

We Create Home Where We Are

In Support of Jewish Diaspora Communities, Indigenous Land
Back Movements, and Imagining a Positive Jewish Future
Outside of Zionism

As Jewish communities address or reflect upon the Zionism ingrained into our culture and attempt to support Palestinian liberation and the end of Israeli apartheid, we must recognize that many who are still Zionists are those who do not see a way forward in Jewish culture without the state of Israel. There are many reasons for this including the need for safety after the Holocaust, the desire for homeland as a people who have been outcasts for millenia, and the pervasive Israeli support in our communities that makes it hard to disagree without being accused of being a fake or self-hating Jew. But what if our strength lies not in land claims to Israel, but in the bond of our diaspora cultures?

Many of us grew up in synagogues longing to one day "return" to the holy land and convinced that the only way to keep our families and communities safe was to have a land that was ours and only ours. However, this is a fairly recent phenomenon. We only have to go back about a century to the Jewish Labor Bund movement in Eastern Europe to see a very different face of Jewish Diaspora - one that believed strongly in the concept of "doikayt", or "here-ness". This movement was an important part of the socialist democrat movement in Russia and was one of, if not the, major social movements within Ashkenazi Jewry. Here-ness meant for Jews to find roots and meaning wherever they were and inherently shied away from the need for an ethno-state. Today we have gotten so far from Bundism, especially within the Ashkenazi diaspora in the United States, that even suggesting that Jews do not have the right to claim Israel as their own by any means necessary can be seen as akin to abandoning one's people and culture.



A Labor Bund poster from 1918 that states "Where we live, this is our country!"

Many have documented why this change occurred, with the Holocaust being the primary driving factor, but it's time to reconnect to our pre-Zionist roots and figure out what the Diaspora past means in the modern era. We must recognize that those who fight for our right to "return" to Israel are not serving the interests of our communities. Zionism outside of our communities covers the self-interest of white nationalists who wish for a Jew-free America and an excuse for Arabophobia and evangelists who hope to fulfill a prophecy for the end-times that requires all Jews to occupy Israel. These are not our allies.

Reclaiming pride in the Jewish Diaspora with a recommitment to Tzedakah (justice) and Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) can show us the way forward: to build a strong international Jewish community, not clouded by land theft and nationalism; to aid the struggle of indigenous peoples and those who have been 'othered' on their land; and to revitalize our distinct culture and traditions alongside those who wish to do the same. With these we can create the safety and community that was longed for in the state of Israel, but hold on to the values and culture that were ours for centuries before we focused our attention on building a nation. It is antithetical to Jewish values to prop up our people on the suffering of others, and by continuing to invest our energy and generations of children in Zionism we lose more than the separation of diaspora could ever take from us. In fact we have already started to lose the beauty of diaspora to the homogenization of the state of Israel, in going anywhere in the world and saying we may be from different countries, have different national cultures, and look

different from each other but we are both Jews; the joy of finding home in unfamiliar places and reveling in all the different things Judaism and Jews can be.

As we seek to reclaim the pride of Diaspora and proclaim "Our Home is Where We Are!", we must be careful to understand exactly what this means in the modern era and in conjunction with others' struggles, especially the indigenous Land Back movement. This does not mean that any one of us owns a claim to land that is not ours, but rather should encourage us to work for Justice within the lands we occupy and take root in. By claiming our homeland where we reside, we need to take on the responsibility of fighting for Indigenous stewardship. Etai Rogers-Fett (@tsukunst on Instagram) imagines a new Hereness of Our Times that states:

we don't own the land, we create home together / we need an ethical diaspora / united/bound together with our neighbors



It's time to recognize that Zionism does not serve the Jewish people. It separates us from each other and the independent beauty that all types of Jews bring to our culture, discourages us from fighting for global Jewish safety and collectivism, and breaks our commandment to

work for collective liberation for all. Israel has not solved the problem that many Jews today still do not have a homeland or feel unsafe in the places our families had resided for centuries, while causing irreparable harm to Palestinians and the land itself. So what if we do away with the need for a homeland? What if we commit ourselves to building a relationship with whichever land we now reside on and all people in it, one that is a reciprocal relationship filled with respect and responsibility for the land and those who care for it? The future of the Jewish people lies in uniting with our neighbors as we all reconnect to our cultures outside of settler and colonial mindsets.