

# Henry David Thoreau ~ On The Duty Of Civil Disobedience

Civil Disobedience is Thoreau's primary essay on how to interact with Government. Here the author argues that a citizen must always uphold conscience over what is prescribed by law. Never one to accept the status quo, Thoreau says that if called, we must all disobey a system that is inherently prone to corruption and that even personal endangerment may be needed in order do what is right. An inspiration to luminaries such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., this essay is one of the core American writings on government.

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## Ivan Krastev ~ Na Europa



*Ills.: Joseph Sassoon  
Semah*

Ivan Krastev (1965), hoofd van het Centre for Liberal Strategies in Sofia en

medeoprichter van de pan-Europese denktank European Council for Foreign Relations, analyseert in *Na Europa* de toekomst van het Europese project. Krastev bespreekt de huidige staat van Europa aan de hand van de vluchtelingen crisis en het populisme en concludeert dat Europa er behoorlijk slecht voor staat. Europa heeft zijn centrale plaats in de wereldpolitiek en het vertrouwen van de Europeanen zelf verloren.

Europa spreekt minder aan dan ooit. Wat de Unie eerder bijeenhield, een gedeelde herinnering aan WO II, heeft inmiddels zijn kracht verloren. De geopolitieke reden voor Europese eenheid verdween met het uiteenvallen van de Sovjet-Unie. Ook de verzorgingsstaat, ooit de kern van de naoorlogse politieke consensus, staat sinds de opkomst van het kapitalisme in de 70er jaren ter discussie.

Maar ook de veranderende ideologie in de wereld speelt de EU parten: de Unie ziet niet wat anderen beweegt. Men dacht dat het Westen voor eeuwig de wereld kon transformeren en de rest van de wereld voor altijd het Westen zou nabootsen. De ambitie onze waarden en instituties te exporteren heeft geleid tot een hevige identiteitscrisis in het Westen, waarin het erfgoed van het christendom en de verlichting niet langer veilig is, aldus Krastev.

Brussel geloofde onvoorwaardelijk in zijn eigen politieke en sociale model en was onkritisch ten aanzien van de wereldgeschiedenis. Men dacht dat het nationalisme en de politieke theologie achter ons lagen, maar in China, India en Rusland en de islamitische wereld zien we ethisch nationalisme en religie als belangrijke krachten, aldus Krastev. 'Europa onderscheidt zich weliswaar middels postmodernisme, postnationalisme, en secularisme maar dat betekent niet dat zij trendsetter is van de mondiale ontwikkelingen.'

Als we ons realiseren dat de vluchtelingen crisis het karakter van de democratische politiek op nationaal niveau ingrijpend heeft veranderd, dan kunnen we misschien het risico op desintegratie het hoofd bieden. Ze is de enige pan-Europese crisis die het politieke, economische en maatschappelijke model van Europa ter discussie stelt: de vluchtelingen crisis bleek het Europese 9/11 te zijn. Als reactie op de migratie zien we een populistische opstand tegen het establishment, en een rebellie van de kiezers tegen de meritocratische elites als die in Brussel.

Krastev definieert de migratie als de nieuwe revolutie, geen revolutie van de massa zoals we die kennen, maar 'een revolutie als gevolg van het vertrek van

individuen en gezinnen’.

Zonder ideologie, politieke beweging of leiders, maar een kwestie van menselijke noodzaak. Het betekent een verandering van land, maar niet van regering. Deze (migratie)revolutie is een inspiratie voor een contrarevolutie: de opkomst van bedreigde meerderheden als een belangrijke kracht in de Europese politiek. Zij zien een samenzwering van elites met een kosmopolitische en immigranten met een primitieve (tribale) mentaliteit. Dat leidt tot een populisme dat wordt gevoed door de demografische verwachtingen van een afnemende rol van Europa in de wereld en de verwachte massale volksverhuizingen naar Europa. De democratie begint inmiddels te werken als een instrument van exclusiviteit in plaats van inclusiviteit.

Door de vluchtelingen crisis komt het nationalisme ook weer terug in het hart van Europa. De conflicten tussen globalisten en ‘nativisten’ en tussen de open en gesloten samenlevingen zijn belangrijker geworden voor de vorming van de identiteit van de kiezer dan de eerdere op klassenonderscheid gebaseerde identiteiten, aldus Krastev.



Is de EU gedoemd uiteen te vallen zoals het Habsburgse Rijk uiteenviel? Zijn we getuige van een ‘desintegratiemoment’ in Europa? Krastev is van mening dat het uiteenvallen van Europa niet meer is te vermijden, en het zal chaos opleveren. Europa zal niet meer leidend zijn in de wereld. Het zou eveneens kunnen leiden tot een einde van de liberale democratieën aan de randen van Europa en het begin van het einde voor verschillende lidstaten. Het einde aan de droom van een vrij en verenigd Europa.

Maar het is niet alleen pessimisme over de toekomst van de EU in de publicatie *Na Europa*, al suggereert de titel weinig optimisme. Krastev signaleert naast deze kwetsbaarheid ook een oplevende veerkracht. De verschillende crises versterken ook het gevoel dat wij allen deel uitmaken van dezelfde politieke gemeenschap Europa. De politieke, culturele en economische samenwerking zal blijven bestaan: we zijn op het gebied van economie en veiligheid zelfs beter geïntegreerd dan ooit tevoren.

Ivan Krastev heeft *Na Europa* niet geschreven met het doel de EU te redden of haar ondergang te betreuren. ‘Het is niet meer dan een overweging van iets wat

waarschijnlijk staat te gebeuren en een analyse van hoe onze persoonlijke ervaringen van radicale veranderingen bepalend zijn voor ons handelen nu.' Als Oost-European fascineert het Krastev getuige te zijn van een déjà-vu -'dat angstige gevoel dat we vandaag meemaken een herhaling is van een eerder moment of een eerdere gebeurtenis in de geschiedenis'.

Ivan Krastev 'The Erosion of trust in the democratic infrastructure' - Conversation of Europe:

The Amsterdam Conversation, 29 November 2013, Felix Meritis Foundation

Ivan Krastev - Na Europa. Boom uitgevers. Amsterdam 2018. ISBN 9789024422616

Zie ook:

Five great revolutions have shaped political culture over the past 50 years, says theorist Ivan Krastev. He shows how each step forward — from the cultural revolution of the '60s to recent revelations in the field of neuroscience — has also helped erode trust in the tools of democracy. As he says, "What went right is also what went wrong." Can democracy survive?

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*Linda Bouws - St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten*

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# Oligarchy Is Destroying Our Society And The Planet



James K. Boyce - Photo by Matthew Cavanaugh

Is capitalism on the brink of joining the dustbin of history? And what would a post-capitalist society and a sustainable economy look like?

Since the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the world has experienced historically unprecedented levels of growth, with capitalism raising the standard of living of many nations. At the same time, capitalism has generated immense contradictions (exploitation of labor and nature, huge economic inequalities and gross social injustices), and these traditionally have been the main foci of radical political movements advancing the vision of a just socioeconomic order. But is the era of capitalist growth now coming to an end?

Renowned economist James Boyce, senior fellow at the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, offers critical insights on all of these questions, which should be food for thought for all progressives in the age of the revival of democratic socialism. Professor Boyce is the author of the forthcoming books *Economics for People* and *The Planet: Inequality in the Era of Climate Change and The Case for Carbon Dividends*.

C.J. Polychroniou: *There are economists today who are arguing that the era of capitalist economic growth is over. Is capitalism, in your own view, on its deathbed, soon to join the dustbin of history like previous economic systems such as feudalism?*

*James Boyce:* Your question really has two parts. One is about the future of capitalism, the other about the future of economic growth. The answers depend on what we mean by both of these terms, “capitalism” and “economic growth.”

Let me start with growth. Whenever we talk about this, we need to ask: Growth of what? Conventional economists use the term to mean growth of GDP, gross domestic product, the monetary value of all the goods and services produced in the economy that carry a price tag. Yet we know that GDP is a hodgepodge of things that are good, bad and useless. It not only includes good things, like food and housing and music, but also bad things, like the costs resulting from wars, prisons and environmental disasters. GDP also includes some useless things, like one-upmanship spending for what Thorstein Veblen called “conspicuous consumption,” the aim of which is merely to attain a higher position in the social pecking order, spending that does not add to a society’s well-being since one person’s gain is just another’s loss. The only thing that all the items counted in GDP have in common is that they carry a market price tag.

At the same time, GDP doesn’t count much that is very important to human well-being. It doesn’t count good things without a price tag, like the unpaid labor devoted to caring for children and the elderly, or ecosystem services, or any of the proverbial “best things in life that are free.” It doesn’t account for things that reduce our well-being like environmental degradation and violence. So, all in all, GDP is a deeply flawed measure of a society’s well-being. Preoccupation [with] how fast it grows is misplaced.

The same applies to “limits to growth,” a phrase popularized by some well-meaning environmentalists. Of course, there are limits to growth, if by this we mean the growth of bad things like pollution, natural resource depletion, imprisonment or violence. None of these can grow forever. The limits may be hard to identify with precision – what, for example, is the maximum percent of a nation’s population that can be put in jail? Three percent? Ten? Twenty-five? – but we know there is a limit.

But this does not mean there are limits to the growth of all the good things, too — things that improve human well-being rather than diminishing it. There are no natural limits to the growth of art or music or knowledge. There are limits on how much food and other necessities we require, but these are limits on demand, not necessarily on our ability to supply them.

This distinction between good things and bad things wouldn't matter if they were locked together in some fixed and immutable ratio, making it impossible to have more of one without more of the other. But the good/bad ratio between them is a variable, not an unchanging parameter, and a fundamental aim of any economy that works for people and the planet is to move the balance in favor of the good.

The "limits to growth" slogan has obscured this, just as GDP has obscured our understanding of human well-being. It conveys the implication that we face an inexorable trade-off between protecting the environment and advancing economic well-being. Ironically, this is the very same message that is propagated by fossil fuel corporations and diehard opponents of environmental protection. In the end, it's a message that limits the growth of environmentalism itself.

I've argued that we need a new banner: Grow the good and shrink the bad.

*What about capitalism?*

A bit like growth, "capitalism" is a word that can mean different things to different people. For some, it means the division of society into two opposing classes: the vast majority who work for a living, and the elite few who live off the proceeds of other people's labor by virtue of ownership of capital. For others, it means just about anything involving markets, or wage labor or the profit motive. In talking about whether capitalism is on its "deathbed" - a better image might be in its death throes, since if it is dying, it's not going gently - we need to unpack these different meanings.

To me, what is not sustainable is the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few. If this is what you mean by capitalism, I truly hope that its days are numbered. Oligarchy, which is the name for concentrated wealth and power, is bad for people not only because it condemns many to poverty and powerlessness, but also because it erodes the mutual trust and affection without which a society cannot function happily or well. And it's bad for the planet because it allows those at the top of the pyramid to use and abuse the environment - both as a source of raw materials and as a sink for the disposal of waste - at the expense of everyone else.

Historically, the political left has seen oligarchy as an outcome of unfettered markets, while the political right has seen it as an outcome of an unfettered state. In truth, however, the defining feature of oligarchy is not the balance between the

market and the state. Its defining feature is the highly unequal distribution of wealth and power. If purchasing power and political power are concentrated in the hands of a few, it doesn't matter whether we have a "free-market" economy or a state-run economy: the result will be unhappy outcomes for most of the people and for the planet, too.

*Capitalism cannot exist without markets. Can markets exist without capitalism?*

Sure. Markets existed before capitalism, and markets will exist after capitalism, however you define it.

Here is a thought experiment: Imagine a society in which a substantial chunk of assets [is] owned in equal and common measure by all. These assets - call them universal property - would include gifts of nature, like the trees in the forest, the fish in the sea, and the minerals in the ground, and also would include some of the institutional infrastructure that society creates and maintains, like financial systems and patent systems. These assets generate income in the form of payments for the use of nature's sources and sinks, taxes on financial transactions and a share in royalties on patented innovations. Imagine that income derived from these assets is paid in equal monthly or quarterly dividends to every person - call it universal income from universal property.

The result would be an equally substantial leveling of the economy's playing field. There would still be markets, in the sense of payments for goods and services. There would still be wages, in the sense of people being paid for work they do. There would still be the profit motive, in the sense of people seeking favorable returns on their investments of time and capital. And there would still be other, nonuniversal assets owned privately by individuals and cooperatives and businesses, or publicly by governments. But whatever you call the result, it would not be capitalism as we know it today. Instead, universal property would inject a dose of equality into the distribution of wealth and power. It would act as a kind of democratic antibody, strengthening the immune system of our body politic against oligarchy.

You might call this vision a new kind of capitalism. Or you might call it libertarian socialism, an idea embraced by Noam Chomsky, among others. To me, the label is less important than the substance: a democratic distribution of wealth and power.

*What forms of resistance could be useful in order to hasten the transition to an economy that works for people and the planet?*



I'm glad you are asking about "forms" of resistance, not assuming there is only one right path. We need to forge a broad alliance of people who act at multiple levels - personal, local, regional, national and global.

At the personal level, we see people choosing to conduct their lives - to work, consume and engage in civic activity -in ways that reflect pro-people and pro-planet values, resisting the temptation to look the other way.

At the local level, we see people struggling for environmental justice, defending the fundamental human right to a clean and healthy environment. We see the growth of cooperative enterprises, new agriculture and community-based clean energy initiatives that, together, are sometimes described as a "solidarity economy" that is incubating alternatives to the status quo.

At the regional level, we see efforts to develop low-carbon and no-carbon transportation systems, to safeguard clean water and open lands, and to build alliances across diverse communities who share a commitment to building an economy that works for people and the planet.

At the national and global levels, we see efforts to mobilize the people to demand policies that guarantee access to health care and education for all, protect the environment, promote peace, and reverse the toxic concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the "1 percent."

By all these paths, people are resisting the degradation of human well-being and the environment and seeking to establish a more level playing field, build a more resilient economy and create a more vibrant democracy.

Sometimes we see a temptation to dismiss the efforts and paths pursued by others as less important or less virtuous than our own, as "false solutions," useless or even counterproductive. This kind of one-size-fits-all arrogance is born of egoism, insularity and lack of imagination. It is inimical to building the alliances we need. So, dogmatism is something we should resist, too.

*Is there hope for the planet, given that humanity is on the edge of a precipice due to global climate change? Is there a way forward?*

There is a vast intermediate terrain between the extreme positions of claiming that climate change is not a problem and claiming that it is the end of the world. Both are forms of denial. The first denies the reality of climate change itself; the

second denies the reality that we can do something about it.

Let's be serious. The planet will survive climate change. Life on Earth will survive climate change, though unless we act today, many species may not. Humans will survive it, too, though unless we act today, many people may not and many more will experience needless suffering.

But we face a continuum of possibilities. The more carbon we dump into the atmosphere, the worse things will be. In fact, exponentially worse: if average global temperatures rise by 3°C [3 degrees Celsius] above the preindustrial level instead of 1.5°C, the damages will not be merely twice as high, but many multiples greater. Where humankind and the planet end up will depend, above all, on how quickly we stop using fossil fuels and shift instead to clean energy. As climate scientist Kate Marvel has put it [quoting earth system scientist Benjamin Cook], "climate change isn't pass/fail."

The good news is that we can take actions now to limit the degrees of damage. The bad news is that we aren't acting nearly fast enough. The binding constraints are political, not technical.

I believe that there are four main arenas where we need to act. The first is to minimize the extent of climate change, above all by reducing our use of fossil fuels. At the level of public policies, this will require a set of complementary measures: carbon pricing that is anchored to hard emissions targets; investments in clean energy and energy efficiency; and smart regulations designed to support an efficient and equitable clean energy transition.

The second arena is adaptation. It is too late to prevent climate change altogether. So, we will need to invest in adaptation as well as mitigation. Here a key question is how resources available for adaptation should be allocated across and within countries. Conventional economics would assign priority to protecting the most "valuable" lives and property - in other words, protecting the people with the most wealth and power and their assets. In the face of rising sea levels and storm surge risks, for example, we could see the construction of sea walls that protect pricey real estate by diverting floodwaters into poor communities. A rights-based approach would start from a radically different premise: the principle that the right to a safe environment is held equally by all. It is neither a commodity that should be allocated on the basis of purchasing power, nor a

privilege that should be allocated on the basis of political power. In this view, adaptation investments should be guided by human needs, prioritizing the communities that need them most.

The third arena for action is to build on the ways that reduced use of fossil fuels can bring about immediate and tangible improvements in public health by improving air quality. The burning of fossil fuels releases not only carbon dioxide, the main culprit in climate change, but also many other dirty pollutants that harm human health. While the damages from climate change are long-term and spread across the globe, the damages from air pollution are near-term and more localized, enhancing their political relevance. It makes good sense to cut emissions where the air quality benefits - known as "co-benefits" in climate policy - are greatest. We know that air pollution disproportionately afflicts people of color and low-income communities, so this is a matter not only of efficiency but also of environmental justice.

The fourth arena is carbon dividends. These recycle the extra money that consumers pay for fossil fuels as a result of carbon pricing as equal dividends to every person in the country or state implementing the policy. The government of Canada recently announced that it will introduce carbon dividends in provinces, including Ontario, that do not already have a carbon price. Carbon dividends are an example of universal income from universal property - the concept I mentioned earlier - the property in this case being the limited capacity of the biosphere to absorb carbon emissions. People pay based on their use of the scarce resource - the rich, who typically have the biggest carbon footprints because they consume more, pay more than others - and everyone receives an equal dividend based on common ownership. With a carbon price-and-dividend policy, the majority of people, including low-income households and the middle class, would come out ahead monetarily, without even counting the benefits of curbing climate change. Their dividends would more than offset what they pay in higher fossil fuel prices, helping to ensure durable public support for the policy.

The insufficiency of inequitable climate policies was demonstrated recently in France by the "Yellow Vest" revolt against President Macron's government that broke out after his government imposed new taxes on gasoline and diesel in the name of fighting climate change. Across the country, hard-pressed working people took to the streets in protest. Macron, they contended, "talks about the end of the world while we are talking about the end of the month." Polls showed

that a large majority of the French people agreed. The new tax was rather modest – it would have added about 35 US cents to the price of a gallon of diesel and 12 cents to a gallon gasoline – but it was enough to provoke such a violent reaction that the government decided to suspend the policy.

The lesson is clear: to be politically sustainable, climate policies must be seen to be economically equitable.

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*C.J. Polychroniou* is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, the political economy of the United States and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to Truthout as well as a member of Truthout's Public Intellectual Project. He has published several books and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Croatian, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish. He is the author of *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at Truthout and collected by Haymarket Books.

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# **The Third Conference On The Political Future Of The Caribbean**

3<sup>rd</sup> CONFERENCE ON THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF THE DUTCH-ADMINISTERED CARIBBEAN - *RE-UNITING THE ANTILLES AND CARIBBEAN IN SOLIDARITY*

*The Third Conference on the Political Future of the Caribbean,*

*Having met at Bonaire, West Indies on 7th and 8th December 2018,*

*Aware* that the political status of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius (Statia) and Saba was transformed in 2010 from being a part of the autonomous country of the (former) Netherlands Antilles to a new political arrangement unilaterally advanced by the Kingdom of the Netherlands akin to that of 'partial integration', and characterized by serious political and economic inequality, rather than the promised political and economic equality originally envisaged.

*Also aware* that this new status is tantamount to unilateral annexation, and is wholly inconsistent with the minimum standards of full self-government and equality required on the basis of international principles of democratic governance,

*Noting* that in 2010, Curaçao and Sint Maarten joined Aruba as the second and third semi-autonomous countries in the Kingdom without the full measure of self-government required under United Nations (U.N.) Resolution 1541 (XV), and subject to the applicability of Article 51 of the Kingdom Charter which provides for unilateral intervention in the affairs of the autonomous countries,

*Read*

further: <https://overseasreview.blogspot.com/2018/12/caribbean-experts-calls-for-regional.html>

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**Paula Bermann ~ Deze ontspoorde wereld**



9 september 1943

‘Mijn Inge, wat zal ze blij zijn, ach, konden we maar allemaal bij elkaar zijn. Maar we moeten dubbel voorzichtig zijn, want de wa-mannen voelen dat ze aan de verliezende hand zijn, en de Grüne Polizei zal harder optreden dan ooit. Hans blijft veel binnen. Hij kookt zelf, schrijft hij, en dat gaat hem goed af, hij studeert.

Sonja weet niet wat ze wil. Ze is vandaag bijzonder nerveus, ongeduldig. Ik begrijp dat en toch moet ik vaak streng zijn, en zij begrijpt dat niet. Haar opvattingen zijn veranderd, en ik ben en blijf een ouderwetse vrouw met te veel plichts- en eergevoel, kuisheidszin. Dat begrijpen

de jongelui niet, ze leven in een ontspoorde wereld.’

Van 1940 tot 1944 houdt de Duits-Joodse Paula Bermann een dagboek bij. Een verslag van de eerste oorlogsjaren in Amsterdam en van de onderduikperiode later in Jutphaas.

Niet alleen de zorg over het lot van haar kinderen, Inge, Hans en Sonja, maken het dagboek beklemmend. Ook beschrijft zij de steeds ingrijpender gevolgen van de Duitse maatregelen om het Joodse deel van de bevolking te isoleren. Daarnaast staat ze stil bij die dubbele identiteit. Duitse voor de Nederlanders, Joodse voor de Duitsers.

Maar ook is het een heel persoonlijk dagboek. Paula Bermann klaagt over het sombere karakter van haar echtgenoot, moppert over het gedrag van haar kinderen en zij voelt zich vaak onbegrepen.

Tegelijkertijd is zij de moeder die ontroerend haar jongste dochter, Sonja, als een dromerig, leergierig meisje beschrijft, die trots is op haar zoon Hans die medicijnen studeert en die de opstandige Inge een pluim geeft voor haar moed.

Het verhaal van een moeder met opgroeiende kinderen in een ontspoorde wereld.

17 februari 1943

‘Ach, de kinderen, als ik die niet zou hebben. Wat verlang ik naar de dood. Ikzelf ben op alles voorbereid, geloof niet dat we de dans ontspringen als het nog lang duurt, maar de kinderen.’

Hoe verder je leest, hoe aangrijpender het dagboek. Al flakkert er zo nu en dan nog een vonkje hoop, de dodendans is niet te ontlopen.

19 maart 1944

De laatste woorden van het dagboek:

'O hart, houd uit!'

Op 27 januari 1945 overlijdt Paula Bermann in Bergen Belsen.

Vandaag zien we de mistige contouren van een nieuwe ontsporing aan de horizon.

De eerste wagons worden weer op de rails gezet.

Het dagboek van Paula Bermann is meer dan een getuigenis van een bittere periode uit onze geschiedenis, het is ook een waarschuwing. Een waarschuwing voor de gevolgen van een wereld die ontspoot.

Paula Bermann - Deze ontspoorde wereld.

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# **Migration And Its Discontents: Israelis In Berlin And Homeland Politics**



Yael Almog *Ills.: Joseph Sassoon Semah*

### *Introduction*

Recent history has established Germany's reputation as a new immigration country, facilitated by its economic boom and a relatively accommodating migration policy. An attractive destination for newcomers, Germany has surpassed many lands such as England and Canada which have long been recognized as immigration countries. Berlin in particular has drawn diverse populations of immigrants, including a considerable number of authors and artists whose works negotiate this relocation to the city. The gap between Germany's notorious historical reputation for being hostile toward minority groups—embodied in the memories of World War II—and its attractiveness for expatriates has grown increasingly wider.

It is under these conditions that the growing community of Israelis living in Berlin has drawn attention from the German, Israeli, and global media. Israeli media and the publicist polemic have been preoccupied in recent years with the role of Israel's living costs as a motivation for migration to Europe. In recent years, public protests in Israel have opted to shift public discussion away from its longtime focus on state security and onto the country's increasingly high cost of living: Daily life necessities have "surpassed" the outside threat of anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli violence. In Israel, the perception of Germany as an attractive destination for emigrants elicits protests against the so-called opportunism of Israeli emigrants accused of "forgetting" the crimes committed by Germany during the Holocaust in favor of the satisfaction of mundane needs.[1] Former



Israeli Minister of Finance, Yair Lapid, for example, has condemned the diffidence of Israelis who leave Israel because life is “easier in Berlin.”[2] According to Lapid, relocating in Berlin, the city which embodies historic insecurity for Jews, exemplifies the renouncement of national solidarity for the sake of economic comfort.

Berlin is characterized, often dismissively, as a “bubble” by Germans and foreigners alike—a desirable location for individuals belonging to minority groups or adhering to subaltern politics. My contention is that this cultural and imaginary construct functions as a microcosm allowing for the transmission of political identities to a new, foreign realm.

By examining recent literary representations which describe Berlin as a place of residence for Israelis, this essay argues that the description of Israeli migrants “escaping” their home country misses a crucial point: During their time in Berlin, Israelis do not simply abandon, but rather relocate Israeli politics to a new setting. This displacement dispels seminal expectations of Jewish diasporic life in Germany—both the Zionist discourse on European Jewish diaspora and Germany’s hegemonic memory culture. For one, the identification of the Israeli newcomers as “oriental” is at odds with an Israeli narrative of European Jews returning to the continent after the trauma of the Holocaust. In the following readings of contemporary literary texts, I trace how sociopolitical conflicts salient to contemporary Israeli society—in particular, tensions between ethnic groups of Jewish Israelis—are negotiated through the act of travelling to Berlin or residing in the city. I follow how these conflicts are reformulated in a vocabulary pertaining to German memory culture and to German-Jewish encounters.

### *Arab Jews and the Berlin Crucible*

A center for writing, translation work, and art, Berlin has retained its reputation as a locus of creativity and prosperity: a dramatically charged position in regards to those Jewish migrants who reside in a city remembered as the epicenter for the mass destruction of European Jewry.

Through manifold references to Berlin’s demography, Israeli prose challenges the victim-aggressor dialectic evoked through the Israeli presence in Germany. One may interpret Israeli migration to the country as an act of “return” for the victims, categorized on the one hand by a newfound, post-Holocaust German interest in Jewishness, and on the other hand, by the reestablishment of the pre-Holocaust European Diaspora. Yet, in the case of many Israelis, feelings of guilt experienced

in their interactions with local Germans supposedly mirror recent memories of the Israelis' own roles in the military occupation of Palestine.

This feeling of guilt reflects identification with a hegemonic collective which exercises (either past or present) power over a national minority. For the German characters in Israeli literature, guilt is a marker of belonging to the national hegemony, and of how engagement with the memory of the Holocaust functions as a reiteration of this power dynamic. [3] The duality ingrained in the figure of the Jew—first victim and now a sovereign citizen—can be challenged through a genealogy of “growing into” this position. The assumption that the Jew was once a victim and is now a potential perpetrator presumes a binary distinction between Jews—marked by their violent history in Europe—and Arabs.

This distinction takes for granted Ashkenazi Jews (Jews of European origins) as solo agents; it perpetuates the establishment of the Israeli national narrative upon disregard for the marginalized narratives of Mizrahi Jews (a definition which usually refers to Jews of non-European origins, particularly those from the Middle East).[4]

In his recently published volume of short stories, Berlin-based Israeli author Mati Shemoelof presents several texts featuring a narrator who describes himself as a marginal subject in Israel and as an outcast to the narrative that the country allocates for its emigres.

Shemoelof's first book of prose details the experiences of a Mizrahi Israeli who migrates to Berlin in part due to economic hardship in Israel (Israel's economic crises effect marginalized minorities to a greater extent than the rest of the population). At the beginning of one of these stories, the narrator loses a tooth. Over the course of the story, he examines this misfortune as a means by which to contemplate on the greater circumstances of his migration to Berlin:

*I am walking inside the rapid transit train back to my home. I almost allow myself to get the stops wrong. I curse migration and all the difficulties that it bears. I feel the city is standing against me. That I have to fight it to move on somewhere. [...] What will happen in the future when something else goes wrong, where will I get the huge sums of money required in order to live as an Iraqi exile in a European city. (Shemoelof 288)*

The charged image of a Jew travelling via train in Germany and reporting his anxiety transitions dramatically when, in the end of the passage, it is revealed that the core of the narrator's insecurity in Europe is not his Jewishness, but

rather his Arabic origins. At the same time, the scene negotiates the narrator's status as a Mizrahi Israeli—the social position that elicited his migration. Experimenting with the precarious status of belonging to a minority group in Europe, the narrator produces both a Mizrahi as well as an Ashkenazi experience, participating thereby in a narrative constitutive to multiple facets of Israeli identity.

The Israeli visitor to Berlin may define his identity (nearly all texts dealing with this phenomenon feature a male protagonist) in terms of transgressing a rigid distinction between Arabs and Jews. Mizrahi Israeli authors problematize their simplistic categorization as Jewish victims who return to Europe, highlighting instead the necessary negotiation of multiple identities while inhabiting the multi-ethnic neighborhoods of contemporary Berlin. As Andreas Huyssen has argued, one inability of Turkish migrants to take part in the “German past” stems from the focus of the country's public memory discourse on World War II of German perpetrators and Jewish victims (Huyssen 164). The inability of German Muslims to wear the shoes of the perpetrator is mirrored in Israeli-Mizrahi literature by the inability of Jews of Arabic origins to wear the shoes of the victim.

### *Israeli National Narrative and the “Return” to Europe*

In Israeli collective memory, the fate of German Jewry has become a paragon for the position that the State of Israel was established through a departure from Europe—a rejection or renouncement of Jewish life on the continent. Gershom Scholem, one of the eminent public intellectuals in the young state, explicated this position (establishing it, thereby, as inherent to Israel's national narrative) in his famous 1964 letter to the editor of a Festschrift for Margarete Susman. The editor had solicited Scholem's contribution to express a testament to German-Jewish dialogue. This prompting provoked Scholem, who instead titled his contribution “Against the Myth of the German-Jewish Dialogue.”

Scholem's text positions the figures of the modern German and the modern Jew in a (failed) dialogue with one another:

*I deny that there has ever been such a German-Jewish dialogue in any genuine sense whatsoever, i.e., as a historical phenomenon. [...] To be sure, the Jews attempted a dialogue with the Germans, starting from all possible points of view and situations, demandingly, imploringly, and entreatingly, servile and defiant, with a dignity employing all manner of tones and a godforsaken lack of dignity, and today, when the symphony is over, the time may be ripe for studying their*

*motifs and for attempting a critique of their tones. (Scholem 61)*

The letter centers its argumentation around a binary distinction: Jews are a distinct entity from Germans. It defines this duality as that of two parallels which do not meet despite incessant Jewish efforts to achieve some form of conciliation. The letter portrays “the German” as the national subject which refused dialogue with the Jew. The figure of the Jew, in return, is conditioned by the failed dialogue which he has tried in vain to hold with his German counterpart.

The letter’s presumptions constitute some seminal cultural and ethnic tensions in contemporary Israeli society. The text defines Israeli Jewishness through the experience of German Jews who have been excluded from the European community. Interventions of so-called ‘oriental’ images within the German-Jewish dialogue—Arabic or Turkish—render the construct of the “Orient” as an active position within the identities of Jewish life in Germany.

The idea that exclusion (and expulsion) from Europe is the constitutive experience of modern Israelis is reiterated in accounts depicting the growing phenomenon of Israeli migration to Berlin in the present. The cover to Oz-Salzberger’s monograph on the subject contains the following citation:

*Europe, which shaped and educated and starved and killed and spewed us continually, is looking at us today—Jews and Arabs, Sephardim and Ashkenazim—in cold remoteness. [...] And this is why Berlin is, after all, a possible gateway to Europe. Precisely because it is such a dark gate. A bloody gate, with a warning sign displayed above it. And it can also focus the Israelis’ longing for Europe through an unequalled lens. It’s right to start here the journey toward our passion for Europe.*

This dire depiction of Berlin emerges through a charged metaphor: in the context of the description of Europe as a locus that “starved and killed” the Jews, the gate evokes in Israeli collective memory the entrance gate to Auschwitz with the warning sign above it. Albeit geographically remote, this site becomes a paragon for the city. Telling is the inclusion of all Israelis—Israeli Arabs, as well—as one entity which has been “educated” by Europe, tortured by it, and which continues to be drawn to the continent. Israelis who choose not only to visit but also to migrate to Berlin thus relocate to a locus of terror. In doing so, they return to the crucible of Israeli identity. Paradoxically, it is in the very act of departing from Israel that they tie their lives, according to this narrative, to the cultural icon which binds together the Israeli population. How do texts evince alternative

accounts of the migration from Israel?

As Hannan Hever has shown, the narrative of migration from Europe to Israel/Palestine, which is constitutive of Modern Hebrew literature excludes non-European authors from the Israeli literary canon. Hever has argued that such images as the crossing of the sea on the way to the Jewish homeland (images perceived as the climactic moments in Israeli literature) cannot be emulated by works of authors who are recognized as having non-European roots (Hever 33-34). The presence of Germany in subaltern Israeli literature demonstrates an additional, provocative facet in rewriting the country's hegemonic national narrative. Such literature presents the conflicted history of European Jews—and their ultimate departure from Europe—as tropes modulated by the agendas and necessities of the Zionist project in its early stages.

The potential of Berlin to function as a locus from which alternative Jewish histories can be imagined is also reflected in David Adaf's novel *De Urbibus Inferis* ("From Cities Below")—a work by another author of Mizrahi origin. Adaf's novel centers on a detective-like historical examination of marginalized Jewish sects. The novel depicts a secret esoteric order in Judaism, "the Rose of Judah," which competed in antiquity, so goes the narrative, against Judaism's hegemonic stream led by Simon bar Kokhba, a well-known mythical sage. The trilogy proposes that bar Kokhba orchestrated the destruction of those who resisted him, culminating in the defeat of Mizrahi leaders by Ashkenazi Jews who—according to this narrative—then took the lead in Jewish tradition. It is during their stay in Berlin that the novel's characters obtain the keys to solving the mystery of how Jewish tradition has been established through the oppression of marginal sects associated with Jewish-Arab identity.

The significance of Berlin in negotiating the assumptions at the core of modern Jewish identity is signaled in the novel's very first line:

*I wouldn't have thought that I would gather the strength to complete this work, had I not resided in Berlin. Maybe since I knew that I was dealing for the first time with human beings whose existence was beyond writing, whose voices demand that I adapt my being and shut it off, at the same time, to let it slip away down here from the ghostly world of those, wherever they are, who await birth.*  
(Adaf 7)

The beginning of the sentence proposes that it is the intradiegetic narrator's time in Berlin which provides him with the energy needed for writing his book.

However, a closer look at the sentence dispels this impression; the narrator's stay in Berlin only allows the narrator to think that he may have the energy needed for this undertaking. Berlin is depicted in the novel as a "city from below": the narrator's descriptions of the city highlight its open sexual atmosphere and decadence, as well as the overwhelming number of (other) Israeli visitors.

In an ironic reference to the city's multicultural identity, one of the novel's protagonists—a Mizrahi woman defined by her underprivileged upbringing in a small town—comments on Kreuzberg "for Turkish shawarma and second-hand stores one doesn't need to go to Berlin" (183). This dismissiveness toward East Berlin's multiculturalism is ironic given the protagonist's family origins. Her socioeconomic background ultimately provokes tensions between her and her (presumably Ashkenazi) boyfriend, and leads to their breakup after she sleeps with a German man as if in reaction to her marginalized Jewish identity. It is during her short encounter with this German man that the female protagonist is exposed to the secret tradition of "the Rose of Judah": her sexual partner has a tattoo on his chest of the order's mystical symbol. Following the narrator's position that Berlin is a locus for ghostly beings "awaiting their birth," the protagonist appears to experiment with alternate identities which problematize her own marginalized position in Israeli society.

### *Europe's Oriental Nomads*

Does the creation of fiction go beyond mere possibility and evince Germany as a concrete locus for Israeli migrants of subaltern identities? Contemporary Israeli texts negotiate their participation in the hegemonic victim-perpetrator narrative by challenging the figure of the victim-aggressor attributed to Israelis in their presence in Germany. In Germany, feelings of guilt presume association with a hegemonic collective that exercises power (past or present) over a national minority. German residents of Turkish origins thus expose national and ethnic biases which are perpetuated under the auspices of guilt (Adelson 84).

The references to Germany's national minorities in Mizrahi Israeli literature are telling. They create a homology between older migrants to Europe and certain Israeli visitors to Berlin who conceptualize themselves through their presence in Germany as outsiders to their own country's memory politics. The exclusion of some ethnic groups from Germany's national narrative resembles common expectations regarding the Israeli presence in Germany including the exclusion of subaltern identities from the narrative of Jewish persecution in Europe.

Contemporary prose may negotiate common accounts of the visit to Germany as an act of “revenge,” “reconciliation,” or “escape.” In these representations of Israeli life in Berlin, Germany constitutes a site for subversive affective identification for Israel’s national minorities—subjects excluded from the country’s hegemonic self-portrayal.

### *Notes*

[1] Works on Israeli migration to Germany which are often based on oral history have described Israeli presence in the country as a derivation of a post-traumatic attitude toward German culture. Fania Oz-Salzberger’s 2001 monograph *Israelis, Berlin* has become a well-known example of this trend. Her essayistic account recognizes the cultural prominence of the Israeli migration to the city when this phenomenon was still new; due to its popularity, it has established that Israeli migrants to Berlin are enchanted by their uncanny return to Germany. Similarly, sociologist Gad Yair presents the subjects in his 2015 study of Israeli migration to Germany the assumption that their lives in the country encompass incessant traumatic connection to German culture and language.

[2] A comment made on his Facebook page that provoked polemical responses in Israeli media. See [TheMarker](#), October 1, 2013. All translations from the Hebrew are my own.

[3] See for example the recent anthology of short stories, published concurrently in German and in Hebrew, *Won’t Forget, Go Out Dancing* (2015) presenting texts by Israeli and German authors on experiences in the other country.

[4] In Modern Hebrew, the category “Mizrahim” marks Jews whose origins are often from countries such as Iraq, Iran, Yemen and Morocco). For an exploration of the tension between Mizrahi authors and the canon of Modern Hebrew literature—deriving from Mizrahi Jews’ identification as “Arab” see Levy’s recent comprehensive study. Levy’s work presents the marginalization of Mizrahi writing as fundamental to the canon of Modern Hebrew literature since its establishment (Levy 60-102). As Halevi-Wise writes, “In Israel, where Mizrahim represent a cultural—albeit not a demographic—minority, Mizrahi cultural contributions are invigorated by a struggle to preserve and legitimize the backgrounds of Jews from Arab lands against an ideology with preconceived social, ethical and artistic standards for Mizrahi conduct” (Halevi-Wise 49).

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#### *About the author*

Yael Almog, Ph.D ~ Faculty Member I Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin Dept. of Evangelical Theology and Jewish Thought, The Goethe University Frankfurt  
Most of her publications can be read and downloaded at <https://uni-frankfurt1.academia.edu/YaelAlmog>