

## An Open Letter to the Pittsburgh Jewish Community

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, the Jewish Chronicle, which presents itself as the sole outlet for Jewish voices in Pittsburgh, published a smear article about me. As I have emailed Chronicle “journalists” multiple times and received non-responses at best, I have decided to speak directly. There are significant problems with this article that must be addressed. Firstly, I was not contacted for comment at all prior to the publication of this article. This is incredibly poor journalistic practice and just one reason this article would not clear the editing desk at any reputable paper.

Secondly, as has been consistent Chronicle practice, Jews who don’t fall lockstep with the Chronicle’s maximalist Zionist positions have their Jewishness called into question. In this article, they write that I “identify” as Jewish. What is the intended interpretation, and what is the reason for doubting my Jewishness? Is my blood impure? Am I not Orthodox enough? Am I too trans and queer? Did the Shoah target people who “identified” as Jewish?

The subtle implication that I am not Jewish is ridiculous. I have been going to TOL/OLS since 2006 where I frequently led and read Torah. I was friends with many of the victims of the horrific antisemitism of October 27, 2018. I participated in JCC basketball, Diller, and JSITE. I’ve been to Hillel on campus, and I went to Camp Ramah as a kid. I’ve lived in Haifa for two years, and I am likely more involved in Jewish community than many people accusing me of being a “fake Jew” or a “rent-a-Jew”. My grandparents spoke Yiddish and my great grandparents were Bundists. I will not let a legacy that I am immensely proud of be erased.

To have this written about me is personally painful. Even worse, it is a manifestation of a dangerous form of antisemitism. Tying Jewishness to a political ideology (in the current case Zionism and more specifically support for the genocide in Gaza) is historically horrible for Jews. When all major local Jewish institutions are brazenly Zionist, when Rabbis are speaking at county council and writing blogs *against ceasefire*, when synagogues are saying prayers for the success and safety of Israeli soldiers and not for Gazan civilians, we must take a step back and reflect on what Judaism means in today’s world.

Also concerning are the factual errors regarding the incidents in question. The Chabad member in question, at a public rally in front of hundreds of witnesses, yelled at me “לך לעזה” – go to Gaza. Disregarding the misgendering, which I personally believe is not accidental and representative of transphobia that has become an acceptable weapon against people you disagree with, there was no audible clarification. Even with the later added “you’ll see what will happen”, the implication is clear to any discerning reader: I am to go to Gaza to die (ironically at the hands of Israel) because I believe that the Palestinian people deserve to live with justice and dignity.

None of the students tabling were in, or have been, in any of my classes. The article (and I assume StandWithUs’ letter to Joan Gabel that I have not seen) implies that it was a woman. This

is easily falsifiable since there are cameras in the building where this took place: all of the students tabling were men. This is also an important detail. There *was* a woman who reported me for mentioning Palestine in class which led to a meeting with the dean of DEI. I don't deny any of this, and I take back nothing that I said in the classroom. I would however never start a political discussion with a current student of mine outside of class. If you are reading this and you know me, and you truly believe that I support the killing of "any Israeli", then your interest in justifying your Zionism to yourself outweighs your own lived experience. StandWithUs and the Chronicle have chosen to knowingly lie to attempt to subject the only Jewish trans faculty member in the department to a neo-McCarthyite investigation and score political points.

There are many general frustrations that I have with the reality surrounding this article, and so I ask you these four questions. Why does Joan Gabel respond to StandWithUs while refusing to meet with students of the University? StandWithUs and Julie Paris are the textbook definition of the anti-protest boogeyman "outside agitators". They are not affiliated with the University in any way, and they have partnerships with Israeli government programs. Why are we wasting our time when Pittsburgh has a clear and painful understanding of the real causes and dangers of antisemitism here in this country? Why is it that whenever the Chronicle and Jewish institutions talk about the "Jewish community" or "Jewish Pitt students/faculty" that our worthiness and validity as Jews depends on our adherence to a 19<sup>th</sup> century, European settler colonial ideology and the resultant state?

Most importantly, why are we wasting our time on this when there is a genocide taking place? I will never apologize for standing in solidarity with the Palestinian people against apartheid, occupation, and genocide – whether the government that does it claims to be of the same religion as me or not. I am passionate about the histories of Palestine, Zionism, anti-Zionism, and Judaism. I will gladly discuss the broader historical context or the current reality and crisis with anyone who comes in good faith. I will not let myself be slandered and lied about in a publication that claims to speak for the Jewish community which I am part of. The University of Pittsburgh and Joan Gabel can do what they want, and I will not care. Free Palestine.