

WEEKEND

# Liberals are looking the wrong way

Gender segregation is a litmus test for democracy in Israel, much like abortion rights in the United States, says Yofi Tirosh, a scholar of feminist jurisprudence

Or Kashti

“The Israeli public that’s committed to democracy and fighting for it is today repeating – when it comes to the issue of women – the same mistake we made less than 10 years ago with the right-wing conservative think tank Kohelet Policy Forum,” says Yofi Tirosh, a jurist and anti-gender segregation activist.

“At the time,” she continues, “I kept hearing that the fears of Kohelet were overblown, that this was just a fringe group that would never gain real power and influence, and that in the name of diversity of opinion they should even be invited to panel discussions. Today we know that this was suicidal normalization. We are now witnessing the same ‘paradox of tolerance’ regarding gender segregation: a free society giving a platform to people intent on eradicating its core values.”

It is precisely the liberal camp’s seeming tolerance of gender segregation in the public domain, and its role in helping to institutionalize it, that has provoked her activism over the years. Today, notes the associate professor at Tel Aviv University Faculty of Law and senior research fellow at Jerusalem’s Hartman Institute, the challenge is not just to confront right-wing religious figures like Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich (Religious Zionism) or MK Aryeh Deri (Shas), but to persuade broad segments of the democratic, liberal public who nonetheless go along with such segregation, to advance different principles and goals.

Tirosh: “Anyone who thinks it’s possible to live with ‘separate but equal,’ or that gender segregation will remain limited to ultra-Orthodox strongholds such as Modi’in Ilit and Bnei Brak, is mistaken. Such segregation and the thinking behind it will end up shaping families, educational settings, commercial and leisure venues – many of the fundamental institutions of life in Israel.

“If until now we mainly heard that the weakening of the judiciary was meant to rescue Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from his corruption trial, secure draft exemptions for the Haredim, or enable annexation of the territories, it is now clear – as my colleagues and I have argued for the past three years – that an equally central goal is the strengthening and expansion of religious law in Israel. This includes reinforcing patriarchal family structures; transferring more powers, positions and state benefits to rabbis; and protecting some very particular expressions of Judaism in the public sphere.

“Women will be the first to feel the consequences once the law demands that they move aside, move back, move out, cover themselves. Alongside women, other minorities will also be harmed. In fact, this may be the goal that’s most likely to be realized because even liberals believe it’s possible to live with a little segregation, as though it is simply an expression of cultural tolerance. Gender segregation is the litmus test for the state of democracy in Israel.”

Just recently, the Knesset passed legislation expanding the authority of the rabbinical courts, empowering them to adjudicate in matters concerning child support. The Ministerial Committee for Legislation also approved a bill (officially titled the Realization of Jewish Identity in the Public Space) aimed at bolstering conservative forms of Jewish religious practice in the public sphere. Among its provisions: barring interference with putting on tefillin (phylacteries) or holding prayers in public areas, and requiring candidates for judgeships to be examined on their knowledge of Jewish law.

Additional moves are in the pipeline. Legislation expanding gender-segregated academic programs for Haredi and Hardalim (the nationalist ultra-Orthodox) communities is pending the two last votes in the Knesset. An amendment to the law prohibiting discrimination in products and services – which, if passed, would allow businesses to refuse services that conflict with their religious beliefs – is being held until the government secures control over the High Court of Justice, ensuring the amendment cannot be struck down. All of this is occurring

openly and in full view.

“A critical stage in the slide toward despotism is the crushing of all forms of civil organization,” Tirosh says. “What Hungary, India, the United States and Israel share is the assault on professional associations and NGOs, on media freedom, on academic freedom and on women’s rights. Authoritarian leaders prefer people who do not join forces with one another. They don’t want free public discourse, free opinions or a free press. They prioritize clear boundaries, supervision and hierarchy. This is true at the national level, and also within the family and in the roles assigned to the sexes.”

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Tirosh’s book “Separate and Unequal: Gender Segregation in Israel” (Berl Katznelson Center; in Hebrew), published earlier this year, was written during the first year of the government’s judicial overhaul and originally slated for release in November 2023; its publication was delayed by two years because of the war in the Gaza Strip. The imprint of the coup is evident throughout the book; its last chapter draws a connection between the institutionalization of gender segregation and the attempt to uproot democracy in the country and in general, the author describes how advocates of segregation of the sexes in public have been deceiving the liberal community, using its own sort of rhetoric to promote an unequal society.

‘Every soldier, Haredi too, must agree to the presence of women in his field of vision and proximity. If he does not understand that there are women everywhere in society, let him bear the consequences.’

Tirosh also documents there the experience she has accumulated during 15 years as a jurist and public activist, mapping and seeking to curb the expansion of gender segregation. Among those working alongside her are members of women’s organizations and former Justice Ministry officials who spearheaded moves to achieve gender equality. Their targets include Council for Higher Education programs based on segregated academic tracks; Israel Defense Forces directives requiring female soldiers to remain out of sight of Haredi soldiers, and Hardali efforts to restrict women’s service and LGBTQ rights in the IDF; “modesty signs” in Beit Shemesh; segregation of men and women in nature reserves and cemeteries; the vandalism of women’s images on billboards and the blurring of their photographs in Haredi newspapers; bus drivers refusing to allow “immodestly dressed” women to board; separate courses for men and women in the civil service and in state-supported programs like driving-refresher classes; publicly funded gender-segregated leisure activities, including for

toddlers; and, specifically, the sort of segregated prayer service the Rosh Yehudi organization attempted to hold in Tel Aviv’s Dizengoff Square in September 2023.

“Frequently it is state institutions themselves that fuel extremism and create new religious standards,” Tirosh notes. “Why do the health maintenance organizations censor photographs of women in their brochures about gynecological services, and why does the Government Advertising Agency erase women from advertisements for recruiting bus drivers? Why does the IDF promise a Haredi soldier that he will not see a single woman during his military service, when even in Mea She’arim he sees women in the street or in a drugstore? The state is cultivating a new Haredi and Hardali expectation, which then spreads from the army and academia to workplaces and shopping malls.”

A few months ago, Tirosh posted on X a photograph of a sign at the entrance to a base of the army’s ultra-Orthodox Hasmonean Brigade. It read: “Dear gate guard, this base is a gender-oriented base. Entry to men only. Any departure from this rule requires approval.” In added that “gender” is a word that goes down smoothly, for some reason. Try replacing it with parallel terms: This is a racist base, an ethnic base. But when it comes to excluding women, the mechanisms of justification do not fall silent.” The post sparked a furor and was widely shared among hundreds of thousands of followers of Haredi and right-wing Haredi news networks.

You are warning about a slippery slope, but warnings like that often sound feeble.

“We are no longer on a slippery slope. We are hurtling downward on a roller coaster, right at the edge of the abyss. Segregated academic tracks were established in 2012 and presented as temporary, intended to remain only until a sufficient number of Haredim entered academia. Very quickly they became permanent, a cultural prerogative that ignores even the partial limitations imposed by the High Court of Justice.

“Discrimination against female lecturers continues, course content is censored and now certain programs want to extend gender segregation to advanced degrees as well. The assumptions that a little segregation leads to integration or that a little consideration never harmed anyone are collapsing before our eyes.”

The feminist legal scholar insists on stretching the line precisely where others dismiss certain phenomena as “trivialities,” as extreme and unrepresentative anecdotes. She argues that the line extends far beyond separating sexes in academia, the army or professional training frameworks. It includes segregating boys and girls as early as age 3 at cultural events subsidized by the Jerusalem Municipality and other cities; women being asked to change seats on trains or planes to distance themselves from men; prohibitions against women eulogizing loved ones or singing at funerals; and female journalists being banned from covering visits by foreign dignitaries to the Western Wall. Earlier this month, when only men were invited to a press conference in India during the visit of Afghanistan’s foreign minister, all the journalists, men and women alike, protested. No such protest occurred in



Prof. Yofi Tirosh. “Everywhere in the world, tyrannical rulers are waging assaults on women to entrench their power. If in the U.S. the battleground is abortions and trans rights, in Israel it’s gender segregation.”

Olivier Fitoussi

Israel.

Every adoption of gender segregation has a ripple effect, Tirosh notes. “If religious soldiers have the right to leave a cultural event when a woman sings on stage, inviting female singers to perform in the IDF becomes a headache. So they simply don’t appear. The same dynamic occurs in workers’ committees. Why, as reported a few weeks ago, did El Al ask the singer Pe’er Tasi to appear without his female backup singers – and why did he agree? And why did the Teachers Union subsidize Hanukkah shows with only male performers?”

“It’s similar to the boycott of [Israel by] international academic bodies: No one wants to get in trouble, so they take a roundabout route. In academia it’s a ‘gray’ boycott, and here it’s gray exclusion. In the past organizers of events apologized for cases of this kind, they were ashamed of them. Today extremists insist that such arrangements are within their right, that this is true equality. And from the side supposedly committed to equality we’re getting more normalization and tolerance.”

What’s wrong with separating men from women if women get the same thing as men – only separately?

“The easy answer is that in practice there can hardly be any segregation under equal conditions. Women will always be sent to the back of the bus and to the last rows of the concert hall; they will be tracked into professions that generate less income and will receive fewer scholarships. I don’t only research legal phenomenon. I also see what happens on the ground, and I find that instances of ‘equal’ segregations are few and far between. It’s not random or surprising, it’s inherent. If the underlying principle of gender segregation is that women should be distanced from the sight of men, then the whole system ends up conforming to male preferences.”

“A more complex answer,” the scholar continues, “is that every time a group, even the most innocent, is marked, there is a social and political effect. It immediately arouses and strengthens hierarchies and stereotypes, especially when the marking revolves around ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity,’ which carry cultural baggage of thousands of years. One of the achievements of modern society is that we have stopped marking people when it’s not essential. We have decided, for example, that employers must not take discriminate on the basis of skin color, religion, sex or sexual inclination. Gender segregation is intended to remind women, before anything else, that they are women. Neither modesty nor dignity are preserved by the segregation mechanism, only a hierarchical structure.”

The argument against you is that you don’t want Haredim in academia.

“I want Haredim everywhere: in academia, in the labor market, in the civil service and of course in the army. There is room for many adjustments, just as we make for others, such as providing a reading program for the vision-challenged. Although a glatt-kosher cafeteria for Haredi students will increase operating costs – in part because of the corruption that sometimes accompanies this – it will not infringe intolerably on the rights of others. The same applies to adjustments to the academic calendar so no exams are scheduled on religious fast days.

“But we cannot accept a situation in which accommodating one group comes at a heavy cost to the fundamental rights of others. There is no place for censoring materials essential to the subjects being taught – for example, the struggle of flight attendant Yonatan Danilovich

‘Not long ago, the Welfare Ministry instructed social workers to refer pregnant women to an organization that treats abortion as murder that women will regret their whole lives. That is worrisome.’

against El Al to have his male partner recognized for employee benefits in a discussion of equality during a constitutional law course, or Freud’s theories, in a psychology course. It is also unacceptable for a Haredi nursing student to learn about the female body by using a mannequin. This is happening in programs designed for such students.”

And the separate units for Haredim in the IDF?

“I suggest that we stay with arrangements that I don’t like but that I’m ready to compromise on, as set forth in 2017 in the Joint Service Order. Fear of contact or being alone with a female soldier allows a religious soldier to request that the female instructor or soldier next to him be replaced by a male, and the separate living quarters are hermetic.”

In the past you were critical of those arrangements. Your view has also shifted.

“I can shout until I’m blue in the face that religion should be separated from the state, but it won’t help, because it’s not going to happen in the next 30 years. My expectation is a minimal one: Every soldier, Haredi too, must agree to the presence of women within his field of vision and in physical proximity. If

he’s unwilling to mingle in the crowd and understand that there are women everywhere in Israeli society – then let him bear the consequences.

“And I hope there will be significant consequences for Haredim who do not want to be drafted or go out to work. Will anyone give me special dispensation if I decide tomorrow that my vegetarianism requires everyone around me to stop eating meat? No. The harm done to others because of my sensitivity would be unreasonable. So either I bear the consequences and don’t leave the house, or I live with my inconvenience.”

Aren’t you just another Western feminist who is forcing her will on Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox women who themselves opt for gender segregation?

“I will defend their right to sit in the women’s section in a synagogue and to have a segregated wedding. That is their basic right. The question is what happens when the state neglects its obligation to defend the equality of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox women and the equality of all women.

“When Haredi women seek aid from the liberal public and its institutions – such as in a petition to the High Court of Justice against the Haredi parties that refuse to include women, or when a Haredi PhD candidate at the Hebrew University told MK Limor Son Har-Melech that if segregation for doctoral candidates is expanded, her sister will not be able to attend coed classes because she will be pressured into the segregated track – then we say they are not authentic Haredi women, that they are not representative.

“Frequently,” Tirosh continues, “the law is paternalistic. It sets restrictions even when a desire or preference exists, if it harms others. For example, it bans the sale of organs even if someone wants to sell them of their own free will, because the harm to others would be problematic.”

Have mistakes been made in the struggle?

“I have second thoughts about the decision of the Israel Women’s Network, which I was involved in behind the scenes, to petition the High Court in 2019 against gender segregation at a concert by Motty Steinmetz funded by the Afula Municipality. We didn’t fully understand the context in which the concert was taking place. I learned only after the legal battle that there are hardly any events of this kind, and our principled opposition was perceived as plundering the already-small municipal budget devoted to Haredim. It’s true that the concert did not meet the legal conditions permitting a segregated service or product, but sometimes it’s better to be smart than right. The opposition turned us into the enemies of Haredi women. They felt we didn’t understand their world and were thwarting their internal struggle. Hap-



A gender-segregated performance in Afula, 2019. Tirosh admits she was wrong to oppose it: “Sometimes it’s better to be smart than right.”

Gil Elyahu



pily, those barriers fell over time.”  
*It’s argued that you opposed the right of Kiryat Arba to open its pool only separately for men and women, but that you accept such segregation among Bedouin in Rahat.*  
“Both Rahat and Kiryat Arba are obligated to open their pools for coed use. But in Kiryat Arba, a settlement abutting Hebron, a third of the inhabitants petitioned the High Court, and in Rahat that hasn’t happened yet. When Bedouin women in Rahat protested segregation in the new auditorium for cultural events, I assisted them in approaching the authorities. Everyone who knows me personally knows there’s no point responding seriously to allegations of hatred of Judaism.”  
*There is a global war against women. U.S. President Donald Trump, for example, has leveraged to his benefit the debate in the United States over abortions and trans people.*

‘Today extremists insist that such arrangements are within their right, that this is true equality. And from the side supposedly committed to equality we’re getting normalization and tolerance.’

“Everywhere in the world, tyrannical rulers are waging assaults on women to entrench their power. If in the United States the battleground is abortions and trans rights, in Israel it’s gender segregation. Segregation is adept at cloaking itself in liberal, utilitarian language. That’s what makes it deceptive.  
“Until recently I believed the assault on women in Israel would not take place in the arena of abortions and reproductive autonomy, because *halakha* (religious law) accords the mother’s life no less value than the newborn’s. But recently there have been indications that this arena is being targeted by the government and by Hardali circles. Not long ago, for example, the Welfare Ministry instructed social workers to refer pregnant women to an organization that treats abortion as murder that women will regret their whole lives. That is worrisome.”

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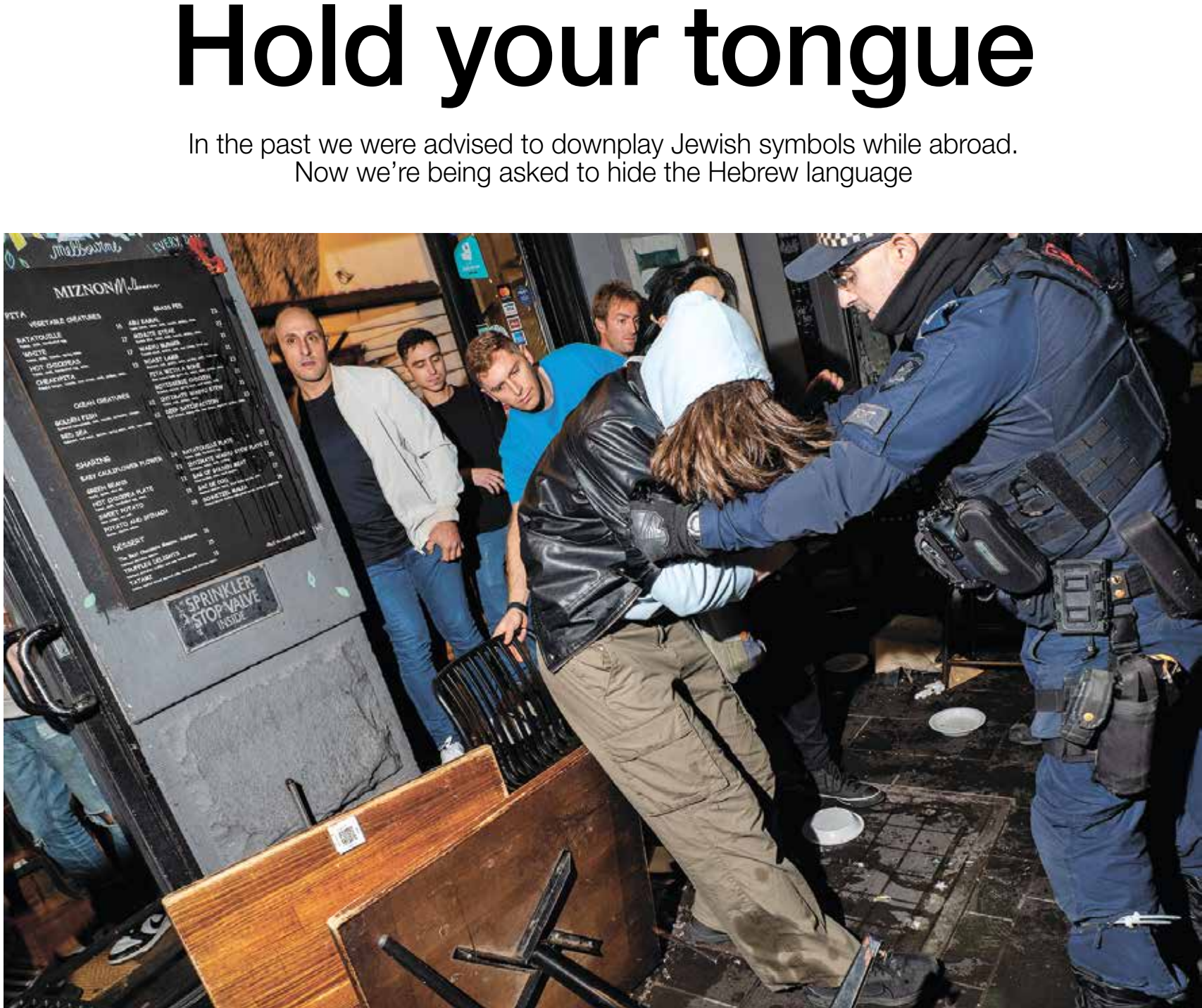
“The first step in exerting control and oversight is to classify and differentiate between groups of people,” asserts Tirosh. “This is why MK Avi Maoz (of the extremist Noam party) and right-wing activist Shai Glick are



The Yom Kippur service in Dizengoff Square, where clashes occurred between worshippers and protesters, in 2023. Tomer Appelbaum

waging a bitter war against multi-gender Hebrew. The multi-gender dot drives them crazy because it’s fluid. Their campaigns are determined and strategic. They know how to work the system and troll institutions until they give in. For example, following appeals from the Hardali organization Hotam, the head of the IDF’s Manpower Directorate instructed the army not to use multi-gendered Hebrew.  
“They constantly push the line further to the right, and as a result, the midpoint for what counts as a reasonable, unifying compromise shifts as well, and at the expense of women’s equality and autonomy.”  
*Where do the courts stand on this issue?*  
“The judiciary has issued rulings that were legally self-evident but publicly courageous in clear cases of personal discrimination. The High Court recognized the right of Leah Shakdiel to serve on the Religious Council in Yeruham in the late 1980s, overturned a Haredi radio station’s refusal to broadcast women’s voices and ordered damages to be paid to women excluded from traveling on buses.  
“In contrast to cases of total exclusion, the courts have difficulty addressing gender segregation because it’s perceived as more complex. There is also apprehension about the public ramifications. The petitions concerning the right of Haredi women to be party members in United Torah Judaism and Shas raised questions about the limits of cultural autonomy

and the balance between Jewish and democratic principles. As a result, the courts waffle on issues such as separating men and women in academia or the Women of the Wall.  
“If the justices feel there is only a limited number of petitions to which they can respond with their full weight, and that these must concern urgent issues truly threatening basic rights – then, unfortunately, segregation is not being categorized as such. This is a perceptual mistake, an error in recognizing the depth of the danger and its centrality in our lives.”  
“In this sense,” she adds, “they are no different from the liberal public. The writer Yishai Sarid said it well at my book launch. Until his wife and daughters made it clear they were not willing to sit in the women’s section when their son was to be called to the Torah at his bar mitzvah, he hadn’t understood how problematic it was. Suddenly he realized what he didn’t understand before, what he didn’t see.”  
*What is the analogy here regarding the justices at the High Court?*  
“I think they believe the problem will remain confined to Bnei Brak. And they believe that if we are truly on the brink of an abyss, it will be possible to stop it in time – as does most of the public. They don’t understand that just as democracy doesn’t die in a single day, equality too disappears through slow but steady erosion. The High Court should have stood firm and delineated red lines. Equality is the Shabbat of democracy. Regrettably, the court does not act that way enough.”  
*Why were you critical of the judgment handed down by Justice Elyakim Rubinstein about the “strictly kosher” [i.e. gender-segregated] bus lines?*  
“On a principled level, Justice Rubinstein rightly determined that segregation on buses is illegal. He was genuinely troubled by incidents in which women were sent to the back. But his understanding of coercion was extremely simplistic. He ignored the power imbalances within the community and showed far too much tolerance for the supposed need to accommodate those who want segregated seating. The result places an impossible burden on Haredi women. It is a clear example, though by no means the only one, of the gap between a principled ruling and the reality on the ground.”  
*Is this also the case when it comes to segregation in academia?*  
“The ruling affirmed the principle that it is a form of discrimination, but in practice it allowed it to continue in undergraduate programs. The High Court did impose certain limits – such as prohibiting discrimination against female lecturers and restricting gender segregation to certain classrooms only – but four years after the ruling, we recently learned through a Free-



A branch of the Israeli restaurant “Miznon” that was vandalized in Melbourne in July. There isn’t a single Hebrew word on the storefront – but the protesters came anyway. Alex Zucco / SOFA Images via Reuters Connect

### Oded Carmeli

Last month an Israeli man who lives in Berlin walked into K-Fetisch, a café in the city’s Neukölln district, with his German girlfriend. She was wearing a T-shirt with the word “falafel” on it, in Arabic, English and Hebrew (in that order). The woman behind the bar asked her what language the third word was, and she said it was Hebrew. At this point the woman behind the bar started to curse her, accused her (yes, the German woman from Berlin) of genocide in Gaza, claimed that Hebrew is an “oppressive language” and threw them out.  
K-Fetisch terms itself a “collective” that offers a “safe space” against homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and so forth. Everyone who’s been to Berlin is familiar with the signs railing against every possible type of discrimination that hang in the windows of business establishments there. Everything – except for hatred of Jews, and through it, hatred of Israel, and through it, hatred of Hebrew.  
Ironically, the T-shirt the woman wore is a “Falafel Humanity Shirt” intended to promote peace and understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. It was jointly created by an Iranian designer living in Berlin and an Israeli designer living in Hamburg. But that makes no difference. Hebrew itself has become a red rag.  
In the previous decade I was a frequent visitor to K-Fetisch. How many hard nights and strange mornings I spent between its rancid walls! I wrote there, and mostly I read there: “The Man Without Qualities” in Avraham Carmel’s wonderful Hebrew translation; “Journey to the End of the Night,” excellently translated by Ilana Hammerman; the poetry of Hedva Harechavi, Yair Hurvitz and Israel Eliraz.  
Year after year I would rent an apartment on Sonnenallee, get drunk in Heiners and sober up in K-Fetisch – an endless cycle. And I always, always had a Hebrew book on me. After all, I was running away from provincial Israel to read in European anonymity, to be ensconced in the capital of European culture. Even in the hummus joints of Sonnenallee, below huge oil paintings of Al-Aqsa Mosque, I would whip out an Israel Eliraz.  
Who would whip out Israel Eliraz on Sonnenallee today? Who would read a translation by Ilana Hammerman on the metro of Rome, London or Paris?  
In the past we were asked to hide Jewish symbols when we went abroad – the kippa, the Star of David – and I said not a word, because I’ve never worn Jewish symbols. Today we’re being asked to hide our Hebrew language. On my recent trip to Greece I packed one English book for Athens, and only when I visited small villages did I allow myself to take out the Hebrew books.  
Many of my friends on the left excuse hatred of Israel as hatred of Zionism, and antisemitism as hatred of Israel, and so on with all manner of verbal juggling. But what excuse is there for hating a language?  
Does a Russian fear pulling out his Dostoevsky outside his country? Does the Chinese mother warn her son not to speak his language too loudly at a music

festival abroad? To the ears of tens of thousands of Jews who survived Arab terrorism, and not only on October 7, the Arabic language immediately and forever evokes horror and death, but nevertheless it’s heard in loudspeaker announcements on the beach in Tel Aviv.  
Arabic is on display in Haifa, Jaffa, Berlin, Paris. Even German, for heaven’s sake, is already being taught for the matriculation exam in blue-and-white high schools. But the awning of the New York restaurant says Rafael in Latin letters, not in Hebrew; ditto Balaboosta. No where will you find Hebrew: not on the menu, not on the façade. Why?  
There isn’t a single Japanese restaurant in the universe that doesn’t adorn itself with Japanese script, even if the owners and managers are from Australia. The same goes for a Greek, Turkish or Spanish restaurant – the language is always considered a sign of authenticity. But at Falafel Brothers in Tokyo you won’t find a single aleph. Out of fear. Strictly out of fear.  
Recently a hummus connoisseur from Jaffa recommended a new national park that opened in northern Jordan. “Twenty

land “Diaspora Hebrew publishing” other than the fact that Sakal and Manor moved to Berlin? There, from the shore of Lake Schlachtensee, they send a pdf of the new novel by Tel Aviv-based Leah Aini to a typesetter in Tel Aviv, who sends it to be printed in Ramat Gan, who sends it to the distributor in Petah Tikva, who distributes it to Jerusalem and Ra’anana.  
The truth is that there aren’t enough Hebrew readers outside of Israel to support a publishing house – not even a bookstore, not even a shelf in a bookstore – and even if there were enough readers, no store in Berlin or Madrid would maintain such a shelf, for fear of repercussions.  
Around the same time that the falafel woman got kicked out of K-Fetisch, I was invited to the Frankfurt Book Fair by the Israeli Institute for Hebrew Literature. The institute’s pavilion was the only Hebrew presence in the world’s largest book fair, alongside dozens of stands in Arabic, English and Chinese. A welcome initiative by all accounts, no? Not according to Hebrew “champion” Manor, who made a post mocking the stand for being “obscure” in a corner.  
Of course, the stand was in the corner

of Bialik Institute, which, like its counterparts the Goethe Institute and the Cervantes Institute, would expose the world to the delights of Hebrew and its literary treasures. If only millions would learn Hebrew, until the Gordian knot between the territory – the Hebrew state – and the language is severed.  
But that’s not what these initiatives are doing. Their audience of readers and stable of writers are virtually all Hebrew-speaking Israelis. They write in Hebrew how much they hate the Hebrew state, and do it for other Hebrew-reading Israelis, and for those who got a scholarship or some juicy residency – and also in broken English for some bored Dane who’s playing on his phone. Fine, let them enjoy it, but what does Hebrew get out of all this?  
By the way, there is one community of Hebrew speakers who are not Jews. It numbers close to a million people who are fluent in it as a second language, and if it were integrated into the Hebrew republic of letters, it would be a giant step for our language, broadening its borders and horizons. But this community consists of Israeli Arabs, and the Diaspora folks like to talk about Arabs – but never with them.  
If Hebrew were really their primary concern, they would disseminate Hebrew literature to tens of thousands of its speakers in Taibeh and Tira, and encourage them to write in it, instead of reaching out to three and a half Ph.D. candidates in Ann Arbor, who today are “exiles,” and next year, when a teaching position becomes available in Bar-Ilan University, will be Ramat-Ganites. If a million Arabs were visiting the cafés of Berlin and the national parks of Jordan and would open a book by Leah Aini, we would be in good shape.  
But don’t hold your breath. Because at the moment, it’s impossible to use the Hebrew language outside the Hebrew state, and without the Hebrew state there is also no Hebrew language. And maybe it’s not surprising that the Israelis who want no connection to Israel are also making a living teaching Hebrew to the children of other disconnectors in Athens or Boston.  
The fast internet and the affordable airfare allow them to stock up on Hebrew to their heart’s content. They read Haaretz in Hebrew, their children grow up on “Aye Pluto,” about the dog from Kibbutz Megiddo, and if they’re seized by nostalgia as night falls, they have the folk duo Dudaim on Spotify. Writers who live both here and there, or demonstratively only there, are convinced that they represent “the big world.” But a Hebrew writer who lives there and publishes here is the dictionary definition of provincialism: He’s a satellite whose existence depends on the continued existence of Israel.  
“My grandfather taught me this lesson,” wrote Jacob Glatstein, who knew a thing or two about the erasure of a language. “Never go into a dark alley / With the following men – / With a guy who passes an icon of Jesus / and doesn’t cross himself, / and with a shopkeeper who speaks incessantly of his own honesty. / But the greatest danger is from a man / who claims he does not care / about the loss of his language and the death of his people” (translation by Boris Maier).

There isn’t a single Japanese restaurant in the universe that doesn’t adorn itself with Japanese script. The same goes for a Greek, Turkish or Spanish restaurant – language is always a sign of authenticity. But at Israeli restaurants abroad you’ll find no sign of Hebrew. Out of fear. Strictly out of fear.

bucks and you’re like, with your feet in the water, splashing.” A dream, I sighed. “Why not? Go, go – with my own eyes I saw Jews there. They just spoke English between themselves.” Like *anusim*, I thought – Sephardi Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity and had to keep their identity a secret. Who wants to vacation like that? I’d rather pay \$200 in Eilat and talk and laugh and cry in my mother tongue.  
The late author Yoram Kaniuk told me once that the whole Zionist project went awry when they started using the word Jew. “When I fought in 1948,” he said, “I fought as a Hebrew soldier, who was born in the first Hebrew city, for a Hebrew state.”  
Indeed, Hebrew is an animal in danger of extinction, far more than Judaism. Eight million speakers live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, with another million scattered here and there, and that’s it. If he were alive, the poet David Avidan would certainly say: Hebrew is a language that lacks strategic depth.  
A good example is Altneuland Press, the new publishing house of Dory Manor and his companion Moshe Sakal. “Altneuland is the first Hebrew-language publishing house established outside of Israel since 1948,” its website declares (in English). Nice. I’m all for it.  
But how exactly does it operate outside of Israel, if its Hebrew books can’t be purchased anywhere east of the Jordan and west of the Mediterranean – namely, outside of Israel? What makes Altneu-

for security reasons, because a pavilion in Hebrew today requires two undercover security guys (just like synagogues in Paris and Jewish preschools in Berlin) – a concept foreign to Manor, because he assimilated into the crowd. Because he doesn’t show Hebrew on his body.  
Manor called the pavilion “publishing washing,” because it was funded by the Israeli government (and the Saudi government didn’t fund the Saudi pavilion? And the Taiwanese government doesn’t fund the Taiwanese pavilion?). But isn’t Altneuland Press “Hebrew washing” – attempting to hide the fact that it’s an Israeli publishing house whose editors and writers and readers are all Israelis?  
Like the chef Eyal Shani, who thought that if he only changed his restaurant’s category from Israeli to Middle Eastern, he’d be left alone and loved abroad, Manor thinks that changing his identity from Israeli to Hebrew will make the Europeans love him. It didn’t help Shani: His Miznon restaurant in Melbourne was ransacked, and at the entrance of the branch near New York City’s Columbia University, someone scrawled, “Long live the intifada.”  
And it won’t help Manor, either.  
The kuntz-hack of Altneuland isn’t even Altneuland’s hack. “Diasporic” initiatives like this crop up all the time, like the journals Mikan Ve’eylah and Netivot Olam – which call for Hebrew to be reimagined as a “world language,” one “without territory.” If only. If only an initiative like this would be established to disseminate the beauty of Hebrew, a kind