

Agreeing to Disagree: Jewish Peoplehood – Between Attachment and Criticism

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Introduction: Facts and Conclusions

Three important facts touching on the relationship between Israel and American Jews – the two communities that together comprise some four-fifths of the Jewish world – have recently become clear and are agreed upon by almost all researchers:

1. Young American Jews are not “distancing” from Israel. They still feel “attached” to it.
2. Travel/study Israel programs work: young people who experience Israel feel a strengthened attachment to it.
3. Attachment to Israel does not mean an absence of critical thinking about it, nor does it imply agreement with Israel’s current policies.

Similarly, three important conclusions arise from these facts that should influence the Jewish establishment’s policy making in the years to come:

1. There is no crisis of lack of attachment in relations between Israel and the American Diaspora that requires intervention.
2. All evidence suggests that travel/study Israel programs should be strengthened and expanded.
3. While Israelis and Americans can and should try to agree on more issues, they seem destined to maintain a relationship with each other based on an understanding that, in many areas, they will not agree.

This paper will briefly survey developments relating to points 1 and 2 and look more broadly at point 3. Finally, it will pose questions that should be addressed by Jewish

people policy makers. Separately, as the data and trends addressed in this paper mainly relate to the American Diaspora, some insights about the relationships between other communities, notably European communities and Israel, will be offered in a separate section near the end.

The End of the Distancing Discourse

In recent years, the debate over young Jews' possible "distancing" from Israel has grown, both in Israel and the Diaspora. Various reasons for this purported distancing have been posited. Some relate to Israel's international image, others to changes in American-Jewish society. The precise characteristics of "distancing" have not always been defined as well as they should have been – in a previous JPPI paper¹ we distinguished between "emotional" distancing, "cognitive" distancing, and a "behavioral" distancing that is claimed to result from them. One thing was clear from the studies published prior to that paper as well as those published since: declarations of a distancing crisis among young American Jews have been exaggerated and, to some extent, unfounded. American Jews under 35 are significantly more attached to Israel² than older American Jews. In Cohen and Abrams' 2012 study, this was examined in a survey that included both a cognitive question (Do you **consider** yourself pro-Israel to a great extent?) and an emotional one (Do you **feel** emotionally attached to Israel?) – Jews younger than 35 responded positively at a much higher rate than the 35-44 age cohort and at fairly similar rates to the over-45 age cohort, which reached adulthood before there was a distancing discourse.

This and earlier studies that examined young American Jews' emotional attachment and behavioral attachment to Israel have had similar findings supporting the conclusion that, in reality, there is no practical distancing between American Jews and Israel. Thus, a study that looked at developing trends relating to financial contributions to Israeli causes found that, contrary to what many believed, contributions to Israel are not declining – but rising.³ The percentage of Jews who have visited Israel was also found to be increasing sharply compared to previous years (34 percent of those under 35 had visited Israel compared to 22 percent of those aged 35-44, and 26 percent of those aged 45-54).⁴ The comprehensive study⁵ of the largest Jewish community in North America – the New York community – completed in the spring of 2012 also provided an unequivocal finding on the question of Israel visits (on the question of distancing itself, its findings were less unequivocal)⁶: despite their young age and limited financial means, the percentage of 18-34-year-olds (those not living with their parents) who have visited Israel is higher than for older age cohorts, with the exception of those over 65 (42 percent versus 34 percent and 38 percent among those aged 35-49 and 50-64 respectively).

These studies and the findings they report have certainly not settled the dispute among researchers over the question of “distancing” from Israel. The New York community study found a significant gap in the level of Israel attachment between 18-49-year-olds and those aged 50 and above, which the researchers attribute (based on earlier studies by some of the same researchers⁷) to the higher percentage of inter-marriage among the younger generation. But it is important to note that at this stage of the debate, the main disputes remaining relate to questions of analyzing past trends rather than current ones. There are those who still believe that a distancing trend had indeed begun to emerge in the American Jewish community, but that it has been halted and even reversed – and there are those who believe that there never was a distancing trend at all.⁸ With regard to the present, there is agreement: a stronger connection to Israel among the under-35s.⁹

It is interesting to note an additional remaining substantive disagreement among researchers claiming a lack of distancing: the researchers who argue that distancing has been halted (“evidence of a turnaround in the frequently-observed long-term slide in attachment to Israel”) essentially credit the Jewish leadership’s work developing travel programs to Israel. Those claiming there never was a distancing give the credit (implicitly) to the young Jews themselves (these researchers also give much credit to travel programs, but not in relation to distancing).

Travel Programs and their Accomplishments

Recent studies that examined the effect of Israel travel programs – principally the shorter and more widespread Birthright trips and the longer “Masa” trips that require a greater commitment from participants – agree in several important respects:

1. Travel programs increased the number of young American Jews who visit Israel compared to preceding generations.
2. Travel to Israel strengthens participants’ ties to Israel (it also strengthens other aspects of Jewish communal identity).

Taken together, the two points above necessarily lead to the conclusion documented in the research: an increase in the younger generation of American Jews’ attachment to Israel as compared to earlier generations (Cohen gave this phenomenon the catchy name “the Birthright Bump”).¹⁰

The contributions Birthright and Masa make to young Jews' connection to Israel have been documented in many studies conducted since the programs began. More than half of Birthright participants report that they are "very attached" to Israel, compared to about a third of Jews who have not participated in the program (the study's comparison is between those who applied to the program and participated in it, and those who applied but were not able to make the trip because of space constraints).¹¹ More importantly, Birthright's impact on the connection to Israel among young Jews with "weak" Jewish backgrounds (offspring of inter-married parents, those from homes in which few Jewish traditions are practiced, those with little or no Jewish education, etc.) is greater and more significant than for those with a "strong" Jewish background. Further, the studies show that a second trip to Israel significantly boosts the strength of the connection.¹² According to a study conducted for the Jewish Agency, 69 percent of those who travel to Israel once say that "concern for Israel is an important part of my being Jewish" compared to 85 percent of those who visit twice, and 86 percent of Masa participants (that is, among the non-Orthodox; the percentage of affirmative answers among the Orthodox, who comprise a significant portion of Masa participants, is 94 percent). One visit, a second visit, and long-term visits all improve – in increasing degrees – participants' level of Israel-related activity. For example, 50 percent of those who made a one-time, short-term visit to Israel reported that they "listened several times or more to Israeli music," compared to 74 percent of those who have visited twice, and 93 percent of Masa participants.

The trips bring young Jews closer to Israel and strengthen their sense of connection to it. At the same time, the trips do not necessarily dampen criticism of Israel or the participants' reservations about Israeli phenomena they encounter, whether during their visits themselves or in media reports after they return home. "Repeated trips to Israel are related not only to attachments but also to knowledge of and critical attitudes toward a broad range of Israeli policies," JPPI's most recent Annual Assessment (2011-2012) found.¹³ There are several reasons for the increased criticism. "Diaspora Jews and Jews from Israel are now experiencing fundamental and significant changes and face basic problems which affect mutual loyalty and criticism between Diaspora Jews and Israelis," Professor Gabriel Sheffer wrote.¹⁴ In any case, recent studies confirming that young Jews' connections to Israel are strengthening as a result of the travel programs also reported a parallel decline of "trust" in Israel among those same young people. According to one study, there is a significant decline among young people in their belief in the proposition that Israel "really wants peace," and a decline in the level of agreement with the statement: "the U.S. should support Israel rather than

the Palestinians, or both sides equally.”¹⁵ And as the researchers reported, “as we go from old to young, we get fewer true-believers [in Israel’s policies] and more doubting skeptics.”¹⁶ In other words, the travel programs strengthen the connection, but do not necessarily serve as an efficacious public relations tool for improving the image of the Israeli political landscape or for the dissemination of the Israeli administration’s diplomatic or other messages.

Attachment without Agreement

As the research indicates and, to a far greater degree, as reflected in the Jewish public discourse, reservations about Israel among Diaspora Jews, and particularly young American Jews, have been more significant in recent years than in previous generations. In a previous JPPI paper¹⁷ we distinguished between four groups of Diaspora “Israel doubters” (this paper presented groups whose reservations are seen as an expression of distancing):

1. Critics of Israeli policy – which in this context includes both political criticism of Israeli policy issues of peace and war, and criticism of the relationship between religion and state in Israel, which poses a special challenge of awareness since this relationship differs so significantly from what American Jews are accustomed to.¹⁸
2. Diaspora Jews who reject the centrality of Israel in the Jewish discourse, and essentially challenge its position as the core Jewish community as opposed to one among several.
3. Jews who reject the tribal-particularist message of national Jewish existence as it is manifest in the Jewish state.
4. Apathetic Jews such as those whose reservations arise from a general lack of interest in Judaism itself, and so are indifferent to Israel.

Doubts about Israel may reflect negative trends, but are not necessarily a sign of negative trends. Especially when we are talking about the first group of doubters – those who are critical of Israel in various areas – reservations can also be evidence of “American Jews who care sufficiently about Israel to seek to influence her,”¹⁹ that is, criticism based on a positive: strengthening concern. And there is another positive aspect that can be suggested: “Paradoxically, it seems that one of the reasons that identified Jews feel more free to criticize Israel than in the past is precisely because Israel seems ‘out of the woods’ inasmuch as its fundamental security and stability seem assured.”²⁰ Public opinion surveys show that when it comes to clear issues of

security, U.S. Jews still support positions that reflect concern for Israel at a very high level (for example: 89 percent of American Jews report that they are “concerned” about the Iranian nuclear threat; 64 percent said they would support U.S. military action against Iran if sanctions against it fail; 75 percent said they would support Israeli military action in such a case).²¹ If they criticize Israel despite their security concerns, it seems they believe that its security will not be harmed by their criticism – that Israel is now sufficiently secure to withstand such criticism.

In any case, whether the criticism indicates a negative development – even one that increases a future risk of distancing – or a positive one, that is evidence of a new form of attachment (we can safely assume that it is a combination of the two), it is clear that the attempt to curb criticism of Israel will be, to say the least, complicated and could have dangerous consequences. Attempts (either overt, or covert and then disclosed) to silence criticism of Israel would itself become an additional and significant cause of growing criticism.

It, therefore, is apparent that Israel and its leaders must get used to a reality, even if they are not happy about it, of critical voices surrounding certain issues – this alongside continuing support and attachment, which may in fact be trending upward. This reality of attachment accompanied by constant criticism requires, of course, adaptation and mutual trust. But it should be noted that Diaspora Jewry has for decades witnessed Israel-Diaspora relations under the shadow of constant criticism of Israel, which has not always been pleasant.

A Relationship of Mutual Criticism

Even today, explicit and implicit Israeli criticism of the Jewish Diaspora has not entirely disappeared from the discourse. In recent years, official voices in Israel have stated that, in the words of Diaspora Minister Yuli Edelstein, “Israel has abandoned the negation of the Diaspora.”²² However, the essence of the Zionist vision includes a negation of the Diasporic condition. And even Edelstein himself says that “One day, the majority of Jews will live in Israel” – an assertion that seems to be not only a demographic prediction more or less agreed upon by all, but also a desire based on the judgment that life in Israel is preferable to a Jew than life in the Diaspora. For many Israeli Jews, the key word that describes U.S. Jewry is “assimilation,” something that was proven when Israel’s Immigrant Absorption Ministry stirred up a storm among U.S. Jews with an advertising campaign designed to bring expatriate Israelis (*yordim*) in the United States back to Israel. The campaign contained clear negative messages implying that Jewish existence over time is not sustainable in the United States.²³ Even leaders whose uncompromising

support for Israel is indisputable, such as Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League, criticized the campaign.²⁴ The umbrella organization Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) called it “outrageous and insulting.”

Among the Jewish public in Israel – who are even less accustomed than their official representatives to couching their messages in polite terms in the interest of maintaining good relations with Diaspora Jewry – many also hold positions (whether justified or not is beyond the scope of this paper) that imply criticism of Diaspora Jews. Israeli Jews have little knowledge of and little interest in Diaspora Jewry, although this does not stop them from making many demands of their brethren around the world. 69 percent of Israelis expect Diaspora Jews to make aliyah to Israel.²⁵ 57 percent believe that Jewish organizations should “always” support the ruling Israeli government,²⁶ and 42 percent state that Jewish organizations “do not do enough” to bridge the policy differences between the U.S. administration and the Israeli government.

Yet along with these demands, Israelis still assume that “Jewish-Israeli identity has to contend with all the elements of life via the binding and sovereign framework of a territorially defined state. And therefore the extent of its reach into life is immeasurably fuller and broader and more meaningful than the Jewishness of an American Jew, whose important and meaningful life decisions are made within the framework of his American nationality or citizenship,” as the writer A.B. Yehoshua²⁷ suggested following the storm he created at the American Jewish Committee convention in Washington. It is apparent that there is difficulty among Israeli Jews in identifying the special positive qualities of Diaspora Jewish communities – that are partially absent from the Israeli community – many of which result from the challenge of maintaining dynamic Jewish life in a competitive and open world. The solutions that have been created in many communities in the face of this challenge not only affect the development of Diaspora communities, but in many cases have also trickled down to and affected (and are still affecting) Israel. This occurred, for example, with the feminist revolution in Judaism generally, and in Orthodox Judaism in the past decade, as well as with Jewish texts presented in new formats and platforms.

While Israeli Jews’ central criticism of Diaspora Jewry relates to the essence of Diaspora life itself and its unavoidable consequences (in the Israelis’ opinion) – assimilation or anti-Semitism – Diaspora Jews’ criticism of Israel relates to a wider variety of areas, the most significant of which are:

- **Israel’s foreign and defense policies, which many (from both the right and the left) consider incorrect:** Criticism of Israeli policy can relate to the continuing

occupation in the territories, to the use of force in time of war, to the lack of Israeli initiative in the peace process, but also – in the opposite direction – to Israel's excessive readiness to make concessions in negotiations, to the lack of commitment to protecting the Jewish character of Jerusalem, etc. This criticism has nourished, and continues to nourish, a growing body of literature in books, articles, and studies in which Jews express their dissatisfaction with the way the Jewish state is run – a state in which they too, implicitly, have a stake and the right to speak (most Israelis, incidentally, believe that in these areas, Diaspora Jews should have little influence on Israeli policy – and mostly, Israelis are not interested in the criticism of Diaspora Jews when it contradicts their own personal opinions).²⁸

- **The treatment of Palestinians living under occupation in Judea and Samaria (and to a lesser extent, in Gaza) as well as the treatment of Israel's own Arab minority:** Alongside the critical political discourse over Israel's handling of matters of war and peace, criticism is leveled by Jews who believe not only that Israeli policy isn't prudent, but also that it is not moral. The fact that Israel rules over a Palestinian minority that does not enjoy full political rights contradicts, in the critics' opinion, general humanistic ethical principles and, in some cases, what certain critics perceive as the principles of Judaism. This criticism often spills over to and affects the relationship between Jews and the Arab minority within Israel's borders, and to how the Jewish state is perceived by its critics as denying or unfairly limiting minority rights.
- **Shaping the relationship between religion and state, and especially the religious-orthodox establishment's control over religious life in Israel:** The Jewish state is the only place in the world in which Judaism has an establishment position of power, and for many Diaspora Jews (as well as for many Israeli Jews), the results of this power seem wanting. Diaspora Jews are opposed to discrimination against non-Orthodox streams, to the unequal treatment of women in Orthodox tradition, to the manner in which religious conversion and family courts are run, and to the requirement that marriages are exclusively conducted by the rabbinate, among others. The relationship between state and religion in Israel is also very different from that in the countries where most Diaspora Jews live (particularly the United States), and they impose on Israel a type of Judaism that, to most of the world's Jews, is alien in its practices.
- **The culture of Israeli discourse broadly – Diaspora Jews have difficulty understanding and identifying with Israeli patterns of behavior they perceive as aggressive and impolite:** This criticism is more general, though not necessarily

less worrying. Israel is a country in which the public discourse is vocal and blunt, and very different from how public discourse is conducted in countries where most Jews live. “Politeness is not one of A.B. Yehoshua’s strong points,” joked Hillel Halkin in the wake of the Yehoshua storm at the American Jewish Committee conference.²⁹ But what Halkin sees as a forgivable weakness – perhaps because he agreed with most of the Israeli writer’s statements – does not necessarily seem that way to other Diaspora Jews. For a long time, many Diaspora Jews have had a problem with “the Israelis,” whom they perceive as “arrogant, tough, and inhumane” and who act “as if they were ‘better Jews.’”³⁰

This dynamic of mutual explicit and implicit criticism along with the growing attachment between the two communities on a practical level – which results, among other things, from the existence of many travel opportunities to Israel, from new communications modalities, and from the access to news from Israel American Jews have (through more and more websites)³¹ – is apparently a permanent one that requires adaptation and poses new dilemmas for Jewish people policy makers. Jews in Israel, who are accustomed to thinking in a classically Zionist way, will not easily change their that Jewish life in the Diaspora is inferior compared to Israel. Jews in the Diaspora who know Israel better and who can more readily stay updated about what is happening there are not necessarily changing their attitudes as a result of this greater familiarity. Sometimes, familiarity actually reaffirms their views and enables them to justify, to others and to themselves, their criticism of Israel.

Policy Questions for Discussion

Strengthening the connection to Israel: Where should this development be channeled?

There is no doubt that strengthening young Diaspora Jews’ connection to Israel is a positive development. Assuming the researchers who are documenting this process are correct, the young American generation is not only not distancing from Israel, it is coming closer to it. This “closing” – again, with appropriate caution – can be seen as encouraging, not only because of what has been documented so far, but also because if Israel travel programs are its main cause, we can expect a continuation and strengthening of this trend. Each year, the number of Birthright participants– the main travel program, which brings the majority of young adults to Israel – increases. There is also some improvement in the availability of post-Birthright programs – those that will ensure the repeat visit that, according to the research, strongly reinforces connection to Israel.

There are questions to which recent trends provide a strong answer. For instance, it is clear that the State of Israel should have, in principle, no doubt about whether to continue supporting travel programs – they serve a critical and unambiguous Israeli interest (though the question of how much funding should be devoted to them requires a discussion of its own). Further, it is apparent that even those who warn against distancing see these programs as an effective way to halt the threat, and therefore recognize that there is less need to search for other solutions to what now seems a non-existent crisis.

However, identifying a positive trend such as this does not in itself put an end to other misgivings about the road ahead. It is especially appropriate to deal with the question of how to leverage the strengthened connection – the “closing” – to help achieve other strategic goals of the Jewish people. In other words, while a closing of relations between communities is an end in itself, it may also have the potential to help in achieving other goals. One can imagine, for example, that closer relations between the communities will make it easier for Israel and the Diaspora to undertake cooperative initiatives in economic, philanthropic, and spiritual projects. It is also possible to take advantage of the stronger connection to enhance mutual influence of various kinds – boosting the learning of Hebrew in the Diaspora, building mutual respect between the different streams of Judaism in Israel, among others. Presenting new objectives such as these requires a review of the overarching goals of the Jewish people,³² and a search for the kind of objectives “closing” could bring.

Criticism of Israel: Silence, limit, or encourage?

As discussed above, it is possible to relate in a number of ways to the criticism young Diaspora Jews have of Israel. It can be seen as a negative phenomenon that strengthens those who have an interest in increasing the number and intensity of accusations against Israel in the unsupportive international arena, and therefore as something that effectively harms Israel’s ability to defend itself against the de-legitimization campaign being waged against it. Such an approach to the phenomenon of Jewish criticism of Israel will be influenced by the substance of the criticism, by its intensity, and by the forums in which the criticism is lodged. But such criticism can also be viewed as a positive phenomenon, as testament to a strengthening bond, to involvement and concern, to a desire to channel the emotional connection into practical outlets of (positive) influence on Israel in various fields.

The Israeli public may well not be happy to hear criticism from Diaspora Jews on topics relating to political decisions whose possible outcomes determine war or peace. 63 percent oppose representation of Diaspora Jews in the Knesset, 49 percent oppose creating a mechanism that would require the Knesset to debate initiatives by Diaspora Jews.³³ At the same time, it seems that less binding mechanisms for Diaspora Jews to become involved in Israeli issues would be met with less resistance (56% support the creation of a “Jewish parliament”). If this is the case, one could go further and assume that constructive criticism could indeed benefit Israel not only from the point of view of strengthening the connection with Diaspora Jewry but also from that of developing more appropriate policies for Israel’s own future.

In other words, the Jewish people’s decision makers can choose one of three possible approaches to criticism of Israel: to attempt to restrict or silence it; to grudgingly accept its existence; or to encourage it while channeling the criticism so that it benefits both Israel-Diaspora relations and, by bringing good advice, Israel itself.

The Israeli message: Respect for the Diaspora? Consideration for the Diaspora?

How far can and should Israel go to eliminate or reduce the message of “negating the Diaspora”? Would relinquishing this negation be a sign of Zionism weakening, or conversely, would it actually be a sign of self-confidence and the sense that there is no longer a need to justify Zionism and to defend against the alternatives? The working assumption of this paper is that of a continuing Israel-Diaspora relationship through close connections and also through mutual criticism (agreeing to disagree) – though this assumption does not require Israel to maintain a confrontational position with respect to Jewish life in the Diaspora. Just as it is appropriate to ask how one should act with regard to Diaspora Jews’ criticism of Israel, it is also appropriate to consider how Israel should act with regard to its criticism of the Diaspora. We propose a number of policy questions in this regard:

- What are the correct ways – in the 21st century – for Israel to encourage aliyah and the return of expatriate Israelis?
- In what ways can Israel soften the sense of alienation that some Diaspora Jews feel when it comes to Israeli policies on various matters?
- Is such softening a high priority? Is Israel prepared to give consideration to the positions of Diaspora Jews in setting its policies on various issues? And if so, which?

Travel/Study Programs: Where do we take them from here?

The travel/study programs available to Jews today did not develop as a result of a planning process by Jewish institutions. To a large extent, these are programs that developed as a result of local initiatives by committed visionaries who decided to go against the tide. The question is whether the next developmental stage of these programs should be managed in this manner, or whether it is possible to reach broad consensus among leaders and institutions about desirable directions for these programs to take down the road. Among other dilemmas that should be considered are:

- What portion of Jewish people resources should, at the end of the day, be devoted to the goal of bringing young Diaspora Jews to Israel?
- Is the current number of participants satisfactory, and should resources be allocated to follow-up programs, or should increasing the number of participants be the top priority?
- Should and in what ways can the content of the travel programs be improved? Is it best to vary them or is there an advantage to providing young Jews with an almost uniform experience – a kind of Jewish rite of passage and affirmation with uniform content?
- Do travel/study programs also have a role in improving Israel's image and in diminishing criticism of it (something that should also be considered in the context of the previous question about content)? What are the advantages and disadvantages of raising the priority of such a goal?
- Is it appropriate for travel programs to also take a more significant role as a dedication rite for young Israeli Jews? Is it appropriate to weigh reverse travel programs – for young Jewish Israelis to become acquainted with Diaspora Jewry?

These and other questions that can be raised should be considered within the institutional frameworks responsible for the programs themselves, as well as by the leaders and institutions that support these programs, including the Israeli government, which currently subsidizes a significant portion of their cost.



The European and other Non-North American Diasporas: Giving a Voice to Unheard Communities¹

Compared to their American counterparts, European Jews have stronger connections to Israel. A large majority of British, French and Russian Jews have visited Israel, have first-degree relatives there, and claim that Israel plays a “central” or “important” role in their Jewish identities.

If the commitment of European Jews to Israel is exceptionally strong, the relationship between Israel and European Jews is asymmetric (this is also true for Jews in other relatively smaller diasporas, such as Australian Jewry and Latin American Jewry – as are many of the observations included in this short addendum). Israel’s actions affect Jews wherever they live, but perhaps particularly so in Europe where anti-Semitism and large, assertive Muslim populations are significant factors.

Jews outside Israel and the United States comprise almost 20 percent of world Jewry and almost a third of Diaspora Jewry. Non-American Jews, though, are sidelined or even excluded from the Israel-Diaspora dialogue, which, notwithstanding its name, is essentially conducted exclusively between Israel and American Jewry. On the public level, indeed, Israel seems still to relate to them almost solely in a classically Zionist way, on the assumption that assimilation or aliyah represent the only alternative futures for these non-American communities. As a result, Israel relates to them mainly on matters of anti-Semitism and anti-Israel activity, or on the subject of aliyah – and even here, Israeli leaders have sometimes seen fit to call for mass aliyah (especially from France) without first consulting them or considering how Israeli pronouncements of this kind might affect them.

Many of the issues the non-Americans face, however – intermarriage and assimilation amid the decline of the tribal/particularist paradigm, for example – are similar to those with which American Jewry is grappling. And despite a strong base of emotional and practical attachment to Israel, the dynamics of doubt and criticism of Israel that have been identified among American Jews find expression in other Diaspora communities too.

These challenges are similar, though not identical. Non-Americans face challenges of their own – such as the post-assimilation regeneration of Jewish life in the former

¹ This section was prepared by Dov Maimon.

Communist bloc. Solutions devised for American Jews are not necessarily relevant for other Diaspora communities.

European Jews, uncomfortable with this asymmetric dynamic, want their voices to be heard about the consequences they face as a result of the interdependent relations they have with Israel. There are structural factors hindering this. Unlike the culturally and nationally homogenous U.S. community, European Jewry is a patchwork of national, cultural, and linguistic communities each with its own challenges and social and political reality. As a result, there is no pan-European institutional structure that speaks with authority on behalf of the 1.4 million European Jews.

As in the relationship between Israel and American Jewry, a free and open dialogue among peers can only be beneficial – not only to the non-American Diaspora Jews whose voices have hitherto fallen on deaf ears, but also to Israelis and even to Americans, to whom the experience and creativity of their non-American brethren can contribute much as they work to strengthen Jewish life in their own communities.

In the “Israel-Diaspora” debates that ultimately set policy directions for the entire Jewish world, their needs and ideas are essentially ignored. More yet, there is a similar – perhaps even more pronounced – asymmetry in the relationship between European and American Jews. For example, American Jewish organizations that have established offices in Brussels and other European capitals have done so more to advance their own interests or provide assistance to weaker European communities than to advance cooperation and dialogue with European Jewry.

Indeed, the concept of the “Israel-Diaspora dialogue” may itself be too limited, and not only because it is effectively viewed as a bipolar conversation between Americans and Israelis. Instead, Jewish policy makers might do well to explore how a multi-local Jewish dialogue might function, one that would surely more accurately reflect not only the reality of Jewish life today, but also the increasingly free-flow of ideas that the digital age has enabled and our modern era increasingly requires.

Endnotes

- 1 For an elaborated discussion of the “distancing hypothesis” see: “The Challenge of Peoplehood: Strengthening the Attachment of Young American Jews to Israel in the Time of the Distancing Discourse,” Shmuel Rosner and Inbal Hackman, JPPI, 2012.
- 2 Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring, 2012 American Jews’ Political Values Survey, Steven M. Cohen and Samuel Abrams, 2012.
- 3 “The New Philanthropy: American Jewish Giving to Israeli Organizations,” Eric Fleisch, Theodore Sasson, Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2012.
- 4 See Cohen & Abrams.
- 5 Community Study of New York: 2011, Cohen, Ukeles, Miller, UJA-Federation of New York, 2012.
- 6 From the study, page 148: “The gap in Israel attachment between the in-married and intermarried is growing even larger than it was before. For example, in comparing Israel-attachment rates for the non-Orthodox, we find a spread of 55% for the in-married versus 23% for the intermarried among those ages 50 to 64; in contrast, for their counterparts under 35, the gap grows to 48% versus 7%. The attachment of intermarried Jews to Israel declines markedly with younger age. The comparable contour for the in-married is non-uniform. In short, a major reason for the drop in Israel attachment among the young is that so many more of them are intermarried and, in addition, younger intermarried Jews are more distant from Israel than their older counterparts. Even more than in the past, intermarriage today is associated with a decreased attachment to Israel.”
- 7 “The Uncontestable, Incontrovertible, and Absolutely Convincing Case for the Distancing from Israel Hypothesis,” Cohen, Steven, Association for Jewish Studies Conference, 2008.
- 8 “Understanding Young Adult Attachment to Israel: Period, Lifecycle and Generational Dynamics, Contemporary Jewry,” Theodore Sasson, Benjamin Phillips, Graham Wright, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe, 2012; “Trends in American Jewish Attachment to Israel: An Assessment of the ‘Distancing’ Hypothesis,” Theodore Sasson, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe, Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2010.
- 9 Cohen and Abrams.
- 10 Cohen and Abrams.
- 11 “The Impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel: 2010 Update,” Leonard Saxe, Theodore Sasson, Shahar Hecht, Benjamin Phillips, Michelle Shain, Graham Wright, Charles Kadushin; Cohen Center, Brandeis University, 2012.
- 12 “Journeys to Israel: The Impact of Longer-term Programs upon Jewish Engagement & Israel Attachment,” Steven M. Cohen and Ezra Kopelowitz, Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), October 2010.

- 13 JPPI Annual Assessment 2011-2012, in: *Creating Jewish Meaning in the United States and Europe*. (“repeated trips to Israel are related not only to attachments but also to knowledge of and critical attitudes toward a broad range of Israeli policies.”)
- 14 *Loyalty and Criticism in the Relations between the World Jewry and Israel*, Gabriel Sheffer, The Israeli Presidential Conference 2011, June 2011.
- 15 Cohen and Abrams.
- 16 Cohen in: *The Rosner-Cohen Exchange Part III: Asking Jews about their trust in Israeli leaders*, *Jewish Journal*, July 16, 2012.
- 17 See: “The Challenge of Peoplehood: Strengthening the Attachment of Young American Jews to Israel in the Time of the Distancing Discourse,” Shmuel Rosner and Inbal Hackman, JPPI, 2012.
- 18 Also see: *Debating Religion and State, Debating Distancing*, Shmuel Rosner, JPPI, 2011.
- 19 *Mass Mobilization to Direct Engagement: American Jews’ Changing Relationship to Israel*, Theodore Sasson, *Israel Studies*, volume 15, number 2, 2010.
- 20 *Rethinking Peoplehood and Israel-Diaspora Relations*, Yehudah Mirsky, JPPI, 2011.
- 21 2012 AJC Survey of American Jewish Opinion.
- 22 *Israel Gave up on the Negation of the Diaspora*, Shmuel Rosner, *Jewish Journal*, December 26, 2011.
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