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# THE PERILS OF BELONGING AND COSMOPOLITAN OPTIMISM: AN AFFECTIVE READING OF THE ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the psychic topography of identities of belonging for their sustainability in a plural world. By drawing on Freud's Moses and Monotheism, I will think about how collective identities are symbolic reconstructions of traumatic pasts and therefore foreclose their hybrid or cosmopolitan origins. While such insight demands a politics of generosity that considers the psychic "necessities" of stable racial identities, it also demands that we be aware of how the psychic mechanisms of survival, and the narratives and the ontologies they produce, might no longer serve their communities, or the communities with which they come into contact, well. Dissatisfied with Edward Said's postmodern/postcolonial response to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in Freud and the Non-European, this paper offers a viewpoint that imagines political responses from the affective site of human loss and injury.*

## Keywords

trauma; belonging; memory; cosmopolitanism; affect

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**N**oni is an unusual Israeli fourth grader. Growing up on a settlement on the West Bank in Jerusalem during the Intifada, a wall divides his neighbourhood from the adjacent Palestinian village. Another more elusive barrier separates Noni from his brother and his friends, who



have made a game of climbing on top of the dividing wall to yell at and taunt Palestinian snipers. In *A Different War*, the short film by Nadav Gal (2004) in which these events take place, survival is imagined by way of aggressive resistance and refusal of vulnerability.

To his brother's consternation, Noni is not so tough. Indeed, Noni might really be a girl whose desires are encouraged by his mother, who helps him apply make-up. So when he is chosen for the lead role of King David in the end-of-year school play, which is to be attended by the Israeli Prime Minister, he secretly longs to be the princess. His brother, who has been egging him on to play their war game, finally succeeds in getting him to climb the wall; but when he reaches the top, he does not throw rocks at the snipers; rather, in a pretty princess dress, he dances tenderly before them.

King David, who famously killed the mighty Goliath, was the King of Israel. He was responsible for uniting the tribes of Israel as one people and was considered to be the most righteous of all kings, and a champion. Though slight in figure, he was a warrior and a military strategist. So Noni as King David marks an obvious revision of historical myth, since the heroic figure of the Jewish tradition, though small, was hardly soft and feminine. Indeed, his triumphs in securing the Israelites a kingdom came by sword and blood. With this revision, might Gal be suggesting an ambivalence in Israel towards its own history and religious tradition? Are Israel's hard defensive strategies being troubled by a gentler approach to conflict?

This paper will consider the precariousness of stable and enduring collective memory, especially as it relates to questions of belonging and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Group identities are invested in stories and histories that play out in emotionally volatile politics, but very rarely do we think about the space of emotions in politics and political relations. Noni's response invites us to think about the emotional perils of belonging: the violence it demands and the courage it takes not to accede to it. The film stages what it means to be vulnerable in the face of violence and the cycles of revenge. Noni is not interested in fighting back and stands up not only to his brother but metonymically to the entire nation and its logic of masculinist revenge as a response to the traumas of war and loss. Noni's feminine vulnerability is flaunted for the world to see, as he stands on top of the wall and dances before the enemy. It gestures towards another ethos and another kind of response to conflict: one that challenges the rules of group belonging and is not afraid of engaging with the other. His intervention not only undoes the logic of revenge, it asks us to think about the place of relationality in politics. In so doing, it re-writes the past and challenges the legacy of King David on the present. It points to the problems of defensively preserving community and group belonging as a strategy of surviving the traumas of community.

It would seem that Sigmund Freud had a similar idea in mind when he wrote *Moses and Monotheism*. At a time when his belonging to a racial group

rendered his life increasingly under threat with the rise of Nazism, Freud proposed that Jewish tradition stands on forgetting its plural or heterogeneous origins, and thus challenges the very grounds of group belonging and the purity of religious tradition and religious identity. Hence, Freud's response to racial hatred was not to re-trench identity and fortify group belonging but to subject it to psychoanalytic scrutiny. For Freud, the appeal of collective identity and religious tradition is that it offers a defence against trauma and loss. In this sense, identity is not easily surmountable, especially when suffering is generations long, as is the case with Jews.

This paper reads *Moses and Monotheism* to think through how histories of belonging are made from responses to trauma that, more often than not, cancel out otherness in the interest of a coherent and stable collective identity. Since hybridity, or what Edward Said calls the "cosmopolitan" nature of identity is a central concern of postcolonial studies, I bring *Moses and Monotheism* into conversation with his postcolonial/postmodern formulation of identity. Hybridity is not only a central theme in postcolonial studies; it has also been the strategy of the political left to argue against nationalism and sectarian violence (Gilroy, 1993; Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1994). Indeed, in *Freud and the Non-European*, Edward Said, arguably the father of postcolonial studies, draws on hybridity theory to challenge Israel's nationalist and identitarian investments. However, although Said uses Freud to make an argument for the fact of Jewish racial hybridity, I suggest he forecloses Freud's important insights into the affective power of identity and group bonding, as a consequence of trauma. Though I share the view that the politics of belonging can lead to exclusion and sectarian violence, and agree that racial/religious identity is inherently cosmopolitan or, as Homi Bhabha (1994) has argued, ambivalent, I suggest that political responses that do not account for the emotional force of identity in political conflict are naively optimistic.

Postcolonial and postmodern philosophies on identity have helped us understand the cosmopolitan nature of identity, but not why group identifications (nationalist, religious, etc.) continue to thrive. Paying attention to the limits of cosmopolitan solutions to political conflicts, Anthony Kwame Appiah defends a "partial cosmopolitanism" (Appiah, 2006, p xvii) and writes that neither "the nationalist who abandons all foreigners nor the hard-core cosmopolitan who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality" are tenable in the complex world in which we live. For Appiah, cosmopolitanism cannot be total, because, if it were, it would imply a universal set of principles and values good for all citizens of the globe. Such a cosmopolitan imperative, he argues, presumes that we have already achieved a universal truth, when in reality the universal is hard to find (Appiah, 2006, p 144). For this reason, a cosmopolitan ethic must be a commitment to pluralism. More than that, he suggests that our relationship to difference must not merely encompass

acts of generosity and kindness but be about “intelligence and curiosity as well as engagement” (Appiah, 2006, p 168).

Appiah is among the postcolonial scholars who are beginning to provide us the conceptual tools for how to have conversations across borders. Appiah’s premise is that we are not as divided as we think, notwithstanding the presence of neo-fundamentalist and universalist movements of Islam and Christianity, which he calls counter-cosmopolitans. Though we are separated by cultural mind-sets and customs, and hence live in a world among strangers, he argues that we are connected by fundamental commonalities that allow for conversation. Also interested in commonality, Paul Gilroy in *Postcolonial Melancholia* suggests a political humanism, grounded in our “elemental vulnerability” (Gilroy, 2005, p 4). Hence, for Gilroy, commonality is not what we have left when we strip human experience from custom and tradition, but is rather the very dynamic of human relationality. For Gilroy, encounters across difference are always occurring and, therefore, generating new identities. In other words, group identities are not made by keeping separate from cross-cultural encounters but rather from the histories of “strangers” chafing against each other, whether they be interactions of colonizer and colonized, identity groups in multicultural contexts, or Jews and Arabs in Israel and Palestine. Indeed, for Gilroy, as in Freud’s reading of Judaism, identities are always already cosmopolitan.

In Gal’s film, the Jewish boys and the Palestinian snipers, though separated and estranged by a wall, nonetheless encounter each other daily. Sometimes these encounters have the effect of changing the terms of belonging by bringing forth new meanings, as is the case with Noni, who refuses to accede to group violence and sets new conditions for conversation with the other. Gilroy’s cosmopolitan optimism can be encapsulated in such moments. But what his cosmopolitanism unfortunately does not account for is situations in which these encounters are neither benign nor produce new meaning. As we know, in the context of Israel and Palestine, the daily presence of the other has the effect of fortifying group belonging, as is symbolically elaborated by the group of boys in *A Different War* who seem to “bond on hate” (Rose, 2003). Cosmopolitan contexts just as powerfully produce “ethnic absolutism” (Gilroy, 1993) as they do hybrid cosmopolitan identities. This is so despite identity’s fundamental cosmopolitan nature. Indeed, this is what Freud suggests in *Moses and Monotheism*, when he argues that group identities are implicated in otherness, albeit unconsciously. As a parable for the psychic challenge of living with difference after having survived group injury or trauma, *Moses and Monotheism* can shed some important light on how identity is a perilous site in present-day political conflicts. I would thus like to bring Freud into conversation with the postcolonial dilemma of living in a plural world. By taking into account the psychic and affective space of collective identities, and by reflecting on how political decisions are made out of emotional histories, I consider how we might

become better readers of history and better able to invent much needed new responses to political conflict.

### Troubled histories of belonging

I want to consider the value of stories, dreams and myths for historicizing and politicizing belonging. This is important not only because history is an obfuscated memory of the past, and therefore mythical or dreamlike, but because myths give us access to the deeply human qualities of how histories get written from the existential experience of loss, difficulty, and relationality. History is the after-effect, as Michel de Certeau suggests, of being affected by otherness (de Certeau, 1988, pp 1–2), and is therefore the outcome of the absence of understanding. To understand history is to understand the human and the human's relationship to the otherness of the past. Dreams and myths help us engage with the unthinkability of the past. They stage the significance of human relationality on history and help us access, borrowing Lawrence Langer's (1991) phrase, the "deep memory" of individual human experience. Friedlander, who makes a qualitative distinction between collective memory and Langer's conceptualization of "deep memory," suggests that "collective memory tends to restore or establish coherence, closure and possibly a redemptive stance, notwithstanding the resistance of deep memory at the individual level" (Friedlander, 1992, p 41).

In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud troubles the redemptive stance of collective group history by exhuming the deep memory of Jewish history. Obfuscating the line between fact and fantasy, Freud revises Judaism. His rendition, however, does not repudiate the historical "record" of how Moses led the Jewish people out of Egypt, but reads it through psychoanalysis, in particular, through his theory of trauma. In his account, Freud unravels the traumatic kernel embedded in Judaism and suggests that the history of Jewish people is a fantasmatic elaboration of a trauma turned into tradition. *Moses and Monotheism* suggests that fantasy and history are inherently entwined and not, as Walter Benjamin cautions, "the way it really was" (quoting Loepold von Ranke; Benjamin, 1968, p 255).

Trauma produces narratives in which fact and fiction come together. From his patients' stories and dreams, Freud gleans the shards of their psychic histories. He understands their narratives as elaborate projections and complex mechanisms of defence produced from early childhood traumas. Similarly, though there is no easy way to understand this symmetry, the story of Moses for him encodes the lost time of an ancient past. The legend relays the following "facts": Moses, a Hebrew, liberated his people from oppression and delivered them out of Egypt, offering the hope of eventually reaching the Promised Land. The strength of this promise was built on the representation of the Jewish people

being chosen by God and that the suffering that they had endured, and were to endure, would not be in vain but would be rewarded by God's love.

But Freud's genealogy uncovers that there was much "distortion" of historical facts to produce Jewish history and identity. The primary distortion is that the Moses we know of from the Bible is a fusion of two historical figures from two different kingdoms. The first Moses led the Jewish people through the Exodus out of Egypt and liberated them from the hands of their colonizers. This Moses, however, was not Hebrew, but was in actuality Egyptian and was subsequently murdered by the very people he had saved. He not only gave them laws and principles to live by, he introduced them to monotheism and re-introduced the practice of circumcision. From noble birth but living his whole life among the Jews, Moses forced upon them an Egyptian religion, though not the dominant Egyptian religion. Moses was killed and his religion abandoned by an obstinate and rebellious people. Even so, the Jewish people did not forget the significance of liberation from Egypt. The event of the murder was repressed from memory, but not obliterated, and returned belatedly disguised in a new version of Moses. Freud argues that the memory fragments of the Egyptian Moses became entwined many generations later with the memory fragments of the second historical Moses. This Moses was from Qades, of the Palestine region, and was a lowly shepherd to whom Jahve revealed himself. He was not a hero, but a man of God, a performer of miracles, and a healer. Also, he was neither a liberator, nor the founder of Jewish monotheism and circumcision; but he was Hebrew and had grandeur because he was a volcano-god, who parted waters and saved his people from the retaliation of their persecutors. The fusion of the Egyptian and Hebrew figures into one Moses both retained and concealed the traumatic memory of the murder.

Freud's rendition suggests that actual historical events were discarded from known memory. Jewish history, in other words, conceals the truth of its traumatic origins while its narrative nonetheless expresses the enigmatic story of the survival of a people. What stories embody then is the "other" of language, the memory that language refuses.

*Moses and Monotheism* is Freud's re-writing of Jewish history. For Freud, the story of Judaism is fantasmatic or mythical not because there was not a historical Moses and not because the Jewish people did not need to be liberated from Egypt, but because Moses became mythologized through time. The story of Judaism exemplifies the genealogy of a fact and its (con)fusion with myth and legend. Jewishness, not unlike all identity constructions, is the outcome of repudiated knowledge. What becomes literalized as a historical fact and reified as tradition is the outcome of lost memory and memory fragments re-organized in the writing of time.

If we read Freud's text through postmodern concerns, as Edward Said has done, it arguably foreshadows postcolonial theories that write against nationalist/essentialist representations of identity, which assume identities to

be racially pure. Very much taken with the political implications of *Moses and Monotheism*, Said's *Freud and the Non-European* reads Freud's genealogy through the historical/political context in which it was written. Said is struck by how Freud, European educated with a Eurocentric cultural view, would at that moment have been compelled to write about what we in our postmodern/postcolonial context call the Other. For Said, this is worthy of pause because the text marks a curious pre-occupation in Freud during the last months of his life. Freud the scientist and cartographer of collective individual and collective histories becomes Freud the historical Jewish man: a man who, with the advent of National Socialism, was displaced from the political instability of Vienna in the 1930s, and who had to work through his relationship to his ancestral faith by way of the figure of its founder. In suggesting that Moses had non-European and Egyptian origins, Freud, under the conditions of political crisis in which he lived, makes a plea for considering identity's "cosmopolitan" origins. Said indeed argues that *Moses and Monotheism* challenged the stability of Jewish identity at a moment in time when fortifying it would have likely offered emotional consolation. In other words, Freud's response to the onslaught of Jewish dehumanization was to foreground the essentialist fictions of identity and belonging.

As a historical response to anti-Semitism, *Moses and Monotheism*, Said attests, is an *event* that perhaps further traumatized Jewish people for its fundamental claim that the "original" Moses was Egyptian. Unable to bear this knowledge, the official Israel "represses" the cosmopolitan origins of Jewish identity:

Quite differently from the spirit of Freud's deliberately provocative reminders that Judaism's founder was a non-Jew, and that Judaism begins in the realm of Egyptian, non-Jewish monotheism, Israeli legislation countervenes, represses, and even cancels Freud's carefully maintained opening out of Jewish identity towards its non-Jewish background. The complex layers of the past, so to speak, have been eliminated by official Israel. (Said, 2003, p 44)

Freud's claims agree with Said's deconstructive project because he is, as Said describes him, a "re-mapper of accepted or settled geographies and genealogies," and thus demonstrates how "history offers itself up by recollection" (Said, 2003, p 27). But while Said's analysis of Israel's relationship to *Moses and Monotheism* compellingly exemplifies Said's commitment to challenge the constructions of identity (his project as well in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*), Jacqueline's Rose's response to Said is equally compelling: Rose argues that Said's argument is optimistic insofar as it does not pay attention to the psychic power of identity, especially when it concerns Freud's own identity investments. Freud's relationship to his Jewishness is, as Rose quoting Said says, "hopelessly unresolved" (Rose, 2003, p 69). She argues that Said does not fully

consider the implications of Freud's ambivalence towards his Jewish ancestry in relation to what he undertakes in *Moses and Monotheism*. For *Moses and Monotheism* is not just a story that exposes the fictions of racial purity; it also speaks to the psychic impossibility of breaking the social tie, a tie to which, Rose argues, Freud himself was not immune. Indeed, Rose asks us to read Freud's text as "a story of political assassination" (Rose, 2003, p 75), or a story that leaves us sombre about our capacity to have an ethical relationship to the Other, especially when what actually ties people together, she reminds us, is collective hate. Freud makes this very point in *Moses and Monotheism*, when he suggests that the origins of Judaism repeat the structure of human history, which he defined in *Totem and Taboo*. Here he argued that not only love, but murder and hatred are constitutive of the communal and religious link. As Rose points out,

you can reject the flawed argument of both these texts while accepting the underlying thesis that there is no sociality without violence, that people are most powerfully and effectively united by what they agree to hate. What binds the people to each other and to their God is that they killed him. (Rose, 2003, p 75)

Thus, while Said is right to say that Freud's reading of Judaic history stages the fragmentation of identity, it also powerfully gives us insight into why trauma "makes people batten down... towards dogma" (Rose, 2003, p 76). Said, in Rose's view, is not considering how fragmentation, what ideally could be a "model for identity in the modern world" (Rose, 2003, p 66), is in actuality resisted. Freud's story of Judaism starkly demonstrates the fixity of identity attachment despite what he knows to be true about identity. For this reason, Rose says that while *Moses and Monotheism* teaches us how to trouble the history of collective identity, it is also "a lament" (Rose, 2003, p 67) about the structure of identity and tradition. Though she accepts Said's reading of the text as a political parable, she is concerned that we might be in danger of retrieving it "for the urgencies of our political present" (Rose, 2003, p 74) without considering how we are all "deeply and passionately" (Rose, 2003, p 74) invested in our own identities.

Curiously, while Said makes an argument for the fragmentation of identities, he only applies this reading to Israel. Said's discussion does not consider what Palestine represses. Though Rose does not say this directly, she critiques Said for not problematizing Palestinian strategic nationalism when she writes:

In his discussion of archaeology, Edward Said contrasts Israeli archaeology, honed so as to consolidate the Israeli citizens' belief in their fledging state, and more recent Palestinian archaeology's 'attention to the enormously rich sedimentations of village history', which challenges the first in the name of "multiplicity of voice". As I listened to this moment of the lecture, I felt that



one could say that Palestinian archaeology is the heir to Freud. I am less sanguine about the ability of new forms of nationalism to bypass the insanity of the group, especially given the traumatized history of both sides of the conflict in the Middle East. (Rose, 2003, p 77)

Suggested here is that even with its claim to “multiplicity of voice,” this version of Palestinian nationalism is not one that can bear to think about its own identity fragmentations and the hybridity produced from the traumatic encounter with Zionism and the state of Israel. Indeed, “Palestine” represses Israel and similarly consolidates Palestinian identity with archaeological re-territorialization. Of course, Rose recognizes that the material consequences in the struggle for land and identity are not the same for Palestinians and Jews; nonetheless, she suggests that the right to exist for each group is psychically being fought by repressing the other.

For me, Rose’s view is important because she is asking us to view the diasporic subject in history in a way that recognizes the psychic investments of identity. She is right to say that Said’s reading of Israel, in some way, reproduces his very critique of identity, not only because he does not give weight to Freud’s ambivalent relationship to his Jewishness, but also because Said himself does not reflect on his own identity investments. Identity, she states, “for Freud, for any of us – is something from which it is very hard to escape – harder than Said, for wholly admirable motives, wants it to be” (Rose, 2003, p 74). From Rose’s perspective, *Moses and Monotheism*, as a political parable, does not offer hope for new responses to political conflict. Freud’s meticulous and even scientific genealogy of the hybrid origins of identity demonstrates, more than anything else, how humans resist the truth of identity in “consoling fictions” (Rose, 2003, p 68). While I think this is true, Rose’s pessimism seems to preclude her from thinking about the fact that parables might help us do more than merely “lament” Israel, for the very reason that they offer us insight into the historical and emotional truths of belonging. While Rose views the truth of belonging exclusively in terms of how groups bond on hate, *Moses and Monotheism* offers a more complex reading. Her position distorts the fact that hate does not operate in exclusion of love. (Freud made this point in both *Totem and Taboo* and in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.) Indeed, social anxiety and fear of losing love is as primal as hatred. As a parable for our time, Freud offers a lens into the complicated affective responses to the conditions of humans facing political traumas and troubling pasts. Freud’s re-writing of the ancient myth makes such an intervention by suggesting that tradition lives affectively in the present and, sometimes, serves it politically.

Also working with Judeo-Christian mythology, Nicholas Mirzoeff reflects on how a myth-like Babel can be a “dream image” (quoting Walter Benjamin) that has a modern presence and is indeed the past’s legacy on the present. In his consideration of how Babel has returned in the falling of the twin towers and

then in, literally, the burning of Baghdad – the actual location of Babylon – he claims that Babel is “at once the pre-history of the present and a descriptor of the utterly contemporary” (Mirzoeff, 2005, p 5). Perhaps Freud could see that the modern developments of his time had an uncanny resonance to religious myth. If that is true, *Moses and Monotheism* is not a parable for politics but is a political parable. Its power lies in its potential to move us to consider our identities and construction of tradition for their political implications. In the same way, Gal’s *A Different War* moves us to unbind Israel’s political fantasies that are entrenched in religious mythology. By invoking the affective dimensions of politics – namely, the defensive and troubling ways Israel imagines its survival – we are all invited to begin the work of mourning. So while I think Said is too celebratory about the political potential of postmodern identities, I think Rose forecloses the possibility of mourning the history of identities and does not consider how we might create the conditions, as Cornelius Castoriadis writes, for “collective reflexivity” (Castoriadis, 1994, p 8), the potential to ponder the relationship between our political actions and the unconscious.

To help us work through our contemporary conflicts with identity and begin to undo the kinds of debate elucidated by Rose and Said, I would like to reflect on how we can approach identity and histories of belonging in a way that does not render irreconcilable the domains of politics and affective realities. I began with Gal’s *A Different War* because its story demonstrates how the history of tradition, political conflicts, and the dimensions of the affective self are intimately fused in ways that open up possibility for both the self and for collective politics. Stories provide a representation of discarded reality (Georgis, 2006); their narratives recover what has been lost and therefore allow us to make complex connections, to grasp the “dynamic mixtures” (Mirzoeff, 2005, p 5) of myth, history, and politics. *Moses and Monotheism* does just that, in that it stages the fusion of story, religious tradition and psychic dynamics. What pulls these domains together, as I have suggested, is trauma. Trauma is a violence that strikes the self from the outside unexpectedly and is therefore unmediated by psychic filters. As a “missed experience” (Caruth, 1996, p 100), the trauma is retained in memory not as an event that can be narrativized, but as affect that returns in fantasy: myth, story, and dream. As such, when we regard historical narrative as we would dreams or myths, we gain insight into the ghosts of our identities and systems of meaning. Stories, in my view, can potentially put us in touch with our collective consoling fictions by the very fact that they confuse the difference between fact and fiction. In so doing, they awaken us to the human experience that underlies the stabilized strategies of survival. The effect of this awakening cannot offer a quick solution to political and psychical conflict because what it opens is the incoherence of language, history, and identity. If we can bear this incoherence, we might be in a position to re-think and re-create ourselves and our entrenched positionalities.

So how might we then read *Moses and Monotheism* as a parable that teaches us more than about the hybrid origins of Judaism? How can it touch us in a meaningful way that helps us undo and work through the conflicts of present-day Israel and Palestine? One way might be to consider the psychic implications of the Moses story and to conceptualize it as a “dream image” or a trauma narrative that has a ghostly presence in modern-day Israel. We might want to think of the Biblical Moses as a spectre in Israel that works on people and shapes fantasmatically the nation state (Rose, 1996). If Moses is past and present, then he might be “the ruins of the present lying amidst the pasts that are not yet past and paths to a future that is yet to come” (Mirzoeff, 2005, pp 5–6). As a figure that keeps the present alive, even if it is in ruins, Freud’s Egyptian Moses might very well be “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 2000) for Israel, even if Freud’s revision of history is not factually sound. As an idea, Freud’s Moses threatens the imaginary community (Anderson, 1991) that holds Jewish tradition together. But the erasure of the Egyptian Moses in Freud’s narrative is only a symptom of trauma. The story that Freud offers is troubling in that it rewrites an iconic story in Jewish tradition to uncover its emotional truths. Freud’s Moses story is devastating because it renders the Exodus, the symbolic beginning of Judaism, a trauma. His story bears witness to a wound that underwrites Jewish history, a wound which, arguably, still resonates affectively in the present.

Even if Israel’s relationship to Freud’s rendition of Jewish identity is one of repression, we must take seriously Freud’s psychoanalytic project. Agreeing with Richard Armstrong, who writes that “Said did not take seriously enough that Freud’s psycho-archaeology was of a *complex* (the unconscious operations of which define its longevity and efficacy), wishing instead to make of *Moses* a mere cultural genealogy or counter-history” (Armstrong, 2005, p 244), I would argue that psychoanalysis does provide a counter-history if we take the view that history always elaborates a *complex* of psychic conflicts and that what Freud actually offers in *Moses and Monotheism* is an affective counter-history. If Moses’ story is a “story of a wound that cries out” (Caruth, 1996, p 4) across time, then history is the narrative outcome of how survival is negotiated and settled. Indeed, Caruth suggests that what Freud does in *Moses and Monotheism* is show “history as survival” (Caruth, 1996, p 63), which for me suggests not only that the Biblical Moses narrative represents Jewish survival in the past but also how it continues to capture the collective imagination for its conscious and unconscious implications. As a story whose central plot is liberation and freedom from oppression in the hope of finding the Promised Land, its relevance to the Jewish diaspora is obvious, post-Holocaust. In other words, tradition, as something that is “immediately available as a story and what [people’s] imaginations are reaching toward” (Gordon, 1997, p 4) endures social change if its strategy of survival can serve new conditions. But if we consider its unconscious implications, as Freud has done, then its spectral

repetition also keys into unconscious content, which might provide insight into what needs to be *undone* to achieve a better strategy of survival. I say this not because I think *Moses and Monotheism* uncovers and cures the psychopolitical conflicts of our times, but because it might provide an opening to think about how trauma and group bonding render the “other” a threat to survival.

What strikes me as one of the more interesting aspects of Freud’s rendition of the Moses story is that it is a story of collective tragedy, not redemption. Moses led the Hebrews out of captivity; but if the Exodus inflicted a crisis of life, as Caruth’s (1996) reading of *Moses and Monotheism* suggests, then perhaps the murder of Moses, the Jews’ liberator, was an act that elaborated a belated knowing about the trauma of captivity, now realized through the unbearable condition of having to survive freedom from the state of homelessness. For Caruth, to come out of trauma is like waking up from death or from not knowing. Freud named this dynamic *Nachträglichkeit*: traumatic experience is “deferred” and returns belatedly, though modified. What characterizes a trauma is that it is “left behind” and therefore “not locatable in the simple violent or original event...but rather in its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance” (Caruth, 1996, p 4). Hence, in the case of Jewish history, it is the Exodus, and not the time of captivity, that inaugurates history because it took the shape of a “departure” (Caruth, 1996, p 13) from death or waking from the trauma of being in captivity. “Free,” but displaced and homeless, the people’s survival after liberation was unbearable and captivity perhaps even enviable, though not tenable. Hence, Moses’ murder might be understood as the affective expression of the burden of survival that haunts Jewish history; the murder is the affective symbolization of the belated knowledge of bondage and captivity followed by homelessness and suffering. Indeed, Caruth suggests that surviving trauma imposes a “double wound” (Caruth, 1996, p 3) and a “double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (Caruth, 1996, p 7).

Freud’s Moses story elaborates a constitutive ambivalence towards the father of Judaism. The freedom he offered was difficult, and he paid for it with his life; but, unable to assimilate the knowledge of this act, the Jews have him return symbolically as the law. This was also the predicament of the primordial father in Freud’s *Totem and Tattoo*, whose sons band together to kill him for having exclusive access to women. The myth exemplifies the paradoxical relation to the father. Although hated, he is also admired for his power. Initially, provoked by hatred, the brothers kill the father but their love eventually re-surfaces in guilt and is finally resolved by repressing the truth of the murder. While there is no psychological representation of the murder, the father symbolically returns in ritual sacrifice, and this collective practice inaugurates the social bond and the law of the father, with whom the sons in brotherhood now make an

identification. Similarly, in *Moses and Monotheism*, the outcome of the discarded murder is the consolidation of religion and tradition that binds Hebrews together through monotheism, in strict adherence to Moses' law and in exclusion of false forms of worship (Assmann, 1997). In Judaism, exclusion is in fact written into tradition through the idea of being chosen. It is what sets Jewish people apart and is thus the glue that binds people against the Other. Though there are many ways to think philosophically about chosenness beyond its literal appropriation, Caruth offers an emotional reading of how it psychohistorically emerges in Jewish tradition and how it provides insight into how Jews have survived. She writes:

precisely the sense of *being chosen* by God, the sense of chosenness that, Freud says, is what has enabled the Jews "to survive until our day." Jewish monotheism, as the sense of chosenness, thus defines Jewish history around the link between survival and a traumatic history that exceeds their grasp.

The sense of chosenness, Freud argues, was originally taught to the Hebrews by Moses. But it was not truly part of a Jewish monotheistic religion, Freud suggests, until after Moses' death. As a consequence of the repression of the murder of Moses and the return of the repressed that occurs after the murder, the sense of chosenness returns not as an object of knowledge but as an unconscious force, a force that manifests itself in what Freud calls "tradition." Thus Freud argues that the point of *Moses and Monotheism* is not to explain monotheism as a doctrine but rather to explain monotheism's peculiar *unconscious force* in shaping Jewish history. (Caruth, 1996, p 67)

Caruth's argument suggests that Jewish chosenness is both how the survival of the people was represented – the "structure of feeling" in Raymond Williams' (1989) words – and the enigmatic space of unthinkable survival. It is the psychic material that cannot be grasped and the unconscious force that shaped Judaic narrative. But, if Caruth's reading is right, then chosenness only returns as a narrative and as tradition in the wake of Moses' murder. Chosenness, arguably, conceals and "fictionalizes" the unutterable trauma for which Moses had to be murdered. As the narrative on which tradition and community is imagined, chosenness is the emotional strategy of survival.

Finding consolation in separation from others, what Freud termed the narcissism of minor differences, is of course not unique to Judaism or Jewish identity. Indeed, as a metaphor, chosenness might help us understand why attachment to ethnic tradition, nationalist identity, religion and so on offers, as Zygmunt Bauman (2001) would say, "safety in an insecure world." Indeed, *Moses and Monotheism* is an interesting parable for identities that emerge from diasporic epistemologies and find consolation in community and belonging. In this way, Moses' story is not only a Jewish story but a human story relevant to modern diasporic groups who have also suffered captivity – colonial

domination – and then global displacement and exile. Vulnerable to the conditions of new contexts, both at home and in the diaspora, identity and group cohesiveness is often the strategy to deal with postcolonial loss, and is also the logic of nationalist exclusion and violence, of which we have witnessed many examples in our time.

Indeed, the Biblical Moses and Freud's Moses might have very significant resonance for modern cultures if we take Bauman's claim that the prevalence of group identity is the "surrogate of community" (Bauman, 2001, p 15), the afterthought to the loss of traditional community from the disparities of modern life. Modern group identities, he suggests, is the psychic solution to a paradise lost. Much like the predicament of Adam and Eve, who did not recognize that they were in paradise until they were expelled, our departure from paradise inaugurated a crisis: we are haunted by the world we have lost and by the "tantalizing" memory of originary or traditional identities for which we nostalgically yearn and which we wish to repossess and inhabit. Identity, Bauman writes, is able to flourish because it "sprouts on the graveyard of communities" (Bauman, 2001, p 16). Though community represents all things safe and homely, in the name of community we have seen many atrocities. Homogeneity is defended at a great human cost: "hand-picked' from a tangled mass of variety through selection, separation and exclusion" (Bauman, 2001, p 14). But community has also been the response of those who have suffered under the hands of slave masters, Empire, war lords, and Nazism.

Community may very well be the world that we have woken up to from the nightmares of modern genocides and colonialism. It is something we must manufacture because the elusive glue that binds people together is especially threatened after a traumatic event. Communities are more often than not made from a politic of group identity and not from a politic that considers, as Bauman would have it, our "common humanity." Israel, for instance, defends itself from the tragedy of historic loss and refuses vulnerability. Its ethos of "never again" is one that imagines safety by erecting walls. In so doing, it exercises its right to resist Palestinians and guards its security by unspeakable violence. Israel (not the real place but the imaginary community) cannot be easily undone, because it is built on a deep and perilous dream that offers consoling fictions to loss. Israel is the fantasy of security in community that seals itself from suffering, because it cannot forget the tragic past. But because it defends itself from vulnerability, it also refuses the past, which is to say its affective legacy. When Israel looks back at the past, as Benjamin's angel of history does, it is not taking in the past or seeing the past in the present; it wants to make whole what has been lost and been taken away. But when we imagine historical progress in this way, as Bauman cautions, repulsion, not attraction, becomes history's principle moving force:

...historical change happens because humans are mortified and annoyed by what they find painful...because they do not wish these conditions to persist,

and because they seek the way to mollify or redress their suffering. Getting rid of what, momentarily, pains us most brings us relief – but this respite is as a rule short-lived since the ‘new and improved’ condition quickly reveals its own previously invisible and unanticipated, unpleasant aspects and brings new reason to worry. (Bauman, 2001, p 19)

Mortified and annoyed by what they find painful, we witness Jews and Palestinians seeking respite from pain and suffering and see the consequences that ensue. Despite all the failures of short-lived strategies, be they bombs or walls, history “keeps piling up wreckage upon wreckage... and the pile of debris before [the angel of history] grows skyward” (Benjamin, 1968, p 258).

While Palestinians and Jews have different ethnocultural genealogies, they share an experience of loss, suffering and vulnerability. Said’s reading does not seriously enough account for how *Moses and Monotheism* is a human or universal story, for he only considers how Israel represses the “truth” of identity and not how identity might be the consequence of what it means for humans to lose home and community. Without this kind of reading, there is no emotional context for why Israel might repress Freud’s story. Said’s analysis elides how the fiction of identity is a consequence of a collective trauma. If Israel represses Freud’s story of identity’s cosmopolitan origins, as Said claims, it is because it needs collective identity to survive. Indeed, as Rose argues, Jews and Palestinians refuse their cosmopolitan origins because of the wounds and traumas that both groups have suffered in the name of identity. Since the postmodern logic is only equipped to account for cultural genealogy of identity and not its emotional and psychic underpinnings, it cannot adequately respond to the wreckage brought on by the wounds to identity itself.

In his last book, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said asks us to consider a secular humanism that allows us to see “things according to the way they were made...to see it from the point of view of its human maker” (Said, 2004, p 11). Said calls for a humanism that is capable of self-knowledge and self-criticism in concert with over-arching human experiences. While I think Said gets very close to thinking about how we might identify those over-arching experiences, the book does not get us closer to understanding, in Bauman’s words, our “common humanity,” or in Gilroy’s words, “a planetary humanism capable of comprehending the universality of our elemental vulnerability to the wrongs we visit upon each other” (Gilroy, 2005, p 4).

For Bauman, the only condition of dialogue between threatened communities is security. Feeling secure, he writes, “makes the fearsome ocean separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ seem more like an inviting swimming pool” (Bauman, 2001, p 142). Achieving this, in my view, means that our stories and narratives of survival have to encompass the affective dimensions of insecurity. This awareness might provide the conditions required to reflect on how tragedies of loss have stolen a

fundamental security from many communities that live on our planet. The myths of this time might have to be tragedies with failed heroes: heroes that ultimately fail to offer emancipation but offer perhaps something as simple as insight.

Gal's *A Different War* offers us insight into the limitations of finding safety in might and fighting back. In its revision of King David, a mighty religious hero in Jewish tradition, it presents a different perspective on whom we might call the heroes of war and conflict. Indeed, it asks us to consider another kind of resistance, one that insists on offering beauty and love to the world. The kind of love gestured to in the film is not made from within the terms of community and belonging that keep us in perpetual anxiety of exclusion and loss; instead, this is a love made from recognizing the other, and it therefore disrupts the narcissism of melancholic loss that keeps the wound open, in a perpetual fixation, and in resistance to mourning. When we refuse to forget the loss, in addictive remembering, otherness is erased and cancelled out to preserve the object of loss, in this case a fantasmatic nation or a homogenous community. Within the narrative logic of this film, this erasure includes the feminine, symbolically dangerous because of its constitutive vulnerability at a time of war, and the Palestinian, the figure that threatens the nation. In war, mastery and might are not so easily abandoned, which is why the figure of Noni's transgendered body is troubling. But, perhaps this is the kind of trouble necessary to re-imagine the terms of community beyond the perilous dreams of safety.

Much like the message of *Moses and Monotheism*, Gal's short film offers an opportunity for reflection. What if Israel, Palestine, Iraq, the US and all the other players in present-day global conflicts are living in traumatic dreams from which they have not woken up? In *A Different War*, the neighbourhood boys symbolize such players in the game of war. They slumber not because they do not act, but because they do not pay attention to what keeps them playing in the game. Though dreams embody the truths we hide from, they also keep us in a dangerous state of "innocence." In this way, they defend us from the traumas of the past. It is not until we wake up from sleep that we can begin to reflect on the truth of the dream. The desire to sleep, as the wreckage piles up, of course suggests a defence against the truth of trauma, but paradoxically, as Caruth writes, it "is *the dream itself*, that is, *that wakes the sleeper*" (Caruth, 1996, p 99). In sleep, the unconscious is making itself known as an unknown because the "the dreamer confronts the reality of death from which he *cannot* turn away" (my emphasis, Caruth, 1996, p 99). In this way, trauma and its dream-like elaborations put us in a state of simultaneously not wanting to forget and not wanting to know. If that is true, then even as we are sleeping, our dreams are calling out to us, attempting to wake us up. Hence the stories we construct to survive not only embody the truths of our traumas, they also cry them out.



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