

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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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.

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

If this is so, then what *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 unassuageable 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 ethno-cratism.

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 *ethno-cratism* 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 (Smootha 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 or relations (Turner, 1996, cited in Sawyer 2002, p.442).

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 Pappé (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. Kirstein 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 racist 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. Petee (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:

[A]ll 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)nterpretive 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.