

Ambivalence, Amity, and Enmity in Israel/Palestine

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Ambivalence, and its more colloquial English synonym “mixed feelings,” connotes contradictory feelings but in regular usage leans more to the negative than the positive (e.g., to have “mixed feelings” about someone, or if a film receives “mixed reviews”). Accordingly, the positive views that an occupied, colonized, or oppressed people holds for its oppressor are often primarily instrumental; that is, the oppressed wish to become as strong as their oppressor so that they may vanquish them. A colonized people can acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in various ways. They may have been educated in institutions propagating the colonizer’s high culture, and the colonial administration and military provides models for imitation. An occupied people that does not have the luxury of a formal education courtesy of the occupier can learn about their oppressor’s administrative and military techniques, way of life, and quotidian behaviour by working for them or being incarcerated in their prisons. In this way, the political-theoretical concepts formulated by an occupied or colonized people may be profoundly shaped by their oppressor, as attested, for instance, by the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence’s close resemblance to Israel’s founding declaration from 1948.

In my remarks today I want to do two things. First, I will provide a *tour d’horizon* of Arab, more specifically Palestinian, ambivalent enmity towards Zionism and Israel over the course of the twentieth century in order to demonstrate the limits of ambivalence and the limits of positive evaluations of Zionism and Israel in Palestinian public discourse. Second, I will show that an equally textured ambivalence has characterized Zionist and Israeli language about Arabs (in general) and Palestinians (in particular). The two are mirror images of each other. Arab enmity towards Zionism and Israel has the appearance of hostility but bears a degree of subterranean admiration, while the Zionist movement and state of Israel have often displayed public sympathy and regard for what are officially known as “Israeli Arabs,” but those positive emotions have been undergirded by negative ones such as fear and scorn. Israeli discursive ambivalence towards Palestinians is particularly interesting for the circumstances under which the patina of amity thickens, thins, or is shattered altogether.

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Ambivalent enmity: Arab discourse on Zionism and Israel

In its early decades, the language of Arab anti-Zionism was hostile yet not vicious.¹ In the early twentieth century, Palestinians expressed rational fears of displacement from their lands and country, and Ottoman officials worried about the creation of a new minority problem akin to that presented by the Armenians. In Egypt and Syria, intellectuals combined realistic assessments of Zionism's achievements with exaggerated beliefs in Jewish power. In 1899, the Muslim reformer Rashid Ridha wrote approvingly of Jewish solidarity, scientific knowledge, and wealth. The Jews, he wrote, "lack nothing but sovereign power in order to become the greatest nation on the face of the earth, an objective they pursue in a normal manner."² In 1905, the secular Arab nationalist Najib Azuri described Jews as a people striving purposefully to establish a state, and that "on the final outcome of this struggle, between the two peoples representing two opposing principles, will depend the destiny of the entire world."³ Azuri's comment is intriguing for not only its view that the fate of humanity rests on the outcome of the Zionist-Arab struggle, but also its presentation of both Jews and Arabs as nations. Unlike European antisemitism, which conceived of Jews as unassimilable, Arab anti-Zionism after Azuri claimed that Jews did not constitute a people but only a religious community. To argue otherwise might open the way to accepting Zionism's fundamental principles, if not its program.⁴

Arab anti-Zionism of the interwar period and during the post-1945 international debates about Palestine's future expressed little admiration for the technological, economic, or political achievements of the Jews in Palestine. During the flurry of international discussions in 1947 regarding Palestine's future, Arab League representatives presented the Yishuv (Palestine's Jewish community) as a charity case rather than a thriving, independent entity. In particular they questioned the value of the much-vaunted *kibbutzim* (collective farms) due to their dependence on largesse from Zionist public funds. Moreover, in testimony before the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), the Iraqi representative responded to Zionist offers of technological assistance to the Arabs:

1 This paragraph is abridged from Derek J. Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2023), 219.

2 Eliezer Be'eri, "The Jewish Arab-Conflict during the Herzl Years," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 41 (1987): 13.

3 Muhammad Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 75–78; the quotation is on 78.

4 On the origins of the Palestinian nationalist claim that Jews comprise a religious, not a national, community, see Jonathan Marc Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race, and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 53–71.

This is an old imperialist argument. It is the argument of the white man's burden, the fallacy of which is already exposed to the world. One aggression after another, one more after another, or waged on the strength of this argument and the world is sick of it! The truth is that this is an excuse for domination. The Arabs do not want that rise in their standard of living which leads to the loss of their own country.⁵

Towards the end of the 1948 war, a hint of ambivalence could be found in Constantine Zureik's iconic screed *Ma'na an-Nakba* (The meaning of the disaster). Much of Zureik's argument had already been repeatedly enunciated: that the Arab claim on Palestine represents the expression of natural right; that the Jews are a religious, not national, community; and that the only just solution is for Palestine to become a unitary democratic state "in which," according to Zureik, "the Jews will dispose of all rights to which their numbers entitled them."⁶

Zureik's account added something new and of considerable future significance, however. The author, a Syrian of Greek Orthodox background, emphasized that the war's primary meaning was its demonstration of the disunity, backwardness, and weakness of the Arab world as opposed to the towering strength and fortitude of its Zionist enemy. A zealous proponent of political pan-Arabism, Zureik saw Israel as the greatest threat to the creation of a powerful, vibrant, and healthy united Arab polity. He fretted that if such a state were to be created under the current circumstances, "the Zionist danger will gradually permeate our sickly, worn body with a cancerous taint, and one day we will wake up and lo! All of Palestine will be in the hands of the energetic, militant Zionist minority."⁷ Even more concerning, Zureik claimed in a radio broadcast from May 31, 1948, was that:

The facility that the Zionist forces have for growth and expansion will place the Arab world forever at their mercy and will paralyze its vitality and deter its progress and evolution in the ladders of advancement and civilization—that is, if this Arab world is permitted to exist at all. . . . We struggle simply to defend ourselves against a treacherous aggression and to protect our very existence.⁸

5 Muhammad Fadhel Jamali, *Iraq's Point of View on the Palestine Question* (Washington, DC: The Arab Office, 1947), 8.

6 Constantine K. Zureik, *The Meaning of the Disaster* (Beirut: Khayat's College Book Cooperative, 1956), 73.

7 Zureik, *The Meaning of the Disaster*, 32.

8 Zureik, *The Meaning of the Disaster*, 69.

Zureik set the tone for much of the Arab world's reaction to the war in its deep-seated, existential fear of Israeli power alongside of its call for coordinated educational reform, technological innovation, and the creation of new, dynamic, merit-based political elites. Zureik's work, like that of numerous Arab writers, was steeped in antisemitism. He accused Jews of possessing "world-wide power" and controlling industries, including the media, in the United States.⁹ Zureik's writings are replete with enmity, and there is little ambivalence in it.

The refrains from Zureik's book were continuously heard throughout the Middle East in the late 1940s and 1950s. Intriguingly, though, the Palestinians were relatively minor players in Zureik's narrative; in Zureik's mind, the *nakba* was that of the Arab world more than that of the Palestinian refugees. In 1949, an English-language article by the Palestinian politician Musa Alami combined Zureik's arguments about the failure of the Arab nation and the need for Arab unity, the Zionists' talents for total war, and Zionist plans for territorial expansion and regional domination with specific references to the plight of the Palestinian refugees. In some ways, however, Alami's article was different from the standard Arab narrative of the war. For example, it made no reference to refugee return, a fundamental demand by Arab states upon Israel at the Lausanne peace conference of 1949. Moreover, Alami considered it "shameful" that Arab governments did not allow the refugees to work and "imprison[ed]" them in camps.¹⁰

Alami's article was striking in two other ways: first, for claiming that Palestinians had fled their homes out of a lack of confidence in their own capacity for defense, with no reference to expulsion by Jewish forces, and second, for writing that the Palestinians "were told that the Arab armies were coming, that the matter would be settled and everything return to normal."¹¹ These aspects of Alami's argument were more typical of pro-Zionist narratives of the war and dropped out of subsequent Arab writing about the war's course and consequences. They do not reflect a positive view of Israel, but Alami was less unequivocally focused on Israel as a uniquely culpable and malevolent actor than subsequent Arab writing from the 1950s.

Thus far, I have discussed public Arab discourse about Israel. The writings of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser provide an opportunity to compare public and private assessments of the Jewish state made by the same individual. In 1955, Nasser's memoirs from the war, during which he served as an officer, were published in the Egyptian weekly *Akher Sa'a*. A similar version of the text was translated into English and published as a pamphlet

9 Zureik, *The Meaning of the Disaster*, 65–66.

10 Musa Alami, "The Lesson of Palestine," *Middle East Journal* 3, no. 4 (1949): 386.

11 Alami, "The Lesson of Palestine," 381.

titled *The Truth About the Palestine War* in May of the following year.¹² The material in the pamphlet differs in key places from the previously published version and appears to have been amplified, tailored, or even fabricated for public consumption. For example, the pamphlet ends with an encounter at Faluja between Nasser and an Israeli officer, the latter dripping “conceit” but then assuming a humble posture and asking Nasser to allow the Israelis to retrieve their dead on the other side of the line of battle.¹³ This story does not appear in the memoir.

The memoirs published in 1955 and this pamphlet from 1956 do agree on one overarching point: The Egyptian army did not lose the 1948 war but rather it was not allowed to win for “political” reasons. Clearly the publication of the memoirs, and even more so of the pamphlet, were designed to prepare the Egyptian people for a second round of fighting against Israel in which, this time, Egypt would prevail. But our understanding of Nasser’s views of Israel is complicated by the publication in 2020 of Nasser’s real-time war diaries by his daughter, Hoda Nasser. Published in France under the title *Nasser: Archives Secrètes*, the diaries present a very different image of Egypt’s performance during the war. On October 27, 1948, Nasser wrote of the Egyptians’ “shoddy command” and incompetence as the prime source of the catastrophe.¹⁴ Over the course of the major Israeli offensive against the Egyptian forces known as Operation Yoav, there is no mention of what was described later in the memoirs and pamphlet as a “political war.” Moreover, on October 28, he wrote, “the Jews were a thousand times better than us.” At first, they had only hunting-rifles, but “they have developed a considerable army: an air corps, an armored corps, an infantry equipped with mortars; heavy artillery.”¹⁵ Nasser’s description of an actual face to face meeting with the Israelis on October 31 is far removed from the abrasive encounter he described in the pamphlet: “The Jewish commander arrives in an armored vehicle bearing a white flag. I go to meet him. He demands our surrender. We refuse. Then he asks to recover the remains of his soldiers killed in combat.”¹⁶ There is no mention here of “conceit” or humble supplication. Ten days later he describes negotiations between Egyptian and Israeli command at Gat: “Here, one has the sense of being surrounded by truly civilized people! Everything is clean; the farm machinery is mechanized; the women are elegant and wear shorts.”¹⁷ The negotiations progress smoothly

12 Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Truth About the Palestine War* (Cairo: Al Tahrir Press, 1956).

13 Nasser, *The Truth About the Palestine War*, 73–76.

14 Hoda Nasser, *Nasser: Archives secrètes* (Paris: Flammarion, 2020), 340.

15 H. Nasser, *Nasser: Archives secrètes*, 341.

16 Nasser, *Archives secrètes*, 342.

17 Nasser, *Archives secrètes*, 346–347.

and the Egyptians depart, “but not without having been offered orange juice, oranges, sandwiches, chocolate, petit-fours, and cookies.”¹⁸

Compared to Nasser’s cartoonish depiction of Israeli villainy in his published work, Sadik Al-Azm’s celebrated short book *Self-Criticism After the Defeat* (1967) represents a rhetorical style much closer to ambivalent empathy. The book begins with a narrative of Japan’s defeat of Russia in 1904–1905 and a clear statement that Japan is Israel and Russia is Egypt. Taking issue with Egyptian pundits, al-Azm claims that the attack on the Egyptian air bases on June 6 was not an act of treachery, but war pure and simple: “Wolves are not blamed for behaving like wolves.”¹⁹ Al-Azm acknowledges “the superiority of the Israeli individual in regards to training, technique, and technology.”²⁰ The Israeli enemy was supplied with the very best modern weapons but also had the correct “spirit and mentality that is entirely at home with the modern technical processes.”²¹ One must “give the full strength of the enemy its due.”²² Arabs, as al-Azm claims, need at least one scientific institution at the level of the Weitzman Institute. His comparison is not only with Israel but also with Vietnam and the Viet Cong, who were able to “diffuse American scientific and technological superiority and neutralize it to their advantage with an analogous scientific mind.”²³ Another model is communist China, which established a Chinese Academy of Science as soon as the PRC was founded.²⁴ Towards the end of *Self-Criticism* al-Azm notes that women are mobilized for the military in Israel as they are in Vietnam. But his admiration for Israel makes no room for accepting it—his call for total war against Israel, against what he calls the aggressions of 1948 and 1967, stands. The goal is to “eliminate Israel as a state.”²⁵

As Jonathan Gribetz demonstrates in a forthcoming monograph, the Palestine Liberation Organization Research Center, founded in Beirut in 1964, very much embodied the spirit of al-Azm’s book.²⁶ The work of the

18 Nasser, *Archives secrètes*, 347.

19 Sadik Al-Azm, *Self-Criticism After the Defeat* (London: SAQI, 2011 [1967]), electronic publication, chap. II, loc. 51–52 of 180.

20 Al-Azm, *Self-Criticism*, chap. II, loc. 52.

21 Al-Azm, *Self-Criticism*, chap. V, loc. 98.

22 Al-Azm, *Self-Criticism*, chap. II, loc. 52.

23 Al-Azm, *Self-Criticism*, chap. V, loc. 93.

24 Al-Azm, *Self-Criticism*, chap. V, loc. 102.

25 Al-Azm, *Self-Criticism*, chap. VI, loc. 119.

26 Jonathan Gribetz, *Reading Herzl in Beirut: The PLO Effort to Know the Enemy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming 2024).

PLO Research Center reflected a particular amalgam of Protestantism, pan-Arabism, and Palestinian nationalism. Many of the researchers were devout Christians educated in Protestant missionary schools, with a deep attachment to the Old Testament that helped them to form a common language and alliance with certain streams within American Reform Judaism, most notably the anti-Zionist universalism of Rabbi Elmer Berger. The Research Center's studious reading and translation of foundational texts by Zionist ideologues revealed a persistent identification of Zionism with religiosity and messianism, ignoring or eliding the Zionist project's often aggressive secularism. The Christian orientation of the Research Center, however, undermines facile associations between religious pluralism and secularism within the PLO itself.

Gribetz detects among the leading voices of the Research Center a thread of political moderation and realism (that is, acknowledging the strength and durability of the state of Israel) from the days of Sabri Jiryis' involvement in the Israeli-Arab political movement *Al-Ard* in the late 1950s and early 1960s, to the PLO's move in the 1970s towards the concept of a "national authority" within lands occupied by Israel in 1967. This thread of moderation led, as in al-Azm's book, to a rejection of antisemitism, manifested in disavowal of blood libels and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and a criticism of the Arab world for persisting in accounting for the *nakba* and Israel's military triumphs via magical thinking.

We may then ask: Is deep knowledge in the textual heritage of the enemy a sign of moderation? After all, the Nazi party had an extensive Judaica library in its Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage, whose researchers claimed Judaic expertise. During the Cold War, were practitioners of enemy studies in the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China familiar with canonical products or analyses of American civilization such as the Federalist Papers, the speeches of Abraham Lincoln, the novels of Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway, and the historical work of Charles Beard, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Richard Hofstadter? In turn, what did American Sovietologists and Sinologists of the Cold War era "know" about their "enemy"? Closer to our own day, is it significant that Al-Qaeda's library in Afghanistan contained a copy of Menachem Begin's memoir *The Revolt*? Within the context of "enemy studies" it is not unusual for a party to justify hostility to their foe by citing scholars from the foe's camp (e.g., Louis Farrakhan citing Jewish scholars to support his claims for Jewish control over the Atlantic slave trade; neo-Nazi websites' "lists of recommended reading" on the Jewish Question featuring work by reputable scholars in Jewish Studies). And it is not uncommon for supporters of a cause to find a "useful renegade" or a supportive group in the enemy's midst (e.g., Elmer Berger and Neturei Karta for the PLO; Irshad Manji and Ahmadiyya Muslims for Zionists).

Gribetz suggests that the pursuit of knowledge about one's enemy may not be intended to promote either conciliation or affection, empathy or sympathy, yet of itself instills awareness of the enemy's humanity, which can lead to a modicum of political moderation. That can certainly be so, and in fact, getting to know the enemy always produces the risk of affective attachment. But it is just as possible that knowing the enemy is perceived and practiced as a necessary precondition for destroying that enemy (Jiryis, according to Gribetz's forthcoming book, said as much).

To sum up, the ambivalence in Palestinian enmity towards Israel was situational and instrumental. I do not deny the formation of collegial, even warm, personal relations between Palestinians and Israelis, be they ordinary people or top-level negotiators and political leaders. However, affinity and affection are labile emotions; enmity is a firmly structured attitude that is reinforced generation after generation.

And now we move from Arabs to Jews, and from enmity to checkered and complicated forms of amity.

Ambivalent amity: Israeli discourse on Palestinians²⁷

Zionism is historically anchored in enmity, but when the movement was first founded the target of that enmity was Christian Europeans, not Middle Eastern Arabs. Pioneer Zionist thinkers such as Lev Pinsker and Isaac Rülff bristled with anger against European society for having persecuted the Jews. Both men saw in a Jewish state in the land of Israel/Palestine not only a safe haven for oppressed Jews but also a source of Jewish honor, dignity, pride, and Gentile respect.²⁸ Nonetheless, although Zionism sought to remove Jews from countries where they were disparaged and persecuted, animosity towards antisemites did not keep European Zionists from considering themselves a part of European culture. Theodor Herzl called Europe "militarized and seedy," but he also promised that a Jewish state would be a "rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism."²⁹ The state would boast all the amenities of Europe: "salted breadsticks, coffee, beer, familiar meats," and the opera.³⁰ The only Arab character in Herzl's novel *Altneuland*, Rashid Bey, was educated in Germany and is immensely grateful

27 This section is condensed and abridged from chapters Two and Six of Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State*.

28 Isaak Rülff, "Aruchas Bas-Ammi: Israels Heilung" (1883), reproduced in *Pioneers of Zionism: Hess, Pinsker, Rülff*, ed. Julius H. Schoeps (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 123.

29 Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York: American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946), 96.

30 Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 15, and Theodor Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, ed. Raphael Patai (New York: Herzl Press, 1960), 69, 210.

to the Zionists for lifting his people out of their Oriental torpor. Zionist settlers had faith in western technology to revive a once fertile but what they saw as a desertified land. The first settlers of the 1880s disparaged local agricultural technology and insisted on using heavy European plows, even though they were ineffective in the light Palestinian soil.

From the very beginning of Zionism, adherents of the movement were well aware that Palestine's population was overwhelmingly Arab. One of the most prominent leaders of the Lovers of Zion movement of the 1880s, Moshe Leib Lilienblum, displayed no ill intent towards Palestine's Arabs. In essays from 1883 and 1884, Lilienblum evoked the Jews' unassailable historic right to the land as well as the economic advantages of living in a space that bridged three continents and would benefit from agricultural and industrial development. Palestine's Arabs, Lilienblum wrote, "acknowledge that Israel's right to the land of its fathers has not passed—this news is the best assurances for our future."³¹

On the other hand, Lilienblum's contemporary Rülff, the chief rabbi of Memel, had a much harsher approach. He averred that Jews must "aspire, in whatever form and by whatever means, to regain our original homeland, the land of our fathers, and re-create the Jewish state." He asserted that the Jewish claim to the land was not merely historic, but also that of "the rights of the conquerors."³² Rülff made his intentions towards Palestine's Arab population crystal clear: "At this point we speak of settlement and only settlement. That is our immediate goal. We speak of it and only of it. But clearly, 'England is for the English, Egypt for the Egyptians, and Judea is for the Jews.' In our land there is room for us. We will say to the Arabs: move on! If they do not agree, if they oppose with force—we will force them to move. We will smite them upon their heads, and we will force them to move."³³

In between Lilienblum's romantic and idealized vision of Jewish-Arab amity and Rülff's militance lay the views of Ahad Ha-Am, who shied away from aspiring to Jewish sovereign authority in Palestine and wanted neither to deport nor to educate the land's Arab majority. Ahad Ha-Am's laissez-faire attitude towards the Palestinians derived less from benevolence than from fear—fear that the Arabs were so numerous and powerful that they could

31 Moshe Leib Lilienblum, " 'Al tihiyat yisrael 'al adamat avotav" (On the resurrection of Israel on its ancestral land), *Kol Kitvei Moshe Leib Lilienblum* [Complete writings of Moshe Leib Lilienblum] (Odessa: Tseitlin Press, 1912–1913), vol. IV, 31 and 60. See also his essay "Ha-regesh ve-ha-mitzvah be-'inyan ha-yishuv" [Feeling and religious duty in the context of settlement], in the same volume, 207–227.

32 Quotations are taken from the English translation in Schoeps, *Pioneers of Zionism: Hess, Pinsker, Rülff*, 122–125.

33 Reproduced in Ben-Tsion Dinur, chief ed., *Sefer toledot ha-haganah* [History of the Haganah] (Jerusalem: Ha-sifriyah ha-tsiyonit, 1954), vol. I, 4–5.

overwhelm a Jewish community audacious enough to seek statehood.³⁴ A rosier scenario for Jewish-Arab co-existence was depicted by Yitzhak Epstein, an educator whose 1907 essay, “The Unseen Question,” acknowledges the Arab presence in Palestine and proclaims that without Arab goodwill the Zionist project would inevitably fail.³⁵ Most interpreters of the essay pay more attention to his warnings about future Jewish-Arab strife than his paternalistic and amicable program of winning Arabs over to Zionism through education.

A *mission civilisatrice* was part of the warp and woof of twentieth-century Zionism. It displayed both compassion and condescension towards the natives. At the turn of the century, radical Labor Zionist youth, recently arrived from Russia, fretted about the veteran settlers’ close economic relations with Arab workers, whom the East European immigrants considered primitive and backward. A desire for cultural separation was manifest in the project to build the “all Jewish city” of Tel Aviv, which was founded in 1909 as a suburb of Jaffa.³⁶ Nonetheless, during the late Ottoman and Mandate periods there were many points of contact between Jews and Arabs in Palestine—through business dealings, social life in mixed cities such as Jerusalem and Jaffa, attendance at sites holy to Jews and Muslims alike and at public events such as the annual Purim Parade in Tel Aviv. As Menachem Klein has shown, some Jews attended Arab schools, and there were intermarriages between elite Jewish women and elite Palestinian men.³⁷ Tami Raz has uncovered evidence of hundreds of inter-communal romantic relationships between Jews and Arabs of more humble backgrounds on the seam between Tel Aviv and Jaffa.³⁸ *A fortiori*, amorousness presupposes amity.

Palestine’s Jews of Middle Eastern origin who until the 1920s constituted the majority of Palestine’s Jewish population claimed that indigeneity and intimate knowledge of Arab ways went hand-in-hand. They presented themselves as mediators between European newcomers and Palestinian Arabs, and as inherently more conciliatory than their Ashkenazi counterparts. Such self-

34 Biographical sketches of Lilienblum, Ben-Yehuda, and Ahad Ha-Am are provided in Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, 2017). For a detailed study of Ahad Ha-Am, see Steven Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha-Am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

35 Alan Dowty and Yitzhak Epstein, “‘A Question That Outweighs All Others’: Yitzhak Epstein and Zionist Recognition of the Arab Issue,” *Israel Studies* 6, no. 1 (2001): 34–54, 39–42.

36 Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State*, 77.

37 Menachem Klein, *Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Hebron* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

38 Tami Razi, “‘Yehudiyot-Araviyot?’ Etniyut, le`umiyut u-migdar be-tel-aviv ha-mandatorit,” [Arab-Jewesses? Ethnicity, nationalism, and gender in Mandatory Tel Aviv], *Teorayah u-Vikoret* 38–39 (2011): 137–160.

presentations may well, however, have been modes of positioning and status-seeking.³⁹ Depicting Mandate Palestine's Jewish population as divided between aggressive Ashkenazim and passive Mizrahim is grossly inaccurate. As Abigail Jacobson and Moshe Naor note, Iraqi immigrants like Ezra Meni and Avraham Sharoni put their Arabic skills to work by working for the intelligence services of the pre-state militia.⁴⁰ In general, Mizrahi Jews in Mandate Palestine were no less likely to espouse political Zionism than their Ashkenazi counterparts. As Yuval Evri and Hagar Kotef have argued, in pre-1948 Palestine, Zionist ideology both allowed for Ashkenazic Jewish immigrants to imagine themselves as natives and for Oriental Jewish natives to be re-configured as settlers.⁴¹

Nonetheless, European Zionists were far from united in touting separation from Arab culture. In Central Europe, Jews had since the mid-nineteenth century played a disproportionate role in the development of the academic study of Near Eastern civilization, in which Islam was presented in a positive light, perhaps because of its historically benevolent attitudes towards Jews.⁴² In the early twentieth century, a coterie of European Jews such as the artists Boris Schatz and Ephraim Moses Lilien romanticized the Orient and the Jews' historic links to it. A small but influential group of European Jewish immigrants to Palestine learned Arabic and developed close relations with members of the bureaucratic, mercantile, and landowning Palestinian elites.⁴³ Zionist activists from Eliezer Ben-Yehuda to David Ben-Gurion claimed that Palestine's Arabs were the devolved descendants of ancient Hebrews, in desperate need of assistance from their more advanced brethren.⁴⁴

A complex web of relations between immigrants and locals typically characterizes settler colonial situations. As Liora Halperin has written, early

39 Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State*, 78.

40 Abigail Jacobson and Moshe Naor, *Oriental Neighbors: Middle Eastern Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2016), 188–189.

41 Yuval Evri and Hagar Kotef, "When Does a Native Become a Settler? (With Apologies to Zreik and Mamdani)," *Constellations* 29, no. 1 (2022): 3–18. See also Caroline Kahlenberg, "How Locals Became Settlers: Mizrahi Jews and Bodily Capital in Palestine, 1908–1948" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2021); and the short but pithy intervention by Jonathan Gribetz, "'To the Arab Hebrew': On Possibilities and Impossibilities," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 3 (2014): 589–592.

42 John Efron, "From *Mitteleuropa* to the Middle East: Orientalism through a Jewish Lens," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94 (2004): 490–520; and Susannah Heschel, "Orientalist Triangulations: Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Response to Christian Europe," in *The Muslim Reception of European Orientalism: Reversing the Gaze*, ed. Susannah Heschel and Umar Ryad (London: Routledge, 2019), 147–167.

43 Gil Eyal, *The Disenchantment of the Orient: Expertise in Arab Affairs and the Israeli State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 62–93.

44 Yael Zerubavel, "Memory, the Rebirth of the Native, and the 'Hebrew Bedouin' Identity," *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): 320–321.

Zionist settlers' assertions of respect for the natives assumed hierarchical relationships of knowledge and power—the settlers knew the natives in a way that the natives could not know them, the settlers were employers and the native employees.⁴⁵ In the relationship between colonizer and colonized, the former appropriates aspects of native culture as a sign of “firstness” and rootedness in the land. Labor Zionists who distinguished themselves from the first settlers by insisting that the land should be worked by Jews alone were themselves echoing the belief, held among pioneer settlers in colonial New England, in the divine commandment to husband the land by the sweat of one's brow.⁴⁶

For early Zionists, in the decades before the Arabs became so clearly denoted as a political enemy, the Arab could be an object of suspicion, a carrier of the virus of Levantine indolence, yet also an object of pity, paternalistic affection, even romanticized emulation. I have already alluded to social, economic, and at times romantic contacts between the two communities during the period of the British Mandate. Love affairs between Jews and Arabs aroused great anxiety amongst Jewish and Palestinian elites alike, yet they were few, and, unlike so many colonial situations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the native woman was rarely an object of sexual fantasy in the literature or art of the Yishuv.⁴⁷ Homo-erotic idealization of the Arab male was more common, in the form of either a hyper-masculine Bedouin horseman or a Jew who had acquired the looks and bearing of one.⁴⁸ This literary trope reflected Zionists' fascination, even obsession, with the physical regeneration of the Jewish body, which was usually coded as male. Zionist striving to achieve and assert masculinity was a response to the feminization of Jews common in the rhetoric of antisemitism, which depicted Jewish males as physically unfit, cowardly, and prone to stereotypical feminine behaviors such as hysteria, scheming, and treachery.

Early Zionist immigrants viewed Arabs with a mixture of curiosity, admiration, and condescension. According to Boaz Neumann, disdain also

45 Liora Halperin, *The Oldest Guard: Forging the Zionist Settler Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021).

46 Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State*, 84.

47 The Hebrew literary scholar Yaron Peleg has portrayed Zionist writers in late Ottoman Palestine as mostly incurious about Arabs. As Peleg relates, however, there was an important exception: Moshe Smilansky's collection of stories *B'nei 'Arav*, published in 1911 under the pseudonym Khawaja Musa (see Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005], 76). Moreover, only one story in the collection, “Latifa,” portrays a male Jew expressing interest in a female Arab. In this story, the female is a fourteen-year-old girl, described primarily in terms of the beauty of her eyes, and the Jewish narrator's interests in her appear to be more fraternal and protective than erotic. An English translation of the story was published in Moshe Smilansky, *Palestine Caravan* (London: Methuen, 1935), 265–269.

48 Yaron Peleg, “Heroic Conduct: Homoeroticism and the Creation of Modern, Jewish Masculinities,” *Jewish Social Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 31–58.

featured prominently. The Zionist pioneers of the early twentieth century determined that Palestine's Arabs lacked the Jewish youths' passionate desire to work, improve, and "redeem" the land: "As a virgin, the land expected to be penetrated; the Arabs were impotent. As a bride, the land demanded love; the Arabs did not love it, even neglected it."⁴⁹ During the interwar period, Zionist claims that Arabs had failed to steward the land and that Zionists had come to reclaim it were commonplace. Contempt for alleged Arab indolence combined with fear of the Arabs' alleged propensity for violence. These fears, stoked by inter-communal violence in Jerusalem in 1920 and Jaffa in 1921, escalated vastly after the riots of August 1929, when Arabs killed more than one hundred Jews throughout Palestine, and the Palestinian Arab Revolt against the British and Zionists over the years 1936–1939. Despite the presence of such powerful negative emotions towards Arabs, textbooks in the Yishuv's schools, alongside political pronouncements from the Yishuv's governing elite, made a studied attempt to refrain from expressions of outright hatred.⁵⁰ Instead, the Arab masses were portrayed as childlike and easily manipulated—deserving of paternalist concern rather than rage. A constant refrain of Zionist settlement was the material benefit it brought to Palestine's Arabs, a benefit that threatened the Palestinians' traditional elites, who were the true barriers to peace.

Even during the 1948 war, Zionist propaganda insisted that Palestine's Arabs were docile and eager to live in peace with their Jewish neighbors. Acknowledging the extent of local Arab opposition to Zionism would call into question the morality of the Zionist enterprise, so acts of violent resistance were attributed to either reactionary elites in Palestinian society or outside agitators. This optimistic viewpoint may well have been sincere as well as instrumental—a perception as well as a rationalization. Whatever feelings lay inside the hearts of the Jewish fighters, and whatever they did to Arabs, whether by their own accord, under orders from their superiors, or with the state's leadership's tacit support, Israel's leadership steered clear of calling for revenge or justifying murderous rage against the enemy.⁵¹ Violent events, of

49 Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, trans. Haim Watzman (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 85.

50 Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 192–193 and 196–197.

51 Almog, *The Sabra*, 202–208. Almog goes so far as to claim that most Israeli soldiers in 1948 did not feel hatred or a lust for vengeance, but massacres of Palestinian civilians and looting of their property suggest otherwise. See Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.) Moreover, Shay Hazkani has documented that depictions of Arabs in training materials for IDF soldiers were crafted to spark hatred and rage against Arabs; see Shay Hazkani, *Dear Palestine: A Social History of the 1948 War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021).

course, did take place including numerous expulsions and, as Benny Morris has exhaustively documented, some two dozen massacres. But during the 1948 War the poet and ghetto rebel Abba Kovner stood out for his frank, unvarnished expressions of hatred of Arabs, and the savagery and bloodlust reflected in propaganda pamphlets he wrote for the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) were off-putting even to hardened commanders.⁵²

Zionist attitudes towards Arabs were usually more complex than Kovner's unhinged fury, and they reflected the colonial as well as national aspects of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. In a colonial setting, there is room in the newcomer's mind for paternalism, admiration, and respect for the native, as well as for fear, disregard, and contempt. In a nationality conflict, the range of feelings between the groups differs, from friendship, comity, and conviviality to rivalry, resentment, and hatred deriving from shifting legal and socio-economic status. In the newly formed state of Israel, the full range of feelings from amity to enmity was present, but official discourse solidly emphasized the former.

In this sense, Israel was similar to other postwar multi-national states that had been the sites of internecine killing but became more circumspect about fomenting political hatred of internal enemies. In post-1945 Yugoslavia, the mutual slaughter during the war of Serbs and Croats, and of Bosnian Muslims by Serbs, was covered up under the slogan "Brotherhood and Unity."⁵³ In Israel, although scores of thousands of Israeli Jews bore the knowledge of what they had done during the war, the instruments of official memory—the state, educational system, and means of mass communication—presented a sanitized version of the war, denying not only the violence wrought by Jews against Palestinians but also the presence of hatred and rage behind it.

By the mid-twentieth century, it had become ignoble in global political rhetoric for a dominant majority to hate a minority. Of course, it happened frequently enough, but regimes that conceived of themselves or wished to be perceived as liberal needed to deny that such feelings existed. In the young state of Israel, there was palpable fear and hostility towards Arab states (especially Egypt), Palestinian trans-border infiltrators (most of whom were unarmed peasants trying to return to Israel or at least recover their possessions, though some were armed militants), and Arab citizens of Israel (nearly fifty of whom were murdered by Israeli border police outside of the village of Kafr Kassem in October of 1956), but hatred of the country's Arab minority was not expressed in school textbooks, the newspapers, or the radio.⁵⁴ The media

52 Hazkani, *Dear Palestine*, 80–91.

53 Max Bergholz, *Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 278.

54 Eli Podeh, "History and Memory in the Israeli Educational System: The Portrayal of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks (1948–2000)," *History and Memory* 12, no. 1 (2000): 65–100.

and schoolbooks acknowledged the absence of most of Palestine's Arabs via neutral terms such as "Arab refugees" and "abandoned Arab villages."⁵⁵ They spoke of the Arabs within Israel as "the Arab minority," which remained largely invisible due to the strictures of military rule and its concentration in specific parts of the country.⁵⁶ According to Israeli public discourse, Jews and Arabs within the state did not hate each other.⁵⁷ As in post-war Yugoslavia, there was little to be gained by promoting such hostility, even if the power and demographic imbalance between Israeli Jews and Arabs, as well as the policy of separating Arabs from Jews, was radically different from Yugoslavia's vision of "Brotherhood and Unity."

Love of one's own community can justify hatred of its enemies; but, as the cultural theorist Sara Ahmed has argued, declarations of love make it possible to deny hatred altogether.⁵⁸ Acts of self-preservation may require the use of intimidation or force, which is presented as the inevitable consequence of love and unaccompanied by hatred. The American Orthodox rabbi Meir Kahane, who advocated removing Arabs from the state of Israel, was fond of saying, "I don't hate Arabs; I love Jews."⁵⁹ During the 1970s and 1980s, Kahane was something of a lone figure in an Israeli state that continued to promote an official discourse of amity towards the state's Arab citizens. This rhetoric changed markedly during and in the aftermath of the Second Intifadah of 2000–2005, during which some one thousand Israelis were killed, and expressions of fear and hatred of Arabs within Israel became more common. In the 2010s, calls of "Death to Arabs" were heard at political demonstrations and at soccer games involving Arab teams, Arab players, or players with Arab-sounding names. This hooliganism was particularly associated with the Beitar Jerusalem team, about which one fan boasted "*Gizanut – zo arakhim*" (racism is a value).⁶⁰

55 Podeh, "History and Memory in the Israeli Educational System," 86.

56 Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 181.

57 Janice J. Terry, "Zionist Attitudes towards Arabs," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6, no. 1 (1976): 67–78.

58 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2004), 42–61.

59 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-10-29-mn-13066-story.html>, accessed February 20, 2024.

60 The chanting may be heard on a video of a match on January 25, 2017, between Beitar Jerusalem and Bnei Sakhnin at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otxRkFwp824>, accessed July 18, 2022. It was also reported following a January 2018 match; accessed July 18, 2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-soccer-club-vows-crackdown-on-racist-fans-after-anti-arab-chants/>. For background to these incidents, see Ephraim Lavie, Meir Elran, and Muhammed Abu Nasry, "Hatred and Racism between Jews and the Arab Palestinian Minority in Israel: Characteristics, Consequences, and Coping Strategies," in *Strategic Survey for Israel 2016–2017*, ed. Anat Kurz and Shlomo Brom (Tel

Survey data suggests that anti-Arab animus was rife among Israel's *fin de millennium* Jewish population. In 1999, seventy-seven percent of Israeli Jews opposed sexual relations between Arab and Jewish citizens of the state, and fifty-six percent opposed granting Arabs equal social rights. Surveys from 2003–2009 showed that about a third of Israeli Jews did not feel “ready” to have an Arab friend and half did not want an Arab neighbor. Fifteen to twenty percent reported having been personally insulted, threatened, or otherwise harmed by an Arab, but between sixty and seventy percent perceived Israel's Arabs as a “demographic threat.” Only two thirds felt Arabs should be allowed to vote for the Knesset, and only a third felt Arabs should be allowed to purchase land where they wished.⁶¹ By 2016, almost half of Israeli Jews agreed that “Arabs should be expelled or transferred from Israel,” with support for expulsion rising to fifty-nine percent among ultra-Orthodox Jews, and seventy-one percent among national religious Jews.⁶² In 2018, ninety percent of Jewish survey respondents objected to their daughter befriending an Arab boy, and almost as many objected to a friendship between their son and an Arab girl.⁶³ More than a third were bothered by the fact that half of Israel's pharmacists are Arab. And a survey of Israeli teenagers, publicized in February of 2021, found that twenty-four, forty-two, and sixty-six percent of secular, religious, and ultra-Orthodox Jews respectively expressed fear and/or hatred of Arabs. Forty-nine percent of religious Zionist youth and half as many of their secular peers supported denying Israeli Arabs the right to vote.⁶⁴

By the early 2000s, Israel's political echelons no longer served as a moderating factor against anti-Arab enmity. At first hateful, anti-Arabic rhetoric came from fringe figures such as Bentzi Gopstein and Itamar Ben-Gvir, but by the 2010s it had ascended to the Prime Minister himself. On election day in 2015, the campaign of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, sent potential supporters text messages that “turnout is three times higher in the Arab sector.” Netanyahu himself posted a video on his Facebook page in which he warned that “the right is in danger of losing power, the Arab voters are

Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2017), 225–234. For a general survey of Israeli Jewish perceptions of Arabs, see Daniel Bar-Tal and Yona Teichman, *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict: Representations of Arabs in Israeli Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

61 Sammy Smooha, *Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel: Alienation and Rapprochement* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2010), 21–22.

62 Pew Research Center, Views of the Jewish State and the Diaspora, March 8, 2016, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/08/views-of-the-jewish-state-and-the-diaspora/>.

63 Tamar Pileggi, “New Poll Shows Strong Anti-Arab Sentiment among Israeli Jews,” *Times of Israel* (December 10, 2018), accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/new-poll-shows-strong-anti-arab-sentiment-among-israeli-jews/>.

64 Or Kashti, “‘Map of Hatred’: Half of Israeli Religious Teens Would Strip Arab Right to Vote, Poll Finds,” *Haaretz* (February 19, 2021), accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-israeli-religious-teens-would-rescind-arab-vote-poll-1.9551732>.

moving in droves to the polling stations. We only have you. Go to vote. Bring your friends and relatives. Vote Likud to close the gap between us and Labor. And with your help, and God's help, we will form a national government that will protect the state of Israel."⁶⁵ After a spate of Arab attacks against Jews and Jewish property during the May 2021 Gaza war, Israel's president, Reuven Rivlin, referred to the burning of synagogues in Lod as a "pogrom" committed by "a bloodthirsty Arab mob."⁶⁶ The mayor of Lod compared the arson to *Kristallnacht*, the massive Nazi-organized pogrom throughout Germany on the night of November 9, 1938. In the next year, an avowedly racist Jewish political party won close to fifteen percent of the Jewish vote in Israel's parliamentary elections, Ben-Gvir was appointed Minister of National Security, and the equally extreme Bezalel Smotrich was appointed Minister of Finance.

Conclusion

In deeply divided societies, amity on a personal level and enmity on an inter-communal level are commonplace. As we have seen, Palestinian enmity towards Israel has co-existed with an eagerness to know the enemy, to appreciate its strengths as well as assess its weaknesses, for the purposes of achieving national liberation, however that may be defined. Israel's public display of amity, on the other hand, has been a vehicle for pacification of and the assertion of cultural superiority over the country's Arab citizens. Until the early twenty-first century, public amity and private enmity co-existed, but of late Israeli public enmity towards Arabs has become endemic.

I have focused on relations between the State of Israel and its Arab citizens, but how might attitudes towards the Palestinians of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza confirm or refute my arguments? Is the rage with which Israelis have regarded Gazan Palestinians since the October 7, 2023, Hamas massacre in keeping or a rupture with the patterns I have described? Moreover, does the state of affairs I have described indicate that the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians is a colonial one? I have argued that official amity and private enmity have characterized colonizers' views of the colonized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the inequalities of power that generate both romanticization of and scorn for

65 Reproduced in Anshel Pfeffer, *Bibi: The Turbulent Life and Times of Benjamin Netanyahu* (Toronto: Signal/McClelland & Stewart, 2018), 358.

66 "After Lod Synagogues Torched, Rivlin Accuses 'Bloodthirsty Arab Mob' of 'Pogrom,'" *Times of Israel* (May 12, 2021), accessed December 7, 2021, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-lod-synagogues-torched-rivlin-accuses-bloodthirsty-arab-mob-of-pogrom/#:~:text=President%20Reuven%20Rivlin%20on%20Wednesday,dark%20periods%20in%20Jewish%20history](https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-lod-synagogues-torched-rivlin-accuses-bloodthirsty-arab-mob-of-pogrom/#:~:text=President%20Reuven%20Rivlin%20on%20Wednesday,dark%20periods%20in%20Jewish%20history;); B. Bar-Peleg, "Minister Backs Calls for Armed Jews to Come Defend Mixed City of Lod," *Haaretz* (June 1, 2021), accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-minister-says-calls-for-armed-jews-to-come-defend-mixed-city-are-legitimate-1.9863621>.

“the noble savage” are unlikely to exist outside of a colonial framework. I am aware, however, of the sensitivity and complexity of any discussion of the relationship between Zionism and colonialism, and I hope that this short paper can stimulate a larger discussion.