Gender
and
Jewish History

EDITED BY

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AND

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Golda and the Court Jew: Golda Meir, Henry Kissinger, and the Personas They Denied

Michael Scott Alexander

The pairing of Golda Meir and Henry Kissinger in an essay about persona may appear random, but the idea was suggested to me by Deborah Dash Moore when she learned I have been working on a political prosopography including the two, leading up to their tense encounters in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war of 1973. Moore pulled me aside at a conference and said I should somewhere address the fact that these two denied the political significance of what was so obviously a part of their public personas: Meir being a woman and Kissinger being a Jew. Such a comparison had not been part of my vision for the project. I had chosen the two because I was interested in power, not persona. But Moore's insight was so precise that it has hovered over my thought since the moment she mentioned it. I hope this essay can be an exercise in reading the tricky terrain of identity and persona, viewed in the light of power and interest. This essay argues that Meir's and Kissinger's lifelong denials of the political importance of their personas constituted, in fact, their most elemental political work. Their abilities to deny what seemed undeniable to most everyone else was founded upon their own thorough identifications with the call of Western liberalism to create a political realm constructed of individuals permitted to make their own identity choices.

Throughout her life, Golda Meir claimed that her sex did not affect her politics or her capacity as a politician. On many occasions she dismissed feminism by claiming that gender was an unhelpful category for understanding politics.[1] Yet any observer of Meir's career will find a long history of explicitly gendered political moments and actions. Despite Meir's self-perception, her political work and her sex were entwined, from the time she was known as Mrs. Meyerson during her early political career in British Palestine to her political ascendancy

as "Golda," the prime minister of Israel. Meir neither particularly noted this persona nor did she disparage it. When an American reporter asked the new prime minister for her gefilte fish recipe, she responded by offering to cook it for the entire press corps.[2] In the same trip to the United States, Meir had absolutely no hesitations in the halls of American power. She let you know, repeatedly, if your view differed from hers in any way, whether you were a janitor in the Histadrut (the Federation of Labor) or president of the United States. There was no escaping Meir's opinion. And in her opinion, expressly stated many times, her being a woman did not really matter politically. There is an apparent contradiction between Meir's perception of herself as a politician undifferentiated by her sex, and the public perception of her as the first mother and grandmother of Israel. That is to say, there is a contradiction between her identity and her persona.

And what of Henry Kissinger? So many suspected him of manipulating, haggling in backrooms, making secret channels abroad and secret tapes at home. Some of these charges may have been true. Yet throughout his career Kissinger presented a core idea about which he was always candid. Since the time of his first serious academic publications in 1957, Kissinger made his realpolitik explicit, including its moral view: a balance of power among nation-states, achieved through the pursuit of self-interest, stabilizes the world and diminishes violence. He was equally explicit about the meaning of Judaism to him: personally, not much. He never really enjoyed its religious aspect, nor did he identify with its collective dimensions. No, he was not callous to the political realities that Jews faced, from Poland in 1939 to Israel in 1973. But neither did he feel, morally speaking, that the woe of this relatively small population had the right to trump the larger stability of the globe. Certainly it could not be allowed to trump American interests. He reasoned straightforwardly. Holocausts occur in conditions of total war. If one believes this to be true, one should try to prevent these conditions from occurring, and by any means necessary. That is exactly what Kissinger did in his career and with his life. When he believed that a political choice might set the interests of Jews, or Israelis, or Cambodians for that matter, against global stability, he always chose the latter and had moral justification for his position.

Yet much of his generation viewed Kissinger as completely cynical, acting for no cause save his own desire for power. Portraits (especially by Jews) depict him in the most derisive tones, whether as power hungry, as a war criminal, or, as Philip Roth said with more precision, as "the court Jew."[3] Roth's epithet is right. The caricature behind Kissinger's persona was indeed the antisemitic character of the court Jew: a political representative of the rejected Jewish nation, who works primarily for his own reward but with the added purpose of laying otherwise great nations in ruins. Veit Harlan's Nazi film *Jud Süß* of 1940

still portrays the clearest version of this old stock character. Why did Kissinger's generation criticize him so, and attach to him this incredible persona? Could it be only on account of Kissinger's politics, a politics that would brook no idealism? Many European Jews of his generation who survived the war saw matters much the same way. But this anticipates this essay's discussion of the confusing tangle of Jewish identity, Jewish persona, and Jewish power in the twentieth century.

By focusing on the group aspect of identity politics, scholars have not given much attention to the individual agency of members in those groups. But if we would try to comprehend the ways in which identity is structured both by others and by an individual actor, we would have a better understanding of what constitutes political behavior. That is to say, *identity* belongs in the study of identity politics. To achieve this, it is sometimes helpful to employ the interpretive prism of phenomenology. Individuals have experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and sometimes they try genuinely to mediate that inner world to others. In political analysis, if someone's words seem consistent with her actions, we should at some level consider believing that her words and actions reflect something of her phenomenal view. We should at least admit the possibility that people do not always speak cynically. So this essay defines identity and persona phenomenologically: identity indicates what a subject claims are her self-perceptions (the phenomenal experience of the self), and persona is the expressed perceptions of the subject held by others. These poles are admittedly related and at times they act reflexively, but as I hope to show, they are not always quite so identical as political philosophers, scientists, and historians have supposed.[4] By acknowledging their difference and comparing them we may better understand the identity politics of two master politicians.

MEIR'S VIEW OF GENDER POLITICS

Whatever had existed in Meir's adolescence of her explicit gender politics became subsumed by her Zionism at age eighteen, in 1916, when she met three pioneers from Palestine, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Ya'akov Zerubavel, and David Ben-Gurion, on their trip to Milwaukee to recruit soldiers for a Jewish Legion that would fight along with the British to defend Palestine. "They were in a fever of anxiety about the fate of the Jews of Palestine," Meir remembered. "In fact, they spoke about the Jewish Legion with such feeling that I immediately tried to volunteer for it—and was crushed when I learned that girls were not being accepted."[5] At that moment Meir might have decried the limitations for women in Zionist politics. But that was not her way of viewing gender politics. Instead she chose to identify what Zionism made possible for women. During the same

recruiting visit, Meir heard Ben-Zvi speak of his future wife, Rachel Yanait, who was a fourth member of their tight group of practical and socialist Zionists. Ben-Zvi's impromptu description of Yanait sparked in Meir a lifelong aspiration of achieving many things in Palestine, including true womanhood. Yanait became her role model:

> As I listened to him, I began to think of her as typical of the women of the *yishuv* [the Jewish settlement in Palestine], who were proving that it was possible to function as wives, mothers and comrades-in-arms, enduring constant danger and hardship, not only without complaining, but with a sense of enormous fulfillment, and it seemed to me that she, and women like her, were doing more—without benefit of publicity—to further the cause of our sex than even the most militant of the suffragists in the United States or England."[6]

To eighteen-year-old Goldie Meyerson, a smart and political young woman living in progressive Milwaukee, the Zionist cause now superseded all others. Indeed it encompassed them. Feminist gains were best made as a byproduct of a nationalist and socialist political focus. In this way Meir upheld a kind of practical feminism. Women would make political inroads on behalf of their sex if they participated generally in politics. Women's rights would follow women as they exercised practical power. To Meir, even the suffragists (whom she admired) had the cart before the horse when they made gender politics their explicit focus. In contradistinction, Meir called her own work a "constructive feminism," and it certainly should be compared to her "practical Zionism," especially regarding their shared principles of political action.

Perhaps in her view of matters in 1916, Meir could not see gender identity as a fruitful area toward which to direct explicit political action. Yet she maintained this critical view of political feminism for her entire life, despite obvious and important gains by that movement throughout the century. "I am not a great admirer of the kind of feminism that gives rise to bra burning, hatred of men or a campaign against motherhood," she said as a retired prime minister in 1975. Yet she also said, "constructive feminism really does women credit and matters much more than who sweeps the house or who sets the table."[7] These were remarkable things to say in 1975. She further claimed that her sex had no effect whatever on her political achievements or limitations, whether she was engaged in the micropolitics of an isolated kibbutz in the 1920s or in the arena of geopolitics half a century later: "The fact is that I have lived and worked with men all my life, but being a woman has never hindered me in any way at all. It has never caused me unease or given me an inferiority complex or made me think that men are better off than women—or that it is a disaster to give birth to children. Not at all. Nor have men ever given me preferential treatment."[8]

Is it actually possible that Meir saw matters as such? Could there have been no difference between her experience of a life in politics and that of her male colleagues? With regard to significant gender differences in politics, Meir would only acknowledge a "double burden" borne by women, created by the obligations of motherhood balanced against the fulfillments of working in realms beyond the family. Yet even this double burden, she said, was solved by Zionism through its socialist experiment, the kibbutz, "where life is organized to enable [women] to work and rear children at the same time."[9] But aside from her double burden as mother and citizen, could she really have viewed her own political experience as undifferentiated by her sex?

Certain crucial episodes in her political career, episodes that were obviously affected by gender, make her expressed view difficult to accept.

GENDER EVENTS IN MEIR'S POLITICAL LIFE

Gender affected Meir's political life from the moment she first met the Zionist emissaries in Milwaukee and was not permitted to join their Jewish Legion during World War I. From then on, gendered political events and perceptions marked the most significant moments in her early career, even if Meir herself did not expressly view matters this way.

Most significantly, Meir's gained a reputation as "The Mattress" during her years in Histadrut headquarters in the 1920s and 1930s, a title she acquired while she was married and still not separated from her husband. She had long romantic relationships with both David Remez and Zalman Shazar (later the third president of Israel), and she probably had some lesser affairs as well.[10] Meir appears to have held significant emotional attachments to these men, and there is no record that she ever commented even to her closest women friends about how she viewed these relationships politically speaking. She discussed her affairs with her friends, but never in the light of Histadrut politics. That very silence may be its own evidence that she did not regard the relationships as politically significant. Or, equally compellingly, we may understand the silence as a symptom of a time and ideology that held sexual politics to be illegitimate. Either way, some obvious questions arise. Did these relationships in fact affect her political achievements by micropolitical, deeply personal, means? With regard to the political consequences of Meir's sexual persona, "The Mattress" is a particularly sexist epithet, one that was not generally attached to women who worked in Histadrut offices but to Meir in particular. Did the persona affect her political life? To that cauldron of ambiguity one must add Meir's estranged marriage: endured for thirty-four years, twenty-three of them in separation from her husband, whom she never divorced and always claimed to love. Were there

political reasons for this marriage, or ramifications? There simply is not enough data to conduct the micropolitical analysis necessary to understand the specific political significances not just of Meir's sex and even her sexuality, but also of her sexual persona.[11]

We do know that David Remez, with whom Meir was having an affair, secured for Meir her first proper political appointment, in the Histadrut, as secretary of its Women Worker's Council in 1927. Recent scholarship has suggested that Remez made this appointment in order to curtail the aspirations of political feminists within the Histadrut. Feminists and their political concerns had made serious enough gains to mandate their official recognition through the creation of a specific women's council, but Histadrut leaders wanted the feminist achievement to end there. Though Meir had lived in the yishuv since 1919 and certainly had crossed paths with the booming feminist movement both in the kibbutz world and within the ranks of urban labor, she always expressly opposed that cause. So when Histadrut leaders circumvented feminist circles and selected Meir to lead the Women Worker's Council, they hoped she would defang it. Meir achieved that, quickly turning the group into a "social service organization," which within three years was renamed the "Organization of Working Mothers"—a title accurately reflecting the sum total of what Meir held to be the burden of her sex. A successful politician is usually accused of many things, but those who claim that Meir single-handedly ended the first wave of feminism in Palestine exaggerate only slightly.[12]

By 1932 Meir probably felt limited by her office in the Women Worker's Council. She sought and received permission from Histadrut leaders to serve a two-year term as secretary of the Pioneer Women, an American women's philanthropic organization in support of the Histadrut. In her memoir, Meir claimed she took this job so far away from Palestine, Histadrut headquarters, and the formal locus of Zionist power, because her six-year-old daughter Sarah was ill and needed American medical attention.[13] But this excuse seems strained given how little time she actually spent with Sarah in America and how much time she spent on the road. Likely, Meir felt stifled in the Histadrut and wanted to strengthen her significance and power within the organization.

She spent most nights of her two-year trip to America in strange homes, on strange couches and beds. She gave Pioneer Women a national presence and created many new chapters. Meir spoke extemporaneously, never from notes. "Sometimes in the middle of the speech she wandered off a little," said one observer, "but her beginnings and endings were tremendous."[14] Following party line, she described Palestine as a frontier and the Jewish laborer as the new pioneer. Though she certainly addressed women's concerns, she did not emphasize these but rather spoke to more general problems facing the Histadrut and Jewish

settlement generally, including immigration and the shifting political situation regarding the Arabs and British. Her memoirs indicate she was taken to task more than once by Pioneer Women leadership for speaking beyond the sphere of her listeners and without sufficient tears. Meir could only reply, "I'm sorry, but I really can't talk any other way."[15] Meir spoke what was on her mind. She was a spectacular speaker and fundraiser, certainly the best among the ranks of the Labor party, and probably the most fiscally successful among all advocates for Zionism with the single exception of Chaim Weizmann himself.[16] Through this initial work for Pioneer Women and later fundraising tours, David Ben-Gurion came to think of Meir as the "Jewish woman who got the money which made the state possible."[17]

After her return to Palestine in 1934, now with the political support of American Jewry (specifically American women), Meir moved up Histadrut ranks and became a member of Vaad Hapoel, the Executive Committee of the Histadrut. She was soon elected as Histadrut secretariat as well as to the chairmanship of Kuppat Holim (the General Sickness Fund). Perhaps most significantly, during this time and until the end of the British Mandate, she became the de facto Histadrut representative to British occupation authorities. She spoke English natively, never wavered from whatever consensus the party leadership had achieved, and was never intimidated.

The most significant moment in her career as representative to the British began on Black Saturday, June 29, 1946, when British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin arrested 2,738 Palestinian Jews, killed three, and generally shut down the Jewish settlement with closed borders and curfews. He used these same tactics in India and Ireland. The entirety of the Histadrut leadership was sent to the jail in Latrun or went into hiding, with the exception of Meir (Ben-Gurion was in Paris). "Perhaps I wasn't really important enough," she recalled, "or perhaps they couldn't accommodate women in Latrun."[18] With Moshe Sharett in jail, Meir became acting head of the Political Department, and she ran all Histadrut operations in Palestine through the end of 1946, including significant civil resistance, though she did communicate with her colleagues in Latrun through a milkman.[19]

Acting as head of the Political Department during the British crackdown was the last post Meir held because of her sex. From that point on her sex became only a hindrance, if that. Shortly after Israel's establishment, the religious right opposed her election as secretary of labor, but could not block her. Hopes of her becoming mayor of Tel Aviv in 1950 were probably quashed for misogynist reasons. Then the record becomes more difficult to discern. Gender still mattered, but there was no particular instance to demonstrate its political significance. Perhaps a micropolitical analysis might prove otherwise, but she does

not appear to have been immediately limited by her sex in her political dealings, whether domestic or international.

So perhaps Meir's deprecation of the political significance of her sex is more understandable than it would initially appear. Meir did not view holding a gendered political identity to be in her interest. She had many female friends and political allies, and she certainly worked in the world of women's politics for long spans of her career, but any group feeling she might have had did not dominate her political interests. She enjoyed strong political relationships with men and women alike, and denied that it was useful to focus on the gender aspects of those relationships.

Can we surmise unspoken reasons for this denial? Perhaps it reflected Meir's famous proclivity to think in black and white, and with respect to politics the world was already clearly divided for her—between Jew and non-Jew. All other politics didn't exist; or rather, other politics were not significant, and constituted only distractions from the essential work of creating a Jewish state. In Meir's view, existential threats facing the Jewish people may have trumped whatever inequalities existed in gender politics. It is equally possible that Meir viewed gender politics as a losing issue. Besides thinking in black and white, Meir was also famous for seeking, finding, and abiding by the will of the majority, and in Palestine and Israel of her generation, men were quite obviously the political majority. So it is reasonable to speculate that Meir silently considered the politicization of gender as threatening her individual political interests. Still, we should also admit the possibility that Meir believed what she said, and that at least in her own case and in her own consciousness, she simply viewed gender politics as an irrelevant distraction. Gender was a factor that Meir herself intentionally did not grant sustained political focus. Insofar as she was a master politician who spent her entire adult life in the halls of power, her expressed opinion about the utility of a gendered view of politics to her own career and identity should count for something.

JEWISH EVENTS IN KISSINGER'S POLITICAL LIFE

The earliest and most profound political events in Kissinger's life that occurred because he was a Jew were his experiences living in Nazi Germany from ages ten to fifteen, and shortly thereafter the murder of thirteen of his relatives in the Holocaust. Of course Kissinger and other Jews were not alone in giving special significance to the Nazi years of power and the period of the Second World War. Between fifty million and seventy million people were killed in those years, presumably affecting every person who lived through the time. Nevertheless, for many Jews of Kissinger's generation the Nazi years of power held particular

meaning because of the special persecution of Jews. For Kissinger, the constant intimidating presence of Hitler Youth and brown shirts in his hometown of Fürth gave personal form to the forces of genocide that would soon decimate his family. In a rare admission of the consequence of these childhood experiences to his later politics, Kissinger told the Museum of Jewish Heritage that his boyhood experience in Nazi Germany "affected my ideas about global issues importantly": "It made me impatient with people who thought that all they needed to do was make a profound proclamation that made them feel good. I mean, I had seen evil in the world, and I knew it was there, and I knew that there are some things you have to fight for, and that you can't insist that everything be to some ideal construction you have made."[20]

What conditions and actions had allowed evil to burst into the world and encompass the globe? What practical steps might have curtailed its emergence? How could similar holocausts be avoided in the future? These were the core practical questions of Kissinger's career as a political scientist and diplomat.

If Kissinger's political consciousness began with the ascendancy of Nazi Germany and the violence of the Second World War, his political life of action started in their aftermath. When Kissinger entered the United States Army in 1944 he was assigned to Division Intelligence because of his knowledge of German. After Germany's defeat in 1945, he moved to the Counter-Intelligence Corps, in which the twenty-one-year-old was responsible for locating and extracting information from Nazis, as well as for the general management of Krefeld, a town of two hundred thousand people. Kissinger found himself among a great many Jewish émigrés in the American Counter-Intelligence Corps, since the Office of Strategic Services (forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency) had made explicit recommendations for military units to use German Jews as "specially qualified personnel" due to their language and cultural knowledge, coupled with their antipathy for the Nazis. As historian Jeremi Suri points out, a large number of German Jewish émigrés worked in military Counter-Intelligence, including Franz Neumann, Hajo Holborn, Felix Gilbert, and Herbert Marcuse, and there began long American careers based on their abilities "to translate German society for Americans."

Bringing the legacy of realpolitik to the consciousness and practice of American political thought constituted Kissinger's career of translation. The good wisdom of statesmen like Metternich and Bismarck, which was the subject of Kissinger's scholarly work at Harvard, appeared less Germanic and more European through the pen of a Jew. Indeed many of these Jewish German émigrés tried to emphasize a European cosmopolitan gist, in contradistinction to a German national one, in their translations. European internationalism was at the heart of Kissinger's famous International Seminar at Harvard, which brought young and aspiring world leaders to America to build international relation-

ships. The seminar represented Kissinger's personal attempt to shatter the isola-
tionist tendencies that had forestalled American involvement in European poli-
tics when American influence might have averted Hitler's bravado. With a sense
of mistakes recently made, and a hope to affect a different future, Kissinger's
International Seminar provided Americans with the contacts necessary to con-
duct personal diplomacy in the context of an emerging global Cold War.

Suri calls this international work "cosmopolitan" and therefore akin to the
phenomenon historian David A. Hollinger describes regarding other theoretical
commitments made by Jews during the century.[21] While some might protest that
Kissinger's realpolitik fostered nationalism by bolstering the power and role of
individual nation-states, Kissinger's hopes for flexible, global, and relationship-
based American diplomacy in the second half of the century did reflect cosmo-
politan tendencies. Compare Kissinger to his Cold War predecessors George F.
Kennan, Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, and Dean Rusk, who saw interna-
tional politics as a showdown and diplomacy as a mechanism for containment.
Remarkably, Kissinger fostered intense negotiations with belligerents, grounded
in the belief that in the pursuit of "real interest" we are all more similar than a
naïve comparison of our ideologies would indicate. This is cosmopolitan di-
plomacy at the deepest level: real dialogue based on the belief in genuine com-
mon interest, despite outward ideological appearances to the contrary. Kissinger
held fast to this cosmopolitan belief, which enabled his inexhaustible schedule
of shuttle diplomacy and negotiation, even among the most intransigent ideo-
logical enemies: America and the Soviet Union; America and China; America
and North Vietnam; Israel and Egypt; even Israel and Syria. What diplomat—
liberal or conservative, before or since—has believed so firmly that one could
find common cause even in this range of impossible animosities?

Can we characterize this cosmopolitanism and theory of diplomacy as "Jew-
ish"? Since neither American nor Israeli Jews particularly appreciated Kissing-
er's work, his diplomacy hardly represents a Jewish view. Still, his experiences
as a Jewish German émigré and his hope of locating and avoiding the kinds of
problems that caused the Second World War influenced his diplomacy. In that
regard, Kissinger and much of his generation of émigré intellectuals pursued
careers initiated by the Holocaust. Even though their actions often took radi-
cally different paths (from the Marxism of the Frankfurt School scholars to the
conservatism of Leo Strauss) they held a common touchstone and animus. In
this limited sense Kissinger's diplomatic theory can be viewed as Jewish, because
the Jewish catastrophe initiated and animated it. Moreover, this Jewish experi-
ence was a core element of his identity and life's work.

Suri also suggests that for a period Kissinger was a "policy Jew," one among
many Jews working in political science, sociology, and history departments in

the second half of the century who were not "the face of power," but rather acted through the interest and patronage of leading government figures. They were, says Suri, "the connective tissue of Cold War society."[22] According to Suri the policy Jew was a hybrid of the court Jew of the European Absolutist monarchies and the state Jew of the liberal French republic. Like the court Jew, the power of the American policy Jew derived from personal and unequal relationships with those who wielded actual administrative government power. Like the state Jew, who worked in government offices as a technician and bureaucrat, Suri believes the American policy Jew was devoted to the state out of a desire to earn its protection. More generally, Suri says the behavior of the American policy Jew, especially his "fealty" and occasional "sycophantic displays of loyalty," fits a historic pattern of "persistent gravitation of Jewish political allegiances in the diaspora toward central authority."[23]

Though I agree with Suri's claims about the emergence of policy Jews in the twentieth century, I am not convinced by Suri's genealogy of them. Are their careers really best understood in the light of the court Jew, the state Jew, and a sycophantic fealty to central government authority? What, for instance, distinguishes the motivations and patriotic identities of these American Jews from their fellow Americans, all members of what has generally been called a "civic generation?"[24] Non-Jews whose political consciousnesses emerged during American mobilizations for the Second World War are not accused of a foundational self-interest and cynicism in their patriotism, so why are Jews? "Having found a haven from Nazi tyranny in the United States," Kissinger wrote, "I had personally experienced what our nation meant to the rest of the world, especially to the persecuted and disadvantaged."[25] Kissinger articulated this sentiment and justification throughout his career. Is this sycophantic dependence and fealty? Or is it the patriotism and conviction of a war refuge turned American citizen and public servant, a genuine believer in the American liberal achievement that had assimilated even this world outcast?

Yes, Walt Rostrow, Daniel Ellsberg, Walter Laqueur, Henry Kissinger, and many among a larger cadre of German Jewish émigrés circumvented working their way through typical bureaucratic state organizations by espousing policy from lecterns and in academic journals. In so doing they gained the ear and interest of the highest level of government decision makers without having to navigate large administrative bodies. Those government bodies, such as the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, in the 1950s, 1960s, and later, still retained stiff impediments to the advancement of Jews and members of other recent immigrant groups, not to mention racial minorities.[26] So with respect to Jewish political influence, the seeming preponderance of academic voices over governmental ones may be due to the fact that Jews who did join

government administrative agencies did not have their voices heard in them for antisemitic reasons, especially regarding foreign policy (that has been a long-standing criticism of the State department). Also, typically government bureaucrats do not have their opinions vetted publicly, yet another possible reason for the seeming silence of Jewish governmental voices as compared to academic ones. In addition, Jews had risen remarkably high in faculty ranks of all major universities, in the humanities and hard and social sciences. The wholesale scaling of academic barriers after World War II is an event in its own right, one in which policy Jews, including Kissinger, participated. If this generation of Jewish academics and civil servants is to be viewed in any way as a generation of court Jews, that would only make sense from the perspective of persona (how they were viewed), not by motivation and certainly not by identity (how they saw themselves).

KISSINGER'S JEWISH IDENTITY AND JEWISH PERSONA

Persona of course matters. Kissinger was aware of his persona as a "court Jew," using it and struggling against it. No clearer example exists than that of Kissinger's service during and after the Yom Kippur War. Arabs simultaneously saw Kissinger as suspect (at their first meeting, King Feisal of Saudi Arabia offered Kissinger a copy of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* which Kissinger declined to accept) and as a "magician" with special influence over the Israelis. Israelis viewed Kissinger as a Jewish lackey, whose power derived solely from his personal influence in the White House, and not from his own office as the United States Secretary of State. President Nixon himself, no stranger to stereotype and prejudice, both distrusted Kissinger's commitment to American interests in the Middle East and pushed Kissinger to use personal influence as a Jew to persuade Jewish leaders concerning American outreach to Arab nations. These various prejudices surrounding Kissinger's persona attempted to identify him as a holder of a particular kind of "Jewish power" that was in reality quite different from the legitimate power he actually wielded.

Kissinger did not always disabuse his interlocutors of their prejudices, but neither did their perceptions influence his strategic view of policy or tactics. Indeed, these prejudices made Kissinger more careful to reiterate and clarify his longstanding commitment to realpolitik as the only realistic means to secure agreement and understanding during crisis. Kissinger later remembered the personal, conflicting identity pressures of working during the Yom Kippur War as an American and simultaneously as a Jew, while he recognized that his persona made these internal identity conflicts even more pronounced and dangerous to navigate: "I had to subordinate my emotional preferences to my perception

of the national interest. Indeed, given the historical suspicions toward my religion, I had a special obligation to do so. It was not always easy; occasionally it proved painful. But Israel's security could be preserved in the long run only by anchoring it to a strategic interest of the United States, not to the sentiments of individuals."[27] The strategic interest to which Kissinger planned to anchor Israeli security was the defeat of Soviet influence in the region. So long as Arab countries accepted Soviet support, the United States would use the Israeli military to limit Soviet successes. That confluence of interest between Israelis and Americans constituted the real foundation of their political relationship, whatever other special historical or cultural sentiments may have existed.[28] But when Anwar Sadat threw out his Soviet advisors and appealed directly to the United States to settle the Sinai disputes and the Yom Kippur War, he undermined America's strategic interest in a total Israeli military success. Kissinger's thinking in this regard merits extensive citation, which I take from a Department of State staff meeting that occurred immediately after a ceasefire was achieved:

> From the beginning, our problem was this: We could not tolerate an Israeli defeat. Apart from any sentiment attachment that may have existed to Israel and apart from any historic ties, the judgment was that if another American-armed country were defeated by Soviet-armed countries [e.g., South Vietnam], the inevitable lessons that anybody around the world would have to draw is to rely increasingly on the Soviet Union. Second, it would undermine the position in the Middle East, even in countries that formerly were not formally opposing us, such as the Saudis, Jordan, if the radical Arab states supported by the Soviet Union scored a great victory over the Israelis.
>
> On the other hand, we could not make our policy hostage to the Israelis, because our interests, while parallel in respect to that I have outlined, are not identical in the overall term. From an Israeli point of view, it is no disaster to have the whole Arab world radicalized and anti-American, because this guarantees our continued support. From an American point of view, it is a disaster. And therefore we went to extreme lengths to stay in close touch with all the key Arab participants.[29]

Kissinger's persona during this crisis influenced him only subtly if at all, and in nonessential ways. His identity as a Jew with sentiments for the Jewish state endured, though he held it in check consciously, indeed professionally. Instead Kissinger demonstrated his identity as an American statesman and diplomat with primary allegiance to American national interests through his actions and words. "I don't know what other Jews expect of me," he said to a friend during this period, "but I consider myself an American first."[30] His diplomatic behavior confirms this belief. That is to say, he admitted his Jewishness existed, in regard

to both persona and identity, but he deprecated its political significance as ultimately distracting and insignificant, even if he sometimes struggled to contain it. Like Golda Meir in her attitude toward gender, Kissinger may not have been unreasonable in thinking so.

THE BENEFIT OF CONSIDERING THE PHENOMENAL VIEW

So everyone saw what Meir and Kissinger did not. It is practically a textbook definition of repression. Yet we should hesitate to slap that term too hastily onto their behaviors, as if by so tagging we understood anything more. Of course people do repress, but people also choose to emphasize that which is important to them and in their interest to emphasize. They ignore, and sometimes even deprecate and contain, that which they view to be extraneous, or dangerous, to the pursuit of their interest.

Perhaps we should for a moment reverse our assumptions and wonder what it is that Meir and Kissinger saw that everyone else did not. Our questions would then be framed more by their phenomenal experiences (their identities) than by those imagined by their viewers (their personas): what complex of feelings, ideas, and reasons enabled Meir and Kissinger to view as insignificant that which others viewed as utterly significant? Given their supreme accomplishments as both politicians and statesmen, what made their views so successful? Or, what made their self-analyses *correct*?

Both cases remind us of just how supremely dedicated their generations of Jews were to the egalitarian political promises of the West—Israeli socialism for Meir and American liberalism for Kissinger. These promises of individual agency and political identity inspired both politicians to believe that they could make their own choices, despite the sharpest evidence to the contrary. Indeed this essential belief in their own political agency brought the two face-to-face in 1973 in a situation of Jews wielding real state power, Israeli and American, that would have been unthinkable just a quarter century before. It was having lived through the unthinkable period of Jewish powerlessness that pushed both to cleave to the Enlightenment political hope as their last hope. In their cases they seem to have been right to do so.

Still, in both cases it remains remarkable and significant that neither Meir nor Kissinger were seen as they saw themselves. Rather they were asked to inhabit roles, markers of a group life that they themselves did not recognize. Meir became Golda, the mother and later grandmother of Israel, the Yiddishe Mama and Bubbe. Kissinger became the court Jew in Nixon's cabinet. This realm of persona also shaped their political reality. These personas—both of them so obviously structured to discredit and enfeeble the power of a minority, both of

them much older and more nefarious than even these two cases demonstrate—
are among the real obstacles that Meir and Kissinger faced and overcame. And
I admit, I am bothered that these obstacles were not only the work of explicit
enemies, but were also laid down by identity groups who tried to claim them.
The pitched battles for political womanhood and political Jewry in the twenti-
eth century were battles in which Meir and Kissinger, respectively, chose not
to participate. From their perspectives, they had higher political purposes to
achieve. Neither politician was unreasonable in making the choices that they
did. But maybe those who tried to locate unspoken group affiliations in the two
were also reasonable in their way. Groups and persons must both be considered
in any political reckoning, especially in the reckonings of identity politics. De-
spite all efforts, Meir and Kissinger were tied politically to the groups that their
personas demanded them to inhabit. That is also political reality. Perhaps then
it is sufficient to conclude that if scholars will compare external identity pres-
sures (persona) against inner-directed interests (identity), we may come closer
to knowing and navigating the political reality in which we all live.

Notes
   1. In this essay I follow Joan Wallach Scott's use of "gender," using it only to connote
the overall construction of societal roles through sex-specific identity assumptions, or
what Scott defines as "knowledge about sexual difference." See Joan Wallach Scott, *Gen-
der and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2.
   2. Golda Meir, *My Life* (New York: Putnam, 1975), 393.
   3. See Seymour M. Hirsh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*
(New York: Summit Books, 1984); Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*
(New York: Verso, 2002); Philip Roth, *I Married a Communist* (New York: Vintage, 1999),
278–79.
   4. Recent political scholarship subsumes questions of persona under larger discus-
sions of identity, as though these things were one and the same. Charles Taylor argues
for a "politics of recognition," meaning that we must emphasize the real consequences
of external, socially imposed, identity categories for politics. Georgia Warnke notes the
illogic, the impermanence, and indeed the utter flexibility of identity borders and defini-
tions, and therefore questions the use of identity for political analysis at all. Both avenues
ultimately call into question the same thing: the use of agency for understanding either
identity or politics. Here I try to compare external identity pressures (persona) against
inner-directed interests (identity). See Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in

Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25–73, and Georgia Warnke, *After Identity: Rethinking Race, Sex, and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

　　5. Meir, *My Life,* 57.

　　6. Ibid.

　　7. Ibid., 113–14.

　　8. Ibid., 114.

　　9. Ibid., 115. See also Golda Meir, "Women's Lib—1930," in *Golda Meir Speaks Out,* ed. Marie Syrkin (Jerusalem: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 43–45.

　　10. Affairs included Yaacov Hazan, Zalman Aranne, and Harry Montor. See Ralph G. Martin, *Golda: Golda Meir, The Romantic Years* (New York: Scribner, 1988), 227–30, 256–57, 306–12.

　　11. Frank Costigliola in his work on the micropolitics of Franklin D. Roosevelt uses the day records of the White House to conduct his analysis. No such record exists for this period of Meir's political life. See Frank Costigliola, "Broken Circle: The Isolation of Franklin D. Roosevelt in World War II," *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 5 (November 2008): 677–718.

　　12. See Sarah Schmidt, "Hagiography in the Diaspora: Golda Meir and Her Biographers" in *American Jewish History* 92, no. 2 (June 2004): 180–82.

　　13. Meir, *My Life,* 136.

　　14. Martin, *Golda,* 188.

　　15. Meir, *My Life,* 140.

　　16. See Yizhak Greenberg, "Golda in the Histadrut: Emissary and Mission" in *Golda—Growth of a Leader,* ed. Avizohar Meir (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1994), 41–137.

　　17. Schmidt, "Hagiography," 170.

　　18. Meir, *My Life,* 195.

　　19. Martin, *Golda,* 269.

　　20. Cited in Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 50.

　　21. David A. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

　　22. Suri, *Henry Kissinger,* 96.

　　23. Ibid., 127–29.

　　24. See Suri's discussion at ibid., 107.

　　25. Ibid., 127.

　　26. Ibid., 95–99.

　　27. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (New York: Little, Brown, 1982), 203–204.

　　28. Some scholars have made a great deal of the soft cultural issues, but these do not operate without some shared real political interest. That is to say, despite admittedly pronounced public relations skills, Israelis or Jews have not been able to convince Americans to act beyond what a reasonable person might take as America's own interest. See Henry L. Feingold, *Jewish Power in America: Myth and Reality* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2008).

　　29. Henry Kissinger, "Record of Secretary Kissinger's Staff Meeting of October 23, 1973 (4:35pm)," in *The October War: A Retrospective,* ed. Richard B. Parker (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 341.

　　30. Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 561.