

Jewish Self-Determination beyond Zionism: Lessons from Hannah Arendt and Other Pariahs. By

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In a particularly dark historical and political moment in Palestine/Israel, Jonathan Graubart offers a glimmer of hope for a brighter future by offering new pathways toward Jewish and Palestinian self-determination. Published amid a moment of despair for champions of justice, equality, democracy, and peace in Palestine/Israel, Jonathan Graubart's *Jewish Self-Determination beyond Zionism: Lessons from Hannah Arendt and Other Pariahs* argues that a revival of Humanist Zionism, tailored to the contemporary moment, is needed to reconcile the long-standing tensions between the Israeli state and the Palestinian people it has long oppressed. Graubart calls on dissenting Jews to work toward implementing a Humanist Zionist vision that seeks equality between Palestinians and Jews.

Humanist Zionism, as envisioned by Martin Buber, insisted that the Jewish community of Mandate Palestine find common ground in their shared humanity with Palestine's Arab community. Graubart adeptly discusses the history of Humanist Zionism alongside Buber's personal and political journey as a mentor to Brit Shalom, the first organized Humanist Zionist movement, and later the Ihud movement, the successor to Brit Shalom. As Buber grappled with the impacts of the prevailing Zionist vision that insisted on Jewish sovereignty and ethnonationalism, he devised a path toward radical coexistence between Palestine's Arabs and the Zionist Jewish community. Buber insisted that the Jewish community collaborate closely with the Palestinians and refuted the idea that a separate and contentious coexistence between the two communities would be better for Jewish survival and self-determination. Essential to Buber's Humanist Zionist vision were the need to minimize injustice and the demand for an ethical and pragmatic coexistence that he believed was only possible with the creation of a binational state in which Palestinians and Jews lived as equals. As Graubart points out, Buber's vision recognized that Palestinians and Jews "must escape a mindset of domination and seek the thriving of many in both communities" (p. 40).

In a subsequent chapter, Graubart shifts his focus to Hannah Arendt who, as a leading voice of Jewish dissent, also challenged the dominant Zionist vision. He presents a textual exegesis of some of Arendt's most well-known texts and an analysis of her lesser-known writings, including her personal letters and correspondences. It shows how she simultaneously favored certain elements of Zionism while making vicious critiques of and expressing disappointment

with how Zionist politics played out. Graubart explains how her criticism of Zionist politics and nationalism led her to support a Humanist Zionist nonstatist and binational vision that advanced solidarity with Palestinians and encouraged Jews and Palestinians "to collaborate on a new model of inclusive political organization that broke with the nation-state model" (p. 64).

An important and timely chapter points to the ways that Buber and Arendt correctly anticipated the negative impacts of creating a militarized Jewish nation-state. This section of the book explores Arendt's and Humanist Zionism's diagnosis and warnings and the impacts of mainstream Zionism on both Palestinians and the moral character of Israel. Graubart shows that this Zionism prioritized a strong and Jewish state over peace and that "Israel's refusal to pursue any... opportunities [for peace] is rooted in the insular nationalism and endemic distrust of outsiders diagnosed by Arendt" (p. 79).

Throughout the book, Graubart switches between the history of the region and the contemporary situation of Israeli occupation while integrating a serious textual analysis of both recent and historical thinkers. The rich analysis of both the origins of Zionism and its contemporary manifestations emerges through his reading not only of significant thinkers such as Arendt, Buber, and Edward Said but also recent public intellectuals like Omri Boehm, Peter Beinart, and Ella Shohat. Furthermore, by presenting an analysis of Said's views, as well as those of Mizrahi scholar-activist Ella Shohat, Graubart includes a critique of Zionism that transcends the Ashkenazi-centric visions of Jewish self-determination; thus, it provides a more nuanced and inclusive version of the impacts of Zionism on the lived experiences of Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews.

Graubart's interesting and compelling contemporary analysis of historical texts by dissenting Jewish luminaries, particularly Martin Buber and Hannah Arendt, is the book's most valuable contribution to the rich body of scholarly literature on Zionism and Jewish self-determination. Through his analysis of their prophetic visions of a Zionism based on Jewish supremacy and ethnonationalism, Graubart argues that a revival of Humanist Zionism could ultimately lead to the sustainable, just, and secure peace that has eluded the region for the past century.

The book also provides a critique of the contemporary liberal Zionist approach to reconciliation with Palestinians. Graubart is gently critical of contemporary liberal Zionism, particularly regarding its failures to confront the horrors of the Nakba, Israel's original sin. According to Graubart, "by brushing past Israel's pre-1967 history, including the Nakba, most liberal Zionists lack a plan for advancing a far-reaching reckoning and reconciliation of Jews and Palestinians.... In effect, liberal Zionists demand a peculiar form of democracy in which the Palestinian presence is sufficiently restricted to prevent any measurable changes in

Israel's Jewish character" (pp. 109–10). This insight is a valuable contribution to critical studies of Zionism.

This leads me to my primary criticism of the book's central argument. Although it made sense for Buber to insist in the 1930s that the Jewish community in Palestine find common ground in their shared humanity with Palestine's Arab community, that does not necessarily work today as a framework for analysis because it ignores the power dynamics and history of Israeli domination over Palestinians. Graubart laudably notes Buber's vision of avoiding the pitfalls of Jewish supremacy and ethnonationalism in Palestine/Israel that we see today. Such a position today must take into account the power dynamics and histories of oppression in the situation on the ground. Therefore, an updated vision of Humanist Zionism must deal with the evolving dynamics of power in the region and the increasing power of Israel's right-wing ultranationalist religious settler movement.

Despite the limitations of Graubart's argument, this book still provides an important focus on Jewish dissent while highlighting the significance of Jewish self-determination

rooted in social justice and inclusiveness. It is a bit sad, particularly in this historically dark moment, examining the binational visions and warnings of intractable violence and conflict put forth by the Jewish dissenting voices in this book. Had the ideas of Humanist Zionism won out over the mainstream Zionism that sought Jewish supremacy and a Jewish demographic majority, things would likely be very different today, and the "unprecedented catastrophe" occurring in Palestine/Israel could have been avoided. For this reason, Graubart's analysis and presentation of these ideas feel timely and relevant in a way that points to possible paths forward leading to justice and peace for those living in Palestine/Israel.

Ultimately, the book makes a valuable contribution to the field of critical Zionism studies. Graubart advances a new approach that moves beyond Zionism while maintaining a commitment to Jewish self-determination. It highlights a well-articulated binational vision for the future rooted in both past ideologies and contemporary realities while also providing a fascinating new analysis of Jewish self-determination rooted in justice for all.