

Religious hate crime on the rise, says political scientist

BY LINDA GLASER

Linda Glaser is the staff writer and publicist of the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell University. She is also the chair of the Ithaca Coalition for Unity and Cooperation in the Middle East. ICUCME helped publicize and handle logistics for an event featuring Miriam Elman, associate professor of political science and a research director in the Program for the Advancement of Research in Conflict and Collaboration at Syracuse University. Elman gave a lecture and workshop in Ithaca on July 31. About 70 community people from the Ithaca area attended the two-hour event.

Elman's lecture is available for viewing on [YouTube](#). Elman has also published a summary of the lecture and workshop's main themes at [Legal Insurrection](#).

ITHACA, NY – Religious bigotry is more visible in America than we've seen in decades. And while conversations about Islamophobia abound in the media, the FBI reports that almost 60 percent of religiously-oriented hate speech and crimes are actually committed against Jews – and only 16 percent against Muslims.

Why, then, is there an absence of conversation about antisemitism? To answer this question, the Ithaca Area United Jewish Community invited political scientist Miriam Elman to discuss "Hate Speech and the New Antisemitism" on July 31 at the Space@Greenstar. More than 70 people attended.

According to Elman, associate professor of political science and a research director in the Program for the Advancement of Research in Conflict and Collaboration at Syracuse University, the rise in antisemitism is directly tied to anti-Zionist rhetoric and the demonization of Israel.

Zionism, said Elman, is simply the belief that Jews have a right to self-determination in their national homeland of Israel, where they have been

an indigenous population for more than 2,000 years.

"Despite the fact that almost half of Jewish Israelis are of Arab descent and that many more are people of color from other parts of the world, in the global campaign for social justice, Jews are cast as white colonial Westerners and Palestinians as people of color," said Elman.

She called for an intellectual "firewall" separating criticism of Israeli politics and policy from the demonization of Zionism and Israel – which she said "is not legitimate, and which can be lethal."

As an example, Elman pointed to the proliferation of antisemitic tropes in conversations about Zionism. "It's become acceptable to talk about Jews controlling the world, such as the Stanford student government representative who recently argued at a public meeting that it wasn't antisemitic to say that Jews control the media and the government."

One way to counter the anti-Semitic rhetoric, said Elman, was to call out how anti-Zionism can be antisemitic in its effects, such as the myth of Jewish centrality, a belief demonstrated on a poster from a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions rally that said, "For world peace, Israel must be destroyed."

"But Yemen is not a mess because of Israel; Syria isn't disintegrating because of Israel... the rise of al-Qaida and ISIS have nothing to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," said Elman. "This is just a recycled version of the old trope of Jews as dangerous purveyors of all the evil in the world."

After Elman's talk, attendees gathered at tables to discuss examples of anti-Semitic images and social media posts, and to debate what can be done to counteract antisemitism in this community.

"All hate speech and hateful actions which come in their wake are to be deplored," said Marcia Zax, president of IAUGC. "We need to come together as a community of different and no religion, of every color of the rainbow, to fight against hate speech."