No Way Out:

How Israeli Jewish dissidents attempt to use alternative national identity discourses to connect with their Palestinian Other

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University, 2012
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work
which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Kathryn Louise Attwell
Abstract

This thesis explores the national identity dilemma arising within ethnocratic states when individuals belonging to the ‘privileged majority’ seek to rectify the privations of their ethnic Other. Ethnocratic states have been set up by activists seeking to protect those they see as belonging to the ethnic nation with which they identify. In the process, the activists marginalise those depicted as Others within the state’s borders, institutionalising a demonising discourse which justifies those Others’ lack of privilege. Dissidents from the privileged majority may seek to remodel the ethnocratic state or challenge its dominant discourse without necessarily opposing the underpinning view of the nation therein, generating dilemmas about how justice for the Other ought to look and how the Us might be reconstituted to attain it. A study of the narratives of dissident Israeli Jews employs the theoretical concepts of ethnocracy and ressentiment to understand these dilemmas.

Existing literature on ethnocratic states is riddled with ‘groupism’ – the tendency to treat ethnic groups or nations as objectively real entities. This thesis emphasises the processes of reification occurring when nationalist activists institutionalise their particular discourse. The concept of ressentiment is used to describe how demonisation of the Other becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy through mistreatment, enabling me to examine how ethnocracy is both discursively constructed and resisted.

The thesis engages qualitatively with interview transcripts and previously published works by eleven Israeli Jewish dissidents. Using narrative analysis, I pay attention to discontinuities, such as omissions and inconsistencies, to explore how the dissidents do not say certain things, or profess contradictory opinions about the place of the Other, ‘national’ history and what the future should hold. I argue that the dissidents largely move between six variants of nationalist discourse because no single discourse allows them to construct a vision of equality and justice for the Other alongside a thick
national identity. Those who do employ a single discourse end up well outside the ‘national’ consensus, suggesting that for many dissidents, there is no way out of the current malaise. However, the dissidents’ efforts can be read as a challenge to the simplicity of ressentiment’s moral certainty, and hence as a contributor to political change.
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INTRODUCTION

“Zionism ... saw itself as national liberation from European anti-Semitic oppression, but at the same time it was itself responsible for the oppression of Palestinians and, in a different way, of Arab Jews. Zionism founded one nation while destroying another nation, gathering Jews from the four corners of the globe while at the same time dispersing Palestinians to the four corners of the globe.... The Palestinians were constructed as the perennial enemy that had to be expelled, or at least disempowered, for the Jewish nation to exist.”

– Ella Shohat.

“Eh, what are you gonna do?” – Homer Simpson

A Tale of Two Zionists

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

The first of our two Zionists is Dan Cohn-Sherbok, co-author of The Palestine-Israeli Conflict: A Beginner’s Guide (2003), which details the historical narratives of each ‘side’. Half is written by Cohn-Sherbok, an Israeli Jew, and the other half by Dawoud Sudqi El Alami, an Israeli Palestinian. At the end, the two writers debate the justice of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, and the consequences this has wrought for non-Jews.

“No respectable analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can deny that there is an inherent conflict between Zionism and Palestinian rights” (Slater 2000, p.19). Observing such a conflict between the co-authors, it is apparent that the moral justifications behind the Zionist position are more complex than those behind the anti-Zionist one. El Alami’s anti-Zionist position is straightforward: he does not accept that the plight of Jewish refugees from Europe should have become the problem of people living in Palestine, although he accepts that all people now living in the land have a shared future. Cohn-Sherbok’s position is more complicated. He would like to see a Palestinian state created, and acknowledges some of the sufferings of displaced non-Jews, yet argues that the Jewish state was
rightfully established. Cohn-Sherbok’s obvious sympathy towards Palestinians appears tempered by what he might be unwilling to give up for the Other in a state he sees as belonging to his own people.

The tale of our second Zionist emerges with the story of Benny Morris, an Israeli historian who dramatically engaged with the plight of the Palestinian Other in a *New Left Review* interview with Israeli journalist Ari Shavit (2004). In the 1980s and 1990s, Morris had been heralded as one of Israel’s ‘new historians’ – a critical voice who called it like he saw it. What he saw – thanks to the opening of Israel’s government and military archives – was the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in order to create the Jewish state. Morris’s critics saw his work as de-legitimising this state, and hence as subversive (see discussions in Sand 2011; Kimmerling 2004), whilst his supporters presumed that he reported Israel’s history with moral outrage (Ash 2004; Kimmerling 2004). His interview with Shavit (2004) therefore contained a shocking revelation: Morris believed that the ethnic cleansing did not go far enough. Though he had concerns about what happened, Morris retrospectively supported the removal of non-Jews from Palestine to create the Jewish state.

In the published interview, Shavit accuses Morris of being “chilling” (p.41), “hard-hearted” (p.42) and right-wing (p.49) and declares his adoption of terms like “cleansing” to be “terrible” (p.42). Yet Shavit does not challenge the wider logic of Morris’s argument: that a viable Jewish ‘democratic’ state could not be established without displacement of non-Jews; something Zionist activists had recognised decades prior to the events Morris had revealed.

Shavit (2004) suggests in frustration that Morris offers only two alternatives – “a cruel, tragic Zionism, or the foregoing of Zionism” (p.50). Yet Shavit’s desire to stand up for a more humane Zionism is stymied by Morris’s implicit denial of its viability. When confronted by Morris’s bald acceptance of breaking eggs, Shavit cannot offer an alternative way of making the omelette – the Jewish state which, like Morris, he supports. Thus the Zionist at the centre of this second tale is not
Morris, but Shavit. For all his visceral moral response to Morris – his need to claim himself as somehow different – Shavit does not challenge Morris with a Zionism that promised to be different. How are we to make sense of Shavit’s yearning for such a Zionism, alongside his distaste for what happened, alongside his embrace of the fruits that the actual Zionist project has yielded? How can we understand people like him as experiencing a dilemma?

**The Dilemma**

The tales of Shavit and Cohn-Sherbok are tales of people who are worried about their Others, in a context in which these worries cannot be fully resolved. If every ethnic nationalist discourse prioritises an Other below the Us, then any individual worried about this Other faces the challenge of articulating this concern and driving it towards a political outcome. But this challenge is far more acute for Shavit and Cohn-Sherbok. They live in an ethnocratic state which privileges their Jewish identity – this is purported to be its purpose – and support for such a state is at the heart of Jewish nationalism. Individuals’ attempts to incorporate concern for the Other within this nationalism expose some undeniable contradictions.

> It may be too much to ask the privileged, even those on the left of the political spectrum, to challenge a system that supports their own privileges and dominance (Rouhana 2006, p.71)

If this is so, then what *are* such people asking of themselves? How might they understand their identities and assert different ways of existing communally? And how might scholars evaluate their efforts? These questions focus us on the dilemma that Cohn-Sherbok embodies and Shavit viscerally experiences. A clear perception of this dilemma is necessary, so I will offer an overview of its two key components before elaborating upon them in more detail.

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

The second component of the dilemma is constituted by concern for the Other. Privileged citizens of a state set up for that purpose ostensibly need not worry about those who are marginalised by this project, as Benny Morris demonstrates. However, when individuals do engage with such worries, they enter into a realm of contradictions not easily resolved.

Together, then, the ‘problematic situation’ and concern for the Other comprise the dilemma. The dilemma can be observed in individuals like Cohn-Sherbok and Shavit who affiliate with Israel and the Zionist project whilst also worrying about their Others. However, aspects of the dilemma also affect more radical individuals. Hence in order to map the dilemma, we need to start with left-wing Zionists and trek out towards the very margins of Israeli society where a vocal minority of anti-Zionist Jews scorn the national project. In the space between these two positions the dilemma will take particular shapes according to how individuals analyse their situations. Accordingly, although the ‘Tale of Two Zionists’ was our entry point into this thesis, the work itself is more aptly a ‘Tale of Eleven Left-, non- and anti-Zionists’, which does not include the two individuals featured above. The subjects of my study, whose labelling as ‘dissident’ will be explained below, provide a way of exploring and mapping the dilemma faced by individuals in an ethnocracy who are concerned about the situation of their Other.

The problematic situation (‘The Thing Without a Name’)

Israeli academic Lev Luis Grinberg (2009) uses ‘The Thing Without a Name’ to describe the ongoing project of Palestinian dispossession and the simultaneous justification of this project within Israeli society. I will elaborate on this in the early chapters of this thesis, but Grinberg’s description provides an accessible introductory overview.
Grinberg (2009) borrows a metaphor used by members of the Israeli government after the acquisition of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 (details included later), to explain the historical desire of Zionist activists to have the dowry (land) but not the bride (non-Jewish residents of it). The phenomenon Grinberg seeks to name “includes both the act of robbing the bride and the portrayal of the abusive husband as the victim of her resistance,” (p.115). He suggests that the inability of academics to come up with suitable terminology to describe this ‘Thing’ forms part of the problem. The ‘Thing’ blurs the names and nature of the participants in the conflict; it re-attributes specific Israeli-only meanings to terms like ‘Right’ and ‘Left’ (p.111); it depicts a decades-long occupation as temporary (p.106); it insists upon a border between Israel and the West Bank which obscures the singular nature of the regime (p.109); it puts Jewish ‘settlers’ in the hot seat whilst letting other Israelis off the hook (p.109); and most significantly, it is continually re-affirmed by every act of resistance. The bride can never be the Victim; this role belongs to the husband even as he continues to appropriate her dowry and work out how to do away with her (p.115).

But the inability to attain focus on the thing at hand does not only place Palestinians in a bind. The ‘Thing’ also traps Israeli Jews who seek to adopt a moral standpoint vis a vis the Other by ensuring that they, too, become part of the problem. This occurs in simultaneous, contradictory directions.

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

Secondly, such individuals are also vulnerable to co-optation; becoming part of the problem by acting (even against their will) as legitimating agents. This occurs at a meta-level and also at the level
of personal engagement. Collectively, the moral stands of dissidents are important hallmarks for a society wishing to depict itself as a flourishing, democracy (see Kirstein Keshet p.143). The concept of ‘shoot and cry’ has been applied to the so-called moral Israeli having no alternatives to violence (Segev 2002; Cohen 2001, p.95; see also Lentin 2010, p.170). It remains an open question the extent to which a state’s democratic credentials are thwarted by personal retribution. However, when the very people who are reviled or ignored for suggesting that their state does not function as a democracy are simultaneously held up in argument for it being regarded as such, these people are damned either way.

At a personal level the engagement of such individuals also becomes questionable, as Lentin (2010) explores in her interrogation of Israelis memorialising the Palestinian Nakba (‘catastrophe’ of dispossession in 1948). Lentin asks whether those “who attempt to bear witness and take responsibility … in not drawing political solutions or defining themselves as anti-Zionist… aim to and ultimately become encompassed by the Israeli Zionist consensus” (p.17-18, my italics). Kirstein Keshet, in her study of the organisation MachsomWatch, which places female Israeli Jewish observers at checkpoints in Occupied Palestine, echoes that many activists “want to protest and yet to reassure – and be reassured – that they are still part of the Israeli collective” (p.110), for example by avoiding “stressing the human rights of the Palestinians” and rather “express[ing] concern for the moral well-being of the soldiers” (p.110). Lentin questions whether engagement with the Other ultimately becomes an “appropriation of memory” and a “signifier of narcissism, stemming from an unasssuageable melancholia and guilt” (p.49-50), ultimately disengaged from restituting the Other. Moreover, such engagement may actually “racialise…” the Other as “the victims of ‘our’ state”, precluding atonement (p.169).

Within these competing traps, the harder individuals try to resolve the contradictions of their ‘moral Zionism’, the more ‘dangerous’ they become. They become a danger to their own self-perceptions (which can explain Shavit’s revulsion for Morris). They also become dangerous to the problem they
are trying to address but may ultimately perpetuate (Lentin 2010). Finally, they become dangerous to the hegemonic doctrine of their society, should they attempt to dismantle the system of privilege that is the Jewish state. Accordingly, such individuals find themselves in what George Clooney’s character in the iconic film *O Brother, Where Art Thou* calls ‘a tight spot.’ Thus, although such individuals may attempt to find new ways of talking about their identities and the Us and Other, their ability to employ alternative discourses of identity are severely limited within their ‘problematic situation’. Often limits are imposed by the individuals themselves, who find that they are more comfortable with contradictions than with the stark poles that lie outside them. If Benny Morris represents the stark pole on one side – the person who has given up on the Other – we will also explore the stark pole on the other side in the form of the radical anti-Zionists who walk away from their society. For those in between, their dilemma involves reconciling with contradictions and limitations as much as it involves attempting to meaningfully connect with the Other across the lines of legally entrenched Jewish privilege.

How do we take our understanding of the ‘problematic situation’ – Grinberg’s ‘Thing Without a Name’ – to a deeper level of analysis? This becomes a key methodology question for the thesis; my answer is to explain systematically how Israeli nationalism operates, utilising the concepts of the *ethnocratic state* and *ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourses*. An ethnocratic state is a state in which activists purporting to represent an ethnic nation have shored up their hegemony via the institutionalisation of ethnic categories and the manipulation of demography to achieve ‘majority rules’ domination. *Ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourses* are the discourses that inspire them to do this – discourses of national identity hostile to those depicted as ethnic Others. When a *ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse* becomes the basis for an ethnocratic state, future generations can be seen as trapped in an apparently inescapable cycle of enmity between two self-evident ‘ethnic nations’ in a state privileging only one of them. The ‘privileged nation’ is compelled to continually fight for its existence against those who see its privilege as fundamentally illegitimate,
sustaining the depiction of a Virtuous Us under attack from an Evil Other. I present the development of Zionism and Israel according to such a framework, arguing that historical events – including indigenous resistance in Palestine and the Holocaust in Europe – affirmed the original impetus of Zionist activists to control a geographical space separated from ‘evil’ Others. Therefore my task becomes one of showing both how ethnocracies are discursively constructed and potentially resisted.

The ‘problematic situation’ generated by ressentiment and ethnocracy – the material reality underpinning the dissidents’ moral ruminations – has been posed in various ways throughout the history of the Zionist project. I will argue that the dilemma facing the dissidents was endemic in the project from the very beginning. Whilst I focus on contemporary individuals as sites of ‘the dilemma’ and assess their attempts to employ alternative discourses of national identity, the imagined connection of these individuals to their forebears is of crucial importance. Some of my subjects seek to join a ‘tradition’ of attempts to build a more enlightened society in Palestine than the one that ultimately emerged. (I distinguish this tradition of internal Zionist opposition from broader absolute opposition to Zionism). I present the tradition of internal opposition to Zionism, and the dissidents’ attempts to join it, as a poisoned chalice. As long as there has been a ‘problematic situation’ of a colonial project establishing a society based on ethnic identity, there have been individuals grappling with how – or whether – this could be done without harming Others already on the land. There have also been those (like Morris) who have declared, to everyone’s dismay: “It cannot be done, but don’t let that stop us.” Such troubling conversations now span over a century, and yet in each era the answers to such questions have ultimately cleaved back to colonisation, ethnic privilege and violence. Because the first generation of internal opponents were unable to formulate an alternative means of carrying out their desire to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine without generating conflict with their non-Jewish Other, they were ultimately not just neutralised but co-opted into the broader Zionist project (see Segev 2002, p.ix-xi). Thus whilst the ‘problematic situation’ and the
‘dilemma’ are as old as the Zionist project, each successive generation must grapple with them anew. Ruminations that the contemporary malaise might have been averted – ‘if only’ previous generations had made ‘better’ decisions – occlude the lack of conceptual clarity to internal dissent which I map in this thesis; a lack of clarity which has seen such dissent incorporated into the ongoing project of ethnocratisation.

Arguably, even Grinberg himself falls into the trap of wistfully grasping for alternatives when he argues: “the Jewish settlers’ desire to establish a national community in Eretz Israel (Palestine) did not have to lead teleologically to the monstrous form it presently takes, The Thing Without a Name” (Grinberg 2009, p.110). Whilst I concur with Grinberg that unfolding events are unique to specific circumstances, the frames of ethnocracy and ressentiment offer little in the way of plausible alternative historical trajectories. Israel’s history, as I tell it here, suggests that there may have been no other way of carrying out the Zionist project. We can ask the same questions for days, weeks, months and years, but if there has only ever been one answer to those questions, then what does it mean to join the ‘tradition’ of asking them? The ‘tradition’ of ‘enlightened’ internal opposition to elements of the Zionist project is like a fossil which can illuminate the issues facing dissidents today as well as foretelling what may come of their efforts. Though the ‘tradition’ may inspire them, it also places an onus on them to be as precise as possible in articulating the tensions between a European colonialist project and the Others on the land – lest they, too, take their place in affirming the ‘morality’ of that which they purport to critique.

This challenge is captured by a candid moment in which one of my subjects, Gilad Atzmon, loudly denounces another subject who is an activist against housing demolitions in Palestine.

Jeff Halper … is a fucking American Zionist who came to live in Israel... and now he says, “Oh, but we don’t want to demolish.” So how do you want to live on other people’s land if you don’t demolish? How do you want to do it? (Atzmon 2010).
In asking whether the road to the present malaise could indeed have led anywhere different, I deny my subjects the shelter of missed opportunities and what one of them calls “wrong turns” (Benvenisti 2010a). I challenge them with a space for dissent in which there might only be “a cruel, tragic Zionism, or the foregoing of Zionism” (Shavit 2004, p.50). I face with them the enormity of what this might mean, and explore their efforts to bring about social change from within this paradigm.

**Ethnocracy**

The concept of ethnocracy is a key facet of the ‘problematic situation’ constituting ‘the dilemma’. ‘Ethnocracy’ offers a way of labelling and understanding states which employ an ethnic nationalist discourse as a form of legitimation, and deny so-called ‘minorities’ the path of inclusion. Existing scholarship on ethnocracy tends to focus on the so-called ‘minority nation’ therein (Sa’di 2000; Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel 1998); I look instead at how the ‘majority’ is constructed ideologically and discursively. This situates my thesis in research looking at ‘dominant’ nationalisms (for more on the theorisation of ‘dominant nationalisms’ see Kaufmann 2004; Wimmer 2004). However, my constructivist approach to ‘dominant’ nationalisms problematises the very concept of a ‘majority’ group, and modifies this language to avoid what Brubaker (2004) terms the ‘double reification’ of ethnic identities.

Within most studies of ethnocratic states, the consensus seems to be that the ‘majority’ benefits. This perspective recurs in both literature that is critical of ethnocratic states (Yiftachel 2006; Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel 1998; Sa’di 2000), and also the ‘ethnic democracy’ literature which argues that such states are fundamentally democratic (Smooha 2005; Gavison 1999). If there is a problem with ethnocracies, then, it would appear – from the existing literature – that this problem manifests in the state’s treatment of the Other whilst the favoured ‘nation’ enjoys a fruitful life in its own democracy (Rouhana 2006; Yiftachel 2006). I suggest instead that individuals constructed as
belonging to this ‘majority’ are situated within a discourse and shaped into a set of power relations that promote ongoing enmity, which cannot be regarded as in their interests. Thus, whilst not disputing that the Other in an ethnocracy is mistreated, I suggest that ethnocracies also harm those constructed as the Privileged Us, even if this harm is obscured by a ‘national project of self-deception’ (Rouhana 2006). My subjects largely constitute a fringe group within Israeli-Jewish society, or ‘weirdos’, as one of them puts it (Levy 2010). By exploring peripheral individuals within a so-called ‘ethnic majority’, I disrupt the idea of contented majorities and consider how this depiction is sustained by the constraints ethnocracy places on alternative discourses of identity.

Nationalism and Ressentiment

If the concept of ethnocracy helps us to understand ‘the problematic situation’ – and hence the attempts of some individuals to seek alternative discourses of national identity – then the concept of ressentiment nationalism is the other key ingredient for this. It will be argued that ressentiment nationalism is the discourse underpinning ethnocracy, perennially contributing to the ‘problematic situation’ in which my thesis subjects are embedded.

I apply a constructivist framework to the study of nationalism, based on the work of Rogers Brubaker (2004). Scholars within the field of ethnicity and nationalism tend to fall within one of three theoretical frameworks – primordialism, instrumentalism / situationalism and constructivism (Brown 2000). There have been other methods of dividing approaches to the study of nationalism; Ozkirimli (2010) depicts a different “tripartite division” he regards to have been popularised by Anthony Smith, consisting of primordialist / perennialist; modernist and ethno-symbolist approaches, which he regards to be unhelpful (p.200-201). However, I consider the primordialist / instrumentalist / constructivist division useful because each has a different vision of what it means to be human at its core.
To summarise each position crudely, primordialist scholars observe that for participants, ethnic and national sentiments and identities appear to be innate and ineffable. The scholars effectively take such identifications at face value and therefore, whilst they might offer explanations for the power of such identities, they do not allow for their potential deconstruction and deeper analysis (Connor 1994; Horowitz 2002; Hearn 2006). However, as Horowitz (2004) notes, the “narrow” message of primordialist scholars “pertaining to the intensity of ethnic affiliations” (p.74) is not inconsistent with, and can provide a useful jumping off place for, more explanatory theories of community.

Instrumentalist scholars, by contrast, build their approach based upon the vision of a rational, utility-maximizing human. Accordingly, they see identities as fluid and multilayered; observing at an aggregate level that identities are mobilised for what can be understood as the personal interest of actors concerned (Ronen 1979; Hardin 1995; Hechter 1986). Finally, constructivist scholars share with their instrumentalist colleagues the perspective that identities are changeable, but emphasise the social construction of identities and the vulnerability of anomic individuals to ideologies of identity (see Brown 2000, Chapter 1; Calhoun 1997, Chapter 2). The humans at the heart of their focus are social creatures whose identities are shaped by the forces around them; less utility-maximisers than lost souls seeking to return to the safety of hearth and home.

My constructivist approach engages with nationalisms as discourses: participatory forms of communication that construct ideologies and histories, which are then depicted as belonging to ‘nations’. R. Keith Sawyer (2002) explains that the term ‘discourse,’ employed in post-colonial theory, anthropology, sociolinguistics, psychology and feminist theory, is usually misattributed to Foucault. The term’s genealogy is actually far more complex, and Sawyer regards the contemporary usage of the word ‘discourse’ to be a replacement for other terms used by various disciplines; terms such as ‘culture’, ‘ideology’ and ‘language’. Its common contemporary usage is defined as
socially produced groups of ideas or ways of thinking that can be tracked in individual texts or
groups of texts, but that also demand to be located within wider historical and social structures

A nationalist discourse, as I employ it here, is circulated by political activists who see themselves as
belonging to a particular nation and attempt to rally others they regard as sharing this identity
towards a common goal. The discourse takes on a shape of its own as multiple participants share
insights, identifying with the image of the nation offered by the discourse. If that image, and those
experiences, derive from the psychological experience of ressentiment and consequently spread a
ressentiment depiction of the nation and Others, then this has profound consequences.

Liah Greenfeld (1992; Greenfeld and Chirot 1994) – the main proponent of the ressentiment concept
with regard to nationalism – notes a tendency of what she calls ethnic nationalisms to be reactive
and belligerent. These nationalisms use purported kinship connections and a mythologised common
history, language and culture as a basis for legitimation. Greenfeld employs Nietzsche’s concept of
ressentiment to explain the emergence and belligerence of these nationalisms. Building upon her
formulation, I emphasise the desire of nationalist activists to clearly distinguish between the Good
Us and the Evil Other, with ethnic categories providing an apparent means of doing so. The pain of
marginalisation experienced by some individuals is resolved by their labelling of those perceived to
be responsible as Evil oppressors. A moral splitting into Virtuous Us / Evil Other is achieved through
the employment of ethnic categories to define and distinguish ‘nations’. Values of Good and Evil,
institutionalised into nationalist discourses, are then imbued into individuals. I will argue that the
dominant Zionist discourse arose from such a process, and accordingly has become the constant
around which alternative national identity discourses in contemporary Israel must negotiate.

Other scholars have also considered competing discourses at work in Israeli society. Shafir and Peled
(1998) argue that individual liberalist, collective republican and ethno-nationalist citizenship
discourses vie for prominence. Yadgar finds competing visions of peace (2003b) and struggles
between universalism and particularism (2002) in newspaper reports. Shenhav (2002) locates the intersection between the “ethnic discourse” and the “Zionist discourse” that he sees as the axis of Ashkenazi (European) Jewish, Mizrahi (Middle Eastern) Jewish and Palestinian identity claims; Rosmer (2010) meanwhile suggests that Mizrahi activists utilise a “universalist” discourse and a “Zionist” one. These authors highlight the tensions generated by the collision of individualism, universalism and sentiments of ethnic affinity. It is my argument that such a collision in the Israeli context produces a series of distinct nationalist discourses. If all nationalist discourses invoke belonging to a particular nation and attempt to mobilise those targeted as sharing this identity, the alternative discourses question ‘who is this nation’, ‘who shares this identity’ and ‘can Others also belong’.

I use the term ‘discourse’ to describe this phenomenon, but other scholars have used the term ‘narrative’ instead. Elizabeth Drexler (2008) talks about “conflict narratives”, and Yadgar (2002) traces the trajectories of the “Jewish narrative” and the “peace narrative”. Gavriel Salamon (2004) talks in a general sense about “collective narratives”, but his usage invokes how “the group constructs and construes its past” (Salamon 2004, p.275). There is thus an inherent notion that the narrative somehow belongs to someone or something; hence Salamon’s account verges into ‘groupism’ (Brubaker 2004) by depicting the ‘collective’ or ‘group’ as a pre-existing entity. By contrast, ‘nationalist discourse’ does not depict any kind of group, and emphasises that it is only as discourse that any sense of ‘group’ might be sustained.

The term ‘discourse’ also encourages us to think of its products as fluid rather than fixed, and to reflect upon the processes of continual negotiation that go into the production of meaning. This thesis seeks to characterise Israeli Jewish national identity, and spaces for resistance to it, at a moment in time in which a particular trajectory might appear obvious. Taking a long view, it seems that Jewish Israel is tightening, hardening, growing ever closer to apartheid and exclusion of its Other, if indeed it is not yet already there. Conceiving of Israel as an ethnocratic state with
institutionalised and preferential ethnic treatment of its subjects indicates that on some level, this process can already be regarded as complete. Yet by using the language of discourse, we remind ourselves of the potential for change and flow; that nothing is fixed forever. What appears to be hegemonic always remains dynamic, because it is ultimately the product of a conversation that may change tomorrow.

For these reasons, I prefer the term ‘discourse’ to ‘narrative’. However, the term ‘narrative’ does appear in this thesis in two distinct usages. The first relates to Narrative Analysis (below). The second is when I talk about a nationalist discourse depicting a ‘historical narrative’. There, I use the term ‘narrative’ interchangeably with ‘story’ (Polkinghorne 1988). In other words, a nationalist discourse may depict a certain version of history as being the single, truthful account of the ‘nation’ it reifies; this would be a ‘historical narrative.’

Another term I use in this work is ressentiment pairs. Ressentiment discourses have a tendency to produce relationships in which two discourses demonise each Other, inviting participants to engage in so-called pre-emptive defence (really, attacks). On each side, the virtuous Us is depicted as vulnerable victim, and overt hostility to Others is framed as rational self-defence. However, ‘defensive attacks’ are perceived as unsolicited aggression by Others, and so manifest the content of the discourse; what may have once been paranoia or exaggeration now describes real conflict.

Zionist and ‘Palestinian nationalist’ discourses operate this way, and as I discuss how they came to do so, I briefly explain the development of the ‘Palestinian ressentiment discourse’. However, I follow the lead of other scholars in focusing more deeply on one side of a ressentiment pair. Drexler (2008) lays out a clear analysis of what she calls “conflict narratives” by the actors involved from the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) nationalist movement in Aceh, Indonesia, and the Indonesian state, yet gives most of her attention to the GAM version. I follow her model by regularly acknowledging that the continuing dynamic with its ‘pair’ informs the Zionist discourse under analysis.
Yet while Drexler focuses on a subaltern nationalist discourse which challenges state power, I am interested in the situation of those whose ‘side’ possesses political power. My representation of *ressentiment* as a property of a ‘dominant nationalism’ challenges the assumption that it is necessarily an expression of the oppressed, and hence that ‘ethnic problems’ are the province of ‘minorities’. Belligerent ethnic nationalist discourses are often expected in disenfranchised pockets of otherwise ‘successful’ societies; Wimmer (2008b) writes of a “normative inversion” strategy to reorder the hierarchy in society according to Nietzsche’s ‘transvaluation’, whereby “the category of the excluded and despise comes to designate a chosen people who are morally, physically and culturally superior to the dominant group” (p.988). Yet in the case at hand, we find a *ressentiment* discourse amongst the privileged population of Jews in their ‘own’ developed and successful state. If we find this kind of discourse in what is popularly imagined to be *that* kind of country, then we’ve disrupted the idea that *ressentiment* is only the province of the dispossessed. I shall argue, however, that *ressentiment* does rely on the continued depiction of the ‘nation’ as under threat; constantly reinvoking a motif of dispossession even in a situation of privilege and dominance (see also, Brown 2008).

‘The Dissidents’

The dilemma forms part of the lived experience of certain individuals who can be understood as the *site* of it; their words and actions are the collision between ethnocracy, *ressentiment* nationalism and concern for the Other. I call such people ‘dissidents’. Whilst such a label might seem over-stated for individuals who in some cases participate in mainstream institutions within their society, a catch-all term is necessary to define my subjects as a cohort. The term ‘dissident’ can be suitably applied if we consider what these individuals are dissenting against. The hegemonic nationalist discourse in Israel defines Jews and Arabs as existential enemies. The subjects of this thesis all dissent against this characterisation and instead seek to re-imagine new forms of identification that enable co-
existence with their Other. This dissent is extremely significant even as it manifests in subtle or variable ways.

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

My dissidents were chosen on the basis of epitomising ‘the dilemma’ inherent in having concern for the Other in a state and society privileging the Us. The selection of dissidents was based upon a range of factors: Who had already produced academic or activist work? Who had written, said or done something interesting or controversial enough to spark my attention? Who was available for interview? Who wanted to participate? One of the most important things about my dissidents was that they could speak English well enough to converse frankly with me. Whilst my subjects conversing in their second (or third) language might place certain limitations on our dialogue, this was preferable to including a third party in our conversation.

I sought to include individuals whose views and experiences range across a spectrum, in order to demonstrate the variability of responses to ‘the dilemma’. There are more radical individuals who could have been included; there are also more ‘mainstream’ individuals who might have been
considered. The point was not to artificially create a set of ‘dissidents’ whose experiences could prove that a dilemma exists and that contradictions are experienced as a result. Indeed, whether or not an individual personally experienced or struggled with contradictions, either generally or specifically within the interview setting, was not a key concern. Rather, this work seeks to engage with what can objectively be regarded as tensions or contradictions arising from how the dissidents’ state and its dominant nationalist discourse are characterised, and how these necessarily curtail attempts to connect with the Other. Obviously, the selection of individuals in whom such tensions or contradictions could be observed hinted at the possibility of obtaining rich interview material. However, these individuals were chosen precisely to dramatically illustrate the various manifestations of the dilemma, rather than to prove its existence or strength.

The inclusion of one particular dissident in this study merits additional discussion at this point, because more than one reader, including an examiner, queried the appropriateness of her inclusion. Popular Israeli novelist Dorit Rabinyan, who has made her name writing fiction eschewing engagement with the concerns of this thesis, is included on the basis of a single article she wrote about a friendship and love affair with a Palestinian artist whilst living in New York (2004). I regard that piece to be a profoundly political work in which Rabinyan displays the tensions between personal and national affiliations. However, an examiner suggested that the piece instead merely muses on the predicament of being Israeli, and is authored by an a-political and mainstream individual. Another reader asked, more bluntly, “Isn’t she just some girl who fell in love with a Palestinian guy?”

These are important critiques because they urge us to consider the moment at which the personal becomes political, and at what point political engagement becomes dissent. Rabinyan is a creative writer, but she also wrote an article that critically examined her own identity and that of the Other, explored political solutions and depicted a tantalising erasure of boundaries even as she insisted on maintaining and strengthening them. Her article did everything that the other dissidents in the study
do in terms of public political engagement on the issue of the Other. The fact that its author turned out to have remained stridently Zionist is a telling illustration of where such moments of dissent may end up – firmly embedded within the national consensus. Rabinyan is thus the ‘extreme’ on one end of the continuum of my dissidents; far more radical individuals occupy the other ‘extreme’. Whilst the ultimate decision on where dissent begins may never be firmly established, making the call to draw that line with Rabinyan on the dissenting side is both methodologically defensible and borne out by the comparative richness her narrative lends to that of Meron Benvenisti, who can be seen to employ a similar “Kinder Zionist” discourse of national identity (see Chapter Six).

Studying the narratives of a small selection of individuals does not enable me to offer a conclusive account of political dissent in Israel. I cannot make sweeping statistical conclusions about what Israelis think, nor make comprehensive predictions about the future, nor argue which model for resolution is superior. Rather, the narratives enable me to look at how a selection of individuals utilise alternative discourses of national identity in an ethnocracy. Focusing on a small selection of individuals enables me to explore their contradictions, whilst recognising that other individuals might formulate completely different responses. As far as the overall exercise is concerned, then, a different selection of dissidents would have served the same purpose, but the thesis is deeply shaped by the contributions of the individuals ultimately included.

I am not the first scholar to examine the place of radical Jews in Israel, or to consider dissent from Zionism. Some scholars have overtly framed this dissent as pathological. Aner Govrin (2006) portrays radical activists as lacking experiences of “healthy psychic growth” in childhood (p.643), leading them to perversely identify with the underdog, even when the Us is under attack from an Other overtly depicted as “the terrorist” (p.645). Identification with this “terrorist” Other is depicted as a psychological oddity and explained through childhood abuse and neglect (p.639-641; 647), rather than as having any basis in critical thinking on behalf of the subjects.
Catherine Silver (2008) takes a similar approach when she subjects supporters of a boycott campaign against Israeli academics to collective psychoanalysis. The boycott campaign was a tactic adopted in the first decade of the twenty-first century by some Israeli, Palestinian and international scholars to try and force the Israeli government to withdraw from the Palestinian territories. Silver categorises its supporters as engaging in one of three possible modes of thinking and feeling: paranoid, humanistic and utopian (p.398). Those who depict Israel in terms like “colonial”, “apartheid”, or “racist” are accused of “paranoid thinking” (p.399). Those who go in for a humanistic engagement with Palestinians are accused of having insufficient empathy with Jewish suffering (p.404), projecting themselves in “grandiose” and “narcissistic” terms (p.404) and putting at risk other “naïve” individuals (p.405). Finally, those who seek a binational state in Israel / Palestine are labelled as having “delusional” ideas (p.407). Psychoanalytical terms are thus employed to systemically decimate any legitimacy to the boycott or its supporters, pathologising dissent as psychologically deviant. These analyses are consistent with the findings of Touma and Zbeidy on the media discourses surrounding Zionism, in which “anti-Zionists are seen as unwanted and deviant from the ‘normal’ and are usually not accepted. Members of anti-Zionist organisations were often regarded as being mentally ill” (cited in Lentin 2010, p.99).

Other studies on the Israeli left avoid moral condemnation, such as David Schnall’s (1979) dated but methodical study of radical dissent in Israel. Janet Powers’ (2006) work on women peace-building in Israel / Palestine takes a sympathetic view of its subjects, whilst Lentin (2010) is critical of her subjects for appropriating the suffering of Others and navel-gazing. Kirsteen Keshet’s (2006) insider analysis of MachsomWatch engages with some of the issues considered in this thesis, such as how dissent lends itself towards co-optation by the mainstream. By engaging with the dissidents as sites of ‘the dilemma’, I add to the study of Israeli dissidence by focusing on the gap between concern for the Other and membership of the privileged ‘nation’; considering how dissent can be constrained and co-opted by the dominant nationalist discourse.
Categories and Terms

Brubaker’s (2004) constructivist approach depicts ethnicity and nationalism as processes by which individuals come to see themselves in ‘groupist’ ways. This ensures that the scholar avoids language which treats groups as real entities beyond the ‘groupist’ claims of nationalist actors. Such an approach, however, provides a challenge when in some respects the groups are real. Because Israeli state institutions separate individual Israeli citizens (and residents of the Occupied Territories) into Jew and non-Jew, we need a terminology that recognises state reification, yet simultaneously affirms that the groups are not ‘real’ beyond it. A terminology is also required for identities prior to the establishment of the Israeli state. I talk, as much as possible, about ideologies, discourses, activists and political movements rather than the groups they purport to represent. I use inverted commas to depict groupist identities as constructed. I also talk about the Us and the Other, since it is quite clear that these terms refer to discursive constructions. However, when I refer to the legal identities assigned by the State of Israel, I do not use inverted commas; I offer more detail on this in Chapter Two.

When I talk about Jewish individuals in Europe, whether in ancient times or in the years preceding the establishment of Israel, I refer to these people as Jews. This is in keeping with their religio-cultural identity, as one might similarly talk about Christians. Jewishness was also something imposed on these individuals from outside, with legal ramifications; just as the Israeli state has made identity labels into real legal categories, so too did the states and empires of Central and Eastern Europe render Jewishness a factor determining residence and work. But while I use the term Jew to depict a particular religio-cultural identity, subsequent political discourses which apply a ‘national’ meaning are a different matter entirely. Hence, I refer to the ‘Jewish nation’ in inverted commas, reflecting a groupist construction invoked by discourse.
I refer to pre-state Jewish settlers in Palestine as Zionists, categorising them according to their participation in a nationalist project. There were also followers of the Jewish faith indigenous to Palestine; problematising the dichotomy between “settler-Jews” and “indigenous-Palestinians” (Sa’di 2004, p.146). This reinforces the idea that one cannot depict any kind of ‘Jewish’ nation living in Palestine prior to 1948. Instead, I talk about the yishuv, the settlers’ community and pre-state institutions from which the State of Israel arose.

After the establishment of Israel in 1948, I use the formal legal identification ‘Israeli Jew’. I apply the same term to settlers in the West Bank and Gaza. I also include in this category a range of immigrants to Israel who have Jewish heritage, such as those who emigrated en masse from the former USSR in the 1990s. These individuals and their families have been incorporated into the settler-colonial society without actually being Jewish in the religious sense.¹

The term ‘Hebrew’ also features in this thesis, not merely as the main official State language but as referent for a more open language and culture-based society evolving out of the Zionist project. In the 1940s, the Canaanite movement in Israel / Palestine sought to distance the ‘Hebrew nation’ from external Jews. This movement had right-wing origins and was committed to the use of violence in incorporating non-Hebrews in Palestine and the wider Middle-East into that culture; it was ultimately marginal (Shimoni 1995, p.315-321; Sand 2011, p.60-61). However, as will be seen in this thesis, the quest to define a secular cultural identity in Palestine has been extended to those seeking co-existence with the Palestinian Other (Lentin 2010, p.98, see also the narratives of Yiftachel, Bronstein, Halper and Davis; Ehrlich 2003, p.76-7).

¹ The relative ease with which these migrants were absorbed into Israeli society indicates that the ethnocratic state can be selectively open to certain Others as a means of providing a garrison against other Others. Thus I depict these individuals as possessing the privileged Israeli Jewish identity, though they do experience problems with religious burial and marriage (Lustick 1999, Al-Haj 2002, 2004).
There is also the issue of what are depicted as intra-ethnic divisions in Israeli society. Within Israeli political discourse, “national’ distinctions” are seen to “separate Jews from Palestinian Arabs, whereas ‘ethnic identity’ is used to describe divisions among Jewish Israelis” – namely those demarcated as Ashkenazi and Mizrahim or MENA (Middle Eastern and North African) Jews (Rosmer 2010, p.122). Rosmer suggests that MENA Jews are depicted as an “internal Other” within Zionism (p.125), and this has been given attention by several scholars (Shohat 1999; Shenhav 2002; Lavie 2002). It is most certainly the case that the hegemonic Zionist discourse, the settlement project ultimately producing the State of Israel, the leadership and direction of the State and even the moralistic dissent examined in this thesis have all been dominated by the ideals, culture and experiences of European (Ashkenazi) Jews and their descendants (on the ‘whiteness’ of dissent, see Kirstein Keshet 2006, esp. p.43-6, 114; see also Lentin 2010). Analysis of the discursively constructed category of MENA or Mizrahi Jews as an internal Other within Zionism tells us something about the racialist logic underpinning it. However, MENA Jews are not the ‘internal Other’ I focus on here. Instead, I focus on the non-Jewish Israeli as the ‘internal Other’ within the State; non-Jewish residents of the West Bank become the ‘external Other’, whilst MENA Jews are part of the Us.

Though I acknowledge the troubled place of MENA Jews within Israel’s history and within the Zionist discourse, this work does not engage in depth with MENA Jew identity politics. Accordingly, I do not employ the term ‘ethnic’ in the way that has been utilised in Israeli political discourse. Instead, I use the term ‘ethnic’ to signify identity claims based on purported kinship, common history, language, culture and ancestral homeland. ‘Ethnic’ in this usage is an antonym of ‘civic’, and hence is a component of the language of nationalism, rather than a social category distinct from it.

I will clarify the terminology I use to depict so-called ‘Arabs’ or ‘Palestinians’ in detail in Chapter Three. Briefly, I avoid referring to a ‘Palestinian nation’ or ‘Palestinian people’. By using the more unwieldy terms ‘the people of Palestine’ or ‘the people living in Palestine’, I depict those in Palestine prior to and during Zionist settlement as people, not a people. Given that I am primarily focusing on
the development of the Zionist discourse, I frequently refer to Palestine’s non-Jewish population as ‘the Other’ depicted by that discourse. After the establishment of Israel, I refer to ‘Israeli Arabs’ or ‘Israeli Palestinians’ and ‘Occupied Palestinians’; specific labels arising from the reification of identities by the state.

A final note on terminology: writers on Israeli identity and politics have drawn attention to the recent construction of the Modern Hebrew language and the mechanisms by which outside knowledge has been imported. Peteet (2005) details how various linguistic terms in the Hebrew language and nomenclature reflect both a colonising and victors’ perspective. Sand (2011) draws our attention to loaded terms like ‘ascent’ for ‘immigration’ (“aaliyah”), suggesting it is difficult for Israeli social scientists writing in their own language to avoid implicitly endorsing the Zionist programme. Gordon (2002a) explains how important segments from political treatises by Mill, Hobbes and Locke have been excised from the Hebrew translations, effectively preventing them from being known by native Hebrew speakers. These works remind us that words, language, translation and the framing of knowledge are crucial to how ideas are transmitted. The English language of this thesis by a non-Hebrew speaker bears such limitations.

**Narrative Analysis**

I frame the dissidents’ dilemma in the realms of discourse, considering how they enact inconsistencies. Narrative Analysis, a method described by Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008), engages with this enactment, offering an interdisciplinary method of engaging with research material obtained through interviews. Narrative Analysis points us to the narrative as a focus of study and attention. Riessman employs three “nested” understandings of narrative in social science research. The kernel narrative is the narrative impulse – the desire to tell stories. From here derives the narrative data – the objects or material for scrutiny. Finally comes the narrative analysis in which
the scholar systematically studies the data. Each of these processes can be understood as generating its own distinct narrative. Riessman refers to texts at several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories) and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant’s and investigator’s narratives (Riessman 2008, p.6).

Riessman describes a structural form of Narrative Analysis which plays with the performance of the interview and applies multiple readings to the transcript. Here, I use a more thematic analysis, which prioritises the content of the narrative over how it has been crafted and who the audience is (p.19). Organising my dissident narratives thematically enables me to draw out specific nationalist discourses. However, Riessman suggests that such a “category-centered models of research... can be combined with close analysis of individual cases” (2008 p.12); accordingly, I do employ elements of ‘structural analysis’. I explore omissions, pay attention to word choices, and make room for the insertion of stories like the one about Eitan Bronstein’s circumcision (see below, p.166-7).

As I assemble accounts of my dissidents’ lives and uttered or published political statements, I craft them into textual documents. I see my role as epitomised by Riessman’s following statement:

[All investigators, no matter the kind of data – oral, written and/or visual – lack access to another’s unmediated experience; we have instead materials that were constructed by socially situated individuals from a perspective and for an audience, issues made vivid in interview situations (Riessman 2008, p.23).]

I am also explicit about my own participatory role in the interview dialogue and narrative construction:

By our interviewing and transcription practices, we play a major part in constituting the narrative data that we then analyse. Through our presence, and by listening and questioning in particular ways, we critically shape the stories participants choose to tell. The process of infiltration continues with transcription... (Riessman 2008, p.50).
In assembling my dissident narratives, I undertake several stages. First, I compile the list of dissidents and secure their agreement for interviews. I then engage with material they have written or stated in previous interviews. This provides a basis for my interview questions, and also aids in the construction of a ‘dissident narrative’ that I ultimately assemble for each subject. In engaging with the pre-existing material by or about my dissidents, I am obliged to consider the issue of packaging. Riessman notes that, unlike oral communications, written documents are already “packaged”, and cautions that

(i)Interpretive issues arise ... for those working with historical documents and autobiographies... including imagined audiences and other contexts implicated in production. Documents do not speak for themselves; decisions by the author and/or archivist have already shaped the texts an investigator encounters” (Riessman 2008, p.22-3).

One issue of packaging occurs with writer Dorit Rabinyan, whose article about her Palestinian friend is interpreted very differently by her reader (me) than its author intended. Another packaging issue arises with Meron Benvenisti, whose critical newspaper articles lead me to make assumptions about his beliefs which he refutes in interview.

After engaging with my dissidents’ existing narratives, I compile a list of questions. Some are open-ended; others are specific. Many require a significant understanding of Israeli politics and society; when these are relayed in the thesis, contextual explanations are offered. The interviews are conducted in January 2010, in London, Berlin and Israel, with the exception of the first Oren Yiftachel interview which is conducted in Perth in 2007. At the beginning of each interview, I explain the premise of my research to the dissidents, including how I see them as embodying a dilemma vis a vis the Other. The dissidents sometimes go on to employ this terminology of the Other; this may be in response to my questions, or reflect an earlier predisposition on their part.

There is a convention within social science research according to which the researcher adopts a neutral stance with regard to her subjects, and provides them with the space to frame their
responses. This convention can be seen to derive from a “widespread emphasis on methodology in social science” which “led its practitioners to believe that their research was indeed value-free,” (Gray, 1989 p.307). Whilst this belief has since been refuted with reference to the social and philosophical ideas underpinning the work of Marx, Weber and Durkheim (Gray, 1989 p.307), the “imagined social scientific dilemma of ethical neutrality versus social relevance” (p.308) remains intact, placing an onus on the researcher who overtly eschews ethical neutrality to explain herself. It is the case that in this particular research project, the nature of the research problem precludes an ethically neutral approach to the very act of interviewing. The fascinating aspect of my subjects is their (at least partial) lack of awareness of the contradictions inherent in their position. Whilst some dissidents go on to speak extremely eloquently about this, in daily life such contradictions tend to be muted or suppressed. As such, the things I wish to explore further with the dissidents are ‘red flags’ that I have picked up in their previous works or words; the dissidents have not elaborated upon them prior to the interviews. This necessitates me adopting a more “confrontational” interviewing approach, which I seek to do explicitly and consensually with my subjects as a co-participant in the construction of meaning. For the most part, it proves a successful strategy, resulting in reflection and candour from both interviewer and interviewee. A potential pitfall is that the approach also gives rise to debate and disagreement within the interview setting. However, I am able to maintain congenial and open discourse on all but one occasion. The exception occurs with Meron Benvenisti, who objects to both the approach and its implications for my line of questioning. However, despite the ensuing discomfort for both of us, which is recounted on p.248-50, the interview with Benvenisti yields rich material, ultimately validating the suitability of my unorthodox approach.

Accordingly, my agenda in the interviews can be seen as one of challenging the dissidents. This is not based on the idea that they are in any way ‘wrong’; rather, I am seeking to explore what they are (and are not) capable of saying, and the means by which they attempt to talk about social justice and equality for the Other. My aim is to elaborate upon the ‘red flags’ by pinning down potential
inconsistencies I have already noted in their writings, and to see how the dissidents respond to the suggestion that there might only be “a cruel, tragic Zionism, or the foregoing of Zionism” (Shavit 2004, p.50). In order to do this, I have to ask difficult questions; expose contradictions; ask dissidents how they can hold opposing opinions; challenge their most personal affiliations. I do this as an academic outsider, whilst also coming from a political tradition which generally lauds ‘moral’ dissidents as heroes rather than honing in on their limitations. To produce this work, I therefore rely on my ability to clearly explain my premise: I seek to depict the ‘tight spot’ and not the failings of the dissidents. My aim is to walk with my dissidents into a complex web of national affinity, personal and political privilege, and genuine concern for the suffering of Others, and then to analyse what we find there. My dissidents bring a wealth of deep thought and personal struggle; engaging with them is a privilege I take extremely seriously. I will emphasise repeatedly that while they are illustrative of a problem, they are not the problem.

I also challenge myself to engage with the dissidents’ Zionisms – which may not resolve ‘the dilemma’ but may nevertheless move both the political conflict and analysis of it into fruitful spaces. Whilst the ‘problematic situation’ represents my honest rendering of the dissidents’ political context, I do not wish for it to function as a trap made by me either for my subjects or my scholarship. Thus ‘the dilemma’ is the starting point for all of us – the place at which my analysis interrogates the dissidents’ lived experience. The finishing point of this questioning – my own and the subjects’ – is the visions they can inspire and the final limitations which they cannot transgress – and the conclusions I can draw from this. I acknowledge the limitations and perhaps futility of the dissidents’ efforts whilst also celebrating what they are able to think, say and imagine.

I complete my fieldwork armed with a recording device full of interviews, each over an hour long and some close to three hours. I transcribe them in full, omitting only the most trivial of moments such as an interruption by a waiter in a café, or an extreme instance of verbal repetition. Any omissions due to interruptions or repetitions are indicated by (...). I insert punctuation but also retain pauses.
and break-offs. One thing I do edit slightly is my own questions, which later proves contentious for one dissident, Meron Benvenisti (see Chapter Six).

The transcripts are checked by those dissidents who wish to see them, and I produce eleven ‘dissident narratives’ which include observations, information from previous publications and correspondence as well as edited material from the transcripts. Portions feature in Chapter Four, where we meet the dissidents. Chapters Five and Six include smaller, ‘micro-narratives’, my term for “brief, bounded segment[s] of interview text” (Riessman 2008, p.61). My ‘micro-narratives’ include stories regaled by the subjects, and my own summaries of their previous works. I use micro-narratives to vividly outline some of the problems facing the dissidents, and to illustrate their usages of the various nationalist discourses.

Additional narratives at work in this thesis include the Tale of Two Zionists, used to elucidate my subject of study. There is also my personal narrative as scholar, which at times comes to the fore. The thesis as a whole has a narrative incorporating my subjectivity and methodology, the thesis argument and the dissident narratives. At each different level of narrative, I am mindful of how the surrounding context constructs meaning. This includes the immediate context of the interview; the wider context of Israeli society; and the broadest context of academia and theorisation of identity underpinning the work.

**Othering the Other**

This thesis covers an aspect of a political conflict that has become the flashpoint of our times. I prepare to the final manuscript for submission in the aftermath of the Israeli military’s ‘Operation Pillar of Defence’ in Gaza, grimly noting that no matter how long it took me to finish my thesis, there was no danger of the conflict finishing before I did. Some writers on aspects of the Israel / Palestine conflict, particularly those looking at left-wing dissent, make their moral stance explicit from the
beginning (Kirstein Keshet 2006; Lentin 2010); I do not wish to frame this work with bold statements of my beliefs. However, in focusing on Israeli Jews, my thesis could be regarded as continuing the marginalisation of Palestinian voices, an issue raised in particular by Lentin (2010). Many of my references and all of my subjects are Israeli Jews; the questions I consider relate to their experiences, and Palestinians are only ever engaged with through this prism. This, however, is the point. Whilst the thesis may inadvertently replicate the silencing of non-Jewish voices within Israeli society, I maintain that entering this conversation, about how Israeli Jews might renegotiate their national identities, can help us to understand the dynamics of the Israeli conflict with – and hence oppression of – the Palestinian Other.

**Thesis Outline**

Chapter One introduces the concept of ethnocracy, locating my formulation in the existing literature on ethnocratic states and ethnic nationalisms. I explain the concept of *ressentiment* nationalism, and explore how it is institutionalised through the ethnocratic state’s Charter.

Chapter Two applies the generalist propositions of the first Chapter to the Zionist discourse, up to Israel’s foundation in 1948. I synthesise the arguments of Shlomo Sand with those modified from Greenfeld to explain the development of Zionism as a *ressentiment ethnic nationalist* discourse. I detail how the Zionist discourse has developed as a *ressentiment pair* with the Palestinian nationalist discourse, leading to the creation of the Jewish state in 1948.

Chapter Three explains the establishment of Israel as a manifestation of *ressentiment discourse*, and explores how the discourse has been institutionalised. I outline the continuation of the *ressentiment pair* with the Palestinian nationalist discourse, and how the Israeli state has constructed ‘actual’ Others through laws and policies.
Chapter Four introduces the dissidents, taking in biographical details, reasons for inclusion in this work and some of their ideas expressed in interview or published work.

Chapter Five explores areas of dissonance in the dissidents’ narratives. These are organised thematically, enabling the presentation of contradictory or problematic components of several dissident narratives in conjunction. I also examine the most radical dissidents, who escape some of the tensions inherent in identifying with the Jewish nation, but whose position nevertheless raises some interesting questions.

Chapter Six outlines five alternative discourses to hegemonic ressentiment Zionism and illustrates them with examples from the dissidents. I argue that in the context of ethnocracy and a hegemonic ressentiment discourse, and given Israel’s specific history of colonialism and ethnic cleansing, single alternative discourses may not offer the dissidents a way of talking about the Other as an equal whilst maintaining a thick sense of national identity. Individuals may be compelled to use other discourses, including ressentiment Zionism, contributing to inconsistencies in their narratives. I also suggest that the pervasiveness of ressentiment depictions of Us and Other in Israeli society can take other forms, which I illustrate from the dissident narratives.

Chapter Seven considers the implications of this analysis and draws some limited conclusions about ressentiment, ethnocracy and the meaning of dissent therein.
CHAPTER ONE – ETHNOCRACY AND RESSENTIMENT

Introduction

This is the first of three chapters developing the ‘problematic situation’ depicted in the Introduction. Three Chapters may seem like a lot before we reach the dissidents whose dilemma arises out of this ‘problematic situation’. However, the dissidents’ political context needs careful elucidation; hence this first chapter engages with the generalist literature on nationalism, ethnocracy and ressentiment.

Calhoun (1997) suggests that there are three ways we can understand nationalism – as discourse, project, and evaluation or “ethical imperative” (p.6). These analytical approaches are compatible – they provide different standpoints for looking at the same entity. In this work, I primarily engage with nationalism as discourse, considering how dissidents challenge the dominant nationalist discourse within an ethnocracy.

Calhoun defines nationalist discourse as

the production of a cultural understanding and rhetoric which leads people throughout the world to think and frame their aspirations in terms of the idea of nation and national identity, and the production of particular versions of national thought and language in particular settings and traditions (Calhoun 1997, p.6).

Nationalist discourses necessarily underlie the projects that they may give rise to; projects of nation- and state-building captured by Gellner’s (1983) famous definition of nationalism as the ‘political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent’ (p.1). From this perspective, ‘nations’ – which nationalist projects construct and reify – should be understood to exist within the discourses that create them. But of course states may also be involved in constructing and circulating these discourses; states reify the ‘nations’ invoked by nationalist discourses and turn ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1991) into legal entities. However,
discourses ‘imagining’ the nation may also precede the establishment of the state. We therefore need a coherent way of thinking about the relationships between these factors inasmuch as they are relevant to our study of the dissidents’ ‘problematic situation’. I formulate such a framework in this chapter.

The first section explains the terms ‘ethnocracy’ and ‘ethnocratic state’, central to my depiction of the structures in which the dissidents are located. I discuss how the concept of the ‘ethnocratic state’ has been previously employed, explain my use of the term, and consider how it invokes the ‘civic-ethnic distinction’. In the second section, I chart the development of a ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse. In the final section, I discuss how such a discourse may be incorporated within what I call the Charter of the ethnocratic state.

**Ethnocracy and the Civic – Ethnic Distinction**

**Ethnocracy: Historical Usages and My Usage**

The idea of the ‘ethnocratic state’ or ‘ethnocracy’ has generally been used by scholars to highlight the capture of the state by a particular ethnic group, and that group’s subsequent employment of the state to advance its interests at the expense of those defined as non-members within the state. Even without employing the term ‘ethnocracy’, many writers have picked up on this monopolisation of power by one ‘ethnic group’, including Conversi (2009), who argues that “Western state-building has been associated with power seizure by specific ethnic groups” (p.57). Other writers pay attention to post-colonial or post-Communist contexts. Weiner (1987), in his survey of political change in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, notes that “[i]n country after country, a single ethnic group has taken control over the state and used its power to exercise control over others,” (p.35). Weiner goes on to note that
ethnic hegemony has been exercised in a variety of ways, from the repression of ethnic and religious minorities to the more benign use of state power to give preferences in education and employment to the dominant ethnic group (Weiner 1987, p.36).

Some scholars explicitly use the term ‘ethnocracy’ to label states in which one ‘ethnic group’ monopolises the state in order to advance its own interests (see, for example, Wimmer 2004). One of the earliest usages of this term was by Mazrui (1975), who used it to describe the Ugandan regime. Since then, Toshchenko has used the term to describe the post-Soviet Central Asian republics (Arutyunyan 2004), while Brown (1994) and Fong (2008) have applied the term to Burma.

Other terms demarcate elements of this process. ‘Staatsvolk’ has been used to depict the subject of this observation; what O’Leary (2001) calls “a national or ethnic people, who are demographically and electorally dominant”; they “own the state” and can “control it on their own through simple democratic numbers” (p.285). Kaufmann (2009) calls this scenario “dominant ethnicity”: “the phenomenon whereby a particular ethnic group exercises dominance within a nation” (p.36, his italics). Brubaker (1996, 2011) has used a terminology of “nationalizing states” and “titular nations” to describe states in which these processes are occurring, and the purported group in whose interests they are deemed to be working, respectively. Hence ‘ethnocracy’ and related terms are widely used to describe this observed phenomenon of explicit ‘ethnic domination’ within states.

Oren Yiftachel, perhaps the most well-published academic on the concept of ethnocracy (2006, 1999, 1997), defines ethnocracies as regime systems in which the dominant “ethnos” (ethnic group), usually in what it regards as its homeland, seizes control of the state apparatus and uses it to further its own territorial and policy interests.2 Minorities are granted some civil and political rights; however, the processes at work in an ethnocracy run counter to equal citizenship. Members of the

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2 Yiftachel (2006) defines regimes as “legal, political and moral frameworks determining the distribution of power and resources” (p.11). He argues that “the state is the main vehicle of the regime, providing institutions, mechanisms, laws and legitimized forms of violence to implement the projects articulated by” it (p.12). I simplify this by characterising the state itself as ethnocratic.
dominant ethnic group are favoured in specific ways by state and quasi-state organisations, and the
dominant ethnic group is prioritised over the experience of equal citizenship for all (Yiftachel 2006,
Chapter 2). Yiftachel focuses mainly on the Israeli example of ethnocracy. However, he points out
that:

the structures, features and trajectories of the ethnocratic regime can be articulated and
generalized, and the model proposed...can frame a new understanding of politics and geography
in many states embroiled in protracted ethnic conflicts (Yiftachel 2006, p.11).

He uses Estonia, Sri Lanka and Australia prior to 1967 as other examples of ethnocracies (Yiftachel

Initially, Yiftachel labels all states that explicitly favour the dominant ‘ethnic group’ as ethnocracies
(2006, p.12) This would include those which are blatantly authoritarian, engage in ethnic cleansing,
or take the Herrenvolk form of ‘democracy’ only for the master race – as seen in apartheid South
Africa. Ghanem (2009) uses the term “ethnic state” for this broader category, which avoids
confusion; ethnocracy can then be categorised as a subtype of ‘ethnic state’. Hence what the
scholars are really interested in is what Yiftachel calls “open ethnocracies.” Open ethnocracies
represent themselves as democratic and uphold several formal democratic mechanisms, such as
elections, civil rights such as freedom of movement, a parliamentary system, and a relatively
open system of media and communication’... But ... these regimes still facilitate an undemocratic
expansion of the dominant ethnonation (Yiftachel 2006, p.12).

Such states can employ some democratic mechanisms because the “dominant ethnonation”
(Yiftachel 2006 p.12) is numerically dominant. Hence although we might conceive of a demonstrably
authoritarian state in which a numerically small ‘ethnic group’ dominates a larger one, ethnocracy in
this thesis will involve a numerically larger ‘group’ dominating a smaller one. However, I will
subsequently contest the ‘groupism’ inherent in this formulation, suggesting a more rigorously
constructivist way of framing it.
The ratio of ‘group’ sizes and observable democratic mechanisms within ethnocracies have led to feisty debates about whether they should be labelled ‘ethnic democracies’ instead (Smooha 1997; Gavison 1999; Dowty 1999). However, it is countered that such states operate only as ‘democracies’ for those who belong to the privileged ‘nation’ – that universalism, minority protections, equal rights and opportunities are sorely lacking for citizens deemed to not belong (Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel 1998). My response to these debates is that ‘ethnocracy’ offers a way of labelling and understanding states which employ an ethnic nationalist discourse as a form of legitimation, and deny so-called ‘minorities’ the path of inclusion. ‘Ethnocracy’ need not expressly engage with the question of democracy, whereas ‘ethnic democracy’ makes a deliberate assertion about the quality of the state in question. ‘Ethnocracy’ has been equated with ‘non-democratic’ by the normative content of the academic debates over which term to use (Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel 1998; Yiftachel 2006), but taken on its own merits, ‘ethnocracy’ can function as a technical term allowing us to depict a certain ideal-type of state and to talk about both ideal-type and real-world examples which approximate it. Whether ‘ethnocracies’ might have some democratic qualities is an issue I will not engage with, since the question of whether something is democratic or not will depend on the definition of democracy one employs (Dowty 1999). Rather than focusing on the question of democracy, then, the term ‘ethnocracy’ enables me to conceptualise ‘ethnocratisation’ as a process carried out by nationalist activists in thrall to a ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse.

I also favour ‘ethnocracy’ over some of the other alternative terms available. Brubaker explicitly states that his concept of “nationalizing states” “is not ... a device for classifying states as nationalizing or non-nationalizing” (Brubaker 2011, p.1807), a task I wish to be able to perform. Hence ‘ethnocracy’ allows me to continue the labelling and classifying carried out by both sides of the ‘ethnic democracy’ /‘ethnocracy’ debate.

The problem with existing conceptualisations of ‘ethnocracy’, however, is that in representing the state as having been captured by the ‘dominant ethnic group’, they assert the prior objective
existence of ethnic groups. Brubaker (2004) urges scholars to avoid the pitfalls of using the terminology of nationalist activists, pointing out that there is an apparent common-sense quality to the invocation of ethnic groups (and hence ethnic violence or ethnic conflicts). Actors on the ground frame events in such language, sometimes lulling even those of us who purport to be constructivists into a conceptual stupor, wherein we find ourselves employing these “categories of ethnopolitical practice” as “categories of social analysis” (Brubaker 2004, p.10, his italics). In other words, we fall into the trap of treating contestable ‘ethnic groups’ invoked by ethnic nationalist discourses as though they are real entities. This tendency in academics is pejoratively termed ‘groupism’ (Brubaker 2004, p.8). The alternative is to conceptualise ethnicity, race and nation... not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals ... but rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms.... It means taking as a basic analytical category not the ‘group’ as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable (Brubaker 2004, p.11).

In following Brubaker’s approach, the theorist thus “avoid[s] unintentionally doubling or reinforcing the reification of ethnic groups in ethnopolitical practice with a reification of such groups in social analysis” (Brubaker 2004, p.10, his italics).

There can be a tendency to rest on the idea that, even if nationalist ideologies are new and constructed, they build upon some earlier incarnation of the national grouping. For example, Anthony Smith’s ethnosymbolist approach (1991, 1999, 2003) validates nationalists’ claims to organic historical entities as well as acknowledging the historicised myths and symbols used to exaggerate, conflate and maintain them. Fundamentally, this position rests upon the idea that there is a substantive truth to nationalists’ claims of an enduring entity at the heart of a modern nation. Guided by Brubaker, I argue instead that we can only take for granted the individual subjective identities and experiences of nationalist activists. What these activists succeed in rousing in other
individuals should not be stretched by scholars to denote objectively existing ‘ethnic categories’ or ‘ethnic groups’ (Smith 1981, p.68-69; see also Smith 1999; see critique in Ozkirimli 2003, p.348-350).

I therefore consider that ‘ethnic groups’ and ‘nations’ are invoked through a particular type of discourse; and only come to objectively exist with state reification. Whatever social and cultural practices might exist prior to state reification of identity, we should not construct a box called ‘the ethnic group’ and assume that people throughout the ages have fitted into this box. Rather, people throughout the ages have made different boxes into which they have inserted their understandings of themselves. This tendency to identify as groups might indeed have been exercised at certain points in history, but it is therefore the tendency that we should consider, and not ‘groups’ themselves (Brubaker 2004, p.11; see also, Ozkirimli and Grosby 2007). Yet even some scholars who highlight the role of ideological processes in creating categories employ ‘groupist’ analysis. For example, at the heart of Yiftachel’s “ethnocracy” is the “dominant group” (Yiftachel 2006, p.16); an “ethnonational core” (p.38) which has seized control of the state and delivered benefits to its cohort. Likewise, though Yiftachel displays awareness of the contested nature of such claims (p.42-45) he refers to “homeland groups” (p.41). Again, we find the very concepts of ethnicity and nationhood inadequately problematised.

Thus we need a way of talking about ethnocracy that reflects the construction and dissemination of ethnic identity. Accordingly, an ethnocratic state is presented here as a state in which a ressentiment ethnonationalist discourse has been institutionalised. I will subsequently explain what I mean by this ressentiment discourse; for now I will simply emphasise this: it is not a group that has captured the state, but rather a particular way of seeing that has become hegemonic; a particular philosophical, social, political approach to questions of identity has been taken-for-granted. Certain individuals who subscribe to this way of seeing have been able to influence state structures and policies so that the ‘ethnic groups’ or ‘nations’ they perceive as innate become the basis for organising society. The
‘ethnonation’ becomes real in the context of being embedded into law and practice; it has not ‘captured’ the state but is in fact proclaimed by it.3

If we understand ‘ethnocracy’ in this way, then an ethnocratic state is initially identifiable on two key bases:

- **Structurally**, it legally and politically creates (at least) two categories of citizens, based on ascriptive ‘ethnic’ or ‘national’ identity, and privileges one over the other.
- **Ideologically**, the state acts as the source of a particular ideological Charter (official state discourse). Through institutional mechanisms, the state disseminates its role as protector of one discursively constructed group, legitimising the privileges given to this group. This Charter of favouritism forms the legitimatory basis of the state, duly represented as the ‘State of the X Nation’.

Given that I have already stated that the kind of ‘ethnocracy’ I am looking at is the ‘open’ kind, we can add a third point of identification:

- **Politically**, citizens deemed to belong to the ‘ethnic nation’ constructed and privileged by the state’s Charter outnumber citizens designated as non-members or Others, enabling the awarding of privilege under the guise of democratic rule.

There are two important points regarding this numerical domination. Firstly, a larger number of X people than Y people only objectively exists within the ethnocratic state institutionalising these identities. Outside, X and Y merely become identity labels invoked by discourses. They are fluid and perhaps changeable; they are certainly not a self-evident basis for organising society. Secondly, it is only because the individuals involved in setting up the ethnocracy take these identities so seriously that they also come to take the proportions of what they see as X and Y people seriously. As a result,3 Other writers on ethnocracy have alluded to such an approach, but without a self-consciously constructivist framework. For example, David Brown’s (1994) depiction of “the communal consciousness of an ethnic group” as “the outcome of a discourse within the ethnic community itself” (p.38) presents the “communal consciousness” as a product of discourse, but does not explicitly acknowledge that the ‘group’ itself is also a product of it.
these numbers are subject to manipulation – and sometimes violent adjustment – to ensure ‘domination by democracy’.

Having outlined these basic features of ethnocracy, I shall now clarify how the concept fits within civic and ethnic depictions of nations.

The Civic / Ethnic Distinction and Ethnocracy

Scholars of nationalism have often busied themselves with the ‘civic / ethnic distinction’. The ‘civic / ethnic distinction’ takes as its basis the idea that there are two different types of nationalism, and as such two different types of nation. Scholars do not always separate them using the same terminology (; see, for example, the various usages employed by Spencer and Wollman 2005; Greenfeld 1992; Plamenatz 1973; Hutchinson 1987 and Kohn 1944), but they nevertheless represent the contention that we are dealing with two different conceptual creatures. Those who employ the distinction therefore argue that civic and ethnic nations (or whichever distinguishing terms they apply) have certain attributes.

According to this depiction, the ‘civic’ type of nation is not based upon ascriptive criteria beyond birth or possession of citizenship within a particular territory, generally contiguous with official state boundaries. ‘Civic nations’ can have members who speak diverse languages, follow diverse religions, and look physically different from each other. The connection between members of a ‘civic nation’ is adherence to common values, and a sense of shared destiny and future (Ignatieff 1994, p.3-4; Greenfeld 1992, Chapter 1; Keating 1996, p.6). Civic nations are perceived to be open, inclusive, permeable and congruent with liberalism and democracy. They take the state and citizenship as their point of reference and can, in theory, include everybody living within the state’s borders as part of the nation – and potentially those beyond it (Spencer and Wollman 2005, p.206).
By contrast, within the orthodoxy of the civic/ethnic distinction, the ‘ethnic’ type of nation is represented as based on ascriptive criteria of race, religion, ancestry or language. As Connor (1994b) points out, it is the perception of these shared qualities by its members, rather than their actuality, that is important; the connection between members of an ‘ethnic nation’ is belief in a shared ancestry and history (Greenfeld 1992, Chapter 1). Some scholars perceive ethnic nations to be natural forms of social interaction, and to offer a basis for meaningful existence (see Tamir 1993; Gans 2003; see also discussion of Herder in Hutchinson 1987, p.42-44). Many scholars recognise the immense power of this way of understanding one’s identity (Connor 1994; Horowitz 2002). Yet ‘ethnic nations’ are depicted as closed, prone to belligerence and xenophobia, collectivist and therefore incongruent with liberalism and democracy (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994; Kohn 1944; Plamenatz 1973).

Scholars such as Spencer and Wollman (2005) and Yack (1999) have criticised the idea of distinguishing between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nations on a number of bases. Others such as Gans (2003) have argued that whilst a distinction exists, it has been misemployed to depict the ‘ethnic’ model as deformed offspring of the ‘civic’ and hence delegitimise it. One key criticism of the distinction is the idea that there are no truly civic or ethnic nations out in the world – most are both, which allegedly makes the distinction unhelpful. Smith (1991) argues that

> every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms. Sometimes civic and territorial elements predominate; at other times it is the ethnic and vernacular components that are emphasised (Smith 1991, p.13).

Another criticism of the distinction argues that the scholarly attachment of virtue to the ‘civic’ nation is a form of Western imperialism that overlooks elements indistinguishable from ‘ethnic’ nations. These include inheritability components of citizenship which are utilised in purportedly civic nations (Spencer and Wollman 2005) and also the use of violence (Keating 1996). Critics also note that historical nationalisms identified as civic because “in principle all could be members of a...
homogenously noble nation”, in practice saw “the systematic exclusion of the vast majority of the population (such as women, servants, Catholics, the poor) from the full exercise of civic rights” (Spencer and Wollman 2005, p.206). The attachment of virtue to the ‘civic nation’ is also accused of overlooking the fact that ‘civic nations’ seem to favour the dominant ‘group’ in society, particularly when this ‘group’ is made up of white Westerners who assume that they have transcended ethnicity (Yack 1999, p.105; Yiftachel 2007; Spencer and Wollman 2005, p.198). It is further argued that all nations have their Others, or excluded ones, whether the nation is defined in civic or ethnic language (Spencer and Wollman 2005; Triandafyllidou 1998).

Some of these criticisms raise valid points; however the civic / ethnic distinction remains extremely useful with specific provisos, which I shall outline now.

Firstly, if we want to use the ‘civic-ethnic distinction’, we should be clear whether we are talking about states (geopolitical entities) or nations (the ‘imagined communities’ deemed to exist wholly or partly within them) or nationalisms (the discourses employed by people who see themselves as belonging to those nations). We should also be clear whether we are talking about ideal types or real things that we might find out in the world, with the preference that these are ideal types useful in analysis (Keating 1996, p.7). I suggest we use the civic/ethnic distinction to talk about discourses. We can recognise that some discourses construct a nation in a more ‘civic’ manner, and others will construct it in a more ‘ethnic’ manner. Eventually these discourses may be institutionalised as the basis of legitimation for particular states, but this will vary from case to case. Given that the ‘absolute civic’ discourse and the ‘absolute ethnic’ discourse are ideal types, then we would locate actual nationalist discourses out in the world as somewhere on this continuum.

On this basis, states themselves should not be labelled as wholly ‘civic’ or wholly ‘ethnic’. States may employ elements of both discourses when making claims to legitimacy through engagement with their citizens. My conceptualisation of an ‘ethnocratic state’ does not discount the operation of civic
discourses in these claims, but rather emphasises that such discourses are muffled by the state’s official relationship to the ‘ethnic nation’ that it reifies and privileges, and from which it draws its fundamental claim to legitimacy.

Accordingly, the legitimacy claim generated by the institutionalisation of a particular kind of ethnic nationalist discourse into a state’s Charter produces a unique set of political problems for individuals living within that state. To study these problems, we need to demarcate both the ‘ethnocratic state’ and the ‘ethnic nationalist discourse’ as terms of reference, and necessarily distinguish these from the more civic discourses and institutions operational in non-ethnocratic states. The latter may, of course, still have their own normative, moral and political problems, including those relating to identity politics. Some of these problems may resemble the problems in ethnocracies, threatening to collapse the civic / ethnic distinction and prompting questions about whether the politics of ethnicity in the former and the latter are really that different. I argue that they are. In ethnocratic states, Others are deliberately excluded from the political society in which they live. Though parallels can be drawn with supposed ‘ethnic core’ states, I will demonstrate that ethnocracies are ultimately different creatures; this demonstration arises out of a critique of the very concept of ‘ethnic core’ states.

If we start by clarifying the concept of ‘ethnic core’ states to which ethnocracies might (erroneously) be likened, we find arguments such as that offered by Yiftachel, who argues that “most nation states advance a project of ethnic domination,” (2006, p.21). Smith (1999) makes a similar proposition when he argues that all nations are formed around an ethnic core. These arguments invoke the

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4 For example, the divisions within the global state system preclude pure universalism; it is difficult to divorce civic nationalist discourses from culture (Peled 1992; Yack 1999); and civic nationalist discourses may virulently assert the uniformity of a given political culture (Gans 2003). Moreover, the ‘neutral’ culture of a civically defined ‘nation’ can be read as belonging to the ‘ethnic majority’ – though I would refute this framing. Regardless of how we frame it, however, this can alienate those who feel marginalised.

5 Yiftachel cites Brubaker here, but Brubaker actually frames this proposition in less groupist terms.
‘groupist’ idea that we might, in many or most states, find one privileged and dominant group at the centre, and one or more marginalised group outside it. It may then be argued that this situation is not markedly different from ethnocracy. I disagree with both elements of this proposition, and also with the groupist language in which it is framed. In fact, it is in offering a non-groupist formulation of so-called ‘ethnic core’ states that the crucial difference between such states and ethnocracies becomes apparent.

If we reframe the concept of ‘ethnic core’ states in non-groupist language, we would instead note that individuals with religious, linguistic or physical differences from people around them may identify as ‘minorities’. This identification may be accentuated when business and public education are conducted with languages and cultural norms shared by a larger proportion of the population, or when individuals who identify as minorities are treated differently by some of their fellow citizens. But these individuals are not objectively minorities because they might learn the dominant language, adopt the cultural norms and thrive in mainstream member of society, effectively escaping marginal status.

In elucidating the status of so-called ‘minorities’ in so-called ‘ethnic core’ state in the terms above, we can see the crucial difference between such states and ethnocratic states. Non-ethnocratic states work towards a project of universal citizenship (Yiftachel 2006, p.21), which is not necessarily benign; in fact it can be brutal. Such states might encourage or enforce the use of a single language in public life; they might only recognise one set of religious holidays and cultural practices, and could be accused of forcible assimilation and cultural destruction of ‘minorities’. They may not provide sufficient resources to integrate those from outside the dominant culture, resulting in the creation of a dispossessed underclass. Crucially, however, as a matter of policy these states do not deliberately exclude ‘minorities’. However oppressive the so-called civic project may prove to be – however much it might ask one to give up in order to belong to the nation, and however
inadequately it may resource such a transformation – it still allows all members of society the option of integration (Yiftachel 2006, p.21).

By contrast, in ethnocracies, minorities objectively exist, created by the state. Ethnocracies feature the “deliberate undermining of the political demos” (Yiftachel 2006, p.21, my italics) so as to exclude sectors of it. They “use the rhetoric of the nation-state but do not allow minorities any feasible path of inclusion” (Yiftachel 2006 p.21). “The state is constructed so as to prevent the integration of minorities” (Yiftachel 2006 p.21). Ethnocratic states therefore do not leave open the possibility for those officially designated as non-members of the nation to raise their status by sacrificing their cultural identity and assimilating. They remain ever Othered, with no option of trading in their second-class status and moving up in the social order (Yiftachel 2006, p.21).  

What we see, then, is a distinction between the privileging of culture, and the privileging of a constructed category of person. To depict a culture as morally or intellectually superior does not mean that others will be excluded from it. In fact the reverse may be the case; a ‘superior’ culture is held up as a model for all, and those who wish (or even those who do not wish) to conform to it are encouraged or compelled to do so. But if a category of person is depicted by the state as special, moral or vulnerable, then this is a more closed unit, especially if this category is defined in ethnic terms. Such is the case in ethnocracies.

Ethnocracies arise in situations in which at least two ethnic nationalist discourses operate in a single geographical space. Each discourse identifies the Us as a virtuous ethnic nation and the ethnic Other

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6 Yiftachel (2006) offers an extreme version of this logic in Sri Lanka, where the Sinhalese-dominated ethnocratic state denies over one million long-term residents citizenship, labelling them ‘Indian Tamils’ as distinct from ‘Sri Lankan Tamil’ citizens of the state, who are also Othered by the regime (p.23).

7 Chaim Gans (2003) attempts to resolve the issue of inclusion of ‘Others’ with a ‘cultural nationalism’ rather than an ‘ethnic nationalism’, arguing that “common descent often goes together with a shared culture and history but may not be required.” (p.15 my italics). However, “in many cases in which cultural nationalism was historically realized, common descent turned out to be the main focus of attention” (p.15), indicating his reformulation may not be particularly useful.
as evil, with hostilities ensuing as a result. As constructivist scholars, we would avoid using terms like ‘heterogeneous’ to describe this population, instead recognising that merely in the eyes of the ethnocracy’s founders, heterogeneity exists, and must be managed in a way to ensure the dominance of their own perceived category. On this basis, it becomes essential for them to not only differentiate the Us from these Others but also to remain permanently separated. The articulation of a single ‘righteous’ nationalist discourse depicting a nation in need of protection against Others becomes the basis for the formation of ethnocracy. Thereafter, the deliberate and ongoing exclusion of Others remains a central tenet of the nationalist discourse legitimising the ethnocratic state; the corollary of its depiction of a vulnerable, virtuous Us. Others are unable to assimilate, not merely because ethnic boundaries are used as the basis for defining the privileged nation, but precisely because these boundaries appear to offer a means of permanent separation. However, as I shall argue, ethnic boundaries ultimately do not fulfil this remit because the identities they demarcate are discursive and shifting.

Having explored this deliberate exclusion, we can now add a fourth point to our list of identifying features of ethnocracies:

- **Structurally**, an ethnocracy legally and politically creates (at least) two categories of citizens based on ascriptive ‘ethnicity’, and treats one better than the other.
- **Ideologically**, an ethnocratic state acts as the source of a particular ideological Charter, disseminating myths regarding its role as the protector of one discursively constructed ethnic category of person, thus legitimising the privileges given to this category.
- **Politically**, individuals deemed to belong to the ‘ethnic nation’ constructed and privileged by the state’s Charter outnumber those designated as non-members or Others, enabling the awarding of privilege under the guise of democratic rule.
- **In terms of identity**, ethnocracies demarcate a tightly defined ‘ethnic Us’ that cannot assimilate the Other, which remains excluded.
Having identified the conceptual creature that we call ‘ethnocracy’, it is now time to consider its ideological underpinnings. In the next two sections, I argue that a ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse lies behind the establishment of the ethnocratic state. Let us now explore how such a discourse develops, and what its characteristics are.

**Ressentiment Ethnic Nationalist Discourses**

In the previous section I argued that the ethnocratic state depends for its legitimacy on a Charter recirculating a ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse. In this section, I explain exactly what I mean by this ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse, offering the general theory behind the ressentiment concept. In the final section, I argue that in certain situations, activists in thrall to a ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse are able to set up an ethnocracy as the perceived ultimate protection of the Good Us against the Evil Other.

**The Concept of Ressentiment**

The term ‘ressentiment’ at the heart of this discussion comes from Nietzsche, but is developed here to apply to nationalist discourses. A summary of Nietzsche’s ressentiment helps us to begin this process. In order to cope with the frustration and confusion arising from dissonance, subordination and what Brown (2012) describes as an awareness of impotence, individuals may undertake an “imaginary revenge” (Nietzsche 1996, p.22) by means of a “radical transvaluation of values” (Nietzsche 1996, p.19) They turn the qualities that appear to explain their repression into markers of virtue, denigrating those perceived as dominators by depicting various aspects of those people’s culture in a negative light.⁸

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⁸ I am indebted to David Brown (2012) for this pithy summary of Nietzsche’s ressentiment.
Though Nietzsche’s original subjects were the Jewish priestly class under Roman subordination, the *ressentiment* concept has much broader applicability. What I refer to here as ‘*ressentiment* discourse’ is a discourse which amplifies a sense of being superior to and wronged by an Evil Other, echoing the process outlined by Nietzsche. The discourse appears to resolve, for those using it, unpleasant feelings of envy, inadequacy and victimhood. However, since unpleasant feelings are themselves amplified by the *ressentiment* discourse, it offers an illusory remedy.

We could talk about numerous *ressentiment* discourses circulating in contemporary society. Consider a homosexual person who says: “straight people discriminate against me.” Consider a wronged woman who says, “all men are bastards.” These examples illustrate that there can be an apparent truth to the sense of slight created by the discourse. Some heterosexual people do discriminate against homosexuals. Women are often harmed by men within a patriarchal society. But what is not true is the universalised identity of the Evil Other; stereotyped so that a particular category of person is depicted as ‘all the same.’ In truth, not all heterosexuals are homophobes; not every man is a bastard. But it is this tendency to collectively demonise the Other that is perhaps most significant in *ressentiment* discourses, enabling the person using the discourse to depict him or herself as a virtuous victim.
Ressentiment and Nationalism

When we apply the concept of ressentiment to nationalism, we see again the centrality of the figure of the Other, which Triandafyllidou (1998) argues is implicit in any kind of expression of Us-ness (p.602). Her Others are organised into significant Others and potential Others, with one significant Other for each nationalism at a given time. I will argue that the crafting of this Other is particularly noteworthy when Us-ness and Other-ness are drawn with ethnic boundaries, inspired by ressentiment.

The most significant analysis of ressentiment in nationalism comes from Liah Greenfeld, who provides a detailed account across a book, Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity (1992), a lengthy article with Daniel Chirot called ‘Nationalism and Aggression’ (1994), and another book, Nationalism and the Mind (2006). While other writers have applied the insights of Nietzsche to analyses of ethnic nationalism, with and without the term ‘ressentiment’ (Wimmer 2008a, 2008b; Brown 2008, 2012), Greenfeld and Chirot adhere to Nietzsche’s original version, describing ressentiment as:

> a psychological state resulting from suppressed feelings of envy and hatred (existential envy)
> and the impossibility to act them out, which in many cases leads to the “transvaluation of values” (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.84).

The scholars employ ressentiment to offer a model of how ethnic nationalisms develop. (They use the term “nationalisms” but their usage of this is parallel to my depiction of nationalist discourses.) I will provide a detailed outline of their model, critique a key aspect of it, and offer a reformulation which helps explain why an ethnocratic state is one possible product of a ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse.

Greenfeld and Chirot argue that the historical development of every specific case of nationalism needs to be charted according to structural, cultural and psychological factors. Structural factors include what is going on in that part of the world where the discourse develops. What economic and
social forces are affecting the lives of the intellectuals and elites who come to develop and define the nationalist discourse? (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.83-85). Structural factors can be understood in the formative sense of a nationalism as the first and “basic stage to which cultural and psychological [factors] are added” (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.85).

Cultural factors are explained as “indigenous traditions that might have existed alongside the dominant system of ideas” (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.83). The idea is that a “traditional identity” is embedded in this dominant system and, because of social change, becomes unviable and is rejected. Intellectuals and elites are thus compelled to look to certain elements of this dominant “system of ideas” which, for whatever reason, have not been rejected (p.84). Greenfeld and Chirot’s cultural factors are things in the metaphorical wardrobes of those developing and enunciating nationalist discourses, under-utilised or unnoticed, which are worn as parts of new ensembles in a changing world. In other words, they are the bread and butter of what become nationalist myths and ‘national character’ – but crucially they are not pre-existing forms of these things (see Ozkirimli and Grosby 2007, p.528).

Psychological factors, finally, can be understood as the self-confidence of the intellectuals and elites involved in constructing nationalist discourses. If these individuals come from a position of optimism, this will be reflected in the nationalist discourse. If, on the other hand, they work from a position of insecurity, the scholars argue that this can manifest as ressentiment (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.84-85). It is here that attention will focus in this thesis. However, I will also consider structural and cultural factors, inspired by Greenfeld’s non-reductionist approach; Greenfeld and Chirot do not try to pin the character of any given nationalism on a single factor. Ultimately, however, they suggest that the interplay of structural, cultural and psychological factors will either produce a ‘civic’ nationalism that is not grounded in the conception of a unique cultural community; or an ‘ethnic’ nationalism that is collectivist, illiberal and focused on uniqueness, defined according
to mythical histories, symbols and legends (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994; Greenfeld 1992, Chapter 1).
The latter is derived from and susceptible to a continuation of ressentiment. 9

Greenfeld and Chirot draw our attention to a particular social stratum where these factors take
effect and nationalisms develop. Like Kohn (1944), Kedourie (1966), Smith (1981), Gellner (1983)
and Hutchinson (1987), they pay attention to the role of intellectuals and elites in developing
modern nationalisms. Although there are significant differences in all these scholars’ accounts, all
suggest that nationalist discourses are formulated by intellectuals and elites seeking to make sense
of their places in a changing world; these literate elites can be understood as producers and
purveyors of ideas (Sand 2009, Chapters 1 and 2; 2011, p.46-47).

Greenfeld and Chirot’s contribution of ressentiment helps us get inside the heads of these elites to
consider how their experiences might affect the resultant nationalist discourse. Brown (2012)
suggests that we can employ the concept of ressentiment most effectively to this class of individual –
an updated version of Nietzsche’s “priestly class” – since they are likely to experience a more intense
and painful displacement than others in their society. With social and economic change, elites and
intellectuals have the most social capital to lose with regard to their own communities; they also
suffer most from failed expectations with regard to their status outside them.

Greenfeld and Chirot’s initial depiction of ressentiment occurring in these elites suggests that if the
following things are in place, ressentiment will occur.

The ... structural conditions that are necessary for the development of this psychological state ...
are two. The first (the structural basis of envy itself) is the fundamental comparability between
the subject and the object of envy, or rather the belief on the part of the subject in the
fundamental equality between them, which makes them in principle interchangeable. The

9 The scholars further divide the ‘civic’ form of nationalism into an ‘individualistic’ manifestation embodied in English
nationalism, and a ‘collectivist’ manifestation embodied in French nationalism. The ‘ethnic’ form of nationalism, however,
is inherently collectivist and has no ‘individualistic’ manifestation (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994 p.85; Greenfeld 1992 p.11)
second condition is the actual inequality (perceived as not fundamental) of such dimensions that it rules the practical achievement of the theoretically existing equality out (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.84-85).

Greenfeld (1992) and Chirot (1994) put this formula into practice by examining the development of various nationalisms, initially in Europe. They depict intellectuals looking at other ‘nations’ and feeling that they ought to be on a par with those they are observing (the first condition). For political and economic reasons specific to each case, the intellectuals cannot reach the level of the objects of their envy (the second condition), and so ressentiment ensues and the envied Other is denigrated.

Greenfeld and Chirot depict nationalism beginning in England in the sixteenth century (1994) then taking root in France in the seventeenth century (Greenfeld 1992, p.113). In these early nationalisms, ressentiment is not involved and their development is explained by structural factors (England) and a combination of structural and cultural factors (France).10 But deriving from these disparate bases, English and French nationalisms both articulate the concept and membership of ‘the nation’ in a fundamentally civic fashion (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.90). Notions of ethnic belonging are not implicit in the construction of national identity here. I will go on to argue that such notions only derive from encounters with those perceived as Others, refuting Triandafyllidou’s (1998) notion that the Other is present in every enunciation of the Us.

Greenfeld and Chirot argue that ressentiment entered the mix when the concept of the nation was imported into Central and Eastern Europe. As intellectuals and elites in neighbouring areas encountered English and French nationalisms, they experienced envy and a sense that they should be equal to those they were observing. However, for various reasons they were not able to attain this equality, and hence ressentiment ensued.

10 Structural factors in the case of England relate to the Wars of the Roses, the ascendancy of the new, meritocratic Tudor elite and the growth of Protestantism with its focus on the individual believer (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994 p.90).
Greenfeld and Chirot argue that ressentiment was the “most important factor” in the development of Russian nationalism (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.92), which they situate within the reign of Peter the Great (1689-1725). They contend that Peter “effectively destroyed [Russia’s] indigenous traditions” in an attempt at Westernisation. His incorporation of a Western-style bureaucracy damaged the position of nobles in that society, generating anomie for these individuals (p.92).

While noble birth necessarily bred high expectations and set young aristocrats apart from the rest, it was powerless to fulfil these expectations. Unhappy with their identity, the Russian nobility was ready to adopt a new one that would be commensurate with their sense of dignity (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.92).

This new identity was to be found in the idea of the nation, but was problematic because

the psychological gratification to be derived from national identity in a nation that was supposedly unique depended on the status of the nation vis-à-vis other nations. But in reality there was little to be proud of in Russia [which] remained terribly backward in almost every respect when compared to the west (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.93)

The West had therefore started out as the model for Russian nationalism, but when the hopes of Russian nationalists of catching up to the West failed to be realised,

admiration of the west turned into ressentiment, and the west itself from the model turned into the anti-model. Since...the indigenous traditions [had been] destroyed, the Russian national consciousness was defined almost wholly on the basis of the transvaluation of the western ideals. The axis of the transvaluation was the rejection of the individual – indeed the central western value. Community took the place of the individual, the mystical Slavic soul was substituted for reason, and liberty was redefined as inner freedom (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.94).

Since Russia’s peasants were “farthest removed from [the] effects” of “the corrupt western civilisation”, “they came to be seen as ... the ideal, pure Russians. The peasants were defined by their
blood and ties to the soil” so these “became the central criteria of Russian nationality (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.94).\footnote{Shlomo Sand (2009) suggests that this was salient for noble intellectuals because the notion of noble blood was already inherent in their understanding of themselves. We could read this as a ‘cultural’ factor, according to Greenfeld and Chirot’s model. Unlike the intellectual class in England (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994), or the French nobility and bourgeoisie (Greenfeld 1992), the drivers of nationalist discourse in Russia had a way of understanding their own ‘blood’ that leant itself well to vertical extension to the ‘nation’ (Sand 2009 p.59).}

What is noteworthy in this account is the way that Greenfeld and Chirot emphasise the “transvaluation of values” in the development of the Russian ethnic nationalist discourse. According to their argument, the Russian nobles adopted an ethnic paradigm specifically to be different from the West, which they envied but failed to equalise. I shall return to this point subsequently, after briefly outlining how Greenfeld and Chirot tell the German story.

Here, the scholars source the rise of nationalism in the eighteenth century to “middle-class intellectuals, rather than the aristocracy,” (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.98). These intellectuals, some from the lower classes, did not enjoy the social mobility that they expected their university educations to deliver.

Enlightenment, which was the dominant philosophy in many prominent German states … placed intellect high in the value hierarchy, boosted the self esteem of intellectuals and encouraged their aspirations for an exalted place in society. This led to the overproduction of intellectuals and the consequent decline of opportunities. Caught in the state of trained unemployability, often very poor and always unhappy, some … turned not against the unaccepting social arrangements, but against the Enlightenment that misled them (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.98).

The disgruntled intellectuals embraced Romanticism, which celebrated communities over an “emphasis on reason and individual autonomy”, with the latter seen to “cripple…men” (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.99). Although the Romantic intellectuals were originally not nationalist, this
changed after France invaded Prussia, giving the Romantics the opportunity to present “the cause of the ruling elite as the ‘German cause’” (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.99-100). War with France further weakened Enlightenment ideals since these became tainted by association with the French revolution, and hence any admiration that German intellectuals may have held for the French also generated ressentiment (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.100).

Again, according to Greenfeld and Chirot’s (1994) account, we see the transvaluation of values at work. The German intellectuals initially formed part of the Enlightenment tradition shared with the West. They saw themselves as equal to their peers but were unable to enjoy the same fruits, so turned on the very values they had formerly embraced. Ressentiment made them flee individualism and universalism for the unique German nation (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.97-101). Ressentiment, as in Russia, was thus responsible for the adoption of an ethnic paradigm.

From the cases they have observed, the scholars conclude that the transvaluation of values inherent in ressentiment takes the form of rejecting civic, universalistic values for an ethnic paradigm (an argument that they appear to have derived from Kohn, 1944). However, I suggest that the scholars have misread this ethnic-to-civic shift as being at the heart of the transvaluation of values, when it is instead merely a contingent feature of European experience. Accordingly, ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ depictions of the nation should not be read as the important values in the ressentiment equation, but rather as the consequences of how ressentiment might invite us to draw boundaries. The important values to be redesignated in the transvaluation of values are not actual values about self and society, relating to themes of the Enlightenment and the visions of Man therein, but rather the far more basic values of Good and Evil. When we start to work with these values, we find that the ability to demarcate the Good Us and the Evil Other is augmented by the invocation of ethnic boundaries. In short, ressentiment inspires an ethnic nationalist discourse not by ‘transvaluating’ the civic, but by ‘transvaluating’ Good and Evil through the use of ethnic categories.
The benefit of this formulation over Greenfeld and Chirot’s can be observed by looking more closely at the contingent nature of the ‘ethnic’ reaction to civic nationalist discourses in the cases they describe, and the inapplicability of this model to other scenarios. Whilst their model works for post-colonial ethnic nationalisms, explicable as the encounters between colonised elites and the Western educators who taught them they were inferior (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.103), other developing nationalist discourses lack this ‘ethnic meets civic’ moment. What happens when the ‘nation’ to which nationalist activists are responding defines itself in *ethnic* terms? If, according to Greenfeld and Chirot, the transvaluation of values means we adopt a different paradigm to that which we envy, then shouldn’t subsequent ethnic nationalisms return to a more civic ideal, rejecting ethnocentrism? Yet in practice, when one ethnic nationalist discourse flourishes, those who feel envious or slighted by it tend to reactively form their own ethnic nationalist discourses. So rather than *ressentiment* leading these individuals to adopt a different set of values, they actually adopt the same ones, apparently mimicking their perceived oppressors. Greenfeld and Chirot’s *ressentiment* model doesn’t explain this, yet this is precisely the situation in which ethnocracies are likely to arise, with two discourses in a single geographical location describing the Us and the Other in ethnic terms.

If we re-interpret the civic-to-ethnic shift at the heart of Greenfeld and Chirot’s position as merely contingent, then the alternative formulation of Good and Evil comes to the fore. Individuals experiencing *ressentiment* and crafting new nationalist discourses only need to turn the envied Other into Bad and the Us into Good in order to satisfy the transvaluation of values inherent in *ressentiment*. (Remember that originally we might see the Other as ‘good’, as the object of our envy, and Us as ‘bad’ for not living up to it.) Crucially, for this to work, individuals need to feel that they are employing clear boundaries, and ethnic boundaries appear to offer this security.

Barth’s (1969) seminal work brings our attention to the maintenance of boundaries by social actors, rather than the ‘cultural stuff’ inside them (see also Brubaker 2009, p.29). Ethnic boundaries appear
to delineate – for those invoking them – fixed and immutable categories of person articulated in terms of genetics and race. Good and Evil can be attached to these categories in ways that appear unshifting and long-lasting, thus enabling ressentiment formulae to be applied with the illusion of permanence. This provides comfort to individuals experiencing ressentiment. Because physical or cultural properties can be objectively observed in multiple individuals, ethnic boundaries allow individuals to be grouped together and stereotyped as the Good Us or the Evil Other. From here, it is easy to forget that there are any other dimensions to individuals designated as Other; to see only their exaggerated differences from the Us. Ironically, the promise of clarity and permanency in ethno-national identities is illusory. In practice, there is always a degree of permeability to the boundary, since “as a discourse, identification is a construction, a process never completed, always in process, always conditional” (Lentin 2010, p.157, paraphrasing Hall). But these vagaries do not matter to those articulating the ressentiment discourse; they do, however, demand a more trenchant commitment to it in the face of contrary evidence.

So if we consider that ressentiment might not involve a transvaluation of values like ‘Enlightenment liberalism’, but rather values like ‘good’ and ‘evil’, we can see why ethnic boundaries were so compelling for disgruntled elites and intellectuals. These individuals employed an ethnic depiction of the nation not because they sought to craft a different kind of nation from the West, but because they sought to understand themselves in a way that could be unambiguously depicted as Good. They needed to draw a boundary around themselves because otherwise no such boundary existed. The hazy universal values out of which English and French nationalisms were crafted might theoretically apply to the German or Russian man – in fact, this was the source of envy in the first place! In response, then, ethnic nationalisms were articulated in which English and French Others could be specifically excluded by virtue of not belonging the (virtuous) ethnic Us. The individuals crafting nationalist discourses needed stronger, clearer depictions of Good and Evil than were currently available. Conceptualising the Us and Other in ethnic terms enabled them to do this, but because
their Other did not define ‘itself’ this way, they had to begin by drawing this boundary around themselves. The ethnic component of ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourses did not arise, therefore, out of a rejection of Western values per se, but rather out of a desire to clearly depict Good and Evil with fixed, immutable categories – in the process rejecting Western values of individualism and universalism by carving out distinct collectivist ethno-national identities.¹²

This explanation works equally well for the scenario in which ethnic (rather than civic) nationalist discourses inspire the production of new nationalist discourses – the scenario not covered by Greenfeld and Chirot. Each time anomic elites or intellectuals meet an external ‘nation’ and the twin conditions of ressentiment are met (envy and an inability to attain equality), ressentiment could ensue regardless of whether the envied ‘nation’ was from the ‘civic’ or ‘civilising’ West or the ‘ethnic east’. The only difference is that if the envied ‘nation’ already defines itself in ethnic terms, those experiencing ressentiment have less creative work to do in crafting their own identities and drawing boundaries around them. Such identities are already part of the nomenclature; the boundary – so craved by those needing to depict their own absolute virtue against an Evil Other – already exists.

**Ressentiment Pairs and Conflict Protagonists**

I will now explain how a ressentiment discourse perpetuates itself. This explanation is still part of a general discussion of ressentiment dynamics – only in the next section will I discuss the specific dynamics leading to the creation of an ethnocratic state. For now, I will argue that whilst a ressentiment discourse is initially purveyed by those who experience ressentiment, it subsequently inculcates many individuals with values informed by the experiences of its creators, changing over time as new circumstances are woven into the interpretative framework.

¹² This does not mean that we should disregard Greenfeld and Chirot’s cogent arguments about German intellectuals resisting the Enlightenment in its ‘nationalised’ form (England and France). This rejection forms a component of the carving out of a unique ethnic German identity, but the primary impetus is the desire to conclusively declare where ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’ reside.
In depicting the virtuous ethnic Us as being harmed by the Other, a *ressentiment* discourse constructs a lens through which the world is viewed, and encourages individuals to act in ways that bring about the cataclysmic events foretold by the discourse. This affirms its apparent truth, turning the reified Us and the envied or hated Other into actual “conflict protagonists” (Drexler 2008, Chapter One). A *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse depicts the ethnic nation as existing in a common-sense fashion, which individuals take for granted as a deep part of their identities (Triandafyllidou 1998, p.593). This identification provides the basis for depicting a slight done to this nation by Others. The apparent existence of two “conflict protagonists” obscures the process of their construction (Drexler 2008, p.30); they are instead represented by *ressentiment* discourses as pre-existing and enduring, which is exactly what those articulating the narrative are aiming for (Brubaker 2004, p.10). However, this is also what these articulators have come to believe themselves – part of the experience of *ressentiment* involves finding new ways to bolster the sense of self (Brown 2012).

Subsequent participants in *ressentiment* discourses need not have experienced the actual moments of pain, anomie, envy or humiliation of the original purveyors, nor even have met the Other[s] denigrated by the discourse. Instead, individuals are schooled in historical examples of slights, and invited to search for continuing examples. Perhaps there will be a truth to their belief that they are being harmed, but the identity of the oppressor will be extrapolated onto an entire category of person rather than the actual actors, agents or systemic features involved. The discourses construct this ‘reality’; their commonsense becomes the only one available and it becomes “impossible to separate the discourse from the materiality of the conflict” (Drexler 2008, p.27, her italics).

Conflict situations are produced and perpetuated by various narrations of successive events that stand, not as object and description, but as spirals of interpretation and action. *That some narratives come true is not evidence that those particular narratives are correct representations of the conflict, but rather signs of their discursive power to reproduce it.* Historical events attain their importance through policies and successive acts that are shaped by discursive constructions of the conflict (Drexler 2008, p.27, my italics).
Drexler borrows the metaphor of the “black box” from Bruno Latour to explain “a social phenomenon whose inner workings are so complex that they are impossible to analyse” (Drexler 2008, p.26). When things are “black-boxed”,

discursive and material resources [are fused] into well-established facts and unproblematic objects that take on lives of their own. Seemingly immune to scrutiny, critique and intervention, black boxes produce new results that extend discourses, replicate institutional practices and produce material effects (Drexler 2008, p.26).

Ressentiment discourses function as “black boxes”, constructing “reality” by offering cogent, self-evident explanations for why things are the way they are. What they obscure, however, is that the explanation at the same time generates the circumstances it seeks to describe. This malaise affects not only the actors in the conflict but also those who comment upon it, further embedding that particular way of seeing:

...[E]thnic and national frames are readily accessible, powerfully resonant, and widely understood as legitimate. This encourages actors and analysts alike to interpret conflict and violence in ethnic terms rather than other terms (Brubaker 2004, p.17).

Hence, regardless of how objectively correct they are in their assessment that they are being wronged, individuals using a ressentiment discourse will be able to find evidence to support their claims. They may then adopt a pre-emptive approach which looks, to those depicted as their Others, more like aggression, and is met accordingly.

On this basis, ressentiment discourses encourage the formation of ressentiment pairs; two ressentiment discourses playing a game of hateful tennis in which actions and reactions repeatedly affirm their respective ‘truths’. Intellectuals targeted as Others may go through their own ressentiment experiences; hence new pairs might emerge, or one ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse might, like a cheating lover, conduct ressentiment relationships with more than one Other. However, each ressentiment discourse is likely to have one “significant Other” (Triandafyllidou 1998)
with which it forms a *ressentiment* pair – in targeting this significant Other with aggression it invites the return of similar ‘affections’. The conflict metastasises from discourse to actual violence; from *ressentiment pair* to “conflict protagonists” (Drexler 2008).

A final thing to consider is that the causal relationship between ethnic nationalist discourses and *ressentiment* might (also) run the other way. I’ve argued that *ressentiment* is likely to take an ethnic nationalist direction because ethnic boundaries appear to offer an easy demarcation of the Good Us and the Evil Other. However, in certain situations, ethnic nationalist discourses may not appear to be overly concerned with any Others. What might the relationship be between these discourses and *ressentiment*? Would they have a propensity to head that way and hence become conflict protagonists?

Greenfeld would seem to answer this question in the affirmative. Rather unhelpfully, she employs the term *ressentiment* in a distinct secondary usage to describe what she regards as the tendency of ethnic nationalisms to be belligerent. Her discussions therefore lack an important distinction between *ressentiment* as a *process* affecting the *formation* of nationalist discourses, and *ressentiment* as a potential *characteristic* of all ethnic nationalist discourses. However, if we put this distinction in place, we can utilise Greenfeld’s explanations of the susceptibility to belligerence within ethnic nationalist discourses to understand how the construction of the Us in ethnic terms might sow the seeds of a hostile *ressentiment* pair relationship, even without belligerent intent – a point that will re-emerge in this thesis when we consider the phenomenon of Cultural Zionism.

Greenfeld explains what she sees as the tendency of all ethnic nationalisms to *ressentiment* (belligerence) by arguing that “ethnic nationalisms...are necessarily forms of particularism” (Greenfeld 2006, p.142). In contrast, whilst it might be true that the conflation of civic nationalisms with universalism has been grossly overstated (Yack 1999; Spencer and Wollman 2005), Greenfeld argues that they are
not, in principle, particularistic, for they are based on the universalistic principle of the moral primacy of the individual. This goes for any individual, whether or not he or she belongs to the national community; as a result, the borderline between “us” and “them” is frequently blurred (Greenfeld 2006, p.142).

Ethnic nationalisms do not even claim to attach any moral attributes to all of humanity, beyond noting that everyone belongs to a nation (Gans 2003). This particularism makes it especially easy for a nation’s moral virtue to be measured only with reference to its treatment of its own members, and for them to be able to go about their business without regard for their Others, who Greenfeld suggests are not perceived as equally human.

In ethnic nationalisms... the borderline between “us” and “them” is in principle impermeable. Nationality is defined as an inherent trait, and nations are seen, in effect, as separate species. Foreigners are no longer fellow men in the same sense, and there is no moral imperative to treat them as one would treat one’s fellow nationals, just the same way as there is no imperative to treat our fellow mammals, or even fellow great apes as fellow men... (Greenfeld 2006, p.142-3).

In these circumstances, it would be easy for those identifying as a nation to ignore, marginalise or somehow harm those within their ambit designated as Others, even without obvious malicious intent. As I have already suggested, ressentiment is a likely outcome for those who feel ignored, marginalised or somehow harmed, regardless of the intentions involved. If such ressentiment is then channelled back to those who ‘inadvertently’ Othered them, a ressentiment pair is likely to develop, precisely because of how those who did the ‘inadvertent Othering’ would then digest this perceived attack. Ethnic nationalist discourses construct a vision of nations as “individuals capable of suffering and inflicting insults” (Greenfeld 2006, p.142) and as “harbouring malicious intentions” (Greenfeld 2006, p.142). This personalisation leads, in Greenfeld’s view, to increased capacity for mobilisation against perceived enemies and a tendency towards ressentiment belligerence.

It appears, then, that simply being an ‘ethnic Us’ (and hence having ethnic Others) can render a nationalism vulnerable to forming a ressentiment pair and becoming a conflict protagonist, even
without initial intent to harm Others. Greenfeld emphasises that ethnic nationalisms do not necessarily turn out this way – “international circumstances and opportunities” will also play a role – but ethnic nationalisms have this propensity because collective responses to perceived insults centre upon the divisions generated by those categories (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.88).

Significantly for this thesis, an ethnic nationalist discourse which inadvertently harms Others will be ill-prepared for their response, which is likely to be read as aggression. Moreover, the notion of the nation as ‘benign’ can be a contributing factor to this. Individuals who associate ‘their’ national character with various noble qualities such as tolerance, peace, love and respect (see also Yadgar 2003b, p.179; Tamir 1993) could not possibly be guilty of harm to Others, so any negative responses must be the fault of Others. Hence, the notion of the ethnic national character as peace-loving and beneficent may actually augment the ressentiment quality of the discourse. Purported benevolent qualities, when projected onto an arbitrarily designated category of person, reveal themselves as illusory at the moment of perceived threat. The ‘peace-loving’ nation becomes petulant when confronted with the unintended consequences of its self-worship. It is immediately re-characterised as a virtuous victim of the Evil Other, and filled with ressentiment. Thus within ethnic nationalist discourses, ressentiment always remains available because of the very framework employed to understand who ‘we’ (and hence Others) are.

**Ressentiment into State Charter and Beyond - The Formation and Operation of Ethnocracies**

Having outlined how ressentiment develops and operates, I will now explain how ethnocratic states can arise out of, and subsequently institutionalise, a discourse of ressentiment ethnic nationalism. I will argue that such a discourse necessarily precedes the establishment of an ethnocratic state (or the ‘ethnocratisation’ of an existing state), though not every instance of a ressentiment ethnic

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13 See Joel Kovel’s (2007) psychological insights in this regard.
nationalist discourse will result in ethnocracy. When ethnocracy does result, however, a relationship can be observed between the ressentiment nationalist discourse that precedes it, the ressentiment Charter of the state set up by nationalist activists, and the subsequent circulation of the ressentiment discourse in society. An exploration of these components in general terms can be brief, since each example of an ethnocracy would involve factors specific to that case.

In a general sense, I employ the term Charter to refer to the official institutionalised discourse of a state which defines ‘the nation’ and demarcates its relationship to it. A state’s Charter is embodied in its founding documents, and manifests in various legislation, policies and court decisions that construct ‘the nation’. Many aspects of a state’s Charter would be established from an early stage; however, subsequent legislation and policy may contribute to or alter a state’s Charter.

Ethnocracies have a Charter that institutionalises the ressentiment nationalist discourse of individuals involved in establishing (or ‘ethnocratising’) them. Ethnocratic states thus reflect – in laws, policies and court decisions – beliefs about ‘the nation’, its unique virtue, and its vulnerability to ‘Others’ held by ‘ethnocratising’ activists. These individuals – and those who follow in their footsteps as state officials – perceive the state as a tool for redressing their (ressentiment-informed) perceived injustices at the hands of Others. They construct, manifest, and subsequently enhance a state that will be a buttress for, and defender of, their perceived nation.

This does not mean that every individual who employs an ethnic nationalist discourse per se will necessarily aspire to ethnocratic rule; though I suggest that if ressentiment is a significant component of the discourse, it will create the conditions and political will for establishing ‘ethnic’ rule. There might, however, be non-ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourses which would take a more benign tone towards Others, or purport not to notice them (see above p.74-5). The content of such ‘benign’ discourses would not necessarily persuade individuals using them to aspire to ethnocracy. However, even such ‘benign’ ethnic nationalist discourses still have a tendency towards
adopting *ressentiment* depictions of Us and Other, because ethnic categories lend themselves to the mapping of Good and Evil in response to any clash with an Other, embedding stereotypes that appear permanent and can be easily employed. Moreover, the presumption of one’s own national virtue might obscure inadvertent mistreatment of Others, thereby opening up those identified as belonging to this particular ‘ethnic nation’ to an Other’s hostility. Such hostility can only be interpreted from within the nationalist discourse as irrational ethnic hatred, thus inviting *ressentiment* affixation of Good and Evil to the identities of Us and Other.

On this basis, I suggest that wherever a *ressentiment* pair has been able to develop, and hence there are two nationalist discourses demonising each Other, it will be the goal of activists on each side to put in place a system that takes power away from the Other. Depending on the relative sizes of the populations deemed by the activists to belong to each ethnic category, ethnocracy may not be suitable. However, if it is, ethnocracy will be attractive because the state can be depicted as a formal democracy in which the ruling majority just happens to also be an ‘ethnic’ majority.

Obviously not all nationalist activists employing a *ressentiment* discourse acquire the possibility to put in place such a system. Numerous historical, cultural, political, social and economic factors will determine whether the opportunity to set up an ethnocracy arises and whether the relative sizes of the perceived ‘groups’ concerned favour such an arrangement. Then a range of factors determine whether the activists will be effective in seizing the moment and implementing laws and policies to establish and perpetuate ethnocracy. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider these factors.

The important point I want to make is this: the activists, in the event that they are successful, are embroiled in their project. Though they are canny in propaganda and mobilisation, they are captive to the *ressentiment* ethnic nationalist discourse, which perpetuates a sense of wound inflicted by Others, and simultaneously nurtures this wound with the depiction of the noble Us. These activists’ participation in the ‘national project’ eases the pain of the wound; delivering them from the
humiliation – real or exaggerated – that they have experienced at the hands of ‘Others’. The strength of the ethnocratic state thus becomes both their revenge and their perceived protection into the future.

I offer five features that demonstrate how the ethnocratic state’s Charter embodies such a response, employing the ideas of Rogers Brubaker in his works on nationalising states (1996, 2011), but with a consciously different angle. Brubaker talks about “motifs” which are “characteristic of nationalist discourses” in a particular set of post-Soviet “successor” states he labels as “nationalizing” (2011 p.1786). I apply his ideas to structures and policies and consider how we might depict a ressentiment nationalist discourse as being embedded therein.

The first and most fundamental feature of an ethnocratic state’s Charter is the depiction of ‘the nation’ as a long-enduring organic entity derived from a common ancestry. It usually also takes for granted the idea that the state’s territory constitutes that nation’s ‘homeland’ (Yiftachel 2006, p.41). This is in keeping with Brubaker’s (2011) notion of the popular belief in “a ‘core nation’ or nationality, understood in ethnocultural terms and distinguished from the citizenry or permanent resident population of the state as a whole” (p.1786, his italics).

The second key feature of an ethnocratic state’s Charter is the assertion of the norm that, since nations inherently exist as organic entities, they are entitled to ‘self-determination’. This represents nations – and the specific nation in question – as ‘entitled’ to states in which ‘the nation’ enjoys cultural, economic, linguistic and numerical hegemony over resident ‘Others’. Brubaker (2011) frames this in terms of ownership; “the state is understood of and for the core nation” (p.1786, his italics).

Thirdly, befitting the ressentiment depiction of the Us as virtuous victims, the State’s Charter depicts the “core nation” as weak and in need of state bolstering. The job of the state is therefore to
“strengthen the core nation, to promote its language, cultural flourishing, demographic robustness, economic welfare or political hegemony.” (Brubaker 2011, p.1786). This is represented as “remedial and compensatory” (Brubaker 1996, p.416), hence making a claim to justice on behalf of those who have suffered, according to the ressentiment discourse. The state’s remedial strengthening of the “core” can aptly be depicted as the “project” of the state (Brubaker 1996, p.431; 2011, p.1789).

Fourthly, the ethnocratic state’s Charter will depict Others as aggressors from whom the “core nation” needs – and deserves – protection. Others, insofar as they dwell within the ethnocratic state’s borders, may be given limited rights as individuals, but these will be trumped by the collective rights awarded to members of the privileged ‘nation’ (Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel 1998). There will be no path for Others to integrate; the legal definition of the ‘nation’ precludes this. The ethnocratic state’s Charter therefore creates a category of internal ‘Others’ who will hold this position permanently unless or until the ethnocratic order is overturned, since in almost every imaginable case the state’s borders do not exclusively contain members of the privileged ‘nation’, but also ‘problematic’ Others.

Finally, the ethnocratic state’s Charter renders all of the above morally, politically and militarily defensible. The state of affairs created for the ‘nation’ and its Others are assumed to be moral and even universalistic, in keeping with the concept of a ‘world of nations’. Embodied within this is the notion that protection of ‘ethnic national identity’ is legitimate government business, defensible to the full extent of the state’s monopoly of coercive power.

Viewed in this entirety, the ethnocratic state can thus be seen as the agent of ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse. (This is as opposed to a more simplistic theoretical understanding of the state as agent of an ‘ethnic group’, for example, as discussed in Section One.) State policies, practices and procedures become “instruments” (Brubaker 2011) which individuals encounter in numerous ways from cradle to grave, internalising the identity depicted therein as taken-for-granted.
When ordinary people encounter institutions displaying national menus of options, nationhood can become an experientially salient frame for the choices they make. When these same people are already embedded in nationally circumscribed institutions, nationhood silently structures the logic of subsequent choices they make (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, p.545).

However, perhaps the most crucial impact of the ethnocratic state’s ressentiment Charter on the people living within it occurs due to relations with Others internal to the state. Because for every encounter with the state that bolsters the ‘national’ member, telling her who she is, why she is here, who wants to hurt her, why she should be armed against him, and who she should spend her life with, there is an inverse encounter between the ethnocratic state and the individual designated as Other under the state’s political control. This Other experiences his identity as the inverse of the privileged ‘national’ – he is taught that he does not belong and accordingly takes the opposite view of the state as awarer of ethnic privilege. He will meet people all his life who treat him as though he is an enemy, and will experience less life chances. He will see state institutions as corrupted, subverting the true meanings of ‘the rule of law’ and ‘democracy’. The ethnocratic state, then, as surely as it creates and reproduces the privileged and fearful ‘nation’, also creates another one. The Other does not even need to ask himself why he is a second-class citizen; he knows it is because he belongs to a different nation and thus his own ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse flourishes. I noted in the previous section that ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourses can develop even in the absence of an ethnocratic state – merely out of encounters between those using such discourses and those depicted as their Others. But in an ethnocracy, the sense of slight experienced by the Other can never be assuaged, since the ethnocratic state objectively de-privileges him on the basis of his allocated identity. There is nothing that stokes the fires of a ressentiment discourse quite like engagement with an Other who is hateful, resentful, and seems to genuinely wish to do one harm. This scenario objectively arises for both ‘nations’ in the ethnocratic state, whose Charter inculcates ressentiment through the construction of a de-privileged Other. The Other’s ressentiment then serves as a catcher’s mitt for the hatred and identification of the privileged ‘nation’, providing a daily affirmation of the truth of ressentiment discourses for all concerned.
Conclusion

This Chapter has elucidated the general concepts which will explain the ‘problematic situation’ of the dissidents. I have located my work within the generalist literature on nationalism, linking it to an approach that considers nationalism as discourse and subscribes to a non-groupist terminology. I have distinguished ethnocracy from other ways of understanding and labelling states, and located it within the civic-ethnic distinction. I have outlined the relationship between ethnocracy and 

ressentiment, depicting the former as the institutionalisation of the latter. In the next two Chapters I will apply these arguments to Zionism and the State of Israel in readiness to explore the dissidents. The dissidents can be depicted as seeking ways to de-ethnocratisate the state, but their privileged position makes their dilemma compelling. Their critique of ethnocracy may be negotiated alongside a sense of ‘national identity’ informed by the ressentiment Charter of the state; interest then arises from how individuals deal with this.\footnote{I emphasise that the dissidents are categorised by the ethnocratic state as ‘national members’ within its laws and frameworks. This is as far as their objective ‘membership’ of the nation extends; the subjective feelings of each individual are another matter entirely.}
CHAPTER TWO: RESSENTIMENT ZIONISM

Introduction

In this chapter, I explain Zionism, the nationalism underpinning the State of Israel, as a resentiment ethnic nationalist discourse. After a brief overview of Zionist ideology and my strategy to evade its hegemonic portrayal of history, I explore the development of the Zionist discourse, outlining how it formed a resentiment pair with ‘Palestinian’ nationalism up to the creation of Israel in 1948. This chapter does not substantiate Israel’s status as an ethnocracy, which is the task of the next chapter. My job in this chapter is to demonstrate how Zionism’s inception and early development fits with the account of resentiment ethnic nationalism offered in the previous chapter. I also consider the effect of ‘virtue’ inbuilt into the Jewish ‘national character’. These explanations will subsequently help portray the dilemma of the dissidents and their place within a problematic tradition of internal dissent.

In the Beginning, There Was Zionism

It is my contention that we need to understand Zionism as a resentiment ethnic nationalist discourse. Its content has been refined over time; arguments have ensued as to the meaning of Jewishness, the necessity of a Jewish state or homeland, and its location. Local and global events have shaped these arguments and led to new ones. The next Chapter will demonstrate how Zionism remains a dominant force in Israeli society, embedded in the state, circulated by its institutions and inculcated in the population. But Zionism – old and new – is based on some core premises, which can be understood as the parameters within which debate occurs. I will offer a brief overview of them now, to be expanded upon in the rest of the Chapter.
Most fundamentally, Zionism can be understood a discourse pertaining to a so-called ethnic ‘nation’; speaking of, and to, individuals politically identified and identifying as ‘Jews.’ It invites them to see themselves as an entitled and virtuous ancient nation taking refuge from Evil and threatening Others by building a homeland in Palestine. The first tenet of Zionism relates directly to this sense of people and place, arguing for the contemporary existence of an ancient Jewish nation. It offers the narrative that this nation was exiled from Palestine in Biblical times, and wandered the earth being mistreated for millennia (Rabkin 2010).

The second tenet provides a political programme for this ‘Jewish nation’, which is urged to ‘wake up’ in the age of nationalism and ‘return’ home to Palestine. This second tenet affirms the narrative of exile noted above by depicting it as objective fact. Simultaneously, however, ‘exile’ is negated as a two-thousand-year aberration, rather than the time in which Jewish traditions developed in a multiplicity of communities across the globe (Balibur 2009, p.132). From this perspective, any continuation of Jewish life outside of Palestine is presented as “bent on ultimate disintegration and secular assimilation” (Schnall 1979, p.20). The call to ‘return’ to Palestine was initially subject to debate, with some Zionists proposing alternative locations for building a Jewish homeland, such as Uganda and the Kimberley in Western Australia (Avineri 1981). A rival Jewish nationalist organisation, the Bund, proposed regional autonomy in Central and Eastern Europe for an “open and flexible national idea based on a rich and vibrant Yiddish culture” (Sand 2011, p.41; see also Machover 2011 p.101). So Palestine was not the only potential site for ‘Jewish national self-determination’, but it soon became the most popular. The relationship between the content of Jewish religious practice and the territory of Palestine meant that a nineteenth and twentieth century colonisation could be framed as ‘return’ (Sand 2009). Such a ‘return’ was depicted as facilitating a full existence for Jews, freeing them from what Zionism represented as an incomplete and parasitic existence in Europe. Zionists influenced by Marxist and socialist theory argued that
Jews, upon ‘returning’, should perform every role in the economy in Palestine, so as to truly lay claim to the land and achieve full human potential (Ram 1999; Schnall 1979, p.19-20).

Additional tenets of Zionism were strengthened as this political programme was put into practice. Zionist ideology had depicted Palestine as empty (Piterberg 2008, p.94), yet there were indeed people there who did not support the Zionist project. As I shall demonstrate, Zionist ideology depicted the hostility of these ‘interlopers’ as an echo of mistreatment of Jews in Europe. This led to a strengthening of the notion that a state in which Jews controlled their own fate was essential. I will explain how ensuing events in Palestine would subsequently legitimise, in the eyes of some Zionists, the ultimate use of violence in attaining this goal.¹⁵ A Jewish state was also seen as part of a “return to history”; “the natural and irreducible form of human collectivity is the nation” and “only nations that occupy the soil of their homeland, and establish political sovereignty over it, are capable of shaping their own destiny and so entering history” (Piterberg 2008, p.95).

Today, with the Jewish state firmly established, Zionism can simply mean supporting the existence of Israel. (As my dissidents will demonstrate, this meaning can be stretched, manoeuvred and challenged.) Yet embedded in this contemporary meaning are all the preceding assumptions – belief in the existence of an ancient Jewish nation, the assertion of its right to return to Palestine, the sense that a Jewish state ought to exist, and the conviction that a degree of force is justified in attaining and maintaining it. These assumptions, especially the first one relating to the continuity of an ancient Jewish nation, have extended well beyond the boundaries of Zionist discourse and into mainstream scholarship on nationalism.

¹⁵ Not all Zionists supported the creation of a Jewish State; I will subsequently differentiate between ‘Political Zionism’ and ‘Cultural Zionism’.
Getting Outside of Zionism

The previous Chapter argued for a reading of ‘nations’ as discursive products of the modern era, rather than as ancient entities. But with the exception of a few writers on Jewish history such as Rabkin (2006), most scholars – not just those identifying as Zionist – take for granted the idea of singular, long-standing, ‘pre-national’ Jewish nation underpinning the contemporary Israeli state. It seems common to follow the kind of approach adopted by Smith (1981, p.15 ; 2010, p.195-199) or Walzer (2001) of depicting an ancient Jewish ethnie ideologically mobilised by the European upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even if this approach emphasises specific events and the activists who were able to mobilise people with mythologised narratives and symbols, it still represents a single, ancient Jewish cultural community at its core. Klier, for example, declares that

The Jews are ... the prime exhibit of an ethnie, to use Anthony Smith’s term, which has survived through millennia despite being bereft of a national territory, a common language or even a common secular culture (Klier 1997, p.170).

Overtly Zionist scholars take this ‘perennialist’ tendency endemic in nationalism studies (see critiques by Ozkirimli 2003; 2007) to an even greater degree by not only depicting an enduring Jewish nation, but also portraying its path to Zionism as inevitable. Given the institutional support of an entire state apparatus, such writers tend to be the most profligate on the subject of Jewish history and politics, hence constructing an apparent consensus of an ancient Jewish nation on an ineluctable path to statehood. For example, Schnall suggests that while the claim to an ancient and enduring nation from Palestine was “often used as a polemic instrument”, it reflected “communal will long before the modern era” (Schnall 1979, p.11). The referent of “communal” is not elaborated, and the idea that a particular collective of people share a mindset is not explained. In another example of representing Zionism as inevitable, Shimoni’s (1995) literature review of modernist and
constructivist approaches to nationalism concludes that the contributions of this scholarship are limited when it comes to “the Jewish case”. The latter is so patently one in which a pre-existing ethnic identity was of paramount importance that only an account of the genesis of nationalism that recognises the great significance of pre-existing ethnic ties holds promise for the explanation of Zionism’s emergence (p.9).

In keeping with this determinist tendency, Avineri asserts that a paradox is at the root of Zionism – on the one hand a deep feeling of attachment to the Land of Israel, becoming perhaps the most distinctive feature of Jewish self-identity; on the other hand, a quietistic attitude toward any practical or operational consequences of this commitment (Avineri 1981, p.4)

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

These ‘teleological explanations’

give meaning to historical events in terms of the implications they might have for other events and grant them significance in terms of some “destiny” towards which history is supposedly moving. By and large most of the secular historiography produced by Jews in Israel, or in the presovereign Jewish community in Palestine, leads to the statist “Zionist solution” of the “Jewish question.” A commodified version of the entire span of Jewish history, including the Holocaust, is recruited in order to lead the consumer of historiography to this one inevitable conclusion to the exclusion of any alternatives (Kimmerling 2008, p.110).

It is difficult for a researcher to navigate these hegemonic primordialist representations of Jews as experiencing a natural, inevitable pull to Palestine and hence Zionism unless – or until – one is offered a plausible alternative. Israeli historian Shlomo Sand (2009) offers such an alternative in The Invention of the Jewish People, debunking some key myths that Zionist historiography and political advocacy have advanced as facts. The importance of this debunking is not to create a false

16 The migration of Jews from Arab lands to Palestine / Israel has also been depicted in similar terms (Shohat 2003).
dichotomy in which the tenets of Jewish nationalism might somehow be ‘true’ without Sand’s debunking and are only revealed as ‘false’ by his efforts. Rather, the point is that for constructivists, all nationalist ideologies are assembled on partial truths or even untruths which resonate to the participants but need not be accepted by analysts. The importance of Sand’s work, therefore, is simply that he provides the tools for such a constructivist analysis of Zionism and ‘the Jewish people’, countering the almost universal adoption by Western academic literature of the Zionist depiction of Jewish identity and history.

It should be noted that Sand, like some of the dissidents in this study, could be regarded as a ‘dissident’ operating in the field of academia. His ideas can be seen as part of a project to forge a new Israeli identity, and indeed his work is explicitly referenced in this regard by one of the dissidents in this thesis, Gilad Atzmon, who notes that Sand poses a political question people seem to want answered (see p.191, below). Sand’s work certainly has political implications, as is evidenced by the response it has received (see below, p.89-90). However, the putative political motivations behind the work are not directly under study here. If such putative motivations were seen as potentially undermining the validity of Sand’s research and arguments, we would be moving into a dangerous realm where academic contributions were always reduced to nothing more than their political potential (for a vision of this realm, see by Gavison, 1998, on how discourse on Israel should be conducted). Whilst scholarly work is of course political, it is not reducible to politics. Accordingly, I take seriously Sand’s scholarly pursuit of establishing a constructivist account of Zionism’s development. Such an account is timely, even if Sand is not the first to advance it (see Evron, 1995), and provides an important contribution to the field by offering a way of talking about identity in non-groupist terms. I use Sand’s account not because he is ‘correct’, but because for a constructivist seeking to use non-groupist language to describe historical phenomena such as the development of nationalisms, there is a dearth of other academic sources in the area which might facilitate such an exercise.
Sand (2009) offers an explanation for this lack, and for the widespread acceptance of the perennialist interpretation of Jewish nationalism. It is hard to escape the apparent existence of an ancient Jewish nation, he says, because there were always people called ‘Jews.’ Our logic takes the fact that these ‘Jews’ existed, and there are people called ‘Jews’ now, and fills in the middle bit: all these Jews must be the same! The idea of nationhood as an understanding of how people in history lived and saw themselves, and particularly the names used for actual contemporary ‘nations’, can trick us into translating these signifiers back into the past and assuming a continual meaning (p.24). Ozkirimli (with Grosby, 2007) points out, “What matters is not the existence of the names throughout history, but what they referred to,” and suggests that while there might be a “perennial existence of a self-designating name”, the referent of this name is continually evolving (p.526). Hence there were ‘Jews’ in the distant past, and there is a discourse proclaiming the existence of a ‘Jewish nation’ today. This discourse draws a linkage between the two entities, depicting the latter as the direct descendant of the former. Sand (2009) highlights that this is a linkage made in the present by interested parties.

In countering the hegemonic perennialist depiction of the ‘Jewish nation’, Sand offers two key arguments:

- That (contrary to the Zionist myth) there was no mass exodus of Jews from what became Palestine in the 2nd Century CE (Sand 2009, Chapter 3, esp p.178-182); and
- That for a few centuries prior to this and several afterwards, Judaism was a proselytising religion, competing with Christianity for converts (whilst also retaining an aversion to this practice discernible in its theology). Sand argues that although proselytising was halted in the Christian world, it continued until the advent of Islam in the 7th Century C.E (Sand 2009, Chapter 3).

Sand’s arguments counter Zionism’s hegemonic claim that a single ‘Jewish nation’ was expelled from Palestine and wandered the earth until Zionism facilitated its ‘return’. Instead, he argues that a proselytised Jewish Kingdom became the basis of the Yiddish-speaking Jewish populations in Eastern
Europe (Sand 2009, p.238-249). Descendants of these populations produced the active quarters of the Zionist movement and the bulk of those individuals who today identify as Jewish in the United States and Israel (Sand 2009, p.247). By Sand’s estimation, few of these individuals could actually claim a blood connection ‘back’ to Palestine, being instead the products of early conversions (Sand 2009, Chapters 3 and 4). He argues that these conversions were often obscured because of the lower status of converts in the religion, and due to complex interactions between Christian and Jewish religious mythologies (Sand 2009, p.210-229, 236). Meanwhile, Sand suggests that amongst those of the Jewish faith who remained in Palestine, “it is reasonable to assume that a slow, moderate process of conversion” from Judaism occurred. He concludes that this – rather than the mythical exile – “accounted for the disappearance of the Jewish majority in the country” (p.182).

Sand’s arguments challenge the notion advanced by Zionists that Jewish national identity generates a legitimate rights claim to Palestine. Not surprisingly, this has generated enormous criticism of everything from the accuracy of Sand’s history (Shavit 2010) to its prior advancement elsewhere (Segev 2002; Judt 2010; Wistrich 2011; Schama 2009; Shavit 2010; Cohen 2009). Sand’s critics note that he relies on the work of modern historians whilst also debunking them, which is deemed inconsistent (Cohen 2009; Shavit 2010). He is accused of utilising arguments shared by anti-Semites (Wistrich 2011), and providing a platform that may be used to deny the Jewish state its existence (Wittenberg 2010). He is also accused of obsessing about origins, which is deemed to have

17 Reviewers of Sand’s work argue that this percentage may have been exaggerated (Schama, 2009); however, at least a proportion of Eastern Europe’s Jews were not directly descended from ancient Israel.

18 Sand (2009) also argues that Christians propagated the myth of Jewish exile from Palestine because it suited Christian theology for Jews to be punished. This was then absorbed by the religion dogma of Judaism (p.177).

19 I am not negating homogenising factors within Jewish communities. Doctrines of faith limited, though did not exclude, marriage in and out. External pressures such as ghettoisation in Europe similarly informed the homogeneity of Jewish communities. However, this does not equate to a single nation across Europe and indeed the world.

20 Whilst it makes sense that there must be Jews today whose families directly descend from ancient Jews, Sand is making the argument (with which I concur) that this cannot be said of the Jewish nation, a modern construct of mythologised historical connections between all individuals identified as national members.
unpleasant racialist overtones (Wistrich 2011; Wittenberg 2010), even if such a focus is necessary to counter the origin myths of Zionism.

The most potentially damning element of all of these criticisms is that Sand’s history might simply be ‘wrong’. But to be useful, Sand’s narrative of Jewish history does not have to be proven to be truer than the Zionist version, whose proponents would also struggle to verify it. As a sympathetic critic notes, “The alternative account of Jewish history that Sand lightly sketches out ... does not purport to be anything more than synthetic, speculative and suggestive” (Sutcliffe 2010). Hence an additional criticism – that Sand, in constructing an alternative narrative, does the same thing he accuses Zionists of doing (Cohen 2009) – misses the point. It is enough that Sand’s narrative is plausible; if we are not bound to the hegemonic perennialist depiction of Jewish history, then he has done his job.

Thus the most important thing is not the argument over which claims are factually true – those of Sand or those of Zionism – but rather that Sand’s account demonstrates myth-making and mythologising at work in the construction of the Zionist discourse. In highlighting the role and experiences of the intellectuals who wove together the historical narrative of the Jewish nation, Sand provides a viable constructivist account of Zionism, allowing it to be studied as a modern phenomenon alongside other nationalist discourses. Sand’s account allows scholars to stand outside the Zionist historical narrative, not necessarily to criticise it, but rather to recognise it as historical narrative. Constructivist scholars have done this with other nationalist discourses (see, for example, Trevor-Roper 1983, on the role of mythology in Scottish identity), often to the dismay of those who see their identities as being undermined. The job of constructivist scholars, however, is not to protect such identities but rather to rigorously chart their construction and dissemination. Whilst this may require the debunking of keenly held ideas, the purpose is not to rate the authenticity or otherwise of claims for their own sake, but rather to highlight the processes of myth-making inherent in all nationalist discourses. In the case of Zionism, however, some debunking of myth
content is clearly required, since an account of the construction and dissemination of Jewish national identity cannot be mounted from within the hegemonic depiction of an ancient Jewish nation always destined to ‘return’ to Palestine.

**The Development of Zionism Through Ressentiment**

Having stepped outside the Zionist depiction of Jewish history and identity, it is now possible to explain the developing character of Zionist discourse through the psychological factor of *ressentiment* in its early propagators. Such an explanation must begin with a depiction of the kinds of societies proto-Zionists and Zionists lived in and the events they experienced – ‘structural factors’ (according to Greenfeld and Chirot’s framework) which affected those identifying as Jews. I will then explore, through a series of vignettes, how we might understand the ‘psychological factor’ of *ressentiment* manifesting in various individuals to form a cumulative discourse. Finally, I’ll engage with the ‘cultural factor’ of Jewish religious mythology that has also contributed to the Zionist discourse. The section should equip readers with an understanding of the discourse and sentiments that Zionist settlers took to Palestine.

**Structural Factors: European Jewish Life, Transformations and the Rise of Ressentiment**

Before the rise of nationalism, Europe was home to many people identifying culturally or religiously as Jews. Whilst Zionism would subsequently invite us to see those Jews as the same Jews existing both throughout history and today – to attribute the same national meaning to their identities – Sand (2009) reminds us that there was no ‘Sleeping Beauty’ Jewish nation, waiting to be woken up with a kiss from the handsome prince of nineteenth century nationalism (‘sleeping beauty’ analogy borrowed from Brown 2000, p.8). Instead, there was a multiplicity of Jewish communities, in Europe and across the world, speaking different languages and following different customs, integrated to varying degrees with non-Jewish neighbours, friends, communities and business associates. Whilst
these Jewish communities shared commonalities in the form of faith and cultural practice, the people living in them did not identify as part of a Jewish nation in the way that we would understand the word today. The ‘national’ meaning ultimately affixed by Zionism was not inevitable, but rather the product of concrete historical developments, in particular the response of intellectuals to being depicted as Others within a new Europe of nations.²¹

The rise of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe was central to this shift in Jewish identity. As outlined in the previous Chapter, nationalist discourses in Central and Eastern Europe developed out of ressentiment reactions to the civic nationalisms of England and France. Ethnic categories appeared to offer clear, delineated boundaries to demarcate the Good Us and the Evil Other. In these first reactive nationalisms, the ethnic boundary had been drawn around the Us, since the (civic) Other did not define itself in such terms. The new ethnic nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe then found it very straightforward to reject all manner of additional Others, including Jews, gypsies and others whose distinctiveness appeared self-evident.

The ressentiment discourse of hatred towards Others contributed to the discrimination against Jews already operational in Europe. Jews had been long-targeted by individuals and institutions of the Christian faith with structural barriers to participation in wider society, ghettoisation, limited employment opportunities, and mass expulsions. However, whilst suffering immeasurably as a religious minority throughout history, Jews were now newly targeted as an ethnic minority.

²¹ Hence Zionist scholars who disproportionally emphasise the similarities between Jewish lives within diverse communities employ teleological explanations. They seek to demonstrate how the rise of nationalism initially enticed Jews away from the singular ethnie and into other nations, and then subsequently spat them back out again; a story best told from the contemporary vantage point of a fulfilled nationalist movement (see, for example, Shimoni 1995). Sand (2009) invites us to imagine instead a different set of identity considerations for these Jews, for whom Zionism, with its specific plan for a Jewish homeland, would not be conceivable until their identities underwent a shift from religious and cultural to secular and political.
Unlike Christian anti-Judaism, which aimed at salvation through conversion, modern anti-Semitism considers Jews to be a race or a people intrinsically alien, even hostile, to Europe, its population and its civilization (Rabkin 2010, p.17).

Late nineteenth century “Jew hatred” became a “multi-faceted” phenomenon taking in “religious, economic, racial and political prejudice” (Brustein and King 2004, p.38). Narratives of hatred were “ignited” by

four critical factors: deterioration in a nation’s economic well-being, the impact of increased immigration of Eastern European Jews, the growth of popular support for the political left, and the extent to which leadership of the political left [was]... identified with Jews (Brustein and King 2004, p.39).

A significant transformation across Europe was Jewish emancipation. With the secularisation of post-Enlightenment societies, Jews were permitted to leave their ghettos and enjoy “legal equality of civil rights” (Davis 2003, p.9). They were able to integrate more, though the extent of this depended upon the permeability of the ‘nation’ in question, which in turn depended on how deeply ressentiment had inspired the character of the nationalist discourse. Accordingly, the journey of some Jews from victims of hatred to first enunciators of the ressentiment Zionist discourse took different forms, depending upon their location.

In Central and Eastern Europe, Jews were let out of the religious ghetto but not let into the ethnic nations depicted by the hegemonic discourses (see, for example, Brubaker 1996, on the state-mandated policies of exclusion in Poland). In Germany, Greenfeld and Chirot argue that Jew-hatred arose as a direct result of the ressentiment of the German Romantic movement towards the West. Jews come to

personify western liberalism, individualism and capitalism. Their vile nature, in accordance with the principles of Romantic philosophy, was seen as a reflection of their race, not religion, and thus there was no hope that they would ever change for the better (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994, p.100)
It makes sense that Jewish intellectuals Othered through overt racialisation would be susceptible to adopting their own *ressentiment* discourse. This would not be the only available response to discrimination and hostility (Falk 2008, p.55) –

It is well-known that for many the persecutions of Europe led to emigration to America. It is estimated that between 1880 and 1920 some two million European Jews reached the shores of the United States (Schnall 1979, p.17).

However, in the case of intellectuals, *ressentiment* would be a salient response. Intellectuals do not merely want to escape what is wrong with their lives, they also want to understand it, and explain it to others in such a way that affirms their qualifications to shape opinion.

In Western Europe, the experience was different. Western European states defined themselves in more civic terms, yet their populations were not immune from new anti-Semitic discourses deriving from new ways of understanding identity (Sand 2011, p.37, 40); re-interpreting old religious divides as racial ones and responding to economic and social transformations. Where the state did seek to facilitate greater integration via emancipation, this may have also had the counterproductive effect of contributing to anti-Semitism, with populations responding reactively to the strong state and taking their anger out on Jews (see Birnbaum’s theory in Brustein and King 2004). However, perhaps the most notable factor contributing to the development of *ressentiment* by some Jews in Western Europe was the failed promise of the state in offering them genuine inclusion, for example as members of the French nation, which was then snatched away. The unfulfilled promise of developmental optimism in the civic state has been linked to *ressentiment* in various contexts (Greenfeld 2006; Brown 2008), and as I shall show below, this phenomenon has been overtly invoked, even mythologised, in the trajectory of Theodor Herzl.

Before I move on to illustrating the experiences of *ressentiment* by some intellectuals contributing to the Zionist discourse, I wish to clarify Sand’s portrayal of them. Sand does not employ the
ressentiment explanation that I offer here for the development of Jewish ethnic nationalism. He instead employs two partial explanations which are not clearly named but are discernible in his work. When clarified, these can contribute towards my ressentiment explanation. The first of Sand’s explanations I call the zeitgeist explanation. This effectively argues that Jewish intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe were inspired by the ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourses around them – this was the zeitgeist and it resonated with them, so they developed their own versions (2009, Chapter 2, esp p. 68, 77). Sand’s second argument is the anti-Semitism argument: that Jewish intellectuals developed a sense of belonging to a unique ethnic nation in response to being rejected by the xenophobic nationalist discourses within their home states. Sand’s critics accuse him of paying insufficient attention to this factor (Wittenberg 2010), which is not entirely fair, as he mentions the role of anti-Semitism on more than one occasion (see p.84), especially within his accounts of individuals’ experiences. However, he places more overt emphasis on the zeitgeist explanation. I incorporate both explanations as separate parts of the ressentiment process. The anti-Semitism explanation is most important, because experiences of anti-Semitism, reinforced by the failures of civic nationalism in Western Europe, were the key factors inspiring some Jewish intellectuals to produce their own version of ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse. However, the ease with which the intellectuals were able to craft this discourse derived from the prevalence of ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourses in their societies – this is where the zeitgeist comes in.

Ressentiment Vignettes

The ingredients of a ressentiment equation (outlined in the previous chapter) include:

1. The sense that one ought to be equal with the object of his attention.
2. Inequality precluding this, and producing envy.

I will now demonstrate that many Jewish intellectuals experienced these things, forming part of a shared cultural experience and contributing to a ressentiment nationalist discourse. The process
begins prior to the overt development of the Zionist discourse with what Sand calls the “pre-nationalist” historians (p.75). These were the first historians identifying as Jews to start talking about Jews as a unique ‘nation’ connected by descent from Palestine. They were ‘pre-nationalist’ because they did not aspire to ‘return’ to Palestine; these notions lay well in the future. However, pre-national historians began to construct a vision of a single ‘Jewish nation’ fragmented throughout the world; hence there became one Jewish history rather than many. Sand represents this new mode of historiography as a direct response to the scholars’ encounters with the ‘ethnic’ nationalisms of their home states (Sand 2009, Chapter 2); I suggest these can be read as inspiring ressentiment.

Isaak Markus Jost, a German Jewish historian who began publishing in 1820, fits well with this explanation. Sand portrays Jost as a “typical Enlightenment liberal”, attached to elements of Jewish religious culture but hoping to harmonise this with his German citizenship (Sand 2009, p.68). Sand notes that Jost was part of a science circle of Jews who were “quite conflicted about their identity and experienced some distress over this issue.”

As intellectuals whose symbolic capital lay principally in their Jewish heritage, they were unwilling to forego their cultural distinction...at the same time they longed to be integrated into the emerging Germany (Sand 2009, p.68).

In Jost’s earlier work, Sand argues, the historian employed a historically accurate and non-consecutive narrative of various Jewish communities (2009, p.68-70). However, Jost seemed to concentrate more closely on the Old Testament story (see below p.102) and become more pre-nationalist in his later work. Sand links this “reconstruction of the Jewish past” to shifts in “German identity politics” (2009, p.71), suggesting that as Jost grew less certain of his place within an increasingly ethnically defined ‘German nation’, he sought an alternative means of ‘belonging’ via the ‘Jewish nation’.
Sand’s account can be read as a *ressentiment* equation. The poignant description of Jost’s science circle depicts the longing of the historian and his friends to be integrated into German society, pointing to an expectation of equality. Yet at the same time, these men felt somehow different; their connection with their Jewish cultural milieu formed part of this difference, but the rise of the German ethnic nationalist discourse which Othered them affirmed it. Jost yearned for equality, and he also admired a nascent republican thread in German nationalism which offered the potential to include Jews (Sand 2009, p.68; 2011, p.39). Yet the ethnic nationalist discourse, with its attendant chauvinism, was ascendant, denying Jost this equality. In seeking a remedy for his hurt, he created a vision of his own ‘nation’, a source of virtue and comfort over the disappointing exclusion from German nationhood.

Another German Jewish historian, Heinrich Graetz, continued the scholarly trend of defining a single Jewish nation. Graetz sought to render the Bible in a scientific manner, omitting miracles and emphasising the centrality of the land to the birth of the Jewish people (Sand 2009, p.72-88). In considering Graetz’s motivations, Sand suggests that

> the hardening of German nationalist definitions based on origin and race... stirred new sensitivities among a small group of intellectuals of Jewish descent. Graetz... was one of them, (Sand 2009, p.75).

We can see the *ressentiment* explanation clearly fitting with Sand’s comments here.

> The oppressed took on the reverse image of the oppressor’s judgment: where Treitschke [*an anti-Semitic intellectual with whom Graetz debated*] held Jews in contempt, Graetz made them into example of moral superiority rising above all others (Sand 2011, p.39)

The employment of superiority as a means of distinguishing oneself from ‘enemies’ is supported by the case of Graetz’s good friend and Zionist activist, Moses Hess. Hess employed Graetz’s ideas to claim the Jews were a nation, and Sand writes that Graetz’s
revelation was the answer to the mental struggles of the weary revolutionary [Hess], whose daily encounters with anti-Jewish expressions, political and philosophical, in Germany drove him to discover his ‘national being’ (p.78).

We can interpret this to mean that it was not merely exposure to other ethnic nationalisms that inspired Graetz’s development of ‘the Jewish nation’ (the zeitgeist); it was also the psychological effect of this encounter which led him to craft his version of ressentiment discourse.

We can also trace ressentiment experiences in avowedly Zionist historians like Yitzhak Baer. Baer was involved in setting up the Hebrew University in Palestine in 1929, and argued that Zionist historians had a distinctly partisan role to play in constructing the nation’s history. Sand offers a clear explanation as to where this idea came from.

[T]he Zionist historian [Baer], harshly rejected by his native Germany... develop[ed] a painful counter consciousness. Ironically this self-consciousness drew on the same imaginary idea of nationhood that had nurtured his mentors for several generations: That the source determines the substance, and the goal is a return to the roots, the primeval habitat (Sand 2009, p.102).

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

This phenomenon has also been termed a “paradox” (Balibur 2009, p.129). The ressentiment argument clearly offers a more cogent explanation for this paradox than Sand’s favoured zeitgeist one. If we bring ressentiment into the mix then we understand that Zionists were actually just following the inherent logic of ressentiment ethnic nationalism, demonising Others who could then be demarcated from the virtuous Us.
Arthur Ruppin, a German lawyer and political and social scientist active in the settlement of Palestine following his emigration in 1907, also illustrates this trajectory. Along with Hess (Sand 2009 p.79), Ruppin was inspired by “a budding interdisciplinary paradigm that became known as Eugenics or Racial Hygiene” (Blum, cited in Piterberg 2008, p.82). Ruppin “adhered to a rigid biological determinism of race” and concluded that the Übermensch – the superhuman – “should only develop amongst his physical type” (Piterberg 2008, p.82). Whilst this was a dominant idea of the age, Piterberg argues that what made Ruppin so dedicated to “the correction and betterment of ‘the Jewish race’ – the very kind of ideology at the heart of proto-Nazism – was the anti-Semitic rejection by his beloved German nation and homeland” (Piterberg 2008, p.82). Thus a ressentiment experience was a key contributor to Ruppin’s racial Zionism. Piterberg adds,

It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that Ruppin’s path was so typical of many Central European nominal Jews…. Their rejection by an increasingly anti-Semitic society made them convert to Zionism, which was an adequate substitution to the Romantic nationalism that had not wanted them (Piterberg 2008, p.83).

Finally, the story of Theodor Herzl, widely regarded as the father of Zionism, can also be recounted as a ressentiment experience. Herzl, initially a proud Austro-Hungarian patriot (Schoeps 1997), subscribed to a republican notion of citizenship incorporating his cultural identification as a Jew. At twenty-three, Herzl resigned from a student duelling fraternity to which he had dedicated four hours a day of the previous two years. This resignation was due to its members participating in an anti-Semitic commemoration of the death of Richard Wagner. Herzl’s decision …caused deep feelings of isolation and rejection…. This was a decisive encounter with social anti-Semitism which was to leave a lasting impression on him (Loewenberg 1971).

We can see in this early incident the ingredients for ressentiment. Herzl expected, and indeed enjoyed, equality. The anti-Semitic display in the duelling fraternity cast doubt on this, then Herzl’s experience as a journalist covering the Dreyfus Affair in France confirmed that a republican vision was unattainable (Schoeps 1997). The Dreyfus Affair involved a French military officer of Jewish
background being found guilty of treason amidst unjust accusations and a fevered anti-Semitic atmosphere (Falk 2008, p.55). It took two subsequent trials for Dreyfus to finally be exonerated (Schoeps 1997; Falk 2008, p.173), but Herzl would argue that the process caused him to give up on a future for Jews in Europe (Sand 2011). Other scholars suggest Herzl’s analysis and subsequent political exploitation of the Affair came well after the event, leading them to question the extent to which it really provided a basis for his political conversion (Piterberg 2008, p.7-8; Falk 2008, p.57; Shimoni 1995, p.89). However, what matters is not when but how Herzl ultimately digested the dueling incident and the Dreyfus Affair, and how his explanations contributed to the ressentiment Zionist discourse. The Dreyfus Affair slotted into a list of grievances compiled across Europe of terrible things done to Jews. Though the Dreyfus Affair was a single incident, it was utilised to symbolise the problems facing all Jews. This is not to say that the Dreyfus Affair did not expose a weakness in French claims to civic universalism, or that the Affair was an isolated incident in a Europe that was clearly prone to a deeply unpleasant form of anti-Semitism. My point is simply that the Affair did not provide absolute evidence that “assimilation and ... emancipation had failed in fin de siecle France” which, as Gabriel Piterberg suggests, was a claim both “premature... overstated and politically tendentious when penned by Zionist scholars and propagandists” (2008, p.16). However, the developing Zionist discourse was effective because it universalised the experiences of some individuals to depict a ‘Jewish problem’ at the hands of Others. This is understandable when we consider that those who saw themselves as sharing the targeted identity would have felt that they, too, would succeed or fail not as individuals, but as members of a group. Earlier, the Russian pogroms of 1881 had similarly prompted a “phenomenal turnabout of those who had believed in a program of emancipation and integration into the host state and society”; a pattern underscoring the rise of Zionism across Europe (Shimoni 1995, p.32). What matters is that some Jews in these contexts understandably lost hope in alternatives. As their options appeared to evaporate, the

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22 Shimoni’s flawed terminology of ‘host state’ depicts Jews as amorphous, fragmented and ‘hosted’ across Europe, occluding the endeavours of Jews who were nationalists in their home states – as some Zionists initially were.
ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse offered a cogent explanation for the experience, identity and plight of Jews in Europe. Moreover, the Zionist political programme offered concrete steps to remedy the situation.

The Zionist movement gained momentum when Herzl published his influential pamphlet The Jewish State (1896), outlining his political programme for Jews to begin building a state in Palestine (Avineri 1981, p.94-8). The hostility towards Jews arising from the ethnic nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe meant that Herzl’s ideas and the growing Zionist discourse enunciated by other intellectuals (see Avineri 1981, on Pinsker, Nordou, Ha’am and Gordon; see also Shimoni 1995) resonated with many people. Avineri claims that the

Zionist movement enlisted, again and again, the intellectual and spiritual resources of a highly literate and vocal people, adept at polemics, loquacious and oriented towards public debate (Avineri 1981, p.91).

Overlooking the obvious groupism (‘a...people’) in this statement, there is merit in the observation that Zionist leaders were persuasive orators, translating individual experiences into what claimed to be a collective consciousness. The discourse of ressentiment Zionism, which so cogently explained the intellectuals’ experiences, offered others an explanation for why things were happening, and an appropriate remedy. In this context, what might have otherwise been random and solitary experiences became testimonies read in particular ways, minor parts of a collective whole.

The Role of the Historical Narrative as Cultural Factor

Having explored the ressentiment experiences of some key individuals and how these began to be distilled into a shared discourse, there remains one more component to consider in the development of the ressentiment Zionist discourse. I will now briefly discuss the role and content of the historical narrative assembled by the early historians – Jost, Graetz and others – and adopted by the Zionist discourse. I conceptualise this narrative as a ‘cultural factor’ in Greenfeld’s tripartite
explanation for the development of nationalisms. Cultural factors, in addition to structural factors and ressentiment, play a significant role in the development of ethnic nationalist discourses (Greenfeld and Chirot 1994). As I noted in the previous Chapter, they are the rarely-worn clothes in the metaphorical wardrobe of those constructing nationalist discourses: the songs, stories, clothes and traditions which nationalist activists depict as the property and practices of ancient, enduring ethnies (Ozkirimli and Grosby 2007, p.528).

The cultural factors contributing to the (hi)story adopted by Zionist nationalist activists are distinct from the psychological factor of ressentiment. In ressentiment, we respond to those against whom we feel inferior or Othered, while cultural factors involve using what is at hand to explain who we are. The story recounted in the Old Testament (the Jewish Bible) was the key ‘cultural factor’ contributing to the character of the Zionist discourse, providing a ready-made myth to explain the history and destiny of the contemporary Jewish nation (Sand 2009; Machover 2011). Pulled out of the wardrobe of the Jewish faith, where it had been “holy scripture...not really accessible to the mind” (Sand 2009, p.75), the Old Testament was re-crafted, as we saw in the work of Graetz (see p.93-4; Sand p.72-88), into a secular account of the history of ‘the Jewish nation.’ Moshe Machover recounts the operation and content of the myth:

Jews already ‘knew’ that they were all direct descendants of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who was renamed ‘Israel’ by God. Thus they were all ‘literally’ Bnei Yisrael (Sons of Israel). Their God-promised and God-given homeland was Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel), covering a huge area ‘from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates’. ...Eventually – to cut a long story short – the Jews were punished ‘for their sins’ and were exiled from their homeland by the Romans. But at the End of Days God will send his Mashiah ben-David (anointed scion of David), who will ingather the exiled Jews and return them to their homeland, the Land of Zion. All that remained for Zionist ideology to do was to secularise this sacred narrative. The eschatological bit, the ‘return’ to Zion, was converted into a political colonising project – hence its very name: ‘Zionism’ – with the impressively bearded Theodor Herzl as secular messiah or his herald (Machover 2011, p.102).
Despite being a ‘cultural factor’ distinct from ressentiment, the content of the Old Testament narrative reinforced the ressentiment depiction of Good Us; Evil Other. It not only offered a plausible account to ‘members of the nation’ of who they were (by way of unworn clothes in the wardrobe), it was also congruent with the ressentiment experiences of nationalist activists in linking victimhood to a means of asserting national virtue. Kovel (2002) argues that the religious category of ‘Jew’ was pre-imbued with (religious) goodness, and that this was carried into the Zionist depiction of the Jewish ‘nation’. The narrative offered by the Old Testament enabled Zionists to depict the nation as both ‘real’ and ‘chosen’. Whilst the tendency of nationalist discourses to depict grandiose visions is by no means limited to Zionism, few others can ‘prove’, using a document revered within many nationalist discourses, that this particular nation is indeed chosen, special, and therefore virtuous. This sense of Zionism’s virtue impaired the ability of its participants to perceive its potential harm to Others. Kovel argues that according to this position, “God’s chosen people, with their hard-earned identity of high-mindedness, by definition cannot sink into racist violence” (Kovel 2002, p.24). Such a perception of virtue, derived from the victimhood of ressentiment and strengthened by the content of the Old Testament narrative, contributed to the Zionist discourse being unable to adequately digest the victims of its project, in turn escalating its ressentiment quality by depicting any opposition as irrational hatred (Rose 2005, p.65; Kovel 2002; Behar 2011). This would play a significant role when Zionist pioneers made the trip to Palestine and encountered a new Other there.

**Ressentiment Zionism Goes to Palestine; Finds an Evil Other There...**

In 1897, Zionists began holding annual congresses with the aim of building a movement to emigrate to Palestine (Schoeps 1997). Zionists were publishing work, to which Herzl contributed a utopian novel, _Altneuland_ (1902), depicting an idyllic Palestine after Jewish settlement. They were also forming youth groups, lobbying world leaders for political support and actually migrating to Palestine (Avineri 1981). Migration brought about refinements to the Zionist discourse, and in this section I discuss these up to the creation of Israel in 1948. My purpose is not to offer a detailed
history but rather to outline how Zionism began to form a *ressentiment pair* with the ‘Palestinian’ nationalist discourse which developed in response to its settlement project. *Ressentiment pairs*, as I explained in the previous chapter, depict a virtuous ethnic Us under attack from the Evil Other; each becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. There are two components to the development of *ressentiment* Zionism in this context. The first is the transference of Zionism’s depiction of the hostile European Other onto the local Palestinian or Arab Other. The second involves the trajectory of the more ‘benign’ version of the Zionist discourse which, over time, came to coalesce with a demonised depiction of the Other whilst contributing to the depiction of Zionism’s virtue. These will be explored in the next two sections.

**The Evil Other: From European to Arab**

As we have seen, Zionism’s initial *ressentiment* relationships were with ‘significant Others’ (Triandafyllidou 1998) in Europe. However, as *ressentiment* discourses evolve they seek and construct new targets of blame. New targets are more than scapegoats; they are visible irritants against whom a *ressentiment* discourse can vent. Jews had been constructed as targets of blame in Europe; now it was the turn of Zionists to construct new targets of blame in Palestine. As I shall demonstrate, *ressentiment* made it difficult for Zionists to discern that the people living in Palestine might have good reasons to resist their ethnocentric settlement project, and hence their very presence in Palestine. Instead, *ressentiment* Zionism could only interpret such encounters through the frame of ‘Good Us; Evil Other’.

For many Zionists, the only way to achieve a functional cultural homeland, along with sorely needed security for the ‘Jewish nation’, was to create a Jewish state in Palestine. This mainstream strand was known as ‘Political Zionism’ (Falk 2008, p.58). Although some pragmatic Zionists initially considered other locations for this state (Schoeps 1997; Shimoni 1995, p.94), the voices linking the Jewish state to Palestine had been – for obvious reasons considering the historical narrative
employed within the discourse – more successful. And although the official line was “a land without people for a people without land” (Robertson 2005, p.xiv), Zionists knew that Palestine was not empty; rather, they considered it to be empty of people with a legitimate claim to the land. Thus an implied but often unacknowledged corollary of Political Zionism was that that Others living in the ‘Promised Land’ would have to be limited in number in order for the ‘Jewish state’ to also be a ‘democratic state’ (see below p.111-112).

Settlement in Palestine led to encounters between those who saw themselves as ‘the Jewish nation’ and those depicted as their Others. Some early Zionist settlers entertained the idea that the fellahin (natives of Palestine who worked the land) represented a remnant of converted Jews who could therefore be absorbed into the contemporary nationalist project. This idea was swiftly discarded when the fellahin were not amenable to the project in question (Sand 2009, p.184-7). They were not amenable to it because, ultimately, most people living in Palestine in the early twentieth century had no good reason to accept the rights claims of European Jews to the land.  

Thus we can trace the development of a ressentiment Palestinian discourse. The people living in Palestine did not have a well-articulated nationalist discourse prior to the arrival of Zionist settlers; a heterogeneous population throughout the region had only “sought a more cohering identity” in the face of British and French colonisation after the First World War (Goldberg 2009, p.106). Thus the

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23 Though broad discussion of this incident is beyond the scope of this Chapter, it represents an early attempt to render an ‘ethnic’ understanding of the nation as partially permeable to a particular Other. Such opening can only ever be partial due to the logic of ‘ethnic boundaries’, but can be compared to the recent ‘opening’ of Israeli Jewish identity to immigrants from Russia with minimal Jewish ancestry. The latter can be read as “ethnocratic multiculturalism”, “selective” in its openness and “restricted to groups considered to be part of the dominant ethnos” (Al-Haj 2004 p.693). The Us can be expanded to include those who would otherwise be non-members, but only in order to provide a demographic and numerical counter to the real Other (Lustick 1999), and only by inculcating these new members with the same boundaries. Therefore the permeability of the Us is governed by its relationship to the Other; there is no possibility of opening towards the Other. Yet even partial opening weakens the very foundational essence of who We are; perhaps this is why the fellahin were so quickly ‘dropped’ when they failed to comply. Another reason may be that the idea of them being ‘converted Jews’ contradicted the Zionist argument that exile, not conversion, explained the demise of Judaism in Palestine.
discourse enunciating a Palestinian nation was in particular carved out in response to ethnic Othering by Zionist immigrants to Palestine; from ressentiment experiences endured by those who felt threatened by the Zionist project and its proponents. As I shall argue, the ressentiment Palestinian discourse was informed by both an evidentiary basis for its claims, and a blanket stereotyping of all those depicted as Other as bringing ill-will.

Peteet (2005, p.170) suggests that the emerging Palestinian discourse tended to refer to ‘Zionists’ rather than ‘Jews’, indicating less focus on the ethnic character of its Other than its political project. However, Shohat (1999) counters that nationalists in the Arab world sought to end colonial rule by inventing “third world nations... according to the definitions supplied by the often Eurocentric ideologies” (p.8-9), unhelpfully leading anti-Zionists to articulate “the idea of a homogenous ‘Jewish Nation’” (p.13). Behar (2007) affirms this unwitting reproduction of Zionist discourse, which demonstrates how ressentiment discourses proliferate through the employment of identity labels already in the nomenclature. The ressentiment discourse employed by Palestinian nationalist activists thus imported identity concepts from – and in response to – those designating them as Others, just as Zionists themselves had done in Europe. However, like Zionists before them, Palestinian nationalists were primarily inspired by their own experiences of ressentiment.

As the Palestinian nationalist discourse came to conflate Zionists and Jews and demonise all of them, the Zionist discourse was simultaneously demonising ‘Arabs’. Again, offering that evidentiary basis, some affirmed this perception by resisting the Zionist project with violence. In 1929, some non-Jews committed a massacre of Jews in Hebron, where Ashkenazi (Eastern European) immigrants dwelled alongside a Sephardic Jewish community which had been there for eight hundred years (Segev 2000, Chapter 14). The fact that long-standing members of the community were targeted demonstrates how the ressentiment pair was beginning to thicken the understanding of all parties that a zero-sum conflict was occurring between two nations. When non-Jews in Palestine used violence against the settlers, Zionists applied European frameworks, labelling such clashes ‘pogroms’ and failing to
differentiate between the anti-Semitic targeting of Jews in Europe, and the specific targeting of Zionist Jews in Palestine by those opposed to their political programme (see Rose 2005 p.130-131). Both were filtered as morally equivalent attacks on the ‘Jewish nation’.

The demonisation of each Other and resultant political responses escalated the conflict, as hostile actions made the Other more likely to engage in ‘pre-emptive’ violence. Over decades, multiple clashes ensued between adherents to the developing Jewish and Palestinian nationalist discourses, heightened by the influence of the British colonial powers who held a Mandate over Palestine in the period of Zionist colonisation following 1917 (prior to which it was part of the disintegrating Ottoman Empire). In the early half of the twentieth century, British officials duplicitously promised the leaders of both nationalist movements that their aims of an independent state would be met; notably promising a loosely-defined Jewish Homeland in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 but then subsequently limiting Jewish immigration from Europe.

The ressentiment pair between Zionism and Palestinian nationalism was compounded by the fact that, within the mainstream ressentiment Zionist discourse, the Palestinian Other was not regarded as a nation. Zionists have long argued that there was no Palestinian nation before the Jewish ‘return’ (Dershowitz 2003) to reinforce their ancient claim to the land. Additionally, since Zionism was a collectivist enterprise, it was generally incapable of interfacing with the Others of Palestine as equal individuals.24 The Zionist discourse thus had to engage with the apparent paradoxical nature of Arab violence and filter its contradictory messages. Zionism “imputed” a “lack of attachment to place” on behalf of its Others because Jews were the true natives; on the other hand these Others displayed an “apparent willingness to fight for it.” To explain this, Zionists classified “Palestinian violence as irrational, without just cause”; at one stage describing those engaged in it as “a gang of robbers,

24 See Greenfeld 1992 Chapter 1 on the collectivist nature of ethnic nationalisms; for the collectivist nature of Zionism see Birenbaum-Carmely (2001); Shimoni (1995) p.121. Revisionist Zionism (see below) did represent the existence of another nation on the land, which would quite understandably oppose the Zionist project.
murderers and bandits” (Peteet 2005 p.167). This notion of irrational violence fits within a reSentiment depiction of Others.

Yet while mainstream Political Zionism was interpreting resistance as irrational evil, the right-wing articulation of the discourse offered a cogent recognition of what was happening in Palestine. This most extreme form of Political Zionism emerged with the rise of Vladimir Jabotinsky’s World Union of Zionist Revisionists in 1925. Arising reactively to what its proponents saw as the slow progress and misguided left-wing idealism of the mainstream, Revisionist Zionism sought an unapologetically militant course of action to establish a Jewish state. Jabotinsky, the movement’s key intellectual, argued that once the Jewish state had been established and then defended over a period of years, rapprochement with its enemies could be pursued and the state integrated into its surroundings.

Until that time, however, in the face of morally framed opposition from natives who would reject Zionist colonialism, those Zionists who nevertheless believed in the justice of their project would have to achieve it through force, behind what Jabotinsky called an “Iron Wall” (Shlaim 2000, p.11-16).

While openly advocating blatant prioritisation of the Us over the Other, Revisionist Zionism nevertheless recognised that another ‘nation’ claimed the land. This is noteworthy, because Revisionist Zionism did not depict Jews as virtuous victims, but rather as active agents in competition for the land. Whilst ethnic identification remained central to this depiction of two nations at war in a zero-sum contest, Revisionist Zionism offered its adherents a unique opportunity to recognise the consequences of their project for Others – albeit whilst still denying these Others a say in their future. But because Revisionist Zionism remained politically marginal, its perspective on the Other was excluded from the defining essence of Zionism, even as its advocacy of settlement and development behind an Iron Wall was eventually adopted by the mainstream programme (Shlaim 2000). Instead, as I shall show, the mainstream Zionist discourse continued to proclaim its inherent virtuousness whilst ultimately permanently exiling and repressing its Others. In order to make sense
of this, we must draw our attention away from the right-wing strand of Zionism and towards the far left. Here lies a bitter irony: the only other notable recognition of Others on the land paradoxically contributed to a delusion of beneficence in the movement’s mainstream, thereby strengthening the resentment discourse.

**The Tragic Trajectory of Cultural Zionism**

The more benign expression of Zionist discourse, known as ‘Cultural Zionism’ or ‘binationalism’, sought to create a centre for the regeneration of Jewish culture in Palestine (Schoeps 1997; Rose 2005; Shimoni 1995, p.104-113). Notably, Cultural Zionism did not aspire to the creation of a Jewish state; some of its proponents saw themselves living in Palestine as a minority community sharing political control of the land with its contemporary occupants (Raz-Krakotzkin 2011; Weiss 2004). Cultural Zionism recognised Others, but sought to co-exist with them, hence was perceived by its proponents as ‘benign’. However, it was precisely this perception that became problematic.

Cultural and Political Zionism aspired to many of the same things – Jewish migration to Palestine, the establishment of a vibrant cultural community, and a re-invention of what it meant to be Jewish (see Avineri 1981, Chapter on Ha’am; see also Shimoni 1995, p.104-113). It is only in the final goals of the project that the two strands diverged, with Political Zionists willing to exact a high price from their Others to achieve a Jewish state, and Cultural Zionists trying to find alternatives. Some notable supporters of Cultural Zionism appear to have come to their position only after rejecting the implications of the Political programme, namely the need to subjugate or expel the native population (see Piterberg 2008, p.9 and sections on Hannah Arendt and Bernard Lazare; see Weiss 2004, p.101 on Hans Kohn). This theory is supported by the movement’s rise in the 1920s (Weiss 2004), well after the political movement was underway, though proto- Cultural Zionists can be traced prior to this (see Sand 2011 on Bernard Lazare).
The connection between Political and Cultural Zionism can be observed in the willingness of many Cultural Zionists to work under the auspices of Political Zionism. For example, Hannah Arendt participated in initiatives in Europe to send young Jews to Palestine (Kohn 2007), presumably without clarifying to every individual with whom she engaged that their actions should not contribute towards building a Jewish state. The spiritual father of Cultural Zionism, Ahad Ha’am, himself had declared that “Palestine will become our spiritual center only when the Jews are a majority of the population and own most of the land” (cited in Shimon 1995, p.111). “Even the most progressive Zionists were not able to articulate binationalism effectively,” concludes Weiss (2004, p.113).

Cultural Zionism thus lacked both the theoretical rigour and independent political impetus to mount a significant alternative model to Political Zionism, relying on two core precepts that it shared with its ressentiment cousin: the idea that there was indeed a ‘Jewish nation’; and the ‘right’ of this nation to ‘return’ to Palestine. These tenets would ultimately undermine the positive relations with Others that were supposed to be part of a binational vision for Israel/Palestine. Ultimately, the ressentiment pairing between Zionism and the Palestinian nationalist discourse broke down the distinction between Political and Cultural Zionism. Since both Political and Cultural Zionism relied upon the existence of a ‘Jewish nation’, both were likely to read an attack on this ‘nation’ as an echo of European persecution. Moreover, since Others in Palestine could not necessarily distinguish between the aims of the Political and Cultural projects (or indeed were equally offended by both), ‘Jews’ adhering to either tenet were thus equally vulnerable to their hostility.

From the Arab point of view, understandably, the bi-national vision [of Cultural Zionism]... was not significantly different from the hegemonic Zionist one, which insisted on a (projected) Jewish majority. One of the reasons to advance the bi-national agenda during the 1940s was in fact to allow Jewish immigration to continue (Raz-Krakotzkin 2011, p.59).
Individuals who had once employed a Cultural Zionist discourse began, in the face of violence, to employ the Political one. The hope that the people of Palestine might recognise the mutual benefit in Zionist settlement was replaced by the perception of a zero-sum ‘national conflict’ (see Weiss 2004, p.107). Arthur Ruppin (introduced on p.95) had been a supporter of a binational state, but after what was known as the Arab Uprising of 1929, he left the Brit Shalom peace movement he had helped establish and put his support behind the Jewish state (Avineri 1981; Kovel 2007, p.178, endnote 18; Weiss 2004). 25 Martin Buber, another Cultural Zionist retrospectively endorsed the establishment of Israel (Kovel 2007, p.219-220).

From here, we can observe the co-optation of Cultural Zionism to the project as a whole. Just as Cultural Zionism had effectively relied on the impetus and inspiration of Political Zionism, now Political Zionism became cloaked in Cultural Zionism’s claims to virtue.

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

Some luminaries of Zionism recognised, privately, that their project would create victims. Theodor Herzl wrote in his diary and in correspondence with other Zionists that the penniless population of Palestine must somehow be spirited over the border of the future Jewish state (see the citation of van der Hoeven Leonhard, in Piterberg 2008, p.39). Chaim Arlosoff, one-time leader of the Mapai party in the pre-state yishuv, wrote in 1932 of the need for a Jewish “minority government” to “seize the state apparatus, administration and military power” (cited in Piterberg 2008, p.78). But these rational calculations were countered by public claims of benevolence, depicting opposition as the fault of the murderous Other. Ressentiment Zionism thus cleaved to the ‘benign’ ideals of Cultural

25 The British attributed the Arab Uprising, which involved the killings of 133 Jews, to Arab fears for their futures and hostility derived from the failure of their nationalist aspirations (see Weiss 2004 p.103; Segev 2000).
Zionism even as the actual project became reliant on force and on repression of that Other (Yadgar 2003b, p.177, 180). Victimhood and chosenness as national traits, instilled by the reßentiment beginnings of the ‘Jewish nation’ and cemented by the content of the historical narrative it advanced, obscured the ability of the Zionist discourse to recognise its victims. Only the Revisionist strand, which was brutally honest but also just plain brutal, was able to recognise, with a shrug, the fate of Zionism’s victims. The rest of Zionism sought shelter under the tenets of its Cultural programme – there was room here for everyone, no harm was intended, and all could prosper.

Though these claims may have been genuinely made by some Cultural Zionists, they could not be substantiated by the Zionist project as a whole – perhaps from the very beginning given the project’s ‘pure settlement’ nature (Piterberg 2008). According to general theory on colonialism, in ‘pure settlement’ colonies

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

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

From this perspective, Zionism’s establishment of a reßentiment pair with the ‘Palestinian nation’ appears inevitable. The population defined as non-Jewish in Palestine would necessarily oppose the establishment of an economy, society and – ultimately – state premised upon its exclusion. Yet reßentiment Zionism continued to adhere to a faulty “dual society paradigm” (Piterberg 2008, p.62-26

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26 Golda Meir, Israeli Prime Minister in the 1960s, argued from her old age that “in 1921 my pioneer generation was neither morally obtuse nor uninformed. We knew there were Arabs in Palestine... Far from ignoring the local population, we were sustained by the sincere conviction that our toil created more and better living space for both Arab and Jew” (Meir 1975 p.63). Yet Meir famously asserted that there was no such thing as a Palestinian (Peteet 2005), meaning that whatever was available for sharing back in 1921, it was not to be shared upon the basis of ‘national’ equality.
4) which maintained that settling Zionists and their Others were somehow able to pursue independent development trajectories, only encountering each other in a “struggle between two impregnable national collectives” (Piterberg 2008, p.64). This faulty perspective depicted the ideals of the settlers rather than the material reality. Though they attempted, in keeping with leftist economic ideology, to build an independent society that would not exploit the labour of non-participants, in reality two economies could not be kept separate any more than the land could be cleanly divided between Jew and non-Jew. The depiction of fully-formed nations encountering each other for the first time in conflict elided the mutual development of Zionist and Palestinian nationalist discourses. Far from being an irrelevant external feature, the “presence and resistance” of Palestine’s non-Jewish population was “the single most significant factor that determined the shape taken by the [Jewish] settlers’ nation” (Piterberg 2008, p.64; 62). The existence of the Other in Palestine, and Zionism’s inevitable formation of a ressentiment pair with it, had everything to do with the direction that the settlement project took – and the ultimate establishment of an ethnocratic Jewish state, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined how the development of the Zionist discourse conforms to the model of a ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourse. The individuals who developed the Zionist discourse were responding to marginalisation by the nascent ressentiment ethnic nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe, and disappointment at incomplete inclusion in the civic vision of the West. Intellectuals seeking to explain their position and to share their credentials as interpreters of reality developed a formula of the Good Us under attack from Evil Other, further strengthened by the adoption of the Old Testament story as historical narrative. When Zionist settlers took this framework to Palestine, it informed how they related to their Others there, whose reasons to reject their project were largely undigested. These new Others became the most significant ressentiment pair of the Zionist discourse. That the resistance of Others to the Zionist project eventually became
reducible to a conflict between ‘Jews’ and ‘Arabs’ demonstrates the power of ethnic categories and the collapse of other mechanisms for understanding identities. This chapter has also engaged with the subsumption of the virtuous ideals of Cultural Zionism. I have suggested that Cultural Zionism could not offer a correction to *ressentiment* in the context of colonisation based on rights claims. At best, it was an early attempt to solve ‘the dilemma’; Cultural Zionism’s proponents grappled with the same problems facing contemporary dissidents. Their cautionary lesson – the subsumption of ‘virtue’ into a national character – remains salient today.
CHAPTER THREE: RESENTIMENT ZIONISM IN ETHNOCRATIC ISRAEL

Introduction

This chapter concludes my explication of the ‘problematic situation’ behind the dissidents’ dilemma – a dilemma constituted by their privileged status in an ethnocracy built upon the dispossession of the Other with whose welfare they are concerned. The previous chapter explained Zionism’s development as a resentiment discourse, detailing how it formed a resentiment pair with the Palestinian nationalist discourse. This chapter outlines the development of the resentiment Zionist discourse from the establishment of Israel in 1948 to the present day. My core argument is that Israeli Jews have been inculcated into a nationalist discourse that employs a resentiment schema, teaching individuals that they belong to a virtuous Us under threat from an Evil Other. This schema is employed to explain the very structures of the ethnocratic state which make the threat from the Other real (since discriminatory state practices exacerbate the resentiment pair). Accordingly, most Israeli Jews’ view of the state is as protector and saviour to be defended at all costs, and not as a contributing factor to the ongoing conflict in which they are embedded.

I advance this argument by exploring a number of arenas from which such messages can be seen as deriving. I begin by examining Israel’s founding Charter in the form of the Declaration of Independence and the Law of Return, showing how they lay the core foundational myths of an ancient and entitled nation in its rightful (empty) homeland. From here, I explore how educational policies and the mobilisation of the Holocaust have contributed to resentiment depictions of the Us and Other. I then detail how the Israeli state’s creation of legal categories of Other has strengthened the resentiment pair. I explain the consequences of these categories and also demonstrate discursive portrayals which collapse them back into an amorphous Evil Other. I then explore the role
played by an Israeli media with close links to the State, depicting Israeli Jews as virtuous victims under attack from an evil Other (Dor 2005). The chapter concludes with a depiction of the current state of the ressentiment pair and the ressentiment discourse, and a reminder of how these, when coupled with concern for the Other, constitute the dissidents’ dilemma.

Since the chapter’s main purpose is to portray a consistent hegemonic discourse of ressentiment Zionism, functioning at various levels of society and continually reinforced by the legally and socially reified identities of Jew and Arab, I run the risk of eliding nuance. It is true that the dissidents do not live in a totalitarian state; they participate in vibrant debates regarded as more radical than those on the same topic conducted in parts of the western world. The dissidents function quite freely in what even the most radical amongst them depict as a democracy for Jews (Pollack 2010); Israeli Jewish society is vibrant and conflictual. As my examination of the dissidents will at least partly demonstrate in later chapters, Israeli Jews are arguing about extremely important things: settlements in occupied Palestine; the treatment of Israel’s citizens who want to commemorate the Nakba (Palestinian ‘catastrophe’ of dispossession in 1948); funding inequalities and military action. Though these debates are not necessarily at the centre of mainstream society, and not all views are afforded equal coverage (see Dor 2005 p.49, 55, on the strategic placement of “bad news” stories from occupied Palestine), they are an ongoing feature of Israeli society.

Moreover, Kirstein Keshet argues that Israeli society is largely held together by the conflict [with Palestinians]; deep ethnic, religious and social divisions bubble just below the surface. These divisions are conveniently shunted aside in favour of a spurious national unity in the face of the supposedly implacable enemy... (2005 p. 151)

The discursive distinction between Ashkenazi and Mizrachi or MENA Jews (discussed on p.34) is an example of such a division. Although Mizrahim are not explicitly constructed as a collective by the state, there have been ample cases in which Jews emigrating from Africa or the Middle East have
been subjected to degrading treatment, from the forced ‘conversion’ of Ethiopian migrants to the ringworm scandal in which immigrant children were subjected to deadly radiation (Shohat 2002, p.275). Numerous works detail the marginalisation of non-European Jews from Israeli Jewish identity, elements of the Zionist narrative and positions of power (Shohat 1999; Shenhav 2002; Lavie 2002; Yiftachel 2006, Chapter 9). These can be seen as disrupting the image of a unified Israeli Jewish identity.

Other divisions within Israeli Jewish society have related to the religious / secular divide. Debates over who controls the meaning of Jewishness and the operation of commerce and personal freedoms centre on the role of the Orthodox rabbinate in personal matters as well as in influencing state policies, foregrounding a religious / secular divide (Yiftachel 2006, p.121-3). Yet this dichotomy, too, is in danger of missing out the complex ‘middle-ground’ identity of what Yadgar (2011) calls “traditionists”, mostly Mizrahi-identifying Jews whose non-Orthodox but observant religious practices either locate them as people of faith in secular society, or as ‘inadequate’ members of religious circles.

Another area of division has involved the ‘who is a Jew’ arguments, in which individuals and organisations have sought to challenge the Orthodox rabbinate-mandated affixation or denial of Jewish identity to individuals. In 1970, a Jewish man successfully won a Supreme Court action to have his children, born to a non-Jewish mother, registered as Jewish, though the five-four split of the judges demonstrates the contentious nature of this. Another man in 1972 failed in his bid to have ‘Israeli’ recorded as his national identity, and a woman in 1976 failed to achieve a similar change to ‘Hebrew’ identity recorded (all examples from Handelman 1994, p.446-449). These examples demonstrate that Israeli Jewish identity is regularly up for debate.

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

The Charter is Laid: The Declaration of Independence and Law of Return

In the previous chapter, I outlined how the conflict in Palestine coalesced into what appeared to its participants as a zero-sum fight between two ‘nations’ over one land. The only shared perception between both camps was a desire for the British ‘colonialists’ to depart; by the end of World War Two, this was imminent. Following an ongoing terror campaign by Zionist militias and an embarrassing incident involving European refugees on board the Exodus ship, Britain hand-balled the question of Palestine’s future to the newly-created United Nations. Ilan Pappe (2001, Chapter 1) suggests that European ethnocentrism, Holocaust guilt, individual ignorance and the personal preferences of participants played a role in various small committees reaching the decision to partition Palestine into ‘Arab’ and ‘Jewish’ states. Ultimately, the United Nations would offer the Zionists part of what they wanted (they aspired to more territory), and deliver ‘Palestinian’ nationalists a crushing blow; more than half of historic Palestine would now become a Jewish state. Following the British withdrawal, the leaders of the yishuv, Palestine’s Jewish settlement
community, declared the state of Israel in existence in 1948. Immediately, war was declared by those inside and outside its boundaries who rejected its establishment. Israel won this war, and in the process acquired more territory than had originally been offered in the partition plan (see Pappe 2001; Morris 2004a). The armistice lines containing this larger territory eventually became the internationally recognised borders of the State of Israel.

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

Two key documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Law of Return (explained on p.126) can be regarded as establishing Israel’s ethnocratic Charter in line with a programme of ‘national’ protection. I argued in Chapter One that a key feature of ethnocratic states is the use of such official documents to institutionalise a narrative of legitimation deriving from a ressentiment discourse. Such a narrative depicts a single ethnic nation as an authentic ongoing entity, discursively positions it in what is portrayed as its rightful homeland, and presents it as in need of protection from (now legally reified) Others, who are present in the state but by definition excluded from the reified nation.

The text of the Declaration of Independence frames state and nation in such terms. The document begins by outlining the history of the “Jewish people”, in line with the work of the nationalist historians discussed in Chapter Two. The historical narrative goes back thousands of years to the
“forcibl[e]... exile” and locates “the people” today in its “historic” homeland from Biblical times (Ben-Gurion et al. 1948). The document goes on to declare that Israel is the State of the Jewish people, again cementing the existence of a taken-for-granted nation as well as asserting the legitimacy of it possessing its own state (Ben-Gurion et al. 1948). The document makes much of ‘national’ rights, but recognises that not all citizens of the Jewish state are Jews; and purports to offer “full and equal citizenship and due representation” to non-Jews (Ben-Gurion et al. 1948). However, the exclusion of explicit ‘minority’ national rights here is noteworthy, since the state being established sanctifies a single reified ‘nation’ without making equivalent space for those deemed not to belong. The Declaration is thus responsible for bringing the Jewish nation into being as a legal entity, simultaneously awarding it hegemony at the expense of those non-Jews living within the territory. The Declaration is the cornerstone of Israel’s ethnocratic Charter.

The other key document is the Law of Return of 1950. Once the Declaration of Independence had discursively established Israel as the rightful home for the Jews of the world, the Law of Return formed part of a massive campaign for Jewish immigration. Such immigration would not only bolster Jewish numbers in the fledgling State and hence secure the ‘democratic domination’ required by the ‘open ethnocratic’ model, but it would also continue the project of reifying the ‘Jewish nation’ and cementing its claim to Palestine. This project had begun even before the state’s foundation with the campaign to have Israel established as the logical relocation point for refugees from the Holocaust in Europe (Zertal 1998). After the state’s establishment, however, there was also a focus on importing Jews from the Middle-East, a policy which Shenhav argues was adopted as “the reality of the mass extermination of Jews in Europe sank in” (Shenhav 2002, p.29; see also Behar 2007, p.587).

27 Political turmoil in surrounding Middle-Eastern countries drew many Jews from there to Israel; turmoil that the Zionist discourse had difficulty digesting. On the one hand, the Zionist establishment wanted to be able to depict the migration of Jews to Israel as an ideological act, assisted by operations with romantic names like ‘Magic Carpet’. On the other hand, advancing the status of Middle-Eastern Jewish immigrants as ‘refugees’ from persecution provided an alibi for the exclusion of non-Jewish refugees via a terminology of ‘population swaps’ (see Shenhav 2002 p.38-41; Peteet 2005 p.165;
The Law of Return, along with the Nationality Law (1952) and the Entry Into Israel Law (1952), enables any person, from anywhere, defined as Jewish on the basis of having a Jewish mother or having converted to the (Orthodox) religion, to migrate to Israel in receipt of full citizenship entitlements and financial support from the state (Saban 2004, p.961; Law of Return 1950). Since then, the definition of Jewishness has been effectively extended by a 1970 amendment, welcoming as citizens individuals with a single Jewish grandparent along with their families (Law of Return, Amendment No. 2 1970). Citizenship offered on the basis of Jewish identity differs markedly from other forms of ancestry-based citizenship. The invoked ‘national’ membership relies not on immediate parentage but purported events of three thousand years ago, linking ‘descendants’ to a territory very recently inhabited by other people. These immigration laws facilitate individuals who may have no family, personal, economic or historical connections to move to Israel on the basis that they already own it. Accordingly, they both establish and reinforce perceptions of ‘Jewish national’ ownership of Palestine, whilst simultaneously deleting Others from the land and from history.

Additional laws, as I shall explain below, have allowed certain portions of the non-Jewish Other to remain in Israel only as discursively constructed remnants of a broader Arab (never Palestinian) nation, or constructed in Orwellian terms as ‘present absentees’ (see footnote 34, p.133). Others who are present as individuals but not ‘nationals’, who are absent even while present, or who have actually been physically removed (p.140-2) can be seen to not exist. They have no legitimate ownership of the land, now or in the past, according to any official Israeli documentation, and cannot therefore be conceptualised as victims of the Zionist project. As I shall demonstrate, the only way that these Others have been able to ‘return’ to the Zionist consciousness is as hostile, irrational beasts trying to claim what rightfully belongs to ‘the Jews’. Accordingly, their sometimes violent efforts have been met with bemusement, fear, and a rejoinder of violence.

Shohat 1999 p.12; for an example of this terminology in practice see Dershowitz 2003 p.88). In reality, a range of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors drove Jews from the Middle East to Israel, including the actions of organised European Zionists in the Middle East, the assistance of Arab regimes (indirectly financed by Israel), and the role of “‘radical’ secular or religious Arab nationalists” who “began to identify non-Zionist indigenous Jews as a potential Zionist fifth column” (Behar 2007, p.597).
From Charter to Commonsense

Founding Charter documents and Acts need to be read alongside policy decisions which reinforce ressentiment depictions of Us and Other. In this section, I explore two significant sets of policy decisions. One pertains to educational policies and particularly the teaching of Jewish history; the other pertains to the official adoption of a certain narrative regarding the Holocaust. We can see, in both sets of policies, a depiction of the Virtuous Us to be contrasted to Evil Others. Even without actively invoking the Palestinian / Arab Other, policies advancing Jewish entitlement can be interpreted in light of the ongoing ressentiment pair with the Palestinian nationalist discourse. Such policies have not equipped Israeli Jews to make sense of their relationship with those forced to yield to the juggernaut of Zionism in Palestine. This has heightened Zionist ressentiment, since there is no way of understanding resistance to colonialist or racist policies from within such a paradigm, except as anti-Semitic hatred of Jews by Evil Others.

Education and Ressentiment

The education system in Israel has been a key means of instilling ‘rightful’ ownership of Palestine, denying the presence and hence the basis for resistance of the Other. Educational syllabi are powerful tools in all nationalisms:

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

When it comes to Israel’s ‘national’ syllabus, the education system prior to the state’s establishment set the tone for what followed. For example, when the Hebrew University was founded in Jerusalem in 1929, the decision was made to set up
not one but two history departments: one named Department of Jewish History and Sociology; the other, Department of History. *All the history departments of all the other universities in Israel followed suit* – Jewish history was to be studied in isolation from the history of the gentiles because the principles, tools, concepts and time frame of these studies were completely different (Sand 2009, p.102, my italics).

The people setting up these universities wholeheartedly adopted the notion that ‘the Jews’ constituted an eternal nation whose homeland was Palestine. Academics at all Israeli universities would go on to educate generations of students in this precept, meaning that the critical skills applied in the generalist study of history would not be available to thinking about ‘the Jews’ (Sand 2009, p.102). Whilst it is not unusual to find a disproportionate focus on the specific ‘national’ history in any given country, what sets this particular case apart is not only teaching of national myth as fact, but the pedagogical tools, in particular the Bible. The narrative of Jewish history outlined in Chapter Two, derived from the Bible and adopted through individuals’ experiences of ressentiment, was now being taught as fact, firstly in the school syllabus of the yishuv, and later in the State of Israel.

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

Students were taught

an ethnocentric and ideologically committed version of history that emphasised the Jewish people’s moral and intellectual contributions to humanity and insisted repetitively on Jewish martyrology through the ages and, as a logical corollary, on the inevitable necessity of the Zionist solution to the perennial Jewish problem (Goldberg 2006, p.105-6).

After Israel’s establishment, the centrality of the Bible continued as State officials deliberately involved themselves in the work of university academics as part of a nation-building programme.
Israel’s first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, began engaging with intellectuals immediately after the 1948 War, focusing on promoting their Biblical studies, “not to bring the ‘People of the Book’ back to religion or tradition” but “to prove, using ‘ancient history’, the Jews’ right to ownership of the land…” (Sand 2011, p.63).

The employment of the Bible as a textbook for studying history and learning one’s identity has thus inculcated in Israeli youth from primary school to university their membership of the eternal Jewish nation, rightfully reclaiming its home in Palestine. This depiction of a virtuous mission, reinforced by the notion of ‘choseness’, means that resistance can only be digested as irrational Evil. Thus although the Other in Palestine is not explicitly invoked in this depiction of the Us, the very omission of the Other renders its ‘return’ inexplicable and thus terrifying.28

The Holocaust and Ressentiment

Representations of the Us can also be seen in how the Holocaust has been formally claimed by the Israeli state. In the resulting depiction, the Evil Other figures prominently and, as I shall demonstrate later, has proved very transferrable to non-Jewish residents of Palestine. But here I focus on the Us; in particular how the Zionist discourse has both claimed and repelled the terrible events in Europe to establish Israel as a garrison state for the ‘virtuous Jewish nation’.

The ressentiment formula of a virtuous Jewish nation under attack from evil Others might seem like it was developed especially so that the horrors of the Holocaust could later be inserted, affirming in horrifying terms the accuracy of the ressentiment Zionist depiction. However, events were not this clear cut; attitudes of the Zionist settler population in Palestine towards the Holocaust were not

28 Since the state’s foundation, non-Jews in Israel have shared this syllabus, albeit in Arabic and in separate schools (Jamal 2008 p.302). Arab students are compelled to learn Hebrew and Jewish culture (Saban 2004 p.939) and non-Jews tend to be excluded from syllabus constriction, thus the ‘Arab’ or ‘Palestinian’ historical narrative is largely absent (Jamal 2009 p.498).
fixed until well after Israel’s establishment, when her early statesmen recognised its political potential to legitimise the Jewish state internationally, and also with a pedagogical purpose for her new citizenry at home (Zertal 2005; Arendt 1976, p.9-10; 19). Over time, the Holocaust would become such an essential part of the ressentiment Zionist discourse that it seems hard to imagine it was ever treated in an unsympathetic manner by early Zionist pioneers. But by starting with this representation, we can observe how the Holocaust was subsequently integrated into a nationalist discourse that both maintained a distance from Jewish victimhood (‘The New Jew’) and simultaneously relied upon it (‘the Virtuous Victim’).

Before Israel’s creation, there had been a crossover between the Zionist attitude towards Jews in Europe and that of Europe’s Judeophobes; namely that Jews constituted an alien nation fulfilling a parasitic role in the economy (Sand 2009; Rose 2005; Arendt 1976). Accordingly, Zionists had been complicit in the project of removing Jews from Europe, enjoying the protection of Nazi officials whilst they attempted to secure the most physically promising specimens for Palestine (Arendt 1976, p.58-61; Zertal 1998). A famous quote from David Ben-Gurion declared: “If I knew that it was possible to save all the children of Germany by transporting them to England, and only half by transferring them to the Land of Israel, I would choose the latter...” (cited in Gilbert 1987, para. 7, see also Zertal p.160 for a discussion of similar calculations). Such attitudes, understandable from the pragmatic viewpoint of those building a nationalist movement, hardly qualified the Zionists of Palestine to become spokespeople for the Holocaust’s victims.

However, I will explain that as it became apparent that the Holocaust could brutally affirm the content of the ressentiment Zionist discourse, it was incorporated in a way that henceforth precluded other possible interpretations. Europe’s traumatised survivors had already been claimed as human capital and legitimatory buttressing for the Jewish State – albeit contemptuously housed in yet more camps and held up as acquiescent to their own destruction (see Zertal 1998 Chapter 7 esp p.221 for Ben-Gurion’s interactions and treatment of survivors, see also p.264-9 for a discussion
of how refugees were depicted in popular culture). But as survivors’ and victims’ experiences were also claimed – as Israel took ownership of Europe’s darkest hour – the *ressentiment* discourse gained its most irrefutable ‘proof’ yet of the Evil of Others.

Israeli historian Idith Zertal (2005, 1998) highlights the role played in this process by Israel’s first generation of statesmen, who

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

The statesmen used institutions like the Knesset and Supreme Court to affix certain understandings of identity – both of the Us and the Other, which can be seen as contributing to Israel’s ethnocratic Charter.

Notably, the decision by the ruling Mapai party in 1950 to prosecute Jews implicated in the deaths of others marked a distinct turning point in what had previously been a policy of distance from the ‘shameful’ European Holocaust. Zertal explains that during the awful processes of internment and genocide, some individual Jews had collaborated with the Nazis in order to attain favours or merely survive. In doing so, they might have been responsible for the deaths of others. The decision to try these alleged “Jewish collaborators” in Israel gave legitimacy to the idea of a single ‘Jewish nation’ whose members were entitled to intervene in the Holocaust’s aftermath regardless of their own backgrounds (Zertal 2005, p.66). The trials were used to make a Europe-Palestine connection, with the single ‘Jewish nation’ under attack from Evil Others as the common denominator. This linkage of Europe and Palestine via the Holocaust generated the “implication... that Jews carried the Holocaust or a potential holocaust within them wherever they went” (Zertal 2005, p.63). Through the so-called “collaborator trials”, this would be instilled into the State’s ethnocratic Charter.
However, the trials were problematic for the new Israeli statesmen in terms of dealing with deviations from the virtue that Jewish identity was supposed to represent. Accordingly, the events recounted could not be absorbed into the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse.

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

Israel’s founding statesmen thus had to modify the results of these trials, even as the trials themselves were able to cement ‘possession’ of the Holocaust. Accordingly, the trials were accompanied by the introduction, in 1953, of a law which saw “the Holocaust and Heroism” officially remembered, with an emphasis placed on those who had resisted the Nazis. The law thus embedded a sanitised version of the Holocaust into Israel’s Charter, ensuring that future Israelis would absorb a particular relationship to the Jews who perished, and accept the relationship between their deaths and the State of Israel (Zertal 2005, p.85). Evil would remain the province of the Other; those of the Us who had participated were “purge[d]” as criminals (Zertal 2005 p.66) and hence extricated from the Virtuous nation. Meanwhile the 1953 law made an explicit connection between the Zionist settlers of Palestine and the minority of armed Jewish resisters in Europe – alike in their failure to acquiesce to Evil Others.

This “purging” of members of the Us who transgress the image of virtue has been an ongoing feature of Israeli society. Kirstein Keshet (2006) notes that when members of the Left-leaning MachsomWatch (Checkpoint Watch) document the ill treatment of Palestinians in by the Army and Border Police, they often “point out the ethnic or class origins” of these individuals. “By defining them as new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union or Ethiopia or as members of minority groups, it is possible to claim that they do not represent ‘us’ – Ashkenazi/Jewish Israelis – who are allegedly decent and humane,” (p.114).
Hannah Arendt’s account of the Jerusalem trial of Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann in 1961 demonstrates again how criminal trials were used to embed certain values into the State’s Charter. Arendt (1976) suggests that prosecutor Hausner, the mouthpiece of Ben-Gurion, introduced a wide array of evidence into the court in order to “paint a picture” of the Holocaust (p.225). This reflects the pedagogical purposes attached to the trial by Israel’s political leadership (Zertal 2005, p.103). The judges were unwilling to limit the testimonies of large numbers of witnesses who had responded to advertisements, recounting horrors that could not be linked to Eichmann and were thus of limited relevance. Arendt (1976, Chapter XIV) points to the exclusion of stories about non-Jews who saved lives, and regards the trial as directed towards a particular vision of Israeli and Jewish life that went well beyond the delivery of justice for criminal acts; a vision we can regard as further cementing the state’s ressentiment Charter.

Today, concludes Grinberg, “we, the victims of the Holocaust, are the ultimate a-historical victim of human history through the generations” (2009, p.113). The ressentiment Charter has become common-sense, and the ethnocratic State of Israel, with its institutionalised reified identities, is understood by its Jewish citizens as the single bastion of protection. In the next section, exploring how different categories of Arab have been created and mobilised within the Zionist discourse, I will revisit the invocation of the Holocaust and explore its implications for the demonisation of ‘Arabs’.

**Five Legal Categories of Other...and One Symbolic One.**

The sections above have explored the construction of the Us in terms that either directly employ ressentiment or depict the Us in a framework in which a ressentiment reading of Others is the only one which makes sense. In this section, I look at how the Other in Palestine has been constructed, both discursively and legally, in the years since Israel’s establishment. Chapter Two explained how the lens of ressentiment Zionism did not enable European settlers in Palestine to make sense of the people already living in their (supposedly empty) ‘homeland’. With a sense of virtue affixed to both
their identities and their national project, idealistic Zionists digested indigenous opposition as a repeat of European ‘pogroms’; they thought that they were hated for being Jews instead of for being settler-colonialists. Accordingly, when Zionists experienced violence at the hands of non-Jews in Palestine, they employed the tropes of *ressentiment* imported from Europe and depicted Palestinians as Evil Others (see previous chapter p.104). Here, I describe how this pattern continued well into Israel’s first decades, when Zionism’s Others were responding not just to the arrival of settler colonialists, but to the establishment of a state based upon their own negation – notably the exclusion of many former residents from their land and homes. The measures undertaken by the Israeli state formed part of a series of political, legal and military decisions creating formal categories of Other. Yet while these categories were giving rise to different experiences and identities for the individuals woven into them, there remained an over-arching depiction of the Evil Other which reduced all such individuals back to a discursive representation. I will argue that the complexity of this situation has ultimately reinforced the *ressentiment* Zionist depiction of Us and Other.

I had a debate with one of the dissidents, Meron Benvenisti, in which we disagreed on the meaning of Palestinian nationhood. Benvenisti took a primordialist view, regarding ‘the Jews’ as an ancient tribe (not to even be sullied by modern terms like ‘nation’), and depicting ‘Palestinians’ in a groupist sense as having been divide-and-ruled by Israel, so that their own nation was now splintered into Israeli citizens, non-citizens and international residents. I took a constructivist view, suggesting that individuals in each legal category had different identities based on their contexts. Our argument highlighted the complexity of bringing together the multiple legal categories of ‘Palestinian’ or ‘Arab’ and the single discursive one that depicts the Other as a monolithic, and usually Evil, collective (although Benvenisti’s depiction was of the Other was more nuanced).

The complexity relates to the difficulty in talking about the actual identities of non-Jews in Israel/Palestine without going into significant detail. Excessive detail can be the enemy of understanding; it
invites the kind of simplification that can be offered by the ‘groupist’ squashing-down to a single nation. But then the minute we try to talk about a single Palestinian discourse or identity, we find ourselves dealing with different ‘groups’ that do, indeed, have different experiences based on their contexts. The legal reality tells us one thing which is too complex; the more simplified groupist depiction of the Other employed by ressentiment Zionism falls apart the minute it is investigated. Thus attempts to analyse the Other from within the ressentiment Zionist paradigm are problematic; they produce a kind of ‘moving target’ which cannot really be understood. I argue that this crisis of understanding contributes to a more strident ressentiment depiction as that Other becomes harder to comprehend.

Since my purpose is to embark on a discussion which explains the evolution of ressentiment through the creation of numerous legal categories, my reader must join me in a discussion of some detail, given that the only alternative is a cursory groupist account which would risk reproducing elements of the ressentiment discourse. For my discussion to be effective, I must clarify that my analysis differentiates between how ressentiment Zionism has referred to metaphorical Others (within the discourse), and how actual Others have been objectively created through laws and policies. Whilst ressentiment Zionism has targeted a generalised ‘Arab’ as its Evil Other from Zionist settlement onwards (Yadgar 2003b, p.178), the ethnocratic Israeli state has over time created five distinct legal categories of ‘Arab’ or ‘Palestinian’. Individuals belonging to these categories have had their own unique experiences as they interface with ethnocratic Israel. At times, their causes and conversations have overlapped; at others they have been counterposed. Common to all has been their depiction by Zionism as the Evil Other, and their counter-depiction of the Zionist Jew in the same terms. The founding of Israel initially created three objective categories of ‘Arabs’ with different legal identities, and this was the status quo from 1948 to 1966. I shall explore these categories and some representations of the ‘Arabs’ deemed to belong to them first, before moving onto the categories created later.
The ‘Israeli Arab’ Other

The first category of Other created with the establishment of ethnocratic Israel was the so-called ‘Israeli Arab’ who lived within the borders of the Jewish state but was not a Jew. The ‘Israeli’ part refers to the citizenship of this cohort, which they were eventually able to enjoy after the abolition of martial law in 1966; the ‘Arab’ part “subsume[s] [them] under the broader Arab category” whilst denying any specific belonging to Palestine (Peteet 2005, p.161). Whilst ‘Israeli Arabs’ are often represented as an ignored, de-legitimised “national minority” (Ghanem 1998; Rabinowitz 2001), this ‘minority-ness’ is itself a product of the ethnocratic state, which must first create ‘majorities’ and ‘minorities’ before it can privilege or de-privilege them. The ratio of ‘ethnic groups’ or ‘nations’ reified by the state can be subject to manipulation, and indeed Israel’s initial majority of ‘Jews’ was very small. Accordingly, the years on either side of her creation saw Zionist activists deliberately altering these proportions so that the state could be, in their eyes, both ‘Jewish’ and ‘democratic’. A manageable ‘national minority’ of ‘Israeli Arabs’ was created through the Law of Return, and the refusal to permit the return of non-Jewish refugees after the 1948 War, which I will examine below.

Whilst this thesis does not focus on the privations experienced by ‘Israeli Arabs’, it is necessary to briefly illustrate how such legal categorisation has affected the day-to-day lives of Israel’s non-Jewish citizens, to make it clear that they form a category distinct from Israeli Jews. Privileges awarded to Jews and restrictions upon non-Jewish engagements in public and private affairs are many and varied; a brief list is offered here.

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30 This is not the preferred description of many individuals who choose to emphasise their ‘Palestinianess’. I employ the Israeli terminology precisely because it reflects the non-consensual aspect of labelling Others.

31 The emphasis on the ‘Israeli’ part of this name also represents a desire by the state to ‘Israelise’ – to a degree – its ‘Arab’ citizens. The idea behind this is one of co-option; ‘Arabs’ are encouraged to enjoy the individual rights their citizenship bestows on them, with the hope that this will ameliorate their dissatisfaction as non-Jews in a Jewish state (see, for example, Ha’aretz Editorial 2007).
• Vast tracts of land within Israel are nationalised or in the hands of international Jewish bodies which allocate them to Jews only (Yiftachel 2006, p.139-40); “Israel’s Arab citizens are currently prevented from purchasing, leasing or utilizing land in the entire area of the regional councils, an area that constitutes around 80 percent of the country” (Yiftachel 2006, p.110).

• Israeli laws and policies have historically given priority to Jewish communities’ abilities to exclude ‘undesirables’ from living within them (Yiftachel 2006, p.142; Rabinowitz 1997 Ch.3; Khoury 2007), though a six-year court case recently saw one instance of this being overturned (Khoury 2011).

• Demarcating Israel as a Jewish state explicitly excludes the ‘minority’ from participating in the construction of the common good (Rouhana 1998, p.281), or from meaningful participation in decision-making bodies crafting policies which affect their lives (see Saban 2004, p.972-982 for a discussion of recent advancements but continued limitations; see also Ghanem 1998, p.433).

• Israel’s Palestinian citizens are excluded from otherwise-compulsory military service, which precludes them from having to participate in the Occupation, but also denies them access to a range of benefits including superior mortgage conditions and jobs (Peled 2008, p.338; Rabinowitz 1997, p.54; Ghanem 1998, p.433)

• Resources including infrastructure and new townships are heavily weighted in parts of the land where Jews live (Ghanem 1998, p.435).

• A ‘Basic Law’ – the closest Israel comes to a Constitution – passed in 1985 embeds the status of the State as Jewish and democratic.32 A party “cannot run today for the Knesset if it proposes a replacement of the State of Israel with a bi-national state, even if it suggests that such a transformation be done through democratic and non-violent means and even if it propagates its position via legitimate and non-violent means” (Peleg 2003, 'Israeli duality' section; para 5). The result: “any democratic struggle to change the state’s Zionist character would be almost impossible” (Yiftachel 2006, p.105).

• The “Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law” (2003) prevents any non-Israeli living in the Occupied Territories (in reality; Palestinians) from gaining citizenship to Israel via marriage to an Israeli (in reality, a Palestinian citizen of Israel), hence denies Israel’s non-Jewish citizens

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32 Whilst this law was ostensibly passed to prevent far-right parties running on the basis of expelling or removing citizenship from ‘Arabs’, it has not prevented parties like “Israel is our Home” (Yisrael Beiteinu) from espousing ‘transfer’. Whilst the effort at protecting democracy is noteworthy, the locking-in of the state’s Jewish character and the assertion that this fits unproblematically with democracy is a significant trade-off for Israeli citizens, regardless of their ascribed identity, who would like to see Israel become a state of its citizens.
the right to establish a family with a partner of their choosing (Schocken 2008, p.334; Peled 2007a; Saban 2004, p.962). 33

- Two Laws passed in 2011 chip away at the rights of all Israelis, but target activists for Palestine. It is now illegal for organisations commemorating the Nakba to receive public money (Groups petition Israeli high court to annul Nakba law 2011); another law “allows the penalisation of any Israeli calling for a boycott of Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories” (Freedom in Israel 2011).

_The Refugee Other_

The second formal category of ‘Arab’ created with Israel’s establishment was the refugees of 1948, a distinct set of legal persons according to United Nations’ Resolution 194 (1948), which proclaims their right to return home. 700,000 non-Jewish refugees left what would become the Jewish state (Kovel 2007; Morris 2001); many of them ended up in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, and a significant number in the West Bank and Gaza. The latter were supposed to be part of the ‘Palestinian’ state; after Israel’s decisive territorial expansion in 1948, they were controlled by Jordan and Egypt respectively. 34

In contemporary scholarship, there has been heated argument about Plan Dalet, the Zionist leadership’s war-time policy to ethnically cleanse areas of the soon-to-be Jewish state of their non-Jewish inhabitants, contributing to the refugee exodus (for an analysis, see Lentin 2010, p.109-10). Whilst it cannot be disputed that massacres were used to wipe out the non-Jewish inhabitants of villages and towns and frighten away others (Morris 2004a; Pappe 2004), it remains contested how high up the chain the order went or how early in the piece it was established (Kimmerling 2004,

33 This law very occasionally impacts on those who possess the privileged Jewish identity, such as Uri Davis and his non-Jewish wife, Miyasar, noted in Chapter Four.

34 Some ‘Israeli Arabs’ were also internal refugees, paradoxically termed ‘present absentees’. These individuals had fled their homes but remained in the borders of the new state, and were subsequently prohibited from reclaiming their properties. Their attempts to return to their homes were regarded as enemy incursions, but they would eventually be awarded basic citizenship as ‘Israeli Arabs’ (Davis 2003; Piterberg 2001).
1983), and whether it was indeed, ‘a master plan for expulsion’ (Pappe 2001, p.98). However, regardless of intentions,

[t]he really important decision, which was conscious and explicit, was to make sure that the collapse of the Palestinian community that unfolded under the pressures of all-out war between Israel and the Arab states would be irreversible (Piterberg 2001, p.56, my italics).

The response of the new Israeli state to the refugees – permanent exclusion and the confiscation or destruction of property – demonstrates the strength of the meanings the ressentiment discourse had come to apply to ‘Jewish’ and non-‘Jewish’ identities. There was an instrumental component in that Zionists were establishing an ethnocratic state in which there needed to be more individuals belonging to one category of person than the other in order for the state to also be legitimately recognised as a democracy (at least in the eyes of the founders). This need to build a ‘Jewish’ numerical majority was a pressing problem that many Zionists had already considered in the years leading up to Israel’s establishment (see, for example, quote by Arlosoff, cited in previous chapter, p.108). Hence the War facilitated the exclusion of Others; it provided a means of “spirit[ing] them across the border” (Herzl in Piterberg 2008, p.39). However, there was also a significant ressentiment basis behind the exclusion of the refugees; Zionism stereotyped and blamed them for what it depicted as violent opposition to the peaceful establishment of the Jewish State (for an example of this automatic stereotyping and blame, see the arguments advanced in Dershowitz 2003, Chapter 12). The discourse could not digest that the paradigm behind the State’s founding was inherently hostile to Others, who would necessarily need to be transferred out of the territory or designated as second-class citizens in order for the plan to proceed (see Piterberg 2008, Chapter 2).

35 A completely different point of contention relates to the virtue of the plan, with one of the supposedly critical ‘revisionist historians’ responsible for unearthing it later extolling its praises (Morris 2004b; Shavit 2004).

36 The decision that the refugees were ‘unwelcome Others’ was implicit in the desire to establish a Jewish state and hence preceded the War. At worst, the expulsion was deliberately planned, at best it was perpetuated by the nascent Jewish State – the effect is the same. Moreover, the perception that Zionists could create a ‘Jewish democratic state’ as long as the numbers were right is inherently problematic – for a critical discussion of the incompatibility of ethnic preference and democracy see Ghanem et al (1998) and Yiftachel (2006).
This became simplified to the extent that the prescribed ethnic identity of the refugees was sufficient for them to be excluded as unwelcome enemies, rhetoric which continues with the representation of their potential return as an unacceptable incursion which would destroy the Jewish state (Dershowitz 2003, p.85; Grinberg 2009, p.114).

‘Generic’ Arabs and Collapsible Others

The third category of ‘generic’ Arab invoked with Israel’s establishment was really a catch-all for what remained outside the first two categories. ‘Generic Arabs’ were non-Jews who fell outside of Israel’s ambit in surrounding ‘Arab’ states, depicted as an amorphous horde hell-bent on Israel’s destruction.

Idith Zertal (2005) illustrates how the Zionist ressentiment discourse collapsed all three categories of ‘Arab’ (internal, refugee and generic) into the broader category of Evil Other during the show trial of Adolf Eichmann. She describes the trial as a

landmark in the process of the organized, explicit mobilization of the Holocaust in the service of Israeli politics and state policy, especially in the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict (Zertal 2005 p.99).

During this period, references to Nazism were liberally applied to ‘Arabs’; Prime Minister Ben-Gurion spoke publicly of Nazis hiding in Egypt and compared the speeches of the Egyptian president to Hitler (p.99). The “transference”, as Zertal calls it, “of the Holocaust situation on to the Middle East reality”, was done

in two distinctive ways: first by massive references to the presence of Nazi scientists and advisers in Egypt and other Arab countries, to the ongoing connections between Arab and Nazi leaders,

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37 The same logic underpinned the treatment of ‘present absentees’ (see footnote 34, p.129) whose exclusion from their homes and properties also derived from their not being Jewish (Piterberg 2001; Davis 2003).
and to the Nazi-like intentions and plans of the Arabs to annihilate Israel. The second means was systematic references – in the press, on the radio, and in political speeches – to the former Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin El-Husseini, his connection with the Nazi regime in general and with Eichmann and his office in particular. In those references he was depicted as a prominent designer of the Final Solution and a major Nazi criminal. The deeds of Eichmann – and other Nazi criminals – were rarely mentioned without addition of the Arab-Nazi dimension (Zertal 2005, p.100).

Eichmann’s “Israeli prosecutor insisted on inflating the Mufti’s role in the planning and implementation of Nazi crimes” (p.102). This, says Zertal, was “very much in line with the specific pedagogical aspect that Ben-Gurion wanted to assign to the trial,” (p.103). Many years later, the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, completed in the 1980s, depicts the Mufti as one of the great designers and perpetrators of the Final Solution: his entry is twice as long as each of the entries devoted to Goebbels and Goering, longer than the two combined entries for Heydrich and Himmler and longer than the entry on Eichmann... [I]n the Hebrew edition... the entry on El-Husseini is almost as long as that on Hitler (Zertal 2005, p.103).

This astounding detail illustrates just how effectively Israel’s political class embedded into the State’s Charter the idea that the European Holocaust was intimately related to, and orchestrated by, ‘Arabs’ in Palestine. Zertal concludes that Ben-Gurion’s legacy to his people by means of the Eichmann trial was two-fold: eternal hatred of the Jews still endured despite the existence of the State of Israel, and the Nazi-like enemy was still rallied at the gates of the nation-in-siege (p.114).

Six years after the Eichmann trial, Israel was engaged in the Six Day War, in which she dramatically conquered territories including the West Bank and the Gaza strip. During the War, Israel’s leaders invoked the Holocaust and combined it with the “redemption of the ancient land” to create a sense of “sacred war” (Zertal 2005, p.113). The “Arab enemy” was represented in the media as “a new, updated version of the gentile oppressor, equivalent to the Nazi exterminator” (Yadgar 2003a, p.57).
In the outcome of the Six Day War, a fourth category of ‘Arab’ was created in the West Bank and Gaza, the only areas that remained of what was once destined to be the partitioned ‘Arab’ state. Israel’s control over them now meant that she had possession of the entirety of British Mandated Palestine. The lives of the ‘Arabs’ living here would now dramatically change; whether they were refugees from 1948 or people who had lived here for centuries, all would become a new legal category I call Occupied Palestinians – incorporated into the State of Israel but without citizenship. While in Israel’s early years, there had been minimal differentiation in the Zionist discourse between ‘generic’ Arabs and ‘Israeli’ and ‘refugee’ ‘Arabs’, and certainly no ‘Palestinians’ (Peteet 2005, p.161), after the Occupied Palestinian was created there eventually came a grudging recognition from some quarters that a Palestinian ‘nation’ had come to exist (Peteet 2005, p.162). Crucially, however, at moments of conflict, Zionism would still conflate Occupied Palestinians with ‘Israeli Arabs’ and ‘generic’ Arabs to form an amorphous and evil Other (Yadgar 2003b, p.178).

The category of Occupied Palestinians arose out of the desire of Israel’s leaders and population to retain the spoils of the Six Day war. In the Zionist historical narrative, the West Bank and the Gaza strip formed part of ‘The Land of Israel’. Zionists had been able to access these areas prior to 1948, but for the nineteen years following Israel’s establishment, they were banished from these territories, which contained the Old City of Jerusalem and gravesites and geological features dating back to Biblical times, as well as the Hebrew University. Israel’s victory thus inspired a settler movement to integrate the acquired lands into the State (Gorenberg 2006, esp Ch.3-5; 10-11). Though there were indeed some clear strategic military reasons to hold on to portions, these did not endorse the wholesale settlement and occupation which followed, which would prove provocative and difficult to defend militarily (Gorenberg 2006, esp. p. 116, 279). Thus, to the extent that there was a conflict between military strategy and settler-colonialist ideology – and indeed there was a significant crossover – the ressentiment discourse’s rights claim to the entire ‘Land of Israel’ trumped
any concerns about how the large numbers of Others therein could be managed. In advancing ‘Jewish’ settlement of the Occupied Territories, the ressentiment discourse justified the fracturing of Israeli ‘democracy’ (Yiftachel 1999) and the denial of political and ultimately human rights to non-Jews there, festering the bitter conflict that continues to dominate Israel / Palestine. 38

Settlement in the Occupied Territories could not occur under the same premises that had facilitated the establishment of Israel; practices which had continued with the settlement of ‘Arab’ areas after 1948 (see Yiftachel 1993). The Occupied Territories could not officially become part of Israel because that would award citizenship to the non-Jewish Other therein, resulting in a state with a significant population of non-Jews (Gorenberg 2006, p.41). Settlement in the style of a colony was a way of acquiring the land seemingly without its problematic population of Others, or the dowry without the bride (Grinberg 2009; Gorenberg 2006, p.63-4). Jews who settled in the Occupied Territories would thus be full citizens of Israel and, over the years, be granted special benefits such as housing subsidies and tax breaks. The State would build infrastructure for them, provide them with military protection, facilitate their acquisition of additional lands and integrate them into life within Israel’s ‘official borders’. All the while they would be living alongside non-citizens – non-Jews – denied these benefits and increasingly paying for them in terms of land, resources and rights, which would only strengthen the ressentiment discourse of this population. The privations Occupied Palestinians would endure over the coming years would see their particular discourse – built upon the original ‘Palestinian’ ressentiment discourse responding to the Zionist project (see above p.105-6) – forming the most significant ressentiment pair with Zionism.

Given the large number of refugee Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories, it is not surprising that the population here was already well-versed in ressentiment; after 1967, there was more fuel for this discourse. Title deeds became meaningless as Jewish settlers claimed privately-owned land, and the State nationalised vast tracts for development; destroying villages, planting forests over

38 I will support the claim that Occupied Palestinians’ human rights have been eroded below on p.138-40.
them, and subsequently building a giant wall through them (Davis 2003; Piterberg 2001). Israeli settlers destroyed the livelihood of Palestinian agriculturalists with minimal interference by the military (Hass 2007), and took over the heart of Hebron, victimising non-Jewish neighbours (Shragai 2007). There has been no recourse for Occupied Palestinians; only more Jewish settlements serviced by new roads proscribed for Occupied Palestinians; requiring more water and amenities and electricity and rubbish dumps (Kovel 2007, p.116-117; p.216-217). Jewish soldiers with machine guns restrict non-Jews with roadblocks and require permits for movement, work and education; there are house searches and demolitions, personal searches and curfews. Civilians are used as hostages by the military in manoeuvres (Dor 2005, p.49); such measures are legitimated within the ressentiment Zionist discourse by the desire to save Jewish soldiers’ lives (Harel 2007, para 2, 7). Yet whilst protecting Jew from non-Jew in the Territories might seem self-evident within the Zionist discourse, the punitive measures of occupation have functioned to cement Israeli control of the land, supported by Israeli courts lending a veneer of respectability (for the Jewish Us) to the disposessions therein.

The effect of these processes in re-ordering perceptions of reality is illustrated by an account from a member of MachsomWatch, which places female observers at military checkpoints in Occupied Palestine. One Watcher’s report describes how soldiers at a checkpoint drive their armoured personnel carrier (APC) extremely close to an Occupied Palestinian woman lifting her child out of a pram, with another child standing close by. When chastised by the Watcher, the soldier, ‘O’, responds: “they signalled her to move and she stopped deliberately.” The Watcher, Aya Kaniuk, ruminates:

The language with which we describe the world is intertwined and inseparable from the reality it creates...For O, the natural thing was the roaring APC. The woman was the aggressor, stopping the vehicle in its natural course. For us the opposite is true, her right to stand was the natural thing while the roaring machine was the aggressor, the unnatural force (cited in Kirstein Keshet 2006, p.61).
The Zionist justification for the privations of the occupation – though not for its overall practice – lies in the explanation for the sometimes violent response to it. The tactics of Occupied Palestinians shifted from a top-down terror campaign against Israel orchestrated by political elites to a more popular resistance movement with the uprisings (intifadas) against the Occupation in 1987 and 2000. The second intifada was symbolised by suicide bombings by ‘martyrs’ from the Occupied Territories, often carried out within Israel’s official borders. These multiple murders cemented the resentment Zionist line that the ‘Palestinians’ – by now there was growing consensus on their existence (Sharoni and Abu-Nimer 2003) – must be evil monsters (Dor 2005; Yadgar 2003b, p.180). Their ongoing deprivations were not seen as relevant. Benny Morris suggests that

when one has to deal with a serial killer, it’s not so important to discover why he became a serial killer. What’s important is to imprison the murderer or to execute him… [I]n some way the Palestinian society itself… is in the state of being a serial killer (Shavit 2004, p.47-8).

The Other and the Us in the Media

Depictions of the Other in Israel’s mainstream media have strengthened the resentment depiction of a virtuous Us under inexplicable attack from an Evil Other. The media is often “described as one of the main realms in which the national community is ‘imagined’” (Yadgar 2002, p.58), and in numerous instances around the world the construction of “impure, dangerous Others with evil intents” has been achieved through “highly charged negative images…” which “evoke fear, hatred, loathing and /or anger [and] mobilize nationalist sentiments…” (Langman 2006, p.72).

This is illustrated in the Israeli case by Dor’s (2005) detailed study of how Israel’s military reoccupation of the West Bank in 2002 was reported by key local newspapers and television stations.39 In particular, Dor suggests that media depictions of Yassir Arafat, President of the

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39 The reoccupation, Operation Defensive Shield, followed the breakdown of the Camp David talks in 2000, after which Prime Minister Ehud Barak circulated a narrative that Israel had made a generous offer to the Palestinian leadership, who rejected it, proving that they were not a partner for peace and hence pushing Israelis to the Right (Dor 2005 p.107). Ariel
Palestinian Authority (the toothless faux ‘Palestinian’ government of the Territories) at the time of the re-occupation, portrayed him as a demonic, omnipotent force.

They all tell the story of a larger-than-life invincible enemy: evil, murderous, cunning, subtle, determined, invincible. He is always in full control of the events in the territories, and even in his isolation in his headquarters in Ramallah only strengthens him; the weaker he grows, the more powerful he becomes; he is absolutely invulnerable; he keeps on lying to everybody and betraying his own people, and most importantly, he is simply enjoying every minute (Dor 2005, p.85)

Arafat’s apparent omnipotence and absolute ‘evil’ are a pertinent reminder of the evil of the ‘Other’ and a sense that ‘we’ are categorically different from him. Israeli Jewish identity is constructed through the media against this image of the Other, with an emphasis on its own virtue. In his study, Dor argues that the imaginary Israeli spoken for during the reoccupation of the West Bank by the media was determined not to be held responsible or blamed for the actions of the government, yet simultaneously supported those actions (Dor 2005, p.6). This, too, is a fitting ressentiment depiction of an Us unable to perceive its own agency and yet defensive. Dor argues that the media during this time period depicted a ‘Jewish’ (not Israeli) nation that had endured great horrors, from pogroms to the Holocaust to the murderous wars waged by ‘Arabs’, and now terrorism from ‘Palestinians’ (Dor 2005, esp. p.18-19). Any responsibility was immediately rejected because of the nation’s ongoing suffering; news sources thus encouraged readers to see themselves as virtuous victims (Dor, 2005 Chapter 1). According to the narrative, these Jewish ‘victims’ were being perversely blamed by Evil Others (the outside world) for defending themselves against ‘More Evil’ Others (Palestinians). This is

Sharon’s subsequent provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque triggered the second Palestinian intifada. With the intifada in full swing and a right-wing government in power, Palestinian militants engaged in a month of regular suicide attacks including one on a Netanya hotel which killed 28 people. Immediately, 20,000 Israeli reservists were called up and over the coming weeks the Israeli military engaged in numerous exercises in the West Bank designed to quell dissent, deter popular resistance and eliminate the ruling apparatus, infrastructure and personnel of the organised Palestinian leadership (Dor 2005 p.3-4).
noteworthy particularly in reports on Israeli fatalities, wherein the moral virtue of the Israeli military is emphasised:

What causes the really heavy losses is the fact that IDF soldiers cannot use the air force or bulldozers, for fear of hurting the innocent civilian population. That’s the basic, fundamental reason for the IDF’s losses in the camp \textit{[in Jenin]} (TV commentator Ron Ben-Yishay cited in Dor 2005 p.63).

Yadgar’s analyses of media reports of the same time period echo such sentiments. He suggests that

the second intifada was perceived and interpreted primarily as violent, unjustified and ungrateful behaviour on the part of the Palestinians, accompanied by insensitivity and lack of understanding for Israel’s distress on the part of the world’s nations (Yadgar 2003b, p.189).

Even the treatment of international reporters by Israeli news organisations reflects the \textit{ressentiment} discourse. Dor (2005) argues that international reporters and the coverage they generated were regarded with hostility by the Israeli media, offering examples in which the reporters were seen as hostile witnesses and in some cases Israeli journalists reported with approval the failures of foreign correspondents to gain access to military areas (p.57-8). He describes a preoccupation with the relationship between international reporters and ‘Palestinians’, and a concern that the former would be susceptible to propaganda from the latter (Dor 2005, Chapter 3). By virtue of their own Otherness, then, international reporters were conflated with the ‘Palestinians’, delivering a narrative of the conflict that unfairly blamed Israel. Dor describes how the daily newspaper \textit{Ma’ariv} printed two photographs next to each other:

Under the caption, “The picture that got published”, appears a photo of an IDF soldier confronting a television crew. Under the caption “The picture that did not get published”, appears a photo of a Palestinian accused of collaborating with Israel, who was lynched by a local mob. \textit{Ma’ariv} – on behalf of all Israelis – is offended by the discriminatory attitude of the world media. This sense of injury conveys a deep message: it portrays the foreign media as engaging in a \textit{discourse of blame} against Israel (Dor 2005, p.24, his italics).
An account of the Israeli media offered by Tamar Liebes (1997) goes some way to explaining why – in the main – it has so whole-heartedly depicted the Us and Other in ressentiment terms. An Editors’ Committee was established in the early days of the state, meeting regularly with military and government officials to ensure that politically contentious stories would not run in any of Israel’s privately owned newspapers. Thus a section of what might otherwise have been independent civil society voluntarily co-opted itself to state control in the name of ‘national’ self-preservation. Liebes (1997) points out that the people who founded the newspapers before Israel’s establishment were essentially the same people who went on to be her first statesmen, sharing a lived experience in Palestine and an ideology of national entitlement that had brought them there. On this basis, the divide between the Israeli state and civil society in her early period was far less marked than we might expect (see also discussion in Sand 2011, p.53-4; 71). Although that divide should arguably have grown with the state’s maturity, ongoing conflict and compulsory military service have kept the state, military and civil society inextricably intertwined, ensuring continued mobilisation of the ressentiment discourse (see Cohen 2001, p.157-8).

Ressentiment to the Present Day

I conclude this section by briefly explaining events up to the present day according to the ressentiment pairing between Zionist and ‘Palestinian’ discourses. I outline the contemporary depiction of ‘Israeli Arabs’ and describe the events leading to the creation of a fifth category of Other in Gaza. I will continue to demonstrate how all categories of Other are collapsible into a single, amorphous entity both ‘Evil’ and responsible for its own suffering.

Whilst a heightened ressentiment pair has developed between Occupied Palestinians and the Zionist discourse since 1967, ‘Israeli Arabs’ have not been immune from ongoing ressentiment targeting. In keeping with the ‘amorphous Evil Other’ conflation of all ‘Arabs’, ‘Israeli Arabs’ have been presented
as a remnant of a much larger hostile mass, and accordingly portrayed as seeking to destroy the Jewish state from within:

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

Objectively, however, possession of Israeli citizenship has placed ‘Israeli Arabs’ in a different situation from Occupied Palestinians (Saban 2004 p.889); they have been depicted (in groupist terminology) as a “trapped minority” fitting uncomfortably between an Jewish state and a Palestinian hinterland (Rabinowitz 2001). The discourse of ‘Israeli Arabs’ is distinct from that of Occupied Palestinians; at times it represents them as part of the ‘Palestinian nation’, at other moments, the discourse emphasises their ‘Israeliness’ and employs claims for either civic equality or national minority status (Sa'di 2000, p.28; Rouhana 1998, p.286; 293; Peled 2007a, p.355-7; Ghanem 1998, p.438-443; Jamal 2008, p.287-8). Since the three claims are incompatible – ‘Israeli Arabs’ cannot simultaneously join the putative Palestinian nation-state, live as equal citizens in a ‘civic Israel’, and live as a protected ‘national minority’ in a ‘Jewish’ or ‘binational’ Israel – ressentiment Zionism depicts ‘Israeli Arabs’ as having only one goal: to destroy Israel. Since this is perceived as a common goal with the Occupied Palestinians (Saban 2004, p.896), it feeds into the ressentiment Zionist conflation of the Evil Other. On this basis, ‘Israeli Arabs’ are demonised with threats of border relocations or transfer to exclude them (Peled 2007a, p.347-350; Kimmerling 2004), a push for them to swear allegiance to the Jewish state (Stewart 2010, para 6,8) and ongoing worries about their fecundity (Sand 2011, p.97). Demographic concerns are so central to the project of ethnocracy with its need for Jewish numerical dominance that “those Jewish Israelis who regard themselves as in the ‘peace camp’ speak in terms of a demographic threat as well,” (Grinberg 2009, p.105).

This ‘minority’ status is imposed by the ethnocratic state, rather than being an objective category.
The population living in Gaza today constitutes a fifth objective category of ‘Arab’ since they live under different political and legal conditions than individuals in the West Bank. Prior to 2005, the Gaza strip to Israel’s south-west had been subject to the same processes of settlement and dispossession as the West Bank; Gaza differed only in that it was geographically separated from the West Bank, and contained less in the way of historically significant artefacts for the ‘Jewish nation’. Perhaps for this reason, and also because it was a small area whose Jewish settlers were greatly outnumbered by their overcrowded ‘Arab’ counterparts, the Israeli government under Ariel Sharon proceeded to ‘disengage’ from it in 2005. This meant a withdrawal of all Jewish settlements and ostensibly a withdrawal of the Army.

The problem was that Gaza, a highly populated urban coastal strip, had no means of providing its population with the necessary means of living, from food to employment to basic infrastructure. In 2006 elections replaced the ‘ruling’ Fatah party with the more extreme Hamas. After a short period of national unity leadership, Hamas seized control in 2007 and the strip was promptly placed under Israeli and international sanctions. Militants continued to fire into Israel, as they had done prior to the ‘disengagement’, which had occurred without any rapprochement and had now worsened into economic deprivation. Israel countered the bombs with a large-scale military operation in 2009, Operation Cast Lead, during which Gaza’s housing and infrastructure was destroyed and 1417 people were killed (Damage to Palestinian People and Property During Operation Cast Lead 2009). Gaza has been placed under a sea and land blockade which has stalled the economy and produced deprivation, illness, malnutrition (Batniji et al. 2009) as well as continued violence. However, this entire scenario is attributed by the resentment Zionist discourse to the deficiencies of ‘Palestinians’. The situation in Gaza demonstrates that ‘they’ did not embrace the ‘independence’ so benevolently granted to them (see, for example, the argument put forward by Shavit 2009), and as such demonstrates their evil as a ‘nation.’ This is then used as evidence why no such policies should

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41 The real rulers continued to be the Israeli government, controlling the flow of people and resources in and out of Gaza.
be pursued in the West Bank; arguably the impulse behind Sharon’s disengagement (Waiting for a Miracle 2005, p.22-23).

Consequently, the occupation and ongoing (mostly) low-level war between Israel and the ‘Palestinians’ (particularly in Gaza but also in the West Bank) results in an ongoing state of enmity. Every encounter simply affirms the ‘truth’ of the ressentiment discourses of both ‘sides’: “Their use of violence is regarded as evidence that they want to kill us.” (Grinberg 2009, p.108). The actions of the Us appear a moral response to the hostility of the Other, mirrored back ad nauseam. On this basis I suggest that the various legal categories of Other have functioned to distract, confuse and divide opposition to the Zionist project. I do not mean that the ‘Palestinians’ had previously formed a single nation which was then categorically broken down by Israel in order to ‘divide and rule’. Rather, I mean that the categories and the regime which determines them are so complex that the Other has become a moving target. It can never be pinned down, precisely because the actual legal categories of Other can be collapsed at any minute into the amorphous symbolic one. Conversely, any attempt to probe the constructed identity of this amorphous symbolic Other becomes complicated by different laws and personal identities – which reflect the competing aims and objectives of people in different political contexts (see also Grinberg 2009, p.107). This inability to attain focus on the Other paralyses analysis, inviting one to cleave to the ressentiment depiction of a single, amorphous Evil Other despite the failure of this depiction to describe material reality. But since the ressentiment depiction continues to offer the moral certainty of Our virtue, this simple mantra can be grasped and held close in the absence of any other easy explanations.

**Conclusion**

We are now at the end of the contextual component of the thesis. This chapter has explored the institutionalisation of the ressentiment Zionist discourse into the ethnocratic state of Israel, which in turn instils a ressentiment Charter into its Jewish population. The Israeli State has reified the Jewish
nation as ‘virtuous victim’ of ‘hateful Others’, whose resistance can only ever be understood in such terms. I have explored how this has been instilled through laws and proclamations; delivered to the population through education and a public discourse surrounding the Holocaust, and invoked simultaneously through five legal categories of Other and a single symbolic one. The status of ‘moving target’ prevents the Other from being understood, since its complexity legitimizes the reduction to stereotypes delivered by ressentiment discourses. Concern for this Other, occurring in the context that I have described, constitutes the dilemma for the dissidents discussed in the remaining chapters. They must negotiate their concern alongside identities which have been produced in this context, and determine whether they can, indeed, relate to their Other as a human being of equal worth.
CHAPTER FOUR: DISSIDENTS IN AN ETHNOCRACY

Introduction

The previous chapters conceptualised Israel as an ethnocratic state with a hegemonic ressentiment discourse depicting the Us as virtuous victim and the Other as Evil. Israeli Jews are privileged by a variety of laws and policies which depict this hegemony as natural; accordingly, resistance from Others is interpreted as attack. Those who want to interpret their Other in a different way must therefore reconceptualise this relationship, negotiating the dominant discourse. This Chapter introduces eleven such individuals who attempt, in different ways, to do this.

These individuals are a disparate collection of people sourced through various means; however, I classify them as ‘dissident’ on the following bases. Firstly, all are Israeli Jews, either by birth or immigration. Not all continue to live in Israel or identify as such, but Israeli Jewish identity has been primary for all of them. Secondly, all take the view that in some regard, Israel is oppressive or unjust to ‘Palestinians’ or ‘Arabs’. Thirdly, all of the dissidents have acted upon this view. Their responses have varied immensely, illustrating that a fitting response to ‘the dilemma’ is by no means a given. The rich variation in the dissidents’ responses enables me to analyse the breadth of possibilities available for thought and action, and how these might be constrained by the hegemonic ressentiment discourse within the ethnocratic state. At the same time, the small number of individuals analysed facilitates deep interrogation of inconsistencies within their narratives.

To introduce the dissidents and explain their suitability for inclusion in this study, I group them into broad categories of academic, activist and commentator (though the three academics are also activists, one of the full-time activists holds academic credentials and another is a religious scholar). I survey the dissidents’ published works, political actions and interview responses, outlining the things they say, and the projects to which they devote their time. In later chapters, the impressive qualities
of the dissidents recede as I interrogate dissonance in their narratives. In this chapter, I present the dissidents at their clearest, demonstrating their commonality in dissent against the dominant depiction of Good Us, Evil Other.

My dissidents reference, discuss and critique each other, sometimes completely unbidden. This interaction demonstrates how discourses are constantly renegotiated. The dissidents’ narratives depict the legal and political freedoms afforded to Israeli Jews by the state (considerably greater than those afforded to Israel’s Palestinian citizens), and also depict the vibrant political culture in Israel. I played this down in the previous chapter, but now bring it to the fore to demonstrate the paradox of constrained identification within a society purporting to offer great democratic freedoms for Jews.

The interactions between me and the dissidents form a significant focus in the next three chapters. I include my own comments and questions as conversational excerpts, and at times discuss my role in the exchanges. Ozkirimli (2003) argues that a constructivist approach to nationalism seeks to challenge and transform (p.343); perhaps the very nature of my project makes it impossible for me to appear to my interview subjects as a detached observer. My approach is generally apparent from my line of questioning, and their responses reflect this. Some welcome me as a fellow traveller; others see me as a challenging outsider. Some interviews are heated, but with one exception, all are warm and mutually respectful.
Academics

Oren Yiftachel

The first dissident chosen for this study was Oren Yiftachel, an academic whose scholarly work brought him to my attention. Yiftachel is a tall, lanky man in his early fifties who seems to live in black jeans and desert boots. He resembles a more attractive version of the film director Quentin Tarantino, constantly infused with energy, with jiggling legs and sharp eyes. This energy is probably necessary for his numerous pursuits; his wife tells me that he often has short power naps and is then wide awake, ready for the next challenge. Yiftachel’s scholarly discipline is political geography, and his intellectual work, some of which I have already employed in this thesis, conceptualises Israel / Palestine as an ethnocracy. Yiftachel’s critique of Israel’s “creeping apartheid” (Yiftachel and Ghanem 2004, p.86-7) extends beyond academia to the liberal daily newspaper, Ha’aretz, and other forums. In his spare time, he works with the disempowered (non-Jewish) Bedouin community around Beersheva. He advances a one-state solution to the Israel / Palestine conflict and has drawn up blueprints for how this might be implemented (2006, Chapter 11).

Yiftachel’s role in this work is complex. I discover his academic writings in 2004 and interview him in 2007, in Perth. In 2010, undertaking the remainder of my interviews in Israel, I briefly stay with Yiftachel and his family in Beersheva, conducting another supplementary interview. My analysis of Yiftachel draws from both interviews as well as his published work. Yiftachel has acted, largely unbidden though gratefully received, as an unofficial supervisor, particularly in the early stages of the work and during my trip to Israel, where he doubled as host and tour guide. As both scholar and private citizen, he is an integral subject of the thesis. His roles cannot easily be reconciled, but overlap is unavoidable when academics construct knowledge upon which others rely. I have chosen to be explicit about these different facets to Yiftachel in the work; hence this section considers his
scholarship as a performance of identity (Riessman 2008) through which he enacts his relationship with the Us and the Other.

For his efforts to transform his society, Yiftachel has paid a high price, professionally and socially. “I’ve been, since the eighties, constantly attacked, and quite often lost jobs, academic jobs and planning jobs, one after the other,” he explains. “You don’t have to feel so sorry for me,” he adds, “because I’ve got other jobs, you know. As compared to the deep racism, say, against Arabs, that they end up not getting any jobs at all” (2007). Yiftachel also claims that he has lost friends and colleagues, and been vilified in the media.

Even my PhD Supervisor has sort of stopped talking to me. And that hurts. But they don’t deal with that at all; they just ... spit the dummy and go. ... I say to them, well let’s talk about – but the minute you mention apartheid, they just go (Yiftachel 2007).

Yiftachel’s hostile reception from Israeli society is telling, given that he maintains a solid affinity to what he refers to as the Jewish or Hebrew people (2007, 2010). He consistently frames his interventions as being in the interest not just of Palestinians but also of Jews. As I shall demonstrate, his way of understanding ethnic identity is crucial to this. He argues for “work[ing] up some social frameworks that can actually transform within, without actually destroying the society” (2007).

“...[I]n that respect you have to adopt some existing categories, knowing of course they are not what they purport to be,” he explains.

They’re not sort of timeless non-changing identities from time immemorial....When there isn’t the colonial factor, when there isn’t the domination in the name of this category, the category can transform itself into something benign...While the Us is overtaking others, people will always be oppressive, we’re always segregative... But while the Us is interested in co-existence it can transform itself from within to be a benign category, right? ... [I]t’s the oppression that has to be first dealt with. And it’s possible to maintain Jewish self-determination without oppressing Others. It’s difficult, but it’s possible, you know (Yiftachel 2007).
Yiftachel condemns Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza since 1967 as having “no moral standing at all,” because at that stage the Jews “did have a homeland” in the already-existent State of Israel (2007). Yet he also critiques the historical dynamics of the Zionist project. He argues for a “mutual apology, although Israel has much more responsibility so Israel has to take responsibility” (2007). Ultimately, he would like to see Israel / Palestine formally reconfigured as a single state with a consociational model of power-sharing. This is in keeping with his idea that ethnic identities should not be stripped from those to whom they are precious. He speaks of a sort of gradual acceptance of the Jewish collectivity, perhaps not a Jewish state but a Jewish collectivity, perhaps like the Maronites and other sort of non-Arab collectivities – or the Kurds – in the Middle East. And then maybe our grandchildren will be able to go to school together first, right. And – then, intermarriage (Yiftachel 2007).

So he does not worry about the Hebrew identity becoming watered down? “We want to hope that love will prevail, at some stage,” he laughs (2007).

Yet this is not to underestimate Yiftachel’s own love of the collective, which he holds in extremely high regard. He argues that ethnic affinity gives people such a framework for existence. Such a purpose in life. This is the project! The project is not to have a Mercedes Benz. [That] is a by-product… But the project is to have this collectivity, with its own history, troubled history, surviving and safe…The project is not individual, right? What gives people meaning, joy, ecstasy, is collective (Yiftachel 2007).

He argues for fluidity, suggesting that “possibly the strongest ethnicity in the world has changed dramatically in the last thirty or forty years” with the influx of Arab Jews and Russians to what had previously been an Ashkenazi identity. He argues for “cultural rights” and “entry and exit freedoms. If I want to become a Ultra-Orthodox, if I want to become an Arab, I should have the right to do so, right?” (Yiftachel 2007).
You will have to, I suppose, adopt certain culture to be an ethnic, you know? But it wouldn’t depend upon your colour or on your mother. This is why I maintain to call it Hebrew. Because a language-based culture allows you more easier entry rather than a religion or history. But I do agree, of course, with the critique ... the minute it becomes oppressive, and I do agree with the critique that is has the potential to become oppressive, right? (Yiftachel 2007)

“But not the critique that it has the inevitability to become oppressive,” I suggest.

“No, it’s not inevitable at all,” he responds.

... [E]thnicity...shouldn’t be defined by bloodlines, and that’s why the word culture is more to my liking ... I don’t think you can, and I don’t think you should, do away with the idea of identities that give people meaning to their life (Yiftachel 2007).

Yiftachel combines his efforts to construct a more open ‘Hebrew’ identity with activism around Bedouin ‘unrecognised villages’, which are denied basic utilities and have any permanent structures regularly demolished (Association of Forty N.D.) Yiftachel has also been involved in the drafting of the proposed academic boycott of Israeli institutions put forward by Palestinian scholars (Yiftachel 2010), though he does not go so far as his colleague Neve Gordon in publicly endorsing a general boycott of Israel.

**Neve Gordon**

Yiftachel’s colleague at Ben-Gurion University is the political scientist Neve Gordon. Gordon wears round, owlish glasses and is in his mid-forties. Gordon has become the Israeli poster-boy for the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, and this, more than anything, has secured his place in this thesis. This mild-mannered academic, who is also an activist in his limited spare time, has urged the world to boycott Israeli products, businesses and institutions as a means of forcing the end of the occupation of Palestine (Gordon 2009). Gordon has, as a result, generated a firestorm of opposition both in Israel and amongst the Zionist diaspora (Ravid 2009a, 2009b; Russo 2009). Supporting BDS is a radical position for any Israeli Jew to take; Gordon’s stance is particularly
radical considering that he is employed as an academic by a state institution. His critics, including the University’s president and a number of American donors, argue that Gordon cannot effectively lobby internationally for university funding if he advocates a boycott of his institution (Russo 2009; Carmi 2009). Needless to say, Gordon has become a controversial figure in Israel despite (or perhaps because of) his pedigree; he served as a paratrooper and sustained serious injuries and permanent disability in combat. Prior to meeting Gordon, I have read some of his opinion pieces and several articles surrounding the BDS controversy. In the interview, we discuss several topics arising out of his work.

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

My first political memory is from the age of ten, when I grew up here in Beersheva, and I came home and said something like, “this is Arab’s work,” and the phrase “Arab’s work” in Hebrew means bad work...work that’s not done well. And my mother chastised me and basically said that it’s a racist phrase, and that I should never use it again.... (Gordon 2010).

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

After his military service and a year abroad, Gordon returned to Israel and joined a group called Gaza’s Team for Human Rights that did human rights in Gaza, and later Physicians for Human Rights, and was the director of that group when it basically just began (Gordon 2010).

Though he would ultimately become disenchanted with NGO work, concluding that “resistance becomes professionalised, a nine-to-five kind of activist,” Gordon’s experiences here helped him to “know... what was going on first hand.”

“[L]ater,” he continues,
I went and studied in the US, came back here and this was during the Oslo years, ... was active again, and then the second intifada erupted, and then understood that the whole ... Peace Now as a political movement, and NGO, were not the answers for change, and then was among the founders of Ta‘ush in Jerusalem. The whole idea of a much more democratic Jewish Arab partnership for change and the move from protest to resistance, from standing with a sign to direct action forms of resistance (Gordon 2010).

Ta‘ush, Gordon explains, is an “Arabic word for partnership.” He likes it because it cannot be co-opted like the word ‘peace’. “Cos everyone’s for peace! Bush is for peace, Sharon is for peace, Netanyahu is for peace, Sharon is for peace, the settlers are for peace...” (Gordon 2010).

After being involved with Ta‘ush for “several years,” Gordon had children and “became a nice bourgeoisie,” though rather than resting on his laurels he helped to set up a Jewish-Palestinian kindergarten.

I ...see that as... a very political project. It is the future, the only possible future in my opinion in this region, with Israelis and Palestinians in this kind of model. It’s a bilingual school, half the children are Jews, half Palestinians, each class has two teachers, one Jewish, one Arab, no translation, Arabs talk Arabic, the Jewish teacher talks Hebrew... They study in both languages and it’s amazing how fast they learn both languages at that age (Gordon 2010).

I ask Gordon how such a school teaches a controversial issue like the Nakba. He explains that kindergarten children do not cover this topic, but

there are three other schools like that in Israel and the idea is to learn the two narratives and then try to create a third narrative that is inclusive of the two sides as an opposing narrative. So they will study the Nakba from the Palestinian perspective, ... and they will study it from the War of Independence, the Israeli Zionist perspective, and then they will try to create a kind of narrative that fits both of them inside (Gordon 2010).

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

42 See explanations on p.18,129-31.
…[W]hat has become clear is that the occupation has penetrated the University. The tactics used by Israel in the occupied territories as forms of punishment and forms of harassment are being used inside this institution. I can’t get in the details of it, but let me say that if they can’t punish me, they’ll punish my friends. For what I said. Which is a tactic used in the occupied territories, and an anti-liberal tactic, cos the view of the liberal is that I have to be responsible for my actions, and not my friends… We have neighbours that have stopped talking to us; they don’t talk to our children. I mean, it’s much worse than I anticipated. But no regrets…(Gordon 2010).

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

Despite the controversy in which he has become embroiled, Gordon adamantly presents himself as a good patriot. Like Yiftachel, Gordon represents his activism as benefitting not only ‘Palestinians’ but also ‘Jews’. He explains that for him, patriotism is “a deep concern about a place and the people that live there.”

When I ask “which people,” he replies:

[F]or me the people are Jews and Palestinians. So I try to be as inclusive as possible, and even the refugees… there are several hundred refugees … from Darfur, okay… And so I am connected to the place, the culture and the people, and I’m deeply concerned about them. In that sense, I’m a patriot (Gordon 2010).

Gordon also orients himself morally using Jewish culture. “I do go back to the bible,” he explains.

I do go back to certain traditions…They inform the way I think about this conflict and the world in general…What is the major theme of the Bible? It’s freedom. If you read the text with that major theme, it can inform your work. What is the story of Passover? What is the story of Yom Kippur, the most religious holiday, if not doubt, doubt in God? But they teach it differently here. You can take those themes from the Bible. I eat pork. I drive. I’m not a good Jew in their sense, but I think I’m a good Jew in the more – that there’s a social justice tradition in the Bible, and that’s clearly there. (Gordon 2010).
Gordon emphasises that social justice is meant to apply to the broader community, not just Jews. He refers to a book review he wrote about a Leon Roth work. Once a committed Zionist, Roth left the State of Israel shortly after its establishment, already disappointed at what it had come to embody. Gordon writes that Roth “spent many years studying Jewish texts and uncovering their universal significance for human life. He constantly accentuates the basic features of equality and freedom within Judaism” (Gordon 2001, para 10).

A Judaism true to its origins is thus universalistic; one that emphasises the past but has meaning for the future, one that makes room for the other and enables him/her to live in his/her otherness. Roth stresses that according to the rabbis, the command to be kind to strangers is repeated in the Pentateuch no less than thirty-six times. Roth’s reading of the Jewish texts led him to advocate the establishment of a bi-national political entity with complete equality of rights between Jews and Palestinians. He believed that this worldview not only correlates with Judaism and classic philosophy, but that both, when read correctly, enhance it (Gordon 2001, para 11).

Despite his affinity with Roth, Gordon explains that his own political vision for Israel / Palestine is more pragmatic. Although he would like to see “a world without nationalism” and “a Middle East with open borders”, he finds “leav[ing] aside the facts on the ground, the ideology and so forth” to be “not helpful.” He prefers to consider the “political strategic question” of “which is the most possible.” Many of his friends, Gordon explains, believe that the settlement of Palestine is entrenched and hence the ideology of a Jewish state must be altered to accommodate this, resulting in a binational state. “I think it’s easier to remove settlements and to find the solution for the rights of ... the Palestinian refugees, than to change that ideology,” Gordon counters. This pragmatism underlines his support for a two-state solution, even as he reluctantly acknowledges that Palestinians in Israel “will continue to be second class citizens” (Gordon 2010).
Uri Davis

The final academic in this study is Uri Davis, lecturer in Critical Israel Studies at (Palestinian) Bir Zuit University in Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem. Davis is well-known internationally for his history of involvement with the organised Palestinian political movement, and for his long-standing arguments against “Israeli apartheid” (1987). Davis has combined career and activism through academic employment and involvement with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and its political wing, Fatah. When we meet in Jerusalem in January 2010, he has recently been elected to its Revolutionary Council, a large decision-making body that informs the work of the inner core. He is married to a former Fatah bureaucrat, and moves in a Palestinian milieu. Well-preserved into his seventh decade, Davis has snowy white hair, a ruddy complexion and a crisp, ‘BBC’ British accent that caps off his confident demeanour.

Davis has come to my attention via his books, particularly Crossing the Border: An Autobiography of an Anti-Zionist Palestinian Jew (1995), which provides most of the background for my interview questions. Davis presents his story as a classic bildungsroman – the journey of the young man from ignorance to enlightenment. He is born in Palestine to a Slovakian mother and a much older British father from whom he acquires British citizenship. Neither parent is a great Zionist, but both are Jews who happen to be living in Jerusalem prior to the establishment of Israel (Davis 1995, Chapter I).

Davis begins his political journey by not wanting to use a weapon during his schooling. He rejects the notion of serving in the Army and is eventually given alternative duty on a kibbutz. After a time, he rejects this too. He becomes involved in radical politics at university and moves to a Palestinian village within Israel (Davis 1995, Chapters I-III). Davis’s “Sabra” identity (he self-applies this ‘native Israeli’ term for an indigenous prickly fruit) remains strong as his politics become more radical. An affair with a “Black Maoist” woman makes him reflect on some of his “colonialist” behaviours, and he depicts himself as “going native”.

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No white person born into European society can be or can become a native of somewhere else. But he or she can go native. It is possible to break through the barrier and operate cross culturally in a common struggle against repression, against discrimination, against racism, and against double standards (Davis 1995, p.109).

Davis’s political journey comes good on his promise of “Crossing the Border”. He builds an association with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation during its years of exile, relocating to the United Kingdom due to the illegality of his actions under Israel’s laws. He develops a respectful relationship with Abu Jihad (Khalil Ibrahim al-Wazir), the founder of Fatah, assassinated in 1988, and with Abu Ammar (Yassir Arafat). The latter gives Davis symbolic and monetary support in his attempts to become involved with the PLO as a “Palestinian Jew” and to open up its premise as an alternative government for a single state in Israel-Palestine. Davis, an anthropology PhD, works within academic institutions in Britain to start up institutes that study Palestine and are critical of Zionism. Finally, following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1992, he moves back to Israel (Davis 1995).

Along the way, Davis marries twice, each marriage producing a son. A third marriage, intact at the time of the autobiography and having produced twins, has disintegrated by the time we meet fifteen years later. He has recently entered his fourth matrimonial engagement, this time with a Palestinian woman who is beyond childbearing age, so “there will be no children!” (Davis 2010). On the record, Davis will only confirm that his legal address is inside Israel. Unofficially, sources tell me that Davis lives in Ramallah with his wife. Legally, he is not permitted to be there; nor is she allowed to live in Israel with him, courtesy of the 2003 Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, which prohibits Palestinians from the territories gaining Israeli citizenship by marriage.

Davis’s final ‘crossing of the border’ is a pertinent illustration of his journey; he has registered as a Muslim in order to marry Miyasar. I wonder whether this represents some kind of desertion of his former identity. Not so, says, Davis, explaining his identity in characteristically long-winded fashion.
Over the years of reflection and practice I changed my label from Palestinian Jew to Palestinian Hebrew. But that change was effected within a stable moral and political and ideological context of opposition to Zionism ... I have been for decades now anti-Zionist, namely resistance to a political system that I regard as indecent in that it distinguishes in law and in practice, discriminates in law and in practice, between Jew and non-Jew in the state of Israel. So in that context of anti-Zionist moral and political commitments, I changed the first segment of my identity from Palestinian Jew to Palestinian Hebrew, attempting a distinction between my tribal origin, which is Jewish, and my national origin which I identify as Palestinian Hebrew; Hebrew designated primarily by national language. So I classify myself as a Palestinian Hebrew of Jewish origin, definitely anti-Zionist, with dual citizenship. I’m a citizen of an apartheid state, the state of Israel, and a citizen of an alleged constitutional monarchy, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Davis 2010).

Davis’s new Muslim faith does not get a mention in this identity label, although he won’t confirm that it is merely an official act done for the legitimacy of his fourth marriage. “I registered myself as a Muslim well before establishing our relationship as a family, and beyond that I will not answer,” he declares.

Davis’s decision to “Cross the Border” and work with the political institutions of the Other has been politically rationalised, he explains.

The Fatah, being an open political organisation, where membership is anchored in commitment to Palestinian fundamental rights and to the political programme of the Fatah and the PLO, but regardless of ethnic background, citizenship, language, whatever, it has a general international membership, was the best option available to me in the political arena both inside Israel and outside Israel (Davis 2010).

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

The likelihood that intervention of people like myself at a leadership position may help shift of the mainstream from diluting Palestinian claims based on international law to reasserting Palestinian claims based on international law; I judged that likelihood sufficiently strong to justify
my affiliation. Definitely better likelihood than affiliating to a political party [in Israel] and ending up as a Member of Knesset (Davis 2010).

Davis’s vision of dismantling the apartheid Israeli regime, as he sees it, results in a state of its citizens. He explains that even adhering to the current PLO position of two states (though he has historically supported one), these states are to be formulated on the basis of all UN resolutions. Implemented to the letter, he explains, these would result in a unitary state made up of a two entities with Jewish and Palestinian ‘decorations’ (Freedman 2009; Davis 2010).

An intervention of Davis in Fatah’s framing of national identity is recounted in Crossing the Border. Davis outlines his response to receiving a facsimile of a planned Palestinian national identity card from the PLO whose logo included “a church and a mosque and the words 'State of Palestine PLO' in Arabic and in English” (Davis 1995).

Three Palestinian Jews, Elisha Davidsson of Reykjavik, Nissan Rilov of Paris and myself, wrote a joint letter to our respective PLO offices in Stockholm, Paris and London: ... “We consider ourselves bona fide Palestinians. We, therefore, feel awkward, as Palestinian Jews, carrying national ID cards which symbolize a church and a mosque (no synagogue) and ignore the fact that the mother tongue of an unspecified number of the citizens of the future integrated Palestine is Hebrew. Furthermore, it is a mistake in our view to identify the Palestinian people and the country by religious symbols. We propose that, subject to discussion and resolution by the PNC, the newly established Department for Marital and Civil Registry reissue the Palestinian national ID cards without any religious symbols and with a three language logo: Arabic, Hebrew and English...” (Davis 1995, p.330-331)

Davis’s intervention seeks to prevent Palestinian nationalism from limiting itself to Muslim and Christian ethno-religious identities in the same way that Israeli nationalism has limited itself to Jewish identification.
Activists

Jeff Halper

Jeff Halper provides an appropriate segue into the full-time activists; American-born Halper possesses a PhD in anthropology and runs the Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions (ICAHD), a well-known Jerusalem-based NGO that tries to prevent the State from demolishing Palestinians’ dwellings in the Occupied Territories. As well as a paid staff, ICAHD attracts a steady flow of international activists who act as human shields and work as labourers to rebuild houses, which are often subsequently demolished again. Halper, their leader, is an affable character with the demeanour of a well-fed, matured hippie, a white beard and a shiny bald head. His American accent has a Hebrew twang. Halper has written a book, An Israeli in Palestine (2008), which details his journey migrating to Israel, and then his confrontation of Zionism there. This book, along with some of ICAHD’s published material, provides the basis for the interview questions.

His NGO work aside, Halper is of particular interest as an adult immigrant to Israel. Many of my other dissidents have not actively chosen the moral quandary of living in a land built on the dispossession of Others. Halper, through a deep affinity with what he calls his “Hebrew” identity, has been motivated to become part of this project, yet he is adamant that there is space for the Other, and that Israel can become a “normal place” (Halper 2008).

Halper begins our interview by revisiting his background.

I come from this small town in Northern Minnesota, so we barely knew we were Jewish, let alone Zionist... But... when I came out of the sixties, what was called identity politics was very important... There was a whole returning back to roots ... and I got caught up in that. Because I always saw my Judaism as more of a people thing rather than a religious thing...There was also alienation from the United States for reasons that I don’t have to explain to you (Halper 2010).
Swept up in a Jewish identification, Halper’s sense of himself began to shift.

... I became an Israeli before I came to Israel. Before I even knew, in other words. It was an identity shift from ethnic to national, ... to being Jewish in a national sense where your ethnic identity ...is primary. And then you become a Jew. But Jew didn’t fit because Jews live in the Diaspora, they don’t live in Israel, unless you’re religious... So here I got very involved with Hebrew culture, the whole Hebrew thing, and I wrote a book about the Jewish community in Jerusalem in the 19th century, and then from there I go onto Israel. So it’s true, I kind of made that shift of identity, and I made the physical move here completely bypassing Zionism... I didn’t know Zionism, I didn’t know Herzl, I wasn’t with the Zionist movement, I didn’t come through the Jewish Agency, I just came; I mean the vehicle was I was doing my PhD in anthropology, so I had ... a little bit of money from a fellowship... So in a way I never needed Zionism. Zionism was irrelevant (Halper 2010).

Halper argues that he has been “able to take on “Israeliness” as [his] primary identity while, on a political level, retaining [his] loathing of Israeli policies, deriving as they are from a racist and insular national narrative... ” (2008, p.26).

“I don’t think I romanticised Israel,” he explains.

... I liked the idea...of this national expression, you know, my Jewish or my Hebrew Israeli identity, and I guess I invested a lot of hopes in it. I had certain expectations that I hoped Israel would fulfil, but I don’t think, I mean, I knew there was an occupation. I didn’t know Israelis that well. So that’s maybe part of the weird thing as well; you come to a country that you really – you’re coming to a construct. I came more to a construct than an actual country. I came to an Israel that I wanted to find (Halper 2010).

“Did you find it?” I ask.

No. No. ... A lot of immigrants do that... and then when Israel doesn’t conform to those expectations – cos Israel promises a whole rose garden for everybody – they get disillusioned and leave. The difference with me was that I wasn’t coming with expectations in the Zionist sense. I didn’t expect Israel to live up to anything cos it never promised me anything.... I came as an anthropologist, I had an agenda. I had a fellowship, I had some money. I had a circle of friends in the peace movement... so I was able to let Israel speak to me. Not promise me, not the
Harper has carved out an identity for himself – and his NGO – as being Israeli without being oppressive. Just as Halper sees his conversion to becoming Israeli as uncomplicated, he yearns for Israel to transcend its Zionist origins and become a normal country.

In his book, he declares “I don’t have a solution to sell. I could live with most of the solutions that have arisen over the years” (Halper 2008, p.216). But he explains that his personal preference is a mixture of the one-state and two-state solutions. As he sees it, the national expression of the two peoples is best dealt with by two states, but the problems of intermingling and the return of Palestinian refugees as best solved by one state. The solution is a European Union-style confederation. A rudimentary Palestinian state would be created – and it would be small, “a Bantustan,” he admits – but Palestinians and Jews could live anywhere in the confederation. They would, however, only retain citizenship of their own state (Halper 2010). “The idea of the confederation is that you keep your citizenship, in other words you disconnect citizenship from where you’re living,” he explains (Halper 2010).

He says the Law of Return is no longer necessary, “Cos whatever Jews wanted to come here, have come here, so you don’t really need it anymore. So I would make it a normal immigration system.” Palestinians in the Diaspora would receive special consideration for a limited time. “Basically, anybody can come, but you know, there could be privileges,” he suggests.
They could say, we’re gonna privilege Palestinians coming home. ... So you could say, look, for a period... “Okay, whoever wants, you’re a Palestinian living in Jordan, you have a certain amount of time to decide whether you want to retain your Jordanian citizenship, or you want to become a Palestinian citizen.” It doesn’t say you have to move.... Let’s say there’s a number of years in which all Palestinians all over the world have the right to come back and get Palestinian citizenship, you know, and then after that time, then you make it a more normal immigration policy. You know, like that. Get everybody here who wants to be here, and everybody out who doesn’t want to be there, and everybody out who are inside where they don’t want to live. Take a couple of years, let everybody kind of move around, and then say, “Okay, from now on we’re a normal place,” (Halper 2010).

Halper brings a refreshing perspective on the demonisation of Others, refusing to single out the victimisation of his own national identity as unique. “Anti-Semitism is a form of racism,” he explains.

... [T]oday, a lot of that xenophobia that went into anti-Semitism is now going into anti-immigrants stuff... so it shows you that it can move into more groups... The way to fight anti-Semitism as a form of racism is to fight racism, through a rights based approach. So it’s not denying the Holocaust, it’s not minimising the Holocaust, but it’s simply saying, “if you want to avoid these things in the future, the answer isn’t to have a movement against anti-Semitism and another movement against anti-black racism, and another movement against anti-north African racism.”... You can’t fragment it into a hundred things. Overall it’s a movement against racism (Halper 2010).

Eitan Bronstein

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

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

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

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

Me and my brother, he was three and a half, I was five. Only then [were we circumcised]. ... For me, this violent act on my body is totally suppressed from my memory, I don’t remember anything about it, and it was not only one day of cutting and three days of healing. It was a long process of healing because there was problem with my own circumcision...I knew that I was circumcised only when I was twenty-something, I don’t know, twenty-three or four. ... We never talked about it. ... When I grew up, before leaving abroad to a long journey, my father ...talked to me about it... It was the first time in my life that I knew about it. I mean, I knew back then, but it’s totally suppressed, this memory of this circumcision and also all my past in Argentina. I think it’s very interesting...the parallel here between my own biography, suppressed memory, and
violent, and the organisation that I initiated deals with suppressed memory and violence of the very being, the very beginning, of the state of Israel (Bronstein 2010).

Bronstein goes on to explain that it was not just his foreskin that was jettisoned when the family moved from Argentina to Israel. His name was also changed, “…I was born Claudio.” Bronstein explains the name change as a “kind of formal ceremonial act, something you have to go through...Back then it was something very common that people who were born somewhere else, they change their names when they come here…” (Bronstein 2010)

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

...She saw a big nice football court, football, basketball, something big like this, and children playing, and she said to my uncle, ... ‘Well it’s wonderful, I guess the kids from the kibbutz come here and play together.’ Then his reaction was amazing. He said to her, ‘Look, it’s OK for you to think these things, [but] please don’t even say or suggest something like this in the kibbutz...don’t even open your mouth with this idea, because this is very dangerous. Even thinking about it.’... Since then she began to understand the reality. She understood quite fast that it’s terrible, but... her main concern was us as a family, us kids, to have a better future... For example, I never questioning the fact of serving in the Army, because my parents...were totally assimilated to the whole society... Okay, so my Mum always voted, sometimes Communist party, other leftists’ parties...but not more than that. She never, like, expressed things, not anti-Zionist, never anti-Zionist (Bronstein 2010).

As a child Bronstein was, like his parents, a “good Israeli”. He envied the neighbouring kibbutz because it produced a number of dead war heroes. “I knew that they were better Israeli than I” (Bronstein 2010). So when it was time for Bronstein to serve in the Army, he did it unquestioningly. However, during his service he was deeply troubled by the occupation, and his prior inculcation into the values of the kibbutz provoked this first moment of dissonance.

[D]espite of all criticism, ...there is one thing that is very strong...sense that I have from the kibbutz, which is much more than ideology. Something in between people, that even if you are
my commander or you are a great professor at university, perhaps I might admire you, but I never think that you are more [of a] person than I am... (Bronstein 2010).

During basic Army training, Bronstein’s unit set up a temporary checkpoint in the Occupied Territories and searched Palestinians and their vehicles.

I felt like I’m in a theatre. Because it was something so kind of natural... everyone knew his role in this situation. And so these people, you know, some of them were old people, young people. I looked at them, I didn’t hate them, but I’m with my gun, I’m part of this Army. I didn’t do anything that harmed them, but I heard stories from some of the soldiers, when they checked the cars, they takes from them some things like some fruit, or something that they sell...They were laughing about it, making jokes about how funny it was to grab something... so this was disgusting for me. The whole situation of me, in such a natural way, we are occupying, we are superior. I told you this background of the kibbutz, because this is what enabled me to see this situation, how terrible it is... I remember I went back home and I talked to my parents about it. I had very strong argument with them, I shouted, I was very confused, I was very angry... I think this was the first time I really faced what was going on (Bronstein 2010).

Nevertheless, Bronstein hastily points out, “I was excellent soldier in the Army. I never refused anything. I was in the very kind of elite unit.” Not long after the end of Bronstein’s full-time Army service, however, the Lebanon War began, and this time things would be different.

I was called to my first reserve and it was go to Lebanon. And there was really my first confusion whether to go or not, because this was the first time that there was a really refuseniks movement in Israel, Yesh Gvul, There is a Limit. And this Lebanon war was the first time there was a movement in the sense that there is a debate, a moral political debate... (Bronstein 2010)

Bronstein refused to serve, and was jailed.

This was for me until today the most crucial point of beginning of really questioning what’s here, you know, all this... It was the first time I said, “there’s a limit to what I’m willing to do.” But even then I didn’t question the drafting to the Army, I didn’t say this Army’s totally wrong, no, only this war is totally wrong (Bronstein 2010).

During the First Intifada, Bronstein refused again, and was jailed twice.
Cos I was for two states, for a Palestinian state and withdrawal from the West Bank. So it was when they began their intifada struggling to have an independent state I said, “How can I participate in oppressing it?” (Bronstein 2010).

But Bronstein’s most radical position came a decade later, when he gave up his support for two states.

[M]y final crisis with Zionism or with the Jewish state as it is, was in October 2000. Thirteen demonstrators [Palestinian citizens of Israel] were killed...The second intifada began, and it began in the West Bank but immediately there were huge demonstrations among Arabs here in Israel. When this began, I immediately identified with these demonstrations...There were thousands of police and Army, you know, tons of equipment. It was really scary. I went up and joined the demonstrators and I saw it. At one point I left, I went back home...I heard on the way on the news that two people were killed there.

...I think for many people like me...this was really... the final break of Zionism. And it happened...only because, as I see it, it happened here. I mean, people were killed in the West Bank, this happened all the time ... but somewhere out there. And also it’s obvious that Israel is oppressing them. But when this happened here and the demonstrators were citizens of Israel, I understood. I felt that there is something much, much, deeper in the fundaments of this place, in how it’s been created and it’s not only...something between Israel and the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza... But it’s also something with all the Palestinians, also the citizens of Israel.

...[Prime Minister Ehud] Barak said ‘we are going to open the roads by all means.’ Now, blocking roads, this is something that happened hundreds and thousands of times in Israel, but by many groups, you know, they do demonstration, they block roads, in many other cases, and you don’t go and shoot them. But in this case, not only go and shoot them, you also recruit thousands of soldiers to attack them. All the language and all the state, you know, the feeling by Israel. They are our enemy. So what does it mean that citizens, supposed by the constitution to be equal citizens, what does it means that we see them as enemy, that the state in certain points, not always, but in violent crisis, we see them immediately as enemies? 43

This is something that made me realise that Zionism is ... about having a place only for one people...[I]f we have others here, they can be here but as long as they don’t challenge anything,

43 Israel does not actually have a Constitution – Bronstein may be referring to the Declaration of Independence which promises civil equality for non-Jews.
and also they don’t ask for too many equal rights cos this is impossible, they’ll never have equal rights ... the Law of Return says explicitly, and now many other Laws, and also the practices. It’s not hidden, it’s out there. So then I understood... Zionism and peace, or peace with the people living here on this land, the two things cannot work together. So either you can be Zionist and – eh – or, if you want to think about it really, you have to quit Zionism as it is today, or as it’s been established since the Nakba (Bronstein 2010).

Having built a career in co-existence education, Bronstein had already developed a sense of embeddedness in Israel’s malaise.

... I am very much part of this shit going on here. So in other words, me, an Israeli Jew, even though I’m non Zionist, even anti-Zionist, whatever, but still I’m a part, I’m this side... (Bronstein 2010)

But after a while, this wasn’t enough.

I think understanding ... that I am a part of this conflict and I am this Jewish Zionist part, and only understanding it, this is what this place brought me to, but there it stopped... Like okay, now what [do] we do about it? I’m stuck with this terrible coloniser identity, what am I doing with it? Just telling it? It’s not enough! (Bronstein 2010).

So Bronstein decided to start Zochrot, which he represents as part of his connection to Israeli Jews.

I see myself, in a way, a converted Zionist that wants to take... moral responsibility on our life here and try to do something about it. I don’t detach myself from all of this. And I could, theoretically. I could either be here and do totally different things, I don’t know, work with money or something, or I could leave.... Many others who share this same ideology choose other ways (Bronstein 2010).

But Bronstein is committed to staying, and is prepared to see the things he loves the most – like Tel Aviv – change in order to achieve his dream of the return of Palestinian refugees from 1948:

“If I try [to] visual[ise] it, think of living here in one state, Tel Aviv basically, and of course every other place in Israel, will change dramatically, but gradually,’’ he explains.
...It’s not the next day after the return of the refugees there will be mosques on every corner. ... Tel Aviv will not be so dramatic in the everyday life.... It will be surrounded by different, on the TV it will be different. Listen to the radio, the language around us, I hope there will be much more Arabic around us...[T]here will be challenges, I’m sure. And some things, also I’m sure we’ll find compromises, but in other things I hope it will be enriched. For example, the rather monolithic environment of Tel Aviv in a way, quite, you know, white city, no Arabs around here. I think if this changes, it’s for better, not for worse (Bronstein 2010).

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

Jews who wish to join this democratic state are welcome, and Palestinians of course, a bit more welcome than others. It’s not that I want to exclude all others, but it’s a place that Jews nationally and culturally have some links, more than Vietnamese or Chinese (Bronstein 2010).

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

For example, Europe now... Perhaps in fifty, seventy, one hundred, two hundred years, there will be a much stronger European identity...But nationality is still important. For me personally, I hope we can understand also this nationalism. Seeing the reality around I know that it’s really strong...A more citizenship sense of nationalism... is something that is a bit beyond my vision (Bronstein 2010).

Bronstein explains that his political options are different from those of outsiders.

“I think it’s very important to boycott Israel,” he tells me.

I hope you and other people in the world can join the boycott movement against Israel, to boycott Israeli goods or Israeli people who speak somewhere, in order to change the policy, our policy. Now me, as Israeli, I cannot boycott myself. I consume everything here...and not only that I consume, I’m part of it... (Bronstein 2010).
Jeremy Milgrom

My third activist is also, like Halper and Bronstein, foreign-born. I discover Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom through some brief comments published online under the auspices of Rabbis for Human Rights, and make contact with him early in my candidature. Milgrom is my only interviewee who is religious, and I am keen to know how this informs his politics. I also want to know how his absence from Israel affects his perspective – I interview Milgrom in Berlin, where he is living at the time. Our interview makes up almost the entire framework for analysis.

Upon meeting Milgrom, I am struck by an almost tangible sadness. His deep eyes are misty, his mouth downturned. The pictures I have seen on the internet depict a quintessential hippie with long curly greying hair, but in person Milgrom displays little bonhomie. He is a man with a heavy weight on his shoulders. It is, I realise, the weight of exile. “I am still in Israel, even when I’m here,” he tells me in his grave yet lilting voice.

We begin by exploring the story of Milgrom’s emigration to Israel, which arose out of winning a Bible study contest. Hailing from Berkeley, California, Milgrom was the son of a Conservative rabbi and “was raised with an Israeli orientation” (Milgrom 2010). The prize for the Bible study contest was therefore an apt one: a year’s schooling in Israel. This year turned into several, and then decades. Milgrom’s parents moved back and forth a few times, but he stayed put. “It’s a very intense thing, becoming Israeli, particularly those years in the late sixties, early seventies. So I guess it kind of got under my skin” (Milgrom 2010). Milgrom describes himself as part of a “minority” of immigrants to Israel who “come for idealistic reasons, from comfortable backgrounds...I was attracted,” he declares. “It had a grip on me,” (Milgrom 2010).

I ask him to explain further, and he immediately asks me if I have been to Israel. “It’s intoxicating,” he explains. “It’s part of, everyone is brought into, sucked into, it’s a love of the land,” (Milgrom
2010). Milgrom admits, “I still have those responses sometimes”, but explains that gradually “[he] began to realise, to return to who [he] was; [he] began to realise that there were failings in Israel.”

Part of this political awakening arose from his youthful grounding in America.

Berkeley in California in the sixties... was a place of ideals. I came to Israel and I began to realise that some of those ideals should be bought into play in Israel also, because the military industrial complex, and Vietnam War, which I ran away from, and then they came running after me! In the war in Lebanon it became very clear... Also the situation with the lack of harmonious internal relations between groups, oppression, marginalisation of the minority, which was the story in the United States but ... in Israel it is more pervasive... (Milgrom 2010).

After finishing school, Milgrom performed his compulsory military service.

I was eighteen and all my classmates who were Israeli were going. I was very drawn to Israel. My main problem about being in the Army was knowing that it was dangerous and whether I thought it was right to sacrifice your life for the nation, for the country. That was a moral question. At that point I wasn’t really aware of the injustice to Palestinians; I just thought it was tragic that there was a war, a lack of peace. I thought it was okay for me to defend my society with a weapon (Milgrom 2010).

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

After my first daughter was born I realised that I was not going to look at a human being through a gun sight. The experience of bringing life into the world and feeling a commonality with other parents... When I was finally called up [to serve in the Lebanon War]... it was a question of, ‘how can I take part in a war which I already knew was illegitimate?’ I ended up, most of that month of reserve duty... I was able to do on the Israeli side of the border, to my great relief. I had ten days to go and they needed someone, some replacement up the other side of the border in Lebanon, and suddenly I found myself there. I kind of lost my resolve not to go. As soon as I got there I said, “I’m not going to stay.” I started a hunger strike... (Milgrom 2010)
The next day Milgrom was sent out of the unit, to his “great relief” avoiding jail. He was invited to explain his perspective to the other soldiers; in particular his framing of the hunger strike on the basis that the food was not kosher.

[W]hat eating means to me is an opportunity to feel blessing and respond to that opportunity by saying a blessing over the food. So you incorporate all of your values – the grace after meals is...not like a few words, it’s full two pages of ideology, Jewish ideology, a beautiful statement at the end of a meal. And includes the blessing or the gratitude for the land that God gave us. I said, ‘Well, this is not the land that God gave us. This is someone else’s land, with someone else’s house.’ And it was fascinating, cos after I said this, one of the officers said to me, “So you live in Jerusalem, right? So you live in an Arab house!” I said, “Actually it’s not an Arab house, I checked it out before I moved in; this was very important to me.” (Milgrom 2010).

Milgrom explains that for a further seven years he was forced to continue the “farce” of reserve duty, “progressively removing [him]self from ... things [he] had a problem with, to the point that [he] was not holding a gun anymore,” (Milgrom 2010). From here, Milgrom was spared Army service but his disillusionment continued. He raised his children in Israel but became “horrified” by the idea that there would be no peace for them in the future.

Israel is becoming more extreme. There are certain things that we could not able to imagine would ever be called into question which are now...Israel defined itself as a Jewish democratic state which is a very interesting, impossible definition, but it was a balancing act that a lot of people still swear by. But nowadays I think people are recognizing that it’s not very democratic, and they’re willing to say that we’re not going to be democratic. We have these survival issues, but these survival issues have been going on for decades, no longer emergencies, rather it’s a way of life. I think that many Israelis don’t expect to reach peace; they just want to manage the conflict; to keep the price from being too high (Milgrom 2010).

So Milgrom decided to move to Berlin. He followed a love affair, which did not last, but his connection with Berlin did. He had come to consider the “question of whether one can do much from within Israel.” His conclusion was that “more can be done from the outside.”
I think Israel will respond to pressure. It’s very difficult to do that in the inside. The pressure has to come from the world. The world has to make a very clear statement. I hope that being outside, in the world, I can help generate that statement (Milgrom 2010).

“Israel is not living in isolation,” he continues.

Israel is very much part of the world, that’s why the world has to speak clearly and say not only do we not accept this, not only do we think this is a disgrace, but we’re going to actually draw a line here and not go across it. If someone decides in Germany not to buy an avocado because it comes from Israel, that’s going to speak (Milgrom 2010).

Milgrom’s activist work involves working towards a one-state solution, which he supports because “the two state solution would ... cut off any chance of Palestinians returning” while return is “essential for the peace and also from a moral point of view.”

He recognises “the attachments that people have to their nation, and their desire to be protected by it, their feeling of insecurity, the national movements and all that,” and so doesn’t expect nationalism to disappear. “...The idea of one country of its citizens has to exist at the same time,” (Milgrom 2010).

He suggests that “to become inclusive would mean to develop attitudes towards the Other, an awareness, acceptance of the culture, a feeling of commonality.” Milgrom rejects the idea that identities can be prescribed and argues that “belonging to one of these people is not a death sentence.” He wants to maintain a sense that nobody has to live in Israel / Palestine, “but to the extent that you feel motivated and connected, then ... I see our future as living together,” (Milgrom 2010).

Milgrom predicts that ultimately “Zionism will fade.”

...[I]t’s no longer necessary... People talk about Israel being post-Zionist from ’48; [it] was already. “Zionism set up the state, now it’s time for us to move over it and to let other things
take over.” I think that this is going to be happening more and more. The issues won’t even be so much why do we have a state, or even who the ‘we’ is, but, what do I know, the people I work with, live with, the future (Milgrom 2010).

**Yonatan Pollack**

The final activist in my study is Yonatan Pollack. He is my youngest interviewee, twenty-eight years old when we meet, and the only subject close to my own age. He is also by far the most radical. Pollack emerges as something of a minor celebrity while I am conducting my interviews in Israel – an activist struggling against various aspects of the occupation, the Wall in particular. My entire study of him derives from our interview. Pollack is a gently-spoken and attractive young man; vibrant tattoos on his forearms peek out from the sleeves of his black hoodie. The radical activists I have met in Australia have extremely anti-nationalist politics; I am interested to find out what the Israeli variant looks like.

“I grew up in a fairly leftist family,” Pollack tells me of his birth and childhood in Israel. “You could say I’m a second generation red diaper baby... My parents were not activists but they were always politically aware and left leaning. My grandfather, however, was very activist...he went to jail for it...” (Pollack 2010).

So the first demonstration my mother took me to, I was about three months old. It was after Sabra and Shatila.44 The first demonstration I can remember ... was around the beginning of the first intifada, I was around six or seven years old.... The only thing I remember is the police horses being marched at the demonstrators to disperse them... I remember being very afraid of the horses.... I became a vegetarian at the age of seven... Around the age of twelve I got acquainted with the animal rights movement in Israel which at the time was very anarchist-centred.... It was a very politicised movement. Animal rights was a big issue but it was only one issue of many things ... Obviously I connected with the people around me, got into anarchism,

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44 During 1982’s Lebanon War, the Christian Phalangist movement massacred Palestinian refugees in two Lebanese camps, Sabra and Shatila, whilst their allies in Israel’s military leadership provided logistical and operational support (Shahid, 2002).
counterculture, and I think that’s really the forming stage of my politicisation, the insurrectionary views, political perception, generally; political action (Pollack 2010).

I suggest that Pollack must have refused Army service.

I had already dropped out of high school and had a few police records for political activity. I... came to the... base and said, “I won’t do it.” I refused to do the medical tests and the psychiatric tests. They looked at my folder and said, “Okay.” I’m actually the only male I know who was released for reason of manpower surpluses! (Pollack 2010).

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

I mean...the original Zionist ethos was the best way ... to interface with that. You know, “Country without a people for a people without country” crap. It’s not that they didn’t know there were people here, they knew there were people very well, but they were not Europeans and they were not white. Obviously Zionism had its, you know, its special circumstances... the Holocaust, but that doesn’t change the fact that it’s largely a movement of white Europeans who were interested in relocating from Europe, from the First World, to the New World, to the Middle East, completely ignoring the rights and the presence of the indigenous population. Zionism isn’t the first example of where ... the agents of colonialism are not necessarily the elites; for example in Australia it was mostly prisoners (Pollack 2010).

Pollack explains that the basis for his involvement in Palestinian resistance is the “South African model” where “dissident whites joined the ANC, joined the black resistance to apartheid. I think both that solution and the model of resistance are compatible to the situation here,” he declares (Pollack 2010).

I presume that Pollack must support a one-state solution, but his answer is not straightforward.

“I think it’s largely a Palestinian decision,” he explains. “I think that my obligation as a descendant of colonialism is to say that I support a one state solution ... but it’s not up to me.”

He is clear, however, that the right of return for Palestinian refugees exists regardless.
It’s not something I do out of generosity, it’s their right. And that I would be more than happy to live in one state and obviously lower my privileges... But I do think if the Palestinians say, look, we’ve had enough, we don’t want to live with you, I’m not in the position to say, “We have to live together.” That’s what I would like to see. But even in such a state, I think the refugees have a right to return here... even in a two state solution, to Jaffa, to Haifa – (Pollack 2010).

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

Under international law – which I don’t think is such a great thing, it’s obviously the law of the conqueror, of the strong – even under international law they have the right to compensation and for returning, they’re not mutually exclusive. ...[T]hey’ve already been in exile in the Diaspora for sixty years now; obviously there should be compensation for that. But that does not affect their right to return. And personally I would like to see return, not just the right of return. I mean, a lot of time the right of return is deconstructed as a theoretic right that should be recognised but not implemented, or people count on the fact that it won’t be implemented because of research that the refugees don’t want to return. Of course in the current state of affairs they don’t want to return – who wants to return to racism and colonialism? But if reality changes and ...there is a possibility for a normal life here, I believe that the refugees would like to return and it’s a positive thing. It’s a positive step towards a future (Pollack 2010).

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

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

I ask what it is to him.

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

People want to see themselves as Jews and that’s their national identity, so be it. But it’s very different than saying there should be a state for Jews. Because what is Judaism, what is being a
Jew? Is it someone whose mother is Jewish? Someone who’s culture is Jewish? What is Jewish culture? American Jewish culture and Yemenite Jewish culture is very different. I’m not the same ethnicity as him; I’m probably much closer in ethnicity to you. So what is Judaism, what is the common denominator? For me, the only common ground that I can find is religion. And since I’m an atheist, I feel no connection to Judaism (Pollack 2010).

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

It’s not something you can compare with the British state; it’s not a nationality in the modern... concept of it ...In most, in all I think, western democracies, once you’re a citizen, you’re part of that nationality. However, you can be a citizen of Israel but you will never be part of the Jewish nationality. This is a racist foundation for a state; therefore it has to be dismantled in order to have any prospects of a future. If Jews want, if people who recognise themselves as Jews want autonomy over everything, any issue of culture and education that concerns them, I see absolutely no reason why that shouldn’t be possible. But under a state that is not racially discriminatory... (Pollack 2010).

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

You know I don’t believe in the justness of states or its capacity to be an agent of justice or an agent of equality or whatever terms you like to use. But obviously we do live in reality and the anarchist revolution is not, ah, just around the corner. And, um, as an anarchist I do believe, even in the short term, equal structure, the power of the state, as much as possible. So obviously small groups, allowing as much autonomy to any group, is a good thing. The question is, how is this implemented? If it is implemented in the form of ‘no go’ areas for Palestinians then this is wrong. If it is implemented in the form of more autonomy over education or culture or religion or whatnot, then I think it’s a positive thing. Everything, especially with a history of colonialism, is a question of form of implementation (Pollack 2010).

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

... I just don’t think that Israeli society [is] your potential agent of change. I think the agent of change is the Palestinians, and their resistance, and the support that they will get, that they can draw, from the international community...[A]s an anarchist I believe in joining their struggle. I
believe that, people should run their own liberation struggles. I’m not so interested in the nationalist part of it, but for me it’s obviously a liberation struggle... (Pollack 2010).

When I suggest that the state’s grip appears to be tightening on people like him, Pollack plays it down in the face of harsher consequences for Palestinians.

It’s getting worse slowly. These arrests – pretty much released the next day. I’ve been arrested over forty times. It’s not so horrible. Actually law enforcement is a lot worse in the [United] States, towards activists. A person like me would have ... spent very long incarceration periods. It is deteriorating, but you know, Palestinians are arrested. First of all, when Israelis are arrested it still gets a lot of coverage; it gets a lot of attention, mainstream attention. It’s disputable. Sixteen arrests made in Ni’ilin. Fifteen of these people are still in jail and they’re going to remain in jail for a very long time, because they’re Palestinians... (Pollack 2010).

At the conclusion of our interview, I ask Pollack what is going to happen in the next few years.

“Nothing,” he replies. “Things are slowly deteriorating. I’m a born pessimist. I have no way to predict.”

“If you’re so pessimistic,” I ask him, “then why do you still struggle?”

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

Writers / Commentators

Along with my academics and activists, I interview four writers / commentators. Each contributes to deep debate and dialogue and yet all are at pains to insist they are not activists.
I meet Ha’aretz journalist Gideon Levy, at his workplace. We chat for an hour in his poky office, decorated bizarrely with a pin board of cat pictures. (The room has a makeshift feel; the cat pinboard may in fact be the work of some previous inhabitant.) Levy has written substantially about Israel and Palestine, particularly about the Occupied Territories. Now, as he enjoys a senior position at the newspaper whilst being legally denied the opportunity to report from the front line in Gaza, he turns his attention to writing opinion pieces in which he castigates his society. These opinions have been shaped by his reporting on the Occupation in the West Bank and Gaza (Levy 2010; Hirschfield 2009); Levy sees the Occupation as the single greatest problem facing his society. However, he is critical of other elements of Israeli life including social mistrust of orthodox Jews (Levy 2007), attacks on homosexuals (2009a), a culture of meaningless military heroics (2009b) and the demise of the political Left (2009c).

Coming from a fairly apolitical background, Levy grew up with a default attachment to Zionism and the Jewish collective. These things have not evaporated with his radicalisation, but instead co-exist with it. This means that Levy remains something of a left-wing Zionist, the kind he says does not exist anymore (Levy 2010). He puts himself “in the margins” amongst “some groups, individuals who are very radical, very devoted, very courageous” but too small to be a real movement (2010). Levy’s particular brand of Zionism sees him engaging with Israel’s past in an interesting way. “I carry the past as a…moral burden,” Levy explains. “I think that would Israel recognise the past, it would also be easier with the Palestinians and more courageous and more generous in the present,” (Levy 2010).

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

Moral recognition, rehabilitating the refugees, many of them in places where they are, with international and Israeli economic help. I’ve been to refugee camps in Jordan, I’ve no doubt that those people if they can just live better, they would stay there... (Levy 2010).

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

I don’t know what it means, Jewish state. I mean, we have one million Russians, half of them at least are not Jewish... It doesn’t talk to me at all, this whole concept of – why a non-Jewish Russian is more Jewish than a Palestinian who lived here for generations (Levy 2010).

Levy would also support a binational state if it appeared more likely to arise (2010).

He explains that his connection to his society is the driving force behind everything he does.

I never thought about leaving, I never thought about going into exile. I’m part of it, for the good and for the bad. I carry moral responsibilities for everything that Israel is doing, settlements, Cast Lead, anything. I’m part of it. This was my choice, this is my choice, this is my place, this is my culture, this is my language – they are my fellow Israelis (Levy 2010).

However, unlike Bronstein, who purports to care even for those he opposes, Levy is vitriolic about some of his fellow citizens. He tells me that once he was driving with a former colleague, and commented that if he saw an injured settler on the side of the road, he wouldn’t stop to help (Levy 2010).

Let’s say the truth, I hate them. Because of what they do, not what they are. Because of the fact of where they live... – I don’t recognise that there are moderate settlers and bad settlers. To me they are all the same (Levy 2010).
When I tell Levy about a friend who says he supported the Palestinians until they started blowing up Israeli buses, Levy responds:

I’m really disgusted by this kind of Israelis ... who, when they started not to behave themselves, the Palestinians – I never was motivated by this, whether the Palestinians are nice or not nice, if they treat their women nice or not nice. This is not my judgement, I’m judging ourselves. My main focus is what we are doing. And this does not change, this just becomes worse and worse. So I never – on the contrary. All those terrible days, and they were terrible days – 2002, 2003, exploding buses – just showed me how much I’m right and how much it calls for a solution, and how much it will not be solved by itself…. (Levy 2010).

“I think about what I’m driven by,” Levy muses. “A deep feeling of guilt. I think this is my main motivation. I really feel guilty about the Palestinians... Because I think we’ve done them terrible things, ‘48, ‘67, ever since that, and I feel personal guilt,” (Levy 2010). The guilt is personal, he explains, “Because I’m part of this collective. Because I always define myself as an Israeli patriot. Because I am so much attached to this collective, this place, this society or whatever. I feel guilty on behalf of things that I was against!” (Levy 2010).

Levy explains that he feels guilt “after every story.”

...[A]lmost every day when I read the newspaper, I feel at least ashamed, if not guilty. And guilt I feel really because of atrocities, and when I came to see those people and so many times I come to the remains of victims, victims by themselves, for so many years I’ve done it and so many years I sit and I hear the story. I feel as if I have done it (Levy 2010).

Levy suggests that this kind of guilt underpins his society, masked as it is by aggression. “...[T]hey found once a speech of one of the Zionist leaders...in the Knesset,” he tells me.

...There was a small remark saying, ‘a weak argument, please raise your voice’. So this aggression shows, I think. I truly believe that part of the Israelis, not all of them, part of them, in the back of their minds, feel that something went wrong. They won’t admit it, they are living in denial, they are brainwashed, and everything, and still this aggression shows lack of confidence... (Levy 2010).
“You can see it in titles in the newspaper,” he adds.

“Israelis are leading.” We are always, we are the best. In the world. No one, even the Americans, would be so occupied with being the best, the number one.... I think [it’s] because nothing has here any real deep roots... You see it even if you come to Tel Aviv, every two years, if you come here you see different shops. Everything changes all the time, no roots. It’s part of the lack of confidence, sure. It’s exactly like being aggressive to our criticisers (Levy 2010).

Like Bronstein, Levy is deeply embedded in Tel Aviv life, albeit in its more salubrious quarters. My hosts have told me that he has a reputation for enjoying the good life. “I have full bourgeois life in Tel Aviv,” Levy confirms (2010). He is at pains to draw a line between this and his profession. “It’s my work,” he says of his writing about the sufferings of Palestinians. “It’s not my hobby. It’s not that I’m an activist.” He tells me that on limited occasions he has become involved with Palestinians and tried to help them, but this is very minimal. “I also, well,” he shrugs, “I also have my life, which is nothing to lose,” (Levy 2010). Levy speaks of “tough times” when his two lives – the one in Tel Aviv and the one engaged with Palestine – have met. “There were times like in Cast Lead...I go every Saturday to the beach, after my tennis game, and see the helicopters in the sky. People don’t even look at them. And life continues like nothing,” (Levy 2010). He also speaks of “bad days in which I would come from terrible stories in the West bank or in Gaza and immediately go to a restaurant in Tel Aviv,” (Levy 2010).

Levy sets himself up in opposition to “weirdos” who are active around the Palestine issue. “I am writing in a leading newspaper... I don’t live in a Palestinian village, not in the territories, I don’t organise, I am not an activist,” (Levy 2010). He compares himself to Amira Hass, the other well-known Ha’aretz writer who reports on life in the Occupied Territories. “She was brought up in a communist home. She is living in Ramallah. She is doing admirable work, but she excludes herself in many ways from the Israeli society,” (Levy 2010). When Hass comes to Tel Aviv, “she has to leave after two hours, because she gets a headache,” (Levy 2010). Levy, who “love[s] Tel Aviv”, tries “to remain somehow connected to the mainstream by way of living, by the place that [he] work[s] for;
it’s all about the mainstream,” (Levy 2010). In separating himself from the “weirdos” (whom he nevertheless “highly appreciates”), Levy argues that he attains legitimacy.

I appear on TV a lot, debates and programs and things like this, so I’m trying at least not to become a weirdo. Because part of these people are perceived as weirdos, they are not weirdos, but they are perceived as weirdos. I try not to be perceived as a weirdo. Maybe I succeed, maybe not, but this gives me also more power (Levy 2010).

**Gilad Atzmon**

The next writer I explore is Gilad Atzmon. Atzmon also does not want to be seen as an activist, although he probably cannot escape being considered a “weirdo” by Israeli society. (That would be putting it politely.) Atzmon is an Israeli-born jazz musician who has made a life for himself in north London. He travels the world playing music, and in his spare time is one of Israel’s most vitriolic critics. Over the last decade he has published a number of lengthy articles, generally his own but occasionally by others, on his website, and it is here that I have discovered his ideas. I am interested in Atzmon as both an ex-Israeli who has chosen to live outside, and a critic of the state’s construction of Jewish identity. I fly to London to meet him and he generously gives me several hours of his time after performing a jazz gig the night before, which I attend. After our interview, Atzmon loads me up with CDs and tells me he will post what I write on his website. I have been identified as a fellow traveller, which I find somewhat alarming since the interview has enabled me to pin down some of Atzmon’s arguments that remained unclear from his articles. These arguments take criticism of Israel, Jewishness and Jews into a space I have determinedly eschewed as both an academic and a human being. However, as I shall demonstrate in Chapters Six and Seven, there is a place for Atzmon’s narrative in this study and his reflections are able to tell us something about the options available for dissidents.

Atzmon begins our interview by exploring his background. He explains that his attitude to life is “probably something to do with [his] Israeliness.” “I just do what I want,” he announces airily. “I
don’t give a toss about anything.” “My father, who was a right wing Zionist, taught me, ‘I don’t agree with anything that you say, but as long as ... it’s well-argued’.” Later, he says, “I took a lot from Zionism and I’m proud of myself. I even give Zionism the credit for... attempting to re-establish a new Jew,” (2010).

Atzmon is also happy to praise some Israelis. During the wars in Lebanon and Gaza, “it was the Israelis” who provided the outside world with “names, all the information that we need” in order to bring legal cases against “Israeli soldiers [and] Generals.... [T]he Israeli dissidents is far more interesting than any other forms of Jewish dissidents,” he continues. “…Because they’re inside, because they’re courageous, because part of the Israeli culture is to speak out proudly,” (2010).

Atzmon is also, at times, sympathetic with those on the “so-called” Israeli left who seek to end the Occupation.

[T]hey try to resolve their own problem, which is a legitimate manoeuvre. Let’s say that you buy a house, took mortgage... And then a week later you go down to the shelter and you see seven Aborigines strapped to the wall. “Oh my god, what are you doing here?” ... Now you are fucked. You are committed to the mortgage, you are living on someone else’s house. It’s not entirely your fault. The Israelis are trapped as much as you would be in this situation. ... (Atzmon 2010).

To understand the significance of Atzmon’s sentiments, one has to contextualise them with Atzmon’s avowed hatred of the Israeli state, his criticisms of Zionist and ‘Jewish’ ideology and, in particular, his attitudes towards the international Jewish community. Atzmon’s dislike of this community extends equally to those who criticise Israel as well as those who champion her. Shielded from Atzmon’s vitriol are only those “Torah Jews” who are religiously active and find reasons within their faith to oppose Israel. Atzmon’s take on the issue is that there is no such thing as a secular Jewish identity, unless it is a national identity. There are religious Jews who can find legitimate criticisms of Israel in the Torah. Then there are Zionist Jews, both in Israel and outside, who believe that the Jews are a national group, and nations are entitled to states, so Israel is the obvious
solution. Atzmon disagrees with the legitimacy of Israel, built on “stolen land”, so he opposes this perspective (2004). The third position is that of an ethnic or cultural Jewishness that rejects Zionism, or at least key elements of Israeli policy like the occupation of Palestinian territory. This is the position of much of the critical international Jewish community, made up of what Atzmon calls “Not In My Name (NIMN) Jews” (Atzmon 2004). NIMN Jews are not religious, but they activate a Jewish identity in their criticism of Israel. In Atzmon’s eyes, this is a bogus course of action. For non-religious Jews to activate a Jewish identity, it must be a national identity, and the invocation of such a national identity gives strength to Zionism’s creation of a state for the Jewish nation. So from this perspective, supposedly anti-Zionist Jews merely provide a fig-leaf for Zionism, legitimising it by other means (Atzmon 2004).

Atzmon explains in the interview that it is not secular Jewish identity that he is opposed to, but its use as a political argument:

What I’m telling to the secular Jew, he wants to have his fucking chicken soup – have it! But he’ll have to admit that chicken soup is not a political argument. So Italian have their pizzas, but they don’t have pizzas for human rights! They don’t have Bolognese for Palestine... (Atzmon 2010).

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

Atzmon’s core diagnosis of the problem facing Israel / Palestine is the ‘cultural factor’ to which I alluded in Chapter Two: Jewish ideology, and in particular its depiction of the Jewish people as ‘chosen’, is the root of the problem. But unlike any other account I have engaged with until our interview, Atzmon extends this argument to offer a sympathetic account of Nazism.
“I don’t justify what happened there,” he explains.

I don’t justify the ethnic cleansing. But I think what the Israelis are doing [now] explains how they got themselves into this persecution in the first place, and how they’re going to get themselves into big trouble in the near future... (Atzmon 2010).

Atzmon further outlines that he is not convinced about “what happened there,” explaining his deep suspicions about the official version of the Holocaust:

... I know what is the narrative; I hardly believe any of it. The issue is that we cannot really know or talk about it in this country [the United Kingdom] because we are part of Europe. And there is legislation in Europe against talking about the factuality of the Holocaust. But I know one thing, there is a big paradox in the Holocaust. On the one hand we have the story of ethnic cleansing, racially orientated, nobody argued about it.... Then something happened which we are not allowed to really investigate. Gas chambers, not gas chambers, gas chambers, what was the capacity. Quite a few people died, we don’t know how many. But one thing is clear. At the end of the war, the Germans are defeated, and we have a death march. And in this death march, hundreds of thousands of Jews are schlepped back to Germany. How do we fit a coherent picture of the German ideology with ethnic cleansing.... on one side, and the schlepping back of the Jews into Germany? They either want them out, or they let them in! One of the answers that I came across ...is that Jews wanted to join the Germans. They didn’t want to wait for the Russians, they were very afraid of the Soviets. They probably knew why! [laughs] ... Now, if the Germans were gassing them in Auschwitz, why would they join the Germans? Another option, ... presented by the Germanophilic historians, is that there was an epidemic of typhus, and the German Army took an initiative to quarantine, so the death march was a humanitarian approach. So when I look at the Holocaust I end up with more questions than answers (Atzmon 2010).

“...We have to be very very suspicious with everything we say or learn about the Nazis,” he tells me at another point, suggesting that I “start to read revisionist[s], because they are well-documented, at least....David Irving is definitely the best English-speaking historian,” he declares. “...[H]e is the biggest expert. Finkelstein, who is a historian, says there is no doubt that Irving is the biggest historian. But there are plenty....[Irving] made one big mistake,” he adds. “He took this intellectually-kind-of-nothing to court for calling him an Holocaust-denier. For sure, he’s a Holocaust denier... He should be proud of it!”
“So are you a holocaust denier?” I ask.

“I don’t engage in historical narratives, I talk about philosophy of history,” announces Atzmon airily.

“...I don’t accept this notion at all... of a denier,” he continues. “...Because first we have to define what is the Holocaust. We cannot do that because there is legislation that doesn’t allow us, you know! As long as we are not entitled to agree what the Holocaust was, how can I agree that I can deny or otherwise?”

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

...The facts on the ground are: apartheid state, with a growing majority of Palestinian people between the river to the sea. The facts on the ground are leading into one Palestinian state... I would prefer, you know that the Israelis would be slightly more vicious [sic], but anyway, their viciousness reflect on their... collective identity, or it reflect on who they are. It gave us a very good perspective into the issue of their history, we can at last comprehend their history. So everything is fine (Atzmon 2010).

This prescription does not lend itself to resolving the conflict, but Atzmon tells me, “We are fighting Jewish power. Palestine is just one symptom of Jewish brutality...” At another moment, he declares, Israel is just one symptom of Jewishness. Zionism is a global movement. It has nothing to do with Palestine. Zionists operate here [in the UK], they have some wide interests. What is it that they want? This is one of those big questions. It’s not clear. Because if they want security, it doesn’t work, because they really draw fire (Atzmon 2010).

We discuss the possibilities for people facing the dilemma that Atzmon once faced – belonging to the nation and yet disagreeing with the practices carried out in its name. I am interested to know what he sees as viable options for people in this situation. He suggests that
some Israelis could come now and tell the United Nations, ‘you fucked us up. Rather than letting us stay in Europe, you sent us all to there,’ which is a legitimate argument. ‘I want my house. I want you German to look after me, you French, you English.’ (Atzmon 2010)

So is leaving the only option? What should an anti-Zionist Israeli, who has no citizenship of another country, do? I put this question to Atzmon.

“He has a problem,” states Atzmon bluntly.

... I’m a philosopher, I’m not a politician. To start with, he should confront his misery... Because in most cases, ninety nine per cent of the cases, rather than confronting their misery, they come into political solution. I’m not looking for political solutions... My mother is one of those cases, and she’s a wandering lost kind of this type... She was born as a Palestinian in Palestine, she’s become Israeli... she doesn’t want to be there, she doesn’t have any other passport... They have to find their way... They can ask for being asylum seekers... By the way, I didn’t have British passport. I was here, I was good citizen, I paid tax. It took me quite a few years to become British subject. I did it.... One thing that is unacceptable. They cannot live on stolen land and saturate us with their lefty bullshit (Atzmon 2010).

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

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

And what should people do with them?
That’s their business... I don’t know what to do with them!... Sometimes I suggest the answer and then I change it... I don’t have any answer to the Israelis. Shlomo Sand ... said, “we are not a nation, we invented ourselves one hundred years ago.” An Israeli... stood up in one of the press conferences and said, “listen, I’m Israeli, I was born Israeli, I feel Israeli, what do you want me to do?” He obviously didn’t have an answer. I have my answer. I’m ex-Israeli. I resolved my situation (Atzmon 2010)

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

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

Why? Cos one of the problem that we have here is that Jews can operate as a collective, but the dissidents cannot be a collective because it is based on the rejection of the collective. So once you turn it into the collective, which the “good Jew”’s trying to do, fucking bring it down!... (Atzmon 2010).

**Dorit Rabinyan**

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

If you remember that someone will say, “it was a political thing not to write about Israel and to write about the Diaspora” or to tell about your grandmother’s story before you tell about your own story, or to reflect yourself in a Jewish feminine minority, all this like – fuck! I want to sing in the shower, you know. I want to enjoy my own voice... (Rabinyan 2010)

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

As I noted in the Introduction to this work, whilst Rabinyan’s novels would not qualify her for attention in this thesis, she has written one piece that I regard as highly political, published in the *Guardian* in 2004. The piece details the life and death of Palestinian artist Hasan Hourani, and charts Rabinyan’s journey from well-meaning but ignorant Israeli leftist to someone who comes to see herself as intimately connected to the Other through their year-long friendship. She invokes powerful images of their similarity and connectedness, which come to overpower the fact that they hold “enemy passports” (Rabinyan 2004).

In the article, Rabinyan recounts the political arguments between herself – a supporter of a modest two-state solution in which Zionism remains intact – and Hourani, who supports a single state in Israel/Palestine. Rabinyan expresses her frustration at his desires, and laments that such a “solution” would simply reverse their roles in the tragedy, placing her as stateless exile (Rabinyan 2004). However, after explaining how Hourani tragically drowns at the beach in Jaffa – he sneaks into Israel illegally and chooses an unobserved and unsafe place to swim – Rabinyan evocatively depicts Hourani’s “binational dream”, rendering her own political aspirations uninspiring and fearful by contrast (2004).

I imagine Hourani as the voice for the things that Rabinyan dare not say or admit, but Rabinyan shatters these illusions in our interview, revealing that she has not changed her mind about anything in the years since. “I still argue with Hasan in my head,” she declares. She has retreated from politics. When I tell her what is going on at the time of our interview, she expresses a weary half-interest. “Yeah? I don’t know, I don’t know. I don’t know nothing. I don’t read newspapers...In a way I’m tired with it, I let go. But umm, I’m scared to say what’s going to happen...I’m frustrated...” (Rabinyan 2010).
The fact that her writing fails to advocate for Rabinyan’s own “lukewarm” peace and two-state solution is of little importance to her. “I don’t care who convinces on it. I can’t do anything to change someone’s political view... It’s not my aim” (Rabinyan 2010). Yet Rabinyan admits that Hourani’s binational state functions as the foil to her “realistic” two-state solution. “In a way, I needed to have his state to be more – I see it as a fantasy, I keep on seeing it as a fantasy,” (Rabinyan 2010).

Rabinyan tells me that she continues to visit Hourani’s family.

[W]hen I go to Ramallah, I enjoy very much, I enjoy being close to Hasan in a way. I enjoy the normality. Just so normal. Like, you know, I visit them. They’re so happy with me. They celebrate me in such a beautiful way. Cos, you know it’s like, his mother told me, “I can smell him from your hair!” (Rabinyan 2010).

Rabinyan’s trips are illegal, since Israeli citizens are prohibited from entering this zone of the West Bank. ‘When I go through the checkpoint, I go through as Palestinian. Nobody doubts that I’m [Palestinian]... At this place, it gives me benefits, I’m using it’

This is one of several conflations of Jews with Arabs. “The fact that I can see so many contradictions in the checkpoints,” she goes on, “is because the ones who are the soldiers and the Palestinian citizens, they look so much alike.” When it comes to her relationship with Hourani, again it is similarity that draws them together. She speaks of “something to be very familiar with the way I felt to Arabness; that it wasn’t coloured for me with fearful colours. It was something that I knew from within.”

I ask her if her Mizrahi identity is part of what makes him seem less Other.45 “No, he was the Other”, she insists.

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45 The status and experience of Mizrahi or “Middle-Eastern” Jews has been detail by Shohat, 1999; Dahan-Kalev 2003; Shenhav 2002. For many Mizrahim, their native language, cultures and customs are Arabic, which has resulted in their
But I was the Other as well! He has the baggage of my Otherness here. In a way, I could refer to something in myself, ... this Mizrahi element, on the background of his Arabness... My Mizrahi identity reflecting the Israeli background is different reflected within him (Rabinyan 2010).

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

Another motif in Rabinyan’s narrative is one of equality. When asked if she supports the existence of a Palestinian Army, she tells me,

This is something me and Hasan we spoke about, and I said, yes, let you have a state, you have a strong Army, then let us fight, and then when we’re equal, let us see. When you’re not so miserable, when not you’re not victimised by this situation, by the colonialists or the European imperialists who made us to be stronger than you (Rabinyan 2010).

Continuing to address Hasan, she claims:

I don’t want you to be stronger than me. I aim for equalness because in equalness I can be the bad one in the afternoon and the good one in the morning. I can accept this elusive justice that runs between ourselves, one day you are the good one, one day I’m the bad one, and we’re shifting (Rabinyan 2010).

“The equalness was a crucial thing” in their relationship, she tells me.

It was very important for me that on the ground of New York we were equal. The fact that, the starting point was that him being occupied by my people makes him inferior to me in this [Israeli] world. I was obsessed with us being equal, with us being free and comfortable (Rabinyan 2010).

being regarded with suspicion. Rabinyan is of Persian origin, “But, something about in Israel, everyone who came from an Islamic country was contained in one sack” (Rabinyan 2010).
Meron Benvenisti

The final writer I explore is Meron Benvenisti, who has been an academic, analyst and politician. Now, in his golden years, he is primarily a commentator; writing for Ha’aretz until 2009 and continuing to make irregular contributions. He has also written several books, keeping his personal identity contained within small anecdotes that raise more questions than they answer. This is particularly the case in Son of the Cypresses (2007), which the reader is invited to approach as autobiography, but on closer inspection, the book actually consists largely of previously published opinion pieces, with no grand narrative tying them together.

To the extent that there is a grand narrative to Benvenisti’s work, it would be the argument that Israel-Palestine is already a binational entity, and perhaps was always so. Whilst much of Benvenisti’s energy is put into observation and analysis of the status quo, he has also written articles modelling how this binational reality could be transformed into a binational state (2003). A deep criticism of the Israeli Right’s desire to control all of Israel / Palestine underpins much of Benvenisti’s analysis, but he reserves equal, if not greater, vitriol for leftists who are savaged for their arrogance, a lack of empathy for their fellow Jews, and in particular their usage of terms like “the occupation.” To Benvenisti, this term is a smoke-screen; Israel’s settlement of the West Bank is “quasi-permanent” (2007).

In Son of the Cypresses, Benvenisti recounts his childhood in Palestine. Particular attention is paid to his father, David Benvenisti, one of the founders of ‘Knowing the Land’. This discipline, taught in schools and encouraged as a popular pursuit, encourages young people to hike, observe and reify the Land of Israel, whose features are given new, Hebrew names. ‘Knowing the Land’ forms an important part of building a ‘nativist’ narrative amongst Jews before and after the State of Israel is created; by ‘knowing’ the land, these eager participants simultaneously ‘Judaize’ (de-Arabise) it whilst ‘nativising’ themselves (Benvenisti 2000). In what he calls “delayed filial rebellion” (Benvenisti
2007), Benvenisti the younger rejects his father’s project, which doesn’t engage with the land as it really is, but instead fetishises it. Palestinian Arabs and their communities are deliberately excluded from emerging maps. Benvenisti’s determination to know the land as it really is underscores much of his work. In *Sacred Landscape: A Buried City of the Holy Land* (2000), he meticulously details how various Palestinian villages and towns have been taken over by Jewish occupants, and how all references to Palestinian names have been replaced with Jewish ones, facilitated by the removal of actual Palestinians from the land in 1948 (2000). The tone of this work appears to be one of empathy for those who have been uprooted, and moral outrage at the Orwellian replacement of nomenclature.

Benvenisti’s most poignant expression features in a *Ha’aretz* article by Ari Shavit, who also conducted the explosive interview with Benny Morris examined in the Introduction to this thesis. In the Benvenisti article, the older man lays bare his break from Zionism and represents the futures of Israeli Jews and Palestinians as intertwined, just like their pasts. Benvenisti, whose “roots lie deep in the old Zionist establishment,” features in the article alongside Haim Hanegbi, a more radical “retired revolutionary” (Shavit 2003). Shavit notes with fascination that completely independently of each other, the two men have reached an intriguing point in their conceptual development… the conclusion that there is no longer any prospect of ending the conflict by means of a two-state solution…. The time has come to establish one state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea: a binational state (Shavit 2003, para 1).

Benvenisti describes his recent reframing of the conflict in Israel / Palestine from a “struggle between two national movements for the same land” (for which two states is an appropriate solution) to “a conflict between a society of immigrants and a society of natives” (para 3-4). He reflects upon how the “conquering immigrants” have been “unable to enjoy the fruits of their
victory”, “achieve tranquillity” or “entrench peace for themselves” (para 5). Reflecting that neither party in the conflict will ever give up its claims, Benvenisti rejects the two-state solution.

You can erect all the walls in the world here but you won’t be able to overcome the fact that there is only one aquifer here and the same air and that all the streams run into the same sea. You won’t be able to overcome the fact that this country will not tolerate a border in its midst (para 8).

Benvenisti suggests Israel’s leaders will have to go through a similar process to South Africans relinquishing apartheid (para 10). After describing a binational state based on federalism (para 11) he then moves into the emotive sphere of identification.

I am seventy now, and I have the right to engage in summing up. And I was part of it all here: the youth movement and the army and the kibbutz and politics. I am the salt of the earth and I’m not ashamed of it… I won’t let anyone tell me I am a traitor. I won’t let anyone say I’m not from here – including the Palestinians. I am exactly what my father wanted me to be: a native… I am a native son. But this is a country in which there were always Arabs. This is a country in which the Arabs are the landscape, the natives. So I am not afraid of them. I don’t see myself living here without them. In my eyes, without Arabs, this is a barren land (para 12).

Benvenisti describes himself as being “drawn to the Arab culture and Arabic language because it is here. It is the land.” He is a “neo-Canaanite”, declaring “I love everything that springs from this soil” (para 13). He then describes his attachment to the Arabs who lost their place on the land, declaring “today I live their tragedy even though I perhaps caused it… for years I didn’t know how to translate that attachment into political language. Now the binational mode of thought may give it political expression” (para 17).

Conclusion

Each of the eleven dissidents introduced here reflects a unique response to the dilemma of worrying about the Us in the context of a hegemonic ressentiment discourse and an ethnocratic state. The
diversity in the dissidents’ responses demonstrates that there is no set method for dealing with ‘the
dilemma’. Instead, individuals employ a range of responses. The next two Chapters examine some of
the discontinuities that emerge in these responses. A single page summary of the dissidents is
included at Appendix A.
CHAPTER FIVE: THEMES OF DISSIDENT DISSONANCE

Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the dissidents; here I begin to examine moments of discontinuity within their narratives. In such moments, we can observe the dilemma the dissidents face as part of the privileged cohort in an ethnocracy who are concerned about the plight of their Other. The dissidents are well-intentioned individuals in a difficult situation; the dissonance within their narratives is a manifestation of their dilemma, not a personal failing. My intention is not to hold them up against some unattainable benchmark, but rather to illustrate how we might perceive them as constrained by ethnocracy, *ressentiment* Zionism and the hostile relations these have generated with the Other.

Moments of dissonance can be observed across multiple dissident narratives, so I organise the dissidents’ responses into themes. I begin each themed section with a brief discussion of how that particular issue demonstrates the tension experienced by the dissidents, then employ illustrative examples before offering some concluding remarks. Not every dissident is included in each section. The themes explored are Attraction to Zionism, which looks at how the dissidents are drawn to elements or consequences of the Zionist project; The Past, which examines how the dissidents narrate their national belonging in the context of the Zionist project’s history of colonialism and dispossession and further back into the development of Zionism; Fear for the Us and Self Interest, which explore how the dissidents’ sentiments about self-preservation might be informed by both the collective fear generated through *ressentiment*, and individual concerns, respectively. All These Things That I’ve Done explores moments in which dissidents have acted against the values they now hold. The final section, What Does it Mean to be Clean, analyses the most extreme dissidents. What
do their experiences tell us about the price to be paid for such ‘extreme’ dissent, and its marginality in Israeli society?

Attraction to Zionism

The dilemma experienced by the dissidents is constituted in part by their membership of the privileged Jewish Us in an ethnocratic state. For some of them, this ‘national’ membership goes beyond denoting their objective legal status, and also invokes personal identification and sentimental attachment to either the Zionist project or its creation of a vibrant Jewish society in Palestine.

American-born Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom demonstrates why the concept of a Jewish national homeland might be an attractive proposition, perhaps unwittingly invoking Kymlicka’s argument that ‘minority cultures’ in pluralist liberal democracies need to expend extra energy on that which ‘the majority’ takes for granted (Kymlicka 1989, Ch.9).

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

(Milgrom 2010).

Such an attachment to a Jewish cultural collective leads other dissidents to overtly identify as Zionists, albeit in ways that challenge the conventional understandings of Zionism explored thus far in this thesis. Oren Yiftachel frames his vision for Israel’s future as “the only way to ensure that we remain there” (Yiftachel 2007). By “we” he means Jews or “Hebrews”; he is adamant that they retain a collective right to the land, constituting the “basic idea of Zionism that [he] support[s].” (Yiftachel 2007)

Eitan Bronstein also sees himself “as a Zionist in a way, but totally in a different way.”
... I see me as this product of Zionism... Me becoming Eitan... is a very Zionist practice. Hebraizing my name, very name. Even to add to it, the meaning of Eitan... Eitan in Hebrew is ‘strong’ or ‘virile’. ...The ... Zionist revolution, how they saw it in Europe, they hoped to have a new person there in Palestine, working the land and being strong. The New Jew. Not anymore this weak Jew dealing with, you know, trade or money, but a new Jew, working the land, strong, virile, like my name, Eitan... (Bronstein 2010).

Bronstein invokes the conscious effort on the part of Zionists to reinvent the stereotype of Jews by replacing them with ‘Hebrews,’ who were different, ‘gentile’ in appearance and outlook. Tilling the soil, raising cattle, living outdoors in a sunny climate and eating a healthy diet, the native-born Hebrew was the antithesis of his indoor-living, east European and bookish counterpart (Goldberg 2006, p.99).

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

My name. The language I speak. The language, Hebrew, is a Zionist project...The whole Hebrew language and culture. My whole life here, you know. I love Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv is, ... as the slogan goes, or the myth, the first Hebrew city, and I’m part of it and I love it... (Bronstein 2010).

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

Israel is very much an immigrant society. So...[it has] all kinds of people, and you feel that they’re not exactly from here. They have strange accent... When someone very nationalist, Zionist, argues with me – there was this one case it was on the radio...a very popular show, he invite[d] me again and again to be interviewed there. He is very nationalist and he has a very strong French accent. It’s so funny...[M]y accent, it is much more better than him. And he is [saying] ‘It’s our country, you are working against us.’ ...In this sense I think I’m better than him...Because he is not exactly from here... So yeah, in a way I also feel that he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He never went to the Army here. He’s not part of this place. I know it’s wrong, what I’m...[]

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46 This can most clearly be seen in the efforts of the Canaanite movement to separate Palestinian Hebrews from Jews. However, the reinvention of Jews can be seen across the project generally, particularly in the fair, robust agricultural labourers depicted in propaganda posters – see Rose (2005) for examples and discussion.
saying. I think I take this thing from Zionism, this ranking of people, being Israeli. But I hope I use it to help something good, you know. Like if more ‘better Israelis’ like me, people like us, I hope this can make this place better. .... Like for example, these Jewish American settlers. We look at them, and we’re ashamed of them, of course, and hate them, many things, but we think in a way that they are less Israelis than us...[T]here is this part of me, that I am not so proud of it...he’s less Israeli than I am. (Bronstein 2010).

For Bronstein, simply living in Israel means in some sense, being Zionist. He explains the contradictions he struggles with:

[B]eing an Israeli...I live through contradictions all the time... My kids, they listen to one story at home but they face or they experience...terrible language and culture in school, other places. So the contradictions are all the time, yes. I hope I have enough sense of humour to contain these contradictions because I don’t think I can be too rigid in trying to solve these contradictions. In some places we try, here in Zochrot and personally, to do something about it. To show it, to tell it to other people, to do Zochrot, to do many things. But if I think I can solve all the contradictions – anyway we cannot solve this anywhere, in any place in the world. But here, these contradictions are so clear and so terrible in many ways. Because on the one hand I love it, and many things around here I like very much. On the other hand some things from our political culture and political life and daily life, I hate, so it’s a terrible contradiction (Bronstein 2010).

He goes on to frame his decision to live in a particular way as retaining an overall connection to Israeli Jews, and by extension, Zionism.

...[T]he fact that I choose the way to live here and to speak the language and write this language and to address Israelis, I think, I hope, I have enough compassion to my Israeli fellows, you know. And this means that I must of course identify with them in a way, with Israelis, and understand that we Israelis have a big problem. Now this I cannot do without some, even, in a way, empathy or sympathy to them, to Israelis. Now, yes, Israelis are Zionist, most of us, and I have to love this part too, in a way... (Bronstein 2010, my italics).

Jeff Halper, who migrated to Israel as an adult with a political vision, also felt a deep attraction for his ‘people’. “I started writing a little on Israeli culture, Hebrew culture, they’re really interesting and I really like them. So I was Israeli, and I am,” (Halper 2010). He translates this into his modern work.
“We are the Israeli committee against housing demolitions. We emphasise the Israeli part,” (Halper 2010).

A minority of my dissidents take their attachment to the ‘Jewish collective’ as far as maintaining a preference for a Jewish state. Dorit Rabinyan declares:

My state, my homeland, the place I belong to...is a Jewish state... There’s only one Jewish state around, on the globe, on earth, and this is mine, this is where I feel related to and identify with, and with its essence and values and definition to be Jewish. I find it the right thing to be (Rabinyan 2010).

Meron Benvenisti also reveals such sentiments when I ask him about his support for a one-state solution to the conflict in Israel / Palestine, which I have deduced from his poignant evocation of a binational state (Shavit 2003), and also his practical guide for its establishment (Benvenisti 2003).

“I don’t say that I want to see it!” he retorts emphatically.

...I am the one who is very upset about it cos I wanted a Jewish state. The fact that it doesn’t exist, or it cannot now it’s quasi permanent binational regime, doesn’t mean that I love it...
(Benvenisti 2010a).

Benvenisti, like the other dissidents examined here, aligns his identity to the Zionist project and its consequences. While for some this is framed as support for the establishment of a national collective, for others it is a reclaimed take on Zionism. Benvenisti and Rabinyan invoke Zionism in its more traditional form by supporting a Jewish state. In the next section, I will explore how such affiliation with Jewish nationalism generates tensions when combined with a critical view of the injustices experienced by Others.
The Past: ‘National’ history

Several dissidents invoke an attachment to aspects of Jewish nationalism; in this section, I explore how their interpretation of the history of the Zionist project in Palestine generates tensions when paired with regrets about the treatment of Others during this time. I then look at how dissidents talk about Jewish history and identity prior to settlement in Palestine. But first, I will elaborate on the question of ‘national’ responsibility.

Farid Abdul-Nour (2003, 2004) argues that when people imagine themselves to belong to a nation, they align themselves with deeds done in that nation’s past, and feel pride in this connection. Such identification is also the source of responsibility for wrongs done to Others in the name of that nation. To the extent that an individual feels pride and connection to ‘the nation’, he or she should also bear some responsibility for its history (2003, p.709), invoking either guilt or shame. Guilt requires redress; ideally, the guilt-feeling individual would undo what had been done or at least wish that it had not occurred (p.708). Shame, on the other hand, does not involve actual regret.

A mature person who conceives of herself as an imagined national agent need not think that “we” ought or could have acted differently from the way “we” actually acted before she can demand a response from herself for bad outcomes brought about by “our” actions... [S]uch a person is not led to an admission of guilt (that would be disingenuous, since she would do it again). Rather, she might be led to reflect on the kind of person she is, at what it says about her to be proud about this act of founding. The discourse of shame opens up this possibility (Abdel-Nour 2003, p. 710-711).

Abdul-Nour argues that nations would be torn apart by guilt. The discourse of shame, with its gradual transformation of identity, may therefore offer more suitable recourse (Abdel-Nour 2004). However, there is a limit to such a discourse, as when Eitan Bronstein (2010) realises that the recognition of his “terrible coloniser identity” is not enough. Accordingly, I want to understand how
the dissidents evaluate Zionist settlement of Palestine, how they define their relationships to those who went before them, and whether their evaluations have the potential to be transformative.

The dissidents could potentially avoid the entire issue by saying: “I don’t support what happened, but there is a Jewish nation here now that needs to be accounted for in future arrangements.” Such an argument would endorse protection of those identifying as the ‘Jewish nation’ without anchoring them to the past, hence precluding the subject from having to take responsibility. Interestingly, though, most of my dissidents don’t utilise this option. Instead, as I will demonstrate, some of them use Cultural Zionism in an attempt to legitimise a Jewish presence in Israel/Palestine. I argue that they do this precisely because they have an emotional investment in the notion of an ancient Jewish nation anchored to Palestine. Cultural Zionism offers the only alternative way of articulating this, against the mainstream political project which they purport to oppose. However, like those who came before them, the dissidents struggle to explain the Cultural Zionist programme in a way that could have offered a meaningful alternative to what unfolded.

Cultural Zionism, discussed in Chapter Two, depicted the ‘Jewish nation’ as having a claim to Palestine, but not the right to build a state there. Cultural Zionism was never effectively articulated (Weiss 2004, p.113) and was inextricably linked to and ultimately subsumed by its Political cousin. I have suggested that this played a role in the ressentiment Zionist discourse’s construction of the project as virtuous, and the consequent interpretation of resistance as irrational evil. Whilst Cultural Zionism represented the earliest manifestation of ‘the dilemma’ – people concerned with the Other attempting to reconcile this with the Zionist project – its resultant contribution to the ressentiment discourse damned the efforts of these individuals by recruiting their moral endeavours to ends they opposed. They were co-opted, as individuals who came to support the creation of the Jewish state, but also as a collective subsequently showcasing its inherent morality. I regard their experiences as cautionary for contemporary dissidents; rendering the ‘tradition’ of internal dissent problematic for its continual susceptibility to co-optation, appropriation and ultimate cleavage to colonisation and
violence. I seek to engage the dissidents with the bald proposition that perhaps there was no other way of attaining the goals of the Zionist project than force, dispossession and repression of Others. My intention is to present the logic of my argument and see how they respond; my hypothesis is that they will not be able to formulate a critique of my argument, but nor will they want to acquiesce with it. This is borne out in interesting ways.

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

...It’s been evicted to its homeland.... It actually it never was evicted from its homeland, like the Zionist story goes, but it was evicted to the homeland. And yes, I suppose that gives it a particular right. It’s been denied citizenship; it’s been exterminated, genocided, evicted from dozens of countries. The only place it could actually reconstitute itself is there, its historical homeland. And it has a right to do that (Yiftachel 2007).

Whilst lamenting the “the way it was done, and the cynical way it was used,” Yiftachel emphasizes the impetus created by “the group of refugees, the majority of Jews, between 80-90% are sort of coerced and forced migrants, nowhere to go” as a basis for the “historical justification” of Zionist settlement (2007). However, he takes the invocation of the historical homeland seriously in its own right. At another point in our interview, he rejects comparisons between Zionism’s colonising and conquering and early Nazism (Burg 2007) partly on the grounds that it is “qualitatively a different project” to “colonise one people that sits on your historical homeland, [than] to colonise twenty peoples that live all across Europe” (Yiftachel 2007, my italics).
Interested in how he responds to the suggestion that the Cultural Zionist position was untenable, I put it to him that the establishment of Israel wasn’t possible without oppression and domination.

“Well, that’s an open question,” he responds.

Probably you’re right...because you know, it was what I call...colonialism of refugees, it’s [an] absolutely desperate type of colonialism. You know, and they, they see their flight from sorrow as the whole entire world. To some extent, who can blame them? Coming from Europe, mainly Arab world, and being the most oppressive [sic] people in the world, in history, you know? So this, ah, is huge weight on the shoulder (Yiftachel 2007). 47

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

as a land expert, I can tell you it is possible. Ah, the Palestinian land ownership, for example, in Palestine in 1948 was only less than thirty percent of the land. Um, you know, there is room. And it didn’t have to create the refugee problem. You know from the beginning it could be a multicultural or bi-ethnic binational state... And so, and it could live, I could even live with an Arab majority, it doesn’t really worry me as long as there is institutional, constitutional support for the continuation of the Jewish collectivity (Yiftachel 2007).

Yiftachel frames his vision for a binational state in Israel / Palestine as something that was possible in the past and remains possible today – he flips easily from land ownership in 1948 to how a binational state could look today. But I am particularly interested in what was “possible” in the context of opposition from Palestine’s indigenous non-Jewish population to the establishment of Israel. When I suggest that to him that “institutional, constitutional support for the continuation of the Jewish collectivity” would not have been forthcoming at the time, Yiftachel responds by seemingly endorsing Israel’s creation.

“But...there was an Israel in 1947, there was an Israel created, let’s not forget that...And that Israel had a large Arab minority but there was a Jewish majority. It could have constructed its

47 I believe Yiftachel means to say “oppressed” rather than “oppressive” here. Also, his mention of “the Arab world” appears to refer to Jews who emigrated from the Middle East to Israel.
own politics and of course with the Jewish influx it would have had a large majority of Jews. But it chose not to do that, it chose to drive the Arabs out. So, you know, I object to that. But that doesn’t mean that, you know – the abuse that existed, that doesn’t negate the need to cater for the collectivity itself. There is nobody else that would cater for it except itself. So that gives it legitimacy, yes... (Yiftachel 2007).

Yiftachel’s criticism of the actions carried out by the new Jewish state is entirely coherent: it could have been a state with a marginal Jewish majority which treated its non-Jewish citizens equally instead of expelling them, whilst also using that majority to enforce the Zionist aspiration of bringing more Jews to the land. However, Yiftachel’s analysis commences after the state’s creation, and when I try to take him further back, there appears to be a void. Like the Cultural Zionists before him, Yiftachel can’t explain how a Jewish homeland could have been attained in Palestine without the UN decision which already thwarted the wishes of non-Jews. But Yiftachel’s “colonialism of refugees” reads desperation into the actions of Zionists settling in Palestine, enabling him to morally justify their cause. He also explains the logic of this argument in keeping with his own identity: “There will be very few people who will say that their own collectivity has to disappear. This is suicidal in a, you know, psychologically pathological way” (Yiftachel 2007).

Activist and anthropologist Jeff Halper takes a more optimistic view of Zionist migration to Palestine. He tells me, unbidden, that perhaps the greatest controversy about him in leftist circles is that he doesn’t “consider Zionism to be a colonial movement... because there was a genuine tie between the Jews and this country,” (Halper 2010).

We speak Hebrew; Hebrew wasn’t invented a hundred years ago, there was already a tie....It wasn’t like some British farmer gets up one morning and decides to go to Kenya to get a lot of cheap land and cheap labour and become a colonialist...There was a connection. Jews were not strangers to this land. That’s what I insist on. The land of Israel, whatever you want to call it, was central to Jewish culture and Jewish symbolism and religion, and in a real way, not in some fakery constructed way...And I think that when the Zionist movement developed, both in terms of fleeing persecution but also in terms of a national movement, like other national movements in Europe, it was legitimate (Halper 2010).
I offer Halper Yiftachel’s “colonialism of refugees.”

I don’t know what that means. No, they weren’t all refugees. I mean, the impulse for coming here was not as a refugee. It was a positive national movement. ...The Jews were a nation, or a pre-nation, within this Europe of tribes and nations, that did have a territorial reference, and that was the land of Israel. And it was a real thing, it wasn’t some fakey thing...and it’s true that there were pressures as well.... I think there’s a genuineness here that has to be respected (Halper 2010).

Part of that respect involves taking seriously the idea that Zionism did not view Palestine’s ‘Arabs’ malevolently.

In those days, they really believed that this was a land without a people. Not in a physical sense, I mean, they’re not blind, but on the point of view that there wasn’t another people here. The Palestinians hadn’t really coalesced either in terms of their national identity. You’ve got to cut people slack, cos when people actually live their lives, ... they do bad things, or they’re not consistent, or they didn’t understand everything... (Halper 2010).

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

I mean, I’m saying the impulse, the nucleus wasn’t colonialism ... I wouldn’t say it’s illegitimate like a colonial movement should be, and that the Jews have no place here; they should go back to Russia. Jews were a thousand years in Russia but were never accepted as Russian. But what I say is: when they adopted this ethnocratic kind of eastern European nationalism, and they denied there was a Palestinian people, and they had this exclusive claim, that’s where it became colonialism. That’s where they start ethnic cleansing, this is the Land of Israel and Meron
[Benvenisti]'s father's story of renaming the country and all that stuff. That’s when it became colonial (Halper 2010).

Eitan Bronstein is also compelled to cut early Cultural Zionists some slack, in Halper’s parlance; to locate their actions without judgement in a historical context. He is also quick to argue that there’s Jewish who have some relations to this place, some link. I don’t neglect or underestimate or try to suggest that there is no connection between Jewish people and the Jewish [inaudible]. Of course people believe in this and it’s okay (Bronstein 2010).

Eager to understand how he retrospectively imagines the history of Palestine might have unfolded, I invite him to explain what could have been different.

...[I]f the leader of the Jewish minority here had said we are willing to see how we can live together here, and not stating that we are having now a Jewish state – if you have a Jewish state, of course, in order to materialise, you have to have a war. But I think there were other voices then that could enable something totally different (Bronstein 2010).

Bronstein places faith in these “other voices” and their ability to achieve something different; I am keen to pin down exactly how this might have operated. I ask Bronstein if he can explain how exactly a Jewish minority – which did not have its own state – would have been able to secure entry rights for Jews to Palestine.

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

The whole notion of Zionism coming here, it’s not just a naïve migration to this empty land. It’s migration with an intention to redeem the land, to redeem the work. So when the Zionist movement and migration began and expanded, also those practices of other ways of expulsion or segregation or ...superiority of Jews ... So it is difficult to talk about 1948 because before that there was already this history of violent behaviour here (Bronstein 2010).

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48 Halper’s use of the term 'ethnocratic' differs from my technical employment of the term; he uses it to depict what I call ‘ressentiment ethnic nationalism’ – discourses of national identity that elevate the Us and demonise Others.
However, “it doesn’t mean that this is the whole story,” Bronstein continues.

...[T]here are many other narratives that you can find hidden in Zionism....There were many Jews who tried to tell and ask Palestinians not to run away, and it was earnest. They were not [political], ...neighbours, usually neighbours. “We want to live with you, don’t run away.” Of course they were not strong enough politically...But naively they thought, yes we can live together. This doesn’t mean they were not Zionist, they were very Zionist (Bronstein 2010).

“I don’t think they were a contradiction,” Bronstein adds.

I think they didn’t see the whole picture from their side. Because this happened in many many cases. Neighbours, Jews and Arabs living, having good relations. There were shootings around, and this was one of the practices of the Zionist forces to go around and to shoot...and to raise fear. And also the stories of the massacres, the massacre of Deir Yassin that caused such huge panic among Palestinians.49 This panic, the [Jewish] neighbours couldn’t experience it because it doesn’t hurt the Jews... But I mean the Jews didn’t have many other options, they were here to stay....[I]n many cases they were upset that the armed forces were forcing [Palestinians] out. They didn’t really have enough power and didn’t try very hard to stop it. In Haifa, for example, the Jewish leaders tried to stop them from going out and also talking about the wish that they will return, but they didn’t do really much. They didn’t try, as I know, to convince the Israeli government to let them return. So it sounds contradictory but I think for them it was something that makes sense (Bronstein 2010).50

Bronstein’s inability to directly answer my question about entry rights – or rather, his long answer which effectively indicts the entire Zionist movement (“violent behaviour”) – brings us to what I regard as a mantra for his interpretation. “There are no real solutions,” he claims.

...You can solve [the problem] politically...but still it doesn’t really solve it in the sense that ... there is no scar. It’s there. It’s forever there. You cannot really overcome in the sense that you forget it...The Nakba is there forever...so in that sense there is no way out. I think it’s very important to express it...There’s no way out... (Bronstein 2010, my italics).

49 Deir Yassin was a village of non-Jews massacred by a right-wing Zionist militia in 1948 (Segev 2000 p.507).
50 For more on the role of Haifa’s Jewish community in the Nakba, see Lentin 2010, Chapter 4, esp. p.74-9. Lentin, citing Weiss (2006) and Morris (2004), surmises less idealistic reasons for the request for Palestinians to remain. She also notes the relatively quick abandonment of this policy.
Bronstein cannot make the alternative “voices” from the past provide me with a direct answer to my question. Yet he, perhaps alone amongst my dissidents, also has a concise answer for the wider question underpinning my research: there is no way out of his own dilemma. The moment at which he lays this bare reverberates throughout this thesis.

The phenomenon Bronstein invokes – of thoughtful dissidents being unable to articulate the means of achieving ‘binational’ harmony in early Palestine – can also be observed in the personal narrative of Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom. When I ask Milgrom what should have happened instead of the War in 1948, the ethnic cleansing and the refusal of return of refugees, he replies:

Well, I think that the partition plan in 1947... was a much better starting point. Had it been accepted, had Israel stuck to it, had Israel gone back to it and not conquered more territory in 1948, it would have been a better thing. It would have been great if the refugees had been welcomed home... (Milgrom 2010).

This reliance on the creation of Israel as a starting point for imagining different visions is almost a direct match with Yiftachel’s response to a similar proposition (see above p.207-8). I advance the proposition that even the Israel proposed in the 1947 UN Partition Plan defied the wishes of non-Jews in Palestine.

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

some of which was, “Great, we’ll live together and they’ll be benefits for us living together.” There was also resentment and a feeling of being marginalised, and an anti-colonial struggle, so this is something that Zionism didn’t deal with properly, and didn’t figure out in a nice way. It sort of went in there and takes advantage of whatever it could take advantage of, so in 1947 things were pretty sticky already. So I guess it would have been better if the state had not been established in 1947 but rather that things had sort of, you know, worked out (Milgrom 2010).
“A lot of people talk about cultural Zionism, spiritual Zionism, a Jewish presence but not a state,” I respond. “I wonder whether that would have been possible. Let’s say the majority of Arabs didn’t want the Jews there, how would a cultural Zionism ... have taken hold?”

Milgrom doesn’t have an answer for this; instead he reframes the question.

Every act, the actors have to think about what they are doing, why they’re doing it and what it does to someone else... There was a significant Jewish minority, still small but significant on the land – people were living together and it was okay. The early Zionists came in the late nineteenth century, and they were living together still. The question is, so what was developing, how would I have felt in those situations? Hopefully I would have been a peace maker or someone who was thinking about the impact of this on other people, but not enough Zionists were doing that. “This is what we want, what we need, this is what we can get.” (Milgrom 2010).

Milgrom’s vision of himself as a moral individual trying to reclaim a movement from disregarding its Others is a coherent way of framing his own identity. However, it is interesting how his responses to questions about the nationalist movement’s alternative strategies bring him to this lonely bastion of absolute individual responsibility – akin to his position today. In the course of our brief exchange on the subject, Milgrom goes from endorsing the partition plan, to rejecting it, to finally only imagining his role in the most personal terms. The alternative possibilities for the collective, which form the basis of my enquiry, have completely evaporated.

Gideon Levy takes a different view on the question of collective moral responsibility, accepting that an injustice had to occur in Israel’s establishment. He sees Zionism as “inevitable in many ways... I couldn’t stop the flow of who’s coming to here. I think this was a solution for the Holocaust,” (Levy 2010). However, Levy argues that one injustice should have been the limit.

I mean, once we did what we did in ’48, okay, we did. This should have been taken in account before we bombed Gaza! We should have remembered that in Gaza are living refugees, because of us. Our victims... So this should have gone into Israeli mind, but it doesn’t (Levy 2010).
For Meron Benvenisti, meanwhile, Israel’s past and his own role in it are open wounds that this hapless researcher unwittingly scratches. I include a more detailed account of our exchange to enable the reader to assess his responses in the context of my own, at times problematic, contributions. I contextualise by explaining, where relevant, why I pursued particular lines of questioning.

Benvenisti adopts a resentful posture even to my very first question about where he fits within the Zionist schema:

“This limits my thinking to something that I think any normal person, at any other place in the world wouldn’t begin to bother. About the constitution of the entity in which he lives. Do you do this in Australia? Is it part of your identity? It’s not part of my identity here. So the fact that Zionists decided that the Jewish state is part of, something that is important to identity, they can think that. I don’t have to think that way (Benvenisti 2010a).

Benvenisti is not going to sit happily in the box that Zionists have made for him, but nor is he going to sit in any other box, such as the “Leftist” box constructed within mainstream Israeli culture as oppositional to the Occupation. “I don’t believe in stereotypes,” he declares. “I don’t believe the fact that you invent Leftism by saying ‘Occupation’ or ‘West Bank’ instead of ‘Judea and Samaria’.” I ask him what terms he uses and he tells me he doesn’t care what terms he uses. When I tell him that I do care, he responds, “Then you’re wrong!”

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

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51 Benvenisti’s opposition to the construction of Leftism can be illuminated by Grinberg, who explains that “Israelis imagine the state of Israel as democratic and sovereign within its pre-1967 borders... Part of the problem lies in the illusion that a border actually exists, and that Jewish Israelis living within Israel’s sovereign borders are somehow not party to the crime being committed ‘there’, in ‘the territories’” (Grinberg 2009 p.109). This outsourcing of responsibility can be observed within other spheres of Israeli society too, such as the racialisation of violent soldiers and border police (see footnote 29, on p.127) and the labelling of Israeli Jews in certain parts of the country as rednecks so that “mainstream Israel... emerge[s] self righteously as ostensibly humane and civilised” (Rabinowitz 1997 p.71).
The problem is, when you get to my age you have to be aware of the failures in your life. I believe that my contradictions come from the fact that I’ve lived too long... People don’t understand that people will think and feel and adjust themselves to changing conditions. So I started by being a kibbutznik, a Zionist, a social democrat. By now, at my tender age, I believe that this is not a Zionist enterprise, but it’s a settler society...Yes, there is a contradiction between how do I see the beginning or the outcome. So it’s a very important question. If I criticise the beginning of this enterprise, I think about my parents. Do I criticise my parents? Do I think that they are colonialists? No. They are not responsible for the fact that in each turning point, this polity or this society takes the wrong turn (Benvenisti 2010a).

I ask him who is responsible.

All of us, the society, the tribe, the entity. They made all of the mistakes. My father came here in 1913, my mother in 1924. They came not out of persecution; they just wanted to build a just society in Palestine. They thought that they are entitled, to the land, to their part of the land, also believing that there’s a place for everybody (Benvenisti 2010a).

Benvenisti depicts his parents in similar terms to Halper describing the early Zionist settlers; I am interested in whether Benvenisti agrees with his parents’ perceptions. “What I think, it’s not to think now...” he replies. “Because it depends how I see them,” (Benvenisti 2010a).

Quite unbidden, Benvenisti then raises his public spat with Palestinian intellectual Edward Said in the Israeli newspapers in 2000. The entire exchange is recorded in Son of the Cypresses. It begins with the publication of Said’s memoir, including his experience of fleeing Jerusalem during the War of Independence/ Nakba. Following the publication of a Said interview in Ha’aretz, Benvenisti writes his own opinion piece which disputes Said’s version of events and accuses Said’s parents of being part of the betrayal of the Palestinian people by the intellectual class. Benvenisti’s parents do not deserve to be cast as the villains of the piece, he says. They had nowhere else to go and they stayed to fight instead. They won. Why should Benvenisti feel sorry for the Saids? (Benvenisti 2007, p.64).

After including his opinion piece in Son of the Cypresses, Benvenisti then includes the response of a “tremendously upset” Said (Benvenisti 2007, p.64), who accuses Benvenisti of slandering his family.
Said claims that people (including Israelis) frequently flee from violence and it does not follow that they should lose their property or residence rights. He argues that it is “unseemly, even indecent, for a member of [Benvenisti’s] people to speak so gloatingly about the misfortunes of others” (Said in Benvenisti 2007 p.63-4).

Benvenisti sums up by noting simply that Said’s “impassioned attack... reinforced my pride in my parents and their generation... We did not flee the country, but stayed and fought and won” (Benvenisti 2007, p.64). This intrigues me. Why does Benvenisti seemingly let Said have the last word? Does Benvenisti consider in retrospect that he was out of line, and use Said as a narrative device to tell the reader this? Apparently not, as becomes clear in the interview:

I said, look, I don’t want to apologise for my victory. The fact that you fled because you had a place in Cairo, so now I have to apologise for the fact that my father and mother stayed on and you fled? No, I’m sorry. You have to take responsibility for the fact that you fled. I am not ready to apologise for the fact that we won and they lost (Benvenisti 2010a).

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

I interrupt at this, bewildered. “A fair fight?”

Yes. Why not fair fight? They decided that the sword would decide and I accepted that the sword would decide. Now the sword has decided, now each one has to accept responsibility (Benvenisti 2010a).

In his writing, Benvenisti has looked at the structural processes that happened; the removal of people from villages – I had thought these were reported with regret. Now, I try to explain my confusion at what I am hearing. “You’ve seen everything that was done!”

“OK, and then what?” he barks.
“And then you say to Edward Said that your parents shouldn’t have, you – you almost say: ‘your parents are cowards’ –”

“That maybe because of that they lost...!”

The betrayal of intellectuals is not something that you can take easily. Part of the Nakba is caused by the fact that they looked down upon the villagers. Had nothing to do with the villagers... [There were not only] internal problems, [but] internal problems that were so detrimental to the cause that they lost. Now do I have to be responsible for that too? (Benvenisti 2010a)

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

“I do,” he insists.

I do feel partial responsibility, but not for the fact that I won and they lost, because they called for this war to begin. The fact that they have their own reasons to – good reason to reject us, I understand. Understand from the very beginning. But when there was war declared, war decided. I disagree with the fact that people take us as the sole responsible for what happened (Benvenisti 2010a).

Benvenisti has aired elsewhere recognition that non-Jews in Palestine had good reason to reject settling Zionists (see, for example, 2007 p.220). What confuse me in the interview is that he restates this in the same breath as the claim that Palestinian resistance rendered them culpable for their ultimate fate. I can’t work out how the two positions can be reconciled. The only coherent positions I can make sense of are either a) that Zionism was a virtuous project, in which case it was too bad for the non-Jews on the land, or b) that a settler-colonial project would of course generate resistance, and that such resistance, whilst it might not be supported, would be understood as part of the process rather than a deviant decision of the ‘natives’. Benvenisti seems to portray an understanding of the process and yet also apportion blame. I try to explain my understanding of
colonialism as a project with obvious consequences by talking about Australia’s dispossession of Aboriginal people.

“That’s not parallel,” he declares.

You can go into all these parallels, but this is absolutely the wrong parallel – there are parallels but not in the way it’s been understood as, what’s the end in which we – it’s one thing which is the same. The initial clash between a settler society and indigenous people. The fact that one came in, faced with total rejection, understandable rejection, by the indigenous, then war started. Each side continued with the initial clash that they had. This is the same as here. But not, the parallel is wrong as I see it (Benvenisti 2010a).

“Why?”

“I’m telling you why!”

“I don’t understand.”

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

“To me it’s not an argument, it’s a healthy discussion.”

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

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


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

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

I nod.

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

Benvenisti begins to grow edgy.

Saying that you are this or that, what you want? What is your aim in assigning responsibility on me? What is it? Is it to say I’m a bad person? What is the – or that my entity is wrong? Therefore it should be despondent or destroyed? What is the aim? What is the object of the exercise? (Benvenisti 2010a).

I (stupidly) think that Benvenisti is speaking rhetorically. I am also distracted by the fact that Benvenisti himself has put forward models for a one-state solution, so I tentatively point out that some people would say that the entity is wrong and it must be dismantled.

So they have a problem with me and with six million people! Or maybe with thirteen million people! And we’ll see who is going to win and who is going to lose! But that is not an argument. That’s a challenge, that’s an attack (Benvenisti 2010a).

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52 Presumably Benvenisti is referring to the entire world’s Jewish population.
I point out that Benvenisti has previously endorsed a one-state solution. He emphatically explains that he is talking about what exists, rather than what he wants. “I want people to face the reality. That’s all,” he tells me. “...This is a description, not a prescription” (Benvenisti 2010a).

The work is something else, that’s how you develop it. For existing conditions that is imposed on us and is there and you cannot in no way ignore reality. But that is not that I’m for the one state solution...And I am especially not for one-state solution because one state solution is a way to disguise the – really, the need, the will, to de-legitimise the Jewish state... It’s being used only for one thing. To say, ‘Jewish state is illegitimate, therefore one state solution.’ And all these people, when I meet them, and I meet them quite often, we have big and bitter arguments and I refuse to accept the legitimacy of their own analysis, because this is not an analysis, it is wishful thinking which is based on the negation and destruction of my own entity (Benvenisti 2010a).

Without realising that I am walking into a “big and bitter argument”, I suggest that perhaps Benvenisti’s society has made its own problems by creating the binational reality. I am trying to convey that it seems incongruous for a state to effectively impose a one-state scenario, as Benvenisti recognises, and simultaneously cry foul when people suggest that a real one-state solution must grant rights and citizenship to all.

“What has this to do with what I’m talking about?” he snaps.

So criticise my society, but you can’t allow to destroy my society because of that. Unless you believe that this is based on something wrong. This initial, original sin...If this is the case then we have to stop discussing and have to prepare for another war! You can’t allow... a subject to commit suicide. If this is how you see it, and people see it, they have to be prepared for that declaration of war they are declaring against me, because they know I would not accept that... (Benvenisti 2010a).

Benvenisti’s “suicide” comment here echoes Yiftachel’s suggestion that it is “psychologically pathological” to want to do away with one’s own entity. But his response confuses me yet again, because in 2004, Benvenisti wrote an opinion piece which asked that very question about whether the Jewish state was founded on an “original sin”, and seemed to suggest the answer was yes! I ask
him to explain this article, in which he observes another generation of Israelis dispossessing another generation of Palestinians, and asks whether there was something defective in the founding fathers’ vision. Half a century later, the Jewish state has been condemned to enmity and cannot survive forever, so Benvenisti wonders whether there was something wrong from the start (Benvenisti 2004).

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

“So what is wrong?”

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

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

“You can’t!” he exclaims.

Well, therefore, you’re wrong. And also...it’s wrong to quote back to a columnist or journalist something that he’s written in one context... You’re talking about a person who is writing to express his conditions and answer the needs of the moment. And this doesn’t mean that you can throw it back at me six years later in a general meaning, trying to make this a general assessment... about myself, my father, my mother, my tribe (Benvenisti 2010a).

I ask him if he would prefer his words to be tomorrow’s fish and chip wrapping. (Later, I’ll wish I asked him why he bothered to collect them into a book!)
“No, no,” he says. “But, but, I also don’t want to go into these questions, because I refuse to answer them. I don’t have to defend myself. That’s it.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to.”

Herein the interview unravels further; I shall include more excerpts from it subsequently. There is certainly a discussion to be had about my own responses to Benvenisti and how I might have provoked such a negative response from him; I revisit this at the end of the next chapter. However, the exchange can be read as a poignant illustration of Benvenisti’s difficulty in squaring present-day evaluations with his attachment to his collective’s historical project.

This tension, I suggest, is at the heart of all the examples included thus far. On the one hand, the dissidents are critical of the dispossession of the Other entailed in the Zionist project. Yet when it comes to locating their place within this history, they struggle to find a means of doing so that they can reconcile with their critical outlook. The dissidents could view the ‘Jewish nation’ as a modern construct which nevertheless needs to be accounted for in future political settlements, thereby ensuring protection for the collective as it stands today. But the dissidents display a far deeper emotional attachment in their identification with the ‘Jewish nation’, and therefore need other ways of explaining their relationship to its place in Palestine. Cultural Zionism appears to offer such an explanation.

Cultural Zionism lurks in all of the dissident narratives as a potentially benign path that the project could have taken, but I have argued that this is illusory. If we modify Abdel-Nour’s (2003, 2004) arguments, dissidents drawing pride from Cultural Zionism as an alternative ‘national history’ appear compelled to effectively articulate it; their apparent inability to do so reveals the centrality of Political Zionism to the successful enactment of the Zionist project. Cultural Zionists could not
resolve their own dilemmas *vis à vis* the Other; at best they were their own era’s version of ‘good people in a bad situation’. The dissidents reflect the historical narrative backwards in a way that supports this. For Yiftachel, the entire ‘Jewish nation’ was in a bad situation of being driven out of Europe. For Halper, the Cultural Zionists were good people who only experienced badness when their nationalism turned “ethnocratic”; Benvenisti’s sentiments about his own parents echo this. Bronstein is far more critical of the Zionist project but is also prepared to see virtue in the Cultural Zionists’ efforts. He and Milgrom display the limitations of the Cultural Zionist vision under questioning, and both respond in ways which are ultimately personal – Bronstein’s bald statement that there is “no way out” and Milgrom’s ultimate location of himself as a lone dissident within the Zionist project’s history. So whilst the dissidents attempt to find solace in the Cultural Zionist alternative history, they also reflect its limitations.

Three of my dissidents take their historical analysis further back to the beginnings of Zionism. We discuss the ‘cultural factor’ of chosenness within the Jewish historical narrative, and how this has augmented the *resentiment* discourse, though the dissidents don’t use these academic terminologies. I am interested in how they tell this story from the inside, the factors that they emphasise, and how they connect this to their own identities and struggles. I will discuss how this topic is treated by Milgrom, Atzmon and Halper.

When Milgrom invokes the Us, he appears to do so with reference to a religious community. But Milgrom thwarts my attempts to construct a dichotomy in which he, the rabbi, talks about Jewishness as a religion, and my other, more secular, dissidents talk about a ‘cultural’ or ‘national’ Jewishness as political ideology. Milgrom presents Jewish religion, culture and ideology as inseparable. There is Jewish culture, which belongs to a Jewish “milieu” (a more ambiguous word than “nation” or “ethnicity”), and the Jewish religion is an intrinsic part of this culture.
I don’t think it’s so easy or even profitable to separate religion from life, when in fact Jewish culture is a religious culture, but it’s also a culture that deals with all these issues of politics and economics and all that (Milgrom 2010).

This means that for Milgrom, dark forces in Jewish history cannot be limited to ideology, nor theology. They cannot be wholly attributed to social forces, nor laid in the hands of a few individuals. According to Milgrom, Zionism did not take something that was religious and apply it to secular nationalism. Rather,

The situation [in Palestine] brought out in prominence forces that were there before but didn’t have the same dominance. It’s not new stuff, it didn’t have to come from colonialism or nationalism or, God forbid, Nazism, can’t even think of that. But, but, no, we had it. This is the difficult thing now for me, recognising as we go back, we did have a long, long history of separatism. Of the feeling of superiority, cos God chose us, because we were the monotheists and they were the idolaters and all that. We didn’t really make the adjustments necessary when Christianity...[and] Islam came about. We didn’t make the adjustments to recognise that we are brothers and sisters, and we are a covenanted people with Muslims and Christians despite the small differences between us. The middle ages were times when those differences were very significant....and that’s haunting us right now...[W]e didn’t – we don’t – have enough of an ideology of partnership (Milgrom 2010).

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

One has the option, the responsibility, to choose and promote the direction which is positive, and to beat back and quarantine the teachings and the attitudes which are difficult. They certainly come out in the issue of the Other. Whether the Other is a woman, or a non-Jew, Palestinian in this case, these things come out... Now I’m in a situation where I recognise how pervasive and problematic teachings are, the entire culture... (Milgrom 2010).

One key concern for Milgrom is how well the ‘problematic’ elements of the Jewish narrative support the current Israeli position.

It’s so easy to take the Bible and the promise of the land and the Biblical rejection of the natives of the land, it’s so easy to take that and to apply that simplistically to the situation we’re in. ...[T]he Bible says [to] have this harsh attitude to the native population along with the promise
that the land would be Israel’s. That lends itself very well to an extreme right wing position. There is plenty else in Jewish culture which is somehow not appreciative of the Other, living with the Other, that kind of thing (Milgrom 2010).

In the face of this, Milgrom explains his continued attachment to Jewishness. He rejects the idea that religion “comes from God, the belief that it’s not a human creation, it’s given.” He speaks of having a “foggy” theology and says, “I can’t use God language,” (Milgrom 2010). He describes his concept of God as “one of harmony and embrace,” and explains, “I don’t experience much harmony; I feel much more the discord in this tragedy,” (Milgrom 2010). The vision of God he can most relate to is that of a recent Talmudic scholar,

who spoke about the Bible as a tragedy. The tragic figure in the Bible is God. God creates the world, humanity, and fails. Almost to the point of giving up, many times. So maybe I can connect with that tragedy, that constant feeling of hope, still, to keep going (Milgrom 2010).

If it is not belief in God that defines Jewish identity, then it can only be his relationship to those with whom he shares his Jewish “milieu.” Yet he does not invoke this as a national affinity. But however Milgrom understands his relationship to his “milieu”, it is evident that in constructing his relationship to it, he sees that he has a responsibility to discharge in leading it towards the good. It is perhaps this which most clearly distinguishes him from Gilad Atzmon.

Atzmon starts out by diagnosing the problem as one that occurs when chosenness is secularised. “Within the Judaic context, chosenness is a burden,” he tells me. “God tells his people, you are chosen by me to stand as a supreme example of good behaviour.” On the other hand, “secular chosenness is pretty vicious, it’s supremacy,” (Atzmon 2010).

Atzmon insists that he “make[s] a clear distinction between Judaism the religion, Jews, the people and Jewishness the ideology.” He tells me that he doesn’t “deal much with Judaism” or “Jews”, and says he deals with “Jewishness, the ideology” (Atzmon 2010). Elsewhere he states “I refrain categorically from referring to Jews and avoid criticism of Judaism” (Atzmon 2007).
However, Atzmon’s conversation is peppered with criticisms of “Jews”. Likewise, his deep-rooted problem with “Jewishness, the ideology” is sourced directly back to the religion. He maintains an argument that there was something pathological about ‘the Jews’ as a collective through many centuries, deriving from the very sense of chosenness that he initially purported to defend in its religious context.

“Yesterday someone sent me a text that I may publish,” he announces at one stage:

“Without Israel, I don’t think that we will never be able to understand the Holocaust.” [sic]… I understand very well, I believe in the same thing…Without Israel we wouldn’t be able to understand… how is it that the entire European people stood up against their neighbours and said, “We don’t want you. You’re out of here.” …Now, looking at history you say, “What is it, how can it happen?” Israel gives us a very crucial glimpse into this ultimate ugly collective. People who have zero respect to the notion of Otherness! (Atzmon 2010).

When I suggest that the character of contemporary Israel and Zionism might be understood as a consequence of the Holocaust rather than an explanation for it (see Rose, 2005), Atzmon counters,

As you probably know, the Holocaust wasn’t the first event of persecution of Jewish people. It happens to them all the way through history. …The Germans didn’t want the Jews, factually the European nations were very happy to deport them, France, Poland, everywhere…. (Atzmon 2010).

When I suggest that perhaps, then, the character of contemporary Israel and Zionism might be understood as a consequence of this anti-Semitism rather than an explanation for it, Atzmon disagrees again.

The problem with the Nazis, it’s that in a certain stage they started to behave like the Jews! This is the problem with the Nazis… Believing in the chosenness, the expansionness, the racial orientation, and legitimacy (Atzmon 2010).
I counter that this is reductionist logic, to say that when someone starts behaving badly that they are behaving like Jews. Atzmon accepts my criticism, “but it’s a legitimate thing to do,” he insists.

Why? Because the Nazi movements started in 1926. 1922, 1926, Mien Kampf... When you read Jabotinsky, from 1906, and when you read Ber Borochov, it’s exactly the same ideology. You see that they are thirty years ahead. Jabotinsky and Ber Borochov were following a tradition of thousands of years of supremacy. Now, one of the reasons that it is harder combat in Judaism – not Judaism – Jewishness, is cos they practice it for thousands of years. Hitler just invented out of the blue? Even if he was a genius he wouldn’t be able to cope with tradition of rabbis that are improving and suggesting manners... to tackle, you know, this kind of opponents, combat anti-Semitism... (Atzmon 2010).

Atzmon fumbles between “Judaism” and “Jewishness” here; he is using the terms interchangeably, but he settles on the one that appears to distinguish between them. Similarly, he suggests that rabbis are responsible for the evolution of Jewish ideology over thousands of years, which hardly quarantines them from responsibility for its alleged toxicity. The conclusion from Atzmon’s argument, then, must be the same as Milgrom’s: despite protestations to the contrary, Jews, Judaism and Jewishness are all interwoven together.

Atzmon seems to hate ‘Jews’ without a coherent world-view. This becomes apparent when he reveres other nationalisms, especially German nationalism. “[W]hen I read Heidegger, I love German tribalism,” he raves. “When you read Hegel. When you read, when you see Palestinian dancing, I love it.” As we debate Marxist theory and its relationship to nationalism, Atzmon asks,

What about belonging as a nation? Does it incorporate nationalism or are we going to be cosmopolitan? ... This is the issue.... The German people felt as a nation. The Palestinians are now, because of negation, feeling as a nation...Now I don’t have any right to interfere with other people’s sense of belonging.... [Y]ou cannot change people. And the world is not cosmopolitan. There are some people who are cosmopolitan, but most people feel some sense of belonging, and sense of belonging is great... (Atzmon 2010)

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53 Borochov was a Russian Zionist who attempted to synthesise nationalism with Marxism (see Avineri, 1981, Chapter 13).
This parallels Yiftachel’s comments about how real ethnic bonds are to those who experience them, and how we must take this seriously in terms of political organisation (see above p.151-3). But Atzmon goes on to declare that the Jewish nation “is an invention... ‘But we feel like a nation.’ Fuck you!” (Atzmon 2010).

I suggest that Atzmon seems to accept the legitimacy of every other nation’s sense of belonging, except Jews.

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

“But that’s always the problem with self-determination.”

“No. Even Nazis, even Nazis, give respect to other nations.”

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

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

“I don’t think so,” he replies.

Because, unfortunately, I’m led to identify some pathological problems that made this nation into what it is. Now, if this nation would transform into something else I might love it, but it won’t be the Jewish nation.... Once a Jew is becoming a universalist.... they stop operating as Jews... (Atzmon 2010).

I ask myself how someone can love one example of ethnic nationalism and hate another for the very features that they admire in the first. Atzmon’s inconsistency leads me to two conclusions. The first
is that he has a disproportionate hatred of Jewish identity, given that the grounds on which he critiques it are not applied universally to other forms of collective identity. The second conclusion is that his own identity must be somehow implicated in his harsh stance against Jews. While I am setting up my recording devices for our interview, Atzmon tells me that he has been trying to work out whether he is a good self-hating Jew or an anti-Semite. During the interview, he explains some of the logic behind the self-hating Jew with reference to Otto Weininger, an Austrian German philosopher who had unpleasant things to say about women and Jews, despite identifying as Jewish himself. “I saw myself as something who is a product of the collective,” Atzmon explains.

... Weininger said that what we really hate in others is that in yourself which you cannot handle. This is why the biggest anti-Semite are always Jews.... [W]hen I read Weininger, I realised that yes, I started to write about myself, about my own hatred. Rather than projecting it on others, I look in the mirror (Atzmon 2002).

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

Self-hater is a wonderful thing. One of the most interesting things for me is that when I saw myself as [a self-hater] for the first time, my first comment was, “I don’t hate myself, I hate you.” Then I saw myself as an anti-Semite, and a holocaust denier. ... I am not afraid of self-hatred... I’m entitled to bounce. But I own my inconsistencies... (Atzmon 2010)

At another point, he declares, “Self-hating Jew is very Jewish, because Jewish love their symptoms, so self-hating Jew loves himself hating himself,” (Atzmon 2010). This, like much of what Atzmon has to say, comes across as a flippant joke, but ultimately offers insight into ressentiment, as I shall explore in the next chapter.

Another version of the history of Jewish culture is articulated by Jeff Halper, who makes the point in his book that when cultures become xenophobic, it’s usually because of pressures outside, rather
than something contaminated within (2008). I posit to Halper that there was, instead, something problematic within Zionism from the beginning.

You’re right, you’re right… No, there’s a third element here. It’s not binary. What I’m saying here is you’ve got Israeli Jews who, you know, they’re not the problem in the sense… And then you’ve got the adverse circumstances. And in between, is the ideology. I say that Israelis are trapped in this ethnocratic ideology, logic. That’s what’s missing here… It’s not intrinsic in terms of Israelis are, by nature, colonialist, or Jews are like that, or whatever, but it’s true that they’ve taken a certain paradigm that has a very compelling logic to it, and that’s what’s making them do these terrible things (Halper 2010).

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

“But I say it came out of a historical context,” he replies, and at this point we concur on the inspiration for Zionism in what Halper calls the “ethnocratic nationalisms” (or what I would call the ressentiment nationalisms) of Central and Eastern Europe.

Yet Halper does not merely reference the influence of surrounding nationalisms upon Zionism. He also references the ‘cultural factor’ in the development of the ideology – the religious content of Judaism.

[T]he Bible is also very ethnocratic, obviously … Had Zionism emerged in the West, what would they have done with the Biblical content? You see, what the Jews have done in the West, first of all they didn’t go to Zionism, because that whole Biblical thing was missing for them. And second of all, they went to the prophets. Jews in the West don’t relate to the Torah… they cut that out because they can’t deal with that stuff. It completely contradicts their western democratic norms. So… [they] went … to the prophets which are much more universalistic and based on justice and all that kind of stuff… I don’t think Zionism could have emerged in the West cos it would have stood too much diametrically opposed to the values of the West. [Zionism] was able to adopt what we consider these racist ideas and genocidal elements that [it] has until today because it came out of that Eastern-Central European thing that had that in the tribe. But that
also derived out of the Bible... That logic wouldn’t have worked in the West, the way it worked in the East (Halper 2010).

Halper’s argument that the Zionists of Central and Eastern Europe were attracted to the more supremacist parts of the Jewish religion that spoke to their ethnic nationalist context concurs with my own. However, Halper’s depiction of different experiences of identity in ‘the East’ and ‘the West’ actually works against the idea of the single Jewish nation that constitutes his own identity. Halper’s ability to make sense of his position as a Western liberal (albeit affiliated) critic thus simultaneously undermines the claim of a single, authentic Jewish national identity that forms the legitimatory basis of Zionism. As such, it can be read as a discontinuity within his narrative.

In this section, I have explored how the dissidents engage with their ‘national’ past, first looking at the history of the Zionist settlement of Palestine, and then how Zionism’s content emerged. When we look at how the dissidents talk about the Zionist settlement of Palestine, we can see a tension between their desire to locate themselves within a nationalist movement (and hence a nation) with benign intentions, and their inability to explain how this could have been enacted. Then when Milgrom, Atzmon and Halper engage with deeper theoretical and academic questions about the relationship between Jewish identity and culture in Europe and the development of a xenophobic nationalism, we see responses ranging from personal anguish, to glee, to discontinuities. For Milgrom, the painful story of Jewish history cannot be told in the way I have told it here in this work. I can distinguish between Judaism as a religio-cultural practice and the nationalism which came to use these traditions as part of its historical narrative and political platform. Milgrom, inside the Us, sees a continuous experience lending itself to exclusion and hatred. This is essentially the same story that Atzmon tells, but unlike Milgrom, Atzmon is quite at ease with the story’s dark content and its consequences for how the teller might view Jewish communal identity. If the story damns Jewish culture, then unlike Milgrom, who vests himself with the hefty task of turning it around, Atzmon sits back to watch it burn. Meanwhile, Halper’s version of the story generates an interesting
contradiction between his western-influenced critique of Zionism’s xenophobic tendencies as a product of the East, and his adoption of that identity. These dissidents’ ways of telling their ‘national’ story, and diagnosing the problems they see therein, demonstrate how a sense of national responsibility might emerge.

**Fear for the Us**

In this section I look at the consequences of how [resentment](#) Zionism constructs a deep fear of Others, depicting preference of the Us as the only effective protection. Fear of Others (which may draw upon or exaggerate objective dangers) is difficult to explore in isolation, since it dovetails with identity reasons (above) and self-interested reasons (below) to support Zionism. There are also genuine reasons for those identifying as the ‘Jewish nation’ to feel threatened, especially in Israel, by the political discourse from the Iranian regime and militant Palestinian organisations in neighbouring states. However, I want to suggest that there might be two different ways of understanding a sense of threat – a rational calculation of geo-political realities, and a larger, timeless sense that there are anti-Semites everywhere waiting to destroy Jews for being Jews (what Veracini 2006, calls "Absolute Anti-Semitism"). The latter view, affirmed by the Zionist discourse, suggests that the Us might require prioritisation over the Other in the name of protection. I am interested in how dissidents express such views and attempt to reconcile them with empathy for the Palestinian Other.

Dorit Rabinyan tells me that despite identifying with Palestinians “standing in lines and waiting, being investigated, and their freedom is being limited”, this occurs “for reasons!” (Rabinyan 2010). She “refuse[s]” to feel moral guilt about Israel’s military actions and doesn’t want to be “demonised” for “protecting [her]self.”

...Yes, this is the neighbourhood I have to protect myself. I don’t live in the Pacific Ocean, I live here. And this is my place, and this is my ancestors’ place, and you know what, forget about it, this is the place I was born into. I have to protect myself (Rabinyan 2010).
Rabinyan tells me to enjoy the privilege of being Australian.

It’s an illusion if I convince myself, if I take it upon myself, that I’m carefree. That I can live anywhere, that I belong anywhere, I belong to the world, the world belongs to me. Second World War was around the corner (Rabinyan 2010).

She notes elsewhere that her nationalism is “uncool” compared to a more cosmopolitan perspective (Rabinyan 2010), but the fear underscoring her perspective is particularly evident when we discuss the Holocaust in more detail.

“I carry the memory of the holocaust in a different way than Adal,” she explains, gesturing to a friend of hers sitting outside the café.

He is the son of two survivors, and he carries it in a different way, but I do too, and I feel obliged to do that. Carrying this memory makes a correction. It doesn’t ease me. Letting go of this memory would have given me a better life. In a way it’s a burden I choose to carry cos it was physically around the corner from my family as well…The Holocaust is not a European memory, it’s a Jewish memory. They weren’t attacked for being European Jews, they were attacked for being Jews. Attacked and demolished. History turned it out that my family moved around the globe and gave me the Israeli citizenship, but it could have been that Hitler was a little bit stronger for longer, and then Iranian Jews would have been on his agenda. …I identify with it because I could have been next. It could have been my brothers and sisters... I see myself in [those Jews] and themself in me. The fact that I am Iranian, for this matter, has nothing to do [with it] (Rabinyan 2010).

The Holocaust looms large for many of my dissidents. Jacqueline Rose (2005) argues that the psychological processes of repression and repetition are at work in Israeli society, so I want to consider my dissidents in this light, and also examine how the Holocaust makes certain things ‘unsayable’. Even the anarchist Yonatan Pollack, who distances himself from the Jewish nation and Zionism, peppers his interview responses with cautionary reminders that he is not trying to “minimise the importance of the Holocaust”; that he acknowledges its “special circumstances”; and
that he is “not comparing” Israel to Nazi Germany (Pollack 2010). Such responses illustrate the
pervasiveness of the Holocaust in Israeli society.

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

[H]e’s careful to say that this is ... pre-World War Two Germany. But when you ... compare
yourself to a beast, right, you don’t say, ‘well, but I compare it to the beast when the beast was a
baby, right?’ When you say Germany, especially to Jews, you cannot separate from the image of
killing six million Jews. So that is academically and politically and ethnically so infuriating!
(Yiftachel 2007).

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

Yeah, it hurts the most but it’s false. I mean, no other nation did what the Germans did, and I
hope nobody does. Not even the Rwandans and the Cambodians, nowhere near what they did,
right. So when you compare it to that you take on board what they did later on. You cannot just
sort of stop. It’s not just the baby beast, but the baby beast who ate your brothers and sisters and cousins, right? (Yiftachel 2007)

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

(Yiftachel 2007)

I revisit some of these points in our second interview three years later. Is it legitimate to attack Burg from a class perspective when Burg is critiquing Israeli nationalism? Is Yiftachel upset by Burg’s comments because they are unhelpful or offensive? And does he find them offensive as an individual with personal connections to the Holocaust, or an Israeli Jew who inherits such connections from the collective?

What you can and can’t say is with a meta-frame of transformation. Of affecting some change. It’s not that you can or can’t say – you can say anything...but I was trying to say what one ought to say, or what kind of discourse one needs to construct in order to effect some change. And I still think that was counter-productive in many ways... (Yiftachel 2010).

“It takes us to compare yourself with your killer,” he continues.

Which I think, psychologically... is very troubling....Half the people in Israel have lost family in there, so it, you drive the thing to an emotive ground, it’s so uncomfortable, so inaccurate, so non-transformative that I thought Burg was wrong in that respect (Yiftachel 2010).

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

“It still does, it still does,” Yiftachel agrees.
And I encounter it a lot, with the Palestinians more than Burg. There are various ways, the Palestinians for example are “Nazis, Nazis, the Jews are Nazis.” And I tell them A) it’s inaccurate and B) you won’t get anywhere with that in terms of, you want to get some kind of coalition, some kind of work together towards a joint goal. You just totally burn your bridge that way (Yiftachel 2010).

I ask whether Yiftachel’s objection is as an individual or as a member of a collective.

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

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

“The whole point of the nation...is that it’s all your flesh and blood.”

“But that part is a construct...” I counter.

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

Look, my family comes from Germany and Lithuania, and Romania and other parts. My father’s family, his half of it was wiped out in the Holocaust, including my cousins, my aunt, uncle, grandparents. They all disappeared. In various ways. Some of them actually in concentration camps and some of them were deported because they were married to Russians so they were deported to Siberia and died in Siberia. So there’s a whole lot of tragedy there, which of course I think affects me (Yiftachel 2010).

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

Concern about the ‘Jewish nation’ extends beyond the Holocaust, but the lesson taken appears to be that hatred of Jews should never be under-estimated. Contemporary Zionist ideology frames the
State of Israel as at the forefront of the fight against anti-Semitism, so that critiques of Israel are frequently labeled “anti-Semitic” (Dershowitz 2003; Falk 2008, p.109). NGOs are devoted to monitoring the media (CAMERA, N.D.) and university campuses (Israel-Academic-Monitor N.D.) for alleged anti-Israel bias, which is then depicted as anti-Semitism. Israel’s defenders seek out criticism of Israel and Zionism, speak out against boycotts and condemn the use of terms such as ‘apartheid’ and ‘racism’. Such interventions are repeatedly represented as Jews fighting off an irrational and catastrophic hatred (Falk 2008).

Interestingly, Neve Gordon, who has been at the forefront of challenges to Israeli policy and has embraced the Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions campaign, previously participated in such efforts. Gordon originally criticised the academic boycott (2003). He has debunked claims that Zionism is a global force, rejected the equation of Zionism with racism, and drawn attention to the lack of brutality of the Occupation compared to other regimes (2003). He also produced a glowing article about living in Israel (2008). Gordon has put energy into these pursuits as well as his long record of Palestinian solidarity struggles.

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

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

... It’s not a monolithic movement, like no, I don’t think any national movement is ever monolithic. So we want to see it within its complexity. And...what I try in my academic work and my political work is not to be a reductionist. So you try to see the complexity and you try to not reduce phenomenon one to the other. And I think there is a difference between Zionism and racism...Now... has Zionism led to the oppression and subjugation of the Palestinians people, or... have the policies of Israel been informed by Zionism... led to bad? I think so, yes. And so that’s what we have to be worried about. ... To come and say Zionism is racism is I think a definitional mistake, a historical mistake, and how it can help us as a political strategy and whether it can create, can be detrimental, is a question. I think it can be detrimental (Gordon 2010).
Gordon’s answer is framed in terms of both academic rigour and political strategy; he constantly pays attention to how his arguments are perceived by his audience. He explains that his glowing article, ‘Why I live in Israel’ (2008) was written at the request of a publication that had long given Gordon free rein, and had found itself under siege from Zionist groups in the Diaspora (Gordon 2010). Yet his desire for facts and correct terminology may extend beyond strategy or intellectual integrity.

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

“And I said, ‘There’s no genocide in Palestine.’ I don’t think saying that there’s a genocide or that there was a genocide in the Gaza campaign – I think to say that is not true...[I]f you count the numbers of people killed, it’s very small. That’s one of the amazing things about this conflict. Not many Palestinians as related to other colonial military occupations. It’s minimal (Gordon 2010).

This comment echoes Yiftachel talking about the “low level” of violence in the conflict compared to other situations (Yiftachel 2010). “It is an amazing phenomenon,” Gordon raves, to the extent that his laconic demeanor permits.

That, if we go to your part of the world, to East Timor, where one third of the population was wiped out, killed, massacred, and then we look at 40 years of occupation here and see that Israel killed 13,000 Palestinian out of a populations of three and a half million, and we see two months in Iraq where that amount could have been killed. And we look at Chechnya and see how, you know – So ... to come and say “this is the bloodiest”, it’s not, and we can’t do that. We have responsibility... as intellectuals try to speak the truth. And to speak the truth to power doesn’t mean to bend the facts so it will fit our ideology... (Gordon 2010).

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

It’s like you wouldn’t want to blame certain actions made by blacks because of bigots. It’s better to blame the bigotry on certain actions done by blacks? The person’s a bigot!...I don’t want to
explain away bigotry by saying we can understand their bigotry cos certain people got drunk and acted in a certain way on the street (Gordon 2010).

Gordon also objects to representations of Zionism as a global force (as made by Baker and Davidson 2003; Mearsheimer and Walt 2007), seeing this as “unpleasant” and “not true in many ways,” (Gordon 2010). I ask what such representations are invoking for him.

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

It exists in the world and is a real phenomenon. There are ... anti-Semites like there are people who are bigots and so forth. And we have to take that phenomenon seriously. And we know that historically bigots and anti-Semites have done a lot of evil to a lot of people around the world. And so we can’t brush it aside and say it’s not important historically. ...[T]here were anti-Semites before the existence of Israel, there was quite a lot. And they had their day (Gordon 2010).

So anti-Semites and, by implication, the Holocaust seem to underlie Gordon’s concerns; he filters criticisms of Israel to see if they reflect such tendencies. However, Gordon doesn’t throw out the accusation of “anti-Semitism” indiscriminately, and actually uses many of the terms for which others are targeted by critics. Accordingly, one is invited to accept his explanation of trying to engage with complexity; of being determined to pursue arguments which are accurate.

Meron Benvenisti more obviously invokes fears for the Jewish nation when he rejects terminology used by academics who threaten to delegitimise his “entity”. “What would you say to academics, theorists of nationalism, who say that nations, tribes, ethnic identities are social constructs?” I ask him.

“Okay, so what,” he replies. “The Jewish construct is three thousand years old. Once you show me another example of a phenomenon like that, then I will discuss it.” Then he asks whether we are discussing general or Jewish tribes. “General is social construct,” he goes on. “The Jews define their
own tribal affinity. Therefore the Jews are not a racial group. That’s why I intentionally define us as a tribe. We are pre-history, like primitive, if you want. Primordial.”

I ask why he avoids the word nation.

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

I offer the social constructivist version to see how Benvenisti responds. “I’ve read Jewish writers who say that to be Jewish was always a religion, and that it only became a nationalist movement when it became Zionism.”

“OK,” he says.

Being Jewish? It’s defined not by us, [but] by the goy, by the gentiles. They have created that notion, they have alienated us. So it wasn’t a positive definition, it was negative. Whoever is not a goy, is a Jewish or is a “these people are different from us”... (Benvenisti 2010a).

It appears that Benvenisti endorses a social constructivist view of other nationalisms (“General is social construct”); however, when it comes to his own “tribe”, there appears to be a dissonance between his explanation of ‘other-defined’ nationalism and his previously stated argument as to its longevity (“the Jewish construct is three thousand years old”).

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

...[T]his would be the entire world, Jews are not afraid of that. If it’s not that way, they are surprised. So the last thing the Jews are afraid of is to be Us and Them, cos that is the nature of the way of life on this planet of the world, so even that is not going to work. I would even welcome that project. You know why? Cos it would unify my tribe! (Benvenisti 2010a).
Fear of the Jew-hating Other emerges differently for Dorit Rabinyan, who has concerns for the kind of regime that might replace Israel in a single-state scenario.

Let’s say this Arab majority won’t be very tolerant… for many reasons, not only for its difficulty to let go of values from the old world and not accept … let’s skip the Islamic thing, let’s skip how we see our societies around us are treating women… For us living here would be like, and I don’t mean mentally… Freedom won’t be a sacred concept. There won’t be two nations living in harmony by co-existence… it will mean that we have to leave! (Rabinyan 2010).

Bronstein alludes to this issue too, albeit with more optimism, explaining that after the return of the Palestinian refugees,

I hope life will be enriched by these changes and not oppressed or suppressed… [P]eople threaten us that it will be a radical Islamic society, and of course this is something that I would struggle very strongly against, if this happened…(Bronstein 2010).

In this section, I have demonstrated some moments at which fear of the Other appears to inform the dissidents’ narratives. Such fear is not completely unfounded, however, and nor does its presence automatically overpower whatever else the dissident is saying. Bronstein, for example, despite acknowledging that there might be something to fear from refugee return, continues to argue in favour of it, framing his argument in terms of contingency plans to “struggle… against” adverse consequences. Gordon, despite an initial appearance of what might appear to be fear of Others, offers persuasive academic and strategic arguments. In the narratives of Benvenisti and Rabinyan, however, fear can be seen to invoke self-preservation.

**Self Interest**

Fear and self-preservation can also be linked to a more dispassionate self-interest. For the standard Israeli Jew who supports Zionism because he or she identifies with a Jewish nation needing its own state, it appears obvious that he or she personally benefits from this situation. For my dissidents the
issue becomes more complex; they may observe the cycle of violence created by Jewish privilege, yet also be reluctant to lower their privileges. The question of self-interest also arises with their efforts to live a ‘moral’ life, as Gideon Levy (2010) suggests below.

My starting assumption that there might be some price to pay in rectifying the Other’s oppression is affirmed by Yonatan Pollack, who rejects the “leftist axiom that the occupation hurts Israel.”

I believe that Israel profits from the occupation immensely, in all senses. In the sense of being a master class. Social, at the level of sociology. The dominator, the master class. Definitely in an economic way (Pollack 2010).

This point is echoed by Meron Benvenisti, who reasserts his opposition to the construction of Leftism by telling me that “all [my] leftist friends are benefitting” from the wealth disparity between the two societies,

talking about the political aspect of it because they don’t want to admit that they don’t want to give up their privileges, the water quantity, the beaches, the good life that will have to be destroyed to be shared by the Palestinians...The economic and social inequality, it’s all concentrated on one thing, political equality, because it’s a way of diverting (Benvenisti 2010a).

Only Neve Gordon rejects my assumption that there might be a certain point at which concern for the Other becomes detrimental to the Us. “I would think of it the opposite,” he challenges. “That the lack of a struggle would lead to certain permutations that would lead to myself having to leave...” (Gordon 2010).

But my positing of a dilemma between resolving the problem of the Other and the interests of Israeli Jews is affirmed by Yiftachel and Benvenisti, who both liken the complete erasure of Jewish Israel/Palestine to an individual act of suicide (see p.208 and p.220 above). This understandable limit to my dissidents’ concern for the Other is evident even in Pollack’s identification with the Palestinian resistance, considered extreme by the rest of his society. “…[T]he Palestinian political spectrum from
the very right of Hamas to the very left of the Popular Front all speak about one state, and no one calls for the exiles of Jews,” (Pollack 2010).

Self-interest for my dissidents, then, is wrapped up in reconfiguring politics in Israel/Palestine into a form which can benefit the Other but without crossing a (variable) line of harming Jews. Self-interest is also met by enacting this in a way that enables the individual to envisage him or herself as moral. Only Pollack is outright dismissive of such a notion:

... I don’t weigh it in the form of, you know, of traditional moralism ... redeeming myself. Clearly I think that my responsibility in the thing – who cares how dirty I am? That’s not the issue. The issue is ... to achieve liberation (Pollack 2010).

I am interested in how my other dissidents’ continued preference of the Jewish Us might be understood as manifesting a personal (rather than ‘national’) self-interest.

Rabinyan is quite explicit on this. “… I can’t lie and say I think about [the Palestinians] before I think about myself,” she explains, telling me that she identifies with Israeli soldiers first and foremost.

They are my brothers. Hasan was a very dear friend, close to me, I care about him personally, but I can’t think of a nation of Palestinians to be prior to my immediate identification with Israelis (Rabinyan 2010).

Journalist Gideon Levy personalises his opposition to a full return of Palestinian refugees on the grounds that this would “create a new injustice... That my house or my neighbour’s house in Ramat Aviv [an expensive suburb in northern Tel Aviv] will have to be evacuated,” (Levy 2010). When I suggest some alternatives that I have heard about – new cities built for returning refugees, for example – Levy responds that this is “utopic.” “I mean, on utopia, wonderful. Realistically, I’m not sure we can absorb millions of Palestinians,” (Levy 2010).

...[W]hen there are so many fears and hates between the two peoples, it will bring to only more violence and bloodshed...[W]e have to remember that those two peoples have so much
between them, so much, so many emotions, so much bad blood. You know, you don’t just bring
them and everyone will fall on the shoulders of the other; there is a terrible gap between the
two societies (Levy 2010).

This argument is worth reflecting on in light of Levy’s support for Israel becoming a civic state of its
citizens instead of a Jewish state (Levy 2010). Zionist orthodoxy rejects the return of Palestinian
refugees on the grounds that their return would put an end to the Jewish state (Dershowitz 2003).
Since Levy does not support the maintenance of a Jewish state, arguably he should be open to the
return of the refugees, but he prefers continued exclusion on the grounds of cultural intolerance
between the two communities, or further injustice to Jews like himself.

Levy’s connection to Israeli life again raises the issue of self-interest. When we discuss his refusal to
be a “weirdo”, I suggest that his place in the mainstream not only gives him legitimacy, it must also
be easy compared to a life on the margins.

I’ll go to a shrink, and I start to find out it’s very hard to draw the line. Sure, there are also many
things in my life that are not connected to my ideological goals. ... Sure. Sure, it’s for my comfort.
They invited me two or three months ago to participate in [the reality TV show] Big Brother VIP.
And there was a whole thing about me going or not going, going or not going. I gained more by
not going, but so much was discussed if I go or not. And again, I would have gone because of
selfish things, and because of the thought that through Big Brother I can get to audiences that I
can never get. ...Both factors, sure, sure, but I can’t tell you which one is dominant. It’s very hard
to separate. I think it’s true about anyone, cos I guess that all those “weirdos”, this also satisfies
some needs for them. I mean nobody’s an altruist who does everything, it’s always finding out
something that we gain out of it (Levy 2010).

Self-interest is difficult to extricate from the various other reasons my dissidents might support
policies which harm their Other. However, I have demonstrated some examples which can be read in
this way. Again, my intent is not to be critical of individuals who may preference their own interests
over the Other; rather, I wish to show that this is part of their dilemma since, as many of them
recognise, there is a price to be paid in terms of lowering one’s privileges for the Other.
All These Things That I’ve Done

Over and in, last call for sin
While everyone’s lost, the battle is won
With all these things that I’ve done

---- All These Things That I’ve Done, Brandon Flowers, The Killers, 2004.

This section explores my dissidents’ reflections upon past action which have worked against their current ideals. I want to know how they interpret these events with hindsight, and how they have contributed to their politicisation.

An issue that arises for all my dissidents is compulsory military service. We saw in the previous chapter that Milgrom and Bronstein refused to serve during Israel’s war with Lebanon, a common “road to Damascus” moment for Israeli dissidents – others being the wars in 1967 and 1973 and the first Intifada (Lentin 2010, p.88-89). Other dissidents served in the Army, and here they explain how they interpret their actions today.

Jeff Halper expresses shame that he served, and pride that his children have refused to serve (Halper 2008). In interview, he explains his service in more detail.

I went through, um, I won’t call it a Zionist phase exactly... it wasn’t that I was not for peace, but... I was more focused on inside Israel... I wasn’t as alienated from Israeli society as I am now ... I guess for me at that time, the going to the army was a part of that. ... I refused to serve in the occupied territories, although I have to say I did do basic training in the occupied territories, but when we had to do things there I didn’t do that. But I was older, I wasn’t in the army Army. I was twenty seven when I came. So I went through a month of basic training, and then I went into the Reserves... I was a lecturer. So I refused to carry a gun, I refused to serve in the occupied territories, and they didn’t care. You know, so what. So I was a lecturer in the army, and I went out, and I lectured soldiers on social issues, social problems. I was part of the education division. So in other words it wasn’t being part of the army in a way that too much interfered with my views (Halper 2010).
There is a sense that although Halper regrets serving in the Army, he is also trying to justify it. His use of the phrase, “You know, so what,” is ambiguous enough to either be the attitude of the Army to his partial refusal, or the response of Halper himself to his service. But Halper may simply be trying to explain why the contradiction, which appears so clear today, was less obvious at the time. Perhaps also justifying, Halper goes on to reflect that there is a certain male adventure element to Army service, which even some left-wingers enjoy (Halper 2010). He adds that the movement Yesh Gvul (There Is a Limit),

are not pacifists... Some of them are officers in the Army and they love to go to the Army. So they just say, okay we’re not going to the occupied territories. So you have to kind of make that separation between going to the army, I guess. Or at least I did then... I wouldn’t do that [now] and I’m glad my kids didn’t do that (Halper 2010).

Neve Gordon declares that his own young children “are going to have to decide for themselves” whether to refuse. “I hope they decide to refuse,” (Gordon 2010). Gordon contemplated refusal, and was “convinced not to by [his] father” on the basis of “the humanitarian soldier, the good soldier”.

There’s the good soldier at the checkpoint and the bad soldier at the checkpoint, and one would give a slap in the face to the person that wants to pass and tell them that they can’t pass and cuss them out, and one will say very nicely that he’s not allowed to let them pass, and he’s very sorry that he can’t let them pass. But both become the technology of the checkpoint. One is probably a better technology than the other but they’re both the technology of the checkpoint (Gordon 2010).

Gordon explains that after his compulsory service, he “did some reserve duty for about a year or two in the educational corps.”

... Before then I didn’t do any reserve duty. And then they asked me to go to Gaza and talk about human rights and human dignity to soldiers in Gaza, and I said that I’m not willing to enter Gaza. I’m willing to talk to the soldiers if I’m out of Gaza. And they took the whole company ... out of Gaza and I spoke to them about human dignity and human rights for an hour and a half (Gordon 2010).
I ask Gordon to explain the distinction between talking to soldiers inside and outside Gaza.

I was not willing to go to the West Bank or the Occupied Territories to lecture. I’m willing to talk to anyone. I’m willing to talk to settlers, and if I have the audience of settlers or soldiers, it’s a wonderful audience to present my views. And so the military decided to give me that audience and I wasn’t willing to give up on it. And I would go and talk about what I thought were the ... violations of the military, to the soldiers. It was a wonderful experience in many ways because I learnt a lot about it, about the military and about the soldiers and what they do. The fact that I was doing it supposedly as a military — I went like this [indicates his civilian clothes]. I didn’t have to; it was giving me an opportunity to talk to soldiers which I would like to convince. I believe in discourse and persuasion as a political form of bringing about change (Gordon 2010).

I asked what he hoped to persuade the soldiers.

I didn’t try to persuade the soldiers ... it’s not my job. [I tried] to be reflective about what they are doing, and to make them reflective. I’m for refusing to serve, so the soldiers I went to talk to were all combat soldiers. If I had to talk to them about what they should do, I would probably tell them to refuse (Gordon 2010).

Part of the dilemma I have explored in this thesis is how opposition is co-opted so that “[e]very act of political resistance becomes an expression of the ‘enlightened Israeli democracy’” (Grinberg 2009, p.106). Interested in Gordon’s take on this, I ask whether the Army used him as a fig leaf.

Not there. I think the army is a bureaucratic institution that didn’t realise what it was doing, and within three lectures realised it and kicked me out. But the question still stands, am I a fig leaf, which is I think an important question. The answer is, definitely.... Israel needs me. .. Israel needs its dissidents to say: Here we are, a free and democratic country (Gordon 2010).

I conclude this section with another excerpt from my interview with Meron Benvenisti. The topic here is not Army service, but actions Benvenisti undertook as Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem in the 1960s. *Son of the Cypresses* includes an interview Benvenisti gave to a journalist in the 1980s, which looks back to the days not long after Israel’s conquer of the West Bank:
In 1968 someone tossed hand grenades onto the road leading to the Wailing Wall. Moshe Dayan came and said we must evict all the Arabs living on the Wailing Wall road, despite it’s being clear that it was not they who were to blame. Three tank units were brought in. I requested four hours of grace in which to evict them peacefully. I went from house to house with my aides. I explained the situation to them and cried along with them. We helped them drag their belongings outside. Thus the need to employ force did not arise. You ask if this was worth something? It wasn’t worth anything concrete, but not one child cried. I did not diminish their hatred. I occasionally see one of the people who were evicted; he looks at me, and I know what he’s thinking. At such times I reflect on the job I did. Perhaps I made the occupation tolerable instead of intolerable. Perhaps I did wrong (Benvenisti 2007, p.79).

This is indeed an old interview; Benvenisti would never talk about “the occupation” today (see above p.214 and footnote 51, p.214). But I do hope he might talk about this painful experience, since the writing contains such ambivalence about his actions.

“It happened forty years ago, that’s what I said, that’s it!” he snaps. “What is there to talk about? What you want to know? What, what, what?”

“What was it like?”

“I wept,” he states simply. “What else? Explain to me what you are after. That I may be able to answer.”

“Well, I would like to ask you what that weeping did to you,” I explain carefully. “But that’s something that you don’t want to tell me.”

“No, enough is enough,” he says decisively, before going on anyway.

[T]he alternative would have been worse...They got thrown out of their house cos the Army would have evicted them. So I thought that maybe – some people would say, “You participated in this.” It depends what ... The question is what. Shall I concentrate on the evil, and then don’t [inaudible], or should I help? Philosophical questions (Benvenisti 2010a).
“I suppose that’s the question that people would ask now,” I muse, thinking about my recent interviews with Bronstein and Gordon. “Do you go and serve as a soldier in the territories and try and be the good soldier who is kind to the Palestinians –”

No, I don’t think so; I think that what I’ve done is something else. It wasn’t a decision to evict them because of military, ah, a military directive, because a Palestinian threw hand grenades. So [inaudible] decided to evict four houses, Palestinians from their homes. Four families, four specific homes [knocks on table in time to these words], in the crossroads leading to the Western Wall (Benvenisti 2010a).

“But for those people, it doesn’t matter where they are…They’re losing their homes.”

Benvenisti is impatient. “How many times you make the same decision if you are in a position of power? Every time that you decide a budget for road accidents… don’t be, don’t be so –”

“Squeamish about it?”

“Exactly, because you always do these things. … It’s very easy to identify as part of a process of dispossession and then it’s, ‘ah, why, why do you?’ This is a very simplistic approach, if you’ll excuse me.”

“That’s okay,” I say. I am aware that the entire weight of our dysfunctional exchange rests upon this moment, and that Benvenisti wants to criticise me. I give him the space to do so, both to genuinely learn from it and also to try and gain greater understanding of him. “Be honest with me. What’s the right approach?”

“The right approach is to see the case and understand it, and sometimes without judgement because you just listen and you are not – Don’t think that every time something happens you have to pick sides, because you don’t know enough. And what you know is half true.”
“Well, what I know in that situation, I learnt from you,” I reply with only a touch of petulance.

“No, no. What you learnt from me is not the context, and you see, that is – Who, who suggests the parallel to existing soldiers, me or you?”

“OK,” I admit. “Well, to me, it seemed similar.”

Well that’s what I’m saying. So before you pass judgement on something that happened forty years ago... take advice from an old man. Think about the possibility that you remain peripheral, and you only understand, not decide, not pass judgement. Sometimes understanding is enough; by understanding, you can understand the victim, you can also understand the oppressor. Cos he has also reasons. He is not a vile person. He is not an evil person (Benvenisti 2007).

Benvenisti ends our interview almost immediately after this exchange. I regard it as a moment of reckoning in which Benvenisti confronts his affiliation with the Zionist project. Despite his hostility to my comparison, there is a legitimate parallel between Benvenisti’s actions and the experiences of Bronstein as an occupying soldier. It is telling to look at how the two men digest these experiences. For Bronstein, being an occupying soldier is a defining moment. Notably, he continues to define himself as part of Israeli society, but he develops a different political outlook. For Benvenisti, on the other hand, evicting residents is an ugly business of which he is compelled to be a part. It pains him to revisit it, precisely because he reconciles it as a necessarily evil of the Zionist project which, at least at the time, he supported.

Israeli literary and social critic Yitzhak Laor has written about S. Yizhar, an author who served as an inspiration for Benvenisti (see 2000 p.231-41). Laor notes that Yizhar was a member of the Knesset representing the ruling party precisely in the years during which what had been destroyed [ie. the Arab landscape] was being buried. ... The Yizharian sorrow [over this erasure] does not become a tragic sorrow because Yizhar does not permit himself real heresy. He remains within the confines of the dominant ideology ... and it a priori disallows any heresy, any real questioning of its values and institutions (cited in Piterberg 2008, p.213).
These comments could be equally made about Benvenisti. Lentin (2010), who also examines Yizhar amongst other writers who simultaneously narrate and obscure the *Nakba* (p.57-60, p.119-20), offers the cogent explanation that

nostalgia is an appropriate emotion to invoke so as to establish one’s innocence and at the same time talk about one has destroyed... Its relatively benign character facilitates imperialist nostalgia’s capacity to transform the responsible colonial agents into innocent bystanders (Lentin 2010 p.56-7, referencing Rosaldo 1989 p.121).

Depicting himself as such a bystander, Benvenisti becomes – perhaps understandably – hostile at the attempted unearthing of his nostalgia’s political meaning.

This section has explored he dissidents’ participation in things with which they might now disagree. Halper and Gordon explain their military service, and the point they have reached today of supporting refusal in their own children. Benvenisti unwillingly revisits his attempt to make home evictions more palatable, but is not willing to revisit his questioning of whether he did the wrong thing.

**What Does it Mean to be Clean?**

Thus far I have examined the tensions between my dissidents’ pursuit of justice for the Palestinian Other, and their attachment to the Jewish Us. One category of dissident seems to escape this tension at an obvious level; Gideon Levy’s (2010) “weirdos” who step outside mainstream Israeli Jewish society. These are the most radical dissidents who oppose a Jewish state, seek to end all forms of Jewish privilege in Israel / Palestine, and work with the Other rather than the Jewish Us. Uri Davis, Yonatan Pollack and Gilad Atzmon fit into this category. Given that my task here is to explore whether, and how, Israeli Jews might be able to overcome the subjectivity instilled by the ethnocentric state, I could simply conclude that some radicals are able to achieve this. But I seek a more nuanced consideration of these radical dissidents, exploring them in three ways. How do they
represent their relationship to Israeli Jews? What does the radical nature of their politics mean for such a relationship – does their status as “weirdos” simply render them irrelevant? And finally, have they paid a price for being a “weirdo”?

Let us first consider the relationship of “weirdos” to the collective. Young anarchist Yonatan Pollack represents himself as distanced from Israeli Jews; I ask him why he is one of the few people I speak to who does not entertain a concern for those who would regard him as part of their ‘nation’. I think here of Bronstein, determined to love his “fellow Israelis” and to integrate his vision of the past into their collective lives. Pollack responds: “That’s not my politics, that’s not my character.”

“So what is it that makes you able to disregard them in that way, and not to be molly-coddling them and worrying about whether they feel okay?” I ask him.

“A lot of it would have to do with psychology and that’s very hard for me to address,” he replies, adding that his political analysis leads him to see the Palestinians as the agent of change.

Later, I reflect that Pollack’s distance from Israeli Jews does not necessarily free him from contradictions. Pollack steps outside the ‘Jewish nation’, but perhaps the ‘cleanliness’ of this action is somewhat illusory. (Pollack also rejects this notion of ‘cleanliness’, see p.243.) When we touch briefly on his personal connection to Palestine, he tells me that his “family is here from before, from a lot before, from the beginning of the twentieth century.” I sense that Pollack’s assuredness and perhaps even his disconnection from mainstream society arise from the same notion of nativeness that Bronstein discusses (see above p.201-2). Pollack is more native than the state; his family has been here for generations. His white skin and vivid blue eyes mark him as part of the Ashkenazi elite; not for him the horrors of the Holocaust, nor the struggles for assimilation faced by immigrants from the ‘illegitimate’ Arab world (see Shohat 1999). Though Pollack never mentions this kind of privilege, he invokes it casually in his disregard for the hegemonic Zionist discourse. And indeed, although we
talk about his family’s presence in Israel before the state existed, we don’t talk about where they came from, or why. At the time, I surmise that Pollack, through divorcing himself from Zionism, does not need to account for their presence in Palestine as part of legitimating his own experience. Only later do I reflect that he, too, might have something to say about how he feels about his family (and by extension, himself) being here.

Uri Davis, like Pollack, can also trace roots back to Palestine. He, too, enjoys the supreme confidence of the privileged Ashkenazi background. His memoir emphasises his nativeness (see p.158 above); like Eitan Bronstein, he openly wears the stamp of the Zionist project on his fit, suntanned body (Davis 1995, p.108). Davis’s relationship to the Jewish collective is conveyed in more affectionate terms than Pollack’s, and he retains a connection to his Jewish identity whilst strictly quarantining its political impact.

“… I have come to make a distinction between my tribal affiliations and my political [and] national affiliations,” he explains.

I regard my affiliation to Jewish communities to be primarily tribal. Tribal affiliations encompass a range of elements. They don’t have to include religious undertakings, they may or may not. They may or may not encompass sentimental parts of tribal heritage and community. I recognise and celebrate parts of the tribal heritage of the community into which I was born. I celebrate that which I regard to be decent and I reject and denounce what I regard to be ethnocentric or outright racist (Davis 2010).

He explains his politics in the following terms:

I’m a product of the American and French revolutions in that I’m wholly committed to the principle of separating religion from the state... The business of the state is to attempt to advance human welfare and my understanding is that...it is valid if it is informed by the values of the Declaration of Human Rights ...I have no problem with celebrating such parts of the tribal heritage as I regard to be decent and recognizing the cultural baggage into which I was born because I do not enter my politics in this way (Davis 2010).
Separating his politics from his personal affiliation enables Davis to engage with his “Jewish tribal origins” without nationalist sentiment. Crossing the Border details his determination to have his two older sons circumcised (p.321). Davis also details the significance to him of the Bar Mitzvah of his eldest son, Gul, despite being a professed atheist. In a speech to the congregation, Davis explains the cultivation of this “ritual traditional heritage”.

For me this bar mitzvah is being held in critical recognition of the historical, cultural and sentimental point of departure of your/our family; in recognition of the fact that you were thrown into the world and into human society at one specific point and not another; in recognition that your point of departure into life is Jewish context and Jewish history rather than any other context and history. ... Your continued critical affiliation to Jewish history is a matter of voluntary resolution. But your point of departure into life is not. It is given to you. It does not, as such, determine your future affiliation. But it does determine the specifics of your person and character in numerous ways... (Davis 1995, p.306)

When we meet, Davis illustrates another manifestation of this “ritual traditional heritage” by telling me about his recent project which has involved re-writing the Jewish Passover Seder prayer, the Haggadah.

.... Since the text has been hijacked by political Zionism in order to justify the settler colonial intervention by the WZO [World Zionist Organisation] in the country of Palestine one cannot, in the context of the past hundred years, ignore the abuse that is associated with this text... I decided to try my hand at subverting and undermining, attempting to retain the traditional scene and take out of the text ethnocentric, collective punishment and God.... It’s now ready, under the title of An Anti Zionist Companion to an Abridged Haggadah, two languages, Jewish and English, translation meticulous...and it awaits publication...Now, I devoted time over the past four years in order to do that job. I regarded that to be a contribution and recognition of my affiliation to the Jewish tribe (Davis 2010).

I ask Davis why he has not simply walked away from his tribal affinity.

“It seems that I do need this,” he replies. “... I can’t answer why my tribal affiliations are sentimentally important to me, but they are. So just take it!” (Davis 2010).
It seems almost too simple that the Western liberal axiom of separating religion from the state releases Davis from contradiction, but it seems to work. Davis’s attachment to his tribal heritage, then, compared to Pollack’s distance from Jewish identity, is a particular facet of his character rather than a contradiction within his politics.

The relationship between Gilad Atzmon and the ‘Jewish collective’ is more complicated. While he links his identity to being Jewish and cites his formative years in Israel as part of his identity (p.181), he is extremely hostile to how collective Jewish identity has manifested, inside Israel and beyond. I will ultimately suggest that Atzmon’s relationship to his Jewish / Israeli identity is different from that of Pollack and Davis, and in fact can be read as a cause of his radical politics rather than a consequence.

The second exploration of my “weirdos” takes in the political implications of their “weirdness”. I have deliberately refrained from engaging in any deep analysis of how my dissidents are treated by their society; such a study would require a different methodology than the one employed here. I am more interested in how the dissidents respond to their dilemma than how they are depicted by other Israelis. However, the dissidents’ marginal status in their society warrants a brief examination in order to explore whether the price to be paid for their radical politics is complete marginalisation or self-exile from their society.

Given Pollack’s obvious distance from Israeli Jewish life, one might expect him to tell stories of exclusion, but this is not the case. “[I]t’s definitely not like we’re ostracised,” he tells me. “You have to understand that part of Israeli society is its liberal myth.”

“You guys are the fig leaf for the enlightened, kind benevolent nation,” I suggest.

“And for Jews, there really is a democracy here,” Pollack adds. The idea of Jewish democracy “allows [him] to do a lot of things that [he] couldn’t have done otherwise,” (Pollack 2010).
When considering the treatment of Uri Davis by his society, I start with a British journalist’s observation that Davis’s rejection of political Zionism, coupled with his conversion to Islam and his recent election to Fatah’s Revolutionary Council means he is treated with a mixture of scorn and hostility by vast swaths of Israelis and supporters of Israel in the Jewish diaspora (Freedman 2009).

I ask Davis how strong the sense is, in the Hebrew community, that he is no longer one of them.

“You have to make a survey in order to answer that question,” Davis tells me. “I don’t think I’m qualified to answer it,” (Davis 2010).

Instead, I ask Davis to explain the extent to which he actually engages with the Hebrew audience. He answers by way of a long-winded parable in which a mule is sold to a buyer under false pretences. It seems as though the mule obediently performs its tasks after a request is whispered in its ear. The buyer finds, however, that the mule remains obstinate, so he returns to the seller and complains. The seller takes a beam of wood and beats the mule, which then goes about its duties at last. The buyer complains that he was sold the mule under false pretences – he did not know he would have to beat it in order to get it to do what he wanted. The seller explains to the buyer, “Sometimes you have to bring its attention to you.” After a small pause, Davis continues that his “main intervention in Israeli society is through the support for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions.”

“To be bashing the mule on its head?”

“And getting its attention.”

Gilad Atzmon, meanwhile, is completely distanced from Israeli society.. His novel, A Guide to the Perplexed (2002) evokes a utopic/dystopic future Palestine in which Israel has been dismantled and many Israeli Jews have fled. Atzmon is reviled even by other dissidents in this study – for example,
Uri Davis declares that Atzmon collectively stereotypes people, which he finds “utterly odious,” (2010).

The final consideration of my “weirdos” explores the price they pay for their actions. Gideon Levy (2010) argues that all individuals, even the “weirdos”, act according to their own self-interests, and I get a strong sense that both Pollack and Davis enjoy the roles that they play in the Palestinian struggle, as much as their actions are driven by their ideals. Pollack, with his cool tattoos, belongs to a rather glamorous international community of anarchists whose appeal derives at least in part from their marginality and the whiff of danger. Davis is a similarly iconic figure, famous across Israel for his vintage Volkswagen Beetles (Freedman 2009) and seemingly reveling in his notoriety as a member of Fatah. Yet I surmise that both men must also pay some kind of price for the lives they have chosen.

Pollack is quick to downplay any personal costs. “I don’t think it’s such a huge thing to do. I mean I’m not paying such a huge price for it, really,” (Pollack 2010). He points out that there might be a social price to pay, but given the circles he moves in, this is largely irrelevant. It also does not seem to affect his ability to earn money – Pollack is a graphic designer who performs as little work as he needs to in order to survive, and says his clients don’t care about his politics (Pollack 2010).

For Davis, the picture is more complex. He depicts himself as someone who has an extraordinarily high calling to the pursuit of justice: “I cannot answer the question why the voice of my conscience is more compelling than the voice of conscience of other people. It remains a mystery,”(Davis 2010). This calling places significant demands on his time, to the detriment of his personal life.

“[M]ost of my time is devoted either to my academic work or to solidarity work,” he says.

[U]pon establishing the first family, the second family, the third family, the women who decided to join their lives to mine were aware that I’m 95% out of the house. In all three cases, children came into the equation rather late in the relationship. Eventually the biological clock ticks with a female spouse in a family relationship, and in all cases the potential mother said, “Look, I have
the potentiality of delivering life. I realise that I cannot really ask you to share childcare in any significant way, but I still don’t want to have a child from another man. So I’m resigned to being effectively a single mother, and I really want to have a child, and it’s with you.” Now I don’t think anyone has the right to deny the fulfillment of that request from a person, any person, let alone the person that is the chosen point of one’s family. Do you have children? When the child comes into the relationship – you can talk and discuss and agree whatever you want to agree – it’s a completely different kettle of fish. The spouses I was fortunate enough to join were admirable, admirable, persons but also persons with an academic career, and a medical career, and after the child was born it appears that the mother needed help. And she turned for help from the obvious party that is obligated to help, namely the father. The father says, “I can’t and I don’t really want to, and I don’t really want to and I can’t, because reducing my commitments from 95% commitment to the call of my conscience... to fifty or sixty percent is a betrayal of my calling.” It can crack trust... And it can crack a rather good marriage. And it did, three times (Davis 2010).

I ask Davis whether his conscience did not also extend to his family life. There is a long pause, after which Davis states, “To a degree I am a product of patriarchy. I tried to reform, but apparently not sufficiently.”

This is Davis as he represents himself in his book as well, married to his political work to the exclusion of family life. Nowhere is this more painfully obvious than in Davis’s tales of his firstborn son, Gul. The reader meets Gul when he is born to Davis and his first wife, a fellow academic, in 1973. Both parents are focused on their careers and Gul is left with a baby-minder who calls him “Grant” and leaves him in his pram all day. Davis recounts an occasion on which the child was sick and he was writing an important document.

I still inwardly cringe at the memory of my baby son, lying in a bundle at my feet, unhappy and whimpering, while I worked... I ignored him and tried to shut him up rather than interrupting my work to pick him up in my arms and comfort him (Davis 1995, p.123).

Gul goes on to develop anorexia nervosa, and is diagnosed with a compulsive suicidal disorder at age sixteen. Davis writes that Gul has been hospitalised ever since; listing, in his meticulous way, the names of all of the different hospitals (Davis 1995, p.324).
I don’t ask Davis about Gul’s health when we meet, but suggest that when I consider the costs of Davis’s actions, they appear to have been his relationships with those close to him.

“Correct,” he declares. “And most significantly, with my firstborn son.”

I tell him that I would like to talk about Gul, but I am also aware that it is a sensitive issue. “Well, let’s agree at least for that stage, for you to be satisfied with that answer,” he suggests. I concur.

We do not return to the issue, yet Gul remains the elephant in the room. I am unsure how Davis’s personal life fits with an academic study of national identity and political struggle. However, Narrative Analysis enables us to analyse Davis’s insertion of Gul’s narrative into his own larger one. Gul is depicted as paying a price, but is it for the Palestinian struggle? Is this a political tragedy, or merely a personal one? There is a sense that Davis uses his political struggle to outsource responsibility for the consequences of his actions, as seen in a letter to his mother and sister in Israel, responding to their accusations that he is in some way responsible for Gul’s condition.

Ora [Davis’s sister] starts with the statement: Gul pays the price of my politics. How does she know? Maybe Gul pays the price of having the kind of mother that he has. Nira and I shared legal custody for Gul, but care and control for Gul was with Nira. We had decided to have Gul on the understanding that his care was to be primarily his mother’s responsibility and after our separation and divorce this remained the case. It is a dangerous business to start blaming me or Nira for Gul’s situation and I would hesitate to direct judgements against his parents in this way (Davis 1995, p.340).

Despite his last sentence here, Davis nevertheless depicts Nira as a questionable mother, whilst representing himself as virtuous. Elsewhere, Davis writes:

Given my total political mobilization I could have children only if my woman agreed to assume the responsibility for looking after them. It is one’s duty to do good and combat evil, and conscience always comes always [sic]. For me this meant that my commitment to the cause of Palestine always came first, so my work had priority over any other claim to my time... I regarded
my position on this matter as rather standard, in that this was a predicament facing every committed professional,” (Davis 1995 p.320-1).

Yet despite this “standard”, Davis depicts his family breakdowns as a price to be paid for his political struggle.

In addition, some micro-narratives in his autobiography which are perhaps intended to convey his idealistic politics can also be read in a different way. In one such narrative, Davis’s second wife removes her top in the company of some male Palestinians. Davis presents his frustration with his wife through a framework of cultural imperialism, depicting her as ignorant and insensitive. The situation could be framed completely differently through the lens of women’s liberation, with the woman cast as the Other amongst men. In another anecdote, the couple have a disagreement in a vehicle, and she swipes his conciliatory hand away. He is angered by this display in front of his Palestinian friends who are travelling with them, because a wife is not supposed to publicly reject her husband (Davis 1995, p.322). Again, Davis seems to put the sensitivities of the Palestinian Other (and his own pride) above those of his female consort.

Perhaps this is a product of his self-professed “conservative liberal” approach which clearly demarcates public and private identities. In public – his engagement with Palestinians and his efforts to reform the communal lives of Hebrews and Palestinians – Davis is principled with regard to minimising distinctions between members of the human race, while in private, he retains a pride in what he calls his Jewish tribal origins. But the complexities of family relationships cannot be adequately resolved by this public / private divide. The fact that Davis fights apartheid in the public sphere but embraces patriarchy in the private sphere does not amount to a failing of his political position per se, but it is interesting to reflect upon. The bigger question is whether we can draw any broader conclusions about the toll that “crossing the border” might exact; I do not think we can make any meaningful assessments in this regard. Any kind of activism can distract an individual from other responsibilities. What is most interesting in this case, however, is how Davis himself represents
these life choices as part of his political journey, and hence central to his act of “crossing the border”.

Meanwhile for Gilad Atzmon, any personal price paid for his political stance and actions is hard to discern. I am struck, upon spending time with him, by how Israeli his context still seems. The bass player in his jazz band is Israeli. His wife is Israeli and, along with his son, still has a connection to the place. Atzmon seems content with his global music career and his home in London. Yet I question whether everything is perfect when I consider the vitriol he expresses for Jews and Zionists. Is there a price to pay for carrying so much hatred? I will explore this in the next chapter.

In this section, I’ve explored the more radical dissidents who distance themselves from Israeli Jewish life, advocate the end of Israel as a Jewish state, and engage with the struggle of the Other. I have explored them from three perspectives: how do they see their relationship to the collective? How does the collective see them? And have they paid a price for their position? Can the more radical dissidents be seen to escape the trap that some of the other dissidents are caught in, whereby their continued identification with aspects of the Zionist project prevents them from being able to fully connect with the needs and interests of their Other? I suggest that the radical dissidents can be seen to escape this trap, but the price they pay for it might be regarded as so high that the option proves prohibitive. For Atzmon, he must hate his origins and – in a sense – himself. For Davis and Pollack, they must emotionally and physically depart where they come from, in the sense that they are now more engaged with the politics of the Other than the Us; though they do not use such terminology. Such dislocation is likely to remain a significant barrier for most Israeli Jews, meaning that although radical politics might be a “way out” of the dissidents’ dilemma, it is likely to always remain a ‘road less travelled’. 
Conclusion

This chapter has explored dissonance in the dissidents’ narratives across six key themes. I have examined their attraction to Zionism, their invocation and assessment of a nationalist past, the way that fears can invoke self-protection and the role that self-interest plays. I have also explored how some dissidents digest the things they have done, and the meaning and place of radical dissent in their society. The dissidents’ interview responses provide insight into the dilemmas generated by their status as Israeli Jews and their identification with the Palestinian Other. In the next chapter, I develop a theoretical framework for analysing these responses, considering the extent to which alternative discourses are able to provide the dissidents with the tools they need to talk about their own identities, their political programme and the Other.
CHAPTER SIX: DISSIDENT DISCOURSES

Introduction

This Chapter offers an analytical framework for making sense of the discontinuities in the dissident narratives. I begin by explaining why I consider discontinuities have emerged, suggesting that the dissidents tend to employ more than one of six available discourses of national identity. I sketch out the six discourses and explain their theoretical bases, offering further insight into how they operate and any tensions within. I then demonstrate the discourses in use with examples from the dissident narratives, discussing how discontinuities can be explained by movement between discourses. The final section considers the pervasiveness of ressentiment in Israeli society.

Understanding Discontinuities

In the interviews, I sought to understand the strategies the dissidents employed in reconciling their identities with their desire for justice and equality for the Other. With some, it was apparent that varying degrees of embeddedness in the ethnocratic state and its hegemonic ressentiment discourse led to either a retreat from that vision, or a shift into different ways of explaining themselves. My explanation for this phenomenon is that the dissidents make use of six available national identity discourses. These include the hegemonic ressentiment Zionist discourse and five alternatives which attempt to subvert it. However, the alternative discourses are developed in the context of an ethnocratic state and the hegemonic ressentiment discourse. For this reason, and because of some contingencies of the Israeli case which I will explain in more detail, the discourses are unable to do the job for some dissidents in a way that they find acceptable, in terms of developing a coherent means of talking about the identities of Us and Other, overcoming ressentiment, and working towards inclusion and equality with the Other. If the dissidents remain entirely within a single
discourse, they are compelled to either adopt an explanation of their identity which may not sit with how they see themselves, or embrace continued preference for the ethnic Us.

There are two explanations for what I call ‘discontinuities’ in the dissident narratives, observable in the form of contradictions and omissions. The first explanation relates to the content of the discourses, and how they organise dissidents’ perceptions of their situation. Each discourse has a specific way of looking at the past, present and future, describing the identity of the (Jewish Israeli) individual employing the discourse, and enunciating a vision for the (Palestinian) Other. However, these discourses do not necessarily give the dissident the appropriate tools for working towards equality. What I call the Binational, Kinder Zionist and Post-Zionist discourses are wedded to a depiction of the Us projecting backwards into the past, yet cannot account for the Us and the Other found in this past in the same clear terms as the ressentiment discourse. Meanwhile the other alternatives – which I label the Civic discourse and Inverted ressentiment – do not resonate with what are often strong ethnonational identities of the dissidents. Meanwhile the hegemonic ressentiment discourse is the one the dissidents are trying to escape.

Using a single one of these discourses, the dissidents may be unable to do or say certain things that they wish to. Thus the second explanation for the discontinuities relates to the way that dissidents respond to the parameters set by the available discourses. One option is to utilise a single discourse fairly consistently. Such an approach demonstrates the limitations of that discourse for the dissident’s own identity, or for justice for the Other. Alternatively, a dissident might move into a different discourse if the current one is not doing the particular desired job. This generates discontinuity within the dissident’s narrative. Thus discontinuities arise both from the context (and therefore content) of the discourses available, and also from the strategies employed by the dissidents to cope with this.
The discontinuities I identify are not the fault of the dissidents, nor are discontinuities *per se* unique to individuals in such situations. Everyone has multiple performances of identity available (Riessman 2008); we promote different parts of ourselves at different times to different audiences. Dorit Rabinyan gives poignant voice to the dualisms she identifies as being the basis for her identity; sourced to her childhood as a ‘Mizrahi’ in ‘Ashkenazi’ Israel, but extending to both Zionism and universalism.

I’m not ready to give up any of these hands, you know? I’m not ready to give up my patriotism to Israel and to who I am, as much as I’m not ready to give up my humanistic, universal self. So there’s no way someone is gonna make me give up my patriotism... But I’m a patriot, but I’m never the less a humanistic.... This duality is what I consider to be human. What I consider to be alive. It’s only, it’s only, it’s the only way I know how things are, you know. There is no other mechanism I can refer except for seeing both all the time (Rabinyan 2010).

However, the dissidents’ employment of multiple discourses tells us something about the situation they face. Their context of an ethnocratic state, with a hegemonic *ressentiment* Zionist discourse, gives rise to a unique problem in trying to connect with the Other across the lines of ethnic privilege. I do not judge the dissidents if they are unable to make the discourses do the job; rather I shed light on how options for dissent against *ressentiment* are constrained by the ethnocratic state and the hegemony of *ressentiment* discourse.

For the purposes of analysis, each dissident is seen as employing a primary discourse, which he or she uses most of the time. This is easy to do with some dissidents; with others it is more difficult in that some dissidents straddle two discourses. My main purpose is to emphasise that single discourses generally do not suffice for the job the dissidents are trying to perform.
The Discourses

*Hegemonic Ressentiment Zionist Discourse*

In trying to articulate their concern for the Other, the dominant *ressentiment* Zionist discourse is the constant around which the dissidents must negotiate. *Ressentiment* Zionism depicts an ancient, singular Jewish nation, displaced from Biblical Israel, having wandered the earth in exile. Jewish experience and identity is centred upon the territory of Israel / Palestine, and – after Jewish ‘return’ – nullified outside it. The State of Israel is depicted as the only solution for the problems Jews have experienced at the hands of Others throughout history. Others have always hated Jews. Others in Palestine have similarly hated Jews, defying their attempts to finally secure a safe haven in the land to which they are entitled. This rejectionism has been the basis of the political conflict in Israel / Palestine; the conflict can only be resolved when Others accept the rights of Jews to a safe place of their own in which they form a majority and can self-govern. In the absence of this ideal, Jews will remain vulnerable to violent Others, and will defend themselves with conduct befitting a self-reflective and peace-loving nation.

The *ressentiment* discourse appears to present self-evident facts about history, identity and Others who act as violent obstacles to peace and self-determination. While the alternative discourses challenge these tenets, they must also traverse the ground laid by them. Accordingly, every alternative discourse necessarily takes *ressentiment* Zionism as its starting point, whether counterposing it or attempting to modify it. Alternative ways of understanding Us and Other in ethnocratic Israel necessarily come up against the institutionalisation of *ressentiment*, from the legal embedding of ethnic categories to the recruitment of every Israeli Jew into the armed services vested with occupying the Other. Alternative discourses, then, are not merely abstract tools with which the dissidents may craft a new vision of their society; rather, they are tools made in the same factory as *ressentiment* Zionism. They may bear the mark of the Zionist project and its outcomes in
the form of thick ethnic identities and conceptualisations of the Jewish nation in history. The discourses are shaped by this context even as they also reflect external political influences and challenges from within the Jewish cultural tradition.

**The Civic Discourse**

The Civic discourse is one alternative discourse whose inspirational basis comes from outside the Israel / Palestine context. Invoking the ‘civic-ethnic distinction’ discussed in Chapter One, the Civic discourse can be characterised by its disregard for the categories of Us and Other in political life. In the Israel / Palestine context, the Civic discourse privatises ethnic identity, depicting those who would be Others as equal participants in a shared society.

This thesis considers whether dissidents might be able to employ ethnic categories of Us and Other in a way that places them on an equal footing. Removing official ethnic identities from the political sphere, the Civic discourse deletes the boundaries which facilitate privileging the Us and legitimise harming Others within the state. This discourse therefore escapes the ‘trap’ of trying to pursue social justice for the Other whilst retaining the identities which are developed by ressentiment, and which are asymmetrically institutionalised into the ethnocratic state.

However, the invocation of a civic discourse by Israeli Jews may be slightly more complicated, since strict civic-liberal interpretations of public and private identities have long been problematised within Jewish intellectual debate. Yitzhak Laor argues that there is an internal contradiction at the very heart of Jewish identity, with Western civilisation demanding that Jews “divide themselves between being a Jew (‘at home’) and being a human (outdoors). As far as the Christian is concerned, no such duality exists...” (Laor 2009, p.126). When French Jews were granted citizenship by Napoleon, Jewish deputies were asked to decide whether they constituted a nation or a religion,

\[54\] States which adopt a ‘civic’ Charter still have an Other who lacks citizenship and exists outside state borders (Spencer and Wollman, 2005). However, this Other is not excluded upon ethnic grounds like internal Others in an ethnocracy.
since if they were the former they could not also be French citizens. The deputies decided that Judaism was a religion and hence French Jews were granted citizenship, but “among themselves... the deputies noted that the question of either / or was essentially a Christian question” (Ehrlich 2003, p.66). The issue was also given consideration by Hannah Arendt and other individuals active within the early cultural Zionist movement, leading to a determination that Jewish identity should not be subordinated to universalism (see discussions in Raz-Krakotzkin 2011). The issue was also explored by Zionist scholars, predictably leading to the conclusion that such dilemmas could only be resolved in a Jewish state (Avineri 1981, p.8-12). These discussions illustrate how the civic discourse is shaped by Christian traditions within the context of the Western Enlightenment; it might be difficult to impose on those who do not understand their identities in this way. This does not preclude such individuals from employing the discourse, but rather suggests that it may not provide a straightforward fit.

**The Binational Discourse**

The Binational discourse can also be seen to derive from general precepts in political theory. The generic proposition of such a discourse is that ‘ethnic nations’ are either authentic entities (in keeping with a primordialist approach to ethnicity which accepts at face value the claims of those who identify as belonging to them) or are, at the very least, ‘real’ enough to be institutionalised into a state on equal terms in the hope that peace will prevail between those who see themselves as belonging. A Binational discourse might invoke the kinds of political solutions proposed by the scholarly father of consociational democracy, Arend Lijphardt (1977, Chapter 2), such as power-sharing through grand coalitions, minority vetoes, federalism and proportional representation. It might also invoke some of the mechanisms of living harmoniously in a context of non-domination explored by Iris Marion Young (2005, p.153-5), particularly horizontal federalism.
However, these are the logical applications of a Binational discourse; the content of such a discourse in Israeli Jewish political life requires a different explanation. A Binational discourse employed by an individual in this context not only asserts the existence of nations as objective fact, but also necessarily invokes subjective identification with one of them. Therefore, an Israeli Jew invoking a Binational discourse will identify with the ‘Jewish nation’, depicted as a long-standing entity with a connection to Palestine.

The Binational discourse can be seen as a modern manifestation of the idea that there are two ‘nations’ who call Israel / Palestine home, and hence a political arrangement of formal co-existence should ensue. Raz-Krakotzkin explains it as the framework of discussion and responsibility ... Binationalism leads to the basic understanding that the questions of the rights of the Jews and the question of the rights of the Palestinians are the same. It thereby implies a Jewish identity based on the recognition of Palestinian rights, one that does not exclude the Palestinians but which begins to imagine these identities together (Raz-Krakotzkin 2011, p.59-60).

However, drawing from the Cultural Zionist ‘tradition’ already discussed in this work, the Binational discourse cannot offer a coherent account of this process. The problems with it can be observed at both an abstract and an applied level. At an abstract level, any kind of binationalist or multiculturalist discourse is ‘groupist’, viewing nations as agents and actors. When such a groupist perspective is applied by an individual identifying as Jewish to the colonising events in the history of Israel / Palestine, the resultant discourse can only ever depict the narrative of a Jewish nation fleeing horror for homeland. The space within the discourse permitting the resident Other to question or resist is lacking; this Other now faces not merely a political movement, but a self-evident nation with both claim and justification for the land. The best that the Binational discourse can say to the Other at this moment of colonisation is “budge up, make room”; thus the claim for recognition of the Other’s rights as an inherent part of the discourse is questionable.
The final noteworthy point about the Binational discourse in Israel / Palestine is that it has a procreative quality to it. Although the discourse depicts an initial formal cooperation between two distinct nations, it alludes to an amalgam of both identities emerging sometime in the future; a combined Jew-Palestinian identity made up of characteristics of both. This putative new identity can be distinguished from civic nationalism in that it combines two ‘ethnic nations’ rather than relegating ‘ethnonational’ attributes to the private sphere. Within the Binational discourse, then, the longed-for family arising from the coupling of two ethnic nations is neither the two parties entering into the marriage, nor the child-identities who become step-children, but rather the brand-new baby tying the families together. The ‘new baby’ is held up as unique; its identity and qualities are extolled in the same terms previously applied to the rest of the family. In possession of the qualities of each side, the ‘new baby’ is an ‘ethnic Us’; its birth has joined Other to Us, and Us to Other.

*The Kinder Zionist Discourse*

Another alternative discourse draws from the tradition sometimes depicted as ‘left Zionism’ by scholars and commentators (see critique in Grinberg 2009 p.111; see also Laor 2009) and framed as ‘liberal nationalism’ by at least one of them (Tamir 1993). Kinder Zionism has developed in the Israel / Palestine context, but can be seen as analogous to discourses in other ethnocratic contexts, such as the one privileging Malays as historical owners of Malaysia (see Mauzy 1983, p.2-4; 47).

Kinder Zionism clearly lays out an option which is superior to the present scenario and depicts this as the optimal solution to the Other’s problem. It can be seen to improve the situation of the Other without sacrificing the privilege enjoyed by the Us, and especially without weakening the boundary between Other and Us. Kinder Zionism manifests most clearly in support for a distinct political solution: that the Occupation end and a Palestinian state be established alongside a Jewish Israel. Whilst such a model might appear to offer equality, its application would result in Others in certain zones either being compelled to leave their homes, or forced to accept second-class citizenship in a
still-ethnocratic Jewish Israel. However, the two-state model is not the only possible manifestation of Kinder Zionism, which is thus best recognised by its approach to questions of identity rather than concrete political solutions. Kinder Zionism displays an apparently genuine attempt to move away from the stereotyping and hatred endemic to *ressentiment*, but with the rules of engagement laid well in advance to ensure that prioritisation of the Jewish Us remains paramount.

**The Post-Zionist Discourse**

An additional alternative discourse, Post-Zionism, can be linked more generally to post-nationalism or post-modernism (Ram 2005 p.35), but its Israeli application draws from a wide range of movements, including ‘new’ or ‘revisionist’ historians like Ilan Pappe (2004, 2001, 1988), Benny Morris (2004a, 1994) and Avi Shlaim (2000, 1988) and sociologists like Baruch Kimmerling (1999, 1992, 1983), Gerson Shafir (1999; 1998) and Uri Ram (1999, 2005, 2008). Literature termed post-Zionist debunks historical myths about the sanctity of Zionism (Morris 2004a; Shlaim 2000), and critiques the construction and treatment of Mizrahim (Shohat 1999). Perhaps the core proposition tying this broad literature together is that Israel is now ready to shrug off its past and move boldly into the future. But what future? Materialists like Shafir and Peled (1998) suggest that globalisation is leading Israel towards a less ethnically-based polity; Ram (2008) suggests that this may be coupled with a reactionary cleaving to ethnic identity. But how does Israel really ‘grow up’, empty itself of ethnic content and divorce itself from history, and is this really the aim? Rather,

> [i]s it the case that the heroic men and glorious past that were effective during earlier nation-building stages must be updated, and the practice of sceptical rationalism regarding the national past amongst descendants becomes the current capital through which the Zionist project may continue into late modernity? (Dalsheim 2007, p.527).

In other words, post-Zionism may simply be Zionism repackaged for a new, sceptical age. This apparent tension in the discourse is supported by the suggestion that some works labelled post-Zionist regard the Zionist project as legitimate but completed. Yadgar suggests an aim to “improv[e]
the (national) status quo, neither revolutionising the existing order nor completely undermining it” (Yadgar 2002, p.64). It is this feature of post-Zionism that I am most keen to consider.

Accordingly, I suggest that the Post-Zionist discourse depicts itself as ostensibly disengaged from the past; hence as forward looking. It is secular, grown-up and eager to end the conflict with the Palestinians and make Israel a good place to live. A significant reference for this transformation is Israelis themselves; Post-Zionism is about shrugging off the shackles of ressentiment and ethnocracy as they embed Us in a mire of conflict. The Post-Zionist discourse retains a loose attachment to the ethnic Us whilst being open to the idea that it might change and recede. However, this loose attachment is not pinned to a fixed continuation of Jewish privilege, as in Kinder Zionism, nor linked to equal sharing, as in the Binational discourse. The Civic, Binational and Kinder Zionist discourses are informed by ideological principles, whereas the Post-Zionist discourse appears to represent a break with ideology (Ram 2005, p.34-5). Post-Zionism imagines no more Zionism telling people how to live, and perhaps no more heavy instructions from any other quarters either. Even Dorit Rabinyan, the least ‘post’ Zionist interviewed, expresses a desire to “breathe” and be free of such pressures (2010). Released from the collective demands of how one ought to live, pragmatism comes to the fore, and as such the Post-Zionist discourse informs reduced expectations compared to the Civic discourse, from which it can be distinguished on the basis of retaining a significant, albeit more fluid, attachment to the ethnic Us in political life. Post-Zionism is necessarily woolly about the identities it promotes and the political solutions it advocates because it is “still tentative and partly confused... trapped in the defense of some Zionist positions while rejecting others” (Nimni 2003, p.9). It harvests the historical fruits of Zionism whilst simultaneously aspiring to a future in which they cease to have a negative impact. An endorsement of the Zionist project seems inherent in the depiction of its completeness (Yadgar 2002, p.64); if it was necessary for ‘the nation’ to do what it did – and if the ‘nation’ at that historical moment is taken for granted as an organic entity – then mistreatment of the Other seems to be something of a ‘necessary evil’. Though this mistreatment is presented as
problematic; on closer inspection this might only be because the Us now pays a price for it. The resultant promotion of a (partial) dissolution of identity evades condemnation or celebration of the past; yet a past left unexcavated quietly maintains ethnic privilege into the future.

**The Inverted Ressentiment Discourse**

The final alternative discourse, Inverted *Ressentiment*, can be explained with reference to the *ressentiment* theory developed in Chapters One and Two. Inverted *Ressentiment* applies *ressentiment* in reverse; the Other is elevated as virtuous, and the Us is demonised. The Inverted *Ressentiment* discourse bestows hatred upon the Jewish collective, meaning that an Israeli Jew must either extricate him or herself from the collective to avoid being tarnished, or else see the self as a legitimate target of hatred. In the case of extrication, the individual can never become the venerated Other, since the Inverted *ressentiment* discourse maintains ethnic boundaries. Thus the discourse decisively Others those employing it, banishing them to a purgatory in which universalistic identities appear illusory, but ‘desirable’ identities are unattainable.

Any Inverted *Ressentiment* discourse is essentially somebody else’s *ressentiment* discourse. In the Israeli Jewish context, the Inverted *Ressentiment* discourse mirrors a Judeophobic or anti-Semitic discourse. Whilst it might at first appear perverse for those identifying as Jews to employ such a discourse, Falk (2008) suggests that “Jewish self-hatred” might long have been a feature of Jewish consciousness and explains (in ‘groupist’ terms) that “a minority group in a given society that is repeatedly told that it is bad, that is rejected and persecuted, may also develop a collective group self that is bad and negative” (p.54). In Zionism’s roots, the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse allied itself to the negative vision of the European Jew offered up by anti-Semitic discourses. In its representation of the Diaspora Jew as a homeless parasite and its advocacy of Jewish emigration from Europe, Zionism dovetailed with anti-Semitic ideology. However, there was an instrumental component to this – Zionism Othered the “old Jew” of Europe in the creation of the celebrated “new
This Othering did not come from hatred; rather, it contrasted the unflattering ‘before’ shot with the attractive ‘after’ shot. Thus although Zionism had a tendency to conflate with anti-Semitic representations of Jews, it certainly did not embrace them in their entirety. But in the context in which Zionism flourished, we can see how the application of groupist terminologies and blanket labels of Good and Evil to ethnic categories might give rise to a discourse like Inverted Ressentiment. The thick ethnic identities constructed by ressentiment Zionism might only appear malleable in the case of complete moral reversal – whatever price this may exact.

**Dissidents Using Discourses**

In this section, I will show how the dissidents use the above discourses to describe their identities, their place in Israel / Palestine and their visions of the Other. I will suggest that each dissident employs a primary discourse, and demonstrate how they shift into others when they are unable to reconcile their identities with equality and justice for the Other. I will cover the discourses in the same order as above, with the exception of the ressentiment discourse, discussed at the end. No dissident employs this discourse as their primary discourse; however, some are compelled to return to it, because it alone offers a coherent narrative of their identity and history. But returning to such a discourse means abandoning the vision of justice and equality for the Other, thereby generating contradictions. Because each dissident narrative is unique, some are more useful for analysis than others; some dissidents will therefore be discussed in greater detail than others. As I move through the discourses, I will also revisit some dissidents, suggesting how their movements traverse the limitations of single discourses.

**Civic Discourse**

The Civic discourse, offering complete engagement with what has hitherto been constructed as the Other, is the primary discourse of two dissidents, the young anarchist Yonatan Pollack and the
veteran maverick Uri Davis. Tellingly, both men have distanced themselves from the Israeli Jewish community, enabling them to adopt an alternative understanding of how a polity should be constructed. Neither, however, delivers the straightforward version of this discourse, which would be to argue for a civic regime in Israel / Palestine in which all ‘Jews’ and ‘Palestinians’ would be equal citizens of an ethnically blind state.

Pollack reserves an anarchist’s scepticism for both state claims to ethnic neutrality and the state’s “capacity to be an agent of justice or an agent of equality” (2010). His vision of himself and the Other, however, conforms to the ethnically blind model of civic universalism, demonstrated by his ease in working with the Palestinian popular resistance. Pollack does not see that ethnic categories have a place in politics: “People want to see themselves as Jews and that’s their national identity, so be it. But it’s very different than saying there should be a state for Jews,” (2010). And while he believes that “allowing as much autonomy to any group is a good thing,” this should only be implemented in a way that doesn’t inhibit Others. His personal motivator is the struggle against injustice: “I’m not so interested in the nationalist part of it, but for me it’s obviously a liberation struggle,” (2010). The Civic discourse thus enables Pollack to join the struggle as an individual fighting injustice, rather than a Jew or Israeli.

The Civic discourse is used in a different way by Uri Davis, whose support for ritual traditions like circumcision and his rewritten Haggadah demonstrate that he takes his own “tribal affiliation” more seriously than Pollack. Nevertheless, this identification does not create contradictions for Davis because he privatises and de-nationalises it (“I do not enter my politics in this way” – 2010). Davis’s Civic discourse can also be seen in his efforts for a new PLO identity card without exclusivist religious imagery.

Both Pollack and Davis have distanced themselves from Israeli Jewish society – Pollack to the extent of problematising the very ties that bind it (“What is Jewish culture?” – 2010), and Davis by situating
himself within a Palestinian milieu, politically and personally. There is something telling in the fact that these are the only two of my dissidents to adopt a primary Civic discourse. It seems to take a rather extraordinary approach to questions of identity within Israeli Jewish society to reach the position of effectively giving up Jewish nationalism. If only “weirdos” (Levy 2010) like Pollack and Davis are willing or able to do this, we might question the extent to which the Civic discourse is a feasible option for dissent, given that it requires letting go of the ‘Jewish nation’. Accordingly, while the Civic discourse is entirely feasible – and is indeed the only discourse that can be employed to pursue equality or justice for the Other without generating tensions – it will not measure up for most dissidents because it negates their identities. This is summed up aptly by Eitan Bronstein, who says “nationality is still important….A more citizenship sense of nationalism... is a bit beyond my vision” (2010).

**Binational Discourse**

More of the dissidents seem comfortable using the Binational discourse, retaining existing ethnic categories and attempting to reshape the power relations between them. The discourse’s ‘procreative’ quality tantalisingly alludes to a new nation; however, dissidents who use the Binational discourse as their primary discourse generate discontinuities as they attempt to navigate the history of the Zionist project and the establishment of Israel. I will compare usages and discontinuities across several dissident narratives.

Eitan Bronstein and Oren Yiftachel can be seen to employ the Binational discourse in a fairly straightforward fashion. Yiftachel employs the Binational discourse as the basis for his model of a non-oppressive binational state, displaying its ‘procreative quality’ in his hope for “intermarriage” and “love... prevail[ing]” between future generations (2007). Bronstein takes seriously the cultural identities of “Jews” and “Palestinians”, claiming that they have a greater right to Israel / Palestine than (additional) Others. His engagement with Israel / Palestine’s history invokes the legitimacy of
two nations on the land. Jeff Halper also employs the Binational discourse to make this argument, combined with a Post-Zionist desire for Israel to be a “normal country” (2010). Neve Gordon emphasises how a “Jewish” way of thinking informs his politics, particularly his affinity for the work of Leon Roth, the Jewish intellectual who sought to embrace Others (see above, p.157).

Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom couples the Binational discourse in a more complicated way with the Civic discourse. I noted above that the dichotomy of public/private identities may not apply so easily in contexts outside the Christian Enlightenment tradition. For Milgrom, privatisation is not possible because he sees politics and religion as inseparable from culture. They form part of his “Jewish milieu”, whilst he simultaneously connects with a universalist milieu through his activism (Milgrom 2010). Ultimately, as a rabbi, Milgrom has a certain audience (“I know that there is a Jewish public that is waiting for me and needs me to say these things,” – 2010). Though he has chosen to extend his political engagement (“If someone decides in Germany not to buy an avocado because it comes from Israel, that’s going to speak”), Milgrom’s intra-Jewish communal identity cannot be dismissed, because his politics doesn’t make sense outside of it. Milgrom invokes a Jewish Us (“...[W]e didn’t – we don’t – have enough of an ideology of partnership,” – 2010), yet deconstructs national bonds (“This conversation right now is the only real connection, all else is problematic” – 2010). The potential alternative explanation of the Us as a community of believers in God is also untenable; Milgrom has a “foggy” theology and “can’t use God language,” (2010). If it is not belief in God that defines Milgrom’s Jewish identity, then it can only be his relationship to those with whom he shares his Jewish “milieu;” a relationship that Milgrom seeks to invoke in a non-national way. Perhaps the futility of this underpins his melancholia, for it becomes apparent that Israel is the site of Milgrom’s Jewish identity; the physical locus for what is now a national Us. Milgrom’s exile from Israel is an exile from an Us consumed by nationalism. When we meet in Berlin, Milgrom’s melancholic exile is demonstrated in poignant ways – his only mobile phone is an Israeli number; he emphasises the time he spends on the internet dealing with Israeli issues: “I am still in Israel, even when I’m here,”
Israel has become the only place in which Milgrom’s Jewish identity can have meaningful content, yet his deep critique of this community has brought about his exile. I understand Milgrom’s primary discourse as Binational because the “we” he invokes cannot ultimately be differentiated from the ethnonational Us of Zionism, despite his intentions. Therefore, Milgrom enters into discontinuities alongside other dissidents who employ Binationalism as their primary discourse; particularly relating to how they evaluate the Zionist project.

I have suggested that the Binational discourse has a tension built into it. On the one hand, it claims to offer equal consideration to both ‘nations’ and both ‘national histories’; on the other hand, the (‘re’)constituting of the Zionist ‘nation’ through the colonisation of land belonging to Others necessarily marginalised those Others and denied them the space for refusal. This tension plays out in the dissident narratives in interesting ways; the dissidents move into other discourses to work around it.

For example, when I ask how the events of 1948 might have unfolded differently, Milgrom legitimises the creation of the UN’s Jewish state in 1947 (“I think that was a much better starting point” – 2010). Then, when I critique the consequences of this, he says, “I guess it would have been better if the state had not been established in 1947 but rather that things had sort of, you know, worked out.” Finally, when I try to pin down how things might have “worked out”, Milgrom can only explain what he would have done if he had been there: “Hopefully I would have been a peace maker or someone who was thinking about the impact of this on other people...” (2010). Milgrom has been using the Binational discourse, but when I talk about the events of 1948, he becomes ‘trapped’ within the paradigm of warring nations needing their own states – the paradigm ressentiment. Zionism manifested in Palestine. Milgrom slips into the Kinder Zionist discourse to argue that the starting point of two states for two nations might have been better than what unfolded; failures of acceptance (on the part of non-Jews) and Israel not having “stuck to it” (2010) are therefore the problem. But when I ask Milgrom to revisit the historical dynamics, he is confronted with a Zionism
that “didn’t figure out in a nice way” the “resentment and a feeling of being marginalised, and an anti-colonial struggle” of the Other (2010). He then shifts again; this time back to the Binational discourse but with himself positioned as a lone moral dissident in history. He reframes the conversation: “The question is, so what was developing, how would I have felt in those situations?” Interestingly, this is not the question – I have been very eager for any dissident to offer me a coherent plan for Cultural Zionism! But all Milgrom can offer is himself: “a peacemaker or someone who was thinking about the impact of this on other people.” The Binational discourse does not give Milgrom anywhere else to go; his deliberate reframing of the question becomes a kind of omission. He chooses not to segue into another discourse – a Civic one, perhaps, which would write off the whole project as misguided, or a ressentiment one which would justify it. I suggest that Milgrom cannot go to the Civic discourse because he ultimately frames himself as part of the Jewish Us. And Milgrom’s narrative is not prone to ressentiment, not even the Inverted Ressentiment that might come from his conclusion that We are the problem. Instead, there remains only the lone dissident in space and time. Milgrom is not trapped in the ressentiment discourse, but for him the Binational discourse also functions as a trap; Milgrom simultaneously eschews nationalism and is bound to it by his Jewish identity.

Oren Yiftachel utilises the Binational discourse with more ease, digesting the contradictions at its basis by legitimising, when pressed, the creation of Israel, despite his affinity for co-existence. Yiftachel depicts Israel’s founding as a “colonialism of refugees” to remove negative intent to Others and explain forces at work beyond the reach of moral ruminations. Jeff Halper, meanwhile, depicts Zionism as a positive nationalist movement; problematic only when infected with “ethnocratic” ideas and enacted in a colonialist fashion. Where Yiftachel finds virtue in the victimhood of refugees, Halper overtly rejects this formulation (“they weren’t all refugees” – 2010) and instead finds virtue in benign intentions and temporal relativism (“You know, it’s a different reality, a different context, a different set of thoughts,” – 2010).
Raz-Krakotzkin suggests that Binationalism can provide “the fertile ground from which to generate an alternative approach to the present.” He argues that “a critical reading” of the literature of Cultural Zionists “indicates the path to a process of decolonization – which in this context means an urgent rethinking of Israeli Jewish nationalism, with the understanding that it must include Palestinian nationalism” (2011, p.59). Invoking Cultural Zionism in this way enables dissidents to map the future. For Halper and Bronstein, the alternatives offered by Cultural Zionism provide contemporary blueprints for reconfiguring Israel / Palestine, or “decolonising Zionism” (Halper 2010). Given Bronstein’s explicit project (through Zochrot) of encouraging Israeli Jews to take responsibility for the troubled history in Palestine, the identity of the “better Israeli” offered by Cultural Zionists could be part of that ownership. If Bronstein asks his “fellow Israelis” to revisit a past in which their collective identity is depicted as oppressive coloniser, then this might prove too difficult (Abdel-Nour 2004, p.710-11; Abdel-Nour 2003). The “better Israeli” within the Cultural Zionist tradition form part of a prouder heritage for people like Bronstein and – ultimately, perhaps, under his tutelage – the entire ‘Jewish nation’.

However, alongside this potentially fruitful application of Cultural Zionism, there is also the risk of evading genuine engagement with the Other. There is a tendency within Zionist social science and discourse to depict as “internal, Israeli only” (Jewish-Israeli) affairs those which have actually been dialectical with the Palestinian Other (Piterberg 2008, p.62-4). Critiquing scholarly analysis of discomfort with the past, Piterberg argues that for liberal Zionist “gatekeepers”, rather than actually engaging with the collision between settler and colonised,

it is always and without exception about ‘us’, ‘our’ dilemmas, doubts, soul searching, struggles with nature, and so on and so forth ad nauseum. The centrality of this denial for a proper understanding of what liberal settler consciousness is all about cannot be over-emphasised (Piterberg 2001, p.222).
Lentin (2010) has made similar criticisms, arguing that despite significant efforts of Israeli Jews to ‘know’ the Palestinian Other – often as military enemy to be strategised, but also as partner for co-existence – “the Palestinians themselves remain unchartered territory”. Instead there is a “kitschy but deadly fascination with the Palestinian other” (p.104), wherein a “contradictory attraction enables us ... to digest the horrific past” (p.96).

With these critiques in mind, the danger is that the contemporary Binational discourse merely recognises the doubt and soul-searching within Zionist history, whilst skimming over the tension between a colonial project enacted upon Others, and purported concern for those Others. I have argued in this thesis that the historical co-optation of internal dissent ultimately strengthened the 

*ressentiment* 

Zionist discourse’s depiction of evil Others resisting a virtuous project; the danger is that contemporary dissidents invoking this ‘tradition’ might ultimately contribute to, rather than subvert, this discourse. Moreover, critics question whether organisations like Zochrot still ultimately silence and appropriate the narrative of Palestinians (see Lentin 2010, p.145-9; 159-62). The most potentially damning critique is that “discourses of remaking Jewish identity”, emphasised by Bronstein as a key aspect of Zochrot’s work, are ultimately a central part of the ethnoracial logic of stratification. The Palestinian-Philistine is pre-modern victim, requiring being ‘given voice to’, while the Israeli-Jew is modern, or postmodern... conferring voice to the voiceless Palestinians (Lentin 2010, p.161-2).

These are not tensions that I or the dissidents can resolve. It is apparent that the dissidents do generate discontinuities as they use the Binational discourse, from returning to the necessity of political Zionism in the establishment of a Jewish State (Milgrom 2010; Yiftachel 2007), to admitting the failures of the co-existence discourse at the time to offer a viable alternative (contextualised by Halper and Bronstein as ordinary people doing the best they could). Even dissidents who attempt to atone for the ‘national’ past and incorporate the privations of the Other into collective memory face accusations of navel-gazing and continued appropriation – this time not of land and chattels but
victimhood and grief (see Lentin 2010, Ch. 7-8, on Bronstein’s Zochrot organisation). It is Bronstein who speaks most incisively about this bind, boldly concluding that there is “no way out,” (2010). At least insofar as history is concerned, then, the Binational discourse may cleave those using it back to the Zionist project, just as their Cultural Zionist forbears ultimately cleaved before them. Therefore, as much as the ‘tradition’ creates a discursive space to explore uncomfortable truths – which may ultimately lead to actions – these processes will remain subject to questions about whether, and how, Israeli Jews can ever really take responsibility for the history in Palestine (Lentin 2010, Ch. 7-8).

_Kinder Zionist Discourse_

“Let’s have a wall. Let’s have a gate in the wall.” – Dorit Rabinyan, 2010.

In my introduction to the Kinder Zionist discourse (above, p.270), I suggested that Kinder Zionism represents a genuine attempt to do justice for the Other, albeit within strict limits, and that this distinguishes it from _ressentiment_. We will find Kinder Zionism in sentiments that ‘good fences make good neighbours’; Dorit Rabinyan’s epigraph for this section is an apt illustration. Her poignant description of her connection with Hasan Hourani and his friends and family illustrates a connection with the Other, yet Rabinyan peppers her narrative with motifs of separation, walls and boundaries; separation is depicted as just and in the interests of both parties.

It is helpful to consider the Kinder Zionist discourse with reference to Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin’s “concept of separation” (Raz-Krakotzkin 2011, p.59-60). Rabinyan depicts the separation of Jews and Palestinians as a viable means of seeking justice for and equality with the Other, even as the actual Other with whom she is connecting (Hourani) disputes this claim with his preference for a binational state (Rabinyan 2004). This political disagreement illustrates the limits of the Kinder Zionist discourse; even as Rabinyan is engaged with an _actual_ Other who argues against _her_ vision for _his_ justice, she holds on to an illusory Other for whom her “modest, lukewarm peace” (2004) will be enough.
Kinder Zionism tends to be tied to a particular political outcome: Jewish (ethnocratic) Israel must continue to exist, albeit alongside a Palestinian state, and this is the limit of identification with the needs or interests of the Other. There is little space, for example, for considering what it might be like for Others to live as an explicit minority in a Jewish state. Rabinyan mentions in passing that she thinks Israel’s “Arab minority is an equal citizen,” (2010). She then depicts my arguments regarding unequal access to housing and land as such a small community of criteria amongst so many levels of freedom, of abilities that Palestinians in other Arab countries won’t have...Such freedom of speech, such freedom of education, so many. No, [your criticism] is just like taking 2% out of 98% and just pointing out to it. And being realistic, I have friends, Arab-Israeli friends, who say to me... “The most educated, democratic, knownledged [Arab] society and community in the whole world is the one in Israel.” I mean, it’s the tools that we give... to the Arab Israeli that turns against Israel by the time it’s convenient... It’s the knowledge of freedom that allows you to point out what is lacking in these few bits. I call it a few bits, but someone who has an agenda will call it an enormous discrimination (Rabinyan 2010).

Later in the interview, Rabinyan also finds herself defending elements of the occupation that she purports to oppose (she writes of “shame and criticism for what Israeliness looks like and for the occupation as its main feature”; describing it as “bad and harmful” – 2004). We have been talking about an image of an Israeli soldier pointing a gun at a Palestinian child in the Occupied Territories, and Rabinyan compares this image to her feelings about the wall snaking through the West Bank.

“Let’s say even if I can look at this terrible wall and understand it,” she begins,

this terrible wall is saving lives, and our lives. In the meantime it’s killing us in different ways, but it is saving lives. So...I can see that this gun is deadly, that it can kill the little child. But this gun is protecting me. What can I say?” (Rabinyan 2010).

There is nothing that either of us can say. Rabinyan cannot use Kinder Zionism to knock down the wall, nor to turn the gun away from the Other’s child. Under questioning, she returns to the
ressentiment discourse’s depiction of the threat of the Evil Other and the greater worth of the Us. (The wall does not just save lives, but “our lives”.) She knows that the child being threatened by the gun is vulnerable and at one point declares that she does not need protection; “not from this child. This child is harmless,” (2010). Yet the soldier and the gun are there to protect the Virtuous Us from the Evil Other, and as long as there is the fear of violence (a legitimate fear), there is an easy collapsing of individuals into identities which determine their worth and status, provided by ressentiment Zionism.

Meron Benvenisti also utilises a Kinder Zionist discourse despite advocating a single-state solution in which the two ‘nations’ would be reified in a power-sharing arrangement (2003). In interview, he responds indignantly to my suggestion that he aspires to such a model (“I don’t say that I want to see it!...I am the one who is very upset about it cos I wanted a Jewish state,” 2010a). His continued attachment to the Jewish state (he “is” upset, not “was”) suggests that Benvenisti still ultimately supports the goals of the Zionist project; he just considers that they have failed. Thus while he writes with compassion about the Other, expressing apparent indignation about the erasure of Palestine’s Arab identity (Benvenisti 2000, Chapter One), his explicit primary interest remains the well-being of the ‘Jewish nation’. Whilst this well-being is served for Rabinyan – and mainstream Zionism – by the classic axiom of a Jewish state, for Benvenisti, this axiom no longer fits the reality. Thus Benvenisti’s Kinder Zionist discourse advocates political solutions not out of a genuine desire to celebrate “a Jewish identity based on the recognition of Palestinian rights” (the binational vision enunciated by Raz-Krakotzkin 2011, p.60), but rather a perceived lack of alternatives. Benvenisti’s pseudo-autobiographical writings about his childhood in mixed Palestine (2007), and his book meticulously cataloguing the destruction of its Arab component (2000) invoke the Binational discourse and a connection to the Other; made explicit when he suggests that the “binational mode of thought” might give expression to the “tragedy” of the Other which he now professes to “live”, “even though [he] perhaps caused it...” (Shavit 2003, para 17). Yet Benvenisti ultimately returns to his
identification with the Zionist project of building a Jewish state, claiming to welcome the hostilities of Others as they would “unify [his] tribe,” (2010) and depicting the Arab Other as responsible for his own dispossession by starting the 1948 War. Despite displaying an understanding of the perspective of those who resisted the Zionist project (“The fact that they have their own reasons to – good reason to reject us, I understand. Understand from the very beginning,” – 2010), Benvenisti depicts the War as a distinct entity rather than a continuation of existing dynamics. This enables him to blame the dispossessed for their own fate since “they decided that the sword would decide” (2010a). As Benvenisti views both Jewish and Palestinian / Arab identities in thick, ethnic terms, he cannot depict them in any other way than as “impregnable national collectives” (Piterberg 2008, p.64). Therefore in order to tell the story of the conflict between these collectives and the victory of his own ‘side’, Benvenisti must employ the ressentiment discourse which depicts the Other as deserving his fate, with all members of that Other responsible for misfortune. The Saids, for example, in being wealthy and fleeing to Cairo, are responsible for not sticking around and defending ‘their’ nation.

Thus the Kinder Zionist discourse provides a basis from which dissidents can entertain the idea of improving the lot of the Other whilst also continuing to prioritise the Us. But when the dissidents are confronted with Kinder Zionism’s limitations regarding equality and justice for the Other, a segue into ressentiment Zionism enables dissidents to minimise the very need for these things by demonising or blaming the Other. The limitations built into Kinder Zionism – and therefore requiring those using it to shift into a different discourse – thus facilitate an ‘entitled’ lack of responsibility which ultimately enables continued prioritisation of the Us.

**Post-Zionist Discourse**

Let us now look at how dissidents employ the Post-Zionist discourse; the primary discourse of journalist Gideon Levy and one which Jeff Halper utilises alongside the Binational discourse. In both
their narratives, which depict a yearning for normality, the Zionist project is nevertheless legitimised either through its just basis (Halper) or its necessity (Levy). These dissidents illustrate how the post-Zionist discourse is underscored by a commitment to a circumscribed future which also clandestinely legitimates the nation’s ‘ethnic’ past. We can therefore see the dissidents slipping into other discourses when asked to pin down the meaning and application of their ideas.

Within the Post-Zionist discourse, as in the Binational and Kinder Zionist discourses, the ‘Jewish nation’ is taken as an organic actor in history; in resolving its European problems in Palestine, mistreatment of the Other became a necessary evil. We can see this when Gideon Levy states that Israel’s establishment was a solution to the Holocaust (Levy 2010). As Bronstein observes, there is “no way out” of Israel’s history (2010), but in the context of the Post-Zionist discourse, certain features put in place by the Zionist project remain sacrosanct. Continued Jewish privilege can be presented in other ways. Gideon Levy states that if he was to lose his home in Ramat Aviv, this would “create a new injustice” which could not adequately resolve the injustice done to Others (2010). Levy also rejects the enactment of the right to return, on the basis that “when there are so many fears and hates between the two peoples, it will bring only more violence and bloodshed (2010). These arguments entail an element of entirely rational individual self-interest, but they could also be seen to facilitate continued Jewish privilege by ruling out certain options. Moreover, they could also be seen as a ressentiment pitting of the virtuous Us against Them. (Why should I have to give something up for Them? And if we can’t live together, it is certainly not I who should have to leave, but They who must remain excluded.) The Post-Zionist discourse lacks the analytical basis from which to either abandon concepts of Us and Other (the Civic discourse) or erect a framework upon which they are both celebrated equally (the Binational Discourse). In the absence of such a framework, categories continue unquestioned and existing power structures are normalised and obscured. Moreover, since ethnic categories have acquired the social meanings generated by
ressentiment, the inherent fear of the Other and preservation of the Us, endemic to ressentiment, remain.

This becomes apparent when we consider one of the political solutions often endorsed within the Post-Zionist discourse. The end of Zionism ostensibly means an end to Israel’s status as a Jewish state. The key replacement countenanced is a state of its citizens, yet this is framed in the context of a two-state solution to the Israel / Palestine conflict. In other words, people using the Post-Zionist discourse welcome an Israel that is a state of its citizens, as long as this Israel does not also include (presently-occupied) ‘Palestine’. Neither Levy nor any other dissident using the Post Zionist discourse endorses establishing such a state in all of Israel / Palestine as part of a ‘one-state solution’.

Although such a position is advanced by a tiny minority of (usually ex-) Israelis (Lentin 2010; Behar 2011; Abarbanel 2012; Peled 2012), generally the ‘post-Zionist’ conceptualisation of a state of its citizens excludes the Occupied Territories from this formulation (see, for example, Ram 2008).

This may be the case for historical reasons. ‘Normalisation’ of Israel was a tenet of the Zionist project right from the start (Ram 2005, p.34), thus a civic outcome in a small Israel might have been Zionism’s obvious conclusion after the project of building a Jewish nation-state was complete. However, an additional reason to reject a single civic Israel/Palestine is that a civic polity of undefined parameters threatens those who identify as Jews / Hebrews. Part of the problem with a civic-liberal state is that the model seems to invite a kind of “veil of ignorance” (Rawls 1971, p.287): if one supports a state of its citizens, then one ought not to be able to pre-decide the ethnic makeup of that state, since the values of ethnic blindness should prevail. Yet individuals identifying as Jews / Hebrews would know beforehand that in a single state in Israel / Palestine built upon values of ethnic blindness and treating all individuals equally, they would only constitute around 50% of the population; an unappealing prospect (see Young 2005, p.153). Thus it could be fair to say that individuals employing a Post-Zionist discourse to invoke a vision of a civic-liberal state – such as Gideon Levy – quietly imagine that this state would contain a high number of Jews. This is only
possible within a two-state framework, since the bulk of the non-Jewish population would be in a separate state. The resultant Israel would no longer privilege Jews, but would remain dominated by the Hebrew language, calendar, culture and social norms. It might no longer circumscribe people’s identities, but its demographic components and borders (explicitly excluding the Occupied Territories) would be pre-ordained. Identities would no longer be prescribed, precisely because they would not need to be – Zionism has already successfully done its job of building a Jewish polity through an ethnocratic state. Culturally and politically, then, the ‘Jewish majority’ could still enjoy dominance in a ‘civic-liberal’ state (see arguments in Nimni 2003, p.12-13) without making this explicit, only resolving the problems of the Other in a prescribed form.55 Thus whilst the Post-Zionist discourse offers the dissidents an attractive way of reconstituting identity, it leaves several things unspoken and intact. The discourse enables dissidents to make a partial break with the past and posit an Israel that is more inviting to Others, but only by leaving a history of Jewish privilege – and perhaps a more subtle continuation of it – unexcavated.

Inverted Ressentiment

Gilad Atzmon employs the Inverted Ressentiment discourse; only such a discourse can explain the apparent anomaly between his antagonism to Jewish national belonging and his celebration of other nationalisms, as well as his more than playful usage of “self-hater” and “anti-Semite” (2010). It is apparent that Atzmon’s proclamations of being “ex-Israeli” do not signify successful extrication from the collective. Atzmon does not employ a Civic discourse eschewing ethnic identities; instead, he remains embedded within an identification of Jewishness, apparently celebrating his (self) hatred. This makes plausible the things that my other dissidents regard as categorically impossible, such as

55 For example, a civic Israel would appear to offer little to refugees seeking to return unless accompanied by an explicit policy establishing and encouraging the right of return. Nevertheless, current non-Jewish citizens would enjoy equality and have a more feasible path of integration into a state no longer constituted by their absence.
wanting one’s own collective to disappear (Yiftachel 2010; Benvenisti 2010a); the state of affairs depicted in Atzmon’s novel, *A Guide To the Perplexed* (2002).

Atzmon’s engagement with the Other appears to be a by-product of his interaction with his Jewish identity. “Israel is just one symptom of Jewishness. Zionism is a global movement. It has nothing to do with Palestine,” he declares at one point (2010). Despite celebrating the Palestinian cause, Atzmon avoids flags and symbols, though he professes to enjoy Palestinian dancing (Atzmon 2010). His aversion to nationalist symbols does not derive from universalistic distaste (in keeping with a Civic discourse), but rather because he considers that Western pro-Palestinian activism is in fact co-opted by Jews (“Britain, the Palestinian solidarity discourse, was controlled by very small circle of righteous Jews” – 2010). Simultaneously, Atzmon reveres German nationalism. Ultimately, this provokes the question as to whether any kind of ressentiment, even with the Us as its subject, can provide meaningful engagement with the Other. Indeed, Inverted Ressentiment may be yet another manifestation of that tendency noted by Piterberg (2008) that renders ostensible concern with the Other as an exercise in navel-gazing (p.62-4). Perhaps Atzmon’s jibe that the “self-hating Jew loves himself hating himself,” (Atzmon 2010) reveals more than it might at first appear.

*Ressentiment Discourse*

I have suggested that some of my dissidents employ elements of the ressentiment Zionist discourse in their narratives. In order to tell ‘their’ national story in a way that legitimately places the Jewish nation in Palestine, the ressentiment discourse offers the only coherent means of doing so. The version of this discourse employed by the dissidents often avoids crude demonisation of the Other but emphasises the virtue of the Us.

Yiftachel, for example, tells the story of victimhood in Europe and the Arab world which explains Israel’s legitimacy as a “colonialism of refugees”. But refugees from the Arab world did not become
so until after Israel’s establishment. However, the *ressentiment* story of Israel as a haven for the persecuted Jews of the entire world is an effective means of ensuring that virtue remains on the Jewish side. Gideon Levy also represents this kind of story when he depicts Israel’s creation as a “solution for the Holocaust” (2010). The depiction of Zionism as a positive nationalist movement, as advanced by Halper and, to a lesser extent, Bronstein, could also be read as a version of *ressentiment* discourse. Zionist settlers are portrayed as having good intentions towards the ‘Arabs’ upon whose lands they seek to build their homeland. For Halper, this only goes wrong when “ethnocratic” logic is employed.

Despite a greater focus on the Virtuous Us, Evil Others do appear as *ressentiment* invocations in the dissident narratives. Benvenisti (2010a) depicts the Arab Other as responsible for his own dispossession by starting the 1948 War, discussed above (p.285). Rabinyan also engages in depictions of Evil Others, particularly when invoking her need for protection. Palestinians are kept waiting in lines “for reasons” (2010), and Rabinyan fears malevolent forces that, upon a putative return of Palestinian refugees or a single-state solution, “will mean that we have to leave!” (2010). However, in considering such segues into *ressentiment*, it is noteworthy that Rabinyan is able to slip out again, perhaps because other aspects of her identity embrace contradiction. Rabinyan employs writing metaphors, and blurs the line between real people and book characters, enabling a fluidity of movement between self and other, universal and particular, “Arab” (Persian) and Jew. Her whole life has been spent asserting her right to multiplicity (p.260); she can segue into *ressentiment* without being consumed by it:

> I don’t have this absolute knowledge about myself, about my existence, that I would take somebody saying, ‘It’s very absolute, it’s very clear, one solution’. No, there’s... always double meanings, subtext...There’s always doubt, nothing is absolutely clear, absolutely one truth (Rabinyan 2010).
For Meron Benvenisti, meanwhile, slippages between discourses invite a wholesale return to reressionment, projected outwardly at his interlocutor but also taking in the Said family, the ill-organised “Palestinian nation” and the “goyim” in general. I shall discuss this more in the next section.

**Pervasive and Displaced Ressentiment**

I have argued in the earlier chapters of this thesis that experiences of reessionment for some European Jews contributed to the adoption of ethnic categories to demarcate the Good Us from the Evil Other. Institutionalised into an ethnocratic state, reessionment has become a lens through which to view the world. In this section, I consider the extent to which the dissidents are affected by reessionment in other forms. First, I consider Meron Benvenisti’s response to me, representative of a Western liberal academic tradition seen as hostile to his identity. I then explore how new forms of Others are constructed, and the implications arising from this.

**Ressentiment to the Hostile Outsider**

My interview with Benvenisti can be interpreted with the aid of the reessionment framework, though I must make a few disclaimers in this regard. Firstly, given that I occupy a position of power in terms of how I shape interviews and organise material, it would be unfair of me to simply label Benvenisti as responding to me with reessionment, when I might instead provoke some of these responses by my conduct in the interview. Whilst my intention has never been to make my dissidents feel attacked, the interview technique discussed in the Introduction (p.36) precludes me from taking a detached approach. Most of my interviewees are happy to have an academic debate. It is only with Benvenisti that this backfires; he complains early on: “this is already an argument” (Benvenisti 2010a). Analysis of the interview becomes problematic after Benvenisti subsequently severs our...
relationship (without pulling out of the research project). I will outline the aftermath of the interview to allow the reader to assess my own role in what transpires.

Back in Australia, I try to work out where the interview went wrong. Perusing the transcript, I trace the moments where I have misinterpreted Benvenisti’s signals, but marvel again at the ferocity of his responses. (At one point, when we are discussing whether the Palestinians are a nation in the primordialist sense, he actually tells me to ‘shut up.’) I send the transcript to Benvenisti, offering an olive branch.

... Revisiting the interview was an uncomfortable process for me because I was aware that on a personal level it hadn’t gone well, even though the material was useful ... I can now see the signposts in your words that made your position clear. At times I continued down a path that you didn’t want to go down, because I did not fully grasp that the Meron Benvenisti I was interviewing was not the same one I had imagined from your writing. This is not a moral judgement, nor an expression of disappointment, nor an apology, since I don’t believe any of those things are required or justified ... I now understand your perspective more clearly. If I had known it before the interview, I would not have asked some of those questions. By the same token, though, I guess that’s the purpose of an interview – to find out things we don’t already know... (Attwell 2010).

Benvenisti’s brief reply includes no niceties by way of introduction.

I read carefully the transcript with a particular interest in the (heavily edited) questions, not the answers. Let me tell you that if this is an interview for a doctoral dissertation, then I am (as we say in Hebrew, the language of the "problematic / undemocratic" entity), a jar. It is your business how you use my words, and I don't want to have any further discussion with you. If you will provide me with the address of your thesis supervisor I’ll contract [sic] him and ask his opinion about methodology and the use of a "scholarly" disguise for value judgments (Benvenisti 2010b, his emphasis).

Benvenisti’s comment about edited questions refers to my occasional simplification of the style – though not the meaning – of my questions in the transcript. His references to Hebrew being the language of the “problematic / undemocratic” entity alludes to a question based, yet again, on my
reading of Benvenisti’s writings on Zionist Israel. I send him a brief email with my supervisor’s contact details, but Benvenisti’s threatened email to David never materialises.

Even before this exchange, back in Israel, our fraught interview casts a pall over my remaining encounters. “I’m waiting for the antagonism!” declares a laughing Jeff Halper, before assuring me, “Meron is a very contrary guy...don’t worry... It wasn’t you.” (Halper 2010). However, it is hard to shake the feeling that it was, indeed, me. But which me – the antagonising interviewer, or representative of the Evil Other? Benvenisti’s hostile reaction to me is apparent in several places: I am the “goy” who invented Jewishness (2010a); the academic who sceptically rejects the “ultimate tribe” for my own evil ends (2010a); the attacker who declares war on Benvenisti and his six (or thirteen) million Jews (2010a). I am a threat, and Benvenisti neutralises me with his formidable mind, delegitimising my work and making personal criticisms. I give him the space to do these things, in the spirit of accessing his ideas and learning from my possible mistakes. My conciliatory email suggests that my misreading of Benvenisti is responsible for our troubled exchange, but after his response, I consider that in digging up his words from the past, I have acted as the voice of his contradictions. I have exposed something uncomfortable for him, and am the obvious repository for these feelings.

My partner, Ian, helps me to make sense of this. Ian is a social worker with generally disadvantaged mentally ill clients, and has seen first-hand the detrimental dependence that welfare creates. But if someone from the Right criticised welfare dependence, Ian would instinctively disagree with this person. The critic from the Right would not have not reached this conclusion through lived experience, Ian explains, so their opinion would be less authentic. In addition, I realise, the right-winger’s goal would be to delegitimise and then dismantle the welfare system. They would not be engaging in what Habermas calls communicative action, or action to achieve understanding, but rather in strategic action, “communication oriented to achieving results” (Harper 2011, p.27-8). Benvenisti views those who advance a binationalist framework in a similar fashion. He senses that
they come from an ideological place of attack, and that their analysis form part of this goal, with the desired result being Israel’s annihilation. Such discussion is, to him, “already an argument” (2010a), which partly explains why he is so defensive.

None of this is to say that I do not contribute to the ultimately toxic exchange with Benvenisti. However, the consideration that Benvenisti employs a ressentiment depiction of the world beyond the Israel / Palestine issue is worth engaging with, even as it must be tempered by recognition of my own incitement. Benvenisti talks about me and the world I represent with what could be read as ressentiment language, and this might suggest that ressentiment becomes a default response.

**Ressentiment Towards New Others**

As I noted in Chapter One, ressentiment can occur within all kinds of encounters between individuals, leading to the formation of opposing discourses depicting apparently self-evident ‘groups’. The ressentiment I have examined in this thesis is a key element of some nationalist discourses. In certain cases in history, the pain of marginalisation experienced by individuals was resolved by their labelling of those perceived to be responsible as Evil oppressors. A moral splitting into Virtuous Us / Evil Other was achieved by the employment of ethnic categories as the defining features of ‘nations’. Those within the nation could be understood as Good, those outside could be understood as Bad; ethnic categories appeared clear and permanent enough to provide the basis for this division. Values of Good and Evil, institutionalised into nationalist discourses, were then imbued into other individuals identified and identifying as belonging to the nation. I have said that this is true of the dominant Zionist discourse, and that the dissidents are a product of this experience.

One interesting way to observe this manifesting is through the development of internal schisms whereby other Others become ‘baddies’ to ‘our’ good. When a ressentiment discourse is dominant, categories of Us and Other are already loaded with moral meaning in a conflictual context. If,
through alternative discourses of national identity, the Palestinian / Arab Other is to be
rehabilitated, then a new guilty party must be targeted for the malaise in which individuals find
themselves and their society. Yadgar observes ideology-based categories of Other when the
ascendant “humanist / universalist” narrative in post-Oslo Israel “abandoned the image of ‘the Arab’
as ‘the Other’ and identified a new group of ‘others’: those who oppose peace, regardless of their
nationality / ethnicity” (Yadgar 2003b, p.61). Gideon Levy’s vitriolic depiction of West-Bank Jewish
settlers illustrates a ressentiment discourse formulated in such terms. From Levy’s perspective,
settlers are inherently evil, whereas by extension people like Levy who oppose settlements are
inherently virtuous (2010). Eitan Bronstein’s distinction between “good” and “bad” Israelis can be
read the same way. Bronstein takes these categories from the parlance of his childhood and
subverts them so that “good Israelis” like himself stand opposed to “bad” ones, like American
settlers and French-born right-wing radio hosts. Bronstein utilises native privilege to construct
himself as superior: “I think I take this thing from Zionism, this ranking of people, being Israeli,”
whilst acknowledging “I know it’s wrong, what I’m saying,” (2010).

Bronstein and Halper also invoke a ressentiment discourse towards the Likud government elected in
1977. Although a Labor leadership presided over injustices to the Other in 1948 and 1967, Likud was
the Evil Other against whom the dissidents were able to take a stand. This can be seen as part of a
cultural phenomenon in which Left intellectuals saw “that the government represented ‘another
people’” (Sand 2011, p.72). Grinberg suggests that such opposition to “the right” and “settlers”
actually represents an insidious process by which

“the labour settlement movement” underwent a metamorphosis: its biological heirs came to be
referred to as “the left” while those continuing its settlement practices came to be referred to as
“the right”. This … has made it easier for those now referred to as “the left” to shake off
responsibility for what the settlers of “the right” are doing … After all, “we” are not the
“occupying settlers” – “they” are (Grinberg 2009, p.111).
What are the implications of the dissident narratives employing a *ressentiment* discourse towards new Others? Firstly, we could consider that they are finding new ways to regard themselves as morally superior, whilst attempting to extricate themselves from something for which they arguably still have “national responsibility” (Abdel-Nour 2003; Grinberg 2009, p.111). However, when we consider the demonisation of right-wingers and settlers within the discourses employed by the dissidents, we find that the Ethnic Us cannot be divided into further moral categories that offer as much meaning and certainty as the ethnic boundaries themselves. For all that Bronstein and Levy castigate their Settler and Likud Others, there is a simultaneous awareness that these would-be Others are part of Us. Levy explains, “I am so much attached to this collective … I feel guilty on behalf of things that I was against,” (2010). Bronstein says of his “Israeli fellows”, “I hope I have enough compassion … this means that I must of course identify with them … Now this I cannot do without some, even, in a way, empathy or sympathy to them,” (Bronstein 2010). Bronstein and Levy do not extricate themselves from the Us; they are not actually ‘splitting’ or ‘outsourcing’ responsibility (Grinberg 2009). This tells us something about the ultimate power of their identification as Israeli Jews. Their *ressentiment* towards Others defined on ideological (rather than ethnic) terms is not as powerful as the ethnic categories forged by the *ressentiment* processes in the creation of Zionism. Nor, of course, are the distinctions between the ideological Us and Other socially and politically reinforced like ethnic categories. *Ressentiment* works best when boundaries appear unalterable; generating the sense that something greater than one’s actions or beliefs determines one’s identity. A “bad” settler can reform and become a “good” Israeli, so these categories are not reliable pegs with which to map a moral universe. Thus *ressentiment* towards new Others fails to flourish, even as dissidents attempt to change the relationship between ethnic categories by finding new Others to demonise.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that we can understand the dissidents as predominantly employing one of six discourses – the hegemonic *ressentiment* discourse and five alternatives. Apart from the Civic discourse, the others all retain an ethnic identity component. Within an ethnocratic state, people are compelled to think in terms of Us and Other and to see themselves as belonging to one of these groups; this then sets the tone for how they evaluate the past, and perhaps also the future, of the ethnic collective to which they see themselves as belonging. The available discourses may not enable the dissidents to say the things they wish to say, and so they may be compelled to use more than one, generating inconsistencies. I’ve also demonstrated how *ressentiment* might be seen as endemic to other aspects of Israeli society, examining how new *ressentiment* discourses might develop different moral categories. These, however, are ultimately unable to counter the ethnic categories created by the *ressentiment* Zionist discourse.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This thesis has explained and analysed a dilemma faced by Israeli Jews concerned with their Palestinian Other. The situation in which these individuals are enmeshed has been theorised as a situation of ethnocracy with a hegemonic *ressentiment* discourse. The concepts of ethnocracy and *ressentiment* not only help us to make sense of the dissidents’ dilemma, they also constitute the material reality that the dissidents are trying to challenge.

Individuals whose identities are constructed within this context may, in extreme cases, simply be able to walk away from national affinity and pursue what they see as the moral cause of their oppressed Other. We have seen this in the case of two radical dissidents, Pollack and Davis, who locate their struggles within the Palestinian political context. Whilst Davis has repackaged his sense of ‘nationality’ as a vestigial, tribal, sentimental affinity that does not infiltrate his politics, Pollack has found nothing meaningful in that identity with which to connect. The path these dissidents have walked is hardly an inviting trail for a society built upon a collectivist sense of the virtuous Us under attack from the Other. It is difficult to see that anything other than a small minority will ever venture down it; accordingly, they will not be able to bring the consensus of their society with them. Indeed, this is the very point: if one seeks to remain part of that consensus, he or she must adopt a very different approach to dissent. Individuals in this latter space grapple with how to square their national affinity with their concern for the Other. I have explained what their choices look like, the sites and themes around which dilemmas have emerged, and how we might understand discontinuities which arise in dissidents’ personal narratives.

I have suggested that no single discourse can offer the dissidents the tools for the job at hand. The Civic discourse deletes categories of Us and Other from political interactions, but takes individuals outside their society. Individuals not willing to step outside this consensus or who find that their own
identities do not accord with a Civic discourse are then compelled to use other discourses. The Binational, Kinder Zionist and Post-Zionist discourses work with identities with which the dissidents feel more comfortable, and yet these discourses necessarily employ the notion of a long-existing Jewish nation with a right to Palestine. Dissidents then struggle to explain this aspect of their identity alongside their regret about the price exacted from the Other. As dissidents attempt to pin down their past and offer visions for the future, they shift between discourses; as they do so, their personal narratives grow more contradictory, particularly when they are ‘obliged’ to use the ressentiment Zionist discourse which they are trying to escape. This discourse, however, is the only one that offers a compelling explanation of who they are and where they come from.

If we read the dissidents’ employment of discourses as attempts to transcend ressentiment and connect with their Others, we could conclude that – with the exception of the radical dissidents employing a Civic discourse and eschewing national identity politics – they are unable to do it. Ressentiment seems so pervasive in their society that it even comes out in other contexts, including against new Evil Others, but even this is ultimately trumped by the thick ethnic categories created and reinforced by ressentiment. On this basis, we might conclude that dissent is severely curtailed in an ethnocracy. If even individuals who try to get outside of it are trapped – by a garrison ethnocratic state which purports to protect them; by the ethnic categories that it reifies; by their desire to protect their own privilege; and – if they traverse all this, then by their irrelevance and marginality, then ethnocracy and ressentiment might appear entrenched. And as much as the ‘tradition’ of internal dissent within the Zionist project can inspire future action, its lack of internal coherence and ultimate (if unwitting) role as apologist for colonisation and violence is problematic for dissidents seeking pride in an alternative national ‘tradition’.

However, the dissidents’ attempts to resolve their dilemma by employing alternative discourses of national identity can still offer a fruitful basis from which their society can be re-imagined. I will trace some trajectories of how individuals demonstrate these possibilities. The first half of this Conclusion
draws some tentative interpretive conclusions from the analysis of the dissident narratives, engaging with three compelling re-imaginings of the Us and Other. I then revisit the theoretical contributions, explaining what we have learnt and what might be undertaken from here.

In the thesis Introduction, I stated that I did not want my analysis of the dissidents’ problematic situation and dilemma to function as a trap for either them or me. Obviously my interest in this research derived from my perception that such individuals have a dilemma; if this dilemma was completely resolvable, there would have been zero intellectual interest in investigating it. It was therefore implicit that my subjects would not be able to reconcile every contradiction. However, in order for my analysis not to function as a trap for any of us, it is important for me to engage with what the dissidents can do – the limited but significant transformations they can bring to their society. The following three examples, fleshed out from the chapters above, deserve recognition for meaningfully subverting the hegemonic ressentiment discourse.

Let us first consider Jeff Halper’s attempts to redefine ‘anti-Semitism’. Halper’s perspective can be compared with Neve Gordon’s (2010) more ressentiment-based formulation that Israel and Jews have distinct enemies who must be fought off (see above p.239). Halper’s alternative approach can be traced to his ‘ethnic’ awakening amidst an American ‘return to roots’ movement; he recognises the propensity of humans to orient culturally and also the necessity of limiting the chauvinism inherent in this process.

The way to fight anti-Semitism as a form of racism is to fight racism, through a rights based approach. So it’s not denying the Holocaust, it’s not minimizing the Holocaust, but it’s simply saying, “if you want to avoid these things in the future, the answer isn’t to have a movement against anti-Semitism and another movement against anti-black racism, and another movement against anti-north African racism.”... You can’t fragment it into a hundred things. Overall it’s a movement against racism (Halper 2010).
Halper recognises that *ressentiment* Zionism cannot work with this formulation “[b]ecause Zionism is xenophobic, and Zionism needs that…” (Halper 2010), both in terms of the particularism of the identity it constructs and promotes, and its asserted virtue. But Halper’s approach challenges this paradigm. The implication is that if ‘Israelis / Jews / Hebrews’ wish to fight shadowy forces in the world that wish them harm, then they must also fight these forces in themselves that would do harm to Others. Bigotry and hatred are behaviours which might be adopted by anybody, including Us; it would not be possible, within Halper’s framework, to sustain an argument that Others are inherently bad. Halper therefore offers a way of responding to genuine threats against one’s perceived collective without using these threats to construct a *ressentiment* pair. Notably, Halper sustains this non-*ressentiment* discourse without eradicating the Us and Other. His challenge to *ressentiment* whilst maintaining ethnic identities is therefore directly applicable to the project of transforming an ethnocratic situation.

Another challenge to the *ressentiment* discourse comes from Gideon Levy, who does something interesting with Zionism’s pervasive victimhood which “habitually uses suffering to engender and calibrate entitlement to rights” (Rabinowitz 2001, p.75). Levy argues that extenuating circumstances may have justified some of the wrongs done to the Other in Israel’s establishment, but these should have been limited in their scope and their accounting after the fact, especially the way that morality was measured thereafter. According to Levy’s logic, if the unfortunate but necessary events of 1948 had been properly accounted for, then the unnecessary coda of 1967 would not have happened. This would have required a nuanced moral understanding on behalf of Israeli Jews in those intervening years: yes, Israel took the land to build a state; no, the refugees could not come back; yes, they could be compensated; no, they would not face any further injustices. Palestinians could be acknowledged as victims without the Jewish state having to cease to exist. The point is not whether this would have been an acceptable outcome for those identifying as Palestinians – most likely it would not – nor whether Levy has gone far enough in his attempts at justice. The point is to
imagine how differently the dominant discourse in Israel would have had to be constituted in order
to sustain it.

Defining the Palestinian tragedy of 1948 as the awful price in blood, dignity and property that
paved the way to the eventual triumph of Zionism is a revolutionary concept... It collapses the
dichotomy between the categories ‘Us’ and ‘Them’, and their inherent analogy to ‘Good’ and
‘Bad’, ‘Right’ and ‘Wrong’, ‘those who Suffer’ and ‘those who inflict Suffering’ (Rabinowitz 2001,
p.75).

Levy helps us to imagine, however illusorily, that a discourse in which victimhood is re-assigned
could have been sustained alongside the Zionist project. However, the real power of his argument
derives from its future potential. Used to construct a new basis for moral calculations, he offers a
way of understanding the contemporary situation without ressentiment, but also without the need
to eradicate the sense of Us which proves such a barrier for reformulating identity.

Eitan Bronstein also overcomes ressentiment in his evocation of a new Tel Aviv after the return of
the Palestinian refugees. Bronstein’s vision does not solve all problems of identity, but vividly re-
imagines a concrete place. Bronstein’s ‘New Tel Aviv’ demonstrates the creative potential of the Us
becoming open to the Other, using the metaphor of a cityscape. The location of this in a city that
Bronstein shared with me, the researcher, as his beloved home, makes this a powerful evocation. In
addition to our interview, some of which was conducted at Bronstein’s favourite cafe with the “best
hommous in Israel / Palestine” (2010), Bronstein and I went drinking one evening at some bars in Tel
Aviv; during this time I was able to appreciate both his love of the city and his vision for its future.

For Bronstein, Tel Aviv is the site of everything he loves and yet, like everywhere else in Israel, it
contains a dispossession; one of Zochrot’s tours exposes the erased Palestinian villages beneath. Tel
Aviv represents a desire to be connected to others, to be part of something exciting. It invokes a
belonging that doesn’t have the “uncool”ness of nationalism (Rabinyan 2010), and yet it owes its
existence to this nationalism. Engagement with Tel Aviv thus provides a motif for engagement with
Israel as a whole, but is also a point of departure. Tel Aviv is the place where Israel meets the world, where East meets West, where nationalism meet cosmopolitanism. It is the place where Israelis live when they want to live in another country (Kraft and Bronner 2009). It is the place where many of my dissidents live, alongside other people who share their views. It is thus an appropriate site for re-imagining; for seeing what ressentiment ethnic nationalism may evolve into.

Bronstein’s New Tel Aviv – inspired by the work of Zochrot – is a place that must own its history. It’s a place affixed with signs saying what happened here, and what used to be here. It’s a place that cannot be undone, and must not be undone; Bronstein acknowledges that this is impossible. Nostalgia cannot lead us back to the past, and we must engage with the world as we find it (Baudrillard 2001; Borgmann 1992). Meanwhile, obvious Zionism has already seeped out of Tel Aviv. The Star of David flag has receded, returning only at bizarre moments, such as around the neck of a cartoon dog on a pet shop wall. (“Dogs of Israel! Your country needs you!”). Tel Aviv is already somehow post-Zionist, whatever that means. Yet it is not the grim post-Zionism of Uri Ram’s (2008) McWorld vision – a heartless metropolis in which nationalism has been replaced with consumerism. The Tel Aviv that I explore with Bronstein has a distinct counterculture; debating in saloons at the back of dress shops and finding your favourite hommous café. Tel Aviv echoes Europe’s coolest cities, yet right now, as Bronstein (2010) notes, it is a monoculture.

Hence Bronstein’s vision is that this city he loves dearly will become more Arabic. His hope for the counter-culture of Tel Aviv morphing into something shared is a motif for the procreative quality of the Binational discourse. The reinvention of Bronstein’s belonging – the opening up to Others – is an act of subversion. Bronstein is willing to take the thing he loves the most and share it; exposing it to different influences means it will not stay the same. The idea of ‘sharing the land’ is symbolic, but the idea of sharing Tel Aviv is concrete. Love of nation and land is metaphysical, particularly as rendered by Zionism, but one’s place of residence is real, in the lived experience of streets, cafes, bars, shops and parks. It is not Bronstein’s ‘generosity’ that inspires – since as Yonatan Pollack (2010)
notes, it is not generous but appropriate to make restitution to a wronged Other – but his delight; and his optimism that what comes next may be even better. Geographic, cultural, linguistic and social landscapes adjust with the presence of this Other. Gideon Levy’s (2010) rootless, ever-changing city begins to host a new kind of Us. The visitor to this new city (me) cannot comprehend the distinction between the two ‘nations’ because the landscape does not reify it. Slowly, organically, they become interwoven.

These brief examples demonstrate how creative challenges to ressentiment do not necessarily require the erasure of the line between Us and Other, or the abolition of the system of privilege created by ethnocracy. The constraints placed on most of the dissidents by their sense of national belonging limit us to celebrating these small moments of inspiration. I never imagined that I would find across my spectrum of dissidents a series of individuals who had managed, like Yonatan Pollack, to avoid discontinuities by negating their sense of national belonging. Rather, Pollack would be the extreme; closer to the centre would be people trying, tripping over their contradictions, and trying again nevertheless. The forms which their trying has taken, and our ability to see it distilled across multiple themes and in these final three inspiring visions, has been my contribution to illustrating how ‘the dilemma’ manifests. If the questions asked were: how far can the dissidents get, how far will they go, how great are the limitations placed upon them, then the answers are: this far. This is what the dilemma has looked like, and felt like, and how it has been constructed. There is no tidy, one-word answer; the limits to my dissidents’ abilities to transcend their dilemma have lain in their own words, and in my analysis that they have to employ multiple discourses to make sense of their worlds, and in the gaps within and incompatibilities between these discourses, and most poignantly, in the sense that there is “no way out” of their dilemma (Bronstein 2010).
The Contributions of this Thesis

In this interdisciplinary work, I have engaged with several literatures and contributed new perspectives to some of them. In examining Israeli Jewish society, I have looked at the ‘dominant’ nation in the ethnocracy rather than the suppressed ‘minority’. This has opened up a new angle on ethnocracy distinct from the ‘ethnic democracy’ theorists whose engagement with Israeli-Jewish society represents a theoretical attempt to justify its continued hegemony. In exploring ‘dominant nationalism’, I have challenged the notion that ‘dominant nations’ exist independently of state structures that reify them. I have suggested that the construction of the ‘nation’, as well as its numerical ‘dominance’, should be understood as processes; ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourses may set in motion the formation of ressentiment pairs, which may ultimately create the conditions for the establishment of ethnocracies.

I have also explored the belligerence of so-called ‘ethnic nations’, arguing that the employment of ethnic categories derives from a need to demarcate a virtuous Us from a demonised Other. I have illustrated how ressentiment ethnic nationalist discourses universalise the experiences of particular individuals, generating emotional responses in other individuals that mimic these experiences. These can then be delivered to an entire population, courtesy of being established as an ethnocratic state’s Charter, simultaneously creating an Other who perpetually affirms the content of the discourse.

In looking at Israeli Jewish dissidents who attempt to transcend such a discourse, I have contributed to the literature on political radicalism in Israel. I have engaged with the dilemma of individuals, living in a state ostensibly constructed around their own privilege, who wish to improve the situation of the de-privileged Other. Their efforts are necessarily constrained by ressentiment ethnic nationalism and ethnocracy; however, their dedicated attempts to work around these obstacles make their efforts utterly compelling.
In choosing to analyse the eleven dissidents featured, rather than a random sample or a larger set of respondents, I have prioritised diversity and depth. Tantalised by what I had already learnt about the dissidents, I engaged them in lengthy conversations which produced rich material and ample examples of discontinuities.

Given a choice of many Israeli Jewish dissidents whose works bring a range of analyses, the eventual set of dissidents and the issues I raised with them indelibly shaped the work’s focus. This became apparent when I read Lentin’s (2010) discussion of Ilan Pappe, who was unavailable for inclusion in this study. Pappe uses a terminology of “ethnic cleansing” which, according to Lentin, critiques the dominant depiction in the very language of the *Nakba* (“catastrophe”) as a disaster befalling a pre-modern and “primitive” people (p.155). This insight might seem marginal to the work as it stands now, but if Pappe had been one of my dissidents, their framing of the Other’s agency and experience might have emerged as a much greater theme for examination. The insights that different dissidents could have brought to this work open up a realm of possibilities unfulfilled.

Likewise, there are many questions that I could have asked my existing set of dissidents. My analysis could have benefited from a greater engagement of the domination of Ashkenazi culture, and particularly Ashkenazi ‘peace’ culture, over Mizrahi culture (Kirstein Keshet 2006, p.114), whilst still recognising the constructed nature of these categories. It may also have been apt to interrogate my subjects more closely on their depiction of the Other and the possibility that they are appropriating his / her narrative (Lentin 2010). The absence of these features can only be put down to the wisdom of hindsight and the immense process of personal learning that informs the production of academic knowledge; reflections that are often absent from the work itself (Steinberg 2012).

It is also valid to consider the possible applications of this thesis and what, if anything, it might tell us about future possibilities for Israel / Palestine. There will be an element to which the discourses advance alternatives to the current state structure, but we cannot follow them to their logical
conclusions. We cannot know which political solutions would prove tenable, nor whether the discourses articulating them would succeed in undermining ethnocracy. What we can conclude is that ethnocracy generates its own contradictions and, in turn, responses to these contradictions. This does enable us to consider one possibility for the future of ethnocracy.

Yiftachel (2006) has argued that the contradictions within ethnocracies render them inherently unstable in terms of how they manifest towards the Other. On the one hand, the ethnocratic state offers the Other limited tools to advance their status and lifestyle; yet it simultaneously prohibits the fulfilment of its promises via its discriminatory treatment. Yiftachel argues that on this basis, the minority will mobilise around the democratic facade of the state, chipping away to expose its contradictions (p.39).

Having engaged with the state’s so-called ‘dominant nation’, it appears that such chipping away could forever remain peripheral in the absence of people like my dissidents prepared to struggle alongside the Palestinian Other. After all, the ethnocratic state was built by individuals whose movement created Us as a political category, with a view to protecting Us, simultaneously ensuring that We continued to exist as a social category. This all occurred in the context of resistance from the Other which only affirmed the validity of Our project – just as resistance continues to do today. I don’t, therefore, agree with Yiftachel that the Other will bring down the ethnocratic state; rather, I consider that the continuation of the ethnocratic state will be determined by how successfully the threat of that Other is utilised to maintain a garrison mentality amongst the Us. Both this Us-ness and its social meaning (the garrison mentality) are challenged by the dissidents, who help us to see Israeli society differently. Through them, we can perceive the Us not as a stable and contented collective, but rather a collection of individuals in thrall to a discourse that militarises them and renders them vulnerable. I have argued – contrary to most academic representations – that the ethnocratic state in which they live has not been crafted instrumentally to advance the goals of ‘the Jewish nation’. Rather, the ‘Jewish nation’ itself has been constructed by activists in thrall to a
ressentiment discourse; they have put in place a state that continually reifies this ‘nation’, facilitating significant harm to the Other (and, ultimately the Us) under the guise of self-protection. I have considered how some individuals constructed as the ‘privileged Us’ have digested and attempted to limit this harm, seeing their own ‘nation’ as also harmed through ongoing enmity.

From this perspective, it is not given that the Us will remain forever attached to its own privilege. The remote possibility remains that dissidents will formulate an internally coherent message that resonates with enough people in their society to build a significant movement. They may be able to persuade other Israeli Jews that the status quo does not serve their interests, nor their self-perceptions as members of a virtuous nation. However, such a possibility remains remote given the position of the dissidents within their society, incorporating vilification, marginalisation and co-optation. The dissidents, framed simultaneously as completely evil, completely irrelevant and completely central to ‘democracy’, become an indefinable moving target in much the same way as the entire project and myth – Grinberg’s (2009) ‘Thing Without a Name’ – that they seek to resist. However, leaving aside the far greater likelihood that the nationalist discourse will respond to internal dissonance with ever more trenchant ressentiment, the dissidents’ efforts (especially if combined with non-violent resistance of the Other [Ghanem 1998, Rouhana 1998; Yiftachel 2006] and mobilised within a regional approach such as that offered by Behar [2011]) nevertheless have the potential to be the harbinger of political change.

Maybe.

Eitan Bronstein’s poignant conclusion that there is “no way out” of his dilemma reminds us of the potency of uncertainty. As long as nationalist discourses depict history in a way that justifies the needs and interests of the purported nation – disregarding or demonising the Other – there is indeed “no way out.” Yet the self-awareness of my dissidents – their recognition that they are unable to be free of contradictions – might lend itself to greater questioning, for when there are no
clear answers, questions cannot be forever suppressed. For people to support occupation, dispossession and violence, the less thought given, the better; but the puzzlement, confusion and ultimate discontinuity of my dissidents continues to keep these ideas bubbling to the surface. Hence whilst there might be “no way out” of the dissidents’ dilemmas, the fact that they have these dilemmas, talk about them and have permitted me to engage with them suggests that their endeavours might offer a limited “way out” sometime in the future. This, too, of course has a caveat. It relies on their continued efforts to speak out, to name “The Thing Without a Name” (Grinberg 2009), to resist co-optation even as it is inevitable, and to take their place within a ‘tradition’ of internal dissent that is deeply problematic, but which could only be more problematic in its absence.
Appendix A

Oren Yiftachel is the political geographer who sees nations as central to people’s happiness. He advocates a binational state in Israel / Palestine.

Neve Gordon is the political scientist who has come out in support of the Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Gordon, who supports a two-state solution for pragmatic reasons, orients himself morally according to Jewish values and admires the work of Leon Roth.

Uri Davis is the veteran maverick who is married to a Fatah bureaucrat and is a member of its Revolutionary Council. Davis is a strong critic of what he calls Israeli apartheid.

Jeff Halper, an anthropology PhD, is the founder of the Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions. Halper, an adult immigrant to Israel, is determined to reconfigure it as a normal country.

Eitan Bronstein is the founder of Zochrot (“remembering”) which focuses on Israel’s violent and repressed past. Bronstein’s vibrant urban life in Tel Aviv orients him towards an Israeli Jewish audience, and he supports a single state in Israel Palestine with the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

Jeremy Milgrom is the melancholy rabbi self-exiled in Berlin. Milgrom’s Jewish identity centres on peoplehood, tradition and culture rather than belief in a transcendental God. He is a pacifist, supports a single-state solution and works to support BDS internationally.

Yonatan Pollack is the radical anarchist who works with the Palestinian popular resistance. Pollack is stridently anti-nationalist and does not see Israel or Zionism as legitimate.

Gideon Levy is the senior journalist who castigates his society for a range of ills, chief amongst them the occupation of Palestine. Whilst considering Israel’s establishment legitimate, Levy argues that her Jewish population should have been subsequently aware of their victims instead of repeatedly worsening the situation for them.

Gilad Atzmon is the London-based jazz musician whose criticism of Israel also incorporates Jewish ideology and international Jewish critics of the state. Atzmon professes that the actions of Israel today can explain why the Holocaust happened.

Dorit Rabinyan is the creative and passionate ‘Mizrahi’ novelist, whose love affair and friendship with a Palestinian artist challenged some – but not all – of her values regarding Zionism and the Other.

Meron Benvenisti is the former politician, analyst and Zionist pioneer who has come to critique the outcomes of the project. His writings portray outrage at the de-Arabisation of Palestine alongside a trenchant refusal to accept criticism.


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