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ESSAY LIVING MEMORY

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This essay invites readers into a process of exploration. In order to address the dynamic nature of memory, it opens with a reconsideration of the author's engagement with Holocaust memory. This is my way into demonstrating the performative nature of memory. Here memory is a lively endeavor that moves from Holocaust commemoration to ritual and from there to a contemporary rereading of Freud and finally culminates in reconsideration the legacy of the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 through the medium of photography. Building towards an engagement with the work of contemporary Israeli cultural critic Ariella Azoulay, this essay enacts the kind of ongoing critical engagement it calls for. It makes its case by taking readers on a journey from Holocaust memory towards 1948 with excursions into ritual, prayer, and Freudian-inflected letters and postcards.

A Way In: The Tower of Faces and Holocaust Memory

In writing about my return visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in *American Jewish Loss after the Holocaust* (2007), I became aware of the ways in which our engagements with Holocaust monuments, museums and memorials change over time. Revisiting Yaffa Eliach's photographic memorial, the Tower of Faces, I was struck by how differently I experienced this compelling memorial. I saw things I had not previously seen while more familiar elements of the memorial became less compelling. As a way of explaining, I drew an analogy to reading: "Like texts we read and reread, our ongoing encounters with monuments and memorials are also not static...we see and experience different things over time. Our interpretations and critical engagements change."¹ I then went on to think about this insight in relation to what it means to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. By acknowledging this dynamic, I argued "we need to be open to how even these narratives change over time."² In the context of my final chapter, this meant appreciating how memory changes. Thus I wrote:

In other words, as I did in my return to the Tower of Faces and the museum, we continue to learn new things from these encounters. We are forever reminded of the ongoing interplay between remembering and forgetting. In both forgetting and remembering, the past continues to change. It becomes

something dynamic. It changes with us. Given this, efforts to commemorate the Holocaust must also remain alive and capable of changing.³

I want to call this dynamic as I articulated it at the end of my book, “living memory.” In so doing I build on a long legacy of critical scholarly work on iteration and memory but apply it here to some of the ways contemporary Jews identify as Jews through an engagement with various Jewish pasts and not only the Holocaust.⁴ For me, there is something both animate and resonant in this notion of living memory. I think it captures something vital and important about contemporary Jewish life.⁵ In part, it is the tension between the past and the present that speaks to me. I am interested in the ways memory opens up in an ever-shifting present, and what it carries forward—the various layers and sediments of other times and other places, the traces that texture our contemporary understandings and how they inform how we live our lives. I am struck by how in these engagements with the past our memories are given new life in the present.

What I come back to is the analogy and the connection between this process of revisiting and reimagining the past and what I described then as a kind of reading practice. This begins to make more sense to me in a Jewish context as I think about the liturgical practice of reading and rereading sacred texts. This reading practice, the return to sacred texts in the liturgical calendar through cycles of Torah readings or the return to specific liturgies on holidays, carries the promise of speaking to us in the present, especially during Passover or the High Holidays. We are commanded to remember at Passover the story of the Exodus as well as the stories of the tellings and the retellings of this narrative. Again, even for those of us who are secular Jews, these liturgical reiterations and reenactments are powerful and compelling because they are both familiar and new. In this way they point to what I am calling living memory.

As I considered this connection to liturgy, I was reminded that even in these enactments, there are different ways to think about the meaning and practice of iteration. There are ways of knowing liturgy or Torah that appreciate re-iteration as a form of mastery, so that the more you recite the liturgy the more familiar it becomes. We become adept in our recitation. We talk about knowing a text “by heart,” but more often than not, such mastery is strangely less about the heart and its desires and more about a kind of automatic recitation without thought or careful consideration. There is a tradition that says that we must have our prayer books always in front of us even if we already know the text. It argues that we must continue to read the text even when we already know its words. The point is that having the text before us offers us a way of not losing sight of the text as such and its importance as an entity that is separate from us, a text that cannot be fully absorbed into our own awareness. In other words, the practice is relational. There is a reading or reciting subject and a text. It is not our task to blur the lines between the text and ourselves. To memorize these words in that manner is to forget the difference between them and us. As much as we embrace the words of the tradition, we are obliged to appreciate the space between the text and ourselves. We are not one and the same. Ours is a relationship, an interaction, and it is through this

exchange that the texts come alive again and again, not always with the same feeling or meaning.

For me, this is a deeply appealing notion because it insists on the importance of the relationship between text and reader, the interaction. It is both performative and dynamic. The obligation in this tradition is to interact in the present with both parties present. The boundaries between us and the tradition or the text, are what enables something new to emerge. The ability to return to a familiar text and read it anew is what keeps the text or tradition alive.⁶

I see this as the promise of sacred texts of all kinds. Similarly, as an academic, this is what studying and teaching are all about. Part of what I love about teaching is returning to a text I have taught many times but to do so with fresh eyes and in the context of a new set of reading partners, the students in a new and different class. Each classroom has its own personality and preoccupations and, as such, what we read together comes to reflect those differences. These iterations are never simply the same. This is what interests me, the notion that tradition and memory or texts and commemorations can and do become fresh and new as we return to them again and again. In the classroom this is, in part, about the collection of voices in the room and what they each bring to the discussion and what they/we as a group create together through our interactions, teacher, students, texts.⁷

Part of the pleasure in these iterations for me as a teacher is the sedimentation, the textures and layers of different readings, the palimpsest of meanings that continues to shift and change as I return to these texts with new students. The pleasure is all about how what were once vivid and compelling readings fade as other interpretations become more salient. None of these are fixed or permanent; all are additions to the repertoire. I love the traces of past readings as they inform new ones. For me the ephemeral quality of these engagements are what make them bristle with life. Bringing new eyes to these texts and memories is how we breathe new life into them. For me, this capacity to read the same text differently, to engage with a work of art or commemoration in ways that change over time, is what makes these activities exciting, compelling, and meaningful. In a similar manner, this is what it means to keep memory alive. To engage with the past is not to pin it down, but rather to appreciate its animating character as one of change, always already a response to the present.

As I consider this notion of living memory not only in terms of texts but also in terms of legacies or that which we pass on, I am reminded of some recent conversation partners, other texts and images that speak to me with some urgency about these questions and about these practices.⁸ Given this I want to consider these issues through a kind of intertextual reading and discussion of Jewish memory. First I will turn the recently published *Racial Fever: Freud and the Jewish Question* (2009) by Eliza Slavet and more specifically her reading of Freud, Derrida, and Lacan. I read Slavet's reading of these texts as a way of getting at the questions of memory and legacy. I am purposely engaging with a mediated account of these discussions in order to highlight the layers.⁹ What strikes me about Slavet's work is her attention to the issue of circulation or memory as a kind of epistolary practice. As she explains, memory

emerges as a kind of package—a letter, a post card, a note—sent out across time. And so with Slavet I want to consider how memory circulates. Likewise, this animating notion of memory might help us reconsider a more recent and indeed fraught and contested site of contemporary Jewish memory, the legacy of 1948. For this, I will turn back to visual culture and more specifically photography as a site of memory. Instead of the Tower of Faces, I will consider another collection of photographs, with Israeli cultural theorist Ariella Azoulay. In my engagement with her work, I want to reconsider the relationship between photography and citizenship, through what Azoulay calls the “civil contract of photography.”¹⁰ With Azoulay as my guide, I want to consider how a notion of living memory might help us appreciate not only what Azoulay is attempting to do, but to enter into the Israeli archive of photographs from 1948 with our own fresh eyes. By returning and re-viewing some of these photographs as Azoulay reframes them in *Constituent Violence, 1947–1950*, one of the exhibitions she curated,¹¹ I want to attempt to appreciate what is lost in the narratives we are more familiar with in telling the story of Israel and its citizens but also to see even Azoulay’s approach as but one of many ways of viewing these materials. Nevertheless, with Azoulay, I want to ask if it might be possible for us to see a civil space where Israel’s citizens and Israel’s non-citizens can and do communicate through the practice of photography as Azoulay suggests? What other possibilities open up if we let go of a notion of any single definitive viewing? In other words, how does returning to this archive as an act of living memory commemorate something otherwise invisible in the present? How can this approach keep even these viewings from becoming static? Can this kind of return help us imagine a different future?

Thinking through Memory

In *Racial Fever: Freud and the Jewish Question*, Slavet has a great deal to say about memory and its relation to race in Freud’s writing, especially in his final book, *Moses and Monotheism*.¹² Through *Moses and Monotheism* and its various intertexts in both the Freudian corpus and the work of his many interlocutors, Slavet addresses the role of memory as an inheritance. She does this by focusing on, among others, Freud’s cross-generational conversations with Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi.

What draws my attention is Slavet’s fourth chapter, “Secret Inclinations beyond Direct Communication.” In part what Slavet argues in this chapter is that Freud challenges many of the ways we are accustomed to thinking about how Jewish memory is transmitted. As she explains, in this way, Freud gets into the thorny issues of heredity, race, and even telepathy. I do not want to get into the specific arguments around these issues. Nor do I want to address the merits of either Freud’s complicated position on these matters or even Slavet’s shimmering analysis. What I want to do instead is build on a set of insights about these matters that Slavet raises in her fourth chapter, a set of reflections that ask us to think again about the work of cultural transmission and, in this way, the work of memory.

In her introduction to the book, Slavet explains,

The question of whether Jewishness is always transmitted to the future is compared to the famous literary debate between Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida about whether 'the letter always arrives at its destination.' Freud suggests that to be Jewish is to be caught up in an interminable process of transference that threatens the borders between past and present and between self and Other. Such phenomena, he suggests, may be more powerful the less they are suspected.¹³

What interests me in this account is the kind of indeterminacy expressed in this persistent longing to remember and, for our purposes, its Jewishness. Before going to the question of its Jewishness, however, I want to linger on the process of transmission. As I read it, and this is the tenor of the exchange between Lacan and Derrida, memories are a bit like letters we keep sending. Although we address them carefully, we do not have control over whether or not they arrive, who receives them, who reads them, how they are read, and what happens to them later. It is all out there in play.¹⁴

As Slavet first discusses it, there is something uncanny about this process. As she looks to Derrida's haunted theory of transmission, his gloss on Freud is configured quite literally in terms of *The Post Card*. She draws our attention to this process as a kind of correspondence. According to Slavet, Derrida's text is a conversation with the ghost of Freud. Derrida's text brings together Freud's letters and texts with speculations of Derrida's own. Derrida re-enters the conversation belatedly. He rereads letters that were not addressed to him and then revives them. More than this he recirculates them; in so doing, he helps us see Freud's thoughts and ideas anew, this time from the perspective of Derrida's own present. In the context of her book Slavet too adds another layer to this sedimented vision. She places her own gloss on both Derrida and Freud over this lively and living conversation. In this way Slavet reminds us vividly that the story continues. The text is not closed. There is more to say.

Memory enters the present in strange and unexpected ways. In so doing, it produces different futures, futures unbeknownst to those who first read and responded to those initial musings. In this way the past is remembered and revived. The past and its memories help us imagine new possibilities in the present. Memory and the past help us see what may have always already been present, but just out of our sight.¹⁵ This work does not in any simple way produce some specific end. We are still learning and seeing what will continue to come from our engagements with these correspondences. These letters, like Freud's, continue to circulate in complicated and unpredictable ways. This, for me, is the promise of living memory. It is also the promise of the archive, as we shall see in what follows.

To more fully explain this process of thinking through the past, Slavet considers the exchange between Derrida and Lacan about Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter."¹⁶ Their exchange and the story, like Derrida's postcard, all fall in on each other. As she explains, in the story an important letter changes hands many times; while readers understand that the letter is

important, we never learn its contents. For Lacan, the message of this story and its letter is that the “letter always arrives at its destination.”¹⁷ And, of course, this is not necessarily a conscious process according to Lacan. As Slavet explains, “That might mean that wherever the letter is, is its destination.”¹⁸

Derrida is not so sure. In response to Lacan, he argues that Lacan overlooks “the possibility of sheer accident” or “irreversible loss,” among which, according to Derrida, are also an inevitable part of such a postal vision. The results of this, according to Derrida, include “forgetting, oblivion, or worse, death and destruction,” all of which “drives people to write, send, and save letters. This is [as Slavet reminds us] one form of *archive fever*: a drive to recall life from dead matter.”¹⁹ For Derrida, the urgency is that there are no guarantees that the letter will ever arrive at its destination, that it will reach its intended addressee. The hope against hope is perhaps that, in the circulation, these posts just might find other readers, in other times and in other places, who need and want them.²⁰

To me this is what memory does: it reverberates, it moves and changes and, in the process of circulating and recirculating, new things come into view. We read and we read again. We see new things with each iteration. Here I am reminded again of Azoulay’s archival work with photography.²¹ In *Constituent Violence, 1947–1950* Azoulay revisits the photographic archive that is both that of the founding of the State of Israel and the story of life before. In revisiting these images, Azoulay looks again at what we thought we already knew, what we thought we were seeing and knowing about a quite specific past. Instead of showing us a version of the same, she opens up a different vision. She shows us traces of the lives of those who inhabited the space that became the State of Israel between 1947 and 1950. She asks us to remember things rendered invisible through the narratives of both the founding of the State of Israel and the *Nakba*. Azoulay’s project attempts to help us see anew and remember a familiar story otherwise. As I will argue, this too is a form of thinking through memory, as it shows us how the past is made new in the present.

As I began working on this essay I decided to send a letter, actually an e-mail of my own.²² I wrote to Eliza Slavet in order to consider with her the ways that our letters do and do not always reach their destinations or what we imagined might be their destinations, their intended readers, or audiences. I returned to her with this vision in part because of other postmarked pictures, my own musings about photographs recovered, remembered, recirculated. I wrote to her about the resonances between her account of Freud and his uncanny notion of memory and the transmission of knowledge, and my own account of these matters in relation to a more intimate story of transmission.²³ This time I had in mind a meditation of sorts on an enigmatic film that performs these strange workings of memory, experimental filmmaker Abraham Ravett’s short non-narrative film, *Half-Sister*,²⁴ a film about his mother’s other child, his half-sister, whose memory returns with receipt of a long-forgotten image of this child mailed to the filmmaker almost fifty years after his half-sister’s death in Auschwitz. The film resonated for me with another image returned belatedly in my own family, a portrait of my father’s parents; not my

grandfather with the grandmother I knew but my grandfather with the woman I was named for and had not known about, the mother who died when my father was child. In my book I wrote about both Ravett's film and the story of the belated return of this portrait of my paternal grandparents. I wrote about the film as a way of getting at this inchoate return of memory. I did so in terms of my efforts to learn not only about this woman who was my grandmother but also about the woman I knew as my grandmother and their relationship to each other. In the process, I made clear how difficult it was to piece together any semblance of a definitive story.

I learned through my own experience that these efforts themselves produce not so much the past but a new vision, the one that I needed to write. I addressed these reflections to my own imagined reader in the form of a letter. My chapter "Postmarked Pictures" ends with a literal letter explaining these matters. Through my e-mail to Slavet, I hoped to share these thoughts and that published letter in a new way, as they resonated with her text.

The Civil Contract of Photography

I think that...there must have been other clues to this person and this unknown past already present in our lives that we had not fully recognized until now. These include certain fascinations, silences, and preoccupations.... This recognition is part of the gift of the return. It constitutes the context of a more metaphorical package. It also helps explain why we are so drawn to these pictures [or memories]. They make visible that which was hidden although always already present. As these legacies begin to unravel, other once hidden aspects of these pasts also come to light.²⁵

I begin this discussion of Azoulay's project with the final words of the letter I wrote to my readers²⁶ because I believe there is a relationship between the kinds of intimate losses I describe and the more public stories Azoulay addresses. There are always clues already there if only we can begin to see them. This is what makes Azoulay's project so painful. She insists that we see what is already present. She asks us to pay attention to what has remained strangely invisible in plain sight. To make these things visible requires a different way of seeing. What Azoulay proposes is a viewing or reading practice that pays attention to the ethical relationship between the subject, the viewer, and the photographer. She calls this relationship the "civil contract of photography."

I learned about Azoulay's book and the two exhibitions she curated, *Acts of State: A Photographed History of the Occupation and Constituent Violence, 1947–1950* during the summer of 2009. The catalogues were a gift from the author. She gave them to me after we spent a long morning in conversation about our work. I was in Israel for the first time in over twenty years. I was there for a conference but had arranged to meet with Ariella while I was there. In our conversation we talked about photography and memory, the labor of memory, and some of the uncanny aspects of my return. We talked about politics and we talked about loss. We spoke of family and about our relationships to Israel and to other Jewish stories. I left her art-filled apartment in Tel Aviv with a

satchel of books and copied pages. She gave me both exhibition catalogues and I promised to send her a copy of my book upon my return to the States. As it turned out, my book took a circuitous route to finally reach her. The package was literally sent to the wrong address, only to be found by a neighbor who eventually found me via e-mail so that I could get him Ariella's correct street address so that he could hand-deliver the book. Needless to say, this exchange took months, but the package eventually did arrive at its intended destination. In the meantime, I ordered a copy of Ariella's book on photography and began looking at and reading the catalogues she had given me. As I began to engage with this material I began to draw deeper connections between our projects in terms of this notion of living memory. Azoulay's work offered me a familiar strategy for engaging photography and memory, but the content and context of her efforts challenged me to reconsider the implications of a notion of living memory in the context of Israel and Palestine. It urged me to re-view and remember Israel's past and my own relation to its history otherwise.

"Constituent Violence, 1947–1950": Entering the Exhibit

Although I would like to share many of the photographs included in Azoulay's exhibition catalogue for "Constituent Violence, 1947–1950," I find this difficult to do. I imagine a defensive and negative response that instead of opening up a conversation might close it down. When I first read her introduction to this project, where she writes about reclaiming this period for all those who lived in Palestine and what was en route to becoming Israel, I now realize that I had my own fantasy about what those images might show. Instead of what Azoulay quite clearly argues for, a vision of a shared catastrophe, I imagined images of a before—images that showed the intermingled lives of the inhabitants, all of the inhabitants of this place, Jewish and Muslim, Christian, Arab, and European together—an idyllic vision. I suspect that my desire for this fantasy of "a life before" speaks more to what I hope for in some future than it does about that past. I also realized that it conveniently allowed me to avoid the painful images that I knew on some level were at the heart of this collection. In many ways Azoulay knows these desires well—the avoidance and the fantasy—and she does this with what I imagine as an Israeli, and not an American Jewish, audience in mind. She curated this collection of archival images in 2009 to insist that viewers see the founding violence, the systemic actions of what became the Israeli state as it made itself into a Jewish state. She does this precisely because she wants to challenge both the presumed inevitability of this process of state formation and the necessity of continuing to think about life in this place only and already on these terms.

For Azoulay the ethics of seeing otherwise is about changing the relationship between the various citizens of the Israeli state and its noncitizens, the relationship between the Jewish character of this state and its democratic ideals. She insists on this other form of viewing as we look to the future from the present, a present shaped by this history and its ongoing repercussions.

As I systematically went through the images collected in this "visual gene-

alogy," what struck me was the evidentiary character of the collection. What Azoulay insists on showing us is how the official Israeli state archives documented the emerging state's systematic efforts to make this place Jewish in photographic images. This was achieved, as Azoulay explains, through systematic efforts to create a clear separation between Jews and Arabs. It was carried out most disturbingly through the displacement of whole populations as well as through property redistribution. These activities included the destruction of not only numerous Arab villages and towns but whole sections of cities like Haifa and Jaffa, or what became Beersheba, Bir al-Sabi'e. These were systematic and violent activities that erased the evidence of where there were once whole communities of Palestinians living among or beside Jews. These efforts were so thorough that this very separation between Jews and Arabs has come to appear natural or given; efforts to imagine that this separation was not always already this way are themselves now difficult to see. This invisibility is, in large part, the urgency behind Azoulay's efforts. By calling attention to how this imposed separation fuels the ongoing sense of us-versus-them, by seeing anew the efforts that went into imposing this very separation, Azoulay wants to imagine a different future, one that resists this dichotomy and the politics of separation.

I am shaken by these images, especially seeing them and rereading them through Azoulay's curatorial gaze. Looking and reading and looking and reading over two hundred of these captioned images together, moving back and forth from the small images in the catalogue and the printed English translation of the extensive captions, made this an especially slow and deliberate process. I could not easily gloss over what was before me. The effort of moving between text, image, and translation slowed down the process. This actually helped me, in Azoulay's terms; to "watch" the photographs she had assembled more carefully. As part of her notion of the civil contract of photography, Azoulay explains that photographs need to be viewed. Still images need to be watched not unlike moving pictures. Instead of the projector creating the illusion of movement, she insists that viewers must return to still images again and again. Over time and in different geographical and/or physical contexts, she argues that we give life to what are otherwise set or static pictures. It is these animating efforts themselves that allow us to appreciate the potential of photography as an ethical and civil practice. Through these efforts to look carefully we become a part of a network of relationships, ethical relationships between viewers, photographers, and those who are photographed. These relationships are what constitute the civil contract of photography.

As Azoulay argues, this implicit contract is at the heart of photography. In *The Civil Contract of Photography*, she explains that evidence of this contract is ubiquitous. Instead of a written document, one encounters "the traces of this contract" where they have been left "at any and every site where there has been photography—that is, almost everywhere."²⁷ As she goes on to explain:

The contract binds together photographers, photographed persons, and spectators. Each of them fulfills her role—persons are being taken in photos, photographers take pictures, spectators look, and all of them know what is expected of them and what to expect from the others. This shared set of ex-

pectations is a civil knowledge that amounts to more than just a technical skill. It is an assembly of civil skills that are not subject to nationality, but rather to borderless citizenship, to the modern citizenship of individuals who know, even when they are subject to boundless rule—and this is part of their civil skill—that the actual rule to which they are subject, in its concrete configuration, is always limited, always temporary, never final, even when there seems to be no exit from it. The photographs that they produce, that are made of them, that they look at, are traces of this civil skill....²⁸

I cite Azoulay at length here in order to clarify her broader project. Here she offers a succinct account of her argument. The contract at the heart of her study is an alternative take on modern citizenship. It is about the ephemeral yet pervasive relations established and reestablished in taking photographs where those involved in these efforts always perform in relationship to each other. Azoulay uses this alternative contract as leverage against the relationships of civil authorities and nation-states. In place of such laws she deploys photography as a different form of civil engagement.

According to Azoulay, these relationships are bound by a kind of civility that although temporary, establishes the possibility of a kind of ethical relationship not bound by the borders of nation-states and their notions of citizenship. This is a crucial stipulation for Azoulay, as she goes on to systematically interrogate the ways in which nation-states use citizenship to limit or circumscribe such civil acts of engagement, acts that must and necessarily do cross borders and boundaries of various kinds. Of course, this civility is, for Azoulay, an alternative to the kind of us–them distinctions that disallow such intimacy and social engagements between subjects occupying different roles.

This civil contract is Azoulay's way into a sustained engagement with the visual legacy of the Second Intifada, the case study at the heart of *The Civil Contract of Photography*. As I have indicated, I am concerned here less with addressing the broader implications of her book, at least for the moment, but instead want to get at this notion of the contract and how it functions more generally in order to better appreciate what Azoulay does in her curatorial project, "Constituent Violence, 1947–1950."

I want to try to see anew the traces of this civil skill as it is enacted among the various photographs Azoulay has collected from the official and unofficial visual archives of the period she is investigating. In her attempt to get at the limits of the partnership between photographer and photographed subject, as well as the ethical engagements of the spectator, Azoulay stipulates that no one of these figures has absolute power over the others. This is a counterintuitive claim. Even as we consider the language of taking pictures, the notion of "shooting" photographs, or for that matter the idealization of the photographer as artist in Western artistic practice, we configure the photographer as the active agent over and against passive subjects and spectators. This is part of what Azoulay resists.

By highlighting "the dimensions of time and movement into the act of watching" still images, Azoulay argues that photographs are not simply seen and known once and for all time. Instead, what this notion of watching en-

ables is a kind of “ethics of spectatorship.”²⁹ To watch photographs is to assume that “these images do not speak for themselves.” As she goes on to explain, “Alone, they [photographic images] do not decipher a thing. Identifying what is seen does not excuse the spectator from ‘watching’ the photograph, rather than looking at it, and from caring for its sense.”³⁰ In other words, what Azoulay is arguing is that one needs to come back to the photographic image again and again. Although the image is, in a sense, stable, its meaning shifts and changes over time. This in turn demands that spectators be open to what *becomes* visible over time and in different settings. This holds true even as we view familiar images again. In this sense spectatorship is performative. Like my notion of living memory, it demands a kind of openness to seeing what we thought we already knew or understood otherwise. Like the sacred text or the individual memory, the meaning or the sense of a photograph can and does necessarily continue to change. It is this animated kind of seeing that Azoulay attempts to capture in her notion of “watching” the still images of photography. This is also why she insists on returning to the archive. The past is not set or stable; it can and does change over time.

In *The Civil Contract of Photography* Azoulay performs this process by revisiting images from the Second Intifada. Along with a number of other visual artists, she returns to an almost banal archive, the seemingly mundane images from the Israeli daily newspapers that covered these events at the time. With these artists she shows us how to review and reconsider what these images tell us, not only about what had been seen but what continues to unfold and become visible as we continue to engage with these photographs in the present. In a sense the various examples of photographers, curators, and visual artists engaging with these images teach us not only how to watch, but what can become possible or visible or thinkable through such sustained engagement.

Seeing 1948 Again

As I returned to the images from 1947 to 1950 after reading *The Civil Contract of Photography*, during the summer of 2010 I was able to appreciate anew what Azoulay was doing. Through my own halting efforts to see this period through the exhibition catalogue and the translation of the captions—matching up my imageless English text with the Hebrew and visual materials in the catalogue—I was struck by how much my temporal, geographical, and linguistic distance from this material informed what I was seeing. I began to see how much my own spectatorial position in a sense forced me to stay with my deepening discomfort. In this way, I became aware of what I thought I already knew. I experienced the disconnection. Seeing the exhibition through the catalogue and the translated text together belatedly, at a geographical distance from Israel at my home in Philadelphia, forced me to reformulate what I thought I knew about this historical legacy, 1947 to 1950, as Palestine was becoming Israel, that time and that place.

What was once a naïve and deeply heroic narrative of the establishment of the State of Israel—known to me more through childhood lore than ac-

tual historical knowledge—began to look quite different. Immediately after I finished watching these images, I wrote notes to myself about how even knowing as we know from other places and other stories of state formation that such efforts never occur without bloodshed, trauma, and loss, especially for those who lose such battles, I was still taken aback. There was something especially painful about what I witnessed. I saw images of the destruction of whole towns and villages now covered with majestic but incongruous memorial forests, often planted in the name of Jews lost in the Holocaust.³¹ I saw pioneering young Jewish girls clearing rubble not of imagined ancient ruins but of new destruction,³² the rubble left and then cleared from what was once a town where one of those forests might now stand. I found myself wanting not to know. I felt a deep sense of loss for the little girl I once was who sent money to plant those forests. Every year, I purchased individual trees in honor of my extended family.

Azoulay's project insists that I let go of any notion of my own innocence. This is why I am drawn to the photograph of the little girls. When I see Arab men and women separated and systematically accompanied out of their homes and communities under the coordinating eye of the Haganah or what became the Israeli military, I cannot say that they "left voluntarily" or that they "fled in war." They were ushered, no, forced out. Their homes were not abandoned. These images from the Israel state archives make this truth abundantly clear in image after image. And yet, even this new truth is itself a moment of reckoning, just one of many ways of viewing these images. This too is a part of what Azoulay's approach makes clear. There are no definitive readings; despite Azoulay's own determined effort to make this case in this exhibition at this particular historical moment.

This particular viewing is about seeing against the grain of more familiar narratives. For Azoulay, this is precisely what this exhibition is all about. She is trying to make visible not only what was systematically made invisible but also the process of disappearing itself. In other words, she wants us to see the labors involved in making these state actions disappear from view, in the name of what would become a seamless official story. And of course she does this by returning to the state's own archive, its own record of its past that includes so much more than any single official story.

Central to the process of disappearing that Azoulay insists on showing is the forced separation between Arabs and Jews. Azoulay radically historicizes this separation to make clear its central role in producing the state. She does this as a way of calling attention to the pervasiveness of these efforts. She insists that this conflict between Jews and Arabs was not always as it now appears to be. The conflict is not an ontological given. Rather it is an effect produced through these systematic efforts, efforts that continue into the present. And it is the ongoing practice that drives her efforts to show the seams of the production of this forced separation.

For many North American Jews like me, who were raised in the aura of Israel's victory in 1967, those of us who went to Israel on pilgrimages to celebrate the centrality of Israel in our lives even as we continued to live in North

America, this revisiting of the past, this seeing otherwise, is difficult and painful. It elicits a kind of grief that cannot simply be a rejection. It demands a kind of ethical reckoning. Trying neither to be defensive nor self-righteous as I look again at this archive is challenging. And as I first encountered these images I was shocked by how much I did not know and at my own indifference. Watching these images I felt caught in the act of my own ignorance, and this is where the urgency of Azoulay's curatorial project broke through. I found myself trying to appreciate again the ethical necessity of her argument and my own naiveté and initial resistance to her challenge. What I wanted to see depicted is in sharp contrast to what was actually there to see. And yet as I return in the process of writing and rewriting this essay, I am increasingly aware of my own desire to draw more definitive conclusions from this reckoning. I wanted to draw my own before and after, my own dichotomy, perhaps not an "us" and a "them," but a kind of clarity about what I have seen. I still believe that Azoulay has helped me appreciate something I had not fully appreciated in the past, but I am also increasingly aware of the ways that even this new vision is not definitive. There are ironies even here in this most urgent project. After all, it is the state's own archive that holds the traces of these contrasting narratives. Most of the images in the exhibition are drawn from the Israeli state archival collection.

If living memory is to matter, it needs to speak to us in the present. It needs to confront us with a compelling argument for seeing otherwise. The future looms large. How might life on the ground in Israel–Palestine be lived otherwise? How might it be possible to consider the needs of all those living in this place, to do justice to their stories, their hopes, and their dreams? This is the civility that Azoulay finds in the photographic contract. In those relationships, she argues, there is a form of seeing and being seen, an engagement not confined by the borders and boundaries of nation-states. It is here that she believes we can begin to challenge the logic of separation between a Jewish "us" and an Arab or a Palestinian "them."

By looking again at these archival images in the present, we can both historicize and denaturalize this separation for the sake of a less violent future but even this move is not definitive. Although this different form of relation is the promise envisioned in Azoulay's efforts to both rethink photography and the various collections of images she curates and writes about right now, her practice suggests that at other times and in other places, these images may very well be seen otherwise with still other stories to tell. But for right now, I want to do justice to the urgency of this moment and what it is that Azoulay urges us to see, right now.

Looking Again: Two Photographs

Azoulay begins the exhibit with images that show the shifting status of peoples and places. More specifically she shows how what were but a few days before the inhabitants of Bir al-Sabi'e became "Arab prisoners of war,"

as the official caption for photograph number one identifies them.³³ In these opening images from the exhibition catalogue, we learn about this place and its inhabitants. As Azoulay explains, "About 3,000 Palestinians lived in Bir al-Sabi'e during the British Mandate. The day after Bir al-Sabi'e was captured, the only people on the street were armed soldiers on patrol whose job it was to prevent life in the town from returning to normal." Their job was, in fact, to "lay the groundwork for transforming Bir al-Sabi'e into a Jewish town. The orders were to settle 3,000 Jews."³⁴ In the rest of her pointed future-oriented caption to Image 2, a view from the street outside the mosque pictured in the first photograph, Azoulay explains that these expelled residents will not be coming back.³⁵ She injects the future into her viewing, linking this present to that past. They will not "be able to enjoy the beautiful trees recently planted as saplings along the sidewalk, and the mosque will no longer be a place of prayer."³⁶ Hugo Mendelson of the Government Press Office photographed both of these images on October 22, 1948. Azoulay also does this in her caption for Image 1 where, in describing the mosque figured in the photograph, she writes, "The new inhabitants will change its function many times...."³⁷

We also learn from Azoulay's caption to the first photograph that there were only one hundred able-bodied Palestinian men left in the town "to help clean up and removed the rubble" of what were, just days before, their homes. Inside the mosque are the remnants of their belongings, including most visibly mattresses and blankets. These men will "soon be transferred to a different prisoner of war camp in Israel."³⁸

By opening the exhibit with these images Azoulay sets the stage for over 200 more photographs and narratives of displacement, destruction, and the recreation of many such places as Jewish spaces and Jewish places, part of the map of the new Jewish state. She allows us to linger with these sad and painful stories that are also a part of the story of the founding of the State of Israel. Frankly, the starkness and didacticism of these retellings and re-visionings of images primarily gleaned from the state's own archives are unsettling. This kind of return is neither easy nor simple. I feel the sting of not knowing as well as the loss of my own less-than-scholarly but deeply held and very old heroic narratives about the founding of the state.

By revisiting this archive with Azoulay, who gave them to me in a fraught present, a present riveted by ongoing conflict, violence, and occupation, I have little choice but to rethink those old tales. This is not some simple substitution of one story for another. Instead, we are asked to hold these deeply conflicted tales together in the current historical moment. The past is shifting. It is no longer what we had thought it once was. Part of what compels my own willingness to see these images otherwise is my sense that the present situation demands such critical engagement. Reimagining the past, and this particular past in this way might help make it possible for us to consider a different and perhaps less violent future.

As my contemporary, Azoulay offers a similar account of her own stance.³⁹ Here again it is my identification with her and the exchange between us that commands my attention. In her extended acknowledgements at the end of the introduction to *Constituent Violence*, she writes:

I was born in the early 1960s and took for granted the existence of the State of Israel. My political consciousness was formed by the 1967 occupation, the injustices it led to and the urgent need to reflect on them. Nineteen forty-eight appeared as a distant disaster, irreversible and less acute than the endless injustices that resulted from the 1967 occupation.⁴⁰

It was only after years of working with the legacy of 1967, ongoing occupation, and the two intifadas, that Azoulay was compelled to revisit 1948. As she explains, she had to reconsider her “assumptions about the irreversibility of 1948” in order to imagine a different future. In this exhibition she sought a way of thinking about “the *nakba* in relation to notions of political body, citizenship and the process of becoming a citizen and as a perspective from which to think about the possibility of regime change in Israel/Palestine.”⁴¹

I realize that many of those reading these words and this text will find this discourse extreme and will want to dismiss it immediately. I cite it here, in part, as a way of getting at what drives Azoulay’s project, its ethical urgency. I do this in support of her and the risks she has taken in helping many of us see against the grain of our more familiar narratives of Israel’s past, the stories that continue to color our accounts of this place in the present. I also do this because of our shared commitment to the practice I am calling living memory as both a visual and a textual practice of iteration.

To reconsider our roles in these civil acts of looking means telling other stories about what we see and what we know. For me, this now includes what I thought I knew about Israel’s founding. Living memory forces us to think again about how we remember and how we make history in the present. But this also means that at another historical moment we might return to this and other archives and see other things. We may very well have other stories to tell even about this past.

Postscript: Some Final Reflections

In writing this essay I began with my vision of what it means to keep Holocaust memory alive and ventured out. I tried to consider the nature and character of memory as an exchange and enacted this through my engagement with the work of two of my contemporaries, Eliza Slavet and Ariella Azoulay. Through my close reading of their work, I have argued that a commitment to memory is not a passive enterprise. It must be performed. At this historical moment, for me this has meant revisiting the archive with Azoulay to see the creation of the State of Israel otherwise.

I believe that these two constellations of recent Jewish memory—Holocaust and Israel—demand our attention as they continue to exert tremendous pressure on how we live as Jews in the present. This demand takes different forms; not all of us can or will agree on what is to be done, but we are, I believe, obligated to look again, to continue to challenge what we thought we already knew. We cannot be complacent.

By seeing the past always already through the lens of the present, new things will continue to come to light. This is what makes memory compelling

as well as challenging. My commitment to living memory has clearly taken me out of my comfort zone. My engagement with Azoulay's work, in particular, has challenged me to confront some of my own deeply held assumptions about Israel's past, assumptions I am sure that I share with a great many other North American Jews.

Living memory does not offer any simple answers, instead it insists on the importance of ongoing engagement. Like ritual, it must be performed over and over again, and, in so doing, we keep those memories alive and lively, we allow the past to shed new light on an ever-shifting present.

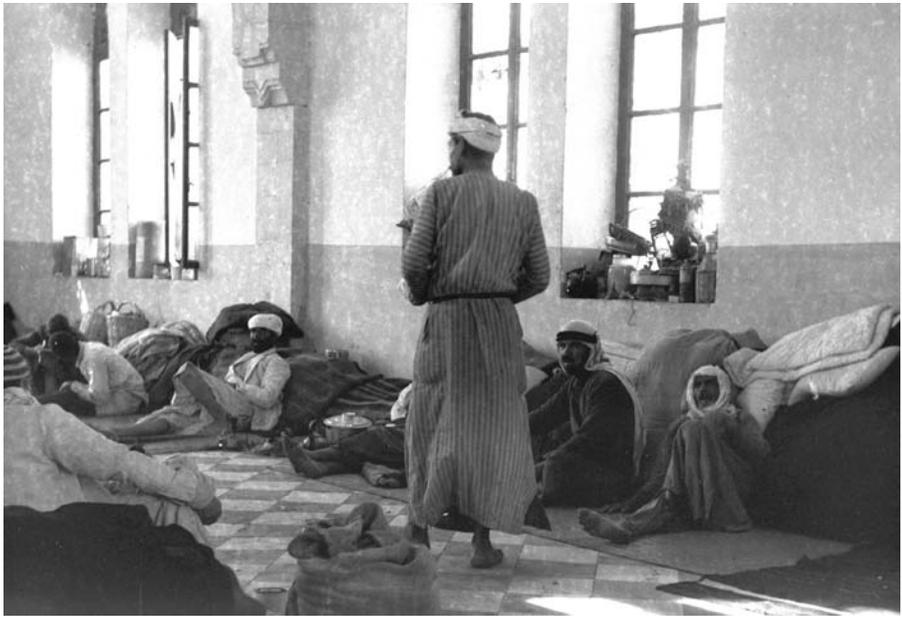
APPENDIX



Abandoned Arab village. When a village is completely transformed, and its population replaced by others, it loses its unique characteristics and its name and becomes an 'abandoned Arab village.' The youths were mobilized to complete the job, to advance the enterprise and bring about progress. The picture shows young girls, Gadna members, clearing 'the rubble of an Arab village' (created, as it were, by natural forces), so that immigrants to Israel could be absorbed.

Photographer: Zoltan Kluger, Central Zionist Archive, September 1949.

This text and image can be found together in Ariella Azoulay, From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947–1950, trans., Charles S. Kamen (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 123. Central Zionist Archive image PHKH/1287282.



***Bir al-Sabi'e (Beersheba).** These are the mosque's final hours serving the town's Palestinian residents. The new inhabitants will change its function many times, ignoring the original purpose for which it was built. When the photograph was taken, it was being used as a detention camp. Most of the people seen outside the walls of the temporary detention camps established in public buildings are Israeli soldiers. The army left 100 healthy, strong Arab men in the city to help them clean up the rubble. Until a few days ago they had lived in the buildings whose ruins they're now required to clear away. During the few hours they're not engaged in that activity, they're shut up in the mosque with mattresses, blankets, and the other belongings they've managed to save from their homes. The official caption describes them as 'Arab prisoners of war.' They'll soon be transferred to a different prisoner of war camp in Israel.*

Photographer: Hugo Mendelson, Israeli Government Press Office, October 22, 1948.

*This text and image can be found together in Ariella Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947–1950*, trans., Charles S. Kamen (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 22. Israeli Government Press Office, image D283-086.*



***Bir al-Sabi'e (Beersheba).** About 3,000 Palestinians lived in the town during the British Mandate. The day after Bir al-Sabi'e was captured, the only people on the street were armed soldiers on patrol whose job it was to prevent life in the town from returning to normal, and lay the groundwork for transforming Bir al-Sabi'e into a Jewish town. The orders were to settle 3,000 Jews. The residents expelled from the town won't be able to enjoy the beautiful trees recently planted as saplings along the sidewalk, and the mosque will no longer be a place for prayer.*

Photographer: Hugo Mendelson, Government Press Office, October 22 1948

*This text and image can be found together in Ariella Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947–1950*, trans., Charles S. Kamen (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 23. Israeli Government Press Office, image D283-112.*

Endnotes

- 1 Laura Levitt, *American Jewish Loss after the Holocaust* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 204.
- 2 Levitt, *American Jewish Loss*, 204.
- 3 Levitt, *American Jewish Loss*, 204-5.
- 4 This is not a uniquely Jewish enactment or practice and in this rendering, by no means do I claim these insights as simply my own. Instead, what this paper does is build on years of critical work on iteration in psychoanalytic, critical theoretical, hermeneutic, and philosophical writing to ask what these dynamics look like in practice. More specifically it asks how this works in the context of contemporary Jewish life. For some of these critical works with special attention to some of the specific issues addressed here see: Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); John P. Muller and William J. Richardson, eds., *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Readings* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.)
- 5 This is also true in how I have thought and written about it since. See "Revisiting and Remembering: Family Photographs and Holocaust Commemoration, Towers, Halls, and Cases," *AJS Perspectives* (Spring 2010): 24-25. This essay links my rereading of the Tower of Faces to a more recent visit to Yad Vashem and the ways what I thought I wanted from a Holocaust museum and memorial had shifted, yet again.
- 6 Again this is not new, it is a critically informed reading of a Jewish practice. Here the theory helps breathe new life into an older tradition.
- 7 This formulation of a relationship between student, teacher, and text comes from Miriam Peskowitz's opening essay in Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt, eds., *Judaism since Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 22-24.
- 8 There are many texts that speak to me. One of these is Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.) Other powerful works that in different ways address these forms of active memory include the haunting and ongoing legacy of Walter Benjamin and his theories of history and ideas about intellectual constellations; see his *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969.) In a different way, these dynamics are very much a part of the powerful literature on Holocaust monuments and memorials. On these issues see James Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) and *The Texture of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.) I thank the anonymous reader who pointed to both Benjamin and the discussions in Germany around the Berlin memorial as important examples of memory in motion. I am grateful to this reader for reminding me of these critical connections.
- 9 I thank David Myers for pushing me to clarify this point. Phone discussion, May 2010, as part of the Hartman Institute North American Scholars Circle.
- 10 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books), 2008.
- 11 Ariella Azoulay was the curator of two photographic exhibits. The first exhibition was of images from 1967, the second presented images from around 1948. The exhibits were: *Acts of State: A Photographed History of the Occupation* (Gallery of the Minshar School of Art, June 2007) and *Constituent Violence, 1947-1950*. The catalogue from *Constituent Violence, 1947-1950* was published in 2009. My focus is on *Constituent Violence*. In what follows, I initially worked from two English translations of the Exhibition materials. One is an unpublished translation of the wall texts for each of the images included in the exhibition. The other is a translation of Azoulay's introduction. Both of these documents were translated by Charles S. Kamen. I read this work as an enactment of Azoulay's civil contract of photography. I am indebted to Ariella Azoulay for sharing all these materials, including copies of the two exhibition catalogues with me in summer 2009. Since I began working on this essay, a version of Azoulay's exhibition catalogue has been published in English. This text is Ariella Azoulay, trans., Charles S. Kamen, *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 194-1950* (London: Pluto Press, 2011.) In what follows I leave the traces of my initial engagement with these materials in the narrative of my essay, but include in the notes and appendix references to the now-published version of these materials.

- 12 Here I build on Slavet's reading of these critical sources. I do this for two reasons. I do this in order to demonstrate that most of us come to these issues through the mediation of other texts and conversation partners. I also do this to enact the kind of layered engagement that I am writing about.
- 13 Eliza Slavet, *Racial Fever: Freud and the Jewish Question* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 19.
- 14 And, of course these are often less than conscious enactments. For additional critical material on this exchange between Lacan and Derrida, see *The Purloined Poe*.
- 15 In a different context while describing this phenomenon specifically in relation to the issue of Jews and race, I referred to the work of B'kol Lashon and the Center for Afro-Jewish Studies at Temple University in the United States. These organizations are devoted to making visible the always already present communities of Jews of color—black Jews, Black Hebrews, and Black Israelites, Kararites, Lemba, and Ibo, among others—who still remain invisible to so many of us not only in Jewish Studies but also in dominant North American Jewish communities. These Jews are only beginning to be seen, addressed, and engaged as Jews. More to my point, our growing knowledge about these communities is revising all that we thought we already knew about Jews, about Jewishness, and about Judaism. Laura Levitt, "Thinking Through Memory," address, Third Annual Jews and Race Symposium, Temple University, Fall 2009.
- 16 There are, of course numerous scholarly engagements with this exchange but for the purpose of this essay, I am interested in building on Slavet's account precisely because she places this exchange in a broader argument about Freud and Jewish memory and that is what interests me here. I am again not claiming that this is a particularly new reading but that it links these arguments to notions of Jewish memory.
- 17 Slavet, *Racial Fever*, 159.
- 18 Slavet, *Racial Fever*, 159.
- 19 Slavet, *Racial Fever*, 159.
- 20 I am playing with both literal and metaphoric letters here to again show the connections between material practices and these more abstract notions about the circulation of memory.
- 21 Along with *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Azoulay published another book on photography, *Once Upon a Time, Photography after Walter Benjamin* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2006.) She also published the exhibition catalogues for *Acts of State: A Photographed History of the Occupation and Constituent Violence, 1947–1950*.
- 22 In the e-mail, I described my appreciation for her work. In part, that e-mail became the basis for some of what I have written here. This e-mail exchange took place in the fall of 2009. In the e-mail, I explained that I initially turned to her book as I was preparing remarks for the Temple University annual symposium on Jews and Race. In that context, my task was to talk about the work of memory as we commemorated the life and work of Gary Tobin. In this exchange, Slavet and I bonded over the importance of her chapter on transmission and the ways that for both of us, this was the most powerful chapter of her book, the most lyrical, and the most generative. I drew connections between her work and the kinds of concerns I had raised in my chapter "Postmarked Pictures."
- 23 See Levitt, *American Jewish Loss*, especially chapter two, "Postmarked Pictures."
- 24 Abraham Ravett, *Half-Sister*, 1985.
- 25 Levitt, *American Jewish Loss*, p.84.
- 26 This is the letter I wrote as a postscript at the end of my chapter "Postmarked Pictures."
- 27 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 26.
- 28 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 26.
- 29 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 27.
- 30 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 27.
- 31 On these forests, perhaps the most powerful treatment of these issues is A.B. Yehoshua's famous short story, "Facing the Forest," in *The Continuing Silence of the Poet: Selected Stories* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 203–36. For more recent academic treatments of these issues see, Carol B. Bardenstein, "Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, eds. (Hanover: Dartmouth College, University of New England Press, 1999), 148–68.
- 32 See appendix with images and text. The image I refer to here is photograph number 97 from the Exhibition.
- 33 See appendix for images and text, this is photograph number 1 from the Exhibition. From English translation of wall text for photograph number 1, translation, 1. All subsequent references to the wall texts will be from this English translation by Charles S. Kamen first taken from the unpublished

- manuscript, "From Palestine to Israel," and now with reference to the published version in *From Palestine to Israel*.
- 34 Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel*, 1.
- 35 Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel*, 1.
- 36 Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel*, 1.
- 37 Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel*, 1.
- 38 Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel*, 1.
- 39 On this notion of the contemporary, see Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.)
- 40 From English translation of Azoulay's introduction, "Constituent Violence, 1947–1950: A visual genealogy of a regime and the transformation of the catastrophe into 'a catastrophe from their point of view,'" translated by Charles S. Kamen, 11. A slightly different version of this statement opens Azoulay's acknowledgements in *From Palestine to Israel*, 17.
- 41 Charles S. Kamen, "From Palestine to Israel," 11.