

## Call Us When You Have Changed your Thinking

[זויכראב שופיח](#)

[תובתכ תשיכר](#)

Rabinowitz Danny

[עדימ זויכראה לע](#)

Haaretz Op-Ed, October 22 2001

[זובשח בצמ](#)

A year has passed since the tragic events in which Arab citizens of Israel were shot dead by members of the Israel police force. It will be a long time before the wounds that were opened in those incidents will heal.

[המסיס יוניש](#)

Many of those who belong to the Jewish mainstream in Israel still believe it is their role to re-educate the Arab community, and this re-education process must also be accompanied by the elements of punishment. On the other hand, many Arabs have a deep and dangerous sense of despair.

[תוריש](#)

[תובוגת](#)

The prospect of egalitarian citizenship, a hope to which the members of an entire generation in the Arab community dedicated a good part of their lives, collapsed in the thunder of the shots fired by the police officers. The vision of Jewish-Arab brotherhood was swallowed up by the mourning chants of the bereaved mothers and by the cries for revenge at the funerals and at the memorial ceremonies.

[המסיס יתחכש](#)

The relative quiet of the Arab community in Israel this past year is misleading. During the first few months following those tragic events, it was the quiet of shock and fear. These feelings have dissipated somewhat; however, beneath the surface surges the mighty current of a natural, self-evident, identification with the Palestinian people and with its national struggle.

The generation that set the tone in the events of October 2000, the young men and women in their early 20s, are not subservient like their grandparents who lived through the events of 1948, nor are they naive like their parents who stood their ground politically on Land Day in 1976. These young Arab women and men in Israel circa 2001 are very familiar with Israeli culture and have a much better knowledge of that culture than did their parents or grandparents.

However, these young people, at the same time, display an unprecedented sense of determination in their desire to disconnect themselves from the State of Israel in its present format. They have no patience for the declarations of politicians about equality.

"Call us when you have changed your thinking," they tauntingly address the Jewish majority in Israel and then go back to the business of advancing themselves and their communities.

The struggle over the status of the Arab citizens of Israel is not a zero-sum game, and it is not being conducted between only two groups. It is part of a wider struggle, which is unfolding in the context of a variegated tribal reality. A number of subgroups are competing for the right to define the state and its values and are indirectly competing for the right to a share in the state's resources - land, capital, political strength, and identity.

If the hegemonic group tries to seize control of everything, there will never be peace in this land. Peace will come only if the group that has emerged victorious in the internal struggle wisely does what the Americans, who have emerged victorious in the global struggle for control of economic and cultural resources, never thought of doing - namely, to triumph without leaving the losers alone in the dark to suffer starvation and to feel deceived and bitter.

The dilemma facing the Jewish majority in Israel has come into sharper focus in the wake of the recent events of last October. On the one hand, there is the approach that advocates a campaign of punishment and which demands not only that the domination by the Jewish majority of the Arab minority continue but that it be intensified by means of the negation of civil rights and by means of other "sticks" - with a small piece of carrot thrown in from time to time.

This approach, which was supported by many members of the Jewish public in Israel until the October riots, has developed thick, tangled roots in the wake of those events. One of the reasons why this approach is enticing and seductive is the phenomenal manner in which the Israeli public discourse has managed to conceal the price tag in the folds of the discourse's garment - relinquishing of the principles of natural equality and genuine democracy, a dangerous slide toward an apartheid-style "democracy of the master race," and living on borrowed time until the violent and inevitable uprising of the victims of this regime.

On the one hand, there is a need for presenting an approach that assigns supreme importance to the principle of equal citizenship. This approach is diametrically opposed to the principle that the right to participate in the life of the state and to enjoy the resources of the state depends on the individual's ethno-national identity. This principle, however, is a complete distortion of the present

situation. The real danger lies in Israel's obstinate adherence to its ethno-national self-definition as a "Jewish state." This spirit is carrying Israeli society and the state as a whole toward a slippery slope at the bottom of which there is an intensification of ethnic oppression - a violent, dark syndrome that has already been termed the "dark side of democracy."

The Arab citizens of Israel have a special role to play in the multi-group struggle over the future of the state. Their success will depend, of course, on the ability of the Jewish majority to harness the emotional resources needed to turn its ethno-territorial project into a comprehensive liberal democracy.

Such a dramatic about-face will signal the choice of a path that can enable this strife-ridden state to survive and to prosper despite its powerful internal tensions. If the Arabs fail in this mission and if the illusion of the seemingly unified Jewish ethnic project remains dominant for another generation or two, there is the distinct possibility that a much more extensive social and political collapse could take place here. The responsibility for that failure would be shared by everyone.