



"Bombed back to the prewar period"

Jewish reactions to anti-Zionism in Norway, 1967–1982

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ABSTRACT • This study analyses Jewish reactions to anti-Zionism in Norway, from the 1967 Six-Day War to the 1982 Israel–Lebanon War, focusing on the shifting political climate towards Israel. Using archival records, press materials and interviews with Jewish community activists, it explores how they defined and countered antisemitism in relation to Israel’s legitimacy. Applying Stuart Hall’s representations theory, and Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities, the study shows how solidarity with Israel marked an additional sense of belonging, giving its defenders agency and something to fight for. As Norwegians, activists asserted inclusion in the national community by opposing antisemitism and defending democratic values. As Zionists, they subscribed to a group that was being attacked and needed defending. The study finds that methods used to combat anti-Zionism resembled those employed against antisemitism. Yet attempts to discredit anti-Zionism failed, furthering the confusion on the boundaries of antisemitism.

1. Introduction

1.1. Norway’s evolving stance on Israel after 1967

The Scandinavian countries were among Israel’s ardent supporters after 1948. For the Norwegian Labour government, Israel’s establishment symbolized democracy’s triumph over Nazism and the rehabilitation of Jews. However, the Six-Day War marked a turning point, with Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Sinai bringing about a re-evaluation of its role in global politics. Emerging voices criticized Zionism as a colonialist movement tied to ‘Western imperialism’.

This critique was initially confined to radical socialist circles but became prevalent with the emergence of a trans-national

anti-Zionist movement in the 1970s. By 1982, Israel’s Lebanon War and the massacres in Sabra and Shatila marked a shift in public opinion, where voices questioning Israel’s legitimacy once confined to radical circles could now be adopted by central democratic parties and expressed in liberal newspapers.

Israel had long been a central identity factor in the Jewish community, as a pillar of renewed consciousness and cultural connection (Banik 2009, 260–5). In a post-religious era, Zionism in West Europe symbolised a revival of Jewish identification that was not entirely based on religion (Avineri 1981, 12–13). After 1967 some Jews increasingly viewed the anti-Zionist movement as antisemitic, particularly interpreting the denial of Israel’s right to exist as an attack on their security and identity, shaped by the memory of the Holocaust.

1.2. A historiographic overview of Israel and Leftist antisemitism in Norway

Historical research on post-war Norwegian antisemitism has largely focused on persistent Nazi ideologies and anti-Jewish attitudes in debates on Israel, prioritizing external (non-Jewish) views over internal Jewish perspectives (Simonsen 2020b, 173–90). Hilde H. Waage has examined Norway's early support for Israel, framing it as a symbol of democracy's triumph over fascism and socialist ideals. She argued that this uncritical stance began shifting after Israel's 1967 victory, bringing attention to the situation of Palestinians (Waage 1996, 388).

Åsmund B. Gjerde explained how Israel became central to New Left ideological debates, driven by anti-imperialism and a reaction to the Right's pro-Israel stance (Gjerde 2018, 19–20). Waage and Gjerde do not analyse the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. This gap is partially explored by Karl Egil Johansen, who examined these concepts but did not provide a systematic analysis of their role in public discourse (Johansen 2008, 105–36).

More recently, Christhard Hoffmann and Kjetil B. Simonsen examined this dynamic in greater depth. Hoffmann explained the 'fading consensus' on defining antisemitism while anti-Zionism gained traction in Norway, furthering the confusion on what can be said about Israel and Jews (Hoffmann 2020, 26–50). Simonsen analysed how post-war antisemitism was publicly discredited but persisted as a cultural structure, manifesting itself in debates on Jews and Israel on both the Right and Left (Simonsen 2023, 217–64). While Waage described Israel's idealisation in both socialist and Christian terms, Simonsen explained the application of Christian anti-Jewish motifs in debates on Israel during the 1970s.

Vibeke K. Banik examined how support for Israel fostered unity within DMT (Det Mosaiske Trossamfund, The Jewish

Community of Norway)¹ but did not address community responses to anti-Zionism (Banik 2009, 260–65). The role of Israel's defence in the struggle against antisemitism, and how activism for Israel strengthened cohesiveness within DMT in relation to the broader society, are not discussed systematically.

Existing research does not ask how Norwegian Jews defined antisemitism in relation to anti-Zionism, and what strategies and methods were employed by the Jewish community to combat perceived antisemitism.

1.3. Objectives and methodology

Addressing the research gap, the questions raised by this investigation are:

1. How did Jewish community members define 'antisemitism' in relation to 'anti-Zionism' between 1967 and 1982?
2. What strategies and methods were developed and used by the Jewish community to combat this perceived antisemitism?

The investigation makes two unique contributions. Firstly, it shifts focus from external to internal perceptions of discrimination and integration. It introduces the problem of Jewish responses to antisemitism within the post-war Norwegian context where antisemitism was discredited. Secondly, it employs a wide range of sources for a new purpose, including under-explored Jewish community archival material, DMT publications, press material and expert interviews. This aims to capture a diversity of voices beyond the executive board and community activists.

There appears to have been a dominant position in support of Israel tied to the idea of belonging within DMT. Despite their criticism of Israel's actions, it is perhaps not surprising to

1 DMT, in Oslo and Trondheim, has been the only remaining Jewish congregation in Norway in the post-war period and is the organized community of Jews in these cities.

find little evidence of internal dispute regarding Israel's importance to Jews and its right to exist in the major newspapers, the DMT protocol or *Jødisk Menighetsblad*, potentially because of a desire to maintain unity.

But the hegemonic position did not apply to everyone. As criticism against Israel's handling of the Palestinians increased among the majority of Norwegians, the space for Jews to speak about Israel may have decreased and the old strategy of lying low (Gjernes 2007) may have been revisited.

1.4. Theoretical foundations

The investigation examines group formation within the debate on Israel and the implications of aligning with a particular 'side' on one's feeling of inclusion. Stuart Hall describes the process of individuals and groups continuously shaping each other's representations through recursive interaction, where each projection is received, processed and sent back, altering our interpretations of people and situations (Hall 1997, 223–79).

Addressing definitions of antisemitism, by applying Hall's concept we examine how community activists understood the anti-Zionist position, particularly the denial of Israel's right to exist. The mutual interpretation and response between proponents and opponents of anti-Zionism form a process of representation, where each side refined its understanding of what constitutes antisemitism in its post-Holocaust context, and ultimately positioned itself *vis-à-vis* the other group on the basis of these perceptions.

In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson explains the construction of identifications as the ties defining our sense of belonging that influence our actions. To Anderson, nationalism is an invented concept, where individuals feel connected to fellow citizens they have never met. This is crucial for building cohesion in a modern nation-state.

Using Anderson's framework to understand strategies developed by Jewish activists to combat perceived antisemitism, we argue that solidarity with Israel was not merely existential, linked to the security of a Jewish state; it provided a sense of belonging, giving its defenders something to fight for. As Norwegians, these activists asserted their inclusion in the national community by defending Norway's liberal and democratic values; as Zionists, they aligned with a group that was being attacked and needed defending, expressing solidarity not only with Israel but with each other.

1.5. Key concepts: anti-Zionism and anti-semitism

This paper explores how individual activists within DMT interpreted and responded to anti-Zionism within the broader Norwegian public debate on Israel. Zionism and anti-Zionism, as well as antisemitism, are mobile social phenomena, with their meanings evolving over time and varying even within the same supportive group. Defenders of Israel could refer to different critics of Israel as 'anti-Zionists', and, *vice versa*, from 1967 some critics of Israel could speak against the 'Zionists' as backing an imperialist movement.

Historically, resistance to Zionism changed from being a Jewish phenomenon before the war, to being a largely non-Jewish phenomenon after it. Various groups, including Right-wing revisionists (holocaust deniers) in Norway and Soviet anti-Zionists, used the term 'anti-Zionism' in ways that echoed traditional antisemitic conspiracy theories more openly than the West's revolutionary Left. This application influenced how the Jewish minority interpreted Norwegian anti-Zionism – whether this was fair or not.

Supporting Palestinians and criticizing Israel's actions do not make you an 'anti-Zionist'. Addressing this, Gjerde has distinguished between the 'anti-imperialist' component and the 'anti-Zionist' position of the New Left.

While the first provided a rationale for being against Israel, the second denied its right to exist in principle. This investigation problematizes the connection between criticism of Israel, anti-Zionism and antisemitism by asking: *to what extent did engagement with the defence of Israel, and the debate concerning its existence, function as part of the struggle against antisemitism?*

2. 'Antisemitism swallowed raw': community reactions to the emergence of anti-Zionism in Norway, 1967

2.1. Representations of Israel and the 'New Left'

The formation of a radical Left in the late 1960s marked a new era in the West. Galvanized by ideological and social pressures of the ongoing Cold War and the war in Vietnam, a counter-cultural revolution against 'the establishment' gained momentum, with the US seeing efforts to advance the civil rights movement redouble. Thus, an international peace movement prompted anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist currents (Frey 2008, 41).

In Norway, Maoist and Marxist-Leninist (-ml) ideologies shaped a dichotomous worldview of global politics framed as a struggle between 'Western imperialism' and the 'Third World'. While Third World nationalism was glorified, Jewish nationalism was viewed as illegitimate in principle. After 1967, the New Left increasingly equated 'Zionism' with fascism, often invoking analogies to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust in their propaganda (Simonsen 2023, 225–9).

In 1967, SUF, the youth wing of the Socialist People's Party SF, adopted a resolution stating that 'Israel in its current form as a bridgehead of imperialism must cease to exist' (SUF 1968, 13). The emphasis of 'as a bridgehead of imperialism' constituted a form of moderation, as did the reservation that the Jewish population in Israel 'should be guaranteed rights to live in

the Middle East' (*Dagbladet*, 9 October 1967).

After the war, the memory of the Holocaust was actively used as a framework to warn the public against antisemitic ideologies, anchoring an 'anti-antisemitic' public norm (Simonsen 2023, 103–42). At the same time, the Holocaust served as a point of reference in wider struggles against racism, genocide and crimes against humanity (Sem 2009, 193).

In this context, many regarded SUF's statement as antisemitic, calling it 'a frontal attack' on Jews historically subjected to persecution (*Morgenbladet*, 13 October 1967). SUF's challenging to the post-war consensus, in which Israel symbolized Jewish revival and the triumph of democracy, put their statement, in the eyes of their critics, on the side of those objecting to such national values, encouraging the interpretation of being anti-Israel as antisemitic.

In return, however, SUF viewed the defence of Israel as an attempt to dismiss the political injustice they were opposing by labelling them antisemitic. SUF argued that the memory of the Holocaust should not cloud judgement of Israel, suggesting instead that Israel had become a persecuting state like Nazi Germany (*Orientering*, 21 October 1967). This reflects a dualistic worldview of a struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed, where they, the anti-Zionists, could not be antisemitic because they fought against a movement that was inherently racist (Ben-David 2023, 75). Each side's viewpoint was altered through its perception of the other, each interpreting the other as a threat to the values of a liberated post-war society, solidifying the boundaries between the two imagined communities.

2.2. A Jewish student's experience

The call against Israel's existence came from a young, marginal movement. Its challenging of the post-war consensus on Israel – and what can be said about Jews – marked a shift in the broader public debate. However, these voices

did not resonate beyond the far-Left fringes, indicating that anti-Zionist sentiments had not yet become comprehensible within wider public opinion. Likewise, few Jewish individuals responded to SUF's Marxist-Leninist provocations (2.3).

DMT had a political non-involvement policy unless the matter concerned the safety of Jews in Norway. Their lack of response to SUF-ml's resolutions suggests that the leadership did not view the movement as a credible threat, reflecting the broader Norwegian consensus at the time. Interviews conducted in this investigation also indicate that SUF-ml did not become the talk of the day in internal conversations, although their agenda was not viewed positively. Before the 1970s, there was no major split between the liberal public opinion and DMT's hegemonic position regarding anti-Zionism.

Still, individuals in the community were affected by this political development, especially young Jews who encountered anti-Zionist activists. One informant relates her experience as a student at the University of Oslo at the time of the Six-Day War, while she was establishing the Nordic Organization of Jewish Students. She recalls an abrupt hostile shift of attitude towards her, although her group did not take any particular pro-Israel stance. She avoided social interactions and 'kept to herself' because she felt that the numbers were against her. At one point, she feared for her physical safety. 'We were just scared. And we felt like we had been bombed back to the pre-war period.'

A retrospective, subjective account of the daily atmosphere among students cannot provide a full picture but it illustrates the deep divide forged in 1967 between two new imagined communities: supporters and opponents of anti-Zionism.

The informant was critical of Israel's treatment of Palestinians, and she participated in the 'Critical Zionists' international debate

society, critical of the occupation. Despite this criticism, she supported Israel's right to exist, and therefore described the anti-Zionist position as 'antisemitic', seeing Israel as a pillar of safety for Jews in the post-Holocaust context.

But without a consensus on the meaning of 'anti-Zionism', her support of Israel was interpreted as endorsement of the occupation. From her perspective, her opponents viewed Israel through the lens of 'Western imperialism', resulting in condemnation of the 'Zionist', and the two sides never got the opportunity to discuss ways for peace, which they supposedly agreed on. Rather, each side interpreted the other from its own horizon of expectations and reacted defensively.

The informant became 'closer than ever' with Jewish friends who also supported Israel and grew apart from others, feeling that the political debate violated her trust. Applying Hall and Anderson concretely, this recursive representation process increased the feeling of cohesion within two new group formations.

2.3. Leo Eitinger against the socialist Left

The psychiatrist Leo Eitinger's commitment to combating antisemitism was deeply connected to his personal and professional experience. A survivor of the death marches, he dedicated his life to the study of human suffering, particularly extreme post-traumatic stress disorder among Holocaust survivors and refugees. Eitinger explained to the public the psychological mechanisms behind xenophobia and 'othering' in society.

By 1967, Eitinger was outspoken against the socialist Left's denial of Israel's right to exist and thus became an early figure in Norway to define anti-Zionism as antisemitic. He took SUF-ml's activism as a sign of resurgent antisemitism which, he argued, was disguised under the term 'anti-Zionism' in debates on Israel: 'The entire extreme Left wing of the Socialist camp has swallowed raw this new

form of antisemitism which is now called anti-Zionism'. This would 'increase the threat to the existence of all Jews affected ... The socialist Left is latently and unconsciously antisemitic' (*Aftenposten*, 16 October 1969).

Eitinger fought the battle against persistent Nazi antisemitism and the battle against anti-Zionism as one. During the 1970s he led efforts to prosecute the Holocaust denier, the high-school teacher Olav Hoaas – among the first convicted in Norway under the law against incitement to racial hatred (Ben-David 2024, 295–8). Interestingly, while the dangers of racist antisemitism were well known, Eitinger put significant emphasis on political agitation coming from the far Left. He challenged the post-war consensus, which tended to see antisemitism as a marginal remnant of Norway's occupation, arguing that it was emerging in new forms as regards Israel.

This form of resilience relies heavily on the understanding of the majority society. His framing of anti-Zionism sought to align the Jewish community and supporters of Israel with national public opinion against the 'extreme Left'. His position reflected DMT's stance and aligned with his professional and public reputation.

However, his focus on Israel's existence as crucial to the safety of Jews did not sufficiently engage with criticism of Israel's actions or address the anti-imperialist view, particularly regarding the situation of Palestinians. There was a risk that the post-Holocaust framework would not remain compelling enough over time to convince the public against making harsh criticisms of Israel.

3. 'Anti-Anti': refutations of the Palestine Committee

The Norwegian Palestine Committee (PalKom), founded in 1973, aimed to support the Palestinian national liberation struggle by opposing the Zionist state of Israel. In 1974, PalKom published *Israel: Propaganda – Reality*,

which portrayed Zionism as a colonialist and racist movement oppressing Palestinians (PalKom 1974, 4). Critics labelled it antisemitic, with an article in *Aftenposten* comparing it to the Nazi publication *Der Stürmer* and accusing PalKom of bringing Nazism back to Norway (*Aftenposten*, 21 December 1974). When *Aftenposten* refused to publish PalKom's response, it appeared in the socialist newspaper *Klassekampen*. PalKom equated Palestinian resistance with the Norwegian resistance against Nazi Germany, but did not recognize Israel within the history of persecution of Jews: 'It is no longer tenable to play on the suffering of Jews during the Second World War to defend the aggression of the state of Israel' (*Klassekampen*, 19 February 1975).

This study examines how defending Israel functioned in the fight against antisemitism. The Jewish law student Jan Benjamin Rødner criticized PalKom's use of sources, accusing them of employing traditional antisemitic tropes about Jewish power and motives, which he argued crossed the boundaries of free speech. For instance, PalKom quoted Theodor Herzl to suggest Zionism was harmful to Jews: 'The antisemites will be our most reliable friends, the antisemitic countries our allies', and 'We will help them [European politicians] get rid of the Jews' (PalKom 1974, 40–43). Rødner argued that Herzl's words were misinterpreted, explaining that Zionism aimed to protect Jews from persecution, and that Herzl's statements in context reflected an awakening to the need for a secure homeland (Rødner 1976, 122–23).

Historically, Rødner's defence recalls the efforts of the Centralverein in 1930s Germany, which published *Anti-Anti – Tatsachen zur Judenfrage* to educate the public on the Jewish Question. This method did not convince antisemites but provided arguments for the public (Schüler-Springorum 2017, 50).

Nevertheless, Rødner's interpretation of the material given in *Israel: Propaganda – Reality*

was not always factual but aimed at criticizing the perceived motivations of the other side. For example, he saw Nazi analogies applied to Israel as antisemitic, arguing they demonized Jews and used their experience against them (Rødner 1976, 44–5). He did not consider that Holocaust memory could be used by Jews and non-Jews alike to warn against the dangers of total war and draw attention to the situation of Palestinians.

Rødner believed there was a connection between Jews and Israel, hence justice for Israel meant justice for Jews. Through Anderson's framework, he not only defended Israel from PalKom but also protected an imagined community of Jews connected to Israel. This 'community' is envisioned through tangible cultural expressions connected to individuals' shared perception of the past and visions for the future. Thus, their imagined sense of communality makes the self-identification concrete. Rødner's affiliation with Israel was not linear but revolved around the collective experience.

One example is Rødner's establishment of the Israel-supporting organization Med Israel for Fred (MIFF) – which, albeit religiously neutral, attracted support from Christian Zionist political figures such as Kåre Kristiansen of the Christian Democratic Party. Rødner sought to build a coalition against antisemitism, forming a community of Israel-supporters, though this also risked politicizing MIFF and affecting its popularity in other sectors.

Early critics of anti-Zionism such as Eitinger responded to threats against Israel's existence. A decade later, PalKom was criticized for using traditional antisemitic tropes in their arguments against Israel, including references to the Old Testament's 'spirit of revenge' (Rødner 1976, 125–6). While some warned of the return of classic antisemitism, it was different from the antisemitic agitation of 1880s western Europe – fighting antisemitism had no inherent connection to defending a state.

Neither PalKom's nor Rødner's writings were widely covered in major newspapers, raising the question of whether this was a sectarian dispute rather than representative of broader Jewish community concerns. I found few sources mentioning Rødner's book, one being Oskar Mendelsohn's acknowledgement in *Jødisk Menighetsblad*, describing him as 'a competent advocate for Israel's case' (*JMB* 1976(1)). The lack of reactions within the Jewish community could indicate either acceptance of his activism or that it had minimal impact, with Rødner being young and not among the decision-makers. PalKom never responded to Rødner, although they made the same arguments later in their newspaper *Fritt Palestina*. Despite a post-war consensus that antisemitism was illegitimate, Rødner's attempts to discredit anti-Zionism in the same way failed. Before the war, without such a consensus, such efforts would also probably have been unsuccessful.

4. UN Resolution 3379: Zionism is racism

In 1975, the UN passed a resolution condemning Zionism as a racist ideology, aligning it with apartheid South Africa. Norway, like most West European and North American countries, voted against the resolution. Critics saw it as a low point in UN history, while *Klassekampen* praised a significant step in the Palestinian struggle.

Though the resolution reflected the growing trans-national anti-Zionist movement, many within DMT were confident of Norway's stance and did not initially recognise an impact on the community. However, as criticism grew many began to respond (*Aftenposten*, 13 November 1975; 28 November 1975).

DMT, in a rare deviation from its practice of political neutrality, published a letter to the government, expressing 'deep concern', and not merely solidarity with Israel: 'From

extremist positions, both on the Right and on the Left, voices arise seeking in different ways to deprive the Jewish minority in Norway, on the one hand, and the Jewish state in Israel, on the other hand, of the right to exist' (JMO/DMT/D40).

DMT described continuity between Nazi antisemitism – targeting Norwegian Jews – and Israel-derived antisemitism,² invoking the memory of persecution, when Norwegian Jews realized the consequences of 'being scapegoated and labelled as a group unworthy to live among other people and nations'. Like Eitinger and Rødner, DMT argued that labelling Israel's right to exist as racist laid the groundwork for persecution, threatening the very existence of Jews. They warned that the resolution would further spread antisemitic tendencies, which had no place in a democratic society (ibid).

Simultaneously, the Nansen Committee against the persecution of Jews – with Leo Eitinger as vice-chairman – called on the government and Storting to fight resurgent 'open and covert antisemitism, evident in the Norwegian public opinion both on the Right and on the Left' (*Verdens Gang*, 30 October 1975). The Nansen Committee framed this issue as a humanitarian concern, distinct from political debates on Israel. Both DMT and the Nansen Committee highlighted the connection between 'anti-Zionism' and 'antisemitism', arguing that political attacks on Israel endangered Jews elsewhere.

Thus, by the late 1970s, polarization deepened between two 'imagined communities' – proponents and opponents of anti-Zionism – each navigating the same fading post-war consensus regarding 'antisemitism' (Hoffmann 2020) yet departing from a contrasting horizon of expectations (Hall 1997; Gilje 2019). While

the anti-Zionist movement consolidated in Norway, focusing on Palestinian rights, DMT took a firm stance against this movement, focusing on possible consequences for Israel with its significance to their community, deeming the movement antisemitic.

In subsequent years, individuals reacted strongly against student demonstrations to boycott Israel. Oskar Mendelsohn, the prominent community figure and author of *Jødenes historie i Norge gjennom 300 år*, defined the demonstrations as 'antisemitic' because of their aggressive nature and the burning of Israel's flag (Mendelsohn 1987, 396). In *Jødisk Menighetsblad*, which he edited, Mendelsohn supported the demonstration organizers' arrests, condemning 'racist propaganda', and warning it was a matter of time before all Jewish, and not merely Israeli, culture would be burnt at the stake (JMB 1977(3)).

Rita Paltiel wrote in *Adresseavisen* that there was 'no difference whatsoever between anti-Zionism and antisemitism' (*Adresseavisen*, 4 October 1977). Eitinger compared young demonstrators to SS soldiers, noting that Jewish students were being harassed on campus, creating a 'tragic alliance between Right- and Left-wing fascism against Judaism' (*Vårt Land*, 21 September 1977). DMT released a statement: 'For us, Norwegian Jews, this form of anti-Israeli demonstrations consequently feels antisemitic' (*Adresseavisen*, 8 October 1977).³

Meanwhile, the 1970s also saw public debate around neo-Nazism and Holocaust denial, particularly with the case of Olav Hoaa, which pushed DMT to combat antisemitism. Norway's 1961 law against incitement to racial hatred, which DMT had helped shape, was grounded in Holocaust memory (Ben-David 2024). However, anti-Zionism was hardly

2 Right-wing antisemites also developed anti-Zionist ideas of fear of 'globalist influence' and 'Jewish power' (Simonsen 2020a, 1–23).

3 It is unclear whether DMT focused on the violence at the demonstrations or Israel's boycott.

included in this provision. Arguably, DMT's appeal to the government and Storting reflected their limited ability to influence the broader conversation. Yet, in their perception, Eitinger expressed a growing concern: 'We cannot say that Jews in general feel fear in Norway. But the absolute safety we felt before 1967 is no longer present' (*Adresseavisen*, 29 August 1978).

5. The counter-hearing on Lebanon, 1982

Israel's Lebanon War from summer 1982, and the massacres in Sabra and Shatila, were criticized vehemently in Israel and internationally, prompting a sharp shift in the political climate towards Israel in the West. While voices calling for Israel to be dismantled came from the radical Left, questions regarding Israel's legitimacy once confined to radical circles could now also be aired in central democratic parties and expressed in liberal newspapers.

Simonsen's analysis of the debate on anti-semitism in Norway finds that criticism of Israel has sometimes served as a platform for antisemitic expression, which was otherwise illegitimate (Simonsen 2023, 266–7). This tendency was coupled with a rise in attacks on Jewish targets across western Europe, showing the price diaspora Jews paid within the anti-Israeli context.

In Norway, Rabbi Michael Melchior reported Jewish children facing harassment and parents receiving threats. Among others, he criticized the application of anti-Jewish tropes in the media, with the metaphor 'eye for an eye, tooth for tooth' – historically used in Christian tradition to show Judaism's 'spirit of revenge'.⁴ With security being increased around the congregation, he concluded: 'Under the guise of being against Israel, they come up with clear antisemitic views' (*Verdens Gang*, 11 August 1982).

4 See Simonsen 2023, 265–88 for an analysis of antisemitism within the framework of Israel's Lebanon War.

Simonsen identifies three political perspectives emerging regarding Israel: 1. The radical Left rejected both Israel's actions and existence, 2. Central democratic segments criticized Begin's policies but not Israel's fundamental legitimacy, 3. Unquestioning supporters of Israel, including some Christian Zionists (Simonsen 2023, 270–1). My survey has found Jewish reactions belonging almost exclusively only to the second category. For example, MIFF condemned the massacres in Sabra and Shatila as 'among the most serious terror conducts in the post-war period' (*Midt-Østen i fokus* 1982(4)).

Jewish voices in Norway largely echoed widespread criticism of Israel but uniquely emphasized the connection being drawn between Israel and diaspora Jews. They argued that traditional anti-Jewish motifs were being applied to Israel and Jews as one, and therefore 'anti-Zionism' was the new manifestation of antisemitism. Some felt a growing connection to the 'imagined community' of Jews and defenders of Israel, but at the same time hoped to dissociate from this source of trouble. When this community represented both Jewish identification and affiliation with Israel, growing criticism reshaped the speech space for Jews, and the low-profile tradition (Gjernes 2007) may have been revisited.

Still, from the 1970s Jewish engagement in debates on Israel has been much more frequent and explicit than the responses to antisemitism during the immediate post-war years. The jurist Charles Philipson said that he would have left Norway, had he foreseen the situation becoming so acute (*Vårt Land*, 10 August 1982). In *Jødisk Menighetsblad*, Oskar Mendelsohn compared 1980s anti-Zionism with Right-wing antisemitism of the 1960 'Swastika Epidemic' – characterized by graffiti on properties and threats against Jewish individuals, before Norway had passed a law against incitement to racial hatred (*JMB* 1982(2)).

The consensus against antisemitism was still protected from all sides, including by PalKom's chairman, who highlighted the need to combat its rise. However, the agreement on what constituted antisemitism faded, and PalKom understood Zionism as its cause (*Klassekampen*, 26 June 1982). This reflects a dynamic where opposing parties, ostensibly promoting shared values, competed for who gets to define antisemitism (Hall 1997; Simonsen 2023, 274–5).

In this climate, the Palestine Front (Palfront), connected to PalKom, organized an international hearing in Oslo to investigate Israel's international law violations.⁵ This hearing, supported by Amnesty International and Palestine-supporting organizations, received financial backing from UN international commissions. Palfront assembled 50 witnesses to testify against Israel's war crimes (*Klassekampen*, 7 October 1982; 29 October 1982).⁶

In response, Jewish activists organized a counter-hearing aimed at fostering public debate without crossing perceived boundaries of antisemitism or challenging Israel's right to exist. They invited Israeli critics of the government to engage in discussion, but a lack of diverse perspectives was pointed out (*Klassekampen*, 1 November 1982). The organizers also met with Norwegian government officials to address what they viewed as anti-Israel defamation rooted in antisemitism (*Midt-Østen i fokus* 1982(5)).

Melchior, a driving force behind the counter-hearing, openly criticized Israel's actions

but sought to distinguish politics from discussions about Jews. He emphasized that while Israel held particular significance for Jews globally, they were not accountable for its actions.

Although an individual activist, his position as the religious leader of DMT drew attention. Melchior was among the only community representatives to be interviewed by *Klassekampen* and *Fritt Palestina* – newspapers criticized for using anti-Jewish tropes (Ben-David 2023, 79; Simonsen 2023, 233–65). Efforts to engage the anti-Zionist audience illustrated the precarious position of Norwegian Jews during the war, as he sought to explain their position. Notably, there was no evident dissent within the community against Melchior's activism, suggesting a collective welcome for his efforts.

To what extent did engagement with the defence of Israel, and the debate concerning its existence, function as part of the struggle against antisemitism? Melchior's arguments show a difference between labelling anti-Zionism as antisemitic in principle, and recognizing antisemitism as a consequence of certain anti-Israel activism (on this see Simonsen 2023, 263). Perhaps this opens a more constructive inquiry into the impact of anti-Zionism on Jewish safety and sharpens our understanding of the interplay between these concepts.

The counter-hearing organizers sought to extend the post-war consensus that deemed antisemitism illegitimate into discussions about Israel. This strategy aimed to garner public support by framing antisemitism as a concern for all who value liberal and democratic principles. However, confusion surrounding antisemitism persisted, exacerbated by Israel's contentious actions in Lebanon.

The counter-hearing received minimal coverage from major newspapers, overshadowed by a scandal involving a panellist accused of being a former Israeli spy who presented dubious evidence in favour of Israel. This controversy

5 These hearings were organized by civil society, following a model used by the Left since the 1960s, such as the Russell-Sartre Tribunal in 1966, which addressed US war crimes in Vietnam (Archibugi and Pease 2018, 187–202).

6 Leo Eitinger was Amnesty International's representative in Norway. He was not invited to the hearing (*Aftenposten*, 31 August 1983; *Midt-Østen i fokus* 1982(5)).

undermined the credibility of the counter-hearing, diverting media attention away from its intended purpose. As this was a public and diplomatic initiative, there is also little evidence of internal discussion around the counter-hearing within DMT.

While the counter-hearing refrained from labelling Palfont as antisemitic, it criticized the organization's bias against Israel. For the organizers, defending Israel's legitimacy was intertwined with combating antisemitism, as they believed attacks on Israel could foster aggression toward Jews. Thus, their strategies for addressing anti-Zionism mirrored those used against antisemitism. Nonetheless, the attempt to delegitimize anti-Zionism was largely unsuccessful, further complicating discussions about acceptable discourse surrounding Israel and Jews.

6. The International Hearing on Anti-semitism in Oslo, 1983

On the anniversary of Israel's Lebanon War, the Nansen Committee against the persecution of Jews – with Leo Eitinger as a driving force – hosted an International Hearing on Antisemitism. It culminated with the Oslo Declaration against resurgent antisemitism 'both in its old guise and new forms' (Eitinger 1984, 4). Our last case study shows an attempt, the first of its kind, to globally define antisemitism and address its connection to criticism of Israel and anti-Zionism – a Norwegian initiative that is today virtually unknown. For the first time, Jewish community activism supporting Israel was officially endorsed by the Norwegian government, with the Oslo Declaration signed by all parties in the Storting.

Christhard Hoffmann includes the hearing in his study of the fading consensus on antisemitism in Norway during the Cold War period (Hoffmann 2020, 40–46). He argues that the anti-antisemitic public norm established after 1945 had dissolved as public

opinion on Israel shifted. By 1983, the Nansen Committee struggled to reinforce this consensus, especially since the Oslo Declaration identified 'anti-Zionism' as a key contemporary form of antisemitism.

Hoffmann shows that while references to the Holocaust have been used to maintain the post-war consensus against antisemitism, the Oslo Declaration also invoked the memory of pre-war antisemitism to interpret contemporary opposition to Israel (Hoffmann 2020, 42). Whether or not the Nansen Committee was right to include part of the criticism made against Israel in their definition, one of the hearing's primary goals – to publicly scrutinize the issue of anti-Zionism – was categorically rejected by the radical Left. Consequently, the hearing revealed a deep divide within Norwegian public opinion and became controversial among opponents.

To legitimize their understanding of 'antisemitism' as a norm, the organizers of the hearing sought to align the narrative for Israel with so-called national liberal and democratic values, and thus recruit anyone who promoted those values as a potential ally. The hearing gathered experts from Israel, the USA and Europe, along with diplomats, religious leaders, journalists and, crucially, all chairpersons of the Storting. The Oslo Declaration concluded that traditional antisemitic stereotypes were being applied to the Jewish state; therefore, anti-Israeli activity was a threat to Jews and was defined as antisemitic.

Furthermore, the declaration addressed the feelings of exclusion among diaspora Jews arising from their connection with Israel, stating: 'When Jews are deprived of their right to choose nationhood' and are targeted in their communities in connection with Israel, their identity is challenged, confronting them with antisemitism (Eitinger 1984, 4).

This perspective was consistent with Eitinger's long-held view that the opposition

to Israel among the socialist Left jeopardized Jewish safety in the diaspora. This aligned with Herzl's early Zionist vision that, without a Jewish national homeland, Jews would always be vulnerable to persecution (Simonsen 2023, 219–20).

Indeed, some Norwegian Jews perceived themselves as more connected with Israel and their Jewish identity in light of the escalating conflict (Olsgard 2015, 124). As illustrated in the case of my informant (2.2), the perception of experiencing antisemitic attitudes fostered greater cohesion within her community – both Jewish and non-Jewish supporters of Israel – and set clearer boundaries against proponents of anti-Zionism. This growing sense of belonging to Israel may not represent a direct individual–state connection but rather a network of support within the imagined community. It was not only Israel making them feel safe but maintaining solidarity with Israel provided a concrete sense of fellowship when the group's immunity was undermined.

Eitinger concluded that the hearing successfully focused international attention on an all-important issue. However, the audience was more concerned with the boundary between legitimate criticism of Israel and hate-speech (*Aftenposten*, 16 June 1983). One might conclude that despite the hearing's proposition, antisemitism could still be defined exclusively within the framework of racist ideology and the Second World War. Yet proponents of anti-Zionism were no different from Eitinger in that they denounced antisemitism and all forms of racism. After all, *Klassekampen* carried the flag of the most politically active newspaper against xenophobia and discrimination – including anti-Jewish hatred.

It is perhaps more correct to say that the boundaries around the weaponization of 'anti-semitism' had faded, as had the application of persistent antisemitism to related discourses, such as anti-Zionism.

7. Concluding remarks

Previous research on Zionism in DMT shows that Israel was seen as a pillar of renewed Jewish consciousness and pride (Banik 2009, 260–65). Building on this realization and applying *imagined communities*, this study concludes that solidarity with Israel after 1967 was not merely existential, as activists such as Leo Eitinger argued. While a Jewish state provided a sense of security in the diaspora, the *constructed idea of Israel* marked an additional sense of belonging, giving its defenders agency and something to fight for.

As Norwegians, these activists asserted inclusion in the national community combating perceived antisemitism, defending Norway's liberal and democratic values. As Zionists, they subscribed to a group that was being attacked and needed defending. This solidarity extended beyond Israel itself and fostered a deeper sense of connection with other defenders of the cause.

As Banik has shown, even when Israel was less controversial, its existence fostered a sense of fellowship among Norwegian Jews. A future study might ask whether DMT's political alignment with Labour in support of Israel before 1967 also led Jews to integrate further and come to be viewed as insiders. However, when defending Israel no longer aligned with the public consensus, the function of fellowship for Israel changed, enhancing cohesion within the community and defining its boundaries *vis-à-vis* other groups.

This study has argued that perceived antisemitism within DMT not only made individuals feel directly connected to Israel (Olsgard 2015, 124) but brought them closer to others within the fellowship. Not only did Israel give a sense of safety, but it was the idea of Israel, as constructed and shared by DMT, that cultivated this feeling.

As early as 1967, Eitinger warned against

rising antisemitism, which he saw as reflected in opposition to Israel's right to exist. At the time, DMT did not yet perceive marginal anti-Zionist groups as a threat – Eitinger's belonging to Israel was largely self-realized. However, by the late 1970s, more Jewish individuals openly identified with Israel, and the association between anti-Zionism and antisemitism became more explicit. By 1982, many who had previously remained silent began to report feeling threatened by anti-Zionist activism. This polarization pushed the communities further apart, solidifying their internal cohesion. Thus, both Zionism and anti-Zionism fostered distinct senses of belonging.

Four decades later, we do not merely prioritize acceptance in society but also recognize a complex dynamic of inclusion. Recent years have seen a resurgence in racism and religious intolerance, contributing to increased polarization and impacting the quality of life and freedom of many. Hall and Anderson have helped us understand two components affecting group formations in society: how we construct meaning out of a situation and how we maintain a sense of belonging.

Flaws in our community can be underestimated or excused while mistakes of the other side enhance our confidence that we should keep distance. Fellowship gives the cause its meaning; and *vice versa*, the enemy's belonging to another group signifies their difference from us, arguably more than their cause itself. This behaviour is not new, as this study has shown. Today, at a time of crucial developments in the Israel–Palestine conflict and the simultaneous rise of islamophobia and antisemitism worldwide, we ask whether there has been any improvement over the last decades in our ability to understand each other from the spectacle of the other (Hall 1997).

To answer the question: *to what extent did engagement with the defence of Israel, and the debate concerning its existence, function as part*

of the struggle against antisemitism? The study finds that the strategies and methods employed by the actors to combat anti-Zionism resembled those developed to combat antisemitism.

Emerging research on Jewish responses to antisemitism has highlighted the power of numbers, through self-organization, and the power of successful alliances with non-Jewish actors to support Jews fighting for their rights (Schüler-Springorum 2017, 245–62). Such strategies rely on majority support, since only the majority is listened to (Levy 2021, 242). Nonetheless, the high public engagement in the debate on Israel shows that individual activists contributed to the community's visibility.

A critical aspect of this study has been understanding how anti-Zionism was framed within the post-war consensus that antisemitism was illegitimate, and how this framing influenced the ability of activists to address perceived anti-Jewish hatred. Unlike their collaboration with authorities against neo-Nazism, DMT struggled to effectively address anti-Zionism, largely because of the lack of consensus over its definitions (Ben-David 2023). Criticism of Israel was not included in the post-war consensus referencing the memory of persecution of Jews.

Attempts to discredit anti-Zionism in the way of antisemitism were unsuccessful. Nonetheless, the government's endorsement of the 1983 Oslo Declaration reflects an acknowledgment of the unique victimization of Jews and a commitment to their inclusion. The International Hearing emphasized collective responsibility to combat anti-Jewish hatred as a threat 'to all mankind which professed the values and ideas of humanism, democracy and peace in freedom'. It defined the overlap between criticism of Israel and antisemitism where attacks on Israel led to aggression against Jews as Jews. While the study found no major split within DMT over support for Israel's existence, it acknowledged internal disagreements regarding

the boundaries of antisemitism. Furthermore, the study could not capture the silent voices within DMT that may have held more critical views on Israel's actions.⁷

Given this lack of consensus, Norway would not be remembered over the years as the home of a pioneering definition of antisemitism worldwide. Rather, the hearing marked a milestone in the fading consensus on what could and could not be said about Jews.

Appendix: interview transcript, 2023, Oslo

[The informant's experience of anti-Zionism as a student in Oslo during the Six-Day War in 1967]: Then from one day to the other. When I said 'Hi!' – no response. And when I entered the room, everybody stopped talking. I thought, weird. And from one second to the other, I was perceived as a representative of the enemy.

But you said nothing about Israel?

No, it was just me. They knew I was Jewish; I was walking around with a Magen David, and it was known that I was part of the Jewish student union.

Did the Jewish student union have any pro-Israel agenda?

No, not at all. It had nothing to do with what we said or did, it was just a perception of the enemy, and what that meant and what it represents. And I was responsible of course for the wars, and for the lives of the Palestinians, like I had murdered Jesus kind of. It was the same kind of thing again. And all these antisemitic

7 Some Norwegian Jews were pro-Palestine activists. In a forthcoming study I identify individuals who criticized the hegemonic interpretation of anti-Zionism within DMT, and some even chose to distance themselves from the community for this reason. These are all non-members of DMT who generally stood outside the scope of this study. However, it is, in my opinion, interesting and necessary to acknowledge these voices. See also Olsgard 2015, 61–4.

things, it has nothing to do with us, but it is the way we are described and portrayed.

In 1967 onwards, was it a brand-new challenge for you? [experiencing hostility in anti-Zionism] Yeah. I didn't expect it. And suddenly it was there in my mind: my mother had told me that when her parents came to Norway, they told their kids, or they have been told by their parents, you cannot trust the others.

But then what did you do? How did you react to this hostility?

No what I did was I pulled back. I didn't go to the library to read, I didn't go to the cafeteria, I was reading in my student room, and I was closer than ever to my Jewish colleagues across the borders. And this was what happened for all of us. We faced the same problem in all these countries, and we tried to talk, but it was no use. We were 2–3 people [in Oslo] and they were hundreds. We all pulled back.

[Regarding criticism of Israel in the international debate society the 'Critical Zionists'.]

I was critical very early on to Israel's dealing with the Palestinians. We could foresee that if you are not dealing with this; it is an issue that is going to grow. And you need to deal with it now. Because now you have the attitudes from the world that is on your side, and the damage isn't that bad that it cannot be restored. If you do something now it will be the best thing for Israel. I [was] caring deeply about the survival of Israel as a country. And as a Jewish country. But we didn't do anything, we just discussed and helped each other to survive.

[The informant's daily experience of anti-Zionism as a Jewish student in the early 1970s.]

It was painful to be out in the society in my part of the world as a student daily because of two groups that were kind of intertwined, that was the Palestine Committee, and AKP–ml. SUF was mild, and AKP was aggressive.

Did Studentklubben react to the anti-Zionist resolutions in the late 1960s?

No, we didn't do anything. We were just scared.

And we felt like we were bombed back to pre-war period time.

Were you concretely fearing for your physical safety?

I think I was at one point. It was scary times. And very unpleasant. I was very careful with

whom I mingled, and basically, I kept to myself and to my closest friends that I trusted.

Did you consider what you were saying?

Yeah, absolutely. And to whom I said what, and it was a really bad time. I hated it. ■

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