Countering the "New Jerusalem"
Philosophical Jewish Positions for an End to the Israeli Occupation

This paper explores normative positions for approaching the peace process in Israel-Palestine. Using the philosophical and sociological writings of Hannah Arendt, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, Judith Butler, Baruch Kimmerling, Zygmunt Bauman, and Jacqueline Rose, among others, it challenges a substantial obstacle to peace: the Israeli sense of perpetual victimization. Butler claims that criticizing Israel is not anti-Semitic. Arendt proffers a call for Jewish responsibility even amidst victimhood. Using the ethical frameworks of Buber and Levinas, the author proposes an intrinsically Jewish argument for peace with Palestinians. Authentic Jewish arguments for peace are essential when countering claims that criticizing the state is anti-Semitic.

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Jewish philosophers Gillian Rose and Hannah Arendt believed that the phenomenon of an ethnic state was a contradiction to any society claiming to be a democracy and that Israel in particular was headed into dangerous territory. The territory became troubled when Israel's Jewishness-as-ethnic-victim trumped its Jewishness-as-principled-democracy, driven by authentic Jewish philosophical and theological ethics. The subsequent essay looks at the way in which political gnosticism of Jewish ethnic identity and nationalism serves to divorce politics from ethics. This paper proffers a solution to this ethical-theological and political problematic and aims to articulate both an "older," yet postmodern, Jewish vision of a pluralistic, just democracy. In this enterprise, we hope to focus beyond the ethnic state to a model for Israel that spans the artificial chasms between philosophical, political, and

religious discourses in hopes of applying theological ethics to the peace process and Israeli cultural narratives.

The thinkers featured in this paper range widely in their topics of discussion and in their classification of ideas: Gillian Rose between metaphysics and politics, Hannah Arendt converging politics and philosophy, Martin Buber regarding theology and sociology, and Emmanuel Lévinas concerning philosophy and theology. Because of their widely divergent grasps of multiple disciplines and varying tensions, these figures are hard to pigeonhole in terms of academic discipline. I will argue, however, that this multiplexity is what makes their seemingly disconnected contributions so valuable for an applied focus. Their theories contribute a critical perspective to the discussion of current political issues, philosophical problems, and empirical concerns of the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and domination of Gaza and the demographic question of the conventional two-state solution, specifically, the nature of a nominalist Jewish democracy (the "New Jerusalem") where identity politics and population quota matter more than justice and Torah. In other words, and more succinctly: To critique Jewish democracy, one must take an intrinsically *Jewish* ethical approach, thus fusing ethics and politics.

Though Baruch Kimmerling notes a decline in the use of hegemonic narratives of dominant Ashkenazi Zionism and the emergence of competing discourses among Israeli social and political groups, including Ashkenazi immigrants, Mizrahim, and Ethiopians, [1] the old lingering, abiding problem of Jewish democracy is that its double-meaning (Jewish ethnic democracy and Jewish ethical democracy) presents a contradiction within the Jewish-Israeli collective psyche. There is a tendency in the ethnic Jewish democracy (sensitive to what Golda Meir saw as the important demographic question of a higher Palestinian birth rate) to proclaim that the experience of Jewish marginalization throughout history, culminating in the Holocaust, has created an identity of victimhood, and that the establishment of Eretz Yisrael to the point of the total exclusion of Palestinians is the necessary means of protection against the possibility of further Jewish marginalization, oppression, victimization. Jewish ethnic democracy proclaims, "Never Again!" with such virulence that it places the Jewish self in the central role where political actions can only be vested in ethnic Jewish self-interest. On the other side, the tendency toward Jewish ethical democracy, invoking earlier figures in the state of Israel, like Martin Buber, suggests that to be Jewish means to be concerned with pluralism, hospitality, and justice for the "Other" in

Levinas' terms. These two tendencies are both Jewish, but in tension with each other. The former creates a dominance logic of political gnosticism not unlike National Socialism in pre-war Germany, or the Hutu's media communications in Rwanda. In these cases victim narratives have, in the past, fueled and legitimated oppressive regimes and genocide. I am not comparing Israel's treatment of the Palestinians to genocide—the extent and method of violence is nowhere near the extreme of these other historical examples, nor are the Palestinians passive sufferers of violence as in these other cases—however, the ethnic logic of victim identity justifying violence against a group cast as "Other" is similar.

The significance of this paper as discourse in the wake of Israel's 2008-09 offensive in Gaza is "radical" in that the thinking borrowed from philosophers Hannah Arendt, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Lévinas, Gillian Rose, and Jacqueline Rose and applied to contemporary events is radical. Though Neve Gordon so incisively argued that assuming a solely "Jewish" perspective on the conflict in Israel encourages tribalism, [2] within a context where criticisms of Israel are labeled as anti-Semitic it is worth considering Jewish philosophical arguments for peace in Israel-Palestine that move away from Jewish victimization. This is especially crucial when considering that these arguments come from those who witnessed and examined the Holocaust. As Zygmunt Bauman observed, the Holocaust is inextricably linked to defining Jewish identity, yet, as it pertains to political behavior, perpetuating the Jewish identity as one of eternal victimhood is very limiting and even damaging. [3] Leonard Grob invoked the image of Israel (as a state) as a "Wretched Samson" or as a superpower that can see itself only as victim, which is a perspective that further compromises Jewish identity. [4] I contend that a vitally important way to counter the Jewish narrative of victimization—ever so much a legitimation for the Gaza conflict—is with Jewish positions that counter that victimization. To be a victim is to cast oneself as the Other. From the point of view of the ethical system of Emmanuel Lévinas, to cast oneself as the Other is narcissism, not ethics, for justice always begins with attention to the Other, not the self. In this essay I will explore several Jewish voices that challenge this paradigmatic identity of victimization and proffer new alternatives for peace in the Middle East based on intrinsically and autochthonous and empowered Jewish positions for ethics and justice.

The Golden Calf: Political Gnosticism in the "New Jerusalem"

The Jewish social theorist Gillian Rose termed the nominalist Jewish ethnic democracy the "New Jerusalem," a kind of modern political gnosticism pace Hans Jonas' critiques of modernity. Rose's reading of Zionism's outcome (namely of the Six Day War, resulting occupation, and accompanying apartheid) is an anticipation of the "New Jerusalem" that has nothing but fascist implications at its core; for Rose, this was the irony of Jewish discourse in the twentieth century: that the emaciated victim of the Shoah evolves into the Israeli machismo of the IDF soldier. Her confirmed "split" between the Old Athens (political monism) and the New Jerusalem is devastatingly un-Jewish. [5] Similarly, the Israeli Rabbi Yeshayahu Leibowitz (d. 1994) called the Occupied Territories the "Golden Calf." He states, "The rabbis who argue today that we should keep the territories for religious reasons are not carrying on the tradition of Elijah and the prophets of God but rather of the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah, 'who ate of the table of Jezebel.'" [6] The State of Israel itself lived according to the "false split" between law and love (state, as the legitimate dispenser of violence, bound by law, excludes love). Rose's understanding of Jewishness that separates law and love harkens back to her essay concerning the construction of a Jewish philosophy. Rose herself was not happy with the construction of Jewish philosophy in postmodern times that drove at these polarities—between love and law. [7] This is integral to the divorce between "Jerusalem," which happens with the accession of violent statehood, and the Occupation, that is, ethics are separated from the politics of the "Jewish state."

Decades before all this was intimated by Rose, Hannah Arendt observed this "New Jerusalem" as the misplacing of love for Torah and justice in favor of a malformed love of the Jewish people. In a letter responding to Gershom Scholem's criticisms of her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, published in *The New York Review of Books*, Arendt states:

> To come to the point: let me begin, going on from what I have just stated, with what you call "love of the Jewish people" or *Ahabath Israel*…You are quite right—I am not moved by any 'love' of this sort, and for two reasons: I have never in my life 'loved' any people or collective—neither the German people nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love "only" my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons. Secondly this "love of the Jews" would appear to me since I am Jewish as something rather suspect. I cannot love myself or anything which I know is part and parcel of my own person. To clarify this, let

me tell you of a conversation I had in Israel. … What he said … ran something like this: "You will understand that as a Socialist, I, of course, do not believe in God; I believe in the Jewish people." I found this a shocking statement and being too shocked, I did not reply at the time. But I could have answered: the greatness of this people was once that it believed in God, and believed in Him in such a way that its trust and love toward Him was greater than its fear. And now this people believes only in itself? What good can come out of that?

… That there can be no patriotism without permanent opposition and criticism is no doubt common ground between us. But I can admit to you something beyond that, namely that wrong done by my own people grieves me more than wrong done by other peoples. [8]

Arendt warns that the love of an abstract "people" too closely resembles a tendency toward fascist totalitarianism. In this context Arendt was deeply troubled by increasing Israeli violence to maintain an intrinsically "Jewish homeland" and also the instrumentalization of violence by American CIA operations during the Cold War. Though dwelling on a Weberian discussion of legitimacy, she departs from Weber in seeing violence not as an indicator of power and authority, but as a marker of the absence of the legitimate dispensation of it. Power is defined collectively through legitimacy, in contradiction to Weber, but violence is an unpower—whether state sponsored or not—and is antithetical to power-as-solidarity and legitimacy.

Arendt asserts: "Power and violence are opposites: where the one rules absolutely the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy." [9] She suggests that violence can "destroy power" and is incapable of creating power. [10] In this context, the terror of the police state begins to "devour its own children" because it places legitimacy in question. [11]

Paralleling this analysis, Emran Qureshi and Michael Sells suggest that Arendt, as early as 1950, warned Israelis that the results of the 1948 war would not exactly erase anti-Semitism from the world but would rather transfer it onto the Arab population. [12] Aware of Israel's collusion with Western powers, Qureshi and Sells quote from *The Jew as Pariah*:

Jews who know their own history should be aware that such a state of affairs

will inevitably lead to a new wave of Jew hatred; the anti-Semitism of tomorrow will assert that Jews not only profited from the presence of the foreign big powers in that region but had actually plotted it and hence are guilty of the consequences. [13]

In retrospect, it is clear Arendt anticipated the consequences of Israeli hegemony over Arabs and the resulting questions of legitimacy of the maintenance of the Jewish state through violence.

Recovering Ethical Zionism Versus Nationalist Zionism

While comfortable with the Zionist label, two thinkers—Martin Buber and Emmanuel Lévinas—offer a reframing of the aims of Zionism as ethical Messianism (as opposed to political Messianism). Martin Buber (d. 1965)—theologian, sociologist and Zionist—rejected Zionism as (mere) nationalism and argued for a more enriched ethical movement calling for power-sharing agreements with local Arabs in Palestine. In 1953, Buber wrote vehemently against expropriation of Arab lands. [14] He was a founder of Brith Shalom (Covenant of Peace), an organization that continues to call for consociational power-sharing with Arabs. [15] Buber's commitment to social justice was an extension of a very real concern for Messianism as an ethical—not nationalist—achievement that values a deferent human relation to God. [16] According to Buber, the true Zionist tendency would be toward an Israel not in a racialized state but in the sense of spiritual rebirth. Buber saw these tendencies—toward ethical Zionism on the one hand and statehood on the other—in opposition:

> In fact these two tendencies are only a new form of the pair that have been running about next to each other from ancient times: the powerful consciousness of the task of maintaining truth and justice in the total life of the nation, internally and externally, and thus becoming an example and light to humanity; and the natural desire, all too natural, to be like nations. The ancient Hebrews did not succeed in becoming a normal nation.

> Today the Jews are succeeding at it to a terrifying degree. [17]

As expressed here, Buber had a frustration with the "Jewish State" itself—given some of

the violent actions taken to maintain the "Jewishness" of the Jewish state. He recognized that the message of Israelite Messianism was that only God can deliver salvation and that men, notably with their politics of power, could actually hinder it. [18] Gillian Rose would note the violence implicit in the project of statehood and warn of the violent implications of the utopic vision of Zionism as a merely political and not ethical project. Rose's criticisms come from the ways in which Buber's vision had failed. She was very dubious of Buber's ethical Zionism and perhaps saw the nightmare of the dream of statehood as violence and argued strongly against Buber's ethics as naïve for this reason: statehood implies exclusion and any cultural, this-worldly soteriology is violent to outsiders.

Rose was doubtful of the separation of ethics from politics, or law and love, as it was presented in the bulk of Jewish philosophy in the twentieth century. This separation, as expressed in Buber, dismissed the importance of the intermediary and intermingling between God-to-man-to-man relations:

> Buber dismisses any intermediary or mediation between God and man or between man and man because it would imply a share in power and domination. This disavowal amounts to an attempt to overcome the predicament of representation (in both its political and aesthetic sense) and of boundary or limit from the definition of God, from the vocation of Israel, and from the mutuality of man. A nihilistic impulse, it is carried over from Buber's political writings to his founding of the existential philosophy of "I and Thou." … As a result of such nihilism, the inner life is left at the mercy of a repeated terror, while the outer world is affirmed in its repeated violence and cruelty. [19]

Rose exposes the nightmare of Buber's dreamy, empty ethics as revealing, in the realm of politics, violence, cruelty, in a single term, ethnic nationalism.

Yeshayahu Leibowitz, mentioned above, is one example of Ultra-Orthodox positioning against the establishment of the Occupation resulting from the Six Day War in 1967. In doing so, Leibowitz extends a representative example of regard for the "stranger": the Palestinian Occupied was the stranger, the Other who must be welcomed, not victimized, assaulted, violated.

Another, more contemporary, example of a radical theological position is that of the head Sephardic rabbi Ovadiah Yosef (b. 1920, Iraq), advisor to Shas party. [20] Graduating from

the Lithuanian anti-Zionist academies, Yosef ruled that, "It is no way a sacred duty to make war and risk lives in order to defend our retention of territories we have conquered in opposition to the view of the Gentiles … and therefore if it is possible for us to give back territories and so avoid the danger of war … we must do so on the commandment to save life." [21]

Also emerging from these academies in Lithuania, Emmanuel Lévinas discusses the very essence and meaning of language itself as extension of welcome to the other. [22] Regarding the "Messianic Age," Lévinas, like Buber, sees that it comes not with the establishment of a state but through ethical action. While Buber conveys this through study of Hasidism and mystical Jewish experience, Lévinas approaches this "ethical Messianism" from the rabbinic sources. The following quote might transform the politico-religious perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From his Talmudic reading, "The Nations and the Presence of Israel":

> One belongs to the Messianic order when one has been able to admit others among one's own. That a people should accept those who come and settle among them— even though they are foreigners with their way of speaking, their smell—that a people should give them an *akhsaniah*, such as a place at the inn, and the wherewithal to breathe and to live—is a song to the glory of the God of Israel. Simple tolerance? God alone knows how much love that tolerance demands. It is impressive and beautiful, that in the relations between Israel and the nations, this should count for so much in Jewish thought. To shelter the other in one's own land or home, to tolerate the presence of the landless and homeless on the "ancestral soil," so jealously, so meanly loved—is that the criterion of humanness? Unquestionably so. [23]

Rather than suggesting the violence of statehood, Lévinas' Talmudic idea of the reality of Israel's "Messianic age" is proclaimed through the extent to which Israel—or God's people —adheres to the "human" principle of hospitality toward difference, fueled by a love that tolerance demands, yet it pushes beyond mere tolerance. Welcoming the stranger—giving her a place at the inn—is a "song to the glory of the God of Israel." While these notions are beautiful and rich, one must note what Lévinas had said in a famous radio interview—that the Palestinian was not "the stranger." [24] Why might he have said this? It seems that his

philosophy would so tremendously benefit the cause for peace and reconciliation in Israel-Palestine. Gillian Rose would have anticipated this problem because she saw the violence inherent in utopias. She suggests that Lévinas' ethics is disconnected from the realm of realpolitik or the concrete application of ethics in the realm of politics. However, Howard Caygill corrects Rose's view to assert that Lévinas' philosophy is replete with the political and admits the violence implied in ethics. "Ethics cannot avoid the predicament of politics, because the ethical is itself a response to the political." [25] Perhaps it is useful to read the Lévinasian beyond Lévinas in this context, keeping in mind that any utopic vision realized might smack of a kind of exclusive, exclusionary *gemeinschaft* or in the observations of some historians of Israel-Palestine, colonialism. Though debated and suggested by Derek Penslar that Israel's Zionists were not seeking to dominate and "civilize" the Arabs located in Palestine per a kind of "white man's burden," but rather were seeking a post-colonial society to civilize, cultivate themselves, and gather the Jewish diaspora, one might suggest that Zionism's "ethical" moment was Romanticism and belied a kind of racist Orientalist view of Arabs as perhaps the "noble savage." [26]

Where Hannah Arendt is dismayed at her Jewish fellows—that they misplace love of God for love of the people of Israel—with a more charitable reading, Lévinas restores the place of God within an ethical Messianism. Reading Lévinas' philosophy beyond his own statement about Palestinians not being the "Other," one sees a gentle admonition to the Jewish position that stunned Arendt. In some ways, then, Lévinas' ethic of "the face" and "welcome to the stranger" is reminiscent of Arendt's love of persons in contrast to the implications of exclusion and colonialism in the abstract "love of a people." Taking the love of the stranger beyond Lévinas' admitted limitation of his own philosophy, one is able to see an ethic that sits beyond the limits of exclusionist politics. Lévinas is also useful for arguing against the self-feeling of victimization. The self is always responsible for the Other. Thus, reading Lévinasian ethics beyond Lévinas' own statement, it is fruitful to see that, as Aristotle understood it, his ethics complete politics and vice versa. Using Rose, moving beyond self-victimization, the stranger becomes the priority in an acknowledgment of the violence implicit in utopias. I will move to a discussion of victimization in the context of more radical positions in Anti- and Post-Zionism.

Confronting the Victim Label: Anti-Zionism and Post-

Zionism

Judith Butler—a noted feminist—examines the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, most particularly Israeli exceptionalism. Writing in *The London Review of Books*, Butler confronts Harvard President Lawrence Summers' statement eliding anti-Israel and anti-Semitic views. In September 2002, Summers stated, "Profoundly anti-Israel views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities. Serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-semitic [sic] in their effect if not their intent." [27]

In response, Butler calls into question this blurring the line between criticism of the state and anti-Semitism, and the over-wrought nature of Israeli victimization as transferring onto oppressor/victimizer:

> It seems, though, that historically we have now reached a position in which Jews cannot legitimately be understood always and only as presumptive victims. Sometimes we surely are, but sometimes we surely are not. No political ethics can start from the assumption that Jews monopolise [sic] the position of victim. "Victim" is a quickly transposable term: it can shift from minute to minute, from the Jew killed by suicide bombers on a bus to the Palestinian child killed by Israeli gunfire. [28]

To reiterate Butler's prescient statement—which eerily foreshadowed the accelerating course of the Intifada and the subsequent construction of the "security fence" around Jerusalem and the surrounding area—Israeli and Jewish victimization overshadows Palestinian victimization. The magazine *CounterPunch* pointed out inaccuracies in *The New York Times'* biased reporting of the ratio of Israeli-to-Palestinian deaths during the conflict in 2004. Alison Weir notes that in 2004, the actual ratio of Israeli to Palestinian deaths of children was 8:176 (or approximately 1:22). [29] In that year of reporting, *The New York Times* reported quite the opposite, that only one Palestinian child died to every seven dead Israeli children reported. Butler's position is that "ethics" cannot begin from the position of victimhood. Butler's observations point to Lévinas' ethics—that justice begins with attention to the other.

A contemporary post-Zionist and Lévinasian American Jewish philosopher, Leonard Grob,

examines the victim narrative within a Jewish framework. In his edited collection of essays by Holocaust scholars writing about Israel-Palestine, he highlights the important work of a "healthy" memory of the Shoah:

> Envisioning oneself as a community of victims—in Yiddish, *Shimson der Nebedicher* ("Wretched Samson" or a superpower which can only see itself as victim—Prime Minister Levi Eshkol [30])—may, ironically, produce real victims. Israelis might well attend to the words of Holocaust scholar Zygmunt Bauman to the effect that Hitler may yet have a posthumous victory: "… [The designers of the Final Solution] did not manage to turn the world against the Jews, but in their graves they can still dream of turning the Jews against the world, and thus … make the Jewish reconciliation with the world … all that more difficult, if not downright impossible." [31] Embracing a self-image of the *eternal* victim, Bauman implies, limits Israel's ability to forge that lasting peace with her neighbors which may provide for her genuine physical security. [32]

Grob and others in this volume explore how the victim-narrative compromises a genuine ethical perspective on the conflict and further expound on how it might actually perpetuate a cycle of violent relations between the Jewish people and the world: The implication being, shockingly, that a resilient sense of Israeli victimization actually confirms the success of the Final Solution. Zygmunt Bauman suggests that Israeli victimization is, in any case, a false, borrowed identity. This aristocracy of "victim by proxy" contains a degree of moral righteousness: "whatever the offspring of the victims do must be morally proper … as long as it can be shown that it was done in order to stave off the repetition of the lot visited on their ancestors." [33] The "victim identity" sense of self obfuscates, or even legitimates, further violence against others as a reasonable response to trauma. The victim narrative becomes an impenetrable excuse for violence in the name self-defense against "Never Again!" The victim identity separates the questions of ethics from politics; the self or one's own group always becomes that in need of aid. An appropriate engagement with politics, *pace* Gillian Rose, would correct for the separation of ethical discourse into the realm of "victim in need of salvage." The dialogue between self and other—required in politics—is a corrective to this problem.

Post-Zionist philosopher Anat Biletzki (b. 1952) also illuminates this problem of the tension between universal approaches to human rights in the Israeli-Palestinian case and the cultural

cross-instantiations of victim-perpetrator narratives to particular Israeli and Palestinian societies. She argues that these identities get bifurcated and that human rights discourse is misled in this particular case because it refuses to acknowledge human rights work as having a political dimension. On World People's Blog, her bio states this problematic, present in her teaching and activism:

> Does this mean, then, that the ideological opposition between politics and human rights, as originally construed in standard and traditional human rights talk, has brought the concrete manifestation of human rights to a dead-end? Is there any way for local human rights organizations—real, operational, organizations that are not globally oriented—to substantiate their particular focus without reneging on universal demands? Or are they doomed to represent, in their respective agendas, their political, "biased" context?

Finally, and going back to the conceptual level—does this imply that the foundational idea of human rights indeed harbors an irreconcilable paradox? The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the human rights organizations that accompany it, will serve as a very germane illustration of this problematic. From the semantics of human rights concepts ("victim," "perpetrator," "non-combatant," "conscientious objection," etcetera), to the pragmatics of human rights discussions in a specific area and time of strife, one can identify the alienation of universalism as the clear and almost immediate consequence of a context so rife with "politics." [34]

Palestinian and radical Israeli sociologists have noted the imbalance of discourse on the issue and the equivalence of representations of Israeli and Palestinian suffering, yet the empirical reality shows a disproportionate amount of suffering on the Palestinian side. This presents us with the difference between "objectivity" and "neutrality"—the uptake of equally balanced narratives may appear to be "objective," but it is not neutral at all when there is an imbalance of power. [35] Authentic objectivity has "nothing to do with the television newscaster's mechanical gesture of allocating the same number of seconds to both sides of a question, or editorially splitting the difference between them, irrespective of their perceived merits." [36] Objectivity should be sensitive to power imbalances; its goal is not neutrality or even-handedness, but rather to the truth of empathy for those who carry the bulk of suffering. Not speaking out against the oppressor in times of oppression is therefore

not neutrality, but complicity by association. As observed by a Vietnam-era graduate student at Boston University who was drafted and refused to report for a physical, "Sometimes to be silent is to lie." [37] Silence at injustice is participation in it.

Though perhaps "apartheid" is a strong label, and the extent of violence and oppression in Israel is not that of South Africa, nevertheless Jimmy Carter's book, *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid* ruptures the biased discourse that sees the conflict as even-handed. In an issue of *Contemporary Sociology*, Taraki deconstructs literature that depicts the conflict as two equal parties feuding over ethnicity or incommensurable mythologies/ideologies. [38] Casting the conflict in this light ignores the grave power-imbalance. There are many examples of this type of "equal ethnic combatants" trajectory in the literature, including *The Palestine-Israel Conflict* by Harms and Ferry, Marc Gopin's *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion can Bring Peace to the Middle East*, and Avner Falk's *Fratricide in the Holy Land*.

Hammer's *Palestinians Born in Exile* discusses the experience of Palestinian marginalization due to exile and colonialism. [39]Also addressing the inequality between Israelis and Palestinians, the Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi stated that the "competing narrative" presentation betrays a kind of marginalization of the Palestinian narrative: An Israeli voice must be heard when a Palestinian voice is aired, but the reverse is not true. [40] Biletzki abstracts these concepts and "frames" them—lingering in the conflict and obscuring truth by equalizing the "plane of victimization."

These narrative identities of "victim" versus "perpetrator" are politicized. Biletzki's position is that human rights discourse concerning Israel-Palestine has skirted this issue of political imbalance. Even prominent scholars of the conflict, such as Herbert Kelman of Harvard University, describe the conflict in a way that renders "equal guilt-share" on Palestinians and Israelis alike: defining the conflict as a "cultural conflict" of two incompatible and warring societies. [41] This, Biletzki states, ignores the political reality. She subtly suggests that universalist discourse on human rights becomes distorted by the particularism of a political climate. Perhaps one can infer from this what Arendt highlighted in her essays on stateless persons, which might sound almost Foucauldian—that any "human" right is protected only by a whim of the state's particular recognition of that "human" person. Perhaps the Palestinian without a two-state solution, or the Arab-Israeli citizen, is exactly the contemporary stateless person whose rights are guaranteed only in a

particularist relation to the balance of power in discourse of citizenship. Biletzki's presentation politically functions as radical "anti-Zionism"; it also recognizes the importance of universal "human" rights but also the limits of universalism in the relations of states and the divisions between communities and power structures of exclusion.

Another post-Zionist is sociologist Baruch Kimmerling of Hebrew University and the University of Toronto. Cited above in the quotation from Leonard Grob's volume, Kimmerling is, in the words of the radical historian Howard Zinn, a "Jew with a Biblical conscience," though a social scientist. [42] Like the prophets Jeremiah and Micah engaged in meta-critique of their existing society, Kimmerling's work involves deep consternation about the interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian history and the way in which the state of Israel has sought to marginalize Palestinians and Arabs more generally. His analysis of the policies of Ariel Sharon accuses him of very destructive politicide of the Palestinians; "by politicide [he means] a process that has, as its ultimate goal, the dissolution of the Palestinian people's existence as a legitimate social, political, and economic entity." [43] Kimmerling even takes the radical position that at the heart of the Israeli rightists' position —still dominant after Sharon's disappearance from the political scene—may also be the "partial or complete ethnic cleansing" [44] of the Palestinians from the territory known as the Land of Israel, or Eretz Yisrael.

In his analysis of the collective psyche/culture of Israel, Kimmerling suggests that deeply embedded in "Israeliness" is a militarism beyond even what abounded in ancient Sparta, perhaps the symptoms of the "wretched Samson" have developed in reaction to Israeli military machismo, which, as Kimmerling describes it, is a military-industrial-cultural complex driving the perception of all social problems and political issues as "existential security issues." [45] This refracted state-military reaction to the experience of victimization, mentioned earlier, is actually strengthened by the competing cultural narratives. This is a result, in Kimmerling's analysis, of two contradictory phenomena in the Israeli state:

> The first phenomenon entails the decomposition of the original Zionist hegemony into many conflicting ideological and institutional segments, which have created a kind of diverse degree of separatist civil societies. … The second phenomenon entails the persistence of the state's strength and centrality—in terms of both monopolizing regulation of the common good and passing legislation, as well as playing a key role in the continuous interrelations

between the cultural sphere and the might and myth of the state's military. [46]

Given this analysis, what has disappeared with the emergence of multiple competing groups in Israeli civil society—from the Yishuv, to the Mizrahim, to Russian and Ethiopian immigrant cultures—is the Zionist hegemonic narrative. But perhaps, what was present in an older Zionist narrative was an ethical rendering of Zionism unlike what is termed in the ethnic Jewish state as it has devolved. This earlier manifestation was a positive ethical relation that dissolved into a strong state-military culture. Ethical Zionism, in addition to ethnic Zionism, was lost to these competing civil societies, and what was left as the "social glue" of Israeli society was the oppressive military culture. This culture now permeates all facets of economic, social, political, religious life.

A Religious Radicalism: Reframing Israeli/Palestinian as Ich-Du Relation

The task of this essay is to refashion an approach to Israel-Palestine from within the roots of Jewish philosophical, ethical-as-political literature. As I see it, the only answer to Butler's puzzle on the interminable over-identification of Jewish suffering as primary in Israel-Palestine is actually an intrinsically Jewish and religio-philosophical pathway, recovering the more ancient and Torah-based aims of ethical Zionism. Butler's radicalism requires a normative reconfiguration that can come only from religion's function as a motivator for a combined political-ethical action. Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* notes that the difference between scientific and philosophic perspectives on the one hand and religious perspectives on the other is that religion is such an unmatchable motivator of human normative action, where the others may suggest contemplation or analysis only. [47] Or, in the terms of the eleventh of Marx's theses on Feuerbach, the point of these religio-philosophic perspectives is to lend a normative guide to action.

In an essay on religious dialogue in Finland, religious studies scholar Ruth Illman suggests, combining Lévinas and Buber so that the relation with the other as *Du* can be a framework for positive modeling of dialogue with those cast in outsider groups, especially between dominant Western Judeo-Christian cultures and the subaltern group of Muslim society. [48] The ethic of hospitality towards radical difference is imbued in the three monotheisms and is both traditional (ancient) and radically postmodern. It is radically "Abrahamic" and

religious in its priority of the other. For Buber, the Israelis need the Arabs, as the "I-Thou is not a dimension of the self but the existential and ontological reality in which the self comes into being and through which it fulfills and authenticates itself." [49] For Buber, man becomes man with the other self. [50] The Israeli-as-I must listen to the Palestinian Other as Thou, and this nonviolent response to the vulnerability of the "face" [51] of the Other is a reflection of our relation to God-as-Thou.

In *I and Thou*, Buber defines the relationships between human beings as the metaphor for the relation to God. [52] Walter Kaufmann suggests that the place of the sacred, for Buber, was in the every day, dispensed in ethical relations with one's neighbors: "The place of the sacred is not a house of God, no church, synagogue or seminary, nor one day in seven, and the span of the sacred is much shorter than twenty-four hours. The sabbath is every day, several times a day." [53]

Inclusion of the Other is an attribute of great cultures and folds back into the I-Thou relation. This is contrasted with a culture that rests upon the I-It relation where other humans are treated as means/objects: "Every great culture that embraces more than one people rests upon some original encounter, an event at the source when a response was made to a You, an essential act of the spirit." [54] Buber contests that cultures can lose touch with this source of spirit: "When a culture is no longer centered in a living and continually renewed relational process, it freezes into the It-world which is broken only intermittently by the eruptive, glowing deeds of solitary spirits." [55] For Buber, the Thou is presented to the I as a gift through encounter:

> The You encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking. But that I speak the basic word to it is a deed of my whole being, is my essential deed. The You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus the relationship is election and electing, passive and active at once: An action of the whole being must approach passivity, for it does away with all partial actions and thus with any sense of action, which always depends on limited exertions. The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. [56]

The relation between I and Thou constitutes a whole. The Palestinian needs the Israeli as the Israeli needs the Palestinian. This relation presents itself not in a means-appropriated relation, but as something else. This requires a responsibility to the other—and ultimately this responsibility is both ethical and political.

> The relation to the You is unmediated. Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity into wholeness. No purpose intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation; and longing itself is changed as it plunges from the dream into appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur. [57]

In this holy encounter—when means disintegrate—the self confronts the other. The priority, as Kaufmann states, is that the other-as-You—not Thou—is encountered. This means that there is a priority of ethics over the instrumental rationality of mere politics. The central stress is ultimately on You, and not Thou: "God is present when I confront You. But if I look away from You, I ignore him. As long as I merely experience or use you, I deny God. But when I encounter You I encounter him." [58] For Buber, the holy is made manifest in the encounter with You. The I-You relation is a "reversal of the will to power" and suggests the "shared silence of presence and inclusion and the acknowledgment of the other partner in conversation and entrance into communion and [co-]responsibility." [59] The ethical is a corrective of the instrumental rationality of the political. The point for Buber is that the ethical must dispense itself into political behavior—the ethical is a curb on politics as political, but is only actualized in political externalization.

And, as Arendt has suggested, the Jewish philosophical mind should be attentive to and aggrieved by Jewish faults; this calls for a reflection on Jewish wrongs and the emotional state motivated toward actions of reconstituting justice. The imbalance of the suffering face of the Palestinian is a call to the Israeli, much like the angel called off the violence of Abraham against Isaac. Taking Claire Katz's reading of the *akedah*—or the sacrifice of Isaac—it is as if human action, represented by the (dangerous) claims of political Gnosticism-as-theophany, has called on Israel (as Abraham) to sacrifice the Palestinian (as Isaac). In Katz's reading of Lévinas, the presence of ethics is not in God's theophany and call for the death of Isaac but in the place of responsibility to the human other in the

appearance of the angel who calls for life—just as, for Lévinas, God is the one who comes to mind in our encounter with the face in the commandment of law, or Torah: Thou Shall Not Kill. [60] If God is "dispensed" in the world, it is not through theophany, but through law, Torah, and the greatest commandment of Torah is that against violence. The greatest law is that of love—law is an inflection of love: there need not be a split between the two.

Another radical religious perspective is from theologian Yeshayahu Leibowitz who called the project of the Occupation an idol, which is an indicting religious term, and projected understanding of the Gnosticism implied in the Modern Israeli right. As Voegelin [61] has articulated with destructive and exclusivist movements of modernity, Israel plans to be a "secular" nation with a pseudo-religious narrative and a modern, false, political "messianic" vision. Gideon Aran and others have rendered this version of political Gnosticism as "messianic nationalism," not rooted in traditional Judaism, but out of the genealogy of European nationalism. [62] Ronen Shamir is a post-Zionist Israeli historian supporting this claim that Zionism both benefitted from British nationalism and colonialism and was by extension a colonialist project itself. [63] Palestinians were considered "the natives to be tamed." [64] One is reminded of Arendt's encounter with the Jewish socialist who, instead of loving God or religious principles, "loves the Jewish people" and presumably a "Jewish State": Settlers who illegally occupy the West Bank are driven by religious fervor and the Biblical Land of Israel, *Eretz Yisrael*, as a cosmological, religious and military goal. Early religious voices of dissent are unfortunately lost to the political shifting of religious positions toward the hardliners. Others have stated that early Zionists were offered land in Uganda, long before Palestine—land that was uninhabited—but early Zionists like Theodore Herzl refused. Ultra Orthodox Jews rejected the state of Israel on the terms that the violence inherent in a state (Weber's suggestion that the state was the legitimate dispenser of violence) is against Torah's proclamation of a life ethic. These important voices, however, were muffled. Adding to this, prominent Jewish rabbis like Yeshiyahu Leibowitz called the Occupation a "golden calf" and said to "give the land back" after the 1967 war. [65] In a series of essays, Leibowitz predicted there would be an apartheid-like fascist situation that would maintain the Occupation:

> Rule over the occupied territories would have social repercussions. After a few years there would be no Jewish workers or Jewish farmers. The Arabs would be the working people and the Jews the administrators, inspectors, officials, and

police — mainly secret police. [66]

Like Arendt's prescient views about anti-Semitism growing in Arabs, Leibowitz's words were also eerily predictive.

Conclusions

What is left to do? These "radical" religious voices—Rose, Arendt, Buber, Lévinas—must be recovered and used to combat the abuses of "religious" narratives to craft expedient and violent political Gnosticisms. I have highlighted some of what many perceive to be radical Jewish messages from within traditional Jewish strains of religious-ethical-philosophical discourse. Ethical discourse with a political objective—unlike the contemporary social scientific debate that resolves itself through the hypothesis that the conflict is "cultural" and between "equals" or philosophical discourse that separates ethics from politics—can reprimand a power inequality and suggest a correction, namely the first step being an end to the Occupation. Then, other normative questions about the implications of the two-state solution, housing seizures, and property expropriations of Palestinian territory in East Jerusalem, and the general "demographic" question, can take place within Israel proper.

Jewish ethics—with its particular acknowledgment of the priority of the other and the oppressed—offers a paradigm for appraising imbalance and demands ethical attention to political action to correct that imbalance. Grob states what the aims of Zionism should be: "More verb than noun, Zionism-as-inter-myth is incessantly forged/re-forged in the presence of the face of the Palestinian who calls his/her Israeli other to account for the ethical import of his/her actions." [67]

In the spirit of Arendt, who called for Jewish criticism of Jewish wrongs, Butler and Biletzki counter the irresponsibility of one-sided victim narratives, and Lévinas and Buber call for Jewish responsibility toward the other. Writing in response to the countless deaths in the 2008-09 Gaza campaign, author Jacqueline Rose commented in the *London Review of Books*:

> If it sometimes seems as if a new limit has been breached, we need to trace this
> language back to the creation of Israel and before, to the founding belief that
> Israel would be the redemption for the historic suffering, and passivity, of the

Jews, a belief given new urgency by the genocide in Europe and which would lay the grounds for the ruthless dispossession of the Palestinians. At a rally in support of Israel's war in Gaza in Trafalgar Square, one banner read: "We will not be victims again." As the rally dispersed, those of us protesting as Jews against Israel's actions were spat at and met with cries of "Kapos." The Holocaust is still the felt justification in the midst of this new war. Israel is the fourth most powerful military nation in the world, yet it lives in a permanent state of fear, always fighting the last war. [68]

Contrary to the claim of victimhood, Lévinas and Buber's ethics for the other realizes that the Jewish experience does not have the only claim on the experience of suffering. When the question of Israel seems to be, who is the aggressor? Jacqueline Rose asks, "Who claims a monopoly on suffering? Whose suffering is felt to warrant a form of state power that is above the law? Already we are being told that there will be no legal reckoning. Faced with war crimes allegations in the past, Israel has blocked all attempts by the UN to investigate its conduct and it is not a signatory to the International Criminal Court." [69]

To ask this question, Jacqueline Rose asserts, is not to dismiss the trauma of the Holocaust: "The effect of trauma is precisely to freeze people in time. There is a psychological dimension to this conflict that seems almost impossibly difficult to shift. In its own eyes, Israel is never the originator and agent of its own violence, and to that extent its violence is always justified. The Palestinians do not count. Even when the worst of what has been done to them is registered inside Israel, it is still the Israeli who suffers more." [70]

In this scenario, the logic of victimization reduces the Palestinians to objects: "they do not count." The concept of Jewish victimization trumps all—it is frozen in time. It remains critical now to value understanding of the Holocaust in such a way that the traumatized frame of mind is recognized. "Never again" is a slogan that has been used to justify Israeli brutality against Palestinians. It is only with a psychologically and religiously infused perspective—though keeping in mind the possible tendency toward Romanticism and Orientalism that might objectify the Palestinian—that this victimization-as-legitimator of violence can be interrupted. Gillian Rose's philosophy acknowledges the violence implied in the utopic transcendent projections of the Zionist dream-become nightmare—that the casting of the "New Jerusalem" implies a kind of violence of identity boundaries. In *The Last Resistance*, Gillian Rose's sister Jacqueline remarked how "needed" her sister's

thought is now. [71] Perspectives claiming the conflict is two-sided—that it is the battle of two equals in cultural conflict—ignore this narrative of victimhood as the source of power through legitimation. Gillian Rose's philosophy would acknowledge the way in which the victimized becomes inscribed as the victimizer—no one is "innocent." [72] One must ask Biletzki, Butler, and Jacqueline Rose's question, "who claims a monopoly on suffering and victimization?"— and Lévinas, Buber and Arendt, heeding Gillian Rose's corrective about the violence inherent in transcendent projections of utopic visions, provide the normative groundwork for that perspective to actively take place.

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