



Fearless Zionism: Cultivating “Eternal Jews” and “1948 Zionists” – while Confronting Un-Jews

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Since October 7, most Jews worldwide are trying to understand that powerful peoplehood moment they experienced. Those gut feelings realizing they were targeted too, by Hamas’s bloody Jew-hatred, then by worldwide anti-Semitism, also reflected positive feelings of belonging. Let’s transform those “peoplehood moments” into a revitalized Zionist movement.

We shouldn’t seek reactive “October 8 Jews,” just like many Zionists never wanted “Holocaust Jews.” My Zionism is not anti-anti-Semitism or anti-anti-Zionism, nor is it contingent on passing Israeli governments. We want “eternal Jews” and “1948 Zionists,” Jews living in Israel time and Zionist time, advancing our 77-year-old adventure in democratic-Jewish statehood while seeing themselves as part of a 3,500-year-old conversation about tradition and meaning, in a community consecrated by an intertwined fate, an inspiring old-new story, and shared culture.

Let’s reimagine Fearless Zionism based on:

- Social Justice Zionism – defending the Jewish people, repudiating our enemies, while reaffirming Zionism’s liberal, Jewish, democratic, and nationalist ideals;
- Responsibility Zionism – critiquing constructively, resetting whatever’s wrong with Israel, and with Jewish dynamics worldwide, ideologically, politically, while rebuilding Israel.
- Identity Zionism – being rebuilt, finding meaning, through identity, history, community.

This necessary conversation about Zionism’s peoplehood-reviving agenda keeps getting upstaged by fights about the war, Israeli politics, anti-Semitism, and a small, overly-influential group of un-Jews: rabbis, professors, community leaders, on the Jewish dole, so obsessed with Israel-bashing, they violate a core peoplehood value: demonstrating solidarity when your people and state are attacked by lethal enemies.

In May 2021, as Hamas bombarded Israel, Natan Sharansky and I were stunned to read a petition repudiating Israel and Zionism that dozens of Jewish Studies and Israel Studies scholars signed. The arguments were as cliché-ridden as they were disloyal. Appalled, we branded these professors and others “un-Jews” [in Tablet](#). Evoking 7-Up the [Uncola](#), we criticized those Jewish leaders undoing the core consensus integrating Zionism, Israel, Judaism, and Jewish peoplehood as the foundations of modern Jewish identity.

Our carefully-formulated argument has been widely misquoted and mischaracterized. Yet we keep hearing, that if we hadn’t written it then, we would have to write it now.

We didn’t target mere critics of Israel but the anti-Zionist Jewish elite, who, in this [case](#), caricatured Zionism as “ethnonationalist ideologies ... shaped by settler colonial paradigms” which “contributed to unjust, enduring, and unsustainable systems of Jewish supremacy.”

These “anti-Zionists know exactly what they are doing, and what they are undoing,” we wrote. “They are trying to disentangle Judaism from Jewish nationalism, the sense of Jewish peoplehood, while undoing decades of identity-building.”

Before linking these marginal extremists to their many historical predecessors – sigh! -- we explained: “We call these critics ‘un-Jews’ because they believe the only way to fulfill the Jewish mission of saving the world with Jewish values is to *undo* the ways most actual Jews do Jewishness. They are not ex-Jews or non-Jews, because many of them are and remain deeply involved Jewishly, despite their harsh dissent. Many un-Jews are active in forms of Jewish leadership, running Jewish studies departments, speaking from rabbinic pulpits, hosting Shabbat dinners.”

Encouraging robust, thoughtful, self-critical discussions, we acknowledged “the difficult dilemmas we do need to debate regarding peace and war, proportionality and morality, Jewish and democratic values—or occupation.... But we can only have those debates if we have empathy for one another and are willing to look out for one another.”

Most absurd was the “how dare you criticize us” criticism from Israel’s most obsessive Jewish critics. They say criticizing Israel expresses their love and engagement. Yet our criticism was unkosher. “I’m just expressing my ‘love and engagement’ with you,” I replied.

Then October 7th happened. IfNotNow and other organizations with rabbis, professors, [hosted shivas](#) while hijacking – desecrating -- other Jewish rituals to mourn all “the deaths,” including Hamas’s mass-murderers.

Their behavior vindicated “un-Jews” as a conceptual tool. Communities have boundaries. The Jewish people share values, culture, a common fate, with much latitude for debate – *machloket!* We should welcome Jews, left to right, religious and non-religious, into our broad, blue-and-white, tent. But what kind of people would we be, if, when sexist, homophobic, dictatorial, genocidal enemies attacked, we had no red lines?

Isn't peoplehood also about confronting those who instead of standing with us and our Jewish, democratic, Zionist values, stand with the enemy, and try delegitimizing their own?

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