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A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism: The Question of Jewish Political Agency

Julie E. Cooper[1]

Abstract

As the prospects for a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have dwindled, Jewish scholars in the United States have increasingly invoked the concept of diaspora to counter a purported Jewish consensus regarding Zionism. In this essay, I critique prominent exponents of this approach (Judith Butler, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin) from a diasporic (i.e., non-Zionist) standpoint. My concern is not that Butler and the Boyarins attack Israel publicly, endorse a binational solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and/or support the movement for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions—rather, it is that they lack a compelling vision for diasporic politics. Their visions prove wanting because they contest Zionism on the terrain of Jewish identity. To loosen Zionism's hold, Butler and the Boyarins recover alternative approaches to the attainment or grounding of Jewish identity. Yet when framed as an ethic of particular identity, diasporic thinking can neither rebut Zionism's political arguments, nor can it develop alternative models of Jewish self-rule. Instead of theorizing Jewish identity, I argue, diasporic thinkers should envision Jewish political solidarity beyond the confines of the nation-state.

Keywords

Jewish political thought, Zionism, diaspora, Judith Butler, Jonathan Boyarin, Daniel Boyarin

[1]Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

Corresponding Author:
Julie E. Cooper, Department of Political Science, Tel Aviv University, Ramat Aviv, P.O.B. 39040, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel.
Email: cooper@post.tau.ac.il

A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism

In recent years, as the prospects for a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have dwindled, American Jewish scholars have increasingly invoked the concept of diaspora to counter a purported Jewish consensus regarding Zionism. In diasporic Jewish traditions, these scholars find resources for contesting Israeli state violence, and, more important, for challenging the notion, which they impute to Zionism itself, that Judaism and Zionism are coextensive. The most prominent exponents of this stance, such as Judith Butler and Daniel Boyarin, advocate one-state and/or binational solutions to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.[1] These scholars not only share a political critique of the state of Israel, they also share a political investment in what I call the ethics of particular identity. Excurses on political dynamics of identity—whether identity can be conceived in ways that encourage responsibility to the other—figure prominently in texts that Judith Butler and Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin devote to the critique of Zionism. Although Butler and the Boyarins draw on different diasporic traditions and develop different accounts of identity formation, each offers a diasporic conception of "Jewishness" in hopes that its adoption will inspire Jews to break with Zionism.

Scholars who recruit diasporic traditions for the critique of Zionism have been subject to scathing attack and anathema from Israel's defenders. To advocate for a binational state, these critics contend, is to betray a pathological deficiency in love of and loyalty to the Jewish people.[2] These intemperate polemics only confirm Butler's complaint that "the threat of being called 'anti-semitic' seeks to control, at the level of the subject, what one is willing to say out loud and, at the level of society in general, to circumscribe what can and cannot be permissibly spoken out loud in the public sphere."[3] If polemical accusations of "cold-heartedness" have had a chilling effect on public criticism of Israel, they have also dampened scholarly debate about what diaspora has historically meant, in Jewish traditions, and how to mobilize these traditions to develop non-Zionist trajectories for Jewish political thought.[4] Too often, scholars who applaud Butler and the Boyarins' public advocacy feel reluctant to interrogate their claims about Jewish identity, belonging, and ethics, lest such critique lend inadvertent succor to defenders of Jewish hegemony in Israel/Palestine. Yet these sophisticated, provocative claims warrant critical engagement from theorists who affirm possibilities for political community beyond, between, and beneath nation-states. Beyond challenging the constraints that stifle public discourse, Butler and the Boyarins challenge sympathetic scholars to resume debate about directions for diasporic politics.

I call this project a "diasporic critique of diasporism," then, because the standpoint from which I engage the work of Butler and the Boyarins is not Zionist.[5] My goal is neither to discredit, nor rebut, these theorists' controversial public declarations regarding Israel/Palestine (e.g., support for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions [BDS] movement).[6] For the purposes of this essay, I grant some of the most contentious claims about the region's history and politics: that the state of Israel is accurately described as a project of settler colonialism; that the occupation of Palestinian territories violates international law; that Palestinians displaced in 1948 have a right to return; and that laws privileging Israel's Jewish citizens contravene the basic requirements of democracy. Moreover, although I contend that Butler and the Boyarins misdiagnose Zionism's animating impulses, my primary goal in exposing these misdiagnoses is not to rehabilitate Zionism but to foreground liabilities of investing political energy in theories of identity formation. Finally, the vantage from which I engage these texts qualifies as diasporic because I do not presume that a nation-state is the default political option, given modern Jewish history.[7]

In short, I critique Butler and the Boyarins not because they censure Israel publicly, endorse binational solutions to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and/or support the BDS movement, but because they lack a compelling vision for diasporic politics. Prevailing approaches prove wanting, I argue, because they contest Zionism on the terrain of Jewish identity. To loosen Zionism's hold on Jewish allegiance, Butler and the Boyarins recover alternative approaches to the attainment or grounding of identity, approaches they consider likely to inspire ethical conduct toward non-Jews. Butler and the Boyarins invest political energy in these projects because they understand Zionism as more than a political movement for the establishment of a Jewish state. Zionism also, on their view, advances a philosophically naïve and morally reprehensible theory of Jewish identity. If Zionism's political failings are inextricably bound up with its theoretical failings, then one can gain traction against Zionism, Butler and the Boyarins suggest, by defining "Jewishness" otherwise. If, however, the demand for a Jewish state rests not on a philosophical mistake about the boundaries of the self, but on a historical, political, and economic analysis of anti-Semitism, then Butler and the Boyarins attack the wrong target. Moreover, in a theoretical framework that places a premium on articulations of "Jewishness," diaspora loses much of its traditional resonance as a condition that demands distinctive modes of political mobilization. In texts by Butler and the Boyarins, diaspora's appeal derives primarily from the resources it affords for constructing a philosophically compelling theory of the Jewish *self* or *collective*—rather than the resources it affords for constructing institutions appropriate to a nonterritorial Jewish *polity*.

My central argument, in this essay, is that diasporic thinkers should redirect their energies from theorizing the Jewish self toward defending the ability of polities other than the nation-state to ensure Jewish political empowerment. Given the diverse sources from which Zionism derives ideological energy, critics of Zionism must engage politically on multiple fronts. Butler and the Boyarins advance a sharp political critique of "the forms of state violence instituted and maintained by political Zionism," and they advocate the establishment of a regime, in Israel/Palestine, that would eschew violence, domination, and discrimination.[8] When it comes to enlisting support for such projects, however, the approaches of Butler and the Boyarins are less politically robust, because they neglect the singular political predicaments of modern Jews. More than a theory about what it means to be Jewish, political Zionism is a theory about the nation-state's ability to vanquish anti-Semitism. The recognition that emancipation did not deliver on the promise of full enfranchisement is the impetus for political Zionism.[9] The admission of Jewish individuals to equal rights did not eliminate European anti-Semitism. Rather, emancipation created new forms of anti-Semitism.[10] If modern Jews remain subject to forms of discrimination that demand a political response, they are without traditional foundations for Jewish solidarity—for emancipation sought to transform Judaism from a theologico-political membership into an individual, private faith.[11] Thus, the admission of Jewish individuals to equal citizenship required the development of new idioms in which to confront political crises. Political Zionism not only diagnoses the political predicament of the modern Jew, it offers him or her a solution—namely, citizenship in a Jewish nation-state.

To contest this solution, diasporic thinkers must grapple with political Zionism's diagnosis of the Jews' vulnerability as a stateless people. Yet, in their preoccupation with the ethics of particular identity, Butler and the Boyarins neglect the political insights that propelled political Zionism. By developing ethically resonant visions of "Jewishness," Butler and the Boyarins may inspire Jews who have long felt muzzled to criticize Israeli policy. Yet the relevant debate to pursue, in this expanded conversational arena, is whether, at this juncture, Jews need a nation-state—not what "Jewishness" means. As we will see, Butler and the Boyarins do not ignore the polity altogether. Yet Butler and the Boyarins approach the polity through excurses on the attainment or grounding of identity, confident that adoption of diasporic identities will incline Jews toward a determinate political stance. As the case of Zionism reveals, however, ethical principles provide little guidance regarding forms of polity adequate to current circumstances—let alone how to mobilize for their establishment. Moreover, by predicating opposition to Zionism on controversial definitions of "Jewishness," Butler

and the Boyarins risk discounting diasporic traditions better suited to theorizing political agency. I engage Butler and the Boyarins to move diasporic thinking beyond debates about identity—what does "Jewish" mean?—toward analysis of modern Jews' political predicaments. The pressing question for diasporic thinkers, I submit, is how to envision political agency in polities other than the nation-state.

From Exile to Diaspora

When contemporary scholars celebrate diaspora as the incubator for an ethically compelling vision of particular identity, they depart from one strand of Jewish thought about exile (*galut*).[12] A prominent strand within rabbinic discourse highlights the constraints that exile places on political agency. In texts by Butler and the Boyarins, an argument about the ethics of particular identity replaces this traditional debate about the metaphysical, geographical, and political conditions for self-rule. Butler and the Boyarins prefer to speak of "diaspora," rather than "exile," to jettison the latter term's theological baggage, as well as its suggestion that dispersion is a plight to be rectified through return to the homeland.[13] Yet one can resist the "negation of the exile" while holding on to the idea that dispersion is a political status. In their embrace of "diaspora," contemporary theorists have muted exile's political connotations. The tendency to treat diaspora as an identity category reflects Butler and the Boyarins' historical location, after the modern transformation of Judaism (a political membership and a religious obligation) into "Jewishness" (a marker of social difference).

In rabbinic texts, exile is a theological condition, a geographical location, and a political status.[14] Banished from the land of Israel by God, Jews live dispersed among the nations, to whose political authority they remain subordinate. Thus, with the loss of the land, Jews also lose political autonomy. On a rabbinic interpretation of Jewish history, "the central question of Jewish political thought" is a question about the value of self-rule: "Just how important is sovereignty, independence, and authoritative direction? How important is it to have, like the other nations, kings of one's own, who appoint judges and fight wars?"[15]

The rabbis answer in the affirmative—sovereignty is indeed important—when they define political independence, and political agency more generally, as what exile precludes. On one influential understanding of *galut*, articulated in the midrash known as "the three oaths," exile consigns Jews to political passivity. An elaboration upon three verses from Song of Songs, each of which yields one "oath," this midrash delineates the posture that Jews must adopt toward the land of Israel, and toward their non-Jewish rulers, while in exile.[16]

> R. Jose son of R. Hanina said: "What was the purpose of those three adjurations?—One, that Israel shall not go up [all together as if surrounded] by a wall; the second, that whereby the Holy One, blessed be He, adjured Israel that they shall not rebel against the nations of the world; and the third is that whereby the Holy One, blessed be He, adjured the idolaters that they shall not oppress Israel too much."[17]

The oaths dictate norms governing the relationship between exilic Jews and their non-Jewish rulers: Jews must accept non-Jewish rule and the nations must restrain their oppressive impulses ("not too much"). More important, the oaths proscribe *aliyah* (or ascent to the land of Israel) en masse ("all together as if surrounded by a wall"). To the best of my knowledge, no rabbinic commentator prohibits individual ascent during the period of exile, although not all consider individual ascent a binding obligation. Indeed, many rabbis who commend individual *aliyah* forbid *aliyah* en masse, citing the three oaths.[18] The oaths discourage *aliyah* en masse because collective return to the land awaits messianic redemption. Here, exile is less about geographical location—individuals are free, in some cases encouraged, to reside in the land of Israel—than about a ban on political initiative.

In other words, Jews must forgo self-determination while in exile. The rabbinic dictum, cited by Moses Maimonides, that "the sole difference between the present and the Messianic days is delivery from servitude to foreign powers [*sheibud malchuyot*]," makes national sovereignty the hallmark of redemption.[19] In the Talmud and in the *Mishneh Torah*, this dictum casts messianism in emphatically "restorative" terms, to invoke Gershom Scholem's typology.[20] For our purposes, Maimonides' rationalism is less significant than the fact that he uses the prospect of restored sovereignty to ward off messianism's antinomian threat. To temper apocalyptic fervor, Maimonides casts the messiah as a political ruler whose primary task is restoration of the Davidic monarchy. "King Messiah will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its former state and original sovereignty [*memshalah harishonah*]."[21] For Maimonides, redemption's allure derives from the prospect of renewed sovereignty in the land of Israel.

Awaiting messianic redemption, the rabbis ask whether self-determination is possible in exile. Marshaling diasporic traditions to oppose Israeli state violence, Butler and the Boyarins pose variations on the question "What does 'Jewish' mean?"[22] One need not share the rabbis' theological pessimism about prospects for exilic autonomy to wonder what has precipitated this transformation of a political status into an identity category. How has a controversy surrounding the meaning of "Jewishness" come to supplant debate about the geographical, theological, and institutional conditions for political agency?

At first glance, it is scarcely surprising that Butler and the Boyarins critique Zionism by elaborating alternative conceptions of "what it is to 'be' a Jew."[23] After all, the conviction, shared by some American Jews, that support for Israel is a sine qua non of Jewish identity could inspire reluctance to criticize Israeli policy (let alone repudiate Zionism). If "the present time" is one "in which Jewish orthodoxy has been redefined as including the unquestioning support for a political entity, the State of Israel, and all of its martial adventures," one might argue, Butler and the Boyarins have no choice but to respond in kind, engaging Zionism on the terrain of identity.[24] Admittedly, claims to orthodoxy, authenticity, and loyalty animate vocal strands of American Zionism. Yet the blackmail of authenticity does not exhaust Zionist argument, canonical or contemporary.[25] Upon reflection, then, one wonders why the ethics of particular identity has become the default idiom for scholarly opposition to Zionism. If Butler hopes to "envisage a new polity after Zionism," why does she proceed by elaborating an ethic of dispossession—instead of outlining the institutional contours of and political prospects for such a polity?[26] The conviction that Zionism is amenable to this analysis reveals diasporic thinkers' acquiescence to a transformation in modern Jews' self-conception. In order for identity to emerge as the point of contention in the debate with Zionism, Judaism first had to become "Jewishness."

Thus, to appreciate political implications of engaging Zionism on the terrain of identity, we must examine Butler's deployment of the term "Jewishness."[27] Butler's point of departure, in *Parting Ways*, is "the hegemonic control Zionism exercises over Jewishness."[28] "If Zionism continues to control the meaning of Jewishness," Butler warns, "there can be no Jewish critique of Israel and no acknowledgment of those of Jewish descent or formation who call into question the right of the State of Israel to speak for Jewish values or, indeed, the Jewish people."[29] Wresting "Jewishness" away from Zionism's tenacious grip is a critical task, according to Butler, because the Zionists' monopolization of the term makes it impossible for the critique of Israel to register as "Jewish." Yet Butler seeks not only to excavate an alternative table of Jewish values—she also challenges the "identitarian presumptions" that support equations of "Jewishness" with Zionism or with social justice.[30] Having isolated "the meaning of Jewishness" as a point of contention, Butler hopes to derive political leverage from recovering "ethical frameworks" in which "Jewishness is itself an anti-identitarian project insofar as we might even say that being a Jew implies taking up an ethical relation to the non-Jew."[31]

Butler aligns her usage of the term "Jewishness" with that of Hannah Arendt. On Butler's reading, Arendt preferred to speak of "Jewishness," rather than "Judaism," to capture "the historical situation of populations who

may or may not engage in religious practices or explicitly identify with Judaism. Indeed, *Jewishness* in Arendt's view is a term that tries to hold together a multiplicity of social modes of identification without being able to reconcile them. There is no one definition and cannot be."[32] Butler judges that Arendt's "view would be sufficient if it did not carry with it the presumption of European origin and affinity," excluding Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews.[33] With this caveat—if only Arendt had captured the full spectrum of modern Jewish identification—Butler implies that appreciation for multiplicity is what distinguishes Arendt's view of "Jewishness." Yet in Arendt's lexicon, "Jewishness" does not serve as a capacious umbrella encompassing "a multiplicity of social modes of identification." Rather, Arendt uses a story about the emergence of "Jewishness" to explain the rise, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of genocidal anti-Semitism. "Jewishness" only becomes conceivable, for Arendt, at a perilous historical juncture—a moment when, no longer defined by nationality or religion, Jewish individuals remain indelibly marked as such. On Arendt's narrative, the transformation of Judaism into "Jewishness" was "dangerous in the extreme," both because it prepared the ground for Nazi anti-Semitism, and because it led Jews to mistake anti-Semitism for a social, rather than a political, phenomenon.[34]

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt uses an anatomy of "Jewishness" to expose the limits of emancipation, which eroded Jewish nationality without delivering substantive equality to Jewish individuals. On Arendt's narrative, the admission of Jews to equal political rights created a dire predicament for assimilated Jews, who "had to differentiate themselves clearly from the 'Jew in general'" to escape the social discrimination to which the Jewish masses remained subject, "and just as clearly to indicate that they were Jews" to retain social cachet among non-Jewish elites.[35] In nineteenth-century Europe, assimilated Jews responded to these pressures not, as Butler implies, by multiplying social modes of identification but rather with "conformism," the creation of a recognizably "Jewish type":

> Instead of being defined by nationality or religion, Jews were being transformed into a social group whose members shared certain psychological attributes and reactions, the sum total of which was supposed to constitute "Jewishness." In other words, Judaism became a psychological quality and the Jewish question became an involved personal problem for every individual Jew.[36]

Reduced to "an empty sense of difference," "Jewishness" becomes something exotic that one exudes, an "interesting" vice.[37] What assimilated Jews failed to understand, however, was that the vice that made them alluring also marked them for elimination. The transformation of Judaism into "Jewishness"

is a condition of possibility for the "Nazi brand of antisemitism," according to Arendt, because it turns "Jewishness" into an indelible stain. "Jews had been able to escape from Judaism into conversion; from Jewishness there was no escape. A crime, moreover, is met with punishment; a vice can only be exterminated."[38]

For our purposes, Arendt's anatomy of "Jewishness" is significant less as an authoritative genealogy of Nazi anti-Semitism than as a caution about the loss of political consciousness that attends the transformation of Judaism—a theologico-political category—into "Jewishness"—a set of social and psychological traits. Rather than resolving the Jewish question, emancipation turned the Jewish question into an intimate, personal conundrum. As Arendt relates, in nineteenth-century Western Europe, assimilated Jews "succeeded in converting a national quality into a private affair," with the result that "their private lives, their decisions and sentiments, became the very center of their 'Jewishness.'"[39] In *Origins*, Arendt not only traces social pressures that led assimilated Jews to understand "Jewishness" as a "private affair." She also laments these individuals' failure to recognize and confront political problems. "Political problems were distorted to the point of pure perversion when Jews tried to solve them by means of inner experience and private emotions."[40] To obsess over personal dilemmas (such as the decision to marry a non-Jew), Arendt contends, is to mistake both the sources of anti-Semitism and the arena in which anti-Semitism must be fought. Thus, on my reading, the critical purchase of the term "Jewishness" derives not from its resistance to singular definition but from its exposé of the limits of emancipation. The "obsessive" preoccupation with "Jewishness" leaves Jews ill equipped to address forms of collective vulnerability that demand a political response.[41]

On Butler's view, defensive reactions to the "critique of the ongoing and violent project of settler colonialism that constitutes political Zionism" are perhaps "only utterable on the condition that we fail to remember what Jewish means."[42] Yet, in her enthusiasm for the political promise of an ethic of dispossession, Butler fails to remember what "Jewishness" meant for Arendt. When Butler heralds the anti-identitarian project of "Jewishness," she forgets Arendt's cautionary tale about the loss of "political responsibility."[43] Butler cannot hear Arendt's cautionary note because she exemplifies the historical transformations whose formative stages Arendt documents. For Butler, "Jewishness" is an ethical modality—rather than a religious obligation or a political membership. By revitalizing diasporic traditions, Butler and the Boyarins would provide succor to Jews wrestling with dilemmas of identity: Can I observe the sabbath and denounce Israeli militarism? Can I join the Palestinian solidarity movement and remain a Jew in good standing?[44]

As an empirical matter, it may be the case that, for twenty-first-century American Jews, the Jewish question surrounds the meaning of "Jewishness," rather than the terms of Jewish enfranchisement. This fact is cause for celebration, because it reflects the unparalleled success of Jewish integration in the United States. Yet it would be naïve to imagine that the ascendance of "Jewishness" comes without cost. When Butler and the Boyarins contest Zionism on the terrain of identity, they tacitly accept the transformation of Judaism into "Jewishness" as a fait accompli. Indeed, they embrace the inward, affective turn, of which "Jewishness" is a prime symptom, as the precondition for a pluralization of Jewish identities—which pluralization provides fodder for the critique of Zionist hegemony.[45] As Arendt warns, however, confining one's critical horizon to "Jewishness" can hinder political thinking. When the meaning of "Jewishness" becomes a paramount concern, one is liable to forget that political Zionism stakes its claim on a defense of the nation-state. For Butler, the critical project is establishing the conditions of possibility for a figure like Arendt—a Jewish critic of Zionism "whose political views made many people doubt the authenticity of her Jewishness."[46] To establish the conditions of possibility for a figure like Arendt is not, however, to grapple with the questions Arendt posed about the difficulty of sustaining political consciousness. As Arendt acknowledges, Zionism's ideological success derives, in part, from its claim to offer the definitive solution to the political predicaments of modern Jews.[47] Butler and the Boyarins neglect to mount a direct rebuttal of Zionism's political claims because they trust that elaborating an ethically compelling vision of "Jewishness" will yield the desired political stance. In the following sections, I contend that arguments about "what it is to 'be' a Jew" provide insufficient traction against a movement, like political Zionism, that stakes its primary claim on a defense of the nation-state as a political form.

Dispersion as an Ethical Modality[48]

In *Parting Ways*, Butler offers the following précis of her project:

> I'm trying to understand how the exilic—or more emphatically *the diasporic*—is built into the idea of the Jewish (not analytically, but historically, that is, over time); in this sense, to "be" a Jew is to be departing from oneself, cast out into a world of the non-Jew, bound to make one's way ethically and politically precisely there within a world of irreversible heterogeneity.[49]

As this passage reveals, Butler's inquiry into "the diasporic" turns on what it means to "be" a Jew. Although "diaspora" in its quotidian acceptation—a

"geographic condition"—remains part of Butler's lexicon, the condition proves noteworthy largely for the ethically resonant "idea of the Jewish" that it inspires.[50] Drawing on texts by Edward Said, Butler contends that dispersion has made insight into relational ethics available to Jewish thinkers (among others). "It is not only that, in diaspora, Jews must and do live with non-Jews, and must reflect on how precisely to conduct a life in the midst of religious and cultural heterogeneity, but also that the Jew can never be fully separated from the question of how to live among those who are not Jewish."[51] On Butler's framing, "the question of how to live among those who are not Jewish" is less a question about "conduct"—the legal, economic, and political institutions Jews developed to navigate heterogeneous societies—than about dynamics of Jewish identity. As Butler interprets Said, "the diasporic" names a distinctive approach to particular identity, "a way of attaining identity only with and through the other."[52]

Although Butler locates diaspora's appeal in the resources it affords for understanding the attainment of identity, she is at pains to deny that these resources "are" Jewish in any straightforward sense. In *Parting Ways*, Butler undertakes a complex philosophical project: Butler simultaneously expounds on what it is "to 'be' a Jew" and denies that the Jew has a stable ontology. As the following sentence illustrates, Butler's argument involves (at least) two moves. "My contention from the outset of this book is that the relation with the non-Jew is at the core of Jewish ethics, which means that it is not possible to be Jewish without the non-Jew and that, to be ethical, one must depart from Jewishness as an exclusive frame for ethics."[53] Here, Butler first identifies relationality as a signature of Jewish ethics and then distances her contention from colloquial notions of "being Jewish." Aware that, by identifying concern for the other as a Jewish value, one risks ascribing unity to the Jewish self and sufficiency to the Jewish frame, Butler denies that relationality is a predicate of a self-identical Jewish subject. Rather, Butler invites readers to understand "the relation to alterity" as "challenging the idea of 'Jewish' as a static sort of being, one that is adequately described as a subject."[54] If one entertains Butler's proposal, to "be" Jewish "is to have already entered into a certain mode of relationality," with the result that the Jewish self is fissured, its unity "interrupted."[55] Moreover, in a framework that posits "a relation to alterity that is irreversible and defining," "Jewishness" involves dispossession:[56]

> It may be that the sense of belonging to that group 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.[57]

Here, Butler casts "Jewishness" as a mode of particular identity that disposes its bearers ethically by challenging "any enclosed and self-referential notion of belonging."[58]

When Butler presents an ethic of "self-departure" as a resource for opposition to political Zionism, she frames the contest with Zionism as a debate about selfhood—rather than a debate about the legitimacy of human agency, the conditions for self-determination, or the best way to combat anti-Semitism.[59] To encourage a rupture with Zionism, Butler would disabuse Jews of the fantasy of sovereign subjectivity, beseeching them to heed external demands that fissure the self. Implicit within this framing is a diagnosis of political Zionism. On Butler's view, "the question of how, whether, and in what way to 'give ground' to the other becomes an essential part of ethical reflection," and an act qualifies as ethical when it establishes place "for those who are 'not-me.'"[60] That Butler incorporates this understanding of ethics into her critique of Zionism suggests that she faults Zionism for refusal to cede ground—for "hermeticism," "communitarianism," and "concern only with the vulnerability and fate of the Jewish people."[61] Butler's recourse to ethics further suggests that, on her view, Zionism's reprehensible hermeticism derives from a retrograde notion of what it is to "be" a Jew. An ethic that "contests sovereign notions of the subject and ontological claims of self-identity" advances the critique of Zionism because, Butler warns, absent such a contest, one is liable to remain within the horizon of national belonging.[62]

Although Butler's diagnosis doubtless rests on empirical observation of disregard for Palestinian suffering, it also reflects a more fundamental conviction about the "overlapping" of ethics and politics.[63] In *Parting Ways*, Butler predicates opposition to Zionism on responsiveness to the other and predicates responsiveness on the displacement of identity. The animating question of Butler's project, I would argue, is one that she formulates when glossing texts by Said: "Is it precisely through a politics that affirms the irresolution of identity that binationalism becomes thinkable?"[64] Speaking in her own voice, Butler appears to answer in the affirmative:

> If the relevant Jewish tradition for waging the public criticism of Israeli state violence is one that draws upon cohabitation as a norm of sociality, then what follows is the need *not only* to establish an alternative Jewish public presence (distinct from AIPAC, to be sure, but also from J Street) or an alternative Jewish movement (such as Jewish Voice for Peace, Independent Jewish Voices in the UK, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, to name but a few), but to affirm the displacement of identity that Jewishness requires, as paradoxical as that may first sound.[65]

That Butler deems political mobilization insufficient without affirmation of "the displacement of identity" attests the strength of her investment in ethics.

Many would consider the conception of identity to which a Jew subscribes irrelevant as long as she enlists in campaigns against Israeli state violence. Yet Butler doubts that Jews who resist "self-departure" would endorse such projects, insisting that "a relation to alterity that is irreversible and defining" is one "without which we cannot make sense of such fundamental terms as *equality* or *justice*."[66] Given that Emmanuel Levinas's affirmation of our constitutive responsibility to the Other did not prevent him from embracing an assertive right-wing Zionism, Butler concedes that ethical discernment does not guarantee political judgment.[67] Yet without issuing guarantees, Butler still insists that Jews can *only* arrive at ethical relationality—and, by extension, the critique of political Zionism—through the self's dispossession: "The very possibility of ethical relation depends upon a certain condition of dispossession from national modes of belonging. We are outside ourselves, before ourselves, and only in such a mode is there a chance of being for another."[68] Indeed, dispossession emerges as a political requirement—for "my very capacity for attachment and, indeed, for love and receptivity requires a sustained dispossession of this 'I.'"[69] In these passages, Butler identifies "self-departure" as the preferred—indeed, the sole—route to the critique of political Zionism. Not content to demonstrate that the critique of Israeli state violence "can" be based on an ethic of cohabitation, Butler insists that it "must" be based on this ethic.[70]

But is this account of the "overlapping" of ethics and politics persuasive? On Butler's diagnosis, Israeli violence reveals an ethical failure—namely, a failure to depart from oneself. Thus, when exposing Israel's cynical invocations of "self-defense" to justify military aggression during the 2006 Lebanon war, Butler characterizes "this 'self' who is to be defended" as a self that "denies the way in which it is, by definition, bound up with others."[71] Here, Butler implies that her political opponents are motivated by refusal of the self's inextricable dependence. Yet a brief detour into canons of Zionist thought suggests that, when it comes to the justification for a Jewish state, there is no direct relationship between "an enclosed and self-referential notion of belonging" and the demand for Jewish sovereignty. In *Parting Ways*, Butler singles out "political Zionism, understood as the insistence on grounding the State of Israel on principles of Jewish sovereignty," for critique.[72] Yet the tradition of *political* Zionism derives not from an ethically suspect assertion of Jewish identity but from a historical, political, and economic analysis of anti-Semitism. In *The Jewish State*, Theodor Herzl promises that the establishment of a Jewish state will eliminate historically specific forms of anti-Semitism. Herzl's investment in the state does not betray "identitarian" commitments—for Herzl defines Jewish nationality as the contingent product of persecution.[73] Curiously, Butler appears more favorably

disposed to schools of Zionist thought that actually do embrace "notions of cultural and religious purity," such as cultural Zionism.[74] Cultural Zionism proves less objectionable to Butler because its proponents did not endorse "a particular state formation," nor were they oblivious to Palestinian claims.[75] Yet Ahad Ha'am, the progenitor of cultural Zionism, was "one of the most essentialist and collectivist Zionist thinkers," insisting on the Jews' innate moral genius.[76] If, in the history of Zionism, the thinkers most committed to "a monolithic and unified identity" were the least committed to establishing a nation-state, Butler's ethical turn is predicated on a misdiagnosis.[77] Political Zionism's justification for a Jewish state rests neither on a philosophical mistake about the self nor on an assertion of "cultural and religious purity," but on Herzl's claim to "understand Anti-Semitism, which is really a highly complex movement."[78]

If the claim that we can *only* escape Zionism's putative narcissism through the self's dispossession misdiagnoses political Zionism, it also threatens to discredit forms of Jewish politics arguably better suited to engage Zionism's political claims. With the assertion that "only through this fissuring of who I am do I stand a chance of relating to another," Butler shrouds the self in suspicion, dismissing more prosaic forms of Jewish belonging, and more straightforward Jewish appeals, as reprehensible in their self-enclosure.[79] When one speaks as a Jew without qualification, Butler warns, one risks imputing "sufficiency to the Jewish framework," thereby replicating the chauvinism with which she taxes Zionism.[80] "Indeed, even the critique of Zionism, if exclusively Jewish, extends Jewish hegemony for thinking about the region and becomes, in spite of itself, part of what we might call the Zionist effect."[81] To avoid "making even the resistance to Zionism into a 'Jewish' value," Butler classes her ethical formulation as "Jewish/not Jewish" and her project as an "impossible, necessary task."[82] But the critique of Zionism is only "impossible" when one must simultaneously "claim one's Jewishness" and decenter the Jewish perspective.[83] Once we detach arguments about the polity from ethical arguments about the self, it becomes possible to imagine Jews who impute univocity to the self endorsing Butler's call for "a new polity that would presuppose the end to settler colonialism and that would imply complex and antagonistic ways of living together."[84]

Yet Butler's ethical strictures cast a pall of suspicion on these more possible forms of diasporic politics. If unqualified assertions of "Jewishness" can inadvertently perpetrate the "Zionist effect," then Jewish movements for subnational autonomy (such as the Zionism of Brit Shalom) begin to look like misguided bids for "identitarian closure."[85] Butler's reservations about Martin Buber, who envisioned Palestine as a land for two peoples, reflect her conviction that "self-departure" facilitates "cohabitation"—a necessary basis

for "the critique of illegitimate nation-state violence"—as opposed to mere "cooperation."[86] To Butler's dismay, Buber "failed to criticize Israel as a form of settler colonialism."[87] On Butler's reading, Buber's failure is not merely a lapse in political judgment. Rather, Buber lacks resources to resist settler colonialism because his I-Thou philosophy insists "on separate identities, culturally distinct, that nevertheless federate as a cooperative dialogue and venture."[88] While Levinas posits "a heterogeneity that is prior to my being and that constantly decenters the autonomous subject I appear to be," Buber leaves the autonomous subject and the autonomous nation intact.[89] It is no accident that Buber affirmed "the rights of Jews to lay claim to more land," Butler implies, because, unlike Levinas, he did not assert the inseparability of Jewish and non-Jewish selves.[90] Yet Buber's failure to condemn the state of Israel as a colonialist project does not demonstrate the impossibility of devising egalitarian arrangements from the standpoint of an autonomous self—just as Levinas's ardent Zionism does not invalidate his ethic of responsibility to the other. The Jewish self is not always already politically Zionist.

Although Butler believes that "envisaging a polity after Zionism may well be the only way out of violence and destruction," she has not written a book delineating the contours of a post-Zionist polity—she has elaborated an ethics of dispossession.[91] Read as a template for diasporic political thinking, *Parting Ways* makes finding the right "kind of particularism"—one that invites processes of "deprovincialization," "generalization," and "universalization"—the critical task.[92] Without denying that non-provincial Jews may envision new forms of polity, I worry that, by placing a premium on the ethics of dispossession, Butler inhibits the kind of thinking required to revitalize diasporic politics. When Butler invests political energy in ethics, she distances the critique of Zionism from the singular political predicaments of modern Jews. In Butler's argument, the contingencies of Jewish history (e.g., the Holocaust) provide occasion for the derivation of "principles of justice and equality and respect for life and land."[93] By deriving such a framework, Butler hopes to advance concrete political goals, including the critique of the nation-state. To derive generalizable ethical principles (applicable to Jews) is not, however, to examine how *this* dispersed people can exercise political agency and confront political challenges. A compelling critique of Zionism, I would argue, must offer historically informed rejoinders to Zionism's diagnosis of the Jews' vulnerability as a stateless people. Such rejoinders may culminate in the endorsement of polities that Butler would judge ethical—but they cannot rely solely or primarily on general ethical principles. The proper object of diasporic critique, I would argue, is not solidarity, belonging, or communitarianism, but the poverty of political imagination when it comes to envisioning political agency beyond the nation-state.

Diasporization as a Pursuit of Moral Purity[94]

Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin were among the first scholars to tout Judaism's diasporic "genius" as a counter to Zionist polemics that cast support for the state of Israel as obligatory.[95] Rather than refuse the prevailing terms of debate, the Boyarins have responded on the polemicists' terrain, that of Jewish identity. Like Butler, the Boyarins would challenge Zionism's hegemony over Israel/Palestine, and over Jewish allegiance, by recovering a diasporic identity whose incorporation of otherness ostensibly renders it immune to domination. On closer inspection, however, the Boyarins' work reveals the lack of a direct relationship between the ethics of particular identity and one's political stance. As the Boyarins' analysis demonstrates, the likelihood that Jews will refrain from violence depends less on their approach to identity than on their historical and political circumstances.

The Boyarins' critique of Zionism is part of an ambitious project to rehabilitate particular identity from the aspersions of Western universalism. The Boyarins write as ardent defenders of particularisms both Jewish and non-Jewish—of the "stubborn hanging-on to ethnic, cultural specificity."[96] As Daniel Boyarin declares, "I treasure in principle and with deep emotion cultural difference per se."[97] Jews committed to campaigns against violence, oppression, and domination, the Boyarins insist, need not accept "Paul's solution of dissolving into a universal human essence."[98] Rather, it is incumbent upon those devoted to "the maintenance of Jewish culture and the historical memory" to demonstrate that particularistic attachments remain consistent with "deeply felt and enacted human solidarity."[99] If the Boyarins exhibit greater enthusiasm for collective identity (and greater reservations about universalism) than Butler, they nevertheless share her anxiety about particularism's ethical valence. As Daniel Boyarin concedes, "The demand for cultural sameness, universalism, has done much harm and violence in the world, but cultural difference as well has to work hard to do no harm."[100] Alarmed by the ways that "cultural difference" can go awry, the Boyarins undertake the "hard work" of domesticating Jewish particularism: "Perhaps the primary function for a critical construction of cultural (or racial or gender or sexual) identity is to construct it in ways that purge it of its elements of domination and oppression."[101] Offering diaspora as a normatively appealing "model" for collective identity, the Boyarins make critical constructions of identity a centerpiece of non-Zionist politics.[102]

When the Boyarins task diasporic thinkers with the critical construction of Jewish identity, they frame the debate with Zionism as a contest surrounding "ethically appropriate" grounds for identity.[103] The Boyarins' influential early essay "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity" begins with

the assertion that "group identity has been constructed traditionally in two ways. It has been figured on the one hand as the product of a common genealogical origin and, on the other, as produced by a common geographical origin."[104] On the Boyarins' interpretation, Zionism founds Jewish identity on territory (a "subversion" and "betrayal" of Jewish culture), while diasporic traditions found Jewish identity on genealogy (thereby preserving Jewish culture).[105] With this antithesis, the Boyarins dismiss the possibility of founding group identity on politics as inconceivable, or, perhaps, untraditional. Having dismissed this possibility, the Boyarins equate Zionism with "autochthony," "one of the most potent and dangerous myths."[106] Here, Zionism is less a movement to combat anti-Semitism than a theory that predicates Jewish peoplehood on attachment to the land of Israel.[107] The Zionist move to found collective identity on territory, the Boyarins contend, necessarily breeds violence. "Insistence on ethnic speciality, when it is extended over a particular piece of land, will inevitably produce a discourse not unlike the Inquisition in many of its effects."[108] On the Boyarins' diagnosis, Israeli state violence exposes liabilities of territorial identity, its "inevitable" propensity toward domination.

If, as the Boyarins suggest, violence is the "inevitable" result of territorially based identities, then the pressing task for critics is to ground identity otherwise. Therein lies diaspora's appeal. That Jews linked through kinship managed to flourish in the absence of a state, the Boyarins contend, "calls into question the idea that a people must have a land in order to be a people."[109] The Boyarins not only celebrate genealogy's power as a strategy of diasporic cultural maintenance, they also tout its ethical merits. On the Boyarins' account, genealogical identity proves a safe form of ethnocentrism, sustaining cultural difference without provoking violence against external others. Diasporic identity proves safe because, in its denial of "a natural association between this people and a particular land," it reveals "the impossibility of seeing Jewish culture as a self-enclosed, bounded phenomenon."[110] In the Boyarins' lexicon, "diasporized identity" is synonymous with "disaggregated identity"—an identity that embraces cultural mixing and rejects pretensions to purity.[111] In Daniel Boyarin's idiom, diasporic identities honor, rather than disown, the "hybridity of cultural identifications."[112] On this logic, the inability to abide difference within the self spawns violence both "discursive" and "actual," as individuals project unruly impulses onto stigmatized others in an effort to sustain delusions of purity.[113] By contrast, an individual who acknowledges the otherness within would never conceive, let alone condone, the project of building walls between Israel and Palestine.[114]

Thus, more than shared theoretical antecedents or an emphasis on otherness, what aligns the Boyarins' "privileging of Diaspora" with Butler's recent

work is the attempt to derive a determinate political stance from an ethic of particular identity.[115] On the Boyarins' rendition of Jewish history, diasporic Jews were able to resist the lure of domination because they developed a novel approach to the grounding of identity. The Boyarins embark on projects of identity construction, then, because they trust that the desired political consequences will follow from adoption of a diasporic identity. Yet, as the Boyarins' work unwittingly reveals, grounding identity properly does not guarantee that one will refrain from violence or reject sovereignty as a political imperative.

When the Boyarins embrace genealogical connection, they locate Jewish identity within the domestic sphere. In the Boyarins' lexicon, genealogy signifies "the claims of physical kinship," "family, history, memory, and practice."[116] This depiction of the Jews as a family rests on an unstated premise—namely, that debunking the myth of autochthony entails abandoning a political conception of Jewish peoplehood. For the Boyarins, "the lesson of Diaspora" is that "peoples and lands are not organically connected."[117] On its face, the diasporic lesson surrounds a people's spatial orientation. In principle, denying an organic connection between land and people could open the door to an emphatically political conception of membership—in which obligation derives from covenant, say, rather than geography. Yet the Boyarins tacitly deny this possibility when they identify the rabbis and, more important, the Neturei Karta, as prime exponents of diaspora's anti-territorial wisdom.[118] With the rabbis, the Neturei Karta understand that "redemption through Land must either be infinitely deferred . . . or become a moral monster."[119] As the reference to the Neturei Karta reveals, what presents as an admonition against territorialism is in fact an admonition against politics as such. Neturei Karta opposition to Zionism derives not from denial of autochthony, but from renunciation of Jewish political agency in *galut*. By casting diaspora as a choice for genealogy, and against the land, the Boyarins elide the theology of political passivity to which their theoretical antecedents subscribe. This elision both reflects, and sustains, a deeper confusion. Like the rabbis, who ostensibly "renounce any possibility of domination over Others by being perpetually out of power," the Boyarins conflate the renunciation of domination with renunciation of "temporal power."[120] The Boyarins endorse diaspora "as an alternative to the model of self-determination, which is, after all, in itself a Western, imperialist imposition on the rest of the world."[121] Yet renouncing the land, as diasporic traditions ostensibly counsel, does not require renouncing self-determination.[122] Renunciation of the land only entails retreat from politics if "the land" is a metonym for human agency.

Despite the Boyarins' stated agenda of identity construction, then, what diaspora really models is the "choice" to renounce political power and

agency.[123] As the Boyarins concede, diasporic Jews were nonviolent because they lacked political power—not because they achieved precocious insight into "the hybridity of cultural identifications":

> The most violent practice that rabbinic Judaism ever developed vis-à-vis its Others was spitting on the floor in the synagogue or walking around the block to avoid passing a pagan or Christian place of worship. Something else was needed for the potential negative implications of the culture to become actualized. That necessity is power over others. Particularism plus power yields tribal warfare or fascism.[124]

In this passage, Jewish violence results not, as the Boyarins suggest elsewhere, from notions of cultural purity. Rather, violence is a product of "power over others," which diasporic Jews (fortunately) lacked. The brand of particularism to which one subscribes now appears irrelevant, dwarfed in significance by one's relationship to power. Thus, notions of Jewish identity that justify provision of charitable resources "only to one family"—"to the virtual exclusion of others"—are safe, even laudable, in diaspora, given the "lack of Jewish power," but they are a "monstrosity" in Israel.[125] Here, the Boyarins allow that diaspora's ethical merits are a function of the Jews' structural position of powerlessness, rather than their cultivation of genealogical identity.

If the desired political results do not follow from the proper grounding of identity, however, challenging Zionism requires more than a rehabilitation of genealogical attachment. Critics of Israel's current regime must also address the political questions that animated political Zionism. Yet, precisely because they hope to gain political leverage from the fashioning of particular identity, the Boyarins have neglected to examine, at any length, the historical, political, and economic conditions of modern Jewish empowerment.[126] Consequently, their first impulse, when imagining ways to avoid domination, involves replicating the structural conditions that ostensibly made the rabbis nonviolent. In the Boyarins' oeuvre, "submissiveness," retreat, and minority status emerge as normative ideals.[127] This elevation of minority status reflects the Boyarins' conviction that ethnocentrism "is ethically appropriate only when the cultural identity is an embattled (or at any rate nonhegemonic) minority."[128] If, as the Boyarins suggest, particularism's ethical merits derive from diasporic Jews' precarious position, Jews must forsake emancipatory, as well as hegemonic, aspirations. As the Boyarins explain, "What we wish to struggle for, theoretically, is a notion of identity in which there are only slaves but no masters."[129] Significantly, the Boyarins struggle for slavery's universalization, rather than its elimination. In this vein, Daniel Boyarin hails the rabbis' purported refusal to openly defy Rome as the epitome of "diasporic

consciousness."[130] The rabbinic strategy for resistance to Roman imperial rule is to "remain in the closet, as it were. Continue to live, continue to maintain Jewish practice, but do not behave in ways that draw attention or provoke the hostile intervention of the ruling powers. It is God who sent them to rule."[131] Upholding rabbinic cunning as a privileged example of the "powers of diaspora," Daniel Boyarin counsels Jews to do "what we do without getting in trouble," and to use "evasiveness"—not political mobilization—"in order to keep doing it."[132] Yet if Roman imperial rule confronted the rabbis with a stark choice between "slavery" and "death," modern Jews have more emancipatory options.[133]

One could justly object that I have exaggerated the Boyarins' disinclination to political thinking. After all, the Boyarins hail diaspora as "a positive *resource* in the necessary rethinking of models of polity in the current erosion and questioning of the modern nation-state system and ideal."[134] Without scanting the Boyarins' commitment to "rethinking models of polity," I would nevertheless argue that their preoccupation with the grounding of identity impedes such efforts. As a brief examination of Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin's respective contributions to *Powers of Diaspora* reveals, their shared enthusiasm for kinship's preservative power obscures the challenge of theorizing diasporic political agency. In Daniel Boyarin's essay, "Tricksters, Martyrs, and Collaborators: Diaspora and the Gendered Politics of Resistance," the "choice to live however one can and continue to create as Jews" is the signature diasporic move.[135] Here, diaspora is "a cultural condition," its vaunted "power" the power to survive, rather than overcome, oppression.[136] The very effectiveness of these cultural powers—their ability to preserve Jewish "difference" under adverse conditions—makes the nature of the polity a matter of relative indifference. One can remain Jewish, in Daniel Boyarin's sense, under a variety of political regimes. Indeed, the Jewish thing to do, when subject to an oppressive regime, is to employ cunning, dissembling, and appeasement to ensure "the continuation of Jewish cultural practice"—rather than agitate to alter the regime or constitute a new polity.[137] If rabbinic tenacity demonstrates the possibility of preserving "cultural power separate from the coercive power of the state," it provides few resources for envisioning a *polity* other than the nation-state, precisely because it diminishes the urgency of such projects.[138]

For Jonathan Boyarin, diasporic existence does entail a distinctive political predicament—namely, the challenge of making effective legal claims in discourses that do not reflect one's "conception of political identity."[139] In "Circumscribing Constitutional Identities in *Kiryas Joel*," Jonathan Boyarin analyzes a 1994 Supreme Court case that assessed the constitutionality of a school district created to educate special needs children from New York's

Satmar Hasidic community.[140] On Jonathan Boyarin's reading, Satmar identity "is organized around diaspora (primary orientation elsewhere than a group's present residence) and genealogy (family and group descent and upbringing)."[141] Yet, as Jonathan Boyarin acknowledges, kinship and collective memory are not the only strategies that Satmar Hasidim have employed to maintain their distinctive way of life. To establish insular communities like Kiryas Joel, the Satmar have relied on state and federal laws governing property ownership and municipal incorporation.[142] In the Satmar case, the vaunted "powers of diaspora" (kinship, memory, "anamnesis") appear relatively weak—for the Satmar must have recourse to "the coercive power of the state" to remain culturally distinct.[143] Rather than demonstrating "how creative the powers of diaspora could be," the Satmar case threatens to confirm genealogy's impotence in a world of sovereign states.[144] Of course, Jonathan Boyarin is well aware of the mismatch between Satmar identity and their legal strategies. Given the individualist underpinnings of American law, Jonathan Boyarin argues, the Satmar had no choice but to frame their arguments in an idiom that ignores the possibility of "an identity dependent on genealogical and diasporic loyalty rather than individual and territorial liberty."[145] Curiously, the recognition that genealogical identity does not automatically generate distinctive modes of political agency neither dampens Jonathan Boyarin's enthusiasm for anamnesis, nor does it inspire a sustained project to develop alternative legal strategies. One might expect Jonathan Boyarin to supplant, or at least supplement, testimonials to "the nonexhaustible, but perpetually extinguishable, resources of memory" with an enumeration of diasporic political resources.[146] Yet Jonathan Boyarin concludes with a call for American jurisprudence to "accommodate a broader range of notions of identity," rather than a call for diasporic Jews to theorize political agency.[147] On the evidence of these essays, "the anamnestic powers of diaspora, creating ties through memory" can maintain cultural identity under regimes both hostile and benign, but they provide scant resources for envisioning polities other than the nation-state.[148]

Conclusion

I have engaged texts by Butler and the Boyarins from a diasporic standpoint to restore neglected modes of political thinking to scholarly debate about Zionism. Elaborating diasporic visions of "Jewishness" is insufficient to challenge political Zionism's ideological hegemony. Critics must also counter the Zionist brief for state sovereignty with an alternative vision of Jewish empowerment—and, to elaborate such a vision, diasporic thinkers must restore analysis of Jewish political predicaments to a place of prominence.

Admittedly, such questions can get lost in the polemics that consume Jewish public discourse, and they can be exploited to disarm Israel's critics. Yet the question of how Jews can exercise political agency in a world of sovereign states remains a live question—and it is the crucial question, I would argue, in the debate with political Zionism. If 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 for political agency. Conversely, Jews who feel a non-paradoxical sense of national belonging—or nurture organic attachments to the land of Israel—might still be convinced, through political argument, that Israel's current regime is neither just nor necessary for the maintenance of Jewish peoplehood.

By demonstrating that the ethics of particular identity need not consume diasporic politics, I hope to make two broader points. First, appreciating limitations of Butler and the Boyarins' respective rejoinders to Zionism should inspire reservations about the robustness of ethical approaches to conflicts over sovereignty, territory, and enfranchisement. Philosophically naïve views of Jewish identity are one source of support for non-egalitarian Zionisms. By recovering diasporic conceptions of "Jewishness," Butler and the Boyarins may dispel reluctance to confront inequality in Israel/Palestine. Yet philosophically naïve views of Jewish identity are not the only source from which non-egalitarian Zionisms derive energy. Thus, the ethics of particular identity does not provide sufficient resources for the political projects that Butler and the Boyarins advocate. Were Jews to adopt hybrid identities or non-communitarian notions of belonging, they would still need to initiate further conversations about the institutions, practices, and policies that best realize their shared commitments and address their shared predicaments. Ethics provides little guidance on such matters, precisely because cultivation of a hybrid identity does not entail a determinate stance on, say, the question of a one-state, two-state, or federal solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. To arbitrate such questions, we need to exercise political imagination and judgment, weighing the ability of different forms of polity to address current political circumstances.[149]

Second, my critique has implications for the development of non-Zionist trajectories within Jewish thought. Reading the Boyarins, one might conclude that dissenters from political Zionism must reject self-determination as "a Western, imperialist imposition on the rest of world" and, consequently, confine Jewish solidarity to cultural projects.[150] Reading Butler, one might conclude that dissenters from political Zionism must abandon self-rule for a universalism that bears traces of the Jewish (and non-Jewish) sources from

which it derives. In short, one might conclude that non-Zionists must abandon a political conception of Jewish peoplehood. I have critiqued Butler and the Boyarins from a diasporic standpoint to expose the falsity of these conclusions. Once we detach arguments about the polity from ethical arguments about the self, new trajectories for non-Zionist thought open up—specifically, trajectories that affirm Jewish self-rule. When understood in institutional terms, self-rule and shared rule are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to devise egalitarian arrangements, in Israel/Palestine, that honor desires for self-determination. Admittedly, retaining a political conception of Jewish peoplehood may not appeal to Butler and the Boyarins. I raise this prospect less to convince Butler and the Boyarins to embrace such a conception, than to persuade readers who remain invested in autonomy that one can resist the nation-state imperative without abandoning aspirations to self-rule. In other words, I address this point to readers reluctant to abandon the nation-state in the absence of alternative vehicles for Jewish self-rule. To engage such readers, and thereby expand the constituency for non-Zionist politics, diasporic thinkers must demonstrate that the nation-state is not the sole polity that facilitates self-rule. Having suspended debates about identity, authenticity, and ethics, one can challenge political Zionism in the name of an alternative vision of self-determination.[151]

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Notes

1. Daniel Boyarin is a signatory of "The One State Declaration." See http://electronicintifada.net/content/one-state-declaration/793. For Judith Butler's binationalism, see *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 4, 208, 216. For Jonathan Boyarin's position, see *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 126.
2. See Allan Arkush, "State and Counterstate," *Jewish Review of Books*, no. 6 (summer 2011); Allan Arkush, "From Diaspora Nationalism to Radical Diasporism," *Modern Judaism* 29, no. 3 (2009): 326–50; Allan Arkush, "Antiheroic Mock Heroics: Daniel Boyarin versus Theodor Herzl and His Legacy," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, no. 3 (Spring-Summer 1998): 65–92; Daniel Boyarin, "Response to Allan Arkush," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, no. 3 (Spring-Summer 1998): 93–95; Cary Nelson, "The Problem with Judith Butler: The Political Philosophy of the Movement to Boycott Israel," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, March 16, 2014; and Elhanan Yakira, *Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust: Three Essays on Denial, Forgetting, and the Delegitimation of Israel*, trans. Michael Swirsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
3. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 127.
4. See Arkush, "State and Counterstate."
5. "Diasporism" is not my coinage, nor is it a label that Butler and the Boyarins adopt. Indeed, Butler and the Boyarins would likely refuse much of what "diasporism" conventionally connotes. By invoking "diasporism," I do not mean to imply that Butler and the Boyarins proffer anything resembling an ideology, nor do I mean to suggest that they constitute a unified camp or movement. Yet Butler and the Boyarins share a political investment in modes of Jewish identity derived from diasporic traditions. Thus, I use the term "diasporism" to capture an influential strand within Jewish thought that makes reservations about Zionism the occasion for rethinking Jewish identity. For other "diasporisms," see George Steiner, "Our Homeland, The Text," in *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1995* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); R.B. Kitaj, *First Diasporist Manifesto* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989); Shaul Magid, "In Search of a Critical Voice in the Jewish Diaspora: Homelessness and Home in Edward Said and Shalom Noah Barzofsky's *Netivot Shalom*," *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2006): 193–227; Frédéric Brenner, *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003); and Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).
6. See "Judith Butler's Remarks to Brooklyn College on BDS," http://www.thenation.com/article/172752/judith-butlers-remarks-brooklyn-college-bds# and "Academic Freedom and the ASA's Boycott of Israel: A Response to Michelle Goldberg," http://www.thenation.com/article/177512/academic-freedom-and-asas-boycott-israel-response-michelle-goldberg#.
7. When I class my standpoint as "diasporic," I do not mean to suggest that all contemporary Zionists support Israeli policy, or that all classical Zionists

advocated the establishment of a Jewish state. I affirm the possibility of critical, egalitarian, and non-statist Zionisms. I would nevertheless distinguish such Zionisms from efforts to theorize Jewish political agency in dispersion.

8. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 2.
9. See Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 13; Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 6; and Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-De-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 147. My narrative centers on political Zionism, because it is the school of thought to which Butler and the Boyarins object most vehemently. Admittedly, other schools of Zionism, such as cultural Zionism, respond to predicaments surrounding identity. See Ahad Ha'am, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem," in *The Zionist Idea*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (New York: Atheneum, 1959), 266. Although I recover political Zionism's aspiration to self-determination, I agree that "Zionists espoused a problematic understanding of democratic politics." See Eyal Chowers, *The Political Philosophy of Zionism: Trading Jewish Words for a Hebraic Land* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16.
10. See Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 85, 89–91, and Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1979), 54–55.
11. See Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 4.
12. See Arnold M. Eisen, *Galut: Modern Jewish Reflection on Homelessness and Homecoming* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), and Yitzhak F. Baer, *Galut* (New York: Schocken Books, 1947).
13. See Butler, *Parting Ways*, 6; Judith Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 77–78; Udi Aloni, "Judith Butler: As a Jew I Was Taught It Was Ethically Imperative to Speak Up," *Ha'aretz*, February 24, 2010; and Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 28–29.
14. See Eisen, *Galut*, xviii, and Baer, *Galut*, 9.
15. Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 124.
16. See Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, trans. Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 211–34.
17. BT Ketubot 111a, in *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Nashim*, vol. 2, trans. Samuel Daiches and Israel Slotki (London: Soncino Press, 1936).
18. See Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 219–23.
19. *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings and Wars, 12.2, in *A Maimonides Reader*, ed. Isadore Twersky (West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, 1972), 224.

20. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 26.
21. *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings and Wars, 11.1, *Maimonides Reader*, 222.
22. See Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?," 74, 89; Butler, *Parting Ways*, 3, 5, 6, 15, 31, 131; Jonathan Boyarin, *Jewishness and the Human Dimension* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 1, 9; and Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 13, 24, 29, 273, 311, 359.
23. Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?," 74.
24. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), xiii. For similar characterizations of the present, see Butler, *Precarious Life*, 111–12; and Butler, *Parting Ways*, 3, 19–20. For the argument that identity-based Zionism is waning among American Jews, see Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Times Books, 2012).
25. See Chaim Gans, *A Just Zionism: On the Morality of the Jewish State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
26. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 33.
27. The term "Jewishness" bears a different resonance in the Boyarins' oeuvre. See Jonathan Boyarin, *Jewishness*, 1. Without denying their differences, I nevertheless argue that, for the Boyarins as for Butler, "Jewishness" registers primarily as an identity category, with the result that opposition to Zionism prompts identity crises.
28. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 4.
29. Ibid., 3. See also 26.
30. Ibid., 73.
31. Ibid., 74.
32. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 14. See also Butler, "Is Zionism Judaism?," 73, 86.
33. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 14.
34. Arendt, *Origins*, 87.
35. Ibid., 65.
36. Ibid., 66. See also 73, 84.
37. Ibid., 67, 83.
38. Ibid., 87.
39. Ibid., 84. See also 67.
40. Ibid., 67.
41. Ibid., 84.
42. Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?," 89. See also Butler, *Parting Ways*, 131.
43. Arendt, *Origins*, 83.
44. See Butler, *Precarious Life*, 113; Butler, *Parting Ways*, 3, 19–20, 27; Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines*, xii–xv; and Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, xiv, xvi–xvii, 311–312.
45. For affect, see Butler, *Precarious Life*, 113, 114; Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, xiii, xv–xviii, xxiii–xxiv; and Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines*, xiii–xiv.

46. Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?," 77. See also Butler, *Parting Ways*, 122.
47. See Arendt, *Origins*, 79n61, 120; and Hannah Arendt, "The Jewish State: Fifty Years After, Where Have Herzl's Politics Led?," in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 375–87.
48. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 6.
49. Ibid., 15. See also 110, 122, 153.
50. Ibid., 99.
51. Ibid., 28. See also 99, 117, 179.
52. Ibid., 31. In recent work, Butler presents a relational self who bears a strong resemblance to *Parting Ways*' diasporic Jewish self as a model of ethical subjectivity. See Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), ix, 3, 70, 94, 107, 116. To note the generic quality of Butler's relational self is not to press an objection against her, since deriving generalizable principles from Jewish sources is one of her express goals. See Butler, *Parting Ways*, 7–8. That Butler can assert the self's constitutive sociality without reference to Jewish history, however, shows how far she diverges from the traditional understanding of exile.
53. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 99. See also 9, 26–27.
54. Ibid., 6.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 5.
57. Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?," 86. See also Butler, *Parting Ways*, 117, 127.
58. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 127.
59. Ibid., 1. For self-defense and self-rule, see 25–26.
60. Ibid., 9.
61. Ibid., 201, 27.
62. Ibid., 9. See also 98.
63. Ibid., 9. See also Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, 72–73. In what follows, I echo Ella Myers, *Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 55, 68, 79, 82–83.
64. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 31.
65. Ibid., 117.
66. Ibid., 5.
67. See Butler, *Parting Ways*, 61.
68. Ibid., 129. See also 6, 51, 63, 117, 118, 121, 127, 131.
69. Ibid., 51. See also 117; Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, ix, xi, 17, 107, 116.
70. See Butler, *Parting Ways*, 4, 27, 99, 117, 118, 121, 205.
71. Ibid., 98.
72. Ibid., 18. See also 19.
73. See Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 92.
74. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 34.

75. Ibid., 18–19.
76. Chowers, *Political Philosophy*, 175; see also 180, 185. For Jews as the "Super*nation*," see Ahad Ha'am, "The Transvaluation of Values," in *Selected Essays of Ahad Ha-'Am*, trans. Leon Simon (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1962), 228.
77. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 31.
78. Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 75.
79. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 6.
80. Ibid., 2.
81. Ibid., 3.
82. Ibid., 1, 2, 6, 28. See also Butler, "Is Judaism Zionism?," 73.
83. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 3.
84. Ibid., 4. Here, I echo Chaim Gans' review of *Parting Ways*: http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/36335-parting-ways-jewishness-and-the-critique-of-zionism/.
85. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 38. For Brit Shalom, see Martin Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 74.
86. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 118, 38.
87. Ibid., 36.
88. Ibid., 38.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid., 50. See also 37, 60, 128. Butler evinces similar reservations about Arendt's support for subnational autonomy. Arendt is ultimately redeemed, in Butler's eyes, because "the idea of 'belonging' that informs her writing on 'the nation' in the thirties and forties seems to slip away by the time the Eichmann trial arrives and plays out on the public stage" (148). Without questioning the accuracy of Butler's rendition of Arendt's intellectual trajectory, I would nevertheless ask why, to recuperate Arendt as a forbear, Butler must depict Arendt as replacing "belonging" with "a more antisolidaristic notion of political organization" (148). Here, Butler suggests that dissenters from Zionism must renounce nationality, belonging, and solidarity, forgetting Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's contention that "binational thinking" encompasses multiple political arrangements. See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Exil et Souveraineté: Judaïsme, Sionisme et Pensée Binationale* (Paris: La Fabrique Éditions, 2007), 167, 213, 218.
91. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 33. See also 4, 6, 16, 18, 19, 34, 50, 53.
92. Ibid., 29, 23.
93. Ibid., 201.
94. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 101. In what follows, I analyze texts co-authored by Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, as well as single-authored texts by each brother. The brothers do not speak unanimously. Yet I take their use of the first person plural, and their acknowledgment of similarities in "sensibility and politics," as evidence of a shared approach to many diasporic matters. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, ix.
95. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 37.
96. Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1993), 720.

97. Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, xxiii.
98. Ibid., 720. See also Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, xxiii; Jonathan Boyarin, *Thinking in Jewish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 157.
99. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 720.
100. Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, xxiii.
101. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 710. See also Jonathan Boyarin, *Thinking*, 34, 59.
102. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 720.
103. Ibid., 718.
104. Ibid., 693.
105. Ibid., 712, 717.
106. Ibid., 699. See also 701; Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm*, xvii, 116–18, 128–29.
107. Elsewhere, Jonathan Boyarin acknowledges the prominence of political argument in classical Zionism. See *Storm*, 120.
108. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 712. For "inevitability," see also 713; Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, viii; Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm*, 126.
109. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 718.
110. Ibid., 721.
111. Ibid.,721.
112. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 15.
113. Ibid., xiv. See also xv, xiv, 25, 210.
114. Ibid., xiv–xv.
115. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 723.
116. Ibid., 702, 714. See also 712, 717.
117. Ibid., 723. See also Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 10.
118. For the Neturei Karta, see Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 61. Although the Boyarins express "sympathy" for some Neturei Karta policies, they decry others as "violently objectionable." Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 724n52.
119. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 714.
120. Ibid., 722, 723. See also 712.
121. Ibid., 711.
122. At times, the Boyarins recognize as much—for they express qualified admiration for the Jewish Workers' Bund. See Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 723, and *Powers of Diaspora*, 21–22.
123. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 719, 722.
124. Ibid., 706.
125. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 712
126. See Yoav Peled, "Exile Deluxe: On the Rehabilitation of Exile in Boyarin and Raz-Krakotzkin," *Theory and Criticism* 5 (Fall) 1994: 133–39 [Hebrew]. Jonathan Boyarin gestures in a more activist direction when he invites Jews to undertake a "communal reorganization" that combines "democratization" with cultivation of a genealogical identity. See Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm*, 128: "The basic point remains: interaction among Jews need not be based on all Jews living together in the same *space*. If we devote more of our energies

toward resurrecting our ancestors, then Jews can derive much of the interactive sustenance we need from living together in time." Yet political Zionists advocated "living together in *space*" as a condition of security, empowerment, and self-determination—not, primarily, as a vehicle for "interactive sustenance." Mistaking a political claim for an identity claim, Jonathan Boyarin imagines that refashioning identity along genealogical lines will instigate a particular kind of political mobilization.

127. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 86. See also Jonathan Boyarin, *Thinking*, 64–65.
128. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 718.
129. Ibid., 711.
130. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 58–59. See also 86, 102.
131. Ibid., 70.
132. Ibid., 68–69.
133. Ibid., 52.
134. Ibid., 5. See also 10, 18; Jonathan Boyarin, *Jewishness*, 119–20.
135. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 53.
136. Ibid., 73. See also viii, 11, 66, 69, 78, 96, 101; Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 719, 720, 721, 723.
137. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 69.
138. Ibid., vii.
139. Ibid., 107.
140. Board of Educ. Kiryas Joel School v. Grumet.
141. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 106. See also 116, 122, 124.
142. See David Myers and Nomi M. Stolzenberg, *American Shtetl: A Hasidic Village in Suburban New York* (forthcoming).
143. For anamnesis, see Jonathan Boyarin, *Thinking*, 35, 139, 175, 181; Jonathan Boyarin, *Jewishness*, 129; Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 701; Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, viii.
144. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, ix.
145. Ibid., 127.
146. Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm*, 129.
147. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 127.
148. Ibid., 24.
149. See Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 2; George Shulman, "Acknowledgment and Disavowal as an Idiom for Theorizing Politics," *Theory and Event* 14 (1), 2011; and Bonnie Honig, "The Politics of Ethos," *European Journal of Political Theory* 10, no. 3 (2011): 422–29.
150. Jonathan Boyarin adopts a more nuanced position on self-determination in *Storm*, 126.
151. My argument bears affinities to the diaspora nationalism of Simon Dubnov. See Simon Dubnov, "Jews as a Spiritual (Cultural-Historical) Nation among Political Nations," in *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*, ed. Simon Rabinovitch (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 23–44. As his title suggests,

Dubnov defined Jewish nationality in cultural, rather than political, terms. The most sophisticated contemporary defender of nationalism makes a similar move. See Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), xiii. Although I agree with Tamir that "nationalism does not necessarily embody a right to establish a nation-state," I would challenge Tamir's assumption that dispensing with a nation-state strips nationalism of political claims. See also David N. Myers, "Rethinking the Jewish Nation: An Exercise in Applied Jewish Studies," *Havruta* (Winter 2011), 26–33.

Author Biography

Julie E. Cooper is Senior Lecturer in the Political Science Department at Tel Aviv University. She is the author of *Secular Powers: Humility in Modern Political Thought* (Chicago).