

The Middle East Union Festival I



Berliner Literarischen Aktion

Digitale Panels (als Streams) und
LIVEMUSIK (vor Ort)

Mit Georges Khalil, Prof. Ella Shohat, Alaa Obeid, Sami Awad Rina Kedem, Maytha Alhassen, Natasha Kermani, Eden Cami und das Kayan Project

Kann und darf man aus dem heutigen Berlin einen friedlich vereinten Nahen Osten imaginieren? Über nationale Grenzen, Kriege, religiöse und sprachliche Unterschiede hinweg? Das Middle East Union Festival der Berliner Literarischen Aktion lässt mit Literatur, Diskurs und Musik diese Vision zum Greifen nah erscheinen. Das von *Hila Amit* und *Mati Shemoelof* kuratierte Festival gastiert im Kino Babylon (12.8.), der NoVilla (15.8.) und an zwei Tagen mit digitalen Panels und einem abendlichem Liveprogramm im LCB.

Arabisch-jüdisches Schreiben: Überlegungen zu Verdrängung und nahöstlicher Diaspora

Mit *Georges Khalil* und *Prof. Ella Shohat* digital (engl.)

<https://lcb.de/programm/the-middle-east-union-festival-i/>

Das gesamte Festivalprogramm auf www.middle-east-union.de

Josef Meri - Pilgrimage To The Prophet Ezekiel's Shrine In Iraq: A Symbol Of Muslim-Jewish Relations



*Ezekiel's Tomb,
located in Al Kifl,
Iraq Photo:
en.wikipedia.org*

Prior to the founding of modern nation states and the evolution of nationalist thought among Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa, pilgrimage to shared shrines was a ubiquitous phenomenon up until the 20th century. However, today one still finds Jews making pilgrimage to shrines of the Talmudic sages and saints (z. addiqim) in Israel, particularly in the Galilee and Beer Sheva, and in Morocco, and Muslims to shrines associated with the prophets, and the Companions and Followers of the Prophet Muh . ammad as well as other holy persons, particularly in Egypt, Morocco, Syria, Iraq and Jordan.

This article will not deal with the theological dimensions of the veneration of holy persons or the arguments for permitting or prohibiting visiting the shrines of holy persons but rather with an aspect of saint veneration which historically attracted mainly Muslims and Jews: the veneration of the Prophet Ezekiel (Arab. H. izqīl, Dhū'l-Kifl) in Iraq.

Pilgrimage to Ezekiel's shrine in Iraq is unique in that some of the most detailed

historical accounts concerning it have been preserved.

The shrine of Ezekiel is found in the village of Kifl which lies 77 miles south of Baghdad in a largely Shi'i region and was one of the most significant places of pilgrimage for Jews and Muslims, especially Shi'is until the first half of the 20th century. As is commonly the case with other prophets and holy persons, multiple shrines were dedicated to Ezekiel. A second shrine existed in Babylonia and a third in Persia. Yet neither was as well documented as the shrine at Kifl, owing to the fact that it was a regional pilgrimage centre attracting Jews and Muslims from as far away as North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, drawn there by the sanctity of the place and its reputation for the fulfilment of supplication and the curing of various illnesses.

Read

more:

https://www.academia.edu/Pilgrimage_to_the_Prophet_Ezekiels_Shrine

**The Middle East Union Festival -
Mehrsprachiges Literaturfestival
(Englisch, Deutsch, Arabisch,
Hebräisch) Berlin, 12. bis 15.
August 2021**



Kann und darf man aus dem heutigen Berlin einen in Frieden und Gleichheit geeinten Nahen Osten imaginieren?

Das MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival lässt, online und verteilt auf Veranstaltungsorte in der ganzen Stadt, diese Vision zum Greifen nah erscheinen – mit Literatur, Diskurs und Musik, mit Performance, Poesie und feministischen und queeren Diskussionen.

Kuratiert von den israelischen Schriftsteller*innen *Mati Shemoelof* und *Hila Amit* und der palästinensischen Umweltaktivistin *Alaa Obeid* wagt das Festival ein mutiges künstlerisch-politisches Experiment: die Proklamation einer kulturellen Vereinigung des diffus kartierten Nahen Osten.

Auf die Eröffnung im BABYLON mit einem Gründungsauftritt, einer Diskussion und dem Konzert einer iranisch-israelischen Musikgruppe folgen in den darauffolgenden Tagen zahlreiche Veranstaltungen – online, im Literarischen Colloquium Berlin und in der Novilla – mit namhaften und brillanten Denker*innen, Künstler*innen und Aktivist*innen, die sich mit dem Grundgedanken des Projekts kreativ auseinandersetzen: *Yehouda Shenhav-Sharabani*, *Ella Shohat*, *Amro Ali*, *Amina Maher*, *Udi Aloni*, *Maryam Abu Khaled*, *Nael Eltoukhy*, *Steve Sabella* und viele mehr haben der Teilnahme zugesagt.

Das musikalische Programm – mit den Ensembles von *Sistanagila*, *Eden Cami* und das *Kayan Project* oder *Rasha Nahas* mit Band – bietet die Möglichkeit, eine gemeinsame Zukunftsvision auch rhythmisch und melodisch zu erkunden. Das besondere Highlight des Festivals ist ein Konzert religiöser jüdisch-arabischer Musiktraditionen mit dem Kantor *Assaf Levitin* und dem Ud-Spieler *Mazen Ragheb Mohsen* in der Synagoge am Fraenkelufer.

Bietet die kulturelle Zukunftsvision des MIDDLE EAST UNION Festivals eine Antwort auf die verhärteten Fronten und heutigen Konfliktlinien? Und wie könnte sie über die Utopie hinaus zur Wirklichkeit werden?

Finden Sie es mit uns heraus!

Für weitere Informationen und das vollständige Programm:

<https://middle-east-union.de/>

The MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival

c/o Berliner Literarische Aktion e.V., Kastanienallee 2, 10435 Berlin

info@berliner-literarische-aktion.de, www.berliner-literarische-aktion.de

Kurator*innen: Hila Amit, Mati Shemoelof, Alaa Obeid

Projektleitung: Martin Jankowski

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Ein Projekt der Berliner Literarischen Aktion nach einem Konzept von Hila Amit und Mati Shemoelof, gefördert durch den Hauptstadtkulturfonds.

The MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival – Multilingual Literature Festival (English, German, Arabic, Hebrew) Berlin, August 12th – 15th, 2021

Can and may we imagine a Middle East unified in peace and equality, in present-day Berlin? The MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival makes this vision seem within reach – with literature, discussions, and music, with performance, poetry and feminist and queer discussions, featured online and scattered across venues throughout the city.

Curated by the Israeli writers *Mati Shemoelof* and *Hila Amit* and the Palestinian environmental activist Alaa Obeid, the festival dares a bold artistic-political experiment: the proclamation of a cultural unification of the diffusely charted Middle East.

The Union launches with the opening at BABYLON and a discussion followed by a concert of an Iranian-Israeli band which will be followed by numerous events – online, at the Literary Colloquium Berlin and at the Novilla – with renowned and brilliant thinkers, artists and activists who creatively engage with the underlying idea of the project: *Yehouda Shenhav-Sharabani*, *Ella Shohat*, *Amro Ali*, *Amina Maher*, *Udi Aloni*, *Maryam Abu Khaled*, *Nael Eltoukhy*, *Steve Sabella* and many others are participating.

The music program – which will feature performances by *Sistanagila*, *Eden Cami* and the Kayan Project and *Rasha Nahas* with band – offers the possibility to also explore a common vision of the future through rhythm and melody. The highlight of the festival is a concert of religious Jewish-Arabic musical traditions with the cantor *Assaf Levitin* and the Ud player *Mazen Ragheb Mohsen* in the Fraenkelufer Synagogue.

Does the MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival's cultural vision of the future offer an answer to today's hardened fronts and lines of conflict? And how could it go beyond the idea of utopia to become reality? Join us to find out!

For more information and the full program: <https://middle-east-union.de/>

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A project of the Berliner Literarische Aktion based on a concept by Hila Amit and Mati Shemoelof, funded by the Hauptstadtkulturfonds.

Linda Bouws – Herinner de Holocaust met wereldwijde context. Het Parool, 15 juli 2021



Linda Bouws. Foto: Het Parool

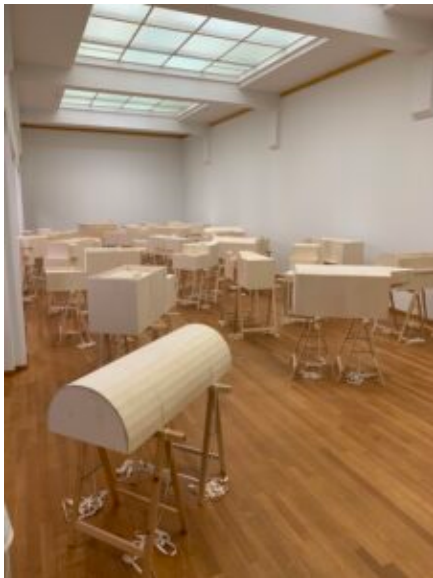
Het nieuwe Nationaal Holocaust Museum moet meer bestrijken dan de vervolging van Joden in Europa, vindt Linda Bouws. Ze pleit voor een nieuwe herinneringscultuur.

In Amsterdam wil het Nationaal Holocaust Museum de geschiedenis van de Holocaust gaan vertellen. De opening is gepland in 2022. 'De meeste mensen weten waar de Holocaust voor staat: voor de moord op zes miljoen Europese Joden, waaronder 104.000 uit Nederland. Met uw steun willen we het Nationaal Holocaust Museum tot de plek maken waar we dat wat nooit vergeten mag worden tonen aan de toekomstige generaties. Zo'n plek is nog steeds hard nodig in Nederland,' aldus de initiatiefnemer op de site van het Joods Cultureel Kwartier.

Er gaat niet dagelijks een nieuw historisch museum open. Zeker in deze tijd is discussie over de doelstellingen en context van zo'n initiatief onvermijdelijk. Daarbij spelen vraagstukken van identiteit en inclusie een steeds belangrijker rol. Bij een beladen onderwerp als de Holocaust zal dat zeker niet beperkt blijven tot stemmen uit Nederland of Europa.

Zo is in Dubai onlangs de eerste Holocausttentoonstelling in de Verenigde Arabische Emiraten geopend in het museum Crossroads of Civilizations. Via persoonlijke getuigenissen wordt het verhaal verteld. Een klein gedeelte is gewijd aan Arabieren en moslims die Joden hielpen de Holocaust te overleven.

To A New Culture Of Remembrance



Joseph Sassoon Semah – Architectural model based on a mass grave of Jews in Baghdad – “Farhud” – the progrom against the Jews of Iraq on June 1-2 1941 – Kunstmuseum Den Haag

A new Nationaal Holocaust Museum is being built in Amsterdam to remember the history of the Holocaust. The opening is planned for 2022. An interesting initiative.

This is what the initiators said over their plan: ‘Most people know about

the meaning of the Holocaust: the assassination of 6 million European Jews, of which 104.000 came from the Netherlands. With your support we want to make the National Holocaust museum the place where we show future generations that this must never be forgotten. A place like this is still very necessary in the Netherlands'. This can be read on the Jewish Cultural Quarter website.

It doesn't happen often that a new historical museum is opened. The most recent Dutch attempt to establish a Nationaal Historisch Museum initiated by Jan Marijnissen failed miserably.

Especially in this day and age, a discussion is inevitable about the objectives and context of such an initiative. Issues of identity and inclusion play an even more important role. With such a sensitive issue as that of the Holocaust, it will certainly not be limited to voices from the Netherlands or Europe.

Just recently the first Holocaust exhibition was opened in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Dubai at the Crossroads of Civilisation Museum. Using personal testimonies the story of the Holocaust is told. A small part of the exhibition is dedicated to Arabs and Muslims who helped Jews survive the Holocaust. If they have devoted any attention to the Holocaust (Farhud) in the Middle East is currently unclear.

It will be inevitable for a museum that proposes to focus on future generations to be clear from the outset about the context of their museum-related activities. For example, you could add to the name Holocaust Museum: 'The history of the Holocaust in the culture of the time and the worldwide meaning for the present', or words with an equivalent meaning.

The Holocaust cannot be understood to be an exclusive definition of the assassination of 6 million European Jews. Hitler's interest went beyond that of Europe. The Holocaust, albeit on a smaller scale, also took place in the Middle East. Jews in Iraq, Tunisia and Libya were persecuted and killed. In Bagdad during the Farhud on June 1st and 2nd 1941 there were around 200 victims and Jewish stores and houses were looted, destroyed and set fire to. The general presumption is, because of the later discovered mass graves, that the number of casualties was very much higher. The persecution of Jews increased after the founding of Israel in 1948. From 1950 until the seventies a huge exodus took place, mostly forced, from Arabic and South-African countries, often

described as a Babylonian exile, meaning for so many the loss of a homeland, culture, traditions and stories.

Certainly in Europe, but also in the Middle-East there is a lack of knowledge and awareness of the injustice done to the Jews in the Middle-East, partly as a result of the Holocaust, after previously living harmoniously with Muslim communities in their residential and working environment.



*Joseph Sassoon Semah -
On Friendship / (Collateral
Damage) III - The Third
GaLUT: Baghdad,
Jerusalem, Amsterdam*

If the future Nationaal Holocaust Museum in Amsterdam, a city with many cultures, wants to be interesting for future generations, then it is necessary to place the exhibitions in the context of diversity within Jewish culture of the time and the meaningfulness for the present. The National Holocaust Museum in Amsterdam has the unique possibility of taking the initiative for a new future-proof Culture of Remembrance. This means that in programming and permanent exhibitions there should be a focus on Jews from all over the world and certainly those in the Middle East; their rich culture after the first exile from Jerusalem, with among others the Talmud Bavli, the centuries of peaceful and productive living with Muslims, the 'Kristallnacht' there, the second exile after the founding of Israel and the emerging Mizrahi Hebrew voice in the public domain, must not be forgotten, after being marginalized for so long.

Only then will justice be done to 'diversity and inclusivity of the Jews' and can the question 'Are Jews white?' perhaps be provided with a more balanced answer.

At the Kunstmuseum Den Haag there is the exhibition '*On Friendship*' until the 29th of August 2021 of work by Joseph Sassoon Semah, the grandson of the last Chief Rabbi of Baghdad, Sassoon Kadoori (1886-1971). Metaphorically speaking it is a tribute to the lost culture in Iraq, and at the same time an invitation to a dialogue about different cultures. 36 architectural models of houses, synagogues and the mass grave of Farhud, and 86 drawings bring back to life the lost, integrated Jewish culture of Baghdad.

Linda Bouws, former director Felix Meritis Amsterdam, curator exhibition

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<https://www.parool.nl/columns-opinie/opinie-herinner-de-holocaust-met-wereldwijde-context/>

Translation: Jean Cameron - Amsterdam

The IHRA's Careless Conflations On Antisemitism (And Few Alternatives)

Contending Modernities, 2021. In this essay Moshe Behar critiques the recent letter sent by English Secretary of State Gavin Williamson to university chancellors instructing them to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliances' (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

Behar contends that the definition of antisemitism that the IHRA has put forward is meant to squash legitimate democratic forms of criticism of the state of Israel much more than to help identify and stamp out antisemitism.

I am a non-white Mizrahi Jewish academic who has been studying Israel/Palestine

and the history of Jews in the Middle East for two decades. My family hails from Ottoman Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, and the Greek islands of Zakynthos and Corfu. All too many of us were murdered by Nazi *Génocidaires* (and rest assured that we will not forget or forgive).

Precisely because of this scholarly and biographic background I was embarrassed to read [the letter sent by England's Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson](#), to all university vice chancellors. Utilizing an authoritarian tone devoid of understatement, Williamson demanded that all universities in England adopt formally what is called "the working definition of antisemitism" drafted by the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\)](#).

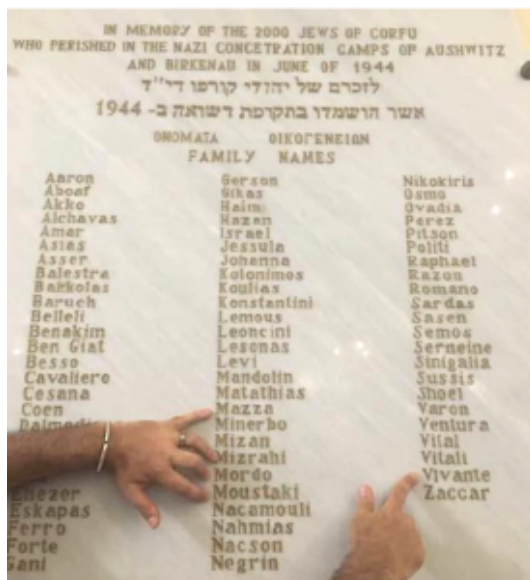


Photo from the Synagogue in Kerkyra/Corfu. Fingers pointing out to families associated with Behar's maternal lineage, Mother's maiden name included.

Born in 1976, Williamson has been a Tory politician for 25 years. He and his party have not been noteworthy for their passionate activism against racism, antisemitism included. Nor did Williamson find it problematic to serve under Boris Johnson, author of *Seventy-Two Virgins* (HarperCollins, 2004), a novel that disappointingly recycled [antisemitic tropes and stereotypical portrayals](#) of Jews and other British minority ethnic groups.

The letter Williamson authored is littered with antisemitic tropes. A non-Jew

himself, Williamson first chooses to single out Jews from non-Jews and, in so doing, officially mark Jews as “other.” Embracing the “divide and conquer” colonial approach, he proceeds to divorce antisemitic racism from [similar manifestations of racism](#) with which he is less concerned, including Islamophobia, Afrophobia/anti-Black racism, misogyny, anti Roma/Gypsy racism, homophobia, and xenophobia vis-à-vis Asians and Arabs.

Most disturbingly, Williamson’s letter upgrades the quintessential stereotype of money and Jews to a new level by linking Jews to monetary penalties and potential state sanctions on universities if their managements exercise what is otherwise a simple academic and democratic right to adopt a view and definition of antisemitism that differ from his. The irony of setting Christmas as the deadline for his pseudo-philosemitic mobilization has apparently escaped Williamson altogether.

The IHRA definition that Williamson labors to impose unilaterally defines antisemitism as “*a perception that may be expressed as hatred.*” This reading is vague, restrictive, minimalist, and in the main emotionalist. It bypasses manifestations of antisemitism that are equally, and possibly even more, important than “perception,” including oppression, discrimination, exclusion, prejudice, bigotry or other tangible actions. Moreover, a wall-to-wall agreement prevails among the rainbow of scholars of antisemitism that one singular definition of the abhorrent phenomenon does not exist. That is the case precisely as there is no one and only definition for racism, feminism, islamophobia, Judaism, Zionism, Islamism, English nationalism, communitarianism, and forms of bigotry.

There are at least four additional definitions of antisemitism that can guide the work of scholars or activists and that are analytically superior to that of the IHRA: the definition of the [Canadian Independent Jewish Voices](#); that of the British Board of Deputies and the Community Security Trust; and that of the British Jewish Voice for Labour. However, the most scholarly rigorous definition is “[The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism](#)” (JDA) that was made public today (disclosure: some serious reservations notwithstanding, I’m one of its 200 academic signatories). To be sure, Williamson’s top-down state decree of a single definition upon academia let alone one deemed deficient by [hundreds of scholars](#) runs the risk of echoing Soviet Stalinism and American McCarthyism.

And Then There Is Israel

As many as seven of the eleven illustrations that the IHRA definition marshals to exemplify antisemitism relate to post-1948 Israel (of which I happen to be a citizen). The Zionist/Arab matrix dominates the definition and as a result it often comes across as concerned more with the protection of Israel than the protection of Jews, let alone non-Israeli Jews. As early as 2016 the British Government's own "Home Affairs Committee" found the IHRA's definition wanting; cross-party committee members insisted on formally affixing [two stipulations](#): (1) "It is not anti-Semitic to criticise the Government of Israel, without additional evidence to suggest anti-Semitic *intent*" and (2) "It is not anti-Semitic to hold the Israeli Government to the same standards as other liberal democracies, or to take a particular interest in the Israeli Government's policies or actions, without additional evidence to suggest anti-Semitic *intent* " (italics added).

While it is unclear how precisely such "intent" is to be established or proven let alone by what body or individual/s it is clear that Williamson opted consciously to exclude these two surgical qualifications. That seems an additional testament to his instrumentalization of antisemitism for sectarian conservative ends. [The Governing Bodies and Presidents/Vice Chancellors of at least 48 universities](#) were unable to withstand the ongoing governmental pressure and effectively all endorsed the IHRA definition top-down without staff consultation. For example, my university's management endorsed the definition *with* the Home Affairs Committee's stipulations; [Cambridge](#) and [Oxford](#) did the same. While this too remains unsatisfactory, it is somewhat less misguided than adopting the IHRA definition *as is*.

The definition Williamson insists on imposing carelessly conflates "Jews" with "the state of Israel" and "Judaism" with "modern political Zionism." The original conflation between these identities and phenomena was and remains an inherent organizing pillar of Zionist ideology. Self-proclaimed pro-Israel bodies and individuals [exercise this conflation](#) regularly in texts, actions, and [advocacy](#). It comes as no surprise that this conflation has often been reproduced by Israel's anti-Zionist critics, at times consciously and at other times as a consequence of inexcusable ignorance.

Recent example of irresponsible conflation between British Jews, Zionism, and Israel's belligerent occupation.

The symbiosis between these opposing, yet mutually-empowering, Zionist/anti-Zionist tides yields the most toxic ground for unambiguous manifestations of antisemitism. This is in contrast to cases where straightforward criticisms of Israel including by such organizations as [Amnesty International](#), [Oxfam](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and the [Open Society Institute](#) (established in 1993 by George Soros) have been fancifully labelled as “antisemitic” to delegitimize pro-democratic activism on behalf of Palestinian human and political rights. Three facts that the IHRA definition fails to acknowledge should neither be forgotten nor blurred conceptually: that many Jews are not Zionist; that the majority of Zionists worldwide are not Jewish (including Christian fundamentalists); and that over 20% of Israeli citizens are not Jewish.

Beneficiary of a Double Standard

The IHRA definition which Williamson aims to institutionalize claims that it is antisemitic to apply “double standards to Israel by requiring of it a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.” Viewed dispassionately through a scholarly lens, this formulation echoes what logicians term “the straw man fallacy.”

First, the overwhelming majority of Israel’s critics worldwide focus on its post-1967 occupation of the West Bank and the actions it is continuing to implement there to date. No democracy in the twenty first century holds a disenfranchised civilian population under such brutal occupation while deepening ceaselessly its colonization, implantation of armed civilian settlers, and illegal settlement construction, all based on religious affiliation and differentiation.

Branding as “antisemitic” criticism of Israeli actions pertaining to its occupation—on the ground that this applies a double standard—is Orwellian. The majority of Israel’s critics demand that Israel cease being the beneficiary of a double standard that has exempted it, for over 50 years now, from democratic requirements otherwise applied to, and expected of, all other democracies. The thrust driving this critique is that Israel will act, and be adjudged, in the same way as standard democracies. If that were to happen, this would *remove* Israeli exceptionalism, not create it.

Yet a transition of this sort remains absent. This partially explains why leading (Israeli) social scientists define Israel as a diminished form of [ethnic democracy](#),

that is, a state that does not meet the minimal requirements that would permit students of Comparative Politics to define it as a “liberal democracy.” For another (Israeli) school of scholars, the label “democracy” should be avoided altogether for the simple reason that the glove does not fit; they thus define Israel as an [ethnocracy](#). For yet a third school of thought, Israel lamentably meets the definition of an [apartheid state](#). Two months ago, the single most prestigious and scholarly of all Israel’s Human Rights Organizations, B’Tselem, published a report titled [“A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid.”](#)

The above constitutes a standard scholarly debate that lacks any inherent link to antisemitism. It therefore should not be interfered with by career politicians for the purpose of policing speech, as [already seems to happen](#). In fact, the principal author of the IHRA definition, Professor Kenneth Stern, explained on many occasions that the definition “was not drafted, and was never intended, as a tool to target or chill speech on a college campus” and that he himself [“highlighted this misuse, and the damage it could do.”](#) It is clear that Williamson did not bother to consult Stern or his writings upon issuing his letter.

Israel vs Civic-Liberal Democracies

The IHRA definition Williamson enforces provides assistance to no one when it resolves that “denying the Jewish people their right to self determination” is a form of antisemitism. While such denial can surely assume an antisemitic form, in the majority of cases it assumes instead a straightforward democratic critique. For starters, scholars and non-scholars alike must have the democratic right to question Israel’s democratic credentials and self-defined national configuration, as well as those of any other state. Israel rests legally upon the notion that all British Jews, for example including those who have never set foot outside Britain enjoy more individual and collective rights between the Jordan Valley and the Mediterranean Sea than non-Jewish Palestinians who live in this territory, including those who have never set foot outside of it. That is the case not only vis-à-vis stateless Palestinians in the West Bank ([annexed de facto but not de jure by Israel](#)) but also with regards the Palestinian *citizens* of Israel, who comprise 21% of its population. Demands to correct this state of Israeli legal-political affairs are calls to democratize Israel; they are by no means a form of antisemitism.

Another problem with the IHRA’s uncritical adoption of Israel’s self-indulged “democratic nation” credentials can be illustrated by the fact that both Israeli

Jews and non-Jews enjoy equal legal recourse to migrate to Britain and the US and acquire their citizenship. Yet the same democratic feature is nowhere to be found reciprocally in the case of Israel.

An Israeli Jew who marries a non-Israeli Jew from, say, Alaska, enjoys automatically a legal right to naturalize their spouse in Israel; conversely, a non-Jewish *citizen* of Israel who marries a non-Jew from Ramallah (or Alaska) does not enjoy the same equal right to bring their spouse and naturalize her or him. That also means that British or American non-Jews including Palestinian American Christians, Muslims, seculars, and others [have no viable legal pathway to emigrate](#) to Israel, nor to reunite with their indigenous families there, nor to become citizens in Israel.

Yet British or American Jews automatically have this right whether they like it or not. Israel is thus neither a democracy in the ways that Britain or other liberal democracies are, nor does it embody a national configuration that can, or should, remain above interrogation. Non-Jews in general, and Palestinians in particular, who seek to have rights in Israel equal to those bestowed upon Jews would first need to undergo a successful religious conversion to Judaism.

As is the case in other democracies, British immigration laws do not restrict a priori possible migration to Britain on the basis of religious affiliation alone. It is not too hard to imagine what the response of British democrats (Jews among them) would be if the right to migrate to Britain was reserved to non-Jews alone. Another example is that the combined state of legal, national, and political affairs in Israel easily enables non-Israeli Jews to purchase land in Israel even if they are not citizens. For Israeli citizens who are not Jewish [this is effectively impossible to do](#). The Israeli notion of ascribing different rights to different religious groups of both nationals and non-nationals is absent in liberal democracies because it fatally corrodes the defining notions of civic democracy.

It therefore should come as no surprise that for its non-Jewish citizens, Israel is experienced as a Jewish and *undemocratic* state. Many Jews with democratic convictions subscribe to this view with ease. The attempt by many – chief among them Israeli Jewish and non-Jewish citizens for whom democracy is sacrosanct – to remove such discriminatory and unequal conditions and legislation, and, in doing so, to democratize Israel by bringing it nearer the model of a state that is *for all its citizens* (as Britain and the US are for example) does not constitute

antisemitism.

The IHRA's stipulation that "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination" is a form of antisemitism is thus deceptive. It is on standard democratic grounds not on antisemitic grounds that many oppose the sweeping extra-territorial privilege of non-Israeli Jews to exercise a "national right to self-determination" inside Israel/Palestine that is bestowed upon them at the direct and inevitable expense of the individual and collective rights of non-Jews living in Israel/Palestine.

Let us lastly think of a European or non-European individual who denies "the right to self-determination" to the people of Catalonia, the Basque country, Scotland, Québec, Corsica (or others worldwide). Does this make them by definition racists vis-à-vis the Scots, Catalans, Québécois?

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Source: [Moshe Behar - "The IHRA, Israel, and Antisemitism" \(2021\) - 2021, Contending Modernities](#)

Moshe Behar holds a PhD in Comparative Politics from Columbia University and is Associate Professor and Programme Director, Arabic & Middle Eastern Studies, University of Manchester, UK. His work includes the anthology [Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics and Culture, 1893-1958](#) (Brandeis University Press) and can be further explored [here](#).