

*Judith Butler*

## Jews and the Bi-National State

by  
Judith Butler

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It is an honor for me to be here today. We have gathered to talk about what is called a just peace, and we have gathered for the most part as a community of academics and activists, so there are already several questions before us, ones that are posed by the title of this conference, ones that are already here laying in wait for us. The one has to do with peace or, what is not always the same, non-violence. Another has to do with justice. And a third surely has to do with what role academics may play in articulating what a just peace might be. I gather we are here because this is what we want: a just peace, and that this common desire is already alive here, already at work here, already motivating us to come and to speak and, perhaps most importantly, to listen. Of course, what we might want or expect from a just peace will be different, and the question will be for us to find a way to negotiate that difference without effacing it. So since I have, in a rather utopian vein, spoken of a “we,” a “we” who have gathered here, let me qualify what I have to say.

Since I am a U.S. citizen, and a diasporic Jew, Ashkenazi in origin, or at least as far as I know, since like many Jews, I lost a good part of my family and my history in the Nazi genocide, I am already in a quandary. It would be a dishonor to all who live in Israel and Palestine for a U.S. citizen to arrive and say what is to be done. You have surely all heard enough of that. What is to be done is best decided through radically democratic means by all the inhabitants of these lands. And I am no such inhabitant, regardless of what my investments in the outcome might be. Precisely, though, because the U.S. continues to exercise powerful influence on Israeli policy towards the Palestinians, it has become necessary to organize in the United States in ways that try to influence what has been a catastrophic support for the exploitation and continued displacement and impoverishment of the Palestinian peoples and the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. There is also upon us as American Jews—but here I think European Jews are also implicated—a demand to rethink and rewrite the history of the founding of the Israeli state, the forcible displacement of 700,000 Palestinians, the present occupation of

3.2 million, and the military aggression against Palestinians that has been part of the founding and continuation of the Israeli state. In my remarks today, I would like to try and say something about what I take the responsibility of a first world Jew to be during these times, both in terms of national policy and cultural interventions. I hope toward the end of my remarks to suggest what role a cooperative alliance of intellectuals might do to struggle against the brutality of the occupation, and to seek an end to the occupation itself.

I will tell you from the outset that I am not a Zionist, although I was brought up in a strong Zionist community in the United States. I am trained as a philosopher, and I confess that my first readings in philosophy were from the tradition of existential theology. My path toward the relinquishing of my Zionism began over twenty years ago, and has recently become a controversial public stance. So although I will not say whether there ought to be a two-state solution, as proposed by the Geneva Accord, or a binational one-state solution, I do not believe that any state should restrict citizenship, or establish gradations of citizenship, on the basis of religious status. Whether what is now called Israel remains one state within a two-state solution, or whether it becomes part of a greater Israel-Palestine, my firm belief is that any claim to political sovereignty based on religious status is misguided, undemocratic, and discriminatory, in principle and in practice. I have read with great interest recently the correspondence and public editorials of the late Martin Buber, and what I found there, to my surprise, was his insistence that Zionism is a position that is committed to international and inter-ethnic cooperation, the universalization of rights. His version of Zionism, as we know, was rather resolutely defeated by the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state, an act which he understood to be a definitive undermining of Zionism itself. At the time, he and others in the Ichud organization disputed the legitimacy of Ben-Gurion's 1948 declaration of the political sovereignty of Israel as a Jewish state.

Buber was idealistic, but he was no saint. He understood the settlement of the lands to be a realization of Zionism, but resisted the claim to political sovereignty. He described in neutral terms the Jewish settlements as "colonization," and refused the critique of colonialism. He sought, paradoxically, humane forms of colonization, arguing for what he called "concentrative colonialism" rather than "expansionist colonialism." These views are clearly problematic, and even the use of the word "concentrative" in the early 40s is no less than terrifying, given its association with the

German concentration camps, and with the devastating realization of this goal in the Gaza Strip. His idealism did not include a robust critique of colonialism, but he did, to his credit, hold out for a federated state in which Jewish and Palestinian cultural autonomy could be maintained, and where the majority would never be in a position to tyrannize the minority. He also called for cooperative economic ventures, the return of Arab lands seized in 1948, and illegally redistributed in 1950, and he asked the Israeli public to try and understand why there might be Palestinian violence against Jews, chastising Israelis for having violated Arab trust and not undertaken cooperative self-government, the fair distribution of arable land, a just adjudication of property rights, and recognition of the humanity of its neighbors. Buber imagined, and I confess to imagining with him, that modes of civil and economic cooperation would lead organically to a form of government that would be based on a shared way of life between Arabs and Jews. He called for the process of peace and cooperation to begin at the cultural level, with the organization of life itself, with the task of living together, and thought that a state form, an internally complex federal form of government for the region, would emerge from this common life wrought together.

This was clearly also the position of Judah Magnes who also claimed at the time that the main policy goal of Jews in Palestine should be to establish institutional structures for Arab-Jewish cooperation. This history is for the most part unknown to American Judaism, since the story we are told, again and again, is that the necessity for the Israeli state emerged as a direct consequence of the Nazi genocide of the Jews. There was, of course, even then, throughout the 1940s, still an open and debated question: what form of government might be needed in these lands, and what would be the most democratic means of deciding the question.

It would later turn out that Primo Levi, whose memoirs on Auschwitz have achieved enormous influence among U.S. intellectuals, would make clear his break with Zionism in 1982, after the assault on Beirut. It was on the eve of Primo Levi's departure to return to Auschwitz to commemorate the dead that he signed the petition, with other survivors, to demand the recognition of the rights of all peoples of the region, published in *La Repubblica*. In his views, the Israeli bombers in 1982 were not fighting for freedom, but had become the new oppressors, fighting to deprive another minority of their freedoms. He wrote, "Everybody is somebody's Jew. And today the

Palestinians are the Jews of the Israelis.” claiming that the Israeli state had become morally unacceptable to anyone who survived the Nazi genocide; after Sabra and Shatilla, he publically asked Sharon and Begin to resign. And though he was told that he needed to remain silent, that in times of war, his open and public criticism could only hearten the enemies of Israel, he stood firm, and deepened his public criticism in 1984, three years before his death, calling upon Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories.

I cite the example of Levi to you because it shows that precisely from within the moral framework derived from the Holocaust, an opposition to the Israeli state is not only possible, but necessary. This thought is nearly unthinkable within American Judaism or, indeed, from within the progressive Jewish movements who call for the end of the occupation. And until we can unlink the way in which the Nazi genocide continues to act as a permanent justification for this state and its policies, there will be a silencing of dissent, a muting of public criticism. Levi himself claimed that we must not let the sufferings of the Jews under Nazism “justify everything.” And the reporter who received this statement responded, “You can reason very coldly.” But this was not coldness on his part; it was feeling, it was horror in the face of atrocities committed by Israelis. It was staying alive to the possibility of knowing and opposing the suffering of others.

Interestingly, it was Buber who blamed the Nazi atrocities for ruining the left-wing Zionist plans for Arab-Jewish alliance. He understood that historical circumstances - the mass extermination of more than six million Jews and the subsequent needs for immediate refuge for hundreds of thousands - as derailing the destiny of Zionism itself. In his view, Zionism was not the necessary outcome of the history of Jewish wandering and suffering; in fact, historical circumstances, violent and arbitrary, defeated Zionism. He opposed any view of Zionism that led to a Jewish state or a permanent Jewish majority. Over and against this view, Ben Gurion could make use of the Holocaust to forge the view that anti-semitism was everywhere, and that the only defense against it was the establishment of a Jewish state that would permit limitless immigration. He took Palestinian acts of violence against the settler colonialists to be nothing other than proof of the persistence of global anti-semitism. As a result, he called for a politically sovereign Jewish state not only to erect a permanent bulwark against anti-semitism but to secure a political instrument by which to guarantee unlimited immigration. In May of 1944, when the brutal facts of the Nazi genocide

were becoming publically known, Buber understood the demand for accommodating as many Jews from Europe in Palestine. In the journal *Be'ayot*, Buber argued that Ben-Gurion seized upon this need for refuge to confound the moral imperative to rescue as many Jews as possible with the political goal, spurious and dangerous, of creating a Jewish majority in Palestine in order to shore up the claims for Jewish sovereignty on a land inhabited by hundreds of thousands of palestinians.

We can see the linkage here, in Ben-Gurion's refutation of Ichud and in his subsequent denunciation of the Anglo-American Inquiry Committee's call for a binational state in May of 1946. Ben-Gurion and Yishuv not only won a political battle, but an ideological one as well, since what became exported as the truth and canonized in the Ashkenazi Jewish diaspora, and then hammered into an ideological condition of life after the six-day war, was the abiding causal link between the appalling extermination of the Jews in Europe and the necessity of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state. This necessity appeared, and still appears to most Zionists, as imperative, even though, with the assistance of the superpowers, it forced the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the appropriation of their homes and lands, and the near certainty of violent conflict for decades to come.

The prevalent view that the genocide led to the necessity of the present Israeli state, the state as a Jewish state, is so deeply entrenched, that any effort to question the structure or status of the current state is regarded by many diasporic Zionists as a sign of a grave and unforgivable insensitivity to the Shoah itself. Indeed, to raise questions about the Jewish presumption of this state is considered not only a sign that one has "forgotten" the Holocaust, but that one is leaving the Jews open to assault and, in that sense, collaborating with the assault itself. And yet, even as this view holds ideologically, there seems to be little sense that the Israeli state in its current form is fostering anti-semitism, confounding what is official Israeli policy with who Jews are or what they believe. The difference is potentially great, greater than the media might think, but the tactical question is, how might we make this difference more emphatic, fostering a voice of dissent and criticism with the power and possibility to forge ties that will lead to non-violent solutions?

In the U.S., most of the organizations who support Israeli policy and the current basis of the Israeli state, argue that a Jewish state was established as a

realization of Zionism, that one can draw a continuous line from the first Zionist World Congress in the 1890s to the realization of the Israeli state in Ben-Gurion's unilateral declaration in 1948. Buber argued, and in the name of Zionism, that the state of Israel destroyed the possibility of Zionism, and that Zionism stood for a spiritual reality radically undermined by nationalism and by state sovereignty. For him, the bi-national state was a logical extension of Zionism itself, and political sovereignty was a "perversion of Zionism." This thought is virtually unthinkable within the current political map, but we must ask, why and how has it become unthinkable? And how might it begin to be thought again?

Buber and others realized that the demand for limitless immigration of Jews to Palestine was intensified in the late 30s and in the 1940s, as Jews escaping Nazi Germany were turned away from Britain and, indeed, the U.S. (which, of course, kept its secret quotas under FDR). And it is important to remember that there were, in the 1940s, and precisely in the aftermath of the Nazi genocide, Jewish groups here in Palestine and elsewhere who concluded that Hitler's racism only added further support for the claim that no state can legitimately make itself into the sovereign domain of a people based on religious affiliation or inheritance. Buber's view was shared by Judah Magnes, by the early Brith Shalom movement that worked toward a Jewish-Arab collaboration, focusing on commonly occupied farmlands, by Ichud, which won a temporary victory in 1946 with its call for a binational state. These views were openly debated in the U.S. in *Commentary* magazine, before its turn to the Right, in *The Menorah Journal* and in *Ba'ayot*, which folded after the events of 1948, and continued, in dwindling form in the journal, *Ner*, which claimed only 800 subscriptions at the time of its closure in the mid-60s. So who are the inheritors of this position within Israel today? We could probably find some members of Peace Now who would trace their intellectual and political inheritance to this early movement toward a cooperative solution, but for the most part we find those inheritors in the cultural movements of cooperation and collaboration: in Ta-ayush, in the village of Neve Shalom\Wahat al-Salam and in the important human rights work of Btselem, and the important debates hosted by The Israel Palestine Center for Research and Information. Perhaps there are others that you can tell me about, and I can pass that on.

In the U.S., progressive Jews are in a radical minority, but they are organizing. They include Zionists who call for Palestinian self-determination,

post-Zionists who call for Palestinian self-determination and statehood, and all those who would, regardless of the one-state or two-state solution, call for the radical restructuring of Israeli citizenship to overcome its racist hierarchies, demand the just reallocation of arable land, and a practical and just policy toward the problem of Palestinian refugees, a problem that, since 1948 at least, has refused to go away, and which has not as yet found its just and practical solution. And though some of us may well be pleased with the Geneva Accord, with the step it takes toward a collaboratively wrought peace, we would probably be unwise to stay content with any peace proposal that takes off the agenda U.N. resolution 242, and the need to address the right of return for Palestinians in a way that can work.

In the U.S., as you know, the political lobby called AIPAC maintains that it represents the views of American Jewry on the state of Israel, and every U.S. president and congress has honored this claim in the last decades. AIPAC represents a strong conservative trend among U.S. Jews, focusing not only on the “defense” of Israel, but garnering political support for the Israeli military and the occupation. The struggle to establish an alternative to AIPAC has been enormously difficult. In the last few years, the organization Brit Tzedek has emerged as an alternative, in many ways mirroring the Labor Party in Israel, with some members more closely allied with Peace NOW. Whereas AIPAC in its Likud and right-wing labor politics boasts approximately 60,000 members, garnering support from the American Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee, Brit Tzedek has achieved 16,000 members in the last two years alone. Brit Tzedek aims to rival AIPAC as the political representative of American Jewry, and it may well achieve its aim to show that American Jewry is strongly divided on the question of the occupation. Brit Tzedek clearly opposes the occupation, supports the Geneva Accord, opposes the separation wall, and has undertaken to raise money to induce illegal Israeli settlers to leave Palestinian lands. Brit Tzedek, although claiming to be neutral with respect to Zionism, leans heavily in that direction, and it has not addressed the question of Palestinian refugees and entitlements to land and property. Nor has it been known for seeking out collaborative venues with Palestinian and Arab organizations. To the left of Brit Tzedek is probably Tikkun, an organization run by Rabbi Michael Lerner, whose personal views establish the official view of the organization. It is *not* known as an internally democratic organization, although its magazine has hosted important commentary on the occupation, making it possible for American Jews to openly oppose the occupation without being

accused of anti-semitism. Tikkun is openly Zionist, and has consistently refused to publish post-Zionist inquiries. It has, however, hosted important essays by Cornel West and Jessica Benjamin on the quest for peace in the Middle East, and it has done an extremely important service by establishing discussion groups on campuses throughout the U.S. where Jewish opposition to Israeli state practices can be articulated and discussed. It is regularly dismissed by Hillel organizations and members of AIPAC for lacking *realpolitik*, and always recurring to the views of its semi-charismatic leader.

Most recently, it seems to me, an organization called Jewish Voice for Peace has become important, vigorously opposing the occupation and the separation wall, exploring the possibility of a binational state, and organizing an important boycott against Caterpillar to stop the export of their bulldozers to the Israeli government for use to crush homes and lives in the occupied territories. Jewish Voice for Peace maintains that “there is no magic spell that will bring peace. It will take time and perseverance from all parties involved. But that process cannot even begin until Israel ends its 36-year old occupation. There needs then to be a process of reconciliation, rebuilding Palestinian society and work toward just resolutions of the outstanding issues, such as the Palestinian refugees, permanent and precise borders, Jerusalem and conditions for Arab citizens of Israel. But until the Occupation ends, matters will continue to be complicated by violence and the disparity of power between the two sides.”

These groups are small, but they have become a thorn in the side of the mainstream Zionist organizations who can no longer so easily claim to represent all Jews in the U.S. The strategic aim, as far as I am concerned, is to break apart that hegemony, and for there to be a strong Jewish voice against the occupation, so that when politicians run for offices, they will not be able to assume that the so-called Jewish vote is monolithic, so that they will not be able to assume that Jews favor Sharon or the occupation, or the separation wall, the continuing subjugation, and the radical devaluation of Palestinian lives.

Today we are here under the rubric of stopping the occupation. Yes, the occupation surely has to be stopped, but that is not the end of the story. The subjugation of the Palestinians did not begin in 1967. It is not really possible to fight for the Geneva Accord without stopping and dismantling the separation wall, for that wall is redrawing the borders as we speak, and its

success will adversely affect the lives of 210,000 Palestinians, and annex approximately 22% of the West Bank as Israeli territory, decimating the economic life of that area, forcibly separating Palestinian villages from wells and hospitals, making it exceedingly difficult for Palestinians to work or to maintain contact with family and community. Given that nearly 90% of Palestinians in those territories make less than 2 dollars a day, this further decimation of the economic base of these territories will produce permanent and demoralized poverty. This wall has no place in the quest for a just peace. Indeed, precisely because the separation wall seems to be drawing new and radically unacceptable boundaries, it has inadvertently breathed life into the one-state solution.

Of course, the Geneva Accord is to be commended as a coalitional peace effort; it represents an impressive effort on the part of non-state actors from both the Israeli and the Palestinian communities to try and make a peace independent of state governments. But even the Geneva Accord cannot be implemented if the wall is not first dismantled. And the Geneva Accord will not be sufficient to maintain the peace until the issue of Palestinian refugees is addressed. The institution of a Palestinian state will not by itself nullify the claims to the land or the petition for restoration. Nor will it address the internal racism and hierarchy that afflicts the institution of Israeli citizenship, where Arab Israelis, including Arab Jews, Christians, and Muslims, suffer second class status, and where the income levels between Ashkenazi and Mizrahim continue to be stark and unjust, and where the founding narratives and the dominant culture are derived from the *Aliyah* from Europe.

Indeed, if there are now 1.2 million Palestinians living within Israel, they will be asked, even within a two-state solution, to live within a state that not only defines its polity and the prerogatives of citizenship as Jewish, but which insists on maintaining majority control over all non-Jewish occupants. I don't believe that the Israeli state in its current form should be ratified, and worry that the Geneva Accord provides cover precisely for such a ratification. This has implications not only for how Palestinians are treated, but for a series of ethnic and racial divisions within the Israeli polity that must be fought and reversed.

On the other hand, the resistance to the prospect of peace is heightened by those Zionists who believe that only through maintaining its military dominance and brutality will Israel survive. This is clearly circular reasoning,

which does not see that the militarization of the state can only and always lead to further militarization. Nonetheless, I am shocked when I come across the military sentiment in its raw form as I was recently, when I received the following email from a Zionist list in the U.S. In a recent missive from an organization called Israel Live!, one of its organizers responded to the question of whether the Presidential candidate, Howard Dean, was good for the Jews. She wrote to her constituency that they should not fear voting for Dean, since he was clearly *in favor of* “extra-judicial killings.” I stared at the phrase. “Extra-judicial killings.” This was an appeal to the U.S. Jewish community to feel relieved, to celebrate, to resolve on a positive vote because this man is said to approve of the daily killings of Palestinian peoples outside the scope of any recognizable law. These are views that can never lead to peace, and yet, those who hold them, understand themselves as righteous, as fighting anti-semitism, as defending the Jewish people, as acting in the name of survival. But are they doing any of these things?

There are other messages I receive, however, and they are problematic for other reasons. I am part of a listserve, academics for justice, which is the strongest internet community of academics I know of that opposes the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. This listserve has done a very good job in mobilizing an academic boycott against Israeli universities, in undermining support for Campus Watch, a neo-McCarthyite anti-Arab group that has sought to restrict how Middle East politics is taught in U.S. universities. This group has also rightly come to the defense of various academics of Arab descent who have become targets of censorship or subject to immigration harassment. It has also, very effectively, come to the defense of Hanan Ashrawi to speak on U.S. college campuses against those who would vilify her for her extraordinary work on Palestinian human rights. Nevertheless, on that same listserve, and in defense of the academic boycott, I read the spurious claim that there are no Israeli academics, except perhaps two, listed there, who have openly voiced opposition to the Israeli occupation. This claim is clearly false, and yet there it is, circulating, part of the rationale for the boycott. One has to bear the wrath of some if one speaks out against the falsity of this claim, and yet it must be done. How can it be that there is, among these very important political organizers, no understanding of the culture and politics of dissent within Israel?

There is, in my mind, here work to be done to try and make clear what the Israeli opposition is, as well as what the Palestinian alliances are who seek a

non-violent resolution to the conflict. To have strong media representation of both, and to establish links between them, will constitute one of the most effective coalitional means I can imagine for the purposes of ending the occupation and pursuing all the related questions of social justice. I am hoping that this is one of the tasks that we can undertake here. It will strengthen the U.S. opposition to current Israeli policy, since so many U.S. progressives believe that it would put them in a bind to oppose Israel, not knowing that there is an internal criticism, a host of dissenters, those whose views and whose activism are not, and will not be, adequately represented in the mainstream media. Similarly, the brave and important statement that Palestinian intellectuals published last year opposing the suicide bombings, this was treated with skepticism by *The New York Times*, and not given the kind of attention it clearly deserved. Why is it that time and again one must fight the conception that all Palestinians support violent measures? It is an indignity to have to defend Palestinians, who suffer violence disproportionately, from this charge. And yet, it must be done to counter the public perception, the media construction, that all Palestinian aspirations are reducible to violence. But what can be heard, and what can be registered? Does the mainstream media foreground the articulate and fair and reflective voice of Hanan Ashrawi, or circulate the important editorials of Moustapha Barghouti, who describes in detail the daily plight of the Palestinians? The cynical obituary of Edward Said in *The New York Times* was yet another example of this effort to demean one of the most important voices for social justice of our time.

Coalitions are not easy or happy places. They are places one stays when one has the impulse to leave. They are forms of work that are, by definition, difficult, since one has to have one's position and allow it to be decentered by what one hears. One must persist in what one knows to be right, and yet know also when to yield, when to do something for the sake of continuing to work together, to preserve the relations at hand. I think that Buber had a point in believing that one had to work at living together, working together in de-institutionalized ways, and that such alliances could provide the foundation and the model for collaborative associations seeking non-violent and just solutions to conflicts that appear intractable. This would mean living to the side of one's nationalism, of one's identification, allowing for a decentering of a nationalist ethos. The question of establishing and tending to relations will be more important than grounding oneself in an identity.

Something other than nationalism has doubtless emerged already through these associations and collaborations, something inadvertent, even beautiful.

What would it mean to begin the practice of undoing nationalism, of countering its claims, of beginning to think and feel outside of its reach? Oddly, I think that we have to have a debate about what it is that one can finally love in order to move outside the claims of nationalism. I found two quotations, quite by accident, in the course of my teaching this last semester, one from Hannah Arendt, the other from Mahmoud Darwish. They seemed to be in conversation with one another, and I offer them to you today as examples of a possible conversation. Arendt was, as you know, criticized by Gershom Sholem and others after she published her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Like the reporter who accused Primo Levi of “cold reasoning” for criticizing Israel, Sholem calls Arendt “heartless” for concentrating on what she takes to be the inadequate visions of Jewish politics at the time. Sholem wrote to her in 1963 from Jerusalem: “In the Jewish tradition there is a concept, hard to define and yet concrete enough, which we know as *Ahabath Israel*: “Love of the Jewish people...” In you, dear Hannah, as in so many intellectuals who came from the German Left, I find little trace of this. Arendt replies, disputing first that she comes from the German Left (and, indeed, she was no Marxist), but then says something quite interesting when accused of failing to love the Jewish people well enough. She writes, “You are quite right - I am not moved by ‘love’ of this sort, and for two reasons: I have never in my life ‘loved’ any people or collective - neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love ‘only’ my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons. Secondly, this ‘love of the Jews’ would appear to me, since I am myself Jewish, as something rather suspect. I cannot love myself or anything which I know is part and parcel of my own person. To clarify this, let me tell you of a conversation I had in Israel with a prominent political personality who was defending the - in my opinion disastrous - non-separation of religion and state in Israel. What he said -I am not sure of the exact words any more - ran something like this: ‘You will understand that, as a Socialist, I, of course, do not believe in God; I believe in the Jewish people.’ I found this a shocking statement and, being too shocked, I did not reply at the time. But I could have answered: the greatness of this people was once that it believed in God, and believed in Him in such a way that its trust and love towards Him was greater than its fear. And now this people believes only in itself? What good can come out of that? -Well, in this sense I do not

'love' the Jews, nor do I 'believe' in them; I merely belong to them as a matter of course, beyond dispute or argument." (*Jew as Pariah*, 247)

In Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness*, his literary account of the bombings of Beirut in 1982, he describes a scene with his Jewish lover. They have been making love, and he becomes sleepy. He is aware that he has to report to the Israeli police in order to avoid being jailed or permanently expelled. His is the first-person voice in the quotation that follows:

He asks, "Do the police know the address of this house?"

She answered, "I don't think so, but the military police do. Do you hate Jews?"

I said, 'I love you now.'

She said, 'That's not a clear answer.'

I said, 'And the question itself wasn't clear. As if I were to ask you, 'Do you love

Arabs?'

She said, 'That's not a question.'

I asked, "And why is your question a question?"

She said, "Because we have a complex. We have more need of answers than you do."

I said, "Are you crazy?"

She said, "A little. But you haven't told me if you love Jews or hate them."

I said, "I don't know, and I don't want to know. But I do know I like the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare. I like fried fish, boiled potatoes, the music of Mozart, and the city of Haifa. I like grapes, intelligent conversation,

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autumn, Picasso's blue period. And I like wine, and the ambiguity of mature poetry. As for Jews, they're not a question of love or hate."

She said, "Are you crazy?"

I said, "a little."

She asked, "do you like coffee?"

I said, "I love coffee and the aroma of coffee."

She rose, naked, even of me, and I felt the pain of those from whom a limb has been severed."

Later, he changes tone, only to change it again: she asks, "and you, what do you dream about?" And he replies, "That I stop loving you." She asks, "Do you love me?" He replies, "No. I don't love you. Did you know that your mother, Sarah, drove my mother, Hagar, into the desert?" She asks, "Am I to blame then? Is it for that that you do not love me?" And he replies,

"No, You're not to blame; and because of that I don't love you. Or, I love you."

This last line carries with it a paradox. I don't love you. Or, I love you. This is both proximity and aversion; it is unsettled; it is not of one mind. It might be said to be the affect, the emotional tenor of coalition itself, the effort to stay in even as one wishes to go, the desire to stay in the midst of what is unresolved, in the disquiet of ambivalence, in order to continue to stay near and to work together until something new emerges.

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