

## The mirror stage of movement intellectuals?

### Jewish criticism of Israel and its relationship to a developing social movement

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#### Abstract

*This article explores the strengths and limitations of movement intellectuals' theorisation of their movement and its terrain of activism. It looks at four published collections of Jewish writers critical of Israel and Zionism and asks how these books represent and defend a developing diaspora Jewish Israel-critical movement, and whether they manage to effectively theorise its terrain of activism. I argue that although these books offer some important purchase on the issues surrounding Israel/Palestine, through promoting the subjectivity of Jewish activists, and by being constrained by what is acceptable among mainstream Jewish thought, they efface the voice and presence of Palestinians, producing a partial understanding of the issue and the movement. I suggest that this may be due to the particular phase of this movement getting to know itself and its terrain of activism, which I characterise as its 'mirror stage'.*

Books reviewed in this article:

Anne Karpf, Brian Klug, Jacqueline Rose, and Barbara Rosenbaum. 2008. *A Time to Speak Out: Independent Jewish Voices on Israel, Zionism and Jewish identity*. London: Verso. 224 pp ISBN-13: 978-1844672295 (pb). Paperback £7.49

Seth Farber. *Radical, Rabbis and Peacemakers. Conversations with Jewish Critics of Israel*. Maine: Common Courage Press. 2005. 400 pp ISBN-13: 978-1567513264 (pb). Paperback \$19.95

Mike Marquesee. 2008. *If I Am Not For Myself: Journey of an anti-Zionist Jew*. London: Verso.: 256 pp ISBN-13: 978-1844672141(hb). Hardback £15.49

Murray Polner and Stefan Merken. *Peace, Justice, and Jews: Reclaiming our Tradition*. New York: Bunim and Bannigan. 2007. 338 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1933480152 (hb). Hardback \$18.25

In the last few years there has been an explosion of diaspora Jewish writing critical of Israel and Zionism. This has coincided, though it is hardly coincidental, with the formation of a specifically diaspora Jewish movement that criticises Israel. There have always been Jews critical of Israel and supportive of Palestinians. Recently though, this has been transformed from a 'Not in my name' individual opposition to and withdrawal of support from Israel to 'Not in our name' - a collective attempt to withdraw legitimacy from Israel's claim to represent Jews, and to forge a specifically Jewish collectivity whose aim is to oppose Israel's policies. We can speak for the first time, not of disaggregated people criticising Israel, but a social movement whose aim is to oppose its treatment of Palestinians.

In this article I seek to explain the relationship between diaspora Jewish writings critical of Israel and this movement. Many of the authors I examine are active in Israel-critical groups (both Jewish and wider) and can be seen, using Gramsci's term, as 'organic intellectuals' for this movement. This is not simply because of any activist involvement, but also because their books are explicitly

designed to build this developing movement – to serve as guides that provide reasons, recruits and routes for its journey.

As such these productions offer an insight into the relationship that movement intellectuals have with a recently established social movement, and how well they can describe and analyse their movement and its concerns. The question of how movement intellectuals understand and present the movement they are associated with has wider application than the specific issue of Israel/Palestine; it links in with the debate comparing academic and activist forms of theorising.

There is no need to reiterate criticism of academic research on social movements, the main points being that these academic descriptions are neither useful for the movements themselves, nor relatedly, are they very good analyses of these movements (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Johnston and Goodman 2006). Such critiques in some cases explicitly contrast academic shortcomings with the output of movement intellectuals (Cox and Barker 2002).

In viewing the type of knowledge produced by movements, Cox and Barker (2002) maintain that it derives from their character as movements in action, rather than static debating fora. The knowledge produced is above all *practical*. It may be practical in providing ideological and moral justifications of the movement or in providing strategic and practical proposals – it is always, however, directed towards what Cox and Barker see as the essential feature of movements – their dialogical and developmental nature – a fact which ensures that movement knowledge is ‘attempts to find answers to the question “what is to be done?” in situations which they do not fully control.’ (2002, 45)

Yet this activist theorising needs to be critically analysed in terms of what forms of knowledge it produces, how it produces this knowledge, and what are the effects of knowledge being produced in conditions of contention. I ask these questions about this movement and with respect to a certain type of activist theorising – books on the movement that have been produced by activists and academics with some degree of movement involvement.

In choosing to analyse published books, I do not claim that this form encompasses all forms of activist theorising. Far from it, such material is overly

representative of movement elites, is produced under market conditions and in response to other force than movement dynamics, including some of the forces that produce academic works. Nevertheless they represent an important public face of the movement and seriously wrestle with issues affecting it. They serve as exercises in movement justification and strategic thinking, and undertake crucial work in identity building that all movements - but particularly this one - needs to undertake.

In the article, I firstly introduce this movement – its aims, origins and its terrain of activism – does it try to change diaspora Jewish discourse on Israel/Palestine, does it try change wider opinions, does it try to do both? Then, I ask what relationship sympathetic academic/activist theorising has with this heterogeneous movement. I examine four books from the last couple of years – from America there is Seth Farber's interviews with anti-Zionists, which forms a useful contrast with a collection of articles from 'moderate' critics of Israel (Farber 2005; Polner and Merken 2007). There's Mike Marquese's transcontinental memoirs and finally another anthology from Jewish academics and activists, this time from Britain (Karpf, Klug, Rose, and Rosenbaum 2008; Marquese 2008a).

These books offer in their different forms - memoir, interviews and multiple voices – various ways to understand both movement and terrain of activism. In doing so I also ask whether the 'manifesto' aspect of this writing detracts from understanding of the issue or whether their engagement contributes to it. I argue that it does offer powerful theoretical engagement with the issues around Israel/Palestine, but that it comes with a downside.

Put simply, through focusing on Jews, these books fail to consider Palestinians adequately. By contesting the terrain of Jewish identity some of these books find themselves in an identity trap whereby the subjects of activism are simply Jews, not Palestinians, something which serves to offer a very partial vantage point on the Israel/Palestine issue. I further argue that this is not a fault of the books being insufficiently objective and academic. On the contrary, it is partly the failure to fully concern themselves with the many way that Jews engage in

activism on Israel/Palestine, and to adequately represent the movement that has led to this effacement of Palestinians.

This article is based on research into this movement – specifically on research into English Jewish Israel-critical activism, as well as readings of these books. As a Jewish activist in the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, I research this activism in the spirit of critical solidarity – seeing it as a ‘partial, imperfect, yet significant praxis’ (Johnston and Goodman 2006: 17). It is in the same spirit I approach these books.

### Description of movement

Firstly are we talking about a movement? There’s certainly something happening in the Jewish world. Since 2002, Jewish groups that oppose Israel have sprung up throughout the diaspora - in Canada, Australia, France, Scotland, even in Germany – and of course many organisations in the US. Taking England, there’s an alphabet soup of groups - Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JfJfP), Independent Jewish Voices (IJV), Jews Against Zionism (JAZ), Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods (J-BIG, Slogan “It’s kosher to boycott Israel”), not to mention the older Jewish Socialist Group (JSG).

This initially confusing profusion should not obscure the networked and decentred nature of this activism. Groups undertake joint activities with Jewish and non-Jewish groups; activists are sometimes linked to no groups, sometimes to many, Jewish and non-Jewish; there are links with radical Jewish cultural groups; and many activists are involved in mainstream political parties. Thus, contrary to the claims of detractors (Atzmon 2005), the English experience shows that what is being created is no new Jewish ghetto, but a situated response to the Israel/Palestine conflict and Zionist support of it, networked both to other Jews and non-Jews.

There are some linkages with Israeli and (to a smaller extent) Palestinian organisations and there are efforts to form coalitions – European Jews for Just Peace (EJJP) in Europe, and the more radical International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN, a network still at the formative stage). Despite these links, most

of the efforts of Jewish Israel-critical groups are still directed at the national level.

While different groups have different priorities the underlying aim of most of them is similar – to challenge Zionist hegemony among their fellow Jews and to challenge Israel, speaking *as Jews*. The latter is mainly directed at mainstream and Jewish media, and provides support to Palestinians and Palestine Solidarity Movements (PSMs). It is also partly directed towards these PSMs – informing them and (to a lesser extent) Palestinian people that there *are* Jews who oppose Israel and asking them not to conflate the two.

These groups have been somewhat successful in informing the world of Jewish opposition to Israel as well as affecting fellow Jews. Jews, as the saying goes, are news; Jews who oppose Israel especially so, with their criticism of Israel garnering respectable media coverage. The opposition they have provoked from local Zionist hegemonies can be seen as a response to their success as well as a success in itself; the fact that Zionists need to spend increasing amounts of time condemning fellow Jews for being antisemitic (Julius 2008; Rosenfeld 2006) undermines this key Zionist argument and diverts their resources.

One should not overstate their effect. They are still a small, marginalised group of people whose claim to speak out as Jews on Israel/Palestine is subjected to constant attack. However, the mere fact of their existence signals success; in removing diaspora Jewish support for Israel out of the universe of the undisputed into the universe of opinion they have performed a valuable task. Some Jews support Israel, some don't – either way the automatic equation between the two is shattered both for Jews and the wider world. They have more definite effects too among other Jews, with some mainstream Jewish opinion beginning to grudgingly respond to the existence of dissent.

Thus we have, certainly in the English instance, a networked group of people engaged in political contention with a common and very clearly delineated enemy – Zionists more so than Israel. This network is seeking to re-cognize the Israel/Palestine conflict for Jews and others (Eyerman and Jamison 1991), and there is a certain commonality of purpose, which takes in major disagreements

over tactics, such as the boycott campaign. It certainly appears to tick many of the boxes as to what a movement is (Crossley 2002; Diani 1992).

However there is some divergence in the movement over the terrain of activism, or to use the term proposed by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu - the field of contention (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). As I indicated, this movement operates in two separate fields – the Jewish field <sup>1</sup> and the field of solidarity activism, with both of these fields operating and contending within a wider political field. For Bourdieu, different fields impose different forms of struggle on actors, partly because one needs to manipulate the language and the silences imposed by the field in order to have any chances of being listened to – or in the language of social movement theory, in order to ensure that the framing of the movement resonates for the target audience.

However the co-option of the field goes beyond this, since we don't inhabit these fields as disembodied rational actors but as embedded, embodied creatures affected by the discourses of the field. Thinking of this in terms of identity formation, - people don't just deploy identities, they inhabit them and are themselves changed by the dynamics of identity formation. For instance, one aspect of this movement is that some activists, through their criticism of Israel, were embedding themselves within Jewish life and Jewish identity debates, somewhat to their surprise (Segal 2005).

This is not to say that actors' opinions are determined solely by their field - here Bourdieu's metaphor of the games player is useful. As he points out, the one who plays the game best is the one who lets the game inhabit them, and thereby can manipulate it to their advantage (Bourdieu 1990). So it is with social movement actors - the question is to what extent the field, the terrain of activism the social movement activist chooses to contest, affects both their identification and ideology.

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<sup>1</sup> I deliberately don't use the words 'the Jewish community' here, since I feel this to be a deceptive term, which allows those dominant in the field to present their hegemony as a natural consensual affair. The concept of field better conveys the processes of contention that actually obtain.

Deploying the memoir: *'If I am not for myself'*

Earlier I referred to these books as guides, comparable in part to travel guides where the authors lay out the barely chartered terrain they have travelled so that others may travel in their footsteps. One will not find any cut-and-dried defence of a movement here, partly because these books are a way of trying to create and guide this movement, something in the process of becoming, and importantly, to guide people into these movements.

The first thing to note is that these books are often highly personal. Returning to the language of social movement theory, they try to achieve their aims not merely through the use of collective framing devices (Benford and Snow 2000), but also through the use of personal narratives. If frames are the moral at the end of the story - strategic, directed and simple to understand, then narratives are the stories themselves – open-ended, incomplete and dynamic (Polletta 1998). The power of narratives derives precisely from their lack of completion, providing a sense of dynamic tension and the possibility for listeners to enter into the story.

All four books try to insert the personal into the political, a strategy immediately relevant to this struggle. It shows others a path to activism and provides a means of offering an important justification for this movement – the authentically Jewish nature of Israel-critical activism. The memoir form is an effective means of creating authenticity and establishing personal authority in advancing controversial arguments. It is undertaken by many anti-Zionist writers –Mike Marquesee, but also Eva Figes and Lynn Segal from Britain, and to a lesser extent Antony Loewenstein from Australia (Figes 2008; Loewenstein 2007; Segal 2007). Such memoirs can be seen as part of a longer tradition that contests the terrain of Jewish identity and memory from colonisation by Zionist narratives (for instance Klepfisz 1990).

There is a certain voyeurism in seeing someone's personal life displayed in a political argument, and at times the memoir form is reminiscent of how pre-revolutionary Enlightenment writers like Rousseau used doses of pornography



to spice up their political and philosophical arguments – a way of holding the readers' attention. Not that the provision of vignettes, strong narratives, characters to interest the reader is to be condemned! Such attempts to be attractive to a wide group of readers underline the extent to which memoirs can be political interventions.

In Marquesee's book, the counter-narrative advanced is both deconstructive and reconstructive. It deconstructs through presenting the author's own experience of just how Jews decided to become Zionist, disrupting the automatic equation of Jewish and Zionist. Besides drawing on his own experience of being called a self-hater for questioning Israel, he delves in considerable detail into his grandfather's personal and political life.

His book switches between political anti-Zionist arguments and accounts of this cantankerous, obstreperous, independently minded grandfather in the eddies of radical New York politics of the 1930s and 40s. The central question Marquesee raises about his grandfather is in the chapter 'Nakba' where he talks of his approval of the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. He asks 'How did the champion of the refugee and the immigrant come to gloat over a forced mass exodus?' (Marquesee 2008a: 209). For Marquesee this question is essential, not simply as a matter of personal understanding, but also because it is directly relevant to why otherwise progressive Jews support Zionism today. His presentation of his grandfather's political life is in part an attempt to unpick the reasons for this jarring support for Zionism.

Yet this book is not just a process of deconstruction; alternative paths are displayed, ideas his grandfather could have had, so that by the end of the book he is able to claim his own anti-Zionism as the true heir to his grandfather's radical political beliefs. This presentation of anti-Zionism as a logical conclusion or even a homecoming for a certain type of Jewishness is achieved by splicing an alternative history of Jewry into the personal stories. Rather than Jewish history being persecution piled upon persecution till the messianic creation of Israel, the portrait is of Jewish people dealing with the challenges and chances offered by diaspora life. Diaspora Jews are shown as confident autonomous actors when they engage with their social surroundings, rather

than when they take the Zionist or ultra-Orthodox route of running away into a self-created ghetto (for a similar treatment of early Zionism, though from wildly different vantage points: Rose 2005; Rose 2004).

The aim is to contest the dominant Zionist narrative of Jewish suffering and alienation from other Europeans, and to create an alternative narrative by revealing those threads of history that Zionism effaces. Instead of Chassidim, the Haskalah <sup>2</sup>; rather than Zionism, Bundism.<sup>3</sup> The biblical origin of Judaism is brought into play to argue that dissident prophesising has always been an authentic way of being Jewish - a central argument in the other books too.

Such alternative history both undermines Zionist claims and fashions a political actor – the diasporist Jew – and the political space in the diaspora where this actor can be active. Just as Zionism was once presented as auto-emancipation from the diaspora (Pinsker 1947), this is a means of auto-emancipation of diaspora Jews from Zionism's vampiric proclivities.

### The mirror stage and identity traps: *'Peace Justice and Jews'*

Marquesee's book shows the need for a social movement to establish a historical lineage and unity for itself; movement intellectuals need to assume that there is an 'itself' to speak for itself and they need to fashion that self. This assumption of a unity can be seen as akin to the psychologist, Jacques Lacan's ideas about a mirror stage in development. This is where the infant 'discovers' itself as a unitary being by seeing itself reflected in the mirror or the eyes of another. This creation of such an identity is one of the main tasks of these books. It explains why, like earlier attempts (Kushner and Solomon 2003) most are collections of voices - not merely to substantiate the claim, made by Judith Butler (2004)

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<sup>2</sup> Chassidism is a revivalist form of ultra-Orthodox worship, originating in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, around the same time as the Haskalah – emancipation of the Jews – began.

<sup>3</sup> Bundism was contemporaneous with early Zionism, both being revolutionary turn-of-the century movements. However Bundism promoted revolutionary change in a pan-European Socialist context, rather than in escape to Palestine.

among others that Jewish dissent is polyvocal and heterogeneous, but also to create within the pages of these books the form of such a movement.

While these books can be seen as acting as mirrors, the crucial difference between these and Lacan's mirror is that they are not created by the Other but by those in the movement itself. They are designed to create a necessary corrective to the distorted reflection offered to Israel-critical Jews by Zionist eyes that see them as self-hating, antisemitic, un-Jewish etc. Marquesee's aphorism: 'If I am not for myself... Zionists and Jewish leaders will claim to be for me' (Marquesee 2008a: 289) is firstly a demand for Israel-critical Jews to give the lie to Zionist claims about representing them. This is a recurring *raison d'être* these authors give for having a specifically Jewish movement. Equally importantly, he is also talking about the importance of rescuing anti-Zionist Jews from pariah status.

However, there is a problem with such identity contestation - the difficulty of lifting one's eyes away from this internal struggle. In fashioning a mirror for itself the movement, like Narcissus, may drown in its own endless refractions. Put less poetically, through this necessary self-affirmation these authors may be unable to escape the identity traps that belie any movement, but particularly this one: where identity is the currency the movement trades on, but at the same time wishes to move beyond – at least to some extent.

This identity trap was recognised a few years back by Neve Gordon (2005), when reviewing two earlier all-Jewish collections of essays. (Kushner and Solomon 2003; Shatz 2004) He acknowledged the political effectiveness of taking a 'Jews only' strategy in compiling these anthologies, but pointed out that this strategy encourages tribalism and 'ends up reproducing some of the most basic biases regarding who can criticize Israel and legitimately discuss anti-Semitism or the connection between Israel and Judaism.' (Gordon 2005: 105)

Marquesee largely avoids such a trap because of his unequivocal leftist and universalistic political stand. Far less successful or interested in avoiding such navel gazing is *Peace, Justice, and Jews*, whose subtitle could be 'look at us, aren't we great'.

While there are some fine individual pieces in this collection of 47 disparate vignettes, the overall tone is one of self-congratulation and self-absorption. The faintly sanctimonious air adopted against those Jews who 'ignore others' legitimate grievances' (Polner and Merken 2007: xv) does not alter the fact that these 'others' are but rarely spoken of. This can even (or especially) be seen in those travelogues where the author 'meets the Arabs'. In this voyage of the enlightened soul, Palestinians, often called Arabs, are usually treated as useful native guides to have - for part of the way. For instance Kenny Freeman talks about how he daringly moves to the Jewish town of Nazareth Illit which he described as being 'attached to' the Palestinian Israeli town of Nazareth, a nice euphemism which allows him to elide over the ethnic cleansing that caused it to be so, or the present day power relations between Nazareth and Nazareth Illit (Ezzat 2006).

After describing how he undertook to befriend a Christian Arab family, Freeman expresses how it was still important to find a Muslim to make friends with, to show that Jews could live with all sorts of Arabs. Having found someone and taken part in their colourful Muslim customs, he could then leave the Nazareth area for comfortably Jewish Tel Aviv. In a way the shallowness of such travelogues is the fault of the memoir strategy – necessarily promoting the personal, indeed self-obsessed point of view. However, the fault cannot be entirely placed on the format; this account can be usefully contrasted with Susan Nathan's (2005) moving, insightful and self-critical exploration of life in an Israeli Palestinian town.

The absence of Palestinians exists at a deeper level in this collection. Tellingly the Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948, is mentioned only once. This occurs in one of the most impassioned pieces –where David Howard, a committed pacifist, angrily rejects all the founding myths of Zionism. More representative however is Rabbi Arthur Waskow's disingenuous take on Israeli history. In *Violence and non-violence in Jewish thought and practice*, the Nakba is simply not acknowledged. It doesn't 'fit' with his narrative of 'purity of arms' whereby civilians were never targeted and Palestinian towns were never attacked by the mainstream Zionists who conquered Palestine in 1948. Invoking

this fantasy past, he talks of how their moral and justifiable 'decision to use military force sparingly' has recently changed into a new and unprecedented aggressive use of violence (Waskow 2007: 122).

This self-deluding narrative is a denial of the actual past of deliberately planned ethnic cleansing (Masalha 1992; Pappé 2006). It is this historical lie that lies behind the professed non-violence of many of the contributors to this book, for it allows them to maintain support of Israel and equate Palestinian and Israeli violence in the present. Unconsciously recalling Anatole France's cynicism about both rich and poor facing arrest if they sleep under bridges, here both the dispossessed and the racial elite will be criticised if they use violence to alter the status quo of Israel.

This is not to say that Freeman, Waskow and other authors are not interested in transformation, but the transformation they are interested in is that Jews become better, more moral people, so as 'to be a free nation in our land', as the title of one contribution has it.<sup>4</sup> Underlying this desire is a merging of diaspora Jews and Israelis which reproduces hegemonic conservative beliefs among the diaspora Jewish field.

### Jews in Exile: *'Rabbis, Rebels, and Peacemakers'*

Reading this collection, one is reminded of theologian Marc Ellis's sharp criticism of mainstream American Jewish critics of Israel, namely that their main interest is in redefining Jewish identity and their chief goal is the struggle to be the next Jewish Establishment. His work is informed by a horror that this nice debate over Jewish identity 'is hashed out over and over again *as the displacement, torture and murder of Palestinians continues, even escalates*' (Ellis 2003: 146-7 italics in original).

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<sup>4</sup> It is ironic that the only critical look at the Israeli peace movement is from within – a judicious appraisal of Machsomwatch by an activist, which more than any praise, gives some hope as to the future of this movement (Resh 2007).

Ellis recommends walking away from this meaningless internal civil war. His point – that those who contest the Jewish field of activity primarily serve to reproduce it – echoes Bourdieu's point about 'the objective complicity' that rebels have with that which they rebel against (Bourdieu 1993: 74). It is not simply the discourses of the field that are reproduced by actors contesting it, it is also the silences – that which the field finds unnameable and unsayable – in this case Palestinian rights – which are transmitted, however unwillingly or unknowingly, by activists.

Ellis advances the idea of a new actor – the Jew in exile, a character akin to Deutscher's non-Jewish Jew (Deutscher 1968). This isn't simply a theoretical construct – while some Jewish activists prioritise efforts to change the Jewish 'community', others saw this as secondary, either because it was a hopeless task, or because so many Jews are alienated from an official community dominated by unresponsive Zionist institutions, and so this is not an entity worth appealing to. Without totally dismissing the Jewish field, they prioritise the wider world.

Ellis's critique and spirit presides over Seth Farber's annotated series of interviews with prominent Jewish anti-Zionists and non-Zionists. Farber's aim was not to present a representative survey of important American Jewish critics of Zionism. Although there are some notable names such as Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein, the book mainly seeks 'to make the anti-Zionist argument (against current Israeli policies) known to a larger public because it is the strongest, most cogent, and the most moral argument for opposing the Israeli occupation – and thus for becoming active in the pro-Palestinian movement.' (Farber 2006)

This book then is a conscious effort to forward one wing of the movement. Accused by a potential interviewee of trying to divide peace-loving Jews, Farber counters by saying that recognition of such a division is long overdue (2006). In this division, Farber's side seems to have the more interesting things to say, possibly because their talk is mercifully free of the half-truths and stock declarations of love for Israel which characterises 'moderate' Jewish critiques.

The book is constructed as a guide for the perplexed to get involved in activism, with slices of anti-Zionist history and theory scattered through the text. Nor is

the personal touch foregone; Farber presents an account of his own trip to Palestine, recalling the memoir form as well as a trusted action repertoire the pro-Palestinian movement uses in encouraging others to get involved (Landy 2008).

Farber's interviewees are equally aware of the book's role in mobilisation and their voices are directed accordingly. Steve Qvester of JATO (Jews Against The Occupation): 'Please exhort your readers in your book to read the words of Palestinians...there's a very bad habit, even on the real Jewish left, of Jews talking to other Jews about the occupation and thinking that they've just finished the conversation' (Farber 2005: 50). This indicates Qvester's understanding that readers will most probably be those on the 'real' Jewish left, as well as a discomfort with this fact, wariness of being stuck in a Jewish ghetto. Of all the books considered, this is the one where awareness of the limitations of a Jews-only format is most clearly perceived, a function perhaps of the interviewees' and author's involvement in wider non-Jewish activism.

Though Farber's anti-Zionist framing may work, his insistence, following Ellis that this solidarity with Palestinians constitutes a return to the Jewish prophetic, i.e. a reclamation of the Jewish covenant and the biblical prophetic tradition, is deeply problematic. Firstly this idea – following Ellis's image of Jews in exile carrying the Jewish Covenant with them as they leave - returns him to the terrain he seeks to avoid, that of the self-regarding Jewish civil war. Secondly, many of his highly articulate interviewees disagree with his interpretation of their politics.

At times, such as with Noam Chomsky (favourite prophet: Amos), Farber's concerns resonate. More often – even with Orthodox religious Jews such as Daniel Boyarin - they don't. As Norman Finkelstein bluntly responds to yet another question about The Jewish Covenant. 'I have no interest in covenants. I don't know who the Jewish people are. These are all metaphysical, extraneous terms to me.' (Farber 2005: 118)

Nor is he the only one to evince such lack of interest. It seems for most, their involvement in this activism has at least as much to do with their sense of being American, or of being universal citizens as with any sense of Jewishness. When

Joel Kovel declaims that Israel in all its horrors is *us* (Farber 2005: 75), the collectivity he refers to is the US, not the Jews.

It is to Farber's credit that he offers his interviewees the space to disagree with him and elaborate their own views. The extreme example of this might be Daniel Boyarin's interview, which descends at times into almost comedic hostility. This interview illustrates the vast gulf that exists between religious Orthodox and more secular Jews despite Farber's efforts to include both within the frame of his mirror. This is not a mere theoretical gulf – in England the one Jewish group excluded (or excluding themselves) from the thick network of opposition to Israel is Neturei Karta – the ultra-Orthodox opponents of Israel.

#### The limits to the form: 'A Time to Speak Out'

Finally, there is *A Time to Speak Out*, an anthology produced by the British group Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) (Karpf, Klug, Rose, and Rosenbaum 2008). In many ways, this is the most intellectually robust of these Jews-only collections and by being so, most clearly reveals the limits to approaching the issue *as Jews* and also to a large extent *as intellectuals* rather than activists.

First, the positive aspects. IJV draws on a wide range of voices from mainstream British-Jewish opposition to Zionism, as well as American, Israeli and Australian writers. The aim of the book is to serve as 'a book of voices...a lively and unpredictable town hall meeting' (Karpf, Klug, Rose, and Rosenbaum 2008: vii). The clearest difference between this and earlier anthologies is its outer-direction, indicating perhaps a greater sense of purpose to this network. The voyages of self-discovery, accounts of 'I went to Israel and guess what I found!' are not completely absent but are secondary. It is as if this stage of the movement is already past; most accounts in this collection can be better characterised as 'I stood up against Israel, and guess what happened to me!'

The first section of this book is a collection of critiques of Israel. Showing the valuable contribution such collections can make to understanding Israel/Palestine, this contains some impressive pieces such as Stan Cohen's excoriating dismissal of Israeli academia and Eyal Weizmann's analysis of the



limits to the humanitarian discourse that surrounds Palestinians, adding to previous Palestinian-centred critiques of this frame (Zreik 2004).

The second section continues in the vein of critique, aimed this time at diaspora Zionists and the silencing of dissent by official Jewish institutions. The authors perform the task of exposing diaspora Zionism admirably; the stories and arguments have a cumulative effect, building up a composite picture of official Zionists as repressive, small minded, provincial and above all unfair. It is hard to read Abe Hayeem's admirably clear account of how architects are silenced by Zionist browbeating, or Emma Clyne's story of the absurdist antics of Jewish student societies, without feeling a sense of indignation at this Zionist hegemony. Here, the injustice frame is placed more over diaspora Zionism than over Israel's actions – with diaspora Jews rather than Palestinians being the main victims in this framing process.

The cool dissection of the arguments of the Zionist lobby by the likes of Richard Kuper, co-founder of Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JfJfP), could be explicitly designed to fulfil one of the book's stated objectives - to 'lead others – likeminded perhaps but independent-minded certainly – to find their voices too.' (Karpf et al 2008: xi). In other words this book, as with others is deliberately designed as a space-clearing exercise to allow and encourage a necessary dissent to be articulated.

Nevertheless the downside of speaking out collectively as Jews is never acknowledged. To repeat: this tactic, however unintentionally, reinforces the idea that Jews have a special role to speak out about Israel, a fallacy which serves to silence the largely absent Palestinians, and to implicitly tell others not to get involved. The incongruity of denouncing particularism and parochialism in a Jews-only collection is not addressed by participants, or perhaps where it should be addressed, by the editors.

Perhaps it is because IJV's actions are focused on other Jews that there is a quite remarkable absence of Palestinians from this collection. They are rarely referred to except as the subjects – or rather the unfortunate helpless objects - of human rights discourse. There is an outright refusal to engage with the democratically elected Hamas government except to lament and occasionally

condemn it. Indeed there is no engagement with any Palestinian political leadership. While it is understandable that liberal diaspora Jews would find it difficult and perhaps also inappropriate to be co-respondents of Palestinian leadership in the Occupied Territories, the non-engagement with Palestinians extends to those living in exile. The painful conclusion is that Palestinians are occasionally to be spoken of but are not welcome to speak in the virtual town hall the editors wish to create.

The troubling absence of Palestinians in this and other collections can also lead to a reproduction of the central Zionist idea – that Israel/Palestine is all about the Jews. Their absence also means that their concerns and proposals are not addressed. This is seen in the refusal by many writers to entertain the idea that the problem with Israel goes beyond the occupation regime. While there is no distasteful Nakba denial such as occurs in American collections, there is an equal refusal to address the demands of Palestinians to reverse its effects and return home.

One could view this as another example of activists being controlled by the discourses allowable in the Jewish field. If one's goal is to change the mindsets of mainstream Jews, one can plausibly argue that this softly-softly approach works better than a more thorough-going strategy. One activist I interviewed defended this approach on practical grounds: 'when you're trying to nudge the door open, you can't, you don't nudge it open with some dynamite.' Questions of strategy as well as ideology must be brought into consideration. Or rather questions of strategy, the choice of the terrain of activism, affect ideology. If 'moderate' Zionists are the target of activism, this helps direct the framing of the conflict – at its extreme there is an unthinking equation of Jews and Israel, more often the problem is framed as not being the racist/settler nature of Israel, it's simply the occupation. And finally, this is a terrain of activism where it is difficult to highlight Palestinian subjectivity.

The silencing of Palestinian voices has been a theme of other collections, and indeed is a problem faced by the entire movement. This isn't simply a result of Jewish advocates promoting their own identities at the expense of Palestinian

subjectivity, or of meekly accepting the limits set by the Jewish field of contention. The problem confronts the Palestine Solidarity Movement as well.

Such a muting of Palestinian voices has many causes – Israel’s growing isolation of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, fractured Palestinian leadership as a result of their fractured experiences – being subjected to sectarian Jewish rule in Israel, military occupation in the Occupied Territories and exile elsewhere (Said 1986). It is also the result of power imbalance between western solidarity activists and the objects of their solidarity (Goudge 2003; Johnston 2003). Jewish activists aren’t the only ones whose field of activism is less universal than first appears, more involved in combating and possibly unconsciously reproducing local and racial hegemonies than in coalition-building across borders.

Nevertheless members of activist groups – Jewish as well as non-Jewish - do face this issue to a greater or lesser extent, and see the need to engage with Palestinians. That this is not done in this volume and only to a limited extent in other books can be seen as a flaw, a failed representation of this movement. (On the other hand, none of these books set out to explicitly describe a fixed, concrete movement.)

I would argue this lacuna occurs, not simply because the authors are writing as Jews, but also because they are writing as intellectuals. Were this a collection of activists, or rather – since many of the writers are activists – a collection of people writing *as* activists - they would feel less entitled to efface Palestinian resistance and subjectivity. It is telling that while activist groups such as JfJfP are occasionally name-checked, they are not discussed, and more radical and very active groups such as J-BIG (Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods) are not even mentioned. The erroneous impression is conveyed that IJV is at the cutting edge of British Jewish opposition to Israel and that the movement is confined to discursively challenging Zionist hegemony, rather than a wider range of activities.

Equally seriously for a collection explicitly designed to speak to a movement, there is little attempt to discuss concrete courses of action, beyond boosting opposition to Zionist hegemony over other Jews. This, I repeat, is despite the

activist credentials of many of the authors. Instead many choose to adopt the intellectual vantage point, of observing from a god's eye position (there is activist engagement – but only with Zionists and fellow Jews) and contenting themselves with judging.

Considering the calibre of many of the people in this collection, it seems that this format – a Jews-only intellectual critique - presents a missed opportunity. For as much as it renders the writers articulate about the problems, it renders them silent about the salient question to every problem: what is to be done?

## Conclusion

One can't formulate hard and fast rules about the strengths and limitations of movement theorising on the basis of four idiosyncratic books within a particular movement, but some general themes emerge. Firstly is the multifaceted nature of these writings. They alternately serve as mobilisation tools, analysable documents and analyses in themselves. They offer well-thought out counterposing views and important theoretical purchase on the movement. In this article I have done little more than scratch the surface of these arguments in order to reveal them; but these ideas demand to be engaged with.

Secondly is their critical distance from the movement they try to mobilise. This can partly be ascribed to how the books stress different factions in this movement and critique other factions, and partly to efforts to conform to dominant academic forms. But this is only part of the story. To return to my metaphor – Lacan claimed the mirror stage was necessary in forming the ego. And indeed movements are often imagined as pure egos, desperately trying to expand, to develop, to conquer target groups. Yet this collection of collections shows another aspect of social movements, their constant effort to try to understand themselves.

The attempt to see the self as whole is (usually) more than a heroic effort in self-delusion. Lacan's insight was that in order to see the self in such a way, one needs an alienation from the self. The best of these books offer such a critical distance, their aim is both to criticise Israel and Zionism, and to apprehend

their own terrain of activism. In this they echo Norbert Elias's challenge to sociologists to try and achieve both detachment *and* involvement. While achieving such harmony should matter much to scholars, these books indicate just how much it does matter to activists.

Thirdly, they reveal something of how the terrain of activism determines the ideological and identitarian frames of contention. Returning to Bourdieu's metaphor of the games player, the extent to which the player can choose how to play the game is evident from the wide divergence of views expressed. Even though all writers speak as Jews and to a greater or lesser extent to an imaginary Jewish collectivity, what they choose to say differs so radically that one cannot ascribe it purely to their terrain of activism. Put another way, one does not make allowances for Israel simply because one is trying to appeal to a group where praise for this state is deep-rooted and discursively hegemonic. This is a choice which some players make and some refuse to make – a choice both strategic and ideological.

Yet perhaps Bourdieu's insight holds true at a deeper level – despite stated opinions the field still constricts the range of activities. If activists are fighting Zionist hegemony among Jews, Palestinians will only ever be incidental objects to this work. It will be confined to the relatively safe slogans of 'end the occupation' or even 'end the most unsavoury features of the occupation'. This should not be automatically condemned, for this might be only one facet of people's activities. To properly assess their effectivity we would also have to look at the other overlapping fields of activism which movement participants are involved in. One unfortunate result of Jews-only collection of essays is that it fails to convey that movement participants *are* involved in coalitions, other groups and so on, or to fully engage with this multi-field activism.

So does this speak of a flaw in movement theorising, particularly distant issue movements – that their analyses are fatally weighted down by their need to highlight the active subjectivity of movement participants? Not necessarily. Earlier I talked of how these works' focus on Jewish subjectivity represented 'missed opportunities' for this movement. This is putting it too strongly, for they

serve an important purpose and can be seen as representing 'work in progress', the long and often wearying progress of a movement constituting itself.

It could be argued that I am falling into another trap here – that I am assuming that there is an imperative for this movement to address Palestinians and their concerns, when this may not be the case. Perhaps this movement will remain as an increasingly comfortable contestation and assertion of a certain type of Jewish identity. And yet addressing Palestinian concerns, being truly universalistic, is one of the implicit and often explicit aims of this movement. It seems a logical corollary that to do so the movement and its intellectuals move beyond the mirror-stage - the immediate problem of combating those Jewish critics who would silence them. As a self-aware and self-consciously learning movement it has the resources and perhaps also the motivation to produce further activist theorising to do just that.

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