

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Zionism as a Performative: Winners and Losers**

Gabriel Mayer

*Graduate Affiliate: University of Haifa, International School, Israel.***Introduction**

The term Zionism conjures up all sorts of reactions, none of them having much connection to the distinctive political, sociological, economical and psychological performance arising over the years. Indeed, while acting as the DNA of pre-statehood Palestine's transformation into the State of Israel, it currently stands more as a slogan or utterance, a call for action—often quite varied—dependent on place person and thing, which invokes its use. Comparing its power as an utterance to “I do” during a marriage ceremony, so famously stated by J. L. Austen, one can clearly see the immediacy evoked by its utterance [1].

What follows is an assortment of historical events, which were turning points for society's view of and utilization for political expediency with many things “Zionist” The foregoing is a metaphorical reality, in as much as Zionism slowly transformed from an academically argued political science subject to a commercialized battle cry of competing societies, individuals, and the everlasting struggle between personhood and statehood. The rhetoric around post-Zionism, by land large a product of the “New Historians” is bypassed in my current discussion because it may well represent the isolated fancies of a core group of academicians who were speaking for themselves about themselves [2].

US Diaspora and Israel: the Struggle over Jewish Nationalism

In this paper I wish to examine the positive or negative appeal of Zionism (as localized in Israel) not only for Israelis but also for outsiders, most specifically the US Diaspora community. Reviewing some historical moments will bring clarity to the

transformation of the term into something that is argued over and sought as a badge of distinction, while losing much of its distinctive historical impacts. While the 1967 war bolstered enthusiasm for Israel and increased the supportive efforts by the American community, we know well that these positive sentiments began to fade over the years. Many factors might account for this, but today we see an increasing estrangement from Israel by the US Jewish community. Some of this is attributable to aggressive Israeli militarism as well as the staunch resistance by the Rabbinate for any stream of Judaism excepting Orthodoxy, but there are other factors going way back to the 1940s.

I count, first of all, the rejection of Jewish nationalism outside of Israel and specifically objections to the concept of American Zionism. These are the areas I wish to explore. It is important for me to acknowledge the fact that in examining Israeli society and history my lacking the Hebrew language is a highly significant tactical disadvantage; objectively speaking, one cannot learn about Israel and its people without knowing the language, or to put it in another way, one cannot fully learn about a Hebraic society in English. Still, there is certain validity in my position because a significant part of this work is to emphasize the competing narratives between Israeli Jews and US Jews. The latter, just like me, lack the language component. Nevertheless, since the majority of the world's Jews live, about evenly split, either in Israel or the US, the differential interpretations of the two groups assume a scientific validity [3].

¹(Austin 1975, pasim) Austen is credited with opening a whole new set of rules for linguistics utilization, by introducing the performative power of words.

²(Likhovski 2010, pp 4-7)

³(DellaPergola 2017 February 22)Abstract

At the beginning of 2016, the world's Jewish population was estimated at 14,412,200—an increase of 100,000 (0.70 %) (Engel 2010) over the 2014 revised estimate. As the world's total population increased by 1.38 % in 2015, world Jewry increased at about half the general population growth rate. Jewish population was highly concentrated in two countries,

Zionism Current Public Views

Turn on the TV, or read news article today, and you are likely to come across, “Israel is a Zionist apartheid state, some of my best friends are Jews and I am not an anti-Semitic. This then immediately raises the question and specter of why is Zionism so reviled and so often associated with antisemitism in the 21st century. Some clues follow. On November 30th, 1975, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution # 3379 declaring that Zionism equaled racial discrimination.[4]Notwithstanding that some year earlier, Martin Luther King, in an address at Harvard University in 1968, declared that, “When people criticize Zionists they mean Jews. You’re talking anti-Semitism [5].

While above I discuss the politics of international strife, along with anti-Semitism, there is contentious deliberation among Jews centered on the concept of Zionism and most especially in the interpretational sensibilities when comparing Israeli Jews to American Jews. And while the forgoing is not a mainstay to my analysis, it is a good measure of the vitriol and attention the very word Zionism is able to conjure. This is very much inherent to its per formative powers and influences.

Early Settlement in Yeshuv

To commence this analysis I wish to report on two episodes occurring in the Yeshuv in the 1920s. In one we look at the development of the Zionization of everyday life, specifically at the time when a Zionist periodization of history was evolving. During the period between the First and Second Aliya, oddly enough, there was no numbering system or distinction between immigrant groups. That there should even be such a system, called Zionist Periodization, has become questionable, especially since Gur Alroey’s research has demonstrated a number of smaller distinct groups throughout the settlement period.[6]More recently, HizkyShoham has examined the genesis of Zionist Periodization and has produced some

Israel (44 % of the world total) and the US (40 % of the world total), 10 % lived in Europe, 5 % in other North America and Latin America, and 2 % in other continents. A steady demographic increase in Israel was matched by stagnation or decline elsewhere which was generated by low birth rates, frequent intermarriage, aging, and emigration.

⁴(UnitedNationsGeneralAssembly 1979)

⁵(Lewis 2002, January 21)

⁶(Alroey 2004, passim)

surprising results [7]. It may come as a surprise, but the first named “wave” was the Third Aliya; however the numbered title had a completely different origin than what is customarily understood. Shoham is able to attribute the periodization phenomena to events surrounding the Third Aliyah. Apparently a confluence of written material by several influential religious writers of the time led to the widespread belief that the Third Aliyah was about to occur! But this was not the third Aliyah that we know today; rather it was third following the First Aliyah from the biblical days of Zerubavel and the Second, about 80 years later, from Nehemiah. So widespread was this belief, for at least a brief period of time, which rumors ran wild and the arrival of the Ruslan-a ship sailing from Odessa in December of 1919-was perceived by some as the start of this much anticipated event. 8].

Subsequent to this, a few years later, what is now the familiar nominalization became widespread. My next stop is a look at the role of archeology, and in general, the nation building narrative that was about to be conjoined with Zionism as ethos for a new state. During these early decades of immigration and settlement, the first stirrings of Jewish archeology took place. Nahum Slouschz is credited with the first excavation under Jewish auspices in 1921 under the sponsorship of the Jewish Palestinian Exploration Society, exploring an ancient synagogue at HamatTiberias [9]. Slouschz and EleazarSukenik, who later became one of the founding members of Hebrew University’s School of Archeology, were two of the first notable Jewish archeologists, both coming from similar Russian originating Zionist idealism?In 1928, during the digging of irrigation canals, a member of kibbutz Hefzibah came across an ancient mosaic.

The archeological remains were discovered on land belonging to the Jewish National Fund within the territory of Kibbutz Hefzibah, but in order to carry out archeological excavation, permission from the British Department of Antiquities was required. Frederick Hermann Kisch, the head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency’s Zionist Executive, to the British Department of

⁷(Shoham 2013, passim)

⁸ Ibid p.13

⁹(Fine 2005, pp. 7-22)

Antiquities, reports the discovery of the mosaic and asks permission to begin an excavation led by a team of the Hebrew University. The permission was granted, and the excavations begun, led by Eleazar Sukenik (he was issued Permit #75 by the Palestinian Antiquities Authority). A synagogue and a mosaic floor from the fifth century were discovered. The site was named Beit Alpha after an Arab settlement located nearby.[10] If we step back and look at all the characters or players in the foregoing, we see a group of Zionist idealists who were striving for similar political goals but their archeological efforts were guided more by a uniform Jewish nationalism common in Europe, the US, and Palestine, and differing from that which became institutionalized in statism upon the formation of the state of Israel in 1948 [11].

Most telling perhaps would be a closer examination of the young settlers who first came upon the remnants of the 5th century synagogue excavated by Sukenik. They were early Zionist pioneers of Beit Alpha, a communal settlement in the Esdraelon Valley. The settlement was founded in the early Twenties by young men and women belong to the socialist youth movement *Hashomer Hatzair* (Young Guard). They subscribed to a bizarre combination of utopian Marxism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and the then fashionable German *Jugendkultur*, with its Romantic worship of nature, cult of eroticism, and disdain for bourgeois values.

In December 1928, some of them were digging an irrigation channel and suddenly struck the brilliantly colored mosaic of a sixth century Jewish synagogue. Their first reaction was to keep the discovery secret, and possibly cover it up again- a natural impulse, perhaps, that field archaeologists often encounter. The main concern, after all, had been to dig an irrigation channel. The unexpected discovery complicated this task and threatened to hold it up, perhaps indefinitely.

But there was more to it: an anti-religion attitude. The young kibbutzniks, full of the fervor of Russian radicalism, had only a year or two earlier come out of Eastern Europe with-as the saying went at the time-“no

clothes, but with copies of *Das Kapital* and Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* in their knapsacks.” A few were still teen-agers. Others were in open rebellion against their Orthodox religious fathers. Some had actually run away from home to help build socialism and create the “new Jew” in the historic land of his forefathers: a utopian community not unlike those of the late 1960s in which their identity would be redefined and based on socialism and love. Religion was the opium of the people.

For this reason alone, it might be best if the synagogue mosaic were covered up again. Others argued that the mosaic was not necessarily religious but rather political, a Zionist monument. It was important, so the argument went, to uphold every archaeological remnant that testified to the Jewish presence in the land, and confirmed the legitimacy of the Zionist claim. A debate took place. The conservationist view prevailed over the iconoclastic.”[12] The fact that these were Jewish efforts, *sans* the imprint of Zionist statism, did not go unnoticed by the world press such as the NYT. A February 7, 1928 article begins with, “Recent excavations in Palestine have proved that there is not a flaw in the biblical narrative of the campaigns of Joshua, and they can now be traced with absolute topographical accuracy. 13 The article attributes the exploration to the efforts of the Committee of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society and describes it as “the only Jewish organization engaged in uncovering Jewish antiquities and monuments in Palestine.” A 1926 article, also in the NYT, describes the efforts of Bishop Dubose, who in cooperation with Emory University, will be working on excavating the ancient city of Sechem, and provides a detailed account of the Israelites activities and history during that era. [14] In yet another article from April 29, 1929, the headliner read, “Dr. Sukenik excavates Synagogue in Palestine Which Makes New History in Judaism.”[15]

Laying the Groundwork in Palestine during British Mandate Period

During these years, those accounted for by British occupation and pre-statehood; the efforts for a nation building narrative were

¹⁰(Elon 1997, pp. 33-36)

¹¹(Segev 2012, pp. 109-111)

¹²(Elon 1997, p. 36)

¹³(NYT 1928, February 7)

¹⁴(NYT 1926, April 26)

¹⁵(NYT 1929, April 29)

not orchestrated by any particular political motivation, but rather a consensus of peoples, even if their origins were from a multitude of political orientations. However, significant dialogues were taking place in academia. David Engle, in his book *“Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust”* dedicates chapter two to the concept of rehabilitating exile.[16]

“Flush with the spirit of national rebirth and independence in the Jewish homeland, seeing themselves the spearhead of intellectual revolution that was to be one of its foremost expressions, they attributed to Zionist outlook their self-proclaimed ability to expose hitherto-hidden spiritual treasures in the Jewish past, knowledge which had eluded earlier generations of researchers who had not taken part in the great work of national reconstruction.”[17]Ben Zion Dinaburg would become one of the leading exponents proclaiming the separation of “there and here” whereby a distinction was to be made between Jews in the diaspora and those in Eretz Israel. This separation became more acute and profound in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust. It was to become part of a shameful past to be a member of the Galut, and its later manifestation would confer a shameful visage to the Holocaust survivors reaching the shores of Palestine during the 1940s. Yitzhak Baer would write, “The Jewish revival of the present day is in its essence not determined by the national movements of Europe; it harks back to the ancient national consciousness of the Jews, which existed before the history of Europe and is the original sacred model for all the national ideas of Europe.”[18]

The net result of such ideas was to gloss over the very origins of Zionism, ones that were definitively rooted in Europe.[19] There was a conscious effort to abrogate the history of the Zionist movement and to subjugate it to what seemed most convenient for the national narrative.

The Years under Ben-Gurion

And this is where the narrative begins to be subjugated to national aspirations of a very political nature: the nation building vision of Ben-Gurion. His concept of *Mamlakhtiyut* is a difficult subject and far too complex for me

to discuss in detail, but this observation by Nir Kedar is insightful, “From this point of view, it would appear that Ben-Gurion rejected connection with the word “community (*kehilah*), preferring to sever the association between the nascent Jewish-Israeli polity and the Jewish people’s recent lachrymal past in the galut (“exile”). In this struggle to forge a “new Jew,” Ben-Gurion jettisoned the traditional political symbol of galut life, the Jewish community, by replacing it with a re-modeled image of Jewish sovereignty.”[20]

Whatever the merits of Ben-Gurion’s visage and its employment, what is certain is that it worked. Oz Almog’s book, “The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew” examines the product of the earlier generation of settlers and pioneers, who were educated in a social framework of labor Zionism, offspring of Kibbutzim and Moshavim, and now were the citizens of Ben-Gurion’s new Israel. [21] What is most remarkable is that a near uniform generation emerged and Jews unified under a new national culture populated it, Jews who felt altogether separate from the exilic remnants of World Jewry.

Diaspora Experience

In the meantime, Cecil Rhodes in Great Britain and Salo Baron in the US were fashioning an altogether different Jewish history. Baron’s non-lachrymose approach to the history of Jews continues to this day to affect American Jewish history and during the 20th century it represented the antithesis of the Zionist dialogue, even though Professor Baron was an influential supporter of Israel throughout its years as Palestine and later in statehood.

As a matter of record, the mass exodus of Jewish intelligentsia from Europe in the middle of the 20th century contributed to formative nucleus of Jewish studies academia in both the US and at Hebrew University in Jerusalem [22]. And the fact is that what was at one time a shared concept of Jewish nationalism, well documented in Joseph

²⁰(Kedar 2002, p. 119)

²¹(Almog 2000, passim)

The fact that this book was a national bestseller in Israel in the year 2000 is a testament to its appeal to the nativist folklorist personage it described. Here was the perfect mixture of land and myth, which flowed easily from the urban centers to the moshave and kibbutz.

²²(Liberles 1995, p.57)

¹⁶(Engel 2010, pp. 85-133)

¹⁷ Ibid p.85

¹⁸ Ibid p.101

¹⁹(Schorske 2012, passim)

Katz's articulation about the "forerunners of Zionism," was destined to diverge at the precise point when Zionism was poised to become a reality.[23] During the 1940s and 1950s American Jews campaigned ceaselessly for the cause of Israel. Led by Abba Hillel Silver, the Jews of America delivered their support by financial means and by effective political activities.[24]

In a scathingly negative review of the book "Judaism or Jewish Nationalism" by Elmer Berger, Lucy Dawidowicz wrote in 1957, "Almost all American Zionists-Labor Zionists to Hadassah ladies alike-have disappointed and alienated veteran Zionists in Israel with their heretical claims that Jews in America are not in Exile, that Israel is not their homeland, that Jews in the United States can live securely as Jews and as Americans." [25] Written in 1957, within a decade of statehood, there are contentious ideologies already, and in that same year an op-ed response to her remarks from Leonard Sussman, Executive Director for the American Council on Judaism, ends with, "In other words, one can only discuss the problems of Zionism from the inside, *by being a Zionist*, and Mrs. Dawidowicz in this article numbers herself among those who accept the basic "Jewish nationalist" approach." [26]

This apparent turmoil around whose Zionism or whose Judaism, or who, what, and when, is an inherent difficulty in any analysis of Jewish history precisely because of the centuries of exilic existence throughout all corners of the world. In a discussion regarding ideological transformations in Judaism, Engel writes about, "That neglect in part on the determination of Israeli historians of the modern Jewish experience ... [to] force the diverse trends in the modern Jewish world into a Procrustean bed of Zionist analysis." [27]

Such back and forth polemics as to who is a Jew, where, when and how are not the subject of my interest in this paper. What I see as problematic is the increasingly heavy burden posed by the word Zionism when it executes a brand name.

²³(Salmon 1999, *passim*)

²⁴(Segev 2012) and (Segev 2014) Segev's scholarship explores the fabric of American Jewish 'politicking' at its most effective best. It is also noteworthy in that he documents Ben-Gurion's personal efforts to win this support.

²⁵(DAWIDOWICZ 1957)

²⁶(Sussman 1957, Dec. 1)

²⁷(Engel 2006, p. 246)

Performativity and the Branding Effect

Up till now, this paper has dealt for the most part with history. However, to better explain my approach to the topic some additional information needs to be applied. I wish to introduce concepts originating in linguistic philosophy, the concept of performativity. The foundation of this concept is traced back to the 1950s and a series of talks by J.L. Austin as he delivered the William James lecture series at Harvard University in 1955. [28]

In defining performativity, Austin contended that linguistic exercises allowed for words to do more than just describe or define; that words could set in motion forces that would then invoke action(s) as a result of linguistics. He begins with the simple assertion that some statements are performative when an action or a change results as a result of that being said (or written) and as long as a few simple rules and conditions are satisfied. [29] As more conditions are defined, there is a concept stating, "There must exist a an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, the procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in special circumstances." [30] These were some of the very early tenets of performativity theory as applied to linguistic philosophy.

Collective Memory and Nation Building

Yael Zerubavel's "*Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*" is a highly regarded work that closely follows and details the making of a national narrative and the formation of collective memory. Throughout the work, and in its discussion in academic circles, the word Zionism is and can be freely exchanged with Israeli Jewish people, things or places. [31] Thus the word or label, Zionism is a noun or adjective without having any particular attributes that enact or enforce a dynamic event, be it of thought, action, or interactive dynamics. When Zionism exerts an effect, such as in creating a Zionist periodization, or even utilized in the 1975 UN Resolution, it assumes the characteristics of a "performative utterance [32]. Here it becomes

²⁸(Austin 1975, *passim*)

²⁹ Ibid p.14-16

³⁰ Ibid p.25

³¹(Zerubavel 1995, *passim*)

³²(Austin 1975, pp. 59-66)

branding, or rather, it is the cause of branding. To illustrate, consider the US Constitution: a rather large piece of work with many words, which had no effect or meaning until it was signed by its signatories. Afterwards, the effects became profound. I am not sure at what point in time Zionism assumed a critical energy that gives it the performative effects it now projects. This is why I chose to describe the early settlement period scenarios, which were formative stages in the adaptation of Zionism into the national narrative and collective memory. By the time Ben-Gurion introduced *Mamlakhtiyut* the game was on. Ironically, and to help make my case, the aforementioned may be also be regarded as a performative word. And while the concept did not arise till decades later, Ben-Gurion instinctively played with the concept, as evidenced by his experimentation with the word over a period of years [33].

Yael Feldman has written extensively about contemporaneous literature as a formative and representational force in advancing Zionist ideologies, and makes the following observation, “exposing one of the oldest antisemitic slurs that is no doubt hiding behind its better-known cousin, the Zionist dichotomy outlined above: If you cannot be like [the New Hebrew Man], either you are a woman, or you are a Diaspora-kike [f.]”[34] This small observation is very powerful if we consider the implication; that being the overarching imposition of Zionism on gender roles and cultural order.

Israel Relations and US

Having started the discussion on the influence of Zionism upon culture and society, inevitably begs the question, what about the American Jew? Clearly such effects are non-existent and not expected, and the schism between Diaspora Jew and Israeli Jew is bared in striking fashion. The significant issue at hand now becomes a question of what is done about this rift? Whether willful or coincidental, under Ben-Gurion’s *Mamlakhtiyut* the forces separate them even more. Thus far, my discussion has been overwhelmingly from the Israeli perspective, and this is not by neglect. The facts are that “over here” tends to discount any Jewish experience outside the borders of Israel. In the November 1996 issue of the

Atlantic Monthly there is an interview by Katie Bacon with author Geoffrey Wheatcroft discussing the effects of Zionism on world Jewry, specifically comparing Israeli Jews and US Jews?[35]In a discussion of Ben-Gurion’s actions shortly after statehood was achieved and Ben-Gurion’s call to all Jews to come and live in Israel. This act immediately infuriated American Jewish leadership. Incidentally, it would be repeated in very recent times when Netanyahu called for the Jews of Europe to come live in Israel in the aftermath of a series of terrorist attacks. Add to these the alienation of non-Orthodox Jews by the Rabbinate, which, while distinctly separate from Zionists politics, has enjoyed increasing powers under a Likud led revisionist rebirth, a type that flourishes under the Zionist banner, and the push-back against the Diaspora is once more reinforced. On American soil, we have a liberal Jewry where Reform and Conservative streams of Judaism are a wide majority and their memberships are progressively being turned off and away by what is perceived as an aggressive Zionist enterprise.

Conclusion

Clearly, we are approaching a sense where once winners, are uniformly turning out to be losers. In the 21st Century and many years distant from the birth of the Zionist enterprise, the term has largely become a title, a brand, a performative linguistic symbol that currently has no political sway, yet can exert great damage to Jewry on both sides of the Atlantic. The phenomenon of post-Zionism may be regarded as both contradiction and reaction to the excesses imposed by old concepts of Zionism. But the reactionary outcomes, especially when coming from a school of “new historians” is, in the view of Yoav Gelber, simple politicide by a group of frustrated and malcontented academics.[36]As for the question raised by the title of this paper: who wins and who loses, the results are not permanent. But consider the fact that the Palestinian cause has made great political gain by equating Zionism with ignominy; they surely win under that proposition. The fact that the term now divides Jews, especially those on the far left and many portions of the US Diaspora, one would clearly attribute that to a losing proposition. There is no telling how

³³(Kedar 2002, pp. 121-123)

³⁴(Feldman 2000, p. 152)

³⁵(Bacon 1996, November Atlantic Monthly)

³⁶(Gelber 2008, pp. 6-8)

the future will regard the concept, or how it will be positioned in Israel in coming years.

But, rest assured, the term will survive its users.

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