

Riches To Rags To Virtual Riches: The Journey Of Jewish Arab Singers



*Shoshana Gabay. Ills.
Joseph Sassoon Semah*

Some of the most revered musicians from the Arab world moved to Israel in the 1950s and 60s, where they became manual laborers and their art was lost within a generation. Now, with the advent of YouTube, their masterpieces are getting a new lease on life and new generations of Arab youth have come to appreciate their genius. Part one of a musical journey beginning in Israel's Mizrahi neighborhoods of the 1950s and leading up to the Palestinian singer Mohammed Assaf.

The birth of the Internet awakens our slumbering memory. Sometime in the 1950s and early 1960s, the best artists from the metropolises of the Levant landed on the barren soil of Israel, from: Cairo, Damascus, Marrakesh, Baghdad and Sana'a. Among them were musicians, composers and singers. It didn't take them long to find themselves without their fancy clothing and on their way to hard physical work in fields and factories. At night they would return to their art to boost morale among the people of their community. Some of the scenes and sounds which at the time would not have been broadcast on the Israeli media

have little by little, been uploaded to YouTube in recent years. Through the fall of the virtual wall between us and the Islamic states, we have been exposed to an abundance of footage of great Arab music by the best artists. This development has liberated us from the stranglehold and siege we have been under, allowing us to reconstruct some of the mosaic of our Mizrahi childhood, which has hardly been documented, if at all.

We should remember that in the new country, as power-hungry and culturally deprived as it was in the 1950s and 1960s, the impoverished housing in the slums of the Mizrahi immigrants was a place for extraordinary musical richness. The ugly, Soviet-style cubes emitted a very strong smell of diaspora. At night, the family parties turned the yards, with the wave of a magic wand, into something out of the Bollywood scenes we used to watch in the only movie theater in our neighborhood. On the table, popcorn and a few 'Nesher' beers and juices. At a Yemenite celebration one would be served soup, pita bread, *skhug* and *khat* for chewing, and at that of the Iraqis, the tables would have kebabs and rice decorated with almonds and raisins. A string of yellow bulbs, as well as a beautiful rug someone had succeeded in bringing from the faraway diaspora, hung between two wooden poles. There were a couple of benches and tables borrowed from the synagogue, and sitting on the chairs, in an exhibit of magnificent play, were the best singers and musicians of the Arab world.

It is worthwhile to reflect upon those rare times, just before the second generation of Mizrahim began trying to dedicate itself to assimilating in the dominant culture. Those were the days when the gold of generations still rolled through the streets of the Mizrahi neighborhoods and through its synagogues. We should step back for a moment and allow ourselves to look at what we had, what was ours, and what ceased to be ours.

An example of the musical paradise in which we lived can be seen in a video recording from a little later - apparently from the early 1990s. At that time, Mizrahi musicians of all origins were already mingling at each other's parties, which we see here in a clip of a Moroccan *chafлах*. The clip, uploaded by Mouise Koruchi, does not tell us where and when the event took place. The musicians in this clip are: Iraqi Victor Idda playing the qanun, Alber Elias playing the Ney flute, Egyptian Felix Mizrahi and Arab Salim Niddaf on violin. One of the astonishing singers is the young Mike Koruchi, tapping the duff and singing with

a naturalness as if he never left Morocco, a naturalness that our own generation in Israel has lost. Indeed, it turns out that back then he used to visit Israeli frequently but did not actually live there.

Following him, we see some older members of the community appear on the stage: Mouise Koruchi sings 'Samarah,' composed by Egyptian singer Karem Mahmoud; after him comes Victor Al Maghribi, the wonderful soul singer also called Petit Salim (after the great Algerian singer Salim Halali); Mordechai Timsit sings and plays the oud; and Petit Armo (father of the famous Israeli singer Kobi Peretz) rounds out the team. This performance could easily be included in the best festivals in the Arab and Western world, complete with Al Maghribi's beautiful clothes and the rug at the foot of the stage.

Next up, we encounter rare footage of singer Zohra al-Fassia wearing beautifully stylish clothes, recorded in her flat in a public housing project, surrounded by treasures from the Moroccan homeland. The clip demonstrates a little more of the musical beauty and the aesthetic of the small celebrations in the development towns and neighborhoods.

In my neighborhood, which was mostly populated by Yemenites, we enjoyed a regular menu of [prayers in angelic voices](#), drifting away out of the many synagogues in the neighborhood every Shabbat and every holiday. This is a recording from government housing in Ra'anana in 1960 of 'Yigdal Elohim Chai' written by Rabbi Daniel Ben Yehuda, the rabbinic judge from Italy. The magnificent and powerful Yemenite tune reflects, to me, more successfully than Sephardic or Ashkenazi ones, the idea of God's greatness expressed in the 13th century *piyut* (a Hebrew liturgical poem). At night the sweeping rhythm of the tin drums, the only musical instruments at Yemenite weddings and henna celebrations, called out to summon us. As soon as we heard the drums from afar we, a herd of kids, ran over to participate. Uninvited guests would never be chased away; there were hardly any fences between the houses anyway; the neighborhood felt like one huge courtyard in the middle of our house. And that is exactly the way it sounds in another recording, in the 1960s, of singer-songwriter [Aharon Amram](#), the most important musical figure among Yemenite Jews.

And now, let's take in the dances of a breathtaking singing and dancing session of Shalom Tsabari of Rosh Ha'ayin, the rhythm virtuoso and one of the greatest

Yemenite singers in a late recording of from the late 1980s. (The drums he plays perfectly recall the black music which arrived in the neighborhood in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was then that the children adapted African-American hairstyles, which miraculously suited their curly hair and prayed with intense bodily twists to the Godfather, James Brown).

In a neighborhood where the only television was in the Iraqi café with its antennae tuned to Arab stations, before the arrival of Israeli television and with few record players around, we had the good fortune to watch singers, vocal legends, who people across the Arab world would have done anything just to catch another glimpse of.

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In the next video clip, Najat Salim performs a song from the repertoire of [Saleh and Daoud al-Kuwaiti](#). Saleh, who accompanies her on the violin in this scene, is the father of modern Iraqi music and, along with his brother Daoud and other Jewish musicians, kicked off the musical revolution that took place in Iraq in the beginning of the 20th century. These musicians played a significant role in turning the ensembles called '*Chalrey Baghdad*' into orchestras in the style of new wave Arab music. In this process, which happened in tandem with that of other Arab countries (first and foremost Egypt), western sounds began to inform the traditional Arab sound - with influences ranging from classical music to waltz, rumba and tango. The revolution was so successful that all Arabs, from the *fellah* to the metropolitan *feinschmecker* connected to it with every fiber of their being. The footage was uploaded to the Internet by an Iraqi, who gave it the somewhat naive title, 'The Star Najat Salim,' apparently not realizing that Salim was virtually unknown in Israel.

Part of the experience of the Iraqi *chafila*, which was typical of the home where I grew up, a secular bohemia rooted in the heart of Arab culture, can be heard in the notes of this fabulous violin *taksim* composed and performed by the violinist [Daoud Aqrem](#) in the following clip, smoking and playing simultaneously. The

Egyptian [Faeiza Rujdi](#), a fiercely expressive Israeli Broadcasting Authority singer whose songs were a hit in Iraqi *chafkas*, introduces Aqrem (in the clip, she sings *muwashshah*, “girdle poems,” which originate in the verse of medieval Andalusia). The [next clip](#) features Iraqi *maqam* singer, poet and composer Filfel Gourgy, accompanied by Saleh al-Kuwaity on violin, with Najat Salim beside him. The clip below shows a royal duet of the mighty Filfel and Najat singing a composition by Mullah Othman al-Musili, the poet, composer and performer of the 19th and early 20th century. Al-Musili was one of the founders of the Iraqi *maqam* and a virtuoso of Turkish-Sufi music. They are accompanied by the Arab Orchestra of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority.

These links demonstrate that it is mostly Arabs who long for Gourgy. The Internet began to break down the barriers of alienation between the Arab public and Jews from Arab countries who immigrated to Israel, but the development came too late. Filfel Gourgy rose to fame only posthumously, and will never know what is written and said about him on Arabic websites today, where he is considered one of the greats among Arab musicians by music experts from academia. Nor will he ever know how often his voice reverberates on Iraqi radio heritage programs for younger generations. Filfel Gourgy did not live to see that young Iraqis who edit small documentaries on YouTube and Facebook sync stills of Old [Baghdad in the 30s](#) to his voice, his music symbolizing Baghdad the way Gershwin’s embodies New York.



The *maqam* artists did not live to witness the 2008 [UNESCO resolution](#) that declared Iraqi *maqam* should be preserved as intangible cultural heritage of humanity. This very same Iraqi *maqam* was severed from the country the moment the Jews hastily packed it in their suitcases and fled to Israel. Filfel Gourgy, Saleh and Daoud Al-Kuwaity, [Ezra Aharon](#), [Ya'acov al-Ammari](#), [Yosef Shem-Tov](#), Elias Shasha, Salim Shabbat, Yechezkel Katzav, [Yusuf Zaarur](#) and many others in the Iraqi Jewish community are displayed on the monumental wall of [the Maqam masters](#).

Meanwhile, all day long at home, the radio was tuned to a variety of Arab

stations; therefore we, the children, simultaneously heard [childhood songs](#) and lullabies along with Arab children in their own countries. Twice a day, a dish was served which featured an Umm Kulthum concert as its main ingredient. And the rest of the day, we would hear Abd al-Wahhab, Abdel Halim Hafez, Farid Ismehan, Fairuz, Sabah Fakhri, Wadih El-Safi and all the rest. We watched Arabic movies on Arab TV, as well as cabaret performances and charming Arabic operettas in local cinemas, way before Israeli television started to broadcast programs in Arabic. Here is [Ya Warda](#), the cabaret song of Zohra Al Fassia, a song that touches the very core of the secular culture of the Arab Jews.

Thanks to the record shop of the 'Azzoulai Brothers' in Jaffa, the neighborhoods and the development towns could hear the singing of the musical genius Salim Halali, an Algerian Jew who, after immigrating to France managed to escape the Nazis. Later he became the idol of Algerian *rai* singers.

This refined man, composer, singer and poet alike, a Jewish homosexual who sang in Arabic in the land of the French, weaved different cultures into his singing: Andalusian, Berber and Arab. The [following clip](#) gives a short summary of the man and his achievements. Look at his fancy gala dresses in the few pictures that highlight his songs. He is all beauty, elegance and cosmopolitanism - features that the Israeli *nouveau riche* has always craved. Halali performed in Haifa in the 1960s and in the [Tel Aviv Sports Hall](#) in 1974, without any mention in the Israeli media. Thanks to Mouis Karuchi, we have the whole recording of the performance in Tel- Aviv in two parts.

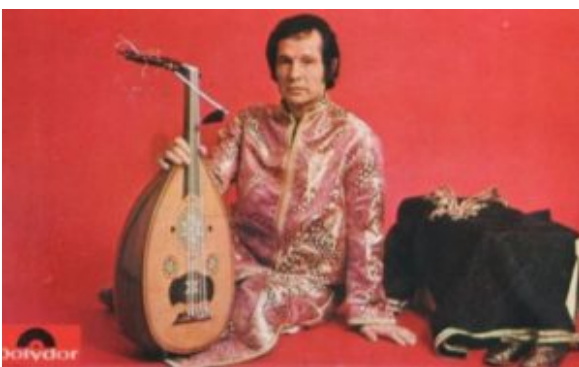
We might examine more closely the odd reversal that occurred in Israel in the life of the Jewish Arabs compared to their brothers, the Jewish artists from Russia. The latter arrived over a century ago from their oppressive country to the United States, and were actually quite fortunate in gaining worldwide acclaim. If the Russian artists experienced the American dream of 'rags to riches,' then the experience of Arab Jewish artists in Israel was the reverse: "from riches to rags."

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When we say, "what once was is no more," about the Diaspora musicians who arrived in Israel, the intention is not nostalgic. It simply communicates that these great musicians had no Jewish successors. The next generation was hardly able to master the art and language of their parents. Of all the important musicians only a few played in the Arab Orchestra of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority. For instance, [Alber Elias](#), [Zuzu Musa](#) from Egypt or *qanun* player [Abraham Salman](#). It was renowned violinist Yehudi Menuhin who kissed Salman's hands, fully recognizing his genius. Those are fine examples of artists who learned music in schools and academies. Yet that sort of musical education was not available in Israel.

The students of artists such as Yosef Shem Tov were in fact Palestinians, whose elite, including Palestinian musicians, was uprooted from their homeland in 1948. There were not many Jews like the musician Yair Dalal who took the trouble to come and learn from masters such as [Salim al-Nur](#). Al-Nur composed pieces of intellectual and emotional complexity. But on YouTube, a melody he composed at the age of 17 in Iraq, 'Oh You Bartender,' attracted many listeners in the Arab world: it was sung by Jewish singer [Salima Murad](#), the national singer of Iraq, and the words were written by the poet and caliph of the house of Abbas, Ibn Al-Mu'tazz of the 9th century.



Salim Halali. He is all beauty, elegance and cosmopolitanism - features that the Israeli nouveau riche has always craved.

Hand in hand with the erasure of the active role of the Jews (sometimes as an avant-garde) in the creation of modern Arabic music, the number of Jewish

listeners has declined. In the first Mizrahi immigrant generation, those in the Mizrahi Jewish community still completely understood both the palimpsest of this high musical language that was developed, layer by layer, over generations and the musical talent of the geniuses of their generation. They continued to consume this music over the entire course of their lives. High art and popular culture were not considered separate entities. Everyone was a connoisseur. As the years went by, the audience grew older. The young generation turned to 'Hebrew' music and was asked to abandon its roots. According to the conventions of Arab culture, an artist needs an audience that can understand what he (or she) sings about, and that would discern the beauty in the musical phrasing he sings or plays. She needs this sigh of pleasure and wonder: 'aha' or 'alla.' Without this feedback, he cannot sing and play. This sudden breach in a naturally developing culture was the reason our musical heritage died.

Logging in to Arab cyberspace, when entering the names of those forgotten artists in Arabic, we will find out that their names are cherished by musicologists on musical forums, in discussions on Iraqi television and radio, and in audio and video clips uploaded by Arab internet users. The acceptance of and excitement over the best of our artists evokes sad thoughts of those who were supposed to be our brothers in Israel.

In Israel, the conversation of the greatness of these musicians has become strange. How is it possible to describe that which is no longer apparent? Many of the youth in Israel no longer understand profoundly the beauty of the sound in the manner of their parents and grandparents and the current young generation of Arabs. One can always praise and exalt, yet she who has Arabic music for breakfast, without saying a word, already knows that Salim Halali and Filfel Gourgy reach great heights. Of course it is possible to talk about the past status of the distinguished musicians and to bring historical evidence to their detractors, that Saleh al-Kuwaiti and Zohra al-Fasia were the artists of the king. Yet this is a defensive discourse. After all, the essence of our tragedy is not that al-Fasia does not have a king to sing to. The problem is that she has no one to sing to.

And this is what Salim Halali sings about in "[Ghorbati](#)" ([my Alienage](#)), a beautiful lamentation about the exile of the eternal wanderer in the places of others (loosely translated): "I, who was silver, turned into copper and the garment I was wearing left me naked. I, who gave advice to the others, now have lost my mind, my wisdom turned to madness.

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[Read part two of this article here](#)

This post by Shoshana Gabay was taken partly from a movie synopsis she wrote a few years ago about Filfel Gourgy, which was rejected by the Israeli Film Fund. It originally appeared in Hebrew on [Haokets](#).

Translated by Benno Karkabe, Noa Bar and Orna Meir-Stacey

Riches To Rags To Virtual Riches: When Mizrahi Artists Said ‘No’ To Israel’s Pioneer Culture



*Shoshana Gabay. Ills.
Joseph Sassoon Semah*

Upon their arrival in Israel, Mizrahi Jews found themselves under a regime that demanded obedience, even in cultural matters. All were required to conform to an idealized pioneer figure who sang classical, militaristic ‘Hebrew’ songs. That is, before the ‘Kasetot’ era propelled Mizrahi artists into the spotlight, paving the

way for today's musical stars. Part two of a musical journey beginning in Israel's Mizrahi neighborhoods of the 1950s and leading up to Palestinian singer Mohammed Assaf. [Read part one here.](#)

Our early encounter with Zionist music takes place in kindergarten, then later in schools and the youth movements, usually with an accordionist in tow playing songs worn and weathered by the dry desert winds. Music teachers at school never bothered with classical music, neither Western nor Arabian, and traditional Ashkenazi liturgies - let alone Sephardic - were not even taken into account. The early pioneer music was hard to stomach, and not only because it didn't belong to our generation and wasn't part of our heritage. More specifically, we were gagging on something shoved obsessively down our throat by political authority.

Our "founding fathers" and their children never spared us any candid detail regarding the bodily reaction they experience when hearing the music brought here by *our* fathers, and the music we created here. But not much was said regarding the thoughts and feelings of Mizrahi immigrants (nor about their children who were born into it) who came here and heard what passed as Israeli music, nor about their children who were born into it. Had there been a more serious reckoning from our Mizrahi perspective, as well as the perspective of Palestinians, mainstream Israeli culture might have been less provincial, obtuse and mediocre than what it is today.

Israeli radio stations in the 60s and 70s played songs by military bands, or other similar bands such as Green Onion or The Roosters. There were settler songs such as "[Eucalyptus Orchard](#)" with its veiled belligerence, and other introverted war songs, monotonous and stale, inspiring depressive detachment. For example, take "[He Knew Not Her Name](#)," sung here by casual soldiers driving in a jeep through ruins of an Arab village, or the pompous "[Tranquility](#)." When these songs burst out in joy, as is the case with "[Carnaval BaNahal](#)," it comes out loud and vulgar. "The Unknown Squad," composed by Moshe Vilensky, written by Yechiel Mohar and performed by the Nahal Band in 1958, always reminded me of the terrifying military march music I used to hear on Arab radio stations as a child. As far as the Arabs were concerned, these tunes represented trivial propaganda, not the cultural mainstream. However, in Israel, the Nahal Band was lauded as the country's finest for more than two decades. Thanks to YouTube, we can now revisit the footage and see them marching, eyes livid and intimidating, faces blank.

Shoshana Damari's voice, which was supposed to cushion our shocking encounter with this music, only made it worse. Every time her voice would boom out on early 70s public television my father would stretch an ironic smile under his thin Iraqi mustache and let out an expressive, "ma kara?" ("what's the big deal?"), in sardonic astonishment of the wartime-chanteuse's bombastic pomp.

It's not hard to understand why revolutionary Zionists would have their hearts set on a patriotic military musical taste, complete with marching music and Eastern European farming songs fitted for a newfound belligerent lifestyle. But this dominating attitude would prove shocking to Mizrahi Jews, and the musicians among them, who took an active role in the greater Arab music scene (for more on the topic **read part one** of this series). These musicians were accustomed to the cultural freedoms they enjoyed in the cosmopolitan atmospheres of Marrakesh, Cairo and Baghdad before the military coups. And contrary to popular belief, our ancestors carried no sickles or swords. From Sana'a jewelers to Iraqi clerks under British rule, Persian rug merchants and Marrakesh textile merchants, the majority of Mizrahi Jews lived in urban areas.

In Israel, Mizrahi Jews found a political rule that penetrated all aspects of civilian life, controlling and demanding full obedience even in matters like culture and music. Everyone had to conform to the idealized Sabra figure who sang "Hebrew" music - as in, Eastern European music with Mizrahi touches, celebrating the earth-tilling farmer and the hero soldier. The Broadcasting Authority's Arab Orchestra, where only a small portion of the musicians were employed and paid meagerly, was established for the sole purpose of broadcasting propaganda to Arab audiences, never with a thought toward domestic consumption.

Patriotic songs that tried *going Mizrahi* weren't of any greater appeal. We didn't get what was so Mizrahi about their monotonous drone. On rare occasions, a moving song like ["Yafe Nof"](#) slipped through. Written by Rabbi Yehuda Halevi and composed by the talented Yinon Ne'eman, a student of songwriter Sarah Levi Tanai, the song plays like an ancient Ladino tune, sung in Nechama Hendel's beautiful, ringing voice. The delightful Hendel, who had also been shunned by the cultural establishment for a time, sings the magical Yiddish tune ["El HaTsipor"](#) (To the Bird), a diasporic soul tune that occasionally snuck its way on to the radio. At the time, I thought this song seemed more adequate in relation to the sorrows of Ashkenazi Holocaust survivors living in my neighborhood than what ["Shualey Shimshon"](#) (Samson's Foxes) had to offer.

There were exceptions, such as Yosef Hadar's timeless "[Graceful Apple](#)" and the internationally acclaimed "[Evening of Roses](#)." Most of the several-dozen versions of this song circulating on the net were not posted by Israelis or Jews, but rather by music lovers in general.

By the early 60s even the founding fathers' children began rejecting pioneer music, in part due to the rise of the urban bourgeoisie in Israel and its desire to break away from a self-imposed quarantine in exchange for a connection to the West. Naomi Shemer, Israel's national songwriter, frequently borrowed from Georges Brassens' chansons and from the Spanish songs of Paco Ibañez. The musical shortcomings of the Kibbutz-born composer are evident by the influences she heavily leaned on during the 60s. You can hear it not only in the tune she used for Israel's national song, "[Jerusalem of Gold](#)," taken from Paco Ibañez' Basque folk song "[Pello Joxepe](#)", but also in "[On Silver Wings](#)" - a patriotic song glorifying air force pilots. The prettiest phrase in the song (at 0:36) was taken from Brassens' "[La Mauvaise Reputacion](#)" (0:21). The irony lies in the fact that Brassens' song was actually about a nonconformist who chooses to stay in bed on France's Bastille Day - the entire song is a hymn of dissent.

Mizrahi youth were similarly stranded during the 60s. The radio played songs by artists who came from old Israeli-Sephardic families, such as the great [Yossi Banai](#), who sang a captivating Brassens (translated by Shemer), [Yoram Gaon](#) in Ladino, and the [Parvarim Duo](#). Although newer immigrants like [Jo Amar](#) managed to slip some heritage into the airwaves, the rest were facing a hopeless situation. They did not have the cultural freedom to delve into their family's musical heritage and come up with something new of their own.

Zohar Levi To Zohar Argov

In order to escape the Cossacks and their *horas*, Mizrahi children - as well as the founders' children - turned to [Radio Ramallah](#), where they could catch up on the Western youth culture denounced by Israel's cultural-political establishment. Elvis Presley, his voice heavily laced with black gospel, had a deep influence on Mizrahi youths. They would congregate, on the beach or during school breaks, clapping their hands to a rock n' roll rhythm, usually carrying a small comb in their back pocket (next to a small color photo of The King) in order to arrange a *brilliantine* hairdo. They would bravely sing away senseless made-up rock n' roll stand-in lyrics.

Ahuva Ozeri, of the same generation (seen [here](#) drumming in a home gathering in the 80s), does a delightful Mizrahi soul cover of Elvis (full of funny Yemenite curse words) and finishes it off with a Yemenite Mawal (01:18). Another possible marker of that generation is represented by an anonymous [cover of Jail House Rock](#), sung in a heavy Moroccan accent. And then there is Shimi Tavori, performing a cover of The Beatles' [Don't Let Me Down](#), after singing Farid al-Atrash's "Ya Yuma" with singer Uri Hatuka chiming in (10:00).

Even when these artists did not remember all the lyrics, their groove and feel for the material was spot on, as if they were born on the Mississippi. Mizrahi and other laborers working in the industrial areas of Hamasger Street in Tel Aviv and in Ramla would return at night to the same streets to visit discotheques. Back then (and to this day) Mizrahi musicians had been equal participants in the [nascent Israeli pop-rock scene](#). Here are the Churchills with lead singer Danny Shoshan playing a [Beatles cover](#).



Zohar Levi

Drummer and composer Zohar Levi, a pioneer of Israeli rock music who composed the score for Hanoch Levin's 1970 play "[Queen of a Bathtub](#)," presents a possible musical turning point. Levi was also a founding member of Aharit Hayamim, a prominent band in Israel's rock history. [Here](#) we see lead singer Gabby Shoshan performing the Levi-composed "Open the Door" with a touch of Mizrahi groove. Levi's music has some "[Hair](#)" influence in it, along with a hint of [Jefferson Airplane](#), but not much of Baghdad - the place where he was born.

When the founders' children made haste to adopt a rebellious Western youth culture in the seventies, one might have expected the daring Levin to be the likely role model. The new music should have turned its back on the establishment's preposterous musical dictums and its mentality of obedience. But talented artists such as Matti Caspi, Ariel Zilber (at the time) and Shalom Hanoach were not really aiming at instigating a "Zionist Spring"; they satisfied themselves with adopting rock techniques and rhythms, as well as the Israeli petite-bourgeois notion that everything taking place in Western capitals is best. The idea was to decorate Hebrew music with some pop-rock. This meant that Mizrahim like Zohar Levi were expected by peers to abandon their heritage in order to progress. Levi represents a shift from a music that grew out of a local and Arab cultural context to a mere imitation of the West, signifying yet another setback for Mizrahi musical culture in Israel. After all, composition is at the very heart of music making. At this point, defeat becomes apparent, as there is no real competition to authentic British and American Rock (even English-speaking countries like Canada and Australia failed miserably).

When comparing Zohar Levi to his Arab contemporaries, such as the younger [Ziad al-Rahbani](#) in Lebanon or [Ilham al-Madfai](#) in Iraq, the plight of this young Mizrahi generation becomes clearer. Rahbani - the composer, pianist, playwright and actor, had no problem integrating his musical heritage with the jazz and rock music that interested him. Here is his "[Abu Ali](#)," written in 1972, roughly around the time when Zohar Levy was active. As for al-Madfai, he found no problem incorporating Flamenco into his Iraqi sound. Both Rahbani and al-Madfai play frequently in international venues. Levy's Arab contemporaries showed him that in order to advance his art, there was no real need for him to set aside his heritage. On the contrary - he could have reached into it. In the end, Levy's musical career was short lived, and despite his impressive talents he did not become the Israeli Rahbani. There were others who did manage such an integration further down the road, such as [Yehuda Poliker](#) and [Shlomo Bar](#).

In fact, the new musicians of "Hebrew music" left the wagon of Israeli music stuck in the mud, rutted by its habitual selective deafness. The time was right to not only admire black music because the Beatles and Rolling Stones were making it, but also to try looking at the musical culture of oppressed people at home, which also included Yiddish music. To illustrate just how bad it was - the extent to which prominent Israeli artists were detached and myopic - I'll mention how

Matti Caspi, despite his great talent and musical erudition, disqualified Ofer Levy for choosing to sing in Arabic during an audition for a military band. Anyone who heard Levy singing a cappella back in those days would not be able to fathom such a decision. The story perfectly sums up the essence of the meeting between those generations: Ofer Levy gets Matti Caspi, but Matti Caspi is very much ignorant of Ofer Levy.

The “tape music” (“Kasetot”) that emerged in the late 60s was the sole propriety of Mizrahi Jews, and showed signs of integration with local music with pop-rock. The *hafla* (a common local ‘shindig’, or gathering) crowd played their own interpretations of Mizrahi and Zionist music, using rock as their medium. Since Mizrahi music was not being taught in Israeli schools, and studying it with musicians abroad seemed like a backwards thing to do, guitarist [Yehuda Keisar](#) would sneak into [Aris San’s](#) concerts to learn some of his electric guitar secrets. The pioneers of Kasetot music, many of whom were born to Yemenite families who settled in Israel generations ago, and whose sons were educated in kibbutzim and boarding schools, lost the ability to play classical Mizrahi and Western instruments (with the exception of Ahuva Ozeri who played the bulbul tarang, and Moshe Meshumar who played the mandolin). At the same time, Arab musicians of the same generation were still studying classical Mizrahi and Western instruments.

When examining the repertoire of Kasetot music, one finds that alongside the tremendous curiosity and openness it showed towards Mizrahi and Mediterranean styles (and even to that of Hasidic music), early adopters of the genre used many “Hebrew” songs, applying to them their own unique interpretations and rhythms. Back in the 90s, I created the TV series “A Sea of Tears,” which chronicled the history of Israel’s Kasetot music. In it, Ahuva Ozeri said she tried to “add some spice” to the songs, to make them more appealing to Mizrahi ears, or in other words, to serve as a link between Mizrahim and the established culture. Paradoxically, these musicians, who at last managed to make Zionist music more popular with Mizrahim, were the ones to put the cultural establishment in Israel into a blind panic.

At the peak of its success, you could see how the building blocks of Mizrahi music continued to crumble. This time in favor of borrowed music, mainly due to the sidelining of earlier generations of musicians, creating a gaping musical void. Composers of this new style were a small few, mostly without proper instrument

training (apart from Ozeri). Ozeri, together with Avihu Medina and singer Avner Gaddasi, were not enough to supply the demand. Medina acknowledged several times that as a boy educated in a kibbutz, his role model had been Naomi Shemer, rather than composers like Aharon Amram or Saleh al-Kuwaiti, who lived in Tel Aviv's Hatikva neighborhood and sold home appliances. True enough, you can hear the Hora rhythm at the beginning of every verse in "[Kvar Avru Hashanim](#)." In fact, Kasetot music was the compromise second generation Mizrahim made in order to be accepted by the cultural political establishment and receive some airtime. Otherwise, their fate would have been as bitter as that of the artists described [in part one of this series](#). But this compromise was not enough to appease the establishment, which continued to disregard and ridicule these artists for many years.

Kasetot music in those days suffered from poor production value. Studio musicians - a prerogative lavished on artists accepted by the establishment - had been too expensive for Kasetot singers to afford. It goes without saying that the quality of production served as one staple excuse to shun the music. The texts they used, one example of which is the lofty biblical Hebrew Medina learned at home, marked it as *outsider* music of the Mizrahi variety. If we compare it to the approachable feel-good vibes of his contemporaries in [Kaveret](#) (a band well-enough versed in local social codes to allow for that kind of verbal jugglery), we can imagine how Mizrahi Jews did not feel at home.

A visit to the [Zemereshet](#) website, the main source for Zionist songs, finds dozens of kosher Zionists songs performed by the *Hafla* crowd. Israel's cultural commissars would never have dreamt it. It is interesting to note that the songs which captivated that crowd most were not songs of war songs nor marching songs, but rather sad romances. Here is [Chen Carmi](#) singing Alexander Penn's "Suru Meni" to an unknown tune, and here is another interpretation by [Rami Danoch](#) of the Oud Band.

Kasetot music, with all its blemishes and delights, had become the only original genre to come out of Israel, and was in fact the most in sync with musical trends abroad: a pop music that successfully blended a mix of ethnic styles.

Sheltered By their fancies

Several years ago, Ariel Hirschfeld, a scholar of Israeli literature and culture,

wrote an essay about the late composer Moshe Vilensky. Titled “The Rust of the Obvious,” the essay hails Vilensky as the greatest composer of Israeli music, urging readers to return to his music and to try and “remove the rust of the obvious” while listening again to his songs. Hirschfeld’s words clearly convey the distance between music that is obvious, and music that had ceased to be obvious.

YouTube makes it possible for us to observe how the Zionist founders and their children are sheltered by their fancies of fine tastes and beautiful melodies. It was generally believed that if they were not stuck in the Middle East, surely the whole world would have admired their music. But here they are, all the songs can be found on YouTube, and who listens to them apart from Israeli audiences? The answer is nearly no one. You won’t find any initiatives by foreigners on the web to upload “Hebrew Music.” Many of these songs have only several thousand views and comments strictly in Hebrew.



Kaveret

Even in videos from a later period, often referred to as “new Israeli music” – such as a highly esteemed song like “[Atur Mitskhekh](#)” – regarded in some media circles to be the foremost Israeli song of all times, sung by the captivating [Arik Einstein](#) and garnering over half a million views – all the comments are in Hebrew, apart from one curious passerby. The same song, uploaded to an English channel on Israel’s musical history, lingers at a mere 1,300 views. Even artists who were selected to represent Israel at the Eurovision song contest (back when a state-appointed the committee chose the competitors), viewed by many millions in Europe, were not able to harness this exposure to success abroad. The case is the same with artists who were sent by the state on concert tours abroad. A 1974 video of the most admired band in Israeli rock, Kaveret, performing “[Natati La](#)

[Hayay](#),” posted on the Eurovision’s English-language YouTube channel, has less than 35,000 views. Kaveret’s [“Baruch’s Boots”](#) has less than 30,000 views and few comments, most of which are in Hebrew (except for several ones in English, posted by an American Jew who spent some time in Israel in the 70s). After the [political power shift in 1977](#), Mizrahi musicians were chosen by the public to represent Israel in the Eurovision. [Yizhar Cohen](#) won the contest in 1978, with hundreds of thousands of views from non-Israeli viewers to show for it. [Dana International](#) achieved similar results.

Even Shlomo Artzi, who was sent to the contest in 1975 with “At Va’Ani,” has had very few of his songs uploaded by non-Israelis (apart from “Iceland,” performed in Hebrew by the Jewish French singer and actor [Patrick Bruel](#) on French television, with some 120,000 views). Artzi also has few uploads on Spanish or English channels, and not many views. His song [“Wiping Your Tears,”](#) on his official channel, has 1.6 million views with comments made only by Israelis (including one Arab Israeli). A version of this song uploaded with an [English title](#) to a channel dedicated to old Hebrew songs has only 26,000 views.

Compare this to the oeuvres of the great Jewish-American composers, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin and the likes of Benny Goodman, who readily absorbed everything they could lay their hands on in their new homeland – particularly the music of the oppressed African Americans – and allowed their music to express universal concerns of human existence, and you might begin to understand how the sons of our conservative revolutionary movement did not get very far with their cultural narrow-mindedness and ideological zeal.

It seems that the destitute of Israel’s music scene are the ones chosen by global Internet citizenry to advance to the front of the stage. Ofra Haza, for instance, could not get any composer of “Hebrew” music to work with her until the late 70s. Here she is singing [“Im Nin’elu”](#) together with the Hatikva Neighborhood Workshop Theater in the early 70s, in a program produced by Israel’s national Channel 1. The YouTube clip for this Yemenite song, composed by Aharon Amram, has more than 2.2 million views. Finely arranged by Yigal Hared, the song remains close in spirit to the original. The cultural crudeness of the establishment makes an appearance one minute into the song, when program director Rina Hararit queues the ending credits to run over Haza’s face. This clip has more than 3,200 excited comments, the great majority of which are not by Israelis. The version by the Hatikva Workshop Theater has more views than the [remix](#) version

that would go on to propel Haza to worldwide stardom in the mid-80s. Apparently some felt the song did not need electroshock.

Some may say that Haza is famous enough, such that anything of hers will receive many views. But that is not so: her “songs for the homeland” have a much smaller audience. Here is Naomi Shemer’s “[Renewal](#),” with only 9,000 views, or Ehud Manor and Nurit Hirsch’s “[Every Day in the Year](#)” with 23,000. The more Haza distanced herself from songs of earth-toiling and pop towards the end of her life, the more her confidence in her musical depth grew and the more she matured. Here she is performing at the Monterey Jazz Festival, singing a “[Kadish](#)” composed by herself and Bezalel Aloni. The clip has over a million views, most of the comments are not in Hebrew, by non-Israelis (judging by the comments, most are probably not even by Jews). Even a stone would be moved by it. Here is another lovely example of an Aharon Amram composition: Shirley Zapari, her mother Miriam Zapari and Achinoam Nini singing “[Tsur Manti](#),” recorded from the Mezzo channel by an Israeli - over 1.2 million views. Amram’s song has double and triple the views of other Nini songs, such as the theme song for Roberto Benigni’s “La Vita è Bella” or her “Ave Maria.” Both were uploaded by non-Israelis.

There is yet another destitute Israeli musical genre that is very popular on the Internet - [Hassidic klezmer](#) music. Here is virtuoso violinist [Itzhak Perlman](#) with a Klezmer band from the U.S., receiving high ratings for their exquisite playing and garnering more than 1.3 million views. Look hard, and you might find one Hebrew comment among the thousand. But not only the great Perlman gets attention - other anonymous Klezmers are not doing so bad on their own. Listen to gripping Russian Jewish music made by [Reb Shaya](#). Judging by the comments, most of the half-million ecstatic viewers are neither Israeli nor Jewish. The stale Israeli argument that every rejection of Israeli artistic offerings is motivated by anti-Semitism is somewhat hampered by these findings. Perhaps we would do better to consider an alternative conclusion, one that would better enlighten the connection between a military existence, a cultural enclave mentality of nationalistic ideological zeal, and artistic ineptitude.

—
This post originally appeared in Hebrew on [Haokets](#). Translated from Hebrew by Yoav Kleinfeld

Paul Simon en de Lage Landen



Het songwriters-duo Boudewijn de Groot-en-Lennaert Nijgh wordt wel beschouwd als de Nederlandse Lennon-and-McCartney. En niet geheel ten onrechte, want alleen al hun album *Picknick* (1967) is op een aantal punten te zien als de Nederpop-tegenhanger van *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* uit 1967: het nummer *Picknick* is, net als de eerste track van *Sgt. Pepper*, programmatisch voor het hele album, *Mensen om me heen* is qua thema het equivalent van *With a*

little help from my friends, *Cinderella* is de Nederlandse *Lucy in the sky with diamonds*, de jaren dertig sound van *When I'm sixty four* keert terug in de *Ballade voor de vriendinnen van één nacht*, in de *Ballade van wat beter is klinkt Getting better* door en de orchestrale climax van *A day in the life* weerklinkt in het slotakkoord van *Megaton*. Om maar een paar voorbeelden te noemen.

Het tweetal is ook de Nederlandse Bob Dylan genoemd, niet alleen omdat het een vertaling van *The times they are a-changing* opnam - *Er komen andere tijden* stond al op de lp *Boudewijn de Groot* (1965) -, maar ook, of vooral, omdat die titel hun motto werd, in ieder geval tijdens wat - overigens onder protest van Boudewijn de Groot - als hun protestsong- periode wordt gezien. Op *Voor de overlevenden* (1966), bijvoorbeeld, staat in *Ze zijn niet meer als toen* (de tekst is van Boudewijn zelf):

Er is gezegd: er komen andere tijden.

Er is gevochten voor een nieuw fatsoen.

Er is niet geluisterd naar wat anderen zeiden,

ik heb geen zin het nog eens over te doen.

Merkwaardig genoeg zijn Boudewijn de Groot en Lennaert Nijgh zelden vergeleken met Paul Simon, terwijl daar wel reden voor is. Al op hun eerste album stond Nijghs vertaling van *The Sound of silence: Het geluid van de stilte*. Overigens een abominabele vertaling van iemand die in diezelfde periode met *Liefde van later* een perfecte vertaling van Jacques Brel's *Chanson des vieux amants* zou maken.

Toen Boudewijn de Groot, na de dood van zijn tekstleverancier in 2002, vaker zelf de pen ter hand nam, dook Paul Simon op in enkele van zijn teksten. Hij verzamelde en becommentarieerde die in de bundeling *Hoogtevrees in Babylon. Alle eigen teksten van 1963 t/m 2006* (Baarn, 2007). Het nummer *Hoogtevrees* op het album *Van een afstand* (1980) 'beschrijft een droom die zo duidelijk was en me 's morgens nog zo helder en compleet voor de geest stond, dat de tekst er een letterlijke weergave van is. (...) Ik hoefde alleen maar uit bed te komen, te gaan zitten met pen en papier en de woorden kwamen vanzelf, compleet met rijm.'

In het eerste couplet dicht hij

Ik werd vergeleken met de groten der aarde,
ze zeiden ook dat het op Paul Simon leek.
Eerst was ik verrast toen begon het te hinderen,
maar niemand nam aanstoot,
hoe kwaad ik ook keek.

En in *Hoogtevrees in Babylon* op de cd *Lage landen* (2007) vinden we een terugverwijzing daarnaar in dit citaat

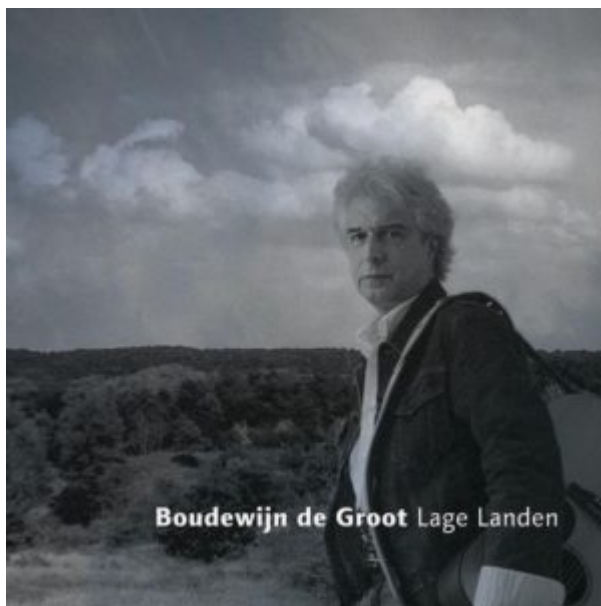
Paul Simon was degene
die vroeg waar ik mee bezig was
hij gaf me een paar stenen
en ging liggen in het gras
hij zei: wordt dit de hoogste toren
ooit door mensenhand gemaakt
dan weet je van tevoren
dat je wordt afgekraakt

hooggegrepen zinnen
theatrale melodie
het lijkt heel wat daarbinnen

maar blijkt een parodie
achttien trage kraaien
vlogen cirkels boven ons hoofd
je moet de leugen niet verdraaien
of je wordt niet meer geloofd

en

ik metselde mijn muren
duizend stenen in het rond
het kon niet lang meer duren
tot ik in de wolken stond
mijn moeder kon ik niet meer horen
Paul Simon schudde 't hoofd
ik dacht: je moet je niet laten storen
door wie niet in je gelooft



Veel heeft hij overigens niet op met zijn Amerikaanse voorbeeld. In zijn toelichting bij het eerste citaat schrijft hij: 'In het verleden ben ik vanwege mijn stem en de muziek die ik schrijf meer dan eens vergeleken met James Taylor en Paul Simon. Ik denk dat "mijn droom-ik" dat onthouden heeft en Paul Simon een vage figurantenrol heeft toebedeeld.'

En bij *Hoogtevrees in Babylon*: 'De tekst is nauw verbonden met *Hoogtevrees*, het lied van dertig jaar geleden, zoals uit de

inleiding van dit boek al blijkt. En dat is ook de enige reden waarom Paul Simon en mijn moeder weer komen opdraven. De eerste keer kon ik niet anders, want ze speelden een rol in mijn droom. Op zich heb ik te weinig affiniteit met Simon om hem zonder aanleiding in een lied ten tonele te voeren, maar *Hoogtevrees in Babylon* sluit nu eenmaal aan op *Hoogtevrees* vanwege het eerder genoemde drieluik. (..)

Mijn (stief)moeder schuifelt nader omdat ze ook voorkomt in *Hoogtevrees* (..). Het behoeft ook geen betoog dat mijn affiniteit met haar groter is dan die met Paul

Simon.'

Ze moeten elkaar al in een vroeg stadium van hun beider carrière gekend hebben. Paul Simons eerste optreden in Nederland - hij was toen 24 - vond plaats in Taverne De Waag, een café-chantant in Haarlem, waar Cobi Schreier het programma bepaalde.

'Niet alleen nationaal, ook internationaal talent weet de weg naar de Waag te vinden. Zo lukt het Cobi om in 1964 folkzanger Pete Seeger in de Waag op te laten treden, Joan Baez heeft er gezongen (..) en op een avond vlak voor Sinterklaas 1965 trad singer-songwriter Paul Simon er op. Het was een intiem optreden voor slechts zeventien mensen, maar het is hem waarschijnlijk zeer goed bevallen: een jaar later, toen het nummer *The sound of silence* de internationale hitlijsten aan het bestijgen was, kwam hij terug met Art Garfunkel. "Ze traden op voor niets," vertelt Cobi daarover, "omdat ik als eerste vertrouwen in ze had." De wereldartiesten logeren bij Cobi thuis en slapen in slaapzakken op zolder. Tenminste, als we romantics Lennaert Nijgh mogen geloven." (Bergshoeff, Kim, *De canon van Haarlem. De 50 geschiedenisverhalen waar je niet omheen kunt*. Amersfoort, 2014)

Een aanzienlijk uitgebreider verslag van een avondje Simon and Garfunkel biedt het verhaal *Man met ervaring* van L.H. Wiener. Hij neemt ons mee naar het Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, geschreven in de spelling uit de tijd dat er in het Concertgebouw nog gerookt mocht worden:



Simon & Garfunkel met Cobi Schreier. Haarlem 1966

Het is 2 mei 1970, R. en ik zijn uit de provincie gekomen om aanwezig te zijn bij het nachtkonsert dat Paul Simon en Arthur Garfunkel in het Concertgebouw geven. (..)

In de hal zie ik Lou van Rees, die deze nacht voor onze rekening neemt. Hij loopt wat en slaat gade hoe per toeschouwer ongeveer f 35,- binnen schuifelt. (..)

We zitten op de vijfde rij podium op stoeltjes van rood skai in een zodanige opstelling dat we de heren op de rug te zien zullen krijgen.

De zaal is nu geheel gevuld maar nog steeds komen er mensen binnen. (..)

Dan verschijnt Lou van Rees op het toneel. Hij herinnert het publiek aan de exclusiviteit van deze nacht. 'U bent een van de maar 9.000 mensen in heel Europa die Simon en Garfunkels optreden kan bijwonen, want zij geven slechts drie konserten. In Londen, Amsterdam en Parijs.' Als hij vervolgens als een cirkusdirecteur de namen der artiesten heeft uitgeroepen, gaat er een deur bij het immense orgel open en blijken Simon en Garfunkel inderdaad te bestaan. Ze lopen zelf en ieder draagt twee gitaren. Het publiek schreeuwt en fluit en applaudisseert. Simon en Garfunkel knikken naar alle windrichtingen en leggen drie gitaren weg op stoeltjes bij de grote vleugel. Er zijn twee mikrofoons opgesteld en twee barkrukken.

(..)

Simon draagt een flodderige, blauwe broek en een gebreid overgooiertje, Garfunkel een zwarte spijkerbroek zonder spijkers en een zwart truitje met korte mouwen. Daaronder heeft hij lange, rode mouwen, zodat hij sterk de indruk wekt van een honkballer. (..)

Er is veel sfeer in de zaal, te veel sfeer misschien zelfs wel. Het tweetal kan aan geen nieuw nummer beginnen of er barst al een applaus los bij de eerste maten. Men is onvoorwaardelijk laaiend enthousiast. Zo had Goebbels ze ook het liefste, zonder mening en buiten zichzelf.

(Die twee op het podium) maken geen bewegingen. Garfunkel houdt zelfs zijn handen op zijn rug in zijn broekzakken. De roem ligt voor het oprapen en zelfs dat hoeven ze niet te doen. De roem wordt hen aangereikt. (..)

Om kwart over een is het pauze en begeven we ons naar andere zalen voor bier. Steeds maar tussen mensen vannacht. Toch valt dit soort me nog mee. Het is niet het publiek van voetbalontmoetingen. Het publiek van moeder de vrouw.

We stellen ons op tegen de zijmuur.

We gaan terug naar de zaal.

Het licht is aan en er heerst een rumoerige stilte. Veel mensen zijn blijven zitten. Sommigen zijn op het toneel geklommen en bekijken de mikrofoons van dichtbij,

leggen hun handen op de krukken, stellen zich machteloos voor hoe het zou zijn als zo veel gedachten zijn bij wat jij doet; het fantasties superioriteitsgevoel dat dan over je komt maar dat je zult moeten bedwingen. Ik denk aan wat Simon en Garfunkel nu doen. Elkaar omhelzen? Ik zie ze op een bank liggen in een kamertje achter het orgel, ergens in deze gewelven. Ze hebben hun warme gezichten tegen elkaar aan en huilen allebei, zonder dat hun schouders schokken maar met alleen zwijgende tranen. Ze spreken niet en houden hun ogen dicht. Dan zie ik hoe voor me twee meisjes bloemen neerleggen op de barkrukken en een ander een ijsje in zilverpapier. Ik begin R. uit te leggen dat het belachelijk is, maar realiseer me halverwege mijn explicatie dat het me niet aangaat, dat er iets gebeurt dat ik alleen maar toevallig zie. Ik vraag hem hoe veel ze voor het konsert krijgen. Hij weet het, want zijn vader zit in de muziek en is betrokken bij de organisatie. Dertig duizend gulden. Ik zie Simon en Garfunkel weer, in dezelfde kamer. Simon heeft een boek op zijn knieën liggen en leest. Garfunkel loopt heen en weer, nog steeds met zijn handen in zijn zakken. Hij vraagt iets. De ander antwoordt niet. Garfunkel kijkt naar een lampje aan de muur; als het branden gaat, moeten ze weer naar het podium. Het lampje is donker en Simon leest. Ik probeer me zelfs de titel van het boek voor te stellen, maar krijg het niet gedaan. Om half twee dooft het licht voor de tweede maal. Applaus. (..)

Als Simon de bloemen van de barkruk opneemt en naar de zaal opsteekt, klatert een luid applaus op, dat aanzwelt tot ovationeel wanneer Garfunkel het zilverpapiertje van het ijsje stroopt en zijn tong ertegen plaatst. Ik leef niet erg mee, merk ik. Ik ben een toeschouwer in de exakte betekenis van het woord. Toch heb ik wel het gevoel bij iets bijzonders aanwezig te zijn, maar Simon en Garfunkel zijn mijn helden niet. Ik vind het kurieus zo dicht te zitten bij Simon en Garfunkel, omdat zij Simon en Garfunkel zijn, wier namen ontelbare keren zijn afgedrukt op papier, uitgesproken, gedacht. Omdat zij bekend zijn bij miljoenen. Ik ben hier meer uit nieuwsgierigheid dan uit waardering. Dat denk ik en het zijn heel makkelijke gedachten waar je je hoofd niet bij nodig hebt. (..)

Als Garfunkel het nummer *Bridge over troubled water* zingt, neemt Simon plaats op de trap tussen het publiek. Garfunkel wordt dan begeleid door een jongeman aan de vleugel en het blijkt dat de vleugel is neergezet alleen voor dit ene nummer en dat de pianist alleen voor dit ene nummer (3x) is meegenomen uit Amerika.

Een meisje dat naast Simon zit, heeft op slag wilde ogen gekregen die tot in de allerverste uithoeken van haar oogkassen schieten om iets te zien te krijgen van

die onvergetelijke herinnering naast haar zonder dat ze haar hoofd hoeft te draaien, want het is toch zeker heel gewoon dat ze naast Paul Simon zit. Garfunkel heeft zijn handen in zijn achterzakken en houdt het hoofd opgeheven. Zijn stem beeft niet, zoals enkele keren aan het begin en het lukt hem goed. Hij oogst stampende toejuichingen. De pianist maakt zich draaiend en buigend uit de voeten. Hij wekt de indruk vooral niet de indruk te willen wekken op eigen sukses uit te zijn. Het is niet zijn avond. Hij wil vooral de show niet stelen. Maar het publiek houdt niet op met applaudisseren. Het roept om een herhaling. Simon en Garfunkel kijken elkaar aan en lachen.

Het meisje naast Simon klapt beschaafd in haar handen. Ze is niet onder de indruk, niet enthousiast zelfs, zoals de rest van het publiek, Ze applaudisseert beschaafd, zoals ze altijd applaudisseert als iets is afgelopen.

Niet kijken, niet kijken, raast het door haar hoofd. Ik ben net zo'n idioot als jij kind, denk ik.

Bridge over troubled water wordt niet herhaald.

Simon zingt *El condor pasa*. Samen zingen ze *Bye bye love* en het publiek klapt mee in demaat, precies zoals het hoort.

Dan is het afgelopen, twintig minuten na de pauze. Tien voor twee. Het publiek neemt het niet. Het wil meer, maar het is woedend op een smekende manier. Getrappel en geroep. Lou van Rees houdt zich weggedrukt tussen twee versterkers. Spreekkoren schreeuwen: *CECILIA!* (..)

Dan mag iedereen weer gaan zitten. Een toegift. Nogmaals *Bye bye love*, nogmaals klappen in de maat. Als het nummer voor de tweede maal beëindigd wordt, springt Lou van Rees als een duveltje tevoorschijn. Met dringende stem dankt hij het fijne publiek en verzoekt het de zaal te verlaten. De lichten gaan aan. Simon en Garfunkel banen zich een weg door zwaaiende armen. (Wiener, L.H., *Misantropenjaren. Verzamelde verhalen*. Amsterdam, 1990)

De rest van het verhaal wordt gevuld met pogingen een jongedame te versieren. Vergeefse pogingen.

Een opmerkelijke ontmoeting in de Nederlandse letteren vindt plaats in *Onderweg met Roadie* (Amsterdam, 2015), waarin Thomas Acda, nadat het duo Acda en De Munnik uiteengevallen is, zijn reis door Amerika beschrijft. Roadie is zijn hond.

Ergens midden in Amerika - in Shitville, Alabama, in de woorden van de auteur - treft hij in een klein gezelschap Art Garfunkel aan, die daar is om behandeld te

worden voor problemen met zijn stembanden. Zelf zanger en - voormalig - lid van een duo herkent hij onmiddellijk de stress die dat Garfunkel moet hebben gegeven:

‘(Deze) man heeft veel last van zijn stem gehad, vooral ook tussen zijn oren. Ik ben zanger, ik hoor dat. Daar hoef je niet zo groot als Art voor te zijn. Elke jongen die van zingen houdt en de baard in de keel krijgt, heeft het ook. Je dént dat je nooit meer kunt zingen, en dus kun je nooit meer zingen. Je lichaam pakt je altijd op je zwakste plek. De angst dat je niet meer kunt zingen is zoveel groter dan een keer een toon niet halen of ernaast zitten. Die angst zit in je ziel. Deze grote zanger had zielenangst. Zielenangst dat hij nooit meer zo mooi zou kunnen zingen als vroeger. Dat vrat hem op. Dus kòn hij ook niet meer zingen zoals vroeger. En nu hoor ik een man die zich daardoorheen heeft gevochten. Een van de grootste zangers ter wereld probeert voor het eerst in drie jaar of zijn stem het zal houden. (..)

Ik voel mijn ogen nat worden. Het moet een gevecht geweest zijn, om hier te komen.’

Nog minder dan in proza zijn er verwijzingen naar Simon en Garfunkel te vinden in de Nederlandse poëzie. In welgeteld één gedicht komen zij voor, in een heus sonnet van de sonnettenbakker - vanwege zijn productiviteit in dit genre zo genoemd door collega-dichters

- Jan Kal:

Sneeuwgezicht

De sneeuw valt aan; zijn naam is Legio.
Wat komt het op je af. Dan klinkt er plots
Simon and Garfunkels ‘Ik ben een rots,
Ik ben een eiland’ op de radio.

The freshly fallen silent shroud of snow
wordt dikker, nu ik op de grenzen bots
van mijn bestaan. Ik denk: een eiland Gods,
insula Dei, en grijp Nescio.

Daar lees ik op het midden van de reis:

‘t Eindigt toch allemaal in sneeuw en ijs.’

Het lied sterft weg: ‘Een eiland kan niet schreeuwen.’

Ik wil eraf, om hier niet in te sneeuwen,
en verder bouwen op de Rots der Eeuwen,
witter dan sneeuw zijn in het Paradijs.

Jisp, 7 november 1980

(Kal, Jan, *1000 sonnetten 1966-1996*. Amsterdam, 1997, pag. 827)

Blijkens het Register op Bijbelplaatsen in Kals bundel dient bij de eerste regel aangetekend te worden, dat het woord Legio verwijst naar het evangelie volgens Lucas, 8:30: 'Jezus vroeg hem nu: "Hoe heet je?". Hij antwoordde: "Legioen". Want er waren vele duivels in hemgevaren.'

Een tweede bijbelplaats van het begrip legioen staat in het evangelie volgens Marcus, 5:9:

'Daarop vroeg Hij hem: "Wat is uw naam?" Hij antwoordde "Mijn naam is Legioen, want wij zijn met velen."'

Beide passages verhalen hoe Jezus een man die bezeten is door 'vele duivels' geneest door de boze geesten van de man over te laten gaan in zwijnen, die zich vervolgens in een rivier stortten en verdrinken.

Het zou, indien er een Engelse vertaling van het sonnet voorhanden was, Simon zeker verbazen deze passages met het poëtische *I am a rock* verbonden te zien.

Lees ook: <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/bob-dylan-in-haarlem/>

**Chomsky: We Must Not Let
Masters Of Capital Define The
Post-COVID World**



Noam Chomsky

The global outbreak of COVID-19 has many thinking that a new economic and political order is inevitably under way. But is that so? In the U.S., the moneyed class, which has thrived under Donald Trump, won't go down without pulling all stops to make sure that popular pressures for radical reforms will be blocked, says world-renowned public intellectual Noam Chomsky. Chomsky also reminds us that overt racism has intensified under Trump, and that police violence is a symptom of the underlying white supremacy that plagues U.S. society. Meanwhile, Trump's anti-environmental policies and his trashing of arms control treaties are bringing the world ever closer to an environmental and nuclear holocaust.

C.J. Polychroniou: It's been argued by many, from various quarters, that COVID-19 has been a game changer. Do you concur with this view, or are we talking of a temporary situation, with a return to the "business as usual" approach being the most likely scenario once this health crisis is over?

Noam Chomsky: There is no way to predict. Those who have primary responsibility for the multiple crises that imperil us today are hard at work, relentlessly, to ensure that the system they created, and from which they have greatly benefited, will endure — and in an even harsher form, with more intense surveillance and other means of coercion and control. Popular forces are mobilizing to counter these malign developments. They seek to dismantle the destructive policies that have led us to this uniquely perilous moment of human history, and to move toward a world system that gives priority to human rights and needs, not the prerogatives of concentrated capital.

We should take a few moments to clarify to ourselves the stakes in the bitter class war that is taking shape as the post-pandemic world is being forged. The stakes are immense. All are rooted in the suicidal logic of unregulated capitalism, and at

a deeper level in its very nature, all becoming more apparent during the neoliberal plague of the past 40 years. The crises have been exacerbated by malignancies that have surfaced as these destructive tendencies took their course. The most ominous are appearing in the most powerful state in human history — not a good omen for a world in crisis.

The stakes were spelled out in the setting of the [Doomsday Clock](#) last January. Each year of Trump's presidency, the minute hand has been moved closer to midnight. Two years ago, it reached the closest it has been since the Clock was first set after the atomic bombings. This past January, the analysts abandoned minutes altogether and moved to seconds: 100 seconds to midnight. They reiterated the prime concerns: nuclear war, environmental destruction and deterioration of democracy, the last of these because the only hope of dealing with the two existential crises is vibrant democracy in which an informed population is directly engaged in determining the fate of the world.

Since January, Trump has escalated each of these threats to survival. He has continued his project of dismantling the arms control regime that has provided some protection against nuclear disaster. So far this year, he has terminated the Open Skies Treaty, proposed by Eisenhower, and imposed frivolous conditions to block the re-negotiation of New Start, the last pillar of the system. He is now considering ending the moratorium on nuclear tests, "an invitation for other nuclear-armed countries to follow suit," [said Daryl Kimball](#), executive director of the Arms Control Association.

The military industry can scarcely control its euphoria over the flood of gifts from the public to develop new weapons to destroy us all, encouraging adversaries to do likewise so that down the road, new grants will flow to try to counter the new threats to survival. A hopeless task, as virtually every specialist knows, but that is not pertinent; what matters is that public largesse should flow into the right pockets.

Trump also has continued his dedicated campaign to destroy the environment that sustains human life. His FY 2020 budget proposal, issued while the pandemic was raging, called for further defunding of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other health-related components for government, compensated by increased support for the fossil fuel industries that are destroying the prospects for survival. And, as usual, more funding for the military and for the [border] wall

that is a central part of his electoral strategy. The corporate leaders Trump has installed to supervise environmental destruction are quietly eliminating regulations that somewhat constrain the damage and that protect the population from poisoning water supplies and the air they breathe. The latter reveals sharply the malevolence of the Trump phenomenon. In the midst of an unprecedented respiratory pandemic, Trump's minions are seeking to increase air pollution, which makes COVID-19 more deadly, [endangering tens of thousands of Americans](#). But it doesn't much matter. Most have no choice but to live near the polluting plants — [those] who are poor and Black, and who vote the “wrong” way.

Again, there are beneficiaries: his prime constituency of private wealth and corporate power.

Turning to the third concern of the Doomsday Clock analysts, Trump has accelerated his program to dismantle American democracy. The executive branch has been virtually dismantled, converted to a collection of cowardly sycophants who do not dare to offend the master. His latest step was to fire the State of New York prosecutor who was investigating the swamp that Trump has created in Washington. He was carrying forward the investigation of the inspectors general who Trump purged when they were getting too close. The next projected step, we have just learned, is to be a [purge of the military command](#), to ensure faithful obedience to the aspiring tin-pot dictator in the event of an international or domestic crisis of his making.

Trump is mimicked closely by Jair Bolsonaro; farce imitating tragedy. But in Brazil, there is still a slim barrier to executive criminality: the Supreme Court, which blocked Bolsonaro's moves to purge the authorities investigating his own swamp. The U.S. trails well behind.

It is quite an achievement in a mere six months to have significantly escalated all three of the threats to survival that have moved the Doomsday Clock toward midnight, while at the same time, administering a spectacular failure to deal with the pandemic. Under Trump's leadership, the U.S., with 4 percent of the world's population, has by now registered 20 percent of [COVID-19] cases. According to a [study](#) in a leading medical journal, almost all are attributable to the refusal by Trump and associates to respect the advice of scientists.

In late March, the U.S. and EU had about the same number of coronavirus cases. Europe adopted the results of U.S. scientific studies, and cases have very sharply declined. Under Trump, cases have increased to over five times the EU level. European researchers are wondering whether U.S. has just given up. Europe is now [considering a ban on travelers](#) from the pariah state that Trump and associates are constructing.

The idea that the U.S. government has given up is mistaken. A more accurate conclusion is that the rulers simply don't care. Their concern is to maintain power and to shape the future society in their image. The fate of the general population is someone else's business.

The task of forging the future world is not left to executive orders. It is by now virtually the sole concern of the Senate, with a Republican majority that is perhaps even more subservient to the master than the executive. Mitch McConnell's Senate has virtually abandoned any pretense of being a deliberative or legislative body. Its task is to serve wealth and corporate power while packing the judiciary, top to bottom, with young ultra-right Federalist Society products who will be able to protect the reactionary Trump-McConnell agenda for many years, whatever the public might want.

The latest Republican effort to punish the population is to call upon the Supreme Court to terminate the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") — as always, offering nothing in its place but empty promises.

Trumpian malevolence is merely bringing to light far deeper malignancies of the socioeconomic order that cannot be ignored if we are to avoid the next and probably worse pandemic, or to deal with the truly existential threats to survival that Trump is working hard to make much more severe.

These are the questions we face as we ask ourselves what we can do to shape the emergence from the current health crisis.

Since the eruption of nationwide demonstrations in defense of Black lives and in support of defunding the police, we have witnessed massive shifts in public attitudes on racism and growing defiance against Trump by leading establishment figures and even within his own party. Can you analyze racism in the Trump era, and speculate as to whether the country is ready for a new era in race relations?

Some insight into "racism in the Trump era" is provided by the record of racially motivated violence. According to the Anti-Defamation League, in 2016, before Trump took office, this curse accounted for 20 percent of terrorism-related deaths

in the U.S. By 2018, the figure rose to 98 percent. And it has continued since. FBI Director Christopher Wray reported that racially and ethnically motivated extremists had been the primary source of ideologically motivated lethal incidents and violence since 2018, and that 2019 marked the deadliest year of white supremacist violence since the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, [Foreign Affairs reports](#).

That is one face of racism in the Trump era, regularly fanned from the White House. The current demonstrations reflect critical tendencies in the opposite direction. The demonstrations are unprecedented: in scale, in commitment, in solidarity and in popular support, reaching well beyond what Martin Luther King Jr. achieved when he was still a popular figure.

These remarkable demonstrations testify to significant changes in popular consciousness. Trump, of course, has been trying hard to stir up his white supremacist voting bloc while tweeting wild charges about how the country is under siege by the violent radicals who run the Democratic Party. But his familiar techniques do not seem to be working as before.

So far, the [short-term] goals of the demonstrators seem to be mostly focused on policing. This focus on police practices leads directly to inquiry into much more fundamental features of American society. There is ample evidence that police violence in the U.S. is well beyond comparable societies, but it doesn't take place in a social vacuum. The U.S. is a far more violent society.

Violence, of course, isn't in the genes. It arises from social maladies that are reflected in many aspects of the society, not least its very low ranking among OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] countries in social justice measures. It's clear why these maladies have a radically disproportionate impact on the Black community. Police violence is a symptom, which cannot be cured while ignoring its roots.

The spread of protests, especially to small-town America, has also brought to light the utterly weird phenomenon of the militia movement in the United States. To what extent is the political ideology of the Republican Party under Trump linked to the extreme anti-government ideology of the militia movement?

Apart from the assault on the Michigan State Legislature by the armed Michigan Liberty Militia ("very good people," Donald Trump assured us), the most dramatic recent case was at the village of Bethel, Ohio. A peaceful demonstration of a few dozen people in support of Black Lives Matter was attacked by 700

counterprotesters from motorcycle gangs, “back the blue” groups, and proponents of the Second Amendment, many armed or with baseball bats and clubs. The Second Amendment has nothing to do with the demonstration, but has become a rallying cry among right-wing groups, constantly evoked by Trump, always irrelevantly, to inflame the “[tough guys](#)” he is counting on.

As for political ideology, modern Republicans like to intone Reagan’s slogan that government is the problem, not the solution. But always tongue-in-cheek. Their idol expanded the federal government ([while almost tripling the national debt](#)). It’s true that the ideology of the modern Republican party is in part anti-government. For them, government has a serious flaw; it is somewhat responsive to the general public. The flaw can be remedied by transferring policy-making to private tyrannies that are completely unaccountable to the public. But government is sometimes the solution for Republicans. One instance is when state power is needed to crush popular interference with the doctrines of the faith, the hallmark of neoliberalism from its origins in interwar Vienna, as we discussed earlier. Government is also the solution for the huge public subsidies for the corporate sector, and more visibly, when the corporate crime wave that has been unleashed by neoliberal principles crashes the economy, as has been happening regularly since Reagan. The masters then run hat in hand to the nanny state to be bailed out. That is happening again today, though this time the corporate greed mandated by neoliberal doctrine is only partially responsible; when the pandemic struck, corporations that had been enriching wealthy shareholders and management with stock buybacks have been demanding, and receiving, public largesse as usual.

On top of that, it always makes sense not to let an opportunity go to waste. Thanks to friends in high places, “[Nearly 82 percent of the benefits](#) from the tax law change [in the coronavirus stimulus] will go to people making \$1m or more annually in 2020.”

The guiding neoliberal principle is simply a sharper version of the traditional understanding that the proper function of government is to “protect the minority of the opulent against the majority,” as James Madison instructed at the Constitutional Convention. Government’s prime concern is the welfare of “the men of best quality,” as they called themselves a century earlier during the first modern democratic revolution in 17th-century England. The “rabble” will somehow fend for themselves.

How? In the neoliberal world, the solution for them is to join the precariat, deprived of support systems (“there is no society”), health programs, child care, vacations, secure pensions, in fact any way to escape the ravages of the market, whatever it brings.

Pensions illustrate neoliberal logic well. The first step has been to dissolve them into private 401(k)s. That might lead to higher returns for those who are lucky, and to disaster for those who are not, but either way, withdrawal of security turns people’s minds way from “dangerous illusions” like solidarity and mutual support to isolation in an uncertain market. The next step has just been taken by Eugene Scalia, who was chosen to be labor secretary on the basis of his credentials as a corporate lawyer strongly opposed to labor rights. Under the cover of the pandemic, he quietly [opened the 401\(k\) market](#) to the destructive private equity firms, offering them a huge source of profit and inflated management fees.

Proceeding further, after firing the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, who stepped out of line by exploring his swamp in Washington, Trump nominated as his replacement Jay Clayton, a private equity lawyer who is a long-time advocate of changing federal law “to let asset managers funnel more money from retirees to those high-risk, high-fee firms,” [David Sirota reports](#) in another of his invaluable exposés of state-corporate crimes. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which monitors these shady organizations, issued another scathing report on their malpractice, which Sirota interprets, plausibly, as a “desperate cry for help” to prevent the stagecoach robbery underway. But to head off that threat, Sirota notes further, the Supreme Court quietly “restricted the SEC’s power to punish private equity firms.”

The circle tightens. Hold on to your hats as the new age is forged by the masters, step by step — if we let them have their way.

Since the outbreak of coronavirus, Joe Biden seems to have recognized that many of the problems facing the contemporary United States are structural, not cyclical. Indeed, Biden seems to have [moved further to the left](#) since Bernie Sanders suspended his presidential campaign on April. This raises the interesting question on whether Biden himself has changed or whether it is the politics and culture of the Democratic Party itself that have changed. Can you comment on the policy agenda of Biden and on the possibly changing face of the Democratic Party?

What Biden recognizes I don’t know. We can however read his program, which

has been pressed well to the left. Not by the Democratic National Committee or the donor class. Rather by direct engagement of Sanders and his associates, and most important, by the constant activism of the groups that the Sanders campaign brought together and inspired. Whether the face will continue to change depends on whether these forces will continue to mobilize and to act.

It's well to remember the traditional left perspective on the quadrennial extravaganzas, including the current one.

There is an official doctrine that politics reduces to voting in an election, and then going home to leave matters to others. That's a wonderful way to suppress the population and maintain authoritarian control. The terminology that is used to implement this technique of control is "vote for X," and you've fulfilled your responsibility as a citizen.

The establishment doctrine is available both for those who favor government policy and those who oppose it. In the latter form, it has recently been called "lesser evil voting," given the acronym LEV.

The traditional left doctrine is very different. It holds that politics consists of constant activism to resist oppression, not only from government, but from even harsher private power, and to develop people's movements to promote justice and popular control of institutions. Every few years an event comes around called an "election." One takes a few minutes to see if there is a significant difference between the candidates, and if there is, to take another few minutes to vote against the worst one and then get back to work. To illustrate the choice, consider global warming, plainly a critical matter (for some, like me, the most critical in human history, along with nuclear war). Democrats and Republicans differ sharply on the issue. The [latest study](#) by the Pew Research Center finds that, *Americans continue to be deeply politically divided over how much human activity contributes to climate change. About seven-in-ten Democrats (72%) say human activity contributes a great deal to climate change, compared with roughly two-in-ten Republicans (22%), a difference of 50 percentage points. The difference is even wider among those at the ends of the ideological spectrum. A large majority of liberal Democrats (85%) say human activity contributes a great deal to climate change. Only 14% of conservative Republicans say the same.*

This coming November, the difference between the candidates is a chasm.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and length.

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, the political economy of the United States and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published several books and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Croatian, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish. He is the author of [*Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books.

Daniel Klein ~ The Status And Participation Of 'Mizrahim' In Israeli Society



Immediately prior to Israeli independence in May 1948, Jews of non-Ashkenazi origin made up only twenty-three-percent of the 630,000-strong Yishuv. Between 1948 and 1981 757,000 Jews immigrated to Israel from African and Asian countries, 648,000 of these before 1964, and the majority in the first few years of the state's existence. This initial mass-immigration wave alone transformed the non-Ashkenazi segment of the population from a minority, mostly well-rooted Sephardi community, concentrated especially in Jerusalem, to a highly diversified, mostly first-generation-immigrant grouping that made up a slim majority of all Jews in Eretz Israel. Ben-Gurion referred to these uprooted individuals, who had permanently fled the hostile environment in their home countries, as "human dust" out of which it was the state's duty to form "a civilised, independent nation", reflecting the

bureaucratic, modernist, and even authoritarian ethos of early Israeli elites.

The term 'Mizrahi' ('Eastern') first developed among Ashkenazim as a general descriptor for the non-European 'edot (communities), owing to the perceived cultural similarity between them, and their lack of overarching, geographically-extended identifiers such as that shared by Ashkenazim. However, we shall see that, in consequence of their shared experience in the new country, a genuinely 'Mizrahi'-identified bloc emerged in the decades following the great immigration wave, the founding event of this new syncretic ethnic-group. This is the first period I will discuss. The second begins by the 1980s and is characterised by the development of an 'Israeli-Jewish' ethnic-group, out of two consolidated (Ashkenazi and Mizrahi) blocs. I will argue that despite confronting harsh challenges in the first period, it is clear today that Mizrahim have affected a substantial long-term reshaping of Israeli society, whilst simultaneously maintaining its core values and stability, thus demonstrating the massive extent of their solidarity and cooperation with fellow Israelis.

The complete paper on academia.edu: https://www.academia.edu/The_Status

The Initiative For Fair Open Access Publishing In South Asian Studies ~ The 2020 Manifesto



FOASAS

Profiteering and restricted access have led to a crisis in academic publishing. The Fair Open Access movement is best promoted by mobilizing individual disciplines. With this manifesto, we, an open group of scholars of classical and modern South Asian Studies, declare our support for Fair Open Access publishing.

§1 As is well known, the impact of publications is very often contingent on factors independent of the quality of the research or the competence of the authors. This includes that the research is published in a renowned journal (or other publication medium), by a renowned editor, or - and this has become a major problem - by a prestigious publishing house.

§2 Most of the prestigious publication media are nowadays controlled by a small number of profiteering international publishers. These companies often sell their products at unjustifiably high prices. Much of the editorial work, on the other hand, is outsourced to researchers (or their co-workers, assistants, employees, secretaries etc.). Because they depend on the prestige capitalized on by the publishers, they generally do this without payment. This situation has led to a real crisis in academic publishing.

§3 The Open Access (OA) movement is a reaction to this development: the advance of digitization has made it easy to make the results of research freely available on the internet. OA publishing offers free access to research, regardless of an individual's financial means or affiliation with a subscribing institution. In the OA model, the individual reader does not pay (except, of course, in the case of printed works). Instead, the publication costs are borne by universities, libraries,

scholarly societies, professional associations or other scholarly institutions. While in the wake of this development a number of institutions have founded in-house publishing projects, some commercial publishers have started to offer OA as well.

§4 In order to compensate for the revenue losses resulting from the free availability of OA publications, however, some profiteering publishers have begun to calculate special fees - imposed on the authors or their institutions. Most often, these fees are unjustifiably high and overcompensate for the production costs. As a growing number of academic institutions nowadays demand that the publications of their employees be OA, they are willing to pay these fees. They even regularly schedule a special budget to finance the publishers.

§5 Ultimately, however, it is the tax payers who have to pay, often several times: funding for research and researchers, library budgets for subscription fees, acquisition of overpriced books, processing costs charged by the publishers for OA publications etc. The only reason this system functions is that researchers and their institutions are dependent on the prestige that profiteering publishers have capitalized on for commercial benefit.

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