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The Critiques of Zionism

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Any cursory web search at once reveals the polarizing nature of the topic of Zionism. For some, as for the founders of the movement, it is the culmination of millennia of messianic tradition, the inevitable return of a chosen people to its divinely ordained homeland after a long and agonizing exile. For others, it is among the more recent and more grotesque manifestations of Western colonialism, an emblem of racism, state violence, apartheid, and rampant nationalism. Even internally, neither proponents nor opponents can reach a consensus – Was the creation of the state of Israel an inevitable result of Providence, or the natural result of national self-determination? Is it offensive because Zionists have themselves taken on the rôle of the messiah, or because the Jewish nation has supplanted the indigenous Palestinian population? Does the Jewish nation exist at all, or is it a modern invention, built of xenophobia and fabricated history? Most importantly, is it possible to be anti-Zionist without being anti-Semitic?

David Engel, Professor of Holocaust Studies, Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, and Professor of History at New York University, sets out to provide an historical overview of, or introduction to, the Zionist movement worldwide, with primary focus on the intellectual, then political aspects of the story. As a “short history,” it necessarily fails to be comprehensive, but Engel’s intention is to present a summary, a springboard for further reading. His stated purpose is to identify the roots of Zionism, to catalogue the goals of the movement and chronicle the pursuit of those goals, to address the ways in which the formation

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of the state of Israel have affected the Zionist movement, and to give readers an historical background from which to analyze the controversies surrounding Zionism.

Engel begins with the premise that Jews are unique among religious groups in that they are also, equally, an ethnic group, though one that has been historically dispersed, living among other groups with varying degrees of integration and acceptance. He claims that Zionism has its roots deep in Jewish history and was in some ways an inevitable product of that history.

Judah (*ha-Am ha-Yehudi*), the land in which the Jewish people coalesced and originated, existed as a political entity from about 1000 BC to about AD 100, and spanned the region from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River and from the Negev Desert to just north of the city of Jerusalem. Though sometimes independent, Judah spent much of its existence dominated by larger empires. The Jews believed that this land was theirs by divine right, in accordance with a promise delivered from God to Abraham, the legendary father of the Jewish people. The area ceased to be specially Jewish in AD 135, when the Romans renamed the area Syria Palaestina. Thus, Judeans abroad continued to be referred to as Jews, despite no longer being associated with any place called Judah.

Engel points to the roots of Zionism in the Jewish Messianic tradition, which promised the eventual restoration of Judah as a Jewish homeland, brought about by a warrior-messenger sent by God. He connects the origins of the movement with European anti-Semitism and the French model of nationalism, which makes the existence of a state both a result of and dependent upon a body of governed people of similar ethnic makeup. Because many Jews considered themselves culturally separate from the peoples of the nations in which they lived, there was concern that they would no longer be considered citizens of the new French-model states. In Eastern Europe especially, where states were reforming along ethnolinguistic lines, there was little place for an insular minority ethnic group. Several solutions were proposed: Jewish migration to the Western European states and the Americas, Jewish lobbying to transform the Eastern European states along the Western model, Jewish migration to a non-European location that could be transformed into a specifically Jewish state. The latter, focused on immediate benefit for Jews who perceived an immediate threat, ignored the religious prohibition against forming a Jewish state without the direct leadership of the Messiah.

Perez Smolenskin, a Belarusian Jew, was among the first to connect the new concept of an ethnic nation with the Jewish people. Writing against the backdrop of the Russian pogroms, he advocated mass emigration, not to Western nations in general, but to a single central locality where Jews could establish themselves as a majority and therefore as a force to be reckoned with. He proposed Palestine, based on its tentative legitimacy in connection with the Jewish people's past, its potential for economic development, and its proximity to Eastern Europe. He did not suggest the establishment of a Jewish state.

Between 1881 and 1899, approximately 25,000 Jews left Europe, primarily from Russia, to settle in Palestine. Some took up agricultural pursuits, some professional occupations. They were encouraged to purchase land legally and establish settlements, becoming citizens of Palestine under the Ottoman Empire.

Leo Pinsker, a Polish-born Jew and author, insisted on the necessity of a Jewish state. He claimed that, because the norm was for ethnic nations to possess a national state, Jews – a nation without a state – were viewed as an anomaly and unnatural. The way to combat that fear was through the establishment of a state for the people. He suggested that that state be founded

either in North America or Palestine, favoring the latter because of the ties Jewish people felt they had to that land.

The Jewish State, published in 1896 by Theodor Herzl, was adopted by Zionists as their foundational text. It called for a Jewish state in Palestine, obtained via the permission of the Ottoman sultan. When the Ottomans refused, Herzl approached the Germans to pressure the Ottomans into considering the proposition. When the Germans likewise refused, Herzl approached Joseph Chamberlain, British Colonial Secretary. Chamberlain offered a tract of East African land for Jewish colonization. The Zionist Organization refused the offer.

Jews continued to settle in Palestine, establishing agricultural communities along a Marxist model, called a *kibbutz*. However, the continued purchasing of land from Arab landlords began to displace large numbers of tenant farmers, which created tension between the preexisting Palestinian population and the Jewish immigrants.

With the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine in 1922, the Zionist cause acquired official endorsement from one of the world's superpowers. However, the British also had an understanding with Hussein ibn Ali, promising an Arab sovereign state in Palestine in exchange for military support against the Ottomans. The proposed Arab state, though, would be a region-wide entity, rather than a Palestinian one. The British clarified their position on Zionist goals, stating that while a Jewish national home was to be established in Palestine, Palestine was not to be converted into a Jewish national home. Meanwhile, continued Jewish immigration to Palestine had put serious strain on the region's economy. With the advent of World War Two, and the possibility of an Arab-Axis alliance, it became even more important for Britain not to be seen as supporting Zionism, and they cracked down on Jewish immigration into Palestine.

The Nazi Holocaust, however, gave Zionism an emotional card to play. With far fewer displaced Jews than anticipated, and survivors being rejected in their homelands, the UN needed a place to put refugees, and Palestine was presented as the optimum solution. On 14 May, 1948, the independent state of Israel was declared, with David Ben Gurion as prime minister. Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq immediately declared war, but by 1949, Israel's defense forces had successfully secured the borders. Despite the accomplishment of Zionism's goal of a Jewish state, the movement did not dissipate. Instead, the goal was altered to the protection of the Jewish state and the facilitation of immigration of more Jews to Israel.

Engel's overview of Zionism is just that – an introduction to the concepts, persons, and major events that have propelled the movement through to the present day. It serves not as an argument or a game-changer, but as a bridge between the literature of the history expert and the popular readership, providing a gateway into deeper study. His overview is very readable to a non-specialist, well-written, with a convenient timeline at the beginning that spans from the fall of the ancient Kingdom of Israel in 721BC to the redefinition of Zionism by the New Jerusalem Program in 2004. Each chapter ends with a thorough bibliography of recommended reading covering several topics related to the chapter. Many of the recommended readings also appear in the author's extensive list of references, primary and secondary sources. Because the majority of those references seem to be drawn directly from the works of some of Zionism's primary players, which is understandable, given the need for a thorough explanation of Zionism's inner workings, they are slightly one-sided.

Engel presents his facts with exceptional clarity, assuming near-zero knowledge on the reader's part and providing appropriate definitions and descriptions as necessary. He also includes convenient asides within the text, inserting brief biographies of prominent Zionists as well as demographic and geographic background information. Taking into account the length

restrictions he likely faced, Engel has clearly put a lot of effort into making his explanation a thorough one, especially in regards to Jewish cultural history and background on European-style nationalism and the concept of an ethno-linguistic nation and its relationship to state legitimacy.

Engel claims to have made a serious attempt at an impartial account of the Zionist movement – “...this is a history book, not a polemic... Its sole purpose is to... evaluate the historical arguments of partisans on both sides from an informed perspective.” (pg. xiii) – and to an extent, he has succeeded. The book neither endorses nor condemns Zionism, expressing understanding but not approval of any action taken by the Zionist lobby. However, the book’s focus is primarily internal, centering on the inner mechanics and dynamics of Zionism. While Engel has done a good job of providing the facts of the movement – names, dates, figures, and quotes – as well as the obstacles faced by Zionism, he downplays much of the international reaction and opposition to the movement, which ought to be an integral part of any history narrative. Such omission could easily, if erroneously, be read as implicit support of the movement, which presumably would be contrary to Engel’s intentions.

As a simple introduction to the topic, however, a “short history of a big idea,” the book does a good job of at least addressing all of the major points of Zionism over the last hundred and fifty years, and the recommended readings provide a sturdy base for further study for a curious student, as they do cover multiple sides of the debate. For a non-expert, the book is an excellent starting point, providing as it does a level-headed take on a starkly polarizing issue.

Judith Butler, known for her contributions to feminist theory and queer theory, attempts to confront the problem of Zionism from an ethical standpoint, drawing on the works of Edward Said, Mahmoud Darwish, Emanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt (whose eponymous professorship of philosophy Butler holds at the European Graduate School), Martin Buber, Primo Levi, and Walter Benjamin. Her argument is geared toward the semantic separation of Judaism and Zionism and the acknowledgement that it is not only possible but necessary to criticize Zionism from a Jewish standpoint and using Jewish values. It is her position that Zionism is directly antithetical to Jewishness, in light of both Jewish theology and Jewish cultural history, so she proposes a binational replacement for the present state of Israel, one in which democracy is introduced on equally Palestinian and Jewish terms, unified by the shared cultural history of exile.

Her opening point is an attempt to define Jewishness in terms of Jewish ethics. Jewish ethics, she argues, has been formed over centuries of displacement, dispossession, and destruction, shaped by those same forces. To be Jewish is to be displaced, dispossessed, and destroyed, at least vicariously through a sort of cultural genetic memory. There can be no Jewishness except in relation to some non-Jew, the one inflicting the oppression. That history of oppression, Butler suggests, creates an identity that cannot exist in a vacuum; if there were no gentiles, Jews would cease to be Jews. That same history also creates a Jewish collective that, by its very nature, must be hypersensitive to displacement, dispossession, and destruction, not only in its own history and present, but in the histories and presents of every people it contacts.

Closely tied to that is her concept of cohabitation, the understanding that, as a wandering people in exile, the Jews have never been able to choose with whom to live, and indeed have never been either chosen or welcome neighbors. Not only are the Jews unable to choose their neighbors, but everyone inhabiting the planet Earth is obligated to live with people we did not choose, though the Nazis tried. In creating a state dedicated to the preservation and upkeep of a single people, whether that people is defined in ethnic, religious,

or cultural terms, Israel has followed in the footsteps of National Socialism with the implication that, were it not for the pure-Jewish demography of the state, the Jewish people would be annihilated. Of course, Butler insists, it is not her purpose to connect Nazism to Zionism in any way; even though both are glaring examples of social subjugation and genocide, xenophobia, racism, and racial arrogance, the *ways* in which they commit genocide and subjugate innocents are entirely different. Throughout the work, Butler emphatically denies all but surface similarities between Zionism and Nazism, with sufficient frequency that one begins to suspect she intends to make the opposite point. While she draws attention to “the very different modes of subjugation, dispossession, and death-dealing that characterize National Socialism and political Zionism” (Butler, 29), her object seems to be to highlight the subjugation, dispossession, and death-dealing rather than the differences. The fact that an entire chapter discusses the Eichmann trial and forced statelessness of the Jews in direct parallel to current events and the forced statelessness of the Palestinians makes one wonder what, exactly, she is trying to convey, if not a parallel between the forces that caused that statelessness then and now. Such a parallel obviously has some merit and must be addressed, but if that is the point Butler wishes to make, she would be better off making it unequivocally.

Through this ethics of victimhood, it becomes the Jews’ responsibility to recognize kinship with other victims, in this case, the dispossessed Palestinians. Paradoxically, it is the responsibility of the Jewish people, in accordance with its identity as a wandering and displaced, to choose to live with those with whom they did not choose to live, rather than seeking out the familiar and comfortable. Somewhat naively, Butler seems to believe that, holding fast to practicality and ignoring the human predilection for holding a grudge, the returning Palestinians would recognize that cohabitation with the Israeli Jews is in everyone’s best interests, integrate quickly and peacefully, establish a Western-style democracy grounded in the Palestinian majority’s fair vote, and ensure that the new Jewish minority be accorded all of the protections and rights the Palestinians themselves were not granted under the Israeli regime. In an ideal world, perhaps, and Butler’s position is essentially that of an idealist. She compares herself to a pacifist, representing not the world that could be, but the world that ought to be. Sadly, the plight of the displaced Palestinians is a very real problem, requiring not a solution that ought to work, but a solution that could.

Returning to Nazi Germany, Butler addresses the Holocaust and denounces those who would reduce it to a justification for Zionism, those who would deny or dismiss it just because it has been used as a justification for Zionism, and those who would continue to draw on it as a source of guilt with which to confront anyone who challenges Jewish exceptionalism. The horror of the Holocaust, according to Butler, must be preserved in the cultural narrative of the Jews as part of her ethics of victimhood, creating that special awareness of the suffering of others. It is part of the definition of the Jewish identity, and its importance cannot be underestimated, but it is never to be used as an excuse, and caution must be exercised, lest the Holocaust narrative perpetuate paranoia and a defensive position that leads to violence out of fear.

Finally, she leaves the Jewish people behind and takes on the problem of a Palestinian identity, defining it in terms very similar to those she used for the Jews – a diasporic nation, dispossessed and discriminated against, currently landless. She scoffs at the idea that a Palestinian return would displace any of the current Jewish residents of Israel, which seems to indicate that, in her model, the returning refugees would be settled in new, purpose-built towns and neighborhoods, made possible by an undetailed redistribution of land.

The core of Butler's argument is deeply true: that a comparatively small political group has no right to define Judaism for all Jews; that it is a human responsibility to identify and combat injustice where one perceives it; and that, as it is not possible to choose with whom to cohabit the Earth, humans must find a way to live with one another. However, in seeking to delegitimize Zionism and deny its place as a valid expression of Judaism, Butler herself attempts to define Judaism in a way that, as proven by the very existence of Zionism, does not represent the sentiment or self-identification of all Jews. Her suggestion of a binational state, based on the complete illegitimacy of the state of Israel and the necessity of its destruction, fails to account for the human element and the fact that animosity is not easily put aside just because it is not rational. She also does not address the fact that, whether or not its foundation was illegitimate, whether or not its policy is in need of alteration, the state of Israel exists now, and its destruction by consensus of its people is unlikely; its destruction by outside forces would be as illegitimate as its founding, by Butler's measure.

Butler's approach to Zionism is almost diametrically opposite to that taken by Engel. Engel professes neutrality and comes at the issue from an historical standpoint, not arguing explicitly for or against, but attempting instead to provide sufficient data for the reader to draw a conclusion, or at least decide to conduct further research. Butler immediately states an anti-Zionist position and comes at the issue with a jumbled discussion of ethics, poetry, theology, ontology, hermeneutics, and identity, all of which says quite a lot about Butler's position, but seems to assume that the reader has come into this book already set with an understanding of Zionism as evil. It discusses, but her arguments proceed from her conclusion, rather than leading to it.

Alan Hart, former ITN correspondent and BBC *Panorama* presenter, brings a journalist's candor to the issue, as well as insight that comes from long contact with Zionism beginning with his presence with the Israelis on the banks of the Suez Canal during the Six Day War in 1967, his purported intimate friendship with both Golda Meir and Yasser Arafat, and more than three subsequent decades of personal interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict. *The False Messiah*, the first book of his three-volume exposition on Zionism, tracks the "real" history of the state of Israel – as separate from the constructed history spread by Zionist propaganda – from its distant archaeological roots to the suicide of James Forrestal in 1949. It is presented in engaging narrative form, in places closely resembling a conspiracy thriller novel, except that fiction is clearly the furthest thing from Hart's mind. Accurate or not, he does succeed in presenting a highly entertaining and more than slightly worrisome history.

Hart's immediate goal is, like Butler's, the separation of Judaism and political Zionism. Also like Butler, he believes that the concept of political Zionism is at odds with the moral and ethical values of Judaism. He goes further than Butler, though, in distinguishing between spiritual and political Zionism – on the one hand, a religious longing that could be satisfied by pilgrimage or spiritual "return" in the sense of reconnecting with an ancient religious ideal; on the other hand, a political ambition satisfied by settling large numbers of Jews in a Jewish sovereign state established within the territory of the ancient Hebrew kingdom of Israel. The former is religiously worthy and politically innocuous. The latter Hart identifies as "a deeply flawed concept" (28).

Again like Butler, Hart insists that the foundation of Israel was never legitimate. This is partly because, by international law, only the Palestinians could have created a Jewish state on their soil, which they never did; and partly because only a nation can exercise sovereignty in a nation-state, and Hart emphatically denies the nationhood of Jews. He claims that, though the historical Hebrews did have a significant presence in the area for about five hundred years,

their power was utterly destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 BC and two hundred years later, the people were dispersed by a subsequent Babylonian invasion. While this event could be interpreted as the beginning of the tradition of Jewish exile, Hart claims that it instead marks the destruction of the Hebrews as a legitimate nation. The Hebrew Jews proselytized other peoples, notably the Khazars of Southern Russia, and intermarried with gentiles to the point that they could no longer be regarded as a distinct ethnic group. After the dispersion of the Hebrews by the Babylonians, Hart argues, the designation “Jew” slowly came to become a purely religious distinction, and to create a Jewish state is as absurd and inegalitarian as a Catholic state. Of course, Hart disregards the fact that all ethnic groups have been subject to mingling of blood and are ultimately created by group consensus as much as by genetic heritage. While his narrative does preclude the possibility of all Jews as direct, endogamous descendants of the ancient Hebrews, he does not explain why a modern group that considers itself cohesive should not be considered cohesive, even if that sentiment were a fairly recent phenomenon.

Hart proceeds to track the history of Zionism through Herzl and Balfour, detailing British betrayal of their WWI Arab allies as they reneged on their promise to create a sovereign Palestinian state, instead providing a pretext in the form of the Balfour Declaration for increased Zionist activity and dispossession of Palestinian Arabs. Britain, of course, had no authority to issue such a declaration in the first place, as Palestine was a part of the Ottoman Empire. The reason Hart gives for Britain’s traitorous about-face is that Zionists were powerful, and Britain needed their influence. He does not give much explanation of how the Zionists gained so much power, especially since he reiterates that most Jews were opposed to Zionism on moral, humanist, and theological grounds.

Still, this already vast and rapidly growing lobby found purchase in Britain and turned their sights also on Russia, Germany, and the United States in their quest to acquire Palestine. Hart describes much international reluctance to throw in with the Zionists, with Winston Churchill and Woodrow Wilson as two of the leading skeptics. Unfortunately, both were manipulated by Zionists who had infiltrated the power structures of the United Kingdom and the United States. Bernard Baruch is one such infiltrator Hart identifies, though considering that Wilson himself appointed Baruch to the Advisory Commission of the Council of National Defense, it seems more likely that Baruch was a powerful man who happened to be a Zionist, rather than a stealthily-implanted Zionist agent.

Perhaps the most difficult point Hart makes is the connection he draws between the Zionist lobby and the Nazi Holocaust. It is not a new idea that, rather than merely responding to the Holocaust with their call for a Jewish sanctuary, the Zionists coldly used those atrocities to further their own agenda. Hart goes further, however, in suggesting that, more than being heartless opportunists, the Zionists actually had a hand in engineering the Holocaust in order to drive the European Jewry into the Middle East. The Zionist lobby forced emigration restrictions in Britain and the United States, limiting the number of Jews who could enter, thus funneling the refugees into Palestine. They negotiated with the Nazis, agreeing to oppose boycotts of Nazi Germany’s exports if the Nazis would deport Jews to Palestine. When President Roosevelt attempted to create a “worldwide political asylum” (165) for Jews, the Zionists opposed him, knowing their position would fall apart if it did not appear that Palestine was the only option for the refugees. While they may not have anticipated the slaughter, Hart intimated that they certainly helped build up to it, and afterward seized the Holocaust as an emotional blackmail card.

Hart moves smoothly from the Holocaust to Zionist terrorism, focusing on the Irgun Zvei Leumi and the Lotiamei Herut Israel (known as the Stern Gang), headed by Avraham Stern and Yitzhak Yzertinsky. His first point is to connect those groups once again with the Nazis. Stern wrote to Hitler, offering his services and assistance in pushing the British out of Palestine, and ultimately to “actively take part in the war on Germany’s side” (213). Two Sternists were responsible for the assassination of Lord Moyne, Britain’s Resident Minister for the Middle East, in 1944, while the Irgun bombed British facilities. The massacre at Deir Yassin, related in play-by-play narrative format, forms the crux of Hart’s point. Two hundred fifty-four Palestinians were killed, many of them while trying to flee. Hart names Deir Yassin the turning point of the conflict, the point at which the Palestinians stopped hoping for a ready solution and began to abandon their homes in favor of safer lands. While acknowledging that, compared to the Nazi Holocaust, the lives lost at Deir Yassin were only a drop in the proverbial bucket, he nevertheless calls it a holocaust – lowercase H – “in its own tiny way” (230), the killing unwarranted and wanton. Unlike Butler, Hart is very forthright in the parallels he draws.

Acknowledging the fact that Israel exists and is unlikely to go anywhere, Hart nevertheless condemns the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, skipping over the well-travelled grounds that, even under the terms of Israel’s creation in 1948, Israel has no right to that territory. Instead, Hart argues that the occupation, on top of being illegitimate, is unnecessary; the existence of the state of Israel is not now, nor has ever been, in any significant danger. The idea of Israel in danger stems from: a continuation of the idea of Jews in danger, which was for a long time spread by Zionists and finally confirmed in the Holocaust; empty Arab threats and posturing and rhetorical vows to demolish Israel; and most of all, Zionist propaganda drawn up out of fear that, if Israel were ever seen as able to take care of itself, their treatment of the Palestinians would no longer be viewed as questionable self defense, but as excessive and oppressive violence.

Hart’s account of Zionism’s rise seems extraordinary and sensationalist. He paints a frightening picture of shadow organizations, secret negotiations, conspiracy with the Nazis, and assassination. By his own admission, this work will be hard to swallow for anyone who has only been exposed to the “fabricated” history propagated by the Zionists. While he does present selected passages from communications that cast serious doubt on the motives of some individuals, the image of mafia-like terror and secret machinations is a long leap, indeed.

Shlomo Sand is a professor of contemporary history at Tel Aviv University and has also taught at University of California, Berkeley, and the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris. His book is controversial in part because, Sand states, there is a divide in Israeli academic thought between Jewish history and the history of everyone else; as an expert in modern French and European history, many felt he had no scholarly base from which to pen a work addressing Jewish antiquity. Sand’s response was that Jewish history has too long been regarded as separate from the history of the rest of the world and was in dire need of reanalysis from a more standard perspective.

Like both Butler and Hart, Sand takes a decidedly anti-Zionist stance, but his status as a resident of Israel lends his work immediate surface credibility, unlike Butler, who refuses to visit Israel, and Hart, who has visited often but is not informed by actual membership in the Jewish cultural memory. Similar to Hart, Sand bases his position on the supposition that modern Jews lack a common ethnic origin and so do not comprise an actual ethnic group. Broadly speaking, their origins are roughly the same as those of the countries in which they reside. Eastern European Jews, he claims, echoing Hart, are descended from the ancient

Khazar kingdom, which was converted to Judaism sometime between 740 and 864 AD. Western European Jews are Western Europeans converted by early Jewish missionaries. There are even Asian Jews indistinguishable from other Asians. He dismisses all studies of Jewish genetics conducted up to the point of his publication in 2009, drawing attention to one particular study that seemed to indicate that Ashkenazi Jews were more closely related to the Welsh than to Palestinian Arabs and another that links both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews to the Kurds and Armenians – neither of which was widely reported. Proselytes, he argues, are the only possible explanation for the huge increases in Jewish population during periods when world population was holding steady; he rejects the sometimes-posed claim that the increase was the result of Jews being the only people who did not commit infanticide or make use of abortion. He claims that, while Judaism has become increasingly more insular, it was at one time a thriving proselytizing religion. Like Hart, Sand also fails to consider that no ethnic group is genealogically pure, nor has ever been thought to be so, as well as the fact that lack of blood kinship does not negate the effects of cultural assimilation.

Sand also describes, in similar tone to Hart, a sort of educational cartel that has been endeavoring for the past century or so to suppress information that contradicts the unbroken Hebrew legacy and propagating information, fictitious or not, that supports it. They have control of the schools and universities, and they write the history books. They have left out the history of the kingdom of the Khazars, as well as Arabia Felix, which became Yemen and was largely Jewish during the reign of Augustus. They are responsible for the otherwise inexplicable genetic studies of the *cohanim* and the discovery of the “seal of priesthood” which, Sand claims, could either indicate an unbroken lineage from Aaron to the present, or quite a lot of intermarriage with gentile women, thus producing gentile offspring. Of course, this educational elite settled on the former interpretation and hushed up the latter. They would also be responsible for the division between history and Jewish history in Israeli universities, which preserves authority and prestige in matters of Jewish history for those who agree with them – and, consequently, bars skeptics like Sand from serious academic discourse on the subject.

His second major point is that, while the descendants of the ancient Hebrews might have a legitimate claim to Eretz Israel, they also never left. He argues that the idea of the Jews as a wandering people in exile is a myth propagated by early Christians in an effort to encourage conversion by constructing an image of Jews as a people being punished by God. With the rise of Christianity, that image gained prevalence and was eventually appropriated by Zionists who coveted Eretz Israel. Sand does not explain why the Zionists subsequently felt the need to fabricate a fictitious history to support this image, when apparently everyone had already believed it for a very long time, or why so many Jews in the nineteenth century did not consider themselves a nation when Jewish nationhood was part of this universally-accepted Christian-generated myth. Indeed, when the Assyrians and then the Babylonians and then the Romans swept through ancient Judea, they may have taken some of the Judeans with them as captives and exiled the leaders of any local resistance movements, but the vast majority of the population stayed put and assimilated. They converted to Islam and today are known as Palestinians. If Sand’s claim is accurate, it would make modern Jews (or at least Zionists) not only usurpers of lands rightfully belonging to the Palestinians by virtue of both possession and inheritance, but also pretenders falsely claiming to be children of Abraham. His support is the logistic difficulty of removing the entire population of a region; it would not have been possible, he claims to send the Judeans into exile.

Like Hart, Sand supports an end to the occupation of West Bank, the occupation of Gaza having ended in 2006, shortly after the publication of Hart's book, but his primary demand is an end to the Law of Return, which gives every Jew in the world automatic citizenship even without residency. It preserves Israel as a refuge for Jews, but nowhere defines Jewishness satisfactorily, with each application being decided on a case-by-case basis. In some instances, conversion to and practice of rabbinic Judaism suffices. In others, "biological" cases, the mother must be considered Jewish, though Sand does not indicate how the mother's Jewish identity is verified. That law, Sand argues, gives automatic preferential treatment to non-Israeli Jews over Israeli Palestinians, non-citizens over citizens on the basis of religion or fictive ethnicity, which is antithetical to democracy.

Interestingly, Butler is the only one of these critics who both skips over the issue of Judaism as ethnicity and proposes the outright de-Judaization of Israel. In the other texts, the assumption seems to be that an ethnic nation does have a right to a state, though need not and should not belong exclusively to a single ethnicity, and though the ethnic nation does not have the right to appropriate the land of another nation. The Jews, in Sand's and Hart's opinion, not being an ethnic nation, did not have a right to a state in the first place, and not being native to Palestine, did not have the right to establish a state in that locality, but now have the responsibility to ensure that their state is a model of equality and democracy, not just for their Jewish population, but for the dispossessed Palestinians as well. Butler proposes that the Jewish people not merely remodel their state without exceptional status for Jews, but actually dismantle their state and turn over their rights and privileges to the incoming Palestinian majority.

Sand's and Hart's solutions seem most practical and practicable, as Israel could at any time choose to withdraw from the territories seized in 1967 and end discrimination against the people who were there before them. Butler's solution is idealist and relies too heavily on much goodwill in a region where, presently, there is very little. All three identify very real problems, but interspersed with exaggeration and speculation, and in Butler's case, pontification. Engel, with his short history, provides background without attempting to tackle the controversies which so many others have failed to solve; for an author of an introduction to a subject, such an endeavor is admirable.

Four books later, we are no closer to deciding how much blame must be assigned, and to whom. While enlightening, a return to the root of the problem has not illuminated a viable path to reconciliation. Hopefully, those who record the history of the coming century will have a more uplifting story to tell.