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CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL JEWISH STUDIES

Scholarly and Public Engagement in Jewish Politics: A Journey through Liminal Space in Ten Short Chapters*

Mira Sucharov

ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the question of what it means to be a scholar-commentator in the digital age. Deploying an autoethnographic style, the essay asks about the role of power and responsibility in teaching, research, and public commentary, particularly in the context of studying and engaging in Jewish politics. The article addresses questions about the proper role of the scholar in the academy and the role of subjectivity and political commitments in structuring scholarship, pedagogy, and public engagement. It also examines how one's view of the profession can seem to shift through the emergence of new writing outlets and new forums for public engagement. Finally, the author investigates how a scholar's own political commitments can shift over time, how one seeks to shore up identification on social media while trying to change hearts and minds through the op-ed pages, and how community identification can serve as a buffer and motivator for particular forms of research and political action.

Keywords: Jewish politics, Israeli-Palestinian relations, public intellectual, subjectivity, autoethnography, Jewish community

CHAPTER 1

I have barely left the house in a month. "All of the mono, and none of the kissing," I wrote on Facebook. As I often do in my social-media travels, I was fishing for affirmation and solidarity. As for the mononucleosis, I had noticed something was amiss as I approached a colleague's classroom where I had been invited to speak. Suddenly, my feet could hardly carry me, and I felt parched. I had a couple of minutes before I was expected, so I escaped into my office to suck down a cup of water and phone my husband, who was traveling for work. Letting my tears flow, I told him that I didn't feel "full." It was the best way I could find to describe how the energy had been drained from me. Rejoining the class, and surrounded by engaged doctoral students, I was grateful for a sudden burst of stamina.

Since then, I can hardly move. So, I've mostly stayed in bed, tethered to my laptop. I can raise my fingers to type, but that's about all. There, I've been updating my Facebook followers, preparing my teaching assistants to cover for my classes, taking phone calls from students, writing some op-eds and chapter drafts for my book, and trying to be cheerful around my kids and extra kind to my spouse, who has been keeping all the balls in the air. I've had to cancel one trip to Toronto to accept a teaching award and another to speak at a conference. Amid all of this, I've had the added pressure of *trying to figure out whether I'm feeling better*, so I can know when to return to teach. The incessant self-assessment is, in some ways, the toughest part.

While inhabiting this in-between state between work and rest, I'm reminded that even before the mono hit, so much of my professional identity had been located in a liminal space between various roles and binaries. In any ordinary academic career, the unstructured nature of the vocation—the different ways one can fulfill our required roles and the added tasks one can invent and embrace—provides challenge and opportunity. But the same lack of structure also makes my choices feel risky and my footing unsure. Rather than seem like a golden mean, occupying the midpoint makes me feel permanently off balance.

Operating physically in this liminal state has forced questions about power and responsibility into such close view that I need to gain some distance to see them clearly. As a political scientist and public commentator

on Israel-Palestine and Jewish politics, I struggle to come to terms with my allegiances, the moral demands of others and of those I place on myself, and the extent of my reach.

I close my laptop and brew a cup of tea. My Facebook friends have warned me against dehydration.

CHAPTER 2

Not leaving the house much is probably for the best. I'm not sure where I'm stepping. I've discovered new intellectual interests and have become increasingly impatient with what sometimes seem like overly abstract concerns in my own field that no longer capture my attention.

Being unsure of my path is both a gift and a burden. It's a gift in that I feel liberated from some traditional academic publishing demands and am encouraged to find new audiences, new outlets, and new scholarly communities. At the same time, the potential accusation of sour grapes haunts me.

But treading on shifting ground also comes with the burden of feeling like an interloper in some spaces and a quitter in others. And I constantly feel like I'm tripping over old questions: What is my proper role as a scholar in shaping the public conversation around issues pertaining to Jewish politics and Israel-Palestine? Is a public conversation with a potentially larger but "lay" audience enough professional legitimation in the eyes of the profession, or are coded, gated, peer-review forums still necessary? And when I'm engaged in broad, public conversations, how should I consider the responsibility that comes with the authority conferred by my position?[1]

On top of all this, I wonder whether I am still part of my traditional intellectual community and whether I even care to be. These days, when describing my research interests, I'm more likely to invoke the phrase "Jewish politics" than "international relations." My discipline of international relations seemed like it might be able to accommodate my shifting intellectual preferences when I discovered the turn to subjectivity that scholars such as Oded Löwenheim, my friend and colleague, were

pioneering. Having published an article titled "Putting the 'I' in IR" and then a book on his daily mountain-bike commute from his home in the Jerusalem suburb of Mevasseret Zion to the Hebrew University's Mount Scopus campus, Löwenheim modeled an exciting and creative scholarly identity. But as a Diaspora Jew, rather than someone living and breathing the "conflict," I was having trouble finding my way into that genre of narrative writing with the same seductive urgency that Löwenheim's writing conveyed. (Löwenehim writes that his first childhood memory is of his father rushing off to join his battalion in the Yom Kippur War. He writes that his decision to cycle to work each day—culminating in a book—was spurred by missing a bus one morning, minutes before it was blown up.) I had even accompanied Löwenheim on his biking route one summer (by car and foot), where he described his project to me, and where we examined and discussed the sites he encountered daily. But as we toured together, I was keenly aware of my insider-outsider status. On one hand, I was his colleague, friend, and fellow Hebrew speaker. On the other, I was clearly a non-Israeli who came at this subject matter from the outside. This insider-outsider status meant that I struggled to locate my own authoritative voice. Finally, on a subsequent trip to Israel, a visit to a bilingual school in Jerusalem brought forth a flood of unexpected emotion, a surge that made me realize that I, too, had a story to tell.[2] This kind of narrative storytelling has a dynamism built in: it transcends intellectual fields and subfields and the academy altogether, just as it draws on very personal experiences down to the corporeal level, to generate insights about politics, judgment, behavior, and possibility. It is at once particular and universal.

And yet, despite my being welcomed back into the pages of a journal in my home discipline, every year I pledge to take a break from the major annual international relations conference I've attended since starting graduate school and instead throw my energy into the smaller, interdisciplinary conferences in Jewish studies and Israel studies that I now attend with more frequency. But every year, an invitation to join a panel at that traditional disciplinary conference pulls me, and I go anyway. There, I move mostly anonymously among the masses of conference attendees wearing suits and lanyards. I can't wait to change back into my jeans.

CHAPTER 3

Today, I try to enjoy the unseasonably warm autumn weather by writing on my front porch. I'm trying to salve the self-pity that has come from not being able to walk among the changing leaves. If my Facebook feed is to be believed, almost everyone I know is out frolicking in the countryside. My bout with mono has given me an acute sense of FOMO.

Inhabiting a liminal space professionally means that this "fear of missing out" has become a permanent part of my intellectual condition, too. If I hew to traditional academic publishing, my reach will be limited, and thus my power to effect change blunted. If I abandon traditional academic outlets and instead embrace the public commentary path as my primary forum, I might be shirking my responsibility to advance scholarly knowledge in the traditional academic sense. My university colleagues might look unkindly on me. I might have to delay, or even forego, my final promotion, which is still judged on traditional grounds. While in my work I tend to challenge existing conventions around some dominant collective political commitments, I cannot single-handedly reroute the steamer ship that is the collection of norms governing my profession. Sometimes I try, tentatively, to gain allies—others who might want to stand alongside me, pressing for norm change. I often end up alone.

And yet, as a public commentator who claims the lens of scholarly understanding when she makes pronouncements, I sometimes wonder whether I am actually trying to get the public to understand things more deeply. Or am I like any other activist—just one who happens to have a PhD and access to the opinion pages—beseeching and imploring others to play social-justice politics? The importance of this question lies in another, more crucial question: To whom am I ultimately responsible? To my colleagues? To my reading audience? To the people who suffer under the thumb of the politics I try to analyze and expose? And of course, there is the underlying aim of knowledge creation, which is central to the academy in the first place.

For me, this tension came to a head last year. I had pitched a piece about Israel's relationship to its Bedouin citizens to a section of a major newspaper. That section is devoted to scholarly analysis of current events.

When the editors accepted my pitch, they cautioned me to avoid "op-ed-style recommendations." After a few rounds of edits and revisions, they said that the piece wasn't right for them. While I had indeed engaged with current research on the intersection of psychology and politics—in this case, Paul Bloom's research on empathy—I had mostly ignored the injunction to avoid prescription.[3] In writing about an oppressed minority within Israel, I realized that I just couldn't bring myself to be ethically neutral. Within that space intended for scholars to share research with the wider public, the editors and I obviously had different aims.[4]

At other times, I try to cut through what I see as tendentious discourse around the issue of antisemitism in contemporary spaces, particularly when it comes to debates relating to Israel-Palestine. On five occasions, I've penned op-eds to give my opinion on whether some controversy is or is not a manifestation of antisemitism. Three times I've argued that it isn't; twice I've argued that it is.[5] (In one of the cases, the pushback was swift and intense, and while I continue to ply my trade, part of me has not yet recovered.)

Sometimes, I fantasize about becoming *the* go-to resource for antisemitism pronouncements. It would accompany the sense I have of myself (no a doubt a function of a dose of hubris) that while others are blinded by ideology, I am guided only by the sober truth. I could be an Antisemitism Arbiter. It would be like a researcher who is asked to identify additives and environmental toxins with scientific precision. I suppose that I crave a straightforward professional identity that would insulate me from being accused of pernicious motives—from disloyalty to my tribe or opposition to values that others hold dear. I could wear a white lab coat over my jeans.

CHAPTER 4

I don't have a white lab coat, and my field is weighed down by the burden of sometimes-clashing ethical commitments.

As a scholar–public commentator who maneuvers largely within the North American Jewish community, what is my endgame? Am I trying to get people to think the way I do? But why should they? Is my way

of seeing the world—no matter how much data I marshal to build my case—the ultimate truth? Plus, with so many sources of information around, with the dynamic of confirmation bias, and with the echo chambers we inhabit, why *would* they think like me?

Of course, as an educator, the idea of trying to get others to think *what* I think is anathema. We are supposed to teach our students how to think, not what to think, as the old chestnut goes. But the opinion pages operate by different rules than does the classroom. Op-ed writers seek not only to inform but also to persuade. Is there something tainted in this? I suppose it depends on whose ends we are serving: scholarly appraisal, the interests of our community, or the interests of the oppressed. But even simple questions are complicated in practice. The long and intense debate on Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) that I hosted today on Facebook shows how, when it comes to Diaspora Jews and campus politics, no one agrees on basic questions such as who is the victim of whose oppression.

CHAPTER 5

I'm still dogged by illness, but I'm feeling lighter. Today, as I write, I'm listening to the Tragically Hip. Lead singer Gord Downie has died, and Canadians are grieving. Streaming his music is a type of private tribute that I can pay while scrolling through Facebook to see what others are saying about the Hip and what still others are saying in the usual debates over Israel-Palestine that fill my feed. My rabbi, an American transplant, wants to know how to catch up on the Tragically Hip discography. Congregants are offering suggestions.

Others in my network are debating the significance of the recent statement by the Israeli Labor Party leader, Avi Gabbay, praising the settlers. One Facebook friend suggests that it's just a strategic bone being thrown to a key segment of the electorate. Another says that it reveals what political Zionism is and always has been. A third is concise: "lolololol."

Before posting my own social-media tribute to Downie, I am careful to add that in the final months of his life, as his body was being ravaged by brain cancer, Downie devoted his time and efforts to working on

Indigenous reconciliation. It's a term, I realize, that lands awkwardly outside of Canada. As if Indigenous peoples and the settler-colonial government (and its citizens) of Canada are a divorced couple who decide to give their relationship another chance. But it's the term that exists among Indigenous communities to denote restorative justice, so that's the term we have.

I was worried that if I hadn't mentioned Downie's reconciliation efforts, my Facebook post could be construed as another attempt at rendering invisible those who were most victimized by the founding of our country. It's a particularly sensitive time given that this year, 2017, marks the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation. I want to highlight Downie's efforts and the importance of the issue generally. I also fear, in the social-media language of the day, that I am virtue signaling.

When writing about Israel-Palestine, I sometimes invoke Canadian parallels. I am hopeful that Israeli and Diaspora Jews who still cling to Zionism can draw some lessons from our gradual but still-existing process of truth and reconciliation. But I also know that I'm trying to insulate myself from charges of hypocrisy. I want to signal that I'm aware that anyone who focuses her career on criticizing Israeli occupation policies and, more recently, Zionist ideology writ large should not turn a blind eye to the ills inflicted by her own country. In my case, donning protective armor by gesturing to Indigenous politics is a strategy not without some irony. One of the times I explicitly invoked the comparison between Canada's and Israel's founding was in an installment of my then-regular column for the *Canadian Jewish News*. There, I compared Canada's 150th anniversary to the 50th anniversary of Israel's occupation of the West Bank. The reaction was swift. Readers seized on my use of the term "occupation." The criticism reached such a fevered pitch that I decided to leave my post at the paper. As I wrote in my farewell piece, I had started to feel like a geologist hired to be a columnist for the community paper of the Flat Earth Society. My self-protective move—to draw parallels across cases to avoid charges of "singling out" Israel—had failed miserably.

In my public decision to step down from my column, I was aware that I was strutting. I cannot deny that I am grateful for the extra exposure I've received from the move.[6] Aside from what it says about my needy ego, I'm

also keenly aware of even more irony: while the move drew some extra exposure, I ended up cutting off my voice to an audience that otherwise might not hear it. Still, at least I went down shouting: my farewell piece received more than twice the number of readers that my other pieces had. And then, when I read about the account in the neutral voice of the author of an academic journal article a few months later, I blanched: "Condemnatory reactions to Sucharov's editorial [sic] led her to resign from her position as a *Canadian Jewish News* columnist." When I read this concise account shorn of my personal emotional context, I realized that my resignation could be interpreted by readers as a mea culpa, as with so many others who step down to admit their own wrongdoing.[7] In fact, one of the most recent high-profile cases of resignation by a writer in Canada was the case of a painful debate over another issue in Indigenous-settler relations in Canada: the question of cultural appropriation.[8]

While it may seem like the most obvious flashpoint when I write about Israel-Palestine is the term "occupation," increasingly I struggle with the term "Zionism" itself. It feels particularly fraught for me, as a scholar with prior ethnonational commitments and deep roots in a community that raised me with profound attachment to Israel. In my case, though, it's an attachment that is now as critical as it is affectionate. Since I'm increasingly aware that I now think of the term "Zionism" in a different way than do many Jews, I fear that we are shouting past one another.

Occasionally, I am fortunate to be in a forum with scholars and professionals with a range of opinions on this contentious term, and I am grateful to share ideas. But even in those spaces, debate can get heated, and I am aware that how I comport myself depends on whether I feel emboldened by being surrounded by others who share my views or whether I feel alone and embattled. When I feel alone, I know that I sound defensive. And for a scholar, defensiveness is the first admission of uncertainty—not the kind of uncertainty that invites mutual exploration but rather the kind that, paradoxically, locks one into unyielding positions.

If I aspired to be a public intellectual when I was younger, I sure didn't anticipate the intensity of social tipping points. Our scholarly facility with playing with ideas depends on finding level ground. And doing

so depends on how we locate ourselves within our overlapping communities of peers. In these debating spaces, if I look just past the shoulders of my interlocutors, I can see the lockers lining the walls. We are all in high school, organizing ourselves into cliques vying for social capital.

CHAPTER 6

If the dynamics of social capital within scholarly spaces is challenging, then so is the task of negotiating my role in the Jewish community.

There was a time when I never declined an invitation to sit around a boardroom table, serve on a Jewish Federation committee or on a synagogue task force, or work up to the vice-chairship of a large local Jewish institution. Now, I feel like I'm mostly radioactive when it comes to local Jewish politics, even as Jewish politics is an increasing intellectual passion of mine. There's nothing surprising about this, of course. As I increasingly train my critical lens on the workings of Diaspora Jewish politics—especially around Israel—my public image has shifted. I am now a thorn in the side of the community's addiction to the status quo.

This morning, I take to social media to poke at my synagogue's speaker series on the topic of Israel by asking the organizers where the ideological diversity is. I am met with an invitation to attend next week's event and to join in conversation with the rest of the audience. I probably won't be feeling well enough by then, I counter weakly. And besides, I add, have there been any women speakers ever invited to speak on the topic of Israel-Palestine? Not knowing whether I would follow through if they called my bluff and invited me to speak, I slink away. I'm a little annoyed with myself for picking a fight when I should be resting. Later on, seeing who among the congregants have clicked "like" on the jabs of my sparring partners, a wave of anxiety washes over me.

Over the last few years, I've experienced donors, in concert with local mainstream Jewish community institutions, pushing me out of a prominent board position because of my writings on Israel. How much of this is gendered, I wonder? Would a man with my views be pushed to the margins of my community to the same extent? On one hand, it

felt entirely old-boys-network to cast aside an outspoken woman who was about to take the reins of a prominent board. But the donor who helped push me out, after all, was a woman. And the person who later replaced me on the board was a woman. And the most disturbing high-profile speaker brought to the Jewish community over the two decades I've lived here—and where I made my dissatisfaction vocally known—was a woman. But structures of gender oppression, as we well know, don't always operate according to a strict rule of inclusion and exclusion. There can be less visible structures defining acceptable types of discourses, ones rooted in gendered understandings of respectability politics. When mixed with tribal assumptions about the boundaries of Jewish community understandings around Israel-Palestine, the results are even more brittle.

While each op-ed that I publish fuels my sense of self, sometimes it feels like the space for maneuverability narrows considerably each time I speak out. I might gain some new allies but even more enemies. By now, I'm used to the conservative establishment facing me down. But I've also faced animus from the other direction. Once, I was critical of the tone and tenor of a video campaign issued by a particular organization on the Left. In a wild turn of events on social media that spiraled out of control, I was accused of racism. I got so wrapped up in the pain of that social-media swarming that I was remiss in not reaching out sufficiently to a friend abroad who was having heart surgery. While I was hurting, I inadvertently hurt him.

The risk in speaking out—whether in being humiliated by the mainstream community or in being accused of nefarious things by others—still feels worth it, though. But while contributing to the public conversation is my oxygen, it's a life source that sometimes suffocates those I love. My spouse only has so much patience to help me pick up the pieces from the fallout of an op-ed or social-media explosion. I worry that my kids will learn the wrong lessons as they see me reeling from an attack about which they don't know all the nuances. And here's a final dose of irony: I have a university press contract to write a book on op-ed writing and social-media engagement.[9] If battle scars count, I suppose I am an expert.

Lately, as these themes and topics have been wearing me down, I fantasize about leaving the subject of Israel-Palestine behind entirely and reinventing myself—as if those places of reinvention don't have their own trenches.

CHAPTER 7

This strange admixture of having both a wide reach and a compromised public image, at least in the eyes of the mainstream Jewish community, has seemed to intensify lately. Canada is currently dealing with the case of Hassan Diab, a Canadian citizen who was accused of committing a terrorist attack on a Paris synagogue in 1980. A victim of a cruel and unjust extradition law, Diab is currently sitting in legal limbo in a French prison. By all accounts, the evidence against him is thin. It's a cause that the far-left Canadian Jewish organization Independent Jewish Voices has taken up. And it's one that I kept my distance from for too long, daunted by the legal details and annoyed by the people who would send me petitions or follow me out of talks I had given, breathlessly imploring me to get onside. But all that changed when another influential Jewish community figure—the past CEO of the now defunct Canadian Jewish Congress—reached out to me to coauthor an op-ed about Diab's plight. I was relieved to have the necessary insider push to stake our claim. We've taken too long to speak out, we wrote in our piece in a major metropolitan daily, but here we were, speaking out now.[10]

Since then, Diab's main supporters have tried to get us to take up the issue with the Jewish community more directly. They believe that my coauthor and I have the right pull to shape opinion where it matters most. I want to help. I feel that I have the responsibility to lend my voice in decrying injustice wherever I can, but I doubt that my voice carries much weight anymore in this community. As I've sought to exercise my scholarly responsibility in the service of justice and human rights, my reach has shortened. With power comes responsibility, and by exercising that responsibility, one's power can sometimes be suddenly recalibrated.

Still, I will try. Diab's wife is waiting to hear from me.

CHAPTER 8

The warm fall has given way to an Ottawa chill. I open an email from a leftist Zionist listserv I (still) belong to. There's a link to a *Jerusalem Post* article. Meretz party members are having an embarrassing public debate over whether they are Zionist. The article says that the party's chairperson, Zehava Gal-On, via the party's Facebook page, has said that "Meretz is a left-wing Zionist party, an Israeli party in which there are Jewish and Arab members, and it will never stop being one." But Secretary-General Mossi Raz disagrees. According to the article, "Raz repeatedly tweeted that 'Meretz never defined itself as a Zionist party in its platform,' but that the party's Jewish MKs are Zionists." He continued, "A party with Arabs in it cannot, by definition, be Zionist."[11]

Already a party struggling for the affections of an increasingly right-leaning electorate, this airing of Meretz members' differences so publicly seems unhelpful and unstrategic. Still, I read the listserv members' commentary while nursing a sense of quiet satisfaction. I don't say anything, though. I don't want to be a killjoy among these progressive Zionists who have been struggling against the current in their own right for so long. Maybe, I think to myself, this will be a watershed moment for shedding old commitments and embracing new ones. I am secretly happy that these veteran leftist Zionists in my email group hear even some Israeli Jewish politicians question whether Zionism is still appropriate.

And while I am pleased to see that fealty to Zionism—an ideology that I am increasingly coming to see as ill-suited to governing the Israel of today—is loosening, I am frustrated that I can't just turn on Netflix and enjoy the new documentary on Israeli cuisine. My mom even texted me about it. Responding to her, I furiously typed back something about cultural appropriation and the forced invisibility of Palestinians. My social-justice radar knows how to ruin a perfectly good time, I realize. I flip to the David Broza peace documentary instead and feel a profound sense of ambivalence; I feel both love and admiration on one hand, and cynicism and irritation on the other, for Broza's Israeli-peacenik idealism. After a few minutes, I turn it off.

CHAPTER 9

While I am enamored of the public commentary conversation, I try to share less of it with my students these days. I had a difficult semester in my Israel-Palestine course a couple of years ago, and part of my response was to scale back the number of my own op-eds I include in my syllabus. I'm wary of being accused of being seen to preach. But there's a pedagogical tension here too. With the power of the podium comes a responsibility, I believe, to model how to be an engaged global citizen. On the other hand, I am not trying to construct clones. Owing to my mono, there is very little cloning going on, no matter my approach. A third of the way through the semester, I have retreated out of sight altogether.

Beyond the question of how best to model public engagement, teaching has now brought a new set of challenges. I'm now having doubts about the value of the narratives-based approach I'd relied on for the better part of two decades. While understanding why each "side" acts the way it does is valuable for identifying and answering explanatory questions, I'm starting to feel that identifying systems of rights violations and structures of oppression is more urgent. Maybe it's a result of social pressure (new social networks, largely occasioned by social media, and new scholarly circles), and maybe it's a function of the tenor of the current political era (from Black Lives Matter to the current occupant of the White House to Richard Spencer and the neo-Nazi marchers in Charlottesville).

Even hearing the situation in Israel-Palestine referred to as "the conflict" now makes me squeamish. To some critics, the word "conflict" implies a degree of power parity—two sides making each other's lives miserable. The better term, some would say, is "oppression." When thinking about who has the power and who lacks it, my mind turns to the metaphor of "the lion's share." When my husband was in journalism school, and while I was in graduate school, he learned that the metaphor is misused. Newspaper style guides emphasized that the phrase doesn't mean one party has most of the power. It means they have all of it. Should we use terms as they are commonly understood, or should we seek to restore a sense of authenticity to our language? It's a question that comes up again and again in discussing Israel-Palestine.

When it comes to pushing for rights-based discourses and an end to oppression, a narrative writing approach isn't without its challenges. With narrative writing comes a sort of automatic nuance. The certainty I wear when I'm writing an op-ed, on the other hand, doesn't seem quite right for the kind of narrative writing I'm drawn to doing in scholarly fora. And yet, my desire for justice seeking and a rights-based approach seems equally urgent. I suppose that by letting readers in on my private struggles, I can square the circle by modeling public engagement—for my students and for my peers—in all its messiness. And that modeling, in turn, can hopefully inspire others to act.

As I type this section about approaches to teaching, my mind drifts to a working breakfast with colleagues at a previous Association for Jewish Studies conference. The conversation turned to a dual-narratives-based pedagogy. One colleague spoke confidently of rejecting that approach. I remained quiet, taking in a new scholarly social scene as I picked at the contents of my packaged kosher breakfast, ordered to accommodate my shellfish allergy. A costumed Santa Claus, hired by the hotel to mark the season, approached our table. We joked about the timing. Santa at the AJS must feel like the Maytag Repairman, we mused. I encouraged Santa to pose with my tablemates for a picture. As one of my colleagues willed me with his eyes not to upload it to Facebook, I snapped a photo on my phone, where it remains.

Today, as I recall that breakfast conversation, my mind turns over the idea of narratives and why professors would avoid such an approach. Has there been something I've been missing, some political subtext to what had seemed to me an eminently reasonable pedagogical perspective? My own book relies on that approach to assess Israel's path to Oslo. High-school students in the south of Israel fought the Ministry of Education some years ago to try to use a dual-narratives textbook in their classroom. And the primary historical textbook I have often used in my course explicitly adopts a dual-narratives approach.[12] I assume that to some, a narratives-based approach might sound like moral relativism, like unwillingness to point out rights violations and systematic oppression, and I pledge to try to shift my orientation while also trying to occupy a liminal space between both.

I continue to try out the embrace of a more rights-forward discourse focused on oppression, without abandoning narratives altogether, by reflecting on my shift in formal scholarly spaces: in an article on subjectivity and pedagogy, in a chapter in an edited volume where I trace my personal teaching evolution, and in a longer coedited volume for course use, now forthcoming.[13] Reflecting on these questions in formal scholarly spaces helps legitimize my uncertainty.

CHAPTER 10

Today, my fatigue lifted a bit. I was able to toss a Nerf football and play three rounds of Mastermind with my son. Tonight, I will venture out for my first social gathering in six weeks, to our monthly *ḥavurah.* Tonight marks exactly thirteen years since the group, an informal community for Jewish celebration, began gathering.

I take to Facebook to announce the occasion. I deliberate over whether to call the anniversary a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. I settle on "Bat" for political reasons and since the word *ḥavurah* is grammatically feminine. I don't know what I'm hoping for by way of social-media reaction: more solidarity, perhaps some praise, maybe some legitimacy that positions my general public engagement in the realm of what is fit and right. Maybe I'm hoping to inspire.

Tomorrow, my husband and I will take my son to meet with our rabbi. *His* Bar Mitzvah is two years away, and the planning begins now. He's got some ethical concerns about some aspects of Judaism, these days. I look forward to seeing what he comes up with for his *d'var Torah.* I am ready to be persuaded, to be challenged, and, for a few minutes, to shed my restlessness.

EPILOGUE

Four months have passed since I penned those ten chapters, and I have just gotten off the phone with our rabbi. Maybe we will have a late-afternoon Bar Mitzvah service for our son instead of the traditional Sabbath

morning one. With a shorter Torah service and no Haftarah (reading from the Prophets), maybe there will be less pressure. And with its dimmed lights, sensuous spices, braided candle, and jumping flame, I love the Havdalah service. It bridges my memories of being an enthusiastic adolescent caught up in the immersive experience of Jewish summer camp with my sense of needing to be a responsible and inspiring Jewish parent, forging our own path.

As for my mono, I still get asked by friends and colleagues how I'm feeling. I notice that the question comes at me with a jolt. It feels odd to recall my weak state now, and I'm grateful for the distance between those sensory memories and my present state.

Since I wrote these ten chapters, I have presented this nontraditional essay at a traditional venue: the annual meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies. There, I was grateful for the professional legitimation that came with sharing this piece in a scholarly forum. And I've since been invited to guest-edit a section of a subsequent special issue on the topic of narrative writing for scholars. With that added legitimation and the invitation to extend the opportunity to other colleagues and help shepherd them through a similar writing process—one that spurs senses of both satisfaction and vulnerability—some of the defensiveness I had felt in needing to justify my professional choices has fallen away. While I eventually submitted to my corporeal weakness during my nine weeks of mono, now I am relaxing more into the contours of professional expectations. And I also know that I can shape those expectations perhaps more than I had realized before.

Perhaps I'm not so unlike my son, who is trying to chart his own course within a grand tradition. It's a tradition that confers its own set of roles and identities and allows new ideas to take hold if the purveyors of those ideas are able to master the art of persuasion. As for the public persuasion that is demanded by strong and reasoned op-ed writing, Hassan Diab's wife is no longer waiting to hear from me. Diab has now returned home to Canada.

NOTES

* The author is grateful for the helpful comments of the participants in the "Jewish Power and Responsibility in Israel and America" seminar at the 2017 annual meeting of the Association of Jewish Studies in Washington, DC, where she presented an earlier version of this essay. She is especially grateful to her discussant, Laura Levitt, to the editors of the journal, and to an anonymous reviewer.

1. My home discipline of international relations has long tried to carve out space for engaging with issues of public importance. But this has typically taken the form of asking how scholars can better contribute to elite-level policy debates. See, for example, Walt, "Theory and Policy." The space I've been exploring over the last several years, by contrast, is more concerned with trying to interrogate and shape an internal community conversation, something that is less well established within the international relations literature and something that enables me—and, I would add, effectively requires me—to be more forthcoming about my own subjectivity, struggles, and political commitments.
2. Löwenheim, "The 'I' in IR"; Löwenheim, *Politics of the Trail*; Inayatullah and Dauphinee, *Narrative Global Politics*; and Sucharov, "Feeling My Way."
3. See Bloom, *Against Empathy*.
4. The relationship between explanation and prescription in international relations is at times simple (understanding what a political actor *ought* to do ideally flows from a scholarly understanding of how things *are* and *how they came to be*). But at other times, the discipline has struggled to push scholars to make those pronouncements. The concluding "policy prescriptions" at the end of many journal articles have come to be seen by many as all too perfunctory. Herein lay the rub for my relationship with these editors: they may have welcomed a prescriptive piece so long as it avoided what they called "op-ed-style" prescriptions, which I interpret as recommendations that are more normative, more elbows out, more certain, and more argumentative. All this gets at the continued (and, to my mind, productive) tension between being a scholar and being an activist. See, for example, Sasley and Sucharov, "Embracing Our (Non-scholarly) Identities."

5. See Sucharov, "Crying Wolf"; Sasley and Sucharov, "Scholarly vs. Activist Identities"; Sucharov, "Was a McGill Student Evicted"; Sucharov, "Jews Drive"; and Farber and Sucharov, "Nothing Jewish."
6. The news site Canadaland featured a piece about my decision, as did the irreverent Jewish podcast *Treyf.*
7. Koffman, "Suffering and Sovereignty," 47. To be clear, this is my casual reading of the move, not actually the intention that I ascribe to Koffman.
8. This was the case of Hal Niedzviecki, who resigned as editor of the Writers' Union of Canada magazine after a short, tongue-in-cheek piece he wrote in the magazine ignited anger. See Dundas, "Editor Quits amid Outrage."
9. Since the time of this writing, the book has gone to press. See Sucharov, *Public Influence*.
10. Farber and Sucharov, "Ottawa Must Seek Justice."
11. Harkov, "Meretz Debates."
12. Caplan, *Israel-Palestine Conflict.*
13. Douglas et al., "Teaching Subjectively"; and Hahn Tapper and Sucharov, *Social Justice and Israel/Palestine*.

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