Narrative vs Historical Truth: 
Insights from Field Work in Right-Wing Popular Consciousness in Israel

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ABSTRACT

The case of Dorit, a right-wing recent convert to Judaism and immigrant to Israel from the United States, is examined in an attempt to show how the need of one woman to dramatize in the performance of life history might forge a truth that is better held together by the force of narrative rhetoric and metaphor than by fact.

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Confusion between how something is narrated (narrative truth) and what actually happened historically (historical truth) exists as a hazard in the psychoanalytic profession. This same confusion can be a harbinger in the field for feminist ethnographic research. The issue holds interest for those who attempt to build on theories of the unconscious and politics in cultural studies, especially for those who after Louis Althusser have used psychoanalysis for studying ideology and the transformation of the subject. I acknowledge that neither subject nor object is necessarily free from projection. However, this paper primarily explores how the need of one woman to dramatize in the performance of life history might forge a truth that is better held together by the force of narrative rhetoric and metaphor than by fact. I suggest that this process fuels expansion of the growing Israeli right-wing. This seems to be especially so among women reaching out to grasp religious ideology, and particularly for recent converts.

The telling of the story by the interviewee/subject is perhaps a conversation undertaken with a purpose, of which feminists should be aware. The subject might be constructing a performative event in presenting a wish to be understood and appreciated by the interviewer. (Weinbaum, forthcoming) The subject also might be biased away from the truth of what “really” happened towards the “sayable.” Hence, the strength of biases of the subject forges the narrative. Ethically, these considerations must be considered in any report of field research.

In this exploration, I discuss the narrative of a woman I will call Dorit. She presents as a right-wing recent convert to Judaism and immigrant to Israel from the United States. Dorit's narrative indicated how her need to survive personal domestic violence formed her perception of the current scenario. This need of hers led to blind spots in perceiving the actual historical situation. In deciphering her narrative, I make connections between her past battering as a child and as a wife.
and her experience of the current situation in Israel, particularly at the outbreak of the *Intifada*.

I collected this interview in the course of a three year project interviewing women from diverse backgrounds in Israel between 1989 and 1991. Dorit was one of 35 subjects I interviewed on 40 hours of tape I collected in the field in this period. I had made an initial trip to Israel in 1989, with an assignment to write something about “the women” by a left-wing feminist who was editing an anthology. She was particularly interested in bonds between Palestinian and Jewish women working against the occupation. However, the stories the right-wing women told me actually gripped me more.

In July of 1989, I made contact with women's centers, located research sites, and attended Women in Black and Women at the Wall demonstrations. In the initial trip I made the decision to return for a more extended project. My first return visit was from December, 1989 to April, 1990, at the height of the period of optimism. At the time, moving Israel to talk with the PLO was the predominant motivation of women's peace groups. My second visit, December, 1990-January 1991, was during the Gulf War build-up.

In my own upbringing as an American Reform Jew, I had been indoctrinated to bond with Israel in the Federation of Temple Youth camps. This indoctrination was attractive in that it made up for my own experiences of exclusion from dominant culture circles including girls' groups and the country club set as a child and teenager growing up in the middle west. Yet in these trips to Israel as an adult, I began to have my doubts about Israel's cohesion as a country and the state of denial the people were living in.

I returned in September-November, 1991, after the setback of the Gulf War. During this period, the prevalent denial of the pain and disappointment of the situation disturbed me, as did statements I heard and collected from some Israeli informants as they discussed, for example, their perceived morbid fear of the Arabs under the threat of the bombs, juxtaposed to their own bravado of supposedly superior Israeli courage. When I came again in August 1993, I was ready to let go of Israel as the organizational nexus of my life due to these recurring complications.

I had entered into the project of interviewing right-wing women with an exploratory approach to understand, to know, to feel, and not to judge. Like a poet, I encapsulated talk. I looked to the roots of these women's personal stories, angers and passions. I searched for the lived experiential realities of the women's lives, rather than for objective facts. My search seemed to be part of the recent struggle for the rights of the disenfranchised which has called women, minorities, and representatives of Third World cultures to set the record straight, since so much has been distorted or left out in traditional telling of history. (Rosenwald 3) My intention was to record how each woman sensed and experienced her own history, and to understand what each woman felt about the history she expressed in her own life choices.
I analyzed the ways my questions and stance as an observer changed in response to the answers I received in the interactions and interviews. Additionally, I explored ways in which the women spoke their stories, the metaphoric use of the language of war, and images they drew upon using language of the family. Denial of some of the harsh realities of the Palestinians by Israeli Jews seemed to stem from trauma. I explored the ungrounded use of history as a way to regain bearings after the upheaval of immigration, the impact of imagined audience, and the intervening factors preventing all women from bonding on the maternal nexus to work together across class, race, ethnicity and nationalism. I discovered that these latter issues included the effect of the media, religion, the *aliyah* process, and socialization through education.

The language my chosen subject used in describing her first-hand experience of the *Intifada* and violence in general in Israel reflected her experience of battering in marriage. Hence this reflection provided a strong emotional coherence that held together questionable facts. She tried like other women to make sense of her experiences in marriage and in her case childhood. In both instances, rather than valuing and protecting her, these institutions of childhood and marriage devalued and demeaned her. Thus, if generalizations might be drawn from a particular case, I would argue that recent arrivals who come out of a sense of trauma find in the continued reliving of danger in Israel a vast theater in which to act out accomplishing steps to reverse their own role as helpless passive victims at earlier points in their individual lives.

When in the field, listening constructively and actively as I worked with Dorit became difficult for me. Her own anti-Arab feelings belied the socialist utopia feeling about Israel with which I had been raised in my own Reform Jewish youth camp experience. This compounded difficulty conflicted with my ethical commitment as a feminist to really hearing women's stories. Furthermore, I began to see the point made in an earlier interview by an activist in Women in Black, an anti-occupation ritual, that dealing with some people in Israel was like dealing with rape crisis victims. This second subject, who had been working for recognition of non-recognized Arab villages in Israel, developed the point analogously. She argued that those who have been raped live in re-enacted fear of men; and similarly, that when Jews in Israel have been attacked by Arabs, they live in continual re-stimulated fear of attack by Arabs.

The contribution to the field of feminist ethnography of this pursuit is the heightened awareness of the relationship between the observed and the observer as the paper also aims to be a contribution to the pursuant discussions of reflexivity that have developed, particularly among feminists who practice participant observation research. One purpose of the exploration is to understand this individual experience--both of the interviewee and of the interviewer--but also, to further my understanding of the psychological underpinning of what is known as the Israeli right wing. Another purpose is to explore the relationship between war, gender, and personal/cultural aspects of conflict in a multicultural environment in which many bring their own case histories to a particular historical experience, blocking the road to peaceful cooperation. I hope this exploration of some motivations for the turn to the Right in Israeli society contributes to establishing the basis for more peaceful conflict resolution and for more peaceful living. I also
hope that this article provides support for feminist researchers to pursue such interpersonal conflicts between researcher and researched as part of the research material, rather than just suppress them or act like these conflicts can be ignored.

For Dorit, the Intifada was a landscape for her to reorient her views according to her own needs and frustrations. These seemed based not on the immediate situation, but on the social order in which her personal problems had first developed. William Earnest analyzed this area as fraught with difficulty in his essay “Ideology Criticism and Life History Research” (1992). Difficulty emerged in the field especially when I attempted to withhold my own assumptions concerning historic events or to pose my understandings only as rhetorical questions in order to collect her perceptions more effectively. I became increasingly aware that Dorit's way of retelling political events actually contained two more interesting subtexts. One was how she made the transition from victim to survivor, as did the stories of many others included in the study. The second was how the socialization process of her aliyah had created a contradiction of what was regarded as legitimately appropriate in terms of rights, privileges and reciprocity.

Such a contradiction was also implicit in other stories. Some subjects by the textual structure of their presentations asserted that the ideology of self-defense applied apparently to Jews, who had a traumatic history from which to recover. But these same subjects did not extend the same ideology of standing up for one's rights to “Arabs,” more specifically to the Palestinians, whose present suffering they dismissively demeaned as practically fictional. Listening analytically for the difference between historical truth and narrative truth revealed guiding metaphors in Dorit's associated experience. These were shockingly outrageous if listening for the “truth,” yet useful for understanding the context of acceptable justification of the ideological underpinnings of those Jews considered right-wing in present-day Israel. I also found through the route of ideology criticism I could understand “the process within which experience is prevented from informing belief.” (Earnest 253)

Dorit held on to Judaism as a way of thinking that brought her closer to the truth. She had recently undergone the aliyah process. This convert in her 40s from the US had turned to Judaism in the process of leaving her violent, abusive husband in Southern California. She had found that Judaism gave her precepts with which she could stand up to her husband. She could thus overcome what she had experienced as the ingrained submissiveness of her own Catholic upbringing. Her perceived sense of Judaism's confrontational honesty had brought her to the religion. She had subsequently clung to this self-selected aspect of Judaism throughout her terrifying experience of facing her husband in the courtroom. Judaism had helped her with her first inner detaching from the victim status. Thus she clung to Judaism during her “inner break.”

Dorit felt that her Catholic indoctrination had brought her to “laying your life down for your enemy” (D'ot 274), “turning the other cheek, never defending yourself, never raising your voice, always being calm” (ibid.). She perceived that Catholicism had put her in an “emotional mess” (ibid.) of extreme guilt, and had
brought her to thinking she “was the ruination of the world” (ibid.) as if suffering was going to make her “holy and close to God” (ibid.).

In Judaism, Dorit reported that she found logic, a sense of order and her calling to pursue justice. The call she felt in Judaism enabled her to hold on to her self-respect as a human being. That is, in her view stated to me as an already existing Jew from whom a new Jew might want to gain validating acceptance, Judaism helped her to become conscious. As a victim beginning to rebel against her own victim status, she found in Judaism the theoretical underpinnings to explain the “bad” status quo. She also found the ability to detail in her mind the necessary steps that she must take to bring about her own liberation from the situation in which she found herself suffering.

Judaism, Dorit reported, “doesn't say let the people beat you up and you will be OK and you will be holy. It doesn't say turn the other cheek. It doesn't preach so much masochism” (275). When her ex-husband pinned her against the wall, hit her, pounded her up against the wall, and told her he was going to divorce her and kill her, she could barely speak (ibid.). She reported experiencing herself as an emotional wreck, “a zombie.” (ibid.). But in turning to Judaism, she was given a different gestalt of behavior which empowered her and allowed her to move from being a victim, to conscious victim, to action:

When I started moving in Jewish circles and I told some of this to a Jewish lady, she said, if my husband ever treated me like that he had better not close his eyes. I had never heard a woman speak with such strength. In Christianity there is this sweet and soft stuff. If you married him, you have to stick it out... And the further I moved into it, it gave me an awful lot of strength until finally when I came to University of Judaism, in Los Angeles. I was talking to Rabbi Rhimbaum. I said to him something about forgiveness. What I don't understand is Jews have a hard time forgiving. He said, it is not that we have a hard time forgiving. It is just that we don't want it to happen again. So we keep talking about it to make sure it doesn't happen again, because in the Torah, it says remember and observe. So I told him a little something about my husband. He said you've got to do something about it because it is called a sin of omission. In law, it is also, as act of omission. I took my husband to court and through Judaism I won. Because, I wrote up my own order to show cause and I told them that in Christianity I was always taught just to forgive and forget, but that my ex-husband was taking this and that and the other. He took the kids, he stole the money, he threatened my life. As a Jew I am called to justice. And my call to justice is not to let this person get away with that kind of abominable behavior and robbery. The judge saw it. No matter what my ex-husband tried, and he hired a Jewish attorney by the way, but no matter what he tried, it didn't work. You know what I took with me when I went to the final trial was my little Hebrew prayer book. It got me through it. I was really quite scared. I was so terrified of him that when I sat in the witness stand to give testimony, and he
looked at me through those knitted dark eyes, I kept seeing him pound, pound, pound against the wall. It scared me. So what I did was, I took off my glasses so I couldn't see him and I spoke from the heart. I think that is what did it. I spoke from the heart. (275-7)

Toby Epstein Jayartne and Abigail J. Stewart have noted the important feminist research principles of understanding emotions, understandings, and actions in the subject's own terms, rather than translating experience into predefined categories that might have the effect of silencing voice (85). But after listening to Dorit's powerful, heartbreaking testimony of her experience as she defined it, I could see that first, she feels a need to be stronger. Thus she performed the same sort of trick she did in the courtroom to accomplish neat and safe near-sightedness when it came to the current situation. That is, she metaphorically took off her glasses, so to speak, so that she couldn't see the real and contemporary plight of actual Palestinians.

Dorit came to the interview armed with documents as intellectual tools to ward off repeated associations of violence, the way she had gone similarly to the courtroom to seek justice with her Hebrew prayer book. She handed me an interview with Arafat published in Playboy. This interview documented his assistance from Arab oil as well as his budget of $220 million to “administer political and social programs.” She was also reading James Adams' Financing of Terror (1986) and Samuel Katz's Battleground: Fact and Fantasy in Palestine (1986). She was brimming with information, eager to discuss her conversion from Roman Catholicism. She was also, as she put it, an eye-witness to the outbreak of the Intifada in East Jerusalem. Throughout her interview I got a sense from this tall, vivacious attractive blond woman struggling for self-respect of how someone coming from a battering experience of violence could draw strength from a nationalistic spirit calling for the right of self defense. This was so particularly because other right-wing women evidenced this trend in interviews, one of whom had experienced rape in the Moroccan revolt. They both shone as they rose to the occasion to describe what it was like to live daily with the threat of violence rippling throughout the larger society.

After listening to her narrative of conversion, I asked Dorit if she saw the Jews as being beaten by the Arabs and as getting the right to defend themselves. Her response was an enthusiastic affirmative. This gave further force to her assemblage of compelling if not completely persuasive explanations annd interpretations:

Yes, that is right. I see them as strong. Seeing them strong yet I am hearing the world come against them, the same way that the world was coming against me. Oh, let them have it. Let them have it. Let me tell you, if you let them have it, they will take everything from you and they will bury you twenty feet under the ground and they will sit on your grave and they won't give a damn. That is exactly where they wanted me. That was after my brother stole my Mercedes. My kids were gone, the house was gone, everything was gone. You cannot stand there, being a pacifist and saying, Oh, I love you. I forgive you. Oh yes. They
think you are a fool. They will just keep taking more and more. So when I hear somebody say “drive them to the sea” I take that literally. I don't think it is a light-hearted joke. I think they mean exactly that. I don't think they would bat an eyelash about it.  
(D’ot 276- 7)

This response showed how she took my interpretation, and ingested it. (“I see them as strong.” ) Then, she associated. By going from the present “see” to the continual “seeing” in “seeing them as strong,” she showed an active process in her mind which brought her to the next association, “hearing the world come against them, the same way the world was coming against me.” At this point the “they” or “them” shifted from referring to the Jews, to those intimates in the world whom she also experienced as coming against her, including not only her ex-husband but her brother. The “them” subsequently shifted to include the Palestinians (Let them have it), in a phrase which communicated first desire to instill violence upon a collective object, and then, in repetition, intense satirical derision of the notion of cooperating with one's own dispossession. Another subject also criticized this notion in another interview, using a metaphor of negotiating what one gives up in negotiating divorce.

When asked to clarify who is saying that now, she talked about the “fanatic Islamic groups, Hamas, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine,” who scared her. Yet she didn't see talking to Arafat, which was a stated goal of the Left at the time in Israel, as a constructive alternative. Again, the use of the word “they” shifted in the course of the response:

The problem I see is, talking to Arafat is comparable to talking with Charles Manson, or trying to make a major deal with someone who is on death row. You can make all sorts of arrangements, but how legitimate are they? How long will they stick with it? I think that is Israel's major concern. They say security first. It's a valid statement to say security first. (D'ot 277

“They” referred to the arrangements, first. Then perhaps the amorphous “they” referred to the Arabs or the Palestinians in general whom she perceived as a totality or as an amorphous inclusive blob emanating out from the hypothetical or metaphorical single cell on death row of the individual Arafat. Dorit's narrative truth worked well to extend the paradigm of self defense against actual blows, expropriation and loss due to the actions of loved ones and family, to arming for self defense in the case of possible ongoing danger in dealing with criminals and thieves. Here it became particularly important to recognize the difference between narrative truth and historical truth, and to distance from the metaphorical power of persuasion in rhetoric of subjects. I had to at least recognize the limitations of the metaphors used, although the metaphors themselves might indeed have seemed to have some virtues in clarifying understandings.

These patterns exhibited in a close textual analysis of Dorit's interview were reflected in others who had also experienced previous trauma. They also came to the interview clutching at the ideology of the “right to possess.” One subject in particular, having been dispossessed personally at an early age when anti-Jewish
feelings arose during the revolt in Morocco, clung during the interview to the 
prayer book to find personal strength. Others also generalized into an unlocatable 
“they,” asserting what are popular myths in Israel, “What they would like us to do 
is chop ourselves up like salami bits, and the Arabs would have the right of return. 
They would fill our country up with billions of Arabs.” (D’ot 62) The latter 
speaker had immigrated just previously. She did not have her home yet completed 
at the time of interview. Nonetheless, she successfully reversed the experiential 
gestalt that some Palestinians must have had: that the Jews were filling up their 
country with “billions” of people. Furthermore, according to this woman's analysis, 
the actions of the unspecified “they” would lead to “the Arabs” having the right of 
return, although only a small sector of the entire Arab population of the Mideast or 
the world was requesting that, and does in no estimate the number reach into the 
“billions.”

I began to examine Dorit's free association with images the more I worked with 
the transcript of her interview. I could see that her language revealed an 
interweaving of the trauma of the personal and the trauma of war. As has been 
pointed out previously, some survivors (in that case specifically of the Holocaust) 
dramatize as they speak and wish to make all future enactment of the similar 
phenomenon cease to occur. (Greenspan) Dorit experienced onslaught and near 
obliteration; she spoke out that all Jews, a group of which she now considered 
she must fight back against this obliteration. She spoke of “the ashes,” 
which she might disintegrate if she gave up her ideological beliefs. As Dorit 
struggled in her reclamation of self-esteem, she claimed that what was needed was 
not an arrogant, haughty pride. It is just looking at yourself 

and saying, “By God, we did it. We didn't think we could but look at the ashes. 
From the ashes we have come to this point. And move forward from there.” (D’ot 
280) (emphasis added)

After revealing earlier in her narrative her personal confusion and state of distress, 
Dorit went on to cite an article that Hitler had written in the Forties. There he had 
argued how his weapons would be mental confusion, distortions, inconsistency of 
the heart, “like your heart and your mind are two different things,” and panic. (280) 
Dorit felt that what he chose to be his weapons were still with Israelis--especially 
the latter, panic. She maintained that Jews have a self-hatred and suicidal 
mentality, and asked, “What are you going to do with your physical self if you 
give it all up. Swim in the ocean, I guess” (281), referring to a possible outcome of 
another Israeli popular view, that the Arabs want to “throw them into the sea.” She 
considered what she saw as the Jewish tendency to succumb to defeatism due to 
the existence of evil mentalities of Neo-Nazism.

I myself had come close to aliyah in overcoming my own traumatic loss at the 
death of my father, which had motivated my own return to Israel as an adult after 
eighteen years previously volunteering on a kibbutz as a teen-age worker. Thus, 
perhaps I had a propensity to identify with those who came for similar reasons of 
the need to compensate for loss or to fill a void. Their stories drew me in. Having 
objectified both myself and my subjects in the process, I could readily see how 
Dorit's personal narrative represented her own experience and yet contained 
similar elements of the survivor stories analyzed by Henry Greenspan. Likewise,
so did the narratives of other right-wing women experiencing a reclamation of Judaism I interviewed. I found I could apply Greenspan's insights by generalizing “trauma” and broadening “survivor” to mean survivor of personally jarring experiences that could not be understood on a cognitive level as being just and fair either to the individual or within the world.

Dorit, like Greenspan's subjects who had survived the trauma of the Holocaust, had a need to “make a story” in which she exhibited her need to negate an earlier personal annihilation and negation. She likewise exhibited the same guilt, rage, and despair about items in the here and now, her guilt as a survivor stemming from surviving both Catholicism and domestic battering. Greenspan characterized the stories of survivors as having the ability to speak eloquently about a passionately proposed future in which the possibility of catastrophe ceases.

Curiously, Dorit exhibited this pattern in the way she spoke enthusiastically of a utopia in which Jews came together to right a wrong, to give themselves credit for how well they have done, and to emotionally overcome the symptoms of the war by building a joyous future together. For Dorit, as with others, a certain drama existed in her life-as-text rendition. This drama also came from her own fight against usurpation. In Dorit's case, the fight seemed to be against the battering by her husband, the violation by her own family which exacerbated matters, and the devastation of her divorce. Her narrative process also entailed sweeping texts, icons and facts into highly idealistic categories. She presented a totalistic view of historical reality as supported by Katz who had worked for the underground against the British pre-state, was elected a member of the first Knesset, and became one of the leaders of the Land of Israel Movement after the Six Day War. Her view of this history projected a need to cleanse her own slate as well as to quiet the screams to overcome her own disintegration inside. A well-sewed up picture of current and historical reality held the pain and horror in check. In this picture, no ambivalence occurred. She projected all the guilt, blame and responsibility onto the other side. Hypothetically, if Dorit tarnished her perspective, and let in other information, she tottered on the subconscious fear that she might be returned to being an emotional wreck. She seemed to be afraid that she would revert to the “zombie” she declared herself once to have been.

Thus, as a narrator Dorit told both her life story and the present Israeli political history in such a way that excluded what for her remained impolitic to include. which is very usual in Israel and perhaps even everywhere that experiences conflict. This becomes a reflection of a general issue of narrative truth and historical truth, as reflected upon by Rosenwald et al. (11) A story may tell us one thing officially, these authors conclude, but at the same time “point our attention to another undeclared truth without which it rings false.” (loc. cit.) As these scholars argue, a life story is more than just a recital of events. Rather, a life story is an organization of experience “relating the elements of experience to each other and the present telling.” (8)

Consequently, Dorit's rendition of her eye-witness view of the outbreak of the Intifada in East Jerusalem was a story representing a good plot of the narrative of Dorit's process of self-recovery, as I could empathetically intuit and recognize from my own experience of dramatic story-telling as part of overcoming my own
childhood experience of violence. The person she was on that day as she witnessed the outbreak, and later as she told me her story, was the person she had been years in becoming. Dorit recounted:

When I came to make aliyah in 1987, I lived up in the Old City. I went back to the convent and stayed there until I completed my method of aliyah. It was the beginning of the Intifada. I got there on November 28, which was America's Thanksgiving Day. The Intifada began December 9. I remember the date because I was walking from the King David Hotel down into the Old City. I was with a Jewish friend and we didn't even get out to the gate and he says, “Let's get out of here. Let's get out of here now.” I think that a lot of people who have lived here perceive the danger before it ever happens and he knew it. He knew something was up. Sure enough. Later on that day there were riots and things that were happening. He said they might be having trouble here and sure enough that was the day it had started. I was supposed to go East Jerusalem and every morning I would have to get up and walk past the tear gas and the soldiers, the IDF (Israeli Defense Force), the UN and the Arabs, the stones and everything to go to my job. It was something like living through the ‘60s--I would have imagined at Berkeley or at Kent State University. Because the feeling of animosity was very, very thick. They were yelling “Kill the Jews' from the mosque. (D'ot 269) The beginning of Dorit's scary narrative about the outbreak of the Intifada indicated a personalistic lens. Being a newcomer in Israel, she perceived the events according to American categories, along American calendars. She situated the event in her own historically specific aliyah, marked by relation to an American holiday. She perceived current events in Israel through the lens of specific periods of import in American history--”like the 60s,” as she imagined would have happened in Berkeley or Kent State. She also related what she identified as a generalized survivor's "sixth sense,” and what psychotherapists call “hypervigilance,” or a premonition of danger in advance that survivors of abuse often have. According to Dorit, this was a shared feeling among many in Israel. Dorit seemed to like to be in a country where this sense of living in anticipated danger was a shared psychic phenomenon. Such a shared state presumably validated her pre-existing psychic structure of surviving on the verge of catastrophe, achieved by other survivors of childhood violence by different means such as joining the circus, going into prostitution, taking great personal risks, and otherwise finding ways to live dangerously.

Because I had just come from interviewing a Palestinian woman from the PLO who said that her group advocated peaceful coexistence, I asked Dorit to specify who the “they” was as used in her phrase “they were yelling kill the Jews. . .” She avoided a direct response. She continued to extend the concept of “they” in an unspecified manner:

They were just trying to stir up the people. And the people, especially in the Old City, are very easily stirred up. It doesn't
take much to get involved in mob violence. It doesn't take anything. This is of course what they wanted. They want people just to jump on. It doesn't matter the reason why, just do it. (D'ot 270) (emphasis added)

This extension of “they” into utter amorphousness makes attribution of senseless, irrational violence with an unspecified “reason” an easy next step. Then she continued to ground her narrative in reference to her own timeline of “sense,” in her aliyah experience. She anchored her experience of the event in her own categories of known reality:

I took a job as a house person, taking care of a child, because I was running out of money. I still hadn't made my aliyah process yet (i.e., gotten a government stipend). I had just come back. I was still in the Old City. This girl came into the youth hostel, which is just yards away from the temple mount. The temple mount is very close. She comes in and says, “Nobody move. Nobody get out of here. The soldiers have declared this a day of danger and no one is to go out.” Somehow it struck me as very funny. I had heard of Valentine's Day, Christmas Day and of course every other kind of day but I had never heard of a day of danger, so I laughed. I said, “This I gotta see.” So this little French friend of mine, Giselle and I, we went up to the terraces. When you get up high on the terraces, you see what used to be Pontius Pilate's place. He used to get up there and look down and see what the Jews were up to. So that is the same thing I did. (loc. cit.)

Dorit's giddy hysterical response to the collectivized danger and to the specter of possible immanent displacement seemed to provide her with relief to her own experience of individual danger. She seemed to make the danger tolerably safe by her ability to place herself somewhere, somehow in ancient history. In her case, this was on the terrain of Pontius Pilate. This fortification of the self for questionable acts in the present by drawing upon some remote past is a pattern that new immigrants often repeat, as the new settler's movement typified by the group galvanized by rabbis in the West Bank City of Hebron, evidences in the extreme. After all, new immigrants are unable to base or orient themselves otherwise in a current and present reality which is jolting, jarring, disorienting, threatening and strange, as this situation described must have been to Dorit.

This personal justification still showed in the models Dorit used to tell her story, in accordance with models of intelligibility specific to the culture in which she was participating. She drew from the particular religious education open to her as she clung to her prayer book to organize daily practices and belief. Consonant with the forces that attempt to stabilize the given organization of her society and culture, her story complied with the general cultural model enacted in Israel. Hence, her stories passed as “sensible” and even self-evident to her. However, the justifications might alarm those operating with other cultural models, such as the model of universal civil rights which I brought with me from my particular background in the United States, inclusive, or so I thought, of my summer youth
camp background in the Reform temple movement whose advocacy of civil rights for Jews did not seem to explicitly argue against the civil rights of others.

Yet these misunderstandings of self and others do not hinge on false beliefs, as Earnest argues (Rosenwald 383). Rather, institutional practices bear directly upon them. In this case the institutions would include media, aliyah, and religious education. These forces are great enough to cause individuals, in the stress of scrambling for survival with the added burden of personal recovery, to lose their ability to revise existing categories for interpretation of ongoing social reality. Hence, they fall short of comprehending their own actions and placement within the situation more holistically. For example, under the sway of religious institutions, some recent immigrants fail to widen the concept of “everyone” used loosely to refer to Israeli Jews, to include Palestinians as well as Jews.

Dorit continued to try to control. She even tried to elevate herself above the event and stem her anxiety by photographing, or making the event hers, She attempted in this manner to make the event real by placing herself in the event visibly for history. She touched the vehicles of crowd dispersion to make them less anxiety-provoking. She befriended her protectors in the present, which she had never done in the immediate family when abused:

Everyone was saying “There are tanks all over the place.”
Because we couldn't see anything we grabbed our cameras and went outside. It wasn't a tank. I don't know the technical name. It was a people mover. It was what they used to move crowds when mobs gather. It was at the end of the street. I went up and asked the soldier if I could touch their tank. They said yes. They were very friendly. I have a feeling I could have climbed on it and I don't think they would have cared. So they took my picture. There was a lot of hostility that was going on but I could see if you kept your head about you, you wouldn't get caught up in it and create violence. (D’ot 270-1)

In this segment, Dorit demonstrated here a sense of being a self partly in her sense of being in relation to others. It could be that Dorit was simply making sure that the soldiers knew she was “of ours” so that they would protect her rather than go against her, being that she was blond. However, in the way she related the story here, she seemed to have acted out her need to proclaim to an audience, “I can handle danger!” Yet in this instance she made some significant progress over events that traumatized her earlier and urged her to merge with others and with a protector. The preservation through the photograph made this easily recognizable. The photograph would enable her to make these steps necessary in her recovery, as would the interview with me. By listening thus far, I affirmed her identity. I even altered her identity for her by offering the cohering influence of my sustained attention. This achieved, Dorit undoubtedly accomplished much in her own integration and healing. Fueled by the experience of victimization which confers a holiness and power upon the victim, even allowing the victim to be reborn in a form that overcomes the victimizer (Jaffee), she reorganized the situation to fit her own psychic needs as left by childhood scars. She saw not only her ex-husband but also her mother enter “senseless rage” and committing acts of violence against
her. She herself becomes the actor, the savior who appears to intercede for innocent victims (the tourists):

I walked out of Jaffa Gate and I saw these young kids, five to ten years old, throwing stones at tourists as they were getting out of the busses. I said to them, “what are you doing. Stop.” They were dazed, like kids that were on drugs. Their eyes were focused but dazed. \textit{It was the same kind of a hatred that I used to see when my mother would go off on me in that fanatic anger or my husband.} That is what I saw. I don't think that these young kids even know what they are getting into. I read something that really interested me about this guy who had been shot and was bleeding. Someone was holding his head up and asking him why he threw the petrol bomb. He said because he was offered money, like thousands of shekels. (D'ot 271) (emphasis added)

Through the vehicle of personal report that narratology lends us, we can see that this interpretive turn demonizes the instigators of Palestinian revolt into Machiavellian manipulators of young children. With a new hermeneutic self-consciousness transforming theories of criticism and history, the interpretive enterprise, even if thrown into doubt methodologically, does provide an insight here: \textit{Recent arrivals who come out of a sense of trauma find in Israel, in the continued reliving of danger, a vast theater in which to act out accomplishing steps in reversing their own role as helpless passive victim at earlier points in their individual life stories.}\footnote{6}

Narrative criticism provides a base to argue that subjects continually reinvent histories in the service of their own contemporary psychological and political aims. This allows us to discern that these recent arrivals have little relation to the actual reality they are experiencing. They grasp at straws, reaching back to find a shelter in ancient history. This, coupled with the recent immigrants' own re-lived and slightly rescripted and personal dramatizations, provides a powerful springboard to seemingly senseless acts, all the while accusing the other of being senseless. The narratives thus induced construct events placed in both personal and social history and are extremely powerful. When circulated among their authors or tellers in social reality, they establish a basis for cohering and rigidifying many into right wing positions which then motivate the actions of recent arrivals. These in turn have an influence in electoral politics since each citizen gets a vote after a brief waiting period. But also individual acts of protest and group acts of outrage emerge which can extend from a sit-in in front of tanks returning lands to the Palestinians to the massacre, committed by an American-born Jew, in Hebron. \footnote{7}

\textbf{ENDNOTES}

\footnote{1}{For discussion of the need to dramatize in relating life histories given in psychoanalysis, and the analyst's resultant distinction between narrative and historical truth, see Donald. P. Spence, Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis (New York, Norton, 1992).}

According to Lani Ravin, and American born Jew who lived sixteen years in Israel, in this situation it was more likely not intuition or a "sixth sense" from hypervigilance but that Dorit's companion was taking note of little tell-tale signs of disruption of normal order signaling danger of which non-Israelis might not be aware. For example, on Yom Kippur, at the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, vehicles were on the road which Israelis knew was not supposed to be happening. Israelis might notice breaks in everyday routine, such as Arabs not being in line to get their work assignments, the streets being too quiet when they are supposed to be noisy, too many Arabs on the streets, or that Arabs are not on the streets. Or, if stores are shut, this might mean that Arabs had gotten a directive not to work, because of a strike. (Personal Communication, March 1998).

The phrase which struck her as humorous might have been a translation problem, as the army can declare an "emergency situation." Ravin, Personal Communication.

For the Jews of Kiryat Arba, for example, the spot where King David established his first royal throne seven years before he conquered Jerusalem led to the creation of a fortified settlement under the leadership of Rabbi Moshe Levinger, symbolizing a "Jewish roller-coaster ride through history" replete with majestic temples, the Wailing Wall, Exile and the Promised Return. See Robert I. Friedman's Zealots for Zion: Inside Israel's West Bank Settlement Movement (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1992) 3.

This pattern was also recognizable in other subjects, such as recorded in my On Hostile Grounds: Voices of Grassroots Women in Palestine/Israel, 1989-91, manuscript in process, and "Constructing Life Narratives..." forthcoming, Biography.

For the tense situation between Jewish settlers and Palestinians in Hebron, see Gila Svirsky, "Overview," 6 November 1996, Post, bridges.shamash.org.

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