

Beyond Sovereignty or Exile: The Limits of Exilic Jewish Politics and the Potential of Jewish Nationality

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This paper is drawn from an early iteration of a dissertation chapter. My dissertation focuses on the moral psychology of attachments to ideals of white American and Jewish citizenship and sovereignty in the United States and Israel/Palestine (respectively). Using a phenomenological approach grounded in my own identities as a white, American Jew, I consider how such attachments constitute an impediment to political responsibility and democratic politics. I focus on how this political responsibility is constituted through the political demands made on white Americans and Jews by non-white Americans and Palestinians. The project is structured through an engagement with the work of Hannah Arendt, whose theory I draw upon and extend to theorize my treatments of sovereignty, citizenship, and political responsibility.

The dissertation also explores how white Americans and Jews might begin responding to the political demands made on them. I do not impute a political duty to accept these claims tout court, but rather a political responsibility to respond to them as those made by political equals.

The goal of this chapter is to consider how recent Jewish theorizations of exile, while often used as a vehicle for imagining more equitable relations between Jews and Palestinians, can sustain a disavowal of Jewish political responsibility for the injustices perpetrated by the State of Israel and Israeli Jews. I extend Hannah Arendt's treatment of Jewish nationality to consider how it might be more amenable to political responsibility-taking and equitable binationalism more broadly.

Introduction

What are the limits of the contemporary Jewish turn to exile? Leading scholarly critics of Zionism have embraced exile to renegotiate Jewish attachments to Zionism and the State of Israel and provide an alternative framework for Jewish identity. This embrace of exile has received unprecedented public attention and support since the October 7th attacks and subsequent Israeli assault on Gaza and Lebanon.¹ This scholarly turn to exile also has an affinity with political orientations advanced by leading organizations on the American Jewish Left such as Jewish Voice for Peace, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, and Jewish Currents—which all argue for a turn towards exilic or diasporic history and experience in contradistinction to Zionism.²

In this paper, I consider how such embraces of exile can facilitate a disavowal of Jewish political responsibility for the injustices committed by the State of Israel, and I explore Jewish nationality as an alternative. I structure this argument through an engagement with Hannah Arendt's treatments of Jewish politics, written primarily between the late 1930s and early 1950s. Arendt's work is a touchstone for the theorists of exile who I explore in this paper.³ But unlike those theorists, Arendt emphasizes the possibility for Jewish nationality to sustain non-sovereign Jewish imaginaries and institutions. I draw upon Arendt's approach for my own theorization of Jewish politics. I focus my critique on exile as opposed to Diaspora (which has been deployed for similar purposes, most notably by Daniel Boyarin) because of the theological importance of exile in Jewish tradition, and because of the broader political relationship between exile and sovereignty.

The paper focuses on core writings from three leading Jewish theorists of exile: Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's "Exile Within Sovereignty," Judith Butler's *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, and Shaul Magid's *The Necessity of Exile*. These works share a common connective tissue: they emphasize how exile can enable a renegotiation of Jewish identity away

¹ See for instance: Marc Tracy, "Is Israel Part of What It Means to Be Jewish?," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2024, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/14/us/israel-jewish-america-diasporism.html>.

² "JVP's Approach to Zionism," Jewish Voice for Peace, accessed November 3, 2022, <https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/zionism/>. "Our Vision," Jewish Voice for Peace, accessed February 21, 2024, <https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/resource/our-vision/>. "Our Core Values & Principles," Jews For Racial & Economic Justice, accessed September 30, 2024, <https://www.jfrej.org/principles>. "History," Jewish Currents, accessed September 30, 2024, <https://jewishcurrents.org/history>.

³ Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Jewish Peoplehood, 'Jewish Politics,' and Political Responsibility: Arendt on Zionism and Partitions," *College Literature* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 57–74. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile and Bi-Nationalism: From Gershom Scholem to Edward Said," in *Carl Heinrich Becker Lecture* (Berlin, Germany, 2011). Shaul Magid, "Introduction," in *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance* (Brooklyn: Ayin Press, 2023), 16. Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, *New Directions in Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 114–50.

from Zionism and in so doing, sustain a recognition of Palestinian claims and a more equitable, binational future.⁴ Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler, and Magid use exile to challenge the “negation of exile” (שלילת הגלות)—the foundational precept of Zionist ideology that imagines Jewish return to, settlement in, and sovereignty over the Land of Israel as preconditions for Jewish emancipation.⁵ Exile, by contrast, is said to offer a notion of Jewishness not polluted by Jewish sovereignty.

As a framework for transnational Jewish politics, exile is insufficient on two counts. Firstly, as a political futurity, exile is underdetermined: it lacks a normative relationship to both a Jewish futurity of/in Israel/Palestine generally and to the institutions of Jewish sovereignty specifically. Instead, it is amenable to a range of outcomes: the renewal of Jewish sovereignty, a democratic binational state, or the physical departure of Jews from Israel/Palestine. Secondly, and perhaps for this reason, Raz-Krakotzkin, Magid, and Butler do not consider the contemporary relationship between sovereignty and exile in Jewish politics in their theorizations of exile. Yet it is immaterial to speak of any contemporary Jewish experience of exile today, given that any Jewish experience of political non-sovereignty since 1948 is tempered by the promise of political rights affirmed by the State of Israel’s Law of Return.⁶

These two outcomes are inborn effects of how these theorists use exile to dissociate Jewishness from Zionism and to reject Zionism and the State of Israel’s claims on Jewish identity.⁷ Yet as a result, they ignore how the very notion of exile they seek to recover no longer exists. As a result, their approaches can sustain a disavowal of Jewish political responsibility. By political responsibility, I mean what Hannah Arendt defines as a responsibility for wrongdoing that we have not directly committed, but which we hold on the basis of an ascriptive identity.⁸

⁴ Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty: Critique of ‘The Negation of Exile’ in Israeli Culture,” in *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty*, ed. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr, Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept (Columbia University Press, 2017), 395–96, <https://doi.org/10.7312/beni17186.23>. Magid, “Introduction,” 19–23. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 180, 215–16.

⁵ Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty,” 393–95. See also: Eliezer Schweid, “The Rejection of the Diaspora in Zionist Thought: Two Approaches,” *Studies in Zionism* 5, no. 1 (1984): 43–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13531048408575854>.

⁶ “Israel’s Law of Return,” accessed November 5, 2024, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-s-law-of-return>.

⁷ This is a central point of Julie Cooper’s critique of Boyarin and Butler’s embrace of Diaspora: in effect, that they focus on Jewish identity rather than the institutions of sovereignty. Julie E. Cooper, “A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism: The Question of Jewish Political Agency,” *Political Theory* 43, no. 1 (2015): 80–110, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591714543858>.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” in *Responsibility and Judgement*, ed. Jerome Kohn (Schocken Books, 2003), 149.

Embracing Jewish nationality does not mean accepting its present relationship to anti-Palestinian expulsion and Jewish sovereignty. Instead, a turn to nationality might provide a framework for helping Jews relinquish their investments in Jewish sovereignty. My use of nationality is grounded in an awareness of how the State of Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza has failed to loosen Israeli and Diaspora Jewish attachments to Zionism and the State of Israel. Nationality can allow Jews to respond to the injustices committed by the State of Israel, as well as the demands of Palestinians, on the terms they are addressed to us.

I realize that foregrounding notions of Jewish nationality to facilitate non-sovereign politics may seem counterintuitive, or even misguided, to those who argue that Jews are not a nation, that the very concept of Jewish nationhood is anti-Jewish, or that any conception of Jewish nationality is an obstacle to Palestinian liberation and justice. But in this moment of catastrophe, Jewish nationality can provide an alternative political grammar that, compared to exile, is more amenable to political imaginaries and institutions that disconnect Jewish emancipation from its current relationship to anti-Palestinian dispossession, expulsion, and genocide.⁹

A Note on Terminology:

Diaspora and exile are etymologically linked in Hebrew (*golah* and *galut*, respectively), thematically connecting Jewish geographic dispersion to the political experience of non-sovereignty. I use Diaspora and exile in related, but not interchangeable, ways. By Diaspora or diasporic, I refer to the empirical reality of Jewish dispersion around the world. By exile or exilic, I refer to the political experience of non-sovereignty—be it in the Land of Israel or in the Diaspora. I also understand exile to denote a broader, Jewish sociocultural orientation. Raz-Krakotzkin terms this orientation an exilic “consciousness” which “guides the existence of the Jew as a member in a minority group that criticizes the basic assumptions of the dominant majority.”¹⁰ Seen in this

⁹ I take the notion of political “grammar” from Bashir Bashir, who emphasizes it in his work on binationalism and on Holocaust and Nakba memory in Israel/Palestine. See: Bashir Bashir, “The Strengths and Weaknesses of Integrative Solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *The Middle East Journal* 70, no. 4 (2016): 577, <https://doi.org/10.3751/70.4.13>.

¹⁰ Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty,” 397. I have found Aron Wander’s reading of Raz-Krakotzkin to be helpful on this point, as well. Aron Wander, “In Search of an Exiled Past: A Review of Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin’s *Toda’at Mishnah, Toda’at Mikra*,” *The Lehrhaus*, July 12, 2024, <https://thelehrhaus.com/commentary/in-search-of-an-exiled-past-a-review-of-amnon-raz-krakotzkis-todaat-mishnah-todaat-mikra/>, <https://thelehrhaus.com/commentary/in-search-of-an-exiled-past-a-review-of-amnon-raz-krakotzkis-todaat-mishnah-todaat-mikra/>.

light, the experience of non-sovereignty sustained a Jewish political, cultural, and theological orientation in the Diaspora.

Additionally, I use the term “Jewishness,” introduced by Arendt and utilized by Butler, to refer to a broader, more political notion of Jewish identity, beyond Judaism qua religion, that also resists Zionist and antisemitic impulses to read Jewish identity through a racial lens.¹¹ I use the term “Land of Israel” when discussing the Jewish religious/theological conception of the land, “Israel/Palestine” when referring to the political territory between the Mediterranean River and Jordan River, and “State of Israel” when considering the political regime which presently exercises political sovereignty over the entirety of that territory. Finally, I define Zionism as an ideology and political movement that today positions state sovereignty as the defining solution to antisemitism and Jewish emancipation.¹²

Part I: Theorizing Contemporary Jewish Politics and Political Responsibility

The State of Israel’s Claims on Jewishness:

The historical shift from exile to sovereignty, and the claims the State of Israel makes on Jewish identity and nationality, are the foundation for my engagement with Arendt and my contention that Jews in both Israel/Palestine and the Diaspora carry a political responsibility for the state and its actions. Any theorization of Jewish politics and nationality today must consider the relationship between the State of Israel and Jewish political rights in both Israel/Palestine and the Diaspora. The establishment of the State of Israel marks a structural shift of Jewish identity and politics in both locales. In the Israeli Declaration of Independence, and more recently in the 2018 Nation-State Basic Law, the state defined itself as the nation-state of the Jewish people. The former “declare[d] the establishment of a Jewish state,” while the latter formally defined the State of Israel as “the national home of the Jewish people, in which it fulfills its natural, cultural, religious, and historical right to self-determination.”¹³ Both of these texts constitute direct claims by the state on Judaism, Jewishness, and the Jewish people.

¹¹ Butler, *Parting Ways*, 14. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 66.

¹² This reading of sovereignty and Zionism is informed by Julie Cooper and Shaul Magid’s treatments of both subjects. Cooper, “A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism,” 101. Magid, “Introduction.” Shaul Magid, “How to Separate Jewishness from Zionism: Or, Israel after Zionism,” in *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance* (Brooklyn: Ayin Press, 2023), 93.

¹³ “The Avalon Project : Declaration of Israel’s Independence 1948,” accessed October 24, 2024, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/israel.asp. Raoul Wootliff, “Final Text of Jewish Nation-State Law,

It is critical to consider how these claims alter the structure of Jewish politics and attendant notions of exile. The Israeli Declaration of Independence proclaimed the state would “be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles”¹⁴ (גלויות מדינת ישראל תהא פתוחה לעלייה (יהודית ולקיבוץ גלויות)). This specific phrase, “Ingathering of the Exiles,” harkens back to biblical promises from God to the Israelites; it constitutes a Zionist claim on Jewishness through the *literal* negation of exile.¹⁵ This claim cannot be dismissed as either rhetorical or aspirational. Rather, it is affirmed by the promise of citizenship provided in the Law of Return.¹⁶ As a result, Jewish sovereignty shifts exile from a sociopolitical reality into a memory from the pre-1948 past. The contemporary condition of Diaspora Jews is thus (at best) one of contingent non-sovereignty, conditioned by the promise of Israeli citizenship. Similarly, Israeli Jews enjoy citizenship in a state that defines itself as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

Arendt’s Theorization of Jewish Politics and Political Responsibility:

In a series of lectures and essays after the *Eichmann* trial, Arendt articulated political responsibility as an acceptance of responsibility for actions one has *not* done, but which have been committed in the name or by a member of an ascriptive community of which we are a member.¹⁷ Arendt further framed political responsibility as a precondition of politics: this “vicarious responsibility for things we have not done,” she wrote, “is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves...and that the faculty of action, which, after all, is the political faculty par excellence, can be actualized only in one of the many and manifold forms of human community.”¹⁸ A notable contradistinction to her more individualist account of action in *The Human Condition*, Arendt’s treatment of political responsibility here positions group identity—and accepting responsibility for deeds others have committed in the name of an identity we hold—as a condition of politics.¹⁹

Approved by the Knesset Early on July 19,” *Times of Israel*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/final-text-of-jewish-nation-state-bill-set-to-become-law/>.

¹⁴ “The Avalon Project : Declaration of Israel’s Independence 1948.”

¹⁵ “Deuteronomy 30 / Hebrew - English Bible / Mechon-Mamre,” accessed October 24, 2024, <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0530.htm>.

¹⁶ “Israel’s Law of Return.”

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” in *Responsibility and Judgement* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 27–28, 44–48. Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” 149.

¹⁸ Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” 157–58.

¹⁹ See for instance: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 175–81.

This normative account of political responsibility builds on Arendt's earlier treatments of Jewish politics and responsibility.²⁰ Her maxim that "if one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew," is suggestive of the importance of both group identity and political responsibility for Jewish politics.²¹ She critiqued Jewish assimilationists in Europe for forgoing "that measure of political responsibility their origin implied," suggesting, as in the previous quote, a notion of political responsibility predicated on how ascriptive identity conditions how we are addressed by others.²² Assimilation, she argued, was predicated upon the "premise of a host people who form a totally unified, undifferentiated organism. The goal is integration into this organism."²³ Assimilationism reified myths of European national homogeneity and denied the fundamental position of Jews as national minorities that emerged in Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries.²⁴

As an alternative, Arendt argued that European Jews should become "conscious pariahs," who used a recognition of their marginalized status as the basis of their entry into politics.²⁵ On the precipice of the Holocaust in 1940, she imagined that Jews might yet use their national minority status to integrate into a future federated Europe. "Our only chance" as Jews in Europe, she argued then, "lies in new European federal system...There may soon come a time when the idea of belonging to a territory is replaced by the idea of belonging to a commonwealth of nations...that means European politics—while at the same time all nationalities are maintained."²⁶ Arendt saw promise in such an approach not because of a normative commitment to federal politics, but because such institutions could address the structural vulnerabilities Jews faced as a national minority.

But today, the figure of the "conscious pariah" no longer reflects the political status of Jews in either Israel/Palestine or the Diaspora. Politically speaking, the "conscious pariah" was

²⁰ Cooper also notes the importance of political responsibility in Arendt's treatment of Jewish politics. Cooper, "A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism," 88.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, "'What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation With Gunter Gaus," in *The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2013), 20.

²² Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 83.

²³ Hannah Arendt, "Antisemitism," in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 53.

²⁴ Arendt, 53.

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 283–86. See also Richard Bernstein's account of Arendt's approach to Jewish political responsibility. Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 37–38, 55–59. Finally, Arendt's maxim has an elective affinity with Sartre's notion of the "authentic" Jew who accepts their "condition as Jew" and "asserts his claim" on this basis. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 91.

²⁶ Hannah Arendt, "The Minority Question," in *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 129–30.

predicated on Jews' national minority status in Europe, and the opportunity this status provided for Jews to ally with other minority and stateless people.²⁷ Arendt advocated for this approach because it relied upon a recognition of Jews' status—rather than a denial of it (as in the assimilationist approach). Taking Arendt's notion of political responsibility seriously now, however, suggests the need to rearticulate our conception of Jewish politics by considering how Jewish sovereignty informs the position of Jews in both Israel/Palestine and the Diaspora.

Julie Cooper's generative critique of Butler and Boyarin gestures to the need for such theorizing. Cooper focuses on how Arendt's treatment of Jewish politics generally, and her critique of Zionism and Jewish sovereignty specifically, stemmed from her understanding that Zionism constructed a (misguided) political diagnosis about the ability of Jewish sovereignty to facilitate Jewish emancipation and politics.²⁸ Both before and after 1948, Arendt repeatedly worried that a Jewish state would overwhelm Jewish politics in Israel/Palestine by subordinating distinct Jewish interests in the Diaspora into the defense and maintenance of Jewish sovereignty.²⁹ After the war, she argued that sovereignty would overwhelm the “nonnationalist, antichauvinist trend” in Zionism that she identified in the kibbutzim and Hebrew University—and which she saw as holding great promise for Jewish politics.³⁰ In *Origins*, Arendt identified Zionism as “the only political answer Jews have ever found to antisemitism.”³¹ But she worried this politics would be overwhelmed by the antipolitical demands of sovereignty.³²

Arendt argued that Jewish sovereignty would engender nationalist balkanization in the Middle East, corrode the fabric of Israeli-Jewish society and politics, lead Jews to weaponize the Jewish “concept of the chosen people and allow its meaning to degenerate into hopeless vulgarity,”

²⁷ Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition,” 275–76, 283–86.

²⁸ Cooper, “A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism,” 87–89.

²⁹ Hannah Arendt, “Zionism Reconsidered,” in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 372–74. Hannah Arendt, “To Save the Jewish Homeland,” in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (Schocken Books, 2007), 396–97, 400–401. Hannah Arendt, “Peace or Armistice in the Near East?,” in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 446–50.

³⁰ Arendt, “Peace or Armistice in the Near East?,” 441–43.

³¹ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 120. See also Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin and Richard Bernstein's treatments of Arendt's critique of Zionism. Both read her as seeing Zionism as carrying significant promise for its political promise, but being misguided by a focus on sovereignty. Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile and Bi-Nationalism: From Gershom Scholem to Edward Said,” 109–19. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, 59.

³² In *The Human Condition*, Arendt identified a tension between sovereignty and plurality that colors a reading of sovereignty as antipolitical. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 234–35.

and destroy the relationship between Diaspora and Israeli Jews.³³ By lionizing Zionism's political engagement while disputing its conclusions, Arendt's approach eschews normative commitments to any one institutional outcome but instead points towards the importance of foregrounding the contemporary status of Jews in Israel/Palestine and the Diaspora. To this point, Raz-Krakotzkin interprets Arendt's approach to politics as one where, "in the name of responsibility... the return to reality and to historical context" is critical.³⁴ It is for these reasons that Arendt opposed Jewish statehood and advocated for a Jewish-Palestinian confederation in Israel/Palestine within a broader Middle East federation even after 1948.³⁵ She contended that this approach was more promising for sustaining the accomplishments of the Yishuv (Hebrew University, the kibbutzim, the revitalization of Jewish culture) because it tethered Jewish rights and emancipation to that of their Palestinian and Arab neighbors.³⁶ She argued that such an approach might alleviate the demands of sovereignty and offer more promise for Jewish emancipation.

Part II: The Turn to Exile or, Recovering Jewishness from Zionism

While at times drawing on Arendt, Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler, and Magid's turns to exile are all animated by a very different impulse. Rather than focusing on Jewish freedom as such, they prioritize recovering a notion of Jewish *identity* not polluted by Zionism or the State of Israel. Cooper argues that Butler's focus on theorizing a non-Zionist Jewish identity elides more crucial questions about the institutional future of Jewish politics.³⁷ My concern, however, is less about the focus on identity as such and more about a crucial shared political assumption in all of their works on exile: that it is possible and preferable to use exile to recover a notion of Jewish identity entirely dissociated from Zionism. It is not the impulse to renegotiate Jewishness, but rather the desire to divorce Jewishness from Zionism, that circumscribes the political imaginaries these theorists develop through their accounts of exile.

³³ Arendt, "Peace or Armistice in the Near East?," 450. Arendt, "Zionism Reconsidered," 372–73. Arendt, "To Save the Jewish Homeland," 396–97, 399–401.

³⁴ Raz-Krakotzkin, "Jewish Peoplehood, 'Jewish Politics,' and Political Responsibility: Arendt on Zionism and Partitions," 65.

³⁵ Arendt, "Peace or Armistice in the Near East?," 446–50.

³⁶ Arendt, 450.

³⁷ Cooper, "A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism," 82.

Negation of Exile and the Redefinition of Jewishness:

To situate their dissociation of Jewishness from Zionism, Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler, and Magid each emphasize how Zionism redefined Jewish identity through the negation of exile theory in terms hostile to the pre-Zionist, exilic formulation of Jewishness.

According to Raz-Krakotzkin, one of the foundational critics of the theory, negation of exile frames exile as a period of Jewish “passivity,” political subordination, and cultural emptiness ahead of the inevitable return to the land.³⁸ He notes how the theory appropriates traditional Jewish theology that tethers a Jewish return to the Land of Israel to the arrival of the Messiah by framing Zionist settlement and sovereignty as actualizing this messianic promise.³⁹ In this way, negation of exile positions Zionism as *both* the overturning of exilic Jewishness *and* the actualization of Jewish redemption. As a result, Raz-Krakotzkin argues that negation of exile animates the nationalization of Jewish identity through Zionism.⁴⁰ Exilic Jewishness is a theological and political obstacle to national sovereignty because its dialogic structure impedes any conception of Judaism as a closed sociocultural or political framework.⁴¹

Building on Raz-Krakotzkin, Magid focuses on how negation of exile inverts the traditional theological conception of exile as something that can be experienced in the Land of Israel: Jewish sovereignty was impossible in the Land of Israel because it belonged to God.⁴² Instead, negation of exile sustains a Zionist approach that Magid argues secularizes the Jewish relationship to the land and weaponizes Jewish messianism to rationalize nationalist sovereignty.⁴³

Butler also alludes to Zionism’s redefinition of Jewishness through negation of exile, critiquing Zionism’s emphasis on “*galut* as a fallen realm.”⁴⁴ In contradistinction to the Zionist formulation of Jewish identity, Butler argues that Jewishness is “an anti-identitarian project insofar as we might even say that being a Jew implies taking up an ethical relation to the non-Jew, and this follows from the diasporic condition of Jewishness where living in a socially plural world under conditions of equality remains an ethical and political ideal.”⁴⁵ Butler imputes to Jewishness

³⁸ Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty,” 393–95.

³⁹ Raz-Krakotzkin, 398–99, 403–4.

⁴⁰ Raz-Krakotzkin, 400–401.

⁴¹ Raz-Krakotzkin, 400–401.

⁴² Shaul Magid, “Who Owns the Holy Land? Thoughts on Homeland, Rights, and Ownership,” in *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance* (Brooklyn: Ayin Press, 2023), 135–37.

⁴³ Magid, 143–54.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Parting Ways*, 15.

⁴⁵ Butler, 117.

an ethics that emerges from the empirical experience of living with non-Jews (an experience Butler terms diasporic, not exilic). As a result, Butler concludes that “if Jewishness mandates this departure from communitarian belonging, then ‘to belong’ is to undergo a dispossession from the category of Jewishness.” For Butler—and for Raz-Krakotzkin—the very project of Zionism qua Jewish nationalism is anti-Jewish.⁴⁶ The Zionist movement’s utilization of negation of exile signals the emergence of a nationality and nationalism that, while Jewish in name, is (in Raz-Krakotzkin’s words) actually the “negation of ‘Judaism.’”⁴⁷

This is a challenging intellectual maneuver given how central Zionism is to Jewish identity and politics today. Magid notes how an attachment to Jewish sovereignty has become foundational for the self-definition of Diaspora Jews: for him, the growing importance of Zionism to Jewish identity is not limited to only avowed supporters of the State of Israel. Instead, he suggests that irrespective of their discrete feelings towards the Jewish state, Jewish Zionists and anti-Zionists alike have accepted the centrality of the Jewish state to Jewish politics, culture, and life in the Diaspora. Despite radically different feelings about the State of Israel, their political orientations both position a relationship to Jewish sovereignty as foundational to Jewish political identity.⁴⁸ Raz-Krakotzkin, meanwhile, identifies the centrality of negation of exile for Israeli Jewish identity; he argues that it is the “central axis...that defines the self-consciousness of the Jews of Israel.”⁴⁹ The turn to exile, then, is meant to offer an alternative framework for Jewish identity that refutes Zionism and the State of Israel’s claims on Jewishness. In the following sub-sections, I show how Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler, and Magid each use exile in this way.

‘Shelter’ in the Land: Raz-Krakotzkin’s Exilic Binationalism

Raz-Krakotzkin’s efforts are a groundwork for both Butler and Magid; his critique of negation of exile in “Exile Within Sovereignty” emphasizes the harm caused by Zionism’s erasure of exilic Jewishness and the potential of a return to exilic Jewishness. Originally published in Hebrew in 1993, the article was only translated into English in 2017. The limits of negation of exile, and therefore the potential of a return to exile, is that the dialogic framework of exilic

⁴⁶ Butler, 127. Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty,” 399.

⁴⁷ Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty,” 399.

⁴⁸ Shaul Magid, “Does the Left Have to Fail to Succeed? Today’s Progressivism through the Lens of 1960s Radicalism” (Boston University Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, Boston, MA, May 3, 2024), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkUMzapLRJs&t=713s>.

⁴⁹ Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty,” 393.

Jewishness means it is challenging to define Jewishness on the basis of nationalism as “a complete cultural framework given to examination as an autonomous system beyond the cultural contexts in which it existed and participated.”⁵⁰ Raz-Krakotzkin uses this discontinuity between the exilic and national formulations of Jewishness to animate his return to exile.

To accomplish this return, he looks to Walter Benjamin and imagines a “Benjaminian turn” to the exilic past. Such a “turn” might recover the dialogic nature of exilic Jewish experience and advance Jewish acknowledgement of Palestinian national claims. Exile, then, becomes a vehicle for Jews to renegotiate their relationship to the Land of Israel, to themselves, and to Palestinians. It would displace sovereignty by offering a theological—not political—relationship to the Land of Israel, amenable to the idea of “shelter.” This is an approach that Raz-Krakotzkin believes can ground Jewish presence in the land in a manner not predicated on sovereignty.⁵¹ He argues that in so doing, exile might allow for a Jewish “recognition of [Palestinians] as part of the self and enables equal dialogue; it leaves behind the concept of the Land as an expression of yearning in a way that dismantles the existing messianic baggage and demands remembrance.”⁵² I read this as an exilic binationalism—but one that is not reducible to specific institutional outcomes. The binationalism Raz-Krakotzkin describes in this article is “is not the call for the wanted type of political solution,” he writes.⁵³ Rather it is a “*moral position*” (emphasis original).⁵⁴

This reading of binationalism contrasts with Raz-Krakotzkin’s later engagements with Arendt on the subject. His turn to exile, though, animates a binationalism qua moral sensibility that prioritizes individual consciousness and identity.⁵⁵ Indeed, the extra-institutional focus of Raz-Krakotzkin’s work is evident in the very title. “Exile *Within* Sovereignty” (emphasis mine) suggests a compatibility between the exilic sensibility Raz-Krakotzkin imagines and the institutions of Jewish sovereignty. Raz-Krakotzkin’s overarching focus in the article, therefore, is to emphasize the discontinuity between exilic Jewishness and Zionism’s rendition of Jewish nationality, and to use the former to sustain a new Jewish political orientation towards Palestinians.

⁵⁰ Raz-Krakotzkin, 401.

⁵¹ Raz-Krakotzkin, 416.

⁵² Raz-Krakotzkin, 417.

⁵³ Raz-Krakotzkin, 416. The only exception is partition, which Raz-Krakotzkin frames as hostile to the moral premises of binationalism. See also: Raz-Krakotzkin, “Jewish Peoplehood, ‘Jewish Politics,’ and Political Responsibility: Arendt on Zionism and Partitions.”

⁵⁴ Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile Within Sovereignty,” 416.

⁵⁵ Raz-Krakotzkin, 411.

Cohabitation as ‘Convergent Exiles’: Butler’s Exilic Jewishness

Extending Raz-Krakotzkin’s exilic formulation of binationalism, Butler also uses exile to renegotiate Jewishness away from Zionism’s nationalist dimensions. Butler imagines how the shared experiences of exile for both Palestinians and Jews could ground a non-nationalist cohabitation between the two.⁵⁶ Unlike Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler uses both Diaspora and exile in their critique, and they emphasize an idea of dispersion as core to the Jewishness they seek to recover.⁵⁷

But exile is central to the anti-national Jewish ethics Butler envisions.⁵⁸ Exile can ground a more equitable binationalism, Butler argues, insofar as Jews are able to “set aside their Jewishness in any account of citizenship and the rights of refugees; paradoxically and crucially, they could most easily engage in this setting aside by drawing precisely on their own exilic histories in order to extrapolate a set of principles that would defend, without qualification, the rights of all minorities and refugees.”⁵⁹ Butler’s binationalism rests on the non-sovereignty of exile.⁶⁰ This is a binationalism oriented around Jewish-Palestinian “cohabitation...understood as a form of convergent exiles.”⁶¹ Like Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler turns to Benjamin to consider how memory might activate this embrace of exile. For Butler, this is a “flashing up” of the repressed, exilic Jewish past that, if recovered, could facilitate a Jewish acknowledgement of Zionist anti-Palestinian violence.⁶² Such a “flashing up” might allow for Jews and Palestinians to “establish principles of social justice on the basis of converging and resonant histories of dispossession.”⁶³

Butler’s exilic binationalism is constitutively anti-nationalist; indeed, it must be so given Butler’s conclusion that Jewishness is a constitutively “anti-identitarian” category that resists any essentialization beyond dialogic relations between Jews and non-Jews.⁶⁴ This conclusion significantly extends Raz-Krakotzkin’s reading of exilic Judaism. While Raz-Krakotzkin sees Judaism as contingent upon through a dialogue with non-Jews, Butler reduces Jewishness to such

⁵⁶ Butler, *Parting Ways*, 180, 205.

⁵⁷ Butler, 5. Cooper, for instance, reads Butler’s critique as primarily oriented around Diaspora—not exile. But I think this reading elides the crucial importance of exile for Butler’s imagined binationalism. Cooper, “A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism,” 84.

⁵⁸ See for instance: Butler, *Parting Ways*, 180, 215.

⁵⁹ Butler, 215.

⁶⁰ Butler, 15.

⁶¹ Butler, 121.

⁶² Butler, 99–113.

⁶³ Butler, 113.

⁶⁴ Butler, 117.

dialogue itself—and the ethics they impute from said dialogue. As a result, Butler imagines that Jews could divorce their sense of self from its present reification through Jewish sovereignty by “drawing precisely on their own exilic histories in order to extrapolate a set of principles that would defend, without qualification, the rights of all minorities and refugees.”⁶⁵ This is a binationalism that uses memories of exile to reject Zionism’s claims on Jewishness.

‘Exile in the Land’: Magid’s Turn to Exile

Finally, Magid engages religious and secular Jewish treatments of exile to anchor a “counter-Zionism” that facilitates a “humble and non-proprietary Jewish relationship to the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.”⁶⁶ Magid believes exile can rehabilitate a Jewish relationship to the land outside the institutional bounds of sovereignty (which in turn could enable equitable relations with Palestinians). Magid hopes Jews can transcend Zionism without delegitimizing the Jewish homeland—a project to which I am sympathetic. By focusing on how exile was a defining attribute of the pre-Zionist Jewish theological relationship to the Land of Israel, he hopes that returning to such a sensibility could allow Jews to relinquish their commitments to sovereignty.

Magid harnesses the theological dimensions of exile to imagine it as a “phenomenological category and even an existential posture or state of being in the world” that allows Jews to transcend the present centrality of Zionism for Jewish identity and politics.⁶⁷ To do this, Magid, like Raz-Krakotzkin and Butler, uses exile to dispute Zionism’s claims on Jewish identity, culture, and religion. Interpreting the post-Zionist rabbi and Israeli settler Rav Shagar’s treatment of exile, for instance, Magid examines how exile can rearticulate the Jewish relationship to the Land of Israel such that it acknowledges Palestinians and, in so doing, allows for a Jewish homeland predicated on a “broken, exilic state.”⁶⁸

Magid presumes an inherent affinity between exile and non-sovereign Jewish politics and institutions. His personal preferred institutional outcome is a transformation of the State of Israel

⁶⁵ Butler, 215.

⁶⁶ Magid, “Introduction,” 19.

⁶⁷ Magid, 21.

⁶⁸ Shaul Magid, “Exile in the Land: The Religious Post-Zionism of Rav Shagar,” in *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance* (Brooklyn: Ayin Press, 2023), 214, 222, 232.

into a “liberal democracy, ‘a state of all its citizens.’”⁶⁹ But he does not discuss how a turn to exile might facilitate the emergence of such a polity.

This lacuna is indicative of a disjuncture between exile and Jewish political institutions; it is particularly clear in Magid’s treatment of Shagar. An Israeli settler, Shagar’s exilic critique comes from the perspective of religious-nationalist Zionism; it is informed in part by the violence perpetrated by the Israeli military against Israeli settlers during the 2005 Gaza disengagement.⁷⁰ Exile disrupts Zionism’s monopoly over Jewish messianism and offers an alternative theology that does not collapse the theological relationship to the Land of Israel into nationalism.⁷¹ But, crucially, Shagar imagines exile *renewing* Jewish sovereignty.⁷² He supports the expansion of Jewish settlements under a reformulated Jewish sovereignty that “inaugurates a new phase of exile...a nation-state with an ethos of exile, a state that embodies ‘justice and compassion.’”⁷³

To be sure, Magid himself does not advocate for a renewal of Jewish sovereignty through an aegis of exile. But his treatment of Shagar illuminates how a theological turn to exile that dissociates Jewishness from Zionism carries a more underdetermined political futurity than he himself acknowledges.

Part III: Exile as Disavowal

By prioritizing a critique of Zionism and the State of Israel’s claims on Jewishness, Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler, and Magid’s treatments of exile elide both the substance of these claims themselves and the political implications of Jewish sovereignty for Jews’ political status in both Israel/Palestine and the Diaspora. In attempting to recover exile from the Jewish past, they fail to analyze how the memory of exile is itself conditioned by the sovereign present. As a result, their formulations of exile are vulnerable to facilitating a disavowal of Zionism’s claims on Jewishness—and by extension, a disavowal of Jewish political rights guaranteed by the State of Israel and political responsibility for responsibility anti-Palestinian dispossession and genocide.

⁶⁹ Magid, “Introduction,” 19.

⁷⁰ Magid, “Exile in the Land: The Religious Post-Zionism of Rav Shagar,” 225.

⁷¹ Magid, 215.

⁷² Magid, 214–26.

⁷³ Magid, 226, 228.

I do not think that Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler, or Magid seek such a disavowal. Raz-Krakotzkin, for instance, considers how Jewish sovereignty is predicated on *Palestinian* exile.⁷⁴ Moreover, he has recently distanced himself from the idea of exile altogether. Instead, he now advocates for a more explicit theorization of the institutional future of Jewish politics. “There is a state,” he declared in a lecture this summer, “and we can’t ignore it in the name of future arrangements, or to escape from our responsibility to the state and its deeds.”⁷⁵ Rejecting the distinction between Zionism and Judaism, he argues that a focus on exile elides discussions about the future of Israeli Jews and the State of Israel—discussions that, in his mind, are constitutively binational and thus animated by Jewish complicity in the ongoing genocide in Gaza.⁷⁶ Raz-Krakotzkin’s shift illuminates how embraces of exile predicated on the dissociation of Jewishness from Zionism can impede a substantive analysis of Zionism’s political diagnosis of Jewish sovereignty as a condition for Jewish emancipation and ending antisemitism.

A political theory that considers how Zionism and the State of Israel’s claims on Jewishness condition the meaning of exile today might be able to resolve this issue. Indeed, such a theory might be able to examine how exile can be recovered *despite* these claims. Yet these are precisely the challenges that Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler, and Magid leave unaddressed because they remain invested in recovering a notion of exilic Jewishness unpolluted by Zionism. As a result, such approaches do not offer a determinate futurity regarding the institutions of Jewish sovereignty, the fate of the Jewish homeland, or the frameworks that might institutionalize exilic renditions of Jewishness.

Disavowal and Political Responsibility:

Accordingly, embraces of exile can sustain a Jewish disavowal of political responsibility. By disavowal, I mean a process in which a dominant group acknowledges histories or present realities of injustice but use that acknowledgement to deny political responsibility for that injustice. As theorized by scholars of white supremacy and settler-colonialism, disavowal allows dominant groups to position themselves as politically innocent for injustice—at times even through the guise

⁷⁴ Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile and Bi-Nationalism: From Gershom Scholem to Edward Said,” 93. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “The Question of Israel and the Urgency of Binational Thinking” (Between State and Exile: Rethinking Jewish Politics, Katholische Akademie Berlin, June 23, 2024), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXjcu8VLIP8&t=4099s>.

⁷⁵ Raz-Krakotzkin, “The Question of Israel and the Urgency of Binational Thinking.”

⁷⁶ Raz-Krakotzkin.

of solidarity.⁷⁷ Jennie Ikuta, for instance, draws on James Baldwin to theorize white Americans' disavowal as a "form of denial; not a denial of the historical fact of slavery or that its legacies have shaped the advantages of present-day white Americans. Rather, it is a denial that white Americans are politically responsible for changing a world in which they illegitimately benefit as a result of past injustices."⁷⁸

Ikuta's formulation illuminates how disavowal can allow dominant groups to use an acknowledgment of injustice to justify their retreat from any commitment to remediation. This is a disavowal of political responsibility understood in the Arendtian formulation of the term.⁷⁹ By instrumentalizing exile to recover a Jewishness not stained by Zionism, these theories reject a formulation of political responsibility predicated on a recognition of one's political position and the demands issued by others on this basis. Exile is meant to enable Jewish acknowledgement of Zionism's harm to Palestinians. But it does so by eliding the structural position of Jews as sovereign citizens (or, in the case of Diaspora Jews, those with the right to such citizenship).

In "Peace or Armistice in the Near East?", Arendt's last major work on Jewish politics before *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the only one written after the 1948 War (it was written in 1950), she gestured towards how the establishment of the State of Israel shifted political responsibility. She argued that "for more than twenty-five years, Jews and Arabs have made perfectly incompatible claims on each other." Arendt read this as a "mutual refusal to take each other seriously."⁸⁰ This "refusal" is suggestive of a Jewish disavowal of claims made by Palestinians on them (and vice versa). Indeed, according to Arendt, the logic of these Jewish claims was based on the idea that Jews deserved "a right of the wrongs of two thousand years, and, more specifically, for the catastrophe of European Jewry." She argued that such claims were "nationalistic because they make sense only in the closed framework of one's own people and history."⁸¹ Arendt's worries

⁷⁷ Tuck and Yang, for instance, discuss "settler moves to innocence," which are psychological "strategies or positionings" that enable the relief of "feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege." There is also an affinity with Charles Mills' "epistemology of ignorance." Mills shows how such ignorance allows Whites to obscure the objective realities of domination and instead cognitively inhabit a "racial fantasyland." Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 10. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 18.

⁷⁸ Jennie C. Ikuta, "On the Uses of Acknowledgment for Injustice: Disavowal and Deflection in Baldwin's Thought," *Polity* 54, no. 3 (2022): 442, <https://doi.org/10.1086/719707>.

⁷⁹ Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," 27–28, 44–48. Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," 149.

⁸⁰ Arendt, "Peace or Armistice in the Near East?," 429.

⁸¹ Arendt, 430.

are not grounded in a concern about disavowal as such, but in how the Jewish disavowal of Palestinian claims undermines Jewish politics. She recognized how this disavowal might allow Jews to ignore their position within the political environment of Israel/Palestine and the Middle East—an ignorance that could rationalize Jewish sovereignty at the expense of Jewish emancipation.⁸²

This approach implicitly accepts Zionism and the State of Israel's claims on Jewishness. Raz-Krakotzkin, Magid and Butler's inability to do so in their accounts of exile, though, leads them to ignore the kinds of political futurities made possible by Arendt's approach. For Butler, the overlap between Jewish and Palestinian experiences of injustice are the foundation of their imagined binational politics.⁸³ But such a framework obscures Arendt's key insight in "Peace or Armistice": that Zionism's rendition of Jewish emancipation was predicated upon Palestinian dispossession. As Edward Said reminds, the "irreducible and functional meaning of being a Palestinian has meant living through Zionism first as a method for acquiring Palestine, second as a method for dispossessing and exiling Palestinians, third as a method for maintaining Israel as a state in which Palestinians are treated as non-Jews, and from which politically they remain exiles."⁸⁴ By rejecting the relationship between Jewishness and Zionism, Butler's approach fails to fully consider how the Palestinian experience of exile is irreducibly tethered to Jewish emancipation. A framework based on exile can obstruct both the structural position of Jews as perpetrators of Palestinian exile and the reading of Jewish emancipation that Zionism offers (and to which many Jews remain attached).

As such, denying the legitimacy of Zionism's claim on Jewishness deprives Jews of the resources to analyze their political responsibility for anti-Palestinian injustice perpetrated in the name of the Jewish people and Jewish freedom. While Zionism may be a negation of exilic Jewishness, the very negation of exile theory constitutes an appropriation of that exilic history, identity, and culture. Effectively theorizing how Zionism's rendition of Jewish nationality obstructs equitable relations between Jews and Palestinians requires an analysis of how this appropriation collapses the rationale of Jewish politics into sovereignty and thereby leads to a belief in the irreconcilability of Jewish and Palestinian national claims. Yet this is precisely the

⁸² Arendt, 450.

⁸³ Butler, *Parting Ways*, 180.

⁸⁴ Edward Said, "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," *Social Text*, no. 1 (Winter 1979): 52.

theoretical analysis turns to exile cannot accomplish without violating their central presuppositions.

The risk, then, is that exile obstructs an opportunity to offer a credible response to the political diagnosis offered by Zionism, and to read Zionism's political diagnosis not as a misguided redefinition of Jewishness but as a substantive political response to Jewish political experience.⁸⁵ Countering Butler's focus on identity, Cooper suggests that if "the allegiance to Zionism derives not from a philosophical mistake about the self, but from the conviction that a Jewish state is required to combat anti-Semitism and achieve self-determination, then one can mount a forceful challenge by offering an alternative vision of political agency."⁸⁶ Undoubtedly, Zionism and the State of Israel have dramatically shifted Jewish identity in both Israel/Palestine and the Diaspora. But it is precisely for this reason that new analyses of Jewish politics must take Zionism's claims on Jewishness seriously—not to affirm those claims but to overcome them.

Part IV: Binationalism and the Potential of Jewish Nationality

Jewish nationality is more amenable to non- or counter-sovereign Jewish institutions that can sustain Jewish-Palestinian equality. This reading of Jewish nationality begins from a recognition of how the State of Israel speaks in the name of the Jewish people and guarantees citizenship to Jews in Israel/Palestine and the Diaspora. Conceptualizing Jewish identity on the basis of nationality can allow Jews to utilize the privileges of citizenship to take responsibility for anti-Palestinian injustice and conclude the project of Jewish sovereignty. My interest is less in theorizing the normative content of a non-sovereign Jewish nationality. Rather, my focus is on how the current grammar of Jewish nationality can be appropriated to sustain binational institutions that can loosen Jewish investments in Zionism and the State of Israel and rearticulate Jewish-Palestinian relations on the basis of political equality.

This approach extends Arendt's treatment of Jewish nationality, which suggests the possibility of a Jewish nationality sustained by binationalism. Arendt did not renegotiate Jewishness outside of Zionism, but rather considered how federative institutions could dislocate Jewish nationality from Jewish sovereignty. The appeal of federative institutions, then, was in how

⁸⁵ Cooper reaches a similar conclusion in her critique of Butler (and Boyarin). Cooper, "A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism," 100–101.

⁸⁶ Cooper, 101.

they could use Jewish nationality to sustain the Palestinian equality Arendt saw as necessary for *Jewish* emancipation and politics.

In “Peace or Armistice,” Arendt warned that the “most outstanding” consequence of the 1948 war was not the establishment of the State of Israel, but the Palestinian refugee crisis—the Nakba.⁸⁷ In so doing, she recognized how such expulsion threatened Jewish emancipation.⁸⁸ In contrast, her proposed federative approach imagined using Jewish nationality as the condition for a pluralistic Jewish politics based on non-sovereignty. Raz-Krakotzkin’s reading of Arendt and binationalism, which departs from his earlier accounts of exile and binationalism, argues that for Arendt, “the rights and perspective of the Palestinians became an integral part of the discussion of Jewish rights and self-definition as well as of the vision of Jewish political emancipation.”⁸⁹ In contrast with his account of exile, Raz-Krakotzkin identifies through Arendt an ideal of Jewish nationality that is bound to a recognition of Palestinian rights *through* an appropriation of Zionism’s own frameworks of Jewishness.

This reading of Jewish nationality is substantively different from Daniel Boyarin’s idea of a Jewish “Diaspora nation”—perhaps the foremost recent engagement with a non-sovereign ideal of Jewish nationality. Boyarin emphasizes Jewish nationality as performative, conditioned upon a shared language (which he acknowledges may be Hebrew), a “common narrative...of ‘us,’” and a set of shared practices.⁹⁰ The “practices” that Boyarin emphasizes come from the Talmud, which he describes as the “soundscape for Jewish culture and thus Jewish worldwide sociality.”⁹¹ By turning to the Talmud as a source of inspiration for Jewish practices and institutions, Boyarin leverages the Talmud’s own emergence in the Diaspora to ground diasporic Jewish nationality.⁹² He sees this as an “explicitly countersovereign” Jewish nationality.”⁹³

Unlike Boyarin, I am less concerned with determining the ideal content of Jewish nationality than considering how nationality is a political lexicon that—because of its associations

⁸⁷ Arendt, “Peace or Armistice in the Near East?,” 444.

⁸⁸ Arendt, 443–50. Explicitly comparing the Middle East to postwar Europe, Arendt imagined a Jewish-Palestinian confederation that mirrored early political agreements in the Benelux countries that paved the way for broader European integration.

⁸⁹ Raz-Krakotzkin, “Jewish Peoplehood, ‘Jewish Politics,’ and Political Responsibility: Arendt on Zionism and Partitions,” 63.

⁹⁰ Daniel Boyarin, *The No-State Solution: A Jewish Manifesto*, 1st ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2023), 96, 122, <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300268416>.

⁹¹ Boyarin, 108.

⁹² Boyarin, 100, 108.

⁹³ Boyarin, 71.

with Zionism and the State of Israel—can help dislodge Jewish investments in sovereignty, supremacy, and genocide by anchoring an alternative vision of Jewish emancipation not predicated on anti-Palestinian violence. Allowing questions of identitarian renegotiation to recede into the background may be a more promising theoretical and political approach than turns to exile (or Diaspora) because doing so can acknowledge the relationship between Zionism and Jewishness without allowing that relationship to overdetermine Jewish futurities.⁹⁴

This approach has an affinity with Bashir Bashir and Rachel Busbridge’s notion of “egalitarian binationalism.”⁹⁵ Like Arendt, they prioritize institutionalized equality as a framework for partnership. They imagine an approach that “does not seek to re-engineer Jewish Israeli and Palestinian identities along civic and cultural lines – an outstandingly demanding, if not paternalistic, task – but rather restructure the relationship between the two.”⁹⁶ Instead Bashir and Busbridge focus on how political institutions can dismantle Jewish “settler colonial privileges, aspirations to exclusive sovereignty over historic Palestine (e.g. Jewish state) and acknowledge the Palestinians as a political constituency with equal rights to the land.”⁹⁷

Jewish nationality offers a foundation for Jewish-Palestinian institutional partnership that begins with a recognition of Jews’ current positional status as *both* sovereigns in Israel/Palestine and dispersed throughout the world today. It can sustain a politics that allows Jews in the Diaspora to more explicitly reckon with how the Law of Return structures our engagement in Jewish politics and with the claims made on us by Palestinians. And in its very terminology, Jewish nationality preempts the disavowal sustained by exile by centering Jews’ contemporary political status.

I am keenly aware that turning to Jewish nationality in this way is not simple. If the promise of exile is that it allows for a Jewishness without Zionism, the alternative I propose accepts the imbrication of Jewishness with Zionism. It opens a difficult conversation about the enmeshment of ideals of Jewish sovereignty into Jewish culture, religious practice, theology, and politics—in both Israel/Palestine and the Diaspora.

The promise in this approach, though, is that it predicates binational partnership on a recognition of existing power relations between Jews and Palestinians. This is a shifted ethos of

⁹⁴ This conclusion aligns with Cooper’s contention that the renegotiation of Jewish identity is not a necessary precursor to institutional reformulation. Cooper, “A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism,” 101.

⁹⁵ Bashir Bashir and Rachel Busbridge, “The Politics of Decolonisation and Bi-Nationalism in Israel/Palestine,” *Political Studies* 67, no. 2 (May 1, 2019): 398, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321718767029>.

⁹⁶ Bashir and Busbridge, 400.

⁹⁷ Bashir and Busbridge, 400.

Jewish-Palestinian partnership, away from notions of solidarity that have gained widespread credence throughout much of the diasporic Jewish Left (especially since October 7th). I am aware that focusing on the future of Jewish emancipation and politics in this moment of extreme anti-Palestinian violence and expulsion could be interpreted as a misdirection away from the fight to end the ongoing genocide. But Zionism's reading of Jewish politics conditions Jewish emancipation on such violence. Turning to nationality thus might help dislocate Jewish investments in Jewish sovereignty and anti-Palestinian violence. Nationality is not the only political grammar for such a project. But it is uniquely promising because it can utilize an existing and widely held political terminology of Jewish identity to offer an alternative to the State of Israel's notions of Jewish nationhood and freedom.

Conclusion

A turn to Jewish nationality cannot guarantee a more equitable future in Israel/Palestine—a future that, already distant before October 7th, appears to be continually receding since. It raises challenging, politically difficult questions about the political and legal status of Diaspora Jews. And it cannot redeem Jewishness from its implication in anti-Palestinian dispossession and genocide.

Raz-Krakotzkin, Butler, and Magid's theories all imagine that exile can allow Jews to renegotiate their sense of self so that it is no longer imbricated in such violence; a turn to exile offers the promise of a Jewishness not polluted by an association with Zionism. But it is precisely this association that requires further analysis in this moment. Not simply because of abstract demands of political responsibility, but because concluding the project of Jewish sovereignty will require a compelling alternative to Zionism's articulation of Jewish political emancipation. Exilic approaches do not offer such an alternative.

Embracing Jewish nationality offers the possibility of appropriating the State of Israel's own terminology of Jewish identity while resisting its collapse into Jewish nationalism and supremacy. In this sense, nationality might help a greater portion of Jews to take political responsibility for the State of Israel's ongoing projects of apartheid and genocide.

Zionism's signal political achievement was a vision of Jewish emancipation that resolved the plight of stateless Holocaust survivors; provided a vision of Jewish politics, power, and culture; and articulated a novel ideal of Jewish identity that filled a vacuum after the annihilation of European Jewry. Today, anti-Palestinian violence and dispossession overwhelms that legacy. Yet

rather than recalling the exilic past, we would be better served by building a *new* Jewish politics that draws upon Jewish experiences of sovereignty and exile but is not subordinated to either. Jewish nationality can be a valuable grammar for such a project.

The relationship between Jewish sovereignty and Palestinian exile cannot be sublimated by a return to ideals of Jewish exile. Rather, it is the fundamental and ongoing political legacy of Zionism for which Jews remain politically responsible. A turn to Jewish nationality cannot offer absolution from this legacy. But it can offer a framework for Jews to begin approaching binational institutions that might help rearticulate Jewish-Palestinians relations on the basis of political equality.

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