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AFTER 10/7: ANTISEMITISM IN A CHANGED WORLD

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Editorial

Ayal Feinberg, Jennifer Wilson, Ella Nayor, Rodi Franco, Rich Quinlan, Robert Litman, Rachel Sari-Singer

Being an American Jew after 10/7—and What This Moment Asks of Scholarship



On October 7, 2023, Hamas's massacre in Israel shattered lives and assumptions in an instant. What followed—a gruesome war, incalculable grief, and a tidal wave of public reaction—reshaped civic life far beyond the region. In the United States and across the diaspora, many Jews describe a newly ambient scrutiny: the sense of being drafted, without consent, as spokespersons for a conflict thousands of miles away; the vigilance required to navigate classrooms, workplaces, and friendships where the abstract language of geopolitics can suddenly become intimate, accusatory, and raw. This social pressure need not announce itself with slurs or threats. Instead, it often arrives as an "invisible" discrimination: the expectation that one's Jewishness explains, justifies, or negates one's moral standing; the quiet recalibration of relationships; the feeling that ordinary encounters may turn, without warning, into moral tribunals.

That experience of being rendered representative does not exhaust the complex realities of Jewish life after 10/7. Nor does it diminish the profound human suffering of Palestinian civilians or the trauma borne by Israelis, hostages' families, and connected communities worldwide. Rather, it underscores the urgency of clear thinking at a time when pain, rage, and political allegiance can too easily substitute for analysis. This Special Issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* takes that urgency seriously. Our contributors examine what has changed since 10/7 as well as what has not across culture, politics, law, education, and digital life. They interrogate the boundary work between antizionism and antisemitism, the spread and mutation of conspiracy theories, and the ways institutions have responded, or failed to respond, to the risks Jews face in public and private spheres.

From Private Encounters to Public Narratives

A recurring theme in Jewish life over the last two years and illustrated in some of the articles gracing this special issue, is the translation of global events into local expectations. Well-meaning acquaintances ask Jewish colleagues to adjudicate the latest op-ed; peers and strangers alike seek emotional validation or political confession. The effect is cumulative. Even without explicit hostility, the daily demand to account for Israel and her actions—real, exaggerated, and fictitious—often in spaces unequipped or inappropriate for nuanced debate, can produce estrangement. This serves as a representative burden: the presumption that Jews, by virtue of identity alone, must answer for a state's actions, accept collective blame, or disclaim their own belonging.

This burden sits alongside more familiar forms of antisemitism that surged after 10/7: vandalism, harassment, intimidation, and the rhetoric of elimination directed at Jews as Jews. Our authors parse the data carefully, distinguishing incidents from perceptions, sentiment from behavior, and correlation from causation. They also resist the false choice between acknowledging Jewish vulnerability and

acknowledging Palestinian suffering. Both are facts that any serious analysis must hold at once.

The Scholarly Task in a Polarized Field

In July 2024, a prominent Holocaust scholar, Omer Bartov, published a widely discussed essay accusing Israel of Genocide in Gaza in the *New York Times*. Regardless of one's view of that piece, its reception illustrates a broader challenge: public discourse that collapses historical analogy, legal terminology, and moral outrage into slogans. Scholarship must do the opposite. It must test claims, specify definitions, and trace mechanisms. When terms like "genocide," "ethnic cleansing," or "apartheid" are invoked, rigorous standards—historical, legal, and empirical—should guide their use. Our authors model that rigor. They analyze language and law without treating them as proxies for empathy; they examine institutional responses without ignoring institutional constraints; they disaggregate anti-Israel speech that is protected (and sometimes persuasive) from antisemitic speech that targets Jews as Jews.

What Does This Issue Advance?

The response to our call for papers was extraordinary—an outpouring of research notes, fieldwork, legal analyses, and theoretical interventions from across disciplines and continents. That breadth is itself a finding: the study of antisemitism after 10/7 is not one conversation but many, ranging from campus climate to algorithmic amplification, from organizational policy to interfaith encounter. It is our hope that gone are the days of esoteric debates over antisemitism definitions and spelling.

Space constraints required difficult editorial choices. We are extraordinarily grateful to all who submitted, and we note with appreciation that a number of strong manuscripts, limited by space rather than merit, were not able to be included in this special issue and, consequently, may grace future issues of JCA. The ten pieces in this collection, including a framing essay, fall into several clusters: education, quantitative approaches, and trauma, memory, and repair. Across these themes, our authors ask readers to consider how antisemitism operates today not only as explicit hatred but also as structural exposure—the disproportionate demand placed on Jews to perform penance, provide reassurance, or renounce connection in order to secure ordinary participation in civic life. The following paragraphs contain a summary of each article, and biographies of the authors.

The special issue opens with a framing essay by Ayal Feinberg, "From Insulation to Isolation: Why American Jewish Exceptionalism No Longer Protects Us from Antisemitism—and What Must Replace It." The article argues that the long-standing narrative of American Jewish exceptionalism, while once a source of security and integration, has also produced strategic and intellectual blind spots that have left Jewish institutions and the academy poorly prepared for the current resurgence of antisemitism. By tracing how this narrative shaped communal priorities, scholarly neglect, and coalition politics, the essay provides a conceptual architecture for the pieces that follow. It also advances a structural path forward centered on formal expertise, intervention research, and landscape mapping, thereby framing the special issue not only as a diagnosis of the present moment but as a call for a more rigorous and accountable field of Antisemitism Studies. Ayal Feinberg, PhD, is Associate Professor of Political Science and Antisemitism Studies and Director of the Center for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights at Gratz College, where he oversees the world's first applied doctoral program in Antisemitism Studies. A leading social scientist in the study of antisemitism, his research focuses on its measurement, contemporary expression, and the development and evaluation of evidence-based interventions to reduce anti-Jewish hate. His scholarship bridges rigorous empirical research and applied public impact, with particular emphasis on

survey methodology, intervention design, and strategies for countering antisemitism across institutional and civic settings.

The first article in the education cluster, entitled "Decolonial Psychology's Blind Spot: From Liberation Praxis to Antisemitism," shows that decolonial and liberation psychology have become dominant in conceptual models of mental health treatment. This article details how the foundation of these movements has contributed to antisemitism in the mental health professions. This has resulted from several features including: an ideological history built on theorists who had glib indifference to historical antisemitism; a priori assumptions that Israel is a Western colonial project; and a Manichean perspective where Jews are oppressors. The article concludes with a series of policy recommendations to allow for continued focus on historically oppressed groups that include Jews. Dean McKay, PhD, ABPP, is Professor of Psychology and a core faculty member in Fordham University's Doctoral Clinical Psychology Program. Over the past two years, he has devoted most of his academic energies to addressing antisemitism in the mental and medical health fields. Dr. Miri Bar-Halpern is a clinical psychologist, Lecturer in Psychology at Harvard Medical School, and Director of Trauma Training at Parents for Peace. Her work focuses on trauma, antisemitism, and radicalization, and she is recognized internationally for her scholarship on traumatic invalidation and resilience. Jennifer Kogan, RSW, LICSW, is a family therapist in private practice. She is a founding member of the Jewish Social Work Consortium and an advocate for justice, dignity, and well-being for all. Susan Hess, MSW, LCSW-IL, is Associate Teaching Professor of Practicum Education at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work and co-founder of Trauma Informed Learning Alliance. She is a transnational speaker and advocate for trauma-informed care, with a focus on communities impacted by intimate partner violence, incarceration, and war. Andrea Yudell, LICSW, LCSW-C, is a psychotherapist in the DC Metro Area. A founding member of the Jewish Social Work Consortium, she writes to uphold ethical practice and address rising dehumanizing narratives in social work.

The next article, "Anthropologists' Academic Boycott against Israel: A Critique," offers an anthropological account of the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) academic boycott against Israel. It argues that the AAA academic boycott should be opposed on principle because it impedes international scholarly exchange which is critical for anthropologists, and it is antithetical to norms of academic freedom which the AAA claims to endorse. AAA's obeisance to BDS demands has led to serious loss of AAA membership and revenue as Jews leave the AAA and foundations cut funds. Evidence has also been accumulating that the AAA academic boycott against Israel harms individuals and not just institutions, particularly academics who speak out in opposition to government policies. By singling out Israel for a boycott, the only Jewish state in the world, the association opens itself up to allegations of antisemitism and promotes actions that are counterproductive to a lasting peace. Cynthia Saltzman, PhD, is Lecturer in Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice and an associate member of the Graduate Faculty Rutgers University-Camden.

The penultimate article in the education cluster, "Echoes of October 7th: A Phenomenological Study of Jewish Students' Experiences at a Small Liberal Arts College," offers a close qualitative account of how campus life after October 7 was experienced by Jewish students in a smaller institutional setting. Drawing on in-depth interviews with twenty-five Jewish students at Lafayette College, the article documents both common and divergent themes across students with differing orientations toward Israel, while showing how trauma, isolation, political homogeneity, and uneven institutional response shape their sense of belonging and their understanding of Jewish identity. Particularly important is the article's attention

to the texture of experience on a campus without the scale or visibility of major research universities, thereby filling an important gap in the literature on post-October 7 antisemitism in higher education. In doing so, the study offers not only testimony, but also a framework for faculty and administrators seeking to better understand how campus climate, activism, and institutional choices can intensify vulnerability for Jewish students while also pointing toward more thoughtful forms of support and protection. Monika Rice is Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies and Russian and East European Studies at Lafayette College. Her research interests include Holocaust memory and testimony, Polish–Jewish relations, and contemporary antisemitism. She is the author of *What! Still Alive?! Jewish Survivors in Poland and Israel Remember Homecoming* (Syracuse University Press, 2017), a Choice Outstanding Academic Title, as well as numerous scholarly articles and book chapters.

The final article in the education cluster is entitled "Antisemitism in Higher Education in the United Kingdom: Jewish Students' Experiences since October 7, 2023." It presents the findings of a comprehensive survey of Jewish students at UK universities at the end of the 2023–2024 academic year (n = 497). Respondents reported witnessing many more antisemitic incidents after than before October 7. Furthermore, the greater the number of antisemitic incidents that students personally experienced and witnessed, the more people and spaces they avoided on campus due to antisemitism; the greater their concerns about antisemitism on campus; the more they felt unsafe on campus; and the greater the negative effects of antisemitism on their studies, wellbeing and campus life. Students' own words are highlighted in the open-ended responses, emphasizing the verbal abuse, physical attacks, intimidation, exclusion, and isolation they experienced, hinting at profound negative effects on their mental health. Together, these findings underscore the pressing need to combat the surge in antisemitism across UK universities, for example, by creating and enforcing clear codes of conduct for staff and students to reduce experiences and expressions of antisemitism, alongside robust reporting mechanisms to capture and address these when they do occur. Professor Leslie Morrison Gutman is Vice Dean for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in University College London's (UCL) Faculty of Brain Sciences. She is Professor of Applied Developmental and Health Psychology in UCL's Department of Clinical, Educational, and Health Psychology, and Director of the MSc Behaviour Change program at the UCL Centre for Behaviour Change. Dr Keren Darmon is an honorary fellow (2025–present) at the Parkes Institute, University of Southampton, where she is researching the Oxford and St. George's club, exploring its role in the lives of the many East End Jewish boys and girls who benefited from its presence in their community and life. Until August 2025, Darmon was Lecturer in Media and Communications at the University of Greenwich, following completion of her PhD in Media and Communications at the LSE. Her post-doc research focused on women in PR, marketing, and advertising with a particular interest in women-only professional networks. Darmon is a former media and communications practitioner with extensive experience in the Government Communication Service (1999–2011).

The next cluster contains quantitative approaches, and begins with an article from guest editor Ayal Feinberg and co-author Jacob Lewis. Their study "Thy Brother's Keeper: Attributions of Blame and Responsibility in the Jewish and Muslim Diaspora" investigates when Americans hold diaspora communities collectively accountable for violence or policy decisions abroad. Across three preregistered US survey experiments conducted from 2022 to 2024 (n = 3,242), participants read realistic news-style vignettes and then judged American Jews, Muslims, and Russian Americans on two outcomes: blame for the overseas actor's behavior and perceived responsibility to publicly "speak

out." Results show these are not the same thing. Respondents were generally more willing to impose an expectation of speaking out than to assign direct culpability, suggesting a distinct norm of demanded denunciation. Partisan ideology consistently shaped responses, with right-leaning respondents more likely to attribute blame. Context also mattered: patterns observed in the lower-salience 2022 wave weakened or shifted during high-salience wartime periods, indicating that moments of conflict can change how collective accountability is applied. These findings help elucidate how blame and demanded denunciation can translate into social pressure, discrimination, and policy debates about minority loyalty. Jacob S. Lewis is Associate Professor in the School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs at Washington State University. His research centers on African politics and focuses on issues of corruption, conflict, and political psychology. He also studies issues of antisemitism in a comparative perspective, focusing on mechanisms of blame and the role of conspiracy theories and populism. His work has been published in the *Journal of Peace Research*, *Political Behavior*, *Political Psychology*, *Political Geography*, *Social Movement Studies*, the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, and more. His work has been supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, US Agency for International Development, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Department of Defense's Minerva Initiative.

The quantitative study entitled "Digital Radicalization and Campus Antisemitism: The Role of Social Media Networks in Mainstreaming Extremist Rhetoric" examines the relationship between anti-Israel campus activism, social media networks, and antisemitic incidents at US universities from 2015 to 2024. Analyzing over 76,000 Instagram posts from anti-Israel campus groups, nearly 10,000 documented antisemitic incidents across 571 universities, and more than 1,000 campus organizations, we find a statistically significant correlation between anti-Israel group presence and antisemitic incident rates—a relationship that intensifies at universities with the highest incident levels. Network analysis reveals National Students for Justice in Palestine as the central coordinating hub within a broader ecosystem extending to off-campus radical organizations, including the Palestinian Youth Movement, which has reported ties to the US-designated terrorist organization Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, as well as groups from the radical left such as Dissenters and The People's Forum. Faculty-led groups also represent a significant portion of the anti-Israel organizations that are active on US campuses. These networks were positioned to leverage the October 7, 2023, attacks as a catalyst for rapidly escalating and mainstreaming radicalized rhetoric glorifying violence and mirroring Hamas propaganda—a surge that intensified further during the spring 2024 campus encampments. We argue this networked ecosystem facilitates the normalization of extremist discourse and contributes to conditions where antizionism and antisemitism become entrenched on many American campuses. Gunther Jikeli is Erna B. Rosenfeld Professor at Indiana University. Dr. Daniel Miehling is a Samarian Foundation research fellow at the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism (ISCA), Borns Jewish Studies Program, at Indiana University, Bloomington.

The last quantitative study, "Antisemitic Narratives on Social Media Become More Radicalized: Increases in Posts Portraying Jews as Evil, Dehumanizing Jews, and from People Self-Identifying as Antisemitic since October 7, 2023," examines how antisemitic rhetoric on social media has intensified following the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel. Drawing on a large-scale analysis of English-language public posts from 2021–2025, the authors identify sharp increases in three categories of discourse: depictions of Jews as inherently evil (up 330%), dehumanizing language (up 324%), and self-identification with antisemitic or Nazi ideology (up 250%). The findings suggest both

a quantitative and a qualitative escalation of hate speech, with growing normalization of explicitly antisemitic expression and erosion of social stigma. The authors argue that this digital radicalization mirrors historical patterns in which the normalization of hate rhetoric precedes real-world violence, underscoring the urgency of proactive intervention by policymakers, platforms, and civil society. Rotem Leiba is Lead Analyst at the Blue Square Alliance against Hate's Command Center. Srinidhi Lakshman is a Brandeis research fellow at BSA's Command Center. Harrison Madnick is a Brandeis research fellow at BSA's Command Center. Steve Mulder is Senior Director of Command Center Analytics and Insights at BSA.

The final cluster focused on trauma, memory, and repair begins with Rachel Benaim-Abudarham's essay, "Antisemitism and the Unclaimed Past: A Trauma-Informed Critique of Jewish Political Discourse," which reimagines contemporary Jewish responses to antisemitism through the lens of collective trauma. Drawing on scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Bessel van der Kolk, and Rachel Yehuda, Benaim-Abudarham argues that Jewish institutional hypervigilance, particularly after 10/7, often functions as a reenactment of unprocessed historical pain. Through close readings, theological reflection, and trauma theory, she calls for a communal shift from defensive posturing toward self-awareness, ethical discernment, and embodied healing. Rachel Benaim-Abudarham is a PhD candidate at Florida Atlantic University, specializing in Jewish history, trauma, and embodiment, with a particular focus on Moroccan Jews. She holds an MS in Journalism from Columbia University and has published in outlets such as the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, and *Tablet Magazine*. An award-winning journalist and educator, she brings together scholarly research and lived narrative to explore how historical suffering becomes present-day communal posture.

The next essay addressing trauma, memory, and repair is, "Weaponizing Trauma Theory against the Jews: A Rebuttal to 'Antisemitism and the Unclaimed Past: A Trauma-Informed Critique of Jewish Political Discourse.'" Rachel Benaim-Abudarham argues that Jews' putatively over-determined and reflexive response to the explosion of antisemitism following October 7 reveals that they have not adequately processed their historical trauma and therefore cannot respond effectively or judiciously to their current crisis. In her response, Corrine Blackmer argues that such unsubstantiated and speculative contentions turn trauma theory against the Jews to deflect from responsible reckoning with the ominous recrudescence of anti-Jewish animus in this contemporary moment. Corinne E. Blackmer, PhD, is Professor of English and Judaic Studies at Southern Connecticut State University. She has authored numerous works on antisemitism and Jewish Studies, and co-edited (with Andrew Pessin) *Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America.*

The article "Engaging in Ethical Activism by Healthcare Professionals: Ensuring Positive Impact without Alienation" analyzes the growing controversy surrounding the politicization of healthcare. The current uptick in activism and advocacy, as well as other political acts, has made this controversy much more visible. Through a look at the rise in antisemitism in healthcare after 10/7, we examine how activism and other political acts can damage relationships of medical professionals and their colleagues and patients, which can undermine quality care. We urge further research and discussion on the role of activism and other overt political acts in healthcare and propose a framework to provide guidance. Dean McKay, PhD, ABPP, is Professor of Psychology and a core faculty member in Fordham University's Doctoral Clinical Psychology Program. Over the past two years, he has devoted most of his academic energies to addressing antisemitism in the mental and medical health fields. Cassondra L. Feldman, PsyD, is a licensed clinical psychologist and educator whose work focuses on health psychology, trauma, and the mental health impact of antisemitism. She is an adjunct professor at Nova Southeastern University,

serves as additional teaching faculty in the Memorial Regional Hospital Psychiatry Residency, and is an affiliate of Baptist West Kendall Hospital's Family Medicine Residency. Elysa Koppelman-White has a PhD in philosophy and an MA in bioethics. She is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Oakland University. Her most recent research focuses on the rise of antisemitism in healthcare. Nicole Z. Spence, MD, is a fellowship-trained anesthesiologist whose clinical work focuses on orthopedic and obstetric anesthesia and analgesia. She is an assistant professor at Boston University and completed her training in New York City and Boston.

Toward a Better Public Square

If scholarship is to serve the public, it must help people talk better. We must engage with more precision, fewer accusations, and a resolute attention to evidence. That does not mean affectlessness. The pain in Israeli and Palestinian communities is real and ongoing; so, too, is the fear many Jews feel in schools, streets, and digital spaces. But facts and empathy are not adversaries. They are co-requirements for a moral public square. Despite the unquestionable feeling that a page has been turned with the acceptance of a hostage-deal and ceasefire, the trauma experienced over the last two years will leave scars on communities for decades to come.

For readers who come to this issue with strong commitments, we offer this invitation: test your intuitions against the arguments and data presented here. Follow the footnotes. Notice where an author persuades you by clarifying a concept, not by hardening a camp. Notice, too, where you are moved by a human story, and then ask what evidence and categories are needed to translate that story into policy, pedagogy, or law.

Finally, for those who recognize themselves in the opening description—the friend asked, yet again, to account for a war you did not wage—know that your experience is part of what this issue seeks to explain. Not to weaponize it, but to understand it: how identity becomes proxy; how solidarity and suspicion intermix; how the lines between political argument and social exclusion can blur. Naming that reality is not the end of our task. It is the beginning of a scholarly and civic project to ensure that, even in a time of anguish, we do not abandon analysis, and, even in a time of argument, we do not abandon each other.

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From Insulation to Isolation: Why American Jewish Exceptionalism No Longer Protects Us from Antisemitism—and What Must Replace It

Ayal Feinberg

Abstract

This article argues that American Jewish exceptionalism, once a powerful narrative of safety, integration, and flourishing, has become a source of strategic and intellectual isolation in an era of resurgent antisemitism. For decades, the belief that the United States offered Jews a uniquely secure and pluralistic home helped structure communal institutions, academic priorities, and coalition politics. Yet that same narrative also fostered critical blind spots: it discouraged the development of formal expertise in antisemitism, treated antisemitism as episodic rather than structural, and encouraged Jewish participation in moral and political frameworks that often-rendered Jewish particularity unintelligible. The article traces how these dynamics have left American Jews and their institutions ill-prepared for a moment in which antisemitism has reentered mainstream discourse. It then examines the tensions involved in replacing this narrative, including debates over American exceptionalism, political polarization, Jewish intersectional identity, and the relationship between urgency and conceptual clarity. In response, the article proposes a structural path forward centered on building formal interdisciplinary expertise in Antisemitism Studies, prioritizing intervention research, and developing landscape mapping frameworks that can evaluate existing strategies, identify gaps, and promote accountability. Moving beyond symbolic reassurance and institutional inertia, the article calls for a new narrative grounded in evidence, resilience, and coordinated action.

Keywords: American Jewish exceptionalism, antisemitism, Antisemitism Studies, intervention mapping, Jewish communal strategy

Part 1: American Jewish Exceptionalism Kept Us Safe. Now It's Keeping Us Isolated



American Jewish exceptionalism—the belief that Jews in the United States have enjoyed a uniquely safe, integrated, and influential existence—once seemed undeniable. Compared to Jewish communities elsewhere, we were more socially accepted, politically connected, and shielded from open antisemitism.

Following World War II, this was, and perhaps remains, the most pervasive self-reflective narrative defining American Jewry.[1] It is impossible to understand current challenges facing the Jewish community without examining the outsized role this frame has had on our institutions and worldview.

American Jewish exceptionalism is like insulating a house so well that it traps its own heat. For decades, this insulation protected us from the storms that battered Jews in Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere. We celebrated our ability to flourish within American liberalism, to be visible, distinct, and thriving. That very pride,

the belief that we had "arrived" and that our experience would diverge from our European forebears, also created a blind spot.

This blind spot was both generated and perpetuated by mistaking representation for safety. From Law to Hollywood, from Madison Avenue to Wall Street, we responded to structural discrimination with expertise. And with this professional acumen came "outsized" representation in critical industries including media, banking, and politics. Even when denied entry to country clubs, schools, and hospitals, we simply built better ones.

Despite representing the same ammunition for conspiratorial antisemitism elsewhere, American Jewish Exceptionalism understood the United States as uniquely different. Here, in a country supposedly defined by pluralism, heterogeneity, and work-ethic, Jewish contributions would not be viewed as a threat but instead be valued as a critical part of the socio-cultural mosaic that makes America so special.

Jewish contributions were not only for Jews, but for all Americans—and exemplified American potential.

The reliance on this narrative within the Jewish community for generations resulted in two critical and interrelated shortcomings.

First, our Jewish institutions never prioritized an expertise in antisemitism. In the academy, Jewish Studies, as a discipline, largely disregarded antisemitism as something unworthy of systematic study. Antisemitism was viewed as episodic and unpredictable. It was in the error term. Few examples capture this more clearly than the response of the Association for Jewish Studies' *AJS Perspectives*, which describes itself as the "leading forum for exploring methodological and pedagogical issues in Jewish Studies," in the years following 10/7. As the Jewish world searched for answers to surging antisemitism, *AJS Perspectives* published issues on artificial intelligence, conversion, and LGBTQ topics. It has still not published an issue focused on contemporary antisemitism or on interventions designed to confront it.

Without a means of formal training, "expertise" in countering antisemitism was almost entirely developed through professional experiences. While these professionals certainly have been dedicated to serving the Jewish community, those previously and currently charged with securing a Jewish future often lack the scholarly depth necessary to comprehend the complex challenges of antisemitism, let alone provide evidence-based approaches to combat it.

Unfortunately, this is not surprising, given that many Jewish legacy organizations devoted overwhelming resources to call attention to the problem of antisemitism in the United States—to break through the easy dismissal of rising antisemitism as "hyperbolic" among a community who learned only of American Jewish opportunity and success.

Second, with shifting cultural winds in the 1990s and 2000s, the Jewish community was quick to engage in frameworks where they did not easily fit, and to identify with binary terms and theories that failed to underscore the nuance of the Jewish experience. Privilege, whiteness, and power could be construed to simply (albeit too simply) explain American Jewish exceptionalism.

Consequently, when self-identified marginalized communities constructed and publicized narratives that challenged American exceptionalism, many Jews found themselves at a crossroads—with paths that demanded they prioritize some elements of their identity at the expense of others. Perhaps no factor is more critical in explaining the spike in antizionist and non-Zionist beliefs of younger generations.

In sum, Jews in the United States have remained on a road paved by American Jewish exceptionalism. We supported the moral imperatives of those we considered coalition allies—often vocally, often financially—but increasingly without inserting our own stories, so as not to upset prevailing power-based frameworks. We

showed up for others, but not explicitly as Jews. We told ourselves we were showing up by stepping back—that racism, sexism, and the challenges of "other" minority communities mattered more. We often made these decisions without ever consulting the very groups we still considered "our allies."

And when others, like the "pro-Palestine" movement, interjected their own grievances and histories into the broader conversation about marginalization and within specific actors of outsized influence like Black Lives Matter, we often viewed them not as partners in a shared struggle but as naïve or opportunistic co-opters. They certainly weren't naïve.

Solidarity cannot be sustained through moral memory alone. Too often, we acted as though the coalition politics symbolized by Heschel marching with King in Selma were a permanent inheritance rather than a relationship requiring continual renewal, mutual recognition, and honest negotiation. We rested on the laurels of an earlier alliance structure even as the language of oppression, power, whiteness, colonialism, and belonging shifted around us. And because we often muted our own Jewish particularity in those spaces, we failed to insist that antisemitism, too, belonged within the moral grammar of justice.

Now, as antisemitism reenters the mainstream—not as fringe vitriol but as normalized discourse—the insulation that once protected us is keeping us isolated. The house is sealed. The air is getting thin.

We desperately need a new narrative, and a reimagining of our approach to countering antisemitism. But how do we call for one without falling into the trap of blaming the victim? How do we embark on something as slow and heavy as redefining the Jewish American story in a moment that demands such urgency, and an environment marred by an often-paradoxical mixture of pride, guilt, admiration, and otherness?

PART 2: THE TENSIONS OF REIMAGINING A NEW APPROACH

The project of replacing American Jewish exceptionalism is fraught with tensions that are both natural and unavoidable. They stem not only from the specificities of Jewish history, but also from the broader social, political, and cultural crosscurrents that define the American present.

The first and perhaps most obvious tension concerns whether the very idea of American exceptionalism—not the interrelated but distinct American Jewish exceptionalism—should be celebrated or condemned.

American exceptionalism is the frame of thought founded on the premise that our nation is set apart by its unique mixture of democracy, liberty, and opportunity, and therefore both paved a distinctly positive road for humanity and is destined to play a major guiding role on this road. Once an axiomatic position absent ideological or partisan divides, today the very idea of American exceptionalism is both widely celebrated and condemned.

To many, the narrative of exceptionalism represents the triumph of pluralism—the story of how structural barriers could be challenged and overcome, and how a minority group could flourish within liberal democracy. American Jewish exceptionalism was clearly housed within this view and co-developed symbiotically for American Jews along with it.[2] To others, however, American exceptionalism cannot be disentangled from the very inequities that persist: systemic discrimination, unequal access, and the use of pluralism as a veneer for deeper social cleavages. For those adopting this view, Jewish success can be seen as a function of the privilege associated with their perceived whiteness, and occasionally more noxious musings surrounding in-group prioritization that can become indistinguishable from centuries-old antisemitism emerging out of the Renaissance.[3]

Recasting our communal narrative in the face of this debate risks being misunderstood as either a capitulation to illiberal populist critiques or, conversely, as a refusal to reckon with the country's deeply imperfect structures.

A related challenge emerges from the stark polarization that defines this American moment. Constructing a new narrative risks leaving us once again outside of the dominant frameworks of discourse, whether those of populist nationalism or of identity-based progressive politics. If the old story insulated us but left us isolated, a premature new story could repeat that dynamic in reverse—positioning Jews as perpetually out of step with the theories that frame America's successes and failures.

A third tension lies in our own intersectional identities. We are Jews and Americans simultaneously, and no ideological frame should force us to choose between the two nor pretend that either needs prioritization. Likewise, our commitments to Israel and to Zionism should remain self-evident to our peoplehood, even as many of us express frustration—even disgust—at particular Israeli state and societal actors and policies. We must make clear that Jewish security and prosperity in Israel are non-negotiable, while simultaneously preserving space for harsh criticism of the state's political decisions. This is not a contradiction, but a mark of integrity, and one that American Jews themselves have long prided themselves on. Yet the challenge lies in how others receive this distinction: too often, such nuance is rejected, misused, or weaponized against us.[4]

Finally, there is the tension—both practical and academic—around the factors necessary for implementing change. Do we need to fully articulate an alternative narrative before we begin to act, or should we proceed even as a new framework evolves? Jewish history suggests that our instinct leans toward exhaustive debate—toward endless parsing of definitions, positions, and even spellings. Yet the current moment demands urgency. The risk is that our tendency toward deliberation becomes paralysis. Conceptual clarity is important, but not if it comes at the expense of desperately needed action.

These tensions cannot be resolved overnight. Nor should they be seen as obstacles to progress, but rather as the natural friction that comes with a community confronting the need to redefine itself in real time. To ignore them is to repeat the mistakes of the past; to acknowledge them is to prepare ourselves for the imperfect but necessary steps forward.

PART 3: A STRUCTURAL PATH FORWARD

How do we move toward action? Our situation demands practical steps—not the illusion of a single silver-bullet solution, but a willingness to invest in strategies that work and have measurable impact. To remain trapped in endless theorizing, or to chase a perfect formula, is to squander precious time in a moment that requires firm resolve and immediacy.

This means recalibrating our priorities. We cannot afford to devote disproportionate resources to organizations simply because they make us feel represented, or because they deliver immediate utility to particular constituencies. We must instead privilege demonstrated success. Expertise should not be assumed on the basis of organizational legacy; it must be validated by evidence, by rigorous evaluation, and by real-world impact.

It also means confronting the counterproductive competitiveness of our current landscape. Too often, our institutions differentiate themselves not by scope or need, but by politics and personality. Instead of developing distinct lanes, deepening expertise, and serving particular audiences, they replicate each other's programming, jockey for funding, and leave key arenas and challenges under-serviced. The result is breadth without depth, visibility without sustainability. Encouragingly, some legacy organizations are beginning to recognize this problem and adjust. But progress remains slow, and meaningful reform can only come if donors demand it. Just as punitive approaches to philanthropy have

reshaped universities in the wake of October 7, so too must donors press Jewish institutions toward accountability, coordination and collaboration, and measurable outcomes.

Yet, even if our institutions are pushed toward reform, structural change alone is insufficient without clarity of purpose. Competition and fragmentation are not just organizational flaws; they reflect deeper disagreements over what we stand for, what is negotiable, and what is not. At the heart of this work, then, is a simple but essential principle: we must prioritize consensus where it is possible and necessary, rather than exhaust ourselves in battles over areas that rightly deserve nuance. Several foundational positions should be named:

- the status quo is unacceptable;
- antisemitism must be confronted based on its consequences, not rationalized by parsing the intent of its perpetrators;
- Jewish diversity—in religious practice, politics, identity, and expression—should be celebrated; but denying the Jewish connection to Israel, historical or contemporary, or weaponizing one's Jewish identity to delegitimize the Jewish identity of others, is dangerous and unacceptable;
- our coalitions must be rebuilt not as transactional arrangements, but as partnerships grounded in shared values: pluralism, security, and freedom of expression.

To translate these principles into a plan of action, there are two necessary steps that are urgent.

First, formal expertise. We need to develop a professional field dedicated to the study of antisemitism as an interdisciplinary phenomenon. Antisemitism is not adequately explained by psychology, sociology, political science, religion, history, or communications alone. It converges with and diverges from other forms of prejudice in ways that demand a holistic approach. Training in this field must produce practitioners fluent in multiple disciplines, and who are able to design, implement, and empirically evaluate interventions that reduce antisemitic acts and rhetoric. Traditional academic disciplines have failed to foster such expertise, and in many cases have become openly hostile to it—an environment made even more inhospitable after October 7.

Building up the field of Antisemitism Studies is not optional; it is essential. While this field of Antisemitism Studies must focus on developing theory, testing hypotheses, and empirically evaluating the causes and variations of antisemitism, priority must ultimately be given to interventions. That combination of intellectual conviction and institutional necessity guided our work at Gratz College and, under my direction, led to the creation of the world's first interdisciplinary applied graduate program in antisemitism studies.

It is not enough to describe the problems of antisemitism with greater precision; we must also assess the diverse strategies to counter it. Intervention mapping provides a way forward: a framework for cataloguing approaches, assessing impact, identifying gaps, and allocating resources where they can do the best.[5]

The figure below illustrates how we can begin to think systematically about this process. It emphasizes that interventions can be designed around perpetrators (actors and motives), targets (victims and their needs), contexts of need (manifestations and severity), and scalability (efficiency and replicability). Taken together, these categories remind us that no single solution can address antisemitism in all its forms. Just as important, they underscore that understanding the diversity of needs allows us to recognize what an intervention does well, and where complementary approaches are required to fill the gaps.

Second, landscape mapping. It is critical that a structured framework be developed that documents and aligns the wide range of interventions currently deployed against antisemitism. This should begin with a comprehensive mapping of strategies across sectors: **education**

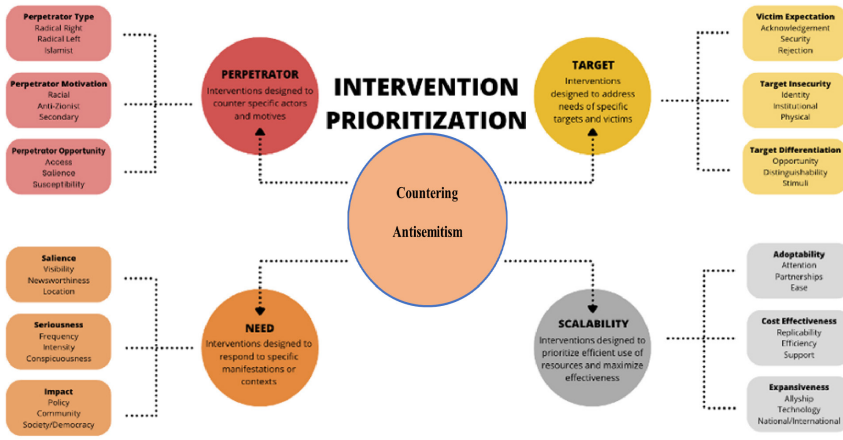

FIGURE 1. Antisemitism Intervention Mapping

(curricular interventions in K-12 and higher education, professional training for teachers, and campus climate programs), **security** (infrastructure upgrades, partnerships with law enforcement, and volunteer security training), **law and policy** (civil rights enforcement, Title VI litigation, hate-crime legislation, and anti-BDS policy responses), **digital platforms** (AI-driven monitoring, content moderation, and media literacy campaigns), and **philanthropy and community work** (grantmaking, coalition-building, and interfaith partnerships).

Such mapping should catalogue the variety of existing efforts but also evaluate them according to measurable outcomes: which interventions actually reduce antisemitism, which raise awareness and educate, and which provide little beyond symbolic reassurance. Equally important, this process can expose critical gaps—areas where there has been an under-investment or where existing efforts lack coordination and collaboration—clarifying which initiatives should be scaled, adapted, or jettisoned. Done well, this mapping would become both a diagnostic tool and a guide for investment. Funding decisions could then be made based on evidence of impact and alignment with communal priorities.

Underlying this work is a recognition that there can be no single solution to antisemitism. It is too complex, too adaptive, and too deeply embedded in social, political, and cultural life. Instead, progress will come through a **mosaic of responses**—each imperfect on its own, but collectively capable of shifting the landscape. Intervention mapping, by making that mosaic visible and strategic, allows us to move from fragmentation and duplication toward coherence and accountability. Without it, we remain reactive; with it, we begin to build a coordinated and data-driven approach to safeguarding American Jewry.

CONCLUSION

American Jewish exceptionalism once gave us confidence, security, and the belief that our story would be different. But as that narrative has frayed, we have been left without the tools or clarity to meet the moment. In this essay, I have traced how insulation turned to isolation and how the task of reimagining our story is riddled with tension.

The essay's final section is more than a roadmap of urgent reforms—it is itself the scaffolding of a new narrative. Unlike the traditional story, which mistook representation for safety and conflated insulation with strength, this narrative locates Jewish life in America within the broader arc of Jewish perseverance. It is a story defined not by exceptionalism, but by the same qualities that have sustained our people for centuries: a commitment to education, the creativity to adapt, resilience in the face of hate and discrimination, and the prioritization of shared values over transactional alliances.

The path ahead will not be easy, but it is navigable. We cannot afford paralysis, nor can we resign ourselves to nostalgia for an exceptionalism that no longer protects us. Instead, we must summon the courage to claim this new narrative as our own—one that is rigorous, honest, and grounded in evidence. If we do, we will not only safeguard Jewish life in America, but also demonstrate the resilience, adaptability, and integrity that have always been the truest markers of Jewish survival.

The house built by American Jewish exceptionalism left us trapped—not because the story failed Jews, but because living under a single framework has left us unable to adapt to America's changing view of itself. By telling our story honestly and prioritizing our values, we can rebuild a home resilient enough to weather any condition, as Jewish life has done for three millennia.

ENDNOTES

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4 In practice, this means Jews are asked to prove their moral legitimacy through ritualized denunciations of Israel, then told those denunciations do not count because Jewish attachment to Israel itself is treated as inherently suspect. The result is a political trap in which Jewish particularity is pathologized regardless of what Jews actually say.

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Decolonial Psychology's Blind Spot: From Liberation Praxis to Antisemitism

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Abstract

Decolonial Therapy is a rapidly emerging treatment model promoted in the mental health professions. The approach is explicitly political, and has a foundation that readily fosters antisemitism. In this conceptual paper, the broad approach is described and its historical antecedents laid out in the treatment model is actively harmful to Jewish clients and mental health professionals, creating a serious public health crisis. By explicitly demanding activism as part of treatment, psychological interventions have been transformed into political propaganda contexts in direct contrast with the expected clinical healing needs of the client. Decolonial aims could potentially involve empirical validation while retaining its focus on the needs of historically oppressed groups, including Jews. In the present manifestation of decolonial psychology, the framing of Jews as oppressors instead creates conditions for harm. The urgency of addressing the political and discriminatory nature of decolonial therapy has increased significantly since the attacks of October 7, 2023, as there are well-documented antisemitic incidents in the mental health professions that can be traced directly to the development of this treatment approach. The article concludes with recommendations for professional reform to overcome antisemitism in the mental health professions.

Keywords: Antisemitism, decolonial psychology, Frantz Fanon, harm, Liberation Psychologies, Marxism, praxis, psychotherapy, social work

> Praxis, noun /ˈpraksəs/
> Practice as distinguished from theory; accepted practice or custom
>
> —Oxford Dictionary

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The definition of praxis on its face seems innocuous. Most mental health practitioners could readily distill their practice approaches and describe how they differ from the underlying theory guiding them. As part of any clinical setting or specialization, these practices may form an accepted body of work that practitioners recognize implicitly. Crucially, however, effective praxis must be anchored in evidence-based therapies, such as cognitive-behavioral, dialectical-behavioral, or trauma-focused approaches, to ensure that interventions are not only theoretically coherent but also empirically validated, reproducible, and capable of producing meaningful, measurable client outcomes.[1]

Praxis is an important concept in recent therapy movements that fuses social activism with direct interventions. The role of praxis as a conceptual frame in social justice movements derives from left-wing political perspectives, often applied as a vague appellation exhorting a shift from theory to practice (discussed at length

in Wainwright).[2] Indeed, for all that has been written about the role of praxis in social justice models of treatment, there is curiously little in the way of specifics of what it means beyond serving as a buzzword for a practitioner's individual derivation of interventions culled from the guiding theory. In short, it is at the discretion of the practitioner to connect the application of the model to the social justice needs of the individual.[3] As scholarship has documented the vagueness of praxis as a therapeutic construct, it also loses connection to evidence-based practice. Practitioners in the broader social justice movement might object to the use of evidence-based concepts, since the foundations are grounded in Western notions of science.[4] However, there are diverse culturally grounded sources for evidentiary support,[5] including data-based approaches that would be acceptable to a broad range of cultural traditions. Culturally adapted, evidence-based interventions, such as culturally adapted cognitive-behavioral therapy, have demonstrated both empirical efficacy and cultural relevance in diverse populations.[6] Moreover, emerging hybrid models like culturally attuned CBT, for example, explicitly integrate social justice principles with trauma-focused methodologies, thereby honoring clients' sociocultural contexts while maintaining rigorous outcome standards.[7] These approaches illustrate that decolonial aims and empirical validation need not be mutually exclusive but can coalesce to enhance therapeutic effectiveness. As these are applied interventions, no approach should be immune to scrutiny when there are ideological foundations. In its current form, the decolonial model is purely conceptual and theoretical, despite the growing use in clinical settings.[8] The zeal with which it is being promoted, along with the ideological political narrowness, makes this approach one that demands greater scrutiny and refinement.

This paper has three primary aims. First, to demonstrate that the roots of decolonial psychology and its associated praxis grant practitioners justification for antisemitism by making psychotherapy expressly political. Thus, therapy is based on the therapist's political agenda rather than the unique clinical needs of the client. Second, this antisemitic justification is amply present and has been shielded from scrutiny by the rejection of empirical evaluation. We note that among the decolonial scholars, there is recognition of the historical discrimination toward Jews,[9] without any corresponding comment about antisemitism resulting from colonialism (by expulsion and murder of Jews) in the Second World War, nor regarding the ideological excesses that have led decolonial scholars to address antizionism. This is part and parcel of how the decolonial movement leaves open room for antisemitism while also seemingly recognizing historical murderous hatred toward Jews. And third, to lay out recommendations whereby the specific mental health needs of individuals from historically oppressed backgrounds, including Jews, may be met. With the addition of our recommendations, we aim for this article to serve as a policy paper, in addition to one that broadly educates about the hazards of this new approach to treatment. It is also important to note that this article focused on decolonial models specifically. However, there are numerous additional concepts that are either related to decolonial models (such as "anti-oppressive practice") and adjacent concepts (i.e., "black-white divide"). Thus, the focus on decolonial models in mental health is solely because it has quickly become dominant, but there are other conceptual threads that possess a similar antisemitic thread.

We also operationalize three core constructs to ground our critique of decolonial psychology in a precise, empirically informed framework. Decolonial praxis is defined as the explicit integration of sociopolitical critique—rooted in liberation theory[10]—into clinical interventions, emphasizing the dismantling of systemic power imbalances but typically lacking standardized, replicable protocols.[11] Traumatic invalidation refers to the clinician's dismissal or reframing of a client's legitimate emotional response in ways

that intensify psychological pain.[12] Compound trauma denotes the synergistic interaction between historical/intergenerational wounds and ongoing stressors (e.g., war, discrimination) that amplify overall distress.[13] Drawing on these definitions and Crenshaw's intersectionality lens of Crenshaw,[14] we argue that when therapists impose decolonial ideology without empirical grounding, clients first experience traumatic invalidation, which then precipitates alliance ruptures, documented as strong predictors of poorer outcomes, and culminates in exacerbated distress, thereby creating a self-reinforcing cycle of harm.[15]

Decolonial Therapy: A Sociopolitical Therapeutic Movement

Recently, Decolonial Therapy (DCT) has emerged as a dominant social justice model of treatment that has roots in *praxis* and left-wing political thought. DCT aims to address the psychological impact of colonialism, systemic oppression, and historical trauma. Laura Brown offers a comprehensive definition of colonization and its psychosocial ramifications, emphasizing the necessity of decolonial interventions that address both overt and covert forms of oppression:

> A colonizing power employs superior weaponry to seize control of a territory. It then embeds itself within the culture and among the Indigenous inhabitants of the conquered land. Colonization commodifies Indigenous peoples—selling them to other colonizers to finance further resource exploitation—and dehumanizes the original inhabitants to rationalize systemic violence. The resultant trauma, generated by these social pathologies, mirrors in its biopsychosocial and existential–spiritual effects the suffering experienced by populations subjected to physical conquest, colonization, and enslavement. Consequently, decolonial, humble, and culturally responsive trauma healing must facilitate liberation from these subtler forms of self-colonization just as much as it seeks to alleviate the distress that such trauma has precipitated.[16]

By situating Brown's definition within current trauma-informed frameworks, practitioners can appreciate the dual imperative of addressing both historical injustices and their ongoing psychological sequelae. Reading the above description, one can easily appreciate how a decolonial lens for treatment and the praxis that might emerge in individualized therapy would be appealing. Considering the long history of Jews facing oppression, colonization,[17] and displacement, the model seems particularly apt for Jewish clients.[18] We cite here Brown as one of the decolonial psychology movement theorists who is also effective in inclusivity of Jews as another historically oppressed group. Dr. Brown is likewise an effective and inclusive voice for feminist movement theoreticians in decolonial psychology.

Decolonial Therapy: A Foundation of Antisemitism

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist, social critic, and revolutionary whose writings have influenced decolonial movements. Trained in France and deeply shaped by his experience with racism, Fanon responded to the French colonial project in Algeria. His most well-known works, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, argue that liberation from colonialism requires radical rupture, including violence, and that rage against the oppressor is not just justified but necessary and purifying.[19] In the 1960s, The Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), a Quebec separatist terrorist group inspired by Fanon's theories, saw violence as a necessary tool for political change. Their violent pledge to establish an independent Quebec included robberies, bombings, kidnappings, and murder.[20] A leading proponent of decolonizing therapy, psychologist Jennifer Mullan, who is also deeply influenced by

Fanon, reframes rage, trauma, and systemic oppression as core to therapeutic liberation: "Frantz Fanon taught us that oppression lodges itself not only in the body politic, but in the literal bodies of the colonized—manifesting as psychic pain, disconnection, and rage. Decolonizing therapy must honor that rage as sacred and recognize that healing is inherently political."[21]

Indeed, Fanon is credited with laying much of the groundwork for DCT and liberation-based psychotherapy models. His vision that rage and violence have an important role to play in the liberation of the "oppressed" has directly influenced these theories. Yet, many decolonizing therapists have abandoned the postmodernism they claim to embrace. Instead, they adopt a rigid binary that frames Jews as white, privileged oppressors. Zionism is mischaracterized as colonialism, thereby denying Jewish indigeneity and contributing to their very erasure.[22] However, the leading proponents of decolonial therapy have distorted the intent and philosophical grounding of Fanon to suit their own ends. Fanon himself could be considered glib in his own writings regarding the Holocaust when he referred to it as "little family quarrels"[23] rather than the continent-wide systematic effort at eradicating an entire people that it was. Accordingly, while Fanon may not have been outright antisemitic, the description is effectively dismissive, making antisemitism a foundation of the decolonial model.

It has been suggested that the movement theorists were concerned with antisemitism from the political right, but the depiction within colonial models do not sufficiently stress its deadly nature from the left.[24] Reviewing the writing of decolonial therapy proponents, they emphasize retribution and usurpation of power in perceived dominant systemic structures without regard for post-deconstruction methods or consequences.[25] This approach leads to a dangerous precedent for followers who might not have absorbed the full political, historical, and sociological consequences of such a stance in their zeal to apply a treatment method to their clients.

Jews who agree to renounce Zionism are warmly welcomed into decolonizing therapy circles, thereby reproducing the very dynamics of exclusion and erasure that this approach claims to resist. The cognitive dissonance Jewish antizionists may experience is matched only by the harm inflicted on Jews whose legitimate pain and trauma are systematically invalidated.[26] This specific social professional traumatic invalidation has led to fractures in identity, as Jews attempt to navigate a world where they need to exist with colleagues in their profession and simultaneously reject their ethnoreligious background.[27] This fracturing of Jewish identity has been described elsewhere, notably among Jewish college students who rejected their identity in order to continue to exist with a modicum of comfort among their classmates and professors who insisted they adopt antizionist positions in a manner aligned with the prevailing academic decolonial zeitgeist.[28]

Notably, in Fanon's, *Wretched of the Earth* "he warns that liberation movements can become new oppressors once they attain power, thus exchanging one barbarism for another."[29] In the case of Mullan and her model of Decolonizing Therapy, Jewish therapists have contacted her to engage in dialogue, with separate notes sent in November 2023 and October 2024. The hope was to engage directly with Mullan, in line with ethical expectations of discussing concerns first with the colleague. As of the writing of this manuscript, Mullan has not responded.

As a result of the leftist-Marxist tilt of the decolonial model and its accompanying emphasis on praxis, antisemitism has been regularized. For example, many practitioners in this model label Zionism as a root cause of mental illness despite its conspicuous absence in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).[30] Zionism is the recognition that Jews are a people entitled to self-determination in their ancestral homeland of Israel. The Jewish people have over 3,000

years of history in the Land of Israel,[31] which DCT ignores or denies.[32] Furthermore, eighty-five percent of American Jews hold favorable views of Israel,[33] making connection to Israel an important component of Jewish identity. DCT seeks to erase a core part of a Jewish individual's identity under the guise of purported health care, and it does so when antisemitism is on the rise.[34] It is a bitter irony, therefore, that the thought-leaders of decolonial psychology characterize the approach, and its counterpart, liberation psychology, as follows: "While decolonial psychologies often involve dismantling colonial frameworks that harm marginalized people, liberation psychologies focus on reclaiming life-affirming practices that honor cultural traditions and empower individuals by reconnecting with their histories, identities, and practices."[35]

At the present time, DCT is a conceptual model without supporting data for its application. The model at this point has insulated itself from scrutiny, as thought leaders reject historical scientific models of empiricism.[36] As a result, the prospect of testing empirically ground conceptual errors and putative harms from this approach being quantified appears remote at this point. The rejection of data analytic models that might reveal potential harm is part of a broader movement away from philosophical approaches that are deemed "Western" in nature (i.e., the Enlightenment[37]) despite the fundamental philosophical errors inherent in these critiques.[38] In fact, empirical research underscores the tangible effects of identity-threat and alliance disruptions in therapy: quantitative work by Crocker et al. demonstrates that experiences of social identity threat elicit measurable physiological arousal during sessions, while Sue et al. qualitatively document how microinvalidations in cross-cultural encounters undermine patient-centered care by leaving clients feeling unseen and disrespected.[39] Moreover, a meta-analysis by Flückiger et al. confirms that alliance ruptures are robust predictors of poorer therapeutic outcomes, highlighting the critical need for clinicians to actively safeguard the therapeutic relationship.[40]

The rise of decolonial methods comes at a propitious time in the history of psychotherapy. Clinical theorists do not have a history of considering the potential harms of their approaches.[41] Just as the field was beginning to take the risk of harm seriously, the shift away from methods for assessment damage from conceptualization and intervention arrives, and it does so on an ideological framework that has ushered in an era where merely questioning the appropriateness of a social justice model is met with condemnation.[42] What this translates to for Jewish clinicians and clients is serious harm, unfettered by any quantitative evaluation.

The Problem: Ideology over Evidence

Psychological therapy can have, broadly speaking, two goals: a reduction of behavior or emotion, or an increase in a skill or behavior. Decolonial therapists aim to increase activism (a behavior) in their clients, and one aspect of this activism involves seeking retribution against innocent targets, sometimes resulting in guilty emotional reactions in a client.[43] Not only is this approach to therapy not evidence-based, but it is also harmful to clients and damages collegial interactions among professionals. This approach forces Jewish clients and colleagues into an impossible position—either reject their historical and cultural connection to Israel or risk being cast as oppressors in the therapeutic setting, which is in direct contradiction with the stated aim of decolonial and liberatory approaches described in Santana et al.[44] For Jewish clients experiencing trauma related to antisemitism, forced displacement, or intergenerational Holocaust trauma, such an approach is retraumatizing rather than healing. Similarly, for Jewish mental health professionals, the retention of a professional community oftentimes hinges on their rejection of a key ethnoreligious value, or at the very least put forth a public face that denies a key facet of their identity.

It is axiomatic for therapeutic spaces to be safe, validating, and healing,[45] yet DCT, as it is often practiced and promoted in professional trainings and scholarly writing, fosters an environment of exclusion and ideological policing.[46] Jewish clients and professionals who express any form of connection to Israel—whether religious, cultural, or personal—risk being invalidated or labeled as colonizers,[47] a deeply distressing and alienating experience that can further lead to traumatic invalidation. When therapy sessions reinforce one-sided narratives that delegitimize Jewish history, identity, and trauma, they cease to be therapeutic and instead become a tool for ideological indoctrination.

To illustrate the above point, at a professional meeting in November 2024, a presenter, Nathalie Edmond,[48] delivered a talk on decolonial approaches for a serious psychological disorder to an audience of approximately nine hundred mental health practitioners. In that talk, the presenter included slides for "the colonized mind" that equated Zionism with genocidal tendencies, misogynoir (hatred toward black women), rape culture, and fascism. In the question-and-answer portion, a Jewish graduate student in attendance questioned the accuracy of the characterization of Zionism, and the presenter followed up with additional justification for her description. When the student pressed her concerns, Edmond dismissed them as a "trauma response," effectively gaslighting her and shifting the focus away from the student's valid critique. There was an additional outcry, and ultimately Edmond recorded a response in which she portrayed herself as the victim.[49] This interaction exemplifies how, under a decolonizing-therapy framework, the therapist's own agenda can override genuine client concerns—transforming the therapeutic space into one that privileges the clinician's ideology over the client's lived experience.

Using our construct-driven lens, and in light of the growing inaccurate representations of Zionism in the context of decolonialism, we can see how the recent special issue of *American Psychologist*[50] on decolonial psychology proceeds with a similar activist thrust yet conspicuously omits any empirical framework or rigorous evaluation of its therapeutic claims. While ostensibly focused on the application of a novel therapy through a variety of lenses and for different populations, the common thread was the direct infusion of politically driven activism in the context of therapeutic approaches. What was missing throughout was any evidentiary basis for the approach; mechanistic models of how colonialism leads to the manifestation of psychopathology; or any calls for determining the efficacy of assessment of treatment through any culturally-informed data models. The special issue was further political and ideologically imbalanced, providing a platform for an overtly antizionist piece that describes Israel as a settler-colonial project[51] without concurrently providing a space for Jewish psychologists whose homeland is under constant threat from Hamas. While scientific scrutiny of any therapeutic model is best done through a wide range of approaches that would be acceptable and suitable for diverse ethnicities, religions, cultures, and identities, the absence of a robust demand for evaluating the benefits and putative risks runs counter to the existing movement to craft clinical practice guidelines by the American Psychological Association (APA). This is especially notable given that the first practice guidelines from the APA were from the treatment of trauma[1] that were recently revised.[52] The entire corpus of conceptual work on decolonial psychology is also aimed at alleviating trauma. And yet, in the entire 186-page clinical practice guideline document, there is not a single reference to DCT. That a major conceptual model would emerge that also has a clear discriminatory foundation toward Jews for a misplaced political ideology related to Zionism makes the full-throated endorsement of the approach by the APA all the more mystifying.

Ethical Issues in Decolonial Psychology—Violations Ignored when It Comes to Jews

Unfortunately, antisemitism has become a central theme in the mental health community,

and it may get worse before it gets better. The growth of DCT and its offshoots has led some mental health professionals to openly advertise their services as "antizionist," intimidating colleagues and clients alike if they identify as Jewish.[53] Worse, the APA, whose former president demanded that leaders in the profession adopt decolonial therapy,[54] just released their new ethics code,[55] and it codifies the framework of "social justice," which supports the decolonial model that seeks to erase the Jewish identity, requiring psychologists to incorporate this model in treatment or risk ethical violations.

The National Association of Social Work (NASW) added social justice to its list of core values in 1993. For Jewish social workers this spoke to an essential piece of Judaism, *tikkun olam* or "repair the world." Unfortunately, NASW's pursuit of social justice has resulted in tunnel vision as it bypasses the Jewish experience completely. NASW's anti-racism statement does not include antisemitism as anti-Jewish racism.[56] In 2021, NASW added self-care and cultural competence to its code of ethics. Cultural humility is a related standard of care which is described by NASW as follows: "Social workers should demonstrate awareness and cultural humility by engaging in critical self-reflection (understanding their own biases and engaging in self-correction), recognizing clients as experts of their own culture, committing to lifelong learning, and holding institutions accountable for advancing cultural humility." Unfortunately, cultural humility as it relates to Jewish social workers and their clients is not in evidence.

Decolonial Psychology concepts have explicitly excluded Jews in numerous ways. Although Anti-racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) frameworks in social work are designed to promote justice and equity, their current implementation often reinforces rigid binaries that erase or exclude Jewish experiences. Many Jewish clients, students, and practitioners report feeling unseen, pathologized, or even targeted within spaces that claim to be inclusive.[57] Language commonly used in ADEI discourse is increasingly weaponized to justify or minimize antisemitic rhetoric—particularly when framed as antizionism.[58] Examples are illustrated in Table 1.

The listed domains are all considered central domains of social justice and ADEI concepts that are expected to be developed and recognized to historically oppressed groups, with the exception of Jews.

Decolonial Methods Fused into Professional Training Programs

In the past five years, there has been a rapid shift to formally incorporate decolonization methods into professional training programs has begun. In clinical and counseling psychology doctoral training, a full-throated call to decolonize the profession was made.[71] The central aim of these shifts in the training philosophy is to address Western biases that would implicitly and explicitly marginalize minoritized groups. The incorporation of decolonial methods into doctoral training emerged from the calls to formally adopt advocacy as part of all professional psychology training.[72]

Social work training programs began making this formal shift to explicitly incorporate decolonial models earlier than doctoral psychology. For example, at Columbia University's School of Social Work, "Foundations of Social Work Practice: Decolonizing Social Work" is a required course for graduation as of 2025. Other social work programs routinely offer decolonizing coursework, and in a recent statement from the Council on Social Work Education[73] there is an explicit call for programs to strive for decolonial methods and to address colonialism in coursework syllabi and training.

Decolonial Erasure of Jewish Contributions to the Profession

While DCT clinicians speak about decolonizing the treatment space, they may actually be colonizing it themselves in the therapist/client power

Table 1. Anti-racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) Exceptions regarding Jews

ADEI Category	Description of Jewish Exclusion
Oppressor/Oppressed Binary	Jews are frequently categorized as oppressors due to perceived whiteness or association with Israel, erasing centuries of persecution and lived trauma.[59]
Decolonization	Framing Zionism as colonialism disregards Jewish indigeneity in Israel and casts Jews as illegitimate settlers.[60]
White Privilege	Ashkenazi Jews are labeled as white and privileged, overlooking systemic antisemitism and excluding them from DEI conversations.[61]
Silence is Violence	The global feminist community's silence—or denial—in response to the documented sexual violence against Israeli women on October 7 starkly contrasts its usual outcry in similar cases, revealing a political filter on empathy that leaves Jewish victims outside the circle of concern.
Intersectionality	Jewish identity is often flattened or erased, especially when it doesn't fit a racially marginalized narrative.[62] Specifically, not all Jews are white, there are numerous groups of Jews of color, including Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews, to name just two large groups within the broader Jewish community.
Antiracism	Antisemitism, despite its racialized history and deadly consequences, is frequently excluded from antiracist frameworks.[63]
Allyship	Jews who express support for Israel or Zionism are often excluded from solidarity spaces, even when speaking from lived experience.[64]
Harm	ADEI frameworks emphasize naming and addressing systemic and identity-based harm, yet Jewish harm is frequently minimized or politicized, especially when connected to Israel. For example, following the October 7 attacks—when widespread sexual violence, murder, and torture of Jews occurred—many institutions failed to acknowledge this as harm within their DEI language. Despite the dramatic rise in antisemitic incidents documented by the Anti-Defamation League[65] and the impact on Jewish students and faculty, few university responses recognized this trauma through the same lens used for other marginalized communities.
Safe Spaces	Safe spaces are designed to protect marginalized individuals from emotional harm and invalidation. However, Jewish students often report that DEI-designated "safe spaces" feel hostile or exclusionary, particularly when Jewish identity is tied—explicitly or implicitly—to whiteness, privilege, or Zionism.[66] After October 7, many Jewish students expressed grief, fear, and trauma, only to be told that acknowledging their pain was politically charged or inappropriate.[67] Even wearing a Star of David or expressing support for Israeli victims has, in some DEI circles, been labeled as threatening, thus rendering these spaces unsafe for Jews.[68]
Brave Spaces	Brave spaces are intended to allow for discomfort, critical dialogue, and the confronting of power dynamics. But Jewish voices are often silenced in these spaces, particularly when speaking about antisemitism that complicates binary frameworks of oppressor vs. oppressed. When Jewish participants name antisemitism or describe trauma linked to October 7, they are often accused of "centering themselves" or derailing intersectional conversations.[69] Meanwhile, the rape and mutilation of Israeli women were largely ignored by feminist circles that pride themselves on speaking truth in brave spaces[70]—suggesting that bravery in ADEI spaces often stops at the threshold of Jewish suffering.

differential, using it to project ideological judgments, rather than engaging with curiosity and presence. Jewish identity is reduced or erased, and this reduction is often not recognized as harmful rather fully endorsed. Not only that cultural humility is not applied but the therapists' need to position themselves as morally correct can supersede the client's need to be heard in their full, complex identity.

Some decolonial therapists allege that Internal Family Systems (IFS) was appropriated from Indigenous healing practices, despite its creator explicitly crediting his own decades of clinical observations and empirical development. For example, it has been alleged that IFS may have emerged out of Western psychology, but that it in fact aligns with facets of an Indigenous worldview.[74]

Perhaps the most egregious example of Jewish erasure in the mental health professions has been in relation to the legacy of Freud and the psychodynamic scholars that followed from his seminal work. In a sweeping re-imagining of the nature and inspiration for Freud's psychotherapeutic model, Sheehi and Sheehi make the claim that the entire scholarly corpus of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic models is a colonial project that is specifically directed at undermining Palestinian sovereignty.[75] This has been despite the well-documented persecution faced by Freud, who famously was denied faculty positions specifically because he was Jewish.[76] Psychoanalysis was pejoratively labeled a "Jewish science."[77] Further, it is well documented that a dangerous and carefully planned effort to spirit over thirty Jewish psychoanalytic scholars out of Germany-occupied Austria took place in 1938.[78] It is noted here that decolonial scholars recognize the colonialism of Germany in the Second World War 2, and they specifically reference the expulsion and murder of Jews by the Third Reich.[79] In this recent historical analysis, it is particularly curious that a discussion of colonialism and Jewish persecution and murder would specifically omit the word "antisemitism," and fail to reference Zionism as an actual social justice model that resulted in the formation of Israel. Instead, the article focuses on "Psyimperialism" and roots it in Western hegemony.

Ethical Inconsistencies in Decolonial Therapy

A social worker repeatedly raised concerns about antisemitic remarks by conference speakers over several months, only to have her complaints largely ignored or met with dismissive deflections from NASW leadership. After sending a conciliatory letter to NASW's CEO, Dr. Estreet, she received no reply, and the NASW president, Yvonne Chase, responded with a generic apology for the delay and reassurance that NASW "strives to be a vehicle for positive change," without addressing the specific incidents or committing to any corrective action. Despite further attempts by two of this article's authors—both leaders in Jewish social work advocacy—to engage in meaningful dialogue, over the course of our attempts at engagement, both the NASW and CASW have demonstrated an unwillingness to take a public stance recognizing the specific rise in antisemitism—with significant increases in incidents as reported by diverse organizations that track religion-based hate, including the Anti-Defamation League, whose methodology has been described in detail.[80] These diverse data sources do not include estimates of unreported incidents, which has been estimated to be as high as seventy-eight percent.[81] When a rise takes place against a specific minority group, in this case Jews, generalized statements against racism will simply not suffice. In July 2025, both NASW and the CASW continued in their unwillingness to take a public stance in support of Jewish members, citing organizational constraints rather than a lack of commitment to ethical principles.

Antisemitic rhetoric and behavior violate the ethical standards of the mental health professions, which call for inclusive, unbiased, and culturally responsive care. Yet, these standards were undermined in March 2024, when

a therapist posted in a private Facebook group for Chicago-area clinicians, asking if anyone would be willing to work with a "Zionist" client. Several Jewish therapists responded, offering to help. What unfolded next sent shockwaves through the Jewish mental health community: those who volunteered were soon added to a list circulated by the Chicago Antiracist Therapists group, labeling them as "Zionist" therapists to avoid referring clients to. This act of targeting therapists based on their Jewish identity or assumed political beliefs sparked fear, silencing, and a deep sense of betrayal. It exemplifies how, under the guise of decolonizing frameworks, some mental health spaces have become hostile—to Jewish practitioners and clients who refuse to disavow Zionism.[82] These discriminatory attitudes and behaviors by practitioners is inconsistent with the ethical guidelines for social workers and psychologists, which both expressly preclude discrimination on the basis of religion and ethnicity (among other demographic characteristics). Failure to fully address this problem in the profession within a major therapy movement threatens the legitimacy of the entire profession.

It should be noted that the ethical guidelines for professional psychology and social work each emphasize competency. Again, the professions have demonstrated a willingness to turn a blind eye to competency violations, including at the professional training level. The APA's Committee on Accreditation lists several required bases of knowledge that are considered core competency areas for professional practice.[83] There are also several optional bases of knowledge. A search of the current guidelines and principles, which serves as the blueprint for doctoral programs for maintaining accreditation, does not contain the words "political," "activism," nor "advocacy," key words that would be expected in a professional framework that is increasingly demanding political knowledge and emphasizing activism and advocacy as integral components of practice. In short, practitioners are engaged in a therapeutic endeavor whose central feature—political activism—is not a core competency.

Similarly, examination of the core competencies demanded for professional social work training, the Council on Social Work Education does not reference specific political education[84]. It does, however, emphasize that social workers do not discriminate based on political ideology, which one can assume includes endorsement of Zionism.[85] Advocacy appears in the context of commitment to structural inequities and in relation to ensuring students are able to fully develop skills in their training. The word 'activism' does not appear in the accreditation standards at all.

Mental Health Impact on Jewish Communities Resulting from Decolonial Psychology: Qualitative and Quantitative Illustrations

Since the October 7 attacks, Jewish individuals outside Israel have reported not only acute distress but also the compounding effects of an ongoing war and intergenerational trauma.[86] In a national survey by the American Jewish Committee,[87] fifty-eight percent of American Jews endorsed moderate to severe anxiety, and forty-five percent reported clinically significant depressive symptoms in the three months following the attacks—a burden intensified by continual news of conflict and concerns for family in Israel. On North American campuses, Hillel International found that seventy-four percent of Jewish undergraduates experienced daily distress tied to antisemitic incidents, and sixty-three percent engaged in avoidance behaviors, with nearly one-third considering academic withdrawal.[88] Although data are limited, what little is available suggests that post-10/7 there has been a significant increase in anxiety and depression in Jews in California[89] as well as in Israel.[90] These acute stressors overlay decades-old intergenerational trauma: studies of Holocaust survivors' descendants have documented heightened baseline anxiety and PTSD vulnerability when exposed to collective threats.[91] Bar-Halpern and Wolfman's

case series echoes these findings, demonstrating that Jewish clinicians not only endure repeated traumatic invalidation—being labeled "complicit" in colonial violence—but also exhibit exacerbated secondary traumatic stress and burnout when their inherited trauma schemas are reactivated by current events.[92] Together, these data highlight a synergistic "compound trauma" effect, wherein ongoing war-related stress and historical familial wounds interact to deepen psychological distress across the diaspora.[93]

What's more concerning is that the mental health community has been deeply affected by those promoting a specific decolonial praxis that demands a relitigation of the existence of the state of Israel, often in direct contradiction to the evidentiary nature of its formation in 1948, and in direct denial of the nature of the attack. Specifically, the claims from many decolonial clinicians have been that Israel, and, by extension, Jews who might support the continued existence of the state, are oppressors, and that Israel itself is a settler-colonial project. As a result, the mental health community has become an unwelcoming place for Jewish clinicians, who have faced repeated traumatic invalidation due to their justifiable distress over the October 7 attacks and the subsequent dismissal of their concerns over the conflict with Hamas and global condemnation of Israel's self-defense.[94] The roots of this ideological framework long predate the attacks of October 7. For example, Levine details how the antiracist foundations of social work excluded any reference to antisemitism.[95] The profession broadly aligns with many Jewish values, while concurrently the broader field has ignored the problem of antisemitism.[96] Additional analyses have specifically noted how colonialism narratives contributed to global denial of sexual violence toward women in the October 7 attacks as well as the ready acceptance of propaganda narratives aimed at minimizing the nature and scope of the attacks.[97] The emergence of antizionism as a left-leaning academic critique of Israel has been suggested as a form of antisemitism infusing the applied social science.[98]

In clinical practice, including within institutes, graduate programs, and trainings, antiracist and DCT frameworks are often presented in ways that not only implicitly or explicitly seek to erase the Jewish experience and the reality of antisemitism in all of its forms, but also tacitly endorse antisemitic narratives. Within these spaces, Jews, particularly those who don't split off their Zionist identity as a coping mechanism to maintain safety, are frequently positioned as "privileged oppressors" within a fixed binary that fails to account for Jewish historical trauma, vulnerability, ongoing experiences of marginalization, and simply being a Jew in the diaspora.

Thus, the treatment space becomes not a holding environment of safety and curiosity, but rather it recreates the actual power differential DCT allegedly purports to dismantle, ultimately colonizing the therapeutic milieu and patients themselves. DCT often conflates Jewish identity with whiteness and power, flattening the complex nature of the Jewish experience across the globe. In widely circulated materials, such as Mullan's DCT diagram, Zionism is explicitly equated with rape, fascism, and other extreme social ills,[99] furthering the rigid binary that Zionists are the ultimate perpetrators of harm. Such framings do not merely omit Jewish suffering; they reposition Jews as perpetrators, even utilizing Holocaust inversion as a tool to further push the narrative that Jews are the ultimate colonizer. This dynamic contributes to an unsafe, harmful, and often retraumatizing environment in which Jewish clients, students, and colleagues may feel covertly coerced to amputate or split off core parts of their identity in order to maintain the therapeutic or collegial relationship.[100] Flückiger et al.[101] demonstrated that ruptures in the therapeutic alliance reliably predict poorer symptom improvement, whereas it has been demonstrated that experiences of social identity threat during sessions elicit heightened physiological arousal,[102] and Sue et al.[103] documented how microinvalidations in

cross-cultural interactions undermine patient-centered care by leaving clients feeling unseen and disrespected. These past accepted empirical psychotherapy process findings are ignored in DCT in favor of ideologically-driven conceptualizations of psychopathology and treatment.

Jewish patients have been turned away from psychotherapy practices because they identify as Zionist. One recent example of this type of behavior in action, "Zoe had seen a therapist for her first session. She told the new therapist that she'd just been in Israel and was now eager to focus on her personal problems. 'Wow. It's good you were assigned to me,' the therapist said. 'No one else in this practice will treat a Zionist.'"[104]

The growing use of DCT has brought us to a fork in the road regarding the credibility and efficacy of our respective fields of Psychology and Social Work, as it's being integrated without consequence with its intrinsic ethical compromises. Qualitative data suggest that antisemitism within social work is both ignored and unaddressed, particularly when it's enacted under the guise of antizionism despite continued ethical compromises both in treatment and professional spaces.[105]

The ethical risks within the therapeutic alliance are vast, as biases and objectifying frameworks about Jews, Israelis, and Zionists remain unexamined or even endorsed within this frame, where Zionists are positioned as the ultimate "privileged oppressors." This leaves little room for appreciating the complexity of the human condition. The conceptualization of privileged oppressors has been examined as a specific accelerating component in modern antisemitism from the left, as it conflates "whiteness" with the existence of Israel as a state that must continually defend itself from hostile global neighbors.[106]

The challenge facing mental health professionals is that many of the decolonial movement theorists view antisemitism as a problem that is now largely behind us, or only exists in right-wing political contexts. As Schraub notes, for instance, "Yet there is a consistent worry felt among many Jews—progressive Jews included—that left-wing critics deprioritize the fight against antisemitism, viewing it as a marginal issue, a distraction from more immediate concerns, or a fight that (but for a few stray cranks) has already been won."[107] This sentiment on the left is common in mental health circles. To illustrate, in a special issue of *American Psychologist* that focused on decolonial psychology, one article depicted Naziism as a form of colonial oppression. In that portion, the authors could only muster the following regarding the Holocaust: "German psychologists were rationalizing the oppression and attempted genocide of Jews, employing one of the strategies of colonization."[108] Schraub further describes how intersectionality, which is observed as a generally beneficial framework, has been problematic for Jews as it has been used in models (such as decolonial psychology) to further delegitimize real claims of antisemitism, relegating them to depiction as weaponization. This extends even to how antisemitism itself is defined. To illustrate, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) has provided by far the most widely adopted definition of antisemitism. It was painstakingly developed over a sixteen-year period, is consensus driven, and adopted by numerous countries, including on a bipartisan basis in the United States. However, despite this, mental health policy organizations regularly mischaracterize it as being a tool to weaponize antisemitism by (falsely) claiming that criticism of Israel is equivalent to antisemitism. This is simply inaccurate, despite the claims of the decolonial movement theorists.[109]

Whereas DCT calls on clinicians to dismantle colonial legacies through individualized interventions, such as calls for activism, multicultural counseling prioritizes culturally informed adaptations of existing evidence-based methods. For example, cultural humility, or examining one's biases, is an intrinsic part of ethical practice, yet is wholly absent when it comes to Jewish identity or Zionism. Basic social work core ethics, particularly cultural humility, countertransference

awareness, curiosity, and presence, have been largely rejected. If anything, because a rigid binary is endorsed as an intrinsic part of DCT, it becomes ethically acceptable, even valorized, to "challenge the Empire." This framing, rooted in Fanon's binary of oppressor and oppressed, and his notion of Empire as an overwhelming force of domination, has paved the way for more contemporary therapists to impose their own ideological narratives onto clients. Mullan also advocates for the use of the treatment room to confront systemic oppression.[110] Yet professional ethics in both psychology and social work makes this an inappropriate use of a space meant for healing, distorting the therapist's notion of who she might project as Empire—centering her own belief system over the patient's—including Jews and Israelis, who are often miscast as in simplistic, flattening frameworks.

It is not merely unexamined countertransference, but a more alarming dynamic: the lack of willingness to examine one's biases, absence of cultural humility, and the failure to recognize that the therapist's projections are, in fact, dehumanizing and antisemitic and does not abide by our core ethic to "Do no harm."[111] When therapists operating within the DCT framework bring ideological rigidity into the countertransference, often in the form of projection, they do not simply overlook their biases; they may actively project their antisemitic ideology onto the client.

Splitting and Internal Fragmentation for Survival

Traditional psychotherapy, which is by far the most commonly practiced model of treatment, demands practitioners remain aware of their internal biases, and attempt as best as possible to avoid projecting their own internal processes onto clients (such as through countertransference).[112] Unrealized countertransference, combined with a lack of cultural humility and an absence of awareness that one's projections are dehumanizing, creates a dangerous scenario for Jewish or Israeli clients and colleagues alike. DCT reinforces the idea that Zionism is a colonialist enterprise and risks reinforcing a binary in which the client is dehumanized as an oppressor unless they amputate the Jewish or Zionist part of themselves.

Considering Object Relations (a major psychological movement in the broader traditional psychotherapy approach),[113] we argue that when a therapist lacks cultural humility, holds unexamined biases, and uses projection or pathologizing language, whether implicitly or explicitly, the client may split off a part of themselves[114] so as not to risk the therapeutic alliance. Instead of encouraging the integration of self, and helping the patient not to exile this core part of their identity, the DCT therapist might reinforce internalization of shame around Zionist or Jewish identity. This may or may not mirror earlier relational dynamics, where the patient or student has had to deny a part of themselves as a survival skill.

CONCLUSIONS

When misapplied to Jewish clients, decolonization therapy can profoundly pathologize a core facet of Jewish identity, Zionism, by recasting it as "internalized colonialism," thereby invalidating both individual and collective narratives of resilience and belonging.[115] In clinical practice, this ideological reframing often retraumatizes clients: genuine grief and solidarity with Israel are dismissed as symptoms of "privilege" or "colonial complicity," triggering shame, helplessness, and a sense that one's emotions are illegitimate. Moreover, when therapists prioritize advancing a political agenda over the client's needs, rather than centering care on the individual's lived experience, they subvert the fundamental client-centered approach, leaving clients feeling coerced, silenced, and unheard.[116] When therapists insist on ideological conformity, referring out or abruptly terminating clients who will not repudiate their peoplehood, they shatter the therapeutic alliance, exacerbating isolation and

discouraging future help-seeking. Finally, by embedding antisemitic tropes within treatment settings, decolonization therapy risks turning care spaces into sites of prejudice,[117] undermining broader efforts to cultivate culturally responsive, trauma-informed practice.[118]

A Call to Action: Ethical, Evidence-Based Mental Health Practices

The mental health community must take *immediate action* to address these concerns and restore integrity to the field. This includes the following requirements.

Policy and Institutional Reform

1. **Rejecting ideological coercion in therapy**. Mental health treatment must be *client-centered and evidence-based*, not driven by political agendas. Therapy should validate Jewish trauma, not erase it. This would require a significant re-orientation in the mental health professions that have fused a political ideology, without corresponding political knowledge, to become more inclusive of Jews.
2. **Protecting Jewish clinicians from discrimination**. Anti-discrimination policies that explicitly mention Jewish identity and Zionist perspectives will reduce burnout and help retain diverse mental health providers.
3. **Address the political and identity-based excesses emerging in training programs**. The alarming shift to specifically fuse political ideology and activism in therapy through DCT has the potential to harm in numerous ways, detailed in Table 2. Each of these areas must be addressed directly.

Research and Evaluation

4. **Demand empirical validation**. Any therapeutic model, including decolonization therapy, should undergo

Table 2. Potential Harms in Direct Fusion of Decolonial Models in Professional Training

Domain of Harm	Description
Loss of Personal Agency	Overemphasizing group norms or values can inadvertently silence a client's own goals, preferences, or unique struggles—undermining self-efficacy and autonomy.
Flattening of Differences	Assuming that everyone in a community shares the same experiences or needs risks "one-size-fits-all" interventions that miss important nuances.
Peer Pressure & Conformity	In group or community settings, clients may feel compelled to agree with dominant voices, even when those conflict with their true feelings—leading to shame or self-censorship.
Re-Traumatization	Discussing collective trauma without adequate individual containment can retraumatize some members, especially if triggers aren't managed sensitively.
Role Confusion	Therapists may be pulled between community expectations and the client's best interests, risking dual-role conflicts.
Underestimating Individual Pathology	Attributing all distress to social factors may lead clinicians to overlook biological or intrapsychic contributors requiring focused, individual interventions.
Tokenism	Superficial "community engagement" initiatives can become checkbox exercises that fail to effect real power-sharing or structural change.

rigorous scientific evaluation before being integrated into mental health practices. For example, future research should employ mixed-methods designs, combining quantitative measures of symptom change with qualitative interviews exploring client experiences, to capture the nuanced impacts of ideological framing in therapy. Longitudinal cohort studies are also needed to assess the durability of treatment effects and the potential for alliance rupture over time. Finally, the development and validation of a standardized "therapeutic invalidation" scale would enable systematic measurement of clinician-induced distress across diverse populations, facilitating rigorous evaluation and the refinement of culturally responsive, evidence-based practices.

Professional Standards and Continuing Education

5. **Addressing antisemitism in mental health training**. Graduate programs, licensing boards, and professional organizations must *educate mental health practitioners on antisemitism*, including its modern manifestations within antizionist rhetoric. This would include recently developed guides to educate professionals regarding antisemitism.[119]
6. **Holding professional organizations accountable**. Licensing boards, therapy associations, and educational institutions must *prohibit the imposition of ideological frameworks* that invalidate Jewish identity and ensure that antisemitism is explicitly addressed in ethical guidelines.
7. **Encouraging Jewish mental health advocacy**. Jewish professionals, allies, and organizations must *amplify their voices* to challenge the harmful effects of decolonization therapy and demand that therapy remains a space of healing, not ideological enforcement.
8. **Educating the broader mental health community**. There must be increased awareness about *the historical and indigenous roots of Jewish identity*, countering the false narratives perpetuated by antizionist rhetoric in therapeutic spaces.

As highlighted in this article, there are numerous ways that decolonial psychology is out of step with core facets of good professional conduct. Mental health organizations need education on antisemitism, Judaism, and Jewish identity and culture, and how to become culturally sensitive in alignment with the stated values of the professions. This would include the development of stand-alone antisemitism policies. This would require collaboration with the NASW, APA, and other bodies to craft ethics guidelines incorporating antisemitism definitions and clear procedures for identifying and addressing antisemitism in practice.

Healing cannot take place in a space where Jewish identity is vilified. The infiltration of DCT into mental health practices is doing real harm, pushing Jewish patients and professionals to the margins. This would include specifying *praxis* that addresses the needs of marginalized individuals and groups without contributing to the marginalization of other groups. It is time for the mental health field to take a stand against this dangerous trend and reaffirm its commitment to ethical, inclusive, and evidence-based care for all.

ENDNOTES

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Supplement 1: Emails Sent to Jennifer Mullan Requesting Engagement regarding Content of Decolonial Therapy (Sender De-identified)

Email 1, November 2023

Dear Dr. Mullan,

I will begin my communication with you with a location of self. I am a psychotherapist and family therapist, Nondual Healer, Somatic Attachment certified therapist and Integrative Mental Health professional. This is where I believe we have much common ground. I am also a proud Jewish woman, Israeli-American, and healer of multi-generational Jewish trauma and wounding. I am located. Please listen to my words as I speak out and cry out.

I reach out to you in hopes to open up authentic dialogue, challenge some of your statements and positions, and call on your accountability to answer for your statements and actions that are in fact deeply rooted in anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Your book and work was called to my attention through the Psychotherapy Networker. As I reviewed some of your background and statements, I found myself again confronting the dangerous territory of anti-Semitism under the guise of a so-called freedom movement. Are you aware of the explicit implications of genocidal doctrine and agenda of the so-called Free Palestine movement? Are you aware of what the chant "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" means and implies? Are you aware that Hamas's (and an overwhelming, alarming, majority of the Palestinian population and its supporters) call for an annihilation of all Jews living in Israel and subsequently Jews all over the world?

Please reference this recording of interviews with Hamas leader, simultaneously justifying and denying the brutal massacre of Jewish as well as domestic workers, and Arabs in Israel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCwNGCpjfrs.

Hamas justifies the kidnapping and brutal killing of babies, women, and elderly in the name of so-called resistance. Hamas vows to do this over and over, again and again. It is both insanity and flat-out anti-Semitism, age-old Jew hatred, that sustains and perpetuates this evil in the world. Where is your solidarity with the Jewish people who suffered this heinous, barbaric, attack on civilians, with no military objective? The simple goal was terrorism and to kill Jews and anyone living among Jews in plain cold blood. I have been in direct contact with the traumatized residents, rescue workers and media who have witnessed the unfathomable barbarism. Babies beheaded, burned alive, and killed in ovens. Whole families tied together, tortured, maimed, burned alive. Children tortured killed in front of their parents, on purpose, to psychologically torture. Parents killed brutally in front of their children. ALL ON PURPOSE. THIS WAS THE STATED GOAL AND OBJECTIVE. Civilians were the targets of this barbaric, heinous so-called act of resistance on Oct. 7th.

Please do not be fooled by the appropriation of this term "resistance." Is it an act of resistance to behead a baby, rape a woman, or kidnap a demented elderly woman? How can you in good conscience align yourself with a movement that ACTUALLY, EXPLICITLY calls for the genocide of the Jewish people in Israel?! How do you demand for freedom of anyone without demanding the release of Israeli and other nationalities of civilian hostages, babies, children, women, and elderly immediately, NOW?!

Do not mistake the Israel-Palestinian conflict as some type of racial conflict similar to that in the history of the United States of Black slavery and subjugation. They are not the same. To compare the two is ill-informed at best and a manipulated narrative to blame Jews for the Palestinian plight when it is their very own leadership that keeps their people subjugated in order to retain power and wealth. Listen to the

words of the son of the founder of Hamas, who articulates exactly who Hamas is and what it means to be Palestinian under their rule: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cIBzZylOpk&t=11s; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2BSDLFVT74.

I believe well-intentioned statements and positions can be ill-informed. I believe good intentions without true understanding can lead to profoundly damaging actions and destructive words. Are you aware that your statements are anti-Semitic and align with the calling of the genocide of Jewish people? Does that resonate with your views? If they do not, I invite you to enter into dialogue. I believe in the power of relationship for those who humbly seek truth and understanding. I have been committed to exploring my own bias in my clinical work. Are you open to explore yours?

With sincerity and heartbreak,

Email 2, October 2024, Sent Directly to One of the Authors of This Paper

I wanted you to know I reached out to Jennifer Mullen through both Facebook and her website. I'm not sure who monitors the messages but it has been well over a week and I have not heard back.

Interview with Mullan on the origins of Decolonial Therapy (from Fowler, J. [2024], *"Episode 40: Jennifer Mullan, PsyD"*, *What Your Therapist Is Reading*, May 22, 2024, podcast episode, 1:04:00, https://www.whatyourtherapistisreading.com/episodes/drjennifermullan):

> And I suppose when I came on the scene and started doing this related to my dissertation back in like 2012, and then little by little engaging in these ways and sort of living into it. Um so I think that folks have different understandings of what it means for me it is the cousin and the companion to land decolonization, right, in other words how do we really give back the land to the indigenous natural stewards of the land for the people that can say hey we're not gonna put pipelines here hey we're not going to kind of pull these trees up in order to make more housing and gentrify this area, right? So, there's that decolonial aspect, right? Where we're no longer taking what's not ours as a society. So decolonizing therapy is about pulling up the mental health industrial complex at its roots.

Later in the same interview:

> And I think that was part of my struggle in writing it is, is it too basic for people that are reading like Franz Fanon and like Paulo Fiori, right? Like, you know, is it too basic? Perhaps, right? And is it too hard for individuals that have like no context of like, wait, what on earth does colonization have to do with therapy and mental health? Right? So, I tried to find that middle ground.

Supplement 2: Letter from NASW CEO and President in Response to Concerns over Discriminatory Content in Professional Training Workshops at the Annual Convention

"My apologies for being a day later than I promised to respond to you. I read over your email several times, and I can understand the pain and discomfort you must have felt in some sessions when anti-Semitic comments were made. Unfortunately, there are individuals in every organization who will make inappropriate comments in large gatherings, and it is impossible for either Dr. Estreet or me to make assurances about what might be said in a public meeting. NASW strives to be a vehicle for positive change and a place for differences to be shared in a way that is respectful and promotes understanding and collaboration. I hope you will remember the positive experiences you had at the conference and continue to advocate for communication and collaboration among nations presently involved in conflict."

As of the writing of this manuscript, the NASW has been unresponsive despite multiple

attempts to engage in any meaningful dialogue with two of this article's authors (JK and AY), who are chairs of the Jewish Therapist Collective (JTC) advocacy committee and members of the Jewish Social Work Consortium. NASW has refused to issue a statement condemning antisemitic behavior in treatment spaces and learning institutions. NASW has issued individual statements condemning racism, homophobia, and transphobia. There has been no mention of anti-Jewish racism[1] or employing the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism, which has been adopted by the United States and many other countries.

A July 2025 response from the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and NASW stated their refusal to take any kind of public stance in support of their Jewish members. The letter stated, "It is understood that this may be viewed or experienced as a lack of support or commitment to standing against antisemites or in solidarity with Jewish social workers and their clients. This is not the intention of CASW or NASW. Both organizations are dedicated to upholding their respective Codes of Ethics and are bound to organizational constraints, including those of the IFSW."

Antisemitism is replete on social work listservs (including NASW's own MyNASW as well as their moderated Facebook page), social media, education, and training. There has been no response from leadership despite many pleas from Jewish members for assistance. It is our contention that NASW's behavior as an organization violates its own code of ethics.

Supplement 3: Letter Sent to Leadership of the American Psychological Association regarding a New Business Item (NBI) Intended to Change the Organization's 2007 Resolution on Antisemitism

This letter was sent on September 4, 2025. Note that the word "mover" next to the names of three professionals indicates that they were the ones who promoted the NBI to the organization for consideration. The nature of the NBI is described in extensive detail in the letter below, and thus we are not including the specific document in these supplemental materials.

To: Wendi Williams, PhD, APA President Elect
Arthur Blume, PhD, Chair, Board for the Advancement of Psychology in the Public Interest
Wendy Jeremie, MSc, Chair, Committee for Global Psychology
Alfonso Mercado, PhD, Chair, Advocacy Coordinating Committee
David Zelaya, PhD, Chair, Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs
Tiffany O'Shaughnessy, PsyD, NBI Mover
Jordan Dunn, PhD, NBI Mover
Dana Charatan, PsyD, NBI Mover

Re: Aug 20 Legislative Council New Business Item titled "Updating 2007 Resolution on Anti-Semitic and Anti-Jewish Prejudice"

Summary: We are alarmed and dismayed at the New Business Item (NBI; attached) that details recommendations for updating the 2007 Resolution on Antisemitism, and we urge the Council to *reject* the NBI as written. After careful reading, it is clear that this NBI would have the damaging effect of allowing and even promoting what would be considered hate speech against the Jewish Community. Rather than address the challenges of antisemitism, the phrasing and political emphasis expressly marginalize the largest proportion of the global Jewish community, for whom Zionism (a movement which advocates for "Jewish self-determination and statehood for the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland, the land of Israel"[2] represents a central component of their identity. We recognize that it has not been adopted, but the mere fact that it was proposed with the blessing of the representative divisions is an alarming development that deserves a fulsome and detailed response.

The resolution lacks the necessary introspection required for serious professional reform; cites old and outdated data on the incidence and prevalence of antisemitism; attempts to delegitimize the Jewish people's right to self-determination in part of their ancestral indigenous homeland; ignores efforts to integrate Jews into EDI initiatives that impact them; includes criticisms of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition[3] that are not factual; removes accountability for anti-Jew hatred from any other groups aside from far right extremists; excludes anti-Zionism from the definition of antisemitism; and if the resolution stands, undermines the as-yet-unformed membership of the Collaborative of Jewish Psychologists (CJP). This resolution, if passed, would greatly worsen the problems the profession and organization face regarding antisemitism and is itself a document espousing antisemitic viewpoints.

Antisemitism is not a mere policy disagreement; clinically, it functions as chronic traumatic stress layered on top of intergenerational trauma. As documented in recent peer-reviewed work on *traumatic invalidation* of Jewish experiences,[4] dismissing, minimizing, or politicizing Jewish harm reliably predicts hypervigilance, sleep disturbance, intrusive memories, anxiety/depression, and shame—over and above exposure to distressing news itself. In organizational contexts, these dynamics map onto *institutional betrayal*, where signals from leadership communicate that Jewish safety is contingent or negotiable. Language that narrows antisemitism or reframes Jewish self-definition as "political" predictably amplifies these risks.

Recent research underscores that antisemitism is not confined to overt acts of hate.[5] In a study of Jewish students, faculty, and staff on North American campuses, nearly all respondents (98.8 percent) reported antisemitic experiences, with subtle microaggressions such as gaslighting and exclusion from diversity initiatives most prevalent. Critically, these experiences were as strongly associated with depression, hypervigilance, and other stress symptoms as overt assaults. Importantly, the most frequently reported form of invalidation was collective delegitimization, defined as denying Jewish indigeneity or applying double standards to Israel, which demonstrates that anti-Zionist framings are among the most common and harmful ways Jewish identity is undermined today.

The effects of antisemitism have intensified dramatically since October 7, with Jewish mental health organizations such as the Jewish Community Mental Health Initiative (JCMHI) facilitating over 1,600 support groups worldwide to address the ongoing trauma. The widespread demand for such interventions underscores that rising antisemitism is not an abstract debate but a profound mental-health crisis that APA, by its own mission, should be prioritizing. Put plainly, an NBI that legitimizes anti-Zionism invalidates critical aspects of Jewish identity, detrimentally impacting the *mental health* of Jewish members of APA and the profession.

We conclude this critique with specific recommendations for an alternative to this NBI that respects the nascent CJP and would accomplish true progress toward addressing antisemitism.

Detailed critique: We have identified the serious problems in the NBI and arranged them by category.

1) **Politicization that Creates Permissibility of Hate**. Disparate Jewish psychologists (individually and in groups) have repeatedly pointed out to the leadership of the organization that antisemitism manifests across the political spectrum. The resolution, as currently written, presents the dangers of antisemitism as solely a politically right-wing phenomenon. Embedded in this issue is the demand for "evidence-based criticism of Israel's institutions, founding principles, practices, policies and actions," which is a thinly veiled attempt to connect a desire from the political left in our profession to relitigate the existence of the state of Israel. This is a demand that is not made of any other country, including many countries formed after 1948, which still

face border disputes. *This represents a specific double standard that is part of the Sharansky "three Ds" model of antisemitism. It is also in keeping with the ongoing demonization of Israel, which constitutes one of the other "Ds" in the Sharansky model*. In practice, it *marginalizes* the largest proportion of the global Jewish community for whom Zionism is an integral identity marker. Importantly, Jewish individuals are being targeted with antisemitism regardless of whether or how they personally identify with Zionism, and anti-Zionist rhetoric has been used to rationalize antisemitic hate crimes, including recent murders in Washington, D.C., and Boulder, Colorado, Therefore, this NBI is not just alienating Zionist-identified Jews but inadvertently fueling antisemitism against all Jews.

2) **Outdated or Selective Data**. The NBI cited nationally representative data to suggest that generally favorable views toward Jews were held in the United States. That study was published two decades before October 7, 2023; since that time, the rate of anti-Jewish hate crimes has spiked, with an influx of anti-Israel and antisemitic rhetoric and action originating from the political left, including from within our profession. This is well known, as a sitting Democratic Congressman, Ritchie Torres (D-NY), has called it to your attention publicly, and there have been numerous public condemnations issued by national-level organizations. Bari Weiss has written extensively about how recent antisemitism has emerged simultaneously from both the far right and far left, making reliance on two-decade-old national survey data inadequate for capturing the full scope of the contemporary threats being examined.[6] Recent monitoring and analyses, including some of our own collaborative work with the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism (FCAS), a premier nonprofit research and hate-monitoring organization, demonstrate the dramatic acceleration of antisemitic discourse and associated hate in digital spaces following October 7.

Research from numerous organizations has demonstrated massive spikes in antisemitic incidents, documented by the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, BBYO, and Foundation to Combat Antisemitism. In 2024 alone, the Anti-Defamation League reported 9,354 antisemitic incidents in the United States, which represented a 54% increase from 2023, a 344% increase over the past five years, and an 893% increase over the past ten years. For the first time in the history of the Anti-Defamation League audit, most (58%) incidents contained elements related to Israel or Zionism. These data are supported by FBI data accumulated across both Democratic and Republican administrations. *By claiming the rates of antisemitism are at the low levels suggested in this NBI, the delegitimization of claims of anti-Jewish bias fulfills the third "D" of the Sharansky model of antisemitism, making this NBI itself antisemitic.*

3) **Improper Conflation with Anti-Muslim Bias**. The opening parenthetically yokes antisemitism to anti-Muslim bias. Both forms of hate deserve serious attention, and APA should address each on its own terms. Pairing them inside a single antisemitism resolution dilutes specificity, encourages competitive suffering frameworks, and is misattuned to the Jewish experience this resolution is meant to address. Per FBI hate crime statistics,[7] after the past ten years, antisemitic hate crimes are approximately *six times* as common as anti-Muslim crimes. Since September 2023, antisemitic attacks have risen to *eight times* as frequent as anti-Muslim crimes in the United States. The specificity, gravity, and extent of antisemitic attacks were highlighted by former FBI Director Wray in testimony before the Senate in November 2023. The authors of this statement condemn any and all hate crimes against any group targeted because of their identity or affiliation, but these should be treated as independent issues.

4) **Excluding Jews from EDI**. The persistent denial of the minority status of Jews contributes to the lack of awareness and understanding that Jews must be included in EDI efforts.[8] In order to properly address this ongoing serious problem,

the field requires a thorough understanding of Jewish culture and the religion, which is missing from this NBI.

Indeed, under the diversity impact statement, the document claims that the resolution "should have a positive effect in allowing psychologists to more effectively advocate against antisemitism." It will not. By narrowing the definition in the way this NBI does, it opens the doors to anti-Zionism, an express modern form of left-wing anti-Jewish animus, as recognized by Jewish groups across the political spectrum. It should be emphasized that the vast majority of world Jewry (over ninety percent) believes in the Jewish people's right to self-determination and governance in the present-day state of Israel. Anti-Zionism is not a political statement about the policies of the Israeli government, but rather seeks to destroy Israel's existence and revoke Jewish rights and heritage. Rather than create an atmosphere of inclusion, this NBI creates a yawning chasm between Jews and other minoritized groups by expressly ignoring the repeated concerns raised by Jewish members about the specific nature of antisemitism experienced *within* the profession and APA as an organization.

5) **Mischaracterization of the IHRA Definition**. The IHRA definition of antisemitism is by far the most widely used and accepted definition of antisemitism, and the only consensus-driven one. It has been adopted by 1,266 global governmental entities, 45 countries, including the United States, 37 US states, 98 US cities and county governments, the Canadian government, and the Global Imams Council.[9] As an *objective* standard, it is widely accepted by diverse groups and is an essential tool for the identification of contemporary anti-Jewish bigotry. It is also important to note that false accusations and mistruths have been leveled against the IHRA. These are refuted elsewhere.[10] The IHRA definition was carefully written to protect freedom of speech by distinguishing between criticism of Israel's policies and conspiracy theories or antisemitic tropes that violate the civil rights of Jewish individuals. Regarding Israel, the IHRA definition specifically covers (1) denial of the Jewish people's right to self-determination, (2) the use of Holocaust imagery to characterize Israel (Holocaust inversion) including drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis, (3) the use of double standards to demonize Israel or Israelis, (4) accusations of dual loyalty and/or (5) use of conventional antisemitic imagery (i.e. conspiracy theories stating that Jews have some sort of hidden power that they use to promote a self-serving agenda) to characterize Israel and/or Jews. The IHRA definition also explicitly states what is not antisemitism, namely, criticism of Israeli policies, and does not infringe on First Amendment Rights as the NBI alleges. Collectively, these important facets are the cornerstone of the IHRA definition, and the absence of any understanding of the underlying basis as expressed in this NBI makes clear that the developers were uninformed and possessed a political agenda in advancing this proposal.

The NBI further misleads the Council of Representatives when it states that Stern was the lead author of the IHRA. He was not. The remaining drafters of the statement all stand behind this extremely carefully crafted definition that was sixteen years in the making. The tactic of specifically citing Stern in the fashion this NBI does is referenced in the IHRA handbook as follows:

> the Definition had many drafters and contributors over a 16-year-long iterative process. Attributing the development of the Definition to a single individual undermines the contributions of countless others who continue to support and stand behind it. Furthermore, overstating the role of a specific contributor in the development of the IHRA Definition misinforms the public and tends to be used in efforts to undermine the definition. Importantly, the other contributors who played crucial roles in the 16-year-long development of the definition continue to support and stand behind the definition.

Finally, the report appears to imply that adoption of the IHRA as a federal civil rights policy has led to worsening antisemitism. This is simply not accurate, and the spike in left-wing antisemitism has been documented in detail[11] and described in innumerable articles across the political spectrum. Additionally, while the developers of this proposed NBI attempt to delegitimize the use of the IHRA statement by noting that it was adopted under the Trump administration in 2019, they fail to recognize that it was also adopted during the Obama administration in 2016, shortly after it was finalized. Further, the Biden administration continued the policy of using the IHRA definition as a benchmark across the federal government. In short, the IHRA definition has enjoyed bipartisan support and directly contradicts the heavy-handed attempt to politically delegitimize the statement.

6) **Process Breach by Pre-Empting the Collaborative of Jewish Psychologists**. It is unclear whether those advancing this NBI possess recognized expertise in antisemitism, Jewish identity, or Jewish mental health. The recent call by APA for the nomination of members of a Collaborative of Jewish Psychologists (CJP), appears to be aimed at assembling such a group. However, the CJP, which, among its charges, will be a specific revision of the 2007 Resolution on Antisemitism, is rendered irrelevant should this NBI pass and get enacted. For a matter of such significance, subject-matter expertise does not seem optional but is rather essential.

7) **Ethical Concerns regarding the NBI and Antisemitism Inherent in Similar Documents**. The NBI raises grave ethical concerns, including the following:

- principle A: *beneficence and non-malfeasance*: The NBI is demeaning, demonizing, and delegitimizing, and inflicts psychological harm on Jewish psychologists; by accepting/ratifying the NBI, APA would be condoning and supporting malfeasance toward Jewish psychologists;
- principle B: *fidelity and responsibility*: We are concerned that the NBI violates trust with Jewish psychologists, and presents a conflict of interest by putting politics over the science of psychology and practice of alleviating human suffering, singling out Jewish psychologists as unworthy of having legitimate concerns;
- principle C: *integrity*: Disseminating outdated data as if it is current is a misrepresentation of facts. Ignoring the impact of the recent escalation since October 2023 of violence against Jewish people and institutions, including our children's schools and our community centers and synagogues, delegitimizes Jews' suffering;
- Principle E: *respect for people's rights and dignity*: This NBI undermines the autonomy and rights of Jewish individuals to define antisemitism for themselves based on the mainstream, widely accepted definition of antisemitism. The NBI would compromise the safety of Jewish psychologists, trainees, and patients by allowing demeaning and harmful rhetoric and behavior in APA spaces;
- 3.01 *unfair discrimination and 3.03 other harassment*: As above, demonization, delegitimization, and double standards are demeaning toward Jews and constitute discriminatory harassment;
- 3.04 *avoiding harm*: Agreeing with the misleading claims therein inflicts the mental anguish of traumatic invalidation on APA's colleagues, Jewish psychologists, as well as the public we serve. This is a specific harm inherent in this NBI.

In sum, were the APA to adopt and enact this NBI, it would be violating its own well-intentioned and well-crafted Ethical Code. If the APA truly values equity, the organization cannot, in good conscience, accept a document that is so profoundly out of step with our professional values.

- table and reject the current NBI as written;
- defer revisions of the 2007 Resolution to the CJP process and commit to genuine engagement with Jewish APA members with diverse viewpoints that are representative of the views held by the mainstream majority of the Jewish community, not fringe extreme ideology on either side of the political spectrum;
- use current, credible antisemitism data (e.g., Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, Center for Combating Antisemitism/StandWithUs, Foundation for Combating Antisemitism) rather than selective or outdated citations;
- work with national, representative Jewish organizations to address issues institutionally and within the field, such as Jewish Federations of North America, the American Jewish Committee, or the Anti-Defamation League;
- affirm inclusion of Jews in EDI frameworks across APA divisions, units, training, and policy;
- correct the record on IHRA's definition: acknowledge its consensus status, clarify misstatements (including authorship and scope), and fully recognize its bipartisan adoption; post this on the APA webpage and promote it widely;
- name antisemitism from both left and right; remove language that collapses antisemitism into a single partisan frame;
- clarify boundaries in APA spaces (conferences/listservs/meetings/courses): speech rights remain intact, but APA environments must be safe for Jews, consistent with APA ethics.

As Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt has observed, antisemitism comes from both left and right; those who only see one side are "blind in at least one eye." We ask Council to restore full vision: reject this NBI, empower a balanced and apolitical CJP, adopt accurate definitions and current data, and ensure that APA spaces are safe for Jews, consistent with our ethical mandate to avoid harm and respect dignity.

ENDNOTES

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Virtue, Boycott, and Exclusion: Anthropology's Turn against Israel

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Abstract

This article offers a critical analysis of the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) academic boycott of Israeli universities, combining institutional critique with an autoethnographic account of the author's experience as an anthropologist opposing the boycott. It argues that this largest US academic boycott against Israel undermines academic freedom, weakens the AAA's role as a forum for scholarly exchange, and contributes to professional polarization. The article contends that the boycott, though formally directed at institutions, inevitably harms individual scholars and disproportionately affects Israeli academics, including critics of their own government. It further suggests that the AAA's alignment with broader BDS activism distorts scholarly norms, fosters ideological conformity, and creates a hostile environment for many Jewish anthropologists representing a troubling pattern in progressive academic circles. Drawing on debates within the AAA and broader academic trends, the essay concludes that academic boycotts are counterproductive, erode intellectual pluralism, and ultimately impede the pursuit of dialogue, understanding, and peace.

Keywords: Academic boycott, American Anthropological Association (AAA), Israel; BDS movement, academic freedom, antisemitism, higher education, scholarly associations

Boycotting Israeli Universities and the Polarization of the AAA[1]



This essay provides a critique and analysis of the American Anthropological Association's academic boycott against Israel, and it is also an autoethnographic account of my own experience as an anthropologist opposing the boycott.[2] I will argue that the AAA boycott has weakened the professional association, created a hostile environment for Jews who identify with Israel, and hurt individual Israelis despite the stated goal of the boycott to target Israeli institutions and not individuals. The AAA is in danger of losing many Jewish anthropologists who are so alienated from the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) AAA academic boycott that they are resigning their membership, finding alternative paths for professional affiliation, or remaining in the association with great discomfort.

Since October 7, 2023, academic boycotts targeting Israeli institutions and academics have skyrocketed. According to an estimate by the Academic Boycott of Israel Monitoring Team, as of December 2025, they have risen to 1,000 cases, particularly from Europe, with no sign of abating even after the ceasefire in Gaza. The repercussions of these boycotts are still unfolding.[3]

As I will discuss, academic boycotts against Israeli universities began in the United States before October 7 and represented part of a

growing trend to isolate Israel in the international community of scholars. The boycott reflects what Rabbi Jason Rubenstein, the executive director of Harvard Hillel, calls "a tectonic-shift in American Jewish life" where it has become "a norm—and not just 'normal'—to discriminate against Zionists and Israelis in many circles of elite, progressive culture." Moral virtue, he says, has become equated with antizionism, and "a place is rendered pure by the exclusion of Zionists."[4]

Since October 7, 2023, when Hamas viciously attacked Israel and the war between Israel and Hamas ensued, the press and the Jewish community provided news coverage of disruptive student protests and encampments on college campuses that called on university administrations to divest from Israel. There has been less coverage, though, of the acrimonious debates in anthropology and other academic departments, scholarly associations, and faculty unions that have been years in the making before October 7 and that persist, about whether to wage academic boycotts and punish Israeli universities. These debates go back to the Palestinian Campaign of the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) begun in 2004 to promote boycotts of Israel as part of its Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, which has been "an international effort to isolate the state of Israel economically and diplomatically with the ultimate goal of undermining the country's political and historical legitimacy." Thus, while many Jewish students and faculty were taken by surprise after October 7 by the cataclysmic rifts on campus and the angry antizionist and antisemitic rhetoric of their progressive colleagues and peers, the early groundwork for polarizing debates about Israel were promulgated by ongoing organized international efforts.

BDS campaigns have had a measure of success promoting academic boycotts of Israel internationally and at home. In the United States, during 2013 alone, the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS), followed by the American Studies Association (ASA), and then the Council of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association voted in favor of boycotting Israeli universities and academic institutions. In 2015, the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) endorsed the BDS movement against Israel.

In 2016, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) narrowly defeated a boycott resolution by just 39 votes, less than 1% of ballots cast.[5] Then, in July 2023, the AAA became the largest and oldest academic association in the United States to support the boycott. Although 71% of those who voted endorsed the boycott, with 2,016 members supporting the boycott and 835 voting against it, only 37% of eligible members participated in the vote. This translates to about one-quarter (26.27%) of eligible AAA members voted for an academic boycott against Israel.

The executive board of the AAA approved a set of actions barring Israeli academic institutions from:

- *being listed* in AAA's published materials, including AAA's AnthroGuide to Departments;
- *advertising* in AAA publications, websites, and other communications channels, including the AAA Career Center;
- *using* AAA conference facilities for job interviews;
- *participating* in the AAA Graduate School Fair;
- *participating* in the AAA Departmental Services Program;
- *participating* in joint conferences or events with AAA and its sections; and
- the boycott also *prohibits* republishing and reprinting articles from AAA publications in journals and publications owned by Israeli institutions.[6]

The boycott's supporters argue that it is targeted against Israeli universities and not individuals. And the AAA did take some measures

to protect Israeli individuals so that, for example, the boycott *does not prevent* "individuals affiliated with Israeli academic institutions from registering for and attending AAA conferences."[7] But, of course, people are the lifeblood of universities, and the two are inextricably intertwined. It is impossible to separate academics from their institutions, and our Israeli colleagues report that the AAA's decision to implement a boycott against Israel's academic institution is having direct negative effects on its doctoral students and junior faculty. Moreover, one can only imagine how it feels for an Israeli to wear a University of Tel Aviv name tag at an anthropology meeting when that university has been condemned and has pariah status.

As others have pointed out, some AAA prohibitions are designed to incur personal as well as institutional harm on Israelis:

> Several of the AAA's avowed prohibitions combine personal and institutional harms: "Being listed in AAA's published materials, including AAA's AnthroGuide to Departments," "Participating in the AAA Departmental Services Program," and "Participating in joint conferences or events with AAA and its sections." It is as if Israeli universities, their students, and their faculty suddenly cease to exist, erased from disciplinary identity and recognition. As the AAA resolution declares, Israel now has only one identity, that of an outlaw Apartheid regime. That designation, first affixed by anti-Israel propagandists, and now used by the AAA to demonize Israel in its entirety, remains objectionable for many of us. The AAA seeks to isolate all Israeli universities from the worldwide community of academics.[8]

Several of my anthropology colleagues who are critical of the AAA boycott have been meeting as an informal group called "Anthropologists for Academic Freedom." My participation in this group grew out of my association with Miriam Elman, the executive director of the Academic Engagement Network (AEN), and Raaefa Shams, the director of communications and programming at AEN, both of whom connected me with other anthropologists who opposed the boycott. The AEN is an organization that works to support campus faculty and staff facing rising antisemitism. Members of the Anthropologists for Academic Freedom group first tried unsuccessfully to lobby against the vote for a boycott, and I believe that I became the anthropologist who posted the most against the boycott on the AAA all-member online discussion forum. The Anthropologists for Academic Freedom are now trying to mitigate its effect.

Among our activities, those of us active in the group circulated a petition to get 250 signatures to prompt a vote of the full membership on a AAA resolution that would amend the organizational bylaws to prohibit any endorsement of an academic boycott directed at any country. But several anthropologists who had signed our petition did not renew their AAA membership, and others were contemplating resigning in protest the boycott. This would have made it very difficult to reach the necessary 250 signatures for a vote of the full membership required by a bylaw. Instead, the Anthropologists for Academic Freedom hoped to work with the AAA leadership to find another way to prohibit academic boycotts, which would presumably cancel the organization's boycott against Israel.

But, for now, our efforts to eliminate the boycott have not born fruit. After the boycott went into effect, I worked on an ad hoc committee that then AAA President Elect Carolyn Rouse chaired to revise and clarify the AAA bylaws regarding rules that the forty special interest AAA sections must follow to issue independent political statements. Murky, imprecise bylaws of the various sections that comprise the AAA had permitted haphazard endorsements of the boycott without official oversight on whether section boards permitted their membership to vote, or if they were even consulted. This meant that, when I renewed my AAA membership, although I would have wanted to be a member

of the Association for Feminist Anthropology (AFA), the Society for the Anthropology of North America (SANA), and the Society for Cultural Anthropology, I would have needed to acquiesce to these groups' endorsement of the boycott with which I disagreed. Although the rules have since been clarified, the revisions in the bylaws regarding AAA sections do not prevent them from supporting an academic boycott.

At the AAA Annual Business Meeting held in December 2025, I began a dialogue with members of the AAA by proposing a plan for the AAA to prohibit academic boycotts in the future, which would include a prohibition against the current boycott against Israel. This began a lengthy online dialogue on the AAA's community forum open to all members, and I offered several reasons why the boycott was hurting the association and violating norms of academic freedom.[9] This conversation has the potential to spark further dialogue and help to bridge some of the polarization of the AAA.

Critiquing Anthropologists' Activism against Israel

Pro-BDS anthropologists were organized in a group called the AnthroBoycott Collective, and they also hoped to bring the boycott to their university campuses.[10] After the AAA ratified the boycott, an article appeared in the *American Ethnologist* expressing the hope that the boycott resolution would not end with the association's vote and would spread to BDS campus activism against Israel. It read, "We hope that this decision empowers anthropologists to pursue conversations within their institutions about how scholars can support Palestinian rights through BDS as part of a broader set of linked anti-colonial, anti-racist actions. Activist connections have been reinvigorated—from Ferguson to Gaza and vice versa."[11]

One of the ways that BDS gained student support on campuses is that its message to advocate for a global movement of solidarity, linking the struggle for Palestinian liberation with the struggles of other oppressed groups, gained currency. The BDS position postulates that systems of oppression, like colonialism and apartheid, are interconnected and that their movement could only succeed by uniting with other liberation struggles. BDS rejects the idea that Israel faces vulnerabilities on multiple fronts, including Hamas following its terrorist attack on Israel which killed more Jews than at any other time since the Holocaust, regional threats from groups like Hezbollah, military conflicts with Iran, and challenges related to its air defense and cyber systems. For instance, when the AnthroBoycott Collective issued a statement on October 16, 2023, in keeping with BDS tenets, it called on the US government to stop the imminent genocide of Palestinians and to end Israel's war on Palestinians in Gaza, saying, "We mourn the many Palestinian and Israeli lives already taken," but there was no mention of Hamas's deadly attack on Israel nor Israel's right to defend itself.[12]

Israel is cast as a supremacist, apartheid, nuclear-powered, settler-colonial oppressor, and the idea of two peoples with historical claims to the land is anathema to BDS proponents. They only see Palestinians as having a legitimate, indigenous claim to the land "from the river to the sea." In this calculation, Israel is seen as a rogue state, and BDS seeks to isolate Israel from the global community and ultimately to abolish it as a nation that represents a homeland for Jews.

Furthermore, BDS refuses to recognize the Jewish people's ancient, historical, and religious connection to the land of Israel. They see all Jewish Israelis as simply "settlers" and ignore the indigenous roots of Jews in the region and those who arrived as refugees from the Middle East and North Africa (Mizrahi Jews), many of whom faced persecution and were expelled from Arab countries. Their perspective asserts that the movement for Jewish self-determination (Zionism) is a mere extension of Western imperialism, not a fundamental call for national liberation and return to an ancestral homeland.

The BDS movement prior to the AAA vote had already established a broader political climate targeting Israel by casting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the evil oppressor against the oppressed, stating on its website: "Most mainstream media outlets are parroting apartheid Israel's propaganda morally equating the violence of the nuclear-powered oppressor with the resistance of the oppressed. In a typically colonial inversion of the truth, they whitewash the violence of apartheid Israel as 'violent clashes' between the 'two sides.'"[13]

Anthropologists for Academic Freedom are against *all* academic boycotts, and believe that "singling out Israel as the sole target is both hypocritical and antisemitic."[14] There are many regimes around the world that are corrupt and support murderous policies including China, Russia, and Iran, to name a few, and they are not the focus of an anthropological boycott, nor are we advocating that they should they be.

But the fact that the boycott overlooks countries with far worse records on human rights violations, and by imposing sanctions against the only existing Jewish majority country and no others, the boycott by extension raises red flags for antisemitism according to the IHRA definition.[15] The boycott is also unfair because it ignores the complexities of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute, including the centuries of struggle and mutual violence between "competing nationalisms, identities, religions, and histories." It demands that anthropologists vilify one side to a tragic conflict in which both have missed too many opportunities for compromise and to live together in peace and justice.

Using mind-boggling logic, pro-boycott anthropologists have decided that it makes good sense to resolve what they perceive as the marginalization or "boycott" of Palestinian academics with another boycott aimed at Israel. This sets a dangerous precedent, and tying the AAA's goals to the BDS campaign also constitutes the scapegoating of a people and a nation.

Anthropologists for Academic Freedom also believe that a boycott is a form of discrimination against our colleagues on the basis of national origin. It constitutes a barrier to scholarly exchange, academic freedom, and free inquiry. Ultimately, a boycott divides the organization into camps, those for a boycott and those against, and the AAA can no longer purport to represent everyone's common interests. For Jews in the AAA who are Zionist or who identify with Israel in any way, along with the majority of American Jews, the AAA has become an unwelcoming, inhospitable place.

Moreover, anthropologists' boycott of Israel demonstrates how fragile academic freedom is and how easily our free speech and right to academic exchange can be endangered. Under the boycott, it might be possible for American professors to tell their students that they cannot write letters of recommendation for them to study in Israel because they are observing an academic boycott. This violates accepted guidelines of academic ethics in coercing students exercising their own academic freedom. Faculty who refuse under the pretext of a boycott to write letters of recommendation on behalf of worthy students prejudice their students' rights and legitimate interests and have justifiably faced disciplinary actions by their own universities. The academic boycott against Israel has already had the consequence of marginalizing Jewish students on campuses and others who believe that Israel has a right to its sovereignty like every other nation in the world.

Vilification of Israel threatens academic freedom, in principle and in practice. As two of us wrote in a previous essay:

> The academic boycott against Israel compromises the AAA's role as a forum for robust continuing debate and scholarly investigation. The respected Kalven Report of the University of Chicago advocates that universities avoid speaking with one voice on controversial issues because this inhibits free inquiry and dissent.[16] [. . .] Many of us believe that the AAA, as a community of scholars, should abide by similar principles and remain a home of continuing

> debate and scholarly investigation. Rather than foster polyvocality surrounding a complex issue, the boycott of Israel seeks to silence social critique by implementing a single official position.[17] [. . .] To justify the boycott, the AAA accuses Israel of operating an apartheid regime 'from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea,' including the internationally recognized state of Israel. This echoes the rhetoric of those who reject the nation's right to exist within any borders. The boycott fails to reflect the humility required before wading into a conflict with a complicated history and a controversial present. That the AAA would pursue such an intellectually and ethically shallow course is especially sad given anthropology's historic commitment to contextual understanding, deep description, and broadmindedness. To cut off ongoing informed conversation and genuine dialogue is against anthropology's mandate.[18]

Pronouncing stances on controversial issues also has a coercive effect that forces everyone in the academic unit to adhere to the same perspective. Individuals have academic freedom that is protected, but as Cary Nelson, former head of the AAUP, has pointed out, when academic departments take a stance on issues over which faculty and students are deeply divided, they create a hostile environment.[19]

Loss of Scholarly Rigor to Score Political Points

When academic departments, programs, scholarly disciplines, and collectivities of faculty in labor unions become politicized and issue political statements on contested topics they may distort modes of reasoning, sacrifice scholarly rigor, and relinquish democratic decisions. The AAA debate on the boycott exposed the risks of politicization and of speaking in the name of a scholarly discipline but outside the bounds of genuine scholarly expertise. Facts were interpreted with hypocritical distortion and internal dissonance in order to score political points. One example of this was the use of biblical passages taken out of context to sway political opinion. The second illustration was the claim that BDS is aligned with international feminist and queer movements but that Zionism, the self-determination and statehood of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland, is incompatible with feminist values.

On the individual level, this problem is illustrated by the distinguished scholar Dr. Alisse Waterston, who is a past president of the American Anthropological Association. Under her leadership as the president of the AAA, there was an earlier vote in 2016 for the membership to endorse an academic boycott of Israel. After the defeat of that last vote, the AAA board decided nonetheless to issue a condemnation of Israel anyway, despite the vote, because, in President Waterston's words, "we had come too far." In the view of those of us standing against the boycott, this was profoundly anti-democratic, because the vote against the boycott should have been the last word on the subject. I for one did not renew my membership at that time in protest.

Moreover, after this first debate on boycotting Israel in 2014–2016, and with the AAA's condemnation of Israel, one of the AAA interest groups called the "Committee on Jews and Judaism," focusing on scholarship on Jews around the world, disbanded because many of the scholars studying Jews left the AAA. I had then assumed the role of national co-chair of the Committee on Jews and Judaism. The resignation of many members of the group should have been an anticipated outcome given that the association singled out only one nationality for condemnation, Israel, the only Jewish state in the world, and they did this after a democratic vote had rejected a boycott against Israel.

Later, as a former president of the AAA, Alisse Waterston decided to endorse the boycott of Israel in 2022 and wrote in an announcement in *Mondoweiss* that she would support the AAA boycott because: "As a Jew, I have looked to the moral teachings from my mother's prayer book to help guide me. Perhaps none is more

important or relevant than the imperative to pursue 'justice, justice,' a word written twice to 'teach us that we must practice justice at all times, whether it be for our profit or for our loss, and towards all men [sic], Jew and non-Jew alike.'"[20]

As any serious reader of the Bible might point out, however, what she omitted is just as important. The passage "*tzedek, tzedek*" or "justice, justice" comes from the Hebrew Bible in Deuteronomy 16:20. The verse reads more fully: "Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that Adonai your God is giving you." In other words, God gave the Hebrews the land that they might thrive. The relevance of this to contemporary politics is a complex question; I do not believe that the Bible need be read as if it were a contemporary political manifesto. But the potential resonance of that passage should not simply be elided by anyone claiming to rely on that very passage as a source of inspiration.[21] More important, this small example dramatically illustrates the problematics of authority and expertise and the need to interrogate all claimed connections between scholarly inquiry and political action. In reading the passage as the pursuit of justice without the link to the realization of the Jewish ancestral homeland, former President Waterston omitted the essential connection between the two ideas. Pursuing justice and occupying and thriving in the homeland are inextricably linked in the passage.

Pro-boycott proponents often made other false claims with no empirical validity to gain political advantage. For instance, they called BDS a feminist enterprise and stated that anthropologists' purpose is to answer the call of Palestinian feminists. But their position was based on shallow feminism and exclusionary politics, not sound scholarship.

The claim that BDS is a feminist enterprise traces back to 2015 when the National Women's Studies Association endorsed BDS. Over 120 Women's and Gender Studies Departments signed the statement.[22] Women's and gender studies programs did not criticize Arab and Islamic states that ban and punish LGBTIQ+ individuals. Nor did they denounce the homophobic acts of Palestinian leadership, including both Hamas and Fatah. But they criticized Israel's more liberal policies and tolerance for sexual expression as an imperialist agenda and pinkwashing.

In light of this position, it is not difficult to understand why feminists after October 7 were slow to condemn Hamas's rape and murder of Israeli women.[23] Dr. Karin Stögner, chair of Sociology at the University of Passau, Germany, has said that "strange alliances" have formed between "queer and intersectional feminism on the one hand and global antisemitism on the other hand." She writes that, "An approach to intersectionality is restricted to the trinity of race, class, and gender" and "it fails to acknowledge Jews and their experience with antisemitism." If intersectional feminism vilifies Jewish nationalism as "white-supremacist," then feminism and Zionism are seen as incompatible and Zionism is equated with racism.

The AAA Creates a Hostile Environment for Jewish Anthropologists

The academic boycott of Israel is already producing specific abhorrent practical consequences. A boycott of Israeli institutions which explicitly ties the AAA to the BDS movement means that the AAA itself may be subject to sanctions in thirty-five US states that have laws, executive orders, or resolutions against the BDS movement, putting into question the location of future annual conferences as well as the participation of anthropology departments at state universities in official AAA activities.

Many faculty members and students who might be critical of Israel's governmental policies, but who identify with Israel and believe that it has a right to exist, no longer feel welcome in the AAA; it is no longer a hospitable place for Jews whose identity is tied to Israel. Jewish anthropologists, however, such as members of Jewish Voice

for Peace (JVP), an anti-Zionist and left-wing advocacy organization, support BDS, deny the Jewish people's right to self-determination, and have become strong, vocal proponents of the AAA boycott against Israel. They appear most at home in the AAA, particularly in the group called The AnthroBoycott Collective which was most responsible for advocacy in support of the boycott.[24] This phenomenon of intra-religious Jewish conflict and how radical Jews provide rhetorical ammunition to those who oppose Israel and are comfortable boycotting Israelis constitutes a separate topic worthy of investigation.

Anthropologist David Rosen, who was particularly active in opposing the AAA boycott in 2016 and in the months leading up to the 2023 vote, noted the irony of the AAA cutting off dialogue with Israeli anthropologists, many of whom were staunchly opposed to Netanyahu's policies and the rightward shift in the Israeli government. He wrote,

> Suppressing moderate voices is central to the BDS's anti-normalization campaign, which is designed to shut down debate and communication surrounding the Israel-Palestinian conflict and drive out the voices of dialogue and moderation. But no one should be surprised. All radical movements demand simple binary oppositions: a world made up of oppressors and oppressed, good guys and bad guys. BDS is no different.[25]

Rosen's point that a boycott drives out moderation and turns dialogue into black and white polarities was clearly illustrated in an online debate that he had with another anthropologist who was a staunch proponent of the AAA boycott. The debate highlighted how, for pro-boycott advocates, more was at stake than a desire to cut off Israeli institutions for the short duration. The ulterior motive was to oppose Israel as a Jewish state, its very existence, and not to merely condemn its politics during its war with Gaza, but instead to banish Israel from the community of scholars indefinitely. The following excerpt of this debate on the AAA's online discussion forum illustrates the virulent antizionism of some proponents of the boycott and their desire to see the elimination of Israel, which in their calculus is an illegitimate state.

David Rosen wrote, speaking on behalf of those anthropologists who expressed criticism of the Israeli Netanyahu government,

> As . . . others have made amply clear, none of us who oppose the boycott are advocates for the policies of the State of Israel. The central question before us is: What kind of strange organization boycotts its allies? Is that going to be the American Anthropological Association? What has led some in the American Anthropological Association to herald this dubious, and to my mind, unethical, path of boycotting the most progressive sectors of Israeli society? [. . .] For more than 24 weeks, Israeli anthropologists have joined the democratic forces of protest seeking to block the drift of Israel into a right-wing authoritarian state. They have been joined by many leading Palestinian citizens of Israel who acknowledge both the pressing need for joint action and the joint fate of Jews and Palestinians. No one is looking at the situation through rose-colored glasses. Everyone recognizes the grim situation of Palestinians living in the occupied territories. No one pretends to have easy fixes. But everyone knows that joint action is key [. . .]. The boycott movement stands in opposition to joint action. Boycotts are part of BDS's anti-normalization campaign, which opposes cooperation with any Israelis, other than those who completely reject Israel's existence in any form, democratic or otherwise. Does anthropology want to align itself with this philosophy? I hope not. For a discipline that is constantly struggling to be seen as relevant, this is the pathway to marginality . . .

One of the most vocal proponents of the BDS academic boycott responded to Rosen in the AAA discussion forum, and in so doing, proved

the very points that Rosen was making by substantiating that BDS supporters saw the state of Israel as illegitimate and would be satisfied with nothing less than its eradication:

> Professor Rosen,
>
> Your post [. . .] conveys that your opposition to the proposed institutional boycott is not a matter of opposition to Palestinian rights [. . .].
>
> Do you, in fact, support freedom and equality for Palestinians, with no qualifications to that?
>
> Here let us note that the Palestinian call for BDS urges the rest of us to adopt and practice BDS (including institutional boycotts of Israeli universities) until Israel "fully complies with the precepts of international law by: 1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling of the Wall. 2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and 3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194." [. . .]
>
> Opponents of the proposed boycott should be straightforward and tell us, without vagueness or equivocation, whether they do or do not support freedom and equality for all Palestinians, throughout the occupied territories and inside the 1948 borders of the Israeli state [. . .].

Academic Boycotts against Israel Grow

Sadly, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), "a half labor-union, half professional-organization," which opposed academic boycotts as a universal principle since 2006 on the grounds that they threaten academic freedom and free exchange, has formally reversed its two-decade opposition to academic boycotts in August 2024 under elected president, Todd Wolfson, who is a PhD anthropologist by training and a Rutgers University associate professor of Journalism and Media Studies. (Todd Wolfson, it should be noted, is also the head of the board of the faculty union of the Rutgers AAUP-AFT chapter which has issued a statement in support of BDS goals.) What this means is that individual university faculty unions represented by the AAUP-AFT that decide to boycott Israel will now be in alignment with the national AAUP-AFT's policy.

This influential organization has opened the floodgates for endless boycotts against Israel, which in fact have occurred, and the decision is not encouraging for civil discourse on campus, nor for the inclusion of Jewish faculty members who support labor issues, but who oppose boycott resolutions against Israel. I should state for the sake of transparency that, in protest against our union's pro-BDS position, I quit the Board of the Lecturers' faculty union at Rutgers, and I am no longer a rank-and-file paying dues member of the union. As Cary Nelson, a former president of the AAUP, pointed out, "We must no longer use AAUP policy as the gold standard for academic freedom."

Historical antisemitism, when it was not genocidal, was often about exclusion or marginalization—from occupations, social milieus, neighborhoods, regions, countries. Its modern successors eerily echo that same impulse, which needs to be both named and resisted. "Negating Israel and its supporters has emboldened antisemitic expressions and actions" as we have seen in evidence since October 7. "The broader project of delegitimizing Israel is threatening the rights of Jews wherever they live to embrace their identity and live without fear."[26]

There is a dangerous hubris reflected in the American Anthropological Association acting as though it were an international criminal court, passing judgment, sentencing Israel, and enacting punishment. Certainly, a boycott undermines the core mission of academia to foster the free exchange of ideas, and it also widens political gulfs:

> Peace, mutual respect for all human rights, and an end to suffering will not come about by hardening people's hearts with academic boycotts. These laudable goals can be achieved

> only through dialogue—not by stifling it. The AAA boycott against Israeli universities and academics is nothing more than antisemitism hiding behind the virtue-signaling sophistry of a false morality.[27]

Since the start of the AAA boycott, pro-boycott anthropologists have gotten ample coverage in AAA publications.[28] For instance, the Society for Cultural Anthropology, a section of the AAA, published a series of essays in 2024, entitled "Anthropology in a Time of Genocide: On Nakba and Return."[29] In one essay by Maura Finkelstein, thought to be the first tenured professor to lose their job for pro-Palestine speech in the United States, she recounts that she was fired from her job as a tenured associate professor at Muhlenberg University after, first, "several Title VI complaints had come to her through the college's Title IX office." The provost said, "Multiple students felt you created an unsafe atmosphere and that you have been targeting and harassing them."

The straw that broke the camel's back and seemed to hasten Muhlenberg's dismissal was when one of Finkelstein's colleagues recommended the university administration fire her after she reposted on Instagram a statement from a Palestinian American poet. "Do not cower to Zionists," the post read, according to Finkelstein. "Shame them. Do not welcome them in your spaces. Do not make them feel comfortable. Why should those genocide-loving fascists be treated any different than any other flat-out racist. Don't normalize Zionism. Don't normalize Zionists taking up space."[30]

About her teaching philosophy, Finkelstein said, "to teach two sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to acquiesce to a veneer of 'balance,' this insistence on 'both sides' is actually a 'one-side' approach that privileges Israel and erases the asymmetry of the colonizer-colonized dynamic."[31]

Finkelstein's firing raises important and complex questions about academic freedom, threats to the tenure system, and whether social media posts should be off limits for consideration in faculty evaluations, but these critical issues are beyond the scope of this paper. What is key here, though, is that the Society for Cultural Anthropology, a section of the AAA, gave Finkelstein, a controversial figure who holds intense antizionist views, a public forum for her ideas. The dilemma is that the AAA provides a platform for extreme antizionist views while boycotting Israeli anthropologists and, in so doing, it creates an "echo chamber"; antizionist AAA publications evaluate antizionist anthropologists' writing as praiseworthy and deserving of publication. This reveals the hypocrisy and potential harm to academic freedom and intellectual exchange. The AAA selectively applies its principles of inclusivity and open dialogue by boycotting Israeli institutions while simultaneously providing a public space for extreme antizionist viewpoints. There is no real debate or dialogue, just highly politicized, polemic writing with a litany of attacks on Israel based on preexisting suppositions about Israel's illegitimacy as a state. This selective approach undermines the association's credibility and its ability to represent all its members.[32]

Anthropologists have normalized delegitimization of Israel as a direct challenge to Israel's right to exist. This has made it very difficult for supporters of Israel to address the conflicts within Israel or criticize governmental policies when their voices are drowned out by those who condemn Israel's right to exist. We do not currently hear the voices of Israelis on the pages of anthropological journals addressing these concerns.

This is one way that the boycott acts as a form of censorship and an attempt to stifle academic freedom for those scholars who do not share the AAA's political stance on Israel. It limits opportunities for collaboration and the exchange of ideas between scholars with different backgrounds and perspectives.

Jewish Anthropologists Who Identify with Israel Depart the AAA

The AAA has become an inhospitable academic environment for Jews who identify with Israel,

and many are leaving the AAA. One active member of the AAA who has assumed leadership positions said, "I also do not think anyone will care [. . .] if Jews are disproportionately leaving. But they will care if membership is dropping—and it is, although whether that is because of BDS or some other reason no one knows." The fact that there are Jewish members of the AAA who are revoking their membership because of the AAA's academic boycott and that the AAA is losing major financial donations is incontestable. The single largest donor to the AAA canceled their donations right after the AAA endorsed a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. At the same time, the AAA fired half of its staff because it was in debt.

I have heard from members of the AAA who have resigned from the organization in the last two years solely because of the academic boycott against Israel. Some have written anguished, angry, painful letters expressing their sadness and frustration that a place that was once their academic home has become a source of alienation. They have also expressed strong criticism that the AAA has become an organization that advocates partisan hostility in its scholarship and its politics. One Jewish anthropologist reflecting on the history of the BDS movement in the AAA wrote me, "I recall that when this [BDS] was discussed at the 2016 business meeting, the BDS group marched in like the Red Guard in the Cultural Revolution! I felt like we were risking our lives in opposing the resolution." But, when the BDS academic boycott became a fact in 2023, this anthropologist quit the AAA, and wrote the following letter:

> Two recent events have sparked my decision to take this path.
>
> First, the vote by a small minority of the membership to support an academic boycott (BDS) of Israeli anthropology [. . .]. While all decent observers of the situation in Israel condemn the actions of the government, the boycott does absolutely nothing to change these policies. It stigmatizes our colleagues who almost universally also oppose these heinous policies and who are our allies in efforts to change the direction of the Israeli government. It also does absolutely nothing to influence any of these policies. To my mind, the boycott does nothing more than provide an opportunity for the self-righteous among us to posture and display their disdain for Israel. Now that war has broken out between Hamas and Israel, I shudder to think of what the BDS proponents will next propose, without deigning to acknowledge the unspeakable crimes Hamas has committed in the name of "resistance." Adopting behavior that recalls the most dreadful examples of political intimidation, in the mode of the Red Guard or the KKK, they have accused those of us who opposed the boycott of being "settler colonialists" or "Zionists," and of harboring other odious and racist positions. Thus, a threatening atmosphere of coercion has made an entrance into domains of the AAA where reason and mutual respect should prevail. This is not a welcome development [. . .].

Another Jewish anthropologist, who is enraged at the AAA boycott and has found alternative professional affiliations as an archaeologist, gave a moving description of visiting the great mosque of Kairouan for evening prayers and how he felt more at home in this environment than with fellow anthropologists at the AAA. He said,

> I feel more comfortable anonymously in Arab nations than I do in the company of a large gathering of cultural anthropologists. [. . .] In late September of 2023, I went with a Tunisian friend into the great mosque of Kairouan for evening prayers. He knows I am Jewish. I washed and then prayed shoulder to shoulder on the ground with hundreds of men. At first, I was scared. But then a peace came to me. As I was saying the *shema* under my breath—not loudly, of course!—it occurred to me how similar it is in content to what the men around me were saying. In the end, I felt more comfortable than I do in my own department.

A couple of scholars published a statement in the *Jerusalem Post* on how the field of anthropology has vastly changed to become an arbiter of political truth, a discipline that "arrogates itself to the final word regarding forms of justice."

> Anthropology was once a discipline which tried to understand culture, both local manifestations with individual characteristics and as a broader concept of beliefs and practices. In recent decades, however, it has deliberately transformed itself into a discipline that purports to study power, in the process arrogating to itself the final word regarding forms of "justice" (environmental, social, restorative, historical, and more). Studying the panoply of the human experience is passe if not retrograde.
>
> So, too, with academic Middle East studies [. . .].
>
> Unconsciously, a wide swathe of Middle East studies, represented by MESA [Middle East Studies Association], has a worldview where Israel is the little satan to America's great satan, reshaping history into a simplistic post-colonial morality play, where imperialism was invented by Britain and taken over by the US [. . .].
>
> Zionism is cast as a bizarre and evil movement, rather than another national liberation movement; Israel is an imposition and aberration, rather than the national realization of an indigenous population; and the Palestinians are hapless victims, whose frequent resort to violence is either elided or cheered.
>
> At one level, the AAA and MESA resolutions represent the politicization of academia, where professors demand that their institutions adopt their politics in place of the often contradictory and always messy politics of the region [. . .].[33]

The archaeologist also wrote to me on January 3, 2024 and raised concerns about antisemitism in the AAA:

> Here is a title for an article/op-ed: "The American Anthropology Association: Trivial Pioneers of the New Antisemitism."
>
> [. . .] Campus reactions have put the AAA solidly in my rearview mirror. In the spring and summer, the AAA horrified me. Now, it seems like a frivolous canary twittering annoyingly in the coalmine. Since 7 October, we are suffocating, but are better off now that the damned bird is dead to us.
>
> The AAA is nothing more than a feckless example of broader currents of antisemitism in America, especially on the left. I know some people are sad for the loss of the AAA as their natural home, but the entire neighborhood and city—the old left where we all fit in and felt comfortable—has been torn down by the new Campus Orthodoxy and much broader currents in America and Europe. This bigger disaster is much more frightening than the loss of a comfortable spot on a sofa in the AAA [. . .].
>
> The AAA is in financial ruin and disarray, and is more involved with political statements than advocating for academic integrity and scholarly inquiry.
>
> The solution is either the continued fracturing and decline of anthropology as an intellectual discipline into a generic ethnic studies that values only social justice postering, or the formation of a new organization designed to reincorporate all that has been lost.

Responding to the loss of AAA membership and donations, one AAA elected official said that the association will put their efforts into the next generation of younger anthropologists. But younger anthropologists are also leaving. One graduate student wrote to the Anthropologists for Academic Freedom on August 1, 2023:

> I am deeply upset by the result of the referendum to boycott Israeli academic institutions.
>
> The effect will mainly be to discredit the AAA and harm students like myself who are unable to access the work of Israeli scholars and form valuable partnerships that would have advanced our understanding of Anthropology. I still plan to attend archaeological field school

in Israel and contribute to the discipline by becoming an Anthropology professor, but not as a representative of the AAA.

I am saddened to reflect upon all that the AAA is losing, including my own membership, engagement, and contributions.

Some anthropologists report being the victim of awful harassment when they tried to organize against the BDS boycott of Israel. As one anthropologist who is actively engaged with Anthropologists for the Academic Freedom wrote to me:

> When I helped organize the campaigns against BDS in both 2015 and more recently, I was subjected to some of the most unpleasant insults and harassment I've ever experienced—from random AAA members, no less. The hostility, self-righteousness and moral posturing were staggering. It remains, without question, the worst experience I've had in academia.
>
> A Jewish anthropologist assuming a leadership position within the AAA said that, "I feel ill at ease to take on this leadership position [. . .] knowing that I am entering a shark tank of political binary rage rather than a community of thoughtful, nuanced discourse [. . .]. I have always loved anthropology, anthropologists, and the best of our field. This level of black and white thinking must stop.

Speaking about membership in one of the sections of the AAA that had no bearing on Israeli/Palestinian relationships, this same anthropologist noted that it had "Palestinian American leadership and vocal anti-Israeli sentiment has grown considerably. I do feel a bit of an exile in that home of 25+ years."

Jeffrey Cohen, a professor of Anthropology at Ohio State University who has been very active in the group Anthropologists for Academic Freedom, explained why he could not remain in the AAA after it endorsed a boycott against Israel despite the important role that an affiliation with the organization had placed in his professional life for many years:

> In August 2023, I left the American Anthropological Association (AAA). I left in response to the July 2023 vote by the AAA to boycott Israeli universities and colleges. About 30% of the AAA members voted in what was an off-cycle referendum, but it was enough. This was not the first attempt by some members of the AAA to demonize Israel and corrupt my field, [. . .] unfortunately it was the first to succeed.
>
> My resignation represented the disgust I felt for the organization. But I couldn't have anticipated the October 7 Hamas attacks, or what has followed since. Nevertheless, these events are all of a piece in my mind. The AAA's boycott was an unprovoked assault on academia and my field and while there was no physical violence involved, like the Hamas attacks it was motivated by extreme antizionism/antisemitism.
>
> Leaving the AAA changed my life. While I am secure in my position and I continue my research, I am no longer able to engage with the larger anthropological community professionally. The AAA leadership would argue leaving was my choice, they are happy to take my money and welcome me back. . . as long as I do not have ties to an Israeli university. For the record, I do write with Israeli colleagues, and I cannot imagine asking them to hide their affiliations.
>
> In a longer article, I argue the AAA has failed in its mission to promote and defend anthropology. In place of its mission to defend the field, the AAA has adopted a tribal identity built around a litmus test that effectively rejects research by investigators who are part of Israel's system of higher education, research that is focused on Israel and research that engages Judaism (this applies not only to cultural anthropology, but all kinds of anthropologies). For anyone who argues I am overreacting, there are members of AAA journal editorial boards and subsections as well as organizers of the AAA's

> many meetings who voted in favor of the boycott and who censor work that they consider Zionistic.
>
> It isn't lost on many of us who have left the AAA that its mission and the biases established by the boycott will grow more obscene with little to no opposition from within. But there are few options around which a repeal might be mounted. The idea of re-joining an academic organization that has become a front for hate, antizionism and antisemitism is simply impossible.

Deborah Tannen, a renowned linguist who had a long-term affiliation with the AAA, explained why she decided not to renew her membership:

> I, like other members and (now) former members, see the AAA boycott as a grievous error. [. . .] For me personally, among the most deeply disturbing aspects is that it has led to the exclusion of Israeli scholars from every aspect of academic life. That the majority of those being thus excluded from educational institutions are Jews is ominous in ways I did not think would recur anywhere in my lifetime, let alone in the United States and in an organization that has been my intellectual home throughout my academic career.
>
> I came to the world of academia comparatively late in my life. [. . .] I treasured my newfound community for its firm footing in the requirement that all research findings, claims and conclusions be based on concrete evidence. Among the many reasons to oppose the boycott, one that therefore cuts particularly deeply for me is the absence of evidence that such boycotts ever achieve their stated goals—and evidence of the opposite. This would be troubling in any group endeavor or movement, but to encounter it in an academic organization undermines the raison d'être of academia—and, by extension, of the AAA.

The AAA Boycott and Its Effects on Israelis

Ultimately, the boycott has eroded the academic freedom of Israeli anthropologists and other scholars—both Jewish and Palestinian—by limiting the work they might conceivably do in the wider community towards conflict resolution, social justice, and a lasting peace. If an academic boycott were merely virtue signaling, that would be bad enough. But it has turned out to frustrate the good work that anthropologists and other academics can do, and this is tragic and irresponsible.

The effect of academic boycotts in Israel has already been counterproductive. As the American Association of University Professors argued in the past before it radically changed its policy, "The target of any boycott should be the specific policies of governments, not the students and faculty who oppose those same policies through public demonstrations, as had been happening throughout Israel."[34]

Israeli academia faces an "unprecedented global boycott: to which the AAA contributes." "Canceled invitations to conferences, a freeze on hiring Israelis at overseas institutions, rejection of scientific articles on political grounds, disruption of lectures abroad—Israeli scholars from various disciplines paint a painful picture of the foreign boycott that has afflicted them since the war broke out in Gaza."[35] Ironically, the AAA boycott and others like it

> swing hardest at Israeli academics, who—like our own—are most often outspoken in their support of Palestinian rights and are critical of the conservative shift in Israeli politics. The AAA's attack against universities therefore aids and abets the current Israeli government in its attempt to suppress academic freedom, democracy, and dissent. The boycott also severely hurts the nearly 20% of students in Israeli higher education institutions who are themselves Palestinian.[36]

One influential Israeli anthropologist said that the cold reception that Israeli anthropologists have received from the American counterparts long pre-dates the boycott decision per se. For instance, Israeli anthropologists

would get a reaction from a journal stating that the paper submitted was ignoring the Palestinian issue, a comment that in some cases was hardly relevant to the topic of the study. Also, an atmosphere of "self-censorship" has emerged: Israelis decide not to submit papers, or not to apply for grants, etc., because they feel in advance that the effort will not be successful. Another senior Israeli anthropologist said, "I can only tell you that the few post-doc and sabbatical seekers I know have self-censored and simply did not apply to US departments."

A study by Shai Farber on how boycotts from the international academic community have affected Israeli scholars across diverse disciplines during the Israel-Hamas war in 2023–2024 used semi-structured interviews to look at the personal narratives of thirty participants from diverse disciplines, including anthropologists, and concluded that Israeli academics suffered varied forms of discrimination:

> They encountered abnormal rejections of research papers without substantive feedback, dis-invitations from conferences based on their nationality, and obstructed attempts at international research collaborations—all seemingly motivated by their Israeli affiliations. This treatment left participants feeling targeted and disadvantaged due to circumstances entirely beyond their control.

Five key themes emerged: "1) Overt and covert discrimination; 2) challenges in international collaborations; 3) ethical and professional dilemmas; 4) long-term personal and career implications; and 5) implications for academic discourse and collaborations."[37]

> Participant D, an anthropologist, shared her exasperation: "I have dedicated my career to promoting cross-cultural understanding through scholarly research. However, now, certain journals seem to have preemptively dismissed my work based solely on my institutional affiliation, not the merit of my findings. It is disheartening" (27 February 2024).

The experiences narrated by Israeli participants across diverse disciplines included an anthropologist who

> expressed dismay at the chilling effect: "As scholars, we are supposed to fearlessly pursue knowledge and shed light on complex human issues through academic inquiry. But now I find myself stuck in this constant calculation—is this particular topic too 'sensitive' or likely to be perceived as objectionable by journals? This nagging self-censorship is plaguing academia" (11 April 2024).

The study went on to conclude that, as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, boycotts, both overt and covert, took a psychological and professional toll on Israeli scholars who felt isolated and uncertain of their professional future navigating a hostile academic environment. The study identified themes of discrimination that included "overt and covert discrimination, challenges in international collaborations, ethical and professional dilemmas, and long-term career implications."

Since October 7, 2023, Israelis have become subject to many such academic boycotts in the United States and internationally. To date, in addition to the American Anthropological Association, the following American academic associations have formally endorsed a BDS academic and cultural boycott of Israel: the African Literature Association, American Studies Association, Association for Asian American Studies, Association for Humanist Sociology, Critical Ethnic Studies Association, National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, and Peace and Justice Studies Association (PJSA).[38] Other scholarly associations have harshly condemned Israel with accusations that Israel is committing

scholasticide and genocide, and there are acrimonious debates that antisemitism is flourishing. Social workers have written:

> Antisemitism is one of the oldest oppressions and one that continues to flourish. However, it remains ignored by the profession both in education and practice. In the wake of the October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel, the most deadly massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, which included the abduction of 250 hostages, the murder of more than 1200 civilians, and the rape and mutilation of numerous Israeli women, social work has remained silent. Jewish social workers are outraged and disappointed in this silence as it permits ancient antisemitic stereotypes and myths to flourish. To redeem itself, the profession must recognize antisemitism, its many forms, and its impact.[39]

Jewish members of the American Psychological Association (APA) have organized and actively tried to fight back against what they perceive as currents of antisemitism in the Association. They filed a formal complaint against the professional association, alleging that an official statement put out by the Psychoanalysis and Social Responsibility Section (APA Division 39, Section IX) relating to Israel's war against Hamas was clearly antisemitic. The statement claimed that members are "unanimous" in "our solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle and condemnation of the Zionist ideology as a result of the occupation, oppression, and dispossession of the Palestinian people." "While the statement denies it is antisemitic, the language calling for the destruction of Israel, its ideology, and the people who support a national homeland for the Jews, as well as the Zionist cause in general, plainly is racist, outrageous, and harmful."[40] The signatories also claimed that Jewish APA has been "harassed, marginalized, and silenced on APA community forums even for attempting to challenge antisemitic rhetoric or correct misinformation."[41]

In the American Historical Association, the elected council leadership ultimately opposed a resolution accusing Israel of committing scholasticide, or the destruction of Gaza's educational system. At the annual meeting of the American Historical Association which has about 10,000 members, 500 members gathered at the annual business meeting on January 25, 2025, and voted overwhelmingly (428–88) to approve a resolution condemning Israel of committing scholasticide in Gaza.[42] But twelve days later, the group's top elected council vetoed the resolution as the official position of the association and did not permit a vote of the full membership. In a written statement, the council said that it "deplores any intentional destruction of Palestinian educational institutions, libraries, universities and archives in Gaza," but the resolution contravened the AHA's "constitution and bylaws because it lies outside the scope of the association's mission and purpose.[43] The fight within the AHA does not appear to be over, and recently two pro-BDS historians were elected to the council.

In the AAA, pro-BDS anthropologists have turned "Zionism" into a hateful mantra, a curse word, mired in allegations of Israel as illegitimate, settler-colonialist, apartheid, and genocidal. The rhetoric is automatic, spit like a bombardment of vulgar epithets. But there is no thoughtful, scholarly discussion about the complexities of peacemaking. There is no subtlety, no nuance, no attempt to bring Israeli voices into the circle, voices that might shed light on the Israeli-Gaza war, engage in insightful dialogue, offer possible solutions to the seemingly intractable differences and violence.

As I write this paper, the world watches the specter of mass starvation in Gaza as Israel and Hamas have failed to arrive at a peace agreement. Rabbis and other Jewish leaders are speaking out publicly. It is sad and self-defeating that just when both Israelis and the people of Gaza need leading thinkers to advise peacemakers and help provide solutions to the ongoing tragic war, the AAA continues to be so partisan in its politics

that it offers little more than condemnation and vitriol against Israel. The continuation of a divisive and destructive effort to delegitimize Israel is not warranted at this historical moment that requires clear-headed, discernment, and not slogans and derogation of Israel. The need for a long-term peace settlement has never been more urgent, and level-headed anthropological scholarship could guide long-term solutions.

On July 29, 2025, the presidents of five of Israel's leading universities published an open letter to Netanyahu, raising concerns over the crisis in Gaza:

> "Alongside a growing segment of the Israeli public, we observe with shock the harrowing scenes emerging daily from Gaza, where hunger and disease continue to claim the lives of the most vulnerable," the university leaders said. They added that they were "appalled" by statements made by some politicians who were "advocating for the intentional destruction of Gaza and the forced displacement of its civilian population."[44]

In an unprecedented move,

> Arab and Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, signed a declaration Tuesday condemning for the first time Hamas's onslaught of October 7, 2023, and calling on the Palestinian terror group to release all the hostages it is holding, disarm and end its rule of Gaza, in a bid to end the devastating war in the Strip. […] Seventeen countries, plus the 22-member Arab League and the entire European Union, threw their weight behind a seven-page text—obtained by the *Times of Israel*—agreed at a United Nations conference on reviving the two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians.[45]

There can be no better time for the American Anthropological Association to end its academic boycott of Israel and provide a forum for Israeli scholars and their institutions to be part of a dialogue toward negotiating long-term solutions that bring peace and dignity to the parties involved in this Middle East conflagration.

The AAA was never meant simply to be a club for like-minded academics, but rather a professional scholarly association that brings together anthropologists across the entire range of ideologies, methodologies, and fields within the discipline. It is therefore especially unfortunate that the academic boycott against Israel has created a deep rift in the organization and politicized it to a degree from which it may never recover.

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Echoes of October 7: A Phenomenological Study of Jewish Students' Experiences at a Small Liberal Arts College

Monika Rice

Abstract

This article presents the results of phenomenological research on Jewish students' experiences at a small liberal arts college (SLAC) in the aftermath of the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. Based on interviews with twenty-five students from diverse political and religious backgrounds, it documents and analyzes student voices. The study distinguishes common and differing themes in the narratives of pro-Israel and pro-Palestine positions the students expressed, and discusses the impact of campus events and activism, as well as the college's responses, on the students' Jewish identities.

Keywords: Post-October 7 campus, antisemitism, Jewish identities, Jewish students' experiences, colleges' responses to antisemitism

Dedicated to Jewish students at Lafayette College: Zionists, antizionists, "in-between," or apolitical . . . who, with generosity and honesty, shared with me their campus experiences since October 7, 2023.

INTRODUCTION

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This article presents the results of phenomenological research on Jewish students' experiences in a small liberal arts college (SLAC) in the aftermath of the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. Based on interviews with twenty-five students from diverse political and religious backgrounds, my project seeks to document Jewish students' voices and understand their experiences during a changing campus climate. The project also explores how the events on campus affected students' Jewish identities and perceptions of Israel as one of the fundamental components of American Jewish identity. This research approaches students' accounts as testimonies from a recent period of historical crisis in which the meaning of liberal education, the terms of democratic public discourse, and the acceptable pathways to Jewish security have all been in question.

My own positionality as a researcher is important in this project: I am a Jewish Studies professor of Polish Gentile origins whose research, thus far, has included Holocaust testimonies, Jewish identities in Poland, and Polish-Jewish relations. My academic journey took a sharp turn in 2000, after the publication of Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors*, which famously discussed the pogrom of Jewish inhabitants in a town of Jedwabne by their Polish neighbors on July 10,

1941. The book engendered the largest public debate in postcommunist Poland and transformed Polish understanding of Poles' role in the Holocaust, contributing to the creation of pluralistic historical memories.[1] However, the debate also effected a defensive reaction against the incorporation of a Polish "dark past" into the national memory, thereby eroding the fledgling pluralistic model of memory. In January 2018, this erosion achieved a new zenith: after three years under the populist Law and Justice Party (PiS) government, the Polish Parliament approved the "Polish Holocaust Laws," making it illegal to accuse the Polish nation or state of collaborating in Nazi crimes. While after six months of global criticism, the most controversial provision was repealed—criminal offense was replaced with civil offense—the Polish public sphere saw an explosion of extreme antisemitism that quickly moved from the margins to the mainstream. Government-run newspapers and TV channels published or hosted speakers expressing explicit antisemitic slurs; government officials were publicly stating that there were Polish and "Jewish" Holocaust perpetrators; attacks on Jews or people thought to be "Jewish" increased, as did acts of vandalism on Jewish buildings and cemeteries. The shock to outside observers and to Poles interested in critical reflection on Polish history was intense (I penned a piece searching for understanding at a liberal Catholic *America Magazine*[2]): up to now, the Polish case of dealing with its difficult past could still be considered an example of a successful transformation from denial of any responsibility for the Holocaust to accepting the notion of partial responsibility for some of its acts. The post-2018 outburst of antisemitism shattered these illusions.

It was thus, on October 8, 2023, that I experienced a sense of déjà-vu when, the day after the massacre of over 1,200 Israelis by Hamas, the demonstrations that broke out in New York city and on American college campuses justified, explained away, and even *celebrated* the mayhem of this mass murder in a multiplicity of versions of "they had it coming."

Back in my classroom, most Jewish students appeared to be in a state of confusion, disbelief, and trauma. As time went on, I saw and heard many students indicate their increasing isolation from their peers and the college at large; they felt abandoned by their "second home" at a time when their Jewish identities were under attack. Their expectations that the college "do something" against anti-Israel narratives were not fulfilled, and their grief for the murdered ones and for the hostages was not given a specific "Jewish" place. They were deeply hurting in a way that I saw as historically connected to the othering, isolation, and marginalization that typify Jewish collective experience.

Having worked on Holocaust testimonies, I understand the unique value of giving account as early as possible. Here were the voices of young Jewish people experiencing mostly for the very first time what it was to be singled out with racist derision. Family knowledge of persecution and Jewish education suddenly became a first-person experience. I could not turn myself away from a need to record those voices as necessary artifacts to understand the experiences of Jewish people I now teach.

On the other hand, from early on, some students were eager to discuss the "pre-October 7" Israel as a necessary "context" to understand the massacre. Although disturbed, they did not appear traumatized by the events in Israel but became increasingly preoccupied with the plight of Gaza. I was struck by this division of perspectives, and I wanted to understand it. This research is a fruit of my need to record and understand the transformation of Jewish students' experience on a small American college campus after October 7.

While literature on the impact of the post-October 7, 2023, campus climate on Jewish students has been fast growing, it is based on samples of students at large institutions across the country, where much pro-Palestine activism

took place; Jewish experiences in smaller schools have mostly escaped similar scrutiny.[3] This present research, focused on a SLAC, is a unique case study of experiences in a single community, thus filling the gap and providing a texture for understanding current Jewish experience. It also discusses the impact of faculty and political activism on a minoritized group and suggests a way forward that faculty and administrators can implement in order to ensure greater protection for students belonging to a small minority of the American population (2.4%), yet which, according to the FBI, has been consistently the prime target of religiously motivated hate crimes (nearly 70% nationwide in 2024).[4]

Antisemitism has dramatically increased in recent decades both in the United States and abroad, becoming a globally acceptable position.[5] On American campuses, it is practically a universal experience for 98.9% of Jewish students, faculty, and staff, with nearly 70% reporting explicit assaults (e.g., direct physical threats) based on their Jewish identity.[6] Even accounting for this explosion, after October 7 antisemitism has taken a new form: the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reports that in 2024, for the first time, a *majority* (58%) of all antisemitic incidents were related to Israel or Zionism.[7]

In contrast to the "classic" antisemitism that defined the Jew as a religious or racial "other" (needing redemption through conversion to Christianity or by racial elimination), the "new antisemitism" employs long-established antisemitic tropes to attack Zionism or Israel, "a country widely understood as one that represents Jews everywhere."[8] That way, antisemitism becomes a global problem, "embraced as much by radical Islamicists and self-styled progressives as by arch-conservatives of both the Left and the Right."[9] Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky provided a classic characterization of "new antisemitism" as being comprised of "three Ds": delegitimization of Israel, its demonization, and double standards in judging its politics.[10] Jerome Chanes likewise identified three characteristics of new antisemitism, emphasizing the connection to Islamism: its collectivizing focus on Israel rather than individual Jews; its rootedness in the Islamic world; and the "old" double standard, which

> refers to the assertion that Jews may not defend themselves as may any other people or person. If this be the case, then—by extension—the legitimacy of a Jewish historical particularism, a Jewish historical identity, is challenged. Deriving from this, of course, is the isolation of the State of Israel and the relegation of Israel to the status of "pariah state."[11]

The perception of a bond between Israel and Jews ties the massacre of October 7 and the subsequent war in Gaza with the global rise in antisemitism. The "semantic war"[12] framing and defining the new antisemitic discourse is the "Z word," or Zionism, which captures a yearning to reestablish Jew's ancestral home. This yearning has been part of Judaism from the time of the first exile, as recited each year at Passover and Yom Kippur, "Next year in Jerusalem." Likewise, daily prayers and wedding ceremonies contain supplications for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and rituals commemorating its destruction.[13] Historic attempts to return to their olden homeland have all expressed Jewish determination to exist in complete, religiously and culturally meaningful, Jewish identity.[14]

As Alyza Lewin argues, not celebrating Zionism as Jewish attachment to the ancestral home does *not* invalidate the claim that Zionism is an integral part of Jewish identity, just like not eating *only* kosher food or not celebrating Shabbat does not erase either one of those activities as a recognized marker of Jewishness. Consequently, just as requiring Jews not to eat kosher food or celebrate Shabbat is universally recognized as antisemitic, so should be the attack on Jewish attachment to its ancestral home.[15]

Zionism is *also* a secular reaction against the failure of assimilation that offers a solution to the exclusionary policies of rising nationalism. As a political movement, it was the *only* feasible and successful attempt to settle the Jewish

minority outside of the European continent in the wake of emerging nation-states.[16] Nevertheless, the creation and survival of Israel through the displacement of about 700,000 indigenous Arabs (Nakba) and several wars for Israel's existence against potentially obliterating attacks from Arab neighbor states led to some delegitimization of Zionism as a national movement. Since the 1975 UN resolution equating Zionism with racism (revoked in 1991), that delegitimization acquired international moral currency, overriding a reasoned discussion. Thus, the term "Zionist" applied to a person concerned about the security and survival of Israel became a negative label and a slur and Zionism came to be equated with oppression and racism akin to fascism. To the contrary, as Cary Nelson et al. point out:

> Nothing about a Zionist commitment to the national liberation of the Jewish people and to their right to return to a state of their own in their ancient homeland [. . .] entails a commitment to Jewish supremacy and to the suppression of Palestinian rights, but the contemporary antizionist movement insists otherwise.[17]

Attachment to the ancestral Jewish homeland, in whatever political form or degree, has only recently been recognized as a "heritage," rather than a political position.[18] Therefore, as Nelson et al. assert, "The commitment to Israel is a central feature of Jewish young adult identity and peoplehood. Antisemitism on college campuses thus mounts an assault not only on religious beliefs but on Jewish student identity."[19] It is important to emphasize the obvious: that criticism of Israel's actions does not, per se, equal antisemitism. Critique of Israel becomes antisemitic when it *denies* Israel's right to exist, misconstrues Israel's efforts to defend itself as *offensive*, and disproportionately *singles out* Israel's actions, while ignoring those of other states' far graver abuses of human rights, and/or using traditionally *antisemitic* tropes. When acquiring any of the above characteristics, the critique of Israel within the campus discourse creates a hostile environment for students whose identity is based on Jewish heritage.

The conflation of religious and political Zionisms results in antisemitic labeling of Jews who support Israel's right to exist—shared by the majority of Jews—with political *preferences* of certain Jews. As is abundantly clear, Israelis have hardly been unanimously supportive of their current government's actions in Gaza. However, Jews globally have been held "responsible" for the war and persecuted, attacked, and even *killed*, a price no other nationals of even the most unjust governments (e.g., the Russians, the Chinese) have paid.

Methodology

This project focuses on the lived experiences of Jewish students. It does not purport to reconstruct the events on campus in the aftermath of October 7. Its subject is the *personal perspective* of students' experiences as expressed through oral testimony. Material for this research draws on semi-structured interviews with twenty-five Jewish American students (including one graduate) at Lafayette College, conducted by me between February 7 and March 14, 2025, averaging ninety-five minutes.[20] Interviewees were asked mostly open-ended questions that encourage free-flowing narrative. Pro-Palestine and pro-Israel self-identifications were used by students themselves to denote the direction of their general position, with awareness of their simplistic connotations.

This study utilizes phenomenological research methodology, based on Edmund Husserl's phenomenological theory, which aims to "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of a universal essence."[21] Thus, it requires a collection of narratives of a similar or the same phenomenon in order to understand its essential, non-accidental features. In my research, I identified "living on the post-October 7, 2023, Lafayette College

campus" as a central experience. My initial analysis focused on identifying significant statements that I combined into themes signifying clusters of meaning. In my secondary analysis, after identifying proximate content, themes emerged as belonging to three axes that capture the main categories of students' experiences. Following that, I developed a structural description of students' experiences, focusing on the "how" of the experience.[22]

Students' narratives discussed internal, external, and existential experiences. Two emotional qualities of experience emerged organically and almost instantly: a positive or negative evaluation of the campus tone directly related to students' pro-Israel or pro-Palestine positions and the role of Israel in their identity.[23] As a researcher, I had no choice but to acknowledge that this distinction was a fundamental difference in evaluating students' experience. Admittedly, binary approaches to conceptualizing Jewish student responses to October 7 have been recently challenged in Krasner et al.'s meticulous study across American campuses that proposed a multidimensional framework to capture a spectrum of Jewish students' *responses* to the post-October 7 campus. My own research, while focused on lived experience rather than reactions, confirms the authors' findings of nuanced Jewish responses; nevertheless, it also recognizes an indisputable "binary" impression of the campus climate that emerged from students' accounts. In addition, my interviews extended over almost a year—a longer period of time than Krasner et al.'s research, i.e., including the time of encampments and activities through and after the fall semester 2024.[24]

The majority of students in the study identified as Jewish in a cultural or ethnic sense, with several emphasizing religion as important component of their identity. Some came from mixed backgrounds where, however, Jewishness and/or Judaism became the family's dominant identity. All of the students supported Israel's right to exist and to self-defense, but this general Zionism could be intensified by three factors: personal connections to Israel (family, friends, trips); commitment to broadly-understood Jewish education (often religious, sometimes on the Holocaust and current events in Israel); and Zionist leanings of the student's parent/s. Although *all* the students expressed *some criticism of Israel's actions* as the war continued, and *nobody* justified the massive civilian death toll of Gazans, when the three above-mentioned factors were the weakest, the students declared less personal attachment to Israel and even questioned whether Zionism can remain a component of their Jewish identities. Within my sample, six students self-identified as pro-Palestine; two among them indicated that already prior to October 7 they had had no attachment to Israel and had not considered such an attachment an element of their Jewish identity.

Students were asked about their understanding of Jewish identity and the role that Israel may play in it. They were then asked to describe their experiences and reactions to the news of the Hamas-led attack and the ensuing war. Further questions probed their impressions of the campus climate throughout fall semester 2023 and spring and fall semesters 2024, their own involvement in any activities related to the events, and their assessment of the college's response to the events on campus. They were also questioned about whether and how their Jewish identities were affected by the experiences on campus in the wake of October 7.

As a qualitative study, this research does not make claims about representability of students' opinions, and numbers do not indicate proportions of the opinions of Lafayette College's Jewish students. My primary objective was to bring to life students' own voices and to understand what their post-October 7 experiences mean for their Jewish identity. The conclusions aim to extract the *essence* of Jewish experience on a SLAC campus, which can be extrapolated to other small campuses.

Lafayette College

Lafayette College is a private liberal arts school in Easton, Pennsylvania, chartered in 1826, with a student enrollment of 2,729 as of 2024. Known for its solid engineering program, it is also famous for providing broad education in writing and humanities. Formally affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, Lafayette's faculty and students consider it "conservative," with white students accounting for 65%, domestic students of color, 25%, international students, 7%, and first-generation students, 12%.[25] Jewish students comprise approximately 10–12%, according to the Hillel Society website. Hillel is the one formally recognized Jewish organization on campus, offering Shabbat services, Sunday bagel brunches, trips and activities for students, as well as a plethora of charitable actions. It strives to provide an inclusive environment accommodating students with varying Jewish backgrounds as well as non-Jews.

The college has a small program in Jewish Studies, with a faculty appointment to the program for the first time in 2021 (in a dual appointment shared with Russian and East European Studies), and many contributing faculty offering courses about the Holocaust, the politics of the Middle East, Jewish literature, Hebrew language and culture, and others.

While the pro-Palestine activism on the campus was limited, non-violent, and there was no encampment, in November 2023 the college was notified of an investigation by the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in response to a complaint about an alleged incident of discrimination on campus. This investigation was settled in June 2024, when the college agreed to revise its discrimination policy.[26]

It is important to compare Lafayette Jewish life with its Lehigh Valley neighbor, Muhlenberg College, which provides much more robust resources and support for its Jewish students. Muhlenberg has 20–30% Jewish students (500–600) in a given year and offers many more "Jewish" activities, centered in two organizations: Hillel and the Leffell Center for Jewish Student Life.[27] Muhlenberg unabashedly announces on its website to prospective parents and students that it is "proudly Zionist" and "[has] not had issues with antisemitism on campus."[28] In contrast to Lafayette, it also offers kosher dining and sponsors Birthright trips to Israel. Its Jewish Studies program has also one program-affiliated faculty and many contributing faculty, offering a wide range of courses in Jewish culture and history.

This brief comparison may lead readers to presume students interested in enrolling in a small college in Lehigh Valley with a more vibrant Jewish life would be better served at Muhlenberg, and that Jewish students who choose Lafayette must do so for other advantages. At the same time, a well-known lack of antisemitism on campus before October 7 was an additional factor that attracted Jewish students to Lafayette.

Below, I will first outline Jewish students' reactions to October 7, 2023, followed by themes of their experiences in the months that followed. I will discuss the themes using three thematic axes along students' self-identification as being pro-Israel and pro-Palestine.

FINDINGS

Reactions to the News of October 7, 2023

October 7, 2023, happened during fall break, when many students were away from campus, mostly at their homes. In the *confusion* of hearing the initial news, students with connections to Israel first went through an agonizing process of ascertaining whether their relatives and friends were safe: "It felt like everything stopped, like everything was frozen. [. . .] a lot of cell towers were down so it was hard to know [. . .]. Thankfully, everybody I know was okay" (A. T.).[29] Personal ties with Israel made students experience fear, terror, heartrending pain, and uncertainty. W. B. said,

> I was so heartbroken, scared and I have [. . .] cousins who work in [the Israeli] army. [. . .] That was really scary—getting texts from my cousins in Israel, seeing pictures of them leaving immediately, going to their bases, not knowing what was going to happen next. [. . .] It was really heartbreaking and terrifying and just more news [was coming] of people that I knew, whom we haven't heard from.

As K. M. noted, "For me as a Jew it was horrifying. I mean, getting these texts from my parents [. . .] [and the] uncertainty what would happen next."

Fear was an important emotion accompanying the search for news. Many experienced a generational connection with young Israelis who lived under existential danger of terrorist attacks:

> I'm emotional, but it was just an immediate fear of . . . I have no idea if my friends are okay, and also just for everyone. My heart was breaking, but I immediately texted all my friends [. . .]; I don't think that I was able to immediately get in touch with them, which was really scary, but it was difficult because I kept thinking about these people that I'm very close with. [. . .] there's nothing really different between them and me [. . .], we both shared the summer camp experience. In terms of values, I am very similar with them. [. . .] They could be here, and I could be there. [. . .] Oh my God, I don't know if my friends are okay. This is so horrible and upsetting and there's nothing I can do. (E. V.)

Even if they did not have friends or close family in Israel, students connected with the *collective* Jewish memory of a unifying danger and threat of persecution. They expressed—consciously or not—the idea of *am Yisrael* (the People of Israel), a spiritual connection of all Jewish people throughout history and geographic dispersion.[30] As D. R. shared,

> The thing that really got me was the hostages, especially hearing that some of the hostages that were taken were just one or two friends away from my friends. And knowing that one of them went on an Israel trip with some of my friends and one of them worked with me last summer and all of these connections to the hostages, even though I had never met them before; [. . .] it doesn't make it any better that I don't know them personally.

Savage torture of Israelis captured by Hamas viewed via livestreaming contributed to the immense *pain*: "And also just the brutality of it [. . .], there was a lot of stuff about how some of them were celebrating . . . to me that's just horrible . . . that was not acceptable" (E. V.).

Likewise, news of expressions of support for Hamas on American universities led students to question the intelligence and morality of those at elite institutions. B.K. shared their dismay at thirty-four student groups at Harvard University that, on October 8, 2023, immediately signed a statement calling Israel "entirely responsible" for the Hamas attack: "that was quite a culture shock, seeing that these are supposed to be the smartest people in the world [. . .]. You don't even know what you're doing."

The unprecedented scale and level of Hamas's atrocities against Israeli civilians evoked feelings of *depression and paralysis*: "At first, we were like, oh, here it goes again. But then it just kept going and going and going throughout the day and the next day, it just kept getting worse and we kept reaching out to everybody in Israel" (A. T.). W. B. shared: "It was just news after news after news, heartbreaking, debilitating, and just overall stomach wrenching." At least five students described symptoms of *trauma*:

> [. . .] the biggest personal change was [. . .] physiological changes in my body when I was walking around campus and my heart rate felt twice as fast as it was the day before. And I was sitting in class and couldn't pay attention and felt like I was literally trembling and sweating all the time even though it was freezing outside.

> I had to force myself to sit down and eat because I was just chronically nauseous. (D. R.)

Similarly, W. B. said they were "paralyzed in bed for two days straight [. . .]. I go to class, get home. and get in bed and cry all day." With time, some students were able to move somewhat away from agonizing over the victims, while others remained concerned about hostages still held by Hamas at the time of the interview (spring 2025):

> My Jewish friends might be posting something like: "Don't forget there are these hostages, you know. There are these little babies who haven't been released." And yet it's crazy that you say, "Don't forget." Because, for someone like me, it's all I think about. (W. B.)

Students also testified to *anger* at Hamas perpetrators and recognized their own psychological need of protection from the onslaught of overpowering emotions: "I saw the news and . . . [it was] just infuriating to see that. [. . .] it was also frightening. I tried reaching out to my cousins in Israel. [. . .] it was probably one of the darkest times of my life" (B. R.). Another student recognized that anger was easier to deal with than mourning: "It was a lot easier to be angry than it was to be sad and helpless. [. . .] It almost helped me feel like I could do something or be in control" (D. R.).

After returning from fall break, many experienced compassionate inquiries from their non-Jewish classmates, yet such initial empathy toward Israel was "short-lived" (D. R.) and soon turned to indifference and hostility, which, mimicking the global trend, dominated the campus tone. One student distinguished a clear arc of time in how things were discussed on campus:

> There was this critical period, in the first few weeks, when people [. . .] weren't yet brainwashed that I actually could have quality conversations. [. . .] As time went on, [. . .] I started to realize a lot of people were like: "Oh, well, [. . .] I don't want to take sides on Israel and Hamas. I've heard both sides, I don't want to get involved in it." And then [. . .] that almost transitioned into: "How could you be pro-Israel?" (D. R.)

An explanation of why this shift occurred speaks volumes about students' understanding of some of the reasons behind the pro-Palestine solidarity movement: "Once Israel attacked Gaza, [. . .] once people saw destruction on both sides, that's when they started to think about who's the underdog in the situation? Who has more power, who has more resources?" (D. R.).

Experiences on Campus. Axial Thematic Analysis

A fundamental difference in the quality of students' experiences on campus was grounded in whether they aligned with Israelis or Palestinians. Among the experiences, three thematic axes emerged. While both groups discussed two axes of commonality—campus support and realignment of their Jewish identity—some pro-Israelis' observations about political homogeneity on campus led to a third axis. Because of its all-encompassing impact on pro-Israel students, I will analyze this axis of distinction first.

A. Experiences of Pro-Israel Students

> We were already so burdened by what was happening in Israel that it was like being punched after you've fallen down. (D. R.)

1. Axis of Distinction: Political Homogeneity

The axis of distinction comprised six thematic clusters of experiences of political homogeneity, centered on pro-Palestine protests—a synecdoche for assorted activities expressing solidarity with Palestine, the only-heard political opinion on campus.

Theme 1. Protests: Privilege, Illegitimacy, Performativity, Disruption

Campus homogeneity was manifested through actions organized by pro-Palestine faculty and Pards for Palestine (PfP), an unofficial and unregistered pro-Palestine student group on Lafayette campus. Their activism took the form of film screenings, teach-in events and panels, walkouts, fundraising, protest gatherings, and flyers distribution that, in general, repeated the anti-Israel playbook heard on other American campuses that depicted Jewish state as a "settler-colonial" project solely responsible for the war in Gaza. PfP was also behind the "No more lives lost" vigil on November 8, 2023, which, although originally intended as a political rally in support of a ceasefire, was officially advertised as a commemoration of those killed in Israel and Palestine after discussions with some Jewish students. Apart from the important support provided by Hillel and the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, the college offered no communal or academic activity on behalf of Jewish students or the pro-Israel perspective. Therefore, students felt justified in thinking that only the pro-Palestine side was given public space. A. T. bitterly noted: "I'm just walking to the library to do my homework and there's this whole thing happening on the quad, but there's no representation of me, and there's no Hillel representation."[31]

While students affirmed the right to protest on campus, many found the form and content of slogans threatening and even illegitimate. A self-described Zionist student, who is also concerned about the plight of Palestinians, said:

> The only thing that frustrated me was how much privilege they had, to be able to advocate for something that didn't affect them at all. There are a couple of students that do have Palestinian ties, and they were advocating, and one of them I got pretty close with [. . .]; he is someone that I have so much respect for, and we've been able to have deep conversations. But other than him and a couple of other people, when they were protesting, the voices that really mattered got lost. Because there are true stories to be told; there is destruction [in Gaza]. [. . .] And when you're screaming into a megaphone, all that gets lost. (D. R.)

The impression that protesters lacked seriousness and commitment to their declared cause was confirmed by the protests' brevity and comet-like appearance, which A. T. commented on: "A lot of people were performative about it. [. . .] It was the same thing [with] Russia and Ukraine—[the war] hasn't stopped, but people have stopped talking about it because they moved on to the next thing." F. K. questioned the rationale for the anti-Israel protests on an American campus: "We go to this little school of 3,000 people; what do you think is going to happen? Nothing's being done other than you're disrupting and harassing people."

Many students experienced the ubiquitous presence of PfP materials as an incursion of hostile political views into public discourse, but also as an intrusion into Jewish students' private spaces. A. T. noted: "There was [the PfP flyer] on my door. [. . .] Why? . . . I'm just trying to go into my house, and this is in my face and I'm walking into Pardee to go to my math class and it's on every stairwell, it's on every door. [. . .] It's just shoved in my face." The protests were perceived as troublesome and annoying; they did not align with the college's educational mission and affected, in some cases seriously, students' performance. Students mentioned decreased learning attainment during the semesters following October 7: "It was a big disruption, big time," noted A. T. and added that spring semester 2024 was their worst ever in terms of academics.

Theme 2. Double Standards

One-sided optical distortion requires using double standards when selecting objects of perception: undesirable objects must be

removed from the vision field, while enlarging desirable objects. In antizionist discourse, distortion involves treating Israel's military actions as *the* global epitome of violence, thus loading unique moral expectations on it, not applied to other militaries. Jewish students were quick to recognize that no other political or military conflict raised temperature on campus the way the Israel-Hamas war did, and connected the dots in a narrative that made sense to them and was not ahistorical:

> People are again [. . .] making Jews the scapegoat and the ones to blame for the treatment of so many people, and what makes me upset is the fact that there's obviously a focus on Israel-Palestine because it's a conflict, but there's so many other conflicts in different parts of the world. People are only focusing on it because it has to do with Jews. And if you look at the percentage of Jews in the world, it's so tiny that there's no other explanation than the fact that there's antisemitic bias in America. (E. R.)

Students experienced it painfully when they were forced to deal with messaging on campus demeaning to their Jewish identity. They correctly concluded that only the Jewish minority is ever asked to tolerate hostile treatment. This theme emerged in many accounts, for example, describing vacillation in accepting anti-Jewish PfP flyers:

> I was upset about it—they posted it on all these dorms in places, and they posted it on our sorority house, and we have a lot of Jewish members who were living in the house. I don't necessarily think it was targeted, but people were talking about, "oh, should we leave it up? Should we take it down?" And a few other Jewish girls in the house and I were really frustrated because if someone said that something was racist or homophobic [. . .], people would take it down immediately. [. . .] But because it was something about being Jewish and related to Israel, people did not have that reaction. (E. V.)

Singling out Israel for exceptional criticism was not lost on students who recognized an injustice of blanket condemnation of a state's defensive war—even if fraught with deadly mistakes—while remaining silent on deliberate atrocities by terrorists, as this student shared:

> A lot of people just follow the narrative and that's what really scares me, especially on a liberal campus. [. . .] People are always looking for pieces to fit their narrative that "colonialism is bad," "a colonial power is Israel," and thus "Israel is bad." It's a perfect story, versus: how about when Israel is attacked? [. . .] nobody has ever spoken up against Hamas, never, ever—even people in the PfP. (L. T.)

Students felt hurt that even when the administration spoke out against the most egregious examples of anti-Israeli rhetoric, the backlash was immediate and profound, making them feel even more silenced. For instance, after Lafayette's president condemned the display of a poster reading, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free"[32] during a protest on October 25, 2023, pro-Palestine activists and faculty, writing in the student newspaper, pushed back: objections to the slogan, they claimed, came from a "lack of knowledge and context," or misunderstanding the "different intentions" of those who pronounce it, thereby missing its polysemic and intention-based contexts.[33] Yet saying "this phrase is used by many different people with many different intentions" offers a conclusion that could justify virtually any hateful slogan."[34] This was not lost on one student, who imagined a very different reaction if any other group had been targeted:

> The protests were really hard for me, especially I didn't understand why there was a refusal to take accountability for the poster "From the river to the sea."[35] [. . .] I think that if it was, again, something that had a racist origin, [. . .] a lot of people would have

> been more upset, but it felt like people refused to comment on it. So it made me really upset and frustrated that people don't consider Jewish hate the same. (E. V.)

The contrast between respecting other minorities' right to define what constitutes offensive treatment and refusing the same right to the Jewish minority signaled that criticizing Israel often carries motives beyond the stated ethical ones of concern for the victims of the war in Gaza.

Furthermore, interviewees cynically remarked that no pro-Israel protest could ever be tolerated in their school: "If Jewish students were walking around the quad with Israeli flags and screaming, 'Woo-hoo, Netanyahu,' it would be considered injustice" (D. R.). What Jewish students heard from sympathetic faculty, for example, was that no one on college grounds could guarantee safety for a pro-Israel gathering. F. K. bitterly predicted: "It's not like we were going to have a protest; that would not end well for any of us."

Theme 3. Ignorance and Ideology

General ignorance of current events and adherence to over-simplified ideological categorizations contributed to students' sense of dominance of a single, pro-Palestine, narrative on campus. This factor is related to Gen Z's reliance on social media for their news; as has been documented, social media, especially TikTok, have been disproportionately displaying anti-Israel content.[36]

To many, binary labeling seemed to replace thoughtful engagement and quash students' sense of freedom of expression. Students were hoping to have honest, nuanced, and respectful conversations with their peers who might not share their support for Israel, and yet who would be open to hear a pro-Israel perspective; but that was not happening, as A. T. describes:

> I've been learning about this issue for as long as I can remember, [but] it's like people see on the news that people are dying [and decide], "Let me post that on my Instagram," without really knowing much about it. [. . .] I do identify as a Zionist, [but] I do not agree with everything Israel is doing [. . .], and a lot of my Israeli friends don't agree with it. [. . .] People in Israel protest the government the same way we do. [. . .] The Israelis and Jewish people are all getting lumped with "terrorists" and it's making this narrative that [we are all terrorists]. (A. T.)

A student who preferred to characterize themselves as "in the middle" on the issue of the conflict, noted:

> [When I mention:] "I think Israel should still exist," it's like all of a sudden: "So you want Palestine to be wiped off the map. You want there to be a genocide." No, of course I don't want that. That's ridiculous. It's binary. [. . .] It feels like it's hard to speak up about being very much in the middle. [. . .] And I also want there to be this place that's very important to our religious context. (J. T.)

Likewise, A. Z. commented: "Almost immediately there was a wave of calling anyone who spoke about anything [differently] as 'Zionist.'"

Students also felt intellectually insulted and disappointed that their peers in an academically selective college resorted to expressions of thoughtless discrimination. A typical comment reflecting this experience was:

> Being a student at Lafayette means that you're pretty smart; you know how to research; it's a competitive institution. So, when you get here, you expect everyone around you to kind of be on that level of curiosity and know how to research and when people post things that just have no facts to back it up, it's like—I know that they're capable of researching it and they don't. [. . .] It changed my view on a lot of people. (A. T.)

The same student discussed how the homogeneity of the campus was manifested in peers' shutting off the truth of their Jewish friends' experiences of connection to Israel and how their peers were unwilling to hear their stories, which angered them:

> One of my best friends is [. . .] in the IDF, and I don't think he's a terrorist. If you're willing to let me talk about my relationship with him and how I grew up with him, maybe you would think differently, but you're not willing to hear me out. (A. T.)

Theme 4. Indifference and Callousness, Intimidation, and Antisemitism

While ignorance of political events was disappointing, what hurt students more deeply was indifference and callousness in reacting to the confirmed bestiality of Hamas's killings on October 7:

> The brutality of it. [. . .] To see there were some people posting [. . .] "Oh well, it's okay because Israel has been doing this [retaliation]." [. . .] Whatever your beliefs are, you should not think that that's okay. I'm genuinely worried for you if you think that is something that is acceptable when so many people just got killed or taken, how can you justify that? (E. V.)

On the first anniversary of October 7, Jewish students were astonished to notice many of their peers in keffiyehs, symbol of Palestinian nationalism. This seemed a deliberate affront on this day, which was difficult to articulate:

> [It] was very shocking. [. . .] So many Muslims are targeted in the United States because of 9/11 and that day is really a hard day for that community [. . .]. But then to do that on a day when so many [Jews] were massacred, in your face . . . It was bizarre to me. [. . .] You're supporting a group of people that wants so many people dead . . . it's mind-boggling. (E. R.)

While Jewish students on campus were spared physical violence, the actions of the Palestinian solidarity movement created conditions for the experience of intimidation and fear. The following account eloquently captures the disturbing impressions of the Jewish students during the protests:

> I was outside, talking with my dad on the phone, and I remember they were chanting some slogans for Palestine [. . .]. That really scared me [. . .]; they were extremely loud and extremely frightening. Every time I saw the flag they were waving, my mind went to the images of New York or Philly where the flag was being waved and the flags of Israel were being burned. *It was less what they were doing in the moment, but it was more what they were supporting that was scaring me.* [. . .] [Although] no one was coming up to me and saying, "You're directly being threatened because you're Jewish," I felt the silence of people who didn't speak up about anything at all or who said, "Zionism is wrong," "Israel is wrong," "Israel needs to be eliminated from the river to the sea," blah, blah, blah . . . (L. T., emphasis mine)

The most consequential pro-Palestine event on campus took place on April 19, 2024, during the prospective students' Sustainability Tours and EarthFest (open to public), when a group of ten to twelve PfP students marched from Farinon (student center) to Markle Hall (admissions), where they entered the president's office, chanting and carrying slogans calling for a ceasefire, Lafayette's financial disclosure, and Lafayette's divestment from "Israel's crimes" (or "Israel's slaughter," in another chant that replicated anti-Israel slogans shouted throughout the United States). According to the student newspaper the *Lafayette*, throughout the campus, student guides felt "uncomfortable"; were "stared down" by the protesters; and witnessed other guides being followed by the protesters.[37] Guides I interviewed, too, mentioned these experiences, adding feeling

harassed when being followed and invaded in their spaces, interrupted and shouted at while they interacted with visitors. The families they were guiding were forced to accept PfP flyers and only then were left alone. Several interviewees mentioned hearing about incidents of protesters asking other students "whether they were Jewish." While unconfirmed by direct witnesses, such narratives reflect Jewish students' heightened anxiety about their safety.

Although the Jewish students whom I interviewed felt physically safe on campus, some felt threatened when their names were frequently mentioned on Lafayette social media by pro-Palestine activists, as reported in this account:

> There were only a couple of times that I considered thinking about [whether] I should feel safe. Should I be contacting Public Safety? [. . .] People were individually name dropping me as someone who was too outspoken in the pro-Israel space. One or two people were individually targeting me that I felt unsafe, but it never prevented me from *doing* things. (D. R.)

Fear of physical threat was real enough to stop some students from visiting certain venues, for example, the Hillel House, to attend listening sessions organized by the then-Hillel faculty director: "People were nervous to go. [. . .] We didn't know if it would be safe [. . .], if someone had gotten mad and retaliated" (E. R.).

The global surge in antisemitism and the dominant pro-Palestine campus tone emboldened some students to "channel" the socially-accepted antisemitism of Kanye West by harassing Jewish students with West's antisemitic "jokes." As one student commented, "Some people are more willing to look past that stuff than others, but some stuff you just can't unsee or unhear" (A. Z.).

Anti-Jewish intimidation was sometimes difficult to pinpoint but was "sensed" in the campus atmosphere. Students connected this generalized unmistakable hostility to the Jewish experience of persecution:

> It's fear that permeates the community. [. . .] You see everyone's scared, and you say: "Oh, should I be scared? [. . .] I mean, it's nothing new. And people think they're funny and they're like: "Oh, I don't really believe it." But that joke, that thought gives someone else what to say. [. . .] And that's what's so scary—it's like the spread of fear and confirming that you are the victim. [. . .] I couldn't point to a single particular event, but it was a general feeling in the air. (K.M.)

Some students found explicit historical analogies to the antisemitism in 1930s Germany to describe what might be happening to the Jews globally and on campus. E. R. quoted Pastor Martin Niemöller:

> For a lot of us, things [are] slowly starting to change, like they did in the 1930s, with certain rules and tasks for Jews, different than for everyone else. [. . .] And there's this quote that keeps playing [. . .]: "First, they came for the socialists and they didn't speak out," and then it's that order of things that I keep imagining to happen. And it's really scary.

An anti-Jewish trope that emerged during the post-October 7 explosion of antisemitism is blaming the victim, which in antizionist iteration targets Israel as a settler-colonial state that "colonized" the "indigenous" population. In discursive antisemitism, this position is exemplified by claims that no Israelis (and no Jews who support Israel—a.k.a. "Zionists"), as belonging to the nation of the "occupiers," are innocent.[38] This semantic moral displacement provided a subtext for Jewish students' experience of inferiority, shame, and a lack of representability compared to other discriminated minority groups, as this passage poignantly captured:

> There was this huge narrative shift that made it seem like October 7 was okay and that "they had it coming," and that was painful

> because–I think that the Israeli government right now is, excuse my French, a shit show: do I think that they should not be killing innocent lives on the other side? Absolutely! But do I think that my cousins and my friends deserve to die because of their [Israeli government's] actions? Absolutely not! [. . .] that was the most difficult thing to grapple with: [. . .] justification for the hostages being taken and the lives that were taken based on actions of the Israeli government; [. . .] that the lives that were lost [on October 7] weren't innocent. (W. B.)

Probed to explain what tainted the innocent victims in the eyes of the world, the student identified antisemitism; they also acknowledged that criticizing Israel was reasonable, but inexcusable immediately after October 7: "It comes down to being Jewish. We've seen it happen before. [. . .] The whole 'Israeli government' argument is much later down the line, as the war goes on. But from the start, and we did see it from the start, it's that they are Jewish" (W. B.).

Theme 5. College Administration, Faculty, Hillel, and the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (OR&SL)

Some students believed the pro-Palestine campus tone to be sanctioned by administrative inertia: "There was an imbalance between what was allowed on one side versus the other [. . .] and it was even to the public eye, like the allowance for there to be more events or activities or movie screenings" (W. B.).

The meager number of pro-Palestine protesters contrasted with the support they seemed to receive from faculty and administrators:

> You look at them and, at first, you'd be laughing because, wow, there's eight or nine of them. [. . .] But then you realize—this is actually pretty loud. [. . .] It's not just about how many people, but who are the people and you see that there's faculty or administrators. [. . .] And then, on campus, you don't see any outright pro-Israel advocacy other than Instagram posts [. . .]. The fact that the only outright public efforts regarding the war were anti-Israel, no matter how many people it was, created this image of: [. . .] "This is what Lafayette stands for," and that's what led to a lot of the intimidation. (D. R.)

1. Faculty

While, overall, most Jewish students reported feeling supported or "not bothered" by faculty, a few accounts indicated a chilling indifference they encountered upon their return from the fall break. For example, W. B. shared: "There was only one professor who even acknowledged what happened over the break. I didn't have a fall break; over fall break my entire life had changed. And everyone was like: 'Hope you had a great break?'"

More problematically, students experienced bias in the classroom, when, often in courses not related to the Middle East, professors only assigned pro-Palestine, antizionist readings and/or discussion questions:

> He mentioned Zionism for the first time in the context of "Zionist forces killed a bunch of children in one village some time ago." And for the people in my class that didn't know anything about this conflict before, I'm [asking] [. . .], how could they know anything else? How could they become educated when all of a sudden, they are given this one narrative? [. . .] So, oh my God, this person I know, my teacher, he's in a position of power determining my grade. I don't feel comfortable expressing my opinions. I never before felt in a classroom that I didn't feel comfortable saying what I truly thought and that was a little bit scary. (L. T.)

Some faculty active in pro-Palestine movement changed what seemed to be a calm and

apolitical campus atmosphere. By uttering antisemitic slogans in protests, on- or off-campus, they contributed to a "collective campus experience" of antisemitism[39]:

> Some of the organizers of PfP went to a protest [in another town] and basically justified the killing of thousands [by Hamas]. [. . .] There was [. . .] a media literacy event on campus. That's when the professor [. . .] said, "You know who controls American media." They were looking to get their narrative out there; looking to influence people that were undecided, not people who had any strong opinions. [. . .] They were just looking to convert people to their side. And that's not the temperature of a discourse that I'm used to. (C. K.)

The same student recalled that, possibly at the same event, professors

> started ripping into the [student] newspaper, [accusing the student editors of] making [the war in Gaza] feel more distant for students on campus. It was hard to see professors take such opinionated stances against students. I had thought that that just wasn't something that professors were allowed to do. (C. K.)

2. Hillel

Hillel, while providing a safe environment for Jewish students, was also a source of alienation for some students, as its advisory board could not come up with a unified language of post-October response and programming. One student frankly admitted:

> I know at Lehigh [University] there's a lot [going on] because they're a bigger school, [. . .] so they have a Hillel Friends of Israel group that was constantly doing stuff, and we just didn't have the number of people that all agreed on the same thing to actually host events like that. [. . .] We couldn't agree on anything (C. K.)

3. Vigil

On October 14, the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (OR&SL) hosted an interfaith community vigil "for all those who want to gather in mutual support [. . .] [to] show our respect for those who have died or are in danger and join our voices in prayer and reflection in the name of peace."[40] The college chaplain strove to provide a space for mourning for Jewish and Muslim students, and many of my interviewees found it consoling. Nevertheless, collective mourning without making a distinction that among the dead "were people killed in a terrorist attack" (A. T.) was seen as blurring a difference between perpetrators and victims, which is a political statement in and of itself. As one student phrased it:

> A lot of people, seeing that it's an inclusive vigil, were kind of given the excuse to attempt [. . .] support for the victims of [Hamas] [. . .], but more so against Israel [. . .]; it gave a lot of people that excuse to say, "We're holding a vigil and that means that there's a reason to hold the vigil because Israel is wrong." (L. T.)

Some students were hurt that they were not permitted to pray the Mourners' Kaddish, Jewish prayer for the dead that can be recited also by non-religious Jews and outside of liturgy. While my interviewees were open to share the space with Muslim students, they felt that even in the act of mourning they could not express their true religious identity: "That there wasn't anything Jewish [about it]. [. . .] It seemed kind of unproductive, where nothing was said that gave a sense of peace to either side" (A. T.).

None of the students objected to the idea of an interfaith vigil per se; it was a lack of vigil specifically commemorating the innocent victims of the attack that intentionally targeted Jews on October 7 that was a painful reminder of whose lives were more "grievable."[41] Students reported

that, when they inquired about a possibility of a separate vigil for victims of the massacre on October 7, they were told that such initiatives were being "continuously blocked" (W. B.).

> It hurts if we're not allowed to have a vigil for the dead and the hostages, because I couldn't honor the people whom I lost with people who understood. [. . .] Someone said the reason [. . .] [was] because there was not enough security. That's crazy. That's an issue in itself. And why should we be afraid to be doing that? [. . .] Why is it political? Why is it partisan? [. . .] It was heartbreaking and angering, very angering. I could not understand it. (W. B.)

2. Axis of Commonality: Support

Theme 6: Support

"Islands of support," while not nullifying the experience of isolation, provided a space of acceptance and safety for pro-Israel students.

1. Hillel

Within days after October 7, the then-director of Hillel invited students to listening sessions with several faculty and the college chaplain. This resource was important, even if few came to take advantage of it, sometimes out of concern for safety, as this account explains:

> I went maybe two or three times before my dad [asked me to stop, for safety reasons]. [. . .] It was amazingly [helpful]. [. . .] I was able to unpack [. . .] how little the DMs and the Instagram messages meant when I realized everyone else in the room was facing it. We were just sitting and sharing stories for a while about things people had been saying to us and people had the most educated and profound takes on these things. [. . .] I felt a lot lighter after going [there]. (A. Z.)

Providing the only space on campus where pro-Israel support could be expressed—"like a little Israeli flag by the food" (D. R.)—likewise gave the students a respite from feeling ostracized.

2. Office of Religious and Spiritual Life

The interfaith vigil discussed above benefitted and provided positive impressions to many Jewish students, who found it an outlet for their grief as well as a communal expression of solidarity with Jewish (and Palestinian) losses: "he last time I remember there being any collective empathy was the vigil, when we were all upset about everyone who had passed away. Everyone! and there was no real talk of the politics of it all because that would have just been not the time or place" (A. Z.).

Many of my interviewees made a point to emphasize how compassionate and responsive the college chaplain was during the stressful post-October days. Here is one of many appreciative testimonials: "She did come from a place of understanding the loss and the fear, which was refreshing. We had somebody who's not Jewish who was willing to rise to that. [. . .] I would definitely say [the chaplain] [. . .] was great" (A. T.).

The chaplain also provided individual assistance to Jewish students and groups. W. B. explained:

> What did help is when the chaplain came to my sorority house, where we had organized [a meeting] to talk about it. And that was hard because that was the first time that I [. . .] was saying out loud the names of the people I lost [among my family and friends]. [. . .] there were a lot of people there who were listening, who cared, even people who didn't have any connection to what was going on, who still cared. So that was nice and helpful.

3. Faculty

With a few exceptions, faculty avoided taking ideological positions in the classroom. B. R. shared: "Professors [. . .] were very thoughtful, so I want to give them credit because they were very considerate and understood what was going on. I mean, they weren't like on [other] campuses, I don't think there were too many like 'brainwashed anti-Israel academics.'" Jewish students valued it when professors were attuned to their pain and offered them a listening ear. Here is one of many examples of personal support:

> I was writing a paper in my [. . .] class that semester about antisemitism and one day in class [as I was exiting] Prof. [X] had tapped my shoulder and said, "Hey, I know you're writing about antisemitism. I just wanted to check and see if you're okay?" And I just started crying. And he [. . .] pulled me into another room and we sat and talked about it for a while, and I was telling him about everything that had gone on and how I was so upset and that it was right after the girl had been sending me these awful messages, and he was very sweet. He was such a good support system. (A. Z.)

Professors were also eager to offer extra time for assignments because of the political situation, which is indicative of faculty's deep concern about their students' wellbeing. One student observed:

> All of my professors were great; I really applaud them. Even the ones who weren't Jewish, they completely understood . . . well, maybe not what I was going through, but if I needed extra time for an assignment. I wrote a few of them an email about how I was feeling, and I was having a hard time focusing [. . .] and they were all, "Take the time you need." (E. V.)

Rarely, in the context of classroom discussion, faculty revealed pro-Israel opinions, which reassured Jewish students that the homogenous campus had its places of "dissent," if not sanity. In one account, a professor addressed a student criticizing Israel with the following response:

> "I don't disagree with you, I think Israel's abusing its power as whatever status it has in the region or [. . .] it's committing war crimes." Then he said, "I see what you're saying, but, as a Jewish person, I can't imagine a world where Israel doesn't exist," so it was very open discussion, but it felt good to hear that. (T. U.)

4. The President

While the college president was considered responsible for the creation of a homogenous tone on campus, several students expressed gratitude for her stance during the post-October period. One student reported:

> I genuinely don't know what the president could have been doing better. The fact that she sent out an email about the poster "From the river to the sea"—I can't think of any college president that would voluntarily do that in that situation. [. . .] Also, the president invited us to her house [. . .] going out of her way to make sure we're doing okay. (D. R.)

Another student confirmed this impression: "I will say the president was nothing but helpful and I want to give her full credit for that. She really stood by the Jewish community at its worst hour" (B. R.).

3. Axis of Commonality: The Effects

Theme 7: Social Isolation

Political homogeneity on campus resulted in sometimes traumatic social isolation; it was experienced as the community's lack of *understanding* of the impact of October 7 on Jews. Students' typical comment was a version of: "I didn't return [to campus] until later, and [going back]

to school was pretty tough because no one really understood" (W. B.).

Intimidation from students' messaging on social media contributed to self-silencing and subsequent isolation, as depicted in this evocative account:

> [When we spoke with Jewish friends] who don't even have ties to Israel, [. . .] we spoke about how isolating it is and also, do we have targets on our back on campus? Because people know that we're Jewish and we know that they have posted hateful sentiments online or we've heard them speak about it or they were at protests; what do they think of us? How do they see us? What are their feelings towards us? Should we be scared? And that fear [. . .] had a huge connection to the loneliness because it silenced us in some way. [. . .] We felt like that because of the fear we shouldn't talk about it [. . .] or we should just come to terms with the fact that this is what it is to be Jewish. And that was extremely isolating. (W. B.)

The starkest divisions between friend or foe took place on social media, where in 200 characters' (Yik Yak) or 60 seconds' "story" posts (Instagram), Gen Z shares their positions on world issues. Many students chose to unfollow acquaintances or friends who posted anti-Israel content, which was sometimes accompanied by hurtful exchanges, as reported in this testimony:

> When I started to realize how antizionist so many people were, just from social media, people that I follow on Instagram suddenly were posting all this stuff, and I was unfollowing them. Even a girl whom I used to be friends with had posted something on my story, and then she said something unkind, and I [said], "Do you understand [what you just posted]?," and I haven't spoken to her since. It made me realize how there's so much false information and—where's all this coming from? (F. K.)

B.K., who generally was not strongly affected by campus events, noted: "And then there's a couple of people that would just bombard their own stories with posts supporting Hamas, [. . .] so I unfollowed them—yes, some people from Lafayette."

How one's friends would react online to the war could become a source of anxiety even when students enjoyed a group of supportive friends: fear was lurking behind where these people really stood on the issue:

> For hours and hours, I would be looking [at the phone] fearfully: which of my friends is going to post this now, which was the most scary for me even now. [. . .] I never really noticed, "Oh, this person is Jewish, this person's not Jewish" [. . .], but then as I started seeing, in terms of violence, even though this person is nice [. . .], they will not support me at this moment. (L. T.)

Students experienced disappointment that acquaintances and friendly peers were excluding them because of political differences, while lacking what my interviewees often demonstrated: empathy and ability to reach out to Muslims and/or Palestinians who were experiencing their own pain:

> It was a moment where I needed people, I needed support; and a lot of people are so stuck in [. . .] their political beliefs that they couldn't find the strength to check in. And not that it is beyond me. I found the strength to check in on my Palestinian friends, see how they were doing. My [. . .] friend is Palestinian, and our families brought each other food. And that is moving, and we both have very differing opinions, [. . .] differing emotional connections, but if they could find it in them to be there for their [Jewish] [. . .] friends and vice versa, there's really no excuse [for others not to do the same]. (W. B.)

Indifference or a lack of compassionate reaction to the news of torture of Israeli civilians placed Jewish students on the defensive. They

felt a need to address implicit anti-Israel bias even when their friends did not mention them directly. For example, commenting on a conversation following the return of four bodies of the murdered hostages in February 2025, a student explained:

> Since the ceasefire, it's been a lot more emotional stuff in educating my friends. [. . .] I was just scrolling and saw the saddest montage of one of the eighty-something old man whose body was being returned. And I started crying and [my friends] were like, "Why are you crying?" And I was telling them. [. . .] And then they're like, "Ugh, I'm sorry," because they don't know what to say. What are they going to say? And finding out that they returned the wrong body of a mother [in the Bibas family]. And then people are [saying], "Well, you're killing our [Palestinian] children." I'm [saying], "No, we're trying to defend ourselves and eliminate a terrorist group. You [Hamas], with your bare hands, killed two babies. You took two babies out of their crib, and there's a difference"; I felt so very drained with all of it, especially in the last month and a half. So drained. (F. K.)

Indifference of non-Jewish friends was also experienced through actions that communicated to Jewish students their exclusion from the general campus community, to which they had thought they belonged: when a few students organized a sorority gathering to learn and commemorate the victims of October 7 and to discuss the conflict, only Jewish students turned up. My interviewee painfully felt it when Jewish students tried to share their knowledge about the developments, but, as they described,

> nobody who wasn't Jewish came to that. There were even some other things where we tried to have, like a Shabbat dinner where everybody was invited. We ordered pizzas and only Jewish people came. It was tough [. . .] [as] we all go to their Christmas parties. (A. T.)

While students were eager to share posts clarifying the situation in Gaza or concerning the hostages, it was a burden to be treated as involuntary "experts" based on their ethnic identity. They found it irritating to be put in a position of political judges, as D.G. shared:

> They would come up with a topic and they would ask me for my opinion before forming their own opinion; it was kind of annoying—in no way am I an expert, and they would oftentimes agree with me, but you don't have to agree with me because I am Jewish!

My interviewees wished, instead, that other students became better informed about current events, so that they could process difficult news on their own, as in this account:

> My best friends were all so supportive, but they also were asking me questions about it, and it isn't my job to explain that or to educate them when I'm going through this either. And so that was probably the most difficult part. It was like the world kept spinning, especially within my circle, like everyone was okay, but I severely wasn't. (W. B.)

The original stress or trauma from the news of the massacre, combined with anxiety about the political and their families' situation in Israel, the wall of misunderstanding, expectations to explain their plight to fellow students, and ordinary demands of student life–contributed to feeling drained and emotionally burned out, as several students indicated:

> My world feels like it's continually being put upside down and then right back up and then upside down again. [. . .] I was on the phone a lot. I was calling my parents. My parents were telling me, call this person, call that person, make sure they're okay. [. . .] I was trying to study. And then on top of that I had

> to [. . .] educate people while also trying to stay on top of my parents. [. . .] And I was afraid that I'm talking to you about it too much or that I look upset too much or that I'm not fun enough or I'm not going out with my friends enough because I'm so emotionally and mentally drained. And it's because nobody understood. And there's just that constant feeling of loneliness. (W. B.)

Theme 8: Coping

Ignorance and a lack of understanding led many students inward; to rely on the Jewish community became the main coping strategy against their social isolation:

> [non-Jewish friends didn't try] to put in the effort to educate themselves about what was going on. [. . .] I was walking on eggshells a little because I didn't want to offend anyone with what I had to say, but I was also so upset. So, for me the people I talked to about it most were Jewish people. (E. V.)

Most pro-Israel students enjoyed strong support from a few Jewish friends with whom they could discuss current events and their own experiences openly, like in this account:

> It also helps that my roommate now and my roommate last year are both Jewish, and so we can talk about anything. [. . .] It's one thing to be and feel supported on campus and it's another to then look into the vast media and be like, "Oh my gosh, everyone's against us." It felt nice at least to know that there were a few people that you can actually see and touch in real life who agree with me, and we are together in this. (A. Z.)

Another student described the experience as a "smaller bubble within the larger Jewish bubble on campus. It made you a bit more unified, integrated as a group, find each other and say, well, here we are—the minority" (D. R.).

A close-knit group of Jewish friends was, quite literally, a lifeline for emotional survival of what sounds like traumatic exclusion on campus, as in this account:

> The only thing that got me through was having support from the people who supported me and trying to find the Jewish community on campus that could talk about it, that wants to talk about it. That was the only way that I got through it. (W. B.)

Another coping strategy was dissociation or separating their "college" selves from their "Jewish" selves, which became private, as described in this account: "I come to classes and behave bravely and don't show much. [. . .] I go home after class and call my family and my camp friends and [it all] happens in my room" (A. T.) Another student captured a need to shut down with the following words: "Coming here was a little bit like a slap in the face . . . Sometimes it was easier to just pretend nothing was happening and go to class and then to strap myself. There was kind of a conflict in my head–what's the best way to go about it in my life?" (W. B.).

Students learnt that, to keep peace online, it was safer to hide their true thoughts, as L. T. indicated:

> My approach to that was always just to keep my opinions to myself because the one time that I posted something once right after October 7 and I saw some people unfollow me . . . I decided to keep my opinions more to myself. I was also scared to see–if I did post, who else that I know would disappoint me in a way? I never really wanted to find out, so I never posted anything more.

Self-censoring was also reported in face-to-face contacts, when sharing political views defied a rational, open discussion; protecting relationships the students still had, even with people who did not understand their position

on Israel, was more important for their social experience:

> I am definitely less trustful of letting people know that I'm a Zionist. I am still comfortable [with them] to know that I am Jewish, but I have now been shutting down more political conversations and steering away from conversations about the Middle East. [. . .] I was always open about having a conversation. [. . .] [but now] I don't want to engage anybody in [a conversation about it] because that is how you're going to destroy a relationship; it's such a polarizing topic right now, that it can't really be discussed. (C. K.)

A rare but significant theme within the thread of social isolation was experiencing meaningful conversations "across the divide," when students could dive deeper into the topic of the conflict with friends who had strong pro-Palestine views:

> It's the most productive conversation I've had about this subject [. . .]. She was very pro-Palestine, and she was still cutting me off at times, but [. . .] she did acknowledge: "Oh, wait, I actually didn't know some of this context." And, "I see your point of view a little bit more." And because she was willing to accept that she didn't know the whole situation, that's how any productive conversation was possible. (J. T.)

Finally, there were accounts testifying to little or no emotional effect of campus climate on Jewish students, which could be due to their personality, resources, or degree of emotional investment in the Israel-Hamas war. For example, B.K. commented, "I was moving on. I was focused on other things and just checking in periodically with my family there. And that was about it." Mostly, feeling unaffected by the campus climate after October 7 came from comparing Lafayette with larger schools:

> All things considered, we got out pretty unscathed. We didn't have swastikas drawn anywhere. [. . .] People were civil enough–the majority, and no one was blatantly attacking people . . . Yes, words may have been exchanged, but no physical attacks happened, to my knowledge, and that's probably the best you could hope for. (J. T.)

Theme 9. Identity

Anti-Israel rhetoric and isolation after October 7 strengthened pro-Israeli students' Jewish identity. The realization of Jewish distinctiveness emerged as the most frequent theme that the students expressed, as in T.B.'s account: "I never really thought of myself in danger; [. . .] being Jewish isn't a huge part of my identity, but I was like, 'wow, people are actually living in fear'." In fact, feeling their identities threatened by anti-Israel noise, my interviewees shared being inspired to learn more about Judaism and the territorial conflict. J. T. said, "I've been more aware of my Jewishness, and I've been more conscious of what Israel means to Jewish culture and religious history. I've also been slightly more aware of possible discrimination and stuff that could come from it."

Some students explicitly stated that their anger strengthened their adherence to Zionism; it helped them own, and not only passively inherit, Zionism as part of their identity:

> [The events on campus and beyond] made me so angry; solidified my belief in myself that I am a Zionist and this is what I believe. [. . .] I grew up in an Israeli family, Zionism was all around me and it was something that I didn't know if I had just grown up into it, or if I genuinely believed it. After seeing all of this, I genuinely believe it's my own thing—not [just] coming from my family or my friends. (A. T.)

Another experience was the realization of Jewish self-reliance. B. R. said: "[It] made me realize that Jews are often on their own and have

to stand up for themselves because no one else is going to do it for them."

Furthermore, Jewish students' experiences of the fragility of social bonds (e.g., being unfollowed on social media) on the one hand, combined with the protection they felt coming from the Jewish "bubble" on the other, brought up existential questions about the comforting sense of belonging, as expressed in this insightful narrative:

> [It] strengthened my Jewish identity because [it] raised the bar of what do I need in a Jewish community? I realize that it's not just about the religious components of Judaism that I'm attached to. [. . .] It's really important that I'm surrounded by other Jewish individuals that feel the way that I feel. [. . .] When I one day have a complete choice of where I want to live and the type of people I want to surround myself by, it definitely strengthened how much I would prioritize being surrounded by people who share similar values to me [. . .] because it's when you're surrounded by those values that you're best able to then branch out and engage with people who have different values from you. (D. R.)

While students experienced the campus atmosphere as hostile or threatening to their Jewishness, some expressed a connection between shame and identity as a deliberate attack on who they are:

> There were definitely things on campus, posters and signs . . . it's scary to be Jewish sometimes. And the [lack of] vigil [for the murdered Israelis]—not having enough security to protect people, it just continuously instills this fear that I should be ashamed of who I am and that I shouldn't talk about it because I don't want people to know. [. . .] It's scary to be Jewish, it's scary to have ties. It's scary to have opinions that are pro-Jewish, but that's how I identify, that's who I am. And I feel I should be ashamed of that and [. . .] throughout the past year and a half it has only gotten worse. (W. B.)

Feeling retraumatized by lack of support on campus, the same student expanded on their ambivalent sense of identity tainted by fear and shame as an unbecoming "underside" of their enhanced pride:

> I've definitely changed [. . .] in terms of my Judaism and identity. [. . .] I feel more scared, but I also feel stronger towards it, especially going to my synagogue for the high holidays. [. . .] I felt also more proud to be Jewish. [. . .] I feel afraid to be who I am. I feel ashamed to be who I am, but then there are also moments where I'm instead surrounded by my Jewish community or I'm just thinking about my grandparents—what they built. My grandfather [. . .] went to Israel fleeing persecution; both of my grandparents did. They raised a family there, they started from literally nothing, with no family, they left their families behind. I'm proud of where my family comes from. I'm proud of who I am. I'm proud of the Jewish values I was raised with. And that was definitely exacerbated after October 7, but also it was tied with the fear. (W. B.)

The theme of *am Yisrael*—the People of Israel—as an imagined community that connects diaspora Jews and Israelis, as well as contemporary and historical Jews, became an important trope that articulated the newly strengthened Jewish identity:[42]

> Everybody knows somebody you know, and that was evident when October happened because it was like, "I know this person who knew this person and I had this mutual friend," and it's like a family and like everyone knew someone [. . .] who lost their lives. (W. B.)

One student expressed their experience of the concept of *am Yisrael* in a moving testimony that spoke about their connection to Hersh Polin

Goldberg, a twenty-three-year-old hostage killed by Hamas in the tunnels of Gaza in August 2024:

> Since October 7, things blatantly anti-Israel upset me [. . .]; [it] proved my connection to the Jewish people and how, no matter what happens, we're all connected. [. . .] When Hersh Polin passed away—that was a huge deal because he worked at my summer camp [. . .]; we were all connected through Hersh. [. . .] One person dies, and a total of six different summer camp communities feels that . . . That's an example [of how that] tied me back to the Jewish people, my Jewish identity, and, when I meet somebody who's Jewish, that's like instant connection of "I'm sure we know mutual people and we've had the same suffering," and it's an unspoken trust. (A. T.)

Awareness of interconnectedness of all Jewish people resulted in an unexpected moral obligation toward those who might be harmed by Jews:

> The attack on the Jewish community I felt was an attack on me. And so, the attack against others by the Israeli government impacted me. I felt like it was my responsibility to protect them in a way. [. . .] In being Jewish and having such close ties to Israel, I also know that it's my job to speak up against the injustice against the other [Palestinian] side. [. . .] It's a Jewish value that I was raised with. (W. B.)

Students also recognized that support for Israel—never uncritical—became a red line separating different factions of the Jewish community, whose understanding of Jewish identity polarized them and reflected the growing division among American Jewry along Zionist/antizionist lines. A. T., for example, came to accept, as D. R. said above, that perpetuating one's Jewish identity may mean making deliberate choices about surrounding oneself with Jewish people of similar values. This was a new element in A. T.'s identity development:

> The symbolism of the fact that [Hersh Polin] was so connected to my area and my age group and [that] this can happen to anyone and that there's people who don't think like that. So I know I said that there is a trust among Jewish people, but, I guess, that doesn't really apply to everybody. I am not close with a lot of antizionist Jews. I see things that they post and I disagree; everybody I know and I'm close with is Jewish Zionist. (A. T.)

B. Experiences of Pro-Palestine Students

Among the twenty-five interviewees, six were—or became after October 7—critical of Israel and supportive of the Palestinian cause as their dominant position on the Israel-Hamas war. Two of these students already did not consider Israel important to Jewish identity before October 7; the remaining four lost their meager attachment to Israel following what they saw as the devastating bombing of Gaza. None of these six students had meaningful personal ties to Israel.

The fundamental distinction between pro-Palestine and pro-Israel students' experiences was, as already indicated, a relatively positive, or at least "not so negative," assessment of these experiences. These students did not feel socially excluded or lonely on campus, as they benefitted from cognitive cohesion of their political views with the dominant tone on campus, including social media. Since their ideological stance conformed to what was communicated on virtually all American campuses, their experience of "fitting in" and comfort of belonging contrasted sharply with feelings of isolation and abandonment that students who support Israel experienced.[43] That is the most likely reason—next to their smaller representation in the sample—that fewer themes emerged in this student group's

narratives, none of which were as elaborate as those of some of their pro-Israel peers. Pro-Palestine students had fewer reactions to the protests and to the interfaith vigil: they did not experience an emotional or cognitive challenge from these events and were generally supportive of both, while some of them had negative experiences, which came from their pro-Israel peers.

4. Axis of Commonality: Support

Theme 10: Support and Belonging

Pro-Palestine Jewish students reported that they continued to have positive interactions with their non-Jewish friends even on the heated topic of Israel and were spared occasional hostile confrontations that the pro-Israel students experienced: "If I'm talking with my friends, we're never hostile. It's always civil and we all know that everyone still has good intentions regardless of what they're saying" (G. A.). C. R. described a similarly objective approach to the topic of the Middle East among their friends, connected with a willingness on their part to hear C. R.'s concerns and opinions and offer C. R. friendly support:

> Within my friend group, people were willing to talk about it, because obviously I wanted to talk about it with my friends, and this is something that can affect me; this is actually happening. They were very open to talk about it, sharing opinions, and these were non-Jewish friends. They approached it with a nonpartisan view, kind of, like, "There's people on both sides, we don't really have a connection to either side, so let's hear it out, get all the information." (C. R.)

Pro-Palestine Jewish students reported that, in their interactions, they did not feel isolated from their peers: "I didn't feel singled out" (G. A.). In fact, some of them found deep support in their non-Jewish friends, to whom they could open up, as this account demonstrates:

> Usually when something major happens in Israel [. . .] it can be used as an excuse to drum up hate against Jewish people. I was worrying that there would be a kind of "they deserved it" mentality. [. . .] But I didn't experience much of that. It was overall quite [. . .] comforting. [. . .] If you brought up the attacks, which mostly weren't brought up because it didn't directly affect Americans, but people were sending out positive messages through the GroupMe there. Overall, it was much more accepting than I'd worried. Especially Jewish friends were obviously supportive, but even the non-Jewish population, like my roommate at the time, he was not Jewish, but he was very supportive. I remember kind of lying awake one night and just chatting with him about it, and he was just overall sympathetic, concerned about me and concerned about how it was affecting us. (G. V.)

Pro-Palestine students also appreciated support from the college community and faculty:

> A lot of professors made it known that they were open to talking, making students comfortable. A lot of people on campus did a really good job, making sure it was a safe space where anyone could share an opinion regardless of religion [. . .] Luckily everyone had opinions, but most people weren't too in your face about it. I'm really grateful for that. (C. R.)

Hillel seemed to play an ambivalent role in the experiences of the pro-Palestine students, as it did in the experiences of pro-Israel students. It was perceived as a place of support for Israel, which was becoming more and more troublesome for pro-Palestine students. Nevertheless, it was also a place of refuge from the politically polarized campus noise:

> When I went to Hillel, sometimes people would be talking about [the war], but also about other but related things—about our Jewish summer camps growing up [. . .] so [. . .] it's more

> focused on the Jewish community. [. . .] Hillel did a really good job [. . .], being an open space where people could go. (C. R.)

Several pro-Palestine students emphasized the open and accepting stance of the then-faculty director of Hillel, whose "neutrality" and compassionate support provided an important balance to what was perceived as a one-sided, pro-Zionist leaning of Hillel members:

> The best was the former Hillel director. He was very supportive throughout the entire thing. He did not take a side, Zionism versus not. He was simply there for everyone who needed it, which I think was a very good thing to have. [. . .] He's always been very kind, very approachable. (G. V.)

Theme 11: The Protests

Pro-Palestine students experienced the protests mostly in a positive manner—not as critique of Israelis or Jews, but as a stand on behalf of a massive loss of civilian lives while at the same time acknowledging that pro-Israel students had no space to express their opinions:

> I did agree with PfP's message. [. . .] I understood just bits and pieces, but overall, they didn't seem like they were for slaughtering Jews or recapturing territory [. . .]. They wanted to stop the deaths, which [I am] fully in support of. There was nothing that struck me about their messaging. So I never felt put down upon. But I'm sure there are Jewish students who did, I don't really know [. . .] how to solve that, because there wasn't a space for them and I don't think there could be a space for them in that political environment. (G. V.)

Pro-Palestine students also expressed criticism of the protests' messages or form, e.g., indicating ambivalence about hearing the slogan "From the river to the sea." While G. V. chose "to believe that it wasn't a terrorist message," they acknowledged that the slogan may imply a destruction of Israel: "People should not have to be forcibly relocated. [. . .] I don't have a perfect solution for the State of Israel. I don't think anyone does." Another student was disappointed by the slogan's aggressiveness and expressed a balanced and considerate view that seemed absent in the protests' messaging:

> I personally feel slogans like that are not appropriate. I didn't love that slogan because [. . .] it has bad connotations. [. . .] Obviously it's against Israel, but it's like, "We don't care, get out;" it doesn't recognize humanity on either side. Most people in Israel are just people with families trying to live their lives. So are people in Palestine. [The slogan] is very eliminatory. [. . .] Everything should just be gone. It's not like we're looking for peace—or for domination. [. . .] I feel protest is fine, but it shouldn't be so aggressive. (C. R.)

Another student echoed the pro-Israel students' opinions as they commented on a general dislike of PfP and the futility of the protests:

> There was a lot of negative sentiment towards them. I'm pretty sure most of it was, "Stop being so loud when I'm trying to eat my lunch." [. . .] I think people were just annoyed that they got in the middle of their day, which is the point of the protests. [. . .] But overall, the sentiment on campus towards them was relatively negative. [. . .] I think it was a failure of PR on their part; they failed to rally the student body. Did they really accomplish anything? I don't think so. [. . .] Nothing changed in Israel; nothing changed in regards to US foreign policy towards Israel. We're in a 2,700-person college. What are we going to do? (G. V.)

Theme 12: Lack of Antisemitism

Pro-Palestine students did not experience fear, intimidation, or antisemitic remarks that the pro-Israel students described. Pro-Palestine

students were sensitive to the issue, however, and declared their readiness to stand up to antisemitism or extremism on the pro-Israel side, had they noticed it:

> If someone has an extreme position such as something that's either just lightly antisemitic or something along the lines of "Israel should just kill whoever they want to kill"—either of those, I would jump in. But I haven't really seen an opportunity to say something because fortunately I haven't had to confront antisemitism. (G. A.)

Another student was adamant that the antizionism-antisemitism connection was absent in campus interactions:

> Honestly, on this campus, there isn't a direct association between Jews and Zionism, which I think is good. I do know several members of Hillel are diehard Zionists, which does not look good, but even so, [the] non-Jewish people on campus don't associate us with Zionism directly, which is good. (G. V.)

The same student acknowledged, nevertheless, that there were moments when those boundaries were crossed on campus and Jews—not only Israel—appeared to be targeted:

> There was a bit of tension around being Jewish at that time. Public sentiment was very pro-Palestine. [. . .] But there are always people who take certain things a bit too far mentally, and there were people who projected pro-Palestine onto a little bit of anti-Jewish sentiment. (G. V.)

This student also reflected that campus events made the reappearance of antisemitism more transparent for them. They compared antisemitism with a superficial tolerance of a non-binary gender identity operating until [non-binary people and Jews] "do something to stand out, do something bad," at which point tolerating them "can be taken away at the drop of a hat until whatever it was blows over and then we're back to the status quo again" (G. V.).

Theme 13: A Counternarrative: Hiding

During the interviews, a counternarrative emerged among pro-Palestine Jewish students that qualified the experience of belonging stemming from cognitive cohesion with the college community. The theme of self-censoring suggests a semi-conscious fear of rejection as even a mild attachment to Israel became a liability by association, as in this account:

> I had to hide that part of myself; otherwise, I would be labeled "an outcast." [. . .] It was never anything overt, never, "I hate Jewish people," but it was a general condemnation of the Israeli state and that did leak into a general condemnation of anyone who liked Israel, not liked Israel's expansionism or bombings, but truly just enjoyed the freedom of being in a Jewish state, which did apply to me. I felt like I wasn't able to express my true beliefs on the matter. I did have to couch things. (G. V.)

G. V.'s testimony provides insight into the semantic boundaries of the campus discourse that seem to stipulate shunning of pro-Israel views because the current political context interprets such views as violence against Palestinians.

> If someone brought up [a pro-Israel view] it would be similar to someone saying, "I love Trump" in this current atmosphere. [. . .] It's not really something you can or should say out loud. Behind closed doors, you can [say]: "I support [Trump's] economic policies." [. . .] similarly at that time publicly saying, "I support the State of Israel," not, "I support the nation of Israel," was not allowed. So, the statement that came out eventually from Hillel [. . .] that they support Israel's right to self-defense and self-determination [. . .] was not well received. Honestly, the good thing about it was, not

> many people read it and not many people cared if they did. But, overall, the right to self-defense has become a dog whistle for the right to invasion. It's not a belief that is acceptable. (G. V.)

Similarly, another student expressed caution in appearing to "defend Israel" when bringing up the victims of October 7; this caution was, on the other hand, absent in contact with other Jews, even antizionists:

> I would not be the one to bring it up. [. . .] I would not want to be misinterpreted. [. . .] I would be concerned that in making that point in that situation I would be giving credence to equating one with the other, rather than acknowledging there is an imbalance here, but that doesn't mean there is no valid point on the other side. [. . .] I'd probably be willing to make the case if they were Jewish, just because my being a Jewish person living in the last couple of decades would probably help understand the position I'm coming from. Because even I know Jews who are aggressively antizionist, and they still very much understand the desire for a homeland free from the threats that created it. (H. B.)

In self-censoring—by prescribing for themselves what were "acceptable" or "allowed" beliefs, or defining the parameters of being "misinterpreted"—students revealed how they internalized categories of permissible discourse. Perhaps this was an indication of their need to accommodate the majority opinion.

Another student explicitly pinpointed the social cost of bringing up the subject among their friends: "you're legitimately risking harming your friendships by posting for either side on this" (J. B.).

Theme 14: Anger at Pro-Israel Students

Three of the six pro-Palestine interviewees expressed discomfort around or anger at Zionist students, whom they perceived as similarly biased and intellectually simplistic as most pro-Israel students regarded the rest of campus. B. L. reported censoring themselves when their Jewish peers commented negatively on pro-Palestine activists:

> The Middle Eastern Student Association posted something about it [the conflict], and I only know about that because the second they post anything about Palestine, people come into the whole [Jewish Students at Lafayette] group chat and start talking badly about it, [. . .] and saying, "It's so dumb" or "It's antisemitic." [. . .] I had such strong emotions about that, but I didn't say anything at all, because I knew that people were not going to agree with me, and it was just going to make people not like me. I also wasn't going to change anyone's opinion. (B. L.)

Another student reacted sharply to lumping Jewishness with Zionism, which threatened their Jewish identity. They emphasized their rejection of the idea, expressed by pro-Israel Jews, which posits Zionism as an essential component of *religious* Jewish identity: "I have [. . .] seething rage for the conflation of Judaism with Zionism from both sides. I am annoyed with people who conflate Jews with Judaism or Zionism, but I am extremely angry about Zionists who conflate Judaism with Zionism" (H. B.).

As indicated above, Hillel provided a place of support for pro-Palestine students, but some of its members were seen as apologists for Israel, which troubled pro-Palestine students, as in this account:

> There were members of Hillel who were vocally pro-Zionist to the point of saying that the Gazans deserved it, [that] this was justified retaliation. They should have known the bombing shouldn't have happened—ignoring the fact that these were hospitals and women and children [. . .]. It pushed me away from Hillel a bit at that point, because, to use the

> quote, "If there are three people in a room and a Nazi, there are four Nazis in the room." [. . .] If you are actively tolerating someone spewing such hatred, then you are allowing that hatred to continue. (G. V.)

While half of the pro-Palestine interviewees expressed discomfort around pro-Israel students, the emotions and experiences they shared were the only negative remarks that they mentioned in the context of the Lafayette campus climate.

5. Axis of Commonality: Effects

Theme 15: Disappointment in Israel

In their accounts, pro-Palestine students created a story explaining their evolution from *attachment* to Israel, which was never uncritical of Israel, to *disappointment* in what Israel came to represent to them. Their narratives had a distinctive pattern: it began with a description of their thoughts on Israel before October 7: "I had been hesitantly supportive of Israel before the facts; I would say, 'Listen, I don't appreciate the administration, I don't recognize the history of injustice, but I still stand by the concept of [Israel] . . . ,' et cetera" (H. B.). However, being confronted by news that predictably focused on the unintended victims of Israel's war against Hamas radically challenged these students' relative support for Israel and required finding a new position: "This was kind of the point at which I really couldn't justify avoiding it anymore and had to come to terms and decide where I stood on it." (H. B.)

Continuous exposure to media coverage, which focused on harrowing images from Gaza, evoked feelings of powerlessness and eventually spurred a reconsideration of their political stance, as in this account:

> For most of my life [. . .] I have taken pride in coming from a people that have been the victims of injustice and weathered it and not allowed it to make us cruel [. . .]. Instead, we chose to create laughter and to enjoy life. [. . .] There's obviously a big distinction between Israel and Judaism and Jews, but I can't really make that claim without a little asterisk saying: "This is what happens when my people had a nation state." (H. B.)

In contrast to pro-Israel students who emphasized opposition to the war among the Israelis, some pro-Palestine students criticized Israelis as being supportive of the *way* their government conducted the war, which contributed to their loss of pride and estrangement from Jewish people:

> There seems to be an undercurrent of Jews willing to accept this sort of behavior from their government or from a government that claims to represent them. It makes me hesitate to make that point about compassion in the face of hardship when we are so willing to inflict that hardship on others. [. . .] I have that pride that was challenged by what you see as behavior of your people and you're not proud of it. (H. B.)

Some interviewees were eager to emphasize that their support for Israel had faded. It could be a "mild" rejection, as in the account below of one of two pro-Palestine students who did not consider themselves Zionist even before October 7. While acknowledging that Jewish people had a right to a "Jewish homeland," they were not invested in the specific location of this homeland and thus, they would easily dispose with an idea of Israel *in* Israel:

> I am a Jewish person, I can't separate myself from that, but I'm not going to change my opinion on something just because I am Jewish. I don't have connection to Israel. And the tragedy is on both sides. So, I didn't immediately associate myself with something that other people were obviously already associating me with. [. . .] As a Jew, it is still an important place. But I'm in a weird in-between place: I feel

> connected to it, but I also don't support what they're doing. It's a weird limbo. [. . .] There is definitely a need for a Jewish state for people, but I don't feel that it needs to be exactly in that place [. . .] because, if there's already so much conflict happening, why do we want to continue that? [. . .] You can't just take over a place and call it "homeland," because there's already people there. (C. R.)

Other students were eager to declare their break with their attachment to Israel in stronger terms, like in these two accounts: "I have no horse in the race besides being Jewish myself and that's not much of one. [. . .] I do feel a connection to Israel as it should be, not [to] Israel as it is" (G. V.). And, "I don't support Israel. Conceptually, the idea of a homeland for Jews and, historically, the time when it was founded, it made perfect sense, but any good will I had towards it got lost, especially in the last couple of years" (H. B.).

Theme 16: Identity

Expanding on these narratives, students explained how their views about how Israel has conducted the war in Gaza affected the type of Jewishness with which they came to identify:

> I identify a lot less with Israel because I kind of have to. There is not the space for me to be positive about it because of the news articles [that] keep coming out about the atrocities [. . .] [it] is not morally okay for me to believe in a Jewish state that commits these atrocities. I have been forced to identify with American Judaism that is culturally not religious, which is not too different than when I was as a child, but then I chose; now I don't really have that mental choice. (G. V.)

Sadly, for G. V., basic religious identity expressed in Shabbat observance, etc., became a source of shame by positioning them, symbolically, in the group seen as perpetrators (liability by association discussed above): "It's not something I can be proud of. Disquieted, sometimes shame. [. . .] Being proud in my religious identity has become synonymous with being proud of atrocities committed, and that's not something I'm able to do" (G. V.).

Realignment of one's Jewish identity included not only a loss of pride, but also a need to hide it, similar to hiding more nuanced views on Israel:

> Even though I continue to believe in the concept of a Jewish homeland, I don't find myself saying that to anyone [. . .] because it doesn't seem a point worth making in the face of the war crimes being committed. It's a hard case to justify [. . .]. I'm not concerned about the continuation of Israel as a nation state. I'm quite concerned about the continuation of Palestinian people's lives. (H. B.)

Another factor that weakened the connection to Jewish identity were interactions with pro-Israel students who were represented—accurately or not—as saying "the Gazans deserved it." Perception of Zionist students as justifying or even being satisfied with the death of civilians alienated them from the group that would attend the Hillel gatherings, as in this account: "It drove me away from my Jewish identity a little bit. It wasn't towards another ideology; I just spent more time with my non-Jewish friends. I spent less time thinking about my Jewish identity" (G. V.). Another student discussed how they lost a sense of trust and safety around certain Jewish people whose opinions they saw as "extremist." That sentiment was a reverse of pro-Israel students "waking up" to the realization that some Jews are strongly antizionist:

> Identifying as a Jew, something changed because of that. [. . .] It's not that [. . .] it made me dislike other Jewish people because that's not true, but it made me feel less safe sometimes to be around other Jewish people when I know that they have extremist opinions. [. . .] I didn't think they were going to attack me or hate [me] [. . .]. But sometimes, being around other

> Jewish people, you're like, "Oh, yeah, I'm Jewish." And so, they'll immediately start talking about how they hate Palestinians and I'm like, "Why do you feel safe to say that around me just because I said I'm Jewish?" They probably wouldn't be saying that to someone who was not Jewish. They felt it was okay to say hateful stuff about [Palestinians]. (B. L.)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this project was to document the voices and understand the experiences of Jewish students at an American SLAC campus in the aftermath of October 7, 2023. My research revealed that the fundamental difference in how students experienced the post-October campus was directly related to the intensity of their attachment to Israel. When students had personal connections to the state, were committed to Jewish education, and were raised by Zionist parents, their affection for Israel was stronger. Consequently, their understanding of political options for Israel's survival tended to be more nuanced than the global anti-Israel narrative: they were able to see the suffering of the people in Gaza and yet understood that Israel's military actions, while not without problematic episodes, stemmed not from genocidal intentions against Palestinians, but from unprecedented conditions of a war for survival against an enemy—Hamas. These students, most likely due to their Zionist formation and personal connections to Israel, had to contend with and challenge not just the media's but also their peers' interpretations of their identities, which took place in an emotionally indifferent and hostile environment. The discrepancy between Jewish students' personal commitments and the generalized antisemitic campus tone left them feeling unsupported and isolated. On the other hand, when at least one of the three factors was weaker or lacking, students felt diminished attachment to Israel and were, consequently, more ready to criticize its politics, aligning with the progressive and dominant stance on campus, thereby engendering a positive experience of social belonging.

In the students' narratives, three thematic axes emerged, two of which pro-Israel and pro-Palestine students shared, although the direction of the students' experiences differed. The two axes of commonality included support experienced on campus and the effect of the campus climate on their Jewish identity and wellbeing. A third thematic axis, one of distinction, appeared only among pro-Israel students: that of political homogeneity on campus, which became a defining experience for them. Themes describing that experience reflected antisemitic speech and acts. These included microaggression and intimidation online and in personal contacts, as well as traumatic invalidation manifested in ignoring and/or minimizing microaggression by the college community.[44] Also disturbing were tropes of the new antisemitism: double standards as manifested in privileging pro-Palestine protests and activism; equalizing the victims of October 7 with victims of the subsequent war (thus eliminating a distinction between a targeted, deliberate brutal massacre and the war's unintended civilian losses); or denying the connection between Jewish identity and attachment to Israel.[45]

Jewish students experienced firsthand that their sense of belonging, identity, even safety, were marginalized or excluded from the college's multiculturalism and DEI agendas.[46] The effects of these experiences were predictable, based on psychological research that indicated that experiencing antisemitism is detrimental to Jews' wellbeing.[47] Interviewees reported heightened depressive symptoms, social isolation, loneliness, sense of abandonment, and shame. In reaction, they tended to strengthen their Jewish identity and concluded that they could only rely on themselves because their needs were not addressed in the discourse of movements for social justice or anti-racism.

Pro-Israel students experienced campus support selectively—from Hillel and individual professors—as islands of caring concern where

they could take shelter from anti-Israel noise and feel heard in their distress and sometimes conflicting feelings. On the other hand, the pro-Palestine students' stance on Israel was developing parallel to that of the general public. Therefore, as some expressed, they "did not feel any need for support" (H. B.). They were fortunate to be able to discuss their thoughts with their non-Jewish friends, even while there was a limit to these conversations, and at times they were forced to practice self-censoring. This last phenomenon *could* suggest that pro-Palestine Jewish students exaggerated feeling "comfortable" with the anti-Israel campus climate. Theirs may have simply been wishful thinking in order to present a greater cognitive cohesion with the majority on campus.[48] When pro-Palestine students searched for a deeper understanding that was lacking among their non-Jewish friends, speaking with the then-director of Hillel and sometimes participating in Hillel activities were helpful.

Concerning identity, multiple studies suggest that negative ethnic identification can adversely affect the formation of personal and social identity in young adults.[49] AMCHA's pre-October study provides a comprehensive analysis of threats to Jewish students on American campuses, and their conclusions can be demoralizing, especially since the climate after October 7 became disproportionally more antisemitic globally: according to AMCHA, in schools where five or more faculty support a boycott of Israeli universities, Jewish students are 3.4 times more likely to be denigrated.[50] The study also found that the extended period of ostracism connected with identifying Jews as Zionists leads to many adverse and long-term psychological effects, i.e., disintegrating one's identity. Equating Jews with Zionists can lead one to "purge" the undesirable, Zionist, part of being Jewish and to comply with an antizionist interpretation of Jewishness, such as adopted by the Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP).[51]

While it is too soon to predict how Jewish students' identities across the United States will adjust in future years, this research suggests that pro-Israel students' experiences on the post-October 7 Lafayette campus strengthened their commitment to Jewishness. Many interviewees shared L. T.'s view: "I started to feel a much stronger relationship to my identity because I saw how much people not only could be unified against Jews, but also how Jews could be unified as a whole." Such remarks indicated a conscious shift to a more intentional Jewishness after October 7.

Pro-Palestine students, in contrast, disengaged further, if not completely, from any support for Israel and expressed shame for belonging to an ethnic group whose state is singled out in global rhetoric as the epitome of "evil." The increasing distance from their pro-Israel peers further pushed pro-Palestine students away from a Jewish identity and attachment to Israel. In this context, their rejection of Israel as a component of their identity may have been a consequence of internalized antisemitism to the degree of dissociating from a religious, historic, and cultural connection to the Land of Israel.[52]

While the direction of students' new or renewed commitment to a Jewish identity took a bifurcated route, both groups considered that this shift reflected a deepening of their Jewish identity, i.e., that they intensified their "Jewishness" along opposite vectors of attachment to or detachment from Israel. These processes of the solidification of Jewish identity along pro- or antizionist lines reflect a widening split in American Jewry on the issue of Israel.[53]

The situation at Lafayette and, by extension, on other SLACs that were spared encampments and sometimes violent protests, might evoke a false sense of containment, which an incisive student articulated this way:

> For the most part [the protests] were pretty respectful, there was no verbal [. . .] or physical

> harassment, and, of course, you don't want those things to happen. [. . .] Because students felt physically safe on campus, which is great, and that's first priority, but that's also why people didn't really think anything was wrong with it. (D. R.)

D. R. noted a false sense of equanimity that Jewish students were not, fortunately, physically endangered, but also questioned whether physical harm is a yardstick by which administrations measure the safety of any other minority on a college campus. As Dara Horn quipped, if ultimate destruction—the Holocaust—becomes a standard by which to judge Jews' safety, "the bar is rather high."[54]

While Jewish students did not experience physical threats or violence, one of the recurring themes in the interviews was fear and anticipation that things could become as dangerous as on larger American campuses. As has been anthropologically demonstrated, fears "reflect not only people's firsthand experiences but [also] the collective social norms, values, and moral codes their group wishes to promote."[55] And while fear can be identified as a construct providing cultural reinforcement, it cannot be dismissed as a construct alone, as the transformation of violent speech into violent acts proves. Even before the attacks on Jewish lives in the United States in 2025,[56] Jewish students experienced anticipatory fear of violence. While its historical origins link fear to collective experience and memory of persecutions, Jewish students also experienced fear from realizing the power imbalance against them in the implied limitations: they were *not* allowed to publicly mourn the murdered on October 7 in a separate vigil; they were *not* allowed to show public support for the release of the hostages; and they were *not* allowed to organize a demonstration on behalf of Israel's defense.[57]

In spite of the homogenous anti-Israel atmosphere on campus, most if not all Jewish students found it possible to empathize with the suffering of Palestinians whom they saw as placed in a hostage position by Hamas and thus becoming unintended victims of Israel's defensive war. As many accounts quoted above demonstrate, Jewish students, even when isolated by a hostile climate, were eager to extend their empathy toward the Palestinians. It is a rational conjecture that, had the anti-Israel protesters and activists shown a similar degree of empathy for students whose attachment to Israel they found anathema, the pro-Israel students on campus would have had a more inclusive and supportive experience. Perhaps these Jewish students would not have experienced secondary trauma. Perhaps they would have suffered less drastically, if they could have relied on a supportive and understanding community on campus. An administration better prepared to address antisemitism by working with the Jewish Studies Advisory Board as well as directly with Jewish students—and thus, with people affected by antisemitism and/or expert in addressing it—could have offered the support needed by all Jewish students on the Lafayette campus.[58] That, unfortunately, is not what the pro-Israel Jewish students will remember as part of their college experience after October 7.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Jewish students at most SLACs were fortunate to miss more violent expressions of antisemitism. However, following the deadly attacks on Jews in 2025 in the United States, it would be unprofessional to overlook antisemitic trends that typify other academic institutions. It is in the interest of all constituencies—college trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and, most importantly, students—that radicalized anti-Jewish hostilities on university campuses be fully recognized and addressed.

The pre-October 7 AMCHA report emphasizes:

> No other student identity group has been subjected to anywhere near the kinds of sustained, coordinated attacks on their identity

> and attempts to expunge it from campus—attacks carried out and condoned by large numbers of students, student organizations, faculty, academic departments, and outside national and international groups—as have Jewish students who feel a connection to the Jewish state.[59]

As Hersh noted in his 2024 report, since "over 80% of Jewish students support the existence of a Jewish state [. . .] that's [. . .] a large share of the Jewish population that other students [and college communities in general] intend to ostracize."[60]

The primary responsibility for combating antisemitism on campus rests with the administration; in its strategy against antisemitism, it should proceed from a clear definition of "antisemitism" that includes manifestations of antizionism. Accepting the term "antizionism" as a *frequent* code for antisemitic expressions does not question students' experiences of being beleaguered in their Jewish identity when surrounded by anti-Israel rhetoric.[61] To redeem this oversight, the administration must establish and enforce—through sanctions—diversity protections of *Jewish Zionist identity as an exceptional case of discrimination*. That exclusive approach is essential, as the nature of antisemitic prejudice is *different* from discrimination of other groups.[62]

While discrimination against any group is unique in that it attacks the unique characteristics of the target group, antisemitism also has additional characteristics that call for exceptional diversity protections. For example, unlike discrimination against other ethnic groups, antisemitism morphs itself to accommodate hatred stemming from contradictory positions, attacking Jews as simultaneously weak *and* powerful, as capitalist exploiters *and* supporters of communism, as rootless Europeans *and* European settler colonizers, as racial subhumans *and* White privileged oppressors, as stateless cosmopolitans *and* Zionist nationalists, and so on. As a result of these antithetical characteristics, according to the AMCHA study, attacks on groups perceived as lacking privilege evoke sympathy for the victims, while acts of bigotry against Jews, especially Zionist Jews, evoke sympathy for the perpetrators. Zionist students on campuses quickly become pariahs, making it difficult for them to call out mistreatment, especially when they are routinely accused of weaponizing antisemitism.[63] Hostility toward the "privileged" victim—perceived as the "oppressor"—is legitimized through statements and actions by faculty that denigrate Jewish attachment to their ancestral homeland, which has a far-reaching negative impact on the administration's responses to anti-Jewish harassment. This impact is the reason for the widely documented inaction and systematic disregard by university administrations of complaints of discrimination from Jewish students, which began well before October 7.[64]

Administrators also struggle to recognize a commitment to Israel as a fundamental characteristic of Jewish identity. Unlike other forms of ethnic or religious bigotry, which mobilize institutional responses, harassment that challenges this commitment (e.g., asserting that Judaism is entirely distinct from Zionism or denying that antizionism can be a form of antisemitism) is typically dismissed as a political view protected by free speech, rather than discrimination against an ethnic or religious group.

Finally, the unparalleled scale and severity of harassment of Jewish students and attacks on their identity indicate a political urgency that administrators must recognize and respond to as they would to increased attacks on any other minority group.

To create an environment where truth can be pursued in freedom and respect, administrators need to be knowledgeable about the potentially harmful impact of anti-Israel rhetoric that dominates the airwaves. Employees responsible for multicultural education on campus should be literate in historical and transgenerational trauma-informed instructional models, with a special focus on Jewish history, the Holocaust,[65]

and the new antisemitism. To meet this need, it is essential for the administration to create mandatory training, courses, and lectures that sensitize faculty, staff, and students alike to antizionist speech and harassment.

The recent comprehensive study of anti-Israel networks on university and college campuses by Gunther Jikeli and Daniel Miehling is an indispensable resource that details how anti-Israel groups distort and impinge upon the free flow of ideas.[66] It provides data on events that amplify campus antisemitism; describes how key actors radicalize campus discourse by demonizing Israel; and identifies antisemitic activist groups on campus. These groups include the National Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP); Palestinian Solidarity Committees and Divestment campaigns; and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). The study also discusses the role of US-designated foreign- and off-campus terrorist groups that are linked to Iran and calls for institutional accountability. It is the responsibility of administrators to enforce policies that distinguish protected political speech from intimidation: identifying "not only explicit calls to violence, but also symbolic content that glorifies acts of terror—often directed at Jews—under the guise of 'resistance,' 'Intifada,' or 'liberation.'"[67]

When the global narrative remains anti-Israel, Jewish students have a right to expect a fair and balanced exchange at least in campus discourse and to rely on understanding and support from their college, teachers, and peers. Their protection from trauma and isolation can be assured in many ways: the college can fund speakers and events that challenge propaganda meant to delegitimize Israel; and the administration can create spaces, within broader Jewish spaces, specifically in support of Zionist students.[68] Additionally, it is essential that Jewish students receive culturally specific counseling that addresses the unique trauma distinct for Jewish students. Only then can the minority Jewish population on campus feel that their Jewish, and in many cases Jewish-Zionist, identity is validated, allowing them the peace of mind and heart to adhere to their deeply-held attachment to Israel.

Finally, it is of utmost importance that faculty in their teaching and mentoring capacities remain strictly within the boundaries of their expertise and create an environment where contesting viewpoints can be safely argued. Such a classroom requires sensitized and informed faculty who can conduct class discussion while calling out contentious terms that can evoke heightened emotions. For example, students of Jewish and/or Zionist backgrounds would feel attacked if terms like "settler colonialism," "genocide," or "pinkwashing" were allowed into class discussions without first defining and analyzing their appropriateness in the Israeli context. While such terms should not be automatically dismissed, a thorough and open approach to them would allow all students to discuss conflicting narratives, revealing how problematic and limited their use is in relation to Israeli history and politics.[69] Activist scholars would benefit from rethinking their teaching in two related respects: primarily their own academic mission, namely, refraining from falling into what Tarunabh Khaitan calls "scholactivism," or the propagation of ideas at the expense of freedom of inquiry, especially when this leads to the discovery of uncomfortable truths. A researcher who confidently seeks to confirm a hypothesis before beginning research is not conducting genuine scientific work, nor one worth pursuing.[70] Furthermore, scholactivism is based on absolutist moral assumptions that demand immediate results in creating a moral framework for legitimate scientific discourse. Such moral prioritization quickly develops into biases that prevent authentic research.[71] For example, a settler-colonial perspective applied to Israel and Zionism requires deliberate omission of facts and misinterpretation of the historical context of the nations involved in the Middle East conflict. However, an ideologically motivated boycott of scholars perceived as associated with settler colonialism because of their Israeli citizenship or pro-Zionist perspective has real

consequences for hundreds of Israeli academics whose research and collaboration contracts have been canceled, even though proponents of the boycott of Israel officially deny that it is directed against individuals.[72]

Secondarily, faculty must consider the effect of their in- and out-of-classroom activism on their minoritized students. As Zahava Feldstein has said, the homogenous voice heard on campus inspired by political activism of antizionist faculty, "put [Jewish students] [. . .] in the position of 'choosing,' and in so doing [antizionist faculty] neither realized nor cared about the emotional or psychological tolls of that choice." Jewish students were "*simply irrelevant* to their activism."[73] Activist faculty against Israel per se must consider the emotional/psychological toll their behavior exacts. They must recognize that Jewish students' position, too, is *relevant* and must be allowed airtime.

One of the most significant, and pessimistic, conclusions of this research is that Lafayette College, like most SLACs communities, failed Jewish students after the events of October 7 by failing to provide them with a safe and empathetic environment in which to express their complex and painful experiences—not to mention to pursue their academic work. It is my hope that this paper contributes to an improvement of campus climate for Jewish—and all—students. In the end, efforts to redress the plight of minority groups, in the event of an attack on their homeland and beliefs, will ease the fear and isolation of not only that group, but will ultimately benefit the greater society.[74]

ENDNOTES

1 Joanna Beata Michlic, "History 'Wars' and the Battle for Truth and National Memory," in *Constructions and Instrumentalizations of the Past: A Comparative Study of Memory Management in the Region*, ed. Ninna Mörner (Stockholm: Centre for Baltic and Eastern European Studies, Södertörn University, 2020), 116.

2 "With Anti-semitism on the Rise, Can Poland Come to Terms with Its Past?," *America Magazine*, November 12, 2018, 28–33.

3 E.g., Graham Wright et al., *In the Shadow of War: Hotspots of Antisemitism on US College Campuses* (Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, December 2023); Cary Nelson, Lilli Friedland, and Leslie O'Connell, "The Impact of Antisemitism on Emerging Adults' Jewish Identity Part 1: Defining the Problem," *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 7, no. 1 (2024); Graham Wright et al., *Drawing the Line: How US Jewish College Students Think about Antisemitism* (Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, April 2024); Eitan Hersh, *The Social Costs of Being Jewish and Supporting Israel on Campus* (San Francisco, CA: Jim Joseph Foundation, 2024); Graham Wright et al., *Campus Voices: Jewish Students' Experiences of Antisemitism at US Colleges* (Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, December 2024); Vikki S. Katz, Emma R. Forman, and Noel H. McGuire, "Unsettled Ground: How Jewish Undergraduates Are Negotiating Identity Shifts and (Un)Civil Campus Discourse after October 7," *Journal of Jewish Education*, March 2025; Yael Silverstein and Caryn Block, "Making the Invisible Visible: A Taxonomy of Contemporary Antisemitic Experiences on College Campuses," *Journal of Jewish Education*, April 2025; Sergio Della Pergola, "Jewish Identity and Anti-Jewism after October 7, 2023: World Routines and Ruptures," *K.'s: Jews, Europe, the XXIst Century*, April 17, 2025, accessed June 23, 2025, https://k-larevue.com/en/jewish-identity; Miri Bar-Halpern, Jaclyn Wolfman, "Traumatic Invalidation in the Jewish Community after October 7," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, May 2025; Jonathan Krasner et al., "Between Home and Homeland: Jewish College Students Confront the Israel-Gaza Conflict and Campus Divides," *Journal of Jewish Education*, May 2025; Talia Morstead and Anita DeLongis, "Antisemitism on Campus in the Wake of October 7: Examining Stress, Coping, and Depressive Symptoms among Jewish Students," *Stress and Health* 41, no. 1 (2025).

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5 One should not overlook that it has been on the rise since 1960. In 1974, ADL director and ADL attorney asked, "Is the post-World War II honeymoon with the Jews over?" Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, *The New Anti-Semitism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 1.

6 Silverstein and Block, "Making the Invisible Visible," 14. Cf., "Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2024," ADL, accessed June 24, 2025, https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2024.

7 "Antisemitic Incident Data Breaks All Previous Annual Records in 2024 for the Fourth Year in a Row," accessed June 26, 2025, https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/antisemitic-incident-data-breaks-all-previous-annual-records-2024-fourth.

8 . Kalman Weiser, "Introduction," in *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism*, ed. Sol Goldberg, Scott Ury, and Kalman Weiser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 6.

9 . Ibid. Literature on the new antisemitism and its conceptual critique is voluminous; important examples include: Forster and Epstein, *The New Anti-Semitism*; Robert Wistrich, "Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 16, no. 3–4 (2004): 27–31; Pierre-André Taguieff, *Rising from the Muck: The New Anti-Semitism in Europe* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2004); Josef Joffe, *Nations We Love to Hate: Israel, America and the New Antisemitism* (Jerusalem: Vidal Sassoon Center for the Study of Antisemitism, Hebrew University, 2005); Bernard Lewis, "The New Anti-Semitism: First Religion, Then Race, Then What?," *American Scholar* 75 (2006): 25–36; Anne Karpf et al., *A Time to Speak Out: Independent Jewish Voices on Israel, Zionism and Jewish Identity* (London and New York: Verso, 2008); Jonathan Judaken, "So What's New? Rethinking the 'New Antisemitism' in a Global Age," *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, no. 4–5 (2008): 531–560; R. Wistrich, *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, the Jews, and Israel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Alvin H. Rosenfeld, ed., *Deciphering the New Antisemitism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Eliezer Ben-Rafael, "Antisemitism: Sociological Perspectives," in *Comprehending and Confronting Antisemitism: A Multi-Faceted Approach*, ed. A. Lange et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020); Irwin Cotler, "Leadership Talk by the Chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights," in *Comprehending and Confronting Antisemitism: A Multi-Faceted Approach*, ed. A. Lange et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020); Shalom Lappin, *The New Antisemitism: The Resurgence of an Ancient Hatred in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024).

10 Nathan Sharansky, "Foreword," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 16, no. 3–4 (2004): 5–8.

11 Jerome A. Chanes, "Esau Hates Jacob: What's New about the New Antisemitism?," in *Antisemitism in North America*, ed. Steven K. Baum et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 49.

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13 Alyza D. Lewin, "Zionism—The Integral Component of Jewish Identity that Jews Are Historically Pressured to Shed," *Israel Affairs* 26, no. 3 (2020): 330–347.

14 For an overview of a messianic sect seeking a return to their Jewish homeland since the twelfth century, see ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 No other area "proposed" to Jewish communities had either any historic or cultural connection to the Jewish people, or was viable for settlers. Cf. Laura Almagor, *Beyond Zion: The Jewish Territorialist Movement* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2022).

17 Nelson et al., "The Impact of Antisemitism," 46.

18 On historic claims of this attachment see Lewin, "Zionism—The Integral."

19 Nelson et al., "The Impact of Antisemitism," 12.

20 The study was approved by the Lafayette Institutional Review Board.

21 John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2025), 87.

22 Ibid., 91, 93.

23 This distinction incidentally confirms psychological research suggesting that "having a strong Jewish identity may sensitize individuals to, and increase reports of, collective experiences of antisemitism." Daniel Rosen et al., "The Anti-Semitism Related Stress Inventory: Development and Preliminary Psychometric Evaluation," *Psychology of Violence* 8, no. 6 (2018): 731. Cf. Silverstein and Block, "Making the Invisible," 17.

24 Krasner et al., "Between Home and Homeland," 3. The final interviews for Krasner et al.'s study took place on April 12, 2024, "five days before the construction of the first Palestine solidarity encampments on university campuses" (ibid., 6).

25 "Lafayette at a Glance," Lafayette College, accessed June 26, 2025, https://about.lafayette.edu/lafayette-at-a-glance/.

26 "Lafayette Resolves OCR Review," Lafayette College, accessed August 7, 2025, https://news.lafayette.edu/2024/06/20/lafayette-resolves-ocr-review/. In March 2025, Lafayette College became one of sixty higher education institutions that received OCR letters warning "potential enforcement actions if institutions do not fulfill their obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to protect Jewish students on campus." "Press Release: U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Sends Letters to 60 Universities under Investigation for Antisemitic Discrimination and Harassment," US Department of Education, accessed August 7, 2025, https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-educations-office-civil-rights-sends-letters-60-universities-under-investigation-antisemitic-discrimination-and-harassment.

27 "Jewish Life on Campus," Muhlenberg College, accessed June 14, 2025, https://www.muhlenberg.edu/hillel/prospectivestudents/jewishlifeoncampus/.

28 "Top 10 FAQS from Prospective Students and Families," Muhlenberg College, accessed February 14, 2025, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.muhlenberg.edu/media/contentassets/pdf/campuslife/hillel/faqs-for-students-and-families.pdf.

29 For confidentiality, students' identities were hidden behind invented initials and plural pronouns.

30 See, e.g., Elliot N. Dorff, "Am Yisrael: Peoplehood," in his *Modern Conservative Judaism: Evolving Thought and Practice* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 311–34. While the ancient concept of peoplehood embraces all the Jewish people everywhere and at all times, it does not suggest any uniformity among its members: "*Am Yisrael* is not like the Catholic Church, where one man determines doctrine for a billion parishioners. Rather, Jews are a loosely bound confederation of communities that disagree on almost everything." Rabbi Eli L. Garfinkel, "PINHAS," in *The JPS Jewish Heritage Torah Commentary* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 301.

31 According to several students, since PfP was not an official student group, the Hillel board decided not to respond to their activity.

32 According to a 2022 report, "the vast majority of respondents considered the slogan 'From the river to the sea' to be antisemitic: 61% felt it was definitely antisemitic, and an additional 22% felt it was probably antisemitic." Wright et al., *Drawing the Line*, 10. As the report confirms, the phrase has been used by Hamas itself to "describe its goal of the destruction of the state of Israel and the elimination of Jews from Israeli territory" (ibid., 5).

33 "Pro-Palestine Protest Promotes Peace, Generates Backlash," *Lafayette*, October 27, 2023, https://lafayettestudentnews.com/153786/news/pro-palestine-protest-promotes-peace-generates-backlash/.

34 Ibid. On the academic misuse of "context" as a justification for Palestinian terror, see: Tomel Dekel, "A Contextless Context: Postcolonial Studies and Terrorism in Israel and Gaza," *Israel Studies* 29, no. 2 (2024): 170–187.

35 The student who carried the poster first claimed he did not realize its antisemitic meaning, then doubled down and embraced it. See "Pro-Palestine Protest Promotes Peace."

36 Chris Bail, *Breaking the Social Media Prism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), demonstrates how social media content is distorted by a disproportionate amount of posts from extremists who influence public opinion. TikTok has been shown to push pro-Palestine content, which was being viewed 10 times more often than pro-Israel content (by November 2023). Scott Galloway, "Short-form War. No Mercy/No Malice," November 3, 2023, accessed June 27, 2025, https://www.profgalloway.com/short-form-war/.

37 "Pro-Palestine Protest Prompts Complaints," *Lafayette*, April 26, 2024, https://lafayettestudentnews.com/164803/news/pro-palestine-protest-prompts-complaints/#.

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39 Collective experiences of antisemitism denote "being exposed to antisemitic remarks about Jews as a group rather than directed at the participant personally." Rosen et al., "The Anti-Semitism Related," 731.

40 Lafayette president's letter to the college community, October 13, 2023.

41 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2016).

42 Cf. Katz et al., "Unsettled Ground."

43 Incidentally also confirmed in recent study across American universities, see ibid.

44 "Rather than being met with compassion and care, many [Jews] were instead met with a stunning mix of silence, blaming, excluding, and even outright denying the atrocities of October 7 along with any emotional pain stemming from them." Miri Bar-Halpern and Jaclyn Wolfman, "Traumatic Invalidation in the Jewish Community after October 7," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, May 2025, 2.

45 Alyza D. Lewin, "Recognizing Anti-Zionism as an Attack on Jewish Identity," *Catholic University Law Review* 68, no. 4 (2019). Cf. Lewin, "Zionism—The Integral."

46 There is substantial literature on it, e.g., the report *Instructing Animosity: How DEI Pedagogy Produces the Hostile Attribution Bias*, NCRI Network Contagion Research Institute at the Rutgers University Social Perception Lab, 2024; Barry A. Farber and Arielle Poleg, "Campus Diversity, Jewishness, and Antisemitism," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 75, no. 11 (2019): 2034–2048; Daniel I. Rubin, "The Muddy Waters of Multicultural Acceptance: A Qualitative Case Study on Antisemitism and the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 1–15; Peter Langman, *Jewish Issues in Multiculturalism* (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1999); Caria G. Naumburg, "Judaism: A Hidden Diversity," *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 77, no. 2–3 (2007): 79–99; Jonathan Judaken, "Reckoning with Postcolonial Judeophobia after October 7 and the Gaza War," *Antisemitism Studies* 8, no. 2 (2024): 317–324; Camila Bassi, *Outcast: How Jews Were Banished from the Anti-Racist Imagination* (London: No Pasaran Media, 2023); David Baddiel, *Jews Don't Count: How Identity Politics Failed One Particular Identity* (London: TLS, 2021).

47 Morstead and DeLongis, "Antisemitism on Campus"; Silverstein and Block, "Making the Invisible," 15; Rosen et al, "The Anti-Semitism Related."

48 According to one post-October report, more than a third of Jewish students hide their identity "in order to fit in," and feel "judged if they participate in Jewish activities." Hersh, *The Social Costs*, 9.

49 Laila Beckwith and Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, *A Looming Crisis for the American Jewish Community: Campus Antisemitism & the Assault on Jewish Identity* (Santa Cruz, CA: AMCHA Initiative, 2022); Cary et al., "The Impact of Antisemitism," 35.

50 The same result was brought by antizionist student groups (Jewish and non-Jewish); the size and private/public status of the school did no bear on these findings.

51 Beckwith and Rossman-Benjamin, *A Looming Crisis*, 23.

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53 Della Pergola, "Jewish Identity"; Elliot Cosgrove, *For Such a Time as This: On Being Jewish Today* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2024); Elizabeth Dias, "How Oct. 7 Changed American Jews," *New York Times*, October 6, 2024; https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/06/us/jews-hamas-attacks.html?smid=url-share; Jennifer Bardi, "How Do Young American Jews Define Being Pro Israel?," *Moment Magazine* 51, no. 2 (2025): 34–37.

54 Dara Horn, *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present* (New York: Norton, 2021), 187.

55 Jennifer Creese, "'We're Alone in This Together': The Anthropology of Fear and Jewish Attitudes to Antisemitism," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 23, no. 1 (2022): 5.

56 The arsonist attack on Pennsylvania governor's residence on April 13, 2025; the murder of Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, Israel's embassy staffers, on May 21, 2025; and the firebombing of pro-Israeli hostage protesters in Boulder, CO, on June 1, 2025.

57 Student narratives confirm a study of university leaders' statements after October 7, majority of whom failed to acknowledge Jewish students' trauma and fears of antisemitism, or to offer support and protection. Leila Beckwith and Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, *Selective Sympathy: The Double Standard in Confronting Jewish Student Trauma and Antisemitism after the October 7th Massacre* (Santa Cruz, CA: AMCHA Initiative, 2023).

58 From an institutional point of view, a post-October study revealed that "greater exposure to antisemitic experiences was associated with lower levels of institutional commitment," which affects alumni investment. Silverstein and Block, "Making the Invisible," 17.

59 Beckwith and Rossman-Benjamin, *A Looming Crisis*, 29.

60 Hersh, *The Social Costs*, 9.

61 Among more recent definitions of antisemitism, the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, 2021, https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/, attempted to address perceived faults with the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance

Alliance) Working Definition of Antisemitism, 2016, https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism. Both documents contain vague statements that potentiate room for misunderstandings; however, general examples *may* serve as useful guidelines, to be applied in consultation with experts.

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63 Beckwith and Rossman-Benjamin, *A Looming Crisis*, 29–30.

64 Cf. literature listed under endnote 47 as well as report from Presidential Task Force on Combating Antisemitism and Anti-Israeli Bias at Harvard University, released on April 29, 2025, https://www.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/FINAL-Harvard-ASAIB-Report-4.29.25.pdf; and report from *Columbia University's* Task Force on *Antisemitism*, August 30, 2024, https://president.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Announcements/Report-2-Task-Force-on-Antisemitism.pdf.

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66 Gunther Jikeli and Daniel Miehling, *Anti-Israel Campus Groups: Online Networks & Narratives* (Bloomington, IN: Knowledge Commons, June 8, 2025).

67 Ibid., 42–43. Cf. Shai Farber, "Weaponisation of Academia: The Palestinian BDS Movement and Anti-Israel Campus Protests," *Israel Affairs*, June 2025, 1–24; NGO Monitor, *The NGO Network Orchestrating Antisemitic Incitement on American Campuses*, April 2025, accessed June 23, 2025, https://ngo-monitor.org/reports/ngo-network-orchestrating-antisemitic-incitement-on-american-campuses/.

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73 Zahava Feldstein, "My Jewish Name, Face, and Voice: Navigating Antisemitism as a Graduate Student in Jewish Education at Stanford," *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 7, no. 3 (2024): 84–85.

74 Cf., for a comprehensive list of policies and strategies for colleges to protect their Jewish students, Cary Nelson, Lilli Friedland, and Leslie O'Connell, "The Impact of Antisemitism on Emerging Adults' Jewish Identity—Part II: Pursuing Solutions," *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 7, no. 3 (2024): 1–16.

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Antisemitism in Higher Education in the United Kingdom: Jewish Students' Experiences in the Academic Year Following October 7, 2023

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Abstract

This study presents the findings of a comprehensive survey of Jewish students at UK universities at the end of the 2023–2024 academic year (n = 497). Respondents reported witnessing many more antisemitic incidents after than before October 7. Furthermore, the greater the number of antisemitic incidents that students personally experienced and witnessed, the more people and spaces they avoided on campus due to antisemitism; the greater their concerns about antisemitism on campus; the more they felt unsafe on campus; and the greater the negative effects of antisemitism on their studies, wellbeing and campus life. Students' own words are highlighted in the open-ended responses, emphasizing the verbal abuse, physical attacks, intimidation, exclusion, and isolation they experienced, hinting at profound negative effects on their mental health. Together, these findings underscore the pressing need to combat the surge in antisemitism across UK universities, for example, by creating and enforcing clear codes of conduct for staff and students to reduce experiences and expressions of antisemitism, alongside robust reporting mechanisms to capture and address these when they do occur.

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Keywords: University campus, education, Jewish student survey, qualitative, quantitative, hate crime, mental health



Since October 7, 2023, when Hamas committed the most murderous attack against Jews since the Holocaust, antisemitism has surged on university campuses. Stop Antisemitism's 2024 College Report, which evaluated twenty-five higher education institutions across the United States, documented a 3,000% increase in antisemitic incident reports compared to the previous year.[1] In the United Kingdom, the Community Security Trust recorded a total of 272 university-related antisemitic incidents in the 2023–2024 academic year, as opposed to 53 the previous year.[2] Such antisemitism threatens Jewish students' educational experiences as well as their Jewish beliefs and identity[3] and can lead to other harms, such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, and feelings of alienation.[4] To prevent further escalation of antisemitism and to support Jewish students who encounter such incidents,

it is essential to document their lived experiences on UK campuses. This study contributes to that effort through quantitative and qualitative analysis of the first comprehensive survey of nearly 500 Jewish students across more than eighty UK universities in the academic year following October 7.

DEFINING ANTISEMITISM

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) provides a working definition of antisemitism that has been adopted by many organizations and approximately forty-four governments worldwide. In the United Kingdom, the government and other public institutions,[5] including the majority of universities,[6] have adopted the IHRA working definition. It states that:

> Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish and non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward the Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. (Para. 2)[7]

The full IHRA definition further stipulates that criticism of Israel, which is similar to that directed toward any other country, may not be regarded as antisemitic; however, criticism that calls for Israel to no longer exist or that blames all Jews for Israel's government policies may be antisemitic.[8]

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Even before October 7, 2023, research has documented the pervasiveness of antisemitism on university campuses, for example, one-third of US Jewish students reported experiencing hate speech against Jewish persons in the weeks before October 7.[9] Surveys of more than 1000 Jewish students attending American colleges or universities found that more than half witnessed or experienced an antisemitic incident, either on their campus or in the general public.[10] Similarly, the 2011 National Jewish Student Survey of more than 900 university students in the United Kingdom found that fifty-two percent of respondents personally experienced and/or witnessed an incident of antisemitism in various contexts on campus.[11] Although British students reported slightly lower rates of antisemitism than American students, they reported a higher number of contexts where antisemitism occurred on campus (such as lectures, clubs, etc.), i.e., 1.57 contexts compared to 1.15 contexts for US students, suggesting that British students may experience a more pervasive form of antisemitism than American students.[12] Research further indicates that Jewish students are disproportionately affected by hate crimes on American campuses compared to other minoritized groups. Utilizing the Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reports Hate Crime (UCR) data from 2003 to 2017, Feinberg found that antisemitic hate crimes were more likely to occur than hate crimes motivated by prejudice towards other groups on university campuses, with the magnitude greater than any other reported hate crime motivation, including anti-Black, anti-Asian, and anti-LGTBQ+.[13]

To understand the reasons that Jews are more likely than other minority groups to be the victims of hate crimes, Feinberg proposed four key mechanisms—*opportunity*, *stimuli*, *organization*, and *distinguishability*—to identify and categorize specific factors that explain antisemitism on American campuses.[14] *Opportunity* reflects the size of the Jewish population on campus, with a greater number of Jewish students providing more opportunities for antisemitism. In the United States, research supports this hypothesis, showing that more antisemitism occurs at universities with a larger proportion of Jewish students.[15] This contrasts with findings of the National Jewish Student Survey, which sampled 1,026 Jewish students across 125 UK and Irish campuses from May to November 2023, with 85% of the responses

received before October 7.[16] The results suggest that there may be a "safety in numbers" effect regarding experiencing antisemitism at UK universities, with 32% who attended universities with a larger number of Jewish students (Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Leeds, Nottingham, and Oxford) reporting that they personally experienced antisemitism on campus compared to 41% overall.

According to Feinberg, *stimuli* are events or circumstances that increase antisemitism (and usually involve Israel), while *organization* is the presence of anti-Israel organizations on campus.[17] In line with hypothesized factors, there is increasing evidence that anti-Israel sentiments predict antisemitism at university.[18] Relatedly, a study of more than 3000 undergraduate Jewish students from the United States and Canada found that one in four respondents had been blamed for the actions of Israel in the past year.[19] Further evidence suggests that antisemitism on campuses increases during key events such as "Israel Apartheid Week" and is higher on campuses with active anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian organizations.[20]

The *distinguishability* factor focuses on the role that a target group's identifiability plays in the occurrence of hate crimes.[21] In support of this hypothesis, there is evidence that antisemitic incidents increase during Jewish holidays on campus, when more Jewish students are distinguishable by attending synagogue.[22] Participation in Jewish campus life is also more likely to distinguish Jewish individuals from other students. Active members of Jewish campus organizations, for example, reported witnessing significantly more antisemitism.[23] Similarly, American campuses with an active Jewish student organization have more antisemitic incidents.[24] These studies suggest that being distinguishable as a Jew through involvement in Jewish campus organizations may be associated with more experiences of antisemitism.

In the wake of October 7, 2023, studies have provided systematic data about the views of Jewish students on college and university campuses. A 2023–2024 survey of US campuses with nearly 2,000 Jewish undergraduate students at fifty-one US campuses found considerable variability across campuses in the level of hostility facing Jewish students during the Israel-Hamas war, with hostility substantially higher at some campuses compared to others.[25] Nevertheless, a third of all survey respondents said they had experienced anti-Jewish insults or harassment, either on social media or, particularly at the most-hostile schools, in person. This survey reinforced that criticism of Israel plays a central role in anti-Jewish hostility, which was most likely expressed by other students on campus as opposed to faculty or administrators. For example, the survey asked to what extent respondents felt blamed for the Israeli government's actions because they are Jewish. At schools with the lowest levels of antisemitism, about 9% said they were often blamed for Israel's actions, while 18% of respondents on the most-hostile campuses said they felt blamed. In a survey of 500 Jewish university students attending American universities, Stop Antisemitism found that 55% reported having personally been victims of antisemitism, 43% reported that they hide their Jewish identity from classmates out of fear, and 70% reported feeling blamed for the actions of Israel. Furthermore, 67% reported feeling like their university did not take sufficient action to protect Jewish students from antisemitism following October 7. Perhaps most troubling, 72% of students reported feeling unwelcome in certain campus spaces simply for being Jewish.[26] Another survey of 201 North American and European Jewish university students reported similar findings.[27] Longitudinal data gathered from January to May 2024 further highlight the potentially detrimental effects of stress associated with antisemitism for Jewish college and university Canadian students, with heightened antisemitism-related stress and stress attributable to the Israel–Palestine conflict independently associated with increased depressive symptoms.[28]

Together, these studies document a high proportion of Jewish students experiencing antisemitism on their university campus and the potential effects of antisemitism on their mental health in the aftermath of October 7. However, these studies have not fully explored Jewish students' experiences of antisemitism, especially in their own words, nor have they examined the factors related to, and the potential effects of, antisemitism for students attending UK universities. A qualitative and quantitative exploration of Jewish students' encounters with campus antisemitism in the aftermath of the October 7 terrorist attacks can provide a more comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences during this tumultuous and often traumatic period.

CURRENT STUDY

This study utilizes the first comprehensive survey investigating the experiences of Jewish students at UK universities as they grappled with antisemitism in the academic year following October 7. Given the high incidence of antisemitism reported on UK campuses, such an undertaking is essential to address this research gap and to provide a data-driven approach for stakeholders developing policies and initiatives that tackle antisemitism on university campuses and in related contexts. Using survey data gathered from 497 Jewish students attending universities across the UK during the closing weeks of the 2023–2024 academic year, this study aims to document Jewish students' lived experiences of antisemitism at university after October 7, and identify variables associated with their experiences of antisemitism.

In line with previous research,[29] the present study examines whether demographic factors such as gender, nationality, department and level of study; factors related to opportunity (size of the Jewish student population); stimuli and organization (presence of protests/encampments); and distinguishability (presence of Jewish student society, involvement in Jewish organizations, openness about Jewish identity); and students' perceptions of the university's response and support are associated with experiences of antisemitism. This makes it possible to assess whether having personally experienced and witnessed antisemitic incidents is associated with greater avoidance of campus activities, more concerns about antisemitism, feeling less safe on campus and lower educational and emotional wellbeing. Lastly, qualitative analysis is applied to answers to open questions. Together, these analyses provide a picture of antisemitism at UK universities as experienced by Jewish students in the aftermath of October 7.

METHODS

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Reading on April 26, 2024.

Participants

The survey was conducted between May 29 and July 3, 2024. It was advertised widely via Jewish university student networks; the MS Teams survey link was sent to Jewish university groups (e.g., Jewish Student Society) via WhatsApp and placed on relevant websites, including the Union of Jewish Students (UJS). Inclusion criteria included self-identifying as Jewish and attending a UK university as an undergraduate or postgraduate student during the academic year of 2023–2024.

Participants were asked to first confirm their consent to participate in the survey based on their responses to three questions to ensure that they understood the purpose of the study and agreed to take part: data are stored anonymously and securely, participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time. If they answered yes to these three questions, they were then asked a series of questions to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria. In total, there were 520 participants who responded to the survey. Of these, sixteen did not meet the inclusion

criteria as they did not self-identify as Jewish. A further seven were excluded due to not completing the survey (n = 3) or entering the survey more than once (n = 4). The final analytic sample included 497 participants.

Of the 497 participants, most were British (65%); 7% were American, 6% Israeli, 7% American/Israeli, 5% British/Israeli, and the remainder were from other countries. 54% identified their gender as female, 43% as male, and 3% as non-binary. The majority (77%) of the participants were undergraduate students, and 23% postgraduate students (13% Master's; 10% PhD).

Of the 138 universities on the Universities UK list, eighty-four universities drew responses to the survey. 90% of these universities have a Jewish student society on campus.

Procedure

The survey was developed based on recent previous surveys gathering data on antisemitism on university campuses, including the survey undertaken by Brandeis University staff in 2023.[30] The pilot survey was first tested with four university students, who provided comments on the nature of the questions and the length of the survey. Refinements based on their comments and suggestions were made, such as adding more diverse spaces on campus where antisemitism occurred. The final survey included a total of seventy-six questions, including four open-ended questions and six questions focusing on consent and inclusion criteria.

Students were asked a series of questions about their Jewish identity and involvement, concerns about antisemitism, experiences of antisemitism at university both before and after October 7, avoidance of certain university people or spaces due to antisemitism, and perceived impact of antisemitism on their well-being, studies, and feelings on campus (see "Measures" section for more details), and perceptions of safety and support, as well as about Palestine-related protests on campus.

In addition, there were four open-ended questions included in the survey. These included: "If you would like to, please use this space to share more about your experience with campus protests and encampments"; "Have you tried to avoid any other interactions or spaces at your university for fear of insult, harassment, or demonization since October 7?"; "Please specify, if you're willing, any incidents you have experienced since October 7"; and "If you wish, you can say more about your general experience on campus in relation to antisemitism and/or anti-Zionism here."

Participants also had the option of including their email address to enter a raffle for one of two £50 vouchers. The survey took an average of 15.5 minutes to complete.

Measures

Personally Experienced Antisemitism (before and after October 7)

Six questions assessed whether students had personally undergone such experiences as insult or harassment in class at university, both after and (for students not in their first year of study) before October 7. The total number of positive answers was computed for each respondent.

Witnessed Antisemitism (before and after October 7)

Five questions assessed whether students witnessed anyone else being subjected to similar experiences under the same circumstances. Again, the total number of positive answers was computed for each respondent.

Avoidance of Antisemitism

Students were asked whether they had tried to avoid certain student groups, buildings, lecturers, other staff, or classes at university since October 7 for fear of insult, harassment, or demonization. The total was computed, to a maximum of five.

Concerns about Antisemitism

The mean of eight questions was computed, assessing students' concerns about antisemitism in different contexts (1= not at all; 5 = a lot), including in classes and seminars, on their university campus, in the United Kingdom, and around the world (α = .93).

Negative Impact of Antisemitism

To assess the perceived negative impact of antisemitism on students, the mean of three questions was computed (α = .86), which asked how much the current post-October 7 conflict has negatively affected their studies, wellbeing, and feelings about being on campus (1 = not at all; 5 = a lot).

University Support

This variable was computed as the number of positive answers to the questions "Do you feel that the university listens to you and provides support?" and "Do you feel you have someone at the university to speak to about your concerns?," and as such ranged from 0 to 2.

Jewish Student Population

The estimated Jewish population on campus (1 = less than 100, 2 = 100, 3 = 200, 4 = 300, 5 =500, 6 = 700, 7 =1000 or more) was obtained from the Union of Jewish Students' website.[31]

Jewish Student Society

The presence of a Jewish student society (1 = yes; 2 = no) was obtained from the Union of Jewish Students' website.[32]

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS was used to analyze the closed-ended survey questions. First, measures were computed, with mean scores calculated for Likert-type responses and count variables computed for yes/no/not sure questions. Reliability was assessed for mean-computed measures. Descriptive statistics were then computed to obtain the proportions, means and standard deviations of the antisemitism measures. T-tests were run to examine changes in students' experiences of antisemitism at university from before to after October 7.

A series of regression analyses were then run to examine whether students' recent experiences of antisemitism differed according to their own characteristics (i.e. gender, nationality, department, level of study, attendance at Jewish events, wearing signs of their Jewish identity) and those of their university (size of Jewish student population, presence of Jewish society, presence of protests/encampments on campus, respondent's perceptions of university support and the university taking antisemitism seriously). For categorical demographic variables, dummy codes were created, with the response having the highest proportion as the reference category. The reference categories included gender (male), department (Arts and Humanities) and level of study (undergraduate). For categorical Jewish involvement and identity questions, one end of the response scale was used as the reference category, including attending Jewish events (never) and wearing visible signs of one's Jewish identity (never). For the presence of university encampments, one end of the response scale was also used (no). Lastly, regression models were run to examine whether students who personally experienced and witnessed more incidents of antisemitism reported greater avoidance of people and spaces on campus, more concerns about antisemitism, more feelings of being unsafe and more negative effects of antisemitism.

For the open-ended responses, inductive thematic analysis was used. In line with Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's research,[33] the process occurred in the following six phases. The first step involved reading and rereading the responses to the open-ended data to become familiar with the data. Second, a codebook was generated based on the responses and existing codes were modified and new codes added as

needed. Third, once the data were fully coded, the codes were examined to identify areas of overlap and similarity, generating themes and subthemes arising from the data. A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set."[34] For example, a few codes clustered around experiencing and personally witnessing discriminatory and aggressive language, so we generated the theme of hate speech. Fourth, potential themes were reviewed in relation to the coded data to ensure the themes captured the most relevant elements of the students' experiences. Fifth, the themes were defined and named. Lastly, key themes were identified, based on the frequency and severity of antisemitism, for the first two open-ended questions (avoidance and encampments) and the final two open-ended questions (incidents and general experiences). For the first 100 participants, the responses from the four open-ended questions were second-coded to establish reliability, which was ninety-five percent across the responses.

RESULTS

This section is divided into three subsections: descriptive statistics, regression models, and qualitative analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Prior to October 7, 24% of respondents reported that they personally experienced and 26% reported having witnessed at least one incidence of antisemitism. Post-October 7, this increased to 72% who personally experienced and 70% who witnessed at least one incidence of antisemitism. Together, 33% either personally experienced or witnessed antisemitism before October 7, while 81% personally experienced or witnessed antisemitism after October 7 (see Figure 1).

Of those who personally experienced antisemitism prior to October 7 (n = 120), these incidents occurred in an average of 2.36 (SD = 1.44) contexts (i.e. on campus, social media, in class). Of those who witnessed antisemitism (n = 130) prior to October 7,

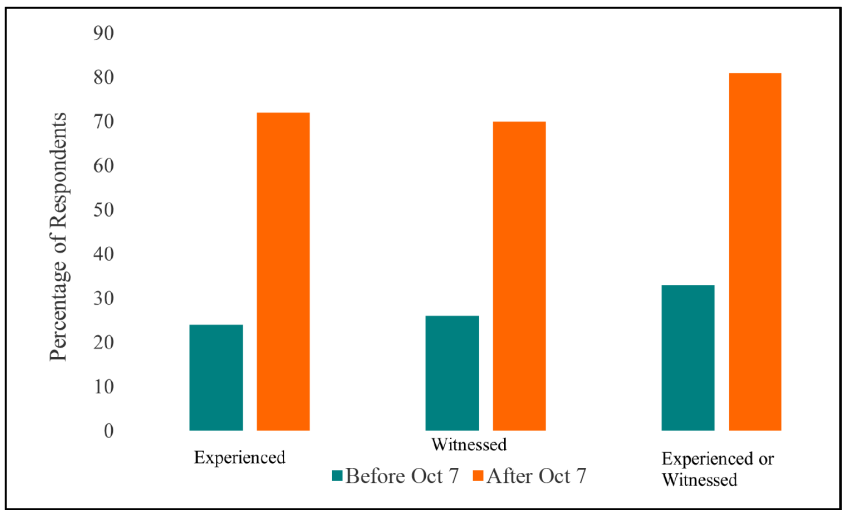

FIGURE 1. Percentage of Respondents who Experienced or Witnessed Antisemitism before and after October 7.

respondents reported these incidents occurred in an average of 2.42 (SD = 1.34) contexts. Of those who personally experienced antisemitism post-October 7 (n = 356), respondents reported these incidents occurred in 2.75 (SD = 1.59) contexts, on average. Of those who witnessed antisemitism (n = 346) after October 7, these incidents occurred in an average of 2.87 (SD = 1.28) contexts (see Figure 2).

12.5% of students reported having been "very" or "somewhat" uncomfortable about being openly Jewish before October 7, but 70% reported being "very" or "somewhat" uncomfortable about it since October 7. Moreover, 81% of the students (n = 405) reported avoiding at least one person or place due to antisemitism, while 40% reported that antisemitism negatively affected their well-being "a lot," and 33% and 28% reported that it affected their feelings about being on campus and their studies "a lot" (respectively).

Regression Models

Table 1 presents the coefficients from a series of regression models constructed in order to estimate the association between a range of student and university characteristics and the following outcome variables: witnessing antisemitism, personally experiencing antisemitism, avoidance of antisemitism, concerns about antisemitism, negative effects of antisemitism, and feeling safe on campus due to antisemitism.

Compared to the very small minority of non-binary students, female students were more likely to report negative effects of antisemitism than male students, while male students were more likely to report having witnessed antisemitism, avoiding people and spaces due to antisemitism, having concerns about antisemitism, feeling unsafe, and experiencing negative effects of antisemitism. Compared to British students, Israeli students were more likely to report negative effects of antisemitism and European students were more likely to have witnessed antisemitism.

Compared to undergraduate students, PhD students were more likely to report avoiding certain people and spaces at university. Compared to students in Arts and Humanities,

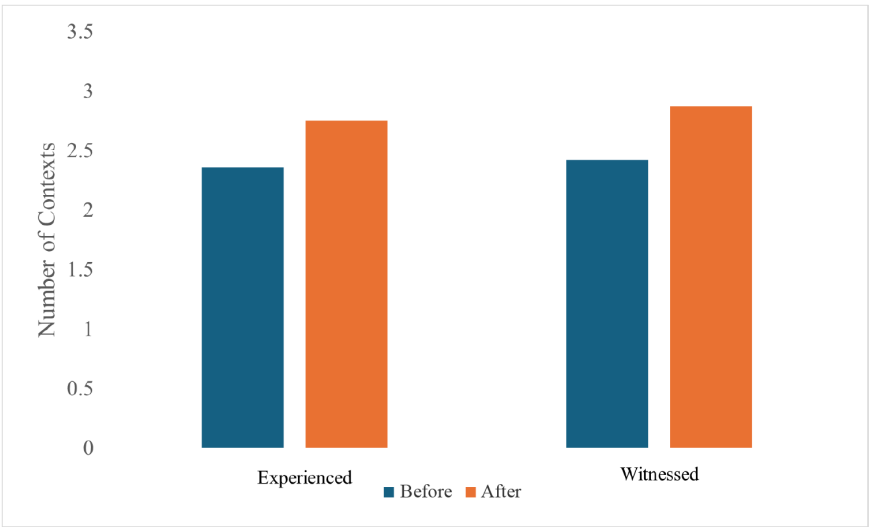

FIGURE 2. Mean Number of Contexts in which Respondents Experienced or Witnessed Antisemitism before and after October 7.

students in Social Sciences were more likely to avoid people and spaces at university due to antisemitism, while those in Natural Sciences were less likely to do so. Again, compared to students in the Arts and Humanities, Law students were more likely to have personally experienced antisemitism and reported having more negative effects of antisemitism, while those in Medical Sciences reported feeling less safe on campus.

Compared to students who "never" wore Jewish symbols, students who wore them "always" and "sometimes" were more likely to report negative effects of antisemitism and less likely to feel safe on campus. Students who organized Jewish events were more likely to report having personally experienced and witnessed antisemitic incidents after October 7, avoiding people and spaces at university due to antisemitism, and having more concerns about antisemitism than students who never organized them. Compared to students who never attended Jewish events, students who attended regularly were more likely not only to report having personally experienced and witnessed antisemitic incidents after October 7, but also to report avoiding people and spaces at university due to antisemitism and having concerns about antisemitism. Students who occasionally attended Jewish events were also more likely to have personally experienced antisemitism than students who never attended them.

In terms of university characteristics, students who attended universities with larger Jewish student populations were less likely to have personally experienced antisemitic incidents post October 7. Students who perceived their university leadership to be serious about antisemitism and who reported receiving higher levels of support from their university were less likely to report having personally experienced and witnessed antisemitic incidents post-October 7, avoiding certain people and spaces at university due to antisemitism, having concerns about antisemitism, feeling unsafe on campus, and experiencing negative effects of antisemitism. Studying at a university where protests or encampments took place was associated with feeling unsafe, and also with greater concern about antisemitism. The presence of a Jewish student society on campus was not associated with any of the outcome variables.

As shown in Table 2, both having personally experienced and having witnessed more antisemitic incidents were independently and significantly associated with avoiding more spaces and people due to antisemitism, having more concerns about antisemitism, feeling less safe on campus and experiencing more negative effects of antisemitism. For example, for each incidence of antisemitism personally experienced, Jewish students avoided an additional .48 people and spaces, and for each incidence of antisemitism witnessed, Jewish students avoided an additional .28 people and spaces.

Qualitative Analysis

There was a total of 669 responses to the four open-ended questions. From these, ten key themes were generated. For the most part, the themes which emerged from the students' responses were similar across the open-ended questions. Quotations from individual responses are numerically labelled, to indicate which question elicited the response.

Avoidance of People and Spaces

This theme reflects students not attending events and activities on campus and avoiding "certain areas at certain times" (1) due to antisemitism. The majority avoided areas where there were encampments and/or protests, for example, "I avoid taking the route down the main street where the encampment is, which is quite hard to avoid in a small town" (1). Many reported having opted out of going to spaces that further their studies, such as "lectures," "research seminars," and "exhibitions and conferences' calls for papers" (1). For example, one student wrote, "I couldn't

Table 1. Student– and University–Level Predictors for Experiences of Antisemitism

	Personally Experienced Antisemitism				Witnessed Antisemitism				A
Predictors	B	SE	t	p	B	SE	t	p	B
(Constant)	2.93	.42	6.98	.00	2.06	.40	5.21	.00	2.72
Student–level									
Female	–.01	.16	–.09	.93	–.08	.15	–.50	.62	.18
Non–Binary	–.56	.45	–1.26	.21	–.99	.42	–2.34	.02	–1.11
American	.49	.33	1.50	.14	.31	.31	1.01	.31	.35
Israeli	.06	.25	.25	.80	.31	.23	1.33	.18	.31
European	.24	.26	.92	.36	.48	.25	1.96	.05	.19
PhD student	.32	.28	1.15	.25	–.02	.26	–.07	.95	.79
Postgraduate student	–.08	.25	–.33	.74	–.04	.24	–.16	.88	.26
Business Dept.	–.09	.33	–.27	.78	.06	.31	.19	.85	.03
Education Dept.	.36	.63	.58	.56	–.33	.59	–.56	.58	.22
Engineering Dept.	.00	.32	.00	1.00	–.32	.30	–1.05	.29	–.18
Interdisciplinary Dept.	.25	.53	.47	.64	–.14	.50	–.27	.79	.08
Law Dept.	1.02	.47	2.17	.03	.27	.44	.62	.54	.55
Natural Science Dept.	–.29	.28	–1.03	.30	.14	.27	.54	.59	–.67
Medical Science Dept.	.12	.24	.50	.62	–.01	.22	–.04	.97	.04
Social Science Dept.	.09	.22	.41	.68	.01	.21	.06	.95	.45
Jewish Identity (Always)	.24	.20	1.17	.24	.08	.19	.40	.69	.18
Jewish Identity (Sometimes)	–.01	.20	–.05	.96	–.14	.19	–.74	.46	.10
Organize Events	1.01	.26	3.83	.00	1.03	.25	4.14	.00	.56
Attend Events (Regularly)	.82	.25	3.34	.00	.78	.23	3.33	.00	.56
Attend Events (Occasionally)	.47	.22	2.16	.03	.31	.21	1.48	.14	.15
University–level									
Number of Jewish Students	–.09	.04	–2.66	.01	–.04	.03	–1.10	.27	–.05
Jewish Student Society	–.22	.29	–.74	.46	.18	.28	.64	.52	–.09
University Serious about Antisemitism	–.27	.07	–3.63	.00	–.28	.07	–3.93	.00	–.36
University Support	–.41	.11	–3.77	.00	–.31	.10	–2.99	.00	–.34
Presence of Campus Protests	–.09	.29	–.29	.77	.47	.28	1.69	.09	.50
Witnessed Campus Protests	–.42	.34	–1.24	.22	.41	.32	1.27	.21	.04
R^2 (Adjusted R^2)	.17(.12)				.17(.12)				

Avoidance due to Antisemitism			Concerns about Antisemitism				Feel Safe on Campus				Negative Effects of Antisemitism			
SE	t	p	B	SE	t	p	B	SE	t	p	B	SE	t	p
.38	7.19	.00	4.18	.21	20.37	.00	2.48	.26	9.70	.00	3.67	.26	14.18	.00
.15	1.26	.21	.06	.08	.72	.47	–.13	.10	–1.34	.18	.27	.10	2.75	.01
.40	–2.75	.01	–.88	.22	–4.00	.00	.64	.27	2.34	.02	–.58	.28	–2.12	.03
.29	1.20	.23	.27	.16	1.71	.09	.17	.20	.84	.40	.34	.20	1.70	.09
.22	1.40	.16	.09	.12	.78	.43	–.15	.15	–1.02	.31	.42	.15	2.72	.01
.24	.80	.43	.22	.13	1.72	.09	.06	.16	.39	.70	.30	.16	1.84	.07
.25	3.15	.00	.16	.14	1.19	.23	.04	.17	.25	.80	.22	.17	1.27	.20
.23	1.14	.25	–.04	.12	–.29	.77	.00	.15	.00	1.0	.13	.16	.85	.39
.30	.12	.91	.03	.16	.16	.88	–.19	.20	–.96	.34	–.15	.20	–.73	.46
.56	.38	.70	–.04	.31	–.13	.90	.36	.38	.95	.34	–.38	.38	–1.00	.32
.29	–.62	.54	.20	.16	1.30	.20	–.25	.19	–1.29	.20	.04	.20	.20	.84
.48	.17	.86	.24	.26	.90	.37	–.39	.32	–1.21	.23	.11	.33	.33	.74
.42	1.32	.19	.07	.23	.32	.75	–.38	.28	–1.35	.18	.68	.29	2.36	.02
.26	–2.63	.01	–.16	.14	–1.17	.24	–.02	.17	–.09	.93	–.21	.17	–1.18	.24
.21	.18	.86	.22	.12	1.92	.06	–.38	.14	–2.64	.01	.25	.15	1.69	.09
.20	2.26	.02	.03	.11	.27	.79	–.06	.13	–.43	.67	.18	.14	1.30	.19
.18	.99	.32	.03	.10	.30	.76	–.31	.12	–2.53	.01	.30	.12	2.42	.02
.18	.54	.59	–.01	.10	–.10	.92	–.28	.12	–2.32	.02	.28	.12	2.33	.02
.24	2.35	.02	.28	.13	2.17	.03	.10	.16	.66	.51	.13	.16	.80	.42
.22	2.50	.01	.23	.12	1.94	.05	.00	.15	–.01	.99	.09	.15	.58	.56
.20	.77	.44	.02	.11	.14	.88	.22	.13	1.65	.10	–.08	.14	–.60	.55
.03	–1.50	.14	–.01	.02	–.47	.64	.01	.02	.32	.75	–.02	.02	–1.07	.29
.26	–.35	.72	.04	.14	.27	.79	.12	.18	.70	.48	–.15	.18	–.83	.41
.07	–5.28	.00	–.21	.04	–5.80	.00	.37	.05	8.24	.00	–.21	.05	–4.60	.00
.10	–3.51	.00	–.23	.05	–4.34	.00	.14	.07	2.06	.04	–.15	.07	–2.20	.03
.27	1.90	.06	.30	.14	2.07	.04	–.41	.18	–2.29	.02	.35	.18	1.90	.06
.31	.12	.90	.29	.17	1.72	.09	–.47	.21	–2.26	.02	.13	.21	.63	.53
24(.19)				.26(.21)				.22(.18)				.29(.25)		

Table 2. Personally Experienced and Witnessed Antisemitism on Student Outcomes

	Avoidance due to Antisemitism				Concerns about Antisemitism				Effects of Antisemitism				Feel Safe on Campus			
Variables	B	SE	t	Sig	B	SE	t	Sig	B	SE	t	Sig	B	SE	t	Sig
(Constant)	.86	.09	9.97	.00	3.23	.05	61.66	.00	2.79	.07	41.93	.00	3.76	.07	50.73	.00
Personally Experienced Antisemitism	.45	.04	10.78	.00	.21	.03	8.29	.00	.26	.03	8.08	.00	–.25	.04	–6.92	.00
Witnessed Antisemitism	.28	.04	6.47	.00	.14	.03	5.37	.00	.15	.03	4.32	.00	–.09	.04	–2.37	.02
R^2 (Adjusted $R^{2)}$	.70 (.49)				.62(.38)				.58(.34)				.48(.23)			

go [to] study in the library because people were shouting into a megaphone outside the entrance multiple times" (3). Another wrote, "I have been avoiding attending lectures in person due to the nature of the protests and their banners and signs that will of course offend me. Also, as I wear a Star of David constantly and proudly, so there are fears" (4).

Withdrawal from Campus

This theme reflects students' withdrawal from campus life, which sometimes included their academic studies. As one student noted, "My campus has been host to so many occupations over the past year. Unfortunately, this has caused me to miss classes, not [go] to certain buildings, [and not] participate in certain student events" (1). Other students mentioned avoiding campus due to antisemitism except, when necessary, for example, writing, "I try to spend as little possible time on campus and not be in crowded places" (1). Some students decided to opt out of school altogether due to antisemitism. A student wrote, "I just didn't go to school" (2). Another student explained, "I previously studied a history course at [name of university] but left after one year. This was because I took an elective on Middle Eastern history that was taught in an extremely anti-Zionist way. I felt extremely unsafe and didn't even feel I could report it" (4).

Social Exclusion

This theme highlights the sense of social exclusion that many students reported due to antisemitism. For some, this social exclusion was subtle, with other students distancing themselves and reducing their interaction with the Jewish student. For example, one student wrote, "though there is no obvious malice or attack, I always feel that some people have changed their attitude towards me" (1). Other students faced more severe social exclusion from roommates and friends. For example, one student wrote, "I have had numerous people who I thought were friends accuse me of being a genocide apologist, a Nazi, a fascist, a racist, and a supporter of apartheid, as well as [of being] Islamophobic" (3). Another student wrote, "I have been removed from a group chat with my course friends. I have been excluded from meetups with them. I have lost friendships I thought were genuine" (3). Within this theme, there were also some Jewish students who described themselves as "non-Zionist" or "antizionist" and opposed to the current Israeli government, and who felt excluded by other Jewish people and from Jewish spaces. As one student explained, "My opposition to the actions of the Israeli government has [led to my being] ostracized . . . from certain Jewish spaces on campus" (1).

Identity Anxiety

This theme underlines the discomfort many students feel about their Jewish identity when confronted with antisemitism. Some students, for example, hid their Jewish identity when walking around campus. For example, one student wrote, "There was a Pro-Palestine stand at the front of the university entrance. I had to hide my identity as I walked past as I am visibly Jewish" (2). Others mentioned avoiding posting on social media and discussing their political views with classmates or even non-Jewish friends. A student noted, "I won't talk about Israel. I won't post about Israel. I won't post anything political at all for fear that someone will say to me 'You're happy to speak up about XYZ but why won't you speak up about Palestine?'" (2). Several students wrote that they refrained from telling people they are Jewish. One student said, "I won't say I'm Jewish because I'm scared" (2). Another student explained, "After October 7 I have become extremely paranoid that I will be 'outed' and have been extremely nice to people who know, [for] fear of being 'exposed'. It's so shameful" (3). For many, this identity anxiety profoundly impacted their mental health. A student wrote, "I do not feel safe or feel like I belong anymore. Last year, I happily announced to my class that I was Jewish; this year, I feel my whole body tense[s] if the word 'Jew' is even mentioned" (3). In another example, a student expressed, "I feel incredibly uncomfortable across the board . . . and go home most weeks now as a result. I can't wear my Star of David necklace or kippah without feeling immense stress" (3). Another student explained, "I believe that for every Jew on campus, this year has been draining and defeating, and the amount of time I have to spend thinking about what I can share with who, where I can go, and what I can wear, etc., has increased exponentially" (4).

Conflation of Antisemitism and Antizionism

This theme reflects what appeared to be a minority concern that antisemitism and antizionism were being conflated by Jewish organizations. For example, one student complained, "I am concerned about the conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. This conflation makes it harder to identify legitimate antisemitism and makes me feel less safe as a Jew on campus" (3). Another student similarly expressed the view that "There are many claims of antisemitism related to anti-Zionism that obscure real antisemitism and dilute the meaning and seriousness of actual incidents" (3), while another wrote, "I have consistently seen the discourse of campus antisemitism weaponized to avoid real discussions around the situation in Israel/Palestine, in such a way which makes it harder for instances of genuine antisemitism to be taken seriously" (3). Students who expressed concerns of this nature generally appeared to consider themselves part of the "non-Zionist" or "antizionist" minority among Jewish students, and a number of them reported attending the kinds of protests and encampments that made other Jewish students feel unsafe. For example, one wrote, "I've seen the blossoming of a fantastic pro-Palestine, largely anti-Zionist community at my university" (4). A typical complaint from these students was of feeling socially excluded from the Jewish community. As one student explained, "Having more recently spent time amongst pro-Palestinian antiwar protesters, I feel in many ways more welcome and supported as a Jewish student there, as opposed to in spaces where my right to Jewish community is predicated on loud affirmations of unquestioning Zionism" (4). Another student who identified as "non-Zionist" suggested that "more should be done to help Jewish students on campus, no matter their political or religious leanings" (4).

Hate Speech

This theme focused on hate speech, personally experienced or witnessed. Many students mentioned that the protests and encampments promoted hate speech about Israel and Judaism. One student noted that a sign said "there is only one solution, intifada revolution" (2). Violence was also sanctioned through signs such as "when Palestine is occupied, resistance is justified" (2). Students also noted that there were "signs in support of [the] Houthis" (2). Social media was also an issue, for instance, with other students "sharing antisemitic posts on certain university societies' social media pages" (2). Other students mentioned being personally targeted on social media, for example, complaining of "hate messages on my Instagram" (2). Many others were targeted while walking around campus—for instance, the respondent who wrote of "relentless abuse while walking past Palestinian protests and numerous fliers and posters ripped down that I've shared of people close to my community who are hostages or killed" (3). Several students also noted that they experienced hate speech while walking to religious services while at university, for example, "Somebody shouted 'f**ing pig' at me while walking to synagogue" (3).

Hate Crime

This theme captures the violent and unlawful acts perpetuated against Jewish students on campus. For some students, this involved property damage, including "vandalism in a flat in my halls" (3). For other students, hate crimes were more serious and had repercussions for their education. One student shared their story, "A public post was made about me, accusing me (by name) of supporting genocide, killing children and supporting [the] Israeli occupation. None of which was true. This post has been shared multiple times. It has led to me receiving threats that I would be physically hurt if I am seen [on] campus" (3). Other students had to get the police involved, for example, one student wrote, "Someone threatened to rape me and called me names because I was Jewish. The police were brought in, and CST were informed" (3). Another student expressed, "I've been harassed in class, people posting 'Zionist demons should die' etc. I have had to get the police to order a [person] to stay away from me." A few students mentioned physical assaults of Jewish students. One student relayed, "I had a friend who was assaulted while entering his apartment building after walking back from campus. A group of pro-Palestinian protesters recognized his kippah and attacked him" (3).

Institutional Apathy

This theme reflects the lack of support and governance from the student's university regarding antisemitism. One student, for example, noted, "encampment has signs about Jews and the university have done nothing to help" (2). Other students felt that their university did not address antisemitism on campus. A student wrote, "I feel the university doesn't take the worries of Jewish students seriously" (2). A few students mentioned that they felt their university was supportive at first, but then this waned over time. One student noted, "I feel [university name] started very positively after October 7 with regards to handling anti-Israel and antisemitism on campus; however, it feels as the end of term approaches, they have just given up and are letting the pro Palestine students do what they want" (2). Other students discussed the university was slow to respond to concerns about safety, for example, "Palestine Soc posted a video of our SU security guards in uniform going along with their protest. This is unacceptable, and I feel very unsafe. I raised the issue at my university, and they haven't done [anything] / gotten back to me. It's been around two months" (3). Some students also perceived that their university seemed unwilling or even nervous to curtail the protests and encampments, with one writing, "Our university has previously faced a lot of criticism for apparently restricting free speech, and they are generally very scared to take a stance" (3).

Compromised Mental Health

Students frequently highlighted the negative toll that antisemitism has had on their mental health. For many students, the protests and encampments were extremely distressing. One student wrote, for example, "I try not to look too much when I walk past [the protests]—again trying to avoid for my own mental wellbeing" (2). For some students, the protest and encampments also impacted their studies. A student wrote, "Makes it really difficult to study on campus when you can hear it in the background / see posters, etc., everywhere. As such an emotive topic which causes me to feel such upset, it's something I try really hard to block out whilst I'm studying and revising for exams. This is hard enough without protests and posters constantly reminding me of it" (2). Another student noted that they had a "panic attack during a supervision because of a pro-Palestinian protest on-campus" (3). Others felt fearful and worried about their safety. One student stated, "The chants in the main campus are antisemitic and make me feel unsafe" (2). Many students highlighted their sense of isolation and vulnerability, with one, for example, writing, "I have never felt less protected as a Jew and [more] alone" (3).

Educational Ostracization

This theme reflects students' experiences in academic spaces when Jews are ostracized or harassed for being Jewish. One student, for example, wrote, "It has been a nightmare being on campus. I have to sit through classes and exams while I'm hearing people scream for my extermination and then being told that it's perfectly supported by the university. I've had to pretend to be perfectly ok in front of guest lecturers for fear that if they knew anything about me, they might treat me differently. I've had to sit through people trying to explain to me that Hamas are resistance fighters and be accused of [whataboutism] when I bring up any other horrific event in the past year" (2). Another student wrote that, for a class right after October 7, "[the] lecturer changed the title of the lecture just before to be about Gaza (my module is nothing to do with that) even though he knew I had friends who died in Israel. There were only 4 people in the class" (3). Another student explained, "There are only 15 Jews on our entire campus, and we are constantly excluded, marginalized, and surrounded by a sea of hatred for Israel and the Jewish people" (4).

It is also important to note that there were some students who provided examples of supportive practices from their lecturers, personal tutors and heads of department. For example, one respondent wrote, "The Head of my Department reached out to me and told me his doors were open if I was distressed by the encampments" (3).

DISCUSSION

The present study documents the lived experiences of Jewish students following the October 7 terrorist attack on Israel. In many ways, the findings are not unexpected as they confirm other research reports about antisemitism on university campuses.[35] However, the survey evidence provides further confirmatory evidence of the scale and scope of the problem, and underlines the associated effects of antisemitism on the lives of Jewish students attending UK universities. Below, the key findings from the survey are highlighted and then recommendations are offered.

Discussion of Key Findings

Students, on average, reported that they experienced two antisemitic incidents at university during the 2023–2024 academic year, which was more than twice what they reported experiencing the previous year. Furthermore, 33% reported that they personally experienced or witnessed antisemitism before October 7, while 81% personally experienced or witnessed antisemitism after October 7. This dramatic rise in antisemitism on UK campuses supports Feinberg's hypothesis regarding *stimuli,* which proposes that antisemitism increases following an event

that usually involves Israel, in this case, the October 7 terrorist attack and the subsequent Israel-Hamas war.

The regression models further show which Jewish students were more likely to have personally experienced or witnessed antisemitism on campus. In line with Feinberg's hypothesis regarding *distinguishability*, which focuses on a target group's identifiability in the occurrence of hate crimes, Jewish students who organize, regularly or occasionally attend Jewish events were more likely to have personally experienced or witnessed antisemitism since October 7. In contrast to Feinberg's hypothesis on the role of *opportunity*, however, students at universities with larger Jewish student populations were less likely to report having experienced or witnessed antisemitism.[36] This finding is in line with another survey showing a "safety in numbers" effect for antisemitism on UK campuses.[37] Students who reported higher levels of university support and their university taking antisemitism seriously were also less likely to have experienced or witnessed antisemitism, highlighting the significant role that universities themselves play in reducing hate crimes on their campuses.

The findings also indicate that many Jewish students avoided aspects of university life after October 7, with students avoiding, on average, two different people and spaces due to antisemitism. In line with earlier findings,[38] this underscores the pervasiveness of antisemitism on UK campuses. Female students and PhD students reported being more likely to avoid people and spaces due to antisemitism than males and undergraduate students. Studying in Social Science departments was associated with the highest levels of avoidance of people and spaces, and studying in Natural Science departments was associated with the lowest, with studying in Arts and Humanities departments being associated with an intermediate effect. Students who organize and regularly attend Jewish events also reported higher levels of avoidance; however, those who reported that their university takes antisemitism seriously and they had university support were less likely to avoid people and spaces on campus due to antisemitism.

The open-ended responses further emphasize how Jewish students withdrew from other aspects of university life, including seminar or lecture rooms, online learning spaces, events, and whole areas of campus. Respondents also reported withdrawing from friends and roommates as well as from social activities and social media due to antisemitism. Likewise, Jewish students reported being socially excluded from people and spaces, with students reporting that they were removed from chat groups and that former "friends" no longer associated with them. These students' experiences further suggest an immediate (and potentially future) impact on their learning, social connections, and mental health. More than a handful of students also noted withdrawing completely from their studies, based on their adverse experiences with antisemitism after October 7. Additionally, a small number of students who identified as "non-Zionist" or "antizionist" reported feeling excluded from Jewish activities, events and sources of support due to their beliefs.

Similar to other reports,[39] antisemitism since October 7 seems to impact students' Jewish identity and involvement. Students, on average, reported a significant change from being "somewhat comfortable" to "somewhat uncomfortable" with openness about their Jewish identity from pre to post October 7. This finding appears to be echoed in some of the open-ended responses, with students mentioning feeling anxious about their Jewish identity. Students reported hiding their identity on campus, not wearing Jewish symbols, and not talking about Israel or their Judaism on social media. Many students reported feeling stressed and ashamed as a result. In further support of the *distinguishability* hypothesis, those students who exposed their Jewish identity to others were more likely to be targeted, which further persuaded many students to keep a low profile.[40]

The findings also indicate that those Jewish students whose universities had protests or

encampments on campuses were more likely to report concerns about antisemitism and feeling unsafe on campus. Similar to the findings on experiencing antisemitism, students who reported having university support and perceiving that their university takes antisemitism seriously had fewer concerns about antisemitism, felt safer on campus and reported fewer negative effects of antisemitism. Although a handful of students reported positive experiences of university support in the open-ended responses, most reported instances of university apathy, with universities seeming unwilling or even nervous to take a stand against antisemitic activities and experiences on campus.

The survey also highlights the repercussions of antisemitism, with students who personally experienced and/or witnessed antisemitism reporting more concerns about antisemitism, feeling more unsafe on campus, and reporting more negative effects of antisemitism. These findings are illuminated by students' voices detailing their antisemitic experiences, which included both hate speech and crime. Verbal harassment was a significant theme, with these incidents occurring in the classroom, on campus, especially as students walked past encampments, and on social media. Students also wrote of physical and sexual threats, stalking and physical assault. The impact of these attacks included fear, intimidation, and shame for the victims, leading to a sense of isolation, exclusion and vulnerability for many Jewish students.

Recommendations

The scale of the antisemitism that university students are experiencing demonstrates the pressing need to address this issue and to design systemic, holistic responses from universities, policymakers, and the higher education sector. While initial and many thoughtful responses to this issue have been implemented at some institutions, a more joined-up approach is required to tackle the antisemitism in higher education. To that end, a number of recommendations have been offered to protect Jewish students as well as free speech and academic freedom.[41] An overview of the common themes of these various sets of recommendations follows.

First, a sectoral taskforce should be created to focus on combatting antisemitism in universities and the higher education sector, comprising senior leaders from universities, sector-specific bodies and representatives from relevant Jewish staff and student organizations (e.g., Union of Jewish Students and Jewish Chaplaincy). The taskforce's aim would be to conduct further research, as necessary, and to produce guidance that can be adopted by individual universities as well as by the sector overall. The taskforce would also consider devising a tool to measure universities' progress in tackling antisemitism.

Second, universities should meet and communicate with their Jewish students and staff regularly, particularly when there are key challenges such as encampments or a rise in antisemitic incidents. Good practice could include open "town hall" meetings with senior leadership at the university, and effective communication mechanisms for all Jewish students with the students' union, as well as discussions with and support for elected Jewish Society representatives. This would be in line with other similar models that are used for other minority groups (e.g., disability networks, LGBT networks, etc.).

Third, universities should ensure that they have clear, enforceable definitions of antisemitism that are included in staff and student codes of conduct and other relevant documents. Those definitions need to be part of diversity and inclusion training and awareness for all members of the university community. Staff ought to receive clear messaging about antisemitism in learning spaces, including what constitutes antisemitism, staff responsibilities for avoiding the expression of antisemitism themselves and for addressing it when expressed by others in physical and online teaching spaces, and where/from whom they can access support. The nature of antisemitism as a

diversity and inclusion issue and the legal protections under the Equality Act 2010 must be central to any training and awareness raising.

Fourth, accessible, clear, and effective reporting procedures should be made available for anyone who has been the victim of or witnessed antisemitism. Reporting mechanisms need to be accessible and easily available, with clear signposting about what will be done by whom within what timeframe at each stage of the process. There must be protection provided from reprisals for people who report antisemitism. Precise and effective disciplinary processes ought to be created and implemented to address all forms of antisemitism. It must be made clear that antisemitism, like all forms of discrimination based on protected characteristics, will not be tolerated. Senior leadership within universities ought to provide unambiguous communications about encampments, the right to protest peacefully, and the right to non-discrimination and non-harassment based on race or religion. These communications should be made accessible and openly available and should be quickly and visibly enforced.

To support universities in identifying cases in which rhetoric is judged to shift from harsh but legitimate criticism of Israel or Zionism to antisemitism, the Intra-Communal Professorial Group (ICPG) has produced a helpful list of key areas on which virtually all participants within the antisemitism debate agree are antisemitic.[42]

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The research presented here suggests that, when Jewish students have university support and perceive that their university takes antisemitism seriously, they have fewer concerns about antisemitism, feel safer on campus, and report fewer incidents of antisemitism and negative effects on their wellbeing and academic pursuits. Accordingly, the authors of this study recommend that universities adopt a policy of unambiguous support for Jewish students in the face of antisemitism and a zero-tolerance approach towards those—staff and students alike—who express antisemitic views.

In the immediate term, we would argue that university leadership can and should take a zero-tolerance approach to antisemitism in their institutions. Starting with acknowledging the problem, universities should set out their understanding of antisemitism and of their public duties under the Equality Act 2010 to protect Jewish students from harassment and discrimination. Next, universities should implement effective antisemitism training and robust report and support systems alongside mechanisms for swift enforcement of disciplinary action against perpetrators of antisemitism.

Further research should be undertaken to continue to record, understand and monitor the nature and form of antisemitism on university campuses. This would be a larger project than the current survey and designed to work with all relevant stakeholders to find consistent solutions for protecting Jewish students' safety and wellbeing. It should also extend to recording and understanding antisemitism as experienced and witnessed by Jewish university staff. In addition, universities can draw on their own research capacity to make more data-informed decisions about responding to antisemitism. This includes supporting research aimed at understanding antisemitism or evaluating the effectiveness of implemented solutions on their own campus.

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Thy Brother's Keeper: Attributions of Blame and Responsibility in the Jewish and Muslim Diaspora

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Abstract

Political violence, ranging from terrorism to interstate conflict, have been a core concern of social scientists for decades. Yet, the study of these phenomena and their effects is often limited to the specific geographic area of their occurrence. We seek to understand how diaspora populations and linked groups to international actors are affected by their geopolitical actions. Namely, considered blameworthy for or responsible to speak out against the actions of states and/or transnational actors with whom they are often linked? We contend that the reporting of salient events associated with a particularly violent conflict, are likely to increase both blame and responsibility to speak out of groups associated with the perceived attacker. We test our hypotheses through three waves of survey experiments in the United States from 2022 to 2024. While support for our hypotheses is mixed, the clearest evidence for our expected effects appears only in the pre-conflict wave, prior to the October 7 attack and the subsequent war in Gaza. In the later wartime waves, these effects largely dissipate, suggesting that in a media environment already saturated with conflict reporting, exposure to a single additional conflict report may have limited marginal impact. More broadly, we find that blame and responsibility to speak function as distinct phenomenon targeting groups associated with international actors. Additionally, our work shows that those on the ideological right are much more likely to blame groups for the actions of associated international actors in conflict.

Keywords: Diaspora politics, blame attribution, collective responsibility, antisemitism, survey experiments, international conflict

INTRODUCTION

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Are diaspora populations considered blameworthy for or responsible to speak out against the actions of states and/or transnational actors with whom they are often linked? On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a deadly attack in Israel that left approximately 1,200 Israelis dead and over 250 Israelis kidnapped and taken hostage, the majority of whom were civilians.[1] In response, the Israeli government launched a significant aerial bombardment and ground invasion that, according to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, had left roughly 40,000 Gazans dead by mid-2024, including both civilians and combatants, while also contributing to famine-like conditions throughout much of Gaza.[2] In the wake of this all, the Council on American-Islamic Relations noted an immediate spike in Islamophobic rhetoric and hate crimes.[3] Notably, as of May 13, 2024, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) identified a 200% increase in antisemitic incidents in the United

States compared to the same period the year before.[4]

This apparent relationship between international conflict and the targeting of diaspora minority populations presents a puzzle: while anger over world events is understandable, there is scant reason to turn against individuals with little to no agency to alter the behavior of the source of the anger. Indeed, targeting local populations might backfire, generating empathy for the diaspora population that is linked—at least conceptually—with the conflict.[5] Yet, despite this, extant research has already uncovered a clear relationship with Israeli armed conflict and spikes in reported antisemitic hate crimes, in some cases dating back more than two decades.[6] More broadly, group-specific (ethnic, religious, racial, sexual orientation, etc.) salient events—terror attacks, trials, crimes, association with disease, war—have been tied increases in that group's targeting.[7] However, existing scholarship, as of yet, has not employed methods that identify the altering of potential target group-specific attitudes caused by these events. We believe that evaluating the impact of these group-specific events on perceived group blame and group responsibility to speak out offer an important opportunity to further evaluate the drivers of potential outgroup bias and targeting.

We note that the phenomenon of blame attribution holds particular salience in the context of diaspora groups, as they navigate the multifaceted landscape of identity, belonging, and connection to their homeland within the states they reside. These layered concerns are often made even more complicated when homelands face political turmoil or are engaged in interstate conflict. We dive deeper into this circumstance with a novel survey experiment. Against the backdrop of a synthetic hospital bombing vignette employed in our survey experiment, we explore the ways in which blame is ascribed to diaspora communities, and the intricate process of assigning responsibility, while controlling for the contextual and demographic clues that cause this process to vary significantly among American respondents.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions: Are diaspora communities and associated states and transnational actors blamed for the actions of their homeland? Are these same groups believed to have a responsibility to speak out against their homeland? Further, this work seeks clarification on variation in possible diaspora community and associated transnational actors perceived blame and responsibility to speak out. Specifically, are some of these groups blamed and believed to have a responsibility to speak out while others do not?

In pursuit of these questions, our article takes on the following structure. First, we review the existing literature that explores blame attribution, with a particular focus on its manifestations in socio-political contexts. Next, we review our pre-registered theoretical expectations that diaspora communities and associated transnational group will see increases in blame and responsibility to speak out following exposure to a synthetic news story where their linked actor targets a hospital. We also theorize that when it comes to blame and responsibility to speak out of American Jews for the actions of Israel, we expect that left-wing respondents will attribute higher blame, threat, and democratic anxiety to Jews than right-wing respondents. Additionally, we expect that right-wing respondents will attribute higher blame, threat, and democratic anxiety to Muslims than left-wing respondents. Following a review of our theoretical expectations, we review our survey and experiment design, as well as share descriptive data on the construction of our samples. In the results section, we explain our findings that show that Jews are uniquely blamed and held responsible for the actions of Israel broadly speaking, and that political ideology is critical to understanding blame for both Jews and Muslims. We close by reviewing how this research and its future iterations can contribute to both continued work and policy focused on

diaspora communities and minority groups linked with geopolitical events.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our research aims to build a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that explain the connection between domestic prejudice manifestation and geopolitical events through the study of attitudinal changes toward groups perceived to be tied to a salient action abroad. As previously mentioned, there is minimal empirical research that explores this phenomenon, or its underlying mechanisms, in contemporary contexts. Consequently, we begin by reviewing relevant cases and empirics of reported hate crime in the United States. We continue by examining blame attribution conceptually, as well as its potential application to explaining group targeting. We move on to the more amorphous work exploring notions of group responsibility, surveying interdisciplinary insights on why it is believed to be an ethical necessity, in some cases, for groups to publicize their opposition to behavior. We follow by auditing the literature that explores the relationship between salient events and hate crime. Finally, we close with a brief review of research focused on Israel and its ties to the manifestation of contemporary antisemitism.

Focusing on mechanisms like group blame and responsibility that may help to explain group prejudice and targeting are grossly understudied yet demonstrably necessary given heightened concern about hate crimes across the United States and around the world. Over the past two decades alone, a number of highly visible cases as well as overall trends seem to underscore a linkage of international actor behavior and the targeting of domestic minority populations associated with them. Violent hate crimes targeting Hispanics across the United States have been motivated by concerns associated with undocumented immigration.[8] Islamic terrorism and related wars and operations in the Middle East have led to the targeting of Muslim Americans.[9] The onset of the COVID pandemic and consequent lockdowns led to a massive rise in reported bias incidents targeting the American AAPI community.[10] Additionally, violent escalations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the 2023–2024 Israel-Hamas war have resulted in a significant rise of prejudice targeting the Jewish community.[11]

Concluding that a great number of these aforementioned hate crimes and bias-incidents are motivated by group blame suffers from a seemingly obvious logical failure: the immediate victim(s) of these events almost always had no agency to change the condition(s) or group(s) behavior underlying the perpetrator's grievances. But to blanketly dismiss the perpetrators of hate crimes and bias incidents as illogical or irrational, and therefore unworthy of empirical study, is grossly misguided. One explanation is that the group hate and prejudice that regularly motivates hate crime perpetrators' bigoted behavior runs so deep that their actions are best explained as spontaneous.[12] Relatedly, considerable research suggests that a large proportion of hate crime is unplanned in a traditional sense.[13] Alternatively, however, it is also reasonable to believe many perpetrators adopt attitudes and beliefs that entire groups are, in fact, to blame for actions made by their ingroup members.

Furthermore, hate crimes and bias-incidents are also commonly known as message crimes,[14] and, while the perpetrator may recognize that an individual target lacks the agency to change the conditions behind their grievances, they believe that the feelings of group insecurity that result from their extra-legal action may in-fact alter group behavior. They often also assume that their actions have the potential to motivate others, which will result in increased pressure to assume the desired change or outcome. For this reason, we are specifically interested in evaluating the role of blame attribution and a belief in the responsibility to speak out, particularly as it relates to salient geopolitical events like actions associated with violent conflict.

Blame Attribution

Blame attribution, a fundamental concept within political psychology, involves the complex cognitive processes through which individuals and societies assign responsibility for significant events or crises. Understanding how blame is attributed is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of public opinion, political decision-making, and social cohesion. Blame attribution has also been specifically applied to explain mechanisms of intergroup discrimination. We contend blame attribution is likely critical to understanding the consequences of holding accountable entire ethnic, religious, and national groups for the actions of states thousands of miles away.

The conceptualization of blame attribution draws from longstanding psychological and sociological theories. Fritz Heider's balance theory and Harold Kelley's covariation model provide foundational frameworks for understanding how individuals make sense of the causality of events.[15] Bernard Weiner's work on attribution theory further delves into the psychological processes underlying the assignment of responsibility, introducing dimensions such as locus, stability, and controllability.[16]

Examining blame attribution within the context of group dynamics, Henry Tajfel's social identity theory is instrumental.[17] With one's social identity and self-categorization based substantially on perceptions of ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation, news stories of groups and nations have been found to have a significant effect on identity formation. Specifically, news focused on national identities have been found to increase a sense of group distinctiveness.[18] Research by James Druckman et al. explores how group identity influences attributions of responsibility, revealing the intricate ways in which social categories shape individual and collective blame assignment.[19]

Within the specific context of crises and conflicts, studies by Philip Tetlock et al. and Jennifer Lerner et al. have investigated the emotional and cognitive processes that influence blame attribution.[20] The distinction between "intentional" and "unintentional" harm, as explored by Leo Montada and Angela Schneider, further deepens our understanding of how intentionality shapes blame judgments in complex situations.[21] Unsurprisingly, research on contemporary crises like the COVID pandemic has underscored how ingroup identification has served as a moderator for blame attribution, with blame for the outgroup driven largely by identity concerns.[22] In a systematic review of extant research assessing attributions of blame, Christine Gilbert finds a positive relationship between blame and crisis-scale as well as attributions of blame.[23]

While blame attribution has been widely explored in social psychology and communications literature, it is far less commonly examined in political and geopolitical contexts. Blame attribution and responsibility as attitudinal mechanisms have been empirically researched even more sparingly in the specific context of violent conflict. Exciting new scholarship has begun to explore what mediates blame attribution for violence, including prior exposure to violence as well as motivational inferences.[24] However, it is critical to note that this research is based primarily on axioms associated with intrastate violence dynamics: namely, that states and state forces avoid indiscriminate violence out of concern for civilian blame. It is unlikely that this assertion would meaningfully apply in an international context, for a violent incident where both parties to the conflict—the perceived aggressor and target—belong to outgroups. Further, existing work has not directly evaluated blame of a diaspora group or linked actor to international conflict as a unique mechanism for a specific violent conflict incident. Given the recognized empirics associated with homeland conflict resulting in spikes of hate and bias-incidents, we hope our work begins to fill this important gap.

Responsibility

Responsibility to speak out against a behavior or specific incident associated with a group more broadly, is a phenomenon commonly discussed outside of the academy, but lacks a coherent research agenda, particularly within political science.

In the US context, perhaps the most salient instance of this occurred immediately following the horrific terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. Because many members of the public did not sharply distinguish between Islamist extremism and Islam as a religion, Muslims both domestically and internationally felt significant pressure to "disassociate" themselves from Al Qaeda and publicly denounce terrorism. Similar pressure was also identified following the 2005 London bombings.[25] We contend that a core challenge of examining group responsibility to speak out against an associated actor is related to the inherent bind that speaking out often places groups associated with an international actor and incident.

The bind of a group's responsibility to speak out occurs in several ways. First, an outgroup association between an entire religious group and a tiny minority of radical actors is viewed as illegitimate, even bigoted, from within the ingroup. A responsibility to speak out against "associated" group actors, incidents, or tactics, may have the effect of legitimizing this unqualified connection. Second, religious and ethnic groups are rarely, if ever, homogenous in their beliefs and practices. Demanding any such group reject the tactics of some within the group dismisses the diversity and heterogeneity of said group. Third, the failure to speak out is often associated by outgroups as a demonstration, in and of itself, of tacit agreement with "associated" perpetrator actors, incidents, or tactics. Consequently, choosing not to publicly speak out, can lead to confirmation negative outgroup sentiments and crystalize dynamics behind intergroup discrimination.

We contend that the belief in a groups responsibility to speak out cannot simply be couched in the broader concept of blame and blame attribution. Responsibility to speak out doesn't necessarily assume direct blame of a broader group for the action of a few of its members and avoids recognizable concerns that individuals and groups often lack direct agency to change associated actor behavior. However, as a belief, it does suggest a meaningful outgroup association between a broader group and its more radical members, or those to be perceived as particularly dangerous and immoral. Specifically, holding a group responsible to speak out inherently insinuates that a perceived ingroup has an onus to distinguish and disassociate itself from those that the outgroup defines as belonging to it. It may also suggest that doing say could have the power to dissuade those from within the ingroup from supporting the would-be disassociated actors, or even alter the very behavior of those disassociated.

Salient Events and Group Targeting

Social scientists have long acknowledged that group threat and blame serve as a prerequisite motivation for bias incident and hate crime perpetrators in many cases.[26] Far fewer studies have empirically examined what contexts and factors cause group blame to vary.

The salient events-induced hate crime literature is most valuable to understanding the relationships of blame and responsibility to speak out with manifest prejudice. However, it is also critical to identifying the very factors and contexts that may increase group blame and perceived responsibility to speak out. Extant research has examined how salient events can trigger spikes in hate.[27] These works rely primarily on grievance-oriented theories that explain hate crime motives as retributive.[28] While prior hate crime research in this space show a clear correlation between antecedent events and changes in crime and violence targeting associated groups,[29] these same studies do not specifically isolate and measure perceived blame and responsibility to speak out.

We argue that salient events, including widely covered violent international conflicts, may be critical to activating latent beliefs about outgroup associations with the actors involved in these violent events. Specifically, conflict-oriented events characterized by considerable carnage could trigger both increases in associated group blame attribution and responsibility to speak out.

Israel and Antisemitism

While the literature has demonstrated why blame attribution and responsibility to speak out are associated with perceived outgroup violence, it is possible that these social-psychological mechanisms may not manifest evenly for all groups. Specifically, while antisemitism has qualities that are both common across many types of intergroup hatred, it exhibits unique qualities and characteristics as well.[30] One of these unique qualities is the connection of Jews, as a people, with the actions of a nation state, Israel or the belief in favor of a Jewish nation state (Zionism). Because modern Zionism—support for an independent Jewish state in Jews historical homeland of Israel—is a widely held belief among Jewish diaspora communities including American Jewry where polling consistently shows between eighty and ninety percent of respondents declare Israel important to their identity,[31] Jews are often associated with the behavior—real, exaggerated, and fictitious—of Israel. This connection is made more distinctive because there are numerous countries that have adopted Islam and Christianity as state religions, but only one Jewish state in the world.

A growing body of empirical research has demonstrated a clear correlation between extreme anti-Israel and antizionist views and antisemitism.[32] Relatedly, scholars have argued that because social desirability has limited the manifestation of classical anti-religious bigotry, hatred for Israel and Zionism can provide cover for antisemitism.[33] It is unsurprising, then, that event-based bias-incident and hate crime research consistently finds a clear link between the occurrence of Israeli military conflict and spikes in reported antisemitic hate crime, both in the United States[34] and around the world.[35]

It is also critical to note that Jewish diaspora communities, like all diasporas, aren't evenly distributed around the world. The United States is home to by far the largest Jewish community outside of Israel, constituting just under forty percent of the global Jewish population.[36] While considerable bipartisan support for Israel has been a hallmark of the US-Israel relationship since Israel's founding, some scholars and policymakers critical of this relationship note the sizable financial and political resources that go into Israel lobbying efforts.[37] Although not without contention, leading Jewish advocacy organizations like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the American Jewish Committee have documented that such criticism can veer beyond legitimate criticism of Israel and into antisemitism.

Because of the unique relationship between Israel and the United States as well as the large size of the American Jewish diaspora, it may be more likely for Americans to associate Jews to Israel in the United States. There is very limited data to evaluate this claim. In a comprehensive global survey aimed at evaluating antisemitism around the world, the ADL's G100 asked respondents if "Jews are more loyal to Israel than to [their country]." Reviewing the empirics across seven of the countries with the largest Jewish diasporas in 2014 (United States, France, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Argentina, Australia), there is little substantive difference in the responses at the national level. Of specific importance for our research samples, thirty-one percent of US respondents and twenty-seven percent of UK respondents answered "probably true" to the statement that Jews in their country were more loyal to Israel.[38]

Another common trope of antisemitism is the conspiracy that Jews act in concert to pursue group-gains at the expense of others or the nation they live. Empirical work has consistently highlighted the link between conspiracy thinking

and heightened levels of antisemitism.[39] Such antisemitic conspiracy thinking is often central to the thinking of beliefs that have been motives for significant anti-Jewish violence on the ideological far right (e.g., Great Replacement Theory which often suggests Jews controlling the media, Hollywood, and government to legitimize a slow but methodical anti-white genocide). However, antisemitic conspiratorial beliefs also manifest on the ideological far left, particularly when it comes to Israel. In the United Kingdom, Labour party antizionist-motivated antisemitism was dismissed by a sizable proportion of the population as an operation out of the Israel embassy. Congressional figures like Ilhan Omar have been criticized for social media posts suggesting Israel conspires to control the world, and former Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney engaging in regular anti-Israel conspiracies ranging from systematic IDF organ trafficking of Palestinians to the belief that Israel was behind 9/11.

THEORY

At the level of theory we contend that salient events like the reporting of a particularly violent conflict incident, is likely to increase both blame and responsibility to speak out of groups associated with the perceived attacker. Blame and its attribution require a more direct connection and assumed agency between a group and its associated actor than responsibility to speak out. Therefore, we expect that respondents will be less likely to attribute blame to the group of interest and more likely to believe that the group has a responsibility to speak out against the actions of the associated perpetrator following exposure to an attack vignette.

Although we expect that the dynamics above will apply in all cases of reported conflict, we contend that the extant antisemitism literature argues that blame attribution my apply uniquely to the association of Jews and Israel. This is because antisemitism has unique corollaries, including a strong association with conspiracy to promote the ingroup at the expense of outgroups through nefarious means. Further, said conspiracy may be heightened in the context of the United States, both because of the large size of American Jewry and the longstanding bi-partisan support Israel receives in Congress along with the consequent military and economic aid associated with this support.

Relatedly, despite the bipartisan support for Israel frequently demonstrated in Congress, recent empirics have shown a growing shift in support for Israel by party, with democrats increasingly less likely to be sympathetic to Israel and republicans being more sympathetic. Eitan Hersh and Laura Royden have best demonstrated this trend in scholarship, showing that young Americans on the ideological left are more likely to view Israel in a similar vein to Iran or Russia.[40] Combined with the considerable anti-Israel sentiment recorded on the ideological left and far-left across Europe, we contend that ideology is likely to be an important mediator of blame and responsibility to speak out for Jews. Additionally, considerable research examining anti-Muslim sentiment and threat has documented its unique manifestation on the political right.[41] Consequently, any conflicts that have an actor associated with Islam may result in higher attribution of blame and responsibility toward Muslims among those on the ideological right.

We also contend that those holding more radical views on political violence and society more broadly are likely to possess higher levels of blame, threat, and democratic anxiety. Consequently, exposure to outgroup conflict may heighten the treatment effect, resulting in higher levels of outgroup blame and responsibility to speak out.

Hypotheses

Per our theory and pre-registration documentation, we advance the following core hypotheses.

Blame attribution: We expect that exposure to vignettes about a country or organization associated with a given group (Israel—Jews, Russia—Russians, Saudi Arabia/ISIS/Hamas—Muslims)

will increase attributed blame to those groups within America. For example, we expect that exposure to information about Israel will increase blame attribution toward American Jews.[42]

Responsibility to speak out: We expect that exposure to vignettes about a country or organization associated with a given group (Israel—Jews, Russia—Russians, Saudi Arabia/ISIS/Hamas—Muslims) will increase the perceived responsibility of associated groups within America to speak out against the actor/actions. For example, we expect that exposure to a story on Russia targeting Ukraine will increase the responsibility of Russian Americans to speak out against Russia.[43]

Jewish uniqueness: We expect that only American Jews will see increased attributed blame and a responsibility to speak out when compared to other groups in the United States.

We also expect that respondents with different ideological beliefs will respond differently to our experimental treatments.

Left-wing bias: We expect that left-wing respondents will attribute higher blame, threat, and democratic anxiety to Jews than right-wing respondents.

Right-wing bias: We expect that right-wing respondents will attribute higher blame, threat, and democratic anxiety to Muslims than left-wing respondents.

DATA AND METHOD

To test our hypotheses, we ran three survey experiments in the United States from 2022 to 2024. For additional details, please see Figure 1. The survey experiments are designed to last approximately eight to ten minutes and include vignette treatments that look like *New York Times* articles. Each survey begins with a series of demographic and sociopolitical questions, including pre-treatment questions about views on Israel, Palestine, and Russia. We also include questions on political ideology (a seven-point scale) and evaluations of statements about American politics. The full wording for all questions and treatments can be found in our statistical appendix, as well as on our Open Science Foundation project registration website.

Table 1. Dates of Survey per Country

Survey	Start	End	Obs.[46]	ITT
1	July 11, 2022	July 13, 2022	1,501	1,500
2	October 9, 2023	October 10, 2023	1,021	1,200
3	April 22, 2024	April 22, 2024	804	800

The survey experiments were reviewed by our institutional review boards and conform to the American Political Science Association's *Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research*.[44] Additionally, the experiments were pre-registered using the Open Science Foundation's preregistration portal.[45] Per our pre-registration, we propose an initial means-based analysis followed by a multivariate regression analysis to address any potentially unbalanced pre-treatment demographic or socioeconomic factors.

Addressing Survey Duration and Time

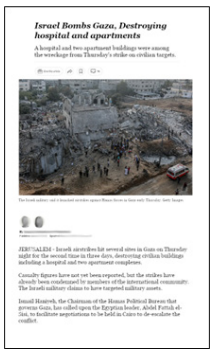
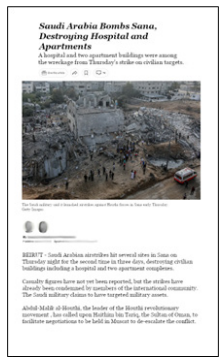
One of the core challenges in using online survey platforms is that some respondents do not dedicate themselves fully to the task at hand. In some cases, respondents rush through the survey as quickly as possible, while others may open up the survey but then complete other tasks in the middle of the survey. We designed our survey to take between eight and twelve minutes, expecting that some respondents would finish it quickly (in perhaps five or six minutes), while others might take significantly longer (up to twenty or even thirty minutes). However, some respondents took less than two minutes, while others took nearly four hours. To our view, it is clear that these individuals are unlikely to have been adequately treated by our vignettes. As a

result, we drop any observations in which respondents took less than two minutes or more than forty-five minutes, resulting in a total of 3,242 respondents across all three surveys.

Vignettes

In our first survey, we included six total vignette-based treatments as well as a control in this survey experiment. Assignment to treatments was randomized via Qualtrics. Our vignettes were designed resemble actual news articles and were thus crafted using image manipulation software. We chose to develop synthetic events rather than using real news article for several reasons. First, because different news media use very different formatting, the use of real articles would have introduced a significant aesthetic confound into our ability to analyze the different effects of the content of each vignette. Second, by creating these vignettes, we were able to standardize the language, including the tone and length, of the vignettes. All participants were debriefed at the end of the survey to ensure that they understood that these vignettes were fabricated. The vignettes focused primarily on a conflict incident (a bombing) between one actor and another. Two example vignettes are displayed below in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of Vignettes

Vignette example: Israel & Palestine	Vignette example: Saudi Arabia & Houthis
	

In our first wave (July 2022), we included six total treatments consisting of visual treatments (see above) as well as a control in which respondents simply clicked ahead to continue the survey. We opted for a vignette-less control to avoid accidentally treating respondents with alternative information that might have an unintended and/or unforeseen effect on our outcome. As Table 3 displays below, we include three primary actors engaging with targets. The first actor is Israel, and we include a conflict-based vignette in which Israel has bombed a civilian target in Gaza. We also include a vignette drawing upon the recent normalization between Israel and several of its Arab neighbors by discussing the (actual) celebration of Iftar by Israeli diplomats with members of Arab governments. We then include two vignettes pertaining to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both are nearly identical, though the second Russian vignette mentions that Ukrainian President Volodymir Zelensky is connected with Israel. Finally, drawing upon the documented persecution of Muslims across much of the Western world in the decades following September 11, we include two vignettes designed to prime the salience of Muslims. The first refers to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its targeting of civilians in Afghanistan, while the second references the Saudi government's war against the Houthis. These last two vignettes were included to ensure that both non-state and state actors were mentioned, since Muslims are often held responsible for the actions of foreign terrorist organizations as well as government actions.

In the second and third waves of our survey experiment (October 9, 2023, and April 22, 2024), we reduced the number of treatments down to three as well as a control. The vignettes remain nearly identical to those used in the first survey wave in structure, format, and content. We include a vignette about Israel targeting Gaza (identical to that in the first survey wave), a vignette about Hamas targeting Israel, and a third vignette about Russia targeting Ukraine

Table 3. Overview of Treatments in First Survey

Treatment	Actor 1	Actor 2	Description
1	Israel	Gaza	Conflict bombing
2	Israel	Arab countries	Celebration of Iftar
3	Russia	Ukraine	Conflict bombing
4	Russia	Ukraine (Zelensky/Israel)	Conflict bombing
5	ISIS	Afghanistan	Conflict bombing
6	Saudi Arabia	Houthis	Conflict bombing

Table 4. Overview of Treatments in Second and Third Surveys

Treatment	Actor 1	Actor 2	Description
1	Israel	Gaza	Conflict bombing
2	Russia	Ukraine	Conflict bombing
3	Hamas	Israel	Conflict bombing

(identical to that in the first survey wave). The survey treatments are listed below in Table 4.

We selected these three diaspora groups—Jews, Muslims, and Russians—for several reasons. First, each group constitutes a small but politically relevant diaspora population within the United States. All three groups have experienced directed harassment in response to international crises. Second, each group provides an important insight into minority experiences in the United States. Russians are a predominantly white ethnic population, whereas Jews and Muslims are classified—in particular by the political right—as non-white populations. Jews are often categorized as an ethnoreligious group, while Muslims are categorized as a religious group. This provides an interesting angle of analysis—an ethnic group, a religious group, and an ethnoreligious group.

Dependent Variables

To measure blame, we include questions about both moral culpability (blame) as well as a broader variable inquiring about responsibility. All respondents were asked about all three groups—American Jews, American Muslims, and Russian Americans. The first question is worded as follows: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how much are American Jews to blame for Israel's actions and policies toward the Palestinians?"[47] The second question is worded as follows: "In your view, how much responsibility do American Jews have to speak out against Israeli actions and policies toward the Palestinians?" We also include similarly worded questions about the blame and responsibility of Russians living in the United States. All such questions are measured on a ten-point scale in which higher values indicate more culpability.

We include both questions because we expect that these two concepts—holding individuals blameworthy and holding them responsible to "speak out"—operate on similar wavelengths while pinpointing different levels of culpability. To our mind, *blame* suggests direct responsibility for the outcome of a policy. On the other hand, *responsibility to speak out* refers to a more oblique level of culpability with diminished agency. These need not be abstract examples. Following the exchange of rockets and missiles between Israel's military and Gaza-based militants in 2021 and 2023, Jews living in the diaspora were frequently targeted for violent retribution in city centers like Los Angeles, London, and Paris.[48] In some notable student protests across the United States at institutions of higher education following Israel's 2023–2024 ground incursion in Gaza, Jewish students were asked to disavow their Zionism to enter specific campus locations.[49] And in the years following the

attacks on September 11, 2001, Muslims around the world were targeted violently, subject to increased state harassment, and actively called upon to speak out against terrorism.

RESULTS

Examining the Data across Waves

We turn first to the mean values of our two core dependent variables—on blame and responsibility—across our three diaspora populations of study. Because the second and third waves of the survey experiment were conducted in the midst of crises (immediately following October 7, 2023 and during the student protests of spring 2024), we are interested in the likely effects of these real-world "treatments" on our results. We recognize, for example, the importance that external events are likely to play in shaping answers to our survey—and that these external events may very well outstrip the potentially modest experimental treatment effects from the vignettes in our surveys.

As demonstrated in Figure 5, we find that, indeed, the mean levels of blame for both Jews, Muslims, and Russians *increase dramatically and significantly* over time.[50] Of these three diaspora populations, Jews are held most blameworthy of the three different groups in the first wave. This blame diminishes in the days following the October 7 attacks, but begins to re-emerge in April 2024. To confirm that this holds statistically, we plot the results of an ANOVA in a Tukey plot below in Figure 1.

Table 5. Mean Levels of Blame and Responsibility across Each Wave

	Blame			Responsibility		
	Jews	Muslims	Russians	Jews	Muslims	Russians
July 2022	2.09	1.87	1.80	4.33	4.63	4.57
October 2023	2.27	2.27	2.21	4.35	4.70	4.51
April 2024	2.40	2.30	2.16	4.51	4.70	4.48

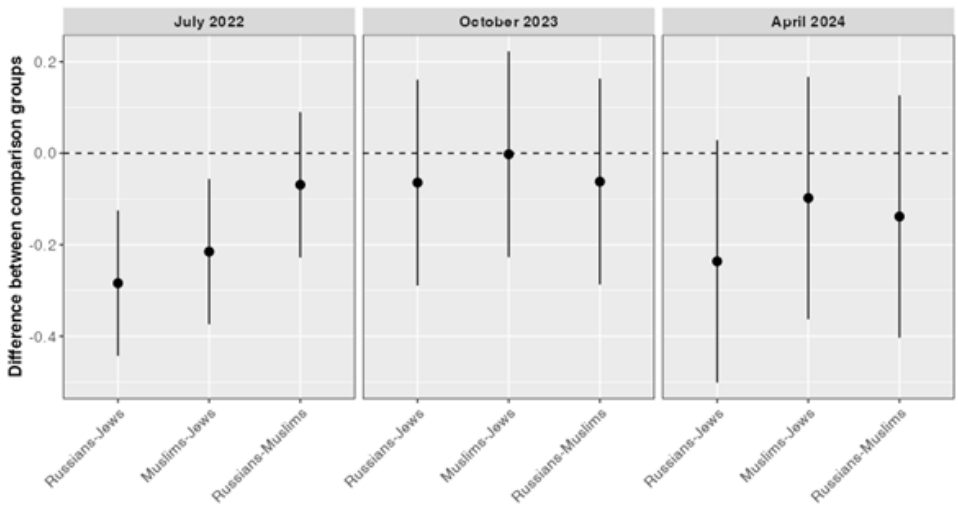


FIGURE 1. Tukey Plot of Blame

Experimental Results

In our pre-registered analysis plan, we specify multivariate regression as our primary form of analysis, which we include in the section below. However, because our treatment groups are remarkably well balanced, we begin by first presenting simple means-based T-Tests in which we analyze whether minority groups are considered blameworthy for the actions of countries or organizations for which they may be perceived to be linked. After presenting these results, we then analyze our results using multivariate regressions per the analysis plan.

We begin by examining attributions of blame across each of our three diaspora groups based on whether respondents received a treatment linked to a given group. When respondents received either the control or a non-relevant treatment, they are assigned into Group 0 (G0). When respondents received a relevant treatment, they are assigned into Group 1 (G1). For example, if respondents receive one of the treatments intended to make Muslims salient (e.g., Hamas, Saudi Arabia, ISIS), then they are coded as being part of G1 when answering questions about blame and responsibility for Muslim Americans.

Below, Table 6 and Table 7 display the experimental results broken out first by wave and then by ideology. In general, we do not find support for the expectation that minority diasporas in America are held blameworthy for the actions of states and nonstate actors to which they are conceptually linked. The one exception to this is that in the first wave (July 2022), respondents that receive treatments about Israel do increase their attributions of blame to American Jews.

Table 6. Attribution of Blame for Foreign Incidents, by Survey Wave

	July 2022				October 2023				April 2024			
	G0	G1	Error	P Value	G0	G1	Error	P Value	G0	G1	Error	P Value
Jewish Americans	2.050	2.208	0.110	0.077	2.285	2.217	0.146	0.680	2.469	2.332	0.175	0.784
Muslim Americans	1.908	1.842	0.099	0.748	2.347	2.039	0.144	0.984	2.324	2.455	0.183	0.237
Russian Americans	1.892	1.883	0.098	0.536	2.238	2.370	0.156	0.198	2.411	2.195	0.175	0.891

Note: T-Test conducted assumption of equal variance and specifying Group 0 with lower mean.

Table 7. Attribution of Blame for Foreign Incidents, by Ideology

	Left Wing				Moderates				Right Wing			
	G0	G1	Error	P Value	G0	G1	Error	P Value	G0	G1	Error	P Value
Jewish Americans	1.996	1.955	0.113	0.640	2.285	2.436	0.133	0.129	2.536	2.441	0.182	0.697
Muslim Americans	1.626	1.688	0.104	0.276	2.203	1.984	0.111	0.975	3.002	2.684	0.201	0.943
Russian Americans	1.658	1.599	0.093	0.738	2.138	2.160	0.120	0.428	2.916	2.906	0.209	0.519

The P-value is 0.059, placing it on the edge of traditional statistical significance. This effect, however, disappears in each of the wartime waves (October 2023 and April 2024).

Similarly, the results in Table 7—broken out by ideology—indicate that, at least when considering whether a group is deemed blameworthy, there are no major ideological distinctions between left-wing, moderate, and right-wing respondents.

Next, we turn to our results regarding minority group responsibilities to speak out against policies. We once again find that there is a substantial difference between pre-war and wartime surveys. In the pre-war survey, there is clear evidence that exposure to information about Israel (including both positive and negative portrayals of Israel) increases respondent expectations that American Jews should speak out against Israeli policies pertaining to the Palestinians. The results are displayed in Table 8 and Table 9. Importantly, the strongest support for our expectations emerges in the first, pre-conflict wave, whereas the later wartime waves show clear attenuation of these effects. The October 9 wave, taken two days after the Hamas raid into Israel, found that this experimental effect disappeared. This is not entirely surprising; after all, the horrors of the October 7 attack were still being uncovered and the significant Israeli military response had not yet commenced in full. More surprisingly, however, the experimental effect remains diminished even in the April 2024 wave. Given the enormous death toll of the Israeli response, overt calls by radical-right Israeli politicians Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich to forcibly evict Palestinians from Gaza, and the onset of nationwide campus encampments and protests, we expected that respondents would have once again expected American Jews to speak up about Israel following vignette exposure. To our surprise, we do not find this.

We do find support—in the first wave only—for our hypothesis that left-wing respondents are more likely to expect American Jews to speak up about Israel. However, we do not find support for the expectation that right-wing respondents are more likely to hold Muslims Americans accountable for speaking up about groups like ISIS or Hamas or countries like Saudi Arabia. We find that, aggregated across the waves, right-wing respondents do hold Russian Americans responsible to speak up about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This result is perplexing, particularly given the surprising acceptance of Russian aggression by much of the American political right.

Regression Analysis

We now turn to our multivariate regression analysis, in which we include two pre-treatment covariates. First, we include a pre-treatment

Table 8. Attribution of Responsibility to Speak Up, by Wave

	July 2022				October 2023				April 2024			
	G0	G1	Error	P Value	G0	G1	Error	P Value	G0	G1	Error	P Value
Jewish Americans	4.230	4.570	0.172	0.025	4.332	4.425	0.207	0.326	4.539	4.366	0.235	0.769
Muslim Americans	4.645	4.571	0.176	0.663	4.789	4.425	0.228	0.945	4.728	4.595	0.244	0.707
Russian Americans	4.634	4.597	0.177	0.582	4.680	4.756	0.219	0.365	4.694	4.695	0.254	0.499

Note: T-Test conducted assumption of equal variance and specifying Group 0 with lower mean.

Table 9. Attribution of Responsibility to Speak Up, by Ideology

	Left Wing				Moderates				Right Wing			
	G0	G1	Error	P Value	G0	G1	Error	P Value	G0	G1	Error	P Value
Jewish Americans	4.541	4.936	0.186	0.017	4.273	4.406	0.181	0.231	4.093	3.750	0.242	0.921
Muslim Americans	4.387	4.366	0.191	0.542	4.599	4.461	0.190	0.767	5.479	4.932	0.262	0.981
Russian Americans	4.472	4.144	0.185	0.962	4.538	4.631	0.188	0.310	5.197	5.696	0.274	0.035

question designed to identify each respondent's existing sentiments about a number of countries. This question is worded as follows: "Do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable view towards each of the following countries or regions?" Respondents were asked to evaluate China, Russia, Germany, Iran, Israel, Ukraine, and the Palestinian Territories (Palestine). The second question was designed to capture respondent-reported levels of knowledge about a number of ongoing conflicts: "How knowledgeable would you say you are about the following ongoing conflicts?" Conflicts included Israel and the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, Russia and Ukraine, Morocco and Western Sahara, and Ethiopia and the Tigray. Finally, we include a variable that measures a seven-point ideological scale, ranging from "very liberal" to "very conservative."

Below, we present our results on perceptions of Jewish blame and responsibility in Table 10. Because we have directional hypotheses, we utilize one-sided p-values, as standard p-values are reported as two-sided, non-directional values. The regressions in Table 10 provide mixed support for our core hypotheses. In the first wave, we find that exposure to one of our Israel vignettes, which describes the celebration of Iftar by the Israeli government with neighboring regimes, causes an increase *blame* of American Jews for Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. We also find that the other vignette, which describes Israel bombing Gaza, causes an increase in expected *responsibility* of American Jews to speak out.

In the second wave, taken right after Hamas's raid on October 7, we find that exposure to the vignette describing a Hamas attack on Israel causes a reduction in the expectation that American Jews speak out against Israel. And in the third wave from April 2024, we find that exposure to our vignette about Israel bombing Gaza also causes a reduction in perceptions of American Jewish responsibility to speak out. We also find in the third wave that exposure to the Russia-Ukraine vignette reduces perceived responsibility.

We also find that pre-treatment covariates matter greatly in explaining attitudes toward American minority populations. Across each test, we find—unsurprisingly—that respondents with more positive views of Israel consistently report lower attributions of blame or responsibility to American Jews. Self-reported knowledge about the conflict correlates positively, consistently, and significantly with increased perceptions of American Jewish responsibility to speak out against Israel as evidenced in Figure 3. And, perplexingly, ideology matters—but not consistently. When measuring blame, conservatives are more likely to blame American Jews than liberals. When measuring responsibility, this is reversed.

Table 10. Multivariate Regression Analysis—Jewish Blame and Responsibility

	Jews to blame			Jews responsible to speak out		
	July 2022	October 2023	April 2024	July 2022	October 2023	April 2024
Intercept	2.276***	2.736***	2.731***	4.777***	4.683***	5.273***
	(0.221)	(0.272)	(0.355)	(0.360)	(0.387)	(0.472)
Treatments						
Israel Palestine	0.028			0.489*		
	(0.174)			(0.282)		
Israel Positive	0.302*			0.270		
	(0.173)			(0.284)		
Russia Ukraine	0.096			0.325		
	(0.174)			(0.284)		
Russia Ukraine Israel	–0.079			–0.147		
	(0.174)			(0.283)		
Saudi Houthis	–0.211			–0.165		
	(0.174)			(0.284)		
ISIS Afghanistan	0.197			0.256		
	(0.174)			(0.282)		
Hamas Israel		–0.266	–0.008		–0.565**	–0.385
		(0.181)	(0.223)		(0.257)	(0.296)
Israel Hamas		–0.266	–0.218		–0.215	–0.497*
		(0.179)	(0.221)		(0.255)	(0.293)
Russia Ukraine		–0.196	–0.288		–0.374	–0.532*
		(0.180)	(0.222)		(0.256)	(0.294)
Pre–treatment covariates						
Attitude toward Israel	–0.462***	–0.469***	–0.547***	–0.319***	–0.362***	–0.409***
	(0.055)	(0.072)	(0.086)	(0.090)	(0.103)	(0.115)
Knowledge of conflict	0.230***	–0.018	0.149	0.307***	0.412***	0.392***
	(0.057)	(0.079)	(0.099)	(0.092)	(0.112)	(0.132)
7–pt ideology scale	0.124***	0.256***	0.195***	–0.153***	–0.017	–0.117**
	(0.027)	(0.033)	(0.042)	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.056)
Num.Obs.	1462	945	799	1468	945	799
R^2	0.067	0.081	0.059	0.037	0.030	0.045

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Moving to Muslim Americans in Table 11, we find strong results in the second and third waves indicating that respondents attribute significantly less blame and responsibility to them when they have been exposed to vignettes about either Israel or Hamas. During these waves, we find that in six of eight scenarios in which respondents were exposed to vignettes including either Israel or Hamas, they report that Muslim Americans are less blameworthy or responsible than respondents that did not receive these vignettes. These findings run counter to our expectations.

We also find (see Table 11) that in the first wave, taken in 2022, with exposure to positive information about Israel (the vignette in which Israel celebrated Iftar with Muslim governments), respondents do indicate that Muslim Americans are responsible to speak out against Islamic governments and organizations. We believe that the rather drastic flip between our pre-war survey and our wartime surveys reveals how important external "treatments" such as the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas can be in shaping American moral calculus as well as impacting political science studies.

Taken together, these results indicate two things. First, that the relationship between international conflict and diaspora minority populations is not nearly as simple as we initially expected. The first wave seems to operate according to our logic: pre-war testing indicates that Jews are held responsible, but this is less clear in the October 2023. The third wave indicates a reversal in our hypothesized logic. Second, respondents clearly distinguish between moral blame and moral responsibility in reference to the linkage between an American minority diaspora and the actions of an international actor. Results from our multivariate regression seem to suggest that this may stem from ideological differences associated with applications of blame and responsibility to speak out. Namely, those on the ideological right are more likely to blame Jews for the actions of Israel but less likely to believe Jews have a responsibility to speak out against the actions of Israel. Importantly, this manifests differently for right-wing views on responsibility of Muslim Americans.

DISCUSSION

We present five distinct hypotheses in this article. The first focuses on blame attribution. It contends that exposure to conflict vignettes featuring an attacker country will increase attributed blame to associated groups living in America. The second assumes the same logic for responsibility to speak out as a mechanism.

Representing the core of our theoretical interest, we find mixed results for our initial hypotheses. Experimentally, the conflict vignette was particularly effective for Jews when it comes to both blame and responsibility, and primarily significant in the first wave of our study. The measured effects could be considered small, but they were substantive and expected given the brief exposure to a single synthetic news story.

We believe that a logical conclusion for the failure of the experimental Israel-oriented vignettes to register effectiveness in the second and third waves has to do with the salience of the Israel-Hamas conflict during these periods, which received significant coverage when these waves were fielded. At the level of theory, the association of American Jews with Israel activated through mechanisms of blame and responsibility to speak out in the non-war wave, were washed away by the salience of the conflict (where these stories, narratives and images were commonplace). Two key empirical points from our analysis lend credibility to this explanation. First, consistently, blame and responsibility to speak out increased over the course of time (see Tables 6 and 8), suggesting a baseline difference between both war and non-war periods, as well as an added effect of enduring conflict. Second, those with greater knowledge of the conflict were consistently more likely to associate groups with increased responsibility to speak out.

Table 11. Multivariate Regression Analysis—Muslim Blame and Responsibility

	Muslims to blame			Muslims responsible to speak out		
	July 2022	October 2023	April 2024	July 2022	October 2023	April 2024
Intercept	1.925***	1.891***	2.526***	3.599***	3.279***	3.999***
	(0.249)	(0.327)	(0.417)	(0.459)	(0.474)	(0.572)
Treatments						
Israel Palestine	0.086			0.390		
	(0.162)			(0.298)		
Israel Positive	0.223			0.647**		
	(0.162)			(0.300)		
Russia Ukraine	0.125			0.297		
	(0.162)			(0.299)		
Russia Ukraine Israel	0.012			0.201		
	(0.162)			(0.299)		
Saudi Houthis	–0.165			0.174		
	(0.163)			(0.300)		
ISIS Afghanistan	0.062			0.227		
	(0.163)			(0.298)		
Hamas Israel		–0.453**	–0.211		–0.467*	–0.581*
		(0.181)	(0.218)		(0.263)	(0.300)
Israel Hamas		–0.390**	–0.384*		–0.224	–0.730**
		(0.180)	(0.217)		(0.261)	(0.298)
Russia Ukraine		–0.175	–0.376*		–0.228	–0.397
		(0.180)	(0.218)		(0.261)	(0.299)
Pre–treatment covariates						
Attitude toward Israel	–0.304***	–0.127	–0.269***	–0.171	–0.233**	–0.230*
	(0.059)	(0.081)	(0.094)	(0.108)	(0.118)	(0.129)
Knowledge of conflict	0.041	–0.051	–0.061	0.342***	0.668***	0.395***
	(0.053)	(0.078)	(0.098)	(0.097)	(0.114)	(0.134)
7–pt ideology scale	0.167***	0.270***	0.215***	0.119**	0.155***	0.165***
	(0.026)	(0.034)	(0.043)	(0.048)	(0.049)	(0.059)
Num.Obs.	1463	945	799	1471	945	799
R^2	0.076	0.090	0.074	0.022	0.068	0.041

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

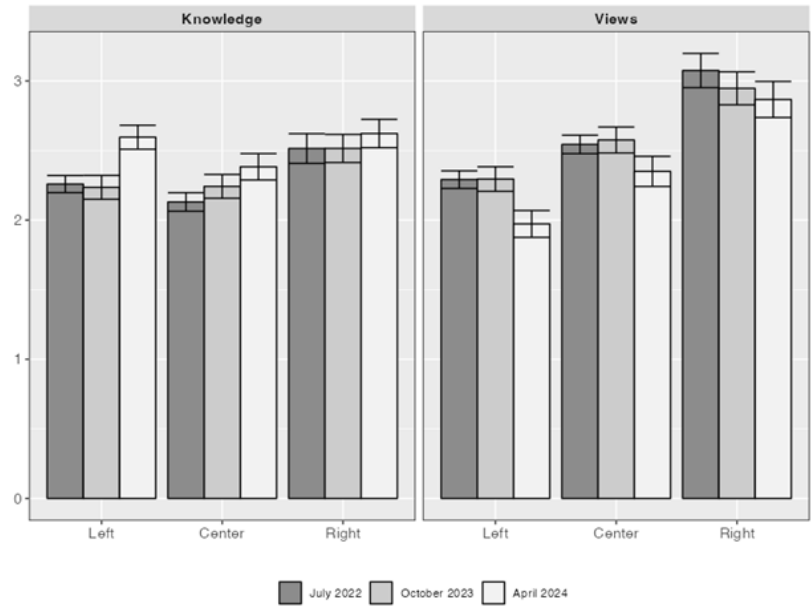


FIGURE 3. Pre-treatment Views and Knowledge of Israel

The third hypothesis focuses on Jewish uniqueness. Like our other hypotheses, our findings were wave dependent. In the first wave, Jewish Americans were the only group to see hypothesized increases in both blame and responsibility post associated conflict vignette exposure. In the second and third waves, when the vignette was revised so to make Hamas and Israel both a perpetrator and a target, we find that the Hamas targeting Israel vignette reduced perceived Jewish responsibility to speak out against Israel immediately following the October 7 attacks but had no effect in the later April 2024 wave. Interestingly, the Israel targeting Hamas vignette had no effect immediately following the October 7 attacks but reduced perceived Jewish responsibility to speak out in April 2024. For Muslim Americans, the Hamas targeting Israel vignette meaningfully reduced perceived responsibility of Muslim Americans to speak out for both the second and third waves. Furthermore, the Israel targeting Hamas vignette, which had no effect for perceived responsibility of Muslim Americans to speak out in the second wave, reduced said responsibility in the third wave. In short, our conflict vignette had a unique effect on American Jews during the first wave when there was no heightened violence and media coverage of events in Israel and Gaza. Immediately following the horrors of October 7 and the consequent death and destruction, our conflict vignettes had the opposite effect of what was hypothesized. We argue this finding requires both more attention and testing. One realistic possibility is that conflict exposure during heightened violence, regardless of perpetrator and target, may increase general sympathy more and therefore reduce more negative attributions of blame and responsibility. We caution that this requires future iterations of work to examine this more specifically.

The fourth hypothesis examines potential left-wing bias, suggesting that respondents on the ideological left will be more likely to attribute higher blame and increased responsibility to speak out for Jews than right-wing respondents.

The fifth hypothesis examines potential Right-wing bias, contending that right-wing respondents will attribute higher blame and increased responsibility to speak out for Muslims than other respondents. We don't find clear support for either of these hypotheses across the three waves conducted for our analysis. That said, it is important to note that generally speaking, those on the ideological left attributed less blame and responsibility to speak out for all groups and treatments.

CONCLUSION

Our article explores two understudied mechanisms of interest in the social sciences for explaining contemporary prejudicial attitudes and manifestations of bigotry. We approach this novelly, through the use of a sophisticated experimental design, employing synthesized news stories and actual conflict imagery. Further, to reduce concerns related to external validity, we utilize a variety of ongoing and salient conflicts, with different actors to differentiate possible group/conflict-specific effects. Also of vital importance, for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we do this not only during times of diminished conflict violence, but immediately following the October 7 attack and again in April during widespread international accusations of ongoing genocide in Gaza.

While support for our hypotheses is mixed, we contend that this is the consequence of the very quality of our research, studying multiple developing conflicts over time through three waves. The concentration of the expected effects in the pre-conflict wave suggests that experimental exposure may matter most when the conflict is not already dominating the information environment. When respondents are already immersed in high-salience reporting, a single additional conflict story may not meaningfully shift attitudes. And, despite our mixed findings, we identify several key takeaways for scholars examining how international conflict affects diasporas and associated ethnoreligious and/or national minority groups.

First, blame and responsibility to speak out are indeed distinct phenomenon which target groups associated with international actors. Respondents are much more likely to assign a group the responsibility to speak out against an associated actor, than to assign that group blame for the actions of said actor. This suggests that Americans generally understand that most associated groups lack meaningful control over associated international actors. It also elucidates the potential concerns of those that feel differently about possible group-control. Responsibility to speak out, on the other hand, is something Americans feel much more comfortable applying to specific groups connected to international entities engaged in conflict. It avoids concern of control, but it does suggest that perhaps those groups have some indirect agency to affect these actors' behavior, or at least a need to distinguish themselves from perceived "bad actors."

Second, broadly, those on the ideological right are much more likely to blame groups for the actions of associated international actors in conflict. Although considerably more research is needed to detail this relationship, this may be driven by the heightened importance of religion, immigration, and national identity that characterizes this ideological subgroup.

Third, conflict exposure may not result in the same directional effects of blame and responsibility during times of low and high conflict salience. It is fascinating result that Israel-Hamas conflict exposure reduces responsibility to speak out, especially for Muslim Americans, during periods of high conflict salience. Further, the Jewish-specific findings of the post-attacks vignette show increased blame and responsibility during low conflict salience wash away or even reverse during heightened conflict. This underscores the potential importance of conflict context among other mediating factors that scholars should consider when conducting experiments aimed at understanding conflict-associated mechanisms.

Our work opens the door for social scientists, ranging from those who study international

conflict to domestic prejudice, to consider the inclusion of blame and responsibility to speak out as mechanisms that may explain key dynamics under their purview. We implore scholars of all orientations and methodologies to expand on this work to provide additional empirical evidence to help better understand and ultimately combat contemporary hate and bigotry.

STATISTICAL APPENDIX

Balance—Wave 1

Below, in Tables 12 and 13, we present balances across treatments for each country. We find that, generally, our treatments are well balanced, across both treatments and countries. Women are slightly overrepresented in the United States. Our samples include well-educated respondents, with mean values indicating that respondents have either begun or completed university degrees. The primary difference that we observe is pre-treatment views of Israel.

We find that, in the first wave, our treatments are very well balanced across each of these demographic indicators. There are a few exceptions to this. Relative to the control, respondents that received the Israel-Palestine treatment have a higher level of education. We also find that relative to respondents that received the Israel-Arab-Iftar treatment, respondents that received the ISIS treatment had slightly lower overall levels of education. We do not find any meaningful statistical differences with the other demographic variables, nor with pre-treatment views of Israel.

Table 12. Balance across Treatments in US Sample

Treatment	Gender	Education	Ethnicity	Religion	Employment	Income	Ideology	Party	Duration	Israel
Control	1.52	4.55	1.39	3.46	3.63	4.01	3.28	2.96	7.38	2.54
1	1.54	4.83	1.47	4.00	3.39	3.98	3.11	2.76	8.23	2.43
2	1.54	4.62	1.44	3.78	3.63	3.77	3.23	2.88	9.06	2.50
3	1.57	4.56	1.25	3.73	3.99	3.67	3.12	2.89	8.82	2.50
4	1.53	4.69	1.43	3.86	3.39	3.82	3.31	2.85	9.30	2.59
5	1.56	4.58	1.47	3.85	3.63	3.94	3.21	2.83	9.15	2.57
6	1.50	4.52	1.41	3.62	3.81	3.86	3.46	2.80	9.02	2.48

Table 13. Covariate Balance across Treatments and Survey Waves

Wave	Treatment	Duration	Gender	Ethnicity			Religion				Socioeconomic		Sociopolitical	
				White	Black	Asian	Christian	Catholic	Jewish	Muslim	Education	Employment	Ideology	Israel Views
July 2022	Control	7.59	1.53	0.81	0.11	0.05	0.32	0.18	0.03	0.01	4.54	3.72	3.30	2.55
July 2022	Israel Palestine	8.39	1.54	0.78	0.13	0.05	0.27	0.11	0.03	0.02	4.85	3.42	3.13	2.44
July 2022	Israel Positive	9.12	1.54	0.79	0.11	0.07	0.29	0.13	0.03	0.02	4.62	3.63	3.25	2.50
July 2022	Russia Ukraine	8.59	1.58	0.83	0.14	0.02	0.34	0.11	0.02	0.00	4.56	4.05	3.11	2.51
July 2022	Russia Ukraine Israel	8.30	1.53	0.81	0.10	0.06	0.25	0.15	0.05	0.01	4.70	3.42	3.30	2.59
July 2022	Saudi Houthis	8.28	1.57	0.78	0.12	0.07	0.25	0.14	0.05	0.01	4.57	3.70	3.19	2.57
July 2022	ISIS Afghanistan	8.88	1.50	0.82	0.10	0.05	0.32	0.15	0.02	0.01	4.53	3.84	3.46	2.49
October 2023	Control	7.60	1.54	0.76	0.12	0.07	0.32	0.14	0.03	0.01	4.45	3.03	3.75	2.62
October 2023	Hamas	8.79	1.53	0.78	0.06	0.11	0.28	0.19	0.02	0.00	4.53	2.87	3.68	2.63
October 2023	Israel	8.79	1.59	0.70	0.12	0.12	0.36	0.12	0.02	0.01	4.51	2.82	3.82	2.55
October 2023	Russia	8.48	1.49	0.74	0.08	0.14	0.35	0.15	0.01	0.01	4.53	2.85	3.82	2.51
April 2024	Control	7.54	1.49	0.74	0.13	0.08	0.33	0.18	0.03	0.01	4.49	3.03	3.71	2.48
April 2024	Hamas	8.19	1.53	0.78	0.10	0.08	0.34	0.20	0.03	0.00	4.58	3.22	4.11	2.30
April 2024	Israel	8.14	1.57	0.76	0.08	0.09	0.36	0.17	0.01	0.01	4.64	2.98	3.75	2.40
April 2024	Russia	7.45	1.58	0.74	0.12	0.09	0.35	0.15	0.01	0.02	4.68	2.69	3.72	2.33

Table 14. Multivariate Regressions, Russian Blame, and Responsibility

	Russians to blame			Russians responsible to speak out		
	July 2022	October 2023	April 2024	July 2022	October 2023	April 2024
(Intercept)	1.774***	1.819***	2.513***	2.838***	1.958***	2.848***
	(0.353)	(0.450)	(0.494)	(0.556)	(0.588)	(0.653)
Treatments						
Israel Palestine	0.008			0.388		
	(0.185)			(0.290)		
Israel positive	0.301			0.382		
	(0.185)			(0.292)		
Russia Ukraine	0.171			0.290		
	(0.186)			(0.292)		
Russia Ukraine Israel	–0.051			0.102		
	(0.185)			(0.292)		
Saudi Houthis	–0.100			0.191		
	(0.186)			(0.292)		
ISIS Afghanistan	0.285			0.302		
	(0.185)			(0.291)		
Hamas Israel		–0.234	0.091		–0.592**	–0.405
		(0.196)	(0.222)		(0.256)	(0.293)
Israel Hamas		–0.059	–0.029		–0.227	–0.342
		(0.195)	(0.220)		(0.255)	(0.291)
Russia Ukraine		–0.094	–0.229		–0.325	–0.364
		(0.195)	(0.221)		(0.255)	(0.292)
Pre–treatment covariates						
Attitudes toward Russia	0.139*	0.127	0.325***	–0.801***	–0.282**	–0.301**
	(0.080)	(0.100)	(0.114)	(0.126)	(0.131)	(0.150)
Attitudes toward Ukraine	–0.025	–0.037	–0.119	0.603***	0.672***	0.494***
	(0.070)	(0.087)	(0.097)	(0.110)	(0.114)	(0.128)
Knowledge of conflict	–0.132**	–0.099	–0.239**	0.226**	0.285**	0.302**
	(0.065)	(0.089)	(0.098)	(0.103)	(0.116)	(0.130)
7–pt ideology	0.063**	0.177***	0.059	0.016	0.153***	0.040
	(0.029)	(0.037)	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.056)
Num. Obs.	1454	945	799	1462	945	799
R^2	0.018	0.037	0.036	0.079	0.066	0.048

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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Digital Radicalization and Campus Antisemitism: The Role of Social Media Networks in Mainstreaming Extremist Rhetoric

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Abstract

Antizionist campus groups in the United States were active well before the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing war in Gaza. However, they have increasingly moved to the center of public debate over the boundaries between pro-Palestinian activism, support for Hamas, and antisemitism. Drawing on a comprehensive dataset—including nearly 10,000 recorded antisemitic incidents across 571 universities, over 1,000 anti-Israel campus groups at 368 institutions, and more than 76,000 Instagram posts from 662 accounts—this study analyzes how digital coordination, radicalized rhetoric, and offline mobilization have converged on US campuses, particularly in the wake of October 7. It identifies the central actors behind a coordinated network of campus and off-campus groups whose messaging increasingly mirrors that of designated terrorist organizations, and shows that radicalized language once confined to the fringes—including the glorification of violence and the demonization of Israel—has since gained traction in mainstream online discourse. Key findings include: a strong statistical association between anti-Israel group presence and antisemitic incidents, especially pronounced on campuses already experiencing elevated incident rates; a surge in antisemitic incidents immediately following October 7 and a peak during the spring 2024 encampments; a significant intensification of online activity by campus groups after October 7, facilitated by Instagram's co-authorship feature; and the emergence of a dense collaboration network linking local student organizations—above all SJP chapters—with radical off-campus groups and foreign ideological actors. These findings highlight the urgent need to understand and confront rising antisemitism and radicalization on US campuses.

Keywords: Antisemitism, antizionism, campus antisemitism, anti-Israel activism, Students for Justice in Palestine, Palestinian Youth Movement, social media, hate speech, Instagram, online radicalization, October 7, Hamas

INTRODUCTION



In recent years, US college campuses have become key battlegrounds for highly organized and increasingly radicalized anti-Israel activism. While political debate and student activism are vital to academic freedom, the rhetoric and actions of some groups now frequently cross the line into antisemitism, creating a hostile climate for many Jewish students and faculty. These effects have been exacerbated since October 7, 2023, with progressive Jewish students facing particular ostracization as progressive student groups often demand total rejection of the Jewish State.[1]

The issue has a growing online dimension that reaches well beyond university campuses.

Social media platforms play a central role in mobilizing these groups, amplifying radical narratives, and coordinating actions at local, national, and international levels. Slogans such as "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" and "Globalize the Intifada" have become normalized rallying cries, circulated extensively across both digital and physical spaces.[2]

Crucially, the implicit violence of such slogans no longer remains rhetorical. The brutal murder of Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim outside the Capital Jewish Museum on May 21, 2025, and the firebombing attack in Boulder, Colorado, on June 1, 2025—both linked to the invocation of such rhetoric—underscore the urgent need to examine their role in mainstreaming and inciting antisemitic violence. These incidents reflect a broader pattern documented in numerous reports,[3] all noting the increasingly blurry line between anti-Zionist rhetoric and antisemitic hate speech.

Campus-based organizations like National Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and transnational groups such as the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM), which reportedly maintains ties to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (NGO Monitor 2025), play central roles in spreading anti-Israel rhetoric. The US House of Representatives launched investigations in 2024 into the foreign funding of these organizations, while the Department of Homeland Security has begun monitoring online antisemitic activity, raising complex questions about civil liberties and academic freedom.[4]

The personal impact on Jewish students is substantial. American Jews report altering their behavior due to fear of antisemitism.[5] Even before October 7, surveys showed that most American Jewish college students had witnessed or experienced antisemitic incidents on campus.[6] These concerns extend globally: in Australia, sixty-four percent of Jewish students reported experiencing antisemitic incidents, with fifty-seven percent hiding their Jewish identity.[7] Similar trends have been documented in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.[8]

Several scholars have analyzed the intellectual foundations of this crisis. Cary Nelson's *Mindless* provides a trenchant analysis of how some university administrations have enabled the proliferation of antisemitic rhetoric, often in the name of academic freedom and social justice.[9] Postcolonial theory has framed Israel as inherently illegitimate, fostering a Manichean worldview that dehumanizes Israelis and Jews while reinterpreting acts of terror as "decolonial resistance." Edward Said, a foundational figure in postcolonial theory, argued that Israel was founded on the "negation of Palestine and the Palestinians" and has attempted "to objectively eliminate the Arab Palestinians."[10]

To be clear: We do not conflate pro-Palestinian advocacy with antisemitism. We affirm the universal right to free expression, peaceful protest, and legitimate political criticism. Our concern lies with rhetoric that promotes or excuses violence, erases Jewish identity, or invokes antisemitic tropes under the guise of justice. This analysis focuses on documented antisemitic incidents and online activity where anti-Israel activism intersects with the glorification of violence and amplification of extremist narratives.

DATASET

This study draws on three datasets:

- the online activity of anti-Israel campus groups on Instagram from 2013 to 2024, comprising over 76,000 posts and related comments;
- a database of nearly 10,000 antisemitic incidents recorded between 2015 and 2024 across 571 universities;
- a list of more than 1,000 anti-Israel campus groups active at 368 universities.

The data on antisemitic incidents and anti-Israel campus groups is publicly available on the website of the AMCHA Initiative, "a

non-profit organization dedicated to investigating, documenting, educating about, and combating antisemitism at institutions of higher education in America."[11] To our knowledge, it constitutes the most comprehensive dataset of its kind. However, the reported number of incidents should be interpreted with caution for several reasons. There is no standardized national reporting system, and many incidents likely go unreported and are thus missing from the AMCHA database. In addition, due to the unprecedented surge in antisemitic activity on US college and university campuses following October 7, 2023, the organization is working through a significant backlog. Because AMCHA processes incidents by institution, this may account for some apparent outliers with unusually low figures. We plan to publish an updated report with revised data later this year.

A total of 1,013 anti-Israel campus groups formed by students, faculty, and staff were identified. Approximately one-third of these are chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). When combined with other explicitly pro-Palestinian groups, they account for forty-five percent of all anti-Israel campus organizations. Faculty-led groups also represent a significant portion, comprising seventeen percent of the total. Other notable categories include radical leftist groups, antizionist Jewish organizations, and groups primarily focused on divestment campaigns targeting Israel.

Eighty-one percent of the anti-Israel campus groups were found to be linked to Instagram accounts. However, some of these accounts were inactive or had been deleted at the time of data collection in January 2025. We successfully scraped publicly available data from 662 active accounts, resulting in a dataset containing detailed information on 76,204 posts published between 2013 and 2024. For each post, the dataset includes the post description, publication date, engagement metrics (likes and comment counts), co-authors or tagged users, and up to ten of the most recent comments.

Instagram Data and Criteria for Classifying Student Groups as Anti-Israel

We identified anti-Israel groups on campus by using the AMCHA Initiative's publicly available database of student organizations categorized by antizionist advocacy or activism. The AMCHA Initiative defines such activity using multiple criteria, including "condoning terrorism against Israel," "denying Jews self-determination," the "demonization of Israel," and "calling for or promoting an economic, academic, or cultural boycott of Israel (BDS)."[12] We extracted the listed groups and their social media profiles from AMCHA's directory,[13] and used these identifiers to construct our scraping queries via Bright Data.

The data acquisition was conducted using Bright Data's automated web scraping technologies, which allowed us to systematically extract relevant content from identified Instagram profiles. The scraper navigated profile pages, retrieving post content, associated metadata, and engagement metrics.[14] To scrape Instagram, Bright Data relies on rotating proxies (with a pool of over 150 million IP addresses worldwide) and advanced anti-bot measures, such as automatic CAPTCHA solving and user-agent rotation, to avoid detection and blocking by Instagram's anti-scraping systems.

Instagram introduced its Collab feature in October 2021, allowing users to co-author posts. When used, a post appears simultaneously on the profiles of all co-authors, sharing the same likes, comments, and engagement metrics. However, co-authorship requires active coordination: one user must invite another to collaborate, and the invitation must be accepted before the post is published on both accounts. Since 2022, forty percent of all posts by anti-Israel groups are co-authored, indicating a strong collaboration.

Anti-Israel campus groups frequently collaborate among themselves, but they collaborate even more often with other accounts. In total, they engaged in collaborations with 5,683 Instagram accounts outside the original set of identified campus groups.

The majority of Instagram posts in the dataset are either single-image posts (fifty-five percent) or carousel posts (thirty-five percent), which together account for ninety percent of all content. In contrast, reels and videos are each used in only five percent of posts.

This indicates a strong preference among campus-based anti-Israel groups for static visual formats, suggesting that these bimodal content types—simple images and image sequences—offer the highest shareability within their activist networks.

Antisemitic Incidents

Antisemitic incidents on campus typically rise during the academic semester and decline when students and faculty are away—such as during summer and other academic breaks, as well as weekends. This pattern is expected. However, the highest monthly number of incidents were recorded in April 2024 during the wave of campus encampments, with 566 incidents, followed closely by October 2023, which saw 540. The third highest peak occurred during the Gaza war in May 2021.

An in-depth examination of October 2023 activity reveals a substantial escalation in antisemitic incidents. The average daily incident rate increased from 4.5 during October 1–6 to 21 between October 7 and 26, falling slightly to 18 per day in October 27–31.

A notable rise to 17 incidents was recorded on October 7, with a further peak of 33 incidents occurring on the Monday following the pogrom in Israel, coincident with students' return to campus (see Figure 1). This elevated level of daily antisemitic incidents persisted until October 12, which marked the "National Day of Resistance" as designated by the National Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP).[15]

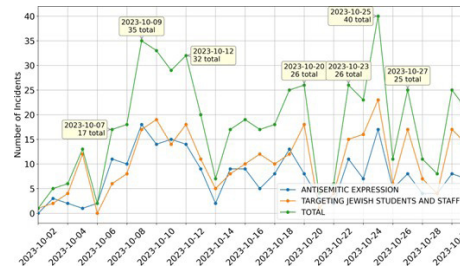

FIGURE 1. Antisemitic Incidents on US Campuses per Day in October 2023

It is noteworthy that the number of incidents per day was higher in the immediate aftermath of October 7, but—against expectations—declined slightly following the start of the Israeli ground invasion and the rising casualty count in Gaza.

Antisemitic Incidents in Correlation to Anti-Israel Groups

Columbia University/Barnard College recorded the highest number of antisemitic incidents (413) from 2015 to 2024, followed by Harvard (240), UC Berkeley (232), and NYU (204). These universities also host numerous anti-Israel campus groups. Three UC campuses rank among the top six, while Ivy League institutions feature prominently (see Table 1).

Of 609 universities in the AMCHA dataset, 571 recorded antisemitic incidents and 368 had anti-Israel groups present. Notably, 320 universities had both incidents and groups, while 241 experienced incidents without such groups, and 48 had groups but no recorded incidents.

We found strong statistical evidence linking anti-Israel group presence to antisemitic incidents.[16] Quantile regression reveals that, on campuses with the highest numbers of antisemitic incidents, the link between the number of anti-Israel groups and such incidents is

Table 1. Top Twenty Universities with the Highest Number of Recorded Antisemitic Incidents and Groups, 2015–2024. Source: AMCHA Initiative

University	Antisemitic Incidents	Quantity of Anti-Israel Groups
Columbia University/ Barnard College	413	20
Harvard University	240	11
UC Berkeley	232	14
New York University (NYU)	204	14
University of California Santa Cruz	203	12
University of California Los Angeles	197	12
University of Minnesota Twin Cities	189	6
University of Michigan	186	6
Rutgers University New Brunswick	182	11
University of Chicago	156	10
Brown University	155	9
San Francisco State University	153	3
University of Pennsylvania	150	10
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	147	5
Stanford University	138	6
Northwestern University	127	8
Tufts University	120	8
University of Washington	119	5
Georgetown University	118	8
Ohio State University	111	10

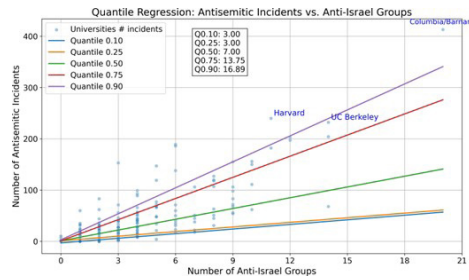

FIGURE 1. Antisemitic Incidents on US Campuses per Day in October 2023

much stronger. While this relationship exists across all levels of campus activity, its intensity increases substantially at higher incident levels. At universities at the bottom ten and twenty-five percent of incident rates, each additional anti-Israel group is associated (on average) with a modest, consistent increase of approximately three reported incidents. At the median, this figure more than doubles to an average of seven additional incidents per additional group. Among the top twenty-five percent of universities with the highest incident rates, the impact grows more pronounced, reaching approximately fourteen incidents for each additional group and peaking at nearly seventeen in the top ten percent. Figure 2 illustrates these patterns, with lines representing the relationship at the tenth, twenty-fifth, fiftieth (median), seventy-fifth, and ninetieth percentiles (shown in blue, orange, green, red, and purple, respectively), where each line estimates the number of antisemitic incidents associated with the number of anti-Israel groups for universities at that level of incident severity—these median effects should be understood as indicative trends rather than precise forecasts.

These findings suggest that sustained anti-Israel group activity may foster campus climates where antisemitic expression becomes normalized. However, this analysis is preliminary and requires caution. It doesn't account

for university size, group activity intensity, institutional factors, or geographic variables. Additionally, reported incidents likely underrepresent actual occurrences, and correlation does not establish causation.

Instagram Posts by Anti-Israel Campus Groups

Instagram serves as the primary platform for anti-Israel campus groups, with over eighty percent maintaining active accounts. Online activity surged after October 7, 2023, and peaked during spring 2024 campus encampments, with the highest daily post volume on May 1, 2024. Another notable spike occurred on the anniversary of Hamas's attack (October 7, 2024) under the slogan "One Year of Genocide."

Radicalized rhetoric invoking "resistance," "martyrdom," and genocide accusations against Israel became significantly more widespread after October 7. Strikingly, genocide accusations began circulating on October 7 itself—while Israel was still counting Hamas's victims—suggesting ideologically driven narratives disconnected from ground realities.

The top ten most-liked posts (each exceeding 100,000 likes, one reaching 432,307) reveal troubling patterns of extremism and propaganda. All were published either after October 7 or during spring 2024 encampments, primarily by SJP chapters and similar organizations. Two originated from off-campus groups—the People's Forum and Healthcare Workers for Palestine NYC—but were co-authored by campus groups at Columbia and Cornell.

These posts operate as propaganda campaigns rather than grassroots activism, employing morally absolutist rhetoric that presents the conflict in stark binary terms with no space for nuance or competing perspectives. The content includes personal intimidation tactics such as support for marching to the private residence of Harvard's interim president (receiving over 100,000 likes), glorification of violence through affirming "Palestinian resistance" one day after October 7 civilian massacre, delegitimizing language such as consistent use of "IOF" (Israeli Occupation Forces) instead of IDF, and performative disruption that celebrates walkouts, die-ins, and confrontational protests as victories.

The most-liked post (432,307 likes) came from SUPER at UW on October 8, 2023, endorsing "the right of Palestinians to resist" while Hamas terrorists were still active. SUPER has deepened ties with extremist networks through collaboration with Samidoun (designated terrorist fundraiser by the United States and Canada in 2024), co-authoring posts with Tariq El-Tahrir, which praised the May 2025 murders at the Capital Jewish Museum, and organizing a "Right to Resist Teach-In" using imagery identical to Hamas propaganda.

These posts reflect a campus culture increasingly prioritizing ideological performance over intellectual integrity, normalizing rhetoric that glorifies political violence and terrorism.

Mapping the Anti-Zionist Campus Group Networks

Instagram introduced its co-authoring feature, known as collaborative posts, in June 2021. Initially, it allowed for a single collaborative account. Later, in 2023, Instagram expanded the feature to allow up to three collaborators, and then in 2024, it further increased the limit to five collaborators. Co-authored posts display the usernames of all contributing accounts, require mutual invitation and approval, and are simultaneously published to the profile grids of all collaborators. Engagement metrics such as likes and comments are aggregated, increasing both visibility and perceived legitimacy of the content. Given these dynamics, co-authorship on Instagram can be interpreted as a robust proxy for deliberate collaboration between actors.

A preliminary analysis of this network—derived from co-authorship data—reveals two central findings. First, anti-Israel campus groups exhibit a high level of digital interconnectivity and coordinated messaging. Students for Justice

in Palestine (SJP), both nationally and through its many campus chapters, emerges as the most significant actor within this ecosystem, accounting for forty percent of the top twenty collaborators. National SJP alone produced 758 collaborative posts, significantly more than any other group in the dataset. This pattern reflects SJP's role not only as a central hub in the network but also as a key driver of message amplification and cross-campus coordination.

Second, the network extends well beyond campus-based organizations. A substantial number of the most frequent collaborators are non-campus, ideologically radical groups, including the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) and DISSENTERS. PYM, which has reportedly maintained ties to the US-designated terrorist organization Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), has the largest follower count in the dataset (743,000) and ranks third in total collab- orations. Similarly, groups from the radical political left—such as DISSENTERS and UMN Students for a Democratic Society—feature prominently in the network, suggesting ideological alignment and operational synergy between student-led antizionist activism and broader leftist political movements.

The growth of Instagram's co-authoring capabilities over time—from one to five collaborators—has likely facilitated broader coalition-building and the simultaneous targeting of multiple audiences. The appearance of deleted accounts among the top collaborators may indicate violations of platform policies or strategic removals in response to reputational risk or moderation pressure. Overall, the findings suggest that this network is not only digitally sophisticated and highly coordinated, but also deeply embedded within a wider ecosystem of radical activism, both on and off campus. These dynamics merit continued scrutiny as they contribute to the normalization and amplification of extremist rhetoric across educational and digital spheres.

The National Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Its Network

Among all anti-Israel campus groups, National SJP stands out as the most frequent collaborator with other like-minded organizations on US campuses (see Table 2). Their posts appear on many of the other anti-Israel groups' Instagram pages. The group has been active for over three decades, organizing campaigns to promote boycotts of Israel and portraying the state in a highly negative light—often through symbolic actions such as constructing mock "apartheid walls" on university campuses. With numerous chapters across the United States, SJP's national organization plays a central role in coordinating local activities and shaping the broader network of anti-Israel activism. Following the Hamas-led attacks on October 7, 2023, SJP was well positioned to rapidly escalate its activities. Within a day, the organization issued a call for a "Day of Resistance" across the United States and Canada (referred to in their materials as "occupied Turtle Island") and released a detailed organizing toolkit. The organizing toolkit published on October 8 included not only strategic guidance, talking points, and templates for mobilization materials, but also a statement explicitly celebrating the Hamas-led attack. It read:

> Today, we witness a historic win for the Palestinian resistance: across land, air, and sea, our people have broken down the artificial barriers of the Zionist entity, taking with it the façade of an impenetrable settler colony and reminding each of us that total return and liberation to Palestine is near. As the Palestinian student movement, we have an unshakable responsibility to join the call for mass mobilization. National liberation is near—glory to our resistance, to our martyrs, and to our steadfast people.[17]

The statement made no mention of, let alone condemnation for, the atrocities committed on

Table 2. Top 20 Collaborators in the Anti-Israel Campus Group Networks (1 = SJP, 2 = radical Palestinian group, 3 = non-campus radical political left, 4 = Jewish group, 5 = deleted account)

Top 20 Collaborators	Followers	Collaborations
National SJP (1)	75,800	758
SJP Chicago (1)	37,700	498
Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) (2)	743,000	346
US Palestinian Community Network (2)	40,400	339
DISSENTERS (3)	47,100	336
TAHRIR University of Michigan (5)	7,863	301
SJP University of Minnesota (1)	10,700	301
Harvard Grad. Students 4 Palestine (5)	8,836	293
JVP University of Michigan (4)	6,244	291
MIT Grads For Palestine (5)	2,854	274
MIT Coalition against Apartheid (5)	account deleted	273
SJP New York University (1)	14,600	261
SAFE University of Michigan (5)	account deleted	241
Maryland 2 Palestine (5)	11,100	241
SJP Chapters Southern California (1)	8,542	225
SJP University of Houston (1)	10,400	225
SJP University of Pittsburgh (1)	deleted	223
SJP New Brunswick (1)	11,200	222
UMN Students for a Democratic Society (3)	8,654	214
Harvard Undergrad PSC (5)	70,200	210

October 7. On the contrary, it framed the violence as a justified "confrontation by any means necessary," and denied Israeli civilians civilian status by labeling them "settlers" and "military assets." The glorification of "resistance" and "martyrs" effectively endorses—and celebrates—the actions carried out by Hamas on that day. The goal, framed as a "total return and liberation," implies the elimination of the State of Israel. In keeping with revolutionary rhetoric, Israel is referred to as the "Zionist entity," while the United States and Canada are called "Turtle Island," symbolically rejecting the legitimacy of all three states. The toolkit widely distributed by SJP included flyer templates for social media that visually glorify the October 7 attack. These materials feature imagery such as powered paragliders and captured tanks—symbols that evoke victory and heroism.

From early on, SJP's language and imagery have drawn a direct connection between campus activism and the actions of Hamas, both of which are framed under the banner of "resistance." While open calls for violence are rare and Hamas is hardly ever mentioned directly, some posts endorse Hamas's murderous activities, such as a post from October 12, 2025, that called for "death to the collaborators," a

phrase referring to Hamas's murder of Palestinians, just three days after the ceasefire announcement.

A closer examination of National SJP's collaboration network reveals that its partnerships extend well beyond the university setting. National SJP routinely engages with both campus-affiliated and external organizations. While some of its regular partners are local SJP chapters, many are not connected to academic institutions. In fact, only two of the ten most frequent collaborators are university-based groups.

By a significant margin, SJP's most frequent collaborator is the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM)—an international organization with local chapters that also appear regularly in SJP's network. PYM has been noted for promoting individuals affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a group designated as a terrorist organization by the US government since 1997.[18] SJP's partnership with PYM significantly amplifies its visibility; PYM's social media following—approximately 737,000—is nearly ten times larger than that of SJP. This close collaboration not only broadens SJP's audience but also suggests that PYM's radical antizionist rhetoric and visual language may shape elements of SJP's discourse. PYM's posts frequently incorporate imagery associated with socialist iconography, national liberation movements, and Islamist martyrdom. Such content often features slogans that reject the legitimacy of the Israeli state, depict convicted Palestinian terrorists imprisoned in Israel as political prisoners, and glorify members of terrorist groups—such as Ahmad Mansour, killed by the IDF on April 7, 2025, who was affiliated with Palestinian Islamic Jihad, another US-designated terror organization.[19]

In addition to PYM, other frequent collaborators include groups from the radical left and anti-war movements, such as Dissenters, Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER), and The People's Forum NYC. In recent years, these organizations have increasingly focused their activism on the Israel-Palestinian conflict and war in Gaza. Their collaboration with SJP helps amplify SJP's messaging within broader protest networks. While National SJP has 76,000 followers, this is a fraction of the 743,000 followers of the Palestinian Youth Movement. Dissenters has 47,100 followers, ANSWER, 41,000, and The People's Forum, 121,000.[20]

Key Actors in the Anti-Israel Campus Group Networks

The anti-Israel network on US campuses is structured around a set of highly coordinated and ideologically aligned student and faculty groups. At the center of this network is National Students for Justice in Palestine (National SJP), which serves as the primary organizer and narrative driver of anti-Israel campus activism—even though it does not operate within a traditional top-down hierarchical structure. With the highest number of collaborations with other groups, National SJP plays a central role in shaping protest strategy, coordinating campaigns, and distributing radical messaging—including materials that openly glorify Hamas-led violence as legitimate resistance. Its influence was especially visible following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks, when it immediately called for a nationwide "Day of Resistance" and circulated an organizing toolkit that celebrated the attack as a historic victory for Palestinian liberation. Local SJP chapters—such as those at New York University, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Chicago—serve as operational hubs with may collaborations across universities. These groups are not merely local activists but active participants in a broader, digitally networked movement. They replicate National SJP's messaging, organize on-the-ground actions like walkouts and encampments, and frequently co-author Instagram posts with both other campus chapters and external groups. While they often present themselves as grassroots voices,

their activities reflect high levels of coordination and alignment with ideologically extreme narratives.

Beyond SJP, other student-led organizations such as Palestinian Solidarity Committees and Divestment campaigns play a significant role in reinforcing the anti-Israel narrative within academic settings. These groups often frame their activism in terms of social justice or human rights, but their rhetoric is frequently indistinguishable from that of more overtly radical organizations. Accusations of genocide, apartheid, and settler-colonialism are central themes, and calls for divestment are embedded within broader ideological projects that seek to delegitimize the State of Israel altogether.

Graduate student organizations, including Harvard Graduate Students for Palestine and MIT Grads for Palestine, contribute to the incorporation of this activism into the university structure. Though they often operate under the guise of social justice or are linked to legitimate efforts of unionization, these groups also reproduce extremist rhetoric, lending it a veneer of intellectual authority. Their involvement strengthens the movement's credibility among faculty and administration and expands its influence within professional and scholarly circles.

Faculty-led groups, albeit less active on Instagram, play a critical and often overlooked role in legitimizing and sustaining this activism. Comprising roughly seventeen percent of all identified anti-Israel groups, these faculty organizations often serve as ideological anchors, reinforcing the framing of antizionism as a necessary expression of anti-colonial or social justice commitments. Faculty members involved in such groups con- tribute to shaping classroom discourse, organize teach-ins, and support student activism, often without challenge from institutional oversight. In doing so, they help normalize rhetoric that is not only hostile to Israel but increasingly antagonistic toward Jewish identity itself.

A further component of the campus network is the involvement of anti-Zionist Jewish or partly Jewish groups, such as Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). While presenting themselves as internal critics of Zionism, such groups are often more active in non-Jewish activist spaces and have, at times, promoted antisemitic narratives.[21] More notably, their participation often serves to provide rhetorical and symbolic cover for other organizations, helping to deflect accusations of antisemitism and to discredit concerns raised by Jewish students and advocacy groups. Groups like JVP at the University of Michigan frequently co-author content with SJP and similar organizations, reinforcing shared messaging while framing it as grounded in Jewish moral authority. By endorsing messaging that denies Jewish self-determination and legitimizes violence against Israeli civilians, these groups enable the normalization of radical anti-Israel positions within activist spaces while claiming moral legitimacy through Jewish identity.

In sum, the campus-based anti-Israel network is far from an unstructured or spontaneous student movement. Rather, it is a tightly coordinated system, characterized by cross-campus collaboration, ideological alignment, and significant participation from faculty and off-campus groups. Through digital platforms like Instagram, these actors project a unified message that often frequently echoes extremist ideology, transforming the university into a staging ground for activism and radical political mobilization.

Off-Campus and Foreign Influence in the Radicalization of Anti-Israel Campus Groups

The role of off-campus and foreign actors, including groups with reported links to terrorist organizations and Iranian-linked accounts, in amplifying anti-Israel campus content raises concerns about external interference in university discourse. These actors use emotionally charged rhetoric to insert themselves into US student movements and steer them in increasingly

extreme directions. Organizations unaffiliated with universities—including groups with documented ties to US-designated terrorist organizations like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—are not only frequent collaborators with campus-based groups but also major amplifiers of extremist rhetoric.

Among the most active non-campus partners is the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM), which collaborates extensively with campus organizations such as National Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). PYM's visual language and rhetoric mirror those of Hamas and other militant groups, invoking themes of martyrdom, armed resistance, and revolutionary liberation. These narratives are seamlessly integrated into the content circulated by student groups, blurring the line between protest and propaganda.

The use of Instagram's co-authorship feature has facilitated the widespread and rapid dissemination of this rhetoric. Posts created or co-authored by off-campus groups from the (radical) left, like Dissenters, The People's Forum, and Healthcare Workers for Palestine NYC frequently reach audiences of tens of thousands, shaping the ideological contours of campus discourse far beyond any one university.

Of particular concern is the ideological convergence between far-left activist networks, Islamist revolutionary narratives, and certain antisemitic tropes. These groups often employ emotionally charged language rooted in (pseudo-)Marxist and Islamic revolutionary frameworks, recasting Israel as a settler-colonial entity and its citizens as legitimate targets of "resistance." Here, we use the term "pseudo-Marxist" to refer to a Third Worldist romanticism[22] reminiscent of Lenin's reformulation of Marx's original call, "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" into "Workers and oppressed peoples of all countries, unite!"[23] This reformulation shifted the focus from class struggle to a distorted version of anti-imperialist solidarity, which rhetorically, is often adopted by anti-Zionist groups to address the "Palestinian cause." The glorification of "martyrs," vilification of "Zionist" entities, and rejection of Israel's legitimacy are consistent features of this messaging—often echoing talking points used by Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Iranian regime.

Indeed, foreign influence has also been documented, including endorsements from Iranian-linked Instagram accounts. Some of these accounts have actively engaged with US campus group content. For example, one such user urged students at Indiana University to read a letter from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, signaling a deliberate attempt to steer student movements toward ideological positions favored by the Islamic Republic.

This networked ecosystem—linking campus activists, radical off-campus groups, and foreign ideological actors—creates a highly porous and politicized environment. It facilitates the mainstreaming of radical antizionist rhetoric and contributes to a climate in which antisemitism, intimidation, and, in some cases, violent incitement can flourish. Slogans like "Free Palestine" and "Resistance by any means necessary" are no longer merely symbolic; they are deployed to justify real-world acts of violence, including the murder of Jewish civilians. Understanding the reach and influence of these off-campus and foreign actors is crucial to addressing the radicalization of student activism and safeguarding academic environments from external manipulation and ideological extremism.

CONCLUSION

The Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023, marked a turning point in campus rhetoric and activist mobilization. The glorification of these attacks by major student groups revealed how certain campus narratives have embraced language and imagery associated with violent extremism. Our analysis of antisemitic incidents, anti-Israel campus group activity, and social media activities in 2015–2024 reveals not only factors contributing to heightened antisemitic activity, but also

how radicalized language has been mainstreamed through emotionally charged online content that frequently mirrors propaganda spread by Hamas and other terrorist organizations.

Antisemitic incidents surge following major geopolitical events involving Israel, but campus activism appears even slightly more influential than developments in Israel or Gaza. The highest monthly total occurred in April 2024 during university encampments, while October 2023 saw immediate escalation coinciding with SJP's "National Day of Resistance" call. Notably, incident rates were higher during Israel's initial airstrikes than after the ground invasion began, suggesting that Hamas massacre glorification combined with activist mobilization drove campus antisemitism more than the ongoing military campaign.

Statistical analysis confirms that anti-Israel group presence strongly correlates with higher antisemitic incident levels, especially on campuses already experiencing problems. This suggests these groups help normalize an anti-Israel climate that lowers thresholds for antisemitic acts.

Radicalized language demonizing Israel and Jewish students has moved from fringe activist discourse into the mainstream. Terms like "resistance" and "martyrdom" now widely glorify violence and terrorism, while accusations of genocide, settler colonialism, and apartheid circulate without evidence. Anti-Israel campus groups have introduced narratives previously confined to militant spaces to broader audiences, with social media posts garnering hundreds of thousands of likes.

Much of this language and imagery is indistinguishable from Hamas propaganda, with campus groups directly lifting visuals from official Hamas materials. What presents as grassroots student activism is increasingly embedded in a networked ecosystem leveraging digital platforms to radicalize and normalize extremist worldviews.

The anti-Israel campus network centers on National Students for Justice in Palestine (National SJP), which coordinates campaigns and distributes radical messaging glorifying Hamas violence. Local SJP chapters serve as operational hubs, while Palestinian Solidarity Committees and Divestment campaigns reinforce anti-Israel narratives under social justice framing.

Faculty-led groups (seventeen percent of identified anti-Israel organizations) legitimize this activism by framing antizionism as necessary anti-colonial commitment. Antizionist Jewish groups like Jewish Voice for Peace provide rhetorical cover, helping deflect antisemitism accusations while endorsing messaging that denies Jewish self-determination and legitimizes violence against Israeli civilians.

Organizations with documented ties to US-designated terrorist groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine actively collaborate with campus groups. The Palestinian Youth Movement extensively partners with National SJP, using visual language and rhetoric mirroring Hamas and other militant groups. Instagram's co-authorship feature facilitates rapid dissemination of this content to tens of thousands.

Foreign influence includes Iranian-linked Instagram accounts endorsing US campus groups and disseminating regime propaganda. This networked ecosystem linking campus activists, radical off-campus groups, and foreign ideological actors creates conditions where antisemitism, intimidation, and violent incitement can flourish.

Universities must recognize that radical anti-Israel activism can become a conduit for incitement, intimidation, and violence. Clear policies distinguishing protected political speech from harassment—particularly when content echoes terrorist organization rhetoric—are urgently needed. This includes symbolic content glorifying terror under "resistance" or "liberation" guises.

Most dangerous is cultivating campus climates where extremist views are normalized

and dissent stigmatized. Students and faculty questioning antisemitic or pro-terrorist rhetoric often face social ostracism, academic consequences, or intimidation. While surveys show most students and Americans reject extremist rhetoric and view Israel as legitimate, campus discourse is shaped by radical minorities through intimidation and ideological policing.

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Antisemitic Narratives on Social Media Become More Radicalized: Increases in Posts Portraying Jews as Evil, Dehumanizing Jews, and from People Self-Identifying as Antisemitic since October 7, 2023

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Abstract

This study examines the radicalization of antisemitic rhetoric on social media following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel. We analyzed English-language public posts from October 7, 2023, to July 28, 2025, and compared them with the preceding time period. Posts were categorized into three themes: depictions of Jews as inherently evil, dehumanizing language, and self-identification as antisemitic or aligned with Nazi ideology. Results show substantial increases across all categories—330%, 324%, and 250% respectively—indicating both quantitative and qualitative escalation. Particularly concerning is the rise in individuals openly embracing the label "antisemitic," signaling an erosion of social stigma. These findings reflect a historical pattern in which normalization of hate facilitates radicalization, which can lead to real-world violence. The results underscore the urgent need for interventions to disrupt pathways from online antisemitic rhetoric to offline harm.

Keywords: Antisemitism, social media, radicalization, dehumanization

INTRODUCTION

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Antisemitism continues to haunt the Jewish community in modern times, visible not only in the spike in antisemitic incidents since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, but also in the rise in antisemitic hate speech on social media. Since the October 7 Hamas attacks, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)[1] and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL)[2] have recorded the highest numbers of antisemitic incidents in the United States. According to the ADL, in 2024 alone, there were 9,354 antisemitic incidents across the country, marking a 344% increase over the past five years and an 893% increase over the past decade.[3] Disturbingly, some studies reveal that segments of the population view violence against Jews as understandable or even justifiable,[4] indicating that people are becoming numb to antisemitic events.

On social media the scale of this trend is staggering. At the Blue Square Alliance against Hate (BSA), our Command Center monitors one billion social media posts daily, and in 2023 we tracked a 333% increase in the volume of mentions related to Israel, Judaism, and/or antisemitism, compared to the year before,[5] with the majority of posts after October 7. In 2024 we tracked a further 51% increase compared to the year before.[6] (This monitoring covers the total online conversation about these topics, not

just antisemitic speech.) During this time, we have tracked the normalization of antisemitic language such as Holocaust denial,[7] the resurgence of antisemitic conspiracy theories,[8] and the use of coded language and emojis to circumvent detection.[9]

One example of the normalization of antisemitic hate speech is the documented increase in antisemitic conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories asserting Jewish control over global systems and theories about blood libel haven't disappeared—they have adapted and become more common online,[10] reflecting widespread acceptance of antisemitic tropes. What is most troubling is not merely the existence of such beliefs, but their casual integration into everyday online discourse.

Other research shows us that when hateful concepts are normalized, they lose their radical effect, meaning that even more radical content starts trickling in. A report by Julia Ebner, "*From Margins to Mainstream: How Extremism Has Conquered the Political Middle,"* published on the website of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, highlights the mainstreaming of extremist views and radicalization dynamics. Ebner emphasizes how extremist ideologies—once confined to the margins—are now embedded in public discourse. This reflects a radicalization process in which online users are steadily exposed to fringe ideas that no longer appear radical due to their repetition and normalization across platforms, contributing to rising hate crimes against minority communities, the reversal of civil rights such as LGBTQ+ and abortion rights, and a pushback against established media and science institutions.[11] The normalization of antisemitic hate speech online exposes a dangerous societal shift that can give rise to more radicalized speech on social media, resulting in more hate crimes against the Jewish community.

We have seen this phenomenon manifest itself historically. In August 1920, during his rise to power, Adolf Hitler normalized antisemitic rhetoric in Germany by dehumanizing Jews, likening Jews to germs—a disease to be "treated" at the root—laying the psychological groundwork for genocide.[12] Similarly, today's digital spaces host rhetoric that draws on similar tactics: normalizing antisemitism and dehumanizing Jews. For example, we have tracked the employing of animal emojis such as pigs, lizards, and rats to metaphorically strip Jews of their humanity.[13] Other posters refer to Jews as a "virus" or "cancer," blaming them for societal decay.[14]

Nazi propaganda also purposefully painted Jews as "evil." It was the continuation of centuries-old racism and anti-religious sentiment. This was not new: Jews have been painted as the Antichrist since the Middle Ages. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these legends were revived and adapted to serve racial mysticism and political mobilization. Accusations of ritual murder, blood libel, and rootlessness were reignited and amplified by the Nazi party to frame Jews as morally corrupt beings and a fundamental threat to civilization.[15]

What was once unspeakable is tweeted, memed, and repeated in today's social media world. In this paper we will quantify how antisemitism online has become more radicalized after the October 7 Hamas attacks, by showing that narratives depicting Jews as evil and posts aimed at dehumanizing Jews have significantly increased on social media. We will also be adding a new dimension to this conversation by exploring the recent growth of the number of people who are publicly and proudly self-identifying as antisemitic or aligning with Nazi ideology.

METHODOLOGY

We examined the radicalization of antisemitic rhetoric on social media since October 7, 2023, by tracking increases in posts that dehumanize Jews, depict Jews as evil, or express explicit antisemitic or Nazi-aligned views. Using Brandwatch®, a commercial social media listening and analytics platform, we analyzed

public posts in English from October 7, 2023, to July 28, 2025, and compared them to the same number of days (660) prior (December 16, 2021, to October 6, 2023).

Brandwatch® collects and analyzes publicly available content across multiple social media platforms including X, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, forums, blogs, and Bluesky in real time and has been used in peer-reviewed studies across public health and digital information research.[16] Boolean queries—search strings combining keywords with operators (AND, OR, NOT)—and custom filters were used to extract and analyze relevant datasets.

The ultimate Boolean query was developed by BSA using institutional research and expert consensus. Over many years BSA created a keyword-based query designed to capture a wide range of posts related to Israel, Jewish culture and antisemitism, while also carefully excluding posts that were deemed irrelevant. The base query includes 6,695 keywords and phrases related to Israel, Jewish culture, and antisemitism.

To capture only the posts that were of interest to this paper, we categorized posts into three topics based on Boolean strings that evoked the themes we analyzed:

1. *depicting Jews as evil*: posts portraying Jews as inherently malevolent or morally corrupt, or the source of evil (e.g., "Jews are evil," "Jews are bloodthirsty");
2. *dehumanizing Jews*: posts depicting Jews as subhuman, parasitic, animalistic, or otherwise outside the bounds of humanity (e.g., "Jews are a virus," "Jews are rats");
3. *self-identified antisemitism or Nazi ideology*: posts in which users openly express pride in antisemitic beliefs or self-identify as antisemitic (e.g., "I'm antisemitic," "It's ok to be a Nazi").

For the purposes of this paper, we decided to capture only posts that explicitly targeted Jews, while excluding mentions that targeted only Israelis or Zionists, in order to analyze the increase in explicit antisemitic speech on social media without invoking a debate surrounding antizionism and anti-Israel sentiment. We also excluded reposts and reshares of posts to not inflate the number of posts that were tagged into each category.

Each Boolean string was refined through targeted sampling. The cleaning process concluded when a 100-post random sample per category consistently met the intended criteria. In most cases, posts that included desired phrases but not the desired sentiment were removed to the best of our ability.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our analysis revealed significant increases in all three categories of posts on social media since October 7, 2023. Posts depicting Jews as evil increased by 330% between October 7, 2023, and July 28, 2025, for a total of 130,545 posts, compared to 30,366 from the preceding time period. Similarly, posts dehumanizing Jews increased by 324% during the same time period to a total of 115,187 posts, compared to 27,143 from the preceding time period. Posts of people self-identifying as antisemitic increased by 250% during the same time period; this category, however, had significantly fewer posts than the other two, totaling at 12,858 posts, compared to the 3,677 from the preceding time period. The antisemitism self-identification category also saw a peak closer to the beginning of our analysis timeframe (Figure 3). The "evil" (Figure 1) and "dehumanized" (Figure 2) categories both

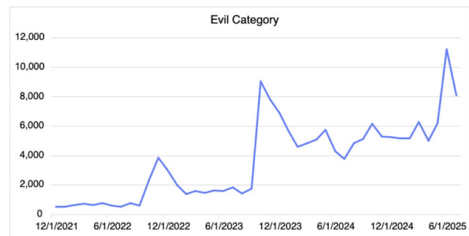

FIGURE 1. "Evil" Category Mentions over Time.

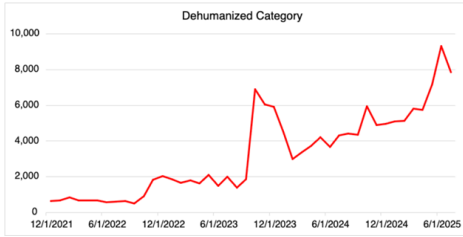

FIGURE 2. "Dehumanized" Category Mentions over Time.

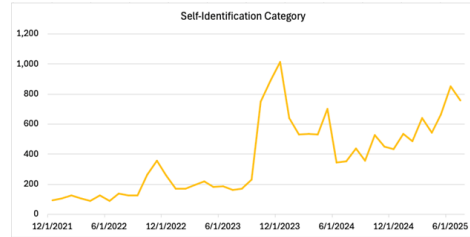

FIGURE 3. "Self-Identified" Mentions over Time.

peaked towards the end of our analysis due to the arm conflict between Israel and Iran in June 2025. The steady increase of mentions since January 2024 comes after the start of the conflict in Gaza, where social media users see and react to content and press that gets released regarding it.

Evil

In our analysis we collected over 130k posts that call Jews "evil" in some fashion. Among these posts, we also found that 111k of those mentions lack any explicit mention to Israel. While we filtered out posts that exclusively painted Israelis or Zionists as "evil," there were posts that implicitly discussed the war in Gaza and blamed Jews as a collective unit for the conflict.

"Evil"-related posts increased 330% in total volume in the period since October 7, 2023. In these posts there were many different terms that invoked ideas of sinister and malicious tactics. Dominant themes included claims that Jews are "followers of Satan," inherently "pure evil," or have "evil in their blood," marking Jews as malicious at birth. Such rhetoric often appeared in response to the Israel–Gaza conflict, where social media users viewed any action by the Israeli military as performed collectively by all Jewish people. Since the conflict, some of the accusations frame Israeli actions as blood libel.[17]

These findings echo historical precedents, most notably the Nazi regime's strategy of portraying Jews as simultaneously being the bane of existence and masterminding all the world's problems. As Figure 1 shows, mentions depicting Jews as "evil" show a significant increase compared to other categories of antisemitic speech, as seen in Figures 2 and 3. Antisemitic rhetoric that labels Jews as pure evil makes it easier to spread hate, as to many people it's normal to hate that which is completely and utterly evil.

Dehumanized

The second category of posts included those that used dehumanizing language, often framing Jews as something gross or not human. We tracked over 115k mentions of this type, with 101k of those mentions not explicitly mentioning Israel in any capacity. This category grew the most: a 324% increase in mentions during the researched time period since October 7, 2023. Within it, we identified two main themes: explicit dehumanizing language (referring to Jews as "parasites," "rats," "demons," and saying that they need to be exterminated) and less explicit language that elicits a gross-feeling reaction ("garbage," "walking disease," "scum"). The three top terms referring to Jews are "demons," "parasites," and "cancer," demonstrating how both the explicit and implicit language are being used equally to push the narrative of Jews being not human. All three terms saw spikes at points in which the Israel and Hamas war made global headlines, as well as during the strikes on Iran in June 2025.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Posts including antisemitic self-identification exhibited a wider variety of expressions, frequently tied to the Israel-Palestine conflict. We identified over 12k total mentions in this category. These posts increased 250% over the research period. This category included any posts in which the author was expressing pride in their antisemitic beliefs. We included phrases such as "being a nazi is cool" or "antisemitic and proud." Many of these posts came in response to global events. A common pattern involved justification of antisemitism (e.g., "If Jews are okay with genocide . . . then yes, antisemitic and proud"),[18] with some users expressing this rhetoric more directly: "I'm antisemitic as hell . . . Semitism means terrorism."[19] It remains difficult to determine how many of these statements reflect genuine belief versus attempts to provoke or troll from anonymous accounts, given the nature of social media and the atmosphere of "trolling" online to elicit engagement. We hypothesize this category captured significantly fewer mentions, since it is still uncommon for people to publicly acknowledge that they harbor hate. Yet, we still saw a significant increase in this rhetoric, which points to more people feeling comfortable with becoming more brazen over the last couple of years.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings presented above demonstrate a significant and disturbing shift in the volume and tone of online antisemitic rhetoric. Our hypothesis that antisemitic discourse became more radicalized following the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel and the concurrent rise in antizionist sentiment is supported by a significant surge in posts depicting Jews as inherently evil (increased 330%) and those employing dehumanizing language (324%). These findings are even more alarming coupled with the notion that people on social media are becoming more comfortable wearing the "antisemitic" label publicly and proudly. These trends demonstrate not only a quantitative escalation but also a qualitative shift toward more explicit and radicalized expressions of antisemitism.

This escalation follows a well-documented trajectory in which the normalization of hateful rhetoric lowers social and psychological barriers to more extreme beliefs and behaviors. Normalization facilitates radicalization, and radicalization has historically translated into acts of violence.[20] The Holocaust provides the most consequential example: years of sustained antisemitic propaganda that dehumanized Jews and framed them as an existential threat prepared the ground for mass persecution and genocide.[21] Contemporary online discourse mirrors these dynamics, with antisemitic tropes increasingly embedded in everyday online conversations and amplified through digital repetition.[22]

Of particular concern is the documented increase in individuals openly declaring themselves antisemitic. Although smaller in absolute volume than other categories, this trend signals an erosion of the social stigma traditionally associated with overt antisemitism. The willingness to self-identify as hateful reflects not only ideological commitment but also the perception that such views are acceptable—or even laudable—within certain online communities.

However, this analysis does not come without limitations. This study has several limitations. Firstly, we relied on publicly available posts collected through Brandwatch®, meaning private conversations and platforms outside its network (such as TikTok, Telegram, or 4chan) were excluded. The dataset was built using keyword-based Boolean queries, which, even after validation, may have missed some antisemitic content expressed through coded or evolving language and may also capture some false positives. The analysis purposefully focused only on posts explicitly targeting "Jews," excluding those aimed solely at Israelis or Zionists as to avoid ambiguity; however, this limited the scope and may have resulted in the omission of antisemitic content expressed indirectly. The study measured

volume but not qualitative nuance, so it could not assess degrees of radicalization or sentiment. Moreover, because online speech often includes irony, trolling, or satire, it was difficult to determine intent or sincerity of some posts. Therefore, we carefully chose keywords to exclude as many posts as we could that did not fit within the scope of this paper; however, some degree of misclassification cannot be ruled out. Finally, the analysis was limited to English-language posts and did not capture antisemitic discourse occurring in other languages or regions.

Taken together, these patterns reveal a dangerous shift in online text environment: antisemitism is proliferating, intensifying, and shedding its remaining social constraints. Given the historical relationship between rhetoric, radicalization, and violence, these findings underscore the urgency of sustained intervention by policymakers, technology companies, and civil society to disrupt the pathways from speech to harm.

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Antisemitism and the Unclaimed Past: A Trauma-Informed Critique of Jewish Political Discourse

Rachel Benaim-Abudarham

Abstract

Since the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks, Jewish institutional life has intensified its vigilance toward antisemitism, often collapsing distinctions between antizionism, criticism of Israel, and genuine antisemitic threat. This article argues that such hypervigilance is not solely a strategic response to real danger, but also a collective trauma reflex rooted in centuries of persecution—from pogroms and the Holocaust to expulsions from Arab lands—now compounded by post-10/7 fears. Drawing on trauma theory, particularly Cathy Caruth's concept of "unclaimed experience" and Bessel van der Kolk's work on embodied trauma, alongside emerging epigenetic research, I examine how unprocessed historical suffering resurfaces in political discourse as policy, rhetoric, and defensive architecture. Through news events, community events, and a close reading of the academic text *Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America*, I show how institutional narratives often conflate dissent with danger, foreclosing critical differentiation and internal pluralism. I argue for a trauma-informed approach to antisemitism that honors the reality of the threats facing the Jewish community while also confronting the reality of inherited pain. The article proposes pathways for transforming fear-based reactions into ethically grounded, pluralistic, and courageous Jewish political engagement in a post-10/7 world.

Keywords: antisemitism, collective trauma, trauma-informed Jewish politics, Jewish political discourse, intergenerational trauma

INTRODUCTION



A striking unconscious pattern has been forced into the forefront of Jewish institutional and cultural life, taking on a renewed vigor in the aftermath of October 7, 2023. From national conferences[1] and communal security budgets[2] to op-eds[3] and social media campaigns,[4] calling out antisemitism has become a central organizing principle of Jewish public discourse, especially among mainstream American and Israeli Jewish institutions.[5] This obsession is not baseless; antisemitism remains a real danger, which has only been exacerbated after 10/7.[6] Yet, the scope and intensity of institutional responses often reflect unresolved historical trauma as much as present danger, blurring the line between vigilance and reactivity.[7] Why has this response become so all-consuming? And what might be obscured by its emotional urgency?[8]

This paper argues that the contemporary Jewish preoccupation with antisemitism is best understood as a collective trauma response, because the intensity of communal reaction often exceeds the scale of the actual threat. Drawing on trauma theory and frameworks, particularly Cathy Caruth's concept of unclaimed experience and Bessel van der Kolk's work on the body's retention of trauma, I propose that Jewish communal fixation on antisemitism functions

less as a rational political strategy and more as a reflexive reenactment of historical suffering.[9] The fear of persecution, shaped by centuries of exile, from pogroms in Eastern Europe[10] to the dhimmi system in Arab lands,[11] from the Holocaust to the expulsion and marginalization of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East, remains embedded in Jewish communal memory, surfacing in reactions to criticism,[12] political tension, or demographic change[13] as if they were immediate threats to survival. In this sense, the past erupts through communal discourse and policies, even in relatively safe and privileged contemporary contexts.

Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America, edited by Corinne E. Blackmer and Andrew Pessin, a compendium of modern scholarship on antisemitism published in 2021, is central to this analysis, as it exemplifies this trauma-driven framing, even before 10/7.[14] While *Poisoning the Wells* was the primary text for the course in which this paper originated, it remains a particularly valuable foundation for this inquiry. The work serves as a compendium of contemporary and traditional Jewish discourse, offering both historical context and modern reflections on antisemitism. This duality makes it an ideal lens through which to explore Jewish responses to antisemitism as a trauma response. While the book documents rising antisemitism, it also reveals the deep entanglement between fear, power, and identity in Jewish political discourse. I will use *Poisoning the Wells* as both evidence and object of analysis, both an artifact of trauma and a participant in its perpetuation.

Rather than dismissing the fear of antisemitism as irrational or bad faith, I aim to diagnose the Jewish preoccupation with it as a symptom of unhealed trauma coupled with present-day privilege, arguing that the Jewish response to the global response to 10/7 perpetuates this framework. This framing allows for a more compassionate and critical analysis that neither negates the reality of antisemitism nor permits its invocation to inhibit accountability. Ultimately, I argue that confronting this trauma directly and separating historical memory from present reflex can open space for Jewish healing and ethical political engagement grounded in courage, not fear.

TRAUMA THEORY AND JEWISH MEMORY

Contemporary Jewish responses to antisemitism, especially the institutionalized forms of surveillance, media monitoring, and defensive posturing, can be better understood through the lens of trauma studies than through traditional political or strategic analysis. Rather than rational responses to measurable threats, many of these behaviors seem to reflect older, unprocessed wounds that resurface under new names.

Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score*[15] demonstrates that trauma is not just psychological, but somatic, which is why rational analyses of the Jewish response to antisemitism aren't enough to uncover its depths. Van der Kolk argues that trauma is stored in the body and that individuals and communities often "live as if the trauma were still happening." Applied to Jewish communal behavior, this helps explain the persistence of siege mentalities long after physical safety has been established. The trauma of the Holocaust, pogroms, and forced exile may no longer be happening, but they are still being relived. Consider how synagogues and schools fortify their entrances,[16] how community leaders equate public criticism with danger,[17] and the educational materials that frame Jewish history as a series of narrowly survived apocalypses.[18] In essence, this means that trauma can't only be healed through the mind on a couch, but must be healed or resolved through intentional body-centered processes.

Cathy Caruth, one of the foundational figures in literary trauma studies, offers another framework that is particularly apt in this analysis. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*,[19] Caruth argues that trauma is not experienced fully in the moment but returns later, often in fragmented and compulsive ways, disconnected from the original context. Modern

nervous system theory would argue that this happens so that the individual can process the trauma at the pace their nervous system will allow, and not to overload their system. For Caruth, trauma is not what happens, but how it returns. She writes, "The impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness: in its refusal to be simply located, in its apparent delay or incompletion."[20] This notion of "unclaimed experience" maps well onto how contemporary Jewish discourse around antisemitism often bypasses the specificity of present circumstances in favor of a generalized existential dread, almost as if every critique of Israel or moment of social discomfort were a precursor to catastrophe. This is not to dismiss these fears, but to suggest they are echoes of prior, unresolved suffering rather than clear-eyed risk assessments grounded in the entirety of present-day realities.

This framework offers a lens for understanding why discussions of antisemitism so often seem to jump from zero to one hundred, with reactions that far outpace the events themselves. Why does a celebrity's Instagram post provoke a communal emergency response?[21] Why does a poorly worded tweet invite a national lobbying campaign? Why is criticism of Israeli policy[22] not treated like criticism of any other state, but rather as an existential threat to global Jewish safety?[23] These reactions can seem irrational until they are located in the psychic time of trauma. As Caruth writes, "The traumatized . . . carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess."[24] Jewish history is saturated with loss, betrayal, and annihilation. For many Jews, especially in the post-Holocaust West, this history has never been fully metabolized, but it shapes identity in profound ways.[25] The Jewish reaction to antisemitism, both real and perceived, can be read as both rational and affective: they are both expressions of re-traumatization and traumatic invalidation that also layer upon older, unintegrated wounds.

What Caruth adds that is so important to this paper's argument is the idea that trauma defies normal experience because it was never experienced in the first place. It bypassed the subject. It was not integrated. As a result, it returns as repetition, not memory. In the Jewish communal context, this helps explain why antisemitism, regardless of its scale, often gets treated as apocalyptic. It is not the event itself (the remark, the protest, the vote) that causes the rupture, but the way it collides with an already ruptured subjectivity, made up of unprocessed wounds.

Such a mind-driven, disembodied trauma logic is amplified when institutions act on behalf of individuals. Caruth's model of trauma as that which is "not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor"[26] helps reframe Jewish institutional behaviors, including over-surveillance of campuses, to the publishing of threat assessments, to the framing of critique as "delegitimization." These are reenactments. To put it poetically, they are nightmares returned as policy. Communal overreactions may appear as political theater, but they often serve the psychic function of managing the unclaimable.

This is where the structure of Caruth's theory becomes especially useful. She insists on the ethical obligation of listening to trauma, not as narrative coherence, but as fragmentation. She resists the pressure to reduce trauma to meaning, or to force it into redemptive closure. That resistance parallels what is needed in communal conversations about antisemitism. When someone says "antisemitism," they are rarely describing one thing. The word has come to carry far more than it can hold—pogroms, gas chambers, exile, rejection, theological hatred, economic scapegoating, microaggressions, the erasure of identity, the guilt of surviving. And yet it is often spoken as if it names one coherent, stable thing. Caruth would urge us to pause here and listen for the fragments.

Recognizing antisemitism discourse as a trauma reflex allows the critique of its effects without denying its origins. Caruth does not ask to discard trauma, but to witness it by sitting with the unresolved and fragmented. But witnessing, as she defines it, is not amplification but rather the presence and discipline of holding pain without letting it dictate policy. In *Duties of the Heart,* an eleventh-century Jewish text about faith and discipline, its author Bahya ibn Paquda teaches that a person must "examine the hidden motives of the soul,"[27] for only through inner awareness can one act with true integrity. Jewish communities may be responding from a place of ancestral pain, but when subconscious fear becomes communal doctrine, it risks flattening the world and reproducing the very cycles of alienation it seeks to resist.

Emerging research in epigenetics further legitimizes the idea that trauma is a living, biological response that, left unchecked, can unconsciously drive behavior and response. Studies like those by Ali Jawaid[28] and Natan Kellermann[29] on Holocaust survivors and their descendants show that fear responses may be inherited through altered gene expression, shaping stress reactivity and perception of safety. Dr. Rachel Yehuda, a pioneer in this field, conducted a study involving thirty-two Jewish Holocaust survivors and their children. The study revealed that both generations exhibited epigenetic changes associated with stress regulation. Yehuda explains that "the gene changes in the children could only be attributed to Holocaust exposure in the parents."[30] This finding suggests that trauma experienced by one generation can leave a biological imprint on the next, affecting their stress responses and perception of safety. Such evidence adds another layer of possibility that there is a potential biological substrate that contributes to hypervigilance.[31]

Taken together, these frameworks invite a rereading of Jewish institutional behavior as an embodied trauma response. Jewish security infrastructures, from security briefings organized by Jewish Federations around the United States[32] to crisis PR firms to campus antisemitism watchdogs, often mirror the hypervigilance of trauma survivors. Jewish educational curricula emphasize victimhood and continuity, while Jewish media outlets elevate every antisemitic incident, however minor or ambiguous, as a sign of returning catastrophe. These behaviors form a defensive architecture that can obscure present-day realities and power dynamics, reinforcing a worldview in which Jews are perpetually at risk, even when they are also, in many contexts, deeply empowered.

CASE STUDY: *POISONING THE WELLS* AS A MIRROR OF TRAUMA LOGIC

Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America offers more than documentation of rising antisemitism: it exemplifies how unprocessed Jewish trauma becomes institutionalized as political epistemology.[33] A close reading reveals rhetorical patterns that echo trauma theory: fragmentation, repetition, and the collapse of historical time into the present. The book's central narrative enshrines inherited fear as strategy, conflating vigilance with identity.

First, the text collapses disparate phenomena into a single, undifferentiated existential threat. In the introduction, the editors write: "Hearing about or bearing witness to frequent, intense incidents of anti-Jewish animus . . . Jewish people are living at an inflection point where the distinction between antisemitism and antizionism verges on collapse."[34] This framing fuses internet vitriol, campus protest, and violent assaults into one seamless catastrophe, echoing what Caruth describes as trauma's refusal to remain temporally contained.[35] The past bleeds unfiltered into the present, rendering political nuance nearly impossible.

Second, the book employs repetition to intensify affect. In chapter 14, Small and Patterson claim: "Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and the BDS movement . . . demonize, delegitimize, and dehumanize Jews and the Jewish State."[36] The tripled verbs, emotionally

charged and rhetorically blunt, mirror trauma's cyclical logic: a repeated emotional overload that prevents critical differentiation between threat and disagreement. Fear is magnified; it is not examined.

Third, the book overgeneralizes in ways that fragment reality into rigid binaries. In chapter 1, Edward Alexander writes that "the disease of antisemitism has thoroughly infected the American university."[37] The metaphor of disease suggests total contamination, denying the diversity of campus cultures and Jewish student experiences. As van der Kolk explains, trauma can lead to a worldview in which the environment is perceived as either safe or utterly hostile—nothing in between.

One of the book's most consistent rhetorical patterns is its systematic conflation of antizionism with antisemitism. Rather than distinguishing critique of Israeli policy from hatred of Jews, the essays treat nearly all forms of dissent as existential threats. This enacts what Caruth calls trauma's recursive return: the past, unprocessed, erupts into present discourse as a distortion of memory, not the memory itself. Chapter 14, for instance, equates student BDS activism with antisemitic extremism, without addressing the political substance or context of Palestinian advocacy.

The text's noncritical inclusion of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which was intended as a flexible, diagnostic framework, reinforces this collapse.[38] When applied rigidly, it becomes a tool for silencing dissent.[39] In Richmond, Virginia, the first US city to adopt IHRA, even Jewish leaders have raised concerns about its weaponization against Palestinian voices. In Germany, Jewish and Israeli scholars have been banned from speaking due to IHRA-aligned restrictions.[40] What begins as trauma protection becomes a barrier to credibility and coalition-building.

This trauma logic also flattens internal Jewish difference. By casting Jews primarily as victims, *Poisoning the Wells* reproduces what van der Kolk calls a "freeze" state, a condition in which the ability to respond flexibly is impaired. Jewish Students and scholars who critique Zionism, are not debated but dismissed, pathologized as self-hating or traitorous. Alexander's chapter derides figures like Judith Butler, Sarah Schulman, and Joel Beinin without attempting to understand the biographical or communal exclusions that shaped their views. Butler's queerness and secularism, for instance, have rendered her marginal in many Jewish spaces; her critique emerges not simply from ideology but, one could argue, from lived disconnection from the wider Jewish whole. This is not to endorse all such critiques, but to insist that trauma theory demands we ask what pain precedes political rupture, and if there is a healing dialogue to be had, especially internally.

Chapter 4, "Holocaust Denial on the Web," offers a final example.[41] The authors present a chilling and important account of how denialism spreads online. But the analysis is reactive, not reflective, and focused entirely on the external threat. What's missing is a question core to this paper: how might Jewish communities respond to danger not just with defense, but with dignity? With ethical strength rather than fear?

Jewish tradition offers a counter-model. The concept of *kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying the divine through one's actions, teaches that Jews are judged not only by what is done to them, but by how they behave in the face of it. Historical examples abound: from the Bar Kokhba revolt[42] to the divisions of Golden Age Spain[43] to the rejection of *Ostjuden* by assimilated Western Jews, internal discord has often preceded external collapse. Fear may be understandable, but that does not take away from the very Jewish ethic of *al tira*, do not fear, a mantra repeated in the Torah 365 times. These moments of crisis demand radical fall, and ethical clarity.

POST 10/7

Building on this framework of trauma as a recursive and embodied force shaping Jewish political and communal responses, the aftermath of the

October 7 attacks reveals a further dimension of collective trauma: how rapid memorialization and repression operate together to both express and obscure the ongoing wounds experienced by Jewish communities worldwide, and therefore obscure Jews' ability to see their role in global dynamics. When grief is bypassed, its energy does not disappear; it merely transforms into defensive posturing. The avoidance of mourning Jewish loss, particularly after collective trauma, often manifests as a heightened need for control and moral certainty. In this dynamic, critique of Israel becomes conflated with hatred of Jews, not because the distinction is intellectually unclear, but because the ungrieved pain of historical persecution makes anything other than unwavering support feel like desecration. The political collapse of antizionism into antisemitism thus mirrors a psychological collapse: a refusal to dwell in vulnerability.

Avner Falk, an Israeli psychoanalyst and psychologist, examines the mechanisms of Jewish collective memory through a similar framework to Caruth. Falk observes, "Most nations, rather than mourn collective losses, immortalize them through memorial days, monuments, national ceremonies, sacred battlefields, and other instruments of commemoration."[44] In Jewish tradition, this is exemplified by Holocaust memorialization and the observance of the 9th of Av—practices Falk describes as "acts of remembering and no longer acts of embodiment."[45] Falk here is honing in on a powerful distinction between the mind and the body. If humans exclusively process through the mind, the physical imprints of this trauma remain in the body.[46] Philosopher Howard Stein builds on this idea of somaticized Jewish experiences, arguing that post-Holocaust Jewish memory often casts "all historic time as cataclysmic,"[47] reinforcing a narrative of perpetual victimhood. As Stein notes, "The specific chosen trauma of the Holocaust merges into the continuum of Jewish history . . . this Jewish history is never over."[48] As such, if the story never ends, then the body can never release the trauma.[49] Nobel laureate and proud Jew Elie Wiesel critiques the risks of memory becoming unprocessed, whether in the mind or the body, warning in *A Jew Today*, "Memory, yes, it sometimes lets itself be devoured by imagination. I like both, but separately."[50]

This rapid shift from trauma to memorialization, circumventing a period of mourning and embodied processing, was starkly evident in the aftermath of October 7. This, in particular, isn't about the rest of the world; it was about the Jewish world's response to the crisis. Within the diaspora, collective response quickly bypassed mourning, moving instead to shock followed by immediate activism: substantial fundraising efforts, the chartering of aid flights, and an outpouring of material support.[51] By spring 2024, less than a year after the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust, a fully produced traveling art exhibition, called NOVA, was established to memorialize and showcase the trauma.[52]

This response, while indicative of the profound collective trauma experienced by Jews worldwide, Zionist and non-Zionist alike, also reveals a communal avoidance of grief's necessary duration, as Falk discusses. The collective was shaken to its core, yet there was little space to feel or to sit with the devastation. The feelings of trauma were pushed down and instead replaced with a mode of urgent action, as though tangible intervention could erase the haunting imagery and sounds that had been seared into collective memory and body.

Memorialization, properly conceived, demands time: time for individuals and communities to metabolize trauma, to derive meaning, and then to transmute experience into art and ritual.[53] The rapid institutionalization of memorial efforts, including the NOVA exhibition and extensive aid initiatives, reflects a patterned Jewish response to trauma—one of immediate mobilization and rallying. While these responses are neither inherently negative nor ineffective, they must be understood as manifestations of trauma coping mechanisms, which risk circumventing the slower, embodied work of mourning and integration.[54]

The trauma of October 7, 2023, remains unresolved: Israel continues its military operations in Gaza, as of the time of the submission of this article, and hostages' remains are still held in captivity, and diplomatic efforts have proven the most effective means of securing their release. This prolonged crisis underscores the psychological dynamics of repression, wherein unprocessed trauma manifests through maladaptive behaviors and ultimately harms those holding onto traumatic experiences.

Repression, as articulated by Sigmund Freud, is an unconscious defense mechanism that expels distressing thoughts and memories from conscious awareness to mitigate anxiety. While this mechanism serves to protect the individual from immediate psychological distress, its long-term effects can be detrimental, leading to the emergence of repressed emotions in indirect and often harmful ways.[55] For instance, unaddressed grief and anger may surface as aggression or violence, a process known as displacement, where emotional responses are redirected from their original source to a safer target.[56] Furthermore, repression can lead to a focus on peripheral issues as a means of diverting attention from the core trauma. This displacement of focus allows individuals and communities to avoid confronting the painful reality of their experiences both on the individual and collective levels. In the aftermath of October 7, the rapid mobilization of aid and the establishment of memorials, such as the NOVA exhibition, while well-intentioned, may serve as mechanisms to bypass the necessary process of mourning and healing. These actions, though constructive, risk becoming performative responses that delay genuine emotional processing.

Moreover, on a political level, when collective trauma is repressed rather than fully processed, it can inadvertently fuel externalized expressions such as heightened defensiveness, political aggression, or projection onto perceived enemies. This dynamic may manifest in the intensification of zero-sum thinking, where complex social and political realities are reduced to binaries of friend versus foe, safe versus threatening. In the context of antisemitism, such repression-driven responses risk reinforcing the very narratives they seek to counter: an unyielding sense of Jewish vulnerability and perpetual siege that can limit critical self-reflection and internal debate.[57] Rather than enabling nuanced discourse or healing, these patterns may exacerbate communal divisions and inadvertently provide antisemitic actors with further fodder by portraying Jewish communities as monolithic and reactionary. The political expression of repressed trauma, therefore, operates as both a shield and a barrier to the self-awareness necessary for breaking cycles of fear. Recognizing this paradox is crucial for fostering Jewish communal resilience and ethical engagement within broader social contexts.

FROM POWER TO SELF-AWARENESS

If *Poisoning the Wells* reveals how Jewish trauma has been codified into fear-driven discourse, and the aftermath of 10/7 demonstrates how the Jewish community has been retriggered into that fear-driven discourse, the question becomes: what does healing look like? How can Jewish communities move from honoring inherited pain without reenacting it? This section explores the theological, historical, and practical tools available for transforming trauma into grounded ethical clarity. Whereas many pieces of scholarship on antisemitism focus on "the other," the remainder of this paper is an attempt to turn the mirror inward and focus on the Jewish community, and see where Jews themselves can take more responsibility for the global dynamics in which we play a role. While this paper stops short of prescribing a single therapeutic model for communal healing, its purpose is diagnostic rather than prescriptive: to illuminate how inherited trauma continues to shape Jewish political and ethical life. In trauma theory, awareness itself is the first stage of repair; witnessing follows, and only then can reorganization occur. The reflections that follow,

therefore, do not offer a linear program but identify practices already latent in Jewish tradition and communal life such as curricular examination, embodied listening, interfaith engagement, and discernment, as starting points for collective integration.

When unprocessed trauma merges with contemporary Jewish privilege,[58] it creates a potent and dangerous reflex: inherited victimhood becomes a shield against introspection, and communal pain is deployed to silence dissent. While rooted in real suffering, this posture becomes corrosive when left unexamined, especially when held by communities with institutional, political, or cultural power. As the Talmud cautions, "Power buries those who wield it."[59]

Jewish history has long warned of the consequences of unexamined trauma. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in *Not in God's Name*, writes that the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. was not only the result of Roman violence but of Jewish infighting: "They might have held out were it not that they were too split . . . for much of the time, these groups were more intent on attacking one another than the enemy outside the walls."[60] And yet, in much of mainstream Jewish memory, this event is remembered solely as persecution from without. The internal fractures that made collapse possible are often eclipsed by a narrative of victimhood. Exile becomes proof of Jewish suffering, not a call to reckon with Jewish disunity, corruption, or political myopia. This is precisely what trauma theory warns against: when historical pain is left unintegrated, it is recast as moral authority and siphons off self-awareness.

The rabbis offer theological language for this danger. They named the cause of the Temple's fall *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred.[61] It was not external aggression, but internal disconnection, that destroyed the Temple, they say. This diagnosis is a spiritual imperative to build a society capable of holding disagreement without collapse.[62] Jewish tradition invites the individual to spiritualize pain.[63] But it also warns that pain, when fused with power, can become blinding.[64]

Social identity theory helps illuminate how this dynamic functions today. Psychologist Orla Muldoon[65] argues that collective trauma often produces rigid group boundaries and heightened threat sensitivity. Belonging becomes conditional on conformity, and, in such a society, dissent is betrayal. This dynamic maps clearly onto contemporary Jewish communal responses to antizionism, in which even internal critique is framed as disloyalty.

Christina Sharpe's concept of wake work, from her seminal text *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, offers another critical lens.[66] Speaking about slavery and post-slavery for the Black community, she argues that communities living in the aftermath of catastrophe must resist the temptation to protect power at the expense of truth. Wake work means attending to pain without turning it into a justification to harm others or themselves. Applied to Jewish communal life, it asks: whom do we silence when we invoke antisemitism indiscriminately? What solidarities do we lose when we conflate discomfort with threat?

These reflexes not only harm those outside the Jewish communal boundary; they corrode the interior. As van der Kolk explains, trauma that is unprocessed manifests as overreaction and collapse of differentiation. Every non-Zionist Jew is a defector, every critique an existential threat.[67] This makes complete sense with the understanding that a dysregulated body politic cannot metabolize change.

This is where trauma theory and Jewish theology meet. *Duties of the Heart* teaches that inner impulses, even subconscious ones, must be brought to awareness if the individual or society is to live ethically. According to Paquda, ethical clarity begins not with external vigilance, but with internal honesty.

So what does healing look like? Dr. Dori Laub, Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, poignantly articulated that trauma must be

witnessed before it can be integrated. "There is . . . an imperative to tell and thus come to know one's story," Laub writes. "But there must also be someone to listen." [68] Jewish communal healing requires both roles: speaker and listener, testifier and witness. To heal the Jewish role in the dynamic of antisemitism, Jews must make space not only for the grief of our ancestors but for the pain of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, of Beta Israel and Arab Jews, of those silenced within our own communal structures.[69] Practically, this means reimagining Jewish history and education curricula to move beyond an Ashkenazi-centered framework. Curricula should actively incorporate non-Ashkenazi perspectives, critically examine the implicit norms that position Ashkenazi identity as standard, and expose students to a broader array of Jewish thinkers and lived experiences. By doing so, Jewish education can foster a more inclusive, honest, and healing communal identity.[70]

Trauma integration means choosing discernment rather than defensiveness. In order to transcend the present trauma loop of suspicion and fear, there must be a concerted effort to learn to distinguish historical memory from present threat, and to discern heated disagreement from direct danger. It is possible to recognize real antisemitism without collapsing all criticism of Israel into hatred. As van der Kolk notes, trauma is about learning how to regulate response.

Judith Herman's foundational work offers a helpful framework here. She argues that traumatic events "destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community" and that survivors come to understand that their sense of self and worth depends upon restoring connection to others.[71] The path forward, she insists, is active rebuilding: "helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma," while "empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery."[72] Rather than treat trauma as an individual pathology, this framework invites us to see it as a communal wound that, if held with care, can become a source of accountability and transformation.

There are already models for this shift, though more self-work is needed before bridges can be built. Interfaith risk-taking, like the first Muslim-Jewish conference hosted in the Arab world in Morocco in 2018,[73] long before the Abraham Accords and long before cooperation was on the table. The conference shows what becomes possible when communities refuse to let trauma dictate their boundaries. In these spaces, vulnerability replaces inherited suspicion and leaves room for something new to emerge. Mutual listening and the dignity of difference[74] become a tool for people and communities to thrive. The end of conference report and two-year follow up concludes the power of the program, but states that "without regular contact between presumed 'others' we see no way to permanently heal these rifts. Our recommendation is to create regular exposure and cooperation between the groups for no reason other than humanization and connection, because healing happens in community and connection."[75]

Finally, the Jewish community needs better tools. Dr. Ayal Feinberg's call to professionalize antisemitism expertise is especially timely.[76] Without rigorous, multidisciplinary standards, Jewish institutions risk mistaking volume for clarity and urgency for wisdom. "We need scholars, not just speakers," Feinberg writes, particularly those who can analyze antisemitism in its historical, political, and psychological context, not merely amplify it. The ability to do that, and place it in a wider Jewish historical framework, will help the Jewish community understand what is happening internally. With that internal awareness, will come the ability to make new choices, respond differently, and cocreate a world where we are not the eternal victims.

CONCLUSION

The future of Jewish ethical leadership depends on our willingness to confront inherited trauma with humility. *Sinat chinam* cannot be healed

with surveillance. Instead, we must cultivate inner coherence and a politics grounded in discernment rather than fear.

This is not a call to become unafraid. Fear is human. But we are called to become free: free to differentiate, free to respond ethically, and free to live Jewish life not in reaction to trauma, but in sanctification of it. As Rabbi Tarfon teaches in *Ethics of Our Fathers* 2:16, "It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." The Jewish task is not merely to survive history, as we have managed to do while thriving, but to transmute the lessons into new ways of being.

ENDNOTES

1 Between January to April 2025 alone, there have been at least eight well-funded global conferences on antisemitism, including: the Combat Antisemitim Movement's Mayor's Summit against Antisemitism (Los Angeles, CA, December 2024), Understanding Contemporary Antisemitism (Evanston, IL, February 2025), Catholics and Antisemitism conference (Washington, D.C., March 2025), the ADL's Never Is Now conference (New York, March 2025), the International Conference on Antisemitism (Jerusalem, March 2025), the Contemporary Antisemitism Conference (London, March 2025), Symposium on Music, Sound, and Antisemitism (New York, May 2025), The Eradicate Hate Global Summit (Pittsburgh, PA, September 2025), and Antisemitism and the Crisis of Liberalism (Yale University, New Haven, CT, April 2025).

2 Jackie Hajdenberg,"US Government Spends Record $454 Million to Secure Religious Institutions amid Rising Antisemitism," *Jewish Daily Forward*, https://www.forward.com/fast-forward/648480/us-government-spends-record-454-million-to-secure-religious-institutions-amid-rising-antisemitism/.

3 A few examples are: Amanda Borschel-Dan, "Holocaust Education Is Broken. Dara Horn Knows How to Fix It," *Times of Israel, April* 23, 2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/spotlight/holocaust-education-is-broken-dara-horn-knows-how-to-fix-it/; Jacki Karsh, "The Best Response when They Try to Scare Jewish Leaders? Make More of Them," Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), April 19, 2025, https://www.jns.org/the-best-response-when-they-try-to-scare-jewish-leaders-make-more-of-them/; "Jewish Pride Is the Answer to Antisemitism," Jewish Journal, December 6, 2023, https://jewishjournal.com/commentary/opinion/366038/jewish-pride-is-the-answer-to-antisemitism/

4 For example, see the extensive records kept by Stop Antisemitism, https://stopantisemitism.org/reports/; or the movement started in 2023 by the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism, Stand Up to Jewish Hate, https://www.fcas.org/standuptojewishhate/.

5 These institutions include but are not limited to The Jewish Federations of North America, Bnai Brith International, AIPAC, the Orthodox Union, the National Council of Young Israel, the Conference of Presidents, the American Jewish Committee, and the Anti-Defamation League.

6 There are global examples, including the mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA, in 2018, which killed eleven Jewish worshippers, or the arson at the synagogue in Melbourne, Australia. Campbell Robertson, Christopher Mele, and Sabrine Tavernise," 11 Killed in Synagogue Massacre; Suspect Charged with 29 Counts," *New York Times*, October 27, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/active-shooter-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting.html; Tiffanie Turnbull, "Melbourne Synagogue Fire 'Likely' Terror Act, Police Say," BBC News, December 9, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crmn74m1jkpo.

7 For example, on April 23, 2025, in a Boca Raton, FL, Orthodox Jewish women's WhatsApp chat called "All about the Hustle," there was an exchange about the display at a Palm Beach County Library in honor of Arab American Heritage month, in which I participated. Some members of the group were calling the display both antisemitic and antizionist, and trying to rally the troops to email the library system and the city. Others argued that, while the display might have been personally triggering to some women, labeling everything as an antisemitic or antizionist attack is potentially hate speech in and of itself, and also works against the long-term interests of the Jewish community. Moreover, the PBC Library system had more than thirty events dedicated to Jewish topics over the following month alone.

8 This paper's argument should not be conflated with the discourse advanced at the 2001 Durban Conference, which dismissed legitimate Jewish concerns and instrumentalized antisemitism in the service of political agendas. This paper seeks to honor the reality of antisemitism while interrogating the psychological and institutional frameworks that shape communal response.

9 While some might argue that other potential drivers contribute to this dynamic, such as calculated political decisions or fundraising strategies, I would argue that these motivations, too, are driven by the same collective trauma.

10 Irina Astashkevich, "Carnival of Violence: Development of the Pogrom Script," in her *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917 to 1921* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2018), 18–37, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv75d7p9.6.

11 Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1979).

12 Dennis Altman, "The New 'Antisemitism' Conflates Criticism of Israel with Prejudice against Jews. But It's Complicated," The Conversation, September 24, 2024, https://theconversation.com/the-new-antisemitism-conflates-criticism-of-israel-with-prejudice-against-jews-but-its-complicated-234582.

13 Joseph Frager, "Assimilation Is Killing the Jewish People," Jewish News Syndicate, December 5, 2021, https://www.jns.org/assimilation-is-killing-the-jewish-people.

14 Corinne E. Blackmer and Andrew Pessin, eds., *Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2021).

15 Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking Press, 2014).

16 "Florida Distributes $25 Million to Continue Protecting Jewish Day Schools," Executive Office of the Governor of Florida, press release, January 30 2024. https://www.flgov.com/eog/news/press/2024/florida-distributes-25-million-continue-protecting-jewish-day-schools.

17 Yehuda Kurtzer and Lani Santo, "Identity/Crisis Podcast: Should Jews Criticize Other Jews in Public?," Shalom Hartman Institute, February 27, 2023, https://www.hartman.org.il/should-jews-criticize-other-jews-in-public-transcript/.

18 Hillary Gardenswartz, "Always the Victim," The Jewish Education Project, 2020, https://www.jewishedproject.org/news/always-victim.

19 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

20 Ibid., 8.

21 "Adidas Drops Bella Hadid from Campaign over Gaza Controversy," *Le Monde*, July 19, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/19/adidas-drops-bella-hadid-from-campaign-over-gaza-controversy_6690554_4.html; Rachel Delia Benaim, "An Open Letter to Selena Gomez from Two 12 Year Old Girls from Southern Israel," Jewcy, 2014, https://www.jewcy.com/news/an-open-letter-to-selena-gomez-from-two-12-year-old-fans-in-southern-israel/.

22 Even by the families of hostages, at this point. For more, see Eve Young, "Hostage Families Threatened to Stay Silent," *Jerusalem Post*, March 23, 2025, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-847290.

23 For example, what was quickly labeled as a "pogrom" on Jews in Amsterdam does not take into account any aggressive behavior from Maccabi Tel Aviv fans, nor does it consider fan culture as understood in broader Israeli society. See "This Is What 'Globalize the Intifada' Looks Like," Jewish News Syndicate, The Focus Project, November 15, 2024, https://www.jns.org/wire/the-focus-project/amsterdam-2024-this-is-what-globalize-the-intifada-looks-like; and Kieron Monks, "An Israeli Soccer Team's Toxic Fan Base," *New Lines Magazine*, August 17, 2022, https://newlinesmag.com/review/an-israeli-soccer-teams-toxic-fan-base/.

24 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 5.

25 Marianne Hirsch explored this concept more deeply in her articulation of "postmemory," the memory carried by the second-generation. This refers not to the children of survivors, who, though they did not experience the direct wounds of trauma, are still living in its shadow. Postmemory illustrates how family dynamics and cultural memory influence the intergenerational processing of trauma, through storytelling and the imagination. As Hirsch writes, postmemory "is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension." Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Post-Memory," *Poetics Today* 29,

no. 1 (2008): 107. For more see Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

26 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 9.

27 Bahya ibn Paquda, *Chovot ha-Levavot* [c. 1080] (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1996), *Sha'ar Yichud ha-Ma'aseh*. My translation.

28 Ali Jawaid, Martin Roszkowski, Isabelle M. Mansuy, "Transgenerational Epigenetics of Traumatic Stress," *Prog Mol Biol Transl Sci* 158 (2018): 273–298, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30072057/.

29 Natan Kellermann, "Epigenetic Transmission of Holocaust Trauma: Can Nightmares Be Inherited?," *Isr J Psychiatry Relat Sci* 50, no. 1 (2013): 33–39, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24029109/.

30 Rachel Yehuda, Nikolaos P. Daskalakis, Linda M. Bierer, Heather N. Bader, Torsten Klengel, Florian Holsboer, and Elisabeth B. Binder, "Holocaust Exposure Induced Intergenerational Effects on FKBP5 Methylation," *Biological Psychiatry* 80, no. 5 (2016): 372–380. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2015.08.005.

31 Steven Porges, "Polyvagal Theory: Current Status, Clinical Applications, and Future Directions," *Clin Neuropsychiatry* 22, no. 3 (2025): 169–184, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40735382/.

32 "Lawmakers Call for 'Big, Meaningful Increase' to NSGP at Capitol Briefing," Jewish Federations of North America, September 12, 2023, https://www.jewishfederations.org/fedworld/lawmakers-call-for-big-meaningful-increase-to-nsgp-at-capitol-briefing.

33 To reiterate, this is not to say that antisemitism is not alive and well—it certainly is, with synagogue violence or attacks against Jews in the streets of the world—but public focus cheapens these true events of antisemitism when every criticism of Jews or Israel is labeled as antisemitism.

34 Blackmer and Pessin, *Poisoning the Wells*, 1 .

35 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 8.

36 Charles Asher Small and David Patterson, "Antisemitism, Soft Jihad, and Extremism in US and Canadian Universities: The Contextualization of National Students for Justice in Palestine (NSJP)," in *Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Andrew Pessin (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 247.

37 Edward Alexander, "Antisemitism in Jewish American Academia," in *Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Andrew Pessin (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 19.

38 Michael Drexler, Ron Smith, and Claire Sammells, "Our Campus Is Trying to Clarify the Distinction between Antisemitism and Legitimate Debate about the State of Israel," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 17, 2025, https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/jersusalem-declaration-antisemitism-bucknell-university-20250417.html.

39 Michael Young, "Weaponizing the Antisemitism Accusation," June 2023, The Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2023/06/weaponizing-the-antisemitism-accusation?lang=en.

40 Helen Whittle, "Germany Passes Controversial Antisemitism Resolution," DW, November 6, 2024, https://www.dw.com/en/germany-passes-controversial-antisemitism-resolution/a-70715643.

41 Joel Finkelstein, Corinne E. Blackmer, and Charles Rubin, "Holocaust Denial on the Web: Confronting the Future of Antisemitism," in *Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Andrew Pessin (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 71.

42 By this, I mean the intense internal Jewish schisms of the end of the Second Temple period, discussed more at length below.

43 Specifically, the 1066 Granada Massacre.

44 Avner Falk, *Fratricide in the Holy Land: A Psychoanalytic View of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 133.

45 Ibid.

46 Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score.*

47 Howard Stein, "'Chosen Trauma' and a Widely Shared Sense of Jewish Identity and History," *The Journal of Psychohistory* 41, no. 4 (2014): 236–257.

48 Ibid., 252.

49 This means the calcified fascia, the hormonal shifts, and even the epigenetic mutations that happen as a result of that trauma. For more, see van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, and R. Yehuda, J. Schmeidler, M. Wainberg, K. Binder-Brynes, and T. Duvdevani, "Vulnerability to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Adult Offspring of Holocaust Survivors," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 155 (1998): 1163–1171, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/9734537/.

50 Elie Wiesel, *A Jew Today* (New York: First Vintage Books, 1972), 85.

51 This has not yet been formally studied, and many of the efforts were grassroots. Informally, there were WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, email chains, and international systems of delivery set up to support the cause, such as "Platoons Who Need Equipment" (WhatsApp) "Getting through Meches" (WhatsApp), "Moms for Israel" (Facebook), to name a few. Moreover, the state of Israel has yet to release a figure of how much aid came in via emergency grassroots support from abroad in the forms of tactical gear, protective gear, food, formula, and support for families.

52 For more about the NOVA exhibition see "NYC Recap," Nova Exhibition, https://novaexhibition.com/nyc-recap

53 Brady Wagoner and Ignacio Brescó, "Memorials as Healing Places: A Matrix for Bridging Material Design and Visitor Experience," *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 19, no. 11 (2022): 6711, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35682295/.

54 For more on memorials as social consciousness, see Gilad Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018): 1441, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441; and Isaac Tylim, "Skyscrapers and Bones: Memorials to Dead Objects in the Culture of Desire," in *Living with Terror, Working with Trauma: A Clinician's Handbook*, ed. Danielle Knafo (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), 461–475.

55 For a longer discussion on repression and displacement as a defense mechanism, see Phebe Cramer, *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action* (New York: Guilford Press, 2006).

56 For a longer discussion on repression, political turmoil, and the importance of mourning, see Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

57 For a detailed analysis of how unprocessed collective trauma can fuel projection and aggression onto perceived outgroups, see Vamik Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride To Ethnic Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

58 Chaim Saiman and Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt, "Materialism and the Rise of 'Modern' Orthodoxy," *Tradition* 56, no. 2 (Spring 2024); Rivka Press Schwartz, "The End of Abundance: American Modern Orthodoxy in a Post-Covid World," Machon Siach, July 2020, https://machonsiach.org/2020-7-16-end-of-abundance/.

59 Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 86b.

60 Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name* (New York: Shocken Books, 2015), 221.

61 Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 9b.

62 This is also inherent in the Jewish idea of *machloket le-shem shamayim,* disputes for the sake of Heaven, or collective betterment.

63 This is the premise of *Sefer Iyov*, the Book of Job. Moreover, the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 5b, teaches that suffering has a redemptive purpose.

64 *Sefer Yeshayahu*, the Book of Isaiah (1:15) states that "And when you lift up your hands, I will turn My eyes away from you; Though you pray at length, I will not listen. Your hands are stained with crime." The Jewish sages interpret this as meaning that, when a ritual is performed without self-awareness and integrity, particularly by those with power, G-d will turn them away.

65 Orla Muldoon, S. Alexander Haslam, Catherine Haslam, Tegan Cruwys, Michelle Kearns, and Jolanda Jetten, "The Social Psychology of Responses to Trauma: Social Identity Pathways Associated with Divergent Traumatic Responses," *European Review of Social Psychology* 30 (2019): 311–348, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10463283.2020.1711628.

66 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

67 In addition to liberal antizionists, consider how the Chabad movement's non-Zionism is treated internally.

68 Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," *American Imago* 48, no. 1 (1991): 75–91, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26304032.

69 Until we learn to hold our own pain, we will never be able to fully hold the pain of another—and certainly another group that the Jewish community has wronged.

70 There are Jewish organizations, such as JIMENA, and individual teachers, such as Rachel Benaim-Abudarham, who have built such curricula. The challenge, however, is that the perspectives and beliefs run deep, and often teachers don't have the know-how or sensitivity to teach in this way.

71 Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 214.

72 Ibid., 197.

73 Sergio Carmona, "Muslim Jewish Conference Organizer Has South Florida Roots," *Sun Sentinel*, September 14, 2018, https://www.sun-sentinel.com/2018/09/14/muslim-jewish-conference-organizer-has-south-florida-ties/#nt=oft01a-7la1.

74 A term coined by the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks in his book of the same name: *Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Continuum, 2002).

75 "2018 Report," Muslim Jewish Interfaith Coalition, https://web.archive.org/web/20190723222053/https://www.themjic.org/programs/ .

76 Ayal Feinberg, "From Crisis to Credential: Why We Must Professionalize Antisemitism Expertise Now," eJewishPhilanthropy, April 22, 2025, https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/from-crisis-to-credential-why-we-must-professionalize-antisemitism-expertise-now/.

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Weaponizing Traumatic Memory against the Jews: A Rebuttal to "Antisemitism and the Unclaimed Past: A Trauma-Informed Critique of Jewish Political Discourse"

Corinne E. Blackmer



According to the Talmud, the First Temple was destroyed because of idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed. However, the rabbis held that the Second Temple, although externally demolished by the Romans, actually was burned down through the internal dynamics of bitter sectarianism and *sinat chinam*, or baseless hatred. Despite their dedication to Torah study and acts of charity, malicious hate without valid cause created deep social divisions, intolerance, and, hence, debilitating susceptibility to foreign military attack. Public inaction in the face of injustice stemming from envy, jealousy, and social difference blinded the Jewish people to the divine image and humanity in those with whom they disagreed or whom they found inimical and otherwise objectionable. This, in turn, caused deep animosities and factions in the community and alienation and distrust in their relations with the larger world. As adumbrated in a later historical period by Rav Kook, the cure for this disastrous internal discord amongst Jewish people—the indispensable precursor to world repair or *tikkun olam*—is *ahavat chinam,* or unconditional love even for Jews with radically different opinions, customs and beliefs. The practice of *ahavat chinam* does not entail adapting objectionable beliefs or rituals or, certainly, seeking unity with those others who do not meet fundamental ethical standards. Rather, it means recognizing the divine image and the humanity in other people, which would, according to Kook and other thinkers, hasten the reconstruction of the Temple and the return of the Jewish people to their land.

The rabbis' sage words about *sinat chinam* and *ahavat chinam* seem particularly relevant and appropriate in our challenging post-October 7 era, when Jews, as a tiny minority, are assailed on all sides with pernicious threats, libels, and conspiracy theories, not to mention internal disputes and division in everything from relations with Israel to proper definitions of antisemitism. But while the seriousness and scope of these many dangers seem obvious, Rachel Benaim-Abudarham, the author of an article on contemporary trauma and Jewish historical memory, argues that unprocessed historical traumatic memory has ethically distorted and compromised recent Jewish political discourse about antisemitic threats. For her, Jews are overreacting in destructive ways and would do better to spend their time in calm self-reflection and measured restraint. In engaging in heedless, panic-driven action rather than judicious contemplation of their situation, they have not only conflated the Jewish past with the present but also exacerbated *sinat chinam* everywhere. Thus, according to Benaim-Abudarham, Jews are, in good measure, responsible for the rise of baseless hatred in their ranks since October 7, especially among younger Jews, who no longer feel organic identification with and love for Israel, their ancestral home.

Before proceeding further, however, I must offer a caveat and a self-disclosure. In assailing those Jews that she believes have stooped to baseless hatred because of their unprocessed historical trauma, she focuses much attention on me as a leading exemplar of *sinat chinam*. In 2021, I co-edited with Andrew Pessin and contributed a co-authored article on antisemitism on the web in an edited volume titled *Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America*, published by ISGAP and Academic Studies Press. She apparently got assigned this text in a university class and objected to the experience by way of feeling alienated and intellectually offended by my conviction that we are living in ominous and worsening antisemitic times. Working as a professor in the humanities as I do, I had long become worried by the postcolonial and critical race theories, saturated in antisemitic and anti-Western orthodoxies that permeated my discipline since the 1990s. Many observers subsequently felt that our volume, which appeared in 2021, was prophetic.

As a preamble, I must also aver that, unlike Benaim-Abudarham, who vociferously dislikes me, I intend to wrap her under the sheltering wings of *ahavat chinam*. Although I disagree with her contentions, which I perceive as animated by pique, trepidation, alienation, genuine concern, and her identity as an antizionist who regards herself as an intrepid outsider, I understand her views, even if they entail deliberate exile from Israel. I wish to do all in my power to reduce the distance between us and arrive at some kind of mutual understanding and respectful recognition because I believe that the world remains a dangerous place for Jews, who therefore need a homeland that offers them refuge. Ironically, in opposing her fervent beliefs, I do so in recognition of the perilous times in which, globally, Jews now live. Now more than ever, we must stand together as a people whatever our convictions and not underestimate the implications of the threats that face us.

According to Benaim-Abudarham, contemporary Jews are held captive to an "unconscious pattern" (3) manifested in hypervigilant conferences, security precautions, and media campaigns that place antisemitism at the center of Jewish life. While averring that such "obsessions" (4) have a basis in reality, their undue intensity reflects unresolved historical traumas that blur the line between past historical terrors and accurate and judicious appraisals of present dangers. To advance these claims, she draws on the work of the well-known literary theorist, Cathy Caruth, and her concept of "unclaimed experience" (4) and also the theories of Bessel van der Kolk, who contends that the body retains the imprint of past traumas. On these bases, Benaim-Abudarham asserts that Jews are not so much engaging in a well-considered political strategy as a "reflexive reenactment of historical suffering" (4)—from the tragedies of persecution and exile through to the Holocaust and expulsion from North African and Middle Eastern lands. These grave unprocessed traumas reemerge "even in relatively safe and privileged contemporary contexts" (5). She thus draws attention to the disconnect between past historical traumas, characterized by extreme violence, deprivation, and persecution, and what she construes as the present-day comfortable status of Jews who project themselves back into these horrific historical contexts. To be fair, some contemporary Jews do indeed compare their present circumstances to the steady growth of Nazi ideology in early 1930s' Germany. They regard Donald Trump as a proto-Nazi determined to upend democracy and inaugurate fascism. But most of the analogies between these two historical periods are informed by trenchant partisan passions with the notable exception of the disquieting resemblances between German universities in the 1930s and present-day American and European universities.

Unfortunately, she provides only limited concrete examples to illustrate these broad claims, but she does conjure an evocative picture

of well-to-do Jews exaggerating present travails because of their phantasmatic immersion in the tragedies of Jewish history. To bolster these claims, she turns to her chief evidentiary text, *Poisoning the Wells*, the book I co-edited with Pessin. This volume, according to her, consists of a volatile blend of "fear, power, and identity" (5) that, for her, stands less as an accurate account of current antisemitism than an artifact of trauma that perpetuates itself through unconscious, compulsive repetition. In brief, antisemitism is not simply the oldest hatred but also the oldest hatred that refuses to accept its fading power or at least its moribund and socially marginal status. She indeed claims, in exaggerated terms, that Jews are not merely fixated on the past but actually reliving it. She sees in Jewish communal responses to October 7, an unhealthy mixture of unhealed trauma and "present-day privilege" (6), a statement that evokes stereotypical assumptions given that antisemitism regularly targets Jews regardless of their socioeconomic status. Her stated goal centers on exposing unhealed trauma, differentiating it from historical memory, and thereby creating an open space for Jewish healing and ethical political engagement "grounded in courage, not fear" (6) to emerge. Although I wish she had given even one concrete illustration of what she means by this formulation, the reader must make inferences and read between the lines as best as possible. Basically, among other things, the author manages to forget that many or even most pre-contemporary Jews were living ordinary, passably comfortable existences before they were spirited away by the authorities to suffer imprisonment or mass death.

Further, how does the author know that raw trauma rather than sober socio-political analysis is the same as "unprocessed wounds that resurface under new names" (6)? To what new names does she refer and why not simply name them? In an attempt to reground this abstract speculative claim, she turns to her other trauma theorist, Van der Kolk, who contends that the body stores or retains trauma as something that persists into the present and gets passed down the generations, meaning that the children or grandchildren of Holocaust survivors experience similar traumas as their forebears. For Benaim-Abudarham, the fact that synagogues and Jewish schools fortify their grounds and that educational materials putatively frame Jewish history as a series of narrowly averted apocalypses reveals this overly responsive mechanism clearly. At this point, locating this author in real life and actual place becomes challenging, as she apparently ignores the fact that Jewish institutions are regularly the objects of threat, violence, and defacement, or that Jews, although comprising an extremely small percentage of the American population, are, according to FBI statistics, the religious group that most often becomes the target of hate crimes, assaults, and vandalism. Jews have understandable reasons for protecting their children and elders in environments rationally perceived as dangerous and having a high attack risk, and security measures at synagogues and Jewish schools no more represent maladaptive or inappropriate responses grounded in unprocessed trauma than metal detectors at public schools, security protocols at airports, or armed guards at supermarkets. Indeed, refusing to acknowledge and respond responsibly to palpable dangers means living in dysfunctional denial. Traumatized people do not merely cope through overreacting. They also frequently engage in disavowal as a protective defense mechanism, where it functions as a subconscious shield to manage overwhelming distress through emotional numbing, memory gaps, and minimizing the impact of traumatic memory.

However, at this point in her argument, the author turns back to Caruth, this time to claim that Jews overreact to what she characterizes as reasonable critiques of Israel, although she fails to distinguish between them and expressions of real antizionism or antisemitism. Again, instead of providing concrete examples of these critiques, she abruptly turns to instances of childish rejoinders and to inanely trivial public displays of antisemitic animus. This reads like a disavowed

tactic meant to distract. The reader begins to suspect that she avoids naming the dissolution of Israel as a Jewish state as the unreasonable objection to which she refers. In an associated fashion, she reframes responses to the often violent and threatening antisemitism displayed in campus riots and encampments as "communal overreactions" (9). However, these and other manifold examples of the dangers of life in the *galut* strengthen the hand of those who assert that Israel stands as an indispensable refuge for the Jewish people. Indeed, did the Jewish students who were assaulted or who were forced to hide from violent crowds guilty of overreaction or self-protective efforts to blend in and hide their Jewish identities to avoid rejection by others? Did they and so many others learn hard lessons about the hazards of life for Jews in foreign lands?

Benaim-Abudarham then turns to fierce objections of overly capacious and "weaponized" uses of the term "antisemitism," which can indeed cover anything from pogroms to microaggressions. However, she forgets that injudicious use of such terms characterizes the naming of all social prejudices, from racism to homophobia.

Because trauma, according to the theorist she references, persists in the psyche and the body, Jewish institutions putatively reinforce a worldview in which they are forever at risk even when they are, in truth, "deeply empowered" (11). In the face of concrete evidence to the contrary, this argument remains unconvincing. Also, the author, revealing self-interested inattention to the classic dynamics of antisemitism, forgets that risk and social empowerment are often intertwined in Jew-hatred. Mapping antisemitism onto other forms of social prejudice produces injurious misperceptions of the unique dynamics of Jews hate.

At this point, she again returns to *Poisoning the Wells,* contending that the volume conflates vigilance with Jewish identity, meaning that, for too many Jews, paranoia frames their whole conception of Jewish selfhood. Her objections enlarge when, in connection with this claim, she asserts that *Poisoning the Wells* merges antisemitism with antizionism. This misrepresents the range, complexities, and volatility of the views expressed in the volume. She remains inflexibly stern in her conviction that antisemitism and antizionism are and must always remain fundamentally opposed. Why this passionate attitude? Antisemitism targets Jews as despised individual members of a *religion*. Antizionism assails them as a *collective people* with collective rights to national self-determination. In brief, Jews can live, even if precariously, in others' lands but not in their own. That Zionism threatens her core sense of herself as an ethical person means that she cannot in good faith extend *ahavat chinam* to Zionists. The latter do not merely differ from her; they stand outside her circle of belonging. Here, she defeats the defining argument of her article; namely, that Jews must extend *ahavat chinam* to *all* Jews, including those whose views differ even in distressing ways. She demands a one-way street, but the Talmudic rabbis conceived of baseless hatred and unconditional love in terms of their return from exile and the building blocks required to reconstruct the Jewish nation with its own land and people.

Like most antizionist Jews, however, her sense of ethics causes her to reject the complicated realities of an imperfect and embodied Jewish state immured in endemic conflict. In this vein, she objects to identifying Students for Justice in Palestine with the BDS movement: one is a palpable threat and the other a manifestation of disagreement, although this ignores that both groups strive for the dissolution of Israel as a Jewish state. For these reasons, she remains fundamentally committed to perceiving Jewish reactions to antisemitism in the *galut* as manifestations of misplaced and unconscious historical traumas rather than reasonable responses to viable dangers that necessitate the escape valve of a Jewish state.

Judaism has always seen Jewish self-love and Jewish nationhood as inextricably connected, as the prayers and liturgy demonstrate. Thus, as

opposed to her claim that *Poisoning the Wells* dismisses antizionist Jews as merely traitorous and self-loathing, the volume poses both as the central warring concepts that inform contemporary Jewish identity. The volume does critique famous antizionist Jewish intellectuals such as Judith Butler and Sarah Schulman but does not omit considerations of how their backgrounds and disconnections from the "wider Jewish whole" (14) account for their rejection of Zionism. Yet how can Zionists reasonably embrace Butler with *ahavat chinam* without losing their sense of coherent selfhood? Butler makes common cause with Hamas, an organization that calls for the genocide of Jews, and Schulman, for her part, not only accuses Israelis of horrific crimes against the Palestinians but also proffers the frivolous conceit that the conflict could be resolved by having nine million Israelis relocate to New York City.

In the end, her vision of peace might merit qualified empathy and understanding, given her ethical beliefs and her identity as an assimilated Jew, but there is no basis for her contention that rapid mobilization of emergency assistance to victims of unspeakably torturous deaths or kidnapping "circumvents the slower, embodied work of mourning and integration" (17). The author wants Jews to substitute contemplation for essential response, but doing so would make the Jewish people appear palpably incapable of effectively mobilizing for their survival in a violent, cruel, and hate-ridden antisemitic world that Benaim-Abudarham avoids confronting. She regards life in the *galut* as the only viable means of living an ethical Jewish existence, and so she finds herself compelled to envision palpable threats to Jewish life as nothing more than unprocessed traumatic memories that call for self-examination and contemplation as the only viable forms of dealing with conflict. In the end, she can do little more than enjoin Jews to discard reasonable measures for survival and embrace unbounded expressions of fearlessness and courage in ways that jeopardize the future of the Jewish people.

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Engaging in Ethical Activism by Healthcare Professionals: Ensuring Positive Impact without Alienation

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Abstract

The politicization of healthcare has been a growing controversy. The current uptick in activism and advocacy, as well as other political acts, has made this controversy much more visible. Through a look at the rise in antisemitism in healthcare after 10/7, we examine how activism and other political acts can damage relationships of medical professionals and their colleagues and patients, which can undermine quality care. We urge further research and discussion on the role of activism and other overt political acts in healthcare and propose a framework to provide guidance.

Keywords: Politicization of healthcare, activism, advocacy, antisemitism

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There is growing controversy over politicization in healthcare as studies show that it has led to a decrease in confidence in doctors[1] and an increase in physician burnout.[2] This commentary addresses one aspect of this controversy: advocacy and activism. Both advocacy and activism rest on a "desire to focus attention on an issue to draw people in, to engage with an issue in some way, and to influence decision-making, policies, and/or to create long-term change."[3] While lines between activism and advocacy can be blurred, in general, activism can involve actions aimed at exerting "pressure on organizations or other institutions to change policies, practices, or conditions the activists find problematic."[4] Activists work from outside a system to influence the inner workings or entirety of a system, which can involve working against those who are (or are perceived to be) in power.[5] Advocacy can be defined as "working inside a system with or in support of organizations, individuals, or policies that might help an issue or group."[6] Healthcare professionals have long engaged in advocacy and activism with the aim of increasing the health and welfare of individual patients (e.g., to aid in access as with calling insurance companies to try to get a procedure covered), groups (lobbying for lower drug prices for AIDS patients), or the general public (advocating for laws that ban cigarette advertising). But such engagement can at times have negative consequences as well, resulting in the opposite of what it's meant to achieve. In this article, we examine how advocacy and activism in healthcare can harm professional and patient relationships, undermining trust and quality care. We call for robust discussions and research on the ethics of advocacy and activism in healthcare, as well as adequate training for professionals to ensure these contributions positively impact medical environments, rather than fostering divisiveness. This piece aims to provide a framework for moving forward.

The current sociopolitical climate is marked by extreme societal polarization and divisiveness, which has increasingly permeated professional

spaces, including healthcare. This divisiveness is evident in hospitals, medical schools, and professional organizations, where advocacy and activism sometimes have escalated into hostility and exclusionary behavior. Alongside this broader divide, antisemitism has seen a surge manifesting in various sectors, including medicine.[7] Recent news and surveys highlight disturbing trends and incidents that inadvertently legitimize behavior which undermines quality care.[8] Consider a few examples drawn from Table 1. In Canada, healthcare unions are engaging in activism by marching in protests with their union flags alongside calls for "intifada," which for the majority of Jewish people can be considered an explicit call for violence and the killing of Jews. After seeing this, one doctor said, "Then I return to work, walk through the hallways, and wonder: Which of my colleagues hates me? Who here wishes for my death? It creates a toxic and divisive work environment, and I feel incredibly lonely and isolated."[9] A psychologist posted on a professional listserv that she was keeping a list of "Zionist practitioners" to blacklist them as a tactic of activism[10] leaving those who found themselves on this list feeling "shocked and scared."[11] Alarmingly, medical students have used student email lists to advocate for Gaza in such a destructive way that one anonymous author responded with a blog, "I Would Never Let These Doctors Treat My Relatives."[12] In defiance of a hospital rule, anti-Israel posters were put up in a London hospital. Upon seeing the posters, one patient said, "I'm an outpatient but God forbid in other circumstances to feel so vulnerable already and be surrounded by hostility would be so scary."[13]

A healthy relationship between healthcare professionals and patients is indispensable to quality care. While relationships are centrally developed between patients and those providing care, their development does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, relationships are situated in a web, where each part impacts their development. For example, patients bring to these relationships their own past experiences with other practitioners, stories of friends' or family's experiences, media exposure, experiences navigating the healthcare system, and cultural, racial, and ethnic differences. The same applies to practitioners in their dealings with patients and other practitioners.[35] This confluence of factors, including advocacy, activism, and the antisemitism they can generate, creates the web that influences the development of patient–practitioner relationships, informs communication and interpretation, and sets expectations around how issues are navigated by all participants based on their knowledge and the reactions they perceive. The role healthcare professionals play in shaping this web, including the way they relate to one another, must be placed at the forefront of problem-solving process in healthcare delivery to avoid impeding the creation of successful, caring patient relationships, and to optimize patient care and possible healthcare outcomes.

Healthcare professionals should know the importance of consistency, justice, and calmness and strive for a respectful, competent, and ethical treatment of patients and each other. Creating professional organizations, codes of ethics, and continuing education programs can support the development of these characteristics. Good collegial relationships demonstrate to patients that healthcare professionals can communicate well to deliver quality care. These conditions allow for safe environments that foster strong collegial and clinical relationships. Relationships characterized by mutual respect, healthy boundaries, effective communication, shared concepts, and expressed care are important for successful healthcare. However, if these relationship aspects are challenged, we must step back and examine the context and variables that can cause ruptures in the relational web.

Healthcare professionals' involvement in advocacy and activism is growing, which, at times, can champion great changes in the web

of their relations with their colleagues and patients. Activism and advocacy impact the development of this web and, thus, the character and success of healthcare professional-patient relationships. If done right, advocacy and activism can positively influence the healthcare environment, strengthening relationships necessary for quality care. For example, many healthcare professionals and hospitals engaged in advocacy and activism during the AIDS pandemic. As an example of advocacy, physicians and healthcare organizations have been involved in the AIDS Memorial Quilt Project, creating panels to honor patients and displaying parts of the quilt to raise awareness. To illustrate activism, Dr. Alan Berkman started an organization called HealthGAP through which he lobbied for changes in laws to reduce the cost of AIDS medications worldwide. These examples of advocacy and activism created many positive changes that impacted relationships, such as removing barriers to access to healthcare. Such actions help strengthen relationships with patients and colleagues, and, as the public is made aware of them, they also strengthen the overall trust that physicians will do what they can to ensure that all of their patients, regardless of cultural, racial, sexual, or ethnic differences, receive proper healthcare. Seeing healthcare professionals bring attention to the plight of one group of people and fighting for change can give all patients confidence that they will have healthcare professionals in their corner should they need it. More specifically, such actions help define patient expectations in healthcare interactions, enhance communication, and push assumptions for positive over negative in the messages they receive. But does activism and advocacy for one group always strengthen the web? Or can it undermine it?

Healthcare professionals involved in well-established activist organizations like Doctors without Borders get specific training in supervision and humanitarian work germane to the area where they will be working. However, in general, healthcare professionals don't get such training, which means that most healthcare professionals are engaging in political activism and advocacy based solely on their personal political views and knowledge of geopolitical events, which might not differ from those of an average citizen. Yet, the codes of ethics and professionalism to which healthcare professionals adhere seem to require different thinking. The American Medical Association (AMA) Code of Ethics makes clear that physicians who participate in advocacy should ensure that the health of patients is not jeopardized and that patient care is not compromised by such engagement.[36] Presently, while the AMA Code of Ethics recognizes that pressuring colleagues to engage in advocacy is unacceptable and using strikes as a tactic can be wrong if disruptive to patient care, there is no robust framework or set of rules aimed at defining when advocacy and activism disrupt or jeopardize patient care or inadvertently harm collegial relationships. Indeed, there is controversy over this question.

In Minnesota, healthcare workers marched at the state capital to protest hospitals banning workplace events about Gaza and firing some employees for personal posts about Gaza. Depending on the content, both of these can be considered acts of advocacy or activism that impact the web that patient–practitioner relationships need to thrive and may even lead patients to question their trust in healthcare professionals. On this basis, one might argue that hospitals are within their rights to interfere. Yet Alycia Garubanda, one of the activists at the Minneapolis protest, said that banning this advocacy and activism is "making us feel like we are doing something wrong when we know we are doing the absolute best we must do, not only for one particular group of patients, but all of our patients and our whole community."[37] The protesters in Minneapolis may not see the differences between advocating for the people of Gaza and advocating for patients with AIDS, believing that in both cases advocating for one group should make all people more confident that they will receive adequate attention from healthcare

professionals. It is not at all clear that this is the case. If flags and political posters were put up in Israeli hospitals, would Arab patients feel more or less confident of the care they receive? These situations are sensitive, complex, layered, and nuanced. Well-thought-out and executed research is needed to better understand how and when healthcare managers should intervene.

What kind of impact are activism and advocacy having on patients? If healthcare professionals are not conscious, cautious, and thoughtful about these impacts, they may do unintended harm. It takes a short time to create fear and mistrust, but much longer to fix that damage once it is done. When patients have harmful interactions with their care teams or become aware that such interactions are taking place, and collegial relationships become fractured and contentious, there is a threat to the web that nurtures relationships so indispensable to quality care. It is important to engage in research and discussion and to generate good training tools to heighten awareness about the impacts of various kinds of activism and advocacy on quality patient care.

While advocacy and activism can create positive change and, at times, foster relationships with colleagues, patients, and the public, many of the examples highlighted in Table 1 show a darker side of these activities as they undermine the effective functioning of healthcare system. Not all engagement with advocacy or activism has beneficial results. Instead, they can create contexts that negatively impact the development of well-functioning relationships with patients and colleagues. Activism can undermine quality

Table 1. Examples of Advocacy, Activism, and Antisemitism in Healthcare

Professional Spaces	Professional Listservs/ student body emails	Professional Organizations	Protests
In defiance of rules, anti-Israel posters were put up in a London Hospital, reading in part: "Israel is starving and killing Palestinians in Gaza. Children are being slaughtered beyond measure. . . Zionism is Poison."[14]	A medical student denied that women were raped on 10/7, while another said the rapes were "justified."[15]	Jewish members of the American Psychological Association (APA) filed a formal complaint over the official statement of Division 39, Section IX, relating to Israel's war against Hamas, which was clearly antisemitic.[16]	San Francisco doctors protested outside hospital calling for global intifada.[17]
Nurses in Australia said on a video chat while at work that they would kill Israeli patients and insinuated they had already done so.[18]	A pediatrician posted that she was Jewish and feeling traumatized and received the response, "Nobody cares. Your trauma is irrelevant."[19]	Ostracized after 10/7, a doctor formed the American Jewish Medical Association (AJMA).[20]	Canada Healthcare Union flew its flag alongside calls for intifada and the destruction of Jews.[21]
Jewish patients fear: as one Holocaust survivor said to her doctor, "Thank God you're Jewish. I feel safer."[22]	A medical student wrote that the consensus Jewish ideology is morally corrupt.[23]	IFSW executive issued censure against the Israeli union of social workers for not acting to promote peace.[24]	Medical students protested in front of their hospital with a banner that praised the Al-Aqsa Flood, Hamas's name for the October 7 massacre.[25]

(Continued)

Table 1. Examples of Advocacy, Activism, and Antisemitism in Healthcare

Professional Spaces	Professional Listservs/ student body emails	Professional Organizations	Protests
George Washington University held a panel discussion, "Understanding the Conflict in Israel and Palestine," where the massacre on 10/7 was justified, hostages were not mentioned, and Jewish student questions on Zoom were ignored and met with nasty comments from fellow students in the chat.[26]	A psychologist asked colleagues to add names of Zionist therapists to a Google doc for the purposes of exclusion and boycotting.[27]	Congressman Richie Torres wrote to the American Psychological Association asking them to address "persistent and pernicious" antisemitism in its rank.[28]	Healthcare workers, along with Within Our Lifetime, protested outside Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan in a demonstration that included shouts of "Shame!" as cancer patients looked on from inside the building.[29]
At UCSF, several medical workers were placed on administrative leave or received warnings from colleagues and supervisors for wearing symbols of Palestinian solidarity or for speaking out against the war.[30]	Torres's letter to the APA cited numerous examples of antisemitic statements and messages in internal listservs; these included statements such as "Kudos to Hamas" and calls for "Intifada, intifada," as well as calls for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israel.[31]		Bay Area doctors participated in a global sick-out to protest lack of medical care in Gaza. Doctors without Borders urged doctors to call in sick to attend the protest.[32]
During surgery, a colleague of a Jewish physician said, "Jews are liars, greedy, stingy, and control everything, including all businesses, which is why there's no freedom of speech against them."[33]			During protests at the Capitol, US doctors and veterans demanded that Trump end Israel support amid Gaza hunger crisis.[34]

care by fracturing professional relationships, alienating practitioners from their professional organizations, and creating profound inconsistencies in patient treatment. These factors can undermine communication, move boundaries of relationships, lower patients' and public expectations, and redefine patient treatment concepts in ways that harm the creation of successful relationships. We call this *agitation* because such engagement, whether formal or informal, creates a context that agitates rather than calmly composes relationships.

Activism and advocacy play crucial roles in healthcare. Survey data shows that future medical professionals are intensely interested in advocacy work.[38] Given that institutional changes are often prompted by formal data gathering, healthcare practitioners and managers need to gather quality data to adequately assess the positive and negative impacts of advocacy

and activism in the healthcare space. They also need to engage in critical discussion on the ethics of activism and advocacy by healthcare professionals. Questions that need to be addressed include the following.

1. When healthcare professionals engage in activism and advocacy, what is their motive?
2. Can activism/advocacy create environments that normalize or even encourage hostile and exclusionary behavior? If so, what are the conditions under which this happens?
3. Should there be restrictions on the tactics healthcare professionals use to engage in advocacy and activism? While the AMA Code of Ethics explicitly mentions going on strike, it makes no mention of other tactics commonly used by activists. Should healthcare professionals engage in boycotts and civil disobedience that could potentially harm people? While such acts may not directly harm patients, they can undermine trust if made public.
4. Should there be restrictions on where activism or advocacy are done? Should advocacy and/or activism be restricted in patient-facing spaces, employee-only spaces, or in social media posts? If so, what should those restrictions be?
5. Should there be restrictions on the content of activism or advocacy? Should we claim, for example, that healthcare professionals should engage in activism or advocacy that is directly related to health, healthcare, and access to healthcare? If so, what constitutes each of these terms?
6. Should we claim that healthcare professionals ought only to engage in activism that benefits all? What would that mean, and how do we determine what benefits all?

A key question that is relevant to the current controversy is: How do we determine when activism becomes agitation? A starting point may be that activism and advocacy shift to agitation when they undermine well-functioning relationships necessary for quality care. Strained professional relationships undermine patient care.[39] Robert Talisse argues that we must depoliticize certain spaces so people can connect on a fundamental human level.[40] Such a connection enables fruitful, meaningful, and dignified conversations. Talisse's approach may be the most applicable when it comes to professional healthcare.

While we are not recommending that healthcare professionals refrain from all advocacy and activism, we advocate that greater attention must be given to navigating and defining how to proceed. We must consider the ethics of advocacy and activism informed by empirical research. In this article, we provide a framework to ground and direct this critical endeavor.

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