



## *The People's Duty*

Can we talk about “the people” as an agent with its own morally important integrity? How should we understand ownership of public property by “the people”? Shmuel Nili develops philosophical answers to both of these questions, arguing that we should see the core project of a liberal legal system – realizing equal rights – as an identity-grounding project of the sovereign people, and thus as essential to the people’s integrity. He also suggests that there are proprietary claims that are intertwined in the sovereign people’s moral power to create property rights through the legal system. The practical value of these ideas is illustrated through a variety of real-world policy problems, ranging from the domestic and international dimensions of corruption and abuse of power, through transitional justice issues, to the ethnic and religious divides that threaten liberal democracy. This book will appeal to political theorists as well as readers in public policy, area studies, law, and across the social sciences.

SHMUEL NILI is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, and a research fellow at the School of Philosophy at the Australian National University, Canberra. He has published widely in leading journals, including *Ethics*, *The American Political Science Review*, *The Journal of Politics*, and *The American Journal of Political Science*.



# The People's Duty

Collective Agency and the Morality of Public  
Policy

SHMUEL NILI

*Northwestern University and the Australian National  
University*



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לאבא משה,  
שניכש מילים תועות רבות כל כך לאורך הדרך  
לאמא מיכל,  
שידעה לאן הדרך תוביל עוד בראשיתה  
ולשניהם,  
יהדיו



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The book's opening chapter updates, revises and extends a discussion of collective integrity I first offered in "Liberal Integrity and Foreign Entanglement," *American Political Science Review* 110.1 (2016): 148–159. A few paragraphs from Chapters 2 and 3 are borrowed from my "Rawlsian Global Politics," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21.4 (2013): 473–495, and "The Idea of Public Property," *Ethics* 129 (January 2019): 344–369. I am grateful to the editors and publishers of these journals for permission to reprint parts of those essays here.

I was a graduate student at Notre Dame when I was first trying to work through some of the ideas that would inform this book. Ruth



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someday, somehow, step back from the abyss, and reclaim the universal ideals on which it was founded.

Though it took me a long time to understand this, the final chapter of this book, and much more generally, my determination to study political philosophy, can be traced all the way to that dreadful morning of November 5, 1995, in which I learned that Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated by a fanatic who wanted to end the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. The state of the nation in that moment seemed to me heartbreakingly encapsulated in the state of my parents, Michal and Moshe, who woke me to say what had happened during the night. Much has changed in our country, in its politics, and in our family, ever since that traumatic event. Yet through it all, my parents have always remained not just my most fundamental and loving support, but also the most striking exemplars of sheer humanity that I know. This book is dedicated to them.