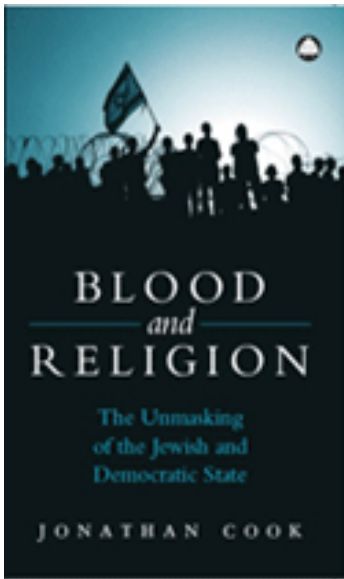


Jonathan Cook, *Blood and Religion. The Unmasking of the Jewish and Democratic State*, Pluto Press, London-Ann Arbor 2006, 222 Pages, € 22,50.



Writing about Israel is a most challenging task, because reporting the reality can get you into deep trouble. That is why Jonathan Cook, who lives as the only foreign correspondent in Nazareth, is very careful about the language he uses, for simple words show "where you stand in a debate". One wrong stammering and he will be accused of "anti-Semitism". "I have largely neglected non-Israeli and Arab sources, not because I doubt their credibility, but because they will be less convincing to those who seek to reject my argument." He exemplifies the absurdity and Orwellian talk about Israeli politics in respect to the "barrier" which is being built around the Palestinian people. If he used the word "wall", he would have been labelled pro-Palestinian. He could merely call it "fence", which is the Israeli word, or he could have used the anaemic concept "barrier". Perhaps German political visitors in cities like East-Jerusalem, Qualqilia, Tulkarem and Bethlehem do see a "fence" where there is an eight meter high wall with twelve meter high watchtowers. Or, if they indeed see a wall, they may still talk about a "fence".

Cook wrote a solid and a fair analysis of the situation of the Israeli Palestinians who are called "Arabs" in Israel. A broad spectrum of political initiatives by the Israeli government against its Arab citizens is unfolded in front of the readers, initiatives which are purely discriminatory or even racist to say the least. "My general argument ... is that Israel is beginning a long, slow process of ethnic cleansing both of Palestinian non-citizens from parts of the occupied territories, which it has long coveted for its expanded Jewish state, and of Palestinian citizens from inside its internationally recognised border." Cook thinks that the Israelis are building their "Jewish fortress". Sharon's famous disengagement plan was not originally his idea, its foundation was laid by his predecessors Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak, both members of the labour party.

The author presents an interesting idea: Israel is not only building an "iron wall" made of concrete, but also a "glass wall". This type of wall "is designed to intimidate and silence its captive Palestinian population". Unlike the "iron wall" it "conceals the nature of the subjugation in such a way that it is seen as necessary, even benevolent". The "iron wall" is a metaphor: the phrase was coined by Zeev Jabotinsky, the revisionist Zionist who thought that the Arabs could only be controlled by military force, which meant by an "iron wall". Jabotinsky and other Zionist leaders like David Ben-Gurion never thought that the Arabs would ever make a compromise with the Zionists who took their land.

The Israeli Palestinians suffered from severe discrimination against them, from the foundation of Israel in 1948 on until May 1967. They could not move from village to village without a permit of the Israeli military. After the siege was lifted, the discriminatory policies continued until today. 1.3 Million Palestinians are second or even third class citizens. During a demonstration in October 2001 in Nazareth, 13 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli police. Twelve of these victims were citizens of Israel, the thirteenth a Gazan. This demonstration, which was held in solidarity with the brutally oppressed Palestinians in the occupied territories, was, in fact, the result of a silent discrimination against the Palestinian Israelis for decades. A commission of inquiry was introduced which was led by former supreme court judge Theodor Or. This commission shed some light on the foundation of the Jewish state.

The "glass wall" is not only a metaphor for the unseen discrimination against the Israeli Palestinians, it also served as a means to deceive the public. Judge Or "demanded that a glass partition be built between the public gallery, where the Palestinian families sat, and the rest of the courtroom. ... On the

TV news and on newspaper photographs, however, it looked as if all the participants to the inquiry were sitting in the same room. The inquiry appeared to be treating all the parties equally when in reality its Arab participants were outsiders, excluded and largely ignored." This "very Israeli solution" provides Cook with an image for the plight of Palestinian Israelis (amazingly, he consistently uses the unpopular term "Israeli Arabs"), and this in a self-proclaimed "democratic and Jewish state". The glass wall is "an even greater obstacle to a Middle East peace than its walls of concrete and steel". The author analyses the political basis for probable future consequences of this discrimination. According to Cook, most Israelis feel uncomfortable with the idea that Israel only is a "Jewish" state; it sounds a little too much like an Afrikaner state or a Catholic state. Thus, "democratic" was added as a kind of public denial that Israel is an ethnic or religious state. The Jewish and democratic idea is crucially important to Israelis, says Cook.

With a lengthy introduction, four chapters, and a very interesting conclusion, the author devotes about a third of his book to recounting Israel's short and horrible history as a sustained struggle against "the demographic demon". Cook conveys the impression that the Israeli political elite is obsessed with the demographic issue. Even the so-called new historian Benny Morris turned into an ardent Zionist again in the light of the second Intifada and the demographic "threat". In the minds of the ruling class the given discrepancy in the birth-rates of Jews and Arabs in the long run bears the danger that the growing number of Israeli Palestinians could become so powerful that they could overthrow the anti-democratic Law of Return from 1950, or force a re-definition of Israel as "a state of all its citizens" - a condition that goes without saying in a normal democracy. In Israel, however, this phrase was coined by Azmi Bishara, a member of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset. Transforming this demand into political reality means that Israel with its current system would be terminated. "Israeli Jews, aware that a detailed explanation of their reasons for rejecting a state of all its citizens might hint at a racist logic at the heart of the 'Jewish and democratic' project, have remained coy about engaging directly in such debates. A state of all its citizens is dismissed, mystifyingly to outsiders, as a 'threat to Israel's existence', 'incitement' or even as part of the 'ideology of terror'. One must read between the lines, decoding what is meant when Israelis deploy these terms." The Israeli Palestinians are seen as the "Fifth column".

Israel's defenders worldwide have tied themselves up in explaining how an "ethnic democracy" can still "operate within the parameters of democratic behaviour". The shame is that so many supporters of Israel have been satisfied with such a contortion. How can it be explained that the Israeli political geographer Oren Yiftachel from Ben-Gurion University defined Israel as an "ethnocracy", being "neither authoritarian nor democratic... Ethnocracies, despite exhibiting several democratic features, lack a democratic structure"? Cook stresses the consensus between secular and religious Jews in Israel: "It will be around the principle that the Other, the enemy, is the Arab". The Palestinian Israeli is the "unwelcome guest, the intruder, the saboteur, the terrorist. And therefore he must be the one to leave, or made to leave." On September 11th, 2006, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that Knesset member Effi Eitam, a former "tourist minister" under Ariel Sharon, asked for the expulsion of the great majority of Palestinians in the West Bank, "and that Arabs should be ousted from Israeli politics as a fifth column and 'a league of traitors'". These remarks were broadcast on the same day when the army radio transmitted a speech which Eitam made on a Sunday at a memorial service for a soldier killed in Lebanon. "We will have to expel the great majority of the Arabs of Judea and Samaria", said Eitam. And about the Israeli Palestinians he stated: "We will have to make another decision, and that is to sweep the Israeli Arabs from the political system. Here, too, the issue is clear and simple. We have raised a fifth column, a league of traitors of the first rank. Therefore, we cannot continue to enable so large and so hostile a presence within the political system of Israel."

Jonathan Cook wrote a well-documented book on the democratically institutionalised injustice of Israel that the West permanently ignores. The image of the "beautiful Israel" which so many Western liberals are trying to sell to the public in the United States and Western Europe, is a fata morgana, and for the

Israeli Palestinians it is a nightmare. The outcome will be gloomy: A "pure state. Their Jewish fortress."
The findings are very impressive and yet not surprising. It is a must read.

Ludwig Watzal