

Translations: A Project Shema Journal

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Editors: Andrew Mbuvi, Ph.D. (Director of Research) and Eli Cohn-Postell, MA (Vice President of Education and Innovation)
Publisher address and Contact: Project Shema 1042 Maple Ave Lisle, Chicago, IL 60532, USA; info@projectshema.org

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Translations: A Project Shema Journal (*TAPSJ*) articles are rigorously researched and reviewed before publication, they are aimed at an informed reader with basic knowledge of the topics addressed, presented in an accessible format that limits use of complicated academic jargon. Some of the material can (and has been) used for training purposes providing basic content to the topic(s) addressed in the articles.

Typically, *TAPSJ* articles are commissioned by Project Shema based on specific topics that are deemed pertinent to the organization's interest, need or response. Despite this, the articles are edited with an eye to ensuring that they engage in the complexity and nuance of the topics addressed with the aim of presenting a balanced analysis of the subject matter.

While Project Shema is a Jewish organization its mission to address Jewish harm through dialogue, curiosity, and empathy across differences, engaging academics, practitioners, educators, and community voices.

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From the CEO's Desk

There are times when I think about our work through the lens of bridge building. At other times I see our work as a bridge itself. In one moment, our goal may be to help connect more people across differences. In the other, we serve as the connection. My hope is that our new online journal, *Translations: A Project Shema Journal* (*TAPSJ*), and the accompanying Translations Podcast can do both.

To translate is, first and foremost, to serve as the bridge. The translator exists between two people who do not share a common language and becomes a conduit for understanding. That's how I see *Translations*; as a conduit first and foremost. Our aim is first to help people communicate when they do not yet have the right words, or when they do not share the same language, context, or points of reference.

We didn't need to launch an online journal, and the research behind it, in order to do this work. Project Shema already serves as a translator through our direct educational programming and institutional support. But the TAPSJ and podcast allow us to extend that role, to translate for many more people, in more places, and through more enduring forms of engagement.

TAPSJ is the product of many people's care, insight, and labor. I am deeply grateful to the Project Shema team and to the collaborators, advisors, contributors, and partners who helped share this project from an idea into a living platform. Their intellectual generosity and willingness to sit with difficult questions have made this work strong and purposeful. In particular, I want to thank Eli Cohn-Postell, our Vice President of Education and Innovation, for the vision behind this effort, kk, our Vice President of Communications, Dr. Andrew Mbuvi, our Director of Research, and Dr. Elana Hubert, who assisted with the project and research, for their support in bringing it to fruition.

While Project Shema's approach to research will remain a narrowly tailored and value-added element alongside our core work of direct educational programming and institutional support, I believe that our perspective, analyses, relationships, access, and even our uniquely diverse team (relative to other Jewish organizations, and more broadly), position us to play an important role in exploring important questions that many inside the Jewish community, and beyond, are struggling to navigate. By offering translation, we can be a bridge. And by doing so, we can help others build more bridges of their own.

In time, I hope you will come to agree.

Oren Jacobson
CEO, Project Shema

In this volume on Anti-Zionism

We could have chosen many topics for the inaugural edition of *Translations*. We chose anti-Zionism because debates about the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism are often reductive, leading people to polarized conclusions. Nonetheless, the question of the contexts and conditions under which anti-Zionist movements or ideas undermine Jewish safety is critical. This collection weaves together various threads in service of providing more nuanced answers to this question.

My essay, "Beyond Words: The Harm of 'Zionist' Dogwhistles" opens the volume. Drawing on new research commissioned by Project Shema, I examine whether the term "Zionist" can function as a dogwhistle in contemporary discourse. This essay considers recent examples, their impact on Jewish safety, and ways to address them.

The next three papers detail the emergence of anti-Zionism in different geographic contexts. In "Emergence of the Anti-Zionist Movement in the United States: A Brief History," Adrian Krupnik examines the trajectory of anti-Zionist thought in the United States, both within and beyond the Jewish community.

Arash Azizi's "Iran's State-led Anti-Zionism: A Brief History," explores anti-Zionism in Iranian politics. The Iranian Revolution provides an important touchpoint for understanding what happens when an explicitly anti-Zionist regime comes to power. Azizi examines the distinctions between anti-Zionist philosophies in Iranian politics and how they have interacted over time.

David Fishman's, "Soviet Anti-Zionism: A Brief History" completes the historical sequence. His paper traces the development of state-sponsored anti-Zionism in the Soviet Union across distinct historical periods, examining the persecution of Zionists and the shifting ways Jews and Zionists were understood and portrayed.

Whitney Weathers' contribution "And we'll understand it better by and by: A Womanist Examination of the State of Black-Jewish Solidarity," broadens the collection's lens. Although it doesn't address anti-Zionism directly, it offers frameworks for empathy, solidarity, and care that are essential to this conversation. Understanding the history of anti-Zionist movements is only part of the work; we must also examine the mental models that shape how we hear and respond to others. Meeting each person's experience with care is a practice that requires intention.

Individually, these essays offer knowledge and perspectives to help readers navigate conversations about anti-Zionism and antisemitism with greater nuance. Together, I hope they will deepen your ability to recognize harmful rhetoric, understand the historical roots of contemporary anti-Zionist movements, and to respond with empathy when people—Black, Jewish, or otherwise—raise concerns about their safety and wellbeing.

Eli Cohn-Postell,
Vice President of Education and Innovation,
Project Shema

Editorial Note: The articles in this journal contain controversial words, ideas, and references. There are individuals cited in this journal who have said or written harmful things about Jews or others. We ask readers to remember that causing harm in one space does not negate the power of their ideas in another space. We believe that nuance is essential to translation, and that this journal is a testament to that possibility.

Beyond Words: The Harm of "Zionist" Dogwhistles

Eli Cohn-Postell, M.A.
VP of Education and Innovation, Project Shema

Abstract

This paper explores how the term "Zionism" can function as a dogwhistle, a term with an ambiguous definition that can both cause harm and provide a speaker with plausible deniability for that harm. I combine lessons from historical records of anti-Zionist movements with new survey data on Zionism as a dogwhistle to highlight how certain anti-Zionist rhetoric can be used to undermine Jewish safety. I explore three contemporary examples of Zionism functioning as a dogwhistle and discuss how empathy is foundational to responding appropriately to instances of Zionism functioning as a dogwhistle.

Keywords: dogwhistle, anti-Zionism. Zionism, overt code, covert code, Womanist, empathy, trauma.

INTRODUCTION

Zionism and anti-Zionism are not monolithic, either as ideas or as movements. This premise should be taken as the starting point for any conversation about the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. Regrettably, Jewish advocacy organizations, newspaper columnists, and popular debates often frame this issue in absolute, binary terms. Anti-Zionism must either always or never be antisemitism. These binary frameworks obfuscate the inherent ambiguity that these terms contain depending on their context and usage.

In this paper, I attempt to answer a more specific question. Given the varied definitions and uses of Zionism, how can we identify and avoid the most harmful cases? With the aid of the newly completed research contained in this volume, I argue that one of the most consistently dangerous instances of anti-Zionist rhetoric is the use of Zionism or Zionist as a dogwhistle. My goals below are to briefly contextualize this conversation against a broader, international anti-Zionist history, to examine the statistical evidence for how the term Zionist functions as a dogwhistle, and to discuss numerous recent examples of Zionism being used as a dogwhistle in ways that undermine Jewish safety. Finally, I borrow from Whitney Weathers' Womanist framework in order to draw a conclusion by offering practical advice for promoting Jewish inclusion.

One theme in the histories of anti-Zionism contained in this journal volume is the relationship between anti-Zionism and global events. Arash Azizi discusses this through the lens of the Islamic Republic of Iran, noting that "Iran's posture toward Israel has often been subject to strategic and military considerations" (p.50). Different anti-Zionist groups in Iran have different

understandings of how anti-Zionism should play a role in their politics, and they are informed by factors including international and domestic concerns. David Fishman reaches a similar conclusion in his paper covering different eras of state-sponsored anti-Zionism in the Soviet Union. He tells us that, during World War II, Soviet officials cultivated relationships with Zionist leaders in the United States because "cooperation in the war against Germany was more important than ideological purity."

In writing about the history of anti-Zionism in the United States, Adrian Krupnik writes that "the discussion surrounding Zionism and anti-Zionism is closely linked to the international political agenda affecting both Israel and the United States, as well as to its expression in domestic politics" (p.20). Conversations about Zionism, Israel, and Palestine are often informed by specific events, such as the Hamas attacks of October 7th and subsequent Israeli war that devastated Gaza. However, these conversations are also linked to broader geopolitical circumstances and Zionism, Israel, and Palestine can also be used as proxies in broad arguments about the global political order.

Recent global trends have created a sense of political instability. While Jews in the US continue to identify overwhelmingly as liberal and vote Democrat, there is a growing conversation about Jewish political homelessness or isolation. In short, the broad conditions that have given rise to anti-Zionist movements in the past appear to be repeating themselves. We thus have reason to examine contemporary anti-Zionist movements with particular scrutiny.

DOGWHISTLES AND MEANING

It is important at the outset to say a few words about how language works. We need this clarity to understand how we can construct meaning around Zionism given its varied uses and definitions. One general problem with determining meaning is that the speaker alone does not determine how a term or phrase is being used. According to Quill Kukla (writing as Rebecca at the time), "I decide whether someone is using her words to order, request, inquire, propose, report, and so on by interpreting her as deploying a wide array of explicit and implicit conventions governing context, tone, gesture, etiquette, conversational flow, and more" (pp.440-1). Or, more pithily, "speech acts have inputs and outputs" (p.442).

Practically, this means that defining words and ideas is a social process. How various listeners are interpreting a term impacts its meaning. It is not sufficient for me to say what I think Zionism is, my conversation partner must in some way agree with my definition. For example, is someone using "liberal Zionism" as a point of pride and self-definition in a personal essay, or to derogate certain Jews as "liberal Nazis," in order to exclude them from political coalitions? It is insufficient to ask people what they mean in these cases. We as the audience help establish meaning by interpreting the speaker's intention.

We must understand this social power of speech in order to understand the concerns about particular examples of anti-Zionist rhetoric that I will discuss below. Lynne Tirrell has done extensive work establishing a connection between harmful speech and acts of violence. She states that "by attending to our own linguistic practices, we can trace changing permissibilities governing speech *and action*, and track modes of violence" (p.142, emphasis added).

In another paper examining the linguistic roots of the genocide against the Tutsi people in Rwanda, she says succinctly that "studying the role of speech acts and linguistic practices…illuminates how patterns of speech acts become linguistic practices that constitute permissibility conditions for non-linguistic behaviors" (p.175). In other words, there is an intimate connection between norms of language and behavior. Dehumanizing language makes dehumanizing behavior permissible.

While the combination of speaker, listener, and action determines meaning for both self-described Zionists and anti-Zionists, my focus here is on one particular form of de-humanizing speech: the dogwhistle. A dogwhistle is a term or phrase with multiple definitions that is used to harm a group using one definition while simultaneously providing plausible deniability for this harm to the speaker. Jennifer Saul provides an extensive breakdown of dogwhistles and their functions in her book *Dogwhistles and Figleaves*. She identifies two different types of dogwhistles with different functions. Overt code dogwhistles are terms or speech acts with at least two plausible interpretations, one of which violates a widespread norm (in the present case norms around minority inclusion are most relevant) and others which appear innocent. Covert effect dogwhistles are communicative acts that raise to salience some underlying, subconscious attitude that violates a widespread norm without the audience's awareness. This inherent ambiguity is essential to how a dogwhistle functions, because it allows the user to say something harmful while denying that they are using a harmful definition of the words in question. Effective dogwhistles must mean different things to different audiences. It is also important to note that both types of dogwhistle can be spread intentionally or unintentionally, making it easy for people to repeat harmful words without understanding the full range of their meaning.

This matters to Jews because derogation and hate-speech can have a significant impact on members of groups targeted for marginalization. Caroline West covers this topic in her paper "Freedom of Expression and Derogatory Words." When people who are targeted by hate-speech speak up, they may fear being ignored or dismissed, which can lead to "'perlocutionary frustration': an inability to use words to achieve certain intended effects…perlocutionary frustration is of special concern when those systematically afflicted are members of historically disadvantaged groups, who need the persuasive opportunities afforded by speech more than most in order to challenge entrenched attitudes and practices of discrimination" (p.249). That is, there

is a double danger contained in the ambiguity of using dogwhistles to discriminate against members of groups targeted for marginalization.

First, is the act of defining them as somehow inferior, other, or undeserving of empathy and care reinforces existing harmful stereotypes. Moreover, this language can prevent people from speaking up to explain their own pain because they fear being disbelieved and invalidated. This is a particularly important concern when the harm in question comes from an ambiguous source such as a dogwhistle, because we will need to rely on people who are hearing different things than we are to understand how the term is being deployed in a harmful way.

ZIONISM AS A DOGWHISTLE

Academics, journalists, and Jewish advocacy organizations have all pointed to ways Zionism is used as a slur. We at Project Shema have utilized this language in our public trainings. “Zionist as a pejorative” even has its own Wikipedia page. I have found that naming the ways that Zionism can be defined in explicitly negative terms provides people with a helpful aid in identifying uses of Zionism that have the potential to undermine Jewish safety. Thanks to new data from a recent study by Laura Royden commissioned by Project Shema, we now have significant evidence that Zionism functions as a specific type of dogwhistle. This is a helpful distinction because we often expect slurs and other pejoratives to be easily identifiable. Dogwhistles, however, are designed to be intentionally ambiguous and misleading. Understanding Zionism as a specific kind of dogwhistle helps us to better identify and respond to some of the most problematic uses of Zionism in anti-Zionist rhetoric.

By now, we have accumulated significant evidence that Zionism is a contested term without a unified definition. Looking within the Jewish community, Matthew Boxer finds “dozens of…definitions in my dataset.” A recent study from the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) reports that while 88% of Jews feel it is important for Israel to be both a Jewish and democratic state, 71% of Jews feel emotionally attached to Israel, and 60% of Jews say Israel makes them proud to be Jewish (qualities which would seem to meet some definitions of Zionism), only 37% identify as Zionists (with 7% self-defining as anti-Zionist). Meanwhile, looking outside the Jewish community, Boundless Israel commissioned a survey that found only 14% of Americans could describe Zionism as a movement for Jewish self-determination when given the opportunity to write a definition in their own words. Participants in Royden’s Zionism as a dogwhistle survey were given six potential definitions of Zionism to choose from (including “I’m not sure”). Only 54% selected the definition most consistent with mainstream usage, which is the belief that Jewish people have the right to live in and maintain a state in Israel.

Jonathan Krasner and his co-authors highlight the impact of this ambiguity in a recent qualitative study of Jewish university students. One group they identified in the study, the

Conflicted, were particularly reticent to be labeled as Zionists because "they were…frustrated by what linguists call semantic discord, the subjectivity and imprecision of language that impedes communication…labeling was integral to the process of othering…of creating impermeable boundaries between insiders and outsiders" (p.23). Tirrell also echoes this message, writing that "derogatory terms used in propaganda usually…convey that there is an essential difference between…groups…Essentialism fuels fear, generates hate, and purports to justify different treatment" (p.191). The Conflicted group resists labeling themselves as Zionist, anti-Zionist, or anything else because they are hyperaware of the multiple definitions of these terms. More importantly, they are also focused on how these definitions can be combined with behaviors to create a harmful or unwelcoming environment. This ambiguity of meaning and use—the idea that Zionism can be used to welcome or to exclude—resonates with what we now know about how Zionism functions as a dogwhistle.

Project Shema commissioned Laura Royden to do statistical research to determine if and how Zionism functions as a dogwhistle. The results surprised us. We were expecting Zionism to function as a covert effect dogwhistle, activating underlying anti-Jewish prejudice in a subconscious way. However, we found that Zionism functions as an overt dogwhistle, a way of invoking negative ideas about Jews without naming them directly. I will spend some time here highlighting the key findings before moving on to discuss specific examples.

We asked people a number of questions to better understand their beliefs about Zionism. We found clear evidence that "most Americans know that Zionism is associated with the Jewish people and identify Jews as the demographic group most likely to be Zionists. However, a substantial minority of respondents hold definitions of Zionism and attribute goals and traits to Zionists that reflect hostile or antisemitic characterizations" (p.14). That is, among the sea of definitions and uses of Zionism, a significant number of people are using "Zionist" to mean something roughly equivalent to "powerful, manipulative, evil Jew," a hostile definition that reflects antisemitic conspiracy theories. It should also be noted that "these patterns are not evenly distributed…younger respondents and those on the political left hold more negative views of Zionists across nearly every question" (p.14).

The survey data does not tell us how many people hold this view of Zionists. The important thing to note is that this is a salient definition for some segment of the population. This is what allows Zionism to function as a dogwhistle in the examples below. People using this harmful definition of Zionism may know they are demeaning Jews, but they will always have plausible deniability because Zionism has other definitions as well.

We found a counterintuitive result when testing for the covert effect dogwhistle. We tested people's willingness to restrict access to university speakers, remove government funding to nonprofits, deny groups political access, and limit coalition partnerships depending on the

identity of the individual or group in question. We asked people whether they supported these restrictions for Jewish groups and individuals, Israeli groups and individuals, Zionist groups and individuals, or a control condition. While the results varied across the vignettes, in all cases respondents were more hostile to Zionists than to Jews. Respondents were particularly inclined to exclude Zionist groups from coalition spaces. We found that people are generally more comfortable excluding Zionists than Jews, which would be consistent with a Zionism functioning as a covert dogwhistle.

We were surprised, however, because this result does not seem to be motivated by underlying antisemitic attitudes.* If Zionist is functioning as a covert effect dogwhistle, we would expect people who are more willing to exclude Zionists to also be holding more explicit antisemitic beliefs. We did not find this to be the case in our data. Nor did we rule out the possibility that the exclusion of Zionists is motivated by a deeper sense of anti-Jewish bigotry that is being masked by social desirability bias. Further research is needed to resolve this question definitively.

I want to state clearly that the practical effect on Jews remains the same, regardless of the covert effect findings. We have clear data showing that a significant number of people are defining Zionist in a way that meets the conditions for an overt effect dogwhistle. They are using the word “Zionist/s” to mean something akin to “evil Jews," which violates widespread norms about anti-Jewish bigotry and the treatment of groups that have been targeted for marginalization historically. At the same time, many of these statements have other, innocent-seeming interpretations that are also plausible. Due to the ambiguity around the term “Zionism,” this is more complicated than identifying a slur or straightforwardly derogatory pejorative.

This hostile definition of Zionism is the starting point. Along with this finding, we see that many people are willing to exclude Zionists from coalition spaces and other fora of civic life. While this may or may not be motivated explicitly by antisemitic attitudes, the result for Jews in these spaces is the same: exclusion and othering. That is because at least some people are aware of how the term Zionist functions as a dogwhistle and are using that knowledge to draw boundaries around their communities that exclude Jews. Further, it is reasonable to expect that even Jews who do not identify as Zionists experience some level of chilling effect or other harm as a result of this speech.

This result harkens back to an earlier, Soviet era anti-Zionism. While not using the language of “dogwhistle,” David Fishman points out that “the attacks against rootless cosmopolitans often included charges of Zionism. The combination of ‘Cosmopolitan’ and ‘Zionist’ was an oxymoron (how can a nationalist be a cosmopolitan?), but the pairing had potential logic.

* Please refer to the survey for details on the specific antisemitism categories used.

Both terms were code for enemy Jew. Since open antisemitism was banned by Lenin's teachings and Soviet law, 'Zionist' became a surrogate epithet hurled at Jews."

CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES

It is helpful at this point to look at real world examples. In this section I will draw on three recent instances of the term Zionist being used as a dogwhistle. I will briefly describe the key events, then look more closely at the use of "Zionist" in each case. I will show that each use is ambiguous and discuss how these examples give the speaker plausible deniability while simultaneously defining Jews in hostile or conspiratorial terms.

a. Brad Lander, A "Liberal Zionist"

One high profile case involves Brad Lander, a Democratic nominee for Congress in New York. Lander unseated an incumbent in the Democratic primary in part by taking a more critical stance on Israel and Palestine. He is a self-described liberal Zionist, one who fully embraces anti-Zionists in his coalition. Lander's political beliefs and Jewish identity create rich ground for discussions of Zionism as a dogwhistle precisely because he identifies as both a progressive and a Zionist. While he identifies as a Zionist, his Zionism does not match the dogwhistle definition of "evil, manipulative, Jew."

This past summer, Lander was participating in a protest when he was loudly heckled by a group of fellow protestors. In a video compilation we can hear people say things like "We don't want no Zionists here!" and, more crudely, "F**k you, ball sack Zionist!" We can easily imagine the group harassing Lander claiming they are not antisemitic and in fact are not making a statement about Jews at all. Rather, they are suggesting that a particular candidate is not values-aligned with the broader community attending the rally and are excluding him based on his self-identified political beliefs. This might be a reasonable claim if we did not have the background we do have in the social nature of speech. But this group does not appear to be politely asking someone to leave a space based on their political beliefs.

To the contrary, they are harassing a particular Jewish individual and fellow protester without making any claims about his politics at all. They are aggressively accosting someone, shouting at them, not listening to his responses, and refusing to engage with the purpose of the rally until the person is removed. The most likely explanation for why Zionist appears in these statements at all, is that the term is functioning as an overt code dogwhistle. This appears to be exactly what the students in Krasner's study, above, were concerned about—defining Zionism in ways that create an unwelcome environment for them as Jews regardless of their personal views on Israel and Palestine.

b. "*Lock Them Up!*"

Our second example highlights how overt dogwhistles and anti-Jewish conspiracy theories can be fused together. Two political candidates have recently combined dogwhistles with conspiracy theories to suggest that all Zionists should be jailed. First was Maureen Galindo, an erstwhile Democratic candidate for Congress in Texas who lost her primary race earlier this year. In an Instagram post (which is still publicly accessible), she pledged to "turn Karnes ICE Detention Center into a prison for American Zionists and former ICE officers for human trafficking. (It will also be a castration processing center for pedophiles which will probably be most of the Zionists)." In the same post, she alleges that "the billionaire Zionists that control San Antonio and South Texas trafficking networks have coordinated a blitz campaign to propagate the conspiracy that anti-Zionist Maureen Galindo wants Jews in warehouses." However, the same post attempts to differentiate between Zionists and Jews, creating plausible deniability.

Similarly, Rasha Zaid, a candidate running for Windsor city council in Ontario, Canada, said at a rally that, "Every person that announces they are a Zionist must be locked up! They are terrorists," while also issuing a statement claiming that "Zionism and Judaism are not the same thing." Zaid has also shared content suggesting that antisemitism is not a real phenomenon and is instead used solely as an excuse to gain sympathy for Jews and Israel.

c. *Zionism and Conspiracy Theories*

The anti-Jewish conspiracy theories are the first things to stand out to me in these examples. Both candidates make allegations related to Jews, money, power, influence, and evil. These are the exact characteristics we would expect to be present when someone deploys an overt code dogwhistle. When individuals adopt these antisemitic tropes, we should be skeptical of their claims to be differentiating between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. This is particularly true when tropes about Jewish power are used to deny the existence of antisemitism wholesale.

As in the Lander case, this is not typical political speech. In the United States and Canada people are meant to be free to express their political views without fear of being imprisoned. There are no political views that are so abhorrent that they result in incarceration. The question then becomes why Galindo and Zaid believe this particular group deserves this unique treatment. The answer lies in the use of the dogwhistle. If Zionism is merely a political belief, it does not make sense to "lock them up." This position only becomes rational if Zionists are in some ways the paragon of evil, or, as both candidates suggest, equivalent to terrorists. However, the dogwhistle is in full effect in both cases.

I want to introduce one final example, perhaps the most complex. This example comes from an X post from Motasem Dalloul, a Gaza-based journalist. The post features a video of Jews

burning Palestinian homes in the West Bank city of Hebron/Al Khaleel. The video is captioned “zionist jewish [sic] settlers burn Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank city of Al Khaleel.” This is a complex case of a dogwhistle because we can make a strong argument that Zionism is being used in an unproblematic way. This appears to be a journalist using descriptive language to describe a scene for his audience. There is nothing controversial about merely describing these individuals as Zionists.

However, there are reasons to question whether Zionist is being used neutrally in this context. We might ask why the word Zionist is included in the post at all. Dalloul’s caption would be factually accurate without adding the Zionist descriptor. Perhaps Dalloul may intend to identify these individuals’ political orientation, but that reasoning is complicated by the reality that the Jewish settlers perpetrating violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank likely hold some variation of a Zionist political outlook.

The best explanation is once again that the term Zionist here is functioning as an overt code dogwhistle. In this case in particular, Zionism’s ambiguity allows readers to fill in their own missing meaning, including those that extend beyond a specific political ideology. One challenge with this example is the potential for perlocutionary frustration. People who question the term risk being portrayed as defending settler violence even if their concern is solely with imprecise or prejudicial language. As a result, neutral audiences may be less likely to engage with the critique of how the term is being deployed.

I am not accusing any of these people of antisemitism. Dogwhistles can be shared unintentionally, and I do not assume that anyone is motivated by anti-Jewish bigotry. Yet the practical result of these uses is the exclusion, othering, and intimidation of Jews. Some of these examples also reinforce conspiracy theories about Jews and power, money, and evil. The fact that these are easy to find, highly visible instances of Zionism being used as a dogwhistle from recent months means that many thousands of people are regularly exposed to uses of Zionism that primarily function to demonize Jews.

RESPONDING WITH A FOUNDATION OF EMPATHY

This section relies heavily on the work of Whitney Weathers, also contained in this volume. She brings a Womanist lens to her research and experience creating more inclusive communities. In her paper, she identifies two themes of Womanist thought that are worth naming here. First, is the importance of relying on the experiences and expertise of Black-Jewish women in order to “leverage those experiences to understand the full extent of systemic oppression” (p.89). While the experiences of Black-Jewish women were not central to this investigation, I am personally thankful for a number of Black-Jewish women both inside and outside Project Shema who have

contributed to and strengthened this work. My contribution to this journal, and *Translations* as a whole, would not be possible without an incredible group of Black-Jewish women[†]

Moving to a wider lens, Weathers discusses how "[f]oundational to Womanism and Womanist advocacy is the capacity to empathize" (p.90). Her expansion on this point is worth quoting in full:

> Moving forward calls us to discern our community's health by stepping into another person's shoes and grasping the nuance of their suffering—even when we have never suffered in the same way. The first step that must be made in reinvigorating Black-Jewish solidarity is the activation of empathy—not just as a feeling, but as an action. Practically, this means honoring the humanity of the people with whom we seek to build community. Begin by asking your fellow person, "How can I help you belong?" "Tell me your stories so that I can learn about your humanity." Empathy requires us to engage with purpose with our community members (p.91).

We at Project Shema are often asked what people need to do, practically, to ensure Jewish safety and wellbeing in their communities. The foundation for all of our responses is empathy. Listen to Jews and their experiences. Take their pain seriously, as you would a member of any group targeted for marginalization historically. It is a simple idea, but one we still need people to choose, because empathy and curiosity form the backbone of my recommendations for how to identify and respond to instances of Zionism being used as a dogwhistle.

When asking if a use of Zionist is functioning as a dogwhistle, first look for ambiguity and determine different possible definitions. Remember that dogwhistles work specifically because of their ambiguity. They are designed to send different messages to different audiences, and their users are relying on only certain people to understand the code. Choose empathy by taking the time to look for potentially harmful uses even if they are not obvious to you.

Second, listen to Jews when they raise concerns about harmful uses of Zionist or Zionism. Scholars like Miri Bar-Halpern, Yael Silverstein, and Caryn Block have identified the harms of traumatic invalidations and microinvalidations among members of the Jewish community. Refusing to acknowledge someone's pain or denying the existence of antisemitism when someone is feeling threatened, lead to significant negative psychological impacts. These impacts include losing a sense of welcoming or communal belonging, increasing feelings of isolation among Jewish community members. You can decide to empathize with people in your community even if you do not understand their concerns for their safety. This is the foundation of all multi-identity relationships and coalition building.

Finally, be wary of instances where anti-Zionist dogwhistles and anti-Jewish conspiracy theories coincide. These instances in particular are likely to fuel anti-Jewish sentiment and to be

[†] *Translations* 3, with an expected publication date in October 2027, will focus on Black Jewish experiences.

heard as threats by Jewish audiences. In these cases, we want people to be sensitive to how dogwhistle language can reinforce conspiracies about Jews, power, money, and disloyalty, among others.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

So far, I have attempted to contextualize the harm of anti-Zionism in the current moment by synthesizing themes we found in the historical record of anti-Zionist movements in the Soviet Union, Iran, and the United States. I defined dogwhistles and presented new research about how "Zionist" can function as an overt code dogwhistle, and I offered examples to highlight how this dogwhistle can be used to Other, intimidate, and silence Jews. In these final paragraphs I will discuss one aspect of this research that deserves further investigation.

The coincidence of Zionism as a dogwhistle and anti-Jewish conspiracy theories is fascinating and should be a subject of future inquiry. In some ways, this phenomenon mirrors previous patterns related to antisemitism and conspiracy thinking. The most salient example comes from Eric Ward's seminal article "Skin in the Game." In this essay, Ward details his years of research as a Black man investigating White supremacist movements. His conclusion is that antisemitism is central to white supremacist ideology, forming its "theoretical core." This often takes the form of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories like those found in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

White supremacists, for example, are unable to explain the gains made by Black Americans during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. As a result, they turn to anti-Jewish conspiracies: "How could a race of inferiors [Black Americans] have unseated this power structure [Jim Crow] through organizing alone?. . . . Some secret cabal, some mythological power, must be manipulating the social order behind the scenes. This diabolical evil must control television, banking, entertainment, education, and even Washington, D.C." The white supremacist worldview is illogical. When members of white supremacist movements are confronted with this illogic, they do not reject their beliefs. Rather, they turn to conspiracy thinking about Jewish power to explain the apparent contradictions. One could easily imagine the "secret cabal" being described as "Zionists."

It would be worthwhile to explore whether these contemporary examples of Zionism as a dogwhistle are utilizing a similar conspiratorial framework. While our statistics show that Zionism is particularly salient as a dogwhistle among the political left, we did also find people across the political spectrum who define Zionism in hostile terms. And one of the original uses of Zionism as a slur or pejorative, "Zio," was popularized by Ku Klux Klan wizard David Duke (who attended an Iranian government sponsored conference on Holocaust revisionism). We should dedicate additional resources to investigating this connection.

Emergence of the Anti-Zionist Movement in the United States: A Brief History

Adrián Krupnik, Ph.D.,
Tel Aviv University, Israel.

Abstract

In this paper, I offer a brief historical overview to understand the genesis of the anti-Zionist movement in the United States. Throughout, I will provide elements to answer the following questions: 1) What are the ideological and intellectual sources of this movement? 2) Are there differences between those sources depending on whether they are Jewish or non-Jewish? 3) Should the anti-Zionist movement be considered a threat to Jews? 4) And what does it represent for democracy? To answer these questions, the research draws on a systematic review of the Jewish press and the *New York Times*, tracing discussions surrounding the term "anti-Zionism" and placing them within the national and international political context. The paper follows a chronological order and, after an introduction, presents three sections corresponding to historical periods in which the term "anti-Zionism" came to express very different political struggles: before the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, during the Cold War, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the concluding remarks, I offer a contextual analysis and provide answers to the questions raised here, which the reader will be able to understand as they progress through each section.

Keywords: Zionism, antizionism, anti-Zionist movement, Zionist enemy, *shtetl*, Nazis, Brandeis, settler colonialism, Cold War, BDS, democracy.

OBJECTIVE, CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS, AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This article contributes to understanding the genesis and current state of the anti-Zionist movement that has taken shape in the United States.[1] What I wish to make clear is that my focus is on anti-Zionism in the United States as a local manifestation of a global political movement that defines itself by its opposition to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. Note that I am not referring merely to a political ideology, but to the living force that drives it while at the same time being promoted by it. For the purposes of this paper, I define the "anti-Zionist movement" as the heterogeneous and vast number of people for whom opposition to the State of Israel and to those

[1] **Author's note**: I am grateful to Project Shema for the opportunity to work on the history of anti-Zionism in the United States. This is a subject of great importance to democratic debate. I would also like to thank Eli Cohn-Postell and Netanya Cranford for their trust and support from the very beginning of this project. Throughout this work, I have endeavored to represent fairly and respectfully the history of the various Jewish currents and traditions within the United States, and I take full responsibility for its contents. The purpose of this article, written at the request of Project Shema, is to contribute to the dialogue among people committed to democratic values who believe in the transformative power of listening. I have sought to present a substantial amount of information in an accessible manner and to explain historical processes that unfolded over more than a century. It is possible that some significant individuals, Jewish organizations, and historical events have not been included or discussed in depth. I ask readers to forgive such omissions, confident that they do not affect the overall meaning of the text or its historical interpretation. I hope that this work will provide answers while also raising new questions that enrich the thinking of those who seek a more just society

who support it is a central variable of political action. In principle, it is the State of Israel and those who support it that the anti-Zionist movement defines as its "Zionist" enemy. This is compounded by the fact that the definition of who or what is considered Zionist is dynamic and is determined by activists in the course of collective political practice. This is so regardless of what any particular activist within the movement may consider, since, as we shall see, they are of very different kinds.

Regarding what I mean by Zionism and anti-Zionism as political ideas, I consider the reasoning set forth by Yehuda Bauer in 1990 to be valid.[3] Thus, I take Zionism to be the idea that drove the Jewish national movement, with the State of Israel as its concrete realization. In this sense, Zionism defined the Jews as a people dispersed throughout the world who preserved their historical connection to the land of Israel and who asserted their right to the Jewish state established there in 1948. Note that this conception of Zionism understands the Jews as a nation and not merely as a religious group. As a people, Jews are comparable to Italians, Germans, Bolivians, Argentines, Palestinians, Kurds, Mexicans, or Americans. Since Zionism views the Jews as a people and as a nation, it reaffirms their right to national self-determination in their historic homeland.

As with other national movements, Zionism does not demand that all Jews live in Israel, nor that they identify with that country, but rather asserts their right to do so. Likewise, for example, no one expects every person of Italian origin to live in Italy, nor regards an Italian American who identifies with their historical bond with suspicion. Moreover, just as Italy is the political unit of the Italians in the international system, Israel is the political unit of the Jews. In summary, Zionism asserts that the Jews are a people, that Israel is their country, and that any Jew around the world has the right to identify, to the extent that they wish, with the country of the Jewish people.

What, then, does it mean to oppose Zionism? Anti-Zionism denies either that the Jews are a people-nation or that they have the right to their own political unit in their historic homeland. At this point, the usual anti-Zionist argument would be that the modern state of Israel was founded on the expulsion and genocide of the Palestinian people and that, furthermore, present-day Israelis arrived there as immigrants. Even if we were to take these assertions as true, which I do not, one could respond: Do we know of any country whose origins do not involve that kind of conflict? Is there any country whose population is not composed of people who arrived at some point from distant lands?

As a preliminary observation, it is worth noting that anti-Zionism, as an idea, was *originally an internal matter within the Jewish community*. The term was frequently, and often unjustifiably, applied to Jews who did not adhere to the Zionist movement. Today, the most salient

[3] Yehuda Bauer, "Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism — New and Old," in *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 195–207.

features of the anti-Zionist movement are its global, politically cross-cutting character and its self-definition as progressive. In discussing anti-Zionism, the main issue is no longer an ideological dispute among Jews, as it was prior to the creation of Israel. Today, the anti-Zionist movement is a formidable political actor with the capacity to influence domestic politics in western societies and, through them, global geopolitics. Moreover, I do not deny that Jews are active within the anti-Zionist movement. Indeed, I consider them to play a fundamentally important symbolic role within the movement.

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In October 2025, reflecting on her electoral defeat of the previous year, Kamala Harris stated that Netanyahu and the war in Gaza had weakened the Democratic administration of Joe Biden, and strengthened Republican candidate Donald Trump. In doing so, she also showed a tendency to consider the question of an alleged genocide committed in Gaza by Israel.[4] In May 2026, when Joseph Kent resigned from his position as director of the National Counterterrorism Center, he argued that President Trump and the United States had been drawn into the war with Iran. His public resignation letter stated that Iran did not represent an imminent threat to the United States and contained the following phrases: "…it is clear that we started this war under pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby." And also: "…high ranking Israeli officials and influential members of the American media deployed a misinformation campaign…".[5] Quotes of a similar rhetorical tenor, as well as related political acts, could be referenced regarding Zohran Mamdani, Mayor of New York, or Abdul El-Sayed, recently elected candidate in the Michigan democratic primaries.

Indeed, discussions around the role of Israel in the international and domestic politics of the United States appear to have reached an unprecedented level of intensity. Nevertheless, a historical review from the origins of Zionism — the Jewish movement that gave rise to the State of Israel — demonstrates that this question is not entirely new. Quite the contrary. Zionism and its opposition, anti-Zionism, were born at practically the same time; both soon became an integral part of the political struggle within the Jewish world and among great powers, while also being the object of domestic political interests in various countries. However, there have been significant transformations in the semantic meaning of both terms — Zionism and anti-Zionism — across the decades, and the social actors associated with each have also changed. It is for this reason that,

[4] "Kamala Harris: 'We Should All Step Back and Ask Whether Israel Committed Genocide," *The Times of Israel*, Oct 14, 2025 - https://www.timesofisrael.com/kamala-harris-we-should-all-step-back-and-ask-whether-israel-committed-genocide/ . Acc: 08/11/26.
[5] "Resignation Letter from National Counterterrorism Center Director Joseph Kent," *The American Presidency Project*, University of California, Santa Barbara, Mar 17, 2026 - https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/resignation-letter-from-national-counterterrorism-center-director-joseph-kent : Acc: 08/11/26.

in order to delve into the history of anti-Zionism in the United States, a brief introduction to the history of Zionism in the context of world politics and the history of the Jewish people is necessary.

By the mid-19th century, Eastern European Jews represented two-thirds of world Jewry, with 80% residing in a *shtetl*, and Yiddish served as the most extended language.[6] Even at the dawn of the 20th century, the Jewish people were primarily European, nor Americans, not Israelis, with their largest demographic concentration still residing in *shtetls* that had developed under the auspices of the Polish nobility that were later included in the Russian Jewish Pale of Settlement. These communities were marked by traditional rabbinical practices fiercely contesting the rising Hasidic movement, which increasingly gained influence among the impoverished, uneducated masses.[7] The Industrial Revolution dealt a severe blow to the *shtetl* economy, based on artisanal livelihoods, while the spread of enlightenment ideals continued to erode the centrality of the synagogue in Jewish life. Integration into national societies through public education, military service, and labor markets facilitated the adoption of secular political ideologies superseding traditional religious frameworks. The long-term impact of the efforts of the *Maskilim*, the Jews who embraced enlightenment and adapted synagogues and religious customs to modernize Jewish life, and the uneven Jewish emancipation across various European nations created new political options. In massive numbers and enthusiastically, Jews started to live according to their own interpretations of Jewish identity and followed conscious strategies for integration into a wide range of nation-states.

But this was not the only massive trend regarding Jews in Europe. The expansion of rail networks across Europe facilitated the migration of Jewish artisans from the *shtetl* to seek new livelihoods in distant urban centers and eventually to other countries alongside their families. The harsh living conditions for millions of impoverished Jews, compounded by the pogroms of the Russian Empire in 1881, produced massive migrations toward the new continent and toward the project of Jewish colonization in Palestine.[8] The migrants brought with them their traditions and political ideas; furthermore, the Jewish press in Yiddish and other languages, as well as the circulation of intellectuals, journalists, artists, and migrants of all kinds, contributed to ensuring

[6] Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).
[7] Viktor Karády, *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era: A Socio-Historical Outline* (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2004).
[8] [*Editorial note*: Words like “colonization” and “Palestine” have meant different things and held varied connotations in different contexts. Palestine is a geographical territory that currently lacks formal borders but has been bounded by controlling powers at different points in history. We have chosen to leave "Palestine" as is throughout this journal, although this reference is specifically to the British Mandate of Palestine. It is also important to note that debates, context, and language about colonialism, Zionism, and the State of Israel have shifted over time. We have a different understanding of colonialism from our historical vantage point than the persecuted 19th century European Jewish community, or Jews from the Middle East and North Africa who would eventually find refuge in Israel. During the early stages of the Zionist movement, the land people now refer to as Israel and Palestine, was part of the Ottoman and British Empires. Some early Zionists, who came of age at the very start of the shift toward nation-states, used the term “colony” or “colonization” in the hopes of establishing an autonomous zone to ensure national self-determination for the Jewish people within their ancestral homeland inside of those empires.]

that many of the political currents followed by Jews had a vibrant transnational dimension for which the waters of the Atlantic were no border. In 1885, in what became known as the Pittsburgh Platform, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) formally rejected Zionism in response to these new influences, maintaining that Judaism was solely a religion rather than a nationality. Many Reform Jewish leaders feared that support for Zionism could raise questions about their loyalty as American citizens.

Gradually, Jews were allowed to join European political movements and parties without relinquishing their cultural identity or religious faith. They also started to establish Jewish variants of these movements. In 1896, prompted by the social integration challenges highlighted by the Dreyfus affair, Theodor Herzl penned *The Jewish State*, and in the following year, the inaugural Zionist Congress convened in Basel in 1897. Zionism offered a national vision for the Jewish people.[9] It was the Jewish version of the nationalisms that struggled to flourish in a context of declining multinational empires. The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) was also founded in 1897 as a federation representing various Zionist movements. However, Zionism was not the only Jewish option. That very same year, in Vilna, Jewish workers' activism led to the creation of the Bund, representing the General Union of Jewish Workers of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia.[10] The Bundists subscribed to Jewish autonomism, which championed their cultural identity without conceiving of themselves as a nation and, therefore, without aspiring to the creation of their own state.[11]

As a result of historical processes and events, Jewish identity was shaped by a nuanced interplay between ethnic and religious affiliations, navigating the competing loyalties imposed by nation-states and social classes. Moreover, amidst war and revolution, Eastern Europe's dense Jewish populations rendered them central to intense political debates and social accusations. In 1902, the Tsar's secret police fabricated the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a Jewish conspiracy theory which supposedly narrated the discussions during the first Zionist congress. The *Protocols* were published massively for the first time in the context of the revolution of 1905, proving useful to the Tsarist repressive forces. This was the first time that Zionism was used to formulate a conspiracy theory. However, opposition to Zionism was at that time, above all, an internal matter of the Jewish people. Jews who actively opposed Zionism came from three broad groups, which can be divided as follows: those who adhered to Jewish religious traditions for which the creation of a Jewish state would only be possible with the coming of the Messiah; those who had assimilated or integrated into the national societies in which they lived to the point of having

[9] Arthur Hertzberg (Ed.), *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2014), e-book.
[10] Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From Its Origins to 1905* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).
[11] Among the leading thinkers of Jewish autonomism was the historian Simon Dubnow, assassinated by the Nazis in 1941.

abandoned Jewish identification, or who understood it only in its religious form; and leftists who aspired to revolution as a universal solution to human problems. It is worth noting that the majority of Jews who did not embrace Zionism were non-Zionists, and not anti-Zionists.

During the First World War, Jews served on both sides of the trenches, navigating the conflicting demands of national allegiances and experiencing the army as a form of social integration.[12] The territories with the highest concentration of Jewish population were precisely those that served as battlegrounds between the warring factions, which produced new waves of refugees and massive migrations. By then, the Jewish presence in Russian communism was prominent. Lenin's authorization of the Jewish section within the Soviet Communist Party (CP), the *Yevsektsiya*, in October 1918 underscored the Bolsheviks' approach to the Jewish people.[13] That authorization would have long-term consequences, as Jewish sections were created around the world answering to the various communist parties.

Just two years later, while the Russian Civil War was unfolding — in which England supported the Whites against the Red Army — Zionism attracted the attention of those who thought of the world as a chessboard. Winston Churchill's notable article "Zionism Versus Bolshevism," published in the *Illustrated Sunday Herald* in February 1920, portrayed Zionism as a counterforce to Soviet influence.[14] The article can be understood today as a demonstration of the growing geopolitical significance of Zionism, its real and imagined role within global struggles.

Since Churchill's article, Zionism first and later the State of Israel, have continued to be at the center of global disputes. The fact is that the economic consequences of the Industrial Revolution, the pogroms, and the First World War caused massive Jewish migration from Europe toward the new continent and Palestine. In the first case, a nation in full development offered freedom and prosperity. In the second, the Zionist project was beginning to take shape. Within a few years, the global Jewish demographic began to transform completely, and the changes were further accentuated by the extermination policies pursued by Nazi Germany during the Second World War (see Table 1). The Jews who arrived in the United States brought in their luggage the various cultural, religious, and political traditions they had embraced. The great demographic explosion occurred between 1880 and 1924 and became visible in cities such as New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia.

Table 1: Jewish Population in Palestine / Israel, the US and Europe by Year

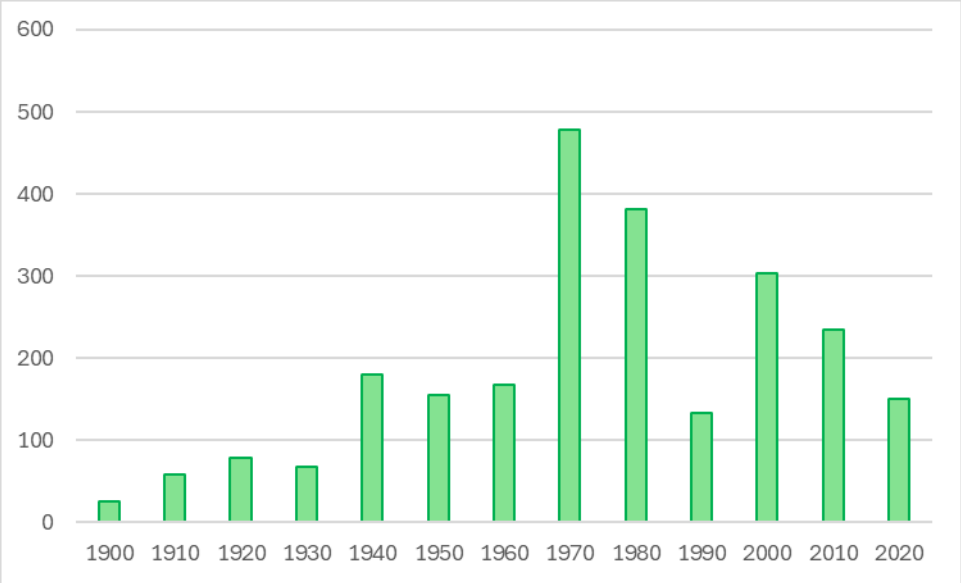
[12] Derek J. Penslar, *Jews and the Military: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
[13] Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "Lenin, Jews, and Power," in *Lenin's Jewish Question* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 64–107.
[14] Martin Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews: A Lifelong Friendship*, 1st ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007).

DATE	In Palestine / Israel	In USA	In Europe
1870	~7,000–10,000	250,000	~6,800,000
1880	~24,000	300,000	~7,800,000
1890	~43,000	450,000	~9,000,000
1900	~50,000	1,000,000	~9,500,000–10,000,000
1910	~85,000	2,000,000	~11,000,000
1920	~84,000	3,300,000	~9,500,000
1930	~175,000	4,200,000	~9,800,000
1940	~450,000	4,800,000	~9,000,000
1945	~554,000	—	~3,800,000
1950	~1,200,000	5,000,000	~4,500,000
1960	~1,900,000	5,500,000	~3,200,000
1970	~2,600,000	5,900,000	~3,000,000
1980	~3,300,000	5,800,000	~2,500,000
1990	~3,900,000	5,500,000	~2,000,000
2000	~4,900,000	5,700,000	~1,700,000
2010	~5,800,000	6,500,000	~1,400,000
2020	~6,800,000	7,100,000–7,600,000	~1,300,000
2025–2026	~7,200,000–7,300,000	—	~1,200,000–1,300,000

On the Jewish population in the United States, see: American Jewish Year Book, https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-78706-6 (no official continuous census of Jews in the United States exists by decade; all figures prior to the twentieth century are historical estimates made by demographers); Pew Research Center, "The Size of the U.S. Jewish Population," - https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/the-size-of-the-u-s-jewish-population/ (for 2020, leading academic estimates place the American Jewish population between 7.1 and 7.6 million, depending on the definition used: "Jews by religion," Jewish ancestry, cultural identity, etc.). On the Jewish population in Europe, see: Holocaust Encyclopedia, "Jewish Population of Europe in 1933," https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/es/article/jewish-population-of-europe-in-1933-population-data-by-country (before World War II, Europe concentrated the majority of the world's Jewish population; in 1933 there were approximately 9.5 million Jews in Europe, over 60% of the world total); Pew Research Center, "Europe's Jewish Population," - https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/02/09/europes-jewish-population/ (after the Holocaust, the population fell to approximately 3.8 million in 1945, and continued to decline due to emigration to Israel and the United States, low birth rates, assimilation, and mass emigration from the former USSR in the 1990s).

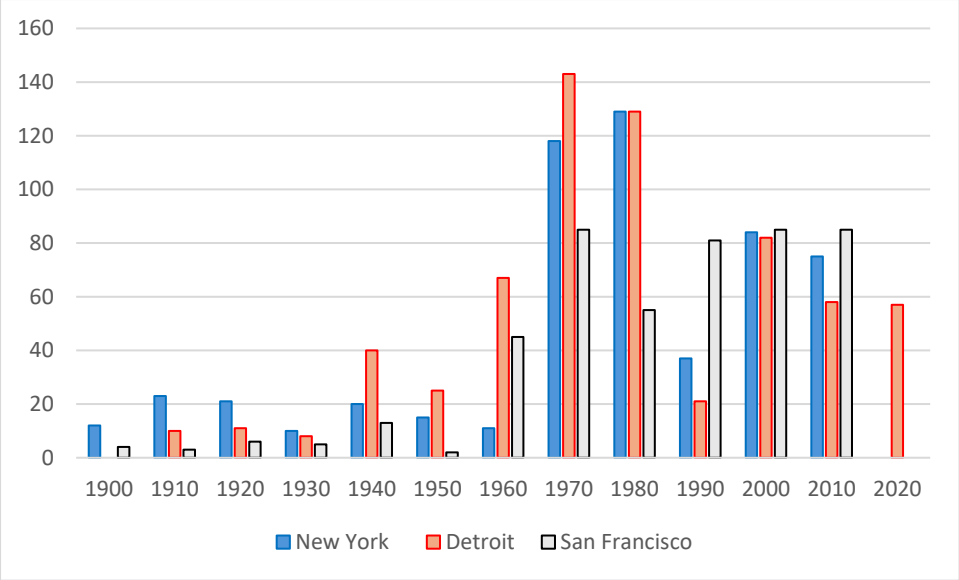
The quantitative analysis of the appearance of the term "anti-Zionism" across a broad selection of English-language Jewish press outlets in the United States serves as a first approach to the phenomenon. From 1900 through October 2023, there were 2,416 articles which mentioned anti-Zionism (Graph 1). It can be clearly observed that the peak occurred during the 1970s. This is not coincidental. As this article will demonstrate, the discussion surrounding Zionism and anti-Zionism is closely linked to the international political agenda affecting both Israel and the United States, as well as to its expressions in domestic politics. For this article, and due to the large number of sources, I paid particular attention to the cities of New York, Detroit, and San Francisco, as they presented the highest number of cases (Graph 2).

Graph 1: Number of Articles with explicit mentions to "anti-Zionism" in US the Jewish Press by year



The table considers the digitalized press media accessible through the Historical Jewish Press project led by the National Library of Israel. By segmenting the number of mentions by city, the following information is obtained: Detroit (651), New York (555); San Francisco (469); Indianapolis (264); Chicago (157), Los Angeles (111); Denver (80); Minneapolis – Saint Paul (70); Louisville (41); Saint Lous (11); Baltimore (3); New Orleans (2); Cincinnati (1).

Graph 2: Number of Articles with explicit mentions to "anti-Zionism" in US Jewish Press of New York, Detroit and San Francisco by year



Total number by city and publication: **New York,** 555 articles: *The Jewish Week* (392) *The New Palestine* (125); *The Maccabean* (16); *The American Jewish Chronicle* (12); *The Hebrew Standard* (10). **Detroit,** 651 articles: *Detroit Jewish News* (608); *The Detroit Jewish Chronicle* (43). **San Francisco,** 469 articles: *Jewish News of Northern California*

UNTIL THE CREATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

In New York, the first explicit mention of anti-Zionism appeared in *The Maccabean* in 1902. The article titled "The Zionist Movement and the Jewish Colonization Association" bore the signature of Israel Zangwill, as it was a reproduction of the speech that the British Zionist leader — a close collaborator of Herzl — had delivered at the Basel Congress the previous year. It was the Fifth Zionist Congress, at which the Jewish National Fund was founded, known as KKL by its Hebrew phonetic acronym. The objective of the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael was to purchase and develop land in Palestine. Herzl was still participating, and interrupted Zangwill's speech on more than one occasion. Urging that economic efforts be concentrated solely on the agricultural and industrial enterprise in Palestine rather than dispersed across other projects, Zangwill argued that it was necessary to "redeem" the Jewish "ancient homeland." They had abandoned it, he explained, because it had been destroyed. He called for patience, as the objective would take time, and toward the close he said:

> In the year 68, when Titus hovered round Jerusalem, the father of anti-Zionism, Jochanan ben Zaccai, escaped from the Holly City in a coffin and fled to the Roman camp. He had persuaded himself Jews could live without a country, by Torah alone. Tonight, 1833 years later, I stand here and see the delegates from all the lands of the Exile who still cry "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning." That is miracle enough. Zionism is living and anti-Zionism is again in its coffin.[15]

[15] Israel Zangwill, "The Zionist Movement and the Jewish Colonization Association," *The Maccabean*, Feb 1, 1902, 14.

As is clear from the excerpt, the label "anti-Zionist," as Zangwill applied it, referred to Jews who believed that the Jewish people could live without a country of their own in their historical land — in this case, believing that preserving their religion was sufficient. Also, in the case of San Francisco, we can see that in those times "anti-Zionists" formed part of a current of opinion within the Jewish people.

In this case, we find the term in a column written by Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger in 1905 for the bulletin he had founded and in which he served as director. It was the bulletin of the Emanu-El congregation, where he had officiated since 1886. Born in Amsterdam, where he graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary, he arrived in the United States at the age of nineteen. He continued his training at the Hebrew Union College and served as rabbi in various cities across the country. At the time of writing that column, he also worked as professor of Semitic languages and literature at the University of California. He was furthermore the author of a book on the life and work of Moses Mendelssohn.[16] The use of the term "anti-Zionism" appears in his call for the defense of Jewish victims of the pogroms that took place in the context of the Russian Revolution of 1905. In it, he proposed that Jews around the world organize to protest before Russia, since no one else had the courage to do so. It was necessary for Jews to organize internationally, setting aside their differences, in order to assist their brothers in Russia in the pursuit of freedom. What he proposed was to raise money to promote the ideas of freedom in the Russian press through those best equipped to do so. He thus issued the following call to action:

> Ye men of Israel, put aside your reform and your orthodoxy. Put aside your Zionism and your anti-Zionism. Put aside your geographical prejudices and antipathies. And in every community throughout the world, unite, unite! One million of Jews, contributing one dollar per annum to a common fund, can raise a million dollars per annum! A million dollars is a tremendous weapon of defense. … The idea looks to us so simple and so practical that we will organize the SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF JEWISH RIGHTS IN SAN FRANCISCO. Perhaps the coast will follow. Perhaps the country will follow. Our plan may be crude but it is sound to the core.[17]

This passage demonstrates that at the time it was by no means far-fetched to conceive of projects that would bring together Zionists and non-Zionists. Furthermore, Rabbi Voorsanger was not the only one to harbor the ideas expressed in the context of the Russian pogroms.

In fact, the following year the American Jewish Committee (AJC) was founded by a group of Jews of German origin, as a response to the Kishinev pogroms. among whose tasks the defense

[16] Previously he had served as editor of *The Jewish South* (Houston, TX) and *Sabbath Visitor*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Cyrus Adler and Frederick T. Haneman, "Voorsanger, Jacob," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14733-voorsanger-jacob; Acc: 08/11/26. J. Leon Magnes, "Jacob Voorsanger," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, no.17 (1909): 224–26, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43057814. Acc: 08/11/26.
[17] Jacob Voorsanger, "Random Thoughts," *Jewish News of Northern California*, Dec 1, 1905, 5.

of Jewish rights is still counted. During World War I, the AJC created the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) to provide support to the Jews in eastern Europe, who were its main focus and only cooperated on specific issues with the Zionists within the American Jewish Congress.[18] The American Jewish Congress was founded in 1918 with the aim of creating a unified organization capable of representing the interests of American Jews in the context of the Paris Peace Conference. Its primary objectives were to combat antisemitism and defend Jewish rights. The initiative for its establishment originated with Bernard G. Richards, and the organization brought together prominent Jewish leaders and groups, including Rabbi Stephen Samuel Wise and Justice Louis Brandeis. The Congress adopted a democratic organizational structure and included both Zionist and non-Zionist members.

In Detroit, the first mentions of anti-Zionism we find appear in four different articles, all of them published in December 1917 by *The Jewish Chronicle*, which had been founded in March of the previous year.[19] These were auspicious times for Zionist hopes, as in November 1917 the Balfour Declaration had taken place, in which the British government gave its approval to the establishment of a "Jewish national home in Palestine."[20] In an extensive column that began on the front page, Elsie K. Sulzberger offered a feminine perspective on the following question: "Are Anti-Zionism and Zionism Irreconcilable." Sulzberger was a woman active in Jewish and secular life, recognized for her leadership in the National Council of Jewish Women, in the Jewish League of Women of Detroit, and a pioneer in birth control education from the early twentieth century. She worked for this latter cause in the Michigan Birth Control League and as vice president of the Detroit Maternal Health Section. Her work was key to the establishment of three birth control clinics in the Detroit area, founding the first one in 1927.[21] Let us pay attention to her reflections on anti-Zionism in times of enthusiasm for the Balfour Declaration.

> By their very definitions Zionism and Anti-Zionism are incompatible, if not inimical. But I truly believe that this is proof of the limitation of language and not of Jewish heart. Zionism in its strictest sense, is an antique ideal, and anti-Zionism itself old fashioned. … In short, between Zionists and Anti-Zionists of the broadest type there remains but one point of difference, and that difference is a mere uncertainty. They cannot agree as to whether the future Jewish settlement at Palestine shall be “nation”, “state” or “colony”, and to what extend it shall be autonomous.[22]

[18] Thomas A. Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism, 1942–1948* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990).
[19] The paper was renamed *The Detroit Jewish Chronicle* in 1919.
[20] Arthur J. Balfour to Walter Rothschild, November 2, 1917 (Balfour Declaration): Wikisource: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Balfour_Declaration. Acc: 08/11/26.
[21] Susan Roth, "Elsie K. Sulzberger 1884–1977," *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, Jewish Women's Archive, https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/sulzberger-elsie-k. Acc: 08/11/26.
[22] Elsie K. Sulzberger, "Are Anti-Zionism and Zionism Irreconcilable? The Woman's Viewpoint," *The Jewish Chronicle,* Dec 28, 1917, pp. 1 and 7.

In the excerpt, the notion of "anti-Zionism" to which Sulzberger referred generically encompasses a diverse collective of Jews who were not convinced of the Zionist project based on the construction of a country. Whether from religious positions or secular assimilationist ones, Jewish opposition to the Zionist movement — which was frequently exercised passively, through simple indifference and without recognizing itself as "anti-Zionist" — expressed the tension between particularism and universalism inherent in the history of the Jewish people. It should also be noted that Jews were strongly represented within communist and other left-wing movements.[23] From 1917 to 1922, Jewish groups and individuals opposed to Zionism expressed their views through publications and newspapers. They portrayed Zionism as an alien, discriminatory, and divisive ideology that conflicted with American values. These critics often argued that the Zionist movement threatened American liberty and fostered anti-Semitic attitudes.

While their criticism reflected deep ideological differences, it also revealed growing concerns among assimilated German Reform Jews about losing the influential position they had held within American Jewish society since the 1870s. During the 1920s, however, many organizations and individuals shifted from anti-Zionism to non-Zionism. Non-Zionists generally supported the development of a cultural and religious center in Palestine but did not endorse the establishment of a Jewish state or identify with the political objectives of the Zionist movement.[24] Among those Jews who actively opposed Zionism, the prevailing idea was that a Jewish state was unnecessary or even harmful. This type of discussion made its presence felt in letters to the editor published by the *New York Times* as early as 1922. In October of that year, the proposal of Reform Rabbi Louis Israel Newman had already become known; concerned about the impact of the *numerus clauses* on future generations of American Jews, he promoted the creation of a Jewish university. His ideas, published first in the *Jewish Tribune* and in 1923 in the form of a pamphlet titled *A Jewish University in America?*, have been considered the impulse that gave rise to the founding of Brandeis University twenty-five years later.[25]

Stephen Gottheil Rich, a renowned stamp collector, wrote to the editor of the *New York Times* to refute Newman's ideas under the title "A Needless University." In his opinion, the proposal for a Jewish university was the "logical culmination of the anti-American activities of the Zionists during the last two and a half decades." He argued that "Zionist and Jewish nationalist" propaganda had succeeded in convincing the public that by virtue of having been born into the "Jewish church" a person did not belong to the American people. From his point of view, establishing a Jewish university would only serve to "perpetuate the isolation which the Jews have

[23] Jewish participation was particularly significant within the Communist Party of the United States between the 1920s and the 1950s.
[24] *Jews against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism, 1942–1948.*
[25] Zev Eleff, "'The Envy of the World and the Pride of the Jews': Debating the American Jewish University in the Twenties," *Modern Judaism* 31/2 (Jan 2011): 229–44.

brought to themselves." He denied that there was any discrimination in colleges and universities and believed that Zionism as a form of Jewish nationalism would achieve the opposite of the end it claimed to pursue. It would succeed in convincing the American people that Jews wished to remain a foreign group. In Gotheil Rich's words, Zionism would achieve:

> …to make American of Jewish faith, whose ancestors have been in this country for several generations, quietly slip out of their church into others by marriage or otherwise. The effect on this direction, due to Zionism, is marked and is increasing. … The Jewish university is needless; it is harmful to Jews and to Americans; it is an idea based upon a fundamental misunderstanding. The less heard of it the better.[26]

Several things deserve to be highlighted about this letter of explicit opposition to Zionism. First, it was expressed in the *New York Times*, and not in the Jewish press. We may consider it the first reader's letter that was in practice anti-Zionist.

It is telling that its author showed concern for the effects of Zionism on Americans "of the Jewish church" who had lived in the country for several generations. Indeed, it appears to be an American example of what was also happening in Western European countries, where Jews well integrated into society feared that their loyalty to the country would be called into question should they adhere to the Jewish national cause. Ultimately, what the author of the letter argued with respect to a hypothetical Jewish university could just as well have been said with respect to the projected Jewish state to which the Zionists aspired. Seven years before this *New York Times* reader sent his letter, ideas contrary to his own were beginning to take shape and become hegemonic. In 1915, Louis Brandeis had stated: “To be good Americans, we must be better Jews, and to be better Jews, we must become Zionists.”[27] For Brandeis, who graduated with honors from Harvard University and was the first Jew to serve on the Supreme Court before devoting himself to Jewish and Zionist leadership, there was no contradiction between being a Zionist — supporting the cause of the Jewish people — and being a good citizen of the United States.

The decade of the 1930s posed ominous challenges for European Jews and had effects on the debate surrounding Zionism in the United States. In the Soviet Union, Stalinist policies began to use the term “Zionist” to repress opposition during the great purges.[28] In Germany, the Nazis developed their versions of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, which were propagated through radio broadcasts in the Arab and Islamic world.[29] In the 1930s, in New York, *The New Palestine* —

[26] Stephen G. Rich, "A Needless University," *The New York Times*, Dec 10, 1922.
[27] Arthur Hertzberg (Ed.), *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2014), e-book; Yossi Justman, "Who Gets to Be a Zionist?," Shalom Hartman Institute, https://www.hartman.org.il/who-gets-to-be-a-zionist/. Acc: 08/11/26.
[28] Theodore H. Friedgut, "Soviet Anti-Zionism: Origins, Forms and Development," in *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 30–45.
[29] Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); Idem., *Three Faces of Antisemitism: Right, Left, and Islamist* (Abingdon, UK:

the official organ of the Zionist Organization of America — mentioned the term "anti-Zionism" in nine articles. Upon reviewing these articles, it becomes evident that during this decade the term was also used to refer to the pan-Arab movement opposing Jewish colonization in Palestine. It also appeared in relation to members of the Jewish people, in the form of alarming calls for attention, as it was argued that non-Zionists and anti-Zionists had not diminished in number, even in the face of the Hitler threat.

In 1936, a certain shift in attitude among Bund activists was noted, which contrasted with the persistent opposition to Zionism on the part of Jewish communists in the face of the advancing work in Palestine. In 1937, the CCAR adopted an official position of neutrality on the issue of Zionism, leaving behind its previous opposition. One of the authors of the referred pieces was the intellectual, journalist, and Jewish leader Bernhard G. Richards, founder of the Jewish Information Bureau of Greater New York. Recounting in 1939 the story of Heinrich Elhanan York-Steiner — a Zionist writer and publicist born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire who migrated to Palestine — he cited the latter's explanations of the causes of anti-Zionism in Germany and the United States.

According to York-Steiner, Jews well integrated into the nation and its culture feared that by supporting the Zionist cause their bond with the German or American nation would be weakened. It was December 1939; the Nazis, who had completely excluded Jews from German society with the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, were putting their racial and antisemitic theories into practice in occupied Poland, and entry into British Palestine remained blocked for Jews by the White Paper. In this context, Richards called for a more vigorous defense of the Zionist cause, arguing that it was grounded in democratic values. He also called for redoubled efforts to secure the support of the Jewish majority for the Zionist cause in the United States. The call to struggle in dramatic times included the explicit condemnation of anti-Zionism:

> Enhanced by the tragic need of historic people facing destruction and doom, our educational, economical and organizational campaigns, should today receive support spelling redemption and hope in a time of almost universal gloom and despair. The proposed reformulation of our position is needed not only to guide and to invigorate our own membership, not only to hold the interest and support of the large numbers of organized American Jews, who on every occasion of trial and test stood firmly with us, but also to solidify the gains which the present administration has made, and to be prepared to vanquish any recrudescence of anti-Zionism which, in a period of confusion, may rear its head.[30]

Routledge, 2023); Klaus Holz, *Die Gegenwart des Antisemitismus: Islamistische, demokratische und antizionistische Judenfeindschaft* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005); Matthias Küntzel, *Nazis, Islamic Antisemitism and the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2024).

[30] Bernhard G. Richards, "The Concentration of Zionist Efforts," *The New Palestine*, Dec 29, 1939.

During the 1940s, the Zionist cause and non-Zionist and anti-Zionist positions continued to be interpreted in light of what was occurring on the world stage, as global events were breaking into domestic affairs.

Take, for instance, the piece published in Detroit on November 20, 1942, by *The Jewish News*. The newspaper announced on its front page that "Jewish Anti-Zionists given severe rebuke by 733 Rabbis," and the subtitle anticipated: "Joint statement issued by leaders of all sections of religious Jewry in America, including heads of rabbinical associations, brands anti-Zionism as 'departure of Jewish religion' … Michigan Rabbis join in condemnation." The newspaper clarified that seven rabbis from Detroit were included in this condemnation of Jewish anti-Zionism, calling it a "cruel blow" to the Jewish people. The declaration stated that "the defeat of Hitler will not of itself normalize Jewish life in Europe." In fact, "Europe will be so ravaged and war-torn that large masses of Jews will elect immigration to Palestine as a solution to their personal problems." The declaration refuted the idea that Zionism was a secularizing movement and, on the contrary, affirmed that it was rooted in the Jewish religion.[31]

Despite the significance of that conference and its historic declaration, not all rabbis wished to abandon their rejection of Zionism based on the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. In fact, 1942 was also the founding year of the American Council for Judaism (ACJ), in which Reform rabbis led by Louis Wolsey reacted to the rapid expansion of Zionism. The ACJ was the only Jewish organization created in the United States with the explicit purpose of combating Zionism and the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, and for a long time it was the only one. In 1943, the organization came to be led by Lessing J. Rosenwald and Rabbi Elmer Berger, who successfully transformed it into a secular anti-Zionist pressure group composed mainly of secular, middle and upper-middle class Jews of German origin. The ACJ came to represent considerable opposition to Zionism, growing from the 67 members it counted in 1943 to 14,000 distributed across 37 local branches in the country's major cities. The leading members of the ACJ were of German origin, as was also the case among the leadership of the AJC. However, by 1942, the AJC had aligned itself with specific Zionist objectives consistent with the Balfour Declaration, although it did not fully endorse the movement's program for the establishment of a Jewish state.[32]

With the appearance of the ACJ, the dispute between Zionists and anti-Zionists formally came to occupy a place in domestic politics. In fact, the only letter to the editor of the *New York Times* that mentions the term "anti-Zionism" during the decade was sent by a Zionist activist and explicitly mentions the ACJ and its leadership. With the war already over, but while the British Mandate still endured, the press secretary of the Jewish Agency for Palestine wrote to the

[31] "Jewish Anti-Zionists given severe rebuke by 733 Rabbis," *The Jewish News*, Nov 20, 1942, p.12.
[32] Thomas A. Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism, 1942–1948* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990).

newspaper to draw attention to what he considered the misuse of the term "Zionist" in past articles. As he explained, the term "Zionist" did not apply to the Irgun Zvai Leumi, the Stern Group, the American League for a Free Palestine, or the Hebrew Committee for National Liberation. He characterized them as terrorist organizations or supporters of terrorism, and added:

The Zionist movement has always maintained that the Jews possess all attributes of nationhood like the French, the Spanish, etc., with the unfortunate exception of not possessing a state of their own. Parenthetically, we wish to point out that once a Jewish state is established, Jews outside Palestine will owe no allegiance to the Jewish state in Palestine, just as Frenchmen who are citizens of the United States do not owe allegiance to France.

> The Hebrew Committee, representing a handful, has repeatedly denied this thesis, and maintains that the Jews throughout the world have only religion in common, a view shared by anti-Zionist Jews such as Lessing Rosewald and the American Council for Judaism.[33]

FROM THE CREATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL TO THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The extermination of millions of Jews and the creation of the State of Israel fundamentally impacted the experience of Jews in the United States and their organizations. This experience was at all times characterized by the reinvention of their identities in such a way that they could preserve Jewish particularity in forms adapted to American society.[34] In 1950, David Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, and Jacob Blaustein, president of the AJC, defined their vision of the relationship between the new country and the Jews of the diaspora. Americans could offer cooperation but should not attempt to influence the internal politics of Israel; for its part, the Jewish state would speak only on behalf of Israeli citizens.[35] Indeed, the materialization of the Jewish state — which had been the objective of Zionism — brought about the rapprochement of individuals and communities that had previously been indifferent or opposed.

The process of moving closer to Zionism, started years before, became more pronounced following the establishment of the State of Israel. The new reality generated new positions, but these were laden with intense internal debates within each organization.[36] The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) was officially founded in 1951 by Isaiah

[33] P. Beck, "Term 'Zionist' Protested," *New York Times*, Dec 31, 1946.
[34] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
[35] David Ben-Gurion, "American Jews and the Diaspora: The Ben-Gurion–Blaustein Agreement," Aug 23, 1950, republished in *American Jewish Year Book* 53 (1952): 564–68, http://najcisraelcovenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Ben-Gurion-Israel-and-the-Diaspora-The-Ben-Gurion-Blaustein-Agreement.pdf.: Acc. 08/11/26.
[36] Geoffrey Levin, *Our Palestine Question: Israel and American Jewish Dissent, 1948–1978* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024).

L. Kenen, who had begun its work several years earlier. At the time, its primary mission was to support the State of Israel, which was absorbing large numbers of refugees and immigrants. Over the years, the organization evolved into one of the most influential lobbying groups in the United States, working to strengthen relations between the United States and Israel.

In relation to the international context, the debates surrounding Zionism and anti-Zionism were defined by the dispute between the United States and the Soviet Union. Thus, throughout the 1950s, "anti-cosmopolitan" campaigns propagated anti-Zionist slogans and rallying cries within the Communist Bloc that recycled the antisemitic stereotypes previously employed by Nazism. The principal innovation was the equation of Zionism with Nazism, and the display of Stars of David placed alongside swastikas, in the context of the Slánský trial of 1952, which formed part of the purge of the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.[37] The word "Zionist" began to be used within the Communist Bloc to designate those who became targets of internal repression.[38] However, while Soviet "anti-Zionist" policies were beginning to be denounced in the Jewish press and numerous conferences were being held on the subject, in the United States "anti-Zionists" continued to form part of the communal debate. For example, Rabbi Solomon Goldman of Chicago praised a newspaper, stating that it was:

> The only anglo-Jewish paper which presents objectively and reviews critically the American Jewish scene. Religion, irreligion, Zionism and anti-Zionism, Orthodoxy, conservative and reform, the B'nei B'rith, the American Jewish Committee, the American Council for Judaism; all of them are reported and surveyed without prejudice.[39]

The dispute between Zionists and anti-Zionists had not disappeared, and among Zionists there were those who believed their adversaries were on the rise.

This was expressed, for example, by "a well-known writer" who signed under a pseudonym the piece in which he analyzed the strategy of the ACJ. In his opinion, its small

[37] Jeffrey Herf, ed., *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism in Historical Perspective: Convergence and Divergence* (London: Routledge, 2007); Robert S. Wistrich, ed., *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990); Robert S. Wistrich, "Anti-Zionist Myths on the Contemporary Left," in *From Ambivalence to Betrayal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 509–34; Robert S. Wistrich, "The Holocaust Inversion of the Left," in *From Ambivalence to Betrayal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 448–78; Robert S. Wistrich, "Antisemitism and Holocaust Inversion," in *Antisemitism Before and Since the Holocaust*, ed. Anthony McElligott and Jeffrey Herf (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 37–49; Meir Kotik, *The Prague Trial: The First Anti-Zionist Show Trial in the Communist Bloc* (New York: Herzl Press, 1987); Angelika Timm, "Ideology and Realpolitik: East German Attitudes towards Zionism and Israel," *Journal of Israeli History* 25/1 (2006): 203–22; Dariusz Stola, "Anti-Zionism as Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967–1968," *Journal of Israeli History* 25/1 (2006): 175–201; Simon Gansinger, "Communists Against Jews: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland in 1968," in *Mapping the New Left Antisemitism*, ed. Alan Johnson (London: Routledge, 2024), 122–30.

[38] Those who appreciate good cinema can see in the film *The Confession*, by Costa-Gavras, based on the memoirs of one of the survivors of that staged trial, how one of the interrogators coached one of the condemned to admit to being a "Zionist."

[39] "What They Say About the Jewish Post," *The New Palestine*, Jan 1, 1952.

membership should have condemned it to marginality. Nevertheless, the "anti-Zionists" and "anti-Israelis" managed to project representativeness due to the growing strength of the American Council for Judaism. He argued that this organization was at its peak because it employed the rhetoric of salesmen, made use of the dual loyalty accusation, and exploited the endorsement of prominent figures.[40]

This view of anti-Zionism as a serious threat coexisted with its opposite, which proclaimed its extinction. The prevailing optimism found its principal argument in the fact that the new generation of American Jews was creating its own culture and leaving past conflicts behind. For example, during the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, Dr. Judah J. Shapiro and Sidney Z. Vincent stated:

> …the old conflicts in American Jewish life are fading: "yiddishisms vs. Hebraism", "Zionism vs. anti-Zionism", "socialist" ideas vs. "capitalist" ideas, even the traditional Reform – Conservative-Orthodox division for the most part is beyond bitterness. …Now largely native born, American Jews are building an indigenous American Jewish life, blending the best Jewish ideals and traditions with the democracy of the American environment.[41]

In June 1967, the Six-Day War consolidated the spheres of influence of the United States and the Soviet Union in the Middle East. The strategic use of "anti-Zionism" that the Soviet Union had employed within the Communist Bloc began to be exported, becoming part of its arsenal in the dispute with the United States. Soviet propaganda persistently used the word "Zionist" as a synonym for "racist" and "oppressor," describing Israel as a colonialist enterprise.[42] The anti-Zionist campaigns promoted by the USSR and its allies were a weapon for destabilizing the Western democracies led by the United States.[43] As for Jewish activists within the Soviet Bloc and in leftist circles, anti-Zionism began to function as a "loyalty test," "the ultimate proof" before which they were required to demonstrate their "commitment to the cause."[44]

But the novel fact that there were Palestinian populations under Israeli military rule produced new debates and questions among Jews in the United States. A new form of Jewish opposition emerged, linked to moral concerns and grounded in criticism of the policies of the State of Israel.[45] All of this took place in the context of growing opposition to the Vietnam War, the

[40] Ben Levi Zvi, "Enemies of Zionism Step Up Campaign," *The New Palestine*, June 1, 1957.
[41] Saul E. White, "The Portion of the week," *The Jewish Community Bulletin*, Nov 27, 1959
[42] Herf, *Three Faces of Antisemitism.*; David Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2017); Izabella Tabarovsky, "Soviet Anti-Zionism and Contemporary Left Antisemitism," in *Mapping the New Left Antisemitism*, ed. Alan Johnson (London: Routledge, 2024), 109–21.
[43] Yehuda Bauer, "Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism — New and Old," in *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 195–207.
[44] Shulamit Volkov, "Readjusting Cultural Codes: Reflections on Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism," *Journal of Israeli History* 25/1 (2006): 51–62.; Sina Arnold, *From Occupation to Occupy: Antisemitism and the Contemporary American Left* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022).
[45] Geoffrey Levin, *Our Palestine Question: Israel and American Jewish Dissent, 1948–1978* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024).

struggle for civil rights, and the rise of the New Left. It is for this reason that the question of anti-Zionism, and whether or not it constituted antisemitism, began to be increasingly linked to the debate surrounding various expressions of the left.

For example, in 1968, Zionist leader Jacques Torczyner stated: "Today anti-Semitism takes on new aspects: it is no longer always called anti-Semitism, but anti-Zionism. Zionists are the victims; Zionists are attacked. And a new anti-Semitism has appeared in the United States, Black anti-Semitism."[46] Nevertheless, it was evident that a prominent number of Jews supported the new radical expressions on the country's political scene. Indeed, the following year, his counterpart Beinesh Epstein argued that Jewish youth participation in revolutionary movements was a constant in history, but that it ultimately proved detrimental to Jewish interests. Communism had diverted young Jews away from Zionism in the times of Hitler's rise to power. "The lessons of the past should apply also to the present problem of the New Left." With regard to the agitation on university campuses, he added that there were Jewish families divided by the political debates in question. His outlook on the matter was deeply pessimistic:

> Some of our public organs woke up to point to the harm our Jewish Leftists are doing to our people by their association with outspoken and anti-Semitic and anti-Israel groups. This, however, can hardly touch the new breed. It is very doubtful whether they can be moved by the specter of the danger their activities may bring to American Jews and Israel. They are strangers without attachment to Jewry or Israel. In fact, they have been brainwashed to hate everything Jewish, and Israel in particular.[47]

In May 1970, the anti-war movement reached its climax with a widespread protest whose intense activity on university campuses was unprecedented. During the strikes, demonstrations and walkouts erupted on more than 700 campuses and drew hundreds of thousands of students.[48] In this context of student unrest, public discussion of anti-Zionism increased, and that year the topic appeared numerous times in the letters to the editor of the *New York Times*. An essay by Philip Green, professor at Smith College, titled "Can it Happen Here? Is it already happening?", published in September, sparked a heated exchange between the author and several readers.[49]

In the opinion of Seymour Graubard, National Chairman of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, Green seemed to excuse the antisemitism of the Black Panthers and their constant calls to destroy Israel, having written: "Even the occasional anti-Semitism of some Panthers, as distinguished from their perfectly legitimate anti-Zionism, is of the crude popular variety that has

[46] Jacques Torczyner, "The ZOA Convention," *The New Palestine*, Nov 1, 1968.
[47] Beinesh Epstein, "Zionism and the Left," *The New Palestine*, May 1, 1969.
[48] The movement was sparked by revelations of a secret U.S. invasion of Cambodia and intensified days later after the killing of unarmed students at Kent State. For detailed information about the strikes and demonstrations visit https://depts.washington.edu/moves/sds_map.shtml: Acc: 08/11/26.
[49] Guenter Lewy, "Fascism: Dead or Alive," *New York Times*, Oct 18, 1970.

existed in almost every Christian nation for centuries." Graubard asked, "Can one really separate their anti-Semitism from their 'anti-Zionism'?" For his part, he presented phrases appearing in Black Panther publications such as "The Zionist fascist state of Israel is a puppet and lackey of the imperialist and must be smashed." Such publications, he explained, accused Israel of every sin, and he asked rhetorically, "Considering their overt anti-Semitism, how are their readers to make the fine supposed distinction between their Zionist 'pigs' and other Jews."[50] With regard to the alleged antisemitism pointed out by Graubard, Green responded:

> As an American I feel absolutely unthreatened by black radicals on those particular grounds (or by anybody else, for that matter); frankly, I think it is self-lacerating fantasizing to picture a real anti-Semitic danger from blacks in the United States. With respect to Israel, of course, the Panthers' anti-Zionism an incredible feeble and pathetic threat. The only effectual American enemies of Israel are the oil companies and their Washington errand boys.[51]

In 1970, the Leningrad trials also took place, concerning an alleged hijacking of a civilian aircraft by individuals who wished to leave the USSR. Among the letters to the editor of the *New York Times*, the Soviet Union's campaigns against Israel and Zionism were repeatedly denounced as antisemitism.[52] During this period, also in the letters to the *New York Times*, accusations of Israel as an apartheid state began to emerge. On university campuses, the discussion surrounding anti-Zionism continued, and students and professors began to appear whose academic proposals were characterized as "anti-Zionist" by Jewish community leaders. At Tufts University, the course "Zionism Reconsidered" was taught by Uri Davis, and later by one of his students, Martin Blatt. Davis had had a fellowship at Brandeis revoked due to his anti-Zionist activism. Professor Gerald Wohlberg, in charge of the investigation into the matter, had explained that according to independent scholars and Middle East experts, the course bibliography fell into the following categories: (1) quasi-scholarly pro-Arab propaganda, (2) non-scholarly trash; (3) classic anti-Zionist Marxist critiques; (4) token outdated Zionist readings; and (5) books by distinguished authors only peripherally related to Zionism.[53]

Following the oil crisis that came in the wake of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, the Soviet Union sought to present itself as the leader of an international "anti-imperialist" alliance, together with the Arab countries and much of the Third World. In 1975, while a growing number of Jews were fighting for their right to leave the USSR and migrate to Israel, the aforementioned international alliance promoted United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with a form of racism. This resolution lent legitimacy to anti-Zionism in its moral

[50] Seymour Graubard, "To the Editor," *New York Times*, Oct 18, 1970.
[51] Philip Green, "Professor Green Reply," *New York Times*, Oct 18, 1970.
[52] Judd L. Teller, "Why the Bolshoi isn't coming," *New York Times*, Dec 12, 1970. Joseph Brandes, "Soviet Threats to Israel," *New York Times*, Dec 16, 1970.
[53] "Boston Jewish Community Hits Tufts U. Anti-Zionism Course," *The Detroit Jewish News*, Aug 31, 1973, 3.

challenge to the State of Israel.[54] On the occasion of Resolution 3379, 14 letters to the editor of the *New York Times* addressed the topic of Zionism and anti-Zionism. Some of them evaluated the diplomatic performance of the United States, the need to reform the international organization that had been born to promote peace and democracy, as well as its prospects for survival. The Union of Jewish Orthodox Congregations of America condemned the resolution, as did individual readers who found it ironic that the most vigorous promoters of the resolution represented countries that "had much to learn" from Israeli democracy.[55]

Among the letters in defense of Zionism sent by Jews, one reader saw in the resolution a new confirmation of how necessary Israel was, while another was unequivocal in his opinion on anti-Zionism. He defined Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people and concluded: "To be anti-Zionist and not antisemitic is like claiming not to be anti-French but not believing in the French people's right to national independence."[56] Similar concepts regarding the indivisible unity between Israel and the Jewish people had previously been expressed in the newspaper by Abba Eban and were now being refuted in the context of the condemnation of Zionism. The secretary general of the Action Committee on American-Arab Relations argued that the defenders of Israel equated Zionism with Judaism in order to accuse their rivals of antisemitism, and added:

> While modern Zionism, as Rabbi Israel Miller has correctly stated, was a response to anti-Semitism and racism, it has evolved into a racist movement of its own. It is a political doctrine claiming that the Jews, as jews, have certain rights denied to others. These include the right to occupy and establish a Jewish state in Palestine. By contrast, Judaism is a religion, linking a Jew to his God in accordance to certain rites and teaching.… The Zionists attempt to shut up criticism of Israel and their racist doctrine by invoking Judaism and claiming that an attack on Zionism is an attack on Judaism. This is nonsense. Zionism is doing damage to Judaism in the process of defending its political ideology.[57]

The arguments put forward in this last letter — according to which Israel was a racist state, Zionists used the accusation of antisemitism to silence their critics, and Zionism was harmful to Judaism — would continue to spread to the present day, embraced by multiple sectors. In 1979, Edward Said published *The Question of Palestine*, a work that became highly influential within

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[54] Zvi Gitelman, "The Evolution of Soviet Anti-Zionism: From Principle to Pragmatism," in *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*, edited by Robert S. Wistrich (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 11–25; Robert S. Wistrich, "The Marxist-Islamist Alliance," in *From Ambivalence to Betrayal* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 563; Arieh J. Kochavi, "Israel and the International Legal Arena," *Journal of Israeli History* 25/1 (2006): 223–44; Anita Shapira, "Israeli Perceptions of Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism," *Journal of Israeli History* 25/1 (2006): 245–66; Joel Fishman, "The Delegitimization—and Relegitimization—of Israel," in *From Antisemitism to Anti-Zionism*, edited by Eunice G. Pollack (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019), 387–404; Rosa Freedman and David Hirsh (Eds.), *Responses to 7 October* (London: Routledge, 2024).

[55] Martina Arroyo, Betty Friedman, Bayard Rustin, Leonard Bernstein, “anti-Zionism resolution: an attack on the UN,” *The New York Times*, Nov17, 1975.

[56] Alan M. Tigay, “How Israel Was Born,” *The New York Times*, Nov 25, 1975.

[57] M.T. Mehdi, “On Defining Zionism,” *New York Times*, Nov 23, 1975.

academic critiques of Zionism and ideological anti-Zionists. Already in the early 1980s, numerous articles appeared on the growth of anti-Zionism and its murky relationship with antisemitism in various parts of the world.

Moreover, emerging in the 1980s, the group known as the Israeli "New Historians" utilized newly declassified documentation on the 1948 war to critique the official narrative surrounding Israel's establishment. It is worth noting, however, that researchers examining this period have never been granted access to Syrian, Jordanian, or Egyptian state archives. The accusations of Israel as racist facilitated the expansion of anti-Zionism in progressive circles where until then Jews who supported Israel had felt comfortable.

For example, at the women's conference organized in Copenhagen by the United Nations, in which anti-Israeli demonstrations were conspicuous; consequently, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, social activist and journalist for *Ms. Magazine*, investigated antisemitism in the feminist movement by interviewing 80 women. Evelyn Tornton recounted that at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, posters promoting a workshop on homophobia and antisemitism had been torn from the walls of buildings advertising the event, from women's restrooms, and from the women's cafeteria. The politician Bella Abzug affirmed that antisemitism was widespread at international women's conferences and stated that anti-Zionism was antisemitism. Elenore Lester, Managing Editor of *The Jewish Week*, said she was struck by having heard a woman shout at the conference: "Golda Meir is not my sister, she is a fascist!" Lester was convinced that the anti-Israeli penetration had begun with the resolution defining Zionism as a form of racism, and it was for this reason that she had co-founded *Lilith*, to provide a feminist expression with a Jewish perspective.[58]

AFTER THE COLD WAR

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR brought an end to their systematic state effort regarding anti-Zionist propaganda of global reach. However, various left-wing traditions and new anti-globalization expressions continued to refer to "Zionism" as an imperialist, racist, fascist, and even Nazi movement. Furthermore, anti-Zionist propaganda in this vein continued to be employed — now with the aid of digital media and satellite television — by the Islamic Republic of Iran. These are the reasons why today the word "Zionist" is used practically as a synonym for "fascist," or as an adjective that discredits the opinion of anyone who defends Israel among those who define themselves as progressives.

Indeed, many American Jews who support the existence of the State of Israel began to feel discomfort in their social spaces of activism. Moreover, the massive and manifest anti-Zionism

[58] Ray Kestenbaum, "Feminist Magazine Exposes Face of Anti-Semitism Inside Women's Movement," *The Jewish Week*, June 13, 1982.

surrounding them began to acquire unmistakable antisemitic traits. The phenomenon did not occur overnight but was rather the result of decades of discourse propagating over the course of a century, which combined with new domestic challenges in a climate of global frustration. With the Soviet Union gone, a period of hope for peace in the Middle East seemed to be opening up, but at the same time, the role of the United States as the hegemonic global superpower meant that all responsibilities fell upon it.

In early 1991, amid the heat of the war in Iraq, the Jewish press of San Francisco reported on the massive demonstration in front of city hall. In it, Bay Area protesters had set out to demonstrate that one could call for peace in the Persian Gulf and support Israel simultaneously. They wore *kippot* and *tallitot*, and some even carried a miniature of the Western Wall or a banner reading "oy vey, there is another way." Ben Shatz, one of the protesters, compared the display of Jewish symbols to the coming out of gays and lesbians. He understood there to be a need for Jews to reclaim their identity before the peace demonstrators who linked the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the Gulf War. Shatz felt rejected by what he defined as antisemitism disguised as anti-Zionism.

According to the report, many Jewish protesters echoed Shatz's sentiments. The anti-war movement, they say, had become "a forum for Jew- and Israel-bashing." In fact, numerous peace protesters through the streets of San Francisco sported Palestinian kaffiyehs and held anti-Israel banners emblazoned with scathing slogans like "We want the U.S. out of the gulf and Israel out of Palestine." Another testimony reflected the complexity of the Jewish dimension in the protest and their relationship with anti-Zionism:

> Many pro-peace Jews, a few of whom take pro-Palestinian position, say that much of the anti-Israel display is legitimate. They nonetheless object to the anti-Semitic tone of some banners and speeches displayed and overheard at the protests. “People told me Jews should go out of Israel and should go back to Europe. A lot of people would like to see Israel disappeared,” said protestor Donna Rabinowitz. “I was torn between going [to the march] with gays and lesbians and going with Jews. I am here with Jews because I’m with Israel. I have to stand by my people.[59]

In 1993, the Oslo Accords sowed hopes of a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but these were left behind with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the escalating violence.

The conflicts of the Middle East became increasingly present in the political debate of the United States; academic discussion surrounding the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism continued to develop, accompanied by an observable growth of anti-Zionism on university campuses, and the growing number of Jews who questioned Israel — or even joined

[59] Garth Wolkof, “Jewish Protesters Search for Voice in Anti-War Movement,” *Emanu-El Jewish Community Bulletin*, Jan 25, 1991.

anti-Zionist expressions — became evident. Nevertheless, the debate surrounding anti-Zionism took place above all in Jewish circles and limited university settings. In fact, the only letter to the editor of the *New York Times* that explicitly touched on the subject during the 1990s was sent from Jerusalem and was written to lament that Arab countries continued to cling to the equation of Zionism with racism.[60] Zionism was not yet on the defensive in the American public sphere.

The hopes of a peaceful resolution between Israelis and Palestinians collapsed throughout the so-called Second Intifada, which extended from 2000 to 2005, claiming numerous lives and further poisoning relations between the two peoples. On September 11, 2001, an unprecedented series of suicide terrorist attacks shocked the world, demonstrating that the forces opposing the United States-led expansion of globalization were formidable. The dangers of distant regions burst into the domestic scene, leaving thousands dead and profoundly affecting the national psyche. Three days earlier, the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism had concluded, which marked the emergence of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS) that portrays Israel as a universal antagonist and presents the Palestinian people as an abstract symbol of the oppressed.[61] That conference, which was heavily funded by the Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, succeeded in giving the anti-Zionist narrative renewed legitimacy, as in 1975. Since then, left-sectors had deployed the same anti-Semitic tropes as propagated by the USSR and have played a key role in normalizing anti-Semitism expressed as anti-Zionism, attacking Israel as "Nazi-like," "apartheid," and "settler-colonial."[62] BDS anti-Zionism, as was the case of Russian tsarist anti-Semitism, is based on disinformation, aggressive propaganda, manipulation, distortion, and isolation of the target.[63]

In the first half of the 2000s, some letters to the editor of the *New York Times* repudiated the anti-Israeli climate that the conference against racism had promoted, while others denounced the "institutionalized racism" and "apartheid" imposed by Israel. There were also letters from readers debating whether anti-Zionism was a form of antisemitism or not, with opinions on both sides. This debate had already reached public relevance and found expression at Brandeis University when, in 2004, a conference was held to discuss antisemitism and anti-Zionism from a historical perspective. The perspectives were varied. David Myers (UCLA) referred to the historically rooted "principled anti-Zionism" of Jews who did not believe Jews constitute a nation

[60] Joseph Lerner, "What Jordan Could Do," *New York Times*, Feb 25, 1992.
[61] Dina Porat, "Anti-Zionism as Antisemitism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism*, ed. Steven Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 448–64; David Hirsh, ed., *The Rebirth of Antisemitism in the 21st Century: From the Academic Boycott Campaign into the Mainstream* (London: Routledge, 2024).
[62] Izabella Tabarovsky, "Demonization Blueprints: Soviet Conspiracist Antizionism in Contemporary Left-Wing Discourse," *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 5/1 (2022): 1–20; Izabella Tabarovsky, "Demonization Blueprints: Soviet Conspiracist Antizionism in Contemporary Left-Wing Discourse," in *The Rebirth of Antisemitism in the 21st Century*, ed. David Hirsh (London: Routledge, 2024), 34–60; Lesley Klaff, "A New Form of the Oldest Hatred: Mapping Antisemitism Today," in *Mapping the New Left Antisemitism*, ed. Alan Johnson (London: Routledge, 2024): 13–27.
[63] Nelly Atlan, "The BDS as an Example of Soviet Political Warfare," *Israel Affairs* 27/1 (2021).

and who argued that the foundation of a state would create great problems. He also referred to the Jewish activists of the Bund, who believed that Zionism was a distraction from the proletarian utopia.

Anita Shapira (TAU) added that there must be differentiation in the analysis, before and after Israel became a state. She also said that the "old myths and prejudices about Jews" were being spread by modern communications; therefore, the idea that Jews rule the world, for example, was even heard in places without any Jewish population. Shulamit Volkov (TAU) emphasized that Israel carried the risks and responsibilities of their policies in the West Bank, but diaspora Jews were the target of antisemitism in Europe. Meir Litvak (TAU) elaborated on the Holocaust denial promoted by Iranian state media, according to which Jews had created "the myth of the Holocaust" to justify the existence of Israel. Iran, Litvak explained, was the most vicious promoter of anti-Zionism because it saw in Israel the embodiment of Western tyranny over Islam. Steven Bayme, National Director of the American Jewish Committee, said that while Jews were not as vulnerable as in the times of the Holocaust — given that 40% lived in Israel, another 40% in the United States, and they had powerful allies — he nonetheless added: "...there are no easy answers to the rise of anti-Semitism."[64]

In 2005, the discussion over the meanings of Zionism and anti-Zionism returned to the pages of the *New York Times*. On this occasion, contributions came from Shlomo Ben-Ami — scholar and politician who held several prominent positions representing Israel — and Avi Shlaim, one of the so-called "new historians" critical of the Zionist narrative. In the letters to the editor, a reader from Haifa questioned Shlaim's argument that Zionism was the enemy of Jews, on the grounds that Israel's constant transgressions of what was "acceptable" in the international arena made it appear as a pariah state. The reader asked why Iran or North Korea were not questioned in the same way, if transgressions of what was "acceptable" were indeed the reason.[65] For his part, the scholar Yehudah Mirsky of Brandeis University linked the reactions against Israel to anti-globalization tendencies, jihadism, and anti-Americanism, adding that they were also — however disturbing it might be to acknowledge — attributable to age-old antisemitism:

> Criticism of Israel is not as such anti-Semitism, by any means. But the virulence and imbalance of those criticisms is explicable only in terms of that history, as is the remarkable and unprecedented adoption of European-style anti-Semitism by many Arabs and Muslims in recent decades.[66]

The following year, the academic and public discussion surrounding Zionism and anti-Zionism gained renewed momentum by virtue of the publication of the book *The Israel Lobby*, by John

[64] Sharon Luckerman, "Defining Hatred: Brandeis Conference puts Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Historical Perspective," *Detroit Jewish News*, Apr 25, 2004, 18.
[65] William Freedman, "Letters Debating Zionism," *New York Times*, Feb 10, 2005.
[66] Luckerman, "Defining Hatred,"18.

Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard University. The principal argument of the book, strongly focused on AIPAC, is that the foreign policy of the United States was being influenced in the interest of Israel rather than in the service of the national interest.

The April 20, 2006, edition of the *New York Times* featured nine letters to the editor reacting both in favor and against. Among the favorable opinions, it was argued that Jews should not apologize for having a lobby in the United States, as many other groups had one as well. It was also noted that if said lobby proved effective, it was because it operated in a democratic environment in which Israel's values inspired sympathy. Other reader letters highlighted the distinction between antisemitism and "anti-Israel policy," and there was also enthusiastic support for the book. The latter was expressed as follows: "I applaud [the book] … Clearly, American Foreign Policy in the Middle East is being driven by strong supporters of Israel to the detriment of American interests."[67] Others, writing from Chicago, denied that criticizing Israel was a taboo:

> Taboos are things people avoid out of fear of ostracism. Here, it seems to me, people proudly proclaim their intention to criticize Israel, noting the danger they face in shattering this supposed taboo, reminding everyone that it is not necessarily anti-Semitic to do so. Quite the opposite of being a taboo, criticizing Israel resembles a kind of intellectual ritual, with its distinct pattern and style.[68]

By 2012, ignorance about Israel, combined with the anti-Israeli sentiment spreading across university campuses, had become alarming to British academics. It was a new global problem. In collaboration with colleagues from Israel and the United States, they created the online journal *Fathom*. Its goal is to defend the "two states for two peoples" paradigm and facilitate critical analysis of contemporary left-wing anti-Semitism.[69]

In 2016, an editorial in *The Jewish News Weekly of Northern California* declared "Intimidating Jewish Students is not Free Speech." The previous week, it recounted, Hillel had invited the mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat, to speak at San Francisco State University about the challenges of governing a culturally diverse city. While some 40 students, almost all Jewish, were preparing to hear him, another 40 students sabotaged the event by shouting anti-Israeli slogans. Those students who disrupted the lecture, the editorial argued, were sheltering behind a misinterpretation of the First Amendment, given that the constitutional right allows individuals to express themselves without government interference or constraints, but "it does not give anyone the right to shut down another individual's speech, that's called bullying." And that type of bullying, the editorial continued, was on the rise on campuses and was focused on a particular group: Jews seen as proxies for Israel who, as such, "they are considered fair game for insults,

[67] Karen Russo, "To the Editor," *New York Times*, Apr 20, 2006.
[68] Chad Levinson, "To the Editor," *New York Times*, Apr 20, 2006.
[69] Alan Johnson, ed., *Mapping the New Left Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2023).

slurs, public humiliation and intimidation." The University of California had approved the previous month a resolution against intolerance, which among other things stated that anti-Semitic forms of anti-Zionism will not be allowed on any U.C. campus. The editorial concluded that this should not be a matter for Jews alone, and called on every right-thinking student, faculty member, and administrator to combat all forms of hatred on campus, including antisemitism.[70]

Indeed, various researchers have expressed deep pessimism regarding the expansion of BDS on campuses and its effects on the academic community. In the opinion of Cary Nelson, BDS has become hegemonic in many universities, defining research agendas and influencing the publishing field.[71] Moreover, this trend has been getting worse since the Hamas attacks of October 2023. According to other scholars, by action or inaction, academia has contributed to the legitimization of anti-Zionism.[72] The anti-Zionist movement has jeopardized the safety and freedom of expression of individuals in academic premises.[73] Many students legitimized Hamas' terrorist attacks as actions of "national liberation" because that is how they are endorsed by many academics.[74] Anti-Zionism as the 21st century expression of antisemitism has even become a fashionable stance.[75]

FINAL REMARKS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

I return here to the questions presented at the beginning of the text. 1) *What are the ideological and intellectual sources of the anti-Zionist movement*? As can be observed in the text, contemporary history has witnessed the emergence of various intellectual and ideological sources that promoted an anti-Zionist discourse. The earliest voices arose among assimilated or even nationalist Jews in Europe prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, their religious Jewish contemporaries, and those adhering to various left-wing currents. As the Zionist project in Palestine progressed, anti-Zionism found expressions originating from Arab nationalism. During the 1960s and 1970s, the awakening of Palestinian nationalism and Soviet propaganda

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[70] "Intimidating Jewish Students is not Free Speech," *The Jewish News Weekly of Northern California,* Apr 15, 2016, p. 26.

[71] Cary Nelson, *Israel Denial: Anti-Zionism, Anti-Semitism, and the Faculty Campaign Against the Jewish State* (Washington, DC: Academic Engagement Network, 2019); Cary Nelson, "From Scholarship to Polemic? A Case Study of the Emerging Crisis in Academic Publishing on Israel," in *Mapping the New Left Antisemitism*, ed. Alan Johnson (London: Routledge, 2024): 223–31.

[72] Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, "The Academic Legitimization of Anti-Zionism and Efforts to Combat It: A Case Study," in *Anti-Semitism on the Campus*, ed. Eunice G. Pollack (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019): 393–413; Eunice G. Pollack, ed., *Anti-Semitism on the Campus* (Academic Studies Press, 2019).

[73] Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "Responding to Campus-Based Anti-Zionism: Two Models," in *Anti-Semitism on the Campus*, ed. Eunice G. Pollack (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019): 414–24.

[74] Cary Nelson, "October 7 and the Antisemitic War of Words," in *Responses to 7 October: Universities*, ed. Rosa Freedman and David Hirsh (London: Routledge, 2024), 88–94; Derek Spitz, "'The Professors and the Pogrom: How the Theory of 'Zionist Settler Colonialism' Reframed the 7 October Massacre as 'Liberation,'" in *Responses to 7 October*, ed. Rosa Freedman and David Hirsh (London: Routledge, 2024), 77–87; Günther Jikeli, "Rain of Ashes Over Elite American Universities," in *Responses to 7 October: Universities*, ed. Rosa Freedman and David Hirsh (London: Routledge, 2024), 67–76.

[75] Jerold S. Auerbach, "Palestinian Identity Theft and the Delegitimization of Israel," in *The Past and Present of a Lethal Ideology*, ed. Eunice G. Pollack (Newton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2017), 215, 225.

exerted significant influence and found common ground with student movements and Black radicalism within the context of the Cold War and opposition to the Vietnam War. It was then that anti-Zionism left its indelible mark on traditional Marxist sectors, those of the so-called New Left, and within academic and intellectual circles. In this sense—in the historical and strictly intellectual sense—it would be correct to assert that distinct forms of anti-Zionism exist.

By the same token, it would even be correct to affirm that not every form of anti-Zionism constitutes a manifestation of antisemitism. However, social reality is not constructed through historical analyses of conceptual positions, but rather through collective, general, and coercive social practices that become independent of the intentions of the individuals who carry them out. Such is the definition of the "social fact" provided by Émile Durkheim in founding the rules of sociological method.[76] In this regard, it becomes far more critical to pay attention to the nature of the anti-Zionist movement that has emerged from the confluence of highly diverse ideological currents and accommodates vastly dissimilar social subjects. According to the anti-Zionist movement ethos, to be progressive, a person must be anti-Zionist. This is a social fact. Anti-Zionism has long ceased to be a theoretical debate among Jews and has come to occupy a position at the very heart of global political conflict.

It is within this context that the following question must be considered. 2) *Are there differences between the sources of anti-Zionism depending on whether they are Jewish or non-Jewish*? Again, at the conceptual level, it remains pertinent to distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish forms of anti-Zionism, or even further, to differentiate between various expressions of anti-Zionism according to their motivating causes. For instance, it must be acknowledged that a major distinction exists, in principle, between those who oppose Zionism as a political ideology because they identify as Jews who do not desire the existence of a Jewish state, those who claim to do so in order to critique specific policies of the State of Israel in Gaza and the West Bank, or those who claim opposition to Zionism in the name of human rights, anti-imperialist, and anti-colonial struggles.

The problem lies in the fact that the contemporary global anti-Zionist movement promotes neither an honest historical debate nor a realistic agenda for the democratization of the Middle East or for peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. It relies on slogans that speak of liberation while implying the eradication of Israelis, such as "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." Furthermore, setting aside the thousands of well-intentioned individuals who join every demonstration, the propaganda animating the movement has been professionally engineered for decades and is massively disseminated by satellite networks like Al-Jazeera, financed and led with political assertiveness by the Iranian government and political actors

[76] Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method and Selected Texts on Sociology and Its Method*, ed. Steven Lukes, translated by W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1982),

around the world sharing similar and deeply focused interests. An activist who joins the anti-Zionist movement motivated by a sincere impulse to fight injustice will discover what Nathan Weinstock discovered. The Belgian historian published his critical book on the State of Israel in 1969 with the goal of bringing the Israeli and Palestinian lefts together. What he uncovered was that both his book and his persona were being instrumentally used in the struggle against the Jewish state.[77] A similar trajectory was followed by Benny Morris, a pioneer among the Israeli "New Historians." Unlike several of his former fellow travelers—who forged careers abroad by systematically attacking the Jewish state—Morris resides in Israel and has asserted that his country must consider the possibility of striking Iran with nuclear weapons.[78] When one realizes that the true objective at stake is one's own extermination, theoretical debate yields to political realism.

Countless individuals, both Jewish and non-Jewish, have participated in the anti-Zionist movement in one way or another until they uncovered underlying ancient anti-Jewish prejudices and a disregard for sincere democratic debate. I refer to the many who were shoved out of demonstrations, denied the right to speak in meetings, or simply labeled as "Zionists" for expressing something that displeased the activist group. The word "Zionist" serves today as a label enabling self-identified progressive anti-Zionists to marginalize opponents in any debate. This term can be weaponized against a Jew or a non-Jew alike, and the social pressure of a movement that has become hegemonic ensures that no one wishes to become its target. This dynamic can unfold in any office, classroom, or public space, far removed from the battlefields where wars are fought with weapons.

Nevertheless, the demonization of Zionism remains linked to military conflict through a continuum of practices. In Fishman's conceptualization, contemporary anti-Zionism operates as an intentional mode of political warfare aimed at undermining Israel's legitimacy and stability via non-military avenues. A key component of this strategy is the systematic rhetorical association of Zionism with racism and colonialism. Rather than offering standard policy critiques, this framework seeks to achieve the state's diplomatic isolation, erode its sovereign entitlements, and delegitimize its historical narrative internationally. Within the dynamics of asymmetric warfare—encompassing nation-states, proxy entities, and diverse social movements—such campaigns pursue the long-term "demoralization" of the state. By delegitimizing Israeli sovereignty, anti-Zionist propaganda aims to sever external support structures and undermine economic stability, positioning global public opinion as the critical arena of contestation.[79]

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[77] Simon Rocker, "Meet the Trotskyist Anti-Zionist Who Saw the Errors of His Ways," *The Jewish Chronicle*, Dec 4, 2014, https://www.thejc.com.

[78] "Benny Morris: Israeli Historian Calls for Nuclear Strike on Iran," *Middle East Eye*, July 1, 2024: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-historian-benny-morris-calls-nuclear-strike-iran. Acc: 08/11/26.

[79] Joel Fishman, "Anti-Zionism as a Form of Political Warfare," in *Anti-Judaism, Antisemitism, and Delegitimizing Israel*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (Lincoln. NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 92–105.

It is precisely at this juncture that Jews who publicly align with the anti-Zionist movement play a pivotal role. These individuals are frequently showcased as living proof that anti-Zionism bears no connection to antisemitism. What remains true, however, is that throughout history, whenever Jews faced intense social pressure, a segment among them attempted to avert a tragic fate by aligning with the dominant and majoritarian group. The irony is that such individuals always remained under suspicion, and vulnerable to targeting. No distinction need be made here between those who acted out of sheer terror—much like the *conversos* during the Inquisitorial era—and those who acted out of pragmatism and professional ambition in subsequent periods. Another typical argument invoked by certain Jewish adherents to the anti-Zionist movement to justify their stance is the invocation of its historical roots. Indeed, various Jewish socialist currents historically opposed the creation of a Jewish state. This argument conveniently omits that Israel is today a concrete reality rather than a speculative project competing with the utopia of proletarian revolution for adherents.

3) *Should the anti-Zionist movement be considered a threat to Jews*? The movement is definitely "harmful" as it is currently operating, for at least three reasons. First, the anti-Zionist movement has matured to the point where it is not only politically influential due to its mobilization capacity and the depth to which its slogans, beliefs, and prejudices have permeated public opinion, but it also provides a collective identity for young people convinced of their progressive stance in an era marked by the absence of grand shared utopias and profound social discontent. Indeed, I can think of no other political movement capable of mobilizing youth to take to the streets in massive numbers united around a single objective. It is precisely this character of an allegedly liberating utopia that has enabled the anti-Zionist movement to draw into its fold environmental sectors and advocates for sexual minorities, for example.

The anti-Zionist movement offers a seemingly noble objective that any person of goodwill would wish to support: "liberating an oppressed people." To present this goal, it has conflated Zionism to the point of rendering it the quintessential symbol of all the evils experienced by humanity over the past two centuries. Consequently, no one who claims to be a Zionist or is perceived as such has a place within the movement. Anti-Zionism, moreover, relies on a diverse set of ideas transformed into dogmas upheld by leaders and figures across academia, the arts, and other spheres of social life. Its apparent spontaneity on the streets should not be confused with the strategic coordination the movement exhibits regarding the campaign against Israel in international forums, multilateral organizations, and on the battlefield. Its action strategy explicitly reflects this, as articulated in the very name of one of the anti-Zionist movement's most visible fronts: "Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions." Like any group, the collective identity of anti-Zionism is defined more through opposition to Zionism than through affinity for the Palestinian people or any other cause.

Furthermore, it is the active anti-Zionists who claim the prerogative to define who is a Zionist and who is not, which policy qualifies, as such, and which does not. One must therefore ask where the dividing line lies between a Zionist and a Jew. The answer is that no such boundary exists in practice. Every Jew becomes a potential suspect of Zionism, as do their associates. Third, anti-Zionism systematically utilizes and promotes ancient antisemitic tropes, particularly conspiracy theories. The sole variation is that where it was once claimed that Jews controlled the world through media and finance, the term "Zionists" is now employed. Numerous scholars and observers have highlighted the continuity between the demonized caricature of Israel and Israelis constructed by anti-Zionism and its medieval Christian counterpart regarding Jews. The same tropes have been transmitted across eras and geographies, passing through the professionalized Nazi and Soviet propaganda machinery to circulate once again in our time. Sad, but true.

Finally, we may now address the core question from the perspective of American society and its foundational values. 4) *What does the anti-Zionist movement represent for democracy*? Any political movement grounded in the demonization of a group fundamentally contradicts democratic values. This is true as a matter of principle, such as the free debate of ideas in public spaces. Anti-Zionism has oftentimes inverted the principle of free expression, hiding behind it to disseminate hate speech and adopt coercive behaviors that silence dissenters. Students and scholars identified with Israel have grown accustomed to feeling threatened or intimidated in various ways. Yet this issue extends far beyond them. Anti-Zionism has normalized hate speech and intimidating practices that undermine the public sphere, intellectual discourse in general, and the democratic principles that purportedly define American society. If the word "Zionist" is validated as a legitimate weapon to delegitimize opponents, the crisis belongs to society as a whole. This is because anyone can eventually be branded a Zionist, and additional epithets can similarly be deployed once such authoritarian logic takes root.

The historical trajectory examined in this article demonstrates that anti-Zionism—regardless of the sincerity expressed by some of its diverse spokespersons—functions as an instrument utilized by foreign powers. History also shows that this weapon proves particularly effective when the United States undergoes periods of domestic strain and when Israel dominates headline news. We are currently navigating precisely such circumstances. American Jews face the challenge of asserting their right to identify with Israel in whatever manner and degree they choose. They also retain the right to remain disengaged from events in Israel, as they are under no obligation to act as experts or issue public statements—just as no Italian-American is expected to account for political developments in Italy. Should American society continue to accept the logic imposed by anti-Zionism, it will fail not only its Jewish citizens, but the very democratic principles that allowed it to flourish. The fact that adopting a harsh stance against Israel has become politically advantageous across both the Republican and Democratic parties clearly

reflects how dominant the anti-Zionist movement has become. Simultaneously, it reveals the inability of contemporary politicians to articulate a constructive platform that inspires hope and credibility. Perhaps, if they were able to offer better employment opportunities and an elevated quality of life, they would not need to expend effort co-opting anti-Zionist ideas. This is deeply regrettable given the monumental challenges facing the United States today.

CONCLUSION

Since the late nineteenth century, the debate between Zionists and anti-Zionists within the Jewish people, and particularly among American Jews, has involved competing visions regarding the most appropriate solutions to the challenges facing Jewish communities around the world. In the United States, this debate led to the creation of a variety of Jewish organizations that, through their development and engagement in public life, contributed to the strengthening of democratic institutions and civic culture. Nevertheless, one fact must be acknowledged. In the United States, anti-Zionism—the opposition to the creation of a sovereign Jewish state—began as an internal debate within American Judaism. Nearly a century later, however, it had evolved into an ideology and political movement largely driven by sectors of the radical left and pro-Palestinian activism, becoming increasingly influential within progressive circles. This contemporary movement encompasses explicit forms of antisemitism, while also including American and Israeli Jews among its supporters. Beyond the United States, anti-Zionist ideology and activism are also promoted by state actors such as Iran. The participation of Jewish individuals in this new form of twenty-first-century anti-Zionism presents a distinct challenge both to Jewish communities and to democratic values.

For several years, a number of observers, journalists, and scholars have suggested that the so-called “golden age” of American Jewry may be coming to an end. Among their principal arguments are the visible rise of antisemitism amid growing political polarization, the weakening of Jewish identity through generational change, and the declining influence of organizations that historically relied upon strong communal attachments. These developments have coincided with increasing tensions in the relationship between the United States and Israel. In any case, the question of whether the golden age of American Jewry is ending cannot be separated from a broader analysis of the state of democracy and the international order—an approach that this article has adopted in examining the history of anti-Zionism.

Indeed, it is difficult to ignore the significant parallels between the period in which Zionism and its opposition first emerged, on the eve of the First World War, and the contemporary era, marked by a vigorous resurgence of global anti-Zionist sentiment. Among these similarities are: (1) intensifying rivalry among major powers within a multipolar international system; (2) a pronounced rise in nationalism; (3) prolonged regional conflicts; (4) political elites that often fail

to grasp the full implications of rapidly changing circumstances; (5) the accelerated development of new technologies; (6) large social sectors that feel economically, politically, or culturally marginalized; (7) terrorism and the erosion of the liberal-democratic consensus; and (8) the emergence of populist movements that channel social discontent through anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric.[80] Taken together, these factors suggest that contemporary anti-Zionist narratives and political activism are unfolding within a broader context of growing international disorder and the weakening of democratic norms and values. The question of the golden age of American Judaism is inseparable from the broader question of the golden age of the United States and the values it once embodied.

In October 2023, following Hamas's terrorist attacks, massive anti-Zionist demonstrations spread across Europe and the United States, even before Israel began its military response. Anti-Zionism, together with its complex and often ambiguous relationship to antisemitism, has become an increasingly prominent feature of contemporary political debate. Understanding this movement is among the central challenges facing Jewish activists and defenders of democratic values more broadly. How can one distinguish between legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and actions and efforts aimed at the destruction of the Jewish state? How can these discussions be conducted within Jewish communities in a spirit of respect and constructive dialogue? How can universities ensure that such debates take place in a manner that is both democratic and safe for all participants? These are new challenges that, as in the past, will inevitably generate intense debate, shifts in political and ideological positions, tensions and dialogue among individuals and organizations. There is no single answer to these questions. Yet it can be argued that American Jews have confronted similarly complex circumstances before. Whether they will once again rise to meet the moment remains one of the defining questions of the present era.

[80] For a complete examination see Odd Arne Westad, *The Coming Storm: Power, Conflict, and Warnings from History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2026).

Iran's State-led Anti-Zionism

Arash Azizi, Ph.D.,
Postdoc, Yale University

Abstract

In this essay, I aim to explain how and why anti-Zionism became so central to the Iranian regime's ideology, to explicate its main features, recount some instances of it and to ask questions about its future. I will also discuss Iran's state-led anti-Zionism in relation to its espousal of antisemitism.

Keywords: antisemitism, anti-Zionism, Axis of Resistance, Holocaust, Iranian regime, state-led anti-Zionism.

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Iran is today the foremost anti-Zionist state in the world. By which I mean both that it opposes Zionism more stringently than any other state and that it dedicates more resources to its anti-Zionism than any other state. In fact, as analyst Karim Sadjadpour has argued, opposition to Israel is one of the three pillars of the regime alongside its opposition to the US and its enforcement of mandatory Hijab.[1]

WHAT'S ANTI-ZIONISM?

As with any other ideology that's defined negatively, anti-Zionism is heterogenous and takes many forms. Understanding various forms and spectrums of global anti-Zionism helps place Iran's state-led version within a broader context. Critics of Zionism might object to it because of a general objection to all nationalisms or they might specifically oppose the ideology and track-record of the Zionist movement since its inception in the late 1800s. Some critics of Zionism might see it as having played out its historical role (they likely would self-define as ''post-Zionists''.) Other Jewish critics of Zionism might object to it theologically (as does the Hasidic Satmar dynasty and some other ultra-Orthodox groups) or on the basis of suggesting alternative ideology and politics for the Jewish community (as do leftist Jewish opponents of Israel.)

Not all critics of Zionism would self-define as ''anti-Zionists,'' as they might prefer ''non-Zionist'' which denotes disagreement with Zionism without outright hostility to it. Some scholars also

[1] https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2022/10/can-the-iranian-system-survive?lang=en: Acc. 8/11/26

use the latter as a category of analysis. A group that opposes Zionism as an ideology but doesn't object to the State of Israel's existence (for instance the Communist Party of Israel) is often classified as ''non-Zionist'' as opposed to ''anti-Zionist.'' When discussing Zionism and its critics, therefore, there should always be a distinction between categories of use and analysis; the former, used by political actors to refer to themselves and the latter used as means of categorizations by scholars.

Various Iranian political groups, including Iranian Jews, have advanced diverse criticisms of Zionism in their history. But this essay is primarily about the state-led anti-Zionism that has long formed part of the ruling ideology of the Islamic Republic. In this stringent form of anti-Zionism, it is not only that the State of Israel has no right to exist, but that the Jewish Israelis have no rights, of any sorts, to be part of any future solutions in the land between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean. As such, while there are active debates about which instances of anti-Zionism count as antisemitism, Tehran's official anti-Zionism can be considered antisemitic under most definitions. As I will show, anti-Zionism and direct antisemitism often go hand in hand with the regime's propaganda.

Yet even Tehran's anti-Zionism has different forms, and its antisemitism, comes in different degrees. While some versions assert some form of acceptance for Jews in general, others are more openly antisemitic and treat Jewish people, as a whole, as an adversary. This involves questioning of their history while engaging in classical forms of antisemitism such as the spread of blood libel or denial of the Holocaust. Another important antisemitic element in Tehran's official anti-Zionism is that it claims "Zionist networks" are behind much that's going on in the world, in a classical antisemitic trope of Jewish global power and control. And, in even wilder versions, such "networks" are alleged to have operated throughout history, including in Jewish antiquity.

IRAN'S OFFICIAL ANTI-ZIOANISM

Of the 192 UN member states, a vast majority (164) recognize the state of Israel. Of the 28 that don't, most accept Israel's existence as a nation-state and have shown willingness to recognize it as part of a two-state solution to its conflict with the Palestinians. However, Iran is unique in not only vocally opposing the two-state solution but also insisting that Israeli Jews should have no say in determining the future of Israel/Palestine. Iran's official suggestion for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that a referendum of "original inhabitants" of the country, including Muslims, Jews and Christians, should determine its future. As Iran defines the term, only Jews who could show presence in Israel/Palestine before 1917 can vote in such a referendum.[2] As such, it excludes more than 90 percent of Israeli Jews. Iranian officials, such as the West-facing diplomat Javad Zarif, have attempted

[2] docs.un.org/en/S/2019/862: Acc. 8/11/26

to present this as an inclusive proposal. But, in the official version offered in 2019 at the UN (during the centrist administration of President Hassan Rouhani, in which Zarif was foreign minister), Iran makes clear that the above-mentioned exclusionary formula is its policy.

While some forms of anti-Zionism reserve individual rights for Israeli Jews, Tehran's version excludes even that. It is thus classified as antisemitic even according to the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism which, compared to other definitions of antisemitism, is most accepting of the possibility of a non-antisemitic anti-Zionism. The JDA counts the following as an indication of antisemitism: "Denying the right of Jews in the State of Israel to exist and flourish, collectively and individually, as Jews, in accordance with the principle of equality."

Iran's anti-Zionism is not a paper policy and has motivated action. Since its foundation in 1979, the Islamic Republic has helped organize militias in Muslim-majority and Arab countries with opposition to Israel being central to these groups and a glue that holds them together. Many of these groups have taken to organizing attacks against Israel, and Israeli civilians abroad. They include a number of Iraqi Shia militias, Lebanon's Hezbollah, Yemeni Houthis and smaller groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Iran has also helped fund and arm Sunni Islamist Palestinian groups such as Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Since around 2003, the term Axis of Resistance has been used as an umbrella term for groups allied with Iran. Iran itself has tried to consolidate the Axis, under the leadership of the militia Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) which means that its anti-Zionist political and media material could be shared between the groups. Amongst these, Houthis are especially dedicated to antisemitism. The group's logo includes "Curse the Jews" as one of its main slogans alongside "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" and its antisemitic output has been shared across the Axis.

Prior to 2023, the Axis had long emerged as Israel's primary security threat. In fact, no Arab state had fired a single shot against Israel since early 1990s whereas Iran-backed groups (including Yemeni Houthis which are recognized by Iran, but not by the UN and most of the world, as Yemen's official government) have repeatedly fought Israel. For many years now, the Iranian-Israeli conflict has largely reshaped and even replaced the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the last two years, Israel's actions against the Axis, and the fall of the Syrian regime of Bashar Assad, has largely destroyed the Axis but direct military confrontations between Iran and Israel took place in 2024, 2025 and 2026, keeping Iran central to Israel's security calculations.

Iran's anti-Zionism thus includes a diplomatic push against Israel, the supporting of armed militias against it, and media productions that justify these actions.

HISTORICAL ROOTS

One reason why anti-Zionism could easily become central to the Iranian regime's identity is that different versions of it were shared by all major groups that contributed to the 1979 revolution. Even so, these versions were quite different from what would emerge as Iran's state-led anti-Zionism of today. Some Iranian nationalists supported Arab nationalism and sympathized with its opposition to Israel in the same vein. Iran's pro-Soviet communist Tudeh Party pushed the USSR's official anti-Zionist line, but this version of anti-Zionism still recognized the two-state solution. Critics of Tudeh, forming the Iranian New Left, which was very influential amongst the youth, criticized this position and advocated a more radical opposition to Israel. Some helped translate the works of the Israeli group, Matzpen, which considered itself anti-Zionist.

Others, such as the guerilla groups People's Mojahedin (known by its Persian acronym MEK) and People's Fadaian, made active alliances with Palestinian groups including the Fatah, the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and other groups in the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO.) Meetings of Iranian student activist groups in the West received greetings from such Palestinian groups, meanwhile Iranian volunteers were trained by these groups in camps located in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Palestinian material, such as pamphlets by the PLO Research Center, were translated into Persian, and distributed. These included various critiques of Zionism.

It should be noted that the pro-revolution and anti-Shah camp also included Iranian Jews, many sympathetic to the Tudeh Party, who helped form groups such as the Association of Jewish Iranian Intellectuals (AJII).[3] Many of these Jews were critical of Zionism and Israel. AJII, for instance, declared opposition to "any form of colonialism, including Zionism" as well as "any sort of racial discrimination, racism, and anti-Semitism." But these groups (nationalists, communists and leftists) were all suppressed by the Islamists who led the 1979 revolution, which built the Islamic Republic in its wake. The version of anti-Zionism that came to dominate the new regime thus had different roots.

Already, since the 1930s, as the Arab-Jewish conflict flared up in Palestine, many of Iran's leading Shia clerics had agitated in opposition to Zionism. Amin al-Husayni, the Grand Mufti of Palestine and a national Palestinian leader, had tried to cultivate links with Shia clerics in Iraq and Iran in the same vein. As the 1947-1948 war broke out, cleric Abolqasem Kashani increased agitation against Zionism and Israel, and he was joined by Fadain of Islam, an armed group, which assassinated Iranian dissident intellectuals and statesmen. Kashani and Fadaian even fundraised and signed up

[3] Lior Sternfeld, "The Revolution's Forgotten Sons and Daughters: The Jewish Community in Tehran during the 1979 Revolution," *Iranian Studies* 47/6 (2014).

people to dispatch them to fight in Palestine, although no such dispatching actually occurred. Declaring his opposition to Zionism, in 1948, Kashani declared: “Based on what logic and law is Palestine a homeland for Jewish immigrations from Germany, Russia, US and elsewhere? If they want to make Jews happy, why don’t they give them a place in their own countries?” He attacked Jews of the Yishuv as "gangsters."

The agitations eventually failed and Iran recognized Israel, on a *de facto* basis, in 1950. Ties flourished between the two countries in arts, trade and education. But, the Islamist tradition of anti-Zionism was picked up by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who had also espoused antisemitism in his work. In his sermons in the 1960s, he singled out Iran’s unofficial ties with Israel as a cudgel in attacking the Shah. He continued such rhetoric after he was exiled out of Iran to Turkey, then Iraq, and eventually, France. When the Islamic Revolution overthrew the Shah in February 1979, under the leadership of Khomeini, Iran immediately cut all ties with Israel. It stopped selling oil to Israel and the apartheid regime of South Africa.

In May 1979, the new regime executed major Iranian Jewish industrialist Habib Elqanian. One of the main charges against him had been his alleged Zionism and links to Israel. This had a chilling effect on the Iranian Jewish community, most of whom would eventually leave Iran (although mostly opting for the United States not Israel.) But a group of Iranian Jews, including Chief Rabbi Yedidia Shofet and pro-revolution intellectuals from AJII, secured a meeting with Ayatollah Khomeini which led to an important declaration. Here, Khomeini, who had also met Iranian Jewish representatives during his time in Paris, said that the new regime distinguished between Zionism and Iran’s own Jewish community. Thus, Iran committed to non-persecution of its own Jewish community (who retained their parliamentary representation under the Islamic Republic) but only at the cost of the community effectively being forced to take an official anti-Zionist position. The communal and political leadership of the Iranian Jewish community inside Iran continues to espouse official anti-Zionism as a mode of self-preservation.

ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM

Iran’s posture toward Israel has often been subject to strategic and military considerations. During the 1980s, for instance, Iran got covert military help from Israel as it fought the forces of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein. Some factions of the Islamic Republic, such as reformists, have sometimes endorsed the two-state solution. After the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, in which the Arab League, led by Saudi Arabia, declared its willingness to recognize Israel in the context of the two-state solution, Iran

officially voted for a resolution of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation which endorsed. Iranian diplomats have since sometimes supported resolutions endorsing the two-state solution.

Overall, however, the broader picture has been that of Iran's ceaseless hostility against Israel. During the 1990s, Iran's backing for rejectionist Palestinian groups and Arab states such as Syria and Libya, helped doom the Israeli-Palestinian process. As PLO and Israel exchanged mutual recognition, Iran hosted leaders of rejectionist groups such as Hamas and groups from the "Damascus Ten." As Iran grew its military presence around the region, following the 2003 Iraq War, there was an uptick in its official anti-Zionism and this went hand in hand with antisemitism. A most egregious example of this was President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's denial of the Holocaust and Iran's hosting a conference of Holocaust deniers in December 2006. But Holocaust denial hadn't been started by Ahmadinejad and would not remain limited to him.

Iran's Supreme Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who had replaced Khomeini in 1989, repeatedly denied the Holocaust and continued to do so to the end of his life. Even more moderate figures, such as centrist Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president, have denied the Holocaust. Major Holocaust deniers, such as French writer Roger Garaudy, have been praised by the Islamic Republic and given awards. This Holocaust denial is always linked to Zionism and Israel as it is alleged that Jews fabricate the Holocaust story to buy sympathy and thus advance their Zionist projects. In 2001, for instance, Khamenei said: "Zionists had close links to German Nazis and gave exaggerated numbers about killings of Jews as a way of generating pity to prepare the grounds for the occupation of Palestine and justifying of Zionist crimes."[4] Khamenei's long reign has been associated with anti-Israel animus and his support for the Axis has been central to his narrative. Under his reign, IRGC and other state-backed organizations have spread outright antisemitism as part of their general anti-Zionist posture.

In spite of this, many of the most egregious and open instances of antisemitism come from people in academia. For instance, Mohammad Mehdi Karimnia, faculty at the Quran University in Qom, published an article in 2000 in *Marefat,* a journal of the Imam Khomeini Institute headed by the major hardliner cleric, Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi.[5] Written shortly after the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the article celebrates the movement as a sign that "the people of Palestine have no hope in plans of compromise and peace negotiations." The article then offers an analysis of Jewish history, from the times of prophet Abraham to the present time. It goes on to attack the Jews due to their "belief in supremacy," allegedly evident in Jews believing they are a "chosen people." It goes on

[4] https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=5070#43766: Acc. 8/11/26
[5] Mohammad Mehdi Karimnia, "Yahood dar Ayin o Amalakrd," *Marefat* 9/5 (2000).

to say: "In all of human history, no nation has been as money-worshipping as the Jews. To get to their goals, they have used any legitimate or illegitimate means."

Another example is a 2005 article by Majid Naimi Jamal in *Jostar*, a journal published by a major institute linked to the Qom Seminary. Entitled "Knowing the Jews," the article is amongst the most visited on the journal's website. Attacking the Jews for their "domination over the world," it includes a long litany of antisemitic claims. The first section of the article offers an interpretation of Qur'anic history of the Israelites while the second part is about contemporary Judaism. It starts with a long section about Zionism which it defines as "a movement to prepare for domination of Judaism over the world." Interestingly, the article's definition of Zionism doesn't even mention Palestine. It claims that the Zionists seek to "take over the means of global propaganda and infiltrate organs of government in countries and international bodies to rule over all nations." It then moves on to a section on Freemasonry which it defines as "a secret party formed by Jews with the goal of destroying religions, morality and states." The article's many other claims include that Jews "invented Jazz, Rock and famous Metal groups to occupy all nations including Iran" and that they are "merchants of wine and this is one of their most important means of propaganda."

These articles might appear to be obscure academic works, but Iranian state-led media outlets use such themes to propagate antisemitic ideas widely. Naimi Jamal's article, for instance, fully engages in blood libel in a section called "Jewish holidays of blood" which, it claims, include Purim and Passover. It recounts a blood libel story from 1823 in Russia in horrid detail. Blood libel claims have been repeatedly published by major Iranian media outlets such as the conservative website *Alef* and centrist newspaper *Jomhuriye-Islami.* In 2002, the cultural commission of the Tehran Jewish Committee (TJC) wrote a letter of protest to the latter, after it had published a blood libel story. The newspaper refused to retract the story and gave TJC a sarcastic response. In the same period, TJC, the main communal leadership body of Iranian Jews, protested the film *Saint Mary*, which was later also as a miniseries on television, dubbed in Spanish and exported to Venezuela. While it's a story of the mother of Jesus, the film's depiction of Jewish religious figures was clearly antisemitic, showing them all as cruel and irrational.

An attempt at another form of anti-Zionism, which rejected Holocaust denial and was less antisemitic, could be seen in the popular TV series *Zero Degree Turn* (2007), made by veteran TV director Hassan Fathi and starring well-known Iranian TV stars. Revolving around a love story between an Iranian student (born to an Iranian father and a Palestinian mother) and a French Jewish girl in wartime Paris, the series depicts Nazi persecution of Jews and the Holocaust, seen as a rebuke of then President Ahmadinejad's denialism. This led to protests by hardliners. A cleric, for instance,

claimed that the series had "wanted to instill the idea of the Holocaust and to give a victimized image of the Jews."

But the series was still anti-Zionist, and it thus shows an interesting example of another, less-antisemitic form of Iranian anti-Zionism. The series (which cites in its credits both Garaudy's *Les Mythes Fondauters de la Politique Israelienne* and TJC's magazines) depicts Zionists as an extremist group who kill their fellow Jews, in Iran and elsewhere, to take over Jewish diasporic communal life and move all Jews to Palestine. Zionists are also repeatedly discussed as collaborators with Nazis. A professor in the film mentions Albert Einstein as a Jewish figure who opposes the foundation of a Jewish state (a claim that's at best a half-truth.) A similar story line about Zionism as a conspiratorial group that kills its own fellow Jews had also been developed in an earlier film, *Lead* (1988), by major Iranian director Maasud Kimiayaee, set in the Iran of early 1950s.

However, this version of anti-Zionism, which doesn't resort to open antisemitism, has been marginalized in Iran as major hardliner outlets usually engage in open antisemitism. The holiday of Purim now leads to annual articles in the hardline press which claim it's a celebration of killing of Iranians (I've discussed this, and how misleading a reading of the Purim story it is, elsewhere: https://iranwire.com/en/features/67315/). Iranian hardliners often attack the tomb of Esther and Mordechai in the city of Hamedan in Iran in response to actions by Israel. Some have even claimed it should become the "Palestinian consulate." This is an example of how anti-Zionism and antisemitism are almost always linked in Iran.

A more bizarre example of antisemitism, which manages to bring together ancient history, Holocaust denial and anti-Zionism, revolves around the Quranic story of the People of the Ditch.[6] Although this story in the Qur'an doesn't reference any particular history, the regime's experts have linked it to 6th century Yemen where Dhu Nuwas, a Jewish king of the Himyarite dynasty, was known to have persecuted Christians. The regime's outlets have claimed that this king burnt Christians alive and thus committed the "real Holocaust."

The regime has spent a massive budget on creating cultural products out of this story. In 2016, an IRGC-linked media company created *Return,* a state-of-the-art CGI film which was also broadcast in other countries such as Lebanon. IRGC media celebrated the film as an "anti-Zionist animation."

[6] For a fuller exploration of this story, see: https://iranwire.com/en/features/68139/: Acc. 8/11/26.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Despite the Islamic Republic's heavy investment in anti-Zionism and antisemitism, the Iranian society has remained particularly aloof from these ideologies. In the post-2023 years, even as anti-Israeli demonstrations rocked many cities around the world, no such demonstrations occurred in Iran on a mass scale. It is true that Israel's direct attacks on Iran during the 12-Day War, and also the 2026 war, which killed hundreds of civilians, as well as its close alignment with right-wing groups in the Iranian opposition, has complicated feelings about the country on the Iranian street. But the sort of anti-Zionism propagated by the regime retains little popularity with people. Yet, the regime's state broadcaster, led by the most extremist elements in the media establishment, has only intensified its antisemitic output. In 2025, a music video called for "uprooting of the Jews" while another depicted an Israeli Jew who was trying to "learn how to swim" to flee Israel.

Such moves face much opposition amongst Iranians. Major public intellectuals and political figures who previously identified with the regime have come out for recognizing Israel. University of Tehran professor Sadeq Zibakalam has said he recognizes Israel as a UN member state. Faezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani, daughter of Ayatollah Rafsanjani and a former leading MP, has indicated similar signals. The Iranian Reformist Front, a major umbrella body that includes part of the ruling establishment and is the party of the current president Masud Pezeshkian, has effectively embraced the two-state solution. A major body of pro-reformist Shia clerics in Qom has taken a similar position, coming under fire from hardliners.

The 2026 war launched by the US and Israel killed Ali Khamenei and he was soon replaced by his son, Mojtaba Khamenei. The new leader has continued the anti-Israel rhetoric of his father, even repeating his notorious prediction that Israel would cease to exist by 2040. Yet, Ali Khamenei's demise has entered Iran into an interregnum. The Iranian regime might very well find itself transformed by the end of this process. Its pillars, including its anti-Israel policy, have proved untenable, paving the path for the country to find itself mired in a devastating war. This might motivate its leaders to drop these pillars. As Iran shifts from ideology to pragmatism, it might even come to abandon its long-lasting anti-Zionism.

Soviet Anti-Zionism: A Brief History

David E. Fishman, Ph.D.,

Jewish Theological Seminary of America

Abstract

This essay considers the metamorphoses of Soviet anti-Zionism from 1917 to 1991. Early Soviet anti-Zionism (1917-1941) focused on dissolving the existing Zionist movement, arresting its activists, and hounding its underground groups. This was part and parcel of the Soviet obsession to create a one-party state but was not antisemitic. Middle anti-Zionism, (1949-1953) introduced the use of "Zionist" as a euphemism or code word for "evil Jew." People of Jewish origin who had nothing to do with Israel or Jewish affairs were accused of Zionism. This was profoundly antisemitic. Late Soviet anti-Zionism (1967-1987) made "Zionism" into a bogeyman, a powerful global conspiracy against communism and progress, with Israel as its base; a movement that was racist, militarist, and a partner of American Imperialism. Paradoxically, the antisemitic nature of the middle and late Soviet anti-Zionism helped spur tens of thousands of Soviet Jews to leave for Israel and other destinations.

Keywords: Communism, Lenin, Yevsektsia, Socialist Zionist, Zionist, antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, Holocaust, genocide.

INTRODUCTION

The Soviet Union (1917-1991) was an ideological state based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism: the abolition of private enterprise, the working class as the ruling class, the uncontested leading role of the Communist Party, state atheism, and the "brotherhood of peoples." Marxism-Leninism considered nationalities and ethnicities a legitimate phenomenon, at least in the short-term future, but viewed nationalism, which gave priority to national identity over class identity, as "reactionary," i.e., harmful to human progress. Nationalism was viewed as a tool of the enemy, the bourgeoisie, to create a false unity between social classes. Zionism, as an expression of Jewish nationalism, was thus considered, throughout Soviet history, to be a bourgeois reactionary phenomenon.[1]

However, the relative weight and prominence that the Soviet state gave to anti-Zionism fluctuated widely during the seventy-four years of the USSR's existence. The tactics, objectives, and target audiences changed. Consequently, the effect that Soviet anti-Zionism had on the country's Jews

[1] Michael Kasprzak, "To Reject or Not to Reject Nationalism: Marx and Engels' Struggles with Nationalism, 1840-1880s," *Nationalities Papers* 40/4. (2012), https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2012.685058

(3 million in 1939, and 1.8 million in 1979), and its role in international affairs, varied over time. It is best to examine Soviet anti-Zionism historically, distinguishing between different periods of its existence.[2]

1917-1939: ANTI-ZIONISM WITHOUT ANTISEMITISM

Vladimir I. Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik Party (later renamed the Communist Party) and the founder of the Soviet state, condemned antisemitism as a feature of the then ruling Tsarist regime and denounced the pogroms that were one of its manifestations. To Lenin, Jews were to be equal members of Soviet society: "The Jewish bourgeois are our enemy, not as Jews but as bourgeois. The Jewish worker is our brother."[3] Several of Lenin's closest associates before and after the 1917 revolution, were Jewish, the most prominent being Leon Bronstein (better known as Leon Trotsky). Opposition to antisemitism became a fundamental feature of the new Soviet regime established by the 1917 Revolution. During the years between 1928-31, the authorities engaged in a concerted public campaign against antisemitism in pamphlets, meetings, and trials. Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin, stated in 1931 that, "Antisemitism, as an extreme form of racial chauvinism, is the most dangerous vestige of cannibalism…. Communists, as consistent internationalists, cannot but be irreconcilable, sworn enemies of antisemitism."[4]

Nonetheless, Lenin and his associates were absolutely committed to establishing a one-party state, in which the only legitimate political entity was the Communist Party, representing the interests of the working class. All other Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian, and Jewish political parties were outlawed between 1917 and 1922. The only legal Jewish political organization was the Jewish Section of the Communist Party (Yevsektsia, 1918-1930), led by former Jewish socialists turned communists. The Yevsektsia's objective was "to bring the revolution to the Jewish street."[5]

The Yevsektsia applied the general Soviet policy of liquidating non-Communist parties to the Jewish community and led the struggle against Zionism. (It fought no less vociferously against the main Jewish socialist party, the Jewish Workers' Bund, which was anti-Zionist.) This liquidationist activity was not antisemitic and was not perceived as such. Especially since the Yevsektsia and its

[2] Jonathan Frankel, "The Soviet Regime and Anti-Zionism: An Analysis," *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, edited by Ezra Mendelsohn (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 440-82. Frankel's article has had a major influence on my thinking on this subject.
[3] Hyman Lumer (Ed.), *Lenin on the Jewish Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1974), 141.
[4] Elissa Bemporad, *Revolution, Civil War, and New Ways of Life, Jews in the Soviet Union: A History* (Vol.1; 1917-1930, New York: New York University Press) 2025; Stalin quote from https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1931/01/12.htm.
[5] Bemporad, *Revolution.*

associated bodies were simultaneously instrumental in building Soviet Yiddish culture (secular schools, theatres, press, literature, academies).

While not discriminatory, the anti-Zionist campaign was unquestionably harsh and brutal. In September and October 1919, the Central offices of the Russian Zionist movement were closed, its funds confiscated, and the leading Zionist publications were banned. That same year, the Yevsektsia passed a resolution to close all Hebrew language schools run by the "Tarbut" [Hebrew culture] organization. During the last public Zionist conference in Russia, which took place in April 1920, with 109 delegates, the participants were arrested by agents of the Soviet political police, led by a young Jewish woman. The delegates left the hall and went to prison singing "Ha-Tikvah" ("The Hope"), the Zionist anthem.

From 1920, the Zionist movement was severely battered, and by 1922, it was driven underground. In Lenin's view they were bourgeois nationalists. The Socialist Zionist groups, however, were more "fortunate" and remained legal for several more years as the question of how to treat socialist Zionists, some of whom called themselves communists, took longer to resolve. The Po'ale Zion Party (which renamed itself The Jewish Communist Labor Party Po'ale Zion) touted its support for Soviet communism, deemphasized its commitment to Aliyah, and functioned legally until 1928. The pioneer organization, He-Chalutz, stressed its work training Jews in agriculture, a Soviet policy priority, and was therefore tolerated until 1927.[6]

During this period, the struggle against Zionism was mainly an internal Jewish matter led by the Yevsektsia and attracted little attention in the general Soviet press. In the 1920s and 1930s, a total of three brochures against Zionism were published in Russian, while there were sixteen such books and brochures in Yiddish, and at least 50 anti-Zionist articles in the Soviet Yiddish Press.[7]

Unlike later, the average Russian or Ukrainian of the 1920s and 1930s knew almost nothing about the "evils" of Zionism. The Soviet authorities were much more concerned about larger enemies and rivals (Russian counterrevolutionaries, Ukrainian nationalists, rich peasants [kulaks], right-wing deviationists, Trotskyites and spies – in that chronological order).

[6] Joseph Schechtman, "The USSR, Zionism and Israel," in Lionel Kochan (Ed.), *The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 106-131.

[7] This calculation is made by consulting the following bibliographic resources: Viktor Kelner and Dmitry Eliashevich, *Literature on the Jews in Russian 1890-1947: A bibliographic Index of Books, Brochures, Reprints of Articles and Periodicals* [in Russian] (St. Peterburg: Academic Project Press, 1995); N. I Rutberg, and I. N. Pidevich, *Jews and the Jewish Question in the Literature of the Soviet Period: A Chronological Thematic Index* [in Russian] (Moscow: Grant Publishers, 2000); Chone Shmeruk (ed.), *Jewish Publications in the Soviet Union, 1917-1960* [in Hebrew and Yiddish] (Israel Historical Society, 1961); and Soviet Yiddish newspapers included in the online archive Historical Jewish Press - https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/newspapers/jpress.

It is telling that in the 1920s, when Zionists attempted to rescue groups affiliated with their movement, such as the sports organization Macabee (abolished in 1925), or the Hebrew theatre Ha-Bimah (active in Moscow until 1926), they appealed to general Soviet leaders who, they believed, quite rightly, were less hostile toward Zionism than the Yevsektsia. In the late 1920s, the Soviet authorities released more than a thousand Zionists sentenced to exile in inner Russia by substituting their sentence with "exile" and deportation to Palestine.[8]

The Yiddish anti-Zionist literature published in this period featured several themes: Zionism was a tool that served British imperial rule in the Middle East - any disagreements between the British and the Zionists were illusory; Zionism was an expression of Jewish chauvinism and racism, which oppressed Arabs by taking their land and denying them their livelihood; the Jewish labor movement in Palestine was an exponent of Social Fascism, a fake socialism that masked bald-faced nationalism; Zionism could not solve the "Jewish question" - it would merely provoke retaliatory violence against Jews, and create an impoverished Jewish working class in Palestine.[9]

The one segment of the Soviet state system that took an active, uninterrupted interest in combating Zionism was the security organs. In 1931, the OGPU (a predecessor to the KGB) estimated that there were 800 active Zionists left in the Soviet Union.[10] This low estimate did not prevent the security services from positing, during the period of the Great Purges (1936-1938), that there existed an all-Union underground Zionist organization, with branches in Moscow, Ukraine, and Belorussia, that was directed by an anti-Soviet center abroad. 420 Zionists, real and imagined, were arrested in 1937, and 1,926 in 1938. Nonetheless, this was a drop in the bucket compared to the 1.5 million Soviet citizens arrested and 650,000 who were shot in those years, in Stalin's obsessive hunt for internal enemies. It is fair to estimate that more than 100,000 of those arrested, and 40,000 of those shot, were Jews. These included not only the above-mentioned 2,400 Zionists, but many of Lenin's Jewish associates and the leaders of the Yevsektsia.[11]

1942-1948: GEOPOLITICS TRUMPS COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY

[8] Ziva Galili, "Zionism in the Early Soviet State: Between Legality and Persecution" in Zvi Gitelman and Ya'akov Ro'i, eds., *Revolution, Repression, and Revival: The Soviet Jewish Experience* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007): 37-68. Yehoshua Gilboa, *A Language Silenced: The Suppression of Hebrew Literature and Culture in the Soviet Union* (New York, NY: Herzl Press, 1982); Ziva Galil, *Exiled to Palestine; the Emigration of Soviet Zionist Convicts 1924-1934* (London: Routledge, 2006).
[9] See, for instance, Pesakh Novik, *Palestine Without a "Holy Curtain"* [Yiddish] (Minsk: Belorussian State Publishing House, 1933).
[10] Arkadi Zeltser and Deborah Yalen, *Terror, Accommodation, and Integration, 1930–1939: Jews in the Soviet Union, a History* (Vol. II; New York: University Press, 2027) (Forthcoming).
[11] Zeltser and Yalen, *Terror, Accommodation, and Integration.*

The Nazi German attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, was, paradoxically, a turning point in the Soviet Union's attitude toward Zionism. The Soviets found themselves having a common enemy with the Jewish communities of the United States and Great Britain.

The American Jewish community was more eager than any other American constituency to fight the Nazis in Europe, not only the Japanese in the Pacific. Cultivating this community was in the Soviets' interest. Since the Kremlin realized that the Zionist movement played a major role in American Jewish life, the Soviets established relations with Zionist leaders. And since Great Britain was the Soviets' other major ally, the USSR discontinued its railing against British Imperialism and against Zionism as the latter's agent. Cooperation in the war against Germany was more important than ideological purity.

In this period, the main conduit for Soviet outreach to World Jewry was a public organization called the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFC), established in early 1942. The JAFC was officially just an information agency about the war but, in fact, it became the central Jewish address in the Soviet Union. It spoke in nationalist terms which would have been impermissible before the war: "To our Jewish brethren the world over", "We are one people, and now we must become one army."[12]

Two leaders of the JAFC, Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels and Yiddish poet Itzik Feffer, visited the US for six months in 1943. Their trip was organized by a welcoming committee in which Zionists played a leading role: Rabbi Stephen Wise, President of the American Jewish Congress (AJC), and Nahum Goldmann, head of the World Jewish Congress (WJC). At the main public event in honor of the Soviet Jewish visitors - a rally at the Polo Grounds with 50,000 people in attendance - the stage was bedecked with three flags; of the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Blue-White flag of the Zionist movement. Three anthems were played. The visitors from Moscow met with Chaim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organization.[13] Such connections and meetings could not have happened without high-ranking approval from the Kremlin.

The Zionist-Soviet thaw had an impact in the spheres of information and diplomacy. The JAFC newspaper "Unity" [*Eynikayt*] began to carry news items from Palestine, written in an even-handed and sometimes sympathetic tone. While Zionism was still a dirty word in the USSR, solidarity with the Jews in Palestine, who were fellow enemies of Hitler, was not. Shakhne Epshteyn, Secretary of the JAFC and Editor of "Unity," wrote on its pages: "No normal, thoughtful and freedom-loving person can be opposed to the Jews in Palestine continuing to develop their home freely, […] based on their own

[12] See Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948* (East European Quarterly Press, 1982), 115-48; Idem, *War Holocaust and Stalinism: A Documented History of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
[13] Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism.*

state system. This is their absolute right as a collective."[14] (Epshteyn, however, was quick to add that Palestine was not the solution to the Jewish question, since only a small part of the Jewish people lived there. Soviet communism was the ultimate solution.)

Diplomatic contacts between Zionist leaders and Soviet officials became frequent and cordial, with the Zionists offering support to the Red Army's heroic struggle against Nazi Germany. In September 1941, Moscow's Ambassador to Britain, Ivan Maisky, met with Chaim Weizmann, and Moshe Shertok (later: Sharet), then head of the Jewish National Council in Palestine; representatives of the Soviet Embassy in Turkey visited Palestine in August 1942 and met with leaders of the Yishuv (Jewish community); Soviet Ambassador to the US Maxim Litvinov met with Shertok and Nachum Goldmann in March 1943; and Maisky, in his new position as Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, visited Palestine in October 1943, with David Ben Gurion giving him a tour of kibbutzim and Jerusalem. There had never been so much direct contact between Zionist and Soviet leaders before.[15]

Nothing came of most of the Zionist leaders' proposals and requests – to release arrested Zionists in the USSR, to permit the study of Hebrew, and to allow emigration of Polish-Jewish refugees to Palestine. But the meetings served a broader educational purpose, familiarizing Soviet diplomats with the Yishuv, and particularly with its socialist features. The encounters also opened the Soviets' eyes to the tensions between the Yishuv and the British authorities.

Once the war against Hitler was won in 1945, the Cold War between the Soviet bloc and the West ensued. In that context, the Soviet Union's paramount geopolitical interest in the Middle East became getting the British out of Palestine. From mid-1945 until mid-1947, the Soviet Union maintained what had been its traditional position: the British must be replaced by a unitary Arab-Jewish state. But in May 1947, the Soviet representative to the United Nations, Andrei Gromyko, gave a speech which signaled a possible change. He spoke of the "indescribable" suffering of the Jewish people in the war, of the plight of homeless Jewish refugees in Central and Western Europe and drew the conclusion that: "it would be unjust not to take into consideration and to deny the right of the Jewish people to realize this aspiration [to establish their own state]."[16] Gromyko concluded his speech by stating that if a unitary bi-national state could not be created, the United Nations should

[14] The quote is from Eynikayt, November 8, 1944, p. 4, cited in *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Post-War Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee*, edited by Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir Naumov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 23. [Date and translation corrected].

[15] Yaacov Ro'i, "Soviet policy in the Middle East: The case of Palestine during World War II," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* (1974): 373-408 - online at https://www.persee.fr/doc/cmr_0008-0160_1974_num_15_3_1213; and in detail, "Documents on Israeli-Soviet Relations, 1941-1953," 2 vols, Frank Cass, 2000 (ARCHIVE-1031 - https://www.storyflo.com/declassified/declassified-archive-org-documents-on-israeli-soviet-relations-1941-195-9da97204).

[16] The text of Gromyko's speech is reprinted in "Documents on Israeli-Soviet Relations, 1941-1953," Vol. 1, pp. 189-196.

consider partitioning Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. On November 29, 1947, the Soviet Union voted for partition, as did four members of the Soviet voting bloc at the UN (Belorussia, Ukraine, Poland and Czechoslovakia).

The partition vote was followed up by the Soviet bloc's action. In February 1948, before the British had left, the Soviets agreed to provide arms to the soon-to-be-born state via Czechoslovakia. These arms were essential to Israel's success in the ensuing War of Independence.[17] It is important to stress that the Soviet authorities, led by Joseph Stalin, viewed the Palestine question exclusively as a foreign policy matter – to expel the British, and compete with the Americans for influence in the Middle East.

In their thinking and domestic propaganda, the Soviet authorities made a sharp, and most would say, artificial distinction between the national rights of the Jewish community in Palestine to a state, which they supported, and Zionism, which they continued to view as a bourgeois nationalist ideology. They believed that the class conflict between Jewish workers and Jewish capitalists in Israel had only begun, and that American influence was a worrisome sign of a capitalist influx. Moreover, the Soviets rejected the concept of the global unity of the Jewish people that underlay Zionism. This rejection was expressed most sharply by the Soviet writer of Jewish background Ilya Ehrenburg in Pravda in September 1948, just a few months after the founding of Israel: "Soviet Jews, along with all Soviet people, are working to build up their socialist homeland. They are not looking to the Near East – they are looking towards the future. And I believe the working people of the State of Israel, who do not share the mysticism of the Zionists, are now looking northward to the Soviet Union."[18]

1949-1953: THE FIRST FUSION OF ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM

Between November 1948 and March 1953, an intense wave of state antisemitism swept across the Soviet Union. It featured several overlapping campaigns: The liquidation of Soviet Yiddish culture, the arrest and execution of the members of the JAFC, and a public campaign against intellectuals and writers of Jewish origin accused of being "rootless cosmopolitans".[19] The antisemitic wave culminated with the "Doctors' Plot," in which Jewish doctors were accused of planning the

[17] Arnold Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship - Israel and the Soviet Bloc, 1947–53* (Champaign, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 54–123.
[18] Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews, 1948-1967: A Documented Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1984), 42, 229-235.
[19] The most in-depth studies of those years are Gennady Kostyrchenko, *Stalin's Secret Policy: Power and Antisemitism* [in Russian] (Moscow: International Relations, 2001); and Kostyrchenko's documentary anthology *State Antisemitism in the USSR: From the Beginnings Until Its Culmination, 1938-1953* [in Russian] (Moscow: Materik, 2005). In English, see Kostyrchenko, "The Genesis of Establishment Antisemitism in the USSR; The Black Years 1948-1953," in Gitelman and Ro'I, *Revolution, Repression, and Revival*, pp. 179-92.

medical murder of high-ranking Soviet officials (January-March,1953).[20] These events were taken by the Soviet elite (and by much of society) as a signal that antisemitism was now permitted and the official policy. Discrimination against Jews in higher education and employment became a widespread practice. Jews were excluded from the upper echelons of the Communist Party, military, security services and diplomatic service, and Jews were purged from the various sectors of the workforce.[21]

Charges of Zionism played a role in nearly all of these campaigns but were not always preeminent. It is important to focus on those campaigns that took place in full public view (as opposed to closed trials and confidential memos), because they had an impact on public opinion and elite actions. The campaign against "Rootless Cosmopolitans" is peculiar in this regard. In a phenomenon that peaked in 1949, the media accused intellectuals of Jewish origin of not being rooted in Soviet or Russian culture, of "kowtowing" to the West, and of championing universal values to the exclusion of Soviet or Communist ones. The press "outed" Jews who had adopted Slavic-sounding names, by disclosing their Jewish birthnames. In doing so, it insinuated that there was a connection between Jewishness and cosmopolitanism, i.e., disloyalty to the Soviet Union. The accused individuals were publicly shamed and stripped of honors, privileges, Communist Party membership, and their jobs.

Paradoxically, the attacks against the "rootless cosmopolitans" often included charges of Zionism. The combination "Cosmopolitan" and "Zionist" was an oxymoron (how can a nationalist be a cosmopolitan?), but the pairing had political logic. Both terms were code words for enemy Jew. Since open antisemitism was banned by Lenin's teachings and Soviet law, "Zionist" became a surrogate epithet hurled at Jews.

Thus, the conformist writers Pavel Antokolsky and Leonid Pervomaisky were exposed in the *Literary Gazette* as cosmopolitans and Zionists. Author Alexander Isbakh, who was "outed" as originally being named Isak Bakhrakh, was accused in a Moscow daily of spreading "overt Zionist propaganda". He mentioned in his memoirs that he had, as a youth, been influenced by the movement and quoted "Ha-Tikvah".[22] Yet, all the unmasked "Zionists" were in fact Soviet patriots, members of the Communist Party, who were unassociated with Zionism or Jewish affairs. Their only real "crime" was being Jewish. Thanks to the campaign against cosmopolitans, "Zionist" became a publicly known

[20] Jonathan Brent, *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot Against the Jewish Doctors* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2003).
[21] See Anna Shternshis, *Postwar Life, Hopes, and Fears, 1945–1953* (Vol. IV, Jews in the Soviet Union: A History; New York, NY: NYU Press, 2026). Joshua Rubinstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom, For Jewish Reactions: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.)
[22] Pinkus, *The Soviet Government*, 229-235.

word of opprobrium.[23] In an ominous sign of things to come, a featured speaker at a widely covered academic conference drew the logical conclusion from these denunciations: Zionism was not only a Middle Eastern problem but that "Anglo-American warmongers are utilizing Zionism as a disruptive weapon in other countries as well," presumably the Soviet Union and its Eastern bloc allies.

The weaponization of anti-Zionism started with the 1949 show trial of veteran Hungarian Communist Laszlo Rajk, who was tried, convicted, and executed on charges of being an agent of Trotskyism, Titoism, and Zionism. In a public report on the trial, the Hungarian Minister of Interior declared that "a vast number of the members of the exposed spy group are Zionists…. The Zionist movement is a willing front for groups spying for the imperialists."[24] This was followed in Romania, where communist party leader Ana Pauker was purged in May 1952 for supporting "the subversive and espionage activities of the Israeli Legation and of the Zionists in the country."[25] Finally, a phantasmagoric trial took place in Czechoslovakia in Nov-Dec 1952, in which Communist Party Secretary-General Rudolph Slansky and thirteen other officials (ten of whom were of Jewish origin) "confessed" (confessed!) to plotting to destroy People's Democracy in Czechoslovakia. The defendants "testified" that they were Zionists who had received instructions from David Ben Gurion (!) to engage in espionage and subversion. Slansky and ten other defendants were sentenced to death and hanged.[26]

It is clear that these trials were conducted in coordination with Soviet officials, and that the anti-Zionist rhetoric used in them imitated the attacks on Zionists in the USSR. *Pravda* and *Izvestia* covered all the East European trials at length, thereby laying the groundwork for the mythological image of Zionism as a monstrous threat to communism.[27]

As long as the Soviets had perceived Zionism as an internal Jewish affair, or as a problem that concerned Palestine, a small territory in the Middle East, combating it was relatively low on their list of priorities. But between 1949 and 1953, the Soviet rhetoric on Zionism was elevated to a new level. Zionists were accused of espionage and sabotage against the USSR and its neighboring Communist

[23] Needless to say, the security services arrested the leaders of the few real Zionist groups that arose in the aftermath of the establishment of Israel. But none of those cases received public attention. B. Pinkus, *National Rebirth and Reestablishment: Zionism and the Zionist Movement in the Soviet Union, 1947-1987* [in Hebrew] (Ber Sheva, Israel: Ben Gurion University Press, 1993), 180-201.
[24] Róbert Győri Szabó, "Anti-Zionism in the show trials in Rákosi era Hungary (1948–1953)," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 24/1 (2025): 24-49, quote from p. 30.
[25] Peter Meyer, B. Weinryb, E. Duschinsky, N. Sylvain, *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1953); Robert Levy and Ana Pauker, *The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 214-17.
[26] Katerina Capkova, Chad Bryant and Diana Dumitru, *The Slansky Trial: A New History* (London: Oxford University Press, 2026).
[27] Capkova, Bryant, Dumitru, *The Slanky Trial*.

states, of working on behalf of American imperialism. As such, the movement was presented as a major threat to the Soviet Union.

This trend culminated with the "Doctors' Plot," announced on January 13, 1953, in which nine Kremlin doctors, six of whom were Jewish, were accused of planning the medical murder of high-ranking Soviet officials. The announcement of the plot by the TASS Soviet news agency stated that the doctors were connected with the "International Jewish bourgeois nationalist organization "Joint" [the Joint Distribution Committee]."[28] The editorials in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* were more explicit, calling the "Joint" a "sordid Zionist espionage organization." A few weeks later, a Moscow weekly proclaimed that "progressive public opinion in all countries condemns the criminal activities of the Zionist hirelings of American imperialism."[29] While the doctors were eventually spared, thanks to Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, the monstrous image of Zionism remained in social consciousness.

What is remarkable about the anti-Zionism of this period is that it had little to do with the newly established State of Israel and its policies. "Zionist" became a bogeyman, a surrogate for "evil Jew," a word used by the Soviet regime to frighten its citizens into thinking that it was threatened by an internal enemy.

1953-1967: ANTI-ISRAELISM WITHOUT ANTI-ZIONISM

The years between Stalin's death and the Six-Day War of 1967 were a kind of interlude between two periods of intense Soviet anti-Zionism. Generally, this was a period of less oppression and greater freedom of speech, especially regarding the crimes of the Stalin era. During Nikita Khrushchev's rule, diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel were strained but unbroken. Soviet officials attacked Israel, but not Zionism, as if the word had been compromised by its abuse under late Stalinism. Giving the word "Zionism" a rest was an aspect of de-Stalinization.

Khrushchev's words at a meeting of the Supreme Soviet in December 1955 were typical of the times:

> Deserving of condemnation are the activities of the State of Israel, which from the first days of its existence began to threaten its neighbors, and to conduct an unfriendly policy towards them. It is clear that such a policy does not suit the national interests of the State of Israel.[30]

[28] Gilboa, *The Black Years*, 295, 301.
[29] Theodore Freedman (ed), *Antisemitism in the Soviet Union: Its Roots and Consequences* (New York, NY: Anti-Defamation League of Bnai Brith, 1984), 534.
[30] Yosef Govrin, *Israeli-Soviet Relations 1953-1967: From Confrontation to Disruption* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 68.

The Soviet reaction to the 1956 Sinai-Suez campaign was also indicative of this stance. The Soviets denounced the "Anglo-French-Israeli aggression," but gave more attention to the colonialist seizure of the Suez Canal than to the Israeli seizure of the Sinai Peninsula. Israel was a servant, a lackey, or at most a junior partner in the venture to Britain and France. Similarly, the Israeli sale of grenade-launchers to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1959 was lambasted by *Izvestiia* as "arms sales to German militarists whose hands are steeped in the blood of six million Jews."[31] The rise of Israeli-West German relations was always described in nefarious terms, as German payment for undisclosed services, or aid to help it militarize.

Yet, the concept of Zionism was not brought into the fray in any of these cases. Israel was presented as a political enemy of the Soviet Union, not as an ideological one. The clash between the two countries was not presented as fundamental or irresolvable. There were also some surprising gestures of goodwill: a large Israeli delegation (200 people) attended the International Youth Festival in Moscow in 1957; a Hebrew-Russian dictionary was published in 1963 with 25,000 copies in print; and in the same year, there appeared an anthology of Israeli poetry. In 1966, Soviet violinist David Oistrakh gave concerts in Israel, and Israeli singer Geula Gil performed in the USSR.[32]

This is not to say that there was a relaxation of policy toward Zionists by the Soviets. Whenever underground Zionist groups emerged, there were arrests and trials. But they were closed trials and not announced in the newspapers. Their goal was to deter Jews from joining such groups and from applying to emigrate to Israel.[33]

The few cases in which the Soviets condemned Zionism were intended for external consumption - to satisfy the Arab states, with which the Soviet Union developed closer ties during those years. In 1965, the Soviet representative in a UN committee introduced a resolution condemning "Nazism, antisemitism and Zionism". (The resolution went nowhere.)[34] In April 1966, the Soviet government embraced the new Ba'ath regime in Syria, and a joint statement by both countries expressed support for the rights of the Arabs of Palestine "in their just struggle against Zionism".[35]

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[31] Govrin, *Israeli-Soviet Relations*, 68.

[32] Gennady Estraikh, "Fighting Zionism," in *After Stalin*, Volume 5 of *Jews in the Soviet Union: A History* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2022).

[33] Preventing the growth of emigration fever was also the objective of most of the articles about Israel in the Soviet press. They emphasized (and exaggerated) Israel's poverty and the miserable conditions that immigrants encountered. On Zionist groups in the USSR in this period, see Pinkus, *National Rebirth*, 201-218, 234-254.

[34] Govrin, *Israeli-Soviet Relations*, 202.

[35] Govrin, *Israeli-Soviet Relations*, 279. But in welcoming remarks to the Syrian delegation, Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin affirmed support for "the independent development of the states in the Middle East. We consistently support the principle of the sovereignty and equality of all nations."

The point is not that public antisemitism died in the USSR after Stalin. It was just expressed in forms other than anti-Zionism – by prosecuting Jews for economic crimes, and through crude attacks on the Jewish religion. One of the most virulent propagandists against Judaism during those years, Trofim Kitchko, author of *Judaism Without Embellishment* (1963), later became an anti-Zionist writer and penned *Zionism, the Enemy of Our Youth* (1972). It was easy to shift from anti-Judaism to anti-Zionism, since the underlying motivation was hostility toward Jews.[36]

1967-1987: A RICH BOUQUET OF ANTI-ZIONISM

All the parts came together in the climactic phase of Soviet anti-Zionism, 1967-1987, which revived earlier Soviet themes, adapted old Tsarist ones, and developed new ones.

(a) *Background and Context*

The stunning Israeli military victory in the 1967 Six-Day War led to a backlash of furious Soviet anti-Israelism and anti-Zionism. The Arab defeat was a blow to Soviet prestige, because Egypt and Syria had been armed with Soviet weapons, which proved to be worthless. The Soviet Union and all the Eastern bloc states (except Romania) broke off diplomatic relations with Israel during the war and responded with a whirlwind of anti-Zionist propaganda (to be analyzed below).

Soviet Jews, however, had an opposite reaction – one of pride and identification with Israel. Between 1968 and 1970, there were 220 public letters and petitions by Soviet Jews asking or demanding the right to leave for Israel. During a period of a year and five months, between June 1968 and October 1969, 30,000 Soviet Jews requested letters of invitation from Israel, the first step in the Soviet emigration process. The first case to draw broad public attention was that of Boris Kochubiyevsky of Kyiv, who wrote an open letter to the Soviet leadership on November 28, 1968. It opened with the words: "I am a Jew. I want to live in the Jewish state. That is my right, just as it is the right of a Ukrainian to live in Ukraine."[37] Kochubiyevsky was arrested and convicted in March 1969 for slandering the Soviet state.

Zionist groups emerged in all major cities. One can speak loosely of the reemergence of a Zionist movement in the Soviet Union for the first time since the 1920s. Underground Zionist periodicals ("Samizdat") began publication in early 1970, one of which was called *Exodus* (Russian "Iskhod"). Unable to emigrate, a group of activists from Leningrad and Riga planned the hijacking of

[36] On Kitchko, Soviet antisemitism in this period, and the portrayal of Israel in the Soviet press, see Ronald I. Rubin (ed.), *The Unredeemed: Antisemitism in the Soviet Union* (Chicago, Ill: Quadrangle Books, 1968),115-26, 135-45, 158-62.
[37] Moshe Dector (Ed.), *Redemption! Jewish Freedom Letters from Russia* (New York, NY: American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry, 1970), 18-19.

a small airplane to Finland, from where they hoped to leave for Israel. The members of the group were arrested before even reaching the airplane, and put on trial in December 1970, an event that was front-page news in the New York Times.

Soviet Jewish emigration had become the cause of an international movement. The first international conference on Soviet Jewry was held in Brussels in February 1971, with the slogan "Let my people go" (taken from Exodus 5:1).[38] The Soviet authorities responded with a mixture of strategic concessions, repressive measures and intense propaganda.

A major concession occurred in 1971, when the Soviet leadership decided to allow limited emigration of Jews to Israel. This was a difficult decision because the advent of a wave of emigration would puncture the Soviet myth that the USSR was the best society on earth for all peoples including Jews. What's more, the authorities worried that conceding to the demand of one group (Jews) would lead to an explosion of demands by various other groups and the loss of social control. On the other hand, the Zionists' demand was the easiest one for the Soviets to satisfy, because it involved leaving the country, not changing it, and related to a relatively small group, the Jews, a scattered ethnicity that constituted 1% of the Soviet population (in Moscow – 4.5%).

The Soviet authorities' main incentive for making the emigration-concession had to do with foreign relations: the desire for trade with the United States (e.g., the purchase of grain) and the desire for arms-control agreements that would facilitate the transition to a consumer goods economy. Jewish emigration became a Soviet bargaining chip in the politics of "détente" – something that the USSR gave to the US in exchange for trade credits and arms control. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (December 1979), Soviet-American relations soured, détente was suspended - and consequently the Soviets cut off Jewish emigration. [39]

In the decade between 1971 and 1981, approximately 250,000 Jews and their relatives left the Soviet Union, more than 65% of them settling in Israel. But the emigration allowed in the 1970s was severely limited. Many applicants were rejected on a variety of grounds: access to state secrets, insufficient family relatives in Israel, failure to obtain permission from one's employer or parents, or no grounds at all. The people whose emigration applications were rejected came to be known as "refuseniks.". [40] They typically lost their employment and were left in a kind of economic and social

[38] The history of the Jewish movement has a rich literature. See, for instance, Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us We'll; Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010).
[39] Robert O. Freedman, "Soviet Jewry and Soviet American Relations: A Historical Analysis," in *Soviet Jewry in the Decisive Decade, 1971-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), 38-68. Jewish emigration resumed in 1988, but under the very different conditions of Mikhail Gorbachev's liberalization policies, known as "Glasnost" and "Perestroika.". That late wave, which continued into the post-Soviet years, is beyond the purview of this essay.
[40] Mark Azbel, *Refusenik: Trapped in the USSR* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 198). Ark Toltz, "Migration since World War I" in the *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* - https://encyclopedia.yivo.org/article/2533.

limbo. "Refuseniks" were viewed by their Soviet neighbors and acquaintances as traitors, since they had applied to leave for an enemy state. The plight of the "refuseniks" deterred many other Jews from applying to leave, which was the objective of the refusals.

The Soviet security organs engaged in repressive measures "as expected." Aliyah activists – those who demonstrated in public for their right to emigrate, led illegal Hebrew classes, and produced Jewish samizdat literature – were harassed and imprisoned on fictitious charges. In 1971 alone, there were trials against groups of Aliyah activists in Leningrad, Riga, Kishinev and Odessa. The KGB established a special anti-Zionism department in July 1973 whose agents engaged not only in surveillance, but also in blackmail and threats, anonymous assaults and beatings, planting narcotics and weapons in the homes of Aliyah activists, and committing some of them to psychiatric hospitals.[41] In 1978, several trials of Moscow activists were held, on charges ranging from "malicious hooliganism" (for hanging a banner "Let us go to Israel" on an apartment balcony) to "parasitism" (i.e., failing to work, except in the illegal profession of Hebrew teachers). The culminating trial was of activist Anatoly (Natan) Sharansky, who was convicted of treason and espionage, and sentenced to thirteen years in prison and labor camps.

(b) *Anti-Zionist Propaganda*

During the 1967 war, the Soviets engaged in intense anti-Israel propaganda and, beginning in 1969, its focus shifted to attacking Zionism. The Soviet campaign against Zionism surpassed in volume and intensity even anti-American propaganda. Between 1968 and 1974, 134 books against Israel and Zionism were published in the USSR.[42] Some of these books were bestsellers, such as Yuri Ivanov's Beware: Zionism (first edition 1969, second expanded edition 1970), with 275,000 copies published. The Soviets also issued Beware Zionism in translations into better English, Arabic, Armenian, Tajik, Kyrgyz, and other languages. The total circulation of all the book's editions was about 550,000. And, in 1970 alone, 200 articles against Zionism appeared in the Soviet press.[43]

This literature can be divided into moderate and radical tendencies. The moderates viewed Zionism as a chauvinistic and racist ideology, which engaged in aggression and mass murder; it was allied with, and a tool of, American Imperialism. Nonetheless, this literature distinguished between Zionism and Jews. Soviet Jews were equal members of society who had contributed to science,

[41] For insights into the view of the Soviet leadership on these trials, and on anti-Zionist propaganda, see Boris Morozov, *Documents on Soviet Jewish Emigration* (Frank Cass, 1999). G. V. Kostyrchenko, *Secret Policy: From Brezhnev to Gorbachev* [in Russian] (Vol. 1; Moscow: International Relations, 2019), 71-78.
[42] Pinkus, *National Rebirth*, 138-9.
[43] Frankel, "The Soviet Regime," 466. https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Иванов_Юрий_Сергеевич.

technology and culture since the revolution. Also, most American Jews were Democrats, and not active Zionists in any meaningful sense of the word. Antisemitism was outlawed in the USSR, and one anti-Zionist wrote: "It is, of course, essential to wage a decisive struggle against antisemitism as against Zionism. That is what the great Lenin taught."[44]

The moderates claimed that most of the Soviet Jews who wished to leave for Israel were being deceived by the Zionists; only a few of them were paid agents or troublemakers. One objective of this stream of writing, often unstated, was to persuade Jews that life in the USSR was good, or good enough, and to dissuade them from applying to leave. Official Soviet Jews adopted this tack, at the "encouragement" of the authorities, including the chief rabbi of Moscow, Yehuda Leib Levin (and later Adolph Shayevich), Yiddish editor Aron Vergelis, World War II hero David Dragunsky, among others. They coalesced into the "Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public," founded in 1983.[45]

By contrast, the radicals combined the political/ideological anti-Zionism of the 1920s with the conspiratorial anti-Zionism of 1949-1953 and added some new themes as well. Their literature was larger and noisier than the rival trend, with the major points of the radical anti-Zionist literature including the following:

> i) *Zionism as a racist ideology based on Judaism*: Zionism, like Judaism, teaches that Jews are the chosen people, and are therefore entitled to enslave, exploit and oppress other people. "The ideological roots of Zionist gangsterism go back to the 'holy' Torah scrolls and doctrines of the Talmud."[46]
>
> ii) *Zionism as a global anti-communist movement*: "The Zionists always viewed a 'Jewish state' only as a means to achieving capitalist aims … to create in many countries a reserve of strikebreakers of the revolutionary movement…. Having concentrated in its hands immense financial resources,… having been propped up by the billionaires of many countries, it works everywhere, day in and day out, against communism."[47]
>
> (iii) *Zionist/Israeli crimes and genocide*: By its very nature, as a product of Zionism, Israel engages in aggression and crimes against the Arabs. In 1967, the Soviet press reported that Israeli tanks rolled over Arab POWS, soldiers engaged in public executions of women and

[44] Cited by Frankel, "The Soviet Regime," p. 464; Kostyrchenko, *Secret Politics*, 522-525.
[45] See the "Statement of Soviet Citizens of Jewish Nationality", in Boris Morozov, Documents on Soviet Jewish Emigration (London, Frank Cass, 1999) pp. 71-75. The propaganda department of the central committee of the Communist Party prepared the statement for them. On the Anti-Zionist Committee, see Kostyrchenko, *Secret Politics: From Brezhnev to Gorbachev*, pp. 480-488.
[46] Vladimir Begun, *The Invasion without Arms* (Minsk, n.p. 1972).
[47] Yuri Ivanov, *Caution: Zionism!: Essays on the Ideology, Organisation and Practice of Zionism* (Moscow: Progress Press, 1970)

children; and set fire to a mosque full of villagers. All these charges were unsubstantiated. The Soviet representative to the UN accused Israel of genocide in 1976. "Hardly a single day has gone by [since the founding of Israel – DEF] without some disclosure in the world press of facts concerning the crime of genocide perpetrated by the Israeli racists."[48]

iv) *Israel/Zionism as an agent of American imperialism and colonialism*: This literature claimed that the Arabs in general, and the Palestinian Arabs in particular, were waging struggles for national liberation. On the other hand, "all the Zionist bands of thugs … operate in close contact with the CIA and FBI."[49]

(iv) *"Zionists" as a code word for "perfidious Jews"*. The literature claimed that the United Jewish Appeal, Bnai Brith, the American Jewish Committee, The Joint Distribution Committee were all Zionist organizations, that engaged in espionage and sabotage in socialist countries. Zionists capitalists, such as the Lehmans, Rothschilds, Warburgs, Guggenheims, and Wolfsons controlled the banks in America, and bankrolled the American military-industrial complex.[50]

(v) *Zionists Agents engage in subversive activities in the USSR and socialist countries*. Aliyah activists are Zionist agents seeking to destabilize Soviet society. Anti-Sovietism is the profession of Zionists[51]; "Zionism tried to destroy the solidarity of the socialist community by covert methods…. They played the role of convinced Communists, devoted to Marxism, so as to worm their way into the party's organs … trying to achieve the aim of undermining, destroying and discrediting the socialist regime."[52]

Equally important is the fact that this literature presented no positive model of Jews, past or present. It mentioned no Jews who were progressive, pro-socialist, or internationalist. The colors were all black. Zionist = Jew= Enemy. Several Western analyses concluded that the Soviet anti-Zionist literature reiterated wholesale canards from the propagandist hoax Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a work written in Tsarist times, by replacing the word "Jew" with "Zionist."

Emotionally, for Jews, the most offensive aspect of the campaign was the comparison of Israel/Zionism to the Nazis. Political cartoons featured Moshe Dayan knocking Adolph Hitler off his pedestal; an Israeli soldier imitating the shooting style of an SS officer; an Israeli with a kipah co-

[48] Abraham Brumberg, "Soviet Jewry and the Six-Day War", in Rubin, *The Unredeemed*, pp.179-192; Zev Katz, "After the Six-Day War", in Lionel Kochan (ed.), *The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917*(Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 333-348; *New York Times*, May 11, 1976, p. 3. V. N. Yemelyanov, *Dezionization: International Zionism* (Paris: np.,1978).
[49] V. N. Yemelyanov, *Dezionization: International Zionism* (Paris: np.,1978);
[50] Freeman, *Antisemitism in the Soviet Union*, 155, 411, 559, 572, 590, 622-23;
Freeman, *Antisemitism in the Soviet Union*, 155, 411, 559, 572, 590, 622-23.
[51] V. Bolshakov, *Anti-Sovietism: Profession of Zionists* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1971).
[52] Begun, I*nvasion Without War*.

authoring the book on mass murder with a Nazi officer, etc. Later came the thesis that the Zionists had in fact collaborated with the Nazis during World War II and that they had been accomplices in the massacre at Babi Yar. One author even offered an explanation: The Zionists wanted the older, weaker Jews to be killed off, because only the youth were fit for building the Jewish state in Palestine.[53] For the unknowing Soviet reader, the analogy and connection between Nazism and Zionism was the most powerful argument against Zionism. The Nazis were the paramount enemy of the USSR. And if the Zionists were associated with them, they (Zionists) were truly the epitome of evil. [54]

Domestically, the anti-Zionist campaign had extremely harmful consequences for Soviet Jews. The typical Russian or Ukrainian reader of the propaganda could not distinguish between Zionists and Jews. Readers who were predisposed to antisemitic attitudes did not try; their prejudices were confirmed. But even the average Russian drew the conclusion that any Jew could be a secret or potential Zionist. If a Jew decided to apply to emigrate, he/she instantly became an enemy of the USSR. Suspicion of Jews abounded. Fewer Jews were accepted into universities or promoted at places of employment. Why should a dean or Human Resources Director risk being accused of harboring Zionists at his school or factory? In short, the anti-Zionist campaign led to a deterioration in the situation of Soviet Jews. The only ways Jews could deal with this situation was either to openly dissociate themselves from Zionism, in a humiliating act of self-preservation, or, paradoxically, to decide to leave the country. The rampant antisemitism cum anti-Zionism pushed more Jews toward *Aliyah*.

Because the anti-Zionist propaganda had so many themes, it was easily adaptable to various foreign audiences. For Western leftists, the Soviets emphasized the struggle against Zionist militarism and genocide, in the era of the Vietnam War; for Marxists, they stressed the image of the class enemy – Zionist capitalists and bankers. For the recently independent African and Asian countries, the Soviet Union used anti-Zionism to present itself as the champion of national liberation against racism and colonialism; and in Arab lands – the anti-Israel rhetoric was music to local ears.

As a superpower, the Soviet Union exported anti-Zionism on a global scale. It took the leading role in advancing the United Nations' resolution that Zionism was "a form of racism and racial discrimination," which passed the UN General Assembly in 1975 - 72 in favor, 35 against, with 32

[53] Pierre-André Taguieff, *Les Protocoles des sages de Sion. Faux et usages d'un faux, t. I, Introduction à l'étude des "Protocoles:" un faux et ses usages dans le siècle* (Paris, Berg International, "Faits et Représentations," 1992).
[54] See the article and collection of cartoons, "When Nazism Became Zionism: An Analysis of Political Cartoons," *Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union* (1983), 159-94. Frankel, "The Soviet Regime," p. 465.; for example, see Freeman, *Antisemitism in the Soviet Union*, 558, 564.

abstentions. (The UN voted to revoke the resolution in December 1991, ten days before the Soviet Union was formally dissolved.) There was considerable intellectual traffic between the Soviet "Zionologists," the Western far left, and Arab intellectuals. Soviet "Zionologists" lectured and attended conferences in Cairo, Beirut and Baghdad. Mahmoud Abbas, today President of the Palestinian Authority, defended his doctoral dissertation at the Institute for Oriental Studies in Moscow in 1982, on "The Relationship Between the Zionists and the Nazis, 1933-1945."[55]

CONCLUSION

The history of anti-Zionism in the Soviet Union demonstrates that the phenomenon was chameleon-like. It could disappear and reappear, shift form and metamorphose. In 1949, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the Soviets had the realization that they could use the word "Zionist" as a surrogate for "Jew," and thereby spread antisemitism while denying they were doing so. The radical anti-Zionism of the 1970s and 1980s renewed this practice. It in turn had a global impact - on the far left in the US and Europe, on the Arab World, Africa, and Asia. The legacy of that anti-Zionism lives on in various circles today.

[55] Izabella Tabarovsky, "Mahmoud Abas' Dissertation," *Tablet* (Jan 18, 2023) - https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/mahmoud-abbas-soviet-dissertation.

"And we'll understand it better by and by:" A Womanist Examination of the State of Black-Jewish Solidarity

Dr. Whitney N. Weathers, D.Min,
Chief Program and Strategy Officer of BAMAH



Abstract

This paper argues that the emphasis on the image of Dr. King and Rabbi Heschel (above), and the consequent romanticization of "Black-Jewish" relations, produces distorted narratives regarding how we view the future of Black-Jewish solidarity. This distortion, as we will see, specifically creates an erasure of Black women, resulting in a lopsided story of the liberation movement. Later in this paper, I will briefly describe narratives connected to the historicization of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), along with the challenges of upholding them. First, I offer a brief introduction to my background to illuminate my interest in this topic.

Keywords: Womanism, Womanist Theology, Black-Jewish, intersectionality, Civil Rights Movement, Whiteness, invisiblization, Feminism

INTRODUCTION

Some scholars and cultural archivists argue that Black-Jewish relations were at their most vibrant during the Civil Rights Movement (1955-1969). An iconic image of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—the most prominent Black-American figure of the Civil Rights Movement—walking arm in arm with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the most prominent Jewish-American figures, became a powerful symbol both during (and after) the Civil Rights Movement. Specifically, the image has been used as evidence that Black Christian and (predominantly) Ashkenazi Jewish communities previously worked together against a common enemy: white supremacy disguised as White Christianity (i.e., Christian Nationalism).[1]

[1] Figure 1: Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Source: Jewish Women's Archive - https://jwa.org/, 2025).

Marc Dollinger, however, argues that the photograph historically functioned as a romanticized proof of evidence of a Black-Jewish solidarity: "[the image] …tended to universalize the friendship between Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel as a metaphor for all Blacks and Jews."[2] Dollinger's observation sheds light on the amalgamative nature of how the two communities have typically been described: Black-Jewish, with a hyphen, implying that the communities are connected yet separate.

Cornel West has a different interpretation of the relationship between the Black and Jewish Communities. For him, "Black anti-Semitism and Jewish anti-[B]lack racism are real, and both are as profoundly American as cherry pie. There was no golden age in which [B]lacks and Jews were free of tension and friction. Yet there was a better age when the common histories of oppression and degradation of both groups served as a springboard for genuine empathy and principled alliances."[3] West takes umbrage with the assertion that there was a "golden age" for the Black community and the Jewish community. Yet, regardless of Dollinger's and West's interpretations, both authors' observations uphold the binary nature of the Black-Jewish solidarity movement: a concept that too often treats Blackness and Jewishness as mutually exclusive identities.

RESEARCHER BACKGROUND: BLACK. CHRISTIAN. WOMANIST.

I am a Black woman, and Womanist theologian, working within the Jewish ecosystem. For the past four to five years, I have studied the complexities and nuances of the struggles connected to Black–Jewish solidarity. Previously, I worked at *UpStart*, a support organization for Jewish entrepreneurs (both those who were Jewish and those who were supporting the Jewish community); my work there centered on how to increase inclusion, equity, and resources for Jewish People of Color (JPoC), Disabled Jewish people, and Jewish members of the LGBTQIA+ community within the organization's programming and resource allocation. That work challenged my assumptions about the Jewish community and refined my resolve to increase my work within interfaith spaces and initiatives.[4]

I am currently the incoming Chief Program and Strategy Officer of BAMAH, an arts organization dedicated to increasing Black-Jewish dialogue through immersive arts experiences with artists from Israel and Historically Black College and University (HBCU) students. Academically, my doctoral research focused on the belongingness needs and challenges that Black women face in

[2] Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s*, Revised edition, Goldstein-Goren Series in American Jewish History (New York: New York University Press, 2024). xii
[3] Cornel West, *Race Matters*, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 71.
[4] To read more about my journey, please see the article, "My Journey as a Black Christian DEI Leader at a Jewish Nonprofit" - https://www.philanthropy.com/opinion/black-and-jewish-allies-essay/.

predominantly white seminary spaces, which directly speaks to my desire for theological and faith-based spaces to be communities of welcome and care. In the Christian faith to which I adhere, we have a scripture that says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12) Put plainly, I see Black-Jewish solidarity as a spiritual struggle against a shared evil—white supremacy, which has created the conditions for racial based systemic oppression and patriarchal ruling.

PAPER OVERVIEW

Within this paper, I argue that by using a Womanist lens to interrogate the course of Black-Jewish solidarity, a faith-based, action-centered path forward to sustained change can be created for all members of the Black-Jewish communities. Womanism resists paternalistic and heteronormative models of cooperation, thus creating conditions for shared liberation and authentic community. I begin by examining how the legacy of Black-Jewish solidarity—especially connected to the Civil Rights Movement— has been tainted by both racism and patriarchy by silencing the voice and impact of the Black woman. After that, I describe Womanism at length, both as a secular and spiritual lens through which to view community-building and care. Additionally, I posit that Womanism is one of the strongest mechanisms for understanding the multifaceted challenge of combating both anti-Black racism and antisemitism, by appealing to the social and local nature of Black women's intersecting oppressions. Finally, utilizing a Womanist hermeneutical lens, I will offer specific next steps for Black-Jewish solidarists to bring the voice of Black women to the forefront of anti-oppression efforts and spaces.

THE PROBLEM(S) WITH THE HISTORICAL DEPICTION OF "BLACK-JEWISH" SOLIDARITY: A BRIEF SYNOPSIS

1) *The communities are two separate entities.* Grammatically, what is averred by the writing of "Black-Jewish" is that there must be both connection and separation between the groups. Dollinger highlights the problematic nature of the phraseology of "Black-Jewish" thusly:

> Rising consciousness about the presence of JOCs [Jews of Color] and their exclusion from most of organized Jewish life goes to the heart of a new and important historiographic challenge in the study of Jewish participation in the Civil Rights movement.... scholars have

> deployed the phrase "Black-Jewish" relations to describe the interracial alliance of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, such a phrase implies Jewish whiteness.[5]

Bruce Haynes agrees with Dolinger's sentiment: "Traditionally, American Jewish identity was founded upon a binary opposition between Black and White that ignored the fact that Jews come in many colors, as any visit to the State of Israel would reveal."[6] The reduction of Jewishness to whiteness not only disregards the impacts of antisemitism that some Jewish people experience (and experienced) as non-white identifying persons but also erases the lived experiences of Jewish people of color, thereby disregarding the diversity inherent in the Jewish community. In her talk, "Who Counts? Race and the Jewish Future," Ilana Kaufman asks, "Have you ever considered if there were Black Jews on the Pettus Bridge?[7] I'm guessing that thought never crossed your mind."[8] I do not believe Kaufman's statement to be condemnatory; rather, I imagine she wanted her statement to be revelatory: as consumers of history, we have been conditioned to think along the racial binary making us disregard the possibility of Black Jews on the Pettus Bridge.

2) *"Black" has historically been interpreted to mean Black-Christian*.[9] Referentially, the image of Rev. Dr. King and Rabbi Heschel embodies the faith-based nature of the Civil Rights movement. The Black Church has long been regarded as the epicenter for spiritual formation and political organization for the Black community, as noted by researcher Albert J. Raboteau: "An agency for social control, a source of economic cooperation, an arena for political activity, a sponsor of education, and a refuge in a hostile white world, the [B]lack [C]hurch has been historically the social center of Afro-American life."[10] The Black [C]hurch, as an abolitionist entity, was poised to support and lead the CRM, and according to Raboteau, Black Christian leaders would have been brought up to fight for their own freedoms and those of others. However, the assumption that all leaders involved in the CRM were Black and Christian is problematic because it directly invalidates the impact of other non-Black or non-Christian leaders such as Betty L. Shabazz (a Muslim); Rabbi Capers

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[5] Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics*. xiii.
[6] Bruce D. Haynes, "An Introduction to the Special Issue: Jews of Color," *Contemporary Jewry* 44/3 (Sept 2024): 499 - https://doi.org/10.1007/s12397-024-09602-5.
[7] The Pettus Bridge is a famous Civil Rights site: "The Edmund Pettus Bridge, now a National Historic Landmark, was the site of the brutal Bloody Sunday beatings of civil rights marchers during the first march for voting rights. The televised attacks were seen all over the nation, prompting public support for the civil rights activists in Selma and for the voting rights campaign. After Bloody Sunday, protestors were granted the right to continue marching, and two more marches for voting rights followed," (Source: "United States Civil Rights Trail," 2025 - https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/edmund-pettus-bridge/).
[8] Ilana Kaufman, "Racism in the Jewish Community: The Uncomfortable Truth," Lecture, EliTalks, 2015 - https://www.myjewishlearning.com/eli-talks/who-counts-race-and-the-jewish-future/.
[9] Henry Louis Gates, *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song* (New York: Penguin, 2021), 130–40.
[10] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, Updated ed (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004). Preface.

Funnye (a Hebrew Israelite); Malcolm X (a Muslim); and Bayard Rustin (a Quaker), etc., within the CRM. While I am not seeking to negate the irrefutable position that the Black Church played in the CRM, I am highlighting how the centrality of the Church has been used to fortify the Black-Jewish binary.

3) *Black-Jewish solidarity is about the Jewish Community's support of Black people (not a bi-directional collaboration).* As noted by Ilana Kaufman, a Black Jewish woman, "Our orientation to Black-Jewish relations was as white Jews helping Black people, which created a hierarchical dynamic that feeds into racism and otherness."[11] The othering mentioned by Kaufman is deeply problematic because that narrative assumes that Black people cannot help [or be part of the] Jewish people. In his article, "Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism," Eric K. Ward highlights that it was his desire for *shared liberation* that led him to combat antisemitism: "Likewise, as much as I draw inspiration from the Jewish community, and as much as I adore my Jewish partner and friends, it was my organizing against antisemitism as a Black antiracist that first pulled me to the Jewish community, not the other way around. I developed an analysis of antisemitism because I wanted to smash White supremacy; *because I wanted to be free* (emphasis added)."[12] Ward's words offer a counternarrative to the monodirectional characterization of the Civil Rights movement (both past and current) because he notes that Black people's anti-racist actions work to mitigate the violence of white supremacy, of which everyone, even the white supremacist, is a victim.

Cornel West contends that Black (Christian) Americans' mis-categorization of Jewishness as whiteness also creates a false narrative of Black-Jewish solidarity because, ". . .the particular interactions of Jews and [B]lack people in the hierarchies of business and education casts Jews as the public face of oppression for the [B]lack community, and thus lend[s] evidence to the mistaken view of Jews as any other white folk."[13] If the Black community sees the Jewish community as the upholders of white supremacy, then there can be no bidirectional support.

What Kaufman and West highlight is that the historicization of the Black-Jewish coalition has presented itself as a relationship based on one-directional benevolence and not bi-directional support. Danjuma G. Gibson describes the mischaracterization thusly: "Perhaps one of the greatest misunderstandings (and tragedies) of the Civil Rights Movement is that it was interpreted as giving concessions to [B]lack and [B]rown people based on the sympathies and moral progress of white

[11] Debra N. Cohen, "Ilana Kaufman Talks Racial Justice and Jewish Philanthropy," *Hadassah Magazine* (July 2019).
[12] Eric K. Ward, "Skin in the Game," *The Public Eye* (June 2017) - https://politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism.
[13] West, *Race Matters*, 76.

institutions and the American power structure."[14] That particular characterization of the movement negates that Black people helped white-presenting folks as well (White presenting Jewish folks, included).

To explain further, this characterization fails to mention, for instance, the Jewish professors who worked at HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) when predominantly white institutions would not hire them or the Black community members who housed Jewish freedom riders and activists during the Civil Rights Movement.[15] Put plainly, the challenge with this particular narrative of a one-directional Black-Jewish relationship is that what is assumed is that Black people could not reciprocate support to the members of the Jewish community.

4) *All of the most important voices of the former and current movement are non-Black Jewish men, Black men, and non-Black Jewish women.* Perhaps, the most tragic element of the historicization of the movement is the marginalization and erasure of the voices of Black-Jewish women and non-men, as well as Black women and non-men. [16] Ralph Ellison, in his book *Invisible Man*, avers that invisibility is precipitated by the seer and not the person seeking to be seen: "I am an invisible [wo]man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe: Nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids, and I might even be said to possess a mind. *I am invisible, simply because people refuse to see me*," (emphasis added).[17] The "refusal" to see others also characterized as erasure] feels endemic to the Black-Jewish solidarity landscape because contemporary leadership and historical narratives overlook and omit Black women's voices and contributions. In the next section, I will explore how many current publications, connected to Black-Jewish relations, uphold the implicit erasure that occurs concerning Black women's support of the former and future Black-Jewish solidarity struggle.

SEEING AND BEING SEEN: THE INVISIBILIZING OF THE BLACK WOMAN

In her article, "In the Color Line: The Tenacity of Racism and Its Challenges to Ethicists," Susannah Heschel, writes that, "On issues of race, we think of Jewish symbols: Joachim Prinz speaking at the 1963 March on Washington on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial; Mickey Schwerner and

[14] Danjuma G. Gibson, *Through the Eyes of Titans: Finding Courage to Redeem the Soul of a Nation: Images of Pastoral Care and Leadership, Self-Care, and Radical Love in Public Spaces / Danjuma G. Gibson* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2024), 159.
[15] For more information regarding this coalition, please see the PBS special, "A Slice of the Community: Black-Jewish Relations: Controversy, History and Allyship," (2023): https://www.pbs.org/video/black-jewish-relations-controversy-history-and-allyship-qv6etc/. Of note: there are no Black women featured in the special.
[16] This statement should not be characterized to mean that women of the Civil Rights Movement are not well known. Rather, what I am asserting is that when imagining the iconic figures of the movement, there are more men mentioned than non-men.
[17] Ralph Ellison, "Invisible Man: Prologue," in *Black Voices: An Anthology of African-American Literature,* ed. Abraham Chapman (New York, NY: Signet Classic, 2001), 192.

Andrew Goodman registering votes in the South, murdered together with James Chaney in Mississippi; Abraham J. Heschel and the other rabbis who marched in Selma for voting rights in 1965."[18] Interestingly, when reporting on the key Jewish figures of the CRM, all of the figures listed in Heschel's analysis are men. Connectedly, a cursory exploration of the Jewish Women's Archive, a modern repository for Jewish history, uncovers that the section dedicated to Jewish women and their efforts towards the CRM is absent of Black Jewish Women altogether.[19] The site highlights Jewish women who were integral to the movement; while there are Black women pictured on the page, there is no direct mention of the impact of Black women (Jewish or otherwise) within the actual article.

Additionally, the monograph, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* by Debra L. Schultz also, only lists white-presenting Jewish women as participants in the CRM struggle. Reiteratively, when Kaufman asks, "Did you imagine Black Jews on the Pettus Bridge?" it would appear as though the answer would be "no." The article entitled, "Top 18 Jewish Female Icons," published by BBYO, a top Jewish organization for Jewish teens, makes no mention of Black Jewish Women[20] and even the book, *Iconic Jewish Women: Fifty-Nine Inspiring, Courageous, Revolutionary Role Models for Young Girls,* fails to highlight one Black Jewish Woman as an inspiring figure.

In the monograph, *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*, there are eleven different readings dedicated to understanding antisemitism; none of the Jewish authors identify as Black, and the sole non-Jewish author, Cornel West, is a man. Notably, the one article specifically dedicated to Black-Jewish relations starts with a quote from the Black woman poet Lorraine Lansbury and ends with a nod towards Black women pastors.

Rev. Carolyn Knight and Suzan Johnson Cook, acknowledge their solidarity efforts during Yankel Rosenbaum's murder.[21] Illustratively, within the eleven articles, Black women, Jewish or otherwise, only appear once, which perhaps illuminates the invisibility of Black women's voices and influences connected to understanding and combating antisemitism and anti-Black racism. But, as Cheryl T. Gilkes has argued, "If it wasn't for the [Black] women, racially oppressed communities would not have the institutions, organizations, strategies, and ethics that enable the group not only to survive or maintain itself as an integral whole, but also to develop in an alien, hostile, oppressive

[18] Susannah Heschel, "2. in the Color Line," in *Judaism, Race, and Ethics*, ed. Jonathan K. Crane (University Park, PA: PSU Press, 2020), 18 - https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271086712-003.
[19] It should be noted that the lack of Black Jewish women mentioned on the site is not exceptional; rather, the paucity of Black Jewish women featured in Civil Rights historiography is revelatory. While researching, I could not find any Black Jewish women known for their work in the Civil Rights movement.
[20] See article, "Top 18 Jewish Female Icons," here: https://azabbg.bbyo.org/post/top-18-jewish-female-icons.
[21] Maurianne Adams and Warren J. Blumenfeld, et al., *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000): 133-191.

situation and to challenge it."[22] Thus, it is time to reevaluate how we think about the necessary players in the Black-Jewish solidarity conversation.

Dr. Eboni Turman, in her article, "Of Men and [Mountain]Tops: Black Women, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Ethics and Aesthetics of Invisibility in the Movement for Black Lives," contends that patriarchal heteronormativity of the CRM "hindered its witness."[23] She writes, "Sexism in the Black [C]hurch paradoxically defies Black freedom. This paradox emerges from the moral dis-connect between Black prophetic churches' institutional espousal of freedom and its conflicting practices that bind Black women to sacralized politics of silence and invisibility."[24] Here, Turman argues that the fight for freedom is futile if a group still upholds some form of bondage.

In the case of Black women, voicelessness is a form of bondage because Black men cannot be proxies for Black women. The need, then, is for barriers that silence and invisibilize Black women to be removed. She notes that Black women were rendered invisible during the CRM, not because they were absent, but because those who needed to see them refused to. Connectedly, Walter Earl Fluker argues that "the misogynist patriarchal leadership of [men Civil Rights figures] has been well-documented and will require even greater attention if they are to continue to serve as critical resources for reflection and formation of new ways of thinking, strategizing and moving into new times . . ."[25] Therefore, there is an urgent and necessary reckoning that must occur regarding who is idolized and upheld as exemplars in the Civil Rights and, by proxy, the Black-Jewish solidarity struggle.

In this section, I illuminated how invisibility plagues the plight of Black women. In the next section, I will explain the secular and spiritual concept of Womanism as a practical framework for addressing the invisibilization of Black women.

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[22] Cheryl T. Gilkes, *"If It Wasn't for the Women ...": Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 7.

[23] In the Black Christian community, some use testimony as the ability to voice how God has worked miracles in their lives. An audible expression, typically done in a crowd, this process is known as being a "witness." A "witness" in this case is the integrity related to one's testimony. Therefore, a hindered witness is when someone's testimony has become diluted because of some form of flaw (either within the testimony or within the person). For more information, see the monograph *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching* by Cleophus LaRue or *Bible Witness in Black Churches* by G. Baker-Fletcher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011).

[24] Eboni M. Turman and Philosophy Documentation Center, "Of Men and [Mountain]Tops: Black Women, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Ethics and Aesthetics of Invisibility in the Movement for Black Lives," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 39/1 (2019): 58 - https://doi.org/10.5840/jsce20194157.

[25] Walter E. Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted: The Future of the Black Church in Post-Racial America*, Religion, Race, and Ethnicity (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 149.

"AIN'T I A WOMAN?": AN INTRODUCTION TO WOMANIST THEOLOGY

At the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, Sojourner Truth delivered the now-famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech.[26] Truth's speech was less about anatomy and more about philosophy. Her admonishment to the predominantly white crowd was that although Black women could work, birth babies, and feel pain, their woman-ness was not as worthy as that of their white peers. Thus, her question: "Ain't I woman?" was actually a summation of the systemic oppression she experienced as a woman, and as a Black person; two identities she could not disconnect. Ultimately, Truth was arguing for the recognition of Black women's humanity.

Returning to the concept of invisibility, Truth was asking, "Don't you see me for who I am with all of my identities?" or "Don't all the parts of me matter?" Although the concept of "intersectionality" (discussed below) did not appear for more than one hundred years after Truth's initial speech, her question was one that Black women have had to grapple with for decades: *can we be seen as both women and Black simultaneously*? Moreover, to what extent does our Blackness inform our woman-ness and vice versa? To what extent are we, as Black women, better poised to understand the journey towards liberation in light of our multiple marginalized identities?

1. *The (Potentially Problematic) Conscription of Intersectionality*

Understanding Womanism first requires understanding the concept of "intersectionality." Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989 to describe how race and gender intersect in ways that oppress Black women.[27] She was clear that the concept was developed by a Black woman, about Black women, and in support of Black women. Fascinatingly, the academy (and others) has conscripted the term to include all identities that inform a person's existence and experience,[28] therefore subsuming the term in a way that is, perhaps, not appropriate nor useful. Jennifer Nash posits that one of the complications with the academic and socio-political tendency to stretch intersectionality to "fit" the plights of others is that it becomes a critique of the framework, thereby removing the framework's original intent: "Critique is not imagined as a generative labour [sic], as a significant component of feminist scholarly conversation; instead, to the extent that it

[26] It should be noted that there is some controversy surrounding the authenticity of Truth's speech. While traditionally attributed to Truth, there is some consternation regarding phrasing within the speech. For more information, please see: "Sojourner Truth: 'Ain't I a Woman?" with The National Park Service, https://www.nps.gov/articles/sojourner-truth.htm.
[27] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 160: https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8/.
[28] David Schraub, "White Jews: An Intersectional Approach," *AJS Review* 43/2 (Nov. 2019): 379–407 - https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009419000461; Jennifer C. Nash, "Feminist Originalism: Intersectionality and the Politics of Reading," *Feminist Theory* 17/1 (April 2016): 3–20 - https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700115620864.

moves away from intersectionality's inaugural texts, critiques hinder intersectionality's analytical capacities."[29] Intersectionality, as a subtext, emphasizes how the invisibility of Black woman-ness creates multiple oppressions for the Black woman; however, in viewing intersectionality through a universalist lens, as it relates to combating racism and antisemitism, Black women have gotten lost.

Karin Stögner notes that, "If intersectionality does not want to be merely a buzzword – or be mentioned purely doxographically according to the motto: 'don't use that concept, only mention it' (Derrida) – then clear thinking about its translation from one context into another is necessary."[30] Personification notwithstanding (the idea that intersectionality "wants" anything), that intersectionality must, in some way, become universally applicable misses the point of its creation. Crenshaw writes: "This is the paradigmatic political and theoretical dilemma created by the intersection of race and gender: Black women are caught between ideological and political currents that combine first to create and then to bury Black women's experiences."[31] The emphasis on Black women is clear, and much like the current Black-Jewish relations, Black women (Jewish or Christian) are required to bury elements of themselves to fit into the binary narrative of being Black or Jewish (or Christian) for the sake of solidarity. Additionally, the broadening of intersectionality also becomes a mechanism for burying: in highlighting the identities of others, Black women remain subtext in larger conversations where they are the minority.

Stögner further argues that the concept of intersectionality, as a combatant of the -isms, fails to address the harmful impacts of antisemitism (which is both a form of racism and xenophobia):

> The discrimination against Jews today is different from that of PoC [People of Color]. If this difference is not recognised [sic], current forms of antisemitism that differ from racism, such as antisemitism related to Israel, not only disappear from view, but can also mask themselves as anti-racist and oppositional. Thus, over-inclusion (treating antisemitism, simply, as racism) necessarily leads to the problem of under-inclusion: contemporary antisemitism is not viewed as racism at all, and the fight against it is less and less recognized [sic] as part of the anti-racist struggle, and can even be considered to be itself conservative, reactionary, even racist.[32]

Problematically, however, Stögner reinforces what continues to be a perpetuated narrative within the Black-Jewish relational understanding: although not all Jewish people are white-skinned, antisemitism must be seen as a separate struggle. Nevertheless, this narrative can uphold the

[29] Nash, "Feminist Originalism," 7.
[30] Karin Stögner, "Intersectionality and Antisemitism – A New Approach," *Fathom*, May 2020: https://fathomjournal.org/intersectionality-and-antisemitism-a-new-approach/.
[31] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing," 160.
[32] Stögner, "Intersectionality and Antisemitism."

invisibilizing of Jewish people of color, especially Black Jewish women, in the name of globalized solidarity.

The tearing apart of intersectionality from the plight of Black women has created the conditions for erasure and voicelessness within Black-Jewish relations. But, to paraphrase Truth, ain't we women? Does not intersectionality offer us reprieve from bifurcated or even trifurcated existences? While helpful, intersectionality, as a framework, is focused on the oppression that Black women experience, which can overshadow the joy and depth connected to Black woman-ness. In the next section, I will explain why Womanism supports the whole experience of being a Black woman and not just about her oppressions.

2. *Purple vs Lavender: Why Womanism Exists*

Alice Walker, in her book *In Search of My Mother's Gardens,* describes womanism as having four distinct elements.[33] I quote Walker's definition in totality below to assist with the framing of the rest of this section. She defines a Womanist as follows:

> 1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A [B]lack feminist or feminist of color. From the [B]lack folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.
> 2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?" Ans. "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."
> 3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.
> 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.[34]

[33] In recent years, Alice Walker has been heavily scrutinized for actions deemed antisemitic; at the time of the release of *In My Mother's Gardens,* this was not the case. It is without question that I stand against antisemitism, in any form and hope that, in being forthright about the complexity of Walker's statements and actions, that can open the door for the important conversation within my article. For more context, please see: https://www.timesofisrael.com/color-purple-release-brings-alice-walkers-history-of-antisemitism-back-into-focus/.

[34] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, A Harvest Book (Orlando Austin New York, San Diego, Toronto, and London: Harcourt, 1983). xi-xii.

First, Walker asserts that Womanists, and those who engage in womanist behaviors, are "serious, responsible, and in charge."[35] In the previous sections, I explained how the invisibilizing of Black women silences their voices, disallows their leadership, and ignores their perspectives on being involved in the shaping of Black-Jewish relations. Eboni Turman writes, "The moral problem of Black women's un-freedom [and invisibilizing] is amplified when it is understood as central, though not intrinsic, to the Black prophetic project of freedom; a project that is employed in church, academy, and society as a beacon for the work of justice-making in the world."[36] Turman refutes the societal impulse to ornamentalize the plight of Black women and argues that Black women's voices must be intrinsically linked to all freedom-based conversations. A Womanist framework not only values the voice(s) of the Black woman but also prioritizes it by activating the voices of others to create sustainable change through intentional dialogue. In short, Womanism takes Black women seriously and puts them in charge of their own liberation.

Second, Walker argues that Womanists see everyone as a part of the same community via the analogy of a garden: "[Womanists are] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in 'Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?' Ans. 'Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.'"[37] Walker's sub-definition highlights the following characteristics of a Womanist: 1) Womanists believe in the survival of the whole community, and 2) Womanists understand that their freedom will probably be self-precipitated.

As I outlined in the previous sections, there still seems to be some tension in defining the "community" that the Black-Jewish solidarity movement is trying to construct. The bifurcation of antisemitism from racism both helps and harms the movement in this way: for Black Jewish women, they are recipients of both "-isms" in addition to being harmed by the impact of sexism. As the Combahee River Collective argues, centralizing the plight of the Black woman, in any movement, is additive to the whole community: "If Black women were free, it would mean everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression."[38] Concomitantly, Walker contends that Womanists are concerned with the whole person, regardless of

[35] Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. xi.
[36] Marshall Turman and Philosophy Documentation Center, "Of Men and [Mountain]Tops," 65.
[37] Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xii.
[38] The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in *All of the Women Are White, All the Black Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1982), 18.

race and status, while also illuminating that a separate framework is necessary, because Black women have routinely been marginalized in liberation movements.

Third, Walker explains that Womanists love their culture. Again, the Black woman has culture that is an amalgamation of faith, music, food, friendship, love, passion, and liberation. Womanists begin with joy and celebration. The rhythms of Black joy and Black sorrow echo an ancient wisdom that both Jewish and Christian communities hold in common. Perhaps one of the most untenable elements of the Black-Jewish solidarity is the solemnity that characterizes the work. It is worth remembering that this deep cultural rootedness and joy are not frivolous but profoundly sacred. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (KJV) proclaims:

> To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
> A time to be born, and a time to die;
> A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
> A time to kill, and a time to heal;
> A time to break down, and a time to build up;
> *A time to weep, and a time to laugh;*
> *A time to mourn, and a time to dance;*
> A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
> A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
> A time to seek, and a time to lose;
> A time to keep, and a time to cast away;
> A time to rend, and a time to sew;
> A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
> A time to love, and a time to hate;
> A time for war, and a time for peace.

This tension between sorrow and celebration is not new. This text reveals that both the Jewish and Christian traditions have long testified that life comes to us in rhythms. Moreover, Scripture teaches us to honor those rhythms by leaning into them completely. Descriptively, Walker notes that Womanists understand the push and pull of struggle and liberation/freedom; the Womanist dances; the Womanist celebrates; the Womanist loves herself and her community, period.

Finally, Walker offers a comparative analysis between the Womanist movement and the feminist movement, as a mechanism for defining the most salient element of Womanism. Walker writes, "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender," highlighting that although closely connected, the terms' meanings are different. The chart below illustrates the nuances of Womanism versus feminism:

	Feminism[39]	Womanism[40]
Definition	… In general, the feminist approach involves support for the equality of men and women, and action directed toward the elimination of women's subordination.	"A [B]lack feminist or feminist of color…committed to the wholeness of entire people, male *and* female."
Origin	1848, Seneca Falls Convention[41]	1980s, with the publication of *In Search of My Mother's Garden*
Challenges	"The seriousness of the charge White feminists make regarding inappropriate male universalism is undercut by the limited perspective which presumes the universality of women's experience."	"Due to the emphasis on the lived experience of the scholar, the label becomes inextricably tied to both the person and her scholarship . . . at least currently, Womanist approaches in biblical studies [and other studies] require a persona; identification as an African American Woman."[42]

Table 1

This chart outlines that feminism is older and more defined than Womanism. Moreover, feminism has an express goal: to eliminate the subordination of all women (although originally "all" meant all *White* women). Connectedly, because the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention was led by white women, women of color, specifically Black women, were left out of the original discussions regarding equality; it is worth noting that slavery did not end in the United States until 1865, which means that the creation of feminism was incubated within a slavocracy.

Without question, Womanism is informed by feminism. Whereas feminism seeks freedom from subordination for the individual woman, Womanism seeks liberation for the individual and the members of her community, simultaneously. It is worth noting that all known Womanists scholars are Black women, which can create some tension for those seeking to embrace the components of Womanism. I will address that tension in subsequent sections.

Fascinatingly, there are usually adjectives attached to the lens of feminism that one is practicing. Therefore, Jewish Feminism, Christian Feminism, and Black Feminism are all different feminist lenses, and although there is a definite intersection between the lenses, the problematic

[39] Nyasha Junior, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation*, First edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 4.
[40] Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. xi-xii.
[41] Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, American Academy of Religion Academy Series, no. 64 (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1989), 5.
[42] Junior, *Womanist Biblical Interpretation*, 115.

separation of the specialties highlights, again, the forced identity-based selection process that occurs for some Black women. Crenshaw gives language to the disconnect: "I argue that Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender."[43] Womanism offers a form of remedy because Womanism upholds that liberation and identity are connected to one's community; therefore, embracing a fully embodied humanity and not just parts.

Crenshaw contends that any framework that makes a Black woman choose is ineffective in the Black woman's fight for freedom from oppression: "Because this intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated."[44] Overall, as Kaufman, Truth, Crenshaw, and others have highlighted, there is a societal inclination to make women [especially Black women] choose which elements of their identities matter most, but this is unfair at best and inhumane at its worst, because any movement that cannot embrace the full humanity of its members is no liberation movement at all.

3. *Womanism as a Theological and Spiritual Lens*

It is not surprising, therefore, that the term "Womanism" has since been adopted and adapted by Black Women theologians to make sense of their world, their work, and their God. Emilie Townes argues that Womanists see societal matters as theological issues: "[Womanism is] a form of reflection that places the religious and moral perspectives of Black women at the center of its method. Issues of class, gender (including sex, sexism, sexuality, and sexual exploitation), and race are seen as theological problems."[45] Womanism is different from feminism in that feminists' origin was that of sameness with their male counterparts and was rooted in political power and white, Christian, heteronormativity. Womanists, on the other hand, have traditionally been less concerned with equality and more concerned with equity for their entire community.

Specifically, as noted by theologian Rev. Dr. Emilie Townes, "Womanist spirituality has a nose for trouble. That is, it has a capacity to anticipate the course of events and to be prepared to recognize that angst is coming."[46] Womanists assume that there will be trouble and struggle on the way to freedom, but they act anyway. That is not to say that feminists do not also anticipate challenges;

[43] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection," 140.
[44] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection," 140.
[45] Emilie Townes, "Womanist Theology," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57/3–4 (2003): 159.
[46] Emilie Maureen Townes, Angela D. Sims, and Cannon, eds., *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader* (1st Ed; Library of Theological Ethics; Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 143.

feminists are poised to see oppression through their specific lens. For instance, if a person is a Jewish feminist, they begin by examining the plight of Jewish women's oppression. Similarly, if a person is a Black feminist, they begin by examining the plight of Black women first, thus examining a subset of people to understand a larger group problem. Womanism is thus situated to anticipate the challenges of the most marginalized in their communities and leverage those experiences to understand the full extent of systemic oppression.

Theologian Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas asserts that the reason why using a lens such as Womanism helps appropriately solve societal problems is because Womanism begins with the plight of the most marginalized within a community, first: "existing on the margins of society and Church provides a people with a special epistemological advantage, a certain way of knowing, that is fundamental to create a just society and Church."[47] Douglas's assertion reveals the necessity of utilizing a Womanist lens to appropriately situate the problems faced by the Black-Jewish community because all liberation movements must be built upon the foundation of the most marginalized within a group. Namely, understanding the experiences of the most invisible community members ensures that what solutioning occurs meets the needs of the whole community and not just some (or most).

As presented throughout this paper, the voices of the most marginalized—Black women—have been made invisible by the communities tasked with speaking for and with them. But, ain't we women? Do not our voices matter? What would it look like to rebuild the Black-Jewish movement with the expertise of Black-Jewish women? In the next section, I offer concrete strategies for activating a Womanist lens in reengaging the Black Jewish, Black-Jewish, Jewish, and Black communities in the fight for freedom.

EMBRACING WOMANISM AS A MECHANISM FOR CHANGE

Cornel West contends that we must situate the Black-Jewish quandary within the ethicality of our respective heritages (and faiths). West admonishes both groups thusly:

> The present impasse in [B]lack-Jewish relations will be overcome only when self-critical exchanges take place within and across [B]lack and Jewish communities not simply about their own group interest, but it should take us to a higher moral ground where serious discussions about democracy and justice determine how we define ourselves and our politics and help us formulate strategies and tactics to sidestep the traps of tribalism and chauvinism.[48]

[47] Kelly Brown Douglas, "Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives: A Womanist Approach to Biblical Interpretation," *Anglican Theological Review* 83/1 (Winter 2001): 43, - https://www.proquest.com/docview/215266364?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true.
[48] West, *Race Matters*, 75.

West highlights that the foundation is already set for Black Jewish, Black, Jewish, Black Christian (and every community) to work together for change. However, individual groups and group members must move beyond the normative facade of ethnocentric values and practices in order to fully embrace a life of justice. In the previous sections, I argued that historical accounts of Black–Jewish relations erase Black women's contributions and voices. However, Womanism, as both a secular and theological concept, offers a robust lens for reimagining solidarity.

I also argued that the historical characterization of Black-Jewish relations is flawed because of the erasure of Black women's contributions and voices. And again, Womanism, as both a secular and theological concept, offers a robust lens for reimagining solidarity. The following three concrete actions—using both Jewish wisdom and Womanist principles— help leaders embrace and elevate the voices of Black women in solidarity work.

Empathize, Don't Ostracize!

Foundational to Womanism and Womanist advocacy is the capacity to empathize. Walker highlights that a core tenet of Womanism is to be concerned with the health of the community. Similarly, *Pirkei Avot* 2:4 instructs us thusly, "Do not judge your fellow man until you have reached his place. Do not say something that cannot be understood, [trusting] that in the end it will be understood." Correspondingly, Christian teaching describes empathy in the following way: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."[49]Judaism Your Way, publishers of *The Torah of Inclusion*, in their executive summary, describe the work as meeting people where they are and including them on purpose.[50] Practically, Emerson and Yancey offer the following framework for activating empathy for shared solutioning:

> Ideally, social contact would help promote knowledge that leads members of all races toward a more positive affect, attitudes, and lessens alienation…These conditions require (1) non-superficial contact (i.e., not the supermarket-type contact), (2) contact that is cooperative instead of competitive, (3) contact that is not coerced, (4) contact supported by relevant authority figures, and (5) contact between social equals. Thus, interracial contact in social settings that promote voluntary, egalitarian, cooperative, intimate contact that is supported by authority has the most potential for generating positive interracial relationships.[51]

[49] 1 Corinthians 12:26, *English Standard Version*.
[50] Judaism Your Way, *The Torah of Inclusion*, Executive Summary (Judaism Your Way, 2021).
[51] Michael O. Emerson and George A. Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers: Toward a Mutual Obligations Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 74.

Perhaps we struggle with empathy because we grew up with a certain socio-economic status and cannot imagine why someone cannot simply "do better." Or, maybe, we have absorbed the harmful and dangerous lie that Jewish people control wealth. Either way, moving forward calls us to discern our community's health by stepping into another person's shoes and grasping the nuance of their suffering—even when we have never suffered in the same way. The first step that must be made in reinvigorating Black-Jewish solidarity is the activation of empathy—not just as a feeling, but as an action. Practically, this means honoring the humanity of the people with whom we seek to build community. Begin by asking your fellow person, "How can I help you belong?" "Tell me your stories so that I can learn about your humanity." Empathy requires us to engage with purpose with our community members.

Prioritize, Don't Monolithize!

As previously noted, Kelly Brown Douglas affirms that listening to the experiences of the most marginalized is a core tenet of Womanist theology. However, prioritizing the experiences of the most marginalized within a community does not mean monolithizing the experiences; rather, it means seeing Black women as individuals who can and must be involved in matters concerning collective liberation. Emerson and Yancey argue that, at times, we use deficient remedies for understanding and solving problems related to race. Because the members of any given group cannot understand and feel the needs of another group as completely and deeply as they can those of their own group, relying on love, compassion, and persuasion to overcome group divisions and inequalities is practically impossible. . . Solutions that fail to achieve a sufficient level of support from all groups simply cannot be successfully implemented or sustained. [52]

Emerson and Yancey argue that working together entails including the voices of all stakeholders, not just some. When groups monolithize Black women, they misunderstand the needs of Black women due to over-generalization. Prioritizing the voices of Black women in the Black-Jewish solidarity movement looks like the following: ensuring panels, taskforces, and sub-groups have Black women on them as leaders and not just participants, while also ensuring Black women are highlighted as leaders and heroes in the material that speaks to Black-Jewish solidarity. The Torah teaches us about the beauty of individuality by instructing us on the sacred concept of *B'tzelem Elohim*—to be made in the image of God. Rebbe Nachman says it thusly: "I am a wonder, and my soul is a great wonder, an innovation like me there has never been."[53] Put simply, it is our duty to uphold

[52] Emerson and Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers*, 69–73.
[53] *Chayei Moharan,* sections 256 and 249.

the individuality of each member of the Black-Jewish solidarity movement because *each of us* is sacred and necessary in the quest for liberation.

Center Joy and Rest!

Tricia Hersey, in her book *Rest is Resistance,* highlights that, "Capitalism has cornered us in such a way that we can only comprehend two options: 1: Work at a machine level, from a disconnected and exhausted place, or 2: Make space for rest and space to connect with our highest selves while fearing how we will eat and live."[54] There is a freneticism associated with solving the problems of racism and antisemitism; rightfully so, I might add. Every day, we see news stories that prove our greatest fears over and over; we are inundated with messages of violence. But Kirk Byron Jones argues that the frenetic pace at which we try to tackle the work of change is harming us from the inside out: "When we cut ourselves off from self through overload and hurry, at best we become hollow producers of good works. We become chronic doers, simultaneously experiencing the equally chronic nagging and gnawing reminders that we are mysteriously and miserably unfulfilled."[55] Walker, in her definition of Womanism, reminds us that a womanist takes time to rest and also takes time to enjoy life. Biblically, the Jewish and Christian traditions regard Miriam as a foremother of our faiths. Miriam, after crossing the Red Sea, sang *and* danced *and* rested; her rejoicing is a model for us:[56] we cannot struggle for freedom without taking time out for rest and joy; we cannot stake our worth on fighting evil, because once the evil is eradicated, we are left empty. A womanist lens says to us: work, then rest. Love food. Love music. Love yourself.

CONCLUSION

While one of the challenges of Womanism is that it is characterized by its emphasis on the Black woman's perspective, an argument can be made (and has been made) that situating Black-Jewish solidarity through the lens of Womanism offers the widest net for cross-ethnic, cross-racial, cross-religious solutioning. Descriptively, Womanists are Black women or women of color who are concerned about themselves and the wholeness of their community. Moreover, they are fearless, almost to the point of recklessness, in matters concerning justice and belonging.

This paper illuminated how the traditional characterization of the Civil Rights Movement invisibilized the voices and actions of Black women. In addition, the connotation of the hyphenated

[54] Tricia Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto*, First edition (New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2022), 15.
[55] Kirk Byron Jones, *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers*, 20th anniversary edition (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2021), 47.
[56] Exodus 15:1-2, *New Living Translation*.

phrase “Black-Jewish” creates an unnecessary fissure between the groups and unintentionally erases people who are a part of both communities. This paper highlighted four narratives that envelop the historicization of Black-Jewish relations and offered an overview of Womanism as a secular and theological concept. Ultimately, Womanism—informed by intersectionality—offers a corrective framework for the erasure of Black women's voices. Womanism is a mechanism that can be employed to understand Black-Jewish solidarity with increased clarity because it shifts the focus of the movement’s energy to the most marginalized group—Black women. In the final section of the paper, I offered three concrete strategies for activating a womanist approach to reimagining Black-Jewish solidarity.

There is a song I used to sing at my church: “By and by, when the morning comes, all the saints of God are gathering home, we will tell the story of how we’ve overcome, and we’ll understand it better by and by.” That refrain captures the prophetic hope of this work. By centering and elevating the voices of Black women in our collective struggle for freedom, our shared story of Black-Jewish solidarity will become more faithfully enfleshed and embodied, and we will indeed, “understand it better, by and by.”