Negotiating Resistance through Narrative: North American Jewish Activists in the Israeli Anti-Occupation Movement

by

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To quote the phrase that I know only too well from my mother: “It takes a village.” This type of work (or any for that matter) never happens alone. Regardless of how much I question and challenge the ideas, stories and legacies I come from, there are some legacies that I will cherish, embody and labor to pass on for the rest of my life. The value of interconnectedness and the communal obligation is invaluable to me, and I regard it as a sacred and protected principle of my family’s for generations, as well as in the Jewish communities that raised me.

That being said, I extend the deepest gratitude firstly to my family. My living, breathing body exits thanks to you, and the countless way you have supported me, loved me, frustrated me, made me laugh, made me think, taught me care and compassion, and worked tirelessly to allow me to live the way I do today. Thank you.

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To my friends, loved ones, peers, I am endlessly grateful for the late nights, food deliveries, love, encouragement, input that you have lovingly given me. Your patience with all the ups and downs of this process is precious to me.

Thank you to countless individuals and communities that are responsible for cultivating and nourishing my sense of curiosity, for encouraging me to learning, for feeding me, housing me, giving me expansive equipment to enrich my thoughts, explorations and experiences. You are innumerable, precisely because you are infinite. For the simple fact that it is impossible to name you all, I resign to another long legacy of boundaries.
**Preface**

“The son of Zoma says: Who is wise? Someone who learns from everyone they meet. As it says in Psalms (119:99), ‘from all my teachers I grew wise, what you shared is my conversation . . .’

Ethics of Our Fathers, Chapter 4, Mishna 1

Israel has been a central part of identity discourse in my family, my school and my personal experience since before I can remember. Throughout my life, my relationship with both the idea and also lived reality of Israel has fluctuated in both wild and mild ways. The making of this intimate ethnography (Waterston 2019) has been a multifaceted, and at times arduous experience that taught me the pursuit of knowledge is never ending as change is constant. It demanded that I grapple with finding, documenting, and unpacking meaning from people, moments and places I encountered along the way. Needless to say, my relationship to the work is, inseparable from processes of research, thinking, processing, feeling, writing and constructing this project. I must start with where my own understanding of where this story begins:

**Simplicity**

I can see stars I never thought I would be able to in the sky. The night is chilled. So chilled, it is hard for me to believe that only hours ago, the middle eastern sun scorched our arms, legs, necks, heads, as we hiked through the Negev. Stepping out into the desert night, distancing ourselves as a group from the campsite, me and my fellow eighth graders follow the head teacher towards the mountains, which, in the emptiness of the desert look closer than they are.
There is gravel under our feet. Soon, once the bright lights of our sleeping tent area dwindle in the distance and the light of the moon and stars become our main source of vision, our teachers, who lead us, tell us to pause. “So,” my morah (teacher) announces in a gentle but loud voice “you will now have time to spread out and reflect on your own. Take as much space as you need but don’t stray too far from the group.” I walk far. I want to be as far from the grade possible. I want solitude. I feel a deep sense of longing vis-á-vis the place I am in, Israel, the desert. As I stand a distance from the others, hoping no one will see my face, there is nothing but air, land and sky between me and the rolling mountains ahead of me. I have been reading texts about this land for such a long time. Ancient texts which connect me to my past, my history, the oral and textual transmissions, rooted in my collective Jewish memory. I simply cannot believe I am here. Everything is in shades of black and blue. The brown shades of sunlight have dissipated. Looking out at the silhouettes of the curvy mountain tops before me, tears begin to roll down my cheeks. I am astonished by the reality of a place I have been taught about my entire life. A promised land I had learned to long for, internalized and experience as my home. And now here I am, I am thinking to myself, in the same land that Abraham walked, looking out mountains that he himself traversed. I am returned to the place that my ancestors of thousands of years ago. My emotions are running high. The strength of my yearning surprises me. What am I yearning for? Why does this thought move me so? That I am from here, that my imagined ancestors, my roots, my history, my stories and rituals and people come from this place? I feel like I have arrived.
I still remember the first conversation with my parents after arriving back from that eighth-grade trip to Israel with my day school -- Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen. After the overly emotional hugging and crying at seeing me after having been halfway across the world for two whole weeks, my parents, happy to see have me home safe asked: “So Marni, how was the trip?!” *How was?* I thought to myself. “I am moving to Israel!” I declared with confidence, giddiness and overjoy.

**Confusion**

Five years later, I spent a year in Jerusalem living with Jewish Israelis on an urban kibbutz. At the age of 18/19, I reveled in the independence, as well as the opportunity to live with Israeli Jews who held a wide range of political perspectives and religious. Before and during this time, I also began the process of learning significantly shocking perspectives and realities regarding Palestinian personal experience and collective history. This process of learning began with two Jewish summer programs that were more critical learning environments. There, my questions were encouraged and I was introduced to a broader range of experiences than ever before. It extended through my gap year in Jerusalem to conversations about the Israeli election the year I was there in 2014-15, and especially a few powerful conversations with left-wing Israeli friends on this program with me. During my year living in Jerusalem, what once was an idea, a sort of utopian fantasy easily held in the diaspora of the perfect society for a Jew and Jewish freedom, began to unravel before my eyes. In its place, the likes of a living, breathing, flawed, politically diverse and disputative nation-state arose out of the depths.
The Jerusalem I began to know was a city of segregation, contingent citizenship and rights, strife, taboos, silence and erasure of Palestinian life and history. I saw, too, a city breathing with religious yearning, ideological extremism, a strongly opinionated populace, unexpected communities and initiatives, music, history, incredibly passionate and opinionated residents of all kind. The country contained robust policies ranging from typical to grossly discriminatory. There was and is still an expanding settler movement to the south and east, with a violent military history and messy, flawed humans. It was just like other countries that commit brutal, heinous crimes against humanity. Israel was no longer the utopian fantasy of my diasporic youth – the place where I could finally understand what home felt like, or where I perfectly, absolutely, belonged. Rather, Israel became a country with a history and present that I could and would critical evaluate.

Despite this, I still dreaded going back to college in America, and was desperate to stay in Israel/Palestine, where my partner lived and where I felt so Jewish – some aspects of the fantasy still hadn’t fully dissipated. Though I wanted to stay in Israel, I still longed to go to a small liberal arts college. The idea that I could be surrounded by critical, curious, passionate students -- that I could be in environments where I wasn’t forever accused of being a leftist, a feminist, an Israel-hater or granola-crunchy -- stood as an unbelievably exciting prospect. It filled me with relief, excitement and motivation. So, I went. Israel, as I had first come to know it, as I had known it as a passionate young Jew in 8th grade, falling in love with an idealized place that might be my home, and Israel/Palestine, Israel-Palestine, Israel and Palestine, a few names that I was coming to know it by, and had been, through
high school, into my Jerusalem year, and as my learning and questions continued during my time at Wesleyan was always on my mind.

**Complexity**

Halfway through my college experience at Wesleyan, after having attending apartheid week events both years, studying Arabic, seeking out different voices around the conflict and the occupation, a few things became clear to me. Firstly, that the precedent in my life which had inextricably linked my Jewishness and a connection to Israel, was an expression of one type of Jewishness, not necessarily essential to it. I was able to put modern political Zionism in its historical context, existing as one of many forms of political expression that Jews across the world explored and entertained in our attempt to imagine a different physical, spiritual, and political situation for ourselves under grave circumstances. Zionism was never and is not equivalent to Judaism. It was a political ideology cultivated by Jews, in the context of a simultaneously vibrant and horrifying period creative Jewish political imagination in Europe between the two world wars (Mendelsohn, 1993). Historian Ezra Mendelsohn (1993) took on the tremendous task of recording and studying the abundant Jewish political organizations of the time with competing political visions, as well as diversity of approach between Zionist theorists. Jewish political thought and practice has a long history of intra-Jewish conflict in its multiple perspectives on home, state, national expression and self-preservation.

As I write this thesis with a critical historical and political approach to Zionism, I want to make sure not to fall into one of two traps: the problematic
discourse which over emphasizes an exceptionally demonic nature of the Israel/the Jewish state (in this trap, Israel is exposed as the global example of moral despotism) and the problematic discourse which equates modern political Zionism and Jewishness. Occasionally academics, activists, leaders, communities and lay people hyper and singularly target Jews for being Zionists, conflating the two, and hold all Jews responsible for the political choices of a modern nation state that is or is not their own (many Israelis also hold multiple and contending political views for their country, some traditionally Zionist and others starkly opposed). My hope is to challenge the inclination to think about Jews as a monolith, Israelis as a monolith, Palestinian as a monolith. One of the most powerful tools of oppression is the erasure of difference, the flattening of the multi-dimensional, and discordant individuals.

As a student, on campus, I was not explicitly involved in Israel/ Palestine political activism. While I loved supporting the amazing educational and political work my peers were engaged in to oppose the occupation, to push for human rights and to increase people awareness of the violence and complicated history, I was consumed by issues in my immediate or home community, the ones I was seeing right around me. Throughout my undergraduate education, reading about indigenous politics in the U.S., the history of slavery in the North and in Middletown specifically, about refugees and undocumented border crossers, about religion, religious history and the rise of Christian nationalism, these topics in my courses always brought me back to this place.

Though the truth remains that Zionism and Judaism are not equivalent, that Israeli-ness is not the authentic expression of Jewishness, my Jewishness is so
deeply implicated in the relationship between some diaspora Jews and Zionism. It is important to note that Israel and Zionism are not all-encompassing questions and struggles in my diaspora Jewish identity. They are one important axis, which meaningfully informed my learning, especially since I was in a partnership with an Israeli for my first two years here, and had just arrived back from Jerusalem weeks before starting university.

My years as an undergraduate at Wesleyan were also the first time since the age six that I lived in a non-Jewish institution or setting. With the exception of a few of my mother’s college friends, whose names my sister’s and I all knew, and who we saw only once every few years, my entire communal and educational life -- learning, living, eating, breathing, crying, laughing, yelling, arguing, growing and failing -- with other Jews. The Jewishness of my life, if you will, was such a pervasive, decades-long foundation, that I did not know just how Jewish my life and world were until I came to Wesleyan. It is for this reason that I chose to use this capstone project to gain a more nuanced understanding of Israel/Palestine, and I needed to understand what it means to be a diaspora Jew in relation to it. This project deals with questions that I hadn’t yet confronted in the stacks of Olin library, or on the written page. That said, my focus here is not to draw a conclusion, but rather an attempt to express, explore and consider with what it means to be a diaspora Jew and what it means to negotiate that identity with questions of belonging. In many ways, the work of being a diaspora Jew grappling with Zionism is just that.

I seek to make sense of what it means to live in a history, a tradition and to grapple with modernity, change and difference. How do reflection, revision,
innovation, and rejection, map onto the process of inheriting our past and dealing with it? In what ways can learning about our individual and collective journeys help us better understand how we got to where we are today? My own quest leading up to this thesis has been on the one hand, one of moving forward in time, expanding beyond my personal experience and history to new articulations of who I am, what I long for, and where I stand. In other ways, my journey in my relationship to Israel Palestine has included reaching back in time, uncovering pasts, histories and inheritances I did not know were there. The process of writing has been illuminating allowing me to bring disparate experiences in the recent past into now or the present as a synthesized meaningful compilation of ideas and explorations, questions, doubts and stories.
Introduction

“Anthropology will continue to get a bad rap as long as we anthropologists think and write about the human condition in obtuse ways. “

Paul Stoller

“Personally, I don’t have hope. I am not here to solve an entire conflict. I don’t have answers. I see our work more as a way of ameliorating the situation, pushing back in places where no one is, building relationships that aren’t otherwise being built,” George, one of the primary activists I spent time with in the field, said to me honestly, when I asked him what kind of change he was trying to make. The work of creating relationships, solidarity and hopeful small-scale projects is a notion that I encountered time and time again from the many activists with whom I spoke. From the onset, the fieldwork research was personal. Most of my interlocutors were North American like me. They also felt they were struggling against a widespread Jewish diaspora apathy or a disturbing ignorance and militant support of Zionist institutions, with a serious injury to critical reflection when regarding Israel, and its history and present relationship to Palestinians and Palestine. Since neither the indirectly violent apologetics nor the direct support of violent behaviors are tolerable anymore for young North American Jews raised within them, I sought to use my thesis writing opportunity as a vessel for growth, learning and inquiry into human stories and politics that continue to shape me and others.

Methodological Mapping
While conducting field research and during the writing process thereafter, several challenging questions arose: How does one research meaningfully and sensitively amidst violence? How does one write from such messy and violent political conditions without reducing people’s humanity to such? How does one write about subjects who teeter on the axis of being socially and politically privileged while also being fringe and marginalized in other ways? And more generally, how does one bring life and presence to individuals, groups, histories and journeys that are multidimensional and full of contradictions? How do I resist the urge to enclose them in absolute, conclusive conceptual boundaries?

My time in the field took several methodological forms including participant observation, interviews and historical research. More specifically, I had numerous conversations with activists, took trips to either Palestinian communities, markets and fields for both activist related work and travel related research. All of my formal conversations were recorded in full and are used with completely informed consent, and all names included here have been changed. Additionally, each night I would journal about my days, recalling encounters and noting powerful images, moments and phrases. The life and world of Israel and occupied Palestine appeared in surges from the world of my West Jerusalem residence. As I began a more intense writing process, I sought approaches that could capture the fragmented moments and conversations, separated by physical space. To capture the ebb and flows of what was at times a tumultuous fieldwork process, marked by residential and geographic segregation and erasure, this ethnography is comprised of a series of moments and encounters during which these surges into the unpredictable world of occupation and
activism occur. They are not chronologically ordered. Rather their arrangement is a reflection of the new insights gained during the writing process, or what Laurel Richardson (2000) refers to as another method of inquiry. As I wrote out these words, I became even more aware of the meaningful ways the encounters themselves speak to each other.

In doing so, I take inspiration from ethnographic works that have shaped my learning, thought and praxis as an Anthropology major at Wesleyan. Works like Elizabeth Chin’s *My Life With Things: the Consumer Diaries* (2016), Paul Stoller’s *Stranger in the Village of the Sick* (2004), and Renato Renaldo’s *The Day of Shelly’s Death* (2014) were some of the most insightful pieces of ethnography. It was the emphasis on understanding how humans make meaning through stories, feelings and relationships that drew me to the study of anthropology in the first place. These can reveal processes, patterns that are critical aspects of the discipline beyond simply their personal narrative allure. In her 2013 Huffington Post series, “Why Anthropology Still Matters,” Professor Gina Athena Ulysse calls attention to the discipline’s emphasis on vocational skills and relevant knowledge production as it has value in a highly professionalized and capital-centered market that values knowledge and understanding for its monetary value.¹ Human relationships, and stories that just explore the nuances and histories of small moments and communities are hardly valuable in this economy. Writing against the tendency towards professional value and towards the continual necessity of humanization, an approach based in encounters

¹ Gina Athena Ulysse, “Paul Stoller or Why Anthropology Still Matters.” 04/25/2013 11:44 am ET Updated Dec 06, 2017
and open analysis is critical to pushing back against white supremacist values that dominate the field to this day, valuing money and power over people.

In their experimental book, *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork* (2007), anthropologists Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa H. Malkki reveal the too often hidden processes in the making of ethnographies. To that end, this book includes their Fulbright proposal, actual field notes and insights as well their email correspondences during Cerwonka’s time in the field. This ethnography of theory making works, in their words, to “capture the process of ethnographic research as unfolds in real time and as it is embedded and embodied in the concrete details of the researcher’s everyday life (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2)” By taking an improvisational approach to writing theory, the researcher is humbled by the understanding that they do not know more than their field, but they can encounter it and converse with it processual collaboration. An understanding, in the words of Cerwonka and Malkki, that the “. . . tempo of ethnographic research (like most knowledge production) is not the steady, linear accumulation of more and more insight,” that the process ”is characterized by rushes of and lulls in activity and understanding, and it requires constant revision of insights gained earlier (5)” is foundational to an inquisitive and improvisational writing approach.

In dialogue with these scholarly insights and with the ethnographic insights of the human, locational, and experiential interlocutors in the field, this project is not ordered or divided as much as it is marked by the surges of the everyday felt and witnessed (Stewart 2017) through research and writing. On the page, this takes the
form of vignettes, ranging in length, which aid the reader in encountering the places, people, feelings and ideas that occur in the space between myself and the field.

**Academic Ancestors**

The notion that research and the process of understanding happens in a circular, non-accumulative way is central to how my writing reflects a non-linear process of insight. Throughout my time in the field, and thereafter, things were clearer and later became less clear, only to become interesting in new ways, diverging from my original line of thought. For example, at the beginning of my research in the field, I was particularly drawn by the question of home and how a diasporic search for home expressed itself among Jewish activists who did not follow the conventionally understood patterns of diaspora Jewish relationship to Israel, yet maintained one still.

Jasmines Habib’s ethnography *Israel, Diaspora and the Routes of National Belonging* (2004) served as an essential point of reference for the diaspora Jewish aspect of my field of research. Her ethnography explores the social practices that comprise diaspora Jewish routes of belonging in an Israeli national frame which envisions the scattered Jewish people as among its satellite citizenry. Looking closely at the language and practices used during diaspora Jewish tours in Israel, communal events in their North American home communities, and between Jews of different generations in the community, Habib explores how diaspora Jews construct lifestyles that center Israel and a sense of belonging to the state in their personal and collective discourse and practices as North Americans. These Jews see themselves within a Jewish peoplehood whose central homeland is Israel, despite the fact that almost all
of them choose to remain physically in North America. The Jews I wanted to study did not fit into these well researched diaspora Zionist narratives and practices. Their politics were deviant, resistant and critical, and yet they chose to live in Israel-Palestine, learn Hebrew, and engage in a small Israeli milieu of radical leftist activists. I thought, how can I differently understand this community as part of a modern nationalist history that connects between a Jewish people, state and land, but with a radically different product than the normal “pro-Israelness” that is used to explicate Jewish diaspora identification with or relation to Israel.

In her recently published ethnography The Israeli Radical Left: An Ethic of Complicity, Scottish anthropologist Fiona Wright (2018), focuses on the lives of radical Israeli left activists in Tel-Aviv Jaffa, the imagined progressive and secular hub of Israel’s discursive claim to be a liberal democracy. (2018: 17). Although my field site community is historically and organizationally related to Wright’s, it differs in two important ways -- in its location and in the identities of the anti-occupation activists. My interlocutors who mostly reside in Jerusalem are international Jewish activists, mostly North American, though some hold dual citizenship (Israel and North America) as well as a few are European.

Not only is Wright’s field slightly different, but her approach to writing it is as well. Evident in the ethnography’s introduction, Wright commits to specific theoretical read of her field: the relationship between ethics and complicity. Engaging the work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’, Wright focuses on his definition of ethics, defined loosely as based in the rejection of the self and centering of the Other (2018: 16-17). In a conceptual approach to the Israeli radical left, she explains their
actions, community, politics and sense of selfhood through a precise ethical frame: these activists pursue the rejection of the Israeli national subjectivity for the embrace of the Palestinian self, experience. This ethic focuses on lifting up and rendering visible the subaltern, the Palestinian Other. In understanding the different engagements and experiences of this activist sector of Israeli society as embodying an ethics that embraces and focuses on otherness and rejects the self, she also explores the constantly negotiated complicity of these leftist Israeli subjects. Being both protected in status as Jewish Israeli citizens, the stakes of their resistance is much less existentially threatening. In the end, Wright offers a nuanced exploration of theoretical discussions of ethics, alterity and complicity. She also brings a world to anthropological literature that is fairly new, seeing as the foundation for Israeli civil resistance of the state, its foundations and current practices, is an outgrowth of both recent violence during the second intifada and a historically gradual process that allowed for the revelation of and exploration of pre- and early state history especially as it relates to the Palestinian experience (Stein and Swedenburg 2005).

In Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg Volume, *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture* (2005), the joint work lays out a history for the slow advancement of a critical field of study surrounding Palestine Israel. Noting the historical barrier to and the historical moments that allowed for the study of Palestinian and Israeli history in a critical way is important. Turning points including the ‘67 war and subsequent (expanded) Israeli occupation, Edward Said’s *The Question of Palestine* in 1979, and the Lebanon war in 1982 and the massacres of Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila refugee camp, all played a significant role in
bringing a Palestinian perspective to a broader public (2005: 2-3). Additionally, during this time, early documents from 1948 and early state history became declassified. During the 60’s and 70’s, a rise in Israeli revisionist historical scholarship took place, as well as the widespread visibility of Palestinian history and experience which came out of Palestinian research institutes based in Lebanon (2005: 2-3). The images and histories of the post ’67 era, involving the mental picture of an unarmed Palestinian stone throwing struggle, against a strongly armed, organized Israeli military became widespread in the American study of Israel as well. This research is also situated in a changing history of how the American academy studies and is able to study Israel and Palestine. When the state was first founded and until the 60’s, writing this piece would have been tremendously risky and censored (Stein and Swedenburg 2005).

A Reader’s Key

In its totality, this thesis consists of three loosely defined types of encounters: encounters with activists and interlocutors, encounters with events, occurrences, specifically to acts of dissent that I participated in during my time in the field, and encounters with places. There is no indication whether I am specifically encountering a person, event or place, though some chapters are titled with names, others with events and others with places. Sometimes in these moments, the distinction between whether I am encountering a person, an event or a place is very clear, in other moments it is not. This is intentionally given that these three aspects cannot be
separated so easily. Place, people and occurrence live together and are deeply mutually influential. Below, I outline.

The first set of vignettes explore paths of arrival. First my own, and then Ella’s, one of the activists with whom I spent nearly three hours interviewing in Jaffa. The section of arrival stories is not just about a physical landing in a place but rather the complex set of personal and collective histories that produce a small but critical movement of international Jews who are a part of the anti-occupation movement. I touch on the entanglement between personal events like searching for home, a job, relationships, building and imagining a story about oneself, and political, national events, like wars, treaties, invasions, declaration, etc. When the historical events of a nation are experienced as public chronologies, they become the stuff of textbooks, impersonal listings of dates, numbers, leaders’ names, places, legal cases. They hardly include the personal experiences of those within the populace. This encounter explores what happens when public political life and the impact they have on personal life and longing collide.

In Foreign Power, I move from a small bar on the Mediterranean seaside with Ella to the West Bank, which in the public and Israeli imaginaries, is the main site of the occupation, though this is not the case. I follow in the footsteps of the civil disobedience of Israeli radical left anti-occupation activists and the international counterparts that frequently join them, which we learn through Ella’s story and the activist communities that were important to her sense of political and social belonging. During my time with Ta’ayush, questions of identity malleability and the privilege of passing arise. What differentiates an international Jewish activist both
from radical left Israeli activists also from international non-Jewish activists that also abound in the region to do human rights work?

“Home is Where You Don’t Need a Map” recounts my travels with activist George to consider the questions and history of tourism in Palestine Israel. More specifically this encounter delves into navigating routes of belonging as a familiar newcomer. I ponder over how itineraries for these international Jewish activists both have changed and sustained themselves, as well as how they impact Georges relationship to place. Next, I settle down for a Shabbat dinner with a community of ATL activists in a small apartment in Nachlaot. Here I am exposed to what happens when Jewish ritual, leftist activists and the textual tradition collide in the city of Jerusalem on Shabbat. How do Jews who are resisting dominant communal political paradigms and ritual traditions make community and inherit tradition in new, creative ways together? Following Friday night Shabbat dinner, I meet an activist named David. His discussion of his politics and work in the anti-occupation world shifts the conversation of the movement into the role that discursive practices play. What role do words play in changing and resisting political norms? How does the use of imaginative discourse regarding state and public values and ethics work to create political change? Why does the movement use the language it uses and who is the movement contending with in its focus on certain forms of political discourse?

Centers and Margins highlights one of several conversations with Eyal, an Israeli-American, born in Israel but raised most of his life in the United States. Our conversation brought up critical tension that he constantly navigates in the life of diaspora resistance in Israel. How can a diaspora approach to anti-occupation
grassroots activism constitute not just a new community of the resistance but a different lens for what is being resisted? How can new theoretical frames for understanding Jewish diaspora impact nationalist politics and narratives of where and what home is? Do these conceptual shifts have positive political power?

In my final segment, *Rediscovering Home* I explore more deeply the theoretical discourse around Jewish diaspora. How is it that Jews understand the relationship between Israel, diaspora and Zionism? How have these frames of understanding been challenged by Jews? And what discourses between specifically North American Jews both allow for and inhibit Jewish diaspora criticism of Israel and Zionism? Finally, I conclude with where the conversation is today between North American Jews regarding Israeli Palestine and why the movement fighting against the occupation on the ground is a part of a larger struggle between North American Jews regarding their relationship to the state of Israel and the conversation that can and cannot ensue.

Finally, a short guide about how to decipher the cacophony of voices in the text. First, the texts in italics and quotation marks are words spoken by interlocutors in the field, collected through informed, consensual recorded conversations. Second, quotations not in italics, dispersed in my paragraphs of writing (with no direct citation) are a mix between small snippets of direct recorded text from a conversation and quotes written in my field notes during the field research process but not recorded on tape, also with the interlocutors’ full knowledge of my role as a researcher working on a thesis project. Third, blocks of text that exist in italics with no quotation marks, which are not analysis, paraphrasing’s, narrative setting or recorded and
written quotes of interlocutors are moments encounter with my own memory and personal history.
Paths of Arrival: Marni

Online
3.21.18 at 10:30 AM

Hi everyone!

I am Marni, an alumna from ’13. This summer I am hoping to do research in Israel/Palestine on Jewish American involvement in regional politics. I am particularly interested in what I perceive as an ambiguous network or conglomerate of American-Jewish “progressives” (in quotation to avoid a debate over what the word absolutely signifies and to simply indicate a spoken, self-identified term) who do work with other Israeli-Jews and Palestinians in the region to “fight the occupation” or to “pursue peace.” This includes American Jews who go there for a year to do service work in “social justice” organizations, or American Jews who have moved to Israel with the hope of doing peace work, educationally focused or focused on social organizing. I am wondering what kinds of networks exist between these Jews and what their relationships to Israelis, Palestinians and more conservative American Jews doing political work in the region look like. What drives one’s choices to go and do this work and how does it fit into a narrative of Aliya² or subvert it? And is it possible to be subversive

²Aliyah is a contemporary term which refers to the act of Jewish immigration to Israel. The Hebrew word which means “ascent,” derives from the biblical term “Aliyah la’regel,” referring to the tri-annual pilgrimage of ancient Israelites to Jerusalem on the holidays of Passover, Sukkot and Shavuot. In the modern Israeli nation state, this process is facilitated by the Israeli Law of Return, officially passed in 1950, and amended in 1970, the right of any Jew to what former Prime Minister Ehud Barak calls this law a “special key.” Barak explains in a 2008 Haaretz interview, against the argument that the law is exclusionary, that this special status ends within the bounds of citizenship: “Israel is a home to which a Jew, as a Jew, is given a special key with which to enter – a golden key, which is not given to others. But once you enter the home, all those who reside in it are equal, non-Jews, too.” Aliyah is supported by many American Jewish Zionist organizations such as Nefesh B’Nefesh founded in 2002 to promote and ease the immigration process for North American Jews. In 2016 they celebrated the immigration of their 50,000th Oleh (one who makes Aliyah). Friends of the IDF is another American Jewish Zionist organization which supports lone soldiers who immigrate to Israel and serve in the military. The idea of Aliyah is celebrated from a Zionist perspective which appraises Israel as the beacon of hope and safety for Jews and as the central and eternal Jewish homeland. On the contrary, the exclusionary and contingent aspects of the Law of Return are deemed destructive in the eyes of human rights activists. The result of continual settlement spawned by Jewish immigration supports the
given the implications on demographics and rights? If anyone has any opinions, connections, identifies as an American-Jew in Israel/Palestine for that purpose or thoughts for a good starting point on this, that would be welcome. I have some ideas, but I am really curious what this brings up for people.

Warmly,
Marni

On March 21, 2018, I sent the email above to the Bronfman Fellowship Listserv. The listserv acts as an online contact zone for conversation, learning and resources sharing between alumni who participated in a yearlong pluralistic North American Jewish high school fellowship.

Responses began to arrive quickly. People were eager to help and had a lot of ideas. They pointed me towards the Jewish American Peace Archives3, Achvat Amim,4 and a few fellowship alumni and their friends regarded as highly involved in exactly this work. After reading about twelve emails, the movement that kept

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3 https://ajpeacearchive.org/
4 Achvat Amim is a five-month program run under the international socialist Zionist movement Hashomer Hatzair in Jerusalem that adults between the ages of 20-30 to engage in critical learning about “Jewish history, tradition and culture” and work in the Israeli human rights sector. The program on the one hand has a strong human rights bent and is known to be a radical challenge to most programs bringing foreigners to either live or work in Israel Palestine, in that it engages these internationals in critical justice work. On the other hand, it still exists as a program encouraging young Jews to come live in Israel in a way that re-enforces the Zionist narrative that encourages Israel as the central authentic site of Jewish self-discovery in a way at odds with Palestinian human rights. https://www.achvatamim.org/the-details.html
resurfacing, and that also felt closest to the kind of work I was interested in researching, was an activist collective called All That’s Left.

This movement was not unfamiliar. During nights that I spent reading reports from Palestine/Israel on sites like Muftah, 972 Magazine, Haaretz and the Middle East Monitor, link after link would lead me to reflections and efforts involving or tangentially relating to All That’s Left. Because the public online presence of the collective amounted to a website with art and testimony from the occupied territories written mostly by “diaspora Jews,” and a Facebook page that I hadn’t yet discovered, the configuration of All That’s Left remained a mystery. Was a non-profit, an activist collective, a blog for sharing art and writing from the occupied territories? In the spring of 2017, news of the Sumud Freedom Camp began showing up in my regular reading of Muftah and 972 Magazine. All That’s Left’s name, along with the Center for Jewish nonviolence showed up in almost every article. Again, when spring 2018 came around and Gazans marched to the fence for freedom, and return, these names surfaced in various reports on the issue. Not until I got responses from alumni of this Jewish fellowship, pointing me in their direction, did I begin to realize that this All That’s Left I was reading places was an organized community – one of the few

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5 Muftah, founded in 2010 is an independent, electronic information site providing analysis of issues based in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The sites goals are to provide a place for diverse, original content and a wide-range of perspective. The content is also supported by academic advisors, who are scholars in the various fields of middle Eastern Studies. [https://muftah.org/our-board-of-advisors/](https://muftah.org/our-board-of-advisors/). 972 Magazine is also an independent online magazine supporting report and analysis content specifically focused on Israel Palestine and writing about the occupation. The sites commitment is to on-the-ground reporting with an eye towards human rights and freedom. [https://972mag.com/about/](https://972mag.com/about/)

centers of gathering for diaspora Jews in Israel/Palestine who were actively involved in the anti-occupation movement.

**On the Ground**

“It may sound simple,” Miranda, an activist with All That’s Left explains in a stern tone, “but not in my name. I really just feel like this is a tremendous *chilul hashem.*” Miranda sits across from me in the trendy Cafe Yehoshua restaurant on Azza Street, a main drag in the *Rehavia* neighborhood of West Jerusalem. A *chilul hashem*, a desecration of God’s name. As we sit sipping our morning coffees Miranda explains to me why, as an American Jew, a diaspora Jew, as someone whose national home is not Israel, she is involved so heavily in anti-occupation activism and organizing. “Not in my name. She says.” Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Miranda currently resides in Jerusalem, organizing as a member of All That’s Left: Anti-Occupation Collective (ATL) and working as an employee of Breaking the Silence (BtS), an Israeli anti-occupation non-profit organization. Most people think that when American Jews move to Israel, whether for a brief period of time or permanently, that they are moving as an act of political solidarity with the State. This modern Zionist framework of Jewish migration to Israel traditionally conceives the movement of diaspora Jews to the perceived homeland of Israel as a form of *Aliyah*, a form of ascension.

For Miranda and her activist counterparts, national sovereignty has its costs, namely the oppression of and discrimination against Palestinians through calculated and violent military occupation. Miranda’s time in Israel, therefore, was specifically focused on critiquing state politics and fighting against its current political behaviors.
In the eyes of her fellow diaspora Jews, this brand of relationality to Israel was dangerously sympathetic with the states constructed “enemy.” Her work is at best highly contentious, and at worst utterly despised, dismissed and rendered heretical. Diaspora Jews like her, whose commitment to Israeli politics is founded in political dissent, are similarly largely renounced and looked down upon by the general diaspora Jewish public.

So, what draws Miranda and her activist counterparts to this work and why do they think their voices are particularly important regarding this specific political issue? “I can’t let this be the picture of what Jews do in the world,” she declares. Her statement illuminates not just her personal story but the larger ethos of a movement of diaspora Jews whose care for human rights and undeniable connection to has taken on a different shape altogether, as I would come to slowly discover in the field. All That’s Left: Anti-Occupation Collective is an activist organization founded in 2012 by North American Jews living in Jerusalem. The collective’s explicit purpose was to create a social and political community whose oppositional stance toward the Israeli military occupation was inspired by the experiences and perspectives of diaspora Jewishness. During research, the group’s members identities ranged: from those who were internationals, or non-citizens of Israel, to those who were of mixed international and Israeli or just Israeli heritage. What united them was their shared desire to reimagine Jewish diaspora politics, by contending with dominant narratives about Israel amongst diaspora Jews that pit the rights and freedom of Jews against the rights and freedoms of Palestinians. By fighting the injustice that is being done “in the name of,” at the expense of Palestinian life and wellbeing, as Miranda puts it,
these diaspora Jewish activist could rewrite the narrative of Jewish relationship to both Jewish community and liberation, and its relationship to Palestinian human rights and the Israeli occupation. To take Miranda’s words literally, that the occupation cannot be the picture of what Jews are doing in the world, if she has any say in it, is to understand that the movement was intent on countering the maintenance of the national status quo and that it would not and should not represent Jews, Jewish belief, ideology or behavior in the world.

In resistance to the pervasive tendency towards ideological puritanism and extremism, in which a discourse and practice of ideological, social and political purism rules, members of ATL continually used the language of “on the ground” (as ATL activists referred to their work). For these activists the words “on the ground” were more than simple locational indicators. They captured an approach, a lens on what radical politics might look like. Through this language they sought to build living relationships, to show up when requested, and respond to the day-to-day struggles enacted through Israeli occupation. For example, membership in the movement is not determined by ideological stand. The litmus test for being involved in anti-occupation activism is not about what type of state solution they purport, or whether they call themselves anti-Zionist, post-Zionist, liberal Zionist, non-Zionist or Zionist, but rather about practical realities of human rights violation, and whether or not they wanted to resist and struggle against these realities.

_A Note on Place_
Though Israel achieved nation-state independence in 1948, Palestine to this day has not achieved a semblance of that same collective freedom. As such, the complex reality of land dispossession and dispute, contingent political autonomy, and territorial and military occupation continue to this day. As I inquired into and encounter the stories of Jewish internationals, locally dwelling anti-occupation activists, I could not ignore that the field was not solely based in the communities I encountered and their socio-political practice and speech. The land was enmeshed in the conversations, practices, policies and emotions occurring in the field. The land carried the violence and silence of the past, and the dreams, actions and feelings of the present and future articulated and negotiated by my interlocutors. In his concluding chapter of *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (2003), the late anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot distinguishes three different ways of relating to the field – as a location, locale, and a locality. A location, he describes “has been situated.” It is located somewhere. To find it, one needs a map. A locale is a place that is “primarily defined by what happens there.” It’s placeness comes through the site of an event. Lastly, a locality, is defined through its “human content (2003: 122-123).” In this chapter, Trouillot sketches a brief history of the discipline, noting its shift through different methodologies, earlier approaches to anthropology engaging in significant armchair scholarship with an emphasis on history and not living fieldwork, and then a turn in the field marked by a later hyper-focus on fieldwork as the meat of ethnographic work. Trouillot on the other hand, is advocating in a self-admitting “formulaic” way, that ethnography can exist somewhere in the middle. One significant aspect of shifting to a more critical
approach in the field is the recognition of location as central to the way power plays out in certain locales and locality. In ethnography, the parts of fieldwork that most often are tended to, are “locale at best, and at worst locality (2003: 123).” This is an unavoidable and critical part of the story. The communities who engage with political and social change are engaging with histories and present relationships between events, people and the places they reside in. Land is an inseparable part of how social and political discursive and other practices take form.
**Paths of Arrival: Ella**

In the year two thousand, Ella arrived at Ben Gurion Airport ready to cross into Israeli state borders and become a citizen. When she arrived, brimming with excitement, she had no clue that in only ten days the second Intifada, or Palestinian uprising, would erupt. In the year 2019, in the very beginning of August, I sat across from Ella at Paspartu, a small bar in Jaffa, right around the corner from the Tuesday evening Greek market. In the distance, the outdoor artist market was bustling. People stopping to listen to live musical performance, or to gaze at the hand-made crafts and clothes being presented, as the sun set opposite the Mediterranean Sea in the historically Palestinian port city of Jaffa. Sitting across from Ella, the distant live music of the market clashed only slightly with the music playing inside the bar. Ella was one of the first members of ATL to respond to initial email to the movement, following the suggestions from my Alumni listserv:

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Marni Loffman to ATL Listserv  
Jul 24, 2018, 10:09 AM  
Dear all,  
I am a current undergraduate student majoring in Cultural Anthropology and Religion at Wesleyan University. As I am entering into my senior year this coming September, I find myself reflecting on the ways in which Israel/Palestine politics impact Jewish diaspora identity. I will be spending the coming year writing on the topic and am doing research in Israel/Palestine this summer. My main research interest centers around questions of home and how politics influences where and what home is. I am specifically interested in the stories of diaspora Jews who live in Israel permanently or temporarily, and engage in anti-occupation political work, whether full time or peripherally. From how I see it, modern Jewish nationalism has deeply impacted contemporary Jewish conceptions of home. With changing political visions and opinions among (not just) diaspora Jews, I wonder how one’s politics affects, shapes, maybe rearticulates one’s sense of home. This is only a brief description of my work and interest, but I would be happy to share more with those who are curious.
I will happily divulge as many details of my research or myself as I can and would love to talk to any of you who are willing and in the Jerusalem area this summer. I am in and around Jerusalem for the entire month of August -- if you or anyone you know would like to share your stories of home and belonging, of your political, national and personal journeys with regard to Israel, Diaspora and Judaism/Jewishness, please write to me! I would love to meet you and chat.

Feel free to email me with questions or interest.

Warmly,
Marni

I received numerous replies, including Ella’s the following day, July 25:

Hi Marni,

I’ve been living in Israel and active for the last 12 years. Originally American. I am extremely interested in reflecting on this and having this conversation, as it is something that I have thought about and then has changed for me throughout the years. The only problem is I have a small child, intense work hours, and a new intern starting to work for me next week, and I leave for three weeks on the 11th. In other words, virtually no time.

I live in Jaffa so the one option is to meet me there one evening.

Let me know. Best to WhatsApp me.

Hope we can work something out!
Ella

“As of right now I feel – if I’m honest – it almost feels like a little secret that I keep is that I secretly love it here, and that I secretly have never felt more at home. But that wasn’t always the case. So that’s the where I am right now and it’s something that I realized really recently – within the past few weeks. So, when I got your email it was
sitting right on that realization. . . When I was first deciding to move back here right after law school [around 2006] I was taking an advanced Hebrew class.”

Ella and her Hebrew teacher were having a conversation one day about Israel. Ella admitted she did not feel at home there and her teacher inquired:

“What is it that makes you not feel at home? And I answered: “everything up to the door knobs. At home the door knobs are round, and you turn them and here they’re like these levers and they are, you know, made of Formica or some kind of plastic. That to me is symbolic of the kind of cold feeling that I got even from just basic Israeli architecture, and the tiles. And [at the time] I was like, I want carpets, and wood, and door knobs that I can turn. And in 2012 I started making a plan to leave and go back to the States. And I started sending job applications all over the States. And almost nobody was biting. And very very ironically what made me end up staying was that there was another war in Gaza – Pillar of Defense in November 2012. That was the first time that there were rockets that made it to Tel Aviv and there were sirens and I was freaked out. And I went to hide in Hod Hasharon with that same friend who was living in Jaffa when I first moved [back] in 2006 and was one of the two people that started bringing me here more often. And somehow, I decided that I really did belong here and that I wanted to stay. But right before I made that decision, I started writing a letter. . . Ever since 2004, when I had started coming during my summers of law school, I had starting writing these regular, every sort of two weeks, missives to about 300 people, like a mass email that was just reflection. I had started writing “the door
knobs are not home." I was going back to that metaphor. And I started writing this update to everyone about why I was finally leaving. And then I didn’t leave, and I didn’t send it. And I realized a couple of weeks ago that I’m very familiar with that lever, and the concrete, and the tiles, and no building ever looking finished and, you know, ash trays in the hallways. It is at best super charming and gives a lot of character, and at worst is something to laugh about -- and definitely familiar. And there was a time that I would visit the States and then I would come back to Israel and would feel a sinking feeling and I would cry for the next 24 hours and I would always blame it on jetlag. But jetlag gets worse with age and I don’t have that [feeling anymore]. I haven’t had that in years. Now when I get back, I’m like -- HOME. It's been a crazy transition."

As the conversation opens, I can feel why she is so eager to discuss. Her story is rich, and her political journey to her present as human rights lawyer doing Palestinian legal representation work was full of twists and turns. We hadn’t even begun discussing politics explicitly, or more so, her political engagements and dispositions. Her activity in the far-left, human rights sector of Israeli civil society appears an organic extension of her journey to Israel/Palestine. When she arrived for the second time as a college student, to spend a year at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, it was clear that her social being in Israel would be informed by her already obvious leftist politics. Her internal negotiations of identity and search were more related to personal questions of belonging.
Within minutes of sitting down, we found ourselves deep in conversation about home, longing, and her relationship to where we are. The “where I am right now” moment that Ella described as she reflected on her present was worlds away from the alienation and sadness, she felt following her three weeks stay and return to the States in 2000 when the Intifada first broke out. As Ella recounted this earlier moment of hope turned sorrow, when her enthusiasm to make a social, political and personal home quickly imploded, crashing in unison with the wave of violence that struck the region, her story breaks the separation barrier between private and public. Through the fissure, her reflection unleashed a tangled web of familial, individual, national, intellectual, political, emotional, historical narrative. Having already mentioned the Second Intifada, as well as the Gaza war, her personal longing for and search for home was never separate from the political and geographical landscapes she traversed. On paper and in books these public political chronologies and events become mere titles with a clear cause and effect in the scope of a linear historical timeline. But for every person involved, these events unfold differently as they impact personal life stories.

If I were to historically describe the Second Intifada, it began in September 2000, when Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ascended to the Temple Mount in Old Jerusalem. The Temple Mount, Har Habayit, or Haram al-Sharif, where Likud party member Sharon, who was at the time running for Prime Minister stepped foot, is not only a sacred place for Muslims and Jews alike. Yes, this platform, surrounded by four crumbling walls of Jerusalem stone hold significant religious meaning for many peoples, most important in my field of study, Muslims and Jews. To name a few,
Haram al-Sharif is home to the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine built in the 7th century surrounding a holy rock, also known as the Foundation Stone. This rock is where Muhammad is believed to have ascended to the heavens. Haram al-Sharif is also home to al-Aqsa mosque, the closest mosque to this incredibly holy Islamic religious site. This same rock holds significance in the Jewish tradition. It is believed to be the same spot as the biblically named Mount Moriah, where the forefather Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac. Additionally, it is believed to be the place where either the holy of holies or the closest altar to it – the outer alter – stood during the time of the Temple as a site of holy Jewish worship in ancient Jerusalem. But broader than just sacred religious meaning which one may think of as relating to spiritual experience alone, the temple mount/Haram al-Sharif holds incredibly powerful geopolitical meaning for Palestinians’ and nationalist Zionists alike. When Ariel Sharon ascended at the time, he was well aware that his feet were not making a spiritual pilgrimage but were marking territory. Palestinian riots protesting this highly politicized and deeply contested act broke out. These riots were met with tear gas and rubber bullets. Thus, began that particular surge of violence, in an already bloody history.

Some say it lasted for five years, others count the casualties up until the year 2008. This moment is said to be the trigger of the second Intifada, which in its shorter life-span was much more fatal than the first. While acts of civil disobedience,

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throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails, and the mass protesting and boycotting of Israeli work and products were Palestinian tactics that characterize the first Intifada, bombings in cars, buses and cafes, in addition to uprising tactics of the first intifada characterize the Second Intifada. The bloody period would change the political and activist playing field in Israel to this day. Between 2000 and 2005, the mix of bombings, stabbings and attacks of what many Palestinians and supporters of their independence call violent resistance, and many Israelis and international Jews call terrorism, killed approximately 1,000 Israelis (some were also killed by Israeli forces). The mix of lethal Israeli military force as well as vigilante settler violence which characterizes this period for Palestinians, which some on the Israeli side characterize as defense and others as institutionalized terrorism and state violence, killed a little more than 3,000 Palestinians.9

What would it mean if I could write on the multidimensional and intricate reality encountered between these public histories and the complex individuals listed in the data above? In Ella’s tale, this historical moment served as the starting point of what Ella imagined would be her final arrival in the state of Israel, though it turned out to be the beginning of a much longer journey. Three weeks after acquiring Israeli citizenship, following the violence precipitating this renewed Palestinian resistance, filled with fear, guilt and a sense of wandering, Ella was on a plane back home. We sat with a bowl of edamame between us and two glasses of beer, and she told me of

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her story for almost three hours, discussing what it means to feel at home and also what it means to be a North American Jew with an incredibly complicated relationship to a place that at once was alien, disturbing and violent and also familiar and warm. It was through those incongruities and dissonances that I heard Ella speak and that I myself live.

Born and raised in Sudbury, Massachusetts, Ella grew up as a Jew in a neighborhood with 10-15% Jewish population. Though there were Jews in her neighborhood, being Jewish always did feel like something special, something different for her and she was proud of those little things that distinguished her. Like for example, her main point of contact with Jewishness was at home through stories and holidays (though her family is pretty secular) and in her Reform Jewish youth group in Sudbury (STFTY). Though Jewishness was a part of her life and she felt proud of that difference, she also grew up in a mixed cultural and religious space. Her parents were divorced and both remarried non-Jews, which meant Christmas and culturally Christian events, ideas and celebrations were central in her younger years. She also attended public school up until college, different from some other international Jewish activists I spoke to who attended Jewish day schools with strong Zionist education that was critical in their formation of a strong care for and relationship to the middle east, particularly Israel/Palestine. All the while, Ella's involvement in Jewish youth group would be critical both to her journey in feeling a sense of belonging and to her future connection to Israel. Her Jewish youth group was where she first felt a deep sense of belonging. The other place that Ella mentioned this feeling of belonging was at her all-girls summer camp. She discovered a different
part of herself in these places. Since Ella’s journey to finding home and belonging had always been a turbulent one, her experience of being seen, heard, important, and able to fully express herself in youth group and summer camp was notable. There she felt like her presence was wanted and purposeful.

This longing to be a part of something, to feel like she actually belonged to something, also pervaded how she felt in her family, as a step sister to four other siblings who she always saw as a foursome to which she was just a plus one. It also pervaded her social worlds at home and at school, where it seemed everyone had a group, or a clique, that they were a part of whole she remained a floater. Additionally, there was some larger lingering question of “where am I from?” “Where do I belong to?” on a larger scale cultural, linguistic and national level, which transformed state, legalistic belonging into personal experiences of identification with national narratives of language, culture and history. She reflects:

“I will say that . . . I took the whole ‘my family is from somewhere else’ more seriously than others who were second or third gen Americans. I was super proud that I was half French, quarter Austrian, I used to say quarter Russian --I didn't know it was Soviet Union at the time and then eventually I figured out that it was Ukraine.”

Both of Ella’s grandfathers immigrated to the US, from Austria and Ukraine, and, as it turns out, both of her grandmothers were French, separately. From a young age, the French language was a huge part of Ella’s life. Speaking and learning it was part of a special connection she had with her mother’s mother. And because of the
language and the strong sense of French cultural heritage, before Israel was even on Ella’s radar at all, France was everything to her. She grew up traveling there frequently, and even had planned on living there for a summer with the help of her French family. But the plan didn’t pan out, and it was during that summer that Israel became significant in Ella’s life. In describing her experience, Israel was originally a place with which Ella had no connection. Though she was a part of Jewish communities that had a latent pro-Israel disposition, or an implicit bias that Jewishness relates to some sort of connection with Israel, growing up being Jewish still was never about Israel for Ella. Feeling a sense of international elsewhere-ness was. Feeling like she didn’t quite know where she belonged was. Even a dominant valuing of progressive values was significantly present for Ella, as she described her own parents’ activism in college. So when she finally arrived in Israel one summer after sophomore year of high school, with NFTY, an international reform Jewish youth movement, through her local chapter STFTY, she arrived there with this sense of longing to belong and a feeling of being from somewhere else, but not necessarily with any concept that because Israel was her homeland and that she should support it and its efforts.

“The summer between my sophomore and junior years of high school I decided to go to France, and we were gonna have our French cousins help me set up an au pair situation. So, I was gonna go and be a nanny for the summer and just take my French to the next level and just be in France. Because I always felt like the US was too small for me and I was an international citizen. I felt that from a really young
age, and I was 14, 15 when I was planning decided to go to France. And then the au pair thing just wasn’t working out. We couldn’t really find anything. And all of my friends from Youth Group, from STFTY, from NFTY were going to Israel that summer. That was the NFTY summer in Israel. Everyone was like, ‘come on. It’s gonna be the most amazing summer. And we’re all gonna be together. You have to come.’ And that was my gang, that was my place of belonging. I convince her [Ella’s mom] over a series of conversations of which I remember only one line -- ‘I feel like Israel is pulling me like a magnet towards it.’ And I don't know if I just made that up because I felt like my friends were the magnet or if they somehow convinced me like ‘oh my god’ if I feel this close to Judaism than I have to go to this place. I cried when I got to the wall. All of these things. And, that ends up happening. I come. The program works. Fall head over heels in love with this place. Have the best summer of my entire life, drink beer, meet boys, have a spiritual connection. Asked more questions than anyone else of the tour guide because I’m just like desperate to learn, so curious, eyes wide open. I learn Arabic words too. People make fun of me, ‘cause I don’t have any bias, because I either ignored that or didn’t pick up on that. But like I want to meet everyone here.

On that first visit, Ella began to feel this connection. In line with the agendas that Israel summer programs for North American teens have to connect young Jews to Israel, the program was successful in some ways. Suddenly a young Jews with no notion of Israel as desirable was thinking of Israel as a possible home at best, or at least a wonderful place. Jewish summer programs that bring teens on pilgrimages to
Israel imply in their existence the imagined bond between non-Israeli Jews and Israel. One of the reasons these programs are so effective is because the larger political agendas of building positive relationships between diaspora Jews and Israel (especially North Americans whose money has historically supported Israel social and military programs and equipment), rooting them in personal stories and experiences that form a significant part of their young adult identity formation. A pathway to connection and love began to form on a personal level. This is what happens to Ella.

Some of the moments she described here are characteristic markers of diaspora Jewish accounts of imagined religious, national and cultural pilgrimage to the modern Israeli nation state. Images of young teens arriving and crying at the Western wall is idiosyncratic of these trips. Drawing on the famous picture of three IDF soldiers at the Western Wall following the Israeli conquest of Jerusalem following the Six Day War,¹⁰ this nationally charged site transforms personal stories of home, history and belonging. The wall becomes a site of one’s own sense of who they are and where they are from. Personal stories of growth and self-discovery become entwined with geographically-situated narratives that serve national interests.

Ella’s interest in learning Arabic and later on her entrance into the Israeli radical left, for which she found herself often feeling a bit too radical, was less

aligned with these classical imaginaries, or well-told narratives of the “diaspora”
connecting with the Jewish homeland. Her version of Jewish diaspora route of
belonging in the Israeli state expands upon them. With Israel now on her radar, Ella
continued on her path through college with the hope and determination to wind up in
that special country again. She eventually spent her junior year as a political science
major at Goucher University in year-long abroad program at Hebrew University in
Jerusalem. During this time, her embodied experience of “home” in this place came
into full force. She described the experience in her own words:

I came to Israel to Hebrew university my Junior year for a whole year. And that was
the year that made me feel really really at home here. . . Learned Hebrew. Oh, this
was before the 2nd intifada. Went to the West Bank, learned what settlements were,
what checkpoints were, became active, felt like I had a purpose, all this activism
legacy -- there was like a thing I could do here. At that point [my activism] was
mostly political, in the true sense of political -- actively campaigning for Barak, Ehud
fucking Barak to be the next prime minister. I was Meretz and he was labor, but I was
doing students for Meretz stuff on campus. I went to several demonstrations. We
actually protested when Clinton came to demand the implementation of Oslo. Like I
held Palestinian state flags. So, it got to the point where that was offensive to my
roommate, an American roommate from California. So, I just came alive. Every
single facet of life that I needed to feel alive -- I had purpose, I had direction, I had
friends, activities, my life was full, really really full.
During her year abroad at Hebrew University, as a young progressive university student, her engagement in Israeli public life began to shift more distinctly from the familiar articulation of diaspora Jewish connection with and belonging in Israel. Likely because she didn’t have a strong Zionist upbringing ideologically, Israel for her was never the Jewish utopian fantasy. Rather Israel was to her, as a young progressive humanist activist college student, a politically complex country. And she was certainly going to engage in social and political issues in the ranks of her progressive civil rights peers. Later in our conversation, she recounted her journey back and forth between Israel and the US. In her final excitement to move here, things turned in an unexpected direction.

*And then I came back, made Aliyah on September 19th, 2000, so if you do history, September 29th, 2000 was the day that the second intifada started, 10 days after I have come on a one-way ticket, have said goodbye to all of my friends. Left my mom balling at JFK. I was also balling. Came here and was all of a sudden like, what the fuck did I do. And also, I was like, I just displaced a Palestinian and who am I to take two citizenships and had a whole crisis around that. And then the second intifada started, and it was scary, and I wasn’t finding, I suddenly didn’t have a community. All the people who I thought were left wing were not the second the intifada broke out. And long story short, three weeks after I got on that plane, I went back. [45:58] not knowing where the hell I belonged. I wrote in my journal on the -- my flight got all complicated on the way back and I ended up having to stop in, I took four legs of flights and had to stop in three different airports, and was almost glad because as*
long as I was in transit that was the only place that felt like home. I have a journal
entry where I say, “the only place that feels right to me right now is in these clouds --
nowhere.”

After Ella’s abrupt shift in life plans occurred, her dream to move to the
middle east ruined, she found herself back in the United States, living at home for a
while working at a record store and then finally making her way to New York, where
she would re-envision her life doing the human rights work she always wanted to be
doing. She worked at a reproductive rights organization in the city and found a
community that she loved. At no point did Ella think to move back to Israel. She had
pushed this dream out of her mind and was cultivating a relationship to her work and
community in the US. Though her sense of lostness pervaded, she slowly found a way
to re-establish a professional and social flow in the states. Moving to New York with
a close college friend who had shared the idea with her back before she went to Israel,
they shared an apartment and began a life in the city. Ella's relationship of belonging
with the Israeli state was not about land, history and religion. It was about people,
culture and politics. Even when describing what drew her to Israel in her college
years and the ways in which she thrived, she felt connected to a cultural and political
milieu. She felt empowered through protests, advocacy and the independence,
freedom and thrill of being abroad. Despite this abrupt shift in plans and a change of
life course, her story continued, Israel/Palestine refusing to leave the frame of her
journey.
“One night, I was sitting at a bar, like the neighborhood bar, in park slope Brooklyn, where I am renting this apartment with my roommate from college. And I start talking with this guy that's in the bar, not in any romantic way, but we just start chatting. And it turns out he is with the New York times, and he has got the middle east beat. And I said, ‘oh that's interesting, I spent some time in Israel.’ And he said, ‘oh really, what do you do.’ And literally, I had just gone up to the bar to get drinks for myself and my roommate. And I start talking to him and it's been like fifteen minutes. And I’m like, oh my god, you have to meet this guy. And some point she’s like. ‘I’m gonna go home’ you could see our apartment from the bar. She left. I ended up staying and talking to this guy, for like, hours. And at some point, he said, you need to meet Marsha Cannery -- she started the Brooklyn dialogue project. She’s you like 20 years older. She left Israel, heartbroken, you need to meet her. And you should meet her next weekend at a screening of a film called promises at the human rights watch festival, that documents Jewish and Palestinian kids’ lives in parallel pre and post second intifada. And she is also going to be meeting with Len and Libby who run the living room dialogue project in san Francisco, and you can just meet them. So, I go. I watch this film. And I run out like three quarters of the way through, start crying outside the theater, cause it’s too much and it's bringing everything back. And I sit and I meet Marsha Cannery, she and I have this instant connection. I join the Brooklyn dialogue project. And eventually join “Jew against the occupation” which is one of the earlier, they don't exist anymore, maybe even IfNotNow type activist circles in New York. And they helped me go through a process. At some point, I’m like women’s reproductive rights by day, Palestinian reproductive rights by night. Planning street theater, wheat
pasting posters around the city, and have this community of people who are Jewish and connected to Israel and oppose Israel’s policies. Who would've thought! Never found a community like that!”

Only six months after she returned, she couldn’t stay away from the region, the occupation and Palestinian human rights issues. Meanwhile, these engagements remained her “night” life, while “by day” she was engaged in reproductive rights work. After beginning a life in New York, finding a rhythm that incorporated her passion for Israel/Palestine politics, yet fed her interests in human rights more generally, she decided to take her fervor to law school to pursue legal work. Again, things took an unexpected turn:

“. . . three years later, am at law school and I'm going to law school to do reproductive rights work, but I decide the first summer at law school is not as critical as the second summer and I just have to close this Israel chapter of my life. Summer of 2004. That’s the summer that I meet the boyfriend I am with for the next four years. I meet him through Ta’ayush, I meet him in South Hebron Hills on a solidarity day in Twane. I go to close that chapter. By day four -- and I remember exactly what that day was because it was Pride and I went by myself and made a lot of friends -- I got tapped in through the activist circles and found out that on any given Friday there was gonna be a bus at 8 am in Gan Hapaamon parking lot -- either on a tour or a demonstration or a solidarity visit. And I was invited [she says with enthusiasm, recalling the feeling of being wanted and welcome somewhere]. And I was just like,
where were you people four years ago. They weren’t! That's the answer! They basically weren't. All of Ta’ayush started because of the Second Intifada. All of these organizations that give us this infrastructure for all the things we are doing now did not exist in 2000. They existed in 2001, 2, 3, 4. So if I had stuck it out, I would have met them, joined them, founded things with them. But they did not exist then. So, all of a sudden, I’m like “oh my god, my people exist.” They were like sleeper cells, activated. And now they exist. And I have this great community. And then through that I meet this wonderful person that we just end up for whatever reason because his friends sucked, it ends up not being the right match, but figured it out in time. And I just end up being like, alright -- now this is what I’m doing. By the end of that summer, I had decided that I was going to become a Palestinian human rights lawyer. I was originally thinking to do policy work as a lawyer and now I was like -- I want to do direct representation. I want to have clients. I went around and interviewed lawyers -- Palestinians and Jews that were working on these issues to ask them what’s a day in the life, to find out if I wanted it. And through that was referred to Michael Sfard. The very next summer, I worked for him. At the end of that summer he said “You have a job whenever you want, with me.” We had such a great rapport. Six months later I called him up and said “So were you serious about that because I’d like to come back. I’m graduating law school. I’d like to come back in September.” He said, “come on over.” So, I finished law school, took the BAR exam, went to Burning Man, flew here -- and have been here ever since.
As she recounted her story from the moment she realized she would be returning to
the US to the moment she rediscovered her connection with Israel through social
communities of protest and resistance that were new when she arrived in law school,
her story of rediscovery resembled an unsuccessful break up. Though she attempted
to recreate her life elsewhere, to embed her energies in different causes, communities
and places, the effort was to no avail. The renewed encounter years later, introduced
Ella to a world she hadn’t known could exist following the disruptive violence that
erupted when she touched down after college. The Ta’ayush and Anarchists Against
the Wall affiliated communities she encountered that summer are the main focus of
Wright’s (2018) ethnography of the Israeli radical left -- a Hebrew speaking, Tel-
Aviv Jaffa centered, secular, leftist, human rights-oriented community working to
support Palestinian human rights efforts. Ella established a life in this sector of the
Israeli radical left, which predates the diaspora activist scene that would eventually
form ATL in 2012. Ella’s would-be husband Mendel, on the other hand, was heavily
involved in a diaspora activist community that Ella intentionally didn’t involve
herself in. It felt less local, extraneous. Slowly and with significant reflection and
hesitance, Ella found her way to that world, and. She describes her entry:

The community that I met Mendel in was one that I stayed clear of for the first
probably six years that I was here. Because I was always essentially uninterested in
the diaspora community. I was uninterested in maintaining a foreigner status.
Because I was, am, Israeli. That was more important to me at the time. I didn’t want
to speak English. I didn’t want to. It’s not like I had a rule against it. Of course, I had
friends that spoke English and I spoke with them, I love my language. But I was here, and in the society, and all my friends were Hebrew speakers. That was a part of the belonging and being part of the society. And I prided myself on mostly being taken as a local. And I only gave in at a certain point. There was a tipping point where I just allowed myself to admit that I had fun in these circles and that all of my stereotypes that they don’t speak Hebrew and that they don’t integrate into society here, and they stay in a little American bubble, it’s probably true of a lot of Americans and brits who are here, but it’s not necessarily true -- and it especially wasn’t true -- of those who were here involved in activism and human rights work. And the way that I was able to transition into hanging out in those circles was discovering how many of those people were actually bilingual or had an Israeli parent or the opposite -- had an American parent. And how my impression were often times really wrong about the kind of lives that they live or the politics that they had. Because that was also my assumption -- that most of the diaspora here was right wing. Or at the very least center apathetic. And so, I suddenly allowed myself to actually admit that I enjoyed spending time, at least part of my time, in these circles. So when I got a phone call from Morty one day saying, hey, em, there is a group of us that want to start an activist group of diaspora folks who are here and want to use the fact that we are here and on the ground, and we understand what’s going on here, to speak to our communities back home. Do you want to join? We are gonna have a first meeting next week. And I said “I don’t really need an American, or an English speaking, or a diaspora activist circle. I’ve got anarchists against the wall, I’ve got Ta’ayush, I work in Michael Sfard’s law office, I’ve got Yesh Din, I’ve got all these other organizations that I work with. I’m involved
in the queer community, and especially in the queer anti-occupation community, like
the pink and black block at all the pride parades that’s like, no pride in the
occupation . . . all these things. And I don’t need another activist circle and I
especially don’t need one of all these people who can’t speak Hebrew, so they can’t
hang out with the other Israelis. I was almost snobby about it. Like, Hey! I don’t need
you guys! I integrated! But, love Morty, to this day we are really good friends, and I
knew that, to this day he wasn’t in that category and so I was like -- I’ll come and I’ll
check it out. I . . . remember that within that first meeting people were asking “What
do we want this space to be?” A lot of people were like “we want it to be a place for
people to tap into all the activism that going on and have a community of people that
speak their language not just in the literal sense but in the cultural sense. And I
actually said “I don’t need a support group.” But I started listening to the way that
people were talking. The words they were using, the way people were relating to each
other, responding to each other. The way they were talking about organizing. The
welcoming vibe is something that . . actually, I worked really really hard to break
into those other groups [those Israeli groups] because they don’t have any of that.
That’s actually a criticism I have of them to this day of a lot of the Israeli groups.
They are not doing outreach or movement growth or things like that very well. Cause
they’re just being Israeli and are like “oh come if you need to come.” And so, all of a
sudden, I realized “oh, you are speaking a language that I want to be speaking” And
I got sucked in really quickly. And felt like, oh, this is actually a really important
angle that isn’t being developed. And there are others in this group that have one foot
in both communities. And there is something we can do with this. So, then ATL
became another piece of the puzzle of not only expanding community, but for me community and home are very tied together. I feel like if I have a community of people... I isn’t just about being seen and feeling like myself, it's also of like-minded...

Marni: Sharing a language

Ella: And on other levels -- the sensitivity, the process that I hadn’t had in any of those other places felt really really good. And so that was added to my life and I have been really really committed to All That’s Left ever since. It has basically replaced my anarchist and Ta’ayush involvement -- ATL was my activism home.

After a long journey of working to be Israeli enough while engaged in human rights activism, Ella was drawn into a diaspora or international activist space almost on accident. Upon this arrival, she noticed that there were many aspects of trying to be in Israeli activist contexts that were more challenging than she gave acknowledged. Ella may have at first regarded one who achieves insider status within Israeli spaces as a more viable politically active subject, as a more authentically local citizen. Once she discovered both the meaning, sense of belonging and political advantages of being in a diaspora activist community, she suddenly understood that there was a plethora of ways to feel like an insider, and multiple different communities in which different familiar and desirable parts of herself were expressed and repressed. Ella’s story of arrival begins negotiating these tensions.
Shades of brown and orange sand rush past the car window as it descends into the Jordan River valley. I am in a 5-seater, squished between George, who brought me on this trip, and an Israeli activist named Yaviv, who is a Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I later learn that Yaviv and his partner travel to the West Bank often to do accompaniment, or in Hebrew liv’i. Liv’i, the literal act of accompanying Palestinian, was founded and is spearheaded by an Israeli activist initiative called Ta’ayush during the Second Intifada. This work began with Israeli activists in the South Hebron Hills and now has expanded in geographical range with a new subset of activists traveling to the Jordan River Valley. Accompaniment in the social, political and geographic context of the West Bank is the practice of activists accompanying Palestinian shepherds, olive farmers and general residents in daily tasks ranging from work to court hearings. Activists head out in response to Palestinians call for human shielding and solidarity in confronting settler and military violence.

Liv’i occurs in the bounds of a specific region in the West Bank. Palestinian land in the West Bank is divided into three different designations. Israeli human rights watch organization reports in their documentation of the occupation on the history and meaning of these three designations which date back to the Oslo accords of the 90’s:

“The 1995 Oslo II Accord divided the West Bank into three types of areas. Concentrations of Palestinian population in built-up areas, which were – and still are – home to most of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, were designated Areas A and B and officially handed over to Palestinian Authority control. They are dotted throughout the West Bank in 165 disconnected ‘islands’. The remaining 61% of the West Bank were designated Area C – the land mass surrounding Areas A and
B, where Israel retains full control over security and civil affairs, including planning, building, laying infrastructure and development.”

Though all Palestinians in the West Bank, regardless of area, are under complete Israeli military rule and are not recognized as legal subjects with basic rights within the Israeli state, there are varying degrees of Palestinian national autonomy under the military occupation. Livu’i groups specifically travel to Area C of the West Bank where there is no Palestinian autonomy. Area C is also home to all of the West Bank Israeli settlements, which is on a steady increase in population, land development and building. Palestinian subjects in Area’s A and B are still subject to the whims of the Israeli military, martial law and the lack of visibility within an Israeli legal frame. But in Area C, the ability of settlers and military personal which abound go unchecked in harassment, home demolition, house mapping, explicit violence, unwarranted arrest and detainment, etc. Following the second Intifada, when the Israeli state narrative about Palestinians as a partner for peace changed from hopeful, under the labor center left leadership of Rabin, to harshly unwilling to engage, under right-wing leadership of the Likud party, violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, especially Area C, intensified (Wright 2018, 15-16). The radically dissenting Israeli activist left, which deviated from the mainstream peace camp at this time, began to focus on how they could support Palestinian human rights given this situation. Livu’i became a valued way to act in solidarity and support Palestinian human rights especially in areas with no Palestinian autonomy.

11 “Planning Policy in the West Bank, 2018 (updated 2019)
https://www.btselem.org/planning_and_building
My heart was racing as we drove, but not because we were going out into the West Bank to accompany a Palestinian Shepherd in al-Ouja, where martial law and settler violence menace Palestinian life and those who join their ranks. Rather I was terrified of how fast the car was driving. We were speeding down possibly the narrowest, most precarious looking mountainside road I had ever been on. To my right, I saw a vast stretch of hilly land, that looked a long way down below where the car was driving. Our driver was American born, now Israeli Rabbi. Trained in the reform movement and spending several years leading the Israeli branch of Rabbis for Human Rights, Rabbi moved to Israel in the 90’s to participate in Israeli human rights work. His engagements ranged from addressing intra-Israeli racial and economic injustice, to the issue of the occupation and the violence against Palestinian oppression that precipitates from it. He was one of the many activists I encountered that day who made this trip regularly, assisting Palestinians who request their accompaniment, translation, assistance and mediation. Rabbi often switched between English, Hebrew and Arabic depending with whom he speaks.

When we were finally with Muhammed, the Palestinian shepherd we accompanied that Tuesday, walking over small hills and across sandy stretches, Rabbi was the only one of the five of us who could and did speak Arabic with Muhammed. The rest of us chattered in Israeli-Hebrew about our lives and work, as we strolled alongside Muhammed and his flock. Muhammad rode a small donkey and carried a stick he used to guide the sheep. He spoke to them in a different language altogether - - neither Arabic, English or Hebrew. His calls sounded not words but fluctuations in
volume and intonation. These sounds contained the power to bring the entire flock to a standstill, the power to invite the flock to bend their heads and graze amidst the dry beige vegetation, and to mobilize the flock yet again to stop their eating and continue to walk. The range of sound, from siren-like to grunting, high to low, exposed the shared fluency between Muhammed and his flock none of us foreigners were privy to, and that is of no interest to peace institutes and activist organizations whose language focuses were directly entrenched in the nationalist politics of language.

Questions concerning language arose. What is the purpose and meaning of learning and speaking a language? Is it an instrument to be more deeply involved politically? Is it a tool to expand one’s knowledge of places and people that without it, one would not be able to access? Or is it a means to control which identity one is able to present or project -- a possible way to hide one’s origins in a place where accent and language are entangled with hyper-nationalized and opposing identity groups? What languages are and aren’t cared about here? The implication of language in a region where language spoken and accent determine one’s movement and access to places, people and legal rights encourages the learning of language as a strategic approach to political alignment and socio-political mobility.

For an Israeli or diaspora Jewish activist who wanted to engage in Anti-Occupation work, Arabic became a necessary tool for political engagement. Rather than an immediate social necessity to communicate with personal relationships, learning a language was a choice to engage in certain political issues. As my interlocutors forged permanent or temporary lives in this new region with a central
focus on political engagement, language was not just a practical tool for, but a symbolic marker of political allegiances and interest.

Though the Zionist movement bickered over whether Hebrew or Yiddish would be the official language of the Jewish state wherever it may be, Hebrew is sufficiently construed, in a contemporary Zionist framework, as the Jewish language. Needless to say, just because earlier religious and legal Jewish texts existed in Hebrew, does not make Hebrew the authentic Jewish language. Jewish texts can be any text made by and for Jews, infusing a dynamic history of Jewish homes, languages and styles into their writing. But for the purpose of diaspora relations with Israel, and the Jewish relationship with language as influenced by a Zionist rhetoric of origins and authentic Jewish identity, Hebrew monopolizes Jewish diaspora efforts in language education. Whether one’s grandparents spoke Yiddish, Arabic, Spanish, French, English, Hebrew is now considered the lost language of our history -- taking us from the ancient to the present and skipping over everything in between. Learning this language becomes a critical way of feeling close to or belonging in Israeli public life.

Several international Jewish activists who I spoke with placed a strong discursive emphasis on Arabic and Hebrew language learning and knowledge. “One of the things I think is unique about our diaspora resistance movement is that many of us speak Hebrew and can actually understand what is going on in Israeli society. We have the skills to switch between worlds in a way that is rare for anti-occupation activism,” remarked Miranda, an ATL activist from Pittsburgh who I speak with weeks later in Cafe Yehoshua. Many of the activists that I spoke with have studied
Hebrew. Some, like Ella, George and Baruch are fluent. Whether like Baruch, they were raised for a large part of their life in Israel, speaking Hebrew, or like Ella and George learned either in intensive Hebrew learning programs or at summer camp, working hard to perfect accents and fluency, Hebrew is an assumed priority given the context of their Jewishness. In the diaspora, the relationship between Jewish identity and Hebrew is clear. If one grows up in any youth movement, Jewish day school or Hebrew school, the hundreds and thousands of years old texts of Jewish heritage and familiar heritage are all in Hebrew and have always been.

George also spent a semester in a community called Givaat Chaviva, an Israeli national education center for the Kibbutz movement that was found in 1949. According to their mission, the self-declared “Center for a Shared Society aims to build an inclusive, socially cohesive society in Israel by engaging divided communities in collective action towards the advancement of a sustainable, thriving Israeli democracy based on mutual responsibility, civic equality and a shared vision of the future.” One of their numerous education projects is their “Living Arabic” program. George took a course with the program to engage his passion for anti-occupation activism on a linguistic level. The program itself is geared solely towards “foreigners,” as the website notes, who seek to enrich their cultural education in the region.

David, for example, spoke to me about this, when recounting his deep desire to and struggle to learn Hebrew. In response to a history of nation building

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13 http://www.intensivearabicsemester.org/
Hebrew education, social activists such as David heed to the desire for language acquisition as a way to connect with places and politics, by creating a critical language learning pedagogy that is self-aware of its politicized reality. On the listserv, ATL members are constant publicizing this initiative -- which numerous were involved in founding and maintaining -- called This Is Not An Ulpan or TINAU for short, which uses a critical learning pedagogy to teach Hebrew and Arabic in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv Jaffa. One of the main goals of the organization is to challenge traditional modes of language learning steeped in nationalist, uncritical histories by “creat[ing] a community of language learners that critically engage with society.”\footnote{https://www.thisisnotanulpan.com/our-story}

When Ella was confronted by her Palestinian friends and colleagues in Bil’in, or and George and or when George and I walked through the streets of East Jerusalem, the question of language looms is also tied visibility. For example, who is Rabbi to me, to different Palestinians and different Israelis? Is he an international or an Israeli? A local or a foreigner? To the Palestinians he organizes with, he is an Israeli. Sure, an Israeli in solidarity. A dissenting, radical left Israeli. But to Israelis, to a public of national insiders who lean conservative, who view the anti-occupation movement as directly threatening Israel’s self-defense and more largely Jewish preservation, this marginal movement of activists is seen as a part of a larger anti-occupation movement that opposes Israel and thus Israelis.

After a day in the valley, Yaviv and I are dropped off on Agron St. in front of the Waldorf Astoria. Back in this Israeli Jewish social sector of the city, passersby
went about their daily business of shopping, talking aggressively into their Bluetooth earpieces, rushing to and from lunch break and shopping outings. Everyone spoke Hebrew shamelessly, and there is an assumption that everyone would understand.

Yaviv and I stood outside of the gigantic, grandiose stone building and in my excitement about the day and desire to learn more about the movement, we got to chatting comfortably and quickly in Hebrew. “The expansion of Ta’ayush work to the Jordan River Valley is essential for a number of reasons,” Yaviv asserted. “Many people don’t think of the occupation as alive and strong in the River Valley, the same way they think it is in and around Hebron and the more Western parts of Area C. In fact, despite the large amount of Jewish settlements in the River Valley, it is non-Israeli land under extremely harsh military occupation. The brunt of the occupation directly impacts the daily lives and livelihoods of Palestinians living there, through the constant barrage of military orders pushing Palestinians off of land, patrolling their movement and daily activities, as well as frequent settler activity.” As a result, Yaviv believed his work there was incredibly important. “Raising awareness about the reality of occupation in the River Valley, showing the illegal settler activity, finding ways to boycott illegal settler products, and exhausting the military patrols which unnecessarily restrict the movement of herders” -- these were three explicit tactics he shared with me that he believed need more attention.

Walking in the dusk of West Jerusalem earlier that morning, the calm in the air promoted a confidence in movement, that having arrived back at the days end, was washed clean of the reality of conflict and violence we had encountered out with Muhammad. A palpable air of safety was omnipresent in the city streets. In the
distance, dogs barked and ran along the grass at the park entrance to the neighborhood of Mishkenot Sha'ananim. As I walked down the slanted sidewalk of Keren Hayesod, a medium sized French Citroen van pulled up a bit behind me. The door flung open and a small stream of middle-aged Arab-Palestinian workers hopped out holding small plastic bags of lunch. They were on their way to work inside Israel’s political borders as I was on my way out. They woke up early just like me, but I assume their journey was less enjoyable than mine, having to rise before dawn in the case that they might be held up or harassed at the checkpoints on their way in. During our car ride to do livu'i in the West Bank in the morning, we encountered no such movement control. The patrolling of movement came only once the group of activists walked alongside Muhammed and his flock grazing peacefully in the valley. As we walked with him, the loud noise of a military jeep began to grow louder as its army-green metal frame approached.

Three, armed Israeli military persons exited the van and approached our group. “Take out your phones. Record, record,” Rabbi instructed us all. We all took out our phones and recorded the two male soldiers and a female soldier approaching us. Rabbi went out in front to approach them before they came closer to Muhammed. Some activists followed. Muhammed stood alone with the flock. The soldiers told the group we must “make him go to the other side of the street back to land he is allowed on.” Rabbi demanded proof and they pulled out a piece of paper. The exchange happened entirely in Hebrew. Aggression rose and they said they would take further action if we didn’t move and that we didn’t have permission to be on that side of the road. The three soldiers began escorting us back across. It turned out that the side of
the street Muhammed wasn’t allowed on was also the side of the street with grazing food for Muhammad's flock. But that was of no matter to the soldiers.

Language, accent, land and national affiliation determined how different actors in this field will be treated. I walked safely in the morning, protected by forces invisible to me. Walking out in the valley, my position and the position of activists changed. There was an identity switch accessible through language and provable Jewishness, which allowed international Jewish activists to safely traverse the streets of Israel as Jewish subjects in a Jewish state, through employing the use of Hebrew and Jewish background, heritage, practice and shared references. On the other hand, the employment of Arabic and presence in the West Bank outside of Jewish Israeli settlement or military contexts suggested a different alignment and performed an international activist, human rights, or state dissenting identity.

After the soldiers finally left, Rabbi reminded us that we must stay for a few more hours. “They will be back,” he exclaimed. And he was right. Only a half an hour later, the car whizzed towards us again, slowing down as it approached, and then continued on. A third time in the next hour, the jeep returned, the soldiers got out to “check on us to offer some water,” as they explained. In the River Valley, activists pointed out to us numerous times that we could not be too aggressive with the patrols and that we should be mindful of our actions. “We get to go home after this,” Yaviv shared with me, “but the Shepherd will take the hit, will be punished later for our actions if we aren’t careful for pushiness or desire to dissent.” An activist in the field might get pressed with minimal charges, but the Palestinian farmer could be arrested and detained indeterminately at will with no legal voice. “We have to actually listen
to what Muhammed wants and understand what will benefit him, not just be pushy,” Yaviv noted. This is one of the aspects of embodying a spatially, communally, linguistically and politically flexible identity.

The Israeli activists I encountered spoke Hebrew regularly with no thought that maybe they should or could switch to another language. They communicated their alliances not through language choice but through discursive nuance – in the ways they spoke about human rights, their discursive rejection of the state and its policies of censorship and surveillance, militarization and warfare; declaring solidarity with Palestinians, or listing human rights organizations they support, holding protest signs with subversive messaging are all examples. International Jewish activists in the Israeli national and geographic landscape don’t necessarily carry the same linguistic markers of Israeli-ness. Since they do not live within these linguistic boundaries which often define friend and enemy in this conflict zone, they can leverage language as a tool of political alignment. Using Hebrew, my interlocutors become Jewish at borders, checkpoint and standing in front of soldiers. Using English, they become internationals in Palestinian cities, universities, and in activist and social circles. Hebrew with the cops. English in East Jerusalem. Arabic in Beit Jalah and on the Palestinian Bus Line.

It is unclear what side these activists belonged to and just quite where they fit in to the political and socio-linguistic landscape. The unique situation of North American Jewish human rights activists allowed for a certain amount of control in being welcome in a wide range of communities, as well as social and political contexts in the Palestinian Israeli landscape. Though in some ways the capacity to
leverage different parts of one’s identity, whether in self-declaration, language usage, dress, or in social/religious/political references, afforded them a social, political and geographic mobility that Palestinians and Israelis do not possess, these activists cannot avoid being read as and behaving like visitors. Leaving the unique positioning of international Jewish activists witnessed as they move between differently occupied territories and varying political spheres, how is this community also navigating the frustration of teetering on the fine line of foreignness?
“Home is Where You Don't Need a Map”15

TOURISTS

Visits of condolence is all we get from them.
They squat at the Holocaust Memorial,
They put on grave faces at the Wailing Wall
And they laugh behind heavy curtains
In their hotels.
They have their pictures taken
Together with our famous dead
At Rachel’s Tomb and Herzl’s Tomb
And on the top of Ammunition Hill.
They weep over our sweet boys
And lust over our tough girls
And hang up their underwear
To dry quickly
In cool, blue bathrooms.

Once I sat on the steps by a gate at David’s Tower, I placed my two heavy baskets at my side. A group of tourists was standing around their guide and I became their target marker. “You see that man with the baskets? Just right of his head there’s an arch from the Roman period. Just right of his head.” “But he’s moving, he’s moving!” I said to myself: redemption will come only if their guide tells them, “You see that arch from the Roman period? It’s not important: but next to it, left and down a bit, there sits a man who’s bought fruit and vegetables for his family.”

—Yehuda Amichai

Yehuda Amichai, one of Israel’s acclaimed national poets wrote his poem Tourists in 1980 (Alter 2015). When I read it, I hear his tone seeping with cynicism. Irony. Maybe even resentment. I hear Amichai whispering in my ear critically, maybe even a little sad – What do these tourists even notice?!? Look! Observe their shallow, prescribed interaction with my home. They know nothing of the life here. Their points of interest are ancient stones, mine are the people that make up the everyday.

15 This quotation is taken from a part of George’s answer to my question, “What is home to you?”
Amichai’s poem is a powerful piece of literature through which to explore a theory of tourism. What constitutes the sight of outsiders visiting a new place with which they have no prior connection? In comparison, how are locals differently seeing and experience connection to the places they dwell in, and the routes through which visitors engage with places of visit. This poem is also particularly relevant to my field because it captures the image of tourism in Israel-Palestine, specifically Jerusalem, the urban hub for many of the international Jewish activists I met in the field. Poetry is not only helpful in engaging ideas but a cogent artistic form for evoking emotions using sensations and images of daily encounters and human experiences. To ignore the compelling and familiar imagery that Amichai captures, would be to exclude one of the most recognizable Israel literary images of the visiting Jewish tourist.

In the first stanza, Amichai begins to lay out places and images we see of the tourist: visiting holy and historical sites, lusting and weeping over local boys and girls, mourning and emotion in public places, and the stark contrast between these interests in local sites and people and what happens behind curtains and in hotel rooms. The first stanza makes it seem that these visits are formulaic, following similar structures no matter the visitor. For them, what they see and feel does not bear the same embodied impact on them as it might for someone who lives the implications of these tense and hyper nationalized contexts on a daily basis. There is a level of shallowness and detachment between the visitor and the site. In the second stanza, this contrast is even more starkly drawn as Amichai describe the tendency of the tourist to pay sharp attention to history, to the past, the inanimate artifact that comprise memorials, archeological sites, and museums).
I read this poem with a North American Jewish fellowship in high school upon first arriving for a five-week trip in Israel. That summer after 11th grade was when I first began to question, in a more destabilizing way, some of the assumed positive associations and uncritical love that I had for Israel as an idea, as a Jewish home, a liberating home for Jews. The trip was my first time back since the 8th grade trip, where my love of the land and the idea of this place as home first took root in a lived way. This literary image, grappling with outsider and insider, past and present, living and ancient, set the stage for my initial experience of critical examination. Was I really returning to a home? In what ways were my behaviors and conceptions distinctively touristic?

In the introduction of her ethnography *Itineraries in Conflict: Israelis, Palestinians and the Political Lives of Tourism*, Rebecca Stein (2008) outlines a brief history of tourism to the Middle East and more largely, the colonial history of travel in the region. The history of tourism in this region is marked by the history of modern nationalist politics of the 19th century and is implicated colonial practices (Stein 2008). “In the first decades of the twentieth century, middle-class Jewish settlers in Palestine enjoyed a set of transregional itineraries (10).” They visited Haifa, Beirut, Tel Aviv, Baghdad and Damascus. These Jewish North Americans embarked on the what was called the *Tiyul* in pre-state Palestine (10). Literally meaning trip or hike, on the *Tiyul* “these Jewish residents of Palestine were avidly touring the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*) in the context of this nationalist pedagogy, a practice imagined as a means of territorial conquest and of nationalizing the Jewish traveler through embodied experience of the land, (10)” Stein notes. Stein summarizes the
continuation of this tourism as Israeli state history unfolds. After the state was founded in 1948, following the Naqba and the ’48 war with the surrounding Arab nations, these regional routes were closed to Israeli tourists. Travel routes changed yet again after 1967, when the Israel occupies the Golan Heights, the West Bank, Sinai Peninsula, and the Gaza Strip. Israeli tourists visited Ramallah and Bethlehem to go shopping, vacation in Sinai, dine in the Old City in East Jerusalem (11). This travel continued until the first Palestinian uprising lasting from 1987-93, when the majority of Israeli tourism in the occupied territories stopped, “Jewish settlers and territorial nationalists” being and exceptional population whose continued travel in these occupied territories served as an important mode of advancing the expansionist Zionist project. After the second intifada broke out in 2000, tourism to these areas almost completely ceases (11).

Though Amichai himself contrasts his sight as a local with the sight of the tourists as foreigners, he too arrived as a foreigner, coming at 12 years old to Mandate Palestine from Germany with his family, at the time foreigner (Scharf Gold 2008). What makes one a local? What determines our routes in a new place? How does one navigate belonging and embedding oneself in a new context upon arrival? Many of my international Jewish interlocutors also arrived at some point as visitors, feeling outsiders in a foreign land -- the irony of course being that the ideological and legislative messaging of Israel suggested that they were actual insiders in their homeland.

Yet for most North American Jews, at first Israel is still foreign. Searching for a route of belonging in a new yet old place leaves one to grapple with a strange mix
of alienness and familiarity: the Hebrew that is the spoken in the streets, familiar
traditional Jewish garb adorned in certain neighborhoods, the cultural references to
shared histories and texts, streets named after famous Jewish characters of every
imaginable type, the city-wide siren rung before the start of the sabbath every week.
On the other hand, the way people interact in the streets, or the general demeanor of
the bus drivers; the climate, from temperature, to vegetation, to the flow of the
seasons; a language that is hard to learn and hard to understand; different social and
political issues, as well as cultural references; different political social and familial
values abound; different lifestyles are assumed. Recall when Ella first encountered
the door knobs, the tile and unfinished buildings. The landscape felt foreign. For the
visitor who carries with them a myth of belonging, the foreignness undermines one’s
understanding of their relationship to place. This confusion between myth and reality
leaves North American Jewish tourist grasping for possible sites and experiences of
the familiar. There exists a desire for tangible expressions of the belonging narrative.
As Stein explains and as Habib explores in her ethnography of diaspora tours and
their itineraries, the relationship between places and stories told about them is
responsible for establishing a stronger feeling of association.

Both Habib and Stein note the significance of tours in Israel-Palestine. Habib
devotes a large section in her ethnography to examining the discursive practices of
Jewish North American tours of Israel. In describing the kinds of tours, she went on
with organizations like the Israel Land Fund, the Israel Civil Society, the Israel
Development Fund, she noted different emphases that they made both in site visits
and narrative focus (Habib 2004, 39). One thing that all of these tours did though, was
highlight the connection between the Jews and the land of Israel. Tours are one way through which, in the diaspora Jewish relationship with Israel, the Israeli nation is “imagined, represented and performed” for its diaspora audience. The explicit purpose of the tours that Habib studies, work to “forge links between diaspora Jews and Israeli Jews, and between diaspora Jews and the state of Israel (37).”

Through her ethnographic work, she observes the type of language used to explain the significances of places, diaspora connection with them as well as the types of places themselves to understand the social practices which constitute a Jewish diaspora national sense of belonging with Israel. Tying current land and practices to ancient Jewish biblical texts -- everything being experienced now is connected to this text we have carried with us for thousands of years. A verse or moment in biblical texts can be pulled and related to every place we go. The national chronologies do not seem to suggest indigenousness, as much as they suggest that the Jews re the oldest surviving collective that can claim historical belonging to the land. This implies that were the Canaanites alive that they would ostensibly have as much claim to the land (44). But the importance of text proof and historical claim is a significant part of the national narrative of home, of who deserves to build and cultivate authority and state infrastructure on the land. In early 2000’s Habib attends a tour with the Israel Land Fund, her guide Laurie emphasizes the importance of agriculture and land. The olive, figs and other forms of harvest, serve as a symbolic and physical manifestation of Jewish ancestry, ownership and traditional practices as a people in the land. Looking at the places visited and the stories told about those places and visitors’ relationships to them, this section of Habib’s ethnography deals with the ways that tour construct
chronological and spatial narratives of Israel, linking history and land to the stories and identities of North American Jews who visit. Tours link visitors to a story about where they are and gives them an epistemological approach to belonging. Knowing something about a place gives one's a means of belonging in that place. Tours ground these stories in physical places and national institutions. How did I as a researcher and young diaspora Jew navigate forming connections to my field?

The ATL listserv was the best sense I had of the movement, before arriving in the city. Their network is centered around an online email base of contacts. The listserv administrators can add anyone interested in connecting, and when newcomers want to find out what's happening in the movement, the latest actions and social gatherings are posted. Following my initial email asking if anyone wants to talk, I was able to line up around seven initial interviews with activists who reached out. More than that, George was an acquaintance on the inside.

Between Here and There

George is a young activist and educator who is living in Jerusalem working in all the right Israeli radical left circles. One of the first people to reach out and enthusiastically offer to talk and spend time, George is one of the more active in a younger generation of ATL, having moved to the city recently. George would continually ask me about my research and was incredibly enthusiastic to spend time and help me navigate the field.
The chilled, air-conditioned coffee shop stood in stark contrast to the scorching, open-aired expanse of the Jordan River Valley. There was no sensorial experience of conflict in the quiet quaint cafe. People sat sipping coffee, reading and writing on their computers, holding books and newspapers, talking about the personal and the political. Between the wooden chairs and tables and the smothering display of New Yorker magazine-covers lining every inch of wall, this cafe seemed to lack place. Walking in, I could imagine myself anywhere in the world. Were it not for the sound of Hebrew reverberating through the room and printed on the menus, I imagined New York or Berlin had their fair share of similar establishments. Of course, every location is unique, but I couldn’t shake the familiar ambiance, characteristic of working cafes in almost any global metropolis. The Coffee Mill is on Emek Refaim Street, which translate to the Valley of Ghosts street, and was in the German Colony of West Jerusalem. In the late 19th century, German Templers moved there. The Arab-Christian landscape, almost entirely erased throughout the past century of displacement, left its mark on the some of the buildings’ architecture, in the shapes of the windows and roofs.

I anticipated this meetup with George would be a short chat -- maybe an hour and a half, two hours of questions and answers, like any other interview I have conducted. With a jovial smile beaming at me from across the table, George fit right into the coffee shop atmosphere. He rocked a Mediterranean hipster look perfectly, with a well-groomed yet well grown orange-blonde beard, sun-kissed (if not burnt)

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cheeks, a faded purple t-shirt, khaki shorts, and a pair of sturdy sandals. He could have easily passed for a student, or at least a local at an establishment like the Coffee Mill. He was traveling light but prepared for the sun, and prepared to walk long distances. I, on the other hand, wore a sleeveless, long, flowy purple tie-dye dress and schlepped with me my extremely heavy purple backpack, stuffed to capacity with snacks, my computer, journals, books and water.

Ordering our coffees, we started to talking. A tour guide, educational programming director and translator for a Jerusalem non-profit called *0202*, George does community outreach and education work. *0202* Point of View from Jerusalem is a non-profit media site, which hires Palestinians, Israelis and internationals to translate news and media sources from different parts of Jerusalem to increase access to insider, autonomous reporting of each community for those who are not from that community, given that the sectors of Jerusalem share residency to the city but share almost no cultural, physical and media spaces. *0202* focus on three main politically, socially, and geographically divided sectors of Jerusalem -- the Haredi, Western and Eastern sectors of the city. The organization translates media sources from these sectors into Arabic, English and Hebrew from their original languages of the same three. This is because segregation in the city is not just physical, geographic and social, it is virtual and it impacts news sites and cultural online spaces as much as it does material ones. With the organization, George’s specific job brings content to schools, communities, visiting programs, by introducing Palestinians, West

17 [https://www.0202updates.org/english/](https://www.0202updates.org/english/)
Jerusalemites Jewish Israelis and Haredi Jews (or internationals) to individuals in sectors of Jerusalem from which they are cultural cut off.

Prior to this position, George worked for Hotline, a refugee crisis center in South Tel Aviv that helps support Eritrean and Sudanese refugees in the city. Coming from a Jewish family in New York, George was raised learning about and visiting Israel frequently. It was a place he felt deeply connected to and with which he had a strong set of lived ties. He could move in and out of Hebrew and English with ease, and admitted that he normally doesn’t feel like a visitor or traveler when in Hebraic-Israeli places under Israeli state rule. Despite this general sense, in all his accounts he rarely described spending time in all Israeli social or political circles, like Ella insisted on. Many of his social spheres were English speaking, if not mixed.

Involvement in diaspora communal engagements on the ground was never a point of hesitation for him. Though I had more questions and I wanted to keep learning about his connection to this place and his activism, he stopped me, saying: “So, what would you like to do today? I have a few ideas but I want to hear what you are hoping for.”

“Honestly, I am open to anything,” I replied. “What are the options?” He seemed antsy to get started. I thought we were just getting started talking but it appeared my friend had other plans. Thankfully, because I like to carry my world on my back, I came prepared enough for a day trip, though I wasn’t expecting one. He enthusiastically described our options. He begins: we could either go to East Jerusalem, near Damascus gate and explore the shops and the old city or we could hop on the Palestinian bus line and head to Beit Jalah, a beautiful Palestinian city right outside Jerusalem where there was a delicious restaurant called Hosh al-
Yasmine. Both ways would allow us to explore a part of Palestine I had never been to before. Plus, we would be supporting Palestinian business owners and we would have the chance to spend the day together as I learn more about George’s work.

And that is how we had arrived on the bustling street of Salah e-Din Street, a main drag of East Jerusalem. The bus slowed as it approached Damascus Gate. The blurred shapes and colors of the moving window turned to golden stones, forming the towering outer wall of the old city in Jerusalem. George and I hopped off and began our walk-through East Jerusalem. In the distance, on the far side of the lite rail tracks, Sultan Suleiman Street, which leads to Salah al-Din Street was humming, packed with at least twice as many people as the quiet, charming main street of Emek Refaim. Arriving in East Jerusalem was like arriving in a different world. The lite rail tracks before us felt like an invisible gate, or like one of those suddenly appearing doors from the novel Exit West (Hamid 2017), which transports anyone who opens it entirely new location. Walking around in my sleeveless dress and sandals, I felt out of place. I was clearly a white, Western, female tourist, prancing around the city, the bare skin on my shoulders and chest disrespectfully exposed. From West Jerusalem to East, suddenly the majority of women had their arms, legs and hair covered, and everything was in Arabic not Hebrew.

George was used to arriving in this part of the city. He came here often, he said, to support Palestinian businesses and more basically, to just hang out, enjoy amazing food and do work at the Educational Bookshop, a destination frequented by leftist diaspora Jewish activists living in Jerusalem. For a while, George and I stopped communicating in Hebrew and switched to English. I was altogether eager to try out
my Arabic in the lively Palestinian city streets. We crossed the light rail and walked along Sultan Suleiman St towards the main drag. The sidewalk was lined with bakeries, juice stands, candy stores and restaurants. “Asir, Asir!,” called one salesman, standing at an outdoor booth of sorts. George turned toward me. “Let’s get some juice,” he said with a questioning and yet encouraging tone. The sun’s heat scorched my sensitive white skin. A noise grumble from my stomach reminded me that I hadn’t eaten all morning. As we approached the stand, the storekeeper asked “Shu bidkoun?” “B’di asir rimoun” I answered. “Shu, shu?!” he asked again. He can’t understand me. “Rimoun,” I replied again, in my confused attempt at an Arabic accent. He made us two hefty capfuls of pomegranate juice, handed them over his stand and we pay our “setaash shakel.” George ushered me along to the next shop. “This way” George indicated, pulling me over to a bakery a few storefronts down. Inside, the walls were covered with shelves of honey glazed pastries, and George, a frequent customer, gravitated knowingly towards his pastries of choice. He was excited to share his favorite sweets with me -- pastries filled with honey and nuts, others covered in sweet sesame grounds, and other doughy, chocolate-stuffed ones. He paid, exchanging some simple Arabic to confirm the purchase and price. “Shukran,” And we were off again.

At the end of the wide set street, after passing by more shopkeepers who called out, beckoning us towards their products, we arrived at a small hummus shop tucked in to the street’s corner. Sitting on a table outside was a family of three accompanied by a journalist. They were loudly discussing Middle East politics in American English. I tried to eavesdrop but failed to discern the exact content. The
waiter came over and invited us to have a seat. When he realized we weren’t speaking Arabic too well, he switched almost immediately to Hebrew, and with a smile asked if we knew what we wanted yet. I felt defeated by the waiters resolve to speak Hebrew and insisted on trying out my Arabic. George, nevertheless, seemed content communicating with the waiter in Hebrew once he realized it was the easiest common language for everyone involved. Like the English speaking “foreigners” Ella avoided for so long when arriving in the Israeli radical left community, I felt initially averse to being the Hebraic touristy outsiders in Palestine. Hebrew rolled off the waiter’s tongue. Was it foreign to this Palestinian landscape? For George and our waiter language is again matter of practicality. For me at first, it viscerally signals something more identarian, more political. All the street signs and shop names are in Arabic, people are speaking Arabic in the streets, and Hebrew of course, is the language of the oppressor. And for some odd and likely colonial rooted reason, lacking strong enough Arabic skills, and fearing Hebrew might be invasive, English had seemed to be the neutral option.

Walking with George in East Jerusalem, he didn’t seem too concerned about how we were perceived or what language we were speaking. Our presence was tourists, not far from our presence in Israeli neighborhoods, had we not spoken Hebrew or lived there before. The only difference: there was no part of George or myself who ever imagined or was taught that Palestine was our home, or that we were supposed to feel at home there. Quite the contrary. The Zionist narratives we both inherited taught us to feel threatened and unsafe with even talk of Palestine and
Palestinians. Traversing the streets of Palestine, George and I were forging relationships with place we were not supposed to ever desire to see.

We sat down and George told me that this hummus place is a personal favorite. It isn’t as oily, he explained, and has just the right amount of lemon juice. There were no menus, so choosing food meant chatting with the waiter, and then deciding together. We ordered two plates of Hummus, one with “fuul” and one with “fitr,” and the waiter brought out various dishes of hors d’oeuvre to eat now or add to our pita and hummus when it arrived-- onion slices, olives, pickles. Soon the waiter brought out a huge tray of warm pita bread.

Finally noting my sad attempt at Arabic, the waiter responded back to me in his first language, “Min wein inti?” Where are you from? He asked with a smile.

“Al-wilayaat al mutahidah,” I answered, worried I would misspeak but innocently eager to practice my two years and five classes worth of Arabic study. We exchanged words for a bit in Arabic, and my tongue grew heavy from the weight of newly introduced phonemes to an untrained mouth. I asked him where he was from in return and where he is in life. More than anything, he continued stressing how much he loves Jerusalem, “Ahsan medina bila’aalam!” The best city in the world. Soon the waiter left us and we gobbled down our delicious hummus plates.

George is a part of a much larger phenomenon of young activists who travel more frequently than most Israeli residents to East Jerusalem or to the beautiful mountainside, organic restaurant Hosh al-Yasmine in Beit Jalah. A week later, George and I would venture there as well. For Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, the streets of East Jerusalem are home. For internationals, whether tourists or activists, and
especially for diaspora Jewish travelers and activists, these places are destinations -- more specifically they are the door to the world of the Other. These destinations, like learning a language, were points of reference for a growing community of young Jewish activists, that prove or indicate their political allegiance. George was not the first activist who went into East Jerusalem to support Palestinian businesses, drink coffee, read and buy Palestinian literature at the educational bookshop, and walk the streets of the all Arabic speaking neighborhoods, whose signs are also all in Arabic. This was an example of an expanding or morphing tourist itinerary. Where once a North American Jew may have gone, to Ben Yehuda street or the shops in the Cardo (heart) of the Jewish quarter in the old city, they now headed down Salah e-Din street to the Educational Book Shop, or to Beit Jalalah to have an organic local meal at a Palestinian mountainside farm on the outskirts of Bethlehem. Where once a diaspora Jew may have taken a trip to the desert to visit Ben Gurion’s grave and hike in Sde Boker, one of these activists may instead have traveled to Ramallah to support Palestinian businesses, meet young people from Birzeit University and practice their Arabic. This isn’t to say that radical Jews visiting Palestine Israel hadn’t done these things before, but rather that a certain sector of diaspora Jews is going through generational changes that separate this burgeoning milieu of North American anti-occupation activists from a more supportive diaspora nationalist past set of generations. George provided deeper insights into who this community is:

“Those Jews who are on the far left doing anti-occupation work are who Jewish education/Israel education was most successful for. If you don’t care about something than you don’t fight to make it better—you just don’t care. So, me, and like
the 25 other people in this world speak fluent Hebrew and are culturally adept here, stuck around because we care about the place and we fight to make this place we think it should be. There is not enough human rights work, or leftist activism here, it is a very small camp. I have particular things that I am good at – I speak Hebrew, I get (understand) Israelis. It is a responsibility I have with my privilege as a Jew to help make this place better. I wrote an article in the Jewish Current about Hebrew being the language of Jewish progressivism. If anyone is serious about taking care of the largest issue that implicates Jews in the world, they have to learn Hebrew. The largest issue in the world that implicates Jews is the Occupation. As a Jew, your name is besmirched by the Occupation. Some people have a real skill set, who need to be here to be doing what they are doing. One of those skills is language, and the other is to have an outside-in look.

His words harkened back to Miranda's “not in my name” sentiment. For George, the capacity to traverse worlds, to move in and out of spaces, was exactly the asset that gave these far-left diaspora activists the motivation to leverage this privilege and do something with it. With so many in the ATL movement having grown up or been exposed to some semblance of a strong Zionist or Hebrew-culture centered Jewish education, they have tools that George sees as almost sinful not to use.

Individuals who associate with the ATL movement traversed these different worlds, through their social and communal practices that expand the geographic destination to East Jerusalem, that incorporated Arabic language learning and that intentionally revived the landscape of Palestinian Jerusalem as a possible Jewish local
destination. George and I had already arrived at the Educational Bookshop where we sat to chat and do work together. This cafe was different from the one we sat in earlier. The walls were not lined with New Yorker magazine covers but rather with shelves upon shelves of books about Palestine, about Israel, about the middle East, about Islam. It was an intellectual hub with book talks, learning and students from the nearby al-Quds University sitting down to do their homework. I no longer felt like I was in Israel, where Palestine and Palestinian identity has been erased virulently from popular culture and the public sphere. The censorship of knowledge suddenly fell away, and books of any author can be spotted on the wall.

“Did you come here knowing you wanted to join an anti-occupation collective, with an ideological vision and purpose? Also is this the first time in your adult life that you are coming live in Israel/Palestine?” I asked. George explained that his relationship with the country and the land was complicated. In one sense, Jerusalem was simply a home away from home. He grew up spending nearly a month every summer here or there. Also, whenever he spoke about coming “here,” he emphasized that it was Jerusalem that he felt most connected to and interested in being in. This was the first time since after high school that he decided to live here indefinitely. As of October, he had been living in Jerusalem. The reason that he moved was not inspired by some great ideological dream or political motivation, though he says he had probably subconsciously wanted an excuse to come here, rather George came back to Jerusalem for love. A budding relationship from Jewish summer camp had brought him halfway across the world again, to be with his former Israeli partner.
“Maybe this is a good place for me to be during some initial years of working and figuring out my life,” he reflected, in the place that was still other but also incredibly familiar. This critical relationship with his partner had him imagining his near future in Jerusalem, and it prompted him to find work at a shelter in the city. Ideology, belief, ideas about our lives are not the only things that bring people places. The choice for George to come to Jerusalem was complicated but also simple -- community, love, partnership. He saw here a partner and also a social, communal life, which spoke to him and his values. Though deeply related to his life here, neither his Jewishness or his political ideology brought him, his social networks did.

A few weeks later a distant cousin of mine and I chatted over dinner about migration and social ties. He is the family genealogy buff. Every time I meet with him, I try to discover something new about my past. In the wake of having lost all of my grandparents, I feel a gaping hole where my rich history lives, and I regret the lost opportunities -- to learn Yiddish from my fluently speaking grandmother or to learn of the immigration stories of any of my grandparents in more depth, for example. At dinner, my cousin and I talked about how the whole Katz family, my maternal grandmother Shirley’s side, all wound up in Pittsburgh, PA. Their family was the vanguard of what would turn into a thriving Jewish community. “Well, a lot of the people in Zbarazh helped each other find work. Like many Eastern European Jewish immigrants, if one knew someone, they went, because it meant they had networks, a community, people to help connect them to work and housing and resources. That’s how they all flocked here,” my cousin, who is a father in his 60’s, explained to me. Though George’s story was not the same (for several reasons including that he isn’t
fleeing anti-Semitism and his home hasn’t become uninhabitable for him and his family) he shared the framework that strong relationships to people and their communities, was a strong pull factor for transnational migration. Even without a connection to language, place, national identity and history, one can come to belong in foreign lands through relationships.

“I wonder,” I pondered with George, “what is the role being Jewish plays in your political dispositions and actions?” Though George didn’t come here for ideological reasons, his movement transitioned him seamlessly into a self-identified “leftist”: anti-occupation “activist” scene. Like many others that I spoke with, Miranda and Ella for example, the transition into this socio-political milieu was obvious considering their politics and communities back home. When it came to Jewishness though, for George (which is not the case for everyone I met,) Jewish identity is not prescriptive of a specific political frame. He was exhausted by the discursive practice which asserts the notion that Jewish values are an essentially align with certain super specific political actions, agendas and beliefs. To try and claim that some set of political dispositions is authentically Jewish, and another is not, misses what he understands as Jewishness. To him, the Jewish tradition is an interpretive one, it informs a tradition, rituals, shared language, cultural practices-- it is a “sociological fact of my existence,” as he calls it. For George there exist countless different ways of living Jewishness. Thus, there are good Jews and bad Jews, just like there are good anything’s and bad anything’s. It is not a unique set of Jewish values that if, were one to adopt them, one would instantly be a good person, on the good side of history. Often, he feels, progressive Jews, with internalized insecurities around
either a lack of Jewish literacy or practice will lay claim to what they call Jewish values, which really is a phrase which masks their western or democratic values.

There is no such thing as a set of Jewish values. Judaism for George is in the people, the community and the rituals and texts they share in conversation and practice. This does not mean that there is one right way to go about rituals and texts. The beauty of the Jewish tradition for George was that there are so many different interpretations. His being Jewish happens through stories, texts, rituals and communal practice. Thus, for George, his Jewishness was inseparable from his personal responsibility to take action regarding the occupation. We continued talking and he reflected on the movement, on ATL and the Jewish diaspora left.

Sometimes Israelis do things that aren’t really effective, and it is a lot of wasted time. Some people are doing development, others translation, others writing. Different organizations have different theories of change. I don’t have hope; I am just trying to ameliorate a terrible situation. No one here thinks of ourselves as changemakers, no one thinks they are near to any final solution. Everyone thinks that the situation is going to get worse before it gets better. We want are just trying to make people’s lives a little better, to take care of those who are vulnerable – we do this by partnering with people who ask for our help, support people on the ground who ask for our help à going out in solidarity to Khan al-Ahmar, honey bees, Hebron – we do what people ask us to do. We aren’t doing sexy work; we are ameliorating people’s lives on the ground. Help build a solar panel. All That’s Left gives a social community for those in the Leftist community. Most of my friends who are in All
That’s Left only hang out with other Leftists in Israel and mostly the diaspora left. Because whenever you have a strong opinion here on the left, in Israel you are in such a minority, you are socially ostracized for the work you do. So, in many ways, these activists are each other’s social group. The All That’s Left party is a huge deal. I would be surprised if people didn’t agree with me. The people who are deep into this stuff as opposed to the people who are not very deep into this stuff.

Are diaspora Jewish activists in Israel Palestine foreigners? What does it mean to be a foreigner? To whom and where are these activists’ identities understood as visitors, foreigners and outsiders and to whom and where are they perceived as insiders? What kind of work are these activists doing? In what ways is it new, innovative, and in what ways is it old?
George offers to pick me up on his way to dinner, but I refuse to let him. For some reason, this Friday night, I have to prove that I can navigate on my own to the obscure location of the apartment where I am headed. Just two days earlier, after our trip to Beit Jalah where we ate a delicious meal at Hosh Al-Yasmine, a Palestinian restaurant oft visited by the small diaspora activist community in Jerusalem, George and I squabbled over the address of the apartment. My stubborn need to have all the information and navigate independently got the best of me, and we bickered fifteen minutes too long. I insisted that there must be some precise way for him to explain to me how to arrive, and George insisted that I would just need to rely on calling someone when I was near or simply letting him pick me up. Wanting to observe Shabbat that week, I had hoped to be able to leave my phone at home.

When Friday finally rolls around, I still consider doing so as I descend the stairs of my apartment building and exit onto a breezy Jerusalem street at dusk. A ghostly echo of the Friday evening siren, which resounds throughout the city weekly to announce the arrival of Shabbat, still hangs in the air. With only a bottle of wine as a gift for the hosts resting in my canvas shoulder bag and nothing else, I wonder if
being phoneless in Jerusalem with no specific address is a smart idea. Still
ambivalent, I run back upstairs, grab my phone and set off towards Nachlaot, a small
neighborhood in West Jerusalem whose residents consist of a funny mix of young
university students and ultra-orthodox Jewish families. When I finally arrive in the
small cobblestone courtyard, which I know to be the general location of the
apartment, I spend ten minutes walking around in circles. It is dark outside. Though
George, as well as Baruch, one of the hosts, had explained that the apartment was in
the back of a specific Ethiopian restaurant, I have already successfully managed to
locate at least four Ethiopian restaurants within a one block radius of where I stand.
After asking a few people sitting around if they know the location of Restaurant
Ethiopian, I defeatedly remove my phone from my bag. The invisible window
separating Shabbat from any other weekday shatters as I press the home button, text
George, and wait for a response. While waiting, I walk around the blocks surrounding
the courtyard for a while longer- some friends sit atop a table, smoking and laughing
together; a family of five argue passionately about when they should head home after
having spent the day in the city, a few of them fidgeting all the while with the big
bags they had brought with them for their day trip. My phone buzzes -- George is
finally calling back. Once we get talking, he quickly explains to me how to arrive at
the apartment from my current location. I had definitely progressed from my original
courtyard confusion, for I am just around the corner from the apartment when he
finally calls.

A big blue metal door guards the inside of their place. The home of Baruch
and Steph consists of a central large den, which roofless, opens up to the sky. All
around the central outdoor den are the various rooms of the apartment: a kitchen to the right, a bathroom straight ahead, and the bedroom tucked away somewhere I never get to see. When I enter, three guests are already gathered. Two women from New Mexico are visiting on a birthright trip; by chance, they bumped into Baruch and Steph earlier in the week, who insisted they come for Shabbat dinner, hoping they would see that there is more to Israel/Palestine than what the narrative of birthright presents. Another good friend of the hosts is wandering about the main room, where a long table draped in a white table cloth is set for significant company. In the kitchen Steph is preparing dishes and organizing cutlery for the table. I introduce myself to her in the doorway of the kitchen, and she and Baruch introduce me to the other guests. Smiling, I pull out the bottle of wine I had brought for them and hand it to Steph.

“Barkan!” She exclaims, her tone simultaneously supportive, amused and disapproving. “They are racists.”

“Oh!” I was glad she was telling me because I had spent nearly thirty minutes in the grocery store reading the backs of wine bottles to make sure I wasn’t buying a product from an illegal settlement in the West Bank. I thought I was being careful.

“This is good to know, sorry about that.”

“No problem,” she says, “now you know.”

All around the walls of the outdoor den hang various banners. One of them, to the right of the kitchen, is a large pink poster which reads “there is no pride in apartheid,” declaring their anti-pink washing position, filling their apartment with symbols of their political allegiance. Everything about the apartment screams activist
resistance culture. From the wine to the walls, their interior design presents a day-to-day teeming with the political. The posters and the talk of racist wine sellers remind me of an encounter I hadn’t been able to talk about. In this company, I feel like I can finally vent about my debacle in the Jewelry store in center city earlier that day.

“What happened?”

All eyes are on me as a few more people trickle into the apartment.

“Well, as often happens whenever I speak in Hebrew here, I got asked by some store owner if I was making Aliyah. We started chatting in Hebrew about jewelry and all of a sudden, he was asking me: ‘So are you moving to Israel?’ I really have been frustrated by this question lately and, maybe I stupidly answered with too much sass, but I said ‘No,’ pretty sternly. I was trying to make a point. Then he asks, ‘Do you like Trump?’ ‘No,’ I reply, ‘do you like Bibi?’ He answers my question with another question: ‘Do you like people who want to kill your family? Do you like people who want to wipe out the Jews? Because Trump doesn’t! Why don’t you like Trump? Do you like Iran?’ The interrogation didn’t end. He continued questioning my politics, with every answer he escalated his attack until he was outright accusing me of loving people who want to wipe out all Jews. ‘So, if a man was pointing a gun at your brother’s head -- to kill him or not to kill him?’ ‘if someone wants to kill Jews, to kill him or not to kill him?’ If Iran wants to kill Jews with nuclear power, to blow them up or not to blow them up?’ Every time I opened my mouth to try to add nuance or claim that he wasn’t responding directly to the things I was saying, he just screamed over me, telling me that there was nothing complicated about it at all. ‘Iran is evil. They want to kill us
all. You are either with evil or with us.’ It was the most frustrating conversation! He
didn’t let me speak at all and if he did, he wouldn’t listen!”

Everyone is shaking their heads, confirming my disheartened sentiment. Some
chime in, laughing off similarly absurd encounters they have had. George himself had
been telling me earlier in the week about a time when he and his friend were wearing
bright pink shirts in the outdoor market, or “Shuk,” called Machane Yehuda,
advertising an extension program for birthright participants run by ATL. The program
works to give birthright participants a supplementary experience to their trip, one
which includes a broader educational scope, providing insight into the stories,
perspectives and politics of Palestinians who experience Israeli Jewish statehood in
an intensely different way than a politically Zionist Jew might. Standing outside with
their signs and information pamphlets, George and his friends were harassed by right-
wing activists, who, also American, English speaking folks, perceive and construe
leftist activists as one of the biggest threats to the security and survival of the state of
Israel and work tirelessly to oppose them.

Whereas George, a part of an extremely small force of under 20 people, is
fighting for equality, human rights and the end of violent military occupation, right
wing activists like Ari Fuld or Uri Pilichowski who oppose them and are representing
hundreds of thousands of people at the very least, fight for Israeli military strength in
pursuit of Jewish political, cultural and demographic sovereignty and territorial power
as a part of a biblical messianic promise/precedent of ownership of the land. In a city
like Jerusalem, where both the religious and nationalist sentiments are so strong, these
kinds of intensely political encounters are to be expected. Be it because of the
religious or political ties that one has to the land, the various neighborhoods and sites around the city are charged with immense historical significance and with contemporary social and political significance, which defines the life and rights of various populations who live there. This creates a culture of nationalist pride and political purpose, which informs/pervades/infuses/saturates everything one does during their day-to-day. This makes George’s and my own encounters in public commercial places commonplace and makes the highly politicized culture being expressed even within Baruch and Steph’s home understandable, however fringe they may be considered amongst the Israeli mainstream.

Finally, when the house fills with all the guests -- friends from work, from law school, from ATL, the activist collective, and random strangers met on the street, we take our places around the table. There are at least four different bottles of wine to start, my Barkan bottle nowhere to be seen. Everyone who wants to pours a glass of wine for the Kiddush. The two women from New Mexico sit across from me and we chat about their travels, about my thesis research, and generally about the kinds of experiences they are looking for after birthright.

“We are really just trying to learn as much as we can while we are here,” one says. “We are open to anything really.”

“Let's say Kiddush,” Baruch announces. We begin to sing the Kiddush, the ritual blessing made over the wine. Everybody holds up their glasses and Baruch chants the opening verses from Genesis sanctifying the separation of the seventh day from all other days of the week. When he gets to the rabbinic liturgical blessings added on, we all chime in in collective song, and when we arrive at the verse
traditionally sung as: “Ki vanu vacharta ve’otanu kiddashtah mi kol ha’amim,” *In us you have chosen, and us you have sanctified from all of the nations, everyone instinctively chants together “im kol ha’amim” with all of the nations. In this verse, the Jewish prayer traditionally recognizes the special anointing that God places upon the Jews in their chosen-ness. But instead, there is an almost ubiquitous liturgical change, everyone sings a version that envisions the Jews as part of a larger collective with “other nations” rather than singling them out. This moment reminds about a phrase I heard in different ways at different times from many of the activists I have spoken with. “Self-determination for all peoples in the places they call home.” People would say this when asked about how they related to the national and cultural project of Israel. In many ways, these activists will not settle for a Jewish project that envisions freedom and self-determination in an exclusive and costly way, singling them out “from” the nations rather than seeing Jewish self-determination as necessarily existing in a more expansive framework of self-determination, whatever that may mean, in the places they call home for all other humans.

Everyone from around the table is smiling. When we finish all of the words of the Kiddush, one person laughs and said, “only with a bunch of leftie Jews in Israel/Palestine would we all say im instead of mi.” People chuckle but before we drink our wine Baruch pauses, “a toast,” he says. We all raise our glasses. “Free Palestine!” Baruch declares. And we all clink glasses and call out in response, “Free Palestine!”

Their social and political itineraries expand to include destinations for food, art, cloths, travel. Though in action, protest mode, they are outsiders -- when they speak
certain words and opinions “free Palestine” “apartheid” “occupation” they are ostracized, othered, but their daily cultural lives, also their physical permission and acceptance in the geopolitical region is commissioned and facilitated by the Israeli state. The cultural spheres they “live” in are Jewish, Israeli, Hebrew speaking. They are under the protection of Israeli security; they are subjects of and subject two the Israeli legal system as permitted residents or visitors or students with visas.
Bezalel street has two parts. On one part, there is a large main road where cars whiz by in the characteristically aggressive and undisciplined way of Jerusalem drivers. On the other part there are no cars. The street turns into a wide-set cobblestone pathway, for walking only. On a sunny Friday afternoon, before the city siren rings to signal the start of the sabbath, the cobblestone section is filled with small vendors, selling handmade jewelry, art and crafts of all sorts. The Bezalel outdoor market is no match for the Nachalat Binyamin artist market in central Tel-Aviv, but its presence is still charming. On any other day, the street is home to a string of delicious cafes, and a big used book store. Today was one of four times activists in the movement had suggested I meet them there. All of them seemed to love Bezalel Street, more specifically Cafe Bezalel. Is this a central gathering spot for people in the movement? I wondered. Are the owners also involved in leftist work or sourcing their products from local Palestinian providers? Or is it because the owners are shamelessly secular in a religious city, keeping their store open on the sabbath, while the rest of the city shuts down to observe the Jewish legal codes that prohibit work, money exchange and production on the Sabbath? Does this make them somehow radical? On my fourth time chatting at the cafe, I asked, “Is there something special about this place? On the Israeli far left or something? So many activists I have spoken to seem to come here all the time?” I was looking for patterns, similar to the frequent activist outings to Hosh Al-Yasmine, or the fact that every North American Jew my age who leans left on Palestine/Israel (that I’ve met) wants to learn Arabic. But when I finally asked the fourth interviewee that I met there named Katya, a staff
member at the Arab-Jewish joint school in the Jerusalem, she remarked, “I think we just really like this Cafe. They have great food. It’s one of the best in the city.” Got it. Just a delicious restaurant. Still a relevant part of the field even if I can’t draw any impressive analytic conclusions from it.

When I arrived to meet David at the Cafe, he was already there. After circling outside and inside for a while trying to find him, I finally spotted his baseball cap pointed down toward the table, or maybe towards the phone in his hands. David was one of the founders of ATL alongside Ella and Morty, all of whom I had the chance to speak with during field work. There were several other founding peers from the time who I did not. When George discussed ATL, David and his partner’s names came up often. Though particular names of activists continually surfaced in the online community, either in listserv posts or popular articles about the movement’s whereabouts and involvement, there were no obvious main actors or leaders. Seemingly, a variety of individuals were responsible for collaborating, sending information to the listserv, and a plethora of committees and subgroups working on a multitude of projects. The title of a “collective” was important to the community, David would eventually explain to me, and was an intentional point of discourse and communal praxis to enact in a radical way. David emphasized the importance of the group being a dynamic, decentralized collective, both for its present tense ability to thrive and additionally, to ensure that it maintain vitality in the absence the founding generation. This reality was perceivable simply on the listserv. Different activists always seemed to be contributing in collaboration with others, using their strengths, perspectives and spheres of influence to build a more impactful, powerful action,
committees and projects. The collective observance of a horizontal form of leadership on the ground, existed in tandem with the reality that in stories with interlocutors, especially of the newer generation, figures like David and his founding counterparts paid a strong oral role in describing the movement and its history. David was one of the founding members -- a cohort of about six North American diaspora Jews with “radical” stances on Israeli politics, and in politically imagining what it looks like for Jews to build a sense of peoplehood and engage in a Jewish society. As we began talking, David introduced his perspective on political change in Palestine Israel:

“I want to use these privileges in order to build this place into a just place, which it is not, it simply is not today. This idea of self-determination, which translates to individual or collective freedom -- to determine your own fate, determine your own future, determine what your life looks like. What does that look like? States are just one model for that. I don’t hold states up as the end all be all of self-determination. States are a model that came into popularity in the last 100 plus years, 150 years, and they are simply a model. And so, when we discuss what self-determination looks like for all peoples in the place, they call home . . . first you have to have the values, the value that all peoples deserve equality, all individuals, all groups and then figure out what models best facilitate those values. And if states facilitate those values, fine. If they don’t, they don’t. We as a movement, as an anti-occupation movement, as a movement for justice here, we, being everyone who is here and around the world fighting for a just future here for the peoples who call this place home, need a better vision than we have today -- a more popular vision of what justice looks like . . . I want to argue and debate and come to common understanding with people who share
basic values of equality and self-determination for all people -- that’s who I want to talk with. Because I know that if we have those same values, we can build a bright future. Then the model becomes something to say, ok, so materially, what best facilitates this vision. But I think it's a question that hasn’t been asked by my movement, Hashomer Hatzair, the movement I grew up in, or any other movement, really properly in the last, many decades, at least, if not entire history: . . . What are our values and what actions on the ground actually represent those values? Which isn’t an easy thing to do, but what I think any movement for liberation needs to do if it wants to call itself a movement for liberation. But [he is eating] that is getting into a lot of ideological weeds . . . I don’t purport to know exactly what the model is here yet, but I am looking to build that with people who agree on equality and collective self-determination is a good thing for those who want it.”

From the onset, David's language was less personal and more political than George and Ella. He talked about states, shared values, models, equality, justice. His focus was on political approach, their theories and underlying values. But how was his political theorizing conversant with an existing history of political language around these issues? In what way did his discourse engage with the language of Zionism and Jewish visions of national freedom? Firstly, David engages extensively with the notion of self-determination. By using this language, he immediately puts himself in dialogue with a pervasive language of nationalism in the region, that includes most mainstream audience, both Palestinian, Israeli and their subsequent diasporas.
Nationalist discourse in 19th and particularly 20th century Europe (as well as global communities under colonial rule such as in the Middle East and North Africa, India/Pakistan, etc.), constituted a prevalent political approach among several self-understood nations with a focus on this idea of independence. Self-determination, a key discursive component of nationalism, is an international legal category that affords all peoples the right to determine their own destiny within the framework of an international order, noted in the charter of the United Nations.\(^{18}\) In the 20th century Jewish political thought, this language of self-determination became central in promoting the importance of the nation, and the link between national independence and strength, power and liberation from oppression. Ezra Mendelsohn (1993) recalls the words of Ojzasz (Yehoshua) Thon, a polish Zionist who in 1919 said “The Jew are a nation, not a religious sect. And we wish the world to know” (1993: 17). Using the language of the nation, was an exercise in demanding national rights, some form of political autonomy or even bigger, statehood (17). In grappling with violence and anti-Semitism, this pursuit of nation status existed as politically imaginative project, creating visions for Jewish independence and freedom from oppression through self-determination. Zionism, as well as Palestinian nationalism\(^ {19}\), draws heavily on this language of self-determination and national freedom. Growing up in a Zionist leaning Jewish community, the language of self-determination is not just a legal term which


\(^{19}\) In article 19 of the Palestinian National Charter from 1968 affirms a sense both that the UN partition of the land is wholly illegal. According to the charter it directly inhibits the rights of Palestinians to their “normal life in Palestine” and their right to achieve sovereignty and self-determination. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/plocov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/plocov.asp)
connotes a specific practice or system but is charged with symbolic meaning as well, connoting the values of independence and freedom.

By drawing on this political language, David’s discursive expression articulates political dreams that render the freedom of “all people” something inseparable from one another. Searching for a more “popular vision,” David seeks to come together with people who share the value of a “just future for everyone,” and to discuss possible models for political freedom, engaging “what self-determination looks like for all peoples in the place they call home. “David, in trying to rally a movement, to grow and gain power, interest and influence, is acutely aware of his political discursive practices. Simply his word choice is highly attentive to the nationalist discourse of his audience. In choosing a positive language of self-determination, justice and freedom, he accounts for the needs of both “self” and “Other as if they are indivisible. David is calling for Israeli and Jewish subjectivities to articulate a model that is foundational, not reactionary. By this I mean that a model that main form an ethic of self-rejection and centering of the other fall into the same binaristic paradigm of justice, freedom and self-determination, which thinks that the pursuit of a collective freedom that necessitates both the exclusion of another’s freedom and their oppression. The primary framework is one of scarcity, either/or. One’s freedom is at odds with the others', that one safety is at odds with the others. Because so much of the discourse of the state of Israel is not focused on or concerned with an ethics of scarcity: friend/enemy, safe/threatening, life/death, David posits a discursive approach which interconnects rather Jewish self, freedom and safety with that of Palestinian self, freedom and safety. His approach to change must come from
protest and dissent both in and out, as well as a foundational reimagining of what a thriving, safe, liberated Jewish self might look like.

David arrives in the world of anti-occupation activism from a very specific point of reference. He sat across from me smiling, introduced himself, and we began to chat. Born and raised in Toronto Canada, David described himself as coming from a secular Jewish background. His mother grew up in the Hashomer Hatzair movement, and so did he. Being a secular Jew meant being a Hashomer Hatzair-nik. His movement, not the anti-occupation movement but the Jewish socialist Zionist movement Hashomer Hatzair that he grew up in, formed the basis for the relationship between his Jewishness and the modern state of Israel. For him being Jewish in a socialist Zionist movement meant being responsible for the history present and future of it, and inevitably his Jewishness was and has always been linked with the Zionism and the inevitable project of the Jewish state. As he spoke of his work in the anti-occupation movement, he continually grappled with the responsibility that his particular Jewish frame of reference calls him towards.

“Hashomer Hatzair started in Galicia in 1913 and developed its ideology over that first decade or so, little less than decade. And then, its plan here, its vision here, was for a binational state, until 1948, the Naqba/war of independence/1948. And so, the idea was that Jewish self-determination would be built on a federation of socialist villages that would be built alongside Palestinian self-determination and so that the state would be binational. And so that’s not to be confused with -- people often
confuse this idea of binational with one state. The idea was that there would be definition of Jewish self-determination, definition of Palestinian self-determination. So, its dual national, not just not-national, which people talk about today -- how important is that? Is it essential to honor the desires for [national] self-determination that Palestinians and Jews have here? I think so, I think at the core the future has to be built, and what I am trying to work towards, is a future built on equality first and foremost, and self-determination for all peoples in the place they call home. I see those values at the core of the ideology of that movement. Of course, idea and action are different and there is a lot of history to be examined and actions to be looked at and criticized throughout. But that’s where this movement comes from and I’m really excited about bringing the conversation in that movement back to those core values.”

The socialist Zionist legacy and inheritance was David’s starting point. He was a part of a Jewish community and tradition rooted in this communal attachment to and inheritance of socialist practices and also a strong understanding that first, Jews, as do all people have the right to self-determination and are a peoplehood, a nation, a historical social group -- not just a religion or not even necessarily a religion and second, that self-determination happens in the form of the nation state, like Mendelsohn (1993) recounts of the Zionist Jews of Europe. David felt like he was able to do in ATL what was still missing in the movement that shape his Jewishness and relationship to Israel. He mentioned wanting and needing to engage in this critical education and self-reflection on the issue of Palestinian justice and freedom in the Hashomer Hatzair movement as well, especially since many Hashomer Hatzair-niks
identify strongly with the movement, while engaging in Israeli peace movements. Below he explains in more detail.

“So when I really boiled down the values at the core of Hashomer Hatzair -- socialist Zionism -- what it's really talking about, by saying those two ideas are inextricable from each other [socialism and Zionism], are the values that I have taken from that and tried to build forward: that all humans have the right to equality, freedom, self-determination -- and that the Jewish people as a people have that right too. And of course, there are different ways of talking about socialism and Zionism, and when you really examine what socialism is talking about in terms of freedom and equality, it's not just talking at an abstract way, it's talking about economic justice, social justice, feminism and anti-racism, and of course Zionism has multiple different views surrounding it but when you really boil it down, those core values, that all humans have the rights to live free equal, self-determined lives, and the Jewish people as a people are no exception, that's what I carry forward and I think those core values. “

Here David talks about this idea of “boiling down.” What happens when he boils down the “values” of Hashomer Hatzair? It is here that David starts to articulate his strong inclination towards “human rights” or “social justice values,” and reads it on to his experience in the movement Hashomer Hatzair. Because for him, the legacy of his secular socialist Zionist Jewish identity is an interpretive one. He reflects on what it looks like to grapple with both the injustices and problems of the movements history while also drawing from its inspiring tradition that has shaped his Judaism and
connected him to his people -- caught between history and present, in an attempt to create a meaningful Jewish modernity.

I think in the last many years of making this jump from my life in Toronto and New York, living communally in New York, and then coming here and building these things with partners . . . though I grew up in this critical space, I’ve learned so, so many things. And every day I’m coming in contact with new injustices that are devastating, and new ideas that are challenging the ideas that I come from and new things that make me ashamed of my history, and proud of the way people acted at particular junctures. Both of those things happen almost daily for me, where I’ll learn something about how the people I identify with historically acted . . . Particular icons: Martin Buber, who is a teacher in the movement, is a big deal for me, and his whole cohort of Yehudah Magnus and Hannah Arendt, in building that movement and the work they did here. And in the most extreme times, people who fought the Nazis throughout Europe, many of them were Hashomer Hatzair members -- the Warsaw ghetto uprising was led by Hashomer Hatzair members. And, those are people who I’m proud of. And, at the same time, when you look through Zochrot archives, for example, and testimonies, you find people who talk about the challenges that Hashomer Hatzair and mapa’am made to the dominant Zionist direction at the time, and also the partaking in that dominant Zionist direction, and that’s like one point at which I point to certain moments that I say I’m glad that there were people standing up, speaking about this stuff, but the Nakba took place and Hashomer Hatzair did have a role in it, the entire Zionist movement, and I have to contend with both of those things, both of those realities. And that’s why I think there’s a lot of people who
say, you know what, fuck it, our history as a movement building this place -- I don’t mean Hashomer Hatzair at this point, there’s people around the world and in Israel Palestine who say yeah! fuck it! Our history is disastrous enough that the points of pride and beauty can be just lifted out of those identities and be put into something brand new and we need to disassociate entirely. And again because of critical education, and this upbringing that didn’t pose “you have to be either this or this,” I tend to think that it's important to sort of take the reality of history, the terrible and the positive and deal with those. And attack both of those and disassociate myself from the things I think are terrible through action today and through representing something different today. And again, I’m not sure that's right, that's just what I see as important. I have room in my heart for people who disagree with that, who identify in different ways, who dissociate themselves with their youth movements that they grew up with, or total ideologies. I just think it's important to engage with those histories and ideologies as a, for better and for worse, a part of those histories and ideology.

Again, David emphasized the importance of considering history in the ways we move forward. Grappling with violent pasts, especially when one's values and narratives feel in contradiction with their historical inheritance, is not an easy task. The social worlds one grows up in, become an integral part of their identity in the world. Throwing this away can be both traumatic on a personal level and also on a social one, because the past becomes yet again erased. David seeks to remember, but
to do so in deviant ways, that allow for new pasts to be remembered and old futures to be rediscovered.

Growing up, my community often discussed how we can reconcile what people called “modern values” with the tradition. The classic question of all good text studies was “how do we reconcile this with contemporary morality?” Our traditional rituals are ridden with ethnocentric language of Jewish chosen-ness, gender and sexuality discriminatory practices, eating and living practices which require communal proximity and separation from outside communities, and so on and so forth. My egalitarian yet observant community in Teaneck was constantly grappling with Rabbinic legal code, reading and rereading, interpreting and reinterpreting texts, in order to find harmony between how we ethically wanted to practice traditions, and our commitment to our tradition, our identity, our community and its history and inheritances. David and I share this similar process of grappling. His devotion to Hashomer Hatzair is not an ideologically one, but rather his connection to the movement is much more intuitive and embodied -- constituting the language, ideas and social world that created him, like when George called being Jewish a “sociological fact of [his] existence.”. On the one hand David has this lived, embodied sense of home and belonging in a movement that predates him and his personal dreams and values.

Because of his critical education though, he always felt equipped to grapple with the messiness and difficulties within what he was given. David noted never thinking anything was magical or perfect. His perception, unlike many of his peers who grew up in Zionist educating institutions, was never pristine or unquestioningly
adoring. Thus, he constantly found himself in the process of change, questioning and continuing that was a critical lifelong cycle. David described this idea of “boiling down” as the process of extracting core values, or intentions, to then understand how models can be reshaped when they take on destructive forms, in order to more to more effectively transcribe these core values on to practiced realities. More deeply this process of examining the past to understand what is beneath the linguistic and practical shells of inherited words and actions, is a way of examining practice and ideas in history and context to better understand them on their own terms. This process facilitates a natural empathy and resilience toward the constant critical conversation with the past.
“At rotzah lashevet?” she asked me, as I lingered awkwardly between two tables near the front door. Around me was the buzz of Cafe Bezalel yet again. Eyal texted me that he is en route. When Eyal arrives, we grabbed a table inside, since outside was full. Neither one of us was hungry. He ordered an orange juice; I ordered a small coffee.

We started talking before I even began recording, picking up from a conversation from Friday night dinner we had been having about whether or not Eyal’s political and life choices were extensions of his upbringing. Eyal, like a handful of the other self-identified diaspora Jewish activists in ATL, was actually born in Israel. In this ethnography, he is the only interlocutor that grapples with this origin story, as well as having a Jewish diaspora heritage (maybe Israel is just another Jewish diaspora anyway). Both of his parents were Americans who had moved to the North of Israel after meeting in Habonim Dror, an international socialist Zionist Youth movement. Until he was nine years old, he was raised in a Galilean socialist Zionist kibbutz called Shorashim. When I asked him what significant influences play into how he understood his politics around Israel Palestine and his Jewishness, he reflected:

“A history of Jewish life that integrates with different Jewish immigrant experiences, and unionism and labor values and that whole Yiddishkeit world in the US influences me. And sort of, my family values and the values of Habonim Dror merge and divide at different points.... that set of references, values justice, labor rights, socialism, were
things that were around as I was growing up. And then in Habonim you are exposed to words like ‘heteronormativity’ at a very young age, so a set of convictions around feminism and gender, economic justice, social justice, you are exposed to and are around.”

“In college, after being a madrich in the movement for two years, I found myself less able to organize and do the work I was interested in in the movement . . . I felt the best way to actualize the values I grew up with from my [family?] and from Habonim was through leaving it.”

Eyal, like David grew up in the socialist Zionist movement, Habonim Dror being an offshoot of Hashomer Hatzair. His personal journey was heavily impacted by social justice values. Participating in labor unions, fighting against classism, economic justice and for justice constitute central experiences that were central component Eyal’s Jewish expression. Though the movement in many ways comprised Eyal’s Jewish identity, it could not fulfill other needs he had to “actualize the values” that he had internalized growing up. Even more so than David, the movement did not feel like a home for his politic audacity. He described feeling tension between his knowledge that the community he came from is responsible for instilling him with the values he has, while at the same time not feeling that it was where he belonged or felt free to effectuate his aspirations in the world. He described this tension as a constant negotiation between continuity and disruption with his past. What did it mean to live in simultaneous continuity of the past, of tradition and also
discontinuity with it? For Eyal, this tension existed not only for his personal life, and relationship to family and home but also in his relationship with his Jewish legacy.

One of the ways that Eyal found home in this tension, particularly as regards his Jewish legacy, was through understanding that the act of radically disrupting his Jewish legacy was in fact a Jewish form. “There are legacies of discontinuity in Jewish life; or discontinuities that actually carry forward a lot of practices and thoughts and ways of being that don’t stray from Jewish history but are perceived so in the moment. And I think that raises a cool set of conversations that relate to the Jewish international anti-occupation community here and everywhere and people who have left politics and are trying to have a certain set of transformations take place within the community around Israel/Palestine.”

What Jewish communities often times described as rupturing with the past, as disturbing tradition, Eyal described as carrying forth the past and its values, goals, desires. Again, Eyal made a similar move as David – looking at historical values, understanding intention in context, and using this deeper understanding to inform how he thought about his present. In a dominant Jewish North American and Israeli context, his own oft-regarded “heretical” anti-occupation stances were seen as breaking off from traditional Jewish diaspora stances which regard unequivocal support for Israeli as quintessentially pro-Jewish. For Eyal, fighting the occupation, which some see as politically threatening to Zionism and opposed to Jewish self-determination, was in fact the way in which he fought for Jewish futures and self-determination. He elaborated on pieces of his experience being in Palestine/Israel, being Jewish, being English speaking and being an anti-occupation activist that
engaged the dissonance of feeling both insider and outsider, at center and margin simultaneously:

“At once, I think -- for myself -- coming here and moving here, there are ways in which I very much fulfilling a classical narrative; a Jewish person moving to Jerusalem to work towards a better Jewish future. In some ways that perfectly fits an archetypal trope and central narrative. And I think at the same time, I’m somewhat inverse-ing it. Or if I don’t see it that way, other people do. And sometimes I do see it that way and claim that and sometimes I don’t claim that.”

“What is the inverse?”

“Well the dominant narrative in our communities as I’ve experienced it, and I think so many of us do, is that the way to fight for Jewish futures or to be invested in Jewish futures is be part of a Zionist project, and a specific kind of Zionist project as it is framed as dominant in Israel and in our international communities. And I’m here, because I love my Jewish communities, because Jewishness is central in my life, because I’m working for better Jewish futures and better futures for everyone, here and elsewhere. But my answers for what that means are seen as outside acceptability or permissibility of a certain set of institutional authorities in the Jewish world or perhaps in the general political world. So again, I am locating myself both at center and margin. For different of us in All That's Left or the Center for Jewish Nonviolence (CJNV) or any of these spheres . . . we are doing it from Jewish places. We act because of our Jewishness, because of our Jewish values, because of our
Jewish traditions. Those traditions are different sometimes. Some people [are] from secular youth movement, some people [are] from religious Jewish backgrounds of all kinds, and still we’re here compelled by those histories, by those traditions, because those are who we are, our Jewishness is a central motivator, which is interesting and exciting, and gives dimension and complicates things in a way that's exciting for me.

As he passionately described his anti-occupation activism and commitment to justice, I sense Eyal reaching for his Jewish legacy. He was combatting a “dominant narrative” that conflates Zionism with Jewish futures, Jewish heritage and love and care for Jewish community. Within this narrative, Eyal was on the margins, rejected as an invested member of Jewish life and future. Within that story, Eyal had constantly prove to the greater Jewish Zionist discourse that in fact, Jewishness and Zionism are not one and the same, and that no, Zionism is not the sole paradigm for positive, successful, thriving Jewish futures. On the other hand, Eyal noted that he himself was a North American Jew traveling to Israel and living within Israeli society. He recognized what it meant to re-inscribe history while trying to change it from the center.

Another notable move that Eyal made, just in his word choice while speaking with me, was his use of pluralities. When he spoke about “Jewish histories” he said it in the plural. When he spoke about legacies, he mentioned it in the plural. Even in discussing “Jewish futures” he communicated it in the plural. What was the significance of articulating collective Jewish identity through language that is
constantly conscious of its own internal diversity and plurality? Since Eyal was
explicit in naming his own resistance towards dominant Zionist frameworks for, this
plurality can be seen as pushing back against the singularity of history and future, of
narrative and possibility that nationalist identity and chronology imposes. Thinking
and talking through Jewish identities in a way that invites a constant awareness and
investigation of multiplicity “gives dimension” -- it breathes a powerful and vitalizing
heterogeneity that is unwilling to flatten the vast and ranging topographies of Jewish
life.
Purity Politics

“Hamatzav nihiyeh me’od mafchid. Yoter ve’yoter zeh kasheh le’haamin et ha mitziut kaan,” one of the Israeli activists said in the car as I and the other three people in the car chomp down on delicious Palestinian pastries in the back seat. We are all coming back from a second trip out to al-Ouja, the small Palestinian village where shepherds have called on activists to accompany them in the field. This time back, I was the only international. I went out without George that day, and on our way back from the field we stopped by the al-Ouja super market and the bakery across the street. Being this is my second time at the bakery, the activists explain that they always love to stop there on their way back. “It is so delicious,” they all exclaim. In the car, as we headed back to Jerusalem, everyone was talking about how scary the situation in Israel has become as free speech and civil disobedience is regarded. “The situation is becoming very scary. More and more it is hard to believe the reality here,” a woman in khaki shorts, a tee shirt and short gray hair remarks in Hebrew. Up until now they have been discussing the recent arrest of 8 Palestinian journalists in the West Bank and the additional detainment of Israel left activists who are involved with Ta’ayush and its Jordan River Valley counterpart at the airport border. They are speaking in shocked and disturbed tones about the border troubles that the son of one of the main Israeli organizers for the livu’i group to al-Ouja has experienced at the airport on his way back into the country. They continued to discuss in exclamation the disturbing arrests of Palestinian journalists from their own homes in the middle of the night. I listened closely to their conversation. “Freedom of speech is dying,” one
says. “There is no room for resistance and difference and thought and perspective,” another adds.

Having spent a month with activists whose bodies can afford the struggle given their somewhat protection as Jews in Israel, I understand that it isn’t easy or heroic work to be doing, especially for Israelis. The political situation of the occupation in Israel doesn’t seem to care as much whether one is a Jew or a Palestinian, but more so whether one is left or right, critical or uncritical of the Israeli security state. Of course, for Palestinians the threat of death or indeterminate incarceration is a constant reality that doesn’t equally apply to even the most radical of conscientious objectors and leftist activists mostly still afforded the rights and representations of law and national visibility resulting from their Jewish or Israeli subjectivity. But the narrative of Jewish and Israeli worth and humanity is in a moment of question, slowly becoming contingent political allegiance.

Leaving Ben Gurion airport on August 28th, I am nervous for the first time that I would be questioned. Before I can head to security, I am stopped at the El Al mini podiums situated between the long windy passenger lines of the airport departure hall and the boarding pass booth. Anyone who has traveled to Israel is familiar with this encounter. There is no entrance to retrieve one’s ticket until after they have passed through an initial stage of security documentation and questioning.

The barrage of questions which at a young age made me feel safe, in this moment, makes me feel afraid. I am no longer on the side of this national context that wants me to be protected. “What is the purpose of your stay? Have your bags been in anyone else's possession since you packed it? Did anyone give you any gifts or items
to bring along? Do you have any weapons, knives, arms in your possession? How long were you in the country?” I answer swiftly in Hebrew addressing with the most broad and appeasing answers I can. I remember the soldiers holding cameras in Hebron, recording us and snapping photos. I think to my extensive correspondence with activist listserv in the country, Ta’ayush and the Jordan River Valley activists WhatsApp groups. The security officer questions me for some twenty minutes, asking me over and over whether I have any other forms of identification, if I am sure that I only have an American passport, why it is that I speak Hebrew so well, and what I am really doing the country. She speaks to another officer, tells me to wait. Looks back and forth between her computer screen and my picture. Eventually, she lets me through. Compared to the usual three-minute questioning I experience at the airport, I am shocked, frustrated and can’t help the feeling that she is trying to send me a message – “Don’t cause trouble, don’t step out of line.” Compared to the stories I have heard and that have erupted on social media, twenty minutes is nothing. With hours of detainment being normal for far-left American Jews, as well as all-together denial of entry, this moment was nothing but a symbolic point of reflection for me and the changing role of Israel for any Jew with politically deviant perspectives and actions. For example, only a few years back, any diaspora Jews who publicly support the BDS movement were completely barred from entry into the country. The idea that political resistance and criticism of any kind, that non-violent effort to forward justice is unacceptable and strips a Jew of their Jewishness in the eyes of a self-proclaimed Jewish state just goes to show how the dominant national political agenda has come to replace the plethora of Jewish people and ideas that exist. Just as fewer and fewer
Israeli’s feel that they can reconcile being in Israel and opposing state policies through free speech and nonviolent activism, the same feeling of marginalization is occurring for north American Jews who try to speak differently about Israel. This Jewish American discourse that asserts the inability for north American Jews to care about being Jewish and also be critical of Israel. The dominating narrative of Jewish education and institutional life equates Jewishness with pro-Israelness.
Rediscovering Home

“Be careful with people in power; because they befriend a person only for their own needs. They seem to be friends when they benefit, but they won’t stand by someone in their time of need.”

-Ethics of Our Father, Chapter 2, Mishnah 3

In November 2017, the Jewish Women’s Renaissance Project (JWRP) hosted an “intimate gathering” with Israel’s Minister of the Diaspora, Naftali Bennett. At the gathering Bennett made a casual statement that to most Jews present was a hilarious side remark -- the crowd collectively exhaled a loud cackled in response. To anyone not inside the pro-Israel Jewish diaspora, this comment is critically important in understanding the framework for how the state of Israel envisions Jews around the world and for how Jews in return envisions ourselves with regard to the state of Israel. Long story short, this story of Jewish relationship to the modern state of Israel is no solely a personal one.

The JWRP was founded in 2008 by eight Jewish women from “different walks of life.” Similarly, to the Birthright Israel program, which brings non-Israeli Jews to Israel to strengthen their Jewish identity and connection to state, the JWRP’s mission is to influence and enrich the Jewish community’s connection with its heritage through bringing Jewish mother to Israel on a pilgrimage trip. Holding the belief that a woman can influence the world, JWRP conceives women’s education as the key to impacting Jewish life. The core financial and educational focus of the JWRP is an 8-day trip to Israel. This tour travels to similar sites discussed in my

20 “Our Story” [https://www.birthrightisrael.com/about_us_inner/52?scroll=art_1](https://www.birthrightisrael.com/about_us_inner/52?scroll=art_1)
21 About The JWRP, 2018 [https://jwrp.org/about-the-jwrp/](https://jwrp.org/about-the-jwrp/)
vignette “*Home is Where You Don’t Need a Map,*” understood in Habib’s ethnography to be central sites where Jewish diaspora identity is constructed through an Israeli national history of the Jewish people. The sample itinerary on their website lays out the visits including Masada, Mt. Herzl, Yad VaShem (the Holocaust Memorial Museum), the Kotel (Western Wall), Independence Hall. They visit some additional sites not listed by Habib such as the Biblical Zoo, which allows visitor to see animals mentioned in the biblical in the biblical land, as well as Tzfat and Tiberias, two of the four holy Jewish cities listed in the Jewish tradition alongside Jerusalem and Hebron.22

At the opening of the JWRP event, featured in a YouTube video23 Naftali Bennett introduced himself: “So, uh, just a bit of background. So, um, I’m Minister of Education and Minister of Diaspora Affairs -- so basically, minister of the Jews [pauses] uh, so I’m your minister.” He paused as the entire crowd laughed hysterically. Pleased, his mouth widened into a cheery smile. The room was full of North American Jews involved in JWRP, who spend their money and time bringing Jewish women to connect with Israel. So why is it so funny for Bennett to make this joke? Why was this room of Americans elated that some Israeli minister is claiming himself to be “[their] minister?”

Without explicitly addressing it, the stories of the activists that I recount in this thesis constantly confront this narrative of Israeli responsibility for and claim to the

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23 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsmfrk3UAuE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsmfrk3UAuE), “Naftali Bennett, Minister of Diaspora Affairs and Minister of Education,” 2017
Jewish diaspora. They subvert in small and big, implicit and explicit ways the dominant paradigm of international Jewish peoplehood, envisioning Israel as its political and personal center. There is no room to debate the systematic and age-old claim of the Zionist project to speak for, act on behalf of, and exist for the benefit of Jews across the globe. There are many drawing points that different Zionist narratives tap into to strengthen this idea, such as the rabbinic prayer liturgy, which in one of the primary prayers uses the language: “mi arba’ah kanfot ha’aretz,” “from the four corners of the universe.” This prayer, as most, has many Jewish interpretation, but quite literally refers to state of Jewish ingathering in Jerusalem from across the world. Political Zionism leverages this ancient Jewish trope in creating the dynamic, processual production of Israeli national memory and future. This Zionist project dreams up a singular, straightforward narrative of Jewish history with a sole point of origin that can then serve as a dream for a clear homeland.

With this historical context in mind, the Zionist project was an imaginative, creative and urgent project that drew from a communal longing for Jewish continuity and freedom from antisemitism. But what was once cultivating strength in a community faced with a looming sense of powerlessness, has monopolized dominant Jewish discourse on origins, homelands, histories and futures. Eyal, addressing it better than I do, pointed to this in his deliberate usage of pluralities when he spoke to Jewish existence in time. In its imagination as the utopic telos for Jews, this hyper-national Israel forges a singular Jewish history leading to that end point. About a half a year ago, I had a thought-provoking conversation on the topic:
“The Diaspora mentality is a slave mentality,” Jim stated matter-of-factly. “No one in the diaspora ever celebrated being in the diaspora when it wasn’t a choice.”

We were sitting at Shabbat dinner together and he asked me about my thesis topic. So, I tell him about All That’s Left, a diaspora Jewish anti-occupation collective in Israel/Palestine, and how I am interested in exploring the nexus between politics, home, belonging, etc.

“If I understand the type you are talking about correctly, I find them distasteful. They are obsessed with powerlessness,” he commented. This was not the first time I heard Jim talk about Israel/Palestine and his take on who and what is problematic within the broader political conflict. I had a sense that he might be skeptical of my topic, and was sure I would get pushback -- as I often do when I fully divulge it to fellow Jewish community members. Despite having prepared myself for a critical reaction, I was struck by his language. Powerlessness. I had not once thought to use this word to describe members of the collective and not once had the word surfaced in my conversations with them. Instead what I witnessed was the attempt to cultivate power in a way that did not succumb to the idea that power, continuity, survival and flourishing is necessarily located either in a nation state, a Jewish majority state, a state maintaining an apartheid or an occupation or a whatever-you-want-to-call-it. Another word from him that strikes: Choice. His understanding of diaspora again is negative – for most of history, “it wasn’t a choice,” meaning these places that were not in Israel were not truly the homes of these Jews, that they didn’t choose to live there so they could not experience meaning there. For
the entirety of history until the state of Israel was founded, Jews were weak victims, and in the nation, with arms, with a country and a majority they are now agents.

Jim’s understanding of diaspora is based on a discursive model that envisions diaspora as negative, equivocating everything outside of a Jewish State to oppression. Homeland, which in Jim’s discourse is tantamount to the nation-state (in this case Israel) is safety, security, survival, preservation, liberation. In this paradigm Israel then, is equated with Jewish continuity and thriving. This narrative leverages a certain historiographic approach to understanding Jewish diaspora that cements this imagination of the diaspora as Jewish death. This narrative, in which the diaspora is a site of suffering, the antithesis of home, where no one wants the Jew so the Jew does not belong, cannot belong, is useful for the state of Israel, of course, and is characteristic of political Zionism.

The word diaspora itself has undergone significant changes in its colloquial and scholarly uses in recent history. Diaspora studies, like many interdisciplinary fields, is often suspect for the “possibility that it lacks intellectual coherence,” because it aggregates several different disciplines without self-consciously defining its object of study (Tölöolyan 2007, 647) As an interdisciplinary field, the academic study of diasporas has emerged piecemeal, engaging a number of disciplines which touch upon the growing pressure of global and transnational processes brought to the fore through categories of “nation, ethnicity, race, migration, and post-colonialism (Tölöolyan 2007, 648).” The main historical moment of scholarly “consolidation of the field is marked by the publication of journal Diaspora in 1991, founded by scholar Kachig Tölöolyan. The journals title draws on the 2,500-year-old term
Diaspora to capture the ethos of broader and continual field of study concerning questions of exile, home, belonging and displacement, specifically through the lenses of the aforementioned categories of nation, ethnicity, race, migration and post-colonialism (648).

The term Diaspora derives from a Greek term used by the Jews of Alexandria around 250 BCE to describe “their own scattering away from homeland into galut, or collective exile (648).” Given that the classic definition of Diaspora persists alongside more contemporary academic uses in the context of mass dispersions, diaspora can designate a wide array of communities, which in turn multiplies the potential meanings that the category encompasses. In Global diasporas: an Introduction, Robin Cohen (2008) devotes a chapter to looking at the classical notion of diaspora as derived from the Jewish tradition, the classical definition is usually indicated through the use of a capital “D” in the title rather than a lower case one, which indicates its expanded usage. He explores different interpretations of the Jewish case after the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem, as well as how the Jewish narrative of dispersion is connected to Muslim and Christian rule in Jewish history. The first narrative of the Jewish Babylonian exile is one of negativity: “Collectively, Jews were helpless chaff in the wind. On an individual level, diaspora Jews were depicted as pathological half-persons -- destined never to realize themselves or attain completeness, tranquility or happiness so long as they were in exile (Cohen 2008, 22).”

This narrative is told and retold in “Jewish literature, art, culture, and of course, prayer (22).” Beginning with the horrors of the destruction of first temple in
Jerusalem, the Jewish narrative of exilic terror recounted in the book of Lamentations following the initial destruction is violently affirmed throughout history, be it by the crusaders, the Muslim conquest, the Spanish inquisition, programs in the Ukrainian countryside, the Holocaust and more. Additionally, the narrative lives in Jewish texts and rituals, such as the practice of breaking a glass at weddings to remember the Temple’s destruction, singing the Aramaic song “Had Gadya” on Passover, which is an extended metaphor for the persistent woes that struck the Jewish people. The list goes on.

The emic literary and historical discourse on Jewish persecution and displacement paints is the one Jim taps into, in which Diaspora as a horrifying site in which powerlessness is the absence of autonomy over one’s destiny (Cohen, 22-23). In addition to the political and identarian biases behind this memory of diaspora, there are economic agendas embedded as well. The international, especially North American, Jewish diaspora has been financially critical to the Zionist project. Who better than American Jews, full of guilt for what is happening in Europe and with a strong investment in Jewish preservation, to fund this expensive settler project? By transforming Jews around the world into part of an Israeli diaspora, a people away from a homeland that can now, or soon hopefully be returned to24 the Zionist project links Jewishness with the new idea for and soon reality of the state of Israel. Today, people casually use the term diaspora to refer to all Jews outside of the state of Israel.

For someone like Jim, the Zionist collective memory gets streamlined as a generic, all-encompassing way to envision Jewishness. In this sense, I understand

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24 The language of return speaks from within Zionist discourse.
Israeli national memory of Jewish history and identity as threatening the intricacies through which Jewish home, belonging and communal vitality has and does take form. Both scholarly and emic Jewish discourses draw on divergent understandings of Jewish diaspora or statelessness. On the contrary, some argue rabbinic texts referring to Zion imagined this idea of Jerusalem as a physical place to be returned to as much as a part of a symbol of collective spiritual longing, impossible to achieve. In his chapter on the Jewish case, Cohen also discusses the discursive tradition of understanding Babylon as a site of Jewish creativity (23-24). Following the tradition understanding of Diaspora as catastrophic and “not a choice” as Jim put it, Scholar Leonard Rutgers (2016) makes an argument that Jews in Roman empire were not at all a Diaspora. Using archeological, textual and historical references, he shows that the Jews of the time certainly felt at home in their dispersed communities, such as Sardis (one of his main examples), and actively chose to move farther and farther away from Jerusalem. This concept, of diaspora as not a state of exile or powerlessness is reiterated by scholars such as Paul Gilroy in his study of the Black Atlantic Diaspora and in Daniel Boyarin’s examination of the history of Jewish diaspora.

These discourses, both Jim and my discussions, and the scholarly debate attempt to solve for a definition. Some, like Rutgers, attempt to discern whether a community is or isn’t a diaspora based on whether or not their dispersion is fueled by catastrophe. Others, like Cohen, Boyarin, Gilroy and Jim seek investigate whether D(d)iaspora is prove whether or not diaspora is positive or negative, creative or
oppressive, enslaved or liberated. These tightly defined terms are operating on binaries that do not reflect the reality of Jewish dispersion or Jewish statehood.

During my research with All That’s Left activists, it is clear that their imagination of diaspora is different between different activists. Theirs are multiple. What this indicates more than anything is that they are thinking actively about what diaspora is, where Jewish home is. They are asking questions that, yes, threatens a framework in which Zionism is the only answer to Jewish persecution, oppression, or confusion about home, belonging and identity. For starters, it can at least be said that diaspora is not negative. Whatever diaspora is – whether the legal status of Jews outside a Jewish state, the condition of exile for Jews post the destruction of the temple, or the traveling, dispersed condition of Jewish peoplehood united by shared texts, conversation and memories. Diaspora for these Jews is a creative site, where statelessness can empower rather than render vulnerable, and inspire rather than only stifle.¹⁴

In practice, home and belonging and the way these experiences influence one’s politics are lived out with a lot more nuance in day-to-day life and language. Now that I have outlined the broader tensions within the academic and political employments of discourse of diaspora, as they relate to nationalist ideology, I can look at the way actual activists may live out contradicting versions of these definitions, in their connection to language, place, political community, religion, values, collective memory, which in practice are more confused and may employ contradictory political conceptions of diaspora, from one day to the next. The political
charge of these discursive strategies, which imagine pasts, futures, origins, roots and routes, is still incredibly relevant.

Diaspora for the collective, is similar to their movement. Power and strength can exist in different ways than we imagine it: dispersed, shared, through vulnerability and empathy, horizontally and with no immediate center. A Jewish diaspora becomes a unique voice, an approach that facilitates polyphonic Jewish life, no matter where the geographic location. This approach raises difficult questions about Zionism. What are the implications that its uniform, absolute conception of home has on those who are not included in the narrative? On “all peoples”? When will state power not be constructed on the backs of an oppressed “enemy”? And when will we be able to start asking these questions and thinking in collaborative, transnational, multi-perspectival ways of these concerns without being excommunicated, thrown out, demonized and de-Judaized?
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