



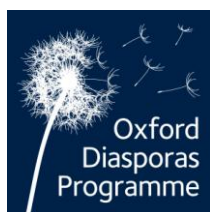
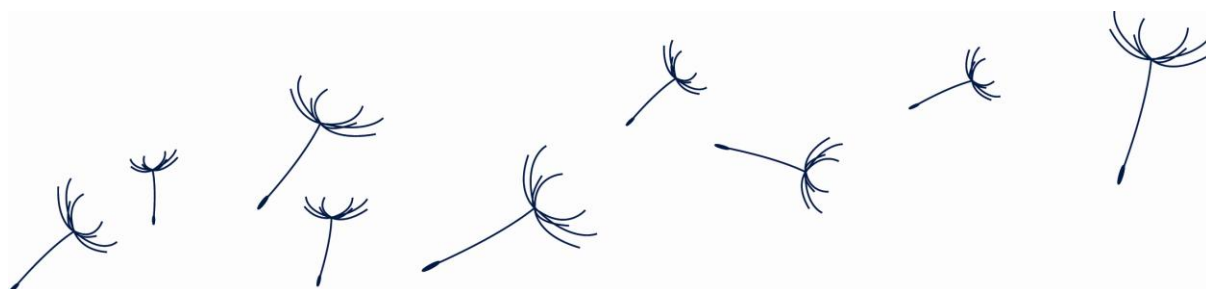
# Working Papers

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## Israel and the diaspora

### Problems of cognitive dissonance

William Safran



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### Abstract

The relationship between Israel and the diaspora has been marked by mutual accommodation. The diaspora has come to accept the fact that Israel is not exempt from the problems and pathologies of states and societies; and Israel has acknowledged the continuation of the diaspora as a centre of Jewish life. Both sides are subject to illusions. Jews in the diaspora believe that Israel will be better supported by their hostland's political right rather than its left; that Israel can be saved, despite itself, by a kind of 'tough love' bestowed upon it by the diaspora or its hostland governments; and that Jewish identity and survival, based on an autonomous and largely secular culture, can be assured regardless of whether Israel exists or not. Israel's illusions are that it can be 'like other nations'; that it can replicate in short order the civic nations that France and the United States became after many generations; and that it must 'de-ethnicise' and de-Judaize to become acceptable to its neighbours.

**Keywords:** Jewish identity; Zionism; Israel; Orthodoxy; anti-Semitism; Holocaust; secular culture

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## 1 Introduction

The relationship between Israel and the diaspora has reached a certain degree of normalcy. Each side has gradually accommodated itself to the other's reality: the diaspora has come to accept the fact that Israel is not exempt from the problems and pathologies of living states and societies, and Israel has acknowledged the continuation of the diaspora as a centre of Jewish life. At the same time, that relationship has oscillated between paranoia and wishful thinking. Israel has had to face increasing global efforts at delegitimation, and the diaspora has been confronted with growing (or revived) anti-Semitism. Some have minimized either threat, while others have exaggerated it. The present paper focuses on the relationship between Israel and the diaspora, and in particular that of the United States.

Both Israel and the diaspora are subject to convictions that are in part illusory, the major one being the denial of interdependence. Other convictions are the following:

1. That Jewish identity in the various hostlands, especially in the United States, has evolved in a positive direction and that Jews have developed a diaspora culture that is indigenous and autonomous. As Gilroy has written, 'Diaspora "ain't where you're from, it's where you're at".' (Gilroy 1991). In the United States, Jews are not in exile (*galut*); they are a constituent part of the American nation, and, in the eyes of many, Judaism is one of the three 'American' religions (Herberg 1960).<sup>1</sup>
2. That Jewish identity in the diaspora can survive and flourish without Israel.
3. That Israel is a state like others; but its survival depends ultimately on the support of the international community and the great powers, in particular the United States – and more specifically, that of one or another of the major political parties. This support, in turn, depends on the good behaviour of Israel. Such behaviour can be promoted by a kind of 'tough love' bestowed upon it by diaspora communities and the governments of countries of which they are citizens.
4. That anti-Semitism has irreversibly declined, at least in the Western democracies, and is not a factor in policies *vis-à-vis* Israel.

## 2 Jewish identity in the diaspora

For two millennia, Jewish identity was essentially based on religion and the culture and social forms associated with it. The homeland figured as a historical point of reference and eschatological hope. Devoted Jews have prayed daily for the restoration of Zion and for an ingathering of Jews from all corners of the earth, and at Passover seders have expressed hope for 'next year in Jerusalem'. Yehuda Halevi declared that 'my heart is in the East but I am in the uttermost West', and Heinrich Heine's 'Hebrew Melodies' contain images of a restored Jewish landscape. In the Ghetto of Riga, Latvian Jews sang about the beauty of Tel-Aviv.

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<sup>1</sup> Just recently (May 2011) President Obama proclaimed Jewish American Heritage Month.

After the French Revolution and the gradual extension of civic and political rights to Jews, religion continued to be the basis of Jewish identity, but it reflected an increasingly diverse approach to Judaism, ranging from ultra-Orthodoxy to a Westernized and desiccated Reform version that defined the Jew simply in terms of individual adherence to a ‘confession’ or cult. With the growth of secularism, the basis of Jewish identity has changed. In Eastern Europe, a secular Jewish identity developed that was based on shtetl life and on communal institutions, the Yiddish language, and (as in the case of the Bundists<sup>2</sup>) on socialism. Since the end of the Second World War, diaspora Jewish identity has been based on several foci in addition to, and often as substitutes for, religion – Zionism, the memory of the Holocaust, and anti-Semitism.

The evolution of Jewish identity in the United States has followed its own path. Before the Second World War, most Jews were non-Zionists; they were mainly concerned with fighting anti-Semitism, solidifying their social, economic, and political position, and adapting Judaism to American life. The Holocaust produced a major shift in attitudes. American Jewish leaders, motivated in part by a guilty conscience for not having made an effective effort at saving the Jews in Europe, worked hard at promoting the creation of an independent Jewish state. After the establishment of Israel, Jewish identity was buttressed by a process of *shepn nakhes* – showing vicarious pride in the accomplishments of the new state.

After the novelty wore off, a certain estrangement occurred between Israel and the diaspora as each side focused on its own priorities (Elazar 1995: 106–7). It was the Six-Day War that transformed collective diaspora attitudes in a major way. The possibility that Israel might be destroyed revealed how deeply American Jewish identity revolved around Israel rather than around this or that American approach to Judaism. Among Israelis, meanwhile, a new interest in their Jewish identity developed between 1967 and 1973 with the growing realization that their country was increasingly isolated globally and that its only reliable ally was diaspora Jewry. Conversely, on the part of the diaspora, ‘Israelolatry’ declined as the country no longer conformed to the utopian vision with which the diaspora had regarded it during its founding years. This was a consequence of a number of developments in Israel: the growing *embourgeoisement* of society; the end of kibbutz idealism; and the treatment of Palestinians, especially in the occupied territories. Nevertheless, the diaspora’s involvement in Israel has continued in many ways, including philanthropic Zionism – contributions to the Jewish National Fund, the Hebrew University, and a variety of other Israeli institutions – as well as research activities, exchange programmes, and lobbying with American governments and legislatures.

At the same time, such involvement has not been necessary for Jews in order to be self-identified as such. Many Jews have argued that living in Western democratic countries, in particular the United States, does not constitute exile. In a book on Jewish identity, a contemporary author writes: ‘Jews now inhabit two promised lands, one Zionist and the other American. Each community of Jews has linked itself to Jewish antiquity to affirm its own legitimacy’ (Auerbach 2001: 22). Both have defined themselves as sanctuaries. For nineteenth-century German Reform rabbis, that antiquity was irrelevant. They replaced the prayer *mipne hataenu galinu me-artsenu* (because of our sins we have been exiled from *our*

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<sup>2</sup> Members of the General Jewish Labor Bund of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia established in 1897.

land) to *avotenu galu me-artsam* (our ancestors were exiled from *their* land) (Wolfsberg 1938: 201). Today, that antiquity has become meaningless to most secular Jews, both in Israel and the diaspora. Some Israelis, like the Canaanites and some Communists, dismiss the Jewish claim to antiquity altogether. A.B. Yehoshua disagrees; he has argued as follows:

Normative Judaism has never legitimated the *golah*...The diaspora was always regarded as a national disaster. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Reform Jewry in the United States attempted to build a legitimate system of diaspora existence and to place the link with Erets Israel in the same light as the religious ties of Catholics with the Vatican. Reform Jews changed their minds after the Second World War and today they can, without hesitation, be described as part of the Zionist movement (Yehoshua 1986: 22).

Those who assert that there exists a Jewish culture that is both secular and non-Zionist do not accept that argument. In their efforts to minimise the importance of Israel for Jewish identity, they reject the 'centrality-of-Israel' thesis as well as the relevance of Zionism; they refer to the existence of a 'global shtetl' marked by Jewish cross-polity relationships, point to a vibrant Jewish secular civilization in diaspora, and question whether the existence of Israel is even necessary for the perpetuation of Jewish civilization. In a provocative book, Caryn Aviv and David Shneer point to new forms of Jewish cultural expression, new institutions, new Jewish rites and celebrations, and new approaches to Jewishness that relate neither to Israel nor even to religion and that define a 'new Jew' who may not even consider herself to be in diaspora (Aviv and Shneer 2005).

Is the Jewish diaspora coming to an end? When Alan Dershowitz writes about the 'vanishing diaspora' he refers, not to demography, but to identity, in particular with respect to the United States, where Jews feel more rooted as part of their host society and less 'diasporan'. This is reflected in part in the growing perception in American society that Jews, although not considered Anglo-Saxon, are not a minority (insofar as that label is applied to categoric groups entitled to affirmative action). Generalizing from this development, however, Dershowitz is wrong when he speaks of 'the gradual demise of ethnicity', (Dershowitz 1997: 25) for ethnic identity is in vogue; but it is increasingly a nominal identity without content.

### **3 Diaspora Jewishness without Israel**

The perception of 'the end of diaspora' is correct if by diaspora is meant the end of the feeling of exile from a country of origin and of the condition of impermanence – in Jewish identitarian terms, the end of being in *galut*. In all those senses, an increasing number of Jews are no longer in diaspora. Even Israelis refer to the Jews abroad, not as being in *galut*, a theologically loaded concept, but in the neutral *tfutsot* (dispersion). This perception is reflected, inter alia, in the fact that the 'Museum of the Diaspora' (*Bet-Hatfutsot*) in Tel-Aviv is now called the 'Museum of the Jewish People'. It is true that Jews in the various lands of their dispersion are moving towards ever greater diversity and are looking for alternatives to both Judaism and Zionism/Israel as anchors of secular Jewish identity. Aviv and Shneer argue that it is this diversity that defines the 'new Jew'; and they reject the traditional

solutions to the problem of preserving Jewish identity: religion (going to *shul*), Zionism (make *aliyah*), and ethics (be a *mentch*).

Proponents of a secular Jewish identity based, not on the idea of 'return' but on permanent deterritorialization, point to a history of dynamic Jewish life in the Eastern European diaspora. It was associated with a 'thick' culture based on Yiddish, a network of institutions, and a pattern of self-isolation mandated by religion and influenced by the hostility of surrounding society. But the sociological context of that culture was permanently destroyed during the Holocaust. Now the two major centres of Jewish life are North America and Israel.

It has been argued that the two are autonomous and independent of each other. For the Boyarins, the diaspora has its own *raison d'être*: it represents otherness or difference contingent on, and living apart from, surrounding society as a desirable social form, and is applicable not only to Jews but to other people as well (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993). With respect to the Jewish diaspora, it is not clear what this difference is based on, other than, perhaps, an essentialist definition of Jewishness. For Richard Marienstras, diaspora identity must have a certain cultural content – in the Jewish case, religion and/or language (Marienstras 1975, 1985: 215–26). But Hebrew requires serious study; moreover, it is hard to see how the study of that language can ignore both religion and Israel. Yiddish, once a major element of Jewish identity in Eastern Europe, is no longer of interest to Jews in Western countries, and its study cannot be much more than a recalling of a destroyed civilization. The rapid decline of the number of Yiddish speakers in the United States is attested by the closing of most Yiddish newspapers, schools, summer camps, and theatres. Yiddish has attained a degree of academic respectability and is taught at a number of American universities.<sup>3</sup> But its daily use is confined to small and self-isolated communities of selected Hasidim, whose *yiddishkeit* is topologically manifested in a few American shtetls, such as New Square and Kiryas Joel. There are at least as many speakers of Yiddish in Israel, but they do not set the cultural tone in that country.<sup>4</sup>

In view of the foregoing, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust must continue to be a staple of Jewish studies programmes. Holocaust memory, however, is fading; there are more recent genocides and ethnic cleansings that push the Holocaust into the background; and anti-Semitism has weakened.

Diaspora identities rest on one or more of the following four pillars: religion, language, memory, and homeland. This applies to Jewish identity as well. In Western diasporas, religion has been the major element. Since the nineteenth century, the United States has been the preeminent place in the world to foster significant new forms of Jewish communal religion. The absence of a centralized Jewish establishment has facilitated experimentation in approaches to Judaism. In addition to various forms of Orthodoxy, Reform, and movements between them, these have included the Jewish Renewal congregations, which celebrate Judaism with song and dance, informal readings and discussions, and 'Adventure

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<sup>3</sup> In addition, there is YIVO (for specialist research) in New York as well as the Yiddish Book Center in Massachusetts, which runs courses and seminars, but with small enrolment.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Sutzkever, the major post-Holocaust Yiddish poet, lived in Israel and edited *Di Goldene Keyt*, the best literary journal in that language. In Israel, Yiddish no longer poses a challenge to the supremacy of Hebrew, and is taught as part of the cultural patrimony of the Jewish people; and in the United States it is studied by those who want to rediscover their roots.

Judaism', with its skiing and other outdoor activities followed by prayer meetings. They have also included new kinds of synagogue architecture, rites of passage, and new approaches to prayer and social organization. It is unclear to what extent these approaches are reflections of religious or secular culture. There is no necessary correlation between the splendour of an edifice and the nature and content of Jewish prayer. There has been a proliferation of more or less informal Jewish *havurot* (fellowships), but their focus has often been the celebration of selected rites of passage rather than the perpetuation of Jewish culture. There is ecological Judaism with its commitment to EcoGlatt cuisine, and gastronomic Judaism, with its subcategories of kosher and kosher style.

Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionism, envisaged a Jewish 'civilization' for the diaspora that would fill the void created by the decline of traditional religious faith. This would parallel the Jewish culture that was created in Israel, where the synagogue has been eclipsed by a national territory, a national language and literature, and a network of civil and political institutions. In the diaspora, the substitute for the synagogue would be the community centre (Kaplan 1934; see also Schweid 2008: 227–36, 240ff). That institution would be the venue for the cultivation of the Hebrew language, the preservation of national memory, the observance of rites of passage and communal festivals, and the cultivation of relations with Israel as the homeland and centre of Jewish culture. The community centre would sponsor lectures, concerts, and film festivals, leaving purely religious functions to the synagogue. This 'reconstructed' approach to Judaism, however, has fallen short of expectations, for the aforementioned activities have not amounted to a diasporic *Jewish* secular culture that is parallel to the *Hebrew* culture existing in Israel.

#### **4 Non-religious diaspora identity and Jewish survival**

The aforementioned approaches and institutional forms, to be sure, constitute a departure from traditional Judaism, but they still have a religious component; at the same time, they may make for a more interesting, more modern, and above all, easier path to the Jewish religion, one that requires minimal commitment and minimal exertion. The most frequently observed Jewish festival is Passover, less for its historical or symbolic significance – the evocation of the Jewish connection to Jerusalem and the theme of freedom – than for its sumptuous food. The next most frequently observed Jewish festivals are Hanukka and Purim because they are 'fun', and because they are occasions for socializing. There are also non-religious forms of being Jewish that require no exertion at all. They include the enjoyment of klezmer music, Woody Allen movies, bagels and Jewish rye bread, *Fiddler on the Roof*, Catskills humour, often presented in 'Yinglish', and mock Jewish variants of Christian culture, often with a smattering of Yiddish.<sup>5</sup> Some of these elements figure prominently in a recent book written by an Israeli that is full of tongue-in-cheek praise of diaspora Jewishness (Rosner 2005; see also Shandler 2005: 195–211). More seriously, the non-religious ways of being Jewish include the promotion of civil liberties and social justice, philanthropy, and progressive economic policies.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, "T'was the night before Chanuka and all over the place, there was noise, there was kvetching, oy what a disgrace...".



The non-religious ‘new Jew’ in the diaspora is increasingly less Jewish. He may hold on to certain elements associated with Jewish rites and customs, but many of these, too – such as klezmer music, circumcision, Passover seders, breaking a glass at weddings, a preference for kosher food, and Yiddish expressions – are no longer exclusively Jewish, since they have been selectively appropriated by non-Jewish society. Even the Holocaust is no longer held to be a specifically a Jewish experience. Conversely, a number of features associated with Christianity have been sufficiently secularized for Jews to embrace them – for example, the ‘Hanukka bush’ in their living rooms and the participation of their children in ‘trick-or-treat’ rounds in the neighbourhood on Halloween (Rosner 2005: 118).

Many observers of the contemporary Jewish diaspora have commented on the rapid growth in the construction of Jewish museums. It may be true that, in terms of the number of such museums, New York, rather than Tel-Aviv or Jerusalem, has been the centre of the Jewish institutional world. But many of their collections are small and contain little more than the usual ritual objects. Museums often deal with artifacts of dead cultures; this explains why there may be an inverse relationship between the number of Jewish museums and the number of living Jews.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish Studies programmes have proliferated in American colleges and universities. They do not compare to yeshivas or Jewish rabbinical seminaries in their curricula; nevertheless, some of them offer an impressive array of courses on the Bible and post-Biblical literature, Jewish history, and Jewish thought. But many other programmes focus on aspects of Israel, on comparative religion, on American-Jewish (or European Jewish) literature, on Jewish feminist studies, and above all, on the Holocaust and subjects related to it, often with the argument ‘that’s what students want’. Some of these are subjects with a limited shelf life, and may not be sufficient to sustain a Jewish identity. It is true that the writings of prominent secular Jewish English-language authors dealt with in these programmes – such as Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Cynthia Ozick, and Philip Roth – have a Jewish flavour and reflect memories of the Yiddish-speaking Eastern European shtetl, but their orientation has not carried over to the next generation of (American-born) Jewish authors.

It is unclear how the spread of Jewish studies programmes or the popularity of specific courses correlates with Jewish identity. After all, not all students enrolled in these programmes or courses are Jews or contemplating conversion to Judaism. Do these programmes simply reflect intellectual curiosity or fleeting academic interests, comparable to Medieval Studies programmes? Not all who enrol in a Jewish studies programme necessarily do so in order to strengthen or rediscover their Jewish identities, just as not all students enrolled in a programme of Renaissance Studies are, or want to become, Renaissance men and women.

In any case, the ‘cultural’ features of the diaspora Jews enumerated above are too thin to produce a meaningful rapprochement with the Israeli Jew, who is increasingly becoming a ‘generic’ Israeli – Hebrew-speaking, secular, Western, individualistic, and focused on the

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<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that since the end of the Second World War there has been a proliferation of Jewish museums in Germany, Spain, and Eastern Europe. In Germany in particular there are frequent Jewish film festivals, performances of klezmer bands, and Jewish (including Yiddish) cultural evenings, but these tend to be exercises in nostalgia, if not public relations.

fate of the land s/he inhabits. To be sure, there are many Israelis, and perhaps a majority, who are deeply Jewish and identify as Jews. This includes most of those who define themselves as 'secular' (see Shain 2002: 290–1). But as Israelis, they have an overriding interest in defending the land in which they live and in promoting the Hebrew language. These interests are of little concern to many American Jews whose Jewish culture is defined in the terms listed above – a fact that explains why they may be indifferent, if not hostile, to Israel.

Recently, a new secular studies major was established at an American college that is to be run by a Jewish sociologist of religion who describes himself as 'culturally Jewish, but agnostic-atheist on questions of deep mystery' (Goodstein 2011). A cultural Jewishness that excludes religion may find a substitute in a focus on Israel (i.e. Zionism) or in a deep Jewish literacy (i.e. knowledge of history, literature, language, and philosophy). If these substitutes are subtracted, what is left?

In Eastern Europe, Jews created a non-religious identity, e.g. the Bundists, who fostered a socialist Jewishness, and the Autonomists (one of whose leading figures was the historian Simon Dubnov), who envisaged a deterritorialized 'diaspora nationalism' articulated in the Yiddish language. More recently, Jews in Russia have been trying to develop a post-Soviet Jewish identity that is post-religious, non-Zionist, and based, not on language or the vestiges of Jewish culture, but on the experience of anti-Semitism. In a number of Western countries, especially in the United States, Jews have also been creating new post-religious, or secular, Jewish identities. It is not always clear, however, whether these identities are post-Zionist, post-diaspora, post-modern (however that is defined), or ultimately post-Jewish.

Future Jewish identities in the diaspora are likely to reflect a continuing process of attrition. The offspring of religious Jews are successively less religious, but their Jewishness may linger on. But for how many generations? Most secular Jews are more American than Jewish; and in time what is left of their Jewishness is likely to fade into an increasingly indistinct memory of an ancestral past.

Many secular Jews have a fond recollection of a grandmother lighting Sabbath candles; but the Sabbath is kept by only a minority of Jews. With every passing generation, the engagement of Jewish children in Jewish ritual and festival celebrations becomes more superficial. Thus the grandfather conducted a Passover seder; the father participated actively in it; the son barely follows along; and the grandson can hardly wait until the meal is served. The traditional Haggadah focused exclusively on the liberation of Israelites from Egyptian bondage; many modern versions tend to be more ecumenical, some containing references to the oppression of Palestinians. These sorts of reconfigured Jewish sentiments are sometimes regarded as aspects of cultural Jewishness. But often enough, being culturally Jewish is a euphemism for being only nominally, i.e., ethnically, Jewish. As Zvi Gitelman has argued, 'Jews in the diaspora remain an ethnic group but one that is eroding because its content is diminishing and its boundaries are blurring', and "'thin culture" and "symbolic ethnicity" are replacing "thick culture" for most Jews' (Gitelman 1998).

In a chapter entitled 'Why So Many Jews are Drifting Away' (Dershowitz 1997: 72ff), Alain Dershowitz speaks of the concern of many diaspora Jews with mere 'Jewish survival', a

concern that has become sacred, especially since the Holocaust. But the survival of what? Without a deep religion and without a secular Jewish culture based on language, Jewishness will become a vestigial folklore. This is a worst-case scenario, but it is not unrealistic.

Dershowitz speaks of a 'generational evolution' of Jewish identity, a process involving a Jew who observes all festivals and eats kosher; a father who is an 'Israelite' and who observes Yom Kippur and eats 'kosher-style' food as well as Chinese food;<sup>7</sup> and a son who is a deist and eats low-cholesterol food. That son may, however, strongly insist upon his Jewish identity. This evolution is analogous to the transformation (over a longer period) of Jewish identity in France from membership in the *nation juive* to being an individual adherent of the *culte israélite* to *Français d'origine israélite* to a re-ethnified *Juif français* (Safran 1983) – except that the recent re-ethnification is marked, not by secular culture, but by a strong Zionism or a revived religious practice.

To some extent, non-religious, ethnic Jewish identity takes on a Zionist form; although (according to a recent poll) only 28 per cent of American Jews define themselves as 'Zionists', 82 per cent support Israel, or at least Israel's existence. But this, too, is subject to generational attrition, with only 20 per cent of Jews under 35 having a 'Zionist' orientation (Amir 2011a). Among the most effective institutions for counteracting this generational attrition are the Jewish summer camps, almost all of which have a religious as well as a Zionist dimension. It has been noted that Jewish summer camp alumni are at once more religiously observant, have a strong sense of kinship with Jews worldwide, and feel strongly attached to Israel (Amir 2011b). Other experiences promoting a strong identification with Israel are the 'Birthright' (*Taglit*) programme and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Jewish all-day schools.

The Jewish identity of young people is a matter of concern. There is an increasing number of Jews, especially in universities, who are detached from Israel; they may be indifferent to it, embarrassed by it, or hostile to it, depending on their ideological orientations. On the other hand, the Birthright programme is very popular. In fact, it appears to be the most successful instrument for instilling Jewish identity among youth. This experience has turned some of the participants into Zionists, and others into repentant religious Jews (*hozrim bitshuva*). Hillel Foundations at universities do their share in maintaining a Jewish identity among students. The 'outreach' programme of the Orthodox Habad-Lubavich movement, too, contributes to sensitizing Jewish students to their religious heritage, but this does not necessarily include the inculcation of Zionism. Jewish young people, in particular college students, need constant reinforcement to sustain their Jewish identity in the face of a variety of distractions and exposure to increasing anti-Israel propaganda at colleges and universities. Such propaganda, which has become sustained and vocal at a number of American and Canadian university campuses, often slides into anti-Semitism. Most Jewish students are unwilling to devote time and energy to fight against this; and they are not helped by visiting Israeli faculty members (especially leftists and post-Zionists) who savage Israeli governments for their domestic and foreign policies, and whose arguments are immediately instrumentalized by enemies of Israel as well as by anti-Semites.

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<sup>7</sup> When Elena Kagan was asked, during a Senate confirmation hearing on her nomination as a US Supreme Court justice where she was at Christmas in 2010, she replied, 'like all good Jews, probably at a Chinese restaurant'.

## 5 The Holocaust as identitarian focus

Jewish identity is based heavily on memory (see Yerushalmi 1982). Since the end of the Second World War, the identity of Jews in the diaspora has been strongly informed by the memory of the Holocaust. That event continues to be commemorated in Holocaust museums, and is kept alive by Holocaust seminars, institutes, journals, movies, novels, projects, Jewish studies programmes, and Holocaust Awareness Weeks at colleges and universities. There are periodic conferences not only of actual concentration-camp veterans, but also of their children and grandchildren, and of those who managed to escape the Holocaust by timely emigration or by fleeing to the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup> In many Jewish communities, Holocaust survivors are feted as heroes, and Holocaust survivorship has even become a profession. The Holocaust has been banalised by being subjected to philosophical and psychological analysis, fictionalisation, dramatisation, and relativisation that threaten to overshadow serious historical studies (see Rosenfeld 2011). This is overkill, which numbs both Jews and non-Jews. Moreover, despite constant reinforcement, memory cannot last forever, especially in the case of American Jews, who share the ahistoricism of American culture. That explains why there are Holocaust memorial evenings at which sentimental poetry is read, in English or Hebrew, that may not even be related to the event that is commemorated. It also explains why some Holocaust-related institutions have now broadened their range of concerns to include genocides, ethnic cleansings, and racial intolerance; and why the memory of the Holocaust is eclipsed, especially among the younger generation, by a preoccupation with more recent massacres.

In Israel, approaches to the Holocaust phenomenon have been more ambivalent. Israel became the receiving country of the largest number of survivors of the Shoah and assumed responsibility for integrating them into society. In turn, these immigrants continued to be a significant element in Israel's Jewish demography. Yet during the first years of statehood, some hard-core Zionists regarded the survivors as cowards. Others regarded arriving concentration-camp veterans as 'human trash'; and even Ben-Gurion originally felt uncomfortable with them and considered them 'hard, evil and selfish'. (Auerbach 2001: 171). At the same time, he was conscious of the role the Holocaust played in the formation of Zionist identity, national cohesion, and the *Weltanschauung* of the Jewish people as a whole, a fact that explains why he countenanced the Eichmann Trial.

Since that trial there has been an evolution of attitudes. There is no Hannah Arendt cult in Israel; those who experienced the Shoah are regarded not simply as victims or collaborators in their own annihilation, but occasionally as resisters as well. The uniqueness of the Shoah in the array of mass murders has been acknowledged by all, save for a small number of Israelis who have been eager to show that they eschew an ethnocentric approach to the subject.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Among the more than 120 participants at a Holocaust Survivors' conference in Denver a number of years ago, only about ten had been inmates of ghettos and/or concentration camps.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Israel Charny, an Israeli psychologist, has been promoting a 'generic' approach to genocide, which includes not only the Deir Yassin massacre but all sorts of mass killings; and he has criticised the insistence on the uniqueness of the Shoah as particularistic 'definitionalism'. See Charny 1996: ix–xv. On more recent polemics regarding the comparative approach to genocides, see Beckerman 2011.

Several of Ben-Gurion's successors, in particular Menachem Begin, frequently referred to the Holocaust. The role of Israel as the 'heir' of Holocaust victims was attested by restitution agreements with Germany (negotiated by Nahum Goldmann, who personified the link between Israel and the diaspora).

Although the Holocaust experience does not inform the quotidian behaviour of Israelis, it is commemorated in places such as Lohamei Hagetaot and Yad Mordekhai, institutions like Yad Vashem, and observances like Yom Hashoah. In an article in 1977, Simon Herman presented opinion-survey evidence that the Holocaust weighed heavily on the consciousness of young Israelis; that the vast majority of them thought that the Holocaust could occur again, at least in some countries, and only 20 per cent believed that it would never occur again (Herman 1977). It is unclear to what extent this consciousness prevails today. Yet the continuing threats to the existence of Israel and the safety of its Jews in that country produce periodic evocations of a new Holocaust – an attack on Israel as the 'Third Temple' (*bayit hashlishi*), after most of the world's Jews are concentrated there (Segev 2000).

The Holocaust is sometimes used as a propaganda weapon, especially by right-wing politicians. But it plays only a minor role in Israeli identity. In the diaspora, the Holocaust is instrumentalized for organizational, and, above all, identitarian purposes; in Israel, this is done mostly for purposes of foreign policy. A recent example of this instrumentalization was the reference by Prime Minister Netanyahu to Israel's 'Auschwitz borders'. That reference is not a matter of right v. left or nationalist v. liberal ideology; the first person who made it was Abba Eban, who was neither right-wing nor religious. Nowadays, the reference is increasingly perverted and instrumentalized by forces hostile to Israel, and even by anti-Zionist Jews, who have compared Gaza to Auschwitz.

## 6 Jewish identity through *tikkun olam*

It is the contention of this paper that all reinforcement of diaspora Jewish identity today takes place either through Zionism or religion. And all reinforcement via religion – or at least a more or less traditional Judaism – relates to Israel in one way or another. That is why many Jewish studies departments have study-abroad programmes in Israel. To be sure, the role of Israel in this regard would be much more effective if its approach to Judaism became less rigid and more pluralistic while continuing to be regarded as an important element of modern Israel. Such a change, however, is impeded by two mutually antagonistic elements within Israel: on the one hand, traditionalists tied to the Orthodox rabbinate who oppose any adaptations to contemporary realities, and on the other, elements within the Israeli elite who want to shut religion out of Israeli culture completely and who deplore the very idea of Israel as a Jewish state.

In the diaspora, many Jewish households where religion has come to play a minor role, if any, have ethnosymbols such as mezuzot, menorahs, and sabbath candlesticks; and occasionally these have a Zionist dimension, such as pictures of the Western Wall, slides of Israel, Israeli *objets d'art*, and coffee-table books. Sometimes, Jewish identity is expressed in celebrations of bar-mitzvahs at the Western Wall and visits to Yad Vashem. These last two are typical places of pilgrimage, which, for many Jews in the North American and Western European diasporas, take the place of the traditional idea of 'return'.

In a sense, these pilgrimages constitute a revision of the position of the American Council for Judaism (ACJ), which resembles that of the Reform movement in early nineteenth-century Germany in wanting to distance Judaism from any connection with the ancestral homeland. But no more, especially since the Six-Day War: the ACJ is nearly defunct, and the above-mentioned liturgical correction is found in no Reform prayerbook today. There are still references to *kibbutz galuyot* (the ingathering of exiles), but as a practical matter, that process is postponed – kicked down the road, so to speak – to a messianic time.

The connection with Israel has been crowded out by another connotation of Jewishness, that of *tikkun olam*, ‘repairing the world’. The moral imperative of *tikkun olam* is often invoked as the essence of Judaism, especially by those who are unwilling to perform the rituals of Judaism or who know little about Jewish literature, language, or cultural traditions. Such an invocation recalls the virtually exclusive focus of classical Reform on the universal message of the prophets or, in more modern terms, the Kantian ‘categorical imperative’. But this message is not exclusively Jewish; making it the central element of Judaism undermines any claim to Jewish distinctiveness, for Jews have no monopoly over good works. In fact, it is not much different from Ethical Culture (a more or less Jewish invention), except that Reform households may have a menorah or a few other Jewish ethnosymbols in their living rooms. Without such symbols, or without some orientation towards Israel, this Judaism would be the religion of a ‘dry baptism’, which stops just short of being Christian.

## 7 Israel – a country like others?

There are Jews both in diaspora and Israel who argue that Israel’s legitimacy as a modern state, and ultimately, its security and very existence, depend, not on this or that political party, but on Israel’s behaving like any other country, and more specifically like a Western democratic one. They believe that in order to survive and gain full acceptance by the international community, and especially by its neighbours, Israel must choose between being a Jewish state and a democratic state: it must be defined, not as a state of the Jewish people, but as a state of all its citizens. They analyse Israel in terms of a ‘civic culture’ paradigm in order to suggest that their country is, or should be, a country like all others. In short, it must cease to be an ‘ethnocracy’ and become a ‘civic nation’ (Smooha 1990 and Yiftahel 2006).<sup>10</sup> Israel must de-ethnicise and de-Judaise itself, at least officially, and must abandon the notion of Israel as a Jewish state, if not as the home of the Jewish people, by adopting certain policies such as giving up the Law of Return;<sup>11</sup> affirming the right of Palestinians to return to Israel; replacing Jewish symbols by more neutral ones; and granting absolutely equal status to the Arabic language.

A number of Israeli political scientists tend to analyse the Israeli situation in terms of ideal norms that have nowhere been attained in real life. This approach is utopian; it is unrealistic to expect Israel to replicate the civic nations that France and the United States

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<sup>10</sup> For a more nuanced and less ideological approach, see Peleg 2007.

<sup>11</sup> A dozen other democratic countries have laws guaranteeing a right of return for their ethnic kin abroad and even the right of diasporas to vote in homeland elections.

have become after many generations of unchallenged existence. Furthermore, the conversion of Israel to a pure civic-nation model would not be reciprocated by Israel's neighbours, almost all of whom define their nations in Islamic terms. The continuing divisions within the Arab world since the 'Arab spring' suggest that the idea of national identity built on citizenship has not taken hold (Shadad and Kirkpatrick 2011), a fact reflected in the recent statement by Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, that an independent Palestinian state would not contain a single Jew.

Israel is not a country like others in terms of its origins, its relations with its neighbours, the continuing threats to its existence, and the linkages to its diaspora. Indeed, there is a sharing of tasks and responsibilities; a similarity, if not symmetry, of attitudes and ideological cleavages; and, on occasion, a reversal of roles between it and the diaspora. An illustration of this symmetrical cleavage is provided by Ofira Seliktar:

[T]here is a split in U.S. Jewry between the more secularized elements in the community, [which] define their Judaism though a liberal universalistic religiosity, and the hard core, composed of nationalists and the Orthodox. The former want to use the peace process to secure a truly democratic, Western, and liberal Israel where enlightened citizenship and religious pluralism are the rule. The latter seek a solution that would guarantee the Jewish rather than civic character of the state and fulfill as much as possible the vision of a greater Israel (Seliktar 2002: 207).

Seliktar returns to this point when she argues that liberals, 'as good Jews [and] loyal Americans', supported the Oslo Agreement, while the Orthodox community and right-wing Jews opposed it (Seliktar 2007: 126f). This cleavage was found within the leadership of Jewish organisations committed to one position or another, but the mass of diaspora Jewry's rank and file was much less categorical and much more confused: not all who opposed the Oslo Accords are Orthodox (who account for only 10 per cent of American Jewry) or Neoconservatives; nor are all who supported it in the liberal or progressive camp.

This cleavage, as the author admits, reflects a parallel division within Israel itself. But not all Orthodox Jews in Israel are nationalists or have a 'Greater Israel' vision, nor are all territorial maximalists religious. In any case, with his public endorsement of a two-state solution and his statement that not all West Bank settlements will remain under Israeli control, even a nationalist like Netanyahu appears to have given up the idea of a 'Greater Israel'.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, many ultra-Orthodox in Israel care less about the existence of Israel than about maintaining their rigid and often intolerant fundamentalist positions, and they support the Netanyahu government only to the extent that it funds their separate educational institutions and maintains their 'free ridership' status, which includes exemption from military conscription for those engaged in the study of Torah.

The attitudes of Israeli and diaspora Jews are often presented in a categorical left v. right, liberal v. conservative, or religious v. secular position. These dichotomies are simplistic. In reality, there is a great deal of ambiguity, and attitudes change in response to events. In short, the polemics regarding a 'Greater Israel' have become irrelevant, and their

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<sup>12</sup> A vision once reflected in Jabotinsky's *shtey gadot leyarden, zo shelanu, zo gam ken* (The Jordan has two banks, this one is ours, and that one, too). It is true that territorial maximalists and messianic nationalists hold out for a biblical Israel. But there are relatively few of them beyond the Gush Emunim settlers.

invocation by the Israeli left is meaningless and inflammatory. The more secularist universalist camp in the diaspora tends to view the Israeli situation from an American perspective, which ignores the neighbourhood in which Israel is located, namely, one marked by the absence of a tradition of states combining western democracy with religious pluralism.

It is important to note that Arabs continue to refuse to accept Israel as a predominantly Jewish state in their midst. There is a notion, widely held among liberal Israelis, that such acceptance would come with regional prosperity: once the Palestinians, and perhaps the Arabs in neighbouring countries, become *embourgeoisé*, ethno-religious hostilities would disappear and the region would become another Switzerland or Benelux. This reflects the belief in the rational-choice, i.e., economic-benefit, paradigm and its applicability to the Middle East. Still others believe that once their Arab neighbours become democracies, Israel's borders will be secure, since (according to a widely held theory among political scientists) 'democracies don't make war on one another'.

## 8 Israel and the reproduction of diaspora syndromes

The Israelotropic orientation of diaspora Jews is matched by behavioural patterns in Israel that may be considered mimetic representations of diasporic attitudes. The diaspora is replicated in Israel in the persistence of sub-identities – Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Ethiopian, 'Anglo-Saxon', Hasidic, academic-universalist, and so on – that constitute microcosms of the diaspora (Attias and Benbassa 1998: 155). It is the existence of such sub-identities that serves to maintain family connections with the diaspora.

There are other manifestations of 'diasporism' in Israel. Some of these are continuations, or imports, of diaspora political culture. *Inter alia*, these include draft-dodging, tax evasion, questionable financial dealings, bribery scandals, undisciplined driving habits, lack of respect for the environment, and *protektsia* ('connections'). Some of these behaviour patterns are particularly common among *haredim* ('tremblers' before God, i.e. segments of the ultra-Orthodox) who live, as it were, in an 'internal' diaspora; but uncivic behaviour is also spreading to other sectors of society. This *incivisme* is attributed by some to a growing elite selfishness, a development that may in turn be attributed to the decline of the kibbutz, the expansion of the post-industrial economy, and the growing gap between rich and poor (see Safran 2003: 391–92). There is also a declining commitment to Israel's future, which is signalled by an increasing number of Israelis getting second passports (including Polish and German ones). Ostensibly to facilitate their travels, this step by Israelis may indicate a hedging of their bets about the survival of Israel as a stable Jewish sanctuary. Eastern European countries used to be unsafe for Jews; now it is Israel that is a relatively 'unsafe' country insofar as it is chronically faced with an existential threat and frequently subjected to rocket attacks. At the same time, its cities are safer than many in 'safe' countries.

Another symptom of diasporism in Israel has to do with its global pariah status and insecurity. In the diaspora, the instability of the Jewish community, manifested by legal disabilities, physical attacks, and periodic threats of expulsion, had forced Jews to take protective measures. These included being on their best behaviour so as not to 'make



waves' and appeasing their (putative or real) enemies in order to be left alone. In Israel, one expression of good behaviour is to make unilateral territorial concessions. Such concessions may have been (and may still be) necessary; but they have become components of what has been called the 'peace process' (as distinct from peace), and have led to a territorial 'concession creep', as demonstrated by events in Lebanon and Gaza.

An assessment of the rationality of concessions is not a simple matter, for it reflects not only sober realpolitik but also cultural syndromes and personal experiences. Veterans of Nazi ghettos tend to view with suspicion those who argue that if the Israelis make territorial concessions, the Arabs will be nicer to them. They view concessions as 'salami tactics': give up land and gain a reprieve until the next demand. Rightly or wrongly, they compare such concessions to the accommodationist behaviour of Jewish leaders in the ghettos who, like Jacob Gens of the Vilnius Ghetto, thought that they could 'give up hundreds to save a thousand'.

The analogy may be inappropriate, for in the case of Egypt, the withdrawal from occupied territory has brought several decades of relative peace. Thus, the concessions were a practical matter. But concessions have also been a reflection of moral insecurity. This has led many Israelis to call for an anticipatory concession: a complete withdrawal from the West Bank; and some have demanded that the American president force Israel to undertake this step by ultimatum.

Many Israelis have catalogued Israel's misbehaviour, and have portrayed their country as not being in conformity with democratic norms. They have been justified in pointing, *inter alia*, to instances of corruption among their political elite; to discriminatory policies *vis-à-vis* Arabs; to racist pronouncements by rabbis; to the official identitarian category of 'Jewish nationality'; and to the demand by *Yisrael Beiteinu* (Israel is Our Home), a nationalist party heavily supported by immigrants from the former Soviet Union, for a loyalty oath by all its citizens and for preference in civil service recruitment given to those who served in the Israeli army.<sup>13</sup> Some Israelis, in particular left-oriented academics and journalists, have made a career of such criticisms. They have compared Israel's behaviour to that of Nazi Germany and South Africa's apartheid regime; they have asserted that Israel does not have a free press, that it lacks a civil society, that it is one of the most autocratic polities in the world, and that Netanyahu is Israel's Leonid Brezhnev.<sup>14</sup> One *Haaretz* journalist suggested that instead of slinging mud at the Goldstone Report, Israel should be thankful for it, because it will cause that country to refrain from deliberately attacking civilians in the future.<sup>15</sup>

This recalls an analogous argument of Jewish reformers in nineteenth-century Germany that in order to gain acceptance by the Christian world, Jews should become more 'civilized', and that their Judaism should become more 'well-tempered'.<sup>16</sup> Some have tended

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<sup>13</sup> These Israelis ignore the shortcomings of Western democratic countries to which they compare themselves: the US, with its poll tax, its preference for war veterans in admission to the civil service, and the long tradition of Anglo-conformity; and France, with the demand by the nationalist right for a *préférence nationale*.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of such critiques, see Alexander and Bogdanor 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Gideon Levy editorial in *Haaretz*, October 1, 2009. He did not react when Goldstone distanced himself (in part) from his own report.

<sup>16</sup> One might imagine another analogy: Medieval Jews arguing that they should be thankful to the Christian world for reminding them to mend their ways and not poison wells in the future.

to blame Israel for the world's hostile attitudes. Thus Moshe Zimmermann, an Israeli historian, blamed Zionism for introducing anti-Semitism into the Middle East,<sup>17</sup> a charge reminiscent of German Jews blaming themselves for their country's problems, or blaming *Ostjuden* for its anti-Semitism.

Some have contended that Israel was born in sin, thereby echoing the lament of diaspora Jews about their exile having been caused by their own sins.<sup>18</sup> The proverbial individual 'Jewish guilt' syndrome of the diaspora has been translated to a collective 'Zionist guilt'. That syndrome has been embraced in particular by the so-called New Historians, who have challenged Israel's founding narrative (Silberstein 1999). This narrative, they have argued, clashes with that of the Palestinians, and they have insisted that the demand, made not only by Prime Minister Netanyahu but also by a number of Western leaders, that Palestinians recognise Israel as a Jewish state is tantamount to asking them to give up their own national identity.<sup>19</sup> They also argue that Israel is an anachronism and should not have been created; that its creation was based on false premises and a misreading of historical developments; and that, in short, it has no right to exist.<sup>20</sup> Finally, they argue that the Israeli Jews' claim and a basic tenet of Zionism (often reiterated by Netanyahu) that they live in the land of their forefathers, is irrelevant, if not false, and they must abandon it. One writer is quoted as saying that the idea of a Jewish state is a logical impossibility because 'a state cannot be Jewish, just as a chair or a bus cannot be Jewish';<sup>21</sup> another, that there is no history of 'the Jewish people' but there are histories of local Jews as part of the non-Jewish milieu (Zimmerman 2000: 11); and still another has insisted that the Jewish people is a mere invention (Sand 2009).<sup>22</sup>

Such reasoning leads to one solution: Israel must de-Judaize itself, if only to accommodate to its environment. That kind of accommodation, advocated by selected segments of the Israeli secular elite, is reminiscent of the widespread belief by emancipated Jews in Germany that Judaism was too Oriental and must adapt to the majority by becoming more Western. There is a difference: Jews were a minority in Germany, whereas they are (still) a majority in Israel.

The above arguments, in particular the vilification of Israel, its institutions, and its people may have begun as serious historical revisionism undertaken by Israeli scholars who have approached their subject as if they were totally detached from it – in short, as if Israel were somebody else's country. Historical revisionism is not confined to Israel, of course; it is engaged in by historians in many countries. But these countries are firmly established, their existence is not under threat, and their legitimacy is not called into question. Israel appears

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Alexander, 'Israelis Against Themselves', in Alexander and Bogdanor 2006: 44.

<sup>18</sup> Some of these arguments are dealt with in greater detail in Safran 2009, esp. 86–90.

<sup>19</sup> This position is reflected in an editorial in *Haaretz* of June 17, 2011. See Dmitry Shumsky, 'The historical truth behind the Israeli-Palestinian narrative', *Haaretz*, June 23, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Arabs agree with that position. According to a recent poll conducted by Sammy Smooha, 61.4 per cent of Israeli Arabs asserted that Israel has no right to exist as a Jewish state. *Jerusalem Post*, 19 May 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Amos Oz, cited by Alexander and Bogdanor 2006: 40.

<sup>22</sup> Sand revisited the questionable 'Thirteenth Tribe' thesis of Arthur Koestler.

to be the only *democratic* country whose elite often denigrates it regularly from abroad.<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps also the only state part of whose intellectual sector calls (explicitly or implicitly) for its dissolution.<sup>24</sup>

Israeli revisionists often go beyond rational critical analysis. In some cases, their fault-finding may be seen as an example of the self-criticism that is part of the Jewish intellectual tradition, or it may represent an attempt at *heshbon hanefesh*, a moral accounting. In other cases, it may reflect ideological conviction. In still other cases, it may manifest a desire to prove the critics' progressive credentials or to curry favour with academic circles abroad; a quest for notoriety; or even participation in 'a carnival of self-loathing' (Hazony 2000: 339) that is reminiscent of the *mea culpas*, the self-flagellations, and the self-hatred of Jews in the diaspora.

Some of the positions listed above stem from exasperation and from a belief that a change in policy can be produced by exaggerating a problem; nevertheless, their dissemination poses a danger to Israel because they are quickly embraced by a hostile world and lead to Israel's delegitimation and the growth of anti-Semitism in diaspora hostlands.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, they make it difficult for the diaspora, especially in the United States, to stand up for Israel as it looks for support from political decision-makers.

## 9 Looking out for Israel? Political connections, assurances, and 'tough love'

In their solicitude for Israel, diaspora Jews obviously use their connections with their hostland's political institutions. Jews in the United States continue to support the Democratic Party out of habit. The party has traditionally stood for both a progressive domestic agenda and support for Israel. Jews have a particular positive memory of Presidents Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson. The party continues to be heavily funded by Jews, and the overwhelming majority of Jewish members of Congress have been Democrats. But in recent years elements within that party have become increasingly reserved, if not hostile, towards Israel. These include a former president, a number of presidential advisors, and members of think tanks, as well as officials of the State Department, an institution that continues to be uncomfortable with Israel's existence.

In the presidential elections of 2008 Jews voted overwhelmingly for Barack Obama, because his campaign rhetoric suggested that he would pursue the progressive policy goals supported by Jews (the exceptions were Orthodox Jews, whose socio-religious attitudes seemed to be better represented in the Republican 'values' agenda). Jewish voters were also encouraged by his promise to defend Israel's interests by promoting face-to-face negotiations with the Palestinians rather than dictating solutions. But since Obama has been

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<sup>23</sup> I distinguish Israel here from Nazi Germany, Franco's Spain, Stalin's Russia, and Ahmadinejad's Iran, much of whose *expatriated* elite complained that they had been prevented from voicing their opinion in their dictatorial homeland and could express their opposition only abroad.

<sup>24</sup> Many of them now live in diaspora (in particular in Britain and France), whence they continue to demonise Israel. They include Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim, Akiva Orr, Rony Brauman and Eyal Sivan, among others.

<sup>25</sup> It has been noted that the shrillest and most self-critical diatribes by Israeli intellectuals against their own country are almost immediately published in English and/or French and often become best-sellers. See Megged 1994 and Levin 2008: 3–14.

in office he has reneged on a number of campaign promises and has been governing less like a progressive Democrat than a moderate Republican. He is regarded by some as indifferent to Israel and as tone-deaf to Jewish concerns; and there are fears that, once he is elected to a second term, Jewish support would no longer be needed, and any remaining constraints against imposing a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict or sacrificing Israel in favour of the Palestinians would disappear (especially if such a settlement might be the only 'progressive' policy legacy available to him). Therefore, his assurances regarding Israel's security are met with a great deal of suspicion. This suspicion increased when Obama, in a speech at the State Department in May 2011, came out categorically in favour of an Arab-Israeli peace based substantially on the armistice lines existing before 1967. This was reflected in opinion polls, which showed that both diaspora Jews and rank-and-file Israelis were becoming increasingly concerned about the reliability of Obama's assurances.

As a result, Jews may turn increasingly to the Republican party. That party (at least under Presidents Reagan and George W. Bush) has seemed to be more friendly towards Israel, as have certain supporters of the Republicans, such as selected Christian fundamentalists.<sup>26</sup> But Christian 'Zionists' have their own agenda; and the apparent pro-Israel orientation of the Republican Party is unreliable.

The Republican Party is an uncertain ally for a number of reasons. The party has been traditionally uncomfortable with ethnic, racial, and non-Christian minorities. A number of its politicians and many of its supporters believe that the United States is a Christian country and that it was established by the founders as such; oppose separation of state and religion; and harbour anti-Semitic attitudes. The party is overwhelmingly supported by traditional Catholics. These Catholics, in America as elsewhere, continue to be theologically opposed to the existence of Israel, despite the overtures of Pope John Paul II; in fact, *America*, the influential Jesuit weekly, recently published an article favouring the dissolution of Israel and its replacement by a bi-national state. Finally, the Republican party continues to maintain strong ties to Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing countries of the Middle East. In sum, Republican support of Israel is purely tactical – it is soft, and inspired by short-term electoral considerations.

The tactical nature of the party's seemingly pro-Israel position is illustrated by Sarah Palin's visit to that country, Glenn Beck's recent paeans to Israel as a defender of civilization, Mitt Romney's support of Netanyahu against Obama, and the exaggerated pandering by Newt Gingrich to the Jewish electorate. But these actions have not effaced their positions on social issues that most Jews oppose.

American support of Israel, in the form of military aid, assurances and guarantees, has come from both sides of the political divide, but this has been dependent on perceptions of the political weight and unity of the Jewish community. If that community is perceived to be divided or politically weakened, such support will correspondingly decline, irrespective of existing commitments, understandings, or treaties. American Jewry's internal divisions are embodied by two major rival lobbies – The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which understates Israel's internal faults and shortcomings (such as its behaviour

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<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the post-electoral position of American Jews, see Prince-Gibson 2008.

towards Palestinians) in order to preserve a façade of unity within the diaspora; and J-Street, which overstates these shortcomings. J-Street describes itself as pro-Israel, and many of its supporters undoubtedly are; however, a number of that organisation's positions suggest that it may be more interested in demonstrating the American Jewish community's image of progressivism and American patriotism and in improving the international image of Israel rather than in its security or even its survival. These positions include opposing Obama's veto of the UN Security Council Resolution condemning Israel's settlement policies as illegal; refusing to take issue with the Goldstone Report, which accused Israel of war crimes in Gaza;<sup>27</sup> and not only declining to fight the 'Boycott Israel' campaign but inviting a Jewish supporter of Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions (BDS) to address its national conference (Goldberg 2011). J-Street's position with respect to BDS has evoked a particularly negative reaction: it has recalled the Nazi *Kauft nicht bei Juden* campaign, the call to boycott Jewish stores – except that Jews themselves had not supported it.<sup>28</sup> The apparent unconcern of J-Street about a nuclear threat to Israel from Iran also reminds one of the downplaying by part of the American Jewish establishment of the Hitler regime and its threat to Jews. In view of the foregoing, J-Street's claim that it is pro-Israel has been called into question by many Jews (Rosner 2011: 208–9).<sup>29</sup> What is certain, however, is that the J-Street establishment, like most organisations, will continue beyond its initial function of providing a counterweight to AIPAC.

The J-Street approach is intended to be one of 'tough love' for Israel – that is, acting in the best interest of that country against its own will. Reflected in demands that Obama deal with Israel more imperatively than he has been accused of doing, this approach is intended to help Israel become an exemplary democracy and 'take risks for peace' (Guttman 2011). But rather than promote peace negotiations and help Israel, the initiatives of J-Street may suggest to Obama that the Jewish community is sufficiently divided for him to try to impose a solution. Jewish leaders in diaspora understand this; the overwhelming majority have reacted negatively to Obama's policy as outlined in his aforementioned speech before the State Department (see Cooper 2011). The American Jewish community's fear of a sellout of Israel by Obama appears to be shared by the majority of Israelis. Israeli polls showing over 60 per cent support of Netanyahu's position, and his personal popularity rose by 13 per cent to 51 per cent after his speech to the US Congress. American Jewish support is even higher, with 84 per cent of American Jews believing that the Israeli government is committed to establishing a genuine peace with the Palestinians.<sup>30</sup>

## 10 The continuing reality of anti-Semitism

In North America as well as all European countries, official institutional anti-Semitism no longer exists, and Jews exercise their religion freely. Given an increasingly complex mosaic of ethnic and religious groups in these countries, Jews have been reasonably successful in maintaining a balancing act between multiculturalism and homogenising pressure, and

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<sup>27</sup> Subsequently J-Street praised Goldstone when he retracted the claims in his Report.

<sup>28</sup> Note that J-Street went further than Meretz. While opposing Israel's settlement policies, this leftist party opposes BDS.

<sup>29</sup> This long-time Israeli observer of the American Jewish scene shares the negative view regarding J-Street.

<sup>30</sup> Luntz Global poll of May 16-17, 2011, in CAMERA press release, May 29, 2011.

between trans-territorialism and rootedness. But this act may not be sustained forever, because xenophobia has been growing and anti-Semitism has grown with it.

For several decades following the end of the Second World War, anti-Semitism declined sharply. In the United States, it was eclipsed by a continuing anti-Black racism; and in Europe there was a taboo, or moratorium, against the open expression of anti-Semitic attitudes, in part because of a guilty conscience regarding the wartime behaviour of many of its citizens. In recent years, however, the taboo appears to have been lifted, and anti-Semitism has been reasserting itself strongly. But whereas traditional anti-Semitism was largely theological and right-wing, much of its contemporary version is ideological and left-wing. Old anti-Semitism was reactionary, whereas the new anti-Semitism is wrapped in the cloak of progressivism, and waged in the name of fighting against the oppression of the Palestinians by the Israelis. This is illustrated in France by the frequent juxtaposition of the *siono-impérialistes* and the *palestino-progressistes*; in Sweden by the campaign of the mayor of Malmö to 'fight against Zionism and anti-Semitism'; and in Germany by charges that the 'Zionists' are behaving towards the Palestinians exactly as the Nazis behaved towards Jews.<sup>31</sup> There is also an electoral factor – the growing number of Muslims in European countries who have become the principal purveyors of Judeophobia.

Hostility to Israel is not always the sentiment that drives anti-Semitism, nor is all anti-Israel sentiment motivated by anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, however, much of it is. There is no doubt that the hostility of Patrick Buchanan in the United States, George Galloway in Britain, and Jean-Marie Le Pen in France is an expression of anti-Semitism, and it is unwise to ignore that fact. Anti-Semitism has maintained itself strongly in Austria, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Spain, and Ukraine, and much of it is still of a theological nature; and it has reasserted itself in Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. It is probable that some of the religiously inspired anti-Jewish measures in a number of countries, such as a ban on kosher slaughtering and campaigns against ritual circumcision, have been driven by anti-Israel sentiments. There is little if anything that Israel can do about it.

Israel's position with respect to these developments is ambivalent. As Yossi Beilin put it, '[t]he Israel establishment has an interest in calling attention to examples of unrelenting anti-Semitism, as evidence that Jews cannot really integrate successfully into non-Jewish society...At the same time, the Jews in Israel are very proud of the achievements of their Diaspora brethren and have no desire to see them fail' (Beilin 2000: 80). Unfortunately, the bickering within Israeli society and the unrelenting attacks by certain academics and journalists on people who disagree with them contribute both to the new anti-Semitism and to a growing impatience with Israel on the part of the diaspora.

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<sup>31</sup> These false analogies are occasionally buttressed by citations of Israelis, e.g. Yeshayahu Leibowitz's remark several years ago that 'Israelis [are] behaving like Nazis' and a statement by Amira Hass, an extreme-left journalist, that 'Israeli apartheid is worse than [that of] South Africa'.

## 11 Conclusion

This paper has been informed by the proposition that neither Israel as a Jewish state nor a Jewishly identified diaspora can exist without the other. They are linked by religion, a common notion of peoplehood, experiences of anti-Semitism, kinship ties, and a common fate. But as was pointed out, religion is weakening in both camps due to galloping secularisation; and the notion of Jewish peoplehood is challenged in the diaspora by intermarriage, a trend that undermines ethnic cohesion. The memory of the Holocaust is gradually fading, and is rejected by many Israelis as a reminder of an embarrassing episode. Family ties, once very important in linking Israel and the diaspora, are loosening with every successive generation, as the number of Jewish immigrants to Israel is not replenished. The fear of a daily, physically threatening anti-Semitism has lessened, as hostlands appear to be less openly hostile to Jews.

Finally, the notion of transborder Jewish solidarity is challenged in Israel by post-Zionists and others who focus on a politically defined Israeli nationhood (see Evron 1995: 191–5).<sup>32</sup> In the opinion of Akiva Orr, secular Zionists are '[a] group whose loyalty is to the Jewish state and who consider Jews as an ethnic group and the Jewish religion as an expendable, outdated appendage...For many Zionists, the Jewish state is the end, whereas the Jewish people are the means'. But he admits that 'the fact that Zion is the religious name for Palestine, and that the Zionist flag is based on the Jewish prayer shawl, reveals...that the secular Zionists cannot sever the link between Jewish ethnicity and Jewish religion. Secular Jewish nationalism is culturally dependent on the Jewish religion' (Orr 1994: 15). Orr argues further that for Israelis, the notion of Jewish peoplehood is used to replenish Israel's Hebrew-speaking ethnic majority; while for the diaspora, Israel serves as a means to sustain Jewish peoplehood in diaspora.

The public pronouncements of some prominent Israelis, including academics and journalists, convey the impression of that they dislike Israel as a *Jewish state* and would prefer to see it replaced by a secular transethnic state. There is even a question whether they care much about the survival of Jewish *peoplehood*. They occasionally do invoke such peoplehood if it serves their ideological purposes, much as secular Jews in the diaspora, including those who maintain no ties to the Jewish community, selectively invoke their 'ethnic' Jewishness in order to attack Zionism. But in the final analysis, they believe that Israel is 'too Jewish'. They envisage that country ideally as a secular state defined politically and linguistically, in which religion or ethnicity plays no role. Such a state is utopian and exists nowhere in the real world. It is particularly unrealistic in the case of Israel, whose very existence is based on the will of a people defined, not by territory or polity, but religion (no matter how interpreted) and/or descent. Moreover, Israel as a secular 'linguocracy' (in place of a religiously-flavoured 'ethnocracy') is a shortsighted proposition. Israel as a merely Hebrew-speaking state without a religious component would alienate the diaspora, whose

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<sup>32</sup> When Israel was established, religious authorities were given authority to determine criteria for personal status matters, defining 'who is a Jew', dietary restrictions, and Sabbath observance. This decision, confirmed by the Israeli Supreme Court, tied Israel to the diaspora in that it accorded preeminence to membership in the 'Jewish nation' (defined in Orthodox terms) over that in the 'Israeli nation' (defined in Zionist terms). Today, the overwhelming majority of Jews in the diaspora and an increasing number of Israelis oppose that arrangement, the former for the sake of pluralism, and the latter for reasons of nationalism.

collective identity is not defined in terms of the Hebrew language. Specifically, Hebrew without Judaism in Israel is juxtaposed to one or another form of (predominantly non-Orthodox) Judaism with little or no Hebrew in the diaspora. This juxtaposition is exemplified by the recent publication in Israel of a Hebrew-language cookbook containing recipes for pork and seafood dishes, and the production in the United States of a steady stream of Jewish cookbooks in English.

Given the rampant secularism of diaspora Jewry, the fading memory of the Holocaust, the superficiality, if not absence, of a specifically Jewish secular culture, and the unacceptability and (owing to intermarriage) unrealism of a purely hereditary definition of Jewishness, Israel remains the only concrete identitarian anchor. In the absence of the linkage with Israel, a meaningful Jewish identity – that is, one beyond a merely self-definitional Jewishness – in the diaspora will ultimately be confined to a handful of Orthodox (and largely Yiddish-speaking) enclaves, almost exclusively in North America.

In Israel itself, as a country in which the Jewish religion plays no significant role, the Hebrew language would before long cease to define the dominant collective identity. Given the superior birthrate of the Muslim Arabs, the Arabic language would become dominant, and the Hebrew-speaking population would inevitably be minoritised.<sup>33</sup> Religious and Hebrew-speaking Jews would become a tolerated *dhimmi* community in the Middle East. In sum, these developments would undermine the continuation of Jewish peoplehood. Israel as an officially bi-national rather than a Jewish state would be even worse, for one would have to envisage the following scenario: given a high birthrate and a predictable illegal immigration of Arabs from neighbouring countries, such a state would eventually be dominated by Arabs; the Hebrew language would be reduced to secondary status, and Jews would constitute a permanent minority, albeit a significant one. In the end, the *raison d'être* of the existing linkage between the diaspora and Israel would disappear.

A de-ethnicisation of Israel would contribute to a break with the diaspora as much as would a de-Judaisation or a reluctance to conceive of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. As it happens, Israel is far from being de-ethnified or de-Judaised. A growing number of Israelis agree with the diaspora in wanting to end the monopoly of the Orthodox rabbinate regarding matters of religion and personal status, and demanding a more pluralistic, more 'laid-back', and more voluntaristic Judaism; they want to end religious politics and religious political parties, but they do not want to destroy the Jewish character of the state and society. In short, most Israelis do not want to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater', i.e. to empty Israel of its Jewish content.

This applies also to the vast majority of Jews who label themselves secular: they value their Jewishness, practise Jewish rites of passage, and celebrate Jewish festivals. It is doubtful that there are many Israelis of Jewish descent who do not consider themselves Jews, especially in light of the fact that Israel's basically Jewish identity is evident on a daily basis.

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<sup>33</sup> According to a recent poll of Palestinians on the West Bank, a majority anticipates an ultimate Arab takeover of Israel under a 'two-states' solution.



The diaspora harbours its own illusions: specifically, that Jewish identity, and ultimately Jewish existence, can be assured regardless of whether Israel exists or not. In the foreseeable future, Israel is likely to be the only focal point of diaspora Jewish identity that will remain standing. Despite the growing secularisation of its society, Israel is Jewish in an institutional sense and still for the most part Jewish in an essentialist way. Israel is self-identified as a 'Jewish state', no matter how that concept is interpreted; and although lessening and not always explicit, its Israeli and Jewish identities are intertwined, as manifested in the fact that its religious holidays and its Sabbath have been nationalised; its school calendar is the Jewish religious calendar; part of its legal system, including its personal-status law, is based on Talmudic law; and the study of the Bible is part of the curriculum in the state school system. Diaspora Jews are ambivalent about certain aspects of that reality: they want Israel to be the political expression of Jewish peoplehood; at the same time, they do not want Israel to prescribe their personal way of being Jewish.

Both Israel and the diaspora have an interest in the maintenance of their respective identities. The pursuit of this interest requires reciprocity: the diaspora Jews must remain sufficiently Jewish to retain their interest in Israel; and Israel must remain appropriately Jewish to retain the interest and support of the diaspora. For without Israel as a focus, Jewish identity will become hopelessly attenuated; and without a Jewishly identified diaspora, Israel will lose its only reliable ally. For without the support of the diaspora, one manifested by its voting and lobbying potential, in particular that of the United States, decision-makers will have little incentive to support the existence of Israel.

Yehezkel Dror proposes a number of steps Israel can take. They include, first of all, Israel's abandoning the notion that the diaspora is 'temporary, pathological, and dangerous' (Dror 2008).<sup>34</sup> This is important, given the belief by diaspora Jewish leaders, especially non-Zionist ones, that attempts by Israel to assert its centrality have a 'disempowering' effect on the diaspora (Silberstein 1999: 20). This belief, in my opinion, applies in particular to leaders of the Jewish establishment whose own Jewishness rests on a flimsy foundation and to those who conceive of Judaism in America as an autonomous and distinctly 'American' religion.

Second, Dror argues, Israel must 'recreate Zionism' by making Jerusalem the 'civilizational capital' of the Jewish people, seeing to it that Israel becomes a 'substantially more Jewish' state and that the majority of Israelis continue to attach importance to their identity as Jews. This requires 'that Israeli elites understand the realities of the Jewish people fully...that Israeli leaders also function as highly-qualified leaders of the Jewish people' and that Israel assume 'co-responsibility for the future of Jewish communities around the world' (Dror 2008: 27).

Dror also wants to strengthen both the Jewish identity of the diaspora and its identification with Israel by making it 'an exemplary state, one that Jews and potential Jews can be proud of'. That, I believe, would be a state free of corruption, economic inequality, and intolerance towards minorities, and one that embraces a more flexible and more inclusive definition of 'who is a Jew', a step that calls for political courage and the abandonment of opportunism on the part of both religious and secular political forces.

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<sup>34</sup>Dror, a political scientist, is the founder of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute.

Instead of maligning Israel for falling short of such ideals, both Israel and the diaspora should work hard at achieving them.

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