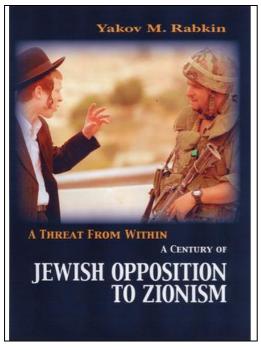
Yakov M. Rabkin, A Threat From Within. A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism. Translation from French by Fred A. Reed with Yakov M. Rabkin, Fernwood Publishing/Zed Books, Winnipeg-London 2006, 261 Pages, L 17.95.



This is the most unusual book I have ever read. It is so groundbreaking that one can ask whether it is proper at least for the German public. It is the most courageous undertaking because it challenges Zionism and its ideology head-on. The book shows that Zionism has little to do with Judaism. It stands for a totally different value system. It is even a negation of central Jewish values. According to the sources the author cites Zionist ideology is absolutely opposed to Judaism and misuses its teachings for its political ends. Nevertheles, it seems as if Zionism is on its way to canonization. Anyone who dares to raise these questions will get into deep trouble. John Mearsheimer, Stefan Walt, Tony Judt, John Rose, Jimmy Carter(!), Michael Lerner, Joel Kovel, Uri Avnery, Jacqueline Rose, Noam Chomsky, Norman Finkelstein, The Jews for Just Peace, Pascal Boniface, Rolf Verleger, Felicia Langer, Rupert Neudeck, Evelyn Hecht-Galinski, the German catholic bishops who toured Israel/Palestine. and many others who were attacked for just speaking out

against Israeli occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people, can tell their individual stories. The non-Jewish critics are defamed as "anti-Semites", and the Jewish ones are denounced as "self-hating Jews", some are even accused of "anti-Semitism". The author shows why such grotesk assertions are nonsense and serve only one purpose: to silence critizism of Israel´s occupation policy which celebrates its 40th anniversary in June.

Yakov M. Rabkin teaches history at the University of Montreal. He specializes in the history of science and contemporary Jewish history. The Israeli philosopher Joseph Agassi writes in the foreword: "Currently, the Zionists declare that all opposition to Zionism is anti-Semitic, and this declaration has grievous consequences for Jews all over the world, including Jews in Israel. It is scandalous to deny legitimacy to criticism of official Israeli positions, and this book makes this point very clear." Agassi mentions that Rabkin raises questions about the myth that Israel protects the Jews around the world and constitutes their natural homeland. This book "rightly shows that this myth is anti-Jewish". Moreover, "this ideology deems anti-Semitism unavoidable and Israel the only place where a Jew can be safe. This view is essentially anti-democratic." Agassi continues: "Israeli governments behave as if they were community leaders still within the ghetto walls." When Israeli politicians call Israel "the Jewish state" this will create "a real and dangerous confusion between faith and democracy".

Yakov Rabkin leads the readers right into the thinking of anti-Zionist orthodoxes, for whom Zionism is the antithesis of Judaism and therefore a heresy. He shows convincingly the split between Judaism and Zionism. Although the readers might think these people Rabkin writes about are a "lunatic fringe", their arguments are still valid and have been bothering the Zionist leadership. In traditional Judaism the Torah is central. "The Zionist movement and the creation of the State of Israel have caused one of the greatest schisms in Jewish history." The Zionists used major elements of Jewish thinking for their political goals. In the eyes of most Rabbis this is blasphemy. The biggest "sin" for them is the establishment of Israel because only the Messiah can create the Jewish nation. For the orthodox rabbis "Zionism represents a negation of Jewish tradition". Any human attempt to build a Jewish state is seen as a violation of God´s will and will lead to a disaster. The author explains why a commitment to the

Torah forms the common denominator for religious opposition to Zionism. For him the Jews have demonstrated that a people can preserve its identity over the course of more than two millennia without a state of its own. In the prologue Rabkin asks critical questions: "Has the emergence of Zionism and the State of Israel so transformed the Jewish people as to bring its unique history to an end? Could it be that Israel, in the light of Jewish tradition, is not at all Jewish?"

The book draws extensively on the rich tradition of rabbinical thought. Rabkin's book explains how a commitment to the Torah forms the common denominator for the religious opposition to Zionism. Pious Jews believe that they have an obligation to criticize Zionism publicly, for two reasons: Firstly, to prevent the desecration of the name of God; secondly, to preserve human life. With this kind of criticism they hope to protect Jews from the outrage they believe the State of Israel has generated among the nations of the world. The last two opinion polls by the EU and the BBC show how relevant their concerns are: The State of Israel is seen as the "greatest threat to world peace" followed by Iran and the United States of America. In seven chapters Rabkin unfolds countless unknown sources of serious arguments against the Zionist enterprise as he calls it. What Rabkin's book also reveals is the fact that most orthodox people do not recognise Israel's right to exist. Why does the west force the Hamas led government to recognise it and not the large numbers of orthodox Jews in Israel and in the US?

The author states in the first chapter "Orientations" that there has been a permanent Jewish presence in Palestine even after the destruction of the second Temple. The coexistence between all three religious groups - Jewish, Muslim and Christians - who lived peacefully together in the "Old Yishuv" until the Zionists arrived in Palestine. This holds also true for the coexistence between Jews and Muslims in the Arab countries. The "New Yishuv" (Zionist settlements) and the State of Israel were an incarnation of European concepts derived from the realities faced by Jews in the Russian Empire. Secular Jewish culture dominated the entire Zionist enterprise. The oriental Jews who came from the Muslim countries to Israel found these concepts alien to them. There has been a massive opposition against the Zionist movement from the start. Not only from the Jewish orthodox like the Haredim, but also from cultural Zionists, reformists, and the non-Zionist secularists.

In the chapter "New Identity" Rabkin states that Zionism has put forward a new definition of what it means to be Jewish. Longing for the Messiah has been a constant notion in Jewish history. The Zionists turned this transcendental concept into a political program which constituted a break with the tradition. The Jewish tradition traces the origins of the Jews to the shared experience of the epiphany of the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. As a group, the Jews are defined by the commitment to the Torah, the normative bond with the Torah remains the determining factor. It is exactely this bond which obliges them to follow the commandments of the Torah, which makes Jews the "chosen people", a status that implies no intrinsic superiority, writes Rabkin. It was under Josef Stalin that the birth of the concept of the "secular Jew" was invented. The Jews of Russia had fewer opportunities to assimilate into their sourrounding society unlike the Jews in Germany and France. Under Stalin Jews ceased to be defined by Judaism and got a "Jewish nationality", this was marked in their identity cards. The great Jewish philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz stated that "Our nation exists only in the Torah." He continues: "Zionism is indeed the negation of Judaism." For the critics of Zionism the Hebrew revival had nothing to do with Judaism, it was just "another revolt against tradition". The "New Hebrew Man" did not "trust in God" (bitahon), but in "military security" which has been the dominating concept in Israel until now.

The author shows in chapter three the deep cultural gap which exists between the Zionist concept of the Land of Israel and the Jewish one. Traditional Jewish culture discourages political and military activism of any variety, especially in the Land of Israel. Contrary to orthodoxy the National Religious stressed the importance of "the Jews' return to history" and to take pride in the normalization of the Jews whom Zionism has liberated from their "age-old passivity". Right from the beginning, Zionism has encouraged

love of the land, a love which has taken political and ideological forms, writes Rabkin. "For the Zionists, love to the land is possessive: it can tolerate no other claimant. The land cannot truly be home to another people that had long inhabited it." This contradicts the traditional Jewish viewpoint in which "the settlement in the Land of Israel will be brought about by the universal effect of good deeds rather than by military force or diplomacy. It will follow the advent of the Messiah, unlike the biblical conquest of Joshua, which was achieved by the use of power." Rabkin also rejects the interpretation of the Bar Kokhba or the Maccabees revolt against the Romans. "The Zionist moral of the story is also opposed to the Jewish tradition." Salvation of the Jewish people can only come about through messianic intervention rather than military force. According to Leibowitz: "The idea of return to the Land of Israel achieved by political means is alien to the idea of salvation in Jewish tradition." And he continues that the Jews had never been "a people of the land", quite the contrary holds true: am ha-aretz, meaning "ignoramus".

Jewish tradition over the last two mellennia can only be described as pacifist. The temple's destruction and the following exile are interpreted as devine punishment for transgressions comitted by the Jews, according to the traditional Jewish argumentation. This was the dominant tradition until the twentieth century when "Zionism restored to military heroism". Zionist ideology transformed the Maccabees into "the patriotic victors of war of national independence. It is a travesty of history", writes Ruth Blau. This secularized image of the Maccabees was the blueprint for several modern Jewish authors, including Zeev Jabotinsky. Rabkin hints at a very interesting trait of Zionism which could deliver an explanation for the aggressive and violent behaviour of the Israeli occupation forces. It is its Russian background. Russian Jews not only made up a majority of the founders of the State of Israel, "they also became the most influential group within its military elite. The man who did more than any other Zionist to introduce terror into Palestine was the Russian Avraham Stern, a member of several paramilitary groupings." Rabkin writes that Moshe Dayan, Ezer Weizmann, Itzhak Rabin, Rehavam Zeevi, Raphael Eitan and Ariel Sharon were all desendents of Russian Jews, "whose propensity for the use of force can only be linked to their estrangement from Jewish tradition". Quoting Martin Gilbert, Rabkin writes that the composition of the Knesset twelve years after the founding of Israel and despite the almost total prohibition of emigration from the Soviet Union for more than four decades, over 70 percent of the members of this political elite were Russian-born, while 13 percent were born in Palestine/Israel of Russian parents. "The American Zionist elites, whose support was crucial for Zionism's success, were also composed primarily of Jews of Russian origion ... Even in Morocco, Zionist ideas and activities were introduced almost exclusively by Russian Jews." The Israeli right-wing parties, which draw much of their support from voters of Russian background, "bear out the Russian dimension of the Zionist enterprise".

The first who resisted the new Zionist settlers were the Jewish rabbies of the Old Yishuv. They feared that the nationalist ambitions of the new settlers would create tensions with Arabs, with whom the religious communities had always coexisted in peace, writes Rabkin. The leaders of the Old Yishuv saw the Jewish settler, and not the Arab population, as the looming threat. Until now, the "memory of cordial relations between Jews and Arabs continues to motivate the anti-Zionists, who question the strong-arm approach they attribute to the Zionist concept of the state". The Satmar Rebbe Yoel Teitelbaum is said to have often prayed for the disappearance of the State of Israel without any Jew suffering as a result. "He looked upon the state as a serious threat to the Jews." The political assassination of Jacob Israel De Haan bore bitter fruit: discord among Jews and Arabs. "The assassination of De Haan was probably the first terrorist act to be committed by the Zionists in Palestine." The opposition to the Zionists portrayed them as "Amalek". Aviezer Ravitzky confirms that the decision to cast the Zionists as a "diabolical force was far from being an improvised one: it drew instead on an entire legal and philosophical tradition".

In chapter five "Collaboration and its limits" the author describes the resistance against the Zionist enterprise by the pious Jews. They viewed the newcomers as "rebels against the Torah and thus as persons both evil and dangerous". Most of them saw in it a rejection of Judaism. Compared with that the Arab reaction to Zionism was slower to gather strength. At first, the local Arab population enjoyed cordial relations with the Zionist leaders. Only when Arab leaders became fully aware of the political ambitions of the Zionist movement did their views come around to those of the pious Jews in taking a rejectionist stance, which has remained dominant in the Arab world ever since.

Opposition against Zionism was particularly strong in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. German Jews refused to allow the first Zionist congress to be held in their country so that it was transferred to Basel. Rabkin describes the anti-Zionist positions by Agudat Israel, the Haredim, the Hasedim and the reform movement. An exception is the National Religious Party which tried to merge Zionism with Judaism. The difference to the other groups is that they see the Zionist enterprise as an expression of divine will, "the finger of God".

In the chapter "Zionism, the Shoah and the State of Israel" Rabkin presents two very different viewpoints of the tragedy. For the Zionists, the Shoah is the ultimate proof of the threat that hangs over the head of every Jew in the diaspora. After World War II., the Zionist movement presented its political project as a reaction to the Shoah. Consistent with this argument, prevention of another Shoah also justifies the military hegemony the new state acquired early and has steadily reinforced ever since. The Zionist message is: the state of Israel must be militarily strong to prevent another Shoah. A totally different interpretation of the Shoah is given by the pious Jews.

From the Judaic point of view shared by most pious Jews, the tragedy of the Shoah calls out for the closest scrutiny of one's own behaviour, for individual and collective atonement, writes Rabkin. For them it is not an occasion for accusing the executioner and even less an attempt to explain his behaviour by political, ideological or social factors. "The executioner - be he Pharaoh, Amalek or Hitler - cannot be anything but an agent of divine punishment, an undoubtedly cruel means of bringing the Jews to repentance." Following the same logic, only divine providence can explain the catastrophes that have afflicted the Jews, affirmed Rabbi Elhanan Wassermann. For him the Nazi persecutions, of which he was soon to become a victim, "were the direct consequences of Zionism". Wassermann's condemnation of Zionism resulted in the fact that it was a sharp beak with Jewish continuity.

Both the Zionists and their detractors agree that the hostility encountered by the Jews through the centuries exceeds all normal bounds: it is a hostility quite unlike all others. While the Zionist habitually attribute the phenomenon of intense hatred to the political and military powerlessness of the Jews, pious Jews tend to locate its root in the seriousness of the sins committed by the Jews. Rabkin mentions another difference between the Zionists and their pious critics concerning anti-Semitism. The Zionists hoped to solve the problem of anti-Semitism trough the establishment of a Jewish state and defines any critique of Zionism and any attempt to question the State of Israel as anti-Semitism. The first critics, as early as the late nineteenth century, mentioned that the establishment of a Jewish state would not eliminate anti-Semitism, "but would in fact place the Jews in greater peril by intensifying and focusing hatred of the Jews. Jewish tradition considers the concentration of Jews in any one place as hazardous. ...Israel's assertive policies and their defence in the name of all Jews by the Zionist organisations may thus be seen as an extraordinary source of danger."

The difference in outlook is also shown in the chapter "Prophecies of Destruction and Strategies for survival". While the National Religious believe the destruction came to an end in 1945, seeing the Shoah as a point of departure for redemption, the rabbinical anti-Zionists insist that both the Shoah and the very existence of Israel are part of the same process of destruction. In their view, all the accomplishments of the Zionist enterprise will be eradicated before the Messiah arrives, who will find

the Holy Land in a state of total devastation. From this perspective the State of Israel can be nothing but an obstacle on the path of redemption. The emphasis is placed on the exclusive role of God in redemption, writes Rabkin. This view is categorically rejected by Zionist messianism.

For the author the civic religion of Israel remains a fragile construction. The Haredim have never accepted it, because it has been introduced to replace Judaism. While criticism of Israeli policies may sometimes be tolerated, all Judaic critiques of Zionism are de-legitimized. Left-wing Jews can easily be discredited by Zionists as "non-Jewish", "self-hating" or even "anti-Semitic" while it would not be convincing to describe the Lubavitch or the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Wassermann or Hakham Alfandari, as anti-Semitic, states the author. The anti-Zionist literature regularly evokes the apocalyptic danger that Israel represents for the whole world. "They are convinced that the creation of Israel, which they see as an arrogant revolt against God, may well touch off a catastrophe of worldwide proportions." They believe that the Zionist structure of the state has perpetuated the conflict.

Rabkin's book shows that Zionism has never been monolithic, and anti-Zionism has reflected this complexity. Despite defamation Judaic opposition to Zionism has shown remarkable perseverance. It seems as if this opposition will persist as long as the Zionist enterprise continues in the Holy Land. They all insist on the primacy of the Torah and its values like peace and dealing justly with the neighbors. Such ideas are substituted in Zionism by militarism and conquest. This exceptional book is an outcry for universal justice and a must read. It should find many readers.

**Ludwig Watzal**