Atalia Omer, *When Peace Is Not Enough: How the Israeli Peace Camp Thinks about Religion, Nationalism, and Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 368.

by *Jon Simons*

When Peace Is Not Enough is a deeply felt, well-researched and innovative book that offers reflexive and constructive criticism of the *thought* (rather than practice of) the mainstream or liberal Zionist peace camp. Atalia Omer interrogates the underlying logic of the conflict in terms of Zionist, Jewish Israeli identity, which she argues is particularistic, Orientalist and ethnocentric (she does not go so far as to call it racist). For the author, "Euro-Zionism" is the "root cause of the conflict" (p. 275) and the source of multiple injustices.

Religious peace studies provides Omer's with a novel critical hermeneutics, through which she attends to the secular, liberal Zionist peace camp's unacknowledged reliance on a political theology. It incorporates Jewish religious symbolism at the same time as it attempts to secularize Biblical mythology, turning redemption of exile into return to the land. Consequently, liberal Zionism is immersed in a messianic historical narrative even as it blames the militant illiberalism of religious settler Zionism for the lack of peace. The Zionist peace movement is conceptually blind to the injustices (colonialism and conquest) entailed by establishing and sustaining an ethno-democratic Jewish state. It is focused on ending the Occupation of 1967 in order to ensure a majoritarian Jewish state, while overlooking the Nakba of 1948. Omer also adopts several other disciplinary perspectives: political theories of multiculturalism and justice, post-colonialism, and cultural theory, from which she derives an analytical-normative "metric by which [to] ... evaluate peace agenda" (p. 156). Liberal Zionist peace is not enough, because it is not *justpeace*, meaning a positive, holistic, transformative peace that entails social justice.

Omer's critical analysis is confined to two peace groups. *Peace Now* exemplifies secular Zionism, but as it is a shadow of its former self, it would have been helpful if the book considered a group that has more current standing. The religious Zionist *peaceniks*, represented by *Rabbis for Human Rights*, are credited with challenging ethnocentrism through their recognition of the non-Jewish Other (the "stranger in our midst") and with distinguishing the Judaic tradition from Zionism. But they fail the test because they accept the political theology of Zionism and Jewish majoritarianism.

Omer is by no means merely critical, but suggests ways in which conceptual blindness can be overcome. She calls for a post-secular secularism through which

Jewish religious tradition can be reinterpreted, pluralized, and play a positive role in Israeli nationhood. Omer also argues that the subaltern voices of Arab Jews (*Mizrahim*) and Palestinian Israelis must be integrated into an intra-Jewish and intra-Israeli reformulation of national, religious and ethnic identity. Between them, those voices articulate socio-economic injustice in Israel with Euro-Zionist colonialism, its Orientalist antagonism to Arabs and Middle Eastern Jewish religion, ethnicity and culture. The discourses of these subaltern social groups have their shortcomings too, Omer says, but are vital to both the conceptualization of *justpeace* and the reimagining of Israeli identity – and Judaism – as belonging in the Middle East. After all the critique, a de-Zionized Israel will need a substantive identity to which people feel committed.

The book advocacy for an intra-Israeli debate about the character of Jewish and Israeli ethnic, religious, and national identity will probably fall on deaf ears. Omer's approach to *justpeace* entails recognition of Zionist colonialism, the injustice of the Nakba, and the eradication of *Ashkenazi* ethnic supremacy. Such talk is anathema to liberal as well as mainstream Zionists, which might prove her point about conceptual blindness, but stands in the way of her holistic approach to conflict transformation that involves "a form of cultural therapy" and "trauma healing" (p. 67). The book will not be persuasive to Zionist Israelis, Diaspora Jews, and many others who regard Arab (and Muslim) hostility to the Jewish state and intransigence as the obstacle to peace. From their perspective the peace movement is blind – in this case to a harsh reality. Omer does acknowledge that Jewish (even if mostly *Ashkenazi*) Diasporic history of persecution, in particular the Holocaust, frame the way in which Jews experience the conflict, as victims of hostility. If openness to subaltern voices is vital to change that perspective, it could be productive to add social psychology to the disciplines Omer includes in her approach to peacebuilding, and to refer to the extensive literature on and examples of dialogue and reconciliation in this and other conflicts.[1]

When Peace is not Enough stands out from other studies of the Israeli peace camp by not approaching it as a social movement, but as a discourse. In doing so, it tends to assume that conceptual blinders rather than material practices and circumstances explain its weaknesses. But is that the case? Omer argues that *Rabbis for Human Rights* falls short as it differentiates normatively between the rights of Israeli Palestinians (as "strangers" on a Jewish majority) and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Yet, during the week in which I read this book, in

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[1] See, for example, Daniel Bar-Tal, "Psychological obstacles to peace-making in the Middle East and proposals to overcome them," *Conflict and Communication Online,* 4/1 (2005): 1-15.

June 2015, *Rabbis for Human Rights* was engaged in its usual work, combining solidarity activity on the ground with legal activism to prevent the destruction of a Palestinian village within the Green Line (Umm al-Hiran) and one beyond it (Susiya). In practice, it blurs the normative boundary between Jewish Israel and Palestine.

On another tack, Tamar Hermann's social movement study of the shortcomings of the Israeli peace movement analyzes the waxing and waning success of the peace movement primarily in terms of changing political circumstances, rather than conceptual limitations. Hermann also recognizes the movement's failure to attract Palestinian Israelis and *Mizrahim*.[2] Similarly, Omer notes that a coalition that articulates the "'domestic' struggles of the *Mizrahim* and Palestinian Israelis for justice and the 'external' struggle of the Palestinians for national self-determination have not materialized," (p. 258) even though the conceptual resources for it exist. Again, social movement research may be a useful route to understand that lack.

Another useful line of analysis to explain the absence of a coalition for *justpeace* might follow from a minor voice among the subaltern voices. Omer does note that a core voice of new *Mizrahi* discourse, the Black Panthers, was informed by the radical left anti-Zionism of *Matzpen*, and she does include the Israeli Communist Party among the voices of Palestinian Israelis. Yet she does not develop a perspective that would, as do these doubly marginalized voices, offer a systematic critique of neoliberalism and capitalism. The holistic approach to peacebuilding on which she draws, which entails "concern with systematic injustices" (p. 67), seems ill-equipped to analyze such injustices without recourse to theories (such Marxism and neo-Marxism) that identify the root causes of social injustice and social conflict in systematic exploitation. Omer wants to both uphold "the principles and values undergirding liberal democracies" and critique "the systems of domination that rearticulate and limit their implementation" (p. 220). But what if (as Marxists and some poststructuralists claim) liberal democracy necessarily entails domination?

Omer characterizes her critical project as a "hermeneutics of citizenship." Yet, that is an odd phrase for the radical practice of peacebuilding she envisages. Repeatedly, she turns to the terms "imagination" and "reimagination" to characterize the work that has to be done on the way to *justpeace*. Omer is leading us towards an inspiring vision of Israel-Palestine, one which is at home in the Middle East and enables all its inhabitants to feel at home. To achieve that

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[2] Tamar Hermann, *The Israeli Peace Movement: A Shattered Dream* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

vision we need not only multiple perspectives but also multiple material acts, affects, bodies. Perhaps the vision is utopian, but "Utopia is a form of concretization that requires detailed planning."[3] Maybe it is enough that the activists who still engage in Palestinian-Israeli peacebuilding, in spite of the difficult circumstances under which they work, imagine peace concretely.

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[3] Norma Musih, "Hannah Farah – Kufr Bir'im", in *Solution 196-213: United States of Palestine-Israel*, ed. Joshua Simon (Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2011): 72.