

## The Sicarii of the Third Temple

by

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This week, in which the First and Second Temples were destroyed, it appears that we do not need Sicarii for undermining our ability to prevent the destruction of the Third Temple. With its own hands, our democracy is distributing the daggers to various groups that are already striving to completely transform the nature of the country – instead of trying to bring them into the fold,

In its infinite wisdom, the Knesset voted a few days ago to exempt the ultra-orthodox schools from teaching a common core curriculum in the basic subjects that would provide their pupils with necessary work tools and civics tools that they will need in adulthood. The executive branch made its own contribution with the decision by the Ministry of Education to teach Israeli Arab pupils about the “nakba” (or catastrophe, in Arabic) – the Arab interpretation of Israel’s independence – this, in an environment in which their community leaders already proudly publish “vision” documents that do not recognize our right to a Jewish home in our ancestral land. As if there were not enough discrimination against Israeli Arabs to feed their discontent, the Knesset voted last week for a law banning sale of Keren Kayemet (Jewish National Fund) land to non-Jews.

How serious is our predicament already? In this country, 3 out of every 4 ultra-orthodox men and Arab women of prime working age (25 to 54) are non-employed (i.e. either unemployed or not participating in the labor force). In addition, the rate of non-employment among their spouses, ultra-orthodox women and Arab men, is double the rate among their respective Jewish non-ultra-orthodox counterparts.

The demographic direction could not be any clearer. In 1960, 85% of the primary school pupils were in either the national or the national-religious school streams, with the remainder in the ultra-orthodox or the Arab school streams. This rate fell to 74% in 1980 and to 54% in 2006. About two weeks ago, the Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics reported that in just 5 years, their enrollment rate will fall to 50%. In other words, as of the year 2013, today’s majority will become a minority in the schools – and within a few years, this will also happen within the general population.

To these numbers one could add some data published by the IDF last week. In 2006, the rate of Israeli men that was drafted into the army from among all of the male 18 year-old Israeli residents fell to just 55%. The rate of conscription among Jewish men is falling by about one percentage point a year. The writing is on the wall.

There are those who attack the use of demographic data as racist. There is no doubt that some of those who deal with domestic Israeli demographics are indeed racists. But they are a minority. The remainder are simply concerned about the future of the Zionist dream – and this is where the true problem lies.

What is hiding behind the criticism, without this necessarily being made explicit, is that the fact that many of those critics view the Zionist ideology itself as racist. This is a primary

source of the disagreement and the time has come to shine a spotlight on the double standard by which Israel is measured. While these same people do not question the legitimate rights of other western nations to live in democratic countries with an official religion, and the symbol of that religion on the country's flag, they are not willing to accord these same rights to the Jewish People in the historic homeland.

As if this were not enough, the self-righteous criticism does not offer a sustainable proposal that could replace the Zionist narrative. If the future work norms and the national service norms of the children will be similar to those of their parents, then the gradually declining minority that will remain will not be able to support either the economy or the society, nor will it be able to defend the country. The Hamas, the Hizbullah and the Iranians do not distinguish between Jews who are Zionists, ultra-orthodox or smug anti-Zionists. They also do not get worked up about vision documents by Israeli Arabs.

If Israel's democracy desires life, then it must become a democracy that actively pursues its right to exist. The time has come to collect the daggers and to distribute oars. We are all in the same boat.