

Forward

WEEKEND READS

12.10.21

News

Can a new word – ‘Zionophobia’ – clarify the debate over Israel?

By Arno Rosenfeld

Israel sits in the center of the roiling debate over what is and isn't antisemitic.

Top Jewish establishment leaders have twisted themselves into knots trying to explain precisely when and how criticism of Israel crosses the line into antisemitism. And even when they draw what seems to be a red line, there are caveats.

Meanwhile, many progressive Jews and Palestinians balk at what they see as frivolous accusations of antisemitism leveled at those trying to stand up for Palestinians suffering under Israeli rule.

Now, a new term has entered the debate, one promoted by pro-Israel advocates who say it can bring clarity to the confusing feud over the definition of antisemitism. Zionophobia – “an obsessive animosity toward the idea of a homeland for the Jewish people” – represents the idea that discriminating against Jewish Zionists is a form of bigotry distinct from antisemitism.

“Zionophobia,” however, seems to have touched off more wrangling – between those who deem it yet another way to delegitimize any criticism of Israel, and those who say it captures the discrimination they experience for supporting the Jewish state.

Judea Pearl, a computer scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles who is active in the campus debates over Israel, appears to have originally coined the term in 2018. But it only drew widespread attention last week after it was used in a letter from University of Southern California faculty concerned about statements made by an engineering student on campus.

More than 65 professors wrote that they were concerned with “the continuing instances of anti-Semitism and Zionophobia on our campus.”

The term's appearance in the letter – and a social media post from the controversial pro-Israel group Canary Mission – quickly drew a mix of mockery and condemnation from pro-Palestinian activists online. Critics seized on the idea that embracing a political ideology like Zionism could make one a member of a group that should be shielded from discrimination.

“We are absolutely NOT making ‘zionophobia’ a thing,” novelist Rebecca Podos wrote on Twitter. “Zionists are not an oppressed or marginalized class of people.” Others were more flip: “They keep creating new ridiculous terms,” another user wrote. “Yeah, I’m definitely apartheidphobic.”

But Pearl argued that discriminating against Zionists is a distinct form of bigotry aimed at Jews, even if those attacking the movement are not otherwise antisemitic.

“Zionism [The eventual return to Zion] is at the core of Jewish identity, more fundamental even than divine supervision,” Pearl wrote in an email. “Hence discrimination on the basis of Zionist beliefs amounts to ‘racism’ - discrimination on the basis of an immutable quality.”

Despite this, Pearl said that claims of antisemitism leveled against anti-Zionists are too blunt to capture this form of discrimination because many of those who oppose Zionism are either Jewish themselves or friendly toward Jews outside the context of Israel.

“I see hordes of BDS cronies volunteering to fight for the right of Jewish students to have a Kosher cafeteria, to pray three times a day, and to wear Yarmulke in public,” Pearl wrote in a 2018 blog outlining the term. “And they truly mean it, as long as the Yarmulke is not decorated with blue and white Magen David.”

The term has other proponents, including Jewish Journal editor David Suissa who lamented that Zionists on college campuses lacked the protections given to gay, Muslim and transgender students.

“All societal phobias – from homophobia to Islamophobia to transphobia – are unacceptable, except, apparently, for Zionophobia,” Suissa wrote in a column last year.

And while the term has been slow to catch on outside of southern California, other Israel advocates have floated similar arguments about how what is traditionally called anti-Zionism can effectively discriminate against Jews even if not all Jews believe in Zionism or

support Israel.

Misha Galperin, chief of the National Museum of American Jewish Heritage, has compared Zionism to Shabbat observance. While Jews may differ in their approach to both concepts, Galperin said, demonizing either one strikes at the heart of an important religious belief for many Jews.

“If somebody denies you the belief in observing Shabbat because it’s part of the Jewish religion, nobody has any doubt that’s antisemitic,” Galperin said. “And if somebody denies you the fact that you are identified with a state – which is also part of our religion – that is also antisemitic.”

Still, Pearl’s promotion of “Zionophobia” runs counter to the way most major Jewish organizations focused on both antisemitism and advocating for Israel have treated anti-Zionism. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s working definition of antisemitism, which has been adopted and aggressively promoted by much of the Jewish establishment, states that “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination” in Israel may be antisemitic but that it depends on the context.

In recent months, both the American Jewish Committee and Anti-Defamation League took what appeared to be more unequivocal approaches to the question of whether opposition to Israel’s existence as a Jewish-majority state is antisemitic.

“We as an organization certainly believe that anti-Zionist rhetoric and speech should be treated as antisemitic in every respect,” Avi Mayer, the American Jewish Committee’s senior spokesperson, told Forward opinion editor Laura Adkins in October.

Similarly, ADL chief Jonathan Greenblatt responded to the controversy over Sunrise D.C.’s boycott of three pro-Israel Jewish groups in October by stating on Twitter: “To be clear: excluding groups solely because they support Israel is antisemitic.”

But others in these organizations subsequently qualified those bold declarations. Kenneth Bandler, director of media relations for the AJC, said that the organization believed “anti-Zionist hate speech,” as opposed to all expressions of anti-Zionism, “should presumptively be treated as antisemitic.”

And a spokesman for the ADL shared with the Forward a definition that the organization uses, which noted that anti-Zionism was not “inherently antisemitic,” although it became

so if it was used to disparage Jews who feel a connection to Israel.

Pearl prefers to sidestep the messiness these definitions can foster.

“Every time we label an attack against Israel ‘anti-Semitic’ we lose the high moral ground and the conversation drifts to where we cannot win,” he wrote in the 2018 article titled, “Zionophobia – our only fighting word.”

If Pearl hopes that his new word will free the debate over Israel from a back-and-forth over the definition of antisemitism, he may be disappointed. Alon Confino, who helped organize the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism over concerns that too many institutions were treating anti-Zionism as antisemitism, said the invention of “Zionophobia” seemed like an attempt to stifle political speech.

“Zionism is a national political movement,” said Confino, a Holocaust scholar at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. “National political movements are always debatable.”

Arno Rosenfeld is a staff writer for the Forward, where he covers U.S. politics and American Jewish institutions. You can reach him at arno@forward.com and follow him on Twitter [@arnorosenfeld](https://twitter.com/arnorosenfeld).

Opinion

2022 Olympians can protest the Uyghur genocide like brave athletes did at Nazi games in 1936

By Rafael Medoff

President Biden's decision to withhold U.S. diplomatic participation from the 2022 Beijing Olympics, while allowing athletes to take part, confronts America's pole-vaulters and shot-putters with a familiar moral dilemma: Should sports and politics mix?

It's a shame that the president has decided to limit his response to Chinese human rights abuses to such a halfway measure. After all, the diplomatic ceremonies that take place at the Olympics are the least important parts of the event; it's the athletic competition that matters. Permitting the American athletes to go to China will undercut the power of the Biden administration's diplomatic gesture.

Now the moral burden shifts to the athletes themselves – just as it did in 1936.

When the Roosevelt administration declined to boycott that year's Olympics in Nazi Germany, American Jewish organizations, the NAACP, and other groups appealed to U.S. athletes to refuse to go to Berlin, as a protest against the persecution of German Jews.

Sadly, only a handful of athletes were prepared to forego the rewards of that year's Olympics competition and speak out against oppression: sprinter Herman Neugass, speedskater Jack Shea, swimming coach Charlotte Epstein, track and field stars Syd Koff, Lillian Copeland, Milton Green and Norman Cahners, and the Long Island University Blackbirds' basketball team. Their sacrifices deserve to be remembered and honored.

Over the years, nearly all athletes continued to adhere to the notion that sports and politics shouldn't mix. On the eve of the 2008 Olympics in China, speedskater Joey Cheek, a previous gold medalist, urged athletes to speak out against China's support of the Sudanese government, which was sponsoring the Arab militias that were carrying out genocide in Darfur. A few athletes expressed sympathy for Cheek's efforts regarding

Darfur, but no participating Olympians publicly criticized the Chinese government or boycotted The Games.

Recently, however, the consensus against mixing sports and politics has begun to crack. When controversy erupted over a new immigration law in Arizona in 2010, the Phoenix Suns basketball team donned uniforms with their team name written in Spanish as a gesture of solidarity with the state's Latino community. In 2016, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick refused to stand for the national anthem as a protest against racism in American society.

Last year, the dam finally broke. When racial justice protests erupted across the country, professional sports leagues jumped in. The National Basketball Association postponed playoff games to protest the Jacob Blake shooting. The National Football League painted the words "End Racism" in the end zones of its teams' fields. Naomi Osaka, a top-ranked tennis player, refused to take part in her scheduled semi-final match. "Before I am an athlete, I am a Black woman," Osaka said. "And as a Black woman, I feel as though there are much more important matters at hand."

The trend continued this past year, with Major League Baseball withdrawing its All-Star Game from Atlanta to protest recently-adopted voting laws in Georgia.

But not every cause has stirred consciences in the world of sports, especially when lucrative business deals are at stake – such as the NBA's burgeoning relationship with the Chinese government. When Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey tweeted a six-word protest against Chinese oppression of Hong Kong in 2019, the Rockets' owner forced him to recant, and some high-profile players publicly defended China.

Whatever one thinks of the merits of a particular issue or a particular type of protest, athletes who speak out are advancing an important principle: Social justice should not stop at the border.

Genocide abroad should matter just as much to every American as immigration laws or race relations at home do. The U.S. government has determined that the Chinese regime is carrying out "ongoing genocide" against its Muslim Uyghur citizens. According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, China's "crimes against humanity" include "forced sterilization, sexual violence, enslavement, torture, forcible transfer, persecution, and imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty."

Celebrities such as athletes are in a unique position to do something about human rights because, for better or for worse, celebrities have influence. Young people look up to them. So it matters whether they use their fame strictly for personal gain, or also use it to fight against injustice. It mattered when Babe Ruth signed on to a protest in 1942 by German-Americans against “the Hitler policy of cold-blooded extermination of the Jews of Europe.” And, conversely, it matters that NBA star LeBron James has been publicly opposing criticism of the oppressive Chinese regime.

The Chinese government sees the Olympics as an opportunity to improve its image and push human rights concerns out of the limelight. Athletes who travel to Beijing next year will be making a statement by their very presence. In effect, they will be saying: Nothing to see here, folks; let The Games begin!

Tennis star Naomi Osaka was right: there are “much more important matters” in the world than throwing touchdown passes, hitting home runs, or winning at Wimbledon. It’s refreshing to hear an athlete articulate that important principle. But will any Olympians have the moral courage to apply it to China’s genocide of the Uyghurs?

Dr. Rafael Medoff is founding director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, and the author of *The Jews Should Keep Quiet: President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust*, forthcoming from The Jewish Publication Society in 2019.

Opinion

I'm alone for the holidays at 78 – and looking forward to a whole new life

By Lynn Brown Rosenberg

Alone for the holidays for the first time in my life. At 78 years old. I contemplated that painful reality.

My mind wandered back to past holidays, and, as my spirits began to sink, I heard my cellphone chime. It was an invitation from the Alpert Jewish Community Center in Long Beach, California, where I swim, to attend a presentation by heroes from Israel's elite search and rescue team, Unit 669, named for the 669 times Jerusalem is mentioned in the Bible. They were on a new mission: to save lives in the U.S. by bringing over cutting-edge emergency medicine and special first-aid kits modeled after the ones carried by the medics on their team.

A nonobservant Jew, I didn't have much interest in Israel until I went on a cruise that included a visit to Jerusalem on the itinerary. I came away deeply touched by all I learned and experienced. The idea of hearing about heroes piqued my interest. Without thinking, I reserved a spot at the event.

Then I remembered my unsteady feet – arthritis, and they're flat as a board – and my sketchy night vision. And my walker.

There was a time where nothing stopped me. I mean nothing. At 22, when I spontaneously decided I wanted to be a professional pianist and vocalist, I took three piano lessons a day for two short weeks, and started my first job at a restaurant and bar in Sun Valley, Idaho. At 58, despite my fears – will a lion suddenly climb into our jeep and decide we'd be a tasty treat for dinner? – I traveled to Africa for a safari.

Even six months ago I was getting around just fine, more or less.

And then one morning I woke with severe pain in my right hip. Bursitis. A condition that affects the fluid-filled sacs that cushion the bones. I screamed in agony whenever I had to put weight on that leg. After many months of irregular walking, my feet became even more unstable than before. Thanks to pool therapy, the pain finally subsided, but I remained unsteady on my feet. I started to need to use a walker for balance.

I had not been out at night alone in a long time. The fear of falling overwhelmed me.

I don't have a boyfriend – yes, I still date! – so I asked a few friends to join me. No one was available. I asked a stranger at the pool. Same answer. I considered canceling my reservation for the event. I wrestled with feeling strangled by the life I was living: confined, without stimulation, without new experiences.

And then I got fed up. I swallowed hard, put on some makeup, and left my apartment.

It was dusk by the time I got to the area where the event was taking place, at a JCC member's home, not the center I was used to. I struggled to see addresses. I could feel my anxiety level rising. A postal worker still delivering mail walked in my direction, and I wasted no time soliciting her help.

I finally found the house and a parking place. I got my walker out of my car and headed for the front door. And that's when I saw the dozen steep steps I would have to climb to enter the house. Instantly, I realized there was no way I could get up there with my walker.

I was about to go back to my car and return home, but a woman attending the event saw my dilemma and said, "I'll help you up." I took her arm and cautiously put one foot after the other. I asked a fellow arriving at the same time – who I later found out was one of the heroes – if he could bring up my walker, and he did.

I was there! I made it!

For the next 90 minutes, three heroes from Unit 669 talked and showed slides chronicling their experiences saving lives.

As I listened to the young men talk, I was awed by all they had accomplished. In their roles, they had to be prepared for anything: saving downed pilots behind enemy lines, braving a water rescue while fighting 10-foot waves, and more.

I was completely caught up in their breathtaking stories of courage and determination, and how, when they finished their five years of service, they turned around and trained others to do what they had done. And I was surprised when I felt just a touch of heroism within myself. I hadn't given in to my challenges.

A slow realization emerged. I didn't need to be held back by my fears. I could forge through, as the heroes did, and as I did in my earlier years. I looked forward to the whole new life that was in front of me. I could see myself as alone for the holidays, burdened by a walker, etcetera. Or I could choose to see, in the place of those burdens, new and different kinds of opportunities.

And the woman who helped me up the stairs? She's coming to dinner this weekend.

Lynn Brown Rosenberg is the author of the 2014 memoir, "My Sexual Awakening at 70." Email: lrosenberg@aol.com

Culture

That time Tom Waits taught Bob Dylan how to curse in Yiddish

By Seth Rogovoy

Tom Waits, whose colorful career in music and entertainment began around 1970, turns 72 today Dec. 7. While he may not be as prolific as he once was as a recording artist, Waits continues to perform and record, and he still shows up in feature films like “Licorice Pizza,” the new Paul Thomas Anderson film starring Sean Penn, Bradley Cooper, Benny Safdie, Maya Rudolph and Alana Haim of the sister singing group Haim. While mainstream commercial success has evaded Waits – whose style is sui generis and more than a bit off-center – he has garnered a cult following as well as the respect of his peers, who have showered him with numerous Grammy Awards and a place in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Back in the aughts, Bob Dylan hosted a weekly, one-hour satellite radio show called “Theme Time Radio Hour.” The program harked back to the days of freeform radio, featuring an eclectic mix of music, including pre-rock pop, jazz, blues, folk, R&B, country, rockabilly and rock ‘n’ roll, interspersed with musings and commentary by Dylan himself. Dylan recorded 100 episodes of the program between 2006 and 2009 before calling it quits.

The program occasionally featured call-ins from celebrities, usually comedians and musicians. Waits was a frequent guest, appearing at least five times to expound upon various subjects, including passenger pigeons and body parts. One time, and without any explanation, Waits called in [he actually sent Dylan cassette tapes, since the program was prerecorded] to share a list of Jewish curses, which from the sound of them must have begun life as Yiddish aphorisms.

Dylan introduced his special guest thusly: “One guy who’s always got something on his mind is Tom Waits. Let’s hear what he has to say.”

In his inimitable deep, gravelly voice that exudes the mood of a hangover, Waits – who is

not Jewish – said to the future Nobel Prize-winning rock poet:

Hey Bob, it's Tom. Here's a little morsel of information. The Jewish people have always had a penchant for colorful cursing. Here are some of the most famous Jewish curses:

May God call the tune, and may your enemies play the music.

May you lose your faith, and may you marry a pious woman.

May all your teeth fall out except one, which should remain for a toothache.

May you grow like an onion with your head in the ground and your feet in the air.

May you have a good long sleep, and may your dreams be only of your troubles.

May you be the proof that man can endure anything.

May your wife eat matzohs in bed and may you roll in the crumbs.

So there.

To which Dylan replied succinctly, “Thanks Tom. That was something else.”

Perhaps it was just coincidence, but Waits’s curses numbered seven in all. Way back in 1963, Dylan wrote a song called “Seven Curses.” The obscure number, written in folk-ballad style, told the story of a cruel hanging judge. Dylan’s seven curses were not funny like Waits’; they were much more grim, more akin to “Chad Gadya” than to the Borscht Belt:

These be seven curses on a judge so cruel:

That one doctor will not save him

That two healers will not heal him

That three eyes will not see him

That four ears will not hear him

That five walls will not hide him

That six diggers will not bury him

And that seven deaths shall never kill him

One thing we do not know is how or why Waits came to know and share those Jewish curses. What we do know is that early in his career, Waits’ manager and publisher was Herb Cohen. David Geffen signed Waits to his first recording contract, with Geffen’s Asylum Records label. Waits and Bette Midler were romantically linked in the mid-to-late 1970s; Waits also dated Jewish comedian Elayne Boosler in the ‘70s.

When Waits moved from Los Angeles to New York City, he befriended Jewish jazz musician John Lurie of the Lounge Lizards, and the duo began sharing a music studio in the

Westbeth artist-community building in Greenwich Village. The two also appeared together in “Down By Law, a film by Jim Jarmusch, and Waits was a guest on Lurie’s TV show, “Fishing with John.” The cover of Waits’ 1992 album, “Bone Machine,” was designed by Jesse Dylan, a filmmaker whose father is Waits’ pal Bob. In 2008, Genesis Prize-nominee Scarlett Johansson recorded an entire album of Tom Waits songs called “Anywhere I Lay My Head.”

In January 2008, Waits performed at a benefit for Bet Tzedek Legal Services – The House of Justice, a nonprofit poverty law center, in Los Angeles, founded in 1974 by a group of Jewish attorneys. Their social justice philosophy was rooted in a central tenet of Jewish law and teaching: “Tzedek, tzedek tirdof – Justice, justice you shall pursue.”

So perhaps those Jewish curses were just something Waits picked up along the way.

Seth Rogovoy is a contributing editor at the Forward. He frequently mines popular culture for its lesser-known Jewish stories.

Culture

It won the Israeli Oscar. But one of its subjects calls it a ‘pseudo-documentary.’

By PJ Grisar

The man who provided the source material for an Ophir-award winning documentary about Nazi architect Albert Speer is challenging the film’s accuracy, claiming the filmmakers put words in his – and Speer’s – mouth.

Screenwriter Andrew Birkin, who tape-recorded over 40 hours of conversation with Speer while developing a film adaptation of Speer’s memoir “Inside the Third Reich” in 1971 and 1972, says Vanessa Lapa’s “Speer Goes to Hollywood,” which is structured around their meetings, invents dialogue and freely lifts Speer’s statements from other sources. The film purports to faithfully reproduce the contents of the tapes, only noting actors are recreating the audio well into the closing credits.

Birkin says he gave Lapa the digitized audio of his conversations in 2016, along with his screenplay for the unmade Speer biopic and archival photos. He had been involved in an earlier version of the film when documentarian Errol Morris was codirecting. Later, after Morris exited the film over creative differences, Birkin went to Israel to record interviews with Lapa.

Birkin says he refused to release the rights to his audio until he saw a cut of the film or at least learned what Lapa’s documentary was going to be about. In early 2020, after Birkin said he cut ties with Lapa, he said he learned from her production company’s lawyer that she had completed the film and was about to show it at the Berlinale. He first viewed the film on a laptop at a hotel in London.

“Talk about a jaw dropping to the floor,” Birkin said in a Zoom conversation. “There’s a couple of times I said ‘Stop! Stop! Pause the tape.’”

Birkin says much of what he was hearing had nothing to do with the conversations he had with Speer. Speer's rant about having a "feeling of disgust" toward Jews was never said to him, Birkin insisted, and if it had been, he says he surely would have taken Speer to task for the remarks.

It wasn't the only time Birkin, who documented time codes from the film, alleges Lapa had fabricated some of his exchanges with Speer. Some of the discrepancies, Birkin says, are minor, like Speer saying he "had to be witty, like Voltaire," or the actor playing Speer referring to what was an outline of Birkin's screenplay as a "script." Others, Birkin says, paint him as someone easily manipulated by Speer or, worse, an accomplice to a cinematic whitewash of his crimes.

"Collectively it makes it sound like I was a collaborator," Birkin said. "It's not a documentary. It's a pseudo-documentary."

It is notable that of the many inaccuracies Birkin indicates, he does not deny one that makes him look quite bad – his use of the term "Jewish brigade" to refer to certain Jewish people at Paramount concerned with having more content about the Holocaust in the proposed film. Birkin said that at the time he did not think the phrase was pejorative – referring to the historical brigade in the British Army – and says that he regrets having used it now.

Birkin says part of the reason Lapa used re-created audio was that he refused to give her the rights to use his original tapes. But he suspects, when not granted permissions, she welcomed the chance to use actors as she had done.

Lapa, who also used actors in her previous film, "The Decent One," about Heinrich Himmler, maintains that she used actors in this film because of the poor quality of the original tapes, which she deemed unsuitable to be used for the duration of a 90-minute film.

"With regard to the question of the usefulness of the analog recordings made by Andrew Birkin 50 years ago and which he made available to us, we can be very clear: we spent countless hours trying to restore these cassette recordings, but this proved to be technically impossible," Lapa and her sound designer Tomer Eliav said in a statement.

Clips of the audio obtained by the Forward were perfectly audible, and Birkin indicated the tapes were once considered to be the subject of a radio program on BBC 4 many years before Lapa approached him. Karen Rose, who was Birkin's producer for the proposed

show, said in an email there was no problem with the tapes.

“Being able to use the actual tapes was what drew me to the story in the first place,” wrote Rose, who is now the co-founder of the UK audio production company Sweet Talk. “Why diminish the authenticity of the programme by re-recording? The tapes needed more concentration than usual but for me it would be worth the effort.”

Rose said that, after her sound engineer had worked on the audio, “They sounded as good as anything being recorded remotely on the internet during lockdown.”

Radio is a different format than film, but Errol Morris told Glenn Kenny of Rogerebert.com “the emphasis on the quality of the Birkin-tapes is misleading. A diversion created by Vanessa Lapa. There is little or no problem with the audio. Birkin’s voice is clear and intelligible throughout. The reason that Vanessa Lapa did not use the audio from the tapes is not because of [their] poor quality. It was because Andrew Birkin never gave her permission to use it.”

When the Forward sent Birkin’s time-coded notes for the film, asking the filmmakers to comment on alleged mistakes and inventions, Lapa did not respond to the specific instances, but invited a journalist to come to Israel and review the production’s materials.

Lapa and Eliav wrote that “it was never our intention to make a film about Andrew Birkin and we have always indicated that. What takes place on screen is how Speer was, what he intended and how he behaved.”

“That Andrew Birkin would possibly have preferred a film focusing on him personally is possible, but again, for us only Speer was historically relevant, no one else,” the statement continued, “[W]e brought the facts as they were recorded in numerous historical sources.”

Told that what Birkin takes issue with is the moments that are presented as from his own tapes, not other sources, the U.S. spokesperson for the film answered that the filmmakers stand behind the accuracy of their film.

Counter to Lapa and Eliav’s claim that Birkin resented not being the focus of the film, Birkin said his concern was just how central he is to the final cut. He finds it curious that though his first tape included a visit with Speer, in which Puttnam and Lieberman, both Jewish and Puttnam now a lord, were also present, he, a then-26-year-old writer is presented as Speer’s only interlocutor about the film project.

Birkin is not considering legal action, noting the expense and the time aren't worth it and he doubts he could make a case for defamation.

"If she wants to sue me, that's fine by me and I'll be happy to be in court and defend myself and say my piece," Birkin said.

A jury would have ample evidence to consider in over 40 hours of tape, though some parts of the audio, as Birkin freely admits, are harder to hear than others.

Lapa's film continues to play in respected arthouse theaters and festivals around the world. She maintains the position she held in October, when she told the Forward that in her film "everything that you hear, the laughs, the breath, the poses is 100% accurate to the original recording."

PJ Grisar is the Forward's culture reporter. He can be reached at Grisar@Forward.com.

News

Muslim leader's warning about Hillel, ADL and other pro-Israel groups prompts backlash

By Arno Rosenfeld

A speech by a leader in the Council on American-Islamic Affairs – the nation's largest Muslim civil rights group – drew a concerned response from some pro-Israel Jewish groups after she warned that Muslims who support Palestinian rights should not work with Jewish organizations that support Israel.

Zahra Billoo, who heads CAIR's San Francisco office, addressed the American Muslims for Palestine convention in Chicago last month, telling attendees that they should be wary of partnering with Jewish organizations that take liberal positions on domestic political issues while also supporting Israel.

"Pay attention to the polite Zionists," Billoo said, "the ones that say, 'Let's just break bread together. We oppose a Muslim ban in the United States – but we cannot support Palestinian human rights.'"

Billoo in her Nov. 27 speech cited the Anti-Defamation League, Hillel, Jewish federations and Zionist synagogues as examples of organizations that Muslims who advocate for Palestinian rights should be wary of working with. Organizers said more than 3,000 people attended the convention at which she spoke.

Her speech, resurfaced online by pro-Israel activists last week, comes at a time when Jewish establishment organizations have been grappling with how to work with progressive activists who often hold staunchly different views on Israel.

In late October, a local chapter of the national environment group Sunrise Movement boycotted a voting rights rally over the inclusion of three Jewish organizations that support Israel but are primarily focused on domestic politics – the National Council of Jewish

Women, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and the Jewish Council on Public Affairs – before ultimately apologizing.

The following month, Rep. Jamal Bowman, a New York Democrat, faced backlash for a trip he took to Israel and the West Bank that was sponsored by the liberal pro-Israel group J Street, with some members of the Democratic Socialists of America calling for the group to withdraw its endorsement of the congressman.

The groups that Billoo called out by name in her speech have fraught histories with American Muslims and pro-Palestinian activists, with the ADL accused of failing to support Palestinians' rights as it lobbies for civil liberties domestically, and Hillel refusing to work with anti-Zionist organizations.

Billoo has clashed with the ADL before, and the organization successfully called for her to be removed from the board of the Women's March in 2019 over social media posts she had made about Israel.

The Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco condemned Billoo's speech Tuesday, calling it "antisemitic and deplorable."

While Billoo mostly focused on Zionist organizations in her speech, she also seemed to hint that attendees should be wary of individual relationships with people who do not share their views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Oh, you get along because you're all in Girl Scouts together? Talk to them about what is happening in Palestine and see how that conversation goes," Billoo said. "They will take your friendship and throw your Palestinian brothers and sisters under the bus."

Billoo also praised two Jewish organizations that are vocal opponents of Israeli human rights abuses – Jewish Voice for Peace, which is anti-Zionist, and IfNotNow, which does not take a position on Zionism – calling them "on your side."

A video of her speech was flagged by the pro-Israel blog *Israellycool* last week.

Arno Rosenfeld is a staff writer for the Forward, where he covers U.S. politics and American Jewish institutions. You can reach him at arno@forward.com and follow him on Twitter [@arnorosenfeld](https://twitter.com/arnorosenfeld).

Culture

No cream cheese? No problem. A dozen alternate bagel toppings.

By PJ Grisar

We're sure you've heard by now. First it was toilet paper. Then coins. At last, the supply chain's woes have hit us squarely in the Jewish soul: there's a cream cheese shortage in New York.

While various reports have it that some bagel places are still schmearing enough Philadelphia to top a sugar cone, many bagel purveyors are feeling the squeeze.

The good news is, bagels are really tasty – and not just with cream cheese. And we can help our local bagel shops by stopping by and ordering one of their finest doughy Os with something else or whipping up some alternate toppings ourselves.

Here's what the Forward staff puts on bagels when the usual schmear is in short supply.

1) Avaco—do try this one for a healthier bagel

I basically went on bagel hiatus when I started doing Weight Watchers in 2011, but then discovered the incredible WW-approved two-ingredient bagel, which I have made in both oven and air fryer to great satisfaction. Amid a general pandemic backslide on healthy eating, I have returned to occasional real-bagel indulgence, generally opting for flagels whenever available to at least cut down the carbs (or scooping out full-size bagels). Out of a probably-misguided sense that avocados are slightly less-bad-for-you than cream cheese – and a reasonable one that they are tastier – I have taken to smashing the ripe green fruit onto the bagel, topping it with everything seasoning and, whenever possible, smoked salmon and sliced red onion.

– Jodi Rudoren, editor-in-chief

2) Whitefish, nu fish

If I can't have cream cheese, give me whitefish salad. Every year, it's my go-to "second bagel" at the Yom Kippur break-fast. After I wolf down the traditional bagel and schmear and go back for round two, I take this slightly more distinctive option. It's always the same: whitefish salad, tomato, and a slice of Swiss [never Muenster!]. Bliss.

– *Rachel Fishman Feddersen, CEO and publisher*

3) Chicken salad and a bit of Korean flair

I recently moved from a bagel desert to a flowering poppy and onion oasis called Astoria, where holey manna lives peaceably alongside souvlaki trucks. Oftentimes I forgo the typical schmear. Brooklyn Bagel & Coffee Company, which, bizarrely, has three locations in Queens, two in Manhattan and exactly none in Brooklyn, boasts a variety of on-menu sandwiches decked out with foodie favorites like hot honey and chorizo. But because they make an honest-to-goodness, crispy, chewy kettle-boiled beauty of a bagel, it's best to keep things simple and let the carbs shine through. I recommend their chicken salad – and really, any chicken salad on a good bagel, especially if it has some apples and grapes. My second pick is unconventional – and treyf – but oh so good. Between the Bagel on 30th Ave slings up a Seoul meets Bagel or "SMB" sandwich with bulgogi beef and egg with cheese, kimchi and gochujang. The owner, Ben, always gives sour straws with your order – and occasionally samples of homemade pudding.

– *PJ Grisar, culture reporter*

4) The Southwestern Sidewalk Bagel

Bagel Shop on 93rd Street and Third Ave serves up one of my favorite sandwiches ever: spicy chorizo with avocado and pepper jack cheese. Best served on an everything bagel and gobbled on the sidewalk, because who wants to wait until you get home?

– *Irene Katz Connelly, staff writer*

5) A time for tofu (and hummus)

As someone who has been lactose intolerant for nearly a decade, I'm thrilled tofu schmear is getting its time to shine. It does have a bit of an unpleasant aftertaste, so you really

have to use toppings strategically. I alternate between vegetable or scallion schmear and add tomato and red onion – definitely also get lox if you eat fish. Another decent option is whatever hummus and random veggie sandwich your local bagel spot offers. Now that I write this out, I think us dairy-free people need better options. Philadelphia, once you sort out the supply chain issues, maybe try innovating on the plant-based front?

– Gabby Brooks, marketing associate

6) Homemade, with a dash of Cynthia Nixon

I confess that I am married to a fantastic bread maker, who several years ago expanded his repertoire to include homemade bagels. (In a pinch we'll buy bagels from Costco. We're only human). We've even gone so far as to transport several gallons of New York City tap water to friends in Chicago so that he could make them authentic New York bagels. My favorite topping at home is a schmear of butter, a fried egg and plenty of Frank's Hot Sauce.

If my in-home baker is too tired and I must indulge, I head over to Murray's Bagels in Greenwich Village to have what I call the Cynthia Nixon: toasted cinnamon raisin bagel, lox, [cream cheese], onions and capers, plus a cup of their fresh-squeezed orange juice. Cynthia may have lost the governorship due to this controversial order, but as a sweet-and-salty devotee I can't get enough. For a modified Cynthia Nixon, sans cream cheese, sub out whitefish spread for both the lox and cream cheese OR keep lox and sub in tofu cream cheese.

– Nora Berman, opinion fellow

7) The BEC classic

As a born-and-raised New Yorker, I can always rely on the corner deli or bodega cooking up the classic bacon, egg and cheese [on whatever bagel choices are available].

– Jenn Martin, executive assistant

8) Lose the schmear, take the avocado (or shoot the bries)

When I worked at a café in Somerville, Mass., during graduate school, I got quickly bored of the basic bagel and schmear for my lunch-break meals – make enough of something for

other people and it starts to look unappealing. So I had to get creative; one of my favorite combos during this period was a bagel with avocado, lox and pickled red onion. If I was feeling luxurious, I'd swap out the avocado with a few slices of brie and maybe a drizzle of balsamic.

– *Mira Fox, staff writer*

9) Dracula's nightmare – and a dream come true for a brisket-loving Jew

I'm a member of the school of Jewish cooking that believes in making the same dishes for every Jewish holiday. It's brisket and kugel for Purim, Passover, Rosh Hashanah and – most recently – Hanukkah. A good thing too because my brisket recipe, which calls for braising five pounds of meat, led to a bagel-spread epiphany. The heads of garlic that I cracked open and left in the pot for three hours came out beautifully caramelized and, if you haven't seen where this is going yet, delightfully spreadable. It may not replace cream cheese for the classic bagel sandwich, but try it for a quick snack and you'll never look back.

– *Arno Rosenfeld, staff writer*

10) What are we, chopped liver? (Yes)

Living on the Upper West Side, there is no shortage of great old-school bagel places. If I had to go cream cheese-less, my go-to would be a kosher salami and egg sandwich from ****Tal Bagels****, or chopped liver from Murray's Sturgeon Shop lightly spread on a toasted bagel.

– *Deb Greenberg, director of development operations*

11) Hot in L.A.

My favorite bagels in Los Angeles are at the Bagel Broker, a family-owned place near the Grove. A Los Angeles classic worth the line around the block at any time between 8 a.m. and noon, most days. I go for the Jalapeño cheddar bagel with egg and lox, and (usually) cream cheese and a simple coffee to enjoy down the street at Pan Pacific Park, the site of old Gilmore field, which predates Dodger Stadium.

– *Aaron White, director of individual giving*

12) Eggs over-the-top

My favorite bagel is a fresh, crispy sesame bagel with egg salad/mayo and tomato – to a point that every bite is a challenge to keep my shirt and pants from getting the remainder. Though I have cut down on bagels in recent years due to a strict low-calorie diet.

– *Jacob Kornbluh, senior political reporter*

PJ Grisar is the Forward's culture reporter. He can be reached at Grisar@Forward.com.



JEWISH. INDEPENDENT. NONPROFIT.

Create a Future for Courageous Jewish Journalism

The Forward is the most significant Jewish voice in American journalism. Our outstanding reporting on cultural, social, and political issues inspires readers of all ages and animates conversation across generations. Your support enables our critical work and contributes to a vibrant, connected global Jewish community.

The Forward is a nonprofit association and is supported by the contributions of its readers.

To donate online visit

[**Forward.com/donate**](https://www.forward.com/donate)

To donate by phone, call

212-453-9454