Hitmazrehut or Becoming of the East: Re-Orienting Israeli Social Mapping

Atalia Omer
University of Notre Dame, USA

Abstract

Through developing of the concept of *hitmazrehut*, the article highlights avenues for decolonializing and de-orientalizing sociopolitical theory and practice in Israel/Palestine. *Hitmazrehut* (literally 'becoming of the East') is understood as the transformation of relations between space, identity, and narrative through an intersectionality framework of social movement activism and intellectual counter-discourse. Exposing the intersections among sites of marginality as well as cultivating localized interpretations of identity (delinked from the orientalist positing of Israel in the 'West') would contribute to the possibility of the formation of transformative coalition building across national boundaries. *Hitmazrehut* is both an outcome and a necessary process for enabling geopolitical reframing. The article begins with the ahistorical and orientalist biases of sociological inquiry into the region. It continues with an analysis of efforts to localize and *re-orient* Jewish identity as well as the Mizrahi discursive critique of epistemological violence guiding sociological scholarship, double consciousness and patterns of ethnic passing.

Introduction

The impetus for this article revolves around two interrelated questions: what a non-orientalist sociology of Israel would look like and, secondly, what the ramifications of such a sociology might be for a broader transformation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the undergirding logic of the Occupation of the Palestinians and Palestinian lands. I argue that a non-orientalist sociology would relinquish the assumption that Israel is in Europe (as per its inclusion in the Eurovision and European sport tournaments) or an extension of European values, an 'enlightened island' in the Middle East (as per familiar rhetorical tropes emblematic of the broader landscape of orientalism).

Corresponding author:
Atalia Omer, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies & Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame, 303 Hesburgh Center, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA.
Email: Atalia.Omer.3@nd.edu

To move beyond this imagined and ideologically constructed geography, Jewish-Israeli society, and with it the operative categories of Israeli sociology, would need to undertake a process of *hitmazrehut*, becoming of the (Middle) East. This indigenizing is not imperialistic. Nor is it utopian. Instead, it offers alternative and thoroughly historically informed ways of understanding connections among the Jewish and Palestinian Arabs and their experiences outside the Euro-Ashkenazi normative terrains. It also offers a method for 'provincializing' Euro-(North)America as the supposed agent of history and modernity in the region (Pappe, 2004).[1]

As Gil Anidjar illumines (2003), de-orientalizing the sociological spaces of Palestine and Israel requires examining the role of Europe and its Christian history not only in colonization but also in dichotomizing the Arab and the Jew. This dichotomization, of course, has its own historicity and betrays the confusion, racialization, and conflation of ethnic, religious, and national indices. Anidjar's genealogy of collapsing 'Jews' and 'Muslims' into one category of the 'Semites' (2003: 101–50) takes him to Hegel by way of Kant's rendering of Jews and 'Mohammedanism' (without conflating the two traditions) as subjects of 'religions of the sublime' and Montesquieu's description of Muslim despotism. In Hegel's work, the 'Muslims', framed as weak and slavish, are conflated with the Jews, and the two are juxtaposed with Christianity's self-understanding and purportedly non-slavish qualities. This conflation, which gains traction in the 19th century, when race theories also gain traction, Anidjar argues, is most (in)visibly embodied in the Muselmann of the Nazi death camps. 'Muselmann' *is* the word 'Muslim' and it is not an accident that it was the word deployed to describe the living dead in the death camps.

This European discursivity prompted secular European political Zionists to cultivate Zionist teleology; they became firmly convinced, as Theodore Herzl did during the Dreyfus trial, that Europe needed to be free of Jews. This, of course, reflects a deep internalization of the anti-Semitic discourse. However, anti-Semitism as hatred of Jews is not unrelated, as the above genealogy suggests, to Europe's other Other: its 'Muslim question'. In effect, 'Israel, as a theologico-political project', Anidjar asserts, 'is the clear continuation of Western Christendom's relation to Islam' and the challenge it has posed to Christian theological supercessionism and the sustained history of wars and Muslim internal and external 'threats' since the seventh century. 'To ignore ["the Muslim question"]', Anidjar continues, 'is to renew and increase the invisibility of the Christian role in the pre-history and the history of colonialism and post-colonialism' (in an interview with Nermeen Shaikh). Hence, de-orientalizing would mean unsettling the enduring logic of Europe as a theopolitical and ideological project and as that project's role within the Zionist discourse. This article suggests social and counter-discursive spaces conducive for unsettling this logic and the sociocultural and political boundaries it has authorized.

I proceed first by highlighting the ahistorical and orientalist biases of sociological inquiry into the region. Second, I analyze internal Jewish challenges to Zionist teleology and explain efforts to localize and thus *re-orient* Jewish identity within the Israeli context. Next, I introduce Mizrahi discursive critique of the epistemological violence guiding scholarship and sociological practices. This analysis provides a background for engaging the phenomenon of double consciousness whereby the Mizrahi public discourse internalizes the logic of orientalism, even while reclaiming a domesticated Mizrahi cultural habitus that appears to resist Ashkenazi normativity. I subsequently discuss ethnic performativity to illuminate resources for challenging the incoherence of rigid, artificial sociocultural and political boundaries. Before proceeding, I turn to clarifying key distinctions between my view of *hitmazrehut* – a historically grounded process of rearticulating sociopolitical categories – and the academically established Mizrahi project of reclaiming pre-Zionist Jewish-Arabness as a foundational resource for re-conceptualizing space and identity.

Not a Utopia

Becoming of the Middle East as per *hitmazrehut* is not a form of orientalism in reverse, meaning valorizing instead of denigrating the Orient while nonetheless participating in its other-ing, thus retaining the assumptions of orientalism. Instead, *hitmazrehut* would mean redrawing the imagined topography that locates Israel in the West and overturning the very assumptions upon which the East-West dichotomy is reproduced within Israeli society and upon which the logic of the Occupation of Palestinians rests. The operative concept here is not the Orient but rather localizing and indigenizing Israeliness, drawing on a multiplicity of resources. This is not a search for precolonial harmony. Localizing, however, need not entail relinquishing the religious significance of the space. Consequently, it calls not only for a discursive and historicist critique of the bifurcation of Jews and Arabs (presuming, erroneously, interchangeability of Arabs and Muslims). It also calls for religiously informed hermeneutics that will participate in (not over-determine) redrawing the sociocultural and geopolitical landscapes governing the division into social units which then become the subject of sociological research and analysis. Relatedly, localizing focuses on what happened to lived Jewish-Israeli communities across time in the sociocultural space of Israel. To this extent, this article suggests a departure from, or at least an expansion upon, the 'orthodoxy' of the radical Mizrahi intellectual and activist vanguard (i.e. Chetrit, 2000, 2005; Shenhav, 2006; Shohat, 1988, 1996) and its project of reclaiming Jewish-Arabness.

The article illuminates that *hitmazrehut* also means overcoming the ahistoricity of sociopolitical and cultural analysis; it identifies how *hitmazrehut* or indigenous forms of Jewish Israeliness derive their authority not only from precolonial and pre-Zionist co-inhabiting of spaces across the 'Orient'. It takes seriously the sociological and anthropological realities born out of historical discursive spaces. Accordingly, Ashkenazi Jews, and Israeli Jews broadly, cannot merely be interpreted (by themselves and their many critics) as estranged from their location as foreign settler colonialists or as an 'enlightened' extension of the 'West'. Certainly, settler colonialism is not an irrelevant motif. Nor is the 'modern West' as an ideological project irrelevant as an explanatory frame. Yet deploying these concepts exclusively is myopic because it prohibits imagining the fruition of efforts of redrawing ideological topographies, propelled by the imperative of Palestinians and Israelis to coexist. Indeed, Shenhav's recent work on intersectionality and coalition-building among settlers, the Haredi Shas (Mizrahi Orthodox) sector, and immigrants from the former Soviet Union points to an effort to traffic in a historically contextualized reframing (not a mere retrieval) of perceptions of the relations between space, identity, and narrative (also see Mizrahi, 2011). However, as long as the implementation of intersectionality theory ends at the thresholds of Zionist sociocultural and ethnic boundaries, its capacity to mobilize across sites of social marginalization is ideologically delimited. More on this below.

Hitmazrehut, therefore, will amount to the transformation of relations between space, identity, and narrative through an intersectionality framework of social movement activism and intellectual counter-discourse. Exposing the intersections among sites of marginality as well as cultivating localized interpretations of identity (delinked from the orientalist positing of Israel in the 'West') would contribute to the possibility of the formation of transformative coalition building. Coalitional work which focuses on social justice issues is not confined to ethnoreligious and nationalist frames, embodied in walls and checkpoints. Thus understood, *Hitmazrehut* is both an outcome and a necessary process for enabling geopolitical reframing such as what is proposed in the Parallel States Project (Levine and Mossberg, 2014) that innovatively delinks territory and citizenship, allowing for the possibility of two states (without territorial divisions) where citizens will fall under their respective state's jurisdiction (Palestinian or Israeli) regardless of the geopolitical space they inhabit. The Parallel States Project (PSP) illumines one possible avenue for de-orientalizing Jewish-Israeli

modes of authorizing geopolitical jurisdiction by simply removing from this equation the necessity of forceful contact with Palestinians and the patterns of displacement and replacement as the inevitable and persistent logical implication of this contact and of Zionism as an ideological formation (Rouhana, 2006; Said, 1979). However, de-orientalizing geopolitical framing cannot be simply dictated by experts. The de-orientalizing logic undergirding the PSP, or other such reframing, needs to take into account sociological obstacles. This is not a nostalgic effort to retrieve a supposed golden age, but rather a project that is thoroughly historical and pragmatic, even if it appears at the moment fanciful. The de-orientalizing analysis I propose is similarly not utopian or naïve about the precolonial Ottoman division of sociocultural space according to the millet system; while relatively pluralistic, it does not cohere with human rights norms. Instead, this analysis necessitates identifying the resources available for reimagining sociocultural and political meanings of citizenship in ways that cohere with the contested inter-cultural tradition of human rights.

There are numerous obstacles to the possibility of *hitmazrehut*, ranging from the double consciousness of Mizrahim and Mizrahiyot[2] manifested in their rigid support of anti-Arab policies and the Occupation to the persistence of a Euro-Zionist hegemony, the lack of Ashkenazi concern with redressing its 'ethnic' gaps and its history of systemic and cultural violence toward non-European citizens, and the failure of the Ashkenazi left to connect the Palestinian and Mizrahi causes. Mizrahi scholarship is highlighting such connections in its effort to challenge the Euro-Zionist ethos and its discriminatory practices.

However, pushing beyond the discursive critique characteristic of Mizrahi studies, *hitmazrehut* denotes more than a process whereby the supposed antinomian relation between the 'Arab' and the 'Jew' is bridged in the person of the Arab-Jew. Beyond this focus on Mizrahi critique and on non-European Jewish narratives and experiences, *hitmazrehut* is a phenomenon that is empirically evident even if ideologically resists. It is misleading and ahistorical to refer to fourth- and fifth-generation Israelis as persistently European, even if they are Ashkenazi. Hence, to reiterate, I expand the Mizrahi discursive critique by suggesting that de-orientalizing Israeli sociology and the study of Israel vis-à-vis the conflict requires leaving behind an ahistorical rendering of the estrangement of Israeli society from the Middle East. The impulse for this does not reside in a nostalgic narrative about Jewish-Arabness as the 'solution'; it springs from the pragmatic need to de-authorize orientalist undergirding of sociological and geopolitical boundaries, not by dismantling Zionism through postcolonial critique but rather through reimagining its contours locally and historically. Now that I have anticipated where I diverge from and expand upon Mizrahi critical 'orthodoxy', I turn to unpack the argument by looking at, while unsettling, the logic of estrangement from the land.

Estrangement

My grandmother Shlomit arrived in Jerusalem straight from Vilna one hot summer's day in 1933, took one startled look at the sweaty markets, the colorful stalls, the swarming side streets full of the cries of hawkers, the braying of donkeys, the bleating of goats, the squawks of pullets hung up with their legs tied together, and blood dripping from the necks of slaughtered chickens, she saw the shoulders and arms of Middle Eastern men and the strident colors of the fruit and vegetables, she saw the hills all around and the rocky slopes, and immediately pronounced her final verdict: 'The Levant is full of germs.' (Oz, 2003: 32)

Grandmother Shlomit was one of Jewish-Israeli writer Amos Oz's grandmothers. He attributes her obsessive preoccupation with cleanliness once in Palestine and then in Israel to her estrangement from her new and somewhat accidental environment. Oz's autobiography, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, from which the quoted lines are extracted, presents a vivid and complex picture of the

final years of the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish Zionist community in Palestine) and the early days of the Israeli state. European Jews in this period were caught between ideological Zionist formations, on the one hand, and deeply felt uprootedness, nightmarish memories and news from their 'homes' in Europe, and ghettoized recreations of Europe in the middle of Jerusalemite neighborhoods, on the other hand. Many of the characters that inhabited the young Oz's childhood were very far from an abstract image of the settler-colonizer. For some, like his mother, the sense of estrangement and uprootedness from Europe led to depression and eventually to suicide. The Zionist narrative about 'home coming' to Palestine/Zion meant, in many instances, loss and refuge rather than any kind of triumphalist reclaiming. The return to one's supposed home was constantly juxtaposed with the images of the Muselmann, which embodied a loss of belief in European grandeur and culture, and the narrative and legacy of the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment. The Muselmann of Auschwitz was the relative of literally everybody (in Oz's neighborhood in Jerusalem). The Muselmann, as noted, carries divergent meanings that undergird the tragic interrelations between Palestine-Israel and Christian Europe and its projects of secularism, racism, and empire, all co-imbricated with the authorizing discourse of orientalism.

Regardless of the sometimes pathetic estrangement of the Jewish refugees in Oz's Jerusalem of the 1940s, the blinding prevalence of orientalism within the Zionist imagination is evident in Grandmother Shlomit's proclamation about the Orient. It is not surprising that when Arab-Jews were brought to Israel from their countries of origin, they were disinfected with DDT and sent to camps known as *maabarot* and later to 'developing towns' in the peripheries. This foundational orientalism set the stage for decades of discrimination and marginalization. Mizrahi or oriental Jews have since suffered systemic and cultural violence under the Euro-Zionist or Ashkenazi hegemony. The very term itself – 'Arab-Jew' – challenges the binary logic of Zionism, which posits the Arab as its Other. Inhabiting the hyphen is therefore an act of discursive critique that, while only practiced by a few intellectuals, social activists, and artists, nonetheless points to the possibility of reimagining social and political boundaries in the region. Rarely does academia venture to theorize outside sociopolitical and cultural boundaries set through processes of ideological construction. In the case of Israel/Palestine and the broader region, sociological inquiry has been determined to a large degree by colonial lines on the sand and the national narratives that authorize them. The fragility of these boundaries is now even clearer with the rise of ISIL/ISIS. Alternative modes (negative or positive) of conceptualizing the relationships among different demographics across the space are and have been possible, even while sociological scholarship usually normalizes geopolitical boundaries.

Conventionally, in western academe, the study of Israeli sociology is subsumed under Jewish or Israeli studies. The Association for Israel Studies lists 20 major centers or institutes devoted exclusively to the academic study of modern Israel (Association of Israel Studies official website). In the US alone, there are an additional 97 programs in Jewish studies with varying degrees of emphasis on the study of modern Israeli society and politics. While there have been some efforts to incorporate Sephardi and Mizrahi studies into the broader scholarly conversations in Jewish studies since the establishment of the Association for Jewish Studies' Sephardi/Mizrahi Caucus in 1998, Sephardi and Mizrahi voices are still only marginally represented in the 'canon' and in broader discussions about Israel as it relates to Jewish identities and histories. The struggle for Sephardi recognition is indeed not limited to the Israeli case, but rather reflects a broader Ashkenazi hegemony.[3] A Jewish-British documentary photographer of Arab origin, Leeor Ohayon (2014), captures a growing realization that 'the Mizrahi story has been sacrificed at the altar of collective memory, silently accepting that ancient Judeo-Islamic civilization is not something worth mourning'. 'To belong to an Arabic or Middle Eastern culture and have a Jewish identity', he continues, 'is an oxymoron – being Polish and Jewish is not.'

While a perusal of courses offered in the over one hundred graduate programs in Middle Eastern studies in the US shows occasional courses on Jewish nationalism, the Jews of the Middle East, and human rights and social justice work in Palestine and Israel, Israel enters Middle Eastern studies only insofar as it relates to the Israeli-Arab conflict or the Occupation of the Palestinians. While Jewish and Israeli studies generally bracket the Middle Eastern location of Israel by way of conventional Zionist ahistoricity and a teleological reading of Jewish history, aided by the orientalist erasure of the indigenous Palestinians, the study of Israel within the context of Middle Eastern studies often brackets Israeli society. Consequently, its sociology is estranged from the region and thus ironically reinforces Israel's own self-projection as a 'western' island in a hostile ocean. While Grandmother Shlomit *was* a stranger to the Middle East, her offspring are ideologically, not empirically, estranged. Re-orienting sociological inquiry will require overcoming this ahistorical bias. The image of the Muselmann is no longer that of an actual relative but rather has turned into the centerpiece of an ironic ideological narrative, deeply steeped in European orientalism. The latter enduringly undergirds the logic of bifurcation governing the Israeli-Palestinian contexts, authorizing marginalization, domination, and occupation of various 'Arabs'. Of course, this explanatory framework is incomplete without taking into account the other cultural, religious, and historical meanings informing Zionist 'return' and subsequent sociocultural and political transformations in the Israeli state.

Now that I have established this ahistorical bias and how the academic production of knowledge is complicit with it, I turn to discuss the role and trans-local spaces of hermeneutical contestation with the intersecting discourses of Euro-Zionism and orientalism. The contestation is trans-local because, as I show below, it challenges Zionist homogenizing of the Jewish world as if all Jews the world over comprised one 'society'.

Challenging Teleology

The challenge for cultivating a non-orientalist conceptual framework is twofold. The first dimension relates to those who inhabit the space and comprise the 'society'. The second involves Jews globally in an effort to denaturalize Zionist teleology and monopoly over Jewish identity. By 'Zionist teleology' I mean the presumptions that Jews speak in one voice and that the Israeli state both represents the fulfillment of Jewish history and functions as the mouthpiece of Jews all over the world. Zionist teleology (whether secular or religious) is, of course, grounded in a political theology authorized by the narratives of return and the motifs of redemption and the in-gathering of exiles (see Omer, 2013). Even in the early decades of secular hegemony, the biblical narratives of conquest and promise as well as the messianic undertone of return and redemption were deeply engrained in the Israeli ethos of the negation of exile. This ethos dismisses the lives of Jews over millennia as simply a prolonged dismembered suspense in time, relevant to the narrative only when read through the teleological prism of dispersal and return to Zion (Gertz, 2000; Kimmerling, 2005; Zerubavel, 1995). Debunking Zionist teleology, the Holocaust ethos (Zertal, 2010), the ethos of the negation of exile, and the related Zionist devaluing of the diasporic increasingly takes place not only in radical intellectual and activist Israeli circles, but also in non-Israeli Jewish contexts, primarily due to ethical outrage and disillusionment with what Israel is doing in the name of all Jews (e.g. Butler, 2004, 2012). 'Not in my Name!' is the slogan. A sustained focus on the hold of Zionist teleology is pertinent for sociological inquiry because it invokes a critical question about the boundaries of the 'social' in Israeli sociology: does it potentially include all Jews? Or does the 'social' include only those within the geopolitical boundaries of the Israeli state? The challenge of a non-orientalist approach would be to imagine how to indigenize the 'social' in a way that detaches it from the universalizing hold of a Zionist teleology without dismissing religious meanings

attached to Zion. The historicity of Zionism and its categorization of Jews are intricately related to the challenge to indigenize and de-orientalize by re-orienting (i.e. by making it Middle Eastern) Israeli sociology. While the Israeli census, as Smader Lavie illuminates, subsumes all those born in Israel under the category *yelidei haaretz* (born in the land), this category is myopic about the effects of diasporic origins on persistent ethnic differentiation and structural and cultural Ashkenazi domination (2011: 57). The key to *hitmazrehut* will be to overcome this enduring discursive logic.

Localizing Jewish Identity

Some of the resources available for such a process of reimagining are historical and textual. Retrieving and foregrounding Sephardi and Arab-Jewish rabbinic resources, as well as historical memories of belonging to the Middle East and its cultural and social terrains, would destabilize Ashkenazi hegemony. Certain Haredi (Orthodox) Mizrahi sectors challenge the Ashkenazi monopoly of rabbinic matters, often to advance sectoral, not intersectional, interests. Yet it is possible to imagine overcoming such empirical obstacles for reclaiming a Mizrahi/Sephardi Jewish religiosity that is fully at home in the Middle East (without the messianic and hegemonic urgency of many Ashkenazi rabbinic conversations). Jews had been an integral part of the Arab and Muslim landscapes of the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa for centuries, after all, and efforts to estrange them from these prolonged experiences are driven by ideology authorized by engrained orientalism.

The assumption of estrangement from the Middle East also prevents an analysis of the processes of localizing Jewishness within the secular Ashkenazi sector. Israeli society of the 21st century is very different from the pre-state Yishuv and the early decades of the Israeli nation-state. The secular Ashkenazi mainstream's relation to Jewish tradition has also transformed along with other sociocultural and political shifts. Some sociological studies (e.g. Ben-Porat, 2013) argue that, due to demographic changes born out of Russian immigration to Israel and consumerism, the status quo between state and religious institutions has eroded, leading to deepening processes of secularization and the subversion of rabbinic hegemony over matters pertaining to life-cycle events, the public observance of Shabbat, and the selling of pork. There is, however, a growing interest in developing familiarity with the resources of Jewish tradition and making them meaningful to Israeli Jews who no longer embrace iconoclastic attitudes toward religion, nor necessarily feel an affinity with ethnocentric and chauvinistic manifestations of Jewishness.

One manifestation of this trend is the success of BINA – the Hebrew acronym for a phrase taken from the Zionist poet Chaim Nachman Bialik: 'a workshop for the soul of the nation'. It also literally means 'wisdom'. A secular yeshivah that was established in 1996, BINA provides various programming for secular Israeli and non-Israeli Jews as well as public events designed with 'the goal of enhancing the cultural identity and communal involvement of Israelis' (BINA, 2015). Emerging in the aftermath of the allegedly religiously motivated assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at a peace rally (1995), a group of leaders from the Kibbutz Movement sought ways to 'bridge the gap of alienation between secular Israelis and their own Jewish heritage, with an understanding that no one can hold a monopoly on Judaism' (BINA website). The normative ground of the pedagogical approach pursued in the secular yeshivot is of the Jewish tradition of 'Torah that leads to action'.

Much of BINA's programing is devoted to engaging questions of pluralism and democracy and foregrounding work for social justice as a pillar of Jewish identity. For secular Israelis who wish to attain literacy in Jewish texts and centuries of learning, BINA's efforts are critical. The popularity of this program suggests the desire of many young people to move away from constrained interpretations of Judaism as 'history', 'ethnicity' and 'nationality' with no complex relations to Judaism-qua-religion

toward actively embracing humanistic Jewish values oriented by social justice demands. However, BINA prevents questioning hegemonic discursive and ethnocentrically defined boundaries, for in its focus on deepening Israeli democratic values, it operates within them. BINA's hermeneutical intervention presents an example of a local effort to live meaningful Jewish life in Israel that avoids both the messianic paradigm and the religious illiteracy that resulted from the ethos of the negation of exile with its downplaying of Jewish learning. Highlighting BINA presents one area where I expand the conventional Mizrahi project of reclaiming a pre-Zionist Jewish identity indigenous to the broader region. BINA's hermeneutical creativity can only be understood within Israeli discursivity. It nonetheless offers indigenous resources for embodying Jewish-Israeliness differently.

Certainly, complementing non-Israeli Jewish challenges to a homogenizing narrative of Jewish history and peoplehood, BINA offers a potentially constructive, even if still ethnocentrically bounded, indigenized Jewish Israeliness, signaling the possibility of a localized emergence of pluralistic Judaism. A focus on cultivating pluralistic and democratic interpretations of the Jewish tradition is not outside the scope of the process and goal of *hitmazrehut*. Religiosity here can play constructive roles in re-narrating the relations between space and identity. Simply employing an unreconstructed secularism that presupposes the category of citizenship only in legal rights-centric terms overlooks the empirical reality of religio-cultural and historic passions people attach to the land and thus the need to engage in the *hermeneutics of citizenship*, contesting and reimagining the 'nation' that authorizes the 'state'.[4] This mode of imagining can be highly conducive to implementing the vision of the PSP which, to reiterate, bypasses the logic of territorial division by proposing parallel sovereignty.

The historical example of the Canaanite Movement (founded in 1939) illustrates a different way of indigenizing. In some respect, Canaanism brought Zionism to its logical conclusion (considering the ethos of the negation of exile): sever all ties with Judaism and embrace a local Hebraic Palestinian identity through active retrieval. Influenced by fascism and folkist Romantic nationalisms in Europe and captured in Canaanism's linguistic and biblical studies of the ancient Hebrew empire, the movement's adherents wanted to revive what they believed was a pre-rabbinic Hebraic hegemony across the ancient land of Canaan and the Fertile Crescent. The Hebrews, they claimed, were very similar to other inhabitants of the ancient Near East and it is this Hebraic and pre-Jewish heritage they sought to recreate.

Despite attracting only a limited number of card-carrying members, the Canaanites had a long-lasting cultural influence (Shavit, 1987). In 1946, professional peace activist Uri Avnery, who tried to dissociate his idea from the Canaanites' pan-Hebraic imperialist impulse, generated an alternative conceptualization of space and identity. His 'Semitic Region', or *Merhav Hashemi*, recognized Semitic commonalities with the Arabs across the region, which, he believed, could form a Semitic Federation (Diamond, 1986: 94). 'To Avnery', James S. Diamond writes, 'this Semitic Revolution would be the final stage of the process that began with the Zionist Revolution (which he felt had accomplished its goals and had dissipated) and continued with the Hebrew Revolution' (p. 94). It is on the basis of this vision that Avnery and his allies resisted the UN Partition Plan 181 to splice up Palestine and divide it between Palestinians and Zionists. Diamond identifies the roots of Israeli post-Zionism in Avnery's early proposal. Clearly, elevating categories such as Semitic commonality is highly problematic and does not escape the critique of (ethnic) hegemony. Nor does it escape the ironies highlighted by Anidjar concerning how Europe had produced the 'Semites' as a racist category, enabling it to conflate both its 'others', Jews and Muslims (read Arabs). Likewise, post-Zionist proposals ignore the many complex religious meanings people attach to their collective belonging. However, these alternative modes of imagining Israeli identity in relation to space challenge the Euro-Ashkenazi estrangement from the Middle East and its ambivalent reliance on a secularized political

theology. Thus, the movement offers a historical example (with some tentacles into the present) of thinking regionally through a different lens. Yet this thinking was, like Zionism, based on secularized (and archeologically verified) biblical narratives. The Canaanites connected with the 'Arabs' of the region through an intellectual maneuver that carried with it the Zionist motif of return and redemption. The Arab-Jews' connection to Arabness and being in the Middle-East is embedded in their actual memories and histories. The Arab-Jewish narrative, therefore, offers a crucial building block for re-orienting sociological thinking about Israel/Palestine as it is located regionally.

Ultimately, if Jewish learning and activism do not address questions of socioeconomic, political, and cultural marginalization of the Mizrahi sector as it relates to the much more detrimental marginalization of Palestinian-Israelis and the Occupation of non-Israeli Palestinians, the effort to localize and embolden Jewish identity will be limited in scope. On the other hand, if the marginalization of the Mizrahi sector is exclusively foregrounded as a cause and a grievance without attending to the interconnections between Mizrahi and Palestinian narratives and predicaments, the forcefulness of the critique is highly diminished and to a certain degree participates in the hegemonic logic (see below). Shas, a political party and social movement, offers an example of a religiously grounded and led Sephardi group, with broad appeal across the spectrum of religiosity among Mizrahi publics (Lehman and Siebzehner, 2006; Yadgar, 2003). Importantly, Shas began under Ashkenazi leadership but has rapidly transformed since its founding under the Ashkenazi Rabbi Shah in 1984. The early Mizrahi leadership of the party consisted of rabbinical students coming out of Ashkenazi yeshivahs, dressed like Eastern European Jews but focused on the needs and grievances of the Mizrahi sector. Many non-observant Mizrahi Jews voted for Shas primarily because of its 'Mizrahi ticket' and its social and educational services, which secured resources that have since become the main focus of Shas's coalitional negotiations within a context of proportional representation in the Knesset. As the refrain in so many other contexts goes: amid the failures of governmental infrastructure, those who are in the trenches, so to speak, and provide necessary child care, diapers, schooling, and shelter win loyalty among recipients of their services.

The spiritual leadership of Shas has been Sephardic and – especially under the spiritual leadership of Chief Sephardi Rabbi Ovadia Yosef – has offered ways to challenge Ashkenazi hegemony not only in social issues but even as it pertains to religious and halakhic matters. Yosef's voting legacy of negotiating territory has given Shas the reputation of a potentially effective coalition partner in the Knesset: less ideological and more pragmatic than religious Zionist parties in terms of the peace process and relinquishing/returning land. Yosef famously authorized the withdrawal from Sinai by invoking the Jewish principle of *pikuach nefeash* (saving life) as trumping other considerations. However, Shas's rhetoric often bifurcates Jews from Arabs as if Mizrahi Jews do not occupy that particular hybridity. To this extent, Shas's sectorial activism is Jewish-centric, illuminating the internalization of the Zionist-orientalist discourse. Yosef frequently referred to Arabs as 'insects' and called on followers to demonstrate 'no mercy over Arabs' and 'hit them with missiles' (Miller, 2013). Hezbollah's news channel Al-Manar, announcing the death of Yosef (2013), highlighted the profound ironies undergirding such racist and violent remarks: 'The death of rabbi Ovadia Yosef: the Zionist Arab who hated Arabs' (Miller, 2013). This quotation exposes the phenomenon of double consciousness, the internalization of the cultural and social logic of one's oppressor (Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1967).

On a broader scale, voting patterns since the late 1970s have generally suggested that an ethnocentric and chauvinistic approach to the 'peace process' would gain more intense support from the Mizrahi sector than the Ashkenazi one. According to a survey of Israeli voters prior to the 2013 elections to the Knesset, self-identified Mizrahim/yot and Sephardim/yot were more likely than

Ashkenazi/yot to vote for Likud-Beytenu (30%) and for Shas (12%), constituting 58 percent and 80 percent of voters, respectively, of their political parties (Miller, 2013). This voting pattern did not change significantly during the elections of 2015 (Magar, 2015). However, the 'despair' many on the 'left' expressed in the daily newspaper *Haaretz* and through social media after the reelection of Netanyahu as the leader of the coalition in the Knesset reflected blindness to the potential for intersectionality of the secular Ashkenazi Zionist 'left' with the Palestinian-Israeli and Mizrahi sectors. An authentic left can only emerge if the rigid boundaries drawn by orientalist and chauvinistic paintbrushes are challenged (Ben-Elul, 2015; Omer, 2013).

That most Mizrahi Israeli Jews support ethnocentric policies by embracing the polarization of Arab and Jew only reaffirms the importance of challenging this polarization and tracing the ideological logic that has produced it. This fact points us again toward the phenomenon of 'double consciousness' in which the Mizrahi or Arab-Jews support entrenching the binary relations between Arabs and Jews in a process that affirms the Jewish citizen as the norm and deems every non-Jew outside the norm. The historical legacy of internal orientalism and the forced estrangement from Arab-Jewish cultures, aided by the current discourse of 'colorblindness', like its parallel in the US, only further entrenches the socioeconomically and culturally privileged position of Ashkenazi Jews. This estrangement drove the Mizrahi vote to Likkud and thus there is a long narrative of national-Zionist socialization of the Mizrahi sector. Relatedly, the 'peace camp' is associated with a white Ashkenazi agenda, a perception reinforced by the reluctance of the 'left' to address the 'ethnic' problem (Magar, 2015). Double consciousness, therefore, has a clear historical and discursive explanation. Its undoing will take more than a discursive critique because of the sociological 'facts' that unfolded as a result of this discursivity.

Many Mizrahim/yot indeed subscribe to ethnocentric and often religio-ethnic interpretations of Israeliness and this subscription could not have arisen without deep and long-term cultural and educational processes. However, to recognize an entrenched pattern does not mean accepting a narrative of an inevitable progressive (or degenerative) trajectory toward greater and greater chauvinism and belligerence. In fact, when the Mizrahi Amir Peretz led the Labor Party during the elections of 2006, a significantly higher percentage of the Mizrahi vote was directed to his party than during the election of 2009 under the leadership of the Ashkenazi Kibbutz-born Ehud Barak (Magar, 2015) who embodies the image of the privileged Ashkenazi. This historical instance suggests the intricate relation between Mizrahi anti-Arab (Palestinian) positions and the legacy of Ashkenazi privilege. Tackling double consciousness born out of socialization within the context of Euro-Zionism would begin in actually addressing domestic issues concerning center and periphery (which is the language often employed to refer to the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi divide). The onus here lies on the privileged persons and socioeconomic classes who tend to populate the 'peace camp'. Likewise, the Mizrahi counter-discourse itself needs to both critically re-embrace Arabness and engage in intersectionality. All these reorientations will contribute to provincializing Europe and de-orientalizing the relations between identity claims within the sociocultural and geopolitical space of Israel and Palestine.

Imagining ways of breaking out of this pattern of double consciousness involves exposing the genealogy of marking the Jew as 'non-Arab'. Before turning to a detailed discussion of how this phenomenon of double consciousness plays out within the Israeli context, preventing the building of coalitions among Mizrahi and non-Israeli Arabs and Palestinian citizens of Israel, let us detour into the state of postcolonial readings of Mizrahi narratives and their grafting onto the Zionist frame. It is now clear that neither the premises of the secular yeshivah nor the Sephardi/Mizrahi sectoral agenda move beyond the hegemonic Euro-Ashkenazi ideological constructs and symbolic boundaries that underlie Rav Yosef's apparent double consciousness.

Epistemological Violence

Employing the hyphen of the Arab-Jew represents an effort by Mizrahi critical scholars to challenge the discursive logic of Zionism and its influence over scholarship on Jews. Edward Said's critique of orientalism has influenced a body of literature and Mizrahi activism in Israel that increasingly began to theorize about the intersections between Palestinian and Arab-Jewish or Mizrahi narratives. Ella Shohat's 'Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the standpoint of its Jewish victims' (1988) pioneered this trend (see also Shohat, 1999), obviously extending the logic of Said's own 'Zionism from the standpoint of its victims' (1979). 'Within [the] Promethean rescue narrative', Shohat writes in a later piece, 'concepts of "ingathering" and "modernization" naturalized and glossed over the historical, psychic, and epistemological violence generated by the Zionist vision of the New Jew'. 'This rescue narrative', she continues, 'also elided Zionism's own role in provoking ruptures, dislocations, and fragmentation for Palestinian lives, and – in a different way – for Middle Eastern and north African Jews' (2003: 50). Shohat and other intellectuals who employ the tools of postcolonial critique (e.g. Chetrit, 2000; Shenhav, 2006) highlight important intersections between Palestinian and Mizrahi narratives, challenging what Shohat refers to as 'a segregated discursive space for history, identity, and culture' (2003: 50).

Sociologist Yehouda Shenhav, a leading Mizrahi intellectual in Israel, exposed how Euro-Zionism assimilated Mizrahi Jews into a universalizing Zionist narrative, diminished their cultural rootedness in their countries of origin, and estranged them from their Arabness by underscoring their Jewishness as occupying an antonymous location in relation to the Arab. These processes were enabled by the deep orientalism of Euro-Zionists. Shenhav documents the orientalist tropes used in the reports of Zionist delegates to Iraq during the time of the Yishuv. One of the ironies that Shenhav's study conveys concerns religion. While in Europe an embrace of Zionism had often meant relinquishing traditional Judaism, Zionist efforts to recruit Arab-Jews to the project of political self-determination necessitated stressing religiosity as an entry path to the Zionist dream since their targets for recruitment were ethnically and culturally Arabs. Religiosity will continue, in the Israeli context, to be closely interlaced with Mizrahi attitudes and political persuasions.

There are important differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi religious resources, however. An Ashkenazi background is more closely associated with the development of the religious Zionist ideology and its implementation in the form of the settlement movement in the territories occupied in 1967. On the other hand, Sephardi/Mizrahi Jews are at least potentially able to think about inhabiting Middle Eastern spaces outside the messianic paradigm. And yet discounting the demographic representation of Mizrahi in the illegal settlements overlooks the need to unpack the socioeconomic structural conditions that have channeled Mizrahim/yot to the settlements (Shenhav, 2012). With neoliberalism firmly oiled in 'Israel proper', the settlements are the only contexts where governmental subsidies are provided for housing. As Shenhav has highlighted, this development socializes new generations of Mizrahi as settlers and blinds them to the possibility of a social movement across ethnoreligious and cultural divides within the broader landscape. Shenhav, as noted, imagines a coalition of ultra-Orthodox settlers, Mizrahi Shas constituencies, and immigrants from the former Soviet Union. He argues that once these groups are able to see outside the ideological map, they will recognize their common struggles, join in co-resistance against systemic and epistemic violence, and participate in reconfiguring geopolitical spaces.

A few other scholars have begun to highlight the case of Mizrahi settlers or the 'Third Israel'. Joyce Dalsheim (2008) unsettles the reigning binaries that differentiate settlers and Mizrahi populations by looking at Mizrahi Jews as settlers, a role traditionally associated with Ashkenazi messianic and religious Zionism. Her account connects socioeconomic 'domestic' questions with the settlement project, which is more often associated with the ethos of security and Zionist ideology.

The entanglement of the Mizrahi sectors and the Greater Israel program can be explained partially through this lens of structural and cultural violence: subsidized housing in the Occupied Territories (OT) represented their only chance for achieving economic advancement. Likud continued the policy that Labor had begun of channeling those who had no chance of economic advancement in the heartland to the territories, including East Jerusalem (Lavie, 2011: 68). Populating the settlement partly with lower-income Mizrahi citizens, who were more motivated initially by economic interests than ideological commitments to the Greater Eretz Yisrael, deepened the disconnect between Mizrahi and Palestinian struggles. Peace discourse in Israel, however, tends to differentiate between the supposedly 'domestic' Mizrahi issues located in urban slums and development towns and the Occupation, resulting in unawareness that 'Mizrahim are the silent majority' in the settlements (Lavie, 2011: 69). That Mizrahim/yot constitute the silent majority in settlements opens up the process of reframing the relation between identity and territoriality/space to socioeconomic and discursive analysis. This type of analysis moves beyond a hermeneutical engagement that tackles how Jewish resources authorize the settlement project, including unpacking the 'elective affinities' (to borrow from Max Weber) between the ethos of security and messianic agenda.

Radical Mizrahi discursive analysis, hence, results in desegregating conceptual boundaries and recognizing the demand 'to dismantle the zoning of knowledge' (Shohat, 2003: 51) that shapes scholarship in Jewish studies, the sociology of Israel, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This undertaking requires denaturalizing the master narratives concerning the dislocation of the Arab-Jews from the Islamic-Jewish Arab milieus, a dislocation that was engineered by Euro-Zionism and enabled by Arab nationalism's discursive and ironic reliance on Zionist binaries (Shohat, 2003: 57). The term 'Arab-Jew' is not intended to denote any essentialist type, but rather to evoke meanings outside Zionist teleology that recall those who 'were shaped by Arab Muslim culture' and who likewise 'also helped shape that culture in a dialogical process that generated their specific Judeo-Arab identity' (Shohat, 2003: 53). These meanings and histories were largely silenced, and nostalgia for any Arab past became, at least for the first four decades of the Israeli state, a taboo (Shohat, 2003: 58). The Mizrahim/yot (the 'Orientals') became a category referring to all those non-Ashkenazi Jews (and in many important respects it is also expanding to include Ethiopian Israeli Jews). It has gained social and political significance with the development of sociopolitical consciousness of the second generation, who were able to connect the dots and see the Mizrahi agenda as one that cuts across specific communal identification as Iraqi, Kurd, Moroccan, or Iranian Jews.

Desegregating conceptual boundaries also illuminates the pervasiveness of the logic of the 'population exchange' or the 'accounting thesis' in which the Arab-Jews' loss of property and displacement pay for the Palestinian experience of the Nakba (the Catastrophe) or their forced expulsion from parts of Palestine in 1948. This logic, as Shenhav (2005) has noted, first constructs the indigenous Palestinian as a generic 'Arab' who should be simply absorbed into the broader generic Arab world. Secondly, it nationalizes the Arab-Jews: their properties are treated as national properties to give away (or sacrifice). What radical Mizrahi discursive analysis accomplishes, therefore, is exposing the interrelation between the much more devastating experiences of Palestinians and those of Mizrahi Jews. Both groups, Mizrahi Israeli Jews and Palestinians, are victims of Euro-Zionism, with obvious variations vis-à-vis the dynamics and logic of the Occupation. This unpacking, however, does not often translate into cross-boundary coalition activism of the kind Shenhav wants to enact (even if only within Jewish-Israeli demarcations of social thresholds for such coalitional activism). Before turning to the reasons for the segregated logic informing the Palestinian and Mizrahi struggles, I briefly discuss moments where desegregated Mizrahi-Palestinian activism or social awareness did manifest.

Even before Mizrahi intellectuals began to read and appropriate Said, early radical Mizrahi activists, partly due to their association with radical anti-Zionist leftist and Jewish and non-Jewish

communist circles, recognized the interconnections between their struggles and those of Palestinians and saw the need to work outside the hegemonic policing of identity boundaries. The demise of the Labor hegemony in 1977 is widely attributed to the earlier protest movement of the Black Panthers (BP) who, emerging from the slums of Jerusalem, demystified the Zionist master narrative or at least lessened its traction. Like the Marxist Matzpen group, BP recognized the connection of their struggle with the Palestinian one (Chetrit, 2005: 139). Another chapter in the repressed history of Mizrahi-Palestinian intersectionality is the Toledo, Spain, conference of 1989, a series of meetings between Mizrahim/yot and Palestinians at a time when meetings with Palestinians were outlawed by the Knesset (prior to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993). As Shohat, who participated in the Toledo Conference, recalls (2014), this was an exciting moment and a subversive one, too, when Mizrahim/yot challenged the Euro-centricity of the Israeli peace camp, which presented the Mizrahim as 'Arab haters' and 'fanatics'. The conference, which 100 Palestinian and Mizrahi individuals attended, produced meaningful exchanges. 'In 1989, only a few decades after the traumatic events of dispossession and dislocation', Shohat writes, 'Palestinians/Arabs and Sephardi/Arab-Jews could meet in Toledo, their old "neighbors"' dating back to a time before borders had been erected and new passports, or *laissez-passers*, has renamed us all. We had to travel *outside* the Middle East in order to imagine living together again, side by side, *in* the Middle East.'

The participants in Toledo were struck by the analogies of their predicament to their Spanish host's history of *convivencia* and expulsions. This was a moment of opportunity to mobilize Mizrahim/yot as cultural and historical bridges for imagining peaceful ways of co-inhabiting the Middle East through reclaiming memories of Jewish indigenous life in the MENA region prior to their brutal disruption by Euro-Zionism. This focus on recovering silenced and erased histories is necessary but not sufficient for de-orientalizing the sociological imagination because reimagining sociological and cultural meanings of space in this way traffics in utopia and nostalgia about the precolonial Orient, thereby reinforcing (not subverting) the discursive logic of orientalism. Decades after the Toledo conference, many projects of cultural reclaiming remain in a posture of lament over the lost richness of sociopolitical and cultural co-inhabiting and its disruption by Euro-Zionism (see, for example, Chacham, 2015), which generated a deep and false bifurcation between Arabs and Jews. Hence, the 'orthodoxy' of the radical Mizrahi discourse stresses the imperative to desegregate the sites of contentions. And yet, with only a few exceptions, rarely did radical Mizrahi activism venture beyond the Jewish demarcation of the 'social' within which social movements operate. Consequently, social movement activism's intersectionality theorizing is confined by geo-political boundaries, or rather the lines and logic of the Occupation.

The legacy of critique and the desegregation of the questions of Mizrahi and Palestinian justice have played into some of the conversations surrounding the later Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition (established in 1996), especially those set by the group of Mizrahi intellectuals who helped conceptualize the organization's spheres of activities. However, most of those activities focused on raising Mizrahi consciousness and empowerment as well as deintensifying the political implications for connecting the Mizrahi struggle with the Occupation of Palestinians and the possibility of just rearrangement of the geopolitical space (see Omer, 2013: 246–70). Unlike Shas, the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow conceptualizes its struggle 'as Mizrahi in its aims and universal in its values' (official website). The coalition presents itself as 'an apolitical, non-parliamentary social movement', but it employs theoretical frames of polycentric and multicultural citizenship discourse that deeply challenge ethnocentric, monocultural nationalism (Yonah and Shenhav, 2005).

Although the consciousness-raising and the cultural and educational efforts of the movement yielded some results, the Mizrahi Democratic Coalition has never gained traction on a mass scale. The broader Mizrahi and non-Mizrahi landscapes suggest the disconnects between the Palestinian and Mizrahi struggles and historiographies are only widening. We witness the enduring operation

of the orientalist discourse in the intensifying patterns of double consciousness and active rejection of the hyphen 'Arab-Jew'. Despite the Mizrahi Democratic Coalition's limited success, it is important to underscore that the active nucleus of the movement consisted of Mizrahi feminists who introduced potentially radical emancipatory and intersectional outlooks that could deepen the Toledo insights about the overlap between the Palestinian and Mizrahi grievances and struggles.

Drawing on the work of Mizrahi feminists such as Henriette Dahan-Kalev (1997) and Vicki Shiran (1991), Pnina Motzafi-Haller (2001) grapples with the epistemic violence that facilitated the disappearance of Mizrahi women from Israeli sociology and (Ashkenazi) feminist theory. Motzafi-Haller recognizes the silencing of Mizrahi women and identifies orientalism as an enduring operative discourse. The key for developing Mizrahi feminism resides in identifying multiple oppressions. 'Mizrahi feminist discourse', Motzafi-Haller writes, 'presents a new epistemic starting point: it rejects a given, predefined community and proceeds instead to develop an ongoing negotiation of identities and crosscutting identifications. Such identifications emerge in particular moments of historical transformation; they are relational (i.e. construct themselves vis-à-vis other counter-processes and collective identities) and are always shaped in contexts of power' (2001: 729). Hence, the Mizrahi feminist epistemological challenge carries the potential to attract a wide and diverse array of constituencies (Lavie, 2011: 59).

However, as Lavie argues (2011), Mizrahi feminism, which emerged in the 1990s, has had to struggle against Ashkenazi feminist elitism in a mode that replicates patterns of feminist struggles elsewhere, such as the efforts by US feminists of color to decenter the agendas and assumptions of white middle-class women.[5] Mizrahi feminism emerged formally in the mid-1980s, though Mizrahi resistance had existed since the 1920s when Yemeni Jews were brought over to Palestine as 'natural workers' recruited for the Zionist project (Lavie, 2011: 60). 'This was the first time', Lavie writes, 'that Mizrahi women identified themselves as a category' (2011: 60; also Shohat, 1996). Their first accomplishment was to refuse the tokenization of Mizrahi and Palestinian-Israeli representation in the Annual Feminist Convention meetings (1991). However, academic feminism remained predominantly Ashkenazi. The 'Question of Palestine', Lavie stresses, especially embodies the deep 'gulf between Ashkenazi feminists and the majority of Jewish Israeli women, who are disenfranchised Mizrahim' (2011: 61). A focus on Palestinians in the OT (perhaps in conjunction with advancing civil rights issues concerning Palestinian-Israeli women) became a well-funded enterprise encouraged by external donors. Too easily, Lavie argues, this turn glossed over the grievances of Mizrahi women and the interconnections between those grievances and those of Palestinians (Lavie, 2011: 61–65). The many 'co-existence' gatherings of Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli women were conducted in English or Hebrew, reflective of class privilege in the case of English and reflective of blindness to the implications of speaking the language of the colonizer in the case of Hebrew. The ability of upper-class Ashkenazi women to engage in 'co-existence' workshops with upper-class Palestinian women from Ramallah 'have permitted Ashkenazi feminists to gloss over and whitewash their racial and class bias toward Mizrahi women with benevolence toward Arab Muslim and Christian women of the West Bank' (Lavie, 2011: 63).

The outcome of the NGO-ization and professionalization of Ashkenazi feminism as entangled with other civil and Palestinian rights is that 'Mizrahi feminism has been transformed into a depoliticized subcontractor of mainstream Ashkenazi feminism' (Lavie, 2011: 64). This hegemonic hold of Ashkenazi feminist discourse prevented the possibility of crosscutting alliances between Palestinian-Israeli and Mizrahi women who faced 'similar structures of patriarchy and similar multiple axes of oppression, whether by Ashkenazi men and women or their own men' (Lavie, 2011: 64–65). Even in the case of Zochrot, arguably a highly effective women-led and mostly Ashkenazi feminist NGO aspiring to decolonize Jewish-Israeli memory and confront the events of the Nakba and redress their long-term ramifications through truth telling and other mechanisms

of transitional justice, the vision of redressing the Nakba through Jewish-Israeli acknowledgement and accountability does not explicate cross-cutting intersectionality with Mizrahi experiences and silences.

The history of Zochrot's educational events does suggest an embryonic awareness of the need to connect and articulate ways of cross-fertilization and Palestinian and Mizrahi co-resistance (see Zochrot, 2015, for a recent effort to brainstorm in this direction). However, Zochrot's stated purpose does not mention the experiences of marginality within Jewish-Israeli society as relevant to the change processes necessary to its implementation. The purpose is 'to challenge the Israeli Jewish public's preconceptions and promote awareness, political and cultural change within it to create the conditions for the Return of Palestinian Refugees and a shared life in this country' (Zochrot, n.d.). Accomplishing this objective requires 'generat[ing] processes in which Israeli Jews will reflect on and review their identity, history, future and the resulting discourse through which they conceive of their lives in this country'. Zochrot justifies the 'focus on the Jewish target audience' as one grounded in an understanding of the Jewish public's 'practical and moral responsibility for Palestinian refugeehood'. This moral and practical responsibility, Zochrot states, also derives from the Jewish 'privileged power position under the present regime'. This articulation precludes the practical and normative need to proceed in an intersectional manner that recognizes multiplicity of power discourses. The struggle cannot only proceed through demystifying ideological maps and Nakba apps that recreate pre-Israel Palestine. The challenge for dispelling preconceptions and cultivating the conditions for deep plurality and cohabitation do reside in *hitmazrehut* as a process and objective.

'The Question of Palestine', Lavie concludes, 'enables the Ashkenazi peace feminists to avoid sharing their power, prestige, and money with the Mizrahi internal Others of Israeli society' (2011: 65). This disjunction between a professional commitment to human rights, on the one hand, and blindness toward the marginalization of Mizrahi women, on the other, has led a majority of Mizrahi women (and men) since 1977 to move to the right of the political landscape. The rightward shift did not change any structural and cultural conditions and many Mizrahi leaders were coopted into a political system that the Ashkenazi elite still controlled. This feminist narrative offers yet another dimension to the story about 'double consciousness' as symptomatic of a complex discursive formation undergirding the disjuncture between Israeli-Jewish-Arab (Mizrahi) and non-Jewish Palestinian-Arab grievances and social agenda.

Silencing Mizrahi grievances, therefore, significantly diminishes the attractiveness of Ashkenazi feminist and other organizations that work to end the Occupation. Addressing the Mizrahi predicament is pivotal for transforming the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, through both identifying crosscutting alliances and imagining indigenized Jewish-Israeli citizenship discourse. Palestinian issues are excluded from the agenda of most Mizrahi feminist groups primarily because the Question of Palestine is supposedly on Ashkenazi turf. Mizrahi groups help with domestic social work, bolstering a diminished social welfare infrastructure. Lavie concludes that the failure of Ashkenazi feminist peace activists to operate 'within the context of the Middle East demographics, cultures, and history and the inability of the Mizrahi feminist movement to weave itself into the feminist fabric of the Arab world' entrench binarism insensitive to demographic and cultural realities in the broader region: that Jews of all ethnicities are mere minorities between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Coast (2011: 73–74). This is reflective of the 'internal colonization of Mizrahim' (p. 74), reinforcing Euro-Ashkenazi hegemony while neglecting the possibility of seeing 'an Arab majority solution' to the conflict. That Mizrahi feminism so far has been unable to build meaningful coalitions with Palestinian-Israeli and non-Israeli women and men does not mean that doing so is impossible. Indeed, because of its focus on epistemic decolonization and transitional justice frames, Zochrot may illumine some possibilities for intersectional activism. Increasing awareness

that Mizrahi women advance issues distinct from those of Ashkenazi feminists is crucial for the de-orientalization of the discourse while re-*orienting* the conversation. De-orientalizing here means profoundly challenging through intersectionality the enduring influence of European theo-political and racist legacies on Israeli discursivity and its logic of other-ing the 'Arab.'

Accordingly, re-orienting here means to locate Jewish-Israeli society squarely in the Middle East, rather than seeing it as an accidental neighbor who *really* belongs in Europe. A Mizrahi critique and its potential implications for social action help denaturalize rigid sociocultural and ethnic boundaries. It thus offers resources for being concurrently Jewish, Middle Eastern, Arab, and Israeli in ways that could constructively illuminate the intersections among Arab spaces across the ideological map: the Mizrahi and Palestinian narratives are intertwined and an analysis of both foregrounds the tools of discursive critique of orientalism. Unlike the Canaanite remapping of space and identity, the Mizrahi critique operates with a social justice compass rather than a romantic folkist retrieval of an idealized past. Embracing the hyphen the 'Arab-Jew' in a relational, non-essentialist manner challenges the discursive formation informing the very terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as the ways it plays out in broader discourse about the Middle East. While a nucleus of Mizrahi scholars and social activists have recognized that forging connections between Palestinian and Mizrahi narratives could reshape the terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, *re-orienting* the conversation beyond a utopian retrieval also involves challenging the ahistorical presumption that a fifth-generation Ashkenazi-Israeli is still European, a stranger to the land, a foreigner. Indeed, this generation occupies the land violently. However, its Middle Eastern location cannot be bracketed. Instead of employing the language of estrangement and a generic analysis of settler colonialism, a constructive re-orientation involves identifying hybridities, crosscutting sites of struggle, and resources for reimagining geopolitical as well as sociocultural ecologies.

Religious reimagining participates in re-narrating the relations between identity and space because it is certainly pivotal for the existing ideological landscape. The undoing of this landscape cannot rely exclusively on the normativity of human rights discourse that, first, exposes the wrongs and, second, offers prescriptions for how to right the wrongs. Attributing a constructive role to religiosity in this case simply entails that the Jewish meanings of Israeli citizenship need to be reimagined also through Jewish resources, not only through the imposition of secular interpretations of nationalism. The presumption that the 'secular' in the 'secular nation-states' entails neutrality vis-à-vis religiocultural imaginations was challenged by many scholars whose genealogy of the secular exposes the concepts and its political manifestations' Euro- and Christian-centric underpinnings (Asad, 2003; Shakman-Hurd, 2008). In this vein, challenging secular and religious Zionism's political theology involves also refiguring the secular and the political through a hermeneutical process, a prototypical example of which BINA represents because it seeks to cultivate democratic and pluralistic values and practices and assert work for social justice as a pivotal dimension of Jewish life. Bracketing and privatizing or 'confessionalizing' the religiopolitical imagination through the lens of 'synagogue-state' (rendering religiosity as irrelevant to reimagining national spaces) will diminish the possibility of *hitmazrehut*, debunking Zionist teleology and localizing the meanings of Jewish citizenship.

One of the challenges I articulated above relates to the concurrent efforts of non-Israeli Jews to challenge Zionist teleology and of Israeli Jews to begin fleshing out (beyond thin secularism) the meanings of their Jewish identity as Israelis rather than as transplants who rely, with various levels of intensity, on a messianic political theology and an autochthonous logic of nationalism. This is what is meant by *hitmazrehut* (becoming of the East/Orient). It is a process that is not limited to Mizrahim/yot alone and their reclaiming of their Arabness. It is also about challenging the presumptions that all Ashkenazi Israeli Jews are still Grandma Shlomit, fresh from Europe. Regardless

of these various processes illustrating the possibility of *re-orienting* and indigenizing Jewishness, however, the realities on the ground suggest chauvinistic interpretations of the Jewish tradition as authorizing the Occupation and the dichotomization between 'Jews' and 'Arabs' – a dichotomization experienced acutely by Mizrahim/yot themselves, partly as a result of the failure of the Israeli peace camp and the 'left' to connect the dots – are becoming more pronounced. The concept of double consciousness is therefore highly applicable in this context: 'peace' is an Ashkenazi-dominated agenda contributing to the segregation of sites of contention as per the above discussion of the delimiting of creative feminist intersectionality.

Highly consistent with my own argument about the complexities of the 'double consciousness', sociologist and anthropologist Nissim Mizrahi (2011) explains how the historicity of Mizrahim/yot within the Israeli and Zionists' discourse informs the perception that the values promoted by Israeli human rights organizations threaten Mizrahi identity. This perception, Dr Mizrahi argues, relates to the lack of self-scrutiny on the part of the 'liberal left' of its own privilege and positionality. Without such self-scrutiny and interrogation of one's normative presuppositions, it becomes harder to open up dialogical space because the promotion of rights is interpreted as threatening by the broader Mizrahi public while their rejection of the rights discourse of the 'left' is interpreted in a paternalistic and orientalist manner as marking 'backwardness'. Indeed, Mizrahi offers a powerful critique of the social limits of the human rights discourse in Israel. Opening up the horizons of this discourse will necessitate a significant reorientation of the 'left' and civil society's liberal grammar. The phenomenon of double consciousness is, to reiterate, symptomatic of entrenched Ashkenazi privilege and blindness to the epistemological and cultural violence associated with the liberal discourse. Hence, the solution here is not simply to impose the language of unreconstructed liberalism (of course, usually still within the boundaries of an ethnocracy), which is supposedly good for the socioeconomically depressed Mizrahi sectors.

Double Consciousness

It is important to reiterate that the majority of Israeli Jews are Mizrahi, and while they usually resist the hyphen Arab-Jew as an imposition by intellectuals, they foreground their Jewish identity as prior to their Israeli one while Ashkenazim/yot reverse this order of identification (Lavie, 2011: 57). This is unsurprising considering the modes in which Jews from Arab and Muslim countries were grafted onto a homogenizing Jewish narrative. They had to overcome their Arabness in order to become members of the Zionist production. Those who supposedly succeeded and became integrated into the higher echelons of society are often described as *mitashkenazim*, denoting the process of becoming or 'passing' as an Ashkenazi 'white'. Highlighting Mizrahi critique, embodied experiences, and cultural productions that challenge Ashkenazi hegemony as well as tracing sociologically the processes of *hitmazrehut* on the ground will offer constructive ways to imagine the Israeli-Palestinian context, broadly, and Israeli society, more specifically, through a non-orientalist prism. Clearly, however, empirical data point in the opposite direction: ideologically constructed binaries and contradictions are manifest in ever-increasing support of ethnocentric policies and chauvinistic agendas, reinforced by an assumption that a peace agenda is an Ashkenazi strategy to further marginalize Mizrahi grievances. Transgenerationally, rigid boundaries become entrenched where they had not been before, resulting, most recently, in the explosively racist and ethnocentric demonstrations during the Gaza assault of summer 2014 and the subsequent intensification of tension in Jerusalem later that same year. Demonstrators against the massacre in Gaza were attacked by right-wing protesters partly incited by a Mizrahi rapper named Yoav Eliasi, known as 'the Shade'. He later, on his Facebook page, thanked the police for only lightly intervening to prevent physical attacks on 'leftist demonstrators' and likewise thanked various

activists associated with the radical anti-Arab racist Kach group, the Jerusalemite soccer Betar fan club, and the anti-assimilationist Lehava group, which affirms the racist ideology of the outlawed Kach movement (Skop, 2014).

Lehava (literally 'flame' but also the acronym in Hebrew for the Organization for the Prevention of Assimilation in the Holy Land) has focused on preventing miscegenation, boasting, reportedly, that 'members already have prevented 1,000 Jewish girls from marrying Arab men and raised "awareness of the dangers of assimilation"' (Kreiter, 2015). The group also targets businesses that employ Palestinians (Israelis and from the Territories) and left-wing Jewish-Israelis, as the example above suggests. Members of the group are accused of an arson attack on the Hand in Hand bilingual school in Jerusalem (November 2014) as well as numerous other instances of violent 'interventions' in an effort to break up possible intermarriages among Israeli-Jews and Palestinians as well as African asylum seekers and other non-Jews who have transformed the Israeli social landscape (including foreign labor from the Philippines and other countries). In the words of Eran Baruch, CEO of the secular yeshiva in Tel Aviv, the focus on miscegenation is also a cover for pure and simple anti-Arab racism and anti-leftist zeal, resulting in vandalism and violence, simplistically inspired by the story of Matityahu the Maccabee and the struggle against Hellenism (Cohen, 2015). There is an irony here since it was political Zionism's subversion of Judaism that foregrounded the Maccabees' importance in Jewish history in the first place. Otherwise, this chapter was downplayed as containing dangerous outcomes, as was the case with the Bar Kokhva Revolt and the siege on Masada – all narratives foregrounded within the Zionist telling of history (Gertz, 2000; Zerubavel, 1995).

So many other ironies are laced into the traction that groups like Lehava have gained in Israeli society. While the leadership of Lehava, as for Kach, is primarily Ashkenazi, they find many of their 'soldiers' among the Mizrahi community, a fact that presents complex ironies if one is to take seriously their Arab identities. Benzion Gopshtein, the leader of Lehava, is a direct follower of the slain American-born Meir Khannah who called for a transfer of all Arabs outside of the territory formerly known as Mandatory Palestine and a strict program of Judaizing the land. While Khannah's appearance on the scene in the 1980s shocked the establishment, Lehava and similar groups are aided structurally, rhetorically, economically, and politically by a transformed political landscape that is increasingly dominated by ethnocentrism born out of a secular ultra-nationalism and a religious messianism evident in the settlement project. Many political analysts have identified the relevance of the Mizrahi vote to the general move, to a more explicitly chauvinistic agenda. Prime Minister Begin supposedly undermined the hegemony of Labor Zionism, but his regime, as I indicate above, did not undermine Ashkenazi hegemony or remedy the Mizrahi realities it had created, even if his victory depended on the Mizrahi vote, disenfranchisement, and politicization. This voting pattern has continued to manifest today, demonstrating the logic of structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990; Uvin, 2003) in which two groups whose predicaments link directly to a third hegemonic group (as Said and Shohat illuminate) are blinded to those intersections. Instead, they see one another – not the hegemon – as their enemy. This is clearly the case empirically, with the majority of the Mizrahi public viewing 'Arabs' as their Other, as the enemy, along with the Ashkenazi left. Importantly, as I note above, the argument about 'double consciousness' informing voting patterns is not inevitable; when Labor was headed by a Mizrahi politician and at least rhetorically affirmed social justice concerns, it did gain greater electoral support.

The category of Mizrahiyut or Mizrahiness does not only denote the struggles of those with roots in the MENA region and cultural formations. Instead, as an analytic category and activist critique, Mizrahiyut supplies an explanatory framework for the marginalization of and discrimination against other communities, too, such as the Ethiopian one. The latter has suffered from the same structural and cultural upshots of Euro-Zionism. The Ethiopian community finally erupted in

protest against police brutality in the spring of 2015 only to meet police brutality and excessive force once again in response (Jones, 2015). Notably, MK Ayman Uda, the leader of the Joint List Party of Palestinian-Israelis and Dov Khenin, who is in the leadership of Hadash, the left-wing Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (a party with deep roots in Israeli communism and the radical left), immediately recognized the intersectionality among (not equivalence of) the various contexts of social and political struggles. Consequently, both walked side by side with the Ethiopian protesters, commenting that this just made sense (Khenin, 2015).

Uda, as well as other Palestinian-Israeli MKs have increasingly been vocal in articulating an intersectional narrative that draws clear distinctions between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi positionalities and histories vis-à-vis Palestine (see also interview with MK's Jamal Zahlaka for the film *Ashkenaz*, excerpted in Noy, 2015). However, these instances of solidarity across identity boundaries are not the norm. Homophobia and anti-Arab (Palestinian) sentiments are interconnected in the terrorism of groups such as Lehava and the related Price Tag and the 'Hilltop Youth' which was behind the stabbing of LGBTQ Parade in Jerusalem and the burning alive of 18-month-old Ali Dawabshe and his family in July 2015 in the Duma Village in the West Bank as well as the arson attempt at the Church of Loaves and Fishes in the Galilee (in June 2015). All acts of terrorism were authorized by employing the language of purity where 'Arabs' threatens the link between the Jewish People and its Land, Christianity represented 'false gods', and the LBTQ community threatens the purity of marriage (Kti'i 2015). While the Jewish terrorists still constitute a minority, they emerged out of a particular context that enabled their radicalization and the consolidation of the ironic language of purity.

Hitmazrehut with Blinders

Indeed, enduring Mizrahi marginalization prevents the formation of alliances with Palestinians; it has the opposite effect of propelling Mizrahim to other-ize the Palestinians and embrace chauvinistic and ethnocentric attitudes. However, cultural developments point toward both a reclaiming of non-Ashkenazi Arab cultural resources as well as, when framed positively, processes of hybridization or *hitmazrehut* of mainstream Ashkenazi culture or, when analyzed negatively, constituting another modality of domestication, this time of Arab cultural productions and tastes. Galit Saada-Ophir (2007) provides an account of the music scene in the primarily Mizrahi and poor southern town of Sderot. While struggling with the familiar effects of double consciousness, Sderot's music scene – with some stars who managed to gain national fame – is a context for subversive counter-cultural production. Musical styles are hybridized and reshaped through the tension between the Euro-Zionist cultural hegemony and the Mizrahi habitus, experiences, and passion for singing in various Arabic dialects.

While Mizrahi intellectuals have introduced important resources for re-conceptualizing Zionist historicity and Israeli identity, their debunking of Ashkenazi hegemony did not result in a broader social movement, for the reasons I discussed above. However, culturally the Mizrahim/yot are gaining more and more traction, which suggests that despite the enduring hegemony of the Ashkenazi minority, the *hitmazrehut* or orientalizing of the Israeli landscape remains possible. The very label 'Mizrahi' (literally Oriental) was employed derogatorily by the Euro-Zionist elites, lumping together all the Arab-Jews, regardless of background, country of origin, or education. Even prior to the postcolonial turn and the introduction of Said's *Orientalism* to the intellectual Mizrahi milieu, the Mizrahi nomenclature began to inform the collective resistance of those who occupied Mizrahi identity. As noted, Mizrahi struggles historically only accomplished limited socioeconomic and political outcomes. However, countering the force of *hitashkenazut* (a derogatory term denoting becoming an Ashkenazi/'white') as an entry ticket to Israeli society, one can trace

more and more *hitmazrehut* embracing a cultural Mizrahi identity – this initially derogatory over-arching label. This process entails valorizing denigrating terms for Mizrahi men and women and their cultural habits, tastes, and appearances.

One exemplar of this transformation is Ron Kakhlili, the producer of a chapter called 'Arsim and frehot: The new elites', in a three-part television series that tantalized Israel in the final months of 2014. In a lengthy interview in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, he discusses his own journey from *hitashkenazut* to *hitmazrehut* (Livne, 2014). *Ars* (singular of *arsim*) is the word used to refer to supposedly low-class 'oriental' behavior; *freha/ot* is the female equivalent. Kakhlili's series, as the chapter title implies, portrayed people embracing these labels as empowering and reflective of their experiences as Mizrahim in Israel. 'The use of the terms "ars" and "freha" mark non-Ashkenazi Israeli Jews as uncultured and an aberration to the otherwise self-perception of Israeli society as a "palace in the jungle"' (Livne, 2014). Kakhlili describes how, when he was appointed editor of the local news in Bat Yam-Holon, which is highly populated by Mizrahim, he came up with the idea of, for the first time, featuring an on-air interview of a very popular Mizrahi musician in Bat Yam with the seriousness otherwise reserved for Ashkenazi artists: about sources of inspiration and so on. Until then, no Mizrahi artists were taken seriously as producers of culture. 'There is a need to give space for this culture', Kakhlili tells his interviewer: 'this is the culture of the majority of Israelis and we must stop treating it as a marginal culture or as non-culture'. This was Kakhlili's own turning point from his trajectory of *hitashkenazut* to actively embracing *hitmazrehut* in the sociocultural sense. 'I realized, at this moment, that I betrayed my father's tradition because I tried to survive, to be like everybody else, to be an Ashkenazi'. Growing up, Kakhlili was spared the predetermined trajectory of so many Mizrahi youth because, due to his high scores on assessment tests, he was not sent to vocational schools. He ended up in a boarding school populated mostly by high-society Ashkenazi kids. Within weeks, he shed his Bat Yam habitus: his musical tastes, dress, etc. 'Gradually', Kakhlili explains, 'I understood that my culture is simply inferior and illegitimate.'

Reinforcing the point that the failure to redress the grievances of the Mizrahim/yot undermines the possibility of constructive change and reshaping the conflict with Palestinians, Kakhlili asks, 'How come the Ashkenazi hegemon can empathize with and fight for Palestinian pain but is unable to engage and contain the pain of the Mizrahi neighbor?' As a result, the Mizrahi who internalized the orientalist discourse and her own marginality marches at the forefront of rallies chanting 'death to the Arabs' as well as 'death to leftists', whom the Mizrahim/yot associate with their own repression in Israel. Kakhlili views this double consciousness as tragic and destructive for Mizrahi activism. Echoing other Mizrahi intellectuals, he believes the Mizrahi struggle need not be restricted only to Mizrahi concerns; rather, it ought to assimilate the struggles of all discriminated-against sectors, such as Russians, Ethiopians, African asylum seekers, Palestinians, and Haredim (Livne, 2014).[6] In other words, Kakhlili's sociocultural *hitmazrehut* also translates into an intersectional political agenda. Current Mizrahi activism and voting patterns, however, illuminate that the domestication of Mizrahi issues vis-à-vis the 'Palestine Question' has resulted in a process of cultural reclaiming (*hitmazrehut*) that is nonetheless colonized by Euro-Zionist and orientalist logic.

Relatedly, while Ktzi'a Alon, a scholar of art and literature, welcomes the domestication of Mizrahi cultural poroductions as pointing to deep subterrenean shifts, apparently neocolonial but leading ultimately to *hitmarehut* (see Madar 2015), Shoshana Gabai (2015) is concerned with what she characterizes as the commodification of Mizrahi pain. The neoliberal media, in a primetime series like 'Arsim and frehot: The new elites', coopts various Mizrahi activists as entertainment. There is a long history, she writes, of expressing cheap sentimentality with the pain of Mizrahim/yot without translating this sentimentality into redistributive policies. Furthermore, Gabai criticizes the narrow focus on Mizrahim/yot as the victims of racism that glosses over how Mizrahim/

yot also participate in oppressing others, most critically the Palestinians. Gabai identifies how Mizrahi identity is depoliticized and domesticated by the logic of multiculturalism, which treats it merely as an array of cultural artifacts in the forms of food, music, and fashion. The entertainment value of 'Arsim and frehot: The new elites', therefore, only reinforces the lack of deep engagement with *mizrahiyut* or Mirahi-nes in a manner akin to the kind of activism conceptualized by Keshet. 'The sycophantic expression "the new elites"', Gabai stresses, 'sprays salt on deep injuries with those who hold old historical memories. We are not a new elite. We are a very old elite whose power was taken from us' (translation mine). Gabai refers to the old pre-Zionist Jewish communities in the East and their continuous centrality among the urban elites. Mizrahim/yot in Israel, she continues, have amnesia about what Mizrahi communities had been before they were aggressively coopted into the Zionist narrative in a manner highly colored by an imported orientalism from Europe. It is this amnesia that leads Mizrahim/yot to assume, falsely, that *hitashkenazut* is 'synonymous with western modernity, human rights, proper manners and education' (Gabai, 2015). The Jews of Arab and Islamic lands had possessed all of those things before they were turned into 'the masses' from the peripheries or the 'development towns' and 'slums' in the large urban centers.

Hence, Gabai highlights the grave ramifications of the derogatory traction that the term *hitashkenazut* has gained among Mizrahim/yot in Israel: it reflects a presumption that *mizrahiyut* and supposedly western values are mutually exclusive. First, higher education and the consumption of high culture are not exclusively Ashkenazi. In fact, historically Arab-Jews often did not share eastern European Jews' anxiety about tradition's tension with modernization and the emergence of secular education. Second, 'if gaining high education and the consumption of culture considered "high" equals *hitashkenazut*, then the Mizrahi intellectual by definition engages in the process of passing as an Ashkenazi and therefore the Ashkenazi Zionist act of eliminating the Mizrahi elite is now done by Mizrahim themselves' (Gabai, 2015). Gabai, therefore, unsettles the presumption that *hitmazrehut* means reclaiming and valorizing the West's fantasies about the Orient. This would not constitute a mark of decolonization but rather would firmly cohere with the orientalist logic.

Hitashkenazut supposedly denotes passing from a marked identity to an unmarked one; it is passing as the hegemonic group and embracing its values. Orna Sasson-Levy and Avi Shoshana (2014) situate *hitashkenazut* in the broader literature on 'passing' and ethnic performativity, arguing that passing is usually monodirectional from blackness to whiteness or from, in this case, *mizrahiyut* to *ashkenaziyut*. Their findings – based on questionnaires and research into blog posts and comments – reinforce Gabai's discussion of Mizrahi-colonized perceptions of *hitashkenazut*. Accordingly, self-described *mitashkenazim* understand their Ashkenazi performativity as including listening to Mozart and Beethoven (while relinquishing Mizrahi music), using proper language peppered with fancy expressions and English words, refraining from Mizrahi marked words, projecting an 'intelligent, polite, gentle, quiet, cultured' persona, changing their last names, and so forth (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana, 2014: 81–4). This ethnic performativity reflects a discursive terrain of cultural racism where *hitashkenazut* means assuming a different 'sonic habitus' as well, where certain music and sounds are marked as uncultured (see Schwartz, 2013).

Likewise, Sasson-Levy and Shoshana note that *hitmazrehut* does not exist as an operative concept in daily life while *hitashkenazut* is ubiquitous. However, *hitashkenazut* does not guarantee mobility or the acquisition of social and cultural capital because *passing* through ethnic performativity always contains the possibility of imperfection and of others identifying the 'act' or the 'closet'. The ubiquity of the concept in common language indicates an essentialist rendering of *mizrahiyut* and the inherent risk of being exposed as a fraud (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana, 2014). The discursive history of Zionism also underscores that *hitashkenazut* has been an integral mechanism for framing the Israeli as white and western. The difficulties of ethnic performativity, therefore, expose the

inherent stratification of Jewish Israeli society and serve, according to Sasson-Levy and Shoshana, to entrench Ashkenazi normativity. Drawing on Judith Butler's discussion of performativity, they argue that *hitashkenazut*, despite supposedly denaturalizing by de-essentializing the norm, does not result in destabilizing Ashkenazi hegemony (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana, 2014). Failing to achieve perfect performativity in the act of passing, in other words, does not subvert but rather reinforces the orientalist cultural terrain. This process of reinforcement is also apparent in the conceptual blinders of *hitmazrehut* that Gabai critiques. Echoing Gabai's indictment, Sasson-Levy and Shoshana acknowledge that Mizrahi food and music and other cultural products have gained momentum as 'an alternative symbolic capital' without presenting any challenge to the ethnic hierarchy. Hence the process of *hitmazrehut* is enduringly influenced by Euro-Zionist discursive zoning. Sociocultural and political *hitmazrehut*, in other words, remains colonized if it translates empirically into embodying orientalist fantasies about the Orient.

Certain Palestinian-Israelis make similar efforts to 'pass'. This is exemplified in the works of the Palestinian-Israeli author and TV producer Sayed Kashua. Kashua's works repeatedly expose the inability of his Palestinian-Israeli protagonists to become unmarked or 'white Israelis' (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana, 2014). His satire, therefore, exposes the ironic spaces created by Euro-Zionist normativity. The clear failures of performativity and the subsequent exposure as 'Arab' both carry a subversive potential (though the high entertainment value of Kashua's TV series *Arab Labor* may suggest a degree of domestication and de-politicization of the Palestinian-Israeli sector) and qualify as a constructive intervention in de-ontologizing seemingly ontological mappings of identities across the sociocultural and geopolitical maps of Israel and Palestine. At the end of the day, Kashua is not really trying to become a Jewish-Ashkenazi Israeli. Instead, he offers a satirical and destabilizing statement that exposes hegemony, from the margins, while also, by virtue of his hybrid location, providing an alternative Israeliness.

His destabilizing of cultural hegemony and Israeli normativity does not translate into a reactionary, anti-orientalist reclaiming of 'Arabness' or precolonial harmony. Rather, Kashua's characters problematize such utopian postures. It is not a coincidence that the Lawyer, a protagonist in his widely translated novel *Second Person Singular*, reverts – despite his supposedly 'cultured' manners and reading lists and socioeconomic markers – to 'Arab' jealousy when he finds the alleged love note in Leo Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), which primes his murderous and paranoid thinking about his wife. Situating the 'love note' in Tolstoy's novella destabilizes the orientalist frame and any romantic longing for a golden age which itself is a product of the orientalist imagination. After all, Tolstoy's jealous character isn't an Arab! Likewise, Kashua's Lawyer's defaulting into his Arabness is a caricature of what the Lawyer's traditional ways are supposed to look like (honor killing, shaming, and so forth). This caricature of the 'Arab' critiques a nostalgic retrieval of 'pure' Palestinian tradition existing in pre-Zionist milieu of the Arab village in Palestine. Kashua's characters struggle with their relationship to the Palestinian Arab village as both their point of departure and the destination of a postcolonial retrieval of Palestine.

Kashua is a Palestinian-Israeli who writes in Hebrew and is deeply embedded in Israeli society. He had undergone his own trajectory of 'passing' into Euro-Zionist Israeli society, beginning with his acceptance as a child into an elite boarding school in Jerusalem and culminating in his relocation from East to West Jerusalem. However, his characters, who are influenced by his own experience, struggle with the elasticity of identity and the tragedy or fortune of belonging neither here nor there. By doing so, they creatively confront Israelis with the incoherence of the identity *they* perform. I illumine the case of Kashua here because it attests to the point that de-orientalizing the social space will require localizing the discourse by highlighting the spaces of intersections (as in between Palestinians and Mizrahim/yot), hybridities which challenge cultural normativity, and the sites where the meanings of Jewish-Israeliness are negotiated in a multi-perspectival and historical

manner, confronted by the Occupation and displacement of Palestinians. The analysis here moves from a simplistic dichotomization of East and West as if the East is embodied in the Lawyer's 'regression' into irrational jealousy or the Mizrahi cultural reclaiming of different soundscapes. All these areas of engagement require overcoming the ahistorical bias that undermines sociological analyses' and social movements' intersectionality in theory and practice.

Drawing on the potentially constructive outcome of subversive performativity, *hitmazrehut* is not another (reactive) manifestation of *hitashkenazut*, operating within persistent orientalist and nationalist frames. I use this term very differently, to suggest the possibility of de-orientalizing the discourse by coming to terms with the fact that Israel is in the Middle East. Thus it is critical to overcome the ahistorical and orientalist trap that posits Israeli society as European. This is not to imply that the upshot would be retrieving an imagined Middle East that is the opposite of Europe; such a binary springs from the orientalist logic we attempt to destabilize and subvert. Kashua above exposes the ironies in the reactionary mode of retrieval. The persistent influence of orientalism manifests itself in the phenomenon of double consciousness among Mizrahi Jews who chant 'death to the Arabs'. In performing their Jewishness as antonymous with the Arab, they embody the Eurocentricity of Zionism and presume coherence with the identity they perform. The challenge of *hitmazrehut*, as I have argued, remains to denaturalize this coherence, to highlight intersectionality, and consequently to rezone cultural and social geographies in the region, in a mode oriented by a multi-perspectival justice discourse. Moving beyond the scope of Mizrahi critique, I have suggested that local resources for *hitmazrehut* are not only embodied in Arab-Jewishness as it reclaims Arabness and exposes the interrelation between the Palestinian and Mizrahi narratives vis-à-vis Euro-Zionism. Resources for Jewish and non-Jewish Israeliness are also historical products of the very dynamics imposed by ideological, cultural, and geopolitical boundaries: Mizrahi and Palestinian-Israelis offer two prominent examples of non-normative and thus counter-hegemonic Israeliness.

Conclusion

To conclude, excluding the study of Israeli society from the scope of Middle Eastern sociological inquiries inadvertently participates in the orientalist underpinnings informing the rhetorical insistence that Israel is merely a stranger and foreign to the Middle East (a settler colonialist presence), an assumption consistent with the self-representation of Euro-Zionism as 'western' and 'enlightened', despite Euro-Zionism's otherwise deep historical and religious claims to the land. Such exclusion of Israeli sociology from Middle Eastern studies, in effect, participates in a discourse that posits Israel as a non-Middle Eastern entity that is only accidently located there. Mizrahi sociological critique and constructive reimagining of the scope of Israeli society illuminate a process of reclaiming indigeneity or nativity, not by way of secularized interpretations of biblical narratives and the religious messianic imagination, but rather partly through reclaiming Mizrahi cultural and sociological rootedness in the Middle East – a rootedness and Arabness denied by the reigning Euro-Zionist discourse. If this process of reclaiming *mizrahiyut* does not proceed in an intersectional manner with the struggle for Palestinian rights and redress of injustices, then it may only stiffen the symbolic boundaries generated by Euro-Zionist discursive hegemony. When *hitmazrehut* is exclusively sectoral, whether through folklorization and cultural commodification or through sociopolitical activism, it remains beholden to orientalist underpinnings. The orientalism cuts in different directions, from the Ashkenazi peace camp's lack of focus on Mizrahi marginality to the Mizrahi's embodiment of the Euro-Zionist bifurcation of 'Arab' and 'Jew'.

Hitmazrehut, as I conceptualize this process, therefore also involves cultivating Jewish Israeliness that is local, historical, and thus Mizrahi in the most inclusive and intersectional

sense – being indigenous to the East – by relinquishing the enduring colonization of spatial and ideational mapping. This approach also necessitates interrogating Zionist teleological and homogenizing mapping of Jewish history and identity. The Parallel States Project affords an imaginative framework where *hitmazrehut* can take place because it removes 'force' and the anxiety about territorial divisibility from the equation.

However, there are several interrelated obstacles to imagining a non-orientalist sociology of Israel. The first relates to a monochrome deployment of the narrative of settler colonialism in which Jewish-Israelis and Zionists can only be read as colonialists, that is, strangers in the land. Through this lens, Israeli Jews are all Grandmother Shlomit: Eurocentric, colonialist, and estranged from the land. This depiction runs into the second challenge of ahistoricity grounded in a presumption that actually residing in the Middle East is not transformative, producing localized, indeed indigenously Middle Eastern, Jewish social meanings, practices, and identities. Hence, while a critique of the hegemonic logic of Zionism is indispensable, this critique nonetheless often participates in the Euro-Zionist discourse by merely inversing it. Consequently, the Zionists are white, non-indigenous inhabitants whose ethnocentric ideology needs to be dismantled through another abstraction, democracy – one person, one vote.

A non-orientalized sociology of Israel/Palestine will necessitate moving beyond abstraction and ahistoricity toward tracing concrete and historical indigenous social formations as well as hermeneutical reimagining of Jewish-Israeliness. Ahistoricity is born out of a lack of theorizing Jewish-Israelis as now indigenous. Unlike the estranged Grandmother Shlomit, about five generations later they are Middle Eastern, whether they like it or not, and they seek out various ways of infusing Jewish meanings into Israeli citizenship, some explicitly chauvinistic and some, in the case of BINA, through Jewish humanism and multicultural discourses. This is not to propose religion as the 'solution' but rather to highlight the non-messianic localization of Jewish-Israeli identity as another site participating in reimagining sociocultural practices and boundaries. The forcefulness of the Zionist discourse, grounded in Eurocentricity, is suffused with an ambiguous political theology that establishes rootedness in the land. Concurrently, its 'enlightened' estrangement is affirmed and reinforced by broader patterns of orientalism according to which Israel is a part or extension of the 'West'. Hence, I suggest that redrawing sociopolitical categories will involve an imaginative step outside binaries that themselves are the outcome of the working of orientalism on knowledge production about Israel.

The article, therefore, proposes integrating the study of Israeli sociology into the broader sociology of the Middle East. Specifically, through a careful study of Mizrahi scholarship and sociopolitical activism, I illuminate how the counter-hegemonic critique and embodied experiences of Arab-Jews or Mizrahim/yot could challenge the Jewish-Israeli sociological imagination by offering a Middle Eastern and thus localized Jewish identity. Especially insightful are Mizrahi feminists, whose critique contributes to a sociopolitical agenda for reconfiguring knowledge production and sociopolitical spaces in Israel-Palestine. Because its formation necessitated borrowing intersectional tools from the struggles of other non-white feminists, feminist Mizrahi scholarship and activism are attentive, primarily on the level of theory, to the crosscutting and multiple layers of oppression. Thus, their critique of the enduring orientalism informing the study of Israeli sociology, on the one hand, and Middle Eastern studies, on the other, offers constructive resources for reframing sociological and political categories of analysis. The article has also expanded upon Mizrahi orthodoxy's reclaiming of Arabness as a resource for rezoning this discursive space by highlighting the risk of reintroducing ahistorical myopia. Such myopia is creeping because of the utopian inclination toward devaluing the authenticity of hybrid and historical identities as loci of reframing the meanings and religiosocial and cultural boundaries of the geopolitical space. This reinterpretation foregrounds the Palestinians also by way of reworking the supposed antonymy between Jew and Arab.

Throughout the article, I have identified a tension between Mizrahi intersectional analysis and empirical facts about the Mizrahi sector's voting patterns, chauvinism, and belligerence against the Israeli (mostly Ashkenazi) 'left' and Palestinians. (Of course, these practices are not exclusively Mizrahi and not unrelated to the use of belligerence and violence among settlers and in other pockets of mainstream society.) The explanation as to why this is the case, despite the evidence suggested through an intersectional analysis, is complex. The phenomenon of double consciousness is an outcome of an intricate discursive space. It is not itself an explanation of this discursivity. Double consciousness is partly explained through the discursive critique of Euro-Zionism articulated by Mizrahi critical 'orthodoxy'. It is also partly attributable to the patterns of discursive zoning practiced by the Israeli 'left' and its inability, related to the currency of the discourse of 'color blindness', to connect the sites of domestic oppression, domination, and marginalization with the peace agenda. The explanation for double consciousness also resides in the logic of multiculturalism (when practiced within rigid ethnocentric boundaries), which reinforces the folklorization of Mizrahiness and its de-politicization vis-à-vis the broader sociocultural and geopolitical landscape.

Funding

Notes

1. Indeed, the experiences and status of the Mizrahi communities within Palestine and Israel are obviously not identical: the Mizrahi sector participates in and benefits from the Zionist logic of control and domination, while Palestinians are more clearly subjected to this logic. However, and as classically articulated by Ella Shohat (1988), both communities' predicaments demand an analysis of the discourse of orientalism as it has participated in authorizing Euro-Zionism.
2. These are the male and female plural forms denoting the initially derogatory and eventually self-empowering nomenclature employed by the Jewish Zionist leadership in Israel, classifying Arab-Jews as one 'Oriental' collective. Mizrahi literally means 'Oriental'.
3. For a systematic and persistent effort to combat Ashkenazi hegemony, see newsletters produced by David Shasha (2014), the director of the Center for Sephardic Heritage in Brooklyn.
4. For a sustained development of the concept and process of the *hermeneutics of citizenship*, see Omer (2013).
5. See also Damri-Madar (2002), Lavie (1995), and Dahan-Kalev (2002).
6. This expansive understanding of the Mizrahi struggle is also echoed in a discussion group led by Professor Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute: 'The Jews of the East, Orientalism, and Modern Awareness'. This sustained discussion attempts to bridge the disciplinary study of Jewish communities in the East and Mizrahim in Israel. The group proposes that connecting these scholarly enterprises with debunking the orientalist biases born out of the interrelated paradigms of modernization and secularization will make possible a 'different way of looking at the Israeli mind and the Western mind' (Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2015).

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