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My Perception of Zionism: From Childhood to Adulthood

In his address entitled “The Jewish Problem: How to Solve It”, before the Conference of Eastern Council of Reform Rabbis on April 25, 1915, Louis D. Brandeis declared, “Let no American imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with Patriotism. Multiple loyalties are objectionable only if they are inconsistent.”¹ Brandeis went further and claimed that good Zionists would become more patriotic American citizens.² As an immigrant in the early twentieth century, Brandeis received his family’s love for education and democracy. He let these values guide him for the rest of his career. On a personal level, I can identify with the words of Louis D. Brandeis.

Upon immigrating to the United States, I learned to adapt myself to American culture. My life became affected by three different cultures. In fact, I speak fluent French, English, and Hebrew. While growing up in France, I felt attached to both my Jewish identity and my identity as a national citizen of France. I had the opportunity to travel to Israel. In the United States, I continued to feel attached to the Jewish people and traveled to Israel frequently. My fascination with Israel and the global nature of the Jewish people guided my career aspirations and goals. It led me to attend Brandeis University where I studied Politics and Near Eastern and Judaic Studies. It also led me to spend my summers learning about challenges faced by Israel’s diverse communities. I believe that Zionism is more than continuing to return to Israel, and the eventual

¹ Sarna, Jonathan. “Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement in Algog, Zionism and Religion.”, *Brandeis University Press, Published by University Press New England*, 1998, pp. 198

² Sarah Schmidt. “The Zionist Conversion of Louis D. Brandeis.” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1975, pp. 31.

return of all Jews to their homeland. By standing for the Zionist cause, I am giving broader expression to the American ideals of democracy, liberty, and social justice.

My connection to the Jewish people and Israel continued to hold an important place in my personal identity in the United States. As a college student, my connection to Zionism allowed me to discuss topics that are dear to me, such as the situation of Jews living in France. I observed, from a young age, that anti-Semitic feelings and actions went hand-in-hand with anti-Zionist remarks and harsh criticism of Israel. At Brandeis, I wanted to speak about a new form of anti-Semitism that I witnessed in France. When I became a member of the Coalition Against Anti-Semitism in Europe, a student organization dedicated to combating and raising awareness of European Anti-Semitism, I felt compelled to speak about the connection between rising *aliyah* rates and levels of anti-Semitism in France. I participated in events from various groups on campus, such as the Brandeis Israel Public Affairs Committee, and learned more about how students respond to key issues facing Israel. However, when I arrived to Brandeis University as a first-year student, I witnessed different perceptions of what it means to be Zionist and to participate in events in the Jewish community. In my discussions with students from Modern Jewish Studies courses, I saw changing attitudes towards world Jewry and Israel. I saw significant “perception gaps” regarding the importance of Israel among Jewish college students, as well as in my own research concerning attitudinal views of Jews towards Israel.³

³ Arian, et al. (2009) *A Portrait of Israeli Jews. Beliefs, Observance, and Values of Israeli Jews*. Guttman Center for Surveys of the Israel Democracy Institute for The AVI CHAI-Israel Foundation, p. 18.

From this experience, I understood that Zionism, as an ideology, is not fixed. In my interactions with other college students, my connection to Zionism required constant reshaping. Today, I understand the importance of the evolving relationship between world Jewry and Israel, and I want to address the question of reconciling Jewish identities. In the future, I hope to become engaged in initiatives that connect Jewish communities around the world with Israel's diverse communities.