

## Israel, Palestine, and the Doppelganger Effect

Since publishing *Doppelganger* in September 2023, some of the most gratifying feedback I have received has been about what one reader called “the Jewish parts.” These passages are mainly (though not exclusively) in two chapters that come late in the book: “The Nazi in the Mirror” and “The Unshakable Ethnic Double.”

They wrestle with many tricky themes, including the persistence of anti-Semitism as an ancient conspiracy theory, and the dangers of a particular kind of trauma-forged identity politics as they play out in Israel. These are themes I have been writing about since I was teenager, yet this time, I found that the figure of the doppelganger, or the doubled self, opened them up in new and surprising ways.

These two chapters also get into the ongoing debates about how the Nazis were influenced by European colonial and racial segregation in the Americas—and how a failure to reckon with those connections shaped and misshaped Israeli history, and contributed to exiling Palestinians into an unbearable purgatory. Israel-Palestine has been described by many as the “open wound” of the modern world: never healed, never even bandaged. On October 7, 2023, that wound was ripped open in ways we cannot yet begin to comprehend.

I am grateful to my publishers for giving me permission to share these pages with you, at no charge. My preference, of course, is for them to be read in context, as part of the whole book. But I think they also stand alone. And since holidays are when many of us have time to talk with loved ones who see the world differently, my immediate hope is for this material to help make some of those conversations a little more productive.

The word I hear most often to describe these battles over land, identity, and safety is *intractable*. I get it and I have experienced that intractability myself. And yet we cannot surrender to this blockage. I wrote *Doppelganger* because I am convinced that we *can* break out of our partitioned narratives, that we can look at and listen to and learn from our doubles, even the ones we most reject. It may be our only hope.

## Chapter 14: The Unshakable Ethnic Double

“It’s anti-Semitism.”

The power is out for the fifth time in this winter of record-breaking windstorms and mudslides, and I have decamped to my parents’ place to siphon electricity for my laptop. Mom is taking advantage of this rare alone time to caution me against dwelling on how I am frequently confused with the feminist writer turned prolific conspiracist Naomi Wolf. (A bit late for that!)

“They see you both as a type,” she says over a bowl of defrosted vegetable soup. “Why draw attention to it?”

She seems sad when she tells me this, deflated. Focusing on my doppelganger trouble—using it to spin out this web of theories about digital doubles and personal brands and the Mirror World and the Shadow Land—will only, she feels certain, attract more of the kind of dangerous attention that is the real reason behind the confusion in the first place. Which, for her, is obvious. It’s the Jew thing.

Others have made points that back her up. Jeet Heer, a columnist for *The Nation* and an avid Wolf watcher, wrote after one of her more egregious streaks of Covid misinformation, “At this point, confusing Naomi Klein with Naomi Wolf is just anti-Semitism. I’m sorry, I don’t make the rules. Your brain should be able to handle more than one Naomi.”

I don’t make the rules, either. Hannah Arendt had a rule, though. “If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew,” she wrote. “Not as a German, not as a world-citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man.” So is that what I have to do? What I have been putting off doing all this time? Do I have to defend myself from all this *as a Jew*?

*Join the club, White Lady, I hear some of you saying.*

This is fair. Countless people on this planet riven with racial hierarchies contend with far more heinous forms of ethnic and racial projection, forced to represent only their skin color to white eyes. They also log on to social media to find themselves blamed and credited for the words and actions of others. The

Australian poet Omar Sakr regularly shares outrageous stories about TV bookers and random readers confusing him with a parade of other public figures with brown skin. Once, he was even sent a complete travel itinerary so that he could arrive for his guest appearance on a home improvement show with which he had no prior contact. And the show made the *same* error with another writer, Osman Faruqi.

“WHY ARE YOU SENDING US OTHER PEOPLE’S TRAVEL ITINERARY?” Sakr demanded. “ARE YOU TRULY INCAPABLE OF TELLING BROWN MEN APART?”

Or think of all of the people who have to contend with the daily wince of having a “work twin”—another person of color from a vaguely similar ethnic background (or a wholly dissimilar one) with whom they are constantly confused by their colleagues. To state the obvious: these are not doppelgangers. There are no uncanny similarities between the people involved—it’s just the way race continues to break so many of our brains. In truth, I have mostly been free to tell myself that this kind of doubling was not my cross to bear. I moved through the world blithely assuming the people I met would easily decode the distinctiveness in my particular arrangement of features and correctly identify me as me—and not project a presumed identity onto me based on a haze of my skin tone, hair texture, and eye shape. What my mother was saying over lunch, though, was that I have been badly fooling myself, that Wolf and I had always been lumped together inside a very particular cultural stereotype—that of the striving Jewess.

“Some reproach me with being a Jew, some praise me because of it, some pardon me for it, but all think of it,” fretted the German political writer Ludwig Börne in 1832. (Changing his name from Loeb Baruch and converting to Protestantism wasn’t enough to protect him.) This is another theme that emerges in Philp Roth’s doppelganger novel *Operation Shylock*: the supposedly eternal nature of Jew-hatred. By the end of the book, Roth’s real double turns out not to be the Fake Roth who impersonates him at all. We learn that, in a way, there is no Real Roth, a man of letters and intellect, just as there is no Fake Roth, a zealous activist and evangelist of Diasporism. Both, within the world of the novel, end up being cast as Philip Roth the Jew. And that means that both are Shylock, the moneylending mutilator in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, determined to get

his pound of flesh. For Roth, Shylock is the Jews' eternal doppelganger.

This is how prejudice works. The person holding it unconsciously creates a double of every person who is part of the despised group, and that twisted twin looms over all who meet the criteria, always threatening to swallow them up. Having one of these doubles means that whoever you are, whatever identity you have fashioned for yourself, however fresh and unique your personal brand, and however much you distinguish yourself from the stereotypes associated with your kind, for the hater you will always stand in as a representative of your despised group. You are not you; you are your ethnic/racial/religious double, and you can't shake that double because you did not create it.

"The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew . . . for it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew." Jean-Paul Sartre wrote those words in his book-length essay *The Anti-Semite and Jew*. This was a deliberately provocative remark, since of course many Jews make their own Jewishness through the positive practice of their culture and faith—not other people's hatred. But Sartre wrote that in the immediate aftermath of Paris's liberation from the Nazis, with memories still fresh of a time when France's Jews—many of whom were so assimilated they barely identified as Jews or even knew that their parents or grandparents were Jewish—were being systematically investigated and inspected for telltale Semitic signs. This is the premise of Joseph Losey's creepy 1976 doppelganger film, *Mr. Klein*, which tells the story of a wealthy Parisian art dealer who is mistaken for a Jew with the same name and gradually becomes ensnared with his own unshakable ethnic double. The film begins in a medical clinic, with an emotionless doctor examining a middle-aged woman: gums, nostrils, jaw, gait—each meticulously and humiliatingly measured and probed to check for a Jew lurking within. The anti-Semite making the Jew, creating the deadly doppelganger with clinical precision.

All members of historically hated groups lug around versions of this invisible double, and some doublings are far more dangerous than others. To be Black in the United States, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in 1897, required a "double-consciousness," a constant feeling of "two-ness," which generated a longing "to merge his double self into a better and truer self," one that did not require this partition. To this day, Blackness generates a double that is so treacherous to those

it is projected upon, and so unremitting in its persistence through the centuries, that no activity is safe from being overtaken by the lethal racial double—not driving, not going for a run, not walking home from the store, not struggling with the lock on your own jammed front door. (“I plan to give you reasons for your jumpy fits / and facial tics,” wrote June Jordan in her 1976 poem “I Must Become a Menace to My Enemies.”) Facial recognition software, originally marketed as a way to remove these kinds of biased doublings from policing, has automated them instead, with artificial intelligence repeatedly misidentifying Black faces, often leading to wrongful arrests and upended lives. In Europe, meanwhile, boat after boat of Black migrants continue to be left to drown, the dangerous doubles of their passengers overtaking them before they even reach dry land.

François Brunelle, the Montreal artist who has made portraits of hundreds of doppelgangers, explains why he is drawn to photographing uncannily similar faces: “The face is the ultimate communication tool that we have to establish and maintain relationships between us as human beings.” Yes. And for a great many people, the face’s ability to communicate is sabotaged by other people’s warped receptors *all the time*.

Other forms of racial doubling ebb and flow on the geopolitical tides. After the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, the figure of the Muslim terrorist loomed so large as a double for all Muslim men that everything from studying engineering to going to the airport became suddenly perilous. For what is a racial profile if not a doppelganger made by the state? In practice, this meant that passengers with common names such as Mohammed (never mind Osama) had to contend with the very real possibility that they had landed on some top-secret, error-riddled no-fly list, which could get them pulled off a plane for special questioning or, worse, hooded and “rendered” to one of the Bush administration’s new “black sites.” The anti-Chinese scapegoating drummed up in the Covid era (with my doppelganger Wolf and her relentless spinning of Wuhan bioweapon plots playing no small role) has cast such an ominous shadow over Asian life that roughly one third of Asian Americans polled by Pew Research in the spring of 2022 reported changing their daily routines to avoid being targeted by hate crimes.

Where does the Jewish double fit into this landscape of malevolent

twinning? Hasidic Jews, conspicuous in black hats and long coats, are easy targets for street violence. But a secular Jew like me? Frankly, I'm battling the feeling that it is slightly fraudulent to even mention it in the same breath. Thanks to the timing and location of my birth, which coincided with a high point in Holocaust education and collective contrition, I have been largely protected from direct encounters with Jew-hatred. A notable exception was a year spent in Oxford, England, when I was ten, where "Jew" was such a frequent schoolyard taunt that I hid my religious identity and muddled my way through morning hymns ("Shine, Jesus, shine! Fill this land with the Father's glory!"). Still, I never thought anti-Semitism had the power to hurt much more than my feelings: my biggest concern was that discovery would cost me my friendship with Katie Bennett, the vicar's daughter. (It didn't. "Happy Hannukah, Naomi!" her dad said to me casually that December—turns out I made a lousy undercover Jew.)

It's a little different for my husband, Avi. He has more classically Jewish features and mannerisms than I do, and after a quarter century of living with him, I have come to recognize the visceral reaction he occasionally inspires. I recognized this same doubling at work when I was on the campaign trail with Bernie Sanders in 2020: some people just couldn't get past the pushy, angry, uncouth Jew they imagined him to be based on his style of speech and mannerisms—never mind the abiding compassion and gentleness of the man himself.

But me? I had smoothed out my ethnic edges, surely; I had protected myself from triggering others in that visceral way. Yet, even as I write these words, I am suddenly unsure I ever believed them. Isn't fear of my Jewish shadow the real reason I complained so bitterly about my too-Jewish name, with its built-in whiny drawl? Isn't it the same reason I obsessively straighten my wavy hair, priding myself on it not being as conspicuous as, say, that of the person I have referred to more than once as "my big-haired doppelganger"? Does this not betray a self-hating desire to avoid the persistent smear directed at Jewish women by Jews and non-Jews alike—that of the Jewish American princess? Isn't biblical Naomi—so driven, doing whatever it took for her people to survive—the ethnic double I was afraid of being confused/conflated with all along? These are all distinct possibilities.

It's also possible that the post-Holocaust lull in open Jew-hatred is coming to a close. Since Trump, anti-Jewish hate crimes have been on the rise. Jews figure prominently in the Great Replacement theory—we eternal Shylocks are apparently the reason so many immigrants are allowed in: so that we can make more coin exploiting them. This was the belief system espoused by the gunman who killed eleven people during Saturday morning services at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 2018. Kanye West's threat to go "death con 3 On JEWISH PEOPLE" who supposedly control his world may have helped open the floodgates further. Many differences remain among the various forms of racial and gender doubling that are surging right now. People don't quicken their steps or lock their car doors because of my Jewish shadow; doctors don't discount my body's capacity to feel pain, and assailants don't calculate that no one with power will come looking for me if they do me harm. And yet, as we have seen, the need for perfect likenesses can easily obscure commonalities—and, as important, short-circuit potential solidarities.

### **Satan's Army of Evil Twins**

Scholars of anti-Semitism trace Jew-hatred back to antiquity, to Hellenistic resentments of Jewish self-segregation, a perceived clannishness. But it was in the Christian world that it became inescapable. The New Testament is a powerful cosmology of doubles: God/Satan, Christ/Antichrist, angels/demons, heaven/hell. Since Jews are associated with Satan in the gospels, Jews and Christians were placed in a twinned relationship from the start, with Jews perennially cast as the demonic doppelgangers of the faithful followers of Christ. Not only did we fail to recognize the true messiah when we had the chance, but we are perennially blamed for Jesus's death. (So, to correct my earlier statement: this is exactly our cross to bear.) It's a story that set the stage for centuries of smears and libels.

Many of those libels involve grisly claims of Jews kidnapping Christian children to drain their blood and use it in secret rituals, accusations that served as pretexts for anti-Jewish mob violence. There are frescoes that still hang in

Polish cathedrals showing plump perforated babies at the feet of hunched-over Jews. This old form of Jew-hatred peaked with the Reconquest of Spain and the expulsion of Jews and Muslims in 1492, which followed massacres, Jew burnings, and mass forced conversion to Catholicism (which offered little protection from being exposed as a closet Jew during the Inquisition). In response to the 1492 expulsion, many Jewish and Muslim refugees—allies at the time—were given safe passage to the Ottoman Empire.

That spasm of violence was not the first time groups of humans slaughtered groups of other humans in battles over land and resources. But this is the period, argue Sven Lindqvist and Raoul Peck, that gave birth to the impulse, which would repeat again and again in the subsequent centuries, to “exterminate all the brutes” in the name of civilization, progress, and piety. And, not coincidentally perhaps, 1492 was the same year that Christopher Columbus’s ships set sail to cross the Atlantic, bringing with them a globalization of these tools of pious annihilation. The association of Jews with satanism provided justification throughout the Middle Ages and well beyond for constraining Jews as second-class citizens, corralled in ghettos and excluded from owning agricultural land and from participating in key trades. Jews were therefore street peddlers and merchants, as well as moneylenders, a profession they were permitted largely because it allowed the Christian ruling class to keep this ungodly activity at arm’s length. By the 1700s, small lenders grew into larger banks, and it was this development—itsself born of anti-Semitism—that would sustain the more modern and ongoing forms of anti-Semitism, those focused on the figure of the money-grubbing Jewish banker, responsible for all the woes and hardships of working people—and plotting, in an international cabal of similarly scheming Jews, to do far worse. From the Illuminati to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, from the Rothschild banking family to George Soros’s philanthropy, Jews have been the subjects and targets of the most persistent conspiracy theory of the last two and half centuries. Despite shifting names and players, the script has stayed remarkably similar: an international Jewish conspiracy stands accused of colluding in the shadows to undermine Christian values, weaken Christian states, seize Christian property, and, in later versions, control the media. From revolutions to pandemics to terrorist attacks, it always seems to be our fault.



QAnon stands out not for the originality of its plotlines, but for its ability to mash up the more modern trope of a Jewish cabal running the world with the more ancient blood libel involving kidnapped and drained Christian children. In QAnon's version, an international conspiracy that includes many prominent Jews, but is not restricted to Jews, kidnaps children to drain them of adrenochrome, apparently in the hopes of prolonging the conspirators' own lives. These stories are currently coursing and combining and morphing in our culture, lending an ancient and sinister energy to the invisible ethnic double that we Jews lug around.

### Look Over There!

In the Mirror World, conspiracy theories detract attention from the billionaires who fund the networks of misinformation and away from the economic policies—deregulation, privatization, austerity—that have stratified wealth so cataclysmically in the neoliberal era. They rile up anger about the Davos elites, at Big Tech and Big Pharma—but the rage never seems to reach those targets. Instead it gets diverted into culture wars about anti-racist education, all-gender bathrooms, and Great Replacement panic directed at Black people, non-white immigrants, and Jews. Meanwhile, the billionaires who bankroll the whole charade are safe in the knowledge that the fury coursing through our culture isn't coming for them. Neither Steve Bannon nor Tucker Carlson invented this play.

Over the centuries, anti-Jewish conspiracy has played a very specific purpose for elite power: it acts as a buffer, a shock absorber. Before popular rage could reach the kings, queens, tsars, and old landed money, the conspiracies absorbed it, directing anger to the middle managers—to the court Jew, to the scheming Jew, possibly with horns hidden under his skullcap. To Shylock.

This is why anti-Semitism is sometimes referred to as “the socialism of fools,” a phrase coined by the Austrian democrat Ferdinand Kronawetter and popularized by Social Democrats in Germany in the 1890s. Where a socialist analysis, grounded in material realities, explains that capitalism is a system guided by internal logics that require dispossession and exploitation, peddlers of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories offer juicy tales of satanic evildoers acting

outside the normal boundaries of societies and economies. And if they exist outside these structures, then they can simply be excised from the body politic—run out of town or, per Lindqvist and Peck, exterminated like brutes.

In Europe, whenever multiethnic groups of workers and peasants started to build power from below, threatening to challenge entrenched wealth, spasms of anti-Semitic propaganda soon followed. Again and again, rootless Jewish devils were pitted against the rooted, ethnically pure Christian citizens of the nation-states in which Jews were never fully accepted, from Spain to France to Poland. The perennial evil twin. These methods have recurred through the centuries for a simple reason: they work. They were a reliable means of blasting apart nascent alliances and coalitions of working people and safeguarding the interests of the wealthy and powerful.

The failed Russian Revolution of 1905 was a particularly tragic case. In January of that year, workers and peasants across the Russian empire staged a wave of strikes and revolts, including inside the military, challenging the monarchy and the rule of Nicholas II. The revolution was led by a multiethnic and diverse alliance, with one of its key factions being the Jewish Labor Bund, a socialist party with tens of thousands of members and hundreds of local councils and defense militias that was particularly powerful in Poland and Ukraine. One of the Bund's core principles was *doi'kayt*, or "hereness"—the idea that Jews belonged where they lived, in what was known as "the pale of settlement," and should fight for greater rights and increased justice as Jews and as workers, alongside non-Jewish members of their class. They should not have to place their hopes in a far-off Jewish homeland, as the early Zionists had begun to argue in that same period. Nor should they have to flee to North America, as hundreds of thousands of German and Eastern European Jews had already felt forced to do. *Doi'kayt* proclaimed that Bundists would stay here—and make here better.

In response to the surging revolutionary coalition, Russia's elites, including the tsar, fought back in two ways: first, by offering concessions, including the creation of a weak multiparty parliamentary system, and second, and simultaneously, by unleashing a virulent campaign of anti-Semitic hate that painted the 1905 revolt as a plot by seditious Jews to rule over Christians. This combination of minor reforms with a major distraction did the trick. Immediately

after the reforms were announced, anti-Jewish mobs staged bloody pogroms in 660 towns and cities, with the worst taking place in Odessa. An estimated eight hundred Jewish people were killed in the rampage. The historian Robert Weinberg described some of the atrocities in *The Russian Review*: “They hurled Jews out of windows, raped and cut open the stomachs of pregnant women, and slaughtered infants in front of their parents. In one particularly gruesome incident, pogromists hung a woman upside down by her legs and arranged the bodies of her six dead children on the floor below her.” It is an image eerily reminiscent of the oil paintings from two centuries earlier depicting the Jewish blood libel—except now made real, and committed *against* Jews. According to Weinberg, “Ethnic divisiveness was a centrifugal force that diminished the capacity of Odessa workers to act in a unified fashion.” A lesson for the tsar, and a lesson for the ages: if you want to crush a revolutionary movement coming at you from below, nothing works quite like an anti-Semitic conspiracy that calls up hatreds older than Jesus Christ.

In truth, any number of identity-based divisions can be marshaled to perform this function: Jews versus Blacks, Blacks versus Asians, Muslims versus Christians, “gender critical” feminists versus transgender people, migrants versus citizens. This is the playbook used by Trump and the other pseudo-populist strongmen the world over: throw some minor economic concessions to the base (or at least claim to do so), unleash the dogs of race and gender-based hatreds, and preside over a rapid upward transfer of wealth, alongside an authoritarian concentration of power.

### The Socialism of Facts

One of the interesting things about digging into the history of Jew-hatred is how contradictory the theories are: Are Jews greedy bankers scheming to get Christian property so we can pocket the money? Or are we rabble-rousing Communists scheming to do away with capitalism altogether? A widely circulated Nazi caricature depicts the “eternal Jew”—a hunched man with gold coins in one hand

and a map of Germany with a hammer and sickle on it in the other, somehow managing to be an archcapitalist and a revolutionary Marxist at the same time. Conspiracy theories don't require internal consistency to find traction (see: Covid is a mild cold—chill out! Covid is a bioweapon—freak out!). Still, it's striking that the two most tenacious lines of attack that Jews have faced over the generations—the scheming Jewish bankers and the scheming Jewish Marxists—are perennially on a logical collision course with each other.

As always, there are seeds of truth to fertilize the fantasies. Just as Jews, because they were barred from so many other industries, were overrepresented in finance, Jews were also overrepresented among revolutionary socialists and Communists. Like, *really* overrepresented. Their ranks included, but were by no means restricted to, Leon Trotsky and much of the Menshevik and Bolshevik leadership at the heart of the Russian Revolution; Rosa Luxemburg and many of her comrades in the Spartacus League who hoped to bring a more democratic version of the revolution to Germany; Vladimir Medem and the entire leadership of the Bund; Emma Goldman and the New York anarchist left; and Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and others in the Frankfurt School. And, of course, the man himself. Karl Marx was not raised Jewish, but he was descended from rabbis on both sides of his family; Marx's father converted to Lutheranism, changing his name from Hershel to Heinrich.

One way to understand Jewish attraction to Communist and socialist ideology might be “Wow, the left really is a Jewish conspiracy!” Another could be that, because Jews have been the targets of so much hatred and discrimination, they are preternaturally concerned with tackling injustice in its many forms (one of the flattering lefty stories I grew up with). But there is another, related possibility: that Jewish interest in the theoretical side of what we now call Marxism—with its sweeping and scientific explications and analyses of global capitalism—is an attempt to compete with those conspiracy theories that have dogged our people through the ages. That all the thousands of pages of theories and manifestos are, partly at least, a long procession of Jews banging their heads up against the brick wall of history and saying: No, your money problems are not the result of Jewish “shysters” ripping off hardworking “goyim”—they flow from a system that was designed to extract maximum wealth from working people. And

that system is not called the “Illuminati” or the “Elders of Zion”—it’s called capitalism. And only unity among members of the working classes—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or religion—will ever stand a chance of winning a fairer world. And also: Please don’t kill us.

These theorists were hardly mere spectators, after all. To one degree or another, all the Jewish socialists and Communists writing and organizing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had skin in the game. Marxism sprouted in the same soil that fertilized *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and that would eventually produce Weimar and then Nazi Germany. No one’s life was unaffected; no one was safe from their Shylock doubles, not even the converts and atheists. Marx’s father converted not out of faith, but because he was a lawyer and a new Prussian decree had barred Jews from occupying legal positions or state offices. Eleanor Marx, Karl’s daughter, chose to reclaim their family heritage and taught herself Yiddish so she could better organize Jewish garment workers in London’s East End, unequivocally declaring, amid a spasm of European anti-Semitism, “I am a Jewess.” Rosa Luxemburg’s political party was a target of what she described as “an all-out orgy of anti-Semitism” in the press. Trotsky, in his early career as a journalist, was shaped by covering outbreaks of anti-Semitic mob violence, describing scenes of gangs “drunk on vodka and the smell of blood.” He was himself routinely portrayed as a Jewish devil (horns and all) by his political adversaries. And, in 1940, the year of his death, Trotsky vividly observed that “in the epoch of its rise, capitalism took the Jewish people out of the ghetto and utilized them as an instrument in its commercial expansion. Today decaying capitalist society is striving to squeeze the Jewish people from all its pores.”

These revolutionaries had grander aims than simply denying their enemies the potent weapon of the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory. They dedicated their lives to enacting socialism in the real world. Still, in their fierce dedication to making political education accessible to working people, I think it’s fair to see the battle against Jewish conspiracy as subtext, if not text. A quest to swap out the irrational hatreds of the vulnerable with worthier targets—economic systems, ideologies, structural inequities. To replace the socialism of fools with the socialism of facts.

## A Debate Cut Down Midsentence

None of this is to say that, among the Jewish intellectuals of these tumultuous times, there was any kind of agreement on what to do about the persistence of anti-Semitism. In the decades before Hitler synonymized Judaism with trauma, and before dissent was supplanted, in many corners, with terrified conformity, Jewish intellectual life roared with drag-down debates over what was then euphemistically called the “Jewish Question.” (Today’s equivalent might be called the “Identity Politics Question” or the “Race Versus Class Question.”) The Cornell University professor Enzo Traverso, who has extensively researched this intellectual history, describes the Jewish Question as “a set of problems related to emancipation and anti-Semitism, cultural assimilation and Zionism”—and among Jewish Marxists and socialists, there was nothing approaching consensus about the possible answers.

Should Jews strive for full equality in Christian societies—voting rights, access to all industries (the position of the social democrats)? Or should the goal be revolutionary transformation of those societies accompanied by full Jewish assimilation into the liberated proletariat, since religion would be less necessary as a source of solace (“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people,” Marx wrote, a position pursued by Trotsky and Luxemburg)? Was Judaism a prison from which the revolution would offer liberation (as the Bolsheviks claimed, though many conceded that there was a need to protect the right to religious practice in private life)? Or was Jewish assimilation, even in a socialist society, a trap, eliding the need for European Jews’ distinct culture and language to be protected within a multiethnic, multinational workers’ society (the Bund’s “hereness” position)? Or was Jew-hatred simply too deep on the continent, too primal, for any of this to work, so that Jewish liberation could be found only in the working-class movements of the amnesiac Americas (the position held by many of my family members as they crossed the Atlantic)? Or was even that mere fantasy, especially under the harsh, overtly racist, and anti-Semitic immigration laws introduced by the United States and Canada in the 1920s and ’30s, making

the only hope for Jewish safety a nation-state of their own, where wandering would end and socialism could become a reality (the view of the Labor Zionists)?

So the Bundists, with their tens of thousands of working-class members devoted to “hereness,” regularly debated the Zionists, mocking them for their “thereness.” The Bund held fast to the belief that Jews would be free when everyone was free, and not by building what amounted to a militarized ghetto on Palestinian land. “Your liberation can only be a by-product of the universal freeing of oppressed people,” wrote the Bundist leader Victor Alter in 1937. Besides, argued Walter Benjamin, “things will go very badly in Europe if the intellectual energies of the Jews abandon it.”

Rosa Luxemburg, years earlier, had sparred with the Bund and advocated a universalism unbound by her Jewish identity. “What do you want with this theme of the ‘special suffering of the Jews’?” a friend asked in 1917. She replied, “I am just as much concerned with the poor victims on the rubber plantations of Putumayo, the black people in Africa with whose corpses the Europeans play catch . . . I have no special place in my heart for the [[Jewish] ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears.” Those lines led her detractors to claim that she minimized Jewish suffering at a time of great hardship. I prefer to see her reaching, however idealistically, for a vision of human solidarity that transcended identity and national borders.

The tumultuous debates over the Jewish Question did not end because one faction won the argument due to the greater force of their ideas, or because they captured the hearts and minds of the majority of Jewish people. The debates died out because, like Red Vienna, the whole terrain on which the debate was happening was crushed by terror, with betrayal and abandonment foreclosing on one possibility after another. Jews were annihilated in the lands where the Nazis gained control and where Jewish workers’ movements, filled with revolutionary swagger, had staged strikes and organized self-defense leagues. When Stalin took command of the Soviet Union, he further centralized power, waging ruthless war on his rivals and attempting to cover over his atrocities by unleashing the hounds of anti-Semitism once again (even, according to Trotsky, calling up the ancient blood libel to accuse his son Sergei of plotting the mass poisoning of workers). Meanwhile, the United States and Canada, like so many other nations, offered little

safe harbor to boats filled with desperate Jewish refugees coming from Europe. (In the infamous words of one Canadian bureaucrat: “None is too many.”) So much for safety being found amid the optimism and amnesia of New York and Montreal.

Revisiting the raucous debates over the Jewish Question within the European Jewish left, I am struck by the fact that so many of the key players advancing a different vision for our people died violently. Rosa Luxemburg was shot by German paramilitary officers and thrown into Berlin’s Landwehr Canal in 1919—and the officer who orchestrated her death would become an ally of Hitler’s. Countless leaders of the Bund were murdered in Hitler’s camps, others in Stalin’s purges. Trotsky was stabbed with an ice ax by one of Stalin’s agents, but not before he conceded that assimilation as a solution to the Jewish problem had failed, though he remained a critic of Zionism. Walter Benjamin took his own life in the seaside Catalan town of Portbou, Spain, unable to secure passage out of Europe after being forced to flee Vichy France.

The one who haunts me most is a Belgian leftist named Abram Leon. Still in his twenties during the war, he could have passed for a young Trotsky himself: a round baby face topped with wavy black hair and heavy black-framed glasses. As a teen, he had lived in Palestine with his family. Back in Belgium, he grew disillusioned with Zionism and became a staunch Trotskyist. During the Nazi occupation, he was forced underground but continued to organize clandestine meetings and publish illegal pamphlets and newspapers. He also worked on a project that might be described as an attempt to understand his own Jewish double: during the war, Leon researched and wrote a scholarly treatise about the uses of anti-Semitism to the global capitalist project, reaching back to the Roman Empire and continuing to the Nazi era. It’s hard to imagine how he was able to conduct this kind of deep research while underground, but he managed, drawing on a wide range of sources.

Leon’s analysis of the Nazis’ use of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories feels particularly relevant to our historical moment. He describes how Hitler harnessed the economic suffering of the lower and middle classes—impoverished by the First World War, pounded by the sanctions afterward, then hit with the Great Depression—and directed that discontent at a chimera the Nazis called “Jewish capitalism.” Cast as distinct from the rest of supposedly healthy and



decent capitalism, Jewish capitalism was a mythic structure, a bogeyman, with a familiar purpose: “Big business,” Leon wrote, “endeavored to divert and control the anti-capitalist hatred of the masses for its own exclusive profit.” Very much as the internationally networked Bannonite right rages at “globalists” to divert popular rage away from capitalism as a system and toward an imaginary cabal that can be cut out, leaving the structures that created and protect the global billionaire class intact.

Leon also explained how the Nazi Party, having witnessed the successful workers’ revolution in Russia, and seeing communism gaining political power in Germany, set out to deliberately weaken the importance of class in the minds of German workers. This was done by replacing class solidarity with racial solidarity, supplanting the common interests shared by all workers with the pleasures and rewards that flowed from belonging to the Aryan race, a bond that claimed to unite the poorest Christian workers with the wealthiest industrialists. But because workers and owners actually have starkly different interests under capitalism, that maneuver required a shadow, an evil twin. “Just as it is necessary to cast the different classes [of Aryans] into *one single race*,” Leon wrote, “so is it also necessary that this ‘race’ have only a single enemy: ‘the international Jew.’ The myth of race is necessarily accompanied by its ‘negative’—the antirace, the Jew.” This was a highly incisive analysis of the dialectical relationship between race and class within a white supremacist regime—Leon was arguing that class solidarity between workers, across ethnic lines, was the primary competition and threat to the Nazi project.

He compiled his insights and research into an important, if little-known book, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*, first published in French in 1946. But Leon never got to see the culmination of his efforts, because the very dynamics he was analyzing came for him. In 1944, as a member of the self-styled master race’s “antirace,” he was captured, tortured by the Gestapo, and sent to Auschwitz, where he was murdered in the gas chambers. He was twenty-six.

In this time of hollowed-out meanings and shallow online performances, what moves me most about Leon’s short life is his faith in ideas. Even surrounded on all sides by mass slaughter, even under such extreme personal circumstances, he still managed to believe that words and analysis and research mattered, that

they still had the power to break an evil spell. Even if those words were too late to matter for him.

Leon's story encapsulates the fate of the debate over the Jewish Question within the Jewish left: it was murdered in mid sentence. Traverso writes, "The war and the Holocaust . . . by exterminating most of [the debate's] actors, destroyed the conditions for such a debate." It was more than that, too. For many of those who survived, Stalin went on to kill their confidence in the possibility—even the *desirability*—of revolutionary change. Unlike the beacon of Red Vienna, the more brutal and totalitarian the Soviet experiment became, the less socialism seemed able to offer a moral alternative to barbarism. Stalin's greatest betrayal of all.

### Twins Battling for All Eternity

Though members of each tendency survived, in the rubble, only one answer to the Jewish Question continued to assert itself with great confidence: Zionism. Israel as a territorial homeland for the Jews, a nation that could be armed and protected from all possible threats, positioned itself as the only option left. The only one not crushed by one form of totalitarianism or another.

And so, in the now very real battle over land and borders, a great many of those earlier debates appeared to fall away. Inside the young nation, and especially after the 1967 war and the protracted occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, anti-Semitism came to be treated not as a question in need of historically informed answers, but rather as something eternal, outside the bounds of history. In this pessimistic telling, Jew-hatred was cast as so potent, so deeply rooted in the collective understorey of humanity, that attempts to fight it by advancing principles of universal human equality, and by joining forces with the many other groups of people who have been terrorized and slaughtered in the name of racial or religious purity and/or superiority, were treated by Israeli leaders and many Jews in positions of leadership as not just naïve but also actively dangerous.

Zionism's offer after its ideological competitors were drastically weakened was simple: rather than trying to defeat anti-Semitism by getting at its

roots, we will hold a gun to its head and force it into submission. And in the face of the spectral Shylock, the eternal Jew that is the shadow-double of all Jews, Israel will respond with a doppelganger of its own: the sunbaked, muscle-bound, land-hungry, machine-gun-toting New Jew—that unbound alter ego of the pale, studious, melancholic Old Jew.

This was the doubling that preoccupied Roth, but it didn't end there, of course. Just as the Old Jews were trapped in a fraternal battle with European Christians, cast as devils onto which all evil was projected, so the New Jews required their own anti-self: the Palestinian, a locus of perpetual threat inside Israel and on its borders.

To explain how we got to this seemingly intractable place, a little history is required—never a simple proposition in a part of the world where rival versions of the past are a dense thicket. The 1930s saw a series of Arab revolts against the influx of Jewish migrants to Palestine, which was then under British control. This wave of Jewish immigration was regarded by many Palestinians as a colonial imposition, a perception that was further cemented when British troops and local police put down the Arab uprising with tremendous force, fueling further resentment. When Palestine was partitioned in 1947, a move with overwhelming Arab opposition, and Israel declared statehood the next year, the first Arab-Israeli war was locked in. These were the years that Palestinians call the Nakba, or catastrophe: roughly 750,000 Palestinians were expelled, hundreds of Palestinian villages were destroyed, and thousands were killed, with many of the horrifying truths about these atrocities finally escaping Israel's own Shadow Lands in recent years.

Of course Palestinians would resist such ethnic cleansing with violence of their own. Yet rather than seeing Arab resistance for what it was—a nationalist, anticolonial battle over land and self-determination (with some anti-Semitic elements, to be sure)—many influential Zionist leaders portrayed the entire Palestinian cause as nothing but more irrational Jew-hatred, a seamless continuation of the very same anti-Semitism that had resulted in the Holocaust, and that therefore needed to be crushed with the kind of militarized force that Jews had not been able to marshal in Nazi-controlled Europe. Within this imaginary, the Palestinian, as the Jew's new eternal enemy, was treated as so

illegitimate, so irrational, so other, that Israelis believed themselves to be justified in reenacting many of the forms of violence, dehumanizing propaganda, and forced displacement that had targeted and uprooted the Jewish people throughout Europe for centuries, a process that continues to this day with ongoing home demolitions, Israeli settlement expansions, targeted assassinations, settler rampages through Palestinian communities, openly discriminatory laws, and walled ghettos into which Palestinians are corralled.

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At my Hebrew day school in Montreal, as in so many schools like it, the facts of the Nazi genocide were drummed into us like arithmetic tables: the numbers of dead, the twisted forms of torture, the gas chambers, the cruelly closed borders. This was the late 1970s and early '80s—before the immersive Holocaust museums with walk-in cattle cars were constructed, before the March of the Living tours took hundreds of thousands of young Jews on trips to Auschwitz—but we received lo-fi versions of the same experiences, and our terrified imaginations filled in the blanks.

Looking back as the parent of a child older than we were then, I am struck by what wasn't a part of these strangely mechanical retellings. There was space for the surface-level emotions: horror at the atrocities, rage at the Nazis, a desire for revenge. But not for the more complex and troubling emotions of shame or guilt, or for reflection on what duties the survivors of genocide may have to oppose genocidal logics in all of their forms. I am struck that we never actually grieved, nor were we invited to seize our anger and turn it into an instrument for solidarity.

Many years later, my friend Cecilie Surasky, then one of the leaders of Jewish Voice for Peace, observed of these kinds of educational methods: "It's retraumatization, not remembering. There is a difference." When she said it, I knew it was true. Remembering puts the shattered pieces of our selves back together again (re-member-ing); it is a quest for wholeness. At its best, it allows us to be changed and transmuted by grief and loss. But retraumatization is about freezing us in a shattered state; it's a regime of ritualistic reenactments designed

to keep the losses as fresh and painful as possible. Our education did not ask us to probe the parts of ourselves that might be capable of inflicting great harm on others, and to figure out how to resist them. It asked us to be as outraged and indignant at what happened to our ancestors as if it had happened to us—and to stay in that state.

The reason for this frozen quality to our education, I now see, was that the Holocaust was a plot point in a larger, prewritten story we not only were being told but also were trapped inside: a phoenix-from-the-flames narrative that began in the gas chambers of Nazi-controlled Europe and ended on the hilltops around Jerusalem. Though there were certainly exceptions, for the most part, the goal of this teaching was not to turn us into people who would fight the next genocide wherever it occurred. The goal was to turn us into Zionists.

The line between the terrifying stories of our people being hunted and exterminated and the existence of this state on the other side of the world, was, we were told, a straight one. It went like this: If fascist fervor ever surged again, and men in jackboots got it into their heads to purge their national bodies of Jewish genes, we would not be left helpless and unarmed once again, not be left to plead for our survival, not be locked out of every nation that might have saved us, not be devoured by the specter of our Shylock doppelganger. Why? Because next time we would have Israel—the white-and-blue flag that flew at every school assembly, the place where the trees we had donated our allowances to buy were standing tall, planted over the Palestinian villages we were never told existed.

As was the case in many left-wing Jewish homes, I learned a different version of “Never again”—that it was a directive, a sacred duty, to oppose hate and discrimination in all its forms, no matter who was the target. But, for the same reasons that she selected my biblical name, my mother insisted that I go to Hebrew day school to cement the bond to our tribe, to learn the songs, rituals, and languages (both Hebrew and Yiddish) that our adversaries had been trying to annihilate since before the Inquisition. And at that school, “Never again” did not mean “Never again to anyone,” as it did in our home—it meant “Never again to the Jews.” It meant “Never again because of Israel.” It meant “Never again because we who have been haunted by Shylock forever have our own double now—and he has a great many guns.”

## Doppelganger Nation

“Doppelgänger politics.” That is how Caroline Rooney, professor of African and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Kent, describes the state of Israel and the complex psychological space it occupies as both victim and perpetrator. The doppelganger nature of the country’s identity is embedded in the dualistic language used to describe it, in which everything is double and never singular: Israel-Palestine, Arab and Jew, Two States, the Conflict. Based on a fantasy of symmetrical power, this suturing together of two peoples implies conjoined twins in a state of unending struggle, an irresolvable sibling rivalry between the two peoples, both descended from Abraham.

For Rooney, Israel as doppelganger exists on two levels. First, it is a doppelganger of the forms of chauvinistic European nationalisms that has turned Jews into pariahs on the continent since well before the Inquisition. That was Zionism’s win-win pitch to anti-Semitic European powers: you get rid of your “Jewish problem” (i.e., Jews, who will leave your countries and migrate to Palestine), and Jews get a state of their own to mimic/twin the very forms of militant nationalism that have oppressed them for centuries. (This is why Zionism was so fiercely opposed by the members of the Bund, who believed that nationalism itself was their enemy and the wellspring of race hatred.)

Israel also became a doppelganger of the colonial project, specifically settler colonialism. Many of Zionism’s basic rationales were thinly veiled Judaizations of core Christian colonial conceptions: Terra Nullius, the claim that continents such as Australia were effectively empty because their Indigenous inhabitants were categorized as less than fully human, became “A land without a people for a people without a land”—a phrase adopted by many Zionists and that originated with nineteenth-century Christians. Manifest Destiny became “land bequeathed to the Jews by divine right.” “Taming the wild frontier” became “making the desert bloom.”

As in all colonial projects, Israel’s settlers needed to engage in various kinds of active unseeing. The legendary U.S. investigative journalist I. F. Stone supported the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, even embedding

himself on one of the clandestine boats, crowded with Holocaust survivors, that eventually made it to safety in “stucco-colored Haifa” in 1946. But after the 1967 war, he conceded, “For the Zionists, the Arab was the Invisible Man. Psychologically he was not there.” Or as the Israeli prime minister Golda Meir put it, “There was no such thing as Palestinians . . . They did not exist.” The great Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish maps this spectral status—of being a “present-absentee”—in his book *In the Presence of Absence*. The lie of Indigenous absence, familiar to all settler-colonial projects, required a great deal of effort to maintain. The Jewish National Fund planted pine trees on top of Palestinian villages and centuries-old agricultural terrace systems. Hebrew place-names replaced Arabic ones. Olive trees, some millennia old, were, and still are, uprooted. As the journalist Yousef Al Jamal writes, “Israeli settlers continue their unbated campaign of uprooting Palestinian olive trees because this tree reminds them of the Palestinian existence.”

There were notable differences in this doppelganger version of settler colonialism, however. One was timing. After World War II, anticolonial movements surged in the Global South, with wave after wave of national movements rising up to reject colonial mandates and assert the right to self-determination. In the years after the war, all around what would become the state of Israel, former colonies were declaring their independence: the French were forced to definitively release their mandate over Syria and Lebanon and withdraw troops in 1946; Jordan won its independence from Britain that same year; Egyptians were in open revolt against the continued presence of the British. Israel, which became a state in 1948, was both a product of those forces and a glaring exception to them. Britain lifted its colonial mandate as part of a broader contraction of its once-global empire. Because a small population of Jews had lived in Palestine continuously, Zionists framed their movement as one of national liberation: like other oppressed people, Jews were getting a state of their own. Of course, from the perspective of the much larger population of Palestinians, who were being evicted from their homes, lands, and communities to make way for a brand-new country, Israel was very far from an anticolonial project. It was the opposite: a settler colony being established at a time when the rest of the world was going in the opposite direction. This could only have been incendiary.

Israel's settler colonialism differed from its predecessors' in another way. Where European powers colonized from a position of strength and a claim to God-given superiority, the post-Holocaust Zionist claim to Palestine was based on the reverse: on Jewish victimization and vulnerability. The tacit argument many Zionists were making at the time was that Jews had earned the right to an exception from the decolonial consensus—an exception born of their very recent near extermination. The Zionist version of justice said to Western powers: If you could establish your empires and your settler-colonial nations through ethnic cleansing, massacres, and land theft, then it is discrimination to say that we cannot. If you cleared your land of its Indigenous inhabitants, or did so in your colonies, then it is anti-Semitic to say that we cannot. It was as if the quest for equality were being reframed not as the right to be free from discrimination, but as *the right to discriminate*. Colonialism framed as reparations for genocide.

Except if Hitler had been inspired by settler colonialism in North America—and he clearly was—then this was anything but reparations. It was a continuation of the colonial logic, but with broken and traumatized people let loose on a people even less powerful than themselves. Palestinians, under this arrangement, became, as the anticolonial scholar Edward Said put it, “the victims of the victims,” or, in the words of the scholar Joseph Massad, “the new Jews.”

To do onto others the same othering that has been done onto you is, of course, psychologically intolerable. Indeed, such actions are so antithetical to Jewish values that they demand extreme repression and projection. Doppelgängers in literature often embody a partitioned self, and, as Rooney writes, “doppelgänger politics is first of all a politics of self-partition,” with everything we cannot bear to see projected onto the other. If Israel practices doppelgänger politics by imitating European nationalisms, it also enacts it in this second way: by projecting all criminality and violence onto the Palestinian other, lest the state's own foundational crimes be confronted. Meanwhile, the colonial nature of the project only grows more naked with time, with openly racist and Jewish supremacist political players consolidating their power at every level. When it formed at the end of 2022, Israel's new far-right government called not just for continued occupation of the West Bank but for its annexation, explicitly stating in its coalition agreement that “the Jewish people has an exclusive and



unquestionable right to all areas of the Land of Israel. The government will promote and develop settlement in all parts of the Land of Israel—in the Galilee, the Negev, the Golan, Judea and Samaria.” The frontier was moving, as all frontiers do.

### Unseeing the Other

It’s not hard to see why many were drawn to Zionism’s promise at the start. After so much trauma, it must have felt irresistible to be offered a flag, a uniform, and a gun—to have more choices than whether to be a target or a charity case. If I had been on one of those boats full of refugees no one wanted, would I have had the strength and forethought to resist the promise of a fortified state of our own? I have no confidence that I could have. Rendered invisible and unseeable by Israelis, many Palestinians respond by refusing to see the state that refuses to see them. “The Zionist entity,” some still call it, seven decades after its formation. “Will you or won’t you acknowledge that Israel has a right to exist?” demand Israel’s leaders and defenders, insisting that a refusal to make this acknowledgment proves that Palestinians favor a second Holocaust. But many Palestinians and their supporters refuse to budge, knowing that conceding Israel’s right to exist would change nothing about its actions, and would uphold an idea of an exclusively Jewish homeland that they contest on principle. I understand this refusal—it is one of the few tools available to an occupied and vastly outgunned people. But it also seems worth acknowledging that for Jewish people who have been treated as inhuman for so much of our history, being called an “entity” is a wounding thing, and wounding in a way that may not be particularly constructive.

As for those not directly affected by this struggle, it would help if more conversations could hold greater complexity—the ability to acknowledge that the Israelis who came to Palestine in the 1940s were survivors of genocide, desperate refugees, many of whom had no other options, *and* that they were settler colonists who participated in the ethnic cleansing of another people. That they were victims of white supremacy in Europe being passed the mantle of whiteness in Palestine. That Israelis are nationalists in their own right and that their country has long

been enlisted by the United States to act as a kind of subcontracted military base in the region. All of this is true all at once. Contradictions like these don't fit comfortably within the usual binaries of anti-imperialism (colonizer/colonized) or the binaries of identity politics (white/racialized)—but if Israel-Palestine teaches us anything, it might be that binary thinking will never get us beyond partitioned selves, or partitioned nations. None of this is intended as an apology for Israeli settler colonialism. Rather, it is an attempt, as the British scholar Jacqueline Rose put it regarding her book *The Question of Zion*, to “go into the mindset of Zionism without blocking the exit.”

In China Miéville's eerie novel *The City & the City*, two metropolises occupy the same physical location, but residents are not permitted to acknowledge each other's existence. When this carefully guarded delusion is punctured, and a resident of one city recognizes or interacts with the doppelganger city, this is known as a “breach” and it is very serious. Many have read the book as an allegory for Israel-Palestine, even though the refusal to see the other in the day-to-day is overwhelmingly on the Israeli side. (Palestinians cannot avoid seeing the walls and soldiers that keep them confined and surveilled.) Still, the novel does help conceptualize the strangeness of the daily spatial terrain, particularly in the West Bank, dotted with fast-expanding illegal Israeli settlements.

Like all segregated societies that are layered on top of each other, Israel and Palestine are not two distinct geographies. Instead, they make up a singular doppelganger society, requiring a doubling of everything: schools, roads, laws, courts. It's a psychological prison for Jewish Israelis, locked inside a fortress of fear and denial, and it's a very literal prison for Palestinians, entrapped in a warren of walls and checkpoints in the West Bank, in the open-air prison that is Gaza, and in the sprawling jail cells that have made incarceration such a routinized part of daily life that around 20 percent of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories has experienced some form of arrest and/or detention by Israeli forces—some 800,000 people, according to a study by the Palestinian prisoner support group Addameer.

In interviews, Miéville expresses discomfort with the idea of his book as an allegory, saying that such a reading is too literal and that the novel explores

the arbitrary logics of borders more generally, between nations and even inside them. Israelis are certainly not the only people on this brutally divided planet trying to lead carefree lives without having to think about the unmarked graves, stolen land, packed prisons, and spectral presences that make their nation possible. It is not the only nation trying to achieve “security” by penning other people in and pointing guns at them. It is hardly the only nation with Shadow Lands that refuse to stay in the shadows. Yet in the crowding of these two, twinned peoples onto this tiny sliver of territory—the wrenching intimacy of the home invasions and demolitions, the ritualistic regularity of the pummeling of Gaza, the spectacle of once-stateless refugees exiling other people into the sea of statelessness—we see in hyperconcentrated form the dead end of this project that dared to call itself “civilization.”

Because, though it may be tempting, Israel-Palestine cannot be written off as a confounding ethnic conflict between a set of intransigent Semitic twins. It is, instead, the latest chapter in that story of the construction of the modern world, a world that is now on fire. A world that was born in fire. A story in which we are all implicated, wherever we live. It began in the lead-up to the Inquisition, with the burnings, torture, and then expulsion of Muslims and Jews; continued with the bloody conquest of the Americas and the ransacking of Africa for riches and human fuel to power the new colonies; wreaked colonial havoc in Asia; and then returned to Europe for Hitler to distill all of the methods forged in these earlier chapters—scientific racism, concentration camps, frontier genocide—into his Final Solution.

But the story didn’t end there. Because the Allies, who finally saw fit to stop Hitler, decided that they did not want to open their borders to his surviving victims, and instead offloaded their Jewish problem, along with their collective shame and guilt about the Holocaust, onto the Arab world and said: “You take it.”

Engaging with the form of Zionism that created the state of Israel in 1948 means accepting that a people, just like a person, can be victim and victimizer at the same time; that they can be both traumatized and traumatizer. So much of modern history is a story of pools of trauma being spatially moved around the globe like chess pieces made of human misery, with yesterday’s victims enlisted as today’s occupying army. The story we are trapped in is not about a people, or

two people, or twins. It's a story about a logic, *the* logic that has been ravaging our world for so very long.

I think that's why, after all of this mapping of mirrored selves and mirror worlds and fascist doubles, I find myself drawn to this place that for so much of my life has been my own Shadow Land—a place I have struggled with in public and in private and in my own highly divided family (which runs the gamut from staunch anti-Zionists to orthodox settlers). Because for me, while Israel is a place, it has also always been a warning. A warning about the perils of building identity based on retraumatization rather than confronting our collective grief; about the dangers of building a group identity around insiders and outsiders; about what happens when once-vibrant debate gives way to fiercely policed speech.

### When Wolf Was Right

Which brings us back to . . . her.

For a brief period, before she fully surrendered to conspiracy world, before the disastrous publication of her book *Outrages*, before all the pictures of clouds, my doppelganger did something I admired. I might not have chosen the exact same words that she chose, or said them in exactly the same way, but I remember seeing a few people confusing me with her at the time, and being just fine with that.

It was 2014 and Israel had launched a particularly deadly assault on Gaza, carried out in the name of destroying the tunnel systems that brought weapons (and much else) over the borders and stopping Palestinian rocket fire. The casualty toll tells the story of appalling asymmetry between occupier and occupied. According to a United Nations report, 1,462 Palestinian civilians were killed that summer, compared with 6 Israeli civilians; 789 Palestinian fighters were killed, compared with 67 Israeli soldiers. The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem reported that of those who did not take part in the hostilities, "526—a quarter of all Palestinians killed in the operation—were children under eighteen years of age."

Before this, I had not noticed Wolf speaking out about Israeli crimes. Like

many North American liberal Jews, she had lived in Israel, spoke Hebrew, believed in a two-state solution. But something wasn't adding up for her about this latest attack. She was shocked by the civilian deaths, particularly the children. Wolf wrote that the assault was a violation of Jewish values and the lessons of the Holocaust. Then she did something quite remarkable: she turned her Facebook page into a clearinghouse for "citizen journalists" to show the human face of the attack on Gaza. For a time, it became a vital source of information. She also wrote a widely circulated post:

People are asking why I am taking this 'side'. There are no sides. I mourn all victims. But every law of war and international law is being broken in the targeting of civilians in Gaza. I stand with the people of Gaza exactly because things might have turned out differently if more people had stood with the Jews in Germany.

She went on to describe going to synagogue, hoping in vain that what she saw as a profound moral crisis might be addressed by her spiritual community. "I . . . had to leave," she wrote, "because I kept waiting for the massacre of Gaza to be addressed . . . nothing. where is god? God is only ever where we stand with our neighbor in trouble and against injustice. I turn in my card of faith as of now because of our overwhelming silence as Jews . . . about the genocide now in Gaza."

The word *genocide* set off a fury, but Wolf isn't known for understatement. And she made her case for why the word fit: the targeting of civilian infrastructure, the absence of a humanitarian corridor, the clear collective punishment. She also gave a series of high-profile speeches on the topic, including a particularly notable one at the Oxford Union. What stood out most when I watched it recently was that it contained none of the swaggering overconfidence that she displays to such disastrous effect about epidemiology. Instead, her voice trembles, and she confesses to being terrified to be entering this fraught conflict. Yet, unlike other subject areas, where she seems to be mostly bluffing, Wolf knows her Old Testament and makes a convincing biblical case that Genesis never promised Israel to the Jews exclusively, that it was always conditional on behaving justly, including being kind to strangers.

All of this went very badly for Wolf. “Naomi Wolf’s Allegations of an Israeli Genocide Fuel Anti-Semitism” was a typical headline in the Israeli press. In the United States, one prominent rabbi in particular, Shmuley Boteach, seemed to make it his mission to take her down. Wolf told *The Guardian* she lost her university position over the issue. “I was [teaching] at Barnard, and the trustees said they were not comfortable with my politics being the face of the university,” she said. “All I ever wanted was to teach and do this kind of research.” She also received “some serious threats online”—enough that she consulted a private security company, and that’s where she met her husband, a former U.S. special forces officer who founded Striker Pierce Investigations.

Having run afoul of many of the same guardians of official Jewry over the past three decades, I have no doubt that these events were both frightening and painful for Wolf. These were her friends, family members, and colleagues turning on her. Zionism, moreover, had always been a plank in her political home. Now that plank was giving way. Which raises a possible question: Did that experience—followed by the public excommunications—contribute to how unmoored she became in subsequent years? Does losing her political home partially explain how far she would stray to find a new home?

Wolf’s experience of being harshly attacked, threatened, and professionally penalized for questioning Zionist orthodoxy is far from unique. It’s part of a much larger story about how a culture that once coursed with debate about these very questions—from our duties to universal rights to the possibilities for multiracial solidarity—had become its mirror opposite. There used to be so many ways to be Jewish and to battle anti-Semitism; it was a question, one with many possible answers. And then we were told that there was just one answer.

That consensus was always an illusion, and the façade has, in recent years, been shattered by a new generation of Jewish writers and organizers gathered around publications such as *Jewish Currents*, and organizations such as IfNotNow and Jewish Voice for Peace, who are returning to old Bundist notions of “hereness,” while joining with Palestinians to challenge Israel’s colonial violence. But they are still small—at least compared with the groups that claim to speak on behalf of all Jews: the ones that have, for a very long time, been dealing with our

community's collective, intergenerational trauma by drawing up enemies lists, by demanding loyalty oaths, by getting lectures and plays and films by Palestinians and their supporters canceled and articles retracted and job offers revoked. These self-appointed spokespeople have claimed that honest political disagreements are existential crises for our entire identity group, and now many champion laws that punish individuals and businesses for supporting the indispensable political tool of peaceful boycotts.

This reality lies at the root of my own discomfort with those progressive tendencies that cheer the censoring of our political opponents, or that offer blank deference to people claiming victim status: I have seen too often how both can go terribly wrong.

### The Missing Chapter

Philip Roth, unsurprisingly, had a lot to say about all this. He was interested in imperfect victims, and the way trauma can be misused. "The Nazis are an excuse for everything that happens in this house!" Portnoy says to his sister in the book that made Roth famous. And as the political scientist Corey Robin observed in a 2021 essay, Roth "isn't speaking only of his family; he's talking about the house of Israel."

Roth was acutely uncomfortable with the ways Israeli militarism threatened to engulf cultural Judaism. Throughout *The Counterlife*, and then *Operation Shylock*, a procession of characters flagellate themselves over the country's moral decay. In *Shylock*, a character who turns out to be a Mossad agent describes Israel as "a Jewish country without a Jewish soul." Fake Roth accuses Israel of, "in many, many terrible ways, deforming and disfiguring Jews as only our anti-Semitic enemies once had the power to do." Yet another character, this one an old Palestinian friend of Roth's (who some critics presumed to be based on the Palestinian American scholar Edward Said), describes diasporic Jewish culture as "all human, elastic, adaptable, humorous, creative" but declares that, in Israel, "all this they have replaced here with a stick!"

Did that make Roth an anti-Zionist? He kept us guessing. After having revived so many of the Bund's old arguments for Diasporism, the book ends with Real Roth succumbing to his primal ethnic fear. He accepts an undercover assignment for the Mossad to collect intelligence about "Jewish anti-Zionist elements threatening the security of Israel." When the Mossad offers him a bribe to delete the last chapter of the book, which tells the story of this top-secret operation, Real Roth complies. The book ends abruptly, leaving the reader to imagine its final pages in a shredder.

After all of that anti-Zionist venting, Roth's final message seemed clear. Yes, he had been a critic of Israel and an irreverent provocateur his whole life. But when it was all on the line, he, too, was willing to set his personal beliefs aside and do his duty for his fortified, militarized tribe. His proxy character, the Real Roth, acted not as a writer, not as a committed loner and nose-thumber, but as a true Jew as defined by the Mossad, stepping into the generalized collective identity beneath his specific individual identity, the collective identity rooted not in what any one Jewish person may or may not want to be or do, but in the deep and abiding fear of what non-Jewish people will do to us. In the face of his unshakable ethnic doppelganger, Roth accepted Israel's offer and became a different kind of double: a New Jew. ("I am a tribesman who stood with his tribe," the Mossad agent character says.)

In a blazing 1963 *Commentary* essay, "Writing About Jews," Roth had said that it was the job of a novelist neither to perform propaganda for his ethnic group nor to concern himself with parochial questions such as "What will the *goyim* think?" Thirty years later, was he letting us know that he had changed his mind, that he was ready to do his tribal duty? Or was the entire ending parody—Roth toying with his Jewish critics by saying: *Look, Rabbi, I'm doing state propaganda, like you always wanted me to—even letting the Mossad hack apart my book! Am I a good Jew now?* Or maybe he didn't want to choose: maybe he was telling us that he was both.



## Armed and Dangerous

And what of her? Other Naomi? Which is she?

Well, for a week in mid-May 2022, my doppelganger posted a series of photographs of her new long gun, spaced out to win maximum engagement from her fans on Gettr. To kick things off, she posted a photo of the gun in a large box: “It finally happened; I purchased my first firearm today. I am the proud if slightly nervous owner of a 22 Rimfire Rifle. Starting ladylike and manageable.” Next, she posted a picture of her husband, putting it together: “Who knew that the perfect husband for a feminist is a man who will help assemble his wife’s first rifle.” Finally, she posted a picture of the fully assembled firearm on her writing table. “Maybe every writer and dissident critic should have a bipod at home in such times as these. The pen may be mightier than the sword, but perhaps these days, with the Ministry of Truth about to take aim at us, writers need both the pen and the (defensive) sword.”

That was the same day when, in Buffalo, New York, an eighteen-year-old white supremacist murdered ten people at a supermarket with a legally purchased AR-15-style rifle.

The following week, Wolf shared a video in which she said that the only reason the United States “is not entirely enslaved like Australia or Shanghai or Canada . . . is that we have millions of owners of guns . . . it is harder to subjugate an armed population. This is why our founders gave us the Second Amendment. For exactly times like these.”

There was a mass shooting on that day too, this one at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. The killer, also eighteen, murdered nineteen children and two teachers with a legally purchased assault rifle.

In her newsletter, Wolf went deeper, writing a kind of feminist love letter to her new firearm: “How had this issue escaped me so long, as a rape survivor myself, and as a feminist? The rape survivor in me longed, on an animal level, for a weapon. Longed, on an animal level, to deter any future attacker. The rape survivor in me wanted a weapon the way an injured creature wants teeth and claws.” She wondered, “Could it always have been this easy? Could women resist

and deter victimization—by simply owning, and knowing how to use, firearms?” Her answer? “Obviously.”

Wolf is certainly not the first former victim to have succumbed to the promise of the gun, though she used to know that it rarely ends well, for either victim or victimizer. Still, it strikes me that it must be liberating, after living so long in opposition, then so long in humiliation, to finally be on the side with so few facts and so very many guns.

She doesn’t talk or write about Palestinian rights much anymore; they aren’t a top concern for her new friends on Steve Bannon’s *War Room*. And her definition of God no longer seems to involve standing “with our neighbor in trouble and against injustice.” On the contrary, she is fully enlisted in the trenches of Bannon’s “Border War,” echoing his lie about “fully open borders presided over by President Biden.” This, she says, is “a tyrant’s dream,” and, she claims, “Traitors are dissolving the boundaries of our nation.”

Civil war is here, she darkly warns: “I am a peaceful person. I do not want war. But war is being waged upon us.” And like so many others, she is getting ready with more than words.

### Erez from Erez

I have had my own encounters with Israel’s doppelganger politics, too many to share at this late stage on our journey. But perhaps there is time for just one.

It was 2009 and I had just published the Hebrew and Arabic editions of *The Shock Doctrine*. A few months earlier, the Israeli military had launched a horrific attack on the Gaza Strip, killing an estimated 1,400 Palestinians and destroying critical infrastructure. I decided that year that I had no choice but to respect the call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) that came from a broad coalition of Palestinian civil society groups—but I also wanted the book to come out in Israel and Palestine, because it had a chapter on the thriving disaster capitalism industry there. In collaboration with activists in Ramallah and Jerusalem, I found a way to publish that respected the call, which involved working with an activist Israeli press that had a long history of supporting

Palestinian rights.

Before the book's launch in Israel, I went to Gaza to see the aftermath of the attacks for myself. I was traveling with Avi and our friend Cecilie Surasky from Jewish Voice for Peace. We weren't sure it would be possible to get in—Israel tightly controls access to Gaza through the Erez checkpoint, and getting a press pass as a foreign journalist required going through the Israeli press agency. Any one of us could have raised a security flag. But probably because of our Jewish names, the person staffing the office didn't bother looking into us, and we got the necessary accreditation. At the Erez checkpoint, our Jewish names activated our ethnic doubles once again and we were assumed to be sympathetic to Israel's occupation. So while Palestinians stood in long interrogation lines, we sailed through with just a quick ID check, along with bag and body X-rays. Then, jarringly, we were on the other side of the concrete wall, surrounded by watchtowers.

Once in Gaza, the three of us spoke with dozens of Palestinians from different sectors to try to learn as much as we could about life under siege. We met with farmers, a beekeeper, and a doctor, all of whom had lost children in the recent air attack. We saw young bodies burned by white phosphorus. We waded through the rubble of apartment buildings that could not be rebuilt because basic building supplies like cement were being blocked by the siege. We met Mona Al Shawa, a Palestinian women's rights activist, who told me, "We had more hope during the attacks; at least then we believed things would change." Now, she said, outside attention had moved on and Gazans once again felt abandoned by the world. The idea that there was more hope when they were under active air assault still haunts me.

On our last afternoon, we sat on plastic chairs in the shaded backyard of a prominent Palestinian family who insisted on feeding us a sumptuous meal of food from their garden—immense-hearted people who refused to hate us because of our ethnic doubles. The father, a doctor, told us that he was happy for his young children to meet Jewish people who wanted peace and justice, since the only Jews they got the chance to interact with were the soldiers at the checkpoints.

"I don't want them to grow up hating Jews," he told us. "But what can I do

if the only Jews he sees are pointing guns?”

By late afternoon it was time to head back to Jerusalem, and that's when our trouble started. A human rights group in Gaza City had organized a press conference about my trip, and the news had clearly made its way up the chain of command at the Erez checkpoint; this time, they were ready for us.

Rather than letting us return, the Israelis kept us waiting, just the three of us, on the Gaza side of the wall for hours. As night fell and the curfew passed, we were left wondering whether we would get through at all. The checkpoint is in a buffer zone, with a long, desolate outdoor corridor dotted with Hamas security details, so being stranded there without a vehicle and no friends around wasn't ideal.

Finally, a remote door in the wall opened and, once we had been fully searched and scanned, we were approached by a stocky, muscular officer with a short black brush cut who identified himself as Erez.

“Erez from Erez,” I said, trying to keep it light. He didn't smile; he simply looked past me to Avi and instructed him to follow him upstairs for additional screening. Cecilie and I waited while he was interrogated. When Avi emerged, he was walking quickly and motioning us to move fast and get the hell away from all the Erezes.

Back at the Jerusalem Colony Hotel, we learned that he had been taken to a corner office to meet a senior Israeli Defense Force commander. The commander took Avi to the window and pointed at a battalion of tanks doing some kind of exercise nearby.

“You see that? I was minutes away of sending them in to rescue you. Do you have any idea of how much danger you were in? Any idea what Hamas was planning to do to you? We see and hear everything that goes on there.” (This is the flip side of the unseeing of Palestinians that is central to a doppelganger society: the all-seeing eye of the surveillance state.)

Erez then joined in to tell Avi that he had heard some of what I had been saying about BDS, and he had some man-to-man advice: “Tell your wife what happened. Tell her what Hamas wanted to do to you. Get your woman under control.”

With the aid of many beers, the three of us deconstructed the levels of

gaslighting that Erez from Erez appeared to have orchestrated. No, we did not buy that the Israeli military was about to open a ground war in Gaza to rescue three Jews who were not lost. Nor did we believe we had been in imminent danger from Hamas. They had questioned Avi in a makeshift checkpoint inside a shipping container for about fifteen minutes, mainly to find out why he had an Israeli first name if he was Canadian (his mother's youthful labor Zionism). But they were satisfied with his press credentials—and it was the Israelis who had left us on the Gazan side for hours before allowing us through the checkpoint.

It seemed clear that they wanted us to sweat, to wonder if we were being abandoned behind “enemy” lines. And then they wanted to send a very clear message: that whoever we thought we were and whatever we thought we were doing, here, on these blood-soaked lands, we were nothing but our ethnic doubles, nothing but our Jewishness. He wanted us to know that our Jewishness could get us kidnapped or killed by Hamas in Gaza, never mind my foolish support for Palestinian rights, and then it would only be the Israeli army that would ride to our rescue, its soldiers risking their lives to save ours, even though they hold us in utter contempt. Because, like Hamas, they don't care about who we think we are as individuals; they care about our Jewish doubles. So, when Hamas attacked us as Jews, Israel would be there to save us as Jews.

That was the piece of theater that was supposed to get me under control, and it surely contained elements of truth. It was also a snapshot of the seedy bargain Israel offers to all Jews, now more than ever. Sure, you might not like the look of what we do—the Palestinian teenagers in prison, the killing of journalists, the openly racist, anti-Arab parties that have moved from the fringes to some of the most powerful offices in Israel's government. But you will accept it because when the world turns against Jews once again—and it will, because Shylock is eternal—you will come running here, with our tanks, our fighter jets, and the nuclear arsenal we will neither confirm nor deny, as your only safe place in the world.

I understand the primal terror that leads many of my people to cosign that contract, because the same trauma has been passed down through the generations to me. But I still can't do it; the price is too high. And not just for Palestinians and Jews. Because the deal Erez offered us is a version of the same

poisonous deal all who are relatively fortunate on this partitioned planet are being offered. Take the gun. Accept the cages. Fortress your escape pod, and your borders. Perfect your kids. Protect your brand. Ignore the Shadow Lands. Play the victim.

But these defenses are no longer holding. The borders and walls don't protect us from rising temperatures or surging viruses or raging wars. And the walls around ourselves and our kids won't hold, either. Because we are porous and connected, as so many doppelganger stories have attempted to teach us.

So there has to be another way. Another portal, to another story of us.

*Author's note: Doppelganger was published one month before the October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel.*

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