

Haaretz

Opinion | The Israeli Left Should Not Preach Morality to B'Tselem

Saturday 30 March 2024, by [LEVY Gideon](#) (Date first published: 31 March 2024).

Volunteers in B'Tselem's camera project in the West Bank. Credit: Helen Yanovsky

We would all know a great deal less about the occupation were it not for B'Tselem. It wouldn't matter to most Israelis and Israeli media outlets; they refuse to know and to report, but it would matter a lot for Israel's moral image. When asked to come up with something good to say about Israel, B'Tselem is a fine response.

The [persecution of B'Tselem](#) did not begin yesterday, but now the left and human rights defenders are joining in. B'Tselem did not meet the standards: The Israeli human rights organization did not condemn the events of October 7 sufficiently, after its initial denunciation October 9.

Today it is impossible to oppose the war, to be shocked by its crimes, to be horrified by the fate of Gaza, to feel compassion for its residents, without first condemning the crimes of Hamas.

Anat Kamm [declares](#) (in an article on this page) that Orly Noy and Yuli Novak, the organization's chair and executive director, respectively, failed to "give proper consideration to the massacre." (When they say massacre, they are referring only to October 7.) Kamm quotes Novak, who described the massacre as "an act of resistance or rebellion against the Israeli apartheid regime," but Eyal Hareuveni, a researcher at B'Tselem, said that Novak made it clear that it was an illegitimate act of resistance.

The October 7 massacre was indeed an illegitimate and criminal act of rebellion and resistance against an occupation and an [apartheid regime](#) that is no less illegitimate and criminal. We are a long way from a McCarthyist witch hunt against B'Tselem. Not only does B'Tselem remain a legitimate organization, but the struggle for its existence should be stepped up now, in these most terrible days of war crimes, violations of international law and trampling of human rights.

No, Anat Kamm, there is no need to choose between human rights and Palestinian nationalism. It is very doubtful that the massacre was carried out in the name of nationalism. The hatred is fed mainly by the occupation. If one must choose, the choice is between a Jewish state and a democratic one, because it is no longer possible to have both.

Both fights, against the war in Gaza and against Israeli apartheid, are being waged not in the name of Palestinian nationalism but rather in the name of morality and international law. I have nothing to do with Palestinian nationalism, and neither does B'Tselem.

No, Anat Kamm, the heads of B'Tselem did not forget that it is a "human rights organization and not a movement for the liberation of Gaza," as you wrote, and you don't need "to remind them of this." It is impossible to be a human rights organization without being a movement for the liberation of Gaza, because there are no human rights without the liberation of Gaza.

The liberation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is the key; it must be fought for, and this is what B'Tselem is doing – one of the last to do so in Israel. The left should bow its head in admiration for B'Tselem, not preach morality to it for not conforming to the standard.

I'm a "frequent flyer" at B'Tselem. Most of my own fieldwork is based on that of its field researchers. I've never been to its offices, but nearly every week I go to the West Bank accompanied by one of the organization's excellent, reliable and professional Palestinian field researchers. They, who have seen everything, cry sometimes – especially of late. They, who have seen everything, never give up on the truth; they probe and pry.

Perhaps that is why a few of them cast doubt on the Israeli reports about October 7. It was uncomfortable. I argued with them bitterly and I was very sorry about it, but that's how it is when you are exposed for decades to the [lies of the occupation](#).

When I asked the acting director of international relations, Sarit Michaeli, for data last week on the Palestinians killed in the West Bank since October 7, she could only give me figures through the end of February. They have not yet fully investigated March's killings. Abroad, and even in the Israeli military, B'Tselem is known for being thorough; it's why the organization's data is considered so reliable.

The argument that has erupted in the left over B'Tselem masks deeper issues. This left never stops searching for justifications for the terrible war and its shameful silence about it. This left also wants to divert attention from the war's crimes. B'Tselem will not give it what it wants.

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P.S.

• Haaretz. Mar 31, 2024 12:17 am IDT:
<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-03-31/ty-article/.premium/the-israeli-left-should-not-preach-morality-to-btselem/0000018e-90a2-d8cd-a9ce-97e646a30000>