



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Where We Are Now By Paul Scham

I am writing this in the first flush of relief after President Biden and Vice-President Harris have been sworn in and the ex-president has been deposited at Mar-a-Lago. As Americans, we rightly feel we have accomplished something big. However, as Americans who are also deeply concerned with and worried about Israel's future, the picture is much less clear. Israel faces an election on March 23rd where the only question seems to be whether or not Bibi's rightwing opponents will topple him – or whether Bibi will survive as prime minister (the latter currently seems more likely). The “Left” is in tatters; Meretz seems assured of at least 5 seats but numerous other small center-left grouplets are swarming in the polls, trying to coalesce and reach the magic threshold percentage of 3.25% needed to enter the Knesset. There is, for the first time, talk of a Jewish-Arab party with mainstream aspirations, but no one has yet come up with a political plan, a program, and a set of forces that might propel it (you can listen to our recent webinar on this issue [here](#)). Meretz has put two Israeli Arabs in its first five seats in its Knesset list for the coming election, but most agree that that does not a real Jewish-Arab party make. Be sure to see the important analysis of Jewish-Arab political cooperation in Israel by Ron Skolnik on p. 3 of this issue of *Israel Horizons*.

Nevertheless, perhaps because I live in the District of Columbia, just a few miles from the Capitol where it all happened, I am feeling strangely optimistic. I have no illusions that Israeli-Palestinian peace is high on anyone's agenda, but I can't help feeling that the political change here truly makes a difference, even for Israel, where most of the Jewish population is probably not happy to be moving from Trumpworld to Bidenworld. Not that the Occupation is likely to dissolve any time soon, but the American role, which remains large in the Middle East and especially with matters relating to Israel, is now controlled by rational hands and minds. I think it matters whether what is still the most powerful country in the world is run by people who have a firm grip on reality – and that the center

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of gravity of this country has moved somewhat to the left in a variety of ways, including how the mainstreams of the Jewish and the general communities regard the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It matters that J-Street has endorsed the majority of Democrats in both the House and Senate. It matters that PIN, the [Progressive Israel Network](#), is now a recognized address for Jewish sentiment on Israel. It matters that the US will almost certainly soon resume aid to the Palestinian Authority, that a Palestinian representative will likely soon be stationed again in Washington, that Jared Kushner will no longer represent the United States in Middle East forums, that there will be at least a serious attempt to reconstitute the JCPOA (the 'Iran nuclear deal'), and that American policy will no longer be calibrated to please the corrupt and dangerous Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, the notorious Mohammed bin Sultan, better known as MBS. Most important, we know there is an administration in place which shares our values, if not necessarily our specific policies with regard to the conflict. But even our own longterm aspirations for the shape of Israeli-Palestinian relations are now in flux.

As regular readers of this column know, I am increasingly drawn to the concept of Confederation as an eventual solution to the Israeli-Palestinian impasse; not as an alternative to the two-state solution but, rather, as a fulfillment of it. Confederation is represented in Israel by the growing movement of [A Land for All](#), a joint Jewish-Arab organization that is not a political party, but rather a growing social movement within Israeli civil society. It is building on the reality of today, that two nations claim the whole land of Israel/Palestine and that neither is going to leave or give up its claims under any conceivable circumstances. While annexation of any part of the West Bank would be illegal under international law and serve to increase enmity between Palestinians and Israelis, it might, in the long run, make a confederation-type or other arrangement between Israel and a future Palestinian state inevitable, as implied by University of Pennsylvania Professor Ian Lustick in his thoughtful and controversial book, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality*. Lustick argues that *de facto* annexation has already occurred, and that the two-state solution, which he championed for decades, is now unattainable.

That may be the case but neither Lustick nor anyone else believes that any amelioration of the situation can happen soon, absent a surprise *deus ex machina* which might upend our calculus. Meanwhile, what is to be done?

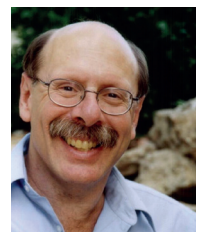
Partners for Progressive Israel has always focused on building connections between progressive Israelis and Americans. That might be a bit easier now that we – the American Jewish Left – again has some access to influence in this new administration, which shares at least some of our ideas regarding

the building blocks of a more stable Middle East. Even if, as expected, the Israeli Right remains in power, under whichever leader, it will have to bend with the winds coming from Washington. We analyze and publicize Jewish-Arab cooperation examples with our [Conversations with Israel and Palestine webinars](#) and with [Kolot-Voices of Hope](#). We took a leading role in the campaign for the [Hatikvah slate](#) in the World Zionist Organization, where we and our allies work tirelessly to institute progressive programs and limit the influence of the Right. Especially in the run-up to an Israeli election (which is most of the time nowadays) we disseminate news on social media regarding the Israeli Left, as it gropes toward a set of common and achievable policies as well as a Jewish-Arab political party or coalition that can represent all Israelis and institute progressive social change.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that this is indeed a tall order. In Israel, where political parties and movements are categorized on the political spectrum according to their views on "security" issues, Arab parties have been automatically categorized as "Left," and, indeed, since 2015 have coalesced into the Joint List under the leadership of Ayman Odeh of Khadash, who has much in common with Meretz and civil society organizations on the Left. But the Joint List also includes parties such as the United Arab List (Ra'am), a moderate Islamist party, whose leader acknowledges that, except for security issues, it has more in common with Shas than with any parties of the Center or Center-left. And indeed, Bibi has been campaigning in Arab villages and town, (hoping Arabs will vote for him "in droves") and there is discussion of a prominent Joint List leader defecting to the Likud. So finding a common program and leader that could unite large numbers of Arabs and Jews under a progressive banner is a challenging task.

However, to bring it all back home, though we are not a lobbying organization and don't work with Congress or the executive branch, we join with our PIN colleagues and many others in trying to influence American society and policy towards a recognition that, without Palestinian (as well as Israeli) self-determination, there cannot be peace, despite the recent normalization of relations of some Arab states with Israel. Now, we know that we will see our voices heard by decision-makers, and that is, indeed, a welcome achievement. ■

Paul Scham is President of Partners for Progressive Israel and the director of the Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland.



Meretz and the Question of Jewish-Arab Political Partnership

By Ron Skolnik



In the run-up to Israel's March 2021 elections, the veteran Meretz party has broken new ground: It is offering a slate of candidates that features the highest level of Jewish-Arab integration ever seen in a party that defines itself as Zionist. Three of the party's first ten (nine to be exact) candidates, and two of its first five, are Arab. If recent polling results hold true (five to seven seats), this means that about 30 to 40 percent of the party's new Knesset faction will be made up of Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel.

Compare the current slate to 1992, the first time the party ran, when, of the twelve Knesset members it earned, only one (Walid Sadik in the ninth slot) was a member of Israel's Arab community. This was no aberration: Meretz's 1996 lineup featured the same level of Arab representation and its 1999 list amounted to a slight demotion, with MK Hussniya Jabara placed one spot further down, at ten. When the party dropped from ten to six seats in 2003, Jabara lost her Knesset seat, and for the first time since its founding, Meretz elected no Arab Knesset members at all to its parliamentary faction. This absence would continue for a decade, until MK Esawi Frej cracked the top five in 2013. But, even then, Frej was Meretz's sole Arab candidate in its top twenty.

Meretz's new election list is, therefore, a major step forward. And yet ... what does it say when, three decades into the party's existence, the prominence of Arab candidates represents a bold innovation for the left-most Zionist political force in Israel?

Meretz's history, it must be noted, is not an outlier in the Israeli system. The minimal Arab representation in the party before now (with the short-lived exception of the [April 2019](#) elections) is entirely consistent with the tradition of de facto segregation in Israel's politics. Aside from a few efforts at true political integration – the first two decades of the Hadash party and the mid-1980s Progressive List for Peace come to mind, along with the current minuscule Da'am party – Israeli parties orient themselves either toward Jewish or toward Arab constituents, and their electoral slates are populated accordingly.

Several party lists are purely Jewish or purely Arab, such as the ultra-orthodox Shas and United Torah Judaism, the right-wing/national-Orthodox Yamina, or the United Arab List, which is considering an independent run this year apart from the Joint List composite slate. Most major parties (even Likud) are not completely homogeneous in makeup, however,

and include at least one (sometimes token) candidate from the “other” community. Nonetheless, these parties (including, on the left, Meretz as well as Hadash in recent decades) are composed predominantly by either Jewish or Arab candidates and draw their vote almost entirely from either Jewish or Arab constituencies. Meretz’s new list is therefore a welcome signal of change.

This de facto segregation in Israeli politics should really come as no surprise, given the degree of de facto segregation in Israeli society overall. Jewish and Arab children, for example, grow up separately and attend separate schools. A 2014 [Taub Center study](#) found that only “6 percent of all the pupils in Israel ... attend schools in which some encounter between [Arab and Jewish] pupils takes place.” And Jews and Arabs live apart as well. Only 10 to 15 percent of Arab citizens live alongside Jews in what are called “mixed cities” (the term itself is remarkable inasmuch as it connotes that “mixing” is an exception to the norm); the rest reside in about 140 strictly Arab localities. Even in the “mixed cities,” such as Haifa, Jews and Arabs are largely segregated by [neighborhood](#). Residential segregation, in turn, has an [adverse effect](#) on Arab integration in the labor market and the dominant Jewish segment of the economy.

The reality of segregation of course seeps into both communities’ attitudes, though more powerfully on the Jewish side. In 2018, the residents of [Afula](#), led by a former mayor, launched a campaign to prevent residential sales to Arab citizens in order to keep it from becoming a “mixed city.” In 2016, rightwing Knesset Member Bezalel Smotrich, who would go on to become a Cabinet Minister in the Netanyahu government, called for segregation in [hospitals](#).

Explicitly segregationist attitudes are sometimes endorsed by a majority of Jewish citizens. A 2019 Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) [study](#) found that 59 percent of Jews (compared to 44 percent of Arabs) support separate Jewish and Arab schools, while a whopping 84 percent of Jews said they would not marry an Arab or allow their children to do so. A nearly as large 77 percent of Arab respondents shared this sentiment regarding Jews.

Even when segregation doesn’t enjoy majority support, it is often endorsed by a significant minority. In one study, [30 percent](#) of Jewish respondents (vs. 21 percent of Arab respondents) agreed that they should be allowed to choose an all-Jewish (or all-Arab) hospital room. According to the IDI survey, 35 percent of Jews said they are unwilling to have an

Arab friend, while 38 percent are unwilling to have an Arab neighbor. (Among Arabs, the numbers were 14 percent and 11 percent, respectively, regarding a Jewish friend or neighbor.)

The causation behind widespread segregation in Israel is beyond the scope of this article. It should be noted, however, that the Israeli NGO Adalah argues that this reality is the product of more than just voluntary mutual avoidance, and involves deliberate State [policy](#). Adalah points, in particular, to the law that allows “admissions committees” to filter out applicants to small Jewish communities based on their “social suitability.” The NGO also notes the work of quasi-governmental organizations like the Jewish National Fund, which is mandated to operate on behalf of Jewish citizens alone.



Regardless of the causes, the segregation prevalent in society also seems to reinforce the thinking, even among progressive Jewish Israelis, that Israel somehow belongs more to its Jewish, than to its Arab, citizens. Take, for example, a recent interview given by Meretz MK Yair Golan. While endorsing the concept of “Jewish-Arab partnership,” Golan [demonstrates](#) that a subliminal “us and them” mentality remains strong, even on the left, as he appears to suggest that such partnership involves not a rejection in principle of greater Jewish “ownership” over the country, but Jewish citizens nobly exercising their proprietorship to welcome in Arab citizens. Here’s Golan in December 2020:

“Jewish-Arab partnership is part of Zionism. It’s written in the Declaration of Independence that we” – i.e. representatives of the Jewish community – “extend our hand in peace to the Arab public to take part in the upbuilding of the land. Therefore, every Zionist party needs to accept into its ranks representatives of the Arab community.”

It’s not that Golan’s brand of left-Zionism is anti-equality. On the contrary: Golan has demanded the [repeal](#) of Israel’s “Nationality Basic Law,” which enshrined the principle of greater Jewish privilege in statute; he [described](#) that legislation as “a finger in the eye,” designed to make clear the second-class nature of Arab citizens. Indeed, Golan’s de facto entry into politics, while still Deputy Chief of Staff, was a [speech](#) he delivered on Holocaust Remembrance Day in which he drew parallels between the “horrific processes in

Europe – particularly Germany – 70, 80, and 90 years ago” and trends in 2016 Israel. And Golan was a co-sponsor of a bill to approve a “[Basic Law: Equality](#),” which would “guarantee that every citizen of Israel is entitled to equality and freedom by virtue of their citizenship.”

Nonetheless, Golan, in his public comments, seems to echo a status quo in which Jewish and Arab Israelis for the most part grow up apart, live apart, create families apart – and perceive their relatedness to their country differently. And while Golan is anything but a racist, it’s that status quo of separateness, unfortunately, that often serves as a breeding ground for distrust, intolerance, and xenophobia. Compare Golan’s remarks above to the [op-ed](#) penned in early December by Uri Zaki, the chair of the Meretz party executive, who has been among those pushing Meretz to become a fully integrated Jewish-Arab political force:

“Meretz needs to begin to behave as an equally Jewish-Arab left party. My model is the wonderful social movement, ‘Standing Together,’ where the Jewish-Arab aspect is manifested at every level of operation: The choice of issues [to tackle], activity in Arab and Jewish communities, egalitarian publications in both languages [Hebrew and Arabic], and, of course – [joint] Jewish-Arab leadership.”

Such a call for joint Jewish-Arab leadership was made in 2019 by former Meretz MKs Esawi Frej (Arab) and Mossi Raz (Jewish). Frej and Raz proposed that Meretz institute a structure with two co-chairs, one Jewish and one Arab, and they expressed a desire to run in tandem as co-chair candidates. (They would eventually suspend their campaign and endorse the candidacy of then-chair Tamar Zandberg, who [promised](#) to advance their proposal – but Zandberg narrowly lost her position in internal elections to current chair Nitzan Horowitz.) Earlier in 2019, Meretz’s “Forum for Jewish-Arab Partnership” had issued a similar [call](#) for this co-chair structure to be required “in every official party institution,” from the chair position on down, as well as for “any official Meretz publication to be published in both Hebrew and Arabic.”

Part of what divides these two approaches, it should be noted, are considerations of electoral strategy. There is a strong belief among some in Meretz that the adoption of the full-scale Jewish-Arab model would produce a [net loss](#) of votes, driving away many Jewish voters towards more centrist party options without the benefit of an equal number of new voters to compensate. With Meretz traditionally struggling just to get past

the 3.25 percent threshold needed to enter Knesset, such a shift, they argue, could be a death blow to the party. Others, however, point to the April 2019 elections, when Meretz survived *davka*, i.e. precisely, because of the approximately [40,000 votes](#) it received in the Arab community. These Meretz figures point to the untapped potential among Arab voters, whose enthusiasm is often weak, contributing to depressed turnout. A fully Jewish-Arab Meretz, they say, could be attractive to those who otherwise give up on elections and stay home.

On the ideological level, the debate in Meretz, and the Zionist political left generally, calls to mind the evolving terminology employed in Israeli civil society. While those endeavoring for equality and minority rights once made use of the word “co-existence” to describe their aims and work, the term has been largely superseded by the phrase “shared society.” The latter implies a situation of co-equality; the former suggests, at worst, a model of gracious host/appreciative guest, and, at best, a sort of social *détente* without the presence of vital, pervasive ethnic/national interaction.

Change is slowly brewing, however, and a growing number of initiatives are seeking to create a political framework that will appeal to, and be represented by, Jews and Arabs in equal measure. One of those, the “Alliance” ([Brit/Tahaluf](#) in Hebrew and Arabic) is an initiative of Jewish and Arab public figures, including many former Members of Knesset, who are calling for a fully equal Jewish-Arab electoral slate based on the principle of civic equality. Another effort, the [Joint Democracy Initiative](#), proposes the formation of a “joint Jewish-Arab political front” that would champion “the values of democracy and human rights, and fully equal rights for all the country’s citizens.”

Meretz is not yet the fully equal Jewish-Arab party that these groups and other figures are calling for. But its current candidate list is a major step in this direction and could be an indication of where the party will be heading over the years to come. ■

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



The views expressed are not necessarily those of Partners for Progressive Israel

Israel Must Provide Covid-19 Vaccine to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories

By Tally Kritzman-Amir



Israel has been in a unique, even paradoxical, position regarding its efforts to contain the Coronavirus pandemic outbreak. On the one hand, it has been unable to prevent the rapid spread of the pandemic and, as of January 16, has racked up the astonishing number of more than one-half million positive cases since its outbreak last year. It also has the dubious distinction of being ranked as 17th highest in the world with regard to a positive diagnosis for the Coronavirus per one million persons. At the same time, Israel has been at the forefront of the vaccination effort, currently leading the world in per capita vaccinations, with more than 22% of its population now vaccinated, a number which is rising rapidly. This remarkable achievement can be attributed to Israel's excellent national health care system, as well its arrangement to obtain vaccines in return for providing statistical data to the manufacturers about the impact of the vaccination on its population.

While this impressive vaccination campaign is going on, one thing that has been generally overlooked is the responsibility of the State of Israel to ensure the safe and timely vaccination of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza. According to media reports, Israel has rejected unofficial requests from the World Health Organization to assist a vaccination operation in the Palestinian territories, and Israel has not provided any assistance to the Palestinian Authorities in obtaining or distributing vaccines. As the occupier, however, Israel is under obligations towards the occupied population

under international law. Those include general obligations to ensure the safety and security of the population, which includes a requirement to ensure the health of the population (Regulation 43 of the Hague Convention on the Law of War on Land (1907)). It should be noted that Israel made unconfirmed claims the Palestinian Authority rebuffed Israeli offers of help in obtaining vaccine doses, which the PA disputes, and now asserts it will assist in getting vaccines for Palestinians in some distant and hypothetical point in the future, after Israelis have been vaccinated.

There is also a specific obligation to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, i.e., "to the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining, with the co-operation of national and local authorities, the medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory, with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics" (Art. 56 of the 4th Geneva Convention). These obligations should be read as requiring Israel to purchase vaccines for the Palestinian population, since Israel is better positioned to do so than the Palestinian Authority, in light of the economic, fiscal and political dependence of the Palestinian Authority on Israel. The failure of the Palestinian Authority to provide vaccines for the population does not relieve Israel from this obligation.

But this is not simply a matter of international law: Israel also has

Israel Must Provide Covid-19 Vaccine to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories

a moral obligation to the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as a legal obligation under its own domestic law. Israel has cultivated the dependency of the Palestinian Authority on its economy, and thus suppressed its ability to develop an adequate health care system. This is true for the West Bank, where Israel maintains control over roughly 60% of the territory by means of the physical presence of its military and civilians. But this is also true for Gaza, where Israel maintains control through governing the perimeters and micromanaging the entries and exits of people and goods in and out of Gaza. With this control comes the responsibility to provide vaccines, especially as the Palestinian hospitals suffer from a chronic shortage of ventilators, PPE, and other medical supplies.

In addition, since Israel is supplying vaccines to the inhabitants of West Bank settlements, offering them to some persons and not others within a certain territory where the only difference between them is their nationality is discriminatory. During the Gulf War, the Israeli High Court of Justice concluded that Israel had an obligation to provide personal gas masks to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and required the state to purchase such masks (HCJ 168/91, Morcos v. Minister of Def., 45(1) P.D. 467, 470-71.). The same logic should apply to the vaccines. It should be noted that this is also in the self-interest of Israeli society, which depends on Palestinian labor and still maintains contacts within Palestinian society.

Sadly, there is currently a petition before the High Court of Justice by the family of Hadar Goldin, an Israeli soldier killed in Gaza in 2014 and whose remains are held by Hamas, in an attempt to block Israeli assistance to vaccination in Gaza. While I support the family's hope that Hadar's remains will soon be brought back to Israel, this seems a highly inappropriate request to the Court to authorize collective punishment.

There are many different wrongs associated with Israel's ongoing control over the West Bank and Gaza, but now is a moment in which Israel should do the right thing. This is not a moment for vaccine nationalism, something the World Health Organization is warning us against. It is a moment to take responsibility for those under Israeli control and to save human lives through the speedy provision of the Covid-19 vaccine to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. ■



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Sikkuy: Advancing Equality and a Shared Society for Arab and Jewish Citizens

By Noga Malkin



Photo Credit: Inna Branzburg

This essay is a part of our series of 'KOLOT: Voices of Hope' profiles of Israelis and Palestinians furthering the cause of peace and equality. Find all the profiles in this series [here](#).

Nearly twenty percent of Israel's citizens are Arab-Palestinians, descendants of those who remained within the Israeli borders after the founding of the state in 1948. Sikkuy is a shared Jewish and Arab nonprofit organization that works to advance equality and partnership between these Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel and the country's Jewish citizens. Since its founding in 1991, Sikkuy has sought to bring an end to the longstanding discrimination and ongoing inequality between these two groups and create a shared society.

At Sikkuy, we believe that all citizens deserve equal rights and that this land belongs to all who inhabit it. To advance this vision, we work with local Arab municipalities and the leadership of the Arab community and engage in advocacy vis-a-vis government ministries, public bodies, the media, and the public at large, promoting policy change that will bring about full and substantive equality and a shared society. Our strategy is to educate and influence senior decision makers in the government and in the public and commercial sectors through professionally developed, data-driven, and practical recommendations for policy change.

We practice what we preach: Sikkuy is co-directed by Jews

and Arabs, and we are proud of our organizational model that features Jewish and Arab management and field staff at all levels. This model ensures equal and shared participation in the decision-making process within the organization and in all our activities.

At Sikkuy, we believe that the work to advance equality and partnership cannot be limited to policy makers. Consequently, we also work to educate and motivate the public at large and to shape public discourse through the media and digital spaces. These efforts are designed to promote a more equal public dialogue and to share Sikkuy's accumulated professional knowledge in discussions about the Arab community in Israel. Against the backdrop of increasing incitement by politicians against Arab-Palestinian citizens, we at Sikkuy speak out clearly and emphatically to demand full and equal rights for Arab citizens and the Arab community.

We are confident that the way to ensure a better future for all the citizens of this country lies in our ability to build a truly shared and equal society – and we believe it's in our power to do so.

From discrimination to equality

A primary reason for the gaps between Arab and Jewish citizens is the unequal allocation of state resources, including budget apportionments, land, and government services. Even though the language of Israeli law is generally egalitarian, discriminatory governmental policies determining resource allocation have created severe inequality and significant gaps. We developed a methodology called “From Barriers to Opportunities,” which allows us to map the barriers in government ministries and in Arab local authorities that impede equitable allocation of state resources; we then publish policy recommendations for overcoming those barriers and engage in advocacy to promote policy change. In addition, we work with Arab local authorities to develop tools and provide professional guidance in support of local economic and urban development.

Our work to advance equality in government policy and budget allocation takes multiple forms, adapted as needed to ensure we can successfully address emerging issues. From the very beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, for example, we put together policy recommendations and conducted advocacy with decision makers to ensure that services, information, and other COVID-related resources would be available and tailored to the needs of Arab citizens. In part thanks to these efforts, the government opened drive-through testing sites in Arab towns, where none were previously in place.

Our work in the area of planning and housing, public transportation in Arab towns (particularly in the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev), and infrastructure and employment has seen great success. Until a decade ago, there were almost no public transportation services available in Arab towns and cities. Thanks to efforts exerted by us and our partners, most Arab cities today have some degree of access to public transportation – albeit nowhere near what is available in Jewish towns; we continue to work to close this gap.



Photo Credit: Oren Ziv – Activestills

Also in Kolot: Voices of Hope: The Umm el-Fahem Art Gallery

Aspiring to bring quality art to the Wadi Ara area in northern Israel, Said Abu Shakra envisioned a local art institution as a way to build a platform for cultural appreciation, tolerance, and artistic dialogue between Israel’s Arab and Jewish populations. In 1996, that vision became the Umm El Fahem Art Gallery. Now an established success with a myriad of programs and exhibitions, the Gallery seeks to become the first-ever Arab art museum in Israel. As part of our Kolot: Voices of Hope series, we featured last month the uplifting story of the Umm el-Fahem Art Gallery. Please visit our website to read the full feature by Nurit Tamir - <https://www.progressiveisrael.org/the-umm-el-fahem-art-gallery>

Land and housing is another area in which we work for equitable resources. Although 14 percent of Israel’s citizens live in Arab-Palestinian towns, these towns encompass only 3.4 percent of the country’s land. Due to ongoing expropriations by the state since 1948 alongside discriminatory land policies, there has been no growth in the amount of land allocated for Arab citizens to live on, despite significant population growth. And while the state has built over 700 new towns for Jewish citizens, virtually no new towns have been built for the Arab community.

This discriminatory policy has resulted in increasingly crowded Arab towns and a severe housing shortage. A restrictive planning policy has pushed many Arab citizens to build homes on land they own but that – due to zoning restrictions – they cannot legally build on. Today, around 30,000 houses and structures are considered “unpermitted” and are subject to fines or even demolition. At Sikkuy, we work with planning authorities and advocate for planning adapted to the needs of Arab towns in order to effect zoning changes and the retroactive approval of “unpermitted” construction.

Increased budgetary allocations for housing and planning in Arab towns was one of the recommendations we worked to include in the historic December 2015 “Government Decision 922,” which aimed to equalize some of the state budget’s funding mechanisms for Arab citizens. Sikkuy was heavily involved in pushing for this budget, which was the largest ever allocated to the Arab community in Israel. Today, we are intensively promoting Decision 922’s implementation in practice and lobbying to ensure continuity in future state budgets.

Separate is never equal: Building a shared society

It is still all too common in Israel to find segregation between Jews and Arabs, perhaps most notably in housing and education. In addition, the language, culture, traditions, and history of Arab citizens are largely absent from public spaces and excluded from public discourse. This segregation creates a sense of alienation and mistrust between the two groups, which is fertile soil for anti-Arab discrimination. At Sikkuy, we promote real change in both the public square and public awareness. Our work aims to persuade government agencies, local and public authorities, and the media to create, advance, and strengthen shared spaces and a shared society.

To build a shared society, we need to assure greater status for the Arabic language and Arab culture. Our vision is that the whole spectrum of shared spaces – public and cultural institutions, nature and leisure venues, workplaces, the health system, academic institutions, public transportation – will accord Jews and Arabs an equal place and a sense of belonging and acceptance. Thanks to our intervention, public transportation services in Israel have been integrating Arabic language into bus station and bus stop signage, on the front of buses, and in relevant user apps. We are also working to promote a greater presence for Arabic at national parks and cultural venues, at Israel Railways, and at the international airports and border crossings. Alongside our efforts to afford the Arabic language a more respected presence, we at Sikkuy also work to ensure that Arab citizens feel wanted in public spaces rather than feeling they must hide who they are or change their identity and appearance.

In addition to building shared public spaces, Sikkuy works to make education for a shared society an integral part of Israel's educational system. We push for appropriate teacher training and in-service courses, promote fair and positive representation of Arab society and culture in learning materials and textbooks, and advocate for stronger programs for the study of Arabic at all levels of the state school system. We maintain a systematic professional dialogue with the Ministry of Education, textbook publishers, teacher-training courses, and other key players in the field of education, and strive to inculcate the values of a shared society as indispensable pedagogical components.

Increasing the presence of Arabic language and culture in

public spaces and in the school system must go hand in hand with greater public awareness. The way Arabs are represented in the media has a significant impact on how they are perceived by the Jewish-Israeli public and, in turn, on relations between Jews and Arabs. Given the importance of the press in shaping people's perceptions and knowledge, we advocate for increasing and improving the representation and coverage of Arab citizens and society in the Hebrew mass media. This approach has been extremely effective: Since launching the project, we have seen a 60 percent surge in the number of Arab interviewees appearing on leading current affairs programs.

We at Sikkuy believe that it is critical to identify the sources of discrimination and oppression and resist them as a united front. We call for the end of the occupation and for a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the same time, we believe it is important to identify and take advantage of opportunities to create a more equal and shared society within Israel's borders as well, one that ensures a better tomorrow for all of Israel's citizens. In addition to our ongoing programs, Sikkuy looks to build on these opportunities and expand our role as agents of social change. Our three decades of experience have shown that when we work professionally and relentlessly, it is indeed possible to create real and lasting change. ■

To learn more about Sikkuy, please visit our website at www.sikkuy.org.il/en, and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).



*Noga Malkin is Sikkuy's
Director of Public Affairs.*

PIN Groups Oppose Codification of IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism, Citing Strong Potential for Misuse

STATEMENT

As organizations that care deeply about the State of Israel and about the wellbeing of the Jewish people, we are deeply committed to the struggle against antisemitism. We are thus obligated to share our concerns about ways in which the effort to combat antisemitism is being misused and exploited to instead suppress legitimate free speech, criticism of Israeli government actions, and advocacy for Palestinian rights. In particular, the effort to enshrine in domestic law and institutional policy the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, with its accompanying “contemporary examples,” risks wrongly equating what may be legitimate activities with antisemitism.

This effort has created opportunities for abuse and politicization by the outgoing Trump administration and others, undermining the moral clarity of the effort to dismantle antisemitism.

We respect the original creation of the IHRA Working Definition as an illustrative tool and as part of a larger and ongoing conversation about the nature of antisemitism. While we maintain no substantive objection to the core definition itself, our concern with its adoption as a legal tool is with the IHRA definition’s “contemporary examples,” which have been included as integral to the definition. We fear its adoption in law or policy at the state, federal and university level and in corporate governance has the potential to undermine core freedoms, and in some cases already has. For this reason, the Progressive Israel Network opposes the codification in US law or policy of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism.

There can be no doubt that some anti-Zionists and critics of Israeli policy can sometimes cross the line into antisemitism -- and they must be confronted when they do. Yet, Secretary Pompeo’s State Department unambiguous declarations that “anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism” and that “the Global BDS Campaign [is] a manifestation of anti-Semitism” represent a harmful overreach. This overreach, which is primarily aimed at shielding the present Israeli government and its occupation from all criticism, is made possible by the use of the Working Definition’s “contemporary examples.” The examples regard as antisemitic the claim that “the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor” and the application of “double standards” to Israel “by requiring of it a behavior not expected or



This statement was issued by the members of the Progressive Israel Network: Ameinu, Americans for Peace Now, Habonim Dror North America, Hashomer Hatzair World Movement, Jewish Labor Committee, J Street, New Israel Fund, Partners for Progressive Israel, Reconstructing Judaism, and T'ruah.

demanding of any other democratic nation.”

We are advocates for a future of equality, dignity and safety for all Israelis and all Palestinians. As such, we insist that activists, academics and all citizens must have the right to express a wide range of political opinions without fear of being suppressed or smeared by the government. This includes critiques of the legitimacy of Israel’s founding or the nature of its laws and system of government, even when we may disagree — sometimes passionately — with those

opinions. These debates are critical for democracy and accountability. They belong in the realm of public discourse and must not be banished by anti-democratic laws or penalties.

We must express our alarm when the U.S. State Department proposes to blacklist non-violent activists and human rights organizations, who are targeted simply because they document abuses or oppose the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. Throughout its tenure, the Trump administration has shown a disturbing eagerness to deploy spurious accusations of antisemitism as a cudgel to attack its political opponents.

Kenneth Stern, the renowned antisemitism expert who drafted the original definition and examples from which the IHRA definition is derived, has written that it was never intended to be used as a sweeping, all-purpose hate speech code and that its use as such by the Trump administration and rightwing Jewish groups “is an attack on academic freedom and free speech.”

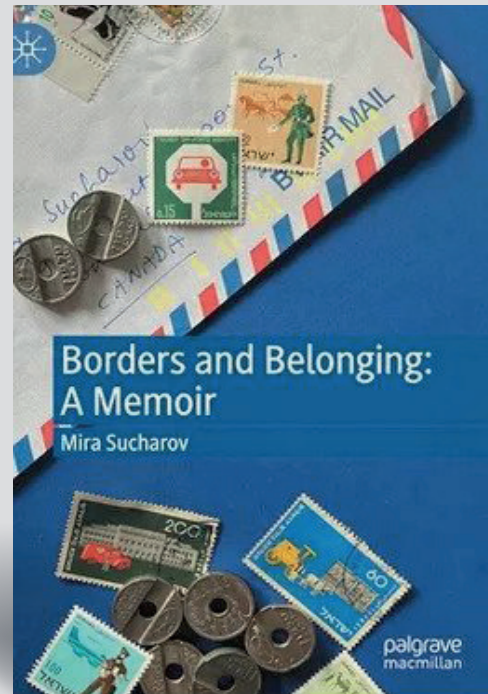
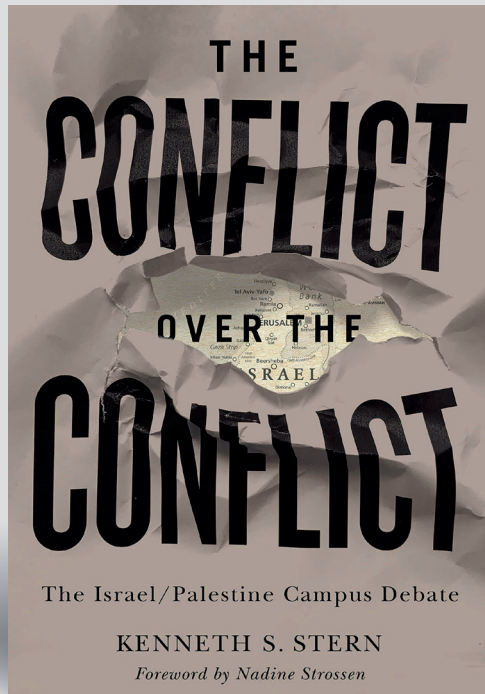
The incoming Biden administration rightly makes clear that it intends to make the fight against rising antisemitism a high priority. Now there is an opportunity to change course. We encourage the new administration and the new Congress to pursue a comprehensive strategy that takes on all forms of antisemitism and extremist hate, and which does not ignore the surging danger and violence of the white nationalist, antisemitic far right. In doing so, both the Biden administration and Congress should reject facile, oversimplified doctrines that can easily be abused. They should refrain from legislating bans on constitutionally-protected speech and legitimate activism, which often wrongfully target those who harbor no hatred towards Jews, and which make it more difficult to identify and confront genuine instances of antisemitism. ■

BDS, Blowhards, Denunciations, and Swear Words

Kenneth Stern, *The Conflict over the Conflict* (Toronto: New Jewish Press, 2020).

Mira Sucharov, *Borders and Belonging: A Memoir* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

Review by Peter Eisenstadt



Twice in recent years I have attended annual conventions of the American History Association (AHA). And twice I have voted against resolutions that condemned Israeli actions, but weren't quite BDS resolutions. (That is, they condemned Israeli actions in Gaza and elsewhere, but did not call for boycotting Israeli academic institutions.) And twice I have been unsure if I made the right decision. I agreed with one commentator who said that while he voted against the resolutions, he found himself in much more agreement with its supporters than with its detractors, most of whom thought the best way to argue against BDS was to make the case that, after all, the Occupation and the Gaza Wars weren't "that bad" and things were looking up for the Palestinians.

My friends at the meeting were split between the pro and contra sides. I thought the resolutions were gratuitous, but certainly agreed that most of the events mentioned in the resolutions were eminently worthy of condemnation. But I wondered why other countries with miserable human rights records were not singled out in this or other AHA

resolutions. However, usually I find myself on the other side of these "holding Israel to a double standard" arguments and wondered about my consistency. I also felt that, for the most part, professional organizations like the AHA should refrain from taking positions on politically controversial issues, on which AHA members are perfectly capable of speaking for themselves.

On the other hand, there are exceptions to this principle, times when political commitment by professional historians is obligatory, and silence is a form of collaboration. Perhaps this was one of those times. Certainly I have put my name to countless petitions condemning Israeli actions over the years. Why not two more? I am tired of resolutions that like a butcher's knife cleaving complex issues into which-side-are-you-on dichotomies. But then again, people at some point have to unambiguously take sides. It is this back and forth scissoring of incompatible moral imperatives is at the heart of Ken Stern's insightful and timely book, *The Conflict over the Conflict*.

Few people are as knowledgeable, or have been as central, to the BDS debate as Kenneth S. Stern. An attorney, he came to prominence defending Dennis Banks of the American Indian Movement. From 1989 to 2014 he was the director of antisemitism research, extremism, and hate studies for the American Jewish Committee, and has helped shape hate studies as an academic discipline. He was a drafter of the much-discussed definition of antisemitism developed by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in 2004. Anyone interested in the history of the BDS controversy (which is presumably everyone reading this) would benefit from reading Stern's book. There is no better road map to the twists and turns of the debate in recent years, in a book that is in equal parts a history and a memoir. I learned much, such as about the connection between the 2001 Durban conference (the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance) and the rise of BDS, and his account of the background to the EUMC definition.

Stern is throughout an eminently fair-minded navigator of the conflict. He is one of those pesky First Amendment near-absolutists who will convince you that, however despicable the views being aired (with the inevitable Holocaust-denier exception), people should be allowed to speak in public, and those with opposing views have the right to make their opposition clear, but not to the point of granting them a heckler's veto. Stern is opposed to BDS as a political strategy, but he is equally opposed to those who deny BDS proponents the right to speak in public. He is outraged by the persistence of antisemitism, and equally outraged by false cries of antisemitism used to silence legitimate critics of Israeli policies.

This plague-on-both-your-houses approach often leaves one warily eying the extremes from some middle vantage point, and Stern is a supporter of organizations such as Alliance for Academic Freedom (AAF), the Third Narrative, and Ameinu that do just that, and which generally are champions of nuance, complexity, and dialogue. But in my experience they are basically anti-BDS organizations, and real dialogue between these organizations and those that support BDS, such as Jewish Voice for Peace or Students for Justice in Palestine, has been largely impossible.

One problem with these sorts of debates is that both sides accuse the other of being intolerant of free speech. The reality is that the BDS forces control a few academic departments and organizations, and the anti-BDS side more or less controls everything else, including academic administrations, and has

the ears of politicians and legislatures.

BDS, as Stern documents, has been a failure. After a brief spurt in the years 2011–2013, very few academic organizations have passed BDS resolutions. Colleges have not banned Israeli scholars, divested from Israeli companies, or from American defense contractors that do business with Israel. The few episodes of hostility towards Jewish students on campus by pro-Palestinian students have been megaphoned into intimations of a coming pogrom which, as Stern points out, never seems to arrive.

Meanwhile, anti-BDS has been a great success. The BDS movement had been magnified into Public Enemy Number One and a Half by Israel and mainstream Jewish organizations in the United States, just behind Iran. BDS supporters have sometimes been banned from entering Israel. The German government, the US State Department, and a number of state governments have passed resolutions and laws that make support of BDS equivalent to antisemitism, and thus a prosecutable hate crime. This pattern is all-too common in American history, as fairly marginal left-wing groups become the basis of mainstream obsessions, from the Red Scare a century ago, anti-Communism in the 1950s, through the current "socialism" and Black Lives Matter scares.

Ken Stern is now apologetic about the role he played in formulating the EUMC definition of antisemitism in 2004, and he has a fascinating account of its creation. The most controversial part of the definition concerned Israel, which included "denying Jewish people the right to self-determination," "applying double standards" to Israel's actions, or claiming that the "existence of Israel is a racist endeavor." He argues these were intended as aids to "data collection," that is, researchers might find antisemitism to lurk behind such accusations (or not.) Instead, the definition, Stern argues, has been "weaponized" and used by organizations and some governments to make these claims prime facie evidence of antisemitism and, by so doing, has contributed to the general climate of intolerance. I have no doubt that Stern's account is accurate, but I think that such a transition was also entirely predictable. If you give witch hunters a manual for the discovery of witchcraft they will find witches.

Stern writes that "the main point of this book is that the issue of Israel and Palestine is incredibly complex." Sure. But we need to be careful not to use "complexity" as an excuse for inaction or countering every suggestion for change to the status quo by replying "you know, things are really complicated." I am leery of what might be called "Israel-Palestine exceptionalism." There are lots of problems that

are incredibly complex. As a historian, if you are not writing about something that is incredibly complex, you are wasting your talents. What distinguishes the Israel-Palestine conflict from other “incredibly complex” problems such as, let us say, racism in America, is that it seems fossilized in amber. There has been no positive movement in the quarter-century since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Israeli politics has lurched sharply and perhaps irreversibly rightwards, the Occupation has become ever more adamant and its supporters ever more intransigent, while the Palestinians, weak and divided, have become ever more politically enfeebled.

We need to remember that BDS is a tactic, not a solution. The real division is between those who sincerely wish to end the Occupation, and those who do not. Among those in the former camp there are those who think BDS is a useful tool, and those who think it is not. And though, of course, there are countless ideas, many mutually inconsistent, on how to end the Occupation, this is what we have to debate. When BDS or not-BDS becomes the main issue, the Occupation itself is relegated to second-order status.

Behind most “incredibly complex” problems lurks a simple truth, and the simple truth behind the Israel-Palestine problem is that Israelis are very afraid to give up the control they currently exert over the Palestinian population in the territories, and the Palestinians are very afraid that their aspirations for self-determination will be negotiated away in any deal with Israel. The rest, as Hillel said is commentary. I think what Hillel meant was that while there are incredibly complex problems, there is no such thing as an incredibly complex solution, because that is not a solution at all. As for worries about antisemitism among BDS supporters, my prescription is don't be an anti-Semite or tolerate it in others, and call it out when you see it, even, and perhaps especially, from people who otherwise agree with you. And likewise for anti-Palestinianism.

The first chapters of Ken Stern's *The Conflict Over the Conflict* stress that the *homo politicus*, and *a fortiori* the Israel/Palestinian *homo politicus*, is usually not a paragon of deliberative rationality. We come to any political debate trailing the burden of our accumulated biases and the ties with the institutions and persons that have made us what we are. And if these are problems, they are also potential sources of strength. The first step towards solving any political problem is to really care about it, and make it a priority. A book that demonstrates this, movingly, is Mira Sucharov's well-written account of her farewell to liberal Zionism, *Borders and Belonging: A Memoir*. It is strongly recommended. Mira is a friend. We met while

posting comments on the listserv of the Alliance for Academic Freedom. We both left, I think, for similar reasons; finding the ideological borders of its “third-wayism” too confining.

But Mira's book is much more than another what-is-to-be-done polemic. It is an account of her life, and an account of how for most North American Jews—Mira is a proud Canadian—the debate about Israel is not about a country thousands of miles away, but is about us. It is something deeply personal, built from memories of family seders, Hebrew school, and Jewish summer camps, trips to and extended periods spent in Israel; of parents, friends, teachers, and lovers. Her memoir is an account of the intellectual and emotional resonances that shaped her efforts to make sense of her Jewishness, and how her political evolution led her to question some of her assumptions, and her leftward shifts led to the fraying and breaking of some old ties. Her politics has led to ostracism from segments of the organized Canadian Jewish community. She describes the pain it has caused and her resoluteness in her current political beliefs, along with the reluctance to define herself, or current and erstwhile friends, through politics alone. Many leftist North American Jews have gone through a similar process of painful maturation, trying to be both a lover of Zion and an anathemizer of Israel's current realities. Mira writes for many of us.

It is one of the signal strengths of both of these books that they do not value intellect over emotions when it comes to the Israel-Palestine question. It is a problem where, with apologies to Yeats, both the best and worst are full of passionate intensity. This will not change. And though the books have somewhat differing political perspectives, they both make the case that we need to use our intellects to discipline our emotions, our emotions to focus our intellects, and to use both to guide our actions. And to return to Hillel, for all the complexity of the situation, all the pilpul of the competing narratives, the accumulated pain and heartbreak, the false dawns and missed opportunities, the solution can be summarized, succinctly: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.” The rest is commentary. ■

*Peter Eisenstadt is an independent historian. His most recent book, *Against the Hounds of Hell: A Life of Howard Thurman (the African American religious thinker)* is forthcoming from University of Virginia Press. He is a member of the Board of Partners for Progressive Israel.*



Antisemitism: What It Is, What It Isn't

Anti-Semitism - What It Is, What It Isn't



This webinar was conducted by Partners for Progressive Israel on December 3rd, 2020. This version has been edited for length and clarity by Julie Arden Ficks. The full webinar can be accessed [here](#).

Jared Jackson: Introducing our panelists: Rabbi Jill Jacobs, the Executive Director of T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, and Kenneth S. Stern, the Director of the Bard Center for the Study of Hate. I want to start with a very straightforward question. What is antisemitism?

Ken Stern: The core of antisemitism is that it's a conspiracy theory about Jews. Jews conspiring to harm non-Jews. It also gives an explanation for what goes wrong in the world.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs: I would add that antisemitism has evolved in many ways throughout the years. It started out as being based in religion. Christians needed to explain why Jews were still around even after Christianity had superseded Judaism. This hatred of Jews then morphed into something that was based on race; even if Jews converted, assimilated or went as far as converting into German society, they would become an even more nefarious force trying to undermine society from within, because one couldn't tell that they were Jews.

Jared: What are some misconceptions around antisemitism?

Jill: People try to wedge it into one particular area. It just

happens on the left. It just happens on the right. It's just about when there's actual violence. There's a lot of ways that people think that antisemitism only fits into one category, but it's often broader.

Ken: People tend to think of antisemitism as somehow siloed; that it's not related to the human capacity to see us and them, and promote hatred based on that definition. To give an example, I think everybody would see The Tree of Life Synagogue attack as an event that should be counted as an antisemitic event. Nobody I know would think of the El Paso shooting to be considered in the same context. If you look at the ideology of the two shooters, they were pretty much identical. They were worried about white Americans being subsumed by these people of darker skin. One decided, "Well, it's the Jews that are making this happen. We're going to go shoot the Jews." The other is, "I'm going to go directly for the people that I'm worried about." This is the same ideology but one is in a lens of antisemitism and one isn't. Antisemitism has its unique characteristics, but it's not as if hatred of Jews is the only hatred that exists in the world.

Antisemitism: What It Is, What It Isn't

Jared: Jill, you mentioned that there are people who are saying that there's antisemitism solely on the left and solely on the right. How does it manifest when we're talking about political streams or whether we're talking about ideologies, whether it's right-wing or left-wing?

Jill: For some reason, with antisemitism people assume that it's only going to be on the other political side. It's not, because it's a prejudice. It's everywhere. We know that every prejudice also exists on the right, on the left.

Ken: Some of the same conspiratorial storylines go on the left and right, recycling the tropes about Jewish control of the media, Jewish control of banks, and so forth. The challenge is to be as concerned about antisemitism from whatever source. In some ways, it's more important inside your own community to call it out as well.

Jared: Who gets to legislate antisemitism and who gets to name, identify, define and/or legislate antisemitism? Is it the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Association)? Is it Jews? Is it Mike Pompeo?

Ken: I don't think Jews could agree on any definition. Regarding the IHRA: what happened there was the Second Intifada that started in 2000, attacks on Jews in Europe. There was a group that was tasked with collecting data on it called the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, the EUMC. They had two problems: one was that there were no markers for data collectors as to what to include and exclude in different countries. The second was that they were faced with this challenge: "what do you do when a Jew is attacked as stand-in for an Israeli?" The IHRA said: "here's a definition on antisemitism." It's a list of stereotypes. It was an effort to try to create some sort of a measure over time and over borders. It was not to classify anybody as an anti-Semite.



Rabbi Jill Jacobs
Executive Director,
T'ruah

Kenneth S. Stern
Director, Bard Center
for the Study of Hate

Jared Jackson
Founder/Executive Director,
Jews in ALL Hues

The concern is that when we allow the government to define what political speech should be suppressed, that's the danger. It's always going to be the speech that the government doesn't like. I don't think it's an appropriate thing for any

governmental agency, whether it's the executive order or what Pompeo was saying, to define antisemitism in that context and say that speech is out of bounds.

Jill: The other idea is about a double standard. A double standard means that you're holding Israel to a standard that you're not holding other countries. When people talk about occupation or about Israel's human rights abuses, we're talking about specific human rights law. There are very specific laws about occupation and relationship to an occupied population. We're holding Israel to the same standard as other countries. It's not like there's a rule about occupation that only applies to Israel and didn't apply to the US or the allied occupation of Germany, for example.

When people use the language of double standard, they don't really mean that Israel is held to different International Human Rights standards than other countries. What they mean is there's more of a focus on Israel than other countries. There is for sure antisemitism mixed in there. Running a human rights organization, people say to us, "Why do you only focus on the US, Canada, and Israel, and the occupied territories?" For us, our answer is, "Well, we live in the United States and Canada. We're a bi-national organization. As Jews, we have a deep relationship to Israel." Sometimes those who are making this argument say, "Why aren't you working on Syria or the Rohingya?" There are Jewish organizations who are. It's just used as an attack line. It's not coming from people who are actually devoting their time to working on those issues. It's using that as a tool for attacking those who are working on Israel.

Ken: When I was protesting for Soviet Jews, nobody was saying, "Well, why aren't you doing Tibet?" If you look back to the history of *The Opposition to Jim Crow*, there were segregationists that were talking about the Communist Party in the US saying, "Well, why aren't you talking about human rights abuses in the Soviet Union?" They weren't. That was a fair excuse but didn't make them wrong about civil rights in the United States.

In terms of anti-Zionism, between '75 and '91 when the United Nations equated Zionism with racism as a de facto. People were making the assumption that if you're a Jew you're therefore a Zionist. If you're Zionist, you're a racist, and you shouldn't be allowed to have Jewish organizations. There was a correlation between that and experiences of antisemitic discrimination. Then the world conference against racism in Durban in 2001 was, in many ways, an attempt to rekindle that. There were vile antisemitic statements there. To say that anti-Zionism is always antisemitism goes into the same

black and white areas. It promotes discrimination against pro-Palestinian activists and Palestinians the same way that the Zionism equals racism coda in law to that against Jews.

Jared: Just to name an elephant that's been in the Jewish sphere – I unequivocally say that Black Lives Matter. There was a platform put out by the movement for Black Lives; it has since been changed and the language around Israel has been taken out. However, the same rhetoric is still being circulated through Jewish circles. Where do you see the line between the rhetoric that people haven't checked in on and the reality?

Jill: The two words that came up that sparked a lot of drama were apartheid and genocide. The extreme focus on Israel within this platform is a distraction from that very urgent need to stop police from killing Black and Brown people.

Jared: "In my city, members of the Arab community are demanding that antisemitism be redefined to include them, with the reasoning that they are Semitic peoples too." Ken, what are your thoughts on that?

Ken: That's an old and ridiculous thing. Antisemitism as a term was defined in the 1870s by Wilhelm Mahler, a German. It had nothing to do with Arabs. It had only to do with Jews. I think Islamophobia is a real deal. To call it something else does a disservice. The same type of thing occurs when people use the term Holocaust to refer to every other type of harm in human history. I'm not saying that the Holocaust is worse by any means. When people talk about the slave trade as the Black Holocaust, it takes away from the slave trade.

Jill: It doesn't make sense to try to change that meaning now in a way that often minimizes prejudice against Jews. First of all, you can talk about Islamophobia. You could talk about anti-Arab bias. When people say that today's Ashkenazi Jews are just descended from Khazar converts – it's an old antisemitic conspiracy. It's used against the Jewish community and sometimes the language is, well, Jews aren't Semites, Arabs are Semites and today's Jews aren't real Jews.

Jared: How do we actually combat antisemitism? How do we combat how anti-Zionism sometimes labels antisemitism or folds it in?

Jill: I don't know the perfect way to get rid of racism, or sexism, or homophobia, either but I do know that it is important to understand the history, to learn about it. A key piece is also having relationships with other communities. If other communities know that we're going to show up for them, they're also going to show for us.

Ken: I think inside the Jewish community we have to be

consistent. We have to be clear about what antisemitism is, and not give people a free ride, even though we may agree with their position on Israel. Also, I think the capacity to combat antisemitism is directly tied to the strength of democratic institutions. I worry about our democratic institutions under stress here, the attack on the press, the attack on the judiciary. If we're fighting for the strength of our democracy, that'll make it easier to combat antisemitism.

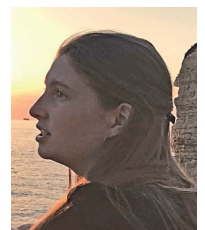
Jared: Regarding Boycott, Divestment Sanctions, BDS, against Israel – what is its effectiveness? Does it have any legs to stand on when it comes to the treatment of Palestinians in Gaza, and the West Bank?

Jill: Boycotts are a protected right of free speech that's been established in law. It's a different question whether BDS should somehow be made illegal, which it should not, in my opinion, and whether it's something that one chooses to support. We as organizations don't participate in the BDS movement. We also believe that free speech includes the right of people to speech that we might not agree with. Also, when the government tries to clamp down on free speech, it's dangerous for everybody, often especially Jews.

One can agree with the BDS movement with the principles and aims of its strategies; it is protected free speech and it's also non-violent. Fighting BDS is terrible for our community. It saps all sorts of resources that could be going to something that is more productive and positive. Also, it's generating more of a backlash against Israel. If the goal is to somehow protect Israel, then these kinds of campaigns don't achieve that goal.

Ken: I would fully endorse everything that Jill said. I'm really worried when we're in a position where the government tries to pass legislation that takes certain speech that it disagrees with, and says the government is harming people who may agree with that position. The idea of dissent is important. Personally, I disagree with BDS. I think it empowers the extremes on both sides. ■

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