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MIZRAHI FEMINISM AND THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

SMADAR LAVIE



ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the failure of Israel's Ashkenazi (Jewish, of European, Yiddish-speaking origin) feminist peace movement to work within the context of Middle East demographics, cultures, and histories and, alternately, the inabilities of the Mizrahi (Oriental) feminist movement to weave itself into the feminist fabric of the Arab world. Although Ashkenazi elite feminists in Israel are known for their peace activism and human rights work, from the Mizrahi perspective their critique and activism are limited, if not counterproductive. The Ashkenazi feminists have strategically chosen to focus on what Edward Said called the Question of Palestine—a well funded agenda that enables them to avoid addressing the community-based concerns of the disenfranchised Mizrahim. Mizrahi communities, however, silence their own feminists as these activists attempt to challenge the regime or engage in discourse on the Question of Palestine. Despite historical changes, the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi distinction is a racialized formation so resilient it manages to sustain itself through challenges rather than remain a frozen dichotomy.

THE MIZRAHIM

The modern State of Israel declared itself to be a homeland to a citizenry consisting of three major social groups: Of its seven million citizens, about 20 percent belong to a group that the government and popular culture term Arab Citizens of Israel, or Israeli Arabs (Ducker 2005). They prefer to be called Palestinian Citizens of Israel, Palestin-

ian Israelis, or Palestinians Residing in Israel. In Arabic they are called “1948 Arabs,” shorthand for those who stayed in Palestine after the 1948 *Nakba* (catastrophe)—the Zionist expulsion of most Palestinians from their homeland in order to carve out the State of Israel. The second group is the *Mizrahim* (Orientals), who constitute 50 percent of Israel’s total population and about 63 percent of the Jewish population (Ducker 2005). Their parents immigrated to Israel mainly in the 1950s from the Arab and Muslim world, or from the former margins of the Ottoman Empire such as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, or even Turkey, Iran, Bulgaria, and India (2005). Officially, the Israeli government terms them “descendants from Asia-Africa,” or *‘Edot Hamizrah* (Bands of the Orient) (Lavie 1992).¹ *Mizrahim*² is the coalitional term they use when advocating their rights before the ruling minority, the approximately 30 percent of Israeli citizenry called *Ashkenazim* (Ducker 2005).

The *Ashkenazim* originated in central and eastern Europe and spoke Yiddish. While their first organized immigration wave arrived in Palestine in 1882, most came after the Holocaust (Lavie 2007). Official Israeli terminology endows them with the appellation *Kehilot Ashkenaz* (Ashkenazi communities) (Ducker 2005, Lavie 1992, Shohat 1988).³ Most *Mizrahim* vehemently reject the identity descriptor “Arab Jews,” designated for them by diasporic anti-Zionist *Mizrahi* intellectuals. Yet while most *Ashkenazim* identify themselves first as Israelis and then as Jews, most *Mizrahim* identify first as Jews and only then as Israelis.⁴

Official discourse camouflages the fact that the majority of Israel’s citizenry is of *Mizrahi* origin. The Israeli population survey authority devised an all-inclusive demographic category, called *yelidei ha’aretz*, for those Israeli Jews “born in Israel.” If one does not know the identity of the parents and grandparents of those born in Israel, then the proportions of *Mizrahim* and *Ashkenazim* seem more equal than they actually are. When younger Jewish Israelis are described as born in Israel, they lose their historical diasporic roots, which still define racial-ethnic zones of privilege. Because *Mizrahi* families had much higher birth rates than the *Ashkenazim* until the middle of the 1970s, it is evident that the majority of Jews born in Israel are *Mizrahim* (Ducker 2005). Identifying this disparity, or its occlusion in the census, greatly clarifies the patterns of discrimination within the Jewish population.

Since the arrival of Ashkenazi Zionists in Palestine in 1882 and

since 1948, the Mizrahim have been expected to relinquish their Arab or Mediterranean culture and family structure and their non-European mother tongues. After 1948, upon immigration, they were forced to reside in economically deprived border villages and development towns. The Mizrahim received government-sponsored training programs for production-line jobs, while the Ashkenazim went to universities for professional training. Like the Palestinian Israelis, the Mizrahi majority has only a small minority of representation in all financial, legal, and cultural institutions of the Israeli elite. This holds true not only in these institutions, but also in political movements such as feminism, where sharp divisions exist between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi feminists.

ASHKENAZI FEMINIST ELITISM

The emergence of Mizrahi feminism in the 1990s must be placed into the context of Ashkenazi elite domination of Israel's public sphere. These elite are an almost hermetically sealed group of families that ensures intergenerational transmission of financial assets and Ashkenazi Zionist pedigree. Upward mobility is almost impossible for those lacking proper genealogy, unless they have relatives, neighbors, and close friends who can "pull strings" for them (Danet 1989,⁵ Etzioni-Halevi 1993). Most of the public sphere is framed by a discourse focusing on security that muffles awareness of the rampant intra-Jewish racism by uniting Jews against the Arab enemy (Chetrit 2004), talking about the Palestinians as a demographic time bomb (Bistrov and Sofer 2006), or appealing to a shared Israeli masculinity (Kaplan 1999). The remainder of the sphere is saturated with U.S.-European high and popular culture.

When Israeli Ashkenazi feminism arose in the 1970s, many of its members were middle-class Ashkenazim who had immigrated to Israel from English-speaking countries. Their activism included founding a system of shelters for battered women, rape crisis lines, courage-to-heal groups for incest survivors, and a prostitute rehabilitation movement and fighting against the commodification of women's bodies in commercials (Safran 2006, Swirski and Safir 1991). From the mid-1980s on, the space that middle-class Ashkenazi feminists had created for feminism in the public sphere was usurped by the *gvarot* (ladies) of the liberal Ashkenazi elite.⁶ The upper-class Ashkenazi feminists had the wealth,

leisure, and Zionist pedigree to conduct full-time feminist advocacy through their fathers, husbands, or other kinship ties. Among them were Shulamit Aloni, wife of Reuven Aloni, a long-time member of the Labor Party establishment; Yael Dayan, Moshe Dayan's daughter; and the much younger Meirav Michaeli, niece of Mordechai Namir, one of the Labor Party's leaders.

Early Mizrahi feminists faced an uphill struggle in their efforts to carve out a place in the little space left in Israeli civil society devoid of militarism or the liberal feminist agenda. Mizrahi women's needs were met by neither group. The *gvarot* were insufficient to represent the welfare mother, the production-line worker from the hinterland company town, or the woman who had just lost her job due to the economic downturn that followed the failed Oslo Peace Accords. They could not even represent the Mizrahi woman intellectual, who had neither the pedigree nor the relatives to secure her a tenure-track position in Israel's "Ashkenazi Academic Junta" (Damri-Madar 2002, Lavie 1995, 2002, Lavie and Shubeli 2006).⁷

MIZRAHI FEMINISM

Mizrahi feminism is the only feminist movement in Israel that currently draws its membership from all segments of society, including intellectuals, artists, small business owners, fired factory workers, and homeless welfare mothers (Shiran 2002b). The movement started when Mizrahi women wanted to bring immediate aid and long-term empowerment and social justice to disenfranchised women in their communities. They were inspired by the distinct voices of U.S. feminists of color who had emerged in the 1970s arguing that white feminism could not transcend the racism, ethnocentrism, and privilege that typified the Western public sphere and its liberal feminist movements. Since American trends arrive in Israel about a decade later, in the mid-1980s a group of Mizrahi women met in Tel Aviv, upon the initiative of the feminist activists Ilana Sugavker, whose parents immigrated to Israel from Bombay, and Hanna Cohen, daughter of Iranian immigrants. Its members were Yemenis Yonit Mansour, Yael Zadok, and Ronit Dagan-Timsit; Iraqis Ilana Shamai, Rutie Gur, Irit Daloumi, and Shosha Goren; Egyptian Vicki Shiran; and Iranian Zehava Goldstein. All were Zionists, but all criticized the

upper-class and Anglo-Saxon influences on Israeli feminists. They criticized, too, the classism and racism faced by Mizrahi and Palestinian-Israeli women (2002b). Though a Mizrahi discourse of resistance had existed in Israel since the 1920s, when the Yemeni laborers brought in as “natural workers” unionized (Kapara 1978), this was the first time that Mizrahi women identified themselves as a category (Shiran 1991, 1996, 2002b, Shohat 1996).

The major event of Israel's feminist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) since the late 1970s has been the Annual Feminist Convention. Until 1991, almost all the speakers and workshop leaders were Ashkenazi women, with the inclusion of a single token Mizrahi and a single token Palestinian-Israeli (Shadmi 2001). The Tel Aviv Women's Group used to joke, in the Audre Lorde (1993/4) tradition of “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House,” that Mizrahi women cleaned house and babysat for the Ashkenazi gvarot so that the gvarot could devote time to feminism.

In 1991 the Mizrahi group refused to remain token participants in the Annual Feminist Convention meetings and demanded proportional representation for each group of Israeli citizens: Palestinians, Mizrahim, and Ashkenazim. It won this battle because, with the refusal of the obligatory single Mizrahi and single Palestinian to act as a fig leaf, the Ashkenazi feminists found their liberalist pluralism challenged.

In 1994 the Mizrahi feminists demanded that lesbians be added to the proportional representation paradigm. From then on, until early 2000, almost all Israeli non-academic feminist events were run by what is officially termed “the quarter system,” where each panel or workshop had an Ashkenazi, a Mizrahi, a Palestinian, and a lesbian (Barkai 1993, Ben-Zvi 1994, Shiran 1995).⁸ Israeli academic feminist events, on the other hand, remained almost exclusively Ashkenazi.

By 2000, many Ashkenazi feminists saw the problem as resolved and returned to the system of the all-Ashkenazi panel with a token Mizrahi and/or Palestinian. Mizrahi feminists tried to challenge this paradigm but were left without much success, because by then some of them felt conflicted by a sense of obligation to Ashkenazi NGO feminists, who had singled them out as “good Mizrahim,” or Mizrahim willing to accept these token diversity roles.

In response to the al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005), many Palestinian-

Israeli individual feminist activists and NGOs boycotted Israeli feminist activists' events altogether. They objected to the fact that such events included Jewish feminists, mainly Ashkenazi, from settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and Orthodox Jewish feminists, mainly Ashkenazi as well, who believe in the idea of a Greater Eretz Yisrael but lived within its pre-1967 borders.

The only event that still observes the official policy of the quarter system is Israel's annual feminist NGO convention. While Mizrahi and Palestinian Israelis seek to devote their energies to their own communities, Ashkenazi feminists have made a strategic choice to shift their focus to the Question of Palestine.

ISRAELI FEMINISM AND THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

The Question of Palestine best illustrates the gulf between Ashkenazi feminists and the majority of Jewish Israeli women, who are disenfranchised Mizrahi. When I mention "the Question of Palestine," I allude to Edward Said's (1979) book of that title. Yet for most Ashkenazi feminists, who conceive of themselves as representatives of all Israeli women, Palestine is to be found only in the West Bank and Gaza (Swirsky 2002). They are not alone in this view. The Question of Palestine has developed into a legitimate subject of activism among feminists in the West—many of whom, particularly in the United States and Canada—are progressive Ashkenazi Jews (Berger-Gluck 1994, Dworkin 2002, Segal 2007, Sturm 1992, Young 1992).

Most Ashkenazi Jews in the diaspora are unaware of the vast socio-economic disparity that exists in Israel and throughout the Jewish world. While 15 percent of world Jewry is Mizrahi, this group resides mainly in Israel. The 85 percent majority of world Jewry that is Ashkenazi resides mainly in the diaspora (Swirski 1989). Historically, diaspora Ashkenazi feminists have been willing to battle racism in their own societies. Progressive and radical Jews have always been at the forefront of anti-racist struggles, whether in South Africa during the fight against apartheid or in the United States during the civil rights movement. Many diaspora Ashkenazi feminists have consistently protested Israel's colonial practices towards non-Jews in the West Bank and Gaza. Nevertheless, because Mizrahi discourse on intra-Jewish racism has been suppressed,

whether by the English language barrier that prevented it from traveling abroad or by severe censorship from Ashkenazi hegemony (Lavie 2006), the extent of Israel's intra-Jewish racial divide is unfamiliar to most progressive Jews abroad.

Ashkenazi peace feminists focus on ending Israel's occupation of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza, and some do concurrently fight for equal civil rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel. But this fight deflects their attention from their responsibility for and participation in the racial and economic oppression of the non-European Jewish majority citizenry within Israel. These feminists employ a discourse about the Palestinian as the external, homogenized, nationalist Other, who cannot be subject to the perennial Israeli debate about who is a Jew (Lavie 2010). Palestinian women especially serve as Others for Ashkenazi feminists, who recognize and nurture this difference.

Such activism almost surely yields European or U.S. funding. It is easier for the Ashkenazi peace gvarot to deal with Palestine as a specifically feminist issue, as this allows them to dialogue with the English-speaking, Western-bred, secular-liberal Palestinian nationalist elite. They need not engage with members of the lower classes of Palestinian women, who belong to Islamist movements such as Hamas, mainly as a result of their disillusionment with the exclusive NGO-ization⁹ and professionalization (Merry 2006, Sangtin and Nagar 2006) of cosmopolitan Palestinian feminism (Jad 2005).

The Question of Palestine is a well-funded springboard for Israeli activism under the utopian platform of peace and coexistence. In Hebrew, *du-kiiyum* literally means "co-existence." It has become a shorthand description of a genre of Palestinian and Israeli get-togethers designed to process old grievances and encourage potentials for peace. Often, a professionally trained group facilitator aids the process. The meetings are held at elegant resorts, in beautiful natural settings meant to provide the relaxed atmosphere needed to allow past traumas to heal. The Israelis likely to participate come from the Ashkenazi upper-middle class. Outside Israel, these *du-kiiyum* get-togethers are conducted in English. This further limits the composition of participants, since, in the non-English-speaking world, English proficiency and upper-class cosmopolitanism often go together. In Israel, the *du-kiiyum* is habitually performed in Hebrew, the colonizers' language. Subaltern Palestinians speak

it fluently. The Israeli participants are not likely to speak Arabic. Some Palestinians have given du-kiiyum the sardonic affectionate nickname “*dukki*” (Lavie 2006, Shubeli 2006).¹⁰

These ritualized du-kiiyum dialogues with the upper-class feminist elite of Ramallah have permitted Ashkenazi feminists to justify their racial and class bias toward Mizrahi women with benevolence toward Arab Muslim and Christian women of the West Bank (far less than toward those of Gaza). They espouse the cause of the Palestinian women activists who are citizens of Israel, even while controlling much of the funding that goes to the Palestinian-Israeli feminist NGOs.

In an era where the public sphere has undergone NGO-ization and feminist NGOs have undergone professionalization (Merry 2006, Sangtin and Nagar 2006), du-kiiyum is used as a magic key to unlock NGO funding for local projects. Funds flow to Israel for dukki feminism from the European Union as well as from diaspora organizations and U.S. Jewish women’s groups. The dukki’s prestige brings in handsome budgets. In late 2002, the peace-and-dialogue movement received about \$9 million of U.S. and EU tax-deductible donations (Ettinger 2003).

Almost all Israeli feminist NGOs are funded by the New Israel Fund (NIF) and Women-To-Women USA-Israel. These foundations espouse an enlightened, left-leaning form of Zionism and have influenced the scholarly political, cultural, and social agendas of Israeli feminism and women’s studies. In the realm of feminist activism, the NIF and its subsidiary, Sherutei Tmikha v’Ye’utz l’Irgunim (Support and Consulting Services for NGOs), or SHATIL, have professionalized the NGOs by offering job opportunities at a time of job scarcity. But hired professionals must conform to role expectations, which has tended to depoliticize some activists. Aside from organizations’ leadership, which is mostly comprised of Ashkenazim, the NIF metes out its funds into part-time positions held mainly by Mizrahi and Palestinian women. This practice confines many grassroots women activists to jobs with fragmented hourly pay, devoid of benefits and labor rights.

In funding NGOs, the NIF has also enacted a Durkheimian division of protest labor. As Durkheim (1884) classifies the manner in which hierarchies of different labors cohere into a social order, the NIF has created a hierarchy of gendered-ethnic-national protests regulated by its funding policies. The progressive-liberal feminist elite is funded

by the NIF and Women-to-Women USA-Israel to protest violations of the human and civil rights of Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, or even those of Israel itself. It employs the language of cosmopolitan human rights, including the discourse and the struggle of indigenous first nations. The funding agencies do not object when these NGOs use terms like “racism” and “apartheid” to describe the discriminatory ideologies and practices of the Israeli regime against Palestinians. The Israeli regime now allows even its Palestinian citizens to have their own tightly supervised human rights NGOs, also mainly funded by the NIF. They receive demonstration permits and conduct activism objecting to Israeli segregationist policies against them. Yet both the government and the funding agencies use the Palestinian-Israeli and Ashkenazi elite human rights NGOs as proof of their claim to enlightenment. The NIF vetoes any Palestinian human rights activism that would inform the Palestinian public about the racial divisions of Zionism or the oxymoronic concept of a democratic Jewish state.¹¹

The NIF and Women-to-Women USA-Israel do not bestow even such confined protest and popular mobilization privileges on Mizrahi NGOs. Instead, they have relegated these NGOs to the role of substituting severely truncated state welfare programs. Feminist Mizrahi NGOs are funded mainly to help women re-enter the job market through workshops for starting small businesses—such as selling home cooking in a tight, highly professionalized catering market or embroidery in an exploitative market for ethnic crafts, already populated by Bedouin women who have their own collectives for embroidery and weaving. When the Mizrahi NGOs refuse to become charities or “oceans of tears,”¹² they are neutralized by the funders’ threats of greatly reducing their grants.¹³ In sum, as Racheli Avidov (2004) argued, Mizrahi feminism has been transformed into a depoliticized subcontractor of mainstream Ashkenazi feminism.¹⁴

Until recently, Ashkenazi feminists have discredited Mizrahi feminists as *mitbakhyenot* (crybabies),¹⁵ while erasing their own color and class differences from Mizrahi women under the guise of Jewish sisterhood (Shiran 2002a). The result has been an almost complete disjuncture between Mizrahi feminists and Palestinian-Israeli feminists, despite their similar structures of patriarchy and similar multiple axes of oppression, whether by Ashkenazi men and women or their own

men. Mizrahi and Palestinian-Israeli feminists are able to dialogue only through the mediation of the Ashkenazi feminists, even when the Ashkenazim are physically absent during the dialogue (Ebron and Tsing 1995, Lavie 1995). Furthermore, the lack of English skills and/or elite educational experience abroad (Lavie 2006) makes it impossible for Mizrahi feminists to engage with the upper-class nationalist feminists of the Palestinian Authority.

The history of feminist activism and scholarship teaches us that progress starts at home. Palestinian feminists, particularly if Islamist, conduct their activism in keeping with the spirit of the old Jewish “sages of blessed memory,” who advised: “Put the poor of your home before those of your town, and the poor of your town before those of the next town.”¹⁶ In other words, use common sense and compassionate logic. Unlike the Israeli feminist gvarot, Palestinian feminists first work locally, putting their class privileges into action for the betterment of the disenfranchised in their own communities, and only then present this work to the international community and media (Jad 2005). Yet the Question of Palestine enables the Ashkenazi peace feminists to avoid sharing their power, prestige, and money with the Mizrahi internal Others of Israeli society. Mizrahi feminists see great irony in the contrast between Ashkenazi feminists’ emphasis of human rights for the Palestinians and silence on human rights for the Mizrahim. This irony is but a small part of the practices and policies that have led the majority of Israeli women, Mizrahi women, to move farther to the right since 1977 (Lavie 2010).

IDIOSYNCRASIES OF ISRAEL’S POLITICAL LEFT AND RIGHT

The majority of Ashkenazim vote for the Israeli political left. The left agrees on a land-for-peace settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but is divided among three factions. First, the Zionist Left, consisting of the Labor Party and MERETZ Party, and even the Kadima Party, voting bloc, espouses liberal to socialist Zionism.¹⁷ Nevertheless, when in power, the Zionist Left has consistently carried out right-wing domestic social and economic policies. The bloc’s affluent constituency has been composed of the Ashkenazi economic-political elite—industrialists, bankers, developers, and high tech businessmen (Reider 2006, Shubeli

2006). A second group, the Post-Zionist Left, recognizes the reality of the 1948 Nakba and conducts active demonstrations against Israel's 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza but does not differ from the Zionist bloc when it comes to its Ashkenazi elite class interests. The third faction, the Anti-Zionist Left, is also of the Ashkenazi elite class but traces its roots back to the European New Left of the 1960s. It favors transforming Israel from a Jewish state, where Jews have advantageous privileges of citizenship, into a secular state with equitable citizenship for all inhabitants, including the Palestinians who remained in what was declared to be Israel after the 1948 war. A minority within the Anti-Zionist Left believes that one state, Palestine/Israel, ought to be formed from Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. None of these leftist movements has managed to attract the Mizrahim.

On the eve of the 1967 war, Michael Selzer (1967)¹⁸ argued that all factions of the Ashkenazi left had aryanized the Jews more than those of the right had, by co-opting the then-fashionable counterculture discourse of peace and love to make solidarity overtures to the Palestinians. But the left, while romanticizing the Palestinians, could not digest its own Jewish Arabs—the Mizrahim—as part of the conflict between Israel and its neighbors. Selzer points out that it treated them as the inassimilable excess of what the left termed “the peace discourse” (94). He concludes that unless the political left dismantles Israel's intra-Jewish apartheid system by de-aryanizing Israel's Ashkenazi domination and hegemony, there will be no armistice, let alone peace, between Israel and the Arab world. Selzer goes on to say that the left has not “realiz[ed] how significant it is that the Ashkenazim have shown themselves incapable of living with their own Jewish brethren of Arab background” (94).

In the 1977 election, the Mizrahim voted almost as a bloc for Menachem Begin, in order to reject the left wing's racial formations of Zionism and its inability to acknowledge the humiliation and discrimination to which the Mizrahim have been subjected under the reign of Labor Party governments since 1948. In 1959, Begin served as head of the right-wing Herut Party and operated far outside the liberal-socialist Zionist consensus. He became one of the most revered figures among many Mizrahim when he made a solidarity visit with the rebels of Wadi Salib, an overcrowded Haifa slum where North African Jews had risen up to protest the squalid conditions of their forced resettlement

into an area whose Palestinian residents had been expelled by the left-wing Labor regime. Because of this visit, and especially because Begin was the first politician to acknowledge that discrimination against the Mizrahim was based on their non-Ashkenazi ethnic origins, the Mizrahim voted for the rightist Likud Party, successor to the Herut Party, for years thereafter. Wadi Salib was the first event to shape post-1948 Mizrahi consciousness.

In his 1977 landslide victory, Menachem Begin moved from underdog to Prime Minister, due in part to the early 1970s civil unrest sparked by the Mizrahi Black Panthers, a protest movement that took its name as a symbolic gesture to the eponymous Oakland movement. The Black Panthers were also in coalition with the budding late-1960s New Left Anti-Zionist Ashkenazi movement. Starting in Jerusalem's pre-1967 borderzone slums, their demonstrations swept through almost all Mizrahi ghettos in Israel's urban centers. These were suppressed by brutal police force, following the instructions of Prime Minister and Labor Party leader Golda Meir. Some Panthers were shot dead at short range by police snipers. Others were co-opted into establishment positions, and those who remained activists are still denied meaningful employment and housing by the Israeli regime. One mysteriously disappeared.¹⁹ Just when they were about to embark on coalitional relationships with European New Left and radical socialist groups, Israeli officials confiscated the passports of their delegation members. Israeli scholars and the public believe that the Black Panthers movement led directly to the fall of the Labor Party and the transfer of power to Begin and the right. The Israeli political right has held power since 1977, except for short periods, and has carried out a policy that had been initiated by the Labor Party—settling the West Bank and Gaza through colonial outposts under the ideology of Eretz Yisrael.

A new generation of Mizrahi politicians aligned themselves with the Likud Eretz Yisrael ideology and practice and rose into lower-level municipal politics as mayors. Then some went to the Knesset or obtained ministerial portfolios. But this new cadre of Mizrahi politicians was still subservient to those with Ashkenazi lineage in the Likud, who were popularly called *nesikhim* (princes). The Mizrahi politicians advanced the political agenda of the *nesikhim* rather than that of their own Mizrahi communities. It is interesting to note that these Mizrahi politicians

enjoyed repeated re-election even though they failed to advance their own communities' interests.

Nevertheless, there were good reasons for the lower-class Jewish majority of Israel to keep voting for the political right. Many Mizrahi families wanted to escape the Mizrahi ghettos, especially when the cities in central Israel started turning into real estate bubbles that made housing there utterly unaffordable.²⁰ In pursuing its goal to settle Eretz Yisrael, the Likud continued the policy of creating viable single family dwellings for lower-middle-class Israelis. It was the Labor government that started devising a plan in which the only housing upgrades available for poor people were to be found in large-scale settlements like Ariel, Ma'ale Adumim, or the newer expansion of Jerusalem's neighborhoods to deep inside post-1967 occupied Palestine. Here, upscale-for-the-poor projects bore names such as Pisgat Ze'ev (The Wolf's Peak)²¹ or Neve Ya'akov (The Oasis of Jacob). Since the mid-1980s, however, right-wing governments of Israel not only invested in these settlements but also initiated project renewal in the Mizrahi ghettos throughout the country. Although the project did not support enough new housing, it did establish community centers and significantly improve the infrastructure, particularly electricity and sewage. Furthermore, it was during the right-wing Israeli regimes that Mizrahi culture, as long as it avoided connecting its own Arabness with that of the Palestinians, embarked on a renaissance (Abarjel and Lavie 2009).

During the 1993-1999 Oslo years, brokered by the United States, the Israelis and Palestinians negotiated Israel's gradual withdrawal from some of the territories it had seized from Jordan and Egypt in the 1967 war. One of the selling points to the Israeli public was the promise of an immediate regional economic boom, led by the globalized restructuring of the Israeli economy. The Labor-MERETZ bloc, then in power, dismantled labor unions and outsourced production to Egypt, Jordan, South Africa, and Southeast Asia. The left elite invested in sweatshops abroad and employed cheap labor to replace Mizrahi and Palestinian-Israeli women production line workers (Bichler and Nitzan 2001, Lavie 2010, Zomer 2001). The Zionist Left leadership also started privatizing the public sphere, and it initiated the move to reduce welfare allowances for the needy. The Post- and Anti-Zionist Left did not protest, afraid of disturbing the peace process. The right deployed populist ethnic and

social justice rhetoric to win the support of Israel's Mizrahim until 2003, when Benjamin Netanyahu slashed almost all the remaining Israeli welfare rights, exposing the rhetoric as hollow.

One of the slogans chanted in many demonstrations by all varieties of the Israeli political left is "Fund the 'hoods," that is, the Mizrahi slums and development towns, "not the settlements," meaning Israeli communities in the West Bank and Gaza. Rafi Shubeli (2006) argues that the evocation of this catch-phrase is illusory. He asks: Since when has the Israeli Ashkenazi left fought for the Mizrahi poor or tried to provide a viable alternative to the avenues for upward mobility provided by allegiance to the right? Ironically, the kibbutzim, the showcases of enlightened socialist Zionism, exploited Mizrahi development towns by hiring underpaid menial laborers with no rights (Chetrit 2004). Shubeli notes that the Ashkenazi left habitually depicts the Mizrahim as the atavistic chauvinistic masses. The left almost always chants the slogan, "Fund the 'hoods, not the settlements," in the context of the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza without acknowledging the fact that the Mizrahim are the silent majority of the West Bank and Gaza settlements. They do not chant that slogan in the context of the racism and poverty typical of lived experience in the slums of either Palestinian Nazareth or mixed Palestinian-Israeli upper Nazareth, let alone skid row South Tel Aviv,²² where they will travel half a mile to the "'hoods" only to eat inexpensive shish-kebabs of foie gras rolled into Iraqi pita-bread. Shubeli concludes that, in a sense, by using such a slogan, the left inflames one public, the Mizrahim, against the other, the Palestinians, due to its omission of the societal context having to do with the ethnic composition of either the slums or the settlements vis-à-vis the ethnic composition of the left.²³

The left's Ashkenazi feminists responded to Israel's grave human rights violations during the first Intifada (1987-2003) and the al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005). In her writings, Gila Swirsky (2002), one of the founders of Women in Black and the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace, vividly evokes the brave feats of Israeli peace activists demonstrating in solidarity with the Palestinians of the West Bank during the al-Aqsa Intifada—endangering their own lives as they distributed food to besieged villages, preventing with their bodies the uprooting of olive trees, or exposing themselves to physical and verbal violence from right-wing Israelis as they marched to crown Jerusalem with peace. Ashkenazi

feminists have demonstrated more often than men; because of the combination of their gender and class privileges, it is less likely that the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers on active duty policing the West Bank, most of whom are Mizrahim, would attack them to stop the demonstrations (Keshet 2006). Still, Ashkenazi feminists ignore the plight of their disenfranchised Mizrahi neighbors; rather, they can be found just across the street, in favor of what Swirsky (2002, 238) describes as “TV crews from all over the world” who document their “street theatre” protests against the occupation. These photograph well for the media in search of simplistic Palestine/Israel binarisms. Concurrently, as Swirsky aptly puts it, these feminists continue to wonder why their groups “remain largely invisible to the Israeli public” (238).

The Ashkenazi left takes for granted the loyalty of the Mizrahim to the state. Indeed, Mizrahim continue to vote for the political right regardless of which party is in power. Similarly, Ashkenazi feminist scholarship and activism continue to ignore these class and race divisions within Israel (Lavie 2010).

MIZRAHI FEMINIST PREDICAMENT AND STRATEGY

The Mizrahi predicament is complicated and driven by contradiction. It cannot be compared to the clear-cut situation of West Bank or Gaza Palestinians living under the daily atrocities of Israel’s military might. It cannot even be compared with the daily acts of apartheid that Israel performs toward its own Palestinian citizens. G. Avivi argues that Mizrahim are situated between their own economic-cultural oppression and the Palestinian fight for national determination.²⁴ Most Mizrahim still believe in Zionism’s utopian promise, even as they remain excluded from its economic and cultural power centers. They are not active in struggles to overcome their disenfranchisement. Avivi hypothesizes that if the Mizrahim were to change loyalties in the Zionism vs. Palestine equation, they would incur immediate losses to whatever gains they have made through the tenuous political-economic upward mobility that came with their Ashkenazification.²⁵

Like all Jewish citizens of Israel, Mizrahim are obligated to serve in the military, an institution that facilitates upward mobility for Israeli Jews. Since the 1982 Lebanon War, however, actual combat has gradually

become less attractive to Ashkenazim, who, due to their superior schools in affluent neighborhoods, are eligible for the high-tech behind-the-lines units. Today, Mizrahim train for the majority of infantry and armored corps front-line duty jobs. Higher casualties follow (Halevi 2003, 2006). Avivi also points out that it is the Mizrahim who end up as targets when Palestinian suicide bombers explode. Suicide bombings are likely to occur on public transportation, which is frequented by Mizrahim who cannot afford to own private cars. Other favorable locations for suicide bombers are impoverished neighborhoods, where residents are not affluent enough to collectively hire the patrolling services of privately run security companies and where official Israeli police rarely patrol, except for during drug raids (Abarjel and Lavie 2009, Rappaport 2003, Shadmi 2004).

The Ashkenazim, whether on the right or left, have international, specifically American, connections in the World Zionist Organization and on Capitol Hill. Ashkenazi feminists on the left, funded by the NIF, have also appeared before the European Parliament and received more funding (Peled-Elhanan 2005). The Palestinians, too, have gradually won international recognition for the Nakba and their heroic struggle for a free and independent homeland. But the Mizrahim, despite their NIF-funded NGOs, have yet to gain international recognition as another regional problem stemming out of the Zionist colonization of Palestine. Only such recognition would persuade the NIF to allow the Mizrahi NGOs to change their focus from local soup kitchens to transnational and coalitional social justice activism for the benefit of the Mizrahi communities, thereby yielding a just and genuine peace process.

At present, Mizrahi feminist NGOs avoid publicly facing the Question of Palestine. Their grassroots advocacy work is funded by diaspora Zionist sources, and Mizrahi feminist NGOs know that cutting these strings would provoke the Ashkenazi hegemony to inflict further losses on Mizrahi communities.²⁶ Furthermore, Mizrahi activists do not collaborate with Palestinian feminists of lower socio-economic status within Israel or the West Bank because of their affiliations with Hamas. All NGOs funded by the NIF are required to take minutes of their meetings, and these minutes are subject to possible inspection by the NIF and the State Registrar of NGOs. This places Mizrahi feminist NGOs in a predicament. These organizations are comprised of, remarkably, the

same factions as those of the Ashkenazi feminists: Socialist Zionists, Post-Zionists, and Anti-Zionists. Yet, although they do not agree with each other, any mention in the minutes of their actual discussions about the Question of Palestine and international affairs would be interpreted by the NIF as an invasion of Ashkenazi turf, with consequences so dire that they dare not risk it.²⁷ The NIF or even the Registrar of NGOs could publicize the opinions of the Mizrahi feminists. If the Mizrahi community finds out about their political opinions, it would likely reject their attempts to conduct projects for women in impoverished neighborhoods. The community is concerned only with the harsh Mizrahi life of trying to get food, employment, housing, and education. Therefore, Mizrahi feminists have agreed among themselves that silence is a wiser strategy.

The Mizrahi feminists' ability to challenge the regime is limited. They are threatened by the NIF with budget cuts whenever they include Mizrahi feminist consciousness in their project proposals along with the charity work. They must speak the language of practice in order to help disenfranchised Mizrahi women resolve their daily problems in dealing with the regime's authorities, which, by default, are Ashkenazi. Thus, they have avoided intellectual possibilities for reabsorbing Mizrahim into Arab space. Mizrahi feminists have not called for a just solution to the Palestine problem by, for example, illuminating the conjuncture of the military occupation's cost with the lack of money for enough mammogram machines in public health clinics in the unemployment-ridden Mizrahi ghettos. They have not pointed out that the early Ashkenazi-Zionist eugenic ideologies and practices against Mizrahim—such as forced sterilization (Hashash-Daniel 2004, Stoler-Liss 1998, 2003²⁸), high-dose X-ray medical experiments without the subjects' consent (Belhassan and Hemias 2004), and the removal of Mizrahi babies for Ashkenazi adoption without the parents' consent (Shubeli 2007, Zeid 2001)—connect to the treatment of Palestinians (Abarjel and Lavie 2009, Lavie 2007). They have been silent about these Mizrahi/Palestinian similarities. Gingerly, even while acknowledging the solace of sorts that Mizrahi communities have found in the political right, Mizrahi feminists would have had to face their constituencies and explicate the interplay between the Mizrahi erasure of Arab memories, rooted in language and culture (Lavie 1992, Shohat 2001), and the almost universal insistence by Israel's Ashkenazi left on a two-state solution.

TWO STATES OR ONE?

A two-state solution, combined with the flat denial of the Palestinians' right of return, is calculated to preserve Israel's Ashkenazi dominance and hegemony. Liberal-socialist and Post-Zionist Left leaders repeatedly say they are willing to swap land for peace, that is, give up Palestinian land that Israel occupied in the 1967 War. Giving up Gaza and the West Bank, however, would release the Israeli regime from its position as an occupier responsible for millions of Palestinian Arabs. Meanwhile, the separation wall, planned and initiated during the short-lived government of Labor Party Prime Minister Ehud Barak with support from MERETZ, and continued by Likud Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, is confiscating large areas of Palestinian land and water within the occupied territories, so that these will be inside the proposed new permanent boundaries of a smaller, more compact Israel. The objective is to restructure Israel into a Jewish-majority state, made possible by the presence of the Mizrahi population. If the leftist leadership can get elected on the peace ticket agenda, in spite of the Mizrahi anti-left vote, Israel's Ashkenazi hegemony and its democratic, peace-loving discourse will emerge, yielding Israel's rebirth as a Jewish state.

As this is written, the Israeli regime has nearly finished building the wall that is to separate the Palestinian Authority of the West Bank and Gaza from pre-1967 Israel and the additional territories it occupied in 1967. Nevertheless, the wall is an integral part of the "two states for two peoples" solution (Abarjel and Lavie 2009). Paradoxically, among pro-Palestine scholars and activists abroad as well as among a handful of post- to anti-Zionist scholars and activists in Israel itself, the idea of a one-state solution is experiencing a resurgence (Abarjel and Lavie 2009, Abunimah 2006, Benvenisti 2010, Shenhav 2010, Tilley 2005).

While a one-state solution does not seem a viable option for the majority of Israeli Jews, Mizrahim and Ashkenazim alike, it is a powerful agenda because of its in situ demographics. As it is, Jews of all ethnic varieties are already becoming a minority in the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Coast (Abunimah 2006). The multiple strands analyzed in this paper point to the failure of Israel's feminist peace movement to work within the context of the Middle East demographics, cultures, and histories and the inability of the Mizrahi feminist

movement to weave itself into the feminist fabric of the Arab World. From the Mizrahi feminist point of view, the assumption that only two peoples are involved here, Israelis and Palestinians, is not matched by reality. For the Palestinian feminists to continue using this binarism reaffirms the European racial domination and internal colonization of Mizrahim. Given the demographics of Israel and Palestine, a one-state solution would be an Arab majority solution. If the Mizrahi feminists advocate it, they would alienate the right-wing Mizrahi communities. If they stay silent and merely watch it come to pass, there will probably be little or no space to enact equal rights for the Mizrahi citizens of this one state. In the Mizrahi activists' scenarios, a just escape from this paradox seems unattainable.

CONCLUSION

Although Ashkenazi feminists are known internationally for their valuable peace activism and human rights work, this paper argues that from the Mizrahi perspective their critique and activism are limited, if not counterproductive. They have not been able to bring racial, social, and cultural justice issues into the perpetual U.S.-brokered political peace process. Further, their choice to pursue international activism, rather than to merge the struggle for a just peace with the struggle against the racism experienced by the Mizrahim, denies them the necessary demographic constituencies to change Israeli voting patterns from right to left. Despite the historical changes reviewed in this paper, the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi distinction is a racialized formation so resilient it manages to sustain itself through historical challenges such as the upward mobility of Mizrahim after 1967, when West Bank and Gaza Palestinians replaced them as blue-collar laborers, and the mass immigration of Ashkenazim from the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Therefore, the Ashkenazi/Mizrahi formation has not remained a dichotomy frozen in time and space.

Mizrahi activists assume that with the establishment of a one-state Israel/Palestine, there will be massive emigration of Jews. Presently it is estimated that since the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000, about 500,000 to one million Israeli Jews have equipped themselves with European Union passports based on their pre-Holocaust

European genealogies (Connolly 2002, Ehrlich 2008, Levi 2004, Reiter 2007, Shavit 2001, Weiman 2008).²⁹ It is estimated that if a one-state solution resolves the Palestine/Israel conflict, EU passport holders, mainly professional Ashkenazim, will emigrate to Europe (Burg 2008).³⁰ The thin crust of Mizrahim who have risen to white-collar occupations in demand will emigrate to countries like Canada and Australia and to the Latin American republics that encourage immigration of wealthy professionals.

Will Palestine/Israel become a patriarchal Islamist state, where remaining Mizrahim become a religious minority? Will a secular patriarchal state emerge, ruled by the Ashkenazi elite who would rather not emigrate because they know they would lose their privilege and wealth by going abroad, where no one knows their family names, descent, and land holdings?³¹ Will they rule alongside the Palestinian moneyed class and educated technocrats? Will these elites once again exclude the majority population, the Palestinians and Mizrahim, from access to education, equitable justice, financial resources, and networks of influence? Between the 2006 Lebanon War and August 2007, Reuven Abarjel, co-founder of the Jerusalem Black Panthers, and I met regularly to discuss the ramifications of the Mizrahi majority on a potential single state of Israel/Palestine. We calculated and hypothesized that in this potential future state, 90 percent of the citizens would be of non-European origin, half of them women.

POST SCRIPT—SACRIFICING GAZA 2009 ON THE ALTAR OF THE ISRAELI LABOR PARTY REVIVAL

Between December 27, 2008 and January 21, 2009, the IDF carried out yet another large-scale military operation against the Palestinian people because of its democratically elected Hamas government and the missiles that it fired from Gaza into Israel. It did so with the silent encouragement of the United States, the European Union, and their Arab subcontractors, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Most Israeli Jews supported the Gaza operation. Yet all the printed and electronic media discussed the cynical timing of the attack on Gaza—six weeks before the Israeli elections of February 10, 2009, during the U.S. interregnum between the Bush and Obama administrations. Not only did the Israeli regime send its

military machine to commit large-scale destruction of civilian lives and properties, it also endangered the lives of its own citizens and soldiers. It did this without even trying to negotiate in good faith with the elected Hamas-led government of the Palestinian people.

It is the leaders of Israel's "peace camp" that started the 2009 Gaza operation, and, before that, the 2006 Second Lebanon War. The perpetrator of the Gaza operation was Ehud Barak, the leader of the Labor Party, while the defense minister in 2006 was Amir Peretz, his predecessor in that post. Their political ancestor was David Ben-Gurion, the orchestrator of the Nakba.

When the Israeli government collapsed in the summer of 2008, polls predicted that in the subsequent elections, the right-wing bloc, led by Netanyahu, would win 65-70 seats in the 120-member Knesset. Both the U.S. and EU leadership, as well as the Egyptian and Jordanian regimes, prefer to deal with the centrist bloc of Israeli politics—that which comprises Tzipi Livni's Kadima and Barak's Labor Parties. The Kadima Party was founded by Ashkenazi members of the Likud Party who were dismayed at the increasing Mizrahi influence in the party. They were joined by defectors from the flailing Labor Party, whose fortunes Barak was reviving through the Gaza 2009 operation. The polls predicted a devastating failure for this bloc due to its almost complete exclusion of Mizrahi representatives.

Barak schemed for a war in Gaza, proclaiming that its purpose was to protect Israeli communities against the Palestinians. Many of the communities directly attacked, and still under attack, by Hamas missiles have a large majority Mizrahi population. In the 1950s Mizrahim were settled by the regime in the Gaza borderzone and other borders Israel shares with Arab states because these were easily targeted by Palestinian guerillas (Lavie 1992). After the Gaza War, the forlorn Mizrahim, for whom the government had repeatedly refused to build adequate shelters, gained status as full-fledged Israelis in the Western media that habitually focus on English-speaking Ashkenazim. It was the wailing of Mizrahim hit by rockets, rather than the massacre of Gazans, that was regarded as good copy. The resulting coverage was used to justify Israel's claims of self-defense (Yegna 2010).

How benevolent was it of the Israeli European elite to hug the Jews of darker hue whom they imported to Palestine as a demographic shield

against the Arab enemy. Now, when Mizrahi lives have become fraught with trauma, due to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, how could these poverty-stricken subordinates not cooperate? Mizrahim enjoyed this rare moment of large-scale attention in the national media, moreover as “true Israelis.”

Like all of Israel’s wars, the recent war in Gaza has been followed by a post-war boom—an additional benefit for the Ashkenazi-controlled economy (Bichler and Nitzan 2001). As well as trying to shift the Mizrahi vote from the right to the center, another goal of this war was to delay the impact of the global economic crisis on the Israeli economy, whose crux is the military-industrial complex.

A window of opportunity for constructive Mizrahi-Palestinian-Arab feminist dialogue opened for a brief period after the 2006 Second Lebanon War. While the Israeli regime had endowed Ashkenazi left-wing kibbutzniks living in northern Israel with well-equipped air-conditioned underground shelters, it had failed to make corresponding provision for the neighboring Mizrahi agricultural cooperatives and development towns. After the war, the Mizrahim in the north—including several long-term Mizrahi feminist activists—publicly acknowledged, with great bitterness, that they had been sacrificed for Israel’s military adventure.

The 2009 Gaza operation carnage was portrayed to the Israeli public as a corrective measure for the defeat by Hezbollah in the summer of 2006. As a result, Barak’s popularity rose from 12 to 70 percent. Nevertheless, as in almost all of the Israeli elections after 1977, the Likud Party emerged victorious with the Mizrahi vote. Any possibility for Mizrahi-Arab feminist dialogue has been slammed shut.

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to write cultural history in the interpretive “middle register” in which this article is written. A huge bouquet of thanks to my pathbreaking sister activists in Ahoti—for Women in Israel, and to the women with whom I shared my days between 1999 and 2007, as we stood together in the lines of the National Security Bureau, Forced Employment Bureau, and the NGOs distributing food for Shabbat. Thanks to these women, I retained the power to hope for better times free of everyday vagaries in order to write.

NOTES

1. I provided all translations.

2. In English, Mizrahim are often mistakenly called Sephardim, derived from the Hebrew word, *sfaradim* (Spaniards). The Sephardim are descendants of the Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492, and they constitute one group of the Mizrahim.

3. Clare Louise Ducker's (2005) findings on Israel's demographics are the most recent and are quite similar to the previous findings mentioned in this article. She wrote her award-winning M.A. thesis, “Jews, Arabs, and Arab Jews: The Politics of Identity and Reproduction in Israel,” at the Hague Institute of Development. Ducker accounts for the large-scale post-Soviet immigration to Israel in the 1990s, yet she is careful to distinguish between the Asian and European post-Soviet Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants. The Central Asian post-Soviet immigrants to Israel are counted as Mizrahim. The visible and vocal post-Soviet immigrants to Israel, however, are the Ashkenazim. In almost all of the wide array of references substantiating the analysis in this article, the fact that race and class go hand-in-hand in Israeli society (i.e., the fact that the Mizrahi majority of Jews of darker hues is comprised mainly of the lower-middle-class and down, while the Ashkenazi minority is largely middle-class and up) is never disputed by any scholar of Israeli society in Hebrew. Such information about the accepted axioms of intra-Jewish racism rarely leaks out of Israel.

4. This data is based on my fieldwork. I started my ethnographic fieldwork and research on Mizrahi feminism between 1990-1994, as it consolidated into a budding social movement. Anthropological fieldwork and research for this article were conducted between 1990-1994. Further fieldwork was conducted between 1999-2007. The data collected during both periods of research and used for this article includes archival research conducted in both official Ashkenazi state archives and the private archives of Mizrahi independent scholars and activists unaffiliated with Israeli universities. Many of the references here have been published only in Hebrew, and not by major Israeli presses. These texts were not translated into English because there is a translation block between the Hebrew and English with regard to grassroots Mizrahi scholarship and activism. Another body of data consists of my detailed fieldnotes. These were written in sites such as literary salons, social movements, the

welfare system, family and bailiff courts, civil society non-governmental organizations and their funding agencies, dance clubs, cafes, housing projects, neighborhoods, schools, concert halls, tourist sites, universities, public events, and the like. In-depth documented dialogues were conducted with intellectuals, activists, and members of various Mizrahi communities. In addition, e-group correspondence and Internet sites of the various Israeli peace feminist movements were regularly read and analyzed throughout the duration of the research and to the present day. In a similar vein, media articles from Israel's printed dailies relating to the issues and dilemmas this article addresses were read and collected regularly for the duration of the research and to the present. Due to the article's historical scope and its portrayal of extremely complicated webs of social and political sets of relations and organizations, I decided not to write it as a traditional "newer"- or "older"-style ethnography. It would have taken too much word-space to bring in the large quotes from my informants, the detailed Hebrew-English translations from archival materials, and my own field diaries, and interpret and theorize them all. I needed a writing strategy that permitted me the complexity of the argument within the limited space of a journal article. I therefore wrote the article in the middle register of academic texts, an ethnographically authoritative Geertzian text of sorts, rather than in the polar manner of snatches of ethnography and high theory that has been typical of my anthropological writings.

5. While I borrow the term from Brenda Danet (1989), her analysis of the Israeli "pulling strings" culture falls within the ideological paradigm of Zionist or post-Zionist academic discourse, which takes for granted the racial formations of the Zionist project and therefore ignores the problem of intra-Jewish racism in Israel.

6. While this term might seem archaic or offensive, *gvarot* was one of the standard Hebrew terminological categories dividing Jewish women in British Mandate Palestine after the 1920s. The other two were *po'alot* (workers), whether Ashkenazi or Mizrahi, and *ozrot* (maids), who, by default, were all Mizrahi (Lavie 2007).

7. The term "Ashkenazi Academic Junta," or "the Academic Junta," is commonly used by the non-academic Israeli public and indicates their estrangement from the impenetrable networks of the Israeli academic elite (Blachman 2005, Zarini 2004).

8. Lesbianism is an identity more difficult to endure as a Mizrahi or a Palestinian than as an Ashkenazi because of the Arab patriarchal structure of taboo in both Mizrahi and Palestinian families. Mizrahi feminists noticed that having a lesbian representative doubled the Ashkenazi presence at feminist events. But because in hetero-normative Israel even Ashkenazi lesbians, with their class-race privileges, are still outcasts of sorts, the Mizrahi feminists decided to put pressure on the lesbians to have a proportional representation within their group, rather than cancel the quarter system of representation (Shiran 1995).

9. NGO-ization is a process by which grassroots social movements transform into "safety valves" by channeling... popular discontent along... harmful ways [and in the process] the exploited and oppressed are divided into sections and identities...." It is a process by which social movements turn into "self-help communi-

ties... absolving the state from all social responsibilities” (Chachage 2006).

10. I rely here on the brilliant discussion of this slogan provided by Rafi Shubeli (2006).

11. In 2006, Palestinian NGOs based in Israel issued a joint document entitled “The Future Vision for Palestinian Arabs in Israel.” The document can be found at http://www.knesset.gov.il/committees/heb/material/data/H26-12-2006_10-30-37_heb.pdf (accessed on July 22, 2010). It recommends that Israel become a state for all of its citizens, without privileging Jews over non-Jews. Some of the NGOs participating in this document are funded by the New Israel Fund. According to some of the signatories, whom I interviewed and who wish to remain anonymous, they received threats that the NIF would cut their funding and, therefore, their salaries, if they continue to initiate and participate in events that the NIF interprets as doing away with what the NIF defines as Israel’s Jewish democratic character.

12. “Ocean of Tears” is a 1998 television series—researched, directed, and produced by Ron Kahlili and Shosh Gabai—about the history of Mizrahi music. It derived its name from a Mizrahi pop tune by the same title. An Ocean of Tears is the ultimate act of *l’hitbakhyen* (see Note 15).

13. In 2002 and from January to March of 2003, Vicki Shiran, founder of Israel’s Feminism of Color, and I worked on the long-term budget of Ahoti (Sistah), a Mizrahi feminist NGO. On January 6, 2003, from 1:30-3:30 p.m., as co-authors of the budget proposal, we defended it in the Jerusalem offices of the NIF. The woman in charge of funding Mizrahi NGOs refused to fund our efforts to raise awareness about feminism of color, saying that it would too divisive for Israel’s feminist movement.

14. The HILA NGO has been suggested for discussion as a beacon of an anti-Zionist feminist NGO. HILA, a Hebrew acronym for “Parents for the ‘Hood,” works to raise Mizrahi and Palestinian parents’ consciousness against the tracking of their children to vocational schools. While its founder is indeed an anti-Zionist Mizrahi feminist, my two decades of observations and interviews indicate that she has not dared go into the Mizrahi communities with her anti-Zionist viewpoints because no one will participate in her projects. Nevertheless, in the rush to create and reframe Mizrahi activist history in the form of scholarly discourse, anti-Zionist Ph.D. students are presently sent from Western universities to study this one- to two- person NGO and give it equal weight to the larger Mizrahi NGOs such as the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow or Ahoti. It is worth mentioning, however, that HILA is well connected to powerful anti-Zionist Mizrahi intellectual exiles outside Israel.

15. The Hebrew slang verb *l’hitbakhyen*, or “to be a crybaby,” is value judgmental, and is used mainly in the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi context. *Livkot* is a verb derived from the same root—the three Hebrew letters *bet*, *khaf*, and *heh*—but, in another conjugation, means “to cry” in standard Hebrew. *L’hitbakhyen* is a reflexive conjugation. Whenever Mizrahim evoke their history of inequality, based on the eugenics ideologies and practices of the Ashkenazi establishment or on this establishment’s anti-Arab sentiments (Lavie 2007), they are accused of being *mitbakhyenim* (crybabies). The term is usually deployed by those articulating what is known as “the Israeli discourse of pluralist enlightenment” as part of its “Israeli

(i.e., Ashkenazi) universalism vs. Mizrahi ethnic particularism” analysis of Israeli society (Abarjel and Lavie 2009). Good examples for the evocation of this verb are in the context of affairs such as the kidnapping of Yemeni babies from the 1930s to the early 1970s, and their subsequent selling for adoption to Ashkenazim (Madmoni-Gerber 2009), or the Ringworm Children Affair (Belhassen and Hemias 2004), where about 150,000 North African children, without their parents’ consent, were irradiated with high dose x-rays as part of an unauthorized medical experiment.

16. Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metziah 71a

17. Because the Ashkenazi Zionist Left keeps moving to the right, the Kadima Party is now considered a leftist party. Kadima has no socialist roots, but, because its leaders promote the idea of a land-for-peace swap with the Palestinians, it is viewed as leftist.

18. Michael Selzer is an Ashkenazi Jew whose parents emigrated from Europe to a part of colonial India that later became Pakistan.

19. According to a January 2009 interview with Reuven Abarjel, one of the Jerusalem’s Black Panthers co-founders, Black Panther ‘Ovadia Harari was executed by Israeli police death squads from short range during a chase in May 1971. Black Panther Daniel Sa’il fled from Israel in 1975. He first went to France, and then Spain. Abarjel states that the rumors were that he broadcasted from the Iraqi radio anti-Israeli propaganda in Arabic and then returned to Spain. He then entered the Israeli consulate there and was never seen again (Fischer 1996). Another panther, Ya’akov (Koko) Der’i, was violently beaten during the 1977 demonstrations. In the 1980s, when many Black Panthers were criminalized for their resistance activity and imprisoned at the Be’er Sheva Jail, they organized a revolt, of which Der’i was a key organizer. For the first time in Israel’s history, prison guards shot tear gas and smoke grenades into the small cells of Jewish prisoners. In doing so, they targeted Der’i. Yehezkel Cohen, another Black Panther, was arrested for being a part of a mainly Ashkenazi group, Shining Path, who was blamed by the Israeli regime in collaboration against the state. The most celebrated prisoner from this group was an Ashkenazi kibbutznic, Udi Adiv. He was given special comfortable conditions in the prison. Cohen, the only Mizrahi in the group, was the one most exposed to torture, emerging from his long jail term with untreated broken bones. In addition, he lost his vision almost completely due to prison torture. See http://www.planet-nana.co.il/r_aberjel10/0_a_r_dvar_hapanterim.htm (accessed on January 9, 2009).

20. The inflated prices of real estate in central Israel, where most employment is to be found, rose sharply in the early 1990s due to the large wave of immigration to Israel by former Soviet Union Ashkenazim, which the Labor Party leadership referred to as the white ‘*aliya* (literally “ascendance,” also the term for Jewish immigration to Israel) that was to redeem Israel from Mizrahi-zation. The European former Soviet Jewish immigrants—as opposed to those from Central Asia—were given large governmental subsidies for rent or purchase of housing. They preferred to live in the central cities’ slums so that they would be closer to employment and better education for their children than in Israel’s hinterlands, where housing is better but schools and unemployment worse (Lavie 1991).

21. “Pisgat Ze’ev” literally translates to “The Wolf’s Peak”—a name that

romanticizes the imperialist endeavor, given that the neighborhood overlooks the majestic desert wilderness dropping sharply from the Ramallah mountain range into the below-sea-level oasis of Jericho. However, it is also possible that the neighborhood is named after Ze'ev Jabotinsky, one of the founders of the right wing Herut Party, precursor to the present-day Likud Party.

22. An eloquent analysis of the division of Tel Aviv into a "White City" and a "Black City" is provided by Sharon Rotbard (2005).

23. Compare Leibovitz-Dar (2002) and Bar'am (2003).

24. G. Avivi is the nickname of an incisive analyst who frequently writes talkbacks and forum entries in *Kedma* (Eastbound), the Mizrahi portal: <http://www.kedma.co.il>.

25. Ashkenazification is the process by which Mizrahim become second-rate Ashkenazim, as they wish to integrate into mainstream Israeli society but lack the phenotypical and historical privilege of coming from Europe.

26. A good example of a possible future grassroots Ashkenazi-Mizrahi-Palestinian devoid of Zionist funding was found at <http://www2.jewishsolidarity.info/en/petition> (accessed on March 18, 2007). As of March 15, 2011, this online petition has been taken down. The reason is unknown.

27. See footnote 13.

28. It is interesting to note that Sahlav Stoler-Liss (1998) meticulously documents Ashkenazi eugenics in her M.A. thesis written in Hebrew for Tel Aviv University, yet, when publishing her findings in English, she uses the less potent and more accepted tropology of building the new Jew's body.

29. The quantity of Internet search results on "European Union Passport" and "Ashkenazim" in Hebrew is staggeringly high (Connolly 2002, Levi 2004, Shavit 2001, Weiman 2008). Y-Net is the highest circulation news portal in Hebrew and a subsidiary of *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, Israel's highest circulation printed daily. One Y-Net (2007) article, actually an English-to-Hebrew translation from the Reuters wire, generated 250 talkbacks. While talkbacks might not be viewed as indicators of public mood in the United States, in Israel, they are of utmost importance to predict public mood and are often referred to or quoted by the printed, high-brow media, politicians, and other public figures. Here are some of the talkbacks' titles with regard to the constantly increasing amount of Israelis, mostly Holocaust survivors or their children, who undergo the expensive, complicated process necessary to equip themselves with European Union passports: "This is an Ashkenazi exit ticket;" "Because the state of Israel will not survive for long;" "Maybe the Jews indeed do not deserve a Jewish state;" "The ship is sinking;" "Among the German Ashkenazim you will find the highest number of racists;" "A shelter to save my family;" "Zionism is science fiction;" "Better Germany on corrupt, racist Israel;" "Ashkenazim AWOL from Israel."

Of particular interest is the legal partnership exhibited in the Internet site www.hagira.co.il (*hagira* means "immigration" in Hebrew), which is run by a group of savvy attorneys who offer their services for Israelis wishing to become citizens of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, England, the United States, Poland, Romania, Germany, and other European countries. One insightful, informative article on

their site is “The Comeback of the Polish Granny” (Linder-Gantz 2005). Several Hebrew Internet sites offer Ashkenazim guidance on how to search for proof of pre-Holocaust family residency in order to start the process of EU passport application in each and every EU member country.

30. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew original of Avraham Burg’s (2008) new book is longer and spells out in larger detail the logic behind the Ashkenazi rush to go through the extensive bureaucratic machinations necessary to acquire a European Union passport. In short, Burg argues that a Jewish state in Israel is futureless.

31. Even though we live in an era of globalized capital and digitized wealth, land holdings as power and wealth are still of crucial importance in Israel, where interestingly, the global economic crisis has resulted in a building spree both within the state’s pre-1967 borders and in the territories occupied by the state since 1967.

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