission of certain details can be seen as purposeful. Instead of analyzing the workings of Israeli army and the roles of its soldiers more acutely, the novel explores how the mere fact of having to serve in the army—considered the most important service to the nation—emotionally influences the individual.

It is not to say that these themes are mutually exclusive. Perhaps if the novel delved any deeper into a political stance, it would alienate readers. Despite questioning the obligation to serve in the army and arguing that this path is not for everyone, the book received generally positive reviews from both the left and right in Israel, winning the Sapir and Israeli Ministry of Culture prizes.



The true breakthrough this novel created might be more difficult to recognize by an American audience, however. In an online interview with *The Drive's* editor at New Vessel Press, Israeli writer Rubi Namdar noted that the novel marks “the beginning of a new era in Israeli culture.” This is because although the narrator is Mizrahi and religious, the narrative is primarily concerned with his identity as an Israeli; about collective experience rather than individual.

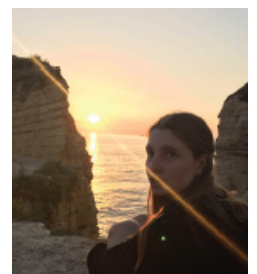
The narrator's experience also stands far from the typical narrative of the wartime hero and traditional masculinity. Discussing mental health issues, particularly depression

and suicide, remain taboo to acknowledge and talk about openly—with oneself and also with family members. This is doubly true given the fact that the narrator is a man. It becomes clear that in the IDF, individuals frequently attempt to use mental health issues as a way to evade army service. People who are actually suffering are oftentimes not taken seriously because of this.

The narrator's behavior makes both of his parents, his significant other, the army officials, and the reader wonder if he is being abused. His answer is no. This is perhaps the most surprising and illuminating aspect of the novel: one does not need to be in an extreme circumstance in order to reject army service—feeling that one does not belong is enough. Some readers may contend that this makes the narrator weak and self-centered, but to others, he is a hero.

“I don't really know how to explain what went wrong or how, but I just know that I can't tolerate the situation there. My soul can't tolerate it,” (Assulin 107) the narrator explains to the Mental Health Officer. After repeatedly telling those around him this and constantly being told that his concerns are unfounded, he is sure of this statement, echoing the experiences, fears and feelings of many in the army today and before him. ■

Julie Arden Ficks is the Program Coordinator at Partners for Progressive Israel. She holds a B.A. in Literature and an M.A. in English and will be pursuing a J.D. at the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University this fall.



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106 W 32ND ST, FL 2
New York, NY, 10001

Tel: (212) 242 4500 / Fax: (212) 242 5718

info@progressiveisrael.org
www.progressiveisrael.org