

Eva Etzioni-Halevy. *The Divided People: Can Israel's Breakup Be Stopped?*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002. x + 185 pp. \$82.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7391-0324-1.



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A Plea For Dialogue and Mutual Respect

Eva Etzioni-Halevy's *The Divided People: Can Israel's Breakup Be Stopped?* is an interesting and timely, yet problematic, examination of the increasingly potent divisions between Israel's secular and religious Jewish communities. A prominent sociologist at Bar-Ilan University, Etzioni-Halevy is an expert on issues of democracy and political elites.

In this book, she has combined her scholarly knowledge with a deeply personal commitment to Zionism and the State of Israel, in an effort to formulate solutions to the dramatic divisions ripping Jewish Israeli society into pieces. By contrasting the distinct and antagonistic opinions religious and secular Israelis hold of each others' communities and values, Etzioni-Halevy presents a portrait of fragmentation so intense that, she claims, it threatens the democratic structure of the Israeli government. In essence, then, her book is as much a plea for an end to this trend as it is a study of it.

The primary argument of Etzioni-Halevy's book is that Israeli democracy will only survive if the leaderships of the secular and religious com-

munities work together to foster a mutually acceptable Jewish identity that all Israeli Jews can acknowledge and accept as their own. (Palestinians living in Green-Line Israel are not considered in this study.) By contrasting elements of public and private experience, Etzioni-Halevy convincingly demonstrates that Israelis are divided in almost every aspect of their lives along the lines of religion, secularity, and political commitment. Separated by differences in spiritual belief and practice, these groups are also increasingly divided by language, neighborhoods, names, clothing, and, most importantly, cultural symbols. Attacks on the Zionist cause among the secular, and the increased birth rate among the haredim, have undermined the once-cohesive nature of Israeli identity. In its place, unifying symbols like Masada and the Army have been replaced by divisive symbols such as Hebron and Shabbat.

Moreover, Etzioni-Halevy accuses political and religious leaders of using the system to reinforce these divisions, by portraying each other as enemies of the State (in the case of the secular against the religious) or enemies of the Jewish

people (in the case of the religious against the secular.) The worst case of this was found in the vicious political climate leading up to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, a moment which Etzioni-Halevy believes threatened to topple the Israeli democracy altogether. At the same time, these leaders often ally to further their own political agendas, reinforcing the divisions between their constituents. One of the best cases of this, according to Etzioni-Halevy, was the ability of the Shas political party to situate itself during the late 1990s within alliances with secular governments in order to increase funding for its vast educational infrastructure. The result was thousands of schoolchildren coming under the formative influence of Shas and its religious ideologies, rather than the secular Israeli government schools.

The result of such wrangling, according to Etzioni-Halevy, is the further division of Israeli Jews, resulting in the increased ignorance and outright hatred of both camps toward one another. As individualism rises among the secular and separation from the state apparatus increases among the religious, Israeli democracy is increasingly inclined to fail. The lack of a tolerant, liberal tradition in mainstream Israeli political culture has not helped the situation. Faced with this daunting prospect, Etzioni-Halevy poses a solution in her book: the creation of a new Jewish identity that is acceptable to both the religious and the secular. She hopes that leaders will formulate a Judaism "with a human and humane face" (p. 161) which is compatible with Western Civilization's liberal goals (crucial for secular democracy), and which gives secular Jews a taste of the richness of Jewish religious traditions, while also maintaining the character of Orthodoxy for those who wish to practice it. In this way, Etzioni-Halevy believes that religious leaders need to realize a "Jewishness of the secular" (p. 166) while secular and religious leaders must behave in accordance with the values they promote.

Although fascinating, this argument is problematic, as, by Etzioni-Halevy's own admission, "it is possible to present the leaders with food for thought, but it is not possible to force them to eat it" (p. 170). Nevertheless, she is adamant in her commitment to Zionism and Judaism as shared worldviews which can strengthen bonds between Israel's secular and religious communities, as well as the nation's democratic structure. In response to Baruch Kimmerling's declaration "A Jewish State--zero democracy," she writes, "when the Jewish-Israeli-Zionist identity that now still holds the state together breaks down, then there will be zero democracy" (p. 171). With this argument, it is clear that Etzioni-Halevy stands firmly in the nationalist Zionist camp of Israeli popular culture. However, this position--as do all political stances--results in some omissions from her study.

The most striking omission is the impact of the Occupation on Israel's public culture and the ways that the settlement movement, the violence of the Occupation, and the economic and psychological impact of the Intifada on Israeli society have furthered the political and social animosities between the religious and secular segments of Israel. Despite the fact that this is a book about divisions between Jews in Israel, and not about struggles between Jews and Arabs, the complete exclusion of the Palestinians from this narrative glosses over deep conflicts arising from debates about the Occupation, debates which either reinforce or break down battles between Jews in Israel. Etzioni-Halevy does mention conscientious objectors in her discussion of the IDF as a social force for unity or dissent, but she obscures their influence by minimizing their relevance to the larger public discourse about Israeli identity and the role of the military in forging it. This exclusion also leaves a hole in her discussion about the military's role in shaping allegiance to the state and its subsequent influence on citizens' lives after their mandatory full-time service.

Moreover, her critique of the New Historicism movement among Israeli academics, while not the first by any means, is problematic, because she is at once critical of their assaults on the Zionist "myths," and yet she reifies these stories' mythic status with her ardent call for their perpetuation as unifying nationalist symbols. Without addressing whether or not she believes in the truth of these myths or in the historical evidence the new historians present, she considers these scholars irresponsible because they break down commonly held assumptions about the Israeli state-building process that unified Jews behind the Zionist program. However, in light of the debates brought about by the New Historicism movements (even as some of its leading lights, such as Benny Morris, have abandoned it), Etzioni-Halevy's call for people to support the myths in the name of civic unity is difficult to rationalize. Her nostalgia for the early, patriotic years of the Israeli state—for example, she bemoans the lack of flag waving in recent Independence Days and the decline in performance of the national anthem (pp. 88-89)—is coupled with a desire to see post-Zionist academics restrained from influencing public opinion (p.30). In both aspects, she dismisses the growing population of Israelis who see a recognition of Israel's disturbing past with the Palestinians as integral to maintaining and fostering the very Israeli democracy Etzioni-Halevy wishes to strengthen.

Despite these very serious problems, Eva Etzioni-Halevy's *The Divided People: Can Israel's Breakup Be Stopped?* remains a fascinating study of the variety of differences in worldview and experiences between secular and religious Jews in Israel. Etzioni-Halevy effectively outlines the ways that Israeli sectors have created, and maintained, distinct and separate communities that are increasingly segregated from one another. Moreover, she has convincingly placed the onus of such division on political and religious leaders who have expanded these gaps for their own gains, rather than sought to construct real bridges

between the communities in the larger effort of maintaining a cohesive, democratic Jewish State. Although it remains to be seen if any of Israel's powerful elites will listen to her pleas and work to establish the communal Jewishness she calls for, by reading Etzioni-Halevy's book, it is clear that she is firmly committed to struggling for the realization of her vision.

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