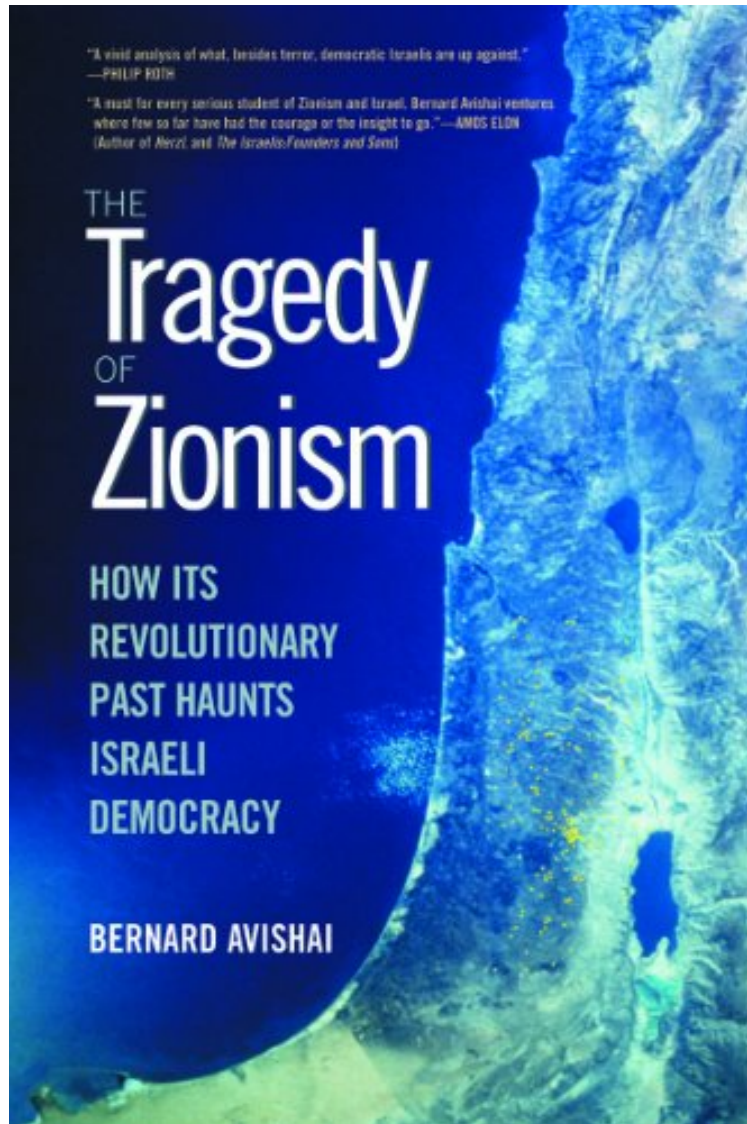


(Online library) The Tragedy of Zionism: How Its Revolutionary Past Haunts Israeli Democracy

The Tragedy of Zionism: How Its Revolutionary Past Haunts Israeli Democracy

Bernard Avishai

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Bernard Avishai : The Tragedy of Zionism: How Its Revolutionary Past Haunts Israeli Democracy before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Tragedy of Zionism: How Its Revolutionary Past Haunts Israeli Democracy:

22 of 26 people found the following review helpful. A balanced but troubling work By Scott Grau The future of Israel will depend to a large extent on how Israelis deal with the tensions and contradictions between the revolutionary ideals

and traditions of Zionism and the aspiration to build a democratic and just society, author Bernard Avishai argues in his book, "The Tragedy of Zionism." Avishai defends the achievements of Labor Zionism and rightly insists that in the context of the period in which Labor Zionism emerged and flourished, it was both necessary, justified and successful, with its greatest triumph evident in the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948. Following the emergence of Zionism in the late 19th century, Avishai traces its evolution, growth, and transformation from a political and ideological movement into the foundation of a state, and from fragile early statehood into local military power. Avishai offers what has been described as a "post-Zionist" perspective on Israeli society and politics, and fears that the institutions and values of traditional Labor Zionism have become anachronistic and in some ways an obstacle to effective and democratic solutions to the problems facing Israel today. At the same time, he is critical of the "New Zionism" which is championed by Ariel Sharon and his Likudnik supporters, but notes the extent to which the rise of this movement has its roots not only in Vladimir Jabotinsky's "Revisionism" of the 1930s, but in the national security statism which emerged in the 1960s, associated with prominent figures like Moshe Dayan. Clearly the 1967 Six-Day War marked a watershed in the development of this movement, while the subsequent 1973 Yom Kippur War to a certain extent seemed to discredit the security policies of the old Labor establishment and, along with important demographic changes in Israel, opened the door to Begin's election in 1977. Avishai rightly rejects the notion of Zionism as some kind of arm of a 20th century European or American colonial or neo-colonial project, and recognizes the legitimate security concerns created by Palestinian rejectionism, Arab hostility, and terrorism. At the same time, he raises serious concerns about the current settler movement, the moral and practical problems and costs raised for Israel by the ongoing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and the impact of the militarization of Israeli society on the future for Israeli democracy. Avishai warmly embraces liberal democratic values, and hopes to see these values thrive in Israel. While it is true that Israel is the region's only democracy, he suggests a kind of fragility to this democracy, and worries over how easily terrorists in both the Israeli community (Dr. Baruch Goldstein, for example) and in the Palestinian community (a whole raft of suicide bombers) can subvert efforts by moderates on both sides to find peace. Ultimately, Avishai recognizes that the Israelis and Palestinians are bound to each other, and any effort to achieve a just peace must recognize the legitimate aspirations and rights of both sides. Avishai argues that Israel must address the question of equal rights for Arab Israelis, and defends the notion of a peace process, whatever the limitations of the Oslo effort in the 1990s. Supporters of the Sharon government probably will find much to argue with in this book, but it would be wrong to say that Avishai is insensitive to the security issues for Israel created by Palestinian terror. Obviously, there can be no peace as long as terror bombers carry out their murderous plans. But just as the effort to make peace carries risks, so does the decision to resolve these problems through war (as was demonstrated by the fate of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon). Avishai offers a profound and thoughtful treatment of these issues and connects that debate to the larger history of the Zionist movement. His urgent concern for the future of Israeli democracy deserves the attention of all who care about the future of Israel, whatever they might think about the specifics of the positions that he takes.

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. An important thesis, but not repeated enough
By Eric Maroney
Avishai has written an important work on the history of Zionism and its implications for the State of Israel as a democratic nation. His essential thesis is that Zionism was a revolutionary movement designed to create a state, but not to govern a state. Revolutionary Zionism should have ended following the founding of the State of Israel. Permanent features of a democratic government, like a written constitution, a bill of rights, separation of religion and state, should have been fixed. But Zionism continued after the founding of the Jewish state, much to the detriment of Israel's vision of itself and its view in the world. This is a good thesis, but Avishai does not repeat it enough, or work out its implications in a general sense. The conclusion spends too much time examining events from 1985, and the afterword, from 2001, does the same. Avishai should have written more generally about the topic near the end, making this work stronger and clearer for the reader.

8 of 11 people found the following review helpful. A thoughtful and thought-provoking coverage
By Midwest Book Review
Political Zionism's revolutionary past continues to haunt and effect Israeli democracy and struggles with its neighbors today. Chapters provide a history of Zionism, conflicts, and the underlying concepts which fostered its growth in the 1930s and threaten its continued existence today. The Tragedy Of Zionism, offers a thoughtful and thought-provoking coverage of a sensitive but timely issue bermane to Judaic and American support for the beleaguered Israeli people.

This original and acclaimed book explores how the impetus to settle in the "Whole" Land of Israel after 1967 derived from unexamined Zionist commitments which, though perhaps defensible in the 1930s, have become increasingly dangerous for Israeli democracy since the 1980s. It is also a chronicle of the unexpected, tragic ways the heroic Zionist theories and institutions have come to threaten Israeli democracy and to burden relations with Palestinians since the Six Day War. The subject of intense controversy when it was first published in 1985, *The Tragedy of Zionism* provides illuminating insight into the history behind the headlines. Now revised, this poignant chronicle addresses timely and compelling questions: could Israel be a democratic state if, in the name of being a Jewish state, it discriminated against non-Jews, including a fifth of its citizens who are of Palestinian Arab origin? Could it be a Jewish state without granting a privileged position to Jewish orthodoxy? *The Tragedy of Zionism* calls for democracy as an end in itself,

not as a political luxury, but as an indispensable means to settle disputes nonviolently.

A rare book builds the future. This is one. -- James Carroll, author, *Constantine's Sword* Bernard Avishai ventures where few so far have had the courage of the insight to go. -- Amos Elon, author, *Herzl and The Israelis: Founders and Sons*, columnist, *Haaretz* He has always been a sympathetic yet highly critical observer of the Israeli scene. -- Hillel Halkin, author, *Letters to an American Jewish Friend*, and contributor, *Hadassah magazine* [A] call to reconsider classic questions. -- *The New York Times Book Review* Less than a decade after the signing of the Oslo Accords, the world has watched in horror as citizens of Jerusalem have become virtual hostages of Palestinian suicide bombers and the Israeli army has moved to destroy what it calls the "terrorist infrastructure." Because violence and instability in this region are felt globally, more people than ever are asking how Israeli-Palestinian relations reached this bleak point and if peace is still possible. Bernard Avishai, veteran analyst of Israeli affairs, provides illuminating insight into the obstacles behind the headlines. *Publisher's Weekly* called *The Tragedy of Zionism* "an explosive book" and Philip Roth hailed it as "a vivid analysis of what, besides terror, democratic Israelis are up against." From the Author *The Tragedy of Zionism: How Its Revolutionary Past Haunts Israeli Democracy* examines the proud history of the Zionist revolution in Europe and Palestine beginning at the turn of the last century. It is also a chronicle of the unexpected, tragic ways the heroic Zionist theories and institutions have come to threaten Israeli democracy and to burden relations with Palestinians since the Six Day War. "People bring tragedy on themselves not with malice but with fidelity," the author observes. "Not by doing the wrong thing but by doing the right thing too long."