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# THE HIDDEN POWERS OF INJURY

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Lynne Segal

1. The Jewish Students group at Warwick, November 2004, for a while persuaded the Students Union to ban two meetings, one on Israel's military 'Refuseniks', another on the 'The Security Fence', claiming the meetings would make them feel unsafe, as Jews.

2. Despite Zionism, a movement originating in the nineteenth century, appropriating the Star of David, thereby trying to fuse the former designations with support for the State of Israel. See for example Gershom Scholem, 'The Star of David: History of a Symbol' in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, New York, Schocken, 1972.

3. Jenny Bourne, 'Homelands of the Mind: Jewish Feminism and Identity Politics', 'Jewish Feminism and Identity Politics', *Race & Class*, XXXIX, (1987): 4.

4. See 'Sisters in Despair', *Jewish Chronicle*, 20/05/1983.

5. Letty Cottin Pogrebin, 'Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement', *Ms*, June, 1982.

6. Hélène Cixous, *Portrait of Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001, pvii.

As I write, academics in Israel have just launched their own version of the notorious US 'Campus Watch' (policing leftists in the USA), encouraging students and staff to monitor and report on 'extremists and radicals in Israeli universities who criticize Israel'. On campuses around the world, as in my patch in Britain, there have been parallel attempts by Jewish student groups to stifle public debate on Israel's activity in and around its occupied territories, claiming that such discussion promotes antisemitism, making Jews too frightened to appear on campus.<sup>1</sup> Yet there is also a growing Jewish voice rejecting the confounding of antisemitism with condemnation of Israeli policy, insisting on the difficult work of untangling any such expedient confusions.

Who's a Jew? The question arouses more than the usual identity muddles, whether trying to distinguish Jewishness (as putatively a type of the ethnicity) from Judaism (as a religion), both of which are distinct from Zionism (as a political movement to create, and later support, a Jewish state in Palestine).<sup>2</sup> In my own adult identifications, women from Jewish backgrounds were prominent in women's movements in the 1970s, though rarely vocal 'as Jews': 'Our Jewishness went unarticulated and unsung', as Jenny Bourne later commented.<sup>3</sup> Given some of the corrosive notes soon to be struck, with the rise of 'identity politics', just as Left and feminist forums unravelled in the 1980s, this was perhaps just as well. What was first most visible as Jewish feminism in London (later to generate the short-lived magazine *Shifra*) appeared at a particularly unfortunate moment, in 1982. It accompanied intense conflict between feminists on the magazine, *Spare Rib*, over Israel's siege of Beirut and South Lebanon, culminating in massacres occurring in the Palestinian Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.<sup>4</sup> It would prove only the start of a quarrel over antisemitism and Zionism that has quickened ever since. That same year, the influential American feminist Letty Pogrebin declared antisemitism 'the hidden disease of the Movement'.<sup>5</sup> Analysed by Wendy Brown as the dangers of 'wounded attachments', competition in victimhood stakes soon become a major hazard in dissident politics. But it has a particular resonance for Jewish identity.

## FAULTLINES OF MEMORY

'Who can say "I am Jewish", without a shudder of the tongue and mind?', Hélène Cixous asks, in her recent homage to her friend and mentor, Jacques Derrida.<sup>6</sup> I can, is my instant reaction. Complacent? Maybe.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps I never appeared 'Jewish enough' to elicit disdain, perhaps my upwardly mobile

parents had too effectively ‘whitened’ their children, in their assimilation into Australian society.<sup>8</sup> Possibly. The absence of any overt antisemitic prejudice and discrimination in all the spaces and places I have occupied (with the voicing of prejudice against Jews, at least superficially, *the* liberal’s imprimatur of vulgar ignorance and stupidity), was compatible, for sure, with its residual, more covert expression, connected to the epoch’s still confidently expressed racism upheld in the ‘White Australia Policy’. However, in Australia’s settler society, Jews were for the most part seen as ‘white’, in stark contrast with the treatment reserved for indigenous Australians, from the beginning dehumanised and degraded in such a way that, if not officially genocidal in intent, amounted to the indifferent annihilation of a people in effect.<sup>9</sup>

Jews overall also fared better than the generally poorer immigrants arriving from southern Europe, especially southern Italians, treated with abiding contempt as ‘stinking Dagos’. Class overrode ethnicity in the circles I knew, and it was precisely the devastating details of recent Jewish history in Europe that were energetically evaded in the post-war boom decades, as Jewish families in western countries for the most part integrated successfully into their differing homelands.<sup>10</sup> At least, this was the situation for Jewish families, such as mine, who had escaped from Europe well before Hitler’s devastation. Those fleeing at the eleventh hour, arriving from fearful hiding or, most terrifying of all, surviving slave labour camps in Nazi-occupied Europe, were treated, at best, with distancing pity. ‘Be thankful you were born in this wonderful country ... They’re making them into lampshades over there’, the Australian poet, Fay Zwicky, recalls her Jewish mother saying to her in the 1940s, following her daughter’s instant recoil from one such impoverished survivor in Australia. Portraying her own further flight from anything so unbearable, she writes: ‘I had laughed, but shrank from the grotesque absurdity of the statement’.<sup>11</sup> We all did. But it remains impossible here to unpick antisemitism from a more familiar psychological recoil, turning away from those whose suffering is too challenging to face.

In the orchestrated forgetfulness of post-war consciousness no-one contemplated the decades in which western governments had remained inactive in the face of the rise of fascism; suppressed information on Nazi genocide as long as possible; did so little to assist the escape of Jews fleeing Europe, the USA least of all (with its immigration restrictions between 1929 and 1948).<sup>12</sup> Nor were they prepared to encounter the shattered worlds of Jewish survivors of the genocidal nightmare, except as grateful new citizens. Only a full generation and more afterwards has the embarrassed silence turned into the confident clamour of ‘holocaust piety’.<sup>13</sup> While survivors of the Nazi death camps freshly displayed the visible marks and tormenting psychic effects of the carnage, some - despite feelings of shame and horror - burning to talk about their harrowing experiences, nobody, Jews or gentiles, wanted to hear.<sup>14</sup>

It was much the same the world over. Those who analyse the politics of

7. This essay is a slice of a chapter from my next book, where I elaborate on such issues in the context of political journeys and belongings, *Making Trouble: Dissident Lives, Political Legacies* (forthcoming).

8. On the ‘whitening’ of Jews in the USA, with certain parallels with Australia, see Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says About Race In America*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1998.

9. See Paul R. Bartrop, ‘Living within the Frontier: Early Colonial Australia, Jews, and Aborigines’, in *Jewries at the Frontier*, Sander Gilman and Milton Shain (eds), Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, p106.

10. See for example Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999.

11. Fay Zwicky, *Hostages*, Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1983.

12. See Breitman, R., and Kraut, A. M. *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987.

13. See Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*,

Oxford, Blackwell, 1993. For a specific discussion of 'holocaust piety' see Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation' in Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (eds), *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1998, pp242-243.

14. Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1994; see also Anton Gill. *The Journey Back from Hell*, London, Grafton, 1988; James Young, *The Texture of Memory*, New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 1993.

15. See, especially, Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003.

16. Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, Haim Watzman (trans) n, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 2000.

17. Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005 (published in Hebrew the previous year as *Death and the Nation: History, Memory, Politics*).

18. Yosef Grodzinsky, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Struggle Between Jews and the Zionists in the*

the current summons to remember note paradoxically that it also serves as another form of *forgetting*. Denial is the pervasive shadow of recent memorials to the Holocaust (a usage appearing only in the 1960s): they flourish with the fading of public responsibilities towards those caught up in the catastrophe and its immediate aftermath (Memorial Day, in Britain, was officially endorsed only in 2000).<sup>15</sup> The coldness greeting Holocaust survivors - wherever they 'returned' - was evident even in Israel, especially in Israel, where aversion was the first main reaction greeting survivors. Old antisemitic imagery, disdaining the 'rootless', submissive Jew, resurfaced in Zionist perspectives. It persisted, as Tom Segev records, at least until - post 1967 - the Holocaust began to emerge as the definitive justification for Israel's war with its neighbours and continuing dispossession of Arab Palestinians.<sup>16</sup> Fellow Israeli historian, Idith Zertal, more recently expanded on the ways in which Zionist Man was depicted, in stark, muscular contrast to the puny and docile Diaspora Jew.<sup>17</sup> Yosef Grodzinsky similarly records the delayed reversal of Ben-Gurion's initial insensitivity towards Hitler's victims only as Holocaust memory came to serve him as a tool against Israel's opponents and critics, a process honed during the trial of Adolph Eichmann in 1961.<sup>18</sup> During the previous decade, as David Grossman recalled of his time at school in the 1950s, 'we learned more about the French revolution than we did about the Holocaust'.<sup>19</sup>

Everything is different now. Having worked angrily to end the decades of silence, British journalist Anne Karpf now conveys her discomfort at the shift from evasion to obligation, in the service of different agendas.<sup>20</sup> More bitterly, the American Norman Finkelstein, like Karpf the child of two camp survivors, despairs that the Holocaust has become 'a tribute not to Jewish suffering but to Jewish aggrandizement'.<sup>21</sup> He draws upon Peter Novick's research on the shifting use of Holocaust memorial in the US for political ends.<sup>22</sup> More judiciously, Eva Hoffman describes the heavy burdens of guilt, grief, anger and resentment she, like other children of survivors, consciously and unconsciously enact, while regretting that the Holocaust has become an ahistorical 'fairytale of good and evil'. 'Distance matters', as she says: 'Stand too close to horror, and you get fixation, paralysis, engulfment; stand too far, and you get voyeurism or forgetting'. But the many painful ambiguities of 'second-generation survivors' are different, Hoffman adds, including even a strange element of 'significance envy', their own lives seeming trivial might make them wish they too had been at the centre of something so enormous: 'the drama of survival conferred on these parents a kind of existential grandeur that no ordinary experience could match'.<sup>23</sup>

Holocaust significance, its deferred effects and traces, can become ontological in salvaging a sense of Jewishness, especially for those who, being at least as well integrated into the wider world as the next person, adhering to minimal (if any) religious practices, find it hard to specify any distinctively 'Jewish' identity other than past (and perhaps potential) adversity. On the one hand, as diverse individuals, most 'Jews' resent attempts to categorise,

and historically at least, disparage them. On the other hand, it can seem that there must be something special, even redemptive, in asserting one's Jewishness, providing a purpose for all Jews have suffered in the past, simply for being Jews. Moreover, threatened adversity, exile and dispossession, is at the core of rabbinical Judaism, especially after the Crusades: the most humble and devout of God's people, suffer just because, eliding multiple paradoxes in both man and God, they *are* His 'chosen people': in man, humility doubles as hubris; in God, punitiveness doubles as preference. Threatened harm easily becomes the fantasmatic glue when few Jews today, in practice, follow any classic Jewish orthodoxy and most feel less affinity with certain traditional Jewish communities (such as the Hasidim) than with non-Jews.<sup>24</sup>

Such unfettered diversity may be just what we might expect when trying to ground *any* collective identity in the shifting, deracinated contexts of contemporary modernity, where Jews share neither a religion, culture, ethnicity, 'race', or genuine equivalence of historical suffering. There have been a multitude of ways in which Jewish communities have survived and often thrived, often despite and because of the prevalence of antisemitism.<sup>25</sup> 'Today the Jew is indefinable', Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias conclude, scrutinising of the rich diversity of Jewish existence across time and place.<sup>26</sup> It is this very indeterminacy, however, that underlies the *power* of shared injury: the role of adversity in binding Jewish identity, more securely than any other common practices or constructions of underlying sensibility, intellect, humour or pride (Yiddishkeit) as Jews. Except for the most orthodox, Holocaust remembrance itself (alongside support for Israel) is now a vital ingredient of Jewish identity world wide: 'the Holocaust has become the key site ... for identification as a Jew'.<sup>27</sup>

## SHARED INJURY

'As long as there is a single anti-Semite in the world, I remain a Jew', the strictly secular Communist writer, Ilya Ehrenburg, wrote in mid-twentieth-century Russia. Confronting persecution is certainly a morally compelling reason for affirming collective identity, as well as powerful way of sustaining it. Moreover, such defensive identification, via past calamity and potential persecution, might seem a sound underpinning for a people who have, so many times over, faced calamity, cruelty and discrimination: for 2000 years the paradigmatic scapegoats of Christendom. Yet it is as problematic as it is compelling.

Historically, the image of the cunning, conniving Jew has held such sway within the Western imagination that it would be hard not to believe it survives, at least unconsciously, within fears and fantasies implanted still today - although, for certain, jostling alongside a grisly array of denigrated others. It is difficult to assess the cultural residue of the figure of the alien Jew, mutating as it has in differing contexts and constituencies from its archetypal

*Aftermath of World War II*, San Francisco, California, Common Courage Press, 2004.

19. Grossman, quoted in Anne Karpf, *The War After: Living with the Holocaust*, London, Heinemann, 1996, p329.

20. Anne Karpf, 'Mass emigration to that foreign country, the past', *Jewish Chronicle*, 28/07/2000.

21. Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry*, London and New York, Verso, p8.

22. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, Boston, Houghton. Muffin, 1999.

23. Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, London, Secker & Warburg, 2004, p177, pp68-9.

24. See for example Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Modern Judaism*, London, Macmillan, 1996.

25. See for example Jon Stratton, *Coming Out Jewish: Constructing Ambivalent Identities*. London and New York, Routledge, 2000.

26. Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias, *The Jews and Their Future: A Conversation on Jewishness and Jewish Identity*, London, Zed Books, 2004, p115.

27. Stratton, op. cit., p.241; see also Jeremy Rosen and David Herman, 'What is Jewish culture?: a debate', *The Jewish Quarterly*, 50, 2 (Summer 2003): 35-39.

28. Stephen Froth, glossing Slavoj Zizek, 'The Other', in *Hate and the Jewish Science*: *Anti-Semitism, Nazism and Psychoanalysis*, London, Palgrave (forthcoming).

29. New EU Monitoring Centre Report Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002-2003, <http://eumc.eu.int/eumc/index.php>

30. Rabbi Naftali Schiff and Lord Janner (president of the Parliamentary committee against anti-Semitism) both compared the attack on a synagogue in North London to 'the destruction in Germany's Kristallnacht in 1938', quoted in Elizabeth Hopkirk, 'Priceless books ruined by arson at synagogue', *Evening Standard*, 21/06/2004, p19.

position as quintessential outsider, despised stranger, within Christian creed and consciousness. Hubs of classic anti-Semitism and Nazi sympathisers are still with us (all too easily accessible on websites such as American 'JewWatch', with their rantings on Zionist Occupied Governments (Z.O.G.), although their chilling activities are - at present - rarely politically effective. They operate alongside the more recent prominence of Judeophobic sentiments in Arab countries, to which I will return.

However, just as antisemitism, with its projection of the Jewish threat, has till recently been widely used to instil a sense of unity and strength in Western communities, the reverse is also true. Invocation of antisemitism, as the danger from the outside other, has helped to maintain its prey: securing a sense of Jewish identity and superiority. Here too, as Stephen Frosh, glossing Slavoj Zizek, notes of the role of racial incitement in instilling fear and hatred, 'the perfect enemy is the one who does not exist, who can be reinvented every time, to face the subject's renewed wrath'.<sup>28</sup> This means looking again at that precarious area between actual threat and fantasmatic threat, exploring the possible manipulations of the latter (conscious and unconscious, the two being intertwined), in the service of identity maintenance and struggles over power and possession.

With the partial, deeply significant, exception of Israel, Jews the world over are currently consistently not only more than averagely prosperous in their homelands but, as never before in modern times, free from personal degradation, harm or discrimination from any reigning government or Western elite. Antisemitic attacks do still occur in Europe, on the increase especially in France, but these need to be studied carefully to understand their continuities and discontinuities with the past. In France, for instance, they are sometimes the work of right-wing extremists (in the *Front National*). The majority of the attacks, however, are perpetrated by socially excluded disaffected Muslim youth, targeting what they see as the 'Zionist enemy' - their occurrence rising and falling with reported levels of repression and resistance in the Israeli-occupied territories of Palestine.<sup>29</sup> In Britain too there has been a rise in attacks on synagogues and other symbols of Judaism, including instances of personal assault. Whoever their perpetrators, and whatever the imagined goal, such attacks are terrifying instances of human cruelty. They should be seen in no other light: whatever the social impotence, shared rage or exclusion they might be undertaken to assuage; whatever the violence perpetrated elsewhere by Israel's so-called Defence Force (the IDF). Nevertheless, the now routine comparison of these occurrences by some of the Jewish establishment to Kristallnacht, in Germany in 1938, is in every way unhelpful.<sup>30</sup>

Nor does it mitigate the offence of antisemitic attacks to point out that racism and xenophobia are on the rise generally at the moment, with Europe's Arab and Muslim inhabitants overwhelmingly its first targets - it merely slots them more usefully into a contemporary perspective. In British crime statistics covering 1999 to 2001, for instance, there were well over

100,000 racist incidents reported, the number rising year on year, of which antisemitic attacks - including leafleting and verbal harassment - went from 270 to over 310.<sup>31</sup> Sadly, that figure has kept rising, with 375 incidents in 2003 and 532 in 2004, remaining the same low (though no less repugnant) proportion of race attacks overall.<sup>32</sup> Monitoring any increase in attacks is crucial. It is far from impossible that there could be growing antisemitism, given the current intensification of global conflict. But in attending to actual antisemitism and reactions to it, past and present, it is crucial neither to embellish nor to distort the particular patterns of prejudice, discrimination, violence and neglect all around us. Those Jewish groups who accuse the government and media of inaction mislead us. Attacks against Jews and Judaism are widely reported and robustly condemned, with police protection very evident when requested.

Of late, conspicuous evocations of Jewish victimisation and warnings of the threat of antisemitism have increased in inverse proportion to the most genuine assertions of zero tolerance for their manifestations at all echelons of global power. It has never been easier to shout one's Jewish identity from the rooftops, with pride - unless, unusually, one lives in the Islamic Middle East, Ethiopia or Central Asia (not where the talk of a 'new antisemitism' is arising). Furthermore, the Western world has never been so receptive to narratives and commemorations of the enduring injuries suffered by the Jewish people, with the Holocaust providing its ubiquitous moral compass today. This is all the easier because Jews nowadays are predominantly amongst the most 'upright' and prosperous tax-payers, making few demands on the national purse and altogether repudiating their more colourful past. Supposedly unlike contemporary asylum seekers, Jews in Britain have always 'cultivated trust and respect for the police after arriving in Britain as immigrants', the late Chief Rabbi of Britain, Thatcher's friend, Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, fibbed back in 1986. Defending a forgotten past, his challenger, Thatcher's foe, the late Raphael Samuel, raced into print to remind him of some more buried Jewish history: the very visible presence of Jews in East London's criminal fraternities in the early twentieth century. The presence of illegal Jewish immigrants in Britain increased after the passing of the Illegal Aliens Act of 1905, designed specifically to restrict Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe.

The ease with which we can proudly proclaim our Jewishness today is not unconnected to the willingness of the powerful to recall the victimisation of a people *no longer in any real need* of shelter and protection, unlike those dispossessed and on the move in the wake of following warfare and ethnic violence today. Tragically, the Jews who nowadays feel most personally threatened live in Israel, especially in its occupied territory. Turning history on its head, the new regional superpower in the Middle East, the massively armed, militarily dictatorial, Jewish state of Israel, is busy ensuring compliance and support from the old reigning imperial power in the region, the late, Great Britain (while the extraordinary financial backing - well over

31. D.D. Guttenplan, 'Letter From London', *The Nation*, 13/06/2002, p14.

32. Jamie Doward, 'Jews predict record level of hate attacks ... Jewish groups ... accuse the government of inaction', the *Observer*, 8/08/2004, p7; Richard Jinman, 'Anti-semitic attacks rise to a record level', the *Guardian*, 11/02/2005, p9.

33. See for example Shawn Twing, 'A Comprehensive Guide to US Aid to Israel,' *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, April 1996.

34. See Ella Shohat, 'Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews', *Social Text*, 21, 2, (Summer 2003).

35. Quoted in Bernard Susser, 'The Ideology of Affliction in *Diasporas and Exiles*, Howard Wettstein (ed), Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p222.

36. *Ibid.*, p221-2.

37. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, George Becker (trans), New York, Schocken Books, 1965, p143.

38. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, New York, Vintage Press, 1973.

39. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p153.

40. Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, Ron Feldman (ed), New York, Grove press, 1978. Most recently, Lyotard expressed a contemporary (post-modern) version of much the same thesis, describing Jews as the inescapable abstract 'other' of modernity, Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the Jews"*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1990, p22.

three billion dollars - Israel now receives annually from the new global superpower, the USA, remains historically unparalleled).<sup>33</sup> Fifty years is a short while to shrug off the habits of two millennia of intermittent persecution, at least for Ashkenazi Jews. (Persecution was not such a significant phenomenon for the Jews of the Ottoman empire, but the richness of Sephardic history and culture, and its links with a larger Arab-Islamic universe, has till now been all but obliterated by power of the European Ashkenazi narrative of antisemitism and the Holocaust.)<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, times change, placing old identities in question.

## IDENTITY AND SUBTERFUGE

It is more than three hundred years since Baruch Spinoza suggested that Jews 'are preserved largely through the hatred of other nations'.<sup>35</sup> In those pre-Enlightenment times when breaking away was impossible, or when Jews lived almost entirely within their own closed religious communities, adversity from without heightened the force of Jewish tradition and solidarity within.<sup>36</sup> Two centuries later, post-enlightenment and the 'emancipation of the Jews', Jean Paul Sartre echoed aspects of Spinoza's analysis in his influential *Anti-Semite and Jew* (first published in France in 1946 as *Reflections on the Jewish Question*, the year before, in *Temps Modernes*, as 'Portrait of the Anti-Semite'). 'It is the anti-Semite who creates the Jew', Sartre argued, who produces the concrete historical situation that inevitably shapes Jewish existence as scorned outsider - whether he bonds only with his own community, or is fully assimilated within a highly cultured Western milieu, eager to honour or defend his European homeland.<sup>37</sup> (Simone de Beauvoir, of course, soon reworked this analysis of subjugated identities, analysing the words and ways of men in creating the situation of women - as *his* quintessential other).<sup>38</sup> The 'authentic' Jew, Sartre wrote, is the person who can recognise his condition as one of the persecuted, and hence feel solidarity with all other Jews.<sup>39</sup> In similar vein, Hannah Arendt wrote of the situation of the intellectual Jew, whose identity becomes that of self-aware 'pariah', knowing there is little escape from the damaging ways in which others perceive them.<sup>40</sup>

Spinoza was ex-communicated for his apostasy and dangerous ideas; Sartre was subsequently belittled for his failure even to attempt to locate any positive core of Jewish identity. Arendt, for a while, regained a partial 'pariah' status amongst American Jews after covering the trial of Adolf Eichmann (for objecting to the prosecutor's portrayal of him as the ultimate incarnation of a monster and, especially, for her provocative analysis of how law-abiding Jewish communities had policed themselves, their obedience assisting the Nazi project).<sup>41</sup> Yet, as the most instantly explosive of all these texts when first published, during the forgotten era of virtual silence on the Holocaust, Sartre's essay was received with great joy by many Jews around the world: 'my very way of walking in the street was transformed by the reading of *Anti-Semite and Jew*', the then twenty year old acolyte, Claude



Lanzmann, recalled twenty-five years later.<sup>42</sup> He was not alone. Sartre's 'generosity and sympathy towards Jews and Israelis' had an immediate and immense impact on French Jews, Robert Misrahi agrees, as their recent nightmare ended, but the world expected survivors to get on with their lives as though everything was normal.<sup>43</sup>

For a short time, with so many Jews still displaced refugees or newly migrant, the world was little changed from pre-war, antisemitic normality - despite the fierce denunciation of Hitler and all things German. Joseph Goebbels's Nazi propaganda, invoking the intellectual, discontented, rootless, cosmopolitan Jew, stirring up social dissidence, resurfaced in the initial post-war era of anti-Communism, orchestrated by the rapidly consolidating new imperial power in Washington. During the peak Cold War witch-hunts against subversives over fifty per cent of those hauled up before McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee were Jews.<sup>44</sup> The spectre of the Jewish traitor hovered over the trial and execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg as spies, in 1953, even though judge, prosecutor and defendants were all Jews. The role of Jews in the Rosenberg case, as both victim and vanquisher, serves as an uncanny preview of the rapidly shifting role of Jews in the USA. Its prosecutor, determined to ensure the joint death penalty, was the Jewish Republican Roy Cohn, indicative of a rising Jewish mainstream soon to appear within the conservative establishment. Fifty years later, during a new paranoia around security after September 11, 2001, I have not heard of a single Jew hauled up before the courts as a potential alien or enemy agent. Even Noam Chomsky - demonised in the Republican press - keeps his job at MIT. Until at least the 1950s, the Left in the United States (as elsewhere in the West), was largely upheld by the commitment and support of Jewish people - despite, and doubtless partly because, the Marxism that loosely underpinned it aspired to a universal equality that paid no special heed to Jews. From the 1960s, the ties between Jews and the Left gradually weakened internationally, through the triple dynamic of increasing Jewish prosperity, declining anti-Semitism and the emerging role of Israel.<sup>45</sup>

In the new centre of Western culture, there was an astonishingly rich Jewish presence from the 1950s onwards, despite secret quotas limiting the number of Jews at most American universities in for another decade.<sup>46</sup> Leading Jewish authors and playwrights were the imprimatur of a rising 'Jewish Fifties', again as cause and outcome of the decline in antisemitism. The daringly foolhardy, all-male heroes of Saul Bellow or Phillip Roth were so colourfully beguiling precisely because of their ambivalent relation to their Jewish roots; Woody Allen and his ilk made New York humour all but synonymous with Yiddish sentiment, while Jewish immigrants appeared in every nook and cranny of Hollywood and popular broadcasting.<sup>47</sup> Even in Britain's more staid cultural scene, also restricting the number of Jews in some public schools until the 1960s, Jewish émigrés were soon prominent in intellectual life, especially in higher education, publishing and the arts.<sup>48</sup> As always, the flip side of successful assimilation into the mainstream was a

41. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York, Penguin Books, 1964, p288.

42. Lanzmann, quoted in Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 'Remembrances of a 1946 reader', *October*, 87 (Winter, 1999): p7.

43. Robert Misrahi, Carol Marks (trans), 'Sartre and the Jews: A Felicitous Misunderstanding', *October*, *ibid*, p62.

44. Paul Buhle, 'The Hollywood Blacklist and the Jew: An Exploration of Popular Culture', *Tikkun*, 10, 5 (1995); Clancy Sigal, 'Hollywood During The Great Fear', *Present Tense*, 9, 3, (1982): 45-48; Marjorie Garber & Rebecca L. Walkowitz (eds), *Secret Agents, The Rosenberg Case, McCarthyism & Fifties America*, Routledge, New York and London 1995.

45. See Arthur Liebman, 'The Ties that Bind: Jewish Support for the Left in the United States', in Ezra Mendelsohn (ed), *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, New York, New York University Press, 1995.

46. Anthony Lerman, 'Sense on Antisemitism', *Prospect*, August 2000, p16.

47. See, for example, Leslie Fiedler *To the Gentiles*, New York,

Stein and Day, 1972; Paul Buhle, *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture*, London and New York, Verso, 2004; Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*, Berkeley, University Of California press, 1996.

48. See, Daniel Snowman, *The Hitler Emigrés: The Cultural Impact on Britain of Refugees from Nazism*, London, Chatto & Windus, 2002; Malachi Haim Hacohen, *Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna*, North Carolina, Duke University, 2002. See also Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', *New Left Review*, 50 (July-August 1968): 18-20.

49. Nathan Glazer, 'The Jewish Role in Student Activism', *Fortune*, LXXIX, (January 1969): 320, quoted in Liebman, *op cit.*, p352.

50. See Staub, *op. cit.*, p2.

51. Naomi Schor, 'Anti-Semitism, Jews and the Universal', *op.cit.*, p116.

52. Quoted in Antony Lerman, 'Sense on Antisemitism', *Prospect*, August, 2002.

53. Phyllis Chesler, *The New Anti-Semitism: The Current*

parallel waning of the old Jewish communities from which many of these rising celebrities had emerged, drawing upon even as they shifted away from their distinctive roots. It is such disappearance that leads some critics, such as Karen Brodtkin from the USA, to suggest that Jewish assimilation only arrives in exchange for the silence and invisibility of Jewish community life within Western liberal democracies: an assertion, however, which seems to me to say as much about the flux of *any* affiliations in modernity, with their shifting ties to influence and respectability, rather than to something uniquely Jewish. With student radicalism on the rise in the 1960s, many Jewish voices were again for a time prominent on the Left, internationally, but they did not become its scapegoats.<sup>49</sup> Tellingly, when a Jewish Rabbi did lose his job at Columbia University for joining the peace movement in 1970, he was fired *not* by the University authorities but by the Jewish Advisory Board, who objected to his stance.<sup>50</sup> 'Today's Jew', as Naomi Schor, a voice from the following decades' protest movement, feminism, concludes: 'is no longer as he was for hundreds of years, the paradigmatic stranger, the unassailable Other. That role has been reassigned today to the immigrant, notably the members of Islam'.<sup>51</sup>

I think she is right. And I am not alone. Britain's previous Chief Rabbi, Lord Jakobovits, declared at the very close of the twentieth century: 'For the first time in 2,000 years of the Jewish experience, there is not a single Jewish community anywhere in the world where Jews are officially persecuted because they are Jews'.<sup>52</sup> Yet, since the year 2000, and endorsed by the current Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, we have seen an ever greater intensification of claims to the contrary: declarations that there is a 'new' antisemitism on the rise, some say, as never before. 'We see the spread of the wildest anti-Semitism' in France, Israel's prime minister, Ariel Sharon, announced, in July 2004. The leading alarmists of the new catastrophe facing the Jews are predominantly voices from Israel and the USA, but their claims are echoed around the world. Sharon has his reasons, however grubby and expedient, for urging Jews the world over to leave behind homelands where they face still negligible personal threat for the only country in the world today whose illegal occupation of Palestinian land seized in the 1967 war increases their danger. The panic peddlers elsewhere might appear more distressingly irrational. The American radical feminist, Phyllis Chesler, who once directed her hyperbole elsewhere, writes today of a new 'war against the Jews', now being waged 'on all continents'.<sup>53</sup> Her compatriot, Abraham Foxman, goes further, insisting that Jews, wherever they are, now confront a threat as great 'as the one we faced in the 1930s - if not a greater one'.<sup>54</sup> Greater? No mere genocide! Several other books have appeared with the same apocalyptic titles and tone. In this country a parallel message is growing, where the 'new anti-Semitism' is often synonymous with criticism of Israel's current policies, as a British compilation on the topic edited by Paul Iganski and Barry Kosmin spells out. In stark contrast with 'old' antisemitism, we learn that the new threat comes from Left liberal elites, the media, trade unions,

progressive churches and universities.<sup>55</sup> Those most committed to promoting tolerance and compassion are pronounced dangerous bigots. Strange times! The newness in this 'antisemitism' (arising in concert with the last Palestinian intifada (accompanying the break-down of the Oslo peace accords in 2000), consists overwhelmingly in its doubling as anti-Zionism or criticism of Israel. Despite claims to the contrary, in all these books it is the criticism of Israel that is defaming and threatening Jews: the 'vilification of Israel' is the core characteristic of the alleged 'new' anti-Semitism, as Brian Klug meticulously argues.<sup>56</sup> It is technically correct to say that even the most uncritical of Israeli government's defenders dismiss such criticism by suggesting that they do not object to 'fair' criticism of Israel. However, it is they who presume to judge what is and what is not fair criticism, while robustly condemning any weighty criticism of Israel as 'excessive' or 'one-sided'.

We now enter the most troubled waters of all. For alongside brutal histories of suffering and loss, one of the most visible ways Jews have united as Jews in recent times is in support for the State of Israel as their 'true' homeland, accepting its right to see us all as its potential citizens. According to a recent survey of thousands of British Jews (perhaps self-selecting, as those already wanting to affirm their Jewishness), more than seventy-eight per cent say they 'care deeply' about Israel (against only five per cent who do not).<sup>57</sup> Many were troubled by reports of Sharon's policy, but almost of all were more 'disturbed' by what they saw as 'biased media coverage' against Israel. In actuality, media bias works in the opposite direction, leaving viewers alarmingly ill informed, as a recent scrupulously detailed analysis of TV coverage of the conflict over the previous two-years in Britain illustrates. The latest study of the Glasgow Media Group reveals that media reporting strongly favours Israeli government views (and their supporters), over Palestinian accounts. Israelis were quoted and spoke in interviews over twice as much as Palestinians, while US politicians who support Israel were frequently heard. The language used to describe the conflict overwhelmingly reflected Israeli perceptions of it, with words such as 'atrocious', 'brutal murder', 'mass murder', 'savagely cold blooded killing', 'lynching' and 'slaughter' reserved for Israeli deaths. Audiences tended to see Israel as responding to Palestinian violence because of the strong emphasis on Israeli casualties relative to Palestinian deaths - despite the overwhelming preponderance of the latter.<sup>58</sup> In a larger population survey of over 50,000 Jewish households in the USA, there was a clearer religious-secular split, with only the majority of religious Jews feeling strongly attached to Israel.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, there have been huge confrontations in US campuses, with critics of Israel accused of inciting antisemitism - most forcefully recently by the president of Harvard University and by Jewish students at Columbia University. So fierce was the confrontation at Columbia, after a group calling itself the David Project fought for the removal of almost all of the professors covering Middle East Language and Culture for their attacks on Israel, that the university spent the final month of 2004 protected by guards braced with a fire hose.<sup>60</sup>

*Crisis and What We Must Do About It*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2003, p3.

54. Abraham Foxman, *Never Again? The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism*, New York, Harper Collins, 2003, quoted in Brian Klug, 'The Myth of the New Anti-Semitism', *The Nation*, 2 February 2004. See also Alan Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 2003.

55. See almost all the essays in Paul Iganski and Barry Kosmin (eds), *A New Antisemitism? Debating Judeophobia in 21st Century Britain*, London, Profile Books, 2003.

56. See Klug, op. cit.

57. This in depth survey of thousands of British Jews was undertaken by Steven Cohen and Keith Kahn-Harris, reported in Simon Rocker, 'Minority support for Sharon among British Jews', *Jewish Chronicle*, 18/06/2004.

58. Greg Philo and Mike Berry, *Bad News from Israel*, London, Pluto Press, 2004. See also Graham Usher, *Dispatches from Palestine: the rise and fall of the Oslo Peace Process*, London, Pluto Press, 1999.

59. Egon Mayer, Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *American Jewish Identity Survey, 2001*, New York, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, available <http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/ajis.pdf>.

## CRITICAL CONNECTIONS: JEWS CONFRONTING THE ISRAELI RIGHT

60. Jennifer Senior, 'Columbia's Own Middle East War', *New York Magazine* 17/01/2005, p12.

61. See Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Modern Judaism*, op. cit., pp178-81.

62. See, Brian Klug, 'The Collective Jew: Israel and the new antisemitism', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 37, 2 (June 2003).

63. Peter Loewenberg, 'Theodor Herzl; Nationalism and Politics' in *Decoding the Past: The Psychohistorical Approach*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1983, p120.

64. George Mosse, *Confronting the Nation: Jewish and Western Nationalism*, Brandeis University Press, 1993; also Daniel Boyarin, 'The Colonial Drag: Zionism, Gender, and Mimicry', in *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997; Jonathan Boyarin, *Palestine and Jewish History: Criticism at the Borders of Ethnography*, Minneapolis, London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

65. See Avi Schlaim, 'Collusion across the Jordan and "The Debate about 1948"', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27, 3, (August, 1995); Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths*

It is hard to pull together concisely all the arguments that reveal quite how offensive, misleading and dangerous it is to identify antisemitism with criticisms of the current policies of the state of Israel. Here are some of them. At no period, since the inception of political Zionism in nineteenth century Europe, have all Jews supported its basic goal of secular nation building, which are at odds with orthodox notions of awaiting messianic redemption (the arrival of the Messiah to return his chosen people to a Homeland of their own, where they will live in eternal peace, truth and happiness).<sup>61</sup> Political Zionists have themselves never been of one mind on the nature of their political goals, the type of state they wished to build, how they should build it, where its borders should be.<sup>62</sup> There have always been significant Jewish voices (especially in recent decades) pointing out that political Zionism, with its rejection of non-violence, adulation of tough manliness and thirst for building the strong state is not only a renunciation of two thousand years of European Rabbinic Judaism, but an internalisation of Aryan, anti-Semitic culture. It was therefore *itself* a form of Jewish self-hatred: 'In this sense Herzl was a Jewish anti-Semite', Peter Loewenberg concludes his psychoanalytically informed history of Theodor Herzl and his followers.<sup>63</sup> His views have been strongly supported by some fellow American scholars exploring the intersections of Judaism, nation building and anxieties over manhood: the late Jewish historian, George Mosse, for one; the eloquent textual analysis of Talmudic scholar and cultural critics, Daniel Boyarin, and the ethnography of his brother, Jonathan Boyarin, among others.<sup>64</sup>

Today, as yesterday, there are within Israel ardent critics of the bellicosity of the current Israeli government - if no effective parliamentary opposition to it. Sadly, their voices are rarely heard abroad, least of all in the USA. Longing to affirm their belief in a Jewish tradition of concern for the dispossessed and persecuted, Israelis committed to peace have sometimes been in the forefront of exposing their country's self-serving mythologies, as seen in the iconoclastic works of those called the 'new historians', beginning with books by Avi Schlaim, Simha Flapan, Benny Morris and Ilan Pappé, over a decade ago. These include, in their view, the prolonged 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians, especially in the 'Nakba' of 1948, with the destruction of hundreds of villages, thousands of homes and several massacres, leaving 700,000 people driven forcibly from their land.<sup>65</sup> (In a hideous twist of fate, the worst massacre, at Deir Yassin, now sits alongside the present site of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum, commemorating not the massacre of Palestinians, by Jews, on that spot, but of Jews slaughtered in another land).<sup>66</sup> Equally ignored in Israel's 'democracy' is the denial of full civil rights or land ownership for the twenty per cent of Palestinians who remain in Israel; the treachery of 'peace negotiations', promising

withdrawal from the remaining area of Palestinian enclaves outside its 1967 borders, on the one hand, even as money and protection is provided for more land seizure in what remains of Palestinian territory by allowing the expansion of new settlements in the West Bank and (up until now) the Gaza Strip, on the other hand.<sup>67</sup> As the Israeli historian Avi Shlaim has written, the settlements in the occupied territories (now controlling over forty per cent of the West Bank) play a key military and strategic role when, sited on hilltops to give a commanding position across the whole of the region, their inhabitants are usually heavily armed, prepared and ready for attack and further expansion.<sup>68</sup>

Yet, it is within Israel itself, as well as outside, that critics suggest that there can be no lasting peace so long as the Israeli military machine keeps over 3.2 million Palestinians living under virtual detention in the West Bank and Gaza. At least since 1967, with its continuing assaults on the land and livelihood of Palestinian communities, Israel has been a nation seemingly prepared to be forever at war with its neighbours: 'The truth is that no one in the government wants peace with the Palestinians', Israeli politician, Shulamit Aloni, mourned in 2004.<sup>69</sup> The same point is made by Idith Zertal, comprehensively documenting the ways in which every Israeli politician who has worked for peace has been personally vilified in the right-wing press, likened to Hitler's appeasers or themselves labelled 'Nazis'. Yitzak Rabin, for example, was murdered a month after Sharon and Netanyahu spoke at a right-wing rally in October 1995, indicting the Oslo Peace Accord supporters as criminal 'Judenrats' (Jews carrying our Hitler's orders).<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, Palestinians (comprising nearly half the population of what was mandate Palestine) are constrained to several only nominally 'self-governing' enclaves in what is now only fifteen per cent of it, 'lacking real sovereignty, freedom of movement, military power, control over water and air, or contiguous territory', as Israeli geographer, Oren Yiftachel, spells out.<sup>71</sup> Daily grappling with, even as he passionately condemns, 'the long path of humiliation and despair' that lies behind the creation of a 'terrorist', the Palestinian psychiatrist Eyad El Sarraj grieves that the struggle of Palestinians like him is convincing his people 'how not to become suicide bombers'.<sup>72</sup> But his wise voice, like those of other prominent Palestinian officials and intellectuals who have repeatedly publicly condemned suicide bombings and violence, is rarely heard by the wider world.

It was the inability of Western democracies to prevent the destruction of two thirds of Europe's Jewish population that secured the success of the Zionist political dream to found a modern nation state in Palestine in 1948, ratified by Britain and the UN. The catastrophe this brought to its resident Arabs is not best seen as the fulfilment of messianic promise to the Jews so much as the long night of barbarism in Europe. Writing with genuine sympathy for and apprehension about Israel, the Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher pointed out, a generation ago, that Jews in Europe had thrived, wherever they were allowed to, not as nation builders but as diasporic

*and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1987; Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism and the making of the Jewish State*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998; Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1951*, London, Routledge, 1992; Ilan Pappé, *The Israel/Palestine Question*, London, Routledge, 1999. Although today a passionate Zionist, these arguments were also presented in the work of Benny Morris, e.g., *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

66. Thanks to Moshé Machover, the philosopher and of science and joint founder of the radical left party, Matzpen, in Israel, for this information, and other careful checking of facts in my text.

67. See Oren Yiftachel, "'Ethnocracy": The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine' *Constellations*, 6 (Sept 1999); Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002; Nadim N. Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict*, New Haven, 1997; Baruch Kimmerling, 'Religion, Nationalism, and Democracy in Israel', *Constellations* 6 (Sept 1999).

68. See, Avi Schlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, (2000).

69. Shulamit Aloni, 'Pre-Messianic Pangs', Translated by Sol Salbe from Ynet (29/07/04), the web site associated with *Yediot Acharonot*, Israel's largest circulating daily <http://www.ynet.co.il/home/0,7340,L-392,00.html>.

70. See Zertal, op. cit.

71. Oren Yiftachel, Contradictions and Dialectics: Reshaping Political Space in Israel/Palestine, An Indirect Response to Lina Jamoul, *Antipode*, 36, 4, (September 2004): 24.

72. Eyad Sarraj, 'Bombs and madness: understanding terror', *Index on Censorship*, 4 (2001): 7.

73. 'Deutscher, 'Israel's Tenth Birthday', in *The Non-Jewish Jew*, op. cit., p12.

74. See, for example, Nur Masalha, *A Land Without a People: Israel, Transjordan and the Palestinians 1949-1996*, London, Faber and Faber, 1997; Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, New York, W. W. Norton; London, Allen Lane the Penguin, 2000.

75. Mitchell Pitnick, 'Reclaiming the Struggle Against Anti-Semitism' in

cosmopolitans. Paradoxically, he concluded, the final founding of the Jewish state was yet another Jewish tragedy: 'a monument to the grimmest phase of European history, a phase of madness and decay'.<sup>73</sup> It is hardly the first nation state to be built upon continuous dispossession and elimination of its indigenous people. Nevertheless, it is not only specious to assert that criticism of Israel is antisemitic, but it threatens to erase the weighty historical and cultural significance of the whole of Jewish persecution. All Middle Eastern scholars are in agreement that the political struggle in that region does not involve opposing Israel *because* it is Jewish. Rather, it is a matter of competing nationalist struggles over the possession of land. The opposition is overwhelmingly to Israel's continuing dispossession of the Palestinians and its failure to pursue fairer, or even genuine, roads towards a peaceful settlement.<sup>74</sup> There is also resistance to the notion of Israel as *the* 'Jewish State', in the sense of being the self-declared state of all the Jews around the world, rather than the democratic representative of all its native-born inhabitants, irrespective of ethnicity.

Infuriatingly, fanning fears understandably embedded through Jewish histories of displacement and catastrophe, antisemitic stereotyping does appear in criticisms of Israel, but it does not reduce to them. The frightening rise of Islamic fundamentalism over the last decade (perversely fed by the US led 'war on terror') encourages such sentiments, including public sale of the notorious tsarist Russian vilification of Jews contained in *The Protocols of Zion*, and the stories that circulate of maverick imams issuing death threats against all 'enemies of Islam', 'the USA' and 'the Jews', in particular. The rise of religious fundamentalism, Islamic, Christian and Jewish is alarming, although their relation to Zionism and Israel is complex. Some of Israel's strongest backers today, the leaders of the Evangelical Christian Right in the USA, are fiercely anti-Judaic. They believe, along with Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, that all Jews must return to Zion, whereupon Armageddon will occur: Jews will either convert to Christianity, or be destroyed.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, some of Israel's strongest critics are committed to a peaceful future for Israel, and Jewish people generally. They condemn the disastrous effects of Palestinian violence, the horror of suicide bombing, even knowing that it occurs in the context of unprecedented Israeli military campaigns against Palestinian leaders and civil society.<sup>76</sup>

It is Israeli dissenters, some calling themselves Zionists, who have long been active in dozens of grass-roots struggles and cross-border activities, working tirelessly for peace, as in the only bi-national village in Israel, 'Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam'. These peace activists can be found in Ta-ayush, Btselem, in New Profile, in diverse campaigns attempting to prevent the Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes and olive groves, working for refugee rights, joining the courageous multi-faceted Coalition of Women for Peace, in silent vigil with Women in Black, monitoring the harassment of Palestinians within Machsom (check point watch). Meanwhile, the majority of Jews in the rest of the world, uncritical Zionists or not, show little desire to claim the

land rights re-issued them by their 'God'- with much help early on from terror squads committed to notions of death and martyrdom (so like the Palestinian nationalists today that Israelis claim to find incomprehensible).<sup>77</sup>

Finally, to suggest that anti-Zionism (a contested term, now covering positions that accept the existence of Israel, if not the legitimacy of all its policies) is essentially antisemitic, entails creating a brand new type of Jewish identity: it is an insouciantly pugilistic one, where the claims of 'injury' that ground it serve primarily to disguise the crimes of the powerful. As the Israeli journalist Akiva Eldar commented recently: 'It is much easier to claim that the entire world is against us than to admit that the State of Israel, which arose as a refuge and a source of pride for Jews, has not only turned into a place less Jewish and less safe for its citizens, but has become a genuine source of shameful embarrassment to Jews who choose to live outside its borders'.<sup>78</sup> Sadly, he exaggerates. For the most part the same mechanisms of denial and projection are at work in the minds of the majority of Jews outside Israel. They too are adept at turning potential shame into anger. The greater the condemnation, the fiercer the anger towards critics who express their horror at the plight of Palestinians over the last four years: seeing the images, reading the evidence of hundreds of children and other innocent civilians killed, homes bulldozed, orchards destroyed, teenagers incarcerated and tortured to be recruited as spies, roads and borders arbitrarily closed, apartheid roads for Jews only.<sup>79</sup> More and more, Palestinian life in the occupied areas evokes that of Jews in the very worst periods of antisemitism in Europe: living in isolated geographical ghettos behind checkpoints, subject to collective punishments, harassed, humiliated, deprived of their means of livelihood, impeded in their efforts to maintain civic infrastructures.

The ruthlessness of Israeli enclosure reached its terrifying climax with the ongoing construction of a steel and concrete 'security fence' through the West Bank. The 'Wall' has resulted in the widespread appropriation or destruction of even more Palestinian property, depriving thousands of adequate access to healthcare, education and even water, as well as livelihoods - cutting them off from their olive groves, agricultural and other forms of employment. As the American psychoanalyst and leftist, Joel Kovel, mourns: 'Zionism has negated what was done to the Jews in Europe, but recreated its own past, with a different set of masks'.<sup>80</sup> Afif Safieh echoes the thought, 'we the Palestinians, have become the victims of the victims of European history, the Jews of the Jews'.<sup>81</sup> Both are reprising the words of Primo Levi to an Italian newspaper in 1982, after the massacres at Sabra and Shatila, when he accused Begin and Sharon of bringing shame on name of the Jews: 'Everybody is somebody's Jew. And today the Palestinians are the Jews of the Israelis'.

Can we ever hope for better times? As I return yet again to this essay, in February 2005, there is a 'truce' in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the old Israeli leadership, under Ariel Sharon, at odds with all his actions hitherto, is

*Reframing Anti-Semitism, Jewish Voice for Peace*, publication, pp8-9.

76. See, for example, Oren Yiftachel, 'Ethnocracy and its discontents: Minority protest in Israel.', *Critical Inquiry*, 26, 4 (Summer 2000): 725-756

77. See Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth*, Amherst, New York, Humanity Books (imprint of Prometheus Books), 2002.

78. Akiva Eldar, 'From refuge for Jews to danger for Jews', *Ha'aretz Daily*, 3/11/2003, accessed [http://www.geocities.com/munichseptember1972/from\\_refuge\\_for\\_jews.htm](http://www.geocities.com/munichseptember1972/from_refuge_for_jews.htm), 29/07/2004.

79. See Mazin Qumsiyeh, *Sharing the Land of Canaan*, London, Pluto, 2004; Catherine Cook, Adam Hanieh and Adah Kay, *Stolen*, Yout, London, Pluto, 2004.

80. Joel Kovel, 'Zionism's Bad Conscience', *Tikkun*, 17, 5 (Sept/Oct 2002), accessed, [www.tikkun.org/Magazine/index.cfm](http://www.tikkun.org/Magazine/index.cfm).

81. Afif Safieh, Director of the Office of representation of the PLO in a letter to the Pope, written in London, 7/10/1997, <http://www.al-bushra.org/vatican/safieh.htm>, accessed 12/08/2004.

closing down Israeli settlements in Gaza; the new Palestinian Authority, President Mahmoud Abbas (more determinedly than Yasser Arafat), is committed to opposing the use of violence by his subjugated people. But if the truce is to hold, Israel will have to end its occupation, enabling a genuinely autonomous, contiguous Palestinian state to emerge. The majority of the Palestinian people, including Hamas and other smaller political Islamic groups, need to believe that there is some hope of obtaining nationhood through peaceful means, if they are to step back from the violence and martyrdom their struggle has bred. It will take enormous pressure on the Israeli state for it to abandon policies it has pursued from the beginning: policing, isolating, restricting or demolishing, Palestinian communities, wherever they are. It is equally necessary to condemn Palestinian violence against civilian targets, which has proved as counter-productive as it is morally wrong - encouraging, even as it (faintly) mirrors, the brutality it opposes. Along these lines, Edward Said argued a few years before he died, that Palestinians and Arab intellectuals must engage openly and courageously with Israeli audiences:

What have years of refusing to deal with Israel done for us? Nothing at all, except to weaken us and weaken our perception of our opponent ... we need to rid ourselves of racial prejudices and ostrich-like attitudes and make the effort to change the situation. The time has come.<sup>82</sup>

The time has come. 'Good morning', Gideon Levy said angrily to the Israeli left, as I write, where have you been hiding? Not all of us were hiding, Rela Mazali replied, describing the thousands of women in Israel who have throughout this intifada lined up to declare, 'We refuse to be enemies': the world needs to hear more from them. 'This Time, I'm Hopeful', Eyad Sarraj says, more confident than before that Hamas, if not Israel, can be persuaded to lay down its weapons.<sup>83</sup>

## WAYS OF BELONGING

Can forms of dis-identification, as psychoanalysts might say, also function, paradoxically, to affirm identity? It has indeed been passionate criticism of Israel's current intransigence towards recognising Palestinian rights that has sufficed to bring more than one lapsed Jew back to affirming their Jewish heritage, in critical engagement with Zionism. We can draw upon that particular Jewish legacy which, moving beyond shtetl and Shul, sometimes freer of fierce national ties and (selectively) more sensitive to intolerance and discrimination, put its faith in universal emancipation and enlightenment. Here, being a 'good' Jew meant cherishing the stories of the struggles, sacrifices and successes of one's forbears by holding progressive social values (if not necessarily, although in greater numbers, embracing both Freud and Marx, alongside commitment to radical causes).<sup>84</sup> More incongruously, it has given some of us friends in Israel, a place we perhaps

82. Edward Said, 'New History, Old Ideas' (1998), reprinted in *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics*, Ephraim Nimni (ed), London, Zed, 2003, p202.

83. Gideon Levy and Rela Mazali, both accessed on *Jewish Voice for Peace* 14/02/2005, <http://ga3.org/jvfp>; Eyad Sarraj, 'This Time, I'm Hopeful', *Washington Post*, 13/02/2005, pB02.

84. For an interesting survey of Jews in the USA, see Anna Greenberg and Kenneth D. Wald, 'Still liberal after all these years? The contemporary political behavior of American Jewry', in Sandy Maisel and Ira N. Forman (eds), *Jews in American Politics*, National Book Network, 2005, p163.



thought we would never even visit, connecting us to that embattled minority working for peace in the region: their children sometimes facing jail as Refuseniks, their jobs perhaps on the line, watching glumly as their country becomes an ever more militarised zone, responsible for daily atrocities.

In this picture, a type of dissidence is serving to ground a critical sense of affiliation, though echoing earlier strands of Jewish radicalism from the days when Jews faced the contempt, or worse, of the powerful. As someone long distanced from my place of birth (like so many of my friends), forming such critical attachments have often seemed like a way of coming home: as an enduringly critical cosmopolitan, perhaps. This thought was also expressed by Bruce Robbins, after (along with his former academic rival, Alan Sokal) he initiated 'An Open Letter from American Jews' in 2002, opposing the massive US military aid sustaining Israeli expansion and brutality in the West Bank and Gaza. He too writes of 'being critical as a way of belonging', noting another paradox about universalism along the way: 'dedication to universal rights', to justice for everyone in the Middle East, including Palestinians, 'seems to have offered many of those "lost children" (Jews by birth but little else) a means of belonging *as Jews*, something they can proudly affirm about their difference from others and about their sameness with others'.<sup>85</sup>

Who's a Jew?, I asked at the beginning of this essay. I am little nearer to knowing at its close, other than to stress the cultural diversity of histories that might connect and, as often, divide 'us'. Neither the old antisemitism that united Jews in adversity, nor the new Zionism that moves many to defend Israel today, can underpin Jewish identity. As Judith Butler writes: "The "Jew" exceeds both determinations, and is to be found, substantively, as a historically and culturally changing identity that takes no single form and has no single telos".<sup>86</sup> This is as we might expect. Identities are experienced as significant and meaningful, when neither our inescapable fate nor some shared and timeless inheritance is. In the nomadic Western metropolis, identities are largely fictitious ways of aligning ourselves with others, recognising similarities and downplaying differences. Such 'tribal' belongings (not so unlike supporting a football team) establish an imagined space with those whose tales of triumph, waves of woe, or mere daily vicissitudes, we feel able to appropriate and experience for ourselves. Alongside any narcissistic gratification, such affiliations provide ways of caring for others, of establishing communities, even as they work to exclude people, and - especially when under threat - all too easily generate hatred towards them. The very fact that identities are far from stable frequently makes their assertion all the *more* brittle and strident.

We can, if we wish, battle to preserve different images of Jewishness. But we cannot simply re-define it. People fighting as Jews for Justice for Palestinians (whether in some psychically rooted or primarily strategic way) share political goals, not a battle to redeem Jewishness. Nevertheless, the affiliations this provides, fraught and fragile, perplexing or pleasurable, as they may be, are likely to be prove pressing for quite some time.

85. Bruce Robbins, 'Solidarity at a Distance', unpublished paper.

86. Judith Butler, 'No, it's not Antisemitic', *London Review of Books*, 21/08/2003, p5.