

Dancing with death: The Intellectual opposition to Zionism

Some of the opponents of Zionism were great figures, but that did not make them prophets.

by Phyllis Chesler



Some insist that the “new” Anti-Semitism is not all that new—and that anti-Zionism is not necessarily anti-Semitic. In fact, this is the current mantra among pro-BDS and pro-Palestine panels [provided the solution](#). The French journalist [Anna O](#),” an early—perhaps the first-ever psychoanalytic patient, was a religiously learned Orthodox Jew and a fearless feminist—and yet she vehemently opposed Zionism. As a wealthy and assimilated Austrian and German Jew, she did not want to give up her place in the European sun.

Many 20th century feminists ([Melinda Guttman](#), [Ann Jackowitz](#)),

were interested in how Anna O was able to “transform” herself from being a psychiatric basket case, who was “hysterically” paralyzed in three limbs, an insomniac, given to hallucinations, and unable to speak in her native German tongue—into becoming then mighty Bertha Pappenheim, the founder of Jewish feminism, the protector of trafficked Jewish girls, unwed mothers, and orphans, and the translator of major Jewish, feminist, and Yiddish works into German.

Why such a religious Orthodox Jew—and a proper Viennese woman, would have taken up the cause of Jewish girls who were trafficked into sex slavery and unwed mothers is a bit of a mystery. For now, I will leave it there. What matters is that Pappenheim found her voice and her mission when she courageously stood up to the rabbis on behalf of such victims, translated Mary Wollstonecraft’s *On the Vindication of the Rights of Women* into German, translated her ancestor Gluckel of Hameln from Yiddish into German, and organized the first-ever Jewish feminist organization in Germany. (Christian feminist organizations would not allow Jews to join them). Orthodox Jews did not encourage feminist ferment.

Freud viewed Bertha as having invented the “talking cure” when she was Breuer’s patient. In 1909, in his lectures at Clark University, Freud stated that “If it is a merit to have brought psych-analysis into being, that merit is not mine.” Freud credited Breuer and the young woman whom they called “Anna O” with the earliest beginnings of psychoanalysis.

Lightly hypnotized, Anna O suggested that she “talk” to Breuer; she called it her private theater and “chimney sweeping.” She suggested reliving or detailing what had been happening to her when she first developed her persistent cough, or paralysis, or inability to speak in her native tongue, and the symptom disappeared, at least temporarily.

I believe in such “talking cures” but let’s be clear: Talking did not cure Pappenheim herself who would go on to spend six

terrible years in Magic Mountain-like sanatoriums for privileged people. The various torturous treatments (electric shock, the application of electric eels, arsenic, chloral hydrate, morphine), turned her hair prematurely white; perhaps such (mis)treatments cured her in the sense that she never wished to endure them again.

Through her mother, Pappenheim was related to the Warburgs, the Goldschmidts, the Rothschilds. She spoke four languages, loved opera, classical music, rare lace, and antique objects d'art. She was related to Heinrich Heine. Pappenheim was friendly with Martin Buber who agreed with her on the question of Zionism; Buber's young disciples and their Israeli intellectual descendants modeled both their universities and Tel Aviv night life (or Tel Aviv-on-the-Seine) along Eurocentric lines. [very long time](#).

Jews have always had a hard time leaving Egypt. Its tastes and smells are familiar and dear to us. Being uprooted is difficult, if not dangerous. Leaving civilization (such as it is), for deserted deserts (where a demanding, albeit consoling God may best be found), has little appeal. Jews also pride themselves on being citizens of the world, universalists, commanded to be a "light" unto the nations, not to leave them for narrow, provincial definitions of Judaism. Jews have led or joined nearly every universalist movements on earth, have taken all sides of an issue—and then some.

It is our genius and, some say, also our downfall.

The celebrated author, [daily walk](#).

Freud did not relocate to Palestine. He went to England. Many of Europe's most celebrated Jewish intellectuals came to America, not Palestine. Their names are legion and include atomic scientists Einstein, Fermi, Teller, and Szilard; architects Gropius and van der Roë; psychoanalysts Bettelheim, Fromm, and Horney; scholars Arendt, Marcuse, and Strauss.

Martin Buber did not choose to immigrate to Palestine.

Other than Arendt, who was still young and in thrall to her Nazi lover, Heidegger, the majority of these intellectuals were mature and wanted to continue to their world-changing work. They did not want to dig ditches, plant trees, lecture to teenagers living in collective settlements, or fight hostile Arabs. Pappenheim also feared that the Jewish state would be a “secular” state, one in which children would be reared collectively without family life.

According to Melinda Guttman, (z”l), after Hitler came to power, Pappenheim held “festive salons” every week. If anyone referred to the “ominous persecution of the Jews,” Bertha would reply: “We are not in the Ghetto. And to the objection, “Miss Pappenheim, we Jews have no space,” she answered “We don’t need space, we have Spiritual Space that knows no limits.”

In 1935, Pappenheim traveled to Amsterdam to meet Henrietta Szold, who was organizing the emigration of young German Jewish teenagers to Palestine. According to Guttman (whose [Pappeneheim](#) still wrote that “We are responsible for each other. We are tied to a Community of fate. For US German Jews, the terrible blow of the Third Reich on April 1, 1933, Nazi boycott day—how it has hit us! How will we survive? How will we bear the hatred and misery? By the suicide of individuals? By the suicide of the Community? Shall we lament and deny? Shall we emigrate and change our economic Status? Shall we act foolishly or philosophically? The Diaspora, even Palestine is exile—yet we may see in the distance, the summit of Mt. Sinai...”

I fear she was talking about an unknown and Biblical Mt Sinai, not a mountain in Palestine proper.

Pappenheim never considered emigrating to Palestine or to America before she became fatally ill with liver cancer.

Should she had opted for Zion, for the children, if not for herself?

After Pappenheim's death, ninety three of the girls of the Beth Jakob School in Poland, which Pappenheim had supervised, committed suicide when the Nazis decided to turn the school into a brothel.

Helene Rraemer, who had been one of Bertha's beloved "daughters" when she was an eight-year-old orphan, took over as director of the home in Neu Isenburg and remained until November, 10, 1938, Kristallnacht. [Israel National News](#).