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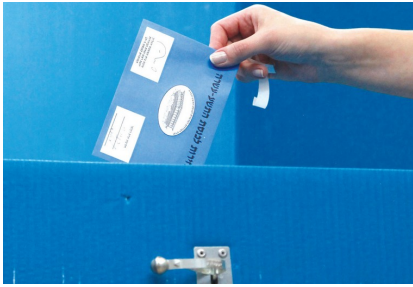


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A Fresh Perspective: Getting down to elections - Defining Zionism

By DAN ILLOUZ
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The elites use their power to promote destructive policies which endanger the existence of the State of Israel. Of course, they do so in the name of great principles, such as Zionism or democracy.

The most important question in any election is not the various positions the different parties hold; these rarely change, and people are rarely convinced to change their opinions.

The most crucial question campaign strategists try to influence is therefore: What are these elections going to be about? The party that defines the correct framework has the highest chance of winning.

In Israel, pundits were all taken by surprise; most people were convinced Israel's coming election would be about economic issues. After all, the housing prices that ignited the 2011 social justice protests are still rising; Yair Lapid has failed miserably as finance minister; and the economy appears to be weakening after years of growth under Likud leadership. It seemed like the perfect storm.

Some believed the election would revolve around the security question, as it so often does. After all, let us not forget that Israel just ended a serious conflict in Gaza, with a lot of unresolved questions.

Sixty-six soldiers and six civilians were killed, most young men whose deaths caused widespread national mourning, with funerals replacing summer festivals. This shock, the pundits thought, could not easily be forgotten.

All of these theories were proven wrong, however – as today, the most important question being addressed in this campaign is this: Who is a Zionist?

Zionism redefined for political purposes

It all started with the agreement between Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni, merging their respective Labor and Hatnua parties into a new party called the Zionist Camp. While this might have initially been considered an ingenious branding idea, making it hard for people who consider themselves Zionists to vote against such a party, this move came back to haunt them.

After the Labor primary, many problematic candidates were chosen and even given senior positions on the party list. This led to an immediate campaign by opposing parties to reveal problematic past statements by these people: Stav Shaffir had slammed "Hatikva" as racist; Merav Michaeli had called on mothers not to send their children to the army because of the so-called occupation; Yossi Yonah, a new face on the list, had said he had a problem with the term Zionism. Even party head Herzog had said the term Jewish state was "totally erroneous."

In response to accusations of anti-Zionism, the Zionist Camp came out with videos in which it claimed to be the real Zionists! How? By redefining what Zionism means, and tying it to their political platform. In other words, the Zionist Camp's campaign claimed they were the true Zionists – because Zionism should be defined as whatever the Zionist Camp's platform says.

No more hope for Jewish self-determination, no more love for the Land of Israel. Just the Zionist Camp's platform.

Beinart vs Navon

This behavior is to be expected by the Left. Besides, it is not the first time the Left has tried to redefine Zionist principles in order to justify its political perspective.

In his 2012 book *The Crisis of Zionism*, Peter Beinart, who claims to speak in the name of Zionism, completely redefined it – coming to the warped conclusion that the Zionist thing to do would be to build a Palestinian State.

Forget about Jewish self-determination, Palestinian self-determination is what matters to his “Zionism.” Forget about love for the Land of Israel, retreating from that land of is the “Zionist” way.

Recently, Emmanuel Navon, a brilliant yet understated right-wing conservative intellectual from Jerusalem, published a book that can be read as a scathing response to Beinart’s argument, called *The Victory of Zionism*. The picture painted in it by Navon is worrying; he describes how post-Zionist and anti-Zionist elements have entered the elite strata of Israeli society – academia, the courts and media.

These elites use their power to promote destructive policies which endanger the existence of the State of Israel. Of course, they do so in the name of great principles – such as Zionism or democracy – which they redefine for their own aims.

Politicians woke up

The phenomenon which Navon described has been taking place quietly, behind the scenes, as the Left took advantage of various loopholes in the Israeli system to keep power – even as the people chose the Right in elections.

For example, in Israel, Supreme Court judges are nominated by a committee in which existing judges have veto power.

In other words, since the existing makeup of the court is left-wing, the court will always stay left-wing.

However, in recent years, legislators started to speak up and tried to fix those loopholes by reforming the existing system. Led by Yariv Levin, various proposals were brought by politicians who wanted to strengthen Israeli democracy against the left-wing takeover.

It seems the far Left has understood that without significant political power, it will not be able to keep the power it grabbed for itself for long. On the other hand, this faction has no chance of getting elected without misleading the public.

Therefore, it seems the far Left has found its solution: enter the traditionally Zionist Labor Party, and influence it from within.

Ben-Gurion or Stav Shaffir?

It should thus not come as a surprise that the central question in this campaign has been about the definition of Zionism.

David Ben-Gurion – Israel’s first prime minister, the founder of the Jewish state and the former leader of Labor – would never vote for a party that calls on people to avoid IDF service, slams the national anthem and is uncomfortable with the word “Zionism.” Ben-Gurion would never vote for the Zionist Camp’s list; no self-respecting Zionist would.

While other issues such as security or economics are of incredible importance when choosing between Zionist parties, there is an even more important and basic question that should be asked about the range of parties: Which parties are Zionist? Which parties believe in the existence of a Jewish and democratic state? The list chosen by the Labor Party for this election shows that the Zionist Camp, regardless of how it self-defines, does not even meet the basic criteria that one could use to define Zionism.

The Zionist Left needs to find a new alternative when going to the polls in March.

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