

Haaretz2060731 Stop living in denial, Israel is an evil state By Gideon Levy

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Israel may not be Nazi, nor even a fascist state. Yet it is a member of the same terrible family, the family of evil states. Just consider these acts of evil perpetrated by the state...



Israeli Border Police officers stand guard as Palestinians wait to cross through the Qalandiyah checkpoint, June 2016. Mohamad Torokman/Reuters

After we've cited nationalism and racism, hatred and contempt for Arab life, the security cult and resistance to the occupation, victimhood and messianism, one more element must be added without which the behavior of the Israeli occupation regime cannot be explained: Evil. Pure evil. Sadistic evil. Evil for its own sake. Sometimes, it's the only explanation.

Eva Illouz described its signs ("Evil now," Haaretz Hebrew edition, July 30). Her essay, which challenges the idea of the banality of evil, considers the national group as the source of the evil. Using philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept, she finds a "family resemblance" between the Israeli occupation and history's evil regimes. This similarity does not mean that Israel is Nazi, nor even fascist. And yet it is a member of the same terrible family, the family of evil states. It's a depressing and brilliant analysis.

The evil that Illouz attributes to Israel is not banal, it cannot happen anywhere, and it has political and social roots that are deeply embedded in Israeli society. Thus, Illouz joins Zeev Sternhell, who warned in his impressive and resounding essay about the cultural soil out of which fascism is now growing in Israel ("The birth of fascism," Haaretz Hebrew edition, July 7).

But alongside these analyses, we must also present a brief history of evil. We must present the instances that combine to create a great and horrific picture, a picture of Israeli evil in the territories, so as to stand up to those who deny the evil. It is not the case of the individual – Sgt. Elor Azaria, for example, who is being tried for the death of a subdued Palestinian assailant in Hebron – but the conduct of the establishment and the occupation regime that proves the evil. In fact, the continuation of the occupation proves the evil. Illouz, Sternhell and others provide debatable analyses on its origins, but whatever they are, it can no longer be denied.

One case is like a thousand witnesses: the case of Bilal Kayed. A young man who completed a prison term of 14.5 years – his entire sentence – without a single furlough, without being allowed to at least say goodbye by phone to his dying father; a clear sign of evil.

About six weeks ago, Kayed was getting ready for his release. A representative of the Shin Bet security service – one of the greatest agencies of evil in Israel – even showed him a photograph of the home his family had built for him to stir him up even more ahead of his release. And then, as his family waited impatiently for him at the crossing point and Kayed grew ever more excited in his cell, he was informed that

he was being thrown into administrative detention for at least another six months, without trial and without explanation.

Since then, he has been on hunger strike. He is cuffed to his bed. His family is not allowed to see him. Prison guards never leave his room and the lights are not turned out for a moment. Evil.

Only evil can explain the state's conduct toward Kayed – only an evil state acts this way. The arbitrary announcement, at the last moment, of a senseless detention is abuse, and the way he has been treated since then is also abuse.

Only evil can explain the detention last week of another young man, Hiran Jaradat, whose brother Arif (who had Down syndrome) was killed in June and whose father died two days ago. He is under arrest for “incitement on Facebook” and was not released to attend his father's funeral. Evil.

The continuation of the detention of poet Darin Tatur – evil. The destruction of the tiny swimming pool that the residents of Khirbet Tana in the northern West Bank had built for themselves – evil. The confiscation of water tanks from a community of shepherds in the Jordan Valley in the July heat – evil.

A great many of the decisions of the occupation regime that decides the fates of individuals, families, communities, villages and cities cannot be explained without evil. The list is as long as the occupation. The extortion of sick people from Gaza to enlist them as collaborators, the blockades on cities and towns for weeks, the Gaza blockade, the demolition of homes – all evil.

Banal or not, its existence must be acknowledged and it must be recognized as one of the most influential values in Israel. Yes, there is an evil regime at work in Israel, and therefore it is an evil state.