The American Jewry’s ‘special relationship’ with Israel

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Abstract

Introduced within a background of nationalist theories and construction of national identity, this work tracks the evolution of the American Jewry’s ‘special’ relationship with the state of Israel through the three key phases of its history: the period before 1967 in which American Jews found themselves in a struggle of loyalties; the period following the Six-Day War of 1967 in which American Jews appeared to become unified as a community around a common relationship with the state of Israel; and the period following the Likud-led coalition governments of the 1980s in which the American Jewish community has become once again fragmented in its identification. These three phases highlight how the American Jewry’s relationship with the state of Israel is inextricably linked to the ways in which American Jews have identified themselves over time. Like identity, the relationship is neither ‘natural’ nor constructed but rather an ever-evolving phenomenon, and, ultimately, only ever a product of the ideological forces, political actors and historical events present at any given time.

Introduction

That the ‘new’ Israel\(^1\) plays an important role in the modern American Jewish identity is indisputable: as Jack Wertheimer (2009) contends, “over the 61 years since its founding, Israel has come to play a pervasive, if unacknowledged, role in virtually every sector of American Jewish public culture” (p.40). Indeed, while the creation of a Jewish state in British-mandated Palestine was not initially supported by American Jewry, over time it has become the defining feature of its group identity to the extent that in 1996 Marla Brettschneider suggested that “(c)entral to any understanding of American Jewish identity is this idea of being pro-Israel” (p.1). This centrality of the Jewish state within American Jewish life is not indicative of a fundamental American

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\(^1\) The modern state of Israel as opposed to the ancient, biblical ‘Holy Land’ of Eretz Yisrael; also referred to as ‘the Land of Israel’ or ‘Zion’.
Jewish ‘pro-Israelism’\(^2\) as is so often presumed, however. Indeed, since the 1980s, the idea of a homogenous American Jewish identity defined by continued support for the Jewish state and all Israeli governments, irrespective of their political stance, has been called into question by a sequence of events that have challenged the legitimacy of such unwavering support and allowed for a new plurality of voices and discourses. As Steven Rosenthal (2001) summarises: “The invasion of Lebanon, the Pollard Affair, the Intifada, and the ‘Who is a Jew’ controversy\(^3\) impelled American Jews’ evolution from an enforced unity on Israel to a new regime of diversity and critical scrutiny” (p.170). Subsequently, where once the identity of the American Jewish majority was narrowly defined by a minority – the leaders of “the organised Jewish mainstream” (Brettschneider 1996 p.2)\(^4\) – it is now defined by many different groups with ever-evolving views and perspectives on Israel.

However, despite the new plurality within the organised American Jewry, which includes the addition of so-called ‘alternative pro-Israel’ groups such as self-proclaimed “pro-Israel, pro-peace” (J Street, year of publication not given) lobby organisation J Street and its sister organisation, JStreetPAC, in reality this ‘plurality’ is comprised of nothing more than several variations on a common theme; that common theme being the state of Israel and American Jews’ identification of it. While it is true that the organised American Jewry has now evolved beyond a singular discourse as such, it is important to note that the multiple discourses which have replaced it remain grouped together around the central theme of the Jewish state. As Wertheimer (2009) acknowledges, while “[i]t is certainly true that American Jews do not hold monolithic

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\(^2\) Habib (2004) suggests that ‘pro-Israelism’ indicates a favourable attitude toward the state of Israel as a political entity. However, a lack of support for Israel, the ‘political entity’, does not necessarily denote a lack of identification with, or attachment to Israel in either its biblical, historical or modern incarnation.

\(^3\) In the last ten years this debate has become increasingly significant for the American Jewish community, largely as a result of the Orthodox rejection of religious converts and the increasing secularisation of the community as a whole. See Bayme (2008); Butler-Smith (2009); and Rosenthal (2001) for more. As Lerner (2010) highlights, modern Jewish identity is not simply derived from religious faith: “There are plenty of Jewish atheists who attend synagogue and celebrate Jewish holidays on a solely cultural basis, as a way of engaging with their distinct heritage. In addition there are those secular Jews who self-identify as such due to their belief that Jewish blood runs through their veins” (pp. not given).

\(^4\) Determining which organisations make up this ‘organised Jewish mainstream’ can be difficult as there is some divergence of academic opinion. However, in 1982, close to the time period that Brettschneider (1996) argues this ‘mainstream’ had most influence over the community’s discourse, Glick argued that the most influential Jewish organisations were as follows: the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), formerly the national Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC); the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations (Presidents’ Conference or Conference of Presidents); and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). All of these organisations can be considered to be ‘pro-Israel’ under the definition offered by Habib (2004) – see footnote five.
views about Israeli options and policies” (p.39), “the intra-Jewish rift that has been heralded for decades has not occurred” (p.39). To the objective outsider, the apparent American Jewish identity of today no doubt looks very similar to the American Jewish identity of the 1970s.

What is more relevant to the discussion surrounding American Jewish identity today, therefore, is not the question of the form in which relations with Israel should exist, but rather the question of why they continue to exist at all. Is it really because the majority of American Jews see themselves as part of a global Jewish ‘nation’ that locates itself through the state of Israel, as Jasmin Habib (2004) would have us believe, or is the ‘special relationship’ in fact merely a Zionist construct, designed to inhibit criticism of the Zionist state from within the United States (US) – which, we must not forget, remains the world’s only superpower (Anderson 2003) – and, ultimately, to sustain its ‘Jewish’ character and the ongoing marginalisation and persecution of the Palestinian people both within, and outside its borders? Through an exploration of the three key phases of the American Jewry’s relationship with the state of Israel this work will seek to argue that the answer to this question in fact lies with neither of these explanations; by placing the relationship within its historical context it quickly becomes apparent that the American Jewry’s relationship with Israel is not a static fact but rather a diachronic phenomenon that has changed over time in response to the changing needs and beliefs of the American. As such, rather than there existing a ‘special relationship’ that is either a ‘natural’ phenomenon or an ideological construct, in reality there exists only a relationship that is consistently a product of its time, its strength only ever dependent upon the prevalent ‘American Jewish’ issues and debates of the day.

**Theoretical chapter**

While Brettschneider (1996) highlights the lack of academic attention given to “the pro-Israel attitude and organisation of American Jews, either in the literature of political science or within Jewish studies” (p.20), she fails to recognise that even less has been given to the reasons behind the American Jewry’s identification of the state of Israel, in particular, and the central role that the Jewish state has come to play in the ‘American Jewish’ group identity. Indeed, of the academics featured in this work’s bibliography, only Jasmin Habib (2004), Ephraim Nimni (2003), and Rosenthal (2001) really go any way towards exploring these issues; as such, the development of the
American Jewry’s ‘special relationship’ with the state of Israel, and, indeed, the development of an American Jewish ‘pro-Israel’ group identity, remains something of an enigma within the discipline of political science. The concentration of Jewish academics in this field of study undoubtedly goes some way towards explaining such lack of attention: with the American Jewry’s shared connection to the state of Israel so sustaining of its group identity, it is not surprising that the majority of Jewish academics may be wary of conducting research which may threaten to undermine it.

This would appear to have been a major oversight on the part of political scientists, however; far from being of relevance simply to the discipline of anthropology as Habib (2004) purports, Israeli academics concerned with the role of the ‘diaspora’ within the modern Israeli political discourse (Nimni 2003), and American Jews concerned with conserving their community’s shared identity (Rosenthal 2001), greater exploration of the questions surrounding the importance of the state of Israel to the American Jewry and its role within the American Jewish identity would undoubtedly prove to be of enormous value to political scholars concerned with the construction of identities in the age of the ‘nation-state’, and the continued role of ideology within modern politics. Moreover, it could also prove to be of value to US politicians in helping them to better understand the impetus behind the organised American Jewry’s role in the notorious ‘Israel lobby’ (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006; Thomas 2007), and informing US foreign policy toward Israel and the wider Middle East.

The American Jewish ‘pro-Israel’ identity is something of an anomaly in identity politics: not only have the majority of American Jews never lived in the state to which they profess such identification with and support for – indeed even the global Jewish population as a whole has not had a substantial presence in the immediate region for almost 2,000 years (Sand 2009; Sowell 1981) – but their relationship with this state has come to precede, and in some cases even obliterate, any relationships with the places from which they originally migrated. Furthermore, contrary to what liberal-nationalist theory would otherwise suggest, this identity has developed in spite of the fact that American Jews have “successfully integrated into the social and cultural American milieu” (Rebhun and Levy 2006 p.394). In order to understand the apparently anomalous nature of the American Jewish identity, therefore, it is necessary to consider

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5 Kymlicka (2002) defines a ‘nation-state’ as a state that has successfully diffused a common national language and identity amongst all its citizens.
the combined impact of the multiple ideological forces at play during its development. These forces include: liberal-nationalism, which informed the construction of state-society relations in the majority of Western liberal democracies, including the US; Zionism, which informed the construction of the concept of ‘the Jewish nation’, and, subsequently, the construction of the Jewish state of Israel; and diaspora-nationalism, which Habib (2004) suggests informed the American Jewish identification with the state of Israel as members of a global Jewish ‘diaspora’.

**Liberal-nationalism**

Liberal-nationalist thinking is based on the idea that a sense of shared national identity can be created across a population of disparate ethnic origin, religious faith and moral orientation, assuming that a shared national identity based on a shared history, a common language, and common public institutions will subsequently lead to social unity in a pluralistic society (Kymlicka 2002). As Will Kymlicka’s (2002) communitarian critique of liberal-nationalism reveals, however, this approach to ‘nation-building’ inevitably produces a shared identity that is invariably “thin” (p.265); unlike non-liberal states, which are unconcerned with promoting pluralism or establishing the unification of disparate ethnic and religious groups within their societies, liberal nation-states must encompass as many different ethnicities, religions, backgrounds and viewpoints as possible within their ‘shared identities’ and therefore cannot afford to include either common ethnic descent, religious faith, or ‘conception of good’ in their construction of a ‘shared identity’ (Kymlicka 2002). Consequently, immigrants to liberal-nationalist societies are left without either a new national identity that encompasses their own ethnic descent, religious faith, and ‘conception of good’ or a new national identity that offers new versions of these aspects to adopt, and, as such, must either look to other places through which to locate and articulate these aspects of their identities or else risk losing them altogether.

The liberal-nationalist idea that a sense of shared national identity can be *created* is at odds with the nationalist understanding of national identity; as both Benedict Anderson (2006), and Walker Connor (1994) suggest, national identity is much more of an *organic* concept. While Anderson (2006) suggests that it emerges from an ‘image of communion’, Connor (1994) argues that it emerges from “a popularly held awareness or belief that one’s own group is unique in a most vital sense” (p.42). Indeed, although Paul Gilbert (1998) purports that what in fact constitutes a national group is its right to
statehood rather than any ‘belief’ or ‘image’, his argument can also be reconciled with Anderson’s (2006) and Connor’s (1994) if we assume that what determines this ‘right’ is a group’s self-differentiation or image of communion. Within the nationalist paradigm, therefore, nations are not constructs but self-sustaining entities.

*The ‘US model’*

As in the majority of liberal and democratic nation-states, the US employs the concept of ‘toleration’ in its approach to ‘nation-building’; the logic underlying this concept is the idea that members of immigrant societies are more likely to assimilate in a ‘tolerant’ society than in an ‘intolerant’ one (Walzer 1997). In the context of Jewish immigrant populations, at least, this logic appears to have proved correct with unprecedented levels of assimilation taking place throughout the liberal democracies of Western Europe and North America (Nimni 2003), and with American society in particular witnessing an unparalleled “upward movement of American Jews – across broad economic, intellectual, social, and political areas” (Sowell 1981 p.88). Unlike in the majority of nation-states where such toleration is commonly focused “not on groups but on their individual participants” (Walzer 1997 p.25), in recent years toleration within the US has expanded to groups where identification is restricted to common ethnicity (Walzer 1997). As James A. Cohen (2001) highlights in his comparative analysis of the US and French models of integration of diversity, in the ‘US model’ ethnic difference is given “official recogni[tion]” (p.121).

It would appear that American society can afford to recognise ethnic difference because, as has already been discussed above, its liberal-nationalist ‘shared identity’ does not include a specific common ethnic descent within it. While this may be technically true of all states that have adopted the liberal-nationalist approach to nation-building, the fact that the US is a predominantly immigrant society means that even those citizens who make up the reigning political majority are relatively recent immigrants to America and thus not ethnically ‘American’. As such, the American national identity is not undermined by group identification so long as it is based upon common ethnicity. Indeed, as Walzer (1997) argues, “a civil religion like Americanism can live fairly comfortably with what might be called alternative civil religious practices among its own participants” (p.79). While in principle this argument should be applicable to non-civil religious practices also, in reality this is rarely the case: indeed, where Judaism has been susceptible to a ‘Christianisation’ by American
society, religions not considered of a ‘Western’ nature have been widely distrusted (Mart 2004).

Zionism

Zionism is an arguably nationalist movement which claims that the global Jewish population is unique from other groups around the world and thus has the right to statehood. While the movement has historically comprised of many different strands, including a spiritual strand whose proponents purported that Jews were unique solely because of their religion (Goren 1999), the strand that has been most influential, that of ‘political’ or ‘Herzlian’ Zionism, instead purports that Jews are unique because of the common suffering that they have experienced as minorities (Ehrlich 2003). In this political context, therefore, the right to statehood is seen as “the immediately attainable and desirable goal” (Goren 1999 p.156) because of the practical function it serves as a solution to Jewish suffering.

Whether political Zionism is truly nationalist, however, is debatable: while it may have emerged from a belief that Jews are ‘unique’, in line with the account of nationalism provided by Connor (1994), the fact that this belief has come about as the consequence of external forces – the intolerance of the societies in which they have resided – suggests that it is an artificial construct, and, as such, is a temporary, rather than fundamental characteristic of the global Jewish population. Indeed, as has been proven by the experiences of the American Jewry, being part of a Jewish minority does not necessarily denote widespread intolerance distinct from that directed toward other minority groups. The idea that common suffering is fundamental to being Jewish has no doubt been fuelled by the existence of a context-specific term – anti-Semitism – through which disparate instances of intolerance experienced by Jewish minorities are identified as being related; indeed, the use of the term ‘anti-Semitism’ by Jews and non-Jews alike has without a doubt blurred the lines between any racial identities that have been imposed upon Jewish minorities throughout the world, and any ethnic or religious identities that these minorities have assumed voluntarily. The distinction between racial identities and ethnic identities is made by Jeff Spinner (1994) in his work, The Boundaries of Citizenship. What is more, the idea that spiritual Zionism is truly nationalist is also debatable: indeed, the shared religious faith of the global Jewish population is arguably no more unique than that of any global religious community.
Though political Zionism has remained essentially secular in its purpose – the ‘normalisation’ of the Jewish people through the establishment of a Jewish society and state in an independent territory in which, ideally, all Jews will eventually settle (Yuval-Davis 2003) – its rationale became inextricably linked with the Jewish religious faith following the so-called ‘Uganda Congress’ of 1903 at which it was determined that a Jewish state should be established in Eretz Yisrael: as Avishai Ehrlich (2003) argues, “[b]y fixing this territory as target it was inevitable that Jewish religious hopes, messianic yearnings and mystical eschatological expectations would merge with the secular national idea” (p.70). This merging of the secular with the religious has been evident in the development of a Zionist narrative through which “‘Zion’, ‘the Land of Israel’ and the Jewish people have been constructed as organically bound together around a myth of common origin and belonging” (Yuval-Davis 2003 p.191), and “Israel has been constructed as a post-factum ‘homeland’ not only to the Israeli Jews but also to many Jews who have never lived in Israel nor have any familial connection with any Israelis” (Yuval-Davis 2003 p.191). In this way, the modern Zionist narrative has created the idea that Jews throughout the world constitute an ‘ethnos’ because of a “connection in time and space between the fathers and the ‘forefathers’ of all the members of the present community” (Sand 2009 p.15); this ‘connecting space’ being ‘the Land of Israel’, as Nira Yuval-Davis (2003) highlights.

*Diaspora-nationalism*

In her account of the contemporary relationship between North American Jews and the state of Israel, Habib (2004) presents the idea of ‘diaspora-nationalism’, a modern-day phenomenon that is the product of a re-framing of more traditional ideas about nationalism within a globalised setting. Within this modern strain of nationalism diasporic communities find relocation through their *relationship* to a state that belongs to their nation rather than through living in that state themselves; as Habib (2004) argues, these communities can “locate themselves as members of a nation that has a history, a memory, and most recently a territory… yet they do not specifically have to territorialise that identity” (p.247). While diaspora-nationalism may retain the right to statehood at its very core, for diasporicists it is not the physicality of a state that is of most importance to them but rather what the state represents: the survival of a shared identity (Habib 2004). Indeed, though any place may represent the ‘kinship’ of a diasporic community that is purported by both Habib (2004) and Daniel and Jonathan
Boyarín (1993), it is only a state that can arguably ensure its survival. This does not mean, however, that only diasporas whose nations’ right to statehood has been realised can be considered authentic ‘diaspora-nationalists’; on the contrary, even an envisaged state has the potential to prove a unifying symbol of a community’s survival where the right to statehood is considered “immediately attainable and desirable” (Goren 1999 p.156).

The idea that the concepts of ‘diaspora’ and ‘nationalism’ can be synonymous, however, would seem something of a contradiction: while diasporas have commonly been understood to be products of historical events or narratives, nationalist movements are products of ambitions to statehood that are either yet to be realised, or are perceived to be in need of continued sustenance. Indeed, the idea that diasporas can only be understood in a historical context is evident within Nimni’s (2003) definition of the term which indicates the condition of shared historical origins through its emphasis on “a dispersion of minorities” (p.133). This interpretation has some resonance with the traditional Hebrew understanding of the term which similarly indicates the condition of shared historical origins through its emphasis on displacement from the homeland (Nimni 2003). Habib (2004) is able to reconcile the concept of ‘diaspora’ with nationalism, however, by suggesting that diasporic communities should not be recognised as ‘dispersed’ or ‘displaced’ but rather relocated through a “practised relationship to homeland” (p.10). By suggesting that ‘diaspora’ constitutes a relationship to a homeland rather than a geographical location, Habib (2004) is essentially removing the concept from its pre-supposed historical context and placing it under the condition of an “envisioned homeland” (Habib 2004 p.16). As such, a community can only remain ‘diasporic’ for as long as there exists such an ‘envisioned homeland’. Habib’s (2004) idea of ‘relocation’ need not indicate that this ‘envisioned homeland’ is a homeland in the traditional sense of the word, however; indeed, in the context depicted by Habib, ‘homeland’ does not refer to the territorial base from which an immigrant society has emigrated (Walzer 1997) or, as Nimni (2003) would suggest, the place of shared historical origins, but rather any place that in some way represents a community’s ‘kinship’.
Before 1967: the American Jewry’s first encounters with a Jewish state

With the recent influx of dramatic headlines and book titles\(^6\) heralding a crisis, and even the *end* of the infamous American Jewish relationship with Israel, one would be forgiven for assuming that such a relationship had always existed, or at least had existed for a long period of time. However, as is highlighted by Jerome Chanes (2003) in his review of Rosenthal’s (2001) book on the matter, *Irreconcilable Differences? The Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair with Israel*, the idea that “the ‘romance’ of American Jewry and Israel was constant and of extended duration” (p.99) is misleading:

“The reality is that Israel simply was not on the ‘radar-screen’ of the organised Jewish community (and, indeed, for most American Jews) from shortly after the creation of the State of Israel until the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel, in point of fact for the first time, burst onto American consciousness. The American Zionist movement – never powerful in any case amongst the grass-roots – all but collapsed... A ‘love affair’ it wasn’t.” (Chanes 2003 p.99)

Though Chanes (2003) is invariably hyperbolic in his analysis of the American Jewry’s relationship with Israel before 1967 his points highlight the lack of attention paid to the origins of the American Jewry’s relationship with Israel by both Rosenthal (2001) himself, and the academic community as a whole. Ironically, they also serve to highlight the hyperbole present within Rosenthal’s (2001) thesis. Where Chanes’ (2003) analysis is at least partly correct, however, is in its assessment of the early American Zionist movement\(^7\): indeed, Thomas argues that “Zionism was very slow to find support in America, especially among the successful and assimilated, but even among the newly arrived poor” (p.20), while Wyszkowski suggests that before 1914 support for Jewish nationalism was consigned to “a handful of zealous harbingers” (Wyszkowski 1991 p.167). As a group still in the throes of becoming ‘real’ Americans as opposed to simply immigrant ‘guests’ (Walzer 1997), Wyszkowski (1991) suggests that the majority of American Jews saw Zionism as a threat to their ‘Americanisation’,
and, as such, preferred to keep “quiet” (Walzer 1997 p.95). Wyszkowski (1991) also goes on to suggest that the idea of Jewish nationalism “revived memories which [American Jewish immigrants] preferred to forget” (p.167); while Herzlian ‘political Zionism’ based Jewish unity “not on religion but on the common suffering (anti-Semitism) of Jews as a minority in the places they resided” (Ehrlich 2003 p.70), for American Jews, however, life in the US did not mean suffering but “freedom and comfort” (Wyszkowski 1991 p.167). In addition, the secular nature of political Zionism also posed a problem for religious Jews, both of the Reform and Orthodox denominations (Butler-Smith 2009 p.162).

While the years after 1914 may have seen a gradual easing of opposition toward Jewish nationalism, even amongst the American Jewish Reform movement (Wyszkowski 1991), support for the Zionist movement was by no means unmitigated; indeed, many leaders within the Reform movement remained vehemently opposed to the idea of a ‘Jewish nation’ as late as 1936:

“The 1936 Columbus Platform had affirmed Jewish people-hood and settlement in Palestine but had not called for Jewish sovereignty. Yet even such statements were too much for the approximately one-third of Reform rabbis who protested Columbus by raising the banner of anti-Zionism while denying the ties of people-hood as connoting disloyalty to America.” (Bayme 2008 pp. not given)

Furthermore, even where support for the American Zionist movement did exist, this support did not automatically denote support for statehood as the “immediately attainable or desirable goal” (Goren 1999 p.156) or statehood within the ‘Land of

8 However, it should be noted here that the American Zionist movement at this time was not purely ‘Herzlian’ in its ideology; indeed, many American Zionists were in fact of the ‘spiritual’ school of thought, believing that Jewish nationalism and religion were inextricably linked. These Zionists were more concerned with the “spiritual and cultural sustenance” (Goren 1999 p.148) that a Zionist revival in *Eretz Yisrael* could provide than with the political goal of securing statehood. Although the spiritual Zionist movement became more or less obsolete with the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, many of the questions that the spiritual Zionists posed remain of topical today. See Goren (1999).
9 Reform Judaism is “a uniquely American creation” (Butler 2009 p.171) that emerged out of the German Jewish immigrant community. Today it is the largest denominational group, with thirty four per cent of American Jewish identifying themselves as Reform Jews in 2000 (Rebhun and Levy 2006). In recent years, the movement’s recognition of converted Jews has been the cause of much friction between the American Jewish community and the state of Israel. See Bayme (2008); Lerner (2010); and Rosenthal (2001).
10 Crucially, Bayme (2008) describes the Reform movement as “clearly the most influential of Jewish religious movements” (pp. not given).
Israel’ specifically; this was particularly so amongst spiritual Zionists who “in the critical years leading to the establishment of the state... entertained serious reservations about statehood as the immediately attainable or desired goal”, believing that a struggle for statehood would bring war and destruction to the Yishuv.\(^{11}\) (Goren 1999 p.156). Indeed, as Thomas (2007) highlights, it was not until the adoption of the so-called ‘Biltmore Program’ in the May of 1942 that the major secular, religious and labour Zionist organisations eventually reached consensus on the goal of “a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine to be achieved under American Zionist leadership” (p.20). Similarly, although the mainstream organised American Jewry also appeared to reach a consensus on support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine by 1948, this consensus was tentative at best, only resulting after opponents of the idea were either denounced, as seen within Hadassah\(^{12}\), or persuaded otherwise by the suggestion of widespread support at the grass-roots level, as seen within the AJC (Bayme 2008). It is important to note here, however, that such tentative support greatly solidified once the horrors of the Holocaust were known and the state of Israel actually proclaimed; as Thomas (2007) argues, after this point “support for the existence and security of Israel was nearly universal among American Jews’, the exceptions being traditional Orthodox who still believed that an Israel created by man was blasphemy” (p.20).

Chanes’ (2003) assertion that the state of Israel did not feature on the organised American Jewry’s ‘radar-screen’ before 1967, however, is far from accurate: although both Bayme (2008) and Wertheimer (2009) confirm that the American Zionist movement “all but collapsed” (Chanes 2009 p.99) after 1948, this did not lead to the state of Israel vanishing from the American Jewish public consciousness. Indeed, the Israel ‘mantle’ was instead taken up by the AJC, the most prestigious American Jewish organisation of the time\(^{13}\) (Bayme 2008), while the 1950s saw a resurgence of the American Zionist Movement after a new objective was found in “the survival of an admittedly undefined Zionist movement” (Butler-Smith 2009 p.174). Furthermore, while the Ben-Gurion-Blaustein Agreement\(^{14}\) may have put an end to Israeli calls for

\(^{11}\) “[A] generic term [used] to describe the Jewish community in Palestine between 1917 and 1948.” (Jones and Murphy 2002 p.xxv)

\(^{12}\) “[T]he leading Zionist organisation” of the time (Bayme 2008 pp. not given).

\(^{13}\) And arguably ‘non-Zionist’ (Butler-Smith 2009 p.168), despite its support of Jewish statehood before 1948.

\(^{14}\) Following tensions between the American Jewish community and the Israeli government over the reluctance of American Jews to make aliyah to the Jewish state, the then president of the AJC, Jacob Blaustein, and the then Israeli prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, reached a formal agreement ensuring
In 1950, aliyah\textsuperscript{15} in 1950, it also arguably marked the point from which a so-called ‘relationship’ between the organised American Jewry and the state of Israel can be recognised. Bayme’s (2008) suggestion that the Agreement “signalled an end to internal Zionist vs. anti-Zionist conflicts in favour of an enduring pro-Israeli consensus” (Bayme 2008 pp. not given), is undermined by Butler-Smith (2009), however, who argues that the prospect of accusations of dual loyalty “remained a topic of debate in the American Jewish community through most of the 1950s” (p.165). The question of who is correct, however, is largely irrelevant here: whatever the answer it cannot be denied that the Jewish state was most definitely on the American Jewish ‘radar’ after 1948.

Chanes’ claim that Israel “burst” (p.99) onto American consciousness after 1967 is also undermined by the increasing relevance of the state to the American public’s conception of the Cold War during the 1950s; as Mart (2004) argues, “[t]he religious message of the Cold War that saw the God-fearing West united against atheistic Communists encouraged an unprecedented ecumenism in American history” (p.109), which subsequently led to the ‘Christianisation’ of Jews and Israel within American society, and an elevation of the Jewish state “to a special status” (p.109). It is also important to note here the historical existence of Hebrew and Old Testament symbolism within the American national discourse: while Glick (1982) refers to a “Hebrew/Old Testament element in America’s intellectual history” (p.132), Walter A. McDougall (1997) highlights the way in which the US was portrayed as an ‘American Israel’ within discussions of American exceptionalism. As such, while it may have taken the Six-Day War of 1967 to solidify Israel’s position as a key ally in the Cold War (Thomas 2007), the idea that it did not feature in the American consciousness at all before this time is further evidence of exaggeration on Chanes’ (2003) part. Moreover, the emergence of the state of Israel within the wider American public’s consciousness also adds further support to the argument that it was on the ‘radar-screen’ of American Jews themselves at this time; with the vast majority of American Jews.

\textsuperscript{15} Hebrew term translated literally as ‘ascent’ and used to describe any Jewish migration to Israel (Jones and Murphy 2002).
Jews becoming increasingly secularised\textsuperscript{16}, and thus increasingly receptive to the influences of wider political and societal trends (Rebhun and Levy 2006) it would appear no coincidence that a resurgence of the American Zionist movement coincided with the ‘Christianisation’ of Jews and Israel within American society.

What is missing from Chanes’ (2003) review, however, is any examination of the assumption of a specifically ‘American Jewish’ group identity that is implicit within the title of Rosenthal’s (2001) book; whilst he calls into question the idea of a ‘love affair’ that has been ‘constant’ and of ‘extended duration’, he fails to call into question the idea of an American Jewish community that has been similarly ‘constant’ and of ‘extended duration’. Furthermore, whilst Chanes (2003) acknowledges the absence of any consideration of what he calls the ‘Orthodox dynamic’ within the American Jewry’s relationship with the state of Israel, his acknowledgement is only made in the context of the waning of the relationship, not in the context of its origins. This is arguably an oversight, however, as indicated in Thomas (2007):

“The Six Day War… galvanised and unified the American Jewish community. Reform Judaism, which had been anti-Zionist, declared its solidarity with Israel that year… The war demonstrated Israel’s substantial military supremacy, but the lessons ‘learned’ were that Israel might be destroyed at any moment, that no one cared about Jews and that Jews should only care for themselves.” (Thomas 2007 p.30)

Though the impact of the Six-Day War on American Jews is an important issue, and one which will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, what is of more relevance here is the idea that there is some correlation between the importance of the state of Israel to American Jews, and the strength of group identification. Such a correlation would suggest some sort of interdependency between the American Jewish identity and the American Jewry’s relationship with the state of Israel, and, subsequently, that the relationship can only be understood within the context of American Jewish group identification.

\textsuperscript{16} In the context of American Jews Butler-Smith (2009) defines ‘secularisation’ as the adopting of US behaviours and attitudes. While this definition is similar to that of the term ‘assimilation’ – see footnote twenty-one – it does not denote leaving one’s group, as such, but rather one’s religion.
Following on from this idea, it is important to recognise the lack of a pervasive ‘Jewish’ identity present amongst Jewish immigrants when they first arrived in the US. Indeed, rather than identifying with all other Jews living within American society, Jewish immigrants appeared to identify largely with those who had emigrated in the same immigration ‘wave’ as themselves. As such, in the early years of the twentieth century, at least, it is possible to identify two distinct and disparate Jewish communities within American society: a “native, or German population” and “the East European ‘Russian’ immigrants” (Butler-Smith 2009 p.162). Though Butler-Smith (2009) hints at ambiguity here, failing to conclude whether the newness of American Jews as a group and the influx of new immigrants ‘precluded’ or simply ‘obscured’ the existence of a single community, the evidence would appear to side with the former: as Charles Wyszkowski (1991) indicates, far from identifying with each other, German Jewish immigrants and East European Jewish immigrants initially saw themselves in competition with each other; he argues that the German Jews’ decision to establish the American Jewish Committee (AJC)\(^\text{17}\) in 1906 was at least partly motivated by “a fear that East Europeans would move ahead of them and create a defense [sic] organisation of their own” (p.239). Similarly, Butler-Smith (2009) herself highlights conflict between the two groups, arguing that the German Jewish population “had greater wealth and looked down on the new immigrants who were poor, distinctly apolitical and Orthodox” (p.162).

Moreover, the concept of ‘being a Jew’ meant very different things to West European Jews and East European Jews at the time of large-scale Jewish immigration to the US\(^\text{18}\): whilst West European Jews associated ‘being Jewish’ largely in terms of their religious faith, and, as such, could be both ‘French’ or ‘German’ and of Jewish faith simultaneously, for East European Jews “being a Jew” was much more of a total, separate identity, with different forms of worship and dress” (Sowell 1981 p.75). For some East European Jews – chiefly those members and supporters of the Bund party\(^\text{19}\) (Ehrlich 2003) – this ‘separate’ identity transcended into that of a national identity where ‘being a Jew’ meant being part of a Jewish nation “distinguished by its language

\(^{17}\) See AJC (2010) for more information on this organisation.

\(^{18}\) Though Jews were in America from 1754 (Butler-Smith 2009), Jewish immigration began on a large-scale in the nineteenth century, peaking at about 1900 (Sowell 1981). However, it is difficult to determine exact numbers due to the fact that the federal government only began to count immigrants of the ‘Hebrew race’ in 1900 (Butler-Smith 2009).

\(^{19}\) The Bund party saw East European Jews as a nation “by reason of their Yiddish language and culture” (Ehrlich 2003 p.68), rather than their shared religious faith.
and the culture created by that language” (Ehrlich 20003 p.68), rather than their shared religious faith. As such, Judaism was perceived as nothing more than a ‘transnational religion’ where believers were not of one nationality but of several (Ehrlich 2003).

The lack of a pervasive specifically ‘Jewish’ identity amongst Jewish immigrants to the US undoubtedly helps to explain the initial lack of support for the early American Zionist movement amongst American Jews: with many Jewish immigrants not even identifying with other Jews living within the US on a collective basis – except for “in the most extreme circumstances” (Butler-Smith 2009 p.62) – it is unsurprising that the concept of a global Jewish ‘nation’ did not take off. Moreover, even when the initially disparate groups of Jewish immigrants did begin to identify with one another as a singular collective, it would appear to have been only as a result of external forces as opposed to the internal forces of a belief in vital ‘Jewish uniqueness’ or an image of ‘Jewish communion’. As Spinner (1994) argues:

“…[Jewish immigrants] began to identify with each other when others did not treat them as German Jews or Eastern European Jews but simply as Jews. They were treated (disdainfully) as a community and so felt obliged to respond as one.” (Spinner 1994 p.25)

Evidence for this can be found in Butler-Smith (2009) where it is suggested that in 1900 “the federal government began to count the number of people immigrating to the United States who belonged to the ‘Hebrew race’”. Furthermore, while the prejudices of American society may have triggered a widespread identification amongst American Jews, it did not appear to trigger an identification on national terms; as Butler-Smith (2009) highlights, though the US may have provided a “singular historical context” (p.163) for the development and expression of an American Jewish community, its environment did not foster communal unity of a national nature at this time.

1967 to 1977: an ‘American Jewish love affair with Israel’

Israel’s presence in the American Jewish public consciousness before 1967 should not detract from the extent to which the year marks a turning point in the American Jewry’s relationship with the Jewish state, however; while Chanes (2003) may be guilty of erasing Israel’s pre-1967 presence on the ‘radar-screen’ of both the organised American Jewry and the wider American public, he is certainly correct to highlight it
as the point at which Rosenthal’s (2001) ‘American Jewish love affair with Israel’ truly began; where the state of Israel was once merely a topic for debate amongst American Jews, after 1967 it arguably became “an object of secular veneration” (Rosenthal 2001 p.xv), and, ultimately, the central focus of a secular American Jewish collective identity – what Brettschneider (1996) terms, “the American Jewish pro-Israel identity” (p.15).

As Ephraim Nimni (2003) highlights, 1967 proved a turning point in the relationships of the entire world’s Jewries, and the state of Israel:

“For the last 35 years, Jewish diasporas [have] lived under the firm hegemony of the narrative of Zionism. This narrative continuously reaffirms the centrality of the State of Israel for Jewish diasporic life and politically subordinates the interests and security of Jewish communities to those of the State of Israel.” (Nimni 2003 p.117)

This is confirmed by Edward Glick who argued in 1982 that American Jews seemed prepared to do anything for Israel, “even fight and die” (p.139). What has made the American Jewry’s relationship with Israel distinct from those of other Jewish populations since 1967, however, is the extent to which its members have remained “proud and patriotic” (Sowell 1981 p.98) citizens of their physical home whilst simultaneously lending arguably unprecedented and unparalleled support to their “envisioned homeland” (Habib 2004 p.16); as Rosenthal (2001) highlights, “no citizens of one country have ever been so committed to the success of another as American Jews have been to Israel” (p.xv). The idea that this contradiction can be explained by the fact that American Jews may have culturally but not psychologically assimilated into American society – a distinction made by Connor (1994) – however, can surely be dismissed: not only have the majority of American Jews “successfully integrated into the social and cultural American milieu” (Rebhun and Levy 2006 p.394)20 but very few have ever even considered making aliyah (Glick 1982; Habib 2004). Furthermore, while Jewish immigrants may have initially “thought of themselves as exiles, guests of the (real) Americans” (Walzer 1997 p.95), Walzer (1997) argues that “[t]oday, all that is history” (p.96).

20 With the notable exception of the Orthodox community who, in 2000, made up only nine per cent of all American Jews living in the US (Rebhun and Levy 2006).
Indeed, a more useful place to begin in trying to understand this phenomenon is the Six-Day War that took place between the state of Israel and its neighbouring Arab countries in the June of 1967; as has already been highlighted above, Thomas (2007) argues that it was the Six-Day War that ultimately “galvanised and unified” the American Jewish community” (p.30). The question of why this War in particular should have had such an impact on the American Jewry demands further exploration, however. After all, this was not the first time that the state of Israel had been involved in armed conflict: when the state was supported by British and French troops in attacking Egyptian forces in the Suez Canal Zone in October 1956 (Jones and Murphy 2002 p.xiii), the resulting war failed to elicit a similar response amongst American Jews. What would seem significant about the Six-Day War of 1967, then, is not the War itself as such – which the state of Israel won “resoundingly” (Jones and Murphy 2002 p.xiii) – but rather the prism through which it was viewed and discussed.

Unlike the ‘Suez crisis’ of October 1956 in which the state of Israel had been supported by Britain and France, in the events leading up to the Six-Day War, the world was perceived by American Jews to have turned its back on the Jewish state, and, subsequently, on Jews in general. As Bayme (2008) argues, “[d]aily threats to eliminate the Jewish state, coupled with the silence of the churches and the liberal world, evoked memories of the Holocaust years and reinforced the belief that Jews could rely only on one another” (pp. not given). A similar argument is put forward by Thomas (2007) who contends that despite the fact that “[t]he war demonstrated Israel’s substantial military supremacy” (p.30, “the lessons ‘learned’ were that Israel might be destroyed at any moment, that no one cared about Jews and that Jews should only care for themselves” (p.30). As an American Jewish woman suggests in Yoav Shamir’s (2009) _Defamation_, “without Israel there isn’t a safe Jew in the world”. The fear behind such sentiments, either real or imagined, undoubtedly goes some way towards explaining why American Jewish relations may have become dominated by a ‘pro-Israel’ discourse after 1967 (Brettschneider 1996); with the state of Israel perceived as the only protection against otherwise inevitable suffering, it is unsurprising that American Jews would wish to support it. Furthermore, the sense of Jewish commonality and separateness invoked by this perception of the War undoubtedly added further credence to the idea that Jews throughout the world constituted a singular nation, an idea that may help to explain the ‘secular veneration’ purported by

The American Jewry’s failure to interpret the events leading up to the Six-Day War in a political, rather than a historical context meant the drawing of such conclusions was inevitable: within the historical paradigm these events could only be understood as part of a pattern of Jewish persecution and global anti-Semitism; the idea that the preceding Egyptian threats against the state of Israel could have been in any way politically justified could not even be entertained. As such, it was also inevitable that Israel’s victory and subsequent occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights (Jones and Murphy 2002 p.xiii), would transform the image of the Jewish state not into that of an occupier but that of a universal Jewish defender in the eyes of American Jews. The success of this discourse in unifying American Jews can undoubtedly be explained by the fact that it could be accommodated within both the secular and the religious paradigms of American Jewish identification: though fundamentally secular, the image of the state of Israel as the ‘universal Jewish defender’ was predictably open to religious interpretation. As Thomas (2007) argues, “[s]ome saw the war as the crucial element in a ‘folk theology’, involving redemption of the Jews after the Holocaust. The war thus helped bridge the historical antipathy between secular and Orthodox Jews” (p.31).

Indeed, such was the power of this discourse that the state of Israel came to replace the Jewish religion as the shared ‘something’ amongst American Jews, and support for the state of Israel came to replace practice of the Jewish religious traditions as the primary indicator of Jewish identity:

“As a result [of the impact of the Six-Day War], the 1970s marked the high tide of ‘civic Judaism’. The Holocaust and Israel became the primary symbols or myths of American Jewry. Federations became far more Israel-oriented, and Jewish identity was often expressed primarily as support for Israel.” (Bayme 2008 pp. not given)

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21 With the notable exception of the Neturei Karta. See Neturei Karta International (2002).
The fact that Israel was, and is, a ‘non-liberal’ state\textsuperscript{22} with a ‘Jewish’ national identity undoubtedly made it a far stronger ‘linking’ factor than shared religious faith alone: not only did it encompass the Jewish religious faith but also – arguably\textsuperscript{23} – ‘Jewish’ ethnic descent and ‘conception of good’. In this way secularised American Jews were able to ‘reclaim’\textsuperscript{24} those aspects of shared identity that had been lost upon their assimilation into American society and subsequent adoption of the liberal-nationalist American identity, and, ultimately, share in a collective identity with other Jews living within America. Although this American Jewish identity may have formed at least in part as a response to new-found Jewish nationalism following the Six-Day War, the fact that it was located within another ‘nation-state’\textsuperscript{25} ultimately prevented it from coming into conflict with the American national identity; rather than calling for either a separate Jewish state within the US, or a ‘two nations, one state’ solution in a similar vein to the ‘Black’ nationalists, American Jews were able to accommodate any nationalist beliefs or imaginings they held within the state of Israel (Connor 1994). Thus, although this nationalism was undoubtedly a product of a hegemonic Zionist discourse that bound Jews together through inevitable and common suffering (Nimni 2003), the fact that it was located in another nation-state suggests that it may have been something of a hybrid in nature, displaying elements of both traditional political Zionism and the more modern phenomenon of diaspora-nationalism.

Both Finkelstein (2000) and Thomas (2007) indicate that this response did not form from the instinct of ordinary American Jews, however, but rather the direction of the leadership of the organised American Jewry: as Thomas (2007) highlights, “[s]tudies suggested… that what had changed was the basis for Jewish community leadership, not the priorities of the community” (p.30). Evidence for this claim can be found in a comparison with the War of 1948 which failed to elicit a similar response despite the fact that Israel had similarly fought off Arab armies. Though it may be possible to look

\textsuperscript{22} The idea that Israel is a liberal nation-state is compromised by its ethno-republican national discourse (Shafir and Peled 2002), which indicates that the Israeli ‘shared identity’ encompasses both common ethnic descent and common religious faith. The inclusion of such shared aspects is at odds with the nature of the liberal national ‘shared identity’ as defined by Kymlicka (2002).

\textsuperscript{23} Sand (2009) disputes the idea that Jews across the world constitute an ‘ethnos’ in his controversial work, The Invention of the Jewish People.

\textsuperscript{24} In light of the fact that the majority of American Jews had not emigrated from the state of Israel but from Germany or Eastern Europe, perhaps a more appropriate word would be ‘discover’.

\textsuperscript{25} While the state of Israel is often recognised as a ‘nation-state’ within international politics, it fails to fulfil the definition provided by Kymlicka (2002) in footnote five. As such, it is more appropriate to refer to it as a ‘Jewish’ state. See Jones and Murphy (2002); the International Crisis Group (2004); Ram (2003); and Shafir and Peled (2002) for evidence.
to differences between the nature of the two Wars for an explanation of the differences in American Jewish public reaction, for example the land gains made in each, Finkelstein (2000) instead frames his explanation in the context of a struggle for political power on the part of what he terms ‘American Jewish elites’\(^\text{26}\), suggesting that the Six-Day War provided them with the opportunity to advance their status within American politics:

“After June 1967, Israel facilitated assimilation in the United States. Jews now stood on the front lines defending America – indeed, ‘Western civilisation’ – against the retrograde Arab hordes… From bit players they could advance to top billing in the Cold War drama. Thus for American Jewry, as well as the United States, Israel became a strategic asset.” (Finkelstein 2000 pp.20-21)

Finkelstein (2000) goes on to suggest that American Jewish elites deliberately drew comparisons between the War and the Holocaust in order to “deflect criticism of Israel” (p.30), and ultimately maintain its elevated status in the Cold War discourse, and subsequently the standing of American Jewish elites within the American political arena.

It is important to recognise, however, the distinct difference between Zionist conspiracy theories of ‘Jewish control’ and Finkelstein’s (2000) argument that American Jewish elites sought political power in order to be accepted by the wider American political elite. Within this context, therefore, American Jewish elites were not trying to assure power for power’s sake or to advance some Zionist ‘agenda’ but rather to advance Jewish assimilation into American society. Indeed, as has already been discussed in the previous chapter, the Zionist ideology had failed to really take off amongst American Jews. Ironically then, it would seem that the ‘American Jewish love affair with Israel’ developed not in response to a new-found belief in a vital ‘Jewish uniqueness’ or image of ‘Jewish communion’ that inextricably bound all Jews throughout the world together, but rather as part of an on-going struggle for acceptance by American society; merely a proxy relationship within the wider context of an American Jewish love affair with America.

\(^{26}\) Presumably he is referring to the leaders of “the organised Jewish mainstream” (Bretschneider 1996 p.2), as discussed in footnote eight.
Like Finkelstein (2000) and Thomas (2007), Brettschneider (1996) similarly suggests that the ‘American Jewish love affair with Israel’ developed under the direction of the leaders of the organised American Jewry rather than from the instinct of ordinary American Jews. Unlike Finkelstein (2000) and Thomas (2007), however, Brettschneider (1996) does not question the development of a relationship with the state of Israel specifically after 1967, but rather the homogeneity of this relationship. As such, her thesis is precluded by an acceptance of the relevance of the state of Israel to American Jews. What is more relevant to Brettschneider, then, is not so much the ‘Israel’ or ‘affair’ elements of Rosenthal’s phenomenon of an (2001) ‘American Jewish love affair with Israel’, but rather the ‘American Jewish’ and ‘love’ elements. Here, Brettschneider (1996) points to the Hobbesian liberal paradigm within which she argues the group politics of American society are played out:

“Despite the particularity of its history and the richness of its own political tradition, in many respects the American Jewish community accepted these [Liberal] options and played according to the accompanying rules. As Israel contributes a central component of the identity of the American Jewish community as a whole, the community’s pro-Israel politics has been particularly subject to the expectations of this paradigm.” (Brettschneider 1996 p.99)

Through the rules of this paradigm Brettschneider (1996) suggests that a shared American Jewish identity was cast “into a static and ahistorical role” (p.13): that of an “American Jewish pro-Israel identity” (p.15). By claiming an American Jewish identity to be a ‘natural’, rather than a historical phenomenon, the leaders of the organised American Jewry were able to prevent groups pertaining to ‘alternative’ discourses from gaining any legitimacy; if the common interests of the American Jewry were ‘natural’ they could not be altered. This thesis ultimately undermines Rosenthal’s claims that the Six-Day War “forged the American Jewish unanimity on Israel” (p.xv): rather than there existing a true unanimity amongst American Jews it would instead appear that discord had simply become imperceptible within a climate “in which politics – serious public discourse necessary for ongoing identity formation – was stifled” (Brettschneider 1996 p.2). The impact of the liberal paradigm upon American Jewish relationship is perhaps not as surprising as Brettschneider (1996) implies, however: despite the arguable existence of a ‘particularity’ of American Jewish history, and a
‘richness’ of American Jewish political tradition, as has already been highlighted above, the increasing secularisation of the American Jewry had seen its relations become increasingly receptive to the influences of wider political and societal trends (Rebhun and Levy 2006).

An alternative context within which to view the development of an ‘American Jewish pro-Israel’ identity, however, is that of the ‘ethnic difference’ era that followed the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Rosenthal 2001; Walzer 1997), and, more specifically, the development of a specifically American construction of group identity within this era. While Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin (1993) argue that group identity is traditionally constructed either as the product of a common genealogical origin or of a common geographical origin, in modern American society it is usually constructed as the product of a common ethnicity – hence the frequently used phrase, ‘ethnic America’. 27 Moreover, while Spinner (1994) argues that a sense of group origins within ethnic groups 28 are usually thought to be based on common language, history, or religion, in the US it is more commonly thought to be based on national origin. 29 In this liberal-nationalist context 30 national origin does not refer to the group’s status as ‘a nation’ but to the nation-state from which they emigrated; as Spinner highlights, “[i]mmigration is the key to ethnicity in America”. While the success of the American Jewry’s integration into American society has inevitably meant that the group’s “religious and ethnic-patterns are heavily shaped by ideological and cultural processes occurring within the general society” (Rebhun and Levy 2006 p.394), the dawn of an ‘ethnic difference’ era based upon a ‘national origin’-orientated perspective of ethnicity has inevitably posed a problem for American Jews: while the American Jewry may share a religion, this is not enough to define them as an ‘ethnic group’ in the American context, and therefore not enough to secure their status as a distinct group within American society. As has already been discussed above, American Jews did not migrate from one nation-state but from several, and, as such, do not share the

28 Spinner (2004) defines ethnic groups as “communities that base themselves on a sense of group origins and share (or think they share) some cultural attributes” (p.25).
29 Although Spinner (1994) supports Anderson’s (2006) idea that ethnic communities are ‘imagined’ he also argues that something tangible – usually language, history and culture – must be shared to ensure that communities can feel this comradeship.
30 Nationalists and liberal-nationalists employ a different sense of ‘nation’: while nationalists define the idea of ‘the nation’ in terms of right to statehood, liberal-nationalists defines it in terms of legal membership of the modern nation-state. (Gilbert 1998)
same national origin; what is more, Shlomo Sand (2009) argues that they do not even share the same historical origin. It would appear, then, that in the absence of a shared place of national origin, American Jews turned to the state of Israel to legitimise their status as a distinct ethnic group within American society. The importance of the state of Israel within this ‘American Jewish’ ethnic identity would undoubtedly help to explain the dominance of a ‘pro-Israel’ discourse at this time: without the legitimacy of a legal ‘homeland’ – an internationally recognised state as opposed to a biblical land – with which to locate the concept of a shared ‘Jewish’ ethnicity, American Jews could not continue to be viewed as a singular community.

1977 to the present day: multiple Israels, multiple relationships

The 1980s witnessed a second turning point in the American Jewry’s relationship with the state of Israel which, although not as dramatic or sudden as its 1967 predecessor, proved to be equally significant; indeed, as seen in the recent influx of headlines and book titles mentioned in the chapter entitled Before 196731, the American Jewry is continuing to feel the ramifications of this turning point even now. Following the Israeli political ‘earthquake’ of May 1977 – in which elections to the Ninth Knesset resulted in the first non-Labour-led coalition (Jones and Murphy 2002) – the ‘pro-Israel’ identity of the previous ten years ultimately “became untenable” (Brettschneider 1996 p.2), leaving a gaping hole within the American Jewish group identity and calling into question the validity of an American Jewish relationship with the state of Israel. Indeed, while there may remain a general consensus around the idea of an “American Jewish pro-Israel identity” (Brettschneider 1996 p.15), Goren (1999) highlights how American Jews as a collective are now struggling with what exactly this constitutes and the extent of its legitimacy as the group’s central identity: “Today much of American Jewish thought is concerned with reconciling a belief in the centrality of Israel in its transcendent importance for the Jewish people with the reality of the State” (p.164).

Where previously it had seemed that American Jews were willing to do anything for the Jewish state, “even fight and die” (Glick 1982 p.139) – albeit whilst continuing to live in the US – since the 1980s the relationship has become increasingly tense to the extent that some American Jewish organisations “don’t even hesitate to lobby

31 See footnote nine.
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Congress against Israeli policies” (Rosenthal 2001 p.xiv). Brettschneider (1996) points to the right-wing Likud-led Israeli governments of the 1980s for explanation, arguing that “[w]ith the policies of the Israeli government growing harder to justify American Jews became increasingly uncomfortable with a central aspect of their identity” (p.2).

In a recent interview with Guardian journalist Chris McGreal (2008), Daniel Levy, a former adviser to Israeli cabinet ministers and the co-founder of new alternative ‘pro-Israel’ group J Street, explained that this uneasiness with the Likud’s policies extended from the liberal stance of the majority of American Jews:

“A community that is very, very liberal, votes 78 per cent Obama, overall a community that prides itself in the role it played historically in the US in advancing civil rights, was suddenly being identified with the most illiberal regressive policies advocated by groups that claimed to be doing this in the name of American Jewry and the name of Israel, making alliances with these dreadful people on the far-right of American politics.” (Levy cited by McGreal 2008 pp. not given)

This seemingly inherent liberalism amongst American Jews is confirmed by Thomas (2007) who argues that the American Jewry has been “persistently liberal” (p.21). Thomas goes even further than Brettschneider and Levy, however, and suggests that disparity does not just exist between the politics of American Jews and recent Likud-led government, but rather between American Jews and most Israeli Jews, and, what is more, that it existed even before 1977; not only have Israeli Jews been traditionally opposed to laissez-faire economics (Jones and Murphy 2002), but, as Thomas (2007) highlights, most “are not social liberals” (p.22). It would seem, however, that this disparity had never previously been great enough for any American Jew to successfully challenge the hegemonic ‘pro-Israel’ discourse that had developed after 1967; as Rosenthal (2001) argues, until 1977 “American Jews had been able to maintain their comfortable and closed system of black-and-white morality”. Indeed, even the state of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights following the Six-Day War appeared to be justifiable to the majority of American Jews because of the fact it had been executed in the defence of Jews who had been abandoned by the rest of the world.
With the arrival of radically right-wing policies following the election of a Likud-led government in 1977, however, it would appear that the disparity had become too great to be obscured. Whether such ‘realisation’ was triggered by Likud’s increasingly oppressive policies towards Palestinians is questionable, however; though governing coalitions led by the Revisionist\(^{32}\) party allowed for the mass expansion of settlement activity close to areas with a high Palestinian population density (Jones and Murphy 2002), Israeli settlements in the Occupied territories had also been condoned by successive Labour administrations following the June 1967 War albeit where they constituted agricultural *Moshavim*\(^{33}\) or *Kibbutzim*\(^{34}\). Furthermore, American Jews continue to be convinced by Israel’s role as a ‘universal Jewish defender’ when it finds itself at war with either the Palestinians or its neighbours: as Natasha Mozgoyava (2009) highlights, “[n]ot surprisingly, the two most recent outpourings of solidarity [from American Jews] came during the second intifada and the Second Lebanon War” (pp. not given). Indeed, this ‘realisation’ may in fact have had more to do with the personality of Likud leader Menachem Begin himself, who, as Rosenthal (2001) highlights, was “a far cry from the urbane, sophisticated tough Israeli ‘new Jew’ with whom the Americans so happily identified” (p.xvii).

More recently, however, this growing ‘realisation’ has undoubtedly had more to do with the increasing influence of Israel’s religious parties in recent years due to “[d]emographic shifts, coupled with the declining hegemony exercised by the mainstream secular parties in Israel” (Jones and Murphy 2002 p.41); not only do the contemporary *Haredim*\(^{35}\) population appear “set against further territorial concessions by Israel” (Jones and Murphy 2002 p.42), something which will undoubtedly throw a spanner in the works of any future peace plan that Levy (cited by McGreal) argues is the desire of a “very large constituency of American Jews” (pp. not given), but they have also been insistent on the idea that “conversions to Judaism carried out under Reform and Conservative Judaism remains invalid” (Jones and Murphy 2002 pp.39-

\(^{32}\) As Jones and Murphy (2002) highlight, “the antecedent of the Likud was the Revisionist Zionist movement” (p.37), which opposed the UN partition plan of 1947 and “continued to agitate for the unity of *Eretz Yisrael*, territory that included at that time the East bank of the river Jordan” (p.37). Similarly, for many of Likud’s supporters, “the historical claim to *Eretz Yisrael* remained the determining feature of the Likud political platform” (p.38).

\(^{33}\) Plural of Hebrew term ‘Moshav’ meaning “[c]ollective farm settlement but one which combines both co-operative and private farming” (Jones and Murphy 2002 p.xxiv).

\(^{34}\) Plural of Hebrew term ‘Kibbutz’ meaning “[c]ollective agricultural settlements where, traditionally, no private wealth existed” (Jones and Murphy 2002 p.xxiv).

\(^{35}\) The Jewish Ultra-Orthodox community (Jones and Murphy 2002).
As Rosenthal (2001) highlights, this latter point is of particular concern to American Jews who, he argues, “rightly recognise the controversy as having great impact for both themselves and Israel. They see the Orthodox rejection of their converts as delegitimizing over 80 per cent of their community… Psychologically this strikes at the heart of their connection with Israel, which is so vital to their sense of Jewish identity” (p.xx).

What the arrival of Likud in 1977 ultimately revealed, however, was the reality of a multiplicity of discourses within the state of Israel; as Rosenthal (2001) argues, “in the long run the rise of Likud with its alternative vision and policies, meant that for American Jews there was no longer one Israel from which to take direction” (p.xvii).

Faced with the reality of ‘multiple Israels’, it would seem that the leadership of the American Jewry could no longer sustain a singular ‘pro-Israel’ discourse: while certain organisations have remained vehemently ‘pro-Israeli’, most notably the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) whose “policy of seeking the maximum possible economic and military assistance and the greatest possible freedom of political action for Israel had since 1977 enabled the Revisionist policies of the Likud” (Thomas 2007 p.40), elsewhere the American Jewry has seen an explosion of new Jewish groups “intent on challenging the mainstream ‘pro-Israel’ attitudes developed and guarded through the activities of the dominant, large-scale organisations such as AIPAC” (Brettschneider 1996 p.2). Where these dominant organisations may have previously succeeded in silencing discord, most famously in the case of Breira (Brettschneider 1996; Thomas 2007), such efforts have since been delegitimized by the divisive nature of issues such as religious legitimacy, the Palestinians’ political aspirations, and the peace process (Rosenthal 2001).

While Brettschneider (1996) suggests that the emergence of so-called ‘dovish’ groups is paving the way for a ‘new democratic theory’, however, such an analysis fails to take into account the fact that all of these organisations continue to be Israel-orientated in their aims, even where such orientation allows for criticism. Indeed, one only need look to the most famous of the ‘dovish’ groups for evidence of this: as Chris McGreal (2009) reveals, while newcomer lobby group J Street may be seeking to redefine what it means to be ‘pro-Israel’, the fact that its ambitions and motives remain constrained within the parameters of a self-confessed ‘pro-Israelism’ (J Street Year of publication not given) suggests that the American Jewish identity remains fixed around the state of
Israel: as McGreal (2009) argues, “J Street stands for what the rest of the pro-Israel lobby stands for: peace, a two-state solution and a secure Israel” (pp. not given). While the unpopular policies of Likud governments may have served to widen the political space of American Jewish relations to some extent, in reality it would seem that the space remains closed to any discussion beyond that of criticism of certain policies and certain governments. The American Jewry’s continued preoccupation with the state of Israel can also be seen in the philanthropic sphere where a similar trend of ‘variations on a common theme’ is evident. As Rosenthal (2001) highlights, while American Jews are becoming increasingly reluctant to donate to the mainstream ‘pro-Israel’ charities, in particular the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Jewish Federations of North America (formerly the United Jewish Communities) umbrella charities, this does not mean that they have stopped giving to Israel altogether; rather, they are now simply spreading their allegiance across the increasing number of Israel-orientated charities which are opening up alongside the continuing expansion of alternative ‘pro-Israel’ groups in the political sphere:

“Establishment jeremiads aside, the general picture of American Jewish giving to Israel is by no means bleak. Giving outside the traditional avenue of UJA/Federation has grown rapidly in the past two decades. Hundreds of Israeli political, social, educational, and cultural institutions have established fund-raising arms in the United States.” (Rosenthal 2001 p.173)

Though it is worth remembering here the argument put forward by Finkelstein (2000) and Thomas’ (2007) that the views of the organised American Jewry do not necessarily reflect those of ordinary American Jews, Levy (cited by McGreal 2009) suggests that where 'the organised Jewish mainstream' failed to accurately reflect the politics of the majority, J Street for one has emerged in response to the politics of the majority: “What we had a hunch about, and was proven when J Street was launched, is that there is this very large constituency of Jewish Americans who do care about Israel and who are cool identifying themselves as pro-Israel” (pp. not given). Though such widespread support for the state of Israel may now be a reality, however, it

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36 See American Jewish Committee (2010) for more information on this organisation.
37 See the Jewish Federations of North America (2010) for more information on this organisation.
38 See footnote four.
undoubtedly stems from the singular discourse that was initially constructed by the leadership of ‘the organised American Jewish mainstream’ following the Six-Day War of 1967; if indeed such support is indicative of a kind of Jewish nationalism, as Habib (2004) would have us believe, then it is important to note Day and Thompson’s (2004) argument that “populations do not just develop an awareness of these [nationalist] ideas as individuals” (p.82) but instead “need to be encouraged” (p.82). In line with Day and Thompson’s (2004) theorising, therefore, it would seem that due to the power of the collective imagination, the centrality of the state of Israel to the American Jewish identity, and the continued trend of ‘pro-Israelism’ have subsequently become “social fact[s]” (Day and Thompson 2004 p.89) of the American Jewry. Indeed, this would help to explain the apparent turn-about of the majority of the US’ Orthodox Jewish population: where once this minority was vehemently “anti-Zionist” (Thomas 2007), its members are now Israel’s strongest defenders. This is particularly so amongst the younger generation where, as Jonathan D. Sarna (2009) highlights, “[y]oung Jews who do identify as Orthodox… generally support Israel ardently” (pp. not given).

Though such attempts to redefine the meaning of the term ‘pro-Israel’ have some resonance with Habib’s (2004) ideas of diaspora-nationalism, however, the fact that this redefinition is taking place within both the public, and the political arena ultimately undermines her argument that such ideas now define the American Jewry’s relationship with the state of Israel; while Habib (2004) suggests that support for the Jewish state no longer constitutes support for the state as a political entity but rather merely “diasporic beliefs in reference to co-responsibility” (Habib 2004 p.260), the existence of supposedly ‘bottom-up’ political groups such as J Street would appear to have proved her wrong. As the Boyarins (1993) argue, while there may exist a diasporic attachment to the state in symbolic terms, it “must have a political expression in the present, in the provision of the possibility for Jews to live a Jewish life in a Palestine not dominated by one ethnic group or another” (p.715). This would indicate, then, that as long as the political situation in the Middle East remains volatile, any American Jewish relationship with the state of Israel will be expressed on political terms.
Whether or not a specifically American Jewish relationship with the state of Israel can continue to exist, however, appears increasingly questionable, and has been a point of much concern for the organised American Jewry, and Israeli Jews alike; indeed, “[w]ith a large sector of American Jewry already evincing tenuous connections to Israel” (Wertheimer 2009 p.42), the prospect of domestic political allegiances “trump[ing] solidarity with Israel” (Wertheimer 2009 p.42) seems an ever closer reality. As Rosenthal (2001) highlights, the decline of an American Jewish identification with the state of Israel is confirmed by analysis of two decades of opinion polls conducted on behalf of the AJC by the sociologist Steven Cohen:

“The days when a vast majority of American Jews felt that ‘if Israel were to disappear it would be one of the greatest tragedies of my life’ have been replaced by feelings much more diffuse and less intense. Recent studies show a smaller percentage of American Jews who ‘very strongly’ or strongly support Israel’. Even more distressing, growing indifference is most pronounced among the young. Cohen has found that for every ten-year drop in age there is a 5 percent decline in support for Israel.” (Rosenthal 2001 p.170)

Evidence of the diminishing role of the state of Israel within the American Jewish identity can arguably also be found in the increasingly centralised position of the issue of anti-Semitism within American Jewish relations, and the subsequently elevated status of so-called ‘defense’ organisations, most notably the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) (Defamation Shamir 2009). As Rabbi Dov Bleich (cited in Defamation Shamir 2009) argues, claims of instances of anti-Semitism, either perceived or actual, have become the last means by which secular Jews can express a collective ‘Jewish’ identity.

Where the pre-‘love affair’ American Jewry was divided by place of origin and religious denomination, the post-‘love affair’ American Jewry appears increasingly divided by their contact, or lack of contact with the ‘civic Judaism’ depicted by Bayme (2008) in the previous chapter. Wertheimer (2009) talks of a “deepening chasm” (p.43) between the Jewish ‘haves’ – “those who are attached to Judaism, received a strong education, and were encouraged by their parents to identify unambiguously with Judaism” (Wertheimer 2009 p.43) – and the ‘have nots’. These ‘have nots’
inevitably pose a far greater threat to an American Jewish identity centred around Israel than the emergence of ‘dovish’ organisations: while opposition to Israeli policies is ultimately only ever as enduring as the policy or government that it is challenging, and thus can continue to exist within a wider ‘pro-Israel’ context, indifference undermines any engagement with the state of Israel altogether. As Rosenthal (2001) argues, “[i]f [American Jews] continue to distance themselves from Israel, they will then have lost one of the last supports of communal identity” (p.193). The American Jewry’s apparent tendency towards fragmentation, however, would suggest that the idea of a truly communal ‘American Jewish’ identity may never have been an actual reality but rather, as Finkelstein (2000) and Thomas (2007) have suggested, merely an illusory product of political expediency on the part of the leadership of the organised American Jewry. As Rosenthal (2001) concludes, the current debate surrounding the question of what form American Jewish relations with the state of Israel should take may lead to the realisation of a final irony: “that for all American Jews’ sincere concern and obsession, their relationship with Israel might be simply a way station on the road to assimilation” (p.xxii).

Conclusion

Despite the increasing fragmentation of the American Jewry in regards their levels of ‘pro-Israelism’, and, indeed, their attention towards Israel in general, Sarna (2009) remains optimistic about the future of the American Jewry’s supposed ‘special relationship’ with the Jewish state:

“In both countries, the ardour of young love, with all its unrealistic hopes and passions and dreams, has given way to middle-aged realities...The deepest and most meaningful relationships, however, survive disappointments. By focusing upon all that they nevertheless share in common, and all that they might yet accomplish together in the future, American Jews and Israelis can move past this crisis in their relationship and settle in, as partners, for the long haul ahead.”

(Jonathan D. Sarna 2009 pp. not given)

This statement fails to really grasp the true nature of the American Jewry’s relationship with the state of Israel, however; while it admittedly acknowledges a ‘crisis’ in the relationship, like the majority of American of academics and commentators in this
field, Sarna ultimately falls into the trap of assuming a ‘special relationship’ or ‘love affair’ to be an ahistorical phenomenon – the nationalist theorist’s ‘social fact’. While both Brettschneider (1996), and Habib (2004) come close to escaping this trap – Brettschneider acknowledging the existence of a singular ‘pro-Israel’ discourse whose hegemony has been assured by a wider societal belief that if a group develops multiple dialogues it stops being a community, and Habib challenging the idea that widespread identification with Israel necessarily denotes widespread support for Israeli government policy – ultimately they both remain unknowingly constrained within the Hobbesian paradigm where group identities are construed as ‘ahistorical’ or ‘static’ (Brettschneider 1996). While the particular American Jewish ‘static’ identity may have expanded since 1977 to allow for a multi-layered dialogue amongst American Jews, essentially it remains a ‘pro-Israel’ construct that is only capable of expanding to allow for criticism of certain Israelis, certain governments, and certain policies, rather than actual disassociation from Israel altogether: ultimately there remains at its heart the ‘static’ belief that the state of Israel is the realised ‘Zion’, and, subsequently, the inevitable object of the American Jewry’s affections, and the axis of a common ‘Jewishness’.

Both Spinner (1994) and Walzer (1997) indicate that the creation of ‘static’ group identities on the part of the leaderships of minority groups is an inevitability within societies such as the US where intolerance is rarely great enough to have “group-sustaining effects” (Walzer 1997 p.33); where a minority groups fails to be reined in by intolerance around them, the organised leadership must instead construct an environment where it no longer becomes “relatively easy… and not at all humiliating, to escape one’s own group and take on the reigning political majority” (Walzer 1997 p.33). Unfortunately for the organised American Jewry, however, where once its Liberal group identity was successful to the point of creating the widespread illusion of an enduring ‘love affair’, since 1977 it appears to have been loosening its grip on American Jews with a large majority now slipping through the identity net into indifferent secularisation. This fact continues to evade Sarna (2009) and his contemporaries, however, who remain seemingly unable to recognise that the American Jewry’s relationship with the state of Israel is only ever the strength it is at

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39 See Bayme (2008); Brettschneider 1996; Butler-Smith (2009); Glick (1982); Habib (2004); McGreal (2009); Mosgoyava (2009); Rosenthal (2001); and Wertheimer (2009).
any one time as a consequence of the ideological forces, political actors and wider historical events impacting upon it. As such, while relations between American Jews and the state of Israel may have become arguably ‘special’ between 1967 and 1977 in reality there has never existed such a thing as a fundamental ‘special relationship’ between the American Jewry and the state of Israel.

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