

Narratives of Violence and Hope in Israel/Palestine

Louise Katz

Introduction

A great deal of scholarship and journalism has been devoted to theorising and commenting on the predicament of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories living in the shadow of a foreign army and, arguably, Israel's failure to meet standards of equality expected of a democratic nation. In news reports there is a daily variety of hypocrisy alongside well-intentioned analysis. It is difficult to know how to begin to talk about this part of the world. A historical perspective? Sociological? Psychological? Political? Is it advisable to introduce a personal note? Would that help, or would it lead to indulgent subjectivity? Yet politics *is* personal not only to those directly involved, but also to others who are moved to pity or contempt or any number of powerful feelings regarding other people, regardless of nationality, political persuasion, or religion. One's sense of self, of belonging, is inevitably allied with the formation of allegiances and political loyalties, which are forged less by careful critical thought than emotional reactivity and may not be within our conscious control. Gilles Deleuze warns us against the "terrifying will to power" of dreams.¹ Our ambitions and cravings may not be halted out of consideration for the effects they will inevitably have on other people on this planet, pullulating with countless desire-fuelled dreams that are continually colliding, like particles in the Large Hadron Collider.

Dreams fuel stories. This essay considers the collision of narrative and counter-narrative in Israel/Palestine, and how spoken and written histories, or descriptions of places, events, or activities when viewed through a particular lens, influence and even create socio-political realities.

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¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 318.

Israel/Palestine is comprised of several ethno-religious tribal groups; yet, as will be discussed, today the dimensions of Jewish and Palestinian dreams and the arc of their stories are largely dictated by the aspirations of particularly influential subsets within the Ashkenazi Jewish tribe. This is why, in order to look at the power of discourse to build or break nations, I will focus largely on certain Ashkenazi narratives. I should add that I do not think I have yet acquired the authority or background to critique Palestinian views.

This essay often refers to ideas of Judith Butler and Hannah Arendt. In the middle of the last century Arendt sought to explicate the possibilities for a Jewish *homeland*—without sovereignty—and that without Arab-Jewish political co-operation at all levels of government “the whole Jewish venture in Palestine is doomed” either to defeat, or to “victory” existing as small “warrior tribe” within an utterly hostile environment.² More recently, Butler has written of the necessity for “an ethical and political concern for the unjust political dispossession of others,” and is profoundly concerned at how the Israeli Ashkenazi and Jewish diasporic populace has drawn back from the Jewish tradition of ethics, which emphasised social justice, a central component of diasporic Jewish identity based on the concept of *tikkun olam*, or ‘world healing’.³ Instead, fear-based aggression against enemies, real and perceived, has become entrenched, breeding a self-destructive self-hatred as well as hatred of the Other—ideas to be developed here in due course.

The first section of this essay will refer to some of the ways in which the stories we tell of ourselves to others represent less who we are than who we want to be—or to be perceived as being—regardless of countermending evidence. These stories emerge from our histories, are driven by desire, and are solidified in the written word; our lexical choices both create and reflect our reality. Particular discourses concerning Israel/Palestine announce or camouflage personal or political intent; encourage or incapacitate imagination; liberate or control populations; enable compassion or exploit a sense of victimhood, or of blaming and shaming. The latter part of the article is concerned with narratives that run counter to the current status quo, or that reflect on ideas of those who continue to navigate seemingly impossible pathways between the polarities of Israel/Palestine, that enable glimmers of

² Hannah Arendt, ‘To Save the Jewish Homeland’, *Commentary*, vol. 6 (1948), p. 398.

³ Judith Butler, *Parting ways: Jewishness and the critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

hope. To be clear: I am not speaking of optimism, but hope according to Václav Havel's formulation—"the ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands the chance to succeed"—which is essential, for without it only despair is possible.⁴

For now, though, here are two contradictory views simultaneously upheld with regard to Israel/Palestine:

1. Since the *Naqba* ('Catastrophe' for Palestinians, War of Independence for Jews) Palestinians have suffered incremental erosion of social justice, from small, retail cruelties to massive disenfranchisement through the destruction of property and illegal land-grabs. These are the subtle and gross mortifications experienced by people in the occupied territories and are all aspects of a strategy of wilfully engendered hopelessness by successive Israeli governments, a "regime of humiliation,"⁵ exercised so that these people will be compelled, at last, to just *leave* and let the Jews have the land that Zionists claim as their own.

2. The Jewish people have historically been treated with great cruelty and injustice; they have been subject to every known torment from insult and humiliation to genocide. The State of Israel is the Jews' rightful home, promised to them by God and sanctioned by legal and political processes. Its existence, seen always in the shadow of the Holocaust, guarantees that such a horror will never be repeated, for now, the Jewish nation has a recognised state. Yet Jews are still suffering unremitting attacks: from anti-Semites globally and locally from Palestinian terrorists. Palestinian terror organisation Hamas specifically targets civilians, refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist, and has vowed to drive the Jews into the sea.

The above two paragraphs comprise two obviously simplified perceptions of the 'Israel/Palestine conflict',⁶ a descriptor that conjures an image of two embattled sides pitted against each other. While it is certainly true that Israelis do live in fear of terrorist attacks, a clear imbalance of power

⁴ Václav Havel, *Disturbing the peace: A conversation with Karel Hvizdala*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Random House, 1990), p. 181.

⁵ Arland Jacobsen, 'The Role of Humiliation in International Conflict', *Northern Plains Ethics Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2013), p. 66.

⁶ A note regarding the decision to use the slash punctuation mark to divide Israel/Palestine rather than a hyphen: For me, the formulation Israel/Palestine implies an either/or relationship; that is, one state exists at the expense of the other. It could also indicate interchangeability depending on viewpoint while also signifying an uncomfortable or violent relationship—even the word itself is brutal: 'slash'.

produces a skewed assertion regarding what might arguably be described as a one-sided war of attrition. As Judith Butler insists, it is only “once political *conditions* of equality are established, [that we can] then perhaps begin to talk within *terms* of equality.”⁷ Otherwise, words fail us.

Constructing ‘True Images Out of Words’

The language of heroism, denial, euphemism, and ambiguity are ways to market a nation. There are maps of Israel/Palestine in textbooks, tourist guides and other official Israeli publications showing the West Bank as part of Israel. Julie Peteet notes that the Jewish population is included in Israel’s official statistics of the West Bank’s population, but not the Muslim or Christian, affirming a wishfully constructed imaginary of a Jewish democracy without Palestinians.⁸ The World Zionist Organisation refers to the land from the Jordan River to the Jordanian border by the biblical names, ‘Judea and Samaria’, even though the West Bank is regarded as Occupied Territory by the United Nations, the European Union, and the International Court of Justice. Indeed, Zionism’s “narrow set of crucial myths: the biblical story of exile, the description of Palestine as a ‘land without a people’ before the arrival of the Jews ... the categorization of all forms of resistance to Israel as anti-Semitic terrorism, and the description of all Israeli actions as defensive” has been extremely successful.⁹ Yet Donna Divine, who is, according to the Jewish and Israeli news source *The Algemeiner*, is one of “the top people positively influencing Jewish life,”¹⁰ contends that it is the abuse of language by leftist journalists and scholars that threatens Israel’s international reputation.

Divine’s article ‘Word Crimes’ includes impassioned refutations of the arguments of several thinkers, and she rightly points out that “questions of language are questions about the distribution of power.”¹¹ However, she

⁷ Butler, *Parting ways*, p. 120, italics mine.

⁸ Julie Peteet, *Space and mobility in Palestine* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017).

⁹ K. A. Wainer, ‘Pappe and Israel’s New Historians’, *Against the Current* (2010), at <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc152/p3280/>, accessed 12/12/2020.

¹⁰ ‘The Algemeiner Jewish 100: Donna Robinson Divine’, *The Algemeiner* (2019), at <https://www.algemeiner.com/list/the-top-100-people-positively-influencing-jewish-life-2019/donna-robinson-divine/>, accessed 12/12/2020.

¹¹ Donna Robinson Divine, ‘Word Crimes: Reclaiming The Language of The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict’, *Israel Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2019), p. 3.

does not attend to evidence that the allocation of power to Jewish (predominantly white and male) constituents is far greater and that overwhelming weight has been accorded Zionist mythology mentioned above. In this battle for word domination, Israel continues to be presented by academics such as Divine and in the global North in general, as a stronghold of Western European values of democracy, regardless of the fact that one ethnic group controls the apparatus of the State. Ethnicities other than Jewish may vote in Israel and they may even enter parliament, but only so long as their activities are not seen to pose a threat to “exclusive Jewish ownership and control of the state.”¹² Oren Yiftachel has argued that Israeli democracy is in fact a façade that “uses the state apparatus to ethnicize the territory and society in question.”¹³

Divine’s claim that Israel’s reputation has been tarnished is certainly correct, but arguably this has less to do with the lexical choices of leftist scholars and journalists attempting to redress the imbalance of power, and more to do with the development of policies of closure and separation of Palestinian villages, and Israeli political and military actions which have been decried by the UN and the international community. Such actions include illegal West Bank settlements, demolitions, retaliatory military overkill, and discrimination in law and education.¹⁴ Divine refers to the language and the “the serious weaknesses” in Jasbir Puar’s argument that Israel “has assaulted the bodies and minds of Palestinians,” yet she fails to demonstrate where Puar is wrong, or how Saree Makdisi “distort[s] the Israeli political system.”¹⁵ This reader assumed that later the author would take both Makdisi and Puar to task through analysis of their claims, but this

¹² Satadru Sen, ‘Ethnocracy, Israel and India’, *History and Sociology of South Asia*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2015), p. 91.

¹³ Quoted in Victoria Mason, ‘The liminality of Palestinian refugees: betwixt and between global politics and international law’, *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2020), p. 91.

¹⁴ Nadia Ben-Youssef and Sandra Samaan Tamari, ‘Enshrining Discrimination: Israel’s Nation-State Law’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2018), pp. 73-87; Ilan Pappé, *Out of the frame: The struggle for academic freedom in Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), *The forgotten Palestinians: A history of the Palestinians in Israel* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2011); Nadim Rouhana and Uri Davis, ‘4. Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State’, *The Palestine Yearbook of International Law Online*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1998), pp. 291-296; Sen, ‘Ethnocracy, Israel and India’; Oren Yiftachel and Asad Ghanem, ‘Towards a Theory of Ethnocratic Regimes: The Politics of Ethno-national Expansion’, *State and Society*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2004), pp. 788-761.

¹⁵ Divine, ‘Word Crimes’, p. 2.

was not forthcoming in ‘Word Crimes’. Divine acknowledges Edward Said’s point that “language was critical to maintaining power,” and adds that it “serve[s] as an instrument for dismantling it as well.”¹⁶ Both statements are true, but seemingly Divine finds any attempts to question the Israeli power structure morally wrong at the most fundamental level. Following this logic, much of the language used in critique is, for her, necessarily “misused.”

Propagandists of all stripes are well aware of the production of ideological effects via discourse¹⁷ and that words are a “mode of action.”¹⁸ The symbolic intervention of naming, in the Israeli context, was certainly a political action from the time of the State’s conception. The earliest leaders began a trend wherein new immigrants were encouraged to adopt names reminiscent of or directly borrowed from the Bible; for example, David Gruen = Ben Gurion, Ariel Scheinerman = Sharon, Golda Meyerson = Meir. With the advent of statehood, the brief of the new Israel Place Names committee was to rename Palestinian sites to recreate a sense of an ancient homeland, an narrative of origin, thus severing bonds with the Diaspora and the ‘shameful’ Jewish history when “the Jew had lived as a slave [considering] suffering and silence his highest virtues.”¹⁹ The action of renaming separated Zionists from this heritage while creating a sense of historic entitlement to ‘Eretz Israel’, effectively making it “a *real artefact* ... in line with the biblical era on the one hand and modern colonial ideology on the other.”²⁰ The political landscape has been reconstructed with Hebraicisations: partial or complete replacement of Arabic place names with Hebrew ones which in highlights Jewish identification with the land while symbolically severing Palestinian connections to it.²¹ The same is true of the use of the term ‘Arab’ to refer to indigenous Palestinians. As a bookseller I

¹⁶ Divine, ‘Word Crimes’, p. 5.

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and symbolic power* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991); Norman Fairclough, *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research* (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁸ Thomas Austin and Renkema Levinson in Norman Fairclough, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketization of Public Discourse: The Universities’, *Discourse & Society*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1993), p. 143.

¹⁹ Paul Breines, *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (USA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), p. 131.

²⁰ Peteet, *Space and mobility in Palestine*, p. 159.

²¹ Saul B. Cohen and Nurit Kliot, ‘Place-Names in Israel’s Ideological Struggle over the Administered Territories’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 82, no. 4 (1992), pp. 653-680.

spoke to in East Jerusalem in 2019 eloquently explained: “The minute I’m not a Palestinian I’m being deprived of my cultural identity [referred to] by my language and my *ethnic* identity which is, I’m an Arab ... by not saying I’m Palestinian is saying that there is no Palestine.”

The experience of victimhood and humiliation are common to both Palestinians and Jews, and according to Arland Jacobson, “constitutive, fundamental to [the] identity ... of two peoples trapped in their own narratives of suffering.”²² Palestine was controlled by the Ottoman Empire, then British Empires, followed by Jordanian rule before the advent of Israel. Israelis of European heritage live within the penumbra of their long history of persecution. These two stories form a dialogue wherein each fails to recognise the suffering and victimisation of the other. One obvious example is that many Israeli Jews deny or ignore the *Naqba*; many Palestinians deny or ignore the Holocaust. Both sides are vying for power over nothing less than the construction of reality itself. Ilan Gur-Ze’Ev and Ilan Pappé frame it this way: “The struggle over control of the memory of victimization is a matter of life and death, and suffering and death—as actuality and as memory—are philosophical, political and existential issues.”²³ Yet as Jacobson mentions, the role Palestinians have played in the suffering of Jewish people is negligible in comparison to the Jewish experience of torment at the hands of Europeans, or the pain that the Jewish people have caused the Palestinians in recent history.²⁴ The Palestinian *Naqba*/Israeli War of Independence in 1948 claimed almost 80% of the region of Palestine and since then, much of Israeli media has been engaged in what Baruch Kimmerling uncompromisingly calls the task of “hermetic self-persuasion of righteousness.”²⁵

Careful selection and distortion of events was, and continues to be, exercised by much of the Israeli media whose uncritical acceptance of official accounts disables other interpretations; for example, reference to what was once known as the ‘War of the Settlements’ became ‘War of Survival’, and the term ‘occupation’ has largely disappeared.²⁶ This closing

²² Jacobsen, ‘The Role of Humiliation in International Conflict’, p. 88.

²³ Ilan Gur-Ze’Ev and Ilan Pappé, ‘Beyond the Destruction of the Other’s Collective Memory: Blueprints for a Palestinian/Israeli Dialogue’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2003), pp. 93-4.

²⁴ Jacobsen, ‘The Role of Humiliation in International Conflict’.

²⁵ Quoted in Pappé, *Out of the frame*, p. 47.

²⁶ Pappé, *Out of the frame*.

down of political criticality—although enjoying a brief renaissance in the 1990s during the prime ministership of assassinated Yitzhak Rabin—has extended its reach in recent years. Edward Alexander in *Jews Against Themselves* goes so far as to assert that questioning Israeli defence strategies, raising doubts about certain Zionist precepts, supporting divestments and boycotts of Israel, and expressing concern regarding the use of the term ‘antisemitism’ (to be discussed in more detail later) makes scholars such as Daniel Boyarin, Martin Jay, and in particular, Judith Butler, “professorial advocates of suicide bombing of Israeli citizens.”²⁷ Israel is presented as being under “siege,”²⁸ a descriptor that would make a fine debating point with Gazans. He also mentions that certain Jewish intellectuals (“co-conspirators” in “economic warfare”) are unable to recognise Israel as the “the very state upon which their identity rests.”²⁹ This seems a particularly skewed perspective given that Jewish people have existed in the Diaspora since the Roman destruction of the second temple of Jerusalem in the first century of the common era.

Antisemitism and ‘Antisemitism’

Antisemitism is undoubtedly rife. The Anti-Defamation League provides a long list of instances of vandalism, as well as verbal and physical attacks, towards Jewish people globally for 2019. Earlier that year the *Guardian* reported a 60% increase in antisemitic attacks in Germany and a 74% increase in France.³⁰ However, there is a dialectical accusation of ‘antisemitism’ that must be interrogated. This label, ironically, tends to be levelled at those Jews who may be opposed to Zionism or who criticise oppressive Israeli government policies rather than the politicians who write them and the people who endorse them. Judith Butler is one such thinker who has been labelled antisemitic, either directly or by implication, by those whose stated intention is to protect Israel and Jewish people elsewhere.³¹ Yet

²⁷ Edward Alexander, *Jews Against Themselves* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2015), pp. 63-64.

²⁸ Alexander, *Jews Against Themselves*, p. 14.

²⁹ Alexander, *Jews Against Themselves*, p. 45.

³⁰ Jon Henly, ‘Antisemitism rising sharply across Europe, latest figures show’, *The Guardian* (15 February, 2019), at <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/feb/15/antisemitism-rising-sharply-across-europe-latest-figures-show>, accessed 12/12/2020.

³¹ See for example Alexander, *Jews Against Themselves*; David Clemens, ‘Judith Butler’s Deific Damage’, *Verdicts*, vol. 33 (2020), pp. 215-225; Lawrence H. Summers, ‘Academic

Butler reminds us that, “there are Jewish values of cohabitation with the non-Jew that are part of the very ethical substance of diasporic Jewishness.” She continues to speak of that commitment,

to social equality and social justice [as] an integral part of Jewish secular, socialist, and religious traditions. [Yet] It has become necessary to reiterate this argument over and against a public discourse that assumes any criticism of the Israeli occupation...is anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish...In other words, it would be a painful irony indeed if the Jewish struggle for social justice were itself cast as anti-Jewish.³²

Alan Wolfe too expresses dismay at Israeli nationalism and the uncritical support of many Diaspora Jews of Israeli government policies, which he sees as their “abandonment of the ethical and universalist foundations of Judaism.”³³ Klug argues that what is at stake is the Jewish tradition of criticism based on ‘readings of readings, words about words, along with their translation into deeds’ which represents a striving towards justice. He goes so far as to say that the Jewish State has become “an idol by another name.”³⁴

The defensive catch cry of ‘antisemitism’ delegitimises any kind of critical thinking about Israel/Palestine and confounds, through intransigent denialism, any movement towards the possibility of negotiations with Palestinians, let alone any demonstration of a fellow-feeling towards the cohabitants of the land or with others in the region. At the time of the Arab Spring, for instance, Benn wrote that Israel might have, “reached out to the revolutionaries, celebrating their achievement or suggesting we need to know them better since they might share values and ambitions with secular, liberal Israelis.” Instead, the Israeli government preferred to support the largely autocratic Middle Eastern status quo and ‘regional stability’ rather than the people straining towards democracy, a political value which, it seems, is to be “praised in principle, but considered perilous in practice.”³⁵

Freedom and Anti-Semitism’, talk given at the Columbia Center for Law and Liberty (29 January, 2015), at http://larrysummers.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/AcademicFreedomAndAntiSemitism_FINAL1-2.pdf, accessed 12/12/2020.

³² Butler, *Parting ways*, p. 117.

³³ Quoted in Gören Rosenberg, ‘Is Israel Good for the Diaspora?’ *Jewish Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 2 (2015), p. 33.

³⁴ Quoted in Rosenberg, ‘Is Israel Good for the Diaspora?’, p. 33.

³⁵ Benn Aluf, ‘Israel is blind to the Arab revolution’, *The Guardian* (23 March, 2011), at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/23/israel-blind-to-arab-revolution>, accessed 12/12/2020.

Criticisms of Israeli policy may be more subtly undermined by referring to them as antisemitic in ‘effect’ if not ‘intent’, a distinction made by Harvard Law president, Lawrence Summers, when criticising Judith Butler as antisemitic.³⁶ Yet if for fear of judgment of ‘intent’ by such as Summers or Alexander, or anxiety that the ‘effect’ of critiquing Zionism or sympathising with Palestinians, could damage the current Israeli status quo, then then silence is the only option: Israeli government policies may not be questioned, statesmen such as Netanyahu must go unchallenged. The insistence on “sentimental and blinding communitarianism”³⁷ is not new, and neither is silencing oppositional voices. Yet as Arendt notes in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and elsewhere, and for which comment she was ostracised, it is perilous to focus only on the dislike one may be accorded while failing to reflect on the reasons for this, justified or otherwise, and one’s own possible complicity, however unwilling.³⁸ For Arendt, these reasons were not based simply on an ‘inevitable’ gentile hatred of Jews as a people, but also on Jewish historical failure to engage politically when they did have some power to do so.

Some Discourses of Jewish Identity

This section looks at certain themes and rhetorical turns which have been chosen for discussion for their contribution to nationalistic fervour, or their contemporary political or economic clout, or their historic resonance and therefore ongoing cultural influence.

Diasporic Identity and Israel

The strongly held belief that Zionism enabled the Jewish people to return to their ‘natural home’ is disputable. According to readings by which Diaspora Jews lived for millennia, the people were “forever unconnected with a particular land, a people that calls into question the idea that people must have a land in order to be a people.”³⁹ The lack of a sovereign state is often perceived as a fundamental weakness; however, it can instead be regarded as a profound strength, even a model that others might emulate as a testimony

³⁶ See Alexander, *Jews Against Themselves*, p. 101.

³⁷ Butler, *Parting ways*, p. 27.

³⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

³⁹ Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, ‘Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1993), p. 718.

to the power of endurance: the opposite of weakness. Discussion of diasporic consciousness becomes the focus of attention later on; for now, though, I just want to stress that dispersion need not be perceived as a humiliating condition, for Jewish identity need not depend on nativism—indeed, Judith Butler has argued that Diaspora is a ‘core value’ of Jewishness. For Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin it exists, “as a perpetual, creative ... tension.”⁴⁰

Shame

Concealed and cowering—the sons of the Maccabees!
The seed of saints, the scions of the lions!
Who, crammed by scores in all the sanctuaries of their shame...
The scurrying of roaches was their flight;
They died like dogs...⁴¹

Both Hebrew and Arabic names—Abraham/Ibrahim, David/Dawud, Joshua/Yehoshua/Yusha—recall a time of conquest and heroism by kings and generals, the sort of leaders that men felt they needed in the Bronze and Iron Ages. They remain an intractable representation of masculine strength. This story of vigorous, commanding, imperious masculinity contrasts dramatically with the archetypal pre-World War II exilic Jew of the Diaspora: a timorous, studious character, an image now held in contempt by many, as reflected above in the words of Israel’s national poet. There are few insults one might level at the victim of a crime, particularly ones of such horrific proportions as the Holocaust, that are as dire as feebleness or worse, complicity.

The intergenerational, internalised nature of antisemitism’s legacy hangs on a sense of shame of those forebears’ humiliating failure to defend themselves. The phrase ‘self-hating Jew’ is often traced to philosopher Theodor Lessing’s eponymous 1930 book, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, though the idea is older; for example, it is found in the 1919 speech of journalist Anton Kuh titled ‘The Tragedy of the Jew’.⁴² Lewis Aron and Karen Starr mention the association of the circumcised penis and effeminacy and the absurd antisemitic theory that circumcision is inherited, rather than acquired.⁴³ This

⁴⁰ Boyarin and Boyarin, ‘Diaspora’, p. 714.

⁴¹ Hayyim Bialik, ‘The City of Slaughter’, in *Complete Poetic Works of Hayyim Nahman Bialik*, vol. 1, ed. Israel Efrosed (New York: Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1948 [1903]), pp. 129-43.

⁴² Paul Reitter, *On the Origins of Jewish Self-Hatred* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012).

image of the feminised man is aligned with other ‘Jewish’ attributes such as ‘primitivity, degeneracy, and disease’—a far cry from the image of nobility and power of the ancient patriarchs mentioned previously and idolised by Bialik, greatly exacerbating the sense of injury. According to James Gilligan and James Vrettos in their study of men imprisoned for violent acts, the “sense of having been wronged, is seen as recompense for those injuries, recent or historical.”⁴⁴

One traditional reading included in Passover is “In every generation they have risen up against us to annihilate us,” a reminder of the perceived inevitability of persecution. This very statement was used as a headline in one of Israel’s major newspapers during the Second Intifada.⁴⁵ It may be, and indeed was, read as a justifiable call to arms, yet this does not obviate another interpretation: an opportunistic preying on the entrenched—or indeed, historical—sense of vulnerability of their Jewish readership. This phrase sees little if any difference between the Holocaust and Palestinian attacks; no recognition of the differing roles played by Nazis and Palestinians. In the same publication, the strength of Israel is evoked in contrast with its shame at having thus far failed to retaliate adequately: “We are a tremendously powerful nation, almost daily put to shame by weak enemies who attack it.”⁴⁶ Readers are exhorted to embrace wholeheartedly the exercise of full Israeli force.

Israel as Western

Jewish return to Israel meant a rupture with diasporic Jewishness, even though a defining characteristic of sense of self amongst Israel’s Ashkenazi population is its cultural identification with Europe. That is, while admiration for and identification with the Europe that produced so much cultural wealth remains undimmed, a peculiar cognitive dissonance enables a disconnect from the fact that it also produced the ferocious antisemitism which decimated European Jewry. Thus, we see a paradoxical identification with gentile Europe alongside disassociation from Jews of Europe; divorce from the ‘weak’ *shtetl*-dwellers alongside pride in European heritage. Perhaps it

⁴³ Lewis Aron and Karen Starr, *A Psychotherapy for the People: Towards a progressive psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), p. xvii.

⁴⁴ James Gilligan and James Vrettos, ‘Violence, Morality, and Religion’, *Tikkun*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2018), p. 51.

⁴⁵ Daniel Dor, *The suppression of guilt: The Israeli media and the reoccupation of the West Bank* (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

⁴⁶ Dor, *The suppression of guilt*, p. 19.

is in ironic instances such as this that the storied substance of political structures becomes particularly clear.

As the then Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak stated twenty-five years ago, Israel is a building, a “villa in the middle of the jungle” which he later amended to, “an oasis fortress in the desert.”⁴⁷ It is considered a Western stronghold modelled on European traditions untainted by antisemitic brutality, set in opposition to the ‘barbaric’ Middle Eastern ‘desert’. Another irony is that the Jewish patriarchs and heroes were indisputably Middle Eastern (and not necessarily from the land now designated as Israel). They were Arab Jews, a term often used derogatively. This marks an ethical and historical failure of Zionist ideology, which Yehouda Shenhav claims has “destroyed the Arab-Jewish option in language and space.”⁴⁸ As Benn, editor-in-chief of Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, remarked, “the benchmarks are always the US, western Europe, or countries of the OECD. It’s never Egypt, Syria, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority or even Dubai.”⁴⁹ Yet diverse thinkers, including Judith Butler, Alain Epp Weaver, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, Ella Shohat, Atalia Omer, Hannah Arendt, and Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis, have declared that this need not be the case, as will be discussed towards the end of this article.

Entrepreneurial Chutzpah

Today Israel enjoys a reputation for entrepreneurial adventurousness and the success of its high-tech industries and start-ups. The narrator of a promotional video for Skillshare,⁵⁰ cites the spirit of *chutzpah* as a primary reason for Israeli indomitability in the market. It is worth noting though, that traditionally, *chutzpah* was associated with arrogance, brazenness, and amorality and the perpetrator was generally despised for their lack of personal responsibility—although it is occasionally afforded respect in religious literature for its biblical association with spirited and ethical inquiry.⁵¹ It is the second reading of *chutzpah* that is best known, and in

⁴⁷ Benn, ‘Israel is blind to the Arab revolution’.

⁴⁸ Yehouda Shenhav, ‘The Palestinian Nakba and the Arab-Jewish Melancholy: An Essay on Sovereignty and Translation’, *Jews and the ends of theory* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2019), p. 54.

⁴⁹ Benn, ‘Israel is blind to the Arab revolution’.

⁵⁰ Polymatter, in conjunction with Skillshare, ‘Why Israel is a Tech Capital of the World’, *YouTube*, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuPx61911Oo>, accessed 12/12/2020.

modern Israel it is sometimes simplistically associated with the image of a tiny, brave nation reaping the just rewards for its courage in facing off terrifying odds recalls the story of David and Goliath, and if one overlooks 'David's geopolitical clout today, it is a major source of national pride and part of national identity-building.

Skillshare refers later to the virtues of long-term military service, where young people learn skills transferable to the workplace. This is true: the IDF's largest unit, Unit 8200 (similar to the US National Security Agency), acts as a 'feeder' for developing cybersecurity companies in the civilian world.⁵² Yet The Citizen Lab "has identified over 100 cases of abusive targeting of human rights defenders and journalists across the globe including countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East."⁵³ While the NSO (Niv, Shalev and Omri Group) claims that its Pegasus spyware is a means of fighting global terror, a senior researcher at The Citizen Lab, John Scott-Railton has commented on Twitter that the company looked "much more like a hacking-as-a-service than software developers".⁵⁴ The national mythology encourages the denial of the malign aspects of Israeli military and industrial successes and focuses on identification with the nation's forward moving, potentially world-improving STEM excellence, as emphasised in Skillshare's declaration that Israeli brilliance has prevailed, "despite the constant threat of terrorism." One might also read this as adulterated *chutzpah* whose rhetoric embraces audacity but neglects ethics.

Opportunities for civil cross-communications which could possibly ameliorate the Israeli-Palestinian stand-off are being denied, according to Stephen Krasner. He claims that technological innovators might find means of easing movement of goods over the borders to the benefit of both Palestinians and Jews, and at least in the short-term, work can be outsourced and education can be undertaken remotely.⁵⁵ He sees it as unlikely that the

⁵¹ Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, *Conscience: The duty to obey and the duty to disobey* (Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2008).

⁵² Paul Rousseau, 'The History and Impact of Unit 8200 on Israeli Hi-Tech Entrepreneurship', unpublished dissertation, Ohio University (2017).

⁵³ The Citizen Lab, 'NSO Group/Q Cyber Technologies: Over One Hundred New Abuse Cases' (29 October 2019), at <https://citizenlab.ca/2019/10/nso-q-cyber-technologies-100-new-abuse-cases/>, accessed 12/12/2020.

⁵⁴ John Scott-Railton, *Twitter* (24 April, 2020), at <https://twitter.com/jsrailton/status/1253531135990267906?s=20>, accessed 12/12/2020.

Palestinian authority would curtail such freedom of movement, and it is possible that the more hard-line Hamas' policies would become less popular amongst a people with a significantly lowered unemployment rate and better living standards. Krasner claims also that many of the calls for boycotts, divestments, and sanctions against Israel could become redundant if such initiatives were pursued alongside other necessary infrastructural, job-creating improvements. That this is not already a mainstream focus for improvement is concerning. Organisations such as PITA (Palestinian Information and Technology Association) exist; however, Israeli control of Palestinian infrastructure has hindered rather than helped development, with 40% of the Palestinian telecom market being lost to interference from unauthorised Israeli operators (60m USD loss to the PA) per year according to the charity, the World Association for Christian Communication.⁵⁶

It may be that this attitude within Israeli business and industrial culture is an aspect of the conscious or unconscious embrace of the image of the nationalistic 'New Jew',⁵⁷ with whom so many Israelis identify, as opposed to the exilic 'weak' or 'gentle' Jew.⁵⁸ Breines had hoped, writing in the 1980s, that his book *Tough Jews* would contribute "to kindling thought that refuses to bow to toughness and nationalism as the inevitable horizons of political and social life."⁵⁹ Indeed, in the 1990s it had seemed that there was reason for optimism regarding the relationship between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. This was, according to Naomi Klein, in part because war was no longer considered a viable option; negotiations continued because Israel did not want to be constrained by involvement in conflict in the emerging globalised, borderless world. However, at the moment some Israelis appear to be immersed in a form of nationalism which is enjoying the profits to be made from conflict and mistrust, for Israel has instead developed an economy "based on the premise of continuing wars and deepening disasters."⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Stephen Krasner, 'A rare win-win: By improving the lives of Palestinians, Israelis could improve their own', *Hoover Digest*, vol. 1 (2016), pp. 89-96.

⁵⁶ WACC, 'How Israel controls Palestinian ICTs' (13 May, 2019), at <https://waccglobal.org/how-israel-controls-palestinian-icts/>, accessed 12/12/2020.

⁵⁷ Jacobson, 'The Role of Humiliation in International Conflict', p. 77.

⁵⁸ Breines, *Tough Jews*.

⁵⁹ Breines, *Tough Jews*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin 2008), p. 428.

The Rhetoric of ‘Strength’ and Righteousness

Today, Israel attends less to the idea of a heritage of history of shame and weakness⁶¹ and more to the narrative mentioned above, of an innovative, pioneering nation characterised by strength and will that their forebears from the *shtetl* could not possibly have imagined. Israel is in large part a product of revolutionary Zionist idealism and the myth of the Sabra—a term with refers to those members of the pioneering youth groups who came to Palestine before 1948, and the following generation. ‘Sabras’ are named for a desert fruit (prickly pear) that resists attack by virtue of its spikes. It represents the new, strong ‘manly, hard Jew’, the polar opposite of the pale, pious yeshiva boy of the European past (although, arguably no less parodic than the pallid skullcapped student or the shyster, the Jewish New York gangster, or for that matter, Svengali and Shylock, beloved of antisemites worldwide).

The mythology of the Sabra, the European Jew rejuvenated through *aliyah* (or ‘ascending’, emigrating or ‘returning’ to Israel), played its part then and continues today. Carlo Strenger asserts that the “New Jew ... should cause to be forgotten for all time the weak, over-intellectual Jew.”⁶² Idith Zertal recognises what Ella Shohat terms a ‘rupture’ with exilic Jewishness and avows that “revolutionary Zionism negated not only the Diaspora’s way of life; it intended to utterly obliterate the Diasporic soul of the Zionists themselves, and along with it ... the entire two thousand-year history of the Exile.”⁶³ Daniel Boyarin views this “negation of the Diaspora” alongside the “rejection of the ‘feminized’ Jew of the Diaspora in favor of the new masculine pioneer [as] ‘a cultural capitulation that does not honor Jewish difference’.”⁶⁴ Such a totalising reaction against one’s forebears, one’s past—of history itself—may be seen as an effort to create a timeless, ahistorical present, an image explored at length by late Israeli novelist Amos Oz.⁶⁵ But in this tenseless present the enemy inevitably and eternally continues “to rise up against us to annihilate us”—a point that Arendt has

⁶¹ Jacobsen, ‘The Role of Humiliation in International Conflict’.

⁶² Quoted in Jacobson, ‘The Role of Humiliation in International Conflict’, p. 77.

⁶³ Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: The Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 8.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Alain Weaver, ‘Further footnotes on Zionism, Yoder, and Boyarin’, *CrossCurrents*, vol. 56, no. 4 (2007), p. 46.

⁶⁵ Amos Oz, *Black Box* (UK: Vintage, 2002).

hotly contested. Alternately, it is a vacuum wherein the past, rather than being reflected upon and learned from, is largely ignored. In its place is “an ideology of toughness, paranoia in the face of difference, and violence [a framework] commonly referred to as ‘realism’.”⁶⁶

This fierce, overtly war-like ‘realism’ is not an Israeli idiosyncrasy. It is an attitude accepted worldwide, and it is hard to argue against the ‘realism’ of ‘toughness’: one *must* be tough to survive. Historically, Israel has been, and is, vulnerable to ‘strongman’ rhetoric. Former general, Matan Vilnai, claimed in 2008: “The more Qassam fire intensifies [from Gaza] and the rockets reach a longer range, they will bring upon themselves a bigger *Shoah*” (the term usually used synonymously with ‘holocaust’).⁶⁷ Very recently, Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted, “In the Middle East, and in many parts of the world ... there is a simple truth: There is no place for the weak ... The weak crumble, are slaughtered and are erased from history while the strong, for good or ill, survive.”⁶⁸

The strongman narrative is assisted by a belief in aloneness against the world; the implication is that ruthlessness is the only way to assure survival. This stance is not peculiarly Israeli but is certainly adopted by Israel and emerges in the claim of ‘nobody to talk to’ about a peace process. Guy Ziv has explored the now entrenched public belief in this assertion which he claims has been rejected by Israel’s security community for decades, and which contradicts military advice regarding questions of national security. Nevertheless, at the time of his re-election in 2015 Netanyahu reiterated that “there are no forces for peace, no partner for peace” to justify avoiding negotiations. This stance aligns well with his instrumental political ambitions, and again in his 2019 re-election bid, when this persistent belief was used alongside the strategy of alarming Israelis of a forthcoming existential crisis should they support the centrist parties opposing him, even though these parties were led by former security officials.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Breines, *Tough Jews*, p. xi.

⁶⁷ Rory McCarthy, ‘Israeli minister warns of Holocaust for Gaza if violence continues’, *The Guardian* (1 March, 2008), at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/01/israelandthepalestinians1>, accessed 12/12/2020.

⁶⁸ PM of Israel, *Twitter* (30 April 2018), <https://twitter.com/IsraeliPM/status/1034849460344573952?s=20>, accessed 12/12/2020.

⁶⁹ Guy Ziv, ‘Nobody to talk to: The persistence of the “no partner” mantra in Israeli discourse’, *Middle East Journal*, vol. 73, no. 3 (2019), p. 368.

It is through language that our perceptions are shaped and our purposes defined. ‘Nobody to talk to’ is similar in effect to other oft-repeated dead-end phrases such as ‘this is the reality...’, ‘the hard facts are...’, and ‘There Is No Alternative’. They are all weaponised clichés to shoot down opposition. In the absence of a peace partner there can be no peace process and therefore no need to consider adaptation to or accommodation with the other. This policy continues today, and at the time of writing with unabashed talk of annexation. The ongoing war of attrition played out in cycles of attack/counterattack, humiliation/revenge continues even though the ‘strongest’ has already claimed all the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, wherein over five million Palestinians negotiate daily Israel’s roadblocks and checkpoints, its walls and electric fences, and basic rights of citizenship continue to be denied. As a former assistant mayor of Jerusalem observed: “A bi-national state isn’t a nightmare of the future, it’s the current reality.”⁷⁰ Zionism’s nationalist aspirations have largely succeeded, and as Hannah Arendt predicted in 1948, it has come to pass that, the ‘victorious’ Jews [are] absorbed with physical self-defense to the degree that [has submerged] all other interests ... political thought [centres] around military strategy; economic development [is] determined exclusively by the needs of war.⁷¹

Violence is the *lingua franca*, so the logic flows that without toughness one can be victimised and abused; one can be annihilated. There is boundless evidence showing that brutality is the way the world works, but there is also boundless evidence showing that it is how the world fails to work. “Eternal war,” as former Mossad chief Shabtai Shavit drily points out, “is not a strategy.”⁷² Neither is perpetual subjugation of a large part of the nation’s—any nation’s—population. The expectation that all Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Bedouin, denied any possibility of self-determination in perpetuity will never act with aggression or always fail if they do, is far more unrealistic than seeking just ways of cohabiting.

Against Outrage and Despair

“Judaism begins and ends with a story. If Christianity is to a great extent about doctrine and Islam about ritual, Judaism is about narrative. To be a Jew is to tell and retell a story.”⁷³ The most told and retold story is that of exile

⁷⁰ Quoted in Weaver, ‘Further footnotes on Zionism’, p. 42.

⁷¹ Hannah Arendt, ‘To Save the Jewish Homeland’, *Commentary*, vol. 6 (1948), p. 398.

⁷² Quoted in Ziv, ‘Nobody to talk to’, p. 372.

and return, yet there are Jewish Israelis who have the *chutzpah*—in the sense mentioned earlier, of ethical inquiry—to attempt to change the terms and nature of this return. As the time for her military service approached, eighteen-year old Yasmin Ricci-Yahav wrote,

I will not accept the endless repetition of sayings such as ‘we have no partner for peace’, ‘we have no one to talk to’ and ‘force is the only option’. I am refusing military service with the hope of advancing a more open and critical discourse, especially among young people, about the army’s ongoing role in carrying out the Occupation. I hope my decision will contribute, in however small a way, to a gradual change of consciousness. And that this change will lead in turn to a search for a solution based on justice and equality for Israelis and Palestinians.⁷⁴

Ricci-Yahav’s modest yet forceful voice brings to mind Havel’s view of hope, which “is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but, rather, an ability to work for something because it is good.”⁷⁵

Similarly overcoming what Arendt referred to as “the narrowness of caste spirit,”⁷⁶ an anonymous teenage blogger, shortly after her release from prison for refusing military service in 2019, discussed her change of attitude towards Palestinians after she attended a summer peace program:

I knew a little bit about the things happening in Palestine, but on some level I thought ... they kind of deserved it. Because what we were taught is that it is controlled by terrorists, and that they just won’t let us have our land that we deserve ... So I talked to these Palestinian kids who hadn’t seen their uncle or their grandparents in years, because they can’t get out of the West Bank to go to Gaza, and they can’t pass the checkpoint, they’re not legal citizens...and they don’t have many rights. It was ridiculous to me. Why are you treating someone like a second-class citizen, just because they’re not Jewish or just because they’re Arab? It was very hard for me to understand that the whole conflict is more complicated than history class ... but there’s a limit to what teachers can say without getting fired.⁷⁷

⁷³ Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One* (Australia: Black Inc., 2010), e-book.

⁷⁴ Yasmin Ricci-Yahav, ‘My Refusal Statement’, *Medium* (2019), at <https://medium.com/@yasmin.ricci1/my-refusal-statement-80948c399fa4>, accessed

⁷⁵ Havel, *Disturbing the peace*, p. 181.

⁷⁶ Arendt, *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. xli.

⁷⁷ @LegiTayUpdates, ‘Taking a Stan’, *Jacobin* (8 April, 2018), at <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/04/israel-defense-forces-taylor-swift-fan>, accessed 12/12/2020.

Plenty has been written on forms of indoctrination in the education system in Israel and the disparities in educational opportunities between Israeli and Palestinian children, where more than three times as much is invested in the children of Jewish citizens than of Palestinians⁷⁸ and on the European narrative occupying a privileged place within its mandated curriculum.⁷⁹ Yet Hilla Dayan, while seeing Israeli universities “as the end point of segregation, exclusion, and denial of education,” still speaks to the concept of a “politics for hope,”⁸⁰ a concept akin to Havel’s insistence that, “the more unpropitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope.”⁸¹ A fine example of this striving against the odds is that of Gazan/Canadian doctor and peace activist Izzeldin Abuelaish, whose three daughters were killed during Operation Cast Lead in 2009. Abuelaish later wrote not a justifiable fury-filled diatribe, but a memoir titled *I Shall Not Hate*, the corollary being, ‘I shall hope’.⁸² The following year he founded the Daughters for Life Foundation, which offers accessible education to girls and young women from Middle Eastern countries, including Israel. Rebecca Solnit⁸³ has written passionately in defence of hope and the cynicism of the ‘realist’, and well before her revolutionary teacher Paolo Freire wrote that it is hope, not ‘realism’, that galvanises people to struggle against oppressive masters. Action must follow or “hope, as an ontological need, dissipates ... and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness can become tragic despair. Hence the need for a kind of education in hope.”⁸⁴ In fact there are education programs such as the one attended by the anonymous *refusenik* mentioned above, as well as human rights organisations within Israel/Palestine and in the Diaspora who work towards recognition of the other as a human being rather than an irredeemable enemy.

Regarding ‘action’, some argue that it is a moral and practical imperative to divide Israel/Palestine into two discrete nations, although

⁷⁸ Saree Makdisi, ‘Apartheid / Apartheid / []’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2018), p. 315.

⁷⁹ Butler, *Parting ways*, p. 118.

⁸⁰ Hilla Dayan, ‘For Occupation Studies, To Cultivate Hope’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2018), p. 352.

⁸¹ Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, p. 181.

⁸² Izzeldin Abuelaish, *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor’s Journey on the Road to Peace and Human Dignity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).

⁸³ Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006).

⁸⁴ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum 1994), p. 3.

Israel's separationism has thus far not succeeded in anything resembling a solution to the Conflict; it is, as Alain Weaver has said, about "managing" it.⁸⁵ Many voices from diverse political leanings insist that opportunities for two-state solution have failed. For others, it is not the central issue. A Palestinian I talked with in Jerusalem in 2019 mentioned dryly that it does not make much difference if it is your neighbour next door who hates you, or the one across the road from behind a fence. In any case, Israel is already, effectively, a bi-national state, though "a wretched form" of it.⁸⁶ Some view the idea of bi-nationalism as a rather feeble utopian view. That said, while acknowledging the complexities involved in solving so many inequities, Gideon Levy asks ironically, "Why is it so scary to live in an egalitarian state [when] all other possibilities are much scarier?"⁸⁷ He declares that even today, conscious and democratic change is still an option, regardless of the chilling similarity to the zeitgeist described by Arendt in 1948:

Even more surprising than the growing unanimity of opinion among Palestinian Jews on one hand and American Jews on the other is the fact that they are essentially in agreement [that] Arabs—all Arabs—are our enemies ... only outmoded liberals believe in compromises, only philistines believe in justice, and only *schlemiels* prefer truth and negotiation to propaganda and machine-guns.⁸⁸

It is important to note, however, that for Arendt, the *schlemiel* is neither incompetent nor stupid but has an honesty which affords him clear sight, an outcast, a pariah, who "challenges an evil philosophical and political status quo."⁸⁹ Her insistence that Jewish/Palestinian cooperation is essential in the most practical sense has not dated either, for, "no matter how many immigrants it could absorb and how far it extended its boundaries [Israel] would still remain a very small people greatly outnumbered."⁹⁰ She concludes that a homeland is the "real goal of the Jews in Palestine [and

⁸⁵ Weaver, 'Further footnotes on Zionism 2007', p. 41.

⁸⁶ Butler, *Parting ways*, p. 18.

⁸⁷ Gideon Levy, 'Who's Afraid of a Binational State?', *Haaretz* (2014), at <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-whos-afraid-of-a-binational-state-1.5317844>, accessed 12/12/2020.

⁸⁸ Arendt, *Jewish Writings*, p. 390.

⁸⁹ Mencahem Feuer and Andrew Schmitz, 'Hup! Hup! We Must Tumble: Toward An Ethical Reading Of The Schlemiel', *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 54 no. 1 (2008), p. 17.

⁹⁰ Arendt, 'To Save the Jewish Homeland', p. 6.

must] never be sacrificed to the pseudo-sovereignty of a Jewish state.”⁹¹ That is, for her the homeland is a political space without sovereignty, or even a majority in Palestine, where rather than disowning one’s exilic heritage, respect for the best of Jewishness would not be surrendered to Zionist political demands which she saw as unrealistic then, and in light of the ongoing horror of the Conflict, only seem increasingly so today.

The Hyphen

Hitmazrehut, or “becoming of the East”⁹² represents an alternative geopolitical framing to the European Jewish Israeli hegemony. The concept hinges on pursuing a sense of identity attached to the locale itself rather than the current mainstream Israeli identification with the West. Yet Ashkenazim are called to disown diasporic culture, as have the Mizrahim, for whom this for whom this has meant shedding their Arab affiliation and identity and “acquiescing in assimilationist modernization, for ‘their own good’.”⁹³ However, according to Atalia Omer, the Mizrahim are “at least potentially able to think about inhabiting Middle Eastern spaces outside the messianic paradigm.”⁹⁴ She asks what a non-orientalist Israel would like. Seemingly gaining energy from the challenge to the “binary logic of Zionism” afforded by the term “Arab-Jew,” she speaks to the possibility of “inhabiting the hyphen.”⁹⁵ There have, after all, been instances of joint Mizrahi-Palestinian activism amongst those who recognise their common struggle.⁹⁶ Edward Said also, while mindful of the very different nature and circumstances of Jewish and Palestinian dispersement and displacement, has pointed out that awareness of their own history of disenfranchisement can lead Jews away from the limits of defensive clannishness to ally themselves with other dispossessed people⁹⁷ and for some, it has.

⁹¹ Arendt, ‘To Save the Jewish Homeland’, p. 9.

⁹² Atalia Omer, ‘Hitmazrehut or Becoming of the East: Re-Orienting Israeli Social Mapping’, *Critical Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 6 (2017), pp. 949-976.

⁹³ Ella Shohat, ‘Rupture and return: Zionist discourse and the study of Arab Jews’, *Social Text*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2003), p. 50.

⁹⁴ Omer, ‘Hitmazrehut’, p. 959.

⁹⁵ Omer, ‘Hitmazrehut’, p. 953.

⁹⁶ Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish conflict in Israel white Jews, black Jews* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁹⁷ Butler, *Parting ways*, p. 28.

A Diasporic Dispensation

Goran Rosenberg revisits Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis' assertion that Judaism depends upon the Diaspora. Having survived centuries of persecution and assimilation, the only thing that Judaism could not survive is "Jewish self-effacement," which for him occurs when Judaism's spiritual force is lost, for this "reduces Judaism to a political and militarized state."⁹⁸ As an agnostic, 'spiritual force' is a difficult phrase; however, it might be interpreted with reference to Butler's identification of traditional commitment to social justice as the "ethical substance of diasporic Jewishness." Butler has emphasised "affirming a *different Jewishness* than the one in whose name the Israeli state claims to speak,"⁹⁹ one that aligns with Daniel and Jonathon Boyarin's idea of importing to Israel a "diasporised" understanding of sharing the geographical space that is Israel/Palestine. Diaspora, then, becomes "the *principle* that must be brought home to Israel/Palestine in order to ground a polity where no one religion or nationality may claim sovereignty over another."¹⁰⁰

Weaver's formulation is similar in its championing of democracy over ethnocracy: "a third way between exile from the land and nationalist sovereignty [wherein] sharing the land with others is a normal state of affairs."¹⁰¹ It is a political model where one's identity is "shaped through one's opening to and encounter with the other." Such a shift towards understanding oneself in relation to the other in politics would have to apply to both Jews and Palestinians; but for Jews, specifically, it would mean abandoning the exclusivism of Jewish-centred nation-statism, with its "obsessions with demographic and border control."¹⁰²

"Diaspora," for the Boyarins and Weaver as well as Butler, is adamantly not "a symptom of disorder," nor need it mean estrangement. Rather, it is a political category that disrupts the association of ethnicity with hegemony. "Exilic consciousness"¹⁰³ is a product of diasporic tradition, not necessarily limited to diasporic Jews, that has been derogated for centuries, and which the 'New Jew', and now, many Israeli citizens have dismissed as a shameful condition of abjection and a danger to the continued existence of

⁹⁸ Quoted in Rosenberg, 'Is Israel Good for the Diaspora?', p. 30.

⁹⁹ Butler, *Parting ways*, p. 26, italics mine.

¹⁰⁰ Butler, *Parting ways*, p. 6, italics mine.

¹⁰¹ Weaver, 'Further footnotes on Zionism', p. 48.

¹⁰² Weaver, 'Further footnotes on Zionism', p. 42.

¹⁰³ Weaver, 'Further footnotes on Zionism', p. 48.

the Jewish people. Yet one might argue back—as Judith Butler has—that violently subjugating people and refusing them basic rights is certainly a way to court aggression, and that it is in fact in the Diaspora that Jews have survived as a people for millennia. One could reverse the argument to view Diaspora not as a tragic condition that can be only be redeemed by a return to Israel, but actually Jewish people’s saving grace. Boyarin and Boyarin advocate,

a privileging of Diaspora, a dissociation of ethnicities and political hegemonies as the only social structure that even begins to make possible a maintenance of cultural identity in a world grown thoroughly and inextricably interdependent. Indeed, we would suggest that Diaspora ... may be the most important contribution that Judaism has to make to the world ... that peoples and lands are not naturally and organically connected.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

This article has looked, too briefly, I fear, at the complexities of national identification in Israel/Palestine, taking into consideration the interrelationships of shame and victimhood with triumphalist sources of self- and nationalist esteem. Also discussed were some of the stories we tell ourselves and how the language used to tell them may be used either to bolster, or to question, treasured conceptions of self and place. This analysis has led to consideration of the respect owed to the concept of Diaspora, which as the Boyarins, Judith Butler, Marcus Ehrenpreis and others have claimed is not “a regrettable interregnum in the history of Judaism, but ... its very foundation.”¹⁰⁵ This is not antisemitic. In fact, it is *prosemitic*. I have attempted to address the possibility that Jews of Israel and the Diaspora can negotiate a pathway through the turmoil with help from traditions other than an exclusivist Eurocentric chauvinism. Nothing is set in stone. Indeed, as Israel’s former Shin Bet security agency chief Ami Ayalon (2020) affirmed recently, “The strength of Zionism is that our fate is in our hands. Not God’s. Not some historical forces beyond our control. We can still decide to change direction and avert disaster ... I even [quote] Herzl’s motto, ‘If you will it, it is no fairy tale.’”

The final part of this essay has summarised some of the work of others who, like Ayalon, have considered possibilities for change within what is currently a system in which justice has failed: Omer’s image of in-

¹⁰⁴ Boyarin and Boyarin, *Diaspora*, pp. 722-723.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Rosenberg, ‘Is Israel Good for the Diaspora?’, p. 30.

betweenness or liminality recalls Weaver and Daniel Boyarin's "third way" between exile and nationalist sovereignty; Goran Rosenberg's evocation of "a new path for Judaism *between* Zion and Diaspora."¹⁰⁶ The 'hyphen' subverts the Ashkenazi prescription against other ways of being Jewish, has the potential to disentangle identity from harshly limiting communitarianism, and looks instead towards ways of being European or Arab, Jewish or non-Jewish in Israel/Palestine. This may sound absurdly utopian. However, the destruction of diasporic consciousness, the annihilation of Palestinian and Mizrahi identity, or perpetual war, are surely despairingly dystopian alternatives.

¹⁰⁶ Rosenberg, 'Is Israel Good for the Diaspora?', p. 33.