Dangerous narratives: politics, lies and ghost stories

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Abstract

Narratives that resonate in the cultural imagination inform the ways in which we apprehend the world. This paper considers how certain images and stories that have been valorised over time bleed into reality and become socially and politically affective. If misrecognised or unacknowledged, an entire people may come to be viewed as monstrous, or their identity rendered down until they seem more ghostly than human. I will deal specifically with how Jewishness and Arabness have been imagined, so that in quite different contexts these peoples come to be apprehended as liminal rather than human beings. From the traditional anti-Semitic perspective the Jew is viewed – by the dominant culture within which he or she co-exists – as a vampiristic agent of decay. Also discussed is how, in contemporary Israel/Palestine, the Arab presence becomes – for certain parts of the Jewish population – ghostly, or monstrous. This dynamic implicates both the coloniser and colonised; indeed, at work here is a congeries of interrelationships, far more complex than the traditional self/other dichotomy. I will also consider the liminal zone wherein such fantastical images have their source, because it is through imagination and storytelling that we continually create and recreate the realities we must then inhabit.

Introduction

The practice of interpreting and commenting on real events through metaphor or narrative is used across the arts, philosophy and social sciences. It is a creative process of envisioning and revisioning events and people, and it involves engagement with liminal territory, a mental space that opens up between imagining, and the production of a concept. That is, ideas which can become solidified in reality are a product of the imagination, which according to seventeenth century Oxford philosopher, Robert Fludd, is a kind of world in itself that it is inhabited by the likenesses or 'shadows' of forms found in 'reality' (cited in Warner, 2002). A fissure, or a crack opens between the material world into a liminal space that may be read as akin to other spaces from two particular mythical traditions: the Judaic *Shekhina* and the Islamic *Na Koja Abad*. These are mythic spaces, real metaphorically and affective in 'reality', and both are seen as connecting the quotidian and the spiritual realms. In *Mundus Imaginalis,* Islamic scholar Henri Corbin (1964) characterises *Na Koja Abad* as 'imaginal' space – it has no material value, yet it is real and may link oppositional realities. Sometimes these oppositions are conceived as world and self, or self and activity, or perhaps as self and other. We might speculate upon the possibility that Fludd's fissure and Corbin's 'imaginal' is liminal territory where destructive or creative ideas, as yet unformed, percolate.

The term 'liminality' is problematic, as it has become a sort of academic buzzword to describe a fugal state of being and is used in philosophy and in disciplines ranging across the social sciences, from anthropology to medicine, psychology, politics and the arts.[1] It is not my purpose here to engage in a study of the many permutations of this concept; but three perspectives are useful in this essay. One relates to Foucault's heterotopia theory, which directly informs discussion of the political situation in Israel/Palestine to follow. The second is the anthropological perspective of Arnold Van Gennep (1960), further developed by Victor Turner (1967), which provides a starting point and useful description of the liminal as fertile ground from which ideas and images germinate.

Very briefly: Van Gennep (1960, pp. 74-75) outlined phases of initiation in tribal cultures. During the marginal phase of initiation (which occurs between separation from the group and eventual reintegration) the initiand, or liminar, is neither what he nor she once was, nor yet what they will be. The condition is characterised by ambivalence; it is this that makes this imaginal space the hub of both personal and cultural change: between oppositional poles is the ground of creativity, of individuation, or of possible reconciliation – and also the space for the creation of monsters. Gilhus (1984, p.107) asserts in her 'Study in liminal symbolism' that 'liminality is basically characterised by being without structure, but is the source and seedbed of positive structural assertions'. I would suggest that liminality is not inflected with morality, but can also become the source of *negative* structural assertions. It may be akin to the process by which actual people become infused with an otherworldly aspect of darkly imaginative associations born of real or perceived cultural fears (Jewish vampire), or if denied a proper social place; that is, unrecognised as a valid social participant, one's 'reality' may become so compromised that one becomes a spectral figure (Palestinian ghost). But a human being is not a ghost; indeed, as Pierre Bourdieu writes in *Pascalian Meditations*, 'there is no worse dispossession, no worse privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition,' (cited in Hage 2003 p. 78). I will discuss how one so dispossessed may resort to violent actions, so that the spectre may in time come to be seen instead as a monster.

A third permutation of the liminal is the 'Fourth World' imagined by Dave Eggers (2004, pp. 140-141). In his novel *You Shall Know our Velocity*, he describes a zone where we go to

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[1] See for example: 'Receiving shadows: governance and liminality in the night-time economy', an article in the *British Journal of Sociology*; a book chapter, 'The Street as Liminal Space'; and a discussion of the 'liminal relationship between nonsense and philosophy' concerning the philosophy of Lewis Carroll.

'create the things that will happen'. Alongside the initiand's liminal zone in which *gnosis* 'is communicated through myths … and through actions' (Gilhus 1984 p. 107), and *Na Koja Abad* and the *Shekhina*, Egger's fictive illustration is also useful when considering how the things we imagine, or the stories we tell, create realities. It is here in the 'pre-real' Fourth World that images and stories with cultural resonance – and therefore the power to endure and proliferate – have their source.

Western mythic imagery has its own particular glamour and stink, demonic and daemonic vigour, evident in folk stories, in fairy tales, myths and in religion. Marina Warner's (2004, p.1) early studies of myth and of Faerie explore 'the pleasures – and the terrors – of … night visitors, watchers and stalkers, werewolves and other kinds of nursery phantom who excite that deep pleasure – the visceral shiver and mental plunge'. For Warner, that fascination with 'divine daimons' and the territory they inhabit endures beyond childhood, and it is unlikely that she is the only one for whom this is so. I will discuss the way in which certain images from the cultural imaginarium – a culturally specific version, if you will, of the broader notion of an imaginal or liminal zone – find correspondences in the popular imagination, with real people in the real world. These can sometimes result in what might be termed 'narratives of denial', where people who represent 'undesirable' social elements become imbued with a level of unreality, become like the initiand, or like those non-corporeal denizens of this in-between space: liminal beings. People envisioned in this way may be banished to the social periphery because they are perceived to present a threat to the mainstream.

To be marginalised is to be relegated to a condition of only partial reality; making of a woman or a man a kind of ghostly trace of a person. By a further act of imagination, the marginal, already an object of fear may then become imbued with a nightmare aspect. How Palestinians become ghosts and Jews vampires will be illustrated by reference to other stories; for, as Richard Devetak (2005, p. 622) asserts in his article, 'The Gothic Scene of International Relations: ghosts, monsters, terror and the sublime after September 11', it would be wrong to exclude fiction from the study of international relations, as fictions 'have a long history in political discourse, from Plato's cave through Hobbes's state of nature to Rawl's original position'. As well as myths and other narrative sources, I will refer to a story steeped in Gothic paranoia, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and to a work of literary fiction that may also be read as a metanarrative for current struggles endured by the people of Israel/Palestine

– *Black Box*, by Israeli author, Amos Oz. Palestinian and Jew may, in their different contexts, be read as the liminal other who requires validation, but must remain separate or be somehow controlled in order to preserve social or political stability. Further, I will show how the 'mainstream' draws from or attains some level of self-justification from the mystery – or mystification – of the other. One might say that in some sense we feed off the body of the scapegoat; we drink the blood of the monster in an act of 'reverse vampirism'. And we do this through the medium of the story – either inventive fiction, or lies born out of narratives of denial.

Jew as Vampire

The vampire might be a denizen of Robert Fludd's 'other world'. He is also easily appreciated as a kind of personified Jungian shadow, in that he represents that which civilised humanity prefers to keep hidden. The vampire is embodied in a fantastical form that a culture can agree is evil, but separate.

Gothic horror stories, including Bram Stoker's *Dracula* were written at a time of political transition. In his essay, 'The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the anxiety of reverse colonisation', Stephen D Arata (2000) claims that in the nineteenth century the British feared a waning of the power and influence of their empire, which may have created a level of cultural anxiety affecting the zeitgeist, enabling those shadows of real forms proposed by Fludd to emerge from his 'other world' as dreams and symbolic stories. At this time, these dreams represented fears of the possibility of the encroachment of the 'other' from the mysterious and dangerous East. Dracula comes from 'Transylvania, the exotic, Eastern land 'beyond the forest', and his project is to contaminate with his own disease the cities of Europe. This 19th century form of the vampire myth developed at a time when the colonialist empire was being shaken by the consequences of the very powers that once made it seem so secure; the 'irrational' East now pervades the imagination of the 'rational' West'. The image of the vampire – born in that fissure between what is imagined and what is real – is that of a lethal yet sensual shadow being, a parasite whose desire is to destroy civilisation and to propagate his own kind by feeding off real, living people.

Thus we have a situation in the late 19th century where England watches its world influence waning and suffers anxiety in relation to certain barbaric 'others' that Arata avers were considered by the Empire as agents of 'reverse colonisation'. That is, 'the "civilised" world feared that it was on the point of being colonised by "primitive" forces' (2000, p. 162) which

would deplete the life blood of the Empire: 'vampires are intimately linked to military conquest and to the rise and fall of empires' (p. 165). The vampire is an agent of change whose existence is facilitated by decay. He is the spark ignited by the slow-growing heat of accumulated compost. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Van Helsing tells us that vampires follow 'in [the] wake of imperial decay' (1996, p. xv). Stoker considers problematic relationships to do with the blurring of boundaries upon which the British Empire depended, from the uncomfortable relationship between West and East, to conflicts 'between civilized and primitive, colonizer and colonized, victimizer and victim… Stoker probes the heart of a culture's sense of itself…in its hour of perceived decline' (Arata 2000, p.164).

The Gothic horror stories that come to light at this time in England's history reflect these fears, borrowing images from the cultural imaginarium, which infuse with sinister glamour a particular minority group of immigrants, largely refugees from the modern Russian pogroms. According to Paul Johnson's *A History of the Jews*, the number of Jewish immigrants to England between 1891 and 1900 increased by 600% (cited in Zanger 1991 p. 34). Zanger quotes the Bishop of Stepney: 'the Jews [are] coming in like an army, *eating up* Christian gentiles' (italics mine). Zanger (1991, p. 33) also reminds us that Svengali, the roguish Jewish hypnotist from George du Maurier's *Trilby*, was almost as popular a villain at the time as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Svengali, along with Shakespeare's usurer, Shylock and Charles Dickens' 'fence', Fagin, was an 'Oriental Israelite Hebrew' whose glamour and powers of suggestion enabled him to bend women to his will. Jewish Svengali is tall, dark and handsome, as is Dracula; both are likened to creatures often invested with nightmarish qualities of bats, rats, and wolves. The horror of beasts with claws and fangs, the nightmares in which we are pursued, controlled, and ultimately devoured, are embodied by the strangers who come from '[t]he poisonous East – birthplace and home of an ill wind that blows nobody any good' (Gerald du Maurier cited in Zanger 1991 p. 35).

In Europe's tradition of anti-Semitism, the Ashkenazi Jew was seen as an alien and oily pariah, who, from within the dankest crevices of culture, works his sinister magic in a similar fashion to that of the vampire. Anti-Semitic images and literature identify the Jew, like the vampire, with parasitism, avariciousness, and aversion to Christianity and its symbols. Looking further back, we find that historically, Jewish blood was thought to be 'black and putrid' (Zafran 1979, p. 17). Indeed, Zafran, continues, 'there is no people more wicked, more impudent, more troublesome, more venomous, more wrathful, more deceptive and

more ignominious', and Jews were 'often considered representatives of the devil, or worse still, demons and devils themselves'. The 'liminal' Jew; that is, the 'shadow' form of the Jew, like the vampire, is a product of Fludd's 'fissure' between what is real and what is imagined.

In 'Dracula's Legacy' the German Lacanian critic, Friedrich Kittler, comments on the inclusion in *Dracula* of one Armenius Vambery, who is based on an actual professor whom Stoker had met at London's Lyceum Club. Vambery was an international sophisticate and a scholar who 'travelled the Orient in oriental disguise, gathering information'. He is present, yet in his multiple masks of Shiite, Sunnite, Jew or Christian, depending on what was required of him, also phantasmal and barely visible; he was undeniably effective in the world – though always through subterfuge. These traits are also those, which at that time in history, associate the caricature of the Diaspora Jew – whose corrupting influence infiltrates the social body – with the parasite or the vampire. In his article, Kittler identifies Vambery, with his 'combination of espionage, Orientalism and disguise' as 'actually…some sort of a vampire' (cited in Gelder 1994 pp. 8-9).

Clearly, the consequences of this kind of mythologising are, for actual human beings, dire. By the late nineteenth century in Germany, for example, the term *schadlinge* was used by Wilhelm Marr to characterize Jews. *Shadlinge*, Alex Bein informs us in 'The Jewish Parasite' (1964, p. 6-7) are '…creatures which damage the objects of man in agriculture … breeding stock …the human body itself'. The Jew dehumanized and envisioned as parasite may, like vampires, viruses or white-ants, be 'more or less systematically attacked and destroyed' (Bein 1964 p.7).

With the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the East/West, parasite/victim, coloniser/colonised, paradigm found a new form on the world stage at a time when imperialism was at last becoming a dirty word. A parallel may be drawn between Stoker's 19th century paranoia and the particular fears and prejudices that beleaguer modern Israel in what may be seen as that nation state's 'hour of perceived decline'. 'Decline' in this case refers less to imperial failure, but to the Israeli loss of their original post-war idealism and sense of righteousness, the validity of the nation's *raison d'être* being criticised from within as well as from external commentators. Political and demographic issues, including a low Jewish birthrate and an exodus of young Jews from Israel alongside the moral exigencies to

be discussed, intensify the stresses placed upon the already tautly stretched social fabric, involving ongoing questioning of national identity.

In his novel *Black Box,* Israeli author Amos Oz deals with uncertain moral ground and political ambivalence. The setting is the unstable terrain of Israel/Palestine, a zone that may be described by way of the Foucauldian formulation of the 'heterotopia', or utopian counter-site. Unlike a utopia, which is an imagined world, heterotopias exist within 'the real space of society' (Foucault 1967). They are real because they occupy geographical space and historical time, but like the liminal spaces previously discussed, are mythic and timeless in their nature and functions, both sacred and forbidden, illuminated with representations of incompatible realities that function in relation to the oppositional poles of the imaginary and the real. Israel is central to the cultural imagination of three monotheisms: a sacred site. Or rather, it is three *different* sacred sites on the same land. In a sense, the contested city of Jerusalem is practically rendered unreal, its actual materiality undermined by its massive load of connotative meaning.

The inhabitants of this heterotopian liminal zone, both Palestinian and Jew, must deal with the apparently insoluble paradox of belonging to two separate nations that inhabit the same physical space. *Black Box* is an epistolary and confessional novel that, through the development of character relationships, explicates layered crises, not overtly between Arab and Israeli, but focused within the Jewish community itself, which reflects Jewish attitudes to the Arab populace rather than dealing with these attitudes directly. In *Black Box*, the relationship between Gideon (Ashkenazi, or European Jew), one-time war hero who later becomes one of Israel's harshest critics, and Sommo (Mizrahi, or 'Jewish Arab') reflects the colonised/coloniser opposition and its concomitant questioning of cultural identity; but rather than being written as a simple dialectic, coloniser and colonised are seen to be implicated in the creation of their respective roles, these roles being examined in a series of inversions or character reversals. At certain times, Sommo's role is seen as vampiristic; at other times, the parasite is Gideon, the intellectual European. In the novel Gideon represents the new face of Western imperialism devilling the conservative Jewish Arab, represented by Sommo, who is now seen as the 'shiftless Oriental', a canny businessman in 'pale-blue, lightweight …Dacron', (Oz 2002 p.123) striking dubious deals with politicians and developers to acquire more land and through it, more power. In an interesting inversion, this image of the Arab Jew is a quasi-Shylockian echo of anti-Semitic images of nineteenth century Ashkenazi

moneylenders involved in the 'cancerous tumour of usury' (Marr cited in Bein 1964 p.6). In the Israel of *Black Box*, the 'civilised world' is once again colonising the 'primitive'. However, this time the situation is complicated by a mutual struggle in which the representatives of each side of the conflict take turns at playing 'vampire', reflecting a nation turned on itself in fear of 'the other within'; that is, within the boundaries of both selfhood and nationhood.

The novel traces the decline of Gideon, the ex-military hero cum critic of the Israeli state, when he returns to Israel from beyond the pale, world-weary and dying, to use his wealth to corrupt Sommo. Yet Sommo willingly drinks Gideon's blood money (an image reminiscent of Bram Stoker's heroine Mina, who must collaborate with her corruptor, Dracula, by drinking his blood while he drinks hers). Gideon, standing for old Europe, for disillusioned Ashkenazi Jewry, (and for harassed-by-humans Dracula) is exhausted, cynical, on the wane; whereas Sommo (new Israel) is full of vitality – in part supplied by Gideon's cash infusions – enjoying a level of febrile vigour also associated the vampire. Thus, after several shifts in the power balance, we see in Gideon's demoralization the exhaustion of a culture in decline; while the religio-political fanaticism of Sommo is in the ascendant.

The image of Vambery, Kittler's disenfranchised Jew, becomes useful here (whether or not one accepts Kittler's association of the names 'vampire' and 'Vambery') because there is a connection between Vambery and Gideon, who in turn stands for the more liberal component of Israeli society. Vambery and Gideon represent the internationalist who, wherever he lives, is always alien; Gideon also shares with this 'actual' vampire the polyphonic qualities of a Jew with a diffuse identity who travels the world, not as a spy, but certainly as a collector then a disseminator of information and ideology; he has alienated himself from his people, has lost his sense of identification with his nation, is unstable and capricious. In Sommo's Israel – even if Gideon were not a left-wing polemicist – a hybridised Jew lacking nationalistic verve and stability and any form of religious orthodoxy is already by default a natural adversary of a conservative like Sommo, who seeks, through the consolidation of spurious but biblically sanctioned 'Greater Israel', completion and belonging. Gideon is and must remain marginal, and in Sommo's eyes, a parasite. Yet the reverse is also true, for Sommo, who represents the religious and the colonialist, is Alexander Gideon's 'other' and destroyer. Gideon's file cards speak to the 'interdependence' of 'torturer and victim.

Inquisitor and martyr. Crucifier and crucified' (Oz 2002 p. 146). To this litany of oppositional interactions one might also add, 'parasite and victim'.

Philosopher Leszek Kolakowski's (1982) 'law of infinite cornucopia' discusses how arguments can be used in an infinite number of ways to support any number of positions. Similarly, narrative components can be arranged and rearranged to produce different stories. Oz's novel is one rendition of one story about Israel. There are other narratives. In his 1998 article on Israeli hegemony, Baruch Kimmerling deals with three countercultures with different stories whose seeds were always present within the dominant model, now arguably declining in power. He mentions that although the aim of the original Ashkenazi Zionist hegemony was to create a secular Jewish society, one must also remember that the religious was always part of the mix. The land was referred to by the biblical term 'Zion', the language chosen was a modernised version of biblical Hebrew, the Old Testament aim of territorial conquest motivated the establishment of the Israeli state, which embraced notions of biblical 'heroes' alongside "heroes of labour" [as] cultivated by the Soviet regime' (Kimmerling 1998, p.50). It is a complex and contradictory combination of narrative elements. The paradox is well illustrated by Kimmerling's (p.51) words: 'The reader only has to imagine the chairman of the World Zionist organization speaking on the UN podium, waving the Old Testament: "This is our charter for the land" '.

The ancient Hebraic narrative of exile and return was consolidated with the creation of Israel as a Jewish state. The original story is one of heroism, where the David of the Jewish diaspora, against all odds, finally defeats Goliath and is at last rewarded. In Israel it was hoped that Jewry would never again have to suffer the consequences of statelessness. But over the last 62 years, the image of freedom fighter has, for many, been corrupted. A brief and simplified time line illustrates this point. First, the heroic narrative: the Jewish state is ratified in 1948; the kibbutz movement begins establishing settlements; the pre-emptive strike against Egypt, Jordan and Syria in the Six Day War in 1967 is magnificently successful, as is the Yom Kippur War in 1973; the 1976 rescue of hostages from Entebbe further casts Israelis as defenders of righteousness… However, world sympathies begin to shift with later events: the Lebanon War in the 1980s casts Israel in the role of oppressor, particularly with the massacre of Arab civilians in the Beirut refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla, in which the Israeli army was implicated; ongoing settlements in the occupied territories which continue today are seen by fewer local or international Israel watchers as

worthy; the invasion of Gaza in 2008 where Israel is accused of war crimes, and the abuse in Dubai of other countries' passports by the Israeli Special operations team, Mossad, provoking an international outcry; and the interception of the Gaza flotilla in May 2010, which amid accusations of summary executions and torture, was judged by the UN as unlawful. This contemporary image in the eyes of much of the world is a far cry from the old story of suffering and eventual heroic triumph. In an October 2, 2010 article 'The Battle for the Middle East Narrative', journalist Paul McGeough, discussing the territorial conflict with Palestinians, describes the one-time 'settlers' – and here he evokes images of 'taming of the wilds and something found' – now being referred to instead as 'colonisers', which instead tells a story of 'dispossession, the planting of foreigners and something lost'. The 'hero' is, in the eyes of many, becoming a far more ambiguous denizen of the Israeli/Palestinian heterotopia.

In decline now is the old rhetoric of Israel as the lone vanguard of democracy in the Middle East, and Ben Gurion's application to Israel of the biblical concept of 'a light to the nations' (Isaiah 49:6). A pertinent metaphorical story for this geographical and historical context is that of Lucifer, the 'light bearer', once the brightest star in the sky: 'How are thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground which didst weaken the nations!' (Isaiah 14:12–14). This passage is usually read as an indictment against the King of Babylon, but this god-king is metaphorically linked with the fall of the rebellious angel referred to in the King James version as Lucifer, but in others as 'day-star, son of the morning', doomed to the Abyss for his arrogance. In myth – and in war stories – the adversary may come to be seen through the lens of monstrosity. If monsters are 'liminal creatures who "defy borders" and "normality" ' then it may be defiance of borders that makes human beings too, seem monstrous; while those who defend the same territory come to be seen, as 'defending 'the civilised against the barbaric, and [upholding] good in the face of evil' (Devetak 2004 p 624). However, the roles of fiend and defender are unstable; they change depending upon who is telling the story, and whose story accrues moral value. Thus Lucifer – and, most importantly, those human beings whom he represents in metaphor – might be either heroic 'bringers of light', or doomed transgressors.

Amoz Oz explicates the roles of coloniser and colonised, and these roles may be linked to older narratives discussed, in which – sustained by traditional mythical imagery – each protagonist becomes monstrous in the eyes of the other. If, as Judith Halberstam has claimed,

'monsters are meaning machines' (cited in Gelder 2000 p.6) then we are fully warned to attend to those meanings.

While Israel's secular Ashkenazi-dominated culture sidelines certain pietistic Jewish citizens, and while restrictions on Mizrahi participation in an Ashkenazi-dominated culture alienate Arab Jews, limits placed on Palestinian citizenship place this cultural group, far more than any other, outside the social mainstream: Israel recognises only Jewish nationality, thus Muslim Arabs are citizens without being nationals (Makdisi, 'The Architecture of Erasure' p. 6). In her 1999 article, 'Jewish and Democratic', Ruth Gavison tells us that historically, Israel failed to 'seriously acknowledge' or deal with the Israeli/Palestininan 'rift' from the outset. Today, the situation is no better. Antony Lowenstein (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2010) argues that Israel, 'an insecure nation demanding obedience to an ideology' continuing to ignore 'the legitimate rights of the Arab population' results in both Palestinians and leftist Jews being 'loathed … smeared and isolated'. Isolation through lack of recognition, according to Bourdieu, cuts one off from 'access to a socially recognised social being … to humanity' (cited in Hage p. 78). Palestinians are simultaneously a part, yet *apart* from the mainstream: a real, yet not real, ghostly presence. Only acknowledgement of social validity will ensure full 'reality': the 'ghosts' can then manifest themselves as human.

Spectralisation affects both colonist and liminar. Ghassan Hage points out in '"Comes a Time We Are All Enthusiasm" 'that the 'dehumanising gaze' that sees 'Them as a non-differentiated entity … is often accompanied by an equally self-dehumanising, abstracted version of Us' (2003, pp. 65-66). This may equate to the attitudes of both Palestinians and Israelis. In the latter case, while the secular nationalist narrative (with embedded biblical aspects) and concomitant self-image is failing, a new Jewish Israeli 'Us' has yet to emerge.

To construct Palestinians and Israelis as one-dimensional heroes and villains is simplistic, and overlooks the ongoing political machinations of both Middle Eastern and Western powerbrokers as well as the ancient and complex narratival palimspsest that is Israel/Palestine. Nevertheless, the Israeli response to the layered images and stories of which the nation is composed has been largely one of denial of both Israeli culpability and the complexities of the relationship between adversaries. An increasing number of Israelis have responded to this moral dilemma by emigrating (figures provided in following section). At this point it would not be hard to introduce the spectre of the so-called 'self-hating' Jew,

which reeks of indulgent guilt; but I would argue that there is less self-hatred at work than despair. Paul McGeough has it that Israel is losing the 'contest for control of the narrative', but more than a matter of losing a propaganda fight for the moral high-ground – which is about appearances rather than substance – Israel is failing as a narrative enterprise on an even more profound level. The populace, both Jewish and Palestinian, need true stories to be told, not romances, mysteries or fabrications: indeed, the consequences of unreal or exclusivist narratives have resulted in the creation of a new kind of ghost.

Palestinian as Ghost

Heterotopias, as previously mentioned, may mediate between interpretations of reality, or may juxtapose representations of incompatible places. Foucault (1967) gives the example of the cinema or the theatre but if the 'incompatible places' are real geographical territories, they may act as staging grounds upon which are played out a drama in which a mirror-exchange occurs between utopian vision and ideology. In this sense, if Palestine as heterotopia has the virtues of the ideologue's utopia projected upon it, then the obvious corollary is that Israel – problematically the same place – is a Zionist heterotopia. Borrowing Foucault's terms: Israel/Palestine, is a 'privileged or sacred or forbidden' place, a fecund seedbed, both historically and culturally, of creative and destructive stories that profoundly affect events there and in the rest of the world. It is simultaneously a mythical and very real place charged with both *eros* and *thanatos*, a liminal zone where symbols, born out of a sense of disenfranchisement or estrangement, are derived.

Arthur Saniotis, in his 2005 article, 'Re-Enchanting Terrorism', illustrates this idea when he characterises Islamist extremists as liminal beings because of the 'indeterminate and transnational nature of jihadism'. Saniotis refers to the liminal model posited by Victor Turner, because of its emphasis on 'ambiguity, fragmentation and "the blurring of set boundaries" ', and to the magical or transformative nature of this state in which new images are created, as well as their extreme affect in the world (Saniotis 2005 p. 533). The above descriptors, however, might also be seen to apply not only to terrorist actions. With accusations of illegality and war crimes being made against the state of Israel, legal boundaries are very 'blurred' here also; the nation is riven with moral ambiguity. Thus, perhaps it may be seen also as simultaneously a physical as well as a metaphorical 'lawless zone', laden as it is with images from a particular utopian vision, fuelling acts of destruction. But these acts are perceived by the participants – whether jihadists or citizen-soldiers – as the

means of creating a new paradigm. Saniotis frames jihadists as 'liminal beings who seek to re-enchant the world via their symbolic and performative features' (p.533). This word, 're-enchanting' belongs to a magical lexicography: magic as means of transformation, and it conjures Blakean millenarian imagery of 'arrows of desire' or 'chariots of fire' as much as visions of an apocalyptic version of the Shi'ite *Mahdi*, or 'Imam of the Age', due at the end of time. Similarly, the Zionist dream of an Israel bounded by biblically-sanctioned borders ordained by the deity is loaded with portentous mythic imagery.

This dream-narrative continues to be reinforced after every Yom Kippur service and Passover *seder* with the traditional invocation: 'Next year in Jerusalem'. Perhaps even more potently, the originary myth of Ishmael (Abraham's elder son born of an Arab slave) and Isaac (his half-brother and inheritor of territory contested ever since) is taught to children from infancy. According to Rita Kissen, in contemporary children's literature, Palestinian Arabs 'remain the children of Hagar – sometimes evil, sometimes good, but always subordinate and inferior to their European cousins' (Kissen 1991, p. 112). Such stories may create or reinforce political realities.

It has been claimed that subordination leading to invalidation of Palestinian self-identity is embedded on the curriculum in state-run Palestinian schools. In the 1970s, a team of Jewish Israeli researchers criticised the focus on Jewish history and the absence in the curriculum of Palestinian history, and the authors of *Indigenous education and empowerment* contend that 'this lack of attention towards Palestinian Arab history, culture and identity and its contemporary political concerns has incessantly been maintained.' (Abu-Saad & Champagne 2006, p. 134). Abu-Saad quotes an Arab student: 'They don't want us … to develop an awareness of our national identity'. This means that an increasing number of the state's citizenry come to age arguably lacking a sense of agency and respect within the mainstream community. This seems likely to preclude realistic future characterisation of the nation as a democracy, given how – according to Oren Yiftachel, lecturer in political geography at Ben Gurion university – 'Arab citizenship in Israel has been structurally constrained by the state's ... hegemonic Judaization project'. Yiftachel conceptualises Arab civil status as 'ghetto citizenship' (2009, p. 56).

It is as if there is literally one land and people (super)imposed upon another, or twin heterotopias bumping up against each other's reality, and bleeding where they meet. One

might say that at this 'intersection of materiality and the imagination' the cultural product created is war.

Stories link the material and the imaginal, history and myth, past with present, and create realities from fears and yearnings. Ideals and prejudices are inculcated, directly or subliminally, through repetitive storytelling – and narratives, particularly time-hallowed ones based on religious myths – may contribute to the justification of a political position and supply a cultural foundation of a people's sense of self and of place in the world. So also does historical storytelling. Israeli identity and politics – as the interplay of power relations, in this case between dominant and liminal social elements – is unavoidably informed by the aftershock of near decimation of European Jewry in WWII. The story of Israel as a modern state arguably begins with the slogan of the Jewish Defence league: 'Never again.' Prescriptions recommended in order for the story to come true vary, however.

In her 2004 article, 'Settler nationalism, collective memories of violence and the "uncanny other" ' Joyce Dalsheim discusses the stories leftist Israeli liberals tell themselves in order to deal with the apparent contradictions of being socially democratic in politics and compassionate in outlook while also being nationalistic. What she refers to as 'nationalist imagining' manages a trick of perception so that the ethics of Jewish settlement is not compromised, and it might also be characterised as a kind of utopian thinking. The stories exhibit a certain carefully constructed ambivalence and denial of the other. Through narrative, what is imagined is perceived as real by means of wishful thinking.

Dalsheim describes a school trip she accompanied to the Palmach museum, whose elaborate audio-visual presentations tell the story of the making of the state of Israel. The teachers, from backgrounds in the left-wing kibbutz movement, expressed an intention to refine their student's ability to think critically about history, yet ironically failed to consider including in the excursion a visit to any sites that had once been Arab, or to extant Palestinian towns. The author also notes that once at the museum, rather than a story being told which disparaged or in any way denigrated the original inhabitants, she found instead that 'that the enemy [was] surrealistically almost entirely absent from this narrative…it was as though they had somehow been wished away' (Dalsheim 2004 p.160).

Dalsheim compares this wishful notion exemplified in the Zionist slogan, 'a land without a people for a people without a land' with the Australian misnomer, 'terra nullius'. But the glib dismissal of the original population of Australia occurred at a time in history when 'Empire' was associated with glory, whereas the newer nation of Israel came into being long after colonialism had slipped to the moral 'low ground'. In imperial Britain there was hardly a need to find ethical justification for colonialist ambitions, but if Zionists are capable of absorbing and sustaining a similar belief as late as the 21st century, this act of mental gymnastics is now becoming increasingly difficult to exercise for the modern liberal humanists within the Israeli hegemony. Living in a postcolonial world, such convenient fabrications are morally insupportable, and so guilt and history meet and cross over and a form of ethical doublethink now comes into play.

Thus, precisely because it is recognised that Palestine was not without a people before 1948 (any more than Australia was not empty before 1770), new stories, formed with the aid of an imaginative disconnect based on an impossible paradox of recognising and simultaneously failing to recognise a whole nation with whom one coexists, creates a weird slippage between reality and make-believe. In a fantastical psychic manoeuvre, liberal Israelis must inhabit a kind of liminal space where Palestinians are there but also 'not-there', existing as a ghostly presence or, as Dalsheim eloquently phrases it, an 'uncanny absence'.

This poetic characterisation of the 'villains [who are] somehow not quite there' (Dalsheim 2004 p. 152) or those 'uncannily absent' ones, reflects the official term used to describe the Palestinians who remained in Israel after 1950: 'present absentees'. Those people, comprising approximately 15% (Yee, 2008) of the Israeli population, fell victim to the new Israeli Knesset's 'Law of Absentee Property', 'which retroactively and prospectively provided for the State of Israel to confiscate properties from anyone identified as an "absentee" ' (Schechla 2001 p. 21) – even though some of those included in this category were, in fact, categorically present. Schechla provides an example of a particularly ironic case of what we might think of as 'uncannily absent presence' or 'spectralisation' of a group of human beings with the case of the three villages of Iqrit, Mansura and Kaf'r Birim, whose inhabitants' 'homes and lands were expropriated by the state under the Absentee Property Law even as they continued to press their case in the courts' (2001, p. 22). Such dispossession, and thus invisibility, is illustrated further by Israeli scholar Hillel Cohen (2005 p. 64.):

> Israel did not mention the origins of the internal refugees in the formal statistics. They were not included in the UNRWA registry, and the abandoned villages did not appear on maps. It goes without saying that no museum was established in Israel to commemorate life in the villages which no longer existed.

A more recent example of what might be interpreted a wilful oversight or denial, is that of the projected Museum of Tolerance, designed by Frank Gehry. It is to be constructed in Jerusalem, although part of the site is already occupied by a Muslim cemetery, *Ma'man Allah* which, according to Makdisi's 'Architecture of Erasure', seems to have come under the jurisdiction, in 1948, of the then Custodian of Absentee Property (2010, p. 6). Amidst Arab protests, Israel's Rabbi Marvin Hier declared in 2004 that the museum would be 'a great landmark promoting the principles of mutual respect and social responsibility' (2010, p.1)

The reality is no less paradoxical or oxymoronic as Dalsheim's description, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for the part of the Israeli population with whom Dalsheim deals in her article to live with this level of ambiguity and contradiction – or with this level of conflict. While popular wars may be thought to promote social cohesion, in the absence of a certain level of consensus 'such as the belief in the necessity of conflict, that it threatens the entire society, that the society is worth preserving, that the conflict will produce the desired results', then cohesion fails, resulting instead in 'disintegration of the group' (Coser cited in Cohen 1988, p. 909). As reported in 2004 in *Ha-aretz*, a prominent Israeli daily newspaper, it was estimated that back then 760,000 Israelis were living abroad, compared to 550,000 in 2000, but 'the fact that *Ha-aretz* published the 2000 and 2003 figures at all has to mean that they were authorized by the Israeli government. This in turn means that the real figures for emigration must be very much higher' (Killgore 2004). And even as Jewish settlements spread in contested territory, the population of Israeli Jews is on the decline. In 2008, Michael Petrou estimated in his article 'Why Israel Can't Survive', that within the next decade or so, due to the higher Arab birth rate, the inclusion of the occupied territories within Israel and ongoing Jewish emigration, that Israel will have a majority Arab population. Considering the profound level of bitterness towards the state of many sidelined Arabs it is unlikely that Israel, in its current manifestation, will be supported by Arab votes; thus, it is highly questionable that Israel can continue as both a Jewish state and democracy: the influence of both the acknowledged and the spectral 'uncannily present absentees' may soon change the nature of Israel. The current political situation attests to the state of denial in which the nation exists. Petrou draws a parallel with Israeli delusional thinking and the story

of a cat in a poem by Spyros Kyriazopoulos 'who licked an opened tin for hours without realizing that she had cut her tongue on its jagged edge and was drinking her own blood'.

Dalsheim's 'liberals' are dealing with – or failing to deal with – a lack of parity on many levels. In his 2004 article 'A Disgrace to the Map of Israel', Ranen Omer-Sherman reviews Amos Oz's illustration in his novel *A Perfect Peace* of how the old Hebrew conception of *t'shuva* or of finding the 'right path' has become compromised. Communal responsibility and nationalist imperative are today, very much at odds. Both Oz's *Black Box* and *A Perfect Peace* reflect that dysfunctional reality and the uneasy combination of factors. Questions arise as to the possibility of ever reconstructing a coherent story that can be aligned with ethical ideals.

As well as the two heterotopian visions coexisting in extreme discomfort and pain, there are also two Israels, as illustrated fictively in *Black Box*: the young and beleaguered state of Sommo's story versus Gideon's paranoid and belligerent state of which he is an uncomfortable citizen. It seems that many non-fictional, entirely real citizens of Israel deal daily with incompatibilities of nationalism and compassion, and that these paradoxes can be sustained only by a tricky sleight of mind akin to Orwellian doublethink. Dalsheim offers an interpretation of what happens in the imaginations of some liberal, secular Jewish Israelis trying to embrace the idea of their right to citizenship of this contested nation state, while being aware – yet failing to acknowledge – the claim of those others to the same territory. But spectralising the adversary patently does not make him disappear.

How can Palestinian claims be so persistently denied? One response might be: When their humanity is denied. In 'violence, mourning, politics', rather than asking if Arabs have suffered dehumanisation, Judith Butler challenges us to consider '*To what extent* have [they]… fallen outside the "human"?' (my italics), which opens up fundamental questions regarding the nature of reality. She then asks: 'How might reality be remade?' and surely it is true that a new way of conceiving self, other and nationhood is essential for Israel/Palestine, a country comprised metaphorically of twin heterotopias; mythically, of embattled rival siblings; literally, of two nations in one that as mentioned earlier, is 'turned on itself in fear of 'the other within'. Perhaps this new reality might be based on a story whose action revolves around a 'spiritual and moral apprehension' as exemplified in that 'paradigm of communal responsibility and social consciousness [that] also bears the weight of a nationalist

imperative', the Judaic *t'shuva*. However, such a re-visioning is as unlikely as a political solution when the 'other' continues to suffer 'the violence of derealization.' Butler goes on to speculate that 'if violence is done against those who are unreal, then from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated' (2004, p. 33), and she develops this idea in terms that reflect traditional imagery from the Western imaginarium, told and retold (from faerie tales to B-Grade horror movies) of monsters who rise again (and again): '[The 'derealized'] have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again)…they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness…The derealization of the "Other" means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral' (pp. 33-34).

Conclusion

'If Christianity is to a great extent about doctrine and Islam about ritual, Judaism is about narrative', suggests Stephen Prothero in *God is Not One* (2010, p. 243). The story told and retold is of exile and return. In the absence of a homeland, Jewish people maintained for centuries their sense of identity and place by retelling stories, and with the advent of Zionism, the core narrative of exile and return met an overtly political narrative. But one might argue, given the current political climate, the narrative of 'rights' on both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, has become redundant. Alternatively, one might agree with Amos Oz, and characterise the 'clash between one very powerful, very convincing, very painful claim over this land and another no less powerful, no less convincing claim as 'tragic':

> Now such a clash between right claims can be resolved in one of two manners. There's the Shakespeare tradition of resolving a tragedy with the stage hewed with dead bodies ... But there is also the Chekov tradition. In the conclusion of the tragedy by Chekov, everyone is disappointed, disillusioned, embittered, heartbroken, but alive. And my colleagues and I have been working ... not to find the sentimental happy ending, a brotherly love, a sudden honeymoon to the Israeli-Palestinian tragedy, but a Chekovian ending, which means clenched teeth compromise. (Omer-Sherman 2004, p.99)

From the Jewish perspective, through a series of imperialistic and political machinations a new country called Israel was brought into being in 1948 as a place of succour for a homeless and historically harassed and horribly abused nation. The establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine may never have been founded on any moral right, but nevertheless European sympathy for the Jews and feelings of guilt after the second world war made such a move

forgivable – but only in the non-Arab world, as opposed to the Arab world where Israel's Independence Day is referred to as *al Naqba*, The Catastrophe.

Narratives of denial result in Palestinian 'spectralisation', which has social and political ramifications for Jew and Arab: demoralisation and anger and reactivity leading to ongoing anguish and conflict. If one's voice is repeatedly ignored, it is not uncommon to start shouting. This is one way of reading Palestinian acts of violence perpetrated against civilians; screams into the ears of the wilfully oblivious. This is not a justification for terrorism. I would agree with Ghassan Hage's assertion that 'both the Israeli invasion [of the West Bank in 2002] and the suicide bombings constitute a kind of warped postmodern pastiche associating medievally violent political affects, early modern veneration of political entities such as "the nation", and late-modern military technology'(Hage 2003, p. 67) But Hage goes on to decry the fact that while forms of violence against civilians are considered justifiable if enacted by this legal nation state, suicide bombings are categorically condemned. When Hage sought to interpret terrorist actions he was accused of moral collusion (Hage 2003, p. 66). The affect of military actions, no matter how extreme, cannot match that of the 'terrorist'. 'They' must remain in the mainstream consciousness as a ghostly 'nondifferentiated entity', abstracted and dehumanised. How does the terrorist identification – by his 'other' – move from human to spectre to monster?

In 'Terror's Abduction of Experience, Wickman tells us that terror is provoked by the spectacle of some awful and inexplicable fright and 'a turbid moodiness lingers… whereas with horror these conventions swell into monstrosities' (2005, p188). Perhaps then, in the case of Palestinian suicide bombings, we are actually dealing with horror rather than terror? The pedestrian nature of tanks and guns – their very legality – cannot match the embrace of a kind of mythic space that opens up when the quotidian world is ruptured by an action committed by an enemy fuelled by despair and desire, by existential anguish. Wickman is discussing literature, but I think the analysis may be extended into the world of objects and people: 'In horror …the sublime and the grotesque meet, often in a panoply of kitsch imagery … [or as Hage has it, 'medievally violent political affects'] characterised by a hyperbolic combination of visceral disgust and psychic anxiety'. Terror – or rather, horror, plunge the mind into liminal space, 'a strange world where anguish and ecstasy coexist' (Bataille, 1988, pxxxii). Thus, the terrorist, or 'horrorist', brings into the world a spiritual dimension of fright

that culminates in an ontological dreadfulness that could only be perpetrated by those who are no longer identified as human, but as monsters.

Failure of acknowledgment or misrecognition of another may result in the other becoming, to a greater or lesser extent, dehumanised. In the extreme, the person becomes like a shade. Images created for the 'spectralised' person are based on old stories from a bank of cultural imagery located between imagination and reality, a zone characterised by ambiguity and, as proposed by Robert Fludd, inhabited by 'shadows' of real forms, or by dreams and symbolic stories. It can be the source of creative energy or a repository of the material of nightmares. So we might say that each culture has its image stock, built up over centuries of remembering and storytelling, available to feed into new narratives, which in turn may enter the cultural imaginarium, perhaps to be used again later on in history: this process might be viewed as an ongoing, two-way exchange between reality and imagination.

Shades may serve a cultural function. We examined possible permutations of such a role: vilified and scapegoated, the shade may be allocated a burden of guilt or cultural anxiety to bear. Also, the now spectral person or group of persons loses what they once had – a monster or a ghost cannot own property. This enables the 'humans' to have what he has lost. We looked at these phenomena in the context of anti-Semitic Europe, and in the heterotopian site of Israel/Palestine.

Jewish citizens of contemporary Israel, or reconstructed colonisers, carry with them the grim legacy of a history in which they have been allocated the role of pariah, of exotic but noxious weed ('wandering jew': a low, creeping herb that threatens the survival of the gardens it overspreads), culminating in a holocaust in which the race came close to extinction. Antisemitic images fuelled this history. Nightmare images of monstrosity from resonant narratives deprived Jewish people of their humanity; rather than refugees seeking succour they became instead, in the European imagination, parasites seeking blood – literally (the blood libel) and figuratively. This may be seen as a sort of negative version of the same process that makes the 'holy' city of Jerusalem the sacral centre of nations. Both come from the same source, that cultural imaginarium, or font of accumulated images and stories. Israel's Jewish population is demographically varied and complex, but two main groups emerge. Those who, like Oz's Sommo, are expansionist in politics and conservative in outlook, and those like Gideon who are liberal-minded and increasingly disaffected by their

new role of coloniser; these colonisers cannot necessarily accommodate their sense of self with this new role, so antipathetic is it to the old myth.

Israel/Palestine, the staging ground for these conflicts, is a single country overlaid with rival utopian ideologies. With its juxtapositions of representations of reality based on conflicting images, it is neither one place nor another, but several places at once. Here, we witness daily a collision of ideology and reality in a liminal zone that is simultaneously physical and imaginary, mythical and mundane, no-man's land and everyman's land. It is an apparently insoluble paradox that is perhaps more real in the idealised abstract than it is in quotidian reality. That statement in no way makes light of the reality of the perpetual suffering there but rather brings into focus the idea that it is the intangibles – the warring ideologies, values and beliefs and stories – that create the world of facts and solids, territories and bodies: the liminal has far greater potency than the resolved poles by which it is circumscribed. And it is in the liminal zone where symbols and ideologies form and where 'the battle for control of the narrative' begins. Israel/Palestine is a heterotopian space charged with energy fuelled by desire, a sacred site between contradictory 'conception[s] and creation', both seedbed of positive structural assertions' and also a shadowland.

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