

BUTLER TROUBLE: ZIONISM, EXCOMMUNICATION, AND THE RECEPTION OF JUDITH BUTLER'S WORK ON ISRAEL/PALESTINE

SHAUL MAGID INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Who is an Anti-Semite? Someone who hates Jews *too* much.

—Jewish-Hungarian proverb

But Zionism was a calculated risk in that it brought about the destruction of the reality of exile. The foes of Zionism certainly saw the risk more clearly than the Zionists.

—Gershom Scholem, interview with Muki Tsur

Everybody is somebody's Jew. And today the Palestinians are the Jews of the Israelis.

—Primo Levi, *Il Manifesto*

The debate surrounding Judith Butler's work on Israel and Zionism has arguably reached a new level of vitriol from various camps in the American Jewish establishment. Critics of her 2012 book *Parting Ways* have taken off the gloves in terms of their willingness to demonize, vilify, and excoriate Butler and her work.¹ Many who never read her work but simply view her as a turncoat because of her support of BDS (Boycott Divestment Sanctions) are even less subtle in their remarks. Those who review her work favorably offer more sober assessments and criticisms of the ways in which she is serving as the intellectual and philosophical foundation of the contemporary anti-Zionist left, both Jewish and non-Jewish. What follows is neither a critique nor a celebration of her work on Israel and Zionism but a contextualization and analysis with specific attention to the ways her detractors have conflated a critique of Zionism with anti-Semitism, making themselves the victims, when in fact, their response which I liken to a new form of excommunication only exhibits the extent to which they are the one who hold the power.

For the sake of full disclosure, I did review *Parting Ways* when it first appeared, and my review was generally positive.² I think her work engages a very complex issue through careful argumentation and analysis. One needn't agree with her premises of diaspora as the "core value" of Jewishness or her reading of all the figures in *Parting Ways*, complex figures in their own right, to appreciate her attempt at deeply thinking through what it would mean to conceptualize a non- or even anti-Zionist diaspora Jewishness in the twenty first century. Nor must one agree with her view of the Israeli nation-state or her support of BDS in order to appreciate the book as a serious meditation on contemporary diasporic Jewishness worthy of close scrutiny. What follows is an attempt to examine the ways in which Butler and her work have exposed a raw nerve in the American Jewish psyche when it comes to Zionism and what that may mean as we move

deeper into the twenty-first century. I begin by contextualizing Butler and her reception in the long history of Zionism in America, turn to her basic argument as I understand it, and then explore why it has aroused such negative attention among Jews in the pews as well as many Jewish academicians, many of whom hold liberal Zionist views. I use the example of her ill-fated invitation to speak on Franz Kafka at the Jewish Museum in Manhattan in February 2014 that she eventually cancelled due to strong opposition from the Jewish establishment as an illustration that Jewish opposition has moved from censorship to a kind of excommunication of Butler, not only as a scholar who holds contested views on Zionism, but as a Jew. I conclude by asking why this so and what might it mean for American Judaism and the American Jewish community.

1. CONTEXTUALIZING AMERICAN JEWS AND ISRAEL

The history of Zionism in America is a far more complicated story than many of today's American Jewish Zionists think.³ In the early years, from the 1880s through the 1930s, much of American Jewry was openly and sometimes passionately anti-Zionist. Figures such as Kaufmann Kohler, rector of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and the American Council for Judaism were particularly vocal in their anti-Zionist sentiments.⁴ Advocates for Zionism such as rabbis Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen Wise were in the minority. Much of prewar anti-Zionism focused on the question of dual-allegiance and the extent to which the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth/state in Palestine would threaten the program of Jewish assimilation in America. Issues such as the rights of the indigenous population, known in Israeli Zionist circles as "the Arab Question," did not attract much attention in America. Nor were American Jews overly concerned with the vehement debates in Europe regarding differing notions of sovereignty that we find in Simon Dubnow's diaspora nationalism or Leo Pinsker's *Auto-Emancipation*.⁵ American Jews did not seem bothered by the ethics of Zionism either; they cared about the impact Zionism would have on their program of Americanization. Zionism for American Jews was, and arguably remains, largely a project about American Jewish identity.

The shift from the anti-Zionism of the Reform Pittsburgh Platform in 1885 to a more tempered tolerance of Zionism in the Columbus Platform of 1937 reflected a sea change among many American Jews in regards to Zionism.⁶ The rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, and also in America in the 1930s, and the impending war, weakened the case for anti-Zionism. The Holocaust and subsequent establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 further marginalized the anti-Zionist camp. Even after the war, however, figures such as Louis Finkelstein, chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary and committed internationalist, remained somewhat ambivalent about Zionism through much of the 1960s.⁷ In short, by the early 1960s Zionism was dominant but it was not yet dogma.

It wasn't until 1967, with the Six-Day War and its triumphant aftermath, that Zionism became the default position of much of American Jewry and arguably became an American Jewish dogma, making non- or anti-Zionism an unspoken heresy.⁸ Even though the category of heresy requires a hegemonic Jewish authority that does not exist in America, thus making accusations of heresy legally unenforceable, I think it is an apt term to describe the parameters of Jewish public discourse.⁹ Norman Podhoretz's proclamation in *Commentary Magazine* in the early 1970s, "We are all Zionists now!" rang true across much of the American Jewish landscape. Much of this had to do with the fear of another "Holocaust" surrounding the Six-Day War in 1967 that resulted in an Israeli triumph beyond expectations. A combination of pride in Israel and the confirmation that Israel was necessary for the survival of the Jews largely erased remaining ambivalence about Zionism for most Jews in America. I suggest that the "we" in Podhoretz's comment was not only descriptive but declarative as well. To be part of the "we" (to be an American Jew in good standing, to be an American Jew at all!) now required Zionism. In some sense the Zionist idea of "negation of the Diaspora" (*shlilat ha-golah*) had transmorphed into an American Jewish "negation of non-Zionism." To be a "good" Jew (Podhoretz's "we") is to be a Zionist. The histories of non- or anti-Zionism were at best viewed as a product of Jewish naiveté; mostly they were erased from American Jewish memory altogether.¹⁰

The univocality of Zionist triumphalism did not last very long. As the reality of Israel's occupation set in, small leftist groups such as the Boston-based Breira group began to raise their voices against the injustices of the occupation. Whether the members of Breira considered themselves Zionists or not I do not know. But their open criticism of Israel as an occupying power, something that today is part of the center-left J-Street movement, was at that time anathema for the post-1967 Zionist-only American Jewish establishment. Brieriah suffered a vehement and fatal backlash by the Jewish establishment and quickly disappeared. Interesting, and somewhat ironically, Israeli protests against the occupation at about the same time, which resulted in the eventual formation of Peace Now (*Shalom Akhshav*) and the Israeli "peace camp," were more tolerated in Israel.

If we move to the present, the situation has surely intensified yet the trajectory remains largely the same. The American Jewish establishment remains staunchly Zionist, now fueled by AIPAC, the ZOA, the AJC and other like-minded organizations. Even organizations on the left (or center-left) such as J-Street or Tikun pledge their allegiance to Zionism, even as both are critical of Israeli policies regarding the occupation and human rights. Peter Beinart, whose controversial book *The Crisis of Zionism* (2012) even calls for a "Zionist boycott" of products manufactured in West Bank settlements, identifies as a proud Zionist.¹¹ In short, non- or anti-Zionism is no longer tolerated in American Jewry. This can be illustrated in the recent debate regarding the National Hillel Guidelines on Israel and the emergence of the "Open Hillel" movement that

rejects the guidelines that mandate only Zionist speakers (and Zionists according to a specific definition) can be sponsored by Hillel. The “Open Hillel” movement which resists these guidelines may expose a crack in the American Zionist façade but the reaction against it only illustrates the strength of Zionism’s dominance and the almost dogmatic status of its position.¹²

One final contextual observation before I turn to Judith Butler and the controversy that surrounds her. While the Zionist trajectory may appear to follow a path forged by the ostensible Zionist turn of Reform Judaism in the 1930s coupled with high profile American Jewish Zionists at that time such as Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis and Harvard professor Horace Kallen and the immigration of Eastern European Zionists in the latter years of the great immigration (1880-1920), there are significant changes. Most prominent among them is that many American Jews who identify as “Zionist” today actually know little about Zionism. That is, they know little about the complex, self-critical, and often messy history of Zionism, an ideology that has been at war with itself for most of its history. Their “Zionism” is arguably “pro-Israelism,” the advocacy of a nation-state and its polices against its critics. Such ostensible “Zionism” is political in a pedestrian way; it is a largely a position of talking points, what Israelis call “*hasbara*” (which can mean either “explanation” or “propaganda” depending on your perspective).¹³ In addition, and this is crucial, the category of anti-Semitism has increasingly entered into the pro-Israel lexicon in response to its critics, Jew and non-Jew alike. Anti-Zionism is often deemed anti-Semitism “in effect if not in intent” (to paraphrase Harvard president Lawrence Summers’s remarks that will be discussed below), thus collapsing “Judaism” and “Zionism” as if contesting the latter is a rejection of the former.¹⁴ This reflexive fusion or equation of Judaism and Zionism underlies the central part of my argument below and perhaps the central impetus of Butler’s work on Israel/Palestine. If indeed there is an identification of these two categories, consciously or not, terms like heresy, and even excommunication, are relevant in describing the reaction to Judith Butler.¹⁵ The intolerance of anti-Semitism as part of any Jewish conversation is justified. However when anti-Semitism is reflexively linked to anti-Zionism (or a deep and systemic criticism of Israel) this excludes anti-Zionism (or even non-Zionism) from the Jewish conversation as well. Anti-Semitism thus serves as the quintessential claim of victimhood (or powerlessness) and simultaneously as a tool of power.

2. JUDITH BUTLER’S “DIASPORIC” JEWISHNESS CONTRA ZIONISM

In the past decade, the American Jewish community has become more divided about Israel than before. The establishment of J-Street, whose platform represents the center-left, as a competing Washington lobby to the center-right AIPAC, is one illustration of how the univocality of Americans Jews on Israel

has eroded. The shift of the BDS (Boycott Divestment Sanctions) movement from an extreme voice to one that is now on the radar screen in pro-Israel circles exhibits the extent to which anti-Zionism, at least among some American leftists, remains a part of the discourse, and thus resistance against it has intensified. More relevant to our concerns, Jewish groups and individuals have come out in favor of BDS (or, alternatively, a form of “Zionist BDS” whereby the boycott only extends to Jewish settlements in the occupied territories), which is viewed by many in the pro-Israel camp as an Anti-Semitic movement.¹⁶ At the center of this storm stands Judith Butler, professor of rhetoric and comparative literature at UC/Berkeley and Wun Tsun Tam Mellon Visiting Professor of the Humanities at Columbia University. Butler made her mark with her groundbreaking work on gender studies beginning with *Gender Trouble* followed by *Bodies that Matter*.¹⁷ Her theory of the performativity of gender revolutionized the field such that anyone working on gender today cannot avoid engaging Butler’s work. Since the early 2000s, continuing her work on gender and comparative literature, Butler has turned her attention to ethics more generally, and Zionism in particular. Her 2004 book *Precarious Life* and her essay that same year, “Jews and the Bi-Nationalism Vision” begins a process that culminates (to this point) with her book *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* in 2012. In it, Butler has made a case for an anti-Zionist, Diasporist position in the twenty-first century.¹⁸ My goal in this essay is not to weigh in on the details of Butler’s argument, one that takes the reader through careful readings of figures such as Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Emanuel Levinas, and Primo Levi among others. Much has been written on this already. I am more interested in the reception, or better, rejection, of Butler, and less about her work per se, since many of her critics in the American Jewish community haven’t read much of her work but render their judgment because of her support of BDS or a few interviews and lectures that appear on YouTube. Before getting there, however, it is necessary to offer a schematic assessment of her position.

In some way, Butler’s turn to the subject of Israel and Zionism does not begin in her 2004 essay on bi-nationalism but in her preface to the 1999 edition of her celebrated *Gender Trouble*. Reflecting on her book, then almost a decade old, she writes, “It was not only from the academy, but from convergent social movements of which I have been a part, and within the context of a lesbian and gay community on the east coast of the United State in which I lived for fourteen years before the writing of this book. . . . At the same time that I was ensconced in the academy, I was also living a life outside those walls, and though *Gender Trouble* is an academic book, it began, for me, with a crossing-over, sitting on Rehoboth Beach, wondering whether I could link the different sides of my life.”¹⁹ While the “outside” for her here is explicitly the gay and lesbian world she inhabited, it was also, perhaps, rethinking her identity as a Jew, something that did not overtly inform her work on gender but remained a part of her life nonetheless.²⁰ If I am correct in this assessment there appears to be a fairly

seamless move from these words in 1999 to the Introduction to *Parting Ways* in 2012 which, while framing her argument, is also about Butler reclaiming her Jewishness as distinct from Zionism. In this sense, *Parting Ways* continues where her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* left off; the continued attempt of a highly accomplished academic to incorporate “the different sides of [her] life.” In her Introduction to *Parting Ways*, Butler makes a case for Jewishness outside Judaism (a locution she borrows from Hannah Arendt). In this sense she follows Arendt’s claim that secularity and Jewishness are not incompatible but rather the secular can be a particular refraction of Jewishness as well. Echoing Arendt, Butler writes, “Not all forms of secular Jewishness are assimilationist.”²¹ Arendt’s critique of the parvenu and her positive appraisal of the pariah frames her notion of an anti-assimilationist secular Jewishness.²² The notion of Jewishness outside Judaism, so to speak, is not specific to Arendt or Butler but is the subject of Isaac Deutscher’s *The Non-Jewish Jew*. Deutscher presents the category of the Jewish heretic as a particular refraction of Jewishness especially, but not exclusively, in the modern world.²³

Like Arendt, the question of the secular and politics stand at the very center of Butler’s reformulation of Jewishness. “But what does secular mean within the context of a Jewish state? We could argue that ‘Jewish’ does not mean adhering to religious Judaism; for this reason Hannah Arendt wrote purposively about ‘Jewishness’ as a cultural, historical, and political category that characterized the historical situation of populations who may or may not engage in religious practices or explicitly identify with Judaism” (*PW*, 14). This, of course, is not new but has a long history in Jewish secularism as recently articulated by David Biale in his *Not in Heaven*.²⁴ But Butler (and perhaps Arendt) means it in a very particular, political, way. What would, or could, secular “Jewishness” mean outside the orbit of Zionism? Arendt is quite critical of what she calls “the exception Jews,” Jews for whom Jewishness means nothing except empty ethnicity yet hold on to certain concepts of Judaism (i.e., chosen-ness) that are meaningless. Discussing Benjamin Disraeli, she writes, “Judaism, and belonging to the Jewish people degenerated into a simple fact of birth only among assimilated Jewry. . . . Secularization and the assimilation of Jewish intelligentsia had changes self-consciousness and self-interpretation in such a way that nothing was left of the old memories and hopes but awareness of belonging to a chosen people . . . Disraeli . . . was the only one who produced a full-blown race doctrine out of this simple empty concept of a historical mission.”²⁵ It may be the case that today Zionism is the stand-in for religion for many assimilated American Jews and Zionism may perpetuate a kind of empty exceptionalism that functions similar to the way chosenness functioned for Disraeli, at least on Arendt’s reading of him. What happens then, if Zionism is rejected? Is this then a repudiation of all aspects of Jewishness? This question is crucial for Butler because the fusion or equation of Judaism with Zionism that she asserts plagues the contemporary Jewish world disables any debate as to the merits, deficiencies, or abuses

of Zionism. Therefore, the very question of Zionism as a viable alternative to Jewishness in today's world cannot even be discussed. Accusations such as those made by Cary Nelson in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* that Butler advocates a naive universalism simply misunderstands her work, in my view. She is no universalist in any naive way. In fact, the very notion of cohabitation, an idea she borrows from Arendt and uses for her own purposes, already speaks to the question of difference and thus distances her from the cosmopolitan universalism of the Enlightenment. Put otherwise, her universalism, like Arendt's, is an expression of her Jewishness, not a rejection of it.²⁶ She is not advocating a contemporary parvenu but rather a new kind of pariah, a non or even anti-Zionist pariah. Here, on the particular/universal question, Butler, close but not identical to Arendt, is not very far from Emmanuel Levinas, a thinker she deeply admires even as she treats critically. The particular without the universal, she would say, and Levinas would agree, is no Jewish particularity at all. For Butler, Zionism has abandoned its universal mandate in its actions against those "others" in its sphere. Therefore, it does not embody what is for her a core value of "Jewishness," the ethical cohabitation with the other (*PW*, 176). On this point, Levinas would likely disagree.²⁷

Butler begins with an assertion that there is an ethical "Jewish" obligation to contest "state violence." "By claiming there is a significant Jewish tradition affirming modes of justice and equality that would, of necessity, lead to a criticism of the Israeli state, I establish a Jewish perspective that is non-Zionists, even anti-Zionist, at the risk of making the resistance to Zionism into a 'Jewish' value and so asserting, indirectly, the exceptional ethical resources of Jewishness" (*PW*, 2). Butler's argument rests on uncoupling various categories that she claims have become fused and prevent the expression of what she considers a core Jewish value of alterity and justice. First is uncoupling Jewishness from Judaism. Second, uncoupling Judaism from Zionism. She argues that these linkages create an ironclad defense against criticism of Israel, not criticism of this or that policy but criticism of the very fundamentals of Zionism writ large. "If Zionism continues to control the meaning of Jewishness, then there can be no critique of Israel and no acknowledgment of those of Jewish descent or formation who call into question the right of the State of Israel to speak for Jewish values or, indeed, the Jewish people" (*PW*, 3). And if Zionism is fused with Judaism, any critique of Zionism moves toward the borders of anti-Semitism. On this reading, the reflexive linkage of Judaism and Jewishness and Judaism and Zionism suffocates her definition of Jewishness such that it makes it, and her, outside the Jewish camp. In Joseph Mossad's language, by rejecting the space/time continuum that is the Jewish nation-state she is excluded from the people it represents (the Jewish people). Her claim, then, that the Jewish nation-state does *not* represent the Jewish people cannot be part of the conversation.²⁸

This very linkage, however, is paradoxical. As Gil Anidjar notes, the two terms, Judaism and Zionism, exhibit a "perplexing duality, a contradictory

affirmation and negation.” On the one hand Zionism can be viewed as the logical conclusion and summation of Judaism. This is how it was seen by some early Zionists. However, Anidjar continues, “It is also the end of Judaism, bringing about the new Jew, or what Benjamin Beit-Hallami has more pointedly called ‘the anti-Jew,’ who is both more and less Jewish than the Jew.”²⁹ So the identity of Zionism with Judaism only inhabits one half of the equation, the other half of which severs Zionism from Judaism altogether. Butler thinks from the latter half of the equation and then tries to fill the space left between Zionism and Judaism with a diasporic form of Jewishness. There is also a coercive and corrosive dimension to this equation from the perspective of Diaspora Judaism because the equation is not one of equality but hierarchy. This is embedded in Zionism’s “negation of the Diaspora” ideology and captured nicely by Amos Oz when he began an address to American Jews, “We [Israelis] are on the stage, you are the audience.” And, I would add, “If you don’t like the show, you are not even in the room.” Joseph Massad presents it similarly. “The conflation/collapse of the Jewish people into the Jewish State is by Zionist design an attempt to render the Jewish people nonexistent except in the confines of a Zionist time/space called The Jewish State.”³⁰ Anidjar takes this in a slightly different direction when he writes, “The claim that Zionists represent all Jews—that all Jews are or should be Zionists that they should morph into Zionists—when articulated in a discourse of opposition and resistance to Zionism, is now said to be no more than covert anti-Semitism.”³¹ There is something sociologically curious about the way and extent to which American Zionism, and today much of American Judaism, submits to that inferior status while thriving in a robust Diaspora with cultural and religious opportunities it rarely has had in its history.

Butler claims the notion of alterity, or the “diasporic,” is endemic to Judaism. “Rather, I am trying to understand how the exilic—or more empathically *the diasporic*—is built into the idea of the Jewish (not analytically, but historically, that is, over time); in this sense, to ‘be’ a Jew is to be departing from oneself, cast out onto the world of the non-Jew, bound to make one’s way ethically and politically precisely there within as world of irreversible heterogeneity. . . . I hope to show why bringing the idea of diaspora back to Palestine—which means, seeing the multiple ways it already functions there—might be useful for finding a way to think about cohabitation, binationalism, and a critique of state violence” (*PW*, 15).³² There is much one can say about this passage. First, historically Butler may indeed be correct, that is, Judaism as we know it today is a diasporic creation. While the return to the land and the culmination of exile is embedded in the hopes and aspirations of this diasporic religion, or religion of the diaspora, the religion as practiced by Jews throughout its history, at least from 70 C.E. onward, is diasporic.³³ Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin take this even further than Butler: “The Rabbis produced their cultural formation within conditions of Diaspora, and we would argue that their particular discourse of ethnocentricity is ethically appropriate only when the cultural identity is an

embattled one (or, at any rate, nonhegemonic) minority.”³⁴ It is arguably the case that the diasporic nature and program of Rabbinic Judaism produced what could be called a religion of semi-enclosure, an ethnocentricity that did not produce subjugation of the outsider (although it may have produced subjugation of the excluded insider, i.e., women). Much of traditional *halakha* was intended to create barriers limiting Jewish/non-Jewish interaction thereby assuring Jewish, religious, spiritual, and physical survival. Various forms of modern Judaism, especially after the emancipation and then in pluralistic America, reinterpreted *halakha* to open Jews and Judaism to their surrounding cultures as a way of integrating into general society. Butler tasks the diasporic nature of Jewish living in another direction.

For Butler the operative category on which she bases her “Jewishness” (not necessarily Judaism) is about cohabitation, living with the other, the recognition of alterity, politically and ethically. In her view of Jewishness, Diaspora is not a way station, a temporary state, but the very core of what it means to live as a Jew. Does this have precedent? That depends. In one sense, similar themes appear in Hermann Cohen’s theory of Jewishness and Germanness as well as other more assimilationist theories that appear in Jewish modernity.³⁵ But Butler goes further for both historical and existential reasons. Her historical station is significant in terms of the next step she takes. As opposed to earlier diasporic thinkers, Butler is not simply advocating or romanticizing Jewish life in the Diaspora, a Diaspora without a State of Israel. Butler thinks in a Diaspora *with* a State of Israel, yet a state she believes does not reflect the core values of her Jewishness, values that were born and matured *in* the Diaspora. Thus she advocates importing that “diasporic” ethic into Israel/Palestine. One does not have to agree with her assessment to allow it to be part of the contemporary Jewish conversation—that is, unless her views have already been excluded by definition due to the equation of Judaism with Zionism.

Her views emerge at a tumultuous time in American Jewry on the question of Israel; the univocality of American Jewish Zionism (“We are all Zionists now”) is under siege by a growing number of Jews and non-Jews who have come to believe that the present state of occupation is not circumstantial but a systemic product of Zionism more generally. That is, the question is not simply about 1967 but about 1948, not the fact of Israel’s existence but, as Arendt argues against Ben-Gurion, the choices made as to what kind of nation-state Israel would be.³⁶ BDS is one form of that protest that seeks to punish the state for its injustices. “Open Hillel” may be another that seeks to open dialogue about Israel among Jewish college students. For Butler “Jewishness” includes a mandate, even obligation, to protest against state violence and the overt domination of one ethnic group (Jews) over another (Palestinians).³⁷ In short, she wants to “diasporize” Israel. Does this mean she wants to dismantle the state of Israel? That all depends. She does advocate a binational state, but she certainly is not the first one to do that; bi-nationalism was invented by early twentieth-century

Zionists.³⁸ She surely does not advocate Israel as a “Jewish” state but a state of all its citizens, but this too is far from radical. Comments such as “Perhaps coexistence projects would fare better if they had as their single and guiding aim the undoing of Israeli colonial power and military force” can be understood in various ways. Is “colonial power” only the occupation or does it include the establishment of the state in 1948?³⁹ Many Jews opposed the establishment of the State of Israel, admittedly before the Holocaust made it a necessity from a political and existential point of view, and many such as Martin Buber and Hannah Arendt protested vehemently against the kind of state Ben-Gurion constructed.⁴⁰ Butler is certainly not the first Jew to contest the structure of the state of Israel. Yet today she is viewed by many as an enemy of the Jews (and not just Israel).

Aside from her open support of BDS, I think what generates so much vitriol is her claim that her anti-Zionism is a form of Jewishness implying that there is both a “Jewish” that is not Judaism per se and also a “Jewish” obligation to contest Israel.⁴¹ I think she intentionally stays clear of making pronouncements about religion per se, which is why *Jewishness* and not *Judaism* is her operative term. I do not think she is trying to essentialize Judaism in any way. But she *is* claiming to locate what she calls “core values” that are born from the Jewish tradition that can then be deployed for other purposes, i.e., figuring out how Jews and non-Jews can live together in the Israeli state. A second provocation, which is essential to my argument here, is her “outing” the implicit fusion of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism as a manipulative tool to deflect criticism of Israel and exclude Israel’s critics from public Jewish space. Other Judaic Studies scholars such as Daniel Boyarin and Charles Manekin voice similar sentiments yet seem to have avoided the more vitriolic reactions that we see now with Butler.⁴² In fact, Boyarin’s attempt to root his diasporic anti-Zionism in rabbinic culture, thus viewing Zionism as a something antithetical to classical rabbinic Judaism, is in many ways a more serious affront than Butler’s secular diasporism, which makes no claim to speak for Judaism per se, even if she does evoke “core values” of Jewishness that she draws from the other modern Jewish thinkers she discusses at length in *Parting Ways*. Boyarin writes, “Zionism is thus a subversion of rabbinic Judaism and it is no wonder that until World War II Zionism was a secular movement to which very few religious Jews adhered, seeing it as a human arrogation of a work that only God should or could perform.”⁴³ In some way, perhaps, this exhibits the extent to which even many progressive Jews today have become so enamored of Jewish textual expertise that they are seduced by someone like Boyarin who comes “with his Talmud under his arm” (to borrow a rabbinic phrase) even if the message he brings subverts the very dogma (Zionism) that they cherish. As a philosopher, and not a Talmudist, Butler is thus a much easier and convenient target.

The troubling role the accusation of anti-Semitism plays in the Zionist debates is developed most cogently by Butler in her chapter in *Precarious Life* devoted to an examination of Lawrence Summers’s public comment

that “profoundly anti-Israeli views . . . by serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not in their intent.”⁴⁴ Here Butler moves more deeply into the implications of the equation of Zionism and Judaism and the role the accusation of anti-Semitism plays in that equation, and also predicts, in my view, what will transpire in the events surrounding her February 2014 invitation to speak about Franz Kafka at the Jewish Museum in Manhattan.

Butler carefully examines Summers’s comment as a way to tease out what she believes lies at its core, an unexamined equation on Summers’s part of Israel and Jews such that criticizing the former is deemed a negation of the latter. Again Butler dwells on what she considers to be dangerous linkages that deflect all criticism. “I take it that Summers’s view, however, relies on the full and seamless identification of the Jewish people with the state of Israel, not only an ‘identification’ that he makes in coupling the two, but also an ‘identification’ that he assumed to be subjectively adopted by Jews themselves.”⁴⁵ While Butler readily acknowledges that criticism of Israel *could be* and indeed sometimes *is* anti-Semitic, that is quite different than saying it is by definition, which is what she claims Summers is implying by distinguishing, while also linking, “effect” and “intent.”⁴⁶ It is here where I think Butler makes the case that stands at the center of *Parting Ways*. She implies that Summers reflects a general consensus among American Jews; he “has identified Jews with the state of Israel as if they were seamlessly the same or has assumed that psychologically and sociologically, every Jew has such an identification, and thus the identification is essential to Jewish identity, an identification without which that identity cannot exist.” (*PL*, 112). Summers moves here from the president of Harvard to the Jewish every-man, a modern-day Tevya the Milkman, voicing what others think, thus explaining why anti-Semitism is so easily thrown at critics of Israel. If you criticize Israel, you are criticizing Jews, and if you criticize Jews, as Jews, you enter into the orbit of anti-Semitism, “if not in effect than in intent.”⁴⁷

This then leaves no space for Jews who *disidentify* with the Israeli state for a variety of reasons. And here, I think, Butler comes to her confessional point. “What do we make of Jews, including myself, who are emotionally invested in the state of Israel, critical of its current form, and call for a radical restructuring of its economic and juridical basis precisely because they are so invested? . . . What if one offers criticism of the Israeli state in the name of one’s Jewishness, in the name of justice, precisely because, as it were, such criticism seems ‘best for the Jews?’” (*PL*, 123–24). In Summers’s assessment, as Butler understands it, there is no space for that kind of Jew because that kind of Jew is already espousing anti-Semitism, “in effect if not intent.” The equation of Israel and Jew, like the equation of Zionism and Judaism, narrows the border within which legitimacy resides. The accusation of anti-Semitism is not only the description of a word or idea, it can also be a tool to control discourse. “What we are up against here is not only a question of whether certain kinds

of ideas and positions can be permitted in public space, but how public space is itself defined by certain kinds of exclusions, emerging patterns of censoriousness and censorship” (*PL*, 126). Equating Jews with Israel determines what indeed is even speakable and thus what is acceptable for any Jew, or non-Jew, to say. This is not to deny that anti-Semitism exists, sometimes in the form of criticism of Israel, and should be, as Butler reiterates consistently, exposed and eradicated. But the accusation of anti-Semitism as linked to criticism of Israel, or anti-Zionism, has become more than that; it has become a way to define Jewishness. Thus we are not only talking here about censorship; we are talking about a form of excommunication, not only censoring what one says about Israel but the ability of that actor to speak at all, one’s ability to occupy, and participate in, Jewish public space.

3. CENSORSHIP V. EXCOMMUNICATION: IS JUDITH BUTLER AN AMERICAN JEWISH HERETIC?

The recent debate about Butler is an interesting moment in American Jewish history that is testing the ability of today’s Jewish community to function in the pluralistic paradigm it ostensibly espouses. This is not to say pluralism must tolerate everything. But it remains worth pondering why today the radical reformation, even abrogation, of religious practice and belief is tolerated while anti-Zionism is not. The lack of any American Jewish hegemony due in part to the disestablishment clause in the American Constitution creates a situation where lines of legitimacy are not clearly defined, nor can norms be legislated in any formal way. Who is “in” and who is “out” (even who is a Jew and who is not) largely changes from one community to another. One can see this regarding egalitarianism, gay and lesbian rabbinical ordination, gay marriage, intermarriage, and the use of biblical criticism among many other contentious issues. American Jews have largely learned to live with this ambiguity in terms of doctrinal and behavioral matters. It is therefore quite surprising that Butler has evoked such negative reaction, culminating in what I call a new form for excommunication coming from numerous corners of the American Jewish community (some of whom are on opposite sides on almost every issue) whereby her presence in any Jewish institution, religious or secular, is challenged. The exercise of *de facto* excommunication illustrates another misconception that stands at the center of my analysis. Butler’s detractors are playing both sides of the game. They are claiming to be victims of Butler’s anti-Zionism (viewing her as representing a damaging threat to their position), and yet their actions show how, in fact, they are the ones who hold all the power. Excommunication, even if not actionable in any legal sense the way it was in Spinoza’s time, is an exercise of authority and thus power. Viewed as a threat, she can be, and largely has been, excluded from the Jewish public square.⁴⁸ In my view, this is precisely because anti-Zionism has

been conflated with Anti-Semitism, making the former a cause for exclusion from the Jewish conversation.

The example I will use is the February 2014 invitation for Butler to speak at a March 6 event housed in Manhattan's Jewish Museum entitled, "Wish You Were Here: Franz Kafka." Butler has written on Kafka and, as the official museum statement reads, "She was chosen on the basis of her expertise on the subject matter to be discussed."⁴⁹ The invitation evoked harsh criticism from many corners of the Jewish world.⁵⁰ Richard Allen, head of the JCC Watch and JNS.org wrote, "The hosting of [BDS] advocate Judith Butler by the Jewish Museum is a slap in the face to every Jew."⁵¹ Others like Dahn Hiuni called it "horrible" and were left "speechless."⁵² In the February 21, 2014, issue of *Commentary Magazine*, Jonathan Tobin wrote that what is at stake here is not simply inviting a BDS supporter to speak at a Jewish institution. Rather, it is "whether an extremist anti-Zionist minority will be able to hijack Jewish institutions." He continues, "The notion that they [Jewish institutions] should give platforms to individuals who are part of a campaign to delegitimize Zionism and the State of Israel is one that strikes most of those donors as indefensible. . . . Judith Butler et al. . . . can say whatever they want about Israel in a thousand other, often more prominent, forums than those in the Jewish community. But they are *not entitled* [emphasis added] to have Jewish institutions honor or fund their anti-Israel hate."⁵³ In an op-ed in the English language website of the Settler News Service *Arutz Sheva*, Ron Torossian wrote how shameful it was for a Jewish institution to "provide a vicious enemy of the State of Israel a forum."⁵⁴ The title of Torossian's op-ed, "The Jewish Museum Must Ban Its Anti-Semitic Speaker," supports Butler's claim. She is no longer simply anti-Zionist, she is anti-Semitic. This should not come as a surprise. The official representative of the Jewish community in Berlin responded to Butler's invitation to the Jewish Museum there by calling her "a well-known anti-Semite and enemy of Israel."⁵⁵

Given their predilections, Tobin and Torossian might have had an argument if they had been talking about Butler's invitation to the Jewish Museum in Berlin on September 15, 2012, where her talk was entitled "Does Zionism Belong to Judaism?" But Butler was not slated to talk about Israel or Zionism at all in Manhattan, she was slated to talk about Franz Kafka (who, by the way, was quoted as saying, "I despise Zionism and I despise anti-Zionism"). Of course Tobin and Torossian and other supporters knew this. And therein lies the rub. This is not a case of censorship, the attempt to deny the right of someone to voice an opinion that is deemed out of bounds for a particular community (here the largely fictitious "American Jewish community"). It is, rather, a tacit excommunication of a person to say anything or take part in any way in a Jewish institution. Excommunication is a harsh term and formally not applicable in a community that has no jurisdiction to enforce it. Yet the fact that Butler's invitation to the Jewish Museum in Manhattan where she was to speak on Kafka caused the same ire as her invitation to speak on Israel and Zionism at the Jewish

Museum in Berlin the year before is instructive. Ironically, her talk in Berlin on Israel and Zionism went off as planned while her talk on Kafka was canceled because Butler pulled out as a result of the controversy. The identical reaction to these two events suggests that the subject of discussion is no longer the problem, the problem is the person. And it is here where we move beyond censorship.

In order to get a better sense of what I mean by a “new excommunication” and what that may say about the American Jewish community, I turn briefly to perhaps the most famous Jewish case of excommunication in modern times, that of the young Baruch Spinoza. While many know of Spinoza’s excommunication, in *Spinoza’s Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind*, Steven Nadler traces the curious frequency with which writs of excommunication (*cherem*) were used in seventeenth-century Amsterdam.⁵⁶ While Spinoza was the most famous, and his writ was uncharacteristically harsh, he was one of dozens of Amsterdam Jews who were excommunicated during this period for a variety of reasons including buying non-kosher food and saying disparaging things about the Amsterdam Rabbinate. Many of these excommunications were temporary and easily rectified with a simple apology.⁵⁷ Spinoza’s was different. His writ concludes with these words, “no one should communicate with him . . . nor shall he read any treatise composed or written by him.”⁵⁸ That is, Spinoza was deemed a permanent *persona non grata* in the Amsterdam Jewish community; he was considered a danger to the Jews. It is interesting that Spinoza seemed not to care about his fate with the Jews of Amsterdam while Butler, quite the opposite, seems willing and even desirous to engage with the Jewish community and claim that she is, in fact, not abandoning the Jews like Spinoza but deeply invested in them. It is also interesting to note how widely Spinoza is read today among Jews, how Spinoza was a great inspiration for Zionists and assimilationists alike, how David Ben-Gurion, an avid reader of Spinoza, publicly rescinded his excommunication in a symbolic gesture of solidarity with this heretical sage.⁵⁹ Butler, on the other hand, has been victim to the vitriol Spinoza received in his lifetime while Spinoza, the great heretic, the architect of biblical criticism, the atheist or at least denier of the covenantal God, is respected and even adored. Butler, the anti-Zionist, anti-assimilationist Jew is despised.

More relevant for our concerns, however, Nadler examines how and why Amsterdam Jews used excommunication with such frequency. He notes that excommunicating Spinoza had a clear political, and not just religious, dimension. “In Spinoza’s era, in fact, the distinction between the private and the public, the personal and the political, was not very well conceived. . . . Their use of the ban of *cherem*—which at first might seem to have been a tool geared simply for maintaining a disciplined Jewish congregation—thus takes on a political dimension, as a public act that was meant to communicate such reassurance to a wider audience.”⁶⁰ Excommunication was thus not only an internal affair but an act that gestured to Dutch society that Jews can be depended upon as

community that keeps its house in order. In terms of the internal impetus for the use of the *cherem*, Nadler offers the following assessment:

The *cherem*, then, was used in Amsterdam to enforce social, religious, and ethical conduct thought becoming of a proper Jewish community, and to discourage deviance not just in matters of liturgical practice but also in matters of everyday behavior and the expression of ideas. All of these would be particularly important issues for a community founded on former conversos. The leaders of the Talmud Torah congregation had to work hard to maintain religious cohesion among a community of Jews whose faith and practice were still rather unstable and often tainted by unorthodox beliefs and practices. Moreover, such a community might feel insecure about its Judaism, and thus in compensation might be particularly inclined to resort frequently to the rigorous means to keep things “kosher.”⁶¹

The fact that Spinoza’s ban was due to his heretical views about Judaism and Butler’s is about her “heretical” views about Zionism plays directly into one of the core arguments in Butler’s work: that Zionism has become fused with Judaism such that dis-identifying with the former is tantamount to denying, or subverting, the latter.⁶² In Spinoza’s day one could not be a Jew in good standing in Amsterdam if one did not believe in the divine origin of the Torah, or immortality, or a personal, creator God. Or at least say they did. In Butler’s day, it seems one cannot be a Jew in good standing if one is not a Zionist.⁶³

This label of excommunication is bolstered by the following approach taken by Israeli artist, playwright, and professor Dahn Hiuni. Hiuni has created a new movement called “Retraction and Disavowals in Scholarship” (RDS) as a response to Butler’s endorsement of BDS. RDS encourages “academics to revisit their work to excise all the references from scholars who have lost credibility in the past few years as public intellectuals because of their support of radical anti-Israel groups.”⁶⁴ This even exceeds the Spinoza writ, which more simply prohibits “read[ing] any treatise composed or written by him.” Hiuni is calling on Jews to erase any reference to Butler in their academic work, even references that have nothing whatsoever to do with Israel or Zionism.⁶⁵ In Butler’s case, this would mean erasing all references to her groundbreaking work on gender and critical theory and would certainly include not reading any of her many books and essays on many subjects. This is not censorship; this is excommunication.

Why such a vitriolic reaction? Here Nadler’s assessment of Amsterdam Jews may be instructive. The pro-Israel American Jewish community feels under siege, not only from anti-Israel voices abroad, and not only from the “radical” leftists at home. The realization among many—true or false is a matter of opinion—that Israel has no intention of ending the occupation has given rise to criticism of Israel in ordinarily “safe houses” (like the U.S. government) but also inside the Jewish community from J-Street (which does not support BDS) to

Jewish Voice for Peace (which does support BDS). “Open Hillel” has defiantly challenged the National Hillel to determine guidelines for topics on Israel. BDS has gone from a marginal almost non-existent phenomenon to one that is now discussed openly in the Israeli Knesset, at AIPAC conferences, on college campuses, in the halls of Congress. In is true that the reaction is largely negative, but the very fact that it is being discussed at all, that arguments must be made against it, speaks to its relevance. This creates a kind destabilization that fosters a need for deliberative, excommunicative action. The pro-Israel American Jewish establishment must show that it can keep its house in order.

This is coupled with the fact that many of the arguments in the pro-Israel lobby in America are tactically informed but largely defensive (*hasbara*) and often not deeply rooted in any intellectual tradition. This was not the case in the heyday of Zionism, when Zionist ideologies, right and left, from Jabotinsky to Berdechevsky, Klatzkin to Borochoy, Kook to Buber, were deeply rooted in philosophical and political ideas. And in Israel today there is an ongoing debate about the intricate nature of Zionism, nationalism, and Jewish existence that is fecund and deeply informed, both theoretically and substantively.⁶⁶ By those standards contemporary American Zionism seems facile, shallow, and reactive. It is why, perhaps, it so easily resorts to demonization, censorship, and, in Butler’s case, excommunication.

It has often been said that American Jewry’s greatest weakness is that its assimilationist project of Americanization combined with the resurgence in Jewish identity in the era of multiculturalism has produced proud Jews who know little about Judaism. This has changed somewhat in the past few decades with progressive Jewish educational initiatives. But the shallowness of Jewish knowledge among many American Jews seems to be reflected in their Zionism as well. I think this is due to two reasons. First, as I mentioned above, American Zionism has really mostly been about American Jewish identity and thus pride in a “Jewish state” matters more than an intricate understanding of the complexity of Jewish nationalism. Second, in some way American Zionism is also a service industry. Going back to the early days of Ben Gurion, Israel largely views American Zionists as Israel’s advocates, thus they needn’t know the intricate and messy details of Zionist history but only the arguments necessary to serve as Israel’s lawyers in the court of public opinion. Like professional advocates more generally, they only need to know what is necessary for the case at hand. Anything more complicates the narrative.

Butler comes to her notion of “Jewishness” with sophistication and depth. One can certainly disagree with it, even passionately. What is so threatening, perhaps, is that Butler comes at her subject with a library of knowledge and a mind trained to think through categories in a deft manner. Many who criticize her work can do the same, and those criticisms should continue to become part of a larger conversation about contemporary notions of Jewishness. But others cannot. And this too creates a destabilization of discourse that lends itself

to rash actions that serve as substitutes for sober argumentation. The rabbis of Amsterdam in Spinoza's time knew their community was not confident about their Judaism; many of them had grown up as Christians and were thus insecure about their Judaism and its legitimate lines of demarcation. A somewhat amusing example brought by Nadler is that Jews in Amsterdam at that time celebrated Purim as "The Festival of Saint Esther." Excommunication was a way of exercising muscle and fostering confidence in the certainty of boundaries. American Jewry today is surely in a different place, but perhaps not categorically so. Maybe we too are experiencing similar anxieties. Spinoza was raised a pious Jew, studied philosophy, and grew to think his way out of Judaism. Butler was raised largely as a secular Jew, studied philosophy, and grew to think her way into a new articulation of Jewishness. Is it somewhat ironic that both meet at the collective Jewish whipping post?

NOTES

I thank Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman, and Larisa Reznik for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), hereafter cited as *PW*. There have been many critiques of Butler's work on Zionism. For a recent lengthy critique that mentions many others, see Cary Nelson, "The Problem with Judith Butler: The Political Philosophy of the Movement to Boycott Israel," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Mar. 16, 2014. This is part of a forum of eight essays called "Academic Activism: Israelis, Palestinians, and the Ethics of Boycott," <https://lareviewofbooks.org/academic-activism>. There are two particularly astute critical reviews of *Parting Ways* worth noting. The first is Seyla Benhabib, "Ethics without Normativity and Politics without Historicity: On Judith Butler's *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*," *Constellations* 20, no. 1 (2013): 150–63. The second is Julie Cooper, "A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism," *Political Theory* (forthcoming). I want to thank Professor Cooper for sharing her essay with me before its publication and for her important comments on an earlier draft of this essay.
2. Shaul Magid, "How to Separate Judaism from Zionism," *Religion Dispatches* (Sept. 27, 2012), http://www.religiondispatches.org/books/atheologies/6423/how_to_separate_jewishness_from_zionism/.
3. There are a plethora of books and articles on Zionism in America and American Zionism. For example, see Naomi Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism 1987–1948* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003); Mark Raider, *The Emergence of American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Zvi Ganin, *An Uneasy Relationship: American Jewish leadership and Israel 1948–1967* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 107–50; Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the US 1926–1948* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Lenni Brenner, *The Iron Wall: Zionist Revisionism from Jabotinsky to Shamir* (London: Zed Books, 1984); Aaron Kleiman, *My Brothers'*

- Keeper: Fostering Projects in the Jewish National Home* (New York: Routledge, 2991); Noam Pianko, *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); *American Jews Reflect on Why Israel Matters to Them*, ed. K. Salkin (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2007); and most recently, Theodore Sasson, *The New American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).
4. On Kohler and Zionism, see Yakov Ariel, "Kaufmann Kohler and his Attitude toward Zionism: A Reexamination" *American Jewish Archives* 43, no. 2 (1991): 207–23. On the American Council for Judaism, see Thomas Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism 1942–1948* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
 5. See Robert Seltzer, *Simon Dubnow's "New Judaism": Diaspora Nationalism and the World History of the Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
 6. For the Pittsburgh Platform, see http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Columbus_platform.html. For the Columbus Platform, see http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Columbus_platform.html.
 7. On the life and work of Finkelstein, see Michael Greenbaum, *Louis Finkelstein and the Conservative Movement: Conflict and Growth* (New York: JTS Press, 2009).
 8. On a sober assessment on the theoretical underpinnings of anti-Zionism, see David Myers, "Can There be a Principled Anti-Zionism? On the Nexus between Anti-Historicism and Anti-Zionism in Modern Jewish Thought," *The Journal of Israeli History* 25, no. 1 (Mar. 2006): 33–50.
 9. For modern Jewish uses of the term "heresy," see David Biale, "Historical Heresies and Modern Jewish Identity," *Jewish Social Studies* (Winter/Spring, 2002): 112–32.
 10. Perhaps somewhat ironically, the most sustained form of this argument appears in Meir Kahane's *Listen World-Listen Jew* (1978) written as a response to the UN "Zionism Is Racism" resolution and Vanessa Redgrave's 1978 Academy Awards speech, where she distinguished Judaism from Zionism. Here is only one way we can see how Kahane's ideas, stripped of their radical expression, have made their way into the Jewish mainstream. I am presently working on a book project entitled *Meir Kahane: American Jewish Survivalist* that explores some of these ideas in depth.
 11. Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Times Books, 2012), 190–95.
 12. See Shaul Magid, "Who Is Boycotting Whom: National Hillel Guidelines, Dissent, and Legitimate Protest," *Zeek*, Jan.10, 2014, <http://zeek.forward.com/articles/117993/>.
 13. I once spoke to a high school student in an Orthodox Jewish Day School in a major American city who told me he had a senior elective class on Israel called "Israel Advocacy." The course was basically learning a list of talking points to respond to anti-Israel activists on college campuses. He had never taken a course on the history of Israel or Zionism and, when questioned, knew almost nothing about either. But he considered himself an ardent "Zionist."
 14. See, for example, in Elhanan Yakira's *Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust: Three Essays on Denial, Forgetting, and the Delegitimization of Israel*, trans. M. Swirsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and my review of the book, in the *Journal of Religion* 91, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 420–22.
 15. The equation of these terms is not new and was part of the Jewish Social Science movement in the early twentieth century. For example, see Arthur Rupp's influential *Die Judentum und Gegenwart* (Cologne: Judische Verlag, 1904), translated as *The Judaism of Today*, trans. M. Bentwich (New York: Holt, 1913). Rupp used the social scientific method to criticize assimilationism and to argue that Jewish survival in the

- modern world depends on Zionism and Jewish nationalism. See Matthew Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 54, and 74–95.
16. On the “Zionist BDS,” see Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism*, 193–96; and David Myers, “Why I Oppose a Boycott, Mostly,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Mar. 16, 2014, <http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/oppose-boycott-mostly>.
 17. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), and *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004). In terms of her turn toward ethics more generally, see her *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
 18. See Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004); and “Jews and the Bi-National Vision,” *Logos Journal*, 2004, <http://www.logosjournal.com/butler.htm>. This was originally a lecture delivered at the Second International Conference on an End to the Occupation, “A Just Peace in Israel-Palestine,” East Jerusalem, Jan. 4–5, 2004. This essay is hardly anti-Zionist. In fact, most of it is taken up with a description of Martin Buber’s critique of the Zionism of his day and a description of the American Jewish peace camp. There is little in this essay that someone on the moderate left would find offensive. For a slightly earlier statement, see Butler, “Reflections on Germany,” in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, ed. D. Boyarin and D. Itzkovitz. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
 19. *Gender Trouble*, xvii.
 20. See, for example, her interview with Udi Aloni in 2010, “Judith Butler: As a Jew, I Was Taught It Is Ethically Imperative to Speak Up,” in *Haaretz*, February 24, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/judith-butler-as-a-jew-i-was-taught-it-was-ethically-imperative-to-speak-up-1.266243>.
 21. Butler, “Is Zionism Judaism? Or, Arendt and the Critique of the Nation-State,” reprinted in *Deconstructing Zionism*, 23–56. The quote is on page 39.
 22. See Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition,” in Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, 275–97. Cf. her essay in the same volume, “Herzl and Lazare,” 338–42, where she juxtaposes Herzl to Lazare, the latter of whom she considers a model of the Jewish pariah. Cf. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 54–88. On Arendt’s thinking on Zionism in particular, see her “Zionism Reconsidered,” in *The Jewish Writings*, 343–74; and idem. “The Crisis of Zionism,” 329–37.
 23. Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).
 24. David Biale, *Not in Heaven: The Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
 25. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest Books, 1968), 73.
 26. See Benhabib, “Ethics without Normativity,” 152. Cf. Butler, *Parting Ways*, 57.
 27. On Levinas’s thoughts on Zionism see Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 177–201. On Levinas and universalism, see Hilary Putnam, “Levinas and Judaism,” *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. S. Critchley and E. Bernascon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33–62. Here it is worth mentioning Hans Kohn as one who expressed similar sentiments almost a century ago. See his resignation letter from *Keren Ha-Yesod* in 1929, “Judaism is Not Zionism,” printed in Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples*, 97–100. Cf. Pianko, *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken*, 135–77.

- Arendt does not identify as an anti-Zionist. As her biographer Elisabeth Young Bruehl writes, “Arendt was not interested in anti-Zionism. But she was, as always, interested in Zionist ‘loyal opposition’ and she responded gratefully when Zionist readers recognized her position for what it was. Hannah Arendt was, as Sirkin implied, “not an anti-Zionist but an internationalist.” See Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 361, 362. I would question whether those kinds of distinctions are still applicable today.
28. See Joseph Mossad, in “‘The Post-Colonial’ Colony: Times, Space and Bodies in Israel/Palestine,” in *The Pre-Occupation of Post-Colonial Studies*, ed. F. Afzal-Khan and K. Seshardi-Crooks (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 335–37.
 29. Gil Anidjar, “*Mal de Sionisme* (Zionist Fever),” in *Living Together: Jacques Derrida’s Communities of Violence and Peace*, ed. E. Weber (New York: Fordham, 2013), 49.
 30. Mossad, “The ‘Post-Colonial’ Colony,” 355.
 31. See Anidjar, “Mal,” 50. This coheres with Slavoj Žižek’s reading of Zionism as making a kind of pact with anti-Semites. See Žižek, “Antisemitisms and Its Transformations,” *Deconstructing Zionism: A Critique of Political Metaphysics*, ed. G. Vattimo and M. Marder (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1–13, esp. 4–7. Equating Judaism with Zionism is, of course, common among anti-Semites.
 32. For a similar argument, see Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 713. “We suggest that an Israel that reimports diasporic consciousness—a consciousness of a Jewish collective as one sharing space with others, devoid of exclusivist and dominating powers—is the only Israel that could answer Paul’s, Lyotard’s, and Nancy’s call for a species-wide care without eradicating cultural differences” (emphasis mine).
 33. On this see W. D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), esp. 69, 70.
 34. Boyarin and Boyarin, “Diaspora,” 718.
 35. See Hermann Cohen, *Reason and Hope*, trans. Eva Jospe and intro. (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1993), 175–96. See Gershom Scholem’s critique, “Jewishness and Germanness” (Hebrew), in *Devarim be-Go* (Tel Aviv: ‘Am Oved, 1976), 96–113. Benhabib criticizes Butler’s connection of Arendt to Cohen. While Benhabib’s critique is well-placed, Cohen’s belief in diasporism and the symbiosis between “Jewishness” and “Germanness,” while distinct from Butler’s view in many ways, certainly historically but even substantively merits a connection worth mentioning. See Benhabib, “Ethics without Normativity,” 157 and note 36.
 36. See, for example, “To Save the Jewish Homeland,” in Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. J. Kohn and T. H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 388–401.
 37. Butler, “Is Judaism Zionism?” 26.
 38. See, Shalom Razabi, *Between Zionism and Judaism: The Radical Circle of Brit Shalom* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Martin Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs*, ed. P. Mendes-Flohr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), esp. 160–63, 179–184, 207–14, 297–99; and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Binationalism and Jewish Identity: Hannah Arendt and the Question of Palestine,” in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed. S. Ascheim (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 165–180.
 39. See Benhabib, “Ethics without Normativity,” 158. It is significant to note that after all of Benhabib’s criticisms of Butler in the end Benhabib comes quite close to what is

- called a “one-state” solution (although she doesn’t call it that) by writing, “maybe the time has come to call for the federation of Israeli and Palestinians peoples, with two parliaments and two electoral systems but a common defense and security policy over territory and airspace, and shared water and other natural resources” (159). I assume she means an equal system of both peoples with no preference for ethnicity when it comes to joint ventures.
40. See, for example, Buber, “On the Moral Character of the State of Israel: A Debate with David Ben-Gurion,” in Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples*, 239–44. Cf. *idem.*, 296, 297.
 41. On her support of BDS that does not include academic boycotts, see her response to Michele Goldberg in *The Nation* at <http://www.thenation.com/article/177512/academic-freedom-and-asas-boycott-israel-response-michelle-goldberg>.
 42. See for example Manekin, “Liberal Zionism in the Era of Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Movement,” *The Daily Beast: Open Zion*, Dec. 20, 2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/12/20/liberal-zionism-in-the-era-of-the-boycott-divestment-and-sanctions-movement.html>. Cf. Mark Oppenheim, “A Conflict of Faith: Devoted to Jewish Observance, but at Odds with Israel,” *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/15/us/a-conflict-of-faith-devoted-to-jewish-observance-but-at-odds-with-israel.html?_r=0. While the reasons why Boyarin and Manekin have not been the brunt of such attacks is unknown, it may have to do with the fact that both are well versed in the classical Jewish tradition (Boyarin as a rabbinics scholar and Manekin as a scholar of medieval Jewish philosophy), traditional Jews, and thus not as easily discounted as Butler, who is a secular Jew without classical Jewish training.
 43. Boyarin and Boyarin, “Diaspora,” 719. At the conclusion of their essay the Boyarins include the ultra-Orthodox and anti-Zionism Statement of Neturei Karta. See also Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 228–60; *idem.*, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 271–313; Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity,” *Critical Theory* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 693–725; and Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 35–102. Daniel Boyarin is a signatory to “The One State Declaration,” <http://electronicintifada.net/content/one-state-declaration/793>. A critical analysis of Boyarin’s position can be found in Cooper, “A Diasporic Critique of Diasporism.” For critiques of Boyarin’s stance on Israel/Palestine, see Alan Arkush, “State and Counterstate,” in *Jewish Review of Books* 6 (Summer 2011), and *idem.* “From Diaspora Nationalism to Radical Diasporism,” *Modern Judaism* 29, no. 3 (2009): 326–50.
 44. Summers made those comments as a public presidential address at Harvard, September 17, 2002. See Butler, *Precarious Life*, 100–27.
 45. Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 111; hereafter cited as “PL.”
 46. For more on the role of the accusation of anti-Semitism in response to critiques of Zionism, see, *The Politics of Anti-Semitism*, A. ed. Cockburn and J. St. Clair (Oakland: AK Press, 2003).
 47. This symmetry between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism is emphasized by Ruth Wisse in her *Jews and Power* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 137–54. Wisse argues

- that anti-Semitism is what gave birth to anti-Zionism and thus one cannot separate the two. In this sense, Wisse adopts the anti-Semitic claim, made by Meir Kahane as well, that “all Jews are Zionists” and thus a criticism of Zionism is a criticism of all Jews. The danger of this equation is that if we determine that anti-Semitism is “unacceptable,” than all criticism of Israel is “unacceptable.” It is unclear whether, in fact, Summers agrees with Wisse’s assumptions, but his comment could be taken to support her views. For a very different view of anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism asymmetry, see Alain Badiou, “‘Anti-Semitism Everywhere’ in France Today,” in *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*, ed. A. Badiou, E. Hazan, and I. Segre (London: Verso, 2013), 3–44.
48. Predictably, a panel on her book was held at the annual American Academy of Religion conference in 2013 and not the Association of Jewish Studies conference.
 49. “Statement Regarding Wish You Were Here: Frank Kafka,” The Jewish Museum, www.thejewishmuseum.org.
 50. See, for example, in “Jewish Museum under Fire for Hosting Anti-Zionist pro BDS Prof,” *Haaretz*, Feb. 20, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/.premium-1.575273>.
 51. “Judith Butler Talk at New York’s Jewish Museum Cancelled,” *Algemeiner Journal*, Feb. 20, 2014.
 52. “Anti-Israel Professor Judith Butler to Speak at NYC Jewish Museum,” *Algemeiner Journal* Feb. 19, 2014.
 53. Jonathan Tobin, “Anti-Zionists Must Not Be Allowed to Hijack the Jewish Community,” *Commentary*, Feb. 21, 2014, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/topic/judith-butler/>.
 54. Ronn Torossian, “The Jewish Museum Must Ban Its Anti-Semitic Speaker,” <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/14545#.UyxOs4WyTPQ>.
 55. See Benhabib, “Ethics without Normativity,” 150.
 56. The Spinoza connection here is not arbitrary. In her interview with Udi Aloni in *Haaretz* in 2010, Butler notes that when she was fourteen and began a private tutorial with her local rabbi as a punishment for her misbehavior in Hebrew School, she wanted to learn about “why Spinoza was excommunicated from the synagogue. I wanted to know what happened and whether the synagogue was justified.” Of Spinoza’s excommunication, see Steven Nadler, *Spinoza’s Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). For a more detailed analysis of the *cherem*, see Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 116–54.
 57. See Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 125.
 58. For the full write of excommunication, see *ibid.*, 120.
 59. On the reception of Spinoza, see Jonathan Skolnok, “Kaddish for Spinoza: Memory and Modernity in Celan and Heine,” *New German Critique* 77 (Spring/Summer 1999): 169–186; and Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the World Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 67–92. On the resurrection of Spinoza and Israeli identity see Yermiyahu Yovel’s two-volume *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).
 60. Nadler, *Spinoza’s Heresy*, 17, 19.
 61. *Ibid.*, 11. Cf. Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 127.
 62. On the use of the term *heretic* in modernity, see Biale, “Historical Heresies,” 128. “And in an age when secular ideologies have often hardened into orthodoxies by labeling

- dissenters heretics, modernity does not always appear to be defined by absolute freedom of choice.” While Biale is not referring to Zionism here, I think it would apply.
63. Butler states quite openly in the beginning of her 2004 essay “Jewish and the Bi-national Vision,” “I will tell you from the outset that I am not a Zionist, although I was brought up in a strong Zionist community in the United States.” This would already disqualify her, given the sentiment of much of contemporary American Jewry.
 64. “Anti- Israel Professor Judith Butler to Speak at NYC Jewish Museum.”
 65. Even the rabbinic sage Rabbi Meir, student of arch-heretic Elisha ben Ayuya (Aher), defended what he had learned from his teacher before his teacher’s heresy.
 66. Two recent examples are Eliezer Schwied, *Eliezer Schweid: The Responsibility of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. J. Tirosh Samuelson, A. Hughes; trans L. Levin (Leiden: Brill, 2013); and Joseph Turner, *Ha-Yakhas le-Tzion u le-Tefuzot be-Makhshevet ha-Yehudit shel ha-Meah ha-20 (The Relationship between Zion and the Diaspora in the Twentieth Century Jewish Thought)* (Israel: Kibbutz ha-Meuhad, 2014). The Schweid volume is an English translation of his work over the last two decades on Jewish existence and Zionism.

PERFORMATIVE ZION: BUTLER’S PARTING WAYS

REBECCA STEIN

In March of 2014, Judith Butler was scheduled to deliver a talk on Franz Kafka at the New York Jewish Museum. But after a furor erupted among Jewish community members concerned about her “anti-Israel stance” (thus framed by her detractors), Butler elected to cancel. The forum in question had no relationship to Israel—at least, none thematized in the museum program. Rather, it drew on Butler’s resources as a philosopher and close reader. “While her political views were not a factor in her participation,” as a spokesmen for the museum would subsequently note, “the debates about her politics have become a distraction making it impossible to present the conversation about Kafka as intended.” The fictive isomorphism of “Jewish” and “Zionist” haunted the cancelation—more pointedly, the fear that her reading of the Jewish thinker might enable, or even *become*, a critical reading of Zionism (this was a ploy, in the words of one blogger, to “use Jewish ethics to prove that Zionism is illegitimate”). Among her critics, there was a pervasive sense that somehow, smuggled through the door of Jewish philosophy and critical hermeneutics, Israel’s image would be tarnished, again. And therein, the “existential threat” to the Jewish state loomed.

The relationship between the Jewish and the Zionist is at the heart of Butler’s engagements in *Parting Ways*. Given Butler’s prominence as an advocate for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement—and given the voluminous public deliberations, often heated ones, that followed the American Studies Association’s pro-BDS resolution in December 2014—the meaning of the book has changed. That is, although Butler’s latest work was written prior to these events, its impact and resonance have been conclusively overwritten