

# Sionismo e identità ebraica

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Philip Weiss

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C'è – finalmente – un attacco al sionismo all'interno della stampa di sinistra/liberale. The Intercept e The Forward hanno pubblicato articoli in onore degli ebrei antisionisti degli anni passati, dell'American Council for Judaism e del Bund. E anche la Nuova Repubblica ora si chiede se il sionismo abbia perso la sua logica .

Con uno spirito simile, l'accademico Freddie deBoer ha pubblicato un eccellente saggio sulle delusioni ebraiche nei confronti del sionismo. Perché gli ebrei americani non capiscono che questa è la loro Sion, gli Stati Uniti, la terra dell'uguaglianza, e non dovrebbero sostenere un paese suprematista etnico che ferisce i palestinesi laggiù, un paese in cui non vorrebbero vivere, deBoer chiede.

deBoer esprime un idealismo che io stesso ho spesso espresso:

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Per tutta la mia vita adulta, ho dibattuto con ebrei sionisti americani che difendono appassionatamente il governo di Israele e Israele come concetto, che diventano poetici riguardo Aliyah, che insistono sulla necessità di uno stato ebraico muscoloso che si codifichi esplicitamente come un paese per e per Ebrei che dicono che essere ebrei significa desiderare un ritorno a Sion – ma che non hanno alcun interesse a vivere in Israele. Potrei prenderli in giro, immagino, ma non lo farei mai. Per tanti ebrei americani, siano essi sionisti impegnati o il numero sempre crescente di coloro che sono permanentemente in conflitto, Israele è solo un'idea, non un luogo; è dove mettono i loro pensieri e sentimenti riguardo all'essere ebrei, il deposito della loro infelicità per le varie forme di mancanza di rispetto che senza dubbio hanno sopportato nella loro vita per essere ebrei. Questi sentimenti sono comprensibili, ma il sionismo che ne derivano è distruttivo. Per ebrei e palestinesi.

Questo argomento è ingenuo. Israele non è una fantasia. Esiste un legame essenziale tra i sionisti israeliani e i sionisti americani, e una comprensione della necessità vitale di ciascun partner nei confronti dell'altro. deBoer fa appello agli angeli migliori della natura ebraica, incarnati oggi da IfNotNow e Jewish Voice for Peace. Ciò che non percepisce sono gli angeli più oscuri dell'identità ebraica, che sono modellati dalla storia ebraica e oggi incarnati dalla lobby israeliana e dallo Stato ebraico anche quando massacra i civili.

I sionisti americani non si lasciano ingannare dal sionismo. Israele non è una fantasia della loro identità ebraica. Gli appassionati sionisti americani sanno *esattamente* cos'è Israele. Sono stati lì un milione di volte, hanno un sacco di amici in Israele e sanno che nel sostenerlo qui hanno un lavoro *assolutamente essenziale che non possono abbandonare*. Questi ebrei sostengono attivamente la palese supremazia, il razzismo e l'apartheid, mentre mentono a se stessi e al resto di noi dicendo che cose del genere non accadono in Israele.

In breve, è necessaria una battaglia ideologica tra gli ebrei della JVP e gli ebrei sionisti liberali e dell'AIPAC in questo paese sull'identità ebraica. Che per fortuna si sta accelerando.

Lasciatemi spiegare perché i sionisti ebrei americani sono così consapevoli e necessari al progetto sionista.

Circa la metà degli ebrei americani sono stati in Israele e oso dire che metà di quella metà ci è stata molte volte (come ho fatto io). Hanno a cuore Israele (come me) e sono assolutamente entusiasti di ciò che è Israele. Il ritornello comune di questi ebrei americani impegnati in visita in Israele è:

*Finalmente ero in un paese in cui non sono una minoranza. Per la prima volta potevo rilassarmi e sentirmi sovrano in una terra. Non portavo più il peso di essere una minoranza perseguitata. Che gioia ho provato nel vedere i muratori ebrei, gli autisti degli autobus e i soldati. E primi ministri e camerieri!*

Questi sono sentimenti assolutamente genuini e consolidano il rapporto degli ebrei americani con Israele. Questi sionisti considerano Israele come il frutto di un movimento di liberazione che ha posto fine all'oppressione europea. La cultura ebraica dell'Europa orientale è nata a Gerusalemme. Lo scrittore Bernard Avishai mi rimproverò proprio su questo punto molti anni fa quando cercò di convincermi a dichiararmi antisionista. La grande cultura yiddish di Varsavia, Vilnius, Kiev, Bialystok, Lvov e Ungheria è stata ricreata qui nella viva lingua ebraica. Il grande scrittore Agnon si trasferì dall'Ucraina a Gerusalemme. Bisogna apprezzare quella cultura e non distruggerla, ha detto.

Ho incontrato molti di questi sionisti culturali. Amano la sensazione di camminare di notte attraverso i quartieri di Gerusalemme ovest e sud e di sentire i mormorii in inglese degli ebrei di Londra e Johannesburg che hanno appartamenti lì. Le colline della Giudea sono la punta di lancia del sionismo americano, i coloni in comunità recintate nei territori occupati. Cultura e politica si fondono. Sionisti di destra e sionisti liberali: stessa differenza.

These are generational feelings, but they are being cultivated in young Jews too. This is the whole point of Birthright. *You need to see how it feels when the bus driver and the boys and girls with guns who get on the bus are all Jewish, how thrilling that is! Yes, the Bedouin tent we go to for one night—those are “Arabs” – but the indoctrination supports a living fantasia, a bustling “startup nation” that survives via majoritarian nationalism, religious myth, military brutality, and U.S. support.*

The fact that Palestinians are oppressed by that society means nothing to these Jews. We have been persecuted for so long ourselves— in their understanding of history— we're finally getting ours. (In other words, these nationalist Jews are as bad as any other set of human beings.)

The second and more important aspect of the relationship is that American Zionists know that they are absolutely essential to the project. Arthur Koestler's memoirs, *Exodus* by Leon Uris, and *The Pledge* by Leonard Slater show how American and English Jews supported the infant Jewish state with illegal arms — and cheered the terrorisms of the Nakba as a war of liberation. In the 60s, AIPAC arose and made sure that Lyndon Johnson understood that he should look the other way about the bomb, not to mention Israel's slaughter of 34 Americans on the USS Liberty (the spy ship in the Mediterranean during the 1967 war). Grant Smith makes a very compelling argument that American Jews bought a uranium processing plant in western Pennsylvania and then smuggled out the enriched metal to Israel so Israel could get the bomb, in utter defiance of international and U.S. law and policy. American Jews made sure that Eisenhower's outrage over the Palestinian refugees would never become U.S. policy. Nor Kennedy's adamant opposition to Israeli nukes.

And, of course, in '67 and '73, the broad base of the American Jewish community exulted at Israeli victories and agonized over its setbacks, while calling the Six Day War a miracle. Even the great Noam Chomsky attended an emergency meeting for Israel at MIT. While the young operator Chuck Schumer held his transistor radio to his ear at Madison High School in Brooklyn. And Tom Friedman gave chalktalks on the Israeli army in the Sinai to his high school class in St. Louis Park, MN.

The organized Jewish community always whitewashed Palestinian persecution and built the modern Israel lobby in the form of countless powerful organizations, including the Jewish Federations, AIPAC, the AJC, the Conference of Presidents, and the ADL. Those five horsemen are reassembled now as the 10/7 Project, with millions to propagandize the U.S. media against the humanity of the tens of thousands of massacred and maimed Palestinian civilians.

American Jews have played an absolutely essential role for Israel on the world stage. Those leading organizations are an arm of the Jewish state diplomatically and politically. David Harris of the AJC was famously "the foreign minister of the Jewish people," working in New York. They have carte blanche in the White House, per Obama's top aide, thanks to campaign donations.

The lobby works to ensure bounteous military aid and legal immunity to a country with the living standard of France that regularly commits war crimes and is denounced by the global south and even Europe and China for those crimes. The organized Jewish community makes sure that every president loves Benjamin Netanyahu, the eternal prime minister — as well as the Labor and centrist ministers, too. When the world came up with a compromise on

the two claims to Palestine in the Partition of 1947 and the Oslo process of the 90s, the American Jewish community made sure that there would be Zero Consequences to the Jewish state of ignoring those agreements and taking more land and kicking the Palestinians out of their houses and never compensating them for the losses. Stu Eizenstat's memoir of the Carter years — he was Carter's top domestic advisor and also Jewish liaison — makes it clear that the Jewish community stymied Carter's opposition to settlements, and may have cost him his job in 1980. Just as the Jewish community and AIPAC flooded to Bill Clinton in 1992 when one-termer George Bush opposed settlements, with the result that no president would ever be out-Israel'd again, as Tom Friedman explained.



Leaders of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations meet with Benjamin Netanyahu, June 1, 2021, and state that it is “an honor” to meet with the Israeli PM “to express solidarity with Israel on behalf of American Jewry.” From Conference twitter feed. Jewish leaders are, l to r, Malcolm Hoenlein, Dianne Lob, Netanyahu, and William Daroff.

This is no idle task. It is a serious job taken on with massive intent and, at times, great arrogance. Alan Dershowitz laid out the job — and the entitlement — to a Westchester synagogue in 2017:

People write a book called the Israel lobby and complain that AIPAC is one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington. My response to that is, that's not good enough. We should be the most powerful lobby in Washington....

We are entitled to use our power. We have contributed disproportionately to the success of this country. We have done so much for this country. When you think of how much better this country has become since our grandparents and great grandparents took the risk of coming, here, we have not only the right we have the obligation to speak out, and use every piece, every bit of power available in support of Israel.

The indoctrination has worked. Today, the Forward tells us that inflexible support for Israeli militarism is part of Jewish identity: A "Cease-Fire Shabbat" at Binghamton University is "a cause that many mainstream Jewish organizations see as antithetical to being Jewish." While the ADL and Jewish Insider state that Jews who are anti-Zionist are antisemitic. Even J Street has endorsed that view.

deBoer says that the U.S. is our Zion, and I agree. I love American traditions of freedom and the struggle for equal rights. Why have American Jews, the most liberal and highly educated prosperous group in the U.S., so readily put aside their American experience and liberal values (and role in the civil rights movement) to fulfill such hateful chores a world away?

There's some guilt and delusion involved. Israelis love to say American Jews would not be safe without Israel, that Israeli military might has changed the status of Jews everywhere. Joe Biden has echoed that idea and I've heard American Zionists state that Israel has made us puissant, not passive.

American Jews feel guilty that they lead cushy lives here while Israeli Jews are "on the front lines" – i.e., in the occupation – and their sons and daughters are dying. Who are we to criticize when they are putting their lives down? Bill Kristol says, and even liberal Zionists agree. My mother's best friend in Jerusalem, a Yiddish translator, used to quote the Talmud to me, that "Aliyah means higher and to be in Jerusalem is to be higher, and you American Jews are yoredim, or lower."

But the biggest reason for this dependent relationship transcends the American experience. It is the sense of Jewish isolation, of a corporate minority stateless existence bred in Europe and forged by the Holocaust. The feeling that we must stick together against the goyim. We can have 400 different opinions about this or that, but when it comes to Jewish life, we must stand as one, because the world has always hated Jews. This is the mantra inside all the major Jewish organizations, but it does not even have to be stated, it is inculcated in Jewish holidays and prayer.

I understand why that feeling arose. It is alive in my mother to this day. Her best friend left Berlin when she was 8, after Kristallnacht. The world turned its back on us. So we must ask, What is good for the Jews?

This attitude is a complete anachronism, and a very dangerous one. Jews need to tear down this belief and reconstruct Jewish identity.

It's a big job, and we will need the help of many idealistic Jews (including IfNotNow and Molly Crabapple and the American Council for Judaism and Matzpen and every other antizionist). And we will need the help of many non Jews. So to Freddie deBoer– Go ahead, make fun of the Jews who won't move there! They need a scolding.