

Opinion Israel Is the Nation-state of the Israelis

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Arab lawmakers tear the nation-state bill in protest after it passes in the Knesset. Olivier Fitoussi

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As those protesting the nation-state law move on, it turns out that I don't belong here, either, primarily because of hidden issues that have not merited any examination or discussion. As I see it, Israel is the nation-state of the Israelis. It belongs to those who pay taxes, vote and get elected to office; those who live here, speak the language, are given their rights and meet their obligations. Just as France belongs to the French and Germany to the Germans, Israel belongs to all Israelis, and only to them.

It does not belong to the Jewish people. There is no regime, government or state that belongs to distant interested parties who are not citizens. Judaism, on the other hand — however one defines it — does belong solely to the Jews. One can be Israeli without being Jewish, and one can be Jewish without being Israeli, but one cannot be Israeli without being a citizen of the state. The state's pretension to represent the entire Jewish people is problematic. If Israel is the state of the Jewish people, then all its conflicts, domestic and foreign, automatically apply to all of the world's Jews.

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They are vulnerable to our enemies and have no protection from Israel's foolish actions, which often put them at risk. The Jewish people was "conquered" by a country that is not its country and it carries heavy obligations without any concrete political rights. In fact, official Israel rejects the majority of this Jewish people, while it, in its diasporas, is supposed to support Israel and shut up — just like the Palestinians.

This is based on a fiction. The shallowness of the legislators has exposed the new right-wing conceit of the nation, a fusion of five components: sovereignty, language, religion, power and territory. But from the biblical Abraham to Likud MK Avi Dichter, we have never been defined that way. Sometimes we were religious but did not hold the whole territory, or we had sovereignty but no power, or authority but not over the whole Promised Land, and we spoke a common language that wasn't Hebrew.

Sorry, the new law does not define me. I do not belong to the nation they've invented, and I refuse to belong. And since this nation-state is not mine, I must request a change in how I'm registered in the Population Registry —from an artificial "Jewish," to "Israeli," as it should be.

I am a member of the Jewish people, but my Jewishness has no genetic or national significance that obligates me. My Judaism has always been a common and shared value system, available to all — the opposite of the ultranationalism now defined in law. It is a cultural civilization of ideas and values that does not need power, territory or coercion to survive. The current version of populist ultranationalism is not Judaism, if only because of the social-nationalist strings on which it plays (interpret as you like).

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If I were in politics now, I would my best to get the MKs of Meretz and the Joint List to immediately abandon the Knesset. Zandberg and Ayman Odeh — rise up and do something! Make a bold move and leave the parliament in the hands of the social-nationalists. Let them defend "the only democracy in the Middle East" by themselves. Let's see them do it.

Personally, I am looking for a wise jurist who will help us in the struggle over the meaning of belonging to Israel; someone who will represent me and others like

me and demand that my identity registration as it appears in the state's hidden archives be changed, or to totally give up on this new nationality, which poses a fundamental contradiction to our Jewish and Israeli identities. Will anyone pick up the gauntlet?



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