**Book Proposal:**

, *Europe Through Israeli Eyes: Israel and the Continent After the Holocaust*

**Synopsis**

*Europe Through Israeli Eyes* will explore Israeli perceptions of the continent in the second half of the twentieth century. It is the first book to systematically investigate Israeli media debates about Europe, encompassing a wide range of political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. In so doing, closely scrutinizes an understudied but crucial dynamic within the Israeli state and society, while making an important contribution to the study of the European idea and transforming our understanding of Israeli-European relations.

Europe has played a key role in Israeli social development. The Zionist movement and many of the state’s founders were born on the continent and European influences on the very inception of the state were crucial. Accordingly, Israel’s links with Europe figure prominently in discussions of the founding of the state and its entanglement with European settler colonialism. They also importantly inform many contemporary political debates that are, however, often fueled by simplistic dichotomies and partisanship. One side portrays Israel as a European or Western outpost in the Middle East, a “Euro-Israel.” The other eschews the country’s connections with European colonialism and related ideas and posits a Jewish break with Europe after the Holocaust. By investigating Israeli views and perceptions of the continent during the second half of the twentieth century, *Europe Through Israeli Eyes* challenges these simplistic counterpositions. The book emphasizes the central importance of the continent for Israelis during this period, while at the same time highlighting deeply ambivalent Israeli attitudes toward Europe when fiercely debating about the country’s distinctive outlooks and geocultural affinities.

Exploring Israeli conceptions of Europe in a systematic fashion is challenging because the concept of Europe itself is difficult to grasp. It can refer not only to a geographical entity, but also to ideas, political visions, cultural influences, societal discourses, and more. *Europe Through Israeli Eyes* identifies several discrete contexts through which Israelis have experienced Europe and debated its meaning, influences, and significance for their own country.

The book examines the period from the 1948 establishment of the state to the turn of the millennium, when the expansion of the EU on the one hand and the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and outbreak of the Second Intifada on the other profoundly altered European-Israeli relations. It explores Israeli conceptions of Europe in light of changing geopolitical contexts, such as the growing political importance of the United States for the Jewish state in the 1960s and 1970s (and the resulting processes of Americanization), as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989–90.

The book’s first part deals with perceptions of Europe in political and economic debates in Israel, starting with the institution that came to represent the idea of Europe like no other in the post-war period: The body that evolved into what is now the European Union (EU). While close ties with the EU and its forerunners have been vital to Israelis, they also paid close attention to developments in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, not least because most of Israel’s founding figures came from that region. Israelis also vigorously debated Europe’s powerful presence in the region in the form of French and British colonialism. By bringing all these aspects together, the book shapes a nuanced and comprehensive picture of what Europe has represented to Israelis.

The second part of the book explores the various ways in which Israelis have participated in European culture. Israelis have, for example, competed in various continental sports leagues and Europe’s largest music festival, the Eurovision Song Contest, as well as traveling the continent for leisure. The book shows how these were not just forms of recreation, but also arenas within which Israelis could debate, sometimes fiercely, the influence on and meaning of Europe for their own society. This is all the more pertinent because the question of European influences on Israeli society has directly informed one of the key tensions in Israeli society: The divide between Jews of European heritage (*Ashkenazim*) and Jews from the Middle East and North Africa (*Mizrahim*). The fields of sports, music, and travel offer an important window into such debates, and help paint a subtle picture of the Israeli engagement with Europe and its culture.

*Europe Through Israeli Eyes* contributes to current scholarly discourse on the idea of Europe, which relates to the continent not as a geographical, political, or social reality, but as a subject that is constantly re-interpreted and questioned. Challenging long-inscribed Eurocentric narratives of Europe, scholars increasingly examine the view of Europe from its margins. The book’s analysis of perspectives from Israel, a country in Asia that is strongly influenced by European, North African, and Middle Eastern cultures, will make an innovative and distinctive contribution to these discussions. Defying simplistic binary categorization, these Israeli perspectives illustrate the unique dynamics and interdependencies between continents and cultures. The book will demonstrate how the way Israelis see Europe and its significance for their own state and society has had a central influence not only on Israeli-European relations, but also on the Jewish state’s integration into Asia.

The main source material for the book consists of thousands of articles and graphic caricatures from the country’s major Hebrew-language daily newspapers as well as a series of popular Hebrew-language travel guides to Europe. My work capitalizes on the recent advanced digitization of these media, which has opened new research vistas by enabling extensive searching and tracing of specialized subjects and themes. By analyzing Hebrew-language publications, the book focuses on the Jewish-Zionist sectors of Israeli society. Ultra-Orthodox and Palestinian-Arab societies are addressed where relevant, but to fully explore each of their very different backgrounds and thus perspectives on Europe would require separate projects. While both groups were largely marginalized during many of the decades under discussion, the Zionist sector was central to the establishment and governance of the state and its institutions. Print media played a pivotal role in the formation and negotiation of the newly formed Israeli national collective. The press simultaneously constituted and shaped the public for which it claimed to speak. Against this backdrop, the book interprets media discussions about Europe simultaneously as a reflection on the Israeli-Zionist collective and integral to the development of “Israeliness.” This process, however, has always been an evolving and multi-voiced phenomenon. Accordingly, the book will draw upon a diverse array of newspapers from the Zionist sector, representing a wide spectrum of political, social and cultural perspectives, and reads them in systematically comparative fashion. It traces the interplay between various perceptions arguing that, for Israeli Jews, Europe took on a starkly Janus-faced image, in which its positive and negative dimensions remained intimately intertwined, dynamically and reciprocally influencing and shaping the Jewish Israeli gaze.

By examining the Zionist public sphere, it sheds important new light on the ideas and concepts, as well as the concrete realities, that Israelis associate with Europe and their assessment of the continent's impact on their own country.

**Book Structure and Chapter Outlines**

The chapters are thematically rather than chronologically organized with each chapter scrutinizing a different context in which Israelis encountered the continent, highlighting distinct aspects of what “Europe” has meant to Israelis in the second half of the twentieth century. Rather than claiming to provide an exhaustive picture or to cover all Israeli debates about Europe, they offer six different facets of the larger discourse on the continent that help to reveal its complexity and dynamism.

Introduction: Jews and Europe

The introduction outlines the main arguments of the book and summarizes the historical and geopolitical contexts of Israeli engagement with Europe. It situates my work within the existing literature on European-Israeli relations, as well as in scholarly, analytical, and policymaking discussions about the “idea of Europe” to prepare the ground for consideration of Israeli perceptions of the continent.

*Part 1: Europe’s Different Faces*

This part is dedicated to the Israeli discourse surrounding the formation of European political and economic frameworks in response to the two major fault lines that defined much of the period: East/West and North/South.

Chapter I: Between Memory and *Realpolitik*: Israeli Perceptions of the EU

This traces Israeli media discussions about the creation and development what is now the EU up to the 1990s Oslo Peace Process and the EU’s Association Agreement with Israel in 2000. Indeed, Israelis debated not only the economic and political relevance of this body, but also its idealistic goals of European rapprochement after World War II. The chapter highlights conflicting attitudes toward the postwar European project, arguing that it was Western Europe’s profound importance to the Jewish state through its geographical and, in many ways, ideological proximity to it that created this ambivalence.

Chapter II: Dissociating from the Past: Israelis Perspectives on Eastern Europe

The emergence of what became the EU generated a powerful Israeli focus on the continent’s West, while central and eastern Europe disappeared behind the Iron Curtain. Yet, as Chapter II shows, the Warsaw Pact countries remained extremely important to Israelis, both in terms of national policy and the Jewish heritage of many there and their links to the Jews who were still there. The chapter examines the ideas Israelis associated with central and eastern Europe and how these changed throughout the Cold War and after the demise of the Soviet Union. The rupture with Central and Eastern Europe and the construction of the Soviet Union as an “other,” I argue, consolidated Israelis’ sense of themselves as belonging to a Western-style state and furthered their estrangement from the former centers of Ashkenazi Jewry.

Chapter III: Europe in Asia and Africa: Israeli Debates on Colonialism

European influence, however, extended far beyond the continent itself. For Israelis, this manifested itself especially in the form of British and French colonial ventures in North Africa and the Middle East. The two powers were also the Jewish state’s most important allies in the 1950s and 1960s, but relations worsened when the two started dismantling their colonial regimes and transforming their relations with the former subalterns. Such issues were all the more crucial to Israelis, as their state was itself accused as being merely another European colonial project. Chapter 3 thus traces the media discussions about European colonialism and its legacy. These debates were shaped not only by the attempts of the Jewish state between Europe and Asia, but also by tensions between *Ashkenazim* and *Mizrahim* and the question of the geo-cultural outlook of the state. These tensions, as well as the broader dynamics between Europe and the Afro-Asian world, I argue, complicated Israelis’ ability to find their place on the continent.

*Part 2: Experiencing Europe through Culture and Travel*

The second part of the book is devoted to three contexts through which a wider Israeli public experienced Europe in a more direct manner: The media spectacle of Eurovision; Israeli participation in European sports leagues; and travel to Europe.

Chapter IV: Falling Between All Stools? Israeli Sport in Search of International Frameworks

Chapter IV looks at debates about the fate of the two most popular team sports in Israel: Soccer and basketball. Israel’s problematic geopolitical circumstances found a very real expression in the country’s international sporting affiliations. While some disciplines, like basketball, were integrated into European frameworks early on, other athletes joined Asian leagues, most prominently the country’s soccer teams. However, when the political atmosphere in Asia deteriorated in the 1970s, the Israeli Football Association was expelled from the Asian leagues and subsequently attempted to enter European ones. Israeli sports, one commentator bemoaned, fell between all the stools. Chapter IV demonstrates that these issues sparked debates about Israel’s geocultural orientation and allegiances far beyond the sports arena. These debates illustrate that Israelis of the period always discussed Europe in the context of and in dynamic interaction with other geocultural connections and influences. Israeli images of Europe, the chapter makes clear, must therefore be understood in the context of these dynamics.

Chapter V: Singing a Song for Europe: Israel in the Eurovision Song Contest

Due to their membership of the European Broadcasting Union, Israel was eligible to participate the Eurovision Song Contest, which it did regularly from 1973 onward. Eurovision participation challenged Israelis, their country being one of the few participants from outside of the continent, to grapple with their different affiliations with Europe and its institutions. Therefore, media coverage of the competition did not solely focus on the artistic aspects but also on the evolving dynamics of European-Israeli relations, discourses on European Jewish history, and its significance for Israel. Focusing on these issues, I argue that participation in the annual spectacle became an important ritual that helped Israelis come to terms with their complex relationship with the continent.

Chapter VI: Between Leisure Trips and Heritage Tourism: Guides Tours to Europe in Hebrew

Israelis participated in the European cultural sphere also quite concretely through travel. Israel’s proximity to the continent and its highly developed tourism industry turned it into the most popular leisure tourism destination for Israelis. Europe is home to many places of great historical significance to the Jewish tourist, but the particular memory of the Holocaust made it impossible for Israeli visitors to enjoy the continent’s attractions without reservation. Hebrew-language guidebooks directed Israeli travelers to sites of particular interest, provided advice, and both reflected their experiences and steered their expectations, thereby constructing a specific Jewish-Israeli view of Europe. Chapter VI analyses four such guidebooks that enjoyed enormous popularity, arguing that the tensions between leisure and heritage aspects of Jewish-Israeli tourism were crucial in shaping Hebrew guidebooks’ perspectives on the continent.

Epilogue: A Janus-Faced Continent

The epilogue summarizes the findings of the individual chapters and thus brings to the fore the essential tensions and ambivalences inherent in the Israeli view of Europe. It shows that these characteristics remain highly relevant despite the significant social and political changes that have taken place since the 2000s, thus providing an essential insight into contemporary Israeli-European relations as well.

**Historiography**

The proposed book will take a unique approach to exploring the idea of Europe, integrating political and economic inquiry with the disciplines of sports history, popular culture, and travel literature. This focus on social and political history makes it stand out in a field traditionally dominated by political scientists and intellectual historians.

It is in conversation with the burgeoning field of scholarship on the idea of Europe and, in particular, with studies that challenge Eurocentrism and Euro-universalism, such as Gerard Delanty’s *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (1995), Anthony Pagden’s *The Pursuit of Europe: A History* (2022), and Shane Weller’s *The Idea of Europe: A Critical History* (2021). While a growing body of work attempts to decenter Western European experiences by focusing on narratives from its east or from the Middle East, only two books (and a few articles) on Israeli perceptions of Europe have been published to date. However, neither Howard Sachar’s Israel and Europe: An Appraisal in History (1998) nor Jehuda Reinharz and Yaacov Shavit’s *Glorious, Accursed Europe* (2010) systematically deal with Israeli views on Europe and both tend to conflate Israeli relations with individual countries, such as Germany or France, with those with Europe generally.

In recent decades, there has been a burgeoning literature on Israeli-European relations: For example, Raffaella Del Sarto’s *Israel and the European Union: Between Rhetoric and Reality* (2014); Sharon Pardo and Joel Peters’s *Uneasy Neighbors: Israel and the European Union* (2009); Sharon Pardo’s *Normative Power Europe Meets Israel: Perceptions and Realities* (2015); and Gadi Heimann and Lior Herman’s *Israel’s Path to Europe: The Negotiations for a Preferential Agreement, 1957–1970* (2018). Most of this literature focuses exclusively on the negotiations and agreements between the Jewish state and the EU. While the book is in conversation with this literature, it transcends its limited focus on the continent’s west, thereby adding an important and new perspective on this field.

The book also contributes to the debates about societal tensions in Israel. Scholars have painted a nuanced picture of the discrimination experienced by Middle Eastern Jews from those of European heritage during Israel’s early years: For example, Bryan Roby’s *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel’s Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle 1948–1966* (2015); Yehouda Shenhav’s *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (2006); and Ela Shohat’s *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements* (2017). While these posit the view that the Ashkenazi elite seek to Europeanize and Westernize the *Mizrahim* in order to develop a state based on European models, they eschew more profound examination of the influence of Europe on Israeli society. Instead, they often talk of this phenomenon simplistically as “Euro-Israel,” illegitimately essentializing European influences just like the Eurocentric worldview these scholars rightly criticize does. The book is an important corrective to that, offering a more nuanced view of Israeli perceptions of the continent that also takes key intra-Israeli tensions into consideration.

**Market**

*Europe Through Israeli Eyes* will be a seminal contribution to scholarship as it sheds new and important light on key aspects of Israeli society, Israeli-European relations, and the idea of Europe. As the first comprehensive study Israeli perceptions of Europe, it will attract the special attention of a great variety of scholarly disciplines, ranging from Jewish and Israeli history, Europe and European foreign relations to scholars interested in popular culture. It will also be essential reading for analysts, policymakers, and their advisors in the fast-shifting terrain of Europe-Israel and West-Israel relations.

The topic is a timely one to publish on in many ways. The idea of a united Europe has faced growing challenges from populist forces over the past decade. With these challenges has come increased public and scholarly attention to the issue, which is likely to continue in the coming years as the battles between supporters of a strong EU and its critics intensify. The Israeli perspectives contained in the book will address some of these keys from a unique angle.

What is more, European-Israeli relations are of high relevance both not only to Israel but also to Europe due to their shared history, but also the proximity and geopolitical significance of the Middle East. Accordingly, there has been a longstanding interest in these relations both from scholars and the wider public. With the current geopolitical ruptures in the wake of the Israel/Hamas conflict, such issues have gained even more urgency.

Finally, Israel has witnessed harsh societal and political struggles about the outlook of state and society during the last years, most prominently over judicial reform in 2023. The question of European influences on the society have been part of these frictions, not least due to the re-emergence of tensions between *Ashkenazim* and *Mizrahim*.

For all these reasons, I believe that the book will not only appeal to scholars, students, analysts, and policymakers, but also to a wider public in Israel, Europe, North America and the rest of the predominantly English-speaking world. It will also provide important context for analysts and policymakers involved in international relations and the study of Israeli domestic politics. It would be a useful primary or secondary textbook and would appeal to academic and institutional libraries’ acquisitions managers. Those with a general interest in Israel, the Middle East, and Europe-Middle East dynamics would find it an accessible entry point that goes beyond dry accounts.

**Format and Timetable**

The manuscript is about 115,000 words. As it draws upon contemporary media, it features several graphic caricatures, most of which are discussed in the text, as well as some pictures from the travel guides. These will enrich the book, as they often capture the Israeli *zeitgeist* and thinking about Europe well.

All six of the book’s main chapters have been first-drafted, and I am currently working on the introduction and epilogue, as well as on revising the chapters. I have already published three articles related to this project, two on Israeli participation in Eurovision and one on Israeli soccer in Asia. Chapters IV and V are in conversation with these articles but make their own distinct contributions. I intend to finish the manuscript within the next three to six months.