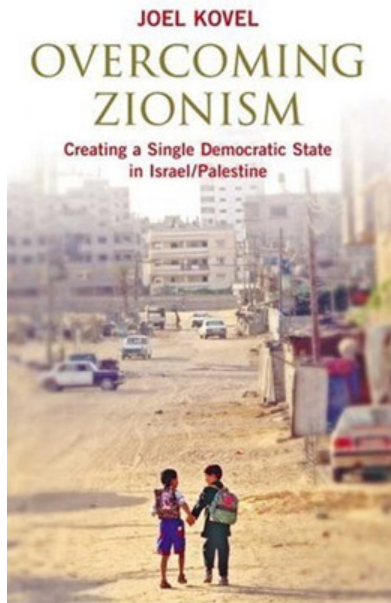


Joel Kovel, *Overcoming Zionism*, Pluto Press, London 2007, p 299, € 24.

Joel Kovel has written a fundamental and devastating critique of Zionism and its political impact on the Palestinian people. The project to write this book evolved out of a series of articles written for "Tikkun" magazine and with the encouragement of Professor Edward Said, the most famous Palestinian scholar in the United States of America. Kovel's articles had previously raised massive criticism by what John Mearsheimer and Stephan Walt called "Israel Lobby". But the publication of this book finally cost the author his part-time tenure at Bard college.



At the outset, the author asks what kind of Jew would write such a book and provides his own answer to this question: "Not a good Jew, for sure." Or, in Isaac Deutscher's words a "non-Jewish Jew". Kovel wrote this book "in fury about Israel and the unholy complicity of the United States and its Jewish community that grants it impunity". The author knows what he is talking about because he originates from this community. His parents were Ukrainian Jews who moved to the United States. He was born in Brooklyn in 1936. In the book's Prologue he describes his alienation from Judaism. This was caused by chauvinism. Kovel thinks that granting a particular group "chosen status is nonsense".

For the author "the overcoming of Zionism is its dissolution". Kovel demolishes Zionism on the historical, political, cultural, ethical, psychological, and environmental level. Zionism seeks "the restoration of tribalism in the guise of a modern, highly militarized and aggressive state." That is why "Tribalism is the curse of Judaism". Kovel thinks Zionism is a "bad idea". For any Zionist Kovel's book is hard to swallow. That is perhaps why it arose such an aggressive reaction by some pressure groups.

Tribalism is institutionalised in Israel in the form of the "law of return", so Kovel. Palestinians dispossessed by Israel's expansion have no right of return. Israel defines itself as a "Jewish and democratic state". The author thinks that democracy and Zionism are a contradiction in terms, they are "incompatible". Kovel criticizes not only the Zionist ideology but also the concept of "exceptionalism". This concept rests on the "terrible Christian and European experience", while the territorial expansion goes at the expense of the Palestinian people.

For Kovel Zionism is not a "dream" but rather a "nightmare". Consequently, he argues for a "binational state" and calls this figure "Palesrael". As the name suggests, this concept might be a non-starter taking the ruling Zionist elite into account. Implementing the right of return for the Palestinians contains in itself the conditions for "bringing down Zionism in an entirely peaceful way". The overwhelming majority of the Israelis are against a one-state solution.

Kovel really believes that "the world would be a better place without Zionism", and that Israel is "the most dangerous place for Jews in the world". This view is also shared by Avram Burg, the former speaker of the Knesset and other far-sighted Israelis. Other critics of Zionism like John Rose in his book "The Myth of Zionism" identify this ideology as the main obstacle to a lasting peace in the Middle East. Kovel's book is a very courageous critique of the manifold contradictions of Zionism and a must read, especially for the political elites in Europe and the United States.

Ludwig Watzal