

Unjust accusations of anti-Semitism demystified in booklet by Hajo Meyer

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Review

Hajo Meyer, *Judentum, Zionismus, Antizionismus und Antisemitismus: Versuch einer Begriffsbestimmung*. Berlin (2009): Frank& Timme GmbH Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur.

Recently, Hajo Meyer* published a remarkable booklet to counteract the conscious abuse of the terms anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism by the State of Israel and its umbrella organizations. As a consequence, people are reluctant to criticize Israel's behaviour. Israel's violations of international law and the ongoing collective punishment of the people in Gaza should in Meyer's view be criticized, and he is appalled by the incapacity of the European Union to hold Israel to account.

Meyer speaks with a unique voice about how Israel is playing on the justified feelings of guilt about the Holocaust in Europe. Meyer was born in 1924 in Bielefeld, Germany. He was 14 years old, when he fled on his own for the virulent anti-Semitism of the Nazi's to the Netherlands in 1939. In 1944 he was captured by the Gestapo and deported to Auschwitz. He is one of the few survivors of Auschwitz and lives in the Netherlands.

After being an almost powerless victim of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism for almost two millennia, Jews obtained political and military power with the foundation of Israel in 1948, writes the author. After World War II, the poison of Auschwitz got stuck to accusations of anti-Semitism. In combination with the radical shift in the position of power of Jews accusations of anti-Semitism can be a serious threat for the accused, certainly in Germany. Meyer calls for the utmost restraint in using the expression “anti-Semite”.

The industrialized mass murder of the Holocaust took place right in the public eye of the Christian western world. The feelings of guilt are completely justified, remarks Meyer. Israel is playing on the feelings of guilt of the West with the threat of public accusations of anti-Semitism when it is criticized for its acts. The West perceives itself as a friend of Israel, but in reality, by not criticizing Israel's violations of internal law, it allows the country to slide further into a hopeless situation. Real friends should tell each other the truth. Maybe one day, the West has to draw the sad conclusion that after the Holocaust, it was also implicated in the destruction of the Palestinian people.

Many Jews derive an important part of their Jewish identity from an uncritical loyalty to the State of Israel, according to Meyer. Instead of believers in God, many Jews have become believers in Israel. As a consequence criticism of Israel is easily mistaken for criticism of being a Jew, and people who criticize Israel are then unjustly called anti-Semite.

Israel's policies are directed at the realization of the political Zionist ideology, notes Meyer. He observes that the current political Zionism is aiming at controlling a maximum of the Palestinian territory with a minimum number of Palestinians living on it. However, not all Jews support the Zionist ideology. The ultra-orthodox Jewish group “Naturei Karta”, the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network and many Jews openly criticize Zionism. This shows that it is not logical to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. But this is not the only reason. Meyer reminds the reader that Zionism is not only supported by Jews, but also by the Christian fundamentalist in the United States and Europe. They represent a powerful and fanatic group of Zionists.

Meyer mentions another striking fact that shows that the equation between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is false. Even extreme anti-Semites like the Nazi's supported Zionism. On 1 September 1933 the Nazi government and German Zionists agreed that German Jewish Zionists, unlike other Jews, were allowed to transfer a large part of their wealth to Palestine by buying German machines

and industrial products with permission to export them to Palestine.

In his booklet Meyer defines an anti-Semite as someone who is negative about expressions of Jews, either in words or in behaviour. An anti-Zionist is angry and critical about the acts of Israel that are in violation with international law. Jewish anti-Zionists, who criticize Israel's behaviour, cannot be easily branded as anti-Semite. Such an accusation does not sound logical and is in general not true. To use the term "self-hating Jew" for Jewish anti-Zionists will not work, because the most important group of self-hating Jews can be found among the pioneers of Zionism, writes Meyer. One of the examples to support his view is a quote from Aaron David Gordon who lived from 1856 until 1922, "[W]e are a parasitic people. We have no roots in the soil, there is no ground beneath our feet. And we are parasites not only in an economic sense, but in spirit, in thought, in poetry, in literature, and in our virtues, our ideals, our higher human aspirations. Every alien movement sweeps us along, every wind in the world carries us. We in ourselves are almost non-existent, so of course we are nothing in the eyes of other people either." Meyer notes that this view of Gordon expresses a hatred that can hardly be met by an extreme anti-Semite.

In the epilogue Meyer writes that he considers Zionism - in every aspect - as a failed ideology. Israel, the product of Zionism, is a deplorable creation that did not bring much happiness to Jews, Palestinians, or to the world.

* *Read my interview with Hajo Meyer **Auschwitz survivor: "I can identify with Palestinian youth"***

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