

The Victimhood of the Powerful:
White Jews, Zionism and the Racism of Hegemonic Holocaust Education

by

Jennifer Peto

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Graduate Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Jennifer Peto
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
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Abstract

This paper focuses on issues of Jewish identity, whiteness and victimhood within hegemonic Holocaust education. I argue that today, Jewish people of European descent enjoy white privilege and are among the most socio-economically advantaged groups in the West. Despite this privilege, the organized Jewish community makes claims about Jewish victimhood that are widely accepted within that community and within popular discourse in the West. I propose that these claims to victimhood are no longer based in a reality of oppression, but continue to be propagated because a victimized Jewish identity can produce certain effects that are beneficial to the organized Jewish community and the Israeli nation-state. I focus on two related Holocaust education projects – the March of the Living and the March of Remembrance and Hope – to show how Jewish victimhood is instrumentalized in ways that obscure Jewish privilege, deny Jewish racism and promote the interests of the Israeli nation-state.

Acknowledgements

My thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Jolan Peto, a Holocaust survivor who spent her life fighting injustice. I know that if she were alive today she would be right there with me protesting against Israeli Apartheid.

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Introduction

My first memory of questioning my loyalty to the Israeli state is from the 9th grade. It was 1995 and I was almost 15 years old, attending a private Jewish high school in Toronto. One day, during a Jewish History class, our teacher was giving a lesson on the city of Hebron. During the class, he mentioned Baruch Goldstein – the Jewish settler who, in February 1994, had massacred over 50 Palestinians while they were praying at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron. When my teacher said Goldstein’s name, he followed it with ‘*zichrono livracha*’ which is Hebrew for ‘may his memory be blessed’. This is a common practice among Orthodox Jewish people when mentioning the name of someone who is deceased. I remember being completely shocked that he would bless the name of a man who had committed such a horrible act of violence. I raised my hand and asked him why he had blessed Goldstein and not said ‘*yemach shmo*’ which, in Hebrew, means ‘may his name be erased from history’ and is commonly said after mentioning the name of an evil-doer that has died. My teacher, who himself was an Israeli settler, became enraged, refused to engage in this debate with me and sent me to the principal’s office where I was reprimanded for being disruptive in class.

By this point in my life, I was quite used to being in trouble with teachers and principals. I had been attending Orthodox Jewish schools since kindergarten and all along I had been questioning the worldview that was being presented to me. In the first grade, after having been told that I could not play the lead in our school play because I was a girl, I decided that god was either sexist or nonexistent. Either way, I wanted to have nothing to do with him. Over the years, both my atheism and my feminism only grew stronger within the sexist, gender-normative and heterosexist educational institutions I

was forced to attend. That all these values were reinforced at home only made me more convinced of my own beliefs and ideas about morality and social justice. Another important aspect of my childhood that influenced my politics was my fascination with the Holocaust. Learning about the violence that my grandparents had faced gave me a deep commitment to fighting racism and all forms of hatred. I remember being confused by the racism I saw in my family and community – I could not comprehend why the victims of anti-Semitism could not see that their own racist beliefs and actions were just as wrong as those of anti-Semites.

Despite all of my rebellion against the oppressive beliefs of my parents, teachers and religious leaders, the one aspect of my upbringing and education that I never questioned was Zionism – loyalty to the Israeli nation-state. In fact, Zionism fit within my childhood understanding of anti-oppression politics because I believed that Jewish people – like women, queer people and people of colour – were oppressed and deserved protection and safety. I had been taught that the ‘Jewish state’ guaranteed our safety and would prevent another Holocaust from happening again. I believed this line of reasoning because I had never been taught about Palestinian history or been exposed to any anti-Zionist viewpoints. I thought all Palestinians were violent terrorists who wanted to kill all Jews, just like the Nazis had tried to do. My morbid obsession with the Holocaust as a child likely only fueled my fears of Palestinians and the genocide that I was told was always waiting to happen at their hands.

What stands out about the incident in the 9th grade was not that I got in trouble at school, but rather that it was the first time I faced a backlash for raising questions about Israel and arguing, albeit in the most minor way possible, that Palestinian lives and deaths

actually matter. Although this was not a life-changing event that completely rocked my Zionist beliefs, it did lead me to start questioning this aspect of my upbringing that I had yet to dismiss as oppressive. I remained a Zionist until first-year university, one year after I left the primarily Jewish suburb that I grew up in. I was having dinner with a friend who I thought was Lebanese – I later learned that his family were Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. His brother, who had just arrived in Toronto from the United Arab Emirates joined us. He was wearing a necklace with Handala¹ on it. I recognized it as Naj Al-Ali's famous cartoon of a Palestinian child holding a rock behind his back and immediately demanded to know why he had a terrorist on his necklace. We then got into an argument about Israel and Palestine that lasted several hours. I pride myself on being able to win most arguments, but in this case I could not beat him – he had facts and history, but all I had was rhetoric and sound-bites. The next day I decided to do more research so that I could win the re-match. Once I began to read about the history of Palestine, I started to understand the violence that was necessary to establish the Israeli state and the violence required to maintain its existence as a Jewish-only state. It was the beginning of the end of my Zionism. The Second Intifada began shortly thereafter, which only accelerated my shift from supporter of Israel to Palestine solidarity activist.

The process of becoming an anti-Zionist Jew can be extremely painful because it requires Jewish people to stop seeing themselves as victims and to accept that by supporting Israel, they are supporting a brutally oppressive regime. For many, this is a devastating realization. It can also have serious repercussions for Jewish people who, upon expressing anti-Zionist views, may become alienated from their families and

¹ Handala is a character who is featured in Palestinian artist Naj Al-Ali's cartoons. He is a cartoon of a refugee child, whose image has become not only Al-Ali's signature, but a symbol of the Palestinian resistance. For more information visit www.handala.org

communities.² This process has been the subject of many autobiographies of anti-Zionist Jews who reflect on the difficulties they encounter as their views on Israel shift and they become more vocal about their rejection of Zionism and their criticisms of Israel.³

My experience was less painful because I was already an outcast in the Jewish community, and estranged from my family for being atheist, queer, gender-queer, feminist and generally outspoken in a highly normative, Orthodox setting. I had less to lose in terms of family and community than many anti-Zionist Jews. Beyond my already outcast status, I believe that the key factor in my ultimate rejection of Zionism was my ability to let go of the idea that Jewish people are inherently victimized. This was in part due to my education within feminist, anti-racist politics, which had taught me to be able to critically analyze power relations, privilege and oppression. I had already come to see myself as a white-skinned, upper-middle-class person living in the West and had begun to recognize the privilege that I held. As I learned more about the history of Palestine, my political and educational background provided me with the framework necessary to see the privilege that Israelis and all Jewish people have in relation to Palestinians. It is also significant that I had long seen the organized Jewish community as extremely oppressive. As someone who had experienced violence and oppression within my own Jewish community, it was not very difficult for me to accept that Jews could be oppressors and by extension, that the so-called 'Jewish state' could itself be oppressive and violent.

² In "Mapping Jewish Dissent: Jewish Anti-Occupation Activism in Toronto", Outlook, May 2004, Sheryl Nestel and Mary Jo Aiken discuss the complex issues that face Jewish anti-Zionists, including rejection from family, the mainstream Jewish community and for some, the positive feelings of community they get amongst other anti-Zionist Jews.

³ See for instance: Halper, Jeff *An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel*, Pluto Press, 2008 and Marqusee, Mike *If I Am Not For Myself: Journey of an Anti-Zionist Jew*, Verso, 2008 and

I have chosen to start my thesis with this brief history of my own rejection of Zionism because it informs my research and lays the foundation for my primary research questions. In my own narrative of becoming an anti-Zionist Jew, I talked about the significance of the Holocaust in forming my first anti-oppressive ideas. Even after I rejected Zionism, the Holocaust still informed my anti-racist politics. I strongly believed in the idea of extending ‘Never Again’ beyond a fight against anti-Semitism, to a fight against all forms of oppression, including Zionism. I started my Master’s degree hoping to understand why others did not feel the same way. My initial research question was why has the Jewish history of oppression not led more Jewish people to take up anti-oppressive politics, particularly around Palestinian human rights? Throughout the course of my degree, I began to realize that my research question revolved around the assumption that a history of oppression should logically lead people to oppose the oppression of others and to interrogate their own privilege. Not only is this assumption naïve, it also has moralistic undertones about the duties of the oppressed to fight for the rights of others.

Not wanting to see myself as naïve or moralistic, I began to explore the underpinnings of my assumption that victimhood should lead to anti-oppressive politics. I now understand that this assumption may very well have its roots in my Zionist upbringing. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I was taught that Jewish people were history’s greatest victims and that we therefore have a unique understanding of suffering. I may have then extrapolated that it was my duty as a Jewish person to use this understanding of suffering as motivation for fighting for the rights of others. In doing so, I never questioned the underlying assumption that as a Jew, I had an intimate, special

knowledge of oppression. This is an assumption that ignores the privilege enjoyed by myself and other Jews of European descent. By focusing only on victimization as a potential motivation for identity formation, my original research questions inadvertently reified Jewish victimization, ignored white-Jewish privilege and, I believe, offered little hope of understanding how Jewish identities – both Zionist and anti-Zionist – are formed.

Instead of taking Jewish victimhood as a fact, I have made it the very subject I want to interrogate. I start from the premise that Jewish people of European descent are a group that today holds power and privilege. In Israel, this dominant group oppresses Palestinians and non-white Jews. Worldwide, the organized Jewish community works tirelessly to support the racist Israeli state and in doing so, aligns itself with oppressive forces in their own countries. It has become abundantly clear that the historical victimization of Jewish people has not led the mainstream Jewish community to support anti-oppressive or anti-racist politics. This phenomenon cannot be blamed on a lack of knowledge about this history of oppression because the last thirty years have seen a proliferation of well-funded memorial projects, feature films and an enormous literature, both popular and academic, dedicated to the subject of anti-Semitism in general, and the Holocaust specifically⁴. My research is therefore aimed at answering the question of how can we explain the existence of a tremendous educational apparatus dedicated to teaching about the history of Jewish suffering within a mainstream Jewish community that is dominated by racist and Zionist ideologies? Rather than asking the morally loaded question of why most Jewish people seem not to have learned from their history, I instead want to ask what are they learning from the history they are being taught? In other words,

⁴ As Norman Finkelstein pointed out years ago, the Holocaust has become an industry all its own: Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust industry : reflections on the exploitation of Jewish suffering*, 2nd pbk. ed. ed. (New York: Verso, 2003).

what are the effects of education projects that focus on Jewish victimhood? Given the privilege – and I would call this white privilege – now enjoyed by Jews of European descent, how and why has Jewish identity continued to revolve around victimhood? Who benefits from the construction of a victimized Jewish identity?

I have chosen to focus my thesis on issues of Jewish identity, whiteness and victimhood. I will present evidence showing that anti-Semitism has massively declined and today, Jewish people of European descent, also known as Ashkenazi Jews, enjoy white privilege⁵ and are among the most socio-economically advantaged groups in the West. Despite this privilege, the organized Jewish community makes claims about Jewish victimhood that are widely accepted both within that community and within popular discourse in the West. I will propose that, in North America, these claims to victimhood are no longer based in a reality of oppression⁶, but continue to be propagated because a victimized Jewish identity can produce certain effects that are extremely beneficial to the organized Jewish community and the Israeli nation-state. It is this study of the instrumentalization of Jewish victimhood where I seek to answer the questions of how and why Jewish identity with victimhood persists despite the tremendous decline in anti-Semitism.

The paper is divided into three main chapters. I will begin by substantiating my claim that Jews of European descent now enjoy white privilege. I will do so by reviewing

⁵ This is not to say that all white-skinned Jewish people enjoy the same privilege as white Christians. Jewish identity is always hidden. Orthodox Jews' religious beliefs proscribe dress that makes them quite visibly Jewish and visibly different from secular Jews and white Christians. This visibility can lead to stigma and discrimination.

⁶ I have chosen to focus on North America partly because it is my context, but also because it can be argued that anti-Semitism is more systemic in Europe, particularly in France where there are more frequent violent attacks against Jewish people and institutions. That said, the level of discrimination faced by Jews in Europe is far less than the racism experienced by other minorities including Arabs, Muslims and Roma people.

and synthesizing the growing literature on Jews and whiteness. Having shown that Ashkenazi Jews are now privileged white people, I will then work to expose some of the tactics that are used to perpetuate the idea that Jews are inherently and forever victimized. There are a wide range of tactics used to (re)produce the ‘Jew as victim’, but I am going to focus on hegemonic Holocaust education because I believe that the Holocaust is central to these claims of victimhood. My sites of study will be two related Holocaust educational programs – the March of Remembrance and Hope (MRH), and the March of the Living (MOL). Both projects take youth from around the world on a week-long tour of Holocaust memorial sites in Poland. The MOL is designed for Jewish students, while the MRH targets non-Jewish students. The MOL has an additional week of touring in Israel, directly following the tours in Europe; MRH participants do not go to Israel. Since the MRH is a Holocaust educational program that specifically targets non-Jews for Holocaust education, my chapter on the MRH will allow me to examine the effects of hegemonic Holocaust education where Jews perform whiteness by presenting themselves to others as victims. The MOL is a program designed for Jews, so it will allow me to study the effects of presenting Jews as victims when such presentations are made within the organized Jewish community itself – when Jews perform whiteness through seeing themselves as victims.

My study involves in-depth research into the promotional and educational materials used on both the MRH and the MOL. This data was publicly available on the websites of both projects. Due to the limitations of a part-time Master’s degree, I was unable to conduct interviews or participant observations on either trip. Should I pursue further studies, I would certainly want to observe the trips and speak to participants about

their views of their experiences. Instead of speaking with participants, I have relied on many of the testimonials posted on the trips' websites. I acknowledge the limitations of this approach because organizers control the website and thus only certain testimonials are available. I still consider this a reliable source of data because my goal is to understand the intended effects of the trips; analyzing the testimonials that organizers consider to be success stories helps expose what they see as a desired outcome.

Jewish anti-Zionism

It is important for me to note that I am, of course, not the first anti-Zionist Jew to take up these issues. There is a long history of Jewish scholars and activists resisting and opposing Zionism. In recent years, two anthologies of such work have been published – *Wrestling with Zion: progressive Jewish-American responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*, edited by Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon and *Prophets Outcast: a century of dissident Jewish writing about Zionism and Israel* edited by Adam Shatz. These anthologies feature articles written by a wide range of prominent Jewish intellectuals including Hannah Arendt, Albert Einstein and Judith Butler, alongside scholars such as Marc Ellis, Sara Roy and Ella Shohat whose academic work focuses on anti-Zionism, Israel and Palestine. Jewish and Israeli historians and political scientists, including Ilan Pappé, Norman Finkelstein, Uri Davis and Joel Kovel have written extensively on the history of Zionism and Israeli Apartheid. There is also a growing body of autobiographical work by Jewish anti-Zionists, including Jeff Halper's *An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel* and Mike Marqusee's *If I Am Not For Myself: Journey of an Anti-Zionist Jew*. In my thesis, I will build on the work of these and other anti-Zionist Jewish scholars. I hope to contribute to this growing body of

literature by integrating critical anti-racist theory into Jewish anti-Zionism. My work is based in the understanding that Zionism – the belief that Jewish people have a right to a nation-state built on top of the ruins of Palestine – is a racist, imperialist ideology that can only effectively be challenged through anti-racist, anti-imperialist theory and activism.

Israeli Apartheid

Throughout my thesis I will be using the term Apartheid in reference to Israeli state policies and practices. I understand that this term remains controversial so I therefore want to briefly explain my decision to characterize Israel as an Apartheid State. Apartheid is a term that means ‘separation’ in Afrikaans and is commonly associated with racial discrimination South Africa. Apartheid is a crime with a definition under international law:

the term "the crime of apartheid", which shall include *similar policies and practices* [emphasis added] of racial segregation and discrimination as practised in southern Africa, shall apply to the following inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.⁷

Many activists, legal experts and scholars have argued that Israel’s policies of discrimination against Palestinians fit this definition of the crime of Apartheid. In June 2009, the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC) released a study indicating that Israel is practicing both colonialism and apartheid in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.⁸ This analysis has growing support from many who were involved in the fight to end Apartheid in South Africa. South African Bishop Desmond Tutu has

⁷ “International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of *Apartheid*” <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/11.htm>

⁸ The full report is available at http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Media_Release-378.phtml

characterized Israel as an apartheid state⁹, as have former ANC minister Ronnie Kasrils¹⁰ and John Dugard, a law professor and UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.¹¹ Israeli scholars and activists, including Ilan Pappé and Uri Davis have called Israel an Apartheid state.¹² Former American President Jimmy Carter has characterized Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories as Apartheid.¹³ The parallels between Israel and South Africa have prompted Palestinian activists and their allies to adopt many of the tactics used to resist apartheid in South Africa. One such tactic is the call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israeli Apartheid that was issued in 2005, by over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations. The BDS movement uses the apartheid paradigm to draw international attention to the crimes of the Israeli State.¹⁴

Although a comprehensive analysis of Israel as an apartheid state is beyond the scope of my research, I want to bring in a few examples of ‘separation’ in Israel to explain my use of this term in my thesis. Perhaps the most blatant apartheid policies relate to citizenship. Israel considers itself to be a Jewish state – citizenship rights are therefore tied to ethnic and religious identity. According to the Israeli ‘Law of Return’, all Jewish people can become Israeli nationals simply by virtue of their ethnicity. At the same time, Palestinian refugees are denied the right to return to their homeland – a right

⁹ Tutu made many statements, as early as 2002, about Israel publicly that have been widely reported. See for example an article published by Tutu in *The Nation* “Against Israeli Apartheid” <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20020715/tutu>

¹⁰ Kasrils is very vocal in his opposition to Israeli Apartheid. See for instance his speech at Israeli Apartheid Week in 2009 <http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/347>

¹¹ Dugard has made comparisons between South Africa and Palestine. See for instance his comments after the war on Gaza “Occupied Gaza like apartheid South Africa, says UN report” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/feb/23/israelandthepalestinians.unitednations>

¹² Pappé is quite outspoken about Israeli Apartheid see for instance “Citizenship law Makes Israel an Apartheid state” <http://ilanpappe.com/?p=75>. Davis wrote a book entitled *Apartheid Israel*.

¹³ In 2006, Cater wrote a best-selling book entitled *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*.

¹⁴ For more information about the BDS movement and the use of the Apartheid paradigm see: <http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/52>

which is enshrined in international law. Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza live under direct military occupation without citizenship and with few basic legal rights. Until 1967, Palestinians living in Israel were denied citizenship and lived under military law.¹⁵ Although Palestinians living in Israel can hold Israeli citizenship, they belong to a separate, lesser category of person under the law. Palestinians who want to run for government office must pledge their loyalty to Israel as a Jewish only state, even though such a state excludes non-Jews by definition. In late 2008, the Israeli Knesset voted to ban Arab parties from running in the federal elections. This decision was later overturned by the Supreme Court, but that it was passed by legislators and had public support is quite telling.¹⁶

Israel's apartheid policies extend beyond discriminatory laws and different categories of citizenship. In 1948, over 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed in order to ensure a Jewish majority on historic Palestine¹⁷. This ethnic cleansing continues through policies designed to make life unbearable for Palestinians. One manifestation of these policies is the multi-billion dollar Apartheid Wall being built by the Israelis in the West Bank. The Wall was declared illegal by the International Court of Justice in 2004, but construction continues. The Wall cuts off Palestinians from their land, water resources and divides the West Bank into incongruous blocks which make travel difficult and at times impossible.¹⁸ Perhaps the most recent blatant examples of Israeli aggression can be seen in the Gaza Strip which is completely sealed off and has been under siege

¹⁵ Pappé, Ilan "Citizenship law Makes Israel an Apartheid state" <http://ilanpappe.com/?p=75>.

¹⁶ "Israel bans Arab parties from running in upcoming elections"
<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1054867.html>

¹⁷ For a comprehensive history of the ethnic cleansing see Khalidi, Walid *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992 and Pappé, Ilan. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2007.

¹⁸ For more information about the Wall visit <http://www.stopthewall.org/>

since 2006. The siege continues even after Israel's brutal military assault on Gaza that began in December 2008. Over 1400 Palestinian people were killed in that assault.¹⁹

In summation, I want to emphasize that under the legal definition of the crime of apartheid, the crimes of an apartheid state need to be similar, but not identical to the crimes of the South African regime. Although there are differences between the two contexts, there are enough similarities to warrant applying the term apartheid to Israel. Given the systemic discrimination faced by Palestinian citizens of Israel, the brutal military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank and the refusal of Israel to allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, there are legitimate grounds to accuse Israel of being an apartheid State. I have therefore chosen to use this term throughout my thesis when referring to Israeli state policies and violence.

¹⁹ For a detailed account of the war on Gaza, see for instance "Operation Cast Lead and the Distortion of International Law A Legal Analysis of Israel's Claim to Self-Defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter" published by Al-Haq
<http://www.alhaq.org/pdfs/OperationCastLeadandtheDistortionofInternationalLaw.pdf>

Chapter 1 – Ashkenazi Jews and Whiteness

Given that my thesis is based on the assertion that in the West today, Jews of European descent enjoy white privilege, it is important that I begin by substantiating this claim. This chapter is therefore a review of the literature on whiteness and Ashkenazi Jews. While there is a wealth of literature on historical and contemporary anti-Semitism and the racialization of Jews, my interest here is to synthesize the work of those who contend that Jews of European descent are now white and who are studying how and why Jews came into this privilege. In my final two chapters, I will discuss anti-Semitism and contemporary Ashkenazi Jewish claims to victimhood.

Jews, Race and Class

Perhaps the most famous book on the question of Jews and whiteness is Karen Brodtkin's *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says About Race in America*. Brodtkin works from a Marxist perspective to explore the relationship between race and class, specifically the relationship between Jewish inclusion within whiteness and Jewish integration into the American middle class.¹ Like most scholars working on the question of Jews and whiteness, Brodtkin identifies the post-WWII era as a key moment in the whitening of Jews. Brodtkin's central argument is that after WWII, through a series of state sponsored programs, including the GI Bill of Rights, Jews and other European ethnics, became integrated into the white middle-class. Brodtkin describes the GI Bill as "the biggest and best affirmative action program in the history of our nation, and it was

¹ She also devotes several chapters to Jews, race and gender, focusing on gender and Jewish identity in the early twentieth century when Jews were 'not quite white'. Unfortunately, this gendered analysis does not extend into the post WWII period when Jews became white folks, and therefore I have not chosen to focus on the gendered aspects of her work, because, while she does provide useful insights into gender and the racialization of Jews, she does not discuss gender and the whitening of Jews.

for Euromales”². She explains that after WWII, white veterans were given extensive government assistance in the form of business, home and educational loans. Brodtkin argues that the GI Bill and other New Deal programs were central to the establishment of a white middle class in the US because they gave whites more economic mobility by allowing them greater to access higher education, and because these programs were also an important factor in suburbanization.³

By calling the GI Bill and other New Deal programs affirmative action for Euromales, Brodtkin draws attention to the ways in which the GI Bill disproportionately benefitted white men, thereby leading to further discrimination against women and African Americans. Brodtkin argues that the exclusions which resulted from the GI Bill and other New Deal programs, limited African American access to education, employment, home ownership, and therefore the middle class. As her primary example of racism in the New Deal, she describes the role of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in promoting segregation in housing. The FHA encouraged developers to only sell to white people. The FHA also engaged in the practice of ‘redlining’ racialized neighbourhoods, that is, designating them as bad locations for investments wherein the FHA refused to guarantee loans, thus drastically reducing the chances for people of colour to secure loans to buy or repair their homes. This effectively shut people of colour out of home ownership and further impoverished their neighbourhoods. The

² Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews became white folks : and what that says about race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998) 27.

³ *ibid.* 38-51

establishment of a predominantly white middle class, further solidified the black/white racial boundaries in the United States.⁴

The significance of the GI Bill and the New Deal for discussions of Jews and whiteness is that Jews did not experience discrimination under these programs, but actually benefitted from them along with other Europeans. Brodtkin credits these programs with integrating Jews into the middle class, and whiteness by extension. Although she does not go as far as explicitly stating that Jews became white at the expense of African-Americans who were shut out of the New Deal, her work is significant because it exposes the role of state sponsored programs in facilitating the socio-economic success of Jews. *How Jews Became White Folks* effectively debunks the myth that American Jews succeeded simply because of hard work and ‘pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps’.

Early in the book, Brodtkin asks and answers the following question:

Did Jews and other Euro-ethnics become white because they became middle-class? That is, did money whiten? Or did being incorporated into an expanded version of whiteness open up the economic doors to middle-class status? Clearly both tendencies were at work.⁵

Brodtkin presents a convincing argument about the ways in which money whitens, that is, how access to the middle class placed Jews firmly on the white side of the black/white divide in the United States. She also shows how an expanded version of whiteness allowed Jews to benefit from the New Deal, rather than being excluded from it and argues effectively that whiteness gave Jews access to the middle class. What is missing from her argument is an explanation of how and why whiteness expanded in this way. In

⁴ Although Brodtkin does not say so explicitly, her analysis seems to only apply to the American North, where practices of segregation were less overt than in the American South.

⁵ *ibid.* 38

her chapter “Race Making” she presents a rather extensive history of Jewish, and other ethnic European, exclusion from education and certain professions in the United States and argues that this led to their racialization. Brodtkin argues that racism forced European immigrants into bad or dirty jobs, and goes on to assert that their association with these lower class jobs further entrenched their racialization by naturalizing their inferiority.⁶ The corollary of this argument is that as Jews and other European ethnics gained access to better work and the middle class, their racialization was diminished because they were no longer associated with these low status jobs. Yet there is no explanation of why Jews and European ethnics were now allowed to access these jobs and education when they had been racialized and excluded for so long.

This limitation of Brodtkin’s work is largely the result of her theoretical framework. She does not depart from a Marxist or class-based analysis of race and in doing so she does not examine other causes of racism and racialization. Within this framework race creates class and vice versa, but the analysis ends there. For Brodtkin “initially invented as a brutal but profitable regime of slave labor, race became the way America organized labor and the explanation it used to justify it as natural.”⁷ While this may be accurate, it is an incomplete analysis of race and racism.

Jews, Race and National Subjectivity

The work of Matthew Frye Jacobson provides an important complement to Brodtkin’s book. He is critical of work that only focuses on class and economics; his work focuses

⁶ *ibid.* 53-68

⁷ *ibid.* 75

on whiteness as it relates to national subjectivity and national identity.⁸ In *Whiteness of a Different Colour: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Jacobson performs a genealogy of whiteness and racism in America and in *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* he does similar work on the rise of ethnicity in the United States. His work situates American racism within discourses of American nationalism; he examines how race shifts alongside these nationalist discourses. In other words, he uncovers how race, whiteness and ethnicity produce, and are produced by, nationalist discourses. As his point of entry into whiteness and race in the United States, he chooses to trace the shifts in the racialization of Jewish, and other European ethnics such as Irish and Italian immigrants in the United States. Jacobson highlights key moments in American history when the status of Euro-ethnics changed and historicizes these changes to demonstrate the ways in which the racialization of these groups shifted in the interests of the American nation-state. Jacobson relies on an impressive range of historical research and provides complex arguments about why and how whiteness shifted throughout American history. Although his work is not entirely focused on Jews – he writes about Jews among other European immigrants – I consider Jacobson’s work exemplary and therefore want to devote a significant portion of this chapter to summarizing his arguments about some of the key moments in the history of American whiteness.

Jacobson begins *Whiteness of a Different Colour* by arguing that racism was foundational to American democracy, not anti-thetical to it. The book begins with an analysis of race in the late 18th century through to the early 19th century. Jacobson

⁸ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a different color: European immigrants and the alchemy of race*, ed. American Council of Learned Societies., 1st Harvard University Press pbk. ed. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) 21.

explains that after the American Revolution citizenship and rights were limited to those who were considered ‘fit for self-government’. This discourse of fitness for self-government, which was so central to American democracy, was a highly gendered and racialized concept in that it excluded women and non-whites from full citizenship because only ‘free white men’ were considered fit for self-government⁹. Whiteness and citizenship became inherently linked in the United States through the division between free white men who could be entrusted with the full rights of citizenship and Others who were not fit for self-government. This discourse was instrumental in simultaneously promoting democracy for whites, while justifying slavery and denying black people’s rights and citizenship. Early American democracy relied heavily on the naturalization and maintenance of a strict black/white division, which largely ignored differences among whites. Jacobson argues that in spite of the exclusivity that results from this discourse of self-government, the category of ‘free white men’ actually proved very inclusive for early European immigrants to America. The strict black/white division in the late 18th century allowed even Jews and the Irish to be eligible for American citizenship. Jacobson writes:

although popular prejudices did exist against *certain* groups of ‘white persons’ – Jews and Catholics in many areas, for instance – still the alchemy of slaveholding and the frontier was powerful enough that in general, Europeans...became simply ‘white persons’ in matters of race and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship¹⁰.

In other words, Jews and Catholics became white because they were whiter than black people and native Americans. This idea that Jews and other Europeans become white in contexts where they were whiter than another more racialized group is a recurring theme in the literature on Jews and whiteness.

⁹ *ibid.* 29

¹⁰ *ibid.* 31

According to Jacobson, this inclusive whiteness shifted in the early 19th century when there was a large influx of European immigrants. With industrialization, and ever increasing immigration, concerns were raised about the fitness for self-government of these immigrants. The massive European immigration became a political crisis in the United States, which gave rise to various scientific discourses about white races. In his chapter “Anglo-Saxons and Others”, Jacobson provides extensive historical documentation of the increasing concern in the United States about the inferiority of various white races, which culminated in the eugenics movement. Although they did not experience racist discrimination of the same magnitude as black people, Jews and other European immigrants did become lesser whites or even non-white when their numbers swelled and they became a threat to the nation-state in the 19th century¹¹.

Jacobson then traces the return of Jews and other European immigrants to whiteness in the early 20th century. Jacobson links a decline in panic about European immigrants with the success of anti-immigrant policies that achieved a sharp decrease in European immigration. Put simply, decreased immigration seemed to have resolved much of the political crisis around European immigration¹². Perhaps more significant though, was the changing circumstances of black people in the United States at this time. In the South, Jim Crow sharpened the black/white divide, and made all Europeans whiter in relation to black people. In the North there was an increase in migration of black people from the South to the North, which in Jacobson’s words “produced an entirely new racial alchemy in those sections,”¹³ meaning that the racial panic no longer focused on European immigrants, but on the growing black population. Finally, protests against

¹¹ *ibid.* 39-90

¹² *ibid.* 95

¹³ *ibid.* 95

segregation in the military, along with increased public debate about Jim Crow made the black/white divide the primary, perhaps the only, race issue once again¹⁴. In this era, being whiter than black people allowed European immigrants, including Jews, to be considered part of the Caucasian race, a term that came into fashion around that same time.

The post-WWII era saw a further integration of Jews and other European immigrants into whiteness. Jacobson devotes an entire chapter to Jews and whiteness, where he cites several key factors for the whitening of Jews after WWII. Drawing on Brodtkin, he makes similar arguments about the GI Bill and the creation of a white middle class¹⁵. He also stresses the importance of changes in immigration patterns starting in the 1960s. Following decolonization there was an influx of non-white immigrants to the United States that once again changed the alchemy of race; this focused the racial panic away from European immigrants towards non-white immigrants¹⁶.

Whiteness of a Different Colour ends with an analysis of the post-WWII era, which is where Jacobson begins with *Roots Too*. In this book he does a genealogy of white ethnicity in the United States. Again, citing extensive historic evidence, Jacobson highlights key events and political crises that led to ethnicity being taken up as a valid category for study and celebration in the United States. His central thesis is that in the post-Civil Rights era, ethnicity works to obscure white privilege and reinforce racism. He also shows how discourses of white ethnicity are instrumental in promoting the interests of the American nation-state.

¹⁴ *ibid.* 95

¹⁵ *ibid.* 188

¹⁶ *ibid.* 117

Jacobson draws links between the civil rights movement and the rise of what he calls White Ethnic Revival. He argues that the civil rights movement made whites aware of, and uncomfortable with their privilege; white ethnic revival rose in response to this consciousness and discomfort¹⁷. Ethnicity allowed white people to distance themselves from this privilege by focusing on the oppression experienced by their ancestors. Ethnic whites could then claim that they are not part of American racism because it was not their ancestors that colonized Native Americans or enslaved African Americans. Jacobson is very critical of such moves, which he argues

fossilizes racial injustice in dim national antiquity, and so glosses over more recent discriminatory practices in housing, hiring and unionization, for instance, which *did* benefit these `newcomers`, fresh off the boat though they were¹⁸.

Jacobson demonstrates the utility of this ethnic revival for obscuring contemporary white privilege and reframing racism as an issue of distant the past. This all works to alleviate the guilt and discomfort that whites experience in the post-Civil Rights era, without forcing them to address racism or white privilege.

Jacobson goes on to argue that ethnicity became increasingly important for identity and community organizing. He argues that white ethnicity was an anti-modern response and that claims of ethnicity were claims to authenticity and identity in the face of fears of homogeneity and assimilation¹⁹. He also argues that rising nationalism and conflicts in the so-called 'Old-World', led to an increase in ethnic organizing among

¹⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots too : white ethnic revival in post-civil rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) 20.

¹⁸ *ibid.* 22

¹⁹ *ibid.* 23-25

immigrant communities in the United States and resulted in the founding of several ethnically based organizations throughout the country²⁰.

Ethnicity not only functioned on an individual and community level, it also became a national project, in which the American nation-state was very heavily invested. Jacobson argues that after Nazism, the category of race itself became associated with fascism and studying or discussing race was seen as inconsistent with American ideals. This, along with changes to American nationalist discourses during the Cold War, led to the advent of ethnicity as a scientific category for study and as a national project²¹. Jacobson brings in numerous examples of state sponsorship of events and programs celebrating and glorifying white ethnicity. During the Cold War, America's national story was transformed into one of immigrants overcoming hardship to succeed in the United States. For Jacobson, the rise of Ellis Island from the once forgotten historical point of entry for European immigrants to the prominence of a national monument, exemplifies the state's investment in celebrating white ethnicity and the myth of the American dream.²² Redefining America as the land of immigrants has tremendous utility for the nation-state in that it obscures the violence of the nation's founding, namely colonialism and slavery. It also perpetuates myths of equality of opportunity which were used to rhetorically distinguish America – a land of freedom and opportunity – from its enemies in the Cold War²³. Again, Jacobson convincingly argues that whiteness, race and in this case, ethnicity, produce and are produced by larger nationalist discourses and therefore shift to reinforce these national narratives. In other words, the category of whiteness, and

²⁰ *ibid.* 27-20

²¹ *ibid.* 33

²² *ibid.* 64

²³ *ibid.* 67

who is included or excluded from it, changes over time in direct response to the interests of the nation-state and the shifting politics of race and racialization.

Jews, Whiteness and Identity

Jacobson's work is focused on how the racialization of Jews shifted in relation to national identity and the needs of the nation-state; he therefore does not really discuss how Jews participated in producing their own racialized identity or how they reacted to their shifting racialization. In *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity*, Eric Goldstein frames his book not "as a study of how Jews *became* white, but as one that explores how Jews *negotiated* their place in a complex racial world."²⁴ Like Jacobson, he traces the racialization of Jews through American history, coming to many of the same conclusions about the reasons Jews were seen as white or not white depending on the politics of a given historical period. He also argues that Jews were often not the primary targets of racism in the United States because the racial discourses centered on black people and Native Americans²⁵. He explains that Jews in the Southern United States experienced less anti-Semitism than Jews in the North, in part because they were a smaller population, but also because "[t]he clear division between slaves and free white in the antebellum South gave Jews an automatic level of social acceptance that was unparalleled in any other Western society of the period."²⁶ Again, here we see the argument that racism often benefits Jews, whose white skin can allow them to fall on the white side of the black/white division. What Goldstein adds to this conversation, is how Jews were involved in this process of racialization.

²⁴ Eric L. Goldstein, *The price of whiteness : Jews, race, and American identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 5.

²⁵ *ibid.* 16

²⁶ *ibid.* 53

Goldstein traces Jewish self-identification throughout American history to argue that Jewish self-identification has also changed historically. He starts his analysis in the colonial period, when Jews identified themselves as a ‘nation’ because this was common terminology for immigrant communities at the time.²⁷ In the late 19th century, Jews became concerned that identifying as a nation was dangerous as it would set them apart within the American nation-state. They therefore began to see themselves as a race. Doing so allowed them to maintain a group identity in a way that did not disturb the social order. At that time, it was accepted that there were many races within the white race, but that these races were still distinct from and superior to African Americans.²⁸

After WWII, Jews began to focus on their status as an ethnic minority, rather than a race. Goldstein presents several different explanations for this shift. First, he argues that this was a response to Jews realizing that they had become white people. The integration into whiteness had required Jews to downplay their differences, but in the mid-1960s, Jews were so integrated that they started to have concerns about the loss of their distinctiveness. He explains that at this point Jews began to claim or reclaim a group-based identity. Goldstein argues that this move was influenced by what he calls ‘identity-based movements’, such as the civil rights and feminist movements, which were gaining legitimacy at that time. The desire for a group identity was a form of resistance against integration into white, middle-class society, but ethnicity also served other important functions for the Jewish community. Goldstein argues that Jews were largely uncomfortable with having become white, and struggled with their newly acquired status as members of the majority. He writes “seeing themselves as part of an oppressive white

²⁷ *ibid.* 16

²⁸ *ibid.* 17

majority was like seeing themselves as goyim [non-Jewish people], a self image that was exceedingly difficult for Jews with memories of the prewar years to accept.”²⁹ Ethnicity and its focus on the history of anti-Semitism allows Jews to deal with the inner conflict that results from being white, because it sets them outside of mainstream whiteness. By focusing on their ethnicity, Jews could enjoy the privilege of whiteness, while still feeling like an oppressed minority that is not complicit in American racism.³⁰ This parallels Jacobson’s arguments about the ways in which ethnicity can work to obscure racism in the United States by focusing on historical victimization, rather than contemporary privilege and complicity.

While Goldstein successfully argues that Jews were active in the production of their racial, and later ethnic, identity and that racialization is not simply a process that happened to Jews, his work falls short in terms of his analysis of Jewish racism. Despite this, Goldstein does highlight some instances of Jewish racism. He mentions Jewish involvement in slavery³¹ and his epilogue includes a discussion of the tensions between African Americans and Jews. However, the majority of Goldstein’s work is less concerned with criticizing Jewish racism and is more interested in Jewish emotional or ethical struggles about their place of privilege in the American racial hierarchy. Jewish racism is therefore framed as a source of emotional conflict for Jews, rather than a serious problem that needs to be addressed in the community. For example, when talking about Jews, white supremacy and slavery Goldstein writes “the strong support some Jews expressed for white supremacy and the slavery system...betrayed a sense of insecurity

²⁹ *ibid.* 213

³⁰ *ibid.* 213-215

³¹ *ibid.* 17

about their whiteness.”³² His discussion of Jewish racism becomes centred on their insecurities and fears, and therefore becomes less about their power and more about their lack of power as marginalized whites; Jewish racism is insecurity, not white supremacy. In his discussion of conflict between African Americans and Jews, he again tends to use the language of emotions, rather than power. While critiquing Jewish acceptance and celebration of their integration into whiteness, Goldstein writes:

ironically because Jews wanted to see themselves as having risen from a disadvantaged “outsider” background and were uncomfortable with the notion that they had been aided by white privilege, they were insensitive to ways in which African Americans had been denied many of the integrationist opportunities Jews had been afforded.³³

Using terms like ‘uncomfortable’ and ‘insensitive’ removes power, racism and white supremacy from this analysis of Jewish attitudes toward African Americans. This reflects a weakness in Goldstein’s analysis of racism in general. Throughout the book, he provides psychoanalytic explanations for racism and anti-Semitism. Goldstein locates the roots of American anti-Semitism and racism within an American psychological crisis around modernity. It is therefore not surprising that he also frames Jewish racism in terms of emotions.³⁴ While Goldstein may not necessarily be trying to excuse or even downplay Jewish racism, his theoretical framework relies too much on psychoanalytic explanations that may have validity, but that ignore the effects of power in racism and white supremacy.

Jewish-Black Relations

Some of the most interesting discussions of Jews and whiteness are found in studies on the relations between black people and Jews. While work on the issue of

³² *ibid.* 18

³³ *ibid.* 215

³⁴ *ibid.* 35-50

black-Jewish relations does not necessarily have to address questions of Jews and whiteness, it is difficult to avoid questions about the racialization of Jews when addressing their relationship with America's predominant racialized group. Much of the literature on Jewish-black relations focuses on their coalition work during the civil rights movement and the subsequent 'falling out' between the two communities. What usually motivates these studies is the assumption that if both groups are oppressed minorities, it would only be natural for them to be allied in the fight against discrimination. The conflict between Jews and black people therefore raises questions about why these two groups find themselves at odds, when their alliance should be so natural. A significant body of work has arisen out of attempts to answer these questions. Studies of black-Jewish relations can be used as an entry point into discussions on a multitude of topics including racism, anti-Semitism, coalition work and the struggles of working across difference. I cannot fully explore this diverse literature, but I do want to draw on some texts that provide insights that pertain to studies of Jews and whiteness. I will be focusing on Cheryl Greenberg's work because she uses a critical race framework and is one of the most prolific scholars working on this issue.³⁵ I will also bring in Eric Sundquist's *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* because he addresses questions of Jews and whiteness directly.

One of the main reasons that studies of black-Jewish relations are so relevant to my study of Jews and whiteness is that changes in the relationship between black and Jewish communities are closely linked to changes in Jews' class standing and their

³⁵ Greenberg's work appears in several anthologies on black-Jewish relations including *Struggles in the Promised Land* Salzman and West (ed), *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century*, Franklin et al (ed) and *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism* Biale et al (ed) and she has also written a book on the subject, *Troubling the Waters*.

membership in whiteness. In *Strangers in the Land*, Sindquist traces the history of Jewish-black relations. He explains that in the South, particularly after the Civil War, Jews were economically linked to black communities because Jews, unlike many whites, were willing to do business within black communities.³⁶ In the North, Jews and black people had frequent contact early in the twentieth century when Jewish immigrants and black people often found themselves living together in impoverished neighbourhoods in urban centres.³⁷ In both the North and the South, Jews and black people were brought together because of the marginalization of the two communities. Changes in the racialization of Jews, combined with sustained racism against black communities, made this shared marginalization a temporary situation. In the North, for example, as Jews became white and middle-class, they left impoverished neighbourhoods and moved to the suburbs, although many kept their businesses and property in black neighbourhoods. Jews were no longer neighbours, but instead were the employers and landlords in black communities. According to Greenberg in “Negotiating Coalition: Black and Jewish Civil Rights Agencies in the Twentieth Century”, many Jews took on social service work in black communities, which brought the communities into contact, but their relationship was hierarchical with Jews being the social workers and teachers in black communities.³⁸ Thus, even though Jews did have more contact with black communities than other white groups, Jewish social and economic mobility resulted in a power imbalance that made the relationship between the two groups fraught with tension and conflict. Within this class-

³⁶ Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the land : Blacks, Jews, post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005) 43-44.

³⁷ *ibid.* 42

³⁸ Greenberg, Cheryl “Negotiating Coalition: Black and Jewish Civil Rights Agencies in the Twentieth Century” in *Struggles in the promised land : toward a history of Black-Jewish relations in the United States*, ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 156

based analysis, the conflict between Jews and black people is tied to the economic exploitation of black communities by certain Jews and the disproportionate success of Jews compared to black people. This links up with Brodtkin's analysis of how Jews became white as they moved into the middle class, and shows the consequences of this shift in racialization on their relationship with black communities.

Much of the literature on Jews and whiteness discusses how Jews were perceived by the dominant white culture. The literature on black-Jewish relations is critical to my study of Jews and whiteness because it provides insight into the ways Jews are perceived and racialized by non-whites. In discussing how Jews are perceived by black people, Greenberg and Sundquist both argue that there is anger towards Jews in many black communities, which can at times be expressed in anti-Semitic forms. They argue that one of the primary causes of black anti-Semitism is anger at the exploitation of black communities by some Jewish people. Greenberg argues that because blacks had more contact with Jews than with other whites, and because this contact was hierarchical and often exploitative, Jews became emblematic of white racism for many blacks and the focus of much of their anger. In *Troubling the Waters*, Greenberg writes: "because so high a proportion of whites working in black areas were Jewish, black resentment of the pettiness of social workers, paternalism of teachers and greed of landlords and their agents landed on Jews."³⁹ For many black communities, Jews were therefore not only white, but they were the whites responsible for much of the discrimination they experienced on a daily basis. Greenberg argues that "the ambiguity of Jews' whiteness also plays out in reverse. If Jews were not entirely white, they nonetheless often 'stood

³⁹ Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the waters : Black-Jewish relations in the American century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) 47.

in' for whites in black people's minds and absorbed the full force of their racial resentment."⁴⁰ Some have argued that many in the black community hold Jews more accountable than other whites because the history of Jewish suffering should have made them more understanding towards black experiences of racism. Both Sundquist and Greenberg reference James Baldwin's famous argument that many in the black community are angry at Jews "not because he [sic] acts differently from other white men [sic], but because he [sic] doesn't" and that the history of the persecution of the Jews does not decrease their anger, but intensifies it.⁴¹ For Baldwin, Jews are not only white, but they are whites whose racism is even more offensive and reprehensible because of their own history of persecution.

To compound the conflict between the two communities, most Jews, are uncomfortable with, if not offended by, being perceived as white oppressors and racists. In "Pluralism and Its Discontents: The Case of Blacks and Jews", Greenberg addresses Jewish discomfort and resistance to being perceived as oppressive whites. She argues that Jews see themselves as an oppressed minority because they compare themselves to the dominant community. However, when other minorities compare themselves to Jews, they are perceived as privileged in comparison.⁴² This perspective of other minorities is missing not only from Jewish self perception, but also within most studies of Jews and whiteness which focus on the racialization of Jews by the state and by other whites.

Although there is a great deal of work on black-Jewish conflict, there are also extensive studies of cooperation between black and Jewish communities and

⁴⁰ *ibid.* 6

⁴¹ *ibid.* 6 and Sundquist, 40

⁴² Cheryl Greenberg "Pluralism and It's Discontent: The Case of Blacks and Jews" in *Insider/outsider : American Jews and multiculturalism*, ed. David Biale, Michael Galchinsky and Susannah Heschel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 60

organizations. Within the literature on black-Jewish relations there are diverging accounts of both the history of cooperation between the two groups and the reasons for the subsequent dissolution of these coalitions. There is general agreement that Jews were involved in the civil rights movement in a greater proportion than other whites, although authors disagree about their level of participation and the motivations for this participation. In “The Southern Jewish Community and the Struggle for Civil Rights”, Greenberg sets out to dispel the myth that all Jews supported the civil rights movement. While not denying the involvement of Jews in the civil rights movement, she documents the negative response of southern Jews to the civil rights movement. Greenberg argues that Jews in the South understood themselves to be on the white side of the sharp colour divide in the South, but feared that they were still very vulnerable to anti-Semitism. This fear pushed southern Jews to work to assimilate into the dominant culture, which included adopting racist positions. Greenberg argues that Jews in the South encouraged national Jewish organizations to remain silent on Civil Rights issues, because they feared confrontation. This put southern Jews into conflict with those Jews in the North who were active in the civil rights movement.⁴³

While it is necessary to include an analysis of anti-Semitism into work on Jewish racism, one of the potential pitfalls of explaining Jewish racism as a response to the threat of anti-Semitism, is that in doing so runs the risk of justifying Jewish racism. It is not clear in this article whether Greenberg sees Jewish racism as resulting from fears of anti-Semitism, or if she sees fears of anti-Semitism as an excuse used by southern Jews to justify their racism. My impression is that she would say that both arguments are valid.

⁴³ Cheryl Greenberg *The Southern Jewish Community and the Struggle for Civil Rights in African Americans and Jews in the twentieth century : studies in convergence and conflict*, ed. V. P. Franklin (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998) 127

She appears critical of Jewish support for segregation and resistance to the Civil Rights Movement, but by linking this support to fears of anti-Semitism, she comes close to excusing Jewish racism as a response to oppression. She writes “many southern Jews in fact held more liberal views on race than did their White Gentile neighbours, but hesitated to speak out for fear of intensifying anti-Semitism.”⁴⁴ While I do think that it is important to recognize that fear of an anti-Semitic backlash can lead to Jewish racism, it should be clearly stated that this fear of provoking anti-Semitism is actually a fear of risking exclusion from whiteness. Jews who may have been opposed to racism against African Americans but refused to speak out, did so because were aware of their somewhat precarious status within whiteness and were unwilling to risk losing their white privilege by supporting the struggle of African Americans.

In addition to researching Jewish resistance to the civil rights movement, Greenberg has also written extensively about Jewish activism. Rather than uncritically celebrating Jewish support for black struggles, Greenberg focuses on the tensions between blacks and Jews as they worked together, and later as their tactics diverged. In “Pluralism and Its Discontents”, Greenberg argues that even early on, Jewish struggles for civil rights were centred on different issues than those that concerned African Americans. She explains:

Discrimination against Jews, while real and severe, was virtually never as physically dangerous, ubiquitous, or economically destructive as that routinely practiced against African Americans. Thus at the forefront for Black agencies were issues such as physical violence, exclusion from skilled and white-collar work, denial of political rights and segregation. Jewish groups focused more on social discrimination, restrictions on employment and in higher education, and immigration quotas.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Greenberg 1998, 127

⁴⁵ Greenberg 1997, 155

Greenberg argues that the white skin privilege that many Jews held was central to the differences in the priorities and tactics between Jewish and black social movement. She brings in the example of a joint campaign in the 1940s and 1950s when Jewish and black groups worked together to fight for removing questions about race and religion from job applications. After the campaign was successful, Jews felt that the battle against discrimination in hiring had been won. Jews with white skin could often hide their religion and avoid discrimination, but black people did not have the option of hiding. A significant victory for Jewish workers was therefore far less meaningful for black workers⁴⁶. This struggle is significant because its success proved that pluralism could work for Jews, but not black people. This would prove to be an important point of disagreement between Jewish and black activists.⁴⁷

Greenberg argues that Jews supported pluralism and made integration into the dominant society their primary goal. That they were largely successful at integrating only reinforced their belief that pluralism and liberal humanism were keys to achieving equality. Starting in the 1960s, many black activists rejected pluralism because they saw integration as impossible and undesirable for black people in a racist society. They then adopted more separatist and identity based politics and tactics. At this point, tensions erupted over a variety of issues. The rise of separatist black activism and Black Power alienated many Jews, who saw separatism as both insulting and potentially dangerous.⁴⁸ Perhaps the most volatile issue, according to Greenberg, was affirmative action. While black groups supported these programs as a way of addressing systemic racism, many

⁴⁶ Greenberg does not really question whether or not Jews were really able to pass. This is a debate that requires further attention.

⁴⁷ Greenberg 1998, 68-69

⁴⁸ *ibid.* 71

Jews were opposed to affirmative action. According to Greenberg, affirmative action was not consistent with Jewish pluralist goals. Jews, who benefitted from pluralism and so-called race-blindness, saw the dissolution of racial categories as the primary goal of the civil rights movement and were therefore opposed to a system that relied on racial categorization.⁴⁹ Here it becomes clear that their whiteness allowed Jews to benefit from pluralism and a politics of race-blindness in ways that black people could not. It is also important to note that since Jews were considered white under these programs, many perceived themselves as victims of affirmative action.

What I find most significant in Greenberg's work is that she demonstrates that Jewish perception of their own victimhood does not accurately reflect their economic situation or the level of anti-Semitism that exists in the United States. She argues that Jewish claims to victimhood lack a class-based analysis which would make clear that anti-Semitism has declined, at least in terms of it being a barrier to economic and social mobility. Such an analysis would show that Jews had become white and would also make clear some of the causes of black anger towards Jews. For Greenberg, this anger is the result of "African Americans [desiring] what Jews already have – the right to embrace difference and yet enjoy access to power."⁵⁰ For Greenberg, multiculturalism is a threat to liberal Jews who see themselves as victims, because it forces them to face their privilege and their complicity in American racism.⁵¹ She advocates for a politics of multiculturalism that rejects the fallacy of race blindness upon which pluralism is based.

Jews, Whiteness, Colonialism and Apartheid

⁴⁹ *ibid.* 71-74

⁵⁰ *ibid.* 81

⁵¹ *ibid.* 81-82

All of the work that I have discussed so far is limited to the United States. A common goal in all of these texts is to show that whiteness and other racial categories are not fixed, but have changed throughout American history. Race, of course, not only changes across time, but also varies in different spaces. *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* is a collection of essays on Jews in various colonial contexts, including Australia, South Africa, Texas and Quebec. Most of the authors argue that Jews experienced far less discrimination in settler colonies than in Europe itself. While the explanations of this phenomenon are somewhat different in each context, several themes emerge within the articles.

First, it becomes clear that Jews become whiter when there is a racialized Other that is less white than the Jews. In “Living Within the Frontier: Early Colonial Australia, Jews and Aborigines”, Paul R. Bartrop argues that in Australia, “a sense of otherness was, it would seem, almost exclusively reserved for people of a different skin color to that of the colonists.”⁵² In Australia these Others include immigrants from China, the Pacific Islands and, of course, the Aborigines, but not Jews. Similarly, according to Seth Wolitz in “Bifocality in the Texas-Jewish Experience”, Jews in Texas, when “forced to encounter the Other – the dominant Anglo-Texan, the subaltern African-American and Mexican American – the new [Jewish] immigrant was hastened on the path of Americanization or, better, Texanization.”⁵³ Here again, the white skin and European

⁵² Paul Bartrop “Living within the Frontier: Early Colonial Australia, Jews and Aborigines in *Jewries at the frontier : accommodation, identity, conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) 96

⁵³ Seth Wolitz “Bifocality in Jewish Identity in the Texas-Jewish Experience” in *Jewries at the frontier : accommodation, identity, conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) 186

origins of Jews allowed them to choose this path of absorption into the dominant group and to avoid association with the non-white Other.

The second theme in the collection is that being among the first European colonialists allowed Jews to become white in certain settler colonies. Wolitz writes “by being present at the origin of the republic and of the state, the Texas Jew lays claims to originary rights which...carry psychological meaning and weight to both Texas Jews and Gentiles.”⁵⁴ John Simon makes a similar argument about South African Jews. In “South African Jewish Experience” he writes “South African Jews were able to claim that they were in at the beginning and that their initiative, their enterprise, their toil and sweat contributed equally with the non-Jew toward the creation and growth of a new settlement, a new community, indeed a new country.”⁵⁵ Being among the so-called ‘founders’ of the country moved Jews from outsider to insider status as they could make claims to citizenship and whiteness by extension because they helped to create the nation.

The final theme in these articles is that participation in colonial violence helped establish Jews as whites. Bartrop sites Jewish participation in the Australian military as a mark of loyalty to the nation-state.⁵⁶ According to Wolitz, many Jews fought for the Confederate Army, which “gave further shape and integration of the Jews into their Texas milieu.”⁵⁷ Finally, according to Simon, Jews were “fully involved in the military actions which were part of the earliest confrontations between the English settler and the indigenous blacks”⁵⁸ in South Africa. It is clear that participation in colonial violence

⁵⁴ *ibid.* 187

⁵⁵ John Simon “South African Jewish Experience” in *Jewries at the frontier : accommodation, identity, conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) 68-69

⁵⁶ Bartrop 94

⁵⁷ Wolitz 186

⁵⁸ Simon 68

allowed Jews to place themselves on the white side of the colour divide by demonstrating their loyalty towards the nation-state.

Most of the authors in this collection, even as they argue that Jews are whitened through racism and participation in colonialism, do not appear critical of Jewish involvement in this violence. Rather than engaging in this type of critical race analysis, the authors focus instead on anti-Semitism and the decreased victimization of Jews on the frontier. That this decline in anti-Semitism is the result of Jews benefitting from racism and colonialism is downplayed, relayed as a historical fact that is neutral and in some articles presented as a positive outcome for Jews. Wolitz's work is a celebration of Texas Jewry and their involvement in settler violence which contributes to the image of the Texas Jew as masculine, even macho,⁵⁹ an image he is quite proud of. Bartrop downplays Jewish involvement in Australian colonial violence and goes so far as to assert that "on the whole, it may be concluded that Jews were not involved in settler violence against Aborigines."⁶⁰ Even if it is factually accurate that Jews were not directly involved in the initial colonial violence, this statement does not take into account that even if Jews were not among the first settlers, they did, and continue to benefit from this violence, and are involved in contemporary violence against Aborigines in Australia. It is disheartening, but not surprising that even within the literature on Jews and whiteness, there continues to be a focus on anti-Semitism and the victimization of Jews, rather than a critical analysis of Jewish involvement and complicity in racism and colonialism.

A notable exception to this is Claudia B. Braude's "Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come: The Denial of the Political in Rabbinic Writing under Apartheid."

⁵⁹ Wolitz 186 and 202

⁶⁰ Bartrop, 107

Braude provides historical evidence about the complicity of the Jewish community's leadership within the Apartheid regime. She explains that South Africa's National Party (NP) was notoriously anti-Semitic before they were elected. After their election, South African Jews feared that there would be a rise in anti-Semitism. The election of the NP had the opposite effect. According to Braude, after the election of the NP:

Jews were not to be treated the way the NP has several years earlier assured they would be, nor the way non-whites were to be treated under apartheid. That South African Jews were not to be discriminated against meant they were to be treated like white South Africans. Jews became white.⁶¹

Braude goes on to argue that the leadership of the Jewish community discouraged Jews from speaking out against the NP and apartheid because of fears that this would lead to an increase in anti-Semitism. She documents the history of rabbinical support for apartheid and the suppression of those who did speak out against apartheid. Braude is very critical of Jewish participation in and support for apartheid and she calls for the South African community to "examine what role the Jewish community played in participating in and benefitting from life under apartheid."⁶² Her work provides an excellent model for integrating critical race and anti-racism into studies of Jews and whiteness.

Gaps in the Literature

One of the major gaps in the literature on Jews and whiteness is the lack of work in contexts outside the United States. This is, of course, understandable, given the large size of the American Jewish population in comparison to the numbers of Jews

⁶¹ Claudia Braude "From the Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come: The Denial of the Political in Rabbinic Writing under Apartheid" in *Jewries at the frontier : accommodation, identity, conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999) 270

⁶² *ibid.* 284

elsewhere.⁶³ Those of us working on this issue outside the United States can borrow from the methods of American scholars, but will ultimately have to examine the specific histories of where we are located to trace how Jews became white folks outside the United States. I will be focusing on the Canadian context throughout my thesis to begin an exploration of how white Jewish identity both produces and is produced by Canadian nationalism.

Beyond needing to expand this literature geographically, studies of Jews and whiteness need to go beyond an analysis that is solely based on race. A significant issue with this literature is that Jews are often portrayed as a monolithic category. Gender, sexual orientation, class and other differences among Jews are not addressed. Further study is needed to understand how these other factors affect how different Jews are racialized and whitened. Also missing is an analysis of how Jews might construct themselves racially depending on their different social locations. It is also important to note that, while non-white Jews are almost always given a token mention in these texts, they are, for the most part, ignored in this literature. Relationships between white and non-white Jews are rarely addressed⁶⁴; Ashkenazi Jewish relationships with black people and dominant white culture are the focus of these studies. In both my discussions of the March of Remembrance and Hope (MRH) and the March of the Living (MOL), I will talk about the attempts of the organized Ashkenazi Jewish community to subsume non-white Jewish identity within a monolithic white Jewish identity.

⁶³ According to the Jewish Virtual Library, American Jews account for 40% of the world's Jewish population, second only to Israel. In contrast, France has roughly 4% and Canada has approximately 3% of the world's Jewish population. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/jewpop.html> accessed April 30, 2008

⁶⁴ While there is little research on relations between white and non-white Jews outside of Israel, there is works that focus on discrimination against non-white Jews within Israel. See for instance Shohat, Ella "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims" *Social Text*, No. 19/20. (Autumn, 1988), pp. 1-35.

Finally, I am concerned that Israel and Zionism are not taken up extensively in this literature. If Israel is discussed, there is usually only a brief mention of the significance of the June War in 1967 as a turning point in black-Jewish relations as many black groups supported the Palestinians in their anti-colonial struggle, which further strained black-Jewish relations.⁶⁵ Only Jacobson briefly mentions the relationship between Israel and the whitening of Jews. He writes “the establishment of a Jewish state ultimately had the...effect of whitening the Jews in cultural representations of all sorts: America’s client state in the Middle East became of ideological necessity and by the imperatives of American nationalism, a *white* client state.”⁶⁶ He does not, unfortunately, elaborate on this point. Analyses of Jews and whiteness that ignore the role of Israel and Zionism in the whitening of Jews are incomplete. Similarly, analyses of Jews, Israel and Zionism that do not take the whitening of Jews into consideration, will only lead to a partial understanding of these issues. It is these issues that will be the primary focus of my thesis, as I work to show the links between Jewish whiteness, claims to victimhood and the Israeli nation-state.

The Consequences of Denying Jewish Whiteness

It seems appropriate to conclude this chapter with a discussion of the importance of studying Jews and whiteness. To do so, I want to perform a critical reading of Michael Lerner’s now infamous “Jews Are Not White” to highlight some of the ways in which denial of Jewish white privilege can be used to obscure Jewish complicity in, and perpetuation of, racism and imperialism. Lerner argues that to be white is to be “a beneficiary of the past 500 years of European exploration and exploitation of the rest of

⁶⁵ See for instance Jacobson, 379-382 and Sundquist, 8

⁶⁶ Jacobson, 188

the world – and hence to ‘owe’ something to those who have been exploited.”⁶⁷ He goes on to argue that including Jews in whiteness necessitates ignoring the history of anti-Semitism and replacing this history with a false one where Jews are part of the exploitative European majority, instead of its victims. Lerner goes on to assert that even though Jews may have made gains materially, they did so at the cost of becoming symbols of oppression to other racialized groups. He argues that Jews were able to make economic gains only by becoming

the *public face* of oppression to the rest of society, the middle men (and increasingly women) who will represent the elites of wealth and power to the powerless....in the US it means, increasingly become the doctors, lawyers, social workers, teachers, government employees, publishing and media people who run the intermediate institutions charged with forging consensus and keeping people behaving within the bounds of the established system of economic and political distribution.⁶⁸

He then moves into a discussion of Israel and acknowledges that Israel has made mistakes in its treatment of the Palestinians, but explains that Jewish insensitivity to the plight of Palestinians is the “consequence of sensitivity dulling genocide – compounded by implacable Arab hostility when it was Jews who were stateless.”⁶⁹ Lerner also addresses Jewish-black relations by criticizing those who would take “the current reality of Jews in the suburbs and imagine that not only were Jews privileged, but that others’ oppression was *our* fault.”⁷⁰ For Lerner, this is a practice of blaming the victims. He concludes by urging Jews and other minorities, including Irish, Italians and Poles to remember their histories of oppression in order to come together in a true multiculturalism that does not privilege one group over another.

⁶⁷ Michael Lerner, "Jews are Not White," *The Village voice* (1993),

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

Lerner's denials of Jewish whiteness are also denials of Jewish complicity in American and Israeli racism. By arguing that the only people who are considered white are those that descend from Europeans who exploited people for 500 years, ignores that whiteness is historically contingent and constantly shifting. It also does not acknowledge that white people still benefit from historical and contemporary racism, regardless of whether or not their ancestors were involved in the historical exploitation. His narrow definition of whiteness and white privilege allows Lerner to focus on the historical oppression of Jews, thereby ignoring their contemporary privilege in ways that are hyperbolic and detract from the credibility of his arguments. Asking readers to sympathize with the plight of Jewish doctors, lawyers and teachers, and insisting that wealthy Jews in the suburbs are not privileged only works to discredit his arguments about the contemporary plight of Jews. That Lerner criticizes Israel, but then quickly uses the Holocaust as an excuse for Jewish support of Israeli violence, demonstrates how histories of anti-Semitism can be abused to deflect criticism of Israel. "Jews Are Not White" is replete with examples of how denying that Jews are white and insisting on a never-ending Jewish victimhood can be used to excuse Jewish racism and Israeli violence. It is for these reasons that critical studies of Jews and whiteness are so important for exposing and fighting the violence of Jewish racism and Zionism. Without this analysis, Jews can remain focused on their own victimization, even as they continue to participate in and benefit from the oppression of others. It is with this in mind that I now move to a critical examination of hegemonic Holocaust education and contemporary Jewish claims to victimhood.

Chapter 2 – March of Remembrance and Hope

There is a growing literature that is critical of hegemonic Holocaust education¹. Much of this work has come from anti-Zionist scholars who are critical of the tendency for Holocaust education projects to present the Holocaust as unique because it is the most horrible atrocity in human history. Of particular concern is that the insistence on Holocaust uniqueness has caused Jews, particularly Jews of European descent, to focus too much on their own victimhood, thereby preventing them from using the Holocaust to see parallels with other struggles, especially the Palestinian struggle. I will be addressing this issue of Holocaust uniqueness in my chapter on the March of the Living (MOL). Here I want to shift my focus to what could be regarded as a break or a discontinuity within hegemonic Holocaust education that has seen a move away from the insistence on the uniqueness of the Holocaust, towards education that seeks to universalize the Holocaust, by using it to teach broader lessons about hatred, intolerance and genocide, a move towards what I am calling Holocaust universalism. Holocaust education projects that are meant for non-Jewish audiences tend to use this more universal approach. Therefore, in this chapter, I will be critically analyzing the effects of using the Holocaust to teach these lessons about genocide and violence to non-Jews.

In order to get at this issue of Jews educating others about racism, genocide and human rights, I am going to be studying the March of Remembrance and Hope (MRH), which began in 2001 and is an offshoot of the MOL that is organized by the same groups. The MRH targets non-Jewish students and takes them to Poland on a week-long tour of Holocaust sites. While the two trips have similar goals, the MRH tactics differ from those

¹ Here I am defining hegemonic Holocaust education as projects that are sponsored by the Israeli government and/or mainstream Jewish organizations. These projects also tend to have the support of Western governments and institutions.

used on the MOL in important ways. Unlike the MOL, the MRH does not include a trip to Israel or any other explicitly Zionist activities. Also, the MOL is heavily focused on the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the Jewishness of the Holocaust, and includes very few attempts to universalize the Holocaust. The MOL literature presents the Holocaust as an exclusively Jewish tragedy, but the MRH website acknowledges that there were non-Jewish victims in the Holocaust. The goals of both trips are similar, but I want to note a key difference in one of the goals. On the MOL:

The final goal is not so much to learn from or about history, but to enter into history. By visiting Eastern Europe, young Jewish students are taking part in a commemorative act, which tells themselves, their people, and the entire world — and perhaps even those who have perished — that the death of six million of our people has been marked and will never be forgotten by the Jewish people.²

On the MRH, however the final goal is inclusive of non-Jewish victims:

By visiting Poland, we are taking part in a commemorative act that declares that the memory of six million Jews and millions of other innocent victims Poles, Roma and Sinti, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, the handicapped and political prisoners who were murdered during the Holocaust and WWII, has been marked and will never be forgotten.³

In my chapter on space and the MOL, I will argue that because the MOL is explicitly Zionist, they need to focus on the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the victimhood of Jews because this is instrumental in producing Zionist Jewish subjects. Here, I want to focus on the effects of acknowledging the non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust on the MRH to show that this can also work towards Zionist political ends.

Another interesting feature of the MRH is the focus on recruiting a diverse group of participants. They describe the trips as

² <http://www.marchoftheliving.org/mol2009/09goals.html> accessed October 28, 2008

³ <http://www.remembranceandhope.com/about/goals.htm> accessed October 28, 2008

a dynamic educational leadership program. It's [sic] purpose is to teach students of different religious and ethnic backgrounds about the dangers of intolerance through the study of the Holocaust, and to promote better relations among people of diverse cultures.⁴

On their website and in their downloadable material, the MRH showcases the involvement of people of colour by making several references to the race/ethnicity/nationality of non-white participants. Of the four testimonials featured on the site, three are from people of colour who are identified as Irish-Ojibway, Rwandan-Canadian and Muslim (the fourth is from a young, non-Jewish Polish man). Many of the pictures from the trip that are on the website and in the literature feature people of colour. It is clear from even a cursory survey of the MRH's publicly available materials, that they are targeting people of colour for participation in their educational project. This raises important questions about the implications of white Jews taking it upon themselves to educate people of colour about genocide, racism and intolerance.

My main argument is that one of the effects of hegemonic Holocaust education that universalizes the Holocaust is the production of white Jewish subjects that see themselves as moral actors whose intimate relationship with oppression and genocide gives them a moral obligation to teach others about the dangers of intolerance, and also makes them into the ultimate authority on these issues. My goal in this chapter is to study the implications of these white Jewish moral actors educating people of colour about racism, genocide and human rights. I will argue that when it is aimed at people of colour, Holocaust education can become a civilizing project, intended to reinforce binaries between non-white people – who are seen to be ignorant about the Holocaust and human rights, and therefore prone to anti-Semitism, terrorism and genocide – and civilized white

⁴ <http://www.remembranceandhope.com/index.html>, accessed October 8, 2008

people who know about the Holocaust and have therefore transcended hatred, racism and violence through their support for human rights regimes. Extending my analysis beyond Jewish subjectivity, I also intend to demonstrate that these civilizing projects have tremendous utility for Western nation-states generally, and the Israeli nation-state in particular. Constructing a binary opposition between anti-Semitic Others and the enlightened post-anti-Semitism, pro-Israel West, is instrumental in obscuring and legitimating the violence of Israeli Apartheid by casting support for Jews/Israel as civilized, and characterizing all resistance to Israeli state violence as anti-Semitism, and therefore the uncivilized actions of terrorists.

I will begin by reviewing some key texts that are critical of hegemonic Holocaust education. Then I will engage in a critical analysis of Holocaust universalism. First, I will argue that even when it is being used to discuss oppression more generally, the very choice of the Holocaust as the most appropriate historical event to form the basis of education on racism is inherently Eurocentric. I will then move into a more specific discursive analysis of hegemonic Holocaust education. Using Wendy Brown's critique of discourses of tolerance in *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, I will present my argument about Holocaust education as a civilizing project. Finally, I will situate hegemonic Holocaust education within the broader context of Western human rights regimes. Relying on feminist and critical anti-racist analyses of the deployment of human rights discourses by Western governments and NGOs to justify imperialist violence, I will argue that Holocaust education, which depends heavily on human rights discourses, is instrumental in deflecting criticism of Israel and garnering support for Israeli Apartheid.

From Holocaust Uniqueness to Holocaust Universalism

Within the literature that is critical of hegemonic Holocaust education, many scholars have focused their critique on the tendency of these educational projects to present the Holocaust as the worst atrocity in human history. They argue that when the Holocaust is regarded as uniquely evil, there is an implicit assumption that it cannot be explained, represented or compared to any other instances of violence and persecution. I want to briefly synthesize some of the key critiques of Holocaust uniqueness. I will then highlight some of the gaps in this literature, which I hope my work will begin to address.

In “On Sanctifying the Holocaust: An Anti-Theological Treatise”, Adi Ophir argues that most Holocaust memorials and educational projects sanctify the Holocaust and have turned it into a religion of sorts. Within this Holocaust religion, the crimes of the Nazi regime become Absolute Evil and exist outside human understanding. He argues that the sanctification of the Holocaust is dangerous

because it blurs the humanness of the Holocaust; because it erases degrees and continuums and puts in their place an infinite distance between one type of atrocity and all other types of human atrocities...because it makes it difficult to understand the Holocaust as a product of human material and ideological systems; [and] because it directs us almost exclusively to the past, to the immortalization of that which is beyond chance, instead of pointing primarily to the future, to the prevention of a Holocaust.⁵

Ophir advocates an abandonment of this Holocaust religion in favour of an approach that is focused less on immortalizing the Holocaust and more on learning from it. He argues for shifting the focus from specifically Jewish concerns to more universal ones. He writes “the universal question presents the Holocaust as a permanently necessary background to

⁵ Adi Ophir, "On Sanctifying the Holocaust: A Theological Treatise " *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art After the Holocaust*, ed. Shelley Hornstein, et al (New York: New York University Press, 2003). 199

interpretations of the present and intentions for the future.”⁶ For Ophir, studying the Holocaust, albeit in very particular ways, holds the potential to help us understand the conditions that allow atrocities of varying magnitudes to occur.

This idea of abandoning the insistence on the uniqueness of the Holocaust in favour of seeking out universal lessons is common in critical work on Holocaust education. In “The Palestinian Uprising and the Future of the Jewish People”, Marc Ellis criticizes what he calls ‘Holocaust Theology’, arguing that memorial of the Holocaust has become the new Jewish secular religion. Like Ophir, he is extremely critical of this sanctification of the Holocaust. He too advocates for seeking more universal lessons from the Holocaust by replacing Holocaust theology with a theology of liberation. He writes, “a Jewish theology of liberation confronts the Holocaust and empowerment with the dynamic of solidarity, proving a bridge to others as it critiques our own abuses of power.”⁷ The idea that the Holocaust holds universal lessons emerges here as Ellis argues that the Holocaust can and must be used to forge links between Jewish struggles and those of others, particularly the Palestinian people.

In *The Holocaust Industry*, American Jewish scholar, Norman Finkelstein is also extremely critical of hegemonic Holocaust education and memorials, but unlike Ophir and Ellis he characterizes these projects not as part of a religion or theology, but instead as a profitable industry. One of his central criticisms of the Holocaust industry is the ways in which it presents the Holocaust as unique in magnitude and horror. For Finkelstein, “a subtext of the Holocaust uniqueness claim is that the Holocaust is

⁶ *ibid.*, 201

⁷ Marc Ellis, “The Palestinian Uprising and the Future of the Jewish People,” *Prophets outcast*, ed. Adam Shatz (New York: Nation Books, 2004) 325., 331

uniquely evil. However terrible, the suffering of others simply does not compare.”⁸ The danger in this is that “the claim of Holocaust uniqueness is a claim of Jewish uniqueness. Not the suffering of Jews but that Jews suffered is what made The Holocaust unique. Or: The Holocaust is special because Jews are special.”⁹ Finkelstein also points out that despite these claims about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, exceptions are sometimes made, and the Holocaust is occasionally used to draw attention to the plight of non-Jews. He argues, however, that this is only permitted when doing so furthers American or Israeli interests. He argues:

to highlight unfolding crimes abroad, the US often summons memories of The Holocaust. The more revealing point, however, is *when* the US invokes The Holocaust. Crimes of official enemies...recall The Holocaust; crimes in which the US is complicit do not.¹⁰

Finkelstein’s work is crucial in demonstrating that even as the Holocaust industry promotes the concept of Holocaust uniqueness, there is room for the Holocaust to be strategically deployed when it serves the interest of Western imperialism. While not completely opposed to drawing analogies between the Holocaust and other atrocities, Finkelstein importantly emphasizes the need to critically investigate the power relations that allow certain atrocities to earn comparison to the Holocaust.

In *The Holocaust in American Life*, American Historian Peter Novick raises questions about the merits of learning about oppression from the Holocaust or using the Holocaust as a source of solidarity with others. Novick is opposed to those who would argue for the uniqueness of the Holocaust. He writes:

⁸ Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust industry : reflections on the exploitation of Jewish suffering*, 2nd pbk. ed. ed. (New York: Verso, 2003). 47

⁹ *ibid.*, 48

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 146

the assertion that the Holocaust is unique – like the claim that it is singularly incomprehensible or unrepresentable – is, in practice, deeply offensive. What else can all of this possibly mean except ‘your catastrophe, unlike ours, is ordinary; unlike ours is comprehensible; unlike ours is representable’.¹¹

However, he does not then advocate using the Holocaust to understand the catastrophes of others. Instead he cautions against this practice. Novick argues:

The principal lesson of the Holocaust, it is frequently said is not that it provides a set of maxims, or a rule book for conduct, but rather that it sensitizes us to oppression and atrocity. In principle it might, and I don’t doubt that sometimes it does. But making it the benchmark of oppression and atrocity works in precisely the opposite direction, trivializing crimes of lesser magnitude.¹²

For Novick, the danger in using the Holocaust for broader education about atrocities and violence is that doing so creates the risk of having other crimes not live up to the magnitude of the Holocaust. A Holocaust-centred approach to understanding other manifestations of oppression and violence could actually have the opposite effect of diminishing or downplaying the horror of other atrocities.

A final important critique of hegemonic Holocaust education is that it focuses exclusively on Ashkenazi Jewish history, thereby ignoring Sephardi history in favour of a monolithic Jewish history of victimization. In “Taboo Memories and Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine and Arab-Jews”, Ella Shohat argues that within Ashkenazi and Zionist historiography, Sephardic history is too often ignored or reduced to “yet another tragic episode in a homogenous, static history of relentless persecution....the inquisition of Sephardi Jews is seen merely as a foreshadowing of the Jewish Holocaust.”¹³ Here

¹¹ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American life*, Ist Mariner Books ed. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 9

¹² *ibid.*, 14

¹³ Ella Shohat, "Taboo Memories and Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine and Arab-Jews," *Performing Hybridity*, ed. Jennifer Fink and May Joseph (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 131.6.

again we see the power of hegemonic Holocaust discourses to relegate other atrocities to the margins of history. Shohat's work demonstrates the Eurocentrism of hegemonic Holocaust education, which is a key point that I will expand upon further in my chapter on the MOL.

Eurocentrism and Holocaust Education

In *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam define Eurocentrism as a "single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as the world's center of gravity, as ontological 'reality' to the rest of the world's shadow."¹⁴ Even though the Holocaust is a horrible chapter in European history, it is nonetheless European history. Therefore, most Holocaust education, even when it attempts to be critical of Europe as a place of anti-Semitism and violence, is still centred on Europe and the West. By focusing only on the evils of Europe, hegemonic Holocaust education can be used to make Europe into the centre of evil in the world, to which all other evils must be compared. Shohat herself mentions the Eurocentrism of Holocaust education writing critically of an

inverted European narcissism that posits Europe as the source of all social evils in the world. Such an approach remains Eurocentric ("Europe exhibiting its own unacceptability in front of an anti-ethnocentric mirror," in Derrida's words)...The vision remains Promethean, but here Prometheus has brought not fire but the Holocaust, reproducing what Barbara Christian calls the 'West's outlandish claim to have invented everything including Evil'.¹⁵

In *Dislocating Cultures*, Uma Narayan makes a similar argument about the Eurocentrism of portraying the West as the centre of all evil in the world. Speaking of a tendency

¹⁴ Ella Shohat, *Unthinking Eurocentrism : multiculturalism and the media*, ed. Robert Stam (New York: Routledge, 1994)., 2.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 3

within Western writing about colonialism to focus on what she calls ‘the Big Bad West’, Narayan argues

[t]he Big Bad West becomes too Big, eclipsing its Other with the Shadow of its Self-Reflection, with its Badness now providing as much of a rationale for its preoccupation with itself as its Goodness did in the civilizing mission of colonial times.¹⁶

In other words, even work that is critical of the evils of the West can become centered on the West. Extending both Shohat and Narayan’s argument, I am contending that Holocaust education centres the evils of Europe and in doing so, also centres the European, albeit Jewish, victims of the Holocaust. As I will show in my analysis of the MRH, this Eurocentrism creates the potential to overshadow victims of other violence, particularly those who are not European/Western.

It is, in part, the Eurocentrism of Holocaust-based education project that leads me to doubt the possibilities of using the Holocaust to answer universal questions about oppression or as the basis for solidarity with other struggles. Unfortunately, because much of the critical literature I mention above ignores the Eurocentrism of Holocaust education, these scholars provide little insight into how the lessons of the Holocaust can be universalized while avoiding the trap of (re)centering Europe, or if that is even possible. I am arguing that criticisms of Holocaust education need to go further than advocating for abandoning arguments around the uniqueness of the Holocaust. This is becoming more urgent as Holocaust education moves away from an insistence on uniqueness towards using the Holocaust to teach non-white Others, about hatred, genocide and tolerance.

¹⁶ Uma Narayan, *Dislocating cultures : identities, traditions, and Third-World feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 141.

The MRH is an example of a Holocaust education program that, while at times insisting on the uniqueness of the Holocaust,¹⁷ claims to be using the Holocaust to fight against discrimination more generally. It is therefore a useful site for exploring the pitfalls of uncritically using the European history of the Holocaust as a paradigm for teaching broader lessons of tolerance. Even though Europe is not cast in a positive light on the MRH, I argue that the trip nonetheless centres Europe and marginalizes the experiences of non-European, non-Western and non-white participants, and the communities they are said to represent.

The organizers of the MRH go to great lengths to show that they are interested not only in educating about and memorializing the Holocaust, but that they are also invested in creating spaces for other peoples' histories of oppression to be heard. Their website features testimonials from various participants including, as I mentioned previously, an Irish-Ojibway participant, a Rwandan-Canadian participant and a Muslim participant. The common thread amongst these texts is that the authors frame the stories of their own or their communities' oppression within an explicitly Holocaust-based framework, where the oppression experienced is only to be discussed in comparison to the Holocaust. This is particularly evident in a speech given by Trish Lynn Cowie, who identifies as Irish-Ojibway. She explains that on the trip "I was drawing parallels between many of the tragedies of the Shoah to what is happening in Canada. I was drawing parallels between the treatment of the Jews and the treatment of the Aboriginal peoples."¹⁸ She draws analogies between the Holocaust and the genocide of Aboriginal people by the Canadian

¹⁷ For example, in the MRH Book, the President of the MRH explains that the "MRH is a commemoration of what is arguably the most horrific period in human history." Here we can see that even as the organizers are working to universalize the lessons of the Holocaust, they are still unwilling to give up claims about the unique magnitude of the Holocaust.

¹⁸ http://www.remembranceandhope.com/testimonials/speech_trisha.htm accessed October 14, 2008

nation-state. She writes “the Nazis attempted to eradicate the Jews. The Canadian State has eradicated entire nations of aboriginal people and is still attempting to be rid of us.”¹⁹ Her speech would no doubt be considered controversial within a mainstream Canadian context and I was honestly surprised to find such a critical analysis of the Canadian nation-state on the MRH website. The inclusion of these statements within the MRH raises questions, especially because this trip is supported by mainstream, non-Jewish Canadian institutions.²⁰

Given the efforts by the Canadian nation-state to deny the genocide of Aboriginal people on this land and the refusal of most Canadians to listen to testimonials like this, I do not want to downplay the impact that Cowie’s speech may have had on the audiences that heard or read it, nor do I intend to criticize her or any of the other speakers for choosing to participate in the MRH or speak about their experiences afterward. Instead, I want to put forward some criticisms of these types of speeches being made under the auspices of hegemonic Holocaust education. The first critique is that the Eurocentrism of the framework of the MRH demands that speakers relate their experiences of oppression to the Holocaust in order for these stories to have validity. That comparisons with the attempted genocide of European Jews are required in order for the atrocities committed against Aboriginal peoples to be recognized, speaks to the Eurocentrism of the Holocaust framework and the racist devaluation of non-European life more generally. Related to this is that Cowie had to first go on a trip to Europe before she could return to address MRH audiences. Within the constraints of the MRH, she was only given permission to

¹⁹ http://www.remembranceandhope.com/testimonials/speech_trisha.htm accessed October 14, 2008

²⁰ The trip is primarily sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Diversity, but is affiliated with other Canadian and American organizations. For a full list please visit: <http://www.remembranceandhope.com/affiliates/affiliates.htm>

speak about the genocide of Aboriginal peoples after she had spent time engaging with European history; her own knowledge and experiences are insufficient to make her an expert on these issues. Finally, it is important to note that within the framework of the MRH, all comparisons between the Holocaust and the genocide of Aboriginal people are surface level in that they only compare the violence of genocide, but do not include any analyses of any common causes of genocide, such as racism and imperialism.

Beyond highlighting the Eurocentrism of the MRH, I also want to bring in a critical analysis of the implications of the effects of white Jews providing this space to an Aboriginal speaker. I am concerned that organizers and audiences gain a sense of moral superiority by organizing and attending this lecture. Their involvement in this project allows them to see themselves as different from the Canadian nation-state and other Canadians who have, and continue to carry out a genocide of Aboriginal peoples. Since the genocide is only discussed through comparison with the Holocaust, Jewish organizers and audiences become moral actors who can identify themselves more with the speaker as the victim of genocide, rather than with the Canadian state as the perpetrators. The MRH does not include discussions of white Canadian Jews as settlers on this territory or the ways in which we benefit from the genocide that is still taking place on this land. Therefore, one of the primary effects of this acknowledgment of the genocide of Aboriginal peoples by the organizers of the MRH is an implicit removing of Jewish-Canadian responsibility for, and complicity in, this genocide.

This issue extends beyond Holocaust education and into the activities of Zionist organizations and the Israeli government. In recent years there has been an attempt by the Israeli government and Canadian Zionist organizations to forge ties between indigenous

communities in Canada and Israel. These efforts are focused on organizing trips to Israel for leaders and community members from various First Nations.²¹ Given Israel's ongoing attempts to ethnically cleanse the indigenous Palestinian population²² and the continued abuse of Mizrahi Jewish populations²³ there is a brutal irony in the Israeli nation-state making efforts to take an interest in supporting indigenous communities elsewhere. This begs the question of what Zionists and the Israeli state seek to gain through these activities. In other words, what are the effects of creating links between Israel and indigenous communities here in Canada? I would argue that the Israeli nation-state is all too aware of the links between the Palestinian struggle and other anti-colonial/anti-imperial struggles worldwide, and the support that the Palestinian people have within these communities and solidarity movements.²⁴ It is these connections between the Palestinian struggle and other indigenous struggles that the Israeli state is working to disrupt by forging both literal and discursive ties between white Jews, Israelis and indigenous communities in Canada. These links have other significant effects that perpetuate Zionist mythology and benefit the Israeli state. When Ed Morgan, a Law Professor at the University of Toronto and President of the Canadian Jewish Congress claims that "we [white Jews and Israelis] share values and similar historical experiences

²¹ For more information about recent trips see the Israeli Embassy website: <http://ottawa.mfa.gov.il/mfm/web/main/document.asp?DocumentID=144612&MissionID=13> and the Assembly of First Nations website: <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=2276>

²² For more information about the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people see for instance Ilan Pappé, *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007). and Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians : the politics of expansion* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2000).

²³ For more information about the oppression of Mizrahi Jews by the Israeli nation-state see Shohat, 131 and "Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims" in *Wrestling with Zion : progressive Jewish-American responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*, ed. Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon, 1st ed. ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2003).

²⁴ One of the most prominent examples of support is the ties between those who fought South African Apartheid and those fighting Israeli Apartheid today. For more information on support for Palestine from South African trade unions, specifically the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), see <http://www.cosatu.org.za/press/2007/may/press46.htm>. Also, several prominent South Africans anti-apartheid activists have vocalized support for Palestine including Desmond Tutu and John Dugard.

with our First Nations friends,”²⁵ he is making a claim not only about a shared history of victimhood, but he is also making a claim about the indigeneity of European Jews in Israel. This reinforces Zionist myths of a European Jewish return to their so-called homeland on Palestinian land. It also seeks to counteract accusations about the colonial, imperial and apartheid nature of the Israeli state. Claims that Israelis share history with First Nations people in Canada make it difficult to argue that today, white Jews and Israelis actually share more of a common history with colonizers than the colonized. This is, why in the logic of the MRH, all comparisons between the Holocaust and other genocides must be limited to talking about the violence of genocide, but none of its causes. A discussion of racism and imperialism would be a threat to the Zionist project of the MRH because addressing these issues could ultimately shift the focus to the racism and imperialism of Israeli Apartheid.

Holocaust Education and Tolerance

The Eurocentrism of a Holocaust-based framework for teaching about oppression and violence is not the only way in which participants’ narratives are constrained within hegemonic Holocaust education projects. These projects ask participants to engage in a very specific discourse – the discourse of tolerance – as they attempt to universalize the lessons of the Holocaust. Therefore, I want to move from the more structural critique of hegemonic Holocaust education as Eurocentric, to turn to a more specific discursive analysis of the MRH and similar projects. I will argue that the MRH is not radical anti-racist education, but is instead a liberal project that aims to teach tolerance and promote diversity, without addressing issues of systemic racism directly.

²⁵ <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=2276> accessed October 15, 2008

Within the literature on the MRH website, there are very few mentions of ‘racism’, ‘oppression’ and other terms that could be considered part of an explicitly anti-racist discourse. Instead, organizers use the language of tolerance and cultural diversity. For example, one of the goals of the MRH is “[t]o welcome opportunities to learn about participants’ different ethnicities and beliefs so that we may transcend our religious, political, and cultural boundaries in order to bear witness to the common humanity we all share.”²⁶ This statement is typical of the discourse of MRH, which focuses on using education to understand difference and promote tolerance of these differences. Within this liberal framework, where racial and class differences are noticeably absent, differences are seen only as barriers that must be transcended, through education and understanding, in order to facilitate recognition of a common humanity. Implicit in this desire to transcend difference is a drive to erase difference and embrace a liberal – therefore white, masculine, middle-class and Western – humanism. There is also no discussion of power relations or systemic oppression, which work to exclude the majority of the world’s population from inclusion in this collective ‘humanity’. It is this discourse of tolerance that I want to critique in order to provide insight into the ways in which hegemonic Holocaust education’s fight against discrimination and intolerance can actually work to obscure and even justify systemic racism and violence.

In *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, feminist theorist, Wendy Brown conducts a genealogy of ‘tolerance’ to expose the various ways in which this discourse can be deployed to obscure racism and justify violence. Brown’s work is based on her observation that since the mid 1980s, tolerance has become a dominant discourse within liberal multiculturalism. Concerned that previously, the

²⁶ <http://www.remembranceandhope.com/about/goals.htm> accessed October 20, 2008

language of tolerance was seen as thinly veiled racism, she tracks the increasing prominence of this discourse within liberal nation-states.²⁷ Rather than accepting this as a positive move towards anti-racism, Brown argues that tolerance operates as a civilizational discourse that is central to constructing the West as civilized and superior to non-Western Others. She explains:

The dual function of civilizational discourse, marking in general what counts as “civilized” and conferring superiority on the West, produces tolerance itself in two distinct, if intersecting, power functions: as part of what defines the superiority of Western civilization and as that which marks certain non-Western practices of regimes as intolerable. Together, these operations of tolerance discourse in a civilization frame legitimize liberal polities’ illiberal treatment of selected practices, peoples and states. They sanction illiberal aggression toward what is marked as intolerable without tarring the “civilized” status of the aggressor.²⁸

Brown’s work demonstrates the utility of the discourse of tolerance for producing the West as those who tolerate and those Others that must be tolerated. When intolerance becomes the mark of the uncivilized, the intolerant become enemies who can then be attacked in order to bring them in line with Western values of freedom and democracy. In her discussion on the War on Terror, Brown writes:

[I]t is not difficult to see how an opposition between civilization and barbarism, in which the cherished tolerance of the former meets its limits in the latter (limits that also give the latter its identity), provides the mantle of civilization, progress and peace as cover for imperial militaristic adventures.²⁹

It is her contention that the discourse of tolerance has been very instrumental in obscuring the violence of the War on Terror and justifying imperialist wars as civilizing missions.

Of particular relevance to my project is Brown’s chapter on the Simon Wiesenthal

²⁷ Wendy Brown, *Regulating aversion : tolerance in the age of identity and empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006)., 135

²⁸ *ibid.*, 179

²⁹ *ibid.*, 179

Center Museum of Tolerance (MOT). The MOT houses a Holocaust museum within a larger museum dedicated to exposing issue of intolerance in daily life.³⁰ Brown is less concerned with debating the effectiveness of the MOT as a museum or memorial project, but instead focuses on questions of how and why the discourse of tolerance functions within the museum and within the larger Zionist project of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre. Given the similarities between the political goals of the MOL/MRH and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, many of Brown's critiques of the MOT apply to the MOL/MRH. I want to synthesize some of her central arguments and build upon them in my critique of the MRH.

One of Brown's primary critiques of the MOT relates to my previous discussion of Holocaust uniqueness. She is very critical of the MOT for its thinly veiled attempts to insist on the uniqueness of the Holocaust. The MOT presents itself as dedicated to issues beyond the Holocaust, but claims of Holocaust uniqueness still pervade the museum. Brown argues that the MOT emphasizes that the Holocaust is the worst atrocity in human history, while characterizing other violence as merely prejudice and intolerance. Brown criticizes the differential treatment that the Holocaust receives, arguing that at the MOT when

violence against women, slavery and genocide in American history, terrorism and mass killing in Rwanda and Bosnia...[are] categorized as 'prejudice,'...these things appear less significant, and less horrible, than what the docent then describes as the 'ultimate example of man's inhumanity to man'.³¹

For Brown, the danger of Holocaust uniqueness, particularly when these claims happen alongside discussions or depictions of other forms and incidents of violence, is that they

³⁰ For more information on the MOT please visit <http://www.museumoftolerance.com/>

³¹ *ibid.*, 115

work to minimize the magnitude of all other incidents of violence and genocide. Although the pervasiveness of claims of Holocaust uniqueness in the MOT appears more extreme than the occasional comment about the unique evils of Holocaust on the MRH, Brown's critique applies to the MRH as well. When hegemonic Holocaust education is universalizing the lessons of the Holocaust, claims about the unique magnitude of the Holocaust are still often present, even if statements to that effect are not central within the project.

Brown's main critique of the MOT focuses on the ways in which the discourse of tolerance can be used to mask the Zionist agenda of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre³². She writes:

the Wiesenthal Center is represented as straightforwardly standing for justice against injustice, right against wrong, good against evil, tolerance and civility against terrorism, and not as a partisan player in a range of political conflicts, policy debates and even wars. Here it becomes clear how the depoliticizing discourse of tolerance is "tacticalized", even weaponized, while the depoliticization itself serves to obscure this move.³³

Brown argues that the discourse of tolerance allows the Simon Wiesenthal Center – an overtly Zionist organization – to present itself as an organization that is fighting for justice. This works to obscure their Zionist political motivations. She goes on to argue that the deployment of the discourse of tolerance not only masks the Center's political agenda, but actually works to further promote its Zionist ideology. The MOT places white Jews – and Israel by extension – on the side of the civilized by aligning their interests with those of the tolerant West; this allows them to stand in contrast to

³² At the time of writing, the Israeli Supreme Court has granted the Simon Wiesenthal Centre permission to build a new Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem on top of an ancient Muslim cemetery. This only further demonstrates both the Zionism and racism of this project.

³³ *ibid.*, 124-5

uncivilized Others. Brown explains that within the MOT, these Others are often Arabs and Muslims who are continually presented as intolerant.³⁴ Brown explains that this

advocacy of tolerant views and a tolerant world is the cover under which very specific political positions are advanced, positions that are consecrated by the rubric of tolerances just as their opposites are painted with the brush of intolerance, violence, barbarism, bigotry or hatred.³⁵

What is particularly alarming about the MOT is that this promotion of a Zionist worldview does not require directly discussing Israel or Palestine. Brown notes that the Israel-Palestine conflict³⁶ does not figure prominently in the MOT; it is not debated alongside other controversial issues that the MOT presents. She argues that the “Israel-Palestine battle is not presented as a candidate for the healing balm of tolerance, because tolerance is not what you extend to the barbarian, by definition an enemy to your way of life.”³⁷ Here she demonstrates the violence that occurs when liberal tolerance meets its limit; that is, when it is confronted with those enemies that it finds intolerable. For the Zionist Simon Wiesenthal Center, the Palestinians are the ultimate enemy of tolerance and are therefore intolerable.

It is this analysis of the relationship between tolerance, Holocaust education and Zionism that makes Brown’s work an important supplement to the critical Holocaust literature that I discussed previously. Her work exposes the ways in which universalizing the lessons of the Holocaust works to align Jews and Israel with the civilized West,

³⁴ According to Brown, the MOT focuses on the treatment of women in Muslim countries and even includes a picture of Palestinian children allegedly celebrating on September 11th, even though this picture was long ago proven to be fraudulent.

³⁵ *ibid* 125

³⁶ I am using Brown’s term here, but I use the term Israeli Apartheid elsewhere because ‘Israel-Palestine conflict’ implies a two-sided conflict that could be between two equal powers, whereas Apartheid speaks to the racist, imperialist violence of the Israeli nation-state.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 135

thereby demonizing Arabs generally, and more specifically Palestinians, as the enemies of Israel, Jews, tolerance and civilization. She argues:

As their suffering is converted into universal and cosmopolitan wisdom, Jews and Israel take their place at the forefront of the struggle of civilization against barbarism, tolerance against hatred...[This] enables a defense of Israel that relies less on Jewish exceptionalism vis-à-vis the Holocaust or Jewishness itself than on positioning Jews as defenders of civilization, humanism, civility and a tolerant order and, conversely, positioning Israel's enemies as enemies to these values.³⁸

I would apply this same criticism to the MRH which uses the universalizing of the Holocaust to align white Jews with liberal Western values of tolerance and acceptance of diversity.

In the same way that the MOT promotes a Zionist agenda without necessarily being explicitly Zionist, the MRH does not mention Israel in their literature, but it is nonetheless a Zionist project. Simply by aligning Jews and Israel with the civility of the West, the MRH achieves an important goal of producing Jews as moral actors and Israel as a moral state. This is instrumental in defending against charges of brutality that are more frequently being leveled against the Israeli state. What is interesting about the MRH is that unlike the MOT – which according to Brown is quite overtly Islamophobic – the MRH organizers make concerted efforts to highlight the participation of Muslim youth on the trip. Muslim participants, especially Muslim women, are displayed prominently in pictures within their literature and on their website. One of the four featured testimonials was given by Ayesha Siddiqua Chaudhry, who identifies as Muslim. Her speech alludes to Israel very subtly, when she talks about her initial hesitation to participate in the MRH because of “the complex and uneasy relationship between the Muslim and Jewish

³⁸ *ibid.*, 136

peoples”³⁹. She then explains that she chose to participate because she believes in dialogue between groups in conflict.⁴⁰ Chaudhry does mention the discrimination faced by Muslims in the West, but only does so as a comparison to the experiences of Jews in Europe, which again reflects the Eurocentric constraints placed on participants by the Holocaust framework of the trip. Most of her speech focuses on recounting her experiences on the MRH “within the context of the Qur’an...whose discourses and narratives inform [her] moral framework.”⁴¹ She reflects on her feelings during the trip and compares the lessons she learned with teachings from the Qur’an. She writes “race, religion, ethnicity and cultures are considered sacred in the Qur’an. Such distinctions are here to stay and the Qur’an recognizes them as signs of God. Consequently, human beings have an obligation to preserve and celebrate such phenomena.”⁴² By invoking language that mirrors the liberal discourse of tolerance on the MRH, Chaudhry provides an interpretation of the Qur’an that promotes respect for people’s shared humanity while also celebrating differences.

It would be incorrect to see the inclusion of Muslim participants on the MRH as a sign that the MRH organizers differ ideologically from the curators of MOT and are not Zionist and/or Islamophobic. I would argue that the celebration of Muslim involvement on the MRH is where the Zionist politics of trip actually becomes more visible. The organizers of the MRH are highlighting Muslim participation in order to celebrate the

³⁹ http://www.remembranceandhope.com/testimonials/speech_ayesha.htm accessed October 21, 2008.

⁴⁰ The notion of inter-community dialogue between Jews and Muslims is problematic because it implies a discussion between two communities that have an equal power relationship. The concept of dialogue – whether between individuals or as part of the so-called ‘peace process’ - is an important tool of Zionists and the Israeli nation-state which allows them to present the situation in Palestine as an even-handed conflict, instead of the violence of an Apartheid regime. Ironically, often this type of dialogue involves South Asian Muslims, who may not have a connection to Palestine.

⁴¹ http://www.remembranceandhope.com/testimonials/speech_ayesha.htm accessed October 21, 2008.

⁴² http://www.remembranceandhope.com/testimonials/speech_ayesha.htm accessed October 21, 2008

production of a particular ‘good’ Muslim subject. This ‘good’ Muslim subject engages in Holocaust education, celebrates liberal values of tolerance and even uses the teaching of the Qur’an to promote these Western, liberal ideals.⁴³ Here the civilizing project of the trip becomes clear as Muslims are targeted for education about liberal values of tolerance. It is significant that this occurs in the context of Holocaust education, because this framework links intolerance and anti-Semitism, often presenting anti-Semitism the worst form of intolerance. Therefore, the production of the ‘good’ Muslim subject also produces the ‘bad’, intolerant Muslim subjects who do not engage in Holocaust education and by virtue of this non-involvement further prove their anti-Semitism which marks them as the enemies of civilization that must be attacked and destroyed. It is also important to remember that Zionists work diligently to conflate anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism so that opposition to Israel becomes de-facto anti-Semitism.⁴⁴ If anti-Zionism is characterized as anti-Semitism and anti-Semitism is seen as the worst form of intolerance, then anti-Zionism becomes a dangerous form of intolerance. This has the effect of making support for Israel an important mark of tolerance, which only further entrenches white Jews and Israel on the side of the civilized West, spreading freedom, democracy and tolerance to the Middle East.

Holocaust Education and Human Rights Regimes

Any analysis of Holocaust education would be incomplete without addressing the history of anti-Semitism and the contemporary fear of a resurgence of anti-Semitism that

⁴³ I am not implying here that this is a misinterpretation of the Qur’an. Instead I am problematizing the language used and how it mirrors the liberal discourse of the MRH and hegemonic Holocaust education.

⁴⁴ For an in-depth analysis of the ways in which anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism are deliberately conflated by Zionists and the Israeli state in order to suppress criticism of Israel see Norman G. Finkelstein, *Beyond chutzpah : on the misuse of anti-semitism and the abuse of history* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

exists within the organized Jewish community. Even as I argue that this victimized Jewish subjectivity is deployed strategically, there is a historical and contemporary basis for white Jews to feel insecure and concerned about continuing to fight anti-Semitism. What I am critical of is that this struggle against anti-Semitism has become so enmeshed with Zionist politics that the effects of hegemonic white Jewish human rights activism are often racist and imperialist. Many hegemonic Jewish Zionist organizations that work on issues of anti-Semitism operate within the discourse of human rights, either in place of, or alongside notions of tolerance and diversity.⁴⁵ The Holocaust usually features prominently within white Jewish discourses of human rights both because human rights as a concept came to prominence shortly after WWII and because of historical Jewish activism around human rights. I want to critically analyze the relationship between white Jews, the Holocaust and human rights activism, specifically within Holocaust education projects that seek to universalize the lesson of the Holocaust within a human rights framework. My goal is to demonstrate that the universalizing of Holocaust education is a tactic that can be deployed in the interests of the underlying Zionist politics that form the basis of most of these projects. Drawing on critiques of human rights that are focused on the deployment of this discourse by other marginalized groups – feminists/women and gays and lesbians – I want to argue that, like the discourse of tolerance, the deployment of human rights discourses within Holocaust education has become instrumental in aligning Jews and Israel with the West in order to justify the violence of Israeli Apartheid.

⁴⁵ In Canada, the most high profile Zionist organization doing work on human rights is B’Nai Brith. For information about their human rights work see: <http://www.bnaibrith.ca/league.html> and for information on their Zionist mandate see: <http://www.bnaibrith.ca/cipac/cipac.html>.

Some of the most insightful critiques of human rights regimes and discourses have come from anti-racist and post-colonial feminist scholars. In “Women’s Rights as Human Rights”, Inderpal Grewal argues that “human rights have become a key mode through which governmental technologies have come into existence through the discourses of liberal democracy as a source of freedom.”⁴⁶ She examines the effects of the deployment of human rights discourses within Western feminism. For Grewal, “feminist activism in human rights is an example of this governmentality, producing knowledges by subjects who saw themselves as ethical and free, and thus as feminist subjects able to work against and within the state for the welfare of women around the world.”⁴⁷ Human rights discourses produce Western feminist subjects who believe that they have human rights and are therefore positioned to help non-Western Others, who lack human rights. In this way, human rights become a mark of the superiority of the West and a sign of the inferiority of Others who have not yet achieved them. Grewal is also concerned that human rights discourses have been taken up within mainstream American nationalist discourses, where human rights are now seen as American values. One of the effects of characterizing human rights as an American value is that “‘America’ has remained hegemonically constructed as a land of freedom and rights through its ability to adjudicate whether other countries and communities had them or needed them.”⁴⁸ Using the example of how the American concern for Afghani women’s rights after 9/11 was used as a justification for war, Grewal shows how human rights discourses – specifically women’s rights – can be deployed by the American nation-state to

⁴⁶ Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America : feminisms, diasporas, neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005)., 138

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 138

⁴⁸ *ibid.* 163

legitimate violence⁴⁹. Grewal concludes that “human rights instruments [are] used selectively by states for their own political agendas; in the application of these instruments, we can see the operations of disciplinary and governmental mechanisms as well as the production of liberal subjects.”⁵⁰ Both Grewal’s concepts of subject production and the utility of human rights discourses for Western nation-states, are particularly useful for my analysis of the effects of the deployment of human rights discourses within hegemonic Holocaust education.

I want to begin this analysis by examining the effects of hegemonic, white Jewish deployment of human rights discourses. In *Jews and Human Rights: Dancing at Three Weddings*, Michael Galchinsky sets out to explore the relationships between American Jews, human rights and Israel. Galchinsky presents a history of Jewish involvement in establishing the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UNHR) and other human rights legislation around the world. He argues that as a direct result of the Holocaust, many Jews became committed to human rights, which they saw as vital to preventing another Holocaust. He writes:

Jews’ historical suffering, especially during the Holocaust, has given them both the *moral justification* [emphasis added] and the platform from which to act in this [human rights] arena. And by acting to build a rights system in the postwar period- when they themselves have been relatively secure and influential – Jewish human rights activists have hoped to put safeguards in place to help themselves and others when times of insecurity arise.⁵¹

He also explains that for many Jews, the UNHR and the establishment of the Israeli nation-state, which both occurred in 1948, are linked as two key events in Jewish

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 146

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 165

⁵¹ Michael Galchinsky, *Jews and human rights : dancing at three weddings* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008)., 20

history⁵². He goes on to argue that because Jews have such a strong connection to human rights and Israel, they are often conflicted when Israel is accused of human rights violations. Galchinsky argues that the Israeli nation-state, along with many Jewish organizations and individuals themselves have grown increasingly skeptical of human rights, particularly within the United Nations, because they regard this framework as inherently biased against Israel.⁵³ This is a large part of his answer to one of the key questions in his book: why Jews, who were traditionally strong advocates of human rights, have moved away from this type of activism in recent decades.

Galchinsky's work shows the links that have been made, both by Ashkenazi Jews and non-Jews, between the Holocaust and the rise of human rights regimes. These links are instrumental in producing a moralistic white Jewish subjectivity that is tied up with human rights discourses. Much in the same way that Grewal shows that Western feminist subjects are produced as superior to non-Western Others by virtue of having human rights, I would argue that white Jewish subjects come to know themselves as superior because of the links that have been made between Jews, the Holocaust and the history of human rights in the West. Ashkenazi Jews, by virtue of the history of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, have become regarded as authorities on human rights and many hegemonic Jewish organizations, including those involved in Holocaust education, have human rights advocacy as a central part of their mandate. It is important to note that these same organizations and institutions are also Zionist and actively involved in advocating for Israel. This apparent contradiction begs the questions of how and why human rights discourses are being deployed by organizations and institutions that defend a racist,

⁵² *ibid*, 3

⁵³ *ibid*, 86

apartheid regime that has an abysmal human rights record. In answering this question, I aim to demonstrate the utility of deploying human rights discourses for obscuring the violence of the Israeli nation-state, even as this state violates the human rights of Palestinians.

Galchinsky writes “as a state born out of the ashes of the Holocaust, Israel clearly has an interest in struggling to end genocide, and it was one of the first states to ratify the Geneva Convention.”⁵⁴ By linking Israel with the Holocaust, Galchinsky is able to characterize the Israeli nation-state as one that is deeply concerned with human rights and preventing genocide; with the Holocaust at his disposal, he needs no further explanation to prove that Israel is a civilized nation that respects human rights. That the birth of the Israeli nation-state involved an ethnic cleansing⁵⁵ becomes eclipsed by focusing on the Holocaust, as do Israel’s blatant violations of the Geneva Conventions. Galchinsky himself describes these violations. He lists illegal settlements, “extrajudicial executions, ill-treatment and torture of prisoners and excessive use of force” as some of the crimes committed by Israel.⁵⁶ Immediately after acknowledging the crimes of Israeli Apartheid, rather than focusing on the crimes themselves, Galchinsky chooses instead to focus on the international response to Israeli crimes. Galchinsky insists that criticism of Israel, even when valid, slips too easily into dismissing Israel’s right to exist. He writes “the proper international response [to Israeli human rights violations] would have been to call for alterations of particular policies or practices, not the wholesale delegitimation of the

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 120

⁵⁵ It can be contentious to assert that Israel carried out an ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Several scholars have shown that the initial displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 along with the continued refusal to allow the refugees to return is a systematic ethnic cleansing. The most comprehensive English language account of this history is Ilan Pappé’s *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 113

state.”⁵⁷ Grewal argues that human rights discourses are often deployed to delegitimize non-Western nation-states by justifying wars and occupations of sovereign nations.⁵⁸ In contrast, human rights violations by Western nation-states become issues of policy and are never even considered grounds to justify military action that threaten the sovereignty of these nation-states. Within the logic of Western imperialism, it would never make sense to call for the occupation of Canada or the United States because of their human rights violations, but it is natural to do so in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example. Here it becomes clear that Israel, despite being in the Middle East, is so politically aligned with the West that Galchinsky can argue that Israel’s human rights violations should not be used to delegitimize it as a nation-state. Instead, criticism of Israel should only lead to policy discussions and reform of practices of this nation-state that, by virtue of being Western, is assumed to fundamentally respect human rights, even if some of its policies are discriminatory.

It is in making these links between the Holocaust and human rights on one hand, and human rights and civility on the other, that enable to the MRH to carry out its Zionist politics without any explicitly references to Israel or Zionism. Like other hegemonic Holocaust education, the MRH works to align Ashkenazi Jewish interests with Western human rights regimes. It does so, in part, by showing Jewish concern for other, non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In thinking through the effects of this move by the organizers, I have found it useful to focus on the inclusion of ‘homosexuals’ in the list of victims of the Holocaust featured in the goals of the MRH.⁵⁹ I do so not only because this is rare in Holocaust education, but also because there is an existing critical literature

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 113

⁵⁸ Grewal, 146

⁵⁹ <http://www.remembranceandhope.com/about/goals.htm> accessed October 28, 2008

about queers and human rights that provides important insights into the strategies deployed on the MRH. In “Mapping US Homonormativities”, Jasbir Puar writes:

For contemporary forms of US nationalism and patriotism, the production of gay and queer bodies is crucial to the deployment of nationalism... because certain domesticated homosexual bodies provide ammunition to reinforce nationalist projects.⁶⁰

She is arguing that gay rights are instrumental in the War on Terror because American claims to respect the rights gays and lesbians become a mark of civility that contrasts the American nation-state with non-Western, specifically Arab states, that are condemned for their persecution of queer people. Like women’s rights, gay rights can be deployed as a justification for imperial wars against nations that do not respect human rights. The irony of course, is that homophobia is still prominent in the United States⁶¹ and even – as Puar demonstrates – within discourses about the War on Terror itself. I would argue that the recognition of the queer victims of the Holocaust functions in similar ways for the organized Jewish community and for Israel. The Israeli nation-state, as part of its mission to present itself as a Western, liberal nation, has taken up gay rights as an issue. In 2006, World Pride took place in Jerusalem and there is now a GLBT Birthright Trip⁶² that takes queer Jewish youth on a free trip to Israel. As respect for GLBT human rights gets taken up by Israel to mark it as a liberal, democratic, Western nation,⁶³ it is not surprising that these issues would become part of some Zionist discourses and ‘homosexuals’ would start to appear within hegemonic Holocaust education.

⁶⁰ Jasbir Puar, "Mapping US Homonormativities," *Gender, place and culture* 13.1 (2003), .68

⁶¹ Despite gains made by queer activists, homophobia remains a serious issue in the United States. From violent hate crimes, to homophobic debates about the definition of marriage, homophobia is still deeply imbedded in American society.

⁶² For more information please visit: http://www.glbtejews.org/article.php3?id_article=480 accessed October 28, 2008

⁶³ This is not to say that homophobia is not still a serious issue in Israel. Many in Israel violently opposed World Pride, but still, because of the power of the myth of Israel being a Western ,liberal democracy, the homophobia in Israel can be readily ignored when it serves the purposes of the nation-state..

I want to close my discussion of human rights with a word of caution. I agree with analyses that show how human rights discourses are a form of governmentality that are instrumental to Western imperialism, and I have demonstrated here how this discourse functions within hegemonic Holocaust education to further Zionist political goals. That said, I want to emphasize that even as I am critical of the deployment of human rights discourses within hegemonic, Zionist Holocaust education, and by oppressive, Western regimes generally, I still see the importance, and even the urgency, of using this discourse within popular struggles. On a practical level, human rights discourses can provide language and tools for resistance and struggles against oppressive regimes. I acknowledge that Western imperial powers often deploy this discourse towards racist, violent ends, which makes the use of human rights problematic in the ways that Grewal and Puar describe, but I also still believe that this contradiction is an inherent weakness of these regimes that can be exploited strategically. Much of the critique of human rights discourses comes out of the very accurate observation that they are so often aimed at non-Western states and cultures, thereby (re)producing Orientalist⁶⁴ views of the superiority of the West. However, that should not preclude aiming this discourse at Western regimes to expose the tragic hypocrisy of Western human rights violations. Yes, this tactic operates within a hegemonic framework rather than challenging it, and as a result will not likely overthrow these regimes, but used strategically, it can lead to improvements in the lives of individuals and communities. This is, in part, why human rights have been taken up within struggles worldwide; a fact that we in the West cannot ignore especially when doing solidarity work with struggles internationally. To dismiss outright the human rights

⁶⁴ Here I am using Edward Said's definition from *Orientalism*, New York : Vintage Books, 2003, originally published in 1978. Traditionally, Orientalism was the study of the Orient, but Said uses the term to describe exoticized, racist depictions of the East within the West.

framework as too Western or imperialist may be a form of imperialism in and of itself because it dismisses the knowledge of those outside the West who have chosen this tactic. Many Palestinian activists often frame their struggle within a rights-based framework⁶⁵ and these organizations do important work for the Palestinian people. The Palestinian Intifada does, of course, include other means of resistance – such as mass protests, calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions and other forms of both violent and non-violent resistance – that go beyond discourses of human rights and formally engaging with the state and NGOs. The use of human rights discourses within popular struggles can and should be analyzed critically, but the choices of those who engage with it must be respected because it is one aspect of a fight that must rely on a variety of tactics and strategies of struggle.

Conclusion

My goal in this chapter was to critically engage with hegemonic Holocaust education that seeks to universalize the lessons of the Holocaust in order to educate non-Jews, particular non-Jewish people of colour, about the dangers of intolerance and the violence of genocide. I am concerned about the implications of this targeting of people of colour for education about racism within a Holocaust framework. My approach is similar to those employed by Brown, Grewal, Puar and others who seek to understand the effects of critical discourses being taken up within hegemonic, mainstream discourses. These authors observed that tolerance, women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, and human rights

⁶⁵ To name a few Palestinian organizations that work on issues of human rights: Palestinian Centre for Human Rights <http://www.pchrgaza.org/about/about.html>, Al Haq, (Palestinian human rights organization, advocating for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories) www.alhaq.org, BADIL: Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights (an organization working around issues of refugee rights) <http://www.badil.org/> and Defence of Children International – Palestine Section (advocates on behalf of the rights of Palestinian children) <http://www.dci-pal.org/english/home.cfm>

more broadly have become integrated into Western imperialist discourses in ways that work to reinforce and solidify existing unequal power relations. I am arguing that hegemonic Holocaust education, while not completely abandoning its commitment to presenting the Holocaust as unique in scale and horror, has begun to strategically move towards allowing for links to be made between the Holocaust and other atrocities. While this is still controversial, universalizing the Holocaust has become a key feature of hegemonic Holocaust education, especially when these projects are not directed at Jewish people. I have argued here that this move is not an outright rejection of the idea of Holocaust uniqueness, nor is it simply a progressive shift towards using the Holocaust for anti-racist education and organizing. Instead, I have demonstrated the ways in which this type of Holocaust education works to produce Jewish moral actors who come to know themselves as innocent victims of racism who cannot see their own racism or their complicity in maintaining systemic oppression. These projects are also instrumental in reinforcing the binaries between the civilized West that is tolerant and respectful of human rights, and those intolerant Others who have no respect for human rights and democracy. This in turn obscures and justifies the violence of the West in general and Israel in particular because the Holocaust is used to align Jews, and Israel by extension, with the civility of the West.

Even as I critique hegemonic uses of the Holocaust and human rights discourses, I am not trying to argue that Jews of European decent should not engage in anti-racist activism or that links should not be made between anti-Semitism and other forms of racism. Unfortunately, hegemonic Holocaust education is currently guided by Zionist ideology and can therefore never be truly anti-racist, despite all claims to the contrary. I

believe that theorizing anti-Semitism can and should be included in analyses of European racism more generally,⁶⁶ it must be done in ways that challenge, rather than reinforce racism and imperialism. Such work must include an analysis of how Jews of European descent have become white people who are complicit in, and benefit from racist violence that targets people of colour. Jewish anti-racist activism must acknowledge the historical violence and oppression experienced by our ancestors, but this cannot be used to justify our current position of privilege or work to obscure the violence of Israel and the Western countries in which most of us live. Such anti-racism activities should focus on Jews finding ways of becoming allies and should borrow strategies from white anti-racist organizing, rather than using tactics that position Jews as victims alongside people of colour. We must also criticize the tremendous power and resources of the Holocaust industry and acknowledge the privilege of having our history so well-documented and prominently memorialized. Jewish anti-racist activists should be demanding that funding for Holocaust education be reallocated toward memorializing other histories that have and continue to be suppressed. Those of us committed both to preserving the integrity of Holocaust education and to fighting against racism and imperialism, must challenge hegemonic, Zionist Holocaust education that works to defend Israeli Apartheid and to further entrench the white privilege of Jews in the West.

⁶⁶ For an analysis of the historical relationship between anti-Semitism and European racism see Shohat, Ella "Taboo Memories and Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine and Arab-Jews." *Performing Hybridity*. Ed. Jennifer Fink and May Joseph. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 131

Chapter 3 – The March of the Living

In my previous chapter, using the March of Remembrance and Hope (MRH) as my primary site, I explored the racist and imperialist effects of hegemonic Holocaust education that targets non-Jewish people, especially people of colour. My focus will now shift to the March of the Living (MOL), an educational project that is intended only for young Jewish students. When critically examining the MRH, I set out to expose some of the hidden effects of this project and show that they were quite different than the liberal-sounding goals laid out by the organizers. I demonstrated that these liberal goals are not only inaccurate and misleading, but that they are indeed instrumental in producing some of the desired Zionist and racist effects of the trip. In the case of the MOL, I believe that the officially stated goals of the trip accurately reflect the desired outcome of this project. The MOL, which was established by the Israeli Ministry of Education,¹ is a blatantly Zionist project that does not hide its desired goal of producing young Jewish subjects who are fiercely loyal to the Israeli nation-state. In this chapter, I am not working to expose *what* the effects of the MOL are, but rather to look at *how* these effects are being produced. I will do so by uncovering the Zionist logic of the trip and then demonstrating, through a critical race analysis, how and why the trip functions so effectively.

According to their website, the mission of the MOL is to:

challenge a new generation of Jews with two of the most significant events of Jewish history - the Shoah (The Holocaust) and the birth of the State of Israel. It is achieved by bringing Jewish teenagers to many of the key places where these events took place, in order to understand the world that was destroyed and how Israel was established.... The mission is to create

¹ Aviv, Caryn and Shneer, David “Traveling Jew, Creating Memory: Eastern Europe, Israel and the Diaspora Business” in *Sociology confronts the Holocaust : memories and identities in Jewish diasporas*, ed. Judith Madeleine Gerson and Diane L. Wolf (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).pg 74

memories, leading to a revitalized commitment to Judaism, Israel and the Jewish People.²

The MOL is structured around the assumption that travel to ‘key places’ from Jewish history is an effective tool for creating memories that will shape the Jewish identity and political loyalties of its participants. Since space is so central to the identity and memory-making projects of the MOL, critical, anti-racist spatial theory holds the promise of providing particularly useful tools for analyzing and critiquing the trip.

Richard Phillips defines unmapping as process that is intended “not only to denaturalize geography by asking how spaces come to be but also ‘to undermine world views that rest upon it’.”³ From a Zionist perspective, the trajectory of the MOL – from European Holocaust memorial sites to Israel – is seen as perfectly logical; it is a re-enactment of the Zionist mythology of Jews rising from the ashes of the Holocaust to return to their homeland in Israel. In this chapter, I will apply a spatial analysis in order to ‘unmap’ the MOL – that is to denaturalize the trajectory of the trip to expose its ideological and political underpinnings and motivations. I will look at each aspect of the MOL, as well as the timing and sequence of the trip, to expose the world views that both inform and rest upon the spaces chosen for the trip. I will do so in order to examine the effects that visiting each space has on participants’ identities. First, I will argue that the European spaces visited on the tour are intended to centre the violence of the Holocaust, European anti-Semitism and the historical victimhood experienced by Ashkenazi Jewish people. This works to produce young Jewish subjects who feel intensely threatened and victimized, despite the privilege they actually hold. Second, I will show that touring

² March of the Living International <http://www.MOL.org/mission.htm>, accessed October 25, 2006

³ *Race, space, and the law : unmapping a white settler society*, ed. Sherene Razack (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002)., pg 8.

Israel directly after visiting Holocaust sites reinforces the Zionist myth that Israel is the only safe-haven for Jews, and that the establishment of the Jewish nation-state was the only possible solution to the problem of anti-Semitism. This obscures the foundational violence of the establishment of Israel and also ensures that participants become fiercely loyal to the Israeli nation-state. Finally, I will end by arguing— that the return home - an aspect of the MOL that receives little to no attention from organizers - is actually an important part of the identity-making process of the trip. The travel home restores the privileged, arguably white, identity of participants who, through their easy travel in and out of their home countries, come to know themselves as subjects who are entitled to this freedom of movement. Overall, I want to demonstrate how the MOL centres the violence experienced by European Jewish people in order to obscure the privilege now enjoyed by most Jews of European descent, to erase the history of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and to ensure that participants support the on-going violence of Israeli Apartheid.

Non-White Jews on the March of the Living

The MOL is structured around the idea that Europe, in this case Poland, is the locus of Jewish history. Within the framework of the trip, there is an assumption that all participants have some familial or ancestral connection to the history of European anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. All this results in a project that is entirely Eurocentric. Herein lies another racist element of the MOL and hegemonic Holocaust education more generally – the erasure of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish history. In my chapter on the MRH, I briefly touched on Ella Shohat’s critique of the ways in which Holocaust memorials and education can work to eclipse non-European, non-white Jewish history⁴. I

⁴ Ella Shohat, "Taboo Memories and Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine and Arab-Jews," *Performing Hybridity*, ed. Jennifer Fink and May Joseph (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 131.6

want to expand on her arguments here in order to denaturalize the organizers' choice of Eastern Europe as the only logical space in which to encounter Jewish history. I want to expose how the trajectory of the MOL works to centre the victimization of European Jews while erasing the histories of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews along with Palestinian history. I am not arguing that Poland is not a significant place where Ashkenazi Jewish history took place, but I do want to emphasize that organizers have made a deliberate, rather than logical or natural choice to visit Poland instead of historical sites, in Spain, Morocco, Iraq or other places that might be significant to Sephardic or Mizrahi Jews.

In "Taboo Memories and Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine and Arab Jews" Shohat takes on the issue of Ashkenazi Jewish racism towards non-white Jews. She argues that the intense focus on the Holocaust and European anti-Semitism reinforces the idea that there is a single, Jewish community with a monolithic history of oppression. For Shohat, this has two interconnected effects that reinforce Zionist myths, particularly those that relate to the creation of the Israeli state. The first is the erasure of Sephardic and Mizrahi history, including the forced displacement of Arab Jews from their countries of origin as a direct result of the establishment of the State of Israel. The second effect of this focus on European Jewish victimization is that it reinforces the Israeli nationalist project by obscuring Israeli state violence and demonizing Palestinians. She writes:

The claim of universal [Jewish] victimization has also been crucial for the claim that the "Jewish nation" faces a common "historical enemy" – the Muslim.... False analogies between the Arabs and Nazis...becomes not merely a staple of Zionist rhetoric, but also a symptom of a Jewish European nightmare projected onto the structurally distinct dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a historical context of Sephardi Jews experiencing an utterly distinct history within the Muslim world...and in a context of the massacres and dispossession of Palestinian people, the

conflation of the Muslim Arab with the archetypical (European) oppressors of Jew downplays the colonial-settler history of Euro-Israel itself.⁵

Shohat's work is critical in understanding how projects like the MOL, which centre and (re)produce a monolithic, European Jewish victimization, function within Zionist discourses. Her work also exposes the racism that non-white Jews experience within Israeli society and in Ashkenazi dominated Jewish communities worldwide. It was beyond the scope of this project for me to interview MOL participants, but it would be quite interesting and important to learn about how non-European Jewish youth experience this trip. Without first-hand accounts, I can only hypothesize their discomfort at being forced to identify with Ashkenazi Jewish history.

As I stated earlier, the goal of this chapter is to analyze how the MOL produces the effects desired by its organizers. Given that the trip's goals all relate to producing a particular white, Jewish subjectivity, I will be focusing on the effects of this trip for the participants that it was intended for - Ashkenazi Jewish youth. The Eurocentrism of the trip itself will be reflected in my chapter because as I focus on the goals of the MOL, which target only white Jews, it will be difficult to analyze the effects of this trip on non-white Jews in a way that is meaningful and not tokenistic. It was therefore extremely important to me to continue to emphasize that Sephardi and Mizrahi Jewish history and identity are glaringly absent on the trip and that most of the goals and effects of the trip do not, and cannot, apply to non-white Jews. As I will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter, the MOL has little to say about non-white Jewish identity and is structured entirely around the assumptions that all participants are Ashkenazi Jews and that the

⁵ Ella Shohat, "Taboo Memories and Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine and Arab-Jews," *Performing Hybridity*, ed. Jennifer Fink and May Joseph (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 131., pg 142

experiences, histories and identities of non-white Jews can be subsumed by the monolithic Ashkenazi Jewish identity (re)produced by the trip.

Poland as Degenerate Space

Keeping this critique in mind, I want to now move to unmapping the spaces of the trip itself. In the introduction to *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, Sherene Razack draws on the Richard Phillips' work on Victorian adventure stories, and argues that "individuals gain a sense of self in and through space, by moving from civilized to liminal and back again to civilized space."⁶ Subjects engaging in these journeys must first see their own space as civilized and the space of the racial Other as dangerous and uncivilized. On their journeys into liminal or degenerate spaces, these subjects gain a sense of their own identity and superiority over the racial Other by returning unscathed from their encounters with this racial Other.⁷ I find this theoretical framework particularly useful for examining the processes of identity formation that are meant to occur during the MOL.

The MOL takes participants on multiple journeys: from their homes to Holocaust memorial sites in Poland, then to Israel and back home again. I propose that on these journeys away from home, the participants enter the liminal spaces of two racialized Others: the Holocaust victim and the Palestinians. Unlike the racial Other in Phillips' adventure stories and in Razacks' work, the Others encountered on the MOL are not necessarily physically present. The Holocaust victims are absent for the obvious reason that they died during the war, but the absence of the Palestinians, is quite deliberate and serves several ideological functions, which I will return to later in my discussion of the

⁶ Razack 2002, p. 12.

⁷ *ibid*, p. 13.

‘uncanny absence’ of the Palestinians in Israel. Despite these being symbolic, rather than physical encounters, I still find Razack and Phillips’ arguments applicable, because I believe that, in terms of identity being produced in and through space, physical and symbolic encounters function similarly.

That Palestinians are a racialized Other to a group of predominantly white, Jewish youth requires little explanation, but I want to briefly explain why I consider Holocaust victims to be a racialized Other to the participants on the MOL. It can reasonably be argued that since they belong to the same religious/ethnic group as the participants, Holocaust victims are not a racialized Other, but rather a historical or temporal Other encountered by Jewish youth on the MOL. I am arguing that on the MOL, young, white Jewish participants encounter a Jewish Other, one who, unlike them, is excluded from whiteness and is subjected to racialized violence. The MOL is structured in such a way that participants are meant to simultaneously identify with and reject the racialized Jewish Other in the degenerate spaces of Poland.

In my first chapter I presented a comprehensive review of literature that shows how Jews of European decent have become white people. Here I want to reinforce this argument within a spatial framework. In *Black body: Women, colonialism, and space*, Radhika Mohanram writes, “first white has the ability to move; second, the ability to move results in the unmarking of the body. In contrast, blackness is signified through a marking and is always static and immobilizing.”⁸ Following her argument, victims of the Nazi Holocaust, would fall outside the category of whiteness. Their movement was constrained violently, not only through confinement in ghettos and concentration camps,

⁸ Radhika Mohanram, *Black body : women, colonialism, and space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).p 4.

but also by marking them with the yellow star and thus rendering them bodies out of place in Europe. Today, white Jewish bodies have the ability to move freely, and significantly, on the MOL, they have the ability to move as tourists⁹ through spaces where other Jews before them experienced the violence of racialized immobility. The free movement of white Jews through Holocaust spaces on the MOL is one of the key identity-making aspects of the MOL.

This is best demonstrated through a critical examination of one of the most significant events on the trip - the 'March of the Living', a march where participants retrace the steps of the 'March of Death,' the actual route that victims of the Nazi Holocaust were forced to take from Auschwitz on their way to the gas chambers at Birkenau. According to the MOL website, youth will "experience Jewish history where it was made. This time, however, there will be a difference. It will be a 'March of the Living' with thousands of Jewish youth...marching shoulder to shoulder."¹⁰ What is so interesting about this statement is that, on the 'Marches of Death', thousands of Jews were marching shoulder to shoulder, but there is some assumed, yet unexplained difference between the Jewish bodies marching today and those that marched during the Nazi Holocaust. I believe that this difference extends beyond the obvious difference between the 'March of the Living' and the 'March of Death', in that marchers today are not on their way to being killed. The difference emphasized on the MOL is that Jewish bodies marching today have agency, choice and mobility, while the Jewish bodies that

⁹ In her article "Delivering Subjects: Race, Space and the Emergence of Legalized Midwifery in Ontario", Sheryl Nestel argues that 'travel' is a "universal form of mobility,' and consequently elides contemporary population movements that are inherently coercive....'tourism,' on the other hand connotes a largely voluntary form of travel available to those whose citizenship status and financial resources permit them access to locations and populations deemed desirable." I use the term tourist here to emphasize the privilege that enables the movement of participants on the MOL.

¹⁰ March of the Living International <http://www.MOL.org/programs/highSchool.htm> accessed November 28, 2006.

marched during the Nazi Holocaust had no power and were simply marked for death. This is a racialized difference – within the MOL framework, the Jews marching today are white people, descending into space of the victimization of their non-white ancestors.¹¹

Another important feature of the Jews on the ‘March of the Living’ is that participants march while draped in Israeli flags. They also plant flags and other Israeli symbols along the route of the March. The marking of the spaces of Poland with Israeli symbols and imagery emphasizes another key difference between MOL participants and the Holocaust victims that marched that route. This difference is both racialized and gendered. In “Living with the Holocaust: The Journey of a Child of Holocaust Survivors”, Sara Roy discusses what she calls the “denigration of the Holocaust and pre-state Jewish life” by many Israeli Jews. Holocaust victims, and Jews before 1948 are seen as “weak and passive, inferior and unworthy, deserving not of our respect, but of our disdain.”¹² While I am not convinced that the MOL is intended to dishonour victims of the Nazi Holocaust, the trip is designed to distinguish between weak, pre-Israeli state Jews and today’s strong Jews who are, or can be, citizens of their own nation-state. Although Roy does not explore this specifically, the terms she uses to describe pre-1948 Jews, such as weak and passive, are references to a feminized Jewish subject. This concept is taken up by Daniel Boyarin in “The Colonial Drag, Zionism, Gender and Mimicry”, where he argues that anti-Semitism feminized Jewish men and “Zionism was considered by many to be as much a cure for the disease of Jewish gendering as a

¹¹ Again I want to reinforce that presuming that the Jewish participants on the MOL are descendants of Holocaust survivors is the Eurocentric assumption of the MOL framework and not my own.

¹² Roy, Sara “Living with the Holocaust: The Journey of a Child of Holocaust Survivors”, in *Wrestling with Zion : progressive Jewish-American responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*, ed. Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon, 1st ed. ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2003). pg 173

solution to economic and political problems of the Jewish people.”¹³ He exposes the ways in which Jewish masculinity is tied up with Zionism, which made men out of Jews through the violence of the conquest of Palestine. This continues today with the glorification of the militarization of Israel and Israelis. The connections between anti-Semitism and the feminization of Jewish subjects is quite clear on the MOL where Poland is represented as a degenerate space of victimization and feminization where Jews walked like ‘lambs to the slaughter’. The youth marching draped in Israeli flags stand in sharp contrast to feminized, victimized Holocaust victims. These Jews are strong, heroic and masculinized. At the same time that the youth participating on the trip are asked to remember and honour the victims of the Nazi Holocaust, they are also given the opportunity to transcend this feminization and victimization through the symbolism of marking Auschwitz with Israeli flags. In this way, the MOL presents Zionism and Jewish nationalism as the only solution to historical Jewish victimization and feminization.

In “Race, Space and Prostitution”, Sherene Razack argues:

Transgression, the controlled excursion into the periphery, is posited as a means by which bourgeois subjects established their identity....it was also necessary to repeatedly affirm that bourgeois subjects could journey into those regions and emerge unscathed in order for those subjects to deny permeability of their body politic and to position themselves as invincible.¹⁴

While I do believe that participants are committing a transgression on their trip to the dangerous spaces of the Holocaust, I have some degree of ambivalence about whether or not participants on the MOL are meant to return unscathed from this journey. On one hand, the Holocaust memorial sites visited on the MOL are spaces of victimization where

¹³ Boyarin, Daniel in “The Colonial Drag, Zionism, Gender and Mimicry”, in *The Pre-occupation of postcolonial studies*, ed. Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2000). p. 237.

¹⁴ Razack 1998, p.362.

the trip's young Jewish participants can encounter a racialized, feminized Jewish Other in order to come to know themselves as mobile and therefore powerful subjects. However, I believe that their identity is not shaped in complete contrast to the Holocaust victim, but rather in *relation* to it. This means that the counter-identification or rejection of the Holocaust victim as Other can only ever be partial, because of the shared religious/ethnic identity between the youth and victims of the Nazi Holocaust. On their website, the MOL organizers tell potential participants:

your stay in Poland and Israel will be a study in contrasts....Poland and Israel; one, the richness and anguish of our past; the other, the hope of our future. This experience will help you understand how important both aspects are to your identity as a Jewish teenager living in the 21st century.¹⁵

It is clear from that statement, that the trip is not designed to have participants feel completely victimized nor is it meant to celebrate the new, more privileged and masculinised Jewish identity by showing participants that Jewish people have overcome victimization and persecution. Instead, the MOL forces Jewish youth to both embrace and fear the racialized Jews of the past. Participants encounter the Holocaust victim as an inferior Other, but do so in a way that reminds them that they are constantly in danger of becoming this Other. On the MOL, the youth are taught the importance of their membership in the category of whiteness by being shown the consequences of exclusion. Holocaust tourism and the movement of Jewish youth through spaces of historical victimization reinforces the mobility and power of young Jewish subjects, but their encounter with the Holocaust victim also renders them vulnerable as they become aware of their tenuous membership within whiteness. It is at this point in the trip that the MOL

¹⁵ March of the Living International, <http://www.MOL.org/programs/highSchool.htm> accessed November 28, 2006.

transports the youth to Israel in order to rescue them from their victimization. With this idea in mind, I will now analyze the Israeli portion of the trip.

From Poland to Israel

Central to the task of unmapping the MOL is showing how the MOL manipulates participants by demonstrating that the MOL is structured in ways that work to deny the violence of Israel's founding, demonize Palestinian resistance and justify Israeli Apartheid as necessary for the safety and survival of the Jewish people. The MOL is planned so that the youth leave Poland after the 'March of the Living' and arrive in Israel just in time for Yom Hazikaron (Israeli Memorial Day for fallen soldiers), which is the day before Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day). Arrival in Israel almost directly from Auschwitz-Birkenau on Yom Hazikaron has two, interconnected effects.

First, the timing of the trip is meant to create a sharp contrast between Poland and the horrible oppression of the Jewish past, with Israel as the hope for a Jewish future. In "It Is My Brothers Whom I Am Seeking: Israeli Youth's Pilgrimages to Poland of the Shoah" Jackie Feldman writes "after the gray deprivation, vulnerability and death of Poland, Israel is constructed as the land of milk and honey, sexy soldiers, military force, sun, beach, and abundant falafel and chocolate. Israel is an idealized 'future of the Jewish people' world."¹⁶ This juxtaposition of Poland as the horrible past and Israel as a wonderful future works to reinforce the Zionist belief that establishing a Jewish nation-state was, and continues to be, the only possible path to ending anti-Semitism. There is no room within the logic of the MOL or the discourse of hegemonic Holocaust education to

¹⁶ Jackie Feldman. "It Is My Brothers Whom I am Seeking: Israeli Youth's Pilgrimages to Poland of the Shoah" cited in *Sociology confronts the Holocaust : memories and identities in Jewish diasporas*, ed. Judith Madeleine Gerson and Diane L. Wolf (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).pg 77

critique this belief or to propose alternatives to the Zionist/nationalist solution to anti-Semitism. The MOL therefore provides one of the more blatant examples of how hegemonic Holocaust education can be used to perpetuate the myth that Zionism and Jewish nationalism are the only possible solution to anti-Semitism. One of the most crucial tasks of my project is to show that loyalty to Israel is not a logical and natural response to the Holocaust or anti-Semitism – it is actually a response that is being very deliberately produced within hegemonic Holocaust education.

Related to this is the second effect of transporting youth directly from Holocaust spaces into Israel, especially when this is done on Yom Hazikaron, a day when participants will be surrounded by memorials to Israeli soldiers who have been killed in Israel's wars and on-going occupation of Palestine. The timing of this travel creates a juxtaposition of Holocaust memorials with memorials of Israeli soldiers. This renders Holocaust victims and Israeli soldiers symbolically equivalent – they are all Jewish martyrs. A second juxtaposition is created through this deliberately timed travel; the Palestinians become linked to the Nazis – at least discursively – as the eternal anti-Semitic enemy of the Jewish state and therefore the Jewish people. For MOL participants, the celebration of Yom Ha'Atzmaut, not only marks Israeli victory over the Palestinians, but also conflates this victory with a mythologized Jewish victory over the Nazis. The conflation of Palestinians and Nazis and the promotion of a transhistorical anti-Semitism is an essential element of Zionism and the Israeli national narrative because it is vital to maintaining Israeli national innocence and innocence of Zionists outside of Israel. In "Settler Nationalism, Collective Memories of Violence and the 'UnCanny Other'", Joyce Dalsheim writes:

in the case of the Israeli national narrative, the most distinctive pattern is the repeated story of how the victims became the victors....The same events would be interpreted entirely differently if the framework changed. If, for example, the template described a powerful people, a conquering people who take over the land of another people...the meaning of particular struggles and their outcomes would be completely different.¹⁷

The MOL recreates this pattern by moving youth from spaces of victimization in Poland to spaces of victory in Israel. Only Jewish casualties in the 1948 War¹⁸ are remembered on the MOL and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians during the Nakba¹⁹ is completely ignored.

The MOL must therefore be seen as part of a larger Israeli/Zionist project of maintaining Israel's origin myths and also defending and justifying Israeli aggression in the face of increasing international criticism of Israeli Apartheid. One of the primary defences of Israeli violence is the argument that the state is acting in self-defence against the threat that the Palestinians pose to Israel's existence. This argument, has no foundation in reality: Israel has one of the most powerful militaries in the world and the backing of Western imperial powers such as Canada, the United States and the European Union.²⁰ Despite the massive disproportion in military strength between the Israeli army and the Palestinian resistance, Israel's claims to be acting in self-defence still have a great deal of traction in the West. The discourse in Canada – of both the media and the

¹⁷ Joyce Dalsheim, "Settler Nationalism, Collective Memories of Violence and the 'UnCanny Other'," *Social Identities* 10.2 (2004), . pg 156.

¹⁸ The war in 1948 is called The War of Independence by Israelis and Zionists, while the Palestinians refer to this war as the Nakba (Arabic for 'catastrophe').

¹⁹ For a comprehensive history of the Nakba, see for instances Ilan Pappé, *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007). and Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians : the politics of expansion* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2000).

²⁰ According to the CIA, the Israeli military has a budget of over \$9 billion annually and almost 2 million people available for military service. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html#Military>. Israel is the largest recipient of USAID, most of which goes to military spending. <http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/cbj2003/ane/il/271-001.html>. Canada and Israel have a free trade agreement, which includes extensive arms trading http://www.international.gc.ca/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/cimar-rcami/2003/2003_7.aspx?lang=en

government – around the 2008-2009 Israeli assault on Gaza exemplifies the acceptance in the West of Israel’s claim to be acting in self-defence even when Israel is in clear violation of international law and the Palestinian casualties massively outweigh Israeli casualties²¹. The reasons for Canada’s support for Israel are complex and are based on economic, military and geopolitical interests. They are not unlike Canada’s reasons for supporting American imperialism for example. That said, the discourses that are used in defence of Israel are different than those used to excuse or deny American, Canadian and other Western imperial violence. Although extremely important, uncovering the motivations for, and the extent of Canada-Israeli relations is a project that is well beyond the scope of my work. What I want to do here is propose some explanations for Canadian and Western acceptance of the specific discourse of ‘Israel acting in self-defence’.

I believe that the belief in the argument that Israel is acting in self-defense ‘Israel acting in self-defence myth’ is tied to Jewish claims to victimization. The success of the Holocaust industry has ensured that the ‘Jew as victim’ can be readily mobilized to portray Israel, the Jewish nation, as forever weak, defenceless and vulnerable. Characterizing Israel as the ever-threatened Jewish nation also allows Israel and Zionists to conflate Palestinian resistance and Palestine solidarity activism with European anti-Semitism and even the Holocaust. Within their logic, criticism of or animosity towards

²¹ Throughout Israel’s attack on Gaza, all three major political parties took pro-Israel stances. The Conservative government took arguably the strongest pro-Israel position in the world with Peter Kent, Canada’s Junior Foreign Affairs Minister, making several public statements condemning Hamas (see for instance “Ottawa Blames Hamas for Civilian Deaths at UN school” http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20090106.wgaza_canadians07/BNStory/Front and “Fate of Canadians in Gaza in hands of Hamas: Kent” <http://www.canada.com/topics/news/world/story.html?id=1148637>). Even the New Democratic Party refused to condemn Israel and in their only public statement, condemned violence on both sides, despite the disproportionate level of violence enacted by the Israeli State <http://www.ndp.ca/press/new-democrat-statement-on-situation-in-middle-east>. As a result of government and media support for Israel, much of the Canadian public also supported Israel during the attacks. A major poll conducted during Israel’s assault on Gaza showed that many Canadians supported Israel during the conflict and nearly half of those surveyed blamed the Palestinians for the conflict. <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=4228>.

Israel is equivalent to hatred of Jews – anti-Zionism becomes the new anti-Semitism.²²

Although these accusations can and do take on overt forms, the tactics used on the MOL to equate Palestinians with Nazis and resistance with anti-Semitism are more subtle.

In order to expose these tactics, I want to explore the second encounter with the Other on the MOL – the encounter with Palestinians. On their trip, the participants are unlikely to actually meet many Palestinians as they do not visit Palestinian towns in Israel, Gaza or the West Bank. They do, however, encounter Palestinians symbolically as a constant, looming threat to their safety. On the MOL, as on many tourist trips to Israel, Israeli soldiers accompany the participants throughout their tour. Participants are likely to see armed soldiers and private security wherever they travel in Israel. For youth who live in countries where soldiers are not commonly patrolling the streets, this militarized space creates a distinct sense of danger and a persistent threat. In “The Unspeakability of Racism: Mapping Law’s Complicity in Manitoba’s Racialized Spaces”, Sheila Gill, citing Linda Martin Alcoff, writes that “on one side of the liberal border are reasonable people who are entitled to equal treatment. On the other are unreasonable people...whose unreasonableness disentitles them from equal treatment.”²³ Participants on the MOL are made to feel intense fear of the potential threat posed by the Palestinians. While touring Israel, participants come to know themselves as reasonable, non-violent subjects in contrast to the Palestinian Other, who, by virtue of their unreasonableness, are justifiably not entitled to basic human rights. In this way, the subjects produced on the MOL can

²² There is a growing literature on the so-called New Anti-Semitism. See for instance Phyllis Chesler, *The new anti-semitism : the current crisis and what we must do about it*, 1st ed. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003). and Alan M. Dershowitz, *The case for Israel*, Updated ed. ed. (Chichester: Wiley, 2004).

²³ Gill, Sheila “The Unspeakability of Racism: Mapping Law’s Complicity in Manitoba’s Racialized Spaces” in *Race, space, and the law : unmapping a white settler society*, ed. Sherene Razack (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002).pg 166.

continue to justify Israeli Apartheid not only on the grounds that Israel must defend itself from this dangerous Other, but also on the basis that Palestinians are unreasonable terrorists who simply do not deserve basic human rights.

The absence of Palestinians on the MOL is also reflective of a key aspect of hegemonic Holocaust education and other Zionist projects and one of the most prominent features of Zionist and the Israeli national narratives – what Dalsheim calls the uncanny absence of the Palestinian/Arab. Dalsheim explains this absence as “a re-inscribed version of previous images of a ‘land without people for a people without land’ – an image reminiscent of...*terra nullis* or empty land.”²⁴ Israel’s origin myth does not include stories of the Palestinian Nakba. In this version of history, Jews rose from the Holocaust to re-claim their ‘homeland’ in Palestine. As in all colonial accounts of *terra nullius*, little attention is given to the original inhabitants of the so-called Jewish homeland or the violence that was required to ethnically cleanse them from that land. On the MOL, the Jewish youth move easily from Poland to Israel and are able to simply disembark from their planes and enter Israel without challenge or conflict. This is intended to mimic the Zionist myth of the innocuous arrival of Jews in Israel, a ‘land without people for a people without land’. While this re-creation of history may be able to succeed in erasing the Palestinian Nakba from Israel’s origin myth, I contend that even the MOL cannot so-easily erase the existence of the Palestinians in the present day.

It is no coincidence that the MOL began in 1988, only one year after the outbreak of the First Intifada in early 1987. Many have argued that the First Intifada marked a turning point in the Palestinian struggle because the plight of the Palestinians received

²⁴ Dalsheim 2004, p. 153.

increased international attention²⁵. With international pressure on Israel only increasing,²⁶ projects like the MOL, and the MRH will become more critical to Zionist defences against condemnation of Israeli Apartheid. I anticipate that as Palestinian resistance and Palestine solidarity activism continue to grow in strength, we will only see an even more concerted push for hegemonic Holocaust memorial projects which will accompany an increasing deployment of bogus charges of anti-Semitism outside of Israel,²⁷ and, of course, Israeli governments continuing to claim that their state is under constant threat of being destroyed.

Returning Home from Israel

Earlier I mentioned that the MOL is structured in such a way that participants come to know themselves as reasonable subjects, entitled to human rights and other privileges. This is further reinforced in the final space of the MOL – the home countries to which the Jewish youth return. In discussing these spaces, I will use Canada as an example, because that is my context. I want to emphasize the ease with which youth travel back to Canada. It is safe to assume, given the expense of the trip and thus the affluence required to be able to afford to go on the MOL, that the majority of the youth on this trip enjoy full Canadian citizenship, hold passports and are therefore able to return to the country with little hassle from immigration and security. Here another violent,

²⁵ Norman G. Finkelstein, *Beyond chutzpah : on the misuse of anti-semitism and the abuse of history* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 4 and Pappé, , pg. 241.

²⁶ In 2005 over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations put out a call for an international movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israeli Apartheid. This movement continues to grow with major successes in Canada, South Africa and throughout Europe. Importantly, these solidarity campaigns have increased international attention to the issue of Israeli Apartheid. Given the success of the BDS movement and with Israel's ever escalating attacks – particularly the war against Lebanon in 2006 and the assault on Gaza in late 2008, early 2009 - international condemnation of Israel continues to mount.

²⁷ In March 2009, just over a month after the end of Israel's military assault on Gaza, the 5th annual Israel Apartheid Week was held. The accusations of anti-Semitism against organizers reached an unprecedented level, due in large part to the increasing Zionist panic over the growing international condemnation of Israeli state violence. This is part of a pattern of increasing attacks against Palestine solidarity activism that reflects the success of this movement.

racialized Other is encountered in Canadian airport spaces as the youth pass easily through racist security checkpoints, that are meant to protect innocent civilians against the violence of so-called terrorists. Participants' mobility in airports reinforces their identification as civilized, reasonable, white subjects.

What is so interesting about this is that ease of travel is a relatively new experience for Jewish people. Just over 60 years ago, Ashkenazi Jews were considered undesirables, who were kept out of Canada by anti-Semitic immigration laws.²⁸ The flight home could provide a good opportunity to educate youth about the Jews who were not allowed to enter Canada to flee Nazism before and during WWII. This history is not taken up within the MOL literature. The return home is benign and is not featured prominently, if at all, in the myriad of photo albums posted on the MOL website. It seems odd that the history of the anti-Semitism of the Canadian nation-state does not come up on a trip dedicated to Holocaust memorial. This is, of course, no coincidence. As white Jews have become incorporated into the Canadian nation-state and obtained full citizenship, this history has been somewhat pushed aside, in order to maintain their privileged position. White Jews have now joined in celebrating Canadian multiculturalism, of which they have been the primary benefactors. It therefore makes perfect sense that these white Jews would not make a special point of rejoicing in their smooth travel back to Canada, because organizers want this to be a non-event for Canadian Jews, who, like other white people, now benefit from racist security and immigration policies. The feeling of relief that most people of colour experience having successfully navigated an airport or other border crossing, would simply not apply.

²⁸ For an in-depth history of Canada's immigration policies towards European Jews prior to and during WWII, see Irving M. Abella, *None is too many : Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948*, ed. Harold Martin Troper, 3rd ed. ed. (Toronto: Key Porter, 2000).

It is important for me to include an analysis of the return home on the MOL because I have come to understand that as I do anti-Zionist and Palestinian solidarity work, I cannot ignore my own context, as a Canadian citizen, living in this settler-colonial state. As I draw attention to Israeli state violence, I need to avoid falling into the trap of Canadian innocence, which is so central to our national origin myths and contemporary national narrative. Israel has historically and is currently conducting an ethnic cleansing of Palestine, as the Canadian nation-state and its non-indigenous citizens continue to benefit from the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous people who live and lived here. Canada's ethnic cleansing began over 100 years before Israel's, which is why its effects are more easily ignored by the mainstream, but this violence still continues. To bring this back into my work on the MOL, it is important to recognize that the violent history of the Canadian nation-state is yet another history that is obscured by the MOL. Jewish youth return to a country they see as their own because, although their ancestors may not have initially colonized these lands, they still benefit from the historic and contemporary racism of the Canadian nation-state. This explains why the MOL, unlike the MRH and other Holocaust education that targets people of colour, does not include any references to the genocide of Aboriginal people on Turtle Island. If this discussion were included in the MOL, not only would it remove the absolute focus on Jewish oppression only, but it would also pose the risk of forcing Jewish youth to come to terms with their complicity in the on-going genocide in their home countries.

Conclusion

What I find so interesting about the MOL and white Jewish identity more generally, is the ability of many white Jews to simultaneously insist on their victimization

while also enjoying the mobility and privilege of whiteness, and celebrating the power of the Israeli nation-state. In working through these contradictions, I am becoming more and more convinced that these claims to victimization are not simply Jews denying their whiteness and privilege, but that they are actually one of the ways in which the organized Jewish community is working diligently to recruit Jews into the project of maintaining and reinforcing this privilege. On the MOL, youth exercise their power as white subjects in various ways, but at the same time they are reminded of the consequences of falling outside of whiteness. The white Jewish subjects that emerge from this trip are supposed to be both powerful and fearful. They are moved to action, to find ways of alleviating these fears by working to maintain their place in whiteness. They are taught on the MOL that their whiteness can only be maintained through racism, both in supporting Israel and also perpetuating or, at minimum, benefiting from racism and imperialism in their home countries. As I argued in my first chapter, the decline in anti-Semitism and intolerance²⁹ has actually been an incorporation of Jews into racism and imperialism. Jewish perpetration of, or support for racism has helped displaced the violence of anti-Semitism by ensuring that it is enacted on someone else, someone less white. What frustrates me most about this is the folly of thinking that anti-Semitism can be eliminated through racism and Zionism. Since anti-Semitism is inextricably linked to racism, we cannot hope to end anti-Semitism without fighting against racism in all of its forms. For the MOL to live up to its lofty goals of honouring the victims of the Nazi Holocaust and fighting anti-Semitism, the trip must move white Jews out of a place of victimization to make them realize the power that they can and do exercise. These trips should encourage them to use

²⁹ Most Zionist organizations would disagree with any assessment that shows a decline in anti-Semitism, however this is precisely the tendency to make false claims of victimization that I am critiquing.

this power to fight racism, because that is the only way they will truly eliminate anti-Semitism, racist violence and actually do justice to the victims of the Holocaust.

Conclusion

On December 27, 2008 I sat down to finish my thesis. As is my usual habit of procrastination, I decided to check my email before getting started. My inbox was flooded with messages informing me that Israel had begun a full-scale military strike on Gaza that had killed over 300 people in the first few hours of bombings. Any thoughts of writing my thesis immediately disappeared. I am an organizer with the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid in Toronto and we immediately began planning our response. Within 24 hours, we organized a rally outside the Israeli consulate that had over 1000 people in attendance. By the next week, the demonstration had grown to over 10,000 protesters. The Jewish Defense League¹, an extremist, right-wing Zionist group organized small counter-demonstrations at each of our rallies. The media coverage of our demonstrations chose to focus on tensions between pro-Palestinian and Jewish groups, often skewing the numbers of protestors on both sides to make the demonstrations appear even in size.² The Canadian government ignored demands to call for sanctions against Israel. Instead, they expressed unconditional support for Israel and repeatedly spoke of Israel's right to self-defense. Although the mainstream Zionist community was late to enter into the public debates over the war on Gaza, they eventually mounted a campaign against Palestinian activists and their allies. The Canadian Jewish Congress held a press conference, alleging anti-Semitic hate crimes had taken place at many of the demonstrations across the

¹ The Jewish Defense League was founded by Rabbi Meir Kahane, who also established with the ultra-right Kach party in Israel. Kach was banned from running in Israeli elections in 1994 after Baruch Goldstein, a member of the party, committed the massacre in Hebron. Although legally operating in Canada, the Jewish Defense League is considered a right-wing extremist organization in the United States (see http://www.fbi.gov/publications/terror/terror2000_2001.htm)

² See for instance "Opponents strategies on Gaza vary widely" <http://www.thestar.com/News/GTA/article/562219> or "Pro-Israeli, Palestinian rallies face off over Gaza" http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20081228/toronto_gaza_081228?s_name=&no_ads=

country. Their evidence of these claims was merely video footage of protestors chanting in Arabic and burning Israeli flags – activities that are in no way anti-Semitic.³

During the first week of the war, I attended an informal meeting of people looking to engage in direct action to bring attention to the war crimes being committed in Gaza. At that meeting, a group of Jewish activists, myself included, decided to occupy the Israeli consulate in Toronto. Our goal was to disrupt the dominant media message that this is an inter-religious conflict and that all Jews support Israeli aggression and violence. We wanted to draw attention to the fact that many Jews oppose Israel's actions, in order to help neutralize attempts by Zionists to characterize all criticism of the war as anti-Semitic. Our hope was that this action would allow others – both Jewish and non-Jewish – to feel more empowered to voice their criticism of Israel's violence against Palestinians without fearing accusations of anti-Semitism. On January 7, 2009, eight of us occupied the Israeli consulate for about two hours before being arrested. We were held in the back of a police wagon for about an hour before being released without charges. All the major news networks were at the consulate and many of us were interviewed, but the story never aired on the evening news. Some articles were published in local newspapers, but for the most part, the media in Canada kept the story quiet. Word of the action spread around the world and we received messages of support from across the globe. In the following days there were similar actions in Montreal, Los Angeles and San Francisco. One success of the action was that after the occupation, there has been noticeably more acknowledgement in the media that there is dissent within the Jewish community and that there are Jewish people who oppose Israeli Apartheid.

³ The footage can be found on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXgMbZwUBeI>

In the weeks that followed the occupation of the consulate, I became one of two main spokespeople for the group that was involved. I was asked to speak at rallies, teach-ins and other events about Gaza and Israeli Apartheid. I received a great deal of attention and recognition for having been part of the action, as well as an outpouring of gratitude from my friends and comrades in the Palestinian community. It was an overwhelming experience and it was difficult to maintain perspective given the pseudo-celebrity status that often comes with direct action. Given the magnitude of suffering in Gaza, alongside the on-going brutality of Israeli Apartheid in the West Bank, Israel and for Palestinian refugees worldwide, it felt inappropriate to be receiving so many accolades for having been arrested and held for just over an hour in a police wagon. The whole experience, especially the attention and praise, only made my privilege that much more evident. I began asking myself a lot of questions about the role of allies in solidarity movements and the place of Jewish anti-Zionist activists in Palestine solidarity work.

This questioning continued after Israel stopped bombing Gaza as I worked with other activists to finalize preparation for Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW). In March 2009, the fifth annual IAW was held in over 40 cities worldwide. Here in Canada, we faced a tremendous backlash for organizing this week of lectures. Members of Parliament, including Liberal leader Michael Ignatief and Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, issued statements condemning IAW as a ‘hatefest’.⁴ Several Zionist organizations, including B’nai Brith and the Canadian Jewish Congress

⁴ Jason Kenney statement is available at: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/DEPARTMENT/media/statements/2009/2009-03-03.asp>. Michael Ignatief’s comments are available at: <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/fullcomment/archive/2009/03/05/michael-ignatieff-israel-apartheid-week-and-cupe-ontario-s-anti-israel-posturing-should-be-condemned.aspx>

called on universities to ban IAW from their campuses.⁵ The poster for the event was banned at Carleton and the University of Ottawa. Here in Toronto, our posters were vandalized and torn down as quickly as we could put them up. The Jewish Defense League protested outside our events and on at least three separate occasions, their members assaulted our organizers and guests. University security and police forces at Ryerson University, York University and the University of Toronto did little to protect organizers and participants from this violence.

It was during IAW and the intense protests leveled against us, that I once again saw the importance of anti-Zionist Jewish participation in Palestine solidarity activism. I remain convinced that it is not our role to speak for or about Palestinians and will openly criticize other anti-Zionist Jewish activists when they cross that line. Our role is a supporting one – where possible and appropriate, we can help to open up spaces to talk about Palestine and Israeli Apartheid. We can work to counter the false accusations of anti-Semitism and hate crimes that are being increasingly aimed at events like IAW and other Palestine solidarity activism. As Jews we can use our privilege to put forward the argument that criticizing Israel is not anti-Semitic, but is actually part of a broader movement towards social justice. We need to fight for and defend the rights of Palestinians and their allies to speak without fear of spurious accusations of hatred and anti-Semitism. It is vital that we constantly recognize our privilege and find ways of being allies without falling into the narcissism that so often comes with white privilege, narcissism that would make us mistakenly believe that this is somehow our movement to lead. All Jewish anti-Zionist activism must start with an understanding that there would

⁵ B'nai Brith took out a full-page ad in the National Post about IAW. It is available at: <http://www.canpalnet-ottawa.org/B%27nai%20Brith%20Ad.html>

be no movement without Palestinian resistance and we must always remember that this is a Palestinian-led struggle, in which we can and should play a supporting role.

Jewish anti-Zionism must be rooted in genuine solidarity and the desire to fight for justice, but to be sincere in these efforts we need to admit that we as individuals, and the Ashkenazi Jewish community as a whole, have much to gain from the ending of Zionism. I personally come to this work out of a strong commitment to fighting racism and imperialism, but I also have a stake in reclaiming Holocaust memory and taking back the history of my ancestors from the Zionist hegemony that has co-opted it. I believe that we need to find ways of honouring the Holocaust that are focused on healing the Ashkenazi Jewish community and that challenge Zionism and Jewish racism, as well as the oppression and violence that exists within the Jewish community. To do so, we need to express our rage and sadness about the abuse of Holocaust memory for Zionist and racist purposes. We need to openly challenge hegemonic Holocaust memorial institutions, which have become sacrosanct within Jewish and non-Jewish communities. We must demand a drastic change in the ways in which we engage with the violence of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. It is time to end memorials that are meant to traumatize and re-traumatize by forcing generations of Jewish people to try to recreate and relive the horrors. We must force the Ashkenazi Jewish community to face the trauma of our past and admit to the ways in which we have chosen to align ourselves with power in an attempt to ensure that we are not victimized again. We must focus on healing from the trauma of the past so that we can move forward because this morbid focus on victimization and the Holocaust prevents us from understanding the wrongs we commit within the community and against others that are less powerful than we are.

I am well aware of the controversy that comes with challenging Zionism and the even more intense controversy that can happen when doing so involves criticizing Holocaust memorials and education. I chose to take up these issues because it is my hope that my academic work can be useful in exposing the ways in which Holocaust education and Jewish claims to victimhood are being used to obscure Jewish racism, and to garner support for Israeli Apartheid. If my thesis can contribute, even in some small way, to normalizing criticism of Israel and Jewish racism, and if it can open up conversations about the damaging effects of hegemonic Holocaust education I will be satisfied with this academic endeavour.

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