



HADASSAH

Defining Zionism IN THE 21ST CENTURY

AN ONLINE SPEAKER SERIES

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STEPHANIE BONDER: Welcome, everyone, to Defining Zionism. I want to thank everyone for joining us this evening. My name is Stephanie Z. Bonder, and I'm President of Hadassah New Jersey. I want to welcome everyone to this installment of Defining Zionism in the 21st Century. Now we are from Congregation Beth El in South Orange, New Jersey.

If there is anyone who hasn't joined our series before, let me explain Hadassah's defining Zionism series because it was developed to create a welcoming opportunity for everyone to explore Zionism through a variety of perspectives. As we have heard throughout the series there are many different definitions of Zionism, and we don't all agree. But the goal of our program is to create a safe space so that we can have these open conversations and really explore different perspectives of Zionism in a respectful and constructive way.

So we do ask that you listen and be respectful during this conversation, both in your commenting and questions today, as well as when you continue the conversation online and in your local community. As a reminder, we encourage you to ask questions via the Livestream chat box. Please register through Livestream if that function is not already enabled on your computers. We have provided index cards for those of you in our audience so you may print your questions for the presenter and we will collect them. I will be asking the presenter all the questions. In addition, please be mindful of the fact that any noise in this room is picked up by the recording equipment, so we ask that you not shuffle papers or whisper to your neighbor. It will be

distracting to those watching the live recording to hear both the presenter and the moderator.

We are so pleased to have Nomi Colton-Max with us today. Nomi is a foreign policy analyst of the Middle East, and the founder of Ameinu. Ameinu in Hebrew means our people. It is a national, multigenerational community of progressive Jews in North America. Ameinu recognizes the unbreakable bond between the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and stands for the commitment to make our own society better. Ameinu recognizes that as Zionists we understand that a secure peace between Israel and its neighbors is essential to the survival of a democratic Jewish state.

Tonight Nomi will be talking about Progressive Zionism, the most important discussion for the next generation of North American leadership. Nomi has been trained as a foreign policy analyst specializing in the Arab world and the Persian Gulf. She is a proud progressive Zionist. She grew up in Canada and both professional and personal development have been centered on Israel and the Middle East. Nomi is currently President of Congregation Beth El in South Orange, New Jersey. She is a long-time member of Ameinu having served as an executive member for several years.

Please note that the opinions of our presenters cover a wide spectrum of ideologies. Hadassah prides itself on being a pluralistic organization that does not align itself with any specific stream of Judaism or any political party. We support the democratically elected government of Israel. The opinions expressed are those of the expressers and Hadassah does not endorse any particular viewpoint. Nomi, thank you for joining us. We welcome you.

NOMI COLTON-MAX: Thank you, Stephanie. I brought my action

figure of Herzl because I figured if there was ever a place that Theodor Herzl should be is on a series of Zionism. So I want to thank you, Stephanie, and I want to thank Hadassah for inviting me to be part of this important series. I've watched the earlier speakers, and it is my hope tonight that my involvement will help educate, inspire, push folks across the country to get involved and support Israel and Zionist causes, and mostly I hope that it will encourage people to ask questions, seek new answers when they hear people talking about Israel.

Before I do that, however, I do want to thank Beth El for hosting this event. I speak tonight as Nomi Colton-Max, an individual, a Zionist, and not as President of Beth El. But I know this is a diverse congregation that welcomes discussion and diverse opinion, and it is the perfect milieu for safe and important discussion. I want to also add that Rabbi Olitsky apologizes that he can't be here, but he had a long-standing commitment.

Tonight I hope to answer a few questions. My definition of Zionism, which at some point along the road will also include what is not in my definition of Zionism. What is Progressive Zionism, which I submit for me is how I define Zionism, and why Progressive Zionism, which many in this country view as something new and arrogantly American is as old as the state itself. And as the title of my talk suggests, while listening to what progressive Zionists say, who we work with and what we do, we offer a way to reach many in North America who seem disengaged from Israel and sometimes our Jewish communities in general. As Stephanie said in the introduction, I am trained as an analyst of Middle East events, but it is the fact that I am a proud Zionist that guided my entire learning career, my academic and career

choices, my volunteer work, and the summer camps for my children.

Like all of you here today I celebrate Israel. I celebrate its language, its beauty and its culture. A country that has had unbelievable successes and proud moments in the last 66 and a half years. We all know about how far Israel has come and I'm sure you've received that E-mail as well. You know the one, a country with less than 1/1000th of the world's population, that developed the cell phone, pentium chip, voice mail, inestable video camera, numbers of awards, always at war, planting more trees, and solved arid issues while working on water issues like no other country in the world. Seventy percent of Israelis born in Israel in a population that is now 8,000 and 59 million over where it started as 860,000 in 1948. But like all countries, Israel has domestic challenges. Yes, of course, Israel is located in a tough neighborhood that seems to be getting uglier and scarier. And yes, Israelis live with the fear of terror every single day which we cannot dismiss. But talking about Israel must also include a discussion of poverty, religious strife, corruption of current and past leaders, immobility of government, demographics, and inequality just to name a few. Israel does not mirror those movies I used to see in day school where there was rikud ayam in the desert. They could fry an egg on a street corner and eat it because it was just so clean. The world of milk and honey. I'm sure you too know of people that got to Israel, had a trip and came home and said you know, it's not like what I pictured it. And you know what? That's okay.

Israeli society faces many of the same issues we face here. For me as a liberal Jew who struggles with social justice and income inequality, I look at Israel and see many of these issues, and sometimes more in the extreme, but

it's okay. It's okay that Israel is not perfect. And it's perfectly acceptable for you to be uncomfortable when you see that poverty that exists. In the last OECD study Israel ranked in the top five member countries with the widest gap between rich and poor. The other countries were by the way in order, Chile, Mexico, Turkey and the United States.

And it's okay that your Judaism was questioned when you landed because they doubt the authenticity of your conversion or the way that Israel is treating its asylum seekers. Why? Because if you truly love something, you love it not just for its beauty, but for its flaws. You hope that with time and with action and care you can work to overcome, or at least to improve upon its weakest parts. To me it is this commitment, this dedication, this belief in self-help which is what makes me proud to be a liberal, a progressive, and just as proud to be a Zionist.

Growing up in a youth movement, my counselors taught me about the pioneers that built communities based on ideas of equality. They spent time thinking of what they wanted in this new country and in their new yeshuvim, their settlements, where they aspired to create something, building upon the ideals, improving over what already existed that helped them create Israel. You see, my Zionism, Progressive Zionism, is part of the labor Zionist and socialist Zionist tradition that had built the state. It is not new. At camp, I learned about Ahad Acham and his belief that Jews and Israel should be a light unto the other nations. It was laid out that Zionism is about tolerance of many kinds, including religion and different political views, something that many seem to currently overlook.

So with that background if I had to define Zionism in three points I

would say Zionism is the belief that there should be a Jewish state. This state should also be a model of acting in fairness and dignity toward all the inhabitants of the state -- Jews and nonJews alike. I would say that striving for peace should be a central pursuit of Zionism, but its absence should not undermine the Jewish national home. Cultural and religious pluralism with Judaism as well as openness to others cultures will be welcome and encouraged. And I would add to these three points they are inherently based on a belief in the legitimacy of national identities and aspirations, and hence a respect for other national movements, including the Palestinians. This was the Zionism set up by Theodore Herzl, David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, and Henrietta Salt.

In fact, this is the Declaration of Independence. If you look at these two paragraphs, you'll see they say the State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the gathering of the exiles. It will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants. It will be based upon freedom, justice and peace as envisioned by the prophets of Israel. It will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all of its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race or sex. It will guarantee freedom of religion, conscious language and education and culture. It will safeguard the holy places of all religions, and it will be faithful to the principle of the charter of the United Nations.

Later it says we appeal in the very midst of the onset launched against us now for months to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the state on the basis of full and equal citizenship, and due representation in all provisional and permanent

institutions.

One other paragraph. We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help, with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The state of Israel is prepared to do its share in the common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.

Reading these parts of the Declaration of Independence are just as important today as they were in 1948. There is nothing in that that conflicts with my liberal beliefs, and nothing that makes me uncomfortable. It holds up in circles of social justice, women's rights, LGBTQ, among Jews and nonJews across the religious spectrum. Yet in November, as you may know, a draft of a new nationality bill passed the Israeli Cabinet that emphasizes Israel's Jewish character above its democratic nature.

Yes, Israel, like the United States, struggles to reach these ideals. So progressive Zionists in Israel and here work with politicians, non-governmental organizations and activists to stop such legislation and improve situations. Ameinu works with Yadid, an organization devoted to community empowerment; with NISPID which works on projects for socio and economic development and peace in the south. And we are proud of those who made aliyah who work in Jewish community centers and towns such as Ako. Makes sense, right? This is an easy sell for progressive Zionists to the greater Jewish community here in North America. Israeli activists and NGOs are doing innovative and important work that they will tell you came out of their belief in Zionism, Progressive Zionism.

Let me turn to my second tenet of Zionism, striving for peace should be

an essential pursuit of Zionism, but its absence should not undermine the Jewish national home. Firstly I want to be clear. Everyone wants peace. And I would argue as well that everyone would agree that Israel will be at its safest and its strongest when there's peace. But peace is not manna from heaven or snow that will just cover Israel and her neighbors one day and bring about a new age. As the expression suggests, we must embark on a path to peace. That path is not smooth. It must be paved over time. There are always detours, and there will be obstructions. Along the way you may discover new access points, but the path does lead somewhere. You take risks along the way that are based on calculations, both short and long term. Peace is also two-way. Someone may arrive there before the person on the other side, but at the end of the day, you need to work with someone, with a partner.

As a progressive Zionist again I look back to the founders who wanted peace and included it in the Declaration of Independence. I look back at the actions of the last 66 and a half years, and I especially look to the developments after 1967, to what this has done for and to Israel, to settlements, the green line, changes in population. And yes, I also look around to what is there today. Hamas is not my friend but a terrorist organization. And I don't like Abbas all the time. And I continue to work and still support a two-state solution. The different plans that exist, the new push by the Arab countries, that of course is a whole stand-alone presentation, and I'm going to wait to talk a little bit in my question and answer about what exactly I would talk about even on the bare minimal. But let's say yes, I work for it, I want it and I think it will happen.

But for tonight I want to point to a few reasons as to why I see this as the only long-term solution. The first few by now should be clear. It is because of my commitment to social justice. The status quo is untenable, and it will only continue to hurt Israel. The third is something that I have not yet touched upon. That is that Israel has a demography problem. It is this issue that can bring about the end to an opinion that will bring about the end of the Zionist state. We're not talking 20 or 30 years out. If we include the occupied territories, Jews will become a minority in their own country. Now, I know that often we hear people say to us to support Israel, that it is an Apartheid state, and it is not. However these numbers tell a very unsettling story. Within Israel proper, the Jewish population is about 75.4 percent Jewish. Israeli census statistics say that the Jewish population between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river is now 5.9 million of the 12 million people living under Israeli rule. If you talk about estimates of close to three million Palestinians in the West Bank, I will let you do the math. But let me say what is obvious. I do not like what these numbers hold for my Zionism and my Israel. So I need to move past the status quo.

So path two, this is the one that you will hear from the far left, the anti-Zionist far left. This option truly calls for a binational state, an Israel without Zionism; a country where two peoples live together under one government. Palestinians and Israelis are equal. I guess a modern post nationalistic state.

Not only do I think that this is even more untenable than peace in the Middle East, but I don't think it's an option because it will lead to a whole new level of all the things that Zionism was set out not to make happen. To

the assimilation, to not having a country, to not having a place, to Jews without one homeland, without a raison d'etre, a lost people. What does that leave? For me it leads back to what I've been working for since I was the same age as my oldest child. When I come home from summer camp -- younger actually -- and explain to my parents that peace with Egypt will never be enough; that a two-state solution is the only way for Israel to reach its zenith. Only here can housing policy not be political. Only here can we really focus on the domestic agenda. And only here will all military once again become an Army.

Do I think that this is easy? Obviously not. And history continues to demonstrate how difficult it is. Do I think that the Palestinians, the Arabs, and the Iranians will love us and respect us once this has happened? Positively not. But you don't make peace with your friends. And I believe that this is the only viable solution. And until many leaders in the Jewish community here, and some in Israel, accept this argument, we will continue to see more North American Jews becoming disengaged from the Israel that we all hold so dear. Why? Well, sitting here in South Orange, New Jersey is the perfect place for this conversation. See, my town of South Orange, my extended town of South Orange and Maplewood is a pretty progressive place. 83 percent of my town voted for Barack Obama in the last election. It's racially diverse, home to many gay and lesbian families, has a large Jewish population, it's economically diverse as well. And let's face it, we choose to live here because we want a backyard and we cannot afford to find them all in Park Slope. This weekend in South Orange many would have attended -- did attend the Martin Luther King Jr. Program put on by the South

Orange/Maplewood coalition on race because these are the things we do in South Orange and Maplewood. We send our well-educated in public and private school children to volunteer. Perhaps they work on housing or they volunteer at a food bank. And slowly they become involved in social justice issues around the world that they live in. And then we send them off to university. And there, somewhere at university, our socially activist children go off to meet other socially activist children. They might be sitting in a room talking about problems in the world, and issues facing women. They may be talking about Nigeria. And somewhere along the way the plight of the Palestinians -- those Palestinians that have been butchered by the Israelis -- enters the conversation. You look around. Wait a second. That's not how I think of it. That's not what I hear of it in my pretty politically correct but safe town. You start to quietly ask questions, and someone says to you well, Israel is an Apartheid state. Someone says to you that there's going to be a boycott of all Israeli goods, and they want you to sign the petition. You hear that Israeli academics are being banned from attending a symposium. What do you do? What do you say? Where do you go? So you turn to Hillel on campus and ask for help. You look to places around. You see other Jews you've seen at a Shabbat dinner. What do you do? What do you say? They don't want to talk about those questions. They don't want to give you an answer. They tell you they're anti-semitic, they dismiss it outright. It's just not true. You're not in the right place. You need to be with us. But what do you say to your friend that called operation cast lead a brutality? What do you say to your roommate who you seem to get on every other issue except Israel? Your child is stuck. Your child turns inward. They stop talking about

it. They stop going to Jewish events. But places do exist to help this person. We, Ameinu, exists to answer these questions. The world is not black and white. It's a lesson that's tough for us to learn as adults. And it's always tough and it always will be. Nuance is difficult.

What do you say to those BDS supporters? This is what you say. You say that there are groups within Israel that are working for peace. You say that they are working within Israel, but there are even groups that work with those in Gaza. You talk about Samerit Samir who lives in the closest community to the Gaza Strip who runs a project called Path to Peace, or promoting creative nonviolent long-term solutions to the security crisis and hope for the region's residents. A friend that has just returned from Israel talked to me about the level of PTSD that impacts their everyday life. It's real. It's an issue. They face it. But they are still working for this peace. You also say to them that boycotts weaken the work of groups on the left, as they undermine progressive forces in Israel. And that groups working for social justice and human rights are those that will be most impacted. You add that BTF plays into the hands of the right wingers in Israel who cultivate an us against them, Israel versus the world mentality. You add that with Israel's strong and stable economy, BDS will take much longer to impact change than working in other ways to support peace. You calmly point out that there is guilt on both sides, and BDS puts the blame on Israel only. And lastly, you state that many of the groups leading this charge are not calling for divestment but for the disappearance of the State of Israel. If this is the case, it's true they are not your friends, and they have a different agenda entirely.

When your student comes home for Passover and asks about the

Palestinians that are having a hard time in the Galilee, you tell them it's true, they fight inequality every day. But you quote Supreme Court Justice Rubinstein who says that everyone that wants to preserve Israel as a democratic and Jewish state must strive to achieve full equality for Arab-Israelis. You mention a coexistence initiative with the local youth in an Arab village. And when they ask about Hebron, you tell about breaking the silence made up of former soldiers and reservists who tell the story of what they describe as the realities of what serving as an occupying soldier means in terms of human right issues for both the occupied and the occupiers. But let us also remember that someone else can be disaffected by those on the right of the political spectrum. Perhaps your aunt commented when she just returned from Israel on the shrinking women's side of the western wall. Tell her more about the plight of women in Israel, both the secular and the religious. Show her pictures from those that participate on the freedom ride through Jerusalem that says women do not sit at the back of the bus. Share the Facebook announcement this week, the women's party that was just announced to make change. Or talk about the happenings in Bet Shemesh. Tell your young feminist about the excellent role model of Stav Shafir, the youngest female Knesset member who is outspoken for demanding fiscal oversight of settlement funding, and supporting a wide array of social justice in Israel, from affordable housing for all young Israelis. And be proud to tell that she now sits fourth on the combined labor (Hebrew) list, meaning there are two women in the top four.

It is these people, these organizations and these causes that can excite and engage North American Jews that are walking away. These progressive

Zionists I want educating my children when they go on Israel programs. It is these progressive Zionists that I want talking and working in our afternoon day schools. I am sure you have many questions and of course there is much more I can say. But let me just end with this: I have told you about my Zionism, my Progressive Zionism. And I have told you why I think it is such a valuable role to be played both here and the offerings that are being spearheaded in Israel. But I also want to tell you what Zionism is not. Zionism does not entail accepting without criticism or endorsing all the decisions and policies of Israel's elected government. Zionism does not mean and should not mean that only Jews should be allowed to live in the Jewish state as equal citizens. Zionism does not mean and should not mean that the political authority of the Jewish state should apply to the whole of Eretz Israel. A Jewish state will not be just or stable without a Jewish majority.

Palestinians also have the right to self-determination in part of their homeland. Zionism does not belong to the right. They cannot hijack it. I will not be called an Israel hater nor an Arab lover. I'm a Zionist.

I have a fifth one too, one that as a child growing up in the Zionist youth movement was not what we were told, but is what I've come to realize is very important in the world we live in today. Zionists do not just have to live in Israel. They have much work to do and a great role to play throughout the Diaspora. They work to spread the important work of what's going on in Israel. They help support it financially. They help educate both politicians and neighbors about Israel. Just as Herzl said, and here I'm purposely quoting something that has been usurped by the far right, so I too am taking it back, (Hebrew) if you will it, it has no -- thanks. (Applause).

STEPHANIE BONDER: Thank you so much, Nomi, for those very interesting words on how you became a Zionist and how you came into this movement. Now, you really spoke about how being part of your Zionist youth movement affected your whole development as a Zionist. Do you think you could expand on how important it is for us as Jewish parents to get our children involved in youth movements that can teach them all aspects of the Zionist dream?

NOMI COLTON-MAX: It's like a dream question. Here is what I would say. I also send my kids to Jewish day school. I am a firm believer in the whole experience. But a Jewish youth movement teaches so much more. First, there's an education that of course you get from youth, from young. People in a youth movement who run it are in their 20s. They've grown up in the movement, spent time in Israel, sometimes -- there's a program for a year. Some have lived there, some have come back. They take what they learn. They see the ideals that they've grown up with, and they try to adapt them and bring them to the kids. They educate them. My son doesn't just go to camp to swim and to play sports. Well, hardly to swim and play sports. But he does know an awful lot about Zionism. He knows about Israel. He knows about progressive forces. He knows that Tel Aviv has been celebrated as the center for gay and lesbian work there. He knows about inequality. He knows how to discuss it. He knows how to bring it into conversation. And he became an activist. And of course the leadership skills that learning and doing and participating with friends in a worldwide youth movement has quite a standing. There are some people here, and as I look around I see some smiles from some who I know share the experience both as a parent and as a

participant. Of course they learn Israeli dance and sing songs and all those basics. I think in this day and age many of our kids don't hear about Gordon, or don't know about what happened in Basel, Switzerland with Herzl. But I do believe this is a place where they do learn it and can learn it and want to learn it.

STEPHANIE BONDER: Thank you. To continue a little further on that note, we try to provide our children with a Jewish background, and we send them to Jewish camping. Then they take the next step. As you talked about they go to college. I can remember as a college student I was involved. There was a demonstration at my university. Lewis Farrakan came to speak. And it was a big deal that the Jewish students felt that he was anti-Jewish, anti-semitic. And that you needed to have a place to go. But on the other side, there were the Jewish students who felt this was dangerous. You could get hurt. This could get violent. Maybe we should leave this place and not be involved. What do you tell your students? You were mentioning that there is a lot of different viewpoints that come on campus. And many of them are negative, and anti-Israel. So how can we use progressive Zionists to face that?

NOMI COLTON-MAX: As I said, it's nuanced. There's always choices and I think that each experience is tough. I think the challenges that our kids -- our college kids face today are far more complicated and difficult than what you and I faced back then as well. I have a child I'm pretty sure that would jump at being at a demonstration. But I want to talk about the part of the Jewish role in demonstrations today because that's what I talked about. It's complicated. Here is why it's complicated. You're right, someone like a

Farrakan gets up and speaks and we'd all agree he's anti-semitic and what he's about to say is anti-Israel. Back to my point about the issues. What happened? The Jewish groups get together and say we need to form an umbrella group. We need to be there together to stand hand-in-hand. But then some things come out of the discussion that make me uncomfortable. What they're talking about is not what I talk about. It's not how I see my role. I'm not going to take what was the Farrakan, for example, discussion, and then turns into something about anti-Israel, whatever, and therefore say as I have been at demonstrations, all Arabs are evil and everyone this. Then it's not helping either side. So you get stuck in the middle. That's the concern. So we as Jews need to work on this umbrella organization. We need to work together. I mean, I will tell you, I was involved at McGill. I was a founder of what was then called the union of progressive Zionists, the only time in Canada we ever said Z. UPZ. We used to say UP zed, but except for that -- which is what has led into J Straight U. I was never attacked on Israel by Arab students, but we were attacked by Jewish students a lot. And that is most upsetting. And that's not helping either. So we need to work together. We need to talk about safe places, and respect each other, and work together. And realize that we're diverse too. And it's those difference of opinions. So when we look and say this is what they said, they can turn around and say what we said back. There's always a he said/she said. We really need to stick together and work together on those points and that's where we're going to make progress. But it's not always easy.

STEPHANIE BONDER: You were telling me earlier with Ameinu there are different strategies that we can bring to these students to help them

face these difficult issues at their schools. I was just watching a documentary talking about how at college campuses across the nation there is this very anti-Israel BDS movement going on. There are free Palestine movements going on. And we need to do something to help our children face these attacks. Again, we want to give them information and knowledge. And you and I were talking about how we should open up the conversation and make it broader.

NOMI COLTON-MAX: Well, I would say Ameinu, founders of something called the third narrative. You can check it out on the website. The third narrative is a group that really looks at those issues and tries to stay on top of the issues that are on campuses, and give options and discussions for how to combat it. They've been particularly -- a lot of the boycott issue, the academia issue which is really mind-boggling really to think that you can have an English studies association that decided they are not going to allow Israeli English scholars in. Why? What's the relevance there? Clearly there there's some sort of underlying group that's at play there. That is not acceptable. That is not acceptable. So that has to be stopped. It has to be brought in.

We looked last week, a few weeks ago again, the Presbyterian group again has been trying to get Caterpillar to pull out of Israel, and groups like that. Again, why? What would be on the agenda of that group that that would be their focus? Yes, I'm fighting for issues in Israel that there's problems in Israel. But compared to everywhere else, why is that the country we're picking on? We're not pulling John Deere out of Syria so fast. But this is what we're going to look at. So just because I'm a progressive Zionist

doesn't mean that I am not involved, not working, not committed to those issues. That's what I said, there's a difference. There's a difference between being a progressive Zionist and being on the far left, on the anti-left. And Ameinu is in this -- progressive Zionists are in this perfect spot where we can help work with that group as well as the right. We're looking in both ways. So that's also what's important here as well.

STEPHANIE BONDER: Thank you. I would like to address some questions that have come from the Livestream. One person has written that I am concerned that you think that Israel is an occupying country. What other country wins territory in a war, and is then called an occupying force? What other country wins and then is called that especially when no one from the PA will sit across the table and negotiate with us?

NOMI COLTON-MAX: There's really two questions there. There's a question of what it means to be an occupier, and then there's a question about the PA. First of all, there's always this complication about occupation, for two reasons. One is that occupation is defined by United Nations law. And it's actually -- it can be a quagmire for both sides. On one hand as an occupier, someone who has not annexed, you are not allowed to fix the roads; you are not allowed to help with certain issues. If you do those issues, ironically you're breaking the law. If you don't do those issues you're looked past that way. Here is the difference. Yes, we are occupying that territory. I'll tell you why I don't have a problem saying it, because we didn't annex it. If Israel was so confident in what they had done, then there would have been a little bit more of a change there for some of it. Some of it we have, and some we've given back. There's still this talk of some of these areas of these

territories. We're out of Gaza. We're out of Gaza. So it wasn't that we -- I am the only one that was talking about the occupation. And it's not just me. I remember being part of the group the year the intifada started, which was against the occupation. It was a bunch of women who stood on busy corners in Jerusalem and held signs. We never spoke. We just held signs. Talking about it as mothers of soldiers, of people who were there.

What was fascinating was that again it wasn't people that walked by and criticized us using the word occupation. They became very sexist in what they called us and the derogatory terms that went with it. But I think that no one is denying this is a land still talking about negotiation. Yes, this government is expanding settlements each and every day. But why are they doing that? They're expanding them because they're trying to prove they belong so it's more difficult to get back. But when you look at discussions where you're talking about area B, area A, there's still an area we're talking about giving back. The reason why is because it's not sustainable now. So if we're not going to -- if we're not just occupying the land and we're taking it over, then again go back to what I talked about. I don't want to be a minority in my own country. And it's not my country. And I'm not going to transfer, like some on the right would say, people to balance out the numbers. That to me is not -- talk about an issue of human rights or talk about international law. So you know, we're talking about differences here. We're talking about looking at areas in different ways. And so yeah, I'm okay with that. Did I answer both?

STEPHANIE BONDER: Thank you. I think that many people have seen that the term of occupying -- we gave land for peace, and when the war

in the '67 occurred, we took over these territories after we were attacked and we conquered. And you're right, there were some areas that were annexed. We annexed parts of Jerusalem and we annexed parts of the Golan. And we did that for security. Then we gave back Sinai, and we have a cold peace with Egypt. With all of that being said, this has been such a problem for decades. Who can we negotiate with? We have offered to give back the West Bank, parts of the West Bank up to 96, 98 percent of what they wanted, with swaps. Now, who can we negotiate with? Because if we offer it right now, Abbas is going about it on his own to unilaterally declare a state, and he's going to the UN. Who is our partner?

NOMI COLTON-MAX: As Rabin said, you don't pick your partner. You can't. It would be nice. You have to -- as I said earlier, I'm not running out to dinner with Abbas, but nor am I running out to dinner with Bibi. Sometimes I think the two of them behave like my two sons with a bit of passive aggressive here, there and everywhere. I also think what negotiators do behind the scenes within closed doors as part of a peace process or negotiations, and what they say publicly are two different things. I have been in some back room negotiations with leaders both in the Arab world and actually as part of the Canadian government. I can tell you that it takes a very brave person to sometimes do something that at first glance looks like it doesn't help all of your people. It takes a brave person -- that's -- the Yitzhak Rabin story comes up a lot for a bunch of reasons. He was a general. He had his problems like many Israeli politicians. He had several lives. He could come back, he went there. But he did it. He made the peace. As you said, some peaces are colder than others. Some things work. You know, at this

moment in time don't think that while all this is going on there still aren't people talking in behind rooms. I was actually in Jordan once, and some -- this was before peace -- and some of the crown prince's horses escaped into Israel. Now, they knew who to call. They called them pretty quickly. They got the horses back. It wasn't like they stood on a border waving their hands saying help help help. And it wasn't like they snuck in. In the region there is work going on all the time. It stops, it starts. You're right, you don't trust them. And we were having this discussion, and Abbas's actions change, and they change a lot. So have our actions changed a lot. We say we're not going to do settlements, and then we expand them again. We're not going to go into these areas of war. We're going to do this stuff. Well, things go in. It's not easy. It's going to be bumps.

Let me just say for a minute, I didn't really talk about what to me a peace plan would entail. Really as I said that is a very different discussion. But I do want to say a few things. I do believe that a comprehensive peace plan will involve giving up land, and that some of that land will have some Jewish families on it. I do not believe that all Palestinians should be entitled to the right of return. Its implementation isn't practical. And insisting on it creates an insurmountable obstacle to peace. That's a big deal. And if you're talking in circles of peace and with Palestinians, that's a really big deal. But at the end of the day I think that people that are serious about peace understand that. And there have been discussions. And I think they've worked all that out already. We know that there will be Palestinian refugees who will be able to receive compensation and they'll move into the West Bank. We know there will be some families that do want to return to Israel

for reunification. We know that. There are some big issues there. But I really think some of those have been worked out. They come in and out of a drawer depending on how things pass. And I do believe that even in terms of Jerusalem, for us also one of the greatest most sensitive issues, that there will be a resolution that's based on creative thinking. What that thinking is, there's a bunch of plans there too. I don't believe that we're going to have one -- it's not going to be the Vatican City, a unified city where we're all going to be there. But at the same time you should know in the last few months there has been a great push among Jerusalem Arabs to get their citizenship, which they refused to do Israeli citizenship for a very long time. They're starting to understand too that there may be gains for them there. There may be gains because of the election that's coming up. There are benefits that they haven't been entitled to that now they can be. So we each continue to find creative thinking. Each side continues to make mistakes. We come together, we go apart, we come together. And yes, some leaders will work better than others. But yes, people have walked away. There's no doubt. But at the end of the day I still come back to what's the choice? What is the choice?

STEPHANIE BONDER: To change the topic slightly, you had mentioned how the group that you founded at McGill University evolved into J Street University. Do you think that J Street has had any impact on moving conservative Americans toward supporting a two-state solution?

NOMI COLTON-MAX: Well, I would -- I'm going to answer your question in a little different way. You said do I think that J Street has worked to make conservative Jews come to a two-state solution? I would say that J Street in general has shown that there is another side to the Jewish

community. It has shown that to people that are involved, and on Washington on the Hill, there are other people that can door knock and other people that can go and other people that have opinions. I think it has showed to some of the disenfranchised Jews that I spoke about that there are people like them maybe who understand the issues and have the verbiage they just haven't yet acquired. And I think that it shows that guess what, the Jewish community is diverse. Hey, there's something we didn't know. And so there can't just be one voice that speaks for all of us. And the other voice didn't speak for me.

STEPHANIE BONDER: On that note, you came around to Progressive Zionism because it had a humanistic impact on you, and it talked about social justice and making social change. How can we make the Zionist story something that shows how people who believe in Zionism also want to make life in Israel better for the Israelis and the nonJews who live in Israel? Talking about feminism, issues of women, and violence against women, and how does Progressive Zionism deal with those issues?

NOMI COLTON-MAX: I hope that that's what I answered. One of the tenets that I really wanted to get across in my speech is that we're not new. We're old. We've been here since the founding of the state. We've been working on these issues for a long time. Somewhere along the way what we were working on got hijacked into that we're not supportive of Israel. The names of the people I mentioned, the NGOs that I mentioned, the fact that the Jewish agency has now been looking to other groups to give some of the educational programs for summer trips to Israel. The fact that Nar Ha'oved is continuing to work with habonim drawer to reach the youth both in Israel and here. The fact that some of Zack's counselors have made aliyah and are living

on an urban kibbutz in Haifa, those are amazing events, amazing activists that these people have moved to Israel to dedicate their life to working for this community, this ideal place. And to me, that is the greatest success story. And to see working together or to go to see kibbutz ravid which is now a place that focuses on educational programs for youth across the country who come in for a week, or to hear that there are groups that are now working with soldiers to really talk about the PTSD when they come out, because it's heavy and it's hard. To know that as I said, to read the books that have come out of Breaking the Silence. If you can -- I don't know if there's one in English, I think there might be. Breaking the Silence have put together books of the interviews they've done with the soldiers. They have an entire book on issues that female soldiers face, both within the Army and from what they're hearing on the streets. And to hear these people have come out and said I don't want to be here. And if you go to Israel, and you want to learn about these things, I encourage you to go visit these organizations, or go visit these communities, or as I said, ask, or go on a trip to Israel, which looks at this part of Israel, which you know, which we used to not talk about or not go visit. I said to you earlier today, the first time I went to Israel, which was in 1983, the program I was on never crossed the green line. Never. We didn't go visit places except once where we were sent by the (Hebrew), and the Jewish agency afterwards said why did we go there? The whole time -- so if we had to get from Jerusalem and we were going up north, we didn't take that bus. We just didn't do it because we didn't believe in it. That was a long time ago now. But these groups have always -- they've existed. We've been there. And we continue to work. And somewhere along the way in the last little bit,

you know, I don't know, we've lost a little bit of this PR war. But we've always been there. As I said to you when I looked at the Declaration of Independence, the issues that are there are the issues we're still working on, we're still fighting about, we're still advocating for. So are all those people.

STEPHANIE BONDER: Just to clarify for anyone who is watching, the green line was the border between Israel and the Arab countries before the 1967 war. So in case you are wondering, those are the lands that are in disputed areas. The areas within Jerusalem have been annexed, and the areas outside of it are considered by some to be the occupied territories.

I have another question from the Internet. How do you ensure a majority Jewish state if you allow people from all different religions, nationalities, to immigrate and become citizens?

NOMI COLTON-MAX: That's a good question, and one of the things I didn't talk about. But if you're following, Israel you know has been a country for asylum seekers through Sudan and areas. These people have not been treated nicely at all, where they've been sent in. It's upsetting to see. But at the same time, I mean, let's be honest, I talked about the percentage of what in Israel proper are still Jewish. You know, we're not talking about a huge group of people. If every bahai in the world went to move to Haifa tomorrow, it still isn't going to make that much of a difference. Yes, there are some nonJewish -- there's some Christians who live in Israel. And we in the kibbutz movement went through a time in the '80s where we had volunteers -- we had volunteers on kibbutz who weren't Jewish and were coming. What happens, and who was working in the fields and some of them were married. There were all those issues that went into play that have now come up a lot because

who is marrying them and what happened to nonJews. But we're not talking about a huge percentage that tomorrow all of a sudden Israel is going to be a minority. It is important to note that the fertility rate of the Israeli Arabs is high. It is important to note that the fertility rate of the anti-Zionist community is also high. So sometimes in Jerusalem I worry more about Zionists being the minority than -- we're still talking about Jews -- because those are numbers that are also perhaps for a different discussion that are high and troubling. But I'm glad to say that I'm not worried about that yet.

STEPHANIE BONDER: Okay. I wanted to speak to the 2014 Israel Democracy Index Survey that just came out. It reported that 86 percent of Israeli Jews are proud to be Israeli. And 65 percent of Israeli Arabs are proud to be Israeli. That's up from 49 percent last year. If you look at the dynamic and the make up of the Jewish population and the Arab population in Israel, what does that tell you about an atmosphere and environment living in Israel?

NOMI COLTON-MAX: First, it tells me that my progressive Zionist colleagues have done an amazing job in the last year working on inequality issues. Secondly and more seriously, I think it's an important fact to realize that even if tomorrow there was a Palestine in the West Bank, that not every Arab -- Israeli Arab is going to go there. They don't want to go there. While there's much work to do still, Israeli Arabs hold an important role and place in society. And they vote. They have their -- they elected, there's a government. There are towns with municipal governments. We have towns that have coexistence. They work on that. People want to live there. We want them to live there. I think that's what also makes Israel, and that's part of -- what makes it special at the same time.

And at the same time, those -- does anybody watch Arab Labor? Have you ever seen Arab Labor? I know -- Arab Labor is one of my favorite shows ever. Arab Labor is an Israeli television show about an Israeli Arab Seinfeld, for lack of a better word. This neurotic man who really just wants to be an everyday Israeli. His parents live in a village, and his wife -- they're educated. He's a journalist, she's a psychologist. His best friend is Jewish but he's now married to the singer who plays his Palestinian girlfriend. It's a hysterical show about the everyday issues that face people in a funny way. But of course in a thought-provoking way, it looks at those issues. So yes, he just wants to be an Israeli. That's all he wants. He wants to live in the apartment with the shower that works, and he wants to be the parent of the first child born in the year, in the new year. But then what happens? If you're born on January first, you get a prize. So in the hospital there's two families about to give birth, and there was of course a Russian oligarch who has money he's going to give to this family. So what happens? The Arab is born first. He sees the name. My friend Mohammed how can Mohammed be the first person born this year in this country? And what goes on, the shenanigans that go on. It's everyday life too. Not everything is political. It's just chaim. Life is not a picnic. That's what you would find with all of this as well.

STEPHANIE BONDER: Nomi, I just want to thank you for clarifying. I think that ending was a really good way to end because it talked about how real life affects everyone, and how we really are needing to see that there's a bigger picture. I want to remind everyone that this session has been recorded as well as all of our past sessions, which you can watch them individually. You can watch them by yourself. You can watch them in a group. It could be

the centerpiece of any Hadassah units program. Please share your feedback with us by completing an online survey. Your input helps us to create programming that is of interest to you and to your communities.

Please continue this conversation on our website at www.Hadassah.org/Zionismdiscussion, and on Twitter using the hashtag [DefiningZionism](#). The next Defining Zionism will be *Why I Call Myself a Zionist and Not Just a Lover or Supporter of Israel*, presented by Gil Troy, professor of history at McGill University.

NOMI COLTON-MAX: Two in a row. I hope they're counting.

STEPHANIE BONDER: And a Shalom Hartman Engaging Israel Research Fellow in Jerusalem. Gil Troy also was a former moskeer of the Queens region of the New York Judea. The date for this session will be Thursday, February 26, 2015. It will also take place between 7:30 and 8:30 Eastern Standard Time. Additionally if you haven't already done so please register for the entire Defining Zionism series to receive updates about all future programs. I would like to thank especially all the volunteers and staff who have been involved in the Defining Zionism series and I would like to let you know without these people the presentations would just not be possible. Thank you again Nomi for such a thought-provoking conversation. Lastly, I would like to thank you all for watching. (Applause).