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Robin Marchant/Getty Images For Zioness Movement

News

This Polarizing Liberal Zionist Group Is Growing. Can It Overcome Its Past?

By Aiden Pink

Carly Pildis is a progressive activist and writer who frequently speaks out about anti-Semitism on the left as well as the depredations of the right. Every day, she says, she gets messages from American Jewish women who tell her they're scared of expressing their support for Israel, or even their Jewish identities, in progressive spaces.

She tried to support the women, advising them and amplifying their concerns in her writing, but there wasn't much more she could do.

Now Pildis, who worked on the 2012 Obama campaign, is taking action on the issue. She has joined the staff of a Jewish not-for-profit called Zioness as its director of organizing and second full-time employee.

"I don't want people to feel afraid," said Pildis. "I want them to know they are powerful, and I joined Zioness to teach them how to grab that power."

Zioness was founded in 2017 to serve people like Pildis - feminists and liberals who don't want to denounce the Jewish state as the price of entry among progressives.

Now it's expanding its staff and ambitions.

But as the group tries to grow, it is facing distrust from other liberal Jewish organizations that would presumably be its natural allies. The divide reflects the tension many American Jews face as they struggle to balance their liberal leanings with their desire to support what they see as an increasingly illiberal Israel.

The suspicion goes back to Zioness's founding two years ago. The group was born after employees of the Lawfare Project, which fights the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel, learned in 2017 that the Chicago Slut Walk had banned "Zionist symbols." Outraged, they flew from New York to Chicago to participate anyway, waving banners proclaiming themselves part of the "Zioness movement."

The group reached its highest profile as a critic of anti-Semitism within the Women's March. Executive director Amanda Berman got invited to speak at synagogues. Chapters - now more than 30 - were formed across the country.

But many prominent Jewish progressives were skeptical, especially about the Lawfare connection. Berman worked there until this January, and Lawfare founder and executive director Brooke Goldstein, who went with Berman to Chicago, is a Trump supporter and a frequent Fox News guest.

Berman insisted at the time and maintains now that Zioness was independent from Lawfare.

Still, some on the Jewish left wondered if Zioness was a bid by right-wing Zionists to co-opt their movement, claiming to be progressive only to cover up their true goal of defending Israel.

Now it seems that IfNotNow and others were right to be skeptical.

Last month, Goldstein wrote on Facebook that Lawfare “funded and incubated” Zioness and that she had “used [Berman] as the face of the movement as she wasn’t a public figure and not identifiable as ‘conservative.’” Goldstein did not respond to interview requests.

What’s more, Berman admits now that her Lawfare connections helped Zioness get right-wing funding. She secured a \$25,000 donation when she spoke about Zioness in 2018 to the Merona Foundation, a Jewish donor network run by the wife of the controversial conservative Jewish philanthropist Adam Milstein.

Yet Zioness’s relationship with Zionist conservatives soured after the group issued a statement calling Trump’s policies of detaining migrant children and separating families heartless and contrary to Zionist values.

“We felt betrayed, basically. And angry,” said former donor Rita Emerson.

These days, Goldstein claims that Zioness is now too anti-Trump. Berman claimed that Milstein used to donate to them but no longer does because it’s “actually progressive.” A spokesperson for Milstein said that was “not an accurate characterization” but declined to say whether Milstein gave or is still giving to Zioness.

Support on the right has withered – but will progressive groups step in as allies, given that their early suspicions seem to have been well-founded?

If the answer is “no,” Zioness’ work will be harder at

the beginning, said Shaul Kelner, a professor at Vanderbilt University who studies social justice movements.

One such progressive Jewish group is T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights. T’ruah is Zionist – they support a Jewish state alongside a Palestinian one – and also campaigns against mass incarceration and family separation, partnering with major organizations like the ACLU.

T’ruah executive director Rabbi Jill Jacobs said she was still skeptical of Zioness’s strategy.

“My perception of Zioness is about showing up at protests with the signs, not around long-term relationships,” she told the Forward. “It’s those relationships that allow you to have complicated conversations around Israel.”

Zioness’s board features Jewish liberals, such as former Clinton White House communications director Ann Lewis and onetime Democratic congressional candidate Erin Schrode. But it’s impossible to know who’s funding it now. Since it’s so new, it’s not yet required to share financial records.

“Other progressive groups are going to be looking at [the funding,] and that will probably influence whether they’re going to work with them or not,” Kelner predicted.

Berman said that the money to hire Pildis came from “an anonymous liberal Jewish philanthropist.” She refused to disclose their identity because she didn’t want Pildis to find out. Pildis said she didn’t know who it was.

Zioness’s next stage, Berman said, involves helping members advocate for specific issues they care about – providing them with policy memos and campaign strategies.

Some chapters are already active. One has joined the Florida Hate Crime Coalition.

Pildis has been hired to train Zioness members to be activists on domestic issues like gun control and reproductive rights. She will teach them how to engage with elected officials and form partnerships with other advocacy groups.

But what Zioness won’t do, say Pildis and Berman, is advocate for Israel – unless someone else brings it up first.

"We've been really clear from day one – we don't exist just to debate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," Berman said.

Kelner said Zioness has a chance to be a long-term success even if other liberal groups keep their distance.

"It's a matter of doing the hard organizing work to transform the base level of demand into people actually signing up," he said. "Then it doesn't matter what the origin story is, because they have the power of numbers behind them."

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Life

'Made In China' Finds The Orthodox Wig Industry

By Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt

Rochel*, an educator and mother of three in Passaic, needed a new *sheitel*. The one she had bought over a year ago was already worn out, the hair was falling out, and she wanted something she could wear both to school and around her kitchen.

But when Rochel went to a local Jewish sheitel shop, "I saw crazy prices – \$1100, \$1200," she told me. Like many young Orthodox women – including myself – she had shelled out that much (at minimum) when she first started covering her hair after marriage, but now, several children later, that price seemed out of reach.

Then Rochel remembered having seen a friend post on Facebook about purchasing a natural-looking wig from a woman named Cindy, based in Shengdao, China, and asked for her number. "It's bizarre. You're Whatsapping with this invisible person on the other side of the world, with a ten-hour difference," Rochel recalled. She texted what she wanted – a band fall, or wig worn with a headband, and paid \$400, including shipping, via PayPal.

"I got it within a week," Rochel said. "And I've worn it every day basically, except Shabbos."

Jewish law calls for women to cover their hair after marriage, and many religious women see wigs as a more subtle covering than hats or headscarves. And the hunt for the right wig – the one that makes you feel like yourself – can be exhausting and expensive.

For generations, wig shops in Orthodox neighborhoods run by Orthodox women known as sheitel-machers, were the only option, and in recent years they have charged anywhere between, on average, \$1,200 to \$5,000 for each human-hair wig to what has seemed like a completely captive market.

But social media and global e-commerce is starting to push back against their monopoly.

In Orthodox women's Facebook and Whatsapp groups, members feverishly discuss how to buy wigs directly

from China, often through AliBaba, often dubbed the “Amazon of China”, where prices are typically \$300 to \$500 – a fraction of the prices in Brooklyn, N.Y., or Lakewood, N.J.. Search AliExpress using keywords like “kosher wig” or “sheitel”, and you’ll find dozens of sellers hawking their wares to desperate Orthodox women looking for ways to cut costs. “I look awesome in my new AliExpress sheitel,” wrote Esther Kurtz in Mishpacha’s women’s magazine, Family First, in September 2017. “And I would do it again...and again.”

Rochel spoke on the condition that her full name not be used – she said she has friends who are *sheitelmachers*, and wouldn’t want to criticize their businesses publicly. She says that she does not plan to return to a *sheitelmacher* any time soon. “How do I know she is not buying from the same Chinese sellers? I’m telling you,” Rochel paused and lowered her voice. “This wig would have been sold to me for \$1,200.”

Cindy, the woman who sold Rochel her band fall, told me via WhatsApp that her company, EBM Wigs, sells more than 150 pieces a month, mostly to customers based in the United States and Israel. She said that she also sells to wig stores, but refused to tell me which ones.

“This is how business works,” said Reena Furst, from Crown Heights. “People are now realizing they can directly bypass the middleman.”

Tali Kaufman, a rebbetzin in Montreal, spent a full year doing her research before buying from a Chinese supplier. “The sheitelmachers are seeing that we are getting wigs for a few hundred dollars and not saying anything – it makes me think the quality is just as good as theirs,” she said. “Having a cheaper option really helps. We are on a rabbi’s salary – it’s not like we can just stroll into wherever and get a \$2500 wig.”

Yet some sheitelmachers are quite comfortable speaking up. “I don’t mind speaking on the record, because I’m very confident, I know what I’m selling,” said Shulamit Amsel of Shuly Wigs in Boro Park. “With wigs, you get what you pay for – as with everything else. It’s like, are you going to buy a custom-made dress for a wedding, or buy from Macy’s, or buy from AliBaba and whatever you get, you get? The other day, a girl came in wearing a fall from Ali, she came in looking for a new fall. It was like straw what she was wearing – I didn’t say a word, but it looked scraggly on her. She didn’t end up purchasing anything with me,

but she was telling her friend, ‘I wish I didn’t spend this money.’”

“I wouldn’t risk it,” Amsel added. Amsel is known, among Orthodox women, as just “Shuly.”

“Girls will always pay for the service, the whole experience of going to a sheitel salon: color and cut, having someone to talk to if there’s a problem, and making it work so you could wear a sheitel for five to seven years,” she said. “I offer a year guarantee on all of the wigs I sell. But the culture of today is that some people just like disposable things.”

To make a successful wig purchase from across the globe, word of mouth is essential. In online groups, women pass along phone numbers of individual Chinese wig-makers, who generally go by English first-names only – Jack, Judy, Alice, Nancy, Wendy. When I reached out to some of them via WhatsApp, their first question was: “Who gave you my number?”

Several women I interviewed said that it took several tries to get the wigs they wanted: often the first or second packages that arrived from China were slightly off in color or measurements, or the cap of the wig was not bleached to hide the knots that tie the hair. Many warned that this route only works for dark-haired customers – that blondes and red-heads would be better off finding their matching locks elsewhere.

“A lot of these Chinese companies will tell the customers that they’re making wigs for the Jewish wig companies, for me, for others,” said Amsel, the Boro Park-based wigmaker. “But they’re lying through their teeth. They’ll steal pictures from Jewish wig companies, they’ll even put fake labels on packages with a frum sheitel company’s address.”

Sara*, a physician’s assistant living in Monsey, N.Y., said that she received a wig made with plastic strands from one popular seller who goes by Jack.. “He insisted it wasn’t plastic,” she wrote to me on Facebook. At first, she said, “he wouldn’t take it back because it was a custom size cap,” so she filed a claim with PayPal “and they sided with me. Paid expensive shipping back so he couldn’t claim not to have received it and got a full refund.”

Tamar, a non-profit professional who lives in the New York area, said that online forums warned of nits in Chinese-imported wigs. “I always put them in the freezer for a day or two, just in case.”

And the ethics of the sourcing are also complicated.

The human hair trade is expected to reach revenues of more than \$10 billion by 2023.

Across Eastern Europe and Asia, hair brokers (often men) approach long-haired women and offer money for their locks. In Russia, women are paid anywhere between 8,000 to 13,000 rubles – \$137 to \$200 in US dollars – for the highest-quality hair on the market. In contrast, in Cambodia and Vietnam, most hair brokers offer just a few dollars for a village woman's hair, Lexy Lebsack of Refinery29 reported.

And in India, Hindu female pilgrims shave their hair in religious rituals, yielding millions of dollars for their temples and local communities. This earned an outrage in the Orthodox Jewish community in 2004, when rabbis discovered that Jewish women were wearing wigs with “hair may have been used in Hindu religious ceremonies,” which are considered idolatrous.

China is the largest manufacturer of wigs and extensions, so regardless of where the hair is harvested and purchased by brokers, it is generally sent there, to factories, where women sort hair into bundles and make them into wefts, lines of hair sewn onto mesh, which are then sewn onto wig caps.

A few months later, that hair might find itself sitting on a head in Bnei Brak or Brooklyn, poring over a laptop, a prayer book, a pot of chicken soup.

The industry is unregulated, and brokers are not required to report the origins of their hair. Reporters have found that some Chinese dealers sell plastic mixed with what is known as “fallen” hair – collected from salon floors, hairbrushes and drains, combed and conditioned into locks. Some of the suppliers even attach Hebrew-language labels claiming that the wigs are deemed “kosher,” and not sourced from Hindu temple rituals – though there is no such certification.

I often wonder about the woman whose hair I now wear on my head – the hair that I picked out at a discounted wig sale, surrounded by other giggling young brides and mothers and grandmothers, throwing off our head-coverings as we tried on new colors and new identities. Who was she? A Cambodian peasant woman, a Chinese teenager, a Peruvian prostitute?

Since I started following the Chinese-made wigs discussions in women's groups, I've been tempted to

try it myself. Cindy of EBM Wigs has sent me videos of a few candidates that would match my hair color, but I have yet to muster the courage to spend \$500 without feeling the hair texture and trying on the cap first.

Yet enough women are willing to take the gamble, for the sake of saving money. “In our community, I feel like a few years ago it was looked down upon to be cheap,” said Chana Snyder, a graphic designer living in New Jersey, who now only buys her wigs from China directly. “We're reaching a breaking point where more people want packages, money-saving deals.”

For years, Jewish-owned wig brands have dominated the Orthodox market across price points. The conventional wisdom is that the more you pay, the more natural you'll look. A top-shelf wig, customers are promised, will make you look just like you did before marriage (or even better). Pay a fortune, and it's practically like having your own hair again. These traditional companies, too, use social media to pitch their products, often running giveaways on Instagram, posting videos showing soft lustrous locks, thousands of women commenting and tagging friends, hoping to snag a free *sheitel*.

One Orthodox woman who lives in Queens, the granddaughter of a sheitel-macher, said she is sure the quality of the wigs from China “is no different from the Jewish brands,” and that she has seen packages in Jewish-owned wig stores with labels from the same city in China where she and friends now order from directly. “I grew up knowing wigs,” she said, on condition of anonymity. “The whole industry got turned on its head.”

Rochel, the mother in Passaic, said the wig industry “has gotten out of hand,” but that it is just one example of many in which companies – often run by Orthodox Jews – are “taking advantage of people's level of observance.”

“When you think about the cost of *yontef* clothing and food, Pesach – everyone cashes out on us,” she lamented.

Leah Amrani, a 26-year old Brooklyn resident, used to run a Facebook group sharing advice about how to measure one's head, color differences, layers versus no-layers, etc. “There are so many people who said, ‘Thank you so much, I really needed a new wig, I couldn't afford another one,’” she told me. “People don't have money to just dish out. And all the big wig

people don't care, they just mark it up."

But Amrani is hardly worried about hurting the sheitel industry. Some women, she said, just like to try things on before committing, and want to buy from a local shop where their wigs can later be serviced.

"People who are into brand names will always buy brand names, and people who want to save a buck, will want to save a buck," Amrani noted.

Chana Ben-Avraham, a mother living in Dallas, Texas, only shops for wigs on AliExpress. "I think people being more open about how they spend on things will alleviate the burden on us," she told me over the phone as she scrubbed her stove. "I can't tell you how many of my friends say to me: 'Don't tell anyone your wig was that cheap!'"

But Ben-Avraham is proud of her penny-pinching. "Our kids are in Jewish schools, we buy kosher meat – we spend so much money on so many things," she said. "If there's one thing we can cut down costs on, we should be parading it and helping each other out."

She paused and added, "What are we doing as a society if we're just showing off how much money we're spending?"

**– Names have been changed to protect subjects' privacy.*

Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt is the life editor at the Forward. Find her on Twitter @avitalrachel.

News

Letter from Germany: We Do Not Want Your Apologies

By Ze'ev Avrahami

Once or twice a week, I walk with my 7-year-old son, sometimes with one of his friends, to a chess class.

There's an easy road: via Rosenthaler Strasse in Berlin's Mitte district, past Hackescher Markt, then a right to our destination. But we don't like the big streets – there are too many people, and we can't play our games.

So instead, we usually take Ackerstrasse, where I name a country and he has to say its capital city; then we go past Koppenplatz, where we play "Department of Funny Walking;" and just before we reach the Jewish high school, we take a right into the street with the yummy waffle stand. That's where we do some "Simon Says." Finally, we turn right again, walk by the fence, pass the police officers and the metal detector, and go inside New Synagogue for the chess lessons.

This is the same place where a 23-year-old refugee from Syria tried to commit an attack on October 4, wielding a knife in his hands as he climbed over the fence and approached the guards shouting slurs about Jews and Israel.

The man did not hurt anyone, and was released one day after the attack. Just four days later, 105 miles away, an anti-Semitic gunman stormed a synagogue in Halle during Yom Kippur prayers. His goal of killing as many Jews as possible was thwarted by a locked door, that shooter instead killed two passing by.

As the shooting in Halle happened, we were on the beach in Israel, where I grew up. But our vacation ends soon, and my family is supposed to back there soon. To Berlin, where we have lived for 12 years. here I own a restaurant that serves Israeli food. Where I walk my son to chess class.

This is what my son expects. My wife and I are talking about it in long, silent, looking-into-each other's-eye conversations.

If we walk to chess class, which route will we follow?

Maybe the busier streets are safer? Should we still talk in Hebrew? What and where are we supposed to look at, to check to see if we are safe, before and after leaving the synagogue?

I Never Answer the Door

I remember the hope that filled my suitcases when I moved to Berlin in 2007: The freedom, the space, the openness, the ability of people to observe and accept one another; the art scene, all these people from all these countries.

But lately, I find myself folding parts of my Israeli and Jewish identity back into my suitcase. I feel I must censor who I am when I leave the doors of our home.

When a package from Amazon comes, I never answer the door; we have a mezuzah on our door frame, and who knows what the delivery person might make of that. So I hear the buzz, and later take the note they left and pick up the package at the bodega across from our building. And then I fold another part of myself into the luggage.

I don't buy the "sorrys." I don't go to the vigils, and I don't join the kippah-wearing ceremonies. How many times can you say that you are sorry and let the same thing happen again? At some point, the word loses its meaning; at some point, the victims understand that it's just the thing you do until the next news will take over.

I don't want to talk about the far-right Alternative for Germany Party, or AfD, either. They don't fool me. They, along with the extreme faction of radical Islam in Germany, are the ones who are responsible for the killers like the Halle shooter.

By the time a killer has been created, it's already too late. I want to go back further. I want to talk about those who are responsible for the fertile ground where far-right nationalism and militant Islamism are forming an unholy alliance in order to attack Jews. I want to talk about those with "clean hands."

The Guy is Still There Every Saturday

Last year, I wrote about the Palestinian falafel vendor at the Saturday market in Berlin's bourgeois Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood, who has been verbally attacking Israelis and other Jews with anti-Semitic slurs for years, every week.

After my article was published, I protested at the

market for 10 weeks. Police stopped me twice and detained me once.

A German newspaper sent its writer to cover the protest. She depicted me as an aggressive man fighting against a Muslim, both of us bringing a conflict from the faraway Middle East to their poor host country, Germany.

But my real protest was with the Germans, who allowed this guy to shout offensive insults at me and other Jews like: "What a shame that Hitler didn't finish his job."

The guy is still there every Saturday, selling his falafel and cursing at Jews. But I am not there anymore. So take your candle vigils and kippah-wearing solidarity shows elsewhere.

This is How You Create That Fertile Ground

Are you sorry? Ashamed? Really?

Let's see: The attacker in Halle said that he denies the Holocaust. What do you expect when German government leaders visit Iran and embrace leaders there that do the same?

The attacker said that Jews are the root of all evil. Well, can I remind you that three months ago, a leading German news magazine accused two little Jewish lobby groups in Berlin of determining Germany's parliament policy in the Middle East. Can't you connect the dots here?

The German ambassador to the United Nations has compared Israel to North Korea. A Lutheran bishop has said the country should reconsider its relationship with Israel. The foreign ministry has compared Jesus and Palestinian refugees. A daily newspaper celebrated Israel's victory in the Eurovision song contest with an anti-Semitic caricature.

A couple of months ago, four Palestinian men were captured and killed after crossing the border from Gaza to Israel with a ton of arms and explosives. A German online news site's headline? "Israeli army kills four Palestinians."

This is how you make the ground fertile for attacks like the one in Halle. Those who are truly sorry don't repeat their acts.

I am not contesting Germans and their right to their opinions; I am not angry as I am writing these lines,

I am realistic: How do we talk about the line between fair and justified critique of Israel and anti-Semitism? If there is no line, don't look shocked when the next attacker strikes.

Germany's commissioner for Jewish life and against anti-Semitism, Felix Klein, made a radical statement in a liberal democracy when he told the Jews of Germany to avoid wearing a kippah.

It's radical because Klein picked up the carpet called "Jews in Germany" and revealed the truth. For years, we swept the situation of Jews in Germany under the carpet. It's time for the government, the politicians, organizations, and all German individuals to pick up their own carpet.

We do not seek your apologies. We just hope not to hear them again in the near future.

Ze'ev Avrahami, a chef, owns Sababa Restaurant in Berlin, where he lives with his wife and two children. He writes regularly for the Israeli daily Yediot Aharonot. Follow him on Twitter @zeevny.



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Culture

Why Those Arrested Giuliani Associates Were Talking About Anatevka

By PJ Grisar

The saga of the two Soviet-born associates of Rudy Giuliani arrested last week for alleged campaign finance violations, has a head-scratching footnote connected to both Yiddishkeit and American Broadway musicals.

As the news of the indictments of Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman spread, so did a video of the two men lounging with Giuliani, the President's personal attorney. The clip, taken at what appears to be the the Trump International Hotel in DC (where the two men are reported to have dined with Rudy hours before their arrest), includes words of congratulations for a guy named "Moshe" and ends with Fruman crowing that "Anatevka is the best place in the world."

Why the shoutout to Anatevka, the fictional shtetl where Tevye the milkman lived in both Sholem Aleichem's stories and the popular musical "Fiddler on the Roof"? Was this Moshe character playing Tevye in an amateur production? The answer is no. But also, kind of yes?

First, some context: This clip of the trio, which features the man formally known as "America's Mayor" saying the words, "Moshe, how are you, baby?" was posted to a Facebook group for American Friends of Anatevka. American Friends is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit on whose board Parnas and Fruman serve. The charity's job is not, as one might suspect, to bankroll productions of Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock's opus, but to support a real-life Anatevka built near Kiev.

Anatevka is a community for Jewish refugees from Eastern Ukraine, established in late 2015 at a time of increasing conflict with Russia in the area, as JTA reported in 2016. It was established by Rabbi Moshe Azman, the man being greeted in the video, on a muddy stretch of land the rough size of three football fields. At the time of its inception, the community

included a wooden shul, a dorm-style residence with 20 units and a concrete schoolhouse with 25 classrooms.

In a 2016 video commercial promoting the Anatevka Jewish Refugee Center, Azman traipses around the commune dressed like Tevye. We know he's supposed to be Tevye, because he's seen both hauling a can of milk and distributing milk to a toddler. Also, he's lip-syncing "If I Were a Rich Man" from the 1971 "Fiddler" film.

"Do we know where is Anatevka? Here is Anatevka," Azman says. "'Fiddler on the Roof' lived here. And now, the hundreds of Jewish refugees come here and build their homes - a place to live."

Then, the sales pitch: "And who will help us to help them? Maybe you?"

The American Friends of Anatevka had \$1,337 in assets reported from their 990 filing in December of 2017, according to Charity Navigator. Filings are typically a couple of years behind, however, and it's possible they've picked up more money since.

Anatevka is actually a pretty curious name for a haven for refugee Jews. At the end of "Fiddler," Tevye and his family, under threat of a pogrom, are forced to flee the shtetl.

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

Opinion

A Year Since The Pittsburgh Massacre, What Have We Learned? A Q&A With Abe Foxman

By Forward Staff

We are approaching the one year anniversary of the Tree of Life shooting in which Robert Bowers murdered 11 Jews at prayer. For the Yahrzeit, we will be rolling out a series of pieces reflecting on the tragedy, and what we've learned in the year since, beginning with an interview with Abe Foxman, the former longtime head of the Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish civil rights organization committed to combatting hate. Foxman spent half a century at the ADL fighting hate. In this interview, he discusses what has changed, and what has stayed the same.

This interview has been lightly edited and condensed for clarity.

The Forward: What is the state of anti-Semitism today?

Abe Foxman: It's serious, but it's not critical. Pittsburgh was a shock, but it should not have been a surprise. It was a shock in the sense that in our history in this country, we have not had that kind of tragedy.

The reason it should not have been a surprise is that those of us who spend time monitoring and analyzing anti-Semitism have always known and believed that anti-Semitism in America is serious: It's there, it's deep.

For example, society has come a long way regarding the charge of Christ killing. The Vatican even "forgave" us, and we dialogued, and we met, and we went to church and they went to synagogue.

But after all is said and done, the fact is that almost 30% of the American public, to this day, believe Jews killed Christ. Thirty percent in America means millions of people! So Christianity has been a major element in legitimizing that anti-Semitic stereotype throughout

the ages, and we have not been immune in this country.

Another element of a major stereotype is this whole notion that Jews can't be trusted. We've been reading about it recently: Are they loyal? Disloyal? This notion that Jews are only loyal to themselves and you can't trust them is also a very ancient anti-Semitic canard. And here too in this country, close to 30% of Americans believe this canard, and it hasn't changed throughout the years with all the progress that we've made with laws, attitude and assimilation. It's still there.

Anti-Semitism is like a virus for which we do not have a vaccine or antidote. I think we came to that conclusion in the early years after the Holocaust. After the world saw what anti-Semitism can do, and it did not muster the scientists, engineers, philosophers and whoever to find an antidote, we came to the realization that it's always going to be with us.

What has served us well is that these attitudes for all these years have remained latent, beneath the surface. And to the extent that those of us who have made it our life's work to study anti-Semitism came to the realization that it will never disappear, what we did as a community and society was to build a firewall, and include elements of containment. So, while we couldn't make it illegal and we couldn't vaccinate against it, we did develop a civil society consensus that you pay a price for anti-Semitism. So if you're in business, you may not be successful. You may, but chances are you won't if you engage in anti-Semitism. If you're in politics, you may pay the price in the long run. And it has worked for us.

Now, in the last decade or so, the societal changes are such that I would say the firewall is breaking down. The elements of containment no longer work as well as they used to. Part of this is the breakdown of civility in general and political civility, the destroying of taboos – which are not total protectors, but they were part of that firewall.

The internet has contributed. Again, anti-Semitism was always there, but it was under the surface. Now, anti-Semitic canards travel in nanoseconds across the globe. They come with a certain sense of credibility and legitimacy.

And in our society today, truth has no validity anymore; nobody knows what is true and what is not.

Truth has almost disappeared, and with it, the credibility of the media. For those of us trying to contain anti-Semitism, media was critical. We used media to fight the lie and to protect the truth. We used it to shame, to embarrass, and primarily to expose and to educate. Media today does not have that sense of certainty, of the impact that it used to have. We used to hold the notion, *How do you answer bad speech? With good speech.* Now, when bad speech comes in a tsunami, how do you deal with it?

And coalitions today are not what they were ten years ago. There is a lot of identity politics, identity interests. It's very hard to build a coalition, as we've seen in the women's movement, for example, which you'd think would be easy.

So all these things that worked for us are now either not working, or not working as effectively, and in turn, we're seeing this latency come to the fore.

Is Trump responsible? Trump didn't create it, but he has to take responsibility. What I mean is, the 200 neo-Nazis that marched in Charlottesville were not created by Trump. They were always there, but for a long time the firewall system worked. They knew enough not to surface their anti-Semitic hatred.

What happened was, at some point it became okay. They felt emboldened and legitimized and able to do it. That is part of Trumpism and the neo-nationalism that is sweeping not only the United States, but the world. And that basically permitted the anti-Semites who were previously in the sewers to come out with thechutzpah to act out.

So it was a miracle that we didn't have deaths resulting from anti-Semitic hate like we did in Pittsburgh. And it is no longer a miracle because it's now okay and it's out in the open.

How is today's anti-Semitism distinct from other periods or places in history?

First, I think the internet is critical here. It has changed the way anti-Semitic hate is delivered, the way it's transmitted and even probably the credibility quotient. We're not really even sure at this moment how powerful the internet is. It has already destroyed privacy, and it's on its way to destroying civility.

Another major element is political. That is, anti-Semitism is being politicized on both sides. It has

become a political football, which I don't think helps; it only exacerbates.

Within the political realm is the very visible, public role that Israel plays. Today, anti-Semitism has more of a so-called legitimate platform than it had before. I'm talking about the BDS elements that are being debated and discussed so much lately. Because it's so visible, it adds to this assessment that anti-Semitism is worse today than it has been in the past.

Now, it's important to note that there are nuances there. In the past I've been asked, *Is criticism of Israel anti-Semitic?* And I said, "No, it's not anti-Semitic. But if there's *only* criticism of Israel, chances are, it is anti-Semitic." Take BDS for example. No, BDS does not necessarily have to be anti-Semitic if the element of looking at injustices in society is applied not only to Israel, but to Saudi Arabia, China, Cuba and so on. But if it's *only* in Israel where you are seeking justice, then it is anti-Semitic.

What do we know about anti-Semitism today that we didn't know before the Tree of Life massacre?

In the ADL and the American Jewish Congress, we tried to educate and promote vigilance between acts of violence and not just after. I think what we're seeing now is a more serious, more realistic understanding that we're not immune to violence; that as long as there is anti-Semitism and hatred and less civility, we have to take our safety and security more seriously than we have in the past. I think that's a realization we came to after Pittsburgh and after Poway.

The question is, to what extent is publicly being a Jew dangerous? We don't want to give Hitler a posthumous victory, in the sense that Jews need to live as Jews, proudly, openly, in any way they want without fear or intimidation.

We have to find a balance and make sure our new awareness and vigilance for protecting Jews and Jewish institutions does not become counterproductive in that it frightens Jews away from sending their kids to Jewish schools, or summer camps, or synagogues. It's a very, very delicate balance.

When you go to Europe, for example, one way to find synagogues – I remember I was once there on Purim and I couldn't find an address. Lo and behold, how did I find it? I looked around and saw two police cars, one military vehicle, and the street blocked off.

So, when parents have to make a decision, *What's the risk?* then the anti-Semite wins even without – God forbid – committing violence.

So it's a new reality and it's being taken more seriously than ever before, in my experience. That's good, but like I said, we need to find a balance so safety and security is not counterproductive to a creative, proud, engaged Jewish life.

For every problem that arises from anti-Semitism, the answer is always education, education, education. The problem is that someone can become infected with anti-Semitism in less than a second, whether it's at home or in a church or wherever. But to unlearn it, takes much more time and effort.

We have no alternative but to educate. It's a slow process, but we've been successful.

Another area where we've been successful is in getting the powers that be – public figures, celebrities, value-setters, influencers – speak out clearly against anti-Semitism. We need them to condemn it whenever it appears and not leave any doubt that it is unAmerican, unChristian, unacceptable, immoral – to make sure that there is a stigma to expressing anti-Semitism. That stigma is part of the firewall I discussed earlier.

I was just talking to my grandkids about the New Jersey politician who used the expression to *Jew someone down*. One of the kids asked me why I was so upset about it. I said, first of all, it came from a legislator, somebody who got elected. And I think we have a responsibility to make sure that we do not ignore this stuff and that it is condemned.

I will confess to you that in all these years, while I have taken anti-Semitism seriously, I never thought I would see it become so pervasive. It's everywhere, and no element of society is immune. We used to say, Oh, the uneducated, the untutored... No. It's the educated and the uneducated.

We always knew that the disease infects everybody, but we didn't see it as clearly in all parts of society as we're seeing it now. It's everywhere, it's every day, and it's in all aspects of life from sports to business.

I guess I shouldn't be surprised, but I am that it is so hard to root out. And that's discouraging, because we made so much progress in this country, so much progress from where we were.

What is the future of anti-Semitism in America?

I think we're going to continue to need to be vigilant and to educate. I do worry about the intimidation factor – how many kids decide not to wear their Star of David, or remove their mezuzah from their dorm room? We don't know.

And the stakes go beyond just fear about being publicly Jewish. Jews have always been a very important part of greater America's progress on social values in terms of respect and liberal values. And we did it because we felt confident, we felt secure, and so we stood for others. When any people feels less safe themselves, it becomes that much harder to stand for others.

Look, I'm an optimist. I survived the Holocaust as a child, so I don't have the luxury of being a pessimist. A million and a half children perished, and I survived, so how dare I be pessimistic about the Jewish future?

While I am an optimist about Jewish life, you have to work at it. You can't just sit back. I think "Never Again" is an aspiration. But I don't think any Jew, and certainly not a survivor, will say it means never again will it happen. There's no certainty. It's something we have to hope for, work for, aspire to.

But I think when you wake up one morning and Jews are killed in the United States of America because they are Jews, it is a very sobering moment of understanding what history is about and that there is no place in the world that is immune from this disease of singling out Jews. And we have been at the top of the hit parade all over the world, in good times and in bad times, in monarchies and democracies, communist states and fascist states.

So Pittsburgh is the reality, the wake up call that no place is immune, not even these wonderful, special United States. And the history of American Jews is still unique in Jewish history, anywhere! But it is not guaranteed that that's the way it will always be. God willing, it will.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.

The Schmooze

Zoe Kravitz Ushers In The Era Of Jewish Catwoman

By Jenny Singer

For people who believe that Jews run Hollywood, the hits just keep on comin' – it was announced on Monday that Zoe Kravitz, the preternaturally cool actress daughter of Lisa Bonet and Lenny Kravitz, will star opposite Robert Pattinson in Matt Reeves' upcoming Batman movie.

Kravitz, who you may know from her turn on "Big Little Lies," or her eerie role in the "Harry Potter"-spinoff "Fantastic Beasts" movies, or from the fact that she always looks like a beached mermaid, will portray the iconic Catwoman, alias Selina Kyle. Reeves' "The Batman," set for release in June 2021, will be the first Bruce Wayne movie since Ben Affleck took off the mask after 2017's "Justice League." For maximum on-screen Yiddishkeit, Jonah Hill is rumored to be in talks to play the movie's villain.

Kravitz follows in the paw-prints of Eartha Kitt, Michelle Pfeiffer, Halle Berry and Anne Hathaway, who have all made their mark on TV and film as the comic book antiheroine. Variety reports that Kravitz won the role over a slew of serious contenders including Zazie Beetz, Eiza Gonzalez, and Alicia Vikander, an Oscar winner. (We're not convinced that pallid grump Pattinson is needed here – why not cast one of these fine ladies as Batman?)

It's fitting for a Jew-ish actress – both of Kravitz' parents are Jewish – to play Catwoman. The character was based in part on Ruth Kane, the cousin of Jewish Batman co-creator Bob Kane. Of course, Kane also created the Catwoman character based on his belief that women are "unreliable" and have a habit of "taking over our souls."

Well. Describing the female ensemble in "Big Little Lies," Kravitz said, "I think there's a lack of representation in what it means to be a woman and a mother nowadays, so it's not candy-coated. It's not sweet; it's not polite." It's safe to guess that she'll take a swipe at the "Batman" legacy of misogyny.

And as for taking over our souls? She's welcome to them.

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