



Tikva Honig-Parnass, False Prophets of Peace. Liberal Zionism and the Struggle for Palestine, Haymarket Books, Chicago, Ill. 2011, 262 pp., \$ 20.

This book explores the Israeli Zionist Left's discourse regarding the „Jewish and democratic“ State of Israel and all of its ramifications. Such undertaking was overdue because it exposes Zionist left-wing intellectuals as hypocrites. It was not the Israeli right that did the „dirty“ work of legitimatizing colonization, oppression, expulsion, discrimination and dispossession of the original owners of the land, the Palestinians, but left-wing „liberal“ intellectuals, especially those of the Zionist Labor movement. They provided not only the political, legal and military establishment with ideological legitimacy but also with a „scientific“ one. Through their intellectual twists and turns, they laid the foundations for governmental policies that „have made possible Zionist colonialism in the Apartheid settler state of Israel“ (193), writes Tikva Honig-Parnass in her unique book.

The author was born into the Jewish community of pre-state Palestine, fought in the first Israeli-Arab war in 1948, and served as the secretary of the then-radical Left-Zionist party Mapam (the United Workers Party) in the Knesset from 1951 to 1954. In 1960 she broke definitely with Zionism and joined the ranks of supporters of the Israeli Socialist Organization “Matzpen”. Since then she has played an active role in the movement against the 1967 occupation of Palestinian land as well as in the struggle for Palestinian national rights, especially for the rights of Palestinian Israelis who live since 1948 as second-class citizens in Israel proper.

As important as this book may be for the unmasking of Zionist-left hypocrisy, her article “Reflections of a Daughter of the ‘48 Generation” in “News from within” of January 1998 is nearly as important to understand Honig-Parnass' political worldview and her total rejection of Zionist ideology. As a politically conscious human being, she found the gap between the purported universalist Zionist rhetoric and its exclusivist parochial real nature unbearable. The humanistic rhetoric of leftist Zionists was limited to those “like us”, and that the other side of the coin was alienation from and dehumanization of all who were “other” – East European Jews, Mizrahim, and above all – Arab Palestinians, writes the author.

Contributing to Ms. Honig-Parnass' “conversion” was her realization how the “48 generation” had been “programmed to reject with disgust the concept of human rights as an absolute value and to accept its subjection to the *collective aim*, namely the aims of Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state.” The Zionist-racist stereotypes of “Arabs” that prevail till this day were already common, according to the author, when the Zionist movement initiated its colonial enterprise. “We sow, and they come and uproot; we plant and they come and burn; we build and they destroy. We never asked the obvious question: But why?”

According to the author, the premises of Zionist ideology can never generate empathy for the suffering of the victims of occupation and oppression. Consequently, “the dehumanization of the Palestinian *enemy* will certainly continue, and so too will the brutalization and dehumanization of the oppressors themselves, who will continue to ‘shoot and to weep’ or weep and even light candles and return to religion.” After the author left the “Alternative Information Center” she edited together with Toufic Haddad the critical newsletter “Between the Lines”. In 2007, an excellent book they wrote - “Between the Lines. Readings on Israel, the Palestinians, and the U. S. ‘War on Terror’” - was released by Haymarket Publishers.

“False Prophets of Peace” unearths the truth and the central role played by the Israeli left in laying the foundation of the colonial settler project and its campaign of dispossession. U. S. and European liberal opinion

still clings to a myth of “progressive” Israeli Zionist intellectuals. The author concentrates on the discourse of these elite intellectuals and academic circles that have nourished the myth of the Zionist Left. She analyses their support for an exclusivist Jewish state that acts as the central Zionist premise guiding Israel’s official ideology, and their attempts to reconcile that with the definition of Israel as a democracy. The book also focuses on the persistent and dominant role of the Zionist labor movement throughout the state’s institutions and political culture. Special attention is paid to the role of the Zionist left “in granting legitimacy to Israel’s version of Apartheid and ‘close to Fascist’ political culture could not have been played to right-wing intellectuals and politicians.” (17) The latter never claimed to base their support for the Jewish identity of the state on universal human rights.

Honig-Parnass asserts that it has become commonplace among Zionist Left scholars and activists to compare the forms of discrimination in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) to South Africa’s Apartheid system. The parallels seem undeniable. Members of the Zionist Left in Israel, however, “refrain from acknowledging the Apartheid nature within the Green Line”, (5) whereas, for example, Saree Makdisi argues that “almost every law of South African Apartheid has its equivalent in Israel today”.

In nine chapters the author challenges every premise of the Zionist Left concerning its defense of Israel as a “Jewish and democratic” state and the justifications given for treating Israeli Palestinians as second-class citizens. The dividing line between the non-Zionist critical Israeli Left and the Zionist Left are represented by the historical events of 1948 and 1967. The representatives of the non-Zionist Israeli Left, which is a tiny minority, regard the injustices committed in 1948 as the starting point of the conflict between Jews and Arabs (“Israel was born in sin”), whereas the Zionist Left sees the cause of the conflict in the June-war of 1967 and the ensuing occupation. Zionist Leftists dismiss also the notion of Israel as a “colonial settler state” and its maintenance as a Western hegemonic colonial project. (24) Have not the Zionist “forefathers” described their project as “colonization” (hityashvut)? According to Honig-Parnass, the Zionist Left wants to erase the memory of the Nakba, the catastrophe that befell the people of the Land of Palestine, the Palestinians. (21) The Nakba is not only the turning point in the modern history of Palestine but also its focal point to the solution of the conflict. The focus on the 1967 occupation as the main cause of the conflict “denies the structural discrimination against Palestinian citizens, and their history and current oppression are excluded from the political discourse and activity of all wings of the Israeli ‘peace camp’”. The intellectual hairsplitting culminates in the “differentiation made by the Zionist Left between the 1967 occupation and the Zionist creation of the Jewish state not only excuses the absence of a moral condemnation against the oppression of Palestinian citizens, but it is also viewed as compatible with the struggle for ‘peace’”.

The Zionist Left does everything it can to prove to Western liberals that Israel as a “Jewish state” can be both “Jewish” and “democratic”. For any Western democrat this appears like trying to square the circle but apparently not for Zionists. According to the author, the Zionist Left is haunted by a “demographic ghost”. (42) This alleged threat seems to numb the minds of eminent intellectuals such as Menachem Brinker of the Hebrew University, who “fails to see the conflict between his commitment to the Jewish state and his liberal values”. (43) The Zionist Left sticks to “the rule of the majority” that discloses its support of the “Law of return”, which in its design maintains this majority, writes the author. According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, talking about a “Jewish majority” is already a political delusion: right now, 11.4 million people live under Israeli domination. Of these, 5.6 million are Jewish, while 5.8 million are not Jewish. Even Ruth Gavison, law professor at Hebrew University and former president of the Israeli Association of Civil Rights (ACRI), supports policies to preserve a Jewish majority, a view that sounds bizarre to Western audiences: “Israel has the right to control Palestinian natural growth (...) Control of birth rates is not racism.” (41) Respected scholars

like Benny Morris are taken in by the so-called demographic threat, as shown in his interview with Ari Shavit in the daily "Haaretz". The author quoted him saying: "The Israeli Arabs are a time bomb. Their slide into complete Palestinization has made them an emissary of the enemy that is among us. They are a potential fifth column. In both demographic and security terms they are liable to undermine the state. So that if Israel finds itself in a situation of existential threat, as in 1948, it may be forced to do it (to expel L. W.)." (50)

For the Zionist Left the Jewish identity of the State of Israel is considered an immutable fact, to which Palestinians must resign themselves. These intellectuals leave no doubt that the Jewish state has been created and sustained by Israel's military might. Tikva Honig-Parnass holds the former Palestinian Knesset Member Azmi Bishara and the National Democratic Assembly (NDA) in high esteem because they put forward the demand for a "state for all its citizens" instead of the "Jewish and democratic" state.

For Western liberal intellectuals, pundits and their media multipliers, Israel is perceived as an open, liberal Western outpost to a "barbaric" environment, echoing how Theodor Herzl, the founding-father of Zionism used to present his Zionist enterprise to Western imperialist politicians. Not so much has changed since then: Israel is presented as "a villa in the jungle" (Ehud Barak). In the chapter "A Theocratic Jewish State" Honig-Parnass illustrates how Jewish religion and religious rhetoric has been and continues to be used to justify the Jewish state with the catchphrase "return to Zion" as a pretext for colonization. The secular Zionist Left had no qualms in defaming the Jewish orthodox instead of the real danger to the existence of the State of Israel, the members of the "National Religious Party" (Mafdal) and their yeshivas in which the students complete a dual training as regular soldiers and as indoctrinated religious fanatic Zionists. (79-88) In the "Kinneret Covenant", published on January 11, 2002, the Zionist Left became reconciled with the fanatical religious right. Their representatives were among others the fanatical General Efraim Eitam from Mafdal and the geographer Arnon Sofer of Haifa University who warned of "the demographic danger of Arabs in Israel". (84) Among representatives from the Zionist Left in this meeting were the well-known Professor Shlomo Avineri and the iconic Zionist Yuli Tamir. Eitam summarized this bizarre gathering by saying that in our hearts we felt "that we are all brothers" ("Effi" Eitam). This "feeling of brotherhood with the extreme right Right has been affirmed through the Labor Party's participation in the right-wing governments." (87)

Only very few Israeli intellectuals see Israel as a "colonial settler state" and "the Zionist movement as an ongoing colonial project" (89), like the author does. The anti-Zionist socialist organization Matzpen was one of few exceptions. This group was founded in 1962 by members of the Israeli Communist Party (MAKI) such as: Moshé Machover, Akiva Orr, Oded Pilavsky, and Yrmiyahu Kaplan. They were joined by some Palestinian Israelis who had left or had been expelled from MAKI, such as Jabra Nicola – a Palestinian Marxist. This group developed a consistent anti-Zionist approach and rejected Zionism as a settler colonial project. For Matzpen, "the expulsion of the Palestinians was Zionism's main goal from the outset". (114) They regarded the Zionist assertion of the "Jewish and democratic" state as contradictory with democracy. The author shares Bishara's classification of Israel as an "ethnic democracy" (96). Other Israelis like Oren Yiftachel call the State of Israel an "ethnocracy" rather than a "democracy". The author shows how Israel's legal system is saturated with discriminatory laws against the Arab and non-Jewish population. The discrimination against the Mizrahim (Jews from Arab countries) in Israel proper occurs on a subtler level.

The author mentions specifically the Zionist Left understanding of "peace". The Zionist Left was thrilled by the so-called Oslo Peace Process, although even outside observers realized that this kind of "peace process" would not lead to peace but rather to collaboration of the colonized elite with the colonizer. The Israeli-German human rights lawyer Felicia Langer and myself were the sole persons in Germany who expressed such

criticism immediately after the signing of the Oslo-accords in September 1993 when the rest of the world applauded this fraud. The Oslo accords did blur the minds of the Zionist Left towards Israel's continued colonization of the West Bank, and the failed "peace" negotiations at Camp David in July 2000 was the casket nail of the so-called Zionist Left peace movement. The collapse of the Zionist peace movement was best reflected by then Prime Minister Ehud Barak's phrase: "there is no partner for peace." (171) If the Zionist Left would have been on the ball it should have recognized that not PLO chairman Yasser Arafat was the "peace enemy" but Barak and his companion U. S. President Bill Clinton. Honig-Parnass shows in chapter "The Zionist Left and 'Peace'" how hypocritical the Zionist Left was in the question of peace.

This book compiles for the first time an overall criticism of the worldview of the Zionist Left in Israel, which is perceived in the West "as one of us". Tikva Honig-Parnass has accomplished a feat by presenting to the outside world an inner Israeli debate on the "Jewish and democratic" setup of the State of Israel and its discrimination of its own non-Jewish inhabitants. Western democrats would certainly be outraged to discover the undemocratic worldview of the Israeli Zionist Left. This outstanding book will, hopefully, find many readers. Intellectually, the book is a real treat.

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