Where Do You Stand?: Lessons I Hope My Great-Grandfather Will Teach Me

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Abstract: In this piece, I reflect on my new research into my great-grandfather, an influential and controversial Rabbi who, beginning in the 1940s, lobbied against the establishment of a Jewish state. Part 1 considers the current crisis in Palestine/Israel alongside a sermon delivered by my great-grandfather 80 years ago. Part 2 reflects on the origin of this research, begun two years before the current escalation of violence, as well as the scope and potential contributions of this study to contemporary American history and to the field of social work. In Part 3, I interrogate why it has taken so long to begin this work, critically reflecting on what has held me back from engaging in anti-Zionist study and action.

***Keywords*:** Palestine, anti-Zionism, social movements, reflective research

Author Note

I wrote and submitted this piece in November 2023 and received peer reviews in March 2025. Much has happened in the months in between. As this manuscript emerged from a particular moment, I have left intact my knowledge and grappling from the time of submission. While there are many variations of Zionism and anti-Zionism, in this piece "Zionism" refers to the political ethnonationalist movement that established and maintains a Jewish majority state, and which is presently reflected by the views of the governing majority in Israel, while "Anti-Zionism" refers to Jewish dissent against Jewish ethnonationalism.

Part 1: Where Do You Stand?

The days following October 7, 2023, were a blur. First: News that Hamas fighters had broken through the heavily reinforced barriers Israel erected to enclose the Gaza Strip and launched a surprise attack. Hamas had murdered over 1,000 people in their homes and communities and kidnapped some 240 others, among them infants and elders. Reports from Israel evidenced people in a state of terror, a sentiment that rippled across Jewish communities worldwide.

And then, within the day, Israel declared war on Hamas. The government cut off water, power, and the import of food and medicine, and launched a relentless bombing campaign that leveled entire blocks and included as targets journalists, ambulances and hospitals, United Nations–operated schools and universities, and places of worship. Within one week, nearly a quarter of the region's residents were homeless; the death toll in Gaza approached 2,000, of which at least 600 were children (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2023).

My first morning back on campus I wandered the empty halls of the School of Social Work. I felt unmoored, desperate for connection. I paused in front of an open office; my colleague asked, "How are you?" I assumed she was asking me as a Jew and tried to put words to the choking

sense of horror rising inside me: "I am terrified this is the start of a genocide." A puzzled look flashed across her face; I realized her greeting had been one of custom rather than curiosity. She did not understand, and did not really want to know.

Before the end of the second week, the numbers of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces had more than doubled (OHCHR, 2023). On October 27, the Gaza Health Ministry released a list of the names, genders, and ages of the more than 7,000 presumed dead (Democracy Now!, 2023) and shortly thereafter, most of Gaza lost phone and internet access (Al-Hlou & Abdulrahim, 2023). As the Israeli Defense Force began its ground invasion of Gaza, Palestinians inside Gaza had no way of communicating with family both inside and outside the war zone, ambulances had no way of receiving calls and responding to the wounded, and journalists had no way of letting the world know the costs of Israel's war to "wipe" Hamas "off the face of this earth" (Lubell, 2023, para. 7). Every day that passed, the death count soared, and the already unlivable conditions within Gaza deteriorated further. Within a month, I am certain: I am witnessing an attempted genocide of the 2.2 million Palestinian people in Gaza. But what can I do? What *should* I do? What are my responsibilities, as an American, as a social work educator, and especially, as a Jew?

As I grapple with this unfolding catastrophe—gut-wrenching in its inhumanity, and excruciating as it is undertaken *in our name*—I keep looking to my great-grandfather, Rabbi Irving Reichert, whose portrait hangs just above my desk. I never knew him, but I have long known of his 1943 Kol Nidre sermon, titled "Where do you stand?", delivered nearly 80 years to the day prior to October 7. On that particular eve of Yom Kippur, otherwise known as the "Day of Atonement," some 70 nations were embattled in World War II, the Nazis had conducted mass executions of Jewish people across Europe, and Hitler's plan to exterminate all Jews—along with other targets of the Nazi regime—was well known. There was an unfolding refugee crisis: Hundreds of thousands of Jewish people had fled Europe, and many more remained desperate for safety. In response, Zionist organizations worldwide deepened their efforts to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, and it was to this latter topic that Rabbi Reichert turned. It was then, as now, a highly divisive topic.

Looking out at his congregants at Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco—one of California's oldest and among the nation's largest Jewish temples—Rabbi Reichert (1953) acknowledged that the question of a Jewish state had become "the rock upon which American Jewry has been cleft into two distinct and determined groups" (p. 136). He understood the fight as between two contrasting theories of change. On the one hand, the political Zionist movement proposed that the sole path to safety for the Jewish people was through the establishment of a Jewish nation and army. On the other hand, Reichert—along with members of the newly formed American Council for Judaism (ACJ) argued that egalitarianism and democracy were the roads to Jewish safety, and that Jewish people are safest when and where all people are safe. Reichert (1953) used this Kol Nidre sermon to make his case for the ACJ, arguing that "the basis of unity among Jews is not political nationalism, but religion" (p. 139). He referenced the violence already unfolding in Palestine—"a long series of riots, assassinations and bloody clashes

between an intensified Jewish nationalism and a defensive Arab nationalism" (p. 139)—before offering the ACJ's approach to the Jewish refugee crisis:

> [The ACJ] believes that Jews and Arabs working harmoniously together in Palestine, under a democratic form of government, democratically arrived at, which shall afford equal protection and opportunity to all men regardless of race, nationality or creed, represents an equitable solution of the problem in harmony with the ideals of the Four Freedoms for which we are fighting. The Council maintains that Palestine is one of the countries to which Jews ought to be permitted to immigrate if they desire. But at the same time, it calls upon the United Nations to liberalize the opportunities for all persecuted and uprooted peoples of Europe to re-establish themselves in their former homes if that is what they want, or to find homes after the war in other lands if they wish to emigrate (pp. 139–140).

The Rabbi foresaw that the decision of whether or not to establish an ethnonationalist political state for Jewish people would have grave and lasting consequences. He ended his sermon with an appeal to his congregants:

> The postwar status of the Jews is a concern that affects deeply and intimately and permanently the lives of every one of you here tonight, and of your children and children's children. You cannot be silent and indifferent on this issue! (p. 142).

Rabbi Reichert was not silent: He spoke on national radio broadcasts, wrote editorials in national newspapers, and toured the country raising alarms about the moral, political, and human consequences of the Zionist nationalist movement. Having traveled to Nazi Germany to document worsening conditions for Jews in 1933 and again in 1937, Reichert was acutely aware of the dangers of ethnonationalist movements. In a 1936 sermon, Reichert (1953) had warned, "There is too dangerous a parallel between the insistence of Zionist spokesmen upon nationality and race and blood, and sinister pronouncements by Fascist leaders in European dictatorships … We may live to regret it" (p. 132). Concurrent with his efforts to delegitimize the *ends* of the Zionist movement—an ethnonationalist state—he warned against the movement's *means*: a proclivity of the Zionist organizers towards stacking votes, smear campaigns, and splitting the Jewish community (see Kolsky, 1990). During his 1943 Kol Nidre sermon, the Rabbi cautioned his congregants to be wary of the dogmatic approach of the Zionist leaders, quoting the president of the Zionist Organization of America, Rabbi Israel Goldstein, who had recently declared, "No Jew is a normal Jew who is not a Zionist" (as cited in Reichert, 1953, p. 137). Rabbi Reichert believed that such a conflation was erroneous and dangerous, and divided a Jewish community who could otherwise be leveraging unified pressure on the U.S. and elsewhere—including in Mandatory Palestine—to open their borders to Jewish refugees.

At the time of the Rabbi's 1943 Kol Nidre sermon, the membership of the Zionist Organization of America represented a fraction of the American Jewish population. Yet, the twin horrors of the Holocaust and the refusal of many countries to offer safe haven to refugees spurred many American Jews to shift their politics towards Jewish nationalism. The ranks of the Zionist

movement swelled. Ultimately, the efforts of the ACJ were unsuccessful at materially shifting U.S. immigration policy or halting the establishment of Jewish state.

Today, the ideological dominance of Zionism is so entrenched that Goldstein's notion, "No Jew is a normal Jew who is not a Zionist," might read to many as a statement of fact. Indeed, in response to a large Jewish rally at the National Mall protesting Israel's attacks on Gaza, David Friedman, the former U.S. ambassador to Israel during Trump's first term, declared: "Any American Jew attending this rally is not a Jew!" (Tait, 2023, para. 8). For many, the trifecta of Jewish people, Zionist ideology, and the state of Israel have been so thoroughly laminated together that it is difficult to think them apart, or to imagine Jews who are not Zionist or Jews who do not universally support Israeli state actions. The more chilling effect of this lamination has been to weaponize any and all critiques of Zionism or the state of Israel as an attack against Jews as a people. In response to the National Mall rally, the Anti-Defamation League (formed to combat antisemitism), issued the following statement: "Let's be very clear—anti-Zionism is antisemitism" (Tait, 2023, para. 8). For (at least) eighty years, proponents of Zionism have been trying to silence dissenting views on the question of Jewish nationalism, and have been remarkably successful.

In my role as a social work educator, many of the Jewish students I encounter were raised with little to no exposure to anti- or non-Zionist Jews, or the role that they played in organizing against the establishment of a Jewish state. Most are unfamiliar with the once foundational Jewish belief that Zionism is fundamentally incompatible with the tenets of Judaism, as reiterated by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1898: "The mission of Judaism is spiritual, not political. Its aim is not to establish a state, but to spread the truths of religion and humanity throughout the world" (p. 4002). Further, Jewish and non-Jewish students alike struggle to apply social work's bedrock commitment to social justice and human rights to the lives of Palestinians, or to consider the ramifications of a settler colonial project that provided a homeland to survivors of the Jewish Holocaust through the expulsion of the Palestinian people (Levine, 2014).

Two years ago, after wondering if my great-grandfather's story could provide a useful intervention into these knowledge gaps, I began inching my way into a research project of his life and the 13 years he spent organizing against Zionism as the national vice-president of the ACJ (Kolsky, 1990; Rosenbaum, 1980). I contacted relatives and began gathering materials. A second-cousin I have yet to meet sent me a portrait of my great-grandfather that had hung in her parent's home. I mounted it above my desk, but made little headway in the work. Now, in the midst of a genocide, I feel he is watching my every move, asking: Where do you stand?

Part 2: Why Begin This Study Now?

If there was a singular spark that turned me towards my great-grandfather as the primary focus of my scholarship, it was a viral 2021 video of New Yorker Justin Fauci squatting in the Al-Kurd family home in Sheikh Jarrah, in a Jerusalem neighborhood built in the early 1950s for Palestinians displaced by the 1948 Nakba. There was a lot happening at this time: IDF raids of

worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque, forced evictions of Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood to create space for Jewish settlers, and mobs of right-wing Israelis marching through Palestinian neighborhoods chanting "Death to Arabs" and "May your village burn" (Democracy Now!, 2021). In many ways, there was nothing novel about this moment: Israel has been expelling Palestinians from their homes since 1948. What was different was me: This time I could not look away.

The viral video shows the Long Island–raised, Brandeis-educated Justin—now calling himself Yaakov—standing in the yard of the occupied multigenerational al-Kurd family home, a home he has now moved into. Mona al-Kurd says, "Yaakov, you know this is not your house," to which Justin responds, "Yes, but if I don't steal it, someone else is gonna steal it" (Sabbagh-Khoury, 2022). Justin, I learned, is one of thousands of U.S. Jews recruited by U.S.- and Israeli-based settler organizations in order to manufacture a Jewish supermajority in the region, including by moving American Jews into currently occupied Palestinian homes (for more on the settlement movement, see Hirschorn, 2020).

So much about the news coverage from these weeks was jarring—the viciousness of the assaults upon people in prayer; the evictions of long-time residents, already refugees once over at the hands of the state—but the presence of Jacob and the role of U.S.-based settler organizations closed the distance between me and this "conflict" in a way that had not previously occurred. My research has focused on contested places and racialized displacement. Most of my work has been in historically Black neighborhoods in Nashville, Tennessee, and Portland, Oregon, where long-time residents are priced out and pushed out; where the places residents have generationally gathered to worship, to organize, to educate, and to celebrate have been destroyed; and where those who remain are often treated as strangers or threats in the neighborhoods where they were born and raised. If I cared about these issues *here,* how could I not care about them *there,* particularly when those displacements were led by U.S.-based organizations and American transplants?

Horrified by narratives that the safety of the Jewish people is somehow predicated on the subjugation, oppression, and annihilation of Palestinian people—and the role of U.S. Jewish organizations in crafting and recirculating that narrative—I felt compelled to act. As I considered the scholarly arena in which I may be best positioned to contribute, the spark lit by Jacob Fauci's expression of Jewish nationalism burned a thread back to my great-grandfather's warnings of the threats of this very ideology. It seemed then, in 2021, and more so today, necessary to document and uplift legacies of Jewish resistance to Zionism. Thus, I embarked on what I hoped would be the first comprehensive biography of Irving Reichert.

The scholarship in the area of Jewish-led anti-Zionist social movements in general, and on Rabbi Reichert in particular, is thin. While he received passing reference in texts about the ACJ (see Kolsky, 1990, and Ross, 2011), the most substantive historical accounts of the Rabbi have been offered by a single historian, Fred Rosenbaum, in chapters of two published books (Rosenbaum, 1980; Rosenbaum, 1991) and numerous speeches. In a 2017 lecture at Stanford University, Rosenbaum expressed his disdain for the anti-Zionist organizing of Rabbi Reichert

and the ACJ, describing it as "the most shameful episode in all of our local history" (Rosenbaum, 2017). That Rosenbaum paid such special attention to Rabbi Reichert speaks to the Rabbi's significance as a historical figure and makes him deserving of more robust historical inquiry than has been undertaken heretofore. Particularly unexplored in existing literature is Rabbi Reichert's rationale for opposing Zionism. Through interviews with those still living who knew the Rabbi, exploration of the archival records, and review of secondary sources, I hope to gain insight into the religious, philosophical, and/or ethical foundations of Rabbi Reichert's anti-Zionist position. What were his central arguments against Zionism and how did these arguments evolve after Israel's statehood? What strategies and tactics did he and the ACJ use to oppose the Zionist movement in America? And, finally, what were the personal and professional costs of Reichert's anti-Zionist stance?

Broadly, it is my hope that this study can meaningfully contribute to the historic record of Rabbi Reichert and offer insight into Jewish-led efforts to oppose Zionism in the mid-20th century. While there are significant limitations as to what a study of a single historical figure can offer, my hope is that this study can be part of a wider reclamation of anti-Zionist pasts, and perhaps inform and inspire a future rooted in collective liberation. This study also has particular relevance to social work. As social work scholar Michael Reisch (2021) observes, "What binds many contemporary social movements most closely with the social work profession, both philosophically and practically, is their common commitment to the expansion of democracy and the promotion of human rights and social justice on a global scale" (p. 10). These commitments have led to social work engagement in various movements for economic, gender, and racial justice, and in opposition to antisemitism and xenophobia (Reisch, 2021). However, as a field, social work has been largely silent on the subject of Zionism and its impact on democracy and human rights for Palestinians, historically and at present (as exceptions, see Levine, 2014; Rees, 2016; Shalhoub-Kevorkian et al., 2022). In contributing to the published scholarship of mid-20th century anti-Zionist social movements, this study may invite social work to consider its historic and contemporary stance towards Palestinian liberation movements.

The stakes for Palestinian people have perhaps not been higher since the 1948 Nakba, when an estimated 750,000 Palestinians were displaced in the creation of the State of Israel. Concurrently, Jewish American resistance to Israeli policies of apartheid and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is on the rise (Fahy et al., 2023; Tait, 2023). There is no Jewish consensus: Divergent interpretations of this moment have ruptured Jewish families, congregations, and even the field of genocide studies (e.g., Klein, 2025). But there is a growing scholarship of Jewish dissent (Butler, 2012; Feld, 2024; Levin, 2023), and American and Israeli Jews are increasingly rejecting the premise that the safety of Jewish people in Israel is predicated on the absence of Palestinians (Da Silva, 2023; Sanders, 2023). Indeed, given the stakes of this moment, answering the question of "why start this study now?" is relatively easy. Much harder to explain is why I did not start it sooner.

Part 3: Why Haven't I Started This Sooner?

After deciding two years ago that I wanted to research my great-grandfather, I have been slow to get going. At first, I convinced myself it was just a matter of clearing space in my full research agenda, which was certainly true. But as openings came, and I filled them with other new projects, I realized I was buried under a landslide of doubt.

I questioned whether I was *the right kind of scholar*. I was trained as a social scientist, not a historian, and though I have robust methodological training and some experience in historical methods, this project is afield from my current research trajectory. Can I do justice to this project with the training and research experience I have? I keep assuring myself that yes, the study as I have defined it—a thorough investigation of a single historical figure—is well within my depth as a scholar. And, I reminded myself that while this work is different from my other research, it is also in line with my scholarly commitments: I have spent my adult life immersed in histories, practices, and movements to contest systemic oppression and advance justice. I have had particular interest in uplifting stories of social justice struggles that have been buried, forgotten, or silenced—stories that often help us to better know our past, understand the present, and imagine our future. Further, as a social work professor, I have a professional obligation to equip future practitioners with the skills and knowledge to create more just policies, systems, organizations, and communities (National Association of Social Workers, 2021). Thus, this work is clearly aligned with my disciplinary commitments and responsibilities.

But then, I worried that even if I had the research tools, I *lacked the subject area expertise* needed to do justice to this study. The study of my great-grandfather is entangled with the history of Jewish and Palestinian peoples. Yet, I have no expertise in Judaica, Jewish-American studies, or Middle-Eastern Studies, and I have never seriously engaged in study related to Palestine/Israel. How will I be able to do justice to the generations of Jewish people's suffering that led to the creation of the state of Israel, and the generations of suffering of Palestinians who have lost their land, liberty, and lives through Israel's creation? I reminded myself that I have long been a student of, and more recently a contributor to, scholarship that explores how relationships of inequality are emplaced and how they can be transformed. Further, background research is something I enjoy doing and do well, and this is an area I am eager to learn.

I also worried that, as a descendant, I was *too close to the subject* to be (or to be perceived as being) a reliable biographer. Yet, I have no interest in cherry-picking history, or painting an overly heroic vision of Rabbi Reichert. I already know some of his failings as a father and grandfather, and I expect to encounter more of his shortcomings—personal and professional—as the study unfolds. My goal is to conduct a holistic exploration of who he was, how he lived, what he believed, and how his views and perspectives evolved over time. There is likely as much to learn from the places in which he struggled to fully live into his values as there is to learn from his achievements. Further, my closeness to the subject has provided me access to stories and artifacts I would not otherwise encounter. Already, I have had the gift of interviewing three people in their 90s who knew my great-grandfather—two nephews and a congregant—and have received a precious bundle of letters between my great-grandfather and

his brother, beginning when they were young men in rabbinical school and continuing throughout their lives.

But then again, I have also worried that I am *not close enough to the subject* to be, or be perceived as being, a reliable biographer. My great-grandfather was the last in a line of rabbis in our family tree, and my particular branch is largely secular. I was raised with a strong sense of quiet family pride in being Jewish, but unaffiliated with Jewish spiritual, cultural, and civic organizations. One consequence of this cultural isolation is that I was not introduced to/indoctrinated into Zionist thinking. However, neither was I raised in an expressly non-Zionist or anti-Zionist household. In the stories passed down about my great-grandfather, the women in my family spoke with reverence of his willingness to take unpopular and principled stands, and to risk his career in doing so. But none, including me, had been inclined to pick up the banner of his beliefs, or to investigate them more fully. Another consequence of my separation from Jewish community and religion is the sense of not being Jewish "enough." As a child I yearned to look more Jewish and to have a more recognizably Jewish name (the irony of this is not lost on me, as internalized antisemitism and pressures of assimilation have led many Jewish children to wish the opposite). To this day I carry an unsettled mix of cultural pride and longing for a community I have never quite known how to access. But here too, I see the opportunity this research presents: a way into deeper exploration of Judaism and Jewish intellectual traditions, and deeper engagement in Jewish communities.

So, what is *really* holding me back? What is under these doubts of not being the right kind of scholar, of not knowing enough, of being too close, or not being close enough? It feels rooted in fear. But fear of what? A few days ago, a Palestinian friend recounted a recent conversation with her son, during which she shared that she was going to be interviewed by a local reporter seeking the "Palestinian perspective" on the current war. "Are you sure that's a good idea?" her 15-year-old had asked, continuing, "Aren't you worried people will think you are antisemitic?" She answered, "I used to be, but now I have the words to talk about it, and I'm not scared anymore." I realized, in that moment, that I do not yet have the words. But why not?

As a young person, I mobilized around various social justice causes. In elementary school, I went door-to-door raising money to address famine in Africa. In high school, I volunteered on a campaign to oppose anti-gay ballot initiatives in my hometown, and worked overnight shifts at a domestic violence shelter. In college, I played leadership roles in various justice-oriented clubs, and started a non-profit organization to educate others about systemic oppression. Yet somehow, I never engaged in serious study related to Palestine/Israel. Sure, I have held a political position, largely parroting the position held by my great-grandfather, as best I understood it: That the State of Israel was founded on a deeply dangerous and morally flawed ideology, and that no peace is possible without equal rights for Palestinians in Israel and self-determination for those in the occupied territories. I have mostly kept that position to myself, and have done little to deepen my thinking or understanding of how the situation in Palestine/Israel unfolded over the last 75 years, how the United States is implicated in the region, what that means for the people living there now, and importantly, what this situation requires of the rest of us, particularly Jewish Americans. When I say I have done little, let me be more explicit: While I have gone to a

few talks here or there, and read essays in passing, I have never taken a class on the historical or contemporary geopolitical context of Palestine/Israel, and before recently, have actually never read a complete book dedicated to the subject. How could this possibly be true? Why have I prioritized learning about so many other struggles, and not this one? Why have I waited so long to research my own family history? Why have I avoided learning, and chosen willful ignorance instead?

Part of this is most certainly a personal failing: I have not sought, in any systematic fashion, to educate myself the way I have about other comparable issues or concerns. (Indeed, thanks to a summer intensive course I took in Derry, I know more about settler-colonialism in the context of Northern Ireland, a region to which I have no connection, than I do in relation to Palestine.) Even as I've started this research project, I have stayed largely in a gathering and acquisition mode for more than a year now—seeking sources and filling my physical and digital library—and have found it difficult to actually begin reading and writing. But this also suggests a structural failing: How could engagement with Palestine/Israel, arguably the site of the most blatant form of contemporary apartheid in the developed world, be entirely absent from my education (including two master's degrees and doctoral study), the focus of which has been social justice? It is as if I have been professionally trained to look away from Palestine/Israel, to consider all other forms of injustice and suffering, but not this one. (I wish I could cite Marc Lamont Hill and Mitchell Plitnick's recent book, *Except for Palestine* here, because I have a hunch they speak to this, but it is one of the many books I have gathered and not yet read.)

The more I scratch at this, I think I have been afraid to learn, because learning would require me to act, and those actions come with risks that I have felt unprepared to take. Unprepared not as in *unwilling*, but as in *not in fighting shape*. Because it does feel that if one speaks out against Zionism—even through, as I propose, inquiry into a historical figure—one has to be prepared to enter a kind of battle. To be clear, the stakes are incomparable to those born by Palestinians who speak out against Israeli policies: There are currently 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners incarcerated in Israel (Ludwig, 2023). Consequences are also extreme for Israeli citizens who criticize the state: Jewish Knesset member Ofer Cassif was recently suspended for his statements against Israeli policies (Marsden, 2023), and Jewish Israeli students have faced arrest and expulsion for protesting the state (Da Silva, 2023). That said, from the blacklisting that my great-grandfather endured, Zionist backlash in America is not nothing.

One of the earliest stories I carry related to my great-grandfather was recounted by his son Irving Jr. as he visited his sister (my grandmother and namesake) when I was around 10 years old. I sat rapt at "Big Amie's" dining room table as these elders recounted their childhood—and the day that the head of the American Zionist Organization visited the family home to offer their father a leadership role in their movement. As Irv recalled: "They said, 'If you join us, we will give you everything West of the Mississippi. If you don't, we will destroy you.'" His father refused, and instead accelerated his efforts to thwart their campaign. In the end, the Rabbi was in many ways destroyed. On the day that the United Nations voted to create the Jewish State, Rabbi Reichert was asked to resign from his pulpit at Emanu-El. For years, he struggled to find another congregation. In 1957, he wrote to his brother, "I was turned down for two other jobs

last month—it appears the Zionists still can't forgive me—and I am as before a 'controversial' figure" (Reichert, 1957, p. 1). The cost of his stance was great: In addition to losing his pulpit, he lost his political influence and sense of purpose. To this day, to resist Zionist ideology in America is rarely without risk. In these first weeks since Israel's declaration of war on Hamas, there has been a flurry of backlash against those who have criticized Israel, and even for those who have not affirmed their blanket support for Israeli retaliation quickly or boldly enough (Hartocollis, 2023; Solender, 2023).

The threat of appearing antisemitic has proved incredibly powerful in silencing critiques of Israeli policies. When these critiques emerge from Jewish people, the critics are quickly dismissed as "self-hating-Jews." When my children were in high school in a new city, they were invited to attend Rosh Hashanah services by a burgeoning friend and her family. My heart swelled to know that they were making friends and connecting with their culture, and I felt immediate appreciation for these parents I had never met, but who had welcomed my children to join them for the day. And then, when the girls returned home, I learned that the father of the household—who for all I knew had never met or even seen me—had referred to me as a Jew-hating-Jew. I was stunned: this man who knows nothing about me, and somehow, he knows *this*? By what piece of evidence did he reach this conclusion? Was I marked in some way? Did he know, somehow, about my great-grandfather's political advocacy? Highly improbable, I know, but there is a way that the Zionist threat against my great-grandfather, "and if you don't, we'll destroy you," has felt like something of a multi-generational curse, and one that I was unprepared to ward against. If they could take down my great-grandfather—renowned for his superior intellect, oratory gifts, dogged persistence, and unwavering courage—how could any of the rest of us stand up against this force?

I feel reverberations of this threat every time some public figure speaks up against Israeli policies or challenges Zionist ideology and is quickly and powerfully reprimanded. Several friends and colleagues suggested I delay starting this research until after I earn tenure. One offered, "You heard what happened to Cornel West, right?" referring to Harvard's failure to grant tenure to one of the most esteemed and prolific public intellectuals of our time, and which West believes was due to his advocacy for-Palestinian liberation (Pierre, 2021). Perhaps it is naivete or privilege, but I do not fear being personally harmed by Zionist backlash (at least, not yet). Instead, I do fear feeling unprepared, not having the words and confidence to effectively respond to such attacks. And, paradoxically, I *can't find* the words and confidence without the courage to learn.

My fear has protected me from being personally targeted with Zionist backlash, but it has also harmed me. Because I have avoided learning, I am less equipped than I should be to meet this moment, as an individual and as an educator. I am working to make up for this now, and have a lot of catching up to do. This fear has also kept me at a distance from Jewish community and Judaism. Throughout my life, I have both yearned for and been wary of Jewish organizations, in part out of fear of how I/we might handle our differences in perspectives on Zionism. And while I have learned from my great-grandfather's legacy that there have *always been* non-Zionist Jewish communities, it is not until recently that I have lived in a place where these are robustly

established. Yet, I still have not made my way to them. I was raised to intrinsically reject Zionism's logic with regard to what conditions are necessary to keep Jewish people safe. It has taken until now for me to fully reject Zionism's attempts to short-circuit my learning, to silence my speech and action, and to control my relationship with Judaism and Jewish community.

Conclusion

This week, I sobbed listening to an account of Golan Abitol, whose kibbutz was attacked on October 7 (Tavernise, 2023). He grieved on air for the friends and neighbors who were murdered that day, for the destruction of the neighborhood where he and his children were born, and spoke with anguish for his community members who were kidnapped: "We want them back. We can't be a community without them. They are part of us. It's like a jigsaw puzzle. You can't take one piece and it will be OK" (Tavernise, 2023). I sobbed because I believe this about communities; this, more than anything, has been at the heart of my research for the last decade. In places where people have fought against oppression to create a sanctuary within which to survive, individuals hold multitudes, each part of a fabric that holds collective histories, present struggles, and hopes for the future. This is true in the communities formed by Jewish refugees after WWII across the world, and in Israel. It is equally true in communities created by Palestinians made refugees by the creation of the State of Israel, across the world, and in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The fabric of collective history, struggle, and hope was torn for Israeli Jews October 7th, and it has been shredded for Palestinians in the days since.

I return to the prophecy in my great-grandfather's 1943 Kol Nidre sermon: "The postwar status of the Jews is a concern that affects *deeply* and *intimately* and *permanently* the lives of every one of you here tonight, and of your children and children's children" (Reichert, 1953, p. 142 emphasis added). Eighty years ago, Rabbi Reichert was fundamentally concerned with how Zionist ideology would ethically, morally, and spiritually corrupt Jewish people. Today, many more Jews share this concern. As one friend put it this morning: "How do we come back from this?" How do we, the people who taught the world to recognize the "signposts along the road to Auschwitz" (Roth, as cited in Perl, n.d., para. 2)—the systematic processes of dehumanization that enable genocide—who swore "never again" to ethnic cleansing, how do we live with the genocide underway in our name?

As I begin to piece together a more complex understanding of who my great-grandfather was, what he believed, and why he dedicated so much of his life to opposing Zionist ideology, I am under no illusion that this study will illuminate a path out of the horrors we now face. That path exists in our future, not in the past. Nor do I yet know how this project will shape my own Jewish identity, though I am certain it will. At present, I hope this study can help fill the well of intellectual fortitude, moral courage, and perseverance that I and perhaps other Jewish social workers so desperately need in order to meet this moment: to resist Zionist silencing; to fight against the atrocities perpetrated in the name of Jewish safety; to affirm Palestinian self-determination; to grieve for and honor all that have died; and on behalf of their children's children, to dream of a future Palestine/Israel that we have not yet seen, but still could come to be.

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