

REVIEW ESSAY

The Jewish-people deniers

Eikh u-matai humtza ha-am ha-yehudi? (When and how was the Jewish people invented?), by Shlomo Sand, Tel Aviv: Resling, 2008, 358 pp.

Judaism's distinctive association between nationalism and religion has confounded both Jews and non-Jews alike. In substance, Judaism is a universal religion; by definition, it is tribal. The boundaries of Jewish nationalism are defined by adherence to the Jewish religion. This marriage of religion and nationalism is not unique to Jews. In the case of other peoples too (Ukrainians, Poles, Irish, Greeks, Hispanics, Pakistanis, Iranians, Arabs etc.), the definition of identity contains an inherent religious component; their religions, however, having been adopted also by non-nationals, may be portrayed as universal. In the case of Jews, the boundaries are blurred: from the start of modern times, there have been Jews who considered themselves affiliated with the Jewish religious community but opted out of Jewish nationality, embracing the national identities of their countries of residence. This innovation started with Claremont-Tonner's demand during the French Revolution that Jews shed their separate identity as a nation and become part of the French state and nation if they wished to enjoy equal rights. But most Jews considered themselves part of *Klal Yisrael*, that amorphous commonality of Jews who profess to belong to the Jewish people, bear its burdens and share its joys, and identify with the fate of Jews the world over. In the nineteenth century, this mass of Jews spawned a Jewish national movement with Zionism as one of its branches.

For those outside of the Jewish collective, the link of religion and nationality is hard to accept; even insiders find it strange. Conversion as the entry ticket to Jewish nationality, as the tribal rite of passage, appears anachronistic and embarrassing in an increasingly secular era. Thus, in every decade we have seen attempts to undo that link by inventing a new past; to eradicate the symbiotic relationship between religion and nationality and to allow the new Israeli nationality to spread its wings and soar away from Jewish history as it was, to an imaginary past cleansed of Jewish shortcomings and weaknesses. The first major attempt in this direction was made by the "Canaanites," a small though highly influential group of young intellectuals who sought to cut themselves off from two thousand years of exile and see themselves instead as the offspring of the fierce peoples of the Fertile Crescent, rather than as the descendants of the poor, humble inhabitants of Eastern Europe's townlets. It was an attempt to invent a local identity connected to the territorial space of the Fertile Crescent, free of the bond to the Jewish people down the generations. This local secular identity also made room for native Arabs who were meant to be citizens with equal rights and obligations in the state that was to arise in the land of Israel. In the past decade, author A. B. Yehoshua has sought in his own way to shake off the national-religious symbiosis, which he regarded as the source of Jew hatred through

the ages; he wanted to see Jewish identity freed of its religious component.¹ Between the “Canaanites,” who vanished from the public horizon in the 1980s, and Yehoshua, several other figures, such as Boas Evron and Joseph Agassi, conceived and spread similar ideas.²

The latest thinker along these lines is Shlomo Sand, whose expertise is French history. Sand contests the historical connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. He argues that the Jewish people, to use his words, is an “invented” entity or “implanted memory” with no connection, in fact, to the land of Israel. The denial of such a connection and the narrow definition of Jews as just a “religious community” – a *millet*, a Turkish term used by the “Canaanites” to define exilic Jewry – aims to influence Israeli Jews to change their self-image and open up to a civil concept of identity; this would enable the State of Israel to become a “state of all its citizens,” unrelated to diaspora Jews who are also just local religious communities (e.g. “Judeo-Americans,” as he calls them). When that happens, the discrimination practiced in the State of Israel against its Arab citizens (“Palestino-Israelis”) on the basis of the Law of Return will disappear, and they will be given the opportunity to fully integrate into an Israeli state that will shed its undesirable Jewish identity yet enable Arabs to keep their separate identity and unique culture.

I have no intention of arguing with Sand’s version of a “state of all its citizens.” I would like to examine the attempt to drag history into a topical argument, and with the help of misrepresentations and half-truths to adapt it to the needs of a political discussion, and all this, ostensibly, under an academic mantle. Sand has written a sharp, pointed polemic drawing on much varied historical material which he re-kneads at will in order to prove that there is not and never was a Jewish nationality. If we were to remove Sand’s long discourse on the essence of nationalism, which is not essential to the basic discussion, as well as his meandering discourse on Zionism’s ostensibly racist nature, which looks like little more than a sideways dig, Sand’s main thesis is: there is no such thing as a Jewish people, there are only Jewish-religious communities which were formed mainly by mass conversions throughout Jewish history.

Sand is bent on undermining the traditional Jewish narrative, which depicts the Jewish people of today as the descendants of the biblical and Second Temple Jews who lost their land, dispersed over the world, yet retained their bond to the land-of-Israel homeland, to which – as the Scroll of Independence states – they have now returned. This portrayal of the Jewish people, he contends, is the result of the work of the great Jewish historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially Heinrich Graetz, Simon Dubnow, and Ben-Zion Dinur. The “bad guys” in the story are the historians for having invented the Jewish people. Sand does not distinguish between Zionists and other types of Jewish nationalists; hence he situates Graetz and Dubnow in the bosom of Zionism, as having created the national narrative that eventually served Zionism. He dismisses the great Jewish historians and finds fault with the concepts of sociologist Anthony Smith because they are not consistent with his own conceptions. Smith saw nationalism as stemming not only from economic developments and the emergence of a class of intellectuals, but also as the self-expression of an ethnic community with memories of a shared past, common myths about founding fathers, a common culture, a bond to the homeland, and a certain degree of solidarity. Sand goes on to “grade” Jewish history departments, which – in his words – are characterized by a “stubborn refusal to open up to innovative historiography that addresses Jewish origins and identity” (p. 28). This topic has been treated in a comprehensive article by my colleague, Israel Bartal, and I will not deal with it again here.³ However, I would like to draw the reader’s attention to Sand’s methods: he creates a problem where one does not exist and then protests: why is it not being dealt with?

Is there really an innovative historiography pressing for the study of Jewish origins and identity? Moreover, why should the question of Jewish origins be the key to the analysis of identity? Isn't this topsy-turvy: a racist proposition that pins identity on origin? No one is claiming that Jews have been racially pure since antiquity. No sane historian would make such a claim. On the contrary: the historians whom Sand both relies on and dismisses have all acknowledged the conversions of the Second Temple period and the early Middle Ages, a phenomenon that added thousands of new "members" to the Jewish people. Alongside the conversions to Judaism, the Jewish people also lost many of its members since the Second Temple period – to Christianity, to Islam, or to assimilation. Belonging to the Jewish people was never conditional on race but on adopting the Jewish religion, and it is still so. Consequently, the discussion of Jewish origins may be intellectually interesting, a curiosity, so long as it does not degenerate into racial overtones. But it is hardly clear why the topic is so important to historical research that it merits accusing all Jewish history scholars of narrow conservatism.

Sand bases his arguments on the most esoteric and controversial interpretations, while seeking to undermine the credibility of important scholars by dismissing their conclusions without bringing any evidence to bear. Here are several examples: as regards the Bible, he attacks the Zionist narrative that held up the Bible as a title-deed to the land of Israel. He cites the reservations of archeologists as to the beginnings of the Jewish people, the Exodus etc. Israeli archeologists maintain that they have found no archeological evidence to substantiate the Bible's presentation of the greatness of the kingdoms of David and Solomon. They believe that Judaism apparently took its first steps in the days of Josiah and the major religious reformation then, to which time Judaism may plausibly be dated. Even this interpretation does not satisfy him. He enlists the extreme Copenhagen School which, following Julius Wellhausen, totally ignores the First Temple period and situates the emergence of Judaism in the Babylonian exile (p. 122). In so doing, he seeks to downplay the periods of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. By his lights then, the Hasmoneans were in fact Hellenists (to wit: their Greek names), noteworthy for their policy of conversion. He gleefully brandishes Alexander Yanai's forced conversion of the people he conquered: already during the Second Temple period, the Jews were not "Jews." The real Jews were Judeans, i.e. natives of Judea. Sand "uncovers" the well-known fact that during the Second Temple period, a Jewish diaspora emerged throughout the Roman Empire. Menachem Stern, a historian of the period, cited several causes for its emergence at that time, from expulsions to economic reasons and conversions. Sand comments: "The technique of spreading information in national-history studies finds pointed expression here" (p. 145). In other words, the fact that Stern listed conversions at the end of his series of causes is interpreted by Sand as a ploy to conceal what he, Sand, regards as the decisive factor. Stern may have listed conversions at the end of his series of causes because he differed from Sand in his assessment, or by pure chance, with no hidden agenda whatsoever, but Sand sees secret motives everywhere. In much the same way, Sand treats the historians Haim Ze'ev Hirshberg and Israel Ben Ze'ev, who wrote on the Jewish kingdom in Himyar and on Berber tribes that converted in North Africa, and from whom Sand drew his knowledge about the converts. Hirshberg claimed that most of the converts to Judaism became Muslims upon the Islamic conquest. Sand does not accept this assertion, as he wishes to claim that North African Jewry stemmed from these converts. So he lambasts the historian for "not having understood" this "fact" (p. 200). When the fourteenth-century Arab historian, Ibn Khaldun, expresses doubt about the conversion of the Berbers and writes that, in any case, the Muslim conqueror who captured North Africa obliterated all trace of the religions extant prior to the conquest, Sand interprets him

contrary to the cited references: “It may be reasonably assumed that Ibn Khaldun supposed that . . .”. What Ibn Khaldun supposed does not lend itself to the probability of an assumption if he did not state so explicitly. However, since Ibn Khaldun was not a Zionist historian, he cannot be rejected out of hand. . .

Another topic Sand likes to punch holes in is the myth of exile: the Jews (were there any or weren’t there any?) were not expelled from the land of Israel, not exiled from it; most of them remained there and in the end adopted Islam, and they were the forefathers of today’s Palestinians. On the other hand, the Jewish diaspora in the Second Temple period and later originated mainly with Jewish converts who had no ties to the land of Israel. This is the obverse of the conversion claim: not only were the Jews not forced out of the land of Israel, not only were Jews in the diaspora unconnected to the land of Israel, not only do diaspora Jews not belong to the land of Israel, but those who do belong to the land of Israel are, rather, the Palestinians, the land’s inhabitants since antiquity. Again, he uses the words of Dinur and his colleagues, who questioned the concept of expulsion: they often stressed that a significant Jewish community had remained in the country until the seventh century, remnants of whom, according to current research, lingered on until the conquest by the crusaders of the eleventh century. The Zionist movement sought to show that Jews cleaved to the country; from its point of view, the question of expulsion was less important than showing that Jews had stayed in the land. Again, Sand erects a phantom – exile – and “proves” that it never happened, something historians do not deny. On the other hand, he ignores the fact that even if Jews were not exiled from their land, and many of them did scatter all over the Roman Empire of their own free will, the very loss of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel, the Romans’ change of its name to Palestine out of a desire to erase all trace of Jews from it, and the establishment of an idolatrous Roman colony on the ruins of Jerusalem after the Bar-Kokhba Revolt was crushed, went down in Jewish collective memory as traumatic. This is true even if the Jewish community in the land of Israel, particularly in Galilee, did continue to flourish, at least until Christianity became predominant in the Roman Empire in the fourth century.

The awareness of exile was deeply ingrained in Jews, and their sense of humiliation at having lost sovereignty over the land of Israel only heightened with the rise of Christianity and Islam – unrelated to the question of whether or not they had been forced into exile. Sand flaunts the assumption of one historian that the myth of the “wandering Jew,” which interprets the sojourn of Jews in the diaspora as retribution rather than free choice, came down to the Jews via Christian sources. Even if we take this assumption to be true, it does not detract from the importance of the self-image of Jews as a suffering collective pushed from pillar to post in exile. In this matter as in others Sand presents, there is also another interpretation for the founding of the myth of exile: the expression “because we sinned we were exiled from our land” appears in Hebrew prayer and was documented in writing as early as the ninth century and apparently dated back much further: it is not necessarily a Christian concept, but a Jewish one, that sees the distancing from the land of Israel as divine retribution, a wretched state in quest of *tikkun* – repair. Since there were no Zionist historians for the first thousand years AD it appears that the “implanted memory” Sand speaks of was not created by them, but has belonged to the self-image of Jews since the Temple’s destruction. Ideas about the end of days were connected to dominion over the land of Israel. “There is no difference between this world and the days of the Messiah except [that in the latter there will be no] bondage of foreign powers,” said the Babylonian Amora Shmuel.⁴ Maimonides explains that in the messianic era, “Except for the fact that sovereignty will revert to Israel, nothing will be essentially different from what it is now.”⁵ The messianic belief certainly contained universal elements, but the Messiah was also

meant to be a particularistic Jewish Messiah. In other words, the concept of exile is not necessarily related to expulsion but to the self-awareness of a people that had lost control over itself and its land. The Jews were no less “a people” than the Romans or Greeks, which is how their contemporaries saw them.

The sense of exile and yearning for messianic redemption lent the sojourn in the diaspora a sense of transience that has nationalist connotations. Indeed, these are found in the letter of Khazar King Joseph to Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, asking for the latest news about the coming of the Messiah in advent of the return to Jerusalem. The “implanted memory,” it transpires, was already very firmly lodged by the end of the first millennium, and even Jews by conversion, like the Khazars, felt a sense of exile though they lived in independence on their own soil. On the other hand, for Hasdai Ibn Shaprut and everyone else who wrote about the Khazars, the very fact of a Jewish kingdom even outside of the boundaries of the land of Israel was a source of encouragement and pride against all the humiliation and degradation heaped on Jews stripped of power and sovereignty. These are not religious emotions. They are an expression of collective memory bound up with national heritage, ancient memories, a culture of life, and day-to-day customs that foster a consciousness of religious and national separateness. Anyone living by the Hebrew calendar, which is attuned to the seasons in the land of Israel, anyone annually reading the Passover *Haggadah*, which is the story of the liberation of a people from bondage to freedom, cannot help but identify with that collective and with the sense of being a group apart, at odds with its surroundings, a clash defined not solely in terms of religion but in terms of peoplehood. It does not necessarily denote a common origin, but the embracing of the same historic memory, the same self-awareness, the same echoes of the past. These were not “implanted” by Zionism. They were integral to the consciousness of the Jewish collective up to the Jews’ encounter with the various forms of modernism, which unraveled the fabric of Jewish identity.

At the heart of Sand’s book we find the claim that the Jews of Eastern Europe, the “Yiddish people” by his definition, do not originate with the Jews who came from the Middle East via Ashkenaz to Poland, but with the Khazars, nomadic tribes that built an empire between the Black and the Caspian seas, converted to Judaism in the eighth century, and scattered to the four winds when their state was destroyed between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. Sand claims that until the 1960s the “Zionist reconstructors of the past” (well-known forgers) did not conceal the Khazar origins of Jews but since then, a “time of silence” has cloaked the subject. He surmises that the change stemmed from one of two causes: either (1) decolonization, which made it necessary to prove that Jews are not merely the white settlers of a country not theirs (such claims against Zionism had already emerged at the start of the British Mandate, during that very same period in which, according to Sand, the Zionists *did not* conceal their Khazar origin); or (2) the added weight given to ethnicity in the politics of identity in the 1970s (but, he claims that the “time of silence” began earlier . . .). There were people who took pains to play down the Khazar connection, Sand asserts, “as the state’s memory mechanisms became established and consolidated in the State of Israel” (pp. 206–8). The idea of a conspiracy of dark forces sitting and plotting what to excise from collective memory reflects the paranoia of an ideological minority that seemingly believes that if *they* were in power, this is how they would behave.

Have historians really claimed what Sand is attributing to them? It appears that their assertions were far more qualified though they did mention the Khazars and were even enthusiastic about the idea of a Jewish kingdom in the early Middle Ages. On the question of the Khazars, Sand’s methods again come to the fore as he grabs at the most unorthodox

theory in the field and stretches it to the outer limits of logic and beyond. A few examples: scholars disagree on whether all the Khazars or only the monarchy and aristocratic elite converted to Judaism. To Sand it is clear that all the Khazars converted. When the Khazar state was conquered by the Russians and the royal family and nobility were apparently killed, the sources speak about some of the Khazars converting to Islam and some to Christianity. Some apparently continued to be Jewish, settling in the Crimean Peninsula and the city of Kiev in Russia. What the actual figures were remains unknown, but they did not number in the masses. The sources are very sparse; to the extent that there is any archeological evidence, it is very little. The whole subject straddles the seam between legend and historical reality. The most esteemed scholar of the Khazar monarchy, by Sand's own acknowledgment, is D. M. Dunlop, a British non-Jew in command of the languages needed to study the Khazars, on whom information is found in Arabic, Hebrew, Byzantine and Chinese literature. This information is fragmentary and at times contradictory. Dunlop, at the end of his book, relates to the theory that the Jews of Eastern Europe are the descendants of the Khazars; he states that "This can be dealt with very shortly, because there is little evidence which bears directly upon it, and it unavoidably retains the character of a mere assumption."⁶ With typical English understatement, he also adds that to speak of East European Jewry, i.e. the Ashkenazim, as the descendants of the Khazars "would be to go much beyond what our imperfect records allow."⁷ Sand defines Dunlop as "extremely cautious" and the gist of his work as "apprehensive" (p. 227). Certainly, Dunlop was cautious since he did not find any material to corroborate wild flights of fancy. Sand, on the other hand, allows himself to soar beyond the existing historical evidence to history as it might have been.

Sand is far from being a pioneer in asserting that present-day Ashkenazi Jews stemmed from the Khazars. The question of Jewish Khazarian origins has stirred tremendous interest in the last 60 years, mostly out of unsavory motives. An Internet search for "Khazars" or "Khazaria" yields dozens of websites on the subject, some pro-Jewish though the overwhelming majority frighteningly filled with Jew hatred. Orthodox Russian nationalists present the Khazar kingdom as an expression of the eternal clash between Judaism and Christianity. Anti-Christian, neo-pagan nationalists regard the Khazars as part of the Zionist-Jewish plot to debilitate and thereby control humanity. Christian fundamentalists invoke the Khazars to undermine the idea that present-day Jews are the descendants of the "divine people" (not that they exonerate them of the charge of deicide). The Khazars feature on the website of the "biblebelievers" (www.biblebelievers.org.au) which claims: "that the Khazars are the lineal ancestors of Eastern European Jewry is a historical fact." The writer goes on to claim that Hitler may have been a descendant of one of the Ten Tribes, and Chaim Weizmann of the Khazars. Therefore, "the home to which Weizmann, Silver and so many other Ashkenazi Zionists have yearned to return has most likely never been theirs." White Power members denounce Jews in U.S. government along the lines of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and explain that they are not really Jews but the descendants of the Khazars; they are therefore unworthy of American aid to restore them to the land of Israel – aid that comes from the thinking that Jews are the descendants of the Chosen People to whom God promised the land of Israel. This chorus has been joined by Islamic extremists who blame the Jews for 9/11; among the other sins they ascribe to them, the extremists contend that Jews are descended from the Khazars, they are not true Jews at all yet they have the effrontery to lay idle claim to the land of Israel and their connection to the Patriarch Abraham, etc. Arthur Koestler's book, *The Thirteenth Tribe*, also stars in this inventory: "Is the Jewish 'Chosen People' Cliché and Falsehood Masquerade Finally Over?" ("Research Proves Jews are not Israelites,"

<http://assemblyoftrueisrael.com/TruthPage/JewsarenotIsraelites.htm>). Those citing it, help themselves to the anti-Semitic writings of Henry Ford. As a scholar of the history of East European Jewry, noted: the terms “Khazaria” and “Khazars” can “be employed for any ideological purpose to hand.”⁸ The abundance of anti-Jewish polemic boasting that it is not anti-Semitic since Jews are not really Semites exposes the racist layer at the root of the discussion of Jewish origins. Sand does not refer to this literature and does not seem conscious of the suspect company he keeps.

Another example of Sand’s methodology: some scholars contend that Yiddish comes from Slavic rather than German. They are very few and their position is far from mainstream. Paul Wexler is the most prominent of them.⁹ They are hard put to explain where the German elements came from, elements that are so dominant that Yiddish-speaking Jews can understand modern German quite easily. Sand has embraced Abraham N. Pollak’s explanation that Polish Jews had trade contacts with Germans in Poland and thereby absorbed their language (p. 232). But it is difficult to find evidence of such intensive contacts between Jews and Germans in Poland that ostensibly would have lent Yiddish its German character. An example of Sand’s manipulation: to contradict the claim that Yiddish stemmed from German, he injects the following statement: “there is no historical finding to point to the migration of Jews *from west* Germany to the eastern part of the continent” (p. 232, my emphasis). The uninformed reader does not notice the word “west,” but Sand well knows that evidence has been found of Yiddish origins in German dialects in Germany’s *east and south*. His claim is thus dubious, but the reader glosses over the above definition with the impression that Jews from the west – Germany – did not migrate to Eastern Europe and could not have brought the Yiddish language with them. The attempt to source Yiddish in Slavic countries is an example of ideology imposing on history.

The history of ethnic groups is very difficult to map. The thirteenth-century Mongol expeditions decimated populations, caused mass flight, laid waste entire regions. The fourteenth-century Black Plague destroyed at least a third of Europe’s population. What happened to the local population in the land of Israel to which Sand attributes Jewish beginnings – did it not endure conquests, expulsion, plagues etc.? The same applies to the Khazars: how many of them retained their Judaism or survived the Mongols, and how far afield did they migrate? All these questions cannot be easily answered by the research today. To be sure, it is known that Jews settled in southern Russia at the start of the second millennium, and they apparently were Khazars. But there is a missing link between them and the Jews who began to arrive in the kingdom of Poland from the thirteenth century on, for whom there has been continuous documentation ever since. According to the mapping of Jewish communities in the fifteenth century, it is clear that the great majority of Jews lived then in western Poland, and during the next two centuries gradually spread over eastern Poland and the Ukraine.¹⁰ How many of the Khazars joined them? How many Spanish exiles reached Poland? How much intermarriage was there? How many conversions or mass rapes took place in this space, diversifying the genetic pool of these Jews? There is no way of knowing. One of Sand’s main claims involves numbers: if not from the Khazars, then where did the millions of East European Jews come from? After all, in Germany’s Jewish quarters in the early Middle Ages there were only several thousand. The answer lies in the statistical data: during the census taken on the eve of Poland’s partition (1764), the kingdom of Poland and Lithuania had some 750,000 Jews. If one reckons a moderate average demographic growth of 1.6 per annum, then in 1660 Poland-Lithuania had 150,000 (by a different calculation, only 100,000). According to the calculations of historians such as Itzhak Schipper and Salo W. Baron, which are based on estimates of taxes paid by Polish Jews, in 1500 (about 400 years after the destruction of the

Khazar kingdom), Poland had only 24,000–30,000 Jews. According to another historian (Bernard D. Weinryb), there were only 10,000.¹¹ One way or another, these figures match both the migration rates of Jews from the west and the natural increase without having to resort to masses of Khazars to balance the account. The great demographic increase of Jews in Eastern Europe occurred in the nineteenth century, not before. This is not the place to explain the causes for its growth but it must be stated that it did not stem from unknown migrants.

Sand claims that, apart from religion, the Jewish communities had no common denominator and they therefore did not constitute a people. But he brings no evidence to bear. Consequently, he accuses the historians of having omitted to study the way of life of the Jewish communities in Poland and Lithuania: had they conducted ethnographic research, they would have found that the Jewish communities had no “secular ethnographic common denominator,” which goes to show that Judaism is no more than a religious culture (p. 236). It is not clear what is meant by a “secular ethnographic common denominator” when speaking of an era in which religion molded every walk of life. In any case, there certainly has been research on a “secular ethnographic common denominator”: if it means folklore, it was undoubtedly researched; if it means attire, music, food – these too were researched. The same goes for economics and commerce, community structure, family life. The research, it seems, won’t satisfy Sand unless one finds the “absence” of a “secular ethnographic common denominator.”

Sand feels threatened by genetics: what if it turns out that there is a genetic link unique to several Jewish communities? After all, the whole factual basis of his denying the existence of a Jewish ethnic group will fall away. He does not bother to understand the data that has come to light about Jewish genetics, which, in some cases points to kinship in the genetic pool of widely-flung Jewish communities, as, for instance, the Jews of Eastern Europe and of Iraq.¹² It is so much easier to diminish all geneticists, especially as they argue among themselves and do not generally agree about one finding or another, a phenomenon typical of independent research. He is content to point to their disagreements in order to dismiss the science out of hand, and to present it as unreliable and to be shunned by anti-racists (p. 262). As far as he is concerned, it is more reliable to construct a theory on the flimsy legs of meager archeological findings on Khazaria, or a linguistic analysis spurned by linguists, than on genetics.

Sand borrows his definition of “nationalism” from the French case. “National consciousness is first and foremost a desire to live in independence in a separate state,” he states (p. 287). This definition ignores the nationalism of minorities, who desire to express themselves and their cultures, not necessarily within the framework of a separate state. There can be a cultural nationalism, striving for autonomy and self-expression in language and culture, and not necessarily for territorial government. There can be a diaspora nationalism, i.e. a nation whose members are spread over several states but who see themselves as belonging to the same collective. All these forms of nationalism emerged in the nineteenth century among Jews. As Ernst Renan said in his well-known essay “What Is a Nation?” (1882), nationalism is a daily plebiscite – it is a conscious choice to belong to a collective characterized by identification with a common destiny, with myths of the past, with creating a common culture, religious and secular, with ties to a homeland, and with the wish to continue to exist as a collective. Until the onset of modern times most of the Jewish people did not doubt that they were a people. Down the generations, different Jewish communities retained contact with one another and, separately, with the land of Israel on questions of religion and religious law, in commerce and mutual help. Even though the Jews in the Middle East and the Jews in Europe were not identical to one

another in their way of life, they retained the common consciousness of a community with a shared destiny, which found expression in moments of crisis such as the ransom of hostages or the Damascus Blood Libel. I would define it as a nation-in-the-making. This is also how non-Jews regarded Jews and even granted them privileges of autonomy beyond the religious sphere – see the Council of Four Lands in Poland. A confirmed anti-Jew such as Voltaire saw the Jews as a people and linked the Jews of his times with the biblical people of Israel.¹³ Only upon the separation of church and state, which occurred in modern times, did objections begin to be heard to the religious-national dualism of Jewish existence which was now presented, in Arnold Toynbee's words, as "a fossilized relic of an extinct civilization."¹⁴ However, the Jews are alive and would like to go on living a national life, in Israel and the diaspora, while retaining a changing relation between religion and nationality. The right of Jews to define themselves on the basis of their own definitions rather than on definitions that do not correspond to their history lies at the basis of the right of self-determination.

The assertion that there is no Jewish people is shared by many groups: Jews who would like to appropriate a different national identity or challenge every national framework whatsoever; people looking for reasons of every sort and type to question the links between the different Jewish communities; those who object both to the bond between the Jewish people and the land of Israel and to that people's right to a state of its own. To deny the existence of the Jewish people sometimes stems from a search for universalism, sometimes from considerations of a rival nationalism, sometimes from mere hatred of Jews, and sometimes from intolerance of an entity that does not fit into the neat definitions of nation and religion. Sand would like to promote a new Israeli agenda, striving for harmony between Jews and Arabs, to be based on the remodeling of Jewish identity. However positive the goals he is targeting may be in their own right, there is something warped and objectionable in the assumption that for Jews to integrate into the Middle East, they, and they alone of all the peoples in the region, must shed their national identity and historical memories and reconstruct themselves in a way that may (perhaps) find favor with Israeli-Palestinians. But reconciliation between peoples makes necessary a mutual recognition of truth, not an artificial analysis that presents a fabricated front, a quasi-mask that hides the real differences. What Sand is offering is this kind of artificial analysis.

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Notes

1. Yehoshua, "Nisayon le-zihui ve-havanah shel tashtit ha-antishemiyut."
2. Evron, *Ha-heshbon ha-le'umi*; Agassi, *Bein dat le-le'um*.
3. Israel Bartal, "Hamtza'at ha-hamtza'ah" (The invention of the invention), *Ha'arets*, 28 May 2008.
4. Brakhot 34 72 (Soncino translation).
5. Mishna commentary of Maimonides, Sanhedrin 10a, cited in Twersky, ed., *A Maimonides Reader*, 414.
6. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, 261.
7. *Ibid.*, 263.
8. Klier, review of Victor Shnirelman, 780.

9. Wexler, *Two-Tiered Relexification in Yiddish*.
10. Rosman, *Ha-yishuv ha-yehudi*.
11. Cited in *ibid*.
12. Shpilberg et al., "One of the Two Common Mutations."
13. See Bein, *The Jewish Question*, 186–90.
14. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 171–72.

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