“Why are you here”?: American Jewish Activists living in Israel-Palestine

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Abstract

As tensions between Israel and Palestine deepen, diaspora communities have become further polarised. Among the Jewish community, Jews living in America feel torn between two centres of Jewish life, America and Israel-Palestine. For left-wing Jews, particularly, engaging in Israeli-Palestinian politics feels like a moral obligation to transform the Jewish community (Kroll-Zeldin 2024). This thesis explores Jewish Americans residing in Jerusalem and engaging in anti-occupation activism and their desires to belong within the community after feeling disillusioned by their Jewish institutional upbringings. Activists seek to forge a community that meets their moral and ethical demands while navigating moral and ethical complications. Since the war that started on October 7th, 2023, the ground has shifted and become more polarised, leading activists, myself included, to seek alternatives. Within the activist community, I argue that at times they reproduce forms of exclusion. Outside of the activist community, as they work in partnership with Palestinians, I argue that sometimes deep relationships are not necessarily cared for.

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Lastly, thank you to all the people who work to make this land better and keep an open heart in a very hard world. May your love and warm embrace of life extend to all beings to create a better future for all of us.

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Introduction

"So, what are you *doing* here?"

It was 8:00 in the morning; I had planned my route perfectly from my apartment in an outer Jerusalem neighbourhood to the town centre. I gave myself time to grab a coffee and arrived on time at the meeting location at the YMCA to attend an educational tour of Jaffa with Zochrot. Zochrot teaches about the Nakba and the Palestinian narrative of Israel-Palestine[1]. The tour was organized by a group called All That's Left: Anti-Occupation Collective (ATL), a community of Jews from English-speaking countries who are involved in activism and education against the occupation. When I arrived, nearly every participant asked, "So, what are you *doing* here?". I had not had enough coffee to try to give an explanation. Many members of ATL are transient attendees of programs, while others have been involved for several years. I was familiar with this line of questioning after living in Jerusalem for more than two years. However, I stopped being able to answer this question with any conviction or excitement. Most people attending the tour were part of an educational program or research project, and they would drone on about it as an answer to the question. But my answer was simultaneously simpler and more complex: "I just *live* here". I am just 'doing life' in Jerusalem. This answer received disappointed looks, almost as though I had 'given in', was I really on their side? Had I accepted the unjust and untenable political situation? Simply living here was considered a type of complicity with the

[1] Note on terminology: I use the term Israel-Palestine to acknowledge both the Jewish and Palestinian connection to the land and honour both communities. As a Jewish person I do see it as the 'land of Israel', yet I also recognise historic Palestine and the Palestinian connection to the land. I do not think it serves us to push out the 'other' narrative

occupation.[2] The answer was only accepted tentatively after further questioning and explaining my work and activism.

This thesis is about what it means to attempt to belong to community, particularly Jewish community, all while exploring what it means to *live* here, in Israel-Palestine, a fraught and contested piece of land. I myself am a left-wing Jewish activist. I was raised abroad and currently live in Jerusalem and hold a deep desire and longing to belong to community and Jewish cultural life, all the while going against a large portion of the Jewish community in order to be part of a movement to end violence against Palestinians and work towards equality and justice in Israel-Palestine. I know there are fellow Jews like me, such as members of ATL and others who were born and raised in North America. They too came to Jerusalem and navigate these same questions of belonging. Navigating questions of belonging is not simply a question of desire and longing, although it exists. Navigating questions of belonging also requires us to tend to the question of 'how to live'? (Gammeltolf 2018a, 85). Therefore, belonging is not simply being part of a community but also creating community. Throughout this thesis, I explore questions that arise from a desire to belong and the moral dilemmas that stem from the question, "How to live?" As I wrote, *just living here* was not considered the right way to 'live'. In this scenario, I described how I had lived in Jerusalem for too long to feel welcomed in this encounter with activists who were primarily transient diaspora Jews. Simultaneously, I have not lived long enough in Israel-Palestine to be considered 'Israeli', and my left-wing politics and relationships with Palestinians have, as we will explore throughout the thesis, left me out of the fold of most of Israeli society. Questions and desire to belong have only become more intense since October 7th,

[2] Occupation refers to many things by locals, the international community, and fellow activists. Some people refer to only the Occupation of the West Bank while others refer to the entirety of the land. Due to the pervasive system of injustice across the land I use the word occupation (little 'o') unless I am specifically referring to the West Bank

2023, and the war that has brutally dragged on. More severe polarisation has taken form, leaving many further out of the realm of possibility of belonging.

The First Protest After October 7th - October 9th, 2023

No one has been speaking about the hostages, and now there are more than 100. We need to find meaning in this time, and we need to bring people home. Israel is now relentlessly carpet-bombing Gaza. The hostages are there too…

The demonstration was silent. Next to me, someone got arrested; they dragged him meters away, and at least five policemen surrounded him and started beating him. I didn't understand; he did nothing. They had surrounded him and taken him away. We started filming. The police pushed us back. There were many elderly among us. We want the hostages' home. We want a ceasefire.

Khalas. [enough]

Within minutes, the demonstration is declared an illegal gathering disturbing the peace. They had already started dragging and throwing punches. They herd us like sheep up the street, but I got sucked towards the back and I wasn't looking for confrontation. My body had already experienced enough, and my nervous system was running on high. Too many rocket sirens this week and attacks have had me on high alert. I got stuck in a dead end, yelled at by the police to go there with a few other people. They were throwing punches, pushing, and shoving everyone. Passersbys started angrily yelling at us, "We are in a war!". Apparently, we can no longer demonstrate when we are "in a war". A war that has been essentially going on for more than 75 years. I'm still backed in the corner; I start speaking to an elderly woman who asks me to share my videos. She wants to reach out to a lawyer. The police return, yelling at us to leave. I do. I walk out calmly and put my hands up. I really can't handle any more right now. As I walk away and cross the street, a policeman grabs my backpack and pulls me back. Shit. I knew I wasn't supposed to wear backpacks to demonstrations. I stumble backwards. A woman on the other side is hysterically crying. Another elderly woman, one I've met before during olive harvests, the only one who seems to be spared from the violence, starts shouting and pointing her two walking sticks towards the police, "You're worse than the Gestapo!" she screams, gesturing towards them with her stick.

I stay by her; I'll probably be safer there. She turned in a different direction, and I walked away with another group and tried to start contacting my friend, but I couldn't find him. I walk away with a few other people, and the police return and pull the sign out of someone's hand. Crumple it and throw it to the ground. More passerbys are yelling at us. Apparently, we are the problem. A group of young magavnikim [army police] *are walking towards us, the one in the back seems chill and is smoking a cigarette. I want to ask if I can have one. I meet up with my friend. We are shaken. He was punched in the head and chased up the hill. He is concerned because he's been concussed. Slowly, we start to see people from the protest walk around and start taking deep breaths. More soldiers are getting called to miluim* [reserves], *and we watch them get a late-night coffee and say goodbye to friends before they leave.*

I catch a bus home.

I'm one stop away when my partner calls me, asking me where I am. I tell him I'm almost home. He sounds a little nervous. He confirms my location a few times before telling me there's been a shooting attack at Damascus Gate. He asks if I'm close. I say I'm close to home, and not in that area. We hang up, and I walk home on high alert. - Author Journal Entry, Nov, 9th, 2023 (edited for clarity)

This demonstration, led by the organization Standing Together, was the first demonstration demanding a hostage exchange and ceasefire in favour of a diplomatic peace agreement. Standing Together is considered a far-left organization among Jewish Israelis and is often labelled as traitorous. Only days after October 7th, very few Jewish-Israelis were asking for a deal. We stood in silent protest demanding an agreement to return the hostages home and end the war. We prayed that there would not be a ground incursion. At the time, we could not have imagined the death toll that was to come, the actual number of hostages that were taken, and the reality for Gazans that one can only imagine in their worst nightmares. Many months later, more Jewish-Israelis began to take to the streets, led by the hostage families to demand a ceasefire. Today, more than 70% of Israelis support a hostage deal, and thousands of Israelis join protests against the government (TOI Staff and Sharon 2024). Since the war started, government mistrust became widespread and pre-war judicial reform protests have turned into hostage return protests. Early in the war, hostage families were afraid to demonstrate against the government out of fear that the demonstrations would negatively influence the government's willingness to make an exchange deal between the hostages and prisoners[3]. However, with more than a year and a half of war with very few tangible successes, hostage families have felt betrayed by the government's lack of will to return their loved ones in favour of continuing the war.

[3] There are many prisoners that are held under arbitrary administration detention without charge or trial. Some consider them also hostages of the Israeli state. The ceasefire deals exchanges both those under arbitrary detention and those who committed violent acts of terror

Despite thousands of Jewish Israelis who have taken to the streets in hopes of a hostage deal, those of us on the 'left' already held grave concerns over the governmental response from the early days of the war. It seemed clear that the rhetoric of revenge and the pain we felt from October 7th guided the government's response. The police and passerbys considered the protest I opened this section with as treasonous. *Smolanim bogdim* [leftists are traitors] was spat in our faces as passerbys became frustrated with messages that were against the war, which has been vastly categorized as a war of revenge. We were smeared for our politics and trying to navigate our own heartbreak surrounding October 7th, 2023 and the subsequent violence in Gaza.

This was not our first protest; everyone I saw was a veteran activist, some had contacts and connections in Gaza and feared for their well-being, and many frequented the Occupied West Bank to engage in solidarity activism. I stood nearly paralyzed, because while I feared greatly for Palestinians within Israel-Palestine and vehemently opposed the government's response to October 7th, just days earlier, I was frantically messaging friends and running to bomb shelters. The fear of opening my phone to find news that someone I know is dead or taken hostage still haunts me. I cannot disaggregate our inherent connection as people who simply live and try to survive in this land.

At the protest, there were many familiar faces, including the elderly woman yelling at the police, calling them "worse than the Gestapo"; she was a veteran activist originally from South Africa. Once, when we were harvesting olives together, activists carried her into the orchard before she plopped into her seat, demanding the branches be brought to her so she could feel that she was contributing to the harvest. Her feisty energy rubbed off on anyone who was within hearing distance. She shared with me that she had written a letter to her family in South Africa explaining how the situation in Israel-Palestine resembled what she remembered from Apartheid

in South Africa. At that time, she had not sent the letter. I wonder if she ever did. She knew how hard her family would receive that letter, but she also felt a need to share the reality of occupation that she was seeing on the ground. A profound moral injustice that she could not turn away from, but confronted directly by engaging in activism.

I open with these encounters to exemplify the shifting grounds and awkward in-between spaces that other left-wing Jews who were raised abroad and currently live in Israel-Palestine, and I reside in. When I arrived on the Zochrot tour, my choice to live in Jerusalem raised eyebrows and resulted in questioning if I was truly in line with their beliefs on 'how to live' in Israel-Palestine as a Jew who grew up in the diaspora. At the protest, we are labelled as a *bogdim* [traitors], sometimes even by those closest to us, like our friends and family, for engaging in activism. For most Jewish-Israelis, the trauma of October 7th was seared into their psyche as the complete break of any possibility of peace, and those of us who still believed in it must not care about our people or be categorized as completely delusional. The space where activists can engage in advocacy and protests is shrinking and suffocating. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel has published multiple reports outlining different facets of government crackdown in Israel-Palestine, including violent dispersal methods of protests, even those which had permits, confiscating signs, and more (ACRI 2024). When being a Jewish activist in Israel-Palestine against the war or engaging with Palestinians, many Jewish-Israelis view this as traitorous because it undermines the carefully curated narrative of victimhood that Jewish experience in the diaspora has been riddled by. Historically, Jewish experience has been one that is enmeshed with antisemitism and oppression. However, today Jews living in Israel-Palestine have significantly more strength than we ever have in the past 2000 years through the army and state sovereignty. However, Jewish Israelis continue to see themselves in a perpetual condition of victimhood

through historical victimhood, general victims of the ongoing conflict, and the events of the conflict (Schori-Eyal, Halperin, and Bar-Tal 2014). Despite this uncomfortable truth of Jewish power in Israel-Palestine, activists, too, are afraid, like any other person living in Israel-Palestine. Loud booms startle me, and I constantly walk on high alert. I see this fear is in every part of all communities across the land, and it motivates me to be an activist to end the brutality that feeds so much of the fear.

My research centres itself on American Jews living in Jerusalem and navigating their relationships and sense of belonging in Israel-Palestine from an awkward insider/outsider position. On the one hand, Jews are welcomed through programs and policies that seek to support the Jewish demographic in Israel-Palestine by encouraging Aliyah (see Khawaja 2018; Kravel-Tovi 2017). On the other hand, left-wing Jews who oppose the Israeli Occupation of the Palestinians are viewed as *bogdim* (traitors). This context sets the ground for how American Jewish activists have been demanded to grapple with their relationship to Israel-Palestine, feeling forced between their values and their identity. This grappling develops moral questions regarding 'how to live' and the possible relationships between individuals, the state, and Palestinians. Throughout this thesis, I explore how Jews raised in America negotiate their sense of belonging(s) and identities as we forge our ways in Jerusalem on the shifting ground of Israel-Palestine politics.

Anthropology of Belonging

Scholars have understood our notions of belonging as shaped by historical moments (Yuval-Davis 2006a; Probyn 2016), alongside questions of political agency and questions regarding 'how to live' (Fagerlid and Tisdel 2020; Gammeltoft 2018a), and often in our contemporary age, belonging has been broadly read alongside 'national belonging' (Anderson 1983). Probyn (2016) points to us to that this political moment of belonging is, "marked by a

wide spread politics of polarization, it is of the utmost urgency that we take into account this desire to belong, a desire that cannot be categorized as good or bad, left or right— in short, a desire without a fixed political ground but with immense political possibilities" (9). As we understand belonging, we must recognize it as an integral part of the political demands placed upon us by our societies. There is a desire to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Belonging is not static, but rather intertwined with emotions and desires. Probyn (2016) argues that "desire as it produces new relations and relationships among individuals, things, groups, etc.— a current that short-circuits the categorial order of things. It should be clear that working within positivity does not necessarily result in a celebratory rhetoric; rather, desire as social force compels us to think beyond the terminal points of either celebration or ressentiment" (14). In understanding belonging we must look at different categories to which we wish to belong and how we morph to "enact belonging", as Gammeltoft (2018b) discusses that "being a member can be painful and demanding, but it can also offer privileges and protections" (89). Thus, the feeling of belonging enables us to feel that we are part of something greater than its parts. Seeking to belong to something greater enables us to feel a sense of belonging while holding our identity(ies).

Today, our notion of belonging in contemporary terms is often regarded as a 'national' belonging through citizenship. Anderson (1983) argues that it is the "most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (3). The value of nationalism and its imagined offerings creates a highly problematized moment for those who reject national ways of belonging and find it riddled with contradictions. Simultaneously, the uniqueness of being Jewish and its traditions create a challenging space to navigate between the universalist ideals and particularist realities. I seek to understand how the ground is shifting underneath Jews from the diaspora in relation to

themselves, Jewish communities, and the State of Israel, particularly amongst those who consider themselves on the political left. Engaging in activism as a Jewish person can often feel lonely and isolating. While many challenges arise within the activist community, the desire for community is tangible. It feels necessary to sustain and hold the different parts of ourselves in a place of belonging. Through our experiences as left-wing Jews, I seek to rupture common understandings of us versus them politics and tend to the moment where I, and others, try to emerge in in-between spaces, without polarising judgment but through an understanding of desire to be part of something, to be part of a political future that includes us and our beliefs, alongside others.

My dear friend and interlocutor, Avi, met me with his lanky body, a white button-up shirt, black pants (all indicative of a traditionally Orthodox man), and a colourful (likely thrifted) overcoat and golf hat on his head. We walked the streets of downtown Jerusalem after grabbing a quick coffee, taking note of the graffiti that read "Save Massafer Yatta" and other slogans spray-painted by activists. As we walked and talked, I commented that I have always admired his ability to connect with different 'worlds' of Jewish and non-Jewish people. I have listened intently to his stories of his time in Beirut and Jordan, as well as his time learning in Yeshiva, with deep interest in how he forges his way in the world. Avi referred to himself as a chameleon, a person who can weave himself through Haredi spaces as a queer religious man and among Palestinians as an activist and Arabic speaker. He weaves his way into spaces and camouflages himself to fit and participate, regardless of the community. Avi exemplifies that belonging "is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalized construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). Avi saw his belongings in a constant state of flux in relation to the different communities and spaces he participated in.

Simultaneously, most of us desire a "sense of attachment to other individuals—to the sense of connection that can arise out of joint social practice" (Gammeltoft 2018a, 85). We wish to belong and feel cared for, and to meet the need for connection with others by forging meaningful relationships and communities. Tending to this notion of belonging enables us to explore what happens when the ground shifts beneath us and what can emerge personally, communally and politically. Belonging is not static and is often linked to deeper questions of the historical and political moments in which we live. As Probyn (2016) argues that belonging is productive, I, too, wish to consider the political opportunities that emerge from the desire to belong. It is these possibilities of political alternatives that I am seeking to unpack and understand. Throughout this thesis, I desire to explore the space in between polarities. At the same time, I spend time identifying the boundaries and contours of community, and I truly seek to decipher the spaces that are in-between and contradictory.

Notably, within Jewish practices, the idea of belonging is deeply upheld in our communal traditions. While Avi can weave in and out of Jewish and non-Jewish spaces, I have always felt that he is most at ease at a Shabbos table, sharing Torah. Many prayers can only be said in groups of ten, traditionally men, which ensures that people are held together in vulnerable moments, like saying the Mourner's Kaddish. Ritual meals and communal gatherings remain integral to Jewish experiences even for some of the most secular community members. This differentiates itself from the more Protestant understandings of the individual and their relationship with Gd (Buckser 2011). Being Jewish is a communal practice, but the tension between communal practice and our particularities and 'others' is the space I explore.

Yisrael(s) – A Jewish Collective

In this section, I seek to outline a sense of Jewish collective identity within which activists are both trying to engage and reshape. I outline the collective Jewish identity while also placing the Jewish experience(s) within a broader scope of literature to develop further the ground on which Jews attempt to belong. While Jewishness is a type of collective identity, often referred to as "*Am Yisrael*" (the Nation of Israel), within the Jewish community, there have always been rifts, divisions, and questions about how to act and be a collective, which has resulted in uncertainty and confusion for both Jews and non-Jews alike. For example, prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, Jewish collective identity was often defined by adherence to *halakha* (religious law) versus a sense of national belonging (Raz-Krakotzkin 2013). Today, Jews by and large see their identity as a collective identity demanding a type of collective rites and sense of belonging; however, how Jews demand this manifestation of collective rites is negotiated both within and outside the Jewish community, including by demanding minority rights outside of Israel-Palestine or geographically bound national rights within Israel-Palestine.

In attempting to understand the Jewish collective experience, I often refer to Jews/Jewishness rather than 'Judaism', following the line of thought of Daniel Boyarin (2019), who argues that referring to Judaism to describe Jews creates the sense that Jews are a religious group rather than an ethnic and national collective. Boyarin (2019) analyses the term Jewishness, in response to Judaism, whereby he argues "[there] are many ways that we continue to be uncomfortable and express our discomfort with this very definition [of Judaism as a faith]. For both Zionists and many non-Zionist Jews (including me), versions of description or practice with respect to Judaism that treat it as a faith that can be separated from ethnicity, nationality, language, and shared history have felt false" (D. Boyarin 2019,153). Jews have always been a part of other political and historical frameworks as a group residing in diaspora for thousands of

years. Jews have been routinely categorized and defined by historical circumstances (Hughes 2010), seldom defined by Jews themselves.

After the establishment of the State of Israel, Jewish voices that demanded alternative avenues towards collective rites vis-à-vis a nation-state were, by and large, silenced, for example, attempting to gain distinct minority rights, which we will explore in Chapter 1. Today, after the emergence of the State of Israel, the ground has shifted, and Jews are attempting to define themselves in the throes of Jewish cultural and religious practices, Zionism, the State of Israel, and antisemitism. For example, even in the United States, Jewish education and Israel education became intertwined after the founding of the State and even more so after ’67. Following 1967, the majority of Jewish educational curricula included mandatory studies on the State of Israel, discussed Aliyah, addressed fears of assimilation, and promoted partnerships between America and Israel (see Zakai 2014). Support for Israel had become a significant part of the Jewish educational experience across the diaspora, leading to more normative views on the State of Israel, at the cost of silencing alternative voices. Since the political Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel, a modern-day national identity has been ascribed to Jewish people. Despite this, many non-Zionist Jews reject the label of Jewishness as a place-bound national identity (see Judith Butler, Michael Marmur, and David Ellenson 2020; Jonathan Boyarin 2002; Daniel Boyarin 2019). Navigating Jewish collective identity in our current moment proves challenging as divergent views within the Jewish collective become further splintered.

One major contemporary challenge Jews face while grappling with questions of collectivity and belonging in Yisrael(s) (*Eretz* – Land, *Am* – People, *Medinat* – State). Upon the emergence of the state, Yisrael transitioned from *Eretz Yisrael* as a utopic vision to a practiced

reality on the ground, manifesting as a nation-state called *Medinat Yisrael*. The collapsing of these Yisraels has created a "gap between what Jerusalem is supposed to be and what Jerusalem actually is" (Roth 2017). This gap is discussed in Jewish literature in both the contemporary, as the building of the nation-state, and the historical sense after the divisions of *Am Yisrael* and the destruction of the temples (Roth 2017). Jews are forced to grapple with both the utopic vision that is often categorized by the coming of Moshiach and the reality of Jerusalem, which is severely divided between East / West, Jewish / Palestinian. Despite this, the gap between the utopic vision of return to Jerusalem and the actuality on the ground remains a ripe and rich place to explore. How do activists feel a sense of connection and belonging to Jerusalem while ultimately rejecting its current form and manifestation? Activists discussed how they grappled with reality, residing within the gap between what Jerusalem is supposed to be and the actual Jerusalem they must navigate. A Jerusalem where a large group of Palestinians live under occupation, experience police brutality, home demolitions, limited access to movement, and more. Simultaneously, Jews from the diaspora came to live in Jerusalem and engage in activism, creating the feeling that we have fallen through the cracks.

Living In-Between

Historically, Jews have resided in liminal spaces, between similarity and difference. Brink-Danan (2008) notes that within much academic literature, Jews are thrown back into the past, marked by the suffering of the Holocaust rather than present-day dynamic relationships to Jewish practices and Jewish identities. Today, Jews are often categorized by Zionism and their relationship to Israel (Bunzl 2004, 5). Furthermore, Jews are also navigating competing demands that stem from both within and outside the Jewish collective, for example, between return and diaspora (see Boyarin 2002), the utopic Jerusalem and the actual Jerusalem (see Roth 2017), between the colonizer and the colonized (see Memmi 1991). My interlocutors, left-wing Jews

from America living in Jerusalem, feel forced to navigate these seemingly binary relations, which create an unsteady ground through which they must navigate their sense of belonging.

As I navigate these tensions internally, I am drawn to the work of Albert Memmi (1991), who wrote in the wake of French colonialism in Tunisia in the 1950s, prompting us to consider his questions and reflections on his sense of belonging. The questions of belonging were further embedded in concerns of antisemitism and colonial realities. Memmi argues that the system of antisemitism itself creates a space in which Jews are stuck between the colonizer and colonized, wobbling between the two groups on unsteady footing (Memmi 1991):

> For better or for worse, the Jew found himself one small notch above the Moslem on the pyramid which is the basis of all colonial societies. His privileges were laughable, but they were enough to make him proud and to make him hope that he was not part of the mass of Moslems which constituted the base of the pyramid. It was enough to make him feel endangered when the structure began to crumble. The Jews bore arms side by side with the French in the streets of Algiers. My own relations with my fellow Jews were not made any easier when I decided to join the colonized, but it was necessary for me to denounce colonialism, even though it was not as hard on the Jews as it was on the others (10)

Memmi (1991) categorizes the Jewish experience and antisemitism as a vulnerable position whereby they both have privileges and the ability to obtain positions of power, while simultaneously reminding Jews that they will be scapegoated and pushed aside when those who are more dominant decide. Memmi (1991) concludes that there became a type of impossibility to belong, claiming that, "[he] was a sort of half-breed of colonization, understanding everyone because I belonged completely to no one" (12). In our contemporary reality, Jewish activists reckon with these demands to belong and simultaneously attempt to create a moral ground to tend to the question of 'how to live?'.

Under the context of the State of Israel, representing a Jewish nation-state, Jewish activists are forced to further reckon with how we engage in an entity that was decidedly built

and developed for us, while also disagreeing with how the State was built and its system of domination over Palestinians and non-Ashkenazi Jews. Those who engage in activism with Palestinians are considered 'left-wing', often a derogatory label in Israel-Palestine due to assumptions regarding how Jews *should* belong to the collectivity. Upon receiving the label of 'leftist', the space of impossibility throws itself open to activists who then navigate the feeling of non-belonging.

Who is left?: Navigating Shifting Ground

Over time, the political left in Israel-Palestine shrank and became increasingly fragmented. To understand the grounds on which my interlocutors and I stand, I must outline the different grounds we are navigating to find our place politically. Attending to the multitude of those who consider themselves 'left' and the current political rhetoric in Israel-Palestine enables us to understand how young activists from America living in Jerusalem situate ourselves on the left. In the State of Israel, the left appears nearly non-existent in the political sphere with very few representatives in the Knesset, and in turn, has become represented through grassroots civil society and ad-hoc groups engaging in political activism. This reality led to a shrinking political space that opposes the right-wing politics of the country that increasingly enacts and develops polices against Palestinians and other minority groups. Abroad, I argue that in the aftermath of October 7th, we are also seeing a failure of the international left in the relationship Israel-Palestine. However, it diverges from the local 'left'. In the aftermath of October 7th, some of the international left appeared to praise the Hamas attack as legitimate decolonization efforts. Simultaneously, it failed to end this brutal war by stopping weapons trades and advocating for a comprehensive peace process. Many activists living in Israel-Palestine feel ostracised and disappointed by those abroad, and struggle to engage with an international audience. Locally, many 'leftists' have been attacked internally as *bogdim* for advocating against the war due to its

horrific destruction. David Scott (1999) wrote in the wake of failed socialist revolutions about how the left has been unattuned to the political situation, thus unable to ask the right questions. The result is that the left has created a situation in which activists have become squeezed from multiple sides. The fragmentation of the left is an outcome of poor questions and a lack of attunement on the ground, which guides me to seek alternative questions that root us in a shared sense of belonging and collectivity. Through these prisms, I aim to draw attention to how Jewish activists from the diaspora, who often reside between Israel-Palestine and abroad, attempt to position themselves in relation to the fragmented so-called left felt across multiple localities and generations, as well as their concerns and tribulations.

Haggai Matar, a Jewish-Israeli activist, wrote in the co-run Israeli and Palestinian left-leaning magazine +972 that,

> "left-wing politics necessitates concern for the safety of all peoples, and a commitment to international law across the board — which includes challenging threats to the collective existence of Jews in this land. But we must also do this because these fears are a central driver of support not only for the current war, but also for the perpetuation of occupation and apartheid" (Matar 2024)

One key concern that I face as a Jewish activist, alongside some of my peers in Jerusalem, is a feeling of disregard for their safety and collective existence. Social media posts praising the resistance with pictures of Hamas fighters or side-by-side comparisons of prisoners and hostages that seek to compare their well-being feel dehumanizing for both people, as though it's a race to the bottom and a competition of evil. Adam Shatz (2023) argues that much of the international left has fallen into a trap of poor readings of Fanon, who wrote about violence as a diagnosis, "rather than a prescription", creating the grounds for celebrating what many thought was a radical anti-colonial act, inherently holding promise of liberation. Not only has October 7th failed to hold any promise of Palestinian liberation, but it has also undoubtedly resulted in mass

displacement and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Meanwhile, the attacks against Israeli civilians on October 7th haunt many activists, leading them to discredit this claim of liberation and fueling fear for their own safety while also acknowledging how this fear has played into furthering the violent rhetoric of Israeli society. Activists living locally are grappling between the justifications of the Hamas attacks and the legitimacy of decolonial violence, and where Hamas falls on that spectrum.

One of the gaps that is felt locally by those who celebrated the Hamas attack internationally was that their real concerns and safety were not being taken into consideration, as Matar (2024) argued. As Adam Shatz (Shatz 2023) furthers the concern, claiming that –

> Jews, both in Israel and the diaspora, have sought explanations for their suffering in the history of antisemitic violence is only to be expected. Intergenerational trauma is as real among Jews as it is among Palestinians, and Hamas's attack touched the rawest part of their psyche: their fear of annihilation. But memory can also be blinding…The inescapable truth is that Israel cannot extinguish Palestinian resistance by violence, any more than the Palestinians can win an Algerian-style liberation war: Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs are stuck with each other, unless Israel, the far stronger party, drives the Palestinians into exile for good. The only thing that can save the people of Israel and Palestine, and prevent another Nakba – a real possibility, while another Holocaust remains a traumatic hallucination – is a political solution that recognizes both as equal citizens, and allows them to live in peace and freedom" (Shatz 2023)

The lack of a political solution that includes an answer to the Jewish existence in the land of Israel-Palestine among the international left has created a fear of abandonment for Jews who fall within the political left. Without international support for Jewish-Israelis, especially by uplifting voices who oppose the oppressive Israeli policies against Palestinians and support Palestinian freedom, it feels like dehumanization runs rampant and falls into similar categories of exclusion of the right.

Within Israeli society, the left forges its own ground as it remains unrepresented within the Knesset, and many leftists vote for Arab-run parties to keep the issues of occupation and Palestinian rights on the table. Following the failure of Oslo 30 years ago, peace organizations have faltered, and young people have lost hope, never having even seen a peace process discussed in the public sphere. The ground has become ripe for criticism against the left in the wake of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination and Ehud Barak's famous comment that there is "no partner for peace", followed by the Second Intifada. Today, the Israeli left has nearly completely waned, and a reactionary right-wing has taken shape under the auspices of Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu for more than two decades. In the aftermath of October 7th, the political right has normalized genocidal rhetoric and far-right wing ideologies in favour of settler violence and militarism. For example, Yoav Gallant, former Minister of Defence within Bibi's party (Likud), advocated a "'complete siege' of Gaza's two million people, about half of whom are under 18. 'No electricity, no food, no water, no gas — it's all closed,' said Gallant. 'We are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly.' (seen in Goldberg 2023). This type of rhetoric has dominated Israeli society, who are deeply traumatized in the aftermath of October 7th and seeks revenge. Within Israel-Palestine, not only is the left unrepresented and declining, but those who continue to stay on the left are often part of ad-hoc grassroots activism and campaigns that are left out of policy discussions, creating a lack of political belonging within Israeli society.

Within Israel-Palestine, there are also fragmented voices on the 'left' itself. The first is the Zionist left, which traditionally holds a more or less socialist perspective. Still, it has primarily promoted a two-state solution in the aftermath of the 1967 war/Naksa (see Pappé 2015). The Zionist Left has been deemed as an Ashkenazi elite, that is, Zionist, liberal, and secular. However, in the 1990s, a small group of anti/post-Zionist left-wing Jews joined forces

with communist groups of the 1960s and Palestinians to create an alternative left that seeks equality and recognizes the Nakba and historic Palestine (Pappé 2015). Among Jewish-Israeli society, those who are more radical may refuse their army service and "are labelled as enemies, traitors, and self-hating Jews" (Weiss 2014, 142). This more 'radical' stance of left-wing activism tends to see Palestinian freedom and Jewish safety as intertwined. At the same time, the Zionist left is embodied in many NGOs and prefers a type of separation for safety. Furthermore, primarily, it is younger activists who fall into the category of the non-Zionist left (see Kroll-Zeldin 2024) and are pushing against a state predicated on an ethnic identity.

Within the left from abroad that is actively working in local anti-Occupation activism, Kroll-Zeldin (2024b) finds "[activists] have a wide spectrum of beliefs regarding the contemporary situation in…some identify as liberal Zionist intent on working toward peace, while others are ardently anti-Zionist who focus more on equality and justice. Some activists are committed to a two-state solution; others are dedicated to the vision of a binational state" (Kroll-Zeldin 2024, 27). While many do hold a range of views, Jewish activists from the diaspora are asked to navigate the shifting grounds between the local/international lefts that exist and often live between Israeli society and North America. I found among my interlocutors that many tended to hold views prioritizing equality and justice. Navigating activism as a Jew from abroad, we also face challenges of engaging both locally and internationally, being able to come and go, and experiencing antisemitism in ways that most local Israelis only read in the news. These experiences challenge how we engage as activists within our rights and within and among local activists. Kroll-Zeldin (Kroll-Zeldin 2024) importantly also notes a generational divide by which many young American Jews are more left than their parents' generation. However, among Jewish-Israelis, youth are more right-wing than their parents' generation (see Harsgor 2024).

Mapping the state of the left in relationship to Israel-Palestine can enable us to see the gaps and attune ourselves to the reality on the ground to ask timely questions that are attuned to the current moment and how to engage in the questions of political belonging. I follow these concerns that have emerged within the left-wing community and in relation to varying voices within the Jewish collective throughout my thesis, as activists negotiate their place and attempt to change political frameworks.

Mapping the state of the left in relationship to Israel-Palestine can enable us to see the gaps and attune ourselves to the reality on the ground to ask timely questions that are attuned to the current moment and how to engage in the questions of political belonging. The left is surely not monolithic, but it remains important in our moral frameworks, particularly in the aspirational questions of 'how to live?' I follow these concerns that have emerged within the left-wing community and in relation to varying voices within the Jewish collective throughout my thesis, as activists negotiate their place and attempt to change political frameworks.

Fieldwork In My Community

Much of my thesis is grounded in my own life, living in the Jewish-American leftist community, as I understand our relationships with the State of Israel and Jewish communities both locally in Israel-Palestine and abroad. I have lived in Jerusalem now for nearly two years and boundaries between my 'research' and my 'life', as I 'live here' and explore 'how to live?' are blurred as many of my interlocuters are also friends, not simply my hour or so long recordings of our conversations, who also grapple with their relationships and raise moral questions of living here and living ethically as a Jew living by choice in Israel-Palestine. In some cases, my conversations with interlocutors have expanded over multiple years of our relationship and activism. The boundaries between myself as a researcher and those I 'researched' are deeply

blurred. Furthermore, I am part of this thesis as I experience my own questions of belonging. I do not shy away from writing my life and relationships into the thesis. Furthermore, at times I spoke to friends and interlocutors casually about my thesis and asked questions like, 'Is this also how you see this question?'. I also heard advice, such as, "this (insert phenomena/specific protest) *needs* to be part of your thesis!" I took these questions and advice seriously, but also forged my own questions and saw different parts than my fellow interlocutors and friends suggested.

While I 'study' activists, I am also an activist. Social justice work has always felt like a path to engage in *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). My field sites moved based on where the activism was, whether at a protest, solidarity weekend, or simply sitting at a café complaining about the rise of fascism. After moving to Jerusalem, the highly controversial judicial reforms were announced (see The Israel Democracy Institute 2024) leading to nearly one quarter of Israelis demonstrating against the judicial overhaul at some point with hopes of undermining Bibi Netanyahu and his far-right agenda that aims to weaken Israel's so-called democracy (Hermann and Anabi 2023), I took part in these protests and moved my research as activism demanded. These protests encapsulated a large portion of Jewish-Israeli society. Still, the Jewish left within it brought to light different fears and the perspective that the corrupt system that Bibi was proposing already exists in the Occupied West Bank, where Palestinians live under brutal occupation. The fear that the left presented was premised on the reality that the fear most Jewish Israelis held was valid *and* already existed in the Occupied West Bank.

Then, of course, there was the brutal attack of October 7th that has felt like it has spun our reality on its head. I woke to rocket alarms that morning, spent time back and forth from bomb shelters, and frantically checked in on friends to make sure everyone was safe. I learned that my favourite barista at my local coffee shop was taken hostage in Gaza; his whereabouts to this day are still unknown. I know of activists who were murdered on October 7th, people I looked up to like Vivian Silver and Hayim Katzman, who had been proud peaceniks. The attack shook many of us, yet in hindsight, I cannot say I was particularly surprised. The situation was untenable for many years, and violence was rising before the attacks of October 7th.

Kibbutz Nir Oz resident and artist Chaim Peri holding a sign that reads 'The Occupation is Killing Us,' in a scene from Ram Loevy's 2003 documentary 'Seger' ('Close, Closed, Closure'). Peri was kidnaped on October 7 and died in Gaza. Credit: Screenshot from "Seger"

(Figure 1: from Peace Now on X (formerly Twitter) Chaim Peri a resident of Nir Oz, who was found murdered after Oct. 7th, with a sign at a protest reading “The Occupation Kills Us”)

These images haunt us activists as we mourn those who were lost, and everyone who continues to be murdered in the brutal war of revenge. The writing was on the wall, but it does not make the reality any easier to stomach. In the aftermath of the October 7th massacre, I had to take a step back from my thesis and writing. It felt too raw. The research felt unclear as attitudes were shifting, and interlocutors and I were navigating this new reality, which held more fear and concern for ourselves and reminded me of my dedication and commitment to non-violent activism and peacebuilding. Furthermore, many of my regular research sites, like protests in Sheikh Jarrah, stopped, and community partners in the West Bank were forced into a lockdown by the Israeli army, making it nearly impossible to access the communities.

Throughout my official fieldwork during the fall and winter of 2022/23, I formally interviewed seven activists to ask them how they arrived at their political views and how they felt they could engage politically in Israel-Palestine. Together, we explored questions of belonging and community. Interviews were held at local coffee shops. These interviews were recorded and transcribed, and lasted more than an hour. I also attended multiple Shabbos meals, including at a minyan/potluck named the anti-Zionist minyan, where I had casual conversations and took field notes after leaving to respect Shabbat. I spent two official weekends in Masafer Yatta doing fieldwork and more casual overnight visits. I harvested olives with human rights organizations in the Occupied West Bank. I attended multiple protests in Sheikh Jarrah and others, like the one I described at the beginning of the introduction. It is not only my field sites that have changed, but I too. Throughout the past two-plus years, I have re-assessed my understanding and relationship to Israel-Palestine. I switched jobs and now I work full-time with a youth peacebuilding organization. I have become more fearful considering the current reality that is plagued with more violence, and my friends have somewhat shifted as many Jews from the diaspora chose to return to the diaspora, losing hope. In many ways, this thesis reflects me and my journey as I have navigated this fraught land and my own queries, concerns, joys and heartbreaks.

Outline of Chapters

This thesis follows my journey alongside fellow activists who came of age in the diaspora and question their sense of belonging within the Jewish world and the world abroad, living between the particular Jewish experience and contemporary moral issues of Israel-Palestine. I seek to ask a different set of questions regarding what it means to be Jewish in this moment and navigate the fraught reality and demands of the world. I seek to attune us to this reality and ask new questions through which a new reality can emerge and tend to the moment.

Chapter One tunes us into the history of the Jewish left as the State of Israel has emerged, and activists' relationship to this history through a historical ontological perspective. I dive more deeply into this polarising political moment and argue that there has always been a non-Zionist left, and explore how relationships between the left and Israel-Palestine have been produced. Throughout the chapter, I seek to understand how the Jewish left has historically evolved in relationship to broader forces in the Jewish world and the amalgamation of Jewish people into the newly founded State of Israel. I explore questions around how left-wing Jews have both forged spaces and how Jewish space has evolved to push the Jewish left into the margins after the founding of the State of Israel. In Chapter Two, I explore questions of national belonging and how left-wing activists from abroad see themselves and navigate the moral demands between national and communal belonging. I trace different trends that lead me to argue that citizenship is represented by ambivalence among those who take citizenship. Lastly, Chapter 3 navigates the moral trials and tribulations of partnerships with Palestinians and how activists negotiate their own communal identities in relationship to Palestinians. I explore questions of communal belonging both within the activist community and between activists and Palestinian partners. Furthermore, I return to our post-October 7th reality, which has shifted the reality and changed how activists engage in partnerships.

This thesis traces our experiences as activists, at times it is deeply personal and challenging, other moments I seek to attune to more pragmatic moments that shape our experiences. Each of my interlocutors has challenged me and aims to challenge the systems around us that produce inequality. I write as both an anthropologist and an activist who deeply cares about a just and shared future on this land for myself and my loved ones. I cannot separate myself from the work as it is deeply part of my daily experience living in Israel-Palestine.

Chapter 1: Living 'Here' or 'There'?

In May 2021, a war between Israel and Gaza broke out, and violent riots erupted across mixed cities within the '48 borders of Israel-Palestine. I was living in Lod/Lydd, a mixed Jewish/Palestinian city. I sat glued to my phone; it felt like every single friend of mine on social media was posting a story about the violence between Hamas and the State of Israel. My feed was filled with provocative images with captions, such as "Israel Under Attack" from organizations like Stand With Us or something along the lines of "Apartheid Israel is Committing War Crimes". These stark headlines felt bleak and void of any real action or meaning, as both Jewish and Palestinian friends of mine were stuck in bomb shelters and afraid to leave their homes. From my feed, it appeared that there were only two ways to look at the conflict: either Jews were the victims of horrible acts of violence, or they were the perpetrators of horrific violence. Before my first experience in Israel-Palestine and my first war, I did not have the experience or relationships with people in Israel-Palestine to grasp what was happening or understand the lived experiences on the ground. Within Israel-Palestine, the frequent reminder of violence brings tensions, frustrations, and fear. However, within the diaspora, young Jews attempt to decipher between the different messages they receive within an ever-polarised context. In response, today, many young Jews are forced to evaluate their values and their relationship with the State of Israel in light of media coverage, which creates a bleak outlook and binary positions.

Headlines in leading publications speak to this tension that diaspora, primarily American Jews, experience. For example, a headline in The New York Times read, "Gaza Conflict Stokes 'Identity Crisis' for Young American Jews" (Dias and Graham 2021) or The Washington Post, "How American Jews' Relationship with Israel went from 'Exodus' to Anguish" (Eisner 2023),

referring to a popular book entitled *Exodus* which was a staple in many Jewish households about the founding of the State of Israel. These headlines speak to the predicament among diaspora Jewish youth who are reassessing their relationship to the State of Israel and their Jewish communal upbringings. This schism becomes increasingly apparent as young progressive diaspora Jews engage more critically in the policies of the State of Israel. As a friend lamented in an article about J-Street, a liberal progressive lobbying organisation, "[his] 'entire experience with J Street U was colored way too heavily by an obsessive lambasting of the 'Establishment'… [focusing on] telling self-pitying stories of how 'x' American institution told me 'y' and I feel wronged and lied to'" (Chanes, seen in, Halpern 2018). Chanes, like other friends and interlocutors, expressed that we have entered a moment where young Jews do not know what to believe or have the tools to grapple with the political reality of Israel-Palestine. This schism has become exacerbated as Jewish-Israelis elected their most radical right-wing government in their history, led by settler leaders. At the same time, progressive Americans grappled with systemic racism in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter movement and other political awakenings to systemic injustices. In this chapter, I aim to unravel this dichotomy through a historical analysis that sheds light on how we arrived at our current political moment, bridging the gap between the Jewish institutions we were raised in and the political left that the post-colonial turn has largely shaped. How do Jewish-Americans navigate the paradox of being critical of the State of Israel, often self-identifying as anti/non-Zionist, yet still find themselves living in Israel-Palestine? Furthermore, what knowledge, experiences, and histories challenged the political Zionist thought among me and my participants that encouraged us to navigate the apparent dichotomy?

Throughout this chapter, I argue that, from a historical perspective, we have reached a significant moment within the Jewish collectivity, marked by generational differences and

controversy. I outline the schisms within and between the Jewish collective from a historical perspective, from the emergence of Zionism and the Jewish relationship to the State of Israel, alongside the political left's relationship to Zionism before and after the Establishment of the State of Israel. The Jewish collective has never held consistent views on the State of Israel, and Jewish Americans have long been divided. As of 2020, more than 70% of American Jews vote democratic and align with more progressive politics (Pew Research Centre 2021), yet often do not align with Democrats who are more critical of the State of Israel and its actions towards Palestinians like the 'squad' (e.g. Ilahn Omer, AOC, Cori Bush, and others). What happens when Jewish Americans feel in conflict with their progressive values and their relationships to the State of Israel? I use this chapter to understand how we arrived at this moment where Jewish youth feel "lied to" by their institutions and where being non or anti-Zionism has become outside of the realm of possibility when engaging in contemporary Jewish life. Secondly, I look at how young American Jews living in Israel-Palestine are reclaiming a leftist position that was forged in previous generations of Jews.

We've been Lied To – But Are we allowed to criticize Israel?

The State of Israel and its history are key pillars of Jewish day / Sunday school curricula. At my Reform Hebrew School in rural Vermont, we would celebrate Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) and learn about the history of the State of Israel. Aliyah (immigration to Israel-Palestine) is highly encouraged, and Nefesh B'Nefesh, the agency used to assist Olim (immigrants), boasts that more than 75,000 North American Jews have made aliyah since 2002 (Nefesh B'Nefesh, n.d.). While surely not every North American Jew makes or aspires to make aliyah, Israel programs like Birthright, Masa Israel Journey, gap year programs and summer camps further seek to strengthen and build the Jewish diaspora's relationship with the State of

Israel through immersive programs that give Jewish youth insight into Israeli life and culture. Many Jewish youth seeking leadership positions within Jewish communities must go to Israel-Palestine for an extended time to study. For example, nearly every rabbinical school within each stream of Judaism requires at least some mandatory time spent living in Israel-Palestine for study and learning. These programs have become a staple part of the upbringing of young North American Jewish individuals and are necessary to gain positions within both conservative and liberal Jewish institutions. Young Jews who join programs and come from the diaspora can witness and learn firsthand what life is like in Israel-Palestine.

However, seeing headlines like "US Tax Dollars Fund Israeli Apartheid" (Underwood 2021) and Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns led me, and some of my interlocutors, to try to understand the situation in Israel-Palestine from multiple perspectives to understand if these claims held merit. Thus, among my interlocutors and me, some of the pro-Israel programs felt inauthentic. We sought to engage in challenging conversations that call into question the normative embrace of Israel they experienced in their Jewish upbringing. This came to the fore when violence erupted in May 2021, following the imminent expulsions of Palestinians in the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, the raid of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, tensions in mixed cities, and rocket fire from Hamas. During the war of 2021, nearly 100 American Rabbinical students from non-Orthodox Jewish streams signed a letter condemning Israel's actions in Gaza and denouncing the Occupation and apartheid, marking a shift in Israel engagement among young Jews seeking leadership positions within Jewish institutions. The lack of nuance and criticism of Israel in normative diasporic Jewish institutions (see Zakai 2014) has led to internal schisms and a shift generationally between younger and older generations (see Kroll-Zeldin 2024).

This letter did not come without backlash; signatories were coerced into relinquishing their signatures, and at least two people lost their jobs, one at a Hillel in the US and another at their congregation (Stein 2023). The letter condemned the State of Israel's actions and racist policies towards Palestinians. Despite accusations of being 'self-hating Jews' and being 'traitors', these are not apathetic or self-hating Jews. These Jews care deeply about Jewish life and are emerging leaders who intend to take positions in local clergy and Jewish community. Marking the generational divides, Kroll-Zeldin (2024) argues that American-Jewish activists in Israel-Palestine see their "active participation in this social justice movement is a Jewish ethic" (6). However, many institutions made it clear to them or let slip that their denunciation of the State of Israel's policies and use of violence against Palestinians was a step too far. For example, Rabbi Buchdahl, a leading rabbi at Central Synagogue, one of New York City's largest shuls and the largest Reform Jewish Community in the United States, gave a sermon at Kol Nidre services during Yom Kippur, the day of mourning and reflection, to express her disappointment. During her sermon, she let slip to the thousands of congregants and those watching online that she would "not want to hire anyone who signed that letter" (seen in Weiss 2021). The irony in this comment emerges as Rabbi Buchdahl, the first East Asian American to be ordained as a rabbi, is often revered as a Jewish leader who embraces diversity and openly speaks out against systemic racism within the USA. If she can openly discuss systemic injustice in America, it begs the question: why does this analysis fail to be extended to Israel? Between the younger generation of Jews and current Jewish leadership, there are increasing tensions with not only their beliefs regarding the State of Israel, but also their upbringing in Jewish communities that have a normative narrative towards the State of Israel, as we saw in Chanes' response to the 'establishment'. While many non-Orthodox American institutions are condemning systemic

racism and fear the rise of antisemitism, they are engaging in politics that have been pejoratively labelled Progressive Except for Palestine (PEP) (see Hill 2021).

The institutions many of us Jews have grown up in have reinforced an idea of Israel as a Jewish homeland that was an imperative after the atrocity of the Shoah (the Holocaust). The establishment of the State of Israel has been a miracle born out of a deep longing to return to the *Eretz Yisrael* represented in the Torah and Jewish prayers, and in the wake of systemic violence against Jews. However, this cannot be disentangled from the violence of the state-building project that political Zionism is that enforces the idea that an ethnically Jewish state is a necessity for Jewish safety. Today, many Jewish institutions hold an entangled logic that Zionism and Jewishness are intrinsically a part of each other and approach the State of Israel through a normative liberal approach and as the 'only democracy in the Middle East'. On the other hand, within academia and the left, the State of Israel has increasingly come to represent settler colonialism through its state practices and undemocratic policies towards Palestinians, non-Jewish refugees, and others. In 2023, the American Anthropological Association passed the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement with more than 70% of voters in favour of boycotting Israel, marking a notable turn in the shifting perspectives towards Israel (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel 2023). Often, interlocutors and I first encounter criticism of Israel in university settings and through engagement with activism among oppressed communities and social justice movements in the diaspora, outside of Jewish communal spaces.

Situating Zionism – Its Emergence and Discontents

Through a historical ontological approach (Hacking 2002), I seek to understand how the schisms within the Jewish community emerged to lead to the current moment, whereby young Jews feel a moral imperative to engage in nuanced and critical conversations about Israel while simultaneously being pushed out of Jewish spaces. By tracing Jewish diasporic institutions' relationships to Zionism and the State of Israel, I hope we can begin to locate how mainstream Jewish institutions have become increasingly normative in their embrace of political-Zionism and the subsequent State of Israel, even within progressive Jewish circles. On the international left, the dominant rhetoric of Israel has also shifted. It has led to a staunch rejection of Israel, whether that be a rejection at large or a rejection of its current formation.

Through a historical ontological approach (Hacking 2002), we can understand the streams of thought that have shaped the formations of our subject positions as left-wing Jews within the current moment. Today, we live in what appears to be an increasingly binary world, where our Jewish institutions offer a definitive answer that Zionism is an intrinsic part of Jewishness. At the same time, those who oppose Zionism fear being labelled as antisemitic. Notably, this political moment emerged within a historically situated context that Ian Hacking (2002). Hacking's (2002) historical ontological approach allows us to trace our histories to understand how they emerge and how facts that appear empirical are "historically situated, and their present versions are highly colored by their predecessors. They seem to be inescapable" (Hacking 2002, 21). Through Hacking (2002), we can understand the explicit formations of history and how the current moment arose and creates the possibilities of our choices (23). Through this chapter, I trace the shifts and turns of thought towards Zionism and the State of Israel that shape our current understanding, and perhaps misunderstandings, of the Jewish and political left's relationship to Israel-Palestine.

At its onset, Zionism and the idea of a Jewish nation-state were highly debated. Zionism was a modern political idea, shaped by Enlightenment thinking and the emergence of nation-states and other revolutions, while simultaneously enacting an ancient 'return' to Zion, thereby bridging the modern and historical connections to Israel-Palestine (see Raz-Krakotzkin 2013). Theodor Herzl, the leading thinker of political Zionism, "always emphasized the like-other-nations motif. And indeed, considering the prominence of the principle of nationalism in late nineteenth-century Europe, the attempt of political Zionism to fit the Jews into the general picture was natural and logical at the time" (Ben-Israel 2003, 94). Before the State of Israel was established and the Nazis murdered six million Jews and created mass displacement, Zionism was hotly debated within European and American Jewish circles (see below). The answer to the question of how to address the realities of violence against Jews post-emancipation was unclear within the Jewish community and ranged from the communist Bund movement in Eastern Europe, immigration, socialism, assimilation, Zionism, and other potential solutions. More than seventy-five years later, non and anti-Zionist positions lie outside the boundaries of Jewish mainstream institutions as the question of the State of Israel is no longer a utopian concept but a reality that Jews, Palestinians, and others are forced to grapple with.

Shifting Positions: The Reform Movement and Zionism

Since its founding, the Reform movement has grappled with its own shifting stance on Zionism and its relationship to Israel. However, today, the Reform movement highlights the often unquestioned and unquestionable support of Zionism within Jewish institutions, even within the most liberal ones. By highlighting the Reform movement's shifting stance, I hope to shed light on how Zionism has become a normative stance within the Jewish community and the shifting positions that Jews and non-Jews have had since the mid-19th Century.

In 1885, the Pittsburgh Conference brought together the German stream of Reform Judaism and the American stream of Reform Judaism to agree on basic principles of the Reform movement (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.). The conference occurred while Zionism was only beginning to be spoken about as a potential solution to antisemitism, two years before the Basel Conference that established the World Zionist Organization in 1887. At the time, tensions were rising between traditionalist and reformist sects of Judaism that opposed orthodoxy, as reflected in The Pittsburgh Conference (see Sarna 1987; Zola 1997). In 1885, the Pittsburgh Platform established Article 5, colloquially known as the anti-nationhood statement (Sarna 1987, 358):

> We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state (1885 Pittsburgh Conference 2023)

The Pittsburgh Platform, established in 1885, directly rejected Zionism and any claim to a nation-state. The Reform movement even banned Zionists from leadership positions (Taylor 2020, 112). Importantly, the statement dissented from mainstream Jewish thought that was attached to the concept of *Am Yisrael* (Nation of Israel), which indicates the ethnic component to Jewish identity, in favour of assimilation into other nations of the time. Moreover, Reform Judaism was rejected by other non-Orthodox movements on the grounds of its rejection of halakha (Jewish laws stated in the Talmud). Sarna (1987) notes that these "criticisms were sounded by like-minded traditionalist rabbis…[who] were yet opposed to the wholesale and reckless discarding of everything that was Jewish simply because it was inconvenient, oriental, or was not in conformity with Episcopalian customs" (360). Thus, the questions between assimilation, reform, and traditionalism came to the fore as a key concern that non-Orthodox

Jews grappled with at the end of the 19th Century and how that would impact their safety and communal well-being. Assimilation was simply a means to gain a sense of belonging as new immigrants in the US and prove their loyalty. Zionism was thus part in parcel of a larger question of the future of Jewishness and Jewish communities.

Today, there appears to be no question of the Reform movement's stance on Zionism. A century later, the Reform Movement reconvened in Pittsburgh to create a Statement of Principles adopted in 1999. The integral parts of the statement in relation to Zionism are noted as follows:

> We are committed to (*Medinat Yisrael)*, the State of Israel, and rejoice in its accomplishments. We affirm the unique qualities of living in (*Eretz Yisrael*), the land of Israel, and encourage (*aliyah*), immigration to Israel.
>
> We are committed to promoting and strengthening Progressive Judaism in Israel, which will enrich the spiritual life of the Jewish state and its people.
>
> We affirm that both Israeli and Diaspora Jewry should remain vibrant and interdependent communities. As we urge Jews who reside outside Israel to learn Hebrew as a living language and to make periodic visits to Israel in order to study and to deepen their relationship to the Land and its people, so do we affirm that Israeli Jews have much to learn from the religious life of Diaspora Jewish communities. (Central Conference of American Rabbis 1999)

This statement begs the question: What has happened over the last 100 years to so clearly shift the stance of Reform Judaism, particularly in America?

The statement is unambiguous; it supports settling diaspora Jews in Israel, encourages travel, and identifies Israel as a particularly special place to live. Questioning Zionism and opposing a Jewish state has seemingly vanished from the realm of possibility within mainstream Jewish movements. Unlike in the early 19th Century, when being non or anti-Zionist was simply part of a larger debate, today, those who are too critical of the State of Israel can be expelled from employment positions in the Jewish community, as we saw earlier among the rabbinical students who signed the letter criticizing the war of 2021. The Reform movement has become

steadfast in its embrace of Zionism and encouragement of the project of the State of Israel. Therefore, we must ask, following Hacking (Hacking 2002), how we came to this place where the Jewish community, broadly speaking, has embraced Zionism, and what were the historical contexts that created these conditions?

I would be amiss not to mention the two most glaring factors, the first being the Shoah, and the second, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the war of 1967. During the Shoah, Nazis murdered six million Jews and millions of others, which left global Jewry traumatized and displaced, and created a sense of urgency to address antisemitism and Jewish safety. Before the Shoah, the Zionist movement was already established and attempting to answer the question of Jewish safety by fighting in the British Mandate of Palestine and supporting aliyah. The 1948 establishment of the state allowed many Ashkenazi Jews a fresh start and opportunity; however, the future appeared uncertain until the 1967 war, when Israel captured Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. The Jewish state is no longer in question but a reality, however flawed. Despite this reality, the question of how Jewish thought shifted and how a normative approach to Zionism was cultivated still eludes us. The facts on the ground do not provide us with an adequate understanding of how Zionism, which was once a movement of many possible Jewish horizons, became a normative fact of Jewish life, with many even going so far as to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism using the terminology interchangeably. How is it that Zionism, which was once debated and even publicly rejected in some Jewish circles, has come to represent the Jewish community at large?

To better answer this question, I wish to revisit the questions of assimilation, reform, and traditionalism, which emerged as key concerns that American (and European) Jews were grappling with at the end of the 19th Century. Post-emancipation, the future of Jewry came into

question. Emancipation was the process by which states, particularly in Europe, began to offer equal rights and citizenship to Jews (Sorkin 2019). Emancipation of the Jewish community was far from a linear path of progress, and Jewish community members held divergent opinions. Sorkin (2019) notes that one key concern was the challenge of assimilation and the loss of communal autonomy among some Jews (3); on the other hand, some Jews mobilized politically to gain equal rights and did not fear assimilation (11). Like all major turning points in Jewish history, there was no unified conclusion of the effect of the emancipation; however, it represented a significant turning point whereby it was, theoretically, *possible* to assimilate. During the 19th Century, the Reform movement embraced this possibility by claiming Jewishness as a religion that could be part of other nationalisms. For the Reform movement in the late 19th Century, Zionism would undermine their efforts in emancipation because they favoured assimilation and becoming part of other nations (Taylor 2020). Jewish responses to their persecution were diverse: "Zionists saw statehood as the solution to the problem of Jewish life as a persecuted minority; others believed that the solution was migration to America, or transnational socialism, or revolutionary communism, or religious orthodoxy, or even folding Jewish life into French or German (or other) nationalisms" (Mor 2020). While the Reform Movement addressed the question of safety by embracing assimilation at the time, other Jewish groups held differing views on how they would ensure their safety and well-being in a new era. In the following section, I wish to open this conversation beyond the Reform movement and explore the Jewish left and their opposition to Zionism in the early 1900s.

The Jewish Left and Opposing Zionism

In the late 19th Century in Eastern Europe, the Bund movement thrived in its effort to unite Jews under a left-wing socialist movement. An integral part of the Bund philosophy was the Yiddish concept of *doikeyt*, or hereness (see Figure 1). The Bund movement was diasporic in its mindset and believed that wherever Jews lived, they needed to build viable communities (see Slucki 2010). The Bund offered a secular, Yiddish and culturally Jewish space that helped form and build the Jewish left in Eastern Europe. These concepts were exported to North America to form the left in a new context, which was demonstrated through Jewish labour movements and unions that thrived in the early half of the 20th Century. Despite the Bund's opposition to Zionism at the time, they still constituted and supported a quasi-nation rooted in Jewish class struggle and Yiddishkeit (see Kafrissen 2019).

Figure 1 - This image is a Jewish Labour Bund campaign poster in Kyiv in 1918. It argues for the concept of Doikeit.

During the massive Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe to the United States at the turn of the 20th Century, Jews settled in metropolitan areas such as Philadelphia and New York City. With them, many Jewish immigrants brought a Bundist outlook to their politics, and many were involved in developing and creating labour unions. Many immigrants fled Eastern Europe and carried their Bundist ideologies of democracy and socialism with them (Slucki 2009). For example, Bernard Weinstein organized on the East Side of New York City and began educating others in Yiddish on their workers' rights (Wolfthal 2018, 4). More than simply being a political outlook, socialism enabled Jewish immigrants to maintain their cultural Jewishness, without the need to turn to a synagogue for Jewish community (Wolfthal 2018, 7). Balthaser (2020) argues that –

> The Communist Party and other smaller socialist and Trotskyist organizations have been underexamined as major sites of Jewish identity formation. It is, for instance, seldom appreciated that the Communist Party witnessed more Jews move through its ranks in the 1930s than the liberal American Jewish Committee (AJC) or more explicitly anti-Zionist Reform Movement's American Council for Judaism (ACJ), let alone organizations such as the ADL (451)

Within a particular subset of Jewish immigrants to the USA, the political left became a formative place for their politics and identity to emerge. Within this discourse being developed, Jewish immigrants placed their economic and political struggles alongside those of other oppressed groups they encountered in metropolitan centers (Balthaser 2020, 451). Jewish identity was being formed under and within the realities of American antisemitism, Jim Crow, and other racialized experiences of state violence that enabled a political left that attempted to respond to this reality. It was at this time that Jews were seldom considered "white", and many were working class. Karen Brodkin (1998) writes of her parents' experience in the 1920s and 30s, a time when "Jews were not assigned to the white side of the American racial binary" (2).

This experience enabled a politics of solidarity among the left's diverse supporters. Among the American Jewish left that was emerging in the early 20th Century, Zionism was seldom supported. For many Jews on the left, Zionism was seen as against the solidarity movements that Jews were taking part in and incompatible with their political efforts that organized among racially diverse populations (Balthaser 2020, 459-60).

The Jewish Left in the mid 20th Century

"*An abyss of blood separates Moscow from Berlin. The distance between them is not only one of geography and ideology; it is the distance between life and death*"

-Elie Wiesel 2011, 18

The Shoah was a turning point in modern Jewish history. While we often analyze it regarding its impact on Jewish communities in Europe, it also greatly impacted Jewish communities outside of Europe. Millions of Jews were systemically murdered, children were orphaned, and survivors around the world were traumatized. Many Jews who had emigrated from Eastern Europe before the Shoah had already fled persecution and pogroms. The Red Scare in the USA resurfaced old fears among the Jews on the left. The future of Jewish life was in question. Following tragic times, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 appeared as a haven for many Jewish refugees who had survived the Shoah and later from neighbouring Middle Eastern countries and the Soviet Union.

Suddenly, the left had to grapple with a new reality, the reality of the State of Israel and the growing Jewish population within it. The reality of the Jewish diaspora forever shifted, and suddenly, more Jews were moving to the state, many from Europe, unable to go elsewhere. Before the Shoah, the Jewish Bund was active in Poland, hosting youth movements, trade

unions, women's organizations and more. By 1947, 90% of the Jewish population in Poland had been murdered, and the Bund was forced to establish itself internationally, headquartered in New York City (Slucki 2010, 351). Post-Shoah, the position of the Bund shifted from simply opposing a future Jewish state to grappling with how to engage with the new Jewish state and the growing Jewish population in Israel-Palestine. Bundists were forced to contend with this new reality, and some shifted their stance to include the Jewish population in the newly founded State of Israel as being part of *doikeit*, thus Bundists rejected the privileging of the Jewish community in the newly founded State of Israel over Jews elsewhere but did not reject the Jewish community in Israel-Palestine in its entirety (Slucki 2010, 355-6). Essentially, according to the Bund, each Jewish community was a centre and place for thriving Jewish life, wherever they were in the world (Slucki 2009). Therefore, Israel-Palestine no longer simply constituted as 'there' but was also 'here'.

During and after the Shoah, Jews who were still attached to Soviet communism as a viable option were quickly disillusioned. Widespread antisemitism spread, and hostilities grew. In the late 1930s, Stalin's purge held deeply antisemitic undertones and included a disproportionate number of Jews (Korey 1972, 116). Following mere undertones of antisemitism, new policies were implemented, applying quotas to Jews in political positions, educational institutions, and general employment, and by 1949, all Jewish institutions were eradicated (Korey 1972, 117-8). Stalinist communism was not a tenable solution, and the Jews were considered cosmopolitan capitalists. While there may have been no gas chambers, reports of the murder of Jews and labour camps are well known, and survivors were forced to go underground or flee. Public Jewish practices were severely limited.

The years after the war and the height of Stalinism created a sense of little hope. Those who had adamantly organized on the left saw communism fail; those who did not want a Jewish state could no longer resist it. As Balthaser (2020) comments -

> While there were Jews on the left, notably members of the Socialist Workers Party, who continued to vocally oppose Zionism, it is not much of a comfort for those afflicted by decades of displacement and state violence to know that Jews whose internationalism should have led them to ally with an anticolonial cause were led astray by a Soviet Zion, if not an Israeli one (464)

The Jewish left, which actively fought against colonialism and other forms of racism, saw its movements fail. Those who initially opposed the State of Israel could no longer reject it entirely because the world was turning towards Israel as a stronghold of Jewish life and family members and friends had moved to the land, whether by choice or not.

Following the establishment of the State of Israel, ministries were established to engage the diaspora and facilitate aliyah. The Jewish National Fund (KKL) facilitated land purchases across the state, often from absentee landowners. Socialist kibbutzim were founded alongside development towns where non-Ashkenazim were dumped in the periphery, often without basic necessities. Jews began to be drafted into the army and aimed to secure the newly established Jewish state. Modern Hebrew became the new mother tongue of the next generation, and absorption centres facilitated immigrants' linguistic and cultural immersion. Today, the Jewish Agency sends Israelis to Hillels and summer camps to promote the Israel-Diaspora relationship and countless programs exist to bring diaspora Jews to Israel-Palestine. Jewish life had turned to Israel. Notably, many local leftist and communist organizations were founded in the new state, including the Bund and other socialist and radical organizations. These organizations attempted to keep the left alive, but the trajectory of the state led the left astray, and Mizrachim, Ethiopians, Palestinians, and others were left out of the fold. The result is that today the left seems smaller

than ever, and the State of Israel has become a reality for Jews around the world to grapple with, regardless of their political affiliation.

Stomaching the Realities

Despite the small number of those who still consider themselves non/anti-Zionist leftists in the failure of post-communism and the war of 1967, a few of us work to educate and learn about how to engage in the push for equality within Israel-Palestine and abroad. The process often involves learning from former movements, such as the Bund and other small activist groups. My friend Aron is one of the people who worked with those who sought spaces that held more nuance and criticism, attempting to bring a viable Jewish left.

When speaking to Aron, I must crank my head to meet his eyes. He speaks intensely, raising concerns about the future of Jewish life and lamenting his frustrations and feelings of rejection in the Jewish spaces where he grew up. When he is not educating fellow Jews on the occupation, he is an avid baseball watcher and deeply involved in the Conservative Jewish movement. I joined him on an educational tour of East Jerusalem, where he introduced us to various activists and communities to discuss the city's situation between East and West. We stopped and browsed at the Educational Bookshop, and someone picked up a copy of *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* by Ilan Pappé. Ilan Pappé is an anti-Zionist Israeli academic who is well known for his writings against Zionism and the State of Israel. As Aron guided people through the bookstore, he caught sight of this participant out of the corner of his eye. Briskly, he walked over to them and said, “that book fucked me up, I was not ready for it, read this one first”. Very quickly, Aron listed the order of the books that the participant should read to prepare him for the criticisms of the State of Israel and Zionism that he would encounter throughout his literary journey. Aron knew that the process of critical engagement with Zionism would disrupt all that these participants were taught in Jewish schools. While he was explaining the rationale, he

shared how he read the *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* in a university course in the United States taught by a professor who was a former B'Tselem researcher, an Israeli Human Rights Organization. The professor was Jewish and Israeli, which should have been familiar to him; however, he still felt that he lacked the tools to process the information in the book, leading to his disillusionment. He was raised in Jewish institutions that did not expose him to the realities of the occupation or the Palestinian narrative. At that point in university, he had not deeply engaged in the realities of the occupation or seen/experienced first-hand state violence. Soon enough, he would.

Since the Second Intifada, the Occupation of the West Bank has only become further entrenched, settlements across the green line have grown exponentially, settler violence has gotten significantly worse, and Jews and Palestinians have only become further divided between walls and checkpoints. Jewish-Israeli racism has become more prominent and accepted. For example, in the summer of 2023, far-right Knesset member from the settlement of Kiryat Arba, Itamar Ben-Gvir gave an interview and shared the following words, “my right, my wife's right, my children's' rights to freely move around the streets of Judea and Samaria [the biblical name for the West Bank] is more important than the freedom of movement of Arabs…My right to life comes before freedom of movement...sorry Mohammad” (seen in Shamir 2023). Ben-Gvir shared the quiet part out loud, that racism is an essential part of upholding the occupation, which requires the dehumanization of Palestinians. Most American Jewish institutions would not promote this rhetoric, yet they also would not reject it. For example, most maps given to Hebrew schools are produced by the JNF and do not have a Green Line. Therefore, it was no surprise that Aron was never introduced to the concept of occupation or Palestinian experiences. This rhetoric facilitates the harsh learning curve of progressive Jews who begin to encounter the realities of

Israel-Palestine. How can one who is active in social justice in the diaspora, or holds progressive politics, support the State of Israel and Knesset members who express such racism? Suddenly, the liberal illusion of the State of Israel, as "the only democracy in the Middle East," is dispelled when one group becomes privileged over another. That privilege becomes encoded into law, like the controversial nation-state law that claims that Israel is a Jewish State and disregards minority rights.

Today, we are seeing more young Jews engaging in movements like If Not Now, Independent Jewish Voices, and Jewish Voices for Peace. For example, in 2024, Jewish Voices for Peace boasted more than 750,000 members and supporters (Jewish Voices for Peace 2024). These movements are challenging the mainstream Jewish institutions and forcing a conversation around the occupation. Today, there are many programs and networks, like those that Aron organizes, where Jews who have been engaged in Jewish institutions can come to Israel-Palestine and engage in learning about the occupation and violence against Palestinians, non-Jewish refugees, Mizrachim, Ethiopians, and others within the land. While there are too few funded opportunities, some programs offer alternative lenses (usually at cost to participants) to witness injustices in Israel-Palestine and engage in solidarity work. Most of my interlocutors participated in, or staffed, these programs to facilitate an alternative 'left-wing' education in Israel-Palestine. This type of education is precisely what Aron did as he brought groups of yeshiva students to meet with Palestinians and facilitate educational projects to share knowledge about the occupation. Moreover, educational programs for those already living in Israel-Palestine and attending yeshiva, gap year programs and rabbinical schools have been created, often by their alumni, to shed light on the injustices happening.

Grappling Academics

It comes as little surprise that the first encounter Aron had with the Occupation and critical engagement in Israel-Palestine politics occurred at university. University academics have long been grappling with the questions of Israel-Palestine. On the one hand, European scholars, some Jewish and others not, witnessed the rise of antisemitism and the atrocities that ensued during the mid-20th Century, which informed their work. On the other hand, the establishment of the State of Israel was followed by a bloody war that expelled 750,000 Palestinians in the Nakba. The question arose: was the State of Israel simply a settler colony whose establishment displaced the local population?

Furthermore, Jewish history is complicated. Jews have been in diaspora, both physically and spiritually, since the fall of the Second Temple, yet there was always a small population of Jews in Israel-Palestine. The question of "where is home for Jews"? becomes increasingly untenable under antisemitic conditions. Therefore, the founding of the State of Israel could be considered both colonial in due to the mass resettlement of Jews that displaced Palestinians, its exclusionary logic against Palestinians and the mass violence that has been enacted and formation as a modern nation-state inherently created a system of supremacy among Jews over Palestinians and others, and simultaneously, it created sovereignty and self-determination for the Jewish people in their ancestral land. How does the academic world grapple with such a puzzle?

Perhaps this was most notable in the falling out between Foucault and Deleuze. In the mid-1960s, Foucault joined the faculty at the University of Tunis. Shortly before Foucault's tenure, in 1952, riots broke out between Muslim and Jewish youth in Tunis, leading to one Jewish youth dead and rumoured to have been killed by a Muslim (Mandel 2017). About fifteen years later, on the first day of the six-day war in 1967, students protested the war against Israel, viewing it as a colonial force, and one group of these students burned local Jewish shops and

firebombed the synagogue (Medien 2020). James Miller (1993) discusses how these instances left Foucault disturbed and shaken: “Throughout his life, he was haunted by the memory of Hitler's total war and the Nazi death camps: in his view, the legitimacy of the Zionist state was simply not open to debate” (171). The antisemitism in Tunisia rattled Foucault, and after the murder of eleven Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics by a member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), he reconsidered his attitude towards political violence (Miller 1993, 233). Following this shift, Foucault and his long-time intellectual partner, Deleuze, began to drift apart, partially due to their divergence in beliefs regarding violent political action and the Israel-Palestine conflict (Miller 1993).

Today, it appears that the academic left has begun to adopt a normative stance on the questions of Israel-Palestine. The American Anthropological Association endorsed the Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions movement by more than 70% in the summer of 2023 (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) 2023). Increasingly, we witness academia analyze Israel-Palestine on the same lines of settler-colonialism on Turtle Island and elsewhere. For example, Ann Stoler (2020) argues that within academia, Israel needs to be more strongly placed in the realm of settler colonialism. This normative stance among academics is becoming increasingly popular towards Israel-Palestine, as it has become frequently offered as a textbook example of colonization. Through Aron’s reading of Pappé, he was forced to grapple with different beliefs towards Israel-Palestine within university, leading to his disillusionment and questioning of their relationship to Israel-Palestine. Suddenly, he too was swept up in this academic debate.

Building a movement with the help of our predecessors

Through social media, the racist rhetoric of many Jewish-Israelis is becoming more readily available, and more Jews are witnessing the Occupation and the price that Palestinians are paying for a sense of Jewish safety. However, it is not simply the learning about and witnessing of the Occupation and the (sometimes discombobulating) education that Jewish students experience in university, but also the history of the Jewish left that the current Jewish left attempts to resurface- the history of labour unions, social justice, and Jewish organizing. When I speak with Jewish activists, they often bring up the hopes of the Bund Movement and their diasporic mindset.

Figure 2: A logo on a T-Shirt that uses the Bund photo and is captioned "wherever we live is our homoland". Found at: https://moshiachmerch.com/

In figure 2, Jewish leftists in ATL recreated the famous Bund poster as a T-Shirt, to depict the person with makeup and changing the wording to "homoland", in recognition of the queer aspect of the contemporary Jewish left's movement. Despite being relatively dead today, the Bund is a formative part of the Jewish left's history and organizing tactics. For many, social justice spaces

were where Jewish identity was formed and witnessing the injustices in Israel creates an isolating feeling among those who care about Jewish safety and left-wing politics. Today, they feel incompatible. Many of us on the Jewish left have been actively involved in social justice movements on Turtle Island and have been deeply engaged in community organizing through institutions such as J Street, If Not Now, Jewish Voices for Peace, and others. When progressive Jews move to Israel-Palestine, they are forced to grapple with a reality of being both 'here' and 'there', grappling with their relationship to the State of Israel. In Chapter 2, I seek to understand this grappling through questions of national belonging and citizenship.

Chapter 2: "Bad Olim" and National Belonging

I sat twiddling my thumbs, nervous and exhausted after a long flight and schlepping my luggage through the airport. We were waiting in the airport's office of the *Misrad HaPanim* (Ministry of Interior) in anticipation of getting our *Teudat Zehuts* (ID cards) and taking our citizenship. One woman next to me explained that she was making aliyah for "ideological reasons" and a strong sense of Zionism and building the Jewish State. She had a job with Google and relocated her office to facilitate her move. I bowed my head and tried to hide my inevitable eye roll. She then asked me if I wanted to take a picture with one of Nefesh B'Nefesh's tacky signs, which featured phrases like "Home is where the hummus is" or "Finally Home." I politely refused, claiming, "It's not my thing". She persisted and finally looked at me questioningly when I refused to get up to take the picture. I did not share her type of excitement; I was not coming for what I saw as Zionist ideological reasons, which I viewed as supporting the building of a Jewish ethno-state. I moved because I went on a program and worked with Kids4Peace years ago. I felt that Jerusalem was a place to which I felt connected, and the social justice work aligned with how I viewed myself as a Jewish person in the world. When I returned to another program for a year, I met some of my closest friends and was offered a job. Over time, it felt like most of my life was already in Israel-Palestine with friends, work and loved ones, and it was only me who longed to be there. I liked to consider my move practical.

I had lived in Israel-Palestine for more than a year, had a local job, and my research was based in Jerusalem. I also wanted to be able to engage in more activism by taking citizenship, which facilitated my ability to engage in activism in the Occupied West Bank to work with fellow activists and Palestinians with much less fear of getting arrested and deported. I went to more protests, was roughed up by police, and saw friends get arrested. I had spent my previous

time in Israel-Palestine learning and volunteering. I had also lived in Lod / al-Lydd during the violence and riots in 2021 and knew just how painful living in Israel-Palestine could be. To be honest, I also fell in love with this land and my connection to *Eretz Yisrael* and many people in it, despite my anger towards the government and the occupation. I felt a sense of home and belonging, however flawed.

Despite my self-proclaimed practicality, I also felt a sense of relief and excitement. It took me over eight months to finally get all my paperwork in order, and I was looking forward to release from my limbo state. My return meant I could press the start button on my life again. The process of taking citizenship was the same as obtaining residency, with more benefits. For example, while either taking residency or taking citizenship, one must 'prove' their Judaism. I had to nearly threaten the Jewish Agency that I would call the *Beit Din* (Rabbinical Court) if they did not recognize my Jewish status. They spent weeks deciding if I was 'Jewish enough' for them by asking for my parents' *Ketubah* (marriage certificate) and likely wishing to subvert my Rabbi's letter because he was Reform. The proof of Judaism and wanting my file to be labelled 'Jewish' was an effort to more easily integrate as I transitioned from my many visitor visas to one of a citizen with full rights in the country. In some ways, it was important to me to be recognized as a Jew as someone who always felt 'not Jewish enough' within Jewish communities or 'too Jewish', having grown up in rural Vermont. I sought a sense of belonging, albeit a national belonging which sometimes makes my stomach wrench, a desire to belong to the people and the place, and citizenship was the means to do that. In the State of Israel, not being halakhically Jewish is a shame to the state project, which confuses the notion of a 'Jewish' state between halakha and a nationality. Many people are encouraged to convert through state mechanisms created to facilitate the *giyur* process (Kravel-Tovi 2017). Despite my insistence

that I am Jewish and wished that the state recognized me as such, I was still ambivalent about receiving citizenship and uncomfortable knowing how many resources were being poured into Olim and how many others in this land were getting neglected. The State of Israel suffers from incredibly high food insecurity rates, wealth inequality, overcrowded classrooms, and much more that remains under-resourced. However, I could receive benefits like free Hebrew courses, rent subsidies, health coverage and more to start my new life in Jerusalem.

The feeling of being a citizen and 'truly' Israeli remains elusive for both me and my interlocutors. My Hebrew remains mediocre, I do not have the *chutzpah* of a true Israeli, and I still apologize while elbowing my way through the *shuk* (market). Mavroudi (2008) discusses how obtaining citizenship can be conceptualized pragmatically, whereby it is a strategic move to gain access to resources while attempting to hold onto one's sense of national belonging as an immigrant. However, my interlocutors and I are not entirely pragmatic; we are immigrating to a place where Jews, like us, are the majority nation, but we are not obtaining citizenship in an ideological sense of Jewish nationalism. Therefore, I offer a conceptualization of ambivalence as we obtain citizenship, meaning that we can both obtain particular, often material needs (e.g. seeing ourselves in 'practical' ways) and simultaneously create more problems (Bauman 1991).

This chapter explores the concerns of interlocutors and me regarding taking citizenship, and how this relates to modes of national and cosmopolitan belonging. We live in a unique situation whereby we have a strong desire and pull to live in Israel-Palestine, while simultaneously rejecting the system of occupation and discrimination upon which the State of Israel is built. This chapter examines how Jewish activists who grew up abroad, with varying relationships to Israel-Palestine, moved to Jerusalem and obtained citizenship. This includes interlocutors who lived sabbatical years or attended gap years and yeshiva programs, as well as

others who came to explore their connections to Jewishness, having grown up in more secular environments. I seek to understand how we situate ourselves in this fraught context, as both Jews and anti-occupation activists living in Israel-Palestine. What questions and concerns arise throughout this process that we must grapple with to understand ourselves within the fraught political context in which we live? To answer these questions, I discuss nationalism and cosmopolitanism, how they shape our current understanding of belonging, how Jews from the diaspora understand themselves in relation to Israel-Palestine, and how citizenship becomes ambivalent for us. Our complicated positionality in Israel-Palestine leads us to grapple with the specific set of concerns and challenges that shape the contours of belonging and desire to belong to the state and our *'Am Yisrael'* of fellow Jews.

Between the Particular and Universal – Nationalism

Upon my arrival in Jerusalem, I sat with a friend who organizes a local program[4] that brings diaspora Jews to engage in activism with Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank and Jerusalem and explore questions of identity and belonging. We sat in a coffee shop outside in Jerusalem as she shared her upbringing and relationship to Israel-Palestine. She shared that she grew up primarily secular with little connection to Israel-Palestine, and like me, a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father. I asked her about her relationship with Israel-Palestine as a child. She recalled her experience with non-connection but held a distinct memory of her mom's excitement when Israel attacked Iran. Her mom's excitement confused her; she had never heard her mom talk about the subject before. This confusion led her to explore different sets of questions about her identity in university, where she studied human rights, Jewish history, and engaged in local community activism. I could relate. I distinctly remember my Hebrew school teacher sharing a

[4] Intentionally anonymous

map of Israel and saying that this was our 'homeland' and we are surrounded by enemies who all 'want to kill us'. She said this shortly after the Second Intifada, where violence and tensions were high, and it was clear that we were supposed to feel some sense of home or connection to Israel. Before moving to Israel-Palestine, my interlocutors and I held varying and unique relationships to the land. During my first visit, I worked with Kids4Peace and attempted to gain an understanding of this land after hearing many different perspectives and strong beliefs during my undergraduate studies. However, most of us who grew up in the Jewish community learned about or heard about our ancestral connection and support for the State of Israel, albeit to varying degrees, which was intended to foster a positive relationship with the country. While this may have been the set intention, the result of such education and conversation became apparent among my interlocutors, who felt 'lied to'. Friends spoke that they did not really know the 'truth' and have thus spent significant time learning and unlearning their relationship with Israel-Palestine. As one of my mentors in the field of peacebuilding shared, 'we were only ever taught half of the story,' leading us to learn about the other 'half' and search for how we can reconcile these narratives, like Aron had in the previous chapter.

On one foot, our narrative is this: After the first waves of aliyah, the State of Israel found itself as one of the newest modern nation-states following the 1948 war, where five surrounding Arab countries attacked, which Israelis refer to as their War of Independence. Many felt that the victory was a miracle, considering a scrappy group of paramilitary organizations could defend and build a new state. The State of Israel was considered essential after the Holocaust, and led many Jews to feel like everyone was an enemy (see Chapter 1). Palestinians refer to 1948 as the Nakba, or catastrophe; this was the story most of us never learned. Due to the fallout of the war, the State of Israel holds a complexity of identities, nationalisms, and questions of belonging

among both citizens and non-citizens, leaving around 750,000 Palestinians as refugees and Jews under a new national identity to lead a country after thousands of years of exile and generations of trauma. This fallout, and the subsequent 1967 war, leading to the Occupation of the West Bank, has led to systemic inequalities and ruptures between an attempted coherent democracy and a subsequent system of what many label as Occupation in the West Bank and/or Apartheid, either in the West Bank or throughout the entire land (see B'Tselem 2021).

Situating ourselves within this political context as anthropologists allows us to understand how these systems relate to individuals living on a day-to-day basis, both as people who currently live in Jerusalem and as we grew up with a particular narrative around the story. Anthropologists who have studied the state and state structures and have found themselves in the "unique position to observe, analyze, and offer insights on these developments, and recent works on these topics present an essential contribution to understanding ethnicity and violence, and the myths people use to justify them" (Boskovic 2019, 926). Therefore, we can begin to understand how, within the State of Israel, both citizens and non-citizens, including activists, engage in the questions of ethnicity and state violence and how it relates to national belonging. I particularly draw attention to the ambiguous nature through which activists relate and question the prevailing myths of nationalism and the subsequent systems that have been produced in Israel-Palestine that disturb us and create questions of responsibility and moral demands.

However, simply categorizing Israel-Palestine as 'apartheid' or 'occupation' in the West Bank, or the entirety of the land, does little to understand how it became such an unequal system and how Israelis and non-citizens forge their relationship to the land, the state, and national identity. There also remains substantial debate within the Jewish communities and non-Jewish communities over these terminologies, but perhaps as an anthropologist it is not my

responsibility to simply define or categorize the state, but to understand and analyze the lived experience of activists as we question and forge our relationship to the state. Rather than situating myself or interlocutors categorically, I am interested in the reconciling of identities, stories, and narratives that exist for one to engage in activism. Herzfeld (2016) discusses the responsibility of anthropologists since Anderson's (1983) seminal text *Imagined Communities* was published. The notion of an Imagined Community develops the concept of nationalism, claiming that a nation cannot be tangible or clearly defined, but must be imagined as it is impossible to know every person, the exact geographic bounds of the nation, and so forth. Therefore, anthropologists have been tasked with grounding the imagined community with experiences of everyday life (Herzfeld 2016). For example, how do we as activists living in the State of Israel understand our own relationship and commitments to the nation? Who constitutes the nation, and how are they defined? How does this relate to both the State of Israel and the Jewish people as a whole? Shifting from structures to experience within them enables anthropologists to understand and analyze questions of belonging within dominant national narratives to uncover what emerges between the citizens/immigrants/non-citizens and the state. Shifting our perspective from state structures to experiences, as Herzfeld (2016) argues, allows us to understand the current historical moment and the actors that create national narratives, as well as their dissonances.

Despite earlier assumptions that nationalism would wither away in response to globalization, we have seen it only re-emerge with resilience, perhaps most prevalently through the rise of populism (Bošković 2019, 926). Yuval-Davis (2006) aptly describes, "[people] are willing to sacrifice their and the lives of others in order for the narratives of their identities and the objects of their identifications and attachments to continue to exist" (202). This notion of sacrifice and

commitment to the nation has become ever more apparent with the widespread expansion of conservative ideologies that seek to preserve different ethnic nation-states. For example, in the State of Israel, the Nation-State Law reifies the importance of Israel as an exclusively Jewish state and that only Jews have the right to self-determination (Waxman and Peleg 2020). However, I am not solely interested in the implications of the Nation-State law, but how Jewish activists work and define themselves in relation to and in response to these conditions. I argue that as social activists and anthropologists interested in political dissent, we must also attune to those who both reject and attempt to reassemble their identity to create alternative modes of belonging both within and outside nation-state structures, which are ever-changing and shifting.

As interlocuters and I resist or subvert claims to national belonging in Israel-Palestine, claiming a more cosmopolitan identity while holding the privilege of multiple passports and the ability to move and traverse borders with ease, many living locally in Israel-Palestine cannot live as such and are tied to this place with few alternative options. Seeing itself as an ethical antidote to nationalism, many scholars and individuals aspire to cosmopolitanism, moving from particularism to a liberal universalism: "cosmopolitanism is the obvious choice as an intellectual ethic or political project that can better express or embody genuine universalism" (Cheah and Robbins 1998, 20). Rabinow (1986) approaches cosmopolitanism with speculation, yet promise, for its respect for difference. Rabinow (1986) defines cosmopolitanism as an –

> ethos of macro-interdependencies, with an acute consciousness (often forced upon people) of the inescapabilities and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories, and fates. Although we are all cosmopolitans, Homosapiens has done rather poorly in interpreting this condition. We seem to have trouble with the balancing act, preferring to reify local identities or construct universal ones (Rabinow 1986, 258)

Rabinow's (1986) interpretation remains far less utopic of cosmopolitanism and perhaps the de-facto state of the world through which one must contend with the particular, as well as the

universal. How do we as Jewish activists from the diaspora tend to our particular Jewishness while also believing in some sort of universalist ideals that are often not espoused within the dominant rhetoric of Israel? How do we obtain citizenship pragmatically, yet also know that we are moving to Israel-Palestine for particular reasons and feelings of care and love for the land and friends there? For us as activists, locating ourselves historically and spatially within the world remains a challenge, while we strive for moral clarity and attempt to engage with the State through activism. For me and many other Jewish activists from the diaspora, our draw to Israel-Palestine is the particular religious and Jewish connection that allows and facilitates our ability to live in Jerusalem. Simultaneously, many of us keep one foot in and one foot out, unable to commit to any singular globalized notion.

Mapping Israeli Nationalism among American Jews

(Figure 1: taken by the author at the anti-judicial reform protests within the anti-occupation bloc. The sign reads “Democracy for everyone” in both the masculine and feminine forms in both Hebrew and Arabic)

‘*Zionism is, what Zionism does’*, or ‘*I just tell people I’m an anti-nationalist’* are phrases I heard recited by activists grappling with their relationship to the State of Israel and Zionism. The first phrase, ‘Zionism is what Zionism does”, refers to the disillusionment of prevailing and diverse Zionist ideologies with the ‘on-the-ground’ reality that activists encounter, such as experiencing police violence, watching home demolitions, and more injustices that produce gross inequality and the privileging of Jews over others. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Zionism in the form of sovereign statehood was greatly refuted by many Jewish groups on the left, only to become a part and parcel of a new reality whereby Jews were forced to contend with the Jewish state of Israel. Under the demise of Oslo and mere lip-service to a two-state solution, many activists favour a binational or completely democratic state between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Few activists in the younger generations still believe in a so-called two-state solution, which is usually advocated by the older generation of activists who voted for Avodah (Labour) before the Second Intifada and the assassination of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The photo above shows a sign from the anti-Occupation bloc of the anti-judicial reform protests that spread across the country before October 7th that advocates for “democracy for all”. At the anti-Occupation bloc, activists argued throughout the demonstrations and handed out flyers that shared that the corrosion of democracy has already happened in the Occupied West Bank. Many activists have seen this firsthand when spending time with Palestinians in the West Bank, for example, being detained or arrested. However, the challenges of police brutality and violence are not only in the West Bank. In the swarm of Israeli flags, the activists raised a few Palestinian flags in a show of solidarity and seeking acknowledgement for the hopes of

democracy for people under these different flags. In response, they were beaten, punched, and the police arrested a few, while others spat out "*smolanim bogdim*" (leftists are traitors) at us. The label of 'traitor' as an immigrant to the country lends itself to immediate complications and questions regarding who is considered 'allowed' and 'good', versus those of us who are seen as coming and disrupting the status quo, particularly in the fraught context of being Jewish in a so-called Jewish state.

Jewish Americans account for nearly 15% of settlers (Hirschhorn 2017), complicating the liberal notions of many American Jews who often reside in the democratic camp and advocate for a two-state solution, which is locally frowned upon by both the political right and the left. Furthermore, today, immigrants coming from North America are often considered privileged, leaving their relative wealth and comforts behind in pursuit of building the Jewish State, unlike other Jewish immigrants who had little choice when escaping persecution. Among activists, many have family living in the West Bank, particularly among those who were raised Orthodox, which complicates these relationships.

Over time, the Israeli State has become more religious, and the combination of staunch nationalism paired with religious decree has emerged to create a strong community of *datti leumi* (religious nationalist). My friend Yoni[5] was raised in New York within a diasporic *datti leumi* community before becoming a left-wing anti-occupation activist. When I met Yoni, he was in his late 20s and had already established himself fairly well in the ATL community. Sitting with Yoni is hard because he constantly moves and shuffles from place to place, having ADHD, and drones on in long rants about 'settler-fascists'. Ironically, Yoni used to be quite close to the 'settler fascists' he grew to resent. When we sat for an interview while engaging in a weekend in the

[5] A pseudonym

Occupied West Bank, he shared with me about his gap year experience in Efrat (a settlement in Gush Etzion) and how he was encouraged to serve in the army and explore Jewish connections to Eretz Israel. His community in New York encouraged Jewish settlement in the State of Israel for national and religious reasons. Yoni shared –

> When I applied there was like this place called Efrat and everyone was like that's past the Green Line that's a good Zionist. And I didn't even know what the Green Line was. Apparently being past the Green Line makes you a good Zionist. First time I heard about the Green Line and had no idea what it meant. OK, it was like gap year [program] and [I got to learn] Krav Maga and I like combat sports so I was like yeah….something [the program] said a lot [was] you can sit and learn all day [in yeshiva…but] what are you going to apply after that? Like you wanna learn about the Bar Kokhba Rebellions? We went to the caves

Yoni's gap year program combined Torah learning, sports, and study tours that taught Jewish history across the land of Israel. Yoni also notes that his program stood in contrast to a more traditional gap year yeshiva program that focus solely on Torah studying and learning, his program focused on embodying religious and national motives, it focused on *doing* religious nationalism, such as touring historical Jewish sights, learning how to defend yourself and your people through combat sports, and engaging in religious nationalism. Yoni's recollection of his gap year exemplifies how to be a strong Jew who embodied nationalist aspirations; it taught him how he was supposed to live. Yoni shared that he did not know what the Green Line was, but for his community of *datti leumi,* it made him a better 'Jew' and more connected to the state project and national and religious motives. His community encouraged him to take on the pioneering spirit of the early Zionists while also learning about Jewish history within the Land of Israel.

Thus, many Jews saw this as Raz-Krakotzkin (2013) conceptualizes as a 'return to history', "interpreted as a return to the national political sovereignty ascribed to ancient Israel, through a rejection of the passivity ascribed to the Jews of the exile and in protest against messianic expectations for divine intervention" (38). Yoni, at that time in his life, actively

embodied the notion of return and modalities of living as a 'Good Zionist' and 'Jew'. When he was a "Good Zionist," he was active and not passive, in the "conclusion of Jewish history and the fulfillment of centuries-long Jewish expectations" (Raz-Krakotzkin 2013, 38). This was the mentality that Yoni and many other Jews, both in Israel-Palestine and the diaspora, were raised with to encourage Jewish immigration to Israel and to settle the land both as a religious and national imperative to 'save' and 'preserve' Jewishness. At this time in his life, Yoni could claim a sense of active participation in particular ethnic nation-building, which led him to a sense of communal belonging, as it linked him as an individual to the collective (Yuval-Davis 2006).

'Bad Olim' – Immigrants' Ambivalence

Despite his gap year program, Yoni never fully conformed to his community's ideals of how to live. He grew up with a challenging relationship with his parents and a learning disability, which made it hard for him to conform to classrooms and 'traditional' spaces. Yoni always sought out experiences that challenged the status quo. This remained true in the context of learning about Palestinians. Yoni's transformation was slow, but a turning point came when he tried out new Jewish spaces on campus and encountered a talk by J-Street, during which a Palestinian speaker discussed checkpoints. This began his journey of learning about Palestinians and further distancing him from his former community. Today, Yoni is known for donning a watermelon kippah and spending days living among Palestinians in the West Bank. He has his photo on right-wing activist pages that seek to expose 'anti-Zionists', 'Jew-Haters', and 'anarchists'. Despite the label of traitor, his Instagram profile reads "self-loving Jew," and he and other activists I work with hold a much more complex and nuanced understanding of themselves and their relationship with Israel-Palestine compared to how dominant right-wing Israelis label us. He still visits his friends from his gap year program and proudly talks about his connection to Jewish people and *Eretz Israel,* and many years ago, he also took citizenship. Interlocuters and I

often live with a sense of ambivalence towards citizenship and national belonging as we navigate the fraught and ruptured land.

As anti-occupation activists who care about the people and place, but disagree with the system of occupation, how can we be both within and outside this system through means of national belonging and citizenship? By taking citizenship, or making Aliyah, one becomes embedded in the system of inequality, creating a sense of complicity (see also Wright 2018). Simultaneously, this system offers some form of protection and safety through financial support, protection against deportation, language learning, and more, as I described above in my reasons for taking citizenship. These conflicting parts create a sense of ambivalence. I refer to Bauman (1991), who uses the term ambivalence to draw attention to the problematics of our classification systems, creating the inside and outside, binaries, and otherings. Sifting through the messiness often reveals new sets of concerns and categories. Therefore, "ambivalence is…both self-destructive and self-propelling. It goes on with unabating strength because it creates its own problems in the course of resolving them" (Bauman 1991, 4). Citizenship falls into a dark hole of ambivalence, both contradictory and problematic, yet it facilitates safety and national belonging. For Olim in the anti-occupation community, the issue of citizenship remains a heated topic. While widely acknowledged as perhaps a 'necessary evil, ' many stress their concerns, guilt, or ambivalence as they participate in the occupation while simultaneously trying to resist it. Like myself, many of my interlocutors expressed ambivalence to taking citizenship as a necessary 'part of it' to make life easier or gain resources. For example, Yoni shared why he took citizenship even after he became an activist:

> [I] got citizenship because…that was just like always part of it…I also think I have intergenerational Holocaust trauma. The permanence of living here and it's just as easy as getting a student visa, it was like I could literally get a student visa or citizenship. When I

> moved here and got citizenship like all the wrong people were happy for me. And like all the right people were skeptical at best

Yoni characterised the 'wrong' people, embodied by people like the woman I met who came for 'ideological reasons', his community that praised him for living in Efrat and touted him as a 'good Zionist'; versus the 'right' people, the activists who prefer not to celebrate citizenship as a beneficial thing but part of the unequal system that allows Jews to return and not Palestinians. At the same time, Yoni wanted to 'be part of it', part of something and have a sense of belonging and permanence in life. Moreover, Yoni offered an analysis of citizenship; he leapt into sets of concerns without any prompting. It was more than just a fact, but a decision that had to be justified due to his intergenerational trauma of the Holocaust, having come from a direct family of survivors. Yoni's description appears in contradictory ways, as a desire to be part of something particular, yet also perhaps sharing a sense of guilt with the ease with which he had obtained citizenship when non-Jews cannot. For example, it was as easy as obtaining a student visa.

Aron, whom we met as an educator, also discussed his citizenship process and views, discussing the 'good' versus the 'bad' in terms of cost-benefit analysis.

> I made Aliyah, I'm a citizen. But, you know, at the point that I made Aliyah in August of 2020, I thought of myself as like, potentially wanting to live here forever, be a part of Israeli society, be a leftist, you know…I was quickly dissuaded off of that. And yeah, I mean, ultimately, every Jewish body here means violence to Palestinians. And for right now, while I'm doing the work, and while I'm committed to doing the work and have very few responsibilities outside of my own personal safety, I can justify the like, cost benefit analysis of my existence here. In addition to you know, the trauma that I've gone through the last three years and probably will be dealing with for a very long time

Aron shared a deep sense of obligation to activism if he chooses to live in Israel-Palestine, a decision he realized cannot be a lasting one. He also decided that he does not want to belong because, in his view, his belonging would negatively impact Palestinians by virtue of simply living in Israel-Palestine. To justify his citizenship, he argued that he must risk his personal

safety, particularly as he categorizes his existence in Israel-Palestine as one of violence; he must then experience violence himself as an activist. Furthermore, he feels an obligation to educate other Jews coming to Israel-Palestine, teaching them which books to read and commit to 'doing the work'. Aron feels that taking citizenship and living in Israel-Palestine can only be acceptable if one is dedicated to activism; citizenship is therefore not something to take for granted, but to use and reconfigure a different structure than that of occupation and violence that I described above. For Aron to feel a sense of belonging and the ability to merely exist in Israel-Palestine, he must risk himself, which is quite a high price to pay. Notably, neither Aron nor Yoni needed prompting to justify or explain why they chose to obtain citizenship; it was not a simple fact of belonging to a nation but rather a fact they felt they needed to justify.

When I sat with Sarah at a local coffee shop, she also shared her concerns, particularly as she grappled with the multiple and pluralistic views of citizenship within the ATL community. Sarah attended the same program my friend above works for, engaging in activism with Palestinians. Today, she works as a journalist and takes any opportunity to escape to Europe. Sarah described her experience receiving citizenship ambivalently, trying to navigate her understanding of herself and grappling with both the state and fellow activists' concerns regarding her citizenship status and sense of belonging:

> I mean, I definitely don't advertise [my citizenship]. To be honest, even in this is on a purely anecdotal level, like, honestly, Palestinians have been way chiller about it than some Jewish leftists that I know, especially the ones that like, will die here on an A1 [visa] and they're just refusing to make aliyah…I don't agree with like, all the outreach or encouraging Jews to make aliyah, especially from countries where they are relatively safe, like the States. But yeah, I mean, [my program] ended in June or July 2019. And my partner and I began dating that March…I wanted to stay here, but I wasn't really sure what I would do. And I also at that point I needed to work...I didn't grow up in like a well-off family…and so it was like the most economically sound decision. It definitely wasn't intended to be this long. I did not want to be here this long

Sarah's decision was based on financial concerns, partnership, and longing for place. Sarah met her partner, who is Israeli and ex-Haredi. Sarah and Aron do not see themselves in a place of permanency, but one that enables movement between places. Sarah, "didn't intend to live [in Israel-Palestine] this long". Furthermore, she expresses the multiple views the activist community holds, the challenges faced within the community of gaining citizenship, and how this relates to modes of belonging. Sarah describes that some activists refuse citizenship as a way to deny ties to the State of Israel and try to feel less responsible for its actions, despite still choosing to live in Israel-Palestine. Sarah expressed her frustration with her friends who hold particularly dogmatic views, and she categorizes them as 'privileged', from families that can support them financially. While many activists are not proud of their American citizenship, there remains a different connection whereby their citizenship was not by choice but by birthright. Thus, choosing to take Israeli citizenship held more stigma within the American Jewish activist community and required further justification. The dichotomy between the global and local becomes expressed through these anecdotes and concerns that attempt to position activists in particular ways with their relationship to Israel, North America, the international Jewish community, and the world at large. These types of analyses were present among many activists I speak with who grapple with their (unintended) complicity in Israeli nationalism that reinforces the abstract ideas of cosmopolitanism that work against nationalism. However, in other ways, activists attempt to fold themselves into Jewish-Israeli society through Hebrew language learning, connecting with other local activists, and by admiring the Jewish history on the land, while trying to open space for more histories and nuances of the complex reality of Israel-Palestine.

As activist olim, we lie in ambivalence, understanding that our citizenship comes with strings attached and sets of obligations, and it creates its own sets of challenges and concerns. Suddenly, we can fully engage in activism, without worries of deportations or the inability to return to Israel-Palestine in the future, gain financial support and more. However, we risk our bodies when we engage in activism that can become violent, partake in a system of inequality, and are forced to navigate relationships within the community. Both Yoni and Aron felt a sense of obligation when they took citizenship in Israel-Palestine; however, what differs from the activist communities' belief and others is that their sense of responsibility is not towards the state. Among the community, citizenship must be justified, and Aron and Yoni both expressed ambivalence with the idea of fully integrating into the mainstream Jewish-Israeli society, but it was a means to make change and take action. This ambivalence does not signal apathy, but rather the opposite; it propelled Yoni and Aron into action, while also creating further challenges and concerns as they navigate the unequal system. Aron and Yoni wanted to be part of the 'good people' and be a 'leftist', meaning part of grassroots social justice movements, which were critical in understanding how they view their sense of national belonging, both inside and outside.

Leftists are Traitors

The type of citizenship I described above was pragmatic for my interlocutors. It facilitated their ability to live in Israel-Palestine and gain access to rights as citizens of the state, as well as particular rights that citizens can access that many non-citizens cannot, such as financial support, voting, and more. However, despite obtaining citizenship, we are not considered 'locals' and in fact are often considered counter to what a Jewish citizen of the Jewish state should believe in; we took citizenship but refused to inhabit the state ideology. Among born

Jewish-Israelis, they can reject the state ideology while speaking perfect and unbroken Hebrew, resisting from within; however, for Jews who take citizenship later in life and refuse the ideology, it comes with a different set of concerns among Israelis who view us as coming to push a particular agenda.

For example, I was sitting in the car with a Jewish-Israeli colleague. At the time, I worked for a volunteer program that engaged in social change and social justice work within the '48 borders of Israel-Palestine. We were visiting the program, and volunteers were running educational activities for asylum seekers from Eritrea. In the car, we spoke about the program and how the participants were challenged to become a cohesive group where participants live together, work together, and engage in the surrounding community for social change and justice work. During this conversation, I brought up a conflict that I had while I was in the program, a conflict with a fellow participant who had different politics from mine. I started by sharing, "He felt very Zionist, that Israel and Zionism were very important to his identity, I don't feel so strongly". Immediately, my colleague interrupted me, "Well, you know", she said, "I've never met someone as left as you, and I have lefty friends" (she was referring here to a gay friend of hers that was very involved in the Tel Aviv pride scene). She continued, "It's hard to talk to you, I really struggle with your politics". I responded, quite dumbfounded and frankly offended, "I have never shared my politics in-depth with you". In a harsh response, she claims she, "'knows what I 'do'". She was referring to the fact that I have frequently gone to the West Bank to work with Palestinians and support volunteer efforts in the Occupied Territories. Knowing a few facts about me, she made deep assumptions as to 'how I live' and how that type of life is not suitable in her view of what it means for me to live in Israel-Palestine. I had actually wanted to share a story about how we overcame our political differences, not by agreeing with each other, but by

helping each other in daily life and having moments where we realized that we were more similar than different. However, I had traversed an elusive emotional border that sits behind a metaphorical wall, all too similar to the actual walls. I used my citizenship privileges to meet Palestinians on the other side; my pragmatic citizenship disrupted the ideological project of an exclusively Jewish State. This would not have been a problem if I had crossed the Green Line to meet family or friends in Gush Etzion. The geographical borders remain elusive, while ethnic borders remain confronting.

In a recent Op-Ed in the Jerusalem Post, Editor Avi Mayer wrote an article entitled "No Longer Part of Us" (2023). The article referred to Jews who spoke out supporting Palestinians after the brutal massacre of October 7th and Israel's subsequent vengeful response, including those he sees as anti-Zionists and who wish to undermine the Jewish state. He shares, "while they may still technically be Jewish due to their parentage or conversion, while they may lead superficially Jewish lives, we can no longer consider them part of *Klal Yisrael*" (Avi Mayer 2023). Klal Yisrael is a Yiddish expression referring to the uniting of the entire Jewish community. In his op-ed, Mayer explicitly states the politics of Jewishness and the internal limits and boundaries of political expression within the Jewish community he desires. Mayer (2023) quotes Maimonides and Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks discussing how these Jews subsequently do not care about the collective Jewish fate and how they have chosen to remove themselves from the community. He even goes so far as to condemn them to Gehenna (a Jew-ish version of hell). While none of my interlocutors glorified the attack on October 7th, many felt marginalized and attacked by this op-ed because they are not Zionist and support Palestinians, and greatly condemn Israel's response. Consequently, Mayer flattens Jewish identity to support the Israeli State and disputes Jewish ethnic and religious beliefs in a sense of tribal agreement and support

of the State of Israel, countering the nuance my interlocutors sought of being both within and without.

Activists fear this type of dogmatic rhetoric and see the slippages where their prevailing ideals that value a more universalistic worldview than in support of a nation-state that they sense would not be allowed within the fold of the Jewish people, according to the op-ed. Following this op-ed, messages were sent in a community group chat asking if 'anyone goes to shul [synagogue] with Avi Mayer?' and people questioning whether they would be counted in the minyan, only to conclude "it'd be very inconvenient [to start counting the minyan and checking the politics of each person]". Other messages expressed their disappointment with the article. Community members feared that this type of rhetoric would only further the mainstream rhetoric that seeks to minimize critical voices of the ongoing war.

Mayer was not the only Jewish leader who spoke up against those he considered to have betrayed the Jewish people from within. The head of the Jewish Agency for Israel in North America, Dan Elbaum, wrote, "There will be a time in the future to wonder about how such [self-described anti-Zionist Jews] could have emerged from our community…It should involve introspection as to Jewish and Israel education. But for now, there is nothing to be done with them. Unlike Hamas, who would have joyously murdered them on October 7th, I do not consider them Jews" (seen in Mayer 2023). According to this comment, only the 'enemies' who wish to destroy the Jewish Nation consider them Jewish. Yet, he claims that these Jews are ironically aligned with them, the enemy, and places Jews in the racialized category of Jewishness, who he knows are subject to brutality. Previously, I have spoken about the feelings towards Israel education among many of my interlocutors who have become disillusioned. They feel 'lied to'. Yet, Elbaum situates himself as a righteous speaker on behalf of the 'real' Jews, despite knowing

they would be equally likely to have been murdered in the massacre of October 7th. Jewish experience of antisemitism and violence, therefore, can only matter if one's politics are aligned. This hostile environment further creates boundaries of belonging for Jewish activists, who feel 'part of it', yet also feel pushed out of many Jewish spaces due to their ideological beliefs and failure to privilege the particular ethnic nationalism that has emerged in the wake of the State of Israel.

Refashioning Oneself

Elbuam and Meyer's analyses create a hegemonic collapse of identity and the desire to paint all Jews who grapple with their relationship to the State of Israel, or outright reject the state, as *bogdim* against all forms of Jewish life, including inside and outside of the land of Israel and the people of Israel. Under this backdrop of staunch Israeli nationalism, activists are refashioning themselves towards a more universalist outlook that enables an ethical response against nationalism and facilitates a flow between places with varying attachments and belongings, in contrast to the type of particularism that ethnic nationalism presents. As Aron mentioned, he sees his position in Israel-Palestine as temporary and requires certain modes of acting to justify his belonging. My interlocutors and I struggle to define ourselves and are in constant deliberation to understand in what ways we are 'local' and belong to the local Jerusalem landscape, and in what ways we are striving to keep one foot out of the land. We wade between the particular and the universal, holding a desire to be part of Jewishness and the broader Jewish collective, while simultaneously rejecting nationalism, which necessitates a reformulation of community and support. Jews in this community both reject the sense of 'rootless cosmopolitanism' and dogmatic nationalism that seeks to classify the Jewish experience.

As my interlocutors engage in activism in Israel-Palestine, they are also deeply attuned to and grapple with how to relate to and engage with global causes around the world, thereby reinforcing their worldviews. For example, Aron explained to me how challenged he was living in Israel-Palestine when George Floyd was murdered and the Black Lives Matter protests were happening across the United States; he felt he had to be there, but also needed to be in Jerusalem. Around the same time, Iyad al-Halak was murdered by the Israeli police in the Old City of Jerusalem. He had severe autism, and his aide tried to explain to the police what was happening to no avail. To date, the officer has not faced any charges. Aron expressed his concern for these events and how he tried to activate the alumni community from his Jewish Day School in Chicago to discuss racism in their school. Throughout our interview and personal interactions, he and others often made universalist claims against issues like police brutality, which happens both in the United States and Israel-Palestine, in an attempt to flatten hierarchies. Activists I work with move and shift between multiple localities, both physically and emotionally, as their concerns and anxieties are felt across space and time. Nationalism cannot enable this type of movement and transcendence, both physically and emotionally, which my interlocutors expressed.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the complicated and ambivalent citizenship and how North American activist immigrants fashion themselves within the State of Israel. Interlocuters and I navigate through the particular versus the universal, the privileges of citizenship, and the ethical dilemmas and challenges that come with violent nationalism. As we move forward, I wish to understand how activists engage with one another and Palestinians, which shapes their worldview, and how activists feel and experience the sense of in-betweenness as part of the Jewish collective, and sometimes stand against the majority of Jewish people. What does it mean

to take part in a community that many consider ‘traitors’? How do Jewish activists from the diaspora manage this complicated space of in-betweenness among our own community, Israeli left-wing activists, and Palestinians?

Chapter 3: Transforming Inside and Out

I sat on the floor, nibbling on my plate, taking in the space. One ear listened to the conversations around me, and the other was soaking in the environment. A group of us American Jewish activists had just finished Kabbalat Shabbat services and were eating a vegan Shabbos dinner in an activist's apartment in the neighbourhood of Nachlaot. Nachlaot is a mix of Jews across the religious and political spectrum, built by Jewish immigrants in the 1870s. Activists brag that they are not living in Nakba houses. It was the end of the summer and the time of year when there were a lot of new faces, mine included. Yearlong programs were starting, including rabbinical schools, and some American Jews wanted to find outlets to engage in activism while they were here. Others were veteran activists, leading prayers, sharing wisdom, and teaching others about engaging 'on-the-ground' with Palestinians. I was sitting at an informal minyan that labelled itself the 'Anti-Zionist minyan', created by ATL members. It felt like a mixer for American Jews who were struggling with having come to Israel-Palestine and sought out a more egalitarian and progressive English-speaking space. The location is never publicized but shared privately upon messaging the WhatsApp admin because the organizers are concerned for their safety and well-being, or that community leaders like Mayer or Elbaum will harass and shame them. Sitting on the floor, there was a sense of familiarity, as Avi noted, 'the davening is boring' (referring to using common American niggunim and tunes), the people are friendly and engaging, everyone put their phones away, but a friendly joint was making its rounds outside. Because some members observed more halakhically and kept kashrut, organizers separated the table between kosher food prepared before Shabbat and 'anything goes', so people could all contribute and respect one another's dietary needs.

As I sat eating, Rachel[6] came up to me. I had known who she was; she had a reputation for her intensity when speaking about politics, and she was incredibly learned in Torah knowledge, studying to become a rabbi. Rachel often brought activism and Torah together, like creating a Kashrut guide for Jews when visiting Palestinian communities. She came and sat beside me, ran her fingers through her hair, and seemingly out of nowhere, exasperated, "liberal Zionists are the worst", while rolling her eyes. I took a pause. I knew what was happening; it was a vetting process to test my politics. This conversation often emerged shortly after the question, "*So what are you doing here?*", but she dove right in. She wanted to know if I was truly 'lefty'. I responded, "I am not so nationalist, I used to work with Indigenous communities in so-called Canada". This answer seemed to satisfy her, but she continued, sharing that it's hard to get liberal Zionists (e.g. two-staters) to 'wake' up to the realities of the occupation; most only see the occupation beyond the Green Line. She argued that people do not want to listen to stories of the Nakba and the foundational problems of the State of Israel. As we saw in the previous chapter, most activists prefer to view Zionism through the lens of what it *does*, rather than what it *means*. I sat and listened, curious to hear what she had to say, and I understood that people would start to trust me more if I engaged in these conversations. Holding similar politics and beliefs establishes trust but also creates contours and lines regarding who is in versus who is out.

These conversations attempt to create and convey the morals and values one should hold to meaningfully engage in activism with the community, despite a general begrudged acceptance of 'liberal Zionists' who still believe in a type of Jewish State, while simultaneously a desire to educate them out of it, as most of the long-term organisers in the community claim to be anti/non-Zionist. The codes of belonging are embedded in this vetting process to uphold a sense

[6] A pseudonym

of moral clarity within the community. In the previous chapter, I explored how Jewish activists grapple with their relationship to the State of Israel and attempt to engage in questions of national belonging. In this chapter, I first turn inwards to how we seek alternative modes of belonging within the Jewish community of American anti-occupation activists living in Jerusalem. Secondly, I turn outward to modes of belonging within Israel-Palestine through exploring modes of partnership and relationship between and among Jewish American activists and Palestinians. As we attempt to transform our Jewish community and change the reality of injustice for Palestinians, we also engage in boundary marking and a process of vetting to decide who belongs and who does not. Gammeltoft discusses the ambiguity of belonging as "not necessarily positive or productive. Rather, more often than not, it entails ambivalence, uncertainty, dominance, and exclusion…belonging indexes fragile, uncertain, and often highly contingent human efforts to be part of something larger" (2018a, 77). Activists sincerely wish to be part of a larger change for justice and simultaneously negotiate their sense of belonging in a future in Israel-Palestine and Jewish community broadly speaking. As young American Jewish interlocutors learn to become activists and educate themselves on the occupation and experiences of Palestinians, they develop their own identity as 'leftists'. This development of Jewish spaces and subsequent education attempts to establish the moral and ethical boundaries of the community, creating, perhaps inadvertently, an insider/outsider dynamic of acceptance and exclusion that reproduces its own fears. While leaders in the community vet and try to analyze who should be the main organizers and in 'high security' group chats, activists are encouraged to read books and learn. I use the concept of the "project of the self" (Rose 1999), a concept coined by Nikolas Rose, to describe this learning process. Activists work on themselves intra-communally in an attempt to transform Jewish spaces and spaces around them through self and

communal education, alongside conversations that outline the morally acceptable positions within the community as I described above. Questions thus emerge regarding how to tend to ourselves and the community, but at times replicate the same systems activists try to avoid.

The second part of this chapter explores how communal codes and markers of morality are then translated into modes of working both within the community and with Palestinians. After looking at our internal conversation among Jewish activists, we must critically analyze how that translates into actual relationships with Palestinians with whom activists attempt to advocate for and work with. This leads us to a question of the efficacy of activism and concerns regarding relationships and partnerships. On the one hand, spaces like the anti-Zionist minyan seek to transform Jewishness and Jewish practice against the backdrop of Israeli nationalism and nationalist politics that I have described. As Jewish activists from the diaspora engage in their own learning process and understanding their relationships with themselves, Israel-Palestine, and others in the community, many do so through engaging with self-described 'partnerships' with Palestinians. These 'partnerships' have been developed over time by local Israelis and international activists (Jewish and non-Jewish) who attempt to resist the occupation together through non-violent action. These 'partnerships' place Palestinians and Jews at the forefront of the struggle for ending the occupation by doing solidarity work, like documenting Human Rights abuses or joining protests. Through these actions, activists engage in these partnerships that both reinforce and try to obscure the power imbalances between the respective communities. These partnerships are often categorized by emergency and timeliness to address immediate demands. The second part of this chapter explores what modes of belonging and interconnectedness can exist and are possible between Jews and Palestinians.

Bearing Witness & Educating the Self

משנה אבות א׳:י״ד
הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי. וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו, אֵימָתָי (יד)

Pirkei Avot 1:14
"He [Rabbi Hillel] used to say: 'If I am not for me, who will be for me? And when I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, then when'?"

'If Not Now' has been sung as a rallying cry and became the name of a movement of some American Jews who oppose the Occupation, with chapters located throughout the US. In the documentary film 'Israelism', featuring Simone Zimmerman, the protagonist of the film and co-founder of 'If Not Now', discusses her first interactions with Palestinians and how she 'woke up' to the realities of the Occupation (Eilerstein and Axelman 2023). She claims she grew up indoctrinated with Israeli *hasbara* (propaganda) and was taught that the State of Israel represents Jews. Therefore, criticism of Israel was often labelled as antisemitism (Eilerstein and Axelman 2023). The film follows her journey as an American Jew who bears witness to the occupation. When Zimmerman attended university at Berkeley, she engaged in pro-Israel activism, and other activists demanded she answer questions about the Nakba, refugees, and the Occupation, to which she had no answer (Eilerstein and Axelman 2023). Like Aron, she felt it 'fucked her up' to learn about these narratives that were kept from her by her Jewish institutional upbringing. Her knowledge of Israel was extensive, but her knowledge of Palestinians was null. Hearing these criticisms piqued Zimmerman's curiosity, and she crossed the Green Line to meet with Palestinians living under Occupation to listen to their stories, which led her to a reckoning with herself and a political awakening (Eilerstein and Axelman, 2023).

Zimmerman's claim that she transformed through learning about an alternative rang true for many I interviewed and spoke with. Yoni spoke with me about how he had once gone to a

conversation about Israel while he was in university and heard a Palestinian speak about checkpoints. Like Zimmerman, a few questions and disruptors of the status quo spun them into more questions and a desire to learn more. After hearing these stories, many decided they wanted to see what was happening for themselves. Sarah, like many others, described her experience of being encouraged by American-Jewish activists in Jerusalem to visit the West Bank and learn more. Once they witnessed the realities on the ground in the Occupied West Bank, many began to awaken and educate themselves and became unable to look away. Suddenly, it was as if an entirely new world had emerged for activists, and they became responsible for understanding and advocating for Palestinians and driving change within their communities. Sarah shared her learning process, which she claimed happened through "just a few days in Khan Al Ahmar"[7]. This process of learning and developing oneself was a theme throughout my research, whereby activists shared the stories that changed them. Sarah shared that –

> [An activist friend] just kind of like planted some seeds, and I reached my own conclusions…really quickly was like, Oh, shit, like everything I learned...before is like a half truth or just a complete lie. Just from a few days in Khan Al Ahmar and just having casual conversations with people

Sarah shares here her new distrust of her previous sources of knowledge, and how friends who are knowledgeable in left-wing theory, paired with her own experience of spending some time with a Palestinian community under threat of forced displacement, led her to her 'own conclusions'. Through the acts of bearing witness to the suffering of Khan Al Ahmar, she took the responsibility to relearn the Israeli education she was taught and had taken for granted. By witnessing the community's struggle and pain, she became responsible for 'the other'. Sarah took

[7] Khan Al Ahmar is a Bedouin Palestinian community outside of Jerusalem that has been under threat of demolition and forced displacement. The community has gained considerable international attention, which many claim has enable the community to remain despite its demolition order. Khan Al Ahmar was also part of a J-Street campaign against their demolition, through which many American activists became involved

on the task of self-education, as we will discuss further in the next section. Prior to the self-education, there are moments of awakening to 'others'.

Levinas discusses this type of awakening that lends itself to the responsibility of the other, deeply rooted in the concept of '*hineni'* or 'here I am'. Levinas works within the Jewish conceptual frameworks through which he argues there is a divine claim to witnessing and experiencing the 'other' (seen in Rapport 2019, 71). Levinas claims that "[h]ere the identity of the subject comes from the impossibility of escaping responsibility, from the taking charge of the other"(Levinas 1981, 14). Thus, it is not simply the witnessing, but the responsibility that becomes an imperative for Sarah, who sought to understand the other and felt a sense of responsibility to take action and become more engaged in the activist community in an attempt to stand with Palestinians. Sarah began by bearing witness to the realities of Khan Al Ahmar, where she saw the village with a tin-roof school and tents all under threat of displacement and demolition. She spoke to activists who helped her frame what she saw into tangible understandings rooted in left-wing and activist theory. Through this experience, Sarah became responsible for both herself and the activist community in an attempt to work and stand for Palestinians. In doing so, she left the normative fold of Jewish life concerning its views on the State of Israel and reworked her relationship to Israel-Palestine.

The concept of *hineni* remains ripe within the Jewish activist and anti-Occupation community. Notably, there is a fellowship program named *Hinenu* (here we are), a three-month immersive program where activists live in Area C of the West Bank with Palestinians to engage in solidarity work. As part of this project, Jewish activists are asked to:

> Amplify these events [settler attacks, military violence, home demolitions, and land seizures, etc.] and stories from the field as part of larger coordinated efforts with Palestinian and Israeli activists. Our partners have made clear that this presence is

> meaningful and important, has the potential to shift violent power dynamics in the field, and therefore must continue (Center for Jewish Non-Violence 2024)

The language echoes that of responsibility. If activists are to engage, document, and share events, then there is the potential to shift the dynamics on the ground. Palestinian partnerships lead this struggle, to which Jewish bodies use their privilege to resist the occupation as a moral imperative that is 'meaningful' and 'important'. Jewish activists are not only responsible but are tasked by themselves and fellow members of the community with amplifying these events to broadcast the Occupation to the world.

Aron, in the last chapter, discussed the responsibility of obtaining citizenship. He analyzed it in a cost-benefit analysis and then shared how he would be 'recovering from the trauma for a very long time', which was in reference to the violence he experienced. While activists surely experience less violence than Palestinians, the experience of violence can shake activists into deeper questions of responsibility as they glimpse into the experiences of Palestinians. Aron discussed the following experience that shifted his positionality, which led to his political awakening -

> [I was] attacked by settlers…so in Sukkot of 2019, I was with Rabbis for Human Rights in Burin, helping with the olive harvest, and 15 to 20 masked settlers, with tzitzis swirling, came down and attacked us with crowbars and stones and eventually broke an 80-year-old rabbi's arms. I was hit with a crowbar [points] here, here and here. And I was hit with a stone in the back of my head and ultimately required stitches on that…the IDF came 20 minutes after it all happened. The jeep took like one twirl around and left. Also, the settlers burned down the field. One settler that day was arrested [and] detained for the night for arson and then released in the morning, and nobody's ever been charged in the attack. So after that I learned more about settler violence, you know, at that point that was like 170 violent attacks by settlers against Palestinians in this one specific village that year.

Aron notably pointed out the "tzitzis swirling", an indication that they were Jews and dressed in traditional religious clothing. He commented on how they broke the arm of an elderly rabbi, indicating his anger and frustration as he spoke about how his fellow Jews were acting in such a

way towards other Jews and Palestinians, leading to moral questions of his sense of belonging to the Jewish community at large and fellow activists and Palestinians. Before he shared this story with me, Aron shared that he had visited a settlement before and met with fellow Jews. The anger and upset were apparent in his voice as he spoke; he "could be attacked as a Jew in a Jewish country," and suddenly any sense of unity among Jews as *Am Yisrael* was shattered in Aron's eyes along with his self-described belief in liberal Zionism, which became anti-Zionism. I sensed his heartbreak as his voice cracked when he shared this story with me. His momentary experience of the other pushed him away from his feeling of being part of the collective, of *Am Yisrael*. While he would take responsibility for others, his fellow people would not accept responsibility for him and his safety once he traversed the physical and emotional walls to meet with Palestinians. The army failed to care; the settlers felt he was a traitor; and he felt like a Palestinian. However, this only strengthened his resolve and his self-proclaimed more radical stance (e.g. anti-Zionism) to develop more awareness and understanding of the violence of occupation and the necessary need to reformulate how he relates to the Jewish collective.

In standing with 'the other' and taking on the ethical stance of *hineni*, both Sarah and Aron ironically assume that the State of Israel and Zionism speak for all Jews, falling into the same logic that activists try to resist. It speaks to the ongoing contradiction that American activists are seeking to unravel, which is refusing the rhetoric that the State of Israel speaks for them and is their beacon of safety, while also feeling responsible for the state's actions. I am drawn to understanding how this logic warps our ability to create rupture and alternative modes of belonging by understanding how activists then 'unlearn' after they awaken to their responsibility.

American Jews Unlearning Together

> "Neither the individual nor the state is where we discover who we are and why… Beyond the most basic rules necessary for the maintenance of the most rudimentary social order, morality lives in communities and the traditions which sustain them."
>
> – Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

As individuals make up our communities, these moments of grappling with our responsibility for 'the other' living under occupation become identifiers and rites of passage for the activist community members, resulting in collective feelings of shame and concern. Central to their politics is a disavowal of Israel's Jewishness, but a simultaneous embrace of the fact that the State of Israel is an inescapable feature in Jewish life that must be contended with, as I discussed while unpacking the left's relationship to the State of Israel in the first chapter. One interlocuter commented that, "we want to care about Jews and half the Jewish population lives here, so we must contend with it". Despite the necessary contention with the State of Israel, among my interlocutors, they have reached a moment of crisis and concern, which has encouraged them to unlearn political Zionism and bear witness to Palestinian reality. However, the State of Israel remains an inescapable force in Jewish life to be grappled with, as we saw clearly in Chapter 1. This positionality feels impossible to navigate, as though our sense of belonging to the Jewish collective was ruptured, and we seek a Jewish alternative that can stand for both our collective Jewishness and our moral beliefs. Among activists, attachments to people, place, and belonging remain part of navigating our commitments to one another in the seemingly impossible situation in which we find ourselves.

On a study tour of East Jerusalem with many rabbinical students, one participant shared that they had an "existential dread of being a Jew associated with Israel" during the introductions for the day. Their fear and shame rang in my ears. They were visiting Jerusalem, so clearly engaging

in ‘Israel’. They had some associations with this land, yet simultaneously felt an ‘existential dread’, was it around how people would view them in North America? How the Israeli State saw them? What or who is ‘Israel’ in their eyes? What types of entanglements did they assume if they felt this dread? The intention behind the tour was for many a show of solidarity and an effort to transform Jewish leadership from within. Educating the future Jewish leaders, the study tour hoped to have a ripple effect and educate the diasporic communities and rethink Jewish communal organizing that acknowledges the occupation and separate Jewishness from Israel. However, that felt impossible. The reality of being in Israel-Palestine and our diasporic connection makes it nearly impossible to disentangle being Jewish and engaging with Israel. Thus, this participant needed to hold a sense of shame and guilt to index a particular and acceptable politic. If one feels ‘guilty’ or ‘shamed’ about the actions of the State of Israel, thereby taking responsibility, they can ‘own’ their internalized complicity vis-à-vis living in Israel-Palestine. Holding this to be true creates a particular mode of belonging based on rejecting the state and intentionally situating oneself as a type of ‘other’. This tour was mainly an opportunity for the converted to show that they oppose the narrative of Israel they grew up with and equip themselves with knowledge and tools about the Occupation in East Jerusalem to absolve themselves from the shame and stain of the Occupation.

Educational tours like this have become the foreground for activists to step into the ‘other’ with the ideals of *hineni* to deepen a sense of empathy and justice. Nikolas Rose (1999) discusses this idea of educating oneself to act as a ‘good citizen’ in *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* by drawing attention to how neoliberalism enables the care of the self, whereby individuals are tasked with the responsibility of becoming their own authority. In the case of Israel-Palestine, as we saw in the previous chapter, becoming a good citizen may be impossible;

many argue that not being a citizen may be best or ensuring one's citizenship is wielded as a force of privilege. Each person I spoke to who discussed their activism had a desire to re-learn and 'unlearn' the land of Israel-Palestine and their relationship and attachments to Israel-Palestine. Rose (1999) argues, "such a citizen subject is not to be dominated in the interests of power, but to be educated and solicited into a kind of alliance between personal objectives and ambitions and institutionally or socially prized goals or activities" (10). As we understand this journey of political awakening among my interlocutors, as we experience the violence of the state or witness the human rights violations of the occupation now, we have a responsibility to create a new system of 'truth' to spread an alternative message. We become responsible for this conversation (see Rose 1999, 4). The result is new relationships with the Jewish community that seeks to transform its relationship to Israel-Palestine and a feeling of responsibility to re-educate the community and create 'partnerships' with Palestinians. These tours keep these conversations alive and allow activists to see the Occupation firsthand while engaging in an alternative Jewish community. As the tour continued, we walked to the Educational Book Shop in East Jerusalem. Activists started recommending books to each other, and veteran activists shared their experiences in the Occupied West Bank working with Palestinians. This was when Aron began making book recommendations, as we saw in the first chapter. Within these communal spaces and communal educational tours, activists engage with one another and question their responsibility and relationships with Israel-Palestine. These tours act as a training ground to forge a small Jewish collective that attempts to create a sense of belonging among a minority of Jews who hold the same political beliefs. Yet, their relationship to the larger Jewish collective remains elusive at times.

Divergent Leftists and Communal Dialogue

On one tour, I went to the West Bank to the area of the South Hebron Hills on a 'solidarity weekend' intended to educate people seeking to get more involved in activism. On these days, activists join Palestinians and help them tend to their land, build, and offer protective presence against the military and settlers who come and disturb their daily life. While my research focuses on American Jews, these weekends are often a partnership between the Palestinian communities, groups like ATL and local-Israeli groups, which opened space for intracommunal dialogue and discussion. When we arrived, we were briefed on what was happening in the community, the area's history and geography. We trekked up to a series of caves where we helped build the floors and walls to make them livable for the residents. At times, when Palestinian homes and structures are demolished, people move into the caves because they are less likely to be destroyed. We worked with the mud on our hands and listened to the Palestinian activists who had organized the activity. After some time, we sat outside in the glaring sun, sharing falafel and vegetables. One of the more veteran Israeli activists, Idan[8], was getting heated about the importance of being an anti-Zionist and only wanting to welcome fellow anti-Zionists in actions, arguing for a strong vetting process to protect the collective and Palestinian partners from those who he felt were ideologically opposed to them. I questioned if this was exclusionary and asked if the label of 'anti-Zionist' is more important than values, and if we were then limiting who would feel welcome to join as activists. For example, if someone is against home demolitions but maybe still self-identifies as 'Zionist', should they be denied access to solidarity actions to rebuild homes? For most Jews, I found that Zionism holds a plurality of views regarding the state's territories and boundaries. Notably, many liberal Zionists vehemently oppose settling the

[8] A pseudonym

West Bank. However, among young activists, as I discussed in Chapter 2, "Zionism is what Zionism does" (a code for occupation), focusing on the impact of Zionism rather than its ideals. Therefore, being an anti-Zionist is a moral positioning of oneself that can be ascribed after one teaches oneself about the occupation. However, for many Jews, Zionism is a utopic vision of safety and collective self-determination. This internal conversation sparked much debate and frustration, both towards each other and towards Israeli society and Jewish communities at large.

I took notes on the days of the solidarity weekend that read –

> *Lots of conversations around anti-Zionism and how we relate to it. It's interesting being here (in a Palestinian community) and having those conversations without the community we serve (e.g. Palestinians). Lots of talk of being 'traitors' and 'leftists' as our own identities*

I understood what the internal conversation was asking: What does it mean to be a Jew who lives in Israel-Palestine? Who gets to decide who should engage in activism, and who is the gatekeeper? It brings us back to the central ideas of communal gatekeeping while also attempting to forge a community and sense of belonging among those of us who have been labelled traitors and outside the Jewish collective. Activists continued to chatter about how they were considered traitors or radicals among the majority of Israeli society. Others started talking about the importance of communism and what the land would look like when all the walls are broken down. This was a conversation about the current state of the land and the potential future, but it was only being had internally among us activists. Our Palestinian hosts seemed uninterested in engaging in this conversation, and activists from within the Green Line far outnumbered the few locals hosting us.

Suddenly, the conversation took a turn. An international activist, who was from Ireland, questioned how he could work with local Israeli leftists, like Idan, and still be compliant with BDS. The question of Jewish Israelis and their role and future was questioned. Idan became heated and aggressively rebutted, “I speak the language, I live here”. Idan, who had just argued with me about keeping a strictly pure anti-Zionist activist space, claimed, “fuck anyone that doesn’t want me here, I’m Israeli, I’m from here, so it’s not like I’m going anywhere”. He burst out with his fears and concerns in the face of an ‘other’ and demanded his rights. His ideological purity test in some ways could not stand up to this line of questioning. He was scared, and just as he held a strong ideology of caring for the ‘other’, suddenly the script flipped, and he needed to be assured of his right to belong. When speaking solely with fellow Jews, this topic seldom arose. We could not assure him of his rights and sense of belonging to live in Israel-Palestine, as it was assumed. The international activist held an entirely different set of questions regarding belonging that threatened Idan. Notably, the entire conversation happened in a Palestinian community on their land. Still, no Palestinian ‘partners’ engaged, and no one seemed to ask, who do Palestinians want to be joining them in their struggle against violence and occupation?

This interaction outlined our communal conversations regarding who and how we should belong and in what circumstances while engaging in activism. Still, it was clear that some type of moral positioning was necessary to be a ‘leftist’ and part of the actions. Once again, a sense of purity politics came into play to decide who can be in and who is out, diverging between different activists. However, this conversation also breaks down the possibility of purity politics holding merit as he reaffirms his belief in living as an Israeli in Israel-Palestine while denouncing Zionism.

What is 'Partnership'?

Throughout my fieldwork, activists shared their personal transformations in the hope that by doing so, they could create broader change within both Jewish circles and for Palestinians. In this section, I transition from our internal conversations to questions of efficacy and impact of working with Palestinians. While activists engage in the project of the self, both to transform local Jewish community, like penning letters against the wars that ease their own internal shame and guilt, or the justifications that emerged whenever someone shared they had taken up citizenship. Within the Jewish activist community and between Palestinians, activists are forced to negotiate how they want to engage and if engagement is for their own sake / the sake of the Jewish people or the sake of Palestinians. However, the relationships between American Jewish activists and Palestinians are generally impersonal and do not deeply engage in political discussion. For example, messages often read - 'our partners in the village are asking for protective presence', or 'our partners are requesting support in the olive harvest', followed by an urgent request to join an action. The structure of 'partnerships' is intended to be self-sustaining, like a revolving door, where activists have the ability to opt in or out based on the demand as it is made, often in a private group chat. While most activists come and go with low-level relationships, a few veteran (American and Israeli-Jewish) activists hold deeper relationships and decision-making power between the general activist community and Palestinians.

As Jewish activists engage in solidarity efforts, much of the rhetoric centers on partnerships and joint struggle. Conceptualizations of partnership are often problematized in the context of international development efforts. Unequal power relations often constitute partnership in development terms, and how participatory development projects can still facilitate unjust exertion of power (Cook and Kothari 2001, 4). Despite the cautionary tale, partnership has become an integral part of development and activist efforts. Situated between NGOs, collectives,

and ad-hoc efforts, left-wing activists in Israel-Palestine support the development and sometimes mere existence of Palestinians and their rights to their land and territory, which becomes an integral part of activism in the region. For example, when sieges occur in Palestinian communities, activists may find ways to procure necessary medicine to supply the communities and use their privilege as Israeli citizens to distribute supplies. In the context of this type of effort, partnerships are designed for coordination and distribution of supplies. However, much of the time, partnerships between activists and Palestinians are categorized by types of 'protective presence' where Jews and Israelis live among Palestinians and document human rights abuses and support gaining access to their land. Engaging in this type of activism requires one to be allowed in. Jensen (2013) –

> suggests that partnership, rather than creating a transparent communicative space, creates multiple gates that swing in different directions and are controlled by different actors, depending on time and place. But this also illuminates another sense of recursive partnerships. It highlights that partnership creates situations in which everyone is dependent on the gatekeeping activities of others (2013, 40-41)

Looking inward within the activist community, we can acknowledge the gatekeeping of particular activists who hold relationships with Palestinians who may seek a type of purity in an activist when coming to join an action. Through gatekeeping, activists seek to protect Palestinians from the risk of unwelcome visitors who could seek destruction by spying on them or collaborating with Israeli authorities. Simultaneously, activists are sought after and requested by Palestinian communities.

While the Jewish intracommunal conversation centres itself around questions of Zionism, challenges and problems of the state, and subsequently, how to be a moral Jew in the messy world of Israel-Palestine politics, externally, we must grapple with and explore how these internal conversations extend themselves to relationships with Palestinians and a shared future of

belonging. Relationships become central and to the forefront for positioning oneself in solidarity with Palestinians. As I shared in the introduction to this chapter, I regularly experienced conversations when activists would discuss who the collective should allow to join in activism, the meaning of Zionism, communism, and other meaningful discussions about envisioning a future in Israel-Palestine, often happening without Palestinians' direct input or thought. These experiences point to the questions of partnerships and how people decide who and what is a 'partner' and how partnership becomes an imperative for engaging in activism, resulting in different forms of gatekeeping and minimal relationships with Palestinians to discuss a shared vision for the future outside of immediate demands – like olive harvesting, which garners widespread activist support.

The face of activists is often not Palestinians themselves, but Jews and Israelis who hold the relationships and usually decide who can enter and who cannot. This decision is made by activists to ensure trust and by Palestinians, because their resources and capacity are limited. When activists mentioned the struggles they witnessed Palestinians facing, they would share with anger, guilt and frustration. However, when I asked them what changed their political beliefs, it was nearly always conversations with other Jews and Israelis and bearing witness as we discussed earlier. Notably, no one told me it was because of a deep relationship with a Palestinian person. For example, Aron spoke about his experience being assaulted by settlers, Yoni shared about hearing a presentation about checkpoints, or Sarah spoke about witnessing Khan Al Ahmer. This finding raises the question of what, if any, role Palestinians play in transforming the Jewish community and what role Jewish partnership and community can play in transforming Palestinian life. If these partnerships do not result in relationships, I fear they hold the potential to obscure a sense of care or relationality between activists and Palestinians,

reinforcing the neoliberal ideals of self-learning and becoming their own authority. However, to truly facilitate a sense of belonging for both Israelis and Palestinians, which emerged when the Israeli activist reasserted his right to live in Israel-Palestine, there must be a sense of seeing one another eye-to-eye, even in the reality of unequal power relations. There does not need to be strong relationships between Jews and Palestinians for American Jews to 'unlearn' political Zionism, but rather not having equal relationships can facilitate a sense of saviourism that perpetuates the ongoing inequality. Palestinians in many ways remain outside, and Jewish activists recognize the system and seek to subvert it, but often do not necessarily recognize the individuality and diversity among Palestinians.

In her book *All About Love: New Visions* by bell hooks (2000), she talks about the imperative of love in justice movements as an ethic to nurture ourselves and others, an antidote to patriarchal thinking and a feminist alignment with what could be possible if love took precedence in how we enter relationships (hooks 2000). A popular read on the bookshelves of many activists (me included) urges us to dig into the sense of love in these partnerships and how they could be deepened to create more profound transformation on all fronts. The concept of love does not escape Levinas (1998) as he speaks of justice –

> Justice comes from love. That definitely doesn't mean to say that the rigor of justice can't be turned against love understood in terms of responsibility. Politics, left to itself, has its own determinism. Love must always watch over justice. In Jewish theology—I am not guided by that theology explicitly—God is the God of justice, but his principal attribute is mercy. In Talmudic language, God is always called Rachmanah the Merciful: this whole topic is studied in rabbinic exegesis. Why are there two accounts of creation? Because the Eternal—called Elohim in the first account—wanted at first (all that is only a fable, of course) to create a world sustained solely by justice. It didn't hold up. The second account, in which the Tetragrammaton appears, attests to the intervention of mercy (108)

Interestingly, Levinas (1998) is not writing strictly as a Jew, but interweaving how Jewish philosophy offers ethics to view the world. When I asked my interview participants if they felt

they were enacting Jewish values, they questioned what it meant. They argued that Jewish values are obscure and favoured a universalist humanitarian approach to the conversation, despite often quoting Torah or other texts to make claims. My interlocutors ironically shifted between the universalist ideals and the particularisms of Jewish texts to exemplify them.

When I speak to Jewish activists, I see that each activist deeply cares for the other and holds responsibility towards their partners and their moral responsibility to end the occupation. Each person says *hineni*. For example, activists are willing to be arrested and actively engage in the frontlines when confronted by the army or police, knowing their privilege, and perhaps holding some guilt and shame for that privilege. However, opaque relationships and dogmatic views of justice can taint the ability to develop relationships that hold space for love. As partnerships develop, love and depth within them remain imperative, rather than simply responding to urgent needs and demands that enable us to stand morally, but perhaps diminish depth in relationships. This occurs as activists make their calls in group chats to show up when there is a particular event or a trying time.

Transforming our Relationships

I must be honest, since undertaking this research and designing my research project, much of my life has changed since arriving and moving to Jerusalem. Not only have I changed, but the circumstances in which we engage as activists have changed. Upon arrival, I was deeply involved in All That's Left (ATL) and attended many protests, solidarity weekends, meetings, and community meals. I saw people come and go and witnessed community members stay and lose strength. To date, only two of the seven formal interviewees remain living in Israel-Palestine. Those who intended to stay permanently often found groups that were more local or secured full-time jobs, which created a challenge in attending ATL activities consistently. Over the past nearly three years of permanently living in Israel-Palestine, I, too, have changed in my

positionality. I took a full-time role as the Program Director of a youth peacebuilding organization. I also fell in love with a partner who happens to be Palestinian. We met through mutual friends who love hiking and attending cultural events and gatherings. Through multiple encounters, we started dating and quickly developed a partnership. He works at a local hospital, managing between patients and insurance companies, and is a trained ICU nurse. He has the ability to empathize and care for people. Together, we have also been experiencing my second war here, and a new round of violence for him as someone who was a young child during the Second Intifada. However, this war is the most brutal yet; we find ourselves hiding in bomb shelters and constantly looking over our shoulders. We have both called each other in distress to make sure the other is safe after local attacks or rocket fire. My nervous system is heightened, and loud noises feel like a threat. While I witness the challenges of my Palestinian partner and friends, I also experience an intertwining of sorts between us in ways I never anticipated. While I still engage in activist activities and support when I can, my relationships have not come from the activist world per se, but through my daily interactions with those I love.

Following October 7th, my partner and I felt scared and hopeless. My partner and I felt strongly that we wanted to help people in some way. My partner offered the extra room in our apartment to a colleague's family member who was relocated from the Otef Azza (the Israeli area next to Gaza that was attacked on October 7th), only to be met with skepticism because he's Palestinian. I volunteered to package food for Jews who were evacuated and Palestinians in the West Bank who lost their permits to enter the area within the Green Line. Responsibility did not evade us and many other Jewish activists, who, despite our own mourning post October 7th, continued to partner with Palestinians and support their urgent needs. However, it has not come

without challenges, as many Jewish activists were afraid and sought empathy from Palestinians that they did not feel they received.

One night, I arrived home to my partner hunched and hovering over a pint of Ben & Jerry's ice cream; his neck was red, and his spoon dug into the pint. I sensed something was wrong and asked him what had happened. He proceeded to share that he was again stopped at a checkpoint. He was visiting his parents, and typically, there is no checkpoint along the way, but they set up an ad-hoc 'flying checkpoint' near his parents' house. It appeared they were looking for him, and it was likely that the Shin Bet (Israel's Intelligence Agency) had tracked his phone or car to interrogate him.

A few weeks before this interrogation, he shared with me that he had registered with a group of medical professionals from East Jerusalem with the Red Crescent to enter Gaza with supplies and provide treatment to Gazans under the relentless bombing of Israel. Petrified of what this could become, I barely slept that week. A similar interrogation happened shortly after he had registered for the program, where they set up a flying checkpoint to find him near his parents' house and interrogate him regarding his registration. He registered out of a deep humanitarian concern, watching the pain of Gazans and knowing he had high-level skills to offer that could be lifesaving. However, the Shin Bet viewed this as a traitorous act and proceeded to interrogate him for hours and refused to allow him to join the program. My partner does not hold Israeli citizenship; in fact, his ID card says "Jordanian," referring to a time before 1967, long before he was born. As an East Jerusalemite, this creates a bit of irony regarding whom he was being a traitor to.

As he hung over the pint of ice cream, he began to share this second, now familiar encounter with the police at this flying checkpoint. This time, they asked him to enter Gaza as a

nurse, but they would pay him to provide information to Israel; in fact, 10,000 NIS per day, which, for context, is my monthly salary. Offended, he refused to collaborate. His love and care for others were twisted to serve authorities that did not even recognize his right to live here. It was not the first time he was summoned in this way. He got angry, and he knew the police officer who was interrogating him. The officer was the grandson of a friend who is a doctor at the hospital where he works. The officer became more aggressive in his request, and my partner became more offended. The officer slapped him, and my partner hit back – something I never thought my partner was capable of, considering his generally calm demeanour, but this hit him differently. Later, he told me he woke up in a chair. He shared with me that he thinks he was tased and given a needle of some sort. He pointed to his upper arm, where there was a very faint mark, like a vaccination scar. After he woke up, the police released him and sent him home.

When he finished explaining, I was stunned, he was angry, and we were both scared. As we lay in bed that night, his breath became rapid, and he started convulsing. I tried to calm him down and asked to bring him to the hospital. We had no idea what they had given him, and I was overcome with fear, wondering what it could have been and if he was having an adverse reaction. He refused to go. As someone who works in a hospital, he is quite stubborn when seeking treatment for himself. I stayed up trying to monitor his condition. In this intimate moment, I realized my worst fear came to light, that he would be hurt at a checkpoint or in the conflict by 'my side' – Jewish Israelis. I finally fell asleep and woke up the next morning. His breathing had normalized, and as we spoke, he shared that he "really thought they tried to kill [him]".

The 'they' are the police who we, as activists, know are more than capable of hurting us when we are with the 'wrong people' or places (e.g. with Palestinians), but how do we grapple

with the reality when those who are hurt are someone we deeply care about, whereby they have nearly no systemic recourse to seek retribution and no safety of citizenship. While discussing romantic and intimate relationships, these fears ring true for others I deeply care for and love. Through my partnership, I notice some Palestinian friends feel safer and more trusting, sharing with me and creating a deeper relationship with me because I can no longer 'check out' of the work; I am deeply entwined in it. Suddenly, I am in the struggle with them. This depth becomes imperative for trust, so Jewish activists and people will continue to show up with and for them. Not just to document atrocities, but to cry with them and care with them.

My partner and I discuss leaving the country, but we cannot unless he obtains citizenship; leaving the country more or less permanently risks him losing his residency documentation. I no longer feel pity, but a deep empathy and love; my activism is shaped by how *we* deserve to live. It shapes *our* lives and *our* questions regarding our future. We wonder if we can have children, knowing they would grow up in this harsh environment. We wonder how we can leave; at one point, we may have to make a decision that would risk him losing his residency status and his ability to return home. These questions about how we live in this land shape how we encounter those we meet and the decisions we make. We become caught in the messiness of the human dynamic, instilled with fear and care for one another.

My Desperate Seeking of a Path Forward

Since the war started, many Jewish activists reached their breaking point and left Israel-Palestine with a sense of hopelessness. Today, only three of my interlocutors remain in Jerusalem. Others, afraid and feeling alone while seeing the rise in global antisemitism, felt a deeper need to protect themselves and have subsequently supported the war effort. Despite living just kilometres away from each other and with a deeply intertwined reality, our literal and emotional walls blind us to truly seeing one another and acknowledging our interconnectedness.

If we truly were to realize our interconnectedness, how would that change our relationships to each other and care for one another to create a community of support and empathy?

However, I must acknowledge how fear has overcome many of us. In our current reality, questions of safety, love, and responsibility have all come into question. Fear has become a political tool for how we engage and organize ourselves, and how both Palestinians and Israelis portray one another. Decleve (2023), in her research on Jewish Israeli activists living with Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank, discusses how their fear feels disconnected from their political beliefs, as though their beliefs as activists who live among Palestinians and their fear around living with Palestinians stand in contrast with each other. Can we feel fear and engage in relationships, or is fear a necessary deterrent to engaging with the 'other'? The nature of fear leads us to objectify or dehumanize one another. The lack of messiness within relationships keeps things at a superficial level, and trust must come from the activist community itself, not in relationships with Palestinians, some of which have fallen apart since the war began. Sustaining relationships with Palestinians for Jewish activists at these times requires one to acknowledge their fear and hold strong enough political beliefs or become deeply enough entangled with Palestinians in relationship to hold the other with care. Engaging in activism from a space of love and relationship is messy. "The practice of love offers no place of safety. We risk loss, hurt, and pain. We risk being acted upon by forces outside of our control" (hooks 2000, 153). As we seek to create a future of justice, peace, and an end to the occupation and war, through relationships, we risk a lot. It becomes scary the further embedded we get between Jews and Palestinians. There is an ease to partnerships and beauty in holding a homogenous community, but they may prove fragile.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I analyzed questions of belonging among the Jewish left and our entanglements between communal, national, and political belonging. We witnessed how my young American Jewish interlocutors grapple with their relationship to Israel-Palestine and ambivalently take citizenship in Israel to enact national belonging. Finally, we saw how the left-wing community in Israel-Palestine is in and of itself fraught and fragile, only becoming more tenuous since the war.

Since the war, so much of life in Israel-Palestine has changed, most for the worse. I wonder when we will reach rock bottom, and people will feel that we have lost enough, leaving no other path forward but that of relationships and belonging for all people in the land. Over the past year, I have taken training in Non-Violent Communication, trying to articulate myself and my relationships better. My teacher asked, 'What if we hold everyone's needs with care?'. How could we create transformative systems that hold people's needs with care? I wonder if we must move beyond a sense of a dogmatic collective, as though a collective could truly be representative or simply amplify the loudest voices. However, in times of fear and war, it is unsurprising that,

> Emotions…shift in different times and situations and are more or less reflective. As a rule, the emotional components of people's constructions of themselves and their identities become more central the more threatened and less secure they feel. In the most extreme cases people are willing to sacrifice their lives and the lives of others - in order for the narratives of their identities and the objects of their identifications and attachments to continue to exist. (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202)

If we are to think about what collective belonging could look like honestly, perhaps we must realize that love and care, more than any guerrilla-style freedom fight or occupation, will be what can offer a sense of safety to all of our affinities towards collectivity. The existential *feelings* that

both Palestinians and Israelis have directly shaped the ways we act towards one another at a collective level. As activists seeking to rupture these views, perhaps we must chameleon as Avi does, put on our different costumes as we enter different spaces, so that we can push in more subtle ways and attempt to, however fractured, to hold all the parts of ourselves in ruptured ways. Or perhaps, we must acknowledge that striving to belong perhaps means we are already outside (Probyn 2016, 8), seeing everyone but belonging to no one (Memmi 1991). What could emerge if we decided that belonging was shrinking us to attachments that cannot support all parts of ourselves?

We then stumble through life, ambivalently and imperfectly, as we live in an imperfect space. Perhaps we must do inner work and communal work to create more space inside us to hold more outside of ourselves. One of the scariest parts of this war we live in is that we are all capable of the evil we see around us. As Hannah Arendt (1963, 2006) aptly points out in the trial of Eichmann, "the trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal." (286). Perhaps as we seek to belong and push beyond purity, we must then recognize our own evil within us. Thus, we can only truly forge a space of belonging by acknowledging our fears and evils. As the world becomes increasingly polarized, I sometimes find myself following suit. I, too, find myself gatekeeping and engaging in conversations about morality and righteousness. Creating a moral code and standard is necessary and important. However, I also must remind myself that I, too, am capable of evil; what parts of me are mirrored in those with whom I disagree? It takes time to break down the evil parts of ourselves to feel we can bring more openness and acceptance. In my relationships with fellow Jews and Israelis, I find myself struggling with this.

I conclude with my own troubles and tribulations on morality and my concerns about belonging. I need to ask myself not just how I belong, but what I am also afraid to belong to? What establishes ‘me’ as different from ‘them’? I believe this must be the question we ask ourselves in this ever-polarising world of left-wing and right-wing politics. While I certainly believe there are codes of morality, I also think we are all capable of immorality, something I have observed among those in my collective. As we seek a path forward, perhaps the work is two-fold, engaging both the inner and outer worlds to see the divine in all beings.

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