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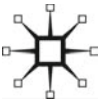

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# Contents

# Preface

Another book on Israel/Palestine. What could possibly be left to say about a situation that has been analysed from just about every perspective? Moreover, why would a woman from the most isolated capital city in the world, far from the Middle East, who does not identify as Jewish, Muslim or Arab, want to say it? In these few pages, I will answer these questions. I hope that my academic readers will indulge me writing from the heart to explain my engagement with this subject matter, and what I hope to offer.

When this book was conceived, I wasn't an academic. I wasn't even a graduate student. I was a failed Australian rock musician escaping my future with bad hospitality work and a British passport, living out my quarter-life crisis far from home. My vague hopes of one day being an academic seemed as distant as my dashed hopes of making a living from music. I was lost in my own life. Then my entire world opened up, because I read a book while on holiday in Prague. *The Palestine–Israeli Conflict: A Beginner's Guide* was perfectly pitched to me: I was a beginner in this field despite having an undergraduate degree in Politics. This book started me on a course of questioning that has sustained my life and work ever since.

As I read the book, I found myself asking an important question. Given the seemingly intractable nature of this conflict, why couldn't I see more Israelis who were reflective; aware of their history and the impetus it placed on them to work towards justice and peace for the victims of Zionism? My hazy and rather obvious hypothesis at the time was that their nationalism was responsible, and the State of Israel was inextricably linked with this. I wondered how I could understand Israeli Jews better, so that I might grasp what those who had visions of justice and co-existence were doing. I was painfully aware then, as I am now, that despite the massive leaps forward from dysfunction that Palestinian society and politics must make, problems that began with agents of Zionism in Palestine must be resolved by those same agents – today's Israeli Jews. I wanted to know who was taking up this challenge and to understand their constraints and limitations; not just the external constraints, but also the ones inside their very beings, products as we all are of our environments. I wanted to discover this by speaking to them, by analysing and unpacking their words. So began my fascination

with and research into this field, a return to formal study and, finally, an academic career.

I started by considering my subjects as moral agents. Their identities – both prescribed and self-ascribed – were less important to me than their ultimate humanity and convictions. Over time, my aversion to analysing or compartmentalising people based on ascriptive categories evolved into a more sophisticated approach that I now recognise as fundamental to my way of understanding the world.

I consider my engagement with 'identity' to be my paramount consideration as I seek to understand the people in this book and the context that shapes and constrains them. Engaging with 'identity' has transformed the way my own life has unfolded, giving me a particular way of seeing this political situation. There are many books about nationalism, Jewish nationalism, resistance and even dissent. Yet I never found a book quite like the one I had set out to write, that puzzled over 'good' people in a bad situation and considered how their resistance might only ever be partial because of these things we like to call identities.

Such a book could only be written from a perspective that regards such people as both products of, and yet distinct from, the categories/'identities' which so many freely ascribe to themselves and others, or develop elaborate institutions to do so for them. Nobody had written such a book, perhaps because it would be very difficult to do so from within such identification. Moreover, people like me generally avoid, and are sometimes expressly forbidden from engaging with, this subject matter. People I've met in the course of writing this book – inside and outside academia – have questioned the legitimacy of me writing on this subject. One of them tried to mobilise others to get me removed from my university. The individuals she targeted on the basis of their Jewish self-identification demonstrated integrity and support for academic freedom in resisting her efforts.

Gilad Atzmon, featured in this book, suggests that looking, sounding and acting like an Israeli may be 'necessary qualities needed to grasp the Israeli mind, politics, identity and culture' (2011, p. 187); in other words, dissection can only be an inside job. Here, I suggest that being an outsider might be equally or more useful, even if, according to more than one Israeli, I do share the 'national quality' of directness. As an outsider, I lack that emotional investment in 'identity', an investment I will demonstrate that Atzmon retains. You, my readers, will judge whether this outsider has indeed brought something of value to the conversation.

I hope that in reading this book you might experience some semblance of my enjoyment and privilege in researching and writing it for the last decade.

I also hope that you will remember, as I repeatedly demand of myself, that the musings of this book and its subjects pertain to the suffering and deaths of many people who would give anything for the rights and privileges to ask, and try to answer, such questions.

# Acknowledgements

Dan Cohn-Sherbok and Dawoud Sudqi El Alami wrote the book that started it all, and Vicky Wilkinson lent me her copy.

David Brown guided my thoughts and words with patience. Jane Hutchison provided support and made valuable alterations and Julia Hobson suggested structural changes. Candice Trevor, Joanne Dolphin and Christine Attwell assisted with an earlier version. Eleanor Davey-Corrigan and Harriet Barker at Palgrave patiently answered every question from an eager and nervous first-time author. Anthony K.J. Smith's careful reading and astute feedback ensured that I communicated effectively.

The Australian Federation of University Women (WA Branch) awarded me the Joyce Riley scholarship in 2008, enabling me to travel to Israel, London and Berlin in 2010 and conduct my interviews. Joe and Amelia Wilkinson hosted and chauffeured me in London, John and Vicky Wilkinson hosted me in Kent, while Mike Wilkinson drove me to the airport. Zoe Keogh and Chris Jonot hosted me in snowy Berlin.

My interviewees all deserve heartfelt thanks. Chief amongst these must be Oren Yiftachel: mentor, friend, unofficial supervisor, security liaison officer, taxi driver, tour guide and – with his lovely wife Amanda – (free) hotel operator. I am also grateful to Dorit Rabinyan, Uri Davis, Meron Benvenisti, Gilad Atzmon, Jeremy Milgrom, Jeff Halper, Eitan Bronstein, Neve Gordon, Gideon Levy and Yonatan Pollack.

Oren and Orit Nahmias cared for me and kept my mind limber with good conversations and good times. Their company inspired my reflections on New Tel Aviv – to me they represented not only the best of Israel but also the best of humanity. I was also grateful for 24 hours in the company of Uri and Miyasar and the inspiration of their love.

I would not have met Oren and Orit without my friend Shahar Hameiri, who has consistently been a great support.

The Asia Research Centre at Murdoch University provided me with a research home and funds to present my research at the inspirational Nations and Nationalism Conference in London 2012. My experiences there assisted me to develop the arguments in this book.

The Sir Walter Murdoch School of Public Policy and International Affairs at Murdoch University has provided me with exciting opportunities.

Thank you to Benjamin Reilly for believing in me, enabling me to commence my academic career and write this book.

Friends of Palestine (WA) kept the issue alive for me, providing opportunities to learn as well as share my knowledge and experiences. I am very grateful to the two special women who offered comments on my drafts – Sarah Haynes and Victoria Martin. Annemarie Whisson helped me to stay abreast of events.

Steven Mock shed light on the 'rabbi-who-doesn't-believe-in-God' thing. Moran Mandelbaum, David Landon Cole and Richard Nile provided constructive comments on my work. Lee Jones and Kelly Gerard helped me to say what I needed to say. William Starbuck taught me a valuable writing technique that has changed my thoughts as well as my words. Yaacov Yadgar, Joel Kovel and Jon Fox enabled me to improve this monograph and inspired me to continue with my academic career. Yaacov also provided a fine example of how to make people's words and lives leap from the page.

My friends and family have always inspired me. Thank you, Joanne Dolphin and Andrew Adamson, for consistently affirming my ability to write. Thanks to Charmaine Brooke for having my back. And thank you to my partner Ian Dolphin for many years of listening and conversation, especially in the early days. We read that book together (with our bedbugs) in our Grim Soviet Era Apartment in Prague – you've been part of this process from the very beginning, even if you did stop following my every word by the end!

Finally, my heartfelt thanks must go to Ian Dolphin, Jean and Peter Dolphin, Christine and Peter Attwell, and Joanne Dolphin and Frank Mofflin. It takes a village to raise a child, and it took a village to support me in writing this book.

I dedicate this book to my children, Albion and Chas, who did not exist when it began but without whom it would now seem meaningless. Parenthood has heightened my awareness of the suffering of others and my drive for positive change. Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom expressed my sentiments beautifully when he said he could never look through a gun sight at another parent. I'm not ashamed to say that I cried then, in the middle of our interview in Berlin. I knew exactly how he felt.

# Introduction

## A tale of two Zionists

Frequently we see debates about Zionism, the Jewish state and the Palestinian question. A brief look at such debates draws our attention to the dilemma at the heart of this work. In each of the two tales below, the interesting figure emerges of the Israeli Jew, self-identified as Zionist, concerned with the plight of his Palestinian Other.

The first of our two Zionists is Dan Cohn-Sherbok, co-author of *The Palestine–Israeli Conflict: A Beginner's Guide* (2003), which details the historical narrative of each 'side'. Cohn-Sherbok, an Israeli Jew, writes half the book, and Dawoud Sudqi El Alami, an Israeli Palestinian, writes the other half. At the end, the two writers debate the justice and consequences of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine.

'No respectable analysis of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict can deny that there is an inherent conflict between Zionism and Palestinian rights' (Slater, 2000, p. 19). Observing this between the co-authors, the justifications of the Zionist position are the most complex. El Alami's anti-Zionist position is straightforward: while he accepts that all the land's residents have a shared future, for him the plight of Jewish refugees from Europe should not have become the problem of people living in Palestine. Cohn-Sherbok's position is more complicated. He would like to see a Palestinian state, and acknowledges suffering of displaced non-Jews, yet argues that the Jewish state was rightly established. Cohn-Sherbok's sympathy towards Palestinians appears tempered by what he is unwilling to give up.

The tale of our second Zionist emerges with Benny Morris, an Israeli historian who dramatically engages with the plight of the Palestinian Other in an interview with journalist Ari Shavit (2004). In the 1980s and

1990s, Morris was heralded as one of Israel's 'new historians' – a critical voice who called it like he saw it. What he saw – thanks to the opening of Israel's archives – was the ethnic cleansing of Palestine to create the Jewish state. Morris's critics saw his work as de-legitimising, whilst his supporters presumed his reports were based on moral outrage. His interview with Shavit therefore contains a shocking revelation: Morris believes that the ethnic cleansing did not go far enough. Despite his concerns, Morris retrospectively supports the removal of non-Jews from Palestine to create the Jewish state.

Shavit accuses Morris of being 'chilling', 'hard-hearted' and right wing, declaring his use of terms like 'cleansing' to be 'terrible'. Yet Shavit does not challenge Morris's logic: that a viable Jewish state was only possible with the displacement of non-Jews, something Zionist activists had recognised decades earlier. Shavit suggests in frustration that Morris offers only two alternatives – 'a cruel, tragic Zionism, or the foregoing of Zionism' (p. 50). Yet Morris's implicit denial of a more humane Zionism stymies Shavit's attempt to stand up for it. Confronted by Morris's bald acceptance of breaking eggs, Shavit cannot offer an alternative way of making the omelette – the Jewish state, which, like Morris, he supports.

Thus, the Zionist at the centre of this second tale is not Morris, but Shavit. For all his visceral response to Morris – his need to claim himself as somehow different – Shavit does not offer any alternatives. How can we make sense of his distaste for what happened alongside his embrace of the fruits that the *actual* Zionist project has yielded? How can we understand people like him as experiencing a dilemma?

## The dilemma

The tales of Shavit and Cohn-Sherbok are tales of people who are worried about their Other in a context in which they cannot resolve these worries. If every ethnic nationalist discourse prioritises an Other below the Us, then any concerned individual is challenged to articulate this concern and drive it towards a political outcome. However, this challenge is acute for Shavit and Cohn-Sherbok. The state privileges their Jewish identification – this is purported to be its purpose – and support for such a state is at the heart of Jewish nationalism. '[I]t may be too much to ask the privileged, even those on the left of the political spectrum, to challenge a system that supports their own privileges and dominance' (Rouhana, 2006, p. 71).

If this is so, then what *do* such people ask of themselves? How might they identify and assert different ways of existing communally? And

how might scholars evaluate their efforts? These questions focus us on the dilemma at the heart of this book.

The first component of the dilemma is what I call the problematic situation. Cohn-Sherbok, Shavit and the subjects of this book live in a state built on the dispossession of the Other, which privileges them over the Other, and which cannot continue in its current form if the interests of the Other are met. The dominant nationalist discourse legitimises this by demonising the Other.

The second component of the dilemma is concern for the Other. Privileged citizens of a state set up for that purpose ostensibly need not worry about those marginalised by this project, as Benny Morris demonstrates. However, the decision to engage with such concerns generates contradictions.

Together, then, the problematic situation and concern for the Other comprise the dilemma. We can observe the dilemma in individuals like Cohn-Sherbok and Shavit who affiliate with the Zionist project whilst also worrying about their Others. However, the dilemma also affects individuals that are more radical. Hence, in order to map it, we need to start with left-wing Zionists and trek out towards the margins of Israeli society where a vocal minority of anti-Zionist Jews spurn the national project. In the space between these two positions, the dilemma takes particular forms based on how individuals analyse their situations. Accordingly, although 'A tale of two Zionists' was our entry point into this book, the work itself is more aptly 'A tale of 11 left-, non- and anti-Zionists' (which does not include Cohn-Sherbok and Shavit, though we will meet Shavit again later on).

## The problematic situation (the 'Thing Without a Name')

The early parts of this book critically engage with the problematic situation, explaining the trap from which concerned Israeli Jews are trying to escape. Israeli academic Lev Luis Grinberg (2009) uses the 'Thing Without a Name' to describe the ongoing project of Palestinian dispossession and its simultaneous justification within Israeli society, which constitutes a trap for those seeking to change their state or society. Grinberg borrows a metaphor used by members of the Israeli government after the acquisition of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 to explain the historical desire of Zionist activists to have the dowry (land) but not the bride (non-Jewish residents). The phenomenon Grinberg seeks to name 'includes both the act of robbing the bride and the portrayal of the abusive husband as the victim of her resistance' (p. 115). Academics' inability to come up

with suitable terminology for this 'Thing' contributes to the problem. The 'Thing' blurs the names and nature of the parties involved and re-attributes specific Israeli-only meanings to terms like Right and Left (p. 111). It depicts a decades-long occupation as temporary (p. 106) and, by insisting upon a border between Israel and the West Bank, obscures the singular nature of the regime (p. 109). It puts Jewish 'settlers' in the hot seat whilst letting other Israelis off the hook (p. 109). Most significantly, every act of resistance reaffirms the 'Thing'. The bride can never be the victim; this role belongs to the husband even as he continues to appropriate her dowry and work out how to do away with her.

The 'Thing' does not only place Palestinians in a bind. It also traps Israeli Jews seeking to adopt a moral standpoint *vis à vis* the Other by ensuring that they, too, become part of the problem. This occurs in simultaneous, contradictory directions.

First, resistance becomes part of the threat, affirming the overall victimhood of the Us. 'Deviant' individuals may be reviled; their patriotic convictions may be questioned and they may face retribution in their professional, personal and public lives. They may also be ignored, written off as freaks whose opinions are irrelevant. The responses of these individuals to such treatment may affect how they engage with their beliefs.

Second, such individuals are also vulnerable to co-optation, becoming part of the problem by acting (even against their will) as legitimating agents. This occurs at a meta-level and at the level of personal engagement. Collectively, the moral stands of dissidents are important to a society wishing to depict itself as a flourishing democracy. Commentators have applied the concept of 'shoot and cry' to the so-called moral Israeli having no alternatives to violence (Segev, 2002). The extent to which personal retribution thwarts a state's democratic credentials remains an open question. However, when a society reviles those who suggest that their state is not democratic, yet simultaneously uses them as evidence for democracy's existence, these people are damned either way.

At a personal level, the engagement of such individuals also becomes questionable. Lentin (2010) asks whether those 'who attempt to bear witness and take responsibility … in not drawing political solutions or defining themselves as anti-Zionist … *aim to* and ultimately become encompassed by the Israeli Zionist consensus' (pp. 17–18, my emphasis). Kirstein Keshet's (2006) study of the organisation MachsomWatch, which places female Israeli Jewish observers at checkpoints in Occupied Palestine, suggests many activists 'want to protest and yet to reassure – and be reassured – that they are still part of the Israeli collective' (p. 110).

Lentin questions whether engagement with the Other ultimately becomes an 'appropriation of memory' and a 'signifier of narcissism stemming from an unassuageable melancholia and guilt' (pp. 49–50), which functions to 'racialise' the Other as 'victims of "our" state' (p. 169).

Within these competing traps, the harder that individuals try to resolve the contradictions of their 'moral Zionism' the more dangerous they become. They become a danger to their own self-perceptions (which can explain Shavit's revulsion for Morris). They also become dangerous to the problem they seek to address, but may ultimately perpetuate. Finally, they become dangerous to their society, should they attempt to dismantle the system of privilege that is the Jewish state. Accordingly, such individuals find themselves in what George Clooney's character in the iconic film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Coen et al., 2001) calls 'a tight spot'. Their situation limits their ability to utilise alternative discourses of identification. Individuals may find that that they are more comfortable with contradictions than alternatives, and impose limits on themselves. If Benny Morris represents one extreme – the person who has given up on the Other – we will explore the other extreme of anti-Zionists who walk away from their society. For those in between, their dilemma involves negotiating contradictions in pursuit of connection with the Other across the lines of legally entrenched privilege.

Elaborating the problematic situation of these individuals in this book, I explain systematically how Israeli nationalism operates, utilising the concepts of ethnocratisation and *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourses. In what I call ethnocratiser states, activists purporting to represent an ethnic nation shore up their hegemony via the institutionalisation of ethnic categories and the manipulation of demography to achieve 'majority rules' domination. *Ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourses inspire them to do this – discourses of national identification hostile to those depicted as ethnic Others. Institutionalised, *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourses trap future generations in an apparently inescapable cycle of enmity between two self-evident 'ethnic nations' in a state privileging only one of them. The situation compels the 'privileged nation' to fight continually those who see its privilege as fundamentally illegitimate, sustaining the depiction of a Virtuous Us under attack from an Evil Other. I present the development of Zionism and Israel according to such a framework, arguing that indigenous resistance in Palestine and the Holocaust in Europe affirmed the original impetus of Zionist activists to control a geographical space separated from 'evil' Others. I thus demonstrate the discursive construction of ethnocratisation as a basis for considering potential resistance to it. I explore this

resistance in the second part of the book, using qualitative analysis of my subjects' written work and interview responses.

It is worth noting that ethnocratisation and *ressentiment* are not the only ways of understanding the problematic situation of Israel's internal critics. Other scholars have considered frames of race and racism (Goldberg, 2009), colonialism and settler-colonialism (Shafir, 1999; Veracini, 2006; Piterberg, 2008), apartheid (Davis, 2003; Glaser, 2003) and occupation. Ethnocratisation as a frame could be critiqued for representing the state in static terms; for glossing over what, in Israel, are significant internal divisions within what is generally depicted as the Jewish nation (such as between *Ashkenazim* of European origin and *Mizrahim* of Middle Eastern origin); or indeed for shying away from the bolder claim of apartheid. However, this book does not ignore these other frames and indeed engages with them in telling the story of Zionism and Israel. I give primary attention to ethnocratisation only after I reconceptualise it in non-reifying, dynamic terms, drawing attention to the discursive 'doing' of ethnicising/racialising that is so fundamental to the State of Israel and contemporary Israeli society. The role of the state in this process is so crucial that I have made conceptualising its relationship with *ressentiment* nationalist discourse my core focus. Whilst apartheid is a suitable term for the practices and policies of Israel, particularly as they pertain to the West Bank, ethnocratisation provides a way of understanding not only the 'doing' of division and domination but also the 'doing' of identification itself.

A common saying declares: 'There is nothing new under the sun.' This is true of the problematic situation generated by *ressentiment* and the structure and operation of the Israeli state. Since the dilemma was endemic in the Zionist project from the very beginning, we can trace variations of the moral ruminations explored in this book back through history. Some contemporary individuals I analyse here invoke an imagined connection to their forebears, seeking to join a tradition of attempts to build a more enlightened society in Palestine than the one that ultimately emerged. (I distinguish this tradition of *internal* Zionist opposition from broader *absolute* opposition to Zionism.) I present the tradition of internal opposition to Zionism, and my subjects' attempts to join it, as a poisoned chalice. As long as there has been a problematic situation of a colonial project establishing a society based on ethnic categories, individuals have grappled with how – or whether – this could be achieved without harming Others already on the land. Some (like Morris) have declared, to the dismay of others: 'It cannot be done, but don't let that stop us.' Such troubling conversations now span over a

century, and yet in each era the answers to such questions have ultimately cleaved back to colonisation, categorisation, privilege and violence. Because the first generation of internal opponents were unable to formulate an alternative method of creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine without generating conflict with their non-Jewish Other, they were ultimately not just neutralised but co-opted into the broader Zionist project. Thus, whilst the problematic situation and the dilemma are as old as the Zionist project, each successive generation must grapple with them anew. Ruminations that the contemporary malaise might have been averted – if only previous generations had made 'better' decisions – occlude the lack of conceptual clarity to internal dissent I map in this book. This lack of clarity has seen such dissent incorporated into the ongoing project of ethnocratisation.

Arguably, even Grinberg himself falls into the trap of wistfully grasping alternatives when he argues: 'the Jewish settlers' desire to establish a national community in *Eretz Israel* (Palestine) did not have to lead teleologically to the monstrous form it presently takes, the Thing Without a Name' (p. 110). Whilst unfolding events are indeed unique, specific and contingent, the path of *ressentiment* offers little in the way of plausible alternative historical trajectories. We can ask the same questions for days, weeks, months and years, but if there has only ever been one answer, what does it mean to join the tradition of questioning? The tradition of 'enlightened' internal opposition to elements of the Zionist project is a fossil in which we can trace the issues facing dissidents today as well as foretelling what may come of their efforts. Though the tradition may offer inspiration, it also places an onus on dissidents to be as precise as possible in articulating the tensions between a European colonialist project and the Others on the land – lest they, too, take their place in affirming the morality of that which they purport to critique.

A candid moment, in which one of my subjects loudly denounces another, captures this challenge.

> Jeff Halper … is a fucking American Zionist who came to live in Israel … and now he says, 'Oh, but we don't want to demolish [houses]'. So how do you want to live on other people's land if you don't demolish? How do you want to do it? (Atzmon, 2010)

In asking whether the road to the present malaise could indeed have led anywhere different, I deny my subjects the refuge of what one of them calls 'wrong turns' (Benvenisti, 2010a). I challenge them with a space for dissent in which there might only be Shavit's 'cruel, tragic Zionism,

or the foregoing of Zionism'. I face with them the enormity of what this might mean and explore their efforts to bring about change from within this paradigm.

## The 'dissidents'

The dilemma constitutes the lived experience of certain individuals; in their words and actions, institutionalised *ressentiment* nationalism collides with concern for the Other. I call such people 'dissidents'. Whilst the label might seem overstated for individuals who, in some cases, participate in mainstream institutions within their society, the subjects of this book all dissent against the characterisation of 'Jews' and 'Arabs' as existential enemies. Instead, they seek to re-imagine new forms of identification enabling co-existence.

The dissidents in this work are not necessarily the most famous dissidents in Israel and perhaps do not even identify in such terms. Nor do they represent a broad cross-section of Israeli society. However, they all fit somewhere on the spectrum between left-wing Zionism and radical anti-Zionism, having been drawn to re-examine their 'national identities' by their concern for the Other. I started by focusing on ten individuals; this grew to 11 when the opportunity arose to interview an interesting character whilst undertaking fieldwork in Israel. Other potential subjects were unavailable, such as Susan Nathan (2005), a disillusioned former Israeli immigrant, and the academic Ilan Pappe (2010). Still more individuals would emerge too late, such as Miko Peled (2012), peace activist and son of a famous Israeli general, and anti-Zionist psychotherapist Avigail Abarbanel (2012).

I chose my dissidents based on a range of factors. Who had already produced academic or activist work? Who had written, said or done something interesting or controversial? Who was available for interview? Who wanted to participate? One of the most important things about my dissidents was that they could speak English well enough to converse frankly with me. Whilst my subjects conversing in their second (or third) language might place certain limitations on our dialogue, this was preferable to including a third party in our conversation.

I sought to include individuals whose views and experiences ranged across a spectrum, in order to demonstrate the variability of responses to the dilemma. The point was not to artificially create a set of dissidents whose experiences could prove that a dilemma exists. Indeed, whether an individual personally experienced or struggled with contradictions, generally or specifically within the interview setting, was not a key

concern, since I worked from the premise that objective contradictions arising from the state and its dominant nationalist discourse necessarily curtail attempts to connect with the Other; as I contend in the first part of the book. My purpose was thus to dramatise and explore how the dilemma manifested through the dissident narratives, rather than to prove its existence or strength.

My inclusion of one particular dissident merits closer examination, because more than one reader queried her appropriateness. I analyse popular novelist Dorit Rabinyan, whose fiction eschews political engagement, based on a single article she wrote about a friendship and love affair with a Palestinian artist whilst living in New York (2004). I regard that piece to be a profoundly political work displaying the tensions between personal and national affiliations. However, one reader suggested that the piece merely muses on the predicament of being Israeli, and is authored by an otherwise a-political mainstream individual. Another reader asked, more bluntly, 'Isn't she just some girl who fell in love with a Palestinian guy?'

These critiques urge us to consider the points at which the personal becomes political, and political engagement becomes dissent. Rabinyan's article critically examined her own identification and that of the Other, explored political solutions and depicted a tantalising erasure of boundaries, even as she insisted on maintaining and strengthening them. Her article did everything that the other dissidents do in terms of public political engagement on the issue of the Other. The fact that its author turned out to remain stridently Zionist demonstrates where such moments of dissent may end up – firmly embedded within the national consensus. Rabinyan is thus the extreme on one end of the continuum of my dissidents; individuals that are more radical occupy the other extreme. Whilst we may never firmly establish where dissent begins, drawing that line with Rabinyan on the dissenting side is both methodologically defensible and borne out by the comparative richness her narrative lends to that of Meron Benvenisti, who can be seen to employ a similar discourse of national identification (see Chapter 7).

Analysing the narratives of a small selection of individuals does not enable me to offer a conclusive account of political dissent in Israel. I cannot make sweeping conclusions about what Israelis think, nor offer comprehensive predictions about the future, nor argue which model for resolution is superior. Rather, I can consider how a selection of individuals utilise alternative discourses of national identity. I can explore the contradictions of a small selection of people, whilst recognising that other individuals might formulate completely different responses. As

far as the overall exercise is concerned, then, a different selection of dissidents would have served the same purpose, but the resultant book might have looked very different, as I shall consider at the end.

## Narrative analysis

In the second half of the book, I explore the dissidents' dilemma through the realm of discourse, exploring how they enact inconsistencies. Narrative analysis, which points to narratives as a study of focus and attention, provides a way of engaging with this enactment. Riessman (2008) refers to

> texts at several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories) and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives. (p. 6)

I use a thematic analysis, which prioritises the content of the narrative, but Riessman suggests that 'category-centered models of research … can be combined with close analysis of individual cases' (2008, p. 12). Accordingly, I also employ elements of structural analysis; exploring omissions, paying attention to word choices, and making room for the insertion of remarkable stories like Eitan Bronstein's circumcision (see Chapter 4).

I see my role as epitomised by Riessman's statement: '[A]ll investigators … lack access to another's unmediated experience; we have instead materials that were constructed by socially situated individuals from a perspective and for an audience, issues made vivid in interview situations' (p. 23). I am also explicit about my own participatory role:

> By our interviewing and transcription practices, we play a major part in constituting the narrative data that we then analyse. Through our presence, and by listening and questioning in particular ways, we critically shape the stories participants choose to tell. The process of infiltration continues with transcription … (p. 50)

In assembling my dissident narratives, I engaged with material my subjects had written or stated in previous interviews. I then compiled a list of questions; some open-ended, others specific. I conducted most interviews in 2010, in London, Berlin and Israel. At the beginning of

each interview, I explained the premise of my research to the dissidents, including how I saw them as embodying a dilemma *vis à vis* the Other. The dissidents sometimes employed this terminology in the interviews; perhaps adopting it from me or reflecting an earlier predisposition on their part.

Within social science, there is a convention in which the researcher adopts a neutral stance with regard to her subjects. Whilst scholars have refuted the 'imagined social scientific dilemma of ethical neutrality versus social relevance' (Gray, 1989, p. 308), there remains an onus on the researcher who overtly eschews neutrality to explain herself. In this particular project, the nature of the research problem precluded an ethically neutral interviewing approach. The fascinating aspect of my subjects was their (at least partial) suppression of the contradictions inherent in their position. Whilst some dissidents went on to speak extremely eloquently about this, several spoke of muting such contradictions in daily life. As such, the things I wished to explore further were 'red flags' I had picked up in their previous works or words; the dissidents had not elaborated upon them prior to the interviews. My aim was to pin down potential inconsistencies and see how the dissidents responded to the suggestion that there might only be Shavit's 'cruel, tragic Zionism, or the foregoing of Zionism'. This necessitated me adopting a more confrontational approach with my subjects. I had to ask difficult questions, expose contradictions, consider how dissidents could hold opposing opinions and challenge their most personal affiliations. I did this as an academic outsider, whilst also coming from a political tradition that generally lauds 'moral' dissidents as heroes. To produce this work, I therefore had to explain clearly that I was depicting the 'tight spot' and not the personal failings of individuals. I aimed to accompany my dissidents into a complex web of national affinity, personal and political privilege, and genuine concern for the suffering of Others. For the most part, it proved a successful strategy, generating reflection and candour from both interviewer and interviewee. The approach also gave rise to debate and disagreement, which I was able to keep congenial on all but one occasion. As I shall explain later, the exception occurred with Meron Benvenisti, who objected to both the approach and its implications. However, despite the ensuing discomfort for both of us, the interview with Benvenisti yielded rich material, ultimately validating my unorthodox approach.

My dissidents brought a wealth of deep thought and personal struggle to this project and I have taken seriously the privilege of engaging with them. Part of this has involved challenging myself to engage with the

dissidents' Zionisms, which may not resolve the dilemma but may nevertheless move both the political situation and analysis of it into fruitful spaces. Whilst my depiction of the problematic situation is an honest rendering of the dissidents' political context, I try to prevent it from becoming a further trap for either my subjects or my scholarship. Thus, the dilemma is the starting point for all of us – the place at which my analysis interrogates the dissidents' lived experience. The finishing point of this questioning – my own and the subjects' – is the visions they can inspire, the limitations they cannot transgress and the conclusions I can draw. I acknowledge the limitations and perhaps futility of the dissidents' efforts whilst also celebrating what they are able to think, say and imagine.

## Othering the Other

This book covers a broader topic that has become the flashpoint of our times. Critics could suggest that in focusing on Israeli Jews, my book continues the marginalisation of Palestinian voices. Many of my references and all of my subjects are Israeli Jews; the questions I consider relate to their experiences, and I engage with Palestinians only through this prism. This, however, is the point. Whilst the book may replicate the silencing of non-Jewish voices within Israeli society, I maintain that entering *this* conversation, about how Israeli Jews might renegotiate national identification, can help us to understand the dynamics of the Israeli Jewish conflict with – and hence oppression of – the Palestinian Other.

## Book outline

This book has two parts. The first part sets up the theoretical premise of the work, elaborating the context of my research subjects in terms of nationalism and the state. In the second part, I use narrative analysis to explore the dissidents' written work and responses to interview questions. While the first part of the book informs the analysis in the second part, I encourage non-academic readers to consider starting at Part II (Chapter 4) and reading through to the end. The vibrancy of the qualitative analysis is immediately accessible, in a way that the earlier nationalism theory may not be. Eager readers can always return to the first part later!

Part I commences with Chapter 1, explaining the ethnocratiser state and *ressentiment* nationalism. This chapter explores how a particular

type of nationalist discourse develops and how activists can institutionalise it. The chapter overtly uses a non-groupist framing to conceptualise nationalist movements and states that reify 'identities'.

Chapter 2 applies the generalist propositions of the first chapter to the development of Zionism. It details how Zionism has formed a *ressentiment pair* with the Palestinian nationalist discourse, leading to the creation of the Jewish state in 1948.

Chapter 3 explains the establishment of Israel as a manifestation of *ressentiment discourse*, explores the continuation of the *ressentiment* pair with the Palestinian nationalist discourse and elaborates the consequences of Israel's construction of 'actual' Others through laws and policies.

Part II commences with Chapter 4, which introduces the dissidents, taking in biographical details, reasons for inclusion in this work and some of their ideas expressed in interview or published work.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore areas of dissonance in the dissidents' narratives. I organise them thematically, presenting contradictory or problematic elements of several dissident narratives in conjunction. I also examine the most radical dissidents, who escape some of the tensions inherent in identifying with the Jewish nation, but whose position nevertheless raises some interesting questions.

Chapter 7 outlines five alternative discourses to hegemonic *ressentiment* Zionism and illustrates them with examples. In the context of a hegemonic *ressentiment* discourse, and given Israel's specific history of colonialism and ethnic cleansing, it argues that single alternative discourses may not offer the dissidents a way of talking about the Other as an equal whilst maintaining thick national identification. This may compel individuals to use other discourses, including *ressentiment Zionism*, contributing to inconsistencies in their narratives.

The Conclusion considers the implications of this analysis. It engages in some limited surmising about *ressentiment*, its institutionalisation into state structures and the meaning of dissent therein.

# Part I
# Context

# 1
# *Ressentiment* and the State

## Introduction

Since the dissidents' political context needs careful elucidation, this is the first of three chapters developing the problematic situation depicted in the Introduction. In this chapter, my focus is theoretical, and I begin by identifying my approach to nationalism, which Calhoun (1997) suggests can be understood as discourse, project and evaluation or 'ethical imperative'. I primarily engage with nationalism as discourse:

> the production of a cultural understanding and rhetoric which leads people throughout the world to think and frame their aspirations in terms of the idea of nation and national identity, and the production of particular versions of national thought and language in particular settings and traditions. (p. 6)

Nationalist discourses necessarily underlie the projects that they may give rise to; projects of nation-and state-building captured by Gellner's (1983) famous definition of nationalism as the 'political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (p. 1). We can understand 'nations' – which nationalist projects construct and reify – to exist within the discourses that create them. However, states may also be involved in constructing and circulating these discourses; states reify the nations invoked by nationalist discourses and turn 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1991) into legal entities. Yet discourses imagining the nation may also precede the establishment of the state.

We need a coherent way of thinking about the relationships between these factors inasmuch as they are relevant to our study of the dissidents' problematic situation. Here, I consider how a type of discourse

can lead political activists and actors to see themselves and Others in a certain way. Such perceptions then inform state-seeking or state-building aspirations and the kind of state implemented if the opportunity arises. The first section of this chapter explains and charts the development of what I call a *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse. The second section explains the incorporation of such a discourse into the state. I argue that we should conceive of the resultant 'ethnocratiser state' as the institutionalisation of *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse, rather than as the property or product of an 'ethnic group'.

## *Ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourses

This section elaborates the concept of a *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse. *Ressentiment*, a term originally employed by Nietzsche, describes a process in which individuals, in order to cope with the frustration and confusion arising from dissonance and subordination, undertake 'imaginary revenge' (1996, p. 22) by means of a 'radical transvaluation of values' (p. 19). They turn the qualities that appear to explain their repression into markers of virtue, denigrating those perceived as dominators by depicting various aspects of those people's culture in a negative light.[1]

Though Nietzsche's original subjects were the Jewish priestly class under Roman subordination, *ressentiment* has broader applicability. A *ressentiment* discourse generates a sense of being superior to, and wronged by, an Evil Other. The discourse appears to resolve, for those using it, unpleasant feelings of envy, inadequacy and victimhood. However, since the *ressentiment* discourse actually amplifies these unpleasant feelings, it offers an illusory remedy.

We could talk about numerous *ressentiment* discourses in contemporary society. Consider someone identifying as homosexual who says 'straight people discriminate against me'. Consider a wronged woman who says 'all men are bastards'. These examples demonstrate that there can be an apparent truth to the sense of slight invoked by the discourse. Some heterosexual people *do* discriminate against those who don't follow their norms. Some men do harm women in our patriarchal societies. However, what is *not* true is the universalised depiction of the Evil Other; stereotyped to depict an entire category of person as all the same. In truth, not all heterosexuals are homophobes, and not every man is a bastard, but this collective demonisation of Others is intrinsic to *ressentiment* discourses.

The sociologist Liah Greenfeld has most convincingly elaborated the linkage between *ressentiment* discourse and nationalism. Greenfeld uses *ressentiment* as a partial explanation for the development of nationalism. She depicts what I call culture-makers – intellectuals and elites seeking to make sense of their places in a changing world – formulating nationalist discourses and, in the process, inadvertently shaping whole societies.

According to Greenfeld, the interplay of structural, cultural and psychological factors upon these culture-makers results in them crafting either a 'civic' nationalism not grounded in the conception of a unique cultural community, or an 'ethnic' nationalism that is collectivist, illiberal and defined according to mythical histories, symbols and legends.[2] This second type – ethnic nationalism – is formed through the psychological factor of *ressentiment*. Culture-makers compare themselves to nearby civic nations, generating feelings of inferiority. Their 'suppressed feelings of envy and hatred (existential envy) and the impossibility to act them out' generate a *ressentiment* 'transvaluation of values' (Greenfeld and Chirot, 1994, p. 84).

Notably, according to this model, *ressentiment* only occurs in the development of ethnic nationalisms. Yet civic nationalisms are equally significant, since they provide the original source of inspiration and envy for *ressentiment*-afflicted culture-makers. Greenfeld argues that *ressentiment*-afflicted culture-makers adopt an ethnic paradigm to define themselves as the moral and intellectual opposite of civic nationalisms. Writing with Chirot, she presents the 'reactive' nature of ethnic nationalisms as a response to the civic self-understanding of the first nationalisms: England and France. In these encounters, as I shall demonstrate, Greenfeld depicts the *ressentiment* transvaluation of values as a conscious shift from civic national identification to its opposite in ethnic nationalist identification.

In the Russian case, she argues that Peter the Great's experimentations with Westernisation dislocated nobles. When these individuals subsequently sought a new, dignified identity in nationalism, their country's objective backwardness imperilled their attempts at pride and self-worth. Thus, says Greenfeld,

> Russian national consciousness was defined almost wholly on the basis of the transvaluation of the Western ideals. The axis of the transvaluation was the rejection of the individual – indeed the central Western value. Community took the place of the individual, the mystical Slavic soul was substituted for reason, and liberty was redefined as inner freedom. (Greenfeld and Chirot, 1994, p. 94)

According to this account, the nobles, through their transvaluation of values, adopted an ethnic paradigm specifically to differentiate themselves from the civic West, which they envied but failed to equalise.

Greenfeld and Chirot make the same argument as they tell the German story, sourcing the rise of nationalism in the eighteenth century to 'middle-class intellectuals' (p. 98) who did not enjoy the social mobility that they expected their university educations to deliver. Initially forming part of the Enlightenment tradition and seeing themselves as equal to their peers in the West, when the intellectuals were unable to enjoy the same fruits, they turned on the values they had formerly embraced. *Ressentiment* drove them from individualism and universalism to the unique German nation. Again, Greenfeld and Chirot depict the transvaluation of values as pertaining to the content of the nationalism.

This argument recurs in Greenfeld and Chirot's analysis of contemporary post-colonial ethnic nationalisms as well. In that context, they posit *ressentiment* deriving from encounters between colonised elites and Western educators who teach them that they are inferior (p. 103). The colonial subject experiences civic nationalism offering illusory opportunity alongside seemingly permanent subjugation. He responds by rejecting the promises of universalism for the unique properties of ethnocultural identification.

Greenfeld and Chirot thus portray ethnic nationalism in a variety of contexts as the *ressentiment* backlash to unfulfilled, disappointing or hypocritical civic nationalism. However, their focus on the civic ideal overstates and universalises a set of contingent experiences, limiting the applicability of *ressentiment* to situations in which we can locate the civic source of disappointment. It also tells us that *ressentiment* must be about ideas, when *ressentiment* is also about identification. Rather than a civic-to-ethnic shift being at the heart of the transvaluation of values, then, we should think more about what *ressentiment* enables individuals to do. Understanding *ressentiment* as a boundary-making exercise allows us to engage with nationalisms like Zionism, which arise in highly ethnicised contexts. Far from being engaged in thinking premised on the civic–ethnic distinction, actors experiencing *ressentiment* are engaged with a far more fundamental problem: trying to understand themselves as Good, and their Envied Other as not-Good, when the observable state of affairs appears to indicate the opposite. Discourses constructing and reifying ethnic categories help *ressentiment*-afflicted culture-makers to carry out this moral reversal. It is precisely the utility of ethnic categories to boundary-making and the associated demarcation of virtue that explains ethnic identification as the basis of nationhood. In short,

ethnic nationalism is adopted because it is useful, not because it is civic nationalism's opposite.

Thus, the values redesignated in the transvaluation of values are not the actual values about self and society, relating to themes of the Enlightenment and the visions of Man therein. Rather, they are far more basic values of Good and Evil, applied to ourselves and those whom we envy. We augment moral demarcation by drawing ethnic boundaries, since these appear to tell us where we end and our Others begin. This is important, lest in denigrating our Others, we inadvertently diminish ourselves. Ethnic boundaries appear to delineate – for those invoking them – fixed and immutable categories. Good and Evil can be attached to these categories and appear as unshifting and long-lasting, enabling the *ressentiment* formula of Good Us, Evil Other to be applied with the illusion of permanence. Physical or cultural properties observable in multiple individuals enable us to group those individuals together and stereotype them. From here, it is easy to forget that they possess any other qualities – we see only their exaggerated differences from Us. Ironically, the promise of clarity and permanency in ethnonational categories is illusory. In practice, there is always a degree of permeability to the boundary, since 'as a discourse, identification is a construction, a process never completed, always in process, always conditional' (Lentin, 2010, p. 157, paraphrasing Hall). But these vagaries do not matter to those articulating ethnic nationalist *ressentiment* discourses. (They do, however, demand a more trenchant commitment to the 'truth' of the discourse in the face of contrary evidence.)

So, if we consider that *ressentiment* might not involve a transvaluation of values like Enlightenment liberalism, but rather values like Good and Evil, we can see why ethnic boundaries would be useful for the first ethnic nationalists Greenfeld and Chirot describe. These culture-makers sought to understand themselves as unambiguously Good compared with the objects of their envy. Crucially, in order to make this happen, they needed to draw a boundary around themselves, because otherwise no such boundary existed. The hazy universal values out of which English and French nationalisms were crafted might theoretically apply to the German or Russian man – in fact, this was the source of envy in the first place. Thus, these early culture-makers differentiated themselves in order to label the objects of their envy as Others. However, they had to begin by drawing the boundary; they had to craft an Ethnic Us before they could understand their Other.

The role of boundary-making in the *ressentiment* transvaluation of values in nationalism is also applicable to situations in which ethnic

(rather than civic) nationalist discourses inspire the production of new ethnic nationalist discourses – the scenario this book explores. In these cases, since the envied nationalism already employs ethnicised terminologies, culture-makers experiencing *ressentiment* have less creative work to do. The boundary – so craved by those seeking to depict their own absolute virtue against an Other – already exists. Culture-makers simply have to invert the moral content of categories already in place.

The formula is so simple and effective that it spreads easily, like common sense. A *ressentiment* discourse inculcates many individuals with values informed by the experiences of its creators, changing over time as new circumstances are woven into the interpretative framework. In depicting the virtuous Us as being harmed by the Other, a *ressentiment* discourse constructs a lens through which the world is viewed, and encourages individuals to act in ways that bring about the cataclysmic events foretold. This affirms the discourse's apparent truth, turning the reified Us and the envied or hated Other into actual 'conflict protagonists' (Drexler, 2008). Identification with the ethnic nation depicted by the *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse provides the basis for perceiving slights enacted by Others. The apparent existence of 'conflict protagonists' obscures the process of their construction; people experience them as pre-existing and enduring.

Subsequent participants in *ressentiment* discourses therefore need not have experienced the pain, anomie, envy or humiliation of the original purveyors, nor even *met* the Other[s] denigrated by the discourse. Instead, the discourse schools individuals in historical examples of slights and encourages the search for new examples. Perhaps there will be a truth to the belief in past or imminent harm, but the status of the oppressor is extrapolated onto an entire category of person rather than the actual actors, agents or systemic features involved. The discourse constructs this 'reality'; its common sense becomes the only one available, and thus, as Drexler (2008) declares with regard to what she calls 'conflict narratives,' it becomes

> *impossible to separate the discourse from the materiality of the conflict.* Conflict situations are produced and perpetuated by various narrations of successive events that stand, not as object and description, but as spirals of interpretation and action. That some narratives come true is not evidence that those particular narratives are correct representations of the conflict, but rather signs of their discursive power to reproduce it. Historical events attain their importance through

> policies and successive acts that are shaped by discursive constructions of the conflict. (p. 27, her emphasis)

*Ressentiment* discourses offer cogent, self-evident explanations for why things are the way they are. What they obscure, however, is that the explanation generates the circumstances it seeks to describe. This malaise affects not only the actors in the conflict but also those who comment upon it. '[E]thnic and national frames are readily accessible, powerfully resonant, and widely understood as legitimate. This encourages actors and analysts alike to interpret conflict and violence in ethnic terms rather than other terms' (Brubaker, 2004, p. 17). Hence, regardless of how objectively correct they are in their claims to victimhood at the hands of an ethnic Other, individuals using a *ressentiment* discourse can find supporting evidence. They may then adopt a pre-emptive approach, which looks more like aggression to those depicted as their Others, who meet it accordingly.

On this basis, *ressentiment* discourses encourage the formation of *ressentiment* pairs; two *ressentiment* discourses playing a game of hateful tennis in which actions and reactions repeatedly affirm their respective 'truths'. Targeted Others may go through their own *ressentiment* experiences; hence new pairs might emerge, or one *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse might, like a cheating lover, conduct *ressentiment* relationships with more than one Other. However, each *ressentiment* discourse is likely to have a 'significant Other' (Triandafyllidou, 1998) with which it forms a *ressentiment* pair – in targeting this significant Other with aggression, it invites the return of similar 'affections'. Thus, the conflict metastasises from discourse to actual violence.

A final thing to consider is that the causal relationship between ethnic nationalist discourses and *ressentiment* might (also) run the other way. *Ressentiment* can take an ethnic nationalist direction because ethnic boundaries appear to offer an easy demarcation of the Good Us and the Evil Other. However, since it is theoretically possible that an ethnic nationalist discourse could lack the *ressentiment* qualities of demonisation and self-elevation, such a discourse invites closer examination. This is especially important, since this book considers the possibility and consequences of 'benign' ethnic nationalisms. Unfortunately, any ethnic nationalism has the tendency to backslide to *ressentiment* because they are 'necessarily forms of particularism' (Greenfeld, 2006, p. 142). Ethnic nationalisms do not even claim to attach any moral attributes to all of humanity, beyond noting that everyone belongs to a nation (Gans, 2003). This makes it easy for those identifying as a

nation to measure moral virtue only with reference the treatment of members.

> [T]he borderline between 'us' and 'them' is in principle impermeable. Nationality is defined as an inherent trait, and nations are seen, in effect, as separate species. Foreigners are no longer fellow men in the same sense, and there is no moral imperative to treat them as one would treat one's fellow nationals, just the same way as there is no imperative to treat our fellow mammals, or even fellow great apes as fellow men … (Greenfeld, 2006, pp. 142–43)

In these circumstances, those identifying as a nation could easily ignore, marginalise or somehow harm those within their ambit designated as Others, even without obvious malicious intent. As I have suggested, *ressentiment* is a likely outcome for those who feel victimised, regardless of the intentions involved. If 'victims' then channel such *ressentiment* back to those responsible, a *ressentiment pair* is likely to develop, precisely because those who did the 'inadvertent Othering' would digest this perceived attack through their identification as an ethnic nation. Ethnic nationalist discourses construct nations as 'individuals capable of suffering and inflicting insults' and 'harbouring malicious intentions', leading to increased capacity for mobilisation against perceived enemies (Greenfeld, 2006, p. 142). Thus, simply being an 'ethnic Us' (and hence having ethnic Others) can render a nationalism vulnerable to becoming a conflict protagonist, even without initial intent. Ethnic nationalisms do not necessarily turn out this way – 'international circumstances and opportunities' also play a role (Greenfeld and Chirot, 1994, p. 88) – but the propensity exists because responses to perceived insults centre upon ethnic categories.

Significantly, when those identifying as an ethnic nation inadvertently harm Others, they are ill-prepared for that Other's response. Unable to comprehend its causes, they read the reaction as unsolicited aggression. Individuals who claim for their nations noble qualities such as tolerance, peace, love and respect could not possibly be guilty of harm; accordingly, any negativity must derive from Others. Hence, notions of ethnic nations as peace-loving and beneficent may actually augment *ressentiment* discourses. Purported benevolent qualities, projected onto an arbitrarily designated category of person, reveal themselves as illusory in the face of perceived threats. The 'peace-loving nation' becomes petulant when confronted with the unintended consequences of its self-worship; it immediately re-characterises as Virtuous Victim and fills

with *ressentiment*.[3] That the ethnic construction of the Us might sow the seeds of a hostile *ressentiment* relationship, even without belligerent intent, is a point that will re-emerge when we consider the phenomenon of Cultural Zionism in the next chapter. For now, we will move on to considering how the institutionalisation of *ressentiment* discourses may occur.

## *Ressentiment* and ethnocratisation

If we now understand how *ressentiment* discourses originate and spread, how do they come to form the basis of states? In this section, I examine this question by using the term charter to refer to the official discourse embodied in states' founding documents, legislation, policies and court decisions. Certain states have charters that recognisably categorise, reify and discriminate between types of person. I use the term ethnocratisation to describe the processes by which nationalist activists, in thrall to *ressentiment* discourses, shape state charters to favour the category to which they see themselves as belonging. I label the result an ethnocratiser state. Ethnocratiser states reflect – in laws, policies and court decisions – the ethnocratising activists' beliefs in the unique virtue of 'their nation' and its vulnerability to Others. 'First ethnocratisers' – and those who follow in their footsteps – perceive the state as a tool for redressing perceived (*ressentiment*-informed) injustices at the hands of Others. They construct the state to be a buttress for, and defender of, their perceived nation by demarcating the population into ethnic categories and hierarchically ordering them to privilege their own cohort. Since the privileged cohort outnumbers the non-privileged – a situation that the activists manipulate – elections can occur without disrupting the system of classification and discrimination, which is thus normalised and legitimised.

This does not mean that every ethnic nationalist discourse inspires this process of ethnocratisation. However, as noted above, even 'benign' ethnic nationalist discourses are vulnerable to *ressentiment* depictions of Us and Other, which may generate the conditions and political will to ethnocratise. When a *ressentiment* pairing occurs, activists on each side seek to put in place a system that takes power away from the Other. The relative sizes of the cohorts the activists deem to belong to each category may determine the relative brutality of such a system. However, the most attractive option enables these activists to depict the state as a formal democracy in which the ruling majority just happens also to be an 'ethnic' majority.

Obviously, not all nationalist activists acquire the possibility to put in place such a system. Numerous historical, cultural, political, social and economic factors determine whether the opportunity to set up such a state arises and whether the relative sizes of the perceived 'groups' favours such an arrangement. Then, several factors determine the activists' effectiveness in seizing the moment to implement laws and policies, thereby establishing and perpetuating such a state. It is beyond this book's scope to consider all these factors. The important point is that the activists, in the event that they are successful, are embroiled in their project. Though canny in propaganda and mobilisation, the *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse perpetuates in them a sense of wound inflicted by Others, simultaneously nurturing this wound with the depiction of the noble Us. Participation in the 'national project' eases the pain of the wound; delivering them from the humiliation – real or exaggerated – that they have experienced at the hands of Others. The strength of the state becomes both their revenge and their perceived protection.

Numerous other scholars have analysed the kind of state I have just described, though often with a different emphasis and terminology. They commonly depict the phenomenon under study as resulting from the capture of the state by a particular 'ethnic group' and that group's subsequent employment of the state to advance its interests at the expense of resident non-members (see Conversi, 2009, p. 57; see also O'Leary, 2001, p. 285 on '*staatsvolk*' and Kaufmann, 2009 on 'dominant ethnicity'). Some scholars explicitly use the term ethnocracy, which my own terminology develops (see, for example, Wimmer, 2004); see also Mazrui (1975) on Uganda; Toshchenko on post-Soviet Central Asian republics (Arutyunyan 2004); and Brown (1994) and Fong (2008) on Burma.

Yiftachel (2006) has utilised ethnocracy extensively to describe regime systems that 'enhance a rule by, and for, a specific ethnos' (p. 32). However, in a terminological turf war over how to conceptualise Israel, sociologist Smooha (1997) has employed a counter label of ethnic democracy. Classifying ethnic democracy alongside other recognised types (consociational and liberal) and placing it on a continuum between consociational democracy and authoritarianism with the potential to move in either direction (2002a, p. 480; 2005, p. 34), Smooha argues that while both the model and its Israeli archetype are not ideal (2002a), ethnic democracy is nevertheless defensible (2002b, pp. 481–82). He argues that although the state awards special privileges to the 'dominant nation', all citizens enjoy individual rights, satisfying

a minimalist definition of democracy (Dowty, 1999, pp. 3–4; Smooha, 2002b, p. 497 and 2005, p. 22). His opponents counter that the theoretical state in question – and Israel in practice – contravenes equality and hence does not qualify as democratic (Ghanem, 1998, p. 443; Ghanem et al., 1998; Yiftachel, 1999, pp. 367–367; Jamal, 2002, pp. 424–28). Like Smooha (1997) with his 'Israeli archetype', some scholars have formulated ethnocracy as a model applicable to other cases including Estonia, Sri Lanka and Australia prior to 1967 (Yiftachel, 2006, pp. 20–32); and Malaysia, Russia, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Slovakia (Ghanem, 2009, p. 464).

Whilst this debate is interesting and important, both ethnocracy and ethnic democracy are problematic from a constructivist perspective. In representing the state as 'captured' by the 'dominant ethnic group' (Ghanem, 2009, p. 463), both ethnic democracy and ethnocracy assert the prior objective existence of ethnic groups, as do representations of 'dominant ethnicity' (Kaufman, 2009) or similar. Brubaker (2004) cautions against this casual invocation of ethnic groups, violence and conflict, arguing that it distorts our perception. Actors on the ground frame events in such language, sometimes lulling even those of us who purport to be constructivists into a conceptual stupor, wherein we find ourselves employing these *'categories of ethnopolitical practice*' as '*categories of social analysis'* (p. 10, his emphasis). This tendency in academics is pejoratively termed 'groupism' (p. 8). The alternative is to conceptualise

> ethnicity, race and nation ... not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals ... but rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms. ... It means taking as a basic analytical category not the 'group' as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable. (p. 11)

Employing such an approach enables a scholar to 'avoid unintentionally *doubling* or *reinforcing* the reification of ethnic groups in ethnopolitical practice with a reification of such groups in social analysis' (p. 10, his emphasis).

Since both ethnocracy and ethnic democracy depict rule by self-evident ethnic group, I have developed an alternative non-groupist term, ethnocratiser state. Ethnocratiser state emphasises the state's role in the construction of categories. Rather than understanding the state as the agent of an ethnic group, which existing formulations of 'ethnocracy'/'ethnic democracy' invite, we can interpret it as agent

of the *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse employed by the first ethnocratisers. As we shall see, such an approach radically alters how we perceive historical events, the role of the state, the process of identification and the potential for dissent and transformation. Once we reject the idea that an 'ethnic group' captures the state, we can identify how a particular way of seeing becomes hegemonic; a particular approach to identification becomes taken for granted. Individuals who subscribe to this way of seeing build institutions and operate policies through which the 'ethnic groups' or 'nations' they perceive as innate become the basis for organising society. As political activists in thrall to *ressentiment* discourses create institutional practices that determine how the state relates to its citizenry, the state becomes the agent of this discourse, reproducing and disseminating it.

The discourse remains salient because the institutional practices brought about by the first ethnocratisers generate political conflict. This conflict then requires explanation; the discourse offers a cogent explanation as to why differential treatment remains necessary. Thus, the *ressentiment* discourse justifies continuing ethnocratisation. The state's job is to disseminate this discourse in perpetuity, legitimising the differential treatment of citizens or subjects. State policies, practices and procedures are 'instruments' (Brubaker, 2011) which individuals encounter in numerous ways from cradle to grave, internalising the categorisation depicted therein as taken for granted.

> When ordinary people encounter institutions displaying national menus of options, nationhood can become an experientially salient frame for the choices they make. When these same people are already embedded in nationally circumscribed institutions, nationhood silently structures the logic of subsequent choices they make. (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008, p. 545)

Perhaps the most crucial impact of this *ressentiment* charter is on the Other internal to the state. This Other experiences identification as the inverse of the privileged 'national' – he is taught that he does not belong and accordingly takes the view of the state as awarder of ethnic privilege, seeing institutions as corrupted and subverting the true meanings of the rule of law and democracy. Thus while *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourses can develop in the absence of an ethnocratiser state – merely from encounters between those using such discourses and those depicted as their Others – within an ethnocratiser state, the sense of slight experienced by the Other can never be assuaged, since the

state objectively de-privileges him on the basis of his allocated category. Nothing stokes a *ressentiment* discourse quite like engagement with an Other who is hateful, resentful, and seems genuinely to wish to do one harm. This scenario objectively arises for both 'nations' in the ethnocratiser state, whose charter incites *ressentiment* in a de-privileged Other. This *ressentiment* then serves as a catcher's mitt for the hatred and identification of the privileged 'nation', affirming the truth of *ressentiment* discourses for all participants.

## Conclusion

This chapter has elucidated the general concepts behind the problematic situation of the dissidents. I have located this book's approach within a non-groupist framework that considers nationalism as discourse and explains ethnocratiser states as institutionalised *ressentiment*. In the next two chapters, I will apply these arguments to Zionism and the state of Israel in readiness to explore the dissidents. We could understand some of the dissidents as seeking to de-ethnocratise the state. However, since they must negotiate their critiques of the status quo alongside 'identities' informed by the *ressentiment* charter of the state, interest then arises from how they deal with this quandary.

# 2
# *Ressentiment* Zionism

## Introduction

In this chapter, I explain Zionism, the nationalism underpinning the state of Israel, as a *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse. After a brief overview of Zionism and my strategy to evade its hegemonic portrayal of history, I explore the development of the Zionist discourse, outlining how it formed a *ressentiment* pair with 'Palestinian' nationalism up to the creation of Israel in 1948. This chapter does not substantiate Israel's status as an ethnocratiser state, which is the task of the next chapter. This chapter instead demonstrates how Zionism's inception and early development fits with the previous chapter's account of *ressentiment* ethnic nationalism. It also considers the how 'virtue' built into the Zionist 'national character' informs the dissidents' place within a problematic tradition of internal dissent.

## In the beginning, there was Zionism

Zionism is a *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse. Its content has been refined over time: arguments have ensued as to the meaning of Jewishness, the necessity of a Jewish state or homeland, and its location. Local and global events have shaped these arguments and led to new ones. As a socially constructed discourse, Zionism, like all other discourses, has been and will continue to be fluid and shifting. However, to the extent that naming and analysing any discourse can be a fruitful exercise, we need to freeze-frame it, to turn it over in our hands and examine its constituents and traces. This creates a dilemma for analysis, since we are now looking at a static image rather than an unfolding scenario, but the static image is the best approximation we have. Viewing

this static image of the discourse in the present day, alongside historical static images recorded in dialogues and texts, enables us to observe that Zionism – old and new – is based on some core premises, providing the parameters within which debate occurs. Most fundamentally, Zionism is a discourse speaking of, and to, individuals politically identified and identifying as 'Jews'. It invites these individuals to see themselves as an entitled and virtuous ancient nation taking refuge in Palestine from Evil and threatening Others.

Zionism begins by arguing for the contemporary existence of an ancient Jewish nation. As I will subsequently explain, it has made this argument so effectively that observers can miss its ideological content and significance. According to the Zionist narrative, the ancient Jewish nation was forcibly exiled from Palestine in biblical times, and wandered the earth being mistreated for millennia. Zionism thus provides a political programme for this 'Jewish nation', which is urged to 'return' home to Palestine. Interestingly, while the discourse depicts the narrative of exile as objective fact, it simultaneously negates it as a two-thousand-year aberration, rather than the time in which Jewish religious and cultural traditions developed in a multiplicity of communities across the globe (Balibur, 2009, p. 132). This perspective presents any continuation of a Jewish life outside of Palestine as 'bent on ultimate disintegration and secular assimilation' (Schnall, 1979, p. 20).

While Palestine was not the only potential site for 'Jewish national self-determination', the relationship between the content of Jewish religious practice and the territory of Palestine enabled the framing of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonisation as a 'return' (Sand, 2009). Zionist activists depicted such a 'return' as freeing Jews from an incomplete and parasitic existence in Europe. Those influenced by Marxist theory argued that Jews, upon 'returning', should perform every role in the economy, so as to truly lay claim to the land and achieve full human potential (Schnall, 1979, pp. 19–20; Ram, 1999). The Zionist discourse also depicted the Jewish state as a 'return to history' more generally; 'the natural and irreducible form of human collectivity is the nation' and 'only nations that occupy the soil of their homeland, and establish political sovereignty over it, are capable of shaping their own destiny and so entering history' (Piterberg, 2008, p. 95).

The Zionist discourse had depicted Palestine as empty, yet the land contained many people who did not support the project. As I shall demonstrate, the Zionist discourse depicted the hostility of these people as an echo of mistreatment of Jews in Europe, strengthening the perceived requirement for a state in which Jews controlled their own

fate. Ensuing events would subsequently legitimise, in the eyes of some Zionists, the use of violence in attaining this goal.

Today, with the Jewish state firmly established, Zionism can simply mean supporting the existence of Israel. (As my dissidents will demonstrate, this meaning is stretchable, manoeuvrable and challengeable.) Yet all the preceding assumptions permeate through this contemporary meaning. In particular, the continuity of an ancient Jewish nation extends well beyond the boundaries of Zionist discourse and into mainstream scholarship on nationalism.

## Getting outside of Zionism

'Nations' are discursive products of the modern era, rather than the ancient entities their proponents often claim. But with the exception of a few writers such as Rabkin (2006), most scholars – not just those identifying as Zionist – take for granted a singular, long-standing, 'pre-national' Jewish nation underpinning the contemporary Israeli state. Many adopt the approach of Smith (1981, p. 15, 2010, pp. 195–99) or Walzer (2001), depicting an ancient Jewish *ethnie* (or ethnic group) ideologically mobilised by European upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even if this approach emphasises specific events and the activists who mobilised people with mythologised narratives and symbols, it still depicts a single, ancient Jewish cultural community. Klier (1997), for example, declares that 'The Jews are…the prime exhibit of an *ethnie*, to use Anthony Smith's term, which has survived through millennia despite being bereft of a national territory, a common language or even a common secular culture' (p. 170). Overtly Zionist scholars take this 'perennialist' tendency endemic in nationalism studies (see critiques by Ozkirimli, 2003, 2007) to an even greater degree by not only depicting an enduring Jewish nation, but also portraying its path to Zionism as inevitable. Given the institutional support of an entire state apparatus, such writers are the most profligate on Jewish history and politics, constructing an apparent consensus on the ineluctable path of the ancient Jewish nation to statehood. For example, Schnall suggests that while the claim to an ancient and enduring nation from Palestine was 'often used as a polemic instrument', it reflected 'communal will long before the modern era' (Schnall, 1979, p. 11). Shimoni's (1995) literature review of modernist and constructivist approaches to nationalism concludes that these contributions are limited in 'the Jewish case'. The latter

> is so patently one in which a pre-existing ethnic identity was of paramount importance that only an account of the genesis of nationalism

> that recognises the great significance of pre-existing ethnic ties holds promise for the explanation of Zionism's emergence. (p. 9)

In keeping with this deterministic tendency, Avineri (1981) invokes a paradox at the root of Zionism:

> on the one hand a deep feeling of attachment to the Land of Israel, becoming perhaps the most distinctive feature of Jewish self-identity; on the other hand, a quietistic attitude toward any practical or operational consequences of this commitment. (p. 4)

For Avineri, then, the marvel is not the Zionist settlement of Palestine, but rather that Jews *resisted* it for so many centuries!

These 'teleological explanations'

> give meaning to historical events in terms of the implications they might have for other events and grant them significance in terms of some 'destiny' towards which history is supposedly moving…. A commodified version of the entire span of Jewish history, including the Holocaust, is recruited in order to lead the consumer of historiography to this one inevitable conclusion to the exclusion of any alternatives. (Kimmerling, 2008, p. 110)[1]

However, in *The Invention of the Jewish People*, historian Shlomo Sand (2009) debunks some key myths that Zionist historiography and political advocacy have advanced as facts. The importance of this debunking is not creating a false dichotomy in which the tenets of Jewish nationalism might somehow be true without Sand's debunking and are only revealed as false by his efforts. Rather, the point is that for constructivist scholars, *all* nationalist discourses convey partial truths, or even untruths, which resonate to the participants but need not be accepted by analysts. The importance of Sand's work, therefore, is simply that he provides the tools for such a constructivist analysis of Zionism and 'Jewish nationhood', countering the almost universal adoption by Western academic literature of the Zionist depiction of Jewish identification and history.

We could regard Sand in the same light as some of the dissidents in this study. His ideas contribute to rethinking Israeli identification, and indeed one of the dissidents in this book, Gilad Atzmon, notes that Sand poses pertinent questions (see Chapter 4). Sand's work certainly has political implications, evident in the response it has received. However, the purported motivations *behind* the work should not detract from its content. Whilst scholarly work is of course political, it is not reducible

to politics, despite what some Israeli theorists argue (see Gavison, 1998). Sand's establishment of a constructivist account of Zionism's development is a seriously important contribution; his non-groupist account of the development of Jewish identification is timely, even if not entirely original (see Evron, 1995). Sand provides such a great resource, not because he is 'correct', but because, for a constructivist seeking to use non-groupist language to outline the development of Jewish nationalism, there is a dearth of other academic sources.

Sand (2009) offers an astute explanation for this lack, and for the widespread acceptance of the perennialist interpretation of Jewish nationalism, from which this book seeks to escape. It is hard to escape the apparent existence of an ancient Jewish nation, Sand says, because there were always 'Jews'. Our logic takes the fact that these 'Jews' existed, and there are people called 'Jews' now, and fills in the middle bit: *all these Jews must be the same!* The idea of nationhood as an understanding of how people in history lived and saw themselves, and particularly the names used for *actual* contemporary 'nations', can trick us into translating these signifiers back into the past and assuming a continual meaning (p. 24). Ozkirimli (with Grosby, 2007) points out, 'What matters is not the existence of the names throughout history, but what they referred to', suggesting that while there might be a 'perennial existence of a self-designating name', the referent is continually evolving (p. 526). Hence there were 'Jews' in the distant past, and a discourse proclaims the existence of a 'Jewish nation' today. This discourse depicts the latter as the direct descendant of the former; a linkage made *in the present*.

In countering the hegemonic perennialist depiction of the 'Jewish nation' that I have outlined above, Sand offers two key arguments. First, he claims that (contrary to the Zionist myth) there was no mass exodus of Jews from what became Palestine in the second century CE. Second, he argues that for a few centuries prior to this and several afterwards, Judaism was a proselytising religion, competing with Christianity for converts (whilst also retaining an aversion to this practice discernible in its theology). Sand argues that although proselytising was halted in the Christian world, Jews continued to seek converts until the advent of Islam in the seventh century CE (Chapter 3, esp pp. 178–82).

In making these cases, Sand counters Zionism's hegemonic claim that a single 'Jewish nation' was expelled from Palestine and wandered the earth until Zionism facilitated its 'return'. Instead, he argues that a proselytised Jewish kingdom became the basis of the Yiddish-speaking Jewish populations in Eastern Europe. Descendants of these populations

produced the active quarters of the Zionist movement and the bulk of those individuals who today identify as Jewish in the United States and Israel (pp. 238–49). By Sand's estimation, few of these individuals could actually claim a connection 'back' to Palestine, being instead the products of early conversions (Chapters 3–4). He argues that complex interactions between Christian and Jewish religious mythologies, and the lower status of converts in the religion, provided an impetus to obscure these conversions (pp. 210–29, 236).[2] Meanwhile, for those of the Jewish faith who remained in Palestine, 'it is reasonable to assume that a slow, moderate process of conversion' from Judaism occurred. Sand concludes that this – rather than the mythical exile – 'accounted for the disappearance of the Jewish majority in the country' (p. 182).

In disconnecting Jewish history from exile, Sand challenges the notion that Jewish national identification generates a legitimate rights claim to Palestine. Not surprisingly, this has prompted enormous criticism of everything from the accuracy of his history (Shavit, 2010) to its prior advancement elsewhere (Segev, 2002; Cohen, 2009; Schama, 2009; Judt, 2010; Shavit, 2010; Wistrich, 2011). Sand's critics note that he relies on the work of modern historians whilst also debunking them (Cohen 2009; Shavit 2010); accuse him of utilising arguments shared by anti-Semites (Wistrich, 2011); and argue that he provides a platform for Israel-haters (Wittenberg, 2010). They also complain that his obsession with origins has unpleasant racialist overtones (Wittenberg, 2010; Wistrich, 2011), though this prompts the question of how else one might counter the origin myths of Zionism. One justified criticism is that Sand's reliance on his alternative 'origin story' creates a logical argument wherein if one *could* prove that all Jews came from Palestine, the Jewish rights claim to the land *would* be valid (Mandelbaum, 2012a). However, it is hard to escape the requirement to tell a different story in order to disrupt the hegemonic taken-for-granted version that links historical and contemporary possession.

Potentially, the most damning criticism is that Sand might simply be 'wrong'. However, Sand does not have to prove that his narrative of Jewish history is truer than the Zionist version, whose proponents would struggle to verify their version of events. As a sympathetic critic notes, Sand's work 'does not purport to be anything more than synthetic, speculative and suggestive' (Sutcliffe, 2010). Hence, the claim that Sand, in constructing an alternative narrative, does the same thing he accuses Zionists of doing (Cohen, 2009), misses the point. It is enough that Sand's narrative is plausible; if we are not bound to the hegemonic perennialist depiction of Jewish history, then he has done his job.

Thus, the most important thing is not the argument over which claims are factually true – those of Sand or those of Zionism – but rather Sand's account of myth-making and mythologising. In highlighting the role and experiences of the intellectuals who wove together the Jewish nationalist narrative, Sand provides a viable constructivist account of Zionism. This account allows us to stand outside the Zionist historical narrative, not necessarily to criticise it, but rather to *recognise* it as historical narrative. Constructivist scholars have done this with other nationalist discourses (see, for example, Trevor-Roper, 1983, on Scottish identification), often to the dismay of those whose sense of self is undermined. The job of constructivist scholars, however, is not to protect identification but rather to rigorously chart its construction and dissemination. Whilst this may require the debunking of keenly held ideas, the purpose is not to rate the authenticity or otherwise of claims for their own sake, but rather to highlight the inherent myth-making. In the case of Zionism, however, some debunking is required, since we cannot account for the construction and dissemination of Jewish national identification from within the hegemonic depiction of an ancient Jewish nation destined to 'return' to Palestine.

## *Ressentiment* and Zionism

Having stepped outside the Zionist depiction of Jewish history and identification, we can now explain the development of Zionist discourse through the *ressentiment* of its early propagators. This explanation begins by outlining the kinds of societies proto-Zionists and Zionists lived in and the events they experienced – 'structural factors' (according to Greenfeld and Chirot's framework) that affected those identifying as Jews. I then explore, through a series of vignettes, how the 'psychological factor' of *ressentiment* manifested to form a cumulative discourse. Finally, I consider how the 'cultural factor' of Jewish religious mythology contributed to the Zionist discourse. These explanations should equip readers with an understanding of the discourse that Zionist settlers took to Palestine – the subject of the remainder of the chapter.

### Structural factors: European life, transformations and the rise of *ressentiment*

Before the rise of nationalism, Europe was home to many people identifying culturally or religiously as Jews. Zionism would subsequently invite us to see those Jews as the same Jews existing throughout history and today – to attribute the same national meaning to their identities.

However, Sand (2009) reminds us that there was no 'Sleeping Beauty' Jewish nation, waiting to be woken by a kiss from the handsome prince of nineteenth-century nationalism (metaphor borrowed from Brown, 2000, p. 8). Instead, there was a multiplicity of Jewish communities in Europe and across the world, speaking different languages and following different customs, integrating to varying degrees with non-Jewish neighbours, friends, communities and business associates. Whilst these Jewish communities shared commonalities in faith and cultural practice, the people living in them did not identify as part of a Jewish nation in the way that we would understand today. The 'national' meaning of Jewishness affixed by Zionism was thus not inevitable, but rather the product of concrete historical developments, particularly the responses of some key intellectuals to being depicted as Others within a new Europe of nations.[3]

The rise of nationalism in Central and Eastern European was central to this shift in Jewish identification, with the *ressentiment* discourse of hatred towards Others contributing to the discrimination against Jews already operational in Europe. Jews had been long-targeted by individuals and institutions of the Christian faith with structural barriers to participation in wider society, ghettoisation, limited employment opportunities and mass expulsions. However, *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourses now newly targeted Jews as ethnic or national minorities. 'Unlike Christian anti-Judaism, which aimed at salvation through conversion, modern anti-Semitism considers Jews to be a race or a people intrinsically alien, even hostile, to Europe, its population and its civilization' (Rabkin, 2010, p. 17). Late nineteenth-century 'Jew hatred' became 'multi-faceted', taking in 'religious, economic, racial and political prejudice'. Narratives of hatred were 'ignited' by 'deterioration in a nation's economic well-being, the impact of increased immigration of Eastern European Jews, the growth of popular support for the political left, and the extent to which leadership of the political left [was] ... identified with Jews' (Brustein and King, 2004, pp. 38–9). Jewish emancipation instigated significant transformations across Europe. The secularisation of post-Enlightenment societies saw rulers permitting Jews to leave ghettos and enjoy 'legal equality of civil rights' (Davis, 2003, p. 9). Depending on how deeply *ressentiment* had inspired the nationalist discourse and thus the permeability of the 'nation' in question, Jews were able to integrate to a greater or lesser extent. These differences in permeability explain why some Jews' journeys from victims of hatred to first enunciators of *ressentiment* Zionist discourse took different forms.

In Central and Eastern Europe, the release of Jews from the religious ghetto did not provide entry into the ethnic nations depicted by the hegemonic discourses.[4] This rendered Jewish intellectuals particularly vulnerable to adopting their own *ressentiment* discourses, since they were now Others in a sea of ethnic national identification. While *ressentiment* was not the only available response to discrimination and hostility – this was also the era of mass Jewish migration, especially to America – *ressentiment* would have satisfied the drive of intellectuals to understand their problems and explain them to others. It is through such a process that intellectuals affirm their qualifications to shape opinion, thus a *ressentiment* discourse would have delivered vulnerable Jewish intellectuals a double whammy of affirmation.

The Western European experience was different. Despite Western European states defining themselves in civic terms, their populations were not immune from responding to economic and social transformations by re-interpreting old religious divides as racial. Counter-intuitively, state attempts to facilitate greater integration via Jewish emancipation may have contributed to anti-Semitism; with populations responding reactively to the strong state and taking their anger out on Jews (see Birnbaum's theory in Brustein and King, 2004). However, perhaps the most notable factor contributing to the *ressentiment* of some Jews in Western Europe was failure of the state's promise to offer them genuine inclusion. Scholars have linked unfulfilled developmental optimism in the civic state to *ressentiment* in various contexts (Greenfeld, 2006; Brown, 2008); this phenomenon is explicitly mythologised in the trajectory of Theodor Herzl (see below).

If we zoom in closer to the experiences of key individuals in these contexts, we can tell the *ressentiment* story effectively as a means of explaining the development of Jewish national identification. This is a story that Sand has started for us, though Sand's account does not explicitly chart the development of Jewish nationalism using *ressentiment*. Sand instead employs two partial explanations. His *zeitgeist* explanation argues that the *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourses of Central and Eastern Europe positively inspired Jewish intellectuals to follow suit. He interweaves with this an anti-Semitism explanation, which depicts Jewish ethnic nationalist identification as a response to rejection by these xenophobic nationalist discourses. Sand's critics accuse him of paying insufficient attention to this second factor, which is not entirely fair; however, he does place more emphasis on the *zeitgeist*. Yet since he neither explicitly distinguishes between nor develops these explanations, I mobilise *ressentiment* for this task. In the vignettes below, some

of which build upon Sand's accounts, I demonstrate how experiences of anti-Semitism, reinforced by disappointing or absent civic nationalism, inspired some Jewish intellectuals to produce *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse. Given that such discourses were part of the *zeitgeist*, they were easy to craft and welcomely embraced.

### *Ressentiment* vignettes

According to Greenfeld and Chirot, there are two necessary ingredients for *ressentiment*. First, an individual must possess a sense of entitlement to equality with the object of his attention. Second, inequality must preclude attainment of this 'entitlement', giving rise to envy. These ingredients were present in what Sand calls the 'pre-nationalist' Jewish historians. These were the first historians identifying as Jews to depict Jews as a unique 'nation' connected by descent from Palestine. They were pre-nationalist because they did not aspire to 'return' there. However, as they began to conceive of a single 'Jewish nation' fragmented throughout the world, they depicted one Jewish history rather than many. Sand represents this new historiography as a direct response to the scholars' encounters with the ethnic nationalisms of their home states. Fleshing out his accounts of their experiences, we can see *ressentiment* at work.

Isaak Markus Jost, a German Jewish historian who began publishing in 1820, was a 'typical Enlightenment liberal', who sought to harmonise his Jewish cultural identification with his German citizenship. Jost was part of a science circle of Jews who were 'quite conflicted about their identity and experienced some distress over this issue'. '[A]s intellectuals whose symbolic capital lay principally in their Jewish heritage, they were unwilling to forgo their cultural distinction … at the same time they longed to be integrated into the emerging Germany' (Sand, 2009, p. 68). Jost's earlier work employed a non-consecutive narrative of various Jewish communities. However, his later work concentrated more closely on the biblical story (see below); a 'reconstruction of the Jewish past' that Sand links to shifts in 'German identity politics' (p. 71). As Jost grew less comfortable within an ethicising 'German nation', he sought an alternative means of belonging via the 'Jewish nation'. Jost and his friends had pursued integration into German society based on a nascent republican thread in German nationalism which offered them equality and inclusion (Sand, 2009, p. 68, 2011, p. 39), but the ascendant ethnic nationalist discourse denied them equality. In seeking a remedy for his disappointing exclusion from German nationhood, Jost's own 'nation' provided comfort and, as I shall elaborate, virtue.

Another German Jewish historian, Heinrich Graetz, sought to render the Bible in a scientific manner, omitting miracles and emphasising the centrality of the land to the birth of the Jewish people (Sand, 2009, pp. 72–88). In considering Graetz's motivations, Sand suggests that 'the hardening of German nationalist definitions based on origin and race … stirred new sensitivities among a small group of intellectuals of Jewish descent. Graetz … was one of them' (p. 75). We can see the *ressentiment* explanation clearly fitting with Sand's writings on Graetz. 'The oppressed took on the reverse image of the oppressor's judgment: where Treitschke [an anti-Semitic intellectual with whom Graetz debated] held Jews in contempt, Graetz made them into example of moral superiority rising above all others' (Sand, 2011, p. 39). Such use of superiority to distinguish oneself from one's 'enemies' is also evident in the case of Graetz's good friend, Moses Hess, a Zionist activist. Hess employed Graetz's ideas as part of his political claim that the Jews were a nation. Sand writes that Graetz's 'revelation [of Jewish history] was the answer to the mental struggles of the weary revolutionary [Hess], whose daily encounters with anti-Jewish expressions, political and philosophical, in Germany drove him to discover his "national being"' (p. 78).

We can also trace *ressentiment* experiences in avowedly Zionist historians like Yitzhak Baer, who helped to establish the Hebrew University in Palestine in 1929. Baer argued that Zionist historians had a distinctly partisan role to play in constructing the nation's history; Sand uses Baer's experiences to explain why he argued this:

> [H]arshly rejected by his native Germany … [Baer] develop[ed] a painful counter consciousness. Ironically this self-consciousness drew on the same imaginary idea of nationhood that had nurtured his mentors for several generations: That the source determines the substance, and the goal is a return to the roots, the primeval habitat. (p. 102)

In terming this state of affairs as ironic, Sand taps into the wider conundrum of how Zionists could have ended up imitating their oppressors. Vexed observers of Israel/Palestine often raise this issue, seeming to regard it as more natural – and certainly more desirable – that victims of ethnic hatred would eschew ethnic hatred. Robert Weltsch, a member of the Brit Shalom ('Peace Alliance') movement, observed in 1929 that 'it would be an interesting irony of history' if 'our liberation' were to result in 'condescension, arrogance and intolerance of others'; 'the same archetype that we previously opposed tooth and nail' (Weiss, 2004, p. 96).

Balibur (2009) terms this phenomenon a 'paradox' (p. 129). The *ressentiment* explanation strips away what appears to be a paradox and helps us to understand that Zionists were no more perverse than anybody around them was; in demonising Others who could then be demarcated from the virtuous Us, they were following the inherent logic of *ressentiment* ethnic nationalism.

Arthur Ruppin, a German lawyer and social scientist active in the settlement of Palestine following his emigration in 1907, demonstrates more *ressentiment* at work. Like Hess, Ruppin was inspired by 'a budding interdisciplinary paradigm that became known as Eugenics or Racial Hygiene' (Blum, cited in Piterberg, 2008, p. 82). Ruppin 'adhered to a rigid biological determinism of race' and concluded that the *Ubermensch* – the superhuman – 'should only develop amongst his physical type' (Piterberg 2008, p. 82). Whilst this was a dominant idea of the age, Israeli historian Piterberg argues that what made Ruppin so dedicated to 'the correction and betterment of "the Jewish race" – the very kind of ideology at the heart of proto-Nazism – was the anti-Semitic rejection by his beloved German nation and homeland' (p. 82). Thus *ressentiment* was a key contributor to Ruppin's racial Zionism. Piterberg adds,

> It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that Ruppin's path was so typical of many Central European nominal Jews…. Their rejection by an increasingly anti-Semitic society made them convert to Zionism, which was an adequate substitution to the Romantic nationalism that had not wanted them. (p. 83)

Finally, the experiences of Theodor Herzl, widely regarded as the father of Zionism, are mythologised in such a way that the *ressentiment* explanation is crystallised, conveniently spanning experiences of both the ethno-nationalist east and the purportedly civic west. Herzl, initially an Austro-Hungarian patriot, subscribed to a republican citizenship incorporating Jewish cultural identification – a story now familiar to us from the experiences of other Jewish intellectuals. At 23, Herzl resigned from a student duelling fraternity to which he had dedicated four hours a day of the previous two years. This resignation was due to fraternity members members participating 'in an anti-Semitic commemoration of the death of Richard Wagner. Herzl's decision…caused deep feelings of isolation and rejection…This was a decisive encounter with social anti-Semitism which was to leave a lasting impression on him' (Loewenberg, 1971, p. 107). Herzl had expected, and indeed enjoyed, equality within the

fraternity and, by extension, his broader society. The anti-Semitic display cast doubt on this, then Herzl's experience as a journalist covering the Dreyfus Affair in France confirmed to him that a republican vision was unattainable. The Dreyfus Affair involved a French military officer of Jewish background being found guilty of treason amidst unjust accusations and a fevered anti-Semitic atmosphere (Falk 2008, p. 55). It took two subsequent trials for Dreyfus to be finally exonerated (Schoeps 1997; Falk 2008, p. 173), but Herzl would later argue that the process caused him to give up on a future for Jews in Europe (Sand 2011). Some scholars suggest Herzl's analysis and subsequent political exploitation of the Affair came well after the event, leading them to question the extent to which it really provided a basis for his political conversion (Shimoni 1995, p. 89; Falk 2008, p. 57; Piterberg 2008, pp. 7–8). Meanwhile, Avineri (1981) argues that the Affair confirmed for Herzl what he already knew and felt about the status of Jews in Europe; something he had already pondered in prior works, and which the Dreyfus Affair now manifested as the 'dramatic expression of a much more fundamental malaise' (p. 93). However, what ultimately matters is not *when* but *how* Herzl ultimately digested these experiences, and specifically how his explanations of them in the public arena contributed to the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse.

Herzl's Zionist narrative utilised the Dreyfus Affair to symbolise the problems facing all Jews. This makes sense when we reflect that the Affair was not an isolated incident, and that French nationalism therefore did not live up to its civic promise. It makes even more sense when we know how events ultimately played out in Europe. However, since nobody could have known this bleak future at the time, the complete demise of the civic option was a political claim rather than mere resignation to inevitable events (Piterberg, 2008, p. 16). It was a claim made by those who had something else to offer instead. Earlier Russian pogroms of 1881 had similarly prompted a 'phenomenal turnabout of those who had believed in a program of emancipation and integration…'; a pattern underscoring the rise of Zionism across Europe (Shimoni, 1995, p. 32). Jews in these contexts understandably lost hope in alternatives to ethnic nationalism. As their options appeared to evaporate, the *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse moved into the void, offering a way of understanding the situation, and, through the Zionist political programme, concrete steps to remedy it.

## The historical narrative as cultural factor

Having explored the beginnings of the distillation of key individuals' *ressentiment* experiences into a shared discourse, I will now explore

the role and content of the historical narrative assembled by the pre-nationalist historians and adopted by the Zionist discourse. This narrative is a 'cultural factor' according to Greenfeld's tripartite explanation for the development of nationalisms. Cultural factors are the songs, stories, clothes and traditions that nationalist activists depict as the property and practices of ancient, enduring *ethnies* (Greenfeld and Chirot, 1994; see also Ozkirimli and Grosby, 2007, p. 528). The cultural factors contributing to the (hi)story adopted by Zionist activists are distinct from the psychological factor of *ressentiment*, but inform the *ressentiment* discourse seamlessly. The Jewish Bible story provides a ready-made myth explaining the history and destiny of the contemporary Jewish nation that coalesces with a *ressentiment* description of virtue and entitlement. Pre-nationalist historians used this 'holy scripture ... not really accessible to the mind' (Sand, 2009, p. 75) to narrate a secular history of the 'Jewish nation', as seasoned Israeli cultural critic Moshe Machover (2011) concisely explains in his review of Sand's book:

> Jews already 'knew' that they were all direct descendants of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who was renamed 'Israel' by God. Thus they were all 'literally' *Bnei Yisrael* (Sons of Israel). Their God-promised and God-given homeland was *Eretz Yisrael* (Land of Israel) ... Eventually – to cut a long story short – the Jews were punished 'for their sins' and were exiled from their homeland by the Romans. But at the End of Days God will send his *Mashiah ben-David* (anointed scion of David), who will ingather the exiled Jews and return them to their homeland, the Land of Zion. *All that remained for Zionist ideology to do was to secularise this sacred narrative*. The eschatological bit, the 'return' to Zion, was converted into a political colonising project – hence its very name: 'Zionism' – with the impressively bearded Theodor Herzl as secular messiah or his herald. (Machover, 2011, p. 102, my emphasis)

The content of the Old Testament narrative reinforced the *ressentiment* depiction of Good Us; Evil Other by not only offering a plausible identification option but also linking victimhood to national virtue. Kovel (2002) argues that the religious category of 'Jew' was pre-imbued with (religious) goodness and that Zionism imported this representation, enabling Zionists to depict the Jewish nation as both real and chosen. Whilst grandiose claims are by no means limited to Zionism, few other nationalist discourses can 'prove' chosenness and virtue using a document revered within *many* nationalist discourses. Zionism's purported

virtue impaired the ability of its participants to perceive its potential harm to Others, since, as Kovel suggests, 'God's chosen people, with their hard-earned identity of high-mindedness, by definition cannot sink into racist violence' (p. 24). The perception of virtue, derived from *ressentiment* and strengthened by the biblical narrative, contributed to the Zionist discourse's inability to digest adequately the project's victims. The outcome of this, as I shall demonstrate in the next section, was the accentuation of *ressentiment* through the interpretation of any opposition as irrational hatred.

## *Ressentiment* Zionism goes to Palestine; finds an evil Other there…

In 1897, Zionists began holding annual congresses with the aim of building a movement to settle in Palestine. Zionists were publishing work, to which Herzl contributed a utopian novel, *Altneuland* (1902), depicting an idyllic Palestine after Jewish settlement. They were also forming youth groups, lobbying world leaders for political support and actually migrating to Palestine. Migration brought about refinements to the Zionist discourse, and in this section I discuss these up to the creation of Israel in 1948. My purpose is not to offer a detailed history, but rather to outline how Zionism formed a *ressentiment pair* with the 'Palestinian' nationalist discourse, which developed in response. *Ressentiment* pairs mutually depict a virtuous ethnic Us under attack from the Evil Other; becoming self-fulfilling prophecies. There are two components to the development of *ressentiment* Zionism in this context. The first is the transference of Zionism's depiction of the hostile European Other onto the local Palestinian or Arab Other. The second involves the trajectory of the more 'benign' version of the Zionist discourse, which, over time, coalesced with a demonised depiction of the Other, whilst contributing to the depiction of Zionism's virtue. I explore these components in the next two sections.

### The Evil Other: from European to Arab

As we have seen, Zionism's initial *ressentiment* relationships were with 'significant Others' (Triandafyllidou, 1998) in Europe. However, as *ressentiment* discourses evolve they seek and construct new targets of blame. Jews had been targets of blame in Europe; now it was the turn of Zionists to construct new targets of blame in Palestine. *Ressentiment* made it difficult for Zionists to discern that the people living in Palestine might have good reasons to resist their settlement project, and hence

their very presence in Palestine. Instead, they could only interpret action and reaction through the frame of 'Good Us; Evil Other'.

For the dominant strand of 'political Zionists', the only way to achieve a functional cultural homeland, along with sorely needed security for the 'Jewish nation', was to create a Jewish state in Palestine. Although the official line was 'a land without people for a people without land', Zionists knew that Palestine was not empty; rather, they considered it empty of people with a legitimate claim to the land. Thus, as I shall subsequently elaborate, an implied but often unacknowledged corollary of Political Zionism was that that Others living in the 'Promised Land' would have to be limited in number in order for the 'Jewish state' to also be 'democratic'.

Settlement in Palestine led to encounters between those who saw themselves as 'the Jewish nation' and those depicted as their Others. While some early Zionist settlers entertained the idea that the *fellahin* (natives of Palestine who worked the land) were a remnant of converted Jews who could therefore be absorbed into the nationalist project, this idea was swiftly discarded when the *fellahin* were not amenable (Piterberg 2008, pp. 7–8; Sand, 2009, pp. 184–87). Ultimately, the *fellahin*, like most people living in Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had no good reason to accept the rights claims of European Jews to the land. Through the experiences of these people, we can trace the development of a *ressentiment* Palestinian discourse. People living in Palestine did not have a well-articulated nationalism prior to the arrival of Zionist settlers; a heterogeneous population throughout the region had only 'sought a more cohering identity' in the face of British and French colonisation after the First World War (Goldberg, 2009, p. 106). Thus, it was ethnic Othering by Zionist immigrants to Palestine that inspired Palestinian nationalism; those who felt threatened by the Zionist project and its proponents experienced *ressentiment*. The *ressentiment* Palestinian discourse, like the Zionist discourse that inspired it, was informed by both an evidentiary basis for its claims, and a blanket stereotyping of all those depicted as Other as bringing ill-will.

Peteet (2005) suggests that this emerging Palestinian discourse tended to refer to 'Zionists' rather than 'Jews', indicating a focus on the political project rather than the identification of the Other. However, Shohat (1999) counters that nationalists in the Arab world resisted colonialism by inventing 'third world nations … according to the definitions supplied by the often Eurocentric ideologies' (pp. 8–9) leading anti-Zionists to unhelpfully articulate 'the idea of a homogenous "Jewish Nation"' (p. 13). This unwitting reproduction of Zionist terminologies

demonstrates how *ressentiment* discourses proliferate through identification labels already in the nomenclature. The *ressentiment* discourse employed by Palestinian nationalist activists imported identification concepts from – and in response to – those designating them as Others, just as Zionists themselves had done in Europe. However, Palestinian experiences of *ressentiment*, like the experiences of Zionists before them, were crucial to the developing *ressentiment* pair.

As the Palestinian nationalist discourse came to conflate Zionists and Jews and demonise all of them, the Zionist discourse simultaneously demonised 'Arabs'. Some Palestinian natives affirmed this perception by resisting the Zionist project with violence. In 1929, some non-Jews committed a massacre of Jews in Hebron, where *Ashkenazi* (Eastern European) immigrants dwelled alongside a *Sephardic* Jewish community, which had been there for eight hundred years (Segev, 2000, Chapter 14). The targeting of long-standing community members demonstrates how the *ressentiment* pairing was thickening perceptions that participants were engaged in a zero-sum conflict between two nations. When non-Jews in Palestine used violence against the settlers, Zionists applied European frameworks, labelling such clashes 'pogroms' and failing to differentiate between the anti-Semitic targeting of Jews in Europe, and the specific targeting of *Zionist* Jews in Palestine by those opposed to their political programme. They filtered both as morally equivalent attacks on the 'Jewish nation'.

Mutual demonisation escalated the conflict, as hostile actions made each Other more likely to engage in 'pre-emptive' violence. Over decades, multiple clashes between adherents to the developing Jewish and Palestinian nationalist discourses were heightened by the influence of the British colonial powers, which held a Mandate over Palestine in the period of Zionist colonisation following 1917. In the early half of the twentieth century, British officials duplicitously promised the leaders of each nationalist movement that they would receive their aims of an independent state; notably promising a loosely defined Jewish Homeland in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 but then subsequently limiting Jewish immigration from Europe.

During this time, the fact that the mainstream *ressentiment* Zionist discourse did not regard the Palestinian Other as a nation compounded the *ressentiment* pair. Zionists argued that there was no Palestinian nation before the Jewish 'return' to reinforce their claim to the land. Since Zionism was a collectivist enterprise, it was equally incapable of interfacing with the Others of Palestine from an individualistic perspective.[5] The Zionist discourse thus had to engage with apparently

paradoxical violent resistance and filter its contradictory messages. Zionism 'imputed' a 'lack of attachment to place' on behalf of its Others because Jews were the *true* natives; on the other hand, these Others displayed an 'apparent willingness to fight for it'. To explain this, Zionists classified 'Palestinian violence as irrational, without just cause'; at one stage describing those engaged in it as 'a gang of robbers, murderers and bandits' (Peteet, 2005 p. 167). Irrational violence fits within a *ressentiment* depiction of Others who simply wish Us ill will with no good reason.

Yet while mainstream Political Zionism was interpreting resistance as irrational evil, the right-wing articulation of the discourse cogently recognised what was happening in Palestine. This extreme form of Political Zionism emerged with the rise of Vladimir Jabotinsky's World Union of Zionist Revisionists in 1925. Reacting to what its proponents saw as the slow progress and misguided left-wing idealism of the mainstream, Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionism sought an unapologetically militant course of action to establish a Jewish state. Jabotinsky, the movement's key intellectual, argued that once Zionists had established the Jewish state and defended it over a period of years, they could pursue *rapprochement* with its enemies and integrate their state into its surroundings. Until that time, however, in the face of opposition from natives who would reject Zionist colonialism, those who nevertheless believed in the justice of their project would have to achieve it through force, behind an 'Iron Wall' (Shlaim, 2000, pp. 11–16).

Despite blatantly prioritising the Us over the Other, Revisionist Zionism nevertheless recognised that another 'nation' claimed the land. This is noteworthy, because Revisionist Zionism did not depict Jews as virtuous victims, but rather as active agents competing for the land. Whilst ethnic identification remained central to this depiction, Revisionist Zionism offered its adherents a unique opportunity to recognise the consequences of their project for Others – albeit whilst still repressing them. However, because Revisionist Zionism remained politically marginal, the mainstream Zionist discourse incorporated only its blueprint for settlement and development, and not its honest reckoning. The mainstream Zionist discourse continued to proclaim its inherent virtuousness whilst ultimately permanently exiling and repressing its Others. In order to make sense of this, we must draw our attention away from the right-wing strand of Zionism and towards the far left. Here lies a bitter irony: the only other notable recognition of Others on the land, aside from Revisionist Zionism, paradoxically contributed to a delusion of beneficence in the mainstream and thereby strengthened *ressentiment*.

**The tragic trajectory of Cultural Zionism**

'Cultural Zionism,' or 'binationalism' as it was sometimes known, sought to regenerate Jewish culture in Palestine. Notably, Cultural Zionism did not aspire to a Jewish *state*; some of its proponents explicitly saw themselves sharing the land with its contemporary occupants (Weiss, 2004; Raz-Krakotzkin, 2011). Cultural Zionism's proponents perceived their project as a 'benign' alternative to political Zionism; however, it was precisely this perception that became problematic.

Cultural and Political Zionism aspired to many of the same things – Jewish migration to Palestine, the establishment of a vibrant cultural community and a re-invention of what it meant to be Jewish (see Avineri, 1981, chapter on Ha'am; see also Shimoni, 1995, pp. 104–13). It is only in the final goals of the project that the two strands diverged, with Political Zionists willing to exact a high price from their Others to achieve a Jewish state, and Cultural Zionists scrambling for alternatives. Some notable supporters of Cultural Zionism appear to have come to their position only after rejecting the implications of the Political programme, namely the need to subjugate or expel the native population (see Piterberg, 2008, on Hannah Arendt and Bernard Lazare; see Weiss, 2004, on Hans Kohn).

We can observe the connection between Political and Cultural Zionism in the willingness of many cultural Zionists to work under the auspices of Political Zionism. Hannah Arendt participated in initiatives in Europe to send young Jews to Palestine (Kohn, 2007); presumably without clarifying to every individual with whom she engaged that they should refrain from building a Jewish state. The spiritual father of Cultural Zionism, Ahad Ha'am, himself had declared, 'Palestine will become our spiritual center only when the Jews are a majority of the population and own most of the land' (Shimoni 1995, p. 111). 'Even the most progressive Zionists were not able to articulate binationalism effectively', concludes historian Weiss (2004, p. 113).

Cultural Zionism thus lacked both the theoretical rigour and independent political impetus to mount a significant alternative model to Political Zionism. It relied heavily on the two core precepts it shared with its *ressentiment* cousin: belief in the 'Jewish nation' and its right to 'return' to Palestine. These precepts would ultimately undermine the positive relations with Others that were supposed to be part of a binational vision for Israel/Palestine. Ultimately, the *ressentiment* pairing between Zionism and the Palestinian nationalist discourse broke down the already blurry distinction between Political and Cultural Zionism. Since both Zionisms relied upon the existence of a 'Jewish nation',

subscribers to either were likely to read any attack as an echo of European persecution. Moreover, since Others could not necessarily distinguish between the aims of the Political and Cultural projects (or indeed were equally offended by both), Zionists adhering to Political and Cultural platforms were equally vulnerable to hostility.

> From the Arab point of view, understandably, the bi-national vision [of Cultural Zionism] ... was not significantly different from the hegemonic Zionist one, which insisted on a (projected) Jewish majority. One of the reasons to advance the bi-national agenda during the 1940s was in fact to allow Jewish immigration to continue. (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2011, p. 59)

Zionists who had once employed the Cultural discourse began, in the face of violence, to employ the Political one. The perception of a zero-sum 'national conflict' replaced any hope that the people of Palestine might recognise the mutual benefit in Zionist settlement (see Weiss, 2004, p. 107). Arthur Ruppin had supported a binational state, but after what was known as the Arab Uprising of 1929, he left the Brit Shalom peace movement he had helped establish and put his support behind the Jewish state (Avineri, 1981; Weiss, 2004; Kovel, 2007, p. 178, endnote 18).[6] Martin Buber, another Cultural Zionist, retrospectively endorsed the establishment of Israel (Kovel, 2007, pp. 219–20).

From here, we can observe the co-optation of Cultural Zionism to the project as a whole. Just as Cultural Zionism had effectively relied on the impetus and inspiration of Political Zionism, now Cultural Zionism offered a cloak of virtue to Political Zionism.

> The framers of the national Zionist narrative, in all its versions, perceived the Jewish-Israeli collectivity as representing universal truth and justice. They sought to apply these qualities in the context of the peaceful revival of collective Jewish existence in the Land of Israel. This self-image continued to dominate the Zionist narrative when it had to deal with the violent reality of a continuous, bloody dispute between Jews and Arabs. (Yadgar, 2003b, p. 177)

Some luminaries of Zionism recognised, privately, that their project would create victims. Theodor Herzl wrote that the penniless population of Palestine must somehow be spirited over the border of the future Jewish state (Piterberg, 2008, p. 39). Chaim Arlosoroff, one-time leader of the Mapai party in the pre-state *yishuv*, wrote in 1932 of the need for

a Jewish 'minority government' to 'seize the state apparatus, administration and military power' (p. 78). However, public claims of benevolence hid these rational calculations. *Ressentiment* Zionism cleaved to the 'benign' ideals of Cultural Zionism even as the actual project became reliant on force and repression of the Other. Victimhood and chosenness as national traits, instilled by the *ressentiment* beginnings of 'Jewish nationhood' and cemented by the content of the historical narrative it advanced, obscured the ability of the Zionist discourse to recognise its victims. Only the Revisionist strand, which was brutally honest but also just plain brutal, was able to recognise, with a shrug, the fate of Zionism's victims. The rest of Zionism sought shelter under the Cultural Zionist cloak of virtue: there was room here for everyone, no harm was intended, and all could prosper.

Though some Cultural Zionists may have genuinely made these claims, they were undermined by the premise of the project as a whole – perhaps from the very beginning, given its 'pure settlement' nature (Piterberg, 2008).[7] According to colonialism theory, in 'pure settlement' colonies

> European settlers exterminated or pushed aside the indigenous people, developed an economy based on white labor, and were thus able in the long run to regain the sense of cultural or ethnic homogeneity identified with a European conception of nationality. (Fredrickson, cited in Piterberg, 2008, p. 55)

> Settler colonies were … premised on displacing indigenes from (or *re*placing them on) the land …. Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of the native societies. … The colonizers came to stay – invasion is a structure, not an event. (Wolf, cited in Piterberg, 2008, p. 61)

From this perspective, Zionism's establishment of a *ressentiment* pair with the 'Palestinian nation' appears inevitable. The population defined as non-Jewish in Palestine would necessarily oppose the establishment of an economy, society and – ultimately – state premised upon its exclusion. Yet *ressentiment* Zionism continued to adhere to a faulty 'dual society' paradigm (Piterberg, 2008, pp. 62–4), maintaining that settling Zionists and their Others somehow pursued independent development trajectories and met only in a 'struggle between two impregnable national collectives' (Piterberg, 2008, p. 64). This faulty perspective depicted the ideals of the settlers rather than the material reality. Though Zionists

attempted to build an independent society that would not exploit the labour of non-participants, in reality they could not keep two economies separate any more than they could cleanly divide the land between Jew and non-Jew. By depicting two fully formed nations encountering each other only in conflict, the dual society paradigm obscured the mutual development of Zionist and Palestinian nationalist discourses. Far from being an irrelevant external feature, the 'presence and resistance' of Palestine's non-Jewish population was 'the single most significant factor that determined the shape taken by the [Jewish] settlers' nation' (Piterberg, 2008, p. 64, 62). The existence of the Other in Palestine, and Zionism's inevitable formation of a *ressentiment* pair with it, had *everything* to do with the ultimate establishment of an ethnocratiser Jewish state, which is the subject of the next chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explained how the developing Zionist discourse conformed to the model of *ressentiment* ethnic nationalism. The individuals who developed this discourse responded to marginalisation by the *ressentiment* ethnic nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe and disappointment with the civic vision. Intellectuals, seeking to demonstrate their credentials as interpreters of reality, developed a formula of the Good Us under attack from Evil Other, strengthened by adopting the biblical story as historical narrative. When Zionist settlers took this discourse to Palestine, it informed their inability to digest why Others there would reject their project. The resistance of Others to the Zionist project was eventually reduced to a conflict between 'Jews' and 'Arabs', demonstrating the power of ethnic categories and the collapse of other mechanisms for understanding identification. Cultural Zionism could offer no correction to *ressentiment* in the context of a colonial project based on rights claims; at best, it was an early attempt to solve the dilemma still faced by internal critics today. The cautionary lesson regarding subsumption of 'virtue' into national character remains equally salient, as we shall see.

# 3
# The Dissidents' Context

## Introduction

This chapter concludes my explication of the 'problematic situation' facing the dissidents, outlining the development of the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse from the establishment of Israel in 1948 to the present day. My core argument is that the dominant nationalist discourse inculcates Israeli Jews into a *ressentiment* schema wherein they belong to a virtuous Us under threat from an Evil Other. This schema simultaneously explains the structures of the ethnocratiser state, which make the threat from the Other real, since discriminatory practices exacerbate *ressentiment*. Accordingly, Israeli Jews generally view the state as their protector to defend at all costs, and not as a contributing factor to ongoing conflict.

I advance this argument by exploring a number of arenas. I begin by examining Israel's founding Charter, showing how the Declaration of Independence and the Law of Return lay the foundational myth of an ancient and entitled nation in its rightful (empty) homeland. From here, I explore how educational policies and the mobilisation of the Holocaust contribute to *ressentiment* depictions of the Us and Other. I then detail how the Israeli state's legal sub-division of Others strengthens the *ressentiment* pair, whilst simultaneously facilitating discursive portrayals that collapse the various sub-categories back into an amorphous Evil Other. I explore how an Israeli media with close links to the state depicts Israeli Jews as virtuous victims under attack. I conclude by describing the current state of the *ressentiment pair* and the *ressentiment* discourse, which, coupled with concern for the Other, constitute the dissidents' dilemma.

Since the chapter's main purpose is to portray a consistent hegemonic discourse of *ressentiment* Zionism at various levels of society, reinforced

by legally and socially reified ethnic categories, I risk eliding nuance. It is, therefore, important for me to note that the dissidents do not live in a totalitarian state; they participate in vibrant debates, which are often more radical than those outside Israel. They function quite freely in what even the most radical amongst them depict as a democracy for Jews; the most extreme dissident in this book claims to be 'constantly' courted to participate in debates by the Israeli media (Atzmon, 2011 p. 187). Ruptures between the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jewish categories, as well as between religious, secular and sandwiched 'traditionists' (Yadgar, 2011), disrupt the image of a unified Israeli Jewish identity. Meanwhile, 'Who is a Jew' arguments challenge the Orthodox rabbinate-mandated affixation or denial of Jewish categorisation to individuals, further problematising the meaning of Israeli Jewishness.

Yet despite this, I argue that dissent in Israeli society on the question of the Other is muted, internally censored and riven with contradiction. The hegemonic *ressentiment* discourse, reinforced by the state, provides the tools for thinking about one's identification and relationship to the Other, effectively ruling out many options. In order to make this argument, which can be borne out by both the research of other scholars and the dissident narratives, I must emphasise the repetitious nature of the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse. Later in the book, as I examine the dissident narratives, I will foreground more of the subtleties in order to demonstrate both the cacophony of potential influences *and* the sense that these somehow, paradoxically, amount to less than they might. It is this paradox that makes the dissidents so compelling, since despite the freedom enjoyed by Israeli Jews to express all manner of views, their dissent is either a street performance largely ignored by passers-by, or, more forebodingly, a performance which itself lacks the consistency and rigour to be anything more than a vibrant artifice of 'national virtue'.

## The Charter is laid: the Declaration of Independence and Law of Return

The previous chapter outlined how events in Palestine coalesced into what appeared to participants as a zero-sum fight between two 'nations' over one land. The only shared perspective was a desire for the British colonialists to depart; by the end of the Second World War, this was imminent. At Britain's behest, the newly created United Nations would offer the Zionists part of what they wanted (they aspired to more territory), whilst delivering Palestinian nationalists a crushing blow; more than half of historic Palestine would now become a Jewish state.

Following Britain's withdrawal, the leaders of the *yishuv*, Palestine's Jewish settlement community, declared the state of Israel in existence in 1948. Immediately, its neighbours and some residents declared war. Israel won this war, in the process acquiring more territory than originally offered in the partition plan. The armistice lines of this larger territory eventually became the internationally recognised borders of the state of Israel.

Thus, Israel was formally brought into existence in 1948 by a Declaration of Independence ratified by decisive military victory. Whilst the ongoing resistance of Palestine's non-Jews to the Zionist project had been a barrier to statehood, this resistance became the basis upon which statehood was considered necessary by almost all stripes of Zionist and external powers with influence. Accordingly, they established the Jewish state against the wishes of Palestine's non-Jewish population; in such a context, it is easy to see why the activists who shaped the state's structures saw it as a means of protecting Jews against Others.

Two key documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Law of Return, established Israel's 'national' protection charter, institutionalising a narrative of legitimation deriving from *ressentiment*. The Declaration of Independence depicts the history of the 'Jewish people' developed by the nationalist historians discussed in Chapter 2. The Declaration narrates 'forcibl[e] ... exile' and locates 'the people' today in its 'historic' homeland. The document proclaims Israel as the state of the Jewish people, again asserting the existence of a taken-for-granted nation as well as the legitimacy of it possessing its own state. The document makes much of 'national' rights, but recognises that not all citizens of the Jewish state are Jews; and purports to offer 'full and equal citizenship and due representation' to non-Jews (Ben-Gurion et al., 1948). However, the exclusion of explicit 'minority' national rights here is noteworthy, since the state sanctifies a single reified 'nation' without making equivalent space for those deemed not to belong. The Declaration is thus responsible for bringing the Jewish nation into being as a legal entity and simultaneously awarding it hegemony at the expense of those non-Jews living within the territory. The Declaration is the cornerstone of Israel's charter.

The other key document is the Law of Return of 1950. Once the Declaration of Independence discursively established Israel as the rightful home for the Jews of the world, the Law of Return formed part of a massive campaign for Jewish immigration. Such immigration would not only bolster Jewish numbers in the fledgling state and hence secure 'democratic domination', but would also continue reifying the

'Jewish nation' and cementing its claim to Palestine. This project had begun even before the state's foundation with the campaign to have Israel established as the logical relocation point for refugees from the Holocaust in Europe (Zertal, 1998). After the state's establishment, however, the government focused on importing Jews from the Middle East as 'the reality of the mass extermination of Jews in Europe sank in' (Shenhav, 2002, p. 29; see also Behar, 2007, p. 587).[1]

The Law of Return, along with the Nationality Law (1952) and the Entry into Israel Law (1952), enables any person defined as Jewish on the basis of having a Jewish mother or having converted to the (Orthodox) religion, to migrate to Israel with full citizenship entitlements and financial support from the state (Law of Return, 1950; Saban, 2004, p. 961). A 1970 amendment has effectively extended the definition of Jewishness, welcoming as citizens individuals with a single Jewish grandparent, along with their families (Law of Return, Amendment No. 2, 1970). Such citizenship, based on Jewish categorisation, differs markedly from ancestry-based citizenship. The invoked 'national' membership relies not upon immediate parentage, but upon purported events of three thousand years ago, linking 'descendants' to a territory inhabited very recently by other people. These immigration laws facilitate individuals with no personal, economic or historical connections moving to Israel because they already own it. Accordingly, the laws establish and reinforce 'Jewish national' ownership of Palestine whilst simultaneously erasing Others from the land and from history. Additional laws, as I shall explain below, have allowed certain portions of the non-Jewish Other to remain in Israel only as discursively constructed remnants of a broader Arab (not Palestinian) nation, or as Orwellian 'present absentees'. Others who are present as individuals but not 'nationals', or who are 'absent' even while present, or who have actually been physically removed, do not exist, and cannot therefore be victims of the Zionist project. The only way that these Others have been able to 'return' to the Zionist consciousness is as hostile, irrational and sometimes violent beasts claiming what rightfully belongs to 'the Jews'. Zionists have met such claims with bemusement, fear and a rejoinder of violence.

## From charter to common sense

Founding charter documents inform and operate through policy decisions, reinforcing *ressentiment* depictions of Us and Other. This section explores educational policies, particularly the teaching of Jewish

history, and examines the state's official adoption of a certain narrative regarding the Holocaust. These practices construct and depict a Virtuous Us contrasted with Evil Others. Even without actively invoking the Palestinian/Arab Other, policies advancing Jewish entitlement have augmented the *ressentiment* pair with the Palestinian nationalist discourse by preventing Israeli Jews from making sense of their relationship with those forced to yield to the juggernaut of Zionism in Palestine. *Ressentiment* heightens when there is no way of understanding resistance to colonialist or racialist policies except as anti-Semitic hatred of Jews by Evil Others.

**Education and *ressentiment***

Israel's education system has been a key means of instilling 'rightful' ownership of Palestine, thereby denying Others' presence and basis for resistance. Educational syllabi are powerful tools in all nationalisms:

> Schooling teaches the 'invented' histories, ersatz continuities, legends and traditions of a 'people' that inscribe a distinct, national identity linked to a common history, a shared culture, common fate and destiny that valorizes uniqueness… The well-studied student will not only know his/her nation's history and geography, but how his/her nation is a little different, and perhaps a lot better than Others… (Langman, 2006, p. 12)

Israel's 'national' syllabus pre-dates the state itself. The founders of Hebrew University in 1929 set up

> not one but *two* history departments: one named Department of Jewish History and Sociology; the other, Department of History. *All the history departments of all the other universities in Israel followed suit* – Jewish history was to be studied in isolation from the history of the gentiles because the *principles, tools, concepts and time frame of these studies were completely different*. (Sand, 2009, p. 102, my emphasis)

Hebrew University founders wholeheartedly accepted that 'the Jews' constituted an eternal nation whose homeland was Palestine; academics at all Israeli universities would go on to educate generations of students in this precept, meaning that the critical skills applied in the *generalist* study of history would not be available to thinking about 'the Jews' (p. 102). The biblical narrative of Jewish history adopted through

individuals' experiences of *ressentiment* was widely taught as fact at all levels of education, first in the school syllabus of the *yishuv*, and later in the state of Israel.

> The Bible became the national textbook, taught in separate lessons rather than as an integral part of the language and literature studies … Teachers … understood the dual function of the Scriptures in shaping the national identity – the creation of a common 'ethnic' origin for the religious communities scattered throughout the world, and self-persuasion in the claiming of proprietary rights over the country. (Sand, 2009, p. 111)

The syllabus taught

> an ethnocentric and ideologically committed version of history that emphasised the Jewish people's moral and intellectual contributions to humanity and insisted repetitively on Jewish martyrology through the ages and, as a logical corollary, on the inevitable necessity of the Zionist solution to the perennial Jewish problem. (Goldberg, 2006, pp. 105–106)

After Israel's establishment, the centrality of the Bible continued as state officials deliberately involved academics in the nation-building programme (Sand, 2011, p. 63).

The employment of the Bible as a textbook for history and identification has thus inculcated in Israeli youth, from primary school to university, their membership of the eternal Jewish nation, rightfully reclaiming its home in Palestine. This depiction of a virtuous mission, reinforced by the notion of 'chosenness', means that resistance can only be digested as irrational Evil. The very omission of the Other renders its 'return' inexplicable and terrifying.

### The Holocaust and *ressentiment*

The formal claiming of the Holocaust by the Israeli state invoked a similar narrative of chosenness and virtue reflected on a backdrop of inhumanity and horror. Whilst the Evil Other figured prominently in this narrative, proving very transferrable to non-Jews in Palestine, in this section I focus on how the Zionist discourse both claimed and rejected the terrible events in Europe to establish Israel as a garrison state for the 'virtuous Jewish nation'. Later, I will look at how the Holocaust narrative depicted Others in Palestine.

There might seem no better fit for the *ressentiment* formula of a virtuous Jewish nation under attack from evil Others than the horrors of the Holocaust, but Israel's founders and leaders did not initially interpret it this way. The Zionist settler population did not 'adopt' the Holocaust until well after Israel's establishment, when her early statesmen recognised the political potential of these heinous events to legitimise the Jewish state internationally and instruct its new citizenry at home (Arendt, 1976, pp. 9–10, 19; Zertal, 2005). Given the Holocaust's centrality to *ressentiment* Zionism today, it is hard to imagine that Israelis would ever have treated the Holocaust and its victims unsympathetically. Recounting the transition from disdain to embrace enables us to consider how Israel's leaders both maintained a distance from Jewish victimhood ('The New Jew') and simultaneously relied upon it ('the Virtuous Victim').

Before Israel's creation, Zionist discourse had intersected with European ethnic nationalist discourses in depicting Jews as an alien nation fulfilling a parasitic role in the economy. Accordingly, Zionists were complicit in the project of removing Jews from Europe, enjoying the protection of Nazi officials whilst attempting to secure the most physically promising specimens for Palestine (Arendt, 1976, pp. 58–61; Zertal, 1998). David Ben-Gurion famously declared: 'If I knew that it was possible to save all the children of Germany by transporting them to England, and only half by transferring them to the Land of Israel, I would choose the latter…' (Gilbert, 1987, para. 7; Zertal, 1998, p. 160). Such attitudes, understandable from the pragmatic viewpoint of those building a nationalist movement, hardly qualified Zionists as spokespeople for the Holocaust's victims. Yet once the Jewish state had claimed Europe's traumatised survivors as human capital and legitimatory buttressing – albeit contemptuously housing them in yet more camps and depicting them as acquiescent to their own destruction (Zertal, 1998, Chapter 7, pp. 264–249) – it could also claim survivors' and victims' experiences too, irrefutably 'proving' the Evil of Others as laid out in the *ressentiment* discourse.

Israeli historian Idith Zertal explains how Israel's first generation of statesmen

> not only played a leading part in historical events but also interpreted, labelled and classified them in terms of importance in such a way as to influence all subsequent thought about them.…. Their generalizations…became accepted truths. (Zertal, 1998, p. 3)

The statesmen used institutions like the Knesset and Supreme Court to affix moral categories, with the ruling Mapai party prosecuting Jews

implicated in the deaths of others. Zertal explains that during the awful processes of internment and genocide, some individual Jews had collaborated with the Nazis in order to attain favours or merely survive. The decision to try these alleged 'Jewish collaborators' in Israel legitimised the idea of a single 'Jewish nation' whose members were entitled to intervene in the Holocaust's aftermath. The trials forged a Europe–Palestine connection, with a single 'Jewish nation' under attack from Evil Others as the common denominator. Linkage of Europe and Palestine via the Holocaust generated the 'implication ... that Jews carried the Holocaust or a potential holocaust within them wherever they went' (Zertal, 2005, p. 63). The so-called 'collaborator trials' instilled this into the state's charter.

However, the trials forced Zionists to deal with deviations from the virtue that Jewish identification was supposed to represent; accordingly, the discourse could not absorb the events recounted by the accused.

> *This* Holocaust literature, this record of the complexity of human existence and its negation in the cataclysmic situation in the camps was not handed down because it embodied – and still does – a vast threat, emanating from the very triviality of the 'crimes' exposed and the banality of the people who committed them; ordinary Jews, every day people, who might well have been us ... And because these accounts deal with ordinary, normal people, and expose the fragility and imperceptibility of the line between good and evil, right and wrong, and their leakage – invisible at the time – from one side of the line to the other – their troubling message could not be compulsory material for a nation establishing and defining itself as absolute good against the Holocaust's absolute evil. (Zertal, 2005, pp. 88–89)

Israel's founding statesmen thus had to modify the results of these trials, even as the trials themselves cemented 'possession' of the Holocaust. Accordingly, the leadership introduced, in 1953, a law which officially remembered 'the Holocaust and Heroism', placing emphasis on those who resisted the Nazis. The law thus embedded a sanitised version of the Holocaust into Israel's charter, ensuring that future Israelis would relate in a particular way to the Jews who perished, and connect their deaths to the State of Israel (Zertal, 2005, p. 85). Evil would remain the province of the Other; those of the Us who had participated were 'purge[d]' as criminals (Zertal, 2005, p. 66) and hence extricated from the Virtuous nation.[2] Meanwhile, the 1953 law connected Zionist settlers of Palestine

to the minority of armed Jewish resistors in Europe – alike in their failure to acquiesce to Evil Others.

Hannah Arendt's account of the Jerusalem trial of Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann in 1961 demonstrates again how criminal trials embedded the state's Charter. Arendt (1976) suggests that prosecutor Hausner, the mouthpiece of Ben-Gurion, introduced a wide array of evidence into the court to 'paint a picture' of the Holocaust (p. 225). The judges were unwilling to limit the testimonies of large numbers of witnesses who had responded to advertisements, recounting horrors that could not be linked to Eichmann and were thus of limited relevance. Arendt notes the exclusion of stories about non-Jews who saved lives, and argues that Israel's leadership pursued a particular vision of Israeli and Jewish life well beyond the delivery of justice for criminal acts.

Today, concludes Grinberg (2009), 'We, the victims of the Holocaust, are the ultimate a-historical victim of human history through the generations' (p. 113). The *ressentiment* charter has become common sense and Jewish citizens understand the State of Israel, with its institutionalised reified ethnic categories, to be the single bastion of protection. In the next section, I will revisit the implication of this digestion of the Holocaust for the demonisation of 'Arabs'.

## Five legal categories of Other…and one symbolic one

Central to the construction of 'Jewish national identity' in Israel, and the continued predominance of the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse, has been the discursive and legal construction of the Other. With virtue affixed to both their identification and their national project, when Zionists experienced violence at the hands of non-Jews in Palestine, they read it through the lens of *ressentiment*, depicting Palestinians as Evil Others. This pattern continued well into Israel's first decades, when Zionism's Others were not just responding to settler colonialists, but to a state premised upon their own negation and exclusion. Political, legal and military decisions by the Israeli state demarcated formal sub-categories of this Other, yet while these sub-categories produced different experiences and identifications for individuals, the overarching depiction of the Evil Other reduced all such individuals back to an amorphous mass. Such complexity has ultimately reinforced *ressentiment* by rendering Otherness almost incomprehensible.

This incomprehensibility can be illustrated by a disagreement I had with one of the dissidents, Meron Benvenisti, over Palestinian nationhood. Benvenisti took a primordialist view, regarding 'the Jews' as an

ancient tribe (not even to be sullied by modern terms like 'nation'), and depicting the 'Palestinian nation' as having been divided and ruled by Israel, splintered into Israeli citizens, non-citizens and internationals. I took a constructivist view, arguing that individuals in each legal category identified based on their contexts, and that this was entirely legitimate. Our disagreement highlighted the complexity of bringing together the multiple legal categories of 'Palestinian' or 'Arab' and the single discursive depiction the Other as a monolithic – and usually Evil – collective (though Benvenisti's depiction was more nuanced). The complexity derives in part from the difficulty in talking about the actual categories of non-Jews in Israel/Palestine without going into significant detail. Excessive, mind-numbing detail invites the simplification offered by the groupist squashing-down to a single nation. However, the minute we try to talk about a single Palestinian discourse or identification, we find ourselves dealing with different sub-categories that do, indeed, generate different experiences. Thus, attempts to analyse the Other from within *ressentiment* Zionism focus on a moving target, which cannot really be understood. This crisis of understanding contributes to a more strident *ressentiment* depiction, as that Other becomes harder to comprehend.

Having just complained about the excessive detail necessary to understand how Zionism legally and discursively constructs its Palestinian Other(s), I must now go into some of this detail in order to explain the evolution of *ressentiment*. This is necessary, given that the only alternative is a cursory groupist account of 'Palestinianness/Arabness', which reproduces the *ressentiment* discourse. My analysis differentiates between how *ressentiment* Zionism has referred to metaphorical Others (within the discourse), and how laws and policies have created *actual* Others. Whilst *ressentiment* Zionism has targeted a generalised 'Arab' as its Evil Other from Zionist settlement onwards, the Israeli state has over time created five distinct legal sub-categories of 'Arab' or 'Palestinian'. Individuals belonging to these sub-categories have had their own unique experiences interfacing with Israel; at times, their causes and conversations have overlapped and at others they have been counterpoised. Common to all has been their depiction by Zionism as the Evil Other, and their counter-depiction of the Zionist Jew in the same terms.

### The 'Israeli Arab' Other

The first sub-category of Other created with the establishment of Israel was the so-called 'Israeli Arab' who lives within the borders of the Jewish state but is not a Jew.[3] The 'Israeli' part refers to the citizenship of this cohort, which only became meaningful after the abolition of martial law

in 1966; the 'Arab' part 'subsume[s] [them] under the broader Arab category' whilst denying any specific belonging to Palestine (Peteet, 2005, p. 161).[4] Whilst analysis often represents 'Israeli Arabs' as an ignored, de-legitimised 'national minority' (Ghanem, 1998; Rabinowitz, 2001), 'minority-ness' is itself a product of the ethnocratiser state, which must first create 'majorities' and 'minorities' before it can privilege or de-privilege them. The ratio of 'ethnic groups' or 'nations' reified by the state is manipulable, and indeed Israel's initial majority of 'Jews' was very small. Accordingly, the years on either side of her creation saw Zionist activists deliberately altering these proportions so that the state could be, in their eyes, both 'Jewish' and 'democratic'. The Law of Return and the state's refusal to permit the return of non-Jewish refugees after the 1948 War created a manageable 'national minority' of 'Israeli Arabs'. Whilst the privations experienced by these individuals are beyond this book's scope, the significant restrictions upon non-Jewish engagement in public and private life have been well documented elsewhere (Rabinowitz, 1997; Ghanem, 1998; Saban, 2004; Yiftachel, 2006; Peled, 2008).

**The refugee Other**

The second formal sub-category of 'Arab' created with Israel's establishment was the refugees of 1948, a distinct set of legal persons according to United Nations' Resolution 194 (1948), which proclaims their right to return home. 700,000 non-Jewish refugees left what would become the Jewish state (Morris 2001; Kovel 2007); many of them ended up in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, and a significant number in the West Bank and Gaza.[5] The latter were supposed to form the 'Arab' state; after Israel's decisive expansion in 1948, Jordan and Egypt took control of their respective adjoining territories.

Contemporary scholars disagree over whether Plan Dalet, the Zionist leadership's wartime policy to ethnically cleanse areas of the soon-to-be Jewish state of their non-Jewish inhabitants, was a formal blueprint for forced deportation endorsed by the highest leadership (see Kimmerling, 1983, 2004; Pappe, 2001, p. 98; Morris, 2004a; Lentin, 2010, pp. 109–110). However, '[t]he really important decision, which *was* conscious and explicit, was to make sure that the collapse of the Palestinian community that unfolded under the pressures of all-out war between Israel and the Arab states would be irreversible' (Piterberg, 2001, p. 56, my emphasis).

The Israeli state's permanent exclusion of refugees and confiscation or destruction of their property demonstrates the strength of the meanings the *ressentiment* discourse applied to 'Jewish' and 'non-Jewish'

categories. Externally imposed categorisation by the new state awarded either national membership or non-personhood and banishment. There was an instrumental component in that Zionists were establishing a state requiring more 'Jews' than 'non-Jews' in order to be recognised as a democracy (at least by its founders). Many Zionists had already considered this pressing problem in the years leading up to Israel's establishment, hence the War facilitated the exclusion of Others; it provided a means of 'spirit[ing] them across the border' (Herzl in Piterberg, 2008, p. 39). However, there was also a significant *ressentiment* basis behind the exclusion of the refugees: Zionism stereotyped and blamed them for what it depicted as violent opposition to the peaceful establishment of the Jewish state. The discourse could not digest that the paradigm behind the state's founding was inherently hostile to Others, who would necessarily need to be transferred out of the territory or awarded reduced citizenship in order for the plan to proceed. The ethnic categorisation of the refugees provided sufficient grounds for their exclusion as unwelcome enemies.[6] This rhetoric continues today, with Zionists representing potential refugee return as an unacceptable incursion destroying the Jewish state (Dershowitz, 2003, p. 85; Grinberg, 2009, p. 114).

**'Generic' Arabs and collapsible Others**

The third sub-category of 'generic' Arab was really a catchall for what remained outside the first two categories. 'Generic Arabs' were non-Jews who fell outside of Israel's ambit in surrounding 'Arab' states, an amorphous horde hell-bent on Israel's destruction.

Idith Zertal (2005) illustrates how the Zionist *ressentiment* discourse collapsed all three categories of 'Arab' (internal, refugee and generic) into the broader category of Evil Other during the show trial of Adolf Eichmann, a 'landmark in the process of the organized, explicit mobilization of the Holocaust in the service of Israeli politics and state policy, especially in the context of the Israeli–Arab conflict' (p. 99). References to Nazism were liberally applied to 'Arabs'; Prime Minister Ben-Gurion spoke publicly of Nazis hiding in Egypt and compared the speeches of the Egyptian president to Hitler (p. 99). The 'transference', as Zertal calls it, 'of the Holocaust situation on to the Middle East reality', occurred

> in two distinctive ways: first by massive references to the presence of Nazi scientists and advisers in Egypt and other Arab countries, to the ongoing connections between Arab and Nazi leaders, and to the Nazi-like intentions and plans of the Arabs to annihilate Israel. The second means was systematic references – in the press, on the radio, and

> in political speeches – to the former Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin El-Husseini, his connection with the Nazi regime in general and with Eichmann and his office in particular. In those references he was depicted as a prominent designer of the Final Solution and a major Nazi criminal. The deeds of Eichmann – and other Nazi criminals – were rarely mentioned without addition of the Arab–Nazi dimension. (p. 100)

Eichmann's 'Israeli prosecutor insisted on inflating the Mufti's role in the planning and implementation of Nazi crimes' (p. 102). Many years later, the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, completed in the 1980s, depicted the Mufti as

> one of the great designers and perpetrators of the Final Solution: his entry is twice as long as each of the entries devoted to Goebbels and Goering, longer than the two combined entries for Heydrich and Himmler and longer than the entry on Eichmann ... [I]n the Hebrew edition ... the entry on El-Husseini is almost as long as that on Hitler. (p. 103)

This astounding detail illustrates just how effectively Israel's political class embedded into the state's charter the idea that 'Arabs' in the Middle East orchestrated the European Holocaust.

> Ben-Gurion's legacy to his people by means of the Eichmann trial was two-fold: eternal hatred of the Jews still endured despite the existence of the State of Israel, and the Nazi-like enemy was still rallied at the gates of the nation-in-siege. (p. 114)

**The occupied Other**

Six years after the Eichmann trial, Israel dramatically conquered territories including the West Bank and the Gaza strip during the Six Day War. This created a fourth sub-category of 'Arab' in these remaining areas of what was once destined to be the 'Arab' state. The lives of 'Arabs' living here would dramatically change; whether they were refugees from 1948 or centuries-long residents, all would become occupied Palestinians – incorporated into the state of Israel without citizenship. While in Israel's early years, the Zionist discourse had minimally differentiated between 'generic' Arabs and 'Israeli' and 'refugee' 'Arabs', with certainly no 'Palestinians', after the occupation the discourse slowly began to grudgingly recognise the existence of a 'Palestinian nation' (Peteet, 2005).

Crucially, however, at moments of conflict, Zionism would still conflate occupied Palestinians with Israeli Arabs and generic Arabs to form an amorphous Evil Other.

The sub-category of occupied Palestinians arose out of the desire of Israel's leaders and population to retain the spoils of the Six Day War. In the Zionist historical narrative, the West Bank and Gaza formed part of the ancient and deeply significant 'Land of Israel'. Jews had been able to access these areas prior to 1948, but the armistice lines of 1948 banished them from the Old City of Jerusalem, ancient gravesites and geological features as well as the Hebrew University. Israel's 1967 victory thus inspired a settler movement to integrate the acquired lands into the state. Though there were indeed some clear strategic reasons to hold on to portions, these did not endorse the wholesale settlement and occupation which followed, which would prove provocative and difficult to defend militarily (Gorenberg, 2006, pp. 116, 279). Thus, to the extent that there was a conflict between military strategy and settler-colonialist ideology – and indeed there was a significant crossover – the *ressentiment* discourse's claim to the entire 'Land of Israel' trumped any concerns about how to manage the large numbers of Other therein.

Settlement of the occupied territories could not utilise the same practices that had facilitated the establishment of Israel; practices which had continued with the settlement of 'Arab' areas after 1948 (see Yiftachel, 1993). The occupied territories could not officially become part of Israel because this would award citizenship to the non-Jewish Other therein, resulting in a state with a significant population of non-Jews. Colonial outpost settlement was the only way of acquiring the land seemingly without its problematic population of Others, or the dowry without the bride. Jews who settled in the occupied territories would thus be full citizens of Israel and, over the years, the state would grant them special benefits such as housing subsidies and tax breaks. The state would build infrastructure, provide them with military protection, facilitate their acquisition of additional lands and integrate them into life within Israel's 'official borders'. All the while, settlers would be living alongside non-citizens – non-Jews – denied these benefits and paying for them in terms of land, resources and rights, which would only strengthen the *ressentiment* discourse of this population. The privations occupied Palestinians would endure over the coming years would see their particular discourse – built upon the original response to the Zionist project – forming the most significant *ressentiment pair* with Zionism.

Given the large number of refugee Palestinians living in the occupied territories, it is not surprising that the population here was already well

versed in *ressentiment*; after 1967, there was more fuel for the fire. Title deeds became meaningless as Jewish settlers claimed privately owned land, and the state nationalised vast tracts for development; destroying villages, planting forests over them, and subsequently building a giant wall through them. Israeli settlers destroyed the livelihood of Palestinian agriculturalists with minimal interference by the military, and took over the heart of Hebron, victimising non-Jewish neighbours. There has been no recourse for occupied Palestinians; only more Jewish settlements serviced by new roads; requiring more water and amenities and electricity and rubbish dumps. Jewish soldiers with machine guns restrict non-Jews with roadblocks and require permits for movement, work and education; there are house searches and demolitions, personal searches and curfews, and military use of civilians as hostages. The need to protect Jew from non-Jew in the territories is self-evident within the Zionist discourse, and Israeli courts uphold the punitive measures of occupation, lending a veneer of respectability to the dispossessions therein.

The Zionist justification for the privations of the occupation lies in the explanation for the sometimes violent response to it, incognisant of the fact that the occupation itself generates resistance. The tactics of occupied Palestinians shifted from a top-down terror campaign against Israel orchestrated by political elites to a more popular resistance movement with uprisings (*intifadas*) in 1987 and 2000. The second *intifada* was symbolised by suicide bombings carried out by occupied Palestinians within Israel's 'official' borders. These multiple murders cemented the *ressentiment* Zionist line that the 'Palestinians' – by now there was growing consensus on their existence – must be evil monsters. Their ongoing deprivations were not relevant.

> When one has to deal with a serial killer, it's not so important to discover why he became a serial killer. What's important is to imprison the murderer or to execute him ... [I]n some way the Palestinian society itself ... is in the state of being a serial killer. (Benny Morris, in Shavit, 2004, p.47–48)

**The Other and the Us in the media**

Depictions of the Other in Israel's mainstream media have strengthened the *ressentiment* depiction of a virtuous Us under inexplicable attack. The media is often 'described as one of the main realms in which the national community is "imagined"' (Yadgar, 2002, p. 58), and in numerous instances around the world, 'impure, dangerous Others with evil intents' have been constructed though highly charged negative

images…', which 'evoke fear, hatred, loathing and /or anger [and] mobilize nationalist sentiments…' (Langman, 2006, p. 72).

Dor's (2005) detailed study of local media reporting on Israel's military reoccupation of the West Bank in 2002 aptly illustrates this.[7] Dor argues that the imaginary Israeli spoken for by the media adamantly refused responsibility for government actions, yet simultaneously supported them. During this period, the media depicted a 'Jewish' nation that had endured great horrors, from pogroms to the Holocaust to the murderous wars waged by 'Arabs', and now terrorism from 'Palestinians'. This narrative rejected responsibility, instead encouraging readers to see themselves as virtuous victims perversely blamed by Evil Others (the outside world) for defending themselves against More Evil Others (Palestinians).

Yadgar's (2003b) analyses of media reports of the same period echo such sentiments, suggesting that 'the second intifada was perceived and interpreted primarily as violent, unjustified and ungrateful behaviour on the part of the Palestinians, accompanied by insensitivity and lack of understanding for Israel's distress on the part of the world's nations' (p. 189). Even the treatment of international reporters by Israeli news organisations reflects the *ressentiment* discourse. Dor (2005) argues that Israeli media were antipathetic to international reporters and coverage. He details examples in which Israeli journalists depicted international reporters as hostile witnesses, and noted with approval the failures of foreign correspondents to gain access to military areas (pp. 57–58). He depicts Israeli journalists as preoccupied by the relationship between international reporters and 'Palestinians', concerned that the former are susceptible to propaganda from the latter. By virtue of their own Otherness, then, international reporters are conflated with 'Palestinians'; thus the daily newspaper *Ma'ariv* 'on behalf of all Israelis – is offended by the discriminatory attitude of the world media. This sense of injury conveys a deep message: it portrays the foreign media as engaging in a *discourse of blame* against Israel. (p. 24).

Liebes (1997) goes some way in explaining why – in the main – the Israeli media has so wholeheartedly depicted the Us and Other in *ressentiment* terms. The state established an Editors' Committee in its early days, which met regularly with military and government officials to ensure that politically contentious stories would not run in any of Israel's privately owned newspapers. Thus, a section of what might otherwise have been independent civil society voluntarily co-opted itself to state control in the name of 'national' preservation. Liebes points out that the people who founded the newspapers before Israel's establishment were essentially the same people who went on to be her first statesmen,

sharing a lived experience in Palestine and an ideology of national entitlement that had brought them there. On this basis, the divide between the Israeli state and civil society was far less marked than we might expect (see also Sand, 2011, pp. 53–54, 71). Although that divide should arguably have grown with the state's maturity, ongoing conflict and compulsory military service have kept the state, military and civil society inextricably intertwined, ensuring continued mobilisation of the *ressentiment* discourse (see Cohen, 2001, pp. 157–158).

### *Ressentiment* to the present day

Whilst a heightened *ressentiment* pair has developed between occupied Palestinians and the Zionist discourse since 1967, the sub-category of 'Israeli Arabs' have not been immune from ongoing *ressentiment* targeting. In keeping with the 'amorphous Evil Other' conflation of all 'Arabs', commentators depict 'Israeli Arabs' as a remnant of a much larger hostile mass, and accordingly portray them as seeking to destroy the Jewish state from within:

> The Israeli Arabs are a time bomb. Their slide into complete Palestinianization has made them an emissary of the enemy that is among us. They are a potential fifth column. In both demographic and security terms they are liable to undermine the state. (Benny Morris, in Shavit, 2004, p. 45)

Objectively, however, possession of Israeli citizenship has placed 'Israeli Arabs' in a different situation from occupied Palestinians; one cogent (if groupist) framing is of a 'trapped minority' fitting uncomfortably between a Jewish state and Palestinian hinterland (Rabinowitz, 2001). The discourse of 'Israeli Arabs' is distinct from that of occupied Palestinians; at times, it represents them as part of the 'Palestinian nation', at other moments, the discourse emphasises their 'Israeliness' and employs claims for either civic equality or national minority status (Ghanem, 1998, pp. 438–443; Sa'di, 2000, p. 28; Peled, 2007a, pp. 355–357; Jamal, 2008, pp. 287–288; Rouhana, 1998, pp. 286, 293). Since the three claims are incompatible – 'Israeli Arabs' cannot simultaneously join the putative Palestinian state, live as equal citizens in a 'civic Israel' and live as a protected 'national minority' in a 'binational' Israel – *ressentiment* Zionism depicts 'Israeli Arabs' as having only one goal: to destroy Israel. Contemporary political rhetoric demonises 'Israeli Arabs' and threatens them with border relocations or transfer (Kimmerling, 2004; Peled, 2007a, pp. 347–350), a push to swear allegiance to the Jewish

state (Stewart, 2010,) and biopolitical demonisation of their fecundity (Sand, 2011, p. 97). Demographic concerns are so central to the project of ethnocratisation, with its need for Jewish numerical dominance, that 'those Jewish Israelis who regard themselves as in the 'peace camp' speak in terms of a demographic threat as well' (Grinberg, 2009, p. 105).

The population living in Gaza today constitutes a fifth objective subcategory of 'Arab' since they live under different political and legal conditions than individuals in the West Bank. Prior to 2005, the Gaza strip had been subject to the same processes of settlement and dispossession as the West Bank, differing only in being geographically separated and containing less in the way of historically significant Jewish artefacts. Perhaps for this reason, and also because it was a small area whose overcrowded 'Arab' residents greatly outnumbered Jewish settlers, the Israeli government under Ariel Sharon 'disengaged' from it in 2005. This meant a withdrawal of all Jewish settlements and ostensibly a withdrawal of the military.

The problem was that Gaza, a highly populated urban coastal strip, had no means of providing its population with the necessities of life, from food to employment to basic infrastructure. In 2006, elections replaced the Fatah party with the more extreme Hamas. After a short period of national unity leadership, Hamas seized control in 2007 and the strip was promptly placed under Israeli and international sanctions. Militants continued to fire into Israel, as they had prior to the 'disengagement', which Israel had enacted without any rapprochement and had now escalated with economic deprivation. Israel countered the bombs with a large-scale military operation in 2009, Operation Cast Lead, during which Gaza's housing and infrastructure was destroyed and 1417 people were killed (Damage to Palestinian People and Property During Operation Cast Lead, 2009). Israel placed Gaza under a sea and land blockade, which stalled the economy and produced deprivation, illness and malnutrition (Batniji et al., 2009) as well as provoking more violence. However, the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse attributes this entire dismal situation to the deficiencies of 'Palestinians'. The Gaza experience demonstrates that 'they' did not embrace the 'independence' Israel so benevolently granted to them (see, for example, Shavit, 2009), and as such demonstrates their Evil. Gaza provides 'evidence' why no such policies should be pursued in the West Bank; arguably the original impulse behind Sharon's disengagement policy (Waiting for a Miracle, *The Economist*, 2005).

Consequently, the occupation and ongoing conflict between Israel and the 'Palestinians' results in ongoing enmity. Every encounter

simply affirms the 'truth' of the *ressentiment* discourses of each 'side': 'Their use of violence is regarded as evidence that they want to kill us' (Grinberg, 2009, p. 108). The actions of the Us appear a moral response to the hostility of the Other, mirrored back *ad nauseum*. On this basis, legal sub-categorisation of the Other has functioned to distract, confuse and divide opposition to the Zionist project. I do not mean that the 'Palestinians' had previously formed a single nation, which Israel then categorically broke down in order to 'divide and rule', as Benvenisti argues. Rather, I mean that the categories, and the regime determining them, are so complex that the Other has become a moving target. It can never be pinned down, precisely because the legal categories of Other can collapse at any minute into the amorphous symbolic one. Conversely, any attempts to probe this amorphous symbolic Other become complicated by different laws, categories and personal identifications, which reflect the competing aims and objectives of people in different political contexts. This inability to attain focus on the Other paralyses analysis, inviting one to cleave to the *ressentiment* depiction of a single, amorphous Other even though this depiction fails to describe material reality. However, since the *ressentiment* depiction continues to offer the moral certainty of Our virtue, its simple mantra can be grasped in the absence of any other easy explanations.

## Conclusion

We are now at the end of the contextual component of this book. This chapter has explored how the Israeli state has reified the Jewish nation as 'virtuous victim' of Evil Others, whose resistance can only ever be understood in such terms. Laws and proclamations have delivered this message; education and a public discourse surrounding the Holocaust have instilled it, and five legal sub-categories of Other and a single symbolic one have invoked it. As a moving target, the Other cannot be understood; its complexity legitimates the reduction to stereotypes. Concern for this Other constitutes the dilemma for the dissidents, which I will discuss in the remaining chapters. They must negotiate this concern alongside personal identification arising from the context I have described here. They must determine whether they can, indeed, relate to their Other as a human being of equal worth.

# Part II
# Dissent

# 4
# Meet the Dissidents

## Introduction

Israeli laws and policies privilege Jews and render their hegemony as natural; accordingly, the dominant nationalist discourse interprets Others' resistance as irrational. Israeli Jews seeking to interpret their Other differently must therefore negotiate the dominant discourse to reconceptualise this relationship; we are about to meet 11 individuals who attempt to do this. All are Israeli Jews, either by birth or by immigration, though not all of them still live in Israel or identify as Israeli. All take the view that Israel is somehow oppressive or unjust to 'Palestinians' or 'Arabs'. The variations in their responses to their dilemma demonstrate that there is no single path for dissent. Instead, individuals have a range of options available to them and the remainder of this book examines what these options look like and what their implications are. By looking deeply at a small number of individuals, I am able to interrogate, in some detail, the inconsistencies within their narratives, which are emblematic of their contradictory context.

In this chapter, I introduce the dissidents and explain why I chose to examine each of them. I group them into broad categories of academic, activist and commentator, though several individuals could fit into more than one category. I examine their published works, political actions and interview responses, outlining the things they say and the projects to which they devote their time. My dissidents reference, discuss and critique each other, sometimes completely unbidden, demonstrating the constant renegotiation of discourse. Their interactions with me also form a significant focus of the next three chapters. I include my own comments and questions as conversational excerpts, and at times discuss my role in the exchanges. Ozkirimli (2003) argues that a constructivist

approach to nationalism seeks to challenge and transform (p. 343); I cannot appear to my interview subjects as a detached observer. Some welcome me as a fellow traveller; others see me as a challenging outsider. Some interviews are heated but, with one exception, all are warm and mutually respectful.

## Academics

### Oren Yiftachel

Oren Yiftachel was the very first dissident I sought to analyse after encountering his scholarly work as an undergraduate. He is a tall, lanky man in his early fifties who seems to live in black jeans and desert boots. He resembles a more attractive version of the film director Quentin Tarantino, and his jiggling legs and sharp eyes buzz with energy. He is a committed critical academic and an activist for social justice whose wife informs me that regular 'power naps' recharge him for his passionate pursuits. A political geographer, Yiftachel conceptualises Israel/Palestine as an ethnocracy, and his critique of 'creeping apartheid' (Yiftachel and Ghanem, 2004, pp. 86–7) extends beyond academia to civil society interventions.

Yiftachel's role in my research project is complex. I discovered his academic writings in 2004 and first interviewed him in 2007. While conducting my fieldwork in 2010, I briefly stayed with Yiftachel and his family in Beersheva and interviewed him again. My analysis draws from both interviews as well as Yiftachel's published work. Yiftachel unofficially consulted on my research project, and in Israel he doubled as host and tour guide. As both scholar and private individual, he is an integral subject of this book, which builds upon and critiques his 'ethnocracy' concept. I cannot easily reconcile the roles he plays, but I can only be explicit about these different facets. In the remaining chapters, I predominantly engage with his scholarship and interview responses as a performance of identity, through which he enacts his relationship with the Us and the Other.

These relationships are complex, and as we will see with other dissidents, they have been personally costly. Yiftachel has paid a price for his efforts to transform his society. 'I've been, since the eighties, constantly attacked, and quite often lost jobs, academic jobs and planning jobs, one after the other', he tells me. 'You don't have to feel so sorry for me', he adds, 'because I've got other jobs, you know. As compared to the deep racism, say, against Arabs, that they end up not getting any jobs at all'

(2007). Yiftachel also describes losing friends and being vilified in the media.

> [E]ven my PhD Supervisor has sort of stopped talking to me, and that hurts. But they don't deal with that at all; they just … spit the dummy and go. … I say to them, well let's talk about – but the minute you mention apartheid, they just go.

This hostile reception is telling, given that Yiftachel maintains a solid affinity to what he refers to as the Hebrew people. He consistently frames his interventions as in the interest not just of Palestinians but also Hebrews. His way of understanding ethnic identification is crucial to this. He argues for 'work[ing] up some social frameworks that can actually transform within, without actually destroying the society … [I]n that respect you have to adopt some existing categories, knowing of course they are not what they purport to be', he explains.

> They're not sort of timeless, non-changing identities from time immemorial. … When there isn't the colonial factor, when there isn't the domination in the name of this category, the category can transform itself into something benign … While the Us is overtaking Others, people will always be oppressive, we're always segregative … But while the Us is interested in co-existence, it can transform itself from within to be a benign category, right? … [I]t's the *oppression* that has to be first dealt with. And it's possible to maintain Jewish self-determination without oppressing Others.

Yiftachel condemns Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza since 1967 as having 'no moral standing at all' because at that stage the Jews 'did have a homeland'. Yet he also critiques the historical dynamics of the Zionist project. He argues for a 'mutual apology, although Israel has much more responsibility so Israel has to take responsibility'. Ultimately, he would like to see Israel/Palestine formally reconfigured as a single state with consociational power sharing. This is in keeping with his idea that nobody should strip ethnic identification from those to whom such identification is precious. He speaks of a

> sort of gradual acceptance of the Jewish collectivity, perhaps not a Jewish state but a Jewish collectivity, perhaps like the Maronites and other sort of non-Arab collectivities – or the Kurds – in the Middle

> East. And then maybe our grandchildren will be able to go to school together first, right? And then, intermarriage.

So he does not worry about the watering down of Hebrew identification? 'We want to hope that love will prevail at some stage', he responds, laughing.

Yet Yiftachel's own identification is powerful. He argues that ethnic affinity

> gives people *such* a framework for existence. *Such* a purpose in life. This is the project! The project is not to have a Mercedes Benz. [That] is a by-product … The project is to have this collectivity, with its own history, troubled history, surviving and safe … The project is not individual, right? What gives people meaning, joy, ecstasy, is collective.

He argues for fluidity, suggesting that 'possibly the strongest ethnicity in the world has changed dramatically in the last thirty or forty years' with the influx of Arab Jews and Russians. He argues for 'cultural rights' and

> entry and exit freedoms. If I want to become a Ultra-Orthodox, if I want to become an Arab, I should have the right to do so, right? You will have to, I suppose, adopt [a] certain culture to be an ethnic, you know? But it wouldn't depend upon your colour or on your mother. This is why I maintain to call it Hebrew. Because a language-based culture allows you more easier entry rather than a religion or history. But I do agree, of course, with the critique … the minute it becomes oppressive, and I do agree with the critique that is has the *potential* to become oppressive, right?

'But not the critique that it has the *inevitability* to become oppressive', I suggest.

'No, it's not inevitable at all', he responds.

> [E]thnicity … shouldn't be defined by bloodlines, and that's why the word culture is more to my liking … I don't think you can, and I don't think you should, do away with the idea of identities that give people meaning to their life.

Yiftachel combines his efforts to reinvent 'Hebrew' identification with activism around Bedouin unrecognised villages, which Israeli authorities deprive of basic utilities and regularly demolish. Yiftachel also

helped to draft the academic boycott of Israeli institutions put forward by Palestinian scholars, though he does not go so far as his colleague Neve Gordon in publicly endorsing a general boycott of Israel. The following chapters will engage more with Yiftachel's identification and narrative, but now it is time to explore his colleague Gordon, whose different experiences and decisions have landed him in hot water with his employer and his country as a whole.

**Neve Gordon**

Like Yiftachel, Neve Gordon works at Ben-Gurion University, but as a political scientist. Gordon has become the Israeli poster-boy for the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. This mild-mannered academic and activist urges the world to boycott Israeli products, businesses and institutions as a means of forcing the end of the occupation. This has generated a firestorm of opposition both in Israel and amongst the Zionist diaspora (Ravid, 2009a, 2009b; Russo, 2009), since Gordon is employed by an Israeli state institution. His critics, including the University's president and a number of American donors, argue that Gordon cannot effectively lobby internationally for university funding whilst advocating a boycott of his institution (Carmi, 2009; Russo, 2009). Gordon has become a controversial figure in Israel despite (or perhaps because of) his pedigree; he served as a paratrooper and sustained permanent disability in combat. Prior to meeting Gordon, I had read some of his opinion pieces and several articles surrounding the BDS controversy; in the interview, we discussed several topics arising out of his work.

Gordon explains his political trajectory, starting with an early anecdote:

> My first political memory is from the age of ten, when I grew up here in Beersheva, and I came home and said something like, 'This is Arabs' work', and the phrase 'Arabs' work' in Hebrew means … work that's not done well. And my mother chastised me and basically said that it's a racist phrase, and that I should never use it again.

Gordon joined the left-Zionist organisation Peace Now, and 'started going to protests around 14 in the West Bank against the settlement project, standing with signs, saying that the settlements are not good for us, blah blah blah'.

After his military service and a year abroad, Gordon 'returned to Israel and joined a group called Gaza's Team for Human Rights … and later

Physicians for Human Rights, and was the director of that group when it basically just began'. Though he would ultimately become disenchanted with working for non-government organisations, concluding that 'resistance becomes professionalised, a nine-to-five kind of activist', Gordon's experiences helped him to 'know ... what was going on first hand'.

'[L]ater', he continues,

> I went and studied in the US, came back here and this was during the Oslo years, ... was active again, and then the second *intifada* erupted, and then understood that the whole ... Peace Now as a political movement, and NGO, were not the answers for change, and then was among the founders of *Ta'yush* in Jerusalem. The whole idea of a much more democratic Jewish–Arab partnership for change and the move from protest to resistance, from standing with a sign to direct action forms of resistance.

*Ta'yush*, Gordon explains, is an 'Arabic word for partnership'. He likes it because it cannot be co-opted like the word 'peace'. 'Cos everyone's for peace! Bush is for peace, Sharon is for peace, Netanyahu is for peace, Sharon is for peace, the settlers are for peace ... '

After being involved with *Ta'yush* for 'several years', Gordon had children and 'became a nice bourgeoisie'. He is being self-deprecating here, since one of the important projects he pursued as a parent was setting up a Jewish–Palestinian kindergarten.

> I ... see that as ... a very political project. It is the future, the only possible future in my opinion in this region, with Israelis and Palestinians in this kind of model. It's a bilingual school, half the children are Jews, half Palestinians, each class has two teachers, one Jewish, one Arab, no translation, Arabs talk Arabic, the Jewish teacher talks Hebrew ... They study in both languages and it's amazing how fast they learn both languages at that age.

The other component of Gordon's supposedly nice bourgeois life is his public support for BDS. He is cagey when I ask for an update, but admits that things are 'very bad'.

> [W]hat has become clear is that the occupation has penetrated the University. The tactics used by Israel in the occupied territories as forms of punishment and forms of harassment are being used inside this institution. I can't get into the details of it, but let me say that

> if they can't punish me, they'll punish my friends. For what I said. Which is a tactic used in the occupied territories, and an anti-liberal tactic, cos the view of the liberal is that I have to be responsible for my actions, and not my friends … We have neighbours that have stopped talking to us; they don't talk to our children. I mean, it's much worse than I anticipated. But no regrets …

Like Yiftachel, Gordon remains philosophical. 'I'm very privileged', he shrugs. 'Much more than the people that you saw this morning.' (He refers to the occupants of an unrecognised village I visited with Yiftachel.)

Despite the controversy surrounding him, Gordon adamantly presents himself as a patriot whose activism as benefits not only 'Palestinians' but also 'Jews'. For him, patriotism is 'a deep concern about a place and the people that live there'.

When I ask which people, he replies:

> [F]or me, the people are Jews and Palestinians. So I try to be as inclusive as possible, and even the refugees … there are several hundred refugees … from Darfur, okay … So, I am connected to the place, the culture and the people, and I'm deeply concerned about them. In that sense, I'm a patriot.

Gordon also orients himself morally using Jewish culture. 'I do go back to the Bible', he explains.

> I do go back to certain traditions … They inform the way I think about this conflict and the world in general … What is the major theme of the Bible? It's freedom. If you read the text with that major theme, it can inform your work. What is the story of Passover? What is the story of Yom Kippur, the most religious holiday, if not doubt, doubt in God? But they teach it differently here. You can take those themes from the Bible. I eat pork. I drive. I'm not a good Jew in their sense, but I think I'm a good Jew in the more – that there's a social justice tradition in the Bible, and that's clearly there.

Gordon emphasises that social justice should apply to the broader community, not just Jews. He refers to a book review he wrote about a Leon Roth work. Once a committed Zionist, Roth left the state of Israel shortly after its establishment, already disappointed. Gordon writes that Roth

> spent many years studying Jewish texts and uncovering their universal significance for human life. He constantly accentuates the basic features of equality and freedom within Judaism … A Judaism true to its origins is thus universalistic; one that emphasises the past but has meaning for the future, one that makes room for the other and enables him/her to live in his/her otherness … Roth's reading of the Jewish texts led him to advocate the establishment of a bi-national political entity with complete equality of rights between Jews and Palestinians. He believed that this worldview not only correlates with Judaism and classic philosophy, but that both, when read correctly, enhance it. (2001, para 11)

Despite his affinity with Roth, Gordon presents his own political vision for Israel/Palestine as more pragmatic. Although he would like to see 'a world without nationalism' and 'a Middle East with open borders', he finds 'leav[ing] aside the facts on the ground, the ideology and so forth' 'not helpful'. He prefers to consider the 'political strategic question' of 'which is the most possible'. Many of his friends, Gordon explains, believe that the settlement of Palestine is entrenched and hence they seek to alter the ideology of a Jewish state to accommodate this, resulting in a binational state. 'I think it's easier to remove settlements and to find the solution for the rights of … Palestinian refugees, than to change that ideology', Gordon counters. This pragmatism underlines his support for a two-state solution, even as he reluctantly acknowledges that Palestinians in Israel 'will continue to be second-class citizens'.

**Uri Davis**

The final academic in this study is Uri Davis, lecturer in Critical Israel Studies at Birzeit University in Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem. Davis is well known internationally for his history of involvement with the organised Palestinian political movement, and for his long-standing arguments against 'Israeli apartheid' (1987). Davis has combined his career and activism through academic employment and involvement with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation's political wing, Fatah. When we met in Jerusalem in January 2010, Fatah members had recently elected him to its Revolutionary Council, a large decision-making body informing the work of the inner core. He was married to a former Fatah bureaucrat, and moved in a Palestinian milieu. Well preserved into his seventh decade, Davis has snowy white hair, a ruddy complexion and the crisp accent of yesteryear's BBC broadcasts and colonial propaganda movies.

Davis has come to my attention via his books, particularly *Crossing the Border: An Autobiography of an Anti-Zionist Palestinian Jew* (1995). The latter is written in the style of a classic *bildungsroman* – the journey of the young man from ignorance to enlightenment. It outlines Davis's birth in Palestine to a Slovakian mother and a much older British father. Neither was a great Zionist, but since both were Jews who happened to be living in Jerusalem prior to the establishment of Israel, they and their children became Israelis. Davis began his political journey when he decided to resist using a weapon during his schooling. He rejected the notion of serving in the Army, too, so the state offered him alternative duty on a kibbutz. After a time, he rejected this too. He became involved in radical politics at university and moved to a Palestinian village within Israel. Davis's 'Sabra' identification (the term for an indigenous prickly fruit, which locally born Israeli Jews self-apply) remained strong as his politics became more radical. An affair with a black Maoist woman prompted Davis to reflect on his 'colonialist' behaviours, and he 'went native'.

> No white person born into European society can be or can become a native of somewhere else. But he or she can go native. It is possible to break through the barrier and operate cross culturally in a common struggle against repression, against discrimination, against racism, and against double standards. (p. 109)

Davis's political journey came good on his promise of 'crossing the border'. He connected with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation during its years of exile, relocating to the United Kingdom due to the illegality of his actions under Israel's laws. He developed a respectful relationship with Abu Jihad (Khalil Ibrahim al-Wazir), the founder of Fatah, and with Abu Ammar (Yasser Arafat). The latter gave Davis symbolic and financial support in his attempts to become involved with the PLO as a 'Palestinian Jew' and to open up its premise as an alternative government for a unified Israel–Palestine. Davis, an anthropology PhD, worked within academic institutions in Britain to start up institutes that study Palestine and are critical of Zionism. Finally, following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1992, he moved back to Israel.

Along the way, Davis married twice, each marriage producing a son. A third marriage, intact at the time of the autobiography and having produced twins, had disintegrated by the time we met 15 years later. He has recently entered his fourth marriage, this time with a Palestinian woman who is beyond childbearing age, so 'there will be no children!' On the record, Davis will only confirm that his legal address is inside

Israel. He is not permitted to live with his wife in Ramallah, nor is she allowed to live in Israel with him, courtesy of the 2003 Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, which prohibits Palestinians from the territories gaining Israeli citizenship by marriage.

In Davis's final 'crossing of the border', he has registered as a Muslim in order to marry Miyasar. I wonder whether he has deserted his former identification. No, he explains in characteristically long-winded fashion.

> Over the years of reflection and practice, I changed my label from Palestinian Jew to Palestinian Hebrew. But that change was effected within a stable moral and political and ideological context of opposition to Zionism … I have been for decades now anti-Zionist, namely resistance to a political system that I regard as indecent in that it distinguishes in law and in practice, discriminates in law and in practice, between Jew and non-Jew in the state of Israel. So, in that context of anti-Zionist moral and political commitments, I changed the first segment of my identity from Palestinian Jew to Palestinian Hebrew, attempting a distinction between my tribal origin, which is Jewish, and my national origin, which I identify as Palestinian Hebrew; Hebrew designated primarily by national language. So, I classify myself as a Palestinian Hebrew of Jewish origin, definitely anti-Zionist, with dual citizenship. I'm a citizen of an apartheid state, the state of Israel, and a citizen of an alleged constitutional monarchy, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Davis's new Muslim faith does not get a mention, although he refuses to confirm that it is merely an official act for the legitimacy of his fourth marriage. 'I registered myself as a Muslim well before establishing our relationship as a family, and beyond that I will not answer', he declares.

Davis's decision to 'cross the border' and work with the political institutions of the Other has been politically rationalised, he explains.

> The Fatah, being an open political organisation, where membership is anchored in commitment to Palestinian fundamental rights and to the political programme of the Fatah and the PLO, but regardless of ethnic background, citizenship, language, whatever, it has a general international membership, was the best option available to me in the political arena both inside Israel and outside Israel.

'My affiliation to the Fatah, my affiliation to the PLO, my acceptance of my election to Fatah leadership position is anchored in a political assessment of likelihood or otherwise', he continues.

> The likelihood that intervention of people like myself at a leadership position may help shift of the mainstream from diluting Palestinian claims based on international law to reasserting Palestinian claims based on international law; I judged that likelihood sufficiently strong to justify my affiliation. Definitely better likelihood than affiliating to a political party [in Israel] and ending up as a Member of Knesset.

Davis's vision of dismantling the apartheid Israeli regime, as he sees it, results in a state of its citizens. He explains that even adhering to the current PLO position of two states (though he has historically supported a single state solution); these states are to be formulated based on all UN resolutions. Implemented to the letter, these would result in a unitary state made up of a two entities with Jewish and Palestinian 'decorations' (Freedman, 2009).

Davis recounts a particular intervention into Fatah's framing of national identity in *Crossing the Border*. He details his response to receiving a facsimile of a planned Palestinian national identity card from the PLO whose logo included 'a church and a mosque and the words "State of Palestine PLO" in Arabic and in English'.

> Three Palestinian Jews, Elisha Davidsson of Reykjavik, Nissan Rilov of Paris and myself, wrote a joint letter to our respective PLO offices in Stockholm, Paris and London: ... 'We consider ourselves *bona fide* Palestinians. We, therefore, feel awkward, as Palestinian Jews, carrying national ID cards, which symbolize a church and a mosque (no synagogue) and ignore the fact that the mother tongue of an unspecified number of the citizens of the future integrated Palestine is Hebrew. Furthermore, it is a mistake in our view to identify the Palestinian people and the country by religious symbols. We propose that, subject to discussion and resolution by the PNC, the newly established Department for Marital and Civil Registry reissue the Palestinian national ID cards without any religious symbols and with a three language logo: Arabic, Hebrew and English ... ' (pp. 330–31)

Davis's intervention sought to prevent Palestinian nationalism from limiting itself to Muslim and Christian identification in the same way that Israeli nationalism has limited itself to Jewish identification.

Unfortunately, he tells me later by email, the intervention elicited no response.

## Activists

### Jeff Halper

American-born anthropology PhD Jeff Halper provides an appropriate segue into the full-time activists. Halper runs the Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions (ICAHD), a Jerusalem-based NGO that tries to prevent the Israeli state from demolishing Palestinians' dwellings in the occupied territories. As well as a paid staff, ICAHD attracts a steady flow of international activists who act as human shields and work to rebuild houses, which the state often subsequently demolishes again. Halper, their leader, is an affable character with the demeanour of a well-fed, matured hippie. His American accent has a Hebrew flavour. Halper's book *An Israeli in Palestine* (2008) details his journey migrating to Israel and his confrontation with Zionism. My questions arising out of it inform our interview.

Halper is of particular interest as an adult immigrant. Many of my other dissidents have not actively chosen the moral quandary of living in a country built on the dispossession of the Others about whom they purport to care. Halper, inspired by the deepening of his 'Hebrew' identity, has been motivated to become part of this project, yet is adamant that Israel can become a 'normal place'.

> I come from this small town in Northern Minnesota, so we barely knew we were Jewish, let alone Zionist … But … when I came out of the sixties, what was called identity politics was very important … There was a whole returning back to roots … and I got caught up in that. Because I always saw my Judaism as more of a people thing rather than a religious thing … There was also alienation from the United States for reasons that I don't have to explain to you.

Swept up in Jewish identification, Halper's sense of himself began to shift.

> I became an Israeli before I came to Israel. Before I even knew, in other words. It was an identity shift from ethnic to national … to being Jewish in a national sense where your ethnic identity … is primary. And then you become a Jew. But Jew didn't fit, because Jews live

> in the Diaspora, they don't live in Israel, unless you're religious … So here, I got very involved with Hebrew culture, the whole Hebrew thing, and I wrote a book about the Jewish community in Jerusalem in the nineteenth century, and then from there I go onto Israel. So it's true, I kind of made that shift of identity, and I made the physical move here completely bypassing Zionism … I didn't know Zionism, I didn't know Herzl, I wasn't with the Zionist movement, I didn't come through the Jewish Agency, I just came. I mean the vehicle was, I was doing my PhD in anthropology, so I had … a little bit of money from a fellowship … So in a way I never needed Zionism. Zionism was irrelevant.

Halper claims he has been 'able to take on 'Israeliness' as [his] primary identity while, on a political level, retaining [his] loathing of Israeli policies, deriving as they are from a racist and insular national narrative …' (p. 26).

'I don't think I romanticised Israel', he explains.

> I liked the idea … of this national expression, you know, my Jewish or my Hebrew Israeli identity, and I guess I invested a lot of hopes in it. I had certain expectations that I hoped Israel would fulfil, but I don't think – I mean, I knew there was an occupation. I didn't know Israelis that well. So that's maybe part of the weird thing as well; you come to a country that you really – you're coming to a construct. I came more to a construct than an actual country. I came to an Israel that I wanted to find.

'Did you find it?' I ask.

> No. … A lot of immigrants do that … and then when Israel doesn't conform to those expectations – cos Israel promises a whole rose garden for everybody – they get disillusioned and leave. The difference with me was that I wasn't coming with expectations in the Zionist sense. … I came as an anthropologist, I had an agenda. I had a fellowship, I had some money. I had a circle of friends in the peace movement … so I was able to let Israel speak to me. Not promise me, not the official Jewish Agency Zionist, you know. People in the neighbourhoods. People I knew … I didn't go through an absorption centre … I made that identity shift before I came, to being Israeli. And I became an Israeli because I integrated. I studied in a neighbourhood, they didn't speak English. I had to learn Hebrew, and I learned the kind of

> street Hebrew. I also met my wife in a peace meeting, so, you know, I was brought into that circle in a more natural kind of way. … Not an ideological process, in which there's some constructed Israel and then, boom, can't possibly match the reality. For me, the reality, good bad and everything else, I just took as if I grew up here … It was more organic.

Halper identifies himself – and his NGO – as being Israeli without being oppressive. Just as Halper sees his 'conversion' as uncomplicated, he yearns for Israel to transcend its Zionist origins and become a normal country. In his book, he declares, 'I don't have a solution to sell. I could live with most of the solutions that have arisen over the years' (p. 216). But he explains to me his personal preference for a mixture of the one-state and two-state solutions. As he sees it, the national expression of the two peoples is best dealt with by two states, but the problems of intermingling and the return of Palestinian refugees as best solved by one state. The solution is a European Union-style confederation. With the creation of a rudimentary Palestinian state – and it would be small, 'a Bantustan', he admits – Palestinians and Jews could live anywhere in the confederation. However, they would only retain citizenship of their own state. 'The idea of the confederation is that you keep your citizenship, in other words, you disconnect citizenship from where you're living', he explains.

He says the Law of Return is no longer necessary, 'Cos whatever Jews wanted to come here have come here, so you don't really need it anymore. So I would make it a normal immigration system.' Palestinians in the Diaspora would receive special consideration for a limited time. 'Basically, anybody can come, but you know, there could be privileges', he suggests.

> They could say, we're gonna privilege Palestinians coming home. … So you could say, look, for a period … 'Okay, whoever wants, you're a Palestinian living in Jordan, you have a certain amount of time to decide whether you want to retain your Jordanian citizenship, or you want to become a Palestinian citizen.' It doesn't say you have to move. … Let's say there's a number of years in which all Palestinians all over the world have the right to come back and get Palestinian citizenship, you know, and then after that time, then you make it a more normal immigration policy. You know, like that. Get everybody here who wants to be here, and everybody out who doesn't want to be there, and everybody out who are inside where they don't want to

> live. Take a couple of years, let everybody kind of move around, and then say, 'Okay, from now on we're a normal place'.

**Eitan Bronstein**

Like Halper, another immigrant to Israel, Eitan Bronstein, has gone on to found an NGO. After a career in co-existence including the School for Peace in a joint Jewish–Palestinian village, Bronstein runs *Zochrot*, which has nine paid employees. *Zochrot*, which, in Hebrew, means 'remembering' using the subversive feminine voice, educates Israelis about the *Nakba*. One of its key tasks is running tours highlighting erased villages buried beneath the Israeli landscape; *Zochrot* also campaigns and litigates to have such villages memorialised. Bronstein is a gentle man in his late forties who lives in the heart of Tel Aviv, and is passionate about his urban life in this bustling metropolis. He has come to my attention in a book, *The Other Side of Israel*, by former Zionist Susan Nathan (2005). Most of my material on Bronstein derives from our interview.

We start by talking about Bronstein's background. He was born in Argentina to a Jewish father and a communist mother, who underwent official religious conversion in Marseilles on the way to Israel. 'We, her sons, kind of automatically become Jews.' Bronstein's father was not a Zionist. 'His grandfather was a rabbi, important rabbi in his community', Bronstein explains, but this identification weakened down the generations. 'He was circumcised, my father.... I guess he did Bar Mitzvah, but I didn't, for example.'

The Zionist in the family was Bronstein's uncle, who left home at 17 and moved to Israel. There, he lived on a kibbutz and married a local woman. 'He wrote letters to my parents', Bronstein recalls: '"It's an amazing paradise, you need to come here." My parents were in very very terrible ... economic situation there, so they were convinced to come here because of economic conditions and not very much political.'

But the trip to Israel was not straightforward; first, there were the boys' foreskins to be taken care of.

> Me and my brother, he was three and a half, I was five. Only then [were we circumcised]. ... For me, this violent act on my body is totally suppressed from my memory. I don't remember anything about it, and it was not only one day of cutting and three days of healing. It was a long process of healing because there was [a] problem with my own circumcision ... I knew that I was circumcised only when I was twenty-something, I don't know, twenty-three or twenty-four ... We never talked about it. ... When I grew up, before leaving abroad to

> a long journey, my father … talked to me about it … It was the first time in my life that I knew about it. I mean, I knew back then, but it's totally suppressed, this memory of this circumcision and also all my past in Argentina. I think it's very interesting … the parallel here between my own biography, suppressed memory, and violent, and the organisation that I initiated [which] deals with suppressed memory and violence of the very being, the very beginning, of the state of Israel.

Bronstein goes on to explain that it was not only his foreskin that was jettisoned when the family moved from Argentina to Israel. They also changed his name. 'I was born Claudio.' Bronstein explains the name change as a 'kind of formal ceremonial act, something you have to go through … Back then it was something very common that people who were born somewhere else, they change their names when they come here … '

Arriving in Israel, the family settled on the kibbutz where Bronstein's uncle lived. Bronstein recounts his mother's eye-opening visit to a neighbouring Palestinian village.

> … She saw a big nice football court, football, basketball, something big like this, and children playing, and she said to my uncle, … 'Well it's wonderful, I guess the kids from the kibbutz come here and play together.' … . He said to her, 'Look, it's okay for you to think these things, [but] please don't even say or suggest something like this in the kibbutz … Don't even open your mouth with this idea, because this is very dangerous. Even thinking about it.' … Since then, she began to understand the reality. She understood quite fast that it's terrible, but … her main concern was us as a family, us kids, to have a better future … For example, I [was] never questioning the fact of serving in the Army, because my parents … were totally assimilated to the whole society … Okay, so my Mum always voted, sometimes Communist party, other leftists' parties … but not more than that. She never, like, expressed things, not anti-Zionist, never anti-Zionist.

As a child, Bronstein was, like his parents, a 'good Israeli'. He envied the neighbouring kibbutz because it produced a number of dead war heroes. 'I knew that they were better Israeli than I.' So, when it was time for Bronstein to serve in the Army, he did it unquestioningly. However, during his service, the occupation deeply troubled him. Interestingly,

his prior inculcation into the values of the kibbutz provoked this dissonance.

> [D]espite of all criticism, ... there is one thing that is [a] very strong ... sense that I have from the kibbutz, which is much more than ideology. Something in between people, that even if you are my commander or you are a great professor at university, perhaps I might admire you, but I never think that you are more [of a] person than I am.

Bronstein's unit set up a temporary checkpoint in the occupied territories and searched Palestinians and their vehicles.

> I felt like I'm in a theatre. Because it was something so kind of natural ... everyone knew his role in this situation. And so these people, you know, some of them were old people, young people. I looked at them. I didn't hate them, but I'm with my gun, I'm part of this Army. I didn't do anything that harmed them, but I heard stories from some of the soldiers, when they checked the cars, they take from them some things like some fruit, or something that they sell ... They were laughing about it, making jokes about how funny it was to grab something ... so this was disgusting for me. The whole situation ... in such a natural way, we are occupying, we are superior. I told you this background of the kibbutz because this is what enabled me to see this situation, how terrible it is ... I remember, I went back home and I talked to my parents about it. I had [a] very strong argument with them. I shouted, I was very confused, I was very angry ... I think this was the first time I really faced what was going on.

Nevertheless, Bronstein hastily points out, 'I was [an] excellent soldier in the Army. I never refused anything. I was in the very kind of elite unit.' Not long after the end of Bronstein's full-time Army service, however, the Lebanon War began. This time, things would be different.

> I was called to my first reserve and it was to go to Lebanon. And there was really my first confusion whether to go or not, because this was the first time that there was a really [a] refuseniks movement in Israel, *Yesh Gvul*, There is a Limit. And this Lebanon war was the first time there was a movement in the sense that there is a debate, a moral political debate ...

Bronstein refused to serve, and was jailed.

> This was for me, until today, the most crucial point of beginning, of really questioning what's here. You know, all this… It was the first time I said, 'There's a limit to what I'm willing to do.' But even then, I didn't question the drafting to the Army. I didn't say this Army's totally wrong, no. Only this war is totally wrong.

During the first *intifada*, Bronstein refused again, and served two jail sentences. 'Cos I was for two states, for a Palestinian state and withdrawal from the West Bank. So it was when they began their *intifada* struggling to have an independent state I said, "How can I participate in oppressing it?"' But Bronstein's most radical transformation came a decade later, when he gave up his support for two states.

> [M]y final crisis with Zionism, or with the Jewish state as it is, was in October 2000. Thirteen demonstrators [Palestinian citizens of Israel] were killed… The second *intifada* began, and it began in the West Bank, but immediately there were huge demonstrations among Arabs here in Israel. When this began, I immediately identified with these demonstrations… There were thousands of police and Army, you know, tons of equipment. It was really scary. I went up and joined the demonstrators and I saw it. At one point I left, I went back home… I heard on the way on the news that two people were killed there.
>
> … I think for many people like me… this was really… the final break of Zionism. And it happened… only because, as I see it, it happened *here*. I mean, people were killed in the West Bank, this happened all the time… but somewhere out there. And also, it's obvious that Israel is oppressing them. But when this happened here and the demonstrators were citizens of Israel, I understood. I felt that there is something much, much, deeper in the fundaments of this place, in how it's been created and it's not only… something between Israel and the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza… But it's also something with all the Palestinians, also the citizens of Israel.
>
> … [Prime Minister Ehud] Barak said, 'We are going to open the roads by all means'. Now, blocking roads, this is something that happened hundreds and thousands of times in Israel, but by many groups. You know, they do demonstration, they block roads, in many other cases, and you don't go and shoot them. But, in this case, not only go and shoot them, you also recruit thousands of soldiers to attack them. All the language and all the state, you know, the feeling by Israel.

> They are our enemy. So what does it mean that citizens, supposed by the constitution to be equal citizens, what does it means that we see them as enemy, that the state in certain points, not always, but in violent crisis, we see them immediately as enemies?[1]
>
> This is something that made me realise that Zionism is … about having a place only for one people … [I]f we have others here, they can be here, but as long as they don't challenge anything, and also they don't ask for too many equal right, cos this is impossible. They'll never have equal rights … the Law of Return says explicitly, and now many other laws, and also the practices. It's not hidden, it's out there. So then, I understood … Zionism and peace, or peace with the people living here on this land, the two things cannot work together. So either you can be Zionist and – eh – or, if you want to think about it really, you have to quit Zionism as it is today, or as it's been established since the *Nakba*.

Having built a career in co-existence education, Bronstein had already accepted his embeddedness in Israel's malaise. 'I am very much part of this shit going on here. So in other words, me, an Israeli Jew, even though I'm non-Zionist, even anti-Zionist, whatever … I'm still I'm a part. I'm this side … ' But after some time, mere recognition became inadequate. 'Like, okay, now what [do] we do about it? I'm stuck with this terrible coloniser identity, what am I doing with it? Just telling it? It's not enough!' So Bronstein founded *Zochrot*, which he represents as part of his connection to Israeli Jews.

> I see myself, in a way, [as] a converted Zionist that wants to take … moral responsibility on our life here and try to do something about it. I don't detach myself from all of this. And I could, theoretically. I could either be here and do totally different things, I don't know, work with money or something, or I could leave. … Many others who share this same ideology choose other ways.

But Bronstein is committed to staying, and is prepared to see the things he loves the most – like Tel Aviv – change, in order to achieve his dream of the return of Palestinian refugees from 1948. 'If I try [to] visual[ise] it, think of living here in one state, Tel Aviv basically, and of course every other place in Israel, will change dramatically, but gradually', he explains.

> It's not the next day after the return of the refugees there will be mosques on every corner … Tel Aviv will not be so dramatic in the

> everyday life. … It will be surrounded by different– on the TV, it will be different. Listen to the radio, the language around us, I hope there will be much more Arabic around us … [T]here will be challenges, I'm sure. And some things, also, I'm sure we'll find compromises, but in other things, I hope it will be enriched. For example, the rather monolithic environment of Tel Aviv in a way, quite, you know, white city, no Arabs around here. I think if this changes, it's for better, not for worse.

In terms of the state, Bronstein declares 'I'd like to see a democratic binational space; I think that both the Jews and the Palestinians can see this place as their home.'

> Jews who wish to join this democratic state are welcome, and Palestinians of course, a bit more welcome than others. It's not that I want to exclude all others, but it's a place that Jews nationally and culturally have some links, more than Vietnamese or Chinese.

I suggest to Bronstein that this reification of identities may prolong their use, embedding conflict. Bronstein responds with 'cultural processes' that can evolve over time into something more shared.

> For example, Europe now … Perhaps in fifty, seventy, one hundred, two hundred years, there will be a much stronger European identity … But nationality is still important. For me, personally, I hope we can understand also this nationalism. Seeing the reality around I know that it's really strong … A more citizenship sense of nationalism … is something that is a bit beyond my vision.

Bronstein explains that his political options are different from those of outsiders. 'I think it's very important to boycott Israel,' he tells me.

> I hope you and other people in the world can join the boycott movement against Israel, to boycott Israeli goods or Israeli people who speak somewhere, in order to change the policy, our policy. Now me, as Israeli, I cannot boycott myself. I consume everything here … and not only that I consume. I'm part of it …

**Jeremy Milgrom**

My third activist is also, like Halper and Bronstein, foreign born. I discover Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom through comments published online under the auspices of Rabbis for Human Rights. Milgrom is my only

interviewee who is religious, and I am keen to know how this informs his politics. I interview Milgrom in Berlin, where he is living at the time following a failed love affair. I am struck by his almost tangible sadness. His deep eyes are misty, his mouth downturned. The pictures I have seen on the internet depict a quintessential hippie with long curly greying hair, but Milgrom displays little bonhomie. He is a man with a heavy weight on his shoulders, which I ascribe to exile rather than heartbreak. 'I am still in Israel, even when I'm here', he tells me.

We begin our conversation by exploring Milgrom's emigration to Israel, which arose out of winning a Bible study contest. Hailing from Berkeley, California, Milgrom was the son of a Conservative rabbi 'raised with an Israeli orientation'. The prize was therefore an apt one: a year's schooling in Israel. This year turned into several, and then decades. Milgrom's parents moved back and forth a few times, but he stayed put. 'It's a very intense thing, becoming Israeli, particularly those years in the late sixties, early seventies. So I guess it kind of got under my skin.' Milgrom describes himself as part of a 'minority' of immigrants to Israel who 'come for idealistic reasons, from comfortable backgrounds … I was attracted', he declares. 'It had a grip on me.'

When I ask him to explain further, he immediately asks me if I have been to Israel. 'It's intoxicating', he exclaims. 'It's part of, everyone is brought into, sucked into, it's a love of the land.' Milgrom admits he still has these responses sometimes, but explains that gradually he 'began to realise, to return to who [he] was' and 'began to realise that there were failings in Israel'. Part of this political awakening arose from his youthful grounding in America.

> Berkeley in California in the sixties … was a place of ideals. I came to Israel and I began to realise that some of those ideals should be bought into play in Israel also, because the military industrial complex, and Vietnam War, which I ran away from, and then they came running after me! In the war in Lebanon it became very clear … Also the situation with the lack of harmonious internal relations between groups, oppression, marginalisation of the minority, which was the story in the United States but … in Israel it is more pervasive …

After finishing school, Milgrom performed his compulsory military service.

> I was 18 and all my classmates who were Israeli were going. I was very drawn to Israel. My main problem about being in the Army

> was knowing that it was dangerous and whether I thought it was right to sacrifice your life for the nation, for the country. That was a moral question. At that point I wasn't really aware of the injustice to Palestinians; I just thought it was tragic that there was a war, a lack of peace. I thought it was okay for me to defend my society with a weapon.

Things would change a decade later, after Milgrom had studied in a New York seminary.

> After my first daughter was born, I realised that I was not going to look at a human being through a gun sight. The experience of bringing life into the world and feeling a commonality with other parents … When I was finally called up [to serve in the Lebanon War] … it was a question of, 'How can I take part in a war which I already knew was illegitimate?' … [M]ost of that month of reserve duty … I was able to do on the Israeli side of the border, to my great relief. I had ten days to go and they needed someone, some replacement up the other side of the border in Lebanon, and suddenly I found myself there. I kind of lost my resolve not to go. As soon as I got there I said, 'I'm not going to stay'. I started a hunger strike …

The next day Milgrom's commanders sent him out of the unit; to his 'great relief' he avoided jail. His commanders invited him to explain his perspective to the other soldiers; in particular his framing of the hunger strike on the basis that the food was not kosher.

> [W]hat eating means to me is an opportunity to feel blessing and respond to that opportunity by saying a blessing over the food. So you incorporate all of your values – the grace after meals is … not like a few words, it's full two pages of ideology, Jewish ideology, a beautiful statement at the end of a meal. And includes the blessing or the gratitude for the land that God gave us. I said, 'Well, this is not the land that God gave us. This is someone else's land, with someone else's house.' And it was fascinating, cos after I said this, one of the officers said to me, 'So you live in Jerusalem, right? So you live in an Arab house!' I said, 'Actually it's not an Arab house, I checked it out before I moved in; this was very important to me.'

Milgrom explains that for a further seven years the military required him to continue reserve duty, while he 'progressively remov[ed] [him]

self from … things [he] had a problem with, to the point that [he] was not holding a gun anymore'.

> There were funny scenes; I was on a guard post. They said, 'Well, your job here is to guard.' I said, 'I'm not going to carry a gun.' They said, 'Okay, we'll put a gun next to you, is that okay?' I said, 'Okay.' I was compromising; they were compromising. One day, they left the gun up there, and it was my gun, I signed for it. The guy who was supposed to take the gun down didn't take the gun down. So, I looked out and found a broom, and … people were screaming, 'What are you doing? You can't carry a gun with a broom!' I said, 'We made a deal. I can't carry the gun. I'm not going to touch the gun.'
>
> Finally, this farce was over, and I went to the very top, wrote letters to the ministers of defence and the generals. I said, this is the situation, this is not good. And they called me up and said, 'Okay, what do you want?' … I offered to do something in the Army that was non-violent, and there was no response. So, this major I was talking to says to me, 'Well, how would you feel if we didn't call you anymore to the Army do reserve duty?' Inside of me, I was jumping up for joy, right, but I didn't want to admit that, that I was so happy, so I said, 'Well, up until a year ago I think I would have been crushed, but now I can deal with it.' *[Laughs.]* 'In that case' [said the major], 'we're going to sign you out and that'll be the end of this. Go to your unit and sign your papers.' So, I went back to the unit, and they had this young man there, I was 37 and he was 23. And he said to me, 'This is the end of your reserve duty. You're not going to be called into the Army anymore, and I want to wish you success in the rest of your life. And maybe some day we'll all be like you.'

Milgrom was blown away by this comment. He thanked the young man, but he had just one more question. 'How is it that all the years I was in this unit, you guys never, you know, it didn't work out, all these options?' Why hadn't they been able to find a way of releasing him from service?

The young man explained. 'The problem was that we couldn't find the right form to fill out for you.'

'Now there is a form like that', Milgrom continues.

> Then, if you had back trouble, if you had domestic problems, if your business was failing, they knew how to deal [with it], they had forms for that. They didn't have a form for someone who didn't want

> to carry a gun. Whose daughter opened his eyes, the birth of his daughter, so they didn't have a form. Now they have.

Milgrom's disillusionment continued. He raised his children in Israel but became 'horrified' by the idea that there would be no peace for them in the future.

> Israel is becoming more extreme. There are certain things that we could not able to imagine would ever be called into question, which are now … Israel defined itself as a Jewish democratic state which is a very interesting, impossible definition, but it was a balancing act that a lot of people still swear by. But, nowadays, I think people are recognising that it's not very democratic, and they're willing to say that we're not going to be democratic. We have these survival issues, but these survival issues have been going on for decades, no longer emergencies; rather, it's a way of life. I think that many Israelis don't expect to reach peace; they just want to manage the conflict; to keep the price from being too high.

Milgrom's activism works towards a one-state solution, which he supports because 'the two state solution would … cut off any chance of Palestinians returning', something 'essential for the peace and also from a moral point of view'.

He recognises 'the attachments that people have to their nation, and their desire to be protected by it, their feeling of insecurity, the national movements and all that', and so he doesn't expect nationalism to disappear. 'The idea of one country of its citizens has to exist at the same time.' He suggests that 'to become inclusive would mean to develop attitudes towards the Other, an awareness, acceptance of the culture, a feeling of commonality'. Milgrom rejects the idea that identities can be prescribed and argues that 'belonging to one of these people is not a death sentence'. He maintains that nobody *has* to live in Israel/Palestine, 'but to the extent that you feel motivated and connected, then … I see our future as living together'. He predicts that ultimately 'Zionism will fade'.

> [I]t's no longer necessary … People talk about Israel being post-Zionist from '48; [it] was already. 'Zionism set up the state, now it's time for us to move over it and to let other things take over.' I think that this is going to be happening more and more. The issues won't even be so much why do we have a state, or even who the 'we' is, but, what do I know, the people I work with, live with, the future.

**Yonatan Pollack**

The final activist in my study is Yonatan Pollack. He is my youngest interviewee, 28 years old when we meet, and the only subject close to my own age. He is by far the most radical. While I am in Israel, Pollack emerges as something of a minor celebrity, struggling against various aspects of the occupation, the Wall in particular. I use my contacts to get his phone number and we arrange an interview in an anarchist bookshop and café in his hometown of Jaffa. Pollack is an attractive and gently spoken young man; vibrant tattoos on his forearms peek out from the sleeves of his black hoodie. The radical activists I know in Australia are extremely anti-nationalist; I am interested to find out what the Israeli variant looks like.

'I grew up in a fairly leftist family', Pollack tells me. 'You could say I'm a second generation red diaper baby ... My parents were not activists but they were always politically aware and left leaning. My grandfather, however, was very activist ... he went to jail for it ... '

> So, the first demonstration my mother took me to, I was about three months old. It was after Sabra and Shatila.[2] The first demonstration I can remember ... was around the beginning of the first *intifada*. I was around six or seven years old. ... The only thing I remember is the police horses being marched at the demonstrators to disperse them ... I remember being very afraid of the horses. ... I became a vegetarian at the age of seven ... Around the age of 12, I got acquainted with the animal rights movement in Israel, which at the time was very anarchist-centred ... . Obviously, I connected with the people around me, got into anarchism, counter-culture, and I think that's really the forming stage of my politicisation, the insurrectionary views, political perception, generally, political action.

I presume that Pollack must have refused Army service.

> I had already dropped out of high school and had a few police records for political activity. I ... came to the ... base and said, 'I won't do it'. I refused to do the medical tests and the psychiatric tests. They looked at my folder and said, 'Okay'. I'm actually the only male I know who was released for reason of manpower surpluses!

Pollack explains his take on Zionism, depicting it as 'a pretty classic colonial enterprise'.

> I mean … the original Zionist ethos was the best way … to interface with that. You know, 'Country without a people for a people without country' crap. It's not that they didn't know there were people here, they knew there were people very well, but they were not Europeans and they were not white. Obviously Zionism had its, you know, its special circumstances … the Holocaust, but that doesn't change the fact that it's largely a movement of white Europeans who were interested in relocating from Europe, from the First World, to the New World, to the Middle East, completely ignoring the rights and the presence of the indigenous population. Zionism isn't the first example of where … the agents of colonialism are not necessarily the elites; for example in Australia it was mostly prisoners.

Pollack explains that the basis for his involvement in Palestinian resistance is the 'South African model' in which 'dissident whites joined the ANC, joined the black resistance to apartheid. I think both that solution and the model of resistance are compatible to the situation here.'

I presume that Pollack must support a one-state solution, but he explains that 'it's largely a Palestinian decision. I think that my obligation as a descendant of colonialism is to say that I support a one state solution … but it's not up to me'.

He is clear, however, that the right of return for Palestinian refugees exists.

> It's not something I do out of generosity, it's their right. And that I would be more than happy to live in one state and obviously lower my privileges … But I do think if the Palestinians say, 'Look, we've had enough, we don't want to live with you', I'm not in the position to say, 'We have to live together'. That's what I would like to see. But … I think the refugees have a right to return here … even in a two-state solution, to Jaffa, to Haifa.

We discuss some of the alternatives to full return, like recognition without implementation, or compensation. Pollack is scathing.

> Under international law – which I don't think is such a great thing, it's obviously the law of the conqueror, of the strong – even under international law they have the right to compensation *and* for returning; they're not mutually exclusive. … [T]hey've already been in exile in the diaspora for 60 years now; obviously, there should be compensation for that. But that does not affect their right to return.

> And personally I would like to see *return*, not just the right of return. I mean, a lot of time the right of return is deconstructed as a theoretic right that should be recognised but not implemented, or people count on the fact that it won't be implemented because of research that the refugees don't want to return. Of course in the current state of affairs they don't want to return – who wants to return to racism and colonialism? But if reality changes and … there is a possibility for a normal life here, I believe that the refugees would like to return and it's a positive thing.

With the right of return fully implemented, Israel would cease to be a 'Jewish state'. Pollack has no problem with this.

'I mean, first of all, we have to ask the question of what is a Jewish state. What is Judaism as a national identity?'

I ask what it is to him.

'I don't have any connection to Judaism', he says, dismissively. 'Obviously I recognise the right of everyone to … self-determination', he continues.

> People want to see themselves as Jews and that's their national identity, so be it. But it's very different than saying there should be a state for Jews. Because what is Judaism, what is being a Jew? Is it someone whose mother is Jewish? Someone whose culture is Jewish? What is Jewish culture? American Jewish culture and Yemenite Jewish culture is very different. I'm not the same ethnicity as him; I'm probably much closer in ethnicity to you. So what is Judaism, what is the common denominator? For me, the only common ground that I can find is religion. And since I'm an atheist, I feel no connection to Judaism.

'I think the idea of the Jewish state is a racist one', Pollack continues.

> It's not something you can compare with the British state; it's not a nationality in the modern … concept of it … In most, in all I think, Western democracies, once you're a citizen, you're part of that nationality. However, you can be a citizen of Israel but you will never be part of the Jewish nationality. This is a racist foundation for a state; therefore it has to be dismantled in order to have any prospects of a future. If Jews want, if people who recognise themselves as Jews want autonomy over everything, any issue of culture and education that concerns them, I see absolutely no reason why that shouldn't be possible. But under a state that is not racially discriminatory …

I ask Pollack about the kind of state he would like to see emerging in Israel/Palestine. '[Y]ou know, ... for me to answer these questions is a little bit ridiculous, because I'm an anarchist', he reminds me.

> I don't believe in the justness of states or its capacity to be an agent of justice, or an agent of equality, or whatever terms you like to use. But, obviously, we do live in reality and the anarchist revolution is not, ah, just around the corner. And as an anarchist I do believe, even in the short term, [in] equal structure, the power of the state, as much as possible. So, obviously, small groups, allowing as much autonomy to any group, is a good thing. The question is, how is this implemented? If it is implemented in the form of 'no go' areas for Palestinians then this is wrong. If it is implemented in the form of more autonomy over education or culture or religion or whatnot, then I think it's a positive thing. Everything, especially with a history of colonialism, is a question of form of implementation.

Pollack explains his involvement with the Palestinian resistance movement in the following terms.

> I just don't think that Israeli society [is] your potential agent of change. I think the agent of change is the Palestinians, and their resistance, and the support that they will get, that they can draw from the international community ... [A]s an anarchist, I believe in joining their struggle. I believe that people should run their own liberation struggles. I'm not so interested in the nationalist part of it, but for me it's obviously a liberation struggle ...

When I suggest that the state's grip appears to be tightening on people like him, Pollack plays it down; neither of us knows that he will be incarcerated before the year's end (*Haaretz*, 2011).

> It's getting worse slowly. These arrests – pretty much released the next day. I've been arrested over 40 times. It's not so horrible ... It is deteriorating, but you know, Palestinians are arrested. First of all, when Israelis are arrested it still gets a lot of coverage; it gets a lot of attention, mainstream attention. It's disputable. Sixteen arrests made in Ni'ilin. Fifteen of these people are still in jail and they're going to remain in jail for a very long time, because they're Palestinians ...

At the conclusion of our interview, I ask Pollack what will happen in the next few years. 'Nothing', he replies. 'Things are slowly deteriorating. I'm a born pessimist. I have no way to predict.'

'If you're so pessimistic,' I ask him, 'then why do you still struggle?'

'You have to. I mean, what's the – the fact that we're not successful, it's worse having done nothing. If you're not 100 per cent successful it doesn't mean that what you do is insignificant.' He shrugs and takes a swig of his orange juice. 'What else would I do?'

## Writers/commentators

I interview four writers and commentators who contribute to deep debate and dialogue, yet all insist they are not activists.

### Gideon Levy

I meet *Haaretz* journalist Gideon Levy at his workplace. We chat for an hour in his poky office, decorated bizarrely with a pinboard of cat pictures. (The room has a makeshift feel; the cat pinboard may in fact be the work of some previous inhabitant.) Levy has written substantially about Israel and Palestine, particularly the occupied territories, which he has visited almost weekly for the three decades since he began his journalism career in the Israeli military (Hari, 2010). His senior position at Israel's liberal broadsheet newspaper gives him freedom to pursue his interests, but Israeli laws have denied him the opportunity of reporting from the frontline in Gaza since 2006 (Hari, 2010). Instead, he combines documenting the ongoing struggles of life for West Bank Palestinians with opinion pieces castigating his society. These target the occupation, which he sees as the single greatest problem. However, he is critical of other elements of Israeli life, including social mistrust of orthodox Jews, attacks on homosexuals, a culture of meaningless military heroics and the demise of the political left (see Bibliography).

Coming from a fairly apolitical background, Levy grew up with a default attachment to Zionism and the Jewish collective. These things have not evaporated with his radicalisation, but instead co-exist with it. This means that Levy remains something of a left-wing Zionist, the kind he says does not exist anymore. He puts himself 'in the margins' amongst 'some groups, individuals who are very radical, very devoted, very courageous', but too small to be a real movement. Levy's particular brand of Zionism sees him engaging with Israel's past in an interesting way. 'I carry the past as a ... moral burden', he explains. 'I think that would Israel recognise the past, it would also

be easier with the Palestinians and more courageous and … generous in the present.'

This informs his opposition to the occupation. 'I think we don't have the moral right to hold this Occupation for 42 years – any case, we *don't* have the right for this – but it's more true because of the past.' Levy's desire for symbolic recognition and restoration echoes the sentiment of Eitan Bronstein's *Zochrot*, but for Levy the gesture has to end with symbolism and financial support.

> Moral recognition, rehabilitating the refugees, many of them in places where they are, with international and Israeli economic help. I've been to refugee camps in Jordan, I've no doubt that those people if they can just live better, they would stay there …

Levy supports a two-state solution, but would like to see Israel as a state of its citizens, rather than a Jewish state. 'I wish it would become, like Australia is … ' he declares passionately.

> I don't know what it means, Jewish state. I mean, we have one million Russians, half of them at least are not Jewish … It doesn't talk to me at all, this whole concept of – why a non-Jewish Russian is more Jewish than a Palestinian who lived here for generations.

Levy would also support a binational state if it appeared more likely to arise.

Three years after our interview, Levy comes out publicly in favour of BDS, describing his action as 'the last refuge of a patriot' (2013). He frames this intervention, like the words and actions that have preceded it, as driven by his connection to his society.

'I never thought about leaving', he tells me.

> I never thought about going into exile. I'm part of it, for the good and for the bad. I carry moral responsibilities for everything that Israel is doing: settlements, Cast Lead, anything. I'm part of it. This was my choice, this is my choice, this is my place, this is my culture, this is my language – they are my fellow Israelis.

However, unlike Bronstein, who purports to care even for those he opposes, Levy is vitriolic about some of his fellow citizens. He tells me that once he was driving with a former colleague, and commented that

if he saw an injured settler on the side of the road, he wouldn't stop to help.

> Let's say the truth, I hate them. Because of what they do, not what they are. Because of the fact of where they live… I don't recognise that there are moderate settlers and bad settlers. To me they are all the same.

When I tell Levy about a friend who says he supported Palestinians until they started blowing up Israeli buses, Levy responds:

> I'm really disgusted by this kind of Israelis… who, when they started not to behave themselves –the Palestinians – I never was motivated by this, whether the Palestinians are nice or not nice, if they treat their women nice or not nice. This is not my judgement. I'm judging *ourselves*. My main focus is what *we* are doing. And this does not change, this just becomes worse and worse. So I never – on the contrary. All those terrible days, and they *were* terrible days – 2002, 2003, exploding buses – just showed me how much I'm right and how much it calls for a solution, and how much it will not be solved by itself.

'I think about what I'm driven by', Levy muses. 'A deep feeling of guilt. I think this is my main motivation. I really feel guilty about the Palestinians… Because I think we've done them terrible things, '48, '67, ever since that, and I feel personal guilt.' The guilt is personal, he explains,

> Because I'm part of this collective. Because I always define myself as an Israeli patriot. Because I am so much attached to this collective, this place, this society, or whatever. I feel guilty on behalf of things that I was against!

Levy feels guilt 'after every story'.

> [A]lmost every day when I read the newspaper, I feel at least ashamed, if not guilty. And guilt, I feel, really, because of atrocities… [W]hen I came to see those people – and so many times I come to the remains of victims, victims by themselves – for so many years I've done it, and so many years I sit, and I hear the story. I feel as if I have done it.

Levy suggests that this guilt underpins his society, masked as it is by aggression. '[T]hey found, once, a speech of one of the Zionist leaders … in the Knesset', he tells me.

> There was a small remark saying, 'A weak argument, please raise your voice'. So this aggression shows, I think. I truly believe that part of the Israelis, not all of them, part of them, in the back of their minds, feel that something went wrong. They won't admit it, they are living in denial, they are brainwashed, and everything – and still, this aggression shows [a] lack of confidence …

'You can see it in titles in the newspaper', he adds.

> 'Israelis are leading.' We are always – we are the best. In the world. No one, even the Americans, would be so occupied with being the best, the number one. … I think [it's] because nothing has, here, any real deep roots … You see it, even if you come to Tel Aviv. Every two years, if you come here, you see different shops. Everything changes all the time. No roots. It's part of the lack of confidence, sure. It's exactly like being aggressive to our criticisers.

Like Bronstein, Levy embeds himself in Tel Aviv life, albeit in its more salubrious quarters. My hosts have told me that he has a reputation for enjoying the good life. 'I have full bourgeois life in Tel Aviv', Levy confirms. He is at pains to draw a line between his private and professional existence. 'It's my work', he says of his writing about the sufferings of Palestinians. 'It's not my hobby. It's not that I'm an activist.' He tells me that, on limited occasions, he has tried to help Palestinians, but seems to shy away from this. 'I also, well', he shrugs, 'I also have my life, which is nothing to lose.' He speaks of 'tough times' when his two lives – the one in Tel Aviv and the one engaged with Palestine – have met. 'There were times, like in Cast Lead … I go every Saturday to the beach, after my tennis game, and see the helicopters in the sky. People don't even look at them. And life continues like nothing.' He also speaks of 'bad days in which I would come from terrible stories in the West Bank or in Gaza and immediately go to a restaurant in Tel Aviv.'

Levy sets himself up in opposition to 'weirdos' who are active around Palestine. 'I am writing in a leading newspaper … I don't live in a Palestinian village, not in the territories, I don't organise, I am not an activist.' He compares himself to Amira Hass, another well-known *Haaretz* writer who reports on the occupied territories. 'She was brought

up in a communist home. She is living in Ramallah. She is doing admirable work, but she excludes herself in many ways from the Israeli society.' When Hass comes to Tel Aviv, 'she has to leave after two hours, because she gets a headache'. Levy, who 'love[s] Tel Aviv', tries 'to remain somehow connected to the mainstream by way of living, by the place that [he] work[s] for; it's all about the mainstream'. In separating himself from the 'weirdos' (whom he nevertheless 'highly appreciates'), Levy claims legitimacy.

> I appear on TV a lot, debates and programmes and things like this, so I'm trying at least not to become a weirdo. Because part of these people are perceived as weirdos. They are not weirdos, but they are perceived as weirdos. I try not to be perceived as a weirdo. Maybe I succeed, maybe not, but this gives me also more power.

**Gilad Atzmon**

Another writer I explore is Gilad Atzmon. Like Levy, Atzmon rejects the activist label, though the 'weirdo' one is probably unavoidable. Atzmon, an Israeli-born jazz musician, has made a successful life for himself in London, travelling the world playing music and moonlighting as one of Israel's most vitriolic critics. Over the last decade, he has published a number of lengthy articles on his website, www.gilad.co.uk; he has since incorporated several of these into a book (2011).

I am interested in Atzmon both as an ex-Israeli and as a commentator on identification. I fly to London to meet him and he generously gives me several hours of his time following a jazz gig, which I attend. After our interview, Atzmon loads me up with CDs and tells me he will post what I write on his website. He has marked me as a fellow traveller, which I find somewhat alarming. However, as I shall subsequently demonstrate, Atzmon's extreme reflections tell us something about the options available for dissidents.

Atzmon elaborates his background in his book. He describes a childhood blindness to Palestinians; falling in love with jazz made by black musicians opens him up to the possibility that it is not 'only Jews who were associated with anything good' (p. 2). His passion for music erodes any military or nationalistic sentiments and connects him to a global milieu, yet does not invoke overt opposition. That develops later, while he is serving in the Israeli Air Force Orchestra with other musicians who are preoccupied only with their own 'personal musical development'. The performers convene to practise playing badly so they can dodge future invitations to perform; here, Atzmon learns 'subversion' (p. 5). A

concert at a 'concentration camp' in Lebanon leads Atzmon to identify as a Nazi *vis à vis* defiant Palestinian prisoners. He complains about small concrete boxes in which he presumes the military locks guard dogs. He is shocked to discover that the boxes instead hold human prisoners. He plots to exit Israel permanently; a decade later, he succeeds. In London, he realises he misses Palestine, not Israel, and soothes his homesickness at a Lebanese restaurant. He studies post-graduate philosophy but becomes an international music star instead.

In our interview, he explains to me that his attitude to life is 'probably something to do with [his] Israeliness'. 'I just do what I want', he declares. 'I don't give a toss about anything.' 'My father, who was a right-wing Zionist, taught me, "I don't agree with anything that you say, but as long as … it's well-argued".' Later, he says, 'I took a lot from Zionism and I'm proud of myself. I even give Zionism the credit for … attempting to re-establish a new Jew.'

Atzmon is also happy to praise some Israelis. During the wars in Lebanon and Gaza, 'it was the Israelis' who provided the outside world with 'names, all the information that we need' in order to bring legal cases against 'Israeli soldiers [and] Generals. … [T]he Israeli dissidents is far more interesting than any other forms of Jewish dissidents', he continues. '… Because they're inside, because they're courageous, because part of the Israeli culture is to speak out proudly.'

Atzmon also expresses sympathy with those on the 'so-called' Israeli left who seek to end the occupation.

> [T]hey try to resolve their own problem, which is a legitimate manoeuvre. Let's say that you buy a house, took mortgage … And then a week later you go down to the shelter and you see seven Aborigines strapped to the wall. 'Oh my God, what are you doing here?' … Now you are fucked. You are committed to the mortgage, you are living on someone else's house. It's not entirely your fault. The Israelis are trapped as much as you would be in this situation …

To understand the significance of Atzmon's sentiments, one has to contextualise them with his avowed hatred of the Israeli state, his criticisms of Zionist and 'Jewish' ideology, and his attitude towards the international Jewish community. Atzmon's dislike extends equally to Israel's champions and critics. Shielded from his vitriol are only those 'Torah Jews' who find reasons within their faith to oppose Israel.

Atzmon's take is that there is no such thing as a secular Jewish identity, unless it is a national identity. There are religious Jews, who

can find legitimate criticisms of Israel in the Torah. Then there are Zionist Jews, both in Israel and outside, who believe that the Jews are a national group, and nations are entitled to states, so Israel is the obvious solution. Atzmon disagrees with the legitimacy of Israel, built on 'stolen land', so he opposes this perspective (2004). The third position is that of an ethnic or cultural Jewishness that rejects Zionism, or at least key elements of Israeli policy like the occupation of Palestinian territory. This is the position of much of the critical international Jewish community, made up of what Atzmon calls 'Not in My Name (NIMN) Jews' (2004). NIMN Jews are not religious, but they activate a Jewish identity in their criticism of Israel. In Atzmon's eyes, this is a bogus course of action; a non-religious Jewish identity must be a national identity, thus its invocation gives strength to Zionism.

Atzmon explains in the interview that he does not oppose secular Jewish identity, but rather its use as a political argument:

> What I'm telling to the secular Jew, he wants to have his fucking chicken soup – have it! But he'll have to admit that chicken soup is not a political argument. So Italian[s] have their pizzas, but they don't have pizzas for human rights! They don't have Bolognaise for Palestine!

'... [I]f the Jews regard themselves as racially oriented group, and they want to act out of this racial orientated banner, they are promoting racism', Atzmon continues. 'And if you're promoting racism, you cannot at the same time claim to serve the universal cause.' He backs this up with signature vitriol: 'To be a secular Jew is not a crime ... To operate politically as a Jew makes you into a Piece. Of. Shit. Categorically. Unless you are religious', he adds hastily.

Atzmon's core diagnosis of the problem facing Israel/Palestine is the cultural factor of Jewish ideology, and in particular the depiction of the Jewish people as chosen. However, unlike any other account with which I have engaged until our interview, Atzmon extends this argument to a sympathetic account of the Nazi ideology.

'I don't justify what happened there', he explains.

> I don't justify the ethnic cleansing. But I think what the Israelis are doing [now] explains how they got themselves into this persecution in the first place, and how they're going to get themselves into big trouble in the near future ...

Atzmon further explains that he is not convinced about 'what happened there' in the Holocaust.

> ... I know what is the narrative; I hardly believe any of it. The issue is that we cannot really know or talk about it in this country [the United Kingdom] because we are part of Europe. And there is legislation in Europe against talking about the factuality of the Holocaust. But, I know one thing: there is a big paradox in the Holocaust. On the one hand, we have the story of ethnic cleansing, racially orientated, nobody argued about it. ... Then something happened which we are not allowed to really investigate. Gas chambers, not gas chambers, gas chambers, what was the capacity. Quite a few people died, we don't know how many. But one thing is clear: at the end of the war, the Germans are defeated, and we have a death march. And in this death march, hundreds of thousands of Jews are schlepped back to Germany. How do we fit a coherent picture of the German ideology with ethnic cleansing ... on one side, and the schlepping back of the Jews into Germany? They either want them out, or they let them in! One of the answers that I came across ... is that Jews wanted to join the Germans. They didn't want to wait for the Russians, they were very afraid of the Soviets. They probably knew why! [Laughs.] ... Now, if the Germans were gassing them in Auschwitz, why would they join the Germans? Another option, ... presented by the Germanophilic historians, is that there was an epidemic of typhus, and the German Army took an initiative to quarantine, so the death march was a humanitarian approach. So, when I look at the Holocaust I end up with more questions than answers.

'... We have to be very very suspicious with everything we say or learn about the Nazis', he tells me at another point, suggesting that I 'start to read revisionist[s], because they are well-documented, at least'.

'David Irving is definitely the best English-speaking historian', he declares. '... [H]e is the biggest expert. Finkelstein, who is a historian, says there is no doubt that Irving is the biggest historian. But there are plenty. ... [Irving] made one big mistake', he adds. 'He took this intellectually-kind-of-nothing [man] to court for calling him an Holocaust-denier. For sure, he's a Holocaust denier ... He should be proud of it!'

'So, are you a Holocaust denier?' I ask.

'I don't engage in historical narratives, I talk about philosophy of history', announces Atzmon airily. '... I don't accept this notion at all ... of a denier', he continues,

> because first we have to define: what is the Holocaust? We cannot do that, because there is legislation that doesn't allow us, you know! As long as we are not entitled to agree what the Holocaust was, how can I agree that I can deny or otherwise?

When we leave this issue behind to discuss the political situation in Israel/Palestine, Atzmon tells me, 'I am happy with the status quo'.

> ... The facts on the ground are: apartheid state, with a growing majority of Palestinian people between the river to the sea. The facts on the ground are leading into one Palestinian state ... I would prefer, you know, that the Israelis would be slightly more vicious [sic], but anyway, their viciousness reflect on their ... collective identity, or it reflect on who they are. It gave us a very good perspective into the issue of their history, we can at last comprehend their history. So, everything is fine.

This does not lend itself to resolving the conflict, but Atzmon tells me, 'We are fighting Jewish power. Palestine is just one symptom of Jewish brutality ...' At another moment, he declares,

> Israel is just one symptom of Jewishness. Zionism is a global movement. It has nothing to do with Palestine. Zionists operate here [in the UK], they have some wide interests. What is it that they want? This is one of those big questions. It's not clear. Because if they want security, it doesn't work, because they really draw fire.

We discuss the possibilities for people facing the dilemma that Atzmon once faced – disagreeing with the practices carried out in their name. He suggests that

> some Israelis could come now and tell the United Nations, 'You fucked us up. Rather than letting us stay in Europe, you sent us all to there', which is a legitimate argument. 'I want my house. I want you German to look after me, you French, you English.'

So is leaving the only option? What should an anti-Zionist Israeli, with no citizenship of another country, do?

'He has a problem', states Atzmon bluntly.

> ... I'm a philosopher, I'm not a politician. To start with, he should confront his misery ... Because in most cases, 99 per cent of the cases, rather than confronting their misery, they come into political solution. I'm not looking for political solutions ... My mother is one of those cases, and she's a wandering, lost kind of this type ... She was born as a Palestinian in Palestine. She's become Israeli ... She doesn't want to be there. She doesn't have any other passport ... They have to find their way ... They can ask for being asylum seekers. ... By the way, I didn't have a British passport. I was here, I was good citizen, I paid tax. It took me quite a few years to become British subject. I did it. ... One thing that is unacceptable: they cannot live on stolen land and saturate us with their lefty bullshit.

Atzmon warms to this theme, despite having earlier declared that Israelis trying to solve this problem are enacting a 'legitimate manoeuvre'. Now, he declares, 'I despise left Zionist Jews who live there more than the right wing!'

Returning to the quandary of the 'wandering, lost' Jew, Atzmon argues, 'You have to find a way. It's a personal issue ... And once we come with the political resolution you already turn the issue into a – you refuse the possibility of ethical engagement.' This underscores Atzmon's refusal to engage with political solutions. 'I'm not trying to lead a movement. My entire issue is to raise questions.'

What should people do with them?

> That's their business ... I don't know what to do with them! ... Sometimes, I suggest the answer, and then I change it ... I don't have any answer to the Israelis. Shlomo Sand ... said, 'We are not a nation, we invented ourselves one hundred years ago'. An Israeli ... stood up in one of the press conferences and said, 'Listen, I'm Israeli. I was born Israeli. I feel Israeli. What do you want me to do?' He obviously didn't have an answer. I have my answer. I'm ex-Israeli. I resolved my situation.

At this point, Atzmon's gentle wife Tali cuts in with a succinct observation. 'It can't be resolved collectively, that's the thing. It is down to every individual.'

'And this is the answer, this is the most important things to say', Atzmon agrees emphatically.

> Why? Cos one of the problem[s] that we have here is that Jews can operate as a collective, but the dissidents cannot be a collective, because it is based on the rejection of the collective. So once you turn it into the collective, which the 'good Jew' [is] trying to do, fucking bring it down!

**Dorit Rabinyan**

The sole female subject of this book is a very different kind of writer. Dorit Rabinyan is a well-loved Israeli novelist whose books determinedly skirt Middle Eastern politics. Their magical realism evokes the culture of Jewish communities in Persia, from where Rabinyan's family hails. Critics have unearthed subversive layers in her books, but Rabinyan maintains a distance from such things. '[W]riting a story is like singing in the shower,' she tells me.

> If you remember that someone will say, 'It was a political thing not to write about Israel and to write about the Diaspora,' or to tell about your grandmother's story before you tell about your own story, or to reflect yourself in a Jewish feminine minority, all this, like – fuck! I want to sing in the shower, you know. I want to enjoy my own voice!

I meet Rabinyan in a coffee shop beneath her Tel Aviv apartment a few hours before Shabbat. She is short and curvy with exotic colouring to my Western eyes. She looks younger than her thirty-seven years, and has the most amazing black, lustrous hair. She has with her a slightly built spaniel, which runs to greet me like an old friend.

Whilst Rabinyan's novels would not qualify her for attention in this book, she has written one piece that I regard as highly political, published in the *Guardian* in 2004. In it, Rabinyan details the life and death of Palestinian artist Hasan Hourani, and charts her own journey from well-meaning ignorance to intimate connection with the Other through their year long friendship. She invokes powerful images of her similarity and connectedness to Hourani, despite their possession of 'enemy passports.' Rabinyan recounts the political arguments between herself – a supporter of a modest two-state solution in which Zionism remains intact – and Hourani, who aspires to a single state. Rabinyan laments that such a 'solution' would simply reverse their roles in the tragedy, placing her as stateless exile. However, after detailing Hourani's tragic drowning at the beach in Jaffa – he sneaks into Israel illegally and chooses an unobserved and unsafe place to swim – Rabinyan evocatively

depicts his 'binational dream,' rendering her own political aspirations uninspiring by contrast.

I imagine Hourani as the voice for things that Rabinyan dare not admit, but Rabinyan shatters these illusions in our interview, revealing that she has not changed her mind about anything. 'I still argue with Hasan in my head,' she declares. She has retreated from politics. When I tell her what is going on at the time of our interview, she expresses a weary half-interest. 'Yeah? … I don't know nothing. I don't read newspapers … In a way I'm tired with it, I let go. But umm, I'm scared to say what's going to happen … I'm frustrated … '

The fact that Rabinyan's writing fails to advocate for her own 'lukewarm' peace and two-state solution is of little importance. 'I don't care who convinces on it. I can't do anything to change someone's political view … It's not my aim.' Yet Rabinyan admits that Hourani's binational state functions as the foil to her 'realistic' two-state solution. 'In a way, I needed to have his state to be more – I see it as a fantasy, I keep on seeing it as a fantasy.'

She continues to visit Hourani's family.

> [W]hen I go to Ramallah, I enjoy very much, I enjoy being close to Hasan in a way. I enjoy the normality. Just so normal. Like, you know, I visit them. They're so happy with me. They celebrate me in such a beautiful way. Cos, you know it's like, his mother told me, 'I can smell him from your hair!'

Rabinyan's trips are illegal, since Israel prohibits its citizens from entering this zone of the West Bank. 'When I go through the checkpoint, I go through as Palestinian. Nobody doubts that I'm [Palestinian] … At this place, it gives me benefits, I'm using it!'

Rabinyan invokes blurred boundaries several times during the interview. 'The fact that I can see so many contradictions in the checkpoints is because the ones who are the soldiers and the Palestinian citizens, they look so much alike.' In her relationship with Hourani, again similarity draws them together; 'something … very familiar with the way I felt to Arabness; that it wasn't coloured for me with fearful colours. It was something that I knew from within.'

I ask her if her Mizrahi identification made Hourani seem less Other.[3] 'No, he *was* the Other,' she insists.

> But I was the Other as well! He has the luggage of my Otherness here. In a way, I could refer to something in myself … this Mizrahi element,

> on the background of his Arabness… My Mizrahi identity reflecting the Israeli background is different reflected within him.

More poignantly, she concludes, 'He was familiar. He was, in a way, something lost that I found.' She alludes several times to their 'relationship' and finally I ask, tentatively, if they were lovers. 'Of course we were lovers!' she laughs scornfully. 'You think I'd go all this way for a friend?'

Another motif for Rabinyan is equality. When I ask if she supports the existence of a Palestinian Army, she tells me,

> This is something, me and Hasan, we spoke about, and I said, yes, let you have a state, you have a strong Army, then let us fight, and then when we're equal, let us see. When you're not so miserable, when not you're not victimised by this situation, by the colonialists or the European imperialists who made us to be stronger than you.

Continuing to address Hasan, she claims:

> I don't want you to be stronger than me. I *aim* for equalness because in equalness I can be the bad one in the afternoon and the good one in the morning. I can accept this elusive justice that runs between ourselves, one day you are the good one, one day I'm the bad one, and we're shifting.

'[E]qualness was a crucial thing' in their relationship, she tells me.

> It was very important for me that on the ground of New York we were equal. The fact that, the starting point was that him being occupied by my people, makes him inferior to me in this world. [I] was obsessed with us being equal, with us being free and comfortable.

**Meron Benvenisti**

The final writer I explore is Meron Benvenisti, who has been an academic, analyst and politician. Now, in his golden years, he is primarily a commentator; writing for *Haaretz* until 2009 and continuing to make irregular contributions. He has also written several books, keeping his identification contained within small anecdotes that raise more questions than they answer. This is particularly the case in *Son of the Cypresses* (2007), which invites the reader to approach the content as autobiography, but on closer inspection the book actually consists

largely of previously published opinion pieces, with no grand narrative tying them together. Benvenisti published his actual autobiography in Hebrew in 2012, but the text remains out of reach to English-speakers.

To the extent that there is a grand narrative to Benvenisti's work, it would be the argument that Israel/Palestine is already a binational entity, and perhaps was always so. Whilst Benvenisti has largely engaged in observation and analysis, he has also written articles modelling how this binational reality could be transformed into a binational state (2003). A deep criticism of the Israeli right's desire to control all of Israel/Palestine underpins Benvenisti's analysis, but he reserves equal, if not greater, vitriol for leftists, whom he savages for their arrogance, lack of empathy and use of terms like 'the occupation'. To Benvenisti, this term is a smoke-screen; Israel's settlement of the West Bank is 'quasi-permanent' (2007).

In *Son of the Cypresses*, Benvenisti recounts his childhood in Palestine, dwelling in particular upon his father, David Benvenisti, a founder of 'Knowing the Land'. This discipline, taught in schools and encouraged as a popular pursuit, encouraged young people to hike, observe and reify the Land of Israel, with new, Hebrew names. 'Knowing the Land' formed an important part of building a 'nativist' narrative amongst Jews before and after the State of Israel is created; by 'knowing' the land, these eager participants simultaneously 'Judaized' (de-Arabised) it whilst 'nativising' themselves. In what he calls 'delayed filial rebellion', Benvenisti junior rejects his father's project, which doesn't engage with the land as it really is, but instead fetishises it, deliberately excluding Palestinian Arabs and their communities from emerging maps. A determination to *really* know the land underscores Benvenisti's work. In *Sacred Landscape: A Buried City of the Holy Land* (2000), he meticulously details how Jewish occupants have taken over various Palestinian villages and towns, replacing references to Palestinian names with Jewish ones; a process facilitated by the removal of actual people from the land in 1948. He appears to adopt an empathic tone regarding those who have been uprooted, and displays moral outrage at the Orwellian replacement of nomenclature.

Benvenisti's most poignant expression features in a *Haaretz* article by our old friend Ari Shavit, in which he lays bare his break from Zionism and represents the futures of Israeli Jews and Palestinians as intertwined, like their pasts. Benvenisti describes his recent reframing of the conflict in Israel/Palestine from a 'struggle between two national movements for the same land' (for which two states is an appropriate solution) to 'a conflict between a society of immigrants and a society of natives'. The 'conquering immigrants' have been 'unable to enjoy the fruits of their victory', 'achieve tranquillity' or 'entrench peace for themselves'.

Reflecting that neither party in the conflict will ever give up its claims, Benvenisti rejects the two-state solution.

> You can erect all the walls in the world here but you won't be able to overcome the fact that there is only one aquifer here and the same air and that all the streams run into the same sea. You won't be able to overcome the fact that this country will not tolerate a border in its midst.

Benvenisti suggests Israel's leaders will have to go through a similar process to South Africa's in relinquishing apartheid. After describing a binational state based on federalism, he moves into the emotive sphere of identification.

> I am 70 now, and I have the right to engage in summing up. And I was part of it all here: the youth movement and the army and the kibbutz and politics. I am the salt of the earth and I'm not ashamed of it … I won't let anyone tell me I am a traitor. I won't let anyone say I'm not from here – including the Palestinians. I am exactly what my father wanted me to be: a native … I am a native son. But this is a country in which there were always Arabs. This is a country in which the Arabs are the landscape, the natives. So I am not afraid of them. I don't see myself living here without them. In my eyes, without Arabs, this is a barren land.

Benvenisti is 'drawn to the Arab culture and Arabic language because it is here. It is the land.' He is 'neo-Canaanite', declaring, 'I love everything that springs from this soil'. He describes his attachment to those who lost their place on the land, declaring, 'Today, I live their tragedy, even though I perhaps caused it … For years I didn't know how to translate that attachment into political language. Now, the binational mode of thought may give it political expression.'

However, as we shall see later in the book, Benvenisti is a complicated man, and his narrative of his place in Palestine contains interesting contradictions. We shall revisit him, and the rest of the dissidents, in the remaining chapters.

## Conclusion

The 11 dissidents introduced here reflect unique responses to the dilemma of concern for the Other in the context of a hegemonic

*ressentiment* discourse. Their diversity demonstrates that there is no set method for dealing with the dilemma; instead, individuals employ a range of responses. The next two chapters extract and examine some of the discontinuities that emerge in these responses. A single-page summary of the dissidents is included in the Appendix for the reader's convenience during the remainder of the book, if required.

# 5
# Themes of Dissident Dissonance: Historicisation and Identification

## Introduction

The next two chapters examine discontinuity within the dissidents' narratives, explaining how we might perceive the dissidents as constrained by the state, *ressentiment* Zionism and the hostile relations these have generated with the Other. As the dissidents are well-intentioned individuals in a difficult situation, I emphasise that dissonance is a manifestation of their dilemma rather than a personal failing. We can observe dissonance across multiple narratives, so I organise the dissidents' responses into themed sections, which run through both chapters. Each section begins with a brief elaboration, then employs illustrative examples, and not every dissident is included in each section. This chapter specifically focuses on the dissidents' identification and engagement with historical narratives.

## Attraction to Zionism

The dilemma experienced by the dissidents is constituted in part by their categorisation as the privileged Jewish Us in an ethnocratiser state. For some, this categorisation goes beyond denoting objective legal status, invoking identification and attraction to either the Zionist project or its creation of a vibrant Jewish society in Palestine. This attraction is a site in which we can explore dissonance within the dissidents' narratives.

American-born Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom demonstrates why the concept of a Jewish national homeland might be an attractive proposition, perhaps unwittingly invoking Kymlicka's (1989) argument that 'minority

cultures' in pluralist liberal democracies need to expend extra energy on that which 'the majority' takes for granted.

> It could be that if you're an artist, say, living in an American Jewish community, all your creative energy goes into prayer and things. You come to Israel, you can be an artist and have more of a discourse with artists … interesting things can happen. I have liked living among Jews in Israel …

Such an attachment to a Jewish cultural collective leads other dissidents to identify overtly as Zionists, albeit in ways that challenge the conventional understandings of Zionism explored thus far in this book. Oren Yiftachel (2007) frames his vision for Israel's future as 'the only way to ensure that we remain there'. By 'we' he means what he refers to as 'Hebrews'; their collective right to the land constitutes a 'basic idea of Zionism that [he] support[s]'.

Eitan Bronstein also sees himself 'as a Zionist in a way, but totally in a different way'.

> I see *me* as this product of Zionism … Me becoming Eitan … is a very Zionist practice. Hebraising my name, very name. Even to add to it, the meaning of Eitan … Eitan in Hebrew is 'strong' or 'virile'. … The … Zionist revolution, how they saw it in Europe, they hoped to have a new person there in Palestine, working the land and being strong. The new Jew. Not anymore this weak Jew dealing with, you know, trade or money, but a new Jew, working the land, strong, virile, like my name …

Bronstein's bicycle-fit body and smile-lines etched by the Middle Eastern sun epitomise this 'new Jew'. 'I carry this on my body', he continues.

> My name. The language I speak. The language, Hebrew, is a Zionist project … The whole Hebrew language and culture. My whole life here, you know. I love Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv is … as the slogan goes, or the myth, the first Hebrew city, and I'm part of it and I love it …

Bronstein even frames his dissidence as stemming from his self-proclaimed native status, which he links to the Zionist project.

> Israel is very much an immigrant society. So … [it has] all kinds of people and you feel that they're not exactly from here. They have

> strange accent … When someone very nationalist, Zionist, argues with me – there was this one case, it was on the radio … a very popular show, he invite[d] me again and again to be interviewed there. He is very nationalist and he has a very strong French accent. It's so funny … [M]y accent, it is much more better than him. And he is [saying] 'It's our country, you are working against us.' … In this sense, I think I'm better than him … Because he is not exactly from here … So yeah, in a way I also feel that he doesn't know what he's talking about. He never went to the Army here. He's not part of this place. I know it's wrong, what I'm saying. I think I take this thing from Zionism, this ranking of people, being Israeli, but I hope I use it to help something good, you know. Like if more 'better Israelis' like me, people like us, I hope this can make this place better. … Like for example, these Jewish American settlers. We look at them, and we're ashamed of them, of course, and hate them, many things, but we think, in a way, that they are less Israelis than us …

For Bronstein, simply living in Israel means, in some sense, being Zionist.

> I live through contradictions all the time … My kids, they listen to one story at home but they face or they experience … terrible language and culture in school, other places. So the contradictions are all the time, yes. I hope I have enough sense of humour to contain these contradictions, because I don't think I can be too rigid in trying to solve these contradictions. In some places, we try, here in *Zochrot* and personally, to do something about it. To show it, to tell it to other people, to do *Zochrot*, to do many things. But if I think I can solve all the contradictions – anyway we cannot solve this anywhere, in any place in the world. But here, these contradictions are so clear and so terrible in many ways. Because on the one hand, I love it, and many things around here I like very much. On the other hand, some things from our political culture and political life and daily life, I hate. So it's a terrible contradiction.

Bronstein retains an overall connection to Israeli Jews and, by extension, Zionism.

> … [T]he fact that I choose the way to live here and to speak the language and write this language and to address Israelis, I think, I hope, I have enough compassion to my Israeli fellows, you know. And this means that I must of course identify with them in a way, with

> Israelis, and understand that *we* Israelis have a big problem. Now, this I cannot do without some, even, in a way, empathy or sympathy to them, to Israelis. Now, yes, Israelis are Zionist, most of us, and I have to love this part too, in a way…

Jeff Halper shared this attraction when he first travelled to Israel. 'I started writing a little on Israeli culture, Hebrew culture, they're really interesting and I really like them. So I *was* Israeli, and I *am*.' He translates this into his modern work. 'We are the *Israeli* Committee Against Housing Demolitions. We emphasise the Israeli part.'

Dorit Rabinyan takes her attachment to the 'Jewish collective' even further, maintaining a preference for a Jewish state.

> My state, my homeland, the place I belong to…is a Jewish state…There's only one Jewish state around, on the globe, on earth, and this is mine, this is where I feel related to and identify with, and with its essence and values and definition to be Jewish. I find it the right thing to be.

Meron Benvenisti also reveals such sentiments when I ask him about his apparent support for a one-state solution, deduced from his poignant evocation of a binational state (Shavit, 2003) and his practical guide for its establishment (Benvenisti, 2003).

'I don't say that I want to see it!' he retorts emphatically. 'I am the one who is very upset about it, cos I wanted a Jewish state. The fact that it doesn't exist, or it cannot, now it's quasi-permanent binational regime, doesn't mean that I love it.'

While some dissidents frame their identification with the Zionist project and its consequences as support for the establishment of a national collective, others offer a reclaimed take on Zionism, or indeed offer a rather unreconstructed version of it. The next section explores how such affiliations generate tensions when combined with a critical view of the injustices experienced by Others.

## The past: 'national' history

Dissidents' interpretations of the Zionist project can generate tensions when paired with regrets about the treatment of Others. Farid Abdel-Nour (2003) argues that when people imagine themselves to belong to a nation, they align themselves with deeds done in that nation's past, and feel pride in this connection. Such identification is also the source of responsibility for wrongs done to Others; to the extent that an

individual feels pride and connection, he or she should also bear some responsibility.

> [A]n admission of guilt … would be disingenuous, since she would do it again … Rather, she might be led to reflect on the kind of person she is, at what it says about her to be proud about this act of founding. The discourse of shame opens up this possibility. (pp. 710–11)

However, there is a limit to such a discourse of shame, as when Eitan Bronstein realises that recognising his 'terrible coloniser identity' is not enough. Accordingly, I want to understand how the dissidents evaluate Zionist settlement of Palestine, how they define their relationships to those who went before them, and whether their evaluations have the potential to be transformative.

The dissidents could potentially avoid the entire issue by saying: 'I don't support what happened, but there is a Jewish nation here now that needs to be accounted for in future arrangements.' This position would protect those identifying as the 'Jewish nation' without anchoring them to the past, hence precluding the subject from acquiring responsibility. interestingly, though, some dissidents instead attempt to use Cultural Zionism to legitimise a Jewish presence in Israel/Palestine. This reflects an emotional investment in the ancient Jewish nation anchored to Palestine, which Cultural Zionism articulates. However, like those who came before them, the dissidents struggle to invoke Cultural Zionism as a meaningful alternative to what unfolded.

The trajectory of Cultural Zionism, as discussed in Chapter 2, is cautionary for contemporary dissidents; the 'tradition' of internal dissent is problematic for its continual susceptibility to co-optation, and its ultimate cleavage to colonisation and violence. I engage the dissidents with the bald proposition that perhaps there was no other way of enacting the Zionist project. Presenting my argument to gauge their response, I anticipate that they will struggle to critique it, but nor will they want to acquiesce. This is borne out in interesting ways.

Oren Yiftachel (2007) engages with the colonisation of Palestine by portraying the Jewish nation as a 'collectivity' with 'its own culture, its own rights, its own projections of the future, its own total life'. It has 'been pushed to the Middle East by the worst of all circumstances … [I]f I'm in search of justice and truth, it will be more unjust to say that this group of people have no right to exist.'

> It actually … never was evicted *from* its homeland, like the Zionist story goes, but it was evicted *to* the homeland. And yes, I suppose

> that gives it a particular right. It's been denied citizenship; it's been exterminated, genocided, evicted from dozens of countries. The only place it could actually reconstitute itself is there, its historical homeland. And it has a right to do that.

Whilst lamenting the 'the way it was done, and the cynical way it was used', Yiftachel emphasises the impetus created by 'the group of refugees, the majority of Jews, between 80 to 90 per cent, are sort of coerced and forced migrants, nowhere to go' as a basis for the 'historical justification' of Zionist settlement. However, he takes the invocation of the historical homeland seriously in its own right. He rejects comparisons between Zionism and early Nazism (Burg, 2007), partly on the grounds that it is 'qualitatively a different project' to 'colonise one people that sits on *your* historical homeland, [than] to colonise 20 peoples that live all across Europe'.

I put it to him that the establishment of Israel was not possible without oppression and domination. 'Well, that's an open question', he responds.

> Probably you're right … because you know, it was what I call … colonialism of refugees, it's [an] absolutely desperate type of colonialism. You know, and they, they see their flight from sorrow as the whole, entire world. To some extent, who can blame them?

Yiftachel suggests, 'The project is to make it as amicable as possible with the Palestinians. And you know', he continues,

> as a land expert, I can tell you it *is* possible. Ah, the Palestinian land ownership, for example, in Palestine in 1948 was only less than 30 per cent of the land … There is room. And it didn't have to create the refugee problem. You know, from the beginning, it could be a multicultural or bi-ethnic binational state … And so, and it could live, I could even live with an Arab majority, it doesn't really worry me, as long as there is institutional, constitutional support for the continuation of the Jewish collectivity.

Yiftachel frames his vision for a binational state as something possible in the past that remains feasible – he flips easily from land ownership in 1948 to a contemporary binational state. However, I am particularly interested in what was possible in the context of opposition from Palestine's indigenous non-Jewish population. When I suggest that

'institutional, constitutional support for the continuation of the Jewish collectivity' would not have been forthcoming at the time, Yiftachel responds by seemingly endorsing Israel's creation.

> But … there was an Israel in 1947, there was an Israel created, let's not forget that … And that Israel had a large Arab minority, but there was a Jewish majority. It could have constructed its own politics and, of course, with the Jewish influx, it would have had a large majority of Jews. But it chose not to do that. It chose to drive the Arabs out. So, you know, I object to that. But that doesn't mean that, you know – the abuse that existed, that doesn't negate the need to cater for the collectivity itself. There is nobody else that would cater for it except itself. So that gives it legitimacy, yes …

Yiftachel's criticism is entirely coherent: Israel *could* have sat with a marginal Jewish majority and treated non-Jewish citizens equally instead of expelling them, whilst also using that majority to bring in more Jews. However, Yiftachel's analysis commences after the state's creation; when I try to take him further back, there appears to be a void. Like the Cultural Zionists before him, Yiftachel cannot explain how Jewish settlers could have attained their homeland in Palestine without the UN decision, which *already* thwarted the wishes of non-Jews. Yiftachel's 'colonialism of refugees' reads desperation into the actions of Zionist settlers. He explains the personal logic behind this: '[T]here will be very few people who will say that their own collectivity has to disappear. This is suicidal in a, you know, psychologically pathological way.'

Activist Jeff Halper takes a more optimistic view of Zionist migration to Palestine. He tells me, unbidden, that perhaps the greatest controversy about him in leftist circles is that he does not 'consider Zionism to be a colonial movement … because there was a genuine tie between the Jews and this country'.

> Hebrew wasn't invented a hundred years ago. … It wasn't like some British farmer gets up one morning and decides to go to Kenya to get a lot of cheap land and cheap labour and become a colonialist … Jews were not strangers to this land. That's what I insist on. The land of Israel, whatever you want to call it, was central to Jewish culture and Jewish symbolism and religion, and in a real way, not in some fakey constructed way … I think that when the Zionist movement developed, both in terms of fleeing persecution, but also in terms of a national movement, like other national movements in Europe, it was legitimate.

I offer Halper Yiftachel's 'colonialism of refugees'.

> I don't know what that means. No, they weren't all refugees. I mean, the impulse for coming here was not as a refugee. It was a positive national movement. ... The Jews were a nation, or a pre-nation, within this Europe of tribes and nations, that did have a territorial reference, and that was the land of Israel. And it was a real thing, it wasn't some fakey thing ... and it's true that there were pressures as well. ... I think there's a genuineness here that has to be respected.

Respect involves taking seriously the idea that Zionism did not view 'Arabs' malevolently.

> In those days, they really believed that this was a land without a people. Not in a physical sense, I mean, they're not blind, but on the point of view that there wasn't another people here. The Palestinians hadn't really coalesced either in terms of their national identity. You've got to cut people slack, cos when people actually live their lives ... they do bad things, or they're not consistent, or they didn't understand everything ...

Halper compares his perspective to that of Uri Davis, who 'measures people according to this rigid ideological, you know, in hindsight kind of measure. He measures them by 2010 and intellectual anti-Zionist' standards. 'Well you can't do that!' exclaims Halper. 'You know, it's a different reality, a different context, a different set of thoughts and everything else ... So, if you cut some of the early Zionists slack, and if you understand that it made sense, it wasn't colonialism. But it became colonial in about ten minutes', he adds.

> I mean, I'm saying the impulse, the nucleus wasn't colonialism ... I wouldn't say it's illegitimate like a colonial movement should be, and that the Jews have no place here; they should go back to Russia. Jews were a thousand years in Russia but were never accepted as Russian. But what I say is: when they adopted this ethnocratic kind of eastern European nationalism, and they denied there was a Palestinian people, and they had this exclusive claim, that's where it became colonialism. That's where they start ethnic cleansing, this is the Land of Israel and Meron [Benvenisti]'s father's story of renaming the country and all that stuff. That's when it became colonial.

Eitan Bronstein is also compelled to cut Cultural Zionists some slack; to locate their actions in a historical context. 'There's Jewish who have some relations to this place, some link. I don't neglect or underestimate or try to suggest that there is no connection … Of course people believe in this and it's okay.' I invite him to explain what could have been different.

> [I]f the leader of the Jewish minority here had said, 'We are willing to see how we can live together here', and not stating that we are having now a Jewish state – If you have a Jewish state, of course, in order to materialise, you have to have a war. But I think there were other voices then that could enable something totally different.

Bronstein places faith in the ability of these 'other voices' to achieve something different; I ask if he can explain how exactly a Jewish minority without a state would have secured entry rights for Jews to Palestine.

Bronstein doesn't have a direct answer. '[G]o back to the beginning', he suggests instead.

> The whole notion of Zionism coming here, it's not just a naïve migration to this empty land. It's migration with an intention to redeem the land, to redeem the work. So when the Zionist movement and migration began and expanded, also those practices of other ways of expulsion or segregation or … superiority of Jews … So it is difficult to talk about 1948, because before that, there was already this history of violent behaviour here.

However, 'it doesn't mean that this is the whole story', Bronstein continues.

> [T]here are many other narratives that you can find hidden in Zionism. … There were many Jews who tried to tell … Palestinians not to run away, and it was earnest. They were not [political], … neighbours, usually neighbours. 'We want to live with you, don't run away.' Of course, they were not strong enough politically … But naively, they thought, 'Yes, we can live together'. This doesn't mean they were not Zionist. They were very Zionist.

'I don't think they were a contradiction', Bronstein adds.

> I think they didn't see the whole picture from their side. Because this happened in many many cases. Neighbours, Jews and Arabs

> living, having good relations. There were shootings around, and this was one of the practices of the Zionist forces, to go around and to shoot … and to raise fear. And also the stories of the massacres, the massacre of Deir Yassin that caused such huge panic among Palestinians. This panic, the [Jewish] neighbours couldn't experience, it because it doesn't hurt the Jews … But, I mean, the Jews didn't have many other options. They were here to stay … [I]n many cases they were upset that the armed forces were forcing [Palestinians] out. They didn't really have enough power and didn't try very hard to stop it. In Haifa, for example, the Jewish leaders tried to stop them from going out and also talking about the wish that they will return, but they didn't do really much. They didn't try, as I know, to convince the Israeli government to let them return. So it sounds contradictory, but I think for them, it was something that makes sense.[1]

Bronstein's inability to answer my question about entry rights directly – or rather, his effective indictment of the entire Zionist movement ('violent behaviour') – brings us to an important recognition. 'There are no real solutions', he declares.

> You can solve [the problem] politically … but still it doesn't really solve it in the sense that … there is no scar. It's there. It's for ever there. You cannot really overcome, in the sense that you forget it … The *Nakba* is there for ever … so in that sense there is no way out. I think it's very important to express it … There's no way out …

While Bronstein's alternative 'voices' from the past cannot provide a direct answer, his own voice can. There is no way out of his own dilemma; a proclamation that reverberates throughout this book.

The phenomenon of thoughtful dissidents being unable to articulate the means of achieving 'binational' harmony in early Palestine is also present in Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom's narrative. When I ask what should have happened instead of the War in 1948, the ethnic cleansing and the state's refusal to permit the return of the refugees, he replies:

> Well, I think that the partition plan in 1947 … was a much better starting point. Had it been accepted, had Israel stuck to it, had Israel gone back to it and not conquered more territory in 1948, it would have been a better thing. It would have been great if the refugees had been welcomed home …

This reliance on the creation of Israel as a starting point is almost a direct match with Yiftachel's response to a similar proposition. I counter to Milgom that even the Israel proposed in the 1947 UN Partition Plan defied the wishes of non-Jews.

'I think the Palestinians had a combination of attitudes and responses to Jews being here', Milgrom responds,

> Some of which was, 'Great, we'll live together and they'll be benefits for us living together'. There was also resentment and a feeling of being marginalised, and an anti-colonial struggle, so this is something that Zionism didn't deal with properly, and didn't figure out in a nice way. It sort of went in there, and takes advantage of whatever it could take advantage of. So in 1947 things were pretty sticky already. So I guess it would have been better if the state had not been established in 1947, but rather that things had sort of, you know, worked out.

'A lot of people talk about Cultural Zionism, spiritual Zionism, a Jewish presence but not a state', I respond. 'I wonder whether that would have been possible. Let's say the majority of Arabs didn't want the Jews there, how would a cultural Zionism ... have taken hold?'

Milgrom doesn't have an answer; instead, he reframes the question.

> Every act, the actors have to think about what they are doing, why they're doing it and what it does to someone else ... There was a significant Jewish minority, still small but significant on the land – people were living together and it was okay. The early Zionists came in the late nineteenth century, and they were living together still. The question is, so what was developing, how would I have felt in those situations? Hopefully, I would have been a peacemaker, or someone who was thinking about the impact of this on other people, but not enough Zionists were doing that. 'This is what we want, what we need, this is what we can get.'

Milgrom coherently frames his own identification in this vision of a moral individual trying to redirect a collective. Yet in the course of this brief exchange, Milgrom goes from endorsing the partition plan, to rejecting it, to finally only imagining his role in the most personal terms. The alternative possibilities for the collective, which inform my enquiry, evaporate.

Gideon Levy takes a different view of collective moral responsibility, accepting that an injustice had to occur in Israel's establishment. He sees

Zionism as 'inevitable in many ways … I couldn't stop the flow of who's coming to here. I think this was a solution for the Holocaust.' However, Levy argues that one injustice should have been the limit.

> I mean, once we did what we did in '48, okay, we did. This should have been taken in account before we bombed Gaza! We should have remembered that in Gaza are living refugees, because of us. Our victims … So this should have gone into Israeli mind, but it doesn't.

For Meron Benvenisti, meanwhile, Israel's past and his role within are open wounds I unwittingly scratch. Benvenisti adopts a resentful posture, even to my very first question about where he fits within the Zionist schema:

> This limits my thinking to something that I think any normal person, at any other place in the world, wouldn't begin to bother. About the constitution of the entity in which he lives. Do you do this in Australia? Is it part of your identity? It's not part of my identity here. So the fact that Zionists decided that the Jewish state is part of, something that is important to identity, they can think that. I don't have to think that way.

Benvenisti is not going to sit happily in the box that Zionism has made for him, but nor is he going to sit in any other box, such as the 'leftist' box constructed as oppositional to the Occupation. 'I don't believe in stereotypes', he declares. 'I don't believe … you invent leftism by saying "occupation" or "West Bank" instead of "Judea and Samaria".' I ask him what terms he uses, and he tells me that he doesn't care. When I tell him that I *do* care, he responds, 'Then you're wrong!'[2]

I ask Benvenisti to talk about the contradictions he raises in his book, and about his own past.

> The problem is, when you get to my age, you have to be aware of the failures in your life. I believe that my contradictions come from the fact that I've lived too long … People don't understand that people will think and feel and adjust themselves to changing conditions. So I started by being a kibbutznik, a Zionist, a social democrat. By now, at my tender age, I believe that this is not a Zionist enterprise, but it's a settler society … Yes, there is a contradiction between how do I see the beginning or the outcome. So it's a very important question. If I criticise the beginning of this enterprise, I think about my parents.

> Do I criticise my parents? Do I think that they are colonialists? No. They are not responsible for the fact that in each turning point, this polity or this society takes the wrong turn.

I ask him who *is* responsible.

> All of us, the society, the tribe, the entity. They made all of the mistakes. My father came here in 1913, my mother in 1924. They came not out of persecution; they just wanted to build a just society in Palestine. They thought that they are entitled, to the land, to their part of the land, also believing that there's a place for everybody.

Benvenisti depicts his parents in similar terms to Halper; I am interested in whether Benvenisti agrees with his parents' perceptions. 'What I think, it's not to think now…' he replies. 'Because it depends how I see them.'

Quite unbidden, Benvenisti then raises his public spat with Edward Said in the Israeli newspapers. He includes the entire exchange in *Son of the Cypresses* (2007), beginning with Said's experience of fleeing Jerusalem during the War of 1948/*Nakba*. Benvenisti's opinion piece then disputes Said's version of events and accuses Said's parents of being part of the betrayal of the Palestinian people by the intellectual class. Benvenisti's parents are not the villains of the piece, he says. They had nowhere else to go and they stayed to fight instead. They won. Why should Benvenisti feel sorry for the Saids? Benvenisti then includes the response of a 'tremendously upset' Said, who accuses Benvenisti of slandering his family. Said claims that people (including Israelis) frequently flee from violence and it does not follow that they should lose property or residence rights. He argues that it is 'unseemly, even indecent, for a member of [Benvenisti's] people to speak so gloatingly about the misfortunes of others'. Benvenisti sums up simply that Said's 'impassioned attack… reinforced my pride in my parents and their generation… We did not flee the country, but stayed and fought and won' (pp. 63–4).

Benvenisti's minimalist rebuttal intrigues me. Does he consider in retrospect that he was out of line, and used Said as a narrative device to communicate this? Apparently not, as becomes clear in the interview:

> I said, look, I don't want to apologise for my victory. The fact that you fled, because you had a place in Cairo, so now I have to apologise for the fact that my father and mother stayed on and you fled? No, I'm

> sorry. You have to take responsibility for the fact that you fled. I am not ready to apologise for the fact that we won and they lost.

I ask why Benvenisti does not have to take any of this responsibility. 'Because it was a fair fight', he shrugs. '… They started –'

I interrupt at this, bewildered. 'A fair fight?'

'Yes. Why not fair fight? They decided that the sword would decide and I accepted that the sword would decide. Now the sword has decided; now each one has to accept responsibility.'

In his writing, Benvenisti has reported the structural processes that happened, the removal of people from villages, with a tone of regret. I try to explain my confusion. 'You've seen everything that was done!'

'Okay, and then what?' he barks.

'And then you say to Edward Said that your parents shouldn't have, you – you almost say: "Your parents are cowards" – '

'That, maybe because of that, they lost!'

He continues:

> The betrayal of intellectuals is not something that you can take easily. Part of the *Nakba* is caused by the fact that they looked down upon the villagers. Had nothing to do with the villagers… [There were not only] internal problems, [but] internal problems that were so detrimental to the cause that they lost. Now, do I have to be responsible for that too?

'I'm not here to say yes or no', I tell him. 'But what I find interesting is that someone who sees things the way that you do doesn't also feel a responsibility.'

'I do', he insists.

> I do feel partial responsibility, but not for the fact that I won and they lost, because they called for this war to begin. The fact that they have their own reasons to – good reason to reject us, I understand. Understand from the very beginning. But when there was war declared, war decided. I disagree with the fact that people take us as the sole responsible for what happened.

Benvenisti has recognised elsewhere that non-Jews in Palestine had good reason to reject settling Zionists (2007, p. 220). His restatement of this, whilst simultaneously declaring Palestinian culpability, throws me. I can only make sense of two coherent positions. Either a) Zionism

was a virtuous project, in which case it was too bad for the non-Jews on the land; or b) a settler-colonial project would generate resistance, and that such resistance would be part of the process rather than a deviant decision. Benvenisti seems to understand the process and yet apportions blame to those responding to it. I try to explain my perception of colonialism as a project with obvious consequences by talking about Australia's dispossession and mistreatment of its own indigenous population.

'That's not parallel', he declares.

> You can go into all these parallels, but this is absolutely the wrong parallel – there are parallels but not in the way it's been understood as, what's the end in which we – it's one thing which is the same. The initial clash between a settler society and indigenous people. The fact that one came in, faced with total rejection, understandable rejection, by the indigenous, then war started. Each side continued with the initial clash that they had. This is the same as here. But not, the parallel is wrong, as I see it.

'Why?'

'I'm telling you why!'

'I don't understand.'

'Because over there –' he begins, and then changes tack. 'You're thinking about Australia now. I don't want to fall into this trap, because this is not an interview. This is already an argument. I don't want to start an argument with you. Sorry.'

'To me it's not an argument, it's a healthy discussion.'

'This is an argument', he insists. 'I don't want to explain my condition by using your condition.'

I suggest that the Zionist project had dispossession built into it.

'Yes. Yes', he says impatiently. 'You want what happened? Examples?'

Benvenisti is tied to the empirical; to facts and figures. I am trying to get to the sentiments behind them. 'I don't want to be sitting here saying, "You should be sorry, you should feel responsible"', I begin to flounder. 'But I still find it hard to understand, the insight you have, to everything that has happened and your, your refusal. And look, yeah, but to say half responsibility here, fifty-fifty, maybe it's not. Maybe it's seventy-thirty, maybe it's eighty-twenty.'

'Maybe it's futile, the whole thing of assigning responsibility', he suggests, sagely. 'Maybe the way to do it is: I apologise for what I've done wrong, and you. I don't have to quantify it. When we get there, maybe.'

I nod.

'But this is nothing to do with the political situation, or with putting blame on me', he continues. 'Cos I'd be the first to refute any facts of my own identity, of the way it's being done. That's all.' Benvenisti begins to grow edgy.

> Saying that you are this or that, what you want? What is your aim in assigning responsibility on me? What is it? Is it to say I'm a bad person? What is the – or that my entity is wrong? Therefore, it should be despondent or destroyed? What is the aim? What is the object of the exercise?

I (stupidly) think that Benvenisti is speaking rhetorically. Moreover, Benvenisti himself has put forward models for a one-state solution, so I tentatively point out that some people would say that the entity *is* wrong and requires dismantling.

> So they have a problem with me and with six million people! Or maybe with 13 million people! And we'll see who is going to win and who is going to lose! But that is not an argument. That's a challenge, that's an attack.

I raise Benvenisti's previous endorsement of a one-state solution. He emphatically explains that he is talking about what exists, rather than what he wants. 'I want people to face the reality. That's all,' he tells me. '…This is a description, not a prescription.'

> The work is something else, that's how you develop it. For existing conditions that is imposed on us, and is there, and you cannot, in no way, ignore reality. But, that is not that I'm *for* the one state solution…And I am especially not for one-state solution, because one state solution is a way to disguise the – really, the need, the will, to de-legitimise the Jewish state…It's being used only for one thing. To say, 'Jewish state is illegitimate, therefore one state solution'. And all these people, when I meet them, and I meet them quite often, we have big and bitter arguments and I refuse to accept the legitimacy of their own analysis, because this is not an analysis. It is wishful thinking, which is based on the negation and destruction of my own entity.

Without realising that I am walking into my own 'big and bitter argument', I suggest that perhaps Benvenisti's society has made its own

problems by *creating* the binational reality. I am trying to convey the incongruity of a state imposing a one-state scenario, as Benvenisti recognises, and simultaneously crying foul at any suggestion of a *real* one-state solution granting rights and citizenship to all.

'What has this to do with what I'm talking about?' he snaps.

> So criticise my society, but you can't allow to *destroy* my society because of that. Unless you believe that this is based on something wrong. This initial, original sin … If this is the case, then we have to stop discussing, and have to prepare for another war! You can't allow … a subject to commit suicide. If this is how you see it, and people see it, they have to be prepared for that declaration of war they are declaring against me, because they know I would not accept that …

Benvenisti's 'suicide' comment echoes Yiftachel's suggestion that it is 'psychologically pathological' to want to do away with one's own entity. I, however, am confounded yet again, because Benvenisti wrote an opinion piece (2004) asking that very question of whether the Jewish state was founded on an 'original sin', and answered it in the affirmative! I ask him to explain that piece, in which he observes another generation of Israelis dispossessing another generation of Palestinians, and questions whether there was something defective in the founding fathers' vision.

'Right, okay', he says. 'So, if after a hundred years, we are still doing exactly the same thing we have been doing all along, then something is wrong.'

'So what is wrong?'

'The fact that you have in your genes. The thing that would happen is, there is a settler society that answers or reacts to some basic codes in their genetic settler society makeup. Yes. So what? What does it mean?'

I explain that I had *thought* Benvenisti's analysis pointed to a deep criticism of the whole enterprise and a desire to dismantle it.

'You can't!' he exclaims.

> Well, therefore, you're wrong. And also … it's wrong to quote back to a columnist or journalist something that he's written in one context … You're talking about a person who is writing to express his conditions and answer the needs of the moment. And this doesn't mean that you can throw it back at me six years later in a general

> meaning, trying to make this a general assessment … about myself, my father, my mother, my tribe.

I ask him if he would prefer his words to be tomorrow's fish and chip wrapping. (Later, I'll wish I asked him why he bothered to collect them into a book!)

'No, no', he says. 'But, but, I also don't want to go into these questions, because I refuse to answer them. I don't have to defend myself. That's it.'

'Why not?'

'I don't want to.'

The interview subsequently unravels further, and at the end of the book, I explore how I might have provoked Benvenisti's negative response. However, a valid interpretation of the exchange is that Benvenisti struggles to square present-day evaluations with his attachment to the Zionist project. This tension, I suggest, is at the heart of all the examples included thus far. The dissidents are critical of the dispossession of the Other; yet when it comes to locating their place within history, they struggle to find a means of doing so that they can reconcile with their critical outlook. Unable or unwilling to view the 'Jewish nation' as a modern construct, which nevertheless needs to be accounted for in future political settlements, dissidents instead display a deeper emotional attachment to the 'Jewish nation'. This necessitates explanations of the nation's place in Palestine; Cultural Zionism appears to offer such an explanation.

Cultural Zionism proffers a benign alternative path for the European settlement project in Palestine, but this is illusory. Modifying Abdel-Nour (2003), dissidents drawing pride from Cultural Zionism's alternative 'national history' have an onus to articulate it effectively; their apparent inability to do so reveals the centrality of Political Zionism to the successful enactment of the project. Cultural Zionists, unable to resolve their own dilemmas *vis à vis* the Other, were, at best, their own era's version of 'good people in a bad situation'. The dissidents reflect the historical narrative backwards in ways that affirm this. Yiftachel's entire 'Jewish nation' was in a bad situation in Europe. Halper's Cultural Zionists were good people who went astray when their nationalism turned 'ethnocratic'; Benvenisti's sentiments about his parents echo this. Bronstein, whilst far more critical of the Zionist project, also sees virtue in the Cultural Zionists, but he and Milgrom display the limitations of the Cultural Zionist vision under questioning. Both respond in ways that are ultimately personal – Bronstein's 'no way out' and Milgrom's identification with the lone dissident.

## The beginning

In my interviews with Milgrom, Atzmon and Halper, we look further back to the beginnings of Zionism, exploring how the cultural factor of chosenness has augmented the *ressentiment* discourse. I am interested in how they tell this story from the inside and connect it to their own identifications and struggles.

Milgrom's invocation of the Us appears to reference a religious community. However, he thwarts my attempts to construct a dichotomy in which he, the rabbi, treats Jewishness as religion, and other, more secular, dissidents portray 'cultural' or 'national' Jewishness as political ideology. Milgrom presents Jewish religion, culture and ideology as inseparable. Jewish culture belongs to what he calls a Jewish 'milieu' (a more ambiguous word than 'nation' or 'ethnicity') of which the Jewish religion is an intrinsic part.

> I don't think it's so easy or even profitable to separate religion from life, when in fact, Jewish culture is a religious culture, but it's also a culture that deals with all these issues of politics and economics and all that.

For Milgrom, dark forces in Jewish history cannot be limited to ideology, nor theology; he cannot attribute them wholly to social forces, nor lay them in the hands of a few individuals. According to Milgrom, Zionism did not take something that was religious and apply it to secular nationalism. Rather,

> [t]he situation [in Palestine] brought out in prominence forces that were there before, but didn't have the same dominance. It's not new stuff, it didn't have to come from colonialism or nationalism or, God forbid, Nazism, can't even think of that … [N]o, we had it. This is the difficult thing now for me, recognising, as we go back, we did have a long, long history of separatism. Of the feeling of superiority, cos God chose us, because we were the monotheists and they were the idolaters and all that. We didn't really make the adjustments necessary when Christianity … [and] Islam came about. We didn't … recognise that we are brothers and sisters … a covenanted people with Muslims and Christians, despite the small differences between us. The Middle Ages were times when those differences were very significant … and that's haunting us right now .. .[W]e didn't – we *don't* – have enough of an ideology of partnership.

Milgrom's task becomes one of salvaging; finding redeeming features to guide the collective.

> One has the option, the responsibility, to choose and promote the direction which is positive, and to beat back and quarantine the teachings and the attitudes which are difficult. They certainly come out in the issue of the Other. Whether the Other is a woman, or a non-Jew, Palestinian in this case, these things come out … Now I'm in a situation where I recognise how pervasive and problematic teachings are, the entire culture …

A key concern for Milgrom is how effectively the 'problematic' elements support the current Israeli position.

> It's so easy to take the Bible and the promise of the land and the biblical rejection of the natives of the land … and to apply that simplistically to the situation we're in. … [T]he Bible says [to] have this harsh attitude to the native population, along with the promise that the land would be Israel's. That lends itself very well to an extreme right-wing position. There is plenty else in Jewish culture which is somehow not appreciative of the Other, living with the Other, that kind of thing.

In the face of this, Milgrom explains his continued attachment to Jewishness. Rejecting the idea that religion 'comes from God … that it's not a human creation, it's given', he speaks of a 'foggy' theology and an inability to 'use God language'. Distanced from his concept of God as 'harmony and embrace', he laments, 'I don't experience much harmony; I feel much more the discord in this tragedy.' The vision of God to which he can most relate is that of a recent Talmudic scholar

> who spoke about the Bible as a tragedy. The tragic figure in the Bible is God. God creates the world – humanity – and fails. Almost to the point of giving up, many times. So maybe I can connect with that tragedy, that constant feeling of hope, still, to keep going.

If it is not belief in a transcendental power that underscores Milgrom's identification, then it can only be his relationship to those with whom he shares his Jewish 'milieu.' The intriguing thing about this relationship is that he resists defining it in national terms, even as he uses the language of 'we.' When I ask him whether he considers

the 'Jewish nation' to be a real entity, he responds, 'It's a meaningful category'.

> The category of Jews who are connected through many things, family, culture, language, geography, past, future, et cetera – these things exist. What does it mean? What do you do with it? That's the question. ... I'm trying to move Jews off the back of the Palestinians. That's my job.

I ask Milgrom how he separates culture from the nationalism that asserts it needs a state. 'I think that the only significant social category is right now', he replies, imbuing our exchange with sudden importance.

> Two people, a conversation. That's a significant social relationship. It extends a little bit beyond this to a family, but that's it. To be a Berliner, to belong to a citizen, these grouping are problematic, they're shallow, they don't – what do they mean? So I, what I share with other Jews, to the extent that we are comfortable with it and using it, is a culture, and some people say it's also a destiny.

Yet Milgrom subverts the idea that culture is automatically destiny.

> My destiny is not necessarily a Jewish destiny but a human destiny, and I include in that the Palestinians. That's a tricky thing, because what do I and Palestinians share, except for the accident of having lived in the same place? Do we have the same politics and language and that? So working together has been a big thing.

Milgrom has tried to negotiate this path by engaging with other cultures.

> I guess the question is: To what extent am I influenced by Jewish thoughts and texts and textures, or the outside interests I'm aware of, clearly outside. I think I'm in a milieu where these things are mixed. I certainly have rabbis and texts that I go to, but I think ... my milieu is largely non-religious, most of it peace activists, more universalist and many non-Jews. It's a wider milieu.

Yet 'Jewish thoughts and texts and texture' remain a significant part of Milgrom's 'milieu'. Despite his assertion of a human destiny, and a belief that a personal exchange is the only real category, Milgrom frequently

speaks in terms of Jewish culture and religion during our interview. After pausing to make a cup of tea, he gives me an example.

> You asked me about political and Jewish, thinking about the continuity of culture and all that. I rang my daughter this morning; her boyfriend's been away for a few months on one of those 'after the Army' trips that people take. They travelled together for a month, and then she had to go back to school, and he continued. He's coming back tonight. I quoted her a verse from the Song of Songs, about the meeting and the longing and all that. This is how I express myself, through the sources. Not just for political things but also for personal things. That's what it can do with rich cultures; it interacts with your life. You create in it; it resonates. It's just an example of how all this can come together.

This attachment to culture prevails, despite Milgrom's ambivalence about how that culture has come about, its core tenets and its operation, and how to interpret it. More importantly, he also claims a responsibility to lead it towards the good. This feature of his narrative most clearly distinguishes it from that of Gilad Atzmon.

When Atzmon and I talk about conceptualisations of Jewish identity in history, he starts out by diagnosing the problem as the secularisation of chosenness. 'Within the Judaic context, chosenness is a burden', he tells me. 'God tells his people, "You are chosen by me to stand as a supreme example of good behaviour".' By contrast, 'secular chosenness is pretty vicious, it's supremacy'.

Atzmon insists that he 'make[s] a clear distinction between Judaism: the religion, Jews: the people and Jewishness: the ideology', claiming he doesn't 'deal much with Judaism' or 'Jews', and instead deals with 'Jewishness, the ideology'. Elsewhere he states, 'I refrain categorically from referring to Jews and avoid criticism of Judaism' (2007; see also 2011, p. 15).

However, Atzmon peppers his conversation with criticisms of 'Jews'. Likewise, he sources his problem with 'Jewishness, the ideology' directly back to the religion. He argues that there was something pathological about 'the Jews' as a collective through many centuries, deriving from the very sense of chosenness that he purports to defend in its religious context.

'Yesterday someone sent me a text that I may publish', he announces:

> 'Without Israel, I don't think that we will never [sic] be able to understand the Holocaust' ... I understand very well; I believe in the same

> thing … Without Israel, we wouldn't be able to understand. .. How is it that the entire European people stood up against their neighbours and said, 'We don't want you. You're out of here.' … Now, looking at history, you say, 'What is it, how can it happen?' Israel gives us a very crucial glimpse into this ultimate, ugly collective. People who have zero respect to the notion of Otherness!

Atzmon warms to this theme; his book the following year asks, 'Can Israeli behaviour throw light on the events that led to the Holocaust, or other instances of persecution of Jews?' (p. 182).

When I suggest that we might understand the character of contemporary Israel and Zionism as arising from the Holocaust, rather than as an explanation for it, Atzmon counters:

> As you probably know, the Holocaust wasn't the first event of persecution of Jewish people. It happens to them all the way through history. … The Germans did not want the Jews; factually, the European nations were very happy to deport them, France, Poland, everywhere.

When I suggest that perhaps, then, we might understand the character of contemporary Israel and Zionism as arising from this earlier dynamic, rather than as an explanation for it, Atzmon disagrees again. 'The problem with the Nazis, it's that in a certain stage they started to behave like the Jews! This is the problem with the Nazis … Believing in the chosenness, the expansionness, the racial orientation, and legitimacy.' I counter that this is reductionist logic. Atzmon accepts my criticism, but insists 'it's a legitimate thing to do'.

> Why? Because the Nazi movements started in 1926. 1922, 1926, *Mein Kampf* … When you read Jabotinsky, from 1906, and when you read Ber Borochov,[3] it's exactly the same ideology. You see that they are 30 years ahead. Jabotinsky and Ber Borochov were following a tradition of thousands of years of supremacy. Now, one of the reasons that it is harder combat in Judaism – not Judaism, Jewishness – is cos they practice it for thousands of years. Hitler just invented, out of the blue? Even if he was a genius, he wouldn't be able to cope with tradition of rabbis that are improving and suggesting manners … to tackle, you know, this kind of opponents, combat anti-Semitism …

Atzmon fumbles between 'Judaism' and 'Jewishness'; he uses the terms interchangeably, but settles on the one that appears to distinguish

between them. He suggests that rabbis are responsible for the evolution of Jewish ideology over thousands of years, which hardly quarantines them from responsibility for its alleged toxicity. The conclusion from Atzmon's argument, then, must be that despite his protestations to the contrary Jews, Judaism and Jewishness are interconnected.

Atzmon seems to hate 'Jews' without a coherent world-view. This becomes apparent in his reverence for other nationalisms. '[W]hen I read Heidegger, I love German tribalism', he raves. 'When you read Hegel. When you read, when you see Palestinian dancing, I love it.' As we debate the relationship between Marxist theory and nationalism, Atzmon asks:

> What about belonging as a nation? Does it incorporate nationalism, or are we going to be cosmopolitan? ... This is the issue. ... The German people felt as a nation. The Palestinians are now, because of negation, feeling as a nation ... Now, I don't have any right to interfere with other people's sense of belonging. ... [Y]ou cannot change people. And the world is not cosmopolitan. There are some people who are cosmopolitan, but most people feel some sense of belonging, and sense of belonging is great ...

This parallels Yiftachel's argument that ethnic bonds are real to those who experience them, and accordingly we must take them seriously in terms of political organisation. However, Atzmon goes on to declare that the Jewish nation 'is an invention ... "But we feel like a nation." Fuck you!'

I point out that Atzmon seems to accept the legitimacy of every other nation's sense of belonging.

'No', he disagrees. 'I just said. The Israelis do feel like they are a nation. There is nothing we can do about it. ... The problem is that they insist to do it at the expense of other people. This is the issue.'

'But that's always the problem with self-determination.'

'No. Even Nazis, even Nazis, give respect to other nations.'

We argue about the Nazis yet again, and then Atzmon repeats, 'The problem [with Jews] is that they always do it on the expense of someone else. That's it. Very simple.'

I ask Atzmon whether his love for nationalism could ever extend back to Israeli Jews.

'I don't think so', he replies.

> Because, unfortunately, I'm led to identify some pathological problems that made this nation into what it is. Now, if this nation would

> transform into something else, I might love it, but it won't be the Jewish nation. ... Once a Jew is becoming a universalist. ... they stop operating as Jews ...

Considering how someone might love one example of ethnic nationalism, whilst hating another for the very features they admire in the first, leads me to two conclusions. Atzmon has a disproportionate hatred of Jewish identification, given that he does not apply his critique to other forms of collective identification. It follows that his own identification is implicated somehow in his harsh stance.

As I set up my recording devices for our interview, Atzmon tells me that he has been trying to work out whether he is a good self-hating Jew or an anti-Semite. I laugh, but soon realise that he isn't joking. He explains the logic behind the self-hating Jew with reference to Otto Weininger, an Austrian German philosopher who had unpleasant things to say about women and Jews, despite his own Jewish identification. 'I saw myself as something who is a product of the collective', Atzmon explains.

> Weininger said that what we really hate in others is that in yourself, which you cannot handle. This is why the biggest anti-Semite are always Jews. ... [W]hen I read Weininger, I realised that yes, I started to write about myself, about my own hatred. Rather than projecting it on others, I look in the mirror.

If he sees a self-hater there, this does not bother Atzmon. 'Don't be worried about self-hater', he tells me, blithely.

> Self-hater is a wonderful thing. One of the most interesting things for me is that when I saw myself as [a self-hater] for the first time, my first comment was, 'I don't hate myself, I hate you'. Then I saw myself as an anti-Semite, and a Holocaust denier ... I am not afraid of self-hatred ... I'm entitled to bounce. But I own my inconsistencies ...

At another point, he declares, 'Self-hating Jew is very Jewish, because Jewish love their symptoms, so self-hating Jew loves himself hating himself'. This, like much of what Atzmon has to say, comes across flippantly, but I will suggest in the next chapter that it offers insight into *ressentiment*.

Jeff Halper articulates yet another version of the history of Jewish culture. He suggests in his book that when cultures become xenophobic,

it's usually because of pressures outside, rather than something contaminated within. I posit that there was, instead, something problematic within Zionism from the beginning.

> You're right, you're right … No, there's a third element here. It's not binary. What I'm saying here is, you've got Israeli Jews who, you know, they're not the problem in the sense … And then you've got the adverse circumstances. And in between, is the ideology. I say that Israelis are trapped in this ethnocratic ideology, logic. That's what's missing here … It's not intrinsic in terms of, Israelis are, by nature, colonialist, or Jews are like that, or whatever. But it's true that they've taken a certain paradigm that has a very compelling logic to it, and that's what's making them do these terrible things.

'You still see that logic as something that arises here from an external situation', I respond. 'And my question is, was it not inherent in that logic, even as the idealistic Zionist in Europe said, "Let's go home"?'

'But I say it came out of a historical context', he replies, and we concur on the nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe inspiring Zionists. However, Halper also references the cultural factor in the development of the ideology – the religious content of Judaism.

> What the Jews have done in the West: first of all they didn't go to Zionism, because that whole biblical thing was missing for them … Jews in the West don't relate to the Torah … they cut that out because they can't deal with that stuff. It completely contradicts their Western democratic norms. So … [they] went … to the prophets, which are much more universalistic and based on justice and all that kind of stuff … I don't think Zionism could have emerged in the West, cos it would have stood too much diametrically opposed to the values of the West. [Zionism] was able to adopt what we consider these racist ideas and genocidal elements that [it] has until today, because it came out of that Eastern–Central European thing that had that in the tribe. But that also derived out of the Bible … That logic wouldn't have worked in the West …

Halper argues that for Zionists of Central and Eastern Europe, the more supremacist parts of their religion resonated with their ethnic nationalist context. However, his depiction of different experiences in 'East' and 'West' actually works *against* the idea of the single Jewish nation. Halper's position as a Western liberal critic of ethnocentrism thus

undermines the claim of a single, authentic Jewish national identity forming the legitimatory basis of Zionism.

## Conclusion

As Milgrom, Atzmon and Halper engage with Jewish identification and culture and the development of nationalism, their responses vary. Milgrom cannot narrate Jewish history as I do in this work, distinguishing between Judaism as a religio-cultural practice and the nationalism that came to use traditions as historical narrative. From inside the Us, Milgrom sees a continuous experience lending itself to exclusion and hatred. This is essentially Atzmon's story too, but unlike Milgrom, Atzmon is quite at ease with its dark content and its consequences for how the teller might view Jewish communal identification. If the story damns Jewish culture, then unlike Milgrom, who vests himself with the weighty task of turning it around, Atzmon sits back to watch it burn. Meanwhile, Halper's version of the story generates an interesting contradiction between his Western-influenced critique of Zionism's xenophobic tendencies, and his identification with its result. These dissidents' ways of telling their 'national' story, and diagnosing the problems they see therein, demonstrate how a contradictory sense of national responsibility might manifest.

# 6
# Themes of Dissident Dissonance: Zionism and the Self

## Introduction

This chapter engages more closely with the individual subjectivity of the dissidents. It begins by considering how the collective fear generated through *ressentiment* might inform self-preservation and self-interest. It then explores moments in which dissidents have acted against the values they now hold. The final section analyses the most radical dissidents, asking what their experiences can tell us about the price to pay for 'extreme' dissent, and the consequences of its marginality.

## Fear for the Us

This section considers how *ressentiment* Zionism constructs fear of Others, depicting preferencing the Us as the only effective protection. Fear, which may draw upon or exaggerate objective dangers, is difficult to explore in isolation, since it dovetails with identification-based support for Zionism explored in the previous chapter, and individual self-interest, elaborated below. There are also genuine reasons for those identifying as the 'Jewish nation' to feel threatened, *especially* in Israel, by the political discourse from the Iranian regime and militant Palestinian organisations nearby. However, there is a difference between a rational calculation of geo-political realities and the larger, timeless sense of anti-Semites everywhere waiting to destroy Jews for being Jews – what Veracini (2006) calls 'Absolute Anti-Semitism'. This latter view, propagated by the Zionist discourse, prioritises the Us over the Other in the name of protection. I am interested in how dissidents who express such views attempt to reconcile them with empathy for the Palestinian Other.

Dorit Rabinyan tells me that despite identifying with Palestinians 'standing in lines and waiting, being investigated, and their freedom is being limited', this occurs 'for reasons!' She 'refuse[s]' to feel moral guilt about Israel's military actions and doesn't want to be 'demonised' for 'protecting [her]self'.

> Yes, this is the neighbourhood I have to protect myself. I don't live in the Pacific Ocean, I live here. And this is my place, and this is my ancestors' place, and you know what, forget about it, this is the place I was born into. I have to protect myself.

Rabinyan tells me to enjoy the privilege of being Australian.

> It's an illusion if I convince myself, if I take it upon myself, that I'm carefree. That I can live anywhere, that I belong anywhere, I belong to the world, the world belongs to me. Second World War was around the corner.

She reflects that her nationalism is 'uncool' compared with a cosmopolitan perspective, but the basis behind it is particularly evident when we discuss the Holocaust.

> Carrying this memory makes a correction. It doesn't ease me. Letting go of this memory would have given me a better life. In a way, it's a burden I choose to carry, cos it was physically around the corner from my family as well … The Holocaust is not a European memory; it's a Jewish memory. They weren't attacked for being European Jews; they were attacked for being Jews. Attacked and demolished. History turned it out that my family moved around the globe and gave me the Israeli citizenship, but it could have been that Hitler was a little bit stronger for longer, and then Iranian Jews would have been on his agenda. … I identify with it because I could have been next. It could have been my brothers and sisters … I see myself in [those Jews] and themself in me. The fact that I am Iranian, for this matter, has nothing to do [with it] …

The Holocaust looms large for many of my dissidents. I want to consider whether the psychological processes of repression and repetition noted by Jacqueline Rose (2005) are at work in Israeli society, and to explore how the Holocaust makes certain things unsayable. Even anarchist Yonatan Pollack, who distances himself from the 'Jewish nation',

peppers his interview responses with cautionary reminders that he is not 'minimis[ing] the importance of the Holocaust'; that he acknowledges its 'special circumstances'; and that he is 'not comparing' Israel to Nazi Germany.

The Holocaust generating things that are unsayable arises in my first interview with Oren Yiftachel when we discuss Avram Burg (2007), a former Zionist luminary whose controversial book compares contemporary Israel to Weimar Germany in the years preceding Nazism. At the time, the book is only available in Hebrew, so I have not read it. Yiftachel, who has, admits to 'mixed feelings'. He appreciates Burg's 'ability to rise and criticise a system that he's been part of for a long time', but suggests that Burg's new leaf has been turned over too late: 'It's like, "Where were you for 20 or 30 years?"' Yiftachel also resents Burg as a 'rich, globalised cosmopolitan person' who fought 'to maintain … a ministerial car and a driver, ten years after he finished his position in the Jewish Agency'. Yiftachel suggests of Burg's beautiful home in Jerusalem, 'You and I could, you know, maybe dream of, um, renting a toilet there'. There is resentment that Burg can flit away whilst others can't. 'It's a bit hot, it's dirty, a bit conflictual, racist, let's move to France, you know. So he has this French passport.' However, Yiftachel reserves his strongest critique for Burg's comparison to Germany. '[It] irked me, though it has an element of truth', Yiftachel admits.

> [H]e's careful to say that this is … pre-World War Two Germany. But when you … compare yourself to a beast, right, you don't say, 'Well, but I compare it to the beast when the beast was a baby', right? When you say Germany, *especially* to Jews, you cannot separate from the image of killing six million Jews. So, that is academically and politically and ethnically so infuriating!

I suggest that the rhetorical usefulness of Burg's comments might derive precisely from their impact.

> Yeah, it hurts the most but it's false. I mean, no other nation did what the Germans did, and I hope nobody does. Not even the Rwandans and the Cambodians, nowhere *near* what they did, right. So when you compare it to that you take on board what they did later on. You cannot just sort of stop. It's not just the baby beast, but the baby beast who ate your brothers and sisters and cousins, right?
>
> … [A]n incredibly fundamentally different step altogether is the extermination of the Jews. I mean, not even talking about the fact

> that it's a Jew talking about that, which is emotionally, of course – but also the whole project of exterminating a whole nation. And you could say Israel, politicising and colonising and breaking the Palestinians politically, it's all true, but there is no programme of extermination. And in fact, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, if you want to be very passionate about it, it's very low-level violence. *Very* low-level violence considering, you know, what the stakes are… So that comparison to Germany, it's provocative, but it will alienate most people and it's also, I maintain, not credible, not credible to the point of criminally not credible…

I revisit some of these points in our interview three years later. Is it legitimate to attack Burg from a class perspective when Burg's critique is of nationalism? Are Burg's comments unhelpful or offensive? And are they offensive for an individual with personal connections to the Holocaust, or an Israeli Jew who inherits such connections from the collective?

> What you can and can't say, is with a meta-frame of transformation. Of affecting some change. It's not that you can or can't say – you can say anything… but I was trying to say what one *ought* to say, or what kind of discourse one needs to construct in order to effect some change. And I still think that was counter-productive in many ways…

'It takes us to compare yourself with your killer', Yiftachel continues.

> Which I think, psychologically… is very troubling. … Half the people in Israel have lost family in there, so… you drive the thing to an emotive ground. It's so uncomfortable, so inaccurate, so non-transformative that I thought Burg was wrong in that respect.

I suggest that Burg's statement seems to have got under Yiftachel's skin personally.

'It still does, it still does', Yiftachel agrees.

> And I encounter it a lot, with the Palestinians more than Burg. There are various ways, the Palestinians, for example, are, 'Nazis, Nazis, the Jews are Nazis'. And I tell them a) it's inaccurate and b) you won't get anywhere with that, in terms of, you want to get some kind of coalition, some kind of work together towards a joint goal. You just totally burn your bridge that way.

I ask whether Yiftachel objects as an individual or as a member of a collective.

'I think, both', he replies. 'Cos we're not just ever individuals anywhere, but especially here. We're very much part of a collectivity.'

I ask if this arises from Yiftachel's own personal history.

'The whole point of the nation … is that it's *all* your flesh and blood.'

'But that part is a construct … ' I counter.

'Anything until it hits you in a bodily way, immediately in front of your eyes, is a construct, right, even inside a family', Yiftachel responds.

> Look, my family comes from Germany and Lithuania, and Romania and other parts. My father's family, his half of it was wiped out in the Holocaust, including my cousins, my aunt, uncle, grandparents. They all disappeared. In various ways. Some of them actually in concentration camps and some of them were deported because they were married to Russians so they were deported to Siberia and died in Siberia. So there's a whole lot of tragedy there, which, of course, I think affects me.

Yiftachel's response resolves my question of the distinction between nation and person. However, the pain seems no less for someone like Rabinyan, whose own family was free from such harm.

Concerns about the 'Jewish nation' extend beyond the Holocaust, but the lesson appears to be that one should never underestimate hatred of Jews. The *ressentiment* Zionist discourse frames the state of Israel as the garrison against anti-Semitism, so supporters frequently label criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic. NGOs are devoted to monitoring the media (CAMERA, N.D.) and university campuses (Israel Academic Monitor N.D.) for alleged anti-Israel bias, which they then conflate with anti-Semitism. Israel's defenders seek out criticism, speak out against boycotts and condemn the use of terms such as 'apartheid' and 'racism'. They represent their interventions as fighting off an irrational and catastrophic hatred.

Interestingly, Neve Gordon, who has long criticised his country and endorsed the Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions campaign, has participated in such efforts. Gordon (2003) criticised an earlier academic boycott, refuted claims that Zionism is a global force, rejected the equation of Zionism with racism and drew attention to the lack of brutality of the occupation compared with other regimes. He also produced a glowing article about living in Israel. I am interested to find out why Gordon put energy into these pursuits as well as his long record of Palestinian solidarity struggles.

I ask why it is so unhelpful to state that Zionism is racism.

'Because we have to understand the world in its complexity, too', he replies.

> It's not a monolithic movement, like no, I don't think any national movement is ever monolithic. So, we want to see it within its complexity. And … what I try, in my academic work and my political work, is not to be a reductionist. So, you try to see the complexity, and you try to not reduce phenomenon, one to the other. And I think there is a difference between Zionism and racism … Now … has Zionism led to the oppression and subjugation of the Palestinian people, or … have the policies of Israel been informed by Zionism … led to bad? I think so, yes. And so that's what we have to be worried about. … To come and say Zionism is racism is, I think, a definitional mistake, a historical mistake. And how it can help us as a political strategy, and whether it can … be detrimental, is a question. I think it can be detrimental.

Gordon references both academic rigour and political strategy; he pays constant attention to how his arguments come across. He explains that he wrote his glowing article, 'Why I live in Israel', at the request of a publication that had long given him free rein, and found itself under siege from Zionist organisations. Yet his commitment to facts and correct terminology may extend beyond strategy or intellectual integrity.

'I was asked once to contribute to a chapter on a book, *The Genocide of Palestine*', he tells me.

> And I said, 'There's no genocide in Palestine'. I don't think saying that there's a genocide or that there was a genocide in the Gaza campaign – I think to say that is not true … [I]f you count the numbers of people killed, it's very small. That's one of the amazing things about this conflict. Not many Palestinians as related to other colonial military occupations. It's minimal.

This comment echoes Yiftachel's depiction of 'low-level' violence compared with other situations. 'It is an amazing phenomenon', Gordon raves, to the extent that his laconic demeanor permits.

> That, if we go to your part of the world, to East Timor, where one third of the population was wiped out, killed, massacred. And then we look at 40 years of occupation here and see that Israel killed thirteen thousand Palestinians out of a population of three and a half

> million. And we see two months in Iraq where that amount could have been killed. And we look at Chechnya and see how, you know – So … to come and say, 'this is the bloodiest –' It's not, and we can't do that. We have responsibility … as intellectuals try to speak the truth. And to speak the truth to power doesn't mean to bend the facts so it will fit our ideology …

I ask Gordon why he objects to Norman Finkelstein's (2005) claim that the actions of Israel fuel the fires of anti-Semitism.

> It's like, you wouldn't want to blame certain actions made by blacks because of bigots. It's better to blame the bigotry on certain actions done by blacks? The person's a bigot! … I don't want to explain away bigotry by saying we can understand their bigotry cos certain people got drunk and acted in a certain way on the street.

Gordon also objects to representations of Zionism as a global force (Baker and Davidson, 2003; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007) as 'unpleasant' and 'not true in many ways'. I ask what such representations invoke.

'You have to understand that anti-Semitism is real', replies Gordon.

> It exists in the world and is a real phenomenon. There are … anti-Semites, like there are people who are bigots and so forth. And we have to take that phenomenon seriously. And we know that historically bigots and anti-Semites have done a lot of evil to a lot of people around the world. And so we can't brush it aside and say it's not important, historically. … [T]here were anti-Semites before the existence of Israel, there was quite a lot. And they had their day.

So anti-Semites and, by implication, the Holocaust, underlie Gordon's concerns; he filters criticisms of Israel to see if they reflect such tendencies. However, Gordon doesn't throw out accusations indiscriminately, inviting one to accept his explanation of trying to engage with complexity; of being determined to pursue accurate arguments.

Meron Benvenisti invokes more obvious fears for the Jewish nation when he rejects terminologies that delegitimise his 'entity'. 'What would you say to academics, theorists of nationalism, who say that nations, tribes, ethnic identities are social constructs?' I ask him.

'Okay, so what', he replies. 'The Jewish construct is three thousand years old. Once you show me another example of a phenomenon like that, then I will discuss it.' He then asks whether we are discussing

general or Jewish tribes. 'General is social construct', he goes on. 'The Jews define their own tribal affinity. Therefore, the Jews are not a racial group. That's why I intentionally define us as a tribe. We are pre-history, like primitive, if you want. Primordial.'

I ask why he avoids the word nation.

'Because nation is not strong enough to describe that, cos then you can say social construct', he replies. 'This is an ancient phenomena that preceded the definitions of nations. Jews themselves define themselves as Zionists because ... they needed to play the game.'

I offer the social constructivist version. 'I've read Jewish writers who say that to be Jewish was always a religion, and that it only became a nationalist movement when it became Zionism.'

'Okay', he says.

> Being Jewish? It's defined not by us, [but] by the goy, by the gentiles. They have created that notion, they have alienated us. So it wasn't a positive definition, it was negative. Whoever is not a goy, is a Jewish or is a 'these people are different from us' ... [1]

Benvenisti endorses a social constructivist view of other nationalisms ('General is social construct') but his invocation of his own 'tribe' raises a dissonance between his presentation of Jewishness as an 'other-defined' nationalism and the claims of longevity he has just made.

A threat beyond academia emerges when Benvenisti equates my tentative question about the theoretical dismantling of the Jewish state to a 'declaration of war'.

> ... [T]his would be the entire world. Jews are not afraid of that. If it's *not* that way, they are surprised. So the last thing the Jews are afraid of is to be Us and Them, cos that is the nature of the way of life on this planet of the world, so even that is not going to work. I would even welcome that project. You know why? Cos it would unify my tribe!

Fear of the Jew-hating Other emerges differently for Dorit Rabinyan, who is concerned about the kind of regime that might replace Israel in a single-state scenario.

> Let's say this Arab majority won't be very tolerant ... For many reasons, not only for its difficulty to let go of values from the old world ... Let's skip the Islamic thing, let's skip how we see our societies around us are treating women ... For us, living here would be like, and I don't

> mean mentally … freedom won't be a sacred concept. There won't be two nations living in harmony by co-existence … It will mean that we have to leave!

Bronstein alludes to this too, albeit with more optimism:

> I hope life will be enriched by these changes [the return of Palestinian refugees] and not oppressed or suppressed … [P]eople threaten us that it will be a radical Islamic society, and, of course, this is something that I would struggle very strongly against, if this happened …

Although fear of the Other certainly informs some dissident narratives, Gordon offers persuasive arguments for its presence, while Bronstein's contingency plans to 'struggle … against' adverse consequences of refugee return do not inhibit his advocacy for it. Benvenisti and Rabinyan, by contrast, link fear with self-preservation.

## Self-interest

Fear and self-preservation dovetail with self-interest. Identification with a Jewish nation and state delivers many benefits to those who subscribe, and the price to pay in terms of existential insecurity may appear worthwhile. For dissidents, self-interest is more complex; they may observe the cycle of violence, yet be reluctant to lower their privileges. Self-interest may also manifest through efforts to live a 'moral' life.

Yonatan Pollack affirms my starting assumption that there might be some price to pay in rectifying the Other's oppression by rejecting the 'leftist axiom that the occupation hurts Israel'.

> I believe that Israel profits from the occupation immensely, in all senses. In the sense of being a master class. Social, at the level of sociology. The dominator, the master class. Definitely in an economic way.

Meron Benvenisti concurs, telling me, 'All your leftist friends are benefitting' from the wealth disparity between the two societies,

> talking about the political aspect of it because they don't want to admit that they don't want to give up their privileges: the water quantity, the beaches, the good life that will have to be destroyed to be shared by the Palestinians … The economic and social inequality, it's all concentrated on one thing – political equality – because it's a way of diverting.

Only Neve Gordon rejects my assumption that there might be a certain point at which concern for the Other becomes detrimental to the Us. 'I would think of it the opposite', he challenges. 'That the *lack* of a struggle would lead to certain permutations that would lead to myself having to leave ... '

However, Yiftachel and Benvenisti affirm my positing of a dilemma between resolving the Other's problem and the interests of Israeli Jews. Both liken the erasure of Jewish Israel/Palestine to an act of suicide. A limit to concern for the Other is evident even in Pollack's identification with the Palestinian resistance: '... [T]he Palestinian political spectrum from the very right of Hamas to the very left of the Popular Front all speak about one state, and no one calls for the exiles of Jews.'

Self-interest for my dissidents, then, reconfigures politics in Israel/Palestine to benefit the Other but without crossing a (variable) line of harming Jews. They also satisfy self-interest by enacting this in a way that enables identification as moral. Only Pollack is outright dismissive of such a notion:

> ... I don't weigh it in the form of, you know, of traditional moralism ... redeeming myself. Clearly I think that my responsibility in the thing – who cares how dirty I am? That's not the issue. The issue is ... to achieve liberation.

I am interested in how other dissidents' continued preference of the Jewish Us might be understood as manifesting personal (rather than 'national') self-interest.

Rabinyan is quite explicit on this. 'I can't lie and say I think about [the Palestinians] before I think about myself,', she declares, telling me that she identifies with Israeli soldiers first and foremost. 'They are my brothers. Hasan was a very dear friend, close to me, I care about him personally, but I can't think of a nation of Palestinians to be prior to my immediate identification with Israelis.'

Journalist Gideon Levy opposes the full return of Palestinian refugees, because this would 'create a new injustice ... That my house or my neighbour's house in Ramat Aviv [an expensive suburb in northern Tel Aviv] will have to be evacuated.' When I suggest some alternatives – new cities built for returning refugees, for example – Levy responds that this is 'utopic'.

> I mean, on utopia, wonderful. Realistically, I'm not sure we can absorb millions of Palestinians. ... [W]hen there are so many fears and hates

> between the two peoples, it will bring to only more violence and bloodshed… [W]e have to remember that those two peoples have so much between them, so much, so many emotions, so much bad blood. You know, you don't just bring them and everyone will fall on the shoulders of the other. There is a terrible gap between the two societies.

This argument is worth reflecting upon in light of Levy's support for Israel becoming a civic state of its citizens. Zionist orthodoxy rejects the return of Palestinian refugees, because their return would put an end to the Jewish state. However, since Levy does not support the maintenance of a Jewish state, arguably he should be open to return. Nonetheless, he prefers continued exclusion on the grounds of cultural intolerance between the two communities, or further injustice to Jews like himself.

Levy's connection to Israeli life again raises the issue of self-interest. When we discuss his refusal to be a 'weirdo', I suggest that his place in the mainstream must be easy, compared with a life on the margins.

> I'll go to a shrink, and I start to find out it's very hard to draw the line. Sure, there are also many things in my life that are not connected to my ideological goals. … Sure. Sure, it's for my comfort. They invited me two or three months ago to participate in [the reality TV show] *Big Brother VIP*. And there was a whole thing about me going or not going… I gained more by not going, but… I would have gone because of selfish things, *and* because of the thought that through *Big Brother* I can get to audiences that I can never get. … Both factors, sure, sure, but I can't tell you which one is dominant. It's very hard to separate. I think it's true about anyone, cos I guess that all those 'weirdos', this also satisfies some needs for them. I mean nobody's an altruist who does everything. It's always finding out something that we gain out of it.

While self-interest is difficult to extricate from other reasons dissidents might support policies harming their Other, we can read the above examples in this light. My intention is not to be critical of individuals; the point is that this is part of their dilemma since, as many of them recognise, there is a price to be paid in terms of lowering their privileges.

## Reconciling with personal pasts

This section considers how dissidents digest past actions that contradict their present ideals. I want to know how they interpret these events with hindsight, and how they have contributed to their politicisation.

An issue that arises for all my dissidents is compulsory military service. Milgrom and Bronstein refused to serve during Israel's war with Lebanon, a common 'road to Damascus' moment for Israeli dissidents (Lentin, 2010, pp. 88–9). Other dissidents who served in the Army explain how they interpret their actions today.

Jeff Halper's book expresses shame that he served, and pride that his children have refused to serve. In interview, he offers more detail.

> I went through, um, I won't call it a Zionist phase exactly ... It wasn't that I was not for peace, but ... I was more focused on inside Israel ... I wasn't as alienated from Israeli society as I am now ... I guess for me, at that time, the going to the Army was a part of that. ... I refused to serve in the occupied territories, although I have to say I did do basic training in the occupied territories, but when we had to do things there, I didn't do that. But I was older, I wasn't in the *army* Army. I was 27 when I came. So, I went through a month of basic training, and then I went into the Reserves ... I was a lecturer. So, I refused to carry a gun, I refused to serve in the occupied territories, and they didn't care. You know, so what. So, I was a lecturer in the army, and I went out, and I lectured soldiers on social issues, social problems. I was part of the education division. So, in other words, it wasn't being part of the Army, in a way that too much interfered with my views.

I am curious whether Halper simultaneously regrets and justifies serving. 'You know, so what' is ambiguous enough to refer to the attitude of the Army, or to the response of Halper under questioning from me. However, Halper may simply be clarifying why the contradiction, which appears so clear today, was less obvious then. He goes on to reflect on the male adventure element to Army service, which even some left-wingers enjoy, and adds that the movement *Yesh Gvul* (There Is a Limit)

> are not pacifists ... Some of them are officers in the Army and they love to go to the Army. So they just say, 'Okay, we're not going to the occupied territories'. So, you have to kind of make that separation between going to the Army, I guess. Or, at least, I did then ... I wouldn't do that [now] and I'm glad my kids didn't do that.

Neve Gordon declares that his own young children 'are going to have to decide for themselves ... I hope they decide to refuse'. Gordon himself

contemplated refusal, but was 'convinced not to by [his] father' on the basis of 'the humanitarian soldier'.

> There's the good soldier at the checkpoint and the bad soldier at the checkpoint … [O]ne would give a slap in the face to the person that wants to pass, and tell them that they can't pass, and cuss them out … [O]ne will say very nicely that he's not allowed to let them pass, and he's very sorry that he can't let them pass. But both become the technology of the checkpoint. One is probably a better technology than the other, but they're both the technology of the checkpoint.

After Gordon's compulsory service, he 'did some reserve duty for about a year or two in the educational corps'.

> Before then, I didn't do any reserve duty. And then they asked me to go to Gaza and talk about human rights and human dignity to soldiers in Gaza, and I said that I'm not willing to enter Gaza. I'm willing to talk to the soldiers if I'm out of Gaza. And they took the whole company … out of Gaza, and I spoke to them about human dignity and human rights for an hour and a half.

I ask Gordon to explain the distinction between talking to soldiers inside and outside Gaza.

> I was not willing to go to the West Bank or the occupied territories to lecture. I'm willing to talk to anyone. I'm willing to talk to settlers, and if I have the audience of settlers or soldiers, it's a wonderful audience to present my views. And, so, the military decided to give me that audience and I wasn't willing to give up on it. And I would go and talk about what I thought were the … violations of the military, to the soldiers. It was a wonderful experience in many ways, because I learnt a lot about it, about the military and about the soldiers and what they do. The fact that I was doing it supposedly as a military – I went like this [indicates his civilian clothes]. I didn't have to; it was giving me an opportunity to talk to soldiers, which I would like to convince. I believe in discourse and persuasion as a political form of bringing about change.

I asked what he hoped to persuade the soldiers.

> I didn't try to persuade the soldiers … it's not my job. [I tried] to be reflective about what they are doing, and to make them reflective. … If

> I had to talk to them about what they should do, I would probably tell them to refuse.

Part of the dilemma I explore in this book is how opposition is co-opted so that '[e]very act of political resistance becomes an expression of the "enlightened Israeli democracy"' (Grinberg, 2009, p. 106). Interested in Gordon's take, I ask whether the Army used him as a fig leaf.

> Not there. I think the Army is a bureaucratic institution that didn't realise what it was doing, and within three lectures realised it and kicked me out. But the question still stands: am I a fig leaf? Which is I think an important question. The answer is, definitely… Israel needs me… Israel needs its dissidents to say: 'Here we are; a free and democratic country.'

This book's most difficult engagement with personal history occurs, not surprisingly, with Meron Benvenisti. Here, the topic is not Army service but, rather, actions Benvenisti undertook as Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem in the 1960s. *Son of the Cypresses* includes an interview Benvenisti gave to a journalist in the 1980s, looking back to the period following Israel's conquest of the West Bank:

> In 1968 someone tossed hand grenades onto the road leading to the Wailing Wall. Moshe Dayan came and said we must evict all the Arabs living on the Wailing Wall road, despite it's being clear that it was not they who were to blame. Three tank units were brought in. I requested four hours of grace in which to evict them peacefully. I went from house to house with my aides. I explained the situation to them and cried along with them. We helped them drag their belongings outside. Thus the need to employ force did not arise. You ask if this was worth something. It wasn't worth anything concrete, but not one child cried. I did not diminish their hatred. I occasionally see one of the people who were evicted; he looks at me, and I know what he's thinking. At such times I reflect on the job I did. Perhaps I made the occupation tolerable instead of intolerable. Perhaps I did wrong. (p. 79).

This is indeed an old interview; Benvenisti would never talk about 'the occupation' today. However, I do hope he might talk about this painful experience, since the writing contains such ambivalence.

'It happened 40 years ago, that's what I said, that's it!' he snaps. 'What is there to talk about? What you want to know? What, what, what?'

'What was it like?'

'I wept', he states simply. 'What else? Explain to me what you are after. That I may be able to answer.'

'Well, I would like to ask you what that weeping did to you', I respond carefully. 'But that's something that you don't want to tell me.'

'No, enough is enough', he says decisively, before going on anyway.

> [T]he alternative would have been worse … They got thrown out of their house, cos the Army would have evicted them. So, I thought that maybe – some people would say, 'You participated in this'. It depends what … The question is what. Shall I concentrate on the evil, and then don't [inaudible], or should I help? Philosophical questions.

'I suppose that's the question that people would ask now', I muse, thinking about Bronstein and Gordon. 'Do you go and serve as a soldier in the territories and try and be the good soldier who is kind to the Palestinians –'

> No, I don't think so. I think that what I've done is something else. It wasn't a decision to evict them because of – military, ah, a military directive, because a Palestinian threw hand grenades. So [inaudible] decided to evict four houses, Palestinians, from their homes. Four families, *four specific homes* [knocks on table in time to these words] in the crossroads leading to the Western Wall.

'But for those people, it doesn't matter where they are … They're losing their homes.'

'How many times you make the same decision, if you are in a position of power? Every time that you decide a budget for road accidents … Don't be, don't be so –'

'Squeamish about it?'

'Exactly, because you always do these things … It's very easy to identify as part of a process of dispossession and then it's, "Ah, why, why do you?" This is a very simplistic approach, if you'll excuse me.'

'That's okay', I say. The entire weight of our dysfunctional and yet revealing exchange rests upon this moment. 'Be honest with me. What's the right approach?'

'The right approach is to see the case and understand it, and sometimes without judgement, because you just listen and you are not – Don't think that every time something happens, you have to pick sides, because you *don't know enough*. And what you know is half true.'

'Well, what I know in that situation, I learnt from you', I reply with only a touch of petulance.

'No, no. What you learnt from me is not the context, and you see, that is – Who, who suggests the parallel to existing soldiers, me or you?'

'Okay', I admit. 'Well, to me, it seemed similar.'

> Well, that's what I'm saying. So before you pass judgement on something that happened 40 years ago … take advice from an old man. Think about the possibility that you remain peripheral, and you only understand. Not decide. Not pass judgement. Sometimes, understanding is enough. By understanding, you can understand the victim; you can also understand the oppressor. Cos he has also reasons. He is not a vile person. He is not an evil person.

Benvenisti ends our interview almost immediately after this exchange, which I regard as a moment of reckoning. Despite his protestations, there is a legitimate parallel between Benvenisti's actions and the experiences of Bronstein as an occupying soldier; it is telling how the two men digest these experiences. Bronstein continues to define himself as part of Israeli society, but develops a different political outlook. For Benvenisti, on the other hand, evicting residents is an ugly business of which he is compelled to be a part. It pains him to revisit it, precisely because it was a necessarily evil of the Zionist project, which, at least at the time, he supported.

Israeli literary and social critic Yitzhak Laor writes about S. Yizhar, a well-loved Israeli author Benvenisti claims as inspiration (2000, pp. 231–41). Yizhar

> was a member of the Knesset representing the ruling party precisely in the years during which what had been destroyed [i.e. the Arab landscape] was being buried. … The Yizharian sorrow [over this erasure] does not become a tragic sorrow because Yizhar does not permit himself real heresy. He remains within the confines of the dominant ideology … and it a priori disallows any heresy, any real questioning of its values and institutions. (Laor, cited in Piterberg, 2008, p. 213)

Lentin (2010), who also examines Yizhar, suggests that

> nostalgia is an appropriate emotion to invoke so as to establish one's innocence and at the same time talk about one has destroyed … [I]ts relatively benign character facilitates imperialist nostalgia's capacity

> to transform the responsible colonial agents into innocent bystanders. (pp. 56–7, referencing Rosaldo, 1989, p. 121)

These comments shed light on Benvenisti and explain some of his hostility at my attempts to unearth his nostalgia's political meaning. I will revisit our exchange at the end of the book to consider some further ways we might read it.

## What does it mean to be clean?

Thus far, I have examined tensions between dissidents' pursuit of justice for the Palestinian Other and their attachment to the Jewish Us. One category of dissident seems to escape this tension: Gideon Levy's 'weirdos', who step outside mainstream Israeli-Jewish society. These radical dissidents oppose a Jewish state, seek to end Jewish privilege in Israel/Palestine and work with the Other rather than the Jewish Us. Uri Davis, Yonatan Pollack and Gilad Atzmon fit into this category. Given that my task is to explore whether, and how, Israeli Jews might overcome the subjectivity instilled by the ethnocratiser state, I could simply conclude that some do succeed in their efforts. However, I seek a more nuanced consideration of these people. How do they represent their relationship to Israeli Jews? Does their 'weirdo' status simply render them irrelevant? And have they paid a price for it?

Let us first consider the relationship of 'weirdos' to the collective. Young anarchist Yonatan Pollack represents himself as distanced from Israeli Jews. I ask him why he is one of the few people I speak to who is not particularly concerned for those who would regard him as part of their nation. I think, here, of Bronstein's determination to love his 'fellow Israelis' and integrate his vision of the past into their collective lives. Pollack responds: 'That's not my politics, that's not my character.'

'So what makes you able to disregard them in that way, and not to be mollycoddling them and worrying about whether they feel okay?'

'A lot of it would have to do with psychology and that's very hard for me to address', Pollack replies, adding that his political analysis leads him to see the Palestinians as the agent of change.

Later, I reflect that Pollack's distance from Israeli Jews does not necessarily free him from contradictions. When we touch briefly on his personal connection to Palestine, he tells me that his 'family is here from before, from a lot before, from the beginning of the twentieth century'. Arguably, Pollack's assuredness and perhaps even his disconnection from mainstream society arise from the same sense of nativeness that

Bronstein invokes in his narrative. Pollack is more native than the state; his family has been here for generations. His white skin and vivid blue eyes mark him as part of the Ashkenazi elite; not for him the horrors of the Holocaust, nor the struggles for assimilation faced by immigrants from the 'illegitimate' Arab world (see Shohat, 1999). Though Pollack never mentions this kind of privilege, he invokes it casually in his disregard for the hegemonic Zionist discourse. And although we talk about his family's presence in Palestine before Israel's creation, we don't talk about where they came from, or why. At the time, I surmise that Pollack's repudiation of Zionism precludes him from the responsibility to account for their presence in Palestine, as part of legitimating his own experience. Only later do I reflect that he, too, might have something more to say about his family being here.

Uri Davis, like Pollack, traces roots back to Palestine, and displays the confidence of the privileged Ashkenazi background. His memoir emphasises his nativeness; again, like Bronstein, he openly wears the stamp of the Zionist project on his fit, suntanned body (Davis, 1995, p. 108). Davis conveys his relationship to the Jewish collective in more affectionate terms than Pollack, and retains a Hebrew identification whilst strictly quarantining its political impact.

'...I have come to make a distinction between my tribal affiliations and my political [and] national affiliations', he explains.

> I regard my affiliation to Jewish communities to be primarily tribal. Tribal affiliations encompass a range of elements. They don't have to include religious undertakings, they may or may not. They may or may not encompass sentimental parts of tribal heritage and community. I recognise and celebrate parts of the tribal heritage of the community into which I was born. I celebrate that which I regard to be decent and I reject and denounce what I regard to be ethnocentric or outright racist.

He explains his politics in the following terms:

> I'm a product of the American and French revolutions, in that I'm wholly committed to the principle of separating religion from the state... The business of the state is to attempt to advance human welfare and my understanding is that... it is valid, if it is informed by the values of the Declaration of Human Rights... I have no problem with celebrating such parts of the tribal heritage as I regard to be

> decent and recognising the cultural baggage into which I was born, because I do not enter my politics in this way.

*Crossing the Border* details Davis's determination to have his two older sons circumcised (p. 321). Davis, a professed atheist, also writes of the significance of the Bar Mitzvah of his eldest son, Gul, explaining the cultivation of this 'ritual traditional heritage' in a speech to the congregation:

> For me this Bar Mitzvah is being held in critical recognition of the historical, cultural and sentimental point of departure of your/our family; in recognition of the fact that you were thrown into the world and into human society at one specific point and not another; in recognition that your point of departure into life is Jewish context and Jewish history rather than any other context and history. ... Your continued critical affiliation to Jewish history is a matter of voluntary resolution. But your point of departure into life is not. It is given to you. It does not, as such, determine your future affiliation. But it does determine the specifics of your person and character in numerous ways ... (p. 306)

When we meet, Davis explains his recent project: re-writing the Jewish Passover Seder prayer, the Haggadah.

> Since the text has been hijacked by political Zionism, in order to justify the settler colonial intervention by the WZO [World Zionist Organization] in the country of Palestine, one cannot, in the context of the past hundred years, ignore the abuse that is associated with this text ... I decided to try my hand at subverting and undermining, attempting to retain the traditional scene and take out of the text ethnocentric, collective punishment and God ... Now, I devoted time over the past four years in order to do that job. I regarded that to be a contribution and recognition of my affiliation to the Jewish tribe.

I ask Davis why he has not simply walked away.

'It seems that I do need this', he replies. '... I can't answer why my tribal affiliations are sentimentally important to me, but they are. So just take it!'

It seems almost too simple that the Western liberal axiom of separating religion from the state releases Davis from contradiction, but it seems to

work. Davis's attachment to his heritage, compared to Pollack's distance, appears as a facet of his character, rather than a contradiction.

The relationship between Gilad Atzmon and the 'Jewish collective', on the other hand, is more complicated. While Atzmon links his identification to Israel and cites his formative years there, he is extremely hostile to 'Jewishness'. In the next chapter, I will interpret Atzmon's relationship to this identification as a cause of his politics rather than a consequence.

My second exploration of 'weirdos' considers the political implications of their weirdness. While I have deliberately refrained from analysing how their society treats my dissidents, their marginal status warrants a brief examination, in order to explore whether they pay a price for their radical politics in the form of complete isolation or self-exile.

Given Pollack's obvious distance from Israeli Jewish life, one might expect him to tell stories of exclusion, but this is not the case. '[I]t's definitely not like we're ostracised', he tells me. 'You have to understand that part of Israeli society is its liberal myth.'

'You guys are the fig leaf for the enlightened, kind benevolent nation?'

'And for Jews, there really is a democracy here', Pollack adds. The idea of Jewish democracy 'allows [him] to do a lot of things that [he] couldn't have done otherwise'.

When I consider Uri Davis's place in his society, I start with a British journalist's observation that Davis's

> rejection of political Zionism, coupled with his conversion to Islam and his recent election to Fatah's Revolutionary Council means he is treated with a mixture of scorn and hostility by vast swaths of Israelis and supporters of Israel in the Jewish diaspora. (Freedman, 2009)

In the interview, I ask Davis how strong the sense is, in the Hebrew community, that he is no longer one of them.

'You have to make a survey in order to answer that question', Davis tells me. 'I don't think I'm qualified to answer it.'

I ask Davis to explain the extent to which he actually engages with the Hebrew audience. He answers by way of a long-winded parable, in which a vendor sells a mule to a buyer under false pretences. It seems as though the mule obediently performs its tasks after its owner whispers a request in its ear. The buyer finds, however, that the mule remains obstinate, so he returns to the vendor and complains. The vendor takes a beam of wood and beats the mule, which goes about its duties at last. The

buyer complains: he did not know he would have to beat the animal in order to gain compliance. The vendor responds: 'Sometimes you have to bring its attention to you.' After a small pause, Davis continues that his 'main intervention in Israeli society is through the support for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions'.

'To be bashing the mule on its head?'

'And getting its attention.'

Gilad Atzmon, meanwhile, maintains a significant distance from Israeli-Jewish society. He does not join the rest of his immediate family when they return there to visit relatives. His novel *A Guide to the Perplexed* (2002) evokes a future in which many Israeli Jews have fled from a dismantled Israel. Even other dissidents revile Atzmon – Uri Davis declares that he collectively stereotypes people, which is 'utterly odious'.

My final consideration of the 'weirdos' explores the price they pay for their actions. Gideon Levy argues that all individuals act according to their own self-interests, and I get a strong sense that both Pollack and Davis enjoy the roles that they play, as well as sourcing inspiration from their ideals. Pollack, with his cool tattoos, belongs to a rather glamorous international community of activists whose appeal derives at least in part from their marginality and the whiff of danger. Davis is similarly iconic; famous across Israel and seemingly reveling in his notoriety. Yet, I surmise that both men must also pay some kind of price for the lives they have chosen.

Pollack is quick to downplay any personal costs. 'I don't think it's such a huge thing to do. I mean I'm not paying such a huge price for it, really.' Whilst there might be a social price to pay, given the circles he moves in, this is largely irrelevant. It also does not seem to affect his ability to earn money – Pollack is a graphic designer who performs as little work as he needs to in order to survive, and says his clients don't care about his politics.

For Davis, the picture is more complex. He depicts himself as having an extraordinarily high calling to the pursuit of justice: 'I cannot answer the question why the voice of my conscience is more compelling than the voice of conscience of other people. It remains a mystery.' This calling has placed significant demands on his time, to the detriment of his personal life.

'[M]ost of my time is devoted either to my academic work or to solidarity work', he says.

> [U]pon establishing the first family, the second family, the third family, the women who decided to join their lives to mine were aware

> that I'm 95 per cent out of the house. In all three cases, children came into the equation rather late in the relationship. Eventually, the biological clock ticks with a female spouse in a family relationship, and in all cases the potential mother said, 'Look, I have the potentiality of delivering life. I realise that I cannot really ask you to share childcare in any significant way, but I still don't want to have a child from another man. So I'm resigned to being effectively a single mother, and I really want to have a child, and it's with you.' Now, I don't think anyone has the right to deny the fulfilment of that request from a person, any person, let alone the person that is the chosen point of one's family.
>
> Do you have children? When the child comes into the relationship – you can talk and discuss and agree whatever you want to agree – it's a completely different kettle of fish. The spouses I was fortunate enough to join were admirable, admirable, persons, but also persons with an academic career, and a medical career, and after the child was born, it appears that the mother needed help. And she turned for help from the obvious party that is obligated to help, namely the father. The father says, 'I can't and I don't really want to, and I don't really want to and I can't, because reducing my commitments from 95 per cent commitment to the call of my conscience ... to 50 or 60 per cent is a betrayal of my calling'. It can crack trust. ... And it can crack a rather good marriage. And it did, three times.

I ask Davis whether his conscience did not also extend to his family life. There is a long pause, after which Davis states, 'To a degree I am a product of patriarchy. I tried to reform, but apparently not sufficiently.'

This is Davis as he represents himself in his book as well, married to his political work. Nowhere is this more painful than in Davis's tales of his firstborn son, Gul. The reader meets Gul when he is born to Davis and his first wife, a fellow academic, in 1973. They leave Gul with a baby-minder, who calls him Grant and leaves him in his pram all day. Davis recounts an occasion on which the child was sick and he was writing an important document.

> I still inwardly cringe at the memory of my baby son, lying in a bundle at my feet, unhappy and whimpering, while I worked ... I ignored him and tried to shut him up rather than interrupting my work to pick him up in my arms and comfort him. (Davis, 1995, p. 123)

Gul goes on to develop anorexia nervosa, and specialists diagnose him with a compulsive suicidal disorder at age 16. Davis writes in 1995 that Gul has been hospitalised ever since; listing, in his meticulous way, the names of all of the different hospitals (p. 324).

When we meet in 2010, I don't ask Davis about Gul's health, but carefully suggest that the costs of Davis's actions appear to have been his relationships with those close to him.

'Correct', he declares. 'And most significantly, with my firstborn son.'

I tell him that I would like to talk about Gul, but I am also aware that it is a sensitive issue. 'Well, let's agree, at least for that stage, for you to be satisfied with that answer', he suggests.

We do not return to the issue, yet Gul remains the elephant in the room. Narrative Analysis enables me to analyse Davis's insertion of Gul's narrative into his own larger one. He depicts Gul as paying a price, but is it for the Palestinian struggle? Is this a political tragedy, or merely a personal one? At times, Davis employs his political struggle to outsource responsibility, as in a letter to his mother and sister in Israel, responding to their accusations that he is in some way responsible for Gul's condition:

> Ora [Davis's sister] starts with the statement: Gul pays the price of my politics. How does she know? Maybe Gul pays the price of having the kind of mother that he has. Nira and I shared legal custody for Gul, but care and control for Gul was with Nira. We had decided to have Gul on the understanding that his care was to be primarily his mother's responsibility and after our separation and divorce this remained the case. It is a dangerous business to start blaming me or Nira for Gul's situation and I would hesitate to direct judgements against his parents in this way. (p. 340)

Despite his last sentence, Davis nevertheless depicts Nira as a questionable mother, whilst representing himself as virtuous. Elsewhere, Davis writes:

> Given my total political mobilization I could have children only if my woman agreed to assume the responsibility for looking after them. It is one's duty to do good and combat evil, and conscience always comes always [sic]. For me this meant that my commitment to the cause of Palestine always came first, so my work had priority over any other claim to my time…I regarded my position on this

> matter as rather standard, in that this was a predicament facing every committed professional. (pp. 320–21).

Yet despite this 'standard', Davis depicts his family breakdowns as the price paid for his political struggle.

We can also read additional micro-narratives in his autobiography, perhaps intended to convey his idealistic politics, more critically. In one such narrative, Davis's second wife removes her top in the company of male Palestinians. Davis presents his frustration with his wife through a framework of cultural imperialism, depicting her as ignorant and insensitive. However, this situation looks quite different through the lens of gender analysis, with the woman cast as the Other amongst men. In another anecdote, the couple have a disagreement in a vehicle, and she swipes his conciliatory hand away. Davis is angry at this display in front of his Palestinian friends who are travelling with them, because a wife is not supposed to reject her husband publicly (p. 322). In these micro-narratives, Davis seems to put the sensitivities of the Palestinian Other (and his own pride) above those of his consort.

Perhaps this is a product of his professed 'conservative liberal' approach, which clearly demarcates public and private spheres. In public, Davis is principled with regard to minimising distinctions between members of the human race, while in private he retains a pride in what he calls his Jewish tribal origins. However, this demarcation does not adequately resolve the complexities of family relationships. While Davis fighting apartheid but embracing patriarchy does not amount to a failing of his political position per se, it is interesting to consider. The bigger question is whether we can draw broader conclusions about the toll that 'crossing the border' might exact; I suggest we cannot. Many activities and passions can distract an individual from other responsibilities; what is most interesting in this case, however, is that Davis himself represents these life choices as part of his political journey, and hence central to his 'crossing the border'.

Meanwhile, it is hard to discern the personal price Gilad Atzmon pays for his political stance and actions. It strikes me, somewhat absurdly, upon spending time with him, how Israeli he still seems. It is a likeness he owns: '[L]ike an Israeli, I do not hold back, I do not mince my words… [I]t is no secret that I look like an Israeli and sound like one' (2011, p. 186). The bass player in his band is Israeli. His wife is Israeli. Atzmon seems very content with his music career and his home in London. Yet I question whether everything is perfect when I consider

the vitriol he carries; I explore later how we might conceptualise this as a price to pay for his political stance.

Do dissidents who are more radical escape the 'trap' of identifying with Zionism and hence neglecting the needs and interests of their Other? It appears, from looking more closely at the radical dissidents in this study, that they do. However, the price that they pay might make this option prohibitive. Atzmon hates his origins and – in a sense – himself. Davis and Pollack emotionally and physically depart from their origins as they escape the political distinction between the Us and Other. Such dislocation is likely to remain a significant barrier for most Israeli Jews, meaning that although radical politics might be a 'way out' of the dissidents' dilemma, it is unlikely to provide a well-trodden path.

# 7
# Dissident Discourses

## Introduction: limitations and discontinuities

This chapter explores the dissidents' strategies for reconciling their personal identification with concern for the Other. Varying degrees of embeddedness into their society and its hegemonic identification lead the dissidents to either retreat from concern for the Other or shift into different ways of talking. This gives rise to contradictions, omissions and side steps, which I conceptualise as discontinuities. I suggest that the dissidents make use of six available national identification discourses: hegemonic *ressentiment* Zionism and five alternatives, which attempt to subvert it. However, the alternative discourses have developed in the context of the ethnocratiser state and the hegemonic *ressentiment* discourse. Due to this, and because of some contingencies of the Israeli case, the alternative discourses are unable to simultaneously satisfy identification, overcome *ressentiment*, and work towards inclusion and equality. This places dissidents in a potentially unresolvable bind.

The content of the discourses I identify in this chapter, and how they organise dissidents' perceptions of their situation, informs this problem. Each discourse has a specific way of organising past, present and future. It prescribes the identification of the (Israeli Jewish) individual employing it and enunciates a particular vision of – or for – the (Palestinian) Other. However, a given discourse may not provide appropriate tools for working towards equality or co-existence, even if it partly resists the hegemonic *ressentiment* Zionist discourse. In particular, the discourses I identify as binational, Kinder Zionist and post-Zionist remain wedded to an Us. This Us is then projected backwards into the past, yet cannot account for the Us and the Other found there without

the clear and compelling terms of the *ressentiment* discourse. Meanwhile, the civic discourse and inverted *ressentiment* fail to resonate with strong ethnonational identifications.

This situation presents dissidents with two possible strategies. First, if the discourse appears to compel a dissident to identify in terms that do not resonate or appear to be 'safe', he or she may embrace continued preference of the ethnic Us due an apparent lack of alternative choices. This obliges the dissident to abandon the connection to the Other inspiring employment of the discourse in the first place. Since single discourses may fail to serve the dissidents in this way, they may embrace the second strategy instead. The second strategy involves moving between contradictory and competing discourses, underpinned by different considerations. This fluid and repeated movement between multiple intellectual spaces generates discontinuity, since dissidents are only able to defy the limits of each individual discourse by simultaneously embracing numerous contradictory positions, thereby defying logic itself.

Such discontinuities are not the dissidents' faults, nor are they unique to individuals in such situations. We all have multiple performances of identification available and promote different parts of ourselves at different times to different audiences. Dorit Rabinyan (2010) gives poignant voice to these multiplicities:

> I'm not ready to give up any of these hands, you know? I'm not ready to give up my patriotism to Israel and to who I am, as much as I'm not ready to give up my humanistic, universal self. So there's no way someone is gonna make me give up my patriotism … But I'm a patriot, but I'm never the less a humanistic … . This duality is what I consider to be human. What I consider to be alive. It's only, it's only, it's the only way I know how things are, you know. There is no other mechanism I can refer except for seeing both all the time.

However, the dissidents' employment of multiple discourses tells us something about the situation they face. Their context gives rise to a unique problem of trying to connect with the Other across institutionalised ethnic privilege. I do not judge the dissidents for being unable to make the discourses do the job; rather I shed light on how dissent against *ressentiment* is constrained by the latter's hegemony within the ethnocratiser state.

## The discourses

### Hegemonic *ressentiment* Zionist discourse

As dissidents articulate their concern for the Other, they must negotiate around the dominant *ressentiment* Zionist discourse. As I have outlined already, *ressentiment* Zionism depicts an ancient, singular Jewish nation, displaced from biblical Israel, having wandered the earth in exile. Jewish experience and identification centres upon the territory of Israel/Palestine, and the discourse – after Jewish 'return' – nullifies life outside. The state of Israel is the only solution for the problems Jews have experienced at the hands of Others throughout history. Others have always hated Jews. Others in Palestine similarly hate Jews, defying their attempts to secure a safe haven in the land to which they are entitled. Others' rejectionism has caused the political conflict in Israel/Palestine; resolution can only occur when Others accept the rights of Jews to form a majority and self-govern. In the absence of this ideal, Jews will remain vulnerable, and will defend themselves with conduct befitting a peace-loving nation.

The *ressentiment* Zionist discourse presents self-evident facts about history, identification, and Others who act as violent obstacles to peace and self-determination. While the alternative discourses challenge these tenets, they must also traverse the ground laid by them. Accordingly, every alternative discourse necessarily takes *ressentiment* Zionism as its starting point, whether counterpoising or modifying it. Alternative ways of understanding Us and Other in Israel necessarily come up against the institutionalisation of *ressentiment*, from the legal embedding of ethnic categories to the recruitment of every Israeli Jew into armed forces vested with occupying the Other. Alternative discourses, then, are not merely abstract tools with which the dissidents may construct new visions of their society; rather, they are tools hewn with the same raw materials as *ressentiment* Zionism. They may bear the mark of the Zionist project and its outcomes, in the form of thick ethnic categories and conceptualisations of the Jewish nation in history. This context shapes the discourses, alongside external political influences and challenges from within Jewish cultural traditions.

### The civic discourse

The civic discourse available to the dissidents takes its inspirational basis from outside the Israel/Palestine context. Invoking the civic–ethnic distinction in nationalism studies, the civic discourse disregards

the categories of Us and Other within the polity of reference. In the Israel/Palestine context, the civic discourse privatises ethnic identification, depicting those who might otherwise be Others as equal participants in a shared society. Removing official ethnic identities from the political sphere, the civic discourse erases the boundaries that facilitate privileging the Us and legitimise harming Others within the state. This discourse, therefore, enables users to escape the 'trap' constituted by pursuing the interests of the Other whilst using asymmetrically institutionalised categories of identification.

However, for Israeli Jews, invoking a civic discourse might be more complicated, since Jewish intellectual debate problematises strict civic-liberal interpretations of public and private identification. Yitzhak Laor (2009) argues that there is an internal contradiction at the very heart of Jewish identity, with Western civilisation demanding that Jews 'divide themselves between being a Jew ("at home") and being a human (outdoors). As far as the Christian is concerned, no such duality exists…' (p. 126). When Napoleon granted French Jews citizenship, Jewish deputies had to decide whether they constituted a nation or a religion, since if they were the former they could not also be French citizens. The deputies decided that Judaism was a religion, but 'among themselves…noted that the question of either/or was essentially a Christian question' (Ehrlich, 2003, p. 66). Hannah Arendt and other individuals active within the early cultural Zionist movement also opposed the subordination of Jewish identification to universalism (see discussions in Raz-Krakotzkin, 2011). Meanwhile, when Zionist scholars explored the issue, they predictably concluded that such dilemmas could only be resolved in a Jewish state (Avineri, 1981, pp. 8–12). Since Christian traditions shape the civic discourse within the context of the Western Enlightenment, such a discourse may not provide a straightforward fit for those who do identification differently, and outside this tradition.

**The binational discourse**

The binational discourse available to dissidents also derives from general precepts in political theory. It builds from the understanding that 'ethnic nations' are authentic entities, in keeping with a primordialist approach to ethnicity, which accepts at face value the claims of those who identify as such. In the hands of pragmatists, the binational discourse may also reflect an assumption that, at the very least, the 'nations' in question are 'real' enough for the state to institutionalise them on equal terms in pursuit of peace between those who see themselves as belonging.

A binational discourse might invoke political solutions proposed by the scholarly father of consociational democracy, Arend Lijphardt (1977, Chapter 2), such as power sharing through grand coalitions, minority vetoes, federalism and proportional representation. It might also invoke mechanisms of living harmoniously in a context of non-domination, such as those explored by Iris Marion Young (2005, pp. 153–155), particularly horizontal federalism. However, these are the logical *applications* of a binational discourse; the *content* of such a discourse in Israeli Jewish political life requires a different explanation. A binational discourse employed by an individual in this context not only asserts the existence of nations as objective fact, but also necessarily invokes subjective identification with one of them. Therefore, an Israeli Jew invoking a binational discourse will identify with the 'Jewish nation', depicted as a long-standing entity with a connection to Palestine.

The binational discourse is the modern manifestation of the idea that two 'nations' call Israel/Palestine home, and hence a political arrangement of formal co-existence should ensue. Raz-Krakotzkin (2011) explains it

> as the framework of discussion and responsibility ... Binationalism leads to the basic understanding that the questions of the rights of the Jews and the question of the rights of the Palestinians are the same. It thereby implies a Jewish identity based on the recognition of Palestinian rights, one that does not exclude the Palestinians but which begins to imagine these identities together. (pp. 59–60)

However, drawing from the cultural Zionist tradition already discussed in this work, the binational discourse cannot offer a coherent account of this process. The problem occurs at both a theoretical and an applied level. At a theoretical level, any kind of binationalist or multiculturalist discourse is groupist, depicting nations as agents and actors. When an individual identifying as Jewish applies such a groupist perspective to the colonising events in the history of Israel/Palestine, the resultant discourse can only depict a Jewish nation fleeing horror for homeland. There is no space within the discourse for the resident Other to question or resist; accordingly, this Other now faces not merely a political movement, but a self-evident nation with both claim and justification for the land. The best that the binational discourse can say to the Other at this moment of colonisation is, 'Budge up, make room'. Thus, it is questionable whether the claim for recognition of the Other's rights is an inherent part of the discourse.

Moving on from this internal flaw, the binational discourse in Israel/Palestine has, in its favour, an alluring procreative quality. Although the discourse depicts an initial formal cooperation between two distinct nations, it alludes to an amalgam of both identities emerging sometime in the future; a combined Jew–Palestinian category made up of characteristics of both. This putative new category differs from civic nationalism in that it combines two 'ethnic nations' rather than relegating 'ethnonational' attributes to the private sphere. Within the binational discourse, then, the coupling of two ethnic nations produces a brand-new baby, which ties the families together. The new 'baby' is unique; its parents extol its qualities in the same terms they previously applied to themselves. Possessing qualities of each parent, the new 'baby' is an 'ethnic Us' whose birth joins the Other to Us, and Us to the Other. It is an evocative vision.

**The Kinder Zionist discourse**

Another alternative discourse draws from the tradition sometimes depicted as 'left Zionism' by scholars and commentators (see critique in Grinberg, 2009 p. 111; see also Laor, 2009) and framed as 'liberal nationalism' by at least one of them (Tamir, 1993). Kinder Zionism has developed in the Israel/Palestine context, but is analogous to discourses in other ethnocratising contexts, such as the discourse privileging Malays as historical owners of Malaysia (see Mauzy, 1983, pp. 2–4, 47).

Kinder Zionism depicts an improvement upon the present scenario as the optimal solution to the Other's problem. Improvement of the situation of the Other is to occur without sacrificing the privilege enjoyed by the Us, and especially without weakening the boundary between Other and Us. Kinder Zionism manifests most clearly in a distinct political solution: ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state alongside a Jewish Israel. Whilst such a model might appear to offer equality, its application would result in Others in certain zones either being compelled to leave their homes, or forced to accept second-class citizenship in a still-ethnocratising Jewish Israel. However, the two-state model is not the only possible manifestation of Kinder Zionism, which is fundamentally an approach to identification rather than a political programme. Kinder Zionism appears to be a genuine attempt to move away from the stereotyping and hatred endemic to *ressentiment*, but the rules of engagement are laid well in advance to ensure continued prioritisation of the Jewish Us.

Mandelbaum (2012b) takes a more cynical view of this discourse, which he labels as 'national left' (p. 450). He argues that it invokes a

disconnect from historical (if still problematic) 'leftist' pursuits of 'peace' and instead promotes unilateral disengagement for securitised demographic purposes. In embracing this 'rightist agenda' (p. 463) the 'national left' (or Kinder Zionist) discourse is potentially more dangerous than overtly right-wing nationalist discourses, since it mainstreams and normalises such sentiments as 'a necessary policy, which stems from a liberal and democractic traditions [sic] much like other Western states' (p. 463).

If Mandelbaum is right, then Kinder Zionism may not belong in the dissenting discourse basket any more than *ressentiment* Zionism itself belongs there. However, I maintain that we need to consider this discourse as a form of dissent – as a stated and claimed opposition to *ressentiment* Zionism – for two key reasons. First, as I noted in the Introduction, whilst discussing whether Dorit Rabinyan was a suitable candidate for analysis, there is a difference between overt demonisation of the Other and at least attempting to understand and connect with the plight of the Other. Even Mandelbaum (2012b) acknowledges that the 'national left' maintains 'a liberal approach regarding the non-Jewish and non-Zionist minorities in Israel' (p. 463), and his analysis maintains the distinction between the 'national left' and the 'right' it increasingly emulates. Second, even if Kinder Zionism turns out to be closely tied to *ressentiment* Zionism, and I will suggest that it does, then we learn this precisely by taking it seriously from the outset as a way of framing dissent. We learn that apparent dissent may be phoney or hamstrung, and that people who imagine themselves to be challenging hegemonic discourses and practices might be doing little more than reproducing them. However, we learn this precisely by examining this precarious dissent alongside more radical endeavours; by understanding it as inside the basket of dissent rather than outside it.

### The post-Zionist discourse

An additional alternative discourse available to the dissidents is post-Zionism. Post-Zionism can be linked more generally to post-nationalism or post-modernism (Ram 2005, p. 35). However, its Israeli application draws from a wide range of movements, including 'new' or 'revisionist' historians like Ilan Pappe (1988, 2001, 2004), Benny Morris (1994, 2004a) and Avi Shlaim (1988, 2000), and sociologists like Baruch Kimmerling (1983, 1992, 1999), Gerson Shafir (1999) and Uri Ram (1999, 2005, 2008). Academic literature termed post-Zionist debunks historical myths about the sanctity of Zionism (Shlaim, 2000; Morris, 2004a), and critiques the construction and treatment of Mizrahim (Shohat, 1999).

Perhaps the core proposition tying this very broad literature together is that Israel is ready to shrug off its past and move boldly into the future. But what future? Materialists like Shafir and Peled (1998) suggest that globalisation is leading Israel towards a less ethnicised polity; Ram (2008) suggests that this may be accompanied by a reactionary cleaving to ethnic identification. Yet how does Israel really 'grow up', empty itself of ethnic content and divorce itself from history, and is this really the aim? Rather,

> [i]s it the case that the heroic men and glorious past that were effective during earlier nation-building stages must be updated, and the practice of sceptical rationalism regarding the national past amongst descendants becomes the current capital through which the Zionist project may continue into late modernity? (Dalsheim, 2007, p. 527)

Post-Zionism may, therefore, simply be Zionism repackaged for a new, sceptical age. The suggestion that some works labelled post-Zionist regard the Zionist project as legitimate but completed reinforces this notion. Yadgar (2002) suggests an aim to 'improv[e] the (national) status quo, neither revolutionising the existing order nor completely undermining it' (p. 64). I am most keen to consider this feature of post-Zionism. Accordingly, I suggest that the post-Zionist discourse depicts itself as ostensibly disengaged from the past; hence as forward-looking. It is secular, grown-up and eager to end the conflict and make Israel a good place to live. A significant reference for this transformation is Israelis themselves; post-Zionism is about shrugging off the shackles of *ressentiment* and ethnocratisation as they mire their subjects in conflict. The post-Zionist discourse retains a loose attachment to the ethnic Us whilst being open to the idea that it might change and recede. However, this loose attachment is not pinned to a fixed continuation of Jewish privilege, as in Kinder Zionism, nor linked to equal sharing, as in the binational discourse. Ideological principles might inform the civic, binational and Kinder Zionist discourses, but the post-Zionist discourse breaks with ideology (Ram, 2005, pp. 34–5). Post-Zionism imagines no more Zionism telling people how to live, and perhaps no more heavy instructions from any other quarters either. Even Dorit Rabinyan, the least post-Zionist interviewed, expresses a desire to 'breathe' and be free from such pressures.

Released from collective prescriptions for how to live, pragmatism comes to the fore within the post-Zionist discourse. It sets lower expectations than the civic discourse, from which we can differentiate it by its

significant, albeit more fluid, attachment to the ethnic Us in political life. Post-Zionism is necessarily woolly about the identification it promotes and the political solutions it advocates because it is 'still tentative and partly confused… trapped in the defense of some Zionist positions while rejecting others' (Nimni, 2003, p. 9). It harvests the historical fruits of Zionism whilst simultaneously aspiring to a future in which they cease to have a negative impact. Endorsement seems inherent in the depiction of Zionism's completeness; if it was necessary for 'the nation' to do what it did – and if 'the nation' at that historical moment is accepted as an organic entity – then mistreatment of the Other may be collateral damage; a necessary evil. Though the discourse presents mistreatment as problematic, on closer inspection this might only be because it extracts a price from Us. A (partial) dissolution of identification thus evades condemning or celebrating the past, yet leaving this past unexcavated could be a way of quietly maintaining ethnic privilege into the future.

### The inverted *ressentiment* discourse

The final alternative discourse, inverted *ressentiment*, epitomises the *ressentiment* theory developed in Chapters 1 and 2, but with a twist. Inverted *ressentiment* is *ressentiment* in reverse; it elevates the Other as virtuous and demonises the Us. The inverted *ressentiment* discourse available to the dissidents bestows hatred upon the Jewish collective, requiring an Israeli Jew to extricate him or herself in order to avoid being tarnished, or else to see the self as a legitimate target of hatred. In the case of extrication, the individual can never become the venerated Other, since the inverted *ressentiment* discourse maintains ethnic boundaries. Thus, the discourse decisively Others those employing it, banishing them to a purgatory in which universalistic identities appear illusory, but 'desirable' identities are unattainable.

An inverted *ressentiment* discourse is essentially somebody else's *ressentiment* discourse. In the Israeli Jewish context, the inverted *ressentiment* discourse mirrors a Judeophobic or anti-Semitic discourse. Whilst it might at first appear perverse for those identifying as Jews to employ such a discourse, Falk (2008) suggests that 'Jewish self-hatred' might have long been a feature of Jewish consciousness. He explains (in groupist terms) that 'a minority group in a given society that is repeatedly told that it is bad, that is rejected and persecuted, may also develop a collective group self that is bad and negative' (p. 54).

In Europe, the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse itself employed the negative vision of Jews offered up by anti-Semitic discourses. Representing the Diaspora Jew as a homeless parasite who should emigrate from

Europe, Zionism dovetailed with anti-Semitic ideology; albeit with an instrumental component – Zionism Othered the 'old Jew' of Europe to create the celebrated 'new Jew' in Palestine (Yadgar, 2003a, p. 55). However, since this was more about juxtaposing the unflattering 'before' shot with the attractive (Zionist) 'after' shot than actual hatred, we should not overstate Zionism's conflation with anti-Semitic representations. That said, in the context in which Zionism flourished, it is not hard to see how the application of groupist terminologies and blanket labels of Good and Evil to ethnic categories might give rise to a discourse like inverted *ressentiment*. The thick ethnic identities constructed by *ressentiment* Zionism might only appear malleable in the case of complete moral reversal – whatever price this may exact from the individual.

## Dissidents using discourses

In this section, I demonstrate how the dissidents use the available discourses to identify and explain their place in Israel/Palestine and their visions of the Other. Each dissident employs a primary discourse, but shifts into others if they cannot use their primary discourse to reconcile identification with equality and justice for the Other. I cover the discourses in the order above, with the exception of the *ressentiment* discourse, which I explore at the end. No dissident employs this discourse as their primary discourse; however, some return to it, because it alone offers a coherent framing of Jewish identification and history in the context of Zionism. Because each dissident narrative is unique, some invite deeper analysis; I therefore discuss some dissidents in more detail than others. As I move through the discourses, I will also revisit some dissidents, suggesting how their movements traverse the limitations of single discourses.

### Civic discourse

The civic discourse, offering complete engagement with what the dominant discourse constructs as the Other, is the primary discourse of young anarchist Yonatan Pollack and veteran maverick Uri Davis. Tellingly, both men distance themselves to varying degrees from the Israeli Jewish community, enabling them to adopt an alternative vision for constructing a polity. Neither, however, delivers the straightforward version of this discourse, which would be to argue for a civic regime in Israel/Palestine, in which all 'Jews' and 'Palestinians' would be equal citizens of an ethnically blind state.

Pollack reserves an anarchist's scepticism for the state's claim to ethnic neutrality and 'capacity to be an agent of justice or an agent of equality.' His vision of himself and the Other, however, conforms to civic universalism, demonstrated by his work with the Palestinian popular resistance. Pollack does not see that ethnic categories have a place in politics: 'People want to see themselves as Jews and that's their national identity, so be it. But it's very different than saying there should be a state for Jews.' Moreover, while 'allowing as much autonomy to any group is a good thing', implementing such autonomy cannot inhibit Others. Pollack's personal motivator is the struggle against injustice: 'I'm not so interested in the nationalist part of it, but for me it's obviously a liberation struggle.' The civic discourse thus constitutes Pollack as an individual fighting injustice, rather than a Jew or Israeli.

Uri Davis, whose rewritten Haggadah and support for ritual circumcision demonstrate commitment to his 'tribal affiliation,' uses the civic discourse in a different way. Nevertheless, his identification keeps him free from contradictions because he privatises and de-nationalises it ('I do not enter my politics in this way'). Davis's civic discourse manifests in his pursuit of a PLO identity card minus exclusivist religious imagery.

Both Pollack and Davis distance themselves from Israeli Jewish society – Pollack to the extent of problematising the very ties that bind it ('What is Jewish culture?'), and Davis by situating himself within a Palestinian milieu, politically and personally. There is something telling in the fact that these are the only two of my dissidents to adopt a primary civic discourse. It seems to take a rather extraordinary approach to questions of identification within Israeli Jewish society to reach the position of effectively giving up Jewish nationalism. If only 'weirdos' like Pollack and Davis are willing or able to do this, we might question the extent to which the civic discourse is a feasible option for dissent, given that it requires letting go of the 'Jewish nation'. Accordingly, while the civic discourse is entirely coherent – and, indeed, is the only discourse that can pursue equality or justice for the Other without generating internal tensions – it will not measure up for most dissidents, because it negates their identification. This is summed up aptly by Eitan Bronstein, who says, 'Nationality is still important…. A more citizenship sense of nationalism…is a bit beyond my vision'.

**Binational discourse**

A larger number of the dissidents seem comfortable using the binational discourse, which enables them to retain existing ethnic categories and attempt to reshape the power relations between them. The discourse's

procreative quality evocatively alludes to a new nation; however, dissidents who use the binational discourse as their primary discourse generate discontinuities as they navigate the history of the Zionist project and the establishment of Israel. We can see this across several dissident narratives.

Oren Yiftachel and Eitan Bronstein employ the binational discourse in a straightforward fashion. Yiftachel utilises it as the basis for his model of a non-oppressive binational state, displaying its procreative quality in his hope for 'intermarriage' and 'love … prevail[ing]' between future generations. Bronstein takes seriously the cultural identities of 'Jews' and 'Palestinians', claiming that they have a greater right to Israel/Palestine than (additional) Others. His engagement with Israel/Palestine's history invokes the legitimacy of two nations on the land. Jeff Halper also employs the binational discourse to make this argument, augmented by a post-Zionist desire for Israel to be a 'normal country'. Neve Gordon claims that a 'Jewish' way of thinking informs his politics, particularly his affinity for the work of Leon Roth, the Jewish intellectual who sought to embrace Others.

Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom couples the binational discourse with the civic discourse in a way that illustrates my observation, above, that the dichotomy of public/private identification may not apply so easily to contexts outside the Christian Enlightenment tradition. For Milgrom, privatisation is not possible because he sees politics and religion as inseparable from culture. They form part of his 'Jewish milieu', whilst he simultaneously connects with a universalist milieu through his activism. As a rabbi, Milgrom has a certain audience ('I know that there is a Jewish public that is waiting for me and needs me to say these things'), and Milgrom's Jewish identification appears central to his politics. He invokes a Jewish Us ('… [W]e didn't – we *don't* – have enough of an ideology of partnership'), yet deconstructs national bonds ('I think that the only significant social category is right now'). He resists the construction of the Us as a community of faith with his 'foggy' theology and professed inability to 'use God language'. If it is not belief in God that defines Milgrom's Jewish identification, then it can only be his relationship to those with whom he shares his Jewish 'milieu'; a relationship that Milgrom seeks to invoke in a non-national way. Perhaps the futility of this underpins his melancholia, for it becomes apparent that *Israel* is the site of Milgrom's Jewish identification; the physical locus for what is now a national Us. Milgrom's exile from Israel is an exile from an Us consumed by nationalism. When we meet in Berlin, Milgrom demonstrates his melancholic exile in poignant ways – his only mobile

phone is an Israeli number; he emphasises the time he spends on the internet dealing with Israeli issues: 'I am still in Israel, even when I'm here.' Israel has become the only place in which Milgrom's Jewish identification can have meaningful content. I understand Milgrom's primary discourse as binational because we cannot ultimately differentiate the 'we' he invokes from the ethnonational Us of Zionism, despite his intentions. Therefore, Milgrom's discontinuities parallel those of other dissidents who employ binationalism as their primary discourse, particularly with regard to how they evaluate the Zionist project.

The binational discourse has a tension within it. On the one hand, it claims to offer equal consideration to both 'nations' and both 'national histories'. On the other hand, ('re')constituting the Zionist's 'nation' through colonial settlement of Palestine necessarily marginalised Others and denied them the space for refusal. This tension plays out in the dissident narratives in interesting ways; dissidents move into other discourses to work around it.

For example, when I ask how the events of 1948 might have unfolded differently, Milgrom legitimises the creation of the UN's Jewish state in 1947 ('I think that was a much better starting point'). Then, when I critique the consequences of this, he says, 'I guess it would have been better if the state had not been established in 1947 but rather that things had sort of, you know, worked out'. Finally, when I try to pin down how things might have 'worked out', Milgrom can only explain what *he* would have done if he had been there: 'Hopefully I would have been a peacemaker or someone who was thinking about the impact of this on other people…' Milgrom has been using the binational discourse, but when I talk about the events of 1948, he becomes 'trapped' within the paradigm of warring nations needing their own states – the paradigm *ressentiment* Zionism manifested in Palestine. Milgrom slips into the Kinder Zionist discourse to argue that the starting point of two states for two nations might have been better than what unfolded; failures of acceptance (on the part of non-Jews) and Israel not sticking to the plan are therefore the problem. However, when I ask Milgrom to revisit the historical dynamics, he confronts a Zionism that 'didn't figure out in a nice way' the 'resentment and a feeling of being marginalised, and an anti-colonial struggle' of the Other. He then shifts again; this time back to the binational discourse, but positioning himself as a lone moral dissident in history. He reframes the conversation: 'The question is, so what was developing, how would I have felt in those situations?' Interestingly, this is *not* the question – I have been very eager for *any* dissident to provide a coherent plan for Cultural Zionism! Yet all Milgrom can offer is

himself: 'a peacemaker or someone who was thinking about the impact of this on other people'. The binational discourse gives Milgrom nowhere else to go; his deliberate reframing of the question becomes a kind of omission. He chooses not to segue into another discourse – a civic one, perhaps, which would write off the whole project as misguided, or a *ressentiment* one, which would justify it. Milgrom cannot go to the civic discourse because he ultimately frames himself as part of the Jewish Us. He simultaneously resists *ressentiment*, especially the inverted *ressentiment* that might follow his conclusion that We are the problem. Instead, there remains only the lone dissident in space and time, the melancholy rabbi self-exiled in Europe. While the *ressentiment* discourse does not trap Milgrom, the binational discourse ties him; the nationalism he eschews binds him through his Jewish identification.

Oren Yiftachel utilises the binational discourse with more ease, digesting its contradictions by legitimising, when pressed, the creation of Israel, despite his affinity for co-existence. Yiftachel's depiction of Israel's founding as a 'colonialism of refugees' removes negative intent to Others and explains forces at work beyond the reach of moral ruminations. Jeff Halper, meanwhile, depicts Zionism as a positive nationalist movement; problematic only when infected with 'ethnocratic' ideas and colonialism. Where Yiftachel finds virtue in the victimhood of refugees, Halper overtly rejects this formulation ('they weren't all refugees') and instead finds virtue in benign intentions and temporal relativism ('You know, it's a different reality, a different context, a different set of thoughts').

Raz-Krakotzkin (2011) suggests that binationalism can provide 'the fertile ground from which to generate an alternative approach to the present'. He argues that 'a critical reading' of the literature of Cultural Zionists 'indicates the path to a process of decolonization – which in this context means an urgent rethinking of Israeli Jewish nationalism, with the understanding that it must include Palestinian nationalism' (p. 59). Invoking Cultural Zionism in this way enables dissidents to map the future. For Halper and Bronstein, Cultural Zionism provides contemporary blueprints for reconfiguring Israel/Palestine, or 'decolonising Zionism' (Halper, 2010). Given Bronstein's explicit project (through *Zochrot*) of encouraging Israeli Jews to take responsibility for the troubled history in Palestine, identifying the 'better Israeli' of Cultural Zionism could be part of that ownership. If Bronstein asks his 'fellow Israelis' to revisit a past depicting their collective identification as oppressive coloniser, this might prove too difficult (see Abdel-Nour, 2003, 2004, pp. 710–11). The 'better Israeli' within the Cultural Zionist tradition

offers a prouder heritage for people like Bronstein and – ultimately, perhaps, under his tutelage – the entire 'Jewish nation'.

However, despite this potentially fruitful application of Cultural Zionism, there is also the risk of evading genuine engagement with the Other. There is a tendency within Zionist social science and discourse to depict as 'internal, Israeli [Jewish] only' affairs, those which have actually been dialectical with the Palestinian Other (Piterberg, 2008, pp. 62–4). For liberal Zionist 'gatekeepers', rather than actually engaging with the collision between settler and colonised,

> it is always and without exception about 'us', 'our' dilemmas, doubts, soul searching, struggles with nature, and so on and so forth ad nauseum. The centrality of this denial for a proper understanding of what liberal settler consciousness is all about cannot be over-emphasised. (Piterberg, 2001, p. 222)

Lentin (2010) makes a similar criticism, arguing that despite significant efforts of Israeli Jews to know the Palestinian Other – often as military enemy to strategise, but also as partner for co-existence – 'the Palestinians themselves remain unchartered territory'. Instead, a 'kitschy but deadly fascination with the Palestinian other' (p. 104) manifests as a 'contradictory attraction enabl[ing] us … to digest the horrific past' (p. 96).

The danger is that the contemporary binational discourse merely recognises the doubt and soul-searching within Zionist history, whilst skimming over the tension between a colonial project enacted upon Others, and purported concern for those Others. I have argued that the historical co-optation of internal dissent ultimately strengthened the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse's depiction of evil Others resisting a virtuous project. The danger is that contemporary dissidents invoking this tradition might ultimately contribute to, rather than subvert, this discourse. Moreover, critics question whether organisations like *Zochrot* still ultimately silence and appropriate the narrative of Palestinians (see Lentin, 2010, pp. 145–49, 159–62). The most potentially damning critique is that 'discourses of remaking Jewish identity', emphasised by Bronstein as a key aspect of *Zochrot*'s work, 'are ultimately a central part of the ethnoracial logic of stratification. The Palestinian-Philistine is a pre-modern victim, requiring being "given voice to", while the Israeli-Jew is modern, or postmodern … conferring voice to the voiceless Palestinians' (Lentin, 2010, pp. 161–62). Neither the dissidents nor I can resolve these tensions. The discontinuities arising from the binational discourse are evident, from the dissidents' return to the necessity

of political Zionism in the establishment of a Jewish state, to admitting the failures of the co-existence discourse at the time to offer a viable alternative (contextualised by Halper and Bronstein as ordinary people doing the best they could). Even dissidents who attempt to atone for the 'national' past and incorporate the privations of the Other into collective memory face accusations of navel-gazing and continued appropriation – this time not of land and chattels but victimhood and grief (see Lentin, 2010, Chapters 7–8). Bronstein speaks most incisively about this bind, boldly concluding that there is 'no way out'. At least insofar as history is concerned, then, the binational discourse cleaves those using it back to the Zionist project, just as their Cultural Zionist forebears ultimately cleaved before them. Therefore, as much as the tradition creates a discursive space to explore uncomfortable truths – which may lead to actions – these processes will remain subject to questions about whether, and how, Israeli Jews can ever really take responsibility for the history in Palestine.

**Kinder Zionist discourse**

'Let's have a wall. Let's have a *gate* in the wall.' (Dorit Rabinyan, 2010)

Introducing the Kinder Zionist discourse, above, I suggested that Kinder Zionism represents a genuine attempt to do justice for the Other, albeit within strict limits, which distinguishes it from *ressentiment*. We find Kinder Zionism in sentiments that 'good fences make good neighbours', aptly illustrated by Dorit Rabinyan in the quote above. She poignantly describes her connection with Hasan Hourani and his friends and family, illustrating a linkage to the Other, yet peppers her narrative with motifs of separation, walls and boundaries; depicted as just and in the interests of both parties.

It is helpful to consider the Kinder Zionist discourse with reference to Raz-Krakotzkin's (2011) 'concept of separation' (pp. 59–60). Rabinyan (2004) depicts the separation of Jews and Palestinians as a viable means of seeking justice and equality, even as the actual Other (Hourani) disputes this claim with his preference for a binational state. Their political disagreement illustrates the limits of the Kinder Zionist discourse; even as Rabinyan engages with an *actual* Other who argues against *her* vision for *his* justice, she holds on to an illusory Other for whom her 'modest, lukewarm peace' will be enough.

Kinder Zionism often attaches to a particular political programme: Jewish (ethnocratising) Israel must continue to exist alongside a

Palestinian state, and this is the limit of identification with the needs or interests of the Other. There is little space, for example, to consider what it might be like for Others to live as an explicit minority in a Jewish state. Rabinyan mentions in passing that she thinks Israel's 'Arab minority is an equal citizen'. She then depicts my arguments regarding unequal access to housing and land as

> such a small community of criteria amongst so many levels of freedom, of abilities that Palestinians in other Arab countries won't have … *Such* freedom of speech, *such* freedom of education, so many. No, [your criticism] is just like taking two per cent out of 98 per cent and just pointing out to it. And being realistic, I have friends, Arab-Israeli friends, who say to me … 'The most educated, democratic, knowledged [Arab] society and community in the whole world is the one in Israel.' I mean, it's the tools that we give … to the Arab Israeli that turns against Israel by the time it's convenient … It's the knowledge of freedom that allows you to point out what is lacking in these few bits. I call it a few bits, but someone who has an agenda will call it an enormous discrimination.

Later in the interview, Rabinyan also finds herself defending elements of the occupation that she purports to oppose (she has written of 'shame and criticism for what Israeliness looks like and for the occupation as its main feature', describing it as 'bad and harmful'). We talk about an image of an Israeli soldier pointing a gun at a Palestinian child in the occupied territories, and Rabinyan compares her response to my description of this image to her feelings about the wall snaking through the West Bank.

'Let's say even if I can look at this terrible wall and understand it', she begins,

> this terrible wall is saving lives, and *our* lives. In the meantime it's killing us in different ways, but it is saving lives. So … I can see that this gun is deadly, that it can kill the little child. But this gun is protecting me. What can I say?

There is nothing that either of us can say. Rabinyan cannot use kinder Zionism to knock down the wall, nor turn the gun away from the Other-child. Under questioning, she returns to the *ressentiment* discourse's depiction of the threat of the Evil Other and the greater worth of the Us. (The wall does not just save lives, but '*our* lives'.) She knows that

the child being threatened by the gun is vulnerable, and at one point declares that she does not need protection 'from this child. This child is harmless.' Yet the soldier and the gun are there to protect the Virtuous Us from the Evil Other, and as long as there is the fear of violence, there is an easy collapsing of individuals into categories which determine their worth and status.

Meron Benvenisti also utilises a kinder Zionist discourse, despite advocating a single-state solution reifying two 'nations' in a power-sharing arrangement (2003). In interview, he responds indignantly to my suggestion that he *aspires* to such a model ('I don't say that I want to see it! ... I am the one who is very upset about it cos I wanted a Jewish state!'). His continued attachment to the Jewish state (he 'is' upset, not 'was') suggests that Benvenisti still ultimately supports the goals of the Zionist project; he just considers them defeated. Thus, while he writes with compassion about the Other, expressing apparent indignation about the erasure of Palestine's Arab markers (2000, Chapter 1), his explicit primary interest remains the well-being of the 'Jewish nation'. Whilst the classic axiom of a Jewish state for a Jewish nation serves this well-being for Rabinyan, and indeed for mainstream Zionism, for Benvenisti, this axiom no longer fits the reality. Thus, his kinder Zionist discourse advocates political solutions *not* out of a genuine desire to celebrate 'a Jewish identity based on the recognition of Palestinian rights' (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2011, p. 60), but rather from a perceived lack of alternatives.

Benvenisti's pseudo-autobiographical writings about his childhood in Palestine (2007), and his meticulous cataloguing of the destruction of its Arab component (2000) invoke the binational discourse and a connection to the Other. He makes this explicit when he suggests that the 'binational mode of thought' might give expression to the 'tragedy' of the Other, which he now professes to 'live', 'even though [he] perhaps caused it ... ' (Shavit, 2003). Yet Benvenisti ultimately identifies with the Zionist project of building a Jewish state, claiming to welcome the hostilities of Others as they would 'unify [his] tribe', and depicting the Arab Other as responsible for his own dispossession by starting the 1948 War. Despite displaying an understanding of the perspective of those who resisted the Zionist project ('The fact that they have their own reasons to – good reason to reject us, I understand. Understand from the very beginning'), Benvenisti depicts the War as a discrete event rather than a continuation of existing dynamics. This enables him to blame the dispossessed for their own fate since 'they decided that the sword would decide'. 'As Benvenisti views Jewish and Palestinian/Arab categories in thick, ethnic terms, he cannot depict them in any other way than as 'impregnable

national collectives' (Piterberg, 2008, p. 64). Therefore, in order to tell the story of the conflict between these collectives and the victory of his own 'side', Benvenisti must employ the *ressentiment* discourse, which depicts the Other as deserving his fate, with all members of that Other responsible for its misfortune. The Saids, in being wealthy and fleeing to Cairo, are responsible for not sticking around to defend 'their' nation.

Thus, the Kinder Zionist discourse provides a basis from which dissidents can entertain the idea of improving the lot of the Other, whilst also continuing to prioritise the Us. However, confronting the dissidents with Kinder Zionism's limitations regarding equality and justice for the Other prompts segues into *ressentiment* Zionism. From here, dissidents minimise the very need for these things by demonising or blaming the Other. The limitations built into Kinder Zionism – and therefore requiring those using it to shift into a different discourse – facilitate an 'entitled' avoidance of responsibility that ultimately enables continued prioritisation of the Us.

**Post-Zionist discourse**

Let us now look at how dissidents employ the post-Zionist discourse. This is the primary discourse of journalist Gideon Levy. It is also a discourse that Jeff Halper utilises alongside the binational discourse. The narratives of both men depict a yearning for normality alongside a legitimisation of the Zionist project, through either its just basis (Halper) or its necessity (Levy). These dissidents illustrate how a circumscribed future underscores the post-Zionist discourse. We can also see in their narratives how the post-Zionist discourse clandestinely legitimates the 'ethnic' past. Dissidents using the post-Zionist discourse slip into other discourses when asked to pin down the meaning and application of their ideas.

The post-Zionist discourse, like the binational and Kinder Zionist discourses, takes the 'Jewish nation' as an organic actor in history; in resolving its European problems in Palestine, mistreatment of the Other becomes a necessary evil. We see this when Gideon Levy states that Israel's establishment was a solution to the Holocaust. As Bronstein observes, there is 'no way out' of Israel's history, but in the context of the post-Zionist discourse, certain features put in place by the Zionist project remain sacrosanct. Continued Jewish privilege operates through claims to rationality: if Gideon Levy lost his home in Ramat Aviv, this 'new injustice' would not adequately resolve injustice done to Others. Levy also rejects enacting the right to return, because 'when there are so many fears and hates between the two peoples, it will bring only

more violence and bloodshed'. Rational self-interest continues Jewish privilege by ruling out certain options, and at times extends to a *ressentiment* pitting of the virtuous Us against Them. (*Why should I have to give something up for Them? If we can't live together, it is They who must remain excluded*.) The post-Zionist discourse lacks the analytical basis for either abandoning Us and Other (the civic discourse) or celebrating them both equally (the binational discourse). In the absence of a critical framework, categories continue unquestioned, normalising and obscuring existing power structures. Moreover, since ethnic categories acquire the social meanings generated by *ressentiment,* the inherent fear of the Other and demand for self-preservation, endemic to *ressentiment*, remain.

One of the political solutions often endorsed within the post-Zionist discourse illustrates this clearly. Moving beyond Zionism ostensibly means an end to Israel's status as a Jewish state. The key replacement countenanced is a state of its citizens, yet the discourse consistently frames this in the context of a two-state solution. In other words, the post-Zionist discourse welcomes an Israel that is a state of its citizens, *as long as this Israel does not also include (presently occupied) 'Palestine'*. None of the dissidents using the post-Zionist discourse endorses establishing such a state in all of Israel/Palestine as part of a one-state solution. While a tiny minority of (usually ex-) Israelis favour this option (Lentin, 2010; Behar, 2011; Abarbanel, 2012; Peled, 2012), the general 'post-Zionist' conceptualisation of a state of its citizens excludes the occupied territories (see, for example, Ram, 2008).

This may be the case for historical reasons. 'Normalising' Israel was a tenet of the Zionist project right from the start (Ram, 2005, p. 34), thus a small, civic Israel might have been Zionism's logical conclusion following the successful building of a Jewish state. However, an additional reason to reject a single Israel/Palestine is that a civic polity of undefined parameters threatens those who identify as Jews/Hebrews. The civic-liberal model invites a kind of 'veil of ignorance' (Rawls, 1971, p. 287): if one supports a state of its citizens, then one ought not to be able to pre-decide the ethnic make-up of that state, since the value of ethnic blindness should prevail. Yet individuals identifying as Jews/Hebrews would know that in a single state in Israel/Palestine, they would only constitute around 50 per cent of the population; an unappealing prospect (see Young, 2005, p. 153). Thus, individuals employing a post-Zionist discourse to invoke a civic-liberal state know this state would contain a high number of Jews. Such a situation is only possible within a two-state framework, since the bulk of the non-Jewish population would be in a separate state. A civic small Israel would no longer

privilege Jews, but would remain dominated by the Hebrew language, calendar, culture and social norms. It might no longer circumscribe people's identities, but its demographic components and borders (explicitly excluding the occupied territories) would be pre-ordained. The prescription of identification could end, precisely because it would no longer be required – Zionism has successfully done its job of building a Jewish polity through an ethnocratiser state. Culturally and politically, then, the 'Jewish majority' could still enjoy inexplicit dominance (see arguments in Nimni, 2003, pp. 12–13), only resolving the problems of the Other in a prescribed form.[1] Thus, whilst the post-Zionist discourse offers an attractive way of reconstituting identification, it leaves several things unspoken and intact. It enables dissidents to make a partial break with the past and posit an Israel that is more inviting to Others, but only by leaving a history of Jewish privilege – and perhaps a more subtle continuation of it – unexcavated.

**Inverted *ressentiment***

The bizarre inverted *ressentiment* discourse can explain the apparent anomaly between Gilad Atzmon's antagonism to Jewish national identification and his celebration of other nationalisms, as well as his more than playful usage of 'self-hater' and 'anti-Semite'. Atzmon's proclamations of being 'ex-Israeli' signify ongoing identification, even in resistance. Atzmon refrains from employing a civic discourse eschewing ethnic identification; instead, he remains embedded within Jewishness, celebrating his (self-)hatred. This makes plausible things that other dissidents regard as categorically impossible, such as wanting one's own collective to disappear; the state of affairs Atzmon depicts in his novel *A Guide to the Perplexed* (2002).

Atzmon's engagement with the Other manifests as a by-product of his interaction with his Jewish identification. ('Israel is just one symptom of Jewishness. Zionism is a global movement. It has nothing to do with Palestine.') He avoids flags and symbols, whilst professing to enjoy Palestinian dancing, and reveres German nationalism. His aversion to Palestinian nationalist symbols does not derive from universalistic distaste (in keeping with a civic discourse), but rather because he considers that Western pro-Palestinian activism is co-opted by Jews ('Britain, the Palestinian solidarity discourse, was controlled by very small circle of 'righteous' Jews'). Ultimately, we must consider whether any kind of *ressentiment*, even with the Us as its subject, can provide meaningful engagement with the Other. Indeed, inverted *ressentiment* may be yet another manifestation of the tendency noted by Piterberg

(2008) for ostensible concern with the Other to be an exercise in navel-gazing (pp. 62–4). Perhaps Atzmon's jibe that the 'self-hating Jew loves himself hating himself' reveals more than it might at first appear.

### *Ressentiment* discourse

I have suggested that some of my dissidents employ elements of the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse in their narratives. The *ressentiment* discourse offers the only coherent means of telling their story in a way that legitimately places the Jewish nation in Palestine. While the versions of this discourse employed by the dissidents often avoid crude demonisation of the Other, they emphasises the virtue of the Us.

Yiftachel, for example, tells the story of victimhood in Europe and the Arab world, which legitimises Israel as a 'colonialism of refugees'. Yet refugees from the Arab world did not become so until after Israel's establishment. However, the *ressentiment* story of Israel as a haven for the persecuted Jews of the entire world ensures that virtue remains on the Jewish side. Gideon Levy tells a similar story when he depicts Israel's creation as a 'solution for the Holocaust'. Depictions of Zionism as a positive nationalist movement, such as those made by Halper and, to a lesser extent, Bronstein, also potentially draw on the *ressentiment* discourse. Zionist settlers have good intentions towards the 'Arabs' upon whose lands they seek to build their homeland; for Halper, this only goes wrong when they employ 'ethnocratic' logic.

Despite a greater focus on the Virtuous Us, Evil Others do appear as *ressentiment* invocations in the dissident narratives. Rabinyan depicts Evil Others when invoking her need for protection. Palestinians are kept waiting in lines 'for reasons', and Rabinyan fears malevolent forces which, upon a putative return of Palestinian refugees or a single-state solution, 'will mean that we have to leave!' However, Rabinyan is able to slip out of *ressentiment* again, perhaps because other aspects of her identification embrace contradiction. She employs writing metaphors and blurs the line between real people and book characters, which enables a fluidity of movement between self and Other, universal and particular, 'Arab' (Persian) and Jew. She has spent her whole life asserting her right to multiplicity; she can segue into *ressentiment* without it consuming her:

> I don't have this absolute knowledge about myself, about my existence, that I would take somebody saying, 'It's very absolute, it's very clear, one solution'. No, there's … always double meanings, subtext … There's always doubt, nothing is absolutely clear, absolutely one truth.

For Meron Benvenisti, meanwhile, slippage between discourses invites a wholesale return to *ressentiment*, projected outwardly at his interlocutor but also taking in the Said family, the ill-organised 'Palestinian nation' and the 'goyim' in general. Benvenisti depicts the Arab Other as responsible for its own dispossession by starting the 1948 War, which I shall discuss more in the final chapter of this book.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that we can understand the dissidents as predominantly employing one of six discourses – the hegemonic *ressentiment* discourse and five alternatives. Apart from the civic discourse, the rest retain an ethnic identification component. Within an ethnocratiser state, people are compelled to think in terms of Us and Other and to see themselves as belonging to one of these categories. This then sets the tone for how they evaluate the past, present and future of the collective to which they see themselves as belonging. The available discourses may not enable the dissidents to say the things they wish to say, compelling them to use more than one, which generates discontinuities. In the final chapter of this book, I will explore the implications of this for Israel's future and for how we might understand dissent within an ethnocratiser state.

# 8
# Conclusion

## Introduction

This book has explained and analysed a dilemma faced by Israeli Jews concerned with their Palestinian Other. I have theorised the context enmeshing these individuals as an ethnocratiser state with a hegemonic *ressentiment* discourse. Ethnocratisation and *ressentiment* are more than concepts with which we can make sense of the dissidents' dilemma; they actually constitute the material reality that the dissidents seek to transform.

Individuals within this context may, in extreme cases, simply walk away from 'national' affinity and pursue what they see as the moral cause of their oppressed Other. Two radical dissidents, Pollack and Davis, do this by locating their struggles within the 'Palestinian' political context. Whilst Davis repackages nationality as a vestigial, sentimental affinity that does not infiltrate his politics, Pollack finds nothing personally meaningful within that identification. The path these dissidents walk is hardly an inviting trail for a society built upon a collectivist sense of the virtuous Us under attack from the Other. It is difficult to see how anything other than a small minority will ever venture down it; accordingly, they will not be able to bring the consensus with them. Indeed, this is the very point: if one seeks to remain part of that consensus, one must adopt a very different approach to dissent. Individuals in this latter space grapple to reconcile national affinity with concern for the Other. I have explained what their choices look like, the sites and themes around which tensions emerge, and how we might understand discontinuities arising in dissidents' personal narratives.

I have suggested that no single discourse offers the dissidents the tools for the job at hand. The civic discourse deletes categories of Us

and Other from political interactions, but takes individuals outside their society. Individuals unwilling to step outside this consensus, or who find that their own identifications do not accord with a civic discourse, must then use other discourses. The binational, Kinder Zionist and post-Zionist discourses utilise identifications with which the dissidents feel more comfortable, but these discourses necessarily employ the notion of a long-existing Jewish nation with a right to Palestine. Dissidents then struggle to explain this aspect of identification alongside their regret about the price exacted from the Other. As dissidents attempt to pin down their past and offer visions for the future, they shift between discourses; as they do so, their personal narratives grow contradictory, particularly when they are 'obliged' to use the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse from which they are trying to escape. This discourse, however, may be the only one to offer a compelling explanation of who the dissidents think they are, and where they think they come from.

If we read the dissidents' employment of alternative discourses as attempts to transcend *ressentiment*, we could conclude that – with the exception of the radical dissidents employing a civic discourse – they are unable to do it. *Ressentiment* seems so pervasive that it even comes out in other contexts, which I will briefly explore in a moment. On this basis, we might conclude that dissent is severely curtailed in an ethnocratiser state. If even individuals who try to get outside the dominant discourse are trapped – by a garrison state which purports to protect them; by the ethnic categories that it reifies; by their desire to protect their own individual privilege; and, if they traverse all this, by irrelevance and marginality – then ethnocratisation and *ressentiment* might appear entrenched. Moreover, as much as the 'tradition' of internal dissent within the Zionist project can inspire future action, its lack of internal coherence and ultimate (if unwitting) apologism for colonisation and violence is problematic.

However, the dissidents' attempts to resolve their dilemma by employing alternative discourses of national identity can still offer a fruitful basis from which their society can be re-imagined. In this work, I've sought to prevent my analysis of the dissidents' dilemma functioning as a trap for either them or me. Obviously, if the dilemma were completely resolvable, there would have been zero intellectual interest in investigating it; it was therefore implicit that my subjects would not be able to reconcile every contradiction. Yet it is important to engage with what the dissidents *can* do – the limited but significant transformations they can bring to their society. Therefore, after I examine some extended effects of *ressentiment,* I will explore three examples of

dissidents' creative engagement, which deserve recognition for meaningfully subverting the hegemonic *ressentiment* discourse, even if they do not resolve every contradiction. I will suggest what we might draw from these experiences.

First, however, I will suggest that *ressentiment* casts a pall over other facets of Israeli society, and trace these through my engagement with the dissidents and their narratives. I thus begin the next section by considering Meron Benvenisti's response to me, token representative of a Western liberal academic tradition seen as hostile to his identification. I then briefly explore how the dissidents construct new Others, and the implications arising from this.

### *Ressentiment* to the 'hostile outsider'

I can interpret my interview with Benvenisti, from which I have already detailed some unpleasantries, with the aid of an extended *ressentiment* framework. However, I must first make a few disclaimers. First, given that I occupy a position of power in terms of how I shape interviews and organise material, it would be unfair of me simply to label Benvenisti as responding to me with *ressentiment*, when I might instead provoke some of these responses by my conduct. Whilst I do not intend to make my dissidents feel attacked, my interview technique precludes a detached approach. Most of my interviewees are happy to have an academic debate; it is only with Benvenisti that this 'is already an argument'. Analysis of the interview becomes even more problematic after Benvenisti subsequently severs our relationship (without withdrawing his consent to participate in the research project). Here, then, I outline the aftermath of our interview, to allow the reader to assess my own role in what transpires.

Back in Australia, once the fieldwork is all over, I try to work out where the interview with Benvenisti went wrong. Perusing the transcript, I trace the moments where I have misinterpreted his signals, but marvel again at his ferocity. (At one point, when we debate whether the Palestinians are a nation in the primordialist sense, he actually tells me to 'shut up'.) I email the transcript to Benvenisti with an olive branch.

> Revisiting the interview was an uncomfortable process for me because I was aware that on a personal level it hadn't gone well, even though the material was useful…I can now see the signposts in your words that made your position clear. At times I continued down a path that you didn't want to go down, because I did not fully grasp that the Meron Benvenisti I was interviewing was not the same one I had imagined from your writing. This is not a moral judgement, nor an

> expression of disappointment, nor an apology, since I don't believe any of those things are required or justified … I now understand your perspective more clearly. If I had known it before the interview, I would not have asked some of those questions. By the same token, though, I guess that's the purpose of an interview – to find out things we don't already know …

Benvenisti's brief reply includes no niceties by way of introduction.

> I read carefully the transcript with a particular interest in the (heavily edited) *questions*, not the answers. Let me tell you that if this is an interview for a doctoral dissertation, then I am (as we say in Hebrew, the language of the 'problematic/undemocratic' entity), a jar. It is your business how you use my words, and I don't want to have any further discussion with you. If you will provide me with the address of your book supervisor I'll contract [sic] him and ask his opinion about methodology and the use of a 'scholarly' disguise for value judgments. (2010b, his emphasis)

Benvenisti's reference to edited questions refers to my occasional simplification of the style – though not the meaning – of my questions in the transcript. His reference to Hebrew being the language of the 'problematic/undemocratic' entity alludes to a question based, yet again, on my reading of his writings on Zionist Israel. Benvenisti confounds me to the end. I send him a brief email with my supervisor's contact details, but his threatened email never materialises.

Even before this exchange, back in Israel, our fraught interview casts a shadow over my remaining encounters. 'I'm waiting for the antagonism!' declares a laughing Jeff Halper during our interview, before assuring me, 'Meron is a very contrary guy … don't worry … It wasn't you.' However, it is hard to shake the feeling that it was, indeed, me. But which me – the antagonising interviewer, or representative of the Evil Other? Benvenisti's hostile reaction to me is apparent in several places: I am the 'goy' who invented Jewishness; the academic who sceptically rejects the 'ultimate tribe'; the attacker declaring war on Benvenisti and his six (or 13) million Jews. I am a threat, and Benvenisti neutralises me with his formidable mind, delegitimising my work and making personal criticisms. I give him the space to do so, in the spirit of accessing his ideas and learning from my possible mistakes. My conciliatory email suggests that my misreading of Benvenisti is responsible for our troubled exchange, but after his response, I consider that in digging up his words

from the past, I have acted as the voice of his contradictions. Having exposed something uncomfortable for him, I am the obvious repository for these feelings.

My partner, Ian, a social worker, helps me to make sense of this. Ian works with disadvantaged mentally ill clients and sees first-hand the detrimental dependence that welfare creates. However, if someone from the right criticised welfare dependence, Ian would instinctively disagree with this person. The critic from the right would not reach this conclusion through lived experience, Ian explains, so his opinion would be less authentic. In addition, I realise, the right-winger's goal would be to delegitimise and then dismantle the welfare system. This critic would not be engaging in what Habermas calls communicative action, or action to achieve understanding, but rather in strategic action, 'communication oriented to achieving results' (Harper, 2011, pp. 27–8). This is how Benvenisti views those who advance a binationalist framework. He perceives that they come from a place of ideological attack, and that their analysis form part of this goal, with the desired result being Israel's annihilation. Such discussion is, to him, 'already an argument', which partly explains his defensiveness.

None of this is to say that I do not contribute to the ultimately toxic exchange with Benvenisti. However, the consideration that Benvenisti employs a *ressentiment* depiction of the world beyond Israel/Palestine is worth engaging with, even as I must temper this with recognition of my own incitement. Benvenisti talks about me and the world I represent with *ressentiment*, and this might suggest that *ressentiment* can be a default response to someone – anyone – like me, for someone – anyone – like Benvenisti.

### *Ressentiment* and new Others

In Chapter 1, I suggested that *ressentiment* can occur within all kinds of encounters, leading to the formation of opposing discourses depicting apparently self-evident 'groups'. The *ressentiment* I have examined in this book emerged within nationalist discourses as individuals resolved the pain of marginalisation by labelling those they perceived to be responsible as Evil oppressors. They employed ethnic categories as the defining features of 'nations' in order to enact a moral splitting into Virtuous Us/Evil Other. They understood those within the nation as Good and those outside as Bad; ethnic categories appearing clear and permanent enough to provide the basis for this division. I have claimed that this is true of the dominant Zionist discourse, with the dissidents bearing the trace of this experience.

An interesting contemporary version of this process of *ressentiment* is evident in the development of internal schisms whereby *other* Others become 'baddies' to 'our' good. A dominant *ressentiment* discourse preloads categories of Us and Other with moral meaning. If alternative discourses of national identification rehabilitate the Palestinian/Arab Other, they may need to target a new guilty party to explain the malaise in which individuals find their society. Yadgar (2003b) observes such ideologically derived categorisations of new Others with the ascendance of the 'humanist/universalist' narrative in post-Oslo Israel. This narrative, he says, 'abandoned the image of "the Arab" as "the Other" and identified a new group of "others": those who oppose peace, regardless of their nationality/ethnicity' (p. 61). Gideon Levy's vitriolic depiction of West Bank Jewish settlers employs this kind of *nouveau ressentiment* discourse. From Levy's perspective, settlers are inherently evil; by extension, people like Levy who oppose settlements are inherently virtuous. We can read Bronstein's distinction between 'good' and 'bad' Israelis the same way. Bronstein takes these categories from the parlance of his childhood and subverts them so that 'good Israelis' like himself stand opposed to 'bad' ones, such as American settlers and French-born right-wing radio hosts. Bronstein utilises native privilege to construct himself as superior: 'I think I take this thing from Zionism, this ranking of people, being Israeli', whilst acknowledging, 'I know it's wrong, what I'm saying'.

Bronstein and Halper also invoke a *ressentiment* discourse towards the Likud government elected in 1977. Although a Labour leadership presided over injustices to the Other in 1948 and 1967, Likud was the Evil Other against whom dissidents were able to take a stand. This reflects a wider cultural phenomenon in which left intellectuals saw 'that the government represented "another people"' (Sand, 2011, p. 72). Grinberg (2009) suggests that opposition to 'the right' and 'settlers' reflects an insidious process by which

> 'the labour settlement movement' underwent a metamorphosis: its biological heirs came to be referred to as 'the left' while those continuing its settlement practices came to be referred to as 'the right'. This ... has made it easier for those now referred to as 'the left' to shake off responsibility for what the settlers of 'the right' are doing ... After all, '*we*' are not the 'occupying settlers' – 'they' are. (p. 111)

What are the implications of dissidents employing a new *ressentiment* discourse towards new Others? Perhaps they are finding new ways to

regard themselves as morally superior, whilst attempting to extricate themselves from something for which they arguably still have 'national responsibility' (Abdel-Nour, 2003; Grinberg, 2009, p. 111). However, when we consider the demonisation of right-wingers and settlers within the dissident narratives, something interesting emerges. We find that they cannot divide the 'ethnic Us' into further moral categories that offer comparable meaning and certainty to ethnic boundaries themselves. For all that Bronstein and Levy castigate their Settler and Likud Others, they are simultaneously aware that these would-be Others are part of Us. Levy explains, 'I am so much attached to this collective … I feel guilty on behalf of things that I was against'. Bronstein says of his 'Israeli fellows', 'I hope I have enough compassion … this means that I must of course identify with them … Now, this I cannot do without some, even, in a way, empathy or sympathy to them.' Bronstein and Levy do not extricate themselves from the Us; they are not actually splitting or outsourcing responsibility. This tells us something about the ultimate power of their identification as Israeli Jews. Their *ressentiment* towards Others demarcated on ideological (rather than ethnic) terms is less powerful than the ethnic categories forged by the *ressentiment* processes in the creation of Zionism. (Of course, distinctions between the ideological Us and Other also lack the social and political reinforcement of ethnic categories.) *Ressentiment* works best when boundaries appear unalterable; generating the sense that something greater than one's actions or beliefs determines one's categorisation. A 'bad' settler can reform and become a 'good Israeli', so these categories are not reliable pegs with which to map a moral universe. Thus, *ressentiment* towards new Others fails to flourish, even as dissidents attempt to change the meaning of ethnic categorical distinctions by finding new Others to demonise.

## Three stories of promise

Having considered the pervasiveness of *ressentiment* and the enduring power of ethnic categories, we can now explore areas of promise deriving from the dissidents. Jeff Halper's attempt to redefine 'anti-Semitism' provides one such example. Halper's perspective contrasts with Neve Gordon's more *ressentiment*-based formulation that Israel and Jews have distinct enemies who must be fought off. We can trace Halper's approach to his 'ethnic' awakening amidst an American 'return to roots' movement; he recognises the propensity of humans to orient culturally and also the necessity of limiting the chauvinism inherent in this process.

> The way to fight anti-Semitism as a form of racism is to fight racism, through a rights based approach. So it's not denying the Holocaust, it's not minimising the Holocaust, but it's simply saying, 'If you want to avoid these things in the future, the answer isn't to have a movement against anti-Semitism and another movement against anti-black racism, and another movement against anti-north African racism.' ... You can't fragment it into a hundred things. Overall it's a movement against racism.

Halper recognises that *ressentiment* Zionism cannot work with this formulation '[b]ecause Zionism is xenophobic, and Zionism needs that', both in terms of the particularist identification it constructs and promotes, and the virtue it asserts. However, Halper's approach challenges this paradigm. The implication is that if Israelis/Jews/Hebrews are to fight shadowy forces in the world that wish them harm, then they must also fight forces in themselves that would do harm to Others. Anybody, including Us, might adopt bigoted or hateful behaviours; it would not be possible, within Halper's framework, to sustain an argument that Others are inherently bad. Halper therefore offers a way of responding to genuine threats against one's perceived collective without using these threats to construct a *ressentiment* pair. Notably, he sustains this non-*ressentiment* discourse without eradicating the Us and Other. His challenge to *ressentiment* whilst retaining ethnic categories is therefore directly applicable to the project of resisting and transforming ethnocratisation.

Another challenge to the *ressentiment* discourse comes from Gideon Levy, who does something interesting with Zionism's pervasive victimhood, which 'habitually uses suffering to engender and calibrate entitlement to rights' (Rabinowitz, 2001, p. 75). Levy argues that extenuating circumstances may have justified some of the wrongs done to the Other in Israel's establishment, but these should have been limited in scope and incorporated into the measurement of morality thereafter. According to Levy's logic, if Israel had properly accounted for the unfortunate but necessary events of 1948, then the unnecessary coda of 1967 would not have happened. This would have required a nuanced moral understanding on behalf of Israeli Jews in those intervening years: yes, Israel took the land to build a state; no, the refugees could not come back; yes, they could be compensated; no, they would not face further injustices. Palestinians could be acknowledged as victims without the Jewish state having to cease to exist. The point is not whether this would have been an acceptable outcome for those identifying as Palestinians – most likely

it would not – nor whether Levy has gone far enough in his attempts at justice. The point is to imagine how differently the dominant discourse in Israel would have had to be constituted in order to sustain it.

> Defining the Palestinian tragedy of 1948 as the awful price in blood, dignity and property that paved the way to the eventual triumph of Zionism is a revolutionary concept … It collapses the dichotomy between the categories 'Us' and 'Them', and their inherent analogy to 'Good' and 'Bad', 'Right' and 'Wrong', 'those who Suffer' and 'those who inflict Suffering'. (Rabinowitz, 2001, p. 75)

Levy helps us to imagine, however illusorily, that a discourse re-assigning victimhood could have emerged alongside the Zionist project. However, the real power of his argument derives from its potential. Constructing a new basis for moral calculations, he offers a way of understanding the contemporary situation without *ressentiment*, but also, like Halper, without needing to eradicate the sense of Us that proves such a barrier for reformulating identification.

Eitan Bronstein also overcomes *ressentiment* in his evocation of a new Tel Aviv, after the return of the Palestinian refugees. Bronstein's 'New Tel Aviv' demonstrates the creative potential of the Us becoming open to the Other, using the metaphor of a cityscape. The location of this in a city that Bronstein shared with me, the researcher, as his beloved home, makes it powerful. In addition to our interview, some of which was conducted at Bronstein's favourite cafe with the 'best hommous in Israel/Palestine', Bronstein and I went drinking in Tel Aviv; during this time I was able to appreciate both his love of the city and his vision for its future. His seductive vision mirrors research findings regarding the potential for 'boundary blurring' within local communities through 'reduc[ing] the importance of ethnicity as a principle of categorization and social organization' (Wimmer, 2008a, p. 1041). This local strategy for breaking down barriers is an organic and authentic experience arising within Bronstein's particular habitus. However, reinforcement from the research explains its attraction and attainability.

For Bronstein, Tel Aviv is the site of everything he loves and yet, like everywhere else in Israel, it contains a dispossession; one of *Zochrot*'s tours exposes the erased Palestinian villages beneath. Tel Aviv represents a desire for connection, to be part of something exciting. It invokes a belonging far from Rabinyan's 'uncool' nationalism, yet owes its existence to this same nationalism. Engagement with Tel Aviv thus provides a motif for engagement with Israel as a whole, but is also a point of

departure. Tel Aviv is the place where Israel meets the world, where East meets West, where nationalism meet cosmopolitanism. It is the place Israelis live when they want to live in another country (Kraft and Bronner, 2009). It is the place where many of my dissidents live, alongside others who share their views. It is thus an appropriate site for re-imagining; for seeing how *ressentiment* ethnic nationalism may evolve.

Bronstein's New Tel Aviv – inspired by the work of *Zochrot* – is a place that must own its history. It's a place affixed with signs saying what happened here, and what used to be here. It's a place that cannot be undone, and must not be undone; Bronstein acknowledges that this is impossible. Learning from Baudrillard, nostalgia cannot lead us back to the past, and we must engage with the world as we find it (Borgman, 1992). Meanwhile, obvious Zionism has already seeped out of Tel Aviv. The Star of David flag has receded, returning only at bizarre moments, such as around the neck of a cartoon dog on a pet shop wall ('Dogs of Israel! Your country needs you!'). Tel Aviv is already somehow post-Zionist, whatever that means. Yet it is not the grim post-Zionism of Uri Ram's (2008) McWorld – a heartless metropolis in which consumerism has replaced nationalism. The Tel Aviv that I explore with Bronstein has a distinct counter-culture; debating in saloons at the back of dress shops and finding your favourite hummus cafe. Tel Aviv echoes Europe's coolest cities, yet right now, as Bronstein notes, it is a monoculture.

Hence, Bronstein's vision is that this city he loves dearly will become more Arabic. His hope for the counter-culture of Tel Aviv morphing into something shared is a motif for the procreative quality of the binational discourse. The reinvention of Bronstein's belonging – the opening up to Others – is an act of subversion. Bronstein is willing to take the thing he loves the most and share it; exposing it to different influences. The idea of sharing the land is symbolic, but the idea of sharing Tel Aviv is concrete. Love of nation and land is metaphysical, particularly as rendered by Zionism, but one's place of residence is *real*, in the lived experience of streets, cafes, bars, shops and parks. It is not Bronstein's generosity that inspires – as Yonatan Pollack notes, it is not generous but appropriate to make restitution to a wronged Other – but his delight; and his optimism that what comes next may be even better. Geographic, cultural, linguistic and social landscapes adjust with the presence of this Other. Gideon Levy's rootless, ever-changing city begins to host a new kind of Us. The visitor to this new city (me) cannot comprehend the distinction between two 'nations' because the landscape does not reify it. Slowly, organically, they become interwoven.

Thus, creative challenges to *ressentiment* do not necessarily require the erasure of the line between Us and Other, or the immediate abolition of the system of privilege institutionalised by the ethnocratiser state. The constraints placed on most of the dissidents by their sense of national belonging limit us to celebrating these small moments of inspiration. I never imagined that I would find, across my spectrum of dissidents, a series of individuals who had managed, like Yonatan Pollack, to avoid discontinuities by negating national belonging. Rather, Pollack would be the extreme; closer to the centre would be people trying, tripping over their contradictions, and trying again nevertheless. The forms their trying has taken, and our ability to see it distilled across multiple themes, manifesting in further instances of *ressentiment*, and evocatively woven in these final three inspiring visions, has been my contribution to illustrating how the dilemma manifests. If the questions were: how far can the dissidents get, how far will they go, how great are the limitations placed upon them, then the answers are: *this* far. *This* is what the dilemma has looked like, and felt like, and how the dissidents' context has informed it. There is no tidy, one-word answer. The limits to my dissidents' abilities to transcend their dilemma have lain in their own words, and in my analysis that they have to employ multiple discourses to make sense of their worlds, and in the gaps within and incompatibilities between these discourses, and most poignantly in the sense that there is 'no way out' of their dilemma.

## Conclusion: the contributions of this book

In this work, I have engaged with several literatures and contributed new perspectives to some of them. In examining Israeli-Jewish society, I have looked at the 'dominant' nation in the ethnocratiser state rather than the suppressed 'minority'. This has opened up a new angle on ethnocratiser states, distinct from the ethnic democracy theorists whose engagement with Israeli-Jewish society uses theory to attempt to justify continued hegemony. In exploring a 'dominant nationalism', I have challenged the notion that 'dominant nations' exist independently of state structures that reify them. I have suggested that we should understand the construction of the 'nation', as well as its numerical 'dominance', as processes. *Ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourses may set in motion the formation of *ressentiment* pairs, which may ultimately create the conditions for the establishment of ethnocratiser states. The relative sizes of the category cohorts involved are far from coincidental.

I have also explored the belligerence of so-called 'ethnic nations', arguing that the employment of ethnic categories derives from a need to demarcate a virtuous Us from a demonised Other. I have illustrated how *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourses universalise the experiences of particular individuals, generating emotional responses in other individuals that mimic these experiences. The discourse invokes these responses in an entire population, simultaneously creating an Other who perpetually affirms the discourse's content.

In looking at Israeli-Jewish dissidents who attempt to transcend such a discourse, I have contributed to the literature on political radicalism in Israel. I have engaged with the dilemma of individuals in a state ostensibly constructed around their own privilege, who wish to improve the situation of the de-privileged Other. Their efforts are necessarily constrained by *ressentiment* ethnic nationalism and the ethnocratiser state; however, their dedicated attempts to work around these obstacles make their efforts compelling.

Given a choice of many Israeli-Jewish dissidents whose works bring a range of analyses, the eventual set of dissidents and the issues I raised with them indelibly shaped the work's focus. This became apparent when I read Lentin's (2010) discussion of Ilan Pappe, who was unavailable for this study. Pappe uses a terminology of 'ethnic cleansing', which, according to Lentin, critiques the dominant depiction in the very language of the *Nakba* ('catastrophe') as a disaster befalling a pre-modern and 'primitive' people (p. 155). This insight might seem marginal to the work as it stands now, but if Pappe had been one of my dissidents, framing of the Other's agency and experience might have emerged as a much greater theme for examination. The insights that different dissidents could have brought to this work open up a realm of possibilities unfulfilled.

Likewise, there are many questions that I could have asked my existing set of dissidents. My analysis could have benefited from a greater engagement of the domination of Ashkenazi culture, and particularly Ashkenazi 'peace' culture, over Mizrahi culture (Kirstein Keshet, 2006, p. 114), whilst still recognising that these are constructed categories. It may also have been apt to interrogate my subjects more closely on their depictions of the Other and the possibility that they appropriate his or her narrative (Lentin, 2010). The absence of these features can only be put down to the wisdom of hindsight and the immense process of personal learning that informs the production of academic knowledge; reflections that are often absent from the work itself (Steinberg, 2012).

It is also worth considering what, if anything, this book might tell us about future possibilities for Israel/Palestine. The discourses certainly advance alternatives to the current state structure, but we cannot follow them to their logical conclusions. We cannot know which political solutions would prove tenable, nor whether the discourses articulating them would succeed in undermining ethnocratisation. What we *can* conclude is that ethnocratisation generates its own contradictions and, in turn, responses to these contradictions. This does enable us to consider one possibility for the future of the ethnocratiser state.

Yiftachel (2006) has argued that the contradictions within such states render them inherently unstable in terms of how they manifest towards the Other. The state offers the Other limited tools to advance its status and lifestyle; yet it simultaneously prohibits the fulfilment of its promises via its discriminatory treatment. Yiftachel argues that on this basis, the minority will mobilise around the democratic facade of the state, chipping away to expose its contradictions (p. 39).

Having engaged with the state's so-called 'dominant nation', it appears that such chipping away could remain for ever peripheral in the absence of people like my dissidents prepared to struggle alongside the Palestinian Other. After all, the Zionist movement that created Us as a political category also built the state with a view to protecting that Us; that state simultaneously ensured and continues to ensure the existence of the Us as a political category. This has all occurred in the context of resistance from the Other, which has only affirmed the validity of Our project. I therefore disagree with Yiftachel that the Other will necessarily bring down the ethnocratiser state. Rather, I consider that continued mobilisation of the threat of the Other is the crucial factor determining the regime's continuation. So, what of this?

The dissidents challenge Us-ness and its social meaning. They help us to see Israeli society differently. Through them, we can perceive the Us, not as a stable and contented collective, but rather as a collection of individuals in thrall to a discourse that militarises and renders them vulnerable. I have argued – contrary to most academic representations – that the state in which they live was not crafted instrumentally to advance the goals of 'the Jewish nation'. Rather, the 'Jewish nation' itself was constructed by activists in thrall to a *ressentiment* discourse; they have put in place a state that continually reifies this 'nation', facilitating significant harm to the Other (and, ultimately the Us) under the guise of self-protection. I have considered how some individuals constructed as the 'privileged Us' have digested and attempted to limit this harm, seeing their own 'nation' as also harmed through ongoing enmity.

From this perspective, it is not a given that the Us will remain for ever attached to its own privilege. Dissidents may be able to formulate an internally coherent message that resonates with enough people in their society to build a significant movement. They may be able to persuade other Israeli Jews that the status quo does not serve their interests, or their self-perceptions as members of a virtuous nation. However, such a possibility remains remote, given that the position of the dissidents within their society incorporates vilification, marginalisation and co-optation. The dissidents, framed simultaneously as completely evil, completely irrelevant and completely central to 'democracy', become an indefinable moving target in much the same way as the entire project and myth – Grinberg's (2009) 'Thing Without a Name' – that they seek to resist. However, leaving aside the far greater likelihood that the nationalist discourse will respond to internal dissonance with ever more trenchant *ressentiment*, the dissidents' efforts, especially if combined with non-violent resistance of the Other and mobilised within a regional approach such as that offered by Behar (2011), nevertheless have the potential to be the harbinger of political change.

Maybe.

Eitan Bronstein's poignant conclusion that there is 'no way out' of his dilemma reminds us of the potency of uncertainty. As long as nationalist discourses depict history in a way that justifies the needs and interests of the purported nation – disregarding or demonising the Other – there is indeed 'no way out'. Yet the self-awareness of my dissidents – their recognition that they are unable to be free of contradictions – might lend itself to greater questioning. When there are no clear answers, questions cannot be for ever suppressed. For people to support occupation, dispossession and violence, the less thought given, the better; the puzzlement, confusion and ultimate discontinuity of my dissidents keeps these ideas bubbling to the surface. Hence, while there might be 'no way out' of the dissidents' dilemma, the fact that they *have* this dilemma, talk about it and have permitted me to engage with it suggests that their endeavours might offer a limited 'way out' sometime in the future. Of course, this, too, has a caveat. It relies on their continued efforts to speak out, to name the 'Thing Without a Name', to resist co-optation even as it is inevitable, and to take their place within a 'tradition' of internal dissent that is deeply problematic, but which could only be more problematic in its absence.

# Appendix: The Dissidents at a glance

**Oren Yiftachel** is a political geographer who sees nations as central to people's happiness. He advocates a binational state in Israel/Palestine.

**Neve Gordon** is a political scientist who has come out in support of the Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Gordon, who supports a two-state solution for pragmatic reasons, orients himself morally according to Jewish values and admires the work of Leon Roth.

**Uri Davis** is a veteran maverick who is married to a Fatah bureaucrat and is a member of its Revolutionary Council. Davis is a strong critic of what he calls Israeli apartheid.

**Jeff Halper**, an anthropology PhD, is the founder of the Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions. Halper, an adult immigrant to Israel, is determined to reconfigure it as a normal country.

**Eitan Bronstein** is the founder of *Zochrot* ('remembering') which focuses on Israel's violent and repressed past. Bronstein's vibrant urban life in Tel Aviv orients him towards an Israeli Jewish audience, and he supports a single state in Israel Palestine with the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

**Jeremy Milgrom** is a melancholy rabbi self-exiled in Berlin. Milgrom's Jewish identification centres on peoplehood, tradition and culture rather than belief in a transcendental God. He is a pacifist, supports a single-state solution and works to support BDS internationally.

**Yonatan Pollack** is a radical anarchist who works with the Palestinian popular resistance. Pollack is stridently anti-nationalist and does not see Israel or Zionism as legitimate.

**Gideon Levy** is a senior journalist who castigates his society for a range of ills, chief amongst them the occupation of Palestine. Whilst considering Israel's establishment legitimate, Levy argues that its Jewish population should have been subsequently aware of their victims instead of repeatedly worsening the situation for them.

**Gilad Atzmon** is a London-based jazz musician whose criticism of Israel also incorporates Jewish ideology and international Jewish critics of the

state. Atzmon professes that the actions of Israel today can explain why the Holocaust happened.

**Dorit Rabinyan** is a creative and passionate 'Mizrahi' novelist, whose love affair and friendship with a Palestinian artist challenged some – but not all – of her values regarding Zionism and the Other.

**Meron Benvenisti** is a former politician, analyst and Zionist pioneer who has come to critique the outcomes of the project. His writings portray outrage at the de-Arabisation of Palestine alongside a trenchant refusal to accept criticism.

# Notes

## 1 *Ressentiment* and the State

1. I am indebted to David Brown (2012) for this pithy summary of Nietzsche's *ressentiment*.
2. Greenfeld (1992) further divides 'civic' nationalism into an 'individualistic' manifestation and a 'collectivist' manifestation. The 'ethnic' form of nationalism, however, is inherently collectivist and has no individualistic manifestation (p. 11). This distinction between civic and ethnic nationalisms is widely operationalised within studies of ethnicity and nationalism. Scholars do not always use the same terminology (see, for example, Kohn 1944; Plamenatz 1973; Hutchinson 1987; Gans 2003; Spencer and Wollman 2005), nor do they always draw the same normative conclusions. However, they commonly contend that we are dealing with two different conceptual creatures. The 'civic–ethnic distinction' also has its critics, who argue that both in theory and practice it breaks down or ceases to be useful for tasks beyond normative judgement (Smith 1991; Yack 1999; Spencer and Wollman 2005). Nevertheless, the 'civic–ethnic distinction' retains merit when employed with regard to nationalist discourses – i.e. when we remind ourselves that we are dealing with abstract concepts on a continuum, while 'real nationalisms' contain competing discourses, which shift over time.
3. See Joel Kovel's (2007) psychological insights in this regard.

## 2 *Ressentiment* Zionism

1. Scholars have also depicted the migration of Jews from Arab lands to Palestine/Israel in similar terms (Shohat, 2002).
2. Sand (2009) argues that Christians propagated the myth of Jewish exile from Palestine because it suited Christian theology for God to punish Jews. The religious dogma of Judaism then absorbed this myth (p. 177).
3. Zionist scholars who disproportionately emphasise the similarities between Jewish lives within diverse communities employ teleological explanations. They seek to demonstrate how the rise of nationalism enticed Jews away from the singular *ethnie* and into other nations, then subsequently spat them back out again into the unique nation to which they had always belonged; a story best told from the contemporary vantage point of a fulfilled nationalist movement (see, for example, Shimoni, 1995). Sand (2009) invites us to imagine, instead, a different set of identification considerations for these Jews, for whom Zionism, with its specific plan for a Jewish homeland, would not be conceivable until their identifications shifted from religious and cultural to secular and political.
4. See Brubaker (1996) on the state-mandated policies of exclusion in Poland. See also Greenfeld and Chirot (1994) on the the German Romantic

movement's projection of hated 'Western' qualities onto racialised Jews (p. 100).

5. See Greenfeld (1992, Chapter 1) on the collectivist nature of ethnic nationalisms. For the collectivist nature of Zionism see Shimoni (1995, p. 121) and Birenbaum-Carmely (2001). Revisionist Zionism did represent the existence of another nation on the land, which would quite understandably oppose the Zionist project.
6. The British attributed the Arab Uprising, which killed 133 Jews, to 'Arab' fears for their futures, and hostility deriving from the failure of nationalist aspirations (Segev, 2000; Weiss, 2004, p. 10).
7. Golda Meir (1975), Israeli Prime Minister in the 1960s, argued from her old age that 'in 1921 my pioneer generation was neither morally obtuse nor uninformed. We knew there were Arabs in Palestine ... Far from ignoring the local population, we were sustained by the sincere conviction that our toil created more and better living space for both Arab and Jew' (p. 63). Yet Meir's famous assertion that there was no such thing as a Palestinian casts doubt upon the promised 'better living space' for 'Arabs' in a Jew-privileging project.

## 3 The Dissidents' Context

1. Political turmoil in surrounding Middle Eastern countries drew many Jews from there to Israel; the Zionist discourse had difficulty digesting this. On the one hand, the Zionist establishment wanted to depict the migration of Jews to Israel as an ideological act, assisted by operations with romantic names like 'Magic Carpet'. On the other hand, advancing the status of Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants as 'refugees' from persecution provided an alibi for the exclusion of non-Jewish refugees, via a terminology of population swaps (Shohat, 1999, p. 12; Shenhav, 2002, pp. 38–41; Peteet, 2005, p. 165). In reality, a range of push and pull factors drove Jews from the Middle East to Israel, including the actions of organised European Zionists in the Middle East, the assistance of Arab regimes (indirectly financed by Israel), and 'radical' secular or religious Arab nationalists' who 'began to identify non-Zionist indigenous Jews as a potential Zionist fifth column' (Behar 2007, p. 597).
2. Israeli society continues to 'purge' members of the Us who transgress the image of virtue. When members of the left-leaning MachsomWatch (Checkpoint Watch) document the ill treatment of Palestinians by the Army and Border Police, they often 'point out the ethnic or class origins' of these individuals. 'By defining them as new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union or Ethiopia or as members of minority groups, it is possible to claim that they do not represent "us" – Ashkenazi/Jewish Israelis – who are allegedly decent and humane' (Kirstein Keshet, 2006, p. 114).
3. This is not the preferred identification of many individuals, who instead emphasise their 'Palestinianness'; I employ the Israeli terminology precisely to emphasise its non-consensual, external imposition.
4. The emphasis on the 'Israeli' part of this name also represents a desire by the state to 'Israelise' – to a degree – its 'Arab' citizens. The idea behind this is one of co-optation; the state encourages 'Arabs' to enjoy the individual rights their

citizenship bestows on them, with the hope that this will ameliorate their dissatisfaction as non-Jews in a Jewish state (see *Haaretz* Editorial, 2007).
5. Many 'Israeli Arabs' were refugees as well, but within Israel. The state prohibited these individuals, paradoxically termed 'present absentees', from reclaiming their properties, and depicted their subsequent attempts as enemy incursions (Piterberg 2001; Davis 2003).
6. The same logic underpinned the treatment of 'present absentees' (see above), whose exclusion from their homes also derived from their not being Jewish.
7. The reoccupation, Operation Defensive Shield, followed the breakdown of the Camp David talks in 2000. Prime Minister Ehud Barak circulated a narrative that Israel had made a generous offer to the Palestinian leadership, who rejected it, proving that they were not a partner for peace, and hence pushing Israelis to the right (Dor, 2005, p. 107). Ariel Sharon's subsequent provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque triggered the second Palestinian *intifada*. With the *intifada* in full swing and a right-wing government in power, Palestinian militants engaged in a month of regular suicide attacks including one on a Netanya hotel, which killed 28 people. Immediately, 20,000 Israeli reservists were called up and, over the coming weeks, the Israeli military engaged in numerous exercises in the West Bank designed to quell dissent, deter popular resistance and eliminate the ruling apparatus, infrastructure and personnel of the organised Palestinian leadership (pp. 3–4).

## 4 Meet the Dissidents

1. Israel does not actually have a Constitution – Bronstein may refer to the Declaration of Independence, which promises civil equality for non-Jews.
2. During 1982's Lebanon War, the Christian Phalangist movement massacred Palestinian refugees in two Lebanese camps, Sabra and Shatila, whilst their allies in Israel's military leadership provided logistical and operational support (Shahid, 2002).
3. The status and experience of Mizrahi or 'Middle Eastern' Jews has been detail by Shohat (1999); Shenhav (2002); Dahan-Kalev (2003). For many categorised as such, their native language, cultures and customs are Arabic, which has resulted in their being regarded with suspicion. Rabinyan is of Persian origin, but explains, '[S]omething about in Israel, everyone who came from an Islamic country was contained in one sack'.

## 5 Themes of Dissident Dissonance: Historicisation and Identification

1. For a less idealistic take on Haifa's Jewish community in the *Nakba*, see Lentin (2010, Chapter 4, esp. pp. 74–9).
2. Grinberg (2009) can illuminate Benvenisti's critique of how Israelis construct leftism. Grinberg notes that 'Israelis imagine the state of Israel as democratic and sovereign within its pre-1967 borders…' This maintains 'the illusion that a border actually exists, and that Jewish Israelis living within Israel's sovereign borders are somehow not party to the crime being committed "there", in "the

territories"' (p. 109). The racialisation of violent soldiers and border police (see Chapter 3 note 2, above) and the labelling of certain Israeli Jews as rednecks so that 'mainstream Israel ... emerge[s] self righteously as ostensibly humane and civilised' (Rabinowitz 1997 p. 71) echo this outsourcing of responsibility.
3. Ber Borachov was a Russian Zionist who attempted to synthesise nationalism with Marxism (Avineri, 1981, Chapter 13).

## 6 Themes of Dissident Dissonance: Zionism and the Self

1. Benvenisti's term 'goy' is an abbreviation for *goyim*, a term used by some Jews to describe those who are not Jewish.

## 7 Dissident Discourses

1. For example, a civic Israel would appear to offer little to refugees seeking to return, unless accompanied by an explicit policy establishing and encouraging the right of return. That said, Israel's current cohort of non-Jewish citizens would enjoy greater equality and have a more feasible path of integration into a state no longer constituted by their absence.

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