

Hooking Up In The Holy Land  
An Ethnographic Study of Non-Reproductive Futures

By

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*This project is dedicated to my Grandfather Marvin Simon whose investment in Zionist worldmaking and the National Jewish Federation brought me to this research.*



**Image 1.** Grandfather (left) next to Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion (center.)  
Source: Personal Family Archives

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*“In this sense, the acknowledgement of history or, inversely, its denial, is not about the accuracy of memory; it is about the relationship to power.” - David Guss, The Festive State*

## **Preface:**

### **Boats on the River**

We are boats of Americans tumbling down the Jordan River, knocking heads in the water’s rhythm; a Zionist youth tour flanked by Palestinian and Bedouin rafters on either side. Our life vests, scrawled in Hebrew, our mouths, in English, yet South Levantine Arabic flows everywhere around us; on the shores, in the music, in the fervid family conversation, between the legs of men, knee deep in water, with hookah spread on fold out tables flush with family gathering. The bluffs are limned with roasted meat smells, cardamom, and the arms of teens hanging by the leafy branches of trees.

I sent a recording from our day spent on the river Jordan to an Arabic speaking friend for translation. In the recording, a group of 2 women clap their hands and chant — a song with lyrics Sarah translates: *It’s what old women sing for young ladies or brides. They were celebrating your youth!* *العرايس يا شوفيه* “We prepare the young brides.” *They started with "هالا" "Hala"—which is Marhaba but in Bedouin Arabic.* I think about the joy in this scene, the potential for collaborative joy between unlikely groups-- a Zionist youth tour that had no provincial knowledge of the native tongue of Palestine, South Levantine Arabic, less of the occupation or of Bedouin communities, and with little curiosity for Arab and non-Hebrew custom. I think about the hospitality afforded to us in this moment despite this arrogance.

I remember one Shabbat in Jerusalem, our Taglit tour guide, an ardent Zionist from Calabasas, invited his lone soldier friend to join us. A lone soldier, I later learned, is often a Jewish-American man who volunteers to serve for the Israeli Defense as a non-Israeli; a man spurred by a longing for combat and violence, he carries a machine gun rifle on his hip, a weapon that is pressed into the graphic American Eagle t-shirt he wears throughout the night. I remember seeing what appeared to be almost the same boyish looking soldier stop me at the Qalandiya checkpoint between Palestinian Area C and Israeli territory outside of Jerusalem, and how I was met with this young soldier’s seething rage when I told him I was an American from Taglit spending time alone with Palestinians in the West Bank. If I can paint a picture of myself, a portrait of my intellectual and emotional development during fieldwork for this project observing Taglit-Birthright tours, it is through these kinds of experiential vignettes for which there is not nearly enough space here to map. Bearing witness to the mundane normalization of military occupation in Israel and its presence over Palestinian life; the resilience of spirit amongst Palestinians despite these odds inspires me to produce this work and circulate it widely.

The time I spent as a conservative Jew raised in the Zionist, American South, taught me to understand Israel as an uncomplicated and somewhat fantastical space; as an apolitical symbol in

need of my blind support and veneration. A cipher that often oriented my community, Israel demarcated a space beyond the hostilities of our Evangelical and Southern Baptist neighbors, a space where Jews were not ‘Other.’

Yet waking up from this nationalist fantasy has felt hazy, fugue like, and often alienating. With this confessional Preface, I hope to encourage others to lean into this assemblage of emotions; of questioning the violence in your communities’ worldmaking, to hold up and question the stories we are told, and those used to justify Israeli violence.

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One of the first songs that I ever learned to play on the piano was the Hatikvah, a nineteenth-century, Jewish poem and the national anthem of Israel, still one of the only melodies I can muster without sheet music. My grandfather, Marvin Simon, fashioned a philanthropic career out of what he called ‘rescue missions’ relocating Soviet Jews to the nascent military project of Israel through the fundraising of other American Zionist initiatives in the 1970s and 80s. These missions would later help annex land from Palestinian families who worked as olive farmers, goat herders, fruit pickers; families tending to land passed down amongst ancestors; and generations that have long predated the modern Ashkenazim settlements of the 1900s.

While I was in line to inherit a willful ignorance for and ambivalence towards the lived and living history of Palestine, the time I spent hunched over scholarship and conversation, through the spirit of resilience I encountered in Arabic tutors from Jafa, activists in Birzeit, and academics in Berkeley-- these interstices continue to inspire me to do the work of learning and sharing the histories kept from me and others like me by elliptic Zionist historiographies of Israeli occupation. It is time to challenge the violence in our worldmaking.

That the ‘past’ is multiple, flexible, and mutable is not always an obvious conclusion. As scholar Anthony Smith suggests, the past is also handed down, is multilayered, and susceptible to different interpretations (Ram, 92). My hope is that this work that I present here might inspire other young Jews and young American Jews raised adjacent to Zionism, to explore the sources sketched throughout my writing and sources that provide alternative interpretations to Israeli history than those you may have been given. I also hope that this project, by deconstructing political Zionism as an object of rigorous study, does the work of demystifying Israeli occupation in re-situating the settler movement outside of the impassable confines of Zionist teleology.

*“We are never as steeped in history as when we pretend not to be, but if we stop pretending we may gain in understanding what we lose in false innocence.”*

*-Michel-Rolph Trouillot*

As I sit writing this Preface, I am not far from Cyprus, idling along the Mediterranean Sea, loitering in an ancient port city called Yafa (Arabic يَافَا) or Yafo (Hebrew יָפוֹ) Once the thriving capital of Palestine, I am now surrounded by palimpsests. Hebrew effaces Arabic as old signs are taken down, new ones put up. Collectives of women in colorful hijabs picnic on the shoreline under the chiaroscuro of a raised Israeli flag. Tourist riff raff loiters around the open aired bazaars-cum-simulations that harken to a strange, Ottoman bygone area that excises Palestinian struggles for liberation from its rotating ‘historical’ exhibits on the empire’s fashion, markets, and architectural design of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A new trend in gentrification of the burgeoning neighborhood is its historical memory.

### **Demystifying Zionist Political History**

Nested within the Swiss capital of Basel, the first Zionist Congress convened in the year 1897; a meeting chaired by Austro-Hungarian playwright, Theodor Herzl and physician Max Nordau. The inception of political Zionism surprisingly predates the refugee crisis of the *Shoah* by nearly forty years, a movement focused on the notion that Ashkenazim (Jews of Eastern Europe) could reconstitute a kind of Europe in the South Levant or Palestine.

Early political Zionists first delineated *Ashkenazim* as the movement’s central pioneers; a body of Semites defined by their role in civilizing the *Oriental, Ottoman, or Mizrahi* Jew of the Middle East. Conquering the ‘Oriental,’ was at once a fantasy fashioned in the language of Herzl, as well as a movement forged in the shadow of German eugenics. In the after image of modern statistics, and against the onset of scientific sexology, Zionism proved one casualty amongst many that shaped itself in the image of ongoing, European race theories. Striking, Herzl’s understanding of racial hierarchy propelled his ideas of what a ‘Western civilization’ in Palestine might look like. Dwarfing the potential for peaceful, plural realities in the Middle East, political Zionists instead took to heart the language of the civilizing missions scrawled in colonial archives of European, Christian empires before them. For Zionist leader Arthur Ruppin, the Jewish question was one of racial degeneration,<sup>1</sup> as Israeli historian Etan Bloom observes: “[the sociologist often] preoccupied himself with the notion of an ‘original Jewish’ gene stock that had worsened with the ‘increase of the Semitic element in the Jewish *Volkskorper*,’ what Ruppin defined as the ‘Bedouin’ or ‘Oriental type’ (Bloom 2008:116; Seikaly and Ajl, 122). A German statistician, Ruppin would go on to join the faculty as founder of the Sociology Department for the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, leaving an impressionable mark as the ‘director of Zionist settlements and colonization in Palestine’ in 1908. Much like American pioneerism, the early Zionist frontiersmen of the New Yishuv claimed divine right to the Middle East, and in the valleys and cliffs of Jerusalem, Galilee, Yafa, and what is now Tel Aviv, land acquisition began as early as 1908.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See also Zionist pioneer Max Nordau’s writing on the subject in his work *Degeneration*, published in 1892 whose work he dedicated to Cesare Lombroso, an Italian criminologist, phrenologist, physician, and founder of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Ruppin, leader and writer for the early Zionist political movement, would go on to erect the 1908 ‘Palestine office,’ a symbol of the early movement and its outpost. Notoriously, the office tasked itself with matters of land

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The regional term South Levant is used to locate the geographical space that rests just beneath the headwaters of the Orontes River and west of the Syrian Desert. A region of Western Asia, this geography includes present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel/Palestine, and most of Turkey, proximal to the Euphrates River. However in the Arab world, this region is known as *al-Sham*, (Arabic الشام) translating to ‘land of the north.’ What was once a topography of fluid borders, rivers, and language, at the turn of the twentieth century, this site found itself embroiled in belligerent episodes of European land seizure. Fractured by the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement between France and Britain, *al-Sham* was drawn into the modern world of the nation state by foreign European powers, negotiating new trade routes carved for the empires through the occupied and nascent nation states. As scholar Ruby Hamad helps articulate, “[and at once] hastily conceived national identities were superimposed over cultural and lingual ties” (Hamad, 64). Around this same moment, the Zionist claim to what is known in Judaism as *Eretz Israel* (Hebrew: the land of Israel) had progressed, two decades or so in the making, to articulate itself as a settler nationalist movement distinct from nationalisms imposed upon *al Sham* as a result of European sectioning of the region.

Culling from the metaphysics of religious Zionism (a movement explored only briefly in this project), the early progenitors of political or Herzlian Zionism argued that the Palestinian region of the South Levant was promised *entirely* to the ancient Israelites by God, and that this covenant could be actualized through the modern construction of a Jewish nation state through expulsion of those non-Jewish. However, and despairingly forgotten in diasporic consciousness, the roots of this political settler-movement and its investments in land seizure of *al Sham*, was forged by Jewry not of the Levant at all but of Europe; a movement not reactionary of immediate physical threat per se but one shaped out of the desire to join a cohort of Christian nations. The following research and subsequent meditations therein, are tailored for young people like myself, and specifically young people within the diaspora. It is for those searching for new questions, new answers, new reference points and critical resources to make sense of Zionism as a political project, and one that has persistently fixated on constructing a perfectible Jewish race and nation of Europe.<sup>3</sup>

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seizure and agricultural training for new Jewish settlers. Around the same time, another coalition, the Jewish Colonization Society (JNC), began financing Jewish farming communities set up in Ottoman Palestine. Later in 1924, Baron de Rothschild forged The Palestine Jewish Colonization Association (PICA) (Hebrew, פ"י"א) maintaining land holdings as far as Syria and Lebanon, subsequently vesting said territory to the State of Israel in 1958 (Fishbach, 162-163).

<sup>3</sup> As Israeli scholar Illan Pappé lucidly offers, “Ever since historiography was professionalized as a scientific discipline, historians have considered the motives for mass human geographical relocations. In the twentieth century, this quest focused on the colonialist settler projects that moved hundreds of thousands of people from Europe into America, Asia, and Africa in the preceding centuries. The various explanations for this human transit have changed considerably in recent times, and this transformation is the departure point for this essay. . . The research on Zionism should be seen in light of these historiographical developments.” For more see: Illan Pappé. *Zionism as Colonialism: A Comparative View of Diluted Colonialism in Asia and Africa*. South Atlantic Quarterly (2008) 107 (4): 611–633.



To practice, what many activists call *radical empathy*, often requires a suspension of one's usual faculties and convictions; a poking through at privately held universals perhaps conditioned in the body over time. This project calls for a radical empathy amongst Jewish readers, focusing centrally on the ongoing disenfranchisement of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli government. This work exhorts a detachment from the Zionist chimera of ancient land right and instead invokes a recentering of the modern history of the movement's leaders and their stated investments in Jewish nationhood. My work therefore asks that readers pause and reflect on the meaning behind the nation-state, a modern construction. To understand motivations behind a nationalist movement, one must pause upon the political promises by which its tinders spark; to look beyond what a nation tells itself that it is, and look instead, and much closer, upon the material circumstances of its boundary making -- both physical and symbolic.

Writing on the topic at hand, the words of scholar Uri Ram can be useful, reminding his readers that nationhood is often best understood as a socially constructed and cultural artifact far from an essential given; the *ideological corollaries* of deeply political interests of the past.<sup>4</sup> The structural formation of a state: its militaries, borders, and settlements or world-making upon living, disenfranchised communities, are geopolitical markers that emplace the birth of a nation in deeply political realities. These are realities that habitually consolidate power and privilege for a circumscribed caste at the expense of those made most marginal to its military violence.

As an artillery of academics have helped testify: there is nothing innate about the forceful relocation of human life. That the nation and all of its borders, militarisms, and ideations of a collective 'Us' is not the province of predestination, is a necessary starting point for those that desire to study history with radical empathy. Zionism exists in the after image of colonialist tools of settlement, seizure, and apartheid, enacted upon a pre-existing life world of Palestine. This is also clear. To understand lucidly that these tools of the oppressor echo across oceans, reverberating through the Zionist movement as much as any other settler nationalist movements with roots in Europe, is difficult for some to acknowledge.

For the purposes of this project, it cannot be stressed enough that "nationalism is not the awakening and assertion of...mythical, supposedly natural and given units" (Gellner:1983:49). It is, on the contrary, all too often a harbinger for violence, a deeply man made, man motivated force for siloing power and control over territory and resources for one elite at the expense of others. Wielded once upon the Jews of Europe and then turned towards the Arabs of Palestine, Zionist dehumanization of Arab has aimed to justify the very real and asymmetrical relationship between the two groups of the region. As will be explored in the chapters that follow the concerted de-valuing of Arab life so central to Zionism as much as European antisemitism reveals itself across the movement's archive, its use of language, its fixations, and policies past and present.

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson coined in this vein the celebrated term 'imagined political communities,' Homi Bhabha depicts the nation as 'narration' and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger propose the notion of 'invented traditions.' For more on this topic see: Uri Ram, *Israeli Nationalism: Social Conflicts and the Politics of Knowledge*, (Routledge: New York) 2011.

## Understanding Political Zionism as Colonialism

Long before threats of missile warfare and intifadas, there was the *Nakba*, or (Arabic: النكبة, al-Nakbah, literally "disaster", "catastrophe", or "cataclysm.") It is a term that marks an event in Palestinian history where nearly 700,000 families were forcibly expelled or made to flee from their homes under Israeli military mandate between 1947-1949.<sup>5</sup> In 1949, the Israeli government cited the figure of 360 abandoned villages to the U.S. State Department, and later, in the 1960s, Palestinian lawyer Sabri Jiryis claimed 374 abandoned Palestinian communities were destroyed by Israeli forces as a result of the expulsion (Fishbach, 162-163). Equally forgotten are the series of events that ensued shortly after the Nakba. Following the formation of the Knesset, Israel's body politic, the young nation moved swiftly to enact what was known as the Absentees' Property Law. This law, and its later amendments, would permit the Israeli seizure of all 'village properties of absentee Arabs' including agricultural properties of 80,000 dunums of abandoned groves (ibid.)

Of course, in 1948, what was meant by 'absentee' was left to loose interpretation in the eyes of Israeli culture and legal courts; a term that misleadingly aimed at indicting those forced to flee



**Image 2.** Palestinians in the city of Ramle surrender to Israeli forces during the 1948 war. Source: Eldad David/GPO

<sup>5</sup> The *Nakba* is an event that has been studied, detailed, and archived by a variety of historians of Israeli history-- by Israeli and Palestinian scholars-- amongst others. For more on this topic see: <https://imeu.org/article/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba>

instead of centering absence as the direct result of removal initiatives heralded by the Israeli government. Centering this event as key to the foundation of Israel, however, necessarily premises what happened before and during the creation of the State, and what continues to happen today: concerted, armed seizure of land from pre-existing and rooted populations. In her definition of ‘melodramatic political discourse,’ scholar Elizabeth Anker argues that melodrama can shape politics beyond the confines of film and literature, often in obvious and yet under scrutinized terms. When called upon to stir national sentiment, melodrama can reduce the nuances of any geopolitics to manichaeistic absolutes. Often invoked to legitimate state violence, the genre can also monetize virtue in national suffering where: “Melodrama’s moral economy originates in evil, and it relies on evil to identify goodness and generate a narrative trajectory” (Anker, 2014). Melodrama can also seat heroism in sovereign action.

All too often, popular Jewish understanding of Israel’s founding myths write over the nation’s material history, and in particular, its historical use of terror both as a strategic and well documented tactic to stabilize its right to sovereign control of the region.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, Zionists place Jewish virtue inherently in the notion that the diaspora has faced displacement and perennial persecution. Held up to the light, one can understand this framing of Israel as one seated against intractable heroism, and predicated in its own way upon heroism in said suffering. Political Zionism however, at its core, continues to organize itself around the aims of Palestinian disenfranchisement, where just recently as I write this in early November of 2020, Israel has demolished the homes of 73 Palestinians and 41 children in the Bedouin settlement of Khirbet Humsa in the Jordan Valley, simply because they could. This of course takes place against Israel’s political theatre as it fetishizes its own virtue; the teleology that Israel can never do *as* wrong as Palestine. Additionally, this disenfranchisement persists in Area C with recent legal wins in Israeli courts that newly permit illegal settlers permission to list homes and apartments on Palestinian land for rent via Airbnb.<sup>7</sup>

In a recent opinion piece in *The New York Times*, writer Emily Shire asked in relation to the International Women’s Day Strike, if the American feminist movement has room for Zionists like herself. She went on to explain: “I identify as a Zionist because I support Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state.” Intentionally and critically rooted in an anti-colonial feminism, the women’s day strike, co-led by Palestinian organizer Linda Sarsour, stated its deep commitment to social

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<sup>6</sup> The Deir Yassin massacre, a notorious historical episode of Israeli violence, occurred on April 9, 1948 where nearly 130 fighters from the Far-right wing Zionist paramilitary groups Irgun and Lehi killed at least 107 Palestinian Arabs. This included women and children in a village of roughly 600 people near Jerusalem. Later, a collection of prisoners were executed, and some subsequently paraded in West Jerusalem by Zionist militias.

<sup>7</sup> Noteworthy, several of the Israeli-Americans who sued the rental company Airbnb helped establish the unlawful Jewish settlements in the West Bank in which the rental properties sit. Those that sued, threatened to leverage charges of antisemitism at the rental company if they did not permit illegal settlement rentals on the Airbnb listing site. These were however settlers who had occupied the land with full knowledge that they were illegally constructed or seized. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the transfer of civilians of the occupying power into occupied territory (i.e. Israeli civilians into the occupied Palestinian territory), as well as the forcible transfer of the local population from their land. For more read: Julia Jacobs. “Airbnb Reverses Policy Banning Listings in Israeli Settlements in the West Bank.” *New York Times*. April, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/world/middleeast/airbnb-israel-west-bank.html>

transformation and to resisting: “the decades long economic inequality, racial and sexual violence, and imperial wars abroad.” The notion then that Israel, and the displacement inherent in Israeli statehood, somehow sits outside of political critique of this nature, that it might be shielded from a meaningful commitment to social transformation, is an issue taken up directly and challenged deeply by this project.

Here is our jumping off point: *that Zionist history politically mobilized a particular present, in a particular image— that this was not an obvious choice, nor a ubiquitous response to the Jewish question amongst Jewry at the time of the movement’s inception—and yet we arrive here now as critics, thinkers, and activists. So how and why?*

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**Image 3.** Palestinian refugees leaving their village, unknown location, 1948. Source: UNRWA



**Image 4.** Hakoah Vienna, Jewish Sports Club Founded in 1909 by Max Nordau co-founder of World Zionist Congress in 1897 Source: Jewish Museum of Vienna



**Image 5.** Herbert Sonnenfeld: Boxer portrait, Berlin 1935, Makkabi Berlin Jewish Sports Club Source: Jewish Museum Berlin

## Acknowledgements

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“Lore about the body makes evident what sort of object, or subject, the body is supposed, in various circumstances, to be” - Katherine Young, *Bodylore*

## Chapter: Introduction

### ‘A Return to Phallustine’

At the turn of the twentieth century, Jewish fitness centers and sports clubs began to proliferate in Austria and Germany, the hub of early Zionist intellectualism.<sup>8</sup> At this same time, Jewish musclemen or the figure of the ‘New Jew,’ had begun to dominate pre-state Zionist media. Centered in the illustrations of Ephraim Moses Lillian, hailed by some as the ‘first Zionist artist or illustrator,’ and littered in print and filmic works sponsored by the World Zionist Organization of the late 1800s, the theme of the Hebrew musclem would find itself energized between pre-state Palestine and European Zionist imaginations. This male body of Zionist image cultures can best be understood as a cipher engineered to discursively shape various meanings behind the movement’s social reality. Notably this would center sex and the body, sites that operated as iconic signifiers for bettering the ‘Jewish race;’ bettering the chosen people; rooting the stronger, more masculine, ‘non-Oriental’ Jew to the land of Palestine.

These icons, didactic ideologically, spoke to a Zionist preoccupation with Eurocentrism, its aesthetic traditions, ideals of masculinity, and its concomitant anxieties surrounding ‘Semites’ that plagued modern Europe. Most striking was *the tendency of the time to fasten essential degeneracy with Jewish masculinity and corporeality*. As Jewish Studies scholar Daniel Boyarin cogently offers, “European cultures represented male Jews as ‘female;’ [whereas] the new Hebrew culture relentlessly worked to overturn this representation. . . turning its back on old Jewish intellectual traditions and replacing them with a worship of virility, productivisation and war” (Boyarin 1997: 34). An alternative to enfeebling stereotypes, the *sabra*, the Israeli settler, was rendered almost hyperbolically masculine, European, muscular, and agrarian, necessitating a hawkish relationship to war and nation building. Early Zionism therefore marked the distinct creation of a virile Jewish conqueror and tiller of the land who would channel sexual energy into nation-building.

It was Boyarin who coyly coined the notion that the settler movement of political Zionism has as much to do with a male *return to Phallustine as to Palestine*. In its apparent focus on the hard, male, Jewish body, the settler project marked the distinct creation of a masculinist conqueror of land, and a Hebrew subject who would channel sexual and physical energy into nation-building (Feldman, 2011; Puar, 2017). For many in Jewish Studies this is provincial knowledge, yet for others for whom this may be instructive, this work starts here.

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<sup>8</sup> Home to Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau

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I am sitting on a soldier's lap in a famous night club somewhere near the Florentin neighborhood of Tel Aviv. It is midsummer and I am bordered on either side by drunk American tourists, a kind of overflow from the summer's state sponsored influx of North American Birthright junkets. "This is where we come to get laid; it's easy here with all the Americans," the soldier brazenly tells me through the interstices of a deep, sonic base. He's right. I see it taking place around me in real time. Looking out at the bric-a-brac music space, I am reminded of the dancehalls of World War II, flush with soldiers hoping for a night of sexual adventure. Here it is a mix of off-and-on-duty servicemen. Some accompany the tourists as a group. (Usually eight soldiers are stationed per Taglit tour as a paid 'vacation' during active service.) Sneaking out from the regular scheduled programming of the tours' itinerary, I am surrounded by soldiers showing Americans in bodycon clubwear and smokey eyeshadow the *real Israel*. This is how I meet the soldier I am sitting with now, he is accompanying one tour and I have snuck off from another.

*I think about the way war flaunts its sexual body on a kind of continuum, and my research meets me here.*

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This project acts as an ethnographic case study of the sexual subcultures of Taglit-Birthright and Zionist tourism. Concomitantly, my work argues that one cannot write a critique of the settler national movement, nor an analysis of its here and now, without first re-centering its core promise of sexual and bodily renewal for the Ashkenazim of central Europe. For the purposes of this project, this argument will prove pivotal in helping testify that political Zionism has continued to understand itself as a 'civilizing' mission of the Middle East. Far from a forthright desire for Jewish nationhood, Herzlian Zionism has historically aimed at constituting a kind of masculinist West in the Levant; a project actualized through the excision and schematic exclusion of those deemed 'Other,' or undesirable by the movements architects. The earliest aims stated by the political project: rehabilitating, and making 'white' the Jew of Europe, meant, as race scholar Paul Kivel describes, '[erecting] a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence [are] justified by their not being white' (Hamad, xvi; Kivel, 19). Kivel continues, "As we study history, we come to learn that race, in part, operates as a social and political construct, one designed so that a small group can amass wealth [and wield power] over another" (ibid). Political Zionism and its investments in 'race making' can be tracked in the writing of the movement's earliest thinkers, namely: Theodor Herzl, Max Nordau, Arthur Ruppin, as will be explored further in the chapters that follow.

It is the pre-state archives that reveal a sociological investment in classification discourses of Semitic bodies, a legacy that persists culturally and politically in the nation's present as tracked in

this work. Stated clearly, upon arrival and settlement in the Levant, the Ashkenazi settlers understood themselves as a privileged caste, a group segregated sexually, linguistically, and socially from the Sephardim, Mizrahim, and Palestinas of the late Ottoman Empire. It is the ongoing and shapeshifting nature of Zionist self-segregation of one constructed Jewish caste, wielded over others, that will be tracked in the following pages of this work.

This project aims to challenge and compromise the hegemonic notion that historic Israeli settlerism and aggression were simply reactionary tools for self-defense. This would be, historically, a falsified claim. There is, as my project will demonstrate, much more to the story. As Maria Lugones aptly offers in her reflections on the study of colonial genders:

In a theoretico-practical vein, I am offering a framework to begin thinking about heterosexism as a key part of how gender fuses with race in the operation of colonial power. Colonialism did not impose precolonial, European arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system. (Lugones, 186)

In this spirit, my project works in the shadow of Lugones's methodology, as well as through the work of historians Ann Stoler and Philippa Levine. Each scholar focuses on gender as an object to study, as well as a 'way in' (to) historicizing colonial power as an event and phenomenon that takes place upon bodies. Additionally, each anthropologist offers that European based settler movements have worked to construct white societies and later stabilize racial hierarchy through the practice of what John Stanfield terms 'race-making.' Race-making can be understood in the context of political Zionism as the concerted practice enacted by Zionist demographers, progenitors, and early thinkers to stabilize superficial, social hierarchies within the Jewish diaspora. Present in the pre-state media and Zionist speech we encounter the bifurcation of: Oriental 'Eastern' Jews and civilizing 'Western' Jews.

By projecting gendered, sexual and social aberrance upon those deemed 'Other' or of the 'East,' Zionism labored to position one caste of Jews 'of the West' as superior to other Jewry, operating within what we know to be a form of 'race-making' common in European based settler colonial movements. As John Stanfield writes in "Theoretical and Ideological Barriers to the Study of Race-Making:" "Racism and race-making are part and parcel of the manner by which major industrial, European-descent nation states such as the United States have originated and developed" (Stanfield 1985:161-162). My project therefore ushers readers to conceptualize Israel and its roots as a European-descent nation state as a site that has continued to invest in its own particular forms of race-making. Settler white supremacy inherent in early and ongoing Israeli state making, constructs itself vis à vis the fear of becoming and of 'mixing' (miscegenation) with the 'Other,' with the 'East,' and with the 'Arab' or African Jew. Leaving deep impressions upon the present, colonial epistemologies surrounding race, or, the constructions of race through histories of colonialism, have often, these scholars offer, involved the ideation of 'normative' and idealized sexualities and

genders; projections imposed upon both settler groups and colonized bodies throughout various histories of European settler movements. Called upon in visual, political, and social discourse, the construction of a ‘civilized’ and ‘civilizing’ body of and for the West, a figure as much a fiction, is crafted as a metric, and used to delegitimize and dehumanize those deemed ‘Other’ in the colonial and I call Jewish colonial imagination of political Zionism.

Dominant cultural articulations of ideal, racialized genders, particularly those that proliferate in historical episodes of settler colonialism, operate, as Stoler and Levine argue, as dialectic discourse. The representational and ideal corps of the settler is tooled to dehumanize and articulate ‘justification’ for settler violence; projecting and defining the ideal body by its constructed and essential opposite. As the Ashkenazi Zionist becomes the ‘muscle’ Jew of *Eretz Israel* or the New Yishuv, the Palestinian Arab or Mizrahi of the Middle East morphs into the ‘new’ Jew’s antithesis: degenerate, infantile, and unrestrained when viewed against and through the metric of the ‘civilized’ settler and his propaganda.

As Max Nordau, co-founder of the First Zionist Congress would state plainly: “but we need not concern ourselves about that, since the chief sufferers. . . are Eastern peoples who play no part in the intellectual development of the white races” (Nordau, 35). Nordau much like Herzl saw himself and the Ashkenazim as Semites of the civilized ‘West,’ an unshaking detail he and Herzl emphasized consistently in their work. Herzl too distills the spirit of his project quite plainly in his diaries: “I am a German-speaking Jew from Hungary and can never be anything but a German. At present I am not recognized as a German. But that will come once we are over there. Through Zionism Jews will again be able to love this Germany to which, despite everything, our hearts have clung” (Boyarin, 237). It is, I argue, the discourse of Zionist ‘race-making’ (making Ashkenazi Jews of the masculinist West) that produced and continues to shape colonial agents and colonial subjects of Israel, and it is this spirit of discourse that produced the ‘new’ Jew explored in subsequent chapters that will follow.

Victors of the ‘successful’ Israeli occupation and colonization of the Levant consistently articulate themselves through the dialectic construction of a heroic ‘civilizing’ settler, caste propped against and constructed by the fear of aberrant, threatening Arabs (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) of Palestine. Strikingly, as Mizrahi and Sephardim continue to integrate into Israeli society— Jews of Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Ethiopia and the Levant— this dialectic discourse of the ‘civilizing’ Israel as bulwark against the Ottoman ‘East’ persists in Israeli political policy and culture as the boundaries, of settler identity expands to accommodate this discourse.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>As scholars before me have labored to map, colonial representations of the sexualized native woman also served, across colonial archives, as a tool to legitimate violence and control over native land. In other words, new sexual projections and constructions of bodies followed various settler colonialist movements throughout their ongoing histories. These constructions often and continue to operate flexibly, and in service of the settler mythos. As Ruby Hamad offers: “The presentation of unrestrained Oriental sensuality was not benign. Such representations allowed Western men to project whatever erotic fantasies they had for the ‘exotic Orient’ onto those women, serving as a means

In the instance of political Zionism, this project argues in dialogue with Ella Shohat, that a dialectic relationship between the ‘civilizing’ Jew of Europe and the colonized Arab of Palestine was constructed, in part, through the figure of the ‘new’ muscle Jew of Europe. The conceit of ‘muscle Judaism’ throughout early Zionism, signals not simply to an idealization of brawn, inherent in many European nationalist movements, but instead, I argue, helps emplace Zionism unmistakably as a settler colonial project, painstakingly invested in producing new kinds of colonial bodies. Political Zionism can therefore be understood as an ongoing movement invested largely in settlerism as a racializing tool for expanding Ashkenazi Jewish colonial power on the global stage.

### **Zionist Settlerism**

Laying bare founder Theodor Herzl’s dream for a European state for the Jews of Europe, complicates popular, Zionist historiographies that venerate pre-state settlers as rogue underdogs, or Maccabees fighting against terrorizing Arab incursion. Framed more accurately, Zionism continues to operate as a Eurocentric movement helmed largely by Ashkenazi colonialists and settler expansionists. Noteworthy, leader of the political movement, Herzl deliberated on the location for his settlement fantasies long before he chose the Middle East, contemplating first between South America and parts of Africa.<sup>1011</sup> As Liat Kozma and Dafna Hirsch explain, this colonialist agenda would inform the ways early pioneers zoned cities, settlements, and even how it offered medical care, enforcing stringent anti miscegenation protocols between settlers and the pre-existing Ottoman communities of Arabs and Mizrahi Jews:

...this discourse was also highly racialized. After ‘civilizing’ and ‘Westernizing’ their own bodies, East European Zionist thinkers and physicians saw themselves as a national elite, in charge of educating their less fortunate brethren into a ‘healthy’ and ‘rational’ way of life, ‘in the service of a national regeneration that would cure not merely the individual body but also the entire nation. (Kozma, 233)

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of simultaneously desiring and systematically devaluing the Oriental woman and her culture.” Ruby Hamad. *White Tears Brown Scars*. Catapult Press, 2020, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Speaking at the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, Theodor Herzl would propose what was called the ‘Uganda Scheme’ suggesting settlement in what is now parts of Kenya and Uganda (15,500 square km territory in today’s Kenya). This proposal would notoriously stir a great deal of controversy within the Zionism movement. This idea however would originate not in the mind of Herzl, but the British: “Its roots were in a meeting that took place in 1902 between the Zionist leader and Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain. Herzl tried to convince him to allow Jewish settlement in Cyprus or Sinai as a temporary solution for endangered Jews.” For more on this topic see: Jacques Kornberg. “Theodor Herzl: A Reevaluation.” in *The Journal of Modern History* 52. The University of Chicago Press Journals, June 1980.

<sup>11</sup> In addition, The Jewish Territorialist Organization (ITO) was founded in 1905. This group grew out of the support that some people had for the Uganda scheme co-developed by Herzl and Sir Clement Hill, Superintendent of African Protectorates who worked under British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Led by British-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill, the ITO advocated for Jewish settlement in various parts of the world. In 1905, the investigatory commission reported on its findings from East Africa at the Seventh Zionist Congress. The scheme was voted down, never to be tabled for discussion again, and the Zionists reaffirmed their commitment to a Jewish homeland in Palestine. (ibid.)

Enforced by stringent cultures and sometimes legal protocols, the pre-state period demarcated a moment that actively strived to prevent<sup>12</sup> ‘mixed breeding<sup>13</sup>’ between the European settlers (Ashkenazim) and Arab Jewish populations, or *Mizrahim* (Hirsch 2009). Ann Stoler’s work can also be helpful here, as she offers how, “The [presence of] metropolitan and colonial discourses on health, ‘racial degeneracy,’ and social reform...reveal how sexual sanctions demarcated positions of power by enforcing middle class conventions of respectability and thus the personal and public boundaries of race” (Stoler, 634). Historians familiar with early Zionism understand the basis of the political movement as rooted in the creation of a racially hierarchized Jewish ethno-state, one that has myopically centered and spatially zoned Ashkenazim regeneration and reproduction at the expense and even with the desire to blunt others.

Most important to stress as mentioned earlier, political Zionism labored to instantiate hierarchies upon Semitic bodies through *new* constructions of race and gender. Only the Ashkenazim, Jews of European descent, could figure as the icon of the ‘New Jew’ in this Zionist imagination. An essential tool for galvanizing the early movement in Europe, the taxonomic tendency that cached various kinds of Jewish bodies under one notion of race-- yet maintained the idea of separate and unequal-- was central to the agenda of the early Congress. It is, I argue, this tendency within Zionist intellectualism, that is often left under scrutinized in popular Jewish understanding of Israel’s history. Today this history persists and permeates as a kind of *public secret*-- that Israel was never predicated (meaningfully) on the formation of a democratic and egalitarian state for *all* kinds of Jews from the ‘four corners of the earth’ to propagate and thrive upon.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed it would be more accurate to historically situate the events leading up to the formation of Israel in 1948, as decisive colonialist choices that have informed and propel forward the political present. Instead of creating a bulwark against European, Christian, and British intervention in the region, a bulwark that alternatively might have been forged alliances between Ashkenazim settlers, Ottoman Mizrahim and Palestinians, “The territorial project of Israeli occupation itself already lays bare the paradox of territory, wherein deep historical connection to the land [had to be] claimed but any genetic connection to the inhabitants of that land must be disavowed” (Puar, 101). It is here where scholars can learn most about Zionism as an ongoing settler, colonialist project, a movement that has labored to ideate an ideal diasporic ‘us’ and a degenerate, disenfranchised ‘Other’ through

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<sup>12</sup> By the time of 1929 Hebron Massacres, the two communities, Sephardim and Ashkenazi, maintained separate schools, worshipped in separate synagogues, and did not intermarry. The Sephardim were Arabic speakers, wore Arab dress and were well-integrated, whereas many of the Ashkenazi community were yeshiva students who maintained ‘foreign’ ways, and had difficulties and misunderstandings with the Arab population Michelle Campos, ‘Remembering Jewish-Arab Contact and Conflict,’ in Sandra Marlene Sufian, Mark LeVine, (eds.) *Reapproaching Borders: New Perspectives on the Study of Israel-Palestine*, Rowman & Littlefield 2007 pp.41–65; pp. 55–56.

<sup>13</sup> For more on this topic see: Hirsch, Dafna. (2009). “We Are Here To Bring The West, Not Only To Ourselves: Zionist Occidentalism and the Discourse of Hygiene in Mandate Palestine,” in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41.

<sup>14</sup>The term *public secret* originates in the work of anthropologist Michael Taussig in his 1999 text: *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*. Stanford University Press. 1999.

sexual, physical, and symbolic borders.

## Project Overview

By engaging the research of Daniel Boyarin, Ella Shohat, Raz Yosef, and Jasbir K. Puar, this project invites readers to re-imagine Zionism not only as a movement with aims of nationhood, but instead as a deeply sexual and racializing project from its very beginnings. The historical reality of political Zionism and its obsession with re-defining the Jewish body as ‘white’ through the construction of new dialectic and settler masculinities cannot be emphasized enough. Regulation of settler sexualities inherent in the aims of Zionism and its constructing of a ‘new’ Jew of Europe, is made central in this work.

I intervene in pre-existing literature on the ‘new Jew’ by centering sexual subcultures of Taglit-Birthright as an ongoing site for Israeli biopolitical management. Here within these diasporic youth tours, Zionism shapes its own vision for the ideal Jewish body: staged, racialized, and subsidized within moving sexual, settler borders. My hope through this work is to offer a new and revived focus on the ongoing aims of political Zionism. This I hope can be achieved through a (re)focusing on the movement’s colonialist beginnings and the project’s desire to engineer a new Ashkenazi Jewry for and *through* the settler conquest of Palestine.

My project offers a counter reading to the glorified image of the Jewish pioneer and the resonance of this afterimage in the present. This project develops by arguing that scholars might read popular Zionist images from early Zionist print media as well as Israeli Defense Force Tinder and social media profiles of today, as sites where Zionism continues to focus on reproduction and the ‘new’ Jewish body across digital networks. The history of the creation of the ‘new Jew’ can be tracked, as Shohat, Yosef, and Puar cogently offer, in the archive of Israeli media across the twentieth and twenty-first century. It is a site that has labored to construct a ‘new’ sexual, Semitic corps, and one markedly distinguished by racial caste (Yosef, 2; Boyarin, 1997). Perhaps most important, the chapters that follow will investigate what readers might learn by the act of throwing into relief and deconstructing sexual subcultures of the holy land; casting focus on forms of coupling subsidized by state power.

This work breaks ground by examining and historicizing the experience of the sexually touring body, both the soldier and the tourist, as individual actors in various choreographies of state power. By studying sexual tourism closely, a form of tourism sought by both members of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) and American Zionists, this work offers ‘a way in’ to glean new insight, and new connections through which one can evaluate Israeli biopolitics or the government's regulation of touring social and political life.<sup>15</sup> At present, Israel’s right-wing ruling government continues to

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<sup>15</sup>As Michel Foucault describes the term in the last chapter of his first volume of *History of Sexuality*, ‘biopower’ elaborates a theory of government where “power... exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations.” For more see *The Will to*



shapeshift, elastically, in unlikely subjects and interstices of social life. This work therefore aims to excavate these interstices and hold them up to the light for further collective reflection and examination.

### **Chapter 1:**

Chapter 1 will introduce the North American and Israeli sponsored junkets known as *Birthright* (English) or *Taglit* (Hebrew תגלית: discovery.) This chapter contextualizes diasporic youth tours as reproductive matchmaking sites, an initiative spurred by an event in the 1980s termed ‘the continuity crisis’ in the United States and Canada. Additionally, this chapter draws readers attention to the sexual *mifgash*, or encounter between North American women and Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers specifically, a meeting programmed in the tours’ itineraries following 2005. This chapter argues that military concubinage of Taglit, or temporary conjugal coupling with Israeli servicemen, orbits Israeli and Jewish pronatalism as a waste product of the reproductive Jewish body.

This chapter also works upon Shaul Kelner’s ethnographic study of Taglit-Birthright tourism and his brief mention of the ‘sex with soldiers’ as it abounds and travels with the tours as a sexual border for the occupation. Working within my own ethnographic fieldwork in the region, I compare my own observations traveling with these tours in the summer of 2019 with ongoing ethnographic literature on this site of study. Lastly, this chapter calls upon queer theory and the anthropology of empire to think through the significance of the non-reproductive coupling that I argue is core to the pronatalist and pronationalist junkets of this study.

### **Chapter 2:**

This section follows the work of Chapter 1 as it orients a deeper focus on fantastic spectacle; how reproductive anxieties and anxieties surrounding heterosexist<sup>16</sup> representation were (and continue to be) constitutive of the Zionist Self and his rejection of the Oriental ‘Other-- the internalized ‘Other’ cast upon the European Jewish male (Thakur, 42; Aji and Seikaly, 2014). This section focuses on Zionist body politics and their concomitant colonial discourses on screens. Focusing on media as a critical site of production for racial imaginaries and nationalist culture, this chapter argues that Zionist image worlds have continued to help forge a compulsively bordered, white Jewish race in Israeli nationalist and visual media. Calling upon the deconstruction of Israeli whiteness in this

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*Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume I* 1976, trans. R Hurley, 1998. Additionally, the new biopower as Foucault describes operates through dispersed networks – what in *Security, Territory, Population*-- Foucault names the *dispositif*. This *dispositif* of power works from below, from beneath, and from the ‘level of life’ itself. As Foucault earlier described in *Society Must Be Defended*, ‘[i]t was a type of power that presupposed a closely meshed grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign’ (ibid, 137.) See also: Michel Foucault, ‘*Society Must be Defended*’ *Lecture Series at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (2003) (trans. D Macey.)

<sup>16</sup>The inclusion of LGBTQ tours that began in 2008, demarcate a turn to *homonationalism* (Puar) and the new marketing of militarism as a gay-friendly enterprise by Zionist philanthropists and lobbyists. For more on this topic see the work of Jasbir K. Puar on ‘Pinkwashing’ in her seminal text: “Homonationalism As Assemblage: Viral Travels, Affective Sexualities,” 2013.

chapter, I explore the notion of whiteness as a mediated construct and tool that services Israel settlerism; its ‘race making’ and the ‘making’ the new Jew or *sabra* of Eretz Israel. As John Stanfield explains,

Race-making is a mode of stratification and more broadly nation-state building. It is premised on the ascription of moral, social, symbolic, and intellectual characteristics to real or manufactured phenotypical features. [He continues, it is these ascriptions] which justify and give normality to the institutional and societal dominance of one population over other populations. (Stanfield 1985:161)

The Instagram renderings of soldiers as well as the digital, diaspora #birthright selfies that I will study here, are divorced from the notion of a genetic ‘prototype’ for the ideal Jewish ‘race’— what was once a message implicit in previous iterations of Zionist visual rhetoric. Yet at the same time, my work argues that the theme of sex, race, virility, and reproduction is not absent from the current and dominant cultural articulations of Zionist, digital archives.

### **Chapter 3:**

Chapter 3 looks closely as the argument develops at how bodies, sex, occupation, and militarism are mediatized. This section relies heavily on the theoretical frameworks surrounding media studies, particularly the research of Hye Jean Chung on “media heterotopias” as she (re) conceptualizes the material realities and labor seamed into disembodied media networks. As current users gain access to global conflict and news online, these sites of ‘proving knowledge’ and ‘performing knowledge’ become social and very much material (in ways this chapter explores) through the digital.

Contemporary self-imaging practices of Israeli defense soldiers veer away from older and romantic iterations of the steadfast worker, settler, and laborer. Instead, current image archives of #birthrightIsrael or #hotIDFgirl juxtapose playful archives of soldiers in bikinis, machine guns and selfies, uniform and fields of flowers, and lifestyle aesthetics on base or on duty. This archive, I argue, exists within and through a very material network of bodies, labor, and border shifting that are explored deeper in dialogue with the work of Eyal Weisman. No longer the posited, collective fetish of producing and consuming the romantic and Jewish folk body, what we find now in Zionist digital publics of social media are more individualistic framing of the national, the diasporic return, the military, and the coding of the Israeli state as a personalized and erotic experience for online users.

Drawing on the extraterritorial and non-state-centric forms of power found in Foucault's notion of governmentality, this project concludes by reflecting upon the nature of historic, symbolic, and ongoing scenes of devastation and how they find themselves reincorporated and cathected as backdrops for sovereign pleasures, digital aesthetics, and expressions of liberal, sexual subjecthood

in the present (Preciado, 2013;Valencia, 2010).

### **Elastic Geographies**

In his 1958 book, *The Poetics of Space*, philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes the experience of a place, much like one's experience of a body (theirs or another's), as that which is molded by a series of *repetitive* choreographies and interactions between people and objects. "The way a hallway moves, the way furniture is placed . . . stepping over the creaky board on the floor or not seating too many people on the lumpy couch" these elements subtly script our actions and plot the trajectories of our bodies in a given space and time (Low, 132). Bodies and places exist, in other words, as dense composites of routine. However text, television, film, conversations, images, fan cultures, erotics, and lore—the *umwelten*, or the semiotic world of the individual-- can also orient one's experience of space and place.

Conditioned, choreographies are inherent in how we perceive. Yet as Avery Gordon cogently asks: "How do we reckon with...the power relations that characterize any historically embedded society [those that] are never as transparently clear as the names we give to them imply?" (Gordon, 3). Occupation, military zones, apartheid. Power can be dull, it can be routine, it can hover on the surface. Modern anthropologists have written extensively on the nature of imagined communities, particularly how they function in political struggles over borders and territory. Fantasies of shared heritage, ethnicity, and folk culture, have often found themselves seamed together through nationalist media in order to glorify one imagined community's physical emplacement within a nationalized territory. Contemporary borders across Israel-Palestine are more abstract than mere strokes on a map, settler highways, and military checkpoints. As much digital as they are material, borders can be tools that shape perception, and interfaces that regulate flows of information, resources, capital, investors, and bodies in ways that are constantly shapeshifting in the region.

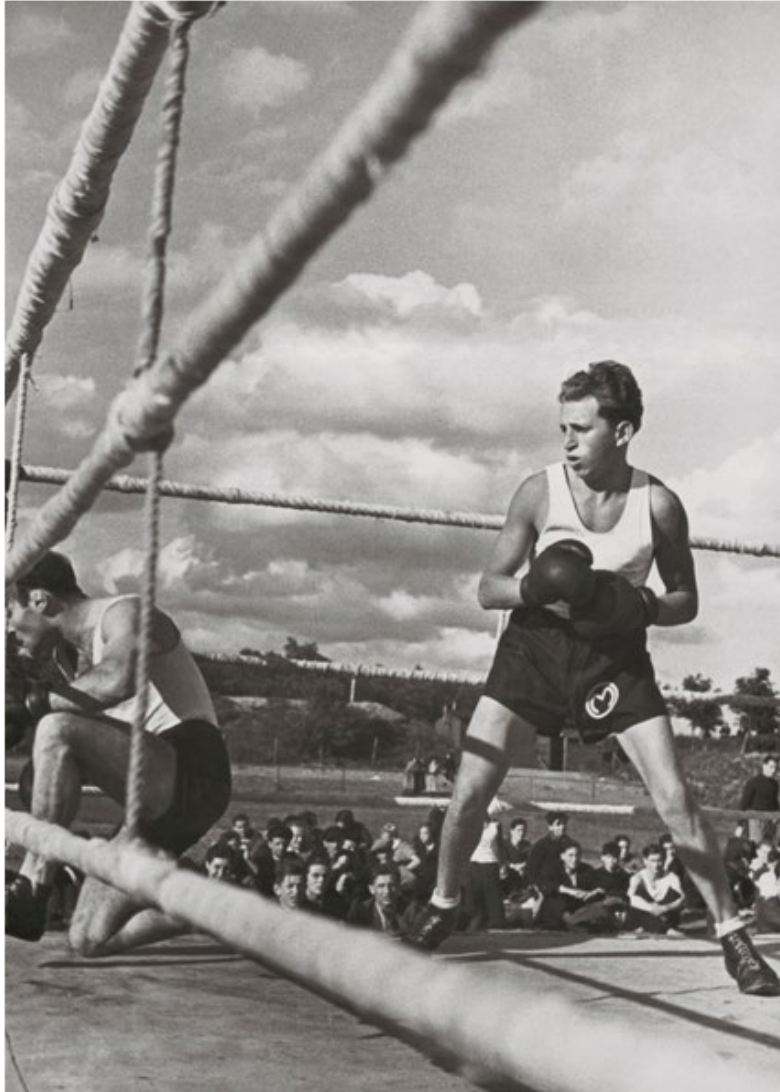
This is a sentiment that motivates the work of Israeli forensic architect Eyal Weizman as he cautions his readers to contemplate the reality in the Occupied Palestinian Territories where, ". . . the organization of geographical space cannot simply be understood as the preserve of the Israeli government's executive power alone, but rather one diffused among a multiplicity of -- often non-state--actors" (Weizman, 5). What, say, of the body of the American Taglit tourist visiting Israel for the first time, experiencing space along fixed but abstract axes of guided routes, 4G networks, city centers and bodily encounters?

In his text, *Hollow Land*, Weizman calls upon the term *elastic geographies* to describe the interplay between Israeli Occupation and the Palestinian populated West Bank in what he calls 'frontier zones.' Weizman offers that,

Against the geography of stable, static places, and the balance across linear and fixed sovereign borders, frontiers are deep, shifting, fragmented and elastic territories.

Temporary lines of engagement, marked by makeshift boundaries, are not limited to the edges of political space but exist throughout its depth. (ibid., 4)

The subsequent chapters are interested in asking the following questions about bodies, geographies, and interstices of Israeli state power: how does the tourist, the non-Israeli, participate amidst, as, and co constitutive of what Weizman calls *elastic geographies* in contested zones like Israel-Palestine? Most pertinent, this work makes an intervention by asking: what can be learned from the act of situating the tourist's body as a kind of *elastic geography*? I approach the pornographic attachments to state violence and its military power that seems central to this site of study -- what I call a concubinage -- that appears almost glaringly consistent, recurrent, to the point where even if an interlocutor did not encounter the sexual 'mifgash' on their own trip, they knew someone who had, or they are familiar with the stereotype. A part of this inquiry is then also an investigation of erotic lore, how it marshals understandings of a place, and what to say about this process in matters of power, settler-coloniality, and its intersections with libidinal female tourism. This project will contextualize the diasporic sexual body as an object whose more recent transnational regulation is belied by particular histories of Israeli ethnonationalism and its eugenic, racial imaginaries. This work orients a deeper focus on nationalist media, and French Philosopher Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopic space: a theory that defines place as a triangular relationship between space, power and rituals/symbols and how this relationship delimits the "inside" and "outside" of a given society.



**Image 6.** Herbert Sonnenfeld; Young Men In Boxing Competition During Jewish Sports Day, Berlin 1936. Source: Jewish Museum Berlin

## Chapter 1: Hooking Up In The Holy Land

### Continuity Crisis

The moniker ‘continuity crisis’ or ‘marriage crisis,’ and its proliferation in 1980s American scholarship, marks a turn in Jewish Studies where academics, social scientists, and North American, Jewish communal institutions began tracking statistical portraits of Jewish life with new rigor. This developing culture of data collection preoccupied itself with sex and statistics, motivated largely by the decline in intramarriage rates and the rise in diasporic assimilation in U.S. and Canadian Ashkenazim.<sup>17</sup> Noteworthy, this scholastic movement has aimed to track the degree of diaspora Jews that marry or partner to other Jews, and the number of children they bear. At the helm of this project, and at the turn of the twenty-first century, Brandeis University would wed the notion of successful, sexual Jewish life with the gains of Zionist communal institutions. One, in other words, intimately paired with the other, distilled most famously in the philanthropic goals of the project Taglit Birthright, a ten-day, proto nationalist matchmaking tour of Israel, aimed at offsetting this new notion of crisis through sponsored potential coupling (Norich, 1994; Wertheimer, 1995; Abramson, 2017).

This commitment also spawned the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, a center that, amongst other tasks, tracks the efficacy of the tours’ matchmaking vis-à-vis social survey projects.<sup>18</sup> Here sociological data collection has aimed, in part, to monitor the afterlife of tour participants’ sexual partnerships, geared at improving the ‘success rate’ of these programs and adjusting the tours’ itineraries accordingly. The notion then that the Taglit junkets were designed self-consciously in the aim of diasporic *shidduchim* (or intra-Jewish matchmaking) at least partially, is a detail often understated in diasporic folk knowledge about the junkets.

Over recent decades, the phenomenon of Taglit-Birthright has found itself parodied in television series such as HBO network’s *Broad City*, (2016) tracked in Jewish blogs, and even examined opinion pieces from the likes of *The New York Times*.<sup>19,20</sup> Earning the nickname ‘Birthrate’ and *Shag-lit* by some Israelis, the sexual framework and undertaking of this program helps lay bare what Michael Taussig calls *public secrets*, as they limn the relationship between Ashkenazim and Israeli Zionism.

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<sup>17</sup> Most alarming was the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) that reported the now-famous figure of 52% inter marriage rates between the years 1985-1990 (Kosmin et al., 1991).

<sup>18</sup> For more on this topic see the living archive of sociological surveys housed in the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies online portal particularly: “Beyond 10 Days: Parents, Gender, Marriage, and the Long-Term Impact of Birthright Israel.”

<sup>19</sup> For more see *NYT* article (May 2008) “Matchmaking, the Ultimate Government Service” written by Francesca Sevre. Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/25/fashion/weddings/25FIELD.html>

<sup>20</sup> Episode titled, “Jews on a Plane” aired on HBO network, season 3, episode 10 of “Broad City” 20 April 2016.

*Public secrets* ripple across the surface of these tours in ways that are rhizomatic, in the middle and between various ongoing histories that orient the settler Israeli project.<sup>21</sup> As a North American run program, the recruitment practice for Taglit tours pressures reproductive flow of particular Jewry over other groups vis à vis subsidized passage to Israel. As a temporary salve spurred to remedy the ‘continuity crisis,’ in American Jewry, Zionist philanthropists use these tours as pressure points, ones that target particular groups to grow reproductively over others within the diaspora.<sup>22</sup> Said differently, the tourism of white, European descendent Jewry is subsidized by the state of Israel disproportionately when compared to ‘reproductive’ tourism that might target Mizrahi Jewry of Arab and African descent, and Sephardim of the Mediterranean; those that populate communities outside of Canada and the United States.

### Political Pronatalism

Documented fastidiously by a variety of scholarship on the topic, most prolifically, Jasbir K. Puar,<sup>23</sup> Meira Weiss,<sup>24</sup> and Israeli scholar Ella Shohat,<sup>25</sup> Israel’s historic investment in population control has operated as a tool for maintaining regional and political power throughout the nation’s modern history. Notably, Israel has engaged in forced sterilization,<sup>26</sup> forced expulsions,<sup>27</sup> and the

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<sup>21</sup> I use this term, rhizome, which appears as the central metaphor of the seminal text, *A Thousand Plateaus* published by French philosophers Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in 1980. To demarcate a shift in perception in how we might frame culture and origins, Deleuze and Guattari offer that: “Rather than narrativize history and culture, the rhizome presents history and culture as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis, for a ‘rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo.’ The planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organization, instead favoring a nomadic system of growth and propagation.”

<sup>22</sup> Namely American and Canadian conservative philanthropists (North America) octogenarian casino billionaire and GOP super donor Sheldon Adelson, who has given some \$160 million to the program to date; Charles R. Bronfman, a billionaire heir to the Seagram's liquor empire and Michael Steinhart.

<sup>23</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right To Maim*, (Durham: Duke University Press) 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press) 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Ella Shohat, “Rupture and Return,” 50; See also pages 65-66 for an overview of the Israeli kidnapping of infants from newly migrated Yemeni Jews, seen as inferior because they arrived from Arab and Muslim countries, considered ‘careless breeders.’ As Puar notes on page 200 of her 2017 text, ‘parents of these babies were told they had died when in actuality they were adopted by Ashkenazi Jews.

<sup>26</sup> Israeli officials have also admitted to forcibly or nonconsensually sterilizing Ethiopian Jewish women during and after the settlement process. Some of these women have testified that they were not permitted inside the country without the administration of a long-lasting sterilization shot. See Gordts, “Ethiopian Women Claim Israel Forced Them to Accept Birth Control Shots” Israel employs a policy of ethnic cleansing through deportation and detainment of African migrants. As *The New Yorker* reported in January 2014 in Margalit, “Israel’s African Asylum Seekers Go on Strike”, undocumented African migrants protested across Tel Aviv new laws that further criminalized their presence and allowed for the indefinite detainment of migrant workers and refugees who are primarily from Sudan and Eritrea in an open-air prison in the Negev Desert. The Israeli government currently gives undocumented migrants whom they seize a choice: leave Israel or face indefinite detainment (Puar, 201)

<sup>27</sup> Deir Yassin most famously was an Arab village cleared out in 1948 by Jewish forces in a brutal battle just weeks before Israel was formed, Deir Yassin has come to symbolize perhaps more than anywhere else the Palestinian sense of dispossession. "The photos clearly show there was a massacre," says Daniel McGowan, a US retired professor who works with Deir Yassin Remembered. "Those photos show [villagers] lined up against a quarry wall and shot. "For more see: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/a-massacre-of-arabs-masked-by-a-state-of-national-amnesia-1970018.html>

withholding of life-giving resources like clean water,<sup>28</sup> sanitation, fair housing, access to visas, hospital care and electricity to its ‘undesirables’ within its population and those forced under its military control. The Palestinian populations of the region face these tactics directly; however, others, such as Jewish-Ethiopian, Eritrean, Yemen, Druz and Bedouin communities, have faced similar obstacles.

In January 11, 2012, the Anti Defamation League (ADL) issued a public statement expressing concern over Ashkenazi discrimination in housing against Israel’s minority Ethiopian populations. A common practice in Israel, Ethiopian Jews were refused the right to rent by local Ashkenazi homeowners’ committees; a testament to ongoing battles that Ethiopians of Israel face as second class citizens.<sup>29</sup> Flickering on the surface of this struggle is the inherent conflict and contradictions of the Israeli state, staged constantly in micro racial discrimination and macro state policy. Israel is, in other words, a nation that posits itself as a democratic Jewish state for ‘all’ diaspora, and yet discreetly centers pronatalism and rehabilitation of Ashkenazi directly at the expense of providing refuge for other Jewry.

I write this now, Israel has left 12,000 Ethiopian Jewish refugees waiting in the nation’s capital Addis Ababa, a population that was promised the right of return by prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2015. Left abandoned by the Israeli government, in October of 2020, Ethiopian-Israeli officers and former soldiers, those with parents and siblings waiting in camps in the city capital, say that the government is violating its 2015 resolution to bring the whole community to Israel by the end of this year. The letter reads:

It is unfathomable that [Jewish] immigration from around the world continues, while only quotas and limits are placed on immigration of Ethiopian Jews. How does the decision to allow only 2,000 immigrants from Ethiopia ease the pain we are experiencing? Who will decide which mother will be permitted to immigrate and reunite with her children, and which mother will not be included in the evil quota

As I write this, neither Benjamin Netanyahu, nor the Joint Distribution Committee, a Jewish relief organization, have issued any kind of response. As previously stated, obstruction of visas and life giving resources to those deemed ‘undesirable’ by the state is an inherent constant of Israeli politics. This targeted discrimination and erasure of plural Jewish identities by the Ashkenazi state and public is a battle that is ongoing.

The words and work of Israeli reporter Amos Elon helps shed light on the historical continuity of

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<sup>28</sup> Since it occupied the West Bank in 1967, Israel has played a large role in scaling down Palestinian water resources through discriminatory [water-sharing agreements](#) that prevented Palestinians from maintaining or developing their water infrastructure through its illegal planning and permit regime. As a result, thousands of Palestinians are unable to access sufficient water supplies and have, in many areas, become water-dependent on Israel.

<sup>29</sup><https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-concerned-at-allegations-of-housing-discrimination-against-israels>



Israeli discrimination of ‘Otherized’ Jews of Israel A famous public intellectual, Elon made a career reporting on what he called the ‘second Israel,’ a term the writer used to describe the impoverished Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants overlooked by the country’s European founders. Most famously, in the early 1970s, Amos went on to publish “The Israelis: Founders and Sons,” where he argued that the early Zionist leaders failed to recognize those living on the land that they had come to reclaim. Amos observed how early leaders and settlers had instead launched a “national and social renaissance in their ancient homeland...[yet] were blind to the possibility that the Arabs of Palestine might entertain similar hopes for themselves” (Bronner, 2009). It is here that we encounter the public secret-- the shifting border-making of Israeli settler whiteness that has past and present, continued to define itself through the targeted exclusion of those deemed ‘Other’-- Mizrahi, Ethiopian, Palestinian.

Obviated by its ongoing history of *selective* pronatalism, one of Israel’s key tactics for maintaining political power, much like other settler nations, has meant fighting to obtain an Ashkenazi population majority over those deemed ‘Other;’ often a shifting and expanding category. As Nadia Abu El-Haj helps elucidate in her research on early Zionist sociologists, the creation of a revived, European Jewish race, the core ethos of the political Zionist movement necessitated the creation of this new race as one both distinct from Arabs and simultaneously connected to the land of Palestine, and thus to its claims to statehood. El-Haj offers: “Even though scholars have written extensively about physical regeneration, the literature has sidestepped the role of racial theory and eugenic thought in helping to frame that vision and desire [for the Zionist settler movement]” (Abu El Haj, 80). On a more basic level, Israel has always targeted its Palestinian birthrate as a kind of war-like threat, actively working to compete against Palestinian and Arab population growth by attempting to raise the Israeli Jewish birthrate more broadly.

In addition, the state has made forceful efforts to encourage more Jews disproportionately from North America and Europe, to immigrate to its shores and make *aliya*, or return and naturalize as citizens of Israel.<sup>30</sup> As my project helps demonstrate, Israel’s selective pronatalism continues to galvanize *against* the shadow of state sterilizations (see footnote: 27) and directed housing limitations placed upon non-Ashkenazim of Ethiopia and the Mizrahi more generally. Ella Shohat, reflecting on the topic lucidly offers,

...Arab Jews presented some challenges for Zionist scholarship, precisely because their presence ‘messed up’ its Enlightenment paradigm that had already figured the modern Jew cleansed from its shtetl past. In Palestine, freed of its progenitor, the Ostjuden, the ‘New Jew’ could paradoxically live in the ‘East’ without being of it. (Shohat 2003: 49)

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<sup>30</sup> Also known as making *aaliyah*, The Law of Return allows Jewish people to naturalize as citizens of Israel however forbids Palestinians to return to the homes from which they and their families were expelled during the *nakba* (catastrophe) in Arabic.

<sup>31</sup> By 2010, [over 17,000 Birthright alumni had already moved to Israel.](#)

The resonance of this sentiment, particularly in Israeli policy making of the present, reverberated sharpest in the words of former Israeli foreign minister Ehud Barak in 1996: “We still live in a modern and prosperous villa in the middle of the jungle.”<sup>32</sup> The ‘jungle,’ of course, seats itself in the mind of the Israeli imagination as the feral, exotic, Middle East in which Israel implants itself but makes sure to demarcate its separation from.

Documented and scrutinized by a variety of human rights’ watch organizations, as of 2020, Israel has continued to provide military security, infrastructure, administrative services, subsidized housing, education, and medical care for more than 642,867 predominately Ashkenazi and self-segregating settlers residing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.<sup>33</sup> Striking, ultra-orthodox communities that have illegally settled in Palestinian populated and Israeli occupied Area C, are often hailed as the foot soldiers of Israel’s selective pronatalism by the state itself. With a national growth rate of 4.2% in population over the past decade, the population growth curve surpasses the 1.4% statistic among non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish citizenry of Israel.<sup>34</sup> The result of the growing status of these settlements and their Ashkenazi populations is twofold for Palestinians who outnumber them. First, Arab populations are zoned out of their land, and are faced with heightened constrictions to resources like roadways, water sources, and sanitation to make space for illegal settlers. Secondly, as the two populations, Palestinian and Jewish Israeli reach almost parity in 2020. The urgency of zooming in on the history of Israel’s focus on breeding and state sponsored nationalist matchmaking, therefore strikes a timely and prescient chord as my research hopes to demonstrate.<sup>35</sup>

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Sitting under a willow tree on a mountain stretch just south of Ben-Gurion airport, I am listening to Divon Yron, the founder of the Israeli travel company, “Sachlav,” that has sponsored our 10-day, all expense paid Birthright visit to the holy land.<sup>36</sup> We have just arrived and this meeting is the first activity on our itinerary, *meant to set the tone for the days ahead*. Cross legged under the hanging foliage, we learn that Yron was born in Israel and has nine children, a point that becomes central to the founder’s talking points during our chat, and one he gives to multiple tours weekly.

His speech begins with a lamentation. He sermonizes on the declining Jewish birth rate in the United States, one he tactfully compares to Israel’s much larger numbers, suggesting that there is

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<sup>32</sup>See: Jen Marlow. “Israel’s Mizrahi Activists Are Fighting The Racist Nation-State Law.” Published in *The Nation*, May 2020. <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/israel-racism-mizrahis-palestinians/>

<sup>33</sup> For more see 2020 report: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/israel/palestine#>

<sup>34</sup> For more on this topic see the Israel Democracy Institute’s 2018 statistical report: [2018 Statistical Report on Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel](#)

<sup>35</sup> For more on this topic see the following demography study linked by the Jerusalem Post: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/jews-and-palestinians-are-almost-at-parity-in-israel-territories-study-628593>

<sup>36</sup> Currently, the tours are managed in part by the State of Israel, the United Jewish Federation and Keren Hayesod, the Jewish Agency for Israel, as well as other smaller scale and philanthropic donors.

much work to be done.<sup>37</sup> With a sage-like conviction he uses his family to intimate what the paragon of Jewish propagation might look like, if we only put our minds and pheromones to it. He then transitions to a sly and coded question: *why do you think you're here?* A gift, he tells us, much different from a present, necessitates a bond between the giver and receiver, a metaphysical kind of obligation to return one grand gesture with another. The scene is metaphorically dense, staged strategically so, as Divon drops fecund symbolism and signifiers, hailing us as potential pro-natalist crusaders for Jewish worldmaking. We are reminded of the cost it took to bring us there in the space where we sat listening.<sup>38</sup> *I think about the way war flaunts its sexual body on a kind of continuum, and my research meets me here.*

Speaking on Israel's political economy of fertility, Jasbir K Puar offers that: "Palestinians [have become] the debilitated bodies in contrast to the rehabilitated bodies protected by the Israeli state." She continues, "Israel asserts the project of rehabilitation through the disavowal of disability onto Palestine" (108). In this context, fetishized Jewish rehabilitation manifests in part through a complex pronatalist or pro-birth agenda: a topic explored by a wide array of literature whose surface will only be touched on here.<sup>39</sup> As Susan Kahn's research on Israeli fertility clinics has helped demonstrate, the "overwhelming desire to create Jewish babies deeply informs the Israeli embrace of reproductive technology" (Kahn, 2000). Unique among nations, Israel provides free, unlimited access to in vitro fertilization procedures for up to two live children until a woman reaches the age of 45. This has, in turn placed the nation as home to the highest per capita users of the procedure, exceeding rates worldwide. Reproductive technologies, including artificial insemination, ovum donation, and even postmortem insemination or posthumous sperm retrieval, are even subsidized by Israeli national health insurance. Thus, every Israeli, regardless of marital status, is eligible for unlimited rounds of in vitro fertilization treatment free of charge.

Yet, a recurring trend within academic literature often couches Israeli pronatalism, or the country's promotion of childbearing and parenthood, as mere reactionary to post-Holocaust population anxieties. Less treaded theories zoom out to the political history of the Zionist movement more broadly, and appeal to its stated and, ongoing, I argue, investments in the creation of a new and perfectible Jewish race. This project investigates the construction of 'normalcy' and how the fantasy for ideal populations orbits the ongoing history of political Zionism.

Population control organizes the political history of Israel on a kind of continuum. As the architecture of early state policies help reveal, one can look as early as David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of the state. It was Ben-Gurion who first encouraged marathon motherhood vis-à-vis

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<sup>37</sup> "By the mid 1990s there were more fertility clinics in Israel per capita than in any other country in the world. (twenty-four units for a population of 5.5 million, four times the number per capita in the United States)" Khan, *Reproducing Jews*, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Birthright trip costs roughly \$3,000 per participant. According to Birthright's own website, over 500,000 people have gone on these trips totaling a bill of over \$1,500,000,000 and counting.

<sup>39</sup> For more of a deep dive on this topic see Birenbaum-Carmeli and Carmeli, "Introduction: Reproductive Technologies among Jewish Israelis," as it explores the complex history of state measures of pronatalism 1-50; Ivry, *Embodying Culture: Pregnancy In Japan and Israel*, 2009.

‘lira awards,’ tokens offered to Israeli citizens that bore ten or more children<sup>40</sup>(Kahn, 3-4). Historically, this state imperative for reproduction found reinforcement in various state policies and protocols across the century. In 1968, for example, the Fund for Encouraging Birth was established to offer subsidized housing loans and increased child allowances for Jewish families with three or more descendants. Later, in 1983, the Law on Families Blessed with Children was passed, offering subsidies for families with three or more children (Yuval-Davis 1987; Kahn, *ibid.*).

Just a decade or so later, the Taglit-Birthright trial tours began, inspired by the ‘singles mission’ trips subsidized by the National Jewish Federation and popularized in the 1980s. Many diasporic youths of this era, youth such as my father, my aunt, uncle and parents of my peers, would take these trips at this time, traveling from all parts of the United States. Incidentally the rise of ‘singles missions’ no doubt coincided and paralleled simmering tensions that would give rise to the second intifada or Palestinian resistance movement in 1987. It is the more recent iteration of state focused pronatalism and pronatalist tourism, Taglit, that has predicated itself on combining the goals of diasporic matchmaking with American Zionist lobbying, fundraising, and Israeli travel marketing. I return to anthropologist Michael Taussig as he highlights the function of secrets in collective societies, pertinent to the staged collectives of the Taglit tours where the undisclosed is already known privately by a public, but only gesturally acknowledged. Contractually, Taussig argues that there exists forms of unsecret secrets, “knowing what not to know” that binds communities as such. This project also meets me here, at the surfacing of political Zionism’s public secrets.

Here young people of the diaspora play a strategic role in the assumed staging and simulating of reproductive ‘utopias,’ and utopias built upon and against dystopias constructed by the Zionist settler imagination and its political fantasies of engineering a ‘new’ Jewish race of Europe and Israel.<sup>41</sup> Reproductive Zionist fantasies in the are therefore informed by a collective and contractual negation of Palestinian rehabilitation and life. Here American Jewish youth become dense sites of biopolitical management of the state as temporary visitors, a newly widespread phenomenon that speaks directly to various conditions of the present. As Paul B. Preciado helps illuminate:

The changes in capitalism that we are witnessing are characterized not only by the transformation of ‘gender,’ ‘sex,’ ‘sexuality,’ and ‘pleasure’ into objects of the

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<sup>40</sup>An award concept that can be traced to the Communist party of the Soviet Union in 1944 prior to 1948; also known as ‘*Heroine Mothers Awards.*’

<sup>41</sup> It is important to note how these tours encourage the potential of state inclusion, connecting participants to internship opportunities, university programs, and IDF lone soldier and medic volunteer training on the horizon after the 10 day tours. In addition, tourists are encouraged to extend their stays, free of charge for up to one month. All of these tactics must be contextualized within the state’s incentive or investment in grooming Ashkenazim for the tours to later make aliya. However the largely marginalized Mizrahim and African Jewish populations are on the whole excluded from the free range market possibilities of making aliya, (naturalizing into Israel as a sovereign citizen), and instead are required to jump through a variety of clearance, vetting, and hoops not mandatory for the Taglit tourists of North America to join and participate in Israeli society.

political management of living (just as Foucault<sup>42</sup> had suspected in his biopolitical description of new systems of social control), but also by the fact that this management itself is carried out through the new dynamics of advanced technocapitalism, global media, and bio-technologies. (Preciado, 26)

That hundreds of thousands of tourists are flown across border states, managed by a consortium of state and non-state actors, and operate as both economic stimulus, digital ‘foot soldiers,’ and subsidized reproductive flow for a particular politic (a politic steered by political Zionism) is noteworthy here and will be explored further in the pages that follow.

### **Tours That Bind:**

In his unique case study of the Taglit-Birthright tours, Shaul Kelner travels with myriad groups across a stretch of seven years, observing the tours’ pedagogical functions and the social environments that they create. Taglit tours, as Kelner observes, more centrally seek to foster in the American Jewish diaspora, a longstanding sense of attachment to Israel, and an attachment based on political and ethnic solidarity. Under the aegis of symbolic consumption of self and society in market economies, the tours are distinctly commerce, symbol, and leisure driven.<sup>43</sup> Fiscal, political, and figurative expansion of the Israeli state, and its occupation of Palestine, orients these junkets as mobile borders.<sup>44</sup> At the heart of Israel’s current settler-colonial project, one finds a layering of recreational tourism and commodified Israeli nationalism. One also finds a second layering of this world upon the colonial ‘death worlds’<sup>45</sup> of Palestinian life, where nearly two million non-citizens are forcibly regulated and often maimed by Israeli militarism often in the name of Israeli pronatalism and rehabilitation. Therefore, Kelner’s is a study of tools, namely, the place-engaging practices used by governments and diaspora organizations to shape political and reproductive identities, with the hopes of securing Israeli political allegiance.

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The barren woman haunts the sociological imagination of Israeli-Jewish politics. An archetype of suffering, she is as old as the matriarchs in the Book of Genesis; the afterimage of Hannah weeping over her infertility; the tragic trope of a fruitless woman. That American Jewish education, philanthropy and communal institutions maintain a laser focus tendency towards matchmaking and

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<sup>42</sup> As Foucault argues in his work on the formation of the modern Western state and biopolitics: “...establishment of a new type of ‘government of the living/ ‘du gouvernement des vivants (1979-1980). . . emerged from the urban, physical, psychological, and ecological ruins of World War II.” For more contemporary elaborations on this topic see: Paul B. Preciado, *Techno Junkie*, p. 25. In this reasoning, offered and re-worked by both Foucault and Preciado, sex and sexuality become the main objects of political and economic activity.

<sup>43</sup> Birthright Israel programs have contributed approximately \$1 billion to the Israeli economy, including 750,000 nights booked in hotel rooms, \$76 million spent on gifts and souvenirs, and the creation of 750,000 workdays for Israelis. (Sourced from: Taglit Birthright web platform.)

<sup>44</sup> Re-thinking Clifford Geertz’s work on political identity and media in cartel economies, Sayak Valencia has written extensively on the new conditions of national promotion in late capitalism. In her book *Gore Capitalism* she argues, “... a new form of nationalism [is instituted] that appeals to the concepts of unity and identity through consumption of both material and symbolic goods.” Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, p. 45.

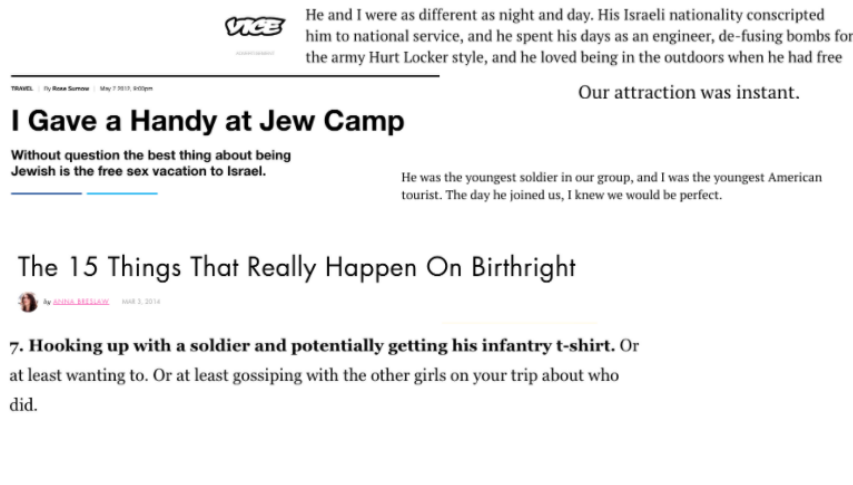
<sup>45</sup> For more on this topic see Achille Mbembé’s seminal essay *Necropolitics* pub. 2003.

birthrates, is a bit of an axiomatic appeal; a phenomenon that scholars have mapped, symptomized, and circled upon for over a century. However just as matchmaking can be situated as the fetish object and goal of the Taglit tours by its philanthropic organizers, and often, many participants, a new fetish object proliferates discourse surrounding these tours: the ‘hot’ Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldier.<sup>46</sup>

In his study of co-ed diaspora tourism, Kelner notes how the *mifgash* or ‘encounter’ with Israeli soldiers on Taglit, (where eight to ten servicemen join the junkets as participants at the halfway mark of the group’s itinerary) was intended to overcome structural barriers faced by the tourist with ‘connecting’ to their visiting destination. Helping to foster a more meaningful and intimate exchange (or cathexis) across cultural differences, the ‘encounter’ was introduced to the tours’ programming in 2005. As Kelner offers: “Through the *mifgash*, Israel will be inside the bus as well as outside, locals will be tourists as well as toured, and foreigners will be objects of the gaze as well as subjects applying it” (134). Sex with soldiers abounds on these junkets and orbits the tours as a kind of non-reproductive sexual border, undermining, in part, the pronatalist agenda set out by the philanthropic *shidduchim*.

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<sup>46</sup> For example, we might situate those that participate in Taglit tourism as the newest iteration of what were once the ‘singles’ mission trips of the 70s and 80s for American diaspora. Here participation was self-consciously marketed for ‘singles’ who hoped to find romantic or sexual success on a proto nationalist ‘mission’ also sponsored by similar Zionist philanthropic organizations and donors.



**Image 7.** Headlines and captions screen grabbed from online editorial opinion pieces written by participants of Taglit-Birthright Israel tours: Source(s): Vice Magazine & Cosmopolitan Magazine, Though Catalogue

The consequences of this turn in Israel Experience tourism, my work offers, signals a new and prolific hyper sexualization of Israeli militarism within diasporic imaginations and tourisms.<sup>47</sup> Noteworthy, while Israel Experience touristy has focused on ‘singles’ tourism with mission trips that predate Birthright, soldiers were largely absent from these UJF (United Jewish Federation) sponsored ‘singles’ missions of the 1980s. The discourse that surrounds these tours, specifically discourse that permeates the diaspora, situates Taglit as a loose form of anticipatory sex tourism. Taglit as heritage ‘homeland’ tour meets state militarism in an under examined ritual: the strategic positioning of the sexual body of the tourist for the soldier and vice versa. Kelner, speaking on the dynamics of gender and sex of the *mifgash*, offers how “well aware” he was that the “*mifgash* encounter was a highly sexual one.” He continues, “Strongly heteronormative, it primarily shaped the interactional field through which Israeli men and American women related to one another” (Kelner, 139). A fruitless outlier to the larger linchpin of the tours, many of the soldiers I interviewed revealed that the *mifgash* or (encounter) between themselves and young, American women, is predicated more on an ethos of play and sex-for-sport than based on any particular tone of reproductive coupling set into motion by Brandeis University and the Sachlav founder, Divon Yron.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Before this turn, we can appeal to examples like *kibbutzim tourism* another site laden with sexual fantasy however one that figured the soldier only peripherally and not central to erotic imagination and pre-formed expectations for Jewish women, diaspora, tourism.

<sup>48</sup> In his foundational work *No Future*, queer theory scholar Lee Edelman examines the figure of the child and reproduction as a horizon point for U.S. politics. In his text, Edelman positions the symbol for non-reproductive politics, the queer body, as a point of departure from normative political subjecthood. He offers: “queers might want to ‘choose, instead, not to choose the Child, as a disciplinary image of the Imaginary past or as a site of a projective identification with an always impossible future” (2005: 31; Halberstam, 91). The core injunction of Edelman’s work



**Image 8.** Israeli American Council Celebrate Israel Festival, Los Angeles Source 2013: Israeli American Council [CC BY 2.0], via Wikimedia Commons

**Image 9.** Photo taken from Taglit-Birthright via Wikimedia Commons

*“I remember specifically, there was a day after we all split off with the soldiers and one of them... the girl who had hooked up with the security guard and this blonde soldier she hooked up with (I also hooked up with) ... sent her this long love letter. He was the most visited of all the soldiers that summer...”* - Bessie Rubenstein age 21, Interviewed Fall 2018 about her Taglit-Birthright Trip

While diasporic matchmaking continues to permeate the junkets, the *mifgash* figures most prominently and immediately in the cultures of these tours as the erotic apogee. Kelner offers, “Even as it forges people-to-people relationships, its mission of fostering cross-cultural understanding ensures that it does so in a way that leads mifgash participants to relate to each other not simply as individuals but also as symbols of their respective societies” (ibid.). This sexual coupling therefore helps as a tool to reinforce a particular Zionist agenda and biopolitics. It is an agenda predicated on military exhibitionism that redirects public focus on the soldier as a pleasure-seeking body as opposed to a tool for war’s inherent military violence.

### **Taglit and the Antisocial Thesis**

A rallying cry in late 1990s, queer theory scholar Lee Edelman would famously opine, “...Fuck the social order and the figural children paraded before us as its terroristic emblem; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Miz*; fuck the poor innocent kid on the ‘Net’; fuck Laws both with capital ‘l’s and with small; fuck the whole network of symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop” (Edelman, 2). It is the symbol of the ‘Child,’ Edelman offers, that acts as the horizon point against

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therefore situates ‘failure’ *productively* as an alternative formulation of, what Jack Halberstam calls, the normative temporality of success.



which most hegemonic politics of the state self-orient; a symbol or horizon used to leverage a limitless license for state power to act as such.

Military concubinage, my work argues, operates similarly within the confines and framework of what Edelman calls ‘reproductive futurism--’ the belief and investment in the idea that political participation and the political itself, is motivated by the belief in creating a ‘better future’ for ‘our children.’ Reproductive futurism of course is never simply about real children per se, however it is, instead, a theory that speaks to the symbolic structure of how the state orients itself and its politics in order to negate critique or protest to its status quo.

As Taglit tours pool various sexual and fiscal resources for Israel: both concubinage and pronatalist matchmaking, each service a kind of Zionist reproductive futurism; an investment in continuing and making ‘more successful’ Zionist gains through the symbols of militarism and future generations. Each mediated site of coupling aims to orient the masses to fall in line; to keep the machine running— people, groups, capital, institutions, sex parts, sex acts, and perceptions of place. Both realities, military concubinage and diaspora matchmaking tourism, seemingly contradictory at first glance, operate as situational pressures that keep the settler body of the state moving forward through the selective creation and negation of life.

The schematic structure for the reproductive futurism of political Zionism, I argue, invests in the notion of a ‘safer’ Israel, an Israel that aims to extend, with impunity, brute military force, land seizure, and borders upon Palestine. The wins of political Zionism are often hailed, self-consciously, as investments for and in a ‘better Jewish future’ for the ‘next generation.’ As Edelman’s theories surrounding the antisocial thesis argues: “the logic of (hetero) sexual ideology... shapes our persuasive understandings of politics, temporality, and social relations” (Edelman, 821). The slippage between Jewish population anxieties and purblind nationalism orients Israel’s understanding of itself and boundaries the critique of the ethical stakes in its securitarian and settler logic.

This slippage, rather, beseeches all Jewry to hail fighting for the safety and future of the nation state as synonymous with fighting for the future of all Jewish life. This of course is a gross and dangerous conflation. Situating Jewish futurity as inextricably synonymous with militarism, and settler nationhood, obstructs and forestalls critique of the nation’s ongoing hawkish laws and policies, and forecloses other possible forms of Jewish futures ‘worth fighting for.’ Additionally, to be anti-state as praxis in this rhetorical framework, is a leftist position often indicted by Zionists and accused to be an anti-Jewish position. This again I argue is a dangerous conflation. The symbol of the future for Israel can also be understood as a fetishized, and militarized horizon, and called upon by pundits to justify war mongering (protect the children of the future), fascist tendencies towards militarization (protect the children of the present), and culture wars (protect the moral compass of the ‘Western, Israeli’ child). Of course, the Palestinian child and his protection is

always excluded from this moral appeal by the state to ‘protect the children’ of the future through unbounded militarism.

*“But, what about the children?” the state entreats.*

Edelman’s argument therefore situates the subject who refuses, or openly challenges, the dominant moral scripts and imperatives of the state, as someone who is positioned as the embodiment of an unrelentingly antisocial and future-negating subject. (For Zionism, the subject who refuses the state’s logics is indicted as a self-hating Jew for example.) While perhaps running the risk of interpreting Edelman’s framework all too literally, this site of study begs the question: what can be learned when scholars focus on the literal non-reproductive futures that service symbolic reproductive futurism, namely: state sponsored, military concubines and the ongoing trends of online, hypersexualized ‘gun-girls,’ militarism and war?

The antisocial thesis, generally construed, argues that all forms of social life and sociality--the parts of worldmaking surrounding the ‘good life,’ the pursuit of happiness, and ‘good’ citizenship-- is oriented towards reproductive futurism: “Indeed, at the heart of my polemical engagement with the cultural texts lies a simple provocation: that queerness names the side of those not ‘fighting for the children,’ the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism (Edelman, 3). Important to note however, scholars such as Jasbir K Puar have carved necessary additions out of Edelman’s thesis, holding up the quagmire of *homonationalism* where queer life and subjects, historically excluded from ‘good’ citizenship, often fight for the rights to assume the logic of the state.

Take for instance the Israeli Defense Force and the State of Israel’s use of ‘queerbaiting’ or ‘pinkwashing.’<sup>49</sup> Here, Puar argues, one can find campaigns for LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans, Queer) IDF— heralding the rallying cry ‘you can be gay and occupy’ — as well as targeted campaigns for LGBTQ Taglit tours in the region. More often than not, Puar argues, there exists a third term where gay culture of the more recent decades has embraced nationalist ideology and neoliberal policy, ‘opting in,’ failing to challenge, and instead advocating for one’s right to participate in state violence and the symbolic structures of the state and its requisite horizons that work to justify and often advocate for expansion of securitarian violence<sup>50</sup> (Puar, 2017).

In her pivotal text *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar signals that often liberal politics subsume queer or once excluded political subjects, coaxing us into the lining of the nation-state. Puar argues that this redirecting of queer life from a positionality as figures of death (Edelman) to subjects tied to ideas

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Pinkwashing,’ broadly construed, defines the action of using queer rights to distract from violence or oppression by a country, government, or organization.

<sup>50</sup> Namely, to serve in the military, on a police force, to profit from state violence, capital, etc. and maintain queer or gay ‘pride.’

of life, productivity, and productivization of and in service to the state apparatus, is an inherent reaction of our political present; monetizing new subjects, and coaxing those once rejected by state norms into the political process.

Where queer scholars such as José Muñoz read potential for queer utopianism in the antisocial thesis, my project questions other forms of cruising where literal non-reproductive futures simultaneously reproduce (hetero) sexist ideology of the nation state (its securitization and right to wield violence upon *bare life*) as much as it ‘fails’ to uphold its pronatalist investments.<sup>51</sup> My project thus asks: where, for instance, does military concubinage of empires’ past, and occupations’ present sit in the schema of reproductive futurism and the antisocial thesis? What would inherently have been understood as ‘antisocial’ life— life hidden, excluded, stigmatized, degraded, from/by the social imagination and public consciousness of the state— has also found itself in a particular historical relationship with the military power over time. Said differently, sex and the obscene have always held a particular and historical relationship to military power, an often violent relationship tacitly understood but denied recognition in the memorial of war by the national public.

My research thus aims to hold up history’s construction of whores, sex tourists, and the often degraded figures of empires’ past and present, those that are often oil the state’s securitarian worldmaking and imperialist militarisms, yet kept out of sight and coerced out of public consciousness. As much literal and symbolic, these figures have been tasked with or are violently forced to fornicate for state, military, and capitalist power. It has been these interstices and cleavages of the hegemonic social that sit in a historical position, removed from public but always present in the making of military empires. State sponsored prostitution, concubinage, and often indentured sexual slavery have always and continue to limn, oil, and tool the acceleration of the imperialist enterprise.

### **Cruising for Non-Reproductive Futures**

It is Summer of 2019. At the foot of our bulletproof bus we are greeted by Israeli soldiers in their bathing suits— *let’s go to the beach!* they exclaim. More abstractly, we have arrived at the middle point of our Taglit itinerary where we are joined by a small group of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) adolescents. I think about our absurdly hunky 21-year-old security guard that shadowed our proto-nationalist parade, always with a handgun strapped to his hip, sometimes playing bongos or acoustic guitar. Or the petite 19 yr. old who casually mentioned that she detonates bombs, speaks

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<sup>51</sup> The term *bare life* is described and worked upon by Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembé in his pivotal text *Necropolitics*. In this work, Mbembé examines the state’s construction of, and orientation towards itself, vis à vis its right to kill those it governs. In other words, Mbembé argues that the state often ritualizes this relational process in episodes of what Giorgio Agamben has termed the ‘*state of exception*’ and the state’s relationship to enmity; that which is constantly produced and appealed to in the form of an ‘Other.’ Additionally, often afforded the sheen of a ‘temporary’ period or crisis, the ‘state of exception can last indefinitely.’ It is this violable ‘Other,’ Mbembé argues, that is constructed by the state as a mortal threat, whose biophysical elimination secures the state’s relationship to itself and its identity (Mbembé, 2003, pp. 16–18).

fluent Farsi, and flaunts her body in a two-piece bathing suit at the bemusement of the American boys, two of which she will go on to spend the night with.

The Taglit body might be thought of as a body that pleasures metonyms for the state and its securitarian logics. Reproductive bodies in this instance are replaced or exchanged with new bodies that pleasure, and bodies that cruise for non-reproductive sex acts—non-reproductive sex acts leveraged to service the symbolic horizon of the Child, nonetheless. Returning to the theoretical tool of the *public secret*, another ripples on the surface of the tours, threatening to reveal deeper roots, cuts, and historicity unbeknownst to the American participants of the Birthright tours.<sup>52</sup> A harbinger of sorts, the advent of the *Muskeljuden* (German: Muscle Jew or Jewry of Muscles) signals Israel as an ongoing *public secret*, a colonial event that necessitated, in part, a new, exhibitionist-like relationship between state-body-and-Ashkenazim. A concept coined by the First Zionist Congress co-founder Max Nordau in the late 1800s, the Muscle Jew represented the goals and emblem of the Zionist political party: German *bildung*. An essence that distills the aims of and galvanized the early project, *bildung* is a German term that derives from (*bilden*: to form, shape, construct) and relates to the German word 'image' (*bild*), implying a human being and their aesthetic character.

This preoccupation in early Zionism with *bildung* and the *Muskeljuden* lent the early movement a discursive tool that encouraged settlers to become one through building, consuming and sharing in collective re-making of the Ashkenazi body and its image. This speaks, as previous sections have demonstrated, to the interplay between eugenics, settlerism, and the German foundations of Zionist aesthetics, an interplay rife with influences derived from European race theories prevalent at the movement's inception. More broadly the specificity of how these theories and concepts have manifested in Israeli social planning, aesthetics, and cultural imagination over time, will be explored further in the pages that follow.

As my research predicates: Israel has and continues to operate as a colonizing project that aimed to invoke racial hierarchy upon its developing citizenry. Forging an Ashkenazi ethno-state, the nascent project constructed itself in the image and concept of a white, Ashkenazi, settler race and civilizing mission. It was this caste, the Jewish settlers of Europe, that steered the political project as one aimed at colonizing the internalized 'Other' inherent in the European production of Jewish maleness. At the turn of the twentieth century, taming associations with effeminacy, degeneracy, and essentialized 'Otherness' appear central to the writings of the early founders of the settler movement. It was here, in this sociological imagination, that the *Muskeljuden* was born, and it is here in this history that offers itself as a tool for interpreting contemporary Israeli aesthetics of the present.

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<sup>52</sup>*Muskeljuden*: German for 'muscular Judaism' was a conceptual term and movement ideated by Max Nordau in his speech at the second Zionist Conference in Basel in 1898. Muscular Judaism emulated ideals seated in Muscular Christianity, a philosophical movement that originated in England in the mid-19th century, characterized by a belief in patriotic duty, discipline, self-sacrifice, manliness, and the moral and physical beauty of athleticism

The Zionist distinction between the Muscle Jew of Europe and the effeminate Jewish ‘Other’ of the Levant or West Asia (‘Middle East’) would trace itself in early Zionist sociology and its regimes of indexicality. This kind of knowledge production and settler epistemology manifested in and by discipline (where bodies were zoned and allowed to go) and by law (who could marry and receive state subsidies such as land.) However often the unsung reality of these knowledge regimes are the ‘unwritten laws.’ These unwritten laws operate as ‘common sense,’ or as knowledge was made manifest and mobilized in the early settlements in image cultures to service particular constructions of the Zionist ‘Us’ vs. ‘Them’ dialectic. As scholar Philippa Levine cogently offers, “[this kind of knowledge] is known far and wide ... but actually it is based on no [explicit] law or regulation” (Levine, 14). Inherent in the early Zionist production of a hyperbolic, Israeli masculinity, one finds the aims of creating a ‘new,’ masculinist, racialized (white) Jew of Europe through constant historical monitoring of the sexual and symbolic borders of the Zionist ‘Us’ and construction of the disenfranchised, often racialized, and ‘Otherized’ Arab ‘Them.’ Nested in the ongoing aesthetic tradition of the Zionist *Muskeljuden* are histories of controlled sex acts, regulated reproduction, sterilization of ‘undesirables,’ and the targeted reproduction of ‘ideal’ Jewish populations. As explored and detailed in previous pages of my work, these histories have helped helm the Zionist goals of regenerating, remediating, and stabilizing a white, Jewish nationhood.

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Israel Experience tourism engages and ontologically orients an Ashkenazi and diasporic self that perceives and acts erotically through/as a kind of nationalist experience. Pedagogic tourism in this way should be considered as a ludic practice (ibid.) —a bounded environment that offers and offers itself as a chance to experiment with new impulse behavior, proffering military concubinage, and the controlled and state sponsored caravanning of one racial caste of Jewish bodies over others. The hypersexualized character of the *mifgash* operates on the register of symbolic *tiyul* — where pioneers (the Taglit tourists) sacralize their relationship to the ‘homeland’ by way of physical and fetish-based activity with their surroundings.<sup>53</sup> Coitus morphs into an embodied and erotic communing with the metonym of the state— its military apparatus: “As with other forms of sex and romance tourism, the cross-cultural liaisons on diaspora Jewish homeland tours are rooted in fantasies of eroticized exotic Others” (Kelner, 139). As this project helps historicize, what informs the diasporic and American subject’s understanding of Israeli geopolitics on these tours, morphs into a sexualization of war and occupation. Here a transposition occurs where individualist, erotic fantasy overlays and obstructs meaningful and intellectual engagement with the region’s modern political history.

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<sup>53</sup> In his ethnographic study of the Taglit-Birthright tours, Kelner maps an old Zionist tradition of using experience of the land to inculcate Jewish patriotism. In the *Yishuv*, he writes, an important rite of passage for young pioneers was *tiyul*, a rigorous hiking expedition “premised on the idea that *yedi’at ha’aretz*, ‘knowing the land of Israel,’ would breed *ahavat ha’aretz*, ‘love for the land of Israel.’ *Tiyul*, Kelner continues, “was not so much an act of teaching information about the land ... as it was an act of sacralizing the homeland” (21-22)—and also gaining familiarity with the land via physical activity.

With accomplices like Ann Stoler and Philippa Levine, my work situates state-standardized, sexual subcultures as sites for excavating ongoing colonial relations of European settler nations. As Stoler, working in the colonial archives of the Dutch colonies of Indochina offers:

Colonial observers and participants in the imperial enterprise appear to have had unlimited interest in the sexual interface of the colonial encounter (Malleret 1934: 216; Pujarnisclé 1931:106; Loutfi 1970:36). Probably no subject is discussed more than sex in colonial literature and no subject more frequently invoked to foster the racist stereotypes of European society. (Stoler, 635)

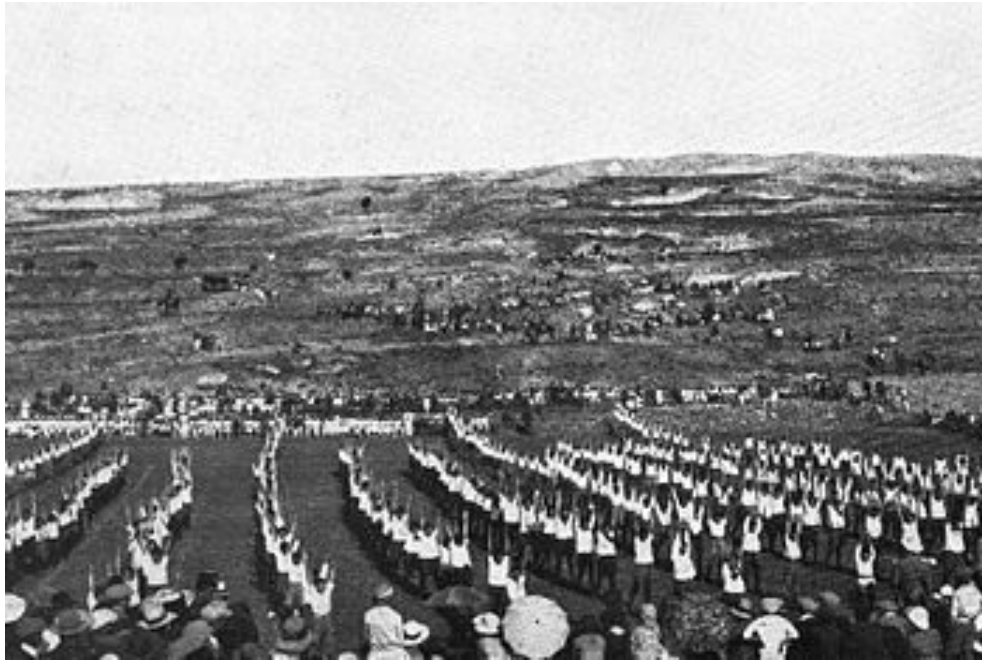
The ‘hookup’ cultures of the Taglit tours help condition and stabilize the sexual borders of colonial relations within Israeli occupation. Here commercial, public, and touring sexual subcultures (sex cultures subsidized, buttressed, and regulated by the state’s economy) act as tools for producing particular kinds of class, social, and soldier coupling over others. This soft power form of sexual control should be understood as more than a ‘social enactment’ or metaphor for colonial domination in the region (Jordan 1968: 141; Stoler, 635) but instead, operate as a fundamental and spectacular tool for demarcating class and race in a larger set of relations of power, touring these relations on display as public parade.

The following chapters will contextualize the Zionist investment in creating a new and ‘virile’ Jew and Jewish race of Europe, a ‘settler self’ constructed through discursive forms of media and the physical boundaries made by said settlers, themselves, and those subject to the movement’s occupation and warfare. As French social theorist Monique Wittig poignantly offers in her seminal, 1978 work *The Straight Mind*,

When we use the over generalizing term ‘ideology’ to designate all the discourses of the dominating group, we relegate these discourses to the domain of Irreal Ideas, we forget the material (physical) violence that they directly do to the oppressed people, a violence produced by the abstract and ‘scientific’ discourses as well as by the discourses of mass media. (Wittig, 53)

Far from immaterial, my work argues that the ‘scientific’ discourses of Zionist and European eugenics, motivated very real and very material settlement in pre-state Palestine. These discourses moreover continue to motivate very real and very material state policies of exclusion and separation of Ethiopian and Mizrahi Jews in Israel’s present. Applying Wittig’s thinking to the site and history in question: the making of Israel in the image of the *Muskeljuden*, I urge readers to contemplate how the physical horrors spurred by settlerism upon Palestine were, in part, motivated by abstract

discourses about sex and the body within the dominating group, political Zionists of Europe.<sup>54</sup> These discourses, as my project shows, prove ongoing.



**Image.10** *Gymnastics in Beit HaKerem, Jerusalem, 1925. Source: Public Domain*

*Field Note //*

We are encamped in the Negev Desert for the night, perambulating the theme park-like grounds of a Bedouin village-cum-simulation; an encampment not rooted in any real Bedouin history but instead harkens to the skeleton of a carnival ground. The property is owned by Taglit, although this overnight stay is meant to signal an authentic ‘encounter’ with what we are meant to understand, what our tour guides call, a composite of ‘local’ Israeli Bedouin life. We are surrounded by outdoor club-like furniture that orients the social spaces of the property: white, block-like sofas set up as if on the beaches of Ibiza, Miami or Barcelona. Each chair and banner is trademarked with Taglit-Birthright and nondescript, American pop music can be heard faintly in a far-off distance. Camels are harnessed and muzzled, corralled in zoo-like metal fencing on the periphery of the zoned compound waiting for the #birthright photo op, where we parade in a circle for five to ten minutes to pose for ‘selfies’ or images taken on our cell phones. The camels groan, sickly and malnourished. I mount the saddle and parade pitifully in a circle.

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<sup>54</sup> Horrors faced by Palestinians as a result of Zionism’s arrival to its shores were first shaped by abstract discourses and discourses constructed by, within, and in service to the land seizure of the dominating group, Zionist settlers.

We rotate through what feels like a cinema of attractions: optical illusions, tricks of perception, staged in a kind of disembodied surrealism from the political reality or historicity of our surroundings. The men who run the site speak to our guides in broken English and we convene under canvas canopies waiting for the Bedouin coffee ceremony to begin. Sitting cross legged I lock eyes with an old man in a thawb, Qamīṣ (Arabic: قميص), as he somewhat mournfully pours coffee in rotation for the seventh ‘show’ this afternoon. He checks his iPhone 8. Then resumes the show. The man tells us that he is demonstrating a ‘welcome’ ritual in Bedouin culture — yet the scene feels devastating against the background of muffled Kesha. Soft base flows from the promotional booths setting up just across the way. Our next event, we will meander through a maze of career booths for Israeli job recruitment: lone soldier enlisting, IDF medic volunteer work, Tel Aviv entrepreneurial internship opportunities. The American band Black Eyed Peas is playing a little too loud and each booth is handing out buttered popcorn and candy.

Really, it all feels a little ridiculous; border fencing in the boundless no man’s land of the desert with an inherently staged and ‘nomadic’ community of Bedouin life; ‘pretending’ to be Bedouin for the night in an ongoing war zone that has historically denied plurality of Bedouin culture in Israeli society<sup>55</sup>; recruiting *real* border making tasks like volunteer military service with pop music and sweet treats and social media handles. There are at least eight other Taglit tours of nearly forty North Americans per group, all of us sharing tents, mats, and floor rugs. Some, to pass the time, have begun circuits of CrossFit— lunging and squatting in Lululemon sportswear. College students before me take turns spotting weights and undulating through circuits of push-ups. I pause to reflect upon the strangeness of this scene. It harkens to ethnographic, archival images from early Zionism. Leaping from the scene I notice a strange symmetry with years past where settlers groom and exercise in the Negev a century prior as a gesture of conquest, foreclosure, and negation— this land is not our land, this land is my land for what the muscle Jews called *bildung*.

In pre-state media, one encounters Max Nordau’s *Muskeljudentum*, a cipher for a ‘new’ Jewish population that had to first find itself engineered in the psyche, in order to mobilize physical, settler migrations to Palestine.<sup>56</sup> In the present, one encounters #Taglit geotagging, a new mode of connecting and consolidating the ‘new Jew’ ideal in one smooth, ubiquitous and digital current.

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<sup>55</sup>As I write this thesis Israel has passed a law titled: “Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish people.” Motioned in July of 2018, this law at once demoted Arabic from an official state language to one with ‘special status.’ Approximately 50 percent of Israeli population is Mizrahi, Jews whose heritage is from Arab and Muslim countries much like the Bedouin men working the campsite for Taglit. According to critics, this law offers legal pretense and heralds self-determining communities such as the Ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazim the right to ban Arabs, Ethiopian Jews, and other subgroups according to clause 7B of the new law from sharing housing, resources, or community with theirs.

<sup>56</sup> This of course pertains more centrally to Herzl’s Zionism, or political Zionism made in the minds of Jewish intellectuals like Theodor Herzl in fin de siècle Europe that took shape in 1897.



*“The colonialist's existence is so closely aligned with that of the colonized that he will never be able to overcome the argument which states that misfortune is good for something. With all his power he must disown the colonized while their existence is indispensable to his own. Having chosen to maintain the colonial system, he must contribute more vigor to its defense than would have been needed to dissolve it completely. Having become aware of the unjust relationship which ties him to the colonized, he must continually attempt to absolve himself. He never forgets to make a public show of his own virtues and will argue with vehemence to appear heroic and great. At the same time his privileges arise just as much from his glory as from degrading the colonized.”*

*— Albert Memmi, **The Colonizer and the Colonized***



**Image 11. & Image 12.** 1971, Bubbie in Israel-Palestine; portraits with camel and unknown man in Negev Desert. Source: Family Archives





**Image 13.** “But the Germans—they stand Foursquare. Look, children, and the two compare, The German and the Jew.” Source: From Elvira Bauer’s book *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud auf seinem Eid* (Never Trust a Fox on the Green Heath and Never Trust a Jew by His Oath), 1936 Nuremberg: Stürmer Verlag. (The Museum of World War II, Boston)

*“An erotic life is, for more and more people, that which can be captured in digital photographs and on video” -Susan Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others” NYT, 2004*

## Chapter 2: The Male Body, #Camels, and Other Zionist Ciphers

### ‘Making the Desert Bloom’

Jewish nationalist media has historically fashioned image cultures as a tool to actualize its national borders. Manifesting and staging settler fantasies on screens, early films of pre-state Palestine were set upon contested and suspended landscapes, projected as empty of local life. Early Zionist films figured pre-state Palestine as settler utopias, fantastic space that mirrored, in many ways, what Michel Foucault describes as: “. . . sites with no real place... sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case, these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (Foucault 1984, 2). The pre-state period of Zionist lobbying called upon early cinema to project and codify the notion of an empty Palestine, and a land fertile (both literally and poetically) for tilling and remaking of the new Jewish body-nation. Defining *utopia* as a kind of optic, Foucault offers:

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. (ibid.)

In his seminal work on expressive culture, American folklorist Roger D. Abrahams suggests that the early field of collecting folklore fomented in early modern Europe, paralleling debates for divine rule over rural commons as they were taking shape. This event, Abrahams argues, drastically shaped what is commonly known today as land-based ‘folk’ groups, culture, and national ‘folklore.’ Abrahams explains: “The identification of folklore with territory, and with its symbolically endowed landscape, emerged in early modern Europe as arguments for divine right for kingship developed” (Abrahams, 3). Abrahams then suggests that through the arts, or aristocratic patronage of aesthetic production, public display of culture allowed kings and aristocracies aimed to stretch the boundaries of their control over rural land by shaping the construction of cultural imaginaries. In this way, the historian (ironically) gleans the process of an elite caste ‘making natural’ and normalizing the constructed fiction of the *folk* as a land-based, de-spatialized, and idealized group. More a fiction or caricature, the notion of a folk identity was molded in aristocratic and later bourgeois aesthetics to rationalize nationalist land seizure and the expansion of political power over otherwise once separate commons.

The virile, tilling *sabra*: the poetic metonym for Jews born in Eretz Israel, was derived from the Hebrew *sābār*: *sabra*, meaning prickly pear. Also known as fruit of the desert, the *sabra* is tough, minacious, dangerous looking in appearance, yet poetically tender and suggestively succulent. The making of the *sabra*, what became the iconic symbol of the Jewish State in early Zionist media, offers an entry point into better understanding and historicizing political Zionism as fantasy—how the movement fervently desired to constitute a corps beyond the shadow of the effeminized, rootless, Jewish ‘Other’ of Europe.

Suffused with the pathos of agrarian iconography, Israeli nationalist, Zionist media figured a phantasmic Jewish body, one mimetically bound to an imagined Hebrew land. Replete with socialist agriculture, tanned, shirtless form, panoramas of folk dancing and Hebrew song (Hammerman, 2012), pre-state agitprop, or propaganda dating back to the late 1800s, fastened the stalwart, nation-builder to a constructed vision of Jewish folk identity, myopically European and often hyperbolically masculine.<sup>5758</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Namely projects sponsored by the World Zionist Organization

<sup>58</sup> Moses Hess's 1862 work *Rome and Jerusalem. The Last National Question* argued for the Jews to settle in Palestine as a means of settling the national question. Hess proposed a socialist state in which the Jews would become agrarianized through a process of "redemption of the soil" that would transform the Jewish community into a true nation in that Jews would occupy the productive layers of society rather than being an intermediary non-productive merchant class, which is how he perceived European Jews.

As Abrahams helps demonstrate, early folklorizing of place or the overdetermination of place with idealized notions of folk culture, is a phenomenon documented in the field of folkloristics (Dorson 1950; Bauman Briggs 1990; Abrahams 1993) or folklore studies more broadly. Folklorizing of place has, these scholars argue, tended to occur amidst junctions of political land seizure across aristocratic Europe amongst other sites in history. It was this period of Early Modern Europe, as well as the shapeshifting of its political landscape, that would later inform, motivate or imbue the poetic language of romantic nationalism in the ways that essentialize land as part of our core to the identity of the nation.

As Abrahams notes, the state's sentimentalizing of a rural 'folk' way of life often manifests as a kind of cultural mimicry by a given political power that refracts the identities of groups it has disenfranchised into its own romanticized and nationalist identity. It is this phenomenon that arguably persists in the ways that Israeli culture—levying a settler-nationalist movement—appropriates Arab culture of the South Levant while at ones disavowing Arabs and Mizrahi citizenry from its dominant cultural imaginary. Take for example za'atar (Arabic عِثْر) a spice mixture that includes toasted sesame seeds, dried sumac, and *Origanum syriacum* (hyssop) a species of Oregano referenced frequently in the Jewish bible. Noteworthy, it is also composed of a species of thyme found in the hills of the Levant. Used distinctly in Levantine cuisine, Za'atar, has become a name metonymically tied to Israel and Israeli culture for the diaspora; an exported good that is sometimes sold as 'holy hyssop' in reference to its ancient Hebrew legacy.

While the fusion of Levantine and ancient Hebrew roots situate this herbal mixture as a potential bridge between Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Palestinians in Israel, its absorption into Israeli nationalist culture also signals an ongoing trend in Israel's erasure of its shared ties with Arabs of the region. Approximately 50 percent of Israeli population is Mizrahi, Jews whose heritage hails from Arab and Muslim majority regions. In other words, these are Jews who speak Arabic as their primary tongue. Yet as I write this thesis, Israel's government has passed a law titled: "Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish people," having motioned to demote Arabic from an official state language to one with 'special status.' The law sparked widespread protest among Mizrahi Jewry and activists. They argue that it has set into motion a direct attack on their visibility in both legal, social, and cultural realms of Israeli consciousness, instigating the already pre-existing hostility between their communities and the anti-Arab sentiments that circulate within Ashkenazi Israeli spaces.

Held up to the light, early Zionist speech and language aimed to inspire settlement of Palestine by a Jewish self, and a 'new' Semitic-self-made of Europe and European ideals. Another site in need of excavation in order to examine this point further, is the movement's early film and media. Steadfast in tracking the interplay between imaginary worldmaking and political strategy, Lebanese media scholar Jack G. Shaheen cogently reminds his readers how policy helps reinforce mythical images just as mythical images help reinforce policy. Shaheen poignantly calls upon the famous Arab

proverb : *Al tikrar biallem il hmar* to discuss the issues of anti-Arab caricature in U.S. media: “By repetition even the donkey learns” (Shaheen, 171). Compiling over 900 U.S. films, Shaheen tracks a consistent pattern of stereotypical anti-Arab representations reproduced with unyielding restraint throughout Hollywood’s history. Equally striking and pertinent to this project, is his indictment of the crossover genre: Israeli American filmmaking.

Disturbingly, only two scenarios present Palestinian families. . . . One year after the state of Israel was born, the film, *Sword of the Desert* (1949), presented Palestine according to the popular Zionist slogan, as a land without a people—even though the vast majority of people living in Palestine at the time were, in fact, Palestinians. This myth—no-Palestinians-reside-in-Palestine—is also served up in *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966) and *Judith* (1966). A decade after *Sword of the Desert* Paul Newman declared war on the Palestinians in *Exodus* (1960). Hollywood’s heroes followed suit. (Shaheen, 187).

Palestinians on Israeli and Israeli American screens in other words are absent or one-dimensionally villainous; there is no in-between. Following mass dispossession and expulsion from their homes (*nakba*) in 1949 Israeli propaganda films systematically erased and dehumanized Palestinian’s political reality in the Levant, painting all Palestinians without humanity or meaningful social reality. As Shaheen stresses: policy helps reinforce mythical images just as mythical images help reinforce policy. Critical theorist Gautam Basu Thakur eloquently echoes and summarizes this idea stating: “. . . forms of [Western] representation are arranged through visible and invisible gestures of foreclosure, disavowal, and repression of the non-Western other in order to constitute the ‘Other’s’ identity-in-difference from the self of Europe” (Thakur, 38). Full feature Zionist films of the 1930s such as *Avodah* (Dir. Helmar Lerski, 1935), *The Land of Promise* (Dir. Juda Leman, 1935), and *The Dream of My People* (Dir. Halome Ami, 1934), stressed calloused hands and a mechanistic, cooperative “making the desert bloom” (Hammerman, 2012), cultivating a Romantic idealization of the laboring Jewish body in a landscape excised of Palestinian life, imbued instead with the German notion of *bildung* (see chapter 1).<sup>59</sup> Harrows, brawn, and fallow terrain are the recurring images that appear when one calls upon early Zionist films of the 1930s, ideologically dense and constructive.

### **Racial Engineering Through Zionist Image Cultures**

We can understand visual constructions of the West, as Shaheen and Thakur lucidly offer, as phantasmagoric projections of the ‘Oriental’ East. Having established Ashkenazi settlers’ explicit desire to self-segregate from the Mizrahi of Palestine and the Levant, (a sentiment consistent in

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<sup>59</sup> On 14 May 1948, on the day the last British forces left from Haifa, the Jewish People's Council gathered at the Tel Aviv Museum and proclaimed the establishment of a Jewish state.

Israeli policy today), and the stated early Zionist intent to colonize over Palestinians--what did it mean to early Zionists to 'make a Europe in Palestine,' and why did it become so hyperbolically masculinist in its aesthetics? While I circle around this question more theories come to mind. As gender and critical race theorist Ruby Hamad cogently contextualizes: "Through the works of Western travel writers, colonialists, artists, diplomats, and 'experts' who positioned Arab and other Eastern cultures as barbaric, backward, violent, animalistic, lewd, and oppressive of women, by default the West became advanced, merciful, civilized, moral, and respectful of women" (Hamad, 64). Hamad is working through the seminal scholarship of Palestinian author Edward Said who reflects on the nature that the imagined and self-imagining West consistently defines itself by a feminized and immutable 'East.'

Moreover, the distinguishing logic of 19th century Eurocentrism was informed by the rise of scientific racism fomenting in this period, a discourse that regarded true differentiation of the sexes as a status that had only been achieved by what eugenicists termed: the more 'highly evolved' white Europeans (ibid.). The American School of Evolution for instance, at the time of the rise of political Zionism and muscle Judaism, had furthered the notion that sex difference was a racial characteristic, asserting that exclusively white European-derived people had evolved to the threshold of having distinctly separate male and female brains and dispositions. According to Kyla Schuller, associate professor of race, gender, and science studies at Rutgers University: "...the prevailing scientific thought at the time [of the late 1800s] regarded this crucial sex difference between men and women to be behind the development of rationality and reason, which to the scientists was a hallmark feature of (Western) civilization" (Hamad, 65). Given this history and the prevalence of this historical discourse in European race theory, the insistence in early Zionism of attaching a new Jewish self to the West and to masculinity, takes on particular political importance and resonance.

Progenitor of the political movement, Theodor Herzl would ultimately echo sociologist Arthur Ruppin's fixation on demography, race, and 'Oriental degeneration' stating, "the Jews of the medieval ghetto in Germany were an 'Oriental tribe'... they wore 'Oriental costume; their speech was Oriental" (Kornberg 1993:24). Herzl, a German-speaking Jew from Hungary, preoccupied himself with the Jewish question in Europe, drawing the conclusion that in order to 'rehabilitate' the status of the Jew as degenerate 'Other,' required that he and his fellow Ashkenazim emulate European ideals and imperialism including city planning, nationalist media, land seizure practices, among others.

This included instantiating a civilizing project predicated on mastery and colonization of the Arab and Oriental 'Other' and his land: a 'primal' scene often staged in pre-state films, print media, and invoked in speech. For instance, the tired Zionist axiom, *make the desert bloom*, became popular throughout the early years of Israeli statehood, somewhat delusionally implying that agricultural

success in Israel was exclusively predicated on tools brought by the West to the East. Herzl, in one of his most prolific founding texts *Der Judenstaat* (*The State of the Jews*, 1896) offers: “For Europe, our presence there [in the Middle East] could be part of a defense wall against Asia. We could be a vanguard of culture against barbarism” (Herzl, 27). The East is seen in early Zionists’ imaginations as pre-modern and savage, figured as such predominantly in a variety of the thinkers’ key texts. It is, in other words, a sentiment relentlessly reproduced throughout the nation’s ongoing history.

The pathologization of Jewish male sexuality had, at the time of Herzl’s writing in the late 1800s, entered scientific discourse of psychotherapy, sexology, medicine, and, notably, the work of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (Yosef: 2004; Boyarin 1997). Zionist desire to create a new, rehabilitated Jewish race, found itself intertwined with attitudes towards breeding of children, bodily hygiene, and racial improvement in the Yishuv (pre-state settlements.) As Zionist body politics and their colonial discourses of the Oriental body helped forge the notion of a Jewish masculinist West, it compulsively did so on screen. In her examination of political, Zionist propaganda films for example, Ella Shohat argued that the Ashkenazi pioneers embody the “humanitarian and liberationist project of Zionism, carrying with them the same banner of a ‘universal’ ‘civilizing mission’ that European powers propagated during their surge into the ‘underdeveloped world’ (ibid). Any investigation of Zionist history can therefore never simply be a question of the geographical locations of Israel and Palestine on a map, but instead of the inner workings of Zionist, colonial imaginations—how they have helped to motivate and justify the very real dislocations of Palestinian peoples in the context of war and violence (Shohat, 2011). A tool for aestheticizing collective Jewish corporeality and its ideals, films like *Avodah*, pre-state Zionists’ submission to the 1935 Venice Biennale, reveal a desire not simply for settler recruitment but a Zionist, intellectual preoccupation with showcasing a new Jewish self to Europe and to a European gaze through Zionist image cultures.

“A bit of *political* freedom. . .yes, but all these are mere details... the important thing is the sum-total of them all: the creation of a *new, corrected, and perfected type of Hebrew*. Therefore, a *psycho-biological approach to the problem of settling Eretz Israel* [lit. the land of Israel] is imperative to all of us!” (89, emphasis in the original).

-Arthur Ruppin, ‘Ingathering of the exiles, eugenically considered,’ 1934





Images 14. 15. 16. Pre-state and early-state Zionist Posters, Source: National Jewish Fund

### Repetition and Mimicry

Israel's heuristic investment in the white, distinctly 'Western' settler as mascot for its nationalist movement, reveals particular anxieties that have preoccupied the project's leaders and media makers from the state's earliest inception. With its emphasis on excising Palestinian presence and inserting a mythologized Ashkenazi *sabra* as the dominant Jewish subject of Zionist image cultures (pre-and post-state,) the political movement forged a collective, ethno-nationalist identity that excluded the very plural identities present in the region at the time of settler arrival. This included various Sephardim and Arabic speaking Mizrahi populations— Jewry of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern descent.

In her study of whiteness and white supremacist discourse, scholar Abby Ferber (1998: 60) suggests that "...White identity defines itself in opposition to [the projected construction of] inferior others; racism, then, becomes the maintenance of white identity." She continues, "When researchers fail to explore the construction of 'race,' they contribute to the reproduction of 'race' as a naturally existing category" (Ferber, 60). Often discounted is the historical and often ambivalent fusion of white supremacy and Jewish identity both in the United States and Israel. To this point, it is important to note the historical shape shifting nature of whiteness by recalling Joe L. Kincheloe's observation that "the Irish, Italians, and Jews have all been viewed as non-white in particular places at specific moments in history" (Kincheloe 1999:167). However, this historical fact of course does not foreclose the potential for Jews or Italians to 'become' white,' but instead, as my project offers,

gestures to what Feldman calls ‘race-making’ as a social conceit of societies past and present. Always shifting and discursive, race and particularly whiteness has found itself called upon by a given regime of power in particular locales of place, so to order bodies and contort access to land and resources.

The pivotal work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant have famously focused on the mutability of race and the notion of race as Nationality. As the two scholars have offered, race has been used as the basis for national projects and is often tied up with the idea of “peoplehood.” In colonial projects in particular, race and nationality have and continue to find themselves used both to motivate subjugation of a foreign people and is also used in resistance movements to challenge conquest. The shape-shifting construction of settler whiteness inherent in various European, nationalist movements, have, my project argues, aimed to make themselves *real* and legitimate through the rehearsal of public spectacle. As Lacan argues in *Four Fundamental Principles of Psychoanalysis*, repetition can mark the failure of subjectivization: “what repeats in the subject [national culture] is precisely that which is not yet mastered or never masterable” (ibid.). In turn, repetition, particularly when rehearsed in dominant cultural articulations such as nationalist media, instantiates an operation of false universals: the Ashkenazi Jewish settler tied to or of the land; the non-existence of Palestinian history; the ubiquity of a white Jewish race ‘of’ the Levant.

Zionist aesthetics chose the Ashkenazim (European Jewry) as universal signifier through and on which Israeli society should base their historical imagination. In his analysis of early Zionist media, Israeli film scholar Raz Yosef offers:

The Israeli dominant cultural articulation [also] seeks to conceal the artificial and historically motivated character of heterosexual masculinity... [that] it brings into effect by naturalizing the work of representation. The forming of the normative Israeli national subject requires identification with the Zionist fantasm of sexuality, identification that takes place through a disavowal of the threatening spectacle of “feminine” maleness. (Yosef, 5)

Inherent in political Zionism, one encounters a widespread refusal to relate (historically, symbolically, visually, and materially) with other Arab Jews and native Palestinians. However, as theorist Judith Butler lucidly offers, any kind of disavowal or refusal to identify with a given position, [suggests] that on some level, an identification has already at some point in time taken place.

Working in conversation with Donald Davidson’s work (1917-2003), scholar Richard Rorty highlights a picture of intellectual and moral ‘progress’ in Israeli modern cinema as a history of increasingly useful metaphors, rather than of increasing understanding of how things really are (Rorty, 8). A key progenitor of the political movement, and founder of Tel Aviv, Arthur Ruppin and his fellow travelers were able to influence pre- and post-state Zionism to cast non-Europeans as a

different class of Israeli citizens, backing their arguments with outdated theories of European eugenicists, and realizing this imagination through visual culture and segregationist state politics.

My project argues, therefore, that the aesthetics of modern Zionism map a political and erotic fantasy of an imagined people; a visual echo that has reached the present across film, (print and new) media, and acts of spatial and reproductive foreclosure. Analyzing the political actualization of Israeli statehood through its living archive of popular image cultures (Israeli dominant cultural articulation') reveals that state subsidized media can refract and reinforce the making of a collective settler, masculinist 'self.' The following chapters thus aim to demonstrate how Israel's making of a virtual self is a process intimately knotted with occupational logics of settler-imperialism.

### **Digital Aesthetics and Birthright #Geotags**

For Taglit (diasporic Israeli tourism) as much as the early days of the World Zionist Organization, media and image cultures continue to create associative, political, Jewish nationalist imaginaries. A turning away from agrarian austerity, self-sacrifice, and transcendence-through-manual-labor, contemporary Zionist media lauds capitalist consumption, cosmopolitanism, and erotic, digital exhibition of military force. These are the new terms that dominate popular Zionist image cultures. The new conditions of the Israeli tourist, as they are impressed and defined against the new conditions of Palestinian *bare life*, can be defined in terms of and through the work of theorist Paul B. Preciado: living-in conditions of the hyper-mediatised pornographic, and Puar: bare life-defined under circumstances of populations not allowed to die or thrive under state control; strategically given 'just enough' to maintain the farce of Democracy for a world stage.

Important to note, conditions of *bare life* in Palestine, or life more generally for Palestinians, is circumscribed in a kind of 'spacio-cide' or dependency on the withdrawn, settler, or Israeli infrastructural support. This leverage "... modulates calories, megawatts, water, telecommunication networks, and spectrum and bandwidth allocation to provide the bare minimum for survival"<sup>34</sup> (Puar, 134). We might then think of the digital publics made from the #IDF and #BirthrightIsrael social media geotags as kinds of moving borders or sites that net across the digital, the social, the economic, and the interplay between bodies and zoning of abstract space. In conceptualizing certain social media accounts and kinds of fan cultures as expansive, militarized zones, the following sections examine how Taglit has taken on the age-old Zionist task of staging, stabilizing, and consolidating Jewish settler whiteness and material settler infrastructure through virtual image cultures. Media networks in this way exist as an interplay between actual bodies and virtual bodies as they come together to buttress border logics of Israeli statehood. Take for instance the #Birthright 'camel selfie,' a placeholder, and souvenir shared by Birthright participants and a gesture encouraged by the Taglit organizing team in their '#helloselfie challenge.' As writer Huw Lemmey poignantly draws out in his recent opinion piece on social media and armed forces:

. . . just as war is the perennial driver of technological development, so it also remains the laboratory in which technological image production is really tested—the ability of one state or another to push representation to its limit and make you feel safe, happy, good about the flesh that is being torn from limb on your behalf. (Lemmey, 2012)

Lemmey offers that it is the repressed acknowledgement of that ‘flesh being torn from limb on your behalf,’ that acts as the innate quality or cadence of contemporary wartime publics.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the aesthetics of pro-war or nationalist film and photography, particularly when intended to circulate widely and to a non-military viewership, reveal a commercial desire to instantiate an *intimate public*, one that deflects, denies, and repurposes, in ‘good feeling’ signifier, that which we refuse to meaningfully address in mainstream nationalist discourse: namely, the contractual brutality in our securitarian worldmaking.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>With the term *intimate publics*, I am refer to Lauren Berlant’s 2008 text, *The Female Complaint The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, where she expands on the term as follows: “A certain circularity structures an intimate public, therefore: its consumer participants are perceived to be marked by a commonly lived history; its narratives and things are deemed expressive of that history while also shaping its conventions of belonging; and, expressing the sensational, embodied experience of living as a certain kind of being in the world, it promises also to provide a better experience of social belonging—partly through participation in the relevant commodity culture, and partly because of its revelations about how people can live. So if, from a theoretical standpoint, an intimate public is a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general, what’s salient for its consumers is that it is a place of recognition and reflection” (Berlant, viii).

<sup>61</sup> Important to note: in a U.S. context whereby U.S. service mediates a good deal of access, and often exists as the only real access to affordable state resources such as healthcare, education, and financial stability for those that otherwise could not afford such resources. It is this reality, a different kind of harshness that is organized by the military industrial complex-- that is elided in pro-military ad campaigns or consumer product advertisements: capitalist violence tooled by the state for its militarism.



Image 1. Checkpoint Ephraim/Taybeh in the West Bank where people wait to commute for entry into Israel

**Image 17.** Checkpoint Ephraim/Taybeh<sup>62</sup> in the West Bank where Palestinians wait to commute entry into Israel for work. Source: David Heap/EAPPI

**Image 18.** Promotional Taglit-Birthright image promoting the #helloselfie #taglit challenge. Source: Taglit-Birthright website.

*“I wonder if Jewish men feel the need to market themselves as being Jewish in dating culture— DC for instance is not a very Jewish area, so maybe men and women feel the need to self-promote with their camel, #Birthright pics. I have seen a lot of that on both Tinder and Bumble.” -Kathryn Fink, 25, reflecting on the ubiquity of ‘camel selfies’ on her dating application Bumble in Washington D.C., 2018.*

<sup>62</sup> In June of 2014, a man died inside of the Israeli checkpoint, pictured in Image 17, and located in the northern West Bank. He was crushed to death at the Ephraim/Taybeh, en route to his place of work in Israel. 59-year-old Adel Muhammad Yakoub was from the northern West Bank village of Balaa. Approximately 10,000 Palestinian workers cross through the checkpoint every day according to reports and inspection procedures at the checkpoint go very slowly causing dangerous levels of overcrowding inside the checkpoint. The victim left behind a wife and seven children, aged 11-16. For more see: <https://www.albawaba.com/editorchoice/crushed-to-death-palestinian-checkpoint-545646>

## Top 10 Selfies You Take on #Birthright



Israel Free Spirit [Follow](#)  
Aug 26, 2016 · 3 min read

A photo is worth a thousand words, but a selfie is priceless. Here are the top selfies taken on #IsraelFreeSpirit #Birthright trips.

### 1. The Camel Selfie



Birthright Israel Alumni From ...  
blog.birthrightisrael.foundation



Problems Only Taglit-Birthright...  
pinterest.com



Camel Love  
pinterest.com



Taglit #Birthright #Israel ...  
pinterest.com



Top 10 Selfies You Take on #...  
medium.com



Mayanot Israel on Twitter: 'Note to ...  
twitter.com



Birthright Trip ...  
iscreen.org



30 Best Birthright images | H...  
pinterest.com



Must Know For Your Birthright...  
medium.com



Toronto Girl Will Have On Birt...  
narcity.com

**Image 19.** Headline for online Medium article titled “Top 10 Selfies You Take on #Birthright”

Source: August 2016

**Image 20.** Image result page for ‘birthright camel selfie’ on the search engine Google Images

Source: 2020

In the present, personal image capture and circulation is multi-platform, and often user generated. Scholarship on the virality of military aesthetics and online selfie cultures is a new and developing field that ranges from the work of Rebecca L. Stein and Adi Kuntsman (2015) on the IDF; Maria Pramaggiore (2015) on American soldiers, their ‘cute’ YouTube performances, and ‘soft power;’ and a growing group of others, many of whom are just now entering into the ring to theorize at the rate that these technologies are expanding.<sup>63</sup> Online personal dating applications as well as digital platforms like Instagram, operate as sites of slippage between nationalist and sexual coupling. A selfie with a camel can operate, for example, as a metonym for pro-Zionism, a staged and often unthinking identification with Israeli occupation. Thrown into relief on dating profiles, this selfie hails the slippage between the aims of intra-Jewish dating, a theme discussed often by those I interviewed in my own fieldwork, and the tendency towards vetting Jewish partners for coupling by recognizing their Jewishness in or as Zionist selfies.

<sup>63</sup>Sontag, *Regarding The Pain of Others*, and Butler, “Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag,” *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*. See also: Struk, *Private Pictures*. Other scholarship on the role of social media in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Allan and Brown, “The Mavi Marmara at the Frontlines of Web 2.0”; Archibald and Miller, “Full-Spectacle Dominance?”; Bennett, “Exploring the Impact of an Evolving War and Terror Blogosphere on Traditional Media Coverage of Conflict”; Berenger, *Cybermedia Go to War*; Berenger *Social Media Go To War*; Hoskins and O’Loughlin, *War and Media*.

As Chapter 1 examined, it was the event of the ‘continuity crisis’ drafted and addressed by North American and Zionist philanthropists, that would wed successful Jewish sexual life with Zionist gains. Set into motion, this pairing of the political with the reproductive, reinforces itself, I argue, across a new array of media, actors, and interfaces within the diaspora. Here digital fan cultures of #Taglit #Birthright, fan cultures that foreclose participation from anyone outside of North America, net across geotags and act as tools for consolidating bodies, both virtual and real, along the aims of Zionism’s eugenic, reproductive, and historical goals. I argue that these online image cultures can also play a soft power kind of mediating hand, assisting in and politicizing the regulation or moderation of Ashkenazi sex acts.

Zionism's zenith for promotional advertising is Birthright Israel. Here, neoliberal labor operates as a kind of state-making effort, creating a living archive of icons, master signs, digital fan cultures and metonymy for nation building beyond the physical confines of settlerism. A far cry from drill to land or muscles to field, the inherent logics of self-consumption and consumption of place define contemporary Zionist media. As scholar Sayak Valencia helps explain, “This change can be understood as displacing the categories of humanism with hedonistic ones that entail an absolute change in the conception and apprehension of reality” (Valencia, 92; Preciado, 33). We might, in other words, contextualize production of Zionist media, and its staged Zionist settler utopias, in an age where consumer needs dwarf and inform perception of nationalist place in a shapeshifting and accelerated terms when compared to years past. This theory will be explored and developed further in the final chapter that follows

Michel Foucault’s pivotal, 1975 text, *Discipline and Punish*, introduced a historical shift observed, he argues, to have taken place between a society that once subjectivized its members through its policies of punishment, to a society whose discipline(ing) was acquired through less material processes: centered on the construction of behavioral norms. Here we encounter the abstraction of the body for politics’ ‘utopian’ actualization, citizenry relegated to abstract terms of mediated cravings, taste, and affinities. From Taglit #hashtag challenges to promotional 4G (‘fourth generation’ mobile network technology) all access cell phone service, Zionist philanthropy’s turn to digital and social media, bespeaks a new approach in the Zionist political recruitment: investing in digital, abstract space and bodies. But how digital and immaterial is online space? The following chapter will explore this topic in dialogue with the work of Eyal Weisman and Hye Jean Chung as they situate the materiality of immaterial online space. This section focuses on the interplay of actual bodies and virtual bodies in the staging of Zionism’s reproductive and sexual utopias— a staging that takes place along the 4G of the Israeli-Palestinian border.

*“Settler Colonialism is not an event, it’s a structure. Zionism is not an event, it’s a structure, and it’s a settler colonial structure. It was a settler colonial structure in 1882, and it is a settler colonial structure in 2017.”* - Ilan Pappé, speech given at Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, 2017

## Chapter 3: Zionist Heterotopias & Military Gun Girls

### Zionist Heterotopias:

The worlds that produce, and therefore also exist within the making of digital film and media objects, are often dense, material, and netted. Far from seamless and abstract, media objects and infrastructures cull together various physical choreographies— choreographies staged between bodies, physical space, labor, and infrastructure. However discursive strategies often attach the concept of seamlessness to globalized media, a sentiment echoed by media scholars, industry specialists, and users themselves. This misunderstanding of digital media naively dissolves spatio-temporal boundaries, figuring online space in often optimistic, ‘utopian imaginings of cross-border mobility.’

In *Media Heterotopias*, scholar Hye Jean Chung calls into question why and how many among us disregard the material conditions inherent in digital media production. Focusing on globalized labor and the material tools in digital worldmaking, Chung lucidly cautions readers to be weary of this erasure as she argues that: “the rhetorical and visual power of seamlessness can conceal the structural inequities of a global film industry [and media making more broadly] that accredit a preponderance of economic and cultural capital to a chosen few” (Chung, 179). Said differently, we can situate the act of imagining as a deeply social, and materially engaging activity; a ‘materially productive process’ as opposed to the often-relegated status of mere disembodied fantasy or escapism (ibid.; Appadurai, 1990).

However, as Chung argues and as my project aims to echo, any attachment to the notion of seamlessness reveals the all too common elision of real bodies themselves; the erasure or unthinkability of material borders and regional politics made deeper in the act of digital media making (Chung, 18-19). Taking this notion a step further, this final chapter situates Israeli cell phone towers, Palestinian bus companies, content moderation centers, and illegal telecommunication networks, as composite of the material-immaterial spaces nested within online image cultures. *Heterotopias*, a concept elaborated by scholar Michel Foucault, articulates a spatial theory for sites that make possible a ‘somewhere else,’ real, physical, or mental. Examples of heterotopic spaces include fairgrounds, gardens, cemeteries, festivals, museums, libraries, brothels, motel rooms, prom nights, and boats. They require some sort of permission to enter like a ticket, gesture or ritual. A #geotag, much in the same way, can operate as a tool for constructing heterotopic space

Heterotopic spaces, according to Foucault, act as other spaces alongside existing spaces. Foucault predicates heterotopias upon six principles that he lays out in his 1967 lecture: “Des Espace



Autres.”<sup>64</sup> Most fittingly, I argue that Israeli political Zionism mobilizes youth tourism as heterotopias of crisis. Here norms of behavior are suspended, particularly with regards to Taglit, they are sites reserved for individuals who are placed in relationship to a society framed largely in crisis itself. However, Foucault rationalizes adolescence more broadly as its own state of social crisis as well, where the sexual subjecthood of a citizenry and the formation of the political individual are conditioned in deeply self-conscious and institutional terms at this time. Another principle of heterotopic spaces: they have a precise and determined function and are reflective of the society in which they exist (he uses the example of the Western cemetery); they also have the power to juxtapose several real places and emplacements simultaneously (like the seeds and species of a garden.) It is the material networks and infrastructures that, I argue are composite of Zionist media heterotopias, physical spaces that help make ‘real,’ the seamless, online Zionist publics and virtual ‘utopias’ discussed in Chapter 2. The following sections will examine how the construction of Israeli cell towers operate as harbingers for expanded settler occupation.

\*

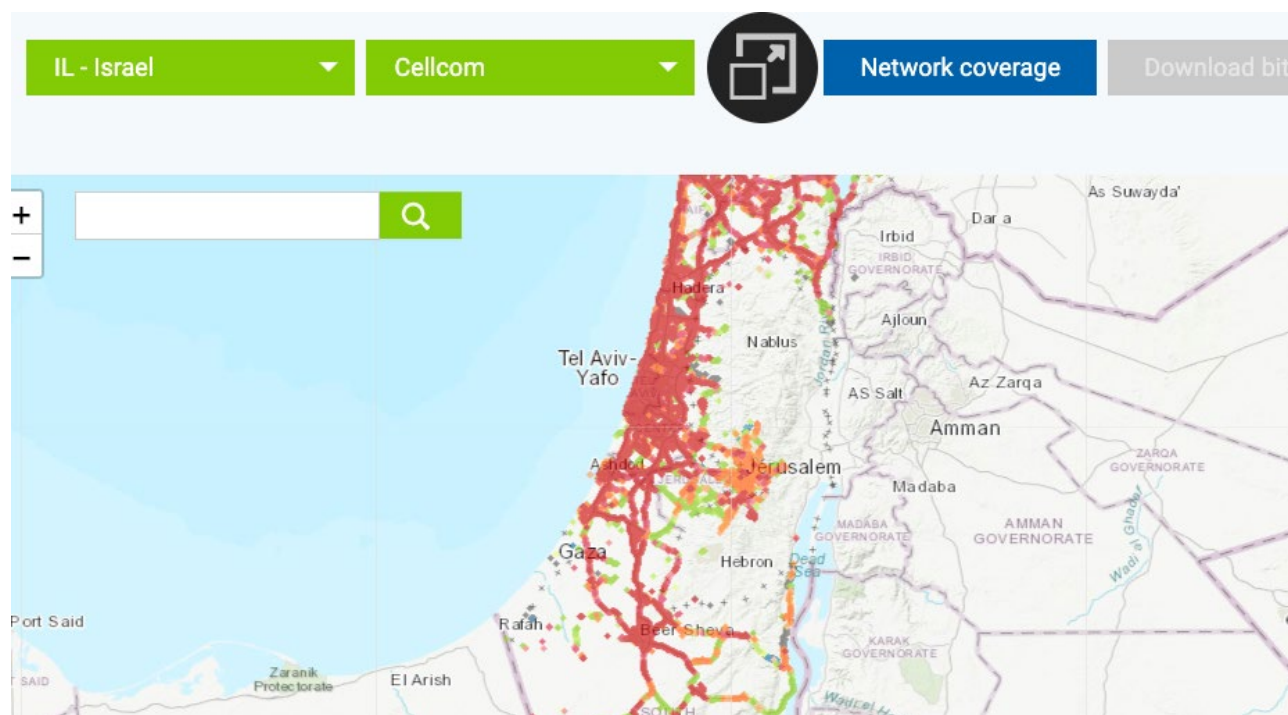
In September of 2013, Israeli communications minister Gilad Erdan, designated cell phone tower antennas as ‘crucial to Israeli security,’ and prevented their dismantling as demanded by Palestinian activist groups in the West Bank and Area C. In a public statement, Erdan would allude to what was inherently understood by a good deal of Israelis and Palestinians alike: that he would and could implore, in advance of any legal ruling, that the Defense Minister, Moshe Ya’alon, designate the antennas as being vital to security. Invoking a kind of Marshall Law logic to block their dismantling, Erdan made plain the commercial tools that the state wields to expand its military borders, settlements, and settler logic under the liberal aegis of ‘security.’ These 100 or so commercial cell phone towers scattered across the West Bank, unambiguously exist in the eyes of the United Nations resolutions 446, 452, 465, 471, and 476 as illegal. However, the petition for their removal was turned down by the Israeli Supreme Court. Operated by the three largest telecommunication carriers that serve Israelis—Pelephone (Israeli), Orange (French),<sup>65</sup> and Cellcom (Israeli)—these towers are used largely by Israeli settlers in Area C, breaking, as mentioned above, UN resolutions and international law. Following this 2013 litigational dispute, yet another illegal settlement outpost of Migron found itself embroiled in similar Israeli court debates, deliberating over cell tower demolition. After the removal of various illegal settlements in Migron, the cellphone towers mysteriously remained. Palestinian activists took the issue to court later only to learn that the various companies had been paid and contracted independently by the settlers (illegally) to erect the towers for 3600\$ USD. In turn, the French communication company Orange appealed to the Israeli government to grant permission for the maintenance of their illegal development, *citing financial investment as their core argument.*

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<sup>64</sup> Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec from *Architecture/ Mouvement/ Continuité*, October 1984.

<sup>65</sup> For more on this intersection between French cellular companies and illegal settlements see: “Exposed: Orange telecom involved in war crimes in occupied territories, according to French officials” in Washington Post. Eugene Kontorovich. June 2015; “Israeli Cellular Companies paid to squat on Palestinian land” April 2015. +972. Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man.

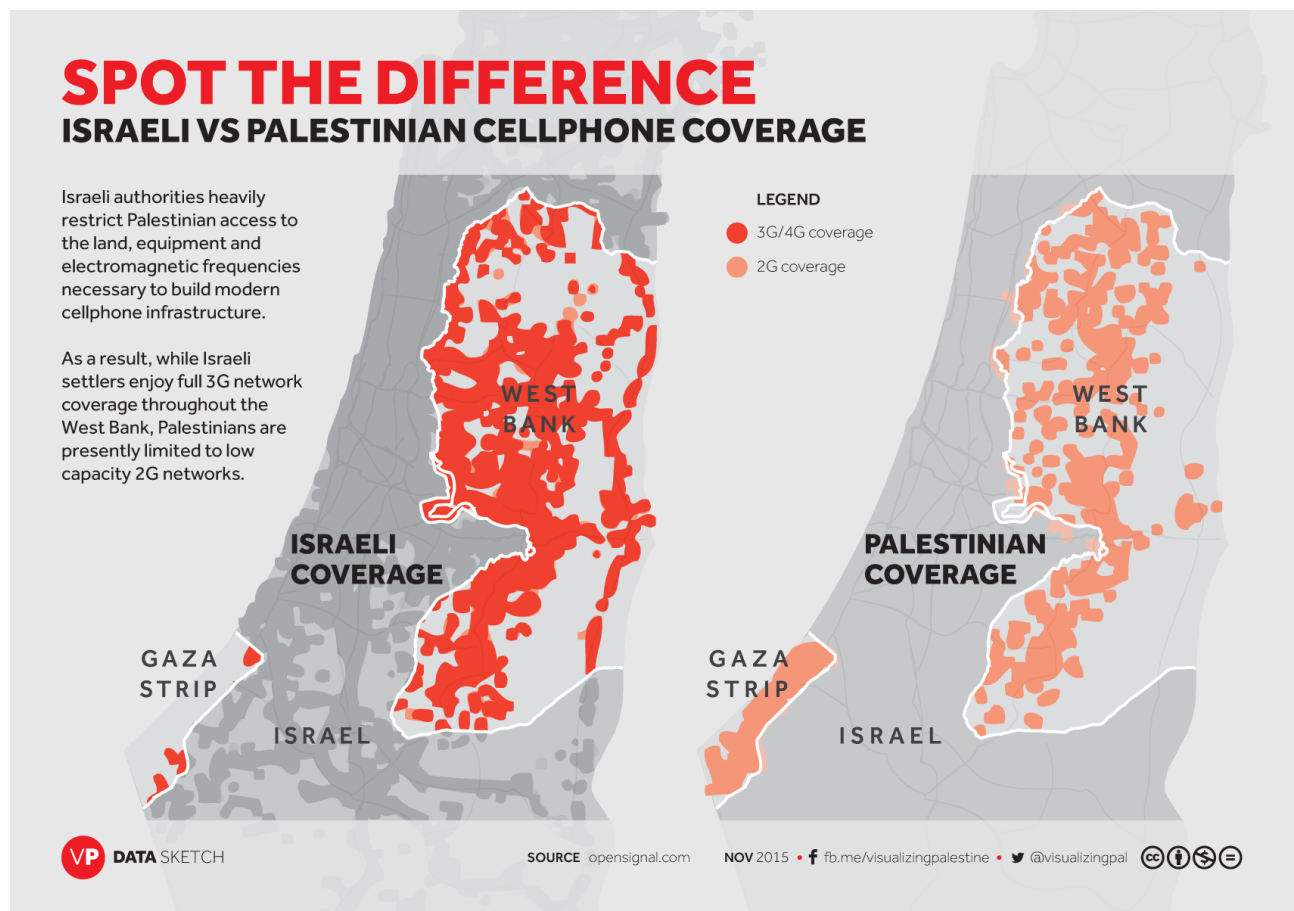
**Image 21.** Map of 4G network cell towers in Israel, Source: nPerf



Returning to Sayak Valencia, here again we encounter consumer and corporate needs as they dwarf and foment nationalist alliances and litigational zoning practices. We can situate the growing expanse of 4G networks, borders that span across the Israeli-Palestinian areas A, B, and C, as the material trace of online Zionism. Here we can observe the *material realities* of the supposedly disembodied digital image regimes that circulate Israeli generated content and Israeli tourist generated content globally. In 2011, the Israeli ministry of communications granted frequency spectrum to two Israeli companies, Golan Telecom and Hot Mobile, stalling any permits for Palestinian companies that desired and petitioned for access to do the same. When Palestinian firms requested access to frequency spectrum, Israeli officials rejected the request citing that no frequencies were left. In turn, Palestinians of the West Bank were forced to patronize and rent spectrum from Israeli companies. As of 2013, between 300,000 and 500,000 individuals of the West Bank had used Israeli SIM cards manufactured in Jerusalem, giving them access to 3G. As a result, Israeli 3G and 4G infrastructure continues to far surpass and occupying over those of Palestinian firms that now exist on a much smaller scale in and of the West Bank and Gaza. This refusal on the part of the Israeli ministry of communications to grant Palestinian firms' early access

to 3G and later 4G technology, would grow the already asymmetrical relationship between the two parties, their respective infrastructures, and economies. Israel's restrictions and conditioning of Palestinian online access, in past and present, has meant to service two particular goals geared towards Palestinian disenfranchisement: 1- obstructing the occupied communities from participating in the globalizing virtual world; and 2- heightening surveillance of their participation if they choose to do so.

**Image 22.** Map of 2G, 3G, 4G service in the West Bank, Source: 'Visualizing Palestine,' opensignal.com; Nov '15



Pictured above, we see another example of a physical world nested within the construction of virtual and Zionist 'utopias.' Here oversight for Palestinian-Israeli bandwidth morphs into an occupational politic. In the region of Israel-Palestine, one's access to the digital can also be understood as one's access to participate in the construction of social and national imaginaries, virtual spaces that "... [do] not remain simply as wishful thinking but become... a tangible force that affects one's sense of identity and sense of place" (Chung, 178). Nearly 1,890,000 Palestinians

currently live under Israeli occupation in various parts of Jerusalem and Areas A, B, and C. Adversely, North American Taglit tourism shuttles nearly 40,000 Jewish youth to the Israeli-Palestinian region each year. A tourist's access to online social networks is omnipresent in the bordered regions, allowing for the visitor to move virtually and physically with nearly total freedom. A luxury boasted by Birthright, tourists can now purchase 4G SIM Cards before departure to the Holy land, offered access to social media in city centers, illegal settlements, contested territory, military bases, and Westbank borderlands.

As Chung elaborates: "The ability of the visual medium to dissolve boundaries between fact and fiction, between dream and reality in our minds, is so potent that the demarcation between truth and fiction becomes less relevant in the eye of the beholder/ believer" (178-179). Another actor in choreographies of Zionist heterotopias mentioned above are Taglit tourists as the design of cell phone towers and their network mounds help habituate and distort the tourist's experience of Israel and the material forces that maintain its sovereign power. Used by both military, Israeli residents, and transient visitors alike, 3G and 4G infrastructure in this instance links each aforementioned actor to the telecommunication dimensions of occupational architecture. The topic of cell towers as ciphers for ongoing occupation has been broached in a variety of literature, most notably in the work of Israeli scholar Eyal Weizman's 2007 *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* and the provocative 2015 book *Digital Militarism: Israel's Occupation in the Social Media Age* by Rebecca L. Stein and Adi Kuntsman.<sup>66</sup> New fault lines for elastic geographies meet here as decentered image flows and digital infrastructure as they discretely expand Israeli force and soft power in Zionist imaginations. Here as well, the "spatial organization of the Occupied Territories is a reflection not only of an ordered process of planning and implementation, but, and increasingly so, of 'structured chaos,' in which the— often deliberate— selective absence of government intervention promotes an unregulated process of violent dispossession" (Weizman, 5). Staged discretely in this 'structured chaos,' one finds an intricate interplay between material infrastructure of Israel's occupation and more abstract, disembodied sites of its state power such as the body of the tourist and the online sexual voyeur.

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<sup>66</sup> The term 'digital militarism' is called upon in the work of Stein and Kuntsman to describe various shifts in Israeli militarism that have taken shape over the past two decades. This turn heralds a new government investment in the military's media use and the branding of militarism for online publics: "The period just described was one of growing digital literacy on both the national and global scale, years in which mobile technologies were spreading at rapid rates" (36). They continue: "a form of digital militarization predicated on social media informality, casual address, autobiographical idioms, and mobile self-portraits...The roots of such developments can be traced to the 2008-2009 military campaign on the Gaza Strip, when Israeli civilians began deploying autobiography and personal testimonies as wartime PR" (37). From: Adi Kuntsman and Rebecca L. Stein, *Digital Militarism*, 2015.

The image displays three promotional cards for 4G SIM card plans, arranged horizontally. Each card features a black and white photograph of a person using a mobile phone. The cards are separated by white lines that converge at a central point above the Standard Plan card. The Standard Plan card also includes a circular badge with the text 'MOST POPULAR'.

Plan Name	Key Features
<b>BASIC PLAN</b>	Unlimited Calling 5GB of 4G Data Unlimited Talk & Text in Israel Unlimited Talk to US &
<b>STANDARD PLAN</b>	High Speed Internet 10GB of 4G Data Unlimited Talk & Text in Israel Unlimited Talk to US &
<b>PREMIUM PLAN</b>	ALL-INCLUSIVE 50GB of 4G Data Unlimited Talk & Text in Israel Unlimited Talk To US &

**Image 23. 24.** Taken from Birthright promotional websites ‘Amazing Israel’ and ‘Israel On the House’ advertising 4G SIM cards to prospective North American tourists

The image shows a promotional graphic with a dark background. On the left, there is a stylized illustration of a hand holding a smartphone, with a thought bubble or cloud shape around it. To the right of the illustration, the headline reads 'DON'T KEEP TO YOUR #SELFIE'. Below the headline is a paragraph of text.

**DON'T KEEP TO YOUR #SELFIE**

You're about to spend a lot of time in the great outdoors, without much access to WiFi. 10 days away from home, doesn't have to mean 10 days out of touch. If you want to keep in contact with friends & family while you're on your Birthright Israel trip, we *strongly recommend* you rent a sim card *before* your departure. Upon arriving at the airport in Israel our trip staff will issue you with your sim card.

## Bodies, Heuristics, and Virtual Voyeurism

In Israel, in the occupied territory of Palestine, present traces of modern devastation share borders with recreational, Jewish, diasporic tourism. Against the backdrop of Israeli militarization, the promotional packages known as Birthright tours invite young people to ‘see’ the ‘real’ Jewish state. This ‘seeing’ is also a bric-a-brac collage of strategic, state commercialization that advertises the experience of ancient land anew. Tailored tour packages for young people's sensibilities, these trips offer a range of themes which include visits to contemporary clubs in cities like Tel Aviv; Zionist techno raves and music festivals; as well as Bedouin desert simulations that center a rustic sense of an a historic ‘old country.’ Ubiquitous, Israeli internet allows the Taglit tourists to post, gush, and digitally cruise the Holy Land, in real time throughout these tours, constituting an ambivalent pro-military public that obfuscates the material realities behind the borders set up in the West Bank. Israel has become a sexual palimpsest for a majority of diasporic women, a topic discussed in previous chapters of my project. Here devastation and conflict is overwritten with erotic exploration where sexual military ‘encounters’ have become a tropological experience for the diaspora. Through oral, digital, and collective storytelling, the many North American Jews overlay erotic fantasy against the brutal reality of ongoing Israeli warfare. Bodies, Weisman argues, often operate much like media:

. . .they are both storage and inscription devices that perform variations on the three basic operations that define media: they sense or *prehend* their environment, they hold this information in their formal mutations, and they can later *diffuse* and externalize effects latent in their form. (Weizman, 53)

Far from the sum of their essential parts, we can think of bodies as the sum of their heterotopias, their online and material choreographies and the experiential information they hold and transmit latent in virtual and physical experience.

## Military Smartphones

According to the Israeli Defense Ministry, as of 2014, the military unit began collaborations with the company Motorola Solutions, an American data and communications company, with the goal of developing a new smartphone that would support 4G as well as secure military networks. Enabling soldiers to send and circulate classified footage from active duty, the smart phones include an eight-megapixel camera and the new feature of encrypted messaging. However, while Defense Ministry literature branded the phone as an advancement in war-time information technologies: “making spoken code a thing of the past,” another bizarre and self-conscious benefit for the IDF has become, ‘selfies,’ as stated by the promotional YouTube video, screenshot below.<sup>67</sup>

A consequence of expanded 4G and smartphone ubiquity amongst Israelis, is the heightened presence of defense force activity on social networks and online dating platforms. Noteworthy, the material imprint of this growing reality is the expansion of illegal cell phone towers in Area C or

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<sup>67</sup>Quote pulled from promotional IDF video posted on the online video-sharing platform Youtube

the West Bank settlements as mentioned in previous sections.<sup>68</sup> Often safeguarded from demolition, these towers are later designated as crucial to security by the Israeli Communications ministry, creating legal pretense to obstruct their removal and legitimate settlement expansion in the contested territory.



**Image 25.** Screen Grab from promotional video published by the Israeli Defense Forces YouTube channel; 2017

The years following the 1993 signing of the first Oslo Accord, marked, *in theory*, the beginning of the end of the conflict over Palestine by invoking a moratorium on construction in the Palestinian inhabited West Bank. The intention of this agreement was to obstruct the expansion of settlements, ultimately halting Israelis and occupying forces who desired official permits to establish new encampments in the region. As Weizman describes in his opening anecdote of his 2007 text *Hollow Lands*:

In 1999 several settlers complained to the military of bad reception on their cellphones as they drove round a bend on the main highway, Road 60, leading from Jerusalem to the settlements in the northern West Bank. In response the cell phone provider Orange agreed to erect an antenna in the area. . . [The settlers picked a] hilltop that had been the site of previous— unsuccessful<sup>69</sup>— settlement attempts. . . The hilltop, its slopes cultivated with figs and olives, was owned by Palestinian farmers from the villages of Ein Yabrud and Burka who were shepherds there. According to the emergency powers invested in the Israeli military, however, the construction of a cell phone antenna could be considered a security issue and could therefore be undertaken on private lands without obtaining the owner's

<sup>68</sup>For more on this topic see: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-demand-removal-of-100-cellular-towers-in-west-bank/>

<sup>69</sup>For more on this story see Eyal Weizman *ibid.* p. 2

consent. Following a request by Orange, the Israel Electric Corporation connected the hilltop to the electricity grid and the national water provider connected the hilltop to the water system, purportedly to enable the construction work. (Weizman, 1)

Cellphone towers catalyze chain reactions in this way, ushering and helping rationalize the construction of new settler infrastructure. Israeli soldiers abound on the social commons of Instagram and Tinder. Servicemen surf, post, swipe, and produce social content in real time from the confines of their military bases or while serving on active duty as Taglit participants. The globalized, digital landscape of Zionist social media can be understood, in turn, as densely saturated with provocative user-generated images (photos posted by users themselves) geo-tagged and re-shared by fan accounts. Gone are the days of official, trademarked, and often centralized military recruitment images of the past. The current mode of military recruitment and visual veneration transmits pro-militarism in a complex of tangled, decentralized and entropic online currents that carry deeply material consequences. Noteworthy as well, images that center Israeli Defense selfies are women often clad in lingerie or bikinis; bodies strapped with military-grade assault rifles, painted with coquettish smiles.



**Image 26. 27.** Female Israeli soldiers posing in their underwear and combat gear stationed on base, 2013. Source: New York Post June 2013

Wartime photography intended for the public domain is not new to digital media, but the current *scale* of public war images, specifically those that depict ‘domestic time’ of soldiers not in combat and in various states of leisure, are incredibly singular to the present. By studying this trend, we might be able to better situate its growing copies within the U.S. and other, global military cultures. A fairly new development in the defense force has taken hold only in recent years. A sharp pivot away from and even contradicting previous cell phone use policy: all previous restrictions have been lifted for active duty servicemen. The consequences of the ‘digital’ turn include: the expansion



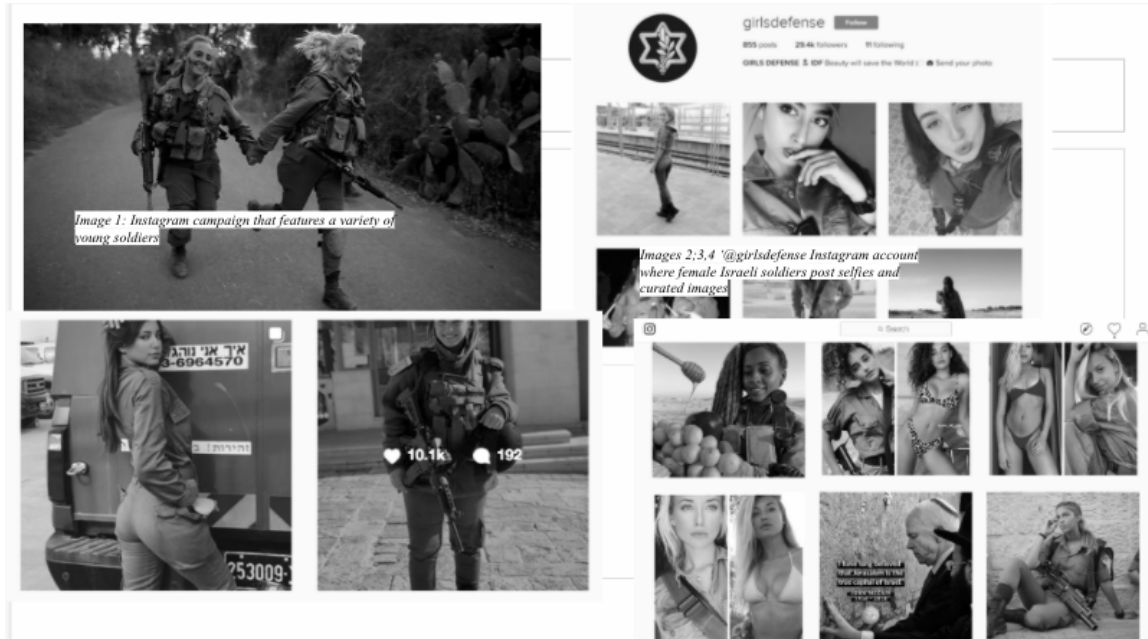
of online literacy, soldiers on TikTok, new on-base 4G infrastructure, and the rapid spreading of IDF ‘Gun Girls.’ However noteworthy, this digital shift has taken place amidst a maelstrom of public relations setbacks for the army pertaining to social media use. Take for instance, 2013, a year when Facebook photos of scantily clad female recruits with army issued weapons made global headlines after circulating personal photos on social media.<sup>70</sup> The reception of these photographs was resoundingly negative, as news outlets decried the imbrication of erotics and militarism as both flippant, obscene, and indecent; doing more harm than good to Israel’s public reputation. In one public announcement, the IDF Spokesperson Unit assured that a disciplinary edict had been ordered, denouncing the “unbecoming behavior” for the Israeli soldiers.

As a response to the scandal, the Defense ministry also moved to temporarily ban soldiers from using social media sites while on bases. This was, indeed, an effort to mitigate future public relations disrepute after an incident came to light in which a video of an Israeli soldier dancing salaciously around a blindfolded, captive Palestinian woman was posted onto YouTube.<sup>71</sup> It is therefore somewhat difficult to make sense of the disparity between rigid censoring of, what I call, erotic militarism of the past (pictured above) and its self-conscious expansion and permission in the present (pictured below.) We might think of the current digital militarism of Israel as a space *distinctly* demarcated by frenzied and entropic erotics. It is one with infinitely expansive actors, consumers, progenitors, and digital fan cultures—one organized by extremes of disembodied avatars, metadata tagging practices, and intimate bodily exchange. Harkening back to Weisman’s theory of ‘structured chaos’, my project argues that much can be learned by observing how the — often deliberate— selective absence of government intervention promotes an unregulated process of violent dispossession in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Weisman, 5). All of these aforementioned qualities make Israeli militarism distinctly unique and separate from other kinds of material and digital militarisms and other military heterotopias.

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<sup>70</sup> One picture revealed a soldier removing her fatigue uniform, exposing her underwear in an ad hoc strip tease, a tone that the IDF would reproach in subsequent public statements.

<sup>71</sup> See video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSsauzmZjbg> and <https://observers.france24.com/en/20101013-dancing-soldier-video-blindfolded-woman-victim-speaks-out-on-observers>



**Image 29.** Compilation of images sourced from @hot\_IDF\_girls and @girlsdefense, IDF fan accounts via the social media platform Instagram

Laura Wexler’s investigation of early war photography (re)defines images from war as borders or markers of the shifting ‘topologies of [nationalist] conflict.’<sup>72</sup> Thinking in this way, Israel’s turn and concomitant investment in digital militarism, reveals a military’s nuanced tooling of new technologies and their respective logics. Equally prescient is Israel’s turn to decentralized soft power of online fan cultures and its call on the diaspora in the shaping of Zionist heterotopias.

### Gun Girls and IDF Digital Fan Cultures

Type “idf” into an Instagram # image search or “Israeli Defense” into Google Image, and you will be greeted with a proliferation of what I call ‘hot girl’ selfies; a search process phenomenologically oriented so that just a few clicks can land a user in a metastatic chain of these images and nothing else. This final section asks, what exactly are the ethics or consequences of this kind of associative, pornographic image streams; geotagged commons littered with Pinterest and Instagram images of young female soldiers smiling, poised like glamour shots in lip-gloss and a little too-snug fitting fatigues with Tavor X95 or M16 Assault Rifles? What do these images signal about digital fan cultures and their role in dominating discourses surrounding war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of the present?

<sup>72</sup> For more see: Laura Wexler. *Tender Violence*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press. 2000.

My project argues that it is the potential for social hacking of search algorithms and flows of geotagging by governments that has become an inchoate and new frontier for globalized warfare both domestically and abroad. It is here that the state creates degrees of separation from itself and its agendas — as Weisman calls a kind of ‘*structured chaos*’ — forged through online heterotopias and fan cultures. It is these new and unlikely actors that play pivotal roles in destabilizing truth regimes, perception, and political discourse in service of the state's asymmetrical power over life and often over critique. We should all be paying more attention. During her 1978 presentation of *The Straight Mind* to the Modern Language Association, French philosopher Monique Wittig imploringly signaled that “Pornographic images, films, magazines, photos, publicity posters on walls of the cities constitute a discourse, and this discourse covers our world with its signs” (Wittig, 53). Nearly forty years following Wittig’s delivery, we encounter another pornographic discourse that covers the now digital ‘walls of our cities’ and the new metaphoric walls that constitute discourse. Here we find the pornographic discourse of online military aesthetics. As Wittig proffers:

The pornographic discourse is part of the strategies of violence which are exercised upon us: it humiliates, it degrades, it is a crime against our ‘humanity.’ As a harassing tactic it has another function, that of a warning. It orders us to stay in line and it keeps those who would tend to forget who they are in step; it calls upon fear. (Wittig, 53)

Wittig in this instance is speaking to the semiotics of 1970s pornographic images regimes, those exclusively generated by men as they once depicted and constructed women in the form of dominated, visual text-objects. In conversation with second wave feminist analysis, Wittig would appeal to a rallying cry, “Lesbians are not women,” as they do not exist, Wittig argued, in the pornographic discourse that produces ‘women’ as sexually dominated objects. Wittig argued that it is ‘the straight mind’ of society writ large which steers dominant cultural articulation, discourse, and therefore production of bodies. This is also an argument later echoed by Edelman mentioned earlier with his notion of *reproductive futurism*. While a great deal of scholarship have since worked upon Wittig’s argument: all porn does not inherently for instance invoke discourses of violence-- this question of the interplay between violence and the pornographic is central to these online image cultures.

In dialogue with Wittig, I offer a close counter reading of the thinker’s words. Instead of centering male violence and misogyny as a ‘way in’ to interpreting how pornographic discourse has the potential (but of course is not essentially bound ) to breed social violence, my work calls upon readers to instead situate the pornographic discourse of digital militarism as a marker of a new material and aesthetic era for ‘strategies of violence exercised upon us.’ Scholarship from Sophia Goodfriend<sup>73</sup> posits the new digital “hot girl” IDF culture as mirroring shape shifting trends in gun

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<sup>73</sup> While Goodfriend has begun to question the market scheme and central role of selling and monetizing dimensions of the IDF ‘lifestyle branding,’ there is still much to track and analyze in this regard.

girl influencer accounts in the United States and Israel. It is here that “the distance between the political image, the consumer image, and the personal profile image shrinks until one is indiscernible from the other” (Lemmy, 2012). “#Idf” markets itself like a brand with images of sexy, youthful, healthy bodies, metonymically mirroring one another as they overdetermine verisimilitude and journalistic reporting of Israeli warfare. Sometimes the same brand marketing of the #idf simultaneously markets real weapons as well, weapons that are produced by Israel and reap financial benefit for Israeli arms trade. The consequence of this marketing is, I argue, the normalization of war and occupation as a kind of lifestyle brand.

Through the ‘liveness’ of online exchange, the soldier body is (re)made as the object of consumption for the ambivalent or aroused digital and diasporic user as an online fetish object. A metonym for the occupation becomes a kind of second body, a digital and phantasmagoric after image sold and marketed to North American Jewry as well as other kinds of publics. Here militarism redirects focus on the sexual body of war as opposed to its inherent violence, leaning into the scopophilic and exhibitionist logics of online image capture and self-circulation more broadly, logics perhaps inherent to these new technologies. What these #idf image commons reveal is that governments can monetize the notion that even militarism can morph into a popular object from which one derives pleasure collecting and looking upon. This pre-supposed sexual referent, the ‘hot’ Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldier, helps construct the American Jewish tourist and their experience of a militarized place. Additionally, the Spokesperson Unit’s presence continues to grow in commercial search, with the ubiquity of idf# military influencer accounts, fan cultures, and fan pages.

The Israeli government has thus shifted the role of production of military images from creative teams and ministries to individual users and fans heralding a new era of nation building— one where militarism orbits and limns online, erotic social commons. In this way, across Pinterest, Instagram, Google, and Facebook, content is aggregated from users and fed back into social networks of the target audience. A kind of sophisticated, unmistakably contemporary brand-management for a large military institution: “. . . it shows a willingness to trust the audience, allowing them to define the brand, making IDFgram perhaps the first crowdsourced propaganda campaign for a state military . . . emulating fashion and lifestyle brands’ movement toward consumer-led campaigns” (Goodfriend, 2019). What is left under examined in this chapter is the aesthetic traditions of gun girls more broadly and how these idf# image cultures communicate, re-work, or speak from the gendering aspects of militarism.

These idf# ‘hot girl’ image commons reveal something about ‘the securitarian state’ and ‘state violence;’ how, in an Israeli context, the state has placed new investment in the aesthetics of hyper femininity, armaments, and eroticism. The #hotidfgirl when thought of in this way, collapses the (hetero)normative home front ideals with warfront ideals. The *what are we fighting for* image-objects and symbolic-regimes of modern war— the pin up girl on the barracks wall— have signaled

to a gendered horizon, a domestic space culturally circumscribed to and therefore protected by the nation's masculinist patriotism and imperialism. However, gone are the days of the military base strip tease, the 1966 playmate visits to Vietnam hospitals, or the pin-up dancing of Joey Heatherton, Anita Bryant, and Raquel Welch on U.S. troop stages. I argue that it is this historical use of sexualized femininity that the #hotidfgirl images must be read through and comparatively into this U.S. context. However, much different from the United States, Israel has consistently imposed conscription on both men and women throughout its military's history. This arguably complicates the ways scholars and activists might interpret gendered militarism and military branding aesthetics more broadly. However, I argue, as digital and globalized publics, the #hotidf image streams solicit fan cultures throughout the world, not simply those on the Israeli or its domestic home front.

The Israeli pin up girl in contemporary nationalist and pro-war media has, in other words, found herself tasked with symbolically representing both the warfront and the home front. She signals a slippage between the state's symbolic production of '*what are we fighting for,*' the often gendered, domestic, and sometimes sexualized woman, and those who are posed doing the fighting. We might understand Israeli militarism as a harbinger and incubator for a new kind of gender-bending military state and propaganda. This slippage between home front ideals and war front ideals flickers on the surface of the #ICEbae hashtag trend on twitter, or the 'kinky' cop compilation videos on TikTok where real American police officers sexualize their vocation and police violence.<sup>7475</sup> This slippage is a topic only breached in the conclusion of my research, however much work is left to be done in evaluating the online trends that brand and coyly sexualize state violence and its foot soldiers. As explored in this chapter, a shift in Israel's approach to its branding of militarism has taken place where soldiers sexually posing for online followers is no longer met with state reprobation. Striking, forms of softcore soldier exhibitionism is now tacitly permitted and infrastructurally facilitated by Israel's recent shift in undoing previous restrictions placed on soldiers and their social media use. In a noteworthy parallel, the United States has as recently as August of this year, reprimanded servicemen and police officers who posed online images in uniform with suggestive undertones. I pose this parallel as a provocation that perhaps the #hotidfgirl will become a more ubiquitous military aesthetic, branding tool, and rhetorical device for future globalized securitarian and fascist efforts in other sites of study.

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<sup>74</sup> For more on Ice bae see: <https://nypost.com/2019/07/15/meet-ice-bae-latina-border-patrol-officer-taking-social-media-by-storm/>

<sup>75</sup> For more on 'sexy cop' TikToks see: <https://nypost.com/2020/08/01/nypd-cops-sexy-tiktok-video-lands-her-in-hot-water/>

## Conclusion

Political Zionism premised racial and social regeneration of Ashkenazim through colonization of the internalized Jewish ‘Other’ of Europe, a kind of colonizing of the self-actualized through the establishment of social hierarchy in Israeli settlement. Notions of a ‘civilizing mission’ over the ‘Eastern’ ‘Other’ is a trope that litters early Zionist speech and text. It is also a discourse that persists in Israeli politics’ present. The Zionist ‘body Master Narrative’ must therefore be understood, as media scholar Ella Shohat offers, unmistakably in terms of race and ethnicity, invested in constructing a social world predicated on the ‘civilizing mission’ helmed by the Ashkenazim of Europe. By stigmatizing Israel’s Palestinian and Arab populations as agents of degeneration, Zionism created a kind of internal and essentially biologized enemy at the onset of early settlement.

As this project has helped historicize, Zionist heterotopias (situational worlds nested in the foreclosure or ritualized construction of other worlds) have invested in the colonial project of racialization. My work has also focused on reproductive and digital heterotopias inherent in political Zionism past and present. As with previous histories of colonial racialization, the making of the settler ‘new Jew,’ signaled the construction of an ideal Jewish body and a Zionist, masculinist West. The ongoing expansion of occupational violence upon those deemed ‘undesirable’ continues to predicate itself upon the controlled reproduction, situational sexualization, and idealization of particular kinds of bodies in Zionist worldmaking. Just as nationalist film once mobilized the cipher of a perfectible Jewish body, a *bildung* that could ‘make the desert bloom,’ new globalized media networks like Instagram, Pinterest, and even Tinder have become encoded, techno-living extensions of political Zionist world-making. Re-framing Taglit-Birthright as not simply diaspora tourism that works towards *shidduchim* (Jewish matchmaking) but instead as a complex and crucial node in the construction and normalization of a racialized Jewish military state, has been central to my research presented here.

As Chapter 1 showed, scholars can understand the dialectic creation of a Zionist ‘us’ and a Palestinian ‘them’ first through the Zionist gesture of denial of regional, Semitic plurality and its creation of the *sabra* or Western folk Israeli identity in its state media. Working upon this notion, Chapter 2 demonstrated how the denial of the reality of Palestinian disenfranchisement makes itself visually, symbolically, and structurally legible in ‘the particular way of knowing the world that produces the characters, objects, and events that inhabit their fictional space’ (Gordon, xi). The ethos of this project, in turn, has worked to respond to the following question: what themes repeat, self-preserve, and strategically create and normalize a new life world over the occupation of another? I argue in dialogue with the seminal work of Ella Shohat, that it is impossible to speak about Israeli cinema and media canons without speaking about Palestinians and their negation— a negation that is inherent to the construction of the Zionist visual imagination. It is through this present that we might question the reality and erotics of self-imaging/self-making as a kind of extension of a military state and its occupation.

Chapter 3 closed by exploring how Israel's image cultures of the present intimately echo Zionist image making of the past in its aims to sexualize Ashkenazi settlerism. The 'new' virtual Jew often operates as a symbol tooled to rehabilitate the effeminized Jew of Europe who was once mired in Orientalist stereotypes. Diasporic fantasy of military concubinage acts as another kind of theatre for the masculinized, settler colonial state to reproduce its own utopian image for itself.

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Finally, this project has also aimed to draw parallels between Taglit-Birthright and early Orientalist sociology and eugenics. Scholars who work on colonial sexualities, thinkers such as Ann Stoler and Phillipa Levine, most famously ideate the history of forced concubinage and the zoning or public display of sexual bodies within the early and late colonies, as central to early empires' formation of racial hierarchies. As mapped in earlier chapters of my work, the ways in which the sexual body of the settler and the soldier are placed in relation to the public sphere, have historically aimed to stabilize the power relations within that given settler society. In Israel, one encounters the ubiquity of an erotic military commons across a variety of digital interfaces. Returning to the site of the Taglit tour, geolocating dating applications emplace the tourist in an Israeli dating pool of military men in 4G networks and martial fatigues. These new digital publics demarcate yet another erotic, Zionist heterotopia, one that is both material and digital. It is here that my future research circles, a space that seems to be present and prolific in public relations of the Israeli state making.

I have argued that we might situate the ardent Zionist investment in bio-data collection, as mapped in earlier sections, with Brandeis University's relationship to Israel Experience Tourism. Both parallel and echo eugenic histories within colonialist empire making. As Philippa Levine aptly offers in her study of the colonial archive of British India: "By the dawn of the twentieth century, British government policy was deeply reliant on, and confident about, its use of what quickly became known as 'blue book sociology.'" She continues, "Figures detailing mortality and marriage, judgements of economic health, statistics...all came to play a more and more central role in determining and shaping government policy" (Levine, 5). Calling on scholars in Jewish Studies, my work sits as an attempt with other works to draw attention to how this site of study— Taglit-Birthright and Zionist media heterotopias— should be placed within history of political Zionism mapped in this work.

The roots of political Zionism as a sexual project looms in the space of the Birthright tour; creating the settler body, re-making the Ashkenazi body as liberal touring, settler subject. The normalizing of certain racial and heterosexual epistemologies of what makes a Jewish race and a Jewish future 'healthy,' 'ideal,' and more transportable across physical boundaries over others is also central to these tours. All of the aforementioned details inform the terms of Jewish tourists and their sexual cruising in the Holy Land.

Moreover, the sexual folklore that surrounds Israeli tourism and the concomitant trope of Birthright as a form of erotic tourism for young Jewish women is a phenomenon this project has aimed to bring to a wider range of readers' attentions. Copulating with a soldier as the main experiential 'trope' of proto-nationalist tours seats sexual fantasy in a bio-political framework that has demanded closer reflection through this project and future work. In this way, political and national subjectivation are best understood as a physical practice as much as a disembodied, mere imaginative process; experiencing notions of a 'homeland' and a 'nation' as an intensely sensual politic and experience — an interplay of bodily and media laden heterotopias.



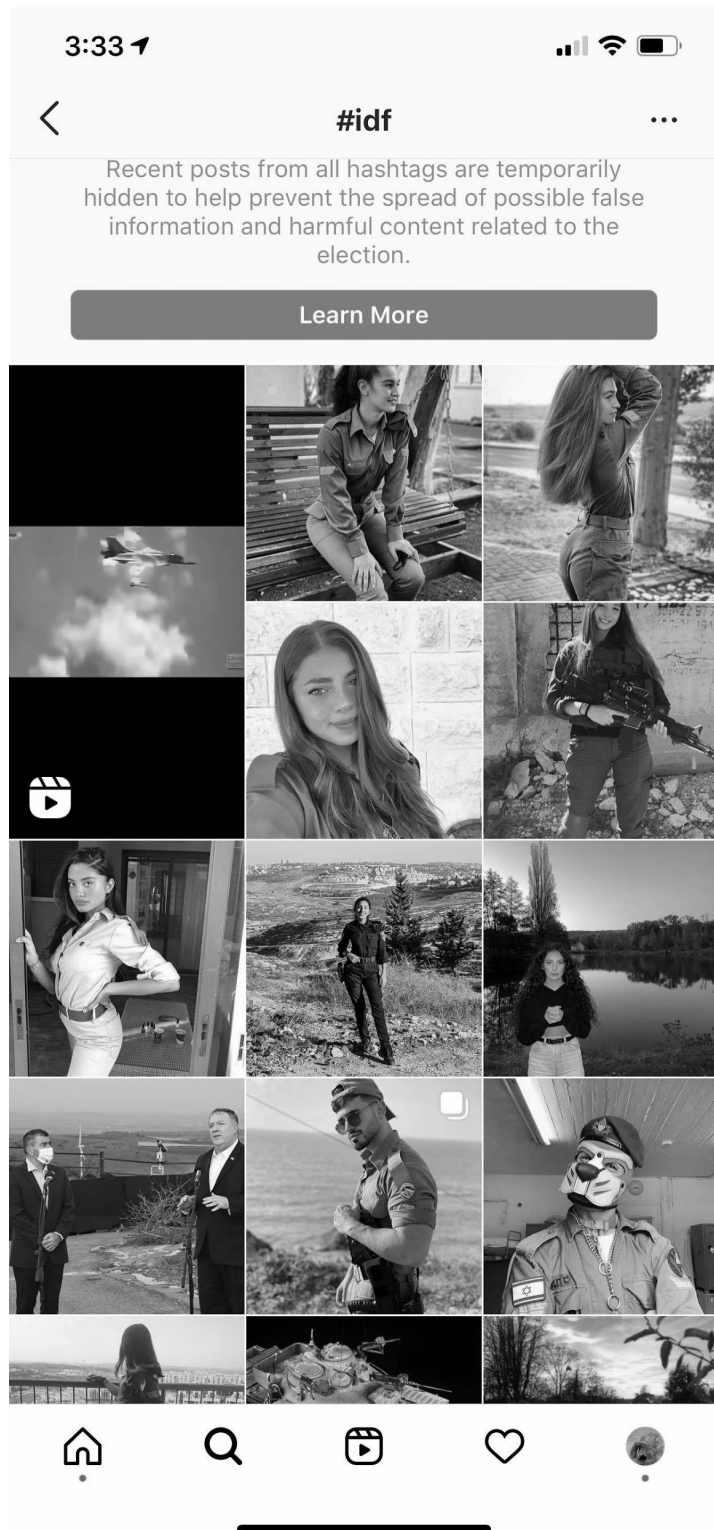


**Image 30.** Austrian gymnastics group, Hakoah Vienna; a Jewish sports club in Vienna, Austria, 1909 Source: Jewish Museum of Vienna



**Image: 31.** Herbert Sonnenfeld: Javelin thrower at the Grunewald athletic grounds, Berlin, ca. 1938 © Jewish Museum Berlin, purchased with funds provided by Stiftung DKL B

**Image 32.** Screenshot sourced from personal iPhone; Search results for #idf geotag on Instagram social media platform Sourced: November 2020



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