

A Question of Zion: A Reply to Shalom Lappin

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In his substantial and far-reaching review of *The Question of Zion*, Shalom Lappin aims to discredit the book on grounds of argument and scholarship, arguing that my objective in the book is ‘to characterise Zionism as a collective mental disorder.’ In the course of his review, Lappin makes many points and presents a number of historical arguments that merit a response. But this phrase from the first sentence of the review – he later describes me as determined to paint Zionism as ‘the offspring of psychological deformation’ [1] – already indicates the extent to which Lappin has completely misunderstood my purpose.

The Question of Zion, as it states clearly in the Preface, is not intended as a history of Zionism. First and foremost, we are dealing with a generic distinction from which many of the disagreements between us then follow. *The Question of Zion* is an attempt to understand some of the convictions that drive Zionism as a belief system, and that have entrenched themselves at the heart of the dominant view of the Israeli nation. To argue that these beliefs are in part unconsciously motivated, that they are the expression of a complex and at times self-defeating psychic dynamic, implies neither deformation nor disorder. It is a fundamental premise of psychoanalysis that all human subjects are driven by such processes. Without them, we would not be human. Although Freud is most famous for his study of individuals, he also devoted much time and space to the analysis of collectivities in his writings on war, civilisation and religion, including, in his last great work on Moses, the rise of monotheism. After Freud, group analysis became a central component of psychoanalysis, notably through the pioneering work of W.R.Bion. A group is the vehicle of both myth and memory; above all, it requires the production of a narrative that coheres the identity of its members. That narrative will be made up of many factors, some indeed conscious, some less so. Lappin, who repeatedly insists on the purely reasoned, pragmatic component of Zionism as if that disqualifies everything else, would be well served by Freud’s concept of over-determination, which allows that behaviour can be caused by more than one factor at the same time. Bion famously made a distinction between the ‘work group’ that aims to secure the realistic objectives of the group and the ‘basic assumption’ that carries its unconscious fantasies. To this extent, and here Lappin is right, Zionism

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is no different from any other collective entity. But to try to understand the specific psychic components or fantasies that play their part in securing one group identity is not to accuse, insult or degrade it (in psychoanalytic vocabulary, fantasy is not daydream or irrational folly, but a crucial part of how we fashion ourselves). Although Lappin ends by arguing that Freud banished the demonisation of the dark forces of the mind, it is clear from the tone of his review throughout that it is he who adheres to a pre-Freudian view in which we are demeaned by the unconscious.

Lappin points out a number of factual errors in the book. I have appreciated when readers have indicated these to me, notably in relation to Jabotinsky's 1933 speech and Herzl's dream which should have read 'biographer of 1919' and not 'in 1919.' These details, plus other typos or mis-transcriptions – for example, the reference to the Pentateuch and the Torah in relation to Shabtai Zvi should have read 'a printed Pentateuch was holier than the Torah scroll' – have all already been corrected in the forthcoming paperback edition of the book. Other charges are however based on either misreading or in themselves require debate (one of Lappin's main tactics is to present contestable argument as factual corrections or his personal interpretation as unanswerable evidence against me). For example, the story about Herzl and Hitler attending the same performance of Wagner is indeed apocryphal and chronologically impossible. However to imply that the point of the anecdote is to suggest that the two figures were 'inspired by the same demonic impulses and romantic myths that Wagner expresses in his music,' with the implication that I am somehow equating their vision, is tendentious to say the least (that they were both inspired by Wagner is however a fact). 'The intention,' Lappin claims 'is unambiguous.' I think not, as my point was rather the opposite – that the same music could have had such a profound influence on two figures who arrived at such dramatically opposed solutions to the Jewish Question. However, as hostile reviewers have been determined to see in this an equation between Zionism and Nazism, one which I specifically repudiate in the book, I have been happy to remove it from the forthcoming edition. The charge that I use 'almost exclusively' a few influential secondary sources is, on the other hand, completely unfounded – it is hard to see how the complete papers and letters of Chaim Weizmann, the original German diaries of Theodor Herzl, his fiction and pamphlets, the writings of Hannah Arendt, and Hans Kohn, and scholarly editions of the writings of Ahad Ha'am edited by Leon Simon and of Martin Buber edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr fall into this category. If the charge is that the writings of these latter two are translations, by utterly reputable scholars it should be said, Lappin should say so (Lappin himself relies on a similar mix of primary and secondary sources in his

review, with two Hebrew texts in the bibliography although these are not cited in the review, and no other language originals).

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However, none of this forms the substance of Lappin's review, which is to take issue with the three theses of the book: that Zionism is coloured by a strong messianic strain even in its secular dimension; that the early critics of Zionism such as Buber and Arendt were prescient in their fears for the future nation; that the Holocaust has entered the national imaginary in a way that, through the depth of the trauma, has fostered the belligerent component of its identity. *The Question of Zion* represents for me the beginning of understanding – it is presented quite clearly as arising out of an 'anguished curiosity' about the direction of the Israeli nation. I make no false claims to be an historian with specialist knowledge, and I continue to learn much from further reading in the field. Nonetheless, I stand by each of these theses and see nothing in Lappin's review that repudiates any of them.

Lappin is dismissive of the argument that messianism is part of the core identity of Zionism, insisting that it was predominantly secular in strain and indeed was condemned as such by key participant groups in its genesis such as the Mizrahi who saw Zionism, notably in the version of Chaim Weizmann and his followers, as a threat to Orthodox religious belief. Lappin usefully fleshes out some of the debates that characterise Zionism at its inception. However none of this detracts from the argument that I am making, which is, that for all its assertions to the contrary, even secular Zionism could not free itself completely from a messianic component and that this has been decisive in the nation's predominant vision of itself and its destiny. This is by no means an argument original to me, but is made by many scholars, such as Aviezer Ravitsky, Eliezer Schweid, and Ian Lustik whom I cite, all of whom Lappin chooses to ignore. [2] As Ravitsky puts it in *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, to quote just one of these: 'Too many elements in Zionist activity and rhetoric evoked the classical vision of redemption for a view that unwaveringly distinguished between the two to capture people's imagination for long.' He continues:

Zionism called for Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel just as messianism promised the return to Zion and the ingathering of the exiles. As the former movement sought to attain political independence for the Jewish people,

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the latter hoped for the liberation of the Jews from 'subjugation to the great powers.' Zionism worked hard to make the land fruitful, to 'conquer the waste places'; it even spoke explicitly of 'redeeming the land.' Employing a somewhat different idiom, messianism taught (in the words of the Talmud) that 'there is no revealed End than this, as it is said, "But you, O mountains of Israel, shall yield your produce and bear your fruit, for their return is near."' [3]

Lappin takes issue with my characterisation of Maimonides as opposing messianism. That Maimonides's writing had a messianic component is true (as indeed had Martin Buber's and Hans Cohn's as I acknowledge). But this messianism is radically distinct from the form of messianism described here. So much so that, in his book *Israelis and the Jewish Tradition – An Ancient People Debating Its Future*, the important Jewish thinker, David Hartman, invokes Maimonides' thinking on this issue precisely as a counter to the form of messianism that he sees as endangering Israel today. 'How,' he asks, 'can we provide a religious response to the rebirth of nationhood without placing our national renaissance within the continuum of a redemptive messianic process?' [4] For Hartman, Zionism was indeed a secular movement, involving nothing less than a 'revolution' in Jewish life, but the Bible was not discarded. On the contrary, it became 'the basis for a new anthropology, not of a new quest for God,' with Hanukah, for example, transferred from the miracle of the cruse of oil to a narrative that recasts Israelis as modern day Maccabees: 'The religious and secular Zionists, then, shared an interest in the Bible for different reasons: one group sought a new anthropology, the other a source for ascribing redemptive significance to the Jewish national renaissance.' [5] Maimonides is crucial because, in this reading, he 'never once introduces the idea of a redemptive scheme for history nor does he connect the vitality of Judaism with a historical transformation of the Jewish people.' [6] For Hartman, the scandal of Maimonides was 'to ignore messianism and the yearning for historical redemption and to make the disembodied intellectual love of God the ultimate telos of Judaism,' a love he wishes to reintroduce into Israel's relationship to Judaism. [7] God 'as loving teacher' absorbs the 'triumphant lord of history of the Exodus narrative.' 'The commitment to the Sinai covenant does not entail a belief in the eventual messianic triumph of God in history.' [8] 'Ignore messianism' means here a refusal of the belief in *historic entitlement*, which secular and religious Zionism shared – it is not true, therefore, that it is only the Kabbalah concept of messianism that Maimonides rejects. This is from the *Mishneh Torah* as cited by Hartman:

The Sages and Prophets did not long for the days of the Messiah that Israel might exercise dominion over the world, or rule over the heathens, or be exalted by the nations, or that it might eat and drink and rejoice. Their aspiration was that Israel be free to devote itself to the Law and its wisdom. [9]

Today the link to the Bible has been lost among Israeli youth: ‘the state of Israel has in a sense become a new Torah for Jews.’ [10] Maimonides belief in the spiritual integrity of the Jew needs, therefore, to be re-invoked as a vital alternative to the ‘territorial, messianic framework’ so prevalent in Israel (only thus will Israel’s relationship to Judaism be preserved). [11] This is of course Hartman’s reading, and can be argued, but Lappin is too hasty in insisting on a simple distinction between the redemptive, as opposed to mystical, messianism of Maimonides’ thought.

More important, Lappin makes much of the internal dissent that characterises early Zionism and Israel today, but he ignores this powerful contemporary appeal by Hartman against the dangerous predominance of messianism in both the founding and contemporary heart of the nation. Lappin is right that the Mizrachi saw Weizmann’s party as a threat to their religious beliefs, that they fleetingly supported the Ugandan option, that leading Orthodox rabbis saw Zionism as an enlightenment threat to religious Judaism. But none of this begins to answer the claim that secular Zionism, notably in the form that came, after these disputes, to predominate over the founding of the state, took its – mostly triumphalist – reference from the Bible. Lappin’s historical account obfuscates where it seeks to clarify. For the same reason, his invocation of Michael Collins and Marcus Garvey to suggest that all nationalisms are coloured by ecstatic religious rhetoric misses the point. It is the view of Israel as the historic fulfilment of a Biblical destiny in Palestine, the vision that came to ground itself in the dominant narrative of Zionism, that is crucial (Lappin misses the key element of Ben-Gurion’s quote which is why the Jews would wander off ‘to Israel of all places’), not the reference to a heroic past, national liberation or freedom, or even redemption of the people, which indeed many of these rhetoric’s have in common.

Even more questionably, Lappin evokes the Orthodox Jewish thinker, Yeshayahu Leibowitz as providing one ‘of the clearest instances of the radical disjunction between classical political Zionism and religious messianism.’(p. 7) It is worth pausing here as this example can do well as an illustration of distorted scholarship on the part of Lappin of the kind he repeatedly imputes to me. In fact the writings of Leibowitz, which I cite in *States of Fantasy* although not in this book, could be said

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to demonstrate precisely the opposite of Lappin's claim. It was because he witnessed the sacralisation of the land in Zionist discourse that Leibowitz, indeed one of the state's most outspoken early critics, made, and re-made, his appeal against state idolatry (like Hartman, he also invokes Maimonides as someone sentient of the 'danger involved in immersing oneself in historical (or meta-historical) reflection on the future redemption'). [12] This is from his article 'After Kibiyeh' written in 1953-54 in response to the massacre of more than fifty inhabitants of the village as reprisal for a hand grenade tossed by Arab infiltrators into a Jewish home in the immigrant village of Yehud:

What produced this generation of youth, which felt no inhibition or inner compunction in performing the atrocity when given the inner urge and external occasion for retaliation? After all, these young people were not a wild mob but youth raised and nurtured on the values of a Zionist education, upon concepts of the dignity of man and human society. The answer is that *the events at Kibiyeh were a consequence of applying the religious category of holiness to social, national, and political values and interests – a usage prevalent in the education of young people as well as in the dissemination of public information.* (my emphasis) [13]

'We have no right,' he insists in his 1959 'A Call for the Separation of Religion and State,' 'to link the emergence of the state of Israel to the religious concept of messianic redemption, with its idea of religious regeneration of the world or at least of the Jewish people. There is no justification for enveloping this political-historical event in an aura of holiness. Certainly, there is little ground for regarding the mere existence of this state as a religiously significant phenomenon?' [14] Perhaps Lappin can explain why Leibowitz would feel the need to make these assertions if this religious endowment of statehood was not exactly what he saw happening in Israel.

Specifically, Leibowitz traces the problem to the founding Declaration of Independence of 1948 with its reference to 'the Rock of Israel' which fraudulently (his word) transferred its meaning from something that transcends all human values and manifestations into the might of Israel as manifested in history: 'If the nation and its welfare and the country and its security are holy, and if the sword is the "Rock of Israel" – then Kibiyeh is possible and permissible.' [15] There could be no stronger illustration of one of the central arguments of *The Question of Zion* – the infiltration into the common language of secularism of a religious and messianic

element has, since the inception of Israel, fostered the legitimization of violence by the state. Where, readers might ask, does this leave Lappin's assertion that Zionist secularism is untainted by messianism or that messianism only emerges nationally with the rise of Gush Emunim following the 1967 War?

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It is a central charge of Lappin's review that I do not give enough weight to the historical persecution of the Jews which determined the need for national self-determination. In fact, on the second page of the book, I state my belief that Zionism 'emerged out of the legitimate desire of a persecuted people for a homeland,' while I insist in Chapter 3 that there can be no understanding of Zionism which does not acknowledge 'the reality of historical anti-Semitism and the effect of persecution against Jews' (the opening of this chapter involves an account of the rise of anti-Semitism in turn of the century Austro-Hungary and its effects on the emergence of Zionism in Europe). [16] More fundamentally, Lappin implies that because I write with the benefit of hindsight in relation to Hitler's destruction of European Jewry, my discussion of the early critics of Zionism – Gershom Scholem, Ahad Ha'am, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, Hans Kohn – is invalid, or rather shows an 'apparent lack of concern for the survival of the Jewish body in the face of extreme threat.' How he deduces this offensive conclusion is unclear, unless it follows from his belief, one which I share and in fact state on p. 118 – although of course Lappin does not cite these lines – that '[it] was the horrors of the Second World War that gave to the Jewish people an unanswerable case.' [17] Lappin cites at length Gershom Scholem's 1946 reply to Hannah Arendt's 1944 'Zionism reconsidered,' in which he fiercely defends Zionism against Arendt's critique. But the fact that Arendt not only expresses this position in the essay to which Scholem objects, but also maintains it in her subsequent 1946 essay, 'The Jewish State Fifty Years On' when the full scope of what had happened in Europe was clear, suggests at the very least that it was possible for a Jewish thinker, writing with full knowledge of the horrors in Europe – 'Today reality has become a nightmare [...] horrible beyond the scope of the human imagination' – to go on believing, even after the Holocaust, that the founding of the state of Israel might constitute a danger to the very Jewish people it was intended to save:

Herzl's picture of the Jewish people as surrounded and forced together by a world of enemies has in our day conquered the Zionist movement and

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become the common sentiment of the Jewish masses. Our failure to be surprised at this development does not make Herzl's picture any truer – it only makes it more dangerous. [18]

Does Arendt show no concern for the fate of the Jewish people? Or is it rather that she is fearful for the future of the new nation given the conditions – including, as Lappin points out, Arab hostility – under which it was forging itself? Lappin cites a whole page by Scholem and not a word by Arendt as if this in itself indisputably settles the argument in Scholem's favour (nor does he cite a word by Ahad Ha'am whose equally profound concerns form the greater substance of this chapter of the book). Instead I would suggest that many of Arendt's fears: for the isolation of the new nation in the Middle East if it imposed itself on its neighbours; for its likely dependence on a distant imperial power; for the militarization which would come to dominate the nation, are still relevant for today. It does not seem to occur to Lappin that to criticise Israel in these terms might precisely arise out of the deepest 'concern for the survival of the Jewish body in the face of extreme threat.' As I state quite clearly in the book, although again you would gather the opposite from Lappin, none of this is to say 'that Israel should cease to exist, but that the nation will perhaps survive only if it takes the fullest measure of this founding dilemma.' [19] This is Rabbi David Goldberg in his recent book, *The Divided Self: Israel and the Jewish Psyche Today*:

It was Herzl's hope that Zionism would break the mould of insecure Jewish existence in the Diaspora and enable Jews to 'live as free men on their own soil, to die peacefully in their own homes.' For Jews, that is more likely to happen almost anywhere in the world than in Israel. [20]

To get the measure of Lappin's unscrupulousness, readers might like to ponder this charge that I do not see the '*acute irony in citing an address given by Buber in 1939 on the dangers that political Zionism poses to Jewish spirituality. Even at that late date Buber was not able to anticipate the terrible events that were about to befall the Jews of Europe.*' (my emphasis) [21] But Buber's strongest critique of the path of political Zionism is reserved for his essay '*Zionism and "Zionism"*' published in 1948, two weeks after the Declaration of Independence, which is central to my discussion, but of course ignored by Lappin. [22] Again, with full knowledge of the 'destructions of millions by Hitler,' Buber lamented what he termed the 'blindness' of the new nation, even in victory; 'Should the Ichud Accept the Decree of History?' is the title of a speech he delivered in 1949, after the founding of the state

and Israel's defeat of the Arab armies in the 1948 war: 'the cry of victory does not have the power of preventing the clear-eyed from seeing that the soul of Zionism has evaporated.'^[23] 'There is nothing sillier,' he continues, 'than to be overjoyed because the Arab population has left.'^[24] You may disagree with these critiques but to suggest, as Lappin does, that Buber's dissent was without benefit of hindsight in relation to Nazi terror, is dishonest to say the least.

Lappin also cites Freud's 1935 letter to L. Jaffe of the Keren Ha-Yesod, the funding agency of the World Zionist organisation, praising its work in endeavouring 'to establish a new home in the ancient land of our fathers' as a sign of our 'invincible will to survive.'^[25] But there is nothing in this letter – which crucially talks of a homeland and not of a state – to counter the fears that Freud expressed in his letter of 1930 in which he declined a request from Dr Chaim Koffler to lend his support to public criticism of British Policy on access to the Western Wall in Jerusalem and on Jewish immigration to Palestine: 'I concede with sorrow that the baseless fanaticism of our people is in part to be blamed for the awakening of Arab distrust. I can raise no sympathy at all for the misdirected piety which transforms a piece of a Herodian wall into a national relic, thus offending the feelings of the natives.'^[26]

Freud's later expression of support for the Zionist endeavour to create a homeland for the Jewish people does not invalidate these earlier fears. Any more, indeed, than Scholem's anger with Arendt, his support for the pragmatic aims of Zionism, disqualifies his earlier refusal to make the books from his library available to the investigating commission following the 1929 Arab riots at the Wailing Wall with the aim, it would seem, of establishing a higher spiritual claim to the wall. Lappin seems to think that because these great thinkers, in the face of rising persecution of the Jews, expressed their support for Zionism, that nothing of their earlier anxieties and reservations remains. This is, surely, to fall sway oneself to the language or effect of catastrophe: that it wipes out any possible critique of the road taken, any warnings borne out by history, and all trace of a more nuanced, hesitant, understanding of the past.

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At stake in this disagreement therefore is not the historical account (although Lappin regularly tries to impugn me with historical ignorance), but how history has been, and should be, used. A prime example of this is Lappin's discussion of the

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Holocaust. I agree with Lappin that my statement that the Holocaust only fully entered the national imagination after the 1967 6 Day War was too hasty and it has been revised in the new edition to include the Eichmann trial of 1961. But simply to list the tributes to the Warsaw uprising from the 1940s and the creation of *Yom Hashoah* in 1951 (not 1952 as Lappin states but let's not be pedantic) does not begin to address the fraught issue of how, that is, on what terms, the Holocaust was allowed to enter the consciousness of the new nation. We can start with *Yom Hashoah*, named, to be precise: *Yom Hashoah v'haGevurah*, or Day of Destruction and Heroism, and declared an annual day of commemoration to take place on the 27th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan, a date chosen to coincide with the Warsaw Uprising (when Begin came to power in 1977, he tried and failed to shift the day of commemoration to the 9 Av, the day of the destruction of the Temple). Lappin does not seem to notice the number of his examples prior to 1961 that contain an allusion to Warsaw. Resistance was the condition of remembrance. As writers such as Sidra Ezrahi, Saul Friedlander, Adam Seligman and Idith Zertal have all pointed out, the symbolic parameters of the tragedy were fiercely policed by the new nation. [27] 'Because Zionist ideology had already incorporated the idea of a moribund Diaspora as a fundamental premise in its reading of the unfolding Jewish history and destiny,' writes critic Sidra Ezrahi, citing historian Alan Minz, the Holocaust did not produce an upheaval in self-consciousness equivalent to that provoked, for example, by the destruction of the Temples.[28] David Goldberg cites early youth leader, Moshe Tabenkin on hearing of the fate of the European Jews: 'rejection of the Diaspora ... now turned into personal hatred of the Diaspora. I hate it as a man hates a deformity he is ashamed of.' [29] Zertal has done most to chart the ambivalence – to put it mildly – with which the new nation treated the survivors arriving on its shores (they were routinely referred to as 'dust,' and as 'soap' – this last a triple allusion to Nazi soap, the pallor of their skin compared with the native born Sabras, and to someone pliable and easily moulded into shape). 'Look, when I came to Israel this was an ideological, elitist society,' Aharon Appelfeld comments in a recent interview. 'Anyone who came from the camps was considered a person with emotional and physical defects.' [30] When the Minister of Education and Culture, Ben-Zion Dinur, submitted to the Knesset for its first reading the Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Law – Yad Vashem, 1953 – whose purpose was to establish a memorial for each and every Jew slain, the one category not mentioned was the survivors, the only living people with a true memory of the event (what could also not be mentioned were the 'collaborator' trials being held at the same time in the Israeli courts which, as Zertal points out, have never been incorporated into Holocaust memory).

Up to 1961, therefore, the entry of the Holocaust into the national imagination was conditional. Eichman's trial ushered in a new phase because his arrest and the staging of the trial on Israeli soil could be seen in itself as a sign of the triumph of the nation over history. It was also intended to incorporate Israelis of non-European origin into a singular, narrative collective. (An aside: to the charge that I treat all Israelis as if they were of European origin, I would point to the second-class treatment of its citizens of Middle Eastern descent, as Lappin acknowledges, their incorporation into this symbolic history, a history they did not share, and the belief of the founders of Israel that it would be an outpost of Europe in the barbarous Middle East; last week, Ha'aretz headlined these lines from their Rosh Hashanah interview with Aharon Appelfeld: 'Perhaps Aharon Appelfeld is the most Israeli of writers because he creates the core of the identity of Israeli society: the "European Jewishness" through which it defines itself.' [31] 'I can testify for myself,' writes Zertal, 'a high school student at the time, and for my friends: the trial was an event of major influence for us. Although my father served as a soldier in Europe in World War II, worked with Jewish survivors after the war, and published a book about his war experiences; and although his entire family perished in the Holocaust, *he never talked about it at home. The trial was thus my first encounter with the horrors*, brought to us by the trial witnesses' testimonies that were broadcast live.' (my emphasis) [32]

Let me be clear. There is no question of passing judgment on Israel for the slow, pained, process with which the horror came to be spoken, nor indeed for the need of the new nation to qualify the horror with the image of the resisting Jew. But to ignore these key moments of transition in the representation of the Holocaust in the Israeli imagination, simply to list all the early events and commemorations, as if we were talking about a smooth continuum, is not historically viable. Lappin's history is not history, but is in itself a form of denial (or denial of denial). 'The decade and a half that preceded the capture and trial of Eichman,' writes Zertal, 'were marked, in Israel and in other countries such as France and the United States, by public silence and some sort of statist denial regarding the Holocaust' (a 220 page textbook of Jewish history published in 1948 contained one page on the Holocaust, but ten on the Napoleonic wars). [33]

What follows after 1961 and is then reinforced by the 1967 War is a new stage: 'During the early statist period [up until the late 50s] a commemoration day and commemoration sites were established,' write Friedlander and Seligman, 'but it was only during the later phase that the Shoah became a central myth of the civil religion

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of Israel.’[34] If the early phase established a causal link between the destruction of European Jewry and the birth of Israel, combining both events in a new symbolic unity of catastrophe and redemption, the 6-day war opened a ‘new phase’ in which Arab hostility became equated with Nazism, and the Holocaust was mobilised for the first time to justify the policies of the state – a move ‘inherent in the very symbolic logic which identified the Israeli state with the redemptive moment in history.’[35] In fact the link from the Shoah to state policy was laid down by Moshe Dayan at the time of the trial: ‘what is becoming clear at the Eichman trial is the active passivity of the world in the face of the murder of the six million. There can be no doubt that only this country and only this people can protect the Jews against a second Holocaust. And hence every inch of Israeli soil is intended only for Jews.’[36] Much of this material, I acknowledge, has only come to my attention since completing the book. I regret this, not just because it adds more substance to statements which I agree need rewording, but because it so dramatically confirms the argument I am trying to make.

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Lappin makes much of the dissenting voices inside the Zionist project – he goes to great length for example to describe the alternative vision of Israeli domestic and foreign policy represented by Moshe Sharett, Foreign Minister and then Prime Minister of Israel in the first half of the 1950s. I read this account with a mounting sense of bafflement, since the point of Sharett’s struggle against the policies of Ben-Gurion is that *he failed*. This is just another instance where Lappin presents historical material as if 1) I must be ignorant of it, whereas it may be that this material is not a relevant part of my discussion, and 2) it in itself proved a point that remains to be made, and is in fact seriously challenged by the history Lappin claims to be charting. The fullest account of the Sharett episode, the one from which I have learnt most, is given by Avi Shlaim in *The Iron Wall*, which of course Lappin does not cite, presumably because to do so would be to acknowledge, precisely in Sharett’s case, the ultimate and tragic ineffectiveness of dissent. We could start for example with Shlaim’s account of the 1948 peace feeler put forward by Kamal Riad, emissary for King Farouk, who at a meeting in Paris with Elias Sasson, head of the Middle East department at the Israeli Foreign Ministry, suggested Egypt’s de facto recognition of Israel in return for agreement to Egypt’s annexation of a large strip of territory in the Negev: ‘Moshe Sharett wanted to explore this peace feeler but Ben-Gurion brushed it aside.’[37] Ben-Gurion prevailed. Without even

mentioning this advance to his cabinet, Ben-Gurion persuaded it to relaunch the war against Egypt, breaking the cease-fire on October 15. It was the beginning of a pattern which would end with the Suez crisis of 1956:

In June 1956 Ben-Gurion forced Sharett's resignation in order to give himself the option of launching a war against Egypt. In October 1956 he exercised this option. [...] Sharett had advocated an alternative to the hard-line policy of Ben-Gurion. This alternative policy was not given a chance. It was defeated by the Israeli defense establishment. The Sinai Campaign drove the last nail into the coffin of the moderate alternative represented by Sharett. Ben-Gurion failed to topple Nasser but he succeeded in toppling Sharett. [38]

That Sharett continued as a voice of dissent, that his beliefs can be traced back to the pre-State period, and his influence forwards into the dissident voices of the Israeli labour movement, such as Aryeh Eliav who opposed the occupation after the 1967 Six Day War, is true. But again, it was the voices supporting the occupation that historically prevailed. Eliav became an outcast (he was one of very few Labor voices opposing the occupation).[39] Today the positions represented by the once influential Shulamit Aloni are marginalised, Yossi Beilin is generally considered to have lost any of the influence he once had – his Geneva initiative powerless against the dominant drift.

We are getting close to the real political disagreement between us. Lappin cannot acknowledge that it is the intransigent and belligerent vision of the nation – according to Shlaim the philosophy of Revisionist Zionist Ze'ev Jabotinsky's 'iron wall' – which has predominated, over and again, in its history. In this context listing all the literary writers who have expressed, I agree, the profoundest critique of the nation's dominant paradigm serves once more the opposite purpose from the one Lappin seems to intend. It is also another instance of misrepresentation since no-one would deduce from his remarks that I discuss at length David Grossman as a key dissenting voice both in his fiction and his journalistic writing. [40] Nor does he name the other dissenters I discuss: Naomi Chazan of Meretz, the refuseniks, Uri Avnery, Avner Azuloy (could that be because they dissent – critique Israeli policy – *too much*?) To the list of literary works Lappin cites, I would add: A B Yehoshua's 1963 'Facing the Forests,' which tells the story of a disaffected Israeli youth who becomes fire watcher in a forest only to discover it was planted on an Arab village abandoned in 1948; and Shulameth Hareven's extraordinary tale

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about the Yishuv's reception of a young boy fleeing the Holocaust, 'The Witness' of 1980 which anticipates by a quarter of a century the analyses of Idith Zertal.[41] But writers have always been, in Shelley's famous formula, 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world.' These writers act as the conscience of the nation. When I teach them, along with the other writers Lappin mentions, the vast gap between their language and the version of nationhood represented by official Zionism is overwhelming.

The question is, therefore: what effect, if any, has all of this had on government policies or on the dominant rhetoric of the state? Speaking at a conference organised by the Central European University of Budapest in 2005 on 'Dissent,' Israeli journalist and media analyst, Daniel Dor commented in discussion: 'Israeli democracy is a democracy of speech – all views are heard, none matters.'[42] Since the outbreak of the second intifada, this has intensified. Resistance to the occupation has taken the form of action – the *refuseniks*, *MachsomWatch*, *Ta'ayush* – precisely because, as he elaborates in his subsequent article, 'the *discursive* enterprise of *dissent* reached a dead-end'; these forms of resistance are not the same as 'successful or efficient dissent.'[43] Lappin writes as if the failure of politicians like Sharret, of opponents like Eliav, of those seeking to influence the course of state policy today, are all irrelevant, as if it makes no difference to how we should see Israel and its history (flourishing dissent as the answer to critics). Instead I would argue that the greatest respect we can pay to the dissident voices of Israeli political and literary culture, is first to acknowledge what they are up against, and then to lament the repeated political side-lining – defeat would not be too strong a word – of their alternative vision.

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The disagreement is political. It is surely significant that the historian Lappin chooses to cite on the events of 1948, and the creation of the Arab refugee problem, is Benny Morris who is now best known for his recent statements supporting the ethnic transfer of 1948, a project which he considers the new state to have unwisely failed to complete. Lappin goes on to state that many in Israel have come to recognise the founding injustice against the Palestinians: 'they have gradually but reluctantly realised that Israel bears an important part of the responsibility for this tragedy.'[44] But in the passage he cites, Morris *claims exactly the opposite*: that there was no plan for ethnic transfer, and that any such policy, unsystematic and

without a general policy, was the purely defensive and reluctant strategy of a wholly innocent and beleaguered fledgling nation. Morris's remarks, in an interview with Ha'aretz in January 2004, are slightly, but significantly, different: 'From April 1948, Ben-Gurion is projecting a message of transfer. There is no explicit order of his in writing, there is no orderly comprehensive policy, but there is an atmosphere of [population] transfer. [...] The entire leadership understands that this is the idea'; 'Of course Ben-Gurion was a transferist. He understood that there could be no Jewish state with a large and hostile Arab minority in its midst. There would be no such state. It would not be able to exist.' [45] On October 31, 1948, the commander of the Northern Front issued a written order to his units to expel the Arab population: 'There is no doubt in my mind that this order originated with Ben-Gurion.' [46] The intention can be traced back further. 'There can be no stable and strong Jewish state,' Ben-Gurion stated in a December 1947 address to the Central Committee of the Histadrut, 'so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent.' [47] This is Moshe Sharett, cited by Ilan Pappé in his forthcoming book on the events of 1948, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. He is addressing the employees of the Zionist organisation in Jerusalem, on the purchase of 2500 dunam (a 1000 square metre unit of land) in eastern Palestine on December 13, 1938: 'This purchase was accompanied, interestingly, by a transfer of population [...] the purchase will include paying the tribe to move east of the river; by this [act] we will reduce the number of Arabs.' [48] On this question, Lappin chooses to ignore once again writers who represent a very different story. Nur Masalha, Walid Khalidi, Baruch Kimmerling, Ilan Pappé all suggest that the expulsion of the Palestinians was a long-held Zionist aim. [49] Their views can be contested, and are highly controversial, as indeed are Morris's, although you would not gather that from Lappin who presents Morris's comments as if they were beyond contest.

Responding to Morris in 2002, Avi Shlaim identifies the message that now underpins Morris's writing: 'the Arabs are responsible.' [50] Read back through Lappin's review and it is clear that his main reproach is that I do not criticise the Arabs, with the implication that to do so would neutralise the argument of the book (as if it would dispense with the need for self-critique). Thus I disregard the 'veneration accorded to suicide bombers in large sections of Palestinian society'; I fail to note the role of the Palestinian 'leadership's violent rejectionism in producing the refugee problem' or 'Arab hostility as a sufficient cause in its own right to explain many of the acute distortions and serious misjudgements that one observes in Israeli political behaviour.' [51] That 'sufficient cause' is worth pausing at – the clear implication being that, despite Israeli aggression, which Lappin recognises, it

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is the Arab's responsibility after all. As for 'rejectionism,' the term is not neutral. Was it simply 'rejectionism' for a population that made up between eighty and ninety percent of the total population in mandate Palestine to refuse the 1928 British suggestion of parity; or to reject the 1947 Partition Plan which offered fifty six percent of the land to the Jewish people who up to that point owned 5.8 percent? Does the term apply only to the Palestinians? Or does it also apply, for example, to Israel's rejection of the 2002 Saudi peace plan which proposed peace and full normalisation of relations with Arab states in return for a withdrawal to the '67 borders and a 'fair solution' to the problem of the refugees? (a proposal currently being revised and already rejected by Israel's government). 'This hostility,' Lappin writes 'may be understandable in historical terms. Rose may regard it as reasoned and justified.' [52] Does he agree? Or is Zionism rational, pragmatic, while only the Arabs can be tarred with the brush of unreason?

Or take Lappin's further charge that I ignore the fact that that 'no significant element of public opinion has ever challenged the cherished myths of the Palestinian national narrative,' a claim for which he offers absolutely no historical authentication whatsoever.[53] I am left wondering whether he reads any Palestinian writing. For while, as I have argued here, literary writing is often powerless against dominant rhetoric, nonetheless, given Lappin's passionate defence of Israeli dissent, it is strange that he does not acknowledge, for example, the writings of Marmoud Darwish which, while creating the poetic voice of Palestinian nationalism, also provides some of the most profound critiques of nationalist identity; of Ghassan Kanafani whose *Return to Haifa* offers a unique Palestinian representation of the Jewish woman from the inside in terms of the burdens of her traumatic history; or Emil Habiby's ironic self-scrutiny; or Anton Shammas's acknowledgement that the Lebanese have not always suffered, or suffered most, at the hands of the Israelis or Jews: 'For a hundred years, since the 1860s, they've been suffering at the hands of the Muslims and the Druze'; or most recently Elias Khoury's *Gate of the Sun*, a Palestinian epic which writes and rewrites the Palestinian narrative; or Donia ElAmal Ismaeel's short story '*Dates and Bitter Café*' which describes the death of a Palestinian suicide-bomber through the grief of the parents, its celebration by the leadership of Jihad as closing 'the door on people's humanity.' [54]

Lappin is looking for symmetry where there is none. Israel is the powerful of the two parties. It has, as he himself states, refused, until very recently, to acknowledge the injustice against the Palestinians involved in the founding of the state. The Palestinians have been faced with repeated denials of their history. For the last

60 years, their project has been to try to get that narrative heard (what exactly are the *'cherished myths'* of this story?) 'The vehement refusal of most Israelis and Diaspora Zionists,' writes David Goldberg, 'to concede the validity of the Palestinian narrative – that the Israeli triumph in 1948 was the Palestinian tragedy – suggests that the "miraculous" solution that Chaim Weizmann had detected in the flight of 600-700,000 Palestinian refugees hides a darker reality that is still too raw to acknowledge.' (the 'still' refers to 2006).[55] The Palestinians are also still an occupied people. You cannot equate them with the Israelis, without falling into the trap of this seemingly unobjectionable statement with which Lappin concludes: 'Surely it is time to demystify this conflict, and to recognise it as a maddening clash of two long-suffering peoples, both of whom have justice on their side.' ('Maddening' has all the tone of an exasperated parent watching two children in a playground brawl.)[56] Perfectly anticipating the vacuity of this formula, Goldberg comments: 'the stock response, "Yes, yes, both our peoples have suffered [although what Palestinians have inflicted on Israelis is hardly symmetrical with what the might of Israel has visited on the Palestinians] but now we must move on" reveals an absence of empathy essential if two hostile peoples are ever to be reconciled.' (Goldberg's parenthesis)[57]

Such reconciliation is my desire, no less than it is the wish of Lappin, who seems to think that trying to analyse that part of Israeli national identity standing in its way is futile or unjust, that it is unacceptable to acknowledge the spots of darkness in a nation's soul. Instead it is my belief; central to *The Question of Zion*, that this is one – by no means the only, but one – essential task in trying to move forwards (the analysis is specific, not exhaustive). Today, Israel is faced with one of the worst crises in its history provoked by a disastrous war that even the former chief of staff, Moshe Ya'alon considers to have been a major error of judgement, based on wrongly prioritising military over political solutions to the conflict.[58] It is an old pattern that fits, in the words of Max Rodenbeck, 'into the mold': 'As long ago as the early 1950s, "fedayeen" groups (meaning those who sacrifice themselves), often representing non-state actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood, launched pinprick raids on the nascent Jewish state, which responded with savage reprisals that typically targeted not fedayeen themselves but Arab civilians as well as governments that Israelis accused of shirking the responsibility of reining in troublemakers.'[59] To argue that, in relation to this recent war, Israel was provoked by the kidnapping of its soldiers, which is of course true, does nothing to answer the charge that it regularly responds to such provocations with disproportionate violence, nor the suggestion that this is something that has typified the state's responses since its

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inception. Lappin mentions neither the war in Lebanon, which in the words of Chief of the General Staff, Dan Halutz, was intended, if the kidnapped soldiers were not returned, to ‘turn Lebanon’s clock back 20 years’; nor the crisis in Gaza, where, as of September 7, the toll stands at 240 dead, including 197 civilians of whom 48 are children and teenagers under 18. Does he really think that there is nothing internal to Zionism that might help us understand why this is so? And is the refusal to countenance such a possibility, or rather the attempt to comprehend something, however dark (Goldberg’s raw, dark, reality), finally the more sympathetic urge? To say this is not to attack Israel, but to fear for it.

In conclusion, Lappin’s review is riddled with errors and misrepresentations. Where he does provide useful historical background not covered in *The Question of Zion*, he presses it into the service of false or overstated claims. Furthermore, his suggestion that Princeton were swayed by commercial or political considerations in publishing the book is risible (what commercial gain can there possibly be in a small print-run monograph on Zionism? and what political advantage, given the virulent hostility in some quarters that the book has provoked?). My sense that this is above all a political disagreement is confirmed by the presence of Anthony Julius and David Cesarani in the list of people he acknowledges, the former already in print against a positive review of *The Question of Zion* in the *London Review of Books*, the latter having distinguished himself by placing, against all professional protocol, the same hostile review, likewise full of misrepresentations, in two publications at once, without, according to the publications in question, informing either that this was what he was doing.[60] Both publications immediately invited my response, something which – although Lappin’s review is no less vitriolic – Democratiya chose not to do (they did, however, on receipt of my reply, invite Lappin’s immediate rejoinder).

It would be ungenerous of course for me not to recognise the immense amount of time and work that Lappin has devoted to my book. But readers can finally judge for themselves whether or not we are dealing with a genuine and measured critical engagement.

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Notes

- [1] Lappin 2006, p. 10.
- [2] Ravitsky 1993, Schweid 1985, Lustick 1993.
- [3] Ravitsky 1993, pp. 37-8.
- [4] Hartman 2000, p. 24.
- [5] Hartman 2000, pp. 8-9.
- [6] Hartman 2000, pp. 85-6.
- [7] Hartman 2000, p. 84.
- [8] Hartman 2000, p. 96.
- [9] Hartman 2000, p. 82.
- [10] Hartman 2000, p. 18.
- [11] Hartman 2000, p. x.
- [12] Leibowitz 1992, p. 103.
- [13] Leibowitz 1992, p. 189 ('After Kibiyeh,' 1953-4).

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- [14] Leibowitz 1992, p. 175 ('A Call for the Separation of Religion and State,' 1959).
- [15] Leibowitz 1992, p. 190 ('After Kibiyeh,' 1953-4).
- [16] Rose 2005, p. xii, p. 115.
- [17] Rose 2005 p. 118.
- [18] Arendt 1978 (1946) pp. 174-5.
- [19] Rose 2005, p. 72.
- [20] Goldberg 2006, p. 200.
- [21] Lappin 2006, p. 8.
- [22] Buber 1983 (1948).
- [23] Buber 1983 (1949), p. 247, 250.
- [24] Buber 1983 (1949) p. 251.
- [25] Freud to L. Jaffe, cited in Yerushalmi 1991, p. 13.
- [26] Freud to Chaim Koffler, cited in Yerushalmi 1991, p. 13.
- [27] Ezrahi 1985-6, Friedlander and Seligman 1994, Zertal 2005, and Zertal 1998.
- [28] Ezrahi 1985-6, p. 249.
- [29] Goldberg 2006, p. 135.
- [30] Mishani 2006, p. 2.
- [31] Mishani 2006, p.12. Appelfeld's own position is complex. For him Europeanism means the 'mixed multitude' and 'pluralism,' at odds with the founding Europeanism of Israel: 'they also wanted to reconstruct Europe here, but the problem was that the reconstruction was not European, that they wanted to give it an Israeli character. In other words the Israeliness, the straightforwardness, all the political thinking rather than the historical thinking.'
- [32] Zertal 2005, p. 111.
- [33] Zertal 2005, p. 92, p. 94.
- [34] Friedlander and Seligman 1994, p. 359.
- [35] Friedlander and Seligman 1994, p. 365.
- [36] Moshe Dayan, Davar, 1 July 1961, is cited in Zertal 2005, p. 109.
- [37] Shlaim 2000, p. 39.
- [38] Shlaim 2000, p. 185.
- [39] See Gershom Gorenberg's response to a review of his book, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977*, by Gadi Taub, *The New Republic*, 15 May, 2006.
- [40] There is one point only in the review which has caused me real concern and that is the letter from David Grossman sent to The Times Literary Supplement in July this year which I had not seen in which he takes issue with my reading of his work, specifically on the link between the Holocaust and Israeli treatment of the Palestinians. In view of how much I learn from Grossman, I will be writing to him to clarify the points of convergence and difference between us.
- [41] Yehoshua 1963, Halban 1998, Hareven 1995 (1980).
- [42] Daniel Dor, speaking at 'Dissent,' a conference organised by Yehuda Elkana and Daniel Barenboim in honour of Edward Said, European Central University, Budapest, April 2005.

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- [43] Dor 2006, p. 279.
- [44] Lappin 2006, p. 16.
- [45] Shavit 2004, p. 16.
- [46] Shavit 2004, p. 16.
- [47] Masalha 1992.
- [48] Haganah Archives, File 003, 13 December 1938, cited in Pappe, 2006, p. 24.
- [49] Masalha 1992, Khalidi 1992, Kimmerling 2003, Pappe 2006.
- [50] Shlaim 2002. (An interview with Morris in *Yediot Aharanot* was entitled ‘Ha’Aravim ashemim’ or ‘The Arabs are to blame’).
- [51] Lappin 2006, p. 15, p. 16, p. 12.
- [52] Lappin 2006, p. 11.
- [53] Lappin 2006, p. 16.
- [54] Darwish 2003; Darwish 2006; Kanafani 2000 (1969); Habiby 2003 (1974); Shammass 1988 (1986) p. 230; Khoury 2005 (1998); Ismaeel 2006, p. 115.
- [55] Goldberg 2006, p. 205. Dor 2005 has also analysed the concerted attempt, on the part of Israel’s media, to refute systematically on behalf of Israel any imputation of blame.
- [56] Lappin 2006, p. 17.
- [57] Goldberg 2006, p. 202.
- [58] Shavit 2006.
- [59] Rodenbeck 2006, p. 6.
- [60] See my letter in reply, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 13 May 2005, and in *The Literary Review*, June 2005.