

# Disavowal In Crisis: The Israeli Far Right and the End of Liberal Zionism

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Abstract: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's religio-nationalist government is redefining the right at home and abroad. Unleashed, it is no longer giving the appearance of playing by the rules that one would expect liberal democracies to adhere to. The Israeli government bucks national and international laws. From its judicial coup within Israel to its terror-inducing raids in the Occupied West Bank to its genocidal campaign in Gaza, Netanyahu's fascist coalition is not only making its Western supporters uncomfortable, it is also, and more importantly, exposing the illiberal and eliminationist core of Israeli politics that the perceived opposition between political Zionism and liberal Zionism tends to obfuscate. I trace political Zionism's cannibalization of its "liberal" twin, attending to the ways it has rendered inoperative the fetishist disavowal that kept liberal Zionists and Western powers more or less content with the status quo, that is, with the Occupation on cruise control. Fetishist disavowal, as Octave Mannoni defines it, follows the pattern, "*Je sais bien, mais quand même*; I know very well, but all the same...." This logic accounts for the way in which "a belief can be abandoned and preserved at the same time." In the case at hand, the logic of fetishist disavowal paints a soothing picture: *We know very well that Israel must reach a compromise with the Palestinians, that it must not be seen as an apartheid state, but all the same, we believe in Israel's unique claim to be at once democratic and Jewish.* Yet the Netanyahu government's stark brutality has thrown Euro-American disavowal into crisis, for Israel is openly engaging in the type of violence that international law was created to prevent. This violence so blatantly violates international norms that it can no longer be so easily disavowed; the fetish is losing its power to dull the urgency of intervening to enact change.

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's religio-nationalist government is redefining the right at home and abroad. Unleashed, it is no longer giving the appearance of playing by the rules that one would expect liberal democracies to adhere to. The Israeli government bucks national and international laws. From its judicial coup within Israel to its terror-inducing raids in the Occupied West Bank to its genocidal campaign in Gaza, Netanyahu's fascist coalition is not only making its Western supporters uncomfortable, it is also, and more importantly, exposing the illiberal and eliminationist core of Israeli politics that the perceived opposition between political Zionism and liberal Zionism tends to obfuscate. I trace political Zionism's cannibalization of its "liberal" twin, attending to the ways it has rendered inoperative the fetishist disavowal that kept liberal Zionists and Western powers more or less content with the status quo, that is, with

the Occupation on cruise control. Fetishist disavowal, as Octave Mannoni defines it, follows the pattern, “*Je sais bien, mais quand même*; I know very well, but all the same....” This logic accounts for the way in which “a belief can be abandoned and preserved at the same time.”<sup>1</sup> In the case at hand, the logic of fetishist disavowal paints a soothing picture: *We know very well that Israel must reach a compromise with the Palestinians, that it must not be seen as an apartheid state, but all the same, we believe in Israel’s unique claim to be at once democratic and Jewish.* Yet the Netanyahu government’s stark brutality has thrown Euro-American disavowal into crisis, for Israel is openly engaging in the type of violence that international law was created to prevent. This violence so blatantly violates international norms that it can no longer be so easily disavowed; the fetish is losing its power to dull the urgency of intervening to enact change.

But examining fetishist disavowal’s crisis tells us more. The American government’s unconditional support of Israel—along with the internal fractures and reactionary entrenchments it is provoking—tells us something about its racial politics at home, about America’s failure to reckon with the Indigenous genocides and chattel slavery on which it is founded, and whose afterlives continue to shape life in the nation. What we are seeing in Israel—a hyper-racialized existence lived under occupation (racialized *because* it is lived under occupation)—echoes what we see in the US because both nations have emerged from similar, though distinct, settler colonial histories. The US’s unconditional military and political support for Israeli carnage in Gaza tells us something about the colonial core of America’s politics, a core orientation, I would add, that does not come as a surprise for the Global South or for North America’s internally colonized and segregated communities. Not unlike Israel’s faltering fetishist disavowal, liberal America’s fetishist disavowal—*I know very well that structural racism exists, but all the same I believe in the American dream, in America’s manifest destiny, that we can follow our better angels,* and so on—is facing a challenge of its own from the far right.<sup>2</sup>

In the following pages, I want to examine more closely the psychic life of liberalism in the wake of such challenges, through recent examples of liberal attempts to recuperate the fetish, to stave off the collapse of disavowal and the reckoning that such an upheaval demands. To do so, I first take up recent work by French-Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz, which I see as representative both of broader tendencies in public discourse and of the tenacity of investments in a particular vision of the Israeli state. The crisis in fetishist disavowal, I argue, opens up an opportunity to embrace an anti-colonial politics, but this will not come about without struggle. The life of fetishist disavowal is long, while the perpetuation of liberalism’s fantasies continues to feed the power of an ultranationalist and racist far right that liberalism ostensibly abhors and opposes.

In forging a parliamentary coalition with extreme-right parties, Netanyahu has drawn severe critiques from citizens across the center-left

spectrum in Israel, who are alarmed by the sharp turn toward illiberalism manifest in the coalition's political agenda, most visibly in its attempts to reduce the power of the judiciary. Eva Illouz, who publishes fairly frequently in the center-left *Haaretz*, has pushed this critique farther than most by extending it to the Occupation itself. In a 2014 article titled, "47 Years a Slave: A New Perspective on the Occupation," Illouz writes, "What started as a national and military conflict has morphed into a form of domination of Palestinians that now increasingly borders on conditions of slavery."<sup>3</sup> Likening Israel's treatment of Palestinians to chattel slavery is a powerful analogy and a disconcerting one for liberal Zionists in particular, who are committed to democratic norms and universal human rights. In this piece, Illouz attempts to unsettle the social coordinates of her fellow Israelis so that the *knowledge* of the inhumane Occupation is not contained and rendered toothless, but might become life or world-altering.

After October 7 one might have expected Illouz to pursue this analogy further, in the vein of Norman Finkelstein, who compared Hamas's attacks to a "slave revolt," of the type exemplified by the enslaved Nat Turner, who in his revolt in Southampton, Virginia, in 1831, "killed a lot of white people, civilians in a rampage."<sup>4</sup> The point here, of course, is not to celebrate violence for the sake of violence, but to show how butchery has historically been met with butchery (and this butchery has in turn been met again with even greater butchery). But Illouz does not follow Finkelstein; in a series of articles she takes the opposite tack and unleashes ire on the global left for its attempts to contextualize and explain Hamas's violence, which she views as minimizing or relativizing the attacks. Like many center-left Israelis, Illouz has "sobered up."<sup>5</sup> Disillusioned by the scale and intensity of Hamas's incursion, she makes axiomatic that the evil of Hamas has no context, and undertakes to save the universalist left from what she characterizes as its "post-colonial" hijacking. Liberal-leftist Zionists in Israel are dismayed, perplexed, hurt, and enraged, struggling to process not only the stunning brutality of Hamas's October 7th attacks, but what they perceive as an ungenerous, indifferent, or even malicious response by the global left. For Illouz, the global left's failure to take a stronger stance against Hamas shows that its scrutiny of the Jewish state stems from a "carefully formulated ideology, and part of a far broader alliance between religious Islam and the 'post-colonial' left."<sup>6</sup> Islam, as the object of Western powers' demonization, finds an ally and a receptive hearing from the left; the latter, suspicious of Western hegemony, is all too eager to defend the former's cause to the rest of the world. But much of Illouz's argument against the global left relies on a familiar pattern of objections leveled at pro-Palestinian activists,<sup>7</sup> who are frequently alleged to embody a "new anti-Semitism."<sup>8</sup> Illouz objects, for example, to the singling out of Israel for its nationalism (the *Why-are-you-picking-on-Zionism?* argument) and the Left's failure to stand up to Islam's abuses (the *Why-are-you-defending-the-*

indefensible? argument). The Hamas attack and its purported support among leftist circles crystalized, for Illouz, what she calls the Left's "moral and intellectual bankruptcy."<sup>9</sup> Why? Because the global Left failed to stand with Israel. Leftists unforgivably turned their back on Jews and channeled their care toward the "Arabs," the Palestinian population. The titles of Illouz's articles take on an increasingly alarmist and accusatory form: from "The Global Left's Reaction to October 7 Threatens the Fight Against the Occupation" (November 11, 2023) to "How the Left Became a Politics of Hatred Against Jews" (February 3, 2024). In these *Haaretz* articles, Illouz seeks to delegitimize the global left, first, by charging its champions (including Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek) with a hatred of Jews, and, second, by undertaking to de-postcolonize the left, that is, to expose its anti-Semitic proclivities, to dismiss its explanatory framework, and expunge its interpretive biases when it comes to Palestine/Israel.

Illouz indicates her disdain for post-colonial studies by putting quotation marks around the "post-colonial" in the phrase "'post-colonial' left."<sup>10</sup> This left, we're told, is promoting and nurturing a "nihilist art of paranoia and exclusion,"<sup>11</sup> relishing in dividing the world crudely into two sides, victims and victimizers (with Jews now permanently occupying the position of the victimizer). Illouz relies on Aviad Kleinberg to take down postcolonial theory. Kleinberg's article "Are All Israelis 'Colonialists' Who Deserve to Die?" echoes the moralizing and contemptuous tone of Illouz's writings. For Kleinberg, postcolonial theory has bewitched today's readers; its excessive skepticism negates all the gains of a more nuanced account of received knowledge. According to Kleinberg's vision—which veers on the caricatural—postcolonial skepticism has given way to a self-righteous dogmatism, where a Manichean logic prevails: "the West is the victimizer and everyone else its victim."<sup>12</sup> Such "selective vision,"<sup>13</sup> Kleinberg warns, simplifies global matters. Kleinberg's manufacturing of outrage falls flat. Let's consider some remarks by Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, two founding figures of postcolonial theory. Said constantly argued against a "politics of blame" that turns your own status as victim into a weapon, and instead insisted that the heart of any solidarity movement must be animated by a critical impulse—"never solidarity before criticism," as he put it.<sup>14</sup> And Spivak likewise warned against the Western self's impulse to fetishize the non-European other, and to arrogate to itself the problems of complexity. By this Western logic, Spivak explains, "the person who knows has all of the problems of selfhood. The person who is known, somehow seems not to have a problematic self. These days . . . only the dominant self can be problematic; the self of the Other is authentic without problem . . . This is frightening."<sup>15</sup> Rather than endorsing a rhetoric of authenticity or pure celebration of the non-Western difference, postcolonial theory underscores that such gestures come at a political and hermeneutic cost.

While viewing herself as a defender of Enlightenment values invested in forging a "just peace" between Palestinians and Israelis,

Illouz was nevertheless distraught by the left's instance that Hamas's attacks did not materialize out of thin air. The belief that Hamas's brutal assault "did not occur in a vacuum" was itself read as an anti-Semitic observation insofar as the condemnation of Hamas was qualified by the impulse to understand the attacks and cast the Palestinian condition in a different light. Offended by this line of argumentation, Illouz intervenes in an attempt to shame the global left and set straight its path, which, again, has been derailed by anti-colonial thought, by post-colonial theory and its morally dubious historicizations:

If we use "context" as an analytical tool to explain and understand, how far should context go? Should we, for example, invoke the context of murderous antisemitism, which has given rise to Zionism, thereby making it drastically different from all forms of settler colonialism? Should we include in our contextualization the fact that the Jerusalem mufti Amin Al-Husseini supported the Nazis and their Final Solution and that, as such, losing Palestine was a part of the redrawing of maps after World War II?<sup>16</sup>

It is not clear where Illouz stands on these specific examples. Are they alternative frames for understanding context (that is, do they supplement post-colonial reasoning and thereby reshape the conclusions the analyst should draw)? Or are they exaggerations to be dismissed, pointing to the futility of contextualizing itself? Illouz's first alternative contextual example has merit and should be introduced in any discussion of Palestine/Israel. The fact that many Jews turned to Zionism as a way to escape anti-Semitism in Europe is deeply important for understanding the settler-colonial context. Like Said, I believe that it is ethically and politically paramount for Palestinians to *understand* the libidinal and material appeal of Israel (which includes a recognition of Jewish suffering). For Zionists, Israel symbolized and continues to symbolize a place of belonging where their safety would not be contingent on the whims of majoritarian rule. But this line of argumentation has its limits. The history of anti-Semitism cannot justify the Zionist dispossession of the Indigenous population and mass ethnic cleansing of their villages. When Zionism becomes an exclusive attachment to historic Palestine (the dream of a Greater Israel, or Eretz Israel)—so that from the river to the sea, all that you will see is Jewish sovereignty—Zionism morphs into an unabashed racism.<sup>17</sup> But Zionism's origins as a liberation movement for Jews cannot be forgotten. Without grasping the passion for Zion, as Jacqueline Rose might put it, understanding (the actions of) your oppressor will always be unnecessarily incomplete.<sup>18</sup> You can (must) acknowledge Jewish suffering, and yet still situate Hamas's attacks in the context of settler colonialism, where Zionism operates as an ideology and collective fantasy that fuels the settler-colonial project. This project has taken to weaponizing the horrors

of the Shoah to silence critics of Israel, and has reached absurd realities: even using the word “Occupation” to describe Israel’s relation to the Palestinian people supposedly “gives credence to the modern blood libel that fuels a growing anti-Jewish hatred around the world, in the United States, and in Hollywood”<sup>19</sup> (as stated in an open letter from over 450 Jewish creatives and professionals, responding savagely to Johnathan Glazer’s condemnation of the Occupation in his acceptance speech after winning an Oscar for his Holocaust film, *Zone of Interest*<sup>20</sup>).

Illouz’s second alternative contextual example is ridiculous. It takes the form of an argument that spoils of war go to the winners. Except that the Palestinians, at the time British colonial subjects, were not defeated in World War II, nor were they responsible for the Nazi murders of six million Jews. Illouz concocts a scenario in which Palestinians could be held responsible for their dispossession. The claim that *some Palestinians are worse than Hitler and that’s why their claim to the land is forfeited* is not by any stretch a credible context for understanding the present situation. Rather, it colludes with the Israeli right’s demonization of Palestinians. As Illouz is aware, Netanyahu made just such an inflammatory statement in 2015, trafficking in racist fabrications and claiming that a Palestinian, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, was responsible for giving Hitler the idea to exterminate the Jews, when Hitler merely wanted to relocate them.<sup>21</sup>

I want to linger a bit more on the question of suffering and the ways in which contextual layers must be seen not simply as oppositional but rather as interlocking or enmeshed with each other. The fact of suffering (the fact that a people has suffered) does not transform a group or its members into ethical subjects (the International Court of Justice’s ruling that the Israeli state is plausibly committing genocide gives the lie to the Israeli military’s claim to be “the most moral army in the world”). Rashid Khalidi comments on the cruel irony of tragic victims becoming the vicious victimizers of others, and this insight applies to Jews as well as to Palestinians: “many of [the Israelis] descended from victims of persecution, pogroms, and concentration camps, have themselves been mistreating another people. We thus find that the sins done to the fathers have morally desensitized the sons to their sins toward others, and have even sometimes been used to justify these sins. (Many Lebanese would bitterly say the same thing about the behavior of the PLO in Lebanon between the late 1960s and 1982).”<sup>22</sup>

Context is no excuse. Context is not straightforward causation. The turn to context represents a concern with understanding, not justification. To disavow the material conditions of the Occupation, to assert that there is no context to the Hamas attacks, leads to the Nazification of Palestinians and genocidal consequences: evil must be annihilated. In Orientalist fashion, it is to confirm, as Odeh Bisharat notes, that “the Palestinians were simply born bloodthirsty beasts, and

that the 56-year-old occupation and the state of perpetual, suffocating refugeehood had no connection to or impact on their behavior.”<sup>23</sup> It is to confirm that Palestinian psychology is “perverse,”<sup>24</sup> that Palestinians exist outside of history, that they are and will always be the same, and that there can thus be no encounter with them other than a violent one. Isn’t this the ideological lie that Netanyahu and his far-right cabinet sold to a sympathetic world, horrified by the events of October 7? The desire to bracket context stems from a deep-seated unwillingness to confront the uncivilizing forces of settler colonialism, from a failure to reckon with Zionism’s inextricable link to a settler supremacist mindset. Palestinians are not born angry; their anger is a *response*, as Andre Lorde would put it, to anti-Palestinian racism, to the Zionist settler’s motto of “*racial elimination*,”<sup>25</sup> to the Occupation, to the caging of Gazans, and so on.

The call for context disconcerts liberal Zionists. Why? Is the worry that when we contextualize and examine the situation, the question, “Do you condemn Hamas?” will lose its rhetorical efficiency? Currently, the accusatory question, “Do you condemn Hamas?” is fully naturalized in mainstream media in the West. To be a legitimate interlocutor—to be on the side of “humans,” not “human animals”<sup>26</sup>—you have to begin by firmly responding Yes to the question. If you hesitate or refuse to answer, you are deemed an anti-Semite, a cheerleader for Hamas, or worse than Hitler. Here Palestinian citizen of Israel Tamer Nafar puts his finger on the ideological trap set by the question: “I have no difficulty expressing empathy to anyone who’s been hurt; the problem is with political statements, since in order to embrace this terrible pain, one has to line up behind Western leaders and global media outlets, which embrace Israel emotionally and politically, as well as sponsoring its army. These are the same bodies that ignore our pain and which have always funded its erasure.”<sup>27</sup> This is the double bind: to be against the suffering of innocent civilians in Israel *and* to refuse to ignore the Jewish state’s “organized inhumanity”<sup>28</sup> of Gaza and align oneself with the same forces that contribute to the systematic demonization and suffocation of the Palestinian people.

When Judith Butler similarly attempts to reorient the discussion to the colonial situation so that a more generative exchange can be had, they are bitterly criticized and dismissed.<sup>29</sup> Declining to label Hamas a terrorist group, Butler, during a panel discussion in France on anti-Semitism, its instrumentalization, and revolutionary peace in Palestine, sought to understand the group’s attacks as instances of anti-colonial resistance: “I think it is more honest and historically correct to say that the uprising of October 7 was an act of resistance. It is not a terrorist attack and it is not an antisemitic attack. It was an attack against Israelis.”<sup>30</sup> To see only anti-Semitism in the deadly assault is a flagrant disavowal of the settler-colonial context. Butler is, in some ways, reiterating Sayegh’s *cri de guerre*, “rights undefended are rights surrendered.”<sup>31</sup> Hamas is defending the rights of the Palestinians against an eliminationist Zionist settler regime.

If a Zionist hermeneutic dehistoricizes and converts all uprisings into instances of anti-Semitism, another attack on Jews because of their Jewishness—and thus draws a straight line from the Third Reich to Hamas—Butler dispels Zionism’s phantasmatic machinery by situating Hamas’s violence firmly in the context of the Occupation, in the struggle for freedom and dignity. The uprising marks a pre-existing or originary violence; it “comes from a state of subjugation, and against a violent state apparatus.”<sup>32</sup> To better understand Hamas’s attacks—if for no other reason than prevent future ones—we need to examine “the political structure and the violence structure from which that uprising emerged.”<sup>33</sup> If we bracket these structures from critical purview, all we see, and project, is a timeless or ontological hatred of Jews; we never understand Palestinian *actions* as *responses*, or instances of counter-violence, to the Occupation. Again, unless you believe that Palestinians who join Hamas are “simply born bloodthirsty beasts” (to be summarily eliminated), you have to look at their actions, their psychic states, in a broader political context, in the stultifying and humiliating reality of the Occupation. Moreover, acknowledging Hamas as a movement committed to armed struggle against a colonial occupier does not in and of itself constitute an endorsement of the *form* that those actions take (such as the tactic of targeting of civilians). But it does enable a different debate to unfold, which historicizes the shifting identities of Israelis and Palestinians as they relate to the ebb and flow of the Occupation: “Let’s at least call it armed resistance and then we can have a debate on whether it’s right or did they do the right thing.”<sup>34</sup> Armed resistance indexes an invader and reorients an interpretive gaze modeled and manufactured by Western power and mainstream media. The message is simple: our gaze cannot solely be engulfed by Hamas’s actions.

On multiple occasions, Butler has explicitly condemned the horrific violence of Hamas’s attacks. Seeing Hamas as engaged in armed resistance “neither romanticizes their atrocities nor justifies their actions.”<sup>35</sup> Butler stresses that “we can, and must, disagree with the tactics of such a movement, and that my view is that the atrocities committed then, and the genocidal actions of the State of Israel, are both to be opposed.”<sup>36</sup> Still, it is easier to distort and cry foul. There is a sadistic enjoyment and virtue signaling in going after anti-Zionist Jewish intellectuals who actively disidentify with the state of Israel and work to reconfigure the interpretive scene and political landscape. For instance, Cary Nelson, in his typical belligerent fashion, indicts Butler for their anti-colonial reasoning, denouncing it as “irredeemably antisemitic.”<sup>37</sup> All resistance to Israeli state violence, including peaceful protests (with a very strong vocal Jewish presence among the activists), become instances of “genocidal intention,”<sup>38</sup> even transforming a call for ceasefire into a call for the destruction of Jewish lives. Despite Butler’s stated preference for the non-violent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, they do not foreclose the question of armed struggle. Rather, as they state,

it is important to ask those who defend Hamas as a movement of armed resistance how they situate this armed resistance within a history of armed struggles, and what, if any, conditions would have to be met for the laying down of arms. One obvious answer is that Israeli state violence would have to end. If Israeli state violence is the condition of possibility for armed resistance, then the cessation of that violence would doubtless produce another political constellation.<sup>39</sup>

It is that other “political constellation” that fetishist disavowal wants to eclipse and keep at bay: *I know very well that the Israeli government is committing state violence, but all the same I don’t believe that we need another political configuration; Israel in its current form can accommodate the Palestinian desire for self-determination; reconciliation is possible; after Netanyahu we can resume the peace process and talks of a two-state solution.*<sup>40</sup> By never assuming the consequences of the knowledge of state violence (that the Israeli government in its default mode is committing a slow genocide), liberal Zionists are not able to imagine nor agitate for an alternative political constellation.<sup>41</sup>

Jewish privilege is what is at stake here. The privilege to mourn and the privilege to subjugate implicate one another. Under a Zionist/Western horizon, normative ontology elevates the Israeli Jew but degrades the native Palestinian. The former, especially in its Ashkenazi/white form embodies/overrepresents the “Human”<sup>42</sup> while the latter is pathologized, reified, and ascribed a “wholly human Other status,” as Sylvia Wynter might put it.<sup>43</sup> When the grievability of Israelis is premised on the un-grievability of Palestinians turned into “depthless savages,”<sup>44</sup> when Palestinian life as such is not experienced or seen as grievable—it is a life lacking human rights—but rather as corrupt and disposable by Israelis and the Global North at large, what are Palestinians and activists defending Palestine to do? A concern for history remains unwelcome in the aftermath of October 7. Nor is there an appetite for imagining the existing political constellation otherwise. There is no daylight between center-left Zionists and far-right Zionists when it comes to reckoning with settler colonialism. The latter is far more belligerent in its opposition, but the former is catching up. One disavows the need for decolonization; the other transforms it into an anti-Semitic slur.

Aligning a group, movement, or cause with terrorism is a sure way to cancel it.<sup>45</sup> But here there seems to be a willful amnesia vis-à-vis Israel’s own brushes with terrorism. Menachem Begin, father of the right-wing Likud party who was elected Prime Minister in 1977, had, during the Mandate period, led the Zionist paramilitary organization Irgun, which targeted British installations and personnel, including kidnapping and executing soldiers (out of impatience with the British timetable for independence) and Arab civilians, including shootings and bombings

of pedestrians, cafes, and buses (in an effort to clear non-Jews from the contested land). “No one who stands athwart the path of Zionism is immune from Zionist vengeance,” writes Fayez Sayegh.<sup>46</sup> And as Gilles Deleuze reminds us, terrorism was constitutive of Zionist nationalism under the British Mandate: “Zionist terrorism was not only directed against the British, but against the Arab villages that had to be erased.”<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, for our purposes, here, Begin objected to the British’s labelling of Irgun as a terrorist group, rhetorically asking: “what has a struggle for the dignity of man, against oppression and subjugation, to do with ‘terrorism’?”<sup>48</sup> Begin waxes poetic on terror, opposing it to the noble Zionist fight for freedom, the desire to drive out “tyrannous rulers” and their reign of fear:

The historical and linguistic origins of the political term “terror” prove that it cannot be applied to a revolutionary war of liberation. ... A revolution, or a revolutionary war, does not aim at instilling fear. Its object is to overthrow a regime and to set up a new regime in its place. In a revolutionary war both sides use force. Tyranny is armed. Otherwise it would be liquidated overnight. Fighters for freedom must arm; otherwise they would be crushed overnight. Certainly the use of force also wakens fear. Tyrannous rulers begin to fear for their positions, or their lives, or both. And consequently they try to sow fear among those they rule. But the instilling of fear is not an aim in itself. The sole aim on the one side is the overthrow of armed tyranny; on the other side it is the perpetuation of that tyranny. The underground fighters of the Irgun arose to overthrow and replace a regime. We used physical force because we were faced by physical force. But physical force was neither our aim nor our creed. We believed in the supremacy of moral forces. It was our enemy who mocked at them.<sup>49</sup>

Both agents of terrorism and freedom fighters traffic in fear, but whereas the former deploys it to pacify those they subjugate, the latter makes use of it to bring about a new order of things, freed of tyranny. If, today, Britain and the rest of the Global North have embraced Begin’s view, accepting Israel’s brand of state terrorism as a legitimate use of violence, the label of Zionist terrorism more accurately captures what is happening from the standpoint of Zionism’s Palestinian victims.<sup>50</sup>

So, when Butler asks us to pause, to question the language we use and how we frame the problem (since bad formulations often lead to worse solutions), they are not obfuscating or muddying the interpretive waters. Quite the contrary, they are pushing us to think: Isn’t Hamas introducing fear in the occupiers’ lifeworld, in “their positions, or their lives, or both,” in order to bring about a “new regime”? If the question has any plausibility, which I believe that it does, then the October 7th uprising,

as Butler observes, is better understood as an act of armed resistance.<sup>51</sup> When liberal Zionists bemoan Butler and others for elevating Hamas's actions, they perhaps don't realize that they are recycling the discourse of the far right. Journalist Etan Nechin, for instance, claims to attend to the complexity of the situation: "Butler's method glosses over the personal impacts of the conflict, and instead generalizes the situation into broad, unchanging categories of oppressor versus oppressed. Butler's approach fails to acknowledge the complex realities on the ground, where the lines between oppressor and oppressed blur and challenge these simplistic distinctions."<sup>52</sup> This is a perfect example of deploying "complexity" as an ideological ruse, distracting us from a confrontation with the real Israel, marked by the violence of the Occupation.

A settler-colonial framework does not crudely simplify matters, but it does point lucidly to an antagonism at the heart of Palestine/Israel: the opposition between Native and settler. Saying the situation is "complex" constitutes what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call "settler moves to innocence": "those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all."<sup>53</sup> As Patrick Wolfe argues the impulse to deny the Native/settler binary reflects a "settler perspective."<sup>54</sup> It neglects to see that the Zionist invasion is precisely a "structure not an event,"<sup>55</sup> not something that can be fixed and relegated to a tumultuous Israeli past. Bizarrely, Nechin even accuses Butler of an accidental Orientalism: "Butler inadvertently adopts an Orientalist stance, too. By casting Palestinians, Arabs, and people of color in a perpetually conflictual role, Butler's narrative brands these groups as inherently confrontational."<sup>56</sup> It is not a question of "casting Palestinians, Arabs, and people of color in a perpetually conflictual role" but of bearing witness to their refusal to accept the existing reality (the Occupation, New Jim Crow, Apartheid). And if the colonized desire for freedom from the yoke of Zionist colonialism is deemed Orientalist, would Nechin extend this observation to Menachem Begin and the Jewish revolt against British imperialism?

Illouz, Nechin, and others, who are equally worried about the shrinking Israeli left, swiftly dismiss a line of thinking coming from "lazy left intellectuals" for its too-easy adoption of a settler-colonial framework, for uncritically putting front and center the colonial situation in their engagement with the Hamas attacks (which itself seems to feed the perception that this engagement constitutes an unqualified defense). Here we can contrast Illouz's move to innocence—Israeli Jews are not simply settlers but victims as well, and we're not really settlers, since "there has been an uninterrupted Jewish presence in Palestine since antiquity"<sup>57</sup>—with the perspective of Indigenous activists and scholars from Turtle Island (North America). From the standpoint of the Red Nation, a collective committed to the liberation of Indigenous peoples from capitalism and

colonialism, the affinity between their condition and that of Palestinians is striking. Shortly after October 7, they issued an open letter stressing their support of and commitment to Palestinian resistance:

The settler states that dispossess and occupy our lands support Israel in dispossessing and occupying Palestine. We see and feel the strength of Palestinian families in the face of the quotidian violence of the Israeli apartheid regime. Colonized peoples have the right to defend themselves and to resist colonial violence. We support Palestinian liberation and their right as an oppressed people to resist colonialism and genocide.<sup>58</sup>

Resistance against the occupier and the desire for freedom are not to be pathologized.<sup>59</sup> Indigenous solidarity has everything to do with context, that is, with the material realities imposed by the settler regime. It does not mean that their condition is identical, only that they share in their struggle against an eliminatory logic that seeks their erasure by whatever means necessary (siege, starvation, transfer, and so on).

In addition to exceptionalizing Israel (Israeli settler reality/history is unlike any other settler states), Illouz believes that you can decouple Zionism from “Jewish fascism,” from its corrosive religious-messianic excesses.<sup>60</sup> A secular Zionism would duly underscore Zionism’s origins as a movement of liberation and legitimize the existence of Israel as a place of security for all Jews around the world while still treating its Palestinian population with dignity. And if Jews are currently unsafe in Israel (and abroad), the blame lies not in Zionism’s intrinsic aggressivity but in its capture by religious fanatics who are currently in political control (and the global left is not helping by its attempts to delegitimize the idea of Israel). If Zionism is not essentially characterized as a racist ideology or a collective fantasy of subjugation that rationalized the colonization of historic Palestine, Illouz can paint a less compromised image of the Israeli state.

Illouz is by no means alone in making such arguments. Howard Jacobson also dismisses the charge that Israel is a colonial/racist project. And he equally frames the question of settler colonialism around the left and Jewish hatred. He distinguishes between a Palestinian anti-Semitism and a leftist anti-Semitism, and finds the latter more offensive: “That many Palestinians have been indoctrinated into the grossest forms of Jew hate is—let us say, so as not to have a fight—understandable. That students at elite Western universities should submit without a whimper to the same indoctrination is not.”<sup>61</sup> In one swoop, Jacobson naturalizes Palestinian anti-Semitism, hinting that they can’t know any better, but Western students should. The title of the article, “The Founding of Israel Wasn’t a Colonial Act—a Refugee Isn’t a Colonist,” announces the wrongheadedness of this *ressentiment*-infused intervention. We’re told the author is “furious,” “afraid,” and “defiled”—the Palestinians and their

leftist supporters display only hateful rage since, presumably, the reality of anti-Semitism does not temper but instead encourages their anger at Israel and its settlers. Jacobson dismisses the charge that Israel is a colonial/racist project. As he smugly affirms, “Fleeing from pogroms isn’t colonizing.”<sup>62</sup> Yes, fleeing for your life doesn’t make you a colonist, but it does if you, tacitly or actively, found and support a state that sought and seeks the dispossession of an Indigenous population. It is an inconvenient truth if we turn to Zionism’s founding architects. Vladimir Jabotinsky, speaking unambiguously in 1923 from the position of an invading sovereign settler:

My readers have a general idea of the history of colonisation in other countries. I suggest that they consider all the precedents with which they are acquainted, and see whether there is one solitary instance of any colonisation being carried on with the consent of the native population. There is no such precedent.

*The native populations, civilised or uncivilised, have always stubbornly resisted the colonists, irrespective of whether they were civilised or savage....*

Every native population, civilised or not, regards its lands as its national home, of which it is the sole master, and it wants to retain that mastery always; it will refuse to admit not only new masters but, even new partners or collaborators.<sup>63</sup>

Likewise, Israel’s first prime minister David Ben-Gurion, in a letter to his son Amos, articulates this very settler-colonial plan: “A Jewish state on only part of the land is not the end but the beginning.... The establishment of a state, even if only on a portion of the land, is the maximal reinforcement of our strength at the present time and a powerful boost to our historical endeavors to liberate the entire country.”<sup>64</sup> Though Ben-Gurion recognizes Indigenous resistance to the partition of historic Palestine (“If I were an Arab I would have been very indignant”<sup>65</sup>), Jewish dominion over the land is the goal: “Palestine is grossly under populated. It contains vast colonization potential which the Arabs neither need nor are qualified (because of their lack of need) to exploit.”<sup>66</sup> Even Jabotinsky’s colonizing Zionism imagined a continued presence of Palestinians in historic Palestine. He acknowledges the impossibility of their erasure: “I am reputed to be an enemy of the Arabs, who wants to have them ejected from Palestine, and so forth. It is not true. Emotionally, my attitude to the Arabs is the same as to all other nations—polite indifference. Politically, my attitude is determined by two principles. First of all, I consider it utterly impossible to eject the Arabs from Palestine. There will always be *two* nations in Palestine—which is good enough for me, provided the Jews become the majority.”<sup>67</sup> For later Zionist right-wingers like Netanyahu following in the footsteps of Jabotinsky—“the radical heirs of Jabotinsky,”

as Seth Ackerman puts it—two nations in Palestine was no longer good enough for them.<sup>68</sup> The right's attitude has changed. A Greater Israel—the fascist one-state solution—now constitutes the Israeli political horizon (what used to be considered only the fringe right's). For the Israeli far right, ejecting Palestinians, for the purposes of territorial expansion, is now both militarily possible and highly desirable.

And let's not forget the work of Israeli historians, like Ilan Pappé, who have convincingly shown that Zionist leaders, from the beginning, were planning to erase Palestinians from the contested land. As Pappé points out, Zionist leaders, in 1948, adopted Plan D (Dalet in Hebrew), a military blueprint for ethnic cleansing. The Dalet Plan emerged as:

both the inevitable product of the Zionist ideological impulse to have an exclusively Jewish presence in Palestine, and a response to developments on the ground once the British cabinet had decided to end the mandate. Clashes with local Palestinian militias provided the perfect context and pretext for implementing the ideological vision of an ethnically cleansed Palestine. The Zionist policy was first based on retaliation against Palestinian attacks in February 1947, and it transformed into an initiative to ethnically cleanse the country as a whole in March 1948.... When it [the mission] was over, more than half of Palestine's native population, close to 800,000 people, had been uprooted, 531 villages had been destroyed, and eleven urban neighbourhoods emptied of their inhabitants.<sup>69</sup>

Pappé does not mince words; the Dalet plan constituted a full-blown agenda of physical removal of Palestinians from their homeland, a “clear-cut case of an ethnic cleansing operation, regarded under international law today as a crime against humanity.”<sup>70</sup>

If the argument that people fleeing pogroms are not colonialists is less than convincing, Jacobson draws a distinction between Israel and its settler excess. Jacobson can then proceed to make inconsequential statements like “the building of settlements on the West Bank is indefensible,”<sup>71</sup> which he, in turn, qualifies immediately by claiming that the Palestinians are to blame for their displacement and suffering. Why? Because their violent actions have hardened the hearts of Israeli Jews: “If something hard entered the Israeli soul, it was not unconnected to the seeming promise of an eternal war with a Palestinian people for whom co-existence with Jews appeared all but unthinkable. Hateful as they are, the settlements were not written into the small print of Zionism. They belong to history, not principle.”<sup>72</sup> Aside from blaming the victims, I agree: today's Zionism is not the consequences of a necessity. Zionism is not by definition a hateful machine. In Saidian terms, Zionism, like any other “ism,” is a worldly matter, subjected to the struggle for meaning. But in its recurring historical manifestations, it comes to gain a material

force and an inexorable logic of its own; in this respect, we can speak here of colonial time, of a Zionist futurology. We can extrapolate an Israeli aggrandizing sovereignty, a merciless drive for territorial expansion, working its way toward a Greater Israel or a historic Palestine without Palestinians. In other words, I see continuity between the early Zionists, the Dalet Plan of 1948, and the current Settler Movement constituting the core of the Israeli far right. Liberal Zionists might object that this is not their narrative of Zionism, that among their ranks stand people who actively seek to challenge the march of the right's ruthless Zionism.

Alon Schwarz's 2022 documentary *Tantura* might serve as a case in point. Though it dares to engage the taboo topic of the Nakba by returning to the destruction of the Palestinian village Tantura, the documentary treats the problem of ethnic cleansing as one of acknowledgment rather than accountability<sup>73</sup>:

We must do this [acknowledge the past] while seeking ways that will allow for a reconciliation and an end to the conflict. Acknowledgment is the basis of everything. Without acknowledgment, the war will continue. We need to come up with new ideas. Zionism must upgrade its operating system if it wants to survive. Taking responsibility doesn't mean returning the refugees to Tantura and deporting the kibbutzniks of Nahsholim—which now stands on the site of the village. There are other ways.<sup>74</sup>

Undoubtedly, but what, more precisely, are these other ways? Reparations, the decolonization of Israel...? No, it is again an alarmist attempt to resurrect the two-state solution. Indeed, the two-state solution as "reconciliation" has everything to do with "rescuing settler normalcy," "rescuing a settler future."<sup>75</sup> What Schwarz fears is an unjust one-state solution which would erode Zionism at its core: "Zionism today is destroying itself in a rush to a single binational state from the river to the sea. The Jewish state has no future if the oppressive rule over the Palestinians continues and if the land will not be divided to form two states."<sup>76</sup> My riposte to Schwarz: the Tantura massacre, and the settler violence that marks it, is not an aberration or exception to the Zionist dream, but constitutive of it, part and parcel of its "operative structure."<sup>77</sup> Zionism is inextricable from its colonial reason. If Schwarz urges his fellow Zionists not to repress the fact of the Tantura massacre, there is no suggestion that knowledge of it will alter the social coordinates of Israeli lives in any significant way. Schwarz is asking his fellow Israelis to "upgrade [Zionism's] operating system," not erase its racist programming. No politics follows this acknowledgment, from "woke Zionism." Guilt, maybe; but hardly any genuine sense of responsibility. Zionists are not being asked to curtail, let alone dismantle, their Jewish privilege or priority. No concrete actions are in fact required of Israeli Jews; you can

still be a Zionist, you just have to recognize that Israel's founding involved crimes against humanity. And since the founding violence of nations is not unique to Israel, an acknowledgement of it does not in itself threaten Israel's place among Western nations. By extension, those who keep insisting on Israel's original violence/sin must be anti-Semitic.

Again, what worries Schwarz's liberal Zionism the most is not the right's repression of Zionism's dark chapters and myths. What it desperately seeks to exclude from the realm of possibilities is a *just* one-state solution from the river to the sea.<sup>78</sup> The idea unsettles liberal Zionists because it casts them as accomplices to an openly supremacist regime, implicated in a national romance of racial elimination. No, Schwarz pursues the path of an introspective and sensitive Zionism,<sup>79</sup> and, in this respect, he can have his cake and eat it too. Schwarz can acknowledge Israel's vicious chapters (and thus gain the moral high ground vis-à-vis political Zionists who are aggressively phobic about the Nakba) and he can proceed with his life without any existential crisis or major disruption. No need for reparation nor redistribution. Israel remains Jewish and democratic.

In their own distinct ways, Illouz, Jacobson, and Schwarz seek, in the words of Lara Sheehi and Stephen Sheehi, "to recuperate and validate the legitimacy of sovereignty of a settler state."<sup>80</sup> Each dreams of an Israel capable of reigning in the state's fascistic and expansionist tendencies. Jacobson and Illouz are more ferocious in demonizing the leftist critics of Israel. Jacobson can even claim that it takes more "moral courage" to castigate Palestinians, since "right now it takes none to castigate Jews"<sup>81</sup>—a surprising statement given the Zionist-inflected McCarthyism reverberating across university campuses in the Global North.<sup>82</sup> Schwarz, for his part, wants change without change; he wants a self-reflexive Zionism that acknowledges its past wrongs but without any real accountability, without any gestures toward decolonizing Palestine/Israel. The three exhibit "settler moves to innocence." What we get in Illouz, Jacobson, and Schwarz is obfuscation at its best: *Israel is not really a settler-colonial state; plus, our own origins begin in trauma and anti-Semitism; yes, we are mistreating Palestinians (how do you respond to a terrorist group like Hamas?) but we are not committing genocide.*<sup>83</sup> *Yes, we did terrible things in the past (ethnic cleansing in 1948) and in the present (the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank; Netanyahu's mismanagement of the Gaza war), but Zionism can be redeemed and brought back to align with the ideals of the European Enlightenment.* Or, formulated in the language of fetishist disavowal: *We know about Israel's past and present violence done to Palestinians, but all the same we don't believe the facticity of Israel exhausts or overrides Zionism's ethical core and thus what Israel could be.*

Illouz, in particular, ironically ends up in Netanyahu's camp.<sup>84</sup> The anti-colonial left is an anti-Semitic left. The possibility of engaging with the

Palestinian question, of getting her liberal Israeli audience to think more critically about “the elephant in the room,”<sup>85</sup> that is, the Occupation, is foreclosed. Worse, Illouz suspends critical thinking in the name of bearing witness to the suffering of Jews: *don't hijack the event, blame Israel, and rob me of my/people's pain*. For Illouz, “the true left, the only one, is the one that recognizes the intractability of certain conflicts because it refuses to privilege the rights of one people to the detriment of another.”<sup>86</sup> I find this vision of the Left lacking any attention to antagonism. Hamas becomes the new political fetish of center-leftist Zionists, a phantasmatic image of the enemy whose purpose is to cover over the true antagonism: Native versus settler. What makes the Palestine/Israel “conflict” intractable stems for the wrong-headed belief that we are dealing with a conflict—and not an antagonism—that is resolvable within the existing Zionist order of things. There is nothing leftist in failing to deal with the “bigger elephant” in the room: settler colonialism.

All of Illouz's notable work in making Palestinian duress and misery visible to Israelis crumbles; what ultimately matters is not Palestinian lives (collateral deaths). October 7 is about Jewish life and death, and only about Jewish life and death. Anti-colonial reason, in its hunger to understand the situation, in its refusal to accept the image of Palestinians as intrinsically anti-Semitic and barbaric, betrayed the Jewish people. I see this reaction to the anti-colonial left as marking a cultural shift. A fetishist disavowal no longer seems to be operational in it. What once operated in the form *I know very well about Palestinian misery, but all the same I believe in Israel's universalist aspirations, I believe in an Israel after Netanyahu* now becomes *I know very well about Palestinian misery, that the Occupation is grotesque, but all the same I don't care. In this moment, when it comes to trauma, my kin come first*.

Illouz keeps insisting on the universalism of her Zionist position, but it is an anxious universalism, a universalism in crisis worried that Israel as such (and not only its right-wing governments) will lose credibility and be deemed an enemy of universal thought. She feels betrayed, blames this leftist abandonment on the left's paranoid hermeneutic, that is, on its reflexive anti-Zionism and simplistic binarism. Her strike at the anti-colonial left is an attempt to reset the moral high ground. This is a universalism that effortlessly opens to a Zionist muscular nationalism or, as Odeh Bisharat put it, to the “warm (and suffocating) embrace of ultranationalism.”<sup>87</sup> Ultranationalism is a form of tribalism and does nothing to challenge Israel's anti-Palestinian collective psyche. The Shoah and October 7 trump the Nakba and the Occupation—as if it was a matter of choosing.

The ultranationalism nurtured and weaponized by the Israeli far right does not need fetishist disavowal to sustain its operation. Ultranationalist logic is explicit: *we know very well about the 1948 Nakba, and we now want to complete it in the annihilation of Gaza*. Their anti-peace plan is

total security through merciless conquest. Normalizing colonial subjugation is its business. Liberal Zionism, on the other hand, needs it desperately to sustain its life, its settler innocence, to keep the unbearable realities/atrocities of genocide at a distance. The global left should welcome the cleavage between the two positions, which can prompt a reframing. The false choice between political/religious Zionism and liberal/cultural Zionism was always a fake opposition, an ideological ruse that makes liberals feel good about their support of a settler state, and occludes their collusion with a genocidal state. For many Palestinians and their anti-colonial supporters, the choice has always clearly been between a muscular and expansionist Zionism on the one hand, and an anti-colonial struggle on the other. It is up to the rest of the world now to take their stand.

- 1 Mannoni 2003, p. 70.
- 2 A post on X from the progressive Jewish organization IfNotNow brings the racial politics of the US and Palestine/Israel into sharp dialogue. The statement captures the porous fault lines separating liberal Democrats from their far-right counterparts, highlighting the political motivation behind the oppositions to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Boycott, Divest, Sanction (BDS) movement: “The fanatical anti-CRT and anti-BDS movements are one and the same: a desperate attempt to hide historical and current reality, to police free speech when it threatens nationalism” (IfNotNow 2021). Both CRT and BDS trouble a collective psychic investment in the existing order of things. Racially sensitive liberals are happy to publicly decry the anti-CRT legislation emerging across the nation, but are tacitly willing to join the same guardians of white supremacy in supporting anti-BDS bills. Liberals in the US back CRT, but block BDS by actively supporting anti-BDS legislations aiming to delegitimize the pro-Palestinian movement. I believe that we need to read the generalized liberal hostility toward BDS not as ignorance about the subject matter (the Palestinian narrative still lacks visibility in Western corporate media) but as evidence of liberal complicity and collusion with an anti-Black world, casting doubt about the liberal support of and commitment to CRT. White liberals are in favor of cosmetic changes. You can talk about Black suffering, celebrate and honor Black history as much as you want, but don’t ask white America to give up on the American dream and its claim to exceptionalism, to confront police brutality and the mass incarceration of Black and Brown bodies (in the end, liberals are by no means hostile to the racialized “Law and Order” narrative)—in short, don’t ask us (white Americans) to give up our privilege or priority. President Joe Biden can talk about introducing new economic policies targeting Black folks, but they will fall short from facing “the gaping wounds of racial economic injustice” (Black Lives Matter 2024) Why? For the liberal Left, America, not unlike Israel, is *not* a racist state or project. See Zalloua 2024.
- 3 Illouz 2014.
- 4 Salvatori 2023.
- 5 Majadli 2024.
- 6 Illouz 2024a.
- 7 To be fair, Illouz has refused to demonize critics of the Israeli state, arguing against anti-BDS legislation, though she herself did not agree with the BDS movement. But the global left’s reaction to the Hamas attacks has soured her position.
- 8 Zalloua 2022.
- 9 Illouz 2024a.
- 10 Slavoj Žižek notes Illouz’s slippages into interpretive “vulgarity” when describing Judith Butler as an “‘intellectual’ in quotation marks.” Žižek counters: “although I had many disputes with Butler, whatever she is, she is an intellectual in the full sense of the term” (Žižek 2023). Likewise postcolonial theory—though not without limitations—is not to be summarily dismissed. With an eye for the persistence of colonial bias and reason in the contemporary landscape, postcolonial theorists—like Said, Spivak, and Achille Mbembe—have played a crucial role in provincializing Western philosophy and its preoccupations, creating, in turn, an intellectual space for thinking non-European difference and the Palestinian question (Zalloua 2017).
- 11 Illouz 2024a.
- 12 Kleinberg 2023.
- 13 Kleinberg 2023.
- 14 Said 1996, p. 32.
- 15 Spivak 1990, p.66.
- 16 Illouz 2023a.
- 17 For Fayez Sayegh, Zionism’s racist proclivities were present from the get-go, set on a collision course with the “inferior” native Palestinians: “Zionist *racial identification* produces three corollaries: *racial self-segregation*, *racial exclusiveness*, and *racial supremacy*. These principles constitute the core of the Zionist ideology” (Sayegh 1965, p. 22).
- 18 Rose 2005.
- 19 Shoard 2024. Center-left Zionists typically see the “conflict” between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis as a 1967 problem—the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories after the Six-Day War must come to an end. The letter’s line of reasoning comes straight out of the Israeli far-right playbook, not what you would expect from liberal Hollywood. The anti-colonial Left agrees: 1967 is not the problem. Rather, it locates the source of the Palestine/Israel antagonism in 1948, in the Zionist settler invasion.
- 20 The specific portion of Glazer’s comments that critics have seized upon (and often misquoted) is the following: “We stand here as men who refute their Jewishness and the Holocaust being hijacked by an occupation which has led to conflict for so many innocent people, whether the victims of 7 October in Israel or the ongoing attack on Gaza.” What Glazer is denouncing here is not his Jewishness but the instrumentalization of Jewish suffering (symbolized by the Shoah) for the justification of Palestinian genocide. In disidentifying with a genocidal Jewish state, Glazer refuses to have his art contribute to the cynical logic of Zionism that, on one hand, sacralizes Jewish suffering, and, on the other, discounts Palestinian suffering.

- Avowing the latter suffering, and having that knowledge alter one's identity, is precisely what liberal Zionists tend to decline to do, preferring instead to isolate the constitutive role of the former suffering in their day-to-day lives. See Klein 2024. In poignant response to the open letter, over 150 Jewish Hollywood professionals signed a letter in support of Glazer's Oscars comments. The signatories reject the Zionist forced choice, affirming: "We should be able to name Israel's apartheid and occupation—both recognized by leading human rights organizations as such—without being accused of rewriting history" (Shafer 2024).
- 21 Illouz neglects to mention that historians immediately refuted Netanyahu's claim that the Mufti of Jerusalem gave Hitler the idea for the Final Solution in 1941. See Rudoren 2015.
- 22 Khalidi 1997, p. 5.
- 23 Bisharat 2023.
- 24 Lara Sheehi and Stephen Sheehi argue that the Palestinian's "perverse" state is explained as either "due to the backwardness of Arab culture or, from a more sympathetic perspective, 'stunted' as a consequence of 'trauma,' 'war,' or occupation" (Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 11). Palestinians are damaged either by the backwardness of their own processes of culturalization or as the debilitating effect of colonial subjugation in the occupied territories. In both instances, the humanity/subjectivity of the Palestinians is politically compromised. The latter explanation may be less Orientalist, but it reifies the victim status of the Palestinian, evacuating any sense of Indigenous agency—*they couldn't do otherwise*.
- 25 Sayegh 1965, p. 27.
- 26 Speri 2023. <https://theintercept.com/2023/10/09/israel-hamas-war-crimes-palestinians/>.
- 27 Nafar 2023.
- 28 Ackerman 2024, p. 16.
- 29 Illouz 2024a; Nechin 2024; Peled 2024; Kraus 2024; Nelson 2024.
- 30 Butler 2024b; see also Butler 2024a.
- 31 Sayegh 1956, p. 46.
- 32 Butler 2024b.
- 33 Butler 2024b.
- 34 Butler 2024b.
- 35 Butler 2024a.
- 36 Butler 2024a.
- 37 Nelson 2024. Nelson's accusation of anti-Semitism must be turned back on its vindictive accuser. In policing Butler's speech, deemed beyond the pale, Nelson displays what Žižek names "Zionist anti-Semitism," insofar as the latter is infuriated by the former's deployment of their Jewishness to denounce Israel's colonial subjugation and state violence (Žižek 2014, p. 6; see also Massad 2013).
- By disidentifying with the Zionist settler-colonial regime, and lending their voice to the Palestinian cause of liberation, Butler refuses to accept the state of Israel as the authority over Jewish matters (unlike Netanyahu's narcissistic reading of the Holocaust imperative "Never Again," Butler reads it as interpellating you—as a Jew—to prevent rather than authorize the genocide of Palestinians). They labor instead to decouple Judaism from Zionism, so that another political configuration of Palestine/Israel might emerge.
- 38 Butler 2023.
- 39 Butler 2023.
- 40 Žižek 2006, p. 56.
- 41 Žižek 2006, p. 53.
- 42 Wynter 2003, p. 260.
- 43 McKittrick 2015, p. 47; see, also, Kashani 2023.
- 44 Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 206.
- 45 Illouz urges the global Left to cancel Butler, that is, to not let them "usurp" the Left in their support of Hamas (Illouz 2024a).
- 46 Sayegh 1965, p. 30.
- 47 Deleuze 2006, p. 241.
- 48 Begin 1977, p. 91.
- 49 Begin 1977, pp. 90–91.
- 50 Said 1979.
- 51 There is also a tendency among Zionists to reclaim the idea of terrorism. Then Prime Minister Ehud Barak said, "Had I been a Palestinian I would have joined a terrorist organization" (Mendilow 2003, p. 209). Consider also the article by Ben Hecht, the militant Zionist Hollywood scriptwriter, "Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine," in which he praises the terrorist actions of the Zionist paramilitary groups in Mandate Palestine (Žižek 2008, p. 119).
- 52 Nechin 2024.
- 53 Tuck and Yang 2012, p. 10.
- 54 Wolfe 2013, p. 257.
- 55 Wolfe 2006, p. 388.
- 56 Nechin 2024.
- 57 Malcom X condemned and ridiculed the popular Zionist narrative that cast Jewish Indigeneity as a justification for settler colonialism: "Did the Zionists have the legal or moral right to invade Arab Palestine, uproot its Arab citizens from their homes and seize all Arab property for themselves just based on the 'religious' claim that their forefathers lived there thousands of years ago? Only a thousand years ago the Moors lived in Spain. Would this give the Moors the legal and moral right to invade the Iberian Peninsula, drive out its Spanish citizens, and then set up a Moroccan nation where Spain used to be, as the European Zionists have done to our Arab brothers and sisters in Palestine?" (Malcolm X 1967). As Illouz notes, Jews did maintain a presence in the country of Palestine, but let's

recall that when the 1917 Balfour Declaration was made Palestinian Arabs comprised roughly 95 percent of the land's inhabitants. Britain's decision to create a national Jewish homeland in historic Palestine was issued without the consultation of the Indigenous Palestinian people. And contrary to Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, who infamously remarked in 1969 that "There was no such thing as a Palestinian. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people .... They did not exist" (Khalidi 1997, p. 147); Khalid Rashidi documents an awareness of Palestinianness or Palestinian identity, at the end of the nineteenth century, that existed prior to the encounter with Zionism, though it was subsequently marked by it. In this sense, Palestinian identity, writes Rashidi, "developed in spite of, and in some cases because of, the obstacles it faced" (Khalidi 1997, p. 6; see also Sayegh 1965, p. 4). Contemporary claims regarding Jewish metaphysical Indigeneity must be heard in the context of Golda Meir's attempts to discredit Palestinianness, painting Palestinians as merely Arabs who call themselves "Palestinians." See also Aranguren, Barrilaro, and El-Kurd 2024.

58 The Red Nation 2023.

59 Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 96.

60 "For those who, like me, define themselves as Zionists—believing that, despite its iniquities, the creation of a Jewish national home was legitimate and necessary—writing these words—Jewish fascism—is shocking. But a number of facts leave no choice" (Illouz 2022).

61 Jacobson 2023.

62 Jacobson 2023.

63 Jabotinsky 1923.

64 Ben-Gurion 1937.

65 Ben-Gurion 1937.

66 Ben-Gurion 1937.

67 Jabotinsky 1923.

68 Ackerman 2024, p. 29.

69 Pappé 2006, p. xii–xiii.

70 Pappé 2006, p. xiii.

71 Jacobson 2023.

72 Jacobson 2023.

73 See Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 131.

74 Schwarz 2022.

75 Tuck and Yang 2012, p. 35.

76 Schwarz 2022.

77 Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 126.

78 A just one-state solution might be the only political constellation capable of dissolving or transcending the Native/settler binary. But there is no new political constellation without a reckoning with settler colonialism. This is why Lydia Polgreen's argument about settler colonialism and its obsession with Indigeneity misses the mark. Polgreen juxtaposes a problematic social media discourse, reminiscent of Illouz's and Kleinberg's

objections, to a simplistic postcolonial binarism ("in this analysis, there are two kinds of people: those who are native to a land and those who settle it, displacing the original inhabitants. Those identities are fixed, essential, eternal") with a desire to be forward looking, moving beyond the vicissitudes of decolonization. Polgreen turns to Fanon and Edward Said for conceptual support, and ends her article with the observation: "Liberation requires invention, not restoration. If history tells us anything, it is this: Time moves in one direction, forward" (Polgreen 2024). Yes, I agree "liberation requires invention," but there is no liberation without decolonization, which is precisely Fanon's point. Unless you want to turn Fanon into a "toothless revolutionary," decolonization is a precondition, a "tabula rasa," for invention (as in the creation of a "new man") (Fanon 2004, p. 1, 239). Fanonian decolonization is clearly not interested in the recovery of a pristine past, in a time prior to the colonial encounter. Decolonialization is an "agenda for total disorder" (Fanon 2004, p. 2), and, in the context of Palestine/Israel, the disorder will most likely take the form, at least in part, of armed resistance against the settler-colonial order of things (the BDS movement can obviously also contribute to this disorder, casting Israel as a pariah state—for its theft of land, systemic subjugation of Palestinians, and flaunting of international law—to the global community). Likewise, Said's vision of a just one-state solution must be set against the failures of the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis, which yielded the Oslo Accords. The absence of a reckoning with settler colonialism transformed the Oslo Accords into "an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles" (Said 1993). Urging a move beyond the settler/Native binary leaves intact the asymmetrical structure between Palestinians and Israel. Neither Fanon nor Said wanted to end with that binary, but they both recognized that there is no liberation without facing the bewitching wickedness of coloniality. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis without the latter confronting the government's displacement and dispossession of Palestinians *and* expressing a commitment to change the colonial situation (before co-existence comes co-resistance), demanding to decolonize to Palestine/Israel (along with both people's collective psyche—whence the necessity of decolonizing the minds of the Native and settler in order to transcend the Manichean logic operative in settler colonialism).

79 With Schwarz's self-reflexive Zionism, we can observe a shift from the "shoot and

weep” genre of Israeli cinema to “ethnically cleanse and weep”; the remorse happens only belatedly when it doesn’t really matter, when there is opportunity not for accountability, but for some surplus-enjoyment in righteousness, that is, in feeling good about feeling bad.

80 Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 116.

81 Jacobson 2024.

82 Saba 2023; Strub 2023; Kane 2023; Marcetic 2023; Montag 2024. Illouz 2023b.

83 Illouz 2023b.

84 Michaeli 2024.

85 Open Letter 2023.

86 Illouz 2024a.

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