As for scriptural Hebrew narratives inspiring what Ra'ad calls "colonial projects" (276), we know as literary critics that any text can engender multiple readings. Hebrew Scripture inspired the African American slaves to resist their oppressors and the nascent United States to revolt against Great Britain.

The Middle East situation is complex, and it does no service to reduce it to one-sided simplifications.

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Reply:

Hardly a "loaded" word, *Palestine* has been the name of the country—what is now the state of Israel and other occupied parts of Palestine (Gaza and the "West Bank")—from at least the eighth century BCE, as Assyrian inscriptions show. Even earlier, in the time of Ramses III (twelfth century BCE), this general area was referred to as *Peleset*. Herodotus used *Palestine*, as did Aristotle, as did the occupying Greeks and Romans. Others continued to use it until 1948, and many, including Pope Francis, still do today. Eusebius of Caesarea is often called "the Palestinian," and both he and Saint Jerome thought they lived in Palestine.

It is "ancient Israel" that is the subject of dispute among historians today, who also question the historicity of Exodus and the Kingdom of David. I argued that "ancient Israel" and biblical stories about it, which insinuated themselves into Western consciousness for various reasons, be replaced by an enlarged, humanistic meaning for *Palestine*. Though slaves, forced to adopt Christianity and hear the Bible, identified with "let my people go!" and the crucifixion, it is nonetheless insidious to use a story like Exodus, or stories of succeeding massacres, as a model for both liberation and oppression, freedom for some and dispossession or slaughter for others. That converted former slaves and natives continued to identify with these stories is a symptom of self-colonization. Edna Aizenberg mistakenly thinks Exodus inspired the American revolt against Great Britain. Instead, this and other biblical narratives were obsessions of Puritan colonists, who saw themselves as god's chosen people conquering a new "Canaan" and who leaned on biblical parallels to justify their "errand in the wilderness," to excuse their murder and dispossession of native populations.

As for Hebrew, it is not as old as people assume. I pointed out that its modern revival has mostly Arabic roots. Its script is commonly confused with more ancient languages in attempts to claim historical depth (often through the use of misleading hyphenation, such as "Hebrew-Canaanite" and "Hebrew-Aramaic"). Hebrew has many fossilized elements not "Semitic" in nature. It was used as a scholarly-religious script, mostly outside Palestine, and was dead in daily practice. *Hebrew* is a misnomer, suggesting links to the idealized "Hebrews" who could not have spoken "Hebrew." Its script is but an appropriation of late Imperial Square Aramaic. The population spoke and wrote Aramaic, as Jesus reportedly did. The ostraca and other inscriptions often described as ancient or paleo-Hebrew are "Phoenician" first and then Aramaic, the regional lingua franca.

Appropriation is a strategy to gain more regional entitlement. The Hebrew Bible is "fine" writing, though much of its founding content is recycled from regional mythological antecedents discovered over the past 150 years. The Bible is a Hellenistic-period extension of mythic-literary traditions originating in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greater Syria over millennia, which continued in other languages. Its earliest form, the Samaritan Pentateuch, borrowing heavily from this heritage as well as from Homeric and classical Greece, was adopted by Jews and expanded with other writings. The Bible therefore cannot be exclusively owned by one faith that relies on it, nor can its uses be extended to supporting land-ownership claims and to linking present

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Jews to ancient Jews or, further back, to "Hebrews" and ancient Israelites, and consequently to denying the rights of the land's continuous inhabitants. The Qumran or Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that the (later Masoretic) Bible text used until their discovery had been doctored by scribes or rabbis to erase the polytheistic underpinnings of the original. For example, the Qumran language of Deuteronomy 32.8–9 demonstrates this later tampering (e.g., "sons [or "children"] of God," whom the chief god assigns to all the nations, was altered to "sons [or "children"] of Israel"); it shows Yahweh as one son of the Canaʿanite pantheon chief Īl (El) and removes monopolies of monotheism and chosenness.

Is there anything but adopted "tradition" to entitle Aizenberg and others to claim these ancient connections? Muslims in Indonesia or Afghanistan might as well consider Mecca and Arabia as their ancestral homeland, or Christians occupy Jerusalem as the site of Jesus's blood sacrifice (as they once did). Shlomo Sand, extending the work of Arthur Koestler and others, demonstrates that present Jews are not ancient Jews, since Jews (particularly Eastern European, Spanish, and North African) were converts in later centuries of the Common Era, and that Palestinians are the most likely descendants of all the consecutive populations, despite changes in religious affiliation (*The Invention of the Jewish People* [Verso, 2009; print] 182–89; see also Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past* [Basic, 1999; print] 254–66). The historical record shows that at the time people assume the population of Palestine was Jewish it was predominantly pagan. Israeli Jews now take over as their own local Palestinian culture, from foods and embroidery to forcibly vacated villages, their stones, architecture, and toponyms.

The "Arab" exodus (*Arab* is a favorite Zionist term for Muslims, used to allege that present-day Palestinians recently migrated from "Arab" countries) resulted from official plans and from massacres of unarmed Palestinian villagers by Zionist terrorists, so that hundreds of thousands were expelled before May 1948. This happened well before intervention by "Arab" governments, who were (as some are still) under the influence of imperial powers. Aizenberg speaks of Jordanian occupation but neglects the ongoing Israeli occupation. The UN's partition plan is not nullified because the Palestinian majority rejected its unfair distribution. Aizenberg uses it implicitly to justify Israel's expansion and to deny a Palestinian state. If this plan legalizes Israel's existence, the boundaries sketched in it should be respected by Israel—along with other UN resolutions, including resolutions 194 and 273, regarding refugees' right of return.

There's a long history in the region, and it's counterproductive to whitewash old or new events. My original point—to which Harrison responded positively—was to extend an apt metaphor for a benign "Palestine." Common arguments and claims injected by Aizenberg try to justify the perpetuation of injustices and inventions in this recent form of colonialism rather than help to reach a resolution.

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