Zionism and the 'self-hating Jew'

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The notion of self-hatred and anti-Semitism among Jews began to be discussed by German writers such as Theodor Lessing, Fritz Wittels and Otto Weininger in the first decade of the 20th century (Baron, 1981; Gilman, 1986). This was followed by a number of German publications on the subject, culminating in a book by Lessing in 1930, *Der judische Selbsthass* (Jewish Self-Hate). In 1941 (republished 1948), Kurt Lewin wrote an account for an English-speaking audience. This article critically reviews Jewish self-hatred as a psychological concept, examining in particular the criteria used to identify its presence in individuals. A lack of clarity over this issue means that the term is often used rhetorically to discount Jews who differ in their lifestyles, interests or political positions (particularly with respect to Israel) from their accusers.

Lewin's description of self-hatred among Jews

Lewin asserted that there is a tendency for some members of underprivileged groups in general, and Jews in particular, to display a degree of hatred towards their own group. He proposed that in any group there are forces drawing people into the group, and forces drawing them away. Given a situation in which the need for status is an important determinant of behaviour, the 'member of an underprivileged group is more hampered by his group belongingness' (Lewin, 1948, p192). As a result, some members desire to leave the group, but since the majority prevents them from leaving they are left on the periphery of the group. According to Lewin, the desire to leave the group is exacerbated by a tendency among members of minority groups to accept the values of the majority, and therefore to see 'things Jewish with the eyes of the unfriendly majority' (p198).

In order to identify who is trying to distance themselves from the group, Lewin assumes that groups have culturally central and peripheral strata, and the 'central stratum contains those values, habits, ideas and traditions which are considered most essential and representative for the group' (p192). Loyal members value these central aspects more highly, and this 'chauvinism' is important to group cohesiveness. Those who would like to leave the group attempt to distance themselves from the group by rejecting Jewish values and customs.

Lewin acknowledged that he had rarely come across direct expressions of self-hatred among Jews. For the most part he found it in behaviours in which it was 'indirect, under-cover' (p187). That is, the behaviours which he singled out were not unequivocal rejections of Jewish identity, nor were they necessarily anti-Semitic. The Jews he identified as displaying self-hate to varying degrees were those taking part in mainstream activities and associations, those who had negative attitudes to particular groups of Jews other than their own, those who did not assert their Jewish identities in the public forum, and those who did not support the organizations that Lewin favoured.

The problem with Lewin's identification of *who* is displaying self-hate arises firstly because of the assumption that there is a correct manner and degree to which people should express their Jewish identities in public, and secondly that there is a set of core values and institutions to Jewish identity. With regards the latter, Lewin assumes that people who do not support the values or institutions he sees as central are purposefully rejecting their Jewish identities. But people may decide not to follow old customs or ascribe to beliefs for many reasons: because of a more general secularisation in Western societies (see Pollak, 1987); because previously close-knit communities (such as the ghettoes of Eastern Europe) became dispersed through urbanisation or emigration (Goldstein, 1995); because younger generations were more critical of the aspirations or values of an older generation (Diller, 1980); or because large-scale immigration meant that people were often born into a different country or society to their parents. To adopt the practices of the majority culture, to take part in its institutions, or to be part of broader social tides does not necessarily imply a hatred of one's ancestral culture. Lewin's claim was that there is a correct way of being a Jew, and people who deviate from this are therefore distancing themselves from their Jewish identity. The problem with this is that who is and is not exhibiting self-hate depends on how

the commentator represents the category, what they define as its essential properties, institutions and political positions, and what level of public identification they judge to be correct. However, these issues are often disputed within social categories. Definitions of Jewish identity have changed over time and have been the subject of much debate. Examples include the changes in the centrality and meaning of the Holocaust for Jewish identity in the last half of the 20th century (Novick, 1999), the debates between spiritual, religious and political Zionists over the nature of the Jews (Hertzberg, 1959), and the controversy of Zionism and its changing relation to Jewish identity over the last century (Wheatcroft, 1996).

Self-hatred in historical context

Sander Gilman (1986) presents a detailed historical examination of the expression of anti-Semitism among Jewish writers in Germany from the 13th to the 20th century. Jews were persecuted throughout the world during this period, and from the 13th to the 16th century in Western Europe there was considerable pressure from the Christian authorities for Jews to convert. Gilman describes the writings of a number of converted or 'baptised Jews' (often priests or monks) which explicitly criticize Jews. Variously the Jews are described as deceitful, stubborn, vindictive, close-minded, blind to the truth of Jesus Christ, and materialistic, beliefs that reflected dominant Christian views.

Some of the writers Gilman describes were clearly attempting to escape being identified as Jews in the public domain, espoused anti-Semitic views, and lived in societies where being Jewish was to be in danger (see Robertson, 1985 for further examples). Many of the later writers Gilman discusses as exhibiting Jewish self-hate, however, although criticising other groups of Jews, were not clearly disowning their own Jewish identity. Indeed, as Gilman points out, many of the writers of the 18th to the 20th century were distinguishing between those they considered 'good' Jews, invariably those accultured, sophisticated German Jews, and 'bad' Jews from the Eastern European countries who were poorer, spoke Yiddish or heavily accented German, and who were less a part of mainstream German life (see also Gay, 1978; Robertson, 1985; Weitzmann, 1987).

Gilman suggests that, for those writers who have publicly criticized aspects of Jewish culture, involvement in progressive movements and literary forms (in particular the Enlightenment) is in itself an indication that one is trying to avoid identification as a Jew. Contrast this with how we might understand Christian writers' participation in such movements – Enlightenment writers who rejected tradition, superstition or religious values criticised Christian practice and belief, but are not labelled self-hating Christians. The problem identity politics poses for progressive Jews is that any movement or form they adopt in opposition to establishment forms is unlikely to be a predominantly Jewish phenomenon. This means, however, that there is always the potential to be labelled disloyal.

Criticizing other groups of Jews

Lewin, and other writers on Jewish self-hatred (eg Booker, 1991; Gay, 1978; Gilman, 1986; Patai, 1977; Robertson, 1985), make much of the conflict between different Jewish groups, particularly those who had come into contact with each other as a result of immigration. These accounts suggest that criticizing other Jews either reveals hatred of one's own Jewish origins and/or a desire to integrate into mainstream society. However, these accounts of self-hate ignore important differences in identity based on class, culture, religious outlook and education between these groups. Gay (1978), for example, describes the great differences between the assimilated Jews of Berlin and the East European immigrants (the Ostjuden) in the early 20th century, which produced an 'intermittent civil war' (p185) between the different Jewish communities. Just as identities can be salient at the level of Jew/Gentile, they can be salient at the level of Russian/German Jew, Orthodox/Secular Jew, or Zionist/Anti-Zionist. These are not pathological levels of categorization and do not require a pathological identity to make them salient. In addition, in any heterogeneous category you will find some sub-groups who believe they behave better than others or embody the principles of the group more than other members. To criticize a sub-group does not imply a criticism of the super-ordinate category.

This is not to deny that there were Jews who lived in anti-Semitic cultures who accepted and/or espoused anti-Semitic stereotypes; the literature is full of such examples. Names such as Otto Weininger, Karl Kraus and Josef Pfefferkorn are notable for the generality and harshness of their accusations against Jews and in their active disavowals of Jewish identity (examples can be seen in Gay, 1986; Gilman, 1986; Le Rider, 1993; Robertson, 1985). There is a large grey area, however, where we should be hesitant about assuming that negative statements about other Jews represent self-hatred. Criticism of sub-groups of Jews which drew on anti-Semitic rhetoric were common in nineteenth and twentieth century arguments over Jewish identity, and have been used variously to argue for and against the Enlightenment, for and against Zionism, for revolutionary socialism, for Orthodoxy, for assimilation, for immigration restrictions. Whether the use of such stereotypes is branded self-hate usually depends on whether the commentator agrees with the wider argument. For example, Zionism promoted the idea of the 'strong Jew' in explicit contrast to a number of unfavourable characteristics that Jews were felt to have acquired from living in anti-Semitic cultures (see Baron, 1981; Elon, 1975; Robertson, 1985; Stewart, 1981 for examples). Because of the similarities between their rhetoric and that of the anti-Semites, the early Zionists were sometimes accused of self-hatred (see Baron, 1981, Gilman, 1986). Even Theodor Herzl was described as being a self-hating Jew for an article he wrote entitled 'Mauschel' (Kike), which severely criticized a section of the Jewish community for, among other things, being 'unspeakably mean and repellent' (Herzl, 1897, cited in Elon, 1975, p251-2). His critic was Karl Kraus, who has himself been branded a self-hating Jew (Gilman, 1986; Le Rider, 1993; Robertson, 1985).

Identity politics

Lewin's motivations were understandable. Identity politics was an important matter for the Jews when he was writing, and Lewin himself had emigrated from Germany in 1933 after Hitler had come to power (Morrow, 1969). He was critical of leaders of the Jewish community in the USA who he thought should assert their identities more strongly. His message was that to dissent, to criticize the group or to focus on its internal differences, weakens it, and given the context when he was writing, when Jews were discriminated against in America and slaughtered in Europe, it endangers the group.

The term 'self-hate' is still commonly used in the Jewish press. It is found in several contexts: to criticize a performer or artist who portrays Jews negatively; as a short-hand description of supposed psychological conflict in fictional characters; in articles about the erosion of tradition (eg marrying out and circumcision); and to discount Jews who criticize Israeli policies or particular Jewish practices. In Janice Booker's '*The Jewish American Princess and Other Myths: The many faces of Jewish Self-Hatred*' (1991) she discusses Jewish stereotypes and criticizes artists and performers who draw on these caricatures. For Booker, these Jewish writers and performers have absorbed anti-Semitic stereotypes and then presented them back to the general public, providing more ammunition for the anti-Semites. Her book also criticizes feminists, left-wing activists, and opponents of Israeli policies for not recognizing the Jews as an oppressed group struggling for nationhood. For Booker, self-hate is visible when a person's actions are perceived to be harmful to her idea of the interests of the Jews. The book can be distilled into a set of rules for being Jewish, and the political positions that are synonymous with Jewish identity are presented as self-evident.

In this type of argument, the self-hatred concept has several benefits. It implicitly asserts that the writer's definition of Jewish identity is correct and natural, and at the same time provides a set of rules governing group members' behaviour. It labels the opinions or behaviours it targets as received, as the uncritical absorption of attitudes from a powerful majority culture rather than being the result of critical analysis. The concept also says something about those it is directed at. On the one hand they have succumbed to the might of the oppressor, and their disloyalty is in part the result of weakness. On the other hand, the attitude is presented as the expression of psychopathology, and therefore not worthy of serious consideration. In Janik's (1987) terms, describing a position as self-hating is "a way of rejecting an argument without examining its merits" (p85).

Jewish Self-Hatred and Zionism

Currently, it is in debates over Israel that the idea of self-hate is perhaps most often found. In these debates the accusation is used by right-wing Zionists to assert that Zionism and/or support for Israel is a

core element of Jewish identity. Jewish criticism of Israeli policy is therefore considered a turning away from Jewish identity itself. To understand this more fully, the development of political Zionism will be briefly described.

As a result of continued persecution and discriminatory laws in many countries around the world, a number of organisations in the 19th century began promoting the idea of organized Jewish settlement in Palestine (Gilbert, 1978). In 1896, Theodor Herzl published *'The Jewish State'*, which provided a practical programme for how it could be achieved, and followed this by organizing the first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897. The Zionist Congress adopted the Basle Programme, which stated that the task of Zionism was to secure a publicly recognized home for the Jews in Palestine (Gilbert, 1978, p51). A further declared aim was that Zionism should 'Dedicate itself to strengthening Jewish consciousness and national feeling' (Elon, 1975; Gilbert, 1978; Stewart, 1981).

According to Gilman, the concept of 'self-hatred' developed at a similar time to political Zionism. Indeed they were often linked. Herzl used the phrase 'Anti-Semite of Jewish origin' (1896/1988 p81) to describe assimilated Jews who might wish to remain in their home countries while at the same time encouraging the Jewish proletariat to emigrate. Theodor Lessing, whose book on Jewish self-hatred, published in 1933, is the only academic study cited by Lewin, and is described by Gilman as 'the paradigmatic study' (p300), was a Zionist (Baron, 1981). Gilman (1986) describes German articles on self-hatred by writers such as Robert Weltsch, Theodor Lessing, and Hans Kohn in the 1920s and 1930s, all of whom used the concept to argue that assimilation was corrupting for the Jews, could only produce self-hatred, and that the solution for Jews was to assert their Jewish identity, primarily through the nationalist project. Although Lewin did not use the 1941 article on self-hate to argue for Zionism, his argument echoes earlier arguments from some in the Zionist movement. For example, Max Nordau, a close associate of Herzl in the development of political Zionism, used the opening speech at the first Zionist Congress to argue that assimilation resulted in a 'spiritual misery' for the Jews:

> "Such is the contemporary situation of the emancipated Jew in western Europe. He has abandoned his specifically Jewish character, yet the nations do not accept him as part of their national communities. He flees from his Jewish fellow, because anti-Semitism has taught him, too, to be contemptuous of them, but his gentile compatriots repulse him as he attempts to associate with them …. he has lost his connection with other Jews ….. His best powers are dissipated in suppressing and destroying, or at least the difficulty of concealing his true character….. he has become a cripple within, and a counterfeit person without, so that like everything unreal, he is ridiculous and hateful to all men of high standards." *(*Nordau, 1897, in Hertzberg 1959, p239*)*

The Diaspora created a problem for the new Jewish nationalism – for thousands of years the Jews had been scattered throughout the world, and had formed distinct communities in the countries in which they lived. The nationalist movement required that such differences be minimised, and the Jews represent themselves as sharing a single identity (see Billig, 1995, and Hobsbawn, 1992, for this point in relation to nationalism in general). Although the early Zionist movement had supporters around the world, it was endorsed more by East European Jews, where persecution was greatest at the turn of the 19th century. The majority of Jews in Western Europe opposed the idea of a Jewish state (Elon, 1975; Wheatcroft, 1996). There were many reasons for this, the primary one being that there was already a long-established Arab population living in Palestine. Jewish anti-Zionists had additional reasons for rejecting Jewish nationalism. Many felt strong attachments to their existing nationalities (Gay, 1978; Weizmann, 1987) and that Zionism would only increase anti-Semitism. Others, notably those Jews who played a major role in the revolutionary socialist movements, favoured a more general secularization which would diminish the importance of all religions and nationalisms (Deutscher, 1968; Gilbert, 1978; Pollak, 1987). Many prominent rabbis argued that Zionism was not consonant with the holy scriptures (Elon, 1975; Wheatcroft, 1996). A further argument of Jewish Anti-Zionists was that the Jews were not an homogeneous people (for examples see Gilbert, 1978; Gilman, 1986; Wheatcroft, 1996). Herzl himself agreed with this, arguing that what bound the Jews together was not necessarily that they themselves identified strongly as Jews (although this would come), nor was it on the basis of a shared religion (since many Jews including Herzl did not practice Judaism), nor was it on the basis of being a single race, but

that they were identified by non-Jews, and in particular by the forces of anti-Semitism, as distinct (Elon, 1975; Stewart, 1981).

As well as attempting to foster a single national consciousness in such a disparate social category, the Zionists had to present themselves as the genuine voice of the Jews. To achieve this, those who opposed Zionism were dismissed as assimilated Jews, on the peripheries of the group, who were no longer representative of Jewish interests. For example, Chaim Weizman, the first president of Israel and one of those involved in convincing the British government to endorse the Balfour Declaration, wrote in a memo to the War Cabinet in 1917 that the anti-nationalists were 'a small minority of so-called assimilated cosmopolitan Jews, most belonging to haute finance, who have lost contact with the development of Jewish life and ideas' (cited in Gilbert, 1978, p101).

Israel and the Self-Hating Jew

Now, over fifty years since the foundation of Israel, the continuing bloody conflict with the Palestinians has ensured that the relation of Zionism and Israel to Jewish identity remains controversial. It should be no surprise, then, to find the notion of Jewish self-hatred frequently used in current debate over Israeli policy. Gilman suggests that "one of the most recent forms of Jewish self-hatred is the virulent Jewish opposition to the existence of the State of Israel" (1986, p391). Similarly, for Booker self-hatred is a fundamental explanation for why Jews might criticize Israel: "While one may argue that these issues are only political, it is important to consider the component of Jewish self-hate that exists in the left-directed anti-Israel slant.." (1991 p96-97). This statement can only be understood if one accepts the prior assumption that "It is a short step from a generalized anti-Zionism to anti-Semitism" (p96). The logic of this argument is as follows: Zionism is a core value of Jewish identity. Criticism of Israel is, therefore, anti-Semitism. Jewish criticism of Israel must then be the result of the internalization of anti-Semitism.

The equation of support for Zionism in general, or the policies of the Israeli government in particular, with Jewish identity is of course extremely controversial given the relatively recent history of political Zionism. There are many Jewish groups, both Zionist and anti-Zionist, which are critical of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. Examples include Jews for Justice for Palestinians (UK), Gush Shalom (Israel), Women in Black (Israel), the Tikkun community (USA), Rabbinical Students for a Just Peace (USA), Jews Against the Occupation (USA), Brit Tzedek (USA), Not In My Name (USA), the Yesh Gvul 'refusenicks', and the Orthodox sect Naturei Karta (for an introduction to the Israeli peace movement see Kaminer, 1996). For these groups, Jewish identity is not consonant with the policies of the current Israeli government, but is affirmed by opposition: "Jewish opponents of Sharon's policies are affirming the highest values of their religion when they conclude that being pro-Israel today requires persuading Israel to end the occupation and break the cycle of violence on both sides" (Brass, 2002, p28; for a similar sentiment see Klaushofer, 2002). Gerald Kaufman, Labour MP (UK) and self-proclaimed lifelong Zionist, who has himself been accused of being a self-hating Jew for his criticism of Israeli policy, makes the same case: "It is time to remind Sharon that the star of David belongs to all Jews, not to his repulsive Government. His actions are staining the star of David with blood. The Jewish people, whose gifts to civilised discourse include Einstein and Epstein, Mendelssohn and Mahler, Sergei Eisenstein and Billy Wilder, are now symbolised throughout the world by the blustering bully Ariel Sharon, a war criminal implicated in the murder of Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila camps and now involved in killing Palestinians once again" (Speech to House of Commons, April 16, 2002).

The existence of Jews who criticize Israel might call into question the assertion that Jewish identity is synonymous with the hawkish Zionism of the current (2003) Israeli government. The accusation of self-hatred solves this problem since it suggests that critics of Israel are pathological and unrepresentative of Jewish identity. For example, the writer Jacques Givet (1979), in a polemic on those who oppose Zionism, states that 'The behaviour of anti-Zionist Jews clearly reveals a rejection of themselves as Jews and an unconscious acquiescence in the image which their enemies seek to project of them. The process is psychologically understandable but is a form of political defeatism' (p53). Givet uses Lewin's account of self-hatred to explain why Jews might be anti-Zionists, suggesting that the use of a psychological

explanation for Jewish anti-Zionism offers 'more solid' grounds for his analysis than if he were to explain these as political choices.

Further examples from *The Jerusalem Post* give a flavour of how this concept is used by those on the right-wing of Zionist politics. In the first case, the concept is directed at those Jews who criticize particular actions of the Israeli government, such as military operations and support for the construction of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. For example, in 1992 Ariel Sharon, the defence minister during the 1982 massacre of Palestinian civilians at Sabra and Shatilla and the current Likud prime minister, wrote a piece in the Jerusalem Post describing the Jewish left-wing who criticized the invasion of Lebanon as 'consumed by self-hate and the tendency to kowtow to the enemy, and the Arab nationalist parties' (Sharon, 1992).

Self-hatred is also used to reject those Jews who support peace initiatives that include an independent Palestinian authority or state. In another article, this time criticizing the then Labor government for their participation in the Oslo peace process and for accepting the idea of an independent Palestinian Authority, Sharon writes 'But history marches on. Terrible self-hate engulfs us. The terrorist organization's flag is unfurled in Tel Aviv's Malchei Yisrael Square. We plead with Arafat by phone, dispatch couriers post-haste. Our leaders talk to Arafat about disarming Jews and dismantling Jewish settlements' (Sharon, 1994; for a discussion of the attempts of the Israeli right-wing to delegitimize Prime Minister Rabin during the Oslo negotiations see Bar-Tal and Vertzberger, 1997).

Another context in which it is used is in response to Jews who stress that Palestinians have suffered injustice. Thus, Michael Freund, ex-deputy director of Communications and Policy Planning in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office (1996-1999) castigates journalists who suggest 'a moral equivalence' between Palestinian and Israeli violence, and writes: 'Though Israel may have left the Diaspora behind, it seems not to have shaken the Diaspora mentality, in which Jews would typically tear themselves apart with self-criticism, and even self-hatred, in the hope that our enemies would hate us less. Sadly, some of our journalists carry on this dubious tradition' (Freund, 2001). In a further example, a dispute arose in Israel in 2000 over a new history textbook to be used in schools which addressed the question of Palestinian refugees for the first time (described by Hoffman, 2000). Opponents, who demanded the book be withdrawn, warned that the book departed from traditional Zionist narratives. The book had been approved by the Education Ministry's committee of history academics. A Likud politician, Limor Livnat (Minister of Education, Culture and Sport in the Israeli government at the time of writing), said in the Knesset Education Committee that 'academia is infected by self-hatred and this is filtering down to the school system.' The Committee called upon the Education Ministry to remove the book from schools.

There is a more sinister side to this type of identity politics. Jews who publicly criticize Israeli policies regularly report receiving death threats and hate mail accusing them of being self-hating Jews (for examples see Engel, 2000; Klaushofer, 2001; Kuttab, 2000; Lerner, 2002). Internet sites of extremist organisations such as the Jewish Defence Organisation, Jewish Watch Dog and Masada2000 post lists of the addresses and phone numbers of so-called 'self-hating Jews' who have spoken out against Israel. On these web-sites, in addition to being charged with self-hate, critics of Israel are described as 'anti-Jewish Jews', 'traitors', a 'fifth column', 'enemies of the Jewish people', and of 'siding with the enemies of the Jewish people'.

Whilst Lewin defined Jewish identity in terms of a set of core values, the quotes above define an enemy as a central feature of Jewish identity. From the beginning, political Zionism defined Jews on the basis of their shared victimhood to argue for a Jewish homeland where they would no longer be victims. Segal (2002) notes how this identity as victim coexists with the model of the 'tough Jew' fostered by the early political Zionists and reinforced by Israel's military successes. The construction of Jews as perennial victims, whilst understandable given the centuries of persecution culminating in the Holocaust that they have faced, nevertheless has important implications for identity politics and intergroup relations in the present, a point noted by Bar-Tal (1998) in relation to Israel, and Novick (1999) in his discussion of Jewish identity in the USA since the Holocaust. The extracts above illustrate how Jews who speak out for Palestinian rights are often portrayed as siding with those who would wish to destroy the Jews. One vivid

example of this is the portrayal of the Labour Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as a Nazi in demonstrations against the Oslo negotiations of the early 1990s (described in Bar-Tal & Vertzberger, 1997).

Conclusion

In a situation of violent conflict, progress towards a negotiated settlement can be blocked by definitions of group identity which function to label anyone who criticizes those in power as disloyal to the group. In the case of Israel, Jewish identity becomes defined (by those in power and other 'hawkish' Zionists) in terms of an enemy, and statements by Jews of injustice to the Palestinians are labelled pathological, weak and treacherous. This occurs against a cultural backdrop in which the concept of Jewish self-hate is well known, and is used in everyday contexts to discuss works by Jewish artists and in arguments encouraging Jews not to give up traditions or to dissolve boundaries with Gentiles. Although professing to be based on a psychological analysis, such uses of the concept need to be understood in rhetorical terms as attempts to stifle debate among Jews about Israel and the policies of its government. It is a powerful manoeuvre because it brands the person as inauthentic, as a traitor, and as weak, thus shaming the target both as an individual and as a member of a community. This is not to deny the usefulness of the notion of self-hate, nor that dominant discourses can create conflicts of identity in minority group members, but to point out that this understanding can be utilised by people to police their own communities in such a way that boundaries and/or hostilities with other groups are maintained.

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