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Opinion |

Israelis Have Forgotten About the Occupation. Again

We don't understand how, after the Oct 7 massacre, Israel is an isolated leper state. We don't understand because we've forgotten the occupation. Don't forget, though, that we, who are liberal and enlightened, were partners in this act of forgetting



A protester burns tyres in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank ahead of an expected release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli hostages held by Hamas, at the end of November. Credit: Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP

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The world ties the events of October 7 to the long conflict with the Palestinians. Yesterday it was shocked by the horror of Kibbutz Be'eri, today by the destruction of Gaza and tomorrow it will be shocked by something else.

That drives us crazy. We see the lack of attention as disrespect for those who were [murdered and abducted](#). We demand recognition of the uniqueness of each particular day. The opinion of the government and the pundits is that October 7 was an event with nothing preceding or following it. No other voice was heard.

There was no voice pointing to the connection between the exploding buses of 2012 and the abducted infants of 2023, or between the intifada and the [Gaza border communities](#). We don't want to see October 7 as a chapter in a story that began a century ago. We consider it a unique, one-time event, like the Holocaust.

The gap between the way [the world perceives the events](#) of that Shabbat and the way we perceive them has created tremendous rage, reflecting a lack of understanding.

We don't understand how after the massacre, of all times, we're more isolated than ever before, a leper state whose artists are boycotted and whose airport is deserted.

We don't understand because we've forgotten the occupation. We don't understand that the demonstrations abroad are against us, too. We complain: Now you remember? Suddenly, the "occupation" has once again been pushed into a place where we want to forget it. Don't forget, though, that we, who are liberal and enlightened, were partners to this act of forgetting.

We're cut off from the world, clothed in righteousness, withdrawing into ourselves and not seeing what the world sees. Why Gaza of all places? Where are the pictures from Be'eri?

Attention to suffering in general and to the suffering of Gazan children in particular is seen here as downplaying the events of that Shabbat. Empathy for the suffering of another is considered treason. That's nothing new: We've never liked to share our suffering with others. We demand exclusivity.

The pundits are going with the official version: from the unrealistic "military maneuver" through "this isn't the time" to investigate the disgrace of that Shabbat, and up to the opinion shared by everyone that there are [no "innocent bystanders."](#)

Nobody is a bystander, not even 3-year-olds. This lets a pilot take down entire buildings along with their guilty residents without the slightest pangs of conscience.

On the question of why we have lost the world's empathy, television is toeing the official line: the answer is [antisemitism](#). How removed this answer is from the distress of the Jews who are now being forced to choose between their country and their religion.

They don't discuss that on TV. There, they flee to the bittersweet realms of "human-interest stories." Lazy reporters demand that shocked survivors provide a quick answer to "What did you feel?" They overuse the term "moving" that is always accompanied by a soulful harp or piano.

The TV studios have taken upon themselves (without being asked) to assume responsibility for the national mood, sometimes at the expense of information.

The story of the fallen soldiers is moving, but [they don't inform us](#) of the total number. Does anyone know how many soldiers have fallen in Gaza so far? Nor do they report on the number of Palestinian civilians killed in Gaza, so we'll be happy about the demolitions and won't be sad about the victims.

Talking heads declare, without naming sources, that "the public wants the war to continue." They also want "to [eliminate Hamas](#)," but there isn't even one brave person who will add, "even at the expense of the hostages' lives."

"Freeing the hostages" has become lip service. The desire to "destroy" Hamas is stronger. Because of the hostages, the "victory," which would atone for the disgrace of the Black Saturday, in the opinion of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the army commanders, is being delayed.

The requisite price for their release would necessarily change the picture of the victory. We'll be forced to go from the glorious "destruction" down to the ordinary buffer zone, the separation barrier, the Bar-Lev Line, the Maginot Line. In other words, in the opinion of former Mossad head Tamir Pardo, we'd have to go back to the line of October 6.

Defeat has consequences. Unrestrained battlefield norms will infiltrate our daily routine. People will shoot one another in an argument over a parking place. Elor Azaria will explain in TV studios the dilemma of firing at a Jew who raises his hands in surrender.

Yet, there's also room for optimism. We can hope that recognition that "victory" is nothing more than a time-out will force us to find another path and a leadership with the courage to follow it. The large prewar protest movement and the magnificent spirit of volunteering during it prove that there are people who still believe there is a right path and there's someone who will lead us along it.