Introduction

“NOW YOU ARE FREE,” HE SAID with a smile.

The workshop has come to a close, and slowly I make my way west, back to Tel Aviv, from Birzeit University in the Occupied West Bank. This time spent in the West Bank feels cathartic, remarkable for the political commitment of those present at the academic workshop, the kindness extended by shopkeepers and strangers in the city, and the intense beauty of the surrounding hills, burned pink and orange at sunrise and sunset. On leaving the university campus at the close of the session, I was apprehensive at the thought of passing through the Qalandia checkpoint on the way to East Jerusalem. Though it would not be the first time I experienced the protocols and practices of Israel’s border policies, a feeling of unease still attended the prospect of border crossing. As I readied myself to travel the distance from Birzeit to Qalandia, other workshop participants recounted stories of mobility constrained and denied as Palestinian residents of the West Bank. Restricted to the areas surrounding home and university, limited to travel within the West Bank, allowed entry solely into East Jerusalem—each woman spelled out the different terms of her confinement. In contrast, my trepidation was a privilege.

On the bus I am the only non-Palestinian passenger, staring out the window as images of iconic graffiti come into focus on the looming grey Wall: a young Yassir Arafat; Banksy’s girl holding balloons—“Sister, you need more?” asks a creature as it offers another floating globe—declarations in English intended for an international audience and their cameras. The bus stops. Two soldiers board, a man and woman, who look as if they are barely out of high school. The young woman checks the IDs of those still on the bus, while the young man stands behind her with a hulking weapon. They arrive
at my seat. I smile. She checks my passport and orders me off the bus to the queue behind the fence.

In the growing heat I stand clustered with my fellow passengers behind the wire fence, not pushing, not shouting, but not pleased—the wait is long and irritating. Many around me are students, with their books and backpacks, and I am struck by the difference from my commute in London, where traveling to university on the Tube at times felt trying. Held like cattle behind the fence, some chat while others look out at the lanes of traffic and auto bays where soldiers and private security agents inspect cars with guns at the ready. They largely seem bored, these agents of the Israeli state, laughing, joking and scuffling between vehicles, inspecting languidly and shouting angrily when needed. We wait for the turnstiles, slowly drawing nearer—these gates allow approximately five people to pass between each click and beep, sometimes more and sometimes less. Seeming to start and stop randomly, they jar those who are passing through when the gate slams to a halt. *Click! Thunk.* The woman ahead gets jammed, looks back at her friends, and carries on chatting from within the cage of metal bars. Around me others talk, text, and wait.

Green light. *Click! Beep! Go.* I am sandwiched between two young men as my turn in the stiles arrives. *Click! Thunk.* The man ahead of me is jammed. He leans against the wall between the bars, waiting. Green light. *Click! Beep! Go.* We are through the turnstile, and I follow what others before me have done: place my bags on the x-ray conveyor belt before walking to a large window with soldiers at the ready. I press my passport to the window, only to be directed to use the scanner—as an American citizen my documents are more “advanced” than the various paper permits issued to different categories of Palestinians.\(^1\) Waved through, I grab my bags and wait again for another turnstile and green light—the inner sanctum is protected on both ends. Green light. *Click! Beep! Go.* We step out into the exit chute, with one more turnstile to negotiate before reaching the line of empty buses. With a sigh of relief I turn to thank the young man behind me, whose subtle guidance made my border crossing less confusing, humiliating, and frightening than it might have been otherwise.

“Now you are free,” he says with a smile.\(^2\)

**OCCUPATION UNRAVELED**

Emerging through the account above is an image of conflict, occupation, and domination in Israel-Palestine, as experienced and understood by a white,
middle-class American feminist researcher who possesses the social and economic capital—the privilege—to cross a boundary dividing relative freedom from daily experiences of oppression. Clear within this narrative are relations of power, modes of regulation, technologies of control, and even sites of contestation, as a bus is emptied of its human cargo, demarcating zones of “here” and “there” along with categories of “us” and “them.” As individuals animate the material terrain of a military checkpoint, identities are suspected and confirmed, threat is assessed and dispelled, and belonging is produced and denied. Whether they are citizen-soldiers, subjects of military occupation, or doctoral researchers, this movement of bodies across and within a constructed border reveals a familiar picture to those who would see it: guns, walls, and fences; youth, aggression, and barely checked power; humiliation, frustration, and steadfastness.

Yet remaining hidden in relation to this image of control and domination is the other side of the checkpoint—what lies beyond the turnstiles once the final green light is granted. Certainly, the Israeli state commands a robust tourism industry whose campaigns and advertisements usher visitors into the dusty antiquity of Jerusalem’s Old City lanes and the European modernity of Tel Aviv’s cafes and beaches. So, too, scholarship critical of Israel’s practices and policies of occupying, annexing, and colonizing Palestinian lands makes visible the political and economic relations that continue to connect Israel with Palestine. Then academics, activists, observers, and visitors indeed “see” Israel through the circulation of discourses and images, sometimes modern, liberal, and democratic, other times repressive, colonialist, and despotic. However, rarely do we travel the road from Qalandia through Jerusalem to Tel Aviv in order to ask how its end might sustain its beginning—how lives made livable on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea might depend on lives constrained and cut short in the hills of Birzeit and Ramallah.

Green light. Click! Beep! Go.

In a journey beyond the checkpoint and into the urban centers of Israel, this book makes visible the micropolitical logics that produce and maintain the realities, practices, and experiences conveyed through the account above. Beyond the turnstiles and soldiers of Qalandia, a coach travels to the East Jerusalem bus station, and a researcher walks toward the city’s west to board a *monit sherut*, or minibus, bound for Tel Aviv. This vehicle winds westward along the highway leading toward the White City, where restaurants bustle and hum as the sun sets blazing orange behind the beachfront boardwalk. At the road’s end lies a kind of normalcy that appears entirely disparate from
everyday life in the West Bank, where even in relatively affluent Ramallah an elderly man turns the earth of a tiny plot with a donkey and plough. Yet normalcy at the (Jewish Israeli) end of the road relies on and arises through the relations of power that necessitate agricultural subsistence within cityscapes, that lock academics at Birzeit University in metaphorical and material prison cells, and that fashion understandings of “freedom” through experiences of oppression at the border. Read thus, continuity replaces contrast as practices of occupation, colonization, and domination bind Israel with Palestine and Jewish Israelis with Palestinians.

In the interest of better understanding how this continuity shapes material conditions and political realities, this book appraises how the everyday attitudes and actions of Jewish Israelis impact Israel’s control of Palestinian territories and populations. Through feminist ethnography and gender analysis, this book explores how political stasis is produced and maintained at the levels of subject, community, and society, with dire implications for the broader region of Israel-Palestine and its peoples. Contributing to a growing body of critical research that regards Israel-Palestine through lenses including history (Shlaim 2000, 2010; Abu El-Haj 2001; Masalha 2003; Khalidi 2006; Pappe 2006; Pappe and Hilal 2010; Dallasheh 2013), politics (Piterberg 2008; Ghanem 2010; Allen 2013; Sa’di 2013), sociology (Lentin 2000; Shafrir and Peled 2002; Ron 2003; Allen 2013), political economy (Gordon 2008; Hever 2010; Abdo 2011), critical geography (Yiftachel 2006; Weizman 2007), and activism (Dallasheh 2010; De Jong 2011; Richter-Devroe 2011, 2012; Weizman 2013; Plonski 2014), the following chapters highlight how the status quo of occupation, colonization, and domination emerges not only through social sanction and popular consent but also through disengagement and inaction—the production of political apathy. However, here apathy does not constitute a lack or absence of care but emerges as underwritten by modes of awareness and investment that elide, erase, or make palatable the discomfiting reality of violence and control. Shifting focus from violent or extraordinary events to the seeming banality of everyday life, the analysis in the following pages uncovers degrees of division and entanglement, modes of avoidance and activism, sites of investment and withdrawal, and moments of normalcy and rupture which directly sustain conflict in penetrating and enduring ways. Guided by the belief that new routes to transformation emerge through understanding how things stay the same, this book asks what the relationship between conflict, apathy, and domination means for visions of the future in Israel-Palestine.
Troubling Normalcy, or Ma la’asot?

Perhaps due to the value judgment often openly attached to apathy as a concept that circulates in public and political discourses, academic inquiries have largely shied from this topic, focusing instead on the desire for and pursuit of normalcy. As this book reveals, in the context of Israel-Palestine the question of political apathy is directly connected to the pursuit of normalcy in conditions of protracted violent conflict. This said, the terms *apathy* and *normalization* should not used interchangeably or treated synonymously—as narratives and experiences reveal, while processes of normalization are central to the production of political apathy, alone they cannot account for the depth and durability of disengagement and inaction. Rather, apathy takes shape through the intersection of multiple social processes, emerging through acts of resistance as much as complicity, interruption as much as accord.

Shifting focus from rupturing events to “the monotony of an unresolved conflict,” scholars of Israel-Palestine highlight how the mundane acts as a site wherein “aborted events and frustrated expectations” might accumulate with significant effect (Allen 2013, 27). Primarily undertaken by anthropologists working with Palestinian communities in the West Bank, existing studies of the will to normality depict practices of “getting by” Israel’s occupation or adapting to its disruption of daily life, violence visited upon bodies, and dislocation from homes and histories. Lori Allen’s (2005, 2008) work in the West Bank highlights the particular kind of agency that accompanies “getting used to it” (Arabic: *ta’wwudna*) in practices of managing and adapting to the dynamism of occupation during the second *intifada*. Here, as individuals and communities “tame violence,” they reincorporate the extreme into the ordinary and contest its ability to determine life. Depicting the same period in the West Bank, Tobias Kelly’s (2008) scholarship looks at the ways in which the desire for “ordinary life” in a context of sustained political violence may take on political and ethical charges, revealing a gap between what “is” and what “ought to be.” Sophie Richter-Devroe’s (2011) post-*intifadas* work also regards the production of normality among Palestinians, highlighting how the pursuit of normalcy and joy among women in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Israel might constitute a significant act of resistance. Here, practices and experiences of pleasure challenge not only the Israeli occupation but also internal power structures within Palestinian communities that entrench patriarchal and social forms of control.
Collectively, this scholarship reveals critical aspects of conflict previously elided by a focus on violent events and macro-level politics, insisting that survival, *sumud* (Arabic: steadfastness), and everyday life can tell us something new about power in Israel-Palestine. Then what is fundamentally different about these practices, processes, ideals, and aspirations among Jewish Israelis, who share a frame of conflict with Palestinians? While methods of “getting by” practiced by Palestinian populations—from travel patterns (Allen 2008; Richter-Devroe 2011) to modes of commemoration (Khalili 2007; Allen 2008), narration (Sayigh 1998; Allen 2008; Ghanim 2009a; Kassem 2011), marriage (Johnson, Abu Nahleh, and Moors 2009; Jad 2009), and desire (Kelly 2008)—might be mirrored in mechanisms developed by Jewish Israelis, the practices of this latter group unfold not as subject to domination but rather as productive of it. Here, longing for a normal life assumes a function and value apart from the normalization of uncertainty, fear, violence, and despair. As this book details, normalcy among Jewish Israelis not only elides power or renders it tolerable but also produces and maintains the sociopolitical relations that underwrite conflict.5

Emerging in tandem with violence, normality among Jewish Israelis serves to gloss, streamline, and consolidate, promising a sense of stability and certainty within the felt precarity of everyday life. Yet, paradoxically, this condition of seeming dependability relies on the very practices, processes, and relations that it purports to overcome or erase—occupation, colonization, and domination—becoming a way of life and state of mind among those whose relative power and privilege require maintenance of the status quo. Thus, a state of flourishing appears to exist despite conflict while taking root in its very perpetuation, an apparent contradiction that makes possible “the good life” for some (Mendel 2009, 2013; Vick 2010; Ochs 2011; Simon 2012; Deger 2012; Natanel 2013) while reducing existence to “bare life” (Ghanim 2008) for others.

Short of claiming that all Jewish Israelis pursue a single vision of “the good life” or disavow what its production and maintenance entail, this book engages with a category of social and political actors whose expressions of opposition indicate a critical awareness of the surrounding world. Based on research conducted in Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem with Jewish Israelis who self-define as politically “leftist,”6 this analysis considers how individuals and communities knowingly grapple with their implication in power. At its root, this book is motivated by the seemingly passive will to surrender, as expressed in the phrase *Ma la’asot?* (What to do?) More than purely rhetorical, this
ambivalent sentiment concluded many political discussions with self-described leftists during my early visits to the region. Relaying a sense of shared fatalism, hopelessness, and disenchantment, this question effectively erases “I” and “we” as culpable actors; yet at the same time it points toward a sense of shared responsibility and the knowledge that action should be taken.

This very tension—when knowledge of what occurs is met with inaction or effacement—lies at the core of political apathy, a sociopolitical process and practice examined to a limited extent in contexts beyond the borders of Israel-Palestine. As undertaken by political scientists and sociologists, existing studies of apathy are framed primarily in terms of detachment from politics and declining formal political participation (Rosenberg 1954; Sevy 1983; Boyer 1984; Herzfeld 1992; Eliasoph 1997, 1998; Dolan and Holbrook 2001; Hay 2007; Greenberg 2010), while psychological and anthropological approaches connect these practices to interpersonal and intimate dimensions (Cohen 2001; Allen 2004, 2008, 2013; Auyero 2007; Kelly 2008; Johnson, Abu Nahleh, and Moors 2009; al-Werfalli 2011; Richter-Devroe 2011). However, apathy itself remains largely undefined within this collective body of work, emerging as a shifting cluster of perceptions and practices that somehow defies rigid categorization. Entangled with wider global trends, at once individual and relational, bound to attitude and belief, and rooted in emotion and desire, apathy evades definition in academic inquiries even as it gains conceptual thickness.

Through a case study of Jewish Israeli society, this book begins to fill the gap in existing scholarship, laying the foundation for further critique and investigation. Among Jewish Israelis political apathy presents a particularly complex and sometimes contradictory puzzle—indeed, the participation of 71.8 percent of the Israeli voting public in recent national elections (Ha’aretz 2015) seemingly points to anything but apathy. At the same time, the resulting consolidation of existing political power has compounded the sense of despair and fatigue articulated by many of those who feel that they should and would take action against government policies and practices, if only they could. Through engaging with these tensions and nuances, this book challenges accounts of apathy that focus solely on a “lack” or “absence” of engagement as evident in formal political participation. Instead, apathy takes shape among leftist Jewish Israelis as active disengagement: a socially produced form of political passivity underwritten by acts of knowing, caring, seeing, feeling, and doing.
Apathy as Active Disengagement

To a limited extent, existing scholarship on political non-participation raises this very possibility: that apparent apathy might be anything but passive. In his work on the “social production of indifference” in Western contexts, Michael Herzfeld (1992) argues that state bureaucracies explicitly cultivate political apathy as an instrument of domination. Here, indifference, or “the rejection of common humanity” (1), is produced through government-led bureaucratic structures as a means of securing consent for systems of exclusion. By providing subjects with a “means of conceptualizing their own disappointments and humiliations,” bureaucracies might generate assent to the humiliation of others (13). For Herzfeld, the danger of social indifference lies in its potential to become habitual, a possibility that arises through the pervasiveness of bureaucracy and its reach into everyday lives. Focusing on post-socialist Serbia, Jessica Greenberg (2010, 41) raises a different possibility in relation to political non-participation: that apathy might constitute a significant “citizen response” to changing sociopolitical contexts, rather than reflecting a lack of political and social progress. Here, withdrawal from the realm of politics becomes a powerful lens with which to analyze how citizens understand and experience democratization on local, national, and international levels (46). In approaching apathy thus, Greenberg highlights individual agency and asks what individuals are withdrawing from when they choose not to participate in politics (63). Among politically disillusioned Serbians, the moral frame that underpins political disengagement and inaction is incredibly significant. In this case, apathy constitutes a kind of moral anti-politics actively practiced by those who understand political participation as entailing untenable compromises, and who experience politics as an ineffective form of democratic engagement or a failed route to moral-cultural regeneration (56–58, 63).

Together, this work on “non-participation” foregrounds both the sociality and activity inherent in political apathy, while at the same time differently drawing attention to how disengagement and inaction intersect with wider relations of power. In the case of Western bureaucracies, the social production of political indifference yields important insights into how state power is produced and maintained through individual experiences of institutional structures (Herzfeld 1992). In the case of Serbia, political apathy sheds critical light on democratization as an inherently social and moral process, challenging the connections assumed to bind democratic participation with social,
political, and moral transformation (Greenberg 2010). Through the lens of political non-participation, studies of indifference and withdrawal helpfully situate women and men firmly “within the mass” (Gramsci 1971), whether reflecting on top-down state power or on the macropolitical ideal of democracy. However, the case of political apathy among leftist Jewish Israelis cannot be understood solely through the mechanisms, structures, and ideals made visible by the scholarship above. As noted earlier, Jewish Israelis outwardly display an impressive commitment to democratic participation, with well over 60 percent of the eligible public consistently voting in national elections. In addition to their active participation in formal politics, “indifference” (Herzfeld 1992) does not characterize the attitude of most Jewish Israelis who self-define as “leftist”; rather, these individuals continue to care deeply about “common humanity” and grapple with questions of morality (Greenberg 2010). Yet here the moral frame undergirding apathy reflects back not on democracy as a political practice or process but on what can, does, and should bind a community together in conditions of protracted conflict.

This investigation into apathy among leftist Jewish Israelis addresses the social worlds and political realities sustained by disengagement and inaction, while at the same time detailing the intimate mechanisms through which they take shape and root. To an extent, the expression and practice of apathy is a privilege in the context of Israel-Palestine, as individuals are differently able to disconnect or disengage from the realm of politics based on their location within hierarchies of power. As this book reveals, the extent to which an individual or community can subscribe to apathy reflects the degree to which they are served in some way—economically, socially, politically, or personally—by the status quo, whether knowingly or not. Relatively “free from the touch of the occupation”¹⁰ in comparison to Palestinians living within or beyond Israel’s recognized state borders, Jewish Israelis as a category may overwhelmingly experience conflict as a kind of “ambience”¹¹ or tension at the margins of everyday life. However, differences based on gender, class, ethnicity, generation, geopolitical location, sexuality, and degree of religiosity complicate any claim to a near-universal experience or understanding of conflict and violence: the ability to defer, displace, or disavow the wider reality is in part determined by social position. For example, when asked how she experiences the occupation in everyday life, thirty-year-old leftist activist Tali remarked: “We have the privilege to feel it when we want to—at demonstrations and even in Jerusalem, we don’t have to. During wartime you can feel it, but even then I asked my girlfriend what she wants to do
if war comes again . . . and she said that she’ll buy a ticket and go away. Leaving is an option when you have enough money. You can live somewhere else . . . I’m working on getting Bulgarian citizenship and my girlfriend has residency in Germany.” As a secular, middle-class Ashkenazi citizen of Israel who lives in Tel Aviv, Tali possesses the kinds of capital that allow her to selectively engage or escape the occupation—a privilege afforded to those Jewish Israelis whose European passports and economic resources provide the promise of a new life “somewhere else” if violence flares.

In drawing attention to how power and privilege inform apathy as a political practice among Jewish Israelis, this book considers how lives, communities, and realities are differently imagined and constructed—and with what political effects. By highlighting the action, intimacy, and sociality inherent in political apathy in Israel-Palestine, the narratives and experiences in these pages challenge readers to rethink their basic assumptions around the term. What is the substance of political apathy? What are its mechanisms and logics? Can apathy involve investment, action, and care? Through questioning prevailing assumptions, apathy emerges not as a measure of polls and statistics but as a tension between conflict and normalcy, politics and intimacy, and action and inaction that takes shape at the level of everyday life.

THE POLITICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

In posing the questions above, this investigation necessitates a fine-tuned lens of analysis that draws attention to how macropolitical power is produced and maintained at micro and meso levels. Underlining sentiments that power may circulate and operate most effectively where it is least obvious (Gramsci 1971; Foucault 1998 [1978]; Mitchell 1990), everyday life increasingly commands attention as a significant site for academic enquiries that aim to analyze politics across multiple sites and levels (see e.g. de Certeau 1984; Scott 1985; Singerman 1995; Bayat 1997, 2010).

In using this prism of the everyday or ordinary, scholars of Israel-Palestine have produced critical ethnographies that indeed link subjects and social relations with Israel’s continuing occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Whether centering on (Jewish) Israeli or Palestinian narratives, experiences, or practices, these accounts provide glimpses into the textures of daily life while revealing individual strategies and structural frameworks for negotiating sustained political violence. From Julie Peteet’s (1994) first-intifāda account
of beatings and imprisonment turned masculine rites of passage among Palestinian men in the West Bank, to Juliana Ochs’s (2011) second-intifada ethnography of security and suspicion as embodied practices linking Jewish Israeli subjects with the state, these insights into daily actions and perceptions shed light on macropolitical trends and processes. By tracing terms of connection, this shift to the everyday facilitates the meeting of scholarship located on either “side” of the presumed divide between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians—here, narratives of suspicion and the politics of security among Jewish Israelis (Konopinski 2009; Ochs 2011) might share a frame with accounts of sumud, or steadfastness, practiced by Palestinian residents of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem (Allen 2008; Kelly 2008; Johnson, Abu Nahleh, and Moors 2009; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009; Richter-Devroe 2011).

Whether in Israel-Palestine or in contexts beyond, investigations into everyday life pivot around a central methodological belief: that the seemingly ordinary and inconspicuous are key to understanding politics and power. Through varying means, scholars of the everyday work to “defamiliarize” or “make strange” the sites, actors, and dynamics often taken for granted in academic analyses (Highmore 2002, 22). Gender analysis presents one such “interruptive strategy” (Brecht 1964, cited in Highmore 2002, 23) that is particularly suited to the work of estranging the ordinary. Framed by a historical legacy and continuing commitment to “telling stories differently” (Hemmings 2011), gender analysis raises critical questions of norms and normality, of divisions assumed to be static, and of how space, place, and politics are valued. Simultaneously an aspect of subjectivity, a relation of power, and a structure of states and societies, gender is integral to the practices and politics of everyday life, though often elided. As illustrated by feminist scholars including Cynthia Enloe (1989, 2010) and Diane Singerman (1995), the apparently depoliticized or apolitical spaces of the everyday and domestic act as forums for political thought, expression, and action. Maligned as “low politics” vis-à-vis the “high politics” of states and elites, the too-neat division of private realms—associated with women and family—from those deemed “public” is always an already political act (Singerman 1995, 5–9; Yuval-Davis 1997, 80). In contexts of war, conflict, and violence, which are often characterized as particularly masculinized enterprises (Cohn 1987; Enloe 1989; Cockburn 2007; Segal 2008), this imposed distinction impacts access to political voice and available registers for action. As this book reveals, political space, voice, and action are central to understanding political apathy.
The capacity of feminist gender analysis to estrange the ordinary is particularly significant to studies of conflict and domination, whose histories of gender-blindness limit the scope of both understanding and transformation. However, the lens adopted must be finely tuned, not just capable of “interrupting” academic discourses and assumptions but also vigilant in accounting for contradiction, complexity, and interrelation. In the context of Israel-Palestine, this vigilance means consistently problematizing obvious dualisms, such as here/there and us/Them, which obscure what lies at stake in the maintenance of power. Then, rather than appraising broad categories of “women” and “men,” this analysis employs an intersectional lens that draws attention to “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation—economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah and Phoenix 2004, 76). Approaching political apathy through an intersectional understanding of gender allows this book to maintain focus on power and privilege, foregrounding how constructions of femininity and masculinity, relations between women and men, and meanings of “male” and “female” intersect with race, class, sexuality, religion, generation, and geopolitical location. Rather than considering intersectional disempowerment—how axes of difference serve to constrain, subordinate, and oppress (Crenshaw 1989)—this book shifts focus to intersectional power, engaging with those actors ordinarily assumed to constitute the standard or norm. Thus, the analysis that unfolds within the following pages operationalizes intersectionality in new ways, enriching not only understandings of conflict and domination in Israel-Palestine but also feminist approaches to power.

Engaging Apathy in the Field

In its focus on power, this book engages with a body of “would-be” and “should-be” actors whose (dis)engagement and (in)action hold significant implications for the future of Israel-Palestine: Jewish Israelis who express opposition to the occupation and annexation of Palestinian territories, yet feel unable or unwilling to act. Admittedly, this group does not constitute a critical mass that, once mobilized, might change the existing policies and practices of the Israeli state. To the contrary, recent analyses and statistics reflect wide public support for the political status quo, along with the growing marginality of opposition (Levy 2012; Sherwood 2012; Verter 2014). Given these trends, some commentators express a wish for greater apathy.
among Jewish Israelis, as a lack of care might enable substantive change.\textsuperscript{16} Even so, this book argues that scholars, activists, and observers must take the prevailing political despair among the leftist minority seriously, as this phenomenon matters deeply to the trajectory of Israel-Palestine—for its very embeddedness in power and for the mechanisms made visible in an age of increasing political alienation.

From October 2010 through September 2011, interpersonal exchanges and direct experiences of political action yielded the ethnographic data that supports this book’s central claim: that political despair among self-defined leftist Jewish Israelis must be understood as a kind of apathy that maintains conflict and domination, not through denial or passivity but through action. Drawing attention to power and privilege, the analysis in the following pages primarily engages with the experiences, attitudes, beliefs, practices, and aspirations of secular middle-class heterosexual Ashkenazi\textsuperscript{17} Jewish Israelis living in Israel’s two main urban centers. Experienced differently based on gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, generation, religion, and geopolitical location, “Jewish Israeliness” cannot be understood as monolithic. As a result of historical dominance, Israel’s Ashkenazi citizens continue to enjoy privilege and largely define the norms within Jewish Israeli society, even as the face of the elected government changes over time to include Mizrahi,\textsuperscript{18} Russian, Ethiopian, Druze,\textsuperscript{19} and Palestinian representatives (Shafir and Peled 2002, 88; Sasson-Levy 2013, 28, 33). Indeed, while Mizrahi Jews now constitute the majority of Israel’s Jewish population (Lavie 2011, 57, 2014, 1–2; Abdo 2011, 89; Sasson-Levy 2013, 32), “Ashkenaziness can be viewed as a resource, a form of symbolic capital that in turn grants access to additional resources” (Sasson-Levy 2013, 33). In its focus on power, this book is concerned with the (in)action and influence of this minority.

With contacts made through “snowball sampling,” largely enabled by the support of Jewish Israeli family and friends,\textsuperscript{20} I conducted fifty-eight semi-structured interviews with political leftists, first in Tel Aviv and later in West Jerusalem. Active research centered on these two urban sites, chosen for their differing proximities to the Occupied Palestinian Territories and histories of political violence, which provided both contrast and continuity within Israel’s internationally recognized \textit{1949 Armistice Agreements} borders (Shlaim 2000, 41–47, 2010, 31).\textsuperscript{21} Though everyday life in Jerusalem is commonly juxtaposed with Tel Aviv (see e.g. Ram 2008), these cities importantly share relative political, economic, social, and historical privilege \textit{vis-à-vis} rural towns, villages, \textit{kibbutzim}, and \textit{moshavim} (Yiftachel 2006, 223).\textsuperscript{22}
Snowball sampling enlarged the effective area of these urban sites, as a small number of individuals living in Jaffa took part in the Tel Aviv interviews, while participants living on the outskirts of Jerusalem in locales such as Mevasseret-Zion and Har Adar contributed to the data collected from this second city.

In the interest of understanding how gender and generation impact political engagement and action, interviews were evenly split between women and men, with the youngest participant twenty-two years old and the oldest nearly ninety. While participants were selected according to their membership in the (dominant) Ashkenazi minority, I additionally interviewed a small number of individuals who identified as Mizrahi or “Arab Jew.” The narratives and experiences contributed by these participants simultaneously clarify and complicate how ethnicity, race, and social class intersect with domination in Jewish Israeli society. Among the participants in both locations, sexuality and martial status constituted further significant social markers, as a range of experiences and attractions shapes individual beliefs and practices. So too within the category of “leftist,” participants’ self-professed degree of political engagement emerged as critical to their narratives and the subsequent analysis. At the outset of research, I intended to interview two broad categories of Jewish Israelis, “activists” and “non-activists,” as defined by their direct involvement (or not) in initiatives that challenge Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories and populations, as well as discrimination and inequality within state borders. However, research participants quickly complicated this easy distinction, presenting a rich continuum of action ranging from “former activists” to “should-be activists,” “passive activists,” “couch activists,” “sometimes activists,” “radical activists,” and “recovering activists.” Importantly, this diverse group of individuals is bound together through their collective relationship to politics in Israel-Palestine, a kind of melancholic attachment of despair or disillusionment that seemingly precludes action.23

In addition to conducting interviews in Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem, throughout the duration of research I undertook an ethnography of everyday life, recording varying experiences of the mundane, from casual conversations and personal travels to participation in community events, large-scale political demonstrations, and international solidarity actions. Beginning with three months of ulpan—the state-sponsored Hebrew language program—I became immersed in everyday life even as I remained an outsider, a position that provided me with a unique lens through which to experience...
the discourses, processes, and practices of community. My location “inside” Jewish Israeli society was secured through marriage to a Jewish Israeli man whose parents had emigrated to Israel from Poland—educated, Ashkenazi, urban, and middle-class, their relatively privileged social location impacted my own, opening doors to the community I wished to study. Yet at the same time my location also remained outside—neither Jewish nor Israeli, I could not overcome a certain distance from the community at the heart of my research. However, this “outsiderness” served to enrich the exchanges and experiences of fieldwork, as I gained access and earned trust, yet remained in need of explanation. This dynamic meant that research participants often related precisely how they viewed the world around them, narrating attitudes and experiences in an effort to clarify and aid understanding.

Then, perhaps inevitably, this book takes shape in part as a mode of autoethnographic writing (Ellis and Bochner 2000), which implicates the researcher in the dynamics and analysis at hand. Admittedly, as an “outsider” to Jewish Israeli society, there is a limited extent to which my analysis and writing can be autoethnographic in the sense of researching and writing about oneself as the subject of study or a member of the community in question (see e.g. Throsby 2013). However, by reflecting on my own impressions and experiences during fieldwork in Israel-Palestine, this book bridges the personal and political—and illustrates more precisely how conflict shapes everyday lives, binding individuals to the collective.

A TAPESTRY OF THE ORDINARY

Weaving the personal with the political throughout, this book unmasks power at the level of everyday life to reveal the logics and mechanisms that sustain apathy, conflict, and domination in Israel-Palestine. Here, normalcy takes active work to produce; it cannot be understood as a neutral state of passivity or a “default” setting but only as a practice of living, politically charged by aspiration and action. In this context, apathy is conceptualized as active disengagement—a kind of hoping, trying, building, believing, knowing, relating, engaging, and acting oriented toward self-preservation. Through feminist gender analysis, apathy emerges as the product of intimate relations and social patterns that give substance, depth, and durability to macropolitical power.

By engaging with a cluster of sensations, practices, and processes including despair, disillusionment, disenchantment, ambivalence, disengagement,
avoidance, and inaction, the analysis in the following pages grants texture and complexity to apathy as a political phenomenon. While tension and sometimes contradiction consequently frame the accounts that emerge within the following chapters, this book is driven by the certainty that as prevailing structures, narratives, and practices produce political effects, so too do our analyses (Mohanty 1988, 69)—thus complexity must be engaged, rather than elided. In tracing the everyday production and maintenance of apathy, each chapter reveals how patterns of gender are understood, experienced, and mobilized in ways that often sustain conflict, and with it, domination. Chapter 1 explores the ways in which gender structures and normalizes hegemonic narratives, institutions, and politics in Jewish Israeli society. Here, cynicism and alienation emerge as the prevailing terms through which many leftist Jewish Israelis relate to politics, producing an inward-facing “politics of living” that aligns with the central narrative of Zionism. Chapter 2 examines how principles of spatial separation—“us here” and “them there”—remain underwritten by entanglement, contact, and dependency. Because communities and geography are produced and experienced as incompletely divided, apathy takes shape as willing disengagement from the social, political, and economic conditions that make everyday life possible. Chapter 3 focuses explicitly on the production of normalcy, appraising how mechanisms of repair and maintenance are activated by the intrusion of politics, violence, and conflict on family and community. In these intimate sites, relations of care and investment reveal how transformative action is not entirely rejected but is taken selectively, in manners and arenas deemed meaningful and effective. Chapter 4 further complicates the apparent division between action and inaction, exploring various sites and forms of political activism that reveal how resistance may become caught up in power. Here, apathy emerges as not the opposite of activism but sometimes paradoxically the very product of political engagement and participation. Drawing together the mechanisms outlined in preceding chapters, Chapter 5 analyzes the social protests that swept across Israel during summer 2011, considering how political participation might be “world-making” rather than “world-changing” on massive scales. By fashioning a space between action and inaction, the protests succeeded in mobilizing and cohering a formerly quiescent public without challenging the key political condition that underlies economic and social life in Israel.

Through the frame of political apathy, this book depicts how leftist Jewish Israelis in Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem actively weave a tapestry of the
ordinary in Israel-Palestine, threaded through with power, privilege, and politics. In doing so, the analysis within these pages ultimately challenges the conceptualization of apathy as an absence or lack, instead revealing how politically significant worlds and relations take shape in the tension between action and passivity. However, diagnosis and critique are not the sole tasks at hand—rather, this book aims to enrich activist strategies through indexing the logics, mechanisms, and structures that presently limit political engagement and action. By uncovering how social relations underwrite systems of macropolitical power, my intention is to open a new conversation about Israel-Palestine, one in which political apathy is taken seriously and regarded as significant to the future of the region.