

Progressive Christians and Antisemitism: From Arrogance to Ignorance on Israel & Palestine

Full Article

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I am a progressive Christian Mennonite. My husband is Jewish, and my children are both Jewish and Mennonite. We live in a rural area of the US, surrounded by homes and trucks flying Confederate flags. There have been Nazi symbols drawn on the walls of my kids' school bathrooms. That use to be something I could shrug off. But now, antisemitic attacks against Jews increased by 60 percent since 2016. An hour from my house, white nationalists with torches marched in the streets of Charlottesville chanting "[Jews will not replace us](#)" to denounce Jewish social justice goals. And the 2018 massacre at the synagogue in Pittsburgh came after a survey indicating a [fifth of young Americans](#) have never heard of the Holocaust. I have new fears for my family's safety, and I think progressive Christians contribute to a culture of hate against Jews.

Many Western Christians, both conservative and progressive, take an "either/or" approach to Israel and Palestine. Almost everything written about Israel and Palestine is written with this assumption: either you blindly support Israel, or you blindly support Palestinians. Either criticism of Israeli policy toward Palestinians is automatically antisemitic, or there is no antisemitism in pro-Palestinian advocacy. This either/or assumption is wrong.

Some seem to think compassion and listening to all sides is wrong, or somehow morally neutral. They seem to think acknowledging the pain of both sides diminishes the side they favor.

Instead, we need more "both/and" thinking. It is possible to both support Palestinians and to pay attention to antisemitism embedded in thousands of years of Christian culture and theology. It is possible to both criticize Israeli policy and criticize Palestinian and Arab leadership. It is possible to both pay attention to power imbalances and listen to the legitimate grievances of all sides. It is possible to both pay attention to Jewish safety, trauma, and rights, and to Palestinian safety, trauma, and rights.

Opposing Israeli policy against Palestinians is not antisemitic. But all too often, antisemitic themes do accompany criticism of Israeli policy, and progressive Christians too easily dismiss the idea that they participate in antisemitism. Just like racism manifests differently in the south and the north in the US, so too does antisemitism look different among conservative and progressive Christians. Progressive Christians are coming to terms that racism permeates our culture and each one of us. So too must we recognize that antisemitism is pervasive.

Some [progressive Christians](#) demonstrate both arrogance and ignorance by simultaneously insisting that they are not antisemitic without awareness of their own blind spots. As a

progressive Christian whose eyes were once blind, this article details the antisemitism I now see amongst my own people.

This article begins by describing five blind spots most Christians have of Jews and Jewish history and perspectives. It then identifies ten ways that progressive Christians contribute to antisemitism. This list draws on interviews and lectures by a wide variety of Jewish activists, scholars, and rabbis that I gathered over a three month period of living in Israel and Palestine in 2017. To contextualize the list, there is an introduction to my own background, antisemitism, and the gaps in understanding within three broad approaches to Israel and Palestine found within Western Christianity as expressed in North America and Europe: Christian Zionism, Islamophobia, and progressive Christianity.

My Background

Over the last year, I have written [a number of articles about Christian antisemitism](#). Mennonites have had strong responses to me. Some have called for Mennonite institutions to cancel my classes on any subject and banning everything I've ever written. Some have written sexist hate mail, cursed at me in misogynist online rants, and told me to "shut up." Some Mennonite pastors denounced me arguing that antisemitism is not an important problem for the church to address. Some think that I'm simply raising concerns about antisemitism because I am Islamophobic or have a secret agenda against Palestinians. Some argue I'm just being used by Zionists and advocating for some kind of naïve "immoral middle" that ignores injustice. Several Mennonites reported me to Mennonite administrators, as if raising concerns about antisemitism itself was a crime. For some reason, it is taboo for progressive Christians to talk about antisemitism.

Because of this very personal history, it is important to put this article in context of my background. As a Mennonite, I have participated in and led advocacy for Palestinian rights for over thirty years. I openly oppose Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the siege in Gaza, and the treatment of Palestinian citizens of Israel as second-class citizens. I believe in the right of return and/or restitution for Palestinian refugees, and in taking down the separation wall. I work toward a shared future where both Jews and Palestinians have equal rights and freedom of movement. I have worked and travelled all over the Middle East and Central Asia working primarily with Muslims. I advocated for Palestinian rights at small White House consultations on the Middle East peace process under the Obama Administration, I oversaw an Israel-Palestine Congressional Briefing Series for two years to bring Palestinian and Israeli leaders to Congress, and I have challenged Israeli policies on CNN and Fox News. I have dozens of Palestinian friends that I talk to regularly.

But I am deeply critical of the ways progressive Christians, particularly Mennonites, Quakers, United Church of Christ, and Presbyterians, relate to Jews and Israel.

My church institutions did well in teaching me about racism, colonialism, and Palestinian rights. I heard dozens of sermons and talks on Palestinian rights. But I have never heard a sermon on antisemitism, I was never taught the history of two thousand years of Christian persecution of Jews, and I learned next to nothing about Judaism in church institutions. Then I learned Mennonite church leaders suppressed [the history](#) of significant [Mennonite participation in the](#)

[Holocaust](#) and how Mennonite humanitarian groups rescued Russian Mennonites who had allied themselves with Nazis. Some of those Mennonites went on to [publish antisemitic newspapers](#) in the US and Canada, and wrote [the White Man's Bible](#), the foundational religious tract for white supremacy in the US.

Some Mennonites cite the trauma Russian Mennonites suffered under the Red Army as justification for their cooperation with Nazis, who were seen as saving them from Russian violence. This is ironic given some Mennonites express little sympathy for and leave out the story of Jewish history and trauma when they discuss Palestinian suffering.

Mennonites participated and supported antisemitism prior to and during WWII. And then Mennonites moved directly into helping Palestinian refugees and denouncing Israel without any concerted effort to help Jewish refugees or address systemic antisemitism in the church. Why had so many Mennonite leaders suppressed this history over the last decades? Why hadn't they apologized to Jewish leaders?

Ten years ago, a Jewish friend charged me with antisemitism. I took her seriously. I thought about it. I came back to her and said "I really don't remember ever saying anything that is antisemitic. I don't remember hearing anything antisemitic growing up. I only remember hearing positive references to Jews." I was genuinely confused by her critique. She recalled her experience at the university where I taught which hosted dozens of students from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Israel during the 1990s and 2000s. Many of the Jewish and Israeli students expressed their dismay that many of the Arab students would not talk to them, and that faculty and staff seemed to ignore the isolation of Jewish students.

A Jewish rabbi who spoke on campus was called out by the president of the university to account for Israeli policy toward Palestinians, as if all Jews automatically are responsible for the Israeli government. After my department sent out a letter to all alumni expressing concern about the Israeli violence in Gaza in 2009 and 2014, my Jewish friend inquired why the only mass emails my department ever sent out had to do with denouncing and singling out Israeli aggression. Over the years, I realized most of my Jewish colleagues expressed dismay about antisemitism, racism, sexism, sexual abuse and other issues among Mennonites and wondered when Mennonites would start to come to terms with their own problems instead of focusing much of their attention on the problems with Israeli society.

When I had the opportunity to lead a group of college students to Israel and Palestine in 2017, I took the opportunity to learn more about antisemitism as well as the Palestinian BDS movement. In a 3-month block of time, my husband and I arranged to spend 6 weeks with Jews and 6 weeks with Palestinians. In Palestine, we learned about Palestinian history, culture, and experience of being second-class citizens in Israel and the occupation of the West Bank, and the siege on Gaza. In Israel, we learned about Jewish history, culture, religion, and spent two weeks studying Christian antisemitism with a variety of Jewish teachers and with the [Bat Kol Institute for Jewish Studies for Christians](#).

We saw firsthand the humiliating border checkpoints and treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank and heard directly about the life threatening and desperate conditions in Gaza. We also

began to more fully understand Jewish concerns about antisemitism and how it affects progressive Christians in our understanding of Israel and Palestine.

Before this trip I had never been exposed to training on antisemitism. As a Mennonite, I had the opportunity to take dozens of trainings on racism, classism, Islamophobia, sexual abuse, and sexism. I have heard more than two dozen sermons and church presentations on the plight of Palestinians. But I have never heard a sermon on the history of Christian persecution of Jews. The church colleges I attended taught me to analyze white superiority narratives, identify white privilege, catch myself with white fragility, and recognize I have been raised in a racist society and will always need to challenge racist assumptions within me. Why would Mennonites be opposed to waking up to the antisemitism embedded in two thousand years of Christianity?

When white supremacists make threats toward Jews, they are talking about my family. When conservative Christians assert a Christian Zionism in which the end times bring about the death of all Jews, they are talking about my family. And when progressive Christians use narratives that exclusively talk about Israel and Jews in a negative light, they threaten my family too.

Three Western Christian Approaches to Israel and Palestine

There are three main categories for how Western Christians approach Israel and Palestine:

Christian Zionism, Islamophobia, and Progressive Palestinian support. On both the left and the right, there is a lack of understanding of Jewish perspectives, Judaism, Islam, and the Muslim world. Western Christians often do harm with all three approaches in how they relate to Israel, Palestinians and the wider Muslim world.

Christian Zionism is the belief that Jews must control the Holy Land in accordance with Biblical prophecy to bring about Jesus' return. Fundamentalist and Conservative Christians tend to support the idea of Christian Zionism, which offers blanket support to Israel and either ignores or denounces Palestinians' claim to the land. This has been particularly hurtful to Palestinian Christians. Christian Zionists tend to support Israel as a Jewish state as a necessary step in Jesus' return. Many Christian Zionists believe Jews must exist in Israel up until the day they will all be killed in the final days before Jesus returns, unless they convert to Christianity. This, of course, is antisemitic.

Islamophobia is prejudice against Muslims. In general, Christians have little understanding of Islam, misunderstand the core teachings of Islam, and are afraid of Muslims. Most Palestinians are Muslim and experience the impacts of Islamophobia from Western Christians. The Western media's portrayal of Muslims and Islam as prone to terrorism has been particularly biased in contrast to their treatment of white nationalists in Europe and the US. Western Christian Islamophobia is an obstacle to understanding Palestinians and the wider Muslim world.

Progressive Christians articulate social justice as a core ethic. Progressives give attention to racism, sexism, sexual abuse and strongly side with Palestinians in denouncing the Israeli siege in Gaza and occupation of the West Bank. The problem of progressive Christians is not in our care and concern for Palestinians, but what we do *not* say about Judaism, Jewish history, and

Israel. Some progressive Christians simply dismiss all critique of antisemitism as being a justification of Israeli policy assuming that antisemitism is a politically charged excuse or defense by those who want total, blind support for Israeli policy.

All three Western Christian narratives are obstacles to a just peace in Israel and Palestine. All of them contain shades of white supremacy, a belief that white Christians are inherently superior and “chosen” over others. None of these three approaches account for the role of Western Christians in persecuting both Muslims and Jews. This article focuses on the third category, progressive Christians, which is a much smaller group. Progressive Christians like to think they are supporting peace and justice. But the progressive Christian approach to Israel and Palestine slows progress toward a just solution for Palestinians and is blind in its own way.

While this article focuses on progressive Christians, there are five gaps found amongst conservative and progressive forms of Christianity.

5 Gaps in Christian Understanding

1. Most Christians lack understanding of Judaism

Most Christians do not teach that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. They do not teach about Judaism, which was Jesus’ religion. They do not analyze the political and cultural factors that help explain why early followers of Jesus separated from Judaism, even though Jesus was a devout Jew. Today many Christians embrace [supersessionist or “replacement theology”](#) which asserts that Christians replaced Jews in terms of their relationship with God. There is relatively little Jewish-Christian dialogue either on theology, or on understandings of Zionism and Israel. Progressive Christians are no different from Conservative or Fundamentalist Christians in terms of their lack of engagement with or understanding of Judaism.

1. Most Christians lack awareness of Christian antisemitism

Few churches give sermons or offer training on antisemitism, or provide resources such as this training guide on [“Understanding Antisemitism” written by Jew for Economic and Racial Justice](#). Most Christians do not understand the role of the church in two thousand years of violence toward Jews. Many Christians still wrongly blame Jewish leaders, not the Romans, for killing Jesus. Christians are widely ignorant about how the Christian church persecuted Jews for centuries through refusing citizenship, imposing special taxes, forcing Jews to live in ghettos, forcing Jews to convert to Christianity, and carrying out the Inquisition and pogroms. Few Christians recognize the way wealthy Christians scapegoated Jews through centuries of mythology. Few Christians acknowledge that Hitler drew on Church traditions and Christian theology in designing the Holocaust. [The Holocaust killed between 6 and 20 million](#) Jews along with Roma, LGBTQ and disabled people.

Many Christian denominations took part in the Holocaust, either by their active support for Nazis, or their quiet complicity. For decades before the Holocaust, some Mennonites participated in racial science. German scientists measured Mennonite noses and foreheads and used church records to prove Mennonites were the purest Aryan race, the “anti-Jew.” Some Mennonite

theologians argued that Hitler was God's messenger on earth, bringing about God's kingdom. Some Mennonites build barracks at concentration camps, used Jewish slave labor, and took the belongings and homes of Jews forced to flee or who were taken away. Some Mennonites worked directly for the Nazis, administering and carrying out executions in the Ukraine, where Mennonites viewed Nazis as saviors from Russian persecution. The Mennonite humanitarian and development agency MCC argued to the United Nations, that Mennonites, like Jews, were an ethnic group that deserved its own nation. Some Mennonite Nazis were given Mennonite passports to deceive immigration agents, who might have sent them back to the Ukraine and certain death. These Mennonite refugees settled in Canada, Paraguay, and elsewhere. Some of these Mennonites continued to spread their Nazi beliefs, including publishing antisemitic newspapers and tracks supporting white supremacy. This is shocking to me, as these details were not included in any of the Mennonite history books or courses I took growing up. And what is more shocking yet is that Mennonite leaders in the US and Canada have deliberately tried to cover up this history and to this date have failed to apologize or be accountable for this history.

The scale of persecution against Jews is distinct in terms of the length of time it has existed, the geographic scope of persecution, and the level of killing of Jews. No other group in human history has faced this amount of trauma.

1. Most Christians lack robust relationships with Jewish organizations

A few high-level forums for Christian-Jewish dialogue do exist. Following the Holocaust, the Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations repented of antisemitic theology and practice in the church and made important public statements. And at the local level, there are some examples of Jewish-Christian dialogue and coordination in helping refugees and other social justice work. But far and wide, most average Christians in Western countries have almost no awareness of Jewish organizations, or Jewish social justice work. They also don't know how Jewish people think about the last two thousand years of Christian persecution of Jews or about Israel today.

Some progressive Christians make lists of acceptable progressive Jewish groups based solely on their stance on whether they support Palestinians *and* oppose the existence of the state of Israel. Progressive Christians seem to value Jewish groups like Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) only when they can be used to help the Palestinian cause. Progressive Christians blatantly take a tokenistic approach, bringing out their Jewish friends from JVP to say "see, I can't possibly be antisemitic because I have this Jewish friend." But strangely, progressive Christians rarely seem to engage with anti-occupation Jewish peace groups that also support Jewish self-determination, are far more connected with mainstream Judaism, and simultaneously support Palestinian rights and Jewish rights.

1. Both conservative and progressive Christians listen primarily to one side: Palestinians OR Jewish Israelis, and not BOTH.

Conservative Christians travel to Israel and Palestine to see the "Holy Land" without ever encountering Palestinians and hearing only a simplistic pro-Israel narrative that affirms Christian Zionism. But progressive Christians who travel to Israel and Palestine and primarily or only

listen to Palestinian narratives also emerge with simplistic narrative that demonizes Jews, only seeing the Palestinian point of view. Some progressive Christians argue it is not necessary to listen to Jewish voices, equating listening to Jews as condoning Israeli policy toward Palestinians. Some progressives do visit with some Jewish Israelis, but they often only meet with extremist Jewish settlers who reinforce an enemy image, or with Israeli peaceniks working against occupation. Neither is representative of mainstream Judaism. And sometimes progressive Christians seem to visit a token Jewish representative only to fend off criticisms of antisemitism, rather than engaging in earnest dialogue with diverse Jewish voices and an agenda to understand, for example Jews who fled persecution in Arab countries to come to Israel. These Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews make up over half of the population of Israel. Yet many progressive Christians routinely use a narrative emphasizing the white European Ashkenazi Jews who are viewed in progressive Christian materials as “settler colonialists” rather than refugees or Jews with a legitimate tie to the land.

1. **Some progressive Christian church agencies work primarily with Palestinians, with far less contact with Jewish Israelis.**

Quakers, Mennonites and Presbyterian mission and service agencies have all worked with Palestinian refugees and Palestinian Christians since 1948. This is important and necessary work. However, the building of extensive relationships in Palestine has not been accompanied by the same robust effort to understand Jewish points of view, or to establish relationships with Jewish organizations. For example, Mennonites have been active in Palestine in the following four areas:

1. *Humanitarian aid and development programming* to support Palestinians.
2. *Justice advocacy programming* related primarily to Palestinian liberation.
3. *Learning tours* to expose Mennonites primarily to Christian Palestinian suffering and biblical historical sites.
4. *Evangelical programming* related to missionizing with the aim of conversion of Jews or Muslims to Christianity.

While Mennonite work includes some collaboration with Jewish organizations, this is mostly to support Palestinian humanitarian aid or liberation, rather than to understand Judaism, antisemitism or Israeli society in its own right.

Antisemitism and Trauma

These five gaps among progressive and conservative Christians creates a foundation upon which antisemitism can thrive in a variety of manifestations.

Antisemitism is the irrational fear of, hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group. Antisemitism precedes modern notions of race and racism. Like other “isms” it involves a projection of negative characteristics onto one group of people. Antisemitism, racism and Islamophobia all come from the same source: the ideology of white supremacy.

Antisemitism, like racism and sexism, can create a sense of trauma for those experiencing it. A *trauma* is an emotional wound that produces feelings of fear, anxiety, lack of control, and a sense of threat to one's identity or life. A *trauma trigger* is something that is said or done that stimulates a response based on an earlier trauma. When people experience trauma, it impacts their ability to respond. It often causes a defensive reaction rather than an openness or willingness to learn from others. *Trauma sensitivity* is an approach that recognizes the significant impact that trauma has on the way an individual and a society thinks and behaves and attempts to avoid stimulating the fear and anxiety based on past trauma. A *trauma-informed approach* anticipates trauma triggers and attempts to relieve the fear or anxiety based on past trauma by affirming a group's safety and identity.

When Jewish people hear Christians – or any group - disregarding Jewish lives, trauma, and safety concerns; speaking in exclusively negative terms about Israel and Jews; accusing Jews of fabricating religious ties to the land; or focusing only or mostly on Israel's wrongdoing or obstacles to peace while ignoring other states' records on human rights, many view these narratives as antisemitic.

It is unfair to assume all critique of Israeli policy is antisemitic. It is also unfair to assume that there is no antisemitism in critique of Israel. Many Jews describe the difference between legitimate criticism of Israeli policy, and antisemitic attacks on Jews. For example, Rabbi Jill Jacobs, the executive director of T'ruah, a Jewish organization dedicated to protecting human rights in the US, in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territories explains how to support Palestinian rights without slipping into antisemitism in her important article [How to tell when criticism of Israel is actually anti-Semitism](#).

The 3D test of antisemitism distinguishes legitimate [criticism of Israel](#) from [antisemitism](#) with a framework published in the *Jewish Political Studies Review* in 2004.^[4] The three Ds stand for:

- **Delegitimization** of Israel and the right to self-determination by offering little or no acknowledgement of Jewish history, suffering, trauma or connection with Biblical lands and posing Israel strictly as a “settler colonial” project where white Europeans came voluntarily to take Indigenous land rather than as refugees and people escaping persecution. Delegitimization also occurs when groups support Palestinian self-determination and statehood but refuse to formally recognize the State of Israel or disavow Jewish rights to self-determination.
- **Demonization** of Israel by using stereotypes of Jews such as the idea of a “Jewish conspiracy” to control the media, economy, or the world; the common use of the term “Jewing” to describe taking advantage of others financially; presenting Jews exclusively as oppressors, not as victims, while presenting Palestinians and other Arabs exclusively as victims, not ever as oppressors. Demonization of Israel also relates to failing to acknowledge Christian, Arab or Muslim persecution of other Muslims, Palestinians, Jews, or Israel. Christians and Muslims have killed about 100 times more Muslims than have Jews in Israel.

- **Using Double standards** to judge Israeli actions, without explanation on the criteria of why progressive Christians pass resolutions and set up committees devoted to denouncing Israeli wrongdoing and Jewish settler aggression against Palestinians when no such resolutions or committees are formed on other humanitarian crises and conflicts such as those in Yemen, the DRC, Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan. It also describes the frustration that [Palestinian leaders' both sanction and reward families of those who kill Jewish Israelis](#). And other Arab countries have also killed and persecuted Palestinians. For example, [4000 Palestinians were killed by Syria in the last few years](#), Lebanon was the site of a massacre of Palestinians, Egypt denies entrance to people from Gaza, and Jordan took over the land set aside for Palestine prior to 1967.

In reviewing Christian narratives about Jews and Israel, it is important to keep these understandings of antisemitism and trauma triggers in mind.

Dealing with Over-Use of Antisemitism Charges and Power Imbalances

Several factors contribute to a progressive culture that dismisses antisemitism charges.

First, the [overuse and abuse of antisemitism](#) to critique any support for Palestinians is wrong and creates a dynamic where some dismiss the whole concept of antisemitism. Caring for Palestinian rights is not antisemitic. These false accusations are an obstacle to a just peace.

Second, some dismiss the concept of antisemitism because they view Jews in North America as “white” and benefitting from the powerful system of white supremacy. [Jews are not all “white.”](#) Most Jews are of Mizrahi and Sephardic origin from Africa and the Middle East. Less than half the Jews in Israel are of European Ashkenazi origin. In North America, some Jews may be treated as part of the white majority. But both white Jews and Jews of color are also treated as non-whites. In some places, Jews are treated similarly to other minority groups like African American, Latino or Asian.

Both the left and the right hold [false narratives of Jewish power](#). Most wealthy people in the US and the world are Christian. A small percentage of Jews compose a small minority of wealthy people. Christians control most of the world’s major media and political outlets. Yet Christians and the mythology of white supremacy use antisemitic tropes to scapegoat Jews for economic, political and social problems. Antisemitism has a long complex history. It is important to recognize how the [ideology of white supremacy uses antisemitism to scapegoat and divide social justice movements](#).

Those who dismiss antisemitism often neglect to understand Jewish persecution in the US, and [Jewish social justice leadership to support multiculturalism, immigration, and civil rights](#). Most Christians don’t understand how [antisemitism preceded and justifies racism toward people of color](#) today. And few understand that white nationalists target Jews specifically because they view Jews as a race that orchestrates multiculturalism and democracy, the values they oppose. White nationalists in the US blame Jews for all the multiculturalism, human rights, and democracy that they hate, as detailed by African American activist Erik Ward in his article on how [antisemitism animates white nationalism](#).

And third, some dismiss the concept antisemitism because they simply do not understand the history of antisemitism and lack an awareness of Jewish analysis and discussion on these issues. Just like racism and sexism manifests in many different ways, antisemitism also includes [microaggressions](#) which are more subtle verbal and nonverbal snubs and insults against a group of people. The shades of antisemitism among progressive Christians are often microaggressions that are difficult for people to see because they have not had the opportunity to study the history of antisemitism and develop a sensitivity to the patterns of its oppression. It is important for all people, especially progressive Christians, to correct their ignorance of the history of antisemitism. Jews for Social and Economic Justice have published a resource guide on “[Understanding Antisemitism](#)” that provides an important foundation for this study.

Ten Shades of Antisemitism in Progressive Christian Rhetoric on Israel & Palestine

With this background in mind, there are ten ways that progressive Christians contribute to antisemitism as they talk about Israel and Palestine.

1. Some Progressive Christians pay little attention to Jewish history and trauma.

Progressive Christians writing about Israel and Palestine often devote only a sentence or two to Jewish history and offer little to no information about refugees from the Holocaust or the pogroms, or the threats toward Jews in surrounding Arab countries. See for example the [Mennonite Palestine Israel Network](#) or the [Quaker Palestine Israel Network](#). Both networks are run by advisory groups with extensive Palestinian connections. At least with MennoPin, the advisory team members list little or no Jewish connections. But given that the Holocaust took place just before the Nakba, it is difficult to understand the lack of attention by Christians to nearly two thousand years of Christian persecution of Jews.

Progressive Christians tend to focus on the Jewish violence toward Palestinians, but not the Christian and Muslim violence toward Jews that preceded it or that continues today. Books, videos, and websites by Mennonites, Quakers and Presbyterians, for example, devote most of the time and space talking about Palestinian refugees and Palestinian trauma from occupation and the Gaza siege.

These are helpful resources to counter the mainstream media’s neglect of Palestinian history and provide important information about Palestinians. But by obscuring, misportraying and ignoring Jewish history and perspectives, these resources are obstacles to the goal of a just peace.

It is important to understand that there were strong colonial aspects to Zionism and the creation of Israel, and that the Jewish settlements today continue in this tradition of settler colonialism. Israelis have wrongly attempted to delegitimize Palestinian history and justify removal of Palestinians by insisting there were very few people living in Palestine. But when progressive Christians speak of Jews living in Israel as *only* colonialists, this is a way of silencing their history of dispossession of their homes and land in Europe and other Muslim countries, or their valid connection to the land to which they prayed for return every year during Passover. Erasing the history of either Jews or Palestinians as wrong. All have a legitimate history of connection to the land, and story of dispossession and trauma.

Progressive Christian resources and web pages often lament the 700,000 Palestinians who lost their home in the Nakba, but often do not mention the 800,000 Jews who fled their homes in surrounding Arab countries. Many progressive Christians know about the terrible Israeli massacre at Deir Yassin of Palestinians. But few progressive Christians know Jewish stories of massacres from Arab forces. Kibbutz Yad Mordechai was settled by the children who survived the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in Poland. They were refugees seeking safety. When Egyptian tanks began shooting cannons into their community in 1948, those early Zionists were viewing their fight for survival against a world that hated Jews, not as colonialists fighting against Indigenous people.

While trauma does not justify violence, it does help to understand it. Progressive Christians show compassion for Palestinian trauma and understand Palestinian violence as part of a larger cycle of violence. Some Israelis view this as justifying terrorism. Yet progressives rarely acknowledge Jewish trauma or seek to understand Israeli policy within a broader cycle of violence. Some progressives dismiss or belittle Jewish trauma. I cannot count how many times I have heard a Mennonite or Quaker speaker on Palestine openly dismiss Jewish trauma and concerns for safety. This is deeply offensive. And this is a double standard, as Palestinians are often portrayed as completely innocent, and their violence is seen as justified and understandable, while Israeli violence is seen as unjustifiable.

Some argue that when Western Christians “wring their hands with guilt over the Holocaust” this is simply a way of justifying Israeli aggression or distracting from the Palestinian cause. I can understand why Palestinians are tired of hearing about the Holocaust. They were not responsible for it, and they have suffered immensely because of it. Some Palestinians feel angry that Western guilt over the Holocaust seems to “tie the hands” of Christians to do something about the suffering of Palestinians today. Their frustration is justified. Western Christians should care about Palestinians as part of a wider social justice ethic. But attempting to support Palestinian rights by ignoring Jewish trauma and safety is counterproductive and antisemitic.

Some Palestinians have gone on tours of the concentration camps in Europe. They have listened to Holocaust survivors. They have a greater understanding of the Holocaust, the pogroms, the Inquisition, and the centuries of persecution against Jews. These Palestinians recognize that acknowledging Jewish trauma is not a distraction from finding justice for Palestinians. *Trauma sensitivity is an essential part of the solution.*

2. Some Progressive Christians ignore Jewish points of view on Israel and Zionism.

Zionism means different things to different people. To many Jews, Zionism is simply the right for Jews to self-determination and safety after millennia of persecution. But to most Palestinians, the term Zionism is equated with the forced dispossession and military occupation of Palestine. While there are certainly many Jews who believe that Jewish self-determination requires militarily controlling all of the land of Palestine, there are many who do not.

Conflating the term Zionism with military occupation obscures possibilities for a just peace. For many Jews, Jewish self-determination can coexist with Palestinian self-determination and Zionism is not incompatible with Palestinian rights. Anti-occupation Jewish groups like [J Street](#),

[Americans for Peace Now](#), [If Not Now](#), [Breaking the Silence](#), and [Gush Shalom](#) articulate this vision, but progressive Christians rarely cite these groups. Jewish religious leaders debate definitions of Zionism, with some leaders arguing against military domination by saying “[the land does not belong to Jews, but rather Jews belong to the land.](#)” The possibility of a shared vision for a shared future are undermined by simplistic and dismissive definitions of Zionism.

Too often progressive Christians fail to understand and acknowledge Jewish views on Zionism. For example, in the Presbyterian Church’s Israel/Palestine Mission Network, their publication “[Zionism Unsettled](#)” equates Zionism with military oppression of Palestinians. The diversity of Jewish views on Zionism are ignored, silenced or dismissed. Jewish leaders widely condemned the Presbyterian Church’s publication of the document, and it was removed from the main church’s website. One Jewish leader said this about the Presbyterian effort, “they had no intention of encouraging thoughtful reflection on Zionism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or Jewish perspectives on Israel. Instead, reductive and divisive thinking of this kind exacerbates polarization and intolerance, both of which are not in short supply in this conflict.”

3. Some Progressive Christians tend to place all the blame on Israel, while ignoring Palestinian and other countries’ contributions to the conflict.

Many progressive Christians appear to believe that Israel holds all the blame for the current situation. Palestinian and other Arab leaders are often portrayed as victims. There is little awareness of massacres and threats from Arab countries toward Israel, or corruption within Palestinian leadership. And there is little acknowledgment of Palestinian suffering and massacres in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria carried out by Christian and Muslim groups. In the last several years, the Syrian government has killed nearly 4000 Palestinians in Syria. But attacks on Palestinians by Arab countries rarely receive public condemnation. Quakers and Mennonites did not mention these massacres on their advocacy websites. Why not? Are these websites concerned about Palestinian well-being only when Jews are perpetrating violence? In 2014, over 1,700 rabbis sent [an open letter to the Presbyterian Church](#) stating that “placing all the blame on one party, when both bear responsibility, increases conflict and division instead of promoting peace.”

4. Some Progressive Christians use Israel as a placeholder for the concept of evil.

Progressive Christians make almost no positive statements about Israel, or the meaning of Israel to Jews. The [Mennonite Palestine Israel Network](#) and the [Quaker Palestine Israel Network](#) are only about “Israel” in a negative sense; in denouncing Israeli policy. There is nothing positive said about Jews or Israel anywhere on these websites. And in the [Presbyterian and Mennonite Study Guide on Kairos Palestine](#), Jews are exclusively portrayed negatively.

Progressive Christians argue that they are only criticizing the state, not the Jewish people. But in practice, some progressives hold any Jew accountable for Israeli policies, as if they themselves are responsible for the policy. Most Jews view Israel as a symbol of their collective identity, but that does not mean they agree with all Israeli policies. When progressives portray Israel as only a colonial, oppressive power, with no mention of the accomplishments and complexity of Israeli society, this is dehumanizing. Too often progressive Christians detail the rich beauty of Palestinian culture and society, but there is no mention of Israeli culture and society and no

mention of Israeli innovations in humanitarian aid, green energy or desalination. In my experience in public settings with Quakers, Presbyterians and Mennonites, any positive statement about Israel is quickly countered by someone in the audience condemning Israeli policy toward Palestinians. For many progressives, Israel is equated in its entirety with occupation and oppression of Palestinians. The term “Israel” is used only as a placeholder for the concept of evil. This is dehumanizing and also a double standard. While the US military is also occupying several countries, progressive Christians continue to engage with positive aspects of US society and culture and do not boycott or condemn the US in its entirety.

5. Some Progressive Christians draw on antisemitic tropes when talking about Israel.

Many progressive Christians recognize that racism is part of our culture and that it shapes our lives and interactions every day. Racism is not simply manifested in slavery, lynchings, or explicit name-calling demeaning the humanity of people of color. Racism often manifests in [microaggressions](#) that unintentionally demean and dehumanize a group of people. But recognizing the sophisticated and subtle manifestations of racism among Western progressive Christians has not yet come to our understanding of antisemitism.

Some progressives dismiss antisemitism because they point to Jews in positions of privilege. A minority of German Jews in Nazi Germany were wealthy. Most of the small Jewish population in Germany was middle class. Wealth has never exempted Jews from persecution. And half of all Jews in Israel today are people of color, coming not from Europe but the Arab and Muslim world where many lost their homes and businesses to persecution.

Progressives lacking education and sensitivity to antisemitism also unwittingly use antisemitic tropes. For example, newly elected progressive Congresswoman Ilhan Omar tweeted in 2012 that Israel had [“hypnotized” the world](#). (She later [apologized](#) for this.) Unfortunately, I’ve also heard progressive Christians make these types of statements, alluding to some illusive Jewish scheming plot. Jewish author Bari Weiss notes that such statements are often made innocently, with confusion as to why Jewish readers would interpret this statement as part of a historic antisemitic portrayal of Jews. But she writes that [“The conspiracy theory of the Jew as the hypnotic conspirator, the duplicitous manipulator, the sinister puppeteer is one with ancient roots and a bloody history.”](#) She points out that there was no “hypnosis” at all. In fact, there was wide denouncement of Israel’s attack on Gaza in 2012 both in the news media and at the United Nations. Many Jewish organizations point out that [the UN has focused on Israel more than any other country](#). Given the relatively low number of casualties in Israel and Palestine (approximately 100,000 over 100 years) given the vast human rights violations and much larger death tolls in other countries, this is difficult to understand.

Other progressive Christians use antisemitic tropes that implicate Jews in killing Jesus. Some [Jews point to the annual “Christ at the Checkpoint”](#) conference that poses Palestinians as symbols of Jesus, persecuted by Jewish soldiers at the checkpoint. Palestinians do suffer at checkpoints. And Israeli policy often seems intentionally to humiliate and traumatize Palestinians trying to get to work or to see their families on the other side of the separation wall. But it is possible to both speak for justice for Palestinian rights and freedoms without relying on

antisemitic tropes that seem to suggest again that Jews killed Jesus, or that deny that Jesus was Jewish.

In order to avoid stumbling into antisemitic themes, progressive Christians need to learn about the history of antisemitism, and to recognize that clumsy and offensive narratives that trigger historic trauma are counterproductive. Again, the “[Understanding Antisemitism](#)” resource is an important resource for progressive Christians. Instead of prompting change and reflection, they prompt defensiveness and build even greater walls to the progressive Christians who appear to threaten Jewish lives and dignity.

6. Some Progressive Christians dismiss Jewish concerns for safety.

Some progressive Christians seem to dismiss Jewish security concerns. Some suggest Israel has such overwhelming military power that they should have no real security fears. Progressive Christians rarely address Iranian, Hezbollah, or Hamas threats to destroy Israel, even though these threats are real and significant. The rockets from Gaza and Lebanon into Israeli territory are fairly regular. While Israel’s military may indeed be strong in comparison to these threats, that is not a reason to suggest Jewish people in Israel should not be fearful. Even if there were no current security concerns, Jewish history makes it understandable that Jews would carry lingering fears that others would seek their destruction again. Jewish people often note that the absence of addressing threats to Jews, particularly in progressive Christian websites and programs, is viewed as part of a much longer history of Christian persecution of Jews.

7. Some Progressive Christians apply a double standard to the ethic of enemy love

There is a popular children’s story among progressive Christians, one of Aesop’s Fables, called [The Sun and the Wind](#). The sun and the wind compete to see which one is most powerful. They have a competition to see which one can make a man walking alone take his coat off. The wind howls and beats the man, but this only makes the man pull his coat tighter around him. The sun shines its warmth on the man, and the man takes off his coat in the heat. The sun wins the competition.

Like this ancient fable, progressive Christians have been vocal supporters of Jesus’ unpopular message of the power of love to transform. Jesus taught to love enemies and those with whom we disagree. In “[God’s Security Strategy](#)” loving enemies is both moral and strategic; it is an effective way to bring about change. In Vietnam, Afghanistan, Rwanda, North and South Korea and many other major conflict, Mennonites and Quaker peacemaking efforts are in contact with all sides of the conflict and make a concerted effort to reach out to the side portrayed as the “enemy,” to understand them so that they can work for a just peace. When Mennonites and Quakers hosted former Iranian president Ahmadinejad for dinner after the UN General Assembly, some touted it as an expression of enemy love. Jewish leaders widely condemned the legitimacy such a meeting conveyed on a leader who has openly expressed Holocaust denial and genocidal threats against the Jewish state, and have taken note that these [Christians boycott Israel while hosting Iranian leaders for dinner](#).

The ethic of enemy love and dialogue with those we disagree with does not seem to apply to Jews and Israelis. Some Mennonites refuse to form relationships with Jews or even have an honest dialogue with Jews. They justify not talking to Jewish Israelis because it might appear to normalize Israeli policy toward Palestinians. Why is there a double standard in applying this ethic to Iran and Israel. Why does dining with Ahmadinejad not normalize persecution of women and minorities in Iran or its threats to Israel?

I work in the field of peacebuilding, where our professional ethics compel us to listen to all sides of a conflict. This stems from Jesus teaching to love enemies, for there may be no clearer way to love enemies than to listen to them and seek to understand. Yet when I wrote a blog on how I was personally transformed by listening to hundreds of Jewish Israelis, some progressive Mennonites began calling for a boycott against me. They argued that the university could not ask them to read a book by me, since anything I wrote was polluted with my willingness to listen to Jews, which they saw as normalizing Israeli policy.

Some of the dialogue programs between Israelis and Palestinians has been rightly criticized for not leading to structural changes. And many Palestinians and their progressive Christian supporters now participate in a boycott of any Israeli-Palestinian dialogue as part of what is known as the “[Anti-Normalization Movement](#).” [Some in the Anti-Normalization Movement have threatened and used violence against Palestinians](#) involved even in social change-oriented dialogue with Jews.

Dialogue is an important element in acknowledging the humanity of others.

1. In dialogue, we learn about how others see the world. This offers new information and an ability to analyze the situation from multiple points of view.
2. In dialogue, we have a chance to tell others how their actions impact us. This leads to changes, at least at the personal level.
3. In dialogue, people build relationships. When there is a crisis, people who know each other can communicate with each other. These gestures of humanity are important, particularly when all sides are dehumanizing others.

Even if dialogue is not the single solution to the problem, [it is part of the solution](#). Identifying its limitations and problems is essential. Suggesting it is only a tool of oppression is foolish. Any path to justice and peace will [include dialogue as part of the solution](#). There is no example of social change happening without channels of dialogue between the various sides.

8. **Some progressive Christians state that boycott, divestment, and sanction (BDS) of Israel is the main way Western Christians should relate to Jews.**

The Kairos Palestine document by Palestinian Christians calls for Western Christians to offer “loving and nonviolent resistance” to Jewish Israelis in the form of [BDS: The Boycott, Divestment and Sanction of Israel](#). The three stated goals of BDS include ending occupation, removing the wall, and allowing return of refugees. Most Palestinians view BDS as a legitimate, nonviolent form of struggle against oppression necessary to force Israel and its supporters to respect Palestinian human rights. There are good reasons to support BDS given that there is no

peace process, no hope for a political settlement, Israeli occupation of the West Bank has been expanding, the siege in Gaza is worsening, and 160 Palestinian organizations are calling for support for BDS. But in my article outlining the [Pros and Cons of BDS](#), I analyze the many problems and critiques of BDS. Many Jews can agree with the goals of ending the occupation and siege and many even support a boycott of settlements in the West Bank. The Jewish peace group Gush Shalom began the first boycott of the settlements. However, progressive Christians have been unwilling to hear and grapple with [Jewish responses and concerns to BDS](#).

First, progressive Christians have not responded to anti-occupation Jewish groups that oppose BDS because it does not affirm a shared future. Most Jews view BDS as a call to destroy the state of Israel and to remove Jews. They point to [language on the BDS website](#) that paints all of Israel as settler colonialism, not just the settlements in the West Bank. This is seen as delegitimizing any Jewish presence in the region, painting all Jews as white colonialists rather than as refugees or survivors and ignoring the Mizrahi and Sephardic majority in Israel with Middle Eastern and African origins. They also point to language demanding a return of all Palestinian refugees, even though research suggests many would prefer [restitution](#) and not return, reducing Jewish fears of a demographic threat. Some Palestinian leaders and founders of BDS, such as [Omar Barghouti insist that BDS does not aim to destroy the Israeli state](#). ([Barghouti 2011](#), 16). But there are [other statements on record](#) that BDS supporters do want to destroy the state of Israel. Anti-occupation Jewish groups have pressed BDS leaders to clarify their intent of BDS.

The [Jewish peace group J Street](#) that has supported calls for a Palestinian state and an end to occupation asserts the following: “The Global BDS Movement does not... [distinguish between opposition to the existence of Israel itself and opposition to the occupation of the territory beyond the Green Line](#)” (also known as the West Bank). Repeated calls to clarify the goals of BDS have not been answered with language that would address these concerns. J Street clarifies: “We do not oppose boycott, divestment, or sanctions initiatives that explicitly support a two-state solution, recognize Israel’s right to exist, and focus only on occupied territory beyond the Green Line. These kinds of initiatives are different than those advocated and initiated by the Global BDS Movement.” J Street has supported the right for people to join BDS, even though they disagree with it, and has opposed legislation in the US to make BDS illegal. All of these Jewish groups, including Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), support the rights for boycotts of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. But only JVP supports the BDS movement, which supports a boycott of all of Israel and all Israeli individuals or groups with any ties to state institutions. And all Jewish peace groups support a just peace where both Jews and Palestinians continue to live in the region.

Second, progressive Christians have not acknowledged that BDS serves as a trauma trigger for many Jewish people. Western Christians have used antisemitic boycotts against Jews for centuries. From a Jewish point of view, there is continuity between Western Christians’ as well as Muslim historic and current use of boycotts against them. This is understandable. Mennonites, for example, already had a filter on church investments to avoid funding corporations involved in military activities. This filter applied to investments globally, not just to Israel. When Mennonites passed a resolution to boycott and divest from Jewish settlements, this actually did not change anything. There was no prior investment to divest from. And the authors of the

resolution had added a footnote that this action in the resolution did not involve a formal endorsement of BDS. Yet some Mennonite activists, wanting to portray a win for BDS, released [press releases](#) to that effect.

Third, some progressive Christians emphasize that BDS is the “only” tactic that can work to bring about change. There are literally hundreds of nonviolent tactics. Relatively few exert punishment on the adversary. Most nonviolent tactics require sacrifices from those protesting, not those being protested. When progressive Christians argue “only BDS can bring change” they are sending a bizarre message about the power of punishment as more effective than other nonviolent tactics that might better accomplish the goals of truth telling and justice.

Fourth, Quakers in particular have taken up a mixed message on BDS, not acknowledging many Jews support a boycott of the settlements, but not a boycott of all of Israel and all Israeli individuals connected to the state. [British Quakers state](#) that they practice a boycott only of the settlements, and do not embrace the full agenda of BDS. But US Quakers offer full support to the entire BDS agenda and published a guide called “[Engaging Critics of BDS: A resource for activists](#)” that severely distorts Jewish concerns and prints outright falsehoods about BDS. The Quakers offer no citations or references to Jewish authors or organizations and seem to be unaware of the actual concerns about BDS. For example, the pamphlet argues that BDS encourages substantive dialogue with Jews. But there have been many examples of protests and threats against Palestinians who are in dialogue with Israelis on a wide range of social change-related issues. Palestinian leaders have even imprisoned Palestinians that it interprets are violating the BDS and anti-normalization framework that opposes dialogue between Palestinians and Jews. The pamphlet also argues that BDS is not applied against individuals. That is also untrue. BDS does call for boycotts and bans of individuals and has been used against Israeli LGBTQ advocates, against Israeli peacemakers, and against Israeli social change-oriented theatre companies. Any individual who has received any money or support from an Israeli institution is a target. In a November 2018 radio program about their BDS pamphlet, three Quakers presented what they have misunderstood as the arguments against BDS. No Jews were included to voice their own legitimate concerns. Happening just weeks after the massacre at the synagogue in Pittsburgh, it is perplexing why these Quakers could not see the connection between silencing the voices of Jews and letting Jews speak for themselves in their programs and publications.

Fifth, there is [little evidence that BDS is working to change Israeli policy](#). Ironically, both right wing Israelis and BDS leaders are the only ones suggesting that BDS is working. Right wing Israelis want to spread fear among Israelis that they must stick together against a world against them. And BDS leaders want to applaud successes in getting more groups to sign onto BDS, even though this does not translate into success in their goals of ending the occupation. BDS is succeeding in gaining global support, in part because of support from progressive Christians.

However, from a strategic point of view, BDS is not creating any significant change within Israel. Occupation and the siege in Gaza are worsening, not improving. BDS is dividing the Jewish and Palestinian peace movements that want an end to occupation. And BDS is emboldening the Israeli right and creating further animosity between Israelis and those who support Palestinians. If anything, BDS seems to be making change less likely, not more likely.

Other punishment-based social change strategies are also faltering. Counterterrorism uses punishment to attempt to hinder the Taliban in Afghanistan. But punishment is having the opposite effect: the Taliban is stronger today than in 2001, primarily because a punishment-based strategy reinforces the sense of danger and humiliation from the US, and this is rocket fuel for recruitment and revenge in an endless cycle of violence.

9. Some Progressive Christian's demand for an end to occupation is not accompanied with calls for a "shared future" or recognizing the state of Israel.

Just as the BDS movement does not articulate a vision of a shared future, so too do many progressive Christians fail to articulate a vision for Jews and Palestinians living together in their own documents, study guides and resolutions. Jews who read progressive Christian websites and texts about Israel and Palestine on [MennoPin](#), [QPin](#), or the [Presbyterian Israel/Palestine Mission Network](#) note that there is little affirmation of Jewish people staying in the region and little attention to a "shared future" where Jews and Palestinians both live with equal rights and freedoms.

10. Some progressive Christians single out Israel but ignore other situations of injustice that they have more control over.

Progressive Christians denounce Israel far more than any other country. Jews have noted that Israel is often singled out, and that this double standard in judgements is an expression of antisemitism.

For example, in 2017, Mennonites in the Mennonite Church USA conference passed only one resolution, a resolution denouncing both antisemitism and Israel's occupation of Palestine. By what criteria do North American Mennonites write and pass resolutions, placing emphasis on Israeli wrongdoing rather than their own, or those of other countries? It was strongly condemned by most Jewish groups who noted the focus on Israel and that double standard. For example, why has there been less attention to the following:

1. Those conflicts where Mennonites are the settler colonialists. Mennonites are settler colonialists in Mexico, Belize, Chaco, US and Canada that continue to this day to dispossess Indigenous people from their land. While some Mennonites have apologized for taking Indigenous land in Pennsylvania, there are far wider implications of [Mennonite complicity with Indigenous dispossession](#) that need to be addressed.
1. Those conflicts where Mennonites are complicit with violence done to make the products we use, such as Mennonite-owned mining corporations in Canada. In Canada, Mennonite-owned mining companies such as [Northern Dynasty are dispossessing Indigenous people of their land right now](#) – but Mennonites have refused to denounce this action or to organize a boycott or any type of collective action against Mennonite leaders of the global mining industry. Mennonite narratives of Mennonite violence toward Indigenous people is sympathetic, recognizing Mennonite trauma and refugee status in Canada. The comparison of how Mennonites treat their own trauma and the maltreatment

of First Nations in Canada is absolutely striking when compared with Mennonite narratives of Jewish trauma and treatment of Palestinians.

1. Those conflicts where many Mennonites are affected. More Mennonites live in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) than any other country outside of the US and Canada. And five million people, including many Congolese Mennonites, have died from civil war in DRC.
2. Those conflicts that are killing far more people like the war in Syria, Yemen, DRC, or the US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Approximately 100,000 Palestinians have died in the last 100 years because of the conflict with Israel. In contrast, half a million Syrians have died in the last seven years, and nearly 14 million people in Yemen are on the verge of starvation because of Saudi Arabia's policy. The scale of suffering does not compare.
3. Those conflicts that are supported by our taxes. Israel receives over \$3 billion in US aid each year, far more than any other country. This may explain why US Mennonites focus on Israel, but it does not explain the focus by Canadian Mennonites on Israel. Furthermore, US taxpayers have spent over \$6 trillion on the US military occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq, but there is no boycott of US goods called for by Mennonite institutions and very little pressure on the enormous US military industrial complex and its impact on people all over the world, all supported by US taxes.

Principles for Talking about Israel and Palestine

While some progressive Christians insist that they are attempting to support peace and justice in Israel and Palestine, the impact of their work creates obstacles, not pathways, to social change.

We must advocate for both Palestinian rights and Jewish rights, no matter the political outcome. Jews and Palestinians and Bedouins and Druze can live with equal rights and freedoms in one state, two states, or a creative two states, one nation confederation.

But how we talk about the current situation matters. Trauma-sensitive narratives are necessary to reduce fear and polarization. Trauma, fear, and anxiety create obstacles to compassion, critical thinking, and creative problem solving. Trauma sensitivity can improve cognitive functioning, and in turn contribute to peacebuilding.

Social change requires building coalitions across the lines of conflict. A strategic nonviolent campaign to end occupation requires dialogue and coalition building between Jewish peace groups and Palestinian change groups. But that won't happen as long as Palestinians and some progressive Christian allies refuse to dialogue with Jews, while most anti-occupation, peace-supporting Jews believe BDS is calling for the destruction of the state of Israel and a removal of Jews from the region. Narrative trauma triggers create obstacles to building strategic coalitions.

Progressive Christians can do better. We can work with Jews and Palestinians to build a more effective social change movement. Some narrative principles for how we talk about Jews and Palestinians could help.

1. **Acknowledge and study the history of both Jews and Palestinians** to understand how they perceive the current situation, and what they see as the obstacles to a just peace.
2. **Recognize the significant generational trauma for both Jews and Palestinians** and acknowledge the role of Western Christians in the suffering of both groups.
3. **Acknowledge the importance of the land for both Jews and Palestinians.**
4. **Acknowledge the right to self-determination for both Jews and Palestinians** and that both have a right to a state that protects and observes their cultural and religious beliefs.
5. **Acknowledge the power imbalance on all sides.** Progressive Christians emphasize the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians. But globally Christians and Muslims have far more power than Jews, and persecution of Jews is widespread.
6. **Recognize positive aspects of both Israeli and Palestinian society.** Jews and Palestinians both have rich cultures and make many contributions to the world. They are more than their conflict. It is unhelpful and discriminatory to speak only in negative terms about either Israel or Palestine, as societies, as these represent the people and culture as well as the policies, however flawed.
7. **Recognize the need for safety and human rights for both Palestinians and Jews.**

End Note: Responses to Critics

Many people have written me about my articles. My responses to some of their arguments are found in the text above. Here are a few responses to their questions and criticisms.

“This is simple, just say occupation is wrong. You make it seem complicated Lisa.”

I agree: occupation is wrong, and it is simple to say that. But finding a solution is not simple. It is a fantasy to think that punishment of Israel and Israelis is going to lead to a simple solution of ending the occupation. The solution is complicated, and it requires all of us to listen to complex narratives on all sides. That is not simple.

“Some Palestinians don’t like what you are writing Lisa, so that means you are undermining their cause.”

A young Swiss-Palestinian man who was my student at one time suggested that I should stop writing and “just listen to Palestinians” and do what they ask me to do. I am an advocate of listening to local people. I’ve spent most of my life listening. As a woman, I often did not travel to countries as an “expert” like my male colleagues with their beards and male entitlements. I traveled as a researcher and I listened to people. I have published [several books about listening to local people](#). So this young man knew he was pushing a button by invoking a principle that I think is very important. He was arguing that I should accept what he thinks, as one Palestinian, rather than listen to other Palestinians or Jewish people.

There are a lot of reasons to listen to people. But listening does not require agreeing with everything local people say. When I lived in Kenya in 2002, some Kenyans asked me to support a US military operation in Kenya to rid the country of Al Shabaab. In Afghanistan, local people asked me to support US occupation there in their fight against the Taliban.

From listening to Palestinians and Bedouins in the West Bank and Gaza for three months in 2017, I heard stories of suffering. I witnessed a situation that is getting worse, not better. I came to understand why many Palestinians do not want to have any dialogue with Israelis. I appreciate and respect their decision. But I also listened to Palestinian strategists who have a very different understanding of how change is going to happen; and in their view there is a lot of work we can do first to understand the narratives and traumas of all sides.

“If both Jews and Palestinians criticize your writing, that means you are a failure.”

The same Palestinian American student told me I had failed to make the argument to listen to both sides. But the people I met in Palestine and Israel doing the most important work were considered traitors by their own communities. People who build peace often hold this title because they work against the status quo. Peacebuilding is not a popularity contest. Peacebuilders have [commitments to ethics](#), and to strategy. If listening to people on all sides of a conflict makes one unpopular, then so be it.