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Op-Ed: Can You Be Jewish and Antisemitic?

By Halley S. Faust

How many times have we seen a Jew write into the *Santa Fe New Mexican* or *Albuquerque Journal* complaining about Israel? Sometimes these plaintiffs begin with a variation of “I’m Jewish. It’s not antisemitic to criticize Israel’s policies.”

There are two underlying claims here: Being Jewish automatically exempts one from being antisemitic, and criticism of Israel’s policies is not antisemitic. Both are often wrong.

First, a person can be Jewish and antisemitic: Bobby Fischer, the 1972 world champion of chess, claimed that “The Jews are a ‘filthy, lying bastard people’ bent on world domination through such insidious schemes as the Holocaust [...], the mass murder of Christian children [...] and junk food...(*The Atlantic*, December 2002)

Fischer was Jewish and an antisemite.

Let’s be clear: the nature of a statement or an act being antisemitic is not dependent on the actor’s religion, no matter how well-intentioned. “I’m Jewish” provides no special moral authority, dispensation or cover. “Being Jewish” provides no immunity from being antisemitic.

Of course, not all Jews and others who criticize Israel are antisemitic, but some do utilize antisemitic tropes in their criticism of Israel. Which takes us to our second claim: Often what the letter writer claims is not truly Israeli policy.

Do the Israel Defense Forces have a policy of targeting children for arrest or shooting? No. But depicting such claims either through written articles or pictures is practiced by anti-Israel groups like the Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) or Santa Feans for Justice in Palestine (SFJP).

Take the recent dispute over fabricated murals on Old Pecos Trail in Santa Fe, supported by JVP and SFJP. One

was of an Israeli soldier purportedly only feet from the Palestinian youth, Muhammed al-Dura, and his father, pointing his gun at the two. Another depiction was of a soldier pointing his gun at two young children while their mother was shielding them.

These were both fabricated – lies being represented as the truth. They were part of what is known as “Pallywood,” faked images and videos made-up to evoke negative emotions against Jewish Israelis. Yet a member of SFJP claimed in a letter to the *Albuquerque Journal* that Israelis killed the boy even though the claim has been refuted.

We can look to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance for what would make a claim antisemitic. Here is a *partial* list:

1. Applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
2. Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
3. Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
4. Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
5. Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
6. I would add at least four more characteristics frequently invoked: making purposely misleading statements about Israeli acts or policies
7. claims taken out of context,
8. blaming the wrong party for cause and effect,

9. misstating the true historical record.

In addition to the ABQ *Journal* letter mentioned above, here are some examples of recent op-eds or letters written to the *Santa Fe New Mexican* that have illustrated these conditions, producing antisemitic statements:

A February letter claimed that the \$3.8 billion annual funding of military assistance from the US to Israel causes Israeli settlers to throw garbage onto the roofs of Palestinian homes - absurdly implying that garbage throwing is an Israeli policy at least partially encouraged because of US funding. The letter began, “I’m a Jewish American...” This violates #2 above.

A February op-ed claimed that Israel should not arrest Palestinian teens throwing stones. Israel has had a number of its citizens killed by stone-throwing Palestinian teens, the last as recently as May 12, 2020 when a 21-year-old soldier was murdered. All Western countries arrest and prosecute youths for throwing stones. This violates #1 above.

In January 2020, a letter to the editor claimed that “the West Bank and Gaza are [just like Native American reservations] ... Suffering is suffering,” she wrote. But historical context is important to understand why suffering occurs and why it may be perpetuated. This violates at least three antisemitic principles above: #6, 8, and 9.

There are many more examples of these antisemitic slurs that violate IHRA standards. Those criticizing Israeli policy, whether Jewish or not, should make sure that their criticism is truly about Israeli policy, and that they are not applying double standards when tackling Israel’s actions.

Halley S. Faust is chairman of Santa Fe Middle East Watch. More information can be found at www.sfmew.org.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thank you for this issue (Summer 2020). You combine news, teaching, community information, and interesting history, all in one beautifully laid-out and substantial newspaper. The chart with all the symptoms of the various illness-

is already taped to my fridge.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Eli Follick

As a former resident of Albuquerque, but now residing a decade in Las Vegas, NV, I have

come to appreciate the *Link*’s printed page. Las Vegas has only *The Israelite*, a free community commercial undertaking with a second page editorial, restaurant reviews, multiple synagogue news and pictures, lots of ads, a for-your-health supplement, off-

set by a Chabhad rabbi’s Torah commentary. There is no Federation newspaper in Las Vegas.

I have been a subscriber of the *Link* since when Mrs. Milstein was editor and her son the Israel correspondent. The *Link* has consistently been full of interesting person opinion, essays, poems, local synagogue, JCC and Federation events, newsy diaspora stories and of course, Israel politics. It usually takes two or three readings to ferret out the assorted details of the articles, then gets tossed, to await the next issue, just like a daily newspaper.

If the *Link* were an electronic version, I am afraid it would be way less interesting and harder to weave through the articles. Please continue this newspaper, worthy of a “Jewish Pulitzer.” The *Link* does indeed link Jews to the Jewish community at large, even when viewed from another state and city.

Thank you,
Mark Zimmerman

It is not incumbent on you to complete the work. But neither are you free to desist from doing your part.

– Rabbi Tarphon

The axiom that politics and morality do not go together can give you an excuse for a generation or two. But at the end of the day, the system is bound to fail.

– Martin Buber

Thank you very much for writing that article in the *Link* called “Grappling with the history of slavery and oppression in New Mexico.” (page 7, Summer 2020).

Every word of your article about slavery and oppression in New Mexico was important for all of us to read and to talk about and to do something about.

Especially at a time like this, your article is important. Thank you for writing it and publishing it in the *Link*.

Janet Kastel Goldberg



Publisher: Rob Lennick, CEO
Jewish Federation of New Mexico (JFNM), 821-3214

Editor: Sara Koplik, Ph.D.

Editorial Board: Marvin Gottlieb, Ph.D.,
Ron Duncan Hart, Ph.D.,
Sabra Minkus, Sarah Newman

Contributors: Diane Joy Schmidt, Shadi Basil, Aviva Maxon, Halley Faust, Iris Keltz, Emet Ma’ayan, Tiziana Friedman, Brian Colon, Gilad Katz, Paula Amar Schwartz, Erika Rimson, Phyllis Wolf, Carolyn Moran, Shelly Prant, Eli Follick, Schelly Talalay Dardashti, Rabbi Deborah J. Brin, Maggidah Batya Podos, Rabbi Shefa Gold, Sharon Cosby, Rabbi Harry Rosenberg, Rabbi Paul J. Citrin, Rabbi Dov Gartenberg, Miranda Jacobson, Nyira

Gitana, Marc Sanders, Naomi Israel, Bonnie Minkus Holmes.
Production: Christine Carter, Envision Graphics
Wire service: Jewish Telegraphic Agency
Address: The New Mexico Jewish Link
5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE, Abq, NM 87109

Submissions:

Letters to the editor, articles, or other information to be considered for publication must be sent with return address and phone number and signed by the author. E-mail submissions are preferred. The editor reserves the right to edit or deny publication to submissions. Materials sent to *The Link* will not be saved or returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope. All letters, readers forums and opinion

The Link is a community newspaper, published since 1971 as a service by the Jewish Federation of New Mexico. It focuses on Jewish life in New Mexico, and is committed to seeing Jewish life thrive.

pieces solely reflect the opinions of the authors and not the opinions of *The New Mexico Jewish Link*, nor of its publisher, the Jewish Federation of New Mexico. These serve as a forum for the New Mexico Jewish community and *The Link* strongly urges submissions. Send submissions via e-mail to sarakoplik@unmhillel.org or via post to

The New Mexico Jewish Link,
5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109.

The New Mexico Jewish Link is published quarterly.

Postmaster: Send address changes to
JFNM, 5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE Albuquerque, NM 87109.

All letters, readers’ forums, opinion pieces and advertisements solely reflect the opinions of the authors and not the opinions of the New Mexico Jewish Link.