



GRAAT On-Line Occasional Papers - April 2009

**Fighting for the Hearts and Minds of American Jews:  
Identity Politics at the Crossroads of Domestic and Foreign Policy**

Pierre Guerlain

Université Paris Ouest Nanterre

The history of thought, to say nothing of political movements, is extravagantly illustrative of how the dictum “solidarity before criticism” means the end of criticism. I take criticism so seriously as to believe that, even in the very midst of battle in which one is unmistakably on one side against another, there should be criticism, because there must be critical consciousness if there are to be issues, problems, values, even lives to be fought for.

Edward Said<sup>1</sup>

If we are to compete for the hearts and minds of Jewish children and adults, we will have to shift our resources toward Jewish education. By Jewish education I do not mean only religious education.

Alan Dershowitz<sup>2</sup>

An ideological battle is raging within the American Jewish community which revolves around support for Israel and the meaning of “Jewishness.” In order to introduce the topic and analyze the parameters of this battle, I will rely first on a series of quotations which I will then put into perspective. The following words were written by Eric Alterman, a liberal professor of journalism, who writes for *The Nation* and is quite critical of US foreign policy:

Today's topic is the paradox—or one of them, anyway—of American Jewish political behavior. No, it's not that hoary old cliché that they “earn like Episcopalians but vote like Puerto Ricans.” Rather, it's that they think like enlightened liberals yet allow belligerent right-wingers and neocons who frequently demonize, distort and denounce their values to speak for them in the US political arena.<sup>3</sup>

Alterman wishes to deconstruct what he perceives to be a common prejudice about Jews in America, a prejudice whose standard form is expressed at the end of the quote. This prejudice is entertained not only by many Americans but also by many in the world who are angry with the special relationship between the US and Israel and the crimes or injustices committed by these two countries. Thus Alterman goes on:

According to the American Jewish Committee's 2007 survey of American Jewry, released December 11, a majority of Jews in this country oppose virtually every aspect of the Bush Administration/neocon agenda. Not only do they disapprove of the Administration's handling of its “campaign against terrorism” (59-31 percent), they believe by a 67-to-27 margin that we should never have invaded Iraq. They are unimpressed by the “surge”—68 percent say it has either made no difference or made things worse, and by a 57-to-35 percent majority they oppose an attack on Iran, even if it was undertaken “to prevent [Iran] from developing nuclear weapons.”<sup>4</sup>

### *Against the ethnicization of thought*

Many liberals and left-wingers in the US, whether they are Jewish or not, refuse the ethnicization of political views. What Alterman is doing aims at showing that American Jews are in fact quite different from the usual representations given of them. All ethnic or so-called racial groups run the risk of being subsumed in only one category; many activists within these groups in effect cooperate with those who demonize them by accepting their generalizations even if they dispute its contents. There is indeed a strange rhetorical convergence between activists for the Israel lobby who describe themselves as Zionists and anti-Semites: both groups who disagree about almost everything seem to agree that “being Jewish” is a political stance. AIPAC

(American Israel Public Affairs Committee) members and supporters try to project the idea that “all Jews support Israel” by which they mean “support the policies of current or past Israeli governments,” and anti-Semites, for very different reasons, are apt to resort to a similar statement. Some left-wing critics of both Zionism and other left-wingers like Noam Chomsky, such as James Petras and Jefferey Blankfort, are apt to resort to the same ethnicization of thought as Zionists and anti-Semites. For instance, when they suppose that Chomsky's ideas are determined by his belonging to a particular ethnic group, Jews. <sup>5</sup>

As Marla Brettschneider writes (in her introduction to a book which stems from her PhD dissertation written in the 1980s): “As an aspect of communal responsibility, the American Jewish community has been expected to be pro-Israel by acting as a defender of the Zionist idea by uncritically supporting, and defending the Israeli government.”<sup>6</sup> In the complex mosaic of American ethnic groups there is a particularly significant and ideologically peculiar fight over the identity of Jews and the meaning of Jewishness in the US. This same researcher, Marla Brettschneider, thus quotes the 1977 annual report of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish organizations: “Dissent ought not and should not be made public [...] because the result is to give aid and comfort to the enemy and to weaken that Jewish unity which is essential for the security of Israel.” (5). Criticism is accepted only if it is within the confines of the community and not part of the public debate (*Lo lifney ha-goyim*, not in front of the Gentiles). It is therefore an ethnic gag order that many Jewish Americans have courageously defied.

Jews represent a bit more than 2% of the US population and only 5% of all voters in national elections. Like African Americans they are a very diverse group in terms of income, though most Jews are middle-class and the percentage of poor Jews is lower than that of poor Hispanic Americans or African Americans, but they are very similar to other ethnic groups like Japanese Americans or Indian Americans.

Phrases like the “Jewish lobby” or “Jewish power” or “the Israel Lobby” are commonly used in the US and in the rest of the world. These expressions are

particularly ambiguous and contradictory in their connotations, which vary tremendously depending on who uses the term. Thus in the US the term “lobby” is not derogatory and does not necessarily imply shady dealings though, of course, many critics worry about the deleterious effect of lobbies and their financial power over the democratic process.<sup>7</sup> The National Rifle Association or the American Association of Retired Persons are powerful lobbies which are both quite legal and very effective in influencing members of the US Congress and, to a lesser extent, the President. Ethnic lobbies are the norm rather than the exception and the so-called Indian lobby, for instance, is becoming stronger and stronger as immigrants from India tend to be well-educated, well-connected and more and more numerous. Indeed Indians have a higher income average than so-called whites or Wasps. Outside the US the word “lobby” itself suggests something shady or even illegal even when, as is the case in the European Union, there are many powerful pressure groups or interest groups that do not always call themselves lobbies.

Within the US there is a polemical use of words such as “lobby” or “power” when connected to Jews. Anti-Semites, will of course, stress “Jewish power” or even talk about the “control of Jews” over the media or US foreign policy, something that Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer do not do in their recent work on the Israel Lobby.<sup>8</sup> Things would be easy if no-one but anti-Semites used this vocabulary but it is also used by some politically active supporters of Israel or of so-called Jewish causes too. Thus Jonathan Goldberg, the editor of *Forward*, a Jewish publication which traces its roots to the Yiddish *Vorwärts*, published a book which he entitled *Jewish Power; Inside the American Jewish Establishment* in 1996.<sup>9</sup> The so-called “organized Jewish community” to use Goldberg’s phrase, that is the multitude of Jewish organizations which officially support the state of Israel, is often torn between two attitudes: minimizing Jewish influence in America by pointing out that Jews are a very small minority and that the Administration is made up of mostly Wasps with a few African Americans, and

expressing pride at the long way Jews in America have traveled since the early years of the twentieth century.

Liberal anti war Jews or the many left-wing Jewish professors in US universities, who often form the backbone of anti-imperialist thinking, are thus caught in a kind of pincer movement: the official spokespeople for the leaders of Israel, the US political leadership and anti-Semites talk about Jews as if they were one bloc, all similar in their ideas and political attitudes. Some of the most articulate critics of Israeli policies (or American ones) are themselves Jewish and very much aware of the history of Jewish people in Europe at the time of the Holocaust yet they are called “self-haters” or “renegades” or “goys” by people who feel they represent true “Jewishness.” People like Tony Judt who was barred from giving a talk at the Polish consulate in New York by a so-called Jewish organization had to say he is Jewish for the *New York Times* to publish an op-ed on the Israel lobby by him.<sup>10</sup> The most consistent and famous critic of US foreign policy, Noam Chomsky, is Jewish and was raised in a Jewish environment which he does not reject at all.<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler, who changed the way we think about gender, belongs to this group of so-called radical intellectuals who are concerned about what the US and Israel do and refuse to systematically approve of anything on “ethnic” grounds. Indeed there is a long tradition of Jewish radicalism in both Europe and the United States which may not be as strong today as it was a century ago or merely sixty years ago but is still significant. Norman Finkelstein, the son of Holocaust survivors, is the most persistent critic of Israel and its apologists in the US. A loud-mouthed critic who is not always “diplomatic,” he often clashes with Alan Dershowitz, a Harvard professor who wrote a book entitled *The Case for Israel*<sup>12</sup> and is in favor of “torture warrants” to fight terrorism.<sup>13</sup> Finkelstein wrote a whole book pointing up the many errors and examples of plagiarism in one of Dershowitz’s own books.<sup>14</sup> Indeed Finkelstein and Dershowitz are the two outer limits of the discourse on Israel taking place not just within the Jewish community but in the US at large.

Between Chomsky and Abe Foxman, the director of the Anti-Defamation League,<sup>15</sup> there are people like Michael Walzer or Todd Gitlin, liberal academics who do not share the views of either writer or people like Rabbi Michael Lerner, obviously a religious person and the editor in chief of the magazine *Tikkun* who has become increasingly critical of the occupation of Palestine, Israeli atrocities perpetrated there often with American support.<sup>16</sup> In other words and not surprisingly American Jews are, like all other ethnic groups, diverse and, again as is the case for any group, their ideas, political attitudes and preferences vary. This, of course, does not mean that there are no dominant characteristics but one should never lose sight of the diversity of American Jews, especially when the American Jewish community is strongly encouraged or even coerced into conformity by organized groups such as AIPAC.

Let me quote a new Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé, who is quite blunt about the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and was hounded out of his job in Haifa and now teaches in Exeter in England.<sup>17</sup> Here is what he has to say about the particular situation of Jews in the US:

In the US today, one cannot ignore the level of integration of Jews into the heights of American financial, cultural and academic power. This has, of course, many positive implications: the Jews in America did not, in Hannah Arendt's words, live "outside the society," as they did in Germany; the anti-Semitism that feeds on, among other things, the alienation of the Jewish experience, did not take root in the US.<sup>18</sup>

Jews are integrated and therefore are an integral part of American society. They intermarry at a very high rate, which means they live in an environment that is very different from the one Jews were familiar with in Europe before World War II or in Israel today. Indeed that is one reason why mainstream pro-Israel organizations must make a special effort to ensure that Jews support Israel. In some ways, so-called Jewish organizations try to enforce a brand of Jewishness on all Jews in the US, a brand that many either do not accept or with which they have only a tenuous connection. In the 1970s a group of progressive Jews called *Breira* (Alternative) was set up and then

systematically demonized, accused of being anti-Israel by mainstream Jewish organizations and forced to disband after five years of existence.<sup>19</sup> Today a group like *Jewish Voice for Peace* plays a similar role.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Different Jewish voices and their impact upon public debate***

It is of course difficult to know how influential various voices are. Chomsky may not be discussed in political science departments but his books sell well and he talks to many audiences, both American and international, though he does not influence the decisions made by the powers that be by one iota. Liberal hawks have often rallied the Bush camp over the war in Afghanistan but expressed doubts about the war in Iraq or even opposed it. The fact that a book by former President Carter, *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid*, was published in 2006 and became a best-seller in spite of the bashing it got in the media indicates that things are changing, however slowly.<sup>21</sup>

Discordant Jewish voices are subjected in the US to the accusation that by not supporting Israel, critics make common cause with anti-Semites, that refusing to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, they are blind or self-haters, and more generally that they belong to the radical anti-American left. They are therefore exhorted to adopt political views on the basis of their ethnicity, however it might be defined.<sup>22</sup> Thus a typical expression of the battle for the hearts and minds of American Jews goes like this:

Whenever Jews speak out against Israel, their motives, their representativeness, their authenticity as Jews are questioned. We are pathologized. For only a psychological aberration, a neurotic malaise, could account for our defection from Israel's cause, which is presumed to be our own cause.<sup>23</sup>

This battle for the hearts and minds of American Jews started mostly in the 1970s and was particularly acrimonious along the years each time Israeli actions or atrocities were publicized in the US, in spite of a definite pro-Israeli bias in the media. So with the 1982

invasion of Lebanon or the war in that country in 2006 or the notorious 2002 Jenin massacres there is an all out media war in which critics of Israel are accused of anti-Semitism. The “new anti-Semitism” in this view is the anti-Semitism that targets Israel as “the Jew among nations.” Now, of course, this is a complex issue, for undoubtedly some anti-Semites hide behind their denunciation of Zionism but, at the same time, apologists for the state of Israel wish to stifle any criticism with the terrible accusation of anti-Semitism.

Jews are understandably wary of anything which can be construed as anti-Semitic or suggest a denial of the Holocaust. No-one wants to be excluded from his or her community and not many intellectuals are as strong as Spinoza who was excluded from his own Jewish community in the Netherlands. So the threat of being accused of anti-Semitism is a potent silencing technique. Yet it is not very different from the threat of being labeled un-American or anti-American. The emotional blackmail is very similar and targets mostly liberals or leftists for, interestingly enough, the right (including the religiously anti-Semitic right, the so-called Christian fundamentalists) is exempted from this criticism. As Ofira Seliktar put it in 2002: “Redefining anti-Semitism was also helpful in combating the growing New Left critique of Israel.”<sup>24</sup> The new definition clearly served ideological purposes and had very little to do with genuine anti-Semitism. An article published in December 2006 entitled “‘Progressive’ Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism” by Alvin H. Rosenfeld for The American Jewish Committee highlights this technique.<sup>25</sup> Progressive authors are criticized for their opposition to Israeli policies, sometimes for their metaphors linking Israel to Germany at the time of the Nazis (which is indeed highly problematic, for Nazi Germany and Israel today are not similar societies; crimes or massacres vary in accordance with the regime committing them).<sup>26</sup> Lobbyists for Israel have to target not just Jews who think differently but the whole progressive camp. *Slate*, the online magazine, even published a test entitled: “Are you a Liberal Anti-Semite?” – which is partly in jest.<sup>27</sup>

As Judith Butler, referring to dissent among American Jews, expressed it in a



speech she delivered in East Jerusalem:

These groups are small, but they have become a thorn in the side of the mainstream Zionist organizations who can no longer so easily claim to represent all Jews in the US. The strategic aim, as far as I am concerned, is to break apart that hegemony, and for there to be a strong Jewish voice against the occupation, so that when politicians run for offices, they will not be able to assume that the so-called Jewish vote is monolithic, so that they will not be able to assume that Jews favor Sharon or the occupation, or the separation wall, the continuing subjugation, and the radical devaluation of Palestinian lives.<sup>28</sup>

There are today in the US very few genuine anti-Semites and they are mostly on the far right (people like David Duke, who is also a racist) or some Christian fundamentalists who have formed an alliance with AIPAC and other mainline conservative Jewish organizations for their own complex political reasons. Thus, they believe that the second coming of Christ will only happen when Jews are gathered in Israel, but then Jews will have to convert or be exterminated. That the organized Jewish community gives real anti-Semites a pass is nothing new. Chomsky pointed this out in the Bush Sr. campaign in 1988.<sup>29</sup> Christian fundamentalists use Israelis for their own religious and political purposes which are quite theocratic and have echoes of *The Merchant of Venice*, the play by Shakespeare. Israelis in the circles of power and their supporters among American Jews also use Christian fundamentalists for their own ideological and political purposes. They do not believe in the religious conceptions of these Christians but garner their support, which, in terms of numbers, is crucial for they represent about 25% of the voters and have huge mobilizing powers.

It is thus apparently paradoxical that Israelis in power and their right-wing allies in the US support people who are anti-Semitic in a significant way but demonize Jews who care about their history, consider the Holocaust as a major crime against humanity and have no sympathy for anti-Semites. The paradox though is only superficial: it is based upon a Machiavellian approach to politics. The real stakes are political, and anti-Semitism is either ignored or denounced in its so-called new forms according to political necessity.

This discrediting of the left or of so-called left-liberals echoes McCarthyism and is particularly effective for it is couched as an appeal to the conscience of liberals and progressives who, naturally, never deny the Holocaust and wish to base their anti-imperialism upon ethics. So ethical activists who advocate respect for international law are discredited by spurious ethical arguments, whereas unethical violators of international law or advocates of the rule of force are welcome as friends of Israel. This expression “friends of Israel” is particularly fraught with meaning and ambiguous. Friends of peace and a just settlement in Palestine might legitimately be called friends of Israel. Indeed, the expression has been hijacked by those who wish to support the state of Israel, regardless of its behavior. Quite clearly the friends of America in the 1960s and 1970s were those who opposed the war in Vietnam and extolled democratic and tolerant values, not the warmongers who seized upon a pretext to start the war and carried out multiple bombings and atrocities. By the same token the friends of France were those who criticized its colonial policies in Algeria, not those who supported them and therefore supported injustice.

### *Solidarity, truth and intellect in political thinking*

Now a return to the Edward Said quotation in the epigraph is in order. Said insisted on the disconnection between solidarity and thinking, which, for our purposes here, means that ethnic solidarity should not impede criticism. Said not only often referred to the work of famous Jewish thinkers like Walter Benjamin or Sigmund Freud, about whom he wrote a book,<sup>30</sup> he claimed he was the “last Jewish intellectual,” in the sense that, like all the famous Jewish thinkers of modernity, he was an outsider.

Among intellectuals and academics, thinkers like Said who was both American and Palestinian, like Hannah Arendt in a former generation who was German Jewish, and then American, or many American Jews today, are put in the difficult position of having to choose thinking— what Said calls criticism— over ethnic affiliation in their intellectual work. This choice must not erase their ethnicity but transcend it. This

is not specific to Jews, indeed it applies to all Arab or European thinkers but as both Americans and Jews these thinkers face the particular pressures of conformity within their society and community. They run the risk of being slandered as anti-American or “self-hating Jews.” Many of them have been very successful at remaining articulate and decently liberal or progressive in the face of such pressures. Though they are not religious or community-oriented, writers like Tony Judt, Judith Butler or Noam Chomsky, in different ways, continue the “Jewish intellectual tradition” invoked by Said but also by George Steiner, and they are the best response to the so-called Israel Lobby.

Another significant quotation will show that things are changing in the US as a whole as well as in the battle for the hearts and minds of American Jews, a group as diverse as any other. It comes from an essay by Tony Judt:

The habit of tarring any foreign criticism with the brush of anti-Semitism is deeply engrained in Israeli political instincts: Ariel Sharon used it with characteristic excess but he was only the latest in a long line of Israeli leaders to exploit the claim. David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir did no different. But Jews outside of Israel pay a high price for this tactic. Not only does it inhibit their own criticisms of Israel for fear of appearing to associate with bad company, but it encourages others to look upon Jews everywhere as de facto collaborators in Israel's misbehavior. When Israel breaks international law in the occupied territories, when Israel publicly humiliates the subject populations whose land it has seized —but then responds to its critics with loud cries of “anti-Semitism» —it is in effect saying that these acts are not Israeli acts, they are Jewish acts: the occupation is not an Israeli occupation, it is a Jewish occupation, and if you don't like these things it is because you don't like Jews. [...] In many parts of the world this is in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling assertion: Israel's reckless behavior and insistent identification of all criticism with anti-Semitism is now the leading source of anti-Jewish sentiment in Western Europe and much of Asia. But the traditional corollary - if anti-Jewish feeling is linked to dislike of Israel then right-thinking people should rush to Israel's defense - no longer applies. Instead, the ironies of the Zionist dream have come full circle: For tens of millions of people in the world today, Israel is indeed the state of all the Jews. And thus, reasonably enough, many observers believe that one way to take the sting out of rising anti-Semitism in the suburbs of Paris or the streets of Jakarta would be for Israel to give the Palestinians back their land. <sup>31</sup>

This text by Tony Judt is indeed a kind of echo of another one by Edward Said who, in 1998, unequivocally condemned those in the Arab world who applauded the theories of French Holocaust denier, Roger Garaudy. Both Said and Judt argue that you must think individually, against your community if need be, and that truth is the only guideline.<sup>32</sup> In other words, American Jews have to face the same pressures as Palestinian or other Arab intellectuals within their communities. That is why it is crucial to have clear operative concepts which can be used to fight all forms of racism, xenophobia and exclusion and therefore do not pit one ethnic group against another. The Middle East conflict is not an ethnic but a political one in which identity politics, whether practiced by the right, the left, some Jews or some Arabs, is reductive and muddies the waters.<sup>33</sup>

In this context a special mention of the impact of the article and then book by Walt and Mearsheimer must be made. Indeed this book, which can be criticized notably for its failure to define clearly what the “American national interest” is, came at a critical time when the consensus efforts by the “organized Jewish community” were showing cracks. Walt and Mearsheimer insist on the geopolitical changes to explain why the US today not only does not need Israel but also that Israel is detrimental to US national interests. The end of the Cold War and the shift to the rhetorical framework of the global war on terror allegedly explain this change in the relationship between the US and Israel. They fail to take into account, I think, the fact that the military-industrial complex backs or is part of the “Israel lobby” and thus determines the official national interest of the US. Walt and Mearsheimer do a good job of describing the lobbying activities of various groups, notably AIPAC and cannot be accused of anti-Semitism by an honest reader. Even if their book, like any scholarly book, can be criticized, it touched a raw nerve at a critical time.

The charge of anti-Semitism is sometimes warranted, although it rarely applies within US academia, sometimes it is a blatant attempt to silence critics. However, from a historical point of view, as far as the US is concerned, this charge is quite ambiguous and confusing for noted anti-Semites such as Richard Nixon have proved to be strong

supporters of Israel while prominent Jewish defenders of Israel, such as Henry Kissinger, have sometimes been criticized by Israeli politicians or pro-Israel supporters. Indeed, even a criminal anti-Semite like Stalin at times supported Israel (notably in 1948 upon its creation and during the war that followed the UN vote). Far-right activists who are known to have made anti-Semitic statements, like Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, sometimes praise Israel for its bashing of Arabs or are themselves praised by official supporters of Israel, like Roger Cukierman in France, the former head of the CRIF – the French equivalent of AIPAC.<sup>34</sup> So the formula according to which critics of Israel are anti-Semites, and supporters of Israel are not, does not make much historical sense. Some Christian fundamentalists are religious anti-Semites who would like to convert all Jews or see them exterminated after the second coming of Christ and are staunch supporters of the state of Israel.

So besides all the issues covered by the book the relevant question here is why Walt and Mearsheimer had such an impact at such a time. After all, Edward Said had expressed similar ideas a few years before, in much stronger language,<sup>35</sup> and other writers had denounced the Israel lobby as early as in the 1980s.<sup>36</sup> The battle for the hearts and minds of American Jews and the calls for solidarity with Israel, right or wrong, follows a characteristic historical pattern: when the dominant official narrative is endangered the battle becomes fiercer, which is what happens with the dominant US narrative and the accusations of anti-Americanism; this is what has been happening since the Iraq war which started in 2003 and what happens in Russia when the world mentions Chechnya, or China when tensions flare in Tibet.

Walt and Mearsheimer, contrary to Said, are mainstream figures, like former President Carter, so the critique of Israel has left its traditional left-wing or left-liberal home, it is now audible outside academia where the historical battle has already been won by new Israeli historians and their American and European counterparts. The Iraq war which is turning into an expensive quagmire for the US illustrates the pitfalls of constant military intervention in the Middle East, and US and Israeli efforts to support

anti-Hamas or anti-Hezbollah forces in Palestine and Lebanon have backfired; so some sectors of the ruling classes, including within the US military, are questioning American foreign policy and therefore the kind of support the US lends Israel. On top of this, different Jewish voices, be they secular or religious, in the US as well as in Europe and Israel itself, undermine the consensus narrative. Hence geopolitical considerations and ethical ones are moving in the same direction. When the Soviet Union wanted to stop the emigration of Jews, ethics was on the side of the Israel lobby on this particular issue and Kissinger appeared too keen on détente for some strong supporters of Israel.

After the war in Lebanon in 1982 or the Jenin crimes in April 2002 or the much documented 2006 Lebanon debacle, ethical considerations met geopolitical realities.<sup>37</sup> The doubt about the US-Israel relationship does not extend over the existence of Israel, which practically everyone in the US supports (as well as practically everyone in Europe). The doubt targets the nature of Israeli actions. Once again one can discern a historical pattern. Only a small group of French academics and intellectuals opposed the war France was waging in Algeria in 1954, then realities on the ground and international condemnation led to changes; only a few Americans opposed the war in Vietnam in 1964 when Johnson lied to escalate the conflict. The conjunction of geopolitical changes, new research by Israeli historians, a new assertiveness on the part of Jewish progressives in the US and the realization that the US Administration, as well as Israeli governments, have lied about their motivations for action have opened a new space in which appeals to ethnic solidarity do not automatically translate into support for Israel, right or wrong.

Indeed the ethnicization of politics is probably so fierce precisely because it is not working perfectly any longer and the ideological diversity of American Jews challenges the consensus efforts by right-wing supporters of the current Israeli administrations. This is not an altogether novel situation as critics of Israel were more numerous in the US in the 1940s. This was the time when the ethnicization of thought started in the Jewish community, among Zionists in the Jewish Agency who were fighting the

American Council for Judaism. The international debate among Jews had always been affected by a tension between universalism and ethnicization; for instance, well-known luminaries such as Freud and Martin Buber had expressed reservations about Zionism in the 1930s. Yet, since 1967, the situation has never been so conflictual both internationally and in the US. The battle for the hearts and minds of American Jews is heating up and following geopolitical changes in the world. Walt and Mearsheimer are only a symptom of some of the changes taking place. This battle cannot totally be divorced from the battle going on in Israel itself, which at times is very violent, as when Zeev Sternhell, a 73-year-old professor was targeted by assassins (but not killed).<sup>38</sup> Opinion about Israel and about Israeli actions among American Jews have not been static since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and there is no reason to imagine they cannot change now, when everything is in flux. The terms of the battle for the hearts and minds of American Jews are changing and slowly moving away from ethnic solidarity. Barack Obama's election, his becoming president in January 2009 just after the Israeli attack on Gaza and the return of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister in the most right-wing administration in Israel (March 2009) will surely lead to some changes in the relation between the two countries and therefore in the ideological battle within the American Jewish community.<sup>39</sup>

---

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Joseph Massad, "The Intellectual Life of Edward Said," *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Spring 2004 (Vol 33, N° 3 p.8). Originally in Edward Said, *The Text and the Critic*, Harvard UP, 1983, p. 28

<sup>2</sup> *The Vanishing American Jew: in Search of Jewish Identity for the Next Century*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1997. The author is a leading advocate of Israeli causes in the US.

<sup>3</sup> "Bad for the Jews," *The Nation*, January 7, 2008  
<http://www.thenation.com/docprint.mhtml?i=20080107&s=alterman>

<sup>4</sup> The full Survey can be found at: <http://www.ajc.org/site/c.ijITI2PHKoG/b.3642849/>

<sup>5</sup> James Petras, *The Power of Israel in the United States*, Atlanta, Clarity Press, 2006. Petras uses the highly problematic expression "Jewish Lobby" thus privileging an ethnic interpretation of policies and silencing the numerous Jewish voices who disagree with the Israel lobby and non-Jewish ones which support it.

Jeffrey Blankfort, "A Debate on the Israel Lobby," *CounterPunch*, February 24 / 25, 2007. <http://www.counterpunch.org/blankfort02242007.html> See also his: "Damage Control: Noam Chomsky and the Israel-Palestine Conflict," <http://www.voltairenet.org/article143519.html> Highly dubious ethnic rhetoric coming from the left.

<sup>6</sup> Marla Brettschneider, *Cornerstones of Peace; Jewish Identity Politics and Democratic Theory*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1996, p. 1. The book includes a detailed list of Jewish organizations, many dissenting from the dominant view.

<sup>7</sup> See Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: the Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy*, Harvard University Press, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Walt & John Maersheimer. *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Griroux, 2007. See also their previous article: "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy," The longer Kennedy School of Government version is on Harvard's site at:

<http://ksgnotes1.harvard.edu/Research/wpaper.nsf/rwp/RWP06-011>

<sup>9</sup> Addison Wesley, Reading, Mass.

<sup>10</sup> This op-ed was entitled "A Lobby Not a Conspiracy" and was published on April 19, 2006. See his closely reasoned article "Israel: the Alternative," *New York Review of Books*, October 23, 2003 and, more recently "The 'Problem of Evil' in Postwar Europe," *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 55, Number 2, February 14, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Chomsky has written dozens of books and hundreds of articles. Let me just mention his scholarly work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the US: *The Fateful Triangle: the United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*, London Pluto Press (revised edition) 1999. Chomsky is very critical of Walt and Mearsheimer for he thinks lobbies have only the influence major forces in the US let them have. See his book of conversations with David Barsamian: *What We Say Goes*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Hoboken, New Jersey, John Wiley & sons, inc., 2003.

<sup>13</sup> See his Jan 22, 2002, *San Francisco Chronicle* article on this at:

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/01/22/ED5329.DTL>

"Moreover, the vast majority of Americans would expect the officers to engage in that time-tested technique for loosening tongues, notwithstanding our unequivocal treaty obligation never to employ torture, no matter how exigent the circumstances. The real question is not whether torture would be used -- it would -- but whether it would be used outside of the law or within the law. Every democracy, including our own, has employed torture outside of the law."

<sup>14</sup> *Beyond Chutzpah: on the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005. It is a deconstruction of Alan Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel*.

<sup>15</sup> See his book answering Walt and Mearsheimer: *The Deadliest Lies: the Israel Lobby and the Myth of Jewish Control*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 and also the *New York Times* article on him: "Does Abe Foxman Have an Anti-Anti-Semite Problem?", January 14, 2007 at :

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/14/magazine/14foxman.t.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>



---

Foxman who is not an academic subjects Judt, but also former President Carter, to a particularly nasty hatchet job. Jimmy Carter published a book entitled *Palestine, Peace Not Apartheid*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2006 which angered many mainstream pro-Israel organizations.

<sup>16</sup> See Michael Lerner's interview on The Israel Lobby at:

<http://www.tikkun.org/magazine/tik0709/frontpage/israellobby>

Lerner thus states:

“The Israel Lobby’s ‘Jewish Political Correctness’ has put a straitjacket on public conversations about Israel. Reporters and even newspapers that report the complicated and two-sided truth of the Israel/Palestinian struggles are quickly labeled anti-Israel or anti-Semitic. Catholics, Protestants, and secular Americans knew that they would face immediate labeling as anti-Semitic if they said what they were seeing in front of their own eyes—that Israel’s treatment of Palestinians seemed to be violating the democratic and human rights norms the upholding of which had been a primary argument for a special relationship between the U.S. and Israel.”

<sup>17</sup> *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oxford, Oneworld, 2006

<sup>18</sup> “Clusters of history: US involvement in the Palestine question,” *Race Class*, 2007; 48; 1 Sage Publications, London. Can be found online at : <http://rac.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/48/3/1>

<sup>19</sup> Mentioned by Edward Tivnan in *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1987 and also in Walt and Mearsheimer and Brettschneider.

<sup>20</sup> Website : <http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org>

<sup>21</sup> New York, Simon & Schuster.

<sup>22</sup> Definitions of who is a Jew vary a lot, a complex issue if there is one. See: Shlomo Sand, *Comment le peuple juif fut inventé*, Paris, Fayard, 2008 (translated from the Hebrew) and “How Do You Prove You’re a Jew?” *New York Times Magazine*, March 2, 2008 ([http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/magazine/02jewishness-t.html?\\_r=1&ref=magazine&pagewanted=all&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/magazine/02jewishness-t.html?_r=1&ref=magazine&pagewanted=all&oref=slogin)) and the chapter entitled “Zion” in George Steiner’s *My Unwritten Books*, New Directions Books, New York, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Mike Marqusee, *The Guardian*, March 4, 2008, “The first time I was called a self-hating Jew.” See also his *If I am Not For Myself: Journey of an anti-Zionist Jew*, London, Verso, 2008. Marqusee is adamantly opposed to any kind of ethnic reduction and therefore critical of all individuals or groups that resort to it, on the right as well as on the left.

<sup>24</sup> Ofira Seliktar, *Divided We Stand; American Jews, Israel, and the Peace Process*, Westport, Connecticut, 2002, p.27. The writer attacks “liberal Christian churches” for being critical of Israel and likens this attitude to that of the Catholic Church when the Holocaust was taking place. This is the usual strategy of mixing two very different phenomena and equating critique of Israel with denial of the Holocaust, something liberals and progressives do not do.

<sup>25</sup> The paper is mostly a dishonest use of quotations isolated from their context so as to give the impression that all these Jewish authors are closet anti-Semites or blind to anti-Semitism when, in fact writers like Chomsky or Neumann are very careful not to play into the hands of anti-Semites.

[http://www.ajc.org/atf/cf/%7B42D75369-D582-4380-8395-D25925B85EAF%7D/PROGRESSIVE\\_JEWISH\\_THOUGHT.PDF](http://www.ajc.org/atf/cf/%7B42D75369-D582-4380-8395-D25925B85EAF%7D/PROGRESSIVE_JEWISH_THOUGHT.PDF)

<sup>26</sup> On the Israeli predilection for accusing one’s enemies of being Nazis see, Sylvain Cypel, *Les Emmurés, La société israélienne dans l’impasse*, Paris, La Découverte/Poche, 2006 [2005], and Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.slate.com/id/2158962/>

<sup>28</sup> *Logos* 3.1 – Winter 2004 Available at: <http://www.logosjournal.com/butler.htm> (accessed April 28, 2008)

<sup>29</sup> Thus Chomsky wrote: “The leading official monitor of anti-Semitism, the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai Brith, interprets anti-Semitism as unwillingness to conform to its requirements with regard to support for Israeli authorities. These conceptions were clearly expounded by ADL National Director Nathan Perlmutter, who wrote that while old-fashioned anti-Semitism has declined, there is a new and more dangerous variety on the part of “peacemakers of Vietnam vintage, transmuters of swords into plowshares, championing the terrorist P.L.O” and those who condemn U.S. policies in Vietnam and Central America while “sniping at American defense budgets.” He fears that “nowadays

---

war is getting a bad name and peace too favorable a press" with the rise of this "real anti-Semitism.""  
<http://www.zmag.org/Chomsky/ni/ni-c10-s20.html>

<sup>30</sup> Freud and the Non-European, London, Verso, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> *Haaretz*, May 5, 2006

<sup>32</sup> Originally published in French, Said's text was published in its original English version by *Le Monde Diplomatique* in its September 1998 issue, "Israel-Palestine a third way." Here is a significant passage:

"The real issue is intellectual truth and the need to combat any sort of apartheid and racial discrimination, no matter who does it. There is now a creeping, nasty wave of anti-Semitism and hypocritical righteousness insinuating itself into our political thought and rhetoric. One thing must be clear in my firm opinion: we are not fighting the injustices of Zionism in order to replace them with an invidious nationalism (religious or civil) that decrees that Arabs in Palestine are more equal than others. The history of the modern Arab world - with all its political failures, its human rights abuses, its stunning military incompetences, its decreasing production, the fact that alone of all modern peoples we have receded in democratic and technological and scientific development - is disfigured by a whole series of outmoded and discredited ideas, of which the notion that the Jews never suffered and that holocaust is an obfuscatory confection created by the Elders of Zion is one that is acquiring too much, far too much currency."

<http://mondediplo.com/1998/09/04said>

<sup>33</sup> In 1974 two researchers Joe Stork and Sharon Rose wrote: "The fight against anti-Semitism can be carried out by being absolutely clear about the differences between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, between Judaism and Zionism. The Zionist establishment wishes to blur those differences every time it serves their purposes. Therefore Zionist interests are served every time that distinction is not made." Quoted in Grant F. Smith, *America's Defense Line; The Justice Department's Battle to Register the Israel Lobby as Agents of a Foreign Government*, The Institute for Research, Middle Eastern Policy, Inc, Washington DC, 2008. Originally as "Zionism and American Jewry" in *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Vol 3, N° 3, Spring 1974, pp. 39-57.

<sup>34</sup> After the 2002 elections in France when Le Pen came second, Cukierman told the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* (April 23): "Le Pen's success is a message to Muslims to be quiet for he has always opposed Muslim immigration."

<http://www.communautarisme.net/index.php?action=article&numero=38>

<sup>35</sup> "America's Last Taboo," *New Left Review*, Nov-Dec 2000, pp. 45-53

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance: Paul Findley, *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby*, Hill, Westport, Conn, 1985.

<sup>37</sup> There is always a semantic war that shadows the real war. The 2002 events in Jenin were called "massacres" by Palestinian groups but even *Human Rights Watch* which disputes the existence of such massacres talks about "serious violations of international humanitarian law, some amounting *prima facie* to war crimes."

<sup>38</sup> See: "Israeli Professor Zeev Sternhell: Bomb at My Home Shows Settler Violence Spilling over Green Line," *Haaretz*, September 28, 2008. <http://www.palestine-pmc.com/details.asp?cat=6&id=388>

<sup>39</sup> About Gaza Eric Alterman wrote another piece mostly distancing himself from the so-called organized Jewish community, notably Abe Foxman entitled "The Defamation League" to poke fun at the so-called Anti-defamation League (*The Nation*, January 26, 2009) He thus wrote: "Writing in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, the celebrated author and patriot David Grossman termed the Gaza operation "just one more way-station on a road paved with fire, violence and hatred," and added, "our conduct here in this region has, for a long time, been flawed, immoral and unwise."

Another analyst dealing with Gaza, Israel and American Jews, John Goekler, writes: "The Israeli mugging of Gaza, and AIPAC's unexamined and unfettered support for it, has clashed with the Jewish ideal of tikkun olam – 'repairing the world.'" Clearly, once again, no unanimity among American Jews. *CounterPunch*, April 3-5, 2009, <http://www.counterpunch.org/goekler04032009.html>