

Israel's "Democracy" Becomes Just Jewish

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66 years after the establishment of the State of Israel, even the most ubiquitous term employed to describe the political nature of Israel as a "Jewish democratic state" is no longer valid. The Netanyahu government and its right-wing coalition partners are preparing a law, which will exclusively define Israel as a "Jewish State" for the "Jewish people". For independent observers, who do not wear rose-colored Zionist propaganda glasses, Israel was never a democracy in the classical Western sense of the term, but always a Jewish democracy or a democracy sui generis, i.e. full democratic rights for Jews only.

Jewish and democratic just does not fit. It's an oxymoron. Nonetheless, the Zionist propaganda (hasbara) has left no stone unturned in order to hammer this contradiction in terms into the awareness of the Western public. The Israeli Palestinians have always been treated as second class citizens. The Israeli political class regards them as a fifth column that cannot be trusted. The definition of Israel as a Jewish state is making visible, even to the politically blindest admirer of Israel, that all non-Jews are citizens with inferior rights.

The new Basic Law that will be up for adoption in the Israeli parliament shows that Israel, after 66 years of its existence, is completely in the dark about its identity. It is the proof of Israel's shortcomings. From the very beginning of Israel's foundation there existed a built-in contradiction: On the one hand, Israel was established as a "Jewish State in Eretz Israel", on the other hand, the same declaration promised to "ensure complete equality of (...) political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion". Historically, it has turned out that Israel could not be both.

In the "Law of Return", the Jewish element was given precedence over the democratic one. The law stipulated that every Jew could immigrate to Israel and obtain Israeli citizenship, while the expelled Palestinians owners of the land were denied to return to their homes. The contradiction was reestablished by the "Nationality Law" of 1952, which reads: "A person who, immediately before the establishment of the State, was a Palestinian citizen (...) shall become an Israel national".

Under the presidency of former Chief Justice Aharon Barak the Basic Law "Human Dignity and Freedom" was passed, which established the phrase "Jewish and democratic state" for Israel. The right-wing parties are up in arms about this phrase and the High Court of Israel (HCI) in general. Some extremists even want to abolish this institution and replace it by a religious court. Due to its large Palestinian population, former Israeli governments downplayed the Jewish component for the democratic one. But since right-wing parties dominate Israel's political landscape and parliament, the public mood got even more susceptible to racism and open discrimination of Israel's Palestinian minority.

As a consequence of this racism, the Netanyahu cabinet has discussed versions of a new Basic Law that will finally establish Israel as a racist pariah state. The cabinet version received 14 yes votes, 6 liberal oriented members voted against. Should this bill become law, Israel is an open ethnocracy. The question which then arises for Israel's friends in the US and Europe is, how can these Jewish-particularistic values agree with democratic ones. One does not need to be prophet to foretell that the West will also have an explanation for this, as it previously has justified Israel's human rights violations, colonialism, violation of international law and all the war crimes and committed atrocities of the Israeli army against Palestinians.

In Israel, this draft caused an outcry by the liberal spectrum. Even President Reuven Rivlin spoke out against Netanyahu's "Jewish state bill". He called for a referendum and said that "democracy and Judaism must remain equal". He asked at a conference in Eilat: "Does promoting this law, not in fact, question the success of the Zionist enterprise in which we are fortunate to live?" Rivlin was a former Knesset member of Netanyahu's Likud party who has political scores to settle with the Prime Minister. Rivlin decried the elevation of Israel's Jewish dimension over its democratic one, which is proposed in the intended new law.

The tainted atmosphere that led to this proposed law will neither vanish in the Knesset nor in the Israeli public. If the "Jewishness" of the State of Israel will prevail over the democratic one, the "Nation-State of the Jewish people" is going to admit that it is an ethnocracy guided by racist ideology. In future, the political discussion must turn on the racial aspect of Jewishness and Jewish culture in Israel and not so much around colonial Zionism, which serves as a vehicle for Israeli Jewish expansionism. Israel has always been a Jewish state, and finally it admits that it has little to do with democracy. How will the US Empire and Israel's European friends react to this new definition of the State of Israel?

At the end of the day, Israel has to choose between a Jewish state with some democratic embedded particles or a democratic state with a Jewish preponderance. It cannot have the cake and eat it, too. The critics of the term "Jewish democratic state" asked for a "Jewish state". For some, a "Jewish state" might be the solution of the Israeli dilemma, but for others this might be the nail in the coffin for the Zionist enterprise. As a state of all its citizens, as proponents of a one-state solution require, Israel is light years away.

Notes

[1] <http://mwcnews.net/focus/analysis/48032-racist-pariah-state.html>

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