

President's Message

I'm writing in early June from Ben-Gurion Research Institute in the Negev, located near Sde Boker, the kibbutz to which David Ben-Gurion retired and where his grave is. It's a very quiet place – great for doing my research on Israeli-Palestinian Confederation and seemingly very far removed from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which appears omnipresent in my usual haunts of Washington, D.C. and the University of Maryland. That's the height of irony of course, since I'm barely 50 miles from Gaza and even closer to the West Bank.

I'm not terribly hopeful about the new Israeli election coming up on September 17. I hope Meretz and Labor will run together (that doesn't mean combining) and push their combined total to 12-15 Knesset seats, perhaps from disaffected Blue-White voters who have realized Blue-White still doesn't know what it stands for. But my guess is that the 'Right-Religious' bloc will do better than in April, with a total of 68-70 seats, including Avigdor Lieberman, who will benefit from his stubbornness, and go up to 7 or 8 seats. The newly reunited (mostly Arab) Joint List may go back up to 12 or 13, but still the 'Center-Left-Arab' bloc would be reduced to 50-52, a decidedly minority opposition.

This likely dismal outcome makes our focus on NGOs and, later in the year, on the World Zionist Organization elections, that much more important. This issue of *Israel Horizons* reflects some of these priorities. We lead off with an article by Galia Golan about [Combatants for Peace](#), which we are highlighting as part of our [Kolot](#) program. It's followed by an opinion piece by Ron Skolnik, who argues that the ubiquitous term "Jewish State" as a synonym for the State of Israel really misrepresents what Israel is and should be (personally, I'll have to think about that for a while). Then we have a particularly thoughtful interview with Avner Gvanyahu, Executive Director of [Breaking the Silence](#), on the role of his organization and that of progressive American Jews. The interview was conducted by Sue Hoechstetter, who did several others as well while in Israel recently, which we hope to publish in subsequent issues of IH. We close with Peter Eisenstadt's review of a particularly fascinating book by Susie Linfield on Jews and the Left, discussing and critiquing eight prominent leftwing (more or less) figures who have discussed Israel (usually critically).

I hope you are enjoying a restful and interesting summer – and I particularly hope that Israel and Palestine will remain peaceful. The political horizon is not at all promising, with a new Israeli election likely to be won by the Right and a sputtering "Deal of the Century" which, if it even exists, seems almost spectacularly unsuited to fulfill even minimal Palestinian aspirations. So it's back to my research on Confederation as a possibly promising variant on the much-maligned two-state solution.



Paul
Paul Scham is President of Partners for Progressive Israel.

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Say Goodbye to “the Jewish State”

By Ron Skolnik



In my view, it's high time to retire the phrase “the Jewish state” and discontinue its use in our Israel conversations. I'll reiterate: “the Jewish state” should no longer be employed as a synonym for Israel.

No, this is not going to be an anti-Zionist screed and, no, I'm not calling for repeal of Israel's Law of Return, either.

In that case, you might ask, why do I want to purge such a time-honored term? Because the repeated, reflexive use of “the Jewish state” over decades has facilitated Israel's steady drift toward illiberalism, particularly under the successive governments of Binyamin Netanyahu.

Yes, I'll admit, it'll be hard to see “the Jewish state” go – first of all, because the term is so evocative, calling to mind, as it does, romantic images of Jewish *aliya*, the popularization and modernization of Hebrew, and Jewish cultural renaissance. Invoking “the Jewish state” also reminds us, reassuringly, that Israel continues to serve as a potential safe haven for Jews, if and when they face persecution in the Diaspora.

I'll acknowledge, as well, that the term even rests on a sound historical basis. Indeed, the UN Resolution (181) of November 29, 1947 that provided Israel with the foundation of its international legitimacy endorsed a partition of the British Mandate territory into “Independent Arab and Jewish States.” (Never mind, for the moment, that, when the UN made that decision, the [population](#) of the area designated for the Jewish entity was less than 60 percent Jewish.)

And, of course, “the Jewish state” is a convenient, colorful sobriquet, allowing speakers, writers, and copy editors to refer to Israel while avoiding repetitious use of the country's official name.

So what's the problem with “the Jewish state,” then?

The everyday words and phrases we employ create a mindset, a way of thinking about the world that, over time, becomes ingrained, axiomatic, unquestioned. Social and political norms based on this thinking become ossified. Consequently, one of the paths to effecting social and political change is to highlight and replace terminology that has passed its expiry date.

Take, for instance, the 1960s feminist effort to popularize the term “Ms.” as the go-to alternative to “Miss” and “Mrs.” so that women wouldn't automatically be defined and categorized by their marital status. For a more recent example, a new [guidance](#) to correspondents of *The Guardian* newspaper by its editor-in-chief is illustrative: Rather than “climate change,” she writes, journalists are encouraged to use the terms, “climate emergency, crisis or breakdown.” Why? Because “[t]he phrase ‘climate change’ ... sounds rather passive and gentle when what scientists are talking about is a catastrophe,” requiring an urgent response.

“The Jewish state” is a phrase that similarly needs to be phased out. According to [data](#) released by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics last month in honor of Independence Day, Israel's population (including settlers, but not including their Palestinian neighbors in the occupied territories) is, in fact, less than 75 percent Jewish. In other words, “the Jewish state” obstructs our view of the significant minority of citizens who are not Jewish, making them less than fully visible and, when they are seen, implicitly casting them as second-class and less than fully legitimate.

It was within the context of “the Jewish state” that Netanyahu could effectively drive his panic-stricken supporters to the voting booths in 2015 with his now infamous racist call-to-arms: “Arab voters are heading to the polling stations in droves!” Similarly, the lens of “the Jewish state” allowed him to base his campaign this year on a warning that his main rivals, the Blue and White party, would form a government with (gasp!) “the Arabs.”

Let's put this in an American context. Almost three-quarters of the population of the United States identify with a Christian faith, a recent [Gallup poll](#) reported. Just over 75 percent are defined as “White” by the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). How would we react if we were continually bombarded by references to the United States as “the White state” or “the Christian state”? Would this not be considered a threat to the rights of non-Whites or non-Christians?

Indeed, the reference to Israel as “the Jewish state” has been

exploited by American White Supremacists as justification of their cause. Frazier Glenn Miller Jr., the former leader of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina, [argued](#) in his 1999 autobiography, *A White Man Speaks Out*, that “If the Jews can have a Jewish state of their own, then why can’t we have a White Christian state of our own?” More recently, American neo-Nazi Richard Spencer, among the leaders of the infamous Charlottesville march in 2017, [declared](#) that “the most important ... ethno-state, the one that I turn to for guidance [is] ... the Jewish state of Israel.”

Let me say clearly: In no way do I believe that everyone who uses the term “the Jewish state” is a Jewish supremacist. In fact, I’m fairly certain that most of those who use that expression want Israel’s predominantly Jewish character to be bounded by the demands of liberal democracy and expressed in a manner consistent with the egalitarian [guarantees](#) made by the country’s founders.

The problem is that “the Jewish state” is so ambiguous a term, so malleable, so subject to interpretation, that it has been successfully exploited by those in Israel who take it to mean “Jews first” – and sometimes “Jews only.”

Taken to its extreme, for example, a “Jewish state” can, within the bounds of semantics, be defined as a country in which only Jews may live. MK Meir Kahane, later banned from the Knesset, [stated](#) during the 1980s that, were he to become prime minister, “not a single Arab” would remain in “the Jewish state” since that was the only way to preserve the country’s Jewish majority.

An only-slightly-less-extreme variant on this concept holds that Jewish statehood equals absolute Jewish dominance – democracy and human rights be damned. MK Bezalel Smotrich, a senior member of the extremist United Right party, a key ally of Netanyahu’s Likud, is pushing a policy based on just such an understanding of the term. Israel, says Smotrich, needs to annex the entire West Bank, impose Jewish supremacy with an “iron hand,” and “help” the Palestinians depart en masse (“[a]s they did in 1948”). “Those who do not go,” he warns, “will either accept the rule of the Jewish state, in which case they can remain, and as for those who do not, we will fight them and defeat them.”

Which brings us back to Netanyahu himself: The prime minister is more attuned to the niceties of pro-democracy discourse, both in Israel and abroad, and, as opposed to the likes of Smotrich, usually tries to tread more carefully so as not to offend. His language, for the most part, is less crass, less crude – especially when he’s speaking English.

Yet, when all is said and done, Netanyahu, too, endorses a two-tiered Israel, with Jewish citizens on top, and he leans heavily on the concept of Israel as a “Jewish state” to rationalize his vision. “This is our state — the Jewish state,” Netanyahu [trumpeted](#) at the Knesset last July in defending the new “Nation-State of the Jewish People” law, which has been roundly condemned by an array of pro-democracy groups. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), for instance, in its [petition](#) to the High Court to overturn the legislation, argues that the law creates a “hierarchy in status,” with Jewish identity counting for more than Arab identity, thus “subordinat[ing] ... the principle of democracy to the Jewish character of the state.”

Having been invoked so often over the years by respected opinion-makers – journalists, politicians and diplomats, clergy, teachers, labor and business leaders – “the Jewish state” phrase has become cozy – familiar and familial, and seemingly innocuous, at least within Jewish circles. And that is precisely its danger, because the term has been weaponized by those in Israel who are promoting a decidedly illiberal agenda.

They deploy “the Jewish state” as rhetorical cover to justify policies that are inconsistent with democracy. They incant it in order to convey false reassurance that the policies pursued under its banner are kosher by default and part of some vague consensus. And when heavier ammo is needed, they summon it in order to besmirch liberal defenders of equality and human rights, branding them as unpatriotic, “anti-Zionist,” “self-hating,” even “treasonous,” all because they oppose the illiberal policies advanced in the name of “the Jewish state.”

We must say goodbye to “the Jewish state,” in other words, not because we want Israel to stop ‘feeling’ or being Jewish. (Besides, that won’t happen, given that demographers [project](#) that its overwhelming Jewish majority will actually expand over the next five decades.) No, we need to bid farewell to “the Jewish state” because that language too easily tips the delicate balance between “Jewish” and “democratic” to the grave detriment of the latter. ■

Ron Skolnik is an American-Israeli political columnist and public speaker, whose articles have appeared in a variety of publications, including Haaretz, Al-Monitor, Tikkun, and the Palestine-Israel Journal.



Combatants for Peace

By Prof. Galia Golan



In 2006, Israeli and Palestinian former combatants, people who had taken an active role in the conflict, laid down their weapons and established [Combatants for Peace](#). Our totally binational, grassroots organization was founded on the belief that the cycle of violence can only be broken when Israelis and Palestinians join forces. Committed to joint nonviolence since its foundation, CfP works to transform the conflict by ending all forms of violence in a non-violent struggle against the occupation and for peace between the two sides. CfP is working to build a peaceful future for both peoples by embodying and serving as a model for our values of freedom, equality and dignity for all. Our mission is to build a strong, influential community of binational cooperation.

As a binational movement, we provide an alternative to violence and exemplify viable cooperation through co-resistance to violence and to the occupation. Thus we are building the infrastructure and basis for co-existence. Members of CfP break through the societal norms of growing militarism, segregation and the increased entrenchment of the conflict, to work together to say, *There is Another Way* (our slogan) to promote a peaceful solution, raise awareness and improve understanding among both publics regarding

the hopes and suffering of the other side. We strive to educate towards reconciliation and a non-violent struggle; we use activism to create political pressure on the leaders of both our societies. Every year, we reach and actively recruit increasing numbers of people, and we encourage our members to be active, initiate and lead activities using their unique skills and interests. CfP activists are empowered by the movement's model of non-violent action, affirming their responsibility to act, change, and lead our societies towards a better, peaceful future.

Organized on a model of geographic twinning (Tel Aviv-Nablus, Jerusalem-Jericho, southern district including Hebron and Israeli Negev communities, northern district including Haifa and the Jordan Rift Valley, etc.), we have some 10 such groups in addition to a theatre group, based on Theatre of the Oppressed, and a women's group. Every group and every position in the movement is joint, Palestinian and Israeli. The geographic groups meet primarily to organize activities on the ground in the occupied Palestinian areas. These have included building playgrounds for children, rebuilding schools destroyed by the Israeli army or facilities including homes damaged by the army or settlers, the construction of water pipelines for Palestinian communities

denied access to water by the settlers or the army, and so on. These activities are all conducted jointly, sometimes in coalitions with other Israeli peace groups such as Ta'ayush or Machsom Watch. A focus of such activity has been area C of the West Bank, under consistent creeping annexation by Israel whereby local Palestinians are evicted or forced out of their homes (sometimes merely caves) or simply prohibited from building. Susiya and Khan al-Ahmar – threatened with evacuation and demolition by Israeli orders – are both communities where CfP has led protests, vigils, and other forms of non-violent action to prevent Israeli government moves against them. In addition, we conduct workshops for activists and the public to provide training in both non-violent action and non-violent communication. In many of these trainings and activities we are joined by groups from abroad, usually in cooperation with our Friends groups in the United States (AFCFP) and in Europe as well as advocates of non-violence all over the world.

In our effort to impact attitudes among the public, and especially young people, CfP holds public lectures under the title *Learning Peace*, goes into schools and, in Israel, into pre-army seminars, in addition to holding home (parlor) meetings, and leading tours inside the occupied West Bank. In all of these activities, a Palestinian and an Israeli CfP member tell their personal stories of transformation from the use of force and violence to the adoption of non-violence. These personal accounts provide powerful examples, indeed role models, especially for young people on both sides of the Green Line. Indeed this is one of the unique features of Combatants for Peace, documented in the American film produced by Steve Akron, *Disturbing the Peace*. These personal stories are the hallmark of the movement since CfP is the only movement in which former combatants from each side of a conflict work together for peace while the conflict is still raging. For this we have twice been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The major annual event of Combatants for Peace is the joint Memorial Ceremony held on the eve of the official Israeli Memorial Day for those fallen in Israeli battles. Our joint remembrance, together with Palestinians, who, like Israelis, have lost loved ones, sends a strong and compelling message of our mutual humanity. Indeed it inspires hope for the future. Held jointly with the Parents Circle/Bereaved Families Forum, the Memorial has become the central event of the Israeli peace camp every year over the past 14 years. Attracting additional thousands each year, it has also been targeted by the Israeli government. Still, the government's



rejection of permits for Palestinians to enter Israel to attend the Memorial has been consistently overruled by the Israeli Supreme Court. Moreover, the event is viewed by tens of thousands over the internet, and smaller Memorials have been organized in the north of Israel and in the Bethlehem area of Palestine, around or during the event. This year's event in Haifa attracted a record number of both Arab and Jewish participants. Mourning is a supremely sensitive issue for both communities, and the Memorial raises controversy and even violent Israeli protests. We do not ignore this; we have held meetings with declared opponents, both before and after the event, in an effort to expand understanding if not actual support.

Combatants for Peace is a unique and impressive movement of people, Israelis and Palestinians, who are willing (and determined) to stand up for peace, justice and non-violent action to end the occupation. Active on the ground, demonstrating through cooperative efforts that ***There is Another Way***, young as well older activists join up regularly, on both sides of the Green Line. For some this may be an act of courage; for all it is a declaration of hope and a belief in a future for both peoples. We do not specify the political form this future will take. We demand only that it be determined through negotiations for a solution agreed upon by both sides and encompassing freedom, safety and dignity for both peoples. ■

Galia Golan, Professor Emerita at the Hebrew University, is a distinguished authority on the former Soviet Union and on Peace and Conflict Studies. She is a leading Israeli feminist and peace activist - one of the founding leaders of Peace Now and currently a leader of Combatants for Peace.





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Among our programs, perhaps most central to this mission is the annual Israel Study Tour - what we have called, for the past 25 years, our Israel Symposium.

Funds have been established -- in the names of two former leaders of Partners -- dedicated to supporting scholarships for people to join us on the Symposium. We ask you to contribute to the Harold M Shapiro Memorial Fund and/or the Theodore Bikel Fund for Peace and Justice.

The Harold M Shapiro Fund honors our founding chairman Harold Shapiro (1927–2017) and promotes his vision of a just and peaceful Israel. Through his leadership, scholarship, and philanthropy, Harold dedicated his life, working for peace, justice, equality, and human rights in Israel and advocating for a two-state solution. The Shapiro Fund's immediate focus is to sponsor Rabbis and young people to participate in Partners' annual Israel Symposium, a program that was particularly dear to Harold.

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The Theodore Bikel Fund for Peace and Justice honors and promotes Bikel's many values that he struggled for throughout his life: human rights and social justice, dignity and peace for Israel, its neighbors and the world. The Fund provides an opportunity for young people to engage with his legacy of social activism. Like Theo, these young people will understand Israel – its complexities and challenges--through personal engagement during the Symposium week, throwing themselves into intensive learning situations in both Israel and Palestine.

Please take this opportunity to contribute to these funds and sponsor worthy individuals to participate in our Symposium. **Your tax-deductible gift of \$50, \$100, \$500, \$1,000 or more to these funds will provide a unique and life-long experience to young progressive leaders.**

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Professor David Rush

New Israeli Heroes for Americans

By Susan Hoechstetter



I recently made a trip to Israel, hoping to shed some light on Israelis who, in these difficult times, are working both for peace and to achieve fair treatment and rights for Palestinians. The trip was motivated by my concern about the increasing number of American Jews, particularly on the left, who seem to be abandoning Israel out of justifiable concern over Israeli treatment of Palestinians. This disconnection, though, comes at just the time that our voices and support are needed to help influence Israeli policy.

Israel's treatment of Palestinians is dividing the American left and disaffecting young Americans. My daughter is in college and hears a great deal about Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights, but little, if anything, about the Israeli Jews and Palestinians who are working to change Israeli policies. I want her and other young Jews, by learning about this work, to see a way forward through supporting and possibly engaging in it, rather than abandon Israel entirely.

I was able to interview several Israeli NGO leaders working for peace and Palestinian rights, who provided their assessments of the current situation and what is needed to achieve change in Israel, described their organizations' work, and shared their thoughts on how Americans, especially Jewish Americans,

could contribute to their work. The first of those interviews, with Avner Gvoryahu, Executive Director of Breaking the Silence, is below.

Once, Israeli soldiers were almost universally admired by many American Jews. Perhaps these social justice and peace leaders will be our new Israeli heroes and heroines.

I learned from these interviews that:

1. *Palestinians and Israeli Jews who work together have forged deep, meaningful relationships:* I admire how hard some Israeli Jews and Palestinians are working, often face-to-face, to attain peaceful and respectful coexistence. Yes, the numbers of people doing that are relatively small but they are inspired and not choosing the easy way out through accepting the current status quo of occupation and inequality. They are sometimes called traitors to Israel and the Jewish people, and are subject to attacks, but they remain committed to acting on their values and are energized by their incremental successes.
2. *Individual groups work differently from each other:* There are more than a hundred groups working for peace and Palestinian rights in Israel and they take diverse approaches.

Many are openly on the left politically while others try to reach a broader population with a more politically centrist approach. Some, like Breaking the Silence, focus on one thing. For them, it's the occupation. Others cast a wider net. Some target specific population groups. For the most part, they do not work together as a coordinated movement.

3. *U.S. Jews are critical to Israel's future:* How Jews in America, and how the U.S. government, support and treat Israel matters a great deal. All of the leaders of the groups I spoke with urged American Jews to take actions to help promote peace and equality in Israel.
4. *Israel's democracy is in danger:* Speaking with these leaders often reminded me of the political and public-opinion struggles progressives face in the United States. While President Trump tries to weaken Congress, Prime Minister Netanyahu is trying to weaken the Israeli Supreme Court, while both are constantly attacking nonprofit organizations.
5. *U.S. donors on the right and left fund Israel differently:* Some interviewees suggested that progressive American Jews are not as politically strategic in their funding in Israel as are right-leaning American funders, and that has influenced Israeli policy directions.
6. *BDS has limited effect and potential danger:* BDS (the movement to Boycott, Divest from, and place Sanctions on Israel) is not having much of an impact in Israel. While there's an understanding of the sentiments behind BDS, there is concern that the language BDS'ers employ can lead to questioning the right of Israel to exist.



Avner Gvaryahu,
Executive Director,
Breaking the Silence

"Breaking the Silence is an organization of veteran combatants who have served in the Israeli military since the start of the Second Intifada and have taken it upon themselves to expose the Israeli public to the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories. We endeavor to stimulate public debate about the price paid for a reality in which young soldiers face a civilian population on a daily basis, and are engaged in the control of that population's everyday life. Our work aims to bring an end to the occupation." <https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/>

We're in Breaking the Silence's office in Ramat Gan, part of metropolitan Tel Aviv, where a few of their staff are sitting on beanbags working at their computers. Avner, who appears to be under 30, gets off a telephone call to greet me warmly.

This interview has been edited for brevity and grammar.

Susan Hoechstetter: Many American Jews, particularly on the left, hear about oppressive Israeli policies towards Palestinians and are under pressure to distance themselves from Israel. Tell us a little bit about yourself, the current atmosphere in Israel, and the work Breaking the Silence is doing to change those Israeli policies.

Avner Gvaryahu: It's clear that we're living through an earthquake in terms of American Jewry-Israel relations. It's Trump; it's Bibi. Some would call it an attack on liberal values across the world. I'm an Israeli, born and raised; a ninth generation Israeli from my Abba's (Dad's) side. My mom grew up in upstate New York. Her mom was Canadian; her parents were immigrants from the Ukraine. My grandfather is a Holocaust survivor who taught at Cornell University and is still doing well at 91.

I see myself as an Israeli patriot. The men and women of Breaking the Silence (BtS) have all served Israel and put their lives on the line for their country. And the work that I and my friends at BtS are doing is rooted in the belief that we have a responsibility to shed a light on this reality we are part of.

We're in the midst of a catastrophe. The State of Israel has been occupying another people for the majority of its existence, intentionally denying basic rights to millions of people for years.

Since 2009, we've seen an increase in this idea that is being told to Israelis and the world – if you want to support Israel, you have to support the occupation. You hear this from cabinet ministers – you're not allowed to differentiate between Israel and the occupied territories. You're not allowed to label or boycott Israeli settlements.

The flip side are the growing voices that say if you want to oppose occupation, then you have to question Israel's right to exist. You'll hear that on the farther left [in the U.S. and especially in Europe]. The danger is that two ideas are feeding into each other, that the reaction [to Israeli policies] is not only questioning the occupation, but the entire state. What we're trying to bring forward is the notion that you have to separate

Israel from the occupation. We have to put a spotlight on what's happening here, not to delegitimize Israel's right to exist but, yes, to delegitimize Israel's right to occupy.

SH: How important is the BDS movement?

AG: So, BDS is not the bogeyman people make it out to be. Our real problem is the occupation. If you don't want BDS, stop the occupation. That's the answer. The balloon called BDS will deflate once you stop controlling other people by force.

Israel is not facing any threat of annihilation, but we are facing a direct threat of turning into an apartheid state. We have government officials calling for that. And BDS is a legitimate approach to this political reality in the view of many progressive Americans, who say: "I will choose to not buy a product made in a place that is occupied by military rule and (in some cases) on someone else's [private] land." Now do I buy into each and every point in the BDS platform? No. I'm an Israeli. I believe in my right to self-determination and I think there's too much of an agnostic approach in the BDS movement about Israel's right to exist. But at the end of the day, the biggest threat to our existence is the occupation. Is there anti-Semitism on the left? For sure. Is some of the criticism of the occupation actually anti-Semitism? Yes, definitely. There's anti-Semitism on the left like there is anti-Semitism on the right, and I'd say much more on the right, but we have to ask ourselves what is the vision that we're looking for.

The conflict is two-sided, with both people having their history in this land, and I don't see a way to end the conflict without having Israelis and Palestinians sit and talk and think about their joint future. Unlike the conflict, the occupation is a one-sided Israeli project. It doesn't mean there aren't other players, other responsibility. It's not belittling Palestinian terrorism, but it's saying that Israel is choosing to maintain the occupation and it's in Israel's power to end it. Breaking the Silence is not a massive team; we're about 20 people altogether, putting on about 500 educational events a year. When I think about where we're putting our energy, it's here in the Israeli public because we're the public that decides to maintain the occupation and we have a responsibility to know and the agency to change it.

SH: What do you think American Jews can do to help?

AG: Even though I think Israel has the power to end occupation, I don't think that that's something we can do alone. I entered houses as a paratrooper in Nablus and Jenin

— operations that are called Straw Widows, basically taking over private Palestinian houses and using them as a military post — it's similar to actions addressed by the American Third Amendment. As a military force we're barging into homes, arresting the head of the family, usually handcuffing and blindfolding him for hours — six hours, 12 hours, 24. The people I arrested and the children that peed in their pants out of fear just at the sight of me are not Israelis. They can't vote. They are Palestinians under military rule.

So the military occupation is not only an internal Israeli issue. And that means there's also an importance for voices from around the world to speak up. Obviously, there's involvement of different countries. I walked around for three years with an M-16 that said on it "Colt, property of the USA government." So, I think that means there's a responsibility for Americans.

There's also a responsibility for American Jews. The American ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, similar to many others, has built partnerships with the most radical rightwing elements in Israeli society. He was president of American Friends of Beth El Institutions supporting a major settlement. There's a building bearing his name on private Palestinian land. If you walk around Hebron, you'll find Friends of Hebron, or the Hebron Fund. You'll find evangelical organizations that funnel money into settlements. So when I think about how I can effect change, I look around at who is preventing change. That's mostly the Israeli public and government, but it's wider than that. If there are Jews on Long Island helping to build settlements through financial donations, then we need their anti-occupation counterparts on Long Island to question that and to find a way to support Israel's right to exist, but not to occupy.

You [American Jews] and we [Israel] should develop a little bit of chutzpah from our rightwing counterparts. David Friedman says he supports building the occupied territories. He says "this is what I believe in. I'm donating. I'm fundraising. I'm promoting." We have to think — how do we create a Friends of Susiya? Local American Jewish communities can say "we're learning about what's happening in Palestinian Susiya; we're connected to the community. If there's a demolition, we'll make our voices heard. If we understand that it's in Israel's interest for Palestinians to stay on their land and for Palestinians to be independent, then that's a natural next step." There can be tzedakah boxes in synagogues around the U.S. supporting Palestinian communities. It's a leap. It's not easy.

But if we recognize that we're moving towards annexation, and if people that care deeply about Israel don't want Israel to be an apartheid state, then that's a basic step.

SH: Are mainstream American Jewish institutions supporting the occupation? And what should American progressives do about it?

AG: Undoubtedly; it's been documented. In some cases directly, and in some cases indirectly. Truah did a report about that. Also, *Forward* did a piece about money going through some Federations to the notorious 'Canary Mission' organization. But it's deeper than "follow the money." It's a sentiment. The sentiment is – "We won't ask what's being done in our name." That's not right. Some groups have been raising their voices for many years. But not nearly enough of the people in the mainstream whose own values are being violated.

SH: It does sound like a leap for American Jews to take some of the actions you suggest.

AG: Everything has to be a leap. You need chutzpah so yes, it's not easy. Even though the majority of American Jews are progressive and a majority probably support a two-state solution, they are still playing within the boundaries of what the Israeli government and the very conservative Jewish American "mainstream" institutions allow them.

You're starting to see the shift with the young generation in the United States who don't subscribe to indefinite Israeli control over millions of people. In that sense you have it much easier than we do. With Trump, you may not always feel that, but I think that the majority of mainstream Jewish Americans understand the idea of the two-state solution. In that sense we're drifting further apart – American Jewry and Israelis. Part of what we have to do is build bridges and think collectively. There has to be a strategy of continuing to pound home this very, very simple message: "Your support for Israel means opposing the occupation." Of course they'll call you traitors and use scare tactics, and they'll try to delegitimize you, but it doesn't matter. In the end that voice is winning with young progressives in the U.S., and most young Jews there are progressive.

SH: What about those in the U.S. who say we don't live there so we can't decide how Israelis should live their lives?

AG: So how can someone who doesn't live here but agrees

with the settlement movement tell me how to live my life? I mean, the settlement in Hebron has 750 Israeli settlers living there, guarded by 650 soldiers every single moment in the middle of a city of 200,000 Palestinians. That's supported by tax-deductible organizations like the Hebron Fund. Which means your government and your tax money is helping them.

SH: You have said young people in Israel are not questioning the occupation like young people in the U.S. Is that because of the government-controlled education they receive, or because of security concerns?

AG: It's probably all of the above. There's been a decline of ideas on the Israeli Left since the mid '90s. You can go back to the Rabin assassination, but even more so after the Second Intifada, so some of it is definitely a reaction to Palestinian violence. But I'd say the core of it is the fact that we as a people have been controlling another people now for 52 years. The majority of Israelis don't know anything else, and if it's not broken why fix it?

SH: Is Breaking the Silence succeeding?

AG: Our job is to end the occupation; the occupation is stronger than ever, so in that sense we're a complete failure. Does that mean I'm pessimistic and don't believe there's hope? No, but we're talking about maybe 15% of Israeli Jews that define themselves as left-leaning. So we're a minority voice. Many Israelis are liberal on many issues, but when it comes to the occupation, they accept the status quo. No one talks about ending the occupation. Even Labor is scared to be seen as left-leaning. And Meretz is small. And when the political opposition is weak, then the only opposition to the occupation is the civil society organizations. We don't have a healthy political system here because it's willing to succumb to anti-democratic norms in order to maintain our rule over the Palestinians. The hard-core right, the settler right, which is even to the right of Likud, has already said openly "we're going to support Netanyahu despite the corruption allegations against him, because we know he's the only one that will allow us to maintain the occupation, and maybe even annex [West Bank territory]."

There's been a systematic attempt to silence civil society organizations, both in Israel and in the West Bank and Gaza. [Note: Avner pulls up the attacks on BtS and on him personally on his laptop.] This is done by rightwing organizations with

close ties to the Israeli government. Take the NGO Monitor, for instance, which monitors leftwing organizations, and works in the international arena to delegitimize them and their foreign donors. Then there's Im Tirtzu, which is the NGO Monitor without the suit and tie. These groups didn't have much power until 2009 [when Netanyahu again became Prime Minister]. There have been physical attacks on our members on college campuses, bullying, people getting threatening phone calls in the middle of the night. This has been a fundamental attempt by the Right to cripple civil society, a serious effort to delegitimize voices critical of the occupation.

SH: So why aren't you pessimistic?

AG: My generation grew up after Rabin's assassination. I didn't have the euphoria of "peace is around the corner." So I didn't start my activism with a lot of hope. But I think that in this moment there is an opportunity to educate ourselves and to build a community that is against occupation, that is thinking together with Palestinian-Israelis, and that is not afraid to imagine a day that the occupation ends. But it will take us a while to get there and we can do it only with real support for that voice from world Jewry, and especially American Jewry.

SH: Is there anything else you'd like to say to our readers?

AG: The testimonies of Breaking the Silence are a very important way to understand what's happening on the ground. I encourage people to read them on our [website](#). The next time you or your friends are here with your synagogue, your family, make sure to come on a tour with BtS. Sit down and meet Palestinians. Make sure you are knowledgeable about the issue. We are the people of the book. We can't be afraid of knowledge. The Jewish community has always drawn enrichment from each other. If you read the Talmud and the Gemara – you had people living here in Jerusalem and people living in Iraq, and they argued and talked and disagreed. That's the Jewish tradition.

SH: Thank you for your time and your heroic work. ■

Sue Hoechstetter lives in Washington, DC where she writes about advocacy, social justice, Israel, and other topics.



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Politics



To view the webinar, go to <https://www.progressiveisrael.org/what-we-do/conversations-with-israel-palestine/israeli-left-after-the-election/>

The Israeli Left after the Election

On April 16, Partners for Progressive Israel hosted a webinar entitled “The Israeli Left after the Election” of April 9. Our panelists were Naomi Chazan, professor emerita at The Hebrew University and a three-term Meretz party Knesset member, and Yoram Peri, professor at the University of Maryland and a former political advisor to the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The discussion was moderated by journalist and broadcaster, Gilad Halpern, host of the English-language podcast, *The Tel Aviv Review*.

Jerusalem: Myths and Realities

On May 29, ahead of Israel’s annual “Jerusalem Day,” we hosted a conversation between Dr. Laura Wharton of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and a member of Jerusalem’s City Council on behalf of Meretz, and Attorney Daniel Seidemann, the founder and director of the NGO, Terrestrial Jerusalem. Entitled, “Jerusalem: Myths and Realities,” the webinar sought to peel away the slogans concerning Jerusalem and discuss the city as it actually is. The conversation was moderated by journalist Jacob Magid, who covers the West Bank and the settlements for *The Times of Israel*.



To view the webinar, go to <https://www.progressiveisrael.org/what-we-do/conversations-with-israel-palestine/jerusalem-myths-and-realities/>



To view the webinar, go to - <https://www.progressiveisrael.org/what-we-do/conversations-with-israel-palestine/Palestinian-Israelis-in-a-Jewish-State/>

Palestinian-Israelis in a Jewish State: Dilemmas of Identity and Politics

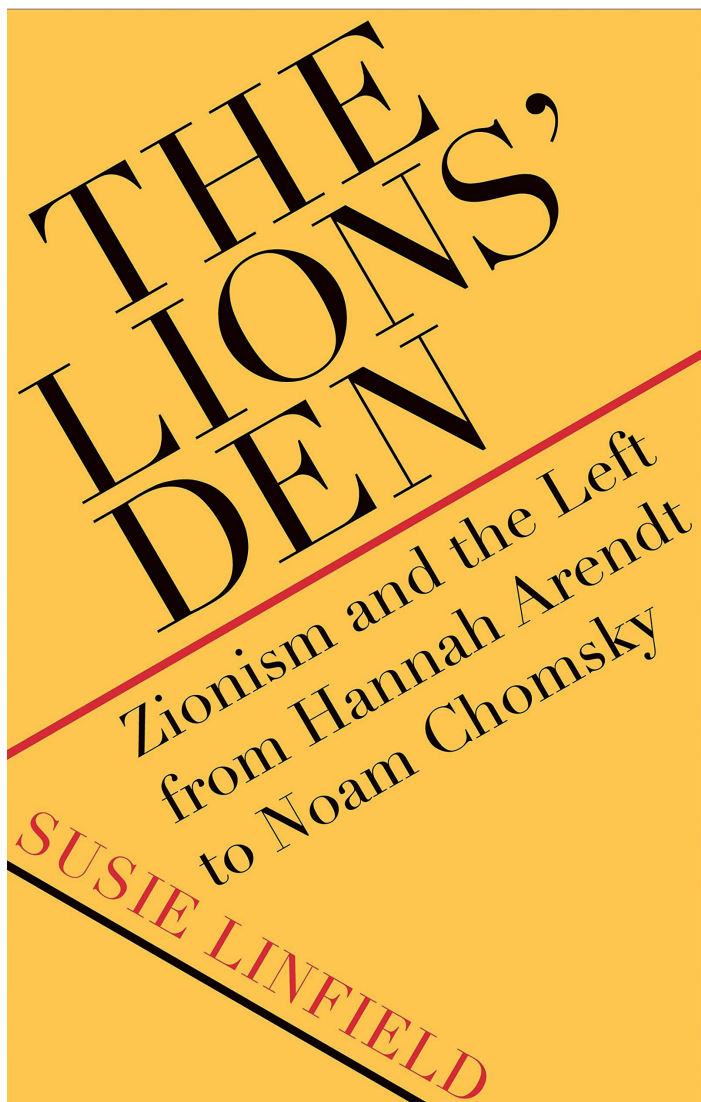
On Thursday, June 13, our webinar, “Palestinian-Israelis in a Jewish State: Dilemmas of Identity and Politics,” shed light on the Palestinian citizens of Israel, who make up one-fifth of the country’s citizen body. Our panelists were Thair Abu Ras, of the University of Maryland’s Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies, and Fadi Shbita, co-director of the Equality Policy Department at the Israeli NGO, Sikkuy - Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality. Dr. Anwar Mhajne, an Assistant Professor at Stonehill College, served as moderator.

The Lion's Den: Zionism and the Left from Hannah Arendt to Noam Chomsky

(Susie Linfield: Yale University Press, 2019)

BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Peter Eisenstadt



Zionism and the Left. What a depressing subject! You know that a book with that as its subject will not have a happy ending, and that you are in store for tales of broken romances, failed friendships, and angry divorces. And yet, for those of us who still endeavor to stretch and contort ourselves to somehow remain faithful to both “Zionism” and “the Left,” it is an essential subject. We were intrigued to learn that a 2012 trip to Hebron on a Partners for Progressive Israel Symposium was one of the inspirations for the book. In any case, *The Lion's Den* – it is not clear if the Zionists or the Left get to play the lions – is a particularly gripping, personal, and sometimes idiosyncratic tour of the terrain.

The title is a little misleading. Those looking for a chronological history of the entwined fates of Zionism and the left from the 1940s to the present, from, say, the Weavers’ 1950 hit recording of “Tzena, Tzena” to recent left discussions of Israeli apartheid and articles on the “Black-Palestinian racial imaginary,” will have to go elsewhere. Instead, Linfield provides a deep examination of eight authors who have written prolifically on the question of Zionism and Israel: Hannah Arendt, Arthur Koestler, Maxime Rodinson, Isaac Deutscher, Albert Memmi, Fred Halliday, I.F. Stone, and Noam Chomsky. Of course, for any book of this sort, one can quibble about the choices. Arendt and the post-Darkness at Noon Koestler were not really persons of the “left,” and one might think for a book of this sort, an Israeli or two would have been appropriate, such as the late Uri Avnery or Amos Oz. Or perhaps a figure such as Edward Said, who probably has shaped left attitudes toward Zionism more than anyone else over the past generation. That said, Linfield’s choices were shrewd. I particularly liked reacquainting myself with Albert Memmi, whose writings on colonialism and the French misadventures in North Africa are at least as trenchant as those of Frantz Fanon.

However, it is clear that Linfield’s main focus in this book is not the left in general, but the Jewish left. Only one of her eight portraits concerns a non-Jew (Fred Halliday, probably her favorite of the eight). She writes of how they wrestled with the particularity of their Jewishness and the universality of their left commitments, and how almost all of them came to wash their hands of Zionism. Linfield wonders why, and seeks to rehabilitate left Zionism.

Linfield is an exhilarating writer, often witty and wise, directly engaging and arguing with her subjects; sometimes admiring, often eviscerating. A few portraits stood out for me. One would think there would be little left to say that is novel on the saturated subject of Hannah Arendt and the Jews, but Linfield accomplishes the task. Arendt’s comments in 1948 on the negative political and psychological impact of a newly independent Israel perpetually surrounded by hostile Arab nations have often been praised for their prescience. For Linfield, however, Arendt’s writings on the Israeli-Palestinian question are weak and confused, an example of how “one shaft of insight can morph into

sightlessness.” She finds Arendt’s refusal in 1947 and 1948 to embrace the need for Jewish sovereignty maddening, with Arendt sticking to her failed preconceptions of what a Jewish homeland could be in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

There can be no doubt that Arendt’s strengths and weaknesses often have a common source, starting from her tendency to observe the day to day stuff of politics from the peak of Mount Olympus, and her penchant for making absolute distinctions that are less clear-cut than they seem. These are certainly on display in her extensive writing on Jewish topics, culminating in what probably remains the most controversial book ever written about Israel, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, whose fatuous aspects Linfield deftly skewers. But with regard to her warnings about the dangers of perpetual conflict between a Jewish state and hostile Arab populations, Linfield is too harsh, criticizing Arendt for the unrealistic nature of her ideas about how to solve the problem. Arendt was not the first, and certainly not the last writer on this topic whose diagnosis of the problem was more acute than her proposed solutions.

Most other writers profiled (except for Memmi and Halliday) fall short of Linfield’s standards, many of them singled out for their lack of insight after 1967 when they were insufficiently critical of the PLO. Linfield is an admirer of I.F. Stone’s early writings on Zionism such as his heroic reportage in his 1946 book *Underground to Palestine*. His passionate support of the right of the Jews to a state was only tempered by his worry that he was unable to find any Palestinian who agreed with him, but he supported Jewish statehood nonetheless. However, she finds his post Six Day War views less impressive, and accuses him of committing the “narcissistic fallacy” of thinking the fedayeen, terrorists, and revolutionaries that came to prominence in the war’s aftermath as amenable to rational discourse as himself. If not all of his statements hold up well a half century later, Linfield reminds us elsewhere that remaining completely consistent in one’s views on Israel and Palestine over many years is “a dubious virtue.” Rather than narcissism, I would argue that many of Linfield’s subjects were guilty of the “fallacy of hopefulness,” believing that, in the words of Bob Dylan, “there must be some way out of here” when there probably wasn’t. She excoriates Chomsky for his mid-1970s turn to PLO boosterism, and what she calls

his “anti-imperialist attention deficit disorder,” and her analysis of Chomsky’s shortcomings in marshalling his facts is fairly devastating.



Author:

Susie Linfield

Susie Linfield teaches cultural journalism at New York University. A former editor at the Washington Post and the Village Voice, she has written for a wide variety of publications, including the New York Times, the Nation, Dissent, and the New Republic.

Linfield’s main point in *The Lion’s Den* is that all too many voices, on the left and, *a fortiori*, on the right, have “had the greatest difficulty in seeing Israel, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in their particularity rather than stand-ins for other struggles and histories”, and that the authors discussed in the book, for the most part, “have refused the harsh, complicated realities of the Arab-Israeli conflict, preferring to project their *a priori* theories, hopes, wishes, and antipathies onto it. This has hobbled them as analysts and activists.” She believes that, again and again, Jewish thinkers on the left have judged the sometimes ugly nature of Jewish particularism more harshly than similar behavior in other ethnic or religious groups, whether out of embarrassment or confusion.

There is something to this, though it is hard to get around the feeling that it has been less Jewish particularity as such than the evil of the occupation that has soured much of the left and the Jewish left on Zionism. Her hope is that after peeling away layer after layer of preconception and misconception, we can get to a basic level of truth that is beyond the exaggerations and willful misconstruing of any side. For Linfield, this truth is that Israel, with all of its flaws, cannot be wished away by the heavy application of left anti-Zionist rhetoric. The aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples for national self-determination are the irreducible fact of the conflict, and ugliness in seeking to realize them does not void the legitimacy of those aspirations.

I am certainly in agreement with this, but when it comes to contested historical truths, getting to the “thing-in-itself” is always a challenge. To give only one example, I am very sympathetic to Linfield’s argument that reducing Israel simply to a “settler-colonial state” is a great distortion of a far more complex history. Zionism was not created by the Great Powers, and the perpetual oppression of the Palestinians was the farthest thing from the minds of the early Zionists. On the other hand it is hard to separate the Balfour Declaration from Britain’s ambitions for the post-Ottoman Middle East. The 1947 Partition Plan, whatever its virtues, was forced on an Arab and Muslim world by a United Nations dominated by the western powers. Needless to say, the main reason Israeli settler-colonialism has become such a dominant left-wing trope, the occupation, has less to do with the history of the conflict than its current morass. To call Israel a settler-colonial state is to make one sort of simplification of a more complex reality; to deny that Israel has its roots in settler-colonialism is to make another. And as for a more complex historical view? Sure, but for most people, discussion about the Israel-Palestine conflict is a zero-sum game where any nuance is seen as naiveté at best and treason at worst, and truth is less important than rendering a verdict of guilty or innocent. And how we get beyond this, I do not know.

Linfield’s animus, throughout, is directed at left-Zionist proponents of binational or a single state, from the Yishuv to the present, seeing such views as wishful fantasy masquerading as policy analysis, a way for Jews to atone for the sin of Jewish nationalism. For Linfield, the two peoples are too different, their aspirations too incommensurate, their shared history too bitter, for them ever to be peacefully contained in a single political entity. The book closes with a dissection of contemporary ideas about a single state. Her critique is very much on target. A single state, she demonstrates, is not at all “realistic.” But are the hopes for two states any more realistic? We can start from the obvious fact that the current governments of Israel and the United States have no interest in pursuing any two-state option, and it is difficult to imagine a two-state model that could satisfy the security needs and demands of Israel and the aspirations of Palestinians for a state that would be genuinely sovereign. And one can further ask Linfield if, given the current political situation, there is anything at all realistic about a left-wing, “third way” Zionism, given the

repeated and decisive rejection of this perspective by the Israeli electorate.

The indisputable fact regarding the Israel-Palestine problem right now is that for all potential positive alternatives, it is far easier to make the case for their probable failure than to reasonably predict their possible success. And when realism leads one to conclude that the most likely outcome of the current situation is something akin to apartheid in the West Bank and God know what in Gaza, realism needs to be supplemented by what one ancient observer of the Middle East called “the evidence of things not seen.”

In the end, Linfield’s syllabus of errors makes for bracing, essential, and riveting reading for anyone concerned with the intersection of left politics and Zionism. Whether one calls oneself a left-Zionist, a non-Zionist, or even an anti-Zionist does little to change the need to reckon with the aspirations of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. The starting point, as she rightly insists, for any way forward is to try for an unblinkered clarity of vision about what is actually happening. And if Linfield, in my opinion, sometimes relies too much on arguments that fall short of this, she is just like everyone else who has tried to make this most intractable of conflicts a bit more amenable to a possible solution. If the Zionist left can do nothing else in this time of woe, it can at least study where it has been, learn from past mistakes, and better prepare for the bitter battles certain to come. ■

Peter Eisenstadt is an independent historian who lives in Clemson, South Carolina. He is completing a biography of the African-American religious thinker Howard Thurman, to be published by the University of Virginia Press.



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