

THE FALLOUT OF THE 2015 ISRAELI ELECTIONS

DIANA BUTTU REFLECTS ON THE IMPACT OF THE ELECTIONS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE AND STEPS ON HOW TO PROCEED FORWARD

Chris Whitman: My first question is what are your overall impressions of the elections?

Diana Buttu: I am not at all surprised by how things worked out. I think the only thing that surprised me were the initial polls that were indicating that the *Zionist Camp* was doing better than they ended up doing. This is also no surprise because, it is not just a question of whether *Likud* managed to garner the highest number of seats but it is important to look at the spectrum of where the votes actually went...who got seats and who didn't get seats, to get a perspective of what Israel as a country is now looking like. What is very apparent now is that, (and apparent for the past few elections), is that steady shift, not just to the right, because the right in Israel is considered the extreme right in other countries, but even going beyond that, to the very extreme right and to religious parties as well. So, it was interesting to see that, if you look at the 120 members of Knesset who are now there, even if you are generous and say that members of the *Zionist Camp* believe in a Palestinian state, with all the vagueness I am implying in my tone about Palestinian state. Even if you are so generous in that definition, practically three quarters of the Knesset vehemently oppose the two state solution, or settlement or whatever you want to call it. So in the best case scenario, you are still looking at around 80 seats that have gone to parties that don't believe in any form of Palestinian rights at all. Then if you add the *Zionist Camp*, and say "ok they believe in SOME Palestinian rights, but not full rights," you are then looking at around 100 seats, out of 120. So that leaves a spectrum of 20 seats, that's all, 1/6 of the population who believes that there should be equal rights for Palestinians...whether that is in the form of two states, or the form of equality, this is the landscape that we are looking at now. This isn't some scenario where *Likud* just parachuted in from nowhere. There has been a very steady march and shift to the right over the course of the past 15-20 years, maybe more, and again not just a shift to the right, but the extreme right, and to a right that doesn't believe in any form of Palestinian rights. So I am not surprised by it and the reason it has all happened is because there haven't been any measures put in to hold Israel accountable for anything. Whether it is for the voting patterns or for the person they put in as the Foreign Minister, or for the settlement construction and expansion, or for the attacks on Gaza, or for any array of things. Basically, no one has been held accountable for any of these issues, at all. It is as if they are thinking "we can eat up the land, and receive billions of dollars at the same time. We can attack Gaza and receive money for the Iron Dome mechanism. We can institute racist legislation and continue to get diplomatic support around the world. We can have a Foreign Minister who calls for the beheading of Palestinians, and still be received in foreign capitals...so why not push it all the way to the max if you are of this persuasion."



Diana Buttu

Whitman: Do you think that the idea of being antagonistic towards Palestinian rights was a conscious voting decision by the Israeli public or would you say this was more of a consequence of voting for these parties?

Buttu: Oh no no, I don't think voters factored this in at all. I don't think Palestinians even factor into Israeli elections, really forever. The Israeli left wing always blames Palestinians and they say that the Israeli public only really votes on the issue of security and based on what's happening with Palestinians. I do not think that is the case at all. I think what's happened is, this is a country that has shifted to the right, and they've put up a wall. They don't see Palestinians anymore, they see a kind of a joker on the other side of the Green Line...talking about negotiations or bilateral processes, and I just don't see the Palestinians remotely factored into this election. These are simply right wing parties that are also right wing on a number of domestic issues as well. Netanyahu, just as he is right wing when it comes to eating up Palestinian land, he is also right wing when it comes to many domestic issues inside Israel. So this has been the shift. It is not that they made a conscious decision and said "I am going to vote for a party that doesn't believe in Palestinian rights," we just don't factor into it. There hasn't been a party who has come in and tested the waters and said "actually, it is time we started to deal with Israel's real issues, the junk Israel has been spewing." That doesn't exist. I have been here long enough to see that there have been small shades of this emerge as "one-hit wonder parties." But then they die down. Like, whether it was Lapid's father's party, Shanoui, Teddy Lapid's party. *Shanoui* came up and said "it is all about change," and then there was Kadima who did the same thing, also a "one-hit wonder." Then the *Pensioners' Party*, to the *Laborist* party, to *Yesh Atid*. None of them really come in to test the waters and say "we are a party who actually believes it is time for Israel to end its occupation and here is the brighter future Israel is going to have."

Whitman: Now when you speak of a rightward shift, in a way does that actually present a better possibility in the long term in regards to holding people accountable? In the sense of "Israel showing its true face?" With Netanyahu consolidating his power it is making Israel, externally, look more aggressive and right wing.

Buttu: Yes. Absolutely. I think there are two parts to your question. The first element is does it portray Israel in its proper fascist light. Yes it does. But the second element is, does something flow from that? And that is where, I am afraid, there is not a whole lot that flows. In other words, the international community hasn't really stepped up and done anything, even when they've seen the ugly face of Netanyahu. By the way, Netanyahu now is, as you saw, starting to look as left wing when you consider his cabinet and parties he may form a coalition with. So yes, I think it is good for the world to see what exactly is happening, where Israel is headed and what it is like. I am unfortunately not convinced this will translate into a change in policy by the international community, to the point where they are going to do something to hold Israel accountable. I wish they would, but I am not holding my breath.

Whitman: Do you think that it needs more of a rightward shift to actually do that, or do you think that Israeli policy would be the catalyst, regardless of who is in power? Does it take the image of a rightward government and society, or does it also require the more aggressive component? Is it more about the image, or about the policy? For example, you had Operation Cast Lead in 2008-9 and you had Operation Protective Edge in 2014. They were very similar operations, except that they had different people in power and the media attention that came with it, and especially for American media. So is it Israeli policy that is driving reaction from the international community or is it just the image of what Israel is?

Buttu: I think it is both. One, there is as you say the image of Israel and who Netanyahu is, but then that also leads people to open up their eyes and recognize what is going on, even if only a little bit. So for example, I don't know if they are 100% accurate, I am just giving an example, the Americans have never to my knowledge cared about whether or not Palestinians in Israel are discriminated against. I have never seen any concern or statements about it. Yet, this past time, it was the combination of Netanyahu saying that there will be no Palestinian state and new settlements to be expanded in the same day, but also when he made the statement about the Arabs voting in droves, that really captured the attention of the White House. There has never been a concern about whether Palestinians in Israel are being discriminated against, but it was that one comment that set them aback. It made them put their radar up, to the point where now, even when they are talking about this issue they are still raising the issue of Palestinians in Israel. It hasn't gone away. So I think that it is both. There is the perception of Netanyahu which has become more negative that has definitely changed, as you said, how it has been covered. I think this will cause the Americans to pay more attention to some of these actions as well.

Whitman: With a focus on Netanyahu as an individual, does this run the risk of taking the focus off the Palestinian issue itself and instead focusing it on Netanyahu as an individual or character? For example, just a few weeks ago, you had the issue of Netanyahu going to the US Congress. The issue wasn't whether or not Netanyahu speaking at the US Congress is appropriate, as a person who is responsible for the killing of 2,200 Palestinians in Gaza. Instead, the issue was "did he have permission from the US President to do so?" Is there a risk that the focus on Netanyahu as a persona detracts from the debate and does not really allow you to move beyond to learn about the Palestinian issue? Or do you see this as a potential catalyst for learning about the Palestinian issue?

Buttu: This is exactly what my fear is. My fear is that the focus will exclusively be on Netanyahu and of course you can change Netanyahu to Herzog or whoever serves in four years' time, and everything is ok. Simply switch characters and that is the end of it. So I am definitely worried about that, but I feel like the mask has come off now and each year more people will see Israel for what it is. To me, people should have skipped the speech. Not because it was Netanyahu coming to address Congress on an issue in which there are ongoing negotiations with Iran. The issue for me was, you have a war criminal and war monger addressing Congress. I don't care that he humiliated the US President or tried to. I am not American, so that means very little to me. The issue that did mean something to me is he is getting all of this attention, and even if you skip the speech you are only skipping it, not because of Netanyahu's policies, but because he made a diplomatic faux pas. So again, I am also concerned in regards to these elections, people are just going to say "this is just Netanyahu and he represents the right, not realizing that he now, due to the election make up, is the center of the spectrum, not the absolute right. I want people to focus on Israel as a country and not Netanyahu as an individual.

Whitman: Now, in regards to the spectrum, we have the clear cut numbers for the past elections. *Likud* ended with 30 seats, *Zionist Camp* with 24, *Joint List* with 13, *Yesh Atid* with 11, etc. It seems after the bigger parties, that many of those parties, like *Yesh Atid* or *Kulanu*, by Israeli standards are center, center right. And that many of the smaller parties ended up being right wing parties that were expected to do better, for example *Jewish Home*. *Yachad*, who was projected to make it did not. So it seems in my opinion, that Netanyahu and *Likud* absorbed the more right wing elements in Israel, into his party. Now he is the anchor, as opposed to before with a smaller *Likud*, he needed the small right wing parties more. Now they went to him, so he doesn't need those parties anymore so he will have more centralized power.

Buttu: Except that he needs them to form the coalition. Netanyahu's options are very slender. He has got 30 guaranteed obviously but very few coalitions to operate with only 61. In order to get a strong coalition, you need mid to high 70s. So, he needs the smaller parties like *Kulanu* and *Jewish Home*. I think that *Jewish Home* is going to play a bigger role than *Kulanu* in terms of making demands and being able to secure a coalition. He needs Shas, he needs United Torah Judaism. He doesn't need much, but he will get what he needs. He could, if he were smart, he would try and form a coalition with Herzog to deflect international attention. Maybe appoint him to be Chief Buffoon and sit with the Palestinians. That would be if Netanyahu were smart. I am not sure if he can see past his loathing for Obama, the Americans, and everyone else in order to show them he is willing to make a coalition with them.

Whitman: If Netanyahu were to make a coalition with Herzog, would you see that as anything beyond placation?

Buttu: No. He is going to do that only because he is in a little bit of hot water with the Americans as well as most of the international community. They need to see that there is a peace process and putting Herzog in wins for all sides, superficially. It shows the international community that Netanyahu still believes in peace and it gives Herzog some political capital because he hasn't really been in politics that long. He has never been in a cabinet. So it gives him some standing that he didn't have in the past. Now, whether the *Zionist Camp* allows that to happen is another issue. If you think about it from Netanyahu's position you can see this as an option. You are right, he and *Likud* absorbed a lot of right wing votes because they began to see there was a risk of a potential left wing, by Israeli terms, victory. I am still blown away that *Labor* is considered left wing. I think that is why he absorbed those votes. I think that *Kulanu* and others have more real support than others do. I think the numbers came out, in regards to votes from settlements, and it said that settlers voted mostly for *Jewish Home* rather than for *Likud*.

Whitman: Yes, I agree, I saw the same study. Speaking of *Jewish Home*, you said that you think *Jewish Home* will extract concessions out of *Likud* to be part of the coalition. Can you elaborate on this? What kind of concessions they could get or what position this puts *Jewish Home* in? What are the ramifications of that considering Naftali Bennett is a proponent of annexing Area C? Would this push Netanyahu towards accepting this proposal?

Buttu: I don't think Netanyahu and Bennett are rivals. I think one pushes the other. One complements the other. I don't think they are political rivals in the sense that they oppose each other. Netanyahu very conveniently uses Bennett to say "I am being forced by members of my coalition for X." Annexation of Area C is not something crazy or new for Netanyahu. Bennett has already stated his terms for entering a coalition, unlike *Kulanu* who is falling over themselves to join the coalition. Bennett has made this clear. He has said they should reinstitute the Jewish Nation-State Law, trying to pass some version of it. He has already come out and said they have to pass some law to curb the work of NGOs, in particular foreign funded NGOs. Number 3, he has also said that Israel should pass a law to legalize those outposts that are located on private Palestinian land. The only loophole that still exists in Israeli law in regards to settlements is, you can't build on private Palestinian land. Bennett wants to override this. It is the only place so far there have been court victories for Palestinians against the settlements. Bennett has come out and said that this will be a condition. So doing the two steps forward towards annexation, but not full annexation because they don't need to fully annex. All they need to do is continue the pace of settlement expansion/construction and continue to incorporate more and more Palestinian land into Israel. And in the end you have the same de facto result without the fanfare. So I do think that *Likud* will be pushing towards this and not because he needs to do this for his coalition but because he genuinely wants to do.

Whitman: In your opinion, what do you think led Israelis to vote for *Likud*? We already addressed the fact that the Palestinian issue is not even considered important enough to be on the agenda. So what is leading *Likud* to be the largest party?

Buttu: Good question but I am not sure I have an answer. I would say there are a few things. One, *Likud* has been doing well for the average Israeli. Not for the majority of Israelis, but enough. They have managed to weather recessions better than the US or other countries. The country seems to have jobs available, it is doing alright. That was probably for me, about it. I didn't really hear a lot of discourse from Israelis as to why they voted for *Likud* vs. voting for Herzog, Lapid, or others. YairLapid, I think he didn't do well because he didn't do anything positive his first years. Beyond that, I actually don't know why people voted for *Likud*. All I can think of is, the economy is doing well and they seem to believe that Netanyahu has provided a sense of security in the country. They haven't had to think about a whole lot of things. I am not a typical Israeli voter, so I don't know.

Whitman: Now we talked a little bit about potential partners in the coalition, so I want to make sure I understand your thinking as to how this will develop. Essentially, you say Netanyahu has two main choices. One, the "smart" track where he will try to make a coalition with *Zionist Camp*, *Yesh Atid*, *Kulanu*...

Buttu: No no, he will not try to make a coalition with *Yesh Atid*. They are out. The plan is to have *Likud*, *Zionist Camp*, *Kulanu* (they are in no matter what), and then some of the smaller parties that are still willing to accept Herzog in the government, minus the religious groups. That is option one. Option two is he goes for the right bloc without the religious groups which will give him a very slim margin, or option 3, right wing with the religious groups, without *Yesh Atid*, *Joint List*, and no *Zionist Camp*.

Whitman: Now looking at these scenarios, if either of these happens what do you expect for the next 4 years in regards to ending the occupation or resolving the conflict, negotiations, etc. Do any of these scenarios have a positive outcome for Palestinians in the occupied territories or is it more about the symbolic facade of having negotiations for the sake of having negotiations? Will it change either way?

Buttu: I don't think it will change anything on the ground for Palestinians and I think the only thing that will change anything on the ground for us, is if we start behaving in a different way. I think now is the time to push for BDS, pushing for isolation of Israel, pushing for Israel's accountability, all of these things. But I don't think that any of those scenarios is going to lead to anything coming from an Israeli initiative or bilateral initiatives between the Palestinians and Israelis. It is just not going to happen. To compare the

years in which I was there and involved in the negotiations and now...it was light years ahead then compared to now, and that is not saying much. Even when I was there, there was never a recognition that Palestinians have rights. It was always framed in this logic of Israel's generosity or morality. Never was it a recognition of Palestinian rights. Israel has moved so far down a path of impunity the last years that I just don't think the mindset of impeding on someone else's rights can somehow be pursued through negotiations or conferences. So I don't think anything is going to come from any bilateral process. And to be honest, for the first time ever, I think Abu Mazen has realized that the bilateral process is dead.

Whitman: Ok, so that is on a macro level of diplomacy, but what about on a micro level of violence. Do the different coalition scenarios you mentioned influence the likelihood of another attack on Gaza or Lebanon or the West Bank? Do any of these coalition options influence the potential for any of these likelihoods?

Buttu: I don't think so. It is hard to predict obviously, but I just don't think there will be any brakes put on anyone regardless of coalition structure. During the attack on Lebanon, the Defense Ministry was from *Labor*, so I just don't think one is any better than the other. I think the only difference between these political coalitions is not how they view Palestinians; there are small shades of difference. I do not want to sound overly cynical and saw none, but small shades. I think the big difference is how they view the country and I think if anything, *Labor* would want to try to make things a little less costly for Israelis, I don't know how they are going to do that, but they would institute laws that maybe give more provisions to those who are more needy and less well off, but that is it. Other than that, I think the distinction between the coalitions does not relate as to how they view Palestinians or how they would treat Palestinians, only how they view the country internally.

Whitman: You said a little bit back that you feel that Abu Mazen is really starting to hit the wall in terms of his belief in the possibility of a bilateral solution, how do you feel that the PA should react to the elections, if at all? They haven't been all that vocal the past week, not making any public statement other than "unless Netanyahu accepts the two-state solution, nothing will happen:" Is that an adequate response? Should it be more? Should they sit back and see how the world handles the issues or how Israel starts to present itself? Should they be active or passive?

Buttu: So I think there is a big difference in regards to what they are doing and they should be doing. What they are doing is being passive because they want to do the wait and see approach, wait and see which coalition arises, and wait and see how the world reacts. Wait and see how the Americans will pressure Netanyahu. That is what they are doing. What should they be doing? I don't necessarily mind the wait and see approach for the next few days, but after the coalition is formed, I do believe they have to be pushing ahead on the macro issue of Israel's isolation. Irrespective of who is in the coalition, they have to be moving ahead with this issue advancing and holding Israel accountable as well as advancing on issues related to BDS. Those are things they are always unwilling to do because they always want to see who sits in coalition. I think the only reason to wait and see is just to use as ammunition later on when pushing for isolation, accountability, and BDS. They don't view things in these ways. They see it as "well maybe someone positive will have an important role and let's see if the world does anything."

Whitman: Can you give some examples about what you mean when you say increasing Israel's isolation? What does this actually mean on a diplomatic level, on a practical level, on a political level, on an economic level, what actually does this entail?

Buttu: I think what I would do as a first step, is push for UN resolutions, even if only in the General Assembly that call for a larger scale boycott against Israel. So far, nothing like this has been attempted. All they have to do is look at what the South Africans did in the early 60s and how they approached the issue, just to see how systematic it was, that by 1965 there were resolutions on the table about various boycotts against South Africa. It laid the foundation. So I think these are the basics they should be pushing ahead with. Even simply doing things like persuading other countries to get involved for more action. Maybe have things brought up like "why is Israel in EuroVision or FIFA," I don't know, things like this. These sorts of things that they can be doing and again I am just thinking about this at the most basic level. I don't have a plan drawn up. One would expect that they had a plan or something already written up.

Whitman: Now, on a micro level, how do you feel Palestinians from the occupied territories should react? Should they be going to the Palestinian Authority (PA) demanding these things you are talking about? Should civil society organizations in the occupied territories be dealing with these issues? Where do you see the connect between the Palestinian Authority and the collective of the Palestinian people because it seems like, in my experience here, there is a growing disconnect between the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people as a collective. What should their role be, if any, in this process?

Buttu: Really good question, I wish I had the answer. I think that ideally, the leaders lead and the people follow, but we don't have that scenario here. Similarly, while civil society has a role there is also a disconnect between civil society and Palestinian society. Not always, but it is there. I think the only place I have not seen that disconnect is the popular resistance groups that are working. They are working on popular resistance, not making that leap between grassroots organizing and international action. That definitely needs to be made, but it hasn't been so far. We must construct a scenario where the people are leading and the leaders follow.

To be quite blunt. I believe civil society plays a role, but again it needs to strengthen...now that I am thinking out loud about it, perhaps that is how to push things forward, by getting these grassroots organizations to increase popular resistance with the hope being that civil society has connections to the international community and this will pick up. Already we have seen small variations of this. In terms of BDS, it is catching around the world. Now while it may not be at the level it should be for Palestinians in the occupied territories, it is getting there. It needs this vertical integration between grassroots and the Palestinian leadership. I just don't think it is going to happen, that is why I am not really answering the question very well, I just don't have a lot of faith that the PA is going to do much and I am speculating that if there are going to be gains made, it is going to be because people around the world are outraged and are saying "enough," and are pushing. The PA will be the beneficiaries of this, even if they are not the instigators. Similarly, when it comes to Palestinians, do I think they should be doing more? I think they are doing a lot. The sheer resistance remains huge, it is just not being capitalized on by any real leadership. You know what, I could not endure this place. I wouldn't be able to endure military occupation for 50 years. Really. I would've lost my mind long ago. One of the reasons why I left Ramallah is because I can't live under that scenario for extended periods of time but Palestinians have. So it shows there is a resilience with them and I am not sure we can demand more than what is already being put forward.

Whitman: I have a question about your feelings on an issue related to all of this. About a month ago, the Palestinian Authority de facto banned the sale of 6 major Israeli companies, specifically Elite, Tnuva, Osem, and other ones...Do you see that as an actual positive step forward, or simply a symbolic gesture that is not going to be maintained long term?

Buttu: There are two things...I don't believe Elite, Strauss, and all these companies are going to be fully boycotted in the West Bank for the long term. I don't think that is going to happen, because the PA never really follows through with what it says and does. That being said, I think that it was a huge step for the PA to finally sign on to something that calls for boycotting Israeli products. Even if it is a small number of companies. Even if that is the case and they moved from embracing Israeli goods and Israel, to now saying "we need to boycott them," it is a huge step. It is definitely not enough. I definitely think it is only symbolic, but even in that symbolism it is a beginning. It is showing a lot, and that they are realizing that the BDS movement is picking up and they can't ignore it any longer.

Whitman: I actually want to shift to a potentially positive topic, or at least more positive than most of the past topics, and that is the Palestinian vote inside of Israel. In the end, the *Joint List* received 13 seats and were just under 11% of votes. Do you see this as a victory for Palestinian citizens of Israel? Was this better than you expected? Does this put Palestinians in a better position than before? What are your expectations of having the *Joint List* with a larger bloc than normal? Is it positive or negative? What are your feelings?

Buttu: I am mixed. I am actually very torn on this. I am torn because I do not wish to legitimize the Israeli system. Obviously when you vote, it means you are legitimizing the system and saying you think change can come from within the system. I do not believe that at all, so I do not want to legitimize the Israeli system and say "oh yeah, change is going to happen because we have more seats." I don't believe that. That said, I think for me I was happy that for once, these four political parties put aside their differences where they had really deep differences. I was delighted they finally put them aside and came together, recognizing that their differences were minor in comparison to the discrimination, the racism, the apartheid,

etc. that we all are living under. There are major issues, being a feminist versus being in some of the other parties, I get it. However, I do think that they finally recognized that there is something that unites us, and what unites us is greater than what separates us. So I am not someone who believes there will be massive change happening because we got more people out to vote or because there are more seats in Knesset. But I do think that it shows that even in the fragmented community of Palestinian citizens of Israel, there is now a sense that we have got to be united to confront the racism, the apartheid, the colonialism, the ethnic cleansing, you name it. That to me left me very very happy. I was delighted in how they ran their campaign because their campaign was clean and it was honest. Clean in the sense that they didn't make disparaging remarks about one another or other candidates. The only time they said things were to highlight what Liebermann and his policies were about. I felt like they were honest because they made it clear, they said "don't expect we will work miracles, we are still living under a Zionist system and we still have differences between us, but we also recognize the only way to move forward is to be united." So I am positive about all of the developments, but I am not a person that thinks "oh yeah, now they will take on Netanyahu and win. I don't think they are going to win anything. But I do think that now, as a more united list, they will at least be able to capture some international attention and to be quite honest, this felt like the first election in which Jewish Israelis, who are not Zionist, like anti-Zionist Israelis, could vote for the underdog and feel like they were voting for the right consolation.

Whitman: What do you think their role will be in this government? They have openly said they are not going to be part of any coalition, so they will be a part of the opposition regardless. Do you see them pushing forward legislation about Palestinian issues or...

Buttu: I think there are going to be a bunch of things at the same time. One is, I think they are going to be goalkeepers, trying to block a lot of legislation. Two, I think they are going to be challenging a lot of legislation and policies that relate to the occupation that require legislation, such as those measures I referred to earlier that Bennett wants to pass. I also think they are going to do a lot to gain more popular support. So already, I don't know if you know, but this weekend they are doing a march from the Negev all the way up to Jerusalem. They are on this 3 day march, in order to highlight the plight of people in the Negev. These are members of Knesset, so they are going to do a lot more of that outreach that hadn't been done in the past. So I think there will be a bunch of things. They can't be a part of any coalition. Even if Herzog had won, because once you are part of the coalition, you can't vote against that coalition. And whether it is an attack on Gaza, I mean they are not going to sit there in an occupation government, supporting occupation policies. It is bad enough that they are sitting in an occupation government. They obviously have to be in the opposition. I think they are going to do a better job. Now, the thing that scares me about the *Joint List* is that they have come together, but completely solid with their coalition. It is still a little bit fragile. The Israelis are going to try to mess with them. They will try to isolate Haneen Zoabi. So the question will be, can the *Joint List* work together as a *Joint List* and stand up for her in ways they have not in the past or is it going to lead to the disintegration of the political party in the long term.

Whitman: One of the constant themes you have touched upon was whether or not Palestinians inside of Israel should even be voting. In the end around 63% of eligible Palestinian voters did vote. If the *Joint List* performs well, do you see this number going up? This number is higher than the last elections. Is this a new trend developing that could be expanded in the future assuming the *Joint List* does well and performs according to the needs of the constituency? If this happens, will there be a higher turnout in the next elections?

Buttu: It depends. I think in general yes, but the only reason I am saying it depends is, as you know, there are two main groups that are pushing against Palestinians voting. One is the religious group, led by Sheikh Salah, and the other is secular nationalist group. So these two forces are people who are saying "there is no need to vote, you are just legitimizing the system." That being said, they have their hardcore supporters, but there are others who say "look we have an opportunity, and having this opportunity also means we have a responsibility. We have the responsibility in voting for someone who is going to try to block some of this racist legislation. So, I think it really just depends on those other two groups gaining in support and how well the *Joint List* does. But I can say one thing for sure...if the *Joint List* does not perform well or if they disintegrate very quickly, that will be the end of voting.

Whitman: Of voting for Palestinians in Israel in general?

Buttu: Yes, we would see a huge drop off if that happens.

Whitman: If the *Joint List* does break up, do you see them going back to the small, issue-oriented kind of Palestinian representation?

Buttu: Yes, I do. Not in the short term, but if they do, yes.

Whitman: I actually only have one last question, as a kind of overall outlook. Do you believe this election will have an impact on Israeli society? Either in one direction or another? I mean, as we discussed earlier, you gave a few scenarios of what can happen. Is this an impactful election for Israeli society? Is this a catalyst for the next stage, or is it a short term, non-impactful election?

Buttu: Yes, I think it is an important one. But I think a lot depends on what the international fallout is going to be regarding Netanyahu. I think that when you have the president, saying that the #1 agenda item for this next government is to repair relations with the United States; it is already having an impact. I think this is going to change things, maybe not for Israeli society, but I think it is going to be an important one for Israeli society.

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