THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY JEWISH CULTURES

Edited by
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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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POWER

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In the past thirty years, power has become one of the most ubiquitous keywords of cultural studies and critical theory. Brought to prominence by two discrete but overlapping intellectual genealogies—the translation of Michel Foucault's work into English and the rise of ethnic and postcolonial studies—power is now an unavoidable category for thinking about cultural texts and identities in a comparative context. To be sure, no singular meaning of power circulates in such thinking. Indeed, the concept possesses completely opposed attributes in much contemporary thought: traditional understandings of power as a repressive, centralized, and hierarchical possession continue to attract adherents despite Foucault's famous dictum declaring that "we need to cut off the King's head" and think of power instead as a productive, dispersed, and immanent relation (Foucault 1980b: 121 and passim). While theorists emerging out of the ethnic and postcolonial studies traditions draw increasingly on figures such as Foucault, work in those areas also maintains some of the political urgency associated with compelling pre-Foucauldian notions of power hierarchies configured around variables such as race, class, sexuality, and gender. Against that backdrop, this chapter will argue that a serious and unsentimental consideration of Jewish cultures and histories can help illuminate the contradictory guises power takes in critical theory at large.

At the same time, however, Jewish studies—and even the more recent and theoretically invested formation of Jewish cultural studies—has rarely been an *explicit* contributor to this ongoing conversation about the nature of power in contemporary societies. The indexes of recent, path-breaking collections in Jewish cultural studies contain no entry for "power" despite their manifest interest in exploring race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in comparative perspective (Boyarin and Boyarin 1997; Biale et al. 1998; Boyarin et al. 2003). Nor is Foucault a significant presence in any of these works, with the exception of his work on sexuality, which plays an unavoidable role in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*. Yet, those works, along with a related collection emerging from the British context, Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus's *Modernity, Culture, and "the Jew"*, certainly suggest new ways of theorizing domination, focused as they are on what Cheyette and Marcus call the "ambivalent positioning which characterizes Jewish history and culture" between "the heart of western metropolitan culture" and "that which is excluded in order for ascendant racial and sexual identities to be formed and maintained" (Cheyette and Marcus 1998: 3).

Although, in complementary fashion, there is a paucity of "mainstream" cultural studies and critical theory work that engages with Jewish history and culture in a systematic fashion when

attending to questions of power, the figure of the Jew does make some notable appearances. Indeed, a whole tradition of twentieth-century French philosophical and theological thinking takes "the Jew" as emblematic of notions of foreignness and non-belonging. This tradition includes both thinkers identified as Jewish—such as Emmanuel Lévinas, Jacques Derrida, and Hélène Cixous—and non-Jewish figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Blanchot, and Jean-François Lyotard. Lyotard's provocative notion of "the jews"—plural, lower-case, and in scare quotes—has proven especially controversial, with critics taking him to task for his allegorization of Jewishness and his seeming disregard of "real Jews" (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993; Cheyette 2003; Shapiro 1994; Silverman 1998). Yet, Lyotard's notion of "the jews" has been influential nonetheless as a mode of disidentifation with powerful, exclusionary national and ethnic identities (cf. Hammerschlag 2010). Even more prominent in recent theory has been the figure of the concentration camp inmate—a figure not always identified as Jewish and sometimes even termed a *Muselmann* or "Muslim," an appropriation of camp slang, to which we will return, that has become a prominent, if contested theoretical concept deployed by Giorgio Agamben (1999) and others (see the critical commentary of Anidjar 2003). In these strands of poststructural and post-Holocaust thought, Jewishness has circulated in proximity to questions of national belonging, racial identity, and genocidal violence—in other words, to key sites where power is negotiated and exercised—even when a direct association between Jews and these questions has not been asserted.

This essay seeks to bring together such dispersed reflections on Jewishness and power in order to foster a mutually beneficial exchange between Jewish cultural studies and contemporary critical theory. It argues that any approach to power in relation to contemporary Jewish cultures has to situate itself at the intersection of at least four major discursive and material axes: a first involving antisemitic fantasy; a second involving genocidal violence and biopower; a third involving contested notions of whiteness and assimilation; and a fourth involving diaspora, Zionism, and state power. These intertwined and sometimes overlapping axes offer the possibility to begin formulating a necessary new account of contemporary Jewish cultures as implicated in—that is, both enabled by and cross-cut with—relations of power.

Historically, Jewish cultures have stood—and, indeed, they continue to stand—at the uneasy intersection of seemingly distinct understandings of power that correspond to these four axes: between economic and political forces, ancient and modern techniques, privileged and marginalized positions, and statist and diasporic social organizations. Jewish cultures are thus an interesting topic for theorists of power for the same reason theories of power ought to be an essential topic for Jews: taking Jewishness into account requires a vision of the world open to ambivalence, complexity, contradiction, and moral gray zones. Jews need theory, in other words, to makes sense of the world they live in; and theorists who don't make sense of the "Jewish question" are missing something essential about power in the modern world: its refusal to resolve into a two-dimensional, either/or, black and white grid.

A preliminary step

Before turning to our four axes, however, a further preliminary step is necessary. In order even to embark on a discussion of Jewish culture and power, it is necessary to break with a key presumption present both in much scholarship and in the non-scholarly attitudes of many Jewish communities: the myth of Jewish powerlessness. As David Biale has shown, the notion that Jews have largely remained external to power is not just a matter of folk wisdom, but has also united political actors and thinkers of very different ideological tendencies. Biale notes, for instance, that although David Ben Gurion and Hannah Arendt "disagreed profoundly about political

Zionism," they nevertheless "retained a similar contempt for the presumed apolitical and passive character of Diaspora Jewish history" (Biale 1986: 5).[1]

Biale conceived his study of "power and powerlessness" in the immediate wake of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon—that is, at a moment of the exercise of evident state power in the name of the Jewish people—but his argument ranges widely through Jewish history in order to illustrate the ongoing negotiation of politics that has defined Jewish existence in the diaspora and beyond. Conceiving power in this context as "the ability of a people to control its relations to other peoples as well as its own internal political, cultural, religious, economic, and social life," Biale finds a complex pattern that cannot be reduced to the simple presence or absence of power, but is rather "characterized by a wide spectrum of persistent and ongoing political activism" (Biale 1986: 7, 6). In drawing attention to the ongoing political life of a non-state-based community, Biale revises both folk and scholarly understandings of Jews' external relation to power and helps establish the conceptual terrain for the flourishing study of diaspora in the 1990s and 2000s.

Biale's account is the most thorough study of the question of power in Jewish history, but it also has implications for the present. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, Biale finds a gap between the perception and reality of "Jewish power" within Jewish communities that remains significant: "The dominant modes of thought in the First Temple period exaggerated Israelite power in order to compensate for a far more perilous reality, while rabbinic political theory … often went to the other extreme of underplaying political power in order to avoid a repetition of the failed rebellions" (Biale 1986: 27). Tracing the ebb and flow of Jewish political engagement and communal capability along with Jews' relation to that dynamic, Biale demonstrates that "power must be historicized: it means different things in different periods of history" (2008: 389). Such an insight helps us make sense of the contemporary period because it encourages us to look beyond the timeless vision of Jewish powerlessness and instead to identify the historically situated, intersecting axes of power that constitute the terrain of Jewish life—and Jewish theory.

Axis I: antisemitism: fantasies of power

By tracing shifting relations and perceptions of power, Biale's history provides an important authorizing template for our discussion. Yet, it doesn't absolve us from having to begin in a rather awkward place: with the acknowledgment of the long tradition of antisemitic fantasy that ascribes unusual power to Jews as a collective as well as to individual Jews. Neither the Jewish people's waxing and waning ability to "control its relations to other peoples as well as its own internal … life" (Biale 1986: 7), nor its own perception of that ability can explain the extent to which Judaeophobic "theorists" have hallucinated phantasmatic power as a possession of "the Jews." The extent, nature, and danger of antisemitism in the contemporary world is the subject of ongoing debate—debate sharpened by considerations such as the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian crisis, the post-9/11 "War on Terror," the collapse of the financial order, and Europe's vexed relation to immigration and religious difference. For our purposes, however, the question is less the empirical extent of antisemitism today than what its structure can tell us about conceptions of power. Considering the structure of antisemitism leads to an insight about the shifting economic and political sources of power; whether we link antisemitism primarily to economic power or to political power will in turn shape how we view the present and future of anti-Jewish sentiment.

In either case, the close link between antisemitism and fantasies of power is itself a potentially distinguishing feature of the particular form of prejudice directed against Jews and Judaism. The precise relation of antisemitism to other forms of racism is also a matter of debate, but it does not presuppose a definitive answer to assert, as political theorist Moishe Postone does, that

antisemitism involves features not often found in, for example, colonial racisms. Postone contrasts the "concrete—material or sexual—" power attributed to the racially denigrated with the "intangible, abstract and universal" power attributed by antisemites to the Jews' "international conspiracy" (Postone 2003: 133).

The conspiratorial, hidden, and intangible power attributed to Jews in modern antisemitism finds its most obvious expression in the great fraud of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, first promulgated by the secret police in Imperial Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century and still available in many of the world's languages.[2] In their original context, the *Protocols* provided, in Stephen Eric Bronner's terms, "a mirror image of history: the powerless become all powerful and the all powerful become powerless" (Bronner 2003: 9). Allegedly written by a member of a secret council of Elders, the *Protocols* both draw on centuries of antisemitic stereotype and promulgate a modern form that remains influential: it conceives the power of the Jews as global, materialist, and devious. But if the motifs of the *Protocols* are familiar, how can we explain their *persistence* and the *belief* they have attracted despite the debunking of the text as a forgery? Or, put in other terms, how does their continued (if by no means uniform) ability to elicit assent help us to understand the workings of power?

Social theorists have offered divergent theories accounting for the irrational persistence of the specifically modern, antisemitic form of racism illustrated by the *Protocols*. I focus on two here that, taken together, offer productive insights into divergent ways of conceptualizing power as rooted either in politics or the economy. As part of his wide-ranging account of modernity, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has offered an original account of Judaeophobia as primarily political in nature. In his contribution to *Modernity, Culture, and "the Jew"*—which builds on previous books such as *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) and *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991)—Bauman makes two fundamental proposals. He suggests, first, that antisemitism (along with philosemitism) should be understood as part of a more encompassing phenomenon, "allosemitism": "the practice of setting the Jews apart as people radically different from all others, needing separate concepts to describe and comprehend them and special treatment in all or most social intercourse" (Bauman 1998: 143). Second, Bauman specifies that the particular quality that makes Jews "radically different" itself varies from other forms of racism. Antisemitism involves "*proteophobia*, not *heterophobia*; the apprehension and vexation related not to something or someone disquieting through otherness and unfamiliarity, but to something or someone that does not fit the structure of the orderly world, does not fall easily into any of the established categories" (Bauman 1998: 144). The model of this "orderly world" is the nation-state. Emblems of non-belonging, Jews are then a figure of ambivalence that disturbs the *ordered* and *state-based* vision of modernity—a figure against which that vision defines itself.[3]

While Bauman appeals to the "nation-state order" of modernity to explain the mutation in anti-Judaism that led to genocidal antisemitism (Bauman 1998: 153), Moishe Postone assigns the leading role instead to the structure and historical dynamics of capitalism, that is, to economic forces. As we have already seen, for Postone, modern antisemitism is not so much defined by the equation of the Jew with ambivalence (what Bronner calls the "chameleon" character of the Jew in the antisemitic imagination [Bronner 2003: 8]) as it is by its belief in the "intangible, abstract, and universal" nature of the Jew (Postone 2003: 133). Postone argues that this antisemitic coding of the Jew as abstraction draws on a fetishized or partial understanding of the structure of capitalism (Postone 2003: 134–35). Because the abstract processes of capitalism outstrip the capacities of individual subjects to grasp them, those who feel left behind by the development of the modern economy search for a personification of those forces: a concrete name that can be given to the abstract powers shaping the world. The name that antisemites find is "the Jew": " the abstract domination of capital, which—particularly with rapid

industrialization—caught people up in a web of dynamic forces they could not understand, became perceived as the domination of International Jewry" (Postone 2003: 134). The particular forms of paranoia and conspiracy that define texts such as the *Protocols* derive exactly from this tendency to seek not simply scapegoats, but *personified* forms of social relations. For Postone, then, modern antisemitism represents a misguided, fetishized critique of capitalism that seeks out a "material carrier" to embody the invisible powers of economic structures and processes.

The differences between Bauman's and Postone's accounts of the genesis of antisemitism are instructive and bear on contemporary theorizations of power. Bauman emphasizes in particular the relation of antisemitism to the *political* realm—the "nation-state order"—whereas Postone sees it in relation to the *economic* realm, the realm of the capitalist production of value. While both theorists offer accounts of the conditions of possibility of the Nazi genocide, this distinction between their theories should also help us to diagnose the present. Since, as Bauman himself points out, the modern political order of the nation-state has seen decline, he argues for a related decline of prejudice against that order's ambivalent other, the Jew (Bauman 1998: 154–55). For Postone, in contrast, the decline of the nation-state would not spell the end of antisemitism, since the fundamental driving force lies not in a particular political order but in abstract processes of value production that have exceeded the nation-state for a long time. His theory would then lead to the expectation that antisemitism would persist beyond the hegemony of the Westphalian state-system. Indeed, he makes just such an argument in a more recent essay on forms of resistance to globalization. Citing both Islamic terrorist networks like Al Qaeda and certain forms of Western anti-imperialism, Postone finds the same fetishized response to capitalism he had diagnosed earlier: "a concretistic understanding of abstract historical processes" (Postone 2006: 96). Once again Jews—and now also Israel (whose actual abuses Postone does not deny)—take on an expanded symbolic value as localized, "material carriers" of global processes.

Depending on how one assesses the current force of antisemitic sentiment, Bauman's or Postone's accounts may seem more convincing. It may also be that both approaches contain elements of truth, for critics have observed both a shift from antisemitism to anti-Muslim racism (or "Islamophobia"), especially in Europe, and persistent anti-Jewish sentiment in various parts of the world.[4] For present purposes, my point is simply to illustrate the potential theoretical (and political) stakes of linking Jews and antisemitism with differently conceived understandings of power as either primarily political or economic in nature: understandings that, taken together, allow us to chart the kinds of continuities and discontinuities in relation to Jews and power that Biale also notes in his historical account.

Axis II: genocide and biopower

Regardless of its sources, when the fantasy of Jewish power is embodied in a text such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or in a state ideology such as Nazism, it can come to have deadly consequences: alleged Jewish power provides an opportunity and excuse for the radical disempowerment and expropriation of Jews and even for their extermination. Many of the issues raised by the Nazi genocide of European Jews exceed the scope of this essay; yet, no discussion of power and contemporary Jewish cultures can avoid referencing the Holocaust. For, if the genocide presents opportunities to explore Jewish resistance or moral complexity in what Primo Levi famously called the "grey zone" (Levi 1988), it also first and foremost forces us to confront the most extreme exercise of power and the most abject experience of powerlessness.

The Nazi racial order remains a perplexing touchstone for theories of power today because it combines forms of domination that seem to come from different historical moments; a

combination of the modern and the seemingly outmoded Jeffrey Herf famously described as "reactionary modernism" (Herf 1986). The persistence of genocide into the post-Holocaust world keeps National Socialism's challenges uncomfortably current. Faced with these challenges, contemporary philosophers such as Agamben and Roberto Esposito have drawn on Foucault's writings and lectures from the mid- to late-1970s on biopower in order to provide new insight both into genocide and the workings of power more generally. Such insight also leads to potential points of intersection between Jewish cultural studies and postcolonial studies because it allows the simultaneous decentering of dominant European traditions from without and within.

In *History of Sexuality* and *"Society Must Be Defended"*, Foucault is concerned with tracing a shift from a centralized understanding of power based on the *sovereignty* of the absolutist monarch to dispersed forms of power that target individuals (*discipline*) and entire populations (*biopower*) (Foucault 1980a; 2003). Unlike sovereign power, these new forms of power are dedicated to *enhancing* productivity and human life, yet, observed Foucault, biopower also brings with it darker possibilities: "If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomenon of population" (Foucault 1980a, 137). Foucault supplements these reflections with a consideration of "State racism," which supplies an answer to the conundrum of how a form of power whose "basic function is to improve life" (i.e., biopower) can be also be capable of mass murder. The answer is *racism*, which introduces "a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die" (Foucault 2003: 254). Taken to its extreme in the Nazi "final solution," however, state racism seems not just the result of biopower but also of the persistence of a supposedly superseded sovereign power: "That is where this mechanism inscribed in the workings of the modern State leads. Of course, Nazism alone took the play between the sovereign right to kill and the mechanisms of biopower to this paroxysmal point. But this play is in fact inscribed in the workings of all States" (Foucault 2003: 260). What remains unclear in Foucault is how we are to think of the "return" of the sovereign power of death in the era of modern biopower. Unpacking this coincidence of seemingly anachronistic forms of power becomes the project of those thinkers who have come after Foucault.

Agamben has gone the farthest in drawing out the implications of Foucault's theory for thinking power in the wake of Nazism. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben emphasizes the intersection—or "indistinction"—between the sovereign or "juridico-institutional" and the "biopolitical models of power" (Agamben 1998: 6). These two forms of power—seemingly "ancient" and "modern"—come together at the site of what Agamben calls *homo sacer* or "bare life," a figure from Roman law "who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*." Going a step beyond Foucault, Agamben argues that it is not simply "the fact that life as such becomes a principal object of the projections and calculations of State power" that characterizes modern politics, but the fact that "the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm" (Agamben 1998: 8). Already in *Homo Sacer*, Agamben makes clear the centrality of Nazism to the understanding of this sweeping history of "Western" politics when he designates *the camp* as "the 'nomos' of the modern"—that is, as its law, order, or paradigm (Agamben 1998: 166–80). In *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999), this assertion is worked out in greater detail and with even more direct relevance to Jewish cultural studies.

In *Remnants*, Agamben investigates bare life in relation to a figure familiar from Holocaust testimonies: the *Muselmann* (see Levi 1986). The term *Muselmann*, whose origins are disputed, refers to those camp inmates whose experience of suffering and starvation had pushed them

beyond all human limits until they became the "living dead" or "drowned," in Primo Levi's description (cited in Agamben 1999: 44; but see Anidjar 2003 for a genealogy). For Agamben, the *Muselmann* does not simply indicate the extremity of the Nazi camps and the Nazi dehumanization of the Jew and other "enemies." Rather, Agamben also understands this figure as paradigmatic of the overlap between sovereign and biopolitical power suggested but not fully explored by Foucault. Drawing on Foucault's account of state racism, Agamben sees the *Muselmann* emerge at the end of a series of "biopolitical caesuras" that divide the "*people* and *population*" according to racist criteria, thus "transforming an essentially political body into an essentially biological body, whose birth and death, health and illness, must then be regulated" (Agamben 1999: 84). Like Foucault's account of Nazism, Agamben's account of the *Muselmann* seems to waver between an understanding of the Holocaust as an extreme version of modern biopolitics and as a singular eruption within it—between the camp as a modern paradigm and as a site that "transcends" all paradigmatic categories.

Responding to Foucault (and, implicitly, Agamben), Roberto Esposito's consideration of Nazi "thanatopolitics" makes this point powerfully: in Foucault's account, "[i]t as if … the generality of the [biopolitical] framework prevails over the singularity of the Nazi event" (Esposito 2008: 111). In contrast, Esposito puts forward an analysis that foregrounds the "rupture" represented by Nazi ideologies and practices. Without denying the relation between Nazism and the biopolitical paradigms that have preceded and outlived it (Esposito 2008: 146), Esposito nevertheless wants to identify its specificity in a way that arguably eludes both Foucault and Agamben by asking why "[u]nlike all the other forms past and present … Nazism propel[led] the homicidal temptation of biopolitics to its most complete realization" (Esposito 2008: 116). Esposito locates this specificity in the importance of a medical paradigm involving disease, infection, and immunization. He notes that, although "the characterization of the Jews as parasites is part of the secular history of anti-Semitism," in Nazi ideology "the Jews didn't *resemble* parasites: they didn't behave *as* bacteria—they *were* bacteria who were to be treated as such. In this sense, Nazi politics wasn't even a proper biopolitics, but more literally a *zoopolitics*, one expressly directed to human animals" (Esposito 2008: 116–17). Esposito's attention to the literalizing "zoopolitics" at the heart of Nazi anti-Jewish ideology and politics is an important complement to Foucault's and Agamben's approach to sovereignty and biopower because it represents an attempt to locate the specificity of that genocidal history within a larger history of power.

Despite presenting a powerful argument for the specificity of the extermination of the Jews, however, Esposito's focus on "human animals" also evokes other racial regimes such as those that developed out of imperialism and slavery, where a kind of "zoopolitics" has also been at work. We might, for instance, recall the linkage of imperialism and totalitarianism in Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. For Arendt, European colonialists' "shocking experiences" in Africa of beings who "behaved like a part of nature" (i.e., like animals) ends up, in an indirect process she calls a "boomerang effect," returning to Europe in the form of Nazi genocide (Arendt 1973: 183, 192, 206). In Arendt's account, which often seems deliberately to inhabit the standpoint of the European perpetrators, these "savages" "were, as it were, 'natural' human beings who lacked the specifically human character, the specifically human reality, so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they had committed murder" (Arendt 1973: 185, 192). Foreshadowing Foucault's concept of biopower, Agamben's account of bare life, and Esposito's insights into zoopolitics, Arendt theorizes the dangers of "the abstract nakedness of being human" (Arendt 1973: 99). While Arendt's account certainly risks reproducing the racism it attempts to explain—and, I have argued, actually does reproduce that racism—the link she uncovers between colonial and Nazi "zoopolitics" finds

confirmation in more forthrightly anticolonial and antiracist critiques such as Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (Césaire 2000).[5]

An account of modern power as simultaneously biopolitical and yet still sovereign thus provides a vocabulary that has both fostered new approaches to understanding Nazism and the Holocaust and allowed a redescription of earlier approaches to the intersection of violence inside and outside Europe that can bring Jewish/Holocaust studies into dialogue with postcolonial theory. Such a dialogue—still in its infancy—should attempt to develop an understanding of power in relation to race, colonialism, and the state that respects both the singularity of extreme acts of genocidal violence and the relationality that links historically and geographically dispersed regimes of racialized power. This differentiated account would also need to take into account our final two axes, both of which are inflected by the memory of the Holocaust and the radical forms of power and powerlessness unveiled in the genocide: the racial transformations of the postwar world and the ongoing conflict over the importance of diaspora and Zionism in Jewish life.

Axis III: post-Holocaust shifts: on the whiteness of Jews

The Holocaust constitutes a limit-case that allows us to see the murderous consequences of an antisemitic conspiratorial logic as well as the "paroxysms" of power in an age where biopower and sovereignty combine to make extermination a conceivable state policy. Yet, its extremity also shocked the conscience of much of the world and thus came to mark an important turning point. Since the Holocaust, fantasies of Jewish power are no longer *Salonfähig*, no longer openly expressible in "polite" society—at least in Western Europe and North America—even if continuities also persist in antisemitic thinking as do traumatic aftereffects for Jews around the world. In the postwar period, two new axes essential to the theorization of power in Jewish cultural studies emerge that cut in a very different direction from those that have preoccupied us so far: the "empowerment" of the diaspora and the establishment of the State of Israel. While a strong diaspora has generally contributed to the consolidation of Israeli power, the coexistence of state-based and non-state-based Jewish communities has also produced important tensions in theory and practice.

Especially in the United States, the capital of the Jewish diaspora, Jews underwent a significant integration into the mainstream in the post-Holocaust years: they became ethnically "white," as many scholars (and writers) have demonstrated, and succeeded in unprecedented ways economically, culturally, and politically in profiting from the postwar boom (see Rogin 1996; Brodkin 1998; Goldstein 2006). In a relatively short period of time, Jews in North America went from being an abject, racially marked immigrant group to being "white folks," in Karen Brodkin's phrase, with all the privileges that such a subject position brings with it in a society still divided dramatically by race. Meanwhile, in Western Europe, a persistent, if now markedly smaller Jewish population ultimately came to occupy a significantly different symbolic position than in the pre-Holocaust moment—rather than remaining the "Other" of the ethnically pure nation-state, some scholars have suggested that Jews have come to represent the cosmopolitan ideal of a transnationalizing European Union (Bunzl 2007). The ubiquity in modernity of phenomena such as urbanization, mobility, and intellectual labor have even led historian Yuri Slezkine to speak of the modern age as "the Jewish century," a thought-provoking redescription of an era often known for anti-Jewish excess and Jewish victimization—not just in Nazi Germany, but also in the Soviet Union, which constitutes one of Slezkine's prime examples of Jewish success (Slezkine 2004).

The postwar "whitening" of Jews and their movement toward the center of Euro-American culture has naturally led to tensions, since this was also the era of struggles for civil rights and

decolonization. In the United States, many Jews supported or even participated actively in the African American freedom struggle, yet this did not eliminate conflicts over whether Jews could maintain "minority" status even as they were accepted as white by a mainstream, Christian-dominated society. In *The Price of Whiteness*, historian Eric Goldstein notes a persistent contradiction, for instance, between Jewish desires for "integration" and "distinctiveness" (Goldstein 2006). Although primarily empirical, work such as Goldstein's contributes to the recent wave of theorizations of whiteness. While much work on whiteness and Jews concerns "how Jews *became* white," Goldstein emphasizes "how Jews *negotiated* their place in a complex racial world where Jewishness, whiteness, and blackness have all made significant claims on them" (Goldstein 2006: 5). The shift from *becoming* to *negotiation* has implications for theories of power. Goldstein does not deny "the power this vision of American society [as divided between white and black] has had in shaping people's lives," and he knows that "[f]irst and foremost, African Americans have had to suffer the social consequences of an ideology that positions them as the essential 'others' of an idealized white America" (Goldstein 2006: 4). But he also seeks to complicate the picture emerging from whiteness studies of "the unmitigated benefits [white] identity confers on the holder: power, social status, and financial rewards" (Goldstein 2006: 5). He finds that "there was also a good deal of coercion involved in the process by which Jews became part of the white majority, a process that entailed significant losses as well as gains" (Goldstein 2006: 5). Alongside the "material and social benefits," Goldstein wants to tally the "emotional costs" (Goldstein 2006: 6).

The vexed relation between the material and the psychic also plays out in theory emerging from the context of decolonization. Most famously, ironic passages from Frantz Fanon's now classic study *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) bring such tensions to the fore.[6] Written just a few years after the defeat of Nazism and the liberation of the camps, Fanon's text proves ambivalent on the question of how to relate black and Jewish experiences of racism. While Fanon sometimes points to what Jews and blacks share, he also often "assimilates" Jews to "the white man." On the one hand, Fanon links blacks and Jews as "brother[s] in misery" (Fanon 1967: 122) because of parallels between European racism and antisemitism. On the other hand, because of the primacy he grants to the "racial epidermal schema" (Fanon 1967: 112) in the constitution of the colonial subject, he ultimately separates the experience of blacks from that of Jews by virtue of the Jews' allegedly greater ability to pass as white. Although Fanon adds a crucial comparative dimension to discussions of racialization, he ignores the contradictions and legacies of antisemitism that make it a very peculiar kind of family affair. On the one hand, seen from the present, Fanon's distinction between the central role that the visual plays in anti-black racism and the centrality of ideas and ideology in antisemitism seems like commonsense. But, on the other hand, this commonsense account amounts to a surprisingly unhistorical theory of Jewish visibility; it ignores the relative consistency of the image of the Jew over time, the frequent association of Jews with various "anomalous" physical traits, including blackness (as demonstrated, for example, in the work of Sander Gilman [1991]), and—at the time Fanon was writing—the still recent production and mobilization of a visible, highly biologized, and even sexualized Jewish difference in the context of a genocidal project. In addition, whether employed in the early 1950s by Fanon or today in the works of some postcolonial critics, this simplified binary between blacks and white Jews risks homogenizing Europe and casting blacks definitively outside European space.

Despite the somewhat ahistorical nature of Fanon's account and acknowledging Goldstein's desire to add nuance and "negotiation" to the discussion of the whiteness of Jews, it remains the case that postwar developments have radically reshuffled the question of power for Jewish cultural studies. For instance, in addition to forcing scholarship to take into account Jews' relations

with other, more (or at least differently) oppressed minorities, the unprecedented security and well-being attained by most Jews so soon after the Shoah has also cast light on intra-Jewish differences. Contemporary theoretical approaches to power thus encourage attention to other axes, such as power relations *among* Jews and *within* Jewish communities. Such an approach addresses Euro-American societies, but is particularly relevant in Israel, where tensions persist between Ashkenazi and Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews. Some social movements and US-based critical theorists, such as Ella Shohat and Gil Anidjar, speak from avowed "Arab Jewish" positions and, drawing on postcolonial studies, denounce "Zionism from the standpoint of its Jewish victims" (to cite the title of a well-known essay by Shohat) in addition to providing powerful critiques of Zionism as such.[7]

Axis IV: confronting state power: from diaspora to Zionism and back

Besides processes of post-Holocaust material and symbolic "empowerment" of Jews in the diaspora, another unavoidable factor marks the contemporary moment, as the writings of Shohat and others already suggest: the realization of the Zionist "dream" in the founding of the State of Israel. Tracking the ways radical critics have recently theorized both Zionism and its "other"—the diaspora—provides a final, politically urgent axis through which to explore Jews' historical and contemporary location between power and powerlessness.

If, throughout Jewish history, the lack of a nation-state rendered Jews vulnerable to exclusion and even genocide, Israel was meant to provide a haven for the formerly powerless and a locus of Jewish political power. Indeed, Israel has developed into a formidable power; it is the sole possessor of nuclear weapons in the region and maintains one of the most powerful armies in the world. It also claims hegemony over world Jewish opinion and often presents itself as the representative and spokesperson for Jews worldwide. Furthermore, in the post–Cold War moment, the globe's only remaining superpower underwrites Israel's powerful position by providing it with billions of dollars of aid and a political and ideological shield against its enemies. In the words of psychoanalytic theorist Jacqueline Rose, "Zionism is one of the most potent collective movements of the twentieth century" (Rose 2005: 14). That "potency needs urgently to be understood," for Zionism has had "the capacity to foster identifications that are as immutable as, indeed, the ineffable Name" (Rose 2005: 15). As Rose's divine simile suggests, part of her clarification of Zionism's power involves what she sees as its unleashing of Messianic energies.

While there is undoubtedly a case to be made for understanding at least certain strands of Zionism as forms of religious nationalism—and therefore a discussion to be had about Zionism's relation to post-secular tendencies in contemporary theory and society—most theoretical approaches to Israel are more concerned with the particular forms of worldly power it exercises (see Ophir et al. 2009). The reality of Israeli power has led to a new dialectic, since its exercise has entailed the radical disempowerment and ongoing colonization of another people, the Palestinians—a phenomenon in recent Jewish history as novel as the state itself. Especially after more than forty years of occupation of the West Bank—and continued control over a blockaded Gaza—Jews, as embodied in a state declared Jewish, can seem to the uncharitable to possess something like the power antisemites have always ascribed to them. Of course, Israel does not embody Jewishness; nor is its power as invulnerable as fantasy might hold or its practices as unique as the extent of criticism it attracts might imply. Yet, for understandable reasons, much of the world looks on at the continued oppression of the Palestinians as one of the signature injustices of the contemporary world and nobody seriously concerned with the ethics of Jewish culture today can avoid facing the fact of Israeli power and the fact that that power is exercised, according to its own logic, in the name of Jews everywhere.

Beyond Israel, and especially in the UK and US, differences between unconditional supporters of the Jewish state and critics and critical supporters constitute a clear site of power. Although the situation is dynamic and criticism of Israeli policy among Jews has become more mainstream and politically influential with the emergence of organizations such as J-Street in the US, the preponderance of material resources and the power of public opinion in diasporic Jewish communities remain with uncompromising supporters of Israel. The "Israel lobby" and the "Holocaust industry" may not be the monolithic and all-powerful entities decried by critics such as Mearsheimer and Wald (2007) and Finkelstein (2000), respectively, but without doubt supporters of Israel (both Jewish and non-Jewish) work from positions of relative power with respect to its critics and, together with the state itself, sometimes draw on the moral capital and absolutist historical vision of the Holocaust as means of justification for policies otherwise unjustifiable.[8]

In the face of these new realities, some theorists not previously associated with Jewishness or forms of Jewish critique have begun not only to speak out about Israeli power, but also to seek within the Jewish intellectual tradition for critical tools to evaluate it. Rose, for instance, draws on Martin Buber's version of Zionism, which is "devoted to the life of the spirit" and not necessarily to the creation of a Jewish state (Rose 2005: 74). For Rose, Buber articulates a critique of Zionism as normalization that suggests a psychoanalytic perspective. She contrasts his binationalist perspective with the political Zionism of Herzl and Weizmann: "For Buber … the nation becomes normal … at the cost of perverting itself" (Rose 2005: 76). To underscore the problem with normalization, Rose turns to Hannah Arendt, who argued in 1944 that "there was no place on earth where a people could live like the organic national body that [Herzl] had in mind." Indeed, Arendt continued, "the real historical development of a nation does not take place inside the closed walls of a biological entity" (qtd. in Rose: 2005: 81–82). If the fetishization of becoming normal leads to the mythic "closed walls of a biological entity"—a biopolitical view, if ever there was one!—Rose's critique of Zionism leads her to want to open up the "organic national body" and develop what Edward Said, in an important essay, called "bases for coexistence" with Palestinians built on shared acknowledgment of suffering (Said 2000: 205–9; cf. Rose 2005: 115). Such acknowledgment would counter the deadly historical and psychic trajectory Rose traces from Zionists' shame at the abject experience of powerlessness in the Holocaust—the experience of being reduced to "bare life"—to an embrace of the power of the state without reserve: "Shame swept under the carpet, this history suggest, breeds violence like nothing else" (Rose 2005: 144). In Rose's psychoanalytically inflected perspective, "the dilemma of what to do with the internal debris of [one's] own past" is *the* post-Holocaust, post–State of Israel challenge for Jewish ethics.

Like Rose, Judith Butler—another distinguished feminist/gender theorist who has recently turned her attention to the Israeli/Palestinian crisis—seeks to draw on a counter-tradition of Jewish thinkers for alternatives to the organicist vision of state power embodied in political Zionism. In an essay that seeks to disentangle Jewishness, Judaism, and Zionism, Butler argues for a radical form of coexistence or "cohabitation," as she calls it. Such a radicalization of cohabitation as beyond individual or collective volition allows Butler to undo the forms of belonging Rose associates with the "normal" understanding of Zionism: "It may be that the sense of belonging to that group [defined by Jewishness] entails taking up a relation to the non-Jew and that this mode of approaching the problem of alterity is fundamental to what it is to 'belong' to Jewishness itself. In other words, to belong is to undergo a dispossession from the category, as paradoxical as that might seem" (Butler 2011: 86). By theorizing belonging as cohabitation and dispossession, Butler means to challenge the premises of the nation-state order that underlies political Zionism.

While Rose would no doubt subscribe to Butler's notion of belonging as dispossession, the two theorists also have slightly but significantly different projects. For Rose, the point is to think Zionism beyond simplistic binaries of for/against (Rose 2005: 14). For Butler, on the other hand, the point is to forge a position *outside* Zionism (Butler 2011: 76). Even as she often draws on the same thinkers as Rose, Butler situates the resources for a radical project of cohabitation beyond any Zionist logic and, instead, in traditions of diasporic thinking. Here, again like Rose, she draws on Said: "it is on the basis of [Jews' and Palestinians'] overlapping senses of … displacement and heterogeneous cohabitation that Said proposes diaspora as a historical resource and guiding principle for a rethinking what a just polity might be for those lands" (Butler 2011: 77).

In embracing diaspora as a response to the conundrums of Jewish power in Israel, Butler follows a highly developed line in recent critical theory. Most obviously associated in Jewish contexts with the work of Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, diasporist thinking is one of the sources of connection between Jews and other postcolonial or migrant subjects (see Gilroy 1993; Rothberg 2009), but also a potential source of tension between them. At a moment when cultural studies was moving in a decidedly transnational direction, the Boyarins published their influential essay "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity" (1993). "Diaspora" provides a critique of the allegorization of Jews and Jewishness in contemporary theory, defends a notion of Jewish collective identity grounded in notions of memory and kinship, and offers an alternative, non-Zionist model for thinking about Jewishness. Put in other terms, the Boyarins' diasporist vision situates Jewishness in a dynamic region between the poles of powerlessness and power. On the one hand, they defend a notion of Jewish collective identity against Walter Benn Michaels's reduction of all identities to forms of racism: Jewish collectivity in the diaspora develops, rather, in response to Christian power and provides resources for a critique of domination (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 705–6). On the other hand, they argue, the Zionist articulation of Jewish collectivity rewrites Jewish history from a position of hegemony: by "[c]apturing Judaism in a state," it "transforms the meanings of its social practices" and thus represents a "subversion of Jewish culture and not its culmination" (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 713, 712). In order to free Jewishness from entanglement with state power, the Boyarins call for the disarticulation of "race and space," which "together form a deadly discourse"—an argument reminiscent of Foucault and Agamben on racism and biopower. In addition, they suggest, anticipating Butler, "that [only] an Israel that reimports diasporic consciousness" can create "a consciousness of a Jewish collective as one sharing space with others, devoid of exclusivist and dominating power" (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 714, 713).

For the Boyarins, then, diaspora seems at first to be the negation of power and the embrace of powerlessness; as they conclude their 1993 essay, diaspora means the "renunciation of sovereignty" along with "a fierce tenacity in holding onto cultural identity" (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 723). Yet, they later argue in a 2002 book, diaspora does not stand outside of power, but represents a particular configuration of power. First, they assign a positive, *constitutive power* to diasporic formations: diaspora constitutes a "*resource* in the necessary rethinking of models of polity in the current erosion and questioning of the modern nation-state system and ideal" (Boyarin and Boyarin 2002: 5). Second, they recognize that diaspora also, negatively, *encodes power relations*: "Evaluating diaspora entails acknowledging the ways that … identity is maintained through exclusion and oppression of internal others (especially women) and external others" (Boyarin and Boyarin 2002: 7). Diaspora can even become a source of violence: "The ragged edges between diasporas sometimes spark violence rather than, or in addition to, coalition politics, as in the case of tensions between Lubavitch Hasidic Jews and members of the African diaspora in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. The powers of diaspora are not necessarily benign,

whether directed outward or inward" (Boyarin and Boyarin 2002: 8). We might also add, following Benedict Anderson, that diasporas are not even necessarily opposed to nation-states, and many diasporic groups (including especially contemporary Jewish communities!) practice "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson 1994).

Despite their clear-eyed assessment of the potential limits of diaspora, the Boyarins nevertheless make a strong case for its powers—and especially for what can be learned by other diasporic peoples from the Jewish diaspora. As they argue, "Jewish culture has elaborated a range of absolutely indispensable technologies of cultural transformation" (Boyarin and Boyarin 2002: 11). These "powers of diaspora" include practices of remembrance, communal textual interpretation, and openness to continued movement or "rediasporization"—technologies that over millennia have assured "survival and presence through absence and loss" (Boyarin and Boyarin 2002: 11–12).

Conclusion: cohabiting with contradiction

The nuanced account of diaspora in the Boyarins' book—and the engagement with conflicts and alternative traditions within Judaism and Jewishness found in their work as well as that of Rose, Butler, and numerous other critics working in the field of the (now, not so) new Jewish cultural studies—suggests the possibility and desirability of a multi-layered account of power in relation to contemporary Jewish cultures. What unites the critique of Zionism shared by Rose, Butler, and the Boyarins—despite significant disciplinary and, no doubt, political differences—is the rejection of an "external" account of power. All of these critics understand power as something *internal* that simultaneously produces and divides both individual and collective subjects. Despite a long history as a persecuted minority, a recent and still-searing collective memory of genocide, and the ever-present ugliness of antisemitism, Jews and Jewish communities are not conceivable "outside" power; nor are they simply its victims.

The ability to articulate an understanding of Jewish cultures as, instead, enabled by and implicated in power has advantages both for Jewish self-reflection and for critical theory more generally. The ambivalence of Jewish history—and the dramatic shifts in relation to power and powerlessness that has characterized it—forbids *moralizing* and *homogenizing* approaches. Minority status, this history teaches us, cannot be equated with powerlessness and thus with a morally "clean" slate. Conversely, the twentieth-century experience of Jews suggests possession of certain attributes of power (say, economic wealth or white skin) does not necessarily situate a community in an unconditionally secure position either. Conceptions of power, like conceptions of Jewish communities, must be sensitive to discontinuity, dispersion, and historical change. They must be open to ironic outcomes and shifts of fortune; they must be ready to cohabit with contradiction.

Notes

1 For a defense of Jewish claims to power from a conservative position, see Wisse (2007). For a critical response, see Biale (2008).

2 For a history of the emergence of the *Protocols* in relation to other antisemitic tracts, see Norman Cohn's classic study *Warrant for Genocide* (Cohn 1996). For a recent analysis of the genesis and effects of the *Protocols*—written from an explicitly progressive political perspective—see Bronner 2003. Bronner also includes excerpts from the *Protocols* that I will cite here.

3 A productive connection can be made between Bauman's theory of Jewishness and ambivalence and Homi Bhabha's account of colonial mimicry: "In the ambivalent world of the 'not quite/not white,' on the margins of metropolitan desire, the *founding objects* of the Western world become the erratic,

eccentric, accidental *objets trouvés* of the colonial discourse" (Bhabha 1994: 92). In Bauman and Bhabha the Jewish/colonized subject both confirms and destabilizes the dominant order, but Bauman's analysis emphasizes especially the side of order while Bhabha's tends toward subversion. See also Bhabha (1998), where—in addition to mentioning analogous histories of trauma—he stresses jokes as a link between Jews and certain colonized subjects.

4 See Bunzl (2007) for an account of shifting relations between antisemitism and Islamophobia in contemporary Europe. Bunzl finds that anti-Muslim prejudice has replaced antisemitism as the driving force of the new Europe, but he also attests to the presence of new forms of antisemitism. The volume contains responses from a variety of positions to Bunzl's analysis.

5 See Rothberg (2009: chapters 2 and 3).

6 On Fanon and the Jews, see Cheyette (2005). This discussion of Fanon is adapted from Rothberg (2009: chapter 3).

7 See Shohat (1988); her title makes reference to Said (1979). On the question of Sephardim, Arab Jews, and Jews of color, see also Shohat (2006); Anidjar (2003, 2007); Alcalay (1992); and Kaye/Kantrowitz (2007).

8 To get a sense of the limited range of opinion on Israel, at least in the United States, consider the firestorm of controversy that erupted after the publication of the late Tony Judt's "Israel: The Alternative" (Judt 2003).

Essential reading

Biale, David (1986) *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*, New York: Schocken Books. A revisionary historical account arguing against the widely held conviction that Jews were a powerless and non-political people between the destruction of the Second Temple and the founding of the State of Israel.

Boyarin, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin (2002) *Powers of Diaspora*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. A programmatic essay on diaspora as a political resource followed by two case studies concerning rabbinic culture and contemporary ethnography by the founders of the new Jewish cultural studies.

Kaye/Kantrowitz, Melanie (1992) *The Issue is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, Violence, and Resistance*, San Francisco: Aunt Lute.

——(2007) *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Two volumes of collected essays by a feminist and social justice activist on a wide range of contemporary political topics.

Ophir, Adi, Michal Givoni, and Sari Hanafi (2009) *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, New York: Zone. A collection of essays by Israeli and Palestinian scholars analyzing the configurations of power in the occupation of Palestinian lands.

Slezkine, Yuri (2004) *The Jewish Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. A provocative and engaging history of the twentieth century that places Jews at the center of modern cultural dynamics.

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10
TEXTUALITY

Devorah Baum

In the beginning is hermeneutics.

Jacques Derrida[1]

[E]verything begins with survival.

Jacques Derrida[2]

In a well-known Talmudic story known as the "Oven of Akhnai"[3] Rabbi Eliezer debates whether a certain oven should be considered ritually clean. Proposing every conceivable argument in support of his claim, Eliezer goes so far as to summon the powers of nature (rivers and carob trees) to bend in his favor. When these natural forces fail to convince his disputants, however, he enjoins a Heavenly Voice to speak up on his behalf, which it promptly does, provoking Rabbi Joshua to retort that "it is not in heaven," where "it" refers to the law. As Rabbi Jeremiah explains, ever since the Torah was given to man on Mount Sinai, authority over its meaning has migrated from heaven to earth, whence, notwithstanding Eliezer's ability to marshal both natural and supernatural evidence, the principle remains that "after the majority one must incline." The story concludes with a postscript in which God, upon hearing the outcome of the rabbis' argument, laughs and declares, "My sons have defeated me! My sons have defeated me!"

However arcane the debate, the Oven of Akhnai reveals an uncannily familiar depiction of ancient rabbis showing greater enthusiasm for questions of textual interpretation than for theological questions regarding the true will or intention of God. Resembling many modern representations of Jews and Judaism, the story may even be a source of this stereotype, for in the Oven of Akhnai the rabbinic tradition can be seen self-consciously representing itself, announcing with its pointedly happy ending (God's laughter and approval) that a much larger argument has been won than the specific issue at hand. The Oven of Akhnai in fact renders visible the efforts of the rabbis to shore up their own authority and establish what has since been taken for granted, but which was by no means always assured: the centrality of the text in the life of the community.

The "people" became a "people of the Book" when rabbinic Judaism succeeded its biblical predecessor. As Moshe Halbertal explains, this was a development that depended on the hierarchical rise of the rabbi-scholar whose "leading role […] constituted a revolutionary, post-biblical conception of religious authority" (Halbertal 1997: 6). Emmanuel Levinas's observation, for example, that "Judaism is indeed the Old Testament, but read through the Talmud," recalls