



PERSPECTIVES

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Contemporary Jewish Academics and the Masochist Tradition

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: There is a strong trend of masochism in the contemporary Jewish world, the origins of which can be found in the Tanach [the Hebrew Bible]. The tradition of Jewish masochism continues through Talmudic expression and into later Jewish literature, and can also be found in the prayer book. One of many recent examples is a letter by 240 Israeli and Jewish scholars to the German government rejecting the parliamentary motion equating BDS with antisemitism.

On May 17th, the German parliament, the Bundestag, adopted a motion equating BDS with antisemitism. In response, 240 Jewish and Israeli scholars wrote a letter rejecting this equivalence. They called on the German government not to endorse the motion and to protect and respect freedom of speech, which they claim are under attack.

This is one of many typical acts of contemporary Jewish masochism. Free speech in Germany has, in the past, led to the most extreme criminal acts against Jews in history. There are still witnesses alive today who can speak to this. There are also a number of substantial antisemitism-promoting issues in contemporary German society and government policy against which these 240 scholars have not protested in an organized way, if at all.

The genocide-promoting Hezbollah organization is permitted to operate freely in Germany. Germany supports many anti-Israel resolutions in the UN and associated bodies while no similar resolutions exist against many criminal nations. This is, according to the main definition of antisemitism (the one from the International Holocaust Remembrance Association [IHRA]), an antisemitic act. Nor did the aforementioned Jewish academics protest against the immigration of hundreds of thousands of antisemites among the refugees from

Muslim countries who have entered Germany since 2015. It should be noted that these imported antisemites do not distinguish in their prejudice and hatred between masochist and non-masochist Jews.

Masochism was and is a substantial strand in Israeli society and the Jewish world. It is a millennia-old tradition. Yet it is almost entirely ignored in Jewish public discourse. One can find masochistic tendencies in the origins of Judaism. During times of adversity, pagan nations often added or replaced their existing gods as they blamed the latter for their misfortunes. The Tanach (The Hebrew Bible) gives an example of this during the Assyrian rule of the land of Israel. When its new inhabitants were attacked by lions, they asked for an Israelite priest to teach them how to worship the Lord while still worshipping their existing gods. In contrast, the Israelites, under ongoing admonishment from their prophets, ultimately started to blame only themselves for their misfortunes.

Well before that time, the patriarch Abraham made an extreme effort in a detailed discussion with the Lord to save the evil city of Sodom from destruction. Yet when the Lord ordered him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, Abraham was willing to fulfill this divine order without any argument.

One can also trace this masochism in the Talmud where it is stated explicitly: "Rabbi Abahu says be always among the persecuted and not among the persecutors." One finds it in later Jewish literature and in the current Jewish prayer book, particularly before the High Holidays.

Yet another Biblical text that can lead to masochism is the one from Isaiah instructing Israelites to be a "light unto the nations." It is masochism incarnate when Jews conclude from this injunction that the State of Israel has failed if it is anything less than perfect. This type of thinking invites discriminatory criticism of Israel against which Jewish masochists have no defense.

In Israel, there are many examples of masochistic phenomena. One is the repeated reference to the "1948 Deir Yassin Massacre." Professor Eliezer Tauber of Bar-Ilan University has established that much of what has been promoted for decades as atrocities in Deir Yassin is a myth or greatly exaggerated. Deir Yassin was a marginal event compared to the huge crimes committed by Western nations in the colonies and during colonial wars by the Portuguese, the British, the French, the Dutch, and others. None of these nations refers to its historic crimes nearly as frequently as Israel cites Deir Yassin.

Among the 240 signatories of the letter from Jewish and Israeli academics to the German government are several hard-core anti-Israel inciters. One of the best known is Noam Chomsky. He has supported the rights of the French academic, Robert Faurisson, one of Europe's leading Holocaust deniers.

Chomsky created a construct to claim that Hitler could have exterminated six million Jews without being an antisemite.

More recently, he has defended the self-defined “friend” and “brother” of genocidal terrorists, Jeremy Corbyn. Chomsky said in an interview that he would vote for Corbyn, whom he called a decent person. He warned of the rise of Judeo-Nazi tendencies in Israel. Chomsky has also called Gaza “a concentration camp.” Alan Dershowitz claimed in *The Case for Israel* that Chomsky holds double standards on racism and blames Israel alone for the 1948 refugee crisis. Chomsky also supported the arming of Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006.

Another signatory was American academic Judith Butler, who said in 2006, “Understanding Hamas/Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive, that are on the left, that are part of a global left is extremely important.”

Perhaps even more striking is the fact that the signatories include Holocaust scholars. One of the most problematic is Daniel Blatman, a professor of contemporary Jewry and Holocaust Studies at Hebrew University. He is also chief historian of the permanent exhibition at the Warsaw Ghetto Museum. In addition to the mass murder of Jews by the Germans on Polish territory, Poles murdered far more Jews than they saved. The fact that Blatman signed the letter is a further indication that he should be followed closely for possible future distortions. When Blatman spoke about his plans for the Warsaw museum, he did not even mention the Polish murderers of Jews during the Holocaust.

Blatman has also attacked the IHRA in *Haaretz*, claiming that it is a tool of the Israeli government. He has accused the IHRA of establishing a definition of antisemitism that serves that government’s political interests.

Blatman has come under heavy criticism from the Honorary Chairman of the IHRA, Yehuda Bauer, who is Israel’s leading Holocaust scholar. He answered in the same daily that the claim that Israel controls the IHRA is an antisemitic canard. He added that Blatman had been named chief historian of a new museum that was supported by the Nationalist Polish regime, apparently as its Jewish-Israeli fig leaf.

Bauer concluded: “I never imagined that an antisemitic attack and venomous criticism of a positive project that promotes Holocaust remembrance would emerge from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on Mount Scopus, and from the person who fills the same position – head of the Institute for Contemporary Jewry – that I held there for decades. But one learns, even at my advanced age.”

Much more attention should be paid to the greatly under-researched,

millennia-old phenomenon of Jewish masochism. It is an important threat to the proper functioning of the Jewish world and Israel. One result of such masochistic behavior is its negative effect on the international and domestic image of both Jews and Israelis worldwide.

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