



September 2012 The history of Zionism

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Zionism

Zionism is the Jewish national liberation movement, which aims to create and develop a State for the Jewish people, namely Israel, with which it identifies in terms of language (Hebrew as the main official language alongside with Arabic), symbols (flag, anthem, and emblem), as well as tradition and culture (festivities and historical memory).



HISTORY

- Zionism was born as a national emancipation movement, developed by Leo Pinsker (Ehad ha-Am, "Auto-Emancipation," 1882), who considered Israel a spiritual homeland, the only place where Jews could never be considered "foreigners." Life in the ancestral homeland would have then cured anti-Semitism, which caused the pogroms between 1871-1884 which inspired the author.
- Consequently, Zionism developed as a political project aiming to "build a Jewish State in Palestine," under the guidance of Theodor Herzl ("The State of the Jews," 1896), who founded the Zionist Organization during the 1897 First World Zionist Congress in Basel.
- International support for the Zionist cause was incorporated by the 1916 Balfour Declaration, with which the British Foreign Secretary Sir Arthur James Balfour committed to build a Jewish State in Palestine. Subsequently, both the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres with Turkey, and the 1922 Mandate on Palestine sanctioned by the League of Nation have incorporated this Declaration.
- After the foundation of Israel in 1948, Zionist principles continued being the ideological basis for the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic State (Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel), of which Jews, their spouses and descendants till the third generation can automatically become citizens (Law of Return).

ZIONIST MOVEMENTS



Zionism, as the national project of the Jewish people, developed in different movements according to different ideologies, including Socialist, Revisionist, Religious, and Environmental Zionism.

- Socialist Zionism considers agriculture the key to Jewish emancipation, after 2000 years in which land and property have been denied under anti-Semitic regimes. Kibbutzim (agro-cooperatives that have brought to reality true socialism) were founded in Israel by exponents of this movement, which organized schools in Eastern Europe preparing future immigrants to life in rural pre-State Israel. Among major members: Moses Hess, David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Berl Katznelson.
- Revisionist Zionism was founded by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, opposing Chaim Weizman and David Ben-Gurion. Revisionists opposed the partition of Palestine and supported armed counter-measures against Arab attacks on Jewish communities. Moreover, they favored the foundation of yishuvim (municipal communities) and moshavim, (non-socialist agro-cooperatives). Finally, they promoted a liberal Israel, with a Jewish majority and Arab representation in national institutions. Among major members: Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Ariel Sharon.
- Religious Zionism was founded by Rav Kook, opposing Jewish Orthodoxy, which considers (and partially still opposes) Zionism as a human anticipation of what only the Messiah can bring, namely the restoration of the State of Israel. On the contrary, religious Zionists consider human deeds necessary to the Messiah's coming. Very heterogeneous, religious Zionism includes socialists, who inspired the religious kibbutzim movement; national-religious, who integrate liberal democracy with religion; and radicals, who support a more predominant role of religion in Israel's public life.
- Environmentalist Zionism focuses on Israel's environment and is represented by the first environmentalist institution, the KKL (Keren Kayemeth Le-Israel - Israel's National Fund), which purchased lands in mandate Palestine for reclaiming and colonizing them.

DEMONIZATION

The term "Zionism" is misused and associated to "racism", "colonialism", foreign occupation. The 1975 UN General Assembly Resolution n. 3379 equated Zionism to racism and was revoked (not annulled, without thus formally repealing the contents) by 1991 Resolution n. 4686.

Zionism is still considered a form of racism and colonialism by the Arab League, as stated in the Arab Charter of Human Rights, as well as by the NGO movement, as stated in the Final Declaration of Durban 2001.

Interview with Fiamma Nirenstein



After more than 60 years since the foundation of the State of Israel, which represents the main Zionist accomplishment of all, what does it mean to be a Zionist now?

Zionism has today a twofold meaning: with regard to Israel, which I believe to be, together with Jerusalem, the Jewish home, and with regard to the Diaspora.

With respect to Israel, Zionism is a "certification of success." It represents the creation and the economic, social, and cultural development of a country that survives despite the ideological enmity of neighboring countries, of Europe, and also of the Obama-ruled U.S. Moreover, this enmity has dramatically increased in consequence of progressive Islamization. Israel's



detractors interpret internal clashes as signs of social decline, but it is the normal exercise of democracy there, which allows conflicting views (the Left, which believes to have a solution to the conflict; the settlers, who claim to live according to being the real Zionists, etc.).

However, I consider Israel's greatest success to be its capacity to kindle passion and enthusiasm among youth. It is not mere patriotism, but a sense of community and ethics—a typically Jewish feature—as well as sense of "giving," similar perhaps to Christian volunteerism elsewhere.

As for the Diaspora, Jewish communities are gasping for air under a virulent wave of anti-Semitism spreading all over Europe. I always sourly smile when I hear such claims as "the re-birth of the German Jewish community." It seems that Europe has lost its memory: 35% of Spanish students do not know what the Shoah was; anti-Semitic parties are increasing, such as the successful Jobbik party in Hungary. Anti-Semitism is no more an unacceptable perversion of the mind; on the contrary, it has become a possible way of thought, as the acclaimed Ahmadinejad shows, when at the UN he speaks of destroying the Jewish people.

In order to define Zionism today, one has to distinguish between a Judaic religion and the Jewish people. Recently developed Jewish religious movements, as well as many liberals and non-Jews, deny the existence of a "Jewish people," relegating its definition to religion, which becomes the way out of avoiding assimilation. But Judaism is in fact constituted by a people, a historical memory, a way of life, and above all by Jerusalem, where Jews have remained, facing the most radical persecutions and prohibitions under the Romans, the Crusaders, and the Muslims.

In this sense, Zionism is the guarantee of survival of the Jewish People, rightly so because it defines Jews as a people. Defining Judaism as a religion solely is functional to the denial of Israel as the "State of the Jewish people," claiming this definition makes of Israel a "confessional" religious state. Zionism, by defining Jews as a people, recognizes its identity and religion; therefore, for those who choose to be secular, the only way to belong to the Jewish people by avoiding assimilation is being a Zionist.

Zionist movements have influenced current Israeli political parties. Among the various parties, the Zionist left, which has founded and long ruled the country, has become almost imperceptible. Where are the left Zionists now?

The Israeli left has long believed that the solution to the conflict would be "land for peace," but this theory has tragically proved to be disastrous, so that even leftist Jews are perplexed about disengaging from West Bank settlements. UN Resolution 242 of 1967 states that each "settlement" has to be negotiated in order to guarantee Israel's security as well. Leaving the West Bank would open the door to missiles that may reach any point in Israel, as happened after 2005 disengagement from Gaza. Many people from the Left have changed their position after Gaza: the disengagement was an opportunity for peace and instead it has given carte blanche to Hamas, which made of Gaza a platform for firing rockets on southern Israel's citizens. Moreover, why does Abu Mazen refuse to talk to Netanyahu, who enforced the settlement freeze? The reason is simple: Abu Mazen respects the tradition of "no to dialogue," which has characterized Palestinian politics since the Six Day War-Arafat would also refuse dialogue. Even Leftist public opinion understands that Palestinians do not want two peoples and two States, but just to root out the Jews. In this respect, Abu Mazen's policy of naming squares and streets after terrorists' names is indeed revealing.

In your books and articles, you eloquently argue that defending Israel is defending democracy against its many enemies. A conspicuous number of non-Jews defend



Israel because they believe in "common shared values" with the Jewish State. Can non-Jews define themselves as Zionist? Is there a non-Jewish Zionism?

Of course there is. Think of Riccardo Muti, Winston Churchill, or take the religious movements. There are people who understand a very fundamental thing: this stony strip of land, and Jerusalem in particular, bears a unique significance to the world, because besides being the place of the three religions, this is the place where monotheism was born, carrying with itself the fundamental idea that changed the world: "You have to be loyal to your consciousness, not to a superior entity." Hence, the principle of equality of rights stems from there, which is part of Jewish heritage. And on this land, which is the land of their spirit and to which they belong, Jews claim their sacred sovereignty. All nationalist movements have a moral basis as peoples have the right to claim a moral foundation, and so does the Jewish people with Zionism. There are people who understand this point. Churchill said that the Jews have the right to claim Jerusalem because it is the capital of their spiritual land. Being Zionist means standing with democracy and freedom, but incertitude over these two fundamental values now debilitates Europe, which does not know any more what it should believe in.

There are currently some pivotal issues in the debate over Zionism and the Jewish nature of the State of Israel. One of these is the relationship between secular and religious, both ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) and national-religious. The assiduous media coverage of events involving Haredi Jews does not consider the remarkable changes their society is undergoing.

When I hear people talking about Haredi Jews, I immediately think of Catholic gatherings on Sundays in Saint Peter's ; I think of the masses waiting for the Pope to deliver his sermon; and I think of monks and nuns in their medieval garments. Isn't it the same as for Haredi Jews? Even in Europe ultra-religious Christians are committed to advance their agenda, as Haredi do in Israel. However, people forget that thanks to Haredi Jews, the Jewish people still exists. It is thanks to them if Judaism survived the Holocaust: when it was Sukkot, in the Nazi camps, they strived to make a sukkah, the traditional structure for the Feast of Tabernacles. Had there not been Haredi Jews, what would it be of Judaism and of the Jews today? Their martyrdom is exemplary, as it was during the Second Intifada, when they used to catch buses because they cannot afford taxis, risking to be blown up under the attacks of suicide bombers. What bothers me is their vigilant disapproval of what they believe to be immodesty, particularly about clothing. They have to learn to let people live how they want to live.

Equally, the media meticulously cover events regarding extremist settlers, who in name of Zionism vandalize (the so-called "price tags") the State, army, and radical left activists.

Settlers are different from the image that portrays them as violent extremists, also because of the reports of the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the main source of information for the international community. It is not uncommon for people to live in settlements because it is a beautiful place where living is less expensive and where one still feels the adventure of the foundation of Israel, all of which occurs in settlements. After being attacked in 1967, Israelis began to live in places mentioned in the texts of the Jewish tradition and with which they were, therefore, familiar. Among the settlers, there are those more militant and those more scholarly, without any military propensity, who simply think that that is their land. Whether it is their land or not is open to discussion, and it will be discussed when the Palestinians decide to talk to the Jews instead of demonizing them. When they will show a genuine disposition for peace, then some of the settlers will disengage, as happened in Gaza, with a river of tears, and obedience to the State.

Dopo più di 60 anni dalla creazione dello Stato di Israele, la cui costituzione era il primo obiettivo del Sionismo, cosa significa essere sionisti?



Interview with AB Yehoshua



In your writings on Judaism, Israeli identity, and Zionism, you claim that the existence of the State of Israel is a remarkable revolution for Jewish identity, since it represents, as a result of the Zionist enterprise, the only Jewish political and cultural system. Now let us ask: After more than 60 years of Jewish "autonomous" life in a Jewish State, what does it mean to be Zionist? What is Zionism in the 21st century, after the creation of the State of Israel as the main aim of 20th century Zionism, and after Zionist movements (socialist, revisionist, religious, as well as orientalist and spiritual) have bequeathed their ideologies to contemporary Israeli political movements?

Zionism is not an ideology, but a platform for different, and sometimes opposed ideologies, which have a common aim: the creation of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. In this definition, the most important word is "state," which is a country with defined boundaries, within which Jews wield sovereignty, for better and for worse, over their own destiny. After the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the meaning of Zionism is that Israel is not just the state of its citizens, Arabs and Jews alike, but also the state of the Jewish people, whereby every Jew in the world may automatically become an Israeli citizen. The 1947 UN resolution that divided Mandate Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab State did not aim to create a state for the 700,000 Jews who then inhabited Israel; on the contrary, it aimed to allow every Jew in the world, refugee or not refugee, Holocaust survivor or not, to become citizen of Israel and enjoy full rights. This is the only meaning of Zionism today, which is enshrined in the Law of Return and in the Right of Return. When a Palestinian state will be established, it will surely have a law of return, for the benefit of Palestinian refugees who will return to the Palestinian state and acquire citizenship.

Other ideological differences and political stances have nothing to do with Zionism, being part, as it happens in any other country of the world, of the political debate between right and left, over religion and state, over boundaries, minority rights, immigration policies, social and economic policies. These are national problems common to all countries, including Israel. And Zionism is irrelevant to this matter.

However, one cannot underestimate the radical change that the creation of the State of Israel has brought into Jewish identity as it has developed since the destruction of the Second Temple. Zionism created the "sovereign Jew," who is subject to a Jewish authority, pays taxes to another Jew, and is surrounded by an essentially complex Jewish reality. Arab citizens are part of this reality, to which they contribute as any other national minority contributes to the communal and identity life of the national majority group within which it lives. Like other minorities, Arab citizens have special rights in order to maintain their culture and identity and to pursue their communal interests. Finally, the meaning of Zionism today is very simple and consists in accepting and recognizing the Law of Return.

In some other interviews, you have often claimed that Israel is the only place where Jews can fully explore their personal and cultural self-determination. In what sense do you believe Israel catalyzes contemporary Jewish identity, and, consequently, how do you explain the rising anti-Zionism among Jewish circles with strong Jewish identity?



As I said, Zionism is the remedy for curing the illness of life in the Diaspora, an almost 2,500 years long Jewish illness, which has had disastrous effects. Among these, there is massive assimilation of great parts of this ancient people, which in three thousands years of history has come to count only 22 million members. The Holocaust is another disastrous result of Diaspora, which in only 5 years exterminated one third of the Jewish people in the most unspeakable and atrocious ways. Not only, but also pogroms, expulsions, sufferings, etc. In Israel, Jews can fully live their identity, with all consequent burdens of responsibility and commitment, in the same way the identity of Italians, English, and Thais is complete in their homelands. Even an Italian who has not read a single line of Dante's Divine Comedy remains Italian, so that no one may ever blame him/her for being only partially Italian or an assimilated Italian. The anti-Zionism of Jews in the Diaspora is significant, and there is no difference if those Jews are religious fanatics, reform Jews, radical or communist Jews. For them, Diapsora is the authentic Jewish identity, in which they find solace for its incompleteness, because they do not take full responsibility for Jewish reality, and from which they flee by assuming another national identity. Anti-Zionists would like to apply the principle of "tikun ha-olam", the Jewish principle of improvement and commitment to the world and the surrounding reality, but not to themselves, because they do not self-control their reality as a dispersed people that lives within other nations.

In an interview you gave some time ago to the Italian television RAI (with the Italian correspondent in Jerusalem, Claudio Pagliara), you defined Zionism in one word: "boundaries", using the plural. Let me ask you your opinion on three controversial "boundaries" that are central to the discourse about Israel and the conflict.

A- Israel-Palestine.

You often argue that Israelis, including also Arab Israelis to a certain extent, and Palestinians, are different peoples, with different cultures, and they need to learn how live separately before being capable of compromising. In this respect, a territorial boundary is then decisive for a territorial separation between the two peoples. But in what sense is the disengagement from the West Bank crucial to the peace process, if the conflict is not about territory, but about identity and narrative?

When I refer to boundaries, I mean physical boundaries. It is a territorial question, within which, as for any other people, the question of national sovereignty is included. Zionism as "boundaries" is the will to create a political, institutional, cultural, and social entity for Jews in their homeland. That is it.

The question of Palestinians or Arabs: We are no doubt two different peoples, as Japanese are different from Indians, Czechs and Russians. The divisions between us is mainly territorial. Jews do not have an ideological position against Arabs' identity or religion, and we have come to the Middle East to live in peace with the Arabs. Palestinians claim that we have stolen their land, wherefore they fight against us. If Jews had created a state in a remote island, there would be no Arab fighting against us.

In short, any definition of the conflict as a racial, religious, cultural, or economic clash is fallacious. The problem is territory. Control over territory. And the war, like 90% of the wars in history, is a fight for control over territory. We Israelis are currently occupying a territory in which 3 million Palestinians live, without recognizing their political rights, and we continue to hold their lands. This is the problem. Only when a Palestinian state will be created, with secure boundaries and sovereignty, only then, Palestnians will make peace with the part they were deprived of (Israel).

As for Israeli Arab Palestinians, they are citizens of Israel and they represent a national minority, loyal to the Jewish state, which tries to guarantee, although not plainly, social and economic equality.



We cannot forget that half of Israel's Jewish population originally comes from Islamic countries; therefore, I restate that between the Arab nation and us there is only a territorial conflict, which is, nonetheless, of great importance.

B- Secular-Religious-Haredi.

In a recent article, which was published in the Italian daily "La Stampa", you harshly criticized the Haredi society and how the State has so far related to it. However, the Haredi society is also evolving and integrating into Israeli society. On the contrary, little consideration is given to national-religious settlers, who are considerably radicalizing and adopting confrontational positions against the State, the army, and radical left activists. Do they represent a "threat" for Israel?

Israel's religious community is growing and strengthening, and it represents a real danger for Israeli democracy. For thousands of years, Jewish identity has been first and foremost religious, because Jews did not have a territory, a common language, or autonomous institutions. And it was precisely religious identity that prevented Jews from going back to their land to live there independently. Zionism is mainly a secular movement and, thanks to its secularity, it has overcome the religious ban on the return to the ancient homeland for building a full nationality.

Religious Jews have always been the most active opponents of Zionism and because of their rabbis' ban on the return to Israel before the Messiah come, the Jewish people was been entrapped in Europe during the Holocaust.

After the creation of the Israel, and after the theological as well as political-ideological defeat during the Holocaust, religious people have reluctantly accepted the democratic state. But with the strengthening of religious identity, religious Jews rise up, claim special rights, and particularly deny the rule of majority and democracy, recognizing the authority of rabbis solely. This is a challenge for Israel's young democracy and for international solidarity. Haredi Jews refuse to serve in the army, impose racist norms against women; religious settlers occupy Palestinian lands and turn against police and the army. There are practically two opposed realities: a national and a religious one.

C- Anti-Zionist and Anti-Semitic.

While some authors want to draw a sharp distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, it is clear that the boundary is blurred, because anti-Zionism, in fighting against Israel, also fights against Israel's identification with the Jewish people, Jewish heritage, Jewish culture and history, and therefore, it cannot be completely bereft of a certain anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism. How come then that anti-Zionists are perceived as liberal progressive? Moreover, anti-Zionism is often associated with the political left, a defined "radical left" to be distinguished from a "moderate left". Where does Zionism fall in between? Where has the Zionist left gone?

Classic anti-Semitism used to say "Jews you are strangers, go away from our lands and go back to Palestine or to the Land of Israel;" and it was ideologically favorable to Zionism. Therefore, I think one should distinguish between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, which is an elaboration of the political Left, which interprets Zionism as a form of classic colonialism. Although Zionism had colonial elements, it essentially differs from colonialism because there was no foreign state, such as Great Britain, France, or Belgium, sending the army to occupy and exploit underdeveloped countries. After the second world war, classic anti-Semitic tenets have been banned, such as "Jews are strangers and exploiters," therefore classic anti-Semitism sometimes covers anti-Zionism, particularly but not only manifest in the radical Left. I believe that anti-Zionism becomes anti-Semitism when one does not recognize the right to self-determination of Jews, which is different from criticism of Israeli policies. And since



Zionism is considered as an aggressive policy against Palestinians and as a form of violent nationalism, it is easy to use the word anti-Zionism to hide pure anti-Semitism.