

## Israel and the Making of American Jewish Identities

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In terms that were at once theological, legal, and political, the year 1967 marked a critical turning point in twentieth-century American Jewish history. On the theological front, in March of that year, Rabbi Emil L. Fackenheim formulated what he named “a 614<sup>th</sup> commandment,” a commandment he defined as “the authentic Jew of today is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another, posthumous victory.”<sup>1</sup> This new commandment—which Fackenheim soon modified to carry the additional injunction that Jews are “commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz, lest their memory perish”—was to have tremendous implications in the years and decades to follow.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it would shape and influence (to a degree Fackenheim could not possibly have anticipated) much subsequent post-Holocaust thought.<sup>3</sup> For one thing, and although this had not necessarily been Fackenheim’s initial intention, his call would be interpreted as biological—that is, that there was the specific imperative for post-Holocaust Jews to survive as Jews in numbers, and not merely in ethical or spiritual values.<sup>4</sup>

On the legal front, the U.S. Supreme Court heard the case of a naturalized American Jew who had immigrated to Israel, and then a decade later sought to renew his U.S. passport. When the State Department contended that he had relinquished his American citizenship when he voted

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Fackenheim, “Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future” (1967), reprinted in The Jewish 1960s: An American Sourcebook, ed. Michael E. Staub (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 72.

<sup>2</sup> Also see Fackenheim’s further elaborations of his position on post-Holocaust Jewish identity in Emil L. Fackenheim, “Jewish Faith and the Holocaust: A Fragment,” Commentary 46 (August 1968), 30-36; and Emil L. Fackenheim, God’s Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections (New York: New York University Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see the summary statement that Fackenheim “has captured—perhaps more intensely than any of his contemporaries—the modern Jewish response to the Holocaust.” John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum, eds., Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 290.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the biological imperative for Jews to survive as Jews, see Michael E. Staub, Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), esp. 240-79; and Michael E. Staub, “Smart,” Shofar 24 (Summer 2006), 2-13.

in an Israeli election, the man brought suit. In May of 1967, the Supreme Court narrowly found in his favor, determining that he could maintain dual citizenship. Citizenship was a constitutionally protected right, the Supreme Court ruled, and could not be revoked without consent.<sup>5</sup>

With the Six Day War only weeks away, this ruling proved serendipitous. Indeed, for the first year following the war, there would be a fifty percent increase in the number of American Jews who made aliyah; over the course of the next twenty years, sixty thousand American Jews would make aliyah to Israel. Certainly the Supreme Court ruling was not the only (or even a major) factor in these migrations. As a sociological study from the mid-1970s concluded, if motives for an increase in post-1967 aliyah could “be summed up in one word it would unquestionably be ‘Jewishness.’”<sup>6</sup> (Though, as I will discuss, the very nature of what “Jewishness” in America meant in these post-1967 years would itself undergo significant transformation.)

It was the political turning point of 1967 that proved the most profound. In June, Israel went to war with—and swiftly defeated—several of its Arab neighbors. The initial anxiety and ensuing relief among American Jews could hardly be overstated. As Arthur Hertzberg wrote in the immediate aftermath of the June war, the “reaction of American Jewry to the crisis was far more intense and widespread than anyone could have foreseen. Many Jews would never have believed that grave danger to Israel could dominate their thoughts and emotions to the exclusion of all else.”<sup>7</sup> Lucy Davidowicz summarized American Jewish responses to the war in this way: “Israel’s military victory brought elation and pride, but, even more, release from tension,

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<sup>5</sup> See summaries of *Afroyim v. Rusk* (1967) at <http://www.richw.org/dualcit/cases.html#Afroyim> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afroyim\\_v.\\_Rusk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afroyim_v._Rusk).

<sup>6</sup> Harry Lieb Jubas, “The Adjustment Process of Americans and Canadians in Israel and Their Integration into Israeli Society” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1974), quoted in Chaim I. Waxman, *American Aliya: Portrait of an Innovative Migration Movement* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 101. Also see Calvin Goldscheider, “American Aliya: Sociological and Demographic Perspectives,” in *The Jew in American Society*, ed. Marshall Sklare (New York: Behrman House, 1974), 335-84.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, “Israel and American Jewry,” *Commentary* 44 (August 1967), 69.

gratitude, a sense of deliverance.”<sup>8</sup> And again, more than two decades later, Hertzberg would reiterate the depth of American Jewish reaction to the war: “After the Six Day War in 1967, Jews in America were freer, and more powerful, than Jews had ever been before in the Diaspora.”<sup>9</sup> Certainly, these conclusions reflect a widely, almost universally, held view on the impact of the Six Day War and how it has been interpreted.

Nor has the consensus surrounding 1967 changed much in recent years. In 2006, for instance, a new American Jewish history notes in passing on how the decisive Israeli victory in the June war resulted in the emergence of a major Jewish pride movement. The “Jewish Renewal Movement,” we are told, drew its impetus not least from American Jews who “reaffirmed Jews’ role as an oppressed minority... by rallying in support of an embattled Israel during the 1967 Six Day War.”<sup>10</sup> This remains simply the incontrovertible bedrock wisdom.

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What might the durable consensus conceal? This paper suggests that the year 1967 was a turning point in one further respect. It is an emotionally charged and highly complex issue that has only now begun to come into focus for discussion by scholars of American Jewish history: the conquest by Israel of the Palestinian territories.

In June 1967, the state of Israel came through military victory to administer 42,000 square miles of Palestinian territory. These lands included the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai, and the Golan Heights. In seizing these regions, Israel grew almost overnight to three and a half times its pre-1967 size. In so doing, it also took responsibility for the one and a quarter

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<sup>8</sup> Lucy S. Dawidowicz, “American Public Opinion,” American Jewish Year Book 1968, eds. Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 205. Norman Podhoretz wrote that the emotional American Jewish response to the Six Day War “can, I believe, be understood to have represented the recovery, after a long and uncertain convalescence, of the Jewish remnant from the grievous and nearly fatal psychic and spiritual wounds it suffered at the hands of the Nazis.” Norman Podhoretz, “A Certain Anxiety,” Commentary 52 (August 1971), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, “What Future for American Jews?” New York Review of Books 36 (November 23, 1989), 26. Hertzberg continued: “This outpouring of feeling and commitment appears to contradict all the predictions about the evaporating Jewishness of the American Jews.” Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Eric L. Goldstein, The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 213-14. Also see Hasia Diner, The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 324; and Jonathan Sarna, American Judaism: A History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 307.

million Palestinians whose lands these were.

The Israeli occupation has led to a host of unforeseen side effects. There was a dramatic redistribution of water resources from Palestinians to Israeli settlers. With limited access to water and often prevented from drilling new wells, Palestinians faced the loss of irrigated land, which meant significant losses in their agricultural production. New Israeli settlers had no similar restrictions. The cost of their water was often subsidized by the government. Likewise, there was a redistribution of pasture and grazing areas on the West Bank; in the first twenty years of the occupation, about one-third of all cultivated land on the West Bank would be acquired by Israeli settlers.<sup>11</sup> By the 1980s, then-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon would state confidently that new settlements in the occupied territories constituted “a miracle comparable to the creation of Israel.” With the establishment of the settlements, Sharon added: “We have won the only battle that is important in the Middle East, the battle for land.... And it’s all been legal.”<sup>12</sup> At the same time, what political economist Sara Roy has called “a process of de-development” whereby Israel “has not treated [the occupied territories] as separate colonial areas to exploit in the usual settler fashion (i.e. by creating structures that relate to and generate profit for the home state) but has integrated Palestinian resources and labor into Israel as a mechanism to hasten the full incorporation of the land and other economic resources into the Jewish state” would certainly be well advanced.<sup>13</sup>

In many respects, the occupation of more than a million Palestinians is the skeleton in the closet of post-1967 American Jewish history. Yet if this is so, it has not been a skeleton whose presence was unknown or kept out of sight. It is crucial to register that an awareness that 1967

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<sup>11</sup> David Kahan, Agriculture and Water Resources in the West Bank and Gaza (1967-1987) (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 110-4; and Michael Palumbo, Imperial Israel: The History of the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (London: Bloomsbury, 1990), 186-87. As one American Jewish observer noted soon after Palestinian demonstrations against the Israeli occupation in December 1987 led to the first intifada: “Stifling pressures of life in this cramped environment have been exacerbated by policies that restrict the expansion of Arab urban areas and have placed some 50 percent of land and most water sources under Israeli control, frequently at the disposal of the new Jewish settlers.” Don Peretz, “Intifadeh: The Palestinian Uprising,” Foreign Affairs 66 (Summer 1988), 966.

<sup>12</sup> Ariel Sharon quoted in David Smith, Prisoners of God: The Modern-day Conflict of Arab and Jew (London: Quartet Books, 1987), 71.

<sup>13</sup> Sara Roy, The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1995), 5.

was not simply a moment of deliverance is not something that emerged only in hindsight. Already at the time, there were dissident American Jewish voices, also among Jews with strong historic ties to the state of Israel. The progressive journalist I. F. Stone had written most sympathetically about the founding of Israel in the 1940s. His eyewitness account of the events of 1948, This Is Israel (with photographs by Robert Capa) remains a key text celebrating the Zionist state's first year. During the late summer of 1967, however, Stone published an essay, entitled "Holy War," that opened with this paragraph:

Stripped of propaganda and sentiment, the Palestinian problem is, simply, the struggle of two different people for the same strip of land. For the Jews, the establishment of Israel was a Return, with all the mystical significance the capital R implies. For the Arabs it was another invasion. This has led to three wars between them in twenty years. Each has been a victory for the Jews. With each victory the size of Israel has grown. So has the number of Arab homeless.<sup>14</sup>

The mere articulation of this view at that moment won Stone harsh criticism from a number of prominent American Jewish commentators.<sup>15</sup>

It appears to have been almost standard operating procedure during the earlier decades of the Israeli occupation for American Jews—or, more precisely, American Zionists—to sidestep discussions of the occupation entirely and also even at times to note how any Palestinian claims to the land could not be legitimate because "Palestinians" as a people did not exist. An exemplar of this strategy was Joan Peters' From Time Immemorial, published in 1984, which concluded that Palestine was a land without people until the Jews returned in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to inhabit it.<sup>16</sup> Since the 1980s, this view that Palestine was "a land without people, for

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<sup>14</sup> I. F. Stone, "Holy War" (1967), reprinted in Prophets Outcast: A Century of Dissident Jewish Writing about Zionism and Israel, ed. Adam Shatz (New York: Nation Books, 2004), 190.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Robert Alter, "Israel & the Intellectuals," Commentary 44 (October 1967), 46-52; and Marie Syrkin, Joel Carmichael, and Lionel Abel, "I. F. Stone Reconsiders Israel," Midstream 13 (October 1967), 3-17.

<sup>16</sup> Joan Peters, From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict Over Palestine (New York: Harper Collins, 1984). Although Peters' text is no longer often treated as a work of serious scholarship, it was at the time highly lauded by such luminaries as Nobel Prize winner Saul Bellow, Auschwitz survivor Elie Wiesel (recipient of the Nobel Prize in 1986), and former Supreme Court Justice Arthur J. Goldberg. New Republic editor in chief Martin Peretz asserted that Peters' book, "if read, will change the mind of our generation." Quoted in Anthony

a people without a land” (or subtler variations of it) has maintained an influential presence in American Jewish discussions of the Palestinians.<sup>17</sup>

During the same time, however, prominent Israeli Zionists neither ignored the occupation nor denied the existence of the Palestinian people. “There is not one single place built in this country [Israel] that did not have a former Arab population,” said Moshe Dayan about Israel in response to the Peters thesis.<sup>18</sup> David Ben Gurion (in conversation with Nahum Goldmann already in 1956, but not reported until 1977) discussed the future of Israel in comparable terms. “Why should the Arabs make peace?” Ben Gurion asked, and then proceeded to answer his own question:

If I were an Arab leader I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: we have taken their country. Sure, God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them? Our God is not theirs. We come from Israel, it’s true, but two thousand years ago, and what is that to them? There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They only see one thing: we have come here and stolen their country. Why should they accept that?<sup>19</sup>

Now in 2006, there may be signs of a new openness to explore critically the negative aspects of the conquest by Israel of the Palestinian territories in 1967. Notable has been the receptiveness to the research of American-born Israeli Gershom Gorenberg. Gorenberg persuasively argues that there never existed a coherent or systematic plan among Israel’s leaders to establish “facts on the ground” through the building of settlements in Gaza or on the West Bank. Nor was there any consensus among Israelis concerning the proper fate of the occupied territories. The settlements proceeded as the result of complex interactions among competing and

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Lewis, “There Were No Indians,” New York Times (January 13, 1986), A15. Peters also won a Jewish Welfare Board Book Council annual award for best book (in the Israel category).

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the writing of Alan Dershowitz, who has stated that while “Palestine was certainly not a land empty of all people... absentee landowners owned much of the land that was eventually partitioned into Israel.” Alan Dershowitz, The Case for Israel (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 24-25.

<sup>18</sup> Moshe Dayan quoted in Geoffrey Wheatcroft, The Controversy of Zion, or How Zionism Tried to Resolve the Jewish Question (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1996), 345.

<sup>19</sup> David Ben Gurion quoted in Nahum Goldmann, The Jewish Paradox (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 99.

often unrelated interests across the ideological spectrum. In the end, according to Gorenberg, Israel's settlement strategy was little more than an "accidental empire" which (by 2002) led to more than two hundred thousand Israelis living on Palestinian territories. This did not need to be so; nor, in his view, have the settlements or the occupation been good for the Israelis. To the contrary, Gorenberg writes, this continued colonization of Palestinian land has only "pulled Jews and Arabs back into an older kind of conflict—instead of a battle between states, a struggle between two ethnic groups struggling for control of the same undivided land—the conflict that existed before the partition of Palestine and Israel's establishment."<sup>20</sup> The settlements "have shackled Israel rather than served it," Gorenberg writes, a perspective that seems principally no longer to be interpreted as anti-Israeli but rather a statement of realpolitik.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, it would appear to be true that Israeli Zionists have routinely been more willing since 1967 to listen to perspectives that criticize Israel for its handling of the occupation than American Zionists have been. Yet this is paradoxical because—at the same time—Jewishness in Israel has also been routinely presented as the gold standard against which Jewishness in the Diaspora can (or should) always critically be measured. The American-born Israeli Barry Rubin, for instance, once observed in the mid-1990s that the assimilating Jews in Galut (or in exile from the land of Israel) liked to express their hesitations about visiting Israel for the first time by saying that such a visit might be "too dangerous." But Rubin argued that this was merely a ruse; the refusal to visit Israel was in truth because these Jews did not want to run the risk of having "an encounter with themselves, a potential threat to one's self-image unlike any other destination." No, Rubin asserted, most Galut Jews preferred "to keep [Israel] at a distance, to ward off any implications for one's own life, to protect the compromises worked out in the assimilation process."<sup>22</sup> The American-born Israeli Charles Liebman was equally dismissive.

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<sup>20</sup> Gershom Gorenberg, The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977 (New York: Times Books, 2006), 5. Also see Gorenberg's The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). These discussions of the settlements are certainly timely and relevant due to the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip late last summer, as well as pronouncements from the new Kadima government in Israel that it plans to make unilateral withdrawals of some Israeli settlements in the West Bank at some point in the future.

<sup>21</sup> Gershom Gorenberg, "Israel's Tragedy Foretold," New York Times, March 10, 2006, A21.

<sup>22</sup> Barry Rubin, Assimilation and Its Discontents (New York: Times Books, 1995), 258.

“The American Jew plays out his relations with Israel in his own mind,” Liebman said. “It has very little to do with Israel.”<sup>23</sup> (And is it coincidence that it has often been those who make aliyah from the U.S. who have been toughest on American Jews? Or is it ironic, since these views are so unflattering, that American Jews so often accede to the idea that Israeli Jewish identity is both “real” and “authentic” in ways American Jewishness simply is not and can never be?)

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This raises the interesting case of Hillel Halkin. Halkin was born in New York in 1939. Raised on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, he is the son of Abraham Halkin, who taught Jewish culture at The Jewish Theological Seminary for nearly fifty years before his retirement in 1977. Hillel made his first visit to Israel in the summer of 1957 where, among other activities, he spent a week on a kibbutz picking apples. In 1970, and partially in response to events surrounding the Six Day War, he and his wife made aliyah. Since the early seventies they have lived in Zichron Yaakov, a town about thirty-five miles south from Haifa. In 1977, Halkin published his first book, Letters to an American Jewish Friend: A Zionist Polemic, which won a National Jewish Book Award.<sup>24</sup>

As its title suggests, Letters is structured rather idiosyncratically as an epistolary narrative. Without introduction or explanatory note of any sort, the book appears simply to reproduce six long letters from Halkin (and addressed to the anonymous “A \_\_\_”) written during a period of nearly six months. The first letter dates from “October 20, 1975,” while the final letter is from “April 12, 1976.” Strikingly, given the polemical nature of the book, Halkin makes only very little mention of contemporary political events in his letters. A relatively rare exception to this rule appears in the opening page of the second letter (dated “November 23, 1975”), where

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Liebman quoted in J. J. Goldberg, “Separated by a Common Cause,” Jerusalem Report (February 27, 1992), 18.

<sup>24</sup> Among the several glowing reviews Halkin received, see especially Robert Alter, “New York and/or Jerusalem,” Commentary 64 (August 1977), 50-56; and Ruth Wisse, “Review: Letters to an American Jewish Friend,” Moment 2 (September 1977), 46-48. In light of my reading of Halkin as a post-1967 text, it is noteworthy that Alter sees Halkin’s book as “clearly a product of this whole post-1973 climate of malaise” (50). For a more critical review, see Bernard Avishai, “You Can’t Go Home Again,” New York Review of Books 24 (November 10, 1977), 24-27.

Halkin bitterly responds to the United Nations' vote to endorse (on November 10) a resolution that labeled Zionism a form of racism. Without mentioning that November 10 is also an anniversary of Kristallnacht (which ran from November 8 to 10, 1938), Halkin indicates that this dark history was much on his mind:

To tell the truth, no stone cast from the tallest of glass houses, especially at the Jews, can surprise me any more. And yet the pure indecency of it—thirty years after the Holocaust—the shameless sons-of-bitches! It's the world's good fortune at such times that there is no justice in it, for if there were, who knows what might happen?<sup>25</sup>

For the most part, however, Halkin's letters are not directed outward at a hostile (gentile) world seen as largely aligned against the Jewish people. Rather, Halkin's words are focused most sharply inward: at the schisms and the misunderstandings between Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jews. Halkin's polemical intents are plainly and simply restated: first, Jewish communal life in the Diaspora is in the process of collapse and is doomed soon to vanish; second, whatever hopes there are for the future of world Jewishness resides strictly within the state of Israel; and so finally "it is natural for a Jew who is committed to his Jewishness to desire to live only in Israel" (24). There is no other plausible or reasonable option available to "a committed Jew."

To make his arguments, Halkin resorts to a battery of persuasive strategies. He elaborately cites the most dire statistics and facts to underscore the declining numbers of "committed Jews" in the Diaspora. (For instance, Halkin chooses to sift away those Jews who are just Jews from those whom he labels "the real Jewish population of the United States," and this number of "real" Jews, Halkin asserts, would certainly not exceed three million by the year 2000.)<sup>26</sup> He rejects the view that Jewishness can or should represent the ideals of "universal social justice" to the world. To the contrary, Halkin asserts,

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<sup>25</sup> Hillel Halkin, Letters to an American Jewish Friend: A Zionist's Polemic (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), 29. Further references to this text will be included parenthetically in the body of this paper.

<sup>26</sup> Halkin, 58-60. Although the Jewish population of the United States by 2000 would actually be six million, Halkin might certainly claim in retrospect that his three million figure for "the real Jewish population of America" was not actually far off the mark.

Nothing in fact could be further from the traditional Jewish mentality, which has always looked upon the gentile world as an arena of blindly chaotic and idolatrous forces that God alone can chasten or suborn to His purposes as He wills. For a Jew to intervene in such a world is worse than folly; one might as well seek to pacify earthquakes and floods. In such a view—and it is, I repeat, as far as one can generalize about such things, the Jewish view—social justice in the world is anything but the proper worry of a Jew (88).

And Halkin also manages to link this false notion of social justice-oriented Jewishness to the occupied territories, sarcastically noting that “while eighteen-year-olds here are defending their country’s threatened borders in Sinai or on the Golan, their Diaspora comrades can be picketing for Mexican farm workers or writing term papers on varieties of ethical theory. Truly a conventional division of labor!” (84)

Halkin does not evade the topic of the occupation. To the contrary, his third letter (dated December 20) directly addresses reported IDF bombings of Palestinian refugee camps, although Halkin resists the perspective that these actions ought to be condemned as somehow “un-Jewish” because “it is senseless to assert that we Jews are the sponsors of ethics in the world or have any special ethical role to play in it” (97). Regarding the Palestinians, Halkin writes:

We have dispossessed them; we have driven them, in some cases deliberately, from their land; we have turned those who remained among us into second-class citizens in our state; and since 1967 we have ruled by military fiat, and not always gently, over a million more of them who are not our citizens at all. It has not been a pretty history.... By the same token, there is nothing intrinsically pretty about a state either (99-100).

For Halkin, the crisis over the occupation is also finally about the failure of Diaspora Jewry to accept its own responsibilities for the future of world Jewishness. Indeed, and despite a willingness to concede that the IDF probably does commit atrocities against Palestinians, Halkin’s key point is that “we in Israel cannot compete with you [the Jew in the Diaspora], if only because we are too busy tending the family store to sit all day long with our thinking caps on” (100-1). The situation of the Palestinians is to be lamented, Halkin suggests, but certainly not

by Jews in the Diaspora whose hands remain so easily clean.<sup>27</sup>

In his final letter, written almost exactly thirty years ago, in April 1976, Halkin returns to the topic of the “million or more Arabs under occupation” by Israel since 1967 and he acknowledges his own “profoundly ambivalent” feelings about these developments (211-2). In addition, Halkin meditates on what he is willing to accept as the “historically inevitable” formation of a Palestinian state “in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” a state that would likely “exist on two or three noncontiguous patches of territory,” have “one of the highest population densities and birthrates of any country in the world and practically no natural resources to support them with,” and would “possess no surplus arable land and few prospects for industrialization” (212-3). He is not hopeful that the establishment of this Palestinian state would result in peace, nor does he accept that Israel’s return to the pre-1967 borders would facilitate a permanent peace, either. What Halkin identifies is a tragedy, but not one that could easily have been prevented.

Has not modern Zionist settlement in Palestine done all it could from the beginning, if only for the sake of its own morale and conscience, to turn a blind eye to the truly tragic nature of a conflict in which an ancient and hounded people was able with the last of its strength, like a shipwrecked sailor casting himself on shore, to regain its lost homeland, yet only by displacing another innocent people whose land it was too? (217)

Ever the contrarian, Halkin harbors no illusions about the present or the future and he makes no

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<sup>27</sup> These historic tensions between Diaspora Jews and Israeli Jews flared up again recently at the American Jewish Committee’s centennial symposium in Washington D.C. On May 1, 2006, during a session entitled “The Future of the Past: What Will Become of the Jewish People?”, renowned Israeli novelist A.B. Yehoshua voiced open hostility to Jewish life in the United States. “For me there is no alternative [to my identity as an Israeli],” Yehoshua said. He added: “I cannot keep my identity outside Israel. Israel is my skin, not my jacket. You [in the Diaspora] are changing jackets ... you are changing countries like changing jackets.” Quoted in Shmuel Rosner, “A.B. Yehoshua Shocks, Puts Israel above His Jewishness,” Haaretz (May 5, 2006). Also see A.B. Yehoshua, “People Without a Land,” Haaretz (May 12, 2006). Later, Yehoshua expressed surprise at the controversy his comments caused: “I think this is common sense. If they were goyim they would understand it right away.” Quoted in Nathan Guttman, “A.B. Yehoshua Sparks Uproar in U.S.,” Jerusalem Post (May 4, 2006). In fact, Yehoshua has long criticized Jewish life in the Diaspora, labeling it “a disease,” “immoral,” and a “neurotic solution.” A.B. Yehoshua quoted in Jonathan Shainin, “Scenes from a Marriage,” The Nation (July 5, 2004), 52. Coincidentally or not, Yehoshua and Hillel Halkin are good friends; Halkin has also translated Yehoshua’s novels into English.

apologies for the past.<sup>28</sup> What has occurred between Israelis and Palestinians is anguishing and terrible, but it is as well unavoidable, possibly existential, and even a consequence of nature.

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In the early 1990s, Israeli historians Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal wrote: “Zionists have been absorbed in a nationalist project rendering the Palestinians almost incidental. In the process, they have failed to grasp the extent to which their own society has been shaped by its ongoing encounter with the Palestinians.”<sup>29</sup> What remains remarkable, though, is not how Israelis may have become more willing to acknowledge the Palestinians and the legitimacy of their grievances, but rather the degree to which American Jews have not done the same.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps it is now at last possible to offer a fuller and more variegated accounting of Israel’s impact on the making of American Jewish identities since the Six Day War, and thus also to attend to the often contradictory emotions—triumphant and defiant, proud and pained—arising from the aftermath of war. We have too long accepted without serious reflection terms set by a generation of Jewish intellectuals whose own investments were to repeat and maintain a narrative which had victory in war leading to a renewed ethnic pride. For the war was not solely a moment of “deliverance,” as Davidowicz would have it, nor did the war simply allow American Jews to feel “freer, and more powerful,” as Hertzberg would like us to believe. I would suggest that while the standard narrative is certainly uplifting, it is also historically selective and incomplete. For the consequences of the 1967 war were also to “shackle Israel” to

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<sup>28</sup> In this regard, see Halkin’s observation about the security barrier currently being built in Israel. “Construction of the barrier has been painfully slow,” Halkin writes, “in large measure because, despite official denials, it is intended to serve as the border to which a unilateral withdrawal will take place and thus to make Israel’s permanent frontier.” Hillel Halkin, “What Israel Did (and Did Not) Vote For,” Commentary 121 (May 2006), 44.

<sup>29</sup> Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, eds., Palestinians: The Making of a People (New York: The Free Press, 1993), xviii. Kimmerling is a noted revisionist (and post-Zionist) Israeli historian. Yet also see Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s recent comments in the New York Times: “The challenge of the Palestinians raises fundamental issues of identity for the state of Israel.” As the Times reporters continued: “He [Olmert] compared the issue, and implicitly the occupation, to a suppurating wound. ‘When you have an open wound, and you’re bleeding in your belly, even when this doesn’t jeopardize your life, it occupies all of your attention most of the time and it deprives you of the joy of life.’” Steven Erlanger and Greg Myre, “Israel Will Buy Supplies for Gaza Hospitals, Premier Says,” New York Times (May 19, 2006), A12.

<sup>30</sup> A striking instance was a presentation by Prof. Ruth Wisse of Harvard University in the fall of 2005. Ruth Wisse, “Did the Diaspora Save or Doom the Jews?” (talk at Princeton University, November 16, 2005).

territories it has since occupied, as well as to the Palestinians whose lives it has since controlled.<sup>31</sup> Regrettably, and far from incidentally, since 1967 American Jews have also been shackled to these occupied lands and to its people—although we have been rather less inclined to explore this, or to devote adequately sensitive and subtle attention to the question of how our own identities as American Jews have been shaped (indeed at times profoundly so) by this open secret.<sup>32</sup>

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A concluding footnote: On the last page of his final letter in Letters to an American Jewish Friend, Halkin informs his interlocutor that he will inevitably make aliyah; it will only be a matter of time. “You will come,” he writes. “I am sure of it” (246). But in this—if only this—Halkin proved mistaken. Halkin’s American Jewish friend, whom he had met at a class on Hebrew literature sponsored by the New York Havurah in 1969, was Alan Mintz.<sup>33</sup> And Mintz never did move to Israel. Rather Mintz stayed in the U.S. to pursue a distinguished academic career. Since 2001, Mintz teaches Hebrew literature at The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. As chance would have it, this is almost precisely the position held for so long by Abraham Halkin, Hillel’s father.

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<sup>31</sup> Israeli novelist David Grossman recently made this observation: “You still remember, dimly, distantly... that you aren't living the life you would have liked to live.... You still remember it, but there are many moments when, out of despair and fear, you start to believe that this madness is the real life.... In this situation, so many Israelis and Palestinians persuade themselves that the people standing before them are evil by nature and evil in essence.... We are so mired in the distortion that we almost do not really register the actual price we are paying for living through four generations now, in a life parallel to the life we could have lived, the life we deserve.” Quoted in Amy Wilentz, “Letter from Jerusalem,” The Nation (April 18, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> This is a research agenda that still lies ahead of us, and is a matter about which we need more extensive dialogue. For an early attempt to pursue these questions, especially as they relate to contemporary concerns, see Michael E. Staub, “American Jews and the Middle East Crisis,” 350 Years of American Jewry, eds. Christian Wiese and Cornelia Wilhelm (New York: Berghahn Books, forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup> Alan Mintz confirmed this information in an e-mail dated May 9, 2006.