

*Rose, Jacqueline: The Question of Zion. Princeton University Press, Princeton-Oxford 2005. 208 S. ISBN 0-6911-1750-0*

*Rose, John: The Myth of Zionism. Pluto, London 2004. 232 S. ISBN 0745320554*

The conflict in the Middle East can only be resolved if two conditions are met: first a minimum of historical justice has to be realised towards the Palestinians and a process of de-zionisation in Israeli politics has to be initiated. Michel Warschawski and Israel Shahak, both courageous Israeli intellectuals, have fought for these arguments. But the Israeli political elite does not want to achieve either of them. Both authors could not be more different: Jacqueline Rose wants to excavate the good intentions of Zionism while for John Rose "Zionism is the problem". Their two different approaches could not be more clearly stated.

Jacqueline Rose, Professor of English at Queen Mary University of London, is appalled at what the Israeli nation is perpetuating in the name of Zionism. She cannot believe that this movement has managed to pervert the good intentions and goals it started with. Did it really have good intentions from the start, however?

She wants to rescue Zionism by taking the side of Zionism's critics, as if this would still matter today. Of course, their arguments were morally better, but in practice the politicians have decided to act differently. To argue that Ahad Ha'am, Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, Hans Kohn and all the others had better arguments is a waste of time. It will not alter the brutal reality that has been created for the indigenous people by Zionism.

For Rose it is problematic that a state which is one of the most powerful nations in the world "chooses to present itself as eternally on the defensive, as though weakness were a weapon, and vulnerability its greatest strength." Rose sees an indirect connection between anti-Semitism and the policies of Ariel Sharon.

"Anti-Semitism is not caused by Israel's policies, but without a clear critique of Israel today, there is no chance of defeating it. No state can act with unlimited impunity even on grounds of self-defence."

Writing on Zionism is for Rose undoubtedly a way of asking Israel to be accountable for its own history. Such an attitude puzzled the Jacqueline Rose and she asks how this could happen. She goes back to the roots of Zionism and describes an inner-Zionist debate in order to show how intense the fight within the movement over the right way to act was. She exemplifies by speaking about people like Ahad Ha'am, Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, Hans Kohn, David Gross-man und Naomi Chazan. All of them called for the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people by Zionism. For Martin Buber the establishment of Israel was in Palestinian terminology a "catastrophe". Although Rose does not give a definition of Zionism she is lost with the existing one. The thinking of these people is needed to reform Israel and create a more humane form of Zionism, so Rose. Does she really believe Zionism can be reformed? Rose discusses three lines of Zionism: Zionism as Messianism, as psychoanalysis and as politics.

The Messianic roots stem from Shabtai Zvi. "Destruction or even wantonness lay at the root of Ziv's capacity to inspire." His proclaimed kingship of Israel became a self-fulfilling prophecy. According to him, Zionism can be understood as the first Messianic movement. The same opinion was shared by Hannah Arendt. Messianism flourishes in dark times, like Zionism; it is a child of exile writes Gershom Scholem. According to him, Jewish Messianism is from its source a "theory of catastrophe". Rose sees Israel as being in a paradoxical situation: the Messianic redemption is a kind of historical revenge. It was especially the suffering which has motivated the Jewish people to tend towards the apocalyptic tradition. For Sholem Messianic Zionism poses a threat to Israel. Chaim Weizman, the first President of Israel said in 1914 at a Zionist meeting in Paris "that they are considered mad; if we were normal, we would not consider going to Palestine but stay put like all normal people".

According to Rose, Zionism was after Weizman nothing more than “a form of collective insanity”.

In the second chapter on the psycho-analysis of Zionism, Rose writes that Theodor Herzl and his whole family were very depressive. This characterization of the father of Zionism proved right also for Chaim Weizmann. In a letter to Leo Motz-kin, Weizmann described his state of mind as “over fatigue and overexcitement”.

“We are nervous, unstrung, flabby, unfit for the Jewish cause ... Our sensitiveness has made us vacillating creatures.”

Such a disillusionment came to the fore in the delusory language: “purity of arms” and “shoot and weep”. Also Hannah Arendt hinted at the psychological contradiction within the Zionist movement. As they were seen to anybody they would be pushed aside as “unrealistic”.

In “Zionism as politics”, Rose hinted at another paradox in Herzl’s behaviour. Herzl wanted nothing more than to become an emancipated and assimilated Jew.

“I am a German Jew from Hungary, and I can never be anything but a German ... At present, I am not recognised as a German. That will come soon, once we are over there.”

His attitude towards anti-Semitism was “ambivalent”. One politician who’s importance for Zionism cannot be regarded highly enough was David Ben-Gurion. According to him, the whole “doctrine of Zionism was defence”. The idea of “Jewish self-defence” came up with the first Pogroms in Russia in 1904/05. Rose points out that Zionism’s initial intention was not a military undertaking, not brutal and not unjust towards the Arab population. She should, however, know that the Zionist enterprise and the writings of the leading Zionists tell a different story. Rose believes that Zionism is destroying not only the Palestinians, but itself.

This book was written with a great deal of empathy by an Israeli who seems disillusioned by the Zionist ideology. She asked desperately how the Zionist movement could go astray and turn into such a brutal occupational regime. Whether the answer lies in a purified Zionism may be doubted. The history of communism tells us a different story.

John Rose in his book is more realistic about the true nature of Zionism. For him

“Zionism is the problem; its removal is the precondition for peace in the Middle East. It is the precondition for Arab-Jewish reconciliation in Palestine. That is the only possible conclusion to this book.”

Zionism is held together by a series of myths.

“A package of false notions which undermine its claims on the Jewish religion and Jewish history, its rationale as a response to Europe’s Anti-Semitism, and above all its justification for its aggressive and very dangerous political posturing in the land of Palestine.”

Rose states openly what his aim is:

„My main concern has been only to demolish Zionism’s mythical history.“

From a scientific point of view it is a forgone conclusion but from a political stand-point it can be dangerous. The so-called friends of Israel all over the world attack and stigmatise anybody who criticises the brutal policy of the Sharon government as an “Anti-Semit”. The Palestinians understand Rose’s realistic view of Zionism. For them this ideology has brought them the loss of their homeland, dispossessions, death, dispersion all over the world and the destruction of their society.

Rose teaches sociology at Southwark College and London Metropolitan University. He separates the facts from fiction and the myths which the Zionist representatives have woven from the establishment of Israel till today. For Rose, David Ben-Gurion was the best “myth-maker”. His belief systems give an “unparalleled insight into Zionist myth-making”. Ben-Gurion stripped the

concept of Messiah of its personification and substituted Zionism as a Messianic movement for the Messiah-as-Person.

“Hence the redemption of mankind is to be preceded by the redemption of the Jewish people, restored to their own Land.”

Martin Buber and Yeshayahu Leibowitz, both Zionists, were appalled at the way Ben-Gurion manipulated the Jewish religion for narrow political ends, according to Rose.

Rose analyses Jewish history and the consequences for Palestine. He thinks that the Jewish claim on Palestine is not well founded. The term “Eretz Israel” is also a “religious myth”. The author shows that from the beginning of Zionist colonisation the farmers resisted it. They and the bourgeoisie knew from the start that it would be asserted at their expense. This kind of resistance against occupation is still there because the fight of the Palestinian people has something to do with justice and historical truth. Rose’s central aim is to bring truth to the open. The book is impressive. Hopefully it will influence the elites in the United States and Europe.

Ludwig Watzal