

Eitan Bronstein Aparicio is a prominent Israeli anti-Zionist peace activist who strongly opposes his own state, which he calls an apartheid state. With the organization Zochrot, which he founded in 2001 and directed until 2011, his mission was to educate Israelis about Nakba, raise awareness about the fate of displaced Palestinians, mark the places where they once lived, and advocate for their right of return.

Together with his wife, a Frenchwoman who, as a committed anti-Zionist, never sought Israeli citizenship, to which she was entitled as a Jew, they founded the organization De-coloniser in 2015. As the name suggests, it focuses on the facts and consequences of the occupation and colonization carried out by the Jewish state of Israel against Palestinians. When their then two-and-a-half-year-old son was tasked with decorating paper tanks for the Israeli Independence Day at a kindergarten, the wife decided that it was not a country in which she wanted her child to grow up. So, five years ago, they moved to Brussels, where they continued their activism, including demonstrations against the state of which Eitan is still a citizen and to which he regularly returns. Although, as he told me, for the first time these days he is starting to feel unsafe there due to his views and beliefs.

Why did you decide to establish the new organization De-coloniser after Zochrot?

Zochrot focused on Nakba and the right of Palestinians to return. Reflecting on how to expand our political goals and considering the entire context of Israeli colonialism, we realized that Nakba, the Arabic term for the expulsion of the majority of Palestinians from their land in 1948, is not the only important moment of that colonialism, but just its climax. There are other dimensions, such as the occupation of the Golan Heights, which is a story in itself. Discrimination and paternalistic behavior towards Jews who already lived in the Middle East and Africa (Mizrachi Jews) are also part of that European colonial consciousness and reality.

You are often portrayed as a radical leftist...

I don't feel like a radical, but I know that many others, especially Zionists, consider me an anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian person. Every person seeking justice must understand that it is the Jewish state that has led us to the situation we are in today, from 1948 onwards. For me, there is nothing extremist about it. Moreover, if you look at the current situation worldwide, I think the Zionists are in the minority, and there are many more people who understand that Israeli colonialism has no future because it cannot bring peace and justice. And not just for Palestinians but also for Israelis who have always lived in fear and a state of war, which will continue as long as there is a Jewish state with this regime. I would say that we are mainstream today.

There are many criticisms of the Western liberal left, where there seems to be some confusion in expressing support for Palestinians and attitudes towards Israel. Any expression of empathy towards Palestinians is qualified as hostility towards Israel and support for those who would like to destroy or expel all Jews from there. How do you see this?

When you read most Israeli newspapers today, you might get the impression that the biggest enemy of Israel, right after Hamas and probably all Palestinians, is the global liberal left that has abandoned us, turned against us, and become anti-Semitic. It's as if all Israeli liberals have succumbed to this crazy, obsessive feeling. For me, that's ridiculous. I by no means deny that there is a lot of anti-Semitism in the world, nor have I followed every statement by left-wing liberals. But just yesterday, for example, I watched an interview with Judith Butler, the famous American philosopher and feminist who became a target of many condemnations and criticisms in Israel. For me, that conversation was excellent. Of course, she strongly condemned Hamas's brutal attack on Israeli civilians but also reminded us of what should be obvious: the context of all these events is Zionism and the colonialist relationship with Palestine and Palestinians. People tend to forget that

and see only criticism of Israel. Not every critique of Israel is anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, a great victory of Zionism is precisely the identification of Israel with all Jews in the world and imposing Israel as the spokesperson, representative, and patron of all Jews, wherever they may be. Israel is very successful in that, putting all Jews in the same danger Israeli citizens are already facing, a danger that the Israeli state cannot defend them from, as shown by Hamas's attack on October 7. Because of that tragedy, Israel now demands the support of the whole world for its actions in the Gaza Strip. Of course, Hamas's attack had genocidal goals and characteristics, and almost the entire world, including many Palestinians and Arabs, condemned it, pointing out, among other things, how such crimes are contrary to Islam and all fundamental human values. However, the Israeli state, which wants the whole world to only talk about Hamas's crimes, with its response, destruction, and genocidal killing in Gaza, is influencing the fact that many are already starting to forget October 7. The world did not stop that day; it observes how many inhabitants of Gaza, including many Gaza children, Israel kills every day. Israel can blame only itself for that, not the world.

It seems important for you to emphasize that the victims of Israeli colonialism are not only Palestinians but also Israelis...

Exactly. I've spent most of my life, a whole half-century, in Israel, and I know what it's like. You get used to and convince yourself that living in constant uncertainty and fear is entirely normal. Of course, Palestinians are the biggest victims, and their suffering is incomparable. Still, Israeli colonialists are in the same situation as all colonial powers worldwide have always been, which means they constantly face resistance to their colonization. There's no justification for that. In that sense, the most right-wing extremists settling in Palestinian territories seem more honest to me. They have no issues with peace because they don't care about it. Their project is to settle throughout all of Israel, knowing that this goal involves many sacrifices, including the lives of Israeli soldiers who are currently dying in Gaza, as well as the lives of killed Israeli civilians. One of the most fervent extremists in the current government, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, stated immediately after October 7th that it is a sign reminding us to be even stronger. For them, sacrifices are inherent in the project of occupying the entire country. However, I believe that the majority of Israelis are not and do not want to be part of that project. Liberal, secular Israelis want to live normally, but despite that, living in constant danger and fear, they invest their lives in achieving that crazy project of occupation.

How much responsibility for the current political situation, including the events of October 7th, does bear on the policies, represented by the current Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, which secretly supported Hamas at the expense of more moderate and agreement-prone political forces among Palestinians?

The truth is, Israel's longstanding strategy has been to weaken Palestinian authorities. Israel used them as subcontractors for the occupation of the West Bank but didn't allow them to politically strengthen. This applies even more to the Gaza Strip, where support for Hamas was sometimes facilitated, for example, by allowing large money shipments. However, such influence is somewhat limited because ultimately, the residents of the Gaza Strip decide on their government. The responsibility of Netanyahu's government goes even further due to the constant rejection of any long-term interim agreement, which wouldn't be peace but wouldn't be war either. Hamas was pragmatic enough to propose such agreements several times in the past, as did Fatah and other Palestinian parties in the West Bank, but Israel rejected them each time. Additionally, the current government, the most extreme right-wing in Israel's history, pursued an intensely nationalist policy with harsh measures against the Palestinian population in the West Bank, involving many military

incursions into cities like Jenin and Nablus and provocations such as those around the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Israel's negotiations to establish relations with other Arab states, like the almost-realized one with Saudi Arabia, completely excluded Palestinians, who weren't even mentioned. In such a situation, Palestinians had only two choices: accept it all and endure such marginalization or resist and remind the world that they exist. What they did on October 7th is terrible and cannot be justified, but it's a form of resistance we've seen many times among many peoples fighting against occupiers.

Is it possible to eradicate Hamas through military action?

This goal was emphasized at the beginning, repeated a few times, and now, but I think most Israelis fully understand that it's not a realistic option. Completely destroying Hamas is simply unfeasible. Except, of course, at the cost of total ethnic cleansing and genocide on a much larger scale, which I hope and believe the world will not allow Israel to do. The problem is that this defined and announced goal, in my opinion, is actually a cover for another goal, and that is revenge. The desire and call for revenge can be seen everywhere in all major Israeli media, in recordings, and messages that people themselves post on social networks. "Let's revenge, teach them a lesson," that's the public mood. And that's exactly what Israel is doing, seeking revenge and wrongly thinking it will ease and heal all wounds and pain. Moreover, not even the lives of hostages in Hamas's hands are being taken into consideration.

However, it seems that an agreement has been reached for the release of at least some hostages, primarily children and women... What is your prediction for the development of the situation?

Predicting anything is challenging, of course. In any case, even if it's just a gesture, this is a positive sign, although it still doesn't seem to indicate a cessation of the war. I believe it's the result of significant pressure on the Israeli government, not only from external sources but also from increasing internal pressure, especially from the families of the kidnapped. However, based on past experiences, it's possible that a good number of hostages will remain in captivity for years. Also, I think this brief ceasefire will become a momentum to gradually, but in the foreseeable future, limit the conflict, reduce destruction and killing, and then completely stop. Judging by the stance of the international community, including the speeches of U.S. President Biden, it seems to me that a new tune is being played. I think they will tell Israel - okay, we supported you in this war, but the conflict MUST end now, a solution MUST be found. Knowing the concept, mentality, narrative, and practices of the state, I think Israel will simply not be able to meet these demands in the coming years, leading to the complete collapse of the Zionist idea of a Jewish state. That project will implode, a process that is already underway. Many are already leaving this Israel. All of this will inevitably bring an end to the idea of a Zionist Jewish state. I hope it happens peacefully, given that it is a state with nuclear capabilities.

The slogan "From the river to the sea, free Palestine" has been in the spotlight these days, which, for most, is a call for the expulsion of all Jews from Palestine, or something even worse... Not for you?

I'm not naive; I know that for many Palestinians, it means a state without a single Jew. However, I interpret that slogan differently, and I know Palestinians who think the same way, as well as organizations that strive for the same: it's about one shared state where everyone is equal. The concept of two states, one of which is Zionist and exclusively for Jews, cannot ensure justice or equality. Therefore, I belong to those who see the solution in one state. I believe the world is

already realizing that two states are an unworkable solution, and no one has done anything serious about its implementation for years.

The organization Zochrot, which you co-founded, raises awareness among Israelis about what Nakba means to Palestinians. Israeli journalist Gideon Levy told me this summer that the vast majority of Israelis don't care about the Palestinian issue at all, even when protesting against Netanyahu...

That's correct. But in recent days, the word Nakba has become more present and increasingly mentioned in Israeli public discourse, as something that Israel is repeating in Gaza. People are aware of the catastrophe that befell the Palestinians in 1948 and what Nakba means. But, unfortunately, I fear that many are happy about it and don't mind if Nakba happens again. I would say that a third of Israelis today are at least aware of Israel's responsibility for the expulsion of a significant part of the Palestinian population. However, if you were to ask them whether they support the right of displaced Palestinians to return, the number would certainly be much smaller. When my wife and I conducted research for a book we published on this topic, the result was that twenty percent of Israeli Jews would be willing to at least discuss the possible return of Palestinians. Of course, provided that it doesn't mean the expulsion of Israeli Jews from their homes, and that is precisely the prevailing narrative in Israel: their return would be our expulsion. Today, all of this is just theory, far from realization. Most Israelis think that on October 7th, the sky fell on our heads, not realizing that Palestinians have been experiencing this since 1948.

Do you have any idea of how many Palestinians actually associate their potential return with the expulsion of Jews?

These days, that number is certainly not small as they vividly experience what it means to be in Palestine with Jews once again. Israel gives them more reasons for this day by day. However, I know that many Palestinians are not averse to the idea of sharing the land with Jews but, of course, under the condition that it stops being a relationship between occupiers and the occupied. Unfortunately, Israel is a state that enforces apartheid. The law preventing Palestinians from returning to the places from which they were expelled, along with constant pressure and attempts to legally prohibit any mention, let alone commemoration, of Nakba, especially in state institutions like schools, are not the only forms of discrimination. There's also the issuance of building permits, undermining Arabic as an official language... Apartheid in Israel has many forms and faces.

Somewhat under the radar these days are reports of growing tensions and violence in the West Bank, where, according to the news, around two hundred Palestinians have been killed in recent days. Do you have more information about this?

The Israeli organization B'Tselem closely monitors all of this and promptly reports on its website. Many Palestinians have been arrested, and numerous cases of their abuse and humiliation have been documented, with some instances even proudly filmed by the perpetrators. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) commander has recently been forced to send military patrols to prevent these abuses, leading to such anger among Jewish settlers that we now have an incredible situation where the Israeli military commander needs bodyguards—not because of threats from Palestinians but from extreme Jewish nationalists and extremists. To me, it seems quite clear that something similar to what happened in Gaza is being prepared on the West Bank immediately after.

Has Hamas actually extended the political life of Benjamin Netanyahu and his government?

As in all wars, most citizens rally behind their country, military, and all war efforts. That's the

current sentiment in Israel. Paradoxically, according to relevant opinion polls, support for Netanyahu and his government has never been lower than it is today. If there were elections today, his coalition might get just over a third of the seats in parliament, a significant drop and defeat for them. Most Israelis understand that this government cannot provide them with security, a better life, or any kind of stability. But while the war continues, nothing will happen to this government. Unless Netanyahu wakes up one morning and concludes that he can't go on. However, that should not be expected from him; as far as he is concerned, he would stay in power forever.

What about Hamas? How much does it care about the lives of Palestinians in Gaza?

Violence always begets more violence; it has always been that way. However, when it comes to the cruelty of the attacks, I would like to remind everyone that part of their attack was initially directed at the army guarding the border of the Gaza Strip, acting as the custodian of a prison from which Palestinians seek liberation. In that sense, the war has also helped Hamas. They had many more problems before this conflict, facing protests and dissatisfaction among the residents of Gaza, a good portion of whom are now proud of them. Yes, Palestinians in Gaza are victims now, but this is nothing new for them—they have been victims for seventy-five years. Regarding concern for the people, I would say that the Hamas government cares neither more nor less for its people than most governments I know, including the Israeli government, where political interests are often more important than people.

You arrived in Israel from Argentina as a five-year-old. What has most shaped your views and prompted you to engage in activism and political action?

I had a typical Israeli childhood on a kibbutz and didn't question the state I grew up in until I went for military service. That's when I experienced what it means to be an occupier and have complete control over other people. I saw it as an unjust situation that was bad for all of us. During the First Lebanon War, I refused to respond to the call as a military reservist and ended up in prison for the first time. As I met more people who thought and felt the same way, I began to form my own political views. All of this led me to a strong opposition to Israeli politics and government. Understanding that my state was treating an entire other people as less valuable prompted me to act based on fundamental human principles. I know that different forms of discrimination exist everywhere, including Belgium, where I now live. But in Israel, discrimination is ingrained in the very foundations of the Zionist Jewish state. I wasn't a born rebel; I was a peaceful child, not breaking anyone's windows. I thought about everything and realized that Jews have the right to live in that land, express their national feelings, nurture their culture—but not in a state intended only for us, from which others were expelled, and where we have all the rights while others have none.