Goodbye democracy, Hello Jungle

Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, July 24, 2018

The severe reactions to the "Nation State" law "whistled up" those who support the law, discount it or are ignorant of its details, to complain about the damage to "pluralism" that has become so precious to them. They accuse the critics of refusing to accept the results of the democratic process, which they were so careful to devalue and undermine, and finally, criticize the critics on the grounds that they oppose viewing Israel as the Jewish nation-state.

It would not be right to respond to these baseless claims without emphasizing that the Nation State law cannot be discussed as an exceptional phenomenon in and of itself. This is a single scene out of a horror movie that has been produced for several years by the Israeli government headed by Netanyahu and led by the Jewish Home party and their troops in the Likud. It contains dozens of anti-democratic, nationalistic, discriminatory and racist scenes against the national gatekeepers, the legal system, Israeli Arabs, LGBT's, refugees, seculars, non-Orthodox, and others.

The inequality that the law expresses has no place under the wings of pluralism, because these are two concepts that contradict each other. Pluralism is one of the basic values ​​of liberal democracy, since it recognizes the rights of the minority. According to pluralism, equal rights and freedom of expression must be granted to different groups in society, so that they can express their differences and unite in different frameworks. The authors of the Nation State law, in complete contradiction to the Declaration of Independence, chose not to mention the word "equality" in spite of all the proposals and reservations that were raised on the subject.

In a pluralistic society, groups espouse values ​​of equality and tolerance and a willingness to live together in mutual respect, mutual recognition and agreement. The Nation State law ignores the value of equality, and most of its initiators are known for their intolerance, for showing disrespect towards various populations in Israeli society and for trying to impose their views on them.

The word democracy, like in the Declaration of Independence, is absent from the Nation State law. The entire emphasis is on a "Jewish state". Those who argue for the righteousness of the law did indeed add the words Democratic and Jewish in their speeches, but ignored the fact that the coexistence of the Jewish and Democratic identities in the State of Israel are conditioned by withstanding several tests: the status of religion in state and politics, the rights of minorities and women, and the right to hold a public struggle over these issues. For years, the Israeli government has been determined to fail Israel in those tests through legislation and discriminatory policies.

Nationalism is based on the idea of ​​self-determination of peoples, and on the right of all peoples to liberty. Nationalism is compatible with democracy and human rights. It sees value in a variety of cultures, languages ​​and peoples. Zionist nationalism, like any other nationalism, sought to strengthen the collective aspect of the Jewish individual, but not at the expense of his individual values ​​and rights, as well as of the non-Jewish citizen, as proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, and without limiting his unique personality and the values ​​that comprise him.

The emphases in the Nation State law and its spirit show that its initiators are loyal to the nationalism that sees the values ​​of the nation as superior to other human values, such as those belonging to the individual, especially the non-Jew, and which are in conflict with them. These followers are at peace with the nationalist approach, which separates the Jewish people from others on the basis of inequality and separates even between individuals in the Jewish people who do not identify with this concept. In the nationalist approach, the nation and the state become a target rather than a means, and stand above humanistic universal values.

The initiators of the law and the Prime Minister supporting it are often photographed with the picture of Ze'ev Jabotinsky in their background. Had they bothered to read his article "On nationalism", written in 1903, they would discover that "nationalism is the individuality of nations, no nation should oppress the national character of another people". Jabotinsky also writes that there is nothing more absurd than the assumption that the Jews "need their state so that they can suffocate and oppress other peoples".

The arguments of the legislators of the Nation State law are the opposite of the spirit of Zionism and the spirit of the Declaration of Independence. They represent anti-democratic trends that say: If you are unable to convince - slander, silence and outlaw. These trends are driven by politicians who interpret democracy as the right of the majority to reach any decision. They reject the principle that in a democracy the majority is entitled to rule only on the condition that it guarantees the rights of the individual - the essence of democracy. The world is perceived as a jungle, the logic of which is a zero-sum game - less for the other camp means more for my camp. Whoever does not support me is necessarily against me. There is no room for the other and the different, on both the social and political levels.

The increase of these phenomena in the governmental and public spheres precludes the possibility of recognizing the two identities of Israel - Democratic and Jewish - as complementary and not contradictory, and are in a sense the "writing on the wall". The Israeli public must understand that there is no need for hatred towards feminism, Arabs, supporters of a political agreement or the leaders of the social protests in order for such things to continue to happen - its indifference is enough to enable their continued existence.