



Delegitimation of Israel and Israel Attachments Among Jewish Young Adults: The College Campus and Other Contributing Factors

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Introduction

This essay analyzes an urgent current concern: Many among Israel's supporters fear that Israel's case is being delegitimized among highly educated, liberal populations--precisely the demographic of most American Jews. This anxiety is especially intense concerning young Jewish adults, who have been described in some research as less attached to Israel than earlier generations. On college campuses, anti-Israel programs, talks, rallies and petition campaigns have attracted attention.ⁱ Some observers, both inside and outside the organized Jewish community, have assumed that this "Israel delegitimation" is a primary factor in putatively decreasing support for Israel among younger American Jews. In a sharply-worded, much-discussed *New York Review of Books* piece, for example, journalism professor Peter Beinart declared, "Morally, American Zionism is in a downward spiral," and accused the organized Jewish community of alienating young Jews by adhering to a repressive policy of blind support for untenable Israeli policies.ⁱⁱ Jewish publications produced a flood of responses, ranging in tone from angry defensiveness to expressions of concern to breast-beating admissions of guilt, including, recently, *The Jerusalem Report's* headlined article: "Israel is experiencing growing international isolation that, if unchecked, could pose a strategic threat to the Jewish state."ⁱⁱⁱ



This perceived threat to Israel's legitimacy as a sovereign state in the eyes of young Jews incorporates at least three complicated twists and turns which make analysis difficult: Some of Israel's perceived isolation does indeed derive from sources working directly toward that purpose. For over a decade an increasingly sophisticated surge of anti-Israel material has been circulated on college campuses and in the cyberspace venues that are so influential in young adult lives. Some unequivocally anti-Israel rhetoric comes directly from overtly anti-Zionist sources, such as the following recent statement of Palestinian goals for the peace talks, according to the PLO Ambassador Abdullah Abdullah:

"The PLO's representative in Lebanon, Ambassador Abdullah Abdullah, emphasized yesterday that the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, which have started in Washington, are not a goal, but rather another stage in the Palestinian struggle... He believes that Israel will not be dealt a knock-out defeat, but rather an accumulation of Palestinian achievements and struggles, as happened in South Africa, to isolate Israel, to tighten the noose on it, to threaten its legitimacy, and to present it as a rebellious, racist state. He noted that Israel faces international isolation with doubt cast on its legitimacy, because of its actions and the war crimes which it has carried out. He added, 'Many Israelis in senior positions are afraid to travel to European countries lest they be put on trial for their crimes.'" [Al-Hayat Al-Jadida , Sept. 9, 2010]

However, in a contrasting twist, other materials utilized in campus rallies were not originally anti-Israel in tone or intent, but were meant as constructive critiques of specific Israeli policies, often suggested by Jewish peace organizations in Israel and the Diaspora, by human rights organizations in Europe, America, and Israel, and by academics and intellectuals in Israel and elsewhere. Nevertheless, while the



motivations and concerns may be grounded in a passionate engagement with Israel, the evidence and claims they produce are often reframed by anti-Israel groups. Thus, texts created by individuals and groups committed to Israel's survival are frequently appropriated and interwoven in campus events with the language of those who hope ultimately to isolate and weaken Israel.

As this essay will demonstrate, this toxic mix, highlighted by images of Palestinian victimization and rhetoric of Israeli apartheid, has become ubiquitous on some college campuses, where leftist professors and pro-Palestinian advocates often create a one-sided picture of Middle Eastern complexities in classrooms, discussion groups, and rallies. In these settings, Jewish students who feel attached to Israel are often confused, made to feel intimidated or isolated, and in the worst cases even fearful for their own safety if they articulate pro-Israel sentiments.

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Finally, in yet another complicating turn, veteran Jewish organizations both in the United States and Israel appear to treat these intermingled attacks as a unified whole. Rushing to defend Israel, the organized Jewish world seems to some to conflate Israel's loyal opposition with Israel's mortal enemies. Not only the leaders of Jewish peace and human rights organizations but also younger American Jewish religious leaders, public intellectuals, writers and artists (ages 22-40) who feel deeply engaged with Israel often complain that their critical concerns about Israeli policies are silenced or marginalized by established Jewish organizations. Indeed, some complain that although their vision of a Democratic and just Jewish State is loyal to Zionist ideals, there is no room for them within the current Zionist establishment. **iv**



These twists and turns, interminglings and confluences of Israel's friends and enemies make it difficult to determine, as the old joke goes, "Who's on first." Thus, this essay declares as axiomatic that the pained critiques leveled by supporters of a Jewish State of Israel at specific Israeli policies which undermine their vision of that Jewish State must be distinguished from corrosive attacks on Israel which assume that Zionism is racism and that Israel has failed to earn its right to exist. Moving beyond this axiom, the essay addresses itself to the following questions: What framing assumptions are utilized to present **both** types of materials (the legitimate critiques of Israel supporters **and** virulent anti-Israel propaganda), with the effect of delegitimizing Israel in American settings, including college campuses? How do young American Jews react to these campus events in specific, and what is the range of young Jewish engagement with Israel in general? What is the evidence for and against an actual decline in Israel connections among young American Jewish adults? How does the focus on social justice articulated by many young Jews intersect not only with bona fide critiques of Israeli policies, but also with attempts to delegitimize Israel? Conversely, how does the protective Jewish establishment reaction--perceived as a blanket rejection of any and all critiques of specific policies--alienate engaged but critical young Jews? Finally, how can positive attachments be harnessed to help deal with the larger problems of delegitimation?

This essay begins by examining anti-Israel incidents on college campuses, with the aim not only of demonstrating activities and rhetoric emanating from diverse sources, but even more so of listening to the voices of Jewish students who talk about



the impact of these episodes on them personally. The discussion then turns to recent research on young Jews' changing attitudes toward Israel and peoplehood, showing that the relationship of young Jews to Israel is more complex than it may appear. The essay cites research indicating that while support for Israel has remained remarkably constant among American Jews over the past decades,^v many young people relate differently to peoplehood, to Jewishness, and to Israel than their parents. For some who have traveled to Israel, Israeli culture is more salient than nationalism or concerns about Jewish vulnerability. Their criticisms of Israel, and especially their profound discomfort with treatment of Arabs within Israel and in the West Bank and Gaza, sometimes reflects multiple Israel trips and familiarity with problems. To be sure, other young Jews have indeed succumbed to delegitimation propaganda. In contrast, still others participate in fervently Zionist efforts to combat anti-Israel rhetoric, and some think in terms of "making *aliyah*," emigrating to Israel.

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This essay assesses change through interdisciplinary methodologies: through statistical studies, through qualitative interviews and participant observer ethnographies of Jewish groups, and through cultural expressions in the press and periodicals, books and the media, literature, film, music and the arts. These methodologies function in a complementary way, each reinforcing the other and filling in gaps in what one can learn from a single data source. In particular, this essay draws on conversations with young (ages 20-40) American Jewish leaders,^{vi} whose voices provide the flesh and blood experience, motivations, and concerns to the numbers that illustrate behaviors.



Academic delegitimation of Israel

Emergence of academic Israel hatred

Attempts to delegitimize Israel on college campuses are part of an international campaign to frame Israel as a pariah state on the model of South Africa. The goal of many implementers of this campaign is ostensibly to pressure Israel into more humane policies toward Palestinian and other minority populations in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel proper. It is here that the confusion between supporters of Israel who work to change Israeli policies and Israel delegitimizers often occurs, since Israel delegitimizers--especially in the United States--often present themselves as only opposing Israeli occupancy of the West Bank and incursions into Gaza, not opposing the existence of Israel itself. However, as this essay will show, in many college environments the campaign spreads into a broader form of Israel-phobia aimed at delegitimizing the very concept of a Jewish State.

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Although the campus delegitimation phenomenon is currently an acute phenomenon, the intellectual roots of this movement emerged decades earlier, and had multiple sources,^{vii} including Marxist discourse, Arab agitation against Israel, and the impact of Arab scholars working in the West, such as Lebanese-Egyptian George Antonius (*The Arab Awakening*, 1938)^{viii} and later Edward Said, Palestinian-American literary theorist and one of the founding figures in postcolonial theory; Said's study, *Orientalism*, 1978, claimed a "subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture,"^{ix} an attack which became enormously influential and was further developed and popularized by Said in his



prolific writings and by fellow travelers. Anti-Zionist tropes were also produced by post-Zionists and other leftists among Israeli scholars (discussed below), although those ideas took some time to penetrate the American consciousness. Anti-Israel rhetoric became more familiar to many, inside and outside of academic settings, in 1975, when the United Nations General Assembly voted positively on the declaration, "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination." Although that resolution was revoked in 1991, it had a quarter-century to wield influence. Another important stream contributing to anti-Israelism was Marxism in general, and most particularly trends generated by the French intellectual left who, bereft at the realization that Communism was not the salvation of the downtrodden, fixed on the "global struggle of political Islam" as their new cause, beginning in the 1980s, as Pascal Bruckner explains in an important new book:

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...the Palestinians, or rather the mythical idea that people have formed of them, conjoin two elements that promote [hatred of the West]: they are poor compared with a handful of colonizers, some of whom came from Europe, and they are mostly Muslims, that is, members of a religion that part of the Left thinks is the spearhead of the disinherited. That is how this endless conflict became, between 1980 and 2000, and at a time when revolutionary horizons were shrinking, the incontestable cause of a certain orphaned progressivism.

This refocusing on the Palestinian struggle combined "anti-imperialism, anti-Eurocentrism, liberation theology, and the Third World liberationism," comments political scientist Richard Wolin. Moreover, it enabled the intellectual left to slide back comfortably into established habits of anti-Semitism, "to hate Jews in good



conscience. When Jews were weak and stateless, they (sometimes) won compassion. With Israelis now perceived as strong--as the aggressors, even as the new Nazis--Europeans are absolved of their post-Shoah guilt and inhibition. Who knows?," Wolin notes satirically. "Perhaps they were right all along to hate the Jews."^x

The current international effort can be said to have become apparent during the First Durban Conference in 2001, when the NGO Forum against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Intolerance" published a concluding statement calling for "a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state" with "the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, the full cessation of all links ...between all states and Israel."^{xi} As Michael Galchinsky notes, this conference picked up where the U.N.'s "Zionism is racism" resolution left off:

While the Zionism=Racism charge was officially repealed in 1991, it resurfaced in August 2001 in the final program of the UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. Again and Again, legitimate questions about specific alleged Israeli rights violations have been turned into pretexts for a broader campaign to ostracize the state of Israel....[as a result] while American Jews have remained far more liberal on most issues than other Americans who share their socioeconomic status, a majority have taken a line on Israeli politics that is concerned less with Israeli democracy than with the state's security.^{xii}

Thus, the sustained campaign to isolate and demonize Israel began roughly on the heels of the Second Intifada, when Israel's peace offerings via the Oslo



agreements were violently rejected by Yassir Arafat's regime, and when Israel was being subjected to horrific terrorist attacks on its civilian population. That campaign took cyberwings and spread throughout European, Scandinavian, North and South American settings. On both sides of the Atlantic, however, it is professors and persons of Arab origin, rather than typical students, who tend to initiate Israel-delegitimizing activities.

It should be noted that Britain has played a particularly significant role: British universities have hosted anti-Zionist academics such as Tony Judt and Ilan Pappé (see below), Israel divestment efforts have begun in Britain, and British periodicals have played a particularly significant role in the spread of anti-Israel materials, many of which were first published in the *Times Literary Supplement* or the *Guardian*.

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Historian Anthony Julius suggests in a recent masterful history of antisemitism in England that English anti-Semitism may now have entered a new phase. As Jonathan Freedland, editorial-page columnist for *The Guardian* explains:

...those [English citizens] who want to defend the Palestinians and stand against Israel need to acquaint themselves with a long and bitter history of anti-Jewish loathing, in word and in deed, that has scarred English history and culture—and then work to free themselves of it or to be morally tainted by it.^{xiii}

Israel bashing as a social justice movement

Analyzing the international picture, many observers conclude that this campaign has goals which are grimly and sweepingly anti-Israel: the goal of a worldwide network of delegitimizers is to undermine and "fundamentally challenge Israel's right to exist as an embodiment of the Jewish people's right to self-determination," a recent study by The Reut Institute^{xiv} cogently states. In doing so, they employ "blatant double standards," often exclusively singling out Israel for criticism. This movement's impact is sometimes unexpectedly broad. For example, according to an article in *The Boston Globe* celebrating the putative building of support "for boycotts against Israel," an American antiwar group called Code Pink "launched a boycott of the cosmetic company Ahava because its products are manufactured in an Israeli settlement." The New England Conference of the United Methodist Church "supports divestment from 29 companies it says are involved in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including Motorola and Caterpillar." Meanwhile, Sydney Levy, speaking on behalf of Jewish Voices for Peace, a California-based group, has pressured TIAA-CREF (the largest educator's investment and pension program) "to divest from companies involved in the occupation."^{xv} Some European and especially Scandinavian countries have for years singled Israel out for economic boycotts, banning Israeli products from grocery and pharmacy shelves.

Delegitimizers work by openly demonizing and branding Israel as beyond the pale, "often by evoking Nazism and apartheid," the Reut analysis points out, adding:



"The key to the success of Israel's delegitimizers is their ability to blur the difference between criticism of Israel and fundamental delegitimation, which allows them to gain sympathy for their cause among the elite and general public."^{xvi} The effectiveness of this strategy cannot be overstated. Many deep supporters of Israel living inside Israel or in the Diaspora have substantive arguments with the policies of particular governments. However, delegitimizers lift these critiques out of context and reframe them in crude terms to support the claim that Israel has forfeited its right to exist.

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement

From England, passage to the United States has often proceeded directly, although in almost all cases the atmosphere in American college campuses is less permeated by anti-Israel feeling. Among other kinds of political pressure, activities that attempt to isolate Israel and Israelis within the academic world seem especially gratuitous. Political scientist Manfred Gerstenfeld documents the strategies and broad attacks on Israel and Israelis within academic and intellectual spheres of endeavor, providing international examples. His list includes: preventing Israeli academics from obtaining grants; convincing academics not to visit Israel and encouraging academic institutions to sever relations with Israeli academic institutions and academics; blocking the publication of articles by Israeli academics; refusing to review the work of Israeli scholars; refusing to support students who want to study in Israel; blocking the tenure and promotion of academics who have ties with Israel; expelling Jewish organizations from the campus; and supporting secret or concealed academic



boycotts. Divestment from entities that are presented as benefitting the settlements is a particularly American phenomenon.^{xvii}

In the United States, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has had an impact on college campuses, not so much in actually accomplishing divestment as in making the delegitimation of Israel normative and pervasive. One self-description defines the "boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement" (BDS) as aiming at "pressuring Israel to withdraw from land claimed by the Palestinians." Officially, American BDS groups tend to limit themselves to anti-settlements rather than anti-Israel targets, because, as Hussein Ibish of the American Task Force for Palestine puts it, the "movement has no chance of becoming mainstream inside the United States as long as it targets Israel" proper.^{xviii}

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However, the BDS movement loses this restraint and on college campuses indulges in overt anti-Israel rhetoric. Campus advocates often target not only Israel's policies in Gaza and the occupied territories but the existence of Israel per se. In Hampshire College, for example, the student who heads The Student Alliance for Israel (the campus's only group of this sort) said, "We're called Nazis." When she hung an Israel flag and Hillel posters from her dorm window, "campus officials told her they could not guarantee her safety."^{xix} Journalist Sue Fishkoff reports that BDS campaigns targeting student governments are now far more "organized" and "vitriolic" than in the past years when "handfuls of anti-Israel students pass[ed] out photocopied flyers." This past year, instead, campuses were visited by "a high-tech



traveling exhibit of Israel's separation barrier, complete with an embedded plasma TV showing anti-Israel images."^{xx}

Recent anti-Israel activities on numerous campuses are ably summarized by Fishkoff, and documented in the Reut report, in two Gerstenfeld pieces, and by the Anti-Defamation League.^{xxi} These sources document a spectrum of events expressing negativity toward Israel, ranging from those that make Israel supporters uncomfortable but stay within the boundaries of academic discourse to those that unequivocally veer into blatant Israel delegitimation and frank antisemitism. One can learn much about delegitimation strategies by paying detailed attention to one example of campus BDS activities: An advertisement for a University of Pittsburgh BDS conference (October, 2009) carries the following headline: "**Divest from Israeli Apartheid! (sic) BDS Conference at Pitt/ Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Against Israel.**" Under the headline, a vivid green rectangle with a juicy, bright slice of a (presumably Israeli) orange is framed by the bold black words: "Don't Buy Into Apartheid. Boycott Israeli Goods." The sponsors of the three-day event are listed as: "Pitt Students for Justice in Palestine, in participation with US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, Hampshire Students for Justice in Palestine, and Pittsburgh Palestine Solidarity Committee." The document goes on to explain BDS: "Boycott, divestment and sanctions are nonviolent tools that were successfully employed to bring justice to South Africans. Now a global movement of students, labor unions, and churches is using these same tools to bring equality to Palestinians and Israelis." Among the activities listed are how to do research on university investments, how to implement boycotts, a session on how to use creative arts in activism, a poetry



reading, and a performance of the play, "My Name is Rachel Corrie."^{xxii} The use of poetry and drama is neither accidental nor innocuous. Theatre, film, and the visual arts are used on campuses to stir powerful emotions on behalf of the Palestinian cause, because they have the great advantage that they can be extremely effective without the necessity of arguing a factual case.

Israel-phobic campus environments

Episodes ranging from random individual comments to organized protests sometimes make students feel that support for Israel is morally suspect. In many locations, university officials have been caught between the demands of American rights of free assembly and free speech, on one hand, and the potential for events in which an anti-Israel miasma pervades the environment, on the other hand.

Binghamton University, Columbia University, University of Chicago, University of Kentucky, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, Tulane University, DePaul University, University of Arizona, Hampshire College, University of California at Berkeley, University of California at San Diego, University of Michigan at Dearborn, Emory University, Georgetown University, New York University, Swarthmore College, Temple University, University of Illinois, Chicago, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, University of Minnesota at Minneapolis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Rochester, University of Southern California at Los Angeles, University of Texas, and University of Wisconsin at Madison are among the many campuses at which anti-Israel episodes have been reported in 2009 alone.^{xxiii}



Once again, a specific example illustrates the dynamic: At the University of Chicago in January, 2009, an event entitled: "Crisis in Gaza: The U.S. Israel, and Palestine," featured notorious anti-Israel polemicists, including former DePaul Prof. Norman Finkelstein and Prof. John Mearsheimer, co-author of the notorious book, *The Israel Lobby*, which misstates and misquotes to "prove" that Zionists pressure America into maintaining policies that go against its own best interests. The event was planned by the Muslim Students Association, the university's Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES), and the student chapter of Amnesty International, but it was planned by a student named Ali Al-Arian who is not affiliated with any of those groups. Al-Arian told a reporter that "The mainstream U.S. media hasn't exactly been truth [sic?] in its reports, so I wanted to bring three distinguished scholars to speak about it. Everything they presented was backed up by facts." Disruptions were minor: While waiting in line for the event, one man identified himself as an Israel supporter, and was called, "Nazi" by another man in line. During the lecture, however, those who disliked Finkelstein and Mearsheimer's message did not disrupt the proceedings. Nor were there disruptive demonstrations outside the lecture. Most students attending said the lectures were "scholarly" and "informative" and they "learned more than from listening to CNN."^{xxiv} In contrast, when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert tried to speak at the University of Chicago in a lecture sponsored by the university's Harris School of Public Policy in the same year, about two dozen students and activists disrupted his lecture with "profanities and calls for his execution. Another 150 demonstrators gathered" outside the hall with signs about Israel's "genocide" in Gaza.^{xxv}



The University of Chicago incident was quickly publicized online and copied elsewhere, a useful example of the way in which electronic networking has worked for the Israel delegitimation cause. Among the many dozens of anti-Israel and antisemitic activities on American college campuses documented in 2009 by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) is this description of the way subsequent university events escalated the anti-Israel propaganda:

Within days, Olmert's critics in the Bay Area were touting the Chicago efforts in promotional materials for a similar effort they were organizing in response to an upcoming Olmert speech hosted by the World Affairs Council in San Francisco. During the San Francisco event, 22 individuals were forcibly removed and arrested after disrupting Olmert with accusations of war crimes and genocide. One shouted that Olmert "belongs in a cage, not on a stage." Nearby, over 200 demonstrators gathered at Union Square, chanting, "Olmert, Olmert, you can't hide, we charge you with genocide."...[at] Tulane University in New Orleans, students wearing fake-bloodied clothes staged a sit-in outside the auditorium.^{xxvi}

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The quiescence of the pro-Israel students, contrasted with the vigorous and disruptive advocacy of the anti-Israel students and outside visitors--is noteworthy and oft repeated.

Official responses and results to anti-Israel advocacy

While Jewish students on campus report that they feel personally intimidated as Jews and as supporters of Israel by episodes such as those described above, campus efforts to delegitimize Israel often do not achieve official successes. In only one school, Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, did a BDS resolution pass in a non-binding student body vote.^{xxvii} University presidents and administrators have



spoken out against anti-Israel rhetoric and/ or BDS efforts at Harvard University (Summers, 2002), Columbia University (Bollinger, 2002), Rutgers (McCormick, 2003), University of Pennsylvania (Rodin, 2002), Georgetown University (De Gioa, 2006), University of Michigan (Deitch, 2006), and Brandeis University (Reinharz, 2007). However, in several instances their outspokenness had practical negative consequences for their standing in their own universities. Many have speculated that one group of agitators pushing for the exit of Lawrence Summers from the presidency at Harvard formed when he helped to squelch the BDS effort there. Similarly, a small coterie of Brandeis University anti-Israel faculty complained to *The Boston Globe* about President Jehuda Reinharz, "over his handling of Jimmy Carter's visit to talk about Carter's book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, as well as the sudden dismantling in 2006 of a Palestinian [student] art exhibit from the university library,"^{xxviii} when it was revealed that Palestinian public relations professionals rather than young students had created and promoted the exhibit. This same small faculty group encouraged the 2010 petition against Michael Oren speaking at the Brandeis Commencement (which garnered a mere 125 student signatures) and subsequently boycotted Oren's rapturously received commencement address.

Thus, even when BDS and other Israel-delegitimation campaigns have not accomplished their official goals, they have had an impact. Some fear they have eroded a clear recognition of "the right of Israel to exist and thrive as a Jewish state," and "the right of Israel to defend its citizens," says Harvard Law School Prof. Alan Dershowitz, a vigorous and vocal Israel advocate. Dershowitz has taken a pro-active role, entering into ongoing public debates with delegitimizers ranging from former President Jimmy Carter to academics like MIT's Noam Chomsky,



Harvard University's Stephen Walt, and University of Chicago's John Mearsheimer. Dershowitz has created a list of "ten areas of agreement" that have "broad consensus among the Jewish people," and in his talks he strongly urges students and Jewish community members to focus on these areas of consensus, rather than on "the 10 percent that separates us."^{xxix}

Academic spokespersons for delegitimizing Israel: United States

Some of the accusations that are hurled at Israel on American college campuses are supplied by American academics. Those of Arab origin, like the late Columbia literature Professor Edward Said, certainly have had wide influence. Today, however, some of the most virulent spokespersons are of Jewish descent. Perhaps the most notorious is MIT Professor Emeritus of Linguistics Noam Chomsky--Alan Dershowitz calls him the "godfather" of anti-Israel utterance--who is always on call for print or media reporters who need anti-Israel sound bites. (To be fair, Chomsky reciprocates Dershowitz's regard, calling him a "real fanatic.") Chomsky asserts that Hamas' "positions are more forthcoming than those of the US and Israel," and he advocates "selective boycotts, carefully formulated" so that they do not reinforce "the harshest and most brutal policies toward the Palestinians," such as boycotts of the "Caterpillar Corporation, which provides the equipment for destroying Palestine. All of their actions are strictly illegal, and boycotts could be made understandable to the general public." Much of Chomsky's commentary on Israel defies paraphrase, and is best conveyed through representative verbatim quotes:



At one time Israel relied on cheap and easily exploited Palestinian labor, but they have long ago been replaced by the miserable of the earth from Asia, Europe and elsewhere. Israelis would mostly breathe a sigh of relief if Palestinians were to disappear...I wrote decades ago that those who call themselves "supporters of Israel" are in reality supporters of its moral degeneration and probably ultimate destruction."

Finally, it must be noted that Chomsky's scorn for the United States surpasses that for Israel, because America, in his eyes, has "a far worse record of violence and terror than Israel." ^{xxx}

One cluster of Israel delegitimation is linked by the accusation that Jews have exploited the Holocaust for their own purposes, which include the creation of a Jewish racist state, and the acquiring of money and power. Professor of History Norton Mezvinsky, at Central Connecticut State University, for example, has suggested repeatedly that the world was blind to the selfishness of "the Zionist State" because of Holocaust guilt. Historian Norman Finkelstein, until 2007 an assistant professor at DePaul University, aroused intense attention among European academics with his book, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (2000). The radical Left was delighted with his accusation that Jewish leaders acquired power and money by exploiting the Holocaust for their own purposes.

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Two recent articles by Manfred Gerstenfeld describing "The Academic Boycott Against Israel"^{xxxi} show how Jewish and non-Jewish academics and other intellectuals have constructed activities and materials that are then picked up and used repeatedly in other venues. As Israeli historian Ronald Zweig, in reviewing the book,



noted, British socialist circles, "anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian *de rigueur*," also were pleased with Finkelstein's picture of "a cabal of Jewish leaders" who "conspired to extort money from European governments, under the pretext of claiming material compensation for the losses of the Holocaust."^{xxxii} Finkelstein's attack on the morality of Holocaust memory is particularly dangerous when linked to the enterprise of creating a moral equivalency between the Israeli military and the Nazis, in the hands of academics like Sara Roy, a Senior Research scholar at the Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Gerstenfeld explains, Roy "exploits being a child of Holocaust survivors," to promote this equivalency, claiming within the context of a Holocaust memorial lecture that "Israeli soldiers openly admit to shooting Palestinian children for sport."^{xxxiii}

Another trend in Israel delegitimation is the declaration that Zionism and Israel as a Jewish State are failed enterprises, and that Israel's only hope is to be reconstituted as a secular, bi-national state, as recommended by British Jewish historian Tony Judt. As Steven Bayme notes, Judt argued that Israel's very existence is anachronistic and mistaken, "since Israel was born as a nation-state in an era of post-nationalism."^{xxxiv} Charging that Israel has become a "belligerently intolerant, faith-driven ethno-state," Judt argued in 2003 that Israel should abandon its Jewishness and become a secular state comprised of Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, and all of Jerusalem, with Jews and Arabs living where they wished throughout.^{xxxv} Judt's ideas, frequently articulated in *The New York Review of Books* as well as in volumes he authored, have had great cache in many academic circles.



Of course, one does not have to be a Jew to be an Israel delegitimater. Two recent American examples are Stephen Walt of Harvard University and John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, whose 2007 book, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* has made them instant celebrities in the anti-Israel circuit. It is noteworthy that the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and the University of Chicago backed away from association with Mearsheimer and Walt's earlier working paper with the same name, with a disclaimer insisting that "the two authors are solely responsible for the content," and both schools "do not take positions on the scholarship of individual faculty." Moreover, scholars in the field have discovered and publicized numerous factual errors^{xxxvi} in both the working paper and the book--errors which, not surprisingly, serve the purpose of reinforcing the authors' polemical assertions: (1) Israel has, from its very first elected governments onward, mistreated Arab populations, supporting "brutal" measures to expel Palestinians, and (2) the Jewish pro-Israel lobby runs America and persuades American governments to act against American interests. Not surprisingly, Tony Judt approved of Walt and Mearsheimer's work.

Perhaps best known of recent materials used to delegitimize Israel—although not authored for that purpose—is the Goldstone Report, the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, headed up by Richard Goldstone, an identified Jew and respected international jurist from South Africa. Soon after the final report was released in September, 2009, its findings were rejected by Israel and by the United States House of Representatives, which passed a resolution characterizing the report as "irredeemably biased and unworthy of further consideration or legitimacy."



Nevertheless, Goldstone was launched onto an academic lecture circuit and lauded on college campuses across America. His prestige was underscored by the fact that the European Parliament passed a resolution affirming the importance of the report and calling on all the parties to implement its recommendations. While Goldstone emphatically did not undertake the report in order to delegitimize Israel, he Goldstone used terms such as "war crimes" to describe Israel's attacks on Hamas operatives in the Gaza strip, language that was picked up and recycled in delegitimizing settings.

Delegitimizing Jewish peoplehood and the Zionist enterprise

It is "now easier to express criticism towards Israel even when talking on U.S. campuses," Frank Barat notes approvingly in his interview with Ilan Pappé, Israeli Professor of History at the University of Exeter in the U.K., and with Noam Chomsky.^{xxxvii} The delegitimation of the State of Israel in its present configuration is ideologically and practically linked to the growing delegitimation of Zionism and the very concept of Jewish peoplehood in academic settings in America, Europe, and Israel beginning in the late 1960s, roughly after the 1967 "Six Day War." As Ilan Troen notes, "One can delineate in the academic literature when the regnant paradigm shifted from pro-Israel (and it was till well after the establishment of the State) to critical or anti-Israel."^{xxxviii} In the late 1960s and 1970s, "New Historian" Israeli scholars including Benny Morris, Tom Segev, Simha Flapan, Avi Shlaim, and his protege, Ilan Pappé, promulgated a revised narrative of the emergence of the Jewish State: Rather than a tiny band of brave Jewish pioneers fighting a David-and-Goliath-like battle against massive, united Arab armies, Israel had from the beginning a disproportionate level of military power, while the Arabs were destined to be defeated



because they were divided by competitive in-fighting. In their revisionist retelling, fueled in part by the release of British and Israeli government documents, the British government, rather than trying to prevent the emergence of a Jewish State, worked against the construction of a Palestinian State. Similarly, the Arab population of Palestine did not voluntarily flee from the newly declared Jewish State in 1948, but, instead, putatively were largely forced out, a process which Pappe labels "ethnic cleansing."^{xxxix}

Pappe, a former Haifa University professor, has been called "the most hated Israeli in Israel," Arguably surpassing Chomsky in his radical attitudes toward the Israel-Palestine conundrum, supporting economic and academic boycotts against Israel, and ultimately a one-state solution. A superstar on the academic lecture circuit, Pappe speaks frequently on American college campuses, and is celebrated in many liberal-left political academic circles.

The "new history" not only reversed the origins of the Jewish State, but also posited a "Post Zionist" attitude toward Jewishness. Broadly speaking, Post-Zionism declares that Jewishness is not a true nationality, since Jews who have visibly different ethnic origins, practice a bricolage of different customs, and do not live contiguous to one another, they thus cannot constitute a nation-race. Tel Aviv University historian Shlomo Sand, for example, argues in *The Invention of the Jewish People*, that the original Jews of the Second Temple were never effectively exiled, and that current populations of Jews in Israel and around the world are descended from eclectic, multi-ethnic groups who retroactively imagined and reimagined



themselves into an ersatz peoplehood in response to external stimuli.^{xl} Political scientist Oren Yiftachel, in *Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine*,^{xli} says Israelis have deliberately used constructions of Jewish ethnicity as power tool of colonial oppression in their "creeping apartheid" over four decades. These charges remove from the Jews the dignity of being an authentic, historical people, and go far beyond Benedict Anderson's dictum that all "nations" are socially constructed, and "imagined."

In its more extreme form, post-Zionism seems to tacitly agree with the concept that classical Zionism equals racism; that is, any formulation of Israel as a "Jewish State"--rather than as one state among many that happens to have many Jewish citizens as well as non-Jewish citizens--is not a legitimate mode of statehood in contemporary times, and Zionism is an illegitimate basis for statehood. A more modulated form of this critique has been famously articulated by sociologist Sammy Smooha, who argues that Israel has "not developed as a Western society" because "the fusion of ethnicity, religion and nationality in historical and contemporary Judaism has precluded the emergence of a new Israeli civic nation grounded in a common territory and shared citizenship." Smooha faults Zionism in particular, declaring, "as long as Zionism remains the main ideology of the state, and thus emphasizing its Jewishness, Israel will encounter difficulties in becoming fully Western."^{xlii}

A more extreme version of this binary is proposed by Bernard Avishai, in *The Hebrew Republic*. Avishai, who has famously proclaimed Zionism to be a failed enterprise, urges not only that Israel leave the West Bank (a policy which the majority



of Israelis are said to agree with) and create a secular democracy, but that it divest from its commitment to Jewishness and abolish the Law of Return which guarantees Jews around the world a place in the Jewish State. As the Hebrew Republic, a state of all its citizens, instead, Israel would at last achieve its goal of becoming a Western democracy.^{xliii}

This stated opposition between Jewishness and democracy is challenged in a new book by Alexander Yakobson and Amnon Rubinstein, *Israel and the Family of Nations: The Jewish Nation-State and Human Rights*. The authors argue that Israel is far from unique in the fact that its national religion is "bound up with its mother country," comparing Israel to Ireland, Greece, Turkey, Pakistan, and India, democratic countries in which religion and government are entangled--and in which specific languages and religions are privileged, as they are in Israel. Similarly, Yakobson and Rubinstein compare the relationship between the Jews of Israel and the Diaspora with the relationship between nationally located and diaspora ethnicities such as the Kurds, Armenians, ethnic Hungarians, and other groups. Their overall point is that Israel fits onto the continuum of democratic styles in a very similar way to other ethnic democracies and their diasporas.^{xliv} Their discussion ameliorates the rejection of Zionism as an obstacle blocking Western democracy in Israel, and is an important rebuttal of more fervent post-Zionists who claim that Jews do not belong to an international peoplehood.



The impact of this denial of peoplehood can be quite practical, as seen in the following incident: On the campus of the University of California at Irvine, Kenneth L. Marcus, former head of the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights said, "Jewish students were physically and verbally harassed, threatened, shoved, stalked, and targeted by rock throwing groups...Jewish property was defaced with swastikas," and students were confronted with violently hateful speech:

They were called "dirty Jews" and "fucking Jews," told to "go back to Russia" and "burn in hell"....[students urged] one another to "slaughter the Jews." One Jewish student who wore a pin bearing the flags of the United States and Israel was told to "take off that pin or we'll beat your ass." Another was told, "Jewish students are the plague of mankind" and "Jews should be finished off in the ovens."

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One frequent speaker, Amir Abdel Malik Ali, said, "now it's time for you to live in some fear...because you were so good at dispensing fear." Not surprisingly, Jewish students were terrified, as one wrote: "Not only do I feel scared to walk around proudly as a Jewish person on the Irvine campus, I am terrified for anyone to find out...that I am Jewish and that I support a Jewish state." However, an attempt to have these incidents dealt with legally as "antisemitic hate speech" was rejected by the officials at the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) because the OCR's mandate "does not cover discrimination based solely on religion, including antisemitic harassment, intimidation, and discrimination." The officials stated that only if the targeted students had been Israelis--and thus of a different nationality--would the attacks aimed at them have come under Title VI. Since the students'



nationality was American, their Jewishness constituted an affiliation with the Jewish religion--not a nationality or peoplehood.^{xlv}

The legal definition of Jewishness in America--at least in this instance--conforms to the demand made on Western European Jews more than two centuries ago, when, after the French Revolution, Comte de Clermont-Tonnere famously demanded that Jewishness be relegated entirely to the private domain as a "personal confession," rather than being one dimension of Jewish peoplehood. Thus, the "brutal bargain," as it came to be known, was, "The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals."^{xlvi}

Other Israeli sources--witting and unwitting--for delegitimizing Israel

As anyone who has spent time in Israel can testify, Israel is a country in which the free exchange of ideas--and opinions--often reaches cacophonous levels. Ironically, one of the most common accusations of Israel's delegitimizers inside and outside the country is that the Zionist establishment in Israel and the Diaspora silences and squelches dissent (Both Chomsky and Pappé--hardly "silent" men--have made just such accusations.) Just the opposite is true: because Israel does not impede the expression of unconventional ideas, leftist Israeli academics and human rights activists have played a significant role in providing materials^{xlvii} employed by Israel delegitimizers in international settings.



Michael Galchinsky's sympathetic study of Israeli human rights efforts is particularly useful in tracing the organizational and individual players; Galchinsky asserts that Diaspora Jews have often retreated from supporting international human rights efforts in the UN and elsewhere because they are linked to virulent anti-Israel propaganda. However, in contrast, Israeli human rights activism has been rising over the past few decades, even as Diaspora Jewish activism has been muted, Galchinsky asserts. In addition to left-leaning academic departments in Israeli universities such as Haifa, Ben Gurion, and elsewhere, human rights organizations such as HaMoked (Center for the Defense of the Individual), B'Tselem (Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupations), PHR (Physicians for Human Rights-Israel), PCATI (Public Committee against Torture in Israel), RHR (Rabbis for Human Rights), ACRI (Association for Civil Rights in Israel), and other Israeli domestic NGOs have utilized international law as "a crucial tool in their struggle for social justice," with the aim of directing "the tools of international human rights and humanitarian law toward Israeli policies and practices." Many of these NGOs are primarily supported by the New Israel Fund and the Abraham Fund. In an effort "to advance Israeli democracy at home," they "engaged in public campaigns to expose" Israeli practices that allegedly violate human rights standards.^{xlviii} Among their "numerous strategies to puncture the public's denial, apathy, lack of empathy, and indifference in the face of high threat perception," NGOs have created materials that are easily transported and adapted for non-Israeli audiences, including "sophisticated media appeals" such as B'Tselem's music video, "Eyes Wide Open," which received 36,000 hits its first year.^{xlix}



Young US Jews' feelings toward Israel and Jewish peoplehood

Discomfort with an understanding of Jewishness as peoplehood has been thoroughly internalized by many younger American Jews, who frequently embrace the cultural "nucleus," the particulars of Jewish culture, but reject "us and them" constructions of ethnicity. This author's Avi Chai research interviews showed that, in a marked change from the past, Jews in their twenties report a strong attachment to Jewish ethnicity, but define **Jewish music, food, books, comedy and cultural performance, family styles and religious rituals as the primary expressions of their ethnicity.** They are confused when they read assertions about ethnic boundaries, because those concepts do not match the reality of their relationship to their Jewish ethnicity. Similarly, many are quite attached to Israeli music, food, and other cultural expressions, but rebel against the idea that Israel is vulnerable, or that they should defend Israel from existential threats. Often, they do not consider themselves conventional Zionists. Brandeis CMJS researchers found: "Younger respondents were no less likely than older respondents to regard caring about Israel as important to their Jewish identities." When they held all other variables constant, "caring about Israel" was positively affected by travel to Israel and by "religious observance" and negatively affected by "parental intermarriage," but age was not statistically significant.

One example of these attitudes is articulated by Rabbi Sarah Chandler, a ROI leadership program veteran who supports the work of organizations like Teva, Adamah, and the Avodah program, explains, "My Israel activism is not primarily



coming from a place of Zionism, it is coming from a place of caring about modern, liberal Jews' ability to stay connected to Jewish life." Chandler urges the integration of moral and Judaic values into daily behavior—"quotidian Judaism"—to give a wide spectrum of young Jewish Americans the cultural literacy to imbue their social justice lives with Judaic knowledge. She supports activities that make quotidian Judaism accessible: blogs and other Internet sites like jewityourself.com. As sociologist Shaul Kelner points out in his analysis of *Tours That Bind*, Israel visits such as Birthright Israel are valued by their engineers and implementers not only (or perhaps even primarily) "for fostering loyalties to the homeland," but rather "for expanding the 'cultural toolkits' that diaspora ethnics have at their disposal."¹ However, despite the intentions of its professionals, Birthright Israel and other trips have a measurable positive effect on Israel attachments as well as Jewish identification.

Facts and figures on Israel attachments among younger Jews

Most studies indicate that the population of young Jews is not monolithic, that support for Israel is widespread among a majority of American Jewish young adults, and that some subgroups are powerfully connected to Israel. Israel connections are influenced by demographic factors such as the religion of one's parents (young adults with two Jewish parents are much more likely to have strong positive connections to Israel than those who grew up in interfaith households) and life cycle trajectories. Social scientists have long noticed life-cycle fluctuations in Jewish engagement, usually rising from less engaged and more ambivalent during the young adult years to more engaged and less ambivalent as marriage and parenthood transform Jewish lives, and Israel engagement may well be part of this familiar syndrome.¹ⁱ



Attitudinal shifts among younger American Jews described in further detail below are key in explicating an apparent contradiction: in decades past, although many American Jews felt attached to Israel even if they had never traveled there, trips to Israel almost automatically seemed to produce positive--and frequently unambivalent attachments to Israel. Today, similarly, as Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman note, "travel to Israel as a predictor of attachment is especially important for younger Jews." However, unlike earlier generations, among younger Jews frequent visits to Israel are also sometimes associated with attitudes critical of the policies of Israeli governments.

For those under age 35, more than half of those who had been to Israel were described as having a "high" level of attachment, compared to about ten percent of those who had never been. Conversely, fewer than 5 percent of Jews under 35 who had been to Israel were described as "alienated from Israel," compared to almost 20 percent of those who had never been.^{lii} Overall, about 60 percent of younger Jews who are not Orthodox say they have "some attachment to Israel," report Cohen and Kelman. Additionally, they "find very sharp differences in attachment to Israel associated with travel to Israel":

Among those who have never been to Israel, the number with a high level of attachment is less than half the number with a low level of attachment (19 percent vs. 42 percent) Among those with only one trip, the relationship is reversed: those with high levels of attachment are double the number of those with a low degree of attachment to Israel (34 percent vs. 17 percent). Those who have been to Israel two or more times are even more firmly attached to Israel, with 52 percent scoring high and under 10 percent at the low end of



attachment. Finally, among those who have lived in Israel...68 percent score high on attachment, and just 6 percent score low.^{liii}

Moreover, social scientists at Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies have powerful new data underscoring the salutary effect of Israel trips not only on connections to Israel, but also on Jewish behaviors, including the frequently cited "litmus test" of marrying another Jew. The bottom line is that even short-term trips like Birthright Israel affect attachment to Jewishness as well as attachment to Israel.^{liv}

As these and other studies make clear, although there are pronounced differences by age, in every segment of the American Jewish community the majority of younger Jews describe themselves as "attached to Israel" **if** (1) they have two Jewish parents, and (2) they have traveled to Israel at least once. The difference between the Israel attachments of inmarried adults and of the children of inmarried parents versus intermarried adults and the children of intermarried parents has often been blurred in highly publicized articles announcing "far lower levels of attachment to Israel among younger Jews." Thus, Cohen and Kelman's data show that "among the intermarried, those with low attachment to Israel are more than double the number with high attachment. Among the in-married and non-married, the number with high attachment to Israel surpasses the number with low attachment."^{lv} Analyzing a summer 2010 survey administer by Knowledge Networks, Brandeis CMJS researchers found: "Younger researchers were no less likely than older respondents to regard caring about Israel as important to their Jewish identities." When they held all other variables constant, "caring about Israel" was positively affected by travel to



Israel and by "religious observance" and negatively affected by "parental intermarriage," but age was not statistically significant.^{lvi}

Denomination is also connected to American Jewish identification.^{lvii} This is especially true with regard to connections to Israel. In the 2007 American Jewish Committee Public Opinion Poll (Synovate, Inc.), when Jews were asked “How close do you feel to Israel?”—6 out of 10 Orthodox respondents answered that they feel “Very close” to Israel, as did 4 out of 10 Conservative Jews and 2 out of 10 Reform Jews. [64 % / 39 % / 22 %] Looking at the other end of the spectrum of feelings about Israel, 16 % of Conservative Jews responded they feel “Fairly distant” or “Very distant” from Israel, as did 30 % of Reform Jews but only 5 % of Orthodox Jews. Thus, Orthodox Jews today are much more likely than non-Orthodox Jews to feel that what goes on in Israel has immediate salience to their lives—one could say they “take it personally.”

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Gender as well as denomination enters into the pattern of whether or not a Jew has visited Israel, and how strong one considers one's Israel attachments. Within the American Jewish community, outside of the Orthodox community, girls and women are dramatically more engaged and attached to things Jewish than boys and men.^{lviii} Among inmarried Jews with children under 18, visits to Israel are reported by 81 % of Orthodox men and 91 % of Orthodox women, 55 % of Conservative men and 61 % of Conservative women, and 32 % of Reform men and 34 % of Reform women (NJPS 2000-01). Another way to look at attitudes toward Israel is to see where respondents rank “Care about Israel” compared to other “Very important Jewish values.” When



asked to rank values they thought were “very important Jewish values” in NJPS 2000-01, those who thought “Care about Israel” was “Very important” included 55 % of Orthodox men and 78 % of Orthodox women, 50 % of Conservative men and 54 % of Conservative women, 42 % of Reform men and 38 % of Reform women. In other words, the group of American Jews most likely to have visited Israel and to rank caring about Israel as a very important Jewish value were Orthodox women. Orthodox men were at the same level as Conservative Jewish men and women, and Reform men and women were lowest of all.^{lix}

It is not a surprise, of course, that there are differences between more ritually observant and less ritually observant Jews when it comes to areas of Jewish life that people define as “religious.” When it comes to activities such as attending synagogue services and lighting Shabbat candles, most would expect that the Orthodox profile is much higher than that of Conservative and Reform affiliated Jews. Less expected are results, such as data from the 2007 AJC Public Opinion Poll, which is similar to data from the NJPS 2000-01 and other studies, showing that in areas of non-religious, ethnic, peoplehood—or tribal—identification, there are large denominational gaps as well.

Not only connections to Israel but social networks—how many Jewish friends does one and one's children have, for example, are an important measure of Jewish identification. How many Jewish friends one has correlates closely with how much one identifies as a member of the Jewish people. The NJPS 2000-01 data showed inmarried Jewish parents having “Mostly Jewish friends” among nine out of ten Orthodox Jews (87/ 93 %), slightly over half of Conservative Jews (57/ 55 %), and



about a third of Reform Jews, ranging from 31 % of Reform men to 42 % of Reform women. Thus, connections to Israel among Conservative and Reform Jews are practically identical with the likelihood of their having visited Israel and also with their connections to other Jews in their American neighborhoods.

To put it very simply, for younger American Jews, statistical attachment to Israel matches whether or not they have visited Israel and how many Jewish friends they have currently. Feeling part of the Jewish people at home and feeling part of the Jewish people overseas are closely connected. Many observers have noted, as well, that apathy toward Israel, perhaps a natural component of assimilation, may be far more widespread among weakly identified young American Jews than defined anti-Israel sentiment. Not surprisingly, weak Jewish connections in general also correlate to few or no Jewish friends and no visits to Israel.

The Jewish fight for social justice and the quarrel with Israeli policies

Recently repeated trips to Israel, however, are related to attachments but also to knowledge of and critical attitudes toward a broad range of Israeli policies. For example, one young rabbi described at length problems in Israeli life, such as "trafficking sex workers, foreign workers who are oppressed, Bedouins that don't have water." In another example, musician Alicia Jo Rabins expressed ambivalent feelings toward Israel that are characteristic of younger Jews who have spent substantial time in Israel, who relate to Jewish culture, and who are critical of Israeli policies. While she is "very grateful for Jerusalem being the place where I studied Torah—it's really moving and incredible," she feels "sad and worried" when she thinks about Israel's



behavior and positions in the world. “I feel ashamed about what’s being done in the name of Jews,” she says, “when you see people doing things in the name of Judaism that you don’t really believe in, it’s very hard as a Jew.” Like many younger American Jews, Rabins is the child of "baby boomers" and is a "second-generation leftist-liberal" in regards to attitudes toward Israel. Although she has moved far closer to Jewish connections than her parents in terms of text study, rituals, worship, spiritual and cultural expression, her political attitudes are a direct transmission from her baby-boomer parents. As Rabins says, “politically, the dominant kind of progressive, leftist American position on Palestine and Israel and stuff is what we grew up with. That was the assumption, as opposed to the generation before my parents, growing up with a kind of allegiance to Israel being the assumption.”

Many young American Jews have very high standards for moral national behavior. They expect the countries they feel attached to--like the United States and Israel--to live up to those moral standards. Thus, their critical attitudes toward Israel are often matched by critical attitudes toward the United States. Their criticism of Israel reflect not so much a lack of interest in Israel as a redefinition of their relationship and involvement with Israel. Young American Jewish leaders and cultural figures ubiquitously declare themselves to be dedicated to global and local social justice in vigorous efforts that transcend ethnic, geographic and socioeconomic boundaries. For many, the most worthwhile Jewish characteristic is the pursuit of social justice. Young leaders such as Rabbi Dara Frimmer, who has served in a variety of chaplaincy and rabbinic and educational positions and participated in Project Otzma, American Jewish World Service, Hazon and Jumpstart, depicts



fighting for justice as the only non-negotiable, quintessential, core Jewish activity. “Don’t keep kosher, that’s fine, don’t keep Shabbat, that’s fine, marry a non-Jew—whatever. But understand that it will take away your Jewish identity if you don’t fight for justice,” she said.

Recent years have seen the steady growth of innovative Jewish institutions created by entrepreneurial Jews in their twenties and thirties who have a lot to say about concepts of Jewishness their new organizations are designed to implement. The innovative institutions and organizations and cultural creations of young American Jews express and influence new understandings of Jewishness which, while quite diverse, differ strikingly from those of previous generations. Both institutional and cultural creations indicate younger American Jews inhabit a different Jewish world than their parents and grandparents.

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Young people with backgrounds in all wings of Judaism as well as those from secular or unaffiliated families often speak about social justice in language virtually identical to classical Reform Jewish conceptions of the universalistic mission of Judaism to be an *ohr lagoyim* (a light unto the nations). Several talked about previous Jewish work on behalf of social justice, such as Jewish and rabbinic activism on behalf of the Civil Rights movement “Jews were on the right (ethical) side of history then. Jews were on the right side of history in the gay rights movement. We should try more often to be on the right side of history.” Interestingly, these beliefs are articulated not only by those working in social justice enterprises, but by artists, intellectuals, and various types of Jewish communal professionals. The passion for



social justice crosses denominational lines and includes those that identify as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, "Post-Denominational," or secular Jews.

For many young American Jewish leaders, social justice concerns become especially poignant in critical examinations of Israel's policies. This is especially true for a constellation of individuals and institutions that one leader called "the New Israel Fund, J-Street, Pro-Peace, Pro-Israel, Pro-Palestinian, Progressive, Post-Zionist elite." Some accuse Zionist organizations and Jewish communal institutions of being self-serving and self-aggrandizing, committed to the status quo which serves them well but does not necessarily serve the needs of the American Jewish community or international goals of social justice.

In these critiques, many have been affected by what sociologist Robert Wuthnow calls the "geographic mobility and general unsettledness of our society." Wuthnow comments that young American adults have "opportunities to make choices that are unprecedented," and they are especially likely to engage in *seeking* and *tinkering* behaviors. His description uncannily reflects many of the spiritual narratives of our informants:

Many have been reared by parents who encouraged them to think for themselves and to make such choices....Seeking is also conditioned by living in a society that often does not supply a single best answer to our questions or needs. This is why seeking results in tinkering. It becomes not only possible but also necessary to cobble together one's faith from the options at hand.^{lx} Economics are also a factor influencing the emphasis on universalistic social



justice and the rejection of "parochialism," and affluence may increase the commitment to social justice. Benjamin Samuels, a Modern Orthodox rabbi in Massachusetts, noted that the current preoccupation with "global" social justice may be "the luxury of children" who grew up with certain expectations. "I see a greater interest in travel or exotic locals, a greater humanistic pluralism." The net effect is broadening, he said, leading to a "passion for new vistas, new approaches, not being narrow or provincial in who you interact with."

Complicated feelings and connections to Jews, Israel and Zionism

Young Jews want to be able to move fluidly between the Jewish and non-Jewish world and reject the "particularism, of like-- six million died, we need to protect ourselves; we need to get to Israel; we have to stick by our own." Many explain that generally the world to them "doesn't seem that threatening," so they don't understand why Jews are "so closed-off." Rabbi Sharon Brous, whose Ikarim project has been acclaimed and influential, says her peers "are very resentful of a Jewish life and a Jewish experience that is insular, that's only worried about Israel or that's only worried about the Jewish community or Jews in need." Young adults are looking for "some more broad articulation of what it means to be a Jew and a human being in the world," explains Brous, so that young Jews understand what it means to engage "not only the Jewish community, and not only the Jews in Israel, but far beyond the Jewish community as well."



Young leaders reject dichotomous us/them thinking and Jewish tribal allegiances, and many young Jews spoke about "not wanting to be restricted to the tribe, and seeing the tribe as opposed to identifying with other groups, serving other groups, or being in community with other groups." This push-back against Jewish particularism and tribalism also translates to a more nuanced and complicated relationship with Israel. An outgrowth of this new and visceral relationship is their dedicating themselves to new organizations which promote measured and critical engagement with the Jewish state. Rabbi Melissa Weintraub, for example, founded Encounter, an educational organization dedicated to exposing Jewish Diaspora leaders with the realities of Palestinian life. She explained that the mission of her work is "to cultivate an awareness in the Jewish community of Palestinian narratives and realities in order to foster more complex and constructive engagement with the situation as a whole." Weintraub envisions building "a community founded on listening, learning and loving."

The tendency of connecting to Israel through cultural materials, rather than through political solidarity, is characteristic of some elite "post-denominational" worship environments whose congregations have educationally and occupationally high status, are comparatively well educated Jewishly, and have almost universally traveled to Israel multiple times. "I see a lot of engagement with Israeli music, culture, film, and things like that," says Washington Square founder Yehuda Kurtzer, himself a Sabbath-observant product of a home with strong diplomatic interests, and highly identified with Israel. However, deciding the group's official attitude toward Israel became a painfully complicated and controversial issue, splitting the group into two



highly polarized, oppositional factions. As a result, "Yom Ha'atzmaut is not really on our liturgical calendar," Kurtzer explains:

Engagement with Israel is one of these issues that's very thorny for this generation of Jews....we have, increasingly, ambivalence about the holiday Yom Ha'atzmaut and what it says about the State of Israel theologically and what the costs are of that theology. The language of *reishit tzmikhat geulateinu* (the beginning of the flowering of our redemption) has produced a political culture in Israel that we're very uncomfortable with--the culture of messianism, the culture of ultra-nationalist Zionism. It's affiliated with that language, and with that kind of mythic structure, so it's hard to say those prayers because of the political identification that it brings with it....

Disillusionment with Zionism and with Israel as the “homeland” of American Jews is often accompanied by a symbiotic fascination with and attachment to Diaspora Jewishness. Young American Jewish leaders and cultural creators and brokers are clearly fascinated with the Jewish Diaspora experience. This fascination expresses itself in a revival of interest in Yiddish language, literature, and culture—as opposed to Hebrew. Recent American Jewish novels as well describe Diaspora experiences around the world rather than gravitating to the Israeli Jewish experience. Although they do not soft-pedal the episodic horrors of Diaspora history, however, many of today’s young American Jewish leaders almost defiantly declare that the Jewish future is in the Diaspora, both personally and collectively.



Cultural expressions delineate critical/ attachment phenomenon

Cultural expressions provide very useful illustrations of the ideological disillusionment of some young Jews with the moral flaws of the Jewish State. For example, a graphic essay/ cartoon by novelist Eli Valley in a recent issue of the influential New York periodical, *The Forward*, portrays a Jewish "Sociologist for Hire," named "Bucky Shvitz." (May 26, 2010) In Valley's graphic essay, Shvitz discovers that young American Jews are losing their Jewish identity because they are so disillusioned with racism, sexism, corruption, and other moral and sociopolitical problems in Israel. However, Shvitz is warned by the established Jewish community that if he wishes to earn money he must bury these findings, and falsely proclaim instead that Jewish identity is linked to Israel attachments. Among the many lively blog responses to Valley's piece, one expounded: "Mr. Valley has succeeded at just the thing that many American Jewish organizations want us to think is impossible: being Jews whose identity is not solely based on Israel. After all there is so much more to being Jewish than just Israel. There are other languages, cultures, food ways, and political points of view...."^{lx}

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Young American de-emphasis on Jewish peoplehood, which provides fertile ground for the delegitimation of Israel, is also explored in Michael Chabon's acclaimed novel, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. Chabon asks whether nationalistic historical Jewish understandings are fundamentally unworkable and dangerous. To Chabon and others like him, there is no promised land that will save the Jews, and religion will not save the Jews. Indeed, having Jewish space and governmental power separate from the non-Jewish world serves to transform religious power into a



stinking morass of Jewish corruption. For Chabon and his fellow travelers, genuine Jewish values can only triumph if individuals are willing to confront the evil of fellow Jews and take a chance on personal integrity, their dearest held truths, and those they love.

Michael Chabon serves as co-chair of Americans for Peace Now, along with his wife, novelist Ayelet Waldman. The two have articulated rejections of conventional “pro-Israeli” policy, such as those in the November 2008 Peace Now Newsletter declaring, "As Jews and Jewish novelists, we devote our lives to envisioning and imagining the world as we have inherited it and as we wish it might be. But all of that history and all those imaginings are endangered, *now*, by those who are committed to ensuring future bloodshed, violence and fear." Some readers felt that the couple’s political and moral critiques of Israel permeated *The Yiddish Policeman’s Union*—and thus reached and influenced a different and perhaps broader audience than those who read Jewish newspapers and Jewish organizational literature.

The New Zionists

Any picture of the relationship of younger American Jews to Israel would be misleading and incomplete without including a group who might be termed "the new Zionists." As individuals, these talented, dynamic young people are committed to Israel and to Israel's defense with a deep passion. They come from many different types of backgrounds. For example, Rachel Fish, a Brandeis Ph.D. student in Israel Studies, served as the point person--and was much vilified in the anti-Israel press--combating anti-Israel divestment campaigns while an undergraduate at Harvard



University and later while a doctoral candidate. Coming from a Reform family in an isolated Jewish community in the American South, Rachel believes in Jewish vulnerability on a profound, personal level. In addition to her other work (and to parenting her babies) Rachel works with The David Project training college students in strategies for defending Israel on college campuses.

The new Zionists include artists like acclaimed young novelist Dara Horn, who dramatizes many different kinds of Jews in her prolific novels. Horn, who comes from a middle-of-the-road Conservative background and still considers herself part of that demographic, incorporates historical settings and events into novels that educate readers about the particularism, marginality and vulnerability of the Jewish experience. She believes the insouciance of young American Jews results from a mirage about their incorporation into non-specific middle class white America, but that Jews are always on the edge, whether they perceive it or not. Horn sees awareness of this vulnerability, and an alertness to the importance of cherishing Jewish traditions and Jewish lives, as the only--and only a partial--protection against being blindsided by fate.

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The new Zionists include young Orthodox leaders like recent Brandeis graduate Avi Bass, who for his senior honors thesis completed a study of factors encouraging emigration to Israel. Bass had the original idea to create an organization called "Impact Aliya," and worked with two friends to make it a reality. He has now emigrated and works to make *aliya* transitions easier for new North American *olim*. And one could include idealists like Rabbi Seth Farber, a teacher and activist on behalf of innovative ideas of open Orthodoxy, embodies what he calls the "love-hate" relationship of some contemporary Zionists. He says, "I love the idea of Israel, having



lived here for 14 years, but I'm very frustrated by the difficult religious culture and ethos of this country." Farber calls the modern State of Israel, "the greatest Jewish experiment in 2000 years," and says the country "never ceases to amaze me and enamor me and challenge me." Farber himself descended from prominent Orthodox leaders who he says dreamed of coming to Israel, and he is constantly aware of his privileged status: "It always amazes me that I can just hop on a plane and come over for a day or two and come back. Whenever I fly, there's always a thrill." At the same time, quotidian existence in Israel "presents a lot of challenges which I wish didn't exist."

The new Zionists have an organization dimension as well. Organizations like The David Project, the Hillel Institute, and StandWithUs, an international organization based in Los Angeles all work to train university students to reframe discussions about the Middle East and to articulate facts about Israel--and to defend themselves for defending Israel. As Roz Rothstein, co-founder of StandWithUs puts it, "Israel is the target, but Jewish students who stand up for Israel also become the target."^{xiii} It is perhaps no wonder that only the most committed students are willing to repeatedly allow themselves to be targeted in this way.

Conclusion

While the vast majority of Americans and American Jews--including younger Jews--continue to support Israel, and while many college presidents oppose BDS and anti-Israel rhetoric, the American free exchange of ideas has set the stage for the delegitimation of Israel on college campuses. Public critiques emanating from left-wing political and academic sources and Muslim activists have been pursued



aggressively, often accompanied by policies that make Israel advocates or pro-Israel campus groups often feel intimidated.

This discussion has emphasized the fact that challenges arise not only from external sources, but also from internal factors, both in the Diaspora and in Israel. Post-Zionist ideology and social justice organizations working for an Israel that more closely matches their vision of a Western democracy have, whether intentionally or not, supplied Israel delegitimizers with much potent material which the latter reframe for their own purposes. Moreover, Israeli human rights activist pleas are often confused with overt negative attacks of Israel delegitimizers by established Jewish organizations, who are often perceived as trying to suppress both with equal fervor. Young American Jews--both those that feel connected to Israel and those that do not--are often dismayed by the human tragedies that result from Israel's policies on the West Bank and unconvinced by attempts of the Jewish "establishment" to downplay these problems. Thus, although Israel advocates often feel they are being silenced on college campuses, advocates of dealing with Israel's human rights problems often feel they are being silenced in the Jewish community.

We can summarize these internal challenges as follows:

Characteristics of younger Jews affecting Israel attachments

1. Sociological/ demographic issues: Young Jews today in the United States and some other Diaspora communities tend to postpone life decisions, such as career choice, life partner, and parenthood. Organized Jewish leadership including Israel advocacy in prior generations came from men and women who were firmly embarked on a life direction, with spouses, children and life's work.



2. Religious issues: Younger American Jews tend to be religiously polarized, with more attracted to Orthodox OR Reform Judaism than to Conservative Judaism. In the past, American Zionist leadership has tended to be drawn from the Conservative movement, and have often reflected what we might call "folk" Conservative standards. As the Conservative movement loses younger adherents, Zionist organizations face the challenge of attracting Orthodox and Reform American Jews who have very different needs and expectations. In particular, the vast majority of American Jews identify with the Reform movement, and younger Reform Jews are often deeply committed to social justice, and critical of Israeli policies, in tune with J-Street rather than AIPAC, and would be turned off by what looks like "knee-jerk" support of Israeli policies. Larger proportions of Reform Jews are intermarried, and may also be concerned about inclusiveness. In this population, the Israeli conversion controversy is hugely alienating.

3. Israel/ peoplehood issues: For many younger American Jews the concept of ethnic peoplehood, the world divided into "us" and "them," is not salient. Younger Jewish leaders are interested in Judaism as a way of providing meaningfulness in life, and in Jewish cultural expressions such as music, literature and film. They respond to Jewish culture and Jewish activities, but not to the idea that there is a difference between Jews and non-Jews. They are thus responsive to Jewish educational activities, but unresponsive to activities to "protect" Jews since they don't feel vulnerable or different. Also, there is a great divide in attitudes toward Israel between those who have two Jewish parents (who tend to feel very connected to Israel) and those with one Jewish parent (more likely ambivalent or apathetic).



As a group, they can be described as **Post-tribal, post-nationalist, post-Zionist**: Younger Jews sit comfortably in their American Jewish skins, partially because Jewish cultural references have become part of the American context. Some are critical of both Jewish tribalism and American nationalism. Many associate primarily with other young Americans who see the world through post-nationalist, global eyes. Many are sensitive to moral weaknesses and political mistakes associated with the American government, and express sadness that their country is so involved in military campaigns.

Not only are they post-nationalist in regard to America, some are also post-tribal in their Jewish lives, and post-Zionist. They are anxious for Judaism to be a force for good in the world as well. Like their Israeli peers, many agonize about the perils of Israeli military and political power. Some are far more worried about Israeli militarism than about Jewish survivability. Among most of the young Jewish leaders we interviewed, ideals of tolerance and inclusivity were compelling and seem to have become the new dogma. Where their parents or grandparents may have sought out Jewish environments that built social capital by enabling them to “bond” with likeminded individuals, to borrow Putnam’s useful distinction, today’s young American Jewish leaders privilege “bridging” forms of social capital instead.^{lxiii} They dislike intensely name-calling such as “self-hating Jew,” which they view as an attempt to manipulate and silence critical thinking. Mention of the Holocaust is not a “magic bullet” for them—quite the contrary--especially when it appears to them that the Shoah is being exploited for political reasons.



Overwhelmingly, young American Jews view international social justice as a critical core of Judaism. They tend to cherish the concept of peoplehood not in terms of tribal ethnicity but as a context for building community and searching for meaning, rather than for its own sake. Younger American Jews with two Jewish parents are strongly connected to Israel—but many relate differently to peoplehood, to Jewishness, and to Israel than their parents. They often see “social justice” as the defining Jewish value. They tend not to respond to “us and them” ethnocentric formulations, or to the concept of Jewish vulnerability.

Activist, passive, and ambivalent young Jews

Young American Jews travel to Israel more often than their parents did at their ages, and have seen the complexities of Israeli life—and many are more critical of Israeli policies because they are familiar with them. However, those who attempt to delegitimize Israel are far more energetic than the majority of young American Jews who care about Israel, but are not passionate activists. These are the passive young people who Yeshiva University student Jonathan Druckman complained about in a recent posting of the YU Monitor, describing an event at Columbia University on March 2, 2010, called "Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner's Guide." Druckman describes the event as, "a systematic assault on Israel's government and Israel's very right to exist" in which speeches were "replete with lies and distorted facts." Equally disturbing to him was the fact that, "the only visible supporters of Israel present were a handful of YU students, along with a member of the David Project staff and a couple of Columbia students." Druckman found it "ironic that at the exact time that this event was taking place, there was a discussion at YU about political



antisemitism." Far more people sat and listened to this analysis than went out on the ramparts to protest Israel being described in apartheid terms.^{lxiv}

A similar story of Jewish passivity in the face of Israel bashing is reported by Republican political consultant and public opinion pollster Frank Luntz, in a gathering of 35 MIT and Harvard students, 20 non-Jews and 15 Jews, to discuss the Palestinian/Israeli conflict during Summer 2010. The incident, in which Jewish students sat silent while non-Jews referred to "the war crimes of Israel," asserting that "the Jewish lobby" means that "the Jews have a lot more power and influence," and then continuing for almost an hour describing Israel as a moral monster, was discussed in a long interview in the *Jerusalem Post*^{lxv} and a shorter narrative by Evelyn Gordon in *Commentary* magazine's blog quoting Luntz's own words^{lxvi}:

And guess what? Did the Jewish kids at the best schools in America, did they stand up for themselves. Did they challenge the assertions? They didn't say sh*t. And in that group was the leader of the Israeli caucus at Harvard. It took him 49 minutes of this before he responded to anything. [Later] it all dawned on them: If they won't say it to their classmates, whom they know, who will they stand up for Israel to? Two of the women in the group started to cry. ... The guys are like, "Oh my God, I didn't speak up, I can't believe I let this happen." And they're all looking at each other with horrible embarrassment and guilt like you wouldn't believe.

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Pragmatic and ideological challenges

The pragmatic challenge to the organized Jewish community is to work with all three groups: those young adults who are dynamic "defenders of the State," those who are attached but critical, and the majority, who run the gamut from passively--if not deeply--pro-Israel to apathetic or uninvolved. Different strategies will be most



successful with each group. It is crucial, for example, to actually listen to and respond honestly to those who ask critical questions, while at the same time conveying more balanced judgments. For the quiescent, not-very-well-informed majority, education that includes cultural elements--books, music, films--can provide emotional bonds as well as useful information. Working with this quiescent group, it is important to remember the observations of Ithaca College Hillel executive director Michael Faber, "For the average student, Israel is a problem--and they don't want more problems. It makes that leg of their Jewish identity wobbly."^{lxvii} Not least, better use should be made of actively Israel-attached and knowledgeable young adults in strategizing how to combat the most virulent materials produced by Israeli post-Zionist academics and pro-Palestinian advocacy groups in the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere.

The ideological challenge is thornier, and not one that can be solved in the scope of this essay: The delegitimation of the State of Israel on college campuses is facilitated by the confluence of Post-Zionist ideas in Israel and the lingering influence of very different schools of thought such as Romantic Nationalism and Marxism in the Diaspora, which view traditional understandings of Jewish peoplehood and classical Zionism alike with suspicion, if not outright rejection. These ideologies reject that concept that Jews, manifestly pan-ethnic and internationally scattered, comprise an actual nation. The policy in some Diaspora campus settings, as this essay has illustrated, is based on the premise that Jewishness is a religious affiliation, not membership in a peoplehood tied to Israel. Similarly, some Israeli post-Zionists argue that Israeli-ness--like American-ness--should have nothing to do with religious affiliation, nor should Jews around the world be privileged with an automatic "law of



return." Thus, both for Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora the delegitimation of Israel is profoundly interwoven with the most existential of questions: What is a Jew and what is the relationship of Jewishness to the State of Israel, and the State of Israel to the state of Jewishness?

Endnotes

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- ^{iv} Unless otherwise cited, discussions of the attitudes of young American Jews and quotes illustrating those attitudes are drawn from interviews that were conducted by Sylvia Barack Fishman, Rachel Shaina Bernstein, MA, and Emily Sigalow, MA, in 2009-2010 for an Avi Chai Foundation-funded research project directed by Prof. Jack Wertheimer (Jewish Theological Seminary) studying young American Jewish leaders. A differently focused discussion of these Avi Chai interviews will be published in a forthcoming publication (citation to come). Bernstein also assisted in the research for this article. Please contact the author for further information.
- ^v American Jewish Committee Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, is conducted on a panel of respondents by Synovate, Inc. (formerly Market Facts, Inc.), and is available online at <http://www.ajc.org/site>.
- ^{vi} Avi Chai interviews, *op. cit.*
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- ^{xix} Gerstenfeld, "Academic Boycott Against Israel," *op.cit.*, p. 18.
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