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# Israeli symbiotic particularity...

... as a role-model for Europe

• GOL KALEV

*Should Europe be European, or should it be a 'state of all its citizens?'*

**T**he US and Israel are rooted in a solid ideological bedrock: the US in Americanism and Israel in Zionism.

The Spring 2020 protests in America underscored that there is a fierce debate about the nature of Americanism, but not an attempt to negate it. For example, there were no credible calls for the cancellation of the Constitution. Similarly, Zionism is the common denominator that unites Israeli Jewish society.

In Europe, however, not only is there is no uniting ideology, there is an outright rejection of ideology. A view emerged that wars are caused by ideology, as well as nationalism, religion and particularity. Hence, universalism leads to peace, and as French President Emmanuel Macron put it, "Patriotism is the exact opposite of nationalism."

This sets the stage for an emerging global divide: American and Israeli particularism on the one hand vs European universalism on the other. This could have remained a philosophical matter, had there not been a disruption to the European model: The rise of Islam in Europe.

Europeans assumed that once Muslims would come, they would accept the European way of life and abandon their particularity. That did not happen. Instead, a fierce conflict

of mutual negation emerged in Europe between Muslims and "indigenous" Europeans. While some European Muslims chose to integrate, many others feel no connection to European culture and reject European values and practices such as secularism, alcohol consumption and childlessness.

Europe for its part makes no secret of its rejection of Islam on the continent. The images of armed French police approaching a Muslim woman on the beach and ordering her to take off her top, depicts this rejection. So is the European Commission setting up a new entity called "Promoting our European way of life."

And so, a fundamental debate about the essence of Europe emerged. Should Europe be European, or should Europe be a "state of all its citizens?"

## Introducing: Symbiotic particularity

Israel represents an alternative to the European approach to its Muslim minority. While there are numerous challenges and no doubt instances of racism and discrimination, there is no European-style negation of Israel's Muslim population. Arab women dressed in Muslim garb are certainly welcomed on the beaches of Tel Aviv and are absolutely safe.

While Europeans encourage Muslims to rid of their Muslim culture and embrace the "European way of life," the model that has emerged in Israel is exactly the opposite: Celebrate your Arab particularity, even if it is rejective of Israel's guiding ideology – Zionism.



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A WOMAN dons a burkini on a beach in Cannes, France, in 2017, in a show of support of womens' right to wear the full-body swimsuit. (Eric Gaillard/Reuters)

An Israeli Arab hospital doctor is a great doctor not in spite of the fact that he was not indoctrinated with the "Zionist way of life," but because he was not. He developed in a path that optimized his own contribution to society, and if that did not include Zionism, so be it.

Israeli Arabs are a cornerstone of Israeli society in nonpolitical ways and without being Zionists, for example as doctors, nurses and pharmacists. Israeli Arabs are at the forefront of Israel's battle against corona and recipients of virtual applause by Israelis of all stripes.

It is exactly the strength of Zionism in Israeli Jewish society that enables the acceptance of groups that do not accept Zionism. Israeli Jews are adamant Zionists. There are exceptions, most notably amongst elements in the media and academia, as well as fringe groups at the periphery of the haredi community (most haredim are Zionist in practice if not by definition). Those exceptions might be vocal, yet numerically small. About 99% of Israeli Jews consistently vote for Zionist parties. The large left-wing party that at times was falsely accused of not being as enthusiastically Zionist as the rest of Israel renamed itself in 2015 "The Zionist Camp." After losing his quest to become prime minister, its leader Isaac Herzog, then proceeded to become the head of the Jewish Agency – the flagship of Zionist institutions. One of the highest-rating TV show each year is the annual Independence Day ceremony that takes place by Herzl's grave – a fulfillment of his Zionist vision.

Israeli Arabs recognize the Jewish national particularity of the Israeli Jew, just as Israeli Jews increasingly recognize that of Israeli Arabs. And herein lies another contrast to the failed European model: Israeli Jews and Arabs alike utterly reject universalisms. Instead, they engage with each other's particularity. Israeli Jews celebrate Arab particularity through consuming Arab art, culture and cuisine. For example, Arab hip-hop music is heard in popular Tel Aviv cafes and bars. The political conflict does not negate cultural fondness, as portrayed in Israeli TV shows like *Fauda* and *Tehran*. The increased embrace of Middle Eastern culture in Israel is also a byproduct of a shift in Israeli ethos and power from the European Jewish founders to Israeli Jews of Middle Eastern ancestry.

Arabs, on their part, celebrate Jewish particularity when they engage with Israeli popular culture and converse with one another in Hebrew or hybrid Arabic-Hebrew. There is a clear trend of Israelization among young Israeli Arabs.

Such Israelization is certainly not an indication that Israel Arabs wish to stop being Arabs, just like Arab-philias within Israeli Jewish society, is not an indication of Israel Jews' wish to stop being Jewish. It is merely a celebration of the other group's particularity.

The election of the first hijab-wearing member of the Israeli Parliament in March 2020 election was welcomed with a degree of pride by many Israeli Jews, including on the right. This is in spite of the fact that most Israeli Jews outright oppose MK Iman Khatib-Yasin's political views and reject her affiliation with a Muslim Brotherhood-linked organization. Her wearing a hijab in the Israeli Zionist Knesset is a symbol of Israeli symbiotic particularity.

**Symbiotic particularity elsewhere in the Middle East**  
The emerging model of Israel symbiotic particular-



ity has a precedent right next door. The Hashemites, a Beduin tribe that came from the Arabian Peninsula during the 20th century, set the national ethos of Jordan, which is even officially named the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. And yet over half of the citizens of Jordan are Palestinians. Just as Israeli Arabs are not Zionists, Jordanian Palestinians are certainly not Hashemites. Yet Jordanian Palestinians not only accept the Hashemite narrative of Jordan, but for the most part celebrate it. It is not perceived to be in conflict with their own Palestinian identity. On the contrary, it is symbiotic to it.

It is possible that over time the Jordanian example will inspire Israeli Arabs to have a relationship to Israel that is closer to that of Israeli Druze, who serve in high-ranks of the Israeli military, police and through Israeli government. Indeed, the Druze are an elite within Israeli Zionist society.

In addition, for many Druze, Hebrew is becoming the first language and Arabic second. Attempts by politicians to recruit the Druze to the opposition to the 2018 nation-state law mostly failed. That is because for most Israeli Druze it is obvious that Israel is the national homeland of the Jewish people, just as it is obvious that they have full rights and are full partners in its endeavors.

Druze pride is not at all inconsistent with Zionism. Most Druze live in Druze villages and marry other Druze. When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivered his victory speech after the March 2020 election, a Druze flag was waved in front of him next to an Israeli flag.

#### Symbiotic particularity – Haredim

The Israeli model of symbiotic particularity applies to insular groups within Israel's Jewish society as well. The ultra-Orthodox haredim do not serve in the Israeli army, but contribute in different ways. Haredi medics save thousands of Israeli lives every year through United Hatzalah, a volunteer organization that swiftly dispatches medics on motorcycles to the scenes of accidents, heart attacks and other emergencies. Similarly, Yad Sarah, a Haredi charity organization provides subsidized wheelchairs and

other medical accessories to all Israelis.

The haredi medic is a great medic not in spite of the fact he did not study math and other curriculum prescribed by the ministry of education, but because he did not. Choosing to study Torah in yeshiva in his insular community allowed him to develop to be who he is, and optimize his contribution to society in that manner. The haredi medic may not know how to solve differential mathematical equations, but this does not detract from his ability to save lives on a scene of an accident, just like the Arab surgeon may not be a Zionist, but this does not detract from his ability to save lives on the operation table.

#### Symbiotic particularity applied to Europe

Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism, envisioned a Jewish state where Muslims were neither 'integrated' nor forced to accept the "Jewish way of life." In his novel *Altneuland*, which describes life in the Jewish state, Muslims chose to live in their own villages by their own values, while at the same time being staunch Zionists. In-fact, in Herzl's novel, a Muslim is one of the leaders of the Jewish state.

Recognizing its mounting challenges, Europe has committed billions of euros to chart "the road to European renewal." Nearly €80 billion has been committed through project Horizon 2020 alone. Europe should use its capital to study Israel's emerging model of symbiotic particularity and see if it can be applied to Europe's new realities. This should be easy to do, since Europe already spends an extraordinary amount of money and resources in Israel. All that is needed is a shift in European attitude – from spending billions on lecturing and imposing European views on Israeli Jews and Arabs, to spending billions on learning and being open-minded.

There is crisp light coming out of Zion. Israeli Jews and Arabs are emanating it. Europeans should learn how to benefit from it. ■

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