Afterword

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This special issue of *Israel Studies Review* is the product of a partnership between the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Tel Aviv University and Shaharit, a new 'think-and-do tank', founded in Israel in 2012. Shaharit uniquely combines theoretical work that focuses on a 'politics of the common good' or a 'post-liberal politics' with advocacy work on the ground, crossing the divides between communities and creating new alignments and partnerships.

All of the authors who have contributed to this issue were involved in a year-long working group held at Tel Aviv University and run by Nissim Mizrachi, Menachem Mautner, and myself. The program was aimed at understanding the massive resistance to the liberal agenda among large parts of the Israeli public, with working-class Mizrahim prominent among them. The group's perspective, featured in each of the articles in this issue and showcased at a conference held at Tel Aviv University in the fall of 2015,[1] focused on the liberal agenda itself, asking what it is about liberalism that invites such resistance, both in Israel and elsewhere. Working with its academic partners, Shaharit aims to rethink and reframe Israeli liberalism, creating a political space that can be an alternative to the culture wars that define politics in Israel and, in many ways, in liberal democracies throughout the world.

Between the fall of 2012 and the spring of 2014, I had the unique privilege of serving as the facilitator for a series of day-long workshops that included the respective leaderships of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and the Fountain of Torah Education (FTE), which is affiliated with the ultra-Orthodox Sephardi Shas political movement. The meetings were inspired by Nissim Mizrachi's (2011) groundbreaking paper, "Beyond the Garden and the Jungle," a revised and updated version of which appears in this issue. This paper had begun to make an impact on the discourse of liberal-left organizations, particularly those

that are searching to better understand the nature of the massive resistance to their agenda of human rights and peace advocacy.

Mizrachi was a board member of ACRI at the time, and the organization's leadership was interested in breaking out of its liberal-left base (largely Ashkenazi, secular, and upper-middle-class) in order to understand the resistance to its message in a more sophisticated framework. Meeting with Shas educators seemed like a good way to start: on the one hand, they are a leadership entrusted with promoting a very different sense of 'the good'; on the other, as Mizrahim, they are part of a cultural-religious legacy that is perceived as being more moderate and open to the 'other' than its Ashkenazi ultra-religious counterpart.

The educational leadership of Shas also had their own motivations for coming to the table. Beyond a healthy curiosity as to what the liberal left, often demonized in their camp, would have to say in such encounters, they too felt that all was not right within their walls. A strong sense of group loyalty to a religious-national identity all too often brings with it a dark side of distrust and dislike for those on the outside who are not part of its sense of the collective. Negotiating an educational approach that allows for a strong sense of identity, a healthy critique of those who hold different values, and yet an acceptance that we need to live in a world where others see the world differently seemed to be a growing educational challenge.

Shaharit had been founded several months before these meetings began, and its agenda was directed at exactly the issues that the ACRI-Shas meetings intended to confront. Already a given in Israeli politics for several decades, resistance to the universalist liberal messages of justice and equality came from working-class Mizrahim, Religious Zionists, the ultra-Orthodox, Russian immigrants, and others—that is, those who maintain a strong ethnic, religious, and national identity rather than the growing universalist identity favored by the liberal left. As this issue's articles powerfully demonstrate, the clash involves conflicting claims of meaning and conflicting visions of the good that are deeply rooted in each group's identity, as well as the moral assumptions that accompany them.

The idea that there are conflicting visions of the good within different social identities is of course not new. What is new is our increased understanding that the liberal solution to these conflicting visions does not work—here in Israel or anywhere else. The liberal solution to conflicting claims to the good was to banish the good from the public square and to protect each individual's right to pursue his or her alternative claims to the good, as long as those claims were pursued privately. In other words, the solution was to be a Jew in the home and cosmopolitan in the street, as Mendelsohn formulated the Enlightenment directive for Jews. The public

square was to be a decidedly neutral (i.e., secular) affair, ruled by rational argument and devoid of traditional allegiances that gain authority from the past and from God.

But as Michael Sandel (1984) has demonstrated, and as Yifat Bitton and Ella Glass's article in this issue so forcefully shows, liberal secularism has its own moral codes and moral assumptions that are in direct conflict with other codes and assumptions. The public square is far from neutral, and religious traditions have shown themselves to be, over long periods of time, guardians of a rich and robust vision of the good. In the void that liberal democracy had created with its sacrifice of a shared sense of the good among citizens in favor of a procedural democracy that focuses on rights, it was easy for religious visions of the good to fill the vacuum that had been created.

In his recent book *The Paradox of Revolution*, Michael Walzer (2015) argues that liberal revolutions of modernity—in Algeria, India, and Israel—aimed to liberate their peoples through a combined liberation from colonial powers and from religious cultures at odds with the assumptions of modernity. All three countries had been seemingly successful in their goal, only to eventually witness a resurgence of religious culture from within the 'liberated' nation. It turns out that the religious cultural commitments had not, after all, been relegated to the privacy of the home and the synagogue, but had claims on the public good. These were thick commitments that enlisted loyalty to a community, as opposed to the thin commitments of a rights-based loyalty to justice for an abstract humanity (Seligman 2009). These thicker commitments have replaced the revolution of the modern secular state.

The downside to these thick commitments is their dark underbelly: they foster a strong sense of group loyalty and identification, but a weak sense of obligation and commitment to those outside of the group circle, particularly those who are perceived to be a threat to the group. Liberals have put their moral focus on equality, rights, and justice—measures that aim to protect the individual yet undervalue group loyalty and commitment. Conversely, conservative traditional views have directed their moral focus on the group and have undervalued the liberal agenda of individual rights and abstract justice for all. Jonathan Haidt's (2012) research on the moral values of liberals and conservatives describes fairly accurately the political dynamics in liberal democracies around the globe.

The liberal vision of society has lost its grip on Israel. Multiple views of the good nurtured in conflicting identities have laid claim to the public square. Traditional worldviews rooted in religious community and national identity are supplanting the primacy of liberalism and its values. What comes next?

At Shaharit, we argue that the only worthy future is one shared by all those who recognize the need to build a shared future together, and that the only solution to radically conflicting views of the good is the painstaking work of building trust and shared political action across communities. According to Haidt's research, traditional-conservative and liberal-progressive worldviews are not incommensurate. Although both conservatives and liberals emphasize only one part of a moral spectrum that includes values of the group and values of the individual, their moral codes can, in the right circumstances, cross the political divide. Navigating this space and creating what might be called a 'post-liberal politics' is Shaharit's goal.

In order to create the ideas and leadership necessary for a politics of the common good, Shaharit works with Jews and Arabs, with the ultra-Orthodox, religious, and secular, with Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, and with local community organizations and national leadership. We sponsor a high-profile multicultural leadership program and run working groups to build 'bonding capital' within Israel's many sociologies and 'bridging capital" across them (see Putnam 2001). We have established community organizations to bring together the many voices of towns and cities in shared civic action, and we support intellectual projects to reframe political categories and conversations.[2]

In the four years since we began, we have learned a few things about what it takes to cross the sociological divides between communities and to build common cause. People come to the public square as part of a collective with a history, a worldview, and shared values. Their individuality is completely embedded in the web of their commitments. When that identity is threatened, people hunker down. They cannot listen, as they correctly sense that their worldview is under attack. Conversely, when people feel that their identities are acknowledged and respected, they open up. Relations precede issues. As any good community organizer knows, you organize around relationships. The issues follow, and not the other way around. And once there is goodwill and a desire to solve problems rather than declare ideological differences, creative possibilities emerge. Thus, a politics of the common good takes shape.

The alchemy of building relationships and commitments that cross sociological divides can be described as the nurturing of semi-porous boundaries between communities. Secure within their boundaries, these communities are then able to open up to the world of others, discovering values that they share, differences that do not seem insurmountable, and tolerance for a world apart that is perhaps threatening but is here to stay. In this way, people recognize the need to learn to live together. No one is converting anyone. Based on still anecdotal evidence, we find

that people who come committed to building a future together will agree on most issues. And perhaps more importantly, that which is not agreed upon changes character. The conversation changes from one between enemies to a democratic conversation among differing viewpoints and policy agendas—a "controversy for the sake of Heaven" (Avot 5:20). Rather than a liberal politics that focuses increasingly on the individual and his or her rights, we are constructing, out of the paradox of seemingly conflicting positions and worlds of meaning, a post-liberal politics of the common good. Our bet is that a politics rooted in such an approach can win the hearts and minds of Israelis who are tired of the culture wars and are looking to build a future together.

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NOTES

1. See https://www3.tau.ac.il/socioconf/index.php.
2. For more on Shaharit, see http://www.shaharit.org.il/?lang=en.

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