

# Sun sets on archetypal 'Jewish mother'



• By ALIZA LAVIE

It would be so easy for us to relegate Jewish actor Seth Rogen to the black-list of Israel haters or, more accurately, of Jews opposed to Israel. In the wake of his recent remarks ("I was fed a huge amount of lies about Israel my entire life," "It [Israel] makes no sense... for the preservation of the Jewish people"), one obvious direction would be to criticize, condemn, discredit or embargo the Canadian-born Jewish comedian. Yet, to do so would be tantamount to ignoring the fact that these sentiments are indicative of a much wider malaise.

While there is a possibility the actor was being intentionally provocative in a bid to plug his latest film in which he plays the title role, or that the Hollywood star was being cynical or funny, this is not necessarily so. He may well have been articulating a gut feeling and reflecting a much broader phenomenon that extends far beyond the scope of a personal statement.

Rogen's more recent "clarification" subsequent to a conversation with Jewish Agency Chairman Isaac Herzog, stating that he had not really apologized to Israel and that "My mom made me call," only served to complicate matters further.

Seth Rogen is not alone. There is a clear, present and potentially irreversible inter-generational divide within Diaspora Jewry's largest community residing in North America – and particularly in the United States – in relation to Israel. Young, secular, liberal Jews, especially in the USA, have become increasingly vociferous in their criticism of Israel's actions and, at times, in opposition to its very existence.

Today, the United States is home to the largest Jewish community outside the State of Israel, with an estimated Jewish population of approximately 5,700,000 souls. About 35% of US Jews affiliate to largest of the three major streams of Judaism, the Reform movement, while approximately 18% belong to the Conservative movement and about 10% to Orthodox Judaism.

One of the major concerns for Jewish community leaders in the USA, as well as in Israel, is the decline in American Jews' sense of affiliation with the Jewish people – and this, primarily in younger adults. Moreover, the parameters of their Jewish identity are also in a state of flux, with research indicating a dramatic transformation within the upcoming generation of American Jewry. Indeed, only two-thirds of young Jews define themselves as "Jewish by religion," while one third refer to themselves as "Jews of no religion," preferring to define their Jewishness in terms of cultural, ethnic and family ties.

One of the manifest corollaries of this tenuous sense of connection expresses itself in terms of their relationship to Israel. The Jewish comedian's remarks reflect rising trends within a younger generation of US Jewry, which is becoming distanced from both Judaism and Israel in an exponential curve. This should be a focus of concern within both communities.

At the same time, the Jewish family framework has become more fragile. In an era where social networks have become the Z-gen's mainstream resource, the traditional home environment, with its potential to impact on them, is being steadily worn away throughout the Jewish community.

FOR THE most part, paternally-guided rituals of initiation into Jewish symbols, ceremonies and customs have long since disappeared and what are presently witnessing is the erosion of the Jewish family's sole remaining traditional bastion: the Jewish mother.

Down the countless generations of Jewish tradition and history, irrespective of the community in question, the home – with the Jewish mother at its hub – has remained the anchor that sustained a sense of belonging. Even those who grew up without a formal Jewish education imbibed their Jewishness from a predominantly maternal influence: it was the mother, grandmother and aunts who handed down the Jewish narrative, inculcating the traditional heritage via the "chalk and blackboard" of their shared



SETH ROGEN. The author argues that there is a clear, present and potentially irreversible inter-generational divide within Diaspora Jewry's largest community residing in North America – and particularly in the United States – in relation to Israel. (Reuters)

personal space.

For lack of a scientific nomenclature, I have opted to use the term of "Jewish feminist responsibility," as in my experience from encounters with hundreds of Jewish women during my research into women's prayers and related travels, this "Jewish DNA" is more prevalent among women. I have borne witness personally to their burning interest, observed the importance attributed to creating belonging and identity, the thirst to acquire however basic a knowledge of tradition – even among women who were not raised in a

Jewishly educated environment.

In this respect, it is precisely Seth Rogen's remark, "My mom made me call Isaac Herzog" that elicits most concern. The mother – once the ultimate role model, the "plus value" of the Jewish family until the last generation – has been transformed into payload, an object of derision and ridicule. These same young Jews no longer hesitate to offend or distance their mothers, nor to express positions diametrically opposed to those in which they were raised and educated.

To say "My mom made me

call him" is tantamount to aiming a body blow in public at the solidarity of the nuclear family that has been an intrinsic part of our lives since our formative days as a people. It implies that, despite millennia of handing over the baton of Jewish heritage within the private domain, there are possibly those who feel there is no longer a need for such transmission.

Similarly, the pillars of those institutions that once epitomized Jewish communities and were instrumental in preserving their heritage are weakening from year to year. The most acute expres-

sion of this state of affairs is that in evidence over the past six months. COVID-19 effectively shut down the JCCs, Jewish libraries and campus organizations. Even the flagship programs, such as Israel Experience, MASA [Israel Journeys] and others, have ceased operations until further notice. Programs that had been ongoing, driven by accumulated experience and a body of knowledge, will eventually need to find the impetus to restart *ab initio*.

Seth Rogen's mother belongs to a generation born into a sense of Jewish identity, one that yearned for Jerusalem and appreciated the quintessential significance of a secure Israel for the Jews. The current generation, however, is dwindling in numbers, and the fabric of Jewish solidarity has been undermined.

AS A COHORT, liberal young adults in the United States are distancing themselves from their national identity in favor of a universalistic approach to *tikkun olam* (improving the world), one that not infrequently engages in a confrontational mode with the Jewish nation-state.

Parallel with the ongoing process of alienation from Jewish heritage taking place in the USA, Israel is experiencing a diametrically opposite dynamic: a renaissance of people returning to traditions, customs and source texts.

This revival of Jewish tradition resonates strongly in both private and public spheres of life. Rituals and traditions once forgotten have recaptured the imagination of many and regained popularity, while the Jewish calendar cycle with its symbols and celebrations forms a vibrant part of the fabric of life, even for those removed from religious observance. Essentially, the Jewish world's two largest communities are moving in completely opposing directions, with the distance between them increasing constantly.

The moment has arrived to review our duty as Jews to be responsible for one another, and the deriving obligation to take appropriate action. We need to stop pointing a finger at – or cursing – the Jewish people, shrugging off remarks made by Rogen and his friends – and move on. Ours is not

the right to slam the door or to desert those communities struggling for survival, leaving them to handle the crisis alone while we rest on our laurels as passive observers. These are our brothers and sisters, and this is the time to act on our commitment to that shared responsibility.

When a family is in crisis, the situation needs to be resolved as a family: through talking about it, arguing points and reinstating trust among ourselves. We should aim to prove through peaceful dialogue that the State of Israel represents a home for the entire Jewish people, irrespective of our differences.

We should be acting in unison to provide proof positive to Rogen and friends that the State of Israel has a lot to offer; that his mother was right – as were other parents – when they spoke passionately in praise of the tiny state that came into existence miraculously against all odds. These Jews perceived Israel as a part of their identity, rather than a negative influence on the world order.

They believed that, while one was not obliged to love everything about Israel, there was no call to hate Israel or doubt "why it even needed to exist." Instead, they understood Israel as a work in progress, a shared endeavor. If we can make this happen, it would offer the potential for a return to Jewish heritage through a sense of identification with Israel.

Change presents opportunities as well as challenges. One of the most fascinating prisms to study families whose children either rejected or turned toward religion is the way they contend with that change. Some families sever all contact, whereas others continue to embrace their children, and, dearest, irrespective of the personal trauma in their lives generated by that transformation.

One needs to be willing to listen to criticism, find space to ventilate on the subject of distress and yet still enfold and embrace one another, if one wishes to preserve the fabric of family structure. This holds true even when the son in question is named Seth Rogen.

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## Biden and Harris: the radical Democrats' Trojan Horse



RIGHT FROM WRONG  
• By RUTHIE BLUM

Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden clearly isn't as dotty as everyone is making him out to be. Or at least he's sharp enough to be heeding his advisers, whose latest move – persuading him to pick Kamala Harris as his running mate – could not have been more on target where the party's chances for having its candidate win in November are concerned.

This is not merely because she is a beautiful woman "of color" with immigrant parents from India and Jamaica. Nor is it due to her being married to a Jew, which provides her material for mother-in-law anecdotes that endear her to audiences of a particular persuasion: loyal Democrats with PACs and deep pockets who celebrate Passover and would rather die than vote Republican.

No, the Biden team's brilliance in selecting the 55-year-old junior senator from California as "veep hopeful" lies in their understanding of what she brings to the ballot box. Like Biden, whose victory in the primaries can be attributed less to his popularity than to voters' strategy when it comes to wresting the White House from US President Donald Trump, Harris is the perfect window dressing for the increasingly progressive Democratic Party.

Though much has been made by the Left of her record as a tough prosecutor and attorney-general, as well as someone "too sympathetic" to Israel, these are precisely the elements of her reputation that

are removing hesitation on the part of moderate Democrats, Independents and anti-Trump Conservatives to support the ticket.

For this reason, Republicans ought to be worried right now. With less than three months until the election, they must work to counteract the fiction that a Biden-Harris bid is a good, sane option for America and, by extension, for Israel.

To do this, Trump supporters need to take a number of steps. The first is to stop insisting that Biden is suffering from dementia and thus is unfit to be president. Whether or not it's true, he's leading in the polls.

The second is to cease downplaying Harris's accomplishments by ridiculing her for "sleeping her way to the top." Her climb up the ladder is irrelevant to the crucial issues currently at stake. Furthermore, nobody – other than her husband, perhaps – actually cares about the ostensible bedroom exploits that may or may not have contributed to her career.

The third is to refrain from pointing to every statement that Biden and Harris have made to illustrate that they are pandering to the likes of radical Congress Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN). That politician's up for election try to keep all members of the house happy is not exactly a hot news flash.

The fourth and most important step is to stress that the upcoming presidential race is not a contest between Trump and Biden, but rather a war between two completely antithetical worldviews: one that embraces traditional American ideas and ideals, and another that favors the "cancel culture" revolution. The former is represented

by Trump, the latter by Biden.

Trump made this clear during his Independence Day speech at Mount Rushmore on July 3, when he described "cancel culture" as the "very definition of totalitarianism," which is "completely alien to [American] culture and values."

More specifically, he said, "In our schools, our newsrooms, even our corporate boardrooms, there is a new far-left fascism that demands absolute allegiance. If you do not speak its language, perform its rituals, recite its mantras and follow its commandments, then you will be censored, banished, blacklisted, persecuted and punished... Make no mistake. This left-wing cultural revolution is designed to overthrow the American Revolution. In so doing, they would destroy the very civilization that rescued billions from poverty, disease, violence and hunger, and that lifted humanity to new heights of achievement, discovery and progress."

Drawing the battle lines, Trump declared that the above efforts "must be stopped."

IF ANYTHING serves to reinforce his words, it's the Democratic Party platform, which seeks to "repair the soul of this nation... to forge a stronger, brighter and more equitable future... Right the wrongs in our democracy, redress the systemic injustices that have long plagued our society... and reinvent our institutions at home and our leadership abroad."

It also states, "We do not simply aspire to return our country to where we were four years ago. We know we must be bolder and more ambitious."

In other words, returning to the days of the progressive administration of former

president Barack Obama is not sufficient to the Democrats' task at hand; their plan, as Trump claimed, is to overhaul the very nature of the country, which they see as inherently evil.

They therefore intend to forge a "new social and economic contract that at last grapples honestly with America's long and ongoing history of racism and disenfranchisement, of segregation and discrimination, and invests instead in building equity and mobility for the people of color who have been left out and left behind for 40 generations."

Apparently, having a black president in office for eight years did nothing to shift this view. On the contrary, Obama's presidency seems to have given the Democrats even greater justification for their gripes.

But then, none of the many and varied Iranian violations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that Obama signed with Tehran in 2015 have made a dent in their position on that either. According to its platform, "The Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA isolated us from our allies and opened the door for Iran to resume its march toward a nuclear weapons capacity that the JCPOA had stopped."

The identity of these so-called "isolated allies" is not clear, but the Democrats even greater justification for their gripes. But then, none of the many and varied Iranian violations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that Obama signed with Tehran in 2015 have made a dent in their position on that either. According to its platform, "The Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA isolated us from our allies and opened the door for Iran to resume its march toward a nuclear weapons capacity that the JCPOA had stopped."

Islamic Republic and cyberattacks by both countries on Iranian computer systems.

Diplomacy – the "urgent" resumption of which Democrats are demanding – served only to strengthen the Iranian resolve to achieve regional, and eventually global, hegemony.

That brings us to Israel, another bone of contention between Democrats and Republicans that needs addressing in relation to Biden and his pick for vice president. Both he and Harris back a diplomatic deal with Iran, believe in the "land for peace" formula for a "two-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and consider Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria to be of questionable legality.

Such are the typical Democratic positions that do not indicate particular animosity toward Israel. Nor is the Jewish state a key concern of American voters, who are preoccupied first and foremost with issues that directly affect their daily lives. But the bond between conservative Americans and their counterparts in Israel matters in a broader sense, because it stems from shared values and policies that the Left in both countries is working hard to derail.

If Biden defeats Trump in November, he and Harris will have been the Trojan Horse that ushered in the anti-American, anti-Israel leftists who will dominate the discourse of their party. One shudders to imagine the crew that will make up his cabinet.

It is this message that Republicans need to convey to anyone liable to err on the side of fantasy about a Democratic Party that no longer exists. Harping on Biden's mental decay, Harris's sexuality and the hypocrisy that each has exhibited of late is a waste of breath and precious time.