

Foreword

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The 41st issue of *Theory and Criticism* is appearing two years after the wave of social protest in the summer of 2011. The issue is divided into two sections: a forum of articles dedicated to the Israeli social protest, and a general section. In the forum, readers will find a collection of articles, edited by **Uri Ram** and **Dani Filc**, which were written shortly after the protest. The articles are dedicated to exploring the phenomenon from diverse perspectives, along with the factors that produced it and its ramifications. The general section of the journal consists of articles and essays that address, from different vantage points and disciplines, themes related to identity, culture and collective memory in Israel. These articles shed light on corners that the main current of the protest failed to illuminate.

Many have already asked, and more will do so in the future, how the protest influenced Israeli politics. The question I would like to raise here, in the spirit of *Theory and Criticism*, turns a critical and reflective look on political theory in Israel: can we understand the social protest also as criticism of the political vision to which *Theory and Criticism* is committed? In Michal Ben-Naftali's essay marking the twentieth anniversary of this journal, she highlighted the fertile dialectic between the two components of the journal's title: theory and criticism. She maintains that the relationship between them is necessary: "Theory... is the underpinning of criticism. ... And criticism... aims to transform, refine, and update the theory from which it emerges."¹ I suggest that we understand the relationship between the two sections of this issue through this lens.

The forum articles deal with the new political situation that is emerging before our eyes and cast a critical look at the alternatives to the old politics that were offered by the protest. These articles investigate the coordinates of the new political discourse, its combinations and divisions, the center and periphery of the protest and, even more so, the new political language it endeavored to create. Among other

¹ Michal Ben-Naftali, "Fathers and Sons: Twenty Years of *Theory and Criticism*," *Theory and Criticism* 37 (Fall 2010), pp. 223–231, on p. 227.

things, they address the class and generational aspects of the protest and highlight the nature of its key demand—a universal call (on behalf of the “people”) for a change in socioeconomic policy. The protest shunted aside important issues within the Israeli political discourse, notably the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the tension or opposition between West and East, in favor of a unifying and conciliatory discourse. The universal demand that citizens made of the state and its political institutions, which stood at the heart of the protest, blurred the strong links that exist in Israel between class differences and national and ethnic differences.

How do the articles in the general section illuminate the critical process that the protest sought to introduce into the political discourse in Israel? If Ben-Naftali is right that *Theory and Criticism* emerged from a crisis in the political language that developed in Israel, from “a refusal to be involved in the political theology that this language conveys and from a desire to find an alternative way to talk about political questions outside the political paradigm it proposes,”² then the question is, what crisis of language sparked the current social protest? What new political language is it seeking? In what way can we also consider it as a critique of the political vision that this journal has pursued for the past two decades?

Prominent among the diverse topics addressed by *Theory and Criticism* have been the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, addressed from a post-Zionist angle; Holocaust memory, addressed through a critique of its subordination to a national narrative; and the attempt to sketch out the contours of citizenship in Israel, along with a search for a secular civic alternative to the formula that coalesced in the 1990s—a “Jewish and democratic state.” The critical writing that flourished in this journal was accordingly identified with post-Zionism. Is the protest conveying the message that the only way to promote effective criticism of Israeli society and politics is to set aside the topics that were at the center of *Theory and Criticism*’s discourse? Is the protest part of the change represented by the new wave of post-post-Zionist writing³ that is turning away from grand political questions, such as the ones that stood at the center of *Theory and Criticism*’s scholarly attention, in order to deal with ordinary people in their daily lives? Or perhaps we should understand the social protest as raising a question not about the choice of topics but about the very division that exists in Israel between critical theory, on the one hand, and political praxis, on the other? Does the protest reflect a type of civic

2 Ibid., p. 225.

3 Asaf Likhovsky, “Post Post Zionist Historiography,” *Israel Studies* 15(2) (2010), pp. 1–23.

political involvement that this journal, despite its fundamental commitment to the synthesis of the two parts of its title, has failed to realize?

What can the articles in the general section of this issue teach us about the tension between theory and praxis? What do they tell us about theoretical and critical thought in Israel today? Is there an acoustic barrier that walls off the articles in the forum and the topics they address from the articles in the general section? Or can we begin to see continuities and unexpected convergences between the two sections once we read them in tandem? For example, is it essential that we turn our attention away from the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in order to deal with socioeconomic issues? Or is there, perhaps, another way to tackle this issue, relying on a social and cultural history that does not erect a rigid distinction between the “political” and the “social”? On the other hand, perhaps it is the protest that joins up with the articles in the general section in the search for a new way to connect citizens to politics, by means of a new definition of the political. What alternatives do the articles in the general section propose to political discourse that was under scrutiny by the social protest? Can they offer a way to integrate the topics that have always occupied the core of the journal’s discourse, with the new insights raised by the protest articles?

With regard to the quest for a new political language, **Amos Noy** reminds us that it is worthwhile to start with the single word. Noy writes about the Yiddish word *yahandes*. The word appears in Avot Yeshurun’s poem “Passover on Caves,” which is considered to be the first reference to the Nakba in Hebrew poetry:

“And father mother, from wherever they were taken to,
From the horrendous fire of fires
Ordered us not to forget Yahandes,
And Poyln also not to forget” (trans. Dan Miron)

The article focuses on the oblivion to which this Yiddish word, which means “conscience,” “compassion,” and “profound morality,” and is derived from Yahades “Judaism,” has been consigned. Yeshurun wanted to restore the word to Hebrew and used it subversively, linking it to the Palestinian calamity. According to him, “the Shoah of European Jewry and the Shoah of the Arabs of Eretz Israel is one and the same Shoah of the Jewish people. Both look us straight in the eye.” This ethical summons seems to have been too hard for Yeshurun’s readers to digest; their reaction to the word he sought to introduce into the

political discourse was to ignore, pretend not to understand, or mock it. Noy reconstructs the history of the word *yahandes* and of the arguments about its meaning and argues that the word's loss of meaning reflects the disappearance of what it signifies -: "The silence about the physical and spiritual destruction of Polish Jewry, ... the Zionist and maskilic 'rejection of the Diaspora,' ... and the denial of the Nakba."

Moving on from a word that links morality and Judaism, two other articles invite us to examine the thought of two Jewish philosophers, Emanuel Levinas and Herbert Marcuse, and to ask how they gave ethical content to their Jewish identity, to the Holocaust and to the State of Israel. **Yael Lin** shows the deep connection between Levinas's Jewish identity and the new ethics he sought to found. Looking at the scene of Moses on Mt. Nebo and drawing on Levinas's idea of fecundity, she proposes that we see the story of Moses as an expression of how his possibilities are expanded by his ethical responsibility for his people: "One can see the possibility of entering the Promised Land as being open to Moses through the encounter with the Other—his people, his sons—who do enter the land." She concludes with an exploration of the relationship between the ethical and the political in Levinas's thought, through the lens of his stand toward Israel as a state and as a messianic idea.

Whereas Levinas's thought can help us uncover ethical possibilities that were latent in the establishment of Israel but were never realized, Marcuse helps us understand the importance of critical thinking in a time of major political events. In his article, **Zvi Tauber** argues that Marcuse, unlike Levinas, drew a distinction between his Jewish identity and his philosophical position as a Marxist and humanist. Even though he never dealt directly with the Holocaust in Europe, Marcuse's main and immediate concern was "devoted to the campaign against the resurgence of a repressive regime, [...] including the campaign against the potential recurrence of genocide." Marcuse supported Israel because he saw it as a factor that could prevent a new Holocaust, but this support was not accompanied by adoption of the religious stance that assigns the Land of Israel to the People of Israel. On the contrary: Building on his humanistic worldview, he took a clear public stand about the injustice that Israel wreaked on the Palestinians. His stand was not limited to criticism but included a call to redress the injustice, not by "turning the wheel back" but by reaching an understanding with its Arab neighbors and, concretely, by the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel and guaranteeing full equality for the Arab citizens of Israel.

Another line connecting the articles in this issue is the tie between forgetting (and memory) and the structure of the Israeli identity. Noy's article returns to the multiple identities that were obliterated after the founding of Israel, through one word whose past and meaning were forgotten. **Or Aleksandrowicz** highlights the lost memory of the social pluralism and lack of segregation along ethnic or national lines in mandatory Palestine. The article reconstructs the urban spatial history of northern Jaffa and southern Tel Aviv, where Jews and Arabs lived side by side. He challenges the persistent view of the district as divided between the Arab Manshiye neighborhood and the surrounding Jewish neighborhoods, as a place where "national identity was inherent to emergence and construction of the urban fabric." Aleksandrowicz argues that from the 1890s to the late 1920s, the urban space of northern Jaffa was perceived as consisting of two separate parts—a southern suburb called "Neve Shalom" by Hebrew speakers and "Manshiye" by Arabic speakers, and a northern slum known as *Harat al-Tanak* (Arabic for "Tin City"). Jews and Arabs lived side by side in these two neighborhoods, divided by socioeconomic differences, rather than by national or religious identity. The border drawn between Tel Aviv and Jaffa in 1921 ran through Neve Shalom Manshiye, but it did not become important until the 1930s, as a result of the increasing national polarization.

Talila Kosh-Zohar deals with Holocaust memory in Israel and offers a feminist reading of a broad spectrum of the second generation literature. She seeks to trace what she interprets as the critical voice of this corpus, a voice that comes out against the aggressive militaristic exploitation of Holocaust memory in Israel. Such, for example, are works that put in their center weak or mute heroines as the true representatives of the memory of the Holocaust, thus opposing the brutal reality and injustices produced by the hegemonic memory.

Literature as a critical voice also stands at the center of the essay by **Hannan Hever**, which juxtaposes the vision of the social protest to the civic identity proposed by Anton Shamas in his writing — an alternative that has never been accepted in Israel. Hever returns to Shamas's *Arabesques* as a bold and pioneering attempt by an Arab author writing in Hebrew to create literature that would found a new Israeli national identity (as an alternative to Jewish national identity) that could be shared by Jews and Arabs on an equal basis. For Hever, the slogan of the 2011 social protest, "the people demand social justice," expresses the current political situation in which the Jewish state, as a body that confers and embodies a collective identity, has grown weaker, but no concrete alternative has emerged to this identity,

and what has sprouted instead is a multiplicity of national, ethnic, class and gender identities and narratives that cannot all be included under the wings of a single national identity.

Finally, confronting the language of reconciliation and rapprochement employed by the protest in its search for an alternative shared identity, **Yael Mishali** looks at the practices of protest and the difficulties they face, especially when they must surmount the barriers between various identities and groups. She touches on the importance of anger as a tool of political protest, as well as its dangers. She notes that adopting anger, while excluding other emotions rejected as irrelevant, is liable to reproduce the divides between activists, which derive from the repressive ideology they are opposing. In light of the centrality of anger as an establishment tool, she calls for consideration of the question, “When does rage spur us to action and when does it blind us to the new repression that is created or stifled in the service of anger?”

The main section of this issue concludes with the book review section, devoted this time to books and films that deal with the link between the military and society in Israel. This theme, which was not at the center of the social protest, also generates questions about the new political language and the nature of the new critical toolbox it gives us, both to consider the status of the military in civilian society and to discuss Israeli socioeconomic policy, in which the defense related component is very large. **Yuval Ben-ziman** analyzes three critical films about the First Lebanon War. He argues that these films, similarly to the public and social criticism after the Second Lebanon War, represent the boundaries of critical discourse in Israel which, despite new currents within it, does not diverge from the national consensus, is careful not to broach the broad political circumstances and, at the end of the day, emphasizes particular forms of social solidarity and avoids questions that challenge them. Something similar can be alleged about the criticism produced by the social protest of the summer of 2011 and its limits.

Assaf David's article examines the military—civilian relations in Israel and the extensive literature on the subject, which endeavors to answer questions such as: Is Israel an army that has a state? Is there a civilian society in Israel? Is it possible to guarantee civilian control of the military, and how? David surveys the theoretical debates about military civilian relations throughout the world and maps the various approaches to the Israeli situation. He concludes by raising two questions about the standard framework for analysis, which examines Israel according to Western

models and ignores the “Arab question” with regard to military relations and Israel’s similarity in this domain to other developing and non-Western countries. Here too we find an interesting parallel to the social protest and to academic analyses of it, especially with regard to the link, sometimes the repressed link, between the protest of summer 2011 and the Arab Spring, and with regard to the central place of Israeli defense policy and the occupation within its political and economic policy.

This is my last issue as editor of *Theory and Criticism*. The difficult questions that the protest raised with regard to the Israeli political discourse in general, and to critical writing in particular, seem to offer an appropriate opportunity for taking my leave. *Theory and Criticism* has recently launched its new website, which can connect it to new readers and develop new channels of dialogue, response and criticism. I would like to thank all of those who have helped and toiled, including the editorial secretary and secretariat, and the members of the editorial board and the inner council.

I would like to express special thanks to the editors of the Books section, Yuli Novak and Yaniv Ron-El, and to the language editor, Naama Pinhasi, for her professionalism and patience. I owe deepest gratitude to Miryam Wijler, research assistant, adviser and friend. Thanks also go to Sara Soreni, the editor and production manager who helped me take my first steps, and to her successor, Dr. Tal Kohavi, who has accompanied me more recently. Special thanks to Prof. Gabriel Motzkin, for his confidence and cooperation throughout the journey. I would also like to thank all of the employees and researchers of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, who make it a place where a journal like *Theory and Criticism* can flourish. Finally, I wish much success to the new editor, Dr. Eitan Bar-Yosef.