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Comprendre l'État d'Israël Idéologie, religion et société

In his latest book¹ published by Éditions Écosociété, *Université de Montréal* history professor Yakov Rabkin delivers a Jewish critique of Zionism.² The key word in his title is “State”, i.e. the State of Israel: “References to Judaism and Jewish tradition are not much help in understanding contemporary Israel; on the contrary, they tend to be misleading, because Zionism and the State that embodies it are revolutionary phenomena. Its policies, structure and laws can be better understood if we don’t refer to Jews and their history. Interpreting the State of Israel’s behaviour positively or negatively by lumping it together with Judaism inevitably distorts one’s understanding. As well, Jews are not the only inhabitants of the State of Israel: excluding the other minorities, the Arab population in Israel is proportionately just as large as the French-speaking population in Canada. So it is wrong to talk about a “Jewish State” or “Jewish lobby”; the right term would be “Zionist State” and “Zionist lobby”.

As the founders of the country dreamt, the State of Israel must be treated like any other modern political structure, i.e. on the basis of what it says and does, without seeing it as the culmination of biblical history nor having to fear accusations of anti-Semitism. It is better analysed in the context of international politics and Western actions regarding the Middle East and its resources. These resources include large reserves of natural gas under the seabed offshore from the Gaza Strip, so severely affected by eight years of blockade imposed by Israel.

The author explains that from a vantage point inspired by the Torah, the ideology of Zionism is contrary to Orthodox Judaism. The inspiration for Zionist groups was in fact secular, not Jewish, and nationalist, even fascist, not biblical.

Originally, notes Rabkin, Zionism was Protestant, not Jewish. It held that the return of Jews to Palestine would accompany the second coming of Christ and the end of history, when Jews would simply no longer exist! Today, the influence of Christian Zionist groups in Washington is so strong that it shapes U.S. foreign policy and ensures massive support for Israel.

In terms of identity, Israel is central to the Jewish debate between integration into the surrounding society or separate development. Israel is the self-proclaimed “State of the Jews,” forcing Jewish communities around the world to take a stand as defenders of Israel or anti-Zionists. Rabkin emphasizes that the idea that any Jew = Zionist, or Jew = defender of the State of Israel is simply a myth, and a fundamentally racist one at that.

The author also emphasizes Zionism’s instrumentalization of the Holocaust, facilitating the Jewish diaspora’s right of return to Israel. Instead of interpreting the Holocaust in the centuries-old Jewish tradition, Zionism has used it as the foundation of national unity in Israel, and as the foundation of metanational allegiance in the diaspora.

Rabkin also shows how the Israeli government violates Palestinians’ basic human rights, ignores UN resolutions and silences all opposition by equating voices of protest with treason. He sees a binational State as the way to break the deadlock.

1 Rabkin, M. Yakov, *Comprendre l'État d'Israël*, Éditions Écosociété, February 2014,

2 “Zionism is an ideology advocating the return of Jews to Palestine that was rooted in Christian Protestant thinking. In the late 19th century, a group of activists of Jewish origin in central Europe shaped it into a political movement that led to the proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948.” This definition of Zionism is found in the glossary in Rabkin’s book, p. 269