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Israeli leftists who emigrate are not heros

Sunday 5 July 2020, by [WARSCHAWSKI Michael](#) (Date first published: 2 July 2019).

Activists who leave the battle are not weaklings, but also not heroes.

To be clear: I don't judge anyone who decides to leave the country and reside abroad. This is a personal decision, just like the decision to keep religious commandments, be vegetarian or, as strange as it might seem, to vacation in the city of Eilat. I understand those who choose to leave and raise their families away from the "made in Israel" colonial and racist filth. A confession: several years ago, during one of Israel's murderous attacks on the Gaza Strip, I pressed my daughter to leave with her family for abroad, to a less polluted place. It pained me to ponder being wrenched from my grandchildren, but I thought it better for them to stay away from this bad place. I never considered those who choose to leave the country as a "fallout of weaklings" (as did Yitzhak Rabin, for those who have forgotten).

Almost all of the motives expressed by the interviewees in *After Losing Hope for Change, Top Left-wing Activists and Scholars Leave Israel Behind* (Ha'aretz, 23 May 2020) are clear, logical and even compelling to me. All except for one: that this decision is a continuation of the struggle they waged prior to their departure. No, friends, no! Even if some of you continue in your new countries to fight for justice and rights, including for your old homeland, this is not continuing the struggle but exiting it. An exit that is not difficult to understand given the almost total collapse of everything we wish to build and the dimming of a political vision. An exit that is easy to identify with if you have children growing up in Israel's racist society. But this is an exit from, not a continuation of, the struggle to change our society and construct an alternative.

Perhaps there really is no chance, but then we should admit our defeat in the struggle to change society and policy. Admit that we thus choose to abandon the sinking ship, leaving the Palestinians in these hard times while wishing them luck. The truth is that apart from brief periods, the Palestinians did not truly believe they could trust us. And you, the Ha'aretz heroes, show them just how right they are.

Just don't say your departure, your defection, is a political act, a fight via other means. Defection? Indeed, a harsh word when addressed to friends with whom I struggled for years. But I stand behind it: millions of Israelis cannot choose this way. They have no second passport, no training that guarantees them a job abroad. They are doomed to remain on the ship and you, my dear friends, have fled on the few available lifeboats. As I said, I do not judge you, but do not present your personal decision as an ideological one.

And now, a few words about my own personal choice. As strange as it may sound coming from one convicted of "supporting terrorist organizations," Israeli society is my only natural environment. The place stinks, but only here do I feel at home. Moreover, I feel responsible for my people and I want, from the bottom of my heart, to be able to live here as free human beings, not as colonial oppressors or as an oppressed minority. Furthermore, I believe the situation is reversible, and that my society can recover. As a political activist who witnesses almost complete nationalistic unity in Israel between the 1967 and 1973 wars, but also the anti-Lebanon war movement that later transformed into a mass movement against the occupation, I know that moods may be reversed, even if it takes time.

Moreover, if Israeli society is doomed to sink into the abyss, I will choose to sink with it, if only

because I have no alternative society. I don't consider myself a hero at all (albeit perhaps a bit romantic, as my daughter says), but a saying of one of my heroes speaks deeply to me. Marek Edelman, a commander of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, addressed the topic of heroism, stating that someone who would not leave his mother as she was taken to the train to Auschwitz is no less a hero than those who took up arms. In that sense, and in that sense alone, I want to be a hero, and I choose not to leave my family and my people, even when the abyss is before us.

P.S.

Translated from the author's blog in Hebrew (2/7/2020)