

- Published 01:06 28.12.10
- Latest update 01:06 28.12.10

Make no mistake - Israelis have always been racist

The racist, extreme right wing gets in and fills the vacuum left by the negligent social left.

By [Merav Michaeli](#)

Among those shocked at the "spread of racism" are people who claim that the residents of the neighborhoods protesting against foreigners are not racist but merely afraid, merely in distress. Indeed, the chief activist in the neighborhood of Kiryat Shalom, Eli Mizrahi, said, "There is no hatred We know they are suffering I don't understand: Why is it necessary to make it harder for us, in a place with a weak population? ... Why pile weakness on weakness?"

It's true; the neighborhoods are weak, with weak residents who have a hard time making a living and getting ahead. One can just read the reports on increasing poverty, declining wages and growing nutritional insecurity to know how tangible the distress is; a struggle for survival. Israel neglected these people and communities, and in recent years is only increasing their number.

But the distress does not contradict the racism, it goes hand in hand with it. In its early days, when Israel's character was taking shape, it determined that the white race was superior. When the people who would eventually become "Mizrahim" arrived and were brought here from North Africa, it wasn't suggested or made possible for them to take part in the government, the land, the systems of power and the media. Very quickly they became citizens, but second-class citizens subject to humiliation and inferior conditions. They were excluded from public life and official cultural life, living with the knowledge and experience of inferiority. And separation: They were put in separate housing projects and separate neighborhoods.

People who grow up with this experience of inferiority, when racism is directed at them, internalize that racism. When a landlord, the master, determines that white is good and black is inferior, you internalize that standard and hate yourself because you are not white. The standard of white superiority and the racism that comes with it become part of you, even when you are its victim.

And then you project your racism onward, to anyone who is darker and more inferior than you. Add to that the existential distress and the inflaming of baser instincts by types like extreme right-wing activist Itamar Ben-Gvir, who don't miss an opportunity to gather new believers, and you get the recent racist demonstrations.

After all, this is always how it works: The racist, extreme right wing gets in and fills the vacuum left by the negligent social left. But make no mistake - the hatred and racism were always here; now they are emerging more loudly.

The white upper classes sublimate their racism: They employ the people they perceive as inferior; they have the money to pay them (not much) to clean for them and take care of them. Once it was the Arabs and the Mizrahim, now it's the "infiltrators" and the foreigners (in fact, upper-class women are the employers, the men don't even have any contact with them).

And so this class does just what the white and racist prime minister is doing, inciting against the very things that step on the weakest points of the weak: "a concrete threat to the Jewish and democratic character of the country," and a "wave threatening Israeli workplaces". And immediately thereafter, warning Israelis "not to take the law into their own hands and not to hurt the illegal infiltrators" so he can wash his hands of the matter: They are the racists, those baboons, not him.

That's the way this class is, part of which belongs to the good old "left," disappointed with the peace process and party to the building of the separation fence, the roads for Jews only and acceptance committees to communities. And in the same breath, they frame the others with the charge of racism, those others from the Hatikva neighborhood and Bat Yam.