The Israelization of British Jewry: Balancing between home and homeland

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Abstract

Israel is increasingly the epicentre of Jewish peoplehood; shaping the lives of diaspora Jews as both an engine driving interconnectedness, and a source of division. 'Israelization' impacts diaspora Jews differently according to country of domicile. This paper examines British Jewry, providing historical context and drawing on interviews to explore the community's shifting identity and culture. It argues that Britain represents a unique model between America and France. In America, where security is greater, Jewish ethnic ties are loosening, whereas in France, doubts over the Jewish community's future increases their focus on Israel. Whilst British Jews experience hostility, they feel safer than in France. Flourishing British, Jewish culture reflects commitment to multi-ethnic Britain, alongside loyalty to Israel. The dynamics of those loyalties are changing however, with dissent against Israeli policies increasingly legitimised. We conclude that the Israelization of British Jewry is all encompassing, even whilst allowing for a thriving diaspora community.

THE ISRAELIZATION OF BRITISH JEWRY: BALANCING BETWEEN HOME AND HOMELAND[1]

Introduction

What is the Jewish question today? Is there still a 'Jewish question' apart from the 'Israeli question?' Nearly seventy years after Israel's establishment, we have reached a historical juncture when the epicentre of Jewish peoplehood has moved from diaspora to Jewish homeland; a dramatic turning point for the role of Jewish civilization in world affairs and for Judaism itself. When Israel was established it was home to roughly 6.5 per cent of world Jewry, but as of 2016, Israel is soon to become home to the majority (DellaPergola 2016).

While in Israel 'Jews are easily defined by both cultural and political boundaries and by content such as language and territory,' in the diaspora, 'the boundaries that once demarcated Jews are fading and the visible content that defined them is disappearing' (Gitelman 1998). In this context, Israel defines not only Jewish life within its borders, but also the lives of diaspora Jews more than ever. Israel is both an engine driving Jewish identity and interconnectedness, and a source of division and even discomfort about the boundaries of Jewish belonging, the essence and morality of kinship ties, and the very meaning of Jewishness and Judaism. In recent decades even anti-Semitism has been 'Israelized'; nowadays being most commonly framed in relation to Zionism and Israel, with boundaries between hostility to Israel and anti-Semitism notoriously porous (Garrard 2015).

The impact of Israelization on diaspora Jews varies according to country of domicile and the characteristics of each community. In the United States, by far the largest diaspora community with 4 to 5 million Jews (Pew Research Center 2013), liberal Jews have assimilated so successfully that they are struggling to keep kinship ties and religious affiliations. Intermarriage has risen in the US from 46 per cent in the early 1990s to 58 per cent today, compared to a more modest rise in the UK from 22 per cent in the early 1990s to 26 per cent today (Graham 2016, 16). The decline of American Jewish ethnicity makes their effort to find modes of Judaism separate from Israel increasingly challenging (Shain & Rogachevsky 2011). The 'Birthright' program bringing young Jews to Israel is seen as America's most significant Jewish educational program, and highly effective in instilling identity (Saxe et al. 2014). At the same time, others are asking to what extent the particularism of the Jewish nation state is compatible with Jewish universal values, especially for liberals (Shain 2007, 68). US-based political scientist Dov Waxman argues in a recent study that

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"a new era of American Jewish conflict over Israel is replacing the old era of solidarity" (Waxman 2016, 3).

In France however, which has the second largest diaspora community with around 475,000 Jews, the Israelization of Jewry is now well recognised, driven mainly by the decline of the Ashkenazi community and the strong interconnections between the largely Sephardic community and Israeli society. The Israelization of French Jews is also driven by insecurity, stemming from Jihadist threats (Shain and Fainberg 2015; Ivry 2015).

A 2012 comparative survey found that 52 per cent of French Jews were considering _aliya_ (emigration to Israel) compared to 20 per cent in the UK (Staetsky & Boyd 2014). Indeed, British Jewish emigration to Israel has remained in a relatively narrow range between around 300 and 800 annually since the early 1980s (Staetsky et al. 2013, 6). In the 2000s, an average 1.6 British Jews moved annually to Israel per 1000 of the Jewish population; more than the US (0.4) but much less than France (3.8). In 2014 and 2015 _aliya_ from France reached record levels, with around 7000 making _aliya_ in both years (_The Times of Israel_, 22 December 2015). From Britain the numbers were 629 in 2014 and 774 in 2015 (_The Jewish Chronicle_, 12 January 2016).

So at a time when a cover of _Newsweek_ magazine carried the headline, 'Why Europe's Jews are Fleeing Once Again' (Lebor 2014), examining British Jewry shows a much more nuanced picture, as a case falling between the experiences of the US and France, in terms of ethnicity, religiosity, sense of security, and ties with Israel.

Britain has the fourth largest diaspora community, numbering around 284,000 (Graham et al. 2012). The community has experienced 350 years largely untouched by widespread violence or expulsion, and was the only major European community to escape the Holocaust. Jews in Britain also played a unique role in advancing Zionism, leading up to securing the 1917 Balfour Declaration, and during the British Mandate in Palestine. Today, Britain's Jews seek unique ways to negotiate the relationship between their place in British society, and their connection to the Jewish state.

We highlight this complexity, charting the boundaries of British Jewish loyalty and belonging. The first section describes the distinct paradox of contemporary British Jewish life: that British Jewry shares the alarm of French and other European Jews at rising antisemitism linked to anti-Zionism, whilst simultaneously demonstrating commitment to a British future and boasting a unique renaissance of British Jewish life. The second section gives brief historical context, explaining how Israel was absorbed into British Jewish identity. The third section describes the evolving Israeli

dimension of contemporary British-Jewish life in key aspects of culture, religion, attitudes to British politics, and internal communal politics, before considering the distinct case of Haredi Jews, who are a fast growing proportion of the community. This interpretative account, highlighting recent trends and significant episodes, is bolstered by interviews with communal figures and survey data. The conclusion shows how the evidence presented explains the distinctiveness of British Jews: a community with its life interwoven with the Jewish homeland, whilst nonetheless seeking new expressions of commitment to a British future.

Part 1: The Paradox of British Jewry

The sense of security for British Jews is increasingly affected by rising anti-Semitism in Europe, including the uncovering of Jihadist plots, and increasing hostile public discourse towards Israel and Zionism, especially on the left, on campuses and from Muslims (Staetsky and Boyd 2014). Julius's study of English anti-Semitism shows how it is 'a new configuration of anti-Zionisms … heavily indebted to anti-Semitic tropes,' which, 'now constitutes the greatest threat to Anglo-Jewish security and morale' (Julius 2010, xxxvii). Concerns spiked during the Gaza conflict in 2014, which triggered anti-Israel demonstrations. Danny Cohen, a British-Jewish Director of BBC Television, captured this moment, saying in December 2014: 'I've never felt so uncomfortable being a Jew in the UK as I've felt in the last 12 months. And it's made us think … is it our long-term home?' (_The Independent_, 22 December 2014). Dave Rich, of the Community Security Trust, which monitors anti-Semitism in Britain, told us, "So much of the anti-Semitism we encounter comes within the framework of anti-Israel discourse and activity. Also, because most Jews have Israel as part of their Jewish identity, a lot of Jewish people feel anti-Israel activity as anti-Semitic" (Rich 2015, interview).

During the 2014 Gaza war, the Tricycle Theatre angered British Jews by demanding the Jewish Film Festival give up an Israeli government grant as a condition for hosting its screenings. According to Dave Rich (2015, interview), it was 'The thing that really pushed the Jewish community over the edge into public anger about UK reactions to what was happening in Gaza … Everyone felt it to be anti-Semitic'. The Jewish Film Festival, backed by communal leaders, Conservative ministers, and even the _Guardian_ newspaper, insisted that the Jewish cultural connection to Israel was a legitimate expression of Jewish identity (The Guardian, 8 August 2014). Nonetheless, the incident illustrated how British Jews' attachment to Israel may clash with their relationship with liberal British society, particularly where left-wing politics dominate.

The election of Jeremy Corbyn – a radical left MP with a record of anti-Zionism and association with Islamists – as Labour leader in 2015, further raised Jewish concerns about anti-Zionism being

entrenched as the 'common sense' of the British Left (Hirsh 2007; Johnson 2015). Corbyn's election was followed by revelations about Labour figures expressing anti-Semitic views, leading to suspensions including Naz Shah MP and former London mayor Ken Livingstone. These events followed the resignation of the Oxford Union Labour Club co-chair in February 2016, citing anti-Jewish hostility shown by fellow Labour students (Chalmers 2016). The tendency for anti-Zionism to blend with anti-Semitism, especially on the left and among Muslims, has alarmed mainstream British politicians as well as Jewish leaders (Mann et al. 2015). Of particular concern is the experience of students, who can find themselves confronted by anti-Zionist activism which is particularly prevalent at British universities, promoted by radical left students and faculty, as well as Muslim students (Klaff 2010; Jaspal 2016, 61–63).

Yet instead of choosing 'exit', British Jews seek to articulate a new version of their loyalty and belonging as British citizens with a special relationship with the Jewish nation state, in the context of Britain's own internal struggles to define its increasingly diverse polity. Some Jews stress a natural fit between the defence of Israel as a liberal democracy, the fight against anti-Semitism, and the struggle against the threat of radical Islam to the values and security of Britain and the West (Phillips 2007, 182). This perspective found sympathy from David Cameron and his predecessors Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, all of whom spoke of the Jewish community as embodying British values, whilst showing warmth towards Israel. Attempts to delegitimize British Jews because of 'Israel's behaviour' were described by David Cameron as delegitimizing British democracy itself. (Cameron 2015a). He did not hesitated to link Jihadist violence to a wider ideology of "Islamist extremism", including anti-Semitic tropes that must be confronted (Cameron 2015b).

Furthermore, while Jews feel the heat of public, intellectual hostility, their sense of physical security is better than for Jews in Paris and Brussels (Staetsky and Boyd 2014). In this complex reality, we have witnessed a flourishing of British Jewish culture, with London described as the 'Jewish Cultural Capital of Europe' (Frieze 2015). A significant number of Jews leaving France are moving to England (BBC News, 1 February 2016). An estimated 23,000 Israelis also now reside in Britain, mostly in London (Graham 2015, 13). A migratory surge swelled the numbers of Israelis in the UK population by 49 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (Graham 2015, 9). A recent study extrapolates from census and survey data to suggest that most Israelis in the UK are partnered with British Jews, concluding that Israelis coming to Britain represent demographically a "potential rejuvenating force" (Graham 2015).

The threat of European anti-Semitism now augments British Jewry's self-assertion to combat the ongoing 'peaceful threat' of assimilation. Sociologists Gidley and Kahn-Harris have identified a paradigm shift in the strategy of Anglo-Jewish leadership 'from a strategy of security to a strategy of insecurity' (Gidley and Kahn-Harris 2012, 181). In other words, while for decades Jewish leaders downplayed external security threats and emphasized integration, over the last two decades their emphasis has shifted to fear of assimilation and recognition of anti-Semitism as sources of community mobilisation.

This new approach to the nexus between Jewish security and identity became evident during the construction of JW3, a £50m Jewish community and arts building, opened in 2013. Stephen Pollard, Editor of the _Jewish Chronicle_ described JW3 to us as 'A huge statement of a vibrant and thriving community … A statement of what we as a British Jewish community can do for ourselves (Pollard 2015, interview).' The building, on Finchley Road, a prominent route between central London and its northern suburbs, represents a deliberate attempt by its funders to change how British Jews perceive their identity both in relation to one another and to non-Jews. JW3's director Raymond Simonson told us the building symbolizes a conscious break with past insularity:

> There has never before been a [Jewish] building built [in Britain] top to bottom and side to side of glass. It means we can see "them" and "they" can see us – which is what community buildings here usually intentionally avoid. There is no fortress mentality … our building screams, 'hello the Jews are here' (Simonson 2016, interview).

What explains this unique turn in the British Jewish experience, where the community is, in contrast to the US, increasingly disturbed by anti-Semitism, but more than France, seeking new expressions of commitment to a diasporic future alongside commitment to Israel? The next section provides historical context for the integration of Zionism in British Jewish identity, before the paper examines how Israel intersects with various aspects of contemporary British, Jewish life.

Part 2: The development of Zionism in British Jewish ethnicity

The public assertiveness of Jewish life in Britain is a departure from traditional inclinations to blend in. For 19th century British Jews who experienced the period of emancipation, the process meant 'the fostering and preservation of the image of an assimilated and acculturated community, as indistinguishable from that of the host society as it was possible for the Jews to possess in Christian Britain' (Alderman 1995, 143). Jewish leaders encouraged their community to sustain Jewish identity in an Anglicized manner, symbolized by Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, son

and successor of Nathan Adler, even adopting Anglican clerical dress and titles (Alderman 1995, 139).

The striving for Britishness precluded notions of Jews as a separate nation (Cohen 2014, 17). This model of integration was temporarily shaken by around 150,000 Jews arriving from Eastern Europe between 1881 and 1914. These immigrants, concentrated in London's East End and other inner cities, were unwilling or unable to immediately drop their distinctive cultural and social identity. When Theodor Herzl appeared in the late 1890s proposing a Jewish state in response to enduring European anti-Semitism, East End Jews cheered him. Most wealthy and established British Jews, however, were unimpressed (Laqueur 2003, 157). The Zionist notion that emancipation had failed was anathema to them.

There were though middle class Jews, not counted among the communal elites, who also got behind Herzlian Zionism, believing 'that British Jews had gone too far in subordinating their collective distinctiveness to the pursuit of social equality' (Endelman 2002, 193). As Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann and his British supporters campaigned to secure the Balfour Declaration – a statement of British support for Zionism – in 1917, this split over Zionism became a defining issue. Of the two Jewish members of Lloyd George's cabinet, Herbert Samuel was ardently pro-Zionist, whilst his cousin Edwin Montagu came to symbolize Jewish opposition to Jewish nationalism. Montagu wrote to Prime Minister Lloyd George of his fear that British endorsement of Zionism would fuel anti-Semitic claims that he had 'the status at best of a naturalized foreigner' (Lewis 2009, 150). But when Jewish anti-Zionists, including David Alexander, President of the Board of Deputies – the formal representative body of British Jewry – publicized their campaign with a letter in *The Times*, they overreached, triggering a vote of censure within the Board of Deputies which forced Alexander's resignation (Laqueur 2003, 194).

Following the Balfour Declaration, membership in British Zionist organisations surged from around 4000 to 30000 by 1921, but this number fell in the late 1920s. Second generation Jews, seeking a route out of poverty and into white collar employment, embraced secular British life. Their Jewish religious attachment declined, and for those inclined to political activism, 'universalist' leftist politics was more attractive than Zionism (Endelman 2002, 216–7).

Yet, over the interwar years, the growing ranks of the Jewish middle class grasped the Zionist torch, historian David Cesarani explained this as "an anti-assimilationist ideology, a way of affirming Jewish identity in a modern, viable form. In this sense, Zionism was a vehicle for Jewish ethnicity before ethnicity had been invented." (Cesarani 1992, 43).

After the Holocaust, British Jews became more uniformly bound up with Zionism, even though their sympathy for Jewish self-determination was complicated by the violent struggle between the Jews of Palestine and Britain itself. They were caught in the maelstrom. British Jews serving in the Palestine Mandate administration faced particular dilemmas of identity and loyalty (Freedland 2005), whilst Jewish violence against the British in Palestine also triggered anti-Jewish riots in Britain.

The historic drama of gaining Jewish sovereignty in 1948 changed Jewish self-perceptions everywhere. The 1967 war was the apotheosis of diaspora Jewish pride in Israel. In Britain too, 'Zionism … replaced Judaism as the cohesive ideology of Anglo-Jewry' (Cesarani 1992, 45). British Jews who felt Jewish but lacked religiosity could draw from Israel new self-assurance and identity. For them, Zionism did not mean moving to Israel. Rather, solidarity with Israel became a vehicle for communal pride and ethnicity. Raising money, providing public support, and occasionally visiting Israel, became their primary Jewish activity. Furthermore, for Anglo-Jewish leaders Israel also became an 'ideological weapon' with which they could try to impose 'communal discipline'; 'a way of determining who was an authentic or acceptable Jew' (Cesarani 1992, 45).

Proud identification of Jews with Israel after 1967 was bolstered by support for Israel in the Labour party. Harold Wilson saw socialist Zionism as exemplifying progressive values (Wilson 1981). But ideological certainty began eroding in the late 1970s, after the rise of the right-wing, pro-settlement Likud, and following the First Lebanon War and First Intifada. With growing hostility towards Israel in media and politics, the Israelcentric identity of British Jews and their unified support for Israeli policies was shaken. Sharp divisions within Israel resonated in British Jewry (Shindler 2007, 229).

Only in the early 1990s, when peace seemed possible and Israel seemed both more secure, and more aligned with the spirit of globalization, did Anglo-Jewish dual affinity with Israel and Britain briefly become more comfortable again. Israel's relative security at this juncture also contributed to British Jews looking inward. Alarmed by rising intermarriage and a shrinking community, they invested greater resources on British Jewish welfare, including an agenda for 'continuity' which sought to combat assimilation by infusing British Jewish life with more positive meaning and vitality. A landmark 1995 survey investigating British Jewish attachment to Israel reflected the order of priorities. Asked about their charitable giving, 42 per cent prioritised UK Jewish causes, and 12 per cent Israeli causes.

Yet this same continuity agenda saw Israel, especially in the hopeful context of the peace process, as an attractive and vital resource for instilling a positive Jewish identity, especially in the youth.

The then-Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote in 1994: 'The Israel of continuity must become Jewry's classroom, the diaspora's ongoing seminar in Jewish identity' (Sacks 1994, 98). Summer tours and gap year programmes for teens became key elements of Diaspora Jewish education in Britain and elsewhere. So whilst Israel declined as a charitable priority (a 2013 survey found just 9 per cent prioritised Israel charities), tangible, personal connections increased. Whereas in 1995, 78 per cent had visited Israel, in 2010, the figure was 95 per cent. Some 67 per cent have visited more than once in the last 10 years (Miller et al. 2015). Yet the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, the collapse of the peace process in 2001 and the Second Intifada, meant that the affinity of British Jews for Israel continued to be complicated by Israel's trials, even as Jews mobilised to defend Israel more publicly than ever, including with an unprecedented Trafalgar Square rally in 2002 (Rynhold 2007).

Having briefly outlined this historical context to the British Jewish attachment to Israel, we now explore this relationship with respect to key aspects of contemporary Jewish life.

Part 3: The Israelization of contemporary British Jewry

Culture

In the reinvigoration of British Jewish life in the last two decades, the leading example is the pluralist Jewish learning and cultural conference Limmud, a kind of 'Jewish Woodstock' (Wolfe 2014, 193) attracting 3000 participants annually. Other significant activities, including Jewish Book Week and the Jewish Film Festival, proudly open Jewish culture to non-Jewish audiences. These events symbolise a transformation away from earlier Anglo-Jewish reticence to articulate Jewishness publically (Kahn-Harris and Gidley 2010, 9–10).

The increasing profile of Jewish culture towards the turn of the millennium coincided with Britain embracing multiculturalism, in response to challenges created by growing non-white populations with distinct religious and ethnic identities. In contrast to the French republican model, ethnic and faith diversity came to be seen as values in line with the British, liberal ethos (Julios 2012, 115–138).

While the challenge of some new immigrant communities has been how to reconcile ethnic distinctiveness with British liberal expectations, for many Anglo-Jews the challenge has been how to reawaken particularity. Their century long timidity in expressing themselves publically, qua Jews, has been challenged by new drives for increasing visibility of Jewish life in the tapestry of 'new Britain'.

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The JW3 centre mentioned earlier is no less than an attempt to position Judaism as part of Britain's own universal creed, including an agenda to open the building, and by extension the British Jewish experience itself, to non-Jews. It is a manifestation of loyalty to Britain, but also a statement of demarcation against insularity within the Jewish community, expressed in extreme form by the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) community. From the perspective of Raymond Simonson:

> The Haredi community in Stamford Hill for example, are Jews in Britain. And a very successful community by 101 standards of what is successfully Jewish. But what I'm most interested in with JW3 is British-Jews … Grappling with the hyphen is about what it's about in modern day life. I can choose to exclude myself from the British bit. I can make *aliya*, I can become Haredi, but actually the vast majority of the Jews in this country are part of British-Jewry – "British and "Jewish", not either/or (Simonson 2016, interview).

Indeed, the pluralistic model of Judaism characterized by Limmud and JW3, have become a battleground over the boundaries of Jewish content and loyalties. They strive to create a space where Jews can express their identity without necessarily being religious, and where Jews of all denomination are accepted. Conservative elements within British Orthodoxy have shunned Limmud for espousing 'the ethos of pluralism,' regarding Jewish belief, which they equate with no less than challenging the almighty (*Jewish Tribune*, 2 October 2013).

Yet the increasing diversity of British Jewish life has not diminished the significance of Israel, both in shaping Jewish ethnic identity and the internal Jewish politics of loyalty. In fact, the growing dominance of Israel on everything Jewish worldwide, thickens Jewish identity, which is becoming more immersed in Israeli culture. Simonson confirms that for JW3 'Israel is a key part of what we do,' with Hebrew classes, Israeli films, political debates, and Israeli political speakers. Of the 69 films exhibited in Britain's Jewish Film Festival in 2015, 23 were entirely Israeli productions and six more partly Israeli, compared to 12 American and eight British (UKjewishfilm.org 2015). The restaurant in JW3 does not serve traditional Ashkenazi food but rather Middle Eastern fare with a 'Tel Aviv vibe' (Zestatjw3.co.uk 2016).

Although British Jews cannot be described as culturally Israeli – only 10 per cent speak Hebrew 'a fair amount'[2] – they are increasingly impacted by Israeli affairs. Israel remains core to the community's efforts to instil Jewish identity in its youth, with over 50 per cent of non-Haredi Jewish youth joining an organised Israel tour at 16 (Ariel et al. 2013). Writers Ben Judah and Josh Glancey have incisively described 'Britain's new EasyJet Zionists,' a short budget flight from friends

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[2] Unpublished data provided by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research based on 2013 National Jewish Community Survey.

and family in Tel Aviv, hooked to Israeli online news, fridges stocked with pitta and hummus, and reading Israeli novelists translated into English (Judah and Glancey 2015). The deep personal connections between British Jews and Israel were demonstrated in a 2010 survey which found that 76 per cent felt Israel was relevant to their day-to-day lives (Graham and Boyd 2010).

Jonathan Boyd, Director of the London based Institute for Jewish Policy Research, gave us his impression that the increasing focus on Israel also reflected the declining influence of American Jewish culture:

> In a previous generation they would have been reading Chaim Potok or Saul Below, and that American Jewish culture now has less prominence. Israeli culture is more vibrant and more dynamic, despite the language barrier for many people, so it's probably taking over (Boyd 2015, interview).

The community's focus on Israel is also reflected by the Jewish press. Stephen Pollard told us: "Almost all our readers … want to see our take on what is going on in Israel. So if on an average week we have six or seven foreign pages, probably about five of those are in some way Israel or at least Middle East based," adding, "The only two things that prompt increased sales are Israel at war and education stories" (interview, 2015).

American Jewry, being much larger, more varied, and relatively free of anti-Semitism, allows more scope for Jewish cultural and religious expression independent of the Israeli scene (Shain and Goldman 2016). Israel is also less accessible geographically, and just 43 per cent of American Jews have visited (Pew Research Center 2013). But the Israelization of Jewish culture in France is if anything more pronounced. French Jews, "follow Israeli media, watch Israeli films, read Israeli literature, conform to Israeli religious patterns, and eat Israeli cuisine" (Shain & Fainberg 2015). French sociologist Erik Cohen found in 2002 that 38 per cent of French Jews would prefer to "be reborn as Jews in Israel," (Cohen 2011, 80). Since then the sense of alienation and insecurity of Jews in France and their interconnectedness with Israel has only grown (Fourquet et al. 2016; Bordes-Benayoun 2014, 293).

Politics

Britain's 2015 general election highlighted how the 'Anglo-Jewish question' is intertwined with the 'Israeli question' in British politics. Until World War II, Jews were politically 'highly cohesive, supporting first the Liberals and then Labour, both in direct opposition to the Conservatives,' who were, 'thought to harbour more anti-Semites and anti-Zionists than the parties of the left' (Kotler-Berkowitz 2001, 451).

However, post-war Jewish support shifted towards the Tories, partly due to economic transition to the middle class, but even more so due to Israel informing Anglo-Jewish ethnicity. The Tories were coming to be seen as more friendly to Israel, and the left as hostile. When Tony Blair shifted Labour rightward both in economic policies and regarding Israel, Jews could again feel comfortable supporting Labour, without harming Israel's interests (Greene 2013, 44–48). But after losing in 2010, Labour shifted left, and Jewish support returned to the Conservatives. This became evident in 2015 when Jews showed their antipathy for Ed Miliband, a Labour leader with Jewish roots who they perceived as disloyal to Israel (Survation 2015; Greene & Shain 2015)

With Jewish refugee parents – renowned Marxist author Ralph Miliband who fled Belgium, and mother Marion Kozak from Poland – Miliband and his brother David grew up with deep awareness of Jewish roots, including visiting their grandmother in Tel Aviv. Yet their parents were assimilated with no involvement in the Jewish community. Photographs of Miliband eating a bacon sandwich reflected Labour's attempts to brand him as in touch with ordinary voters. He presented his background as the child of refugees who fled the Nazis penniless (Miliband 2012b). As Labour leader he did not project Jewish particularity, rather weaving his Jewishness into a universal story representing humble origins and the possibility that immigrants can become patriotic citizens (Miliband 2012a).

Yet at the same time Miliband told British Jews he was one of them. He spoke at pro-Israel events and visited Israel, with media accompanying his visits to Yad Vashem and his cousins on a kibbutz (Miliband 2014). However, Miliband's attempts to win Jewish hearts and minds foundered during the 2014 Gaza war. While Prime Minister David Cameron defended Israel, Miliband attacked his 'silence on the killing of hundreds of innocent Palestinian civilians' (Greene 2014). He later supported a House of Commons vote to recognize Palestinian statehood, and addressed a meeting of the pro-boycott Palestine Solidarity Campaign. These actions – interpreted as politically motivated to appeal to left-wing and Muslim voters – painted him disloyal for many Jews (Lipman 2014; Philpot 2015). A pre-election survey found just 13 percent of Jewish voters considered Miliband a prime minister who would be good for the Jews (_The Jewish Chronicle_, 7 April 2015).

Surveys of French Jews suggest a comparable swing to right wing candidates perceived as more pro-Israel (IFOP 2014). In the US, however, whilst concern for Israel is a factor for Jewish voters, it is rarely a decisive issue, since candidates from both parties typically pledge strong support for Israel (Rynhold 2015, 156). An exception was Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who like Miliband, identified as Jewish but had little connection to organised Jewish life, had a

non-Jewish partner, and ultimately alienated more engaged Jews due to his criticisms of Israel (Kornbluh 2016).

Miliband, like Sanders, stands low on the scale of Jewish commitment. British Jews who marry non-Jewish partners tend to take little or no part in Jewish events, and have limited connection to Jewish communal life (Graham et al. 2014). They have lower degrees of attachment to Israel than more engaged Jews, and are less likely to pass Jewish identity to their children. It can be said that they are far more British than Jewish. This explains why despite his Jewish identity, Miliband found himself so out of step with the Jewish mainstream.

Religion

Survey data show a strong correlation among British Jews between commitment to Jewish religious observance and commitment to Israel. When a 2015 survey asked British Jews if they agree that, 'Israel's treatment of the Palestinians has weakened my attachment to Israel', only 15 per cent of members of Strictly Orthodox synagogues agreed, and 22 per cent of central Orthodox members, in contrast to 49 per cent of progressive synagogue members and 50 per cent of non-synagogue members (Miller et al. 2015). Surveys of US Jews find the same correlation with 61 per cent of Orthodox American Jews 'very attached' to Israel compared to 47 per cent of Conservative, 24 per cent of Reform and 16 per cent of no denomination. In France too, 'Attachment to Israel is much stronger among those whose religious practice is stronger' (Bordes-Benayoun 2014, 290). However, whilst in the US, just 10 per cent of Jews identify with Orthodoxy, in Britain Orthodoxy is the most common affiliation, as in France where Sephardi Jews of North African origin predominate (Cohen 2011, 73). Some 40 per cent of British Jews identify as Haredi, Orthodox or Traditional (typically central Orthodox synagogue members who are not religiously observant), compared to 18 per cent identifying with progressive streams (Graham et al. 2014, 16).

Observant central Orthodox Jews, (adhering to Jewish law whilst engaging with secular society) are committed to the notions of Jewish peoplehood and the Land of Israel as religious concepts, and the State of Israel as a political project for Jewish sovereignty and security. Even non-observant members of Orthodox synagogues are generally more hawkish than affiliates of progressive (Reform, Liberal or *Masorti*) denominations or those identifying as secular/cultural Jews (Miller et al. 2015).

The United Synagogue, the umbrella for most central Orthodox congregations, reflects and encourages strong ties to Israel. Its chief rabbi, more than any other figure, is seen by the British establishment as the figurehead of British Jewry. He is viewed not only as a religious authority,

but as a representative of the community and its political concerns, including Israel's security. 'They see me as an envoy to Israel', Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis told us, and 'they even called me to update me on Britain's position relating to Iran' (2015, interview).

For Mirvis Israel gives British Jews '*shalvat nefesh*' [piece of mind] in the knowledge that '*yesh lanu bayit*' [we have a home]. He told us 'Israel is central to everything I do,' stressing that Israeli religious and social developments have a tremendous influence on Anglo-Jewry. Mirvis describes himself as a 'product of Israeli *yeshivot*,' noting that he is the first chief rabbi who prays in '*nusach sphard*' a style of prayer and enunciation incorporating eastern traditions and common in Israel, but hitherto not in Britain. It signifies his connections to the religious Zionist world of modern Orthodoxy in Israel. Whilst many rabbis employed by United Synagogue congregations, by contrast, are rooted in the Haredi Jewish world which is traditionally ambivalent regarding Zionism, they are nonetheless also graduates of Israeli religious institutions, albeit Haredi ones. Jew's College, which ordained Ashkenazi Orthodox Rabbis in London for nearly a hundred years, no longer does so.

Israeli religious institutions increasingly influence not only Orthodox British religious leaders, but the educational of its youth. Instilling a close identification with Israel is typically part of the ethos of mainstream Orthodox secondary schools, often including Israel trips in their curricula. Many British Jews from observant central Orthodox homes study in Israel before attending a British university, either with the religious Zionist youth movement Bnei Akiva or, more commonly, enrolled at a yeshiva or seminary. Bnei Akiva, for a long time the only youth movement option for observant Orthodox Jews, teaches that God has a hand in history, that Israel's establishment heralds the process of redemption, and that the pinnacle of being a good religious Zionist is making *aliya* (Bauk.org 2016).

Deep immersion in a practicing Jewish home and a long-term study programme in Israel are highly effective in instilling strong Jewish identity (Graham 2014). Yet, the Israelization of this identity presents dilemmas. The Jewish community in the UK has been a victim of Bnei Akiva's success, with dynamic leaders fulfilling the movement's ideology and moving to Israel, depriving British Jewry of their talents. It is notable that in the context of the British Jewish renewal movement that the United Synagogue established 'Tribe' as an alternative to Bnei Akiva (Behrman 2016, interview). Tribe promotes love for Israel, but not *aliya*. Its leadership training run for gap year students in Israel aims for its graduates to 'come back to the UK and be future leaders of the community' (Tribeuk.com 2016). It reflects a vision for a community inextricably tied to Israel, but with its future in the UK.

A hugely influential figure for the UK central Orthodox is former chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who has given an intellectual basis to a Jewish identity with a foot in both camps: authentically British, and authentically Jewish with an unwavering commitment to Israel. For him, Israel is a key pillar for Jewish peoplehood, security and identity.

Sacks's moral stature with British leaders and media, his authority on Jewish thought, his communal leadership, and his interfaith work, have made him one of the most important British Jews of our time. His writings articulate a vision of the Jewish people navigating between a particularistic identity and a universal mission. Sacks warns against a Jewish identity built around memory of the Holocaust and fear of anti-Semitism (Sacks 2009, 259). He distinguishes himself from American modern-Orthodox champion Rabbi Soloveitchik who argued the Jewish people's fate is to dwell alone; an 'existence of necessity [that] gives rise to the historical loneliness of the Jew' (Soloveitchik 2000, 43).

At the same time Sacks affirms the centrality of Israel for Jewish peoplehood, both spiritually and physically, yet without suggesting that all Jews should move there. For Sacks, exile was a condition of the Jews as a collective, ended by Israel's establishment. Whilst Sacks writes that, 'only in Israel can Jews live Judaism in anything other than an edited edition,' (2009: 136) he does not describe the diaspora Jewish condition in the traditional Orthodox terms of 'exile'.

Indeed, for Sacks, Jews in the West have a special mission to apply Jewish wisdom to the universal challenges facing Western civilization and its liberal, democratic values. Sacks sees a new opportunity for Jews to shape this conversation, created by their strong connection to liberalism in the West, and by Israel's existence, which allows Jews to speak as Jews without fear, since 'no longer need they be haunted by the trauma of homelessness' (Sacks 2009, 8). Sacks depicts Israel as itself embodying the universal values he espouses: the right to a distinct Jewish state in the midst of the Arab-Islamic world, and 'an everlasting symbol of the victory of life over death, hope over despair' (Sacks 2009, 153).

When the universalistic-ethical dimension in Sacks's thinking has clashed with his Zionism however, he has found himself in trouble. In a 2002 interview, during the Second Intifada, Sacks blamed the Palestinians, but nonetheless said of Israeli actions, 'There are things that happen on a daily basis which make me feel very uncomfortable as a Jew' (*The Guardian*, 27 August 2002). His comments outraged many Israelis and British Jews, forcing Sacks to express regret (Shain and Barth 2003).

Indeed, Sacks illustrates the possibility of being a Jewish and proudly Zionist voice in the British conversation, but also the tension this entails in a Jewish world torn between particularism and universalism. As Chief Rabbi he proved that criticising Israel on moral grounds was territory too dangerous to inhabit and maintain his position as a consensus faith leader who could speak both to and for mainstream British Jewry.

Communal politics

The Israelization of Judaism has been informed by deep conflicts over Israel's character as a Jewish and democratic state. For Orthodox or traditional Jews, criticism of Israel is often seen as an assault on the Jewish people and Judaism itself. Progressive and secular Jews, meanwhile – who have long wrestled with the boundaries of religion and their affinity to their ethnic kin – tend to be more uncertain as to how much affinity with Israel can assist in preserving Jewishness, and how much it is discordant with their liberalism.

Charley Baginsky a Rabbi in Britain's Liberal Judaism movement, whilst strongly affirming the relationship between Jews and Israel, sees a need to redefine that relationship for congregants overwhelmed by controversies over Israel's democratic character and the Palestinian question. She told us:

> For all of us as British Jews now it's exhausting … When you turn on Facebook and every second article is one side or the other … it can be much easier to opt out of that conversation. … Our Israel education across the board is not always great in terms of content. So people feel ill equipped to be able to have those conversations (interview, 2016).

Controversies about Israel are the source of the sharpest disputes within the Jewish community. Indeed, Raymond Simonson told us, "As Jews in Britain we can't have an intelligent and mature adult debate or conversation about anything to do with Israel unless we 100 per cent agree, because the minute we have a different viewpoint, publicly I mean, it's a spat" (Simonson 2016, interview).

This observation resonates with Keith Kahn-Harris's insightful book Uncivil War, which shows how Israel's politics and conflicts create deep divisions in Britain over who is a loyal Jew. While these issues have penetrated diaspora Jewry in North America (Waxman 2016) and France (Winter 2014), for British Jews they are potentially more toxic because of the community being at the same time very diverse, but also relatively small and close nit. Indeed, the, 'Tight webs of personal

ties and geographic closeness means British Jews are constantly confronted with those whose views they might find abhorrent' (Kahn-Harris 2014, 19).

A significant source of frustration for some is the feeling that the formal Jewish representative organisations such as the Board of Deputies – dominated by the Orthodox mainstream and committed to presenting the façade of unity – fail to reflect views more critical of Israel.

In 2007, a group calling itself Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) sought to distance themselves from Israel, declaring in *The Guardian* that: 'the broad spectrum of opinion among the Jewish population of this country is not reflected by those institutions which claim authority to represent the Jewish community.' (*The Guardian*, 5 February 2007). This was a doomed revolt however, since most signatories had little connection to the organized Jewish community. They were branded 'AsAJews' by critics – Jews who 'parade their Jewishness in order to discredit, in the eyes of the onlooking world, the fears of their fellow Jews' (Hirsh 2014). The few signatories immersed in Jewish life, notably sociologist Antony Lerman, and Liberal Rabbi David Goldberg, see Jewish life in Europe as today's authentic expression of Judaism, and try to distance themselves from the Jewish nationalism of Israel (Goldberg 2012; Lerman 2009). However, these views remain marginal.

More significant have been critics of Israeli policies whose commitment both to British Jewry and to Israel are unquestionable. Mick Davis, Chair of the Jewish Leadership Council, which coordinates major British Jewish organisations, triggered controversy in 2010 after attacking Israeli policies, asserting the right of diaspora Jews to criticise, and calling on the Israeli government to recognize how its actions impacted diaspora Jews (*The Jewish Chronicle*, 24 November 2010). Davis's comments followed a survey which found that 74 per cent of British Jews opposed Israel's expansion of West Bank settlements.

These developments, along with the establishment of J-Street as a left-wing alternative to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, presaged the founding of Yachad in 2011, a group professing love for Israel but opposition to Israeli policies in the occupied territories. (Yachad.org.uk, 2016). Unlike IJV, Yachad's founders were rooted in the community, including graduates of Zionist youth movements. Their chair Gideon Smith is typical; a graduate of the Institute for Diaspora Youth Leaders in Jerusalem, and former Union of Jewish Students activist. Smith represents a generation for whom Israel is closer than ever. His sister lives there and he visits often. 'Israel is an integral part of British Jewry,' he told us (interview, 2015). He stresses the proximity of Israel for British Jews, the strong sense of connection even for those who are not religious, and the increase in Jewish day school attendance with students studying Hebrew.

But at the same time Smith fears that whereas 'Israel has been the common denominator for all denominations, this is at risk because of the politics and the question of the territories.' He fears Jewish youngsters disconnecting from Israel, and points to a Yachad sponsored survey suggesting a drop in British Jews identifying as 'Zionist'. The same survey indicated that 49 per cent of under 30s agree: 'Israel's treatment of the Palestinians has weakened my attachment to Israel' and just 19 per cent agree that 'British Jews should not criticise Israel in public' (Miller et al. 2015).

Yachad's activism includes not only community education, but also letter writing to MPs and ministers expressing concerns at Israeli policies. In regular consultations between the Foreign Office and British Jews, Yachad is represented, alongside the Board of Deputies, the Jewish Leadership Council, the pro-Israel research organisation BICOM and other Jewish and pro-Israel organisations, with a cacophony of voices speaking for British Jews on Israel.

Whilst Yachad has criticised the official community representation, it has also sought entry into it; testing the boundaries of loyal dissent. It was a sign of the times that when the British Zionist Federation (ZF) rejected Yachad's application to affiliate in 2013 it brought communal criticism upon the ZF itself (*Jewish Chronicle*, 28 February 2013). When Yachad applied for representation on the Board of Deputies the following year, it was accepted after a lengthy debate. Like Mick Davis, Yachad had tested the boundaries of loyalty yet maintained their place within the communal fold.

<u>The Haredim</u>

Despite the successes of the Jewish renewal agenda, every sector of British Jewry remains in demographic decline bar the haredim, who have fertility rates of over six children per woman. The high birth-rate is repeated in every ultra-Orthodox community, including France and the US, but Haredim are a higher proportion of the total in the UK and have higher retention rates than the US (Jewish People Policy Institute 2014). In 2011 haredim accounted for 10-15 per cent of British Jewry, but during the second half of this century they will likely become a majority (Staetsky and Boyd 2015). Haredim are highly heterogeneous, subdivided into many sects, varying in their relationships with Israel, wider society, and other Jews. What unites them is strict adherence to Jewish law and aversion to secular influences. To varying degrees haredim are detached both from general British society but also other Jews, with their own synagogues and rabbinic authorities, which refuse to participate in communal organisations where non-Orthodox Judaism is represented, including the Board of Deputies.

Haredim are unlike the more acculturated and assimilated British Jews in that the community does not 'need' Israel as a hook for its cohesion. Commitment to undeviating preservation of Jewish law, religious study, and avoiding corrupting external influences are defining. For theological reasons, many are ambivalent regarding the secular Jewish State, and a fringe minority are openly hostile. However, due to the centrality of the Jewish people and its welfare in their world view, Israel commands deep concern and commitment. Surveys show haredim are more hawkish on the Israeli-Palestinian issue that any other sector of British Jewry (Miller et al. 2015). They also have very strong, personal connections to Israel. According to Jonathan Boyd, 'The extent to which they will go to study, or for _smichot_ (Rabbinic ordination), or to marry Israelis who will come here; their real engagement with Israel is very solid' (Boyd 2015, interview).

It is also Haredi Jews, easily identifiable by their dress, who are most likely to experience anti-Semitic harassment, which surges when Israel is involved in conflict (Staetsky et al. 2014). Whilst some Haredi Jews may be insulated from anti-Zionist discourse which other Jews encounter, they are more likely to experience blowback from the Middle East such as physical attacks.

Conclusion

The British Jewish case represents a special model in the Israelization of Judaism between diverging American and French experiences. Britain's Jews sustain ethnic and community cohesion to a greater extent than in America. The enduring sense of insecurity felt by Jews in Europe, in contrast to those in America, impacts Anglo-Jews. But whilst they are deeply perturbed by hostility toward Jews and Israel in parts of British society, they still feel more secure and see a brighter future than their French counterparts. This is due both to the community's longevity, and to British multiculturalism. The recent flourishing of Jewish culture has become an expression of unyielding Jewish commitment to Britain itself, to the open and pluralist culture of the West, whilst maintaining loyalty to the Jewish state.

The boundaries of British Jewish loyalties and identities today are determined largely on two dimensions: commitment to Israel and religious practice. For the relatively small number who would like to maintain a rich Jewish life detached from Israel, doing so appears almost impossible. Israel's ancestral pull as well as its modern culture draws Jews in, and outshines American Jewish culture. At the same time, Israel's political controversies impose themselves on British Jews, whether they like it or not.

For liberal and progressive Jews, this Israelization of identity is increasingly a source of tension. Indeed, a significant number of progressive and secular Jews in Britain admit that Israel's politics

drive them away. Yet those who would like to respond to Israel's controversies by distancing themselves from the Jewish state, tend to sit at the lower end of the scale of Jewish identity, practice and belonging, and among the most likely to intermarry and assimilate.

Meanwhile there is increasing room for descent against Israeli policies, and those seeking room to criticise have successfully institutionalised themselves within the community in the form of Yachad. Yet it is clear that the boundaries of loyalty among British Jews are dictated by the limits of the Zionist spectrum, which itself is often defined by the debates inside Israel. Those who fail to cross the threshold may be cast as disloyal.

Only the ultra-Orthodox can remain, theoretically, ambivalent regarding Israel and not have their credentials as loyal Jews questioned, or fear for the sustainability of their Jewish life. Yet even the British Haredi community is today deeply enmeshed with Israel through personal and institutional ties.

In short, the Israelization of British Jewry is all encompassing, even whilst it allows for the thriving of the diaspora community in Britain.

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