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Two Stories in One

Noni is an unusual Israeli fourth-grader. Growing up on a settlement during the second Intifada in a town called Gilo (an occupied neighborhood of East Jerusalem), he lives in a neighborhood divided by a wall from the adjacent Palestinian town, Beit Jala. Noni's brother Zahi and his friends have made a game of climbing on top of the dividing wall to taunt and yell at Palestinian snipers. In *A Different Kind of War*, the short film by Nadav Gal (2004) in which these events take place, these Jewish Israeli boys have learned to imagine survival by way of group aggression and resistance to vulnerability.

A different kind of barrier, however, separates Noni from his brother and his friends. To his brother's consternation, Noni is not so tough. Furthermore, Noni might really be a girl whose desires are encouraged by his mother, who helps him apply makeup. So when he is chosen for the lead role of King David in the end-of-the-year school play, which is to be attended by the Israeli prime minister, Noni secretly longs to be the princess. When Zahi finally manages to badger his little brother into playing the boys' war game, Noni climbs on top of the wall but does not follow the script and yell "Death to the Arabs!" at the snipers. Rather, in a pretty princess dress, Noni dances tenderly.

David, who famously killed the mighty Goliath, became the King of Israel. Responsible for uniting the tribes of Israel as one people, he was considered most righteous of all kings and a champion. Though slight in stature, David was a warrior and a military strategist whose triumphs in securing the Israelites a kingdom came by sword and blood. But young David was not only small; like Noni, he was also queer. The Bible is

ambiguous about the nature of his close, some say erotic, relationship to Jonathan, who was also a hero and a rival for the crown. The David and Goliath myth is interesting because it arguably represents Israel's ethos: from a vulnerable, and even precariously queer predisposition, the Jewish people defeat and displace their enemies, occupy and settle on the land, securing a strong Jewish state.

But *A Different Kind of War* revises this ethos in Noni as King David. Despite Noni and David's shared social queerness, youth, and size, they have little else in common. Noni does not identify with David and struggles to perform him. David, the youngest and beloved son of Jesse, surprises both his father and his king. Crossing the valley that separates the Israelites from the Philistines, David encounters Goliath, leader of the Philistines. Unable to resist Goliath's goading, he returns to fight Goliath and kills him. In the end, he saves his people from defeat and humiliation. Noni, on the other hand, cannot connect with his father, who seems to have an important post with the Israeli military. His father appears to get on better with his other son, Zahi, with whom he plans to go on a road trip adventure in a jeep. Noni, in contrast, is repelled by the games of boys and men. During rehearsals at school, he fails to kill Goliath with gusto and eventually loses the role. But Noni not only rejects masculine bonding,¹ he also rejects the group. In Noni, the story of David and Goliath is undermined by a queerness that is both informed by and in excess of his queer gender identity. For me, Noni's queerness is both real and symbolic. It is both what we understand to be socially anti-normative, but also what makes possible desires of a different kind, namely, the desires whose aims are dangerous at a more primal level because they threaten our dependencies and vulnerabilities to one another. In this revision of the biblical myth, might Gal be suggesting (or encouraging) an ambivalence in Israel toward its own history, group identity, and religious tradition? Are Israel's hard defensive strategies against the trauma of the Jewish Holocaust (and before that statelessness and anti-Semitism) being challenged by its own people's queer affects?

As I argued in my introduction, group identities, especially those that arise from traumatic histories, are invested in stories that resist queer affects and threaten the social bond. Noni's response invites us to think about the emotional perils of group love: the violence it demands and the threat of loss of love and security if we cannot accede to it. When a group has undergone a trauma as devastating as genocide, safety has been profoundly threatened. Under these circumstances, we are more likely to

turn to community because it promises safety in the bonds that tie people together. These bonds, however, are conditional and require submission to authority.

Noni is torn, but ultimately his dream to be a girl compels him more than the desire for safety. As an outsider to the nation, Noni is impervious to its demands. For Noni, and many others, the nation is a source of harm, not security. Indeed, his war might be with the nation, which hails its citizens to aggressively separate and guard its walls against its enemies. Arguably, the terms of belonging to this community (and many other politically injured groups) is a paranoid belief in an enemy, and therefore a coterminous belief in being the victim.

A Different Kind of War stages the problems of acting out from “injured states,” as Wendy Brown (1995) puts it. Brown warns of the political implications of woundedness becoming the basis of political identities and responses: being invested in the economy of perpetrator and victim fosters a hunger not for emancipation, but rather for empowerment from recrimination. What is at stake for me in such responses is that the originary event of suffering is unaddressed, remains frozen in time, and requires a culprit to sustain its injured state. In Israel, Jacqueline Rose argues, a fortified collective victim identity only serves to license Israel’s violence against Palestinians (2007, 54). Unable to grieve its historic injuries, Israel exerts its right to power to defend itself from harm. While the harm is not necessarily imaginary—though Palestine is hardly a Goliath in the face of the Israeli state—its psychic investment in power and repressing Palestinians has ironically not helped protect Jewish people from further harm. Nonetheless, the narratives of empowered victimization and separation walls persist as Israel’s better story for the trauma of the Jewish Holocaust.

In Noni, however, we encounter another story. He is not interested in fighting back to defend himself. When he stands up to his brother, he is also symbolically turning against the nation’s logic of “one people.” In refusing the nation’s masculinist revenge as a response to historic traumas and present-day war and loss, Noni stands alone. Conscious of his difference and vulnerability to his brother and his peers, he risks expulsion and bravely reaches out to their enemy. Noni’s feminine vulnerability is flaunted for the world to see, as he stands on top of the wall and dances. His actions gesture toward another ethos and another kind of response to conflict: one that not only refuses the rules of group belonging but in dancing before the other, he also communicates an alternate relationality. Noni’s social queerness sets him apart from his peers and inadvertently

makes it possible for him to change the terms of connection: from allegiance to blood ties and its policed borders, to ties made from “antisocial” or unsanctioned bonds and their queer affects.

In refusing to treat the other as an enemy, Noni becomes an enemy of his nation. His war is most certainly of a different kind, and he is thus a different kind of hero. In symbolically reaching out to the Palestinians, Noni’s queer affects contaminate the nation with the specter of a different kind of love. Such queer affective ties, I would argue, can lend themselves to unwieldy responses. Sometimes they express gender queer desires such as Noni’s, and sometimes they are more abstract. Because queer affects have inarticulable desires, one can find oneself, as Noni does, standing on top of a wall and facing your enemy, disarmed, speechless, and dancing. For me, *A Different Kind of War* stages the complex, tumultuous psychic conflicts embedded in politics and offers hope for a future that refuses to be legislated by the stories from the past. King David’s legacy is celebrated in Israel because he fought the biggest and the toughest man and fortified the Israelites. But *A Different Kind of War* teaches us that that the story can change and should change. Noni as King David rewrites how we might be inspired by someone who was not like the rest and found a way of being that goes beyond to the limits of the nation and group belonging.

It would seem that Sigmund Freud had a similar idea when he wrote *Moses and Monotheism*. At a time when his belonging to a racial group rendered his life increasingly under threat with the rise of Nazism, and Jewish nation- building was fortifying exponentially, Freud, like Noni, refused to participate. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud proposes that the Jewish tradition, though genealogically heterogeneous, stands on forgetting its plural origins. Freud’s response to racial hatred was therefore not to retrench identity and strengthen group belonging in the face of hostility; instead, he chose to subject racial hatred to psychoanalytic scrutiny. Indeed, he challenges the very grounds of group belonging and the purity of religious tradition and religious identity. For Freud, the appeal of collective identity and religious tradition is that it offers an illusory defense against trauma and loss. For this reason, the fixities of collective identity are not easily surmountable—especially when the suffering spans generations, as is the case with Jews.

This chapter reads *Moses and Monotheism* to think through the way histories of belonging are made from responses to trauma that, more often than not, cancel out otherness and resist change in the interest of a coherent and secure collective history and identity. To do this, Israel must forget

its Jewish history, producing, as Gil Hochberg writes, “two thousand years as a mere ‘break’ or ‘interruption’ of an otherwise continual Jewish national consciousness” (2007, 9). Since hybridity, or what Edward Said calls the “cosmopolitan” nature of identity, is a central concern of postcolonial studies, I bring *Moses and Monotheism* into conversation with his postcolonial/postmodern formulation of identity. Hybridity is not only a central theme in postcolonial studies, it has also been the strategy of the political left to argue against nationalism and sectarian violence (Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1994; Hall 1994). Indeed, in *Freud and the Non-European*, Edward Said, draws on hybridity theory to challenge Israel’s attachment to a fixed Jewish identity. He reads Freud to make an argument for the fact of Jewish racial hybridity; however, Said forecloses Freud’s important insights into the affective power of identity and group bonding, as a consequence of trauma. I share the view that the politics of belonging can lead to exclusion and sectarian violence, and agree that racial/religious identity is inherently cosmopolitan or, as Homi Bhabha (1994) has argued, ambivalent. That said, I suggest that political responses that do not account for the emotional force of identity in political conflict are naively optimistic. Postcolonial and postmodern philosophies have identified the cosmopolitan nature of identity, but have not managed to work out why group identifications (nationalist, religious, etc.) continue to thrive. Paying attention to the limits of cosmopolitan solutions to political conflicts, Anthony Kwame Appiah defends a “partial cosmopolitanism” (2006, xvii) and writes that neither “the nationalist who abandons all foreigners nor the hard-core cosmopolitan who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality” are tenable in the complex world in which we live. For Appiah, cosmopolitanism cannot be total, because, if it were, it would imply a universal set of principles and values good for all citizens of the globe. Such a cosmopolitan imperative, he argues, presumes that we have already achieved a universal truth, when in reality the universal is hard to find (Appiah 2006, 144). For this reason a cosmopolitan ethic must be a commitment to pluralism. More than that, he suggests that our relationship to difference must not merely encompass acts of generosity and kindness but also embrace “intelligence and curiosity as well as engagement” (Appiah 2006, 168).

Appiah is among a wave of postcolonial scholars offering us conceptual tools for how to have conversations across borders. His premise is that we are not as divided as we think, notwithstanding the presence of the neo-fundamentalist and universalist movements of Islam and

Christianity, which he calls counter-cosmopolitans. Though we are separated by cultural mind-sets and customs, and hence live in a world of strangers, Appiah argues that we are connected by fundamental commonalities that allow for conversation. Also interested in commonality, Paul Gilroy in *Postcolonial Melancholia* suggests a political humanism, grounded in our “elemental vulnerability” (2005, 4). Hence, for Gilroy, commonality is not what we have left when we strip human experience from custom and tradition, but is rather the very dynamic of human relationality. For Gilroy, encounters across difference are always occurring and, therefore, generating new identities. In other words, group identities are not made by keeping separate from cross-cultural encounters but rather from the histories of “strangers” chafing against each other, whether they be interactions of colonizer and colonized, identity groups in multicultural contexts, or Jews and Arabs in Israel and Palestine. Indeed, for Gilroy, as in Freud’s reading of Judaism, identities are always already cosmopolitan.

In Gal’s film, the Jewish Israeli boys and the Palestinian snipers, though estranged and separated by a wall, nonetheless encounter each other daily. From these encounters collective identities are narrativized such that the story of each group becomes implied in the other. Sometimes these encounters have the effect of changing the terms of belonging by creating new stories—as is the case with Noni who refuses to accede to group violence, thus setting new conditions for a possible conversation with the other. Gilroy’s cosmopolitan optimism colors such moments; what it does not consider, unfortunately, are situations in which these encounters are neither benign nor produce new stories. As we know, in the context of Israel and Palestine, the daily presence of the other has the effect of fortifying group belonging, as is symbolically elaborated by the group of boys in *A Different Kind of War* who seem to “bond on hate” (Rose 2003). Cosmopolitan contexts produce “ethnic absolutism” (Gilroy 1993) just as powerfully as they do hybrid cosmopolitan identities. This is so despite identity’s fundamental cosmopolitan nature. Indeed, this is what Freud suggests in *Moses and Monotheism*, when he argues that group identities are implicated in otherness, albeit unconsciously. As a parable for the psychic challenge of living with difference after having survived group injury or trauma, *Moses and Monotheism* can shed some important light on how injured identities are a perilous site in present-day political conflicts. And because it provides us with vital emotional insight into the politics of groups, we may begin to imagine a better story than the existing one. A better story requires more than understanding our fundamentally

cosmopolitan subjectivities; it demands mourning the injuries that have hurt us. When we mourn injury, we are more likely to relax the group bonds and reach out to toward the other. Only under such conditions might we be open to allowing the group to be “contaminated” by ties to those we call our strangers or our enemies. Though cosmopolitanism is a fundamental feature of human subjectivity, it is an emotional feat to embrace it. What this means for social change is that it is not easily achievable and that politics must consider affective life.

Troubled Histories of Belonging

In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud troubles the redemptive stance of collective group history by exhuming the deep memory² of Jewish history. Obfuscating the line between fact and fiction, Freud offers an alternate rendition of Jewish history. His version does not repudiate the historical “record” of how Moses led the Jewish people out of Egypt, but reads it through psychoanalysis and through his theory of trauma. In his account, Freud unravels the traumatic kernel embedded in Judaism and suggests that the history of the Jewish people is a phantasmatic elaboration of lost memory turned into tradition. As Walter Benjamin cautions, history is not an account of “the way it really was” (quoting Leopold von Ranke, Benjamin 1968, 255).

While it might seem that historical narrative is an unreliable representation of the past, all narratives, from a psychoanalytical perspective, are a resource for insight. From his patients’ stories and dreams, Freud gleans the remains of their past. He understands their narratives as elaborate projections and complex mechanisms of defense produced from early childhood traumas. Similarly, though there is no easy way to understand this symmetry, Freud sees the story of Moses as encoding the lost time of an ancient past. The legend relays the following “facts”: Moses, of Hebrew origin, liberated his people from oppression and delivered them out of Egypt, offering the hope of eventually reaching the Promised Land. The strength of this promise was built on the representation of the Jewish people being chosen by God and that the suffering that they had endured, and were to endure, would not be in vain but would be rewarded by God’s love with a promised land.

But Freud’s genealogy uncovers that there was much “distortion” of historical facts to produce Jewish history and identity—as is always the

case with any nation's story of itself. The primary distortion is that the Moses we know from the Bible is a fusion of two historical figures from two different kingdoms. The first Moses led the Jewish people through the Exodus out of Egypt and liberated them from the hands of their colonizers. This Moses, however, was not Hebrew; he was an Egyptian of noble birth who had lived his whole life among the Jews. Moses forced upon them an Egyptian religion: he not only gave them laws and principles to live by, he introduced them to monotheism and reintroduced the practice of circumcision. In the end, however, Moses was murdered by the very people he had saved, and his religion abandoned by a rebellious people. Even so, the Jewish people did not forget the significance of liberation from Egypt. The event of the murder was repressed from memory, but not obliterated, and returned belatedly disguised in a new version of Moses. Freud argues that the memory fragments of the Egyptian Moses became entwined many generations later with the memory fragments of the second historical Moses. This Moses was from Qades, of the Palestine region, and was a lowly shepherd to whom Jahveh revealed himself. He was not a hero, but a man of God, a performer of miracles, and a healer. Also, he was neither a liberator, nor the founder of Jewish monotheism and circumcision; but he was Hebrew and had grandeur because he was a volcano-god, who parted waters and saved his people from the retaliation of their persecutors. The fusion of the Egyptian and Hebrew figures into one Moses both retained and concealed the traumatic memory of the murder.

Freud's rendition suggests that actual historical events were discarded from known memory. Jewish history, in other words, obscures the truth of its traumatic origins while its narrative nonetheless expresses the enigmatic story of the survival of a people. What stories embody then is the discarded "other" of language, the queer memory that language refuses. *Moses and Monotheism* is Freud's rewriting of Jewish history. For Freud, the story of Judaism is fictional not because there was not a historical Moses and not because the Jewish people did not need to be liberated from Egypt, but because Moses became mythologized through time. The story of Judaism exemplifies the genealogy of a fact and its (con)fusion with myth and legend. Jewishness, like all identity constructions, is the outcome of repudiated knowledge. What becomes literalized as historical fact and reified as tradition is the effect of lost memory and memory fragments reorganized in the writing of time.

If we read Freud's text through postmodern structuralist concerns, as Said has done, it arguably foreshadows postcolonial theories that write

against nationalist/essentialist representations of identity, which assume identities to be racially pure. Very much taken with the political implications of *Moses and Monotheism*, Said's *Freud and the Non-European* reads Freud's genealogy through the historical/political context in which it was written. Said is struck by how Freud, European-educated with a Eurocentric cultural view, would at that time have been compelled to write about "the other," as we see it in our postmodern/postcolonial context. For Said, this is noteworthy, signaling a curious preoccupation in Freud during the last months of his life. Freud the scientist and cartographer of individual and collective histories becomes Freud the historical Jewish man: a man who, with the advent of National Socialism, was displaced from the political instability of Vienna in the 1930s, and who had to work through his relationship to his ancestral faith by way of the figure of its founder. In suggesting that Moses had non-European, Egyptian origins, Freud, under the conditions of political crisis in which he lived, makes a plea for considering identity's "cosmopolitan" origins. Said furthermore argues that *Moses and Monotheism* challenged the stability of Jewish identity at a moment in time when fortifying it would have likely offered emotional consolation. In other words, Freud's response to the onslaught of Jewish dehumanization was to foreground the essentialist fictions of identity and belonging.

As an historical response to anti-Semitism, *Moses and Monotheism*, Said attests, is an *event* that perhaps further traumatized Jewish people for its fundamental claim that the "original" Moses was Egyptian. Unable to bear this knowledge, the official Israel "represses" the cosmopolitan origins of Jewish identity:

Quite differently from the spirit of Freud's deliberately provocative reminders that Judaism's founder was a non-Jew, and that Judaism begins in the realm of Egyptian, non-Jewish monotheism, Israeli legislation countervenes, represses, and even cancels Freud's carefully maintained opening out of Jewish identity towards its non-Jewish background. The complex layers of the past, so to speak, have been eliminated by official Israel. (2003, 44)

Freud's claims agree with Said's deconstructive project because he is, as Said describes him, a "re-mapper of accepted or settled geographies and genealogies," and thus demonstrates how "history offers itself up by recollection" (2003, 27). But while Said's analysis of Israel's relationship to

Moses and Monotheism compellingly exemplifies Said's commitment to challenge the constructions of identity (as he did in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*), Jacqueline Rose's response to Said is equally compelling. Rose argues that Said's argument is optimistic insofar as it does not pay attention to the psychic power of identity, especially when it concerns Freud's own identity investments. Freud's relationship to his Jewishness is, as Rose quoting Said says, "hopelessly unresolved" (2003, 69). She argues that Said does not fully consider the implications of Freud's ambivalence toward his Jewish ancestry in relation to what he undertakes in *Moses and Monotheism*. For *Moses and Monotheism* is not just a story that exposes the fictions of racial purity, it also speaks to the psychic impossibility of breaking the social tie, a tie to which, Rose argues, Freud himself was not immune. Indeed, Rose asks us to read Freud's text as "a story of political assassination" (2003, 75) or a story that leaves us somber about our capacity to have an ethical relationship to the other, especially when what actually ties people together, she argues, is collective hate. Freud made this very point in *Moses and Monotheism*, when he suggested that the origins of Judaism repeat the structure of human history, which he defended in *Totem and Taboo*. Here he argued that not only love but murder and hatred is constitutive of the communal and religious link. As Rose points out,

you can reject the flawed argument of both these texts while accepting the underlying thesis that there is no sociality without violence, that people are most powerfully and effectively united by what they agree to hate. What binds the people to each other and to their God is that they killed him. (2003, 75)

In *The Last Resistance* (published four years after Rose's essay in response to Said's *Freud and the Non-European* came out), Rose extensively elaborates how group psychology is implicated in the Zionist imaginary, which is of course not unique to Zionism. To be part of any group, Rose argues, all hatred is pushed to the outside other, and what binds people together is a commitment to a strict ideal and a strict identification with members of the group. Indeed, social anxiety and hate is predicated on the fear of losing love. (Freud made this point in both *Totem and Taboo* and in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.) We love and need to be loved back when we have most to fear. Such love cannot afford unstable collective imaginaries. Hence, while Said is right to say that Freud's

reading of Judaic history stages the fragmentation of identity, it also powerfully gives us insight into why trauma “makes people batten down . . . towards dogma” (Rose 2003, 76). Said, in Rose’s view, is not considering how fragmentation, what ideally could be a “model for identity in the modern world” (2003, 66), is in fact psychically resisted. Resistance, she later argues in *The Last Resistance*, “is blindness. It is the strongest weapon or bluntest instrument the mind has at its disposal against the painful, hidden, knowledge of the unconscious” (2007, 19). For me, Freud’s story of Judaism starkly demonstrates the fixity of identity attachment made from such resistance to pain, despite what he knows to be true about identity’s hybridity. For this reason, Rose says that while *Moses and Monotheism* teaches us how to trouble the history of collective identity, it is also “a lament” (2003, 67) about the structure of identity and tradition. Though she accepts Said’s reading of the text as a political parable, she is concerned that we might be in danger of retrieving it “for the urgencies of our political present” (2003, 74) without considering how we are all “deeply and passionately” (2003, 74) invested in our own identities.

Curiously, while Said makes an argument for the fragmentation of identities, he only applies this reading to Israel. Said’s discussion does not consider what Palestine represses. Rose does not say this directly; however, she critiques Said for not problematizing Palestinian strategic nationalism when she writes:

In his discussion of archaeology, Edward Said contrasts Israeli archaeology, honed so as to consolidate the Israeli citizens’ belief in their fledgling state, and more recent Palestinian archaeology’s “attention to the enormously rich sedimentations of village history,” which challenges the first in the name of “multiplicity of voice.” As I listened to this moment of the lecture, I felt that one could say that Palestinian archaeology is the heir to Freud. I am less sanguine about the ability of new forms of nationalism to bypass the insanity of the group, especially given the traumatized history of both sides of the conflict in the Middle East. (2003, 77)

Suggested here is that even with its claim to “multiplicity of voice,” this version of Palestinian nationalism is not one that can bear to think about its own identity fragmentations and the hybridity produced from the traumatic encounter with Zionism and the state of Israel. Indeed, “Palestine” represses Israel and similarly consolidates Palestinian identity

with archaeological reterritorialization. Of course, Rose recognizes that the material consequences in the struggle for land and identity are not the same for Palestinians and Jewish Israelis; nonetheless, she suggests that the right to exist for each group is psychically being fought by repressing the other.

For me, Rose's view is important because she is asking us to view the diasporic subject in history in a way that recognizes the psychic investments of identity. I agree with Rose that Said's account is not impervious to his very critique of identity, not only because he does not give weight to Freud's ambivalent relationship to his Jewishness, but also because Said himself does not reflect on his own identity investments. Identity, she states, "for Freud, for any of us—is something from which it is very hard to escape—harder than Said, for wholly admirable motives, wants it to be" (2003, 74). From Rose's perspective, *Moses and Monotheism*, as a political parable, does not offer hope for new responses to political conflict. Freud's meticulous and even scientific genealogy of the hybrid origins of identity demonstrates, more than anything else, how humans resist the truth of identity in "consoling fictions" (Rose 2003, 68). More than that, the insistence of a stable identity is the very product of the threat of its fragmentation. Fundamentally, modern national identities are a product of their encounters with otherness—essentially hybrid, even as they negate this truth. Hybridity is therefore not the solution to the problem of identity, but is its "cause." Arguably, official Israeli identity is unimaginable without its encounter with Palestinians. Who would Zahi and his friends be without their Palestinian neighbors? And would Palestinians of pre-1948, which marks the end of the British Mandate in Palestine and the birth of Israel, even recognize the Palestinians of today?

While I share Rose's critique of cosmopolitan optimism, I am wary of her overall pessimism. *Moses and Monotheism* does not merely help us "lament" the problems of tradition and identity, it gives us access to the emotional truths of belonging that deeply inflect history and meaning-making. Rose views the truth of belonging exclusively in terms of how groups bond on hate, but *Moses and Monotheism* offers a more complex reading. As a parable for our time, *Moses and Monotheism* offers insight into the complex affective responses to the conditions of people facing political traumas and troubling pasts. Freud's rewriting of the ancient myth at a poignant time of Jewish struggle makes an important intervention by suggesting that tradition, as the thing that holds groups together in the phantasy of safety, serves and produces political life.

Also working with Judeo-Christian mythology, Nicholas Mirzoeff reflects on how a myth like Babel can be a “dream image” (quoting Walter Benjamin) that has a modern presence and is the past’s legacy on the present. In his consideration of how Babel returns in the falling of the twin towers and then, literally, in the burning of Baghdad—the actual location of Babylon—Mirzoeff claims that Babel is “at once the pre-history of the present and a descriptor of the utterly contemporary” (2005, 5). Perhaps Freud could see that the modern developments of his time had an uncanny resonance to religious myth. If that is true, *Moses and Monotheism* is not a parable *for* politics but *is* a political parable. Its power lies in its potential to move us to consider how group identity and tradition are not outside political ideology but implicated in it. Arguably, politics and tradition share the affective goal of group survival from trauma. Gal’s *A Different Kind of War* challenges this volatile mix and moves us to unbind Israel’s political phantasies that are entrenched in religious mythology. By invoking the affective fusion of religious tradition and politics, we are invited to begin thinking differently about how Israel imagines survival and its toll on its own people, let alone Palestinians. Noni is simultaneously ambivalent toward King David’s heroic character and to the logic that thinks it brave to shout insults at the Palestinians from behind the wall. His ambivalence invites us to think about the ghosts that frighten Zahi and his friends, empowering them to bond on hate. In its attention to the emotional life of group allegiance, the film encourages a “collective reflexivity,” in the words of Cornelius Castoriadis (1994, 8), which is the work of thinking about the relationship between our political actions and the unconscious. In my lexicon, this would mean that we understand Israel’s Zionism—its belief in its sovereign and religious right over land—as the better story of Jewish survival. Zionism is the narrative solution to the affective legacies of a traumatic past. It is therefore not simply a political movement in Israel but also an emotional one.

Stories, as I have argued, provide a representation of discarded memory; their narratives recover what has been lost and therefore allow us to make complex connections, to grasp the “dynamic mixtures” (Mirzoeff 2005, 5) and consequences of myth, tradition, and politics. Much like the story David and Goliath, the Moses story is a “dream image” or a trauma narrative that has a ghostly presence in modern-day Israel. We might want to think of the biblical Moses as a specter in Israel that works on people and phantasmatically shapes the nation-state (Rose 1996). If Moses is past and present, then he might be “the ruins of the present lying amidst

the pasts that are not yet past and paths to a future that is yet to come" (Mirzoeff 2005, 5–6). Freud's Egyptian Moses might very well be "difficult knowledge" (Britzman 2000) for Israel, even if Freud's revision of history is not factually sound. As an idea, Freud's Moses threatens the imagined community (Anderson 1991) that holds Jewish tradition together. But the erasure of the Egyptian Moses in Freud's narrative is only a symptom of trauma. The story that Freud offers is troubling in that it rewrites an iconic story in Jewish tradition to uncover its emotional truths. Freud's Moses story is devastating because it renders the Exodus, the symbolic beginning of Judaism, as a trauma: the father is killed and replaced with another (more appropriate) father. Freud's story bears witness to a wound that underwrites Jewish history, a wound that still resonates affectively in the present.

If Israel's relationship to Freud's rendition of Jewish identity is one of repression and resistance—invested in being a victim rather than working through suffering, as Rose contends—then we must take Freud's psychoanalytic project seriously. I agree with Richard Armstrong who writes that "Said did not take seriously enough that Freud's psycho-archaeology was of a *complex* (the unconscious operations of which define its longevity and efficacy), wishing instead to make of *Moses* a mere cultural genealogy or counter-history" (2005, 244). However, I add that psychoanalysis in actuality provides a counter-history if we take the view that history actually elaborates a *complex* of psychic conflicts and that what Freud actually offers in *Moses and Monotheism* is an affective counter-history. If Moses' story is a "story of a wound that cries out" (Caruth 1996, 4) across time, then history is the narrative outcome of how survival is negotiated and settled. Indeed, Caruth suggests that what Freud does in *Moses and Monotheism* is show "history as survival" (1996, 63), which for me not only suggests that the biblical Moses narrative represents Jewish survival in the past, but also how the story continues to capture the collective imagination for its conscious and unconscious implications. As a story whose central plot is liberation and freedom from oppression in the hope of finding the promised land, its relevance to the post-Holocaust Jewish diaspora is obvious. In other words, tradition, as something that is "immediately available as a story and what [people's] imaginations are reaching toward" (Gordon 1997, 4) endures social change if its survival strategy can serve new conditions. Considering the story's unconscious implications, as Freud has done, might provide insight into what needs to be *undone* to achieve a better strategy of survival. I say this not because I think *Moses and Monotheism*

uncovers and cures the psychopolitical conflicts of our times, but because it might provide an opening to think about how trauma and group bonding render the other a threat to survival.

What strikes me as one of the more interesting aspects of Freud's rendition of the Moses story is that it is a story of collective tragedy, not redemption. Moses led the Hebrews out of captivity; but if the Exodus inflicted a crisis of life, as Caruth's (1996) reading of *Moses and Monotheism* suggests, then perhaps the murder of Moses, the Jews' liberator, was an act that triggered a belated knowing about the trauma of captivity. This trauma was then realized through the unbearable condition of having to survive freedom in the state of homelessness. For Caruth, to come out of trauma is like waking up from death or from not knowing. Freud named this dynamic *Nachträglichkeit*: traumatic experience is "deferred" and returns belatedly, though modified. What characterizes a trauma is that it is "left behind" and therefore "not locatable in the simple violent or original event . . . but rather in its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance" (Caruth 1996, 4). Hence, in the case of Jewish history, it is the Exodus, and not the time of captivity, that inaugurates history because it took the shape of a "departure" (Caruth 1996, 13) from death or waking from the trauma of being in captivity. "Free," but displaced and homeless, the people's survival after liberation was unbearable and captivity perhaps even enviable, though not tenable. Hence, Moses' murder might be understood as the affective expression of the burden of survival that haunts Jewish history; the murder is the affective symbolization of the belated knowledge of bondage and captivity followed by homelessness and suffering. Indeed, Caruth suggests that surviving trauma imposes a "double wound" (1996, 3) and a "double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (1996, 7).

Freud's Moses story elaborates a constitutive ambivalence toward the father of Judaism. The freedom he offered was difficult, and he paid for it with his life; but, unable to assimilate the knowledge of this act, Judaism has him return symbolically as the law. This was also the predicament of the primordial father in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, whose sons band together to kill him for having exclusive sexual access to women. The myth exemplifies the paradoxical relation to the father: although hated, he is also admired for his power. Initially, provoked by hatred, the brothers kill the father for hoarding women, but their love for him eventually resurfaces

as guilt and their hatred finally resolved by repressing the truth of the murder. While there is no psychological representation of the murder, the father symbolically returns in ritual sacrifice and this collective practice inaugurates the social bond and the law of the father, with whom the sons in brotherhood now make an identification. Similarly, in *Moses and Monotheism*, the outcome of the discarded murder (and the discarded sexual, in Kristeva's interpretation of the myth in *Sense and Nonsense of Revolt*) is the consolidation of religion and tradition that binds Hebrews together through monotheism, in strict adherence to Moses' law and in exclusion of false forms of worship (Assmann 1977). In Judaism, exclusion is in fact written into tradition through the idea of being chosen. It is what sets Jewish people apart and is thus the glue that binds people against the other. Though there are many ways to think philosophically about chosenness beyond its literal appropriation, Caruth offers an emotional reading of how it psychohistorically emerges in Jewish tradition and how it provides insight into how Jews have survived. She writes:

precisely the sense of *being chosen* by God, the sense of chosenness that Freud says, is what has enabled the Jews "to survive until our day." Jewish monotheism, as the sense of chosenness, thus defines Jewish history around the link between survival and a traumatic history that exceeds their grasp.

The sense of chosenness, Freud argues, was originally taught to the Hebrews by Moses. But it was not truly part of a Jewish monotheistic religion, Freud suggests, until after Moses' death. As a consequence of the repression of the murder of Moses and the return of the repressed that occurs after the murder, the sense of chosenness returns not as an object of knowledge but as an unconscious force, a force that manifests itself in what Freud calls "tradition." Thus Freud argues that the point of *Moses and Monotheism* is not to explain monotheism as a doctrine but rather to explain monotheism's peculiar *unconscious force* in shaping Jewish history. (1996, 67)

Caruth's argument suggests that Jewish chosenness is both how the survival of the people was represented—the "structure of feeling" in Raymond Williams' (1989) words—and the enigmatic space of unthinkable survival. It is the psychic material that cannot be grasped and the unconscious force that shaped Judaic narrative. But, if Caruth's reading is right,

then chosenness only returns as a narrative and as tradition in the wake of Moses' murder. Chosenness, arguably, conceals and "fictionalizes" the unutterable trauma for which Moses had to be murdered. As the narrative on which tradition and community is built, chosenness is the Jewish better story for survival.

Finding consolation in separation from others, what Freud termed the narcissism of minor differences, is of course not unique to Judaism or Jewish identity. Moreover, as a metaphor, chosenness might help us understand why attachment to ethnic tradition, nationalist identity, religion, and so on offers, as Zygmunt Bauman (2001) would say, "safety in an insecure world." *Moses and Monotheism* is an interesting parable for identities that emerge from diasporic epistemologies and find consolation in community and belonging. In this way, Moses' story is not only a Jewish story but a human story relevant to modern diasporic groups who have also suffered captivity—colonial domination—and then global displacement and exile. Vulnerable to the conditions of new contexts, both at home and in the diaspora, identity and group cohesiveness is often the strategy to deal with postcolonial loss, and is also the logic of nationalist exclusion and violence, of which we have witnessed many examples in our time.

Indeed, the biblical Moses and Freud's Moses might have very significant resonance for modern cultures if we take Bauman's claim that group identity is the "surrogate of community" (Bauman 2001, 15)—the afterthought to the loss of traditional community from the disparities of modern life. Modern group identities, he suggests, is the psychic solution to a paradise lost. Much like the predicament of Adam and Eve, who did not recognize that they were in paradise until they were expelled, our departure from paradise inaugurated a crisis: we are haunted by the world we have lost and by the "tantalizing" memory of originary or traditional life for which we nostalgically yearn and miss for its security. Social and cultural identity, Bauman writes, is able to flourish because it "sprouts on the graveyard of communities" (2001, 16). In the name of lost or endangered cultures, we have seen many atrocities. Safety (from the hands of slave masters, Empire, war lords, or Nazism) in homogeneity is sometimes defended at a great human cost: "'hand-picked' from a tangled mass of variety through selection, separation and exclusion" (Bauman 2001, 14).

The modern imagined community may very well be the world that we have woken up to from the nightmares of slavery, genocides, and colonialism. It is something we must manufacture because the glue that binds people together is especially threatened after a traumatic event.

Such communities are more often than not made from a politic of group identity and not from a politic that considers, as Bauman would have it, our “common humanity” (2001, 136), which might imagine “a community woven from sharing and mutual care” (2001,150). The Israeli state, for instance, defends itself from the tragedy of historic loss and refuses vulnerability. Its ethos of “never again” is one that imagines safety by erecting walls. In so doing, it exercises its right to resist Palestinians, guarding its security by unspeakable violence. Israel (not the real place or the people but the imaginary community) cannot be easily undone, because it is built on a deep and perilous dream that offers consoling fictions to loss. Israel is built on the phantasy of security in community that seals itself from suffering, because it cannot forget the tragic past. But because it defends itself from vulnerability, it also refuses the past, which is to say its queer affective legacy. When official Israel looks back at the past, as Benjamin’s angel of history does, it is not taking in the past or seeing the past in the present; it wants to make whole what has been lost and taken away. But as Bauman cautions, when we imagine historical progress in this way, repulsion, not attraction, becomes history’s principle moving force:

. . . historical change happens because humans are mortified and annoyed by what they find painful . . . because they do not wish these conditions to persist, and because they seek the way to mollify or redress their suffering. Getting rid of what, momentarily, pains us most brings us relief—but this respite is as a rule short-lived since the “new and improved” condition quickly reveals its own previously invisible and unanticipated, unpleasant aspects and brings new reason to worry. (2001, 19)

Mortified and annoyed by what they find painful, we witness Jews in Israel and Palestinians seeking respite from pain and suffering—with the predictable, tragic consequences. Despite all the failures of short-lived strategies, be they bombs or walls, history “keeps piling up wreckage upon wreckage . . . and the pile of debris before [the angel of history] grows skyward” (Benjamin 1968, 258).

While Palestinians and Jewish Israelis have different ethnocultural genealogies, they share an experience of loss, suffering, and vulnerability. Said’s reading does not truly account for how *Moses and Monotheism* is a human or universal story. He only considers how Israel represses the “truth” of identity, not how group identity might be the *consequence* of what it means for humans to lose home and community. Without this

nuanced reading, there is no emotional context for why Israel might repress Freud's story. Said's analysis elides how the fiction of identity is a consequence of a collective trauma. If Israel represses Freud's story of identity's cosmopolitan origins, as Said claims, it is because it needs collective identity to survive. Indeed, as Rose argues, Jews and Palestinians refuse their cosmopolitan origins because of the wounds and traumas that both groups have suffered in the name of identity. Since the postmodern logic is only equipped to account for cultural genealogy of identity and not its emotional and psychic underpinnings, it cannot adequately respond to the wreckage brought on by the wounds to identity itself.

In his last book, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said asks us to consider a secular humanism that allows us to see "how a thing is made, to see it from the point of view of its human maker" (2004, 11). Said calls for a humanism that is capable of self-knowledge and self-criticism in concert with overarching human experiences. While I think Said gets very close to thinking about how we might identify those overarching experiences, the book does not get us closer to understanding, in Bauman's words, our "common humanity," or in Gilroy's words, "a planetary humanism capable of comprehending the universality of our elemental vulnerability to the wrongs we visit upon each other" (2005, 4). I do not mean to suggest that Said was not aware of our common human suffering. In an article he wrote in 1997 for *Al-Ahram Weekly* called "Basis for Co-existence" (quoted and praised in Rose's *The Last Resistance*), he asserts that Palestinians and Jews need to acknowledge each other's suffering. But in acknowledging suffering, we have to understand that suffering is psychically resisted because it renders us vulnerable; and in defense against feeling vulnerable, harm is committed on both sides. While aggression toward the other happens in the name of suffering on both sides, in Israel, as Rose (2007) argues, the traumatic history of the Jews returns with Zion and a powerful state wherein the destruction of the Holocaust is displaced on Palestinians and, paradoxically, on Jews. She writes: "this is the most disturbing meaning of displacement—when a traumatic history is loudly invoked with devastating political consequences, almost as a smokescreen for itself" (2007, 55). So perhaps what needs to precede acknowledgment of each other's suffering is the acknowledgment of what suffering can do to us. This would require, as I have argued, that we consider the affective life of suffering and its vicissitudes in our political responses.

For Bauman, the only condition of dialogue between threatened communities is nondefensive security. Feeling secure, he writes, "makes the fearsome ocean separating 'us' from 'them' seem more like an inviting

swimming pool" (2001, 142). Achieving this, in my view, means that our stories and narratives of survival have to encompass the affective dimensions of insecurity. The myths of this time might have to be tragedies with failed heroes or heroes that offer us safety through connection, not separation. Gal's *A Different Kind of War* offers us just that. Noni is an antihero or a hero of a different order. He does not find security in might and fighting back: he does not participate in the narrative logic of the nation that imagines itself as the small King David who rises up and defeats his enemies. In its revision of the story of King David, *A Different Kind of War* presents a fresh perspective on those we might call the heroes of war and conflict. It asks us to consider another kind of resistance, one that arises from a place in the self that recalls Eros and the pleasures of our preverbal attachments. From this queer place, delight and connection supplant walls and separation. The kind of love gestured to in the film is not made from within the terms of community and belonging that keep us in perpetual anxiety of exclusion and loss; instead, this is a love made from risking insecurity and vulnerability. Noni's actions spring from listening to his queer affects, despite the harm this might bring to him. It would seem that because he preserves the integrity of his singular desire, finds a security in it, that he is able to reach out toward the other.

To be clear, Noni dances in response to his brother. At no point do we see the Palestinians on the other side, but he does face them. While some might argue that Gal does not attempt to humanize Palestinians, in my view this is not the work of the film. Indeed, to represent the Palestinians would distract from the kind of emotional work that is necessary to make way for a different kind of relationality. Noni's queer insistence on being a girl disrupts not only the common sense of gender regulation but ruptures the collective narcissism of melancholic loss that keeps the wound open, in a perpetual fixation, in resistance to mourning. Noni's tender dance on top of the wall, between the two worlds, choosing not to participate in the boys' (and symbolically, the nation's) war games, is not a guarantee for change. More importantly, it is an opening, an invitation to mourn the losses from the demands of culture and wounded community. Noni's dance is simply, but vitally, an interruption to a masculinist approach that defends against vulnerability in the interest of "never again." Unfortunately, this defensive stance only cyclically replays the story of injury and victimization in Israel's fight against the Palestinians.

Within the narrative logic of film, the threat to victory is the feminine, symbolically dangerous because of its constitutive vulnerability at a time

of war. In war, mastery and might are not so easily abandoned, which is why the figure of Noni's transgendered feminine body is troubling for Zahi and his friends who insist on putting him right. The feminine is not only a cultural signifier for softer and gentler relationalities. The feminine, understood in terms of the presymbolic maternal connection, is actually dangerous because it knows no boundaries, has no language, and does not respond to authority. In this sense, the feminine is always already queer, always already the site of trouble. When it returns in excess of desire for community to privilege pleasure and relationality, as it does for Noni, it rethinks the terms of community beyond the perilous dreams of safety, beyond separation walls, and beyond consoling fictions of group bonding. Only from making such emotional insights might we move toward recognizing and embracing the meanings of our cosmopolitan origins and our psychohistoric intersubjectivities. I would agree with Said that Israel most certainly does need Freud, but this might only come with the work of unbinding its emotional fixities that defend itself from Freud. *A Different Kind of War* does this work by rebinding the affect of fear to the walls of separation such that we might see the walls for what they achieve psychically: fortresses of fear.

In *A Different Kind of War* the neighborhood boys are players in a war game, deeply in the clutches a traumatic dream. They slumber not because they do not act, but because they do not pay attention to what keeps them playing the game. Though dreams embody the truths and fears we hide from, they also keep us in a dangerous state of "innocence." In one sense, dreams defend us from the traumas of the past. It is not until we wake up that we can begin to reflect on the truth of the dream. The desire to sleep, as the wreckage piles up, of course suggests a defense against the truth of trauma. As Caruth writes, however, it is also paradoxically "*the dream itself . . . that wakes the sleeper*" (1996, 99). In sleep, the unconscious is making itself known as an unknown because the "the dreamer confronts the reality of death from which he *cannot* turn away" (1996, 99, my emphasis). In this way, trauma and its dreamlike elaborations put us in a state of simultaneously not wanting to forget and not wanting to know. If that is true, then even as we are sleeping, our dreams are calling out to us, attempting to wake us up. Hence the better stories we construct to survive not only embody the truths of our traumas, they also cry them out.