What do you call it when Jeremy Corbyn walks into a Seder? Jewishness, Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) and ethical subject-formation

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Abstract

Then UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's attendance at a Passover Seder organised by the radical leftist group, Jewdas, in April 2018, led to a brief but vitriolic controversy involving Anglo-Jewish umbrella organisations concerning who qualifies to speak as a Jew. This article uses this controversy to engage with Judith Butler's attempt to address this question, suggesting that in decentring Zionist claims to Jewish subjectivity she fails to take account of how different Jewish subjectivities are formed, and thus ends up proposing a 'good Jew/bad Jew' binary that dissolves Jewishness into universal humanism. Drawing on the work of the German-Jewish mystical anarchist Gustav Landauer (1870–1919), the article proposes a different way of understanding subjectivity that retains ontological inherency as a plausible precondition for ethical solidarity. As such, the article's argument has implications not merely for a reworked understanding of Jewish subjectivity but for the politics of subject formation more broadly.

Keywords

Judith Butler, ethics, Gustav Landauer, subjectivity, Zionism

Introduction

On 2 April 2018, then UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn attended a Passover Seder, an annual event in the Jewish calendar that, for those who observe it, is held in

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people's homes and/or Jewish community centres, and which retells the biblical story of the Jewish people's enslavement in and subsequent escape from Pharaonic Egypt. This Seder was organised by the Jewish radical left and anti-Fascist group Jewdas, which since its inception in 2009 has been a vocal critic and satirist of Israel, Zionism and mainstream Anglo-Jewish umbrella organisations (see Jewdas, 2009). The Seder took place in a context of various accusations levelled at the Labour Party concerning its alleged failure to satisfactorily address cases of antisemitism within the party, including its leadership.[1] This had led to a demonstration organised by mainstream Anglo-Jewish umbrella organisations on the evening of 26 March 2018 outside Parliament.[2] On 30 March, Corbyn released a video in which he discussed his opposition to antisemitism and declared to British Jews 'I am your ally' (Heffer, 2018). Given Jewdas's politics, Corbyn's subsequent attendance at the Seder was met with outrage by the Anglo-Jewish umbrella organisations that had organised the demonstration, with the then President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Jonathan Arkush, claiming that Corbyn's attendance was intentionally provocative, as Jewdas was 'a source of virulent antisemitism', that 'they are not all Jewish' and that they were 'lifelong campaigners against the Jewish community to whom they show the upmost disregard and contempt'.[3]

The Corbyn-Jewdas controversy provides a rich terrain for an exploration of the supposed tension between ontologically inherent and ethically relational modes of subject formation. In this article, ontological inherency entails a process of subject-formation that is built around an affinity to sets of cultural markers that are perceived by some of their adherents, and certainly their critics, as fixed and transhistorical. In mainstream cosmopolitan thought for instance, ontological subject formations, because they are not 'real', are in irredeemable tension with more ethical forms of subjectivity that are predicated on a supposed openness to the world, and a concomitant solidarity with oppressed groups. Fixed, ontologically inherent affiliations are rendered as primordial and anti-humanist, and Western traditions of individual moral and political subjectivity are naturalised as the only pathway to the practice of a universal ethic of solidarity and care. Communitarian ties are thus viewed as being inimical to any project of global liberation (for instance, Pogge, 1992; Cohen and Vertovec, 2002; Singer, 2004), or at best, strategic transitional points on the path to a global cosmopolitan community (for instance: Spivak, 1984–85: 184; Fanon, 1963: 144). In response to this tendency, this article seeks to offer an account of how communal affiliations (ontological inherency) might act as a necessary precondition for an ethical form of subjectivity that engenders solidarity across cultural and territorial boundaries.

Jewdas claims to challenge 'the opressiveness [sic] of the "natural" in favour of ethics designed to meet the face of the other. [Jewdas] preaches of the need to widen Judaism beyond the boundaries of those born Jewish, towards an ethic of wider concern, a Judaism that might at times stand in critique of the Jews'.[4] In the context of moral cosmopolitan and humanist critiques, however, one might wonder whether it is possible for Jewdas to be radically engaged with oppressed non-Jews and essentially and ontologically Jewish simultaneously, whereby the latter stands for an affiliation to a particular community and tradition of being and acting in the world. Furthermore, Jonathan Arkush's response to the Jewdas Seder appears to reinforce the cosmopolitan critique of ontological inherency by implying a miscorrelation between being Jewish and showing

solidarity with Palestinian struggles for liberation. Here, it is notable that when Arkush accused Jewdas of holding the Jewish community in 'the upmost disregard and contempt', and of not really being properly Jewish, he was referring to a conflict that dates back to a hoax email that Jewdas circulated in 2009, and that centred on what Jewdas held to be the Board's uncritical support of Israel. The email, sent from 'info@boardofdeputies.org', announced the cancellation of an 'Israel solidarity rally' organised by the Board and other mainstream Anglo-Jewish organisations, called to support Israel during the contemporaneous conflict in Gaza (known as 'Operation Cast Lead'), due to be held on 11 January of that year. Among other things, the email suggested that the Board did not want to be 'seen as supporting Israel's military campaign', and called for the lifting of the economic blockade on Gaza.[5] By holding Jewdas's record of criticism of mainstream Anglo-Jewish organisations and their support for the State of Israel as evidence of them not being 'properly' or 'all' Jewish, a conflation emerges between Jewdas's unequivocal solidarity with Palestinian liberation and being irredeemably un-Jewish. A straightforward 'with them (Palestinians) = against us (Jews)' formula is erected that forecloses any possibility of acting in solidarity across boundaries from an ontologically inherent subject position.

This article challenges this formulation. First, the article identifies efforts by the state of Israel and its supporters (like the Board of Deputies) to make ethno-nationalism, in the form of Zionism, the ontologically inherent anchoring point of Jewish subjectivity that in practice has foreclosed more transcendental and solidarity-based forms of Jewishness. Here, I share Judith Butler's (2012: 22) approach to Jewishness when they write of 'tracking the generalization of certain principles that are derived from particular religious formations, cultural and historical modes of belonging, patterns of self-reflection and analysis, and conventions governing modes of resistance and the articulation of ideals of social justice'. A necessarily concise definition of Zionism here refers to the belief in a nation-state for people of Jewish descent founded on some combination of territory that generally runs from the Jordan River in the east to the Mediterranean in the west of modern-day Israel-Palestine, and that privileges the rights of people of Jewish descent (in principle not necessarily over and above that of non-Jewish people, although in practice that has mostly been, and is increasingly, legally the case[6]). Whilst different strands of Zionism that traverse the political spectrum exist, and demarcate their territorial claims differently, all are united by a belief system that naturalises and privileges the relationship between Judaism, Jews, and the territory of modern-day Israel (and in many cases beyond; see Schwartz, 2009), as encapsulated in the state of Israel as a Jewish state/state for Jews (see Hertzberg, 1997 [1959]), albeit not all render these claims in exclusive terms.

Secondly, the article seeks to problematise both ethno-nationalist Zionist claims to Jewish subjectivity, *and* the cosmopolitan dismissal of ontologically inherent subjectivity, by constructing an ontologically founded Jewish subject formation without Zionism. This is a formation that foregrounds dialogues between peoples and the 'value of a world in which other worlds are possible' (Dunford, 2017: 380). In doing this, the article empathetically critiques recent interventions in the debate about how and if Jewish subjectivity can be reimagined without Zionism and Israel in ways that might be productive of ethical subject formations. Specifically, the article explores the work of

Judith Butler (2012) as a recent exemplar of this trajectory (see also Raz-Krakotzkin, 2007; Sand, 2014; Braverman, 2018), suggesting that in reimagining Jewish subjectivity without Zionism, Butler in fact dissolves Jewish subjectivity. As a counterfoil to Butler and in order to reclaim a Jewish subjectivity more ontologically founded on inherent Jewishness, the article foregrounds the life and thought of one radical Jew, Gustav Landauer, an anarcho-socialist beaten to death by German *freikorps* in 1919 for his central role in driving the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Where other Jewish radicals of the period had backgrounded or even disavowed their Judaism in the name of universal secular humanism (i.e. Rosa Luxembourg, Karl Marx, Emma Goldman, etc.), Landauer stood out for drawing his political radicalism from a self-understood heretical reading of Jewish texts and traditions (amongst others). The article will suggest that Landauer helps to develop an understanding of how ontological inherency (and not just as understood with reference to Jewishness) can be a productive precondition for a relational ethical subject formation that engenders solidarity across cultural and territorial boundaries.

The state of Israel and contested Jewish subjectivity

Nineteenth-century Zionist projects were always in part composed by a hegemonic exclusionary vision that acted to racialise several groups, including Eastern European Jews, who became weak fodder for the Zionist project and/or racially polluting to that same project (Elon, 2003: 260; Grodzinsky, 2004: 80–100), Palestinian Arabs, and then Maghrebi and Arab Jews (Shohat, 1988; Shabi, 2009). In the latter case, this hegemonic construction entailed the simultaneous 'whitening' of what a modern Jew should look like. After the Shoah, this manifested in the secular and white 'new Jew', or 'Sabra', a figure that had not, in its own mythology, meekly succumbed to the Nazi Holocaust like its religious European counterparts or lived in supposed backwardness amongst the Arabs of the Maghreb and Middle East for millennia (Almog, 2000; Sand, 2014: 48). As far as the latter went, this project was underpinned by state racism,[7] and a broad array of structural impediments across housing, employment, education, culture and beyond (Shabi, 2009), erected against those Jews of colour and their descendants, which went hand-in-hand with structural discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel, and more recently applies itself to Jews from Ethiopia (Ben-Eliezer, 2004) and to non-Jewish people of colour seeking asylum in Israel (see Bachner, 2018).

The image of the historical Jewish subject, ever-yearning for a physical and spiritual relocation to Zion (which did not necessarily always correlate with the physical site of contemporary Israel/Palestine; see Reif, 1997), which can be found scattered throughout Jewish liturgy, became thoroughly intertwined with a Euro-Christian eschatology of salvation (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2007: 536) and was captured by a modernist project of nation-state building. This was then projected back to the world, including Jewish diasporas, as transhistorical ontology, despite the fact that notions of Zion and Jerusalem have taken on different meanings in different contexts throughout the millennia (Reif, 1997). Partnering the attempt to racially demarcate the 'new Jew' then has been an effort to erase Jewish political plurality, and assert Zionism, albeit in its different strains, as the boundary between Jewishness and non- or self-hating Jewishness (as seen in Jonathan Arkush's comments about Jewdas). The organs of the Israeli state have made, and

continue to make, sustained efforts to project a singular and ethno-nationalist conception of Jewish subjectivity as being in intrinsic relation to Israel and Zionism. This project is today pursued through two main strategies. One of these is evident in the funds that the Israeli state and its supporters spend on subsidising highly manufactured tours of the country, for instance the Taglit-Birthright programme. This programme provides all-expenses-paid, highly curated tours of Israel for Jewish adults who have never been on an organised tour of the country before. Founded in 1999, it claims to have sent over 600,000 participants on such tours[8] and is thus a major conduit through which people who have never visited Israel before can be inculcated into a particular Zionist narrative. Taglit-Birthright claims to instruct participants in 'Narratives of the Jewish People', and to expose them to 'an unmediated and responsible experience of the country through its achievements as well as challenges'.[9] Palestinians are not mentioned on the Taglit-Birthright website and, according to press reports, Taglit-Birthright stopped allowing Palestinian citizens of Israel from meeting with programme participants in November 2017, after only one year's trial (Maltz, 2017).

The controversy over the Corbyn-Jewdas Seder is an example of the second strategy to demarcate Jewish subjectivity pursued by the Israeli state and its supporters, which is to deny the possibility of identifying as simultaneously Jewish and non- or anti-Zionist (thus crowding out the space for alternative expressions of Jewishness).[10] This is made clearer when we consider the ways in which Jewdas has staked out claims to Jewishness, claiming to provide 'new and more radical ways of being Jewish' by decentring Zionism as the central marker of Jewish identification,[11] and that a majority of its members are 'synagogue-going Jews, most with either paid or voluntary positions within our communities'.[12] A Jewdas pamphlet, 'How to Criticise Israel without Being Anti-Semitic', explicitly argues that to claim that antisemitism no longer exists 'or is only invoked by Zionists trying to close down debate, is dismissive and inaccurate'. The pamphlet then lists common tropes about Jews that are either misconceptions or straightforwardly Judeophobic, e.g. that all Jews are powerful, consider themselves to be superior to non-Jews, are all Zionists, are all white, and so on.[13] The text was written explicitly for people engaging in Palestinian liberation activism. In this light, for the representatives of umbrella Anglo-Jewish organisations to accuse Jewdas of being 'not Jewish' or 'anti-semitic' is striking and suggests that what was at stake with Corbyn's attendance at the Seder was not necessarily solely antisemitism, or even Corbyn's attitude towards Israel and Jews per se, but rather what and who counts as being 'Jewish'. If Jonathan Arkush, the then-elected president of the main umbrella body of Anglo-Jewry, is correct, then being anti-Zionist, or showing unequivocal solidarity with Palestinian victims of Israeli state violence, is not commensurable with being legitimately Jewish. This gives succour to the claims of liberal and moral cosmopolitans that ontologically inherent cultural attachments (such as those implied in Arkush's assessment of Jewdas) foreclose transcendent acts of solidarity (e.g. Singer, 2004).

Judith Butler's 2012 book, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, was an attempt to speak back to hegemonic Zionist attempts to ethically delimit Jewishness. In the following section, the article critically engages with Butler to illustrate how in defending Jewishness from the delimitations of Zionism, Butler inverts the

ethnocentric Zionist claim that only Zionists can be Jews, instead arguing that ontologically inherent Jewishness will be unavoidably Zionist and ethnocentric.

Parting ways with Judith Butler

In *Parting Ways*, Judith Butler seeks to contest the idea that individuals are fully or even mostly autonomous, what they label the 'sovereign notions of the subject and ontological claims of self-identity' (2012: 9) that constitute Zionist delimitations of Jewish subjectivity. Butler instead argues that to be 'Jewish . . . is to have already entered into a certain mode of relationality' (p. 6). This is because, for Butler, 'the relation to the gentile defines not only [the Jewish] diasporic situation, but one of its most fundamental ethical relations' (p. 6). As such, 'Relationality replaces ontology, and it is a good thing too' (p. 5). This is a key formulation for Butler, and one this section treats as being problematic. For Butler, this relationality is inherent to Jewish subjectivity because of what Boyarin and Boyarin have separately called the 'nonhegemonic' Jewish diasporic experience (1993: 718), and results from 'the dispersing of the self that follows from . . . encounter' (Butler, 2012: 26), i.e. the challenge that an encounter with humanity presents to logics of individual autonomy and internal coherence. For Butler, this is important as they seek to deny any kind of inherency to Jewishness. Butler justifies this because 'the Jew can never be fully separated from the question of how to live among those who are not Jewish' (p. 28). As such, for Butler, ontological subjectivity is a denial of the relational reality that is being Jewish. In a Zionist context, the ontological claim is that the state of Israel is inherent to Jewish subject formation and identity. In order to escape from this formulation therefore, Butler must reject the relation between subject formation and ontological inherency.

Butler's argument encounters problems because it downplays the exogenous factors that produce ontologically inherent subject formations (and sets these resultant formations up as being unethical). We see this most clearly in Butler's treatment of Edward Said's formulation of the biblical Moses, an Egyptian prince, as the exemplary Jew. For Butler, Moses, 'the Arab-Jew, is at the origin of our understanding of Judaism . . . "Arab" and "Jew" cannot be disassociated' (2012: 30). As incredibly generative as this statement is for thinking about solidarity across supposedly fixed boundaries, it cannot but fail to be confronted by the figure of the actually existing Arab-Jew. Notably, the majority of Arab-Jews living in Israel (known as 'Mizrachim') have consistently voted for centre-right political parties since the right took advantage of Mizrachi disillusionment with the institutionalised racism perpetuated by Israel's first Labour governments from 1948 into the late 1970s. For instance, a 2013 pre-election poll showed that a majority of those who voted for Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud-Beteinu party were Mizrachi (Miller, 2013). Today, it is not uncommon to find Arab-Jewish citizens of Israel characterise themselves with the cry 'We are not Arabs!' (Shabi, 2009: 217). Similarly, Butler seems unconcerned with why some Jews might identify as Zionist in the first place, which might not necessarily be because of some kind of ideological commitment to national chauvinism, but rather through direct experience of or fears about persecution and violence committed against them (and the subsequent belief, however contentious, that

the existence of a Jewish national homeland is thus necessary in order to safeguard them).

Butler renders the exogenous factors that inform subject formation as inimical to ethical forms of subjectivity, and indeed suggests that such factors can and should be overcome (2012: 27). The desire to 'depart from a concern only with the vulnerability and fate of the Jewish people' (p. 27) may be legitimate, but should not necessitate the rejection of historical communitarian moorings, and indeed fails to take account for how such moorings are formed, embodied and, for those dispossessed and traumatised through colonial violence, often necessary (Ramnath, 2011: 21). Indeed, Stuart Hall underlines how we risk reinforcing colonial narratives of hegemonic racialised identity when we situate the latter as an unproblematised site of colonial-modernity's production. In so doing, we erase the multiple histories of peoples transported under conditions of slavery, bonded labour and other more or less forced migratory movements. As such, Hall warns us not to overlook the potential power of a 'reimaginative rediscovery which conceptions of a rediscovered essential identity entails' (1977: 171–2).

Butler thus risks recommending a process of self-actualisation that bears little relationship to the conditions under which many people live, particularly those who do not exist within the kinds of privileged conditions that beget the kind of choice Butler suggests. Vitally, how the ontological subject can become ethical is thus completely overlooked within Butler's schema. This is further embedded because, for Butler, we are all, essentially and always, already composed by, in Butler's terms, the Other (2012: 21). As such, 'we come to recognize that we are, at an ontological level, dis-possessed . . . evacuate[d] . . . of all ontological substance' (p. 66). This is a pre-social relation: 'it precedes contact, is mired in interdependency, and is often effaced by those forms of social contract that presume . . . an ontology of volitional individuals' (pp. 129–30). In other words, none of us are singular, we are all multiple; and because this is a pre-social formation, one that simply exists, Butler brings ontology right back in, replacing multiple ontological inherencies and identifications with a singular ontology, in the process constructing the erasure of difference and the dissolving of plural subject formations and identifications.

This logic leads Butler to argue that Jewish opposition to Israel must not be Jewish as such but must instead 'affirm the displacement of identity that Jewishness requires' (2012: 117). There are many reasons to agree with such a claim, not least that Zionist attempts to mandate that only (Zionist) Jews can really claim to speak about Israel is one that must be thoroughly debunked, and that as Butler suggests elsewhere, speaking *as Jews* on Israel risks reinstating the Zionist claim that the State of Israel and its bureaucracy is somehow fundamentally Jewish (p. 3). Nonetheless, Butler's claim emerges from a thoroughly privileged position that takes no account of the conditions under which subjects become ontologically inherent, embodied and affected. Operating beyond the confines of privileged spaces, where antisemitism may be more keenly felt, means that one does not always have the choice as to whether or not one is fixed in place and identity as, or can speak as, a 'Jew'. It is the centrality of self-actualisation that exists within Butler's notions of Jewishness that makes these notions particularly privileged. For only on the basis of self-actualisation can one claim that Jews must, under all conditions, form their identities around non-ethnocentric, non-statist forms of

Jewishness (and this obviously applies to other forms of ontologically held subject formations, particularly those formed through processes of oppression and dispossession). To be clear, it is one matter to dispute the historical, political and ethical claims contained within variants of Zionism, and those who consider themselves as Zionists, and indeed to dispute the degree to which Zionism can be properly considered as sitting comfortably within Jewish traditions of thought and practice; it is quite another to suggest that adopting a Zionist position necessarily invalidates claims to be Jewish, which is the logical 'good Jew/bad Jew' binary end-point of Butler's argument, where they seek to construct a Judaism that is Zionist-free. Indeed, in making this argument, Butler mirrors Zionist claims that to be inherently Jewish is to be inherently Zionist. This is because, for Butler, being ethically Jewish means precisely the rejection of any notion of ontological inherency, as expressed in Zionist narratives of Jewishness. Thus, if you can't be a simultaneously ethical and ontologically Jewish Jew, then chauvinistic renditions of ontological Jewishness will have free rein in delimiting ontological Jewish subjectivity.

Butler's formulations are more broadly problematic, as they efface the desirability of different ontological inherencies and risk reiterating the colonial project of universal humanism characteristic of moral cosmopolitan thought (Dunford, 2017), which claims for itself 'the right to be "the" world, subjecting all other worlds to its own terms or, worse, to non-existence' (Escobar, 2015: 3). As a response to this tendency, Rojas suggests that it is vital 'to recognize difference [...] to refuse the step that requires reducing this difference to a shared category, and accepting that we are not metaphysically committed to a common world' (2016: 370). Butler's approach, however, risks the opposite when she writes that even under conditions of persecution the ethical commitment to the Other would be no less obligatory, for under such conditions 'a responsibility is born precisely from that persecution. What that responsibility entails is precisely . . . a struggle against the ethics of revenge . . . a struggle to encounter and honor the face of the other' (2012: 60).

This is a brave commitment, and yet it is difficult to imagine applying this approach in all instances to, for instance, First Peoples,[14] or indeed Palestinians. Must they always 'honor the face of the other' when they have been so radically and violently dispossessed by it? Is this not to deny them their rights to difference? There is at the least cause to pause here when considering such an implication of Butler's argument. How then do we take up Butler's challenge, a challenge that emerges similarly from other figures on the radical left (although there is not room for a fuller discussion here; see Fanon, 1963: 45, 144; Said, 1978: 45, 328)? How might we respond to the Corbyn-Jewdas controversy in such a way that speaks back to the chauvinism of the Board of Deputies, but retains the ontologically inherent Jewishness of Jewdas, without dissolving it into a soup of relational universalism? What are the implications of doing this for thinking political subjectivity as both ontologically inherent, *and* standing in ethical relation to all humans and non-humans? The following section will propose that a German-Jewish mystical Anarchist called Gustav Landauer may enable us to address these questions by thinking about Jewish subjectivity, and thus subjectivity more broadly, as relational *only because* it is ontologically inherent.

Gustav Landauer

These final sections of the article seek to remember difference (Hall, 1977: 171–2). The controversy about the Jewdas Seder is a reminder that homogenous narratives of identity based on cultural affinity can be violent, but the rest of this article will suggest that this does not necessarily require the dissolution of cultural affinity and resultant forms of ontological inherency and subject formation per se. As such, these sections will foreground the relationship between Butler's figure of the ontologically inherent Jew and the ethical Jew, arguing that, given histories of antisemitism that solidify and fix the Jewish subject (Englert, 2018), it is vital to elucidate an ethical yet ontologically inherent subject formation of Jewishness, which carries relevance for how we think about political subjectivity more broadly. This is in order to transcend the oft-suggested necessary relationship between ontological inherency and ethno-nationalism/ontological Jewishness and Zionism, which is mirrored by Butler (see also Sand, 2014), whereby ontologically inherent Jewishness is held to be necessarily compromised by ethnocentrism and Zionism. These moves are necessary for creating the intellectual groundwork for thinking about a form of subjectivity that is at once ethical *because* it is ontologically inherent. I will argue that we can cover a lot of this ground through an exploration of the life and thought of Gustav Landauer (1870–1919).

Born into a middle-class assimilated German-Jewish family in Karlsruhe in 1870, Landauer was intellectually and politically active from a young age, becoming the editor of the radical journal *Der Sozialist* when he moved to Berlin as a student at the end of the 1880s. Sentenced to 11 months in prison for incitement in 1893, he was refused re-entry to university on his release, and so his subsequent intellectual development became rather auto-didactic (Maurer, 1971: 155–7). One of a tiny minority, even among radical circles, to oppose German militarism during the First World War from the outset, when the Bavarian Soviet Republic was declared in November 1918 Landauer was invited to Munich to support the uprising. Although disappointed at the factionalism of the enterprise (Landauer, in Kuhn, 2012: 171–98), he nonetheless became Minister for Public Education during an iteration of the Republic. Shortly after, on 3 May 1919, nearly 40,000 regular and irregular German State troops marched on Munich, taking the city and killing large numbers of Republicans, variously affiliated. Landauer was arrested, removed to a military camp, and beaten to death by a mob of soldiers.

In the final two sub-sections of the article I seek firstly to lay out the distinctly Jewish nature of Landauer's politics and praxis, and distinguish this from the emblematic work of Judith Butler. Following this, the article will use Landauer's writings on temporality, liberation and spirit to suggest that we can derive a specifically and ontologically inherent Jewish iteration of subjectivity from this work that rests on memories of exile and community. This is an iteration of Jewishness that simultaneously necessitates solidarity beyond its own boundaries, a solidarity that would be impossible without an ontological sense of self. As such Landauer contributes to an understanding of the subject that is in ethical relation to the world because it is ontologically inherent, avoiding the pitfalls of the kinds of universal humanism found in Butler and other radicals writing in a similar oeuvre, as well as the chauvinism of ethnocentric Zionism.

Gustav Landauer and ontologically inherent Jewishness

In late 19th-century Europe there was a wide range of radical positions taken up by Jews, including many positions taken up in opposition to a distinctive Jewish nation/identity/subjectivity that transcended the laws of historical dialectical materialism (see most obviously Marx, 1959: 35, 47). Putting this position to one side, there were yet more distinctions between those Jews who saw the importance of subsuming their struggles against antisemitism within the broader proletarian movement (communists); Bundists, who sought to maintain a distinct Jewish dimension to their struggle for socialism *in* Russia/Europe; and left-Zionists, who took a Trotskyist and settler-colonial approach to exporting revolution to Palestine (Brossat and Klingberg, 2017 [1983]). However, for Brossat and Klingberg, even those Jewish radicals who sought to retain the Jewish dimension of their struggles for socialism (and, according to them, even amongst communists, this was the great majority), did so in order to show that Jews could fight, that Jews were courageous, and that 'the atavistic prejudices were a lie' (2017 [1983]: 18).

As such, these were struggles with universalist pretensions to fit *in*, to reject Jewish particularity, and to illustrate that Jews too could 'take on life as moderns' (Shilliam, 2015: 10). As we will see, Landauer inverted and politicised these 'atavistic prejudices' of the Jew as a wandering, rootless cosmopolitan, furnishing an ontology of Jewish subjectivity that necessitates an ethical relationality. Landauer's outlook cohered around 'a religious symbolic universe [that] . . . seemed to escape the usual distinctions between faith and atheism', and whilst it was 'man who created God, not the other way around' (Lowy, 2014: 58; see also Breines, 1967: 77), this did not necessarily invalidate God, or rather a de-anthropomorphised godliness, as a tool with which to challenge the secular rationality of the state. Exposed in Berlin in the early 1900s to the lectures on Eastern European Hassidic thought by the Jewish theologian and philosopher Martin Buber, Landauer was impressed by the importance the 18th-century Hassidic tradition placed on the relation between the mystical and corporeal, on the holiness of all material things and acts, and the idea that Jews who sought to await the messianic era rather than create it were therefore pursuing 'the road of false messianism, leading inexorably not only to inconsolable disappointment, but also to a nihilism, a rejection of [the Jewish] moral task within history' (Mendes-Flohr, 2015b: 40). Unlike those fin-de-siècle romantics who sought to valorise and depoliticise this Hasidic tradition (Underhill, 2009: 28), or Jewish philosophers who read Zionism as a contradiction to the Jewish mission of withdrawal from material conditions and politics (see Rosenzweig, 2005 [1921]: 347–8), Landauer weaponised Hassidism to construct a revolutionary politics that saw every moment as pregnant with the possibility of transcending the state and modernity, and teleological commitments to material progress. Walter Benjamin (1999: 255) would later call this form of revolutionary intervention in history 'messianic time'. Therefore, rather than embracing the state and modernity by injecting it with some Jewish content (qua Bundists and left-Zionists), rejecting Jewishness in favour of universalism (qua communists) or retreating from modernity into some *volkish* premodern Eastern European Jewish fantasy (qua Jewish New Romantics), Landauer's Jewishness was in fact rooted very squarely in a direct struggle against, rather than an

attempted insertion into or retreat from, these manifestations of modernity, which he saw as centralised violence.

As such, Landauer's politics became increasingly and explicitly inherently Jewish, in that he began to regard 'the condition of Jews as the objective foundation of their international socialist role' (Lowy, 2014: 48). In his earlier writings (prior to roughly 1908/9, when he met Buber) Landauer does not refer to his own Jewishness. Yet he had read Spinoza in his youth (Von Wolzogen, 2015) and had been affected by the Dreyfus scandal in France in 1894 (Seeligmann, 2015: 206). His three major written contributions, *Through Separation to Community* (2010 [1901]), *Revolution* (2010 [1907a]) and *For Socialism* (1978 [1911]), track his growing engagement with Jewish mysticism, although all three are riven with broader mystical referents (David, 2015: 100). This meant that Landauer was easily and seamlessly able to incorporate a significant Jewish element into his thinking upon befriending Buber in 1908/9 – all of the building blocks were already there.

Where Butler therefore seeks to dissolve the ontological inherency of Jewish subjectivity in order to be at one in and with the world, Landauer offers a subtly different approach, albeit one that at first appears to share much with Butler. On the relationality of the subject, for instance, Landauer writes that:

> my inner feeling that I am an isolated unit can be wrong – and I declare it so . . . I reject the certainty of my 'I' so that I can bear life . . . in order not to be a godforsaken loner, I accept this world and surrender my I. I do this to feel one with the world in which my I has dissolved . . . The I kills itself so that the World-I can live. (2010 [1901]: 97)

The isolated figure of the autonomous individual is thus dissolved in favour of a more horizontal relationality; 'the concrete and isolated individual is as much of a spook as God' Landauer writes (2010 [1901]: 101). He then goes on to dissolve teleological isolation, the idea of an autonomous present free of the past and maker of the future, in a similar manner. There is no prior or after, no teleology; history becomes memory:

> What we are, is what our ancestors are within us. They are active and alive in us, they are with us when we interact with the outside world, and they will be passed on with us to our descendants. What we are part of is an unbreakable chain that comes from the infinite and proceeds to the infinite . . . Everything which lives, lives once and for all . . . we are the instants of the eternal community of ancestors. (2010 [1901]: 100)

Biblical Hebrew contains no word for history. The closest word is *zachor*, translated as memory. Modern Hebrew has simply incorporated a Hebrew-ised version of the English, *historia*. The distinction between history and memory is central for Landauer, whereby because it is not sequential, it can be constantly generative of new relationalities and solidarities. Landauer's conception of temporality thus dissolves teleological time, whereby memory becomes revolutionary, whilst history is devoid of spirit. Memory must interrupt history in order to transform it, by illuminating the relational, intersubjective character of human and human, human and non-human. Although writing about this in *Through Separation to Community* in 1901, such a schema is able to fit easily into the Hassidic paradigm which he came to embrace later.

Both the horizontal and teleological isolation that Landauer dissolves, and the new relationalities that emerge through this process, are only available, accordingly, through a journey inwards and a rejection of a form of subjectivity that sees the individual as historically and socially isolated. To what extent is this distinct from what Judith Butler writes in *Parting Ways*? Explicitly, Landauer's 'World-I' (2010 [1901]: 97) appears initially to share a great deal with Butler's notion of the subject as already composed by its Others. This would thus appear to be a position opposed to distinct ontological inherencies. However, as his writing developed, Landauer began to finesse these earlier writings and fit them into a broader and more ontologically inherent Jewish frame. As we have seen, in order to serve the world, the subject had to be reconceived as fundamentally embedded in the past, present and future. However, Landauer rejected the idea of a universal human subject which he saw as composed of dangerous centralising tendencies. This was evident in a self-explanatory piece entitled 'Do not Learn Esperanto!', where Landauer argued that 'humans can understand and talk to one another because they are different . . . Only the most trivial, petty, unimportant things can be expressed by an artificial product; only what is old and has been endlessly regurgitated – nothing new, fermenting, creative, ingenious' (2010 [1907b]: 277). As such, Landauer conceived of his identity as multiple, but also rooted in his ontological inherency:

> My being a Jew and a German at the same time does not do me any harm, but actually a lot of good . . . I experience this strange and yet intimate unity in duality within myself as something precious and do not distinguish one element of this relationship within myself as primary, and the other, secondary. I have never felt the need to simplify myself or to create an artificial unity by way of denial; I accept my complexity and hope to be an even more multifarious unity than I am now aware of. (Landauer, 1913: 252)

As such, Landauer's relationally constituted 'World-I' was only accessible via an attachment to the parochial. An obvious tension, however, remains between conceiving of the subject as in fact relationally constituted on the one hand, and then privileging certain 'communities of ancestors' on the other (be they German, Jewish, both and more). This is not a tension that Landauer necessarily resolves, but I treat it here as a productive tension, and one that potentially protects against the privileged universalism risked in Butler's arguments.

For Landauer, his Jewishness is never dissolved; instead it co-exists, relational yet distinctive. Indeed, it is in Landauer's conception of Jewish subjectivity that we see this productive tension most at play, for it is here that Landauer's socialism interweaves with the reification of his always open, yet inherently Jewish, subjectivity. The unavoidable mission of Jews was to 'act among the nations, like Job activated by his suffering, abandoned by God and the world in order to serve God and the world' (Landauer, 1911: 8), whereby in doing so 'one can become God; . . . one can become the world instead of just recognising it . . . we can find the world in ourselves!' (Landauer, 2010 [1901]: 100). Jews were well-equipped to do this because 'whilst all other nations have drawn political boundaries around themselves and have neighbours beyond their borders who are their enemies; the Jewish nation has its neighbours in its own breast . . . Is not this a sign of the mission which Judaism ought to fulfil in relation to humanity and within humanity?'

(Landauer, 1913: 252). Like Butler, Landauer here asserts the Other-facing inherency of Jewishness, but unlike Butler, this Other-facing characteristic is only possible through a never-ending affirmation of something simultaneously different – ontologically inherent Jewishness. Ontologically inherent Jewishness thus cannot be dissolved, for its dissolution would also dissolve the rights to difference claimed by other humans/non-humans, who can never be automatically expected to speak back peaceably or in a spirit of reconciliation. This is not the same as asserting a pre-social, pre-relational foundation to subjectivity. As Landauer argued, ontologically inherent subjectivity is indeed constituted by relationality, but this is not a relationality that looks the same everywhere in every place, the necessary implication of Butler's argument (2012: 5) that relationality should universally replace ontology, or become the universal ontological condition.

It was, perhaps understandably, at a meeting of young leftist Zionists in Berlin in 1912 that Landauer put all of this together most forcefully. Addressing the audience, he told them that Jewishness was 'an indomitable fact, a natural characteristic that there is something that by nature binds Jews to one another. One is a Jew, even if one does not know it or wish to confess it' (Landauer in Mendes Flohr, 2015a: 1). This statement is uncomfortably naturalistic and ethnocentric, although perhaps his audience had a bearing on how Landauer articulated this. On a different register, however, it would have been difficult to construct the objective function of Jewish subjectivity, without asserting its simultaneously internally and inherently unified logic. For Landauer continued, that while some Jewish socialists would seek to shape the 'national community as the basis of the new society' (i.e. communists) and many 'others will decide that what is initially needed is a new Jewish community' (i.e. Bundists and Zionists), for others (i.e. himself):

> the *Galut*,[15] exile as inner disposition of isolation and longing, will be the utmost calling that bonds them to Judaism and to socialism. For these lonely individuals Judaism and socialism will be the same; they will know that Judaism and socialism have charged them to demand human solidarity and justice . . . *the Jews can only be redeemed with all of humanity*, and that the two are one and the same: to pursue persistently the messiah in national banishment and dispersion, and to be the messiah of the nations. (Landauer in Mendes Flohr, 2015a: 1–2, emphasis added)

Landauer here connects Jewish liberation with the liberation of all peoples, precisely through a position of differentiated ontologically inherent Jewishness/subjectivity. And whilst the rhetoric is suffused by a degree of ethnocentrism, if Jews could not be liberated without the liberation of all peoples, then it would make no sense to politically engage in projects that privileged Jews as Jews (qua Zionism). As such, Landauer displaces Zionism as the delimitation of ontologically inherent Jewish subjectivity and Jewish liberation, yet offers a way of thinking about retaining parochial cultural affinities. This provides an ontological basis for subject formation, which makes such a formation necessarily ethical because of the impossibility of subjective liberation without the (objective) liberation of all.

Landauer's 'Jewish-I' (as well as his other ontologically inherent 'I's) was thus a necessary precondition for and fellow-traveller with his 'World-I' (2010 [1901]: 97).

The next concluding section goes on to flesh out and explore this relationship between 'World-I' and 'Jewish-I' in more detail, exploring the implications of this formulation for rethinking the necessary ontologically inherent preconditions for the production of a relational and ethical form of subjectivity.

Landauer and the ontological preconditions of the 'World-I'

In providing 'new and more radical ways of being Jewish',[16] Jewdas stakes a claim to ontologically inherent Jewishness. As we have seen, for Judith Butler this remains a problematic position. Thus far however, I have argued that this does not have to be the case, and that Butler's empathetic criticisms of groups like Jewdas (i.e. Butler, 2012: 117) rest on a series of problematic assumptions, including that Jews (or anyone else) simply self-actualise into who they are, and that Jewishness can only be a useful resource for thinking about ethical forms of subjectivity if Jewishness has no inherency to it (this being, for Butler, the very definition of Jewishness). Rather, the controversy over Jeremy Corbyn's attendance at the Jewdas Seder brought to the fore why there is much at stake over claims to ontologically inherent Jewishness and the politics of subject formation more broadly. Furthermore, the analysis of Gustav Landauer in the previous section illustrates how retaining parochial and inherent affiliations and memories can be a productive precondition for the kind of relational subjectivity that Judith Butler envisions in their imagination of a more just world.

It is within Landauer's 'diversity of true nations' (Breines, 1967: 82) that we can perhaps see the kinds of politics made possible by his distinctly Jewish conception of subjectivity. For Landauer, exile/*Galut* meant that Jews could be the redeemers of humanity, a reinterpreted version of the biblical instruction to be *Or Lagoyim*, 'a light unto the peoples', through an explicitly non-statist, non-chauvinistic subjectivity, one that yet retained a distinctive and inherent form of identification as Jews-of-the-world, citizens of nowhere and everywhere simultaneously. This inversion of the Christian Judeophobic trope of the 'Wandering Jew' can signpost us to a different conception of subjectivity to that provided by Butler, where we take a humanistic but parochial approach to building relations across differences, that maintains the latter rather than dissolving them. Instead of the Butlerian approach to subjectivity (informed in large part, although not uncritically, by Derrida[17]; i.e. Butler, 2012: 39), which erases ontologically inherent Jewishness in favour of ontologically inherent universal humanism, Landauer's Jewishness offers a subject formation that is necessarily ethically committed to building movements and solidarities based on the recognition of the claims to be different by Others; a universal equality of parochialisms where 'people(s) have a right to inhabit their different worlds because they are equal' (Dunford, 2017: 381). In this way, one provocative way of interpreting Landauer's assertion that 'One is a Jew, even if one does not know it or wish to confess it' (Landauer, in Mendes Flohr, 2015a: 1) is that we are all, as well as everything else, Jews; not in a religious or affiliative manner, and not in a way that subsumes other parochial ontological inherencies, but in the sense of beginning the process of building relations of solidarity from a position of wandering, dispersal and exile. More or less embedded in a modernist and statist imaginary and ontology – *in history* – we are all, to an extent, in *Galut*.

One implication to consider from this is to understand Landauer's claim, and the implication that the World-becomes Jewish (rather than Jews-become the World, as Butler might suggest), in the context of a politics of ethical parochialism. This is a form of subjective politics that sees oppression functioning and being produced through the spaces that our I's occupy, and it is only by repairing *those* spaces that broader patterns of oppression might be addressed, although of course not all spaces will be similarly composed by oppression. This in itself speaks to a degree of privilege; the privilege of political agency, and the privileged agency of particular spaces to affect broader political, economic and social change. But it is equally true that oppression and injustice are just as much (re)produced through such spaces as those more obviously characterised by their oppression (see for instance Doreen Massey's [2005: 101] discussion of the transnationally productive and oppressive power of London's finance spaces).

This article has sought to engage with Gustav Landauer to help inform, through a Jewish framework, an appraisal of radical subjectivity that in order to remember difference (Hall, 1977: 171–2) must be necessarily ontologically inherent. As much as the Board of Deputies of British Jews' hegemonic claims to cultural affinities might point otherwise,[18] this article suggests that Gustav Landauer presents a reading of what it means to be Jewish in the world that has significance for how we might think about the possibilities of ontologically inherent subjectivity more radically. The article has sought to show how in contrast with the emblematic scholarship of Judith Butler, who dissolves Jewishness in the world, Landauer points to a way in which, by dissolving the world into Jewishness (or other egalitarian readings of religio-cultural affiliations), we might foreground cultural affiliations and privilege these frameworks as productive preconditions to universal commitments to liberation and solidarity. In confronting Anglo-Jewry with the chauvinism of its umbrella bodies, whilst simultaneously retaining a claim on Jewishness, the existence of groups like Jewdas points towards the kind of politics and praxis Landauer channelled. Both they and Landauer show, in the process of worlding the social and historical I, how the subject can emerge as ethically relational whilst holding onto, instead of dissolving, its ontologically inherent self, where the latter represents an ultimately paternalistic, and potentially violent, hegemonic act of centralisation.

Notes

1. The veracity of these claims is not something this article takes a position on. Subsequent to the events outlined in this article, members of the shadow cabinet, including eventually Corbyn himself, apologised for cases of antisemitism within the Party. The depth and breadth of such cases, and the ways in which they were or were not dealt with by the Party, were the subject of a statutory investigation by the UK Equalities and Human Rights Commission, which subsequently found that the Labour Party had engaged in "unlawful acts of discrimination and harassment" against Jewish members (https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/news/investigation-antisemitism-labour-party-finds-unlawful-acts-discrimination-and). At the time of writing however, it is anti and non-Zionist Jewish members of the Party who are among those being excluded and investigated by the new Party leadership.
2. See 'Enough is Enough Call to Action', available at: https://www.bod.org.uk/enough-is-enough/ (accessed 16 June 2018).

3. Available at: https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/jonathan-arkush-claims-jewdas-is-a-source-of-virulent-antisemitism-1.461817 (accessed 16 April 2018).
4. See https://www.jewdas.org/about/ (accessed 19 June 2018).
5. See https://www.jewdas.org/that-hoax-email/ (accessed 9 January 2019).
6. See for instance the full text of the Nation State Law, passed in July 2018 (available at: https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Read-the-full-Jewish-Nation-State-Law-562923, accessed 10 January 2019). More recently, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has proclaimed that Israel is 'the national state, not of all its citizens, but only of the Jewish people' (available at: https://www.npr.org/2019/03/11/702264118/netanyahu-says-israel-is-nation-state-of-the-jewish-people-and-them-alone?t=1552476911685, accessed 13 March 2019).
7. In 2015 newly released documents recorded Israel's first Prime Minster, David Ben Gurion, commenting on the likelihood of a Mizrachi majority in Israel thusly: 'The problem is what the character of the Oriental communities will be. They will be the majority of the nation; they have six-to-eight children and the Ashkenazim [Jews of European descent] only two children. The question is whether they will lower the nation or [whether] we will succeed by artificial means and with great efforts to elevate them' (emphasis added, in Weitz, 2018). It should be noted that such attitudes have been well known and documented since the founding of the State of Israel (see Shabi, 2009).
8. Available at: https://birthrightisrael.foundation/numbers, accessed 17 May 2018.
9. Available at: https://int.birthrightisrael.com/information, accessed 1 February 2018.
10. As we will see, Judith Butler unwittingly inverts this claim with similar results, i.e. one cannot be a non-Zionist and be ontologically Jewish.
11. Available at: https://www.jewdas.org/about/, accessed 16 April 2018.
12. Available at: https://www.jewdas.org/enough-is-enough/, accessed 15 May 2018.
13. Available at: https://www.jewdas.org/how-to-criticise-israel-without-being-anti-semitic/, accessed 15 May 2018.
14. For an argument by indigenous scholars against reconciliation as a suitable approach to resolving the structural injustices faced by indigenous peoples and First Nations in North America, see Coulthard (2014) and Powys White (2018).
15. Rabbinic Hebrew term for exile
16. Available at: https://www.jewdas.org/about/, accessed 16 April 2018.
17. Derrida writes that 'There is no opposition, fundamentally, between "social bond" and "social unravelling" . . . a certain interruptive unravelling is the condition of the social bond, the very respiration of all "community"' (2002: 99), and that the project of deconstruction creates 'a universal beyond all relativism, culturalism, ethnocentrism, and especially nationalism' (2005: 149).
18. The Board of Deputies' response to Jewdas was not a one-off. When Jeremy Corbyn announced that he would be standing down as leader of the Labour Party following the latter's defeat in the December 2019 UK General Election, the Board of Deputies issued a series of litmus tests for the Labour Party's post-Corbyn candidates, which included the pledge to 'engage with the Jewish community via its main representative groups and not through fringe organisations'. Available at: https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/board-of-deputies-demands-labour-leadership-contest-race-candidates-sign-up-to-pledges-antisemitism-1.495274, accessed on 13/01/2020

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